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U.S. foreign policy up for rent, Zarif says

POLITICS **TEHRAN** – Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif says the U.S. foreign policy has been turned into a "rental" and any pressure group which can pay more will be able to move the U.S. toward its own objectives. Hinting at the recent anti-Iran remarks by Mike Pompeo, the new U.S. secretary of state, Zarif said the remarks were so "nonsensical, discourteous and illogical"

that they do not deserve to be responded to, ISNA reported. The U.S. government's current officials are not only imprisoned by their own delusions, but they are also imprisoned by the corrupt pressure groups whose scandals are being laid bare to the public on a daily basis, the chief diplomat added. This, the foreign minister said, "reflects the bankruptcy of the United States of America." **->2**

Autism screening pilot scheme to launch in Iran

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** – An autism screening program will be piloted in a collaborative initiative between the Welfare Organization and the Special Education Organization by September 23 in Isfahan province, Mohammad Taqi Jaghataei, an advisor to the Ministry of Health has said. "The aim of the program is to complete

the autism children's screening circle. Part of this cycle involves preschoolers which is conducted by the Welfare Organization, and the other part involves screening and identifying school-age children [suffering autism] which is administered by the Special Education Organization," IRNA quoted Jaghataei as saying. **->12**

Syria: Iran, Hezbollah presence not up for discussion

Syria's deputy foreign minister has hailed Iran and the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement's assistance to Damascus in its counter-terrorism fight, saying the pair's withdrawal from the country is not up for discussion. "This topic is not even on the agenda of discussion, since it concerns the sovereignty of Syria. We cannot let anyone

even raise this issue," Faisal Mekdad told Russia's Sputnik news agency on Wednesday. He also said that those who demanded the pullout of the Iranian military advisers and Hezbollah forces from Syria "are considering the possibility of intervention in all parts of Syria, including the support of terrorists in Syria and elsewhere in the region." **->13**

PERSPECTIVE
 **Bahman Naghadeh**
Journalist

U.S. grave mistake

While few days have passed since the United States has officially walked out of the nuclear deal with Iran, U.S. Democrats were quick to condemn Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from the Iran nuclear accord. Members of the U.S. Democratic Party called this decision a "grave mistake" and mentioned that Trump's actions recklessly endangered the U.S.'s relationships with its global allies.

Senator Bob Menendez, the top Democrat on the Senate foreign relations committee, stated that Trump's decision to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) paved the way for upcoming dangers.

"With this decision President Trump is risking U.S. national security, recklessly upending foundational partnerships with key U.S. allies in Europe and gambling with Israel's security," he said.

Adam Schiff, the U.S. Representative for California, wrote in Twitter account: "Decision to withdraw from Iran (nuclear) deal will undermine our national security... and cause the world to conclude America doesn't keep its word. Scuttling the deal without a Plan B is not a strategy, but a dangerous abdication."

Calling the decision an error of "historic proportions", Schiff added: "Scuttling an agreement that had halted the Iranian nuclear program and put in place an intrusive regimen of inspections without a credible Plan B is a mistake of historic proportions."

The U.S. Government announcement of the country's unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA raised lots of objections among American citizens. The polls conducted in the United States indicate that as many as one in three Americans believed the U.S. should remain part of the Iran nuclear deal.

Chris Murphy, another Democrat who serves on the Senate foreign relations committee, called Trump's announcement as "terrible news":

"Pulling out of the Iran deal is like a soccer player deliberately kicking the ball into their own team's goal... There is nothing but downside for the U.S., especially since Trump has zero plan for what comes next."

This was while the Republican Jewish Coalition, a group that aggressively lobbied against the JCPOA, welcomed the U.S. Government announcement and Trump's walking out of the nuclear deal in a statement: **->7**

Pompeo speech an exercise in idiocy: Prof. Zonis

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
By Payman Yazdani

TEHRAN – Marvin Zonis, Professor of international political economy believes that the Pompeo speech was an exercise in idiocy that only provides Trump with excuse to pressure the government in Iran in any way possible to bring about regime change in Iran.

The U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo laid out the Trump administration's new strategy for Iran on Monday two weeks after the U.S. President Donald Trump walked away from the Obama administration's Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA).

Repeating lots of baseless accusations against Iran, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in his speech at the Heritage Foundation on Monday made 12 demands on Iran including to:

-Declare to the IAEA a full account of the prior



military dimensions of its nuclear program and permanently and verifiably abandon such work in perpetuity.

-Stop enrichment and never pursue plutonium reprocessing, including closing its heavy water reactor.

- Provide the IAEA with unqualified access to

all sites throughout the entire country.

- End its proliferation of ballistic missiles and halt further launching or development of nuclear-capable missile systems.

-Release all U.S. citizens as well as citizens of U.S. partners and allies.

-End support to Hezbollah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Just hours after Pompeo's speech many EU officials and international figures rejected his demands on Iran as unrealistic and futile.

Some experts from CNN and FT called the Pompeo's demands "pipe dream" that indicates that the U.S. administration has not any new strategy towards Iran after its withdrawal from the JCPOA.

To shed more light on the issue we reached out to Marvin Zonis, Professor of international political economy and leadership in the University of Chicago. **->7**

Saudi Arabia's desperate alliance moves

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN (MNA) – The establishment of security pacts and alliances among countries demands high levels of cooperation from its member to deal effectively with different threats. Saudi Arabia and Egypt, for instance, have called for an "Arab NATO" to "wipe terrorism from the face of the earth." This proposed alliance already faces various internal and external challenges, for instance over the future of the Assad government in Syria and how to deal with conflicts in Libya and Yemen. This can make the long-term survival of such arrangements quite difficult in environments that are fast changing and under tremendous stress.

Alliances require weaker countries to accept the leadership of stronger countries. Saudi wealth, however, has not been able to buy it security and safeguard its interests. For example, the parliament of Pakistan voted not to join the Yemen War despite Saudi's pressure. Islamabad declared that it would join the war only if the Houthis directly attacked Riyadh. In another case, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who enjoys financial assistance from Riyadh, refused to provide the Saudis with air attacks in the Aden Gulf, only agreeing to deploy ground forces to Yemen. As a result of its limited powers of persuasion, Saudi Arabia's alliance are generally unofficial and tactical, not strategic.

Saudi Arabia has tried to create multilateral

alliances with Arabs, Muslims, and some other nations. The first formation was the Arab Alliance in Yemen in March 2015. Subsequently, the Islamic alliance for the fight against terrorism was created in December 2015. The latest, which came together in June 2017, was an alliance to force Qatar to make a strategic deal with the dominant Saudis in the PGCC.

All three alliances under the leadership of Saudi Arabia are getting weaker, and the participating countries don't expect the bonds to improve. These alliances don't really function day to day, and not all the members agree in equal measure about the purposes. There is no limitation on the term of these alliances, but their cancellation is always possible. **->7**

ARTICLE
 **Hanif Ghaffari**
Political analyst

Trump's fearing from future

As we get closer to November, Donald Trump and his entourage are getting more afraid. The Congressional elections this year can be a prelude to the fall of Trump's power and his becoming a one term president in the United States. The U.S. controversial President recently announced that he would be questioned by Democrats if they could win the majority of the Congress seats. However, Trump's main worries are about the Senate. Trump is seriously concerned lest the democrats are going to win the absolute majority of the Senate (more than 60 seats). At the next level, Trump doesn't have hopes for the Republicans to maintain their majority in the House of Representatives.

Polls Results Aren't to Trump's Advantage

Polls conducted in the United States indicate that Trump and the Republicans' popularity has fallen drastically compared with that of 2016 (during the time of U.S. general elections). At the end of 2017, the polls results suggested that about 31 percent of the Republicans (the Republican Party's proponents) demanded the presence of someone other than Trump in power. Even Republican Senators such as Jeff Flake, the Republican Senator and one of Trump's main opponents in the party, announced the possibility of another candidate's presence in the 2020 presidential elections. The fact is, not only Democrats, but also Republican senators like John McCain, Rand Paul, Jeff Flake, and... are deeply opposed to Trump's policies, and they have publicly voiced their opposition. Many U.S. affairs analysts believe that in case of Republicans defeat in the Congressional elections, the gap will become even wider between the Republicans and Trump, and the Party members' opposition to the President will be more explicitly voiced out. Under such circumstances, Republicans no longer regard it to their benefit to invest on Trump's presence in power.

Another point is that recent polls show the determination of American citizens to "cross Trump" and its policies. According to a new Survey Monkey tracking poll, only thirteen percent of Americans said they would consider the U.S. President Donald Trump to be honest and trustworthy. **->13**



Tehran Times / Mehdi Pedramkhoo

Water flows again into Karkheh

Once again water flows into Karkheh River, southwestern Iran, and buffaloes are back in the muddy waters where they belong to.

More than 3,000 water buffaloes are inhabiting Hamidiyeh, southwestern Khuzestan province. Last week, water level was pretty low in the river and now the river is filled with water again. The locals make a living by animal husbandry and selling dairy products.

Unfortunately, low precipitation and drought spells have negatively affected the living conditions of people, especially in southern parts of the country.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Rouhani set to visit China within weeks

POLITICS TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani will visit China within weeks upon an official invitation by his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping, presidential chief of staff Mahmoud Vaezi said on Wednesday.

Talking to reporters after a cabinet meeting, Vaezi said Rouhani will visit China to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit, Mehr reported.

Vaezi also said Rouhani has been invited by the president of FIFA to attend the opening ceremony of the upcoming World Cup in Russia but he is unlikely go there due to his busy schedule at the time.



No toleration for cap on Iran's missile power: Hatami

POLITICS TEHRAN — Defense Minister Amir Hatami said on Wednesday that Iran would never compromise on its missile power, reiterating Tehran's long held position that Iran's missile power is of defensive nature, Fars reported.

Responding to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's remarks on Iran's missile power, Hatami said, "If the Islamic Republic wanted to pay attention to such delusional remarks over the past 40 years, it wouldn't have gained such power, glory and dignity."

Today, he said, the Iranian Armed Forces are fully prepared to counter the enemies' threats and conspiracies. "History reflects our nation's resistance in all fields," he added.



General: U.S. not the only superpower in multipolar world

POLITICS TEHRAN — The United States is not the only superpower in the world anymore as a multipolar world is on the rise and U.S. power is fading, says Yahya Rahim Safavi, a top military adviser to the Leader.

Speaking to reporters on Wednesday, General Safavi also denounced the anti-Iran remarks by the U.S. secretary of state, saying such "hostile remarks" are deemed unacceptable by the Iranian nation and the world, the YJC reported.

Safavi, who was chief of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps from 1997-2007, also said U.S. President Donald Trump is delusional and "that's why he believes toppling the Islamic Republic is possible."



Iran sanctions will further endanger Mideast: French FM

POLITICS TEHRAN — France has criticized the U.S. for withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal and resorting, instead, to a policy of pressure and sanctions against the country, warning that such approach could further destabilize the restive Middle East region.

Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian told France Inter radio on Wednesday that he disagreed with Washington's decision earlier this month to defy international warnings and withdraw from the 2015 nuclear deal, Press TV reported.

"The sanctions to be launched against Iran will not foster dialogue," but will rather weaken those promoting negotiation, he said.



Russia: U.S. demands to Iran 'totally unacceptable'

POLITICS TEHRAN — Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Wednesday the U.S. has put forward totally unacceptable demands to Iran, criticizing the U.S. government for its policy of "ultimatums" and "threats" towards Iran.

"A campaign against Iran has been gaining momentum in the U.S. as Washington has clearly opted for the policy of ultimatums and threats towards Iran," she said.

"We have never supported the policy of unilateral sanctions and will never do that as we believe them to be illegal. We are determined to advance our comprehensive cooperation with Iran," she added.



Sadrist Movement: 'Washington can't dictate its Iran policy to Iraq'

POLITICS TEHRAN — Dhia al-Asadi, head of the political bureau of the Sadrist Movement, has said that Washington cannot dictate its Iran policy to Iraq, stressing such meddling behavior is "unacceptable".

The Sadrist Movement and its partners in Iraq did not make all the sacrifices to just bow down to the desires and demands of America, al-Asadi told Al Mayadeen, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

He further said that the Islamic Republic is Iraq's neighbor and the two countries have mutual interests, adding that Iraq's policy is based on its national interests.

Iran not looking for anyone's smile to boost defense power: military chief

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran's military chief said on Wednesday that the Armed Forces are prepared more than any other time to defend the country against foreign threats, asserting that Iran doesn't need anyone's "smile" or go-ahead with its plans to boost defense power, ISNA reported.

Major General Mohammad Hossein Baqeri made the remarks in an address to the parliament on the eve of the anniversary of the liberation of Khorramshahr from the Iraqi occupation in 1982.

The general also pointed to the recent pressure on Iran by Washington and its regional allies, especially after Trump effectively withdrew the U.S. from the internationally-backed 2015 nuclear deal, saying, "We can move beyond current incidents only by relying on domestic power and potential as well as benefiting from [our] regional and international friends."

The senior commander said while breaking its promises the U.S. has laid out a list of



"dos" and "don'ts" for the Islamic Republic. The U.S. leaders have turned into employees of the Zionist regime, he added.

It came after U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Washington would increase financial pressure on Iran by slapping it with the "strongest sanctions in history" if Tehran refuses to fulfill Washington's 12-point list of demands. One of the conditions that Pompeo put forward was that Iran stop its ballistic-missile program.

General Baqeri said since the U.S. does not dare to confront Iran militarily, it is thus trying to bring the Iranian nation under pressure through an "economic war".

In remarks on Tuesday, Ali Shamkhani, the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, said it is "understandable" that the United States and its regional allies, which are the main creators and supporters of the Takfiri terrorism, be "angry" as Iran prevented Daesh (ISIL) to spread its domain of ruling in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and even Europe.

Leader: Don't tie country's affairs to JCPOA

Ayatollah Khamenei says 'resistance' against U.S. will make it 'back down'

POLITICS TEHRAN — Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Leader of the Islamic Revolution, on Wednesday called on the government "not to tie the country's affairs to the JCPOA and foreign issues."

"We should not tie our country's issues to something which is not in our control," the Leader told a number of senior state officials.

On May 8 Donald Trump effectively withdrew the U.S. from the 2015 nuclear agreement and announced Washington will introduce sanctions against Iran. Two weeks later his new secretary of state Mike Pompeo used a harsh language against Iran, saying the U.S. will "crush" Iran with economic and military pressure if it does not halt all uranium enrichment, stop its ballistic-missile program, give nuclear inspectors access to the entire country among other demands.

Under the nuclear program endorsed by the UN Security Council, Iran was obliged to scale back its nuclear enrichment work in exchange for termination of economic and financial sanctions. Since the deal went into effect in January 2016 the UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, has issued 11 reports each time confirming Iran's loyalty to the terms of the agreement.

The Leader cited a number of reasons why Iran should not trust the West, particularly the United States.

The Leader said "flexibility" in the face of enemy will not make it soften its approach, rather, he said, will make it "more aggressive".

Citing an example, the Leader said in 2003 the sitting administration in Iran showed flexibility toward the Bush administration but later then U.S. president called Iran an "axis of evil".

"If you want to do something to reduce enmity do it, but its way is not flexibly," the Leader told government officials.

Ayatollah Khamenei said "resistance" against the U.S. will make Washington "back down".

The Leader said, "The fact that today the United Nations has recognized our right to (nuclear) enrichment was not because of negotiations. Its reason was because of our progress in the nuclear field."

The European Union has said it will stick to the nuclear program. However, some major European companies are leaving Iran since Trump announced withdrawal from the nuclear accord.

■ 'Don't pin hopes on Europe'
Ayatollah Khamenei told government officials not pin hopes on Europe because experience has shown that Europe is more inclined toward the United States when it comes to major issues.

"We are not seeking confrontation with Europe but these three countries (France, Britain, and Germany) are aligned with the U.S." when it comes to sensitive issues, the Leader explained.

For example during the nuclear negotiations France played the role of "bad police" and Britain has halted the import of yellow cake by Iran.

Ayatollah Khamenei added the government must "not tie the country's affairs to the JCPOA and foreign issues."

"We should not tie our country's issues to something which is not in our control."

■ 'All conspiracies for regime change in Iran have failed'

Elsewhere in his remarks, Ayatollah Khamenei said since the beginning of the 1979 revolution, the U.S. has resorted to different hostile acts to harm the Islamic Republic.

The U.S. has organized "different political, economic, and military, and propagandistic" moves against Iran and the motives behind all these acts have been "regime change" and this word is being repeated, and it "is not something new".

"All these conspiracies have failed."
The Leader added, "We have no doubt that the enemy will be defeated and anyone who is familiar with Islamic teachings knows this."

The Leader predicted the current U.S. President Donald Trump will find a fate like those of his predecessors such as George W. Bush, Ronald Reagan and other neo-cons.

"He (Trump) will be lost in history," the Leader predicted.

■ 'Iran cannot interact with U.S'
"The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran cannot interact with the United States because the United States has not been committed to its obligations," the Leader remarked.

Ayatollah Khamenei also said in terms of commitment to obligations under the nuclear agreement there has been no difference between the Trump and Obama administrations because "each one has violated their commitments in a way."

He said the United States' "animosity" with the Islamic Republic is not because of Iran's nuclear program, rather it is because Tehran is not "bowing down" to Washington and that Iran's power is increasing greatly. "The U.S. is deeply opposed to such a system and wants to undermine the elements of the power in the Islamic Republic of Iran."

Iranians not intimidated by U.S. empty threats: Rouhani

POLITICS TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani on Tuesday downplayed recent anti-Iran threats by the U.S. administration, saying that such threatening

statements will not intimidate the Iranian nation. Addressing a gathering of athletes, Rouhani pointed to the recent remarks made by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, saying,

"The Iranian nation is not afraid of empty threats and is so much greater than Trump, Pompeo, (John) Bolton and all these extremist people who have gathered in Washington."

"The Iranian nation have been victorious in all periods of history and I want to say it here again Mr. Trump that this nation will be victorious against you."

Foreign Ministry: U.S. giving no weight to international obligations



POLITICS TEHRAN — The Iranian Foreign Ministry issued a statement on Wednesday saying U.S. sanctions on the Iranian central bank governor is a "blatant defiance of well-established international norms and rules".

Following is the text of the statement posted on the Foreign Ministry website:

The last week move by U.S. Department of the Treasury to include the name of the governor of the Central Bank of Iran and one of its directors on the sanctions list is a sign of the U.S.' blatant defiance of well-established international norms and rules including immunity of governments and central banks.

Central banks play a role in shaping and implementing monetary policies and bringing monetary stability inside the countries and in the international system, so imposing sanctions on central bank officials

is against customary and treaty obligations of governments to maintain international monetary policy. The U.S. move, which indicates this government gives no weight to its international obligations, has prompted international observers to see the U.S. government as an oath-breaker who pays no respect to international obligations.

The Foreign Ministry seriously condemns the U.S.' unconventional and illegal move, and announces that the Iranian government and Central Bank reserves the right to adopt all legal and political solutions to counter the U.S. Treasury Department's move. The Foreign Ministry believes a continuation of such destructive and unilateral moves by the U.S. could have unpleasant consequences for international ties in the monetary and financial sectors.

JCPOA will vanish if it is linked to other issues, Iran warns



POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has warned the European Union that it is not possible to link the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, to other issues, saying in that case the agreement will cease to exist.

"If they try to link the JCPOA to other issues, they will lose the agreement and other issues will become more complicated to settle," Araqchi told Spanish newspaper El Pais in an interview published on Monday.

He added, "Mixing issues is a very big mistake."

The top diplomat asked: Iran's message is clear and that how is it possible to negotiate about other issues when

the nuclear deal does not work? Given the U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal, the Europeans have a few weeks to guarantee Iran's interests and time is needed to see whether the deal is working, he noted.

Since Trump withdrew from the nuclear pact on May 8, Iran has been seeking guarantees that its economic interests are protected otherwise it will resume nuclear activities at a greater speed.

The nuclear deal was signed in July 2015 between Iran, Germany, the European Union and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. It went into effect in January 2016.

International Atomic Energy Agency has reported ten times that Iran has been committed to the nuclear deal.

U.S. foreign policy up for rent, Zarif says

Zarif calls Pompeo's remarks very 'nonsensical, discourteous and illogical'

1 -> Announcing Washington's new policy toward Iran on Monday, Pompeo demanded that Tehran halt all uranium enrichment, stop its ballistic-missile program and give nuclear inspectors access to the entire country. He also said the U.S. will "crush" Iran with economic and military pressure unless it changes its behavior in the Middle East.

Zarif said all of Pompeo's words were based on trumped-up charges and were nothing but old, failed policies which he repeated with heightened "shamelessness" and "intensity".

He went on to say, "The Americans think they can succeed by their past policies and what they used to call the crippling

sanctions which failed to drive a wedge among the Iranian nation even when they had global consensus against Iran."

"Once, the Americans managed to form a global consensus against Iran with their lies but today it is quite clear that such consensus has been formed against America," the foreign minister noted.

On Monday, a few hours after Pompeo made his speech against Iran at the Heritage Foundation, Zarif said the United States is addicted to making repeated mistakes. "US diplomacy sham is merely a regression to old habits: imprisoned by delusions & failed policies—dictated by corrupt Special

Interest—it repeats the same wrong choices and will thus reap the same ill rewards," Foreign Minister Zarif tweeted.

Pompeo's remarks come nearly two weeks after U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew his country from the nuclear deal, officially recognized as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and vowed to reinstate economic sanctions on Iran.

Trump's move came despite the fact that the UN's nuclear watchdog, in charge of monitoring Iran's compliance with the deal, has confirmed that Tehran has abided by the terms of the agreement.

Lebanon's new parliament holds first session, re-elects Berri as speaker

Lebanese lawmakers have re-elected Nabih Berri as parliament speaker as they convened for the first session of the legislative chamber since the May 6 elections.

Berri managed to win 98 votes in the 128-seat parliament on Wednesday.

In remarks following his re-election, Berri called for the formation of the new Lebanese government as soon as possible. "I extend my sincere thanks, for the sixth time, to the MPs for their confidence in renewing [my] responsibilities as Parliament Speaker," he said.

Berri was running unopposed for the post of parliament speaker reserved for a Shia in Lebanon's sectarian power-sharing system, under which the prime minister must be a Sunni Muslim and the president a Maronite Christian.

In a statement, Berri's office had demanded that supporters avoid celebratory gunfire after the veteran politician's re-election.

On May 6, Lebanon held its first parliamentary elections in nine years. The vote had been delayed three times since 2009 due to the crisis in neighboring Syria as well as disagreement over the country's new electoral law.

The Interior Ministry put the voter turnout at 49.2 percent. Berri's Amal Movement, which is closely aligned with the Hezbollah resistance movement, won 13 seats at the Lebanese legislature.

Hezbollah together with allied groups and individuals managed to secure at least 70 of the parliament's 128 seats in the elections.

Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah declared a "great political and moral victory for the resistance option that protects the sovereignty of the country."



After the appointment of the parliament speaker, President Michel Aoun will consult lawmakers about the post of prime minister, with Saad Hariri widely expected to be named premier again.

Hariri's Future Movement lost over a third of its parli-

mentary seats in the election.

Lebanese news outlet al-Jadeed quoted Hariri as saying on Tuesday that a decision had been taken "to accelerate government formation."

(Source: Press TV)

Trump's fundraiser promoted anti-Qatar policies to gain hefty deals: report

A top fundraiser for the United States President Donald Trump and his business partner have reportedly promoted anti-Qatar policies at the highest levels of the U.S. government in return for lucrative business favors from the crown princes of the House of Saud regime and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

According to an investigative report released by the Associated Press, Trump's fundraiser Elliott Brody and Lebanese-American businessman George Nader spent a year cultivating links with the Saudi regime Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) and UAE Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan (MBZ) who were seeking to change the US foreign policy with regard to their archrival Qatar.

The AP investigation was based on interviews with over two dozen informed individuals and hundreds of pages of leaked emails between Brody and Nader, including work summaries, contracting documents and proposals.

Brody and Nader spearheaded their secret campaign to influence the White House and Congress and championed the anti-Qatar policy of the Persian Gulf monarchies that eventually led to the blockade of the tiny nation.

The AP had previously reported that Brody and Nader were seeking to get an anti-Qatar bill through Congress, noting that they tried to conceal the source of the money behind their influence campaign. The two did not register with the U.S. government under the Foreign Agents Registration Act, which obliges lobbyists working for foreign governments to disclose their ties and political activities.

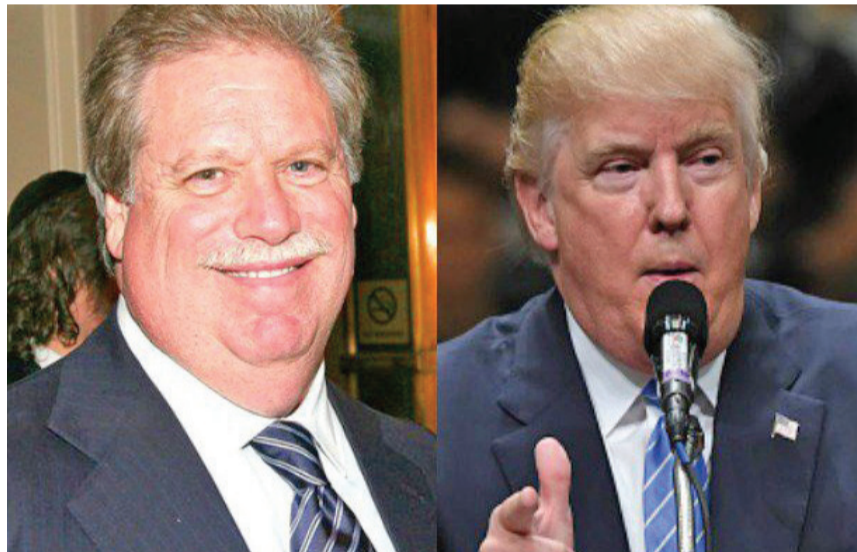
In the course of two meetings with Trump, Brody passed messages from the two princes to Trump and told the president he was seeking business with the Arab royals.

Nader, who has been setting up behind-the-scenes meetings for Israeli and Arab dignitaries with American power brokers and legislators in the U.S. since 90s, is a pedophile convict charged with sexually abusing 10 minors in the Czech Republic in 2003.

He is now living in the UAE, working as an adviser to Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

Nader and Brody formed their partnership to curry favor with the two Arab crown princes by launching a campaign against Qatar in order to turn that success into multi-million-dollar defense deals.

On February 7, 2017, Brody wrote to a staffer for the chairman of the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee with regard to a planned sanction bill against Qatar over



alleged support of terrorist groups.

The two business partners offered several plans to Mohammed bin Salman and Mohammed bin Zayed for over \$1 billion of contracts, including formation of a Muslim military force of 5,000 troops to fight in the escalating war in Yemen, cooperation with the UAE to gather intelligence, enhancement of Saudi maritime and border security and creation of counterterrorism centers in Saudi Arabia.

According to the first emails and a March 2017 document, Nader and Brody decided to focus on the lobbying campaign, by proposing a \$12-million budget to "expose and penalize" Qatar and get Washington to pressure Doha to "aid in coercive action against Iran."

The main objective of the plan was reportedly providing evidence about Qatar's closeness with Iran and Doha's support for banned groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood.

The two were seeking to use Brody's intimate ties with Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin to persuade the U.S. administration to impose sanctions on Qatar and move America's key military base from al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar to another Persian Gulf country.

Brody claimed that he had gained the support of chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Republican Rep. Ed Royce, for an anti-Qatar bill, noting he had "shifted" Royce from being critical of Saudi Arabia to "being critical of Qatar."

The AP had earlier reported that Brody gave nearly \$600,000 to GOP (Grand Old Party) candidates and causes since the beginning of 2017, with Royce receiving the

biggest share.

On the other side, Nader wrote to Brody in an email in March that he had "a terrific, magnificent meeting" with Mohammed bin Salman, laying the groundwork for their intended billion-dollar contracts.

Brody also persuaded the American think tank, Foundation for Defense of Democracies, to hold an anti-Qatar conference at the Fairmont Hotel in Washington on May 23, 2017, and assigned the commission of 200 articles to the foundation and other think tanks.

On April 21, 2017, Brody sent Nader a "confidential" draft of an Op-Ed, "The Two Faces of Qatar, a Dubious Mideast Ally," which was published in The Wall Street Journal three days later.

The piece, co-written by former deputy head of the U.S. European Command Gen. Charles Wald, called for relocation of the U.S. military assets from the al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar to the UAE.

Wald himself was in fact listed as a member of Brody's company, Circinus LLC. that was pitching contracts in Saudi Arabia.

Two weeks later in June, the UAE, the Saudi regime, Bahrain and Egypt launched a travel and trade embargo against Qatar.

The Saudi regime-led quartet presented Qatar with a list of steep demands and gave it an ultimatum to comply with them or face consequences.

Doha, however, refused to meet the demands and stressed that it would not abandon its independent foreign policy.

Qatari emir is not attending a summit of Arab nations in Saudi Arabia.

One day after the blockade started, Trump

sent a series of tweets signaling support for the anti-Qatar measures, noting his recent visit to Saudi Arabia was "already paying off." Trump added that the Saudis and its allies "said they would take a hard line on funding extremism and all reference was pointing to Qatar. Perhaps this will be the beginning of the end to horror of terrorism!"

In late September, Brody arranged another meeting with Trump in the Oval Office at the White House. According to emails between Nader and Brody, the meeting sought to sell the idea for a Muslim fighting force, to keep the president from intervening in Qatar and to set up a discreet meeting between Trump and the crown prince of Abu Dhabi.

The princes "are counting on you to relate it blunt and straight," Nader wrote.

After the meeting was held on October 6, 2017, Brody reported back to Nader that he had urged Trump to stay out of the Qatar dispute and explained Circinus' plan to build a Muslim fighting force.

"President Trump was extremely enthusiastic," he wrote.

Brody met Trump again on December 2, 2017, telling the president the crown prince were "most favorably impressed by his leadership."

He also offered the crown princes' assistance in a Middle East peace plan being drawn up by Jared Kushner, but did not talk about his partner's utter contempt for the plan.

"You have to hear in private my Brother what Principals think of 'Crown prince's efforts and his plan!'" Nader wrote.

"Nobody would even waste cup of coffee on him if it wasn't for who he is married to," he added.

Leaked emails show the UAE lobbied the U.S. to sack Secretary of State Rex Tillerson for failing to support the Emirates against rival Qatar.

According to a leaked email, a few days after Brody's meeting with Trump, the UAE awarded Brody an intelligence contract worth of up to \$600 million over 5 years.

In February, leaked batches of Brody's emails and documents that had apparently been hacked were sent to the AP, The New York Times and other news organizations anonymously.

Reports said Brody was also planning to use his White House access for clients in Africa, Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

Last week, the House of Saud regime reportedly decided to stop working with Nader and Brody, with a senior official citing Mohammed bin Salman as saying that Riyadh must end "engagement with these people."

(Source: agencies)

Venezuela ejects top ranking U.S. officials

Venezuela has kicked out the top two United States diplomatic representatives in the country in response to Washington's latest round of sanctions imposed over recent election results.

On Tuesday, Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro ordered the expulsion of the U.S. charge d'affaires Todd Robinson and deputy head of mission Brian Naranjo and declared both of them "persona non grata."

"They must leave the country in 48 hours in protest and in defense of the dignity of the Venezuelan homeland... Enough of conspiracies!" he said.

Maduro made the announcement via a nationally televised speech after being officially proclaimed the winner of Sunday's election.

On Monday, the U.S. President Donald Trump boosted sanctions against Caracas, making it harder for the country

to liquidate state assets.

"I repudiate all the sanctions that are sought against the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, because they harm it, they generate suffering for the people of Venezuela," said Maduro.

We will present evidence to the country of the conspiracy in the military field of the United States charge d'affaires and his embassy, of the conspiracy in the economic field and of the conspiracy in the political field," he added.

Venezuela's foreign ministry released a statement referring to the sanctions "a crime against humanity."

"Venezuela once again condemns the systematic campaign of aggression and hostility by the U.S. regime to punish the Venezuelan people for exercising their right to vote," read the statement.

These arbitrary and unilateral measures constitute a

crime against humanity, it added.

The U.S. also said it would not recognize the election and would actively consider oil sanctions on the country.

Washington has already imposed sanctions against Venezuela and blamed, together with its allies in the region and elsewhere, Maduro's government for the country's acute economic crisis.

On Saturday, the U.S. ramped up pressure on Caracas by imposing new sanctions against the government's top officials.

Maduro's government, however, said the U.S. was using new sanctions to sabotage the election. It called Washington's move as part of "a systematic campaign of aggression" by Trump's administration and said they had no legal base.

(Source: Press TV)

N. Korea preps nuclear site demolition despite U.S. summit doubts

Trump casts doubt on June summit with Kim



Invited foreign journalists began a long journey up North Korea's east coast Wednesday to witness the slated destruction of the reclusive regime's nuclear test site, a high profile gesture on the road to a summit with the U.S. that Donald Trump now says might not happen.

In a surprise announcement Pyongyang said earlier this month that it planned to "completely" destroy the Punggye-ri facility in the country's northeast, a move welcomed by Washington and Seoul. Punggye-ri has been the staging ground for all six of the North's nuclear tests, including its latest and by far most powerful one in September last year, which Pyongyang said was an H-bomb. The demolition is due to take place sometime between Thursday and Friday, depending on the weather.

The North has portrayed the move as a goodwill gesture ahead of a planned June 12 summit between Kim and Trump in Singapore.

But doubts have since been cast by both sides on whether that historic meeting will take place.

Last week Pyongyang threatened to pull out if Washington pressed for its unilateral nuclear disarmament. Trump also said the meeting could be delayed as he met with South Korean leader Moon Jae-in in Washington on Tuesday.

"There are certain conditions we want to happen. I think we'll get those conditions. And if we don't, we won't have the meeting," he told reporters, without elaborating on what those conditions might be. Politically, Trump has invested heavily in the success of the planned summit, and so privately most U.S. officials, as well as outside observers, believe it will go ahead.

But as the date draws near, the differences between the two sides are coming into sharp relief.

Washington has made it clear it wants to see the "complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization" of the North.

Pyongyang has vowed it will never give up its nuclear deterrence until it feels safe from what it terms U.S. aggression.

Observers will be watching this week's demolition ceremony closely for any clues to the North's intentions.

Experts are divided over whether the demolition will render the site useless. Sceptics say the site has already outlived its usefulness with six successful nuclear tests in the bag and can be quickly rebuilt if needed.

Previous similar gestures by the North were rapidly reversed when the international mood soured.

But others say the fact that North Korea agreed to destroy the site without preconditions or asking for something in return from Washington suggests Pyongyang's sincerity.

Go Myong-hyun, an analyst at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, said both sides were playing "a game of chicken" in the run-up to the summit "to gain an upper hand in negotiations".

He said the destruction of the site would win Pyongyang international sympathy even if the summit collapses.

"North Korea can say to the international community that it did its best to achieve denuclearization through negotiations but was pressured by the United States and couldn't do it," he said.

A handful of foreign journalists from China, the U.S., Britain, Russia and South Korea were invited to attend the demolition ceremony. They set off from the North Korean city of Wonsan on Wednesday around 0800 GMT, according to tweets from some of the journalists within the group.

They are expected to travel for some 20 hours by train, bus and finally a short hike to the remote test site -- a vivid illustration of the impoverished country's notoriously decrepit transport infrastructure.

The South Korean journalists were only allowed to attend at the last minute by Pyongyang on Wednesday.

Seoul scrambled a government passenger jet to ferry them to Wonsan -- a rare direct flight between the two countries.

Agence France-Presse is one of a number of major media organisations not invited to cover the demolition.

On Seoul's streets Wednesday, South Koreans were circumspect about whether they thought Pyongyang was genuine.

"I don't really have any faith," said Korean-American businessman Peter Chung. "But... I hope for the best."

(Source: AFP)

Tensions soar between India, Pakistan along Kashmir frontier

Indian officials say at least four civilians have been killed in firing by Pakistani troops along the volatile frontier in Indian-controlled Kashmir, in escalating violence in the disputed region that both countries blame the other for initiating.

Police said Wednesday that Pakistani soldiers continued targeting dozens of Indian border posts and villages with mortars and automatic gunfire for the sixth straight day in the Jammu region. At least 30 people have been injured.

Pakistan did not immediately comment.

Indian officials have called the violence a continuous violation of the cease-fire accord of 2003 between the rivals.

India and Pakistan have a long history of bitter relations over Kashmir, which both claim. They have fought two of their three wars since 1947 over their competing claims to the region.

(Source: AP)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	95445.1
IFX	1107.04

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,080 rials
EUR	49,466 rials
GBP	56,425 rials
AED	11,458 rials

Source: mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

WTI	71.77/b
Brent	78.95/b
OPEC Basket	76.21/b
Gold	\$1,269.60 /oz
Silver	\$16.54/oz
Platinum	\$911.25/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



95% of electricity sector's equipment is domestically manufactured

E N E R G Y TEHRAN — Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian said that 95% of the equipment used in the electricity sector is domestically manufactured, IRIB reported on Wednesday.

In the water sector, except for some instrumentation related to water treatment machinery, all pieces of equipment are domestically manufactured, the minister said.

"In construction of dams as well as irrigation and drainage networks, and in water and wastewater treatment, the work is done relying on domestic capability and if there is any cooperation with the foreign companies it is for transfer of knowledge", Ardakanian noted.



Inflation rate down to 8%: statistical center

E C O N O M Y TEHRAN — The Statistical Center of Iran announced that the inflation rate in the twelve-month period ended on the last day of the second Iranian calendar month Ordibehesht (May 21) stood at 8 percent, down 0.1 percent from its previous month, IRNA reported.

All sectors of the Iranian economy registered positive growth in 2017, during which 650,000 jobs were created and the country attained a single-digit inflation rate after a quarter of century.

Malaysian PM says national debt is 65% of GDP

Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said on Wednesday that the new government will look to cut down the country's debt which amounts to 1 trillion ringgit, by aborting or reviewing some projects and cutting salaries of cabinet ministers.

Mahathir also said the national debt is 65 percent of the GDP. Ousted premier Najib Razak has said previously that the debt was below his government's self-imposed ceiling of 55 percent of GDP.

"I've been informed that our debt is actually 1 trillion ringgit, but today we were able to study and look for ways to reduce this debt," he said at a press conference.

(Source: CNBC)

Turkey heads toward a currency crisis as Lira goes into freefall

Turkey is entering the grips of a full-blown currency crisis.

The lira was already on course for its worst month since 2008 when it plunged to a new record Wednesday, a sign that the central bank's apparent refusal to step in is giving traders free rein to bet against it. It sank as much as 5.2 percent.

Policy makers "must hike now," said Cristian Maggio, the head of emerging-market strategy at TD Securities in London. "There's no limit to how far this could go because this is becoming a currency crisis." Eventually, Turks will start selling too, and then there will be "total loss of confidence," he said.

The lira has fallen on every day but three this month, a selloff that has accelerated since President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has long called for interest rate cuts to fuel growth, said this month he intends to take more responsibility for monetary policy if he wins the June 24 election. Traders are also punishing the nation for failing to do enough to combat double-digit inflation and a widening current-account deficit.

The lira's 21 percent loss this year, the second worst in emerging markets, is close to exceeding the decline in Argentina's peso. The projected carry return on the lira, based on the interest-rate differential adjusted for funding costs and expected swings, plunged to the lowest since January 2017.

Even Japanese margin traders, who until recently were doubling down on their Turkish bets, have been cutting their losses.

Borsa Istanbul, the nation's stock exchange, said there's no economic data that justifies the lira's depreciation. It attributed the decline to "speculative approaches" aimed at putting Turkey's economy in a negative light.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Jobs to be created for 1.033m people by March 2019

E C O N O M Y TEHRAN — Mohammad Baqer Nobakht, the head of Planning and Budget Organization of Iran, announced that jobs will be created for 1.033 million people in the country by the end of current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2019), IRNA reported. The official said some 797,000 people were added to the employed population of Iran in the last calendar year.

He further mentioned creating jobs in the rural areas as one of the main employment plans of the government.

Some 210,000 jobs were created in the rural areas in the past calendar year, according to Abolfazl Razavi, the vice president for rural development and deprived areas.

The official said the figure is tried to reach 300,000 in the current year.



Mohammad Baqer Nobakht, the head of Planning and Budget Organization of Iran,

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. The Statistical Center of Iran has an-

nounced that the number of employed people reached 23,378,613 in the past year. The center also put the country's unemployment rate at 12.1 percent, indicating 0.3 percent fall year on year.

Austria's OMV stands by Iran project

Austrian energy group OMV is continuing with planned Iranian energy projects despite the United States' withdrawal from a nuclear pact with Tehran, but said on Tuesday it had made no investments there yet.

European firms doing business in Iran face U.S. sanctions after President Donald Trump withdrew from a deal between the U.S., France, Germany, Britain, Russia, China and Iran, which lifted sanctions in exchange for Tehran limiting its nuclear program.

The other signatories have indicated that they hope to salvage the deal. French finance minister Bruno Le Maire brought up the idea that the European Union could compensate European companies that might face U.S. sanctions.

OMV was monitoring political developments in the U.S. and the European Union very closely, OMV's upstream chief Johann Pleininger told its annual share-



holder meeting in Vienna. "The project has not come to a standstill, it is continu-

ing," Pleininger said with regard to Iran, adding that "no investments have been made yet".

The Austrian group, which generates the bulk of its profit in Europe, started operations in Iran in 2001 as the operator of the Mehr exploration block in the west of the country.

OMV halted operations in 2006 due to sanctions, but following sanctions relief it signed in May 2016 a memorandum with the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) for projects located in the Zagros area in the west and the Fars field in the south, where foreign firms often need a local partner.

In June 2017, OMV and Russia's Gazprom Neft announced a memorandum of understanding to work in Iran's oil sector.

OMV is Austria's former state petroleum company and the government still holds a 31.5 percent stake. Its second-biggest investor is Abu Dhabi industrial group Mubadala Investment with 24.9 percent. (Source: Reuters)

French unemployment edges up, dampening Macron's hopes

French unemployment rose slightly in the first three months of the year, confounding economists' expectations for a decline and suggesting President Emmanuel Macron's policies to boost jobs and growth are struggling to find traction.

Data from the national statistics office INSEE showed the ILO jobless rate rose to 9.2 percent in the first quarter, up from 9.0 percent in the last quarter of 2017. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast a rate of 8.8 percent.

While disappointing for a government that has banked on bringing high unemployment down via faster growth and tweaks to employment law, analysts suggest France may now be hampered by a wider loss of momentum across the euro zone.

"The first quarter data showed a slowdown in France but actually the country's loss of inertia wasn't a one-off, it was across Europe generally," said Lorne Baring, chief investment officer at B Capital SA.

"The question now is whether the second quarter brings France, and Europe as well, back towards the improving trend or if it confirms a slowdown is under way."

At the end of last year, in the months after Macron's election victory, France looked to be in a strong position, with growth picking up and business and consumer confidence at or near highs.

But first quarter growth of 0.3 percent came in below expectations and manufacturing surveys and other indicators have since pointed to a slowdown in momentum.

Disruptive factors

A survey of French purchasing managers on Wednesday showed business activity slowed more than expected in May, although the month was affected by a high number of holidays.

IHS Markit said its composite PMI, which covers the services and manufactur-



French President Emmanuel Macron talks with Whirlpool employees during a visit at the company's factory in Amiens, France, October 3, 2017.

ing sectors, fell to 54.5 points from 56.9 in April, hitting its lowest level since January 2017.

"There have been short-term disruptive factors," said IHS Markit chief economist Chris Williamson, adding that companies remained upbeat about prospects for now. "So we remain positive about the outlook."

Part of the problem for the euro zone is a raft of political uncertainty, both at home and abroad.

While Germany continues to grow, weaker global trade and the looming prospect of a tariff battle with the United States have hit output. The rate of growth halved in the first quarter of the year.

Italy, the euro zone's third largest economy, has still not appointed a prime minister since elections in March, and the candidate proposed by the populist coalition seeking to take office is an entirely unknown quantity.

Yields on Italian debt have climbed — reflecting the higher risk of holding Italian assets — on the back of the political instability and the euro-scepticism of both the anti-establishment 5-Star Movement and the far-right League.

(Source: Reuters)

Trump floats management changes instead of sanctions for China's ZTE

U.S. President Donald Trump on Tuesday floated a plan to fine ZTE Corp and shake up its management as his administration considered rolling back more severe penalties that have crippled the Chinese telecommunications company.

Trump's proposal ran into immediate resistance in Congress, where Republicans and Democrats accused the president of bending to pressure from Beijing to ease up on a company that has admitted to violating sanctions on Iran.

Their reaction could complicate Trump's efforts to win concessions from China that would narrow a \$335 billion annual trade gap.

Speaking at the White House, Trump said U.S. technology companies have been hurt by an April Commerce Department decision that prohibits them from selling components to China's second-largest telecommunications equipment maker. ZTE shut down most of its production after the ruling was announced.

"They can pay a big price without necessarily damaging all of these American companies," Trump said.

Trump said ZTE may instead face a fine of up to \$1.3 billion, new management and a new board of directors, though it was not clear whether he had the legal authority to impose new financial penalties.

That drew a quick response from Republicans and Democrats in Congress.

Some 26 senators, including the chamber's top Democrat, Chuck Schumer, and No. 2 Republican, John Cornyn, urged the administration in a letter to keep penalties in place for "serial and pre-meditated violators of U.S. law, such as ZTE."

The Senate Banking Committee also voted 23-2 to make it harder for the president to modify penalties on Chinese



telecommunications firms, drawing the support of liberal Democrats like Chris Van Hollen and conservative Republicans like Tom Cotton.

The Republican-controlled House of Representatives is weighing a proposal that would block the sale of ZTE products and those of another Chinese company, Huawei Technologies, until national security officials certify they are safe. It would be added to a defense-policy bill that Congress typically passes each year.

Congress last year passed a law that required the administration to impose new sanctions on Russia, though similar action this year could be more difficult as the November elections draw near.

According to sources familiar with the discussions, a proposed trade deal with China would lift a seven-year ban that prevents U.S. chipmakers and other companies from selling components to ZTE, which makes smartphones and telecommunications networking gear.

In return, China would eliminate tariffs on U.S. agriculture or agree to buy more farm products from the United States.

The U.S. Commerce Department imposed the ban in April after it determined that ZTE had broken an agreement after it pleaded guilty to shipping U.S. goods and technology to Iran.

(Source: Reuters)

Euro zone business slowdown suggests best days may be over

Euro zone economic growth slowed much more sharply than expected this month, a business survey showed, which along with weaker inflation has intensified concerns there will be no return to the bloc's recent boom times. The European Central Bank will end its asset purchase programme this year and hike interest rates in 2019, a Reuters poll found last month, although policymakers may be concerned to see inflation easing along with growth.

While the expansion still remained relatively strong, growth slowed to a 20-month low in the bloc's largest economy, Germany, and the lowest in a year in a half in No. 2 economy France, according to the latest IHS Markit purchasing managers' surveys.

French unemployment also rose in the first three months of 2018, confounding economists' expectations for a decline, according to separate official data.

The euro fell to a six-month low after the German PMI data, which are released before the euro zone numbers, raised concerns a slowdown in Europe's biggest economy in recent months was more widespread than previously thought.

"Contemplating the euro zone's growth perspectives we, unfortunately, might have to refer to the famous Looney Tunes catchphrase 'That's all folks!'," noted Peter Vanden Houde, an economist at ING.

The Euro Zone Composite Flash Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), seen as a good guide to economic activity, sank in May to an 18-month low of 54.1 from 55.1, below all forecasts in a Reuters poll which predicted a dip to 55.0.

Figures above 50.0 in the PMIs suggest expansion.

Having outpaced its peers in 2017, expanding at record levels at the turn of the year,

euro zone growth has steadily weakened. Forward-looking indicators in the PMIs also deteriorated, suggesting no imminent bounce-back.

"May's fall in the euro zone PMI yet again partly reflected temporary factors, but the continued softness of the surveys in Q2 is certainly a concern. The declines in the forward-looking components are somewhat worrying," said Jessica Hinds at Capital Economics.

New business growth slowing HIS Markit said the PMI, alongside the April reading, pointed to second quarter growth of 0.4 percent, weaker than the 0.6 percent prediction in an April Reuters poll.

A composite output price index fell to an eight-month low of 53.0 from 53.4. Euro zone inflation slowed to 1.2 percent in April, official data showed last week, moving further away from the ECB's two percent target ceiling.

Despite those easing price pressures, a

PMI covering the bloc's dominant service industry slumped to 53.9 from 54.7, missing expectations for a gentle slide to 54.6.

That was its lowest reading since the start of 2017 and below all poll forecasts.

With new business growth slowing, and firms building up backlogs of work at a slower pace, optimism fell to a nine-month low. That sub-index fell to 64.4 from 66.2 in April.

It was a similarly disappointing month for manufacturers. The flash factory PMI missed expectations for a modest dip to 56.0 from 56.2, instead coming in at a 15-month low of 55.5.

An index measuring output, which feeds into the composite PMI, fell to an 18-month low of 54.5 from 56.2.

Optimism also fell among factory managers too, slowing their hiring growth to the slowest pace for nine months. The employment index dipped to 55.5 from 56.6, a nine-month low.

(Source: Reuters)

UK government looks to force open \$640m fund to pay off national debt

The U.K. government will go to the country's highest court Tuesday in a bid to force open a £475 million (\$640 million) charity fund set up 90 years ago with the intention of paying off the national debt.

The "National Fund" was opened in 1928 by an anonymous benefactor who donated £500,000, but on the condition that it must

remain untouched until the U.K. raises enough money to pay off its entire national debt.

While the fund currently stands at £475 million, it represents just 0.06 percent of the U.K.'s estimated £1.7 trillion debt.

Attorney General Jeremy Wright will urge High Court judges on Tuesday to change the terms of the trust fund and release the

money to pay off some of the U.K.'s debt.

"Almost 90 years ago, an anonymous donor bequeathed money to the nation and yet we have not been able to put it to good use," Wright said. "We have been working with the Treasury, trustees and the Charity Commission to find a solution consistent with the donor's original objectives of extinguishing

the national debt."

Barclays, which oversees the management of the fund, has for years tried to obtain permission to gain access to the money, to make it available for charitable grants or hand it over to the Treasury.

Any changes to the fund must be approved by the High Court. (Source: CNBC)

Oil prices slip on potential easing of OPEC supply curbs

Oil prices eased on Wednesday as the possibility of higher OPEC output weighing on the market, although geopolitical risks are expected to keep prices near multi-year highs.

Brent LCOc futures fell 37 cents, or nearly 0.5 percent, to \$79.20 a barrel by 0636 GMT, after climbing 35 cents on Tuesday. Last week, the global benchmark hit \$80.50 a barrel, the highest since November 2014.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude CLc1 futures eased 21 cents, or nearly 0.3 percent, to \$71.99 a barrel, having climbed on Tuesday to \$72.83, also the highest since November 2014.

"It looks like the market is pausing at current levels," said Michael McCarthy, Chief Market Strategist at brokerage CMC Markets. "If sanctions are introduced against Iran, most of the OPEC producers would like to be pumping more oil, particularly giving the higher prices."

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) may decide to raise oil output as soon as June due to worries over Iranian and Venezuelan supply and after Washington raised concerns the oil rally was



going too far, OPEC and oil industry sources familiar with the discussions told Reuters. OPEC-led supply curbs have largely cleared

an inventory surplus in industrialized countries based on the deal's original goals and stocks continue to decline.

"...Investors are mindful of upcoming talks between Russia and Saudi Arabia about whether they should look at a controlled relaxation of over-compliance with their output cut agreement," ANZ said in a note.

Rising supply in the United States, where shale production is forecast to hit a record high in June, has limited the upward move in prices.

Concerns about a potential drop in Iranian oil exports following Washington's exit from a nuclear deal with Tehran have driven prices to multi-year highs.

In addition, Venezuela's crude output could drop further following a disputed presidential election.

The United States is actively considering oil sanctions on Venezuela, where output has dropped by a third in two years to its lowest in decades.

U.S. crude and distillate stockpiles fell last week, while gasoline inventories increased unexpectedly, data from industry group the American Petroleum Institute showed on Tuesday.

(Source: Reuters)

Traders see higher oil prices in the long term

By Tsvetana Paraskova

Oil market participants and analysts have been focused on the front-month oil futures prices that rallied to levels last seen in November 2014, with Brent Crude breaking above \$80 a barrel last week.

Yet, over the past month, an even bigger rally has been taking place at the back end of the curve—in the five-year forward oil prices that generally trade in a much narrower band than front-month futures do.

The rally in forward prices has outpaced the front-month price increase, suggesting the speculators are betting on rising oil prices in the medium term, to 2022 and 2023, and that the 'lower-for-longer' could be over, analysts tell Bloomberg.

While Brent Crude jumped last week to above \$80 and WTI Crude broke above \$72, the five-year Brent forward price has jumped to above \$63 a barrel, after having traded mostly constrained in the \$55-60 narrow range for the past year and a half. Brent for December 2022 delivery has jumped by 10 percent since the beginning of May to more than \$64 a barrel, and the December 2023

futures prices have surged past \$63.

With oil producers not yet rushing to hedge production to the five-year forward price end of the curve and weighing down on prices, forward prices have more room to rise, analysts told Bloomberg.

The five-year forward Brent futures have jumped by 11 percent over the past month, while the front-month futures gained 6.8 percent.

Over the past few months, much of the rally in front-month futures prices has been driven by geopolitical concerns of possible supply disruptions in the short term, with plunging Venezuelan production and a potential loss of some Iranian oil barrels with the reintroduction of the U.S. sanctions on Tehran.

In the five-year forward prices, speculators and analysts look at the longer-term forecasts for supply and demand that are more 'shielded' from the geopolitical risk premium that pushes the \$80 oil rally we all see in the charts.

According to analysts and traders who spoke to Bloomberg, the forward price rally is more impressive than the front-month price gains and suggests that investors and speculators could be betting on higher oil

prices in five years' time based on supply and demand expectations.

"The war premium at the front of the market masked the fact that future significant demand increases and questions over supply levels equate to higher prices down the line," Richard Fullarton, founder of commodity-focused hedge fund Matilda Capital Management, told Bloomberg.

On the demand side, global oil demand growth continues to be strong, following stronger-than-expected demand last year. The price rally has had some analysts question whether \$80 oil could start slowing down some of the expected oil demand growth. Yet, currently growth is still expected to be strong.

On the supply side, the OPEC/non-OPEC cuts are currently holding back oil volumes from the market. Regardless of how long OPEC and friends will withhold 1.8 million bpd—due to Venezuela's plunge it's more than 2 million bpd—of supply, the oil industry will start to feel soon the underinvestment in projects during the worst of the oil price slump, analysts warn.

According to the International Energy Agency's (IEA) Oil 2018 report, "the recovery from the historic drop-off in investments

by 25 percent in both 2015 and 2016 has barely started. Investment was flat in 2017, and early data suggests only a modest rise in 2018. This is potentially storing up trouble for the future."

Current investment is overwhelmingly taking place in U.S. shale, and "upstream investment may be inadequate to avoid a significant squeezing of the global spare capacity cushion by 2023, even as costs have fallen and project efficiency has improved," the IEA said.

Five years from now, global oil demand is expected to continue to grow while supply could be squeezed by the 2015-2016 slump in investments in longer-lead time offshore projects.

Thus, the rally in five-year forward prices is not without its reasons.

"For the first time since December 2015, the back end of the curve has been leading the complex higher," Yasser Elguindi, a market strategist at Energy Aspects Ltd in New York, told Bloomberg.

"It seems that the investor community is finally calling into question the 'lower for longer' thesis."

(Source: oilprice.com)

Kenya removes roadblock for oil industry development

The Kenyan government and local lawmakers from the oil-rich Turkana region reached an agreement on the distribution of oil revenues that was preventing the country from beginning the development of its oil resources in earnest.

Under a bill proposed at the start of this year, Bloomberg reports, Kenya offered local communities 5 percent of the revenues to be generated by the exploitation of oil and gas reserves, with another 20 percent going to the local government. However, the bill had a caveat: the amount of money must not exceed central government money allocations for the regions.

The Turkana lawmakers were okay with receiving 20 percent of revenues with another 5 going to the local communities but they were not okay with the caveat regarding central government allocations. Now, the central government has agreed to drop this particular part of the proposal.

President Uhuru Kenyatta announced the deal over the weekend, as reported by Reuters, and today it was confirmed



by a Turkana member of parliament to Bloomberg. "We will intensify our exploration efforts not just in Turkana but in the rest of the country now that we have a legal instrument that can help guide how oil and gas will be handled in our republic," Kenyatta said.

Kenya has stored 70,000 barrels of oil in the north of the country, waiting to be trucked to the Mombasa port for pilot exports, awaiting the solution of the revenue-sharing problem.

(Source: oilprice.com)

British Petroleum to buy U.S. LNG for 20 years amid struggle for EU market

The multinational oil and gas giant British Petroleum (BP) has signed an agreement to buy liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the U.S. company Venture Global for the next 20 years, according to The Financial Times.

Under the deal, BP will buy 2 million metric tons of LNG per year after Venture Global's Louisiana-based Calcasieu Pass export facility is put into operation in 2022.

The agreement came after Venture Global inked similar deals with Royal Dutch Shell, Italy's Edison and Portugal's Galp, which have agreed to purchase a combined 6 million metric tons of LNG a year.

Earlier this month, a diplomatic source told Sputnik that the European Commission had proposed boosting the EU's LNG imports from the United States in exchange for U.S. tariffs on steel and aluminum imported from EU member states being scrapped.

Speaking to Sputnik in March, Assistant Secretary of State Sandra Oudkirk signaled Washington's readiness to compete with Russia in the LNG market



in Europe.

She admitted that the volume U.S. companies could sell to the EU "is much less than the volume that Russia can sell through its pipelines."

In the first quarter of 2017, the United States had become the sixth largest LNG supplier to the EU.

The International Energy Agency in turn reported that the United States may become one of the leading LNG exporters in the next five years.

(Source: Sputnik)

OPEC may decide to ease oil supply curbs in June, sources say

OPEC may decide to raise oil output as soon as June due to worries over Iranian and Venezuelan supply and after Washington raised concerns the oil rally was going too far, OPEC and oil industry sources familiar with the discussions told Reuters.

Persian Gulf OPEC countries are leading the initial talks on when the exporting group can boost oil production to cool the oil market after crude rose above \$80 a barrel last week, and how many barrels each member can add, the sources said.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and non-OPEC producers led by Russia have agreed to curb output by about 1.8 million barrels per day (bpd) until the end of 2018 to reduce high global oil stocks, but the inventory overhang has now fallen close to OPEC's target.

"All options are on the table," one Persian Gulf oil source told Reuters, adding that a decision to raise output might be taken in June when OPEC next meets to decide on its output policy, but there is no certain number yet by how much the group would need to ease its oil supply curbs.

OPEC and its non-OPEC allies may opt to relax record high compliance with the supply curb agreement, another source said.

OPEC's compliance with the deal reached an unprecedented 166 percent in April, meaning it has cut



well above its target.

"We are still studying the different scenarios," the second source said, adding that even if OPEC decided to ease the output restrictions in June it may take three to four months to put into effect.

"That is one of the options," an OPEC source said, referring to adding more supply at the June meeting.

Falling Venezuelan output due to an economic crisis has helped OPEC and its allies deliver a bigger cut than

intended.

Saudi Energy Minister Khalid al-Falih is set to meet his counterparts from Russia and the United Arab Emirates, which holds the OPEC presidency in 2018, in St. Petersburg this week to discuss this issue, sources said.

So far, OPEC has said it sees no need to ease output restrictions despite a fall in global stocks to the groups desired levels and concerns among consuming nations that the price rally could undermine demand.

But the sources said that the quick decline in global oil inventories and worries about the impact on oil supplies after the U.S. decision to withdraw from the international nuclear deal with Iran, as well as Venezuela's collapsing oil output, were behind the change in OPEC's thinking.

Concerns raised by the United States that oil prices were too high also made the exporting group start internal discussions, the sources added.

U.S. President Donald Trump accused OPEC last month of "artificially" boosting oil prices.

Last week, Falih said he had called his counterparts in the UAE, the United States and Russia, as well as major oil consumer South Korea, to coordinate global action to ease global market anxiety.

(Source: Reuters)

China is a renewable energy champion, but it's time for a new approach

The development of renewable energy in China has attracted global attention in recent years. In 2012, China's installed capacity of wind and solar power was 61GW and 3.4GW respectively, while the annual electricity generated by renewables was only 2.1% of China's total consumption. By 2017, China's wind and solar power capacity had increased to 168.5 GW and 130.06 GW respectively, and renewables were generating 5.3% of China's electricity supply.

At present, China leads the world in terms of wind and solar power capacity. And with large-scale industrial applications, the costs have fallen substantially. A good example is photovoltaic (PV) technology: the price of PV modules decreased from about 30 Yuan per watt in 2007 to about 10 Yuan in 2012, and by 2017 it had decreased further to just 2 Yuan per watt.

The success of China's renewable energy drive fully illustrates the effectiveness of China's on-grid tariff subsidies. The advantage of the on-grid tariff policy – through which the government can make renewable energy production more competitive and attractive to businesses and investors – is that it anchors the revenue of power generation throughout the entire life cycle. In this way, it conveys a clear price signal to investors, and can effectively support the early stages of renewable energy development.



However, alongside the rapid expansion of installed capacity, the total amount of renewable subsidies is also mounting rapidly. Based on the average on-grid electricity tariff, the total amount of wind and PV subsidies in 2012 came to about 60 billion yuan, a figure that had increased to 170 billion yuan by 2017. Although the government reduced the subsidy several times during this period, the total amount of subsidy continued to climb. The subsidies for renewable energy should be compensated by the renewable surcharge collected from end consumers. China's renewable surcharge was 0.015 yuan/kWh in 2012, and rose to 0.019 yuan/kWh in 2016. There was a surplus of 15 billion yuan in the account of China's 'renewable energy subsidy' in 2012, but by 2017 it had turned into a large deficit of about 80 billion yuan.

Therefore, China's expansion of renewables will inevitably lead to a rapid increase in subsidies. Solutions to accommodate rapid renewable expansion usually lead to two phenomena: one is the rapid growth of end consumer tariffs, such as in Germany, and the other is maintaining high subsidies, such as in China, but with a large subsidy deficit.

The rapid development of renewables in Germany has led to a significant rise in electricity tariffs, which have nearly doubled over the past decade, making Germany one of the countries with the highest electricity tariffs in Europe. Of these tariffs, the largest incremental has been the renewable energy surcharges. At present, Germany's renewable surcharge roughly amounts to 0.8 yuan/kWh – or €0.11 – which alone is equivalent to China's average end consumer tariffs. This has had a considerable negative impact and has provoked great opposition. As a result, the development of renewables in Germany has slowed sharply in the last two years.

Last year, there was an appeal to increase China's renewable surcharge to 0.3 yuan/kWh in order to balance the subsidy deficit. But it did not happen. Instead, the government this year lowered the end consumer tariffs for industrial and commercial consumers by 10%. It would seem it is not possible to increase funding for renewable subsidies. At the same time, the installed capacity of China's PV surged significantly. In the first nine months of 2017, about 42GW of new capacity had been installed and this increased the subsidy bill by nearly 30 billion yuan.

At present in China the quality of renewables, rather than the quantity, should be prioritized. Since competitiveness is crucial to future development, subsidies should be designed in such a way as to favor competitiveness. The current approach – subsidy based on quantity (generation hours) – could possibly prompt some enterprises to overlook the long-term interests of the industry in order to make short-term profits.

The curtailment of wind and solar in China is largely due to the imbalance in China's energy endowment. The majority of renewable generation is concentrated in western China, but the market's capacity to accommodate wind and solar power there is very limited. Despite the government's efforts, the relatively large curtailment is likely to continue, as long as renewable installed capacity continues to grow rapidly. As such, the government might need to consider reducing subsidies to contain the enthusiasm for renewables. Further, with the current electricity surplus in China, transferring subsidy reductions into cost reductions can reduce inefficient capacity installations. Reducing subsidies can also force renewables manufacturers and power plant investors to consider future investments more carefully, and encourage them to look for more economical projects.

All subsidies are, in general, temporary and unsustainable. With the rapid growth of renewable energy, the increasing financial burden will inevitably lead to the reduction and even elimination of subsidies. It is problematic for an industry to plan long-term development with a reliance on subsidies. Further, with the costs of renewables falling drastically, the marginal stimulus effect of subsidies on renewables has been greatly reduced. It could be more effective to promote renewable development by implementing environmental tax, carbon trading and a carbon tax.

Renewable subsidies should be used to encourage technological innovation. Only the cost reductions brought about by innovation will be certain and permanent. It is commonly understood that the 21st century is a time for renewable development. However, renewable energy development still encounters challenges. Given that the businesses involved in renewables are still by and large struggling in their financial performances, government support is still needed and, in particular, technological innovation needs sufficient financial support.

If subsidy is still necessary at this stage, the government should change the way subsidy is granted. For example, the government could consider subsidizing renewable energy enterprises for a fixed quantity until the quota runs out. This can prevent renewables firms from indulging in illegal behavior, and force them to improve their competitiveness through innovation. Further, the government could move subsidy to the upstream of the industrial value chain to support key technologies such as energy storage.

As renewable energy in China enters this stage of rapid growth, subsidy policy should be more flexible and better designed to reflect reality. The government needs to carefully design subsidies in order to stimulate innovation and to address the developmental problems of renewables.

(Source: europeansting.com)

Central African leaders turn to constitutional changes to cement power

Voters in Burundi have backed wide-ranging constitutional changes that will reinforce the power of the president, Pierre Nkurunziza, potentially allowing him to rule for up to 14 more years after his current term expires in 2020.

The measures were approved by 75% of voters, with 17% opposed, on a reported turnout of 98%.

Presidential terms will be extended from five years to seven and there will be changes to the distribution of senior government posts according to ethnicity. Critics fear this will upset a delicate balance between communities that has preserved peace since the end of a civil war.

The result reinforces a broader trend in the central African region where a series of rulers have lifted limits on their terms or otherwise bolstered their powers.

"It is a negative trend and we need to ask what factors are behind it," said Patrick Hajayandi, of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation. "One is that many people currently believe democracy brings instability and are looking at other political models. China and other eastern nations seem to be developing very fast and have the stability that Africa needs."

Tensions in Burundi have been running high for months and there has been a wave of alleged detentions and killings of the government's perceived opponents.

The main opposition leader, Agathon Rwasa, said he rejected the "fantasist results". He said: "The electoral process has been neither free nor transparent, nor independent and still less democratic."

The EU and the U.S. have denounced intimidation, repression and harassment of opposition supporters, while Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have repeatedly documented widespread abuses by security forces and government-sponsored organizations. Burundi's government has said the charges are malicious propaganda spread by exiles.

Nkurunziza, a former teacher and rebel leader who is the son of a Hutu father and a Tutsi mother, has been in power since 2003. Nic Cheeseman, a professor of democracy at the University of Birmingham and an expert on African politics, said Nkurunziza had learned from other leaders in the region. "Leaders are getting more and more strategic and clever about how they package democratic backsliding for domestic and international audiences," he said.

Paul Kagame, the president of neighboring Rwanda, won re-election last year for a third seven-year term, after a constitutional change that waived a previous two-term limit were approved in a referendum.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo's president, Joseph Kabila, has ignored the end of his second mandate and is yet to give an assurance that he will not seek a third term in polls scheduled for December. Uganda's Yoweri Museveni, 73, recently brought in a law waiving a presidential age limit of 75 and allowing him to run for a sixth term in 2021.

Analysts say such tactics are common across Africa, though some regions are less prone than others. "Some regions, such as [the Economic Community of West African States], are more willing to address the issue and understand its implications for stability ... but there is a serious problem," said Stephanie Wolters, an expert at the Institute for Security Studies in South Africa.

"Burundi and DRC are both on their third post-conflict election and that tends to be the one that is problematic because the elite doesn't feel like leaving."

Nkurunziza, a born-again Christian who won some support with public displays of faith, was re-elected unopposed in 2010 after the opposition boycotted the vote. In 2015 he triggered a crisis by pursuing a third term. Since then more than 1,000 people have died in political violence and more than 400,000 have fled the country.

(Source: The Guardian)

A G7 summit with hospitality on the table

As host of June's Group of Seven gathering, Canada has put two of the latest mass migrations on the agenda. Its own generosity toward migrants should help elevate the West's response to a global refugee crisis.

As befits its reputation for generosity, Canada is ranked in the top four of nations most accepting of migrants, according to a recent Gallup poll. As a share of population, its yearly immigration is three times that of the United States. This distinction may help explain why, as the host of a Group of Seven summit of major Western leaders, Canada has invited a most unlikely guest to the G7's gathering in Quebec next month.

She is Sheikh Hasina, prime minister of Bangladesh. Her South Asian country is now coping with one of the world's latest mass movements of refugees – the forced exodus of 700,000 Rohingya Muslims from mostly Buddhist Myanmar in a case of violent ethnic cleansing.

In addition, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has put a related topic on the G7 agenda: Venezuela, also a recent source of mass migration. An estimated 5,000 Venezuelans a day are fleeing to neighboring countries, a result of mass hunger and poverty under a dictatorial regime. The number seeking asylum in the U.S. jumped last year by 88 percent. And after a sham election in Venezuela last Sunday, the total number of migrants is expected to rise from 1.5 million to 2 million by year's end.

Canada's spotlight on these two countries is both welcome and well timed. According to the United Nations, the world is experiencing the highest number of displaced people on record, or about 40 million people, in places as diverse as Syria, South Sudan, Nigeria, Yemen, Venezuela, and Myanmar. Millions are fleeing for reasons just as diverse – political turmoil, mass poverty, or ethnic and religious conflict. In Myanmar, many Rohingya women fled just to avoid being raped.

While many Western countries, including the U.S., are increasing aid to refugees, the need for humanitarian assistance keeps rising even as the West's ability to address the root causes of each crisis has diminished. Canada hopes to start a fix for all this by focusing the G7 summit on ways to influence the leaders of Myanmar and Venezuela.

Western democracies have a big stake in such a difficult task. Anti-immigrant feelings are disrupting their politics, reflected in Britain's vote to leave the European Union, and the rise of extremist parties in many EU nations. Voters increasingly fear a loss of national sovereignty, local community, and rule of law.

Like many other global issues, mass migration needs to be on the agenda of world leaders. And it takes a generous country to put it there. As Canada knows, every refugee deserves a home, either back in their own country or in a welcoming foreign land.

(Source: The CSM)

Call for coup in Saudi

By David Hearst

A dissident Saudi prince has called on his uncles to depose King Salman and take over the country.

Prince Khaled bin Farhan made the appeal to Prince Ahmed bin Abdulaziz and Prince Muqrin bin Abdulaziz, saying that the damage being done to the Saudi royal family and the kingdom by Salman's "irrational, erratic and stupid" rule had gone beyond the point of no-return.

In an interview with Middle East Eye, Prince Khaled, who was given political asylum in Germany in 2013, said that if Ahmed and Muqrin were to unite ranks then "99 percent of the members of the royal family, the security services and the army would stand behind them".

Prince Khaled is a distant member of the Saudi royal family. But Riyadh is sensitive to any member breaking ranks, however distant he may be to the line of succession, and has tried to lure him back.

The prince said that recent statements by Mamduh bin Abdulaziz, one of the eldest surviving brothers of King Salman, indicated wider resentment within the family as a whole.

"There is so much anger within the royal family," Prince Khaled said, "I took this information and appeal to my uncles Ahmed and Muqrin, who are the sons of Abdulaziz and are highly educated, well versed and able to change things for the better. I can say that we are all behind them and support them."

Ahmed bin Abdulaziz, a former deputy minister of interior and minister of the interior, retains the support of important sections of the security forces and the tribes, the prince said. Muqrin bin Abdulaziz was initially appointed crown prince by his brother Salman, only to be replaced by Mohammed bin Nayef in April 2015; he in turn was replaced by current incumbent Mohammed bin Salman, sometimes known as MBS, in June 2017.

Prince Khaled said he had received a large number of emails from people within the police and army in support of his call. "I perceived from them that they are appealing, rather than demanding, to Prince Ahmed bin Abdulaziz to take an initiative to change the current situation."

■ Mystery over palace gunfire

The call for a coup comes as mystery continues about bursts of heavy gunfire which were heard outside the king's Ouja palace in Riyadh in April. The official explanation was that security guards had shot down "a toy drone".

But the anonymous Saudi blogger Mujtabid said that the palace had been attacked by heavy guns mounted on two SUVs, during which six security staff and two assailants were killed.

MBS has not been seen in public since the shooting incident prompting speculation in the Russian media that he had been killed. In recent days, the office of MBS has released images of him with regional leaders to counter such rumors.

Prince Khaled said the drone was a cover story which defied logic. "I personally believe that this was not necessarily an attempt to



Prince Khaled bin Farhan

"If MBS stayed in power then upheaval would follow. I would like to say to the Europeans that the situation in Saudi Arabia resembles a volcano that is about to erupt. If it erupts, it will affect not only the situation inside Saudi Arabia or in the Arab region but it will have an effect on you too", Prince Khaled says.

bring down Mohammed bin Salman but rather an act of protest against him."

But he warned that if MBS stayed in power then upheaval would follow. "I would like to say to the Europeans that the situation in Saudi Arabia resembles a volcano that is about to erupt. If it erupts, it will affect not only the situation inside Saudi Arabia or in the Arab region but it will have an effect on you too."

Saudi is a combustible mixture of different generations, tribes, regions and Wahhabism. If a coup was started outside the royal family, then the kingdom with its strict Wahhabi interpretation of Islam, could easily become a center for international terrorism, he said.

Prince Khaled said that there are terrorist sleeper cells within Saudi Arabia and that the Wahhabi ideology is a radical ideology. It was these Islamists, he said, who most frighten Europeans and Americans.

"So, if Saudi Arabia descends into a state of chaos, there will be global chaos, and it [Saudi Arabia] will be a source of terrorism for the entire world as it will support and sustain international terrorism."

■ The family feels it has been humiliated

Prince Khaled belongs to the al Farhan branch of the Saudi royal family. It dates back to the 18th century, when Farhan was one of the three brothers of Muhammad bin Saud, from whom Abdulaziz, the major branch of the family, descended. The rift began after Khaled's father, who became known as the Red Prince, advocated a constitutional monarchy.

Senior members of the royal family have attempted to lure the dissident prince back to Saudi in order to silence him. One of them offered him a seat in his private plane when on an official visit to Germany, an

offer he declined.

Prince Khaled was granted political asylum within two months of arriving by the German authorities, such was their assessment of the danger of abduction. He has also been told by German intelligence that his security outside the country cannot be guaranteed, even if he travels within the EU.

The prince, who said he is in regular touch with other princes in Saudi, describes the royal family as being in a state of shock at the arrest, detention and mistreatment of senior princes, such as Muqrin, during the purge ordered by King Salman and his son Mohammed in late 2017.

"It was a shock for the entire family because prominent figures in the family were detained, in a way that held a great deal of humiliation. It was a shock for the entire family. The family is now facing the undermining of its standing in the eyes of the people. And this will inevitably undermine its legitimacy."

Prince Khaled said that the anti-corruption campaign was politically motivated to remove any challenge from more senior, experienced and legitimate rivals.

■ The motives of MBS

MBS has had a heady rise to power during the past year, but Prince Khaled said that for many years he was an ordinary member of the family and that as a youth he suffered from "psychological problems".

"I wouldn't say he was violent," Prince Khaled said, "but when he was younger, in the royal family, he didn't have status. He was an ordinary member of the family. His brothers had higher positions, and they had a voice within the Saudi ruling elite. Of course, his cousins were older, more experienced, better positioned, more educated and everything else."

"So I think he developed psychological problems, because one of his cousins whom he arrested, when he would meet him, he [Mohammed bin Salman] would have to ask for an appointment, and maybe the prince would meet him, or maybe not. So this created within him a psychological problem and today he is taking his revenge against his cousins."

Saudi claims to have netted \$100bn from the 300-plus people who were detained at the Ritz-Carlton hotel in Riyadh in late 2017.

But even after their release, Prince Khaled said, the former detainees were not free men: instead they have monitoring devices fitted to their legs, their mobiles phones monitored and are banned from travelling outside the kingdom. "So they live in a very humiliating situation," he observed.

Under normal circumstances, the prince said, he would commend some of the reforms introduced by MBS, including allowing women to drive and restricting the influence of religious authorities.

But he described these moves as palliatives intended to appease the West, ignoring that the real problem in Saudi is the political system, in which the king has absolute powers to appoint judges, members of the Shura Council and the government itself.

"The make-up of the state will constantly change with the personality of the king," Prince Khaled said. "Where is the strategic plan for the state? We need to have a clear goal that we're working towards. And it's the role of the king to come up with a tactical plan to help us enact these strategies."

"But, with the way we're going, our country will be late reaching them. We're already late. We use to think that we had financial assets and educated individuals, but unfortunately the situation right now is taking us back years."

The kingdom's political system, Prince Khaled said, represented the will of the king and no one else: when there is a new king, everything changes.

Saudi, he noted, may be one of the biggest states in the Middle East with a population of more than 30 million, may be a member of the G20, may be the largest exporter of oil in the world, may be the holder of the second largest reserves of oil on the planet, may have a right of veto in the IMF - but the state itself is nothing more than an embodiment of the reigning king.

The prince admitted to a personal grudge against King Salman, who as the Emir of Riyadh had wielded power in family affairs. He called Salman a racist, saying he had forced the prince's father to divorce his Egyptian wife and Khaled's sister to divorce her Kuwaiti husband.

While the kingdom was a dictatorship before Salman acceded to the throne, Prince Khaled said, at least positions of power were shared out: today, that power is concentrated in the hands of one person.

What about the recent statement from bin Salman, that only death would stop him from ruling for 50 years?

"I would like to ask him a question through you," Prince Khaled said. "Has he signed a contract with God that he would be allowed to live 50 years? How can he guarantee that?"

(Source: Middle East Eye)

Congress rebels against Trump's Middle East war secrecy

By Bryant Harris

As the top Democrat on the House panel overseeing the Defense Department, Rep. Stephen Lynch of Massachusetts has traveled to Iraq almost two dozen times under three different presidents.

But now, that ability to monitor U.S. military actions and foreign aid, Lynch insists, is being compromised by what he contends is a plummeting level of transparency under President Donald Trump, even as the administration promises to confront Iran throughout the Middle East. With the Pentagon restricting congressional travel to the region and classifying more information on its operations, Lynch and several of his Democratic colleagues have begun pushing back.

"I would say since the Trump administration came in, we have seen a gradual increase in limitations on [congressional delegations], especially Iraq and Afghanistan and understandably Syria," Lynch told Al-Monitor in an interview this week. "The work we've been doing under [Barack] Obama and under George W. Bush, we've had far greater access."

The Pentagon this month restricted access for senior Defense Department officials to Iraq and Kuwait, a key entry point into Iraq, until mid-June and then again from late August through September, Al-Monitor has learned. At the same time, Defense Secretary James Mattis and Joint Chiefs Chairman Joseph Dunford sent a letter to Congress asking members and staffers to limit travel to Iraq and Kuwait during those times.

The measure coincides with the recent elections, the Ramadan season and the March transfer of control over the headquarters in Baghdad for the anti-Islamic State (ISIS) ground operations, according to the Pentagon.

"During this time, commanders would not be able to adequately host senior-level visitors and while supporting these competing requirements," a spokeswoman told Al-Monitor. "DoD supports members of Congress in their need to understand DoD missions, provide oversight and visit deployed U.S. forces, however, we do put limited travel restrictions in place when conditions on the ground require military commanders to focus their resources on essential mission requirements."



U.S. Rep. Stephen Lynch, D-Mass., (L) meets with Iraq's Deputy Foreign Minister Labid Abbawi (C) during his visit to Baghdad, Iraq, July 26, 2009.

Some Democrats are balking at what they view as the Trump administration's penchant for classifying materials.

Additionally, a House aide told Al-Monitor that the Pentagon imposes travel restrictions throughout the region "every summer during the fighting season [in Afghanistan] or when units are in rotation." The Army announced Tuesday that the 18th Airborne Corps, stationed at Fort Bragg, would be deployed to Iraq in the fall, relieving the 3rd Corps.

Those explanations haven't placated Lynch, who has offered an amendment to the annual defense bill that calls on the Pentagon to "authorize and facilitate meaningful access and assistance" for congressional delegations that have made a "reasonable request" to access "missions and operations" in Iraq, Kuwait, Syria and Afghanistan. The House is voting on the bill this week.

"All things considered, I think I've been fairly supportive of our operations in both those countries," said Lynch, who voted in favor of the Iraq war authorization in 2002. "I

expressed my displeasure and disappointment with the fact it seems to be at the whim of the Department of Defense as to whether Congress gets to do its constitutional duty to provide oversight."

While the Pentagon has offered to make exceptions for some lawmakers, Lynch maintains that access to certain areas remains problematic. Most recently, he has been trying to access Mosul for a firsthand look at reconstruction efforts in the devastated city following its liberation from ISIS last year. He noted that even the Bush administration eventually allowed him to access Sadr City during the height of Muqtada al-Sadr's insurgency to examine a multimillion-dollar U.S. water treatment project — even if it took him five trips to finally gain access.

"There's no good justification," he insisted. Separately, some Democrats are balking at what they view as the Trump administration's penchant for classifying materials.

Last week, for instance, the president handed Congress a classified report outlining the administration's strategy in Yemen, even though lawmakers had requested an unclassified version with a classified annex as needed. Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., a harsh critic of the Saudi-led campaign against the Houthis in Yemen, has responded with an amendment to this year's defense bill requiring an unclassified assessment of the civil war's impact on the growth of Islamic State (ISIS) and al-Qaeda branches in the country.

"The administration has not been forthcoming about our role in Yemen," Khanna told Al-Monitor. "An explanation is owed to the American public and I want to see a transparent report."

Lynch also pointed to the Defense Department's recent classification of previously unclassified data in the Afghanistan war, including territory assessments, casualties, rates of attrition, recruitment and training.

"There's a lid being put on access to firsthand information, and then the information they choose to give us and the inspector general is also limited in terms of circulation," he said.

Hoping to curb this trend, Lynch has also offered an amendment requiring the Pentagon to rescind its decision to redact troop levels for Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria in its quarterly public reports.

(Source: Al Monitor)

Israel not to cooperate with UN probe of Gaza killings: expert

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — A UN rights expert said Israel will not cooperate with an investigation ordered by the UN Human Rights Council into the killings of Palestinians by Israeli troops in Gaza last week.

“The inquiry is directed to examine whether war crimes have been committed, to determine responsibility and accountability, and to make recommendations with an eye to avoiding and ending impunity. The inquiry is directed to deliver its final report to the Council next March,” Michael Lynk, the UN Special Rapporteur on situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory, said in an interview with the Tasnim News Agency.

He added, “Israel did not co-operate with the previous two inquiries established by the HRC — to investigate the 2008-09 and 2014 wars in Gaza — and there does not appear to be any positive early signs that Israel will offer to work with this inquiry either.”

Michael Lynk is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Law, Western University, in London, Ontario. He joined the Faculty in 1999, and has taught courses in labour, human rights, disability, constitutional and administrative law. He served as Associate Dean of the Faculty between 2008-11.

The following is the full text of the interview. ■ Israeli forces killed at least 62 Palestinians during protests near the Gaza fence on the eve of the 70th anniversary of the Nakba Day (the Day of Catastrophe). What is your take on this?

A: The mass killings and wounding of protestors from Gaza, beginning on 30 March and continuing through April and May — most of whom appear to have been either unarmed, or otherwise presenting no probable threat to the lives or well-being of the Israeli military — appears to be a blatantly excessive use of force by the Israeli military. International human rights law sets strict prohibitions on



the use of force by security officers, the military and law enforcement officials. Lethal force against demonstrators is forbidden unless strictly unavoidable as a last resort in the case of an imminent threat to life or threat of serious injury to the armed officer. Given the lack of any causalities by the Israeli military forces, because they were well-protected and out of range of any harmful object that any of the demonstrators possessed — one soldier was reported to have been slightly wounded throughout the seven weeks of the protests — it would appear to be a steep argument to make that the use of lethal force in these circumstances was justified.

■ You were quoted by media as saying that “Israel’s use of force may amount to a war crime.” Please explain on this.

A: The modern definition of war crimes is found in the 1948 Rome Statute. Among the acts which could constitute a war crime are: (i) “Willful killing”; and (ii) “Willfully causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or health”. These are also grave breaches under Article

147 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. I note that the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court cautioned Israel and Hamas in April that: “Violence against civilians — in a situation such as the one prevailing in Gaza — could constitute crimes under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, as could the use of civilians for the purpose of shielding military activities.” I also note, with alarm, that the IDF posted the following message on its Twitter feed following the first series of killings on 30 March: “Nothing was carried out uncontrolled; everything was accurate and measured, and we know where every bullet landed.”

■ the 70th anniversary of the Nakba Day coincided this year with Washington’s embassy relocation. The U.S. Ambassador to the UN has said “no country would act with greater restraint than Israel”, as the death toll of Palestinians killed by Israeli troops passed 60 and officials said 2,700 had been wounded. What do you think about this?

A: With great respect to the American

ambassador, it is beyond my moral imagination to understand how the killing of 60+ demonstrators — most of whom were unarmed — and the wounding of several thousand more represents restraint in these circumstances. No dictionary that I possess appears to encompass such a mass killing within its definition of “restraint”.

■ As you know, the UN human rights body has called for an independent investigation into the recent Israeli massacre of Palestinian protesters in the Gaza Strip after the U.S. blocked the same bid at the Security Council. “We call for independent, transparent investigations in all cases of death and injury since 30 March. Since 30 March, 112 Palestinians, including 14 children, have lost their lives at the fence and thousands have been injured,” Rupert Colville, the spokesman for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, said. When will the probe start? How much respect do you think Israel has for international human rights organizations?

A: The United Nations Human Rights Council voted on Friday, 18 May, to create an independent, international commission of inquiry to examine the events of the past two months in Gaza and the rest of the oPt (occupied Palestinian territories), in the context of international humanitarian and human rights law. The inquiry is directed to examine whether war crimes have been committed, to determine responsibility and accountability, and to make recommendations with an eye to avoiding and ending impunity. The inquiry is directed to deliver its final report to the Council next March.

Israel did not co-operate with the previous two inquiries established by the HRC — to investigate the 2008-09 and 2014 wars in Gaza — and there does not appear to be any positive early signs that Israel will offer to work with this inquiry either.

Pompeo speech an exercise in idiocy: Prof. Zonis

1 → Here is the full text of his interview:

■ He has promised very tough sanctions on Iran. Considering the fact that even the U.S. closest allies in EU have announced they will be committed to the JCPOA and will keep on business and trade with Iran, how realistic and feasible are Mr. Pompeo’s promised sanctions?

A: Despite the eagerness of the Europeans to figure out a way around the new sanctions so that European firms can continue to do business in Iran, they will find it difficult to do so.

The U.S. cab deny European firms access to the U.S.

banking system and dollars and most European firms will not wish to take the risk of being shut out of those systems. On the other hand.

■ Will other global powers like Russia and China follow up possible U.S. unilateral sanctions against Iran?

A: China and Russia have demonstrated their willingness to violate the sanctions in the past and can be expected to do so again.

■ How do you assess the consequences of Trump’s unilateral policies? What can be his policies consequences for the U.S. and the world?

A: The Pompeo speech was an exercise in idiocy. The

only rational explanation is that the Trump administration knows that Iran cannot comply with the 12 demands and that, therefore, Trump will have an excuse to pressure the government in Iran in any way possible. Trump and his advisors would like to bring about regime change in Iran. The U.S. invasion of Iraq ought to be a lesson for them. But it does not appear to be.

■ He has talked about forcing Iran to accept a new security architecture for the region. What kind of architecture possibly he means and aims for?

A: This is an empty phrase which has Iran retreating to its borders and essentially abandoning any foreign policy.

U.S. grave mistake

1 → “Today’s decision renewed hope for a truly long-term nuclear-free Iran. Iran continues to be an existential threat to Israel, and continues to menace Israel directly and through its proxies. We appreciate President Trump’s bold foreign policy and look forward to his leadership in dealing with the Iranian threat.”

Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu also praised the «brave and correct» decision by Trump, and called the 2015 accord a «recipe for disaster».

On the other hand, former U.S. President Barack Obama released a criticism on Tuesday of the U.S. pulling out of the Iranian nuclear deal, and called Trump’s decision «misguided.»

Obama and other senior officials from his administration expressed their deep worries on the Trump’s decision, and mentioned that this move means turning back to U.S. allies in Europe. «Walking away from the JCPOA turns our back on America’s closest allies, and an agreement that our country’s leading diplomats, scientists, and intelligence professionals negotiated,» Obama said. «In a democracy, there will always be changes in policies and priorities from one Administration to the next. But the consistent flouting of agreements that our country is a party to risks eroding America’s credibility, and puts us at odds with the world’s major powers.»



Trump administration withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal noting that companies doing business with Iran have between three and six months to wind down any business with the country before facing sanctions. But it seems that Europe wants to protect its businesses is looking for some ways to fight back against these sanctions.

The truth is that it’s to Europe’s benefit to defend the JCPOA despite the U.S. withdrawal. That, in turn, requires Europe, along with Russia, China, and other United Nations member states, to ensure that economic relations with

Iran can develop. But this would happen only if European countries were determined to confront U.S. extraterritorial sanctions, which aim to deter trade and financial activities with Iran by non-U.S. actors. Under the current circumstances, many of European citizens are well aware that Europe’s interests are no longer aligned with those of the United States. It’s time for European authorities to open their eyes on the fact that the U.S. don’t really care about a trans-Atlantic alliance of shared interests, values, and approaches.

The humiliating failure of French Presi-

dent Emmanuel Macron, UK Prime Minister Theresa May, and German Chancellor Angela Merkel to convince Trump to remain as part of the nuclear deal was predictable. But the European troika chose to close their eyes on it, and instead of restraining U.S., as it was their responsibility according to the deal, they tried to negotiate over new terms and conditions to be included in the deal in the form of a secondary agreement.

Yet the JCPOA can still be saved, since it is a multilateral agreement, endorsed by the UN Security Council (Resolution 2231). The nuclear agreement wasn’t merely a deal between Iran and the US, and under Article 25 of the UN Charter, all UN member states, including the U.S., are obligated to fulfill the JCPOA. Trump’s withdrawal of the U.S. from the JCPOA is itself a violation of international law. Now the United States has only one way to block the implementation of the agreement between Iran and the rest of the world, and that’s through Extraterritorial sanctions. The U.S. Government decided that it will not trade with Iran and violated the JCPOA. But even with the U.S. walking out of the nuclear deal, it is quite another thing for the U.S. government to attempt to block trade with Iran by non-U.S. parties. This is exactly what Trump has in mind. NOW It is up to Europe to stand against it, in their own direct economic interest.

Europeans want to preserve JCPOA: Tabatabai

By Javad Heirannia

Ariane Tabatabai, director of curriculum and an assistant teaching professor at the Georgetown University Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service says “the most important driver behind the Trump administration’s decision to withdraw from the JCPOA is domestic politics.”

Fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School’s Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs also adds that “President Trump strives to undo President Obama’s legacy.”

“I do believe that the Europeans want to preserve the JCPOA and are trying their best to overcome the hurdles created by the U.S. exit from the process,” Tabatabai says the Tehran Times.

Following is the full text of the interview:

■ The US violated the JCPOA. What are the reasons behind this unilateral revocation?

A: The most important driver behind the Trump administration’s decision to withdraw from the JCPOA is domestic politics. First, President Trump strives to undo President Obama’s legacy. And the JCPOA was one of Obama’s chief foreign policy achievement and legacy. Second, one of Trump’s

only concrete foreign policy promises on the campaign trail was to undo the JCPOA. So, pulling America out of the JCPOA is essentially a campaign promise being fulfilled to his base.

■ In regard to Trump’s violation of the Iran deal, what are the obligations and responsibilities of the deal’s other signatories?

A: If all other parties decide to proceed without the United States, they will all have to uphold their respective ends of the bargain. But it’ll be incredibly difficult for the Europeans, in particular, to provide Iran with what it wants out of the JCPOA without some U.S. buy in. The Europeans, both in Brussels and in other capitals, are trying to find solutions to this very problem as we speak.

■ In a tactful reaction to Trump’s Betrayal of Nuclear Deal, Iran said the survival of JCPOA highly depends on firm European guarantees. Since the EU’s leverage is not strong enough to bring the US back to reason, shall Iran count on their guarantees?

A: I do believe that the Europeans want to preserve the JCPOA and are trying their best to overcome the hurdles created by the U.S. exit from the process. That said, there’s

no doubt that America’s economic power, combined with Europe’s own interests in other areas and its history of taking a backseat to the United States, make it all very challenging. It’s too early to tell if the EU proposed measures will be enough to satisfy Iran.

■ Will EU dare to invest or have economic engagement with Iran in a situation where the US nuclear related sanctions are back again and the foreign companies face US penalties?

A: The EU is doing what it can at the EU level to minimize the damage of new U.S. sanctions. That said, the EU can’t force companies invest in Iran. It can only help them navigate the minefield of doing business with Iran in the current climate. Iran can tackle the challenges that impact its economy and deter businesses to encourage companies to invest in Iran.

■ Returning which kind of the sanctions are red line for Iran that will danger its national interest?

A: To my knowledge, there’s no clear indication that specific kinds of sanctions are a red line. What needs to meet the Iranian expectation is the total “package” offered by the Europeans, in particular, to keep Iran on board.

Saudi Arabia’s desperate alliance moves

1 → The Yemen Alliance includes Morocco, Senegal, and the U.S., all of whom are thousands of miles from the battlefield. A number of the members for the 40-member Islamic alliance against terrorism are located very far from the command center in Riyadh.

■ **Containing Iran**

Preventing Iran from penetration westwards is one of the cardinal aims of the current foreign policy of Saudi Arabia. The Saudis fear Iran’s expansion and regional influence.

Saudi Arabia has also created an unofficial alliance to prevent the penetration of Iran and Qatar into Africa. To this end, Saudi Arabia has reached out to Mauritania and Senegal on the one hand and Libya and Chad on the other. The presidents of Senegal and Mauritania travelled to Riyadh to discuss this issue in April 2015. They committed sending thousands of their troops to join the fight against Yemen under the leadership of Saudi Arabia. Later visits by Muhammad bin Abdulaziz, the president of Mauritania, were dominated by the goals of the Saudis.

Although the countries share a common Islamic identity, not all the 41 members of the Islamic alliance against terrorism are actually Muslim. For example, most citizens in Gabon are Christian. None of the members is a Shia-dominated government, such as Iran, Iraq, or Syria. Also, none of the members of these alliances is willing to accept the dominance of Saudi Arabia. After all, Saudi money is not able to prevent direct threats against their interests. In the end, such alliances are contingent on financial support from and absolute obedience to Riyadh.

Riyadh has tried to change the PGCC into a collective security alliance ever since its creation in the 1980s. Riyadh’s allies—Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and even the UAE—rebuffed these attempts. Saudi Arabia also tried to upgrade the level of military cooperation between PGCC members and the U.S. and mold the organization into a Common Defense System like NATO. But relations between the PGCC and Washington have not always been rosy. For instance, the United States damaged its credibility among PGCC members when Barack Obama told Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak to step down following the public protests in 2011. Also, when PGCC members were trying to reach an agreement with the United States on new missile defense systems, Obama demanded that the PGCC maintain a cold peace with Iran.

By going to war in Yemen—ostensibly to combat forces aligned with Iran—Saudi Arabia has shown little interest in such a cold peace. Saudi forces have been engaged in Yemen for such a long time with little success, despite having superior technology and weapons, thanks to the United States. Riyadh is unlikely to confront Tehran directly—as opposed to indirectly in Yemen—without a green light from Washington. So far, the U.S. policy in the region has been based on preventing outright war against Iran.

■ **Balance of Power against Iran**

Saudi attempts to challenge Iran’s regional power have encountered several obstacles. First of all, Iranian influence has expanded to Iraq, Syria, Bahrain, Yemen, and some parts of Lebanon. Second, Iran’s missiles have considerable deterrent power.

In response, Saudi Arabia has tried to expand its influence into states such as Iraq and Syria, both of which have been aided by Iran. This process has targeted the strategic depth of Iran by supporting opposition groups in Syria and attacking the Houthis in Yemen. Despite Saudi attempts, however, Tehran has established itself in the political future of both Iraq and Syria. Nor, despite interventions by the PGCC, have popular movements been eliminated in Bahrain. In Yemen, Saudi Arabia appears to have gotten bogged down in a costly war with few if any gains.

So, Iran remains the main player in the region despite the various alliances against Tehran. Friendship between Saudi Arabia and Israel is something of an embarrassment in the Muslim world, and may be a futile attempt by Riyadh to shore up its waning power regionally. If Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman decides to continue with his brinkmanship and “friendship” with the Israelis, the result will probably be rejection of the Saudis by many Muslims.

‘Rest of JCPOA signatories want to keep it alive’

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Shireen Tahmaasb Hunter, a professor of political science at Georgetown University, tells to Tehran Times that “The rest of the signatories to the JCPOA want to keep it alive.”

Professor Hunter also says that “But there is not much they can do about it, without jeopardizing their own economic interests.”

She also adds that “European countries are unlikely to endanger their relations with America for Iran’s sake.”

Following is the text the interview:

■ The U.S. violated the JCPOA. What are the reasons behind this unilateral revocation?

A: There are several reasons for Trump’s decision: First, he was form the beginning opposed to the nuclear deal; second, he wants to undo Obama’s legacy; third, Trumps is close to hardline Israelis and their American supporters; Fourth, he wanted to please the Israelis and the Saudis; Fifth, many of Trump’s new appointees support a hard policy vis a vis Iran. They want to exacerbate Iran’s economic and hence social problems and prepare the way for a regime change, either with or without military intervention.

■ In regard to Trump’s violation of the Iran deal, what are the obligations and responsibilities of the deal’s other signatories?

A: The rest of the signatories to the JCPOA want to keep it alive. But there is not much they can do about it, without jeopardizing their own economic interests. The fact is that, Iran is not economically or politically so important for them that they would run any significant risk for its sake.

■ In a tactical reaction to Trump’s Betrayal of Nuclear Deal, Iran said the survival of JCPOA highly depends on firm European guarantees. Since the EU’s leverage is not strong enough to bring the US back to reason, shall Iran count on their guarantees?

A: European countries are unlikely to endanger their relations with America for Iran’s sake. Moreover, as free market economies, European states cannot force their businesses to do work for Iran. The latter will make its decision on calculations of cost-benefits of doing business with Iran.

■ Will EU dare to invest or have economic engagement with Iran in a situation where the US nuclear related sanctions are back again and the foreign companies face US penalties?

A: According to reports, the pre JCPOA sanctions will return. These include a wide range including the purchase of Iran’s oil and banking operations. By undermining Iran’s economy and its social cohesion all these sanctions undermine Iran’s vital interests. Iran’s options are limited, leaving the JCPOA will only increase pressure on Iran and would increase the risk of military attack. Iran should take these risks very seriously.

'Mexico First' frontrunner uses Trump playbook in crunch election

By Andrés Martínez

On July 1, Mexicans will elect a new president. Much like American voters in 2016, they are eager to "drain the swamp." And Mexico indeed may end up electing a rather swampy candidate who promises to do so.

Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the populist former mayor of Mexico City and twice-defeated presidential candidate, has a comfortable lead in the polls. The prospect of his victory has rattled financial markets, as well as those in Mexico concerned about democratic niceties and the rule of law.

Though many people both inside and outside Mexico passionately argue about whether or not AMLO, as he is known, is the Mexican incarnation of Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, the debate seems a bit off-point. AMLO might well be no Chávez, and still be a dreadful prospect. AMLO would almost certainly represent a return to the country's more authoritarian, statist past. With an inward- and

backward-looking view of the world, his slogan may not be "Make Mexico Great Again," but it might as well be "Make Mexico Mexico Again."

AMLO and his followers despise elements of modern Mexico. They are aghast at the closer diplomatic and economic ties to the United States, the encroachment of foreign brands into their country, and the chiseling away at the state's monopolistic control over spoils to be doled out to unions which spout the Orwellian cant of institutionalized revolution. For all the dysfunction of the current administration of President Enrique Peña Nieto, its early education and energy reforms were powerful blows against the old Mexico of AMLO's dreams.

■ Legitimate president

AMLO's demagogic temperament is as worrisome as his call to move Mexico back into the past. When he lost the 2006 election, he engaged in a years-long tantrum, refusing to accept the results and referring to himself as the "legitimate

president."

Unwilling to share the limelight with others, he then broke away from the established PRD leftist party (just as he'd earlier broken away from the PRI) to create a new "movement" and party that he runs like a family business. Despite well-known ties to some of the least savory elements in Mexican politics, and a track record of surrounding himself with cronies susceptible to "entrapment" by donors bearing cash in brown bags, AMLO claims he will end corruption in Mexico through the sheer force of his personality and example. He is also talking, with trademark vagueness, about an "amnesty" for organized crime.

Equally alarming, he is promising to submit as president to an unprecedented referendum every two years. AMLO is pitching this as a curb on his power, but opponents naturally see in it a potential Trojan horse to take on the prohibition against extending the single six-year term of office to which

presidents are still restricted under Mexican law.

Mexican voters have twice rejected AMLO's calls to move Mexico backwards by voting against him, and in favor of center-right PAN and centrist PRI presidents, in 2006 and 2012. That AMLO is still a presence in Mexican political life is an indictment of these established parties' failure to reform the nation's political culture and to strengthen the rule of law amid the carnage inflicted by warring drug cartels.

Increasingly, Mexico boasts a first-world economy but decidedly third-world, corruption-riddled governance.

The first of three presidential debates, one focused on this all-important governance issue, was held on April 22, featuring all five candidates. Whether or not AMLO's election is already a foregone conclusion was Topic A in a lively debate that often boiled down to four frustrated candidates practically banging their heads against their podiums

in frustration, uttering some variant of "Lopez Obrador calls himself an honest reformer, but ... (insert any one of a series of damning truths)."

■ Middle-class voters

If AMLO acted as if he could barely be bothered to engage at the debate, at least he showed up. In 2006, he famously made the mistake of sitting one out when he was also the frontrunner, a decision his opponents effectively attributed to either excessive arrogance or cowardice. This propensity to self-destruct has been notably absent in AMLO's third consecutive run for the presidency. This time, he is running more as mellowed uncle than angry revolutionary by making it a priority to reassure skeptical middle-class voters who might be drawn to his call for shaking up the political order, but who worry about his temperament and about any reckless abandonment of sound economic policy that might bring back a plummeting currency and soaring inflation. →13

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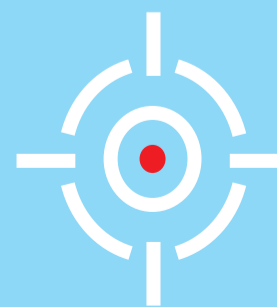
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Exquisite handicrafts on show at Intl. Holy Quran Exhibition

HERITAGE TEHRAN — A collection of exquisite handicrafts has been put on show on the sidelines of the 26th International Holy Quran Exhibition, which is currently underway at Tehran's Imam Khomeini Mosalla.

A demonstration of 50 delicate works along with handicraft-skills workshops and sales exhibits have been arranged by the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization, CHTN quoted CHHTO Deputy Director Pouya Mahmoodian as saying on Tuesday.



"The artisans participating the event are natives of Alborz, Qom and Tehran provinces... and the works selected for the event are deemed to be closely related to Quranic themes," she added.

Top translations, interpretations as well as copies of the Holy Quran published by various domestic and foreign companies are on show at the exhibit, which will be running until June 4.

The rise in tourists visiting Japan is statistically off the charts

From 1995 to 2012, the annual number of tourists going to Japan increased from 3.3 million to 8.4 million, a growth rate of about 6% each year.

And then, the deluge. In its most recent report, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) estimates that about 28.7 million tourists visited Japan in 2017. This increase, a change of more than 20 million over just five years, is the largest ever recorded by the organization, which keeps statistics going back to 1995. The UNWTO considers any overnight stay by a foreigner a tourist visit.

It is likely the largest increase in tourists, in absolute numbers, a country has ever seen. While it is possible there was a larger increase somewhere before 1995, tourism levels were much lower before this period. The total number of global tourist visits in 1995 was about half a billion; in 2017, it was over 1.3 billion.

Although international tourism is growing across the world, what is happening in Japan is special. Between 2012 and 2017, the number of international tourist visits to Japan increased by a whopping 250%, far more than other countries.

Japan's tourism boom stems from a relaxation of visa requirements, particular for visitors from China. It has also been spurred by the fall in the value of the yen starting in 2011. This made the historically expensive country more accessible for middle-income travelers. Although Chinese tourists make up the biggest share of the growth, more tourists are arriving in Japan from nearly everywhere.

The increase has been a boon for Japan's economy, but not everybody is happy about it. The Japan Times reports that in cities like Kyoto and Osaka, which have seen the greatest influx of tourists, some locals feel that their cities have become overrun. The Japanese media calls the phenomenon "tourism pollution"

The tourism tide doesn't seem likely to turn anytime soon. Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe is targeting 40 million tourists in 2020 when the country hosts the Olympics. Recent trends suggest that number is well within reach.

(Source: Quartz)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Chongoni Rock-Art Area

Situated within a cluster of forested granite hills and covering an area of 126.4 km², high up the plateau of central Malawi, the 127 sites of this property feature the richest concentration of rock art in Central Africa.

They reflect the comparatively scarce tradition of farmer rock art, as well as paintings by BaTwa hunter-gatherers who inhabited the area from the Late Stone Age.

The Chewa agriculturalists, whose ancestors lived there from the Early Iron Age, practiced rock painting until well into the 20th century.

The symbols in the rock art, which are strongly associated with women, still have cultural relevance amongst the Chewa, and the sites are actively associated with ceremonies and rituals.



Rock art at Chongoni

The rock art of the Chongoni sites records the cultural history and traditions of the peoples of the Malawi plateau: the transition from a foraging lifestyle to food production, the subsequent Ngoni invasion of the Chewa people, and the coming of the white man.

The paintings also depict symbols significant during initiation ceremonies and ritual practices. As a center of traditional and religious ceremonies, the rock art area encapsulates living cultural traditions.

The area's topography of rock overhangs amongst wooded slopes and grassy clearings provides a protective setting that is integral to the outstanding universal value of the rock art site.

(Source: UNESCO)

Projects underway to uplift Yazd tourism standards

TOURISM TEHRAN — The UNESCO-registered city of Yazd has been subject of extensive restoration and renovation projects in a bid to improve tourism standards in the central Iranian city.

"A budget of 35 billion rials (some \$833,000) has been channeled into the projects, which are adding up to 14, and were commenced at the beginning of the current Iranian [calendar] year (March 21)," ISNA quoted Movahed Mirshamsi, a supervisor of urban developments at Yazd Municipality, as saying on Monday.

Rehabilitation of flooring textures, pedestrian paths, historical façades, passageways, and mud-brick structures are amongst projects, being mainly implemented in popular tourist spots and historical places, he added.

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.

With its winding lanes, forest of badgirs (wind catchers), mud-brick houses, atmospheric alleyways and centuries of history, Yazd is a delightful place to stay, referring as a 'don't miss' destination by almost all travel associates in the region. The city has an interesting mix of people as well, some 10 percent of whom follow the ancient religion of Zoroastrianism.



A view of Yazd, a UNESCO-registered city in central Iran

Qajar-era envelopes, lithography and carpets on show at Golestan Palace

HERITAGE TEHRAN — Three exhibitions of Qajar-era (1789–1925) objects opened doors to the public on Wednesday at the UNESCO-registered Golestan Palace in central Tehran.

One showcases over 100 used and unused envelopes, telegraph papers, official headers, treaty agreements and postal apparatus, Tasnim quoted Masoud Nosrati, director of the historical site, as saying on Wednesday.

Another exhibit features 30 lithographic images reflecting themes of Iranian princes and princesses, Napoléon Bonaparte, rural celebrations, various birds, nomadic people and military personnel, the official added.

A selection of 13 rare rugs and handcrafted carpets that bear

Kashan style of weaving have been put on show for the third, the report said.

Every day, clusters of foreign travelers visit the lavish palace, which is a masterpiece dating from the Qajar era (1785 to 1925). It embodies a successful integration of earlier Persian crafts and architecture with Western influences.

Golestan Palace became a center of Qajari arts and architecture of which it is an outstanding example and has remained a source of inspiration for Iranian artists and architects to this day.

The two-week exhibitions are organized on the occasion of a national cultural heritage week, which comes to an end on Thursday.

Hawaii volcano eruption driving away millions in tourism dollars

HONOLULU, Hawaii (Reuters) — Cruise ships have canceled stops on Hawaii's Big Island. Hotel rooms will sit vacant this summer despite price cuts.

And guest house owners and tour guides that depend on the 2 million visitors each year to Hawaii Volcanoes National Park are wondering how long their families will go without any income.

Tourism authorities say summer bookings for hotels on Hawaii's Big Island have fallen almost 50 percent since the volcano began spewing lava and toxic gases on May 3.

The closure of the park, the state's top tourist destination, alone is costing the island \$166 million, the National Park Service said on Monday.

The lost revenue rises to \$222 million when some 2,000 jobs indirectly impacted by park tourists are included, according to a park service report.

Tourism is the Big Island's largest industry, and by far, biggest employer, providing more than 30 percent of private sector jobs in 2017, according to the Hawaii Visitors Bureau. Erik Storm's EcoGuides business, which conducts tours

of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, ground to a halt a month ago when volcanic conditions made it too dangerous to visit lava areas.

"We have a family to support so we hope that the National Park will reopen again soon, otherwise this could have a serious impact on our life."

Spooked by lava

The volcano, however, shows no sign of quieting down. Geologists say the current cycle of eruption is among the worst events in a century from one of the world's most active volcanoes. A series of Kilauea eruptions in 1955 lasted 88 days.

Potential visitors to the Big Island have been spooked by images of lava torching homes, soldiers wearing gas masks and now deadly white clouds of acid and glass shards as molten rock streams into the Pacific.

While Kilauea's lava flows are in a small, roughly 10-square-mile rural area in the southeast Puna district, the volcano is having an impact on tourism across the Big Island, home to 200,000 people.

Beverly Oka's family-run Uncle Billy's Kona Bay Hotel

is 120 miles (193 km) west of the lava flows, but bookings through the summer months are down around 40 percent.

"We are not affected. We have some vog, but not more than usual," said Oka of the volcanic smog that routinely blows from Kilauea, which has been in a near constant state of eruption since 1983. Her hotel is offering a 30 percent discount to try to lure customers.

Norwegian Cruise Line canceled stops on the Big Island for its cruise ships due to "adverse conditions." Royal Caribbean Cruises nixed a port call in Hilo, the island's largest city, which is about 20 miles (32 km) northeast of the volcano.

Rob Guzman and his husband Bob Kirk fled their guest-house rental business just 6 miles (10 km) from the lava flows, unnerved by near constant tremors, clouds of toxic sulfur dioxide gas and risks highway escape routes would be cut off.

"We've lost more than half of our household income and many other people will be in the same situation indefinitely," said Guzman, a resident of Kalapana Seaview Estates, who is staying with friends north of Hilo.

Why you should try slow travel at least once

By Claire Tsosie

There's an easy way to make your next vacation feel longer: Slow it down.

You don't have to request more time off to make this happen, either. Instead, ditch the jam-packed itinerary, tourist traps and endless dining out, and go for a trip that follows the "slow travel" doctrine.

"In my definition, a slow travel trip is a trip that includes one week in one place," says Pauline Kenny, owner of the travel website SlowEurope.com, who coined the term "slow travel" and started the website SlowTrav.com in 2000 (which she later sold). Specifically, she notes, "slow travel" means staying in a vacation rental where you can cook some of your own meals, rather than in a hotel.

Kenny's framework is simple — and potentially life-changing. Slow travel can give you time to relax, discover new places and make lasting memories. Along the way, you can also save plenty of money. Here's why you should try it at least once.

Live like a local

To really know what it's like to live in a new place, it helps to establish a routine. If you're bouncing from one city to the next, there's not enough time to do that.

"Just by spending a week, you have a different experience," says Kenny, who now lives in Bridport, Dorset, in the United Kingdom. At the time of this interview, she was slow traveling in Levanto, Liguria, in Italy. "You're based in a town, or near a town. You go out and do your grocery shopping. Locals begin to recognize you. You form more of a bond with the area. ... You live like a local. Even if it's only for a week, you experience what it's like to live there."

Kenny and her husband started traveling through Europe and staying in vacation rentals in the '80s. At the time, staying in vacation rentals was common for European travelers, but unusual for American travelers,



she notes. Taking her cue from the slow food movement of the '90s, Kenny debuted her website, SlowTrav.com, and introduced the concept of slow travel to readers in 2000. She also trademarked the phrase "slow travel" in the U.S. in 2005, while in Santa Fe, New Mexico. (She's since sold that website and trademark.)

Wander off the beaten path

For Gigi Griffis, a content strategist and writer who travels full time, vacationing used to mean hitting all the "must-see" destinations. But after enduring some stressful mishaps, she's now a believer in slow travel. The change of pace gives her time to go on more spur-of-the-moment adventures and see some lesser-known wonders.

A couple of years ago, while slow traveling in Croatia, a local man Griffis met through a travel networking site gave her a tour of the Croatian coast on his motorcycle. Of the many memorable places they visited, Griffis remembers one particularly dramatic sight: an abandoned fortress on a mountain behind the city of Omis. Unlike other abandoned fortresses she had seen in Europe, there were no admission fees or tourists there.

"It's just a crumbling beautiful ruin, on a mountaintop, with views all the way out to the ocean. And I never would have found that without him taking me there," Griffis says.

Save money on food

Dining out for every meal can be incredibly expensive. You can give yourself — and your wallet — a breather by spending your next vacation in a rental with a kitchen, grocery shopping at the local markets and preparing some meals on your own. Along the way, you might be able to discover some new foods that you love.

"In Croatia, I was making salads and I was just buying greens that came out of people's gardens," says Griffis, who lived in Denver before she began traveling full time. At the time of this interview, she was based in New York City. "I don't even necessarily know what they all are, but I'm just like, 'All right, I'm going to try that!' And I ended up finding greens I actually liked better than the ones you typically see in stores."

You still have the option of visiting restaurants, of course. But with food at home, you'll be dining out because you want to — not because it's your only option.

Go on more memorable trips

For Veren Ferrera and Sam Anthony, the couple who co-founded the travel blog Alternative Travelers, traveling slow makes for more memorable trips. That's because it gives them more time to meet new people.

"Most of my best travel memories are the memories I have with other people — not taking a picture of X landmark," Anthony says. Because she's trained as an anthropologist, she also appreciates having more time to learn about the local culture, she adds.

"It sounds impressive if you went to 10 cities in Europe over a short period of time and saw this, this and this," Ferrera says. "But in reality, what are you actually doing? It's a complete blur." When you travel slow, your trips become more meaningful, he notes.

Talk to locals

For both Ferrera and Anthony, talking to locals is one of the best parts about slow travel. The couple, previously from New York City, now live in Madrid. On one occasion, while the couple was slow traveling in Bilbao, Spain, a local man struck up a conversation with them. Because both Ferrera and Anthony are fluent in Spanish, they were able to talk with him. It was one of the highlights of their trip.

"He was telling us all this history about the place," Ferrera says. "And this isn't an experience you could pay for. This isn't an experience you could sign up for. It was completely serendipitous."

Get to know people

Before your trip, consider connecting online with residents living in the city you plan to visit, as Griffis did. While you're there, make an effort to say hi to people in cafes and stores. If you're familiar enough with the language, try carrying on a conversation. Talk to your host or the person whose space you're renting. Just from these small day-to-day interactions, your trip will become more meaningful and memorable.

(Source: newscentermaine.com)

Egg a day tied to lower risk of heart disease, researchers find

People who eat an egg just about every day may have a lower risk of heart attack and stroke than individuals who don't eat eggs at all, a large Chinese study suggests.

Researchers examined survey data on egg consumption among 461,213 adults who were 51 years old on average. When they joined the study, none had a history of heart disease. Overall, they ate an average of half an egg daily; about 9 percent of them avoided eggs altogether while 13 percent ate roughly one egg every day.

At least half of the participants were followed for nine years or more. During that time, 83,977 people developed heart disease or had a heart attack or stroke, and 9,985 died from these conditions.

Compared to people who never ate eggs, individuals who ate an average of 0.76 eggs per day were 11 percent less likely to develop cardiovascular diseases and 18 percent less likely to die from these conditions, the study found.

High-quality protein

"This is important to people, especially those in the part of the world where eggs are major sources of high-quality proteins and other important nutrients for the body," said Dr. Luc Djousse, a researcher at Harvard Medical School in Boston who wasn't involved in the study.

"The take-home message from this is that when consumed in moderation, there does not appear to be an elevated risk of developing heart disease or stroke," Djousse



"Eggs are not safe for anyone at risk of heart attacks or strokes, but particularly not for diabetics," said Dr. J. David Spence of the Western University Stroke Prevention & Atherosclerosis Research Center in London, Ontario.

said by email.

But that doesn't mean people should be rushing to make a three-egg omelet every day for breakfast.

That's because the study doesn't offer any insight into the risk of heart disease or stroke associated with more than one egg a day, Djousse said.

"Eggs are not safe for anyone at risk of heart attacks or strokes, but particularly not for diabetics," said Dr. J. David Spence of the Western University Stroke Prevention & Atherosclerosis Research Center in London, Ontario.

"Eggs increase the risk of vascular disease," Spence, who wasn't involved in the study, said by email. For example, egg yolks contain phosphatidylcholine, a chemical that can contribute to clogged arteries, he said.

Eggs are a primary source of dietary cholesterol, but they also contain high-quality lean protein and many vitamins, the study team notes in the journal *Heart*. Previous research on the link between eggs and heart disease have offered inconsistent results, with some pointing to a protective effect and others suggesting that eggs might make people more likely to have a heart attack or stroke.

Eggs can contain around 200 milligrams of cholesterol, and scientists used to think that eating eggs would lead to higher levels of cholesterol in the blood, Djousse said. (Source: CNBC)

Earth's ozone layer is under attack, new study suggests

The Earth's atmosphere as seen from space. Ozone in the atmosphere's high-altitude layers blocks harmful ultraviolet radiation from reaching the surface — but is also destroyed by certain chemicals, such as chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).

A blockbuster study published in the journal *Nature* on May 16 revealed that for the first time since the 1980s, ozone-depleting chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) have ticked sharply upward in the atmosphere — suggesting a new source. Here's the thing though: Not only do scientists have no idea what that new source is, it doesn't make much sense that someone would decide to pump out CFCs again. That's because there are numerous, inexpensive alternatives to CFCs that work just as well.

As *The Washington Post* explained in its detailed report on the study, global CFC production has been near zero since the materials were banned in the 1987 Montreal Protocol. Overall, atmospheric CFCs are still declining, and the ozone layer is still replenishing itself. But the new source has slowed that process significantly, and scientists find the situation completely baffling, said John L. Ferry, an environmental chemist at the University of South Carolina.

CFCs are molecules made up of carbon atoms linked to chlorine and fluorine atoms, halogen elements that render the molecule

volatile but particularly nonreactive, Ferry told *Live Science*. Volatile chemicals, meaning chemicals that evaporate easily, are important in foaming devices like fire extinguishers and devices that cool air, like refrigerators and air conditioners.

Ammonia or butane

The "original refrigerants ... were ammonia or butane," Ferry said. "One of them is very, very toxic—ammonia—so we needed a replacement that was nontoxic. And the other one was very, very flammable: butane."

CFCs were special because they were neither flammable nor reactive enough to be toxic. They were enormously popular, until it turned out that high in the atmosphere they were breaking down. And all that loose chlorine was tearing up the ozone layer, ripping up the chemical bonds of high-flying molecules that protect Earth's surface from ultraviolet radiation.

Replacing CFCs was a challenge, Ferry said. Some alternatives turned out to be too reactive, causing cancers and other problems. And there's no single class of molecules that works in every situation in which CFCs were once used.

That, along with the penalties for using CFCs, makes the discovery of a mysterious new source for one such chemical, CFC-11, particularly confusing. (Source: *Scientific American*)

Major fossil study sheds new light on emergence of early animal life 540m years ago

All the major groups of animals appear in the fossil record for the first time around 540-500 million years ago -- an event known as the Cambrian Explosion -- but new research from the University of Oxford in collaboration with the University of Lausanne suggests that for most animals this 'explosion' was in fact a more gradual process.

The Cambrian Explosion produced the largest and most diverse grouping of animals the Earth has ever seen: the euarthropods.

Euarthropoda contains the insects, crustaceans, spiders, trilobites, and a huge diversity of other animal forms alive and extinct. They comprise over 80 percent of all animal species on the planet and are key components of all of Earth's ecosystems, making them the most important group since the dawn of animals over 500 million years ago.

A team based at Oxford University Museum of Natural History and the University of Lausanne carried out the most comprehensive analysis ever made of early fossil euarthropods from every different possible type of fossil preservation.

In an article in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* they show that, taken together, the total fossil

record shows a gradual radiation of euarthropods during the early Cambrian, 540-500 million years ago.

Early animal evolution

The new analysis presents a challenge to the two major competing hypotheses about early animal evolution.

The first of these suggests a slow, gradual evolution of euarthropods starting 650-600 million years ago, which had been consistent with earlier molecular dating estimates of their origin.

The new research suggests a middle-ground between these two hypotheses, with the origin of euarthropods no earlier than 550 million years ago, corresponding with more recent molecular dating estimates, and with the subsequent diversification taking place over the next 40 million years.

"Each of the major types of fossil evidence has its limitation and they are incomplete in different ways, but when taken together they are mutually illuminating and allow a coherent picture to emerge of the origin and radiation of the euarthropods during the lower to middle Cambrian," explains Professor Allison Daley, who carried out the work at Oxford University Museum of Natural History and at the University of Lausanne. (Source: *sciencedaily.com*)

The most common cancer in children could be preventable, study shows

A review of studies has provided some promising clues on the causes of the most common type of cancer in children, and the researcher behind the work says the disease could even be preventable.

According to the data, acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) is a combination of a genetic mutation, and then exposure to a common infection — after the child has experienced a 'clean' first year of life.

ALL affects one in 2,000 children, and its rate has been increasing in affluent countries by about 1 percent a year. Even though scientists already knew there were some genetic risk factors, this research gives a solid basis to how the devastating cancer forms.

"I have spent more than 40 years researching childhood leukemia, and over that time there has been huge progress in our understanding of its biology and its treatment — so that today around 90 percent of cases are cured," said the review author Mel Greaves, from the Institute of Cancer Research in London.

Gap in knowledge

"But it has always struck me that something big was missing, a gap in our knowledge — why or how otherwise healthy



children develop leukemia and whether this cancer is preventable."

Greaves looked at a large collection of papers to determine how and why this cancer forms.

In the review, he discusses how a genetic change in the womb causes something called a pre-leukemic clone.

Then, in the first year of life, a lack of exposure of microbes stops the immune system from learning how to deal with biological threats correctly.

Finally, in a small number of cases, a common infection triggers the second

mutation, leading to the development of ALL.

"The research strongly suggests that ALL has a clear biological cause, and is triggered by a variety of infections in predisposed children whose immune systems have not been properly primed," said Greaves.

"This body of research is a culmination of decades of work, and at last provides a credible explanation for how the major type of childhood leukemia develops."

"It also busts some persistent myths about the causes of leukemia, such as

the damaging but unsubstantiated claims that the disease is commonly caused by exposure to electro-magnetic waves or pollution," he added.

Animal studies

There was a number of evidence points Greaves used in his review including animal studies that show animals that are bred free of microbes develop leukemia when exposed to an infection.

He also looked at studies that show children who were breastfed, went to nursery, or had older siblings, have lower rates of leukemia.

Importantly, Greaves believes that with this information, we could even prevent this type of leukemia from developing at all.

"Most cases of childhood ALL are potentially preventable," he writes.

A "more realistic prospect might be to design a prophylactic vaccine that mimics the protective impact of natural infections in infancy, correcting the deficit in modern societies."

It's important to note that we still need to gather more information about this disease, and this review is probably not the final word on the matter. (Source: *sciencealert.com*)

Middle East Largest Blood Bag Production Plant Financed by Bank Mellat

The largest Blood Bag Production Plant in the Middle East was financed by Bank Mellat, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

Blood Bag Production Factory of Fardavar Company in Payam Special Economic Zone, in Alborz Province, was put into operation in the presence of Dr. Seyyed Hassan Ghazizadeh Hashemi Minister of Health and Medical Education,

Dr. Pour-Fat'hollah Head of Iranian Blood Transfusion Organization (IBTO) and Dr. Mohammad Bigdeli CEO of Bank Mellat.

Fardavar Company's Blood Bag Production Factory is the largest blood bag production plant in the Middle East region that has been launched in cooperation between French MACO PHARMA Company, one of the leading blood bag production companies in the

world, and Fardavar Company as joint venture (JV).

This project has been financed and put into operation with direct investment of Bank Mellat. It is estimated that new employment opportunities will be generated for about 400 job-seeking people.

The report put the annual production capacity of this industrial unit at two

million bags for domestic use and also eight million bags for meeting demands of regional market including Turkey, Russia and Arab countries.

Bank Mellat has thrown its heavyweight on production projects of the country in line with materializing objectives of resistance economy and increasing export capability of producers, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank concluded.

Space-like gravity weakens biochemical signals in muscle formation

Astronauts go through many physiological changes during their time in spaceflight, including lower muscle mass and slower muscle development. Similar symptoms can occur in the muscles of people on Earth's surface, too. In fact, it could affect everyone to some extent later in life.

"Age-related skeletal muscle disorders, such as sarcopenia, are becoming a greater concern in society," said Hiroshima University (HU) Professor and Space Bio-Laboratories Director Louis Yuge. "It is especially a big concern in Japan, where the number of aging people is increasing."

In a study published in *Microgravity*, a medical research group at HU led by Yuge shed light on these similarities. They found that the process that affects gene expression of differentiating muscle cells in space also affects cells in the presence of gravity.

The genetic and molecular basis of impaired muscle development has been unclear. Yuge thinks there is a pressing need to understand it and come up with better treatment outcomes.

He and his team investigated how simulated microgravity — that is, gravity in space-like conditions — affects muscle cell differentiation and gene expression.

They observed what happened to rat muscle cells over time. Some cells were treated with a drug that stops DNA methylation from happening, while other cells were not. DNA methylation is a process that controls gene expression and muscle cell differentiation.

Next, they grew the cells either in normal gravity or inside of Gravite, a machine that simulates gravity at levels that astronauts experience in spaceflight. Cells in microgravity exhibited less cell differentiation after all. However, cells growing without the drug formed muscle fibers at a slower rate and showed less gene expression. (Source: *eurekalert.org*)

Belly fat linked to vitamin D deficiency in new study

Researchers in the Netherlands found that people with higher levels of total body and abdominal fat had lower levels of vitamin D compared to those with less fat. This could mean that people who are overweight are prone to developing vitamin D deficiencies and related conditions, the scientists suggested. If proven, the link could have health implications for the more than one-third of U.S. adults who have obesity.

Vitamin D can be absorbed into the body from sunlight, and is also present in foods such as beef liver, oily fish like tuna, mackerel and salmon, as well as cheese, egg yolks, mushrooms and some fortified foods.

The body needs vitamin D in order to absorb calcium, and deficiency can lead to bone disorders. However, growing evidence suggests it could also play a role in the development of respiratory tract infections, autoimmune diseases and heart conditions.

The team from the VU University Medical Center in Amsterdam and Leiden University Medical Center noted the levels of total body fat and abdominal fat in participants of the Netherlands Epidemiology of Obesity study. The overall cohort included more than 6,600 individuals between 46 to 65 years of age, many of whom were obese. 2,580 of those were involved in the study.

"Although we did not measure vitamin D deficiency in our study, the strong relationship between increasing amounts of abdominal fat and lower levels of vitamin D suggests that individuals with larger waistlines are at a greater risk of developing deficiency, and should consider having their vitamin D levels checked," she said in a statement. (Source: *Newsweek*)

Saturn's inner moons got their odd shapes from collisions, mergers

The inner moons of Saturn are some of the oddest-shaped places in the Solar System. A new study reveals how they likely received their special shapes.

Previously, scientists did not have a formal explanation about why Saturn's inner moons have peculiar shapes. A new study has revealed that collisions and mergers between the moonlets likely formed the shapes.



Images of the moons were first captured by the Cassini spacecraft in April 2017. Although there were some theories about the formation of the moons, they did not take into account the tidal forces of Saturn.

The "Cassini spacecraft revealed the spectacular, highly irregular shapes of the small inner moons of Saturn, ranging from the unique 'ravioli-like' forms of Pan and Atlas to the highly elongated structure of Prometheus," the researchers wrote in the study.

Saturn is about 95 times larger than the Earth, and the inner moons travel at a closer distance than the Earth and its moon. The pull from Saturn played a big role in the formation of the inner moons.

The researchers discovered that more flattened inner moons were likely caused by head-on mergers. Longer moons with smaller widths were possibly the result of an impact from the side. A few of the impacts might have caused moons to split apart.

"If the impact angle is bigger than 10 degrees, the resulting shapes are not stable anymore," said study co-author Adrien Lela.

It is estimated from the findings that 20 to 50 percent of the inner moons have an equatorial ridge or long shape. Other moons are in the shape of a potato. (Source: *Tech Times*)

Iran running HIV prevention programs for at-risk women, youth

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Iran is conducting HIV prevention programs to protect vulnerable women and at-risk youth from catching the virus, Health Minister Hassan Qazizadeh-Hashemi said on Tuesday.

He made the remarks during his speech at the 71st World Health Assembly (WHA) side event titled “towards universal coverage with HIV prevention services and commodities – the Global Prevention Coalition and Roadmap” held on May 22.

Delegations of Ecuador, Haiti, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Luxembourg, Maldives, Mexico, Panama, Ukraine, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the African Group are the organizers of the event.

“It is globally proved that once prevention programs ceased to be implemented, epidemics strike,” the minister said, adding, “Iran not only pursues Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) goals but also carry out prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) programmes.”

Moreover, special centers offering services to vulnerable women also provide them with consultation, HIV testing, tips for healthy pregnancy and social support, he noted.

Offering services to couples living with HIV when one partner is positive and the other is negative, is part of the HIV prevention programs in Iran as well, he highlighted.

The mission of UNAIDS is to lead, strengthen and support an expanded response to HIV and AIDS that includes preventing transmission of HIV, providing care and support to those already living with the virus, minimizing the vulnerability of individuals and communities to HIV and alleviating the impact of the epidemic. UNAIDS seeks to prevent the HIV/AIDS epidemic from becoming a severe pandemic.

UNAIDS has five goals including leadership and advocacy for effective action on the pandemic; strategic information and technical support to guide efforts against AIDS worldwide; tracking, monitoring and evaluation of the pandemic and of responses to it; civil society engagement and the development of strategic partnerships; and mobilization of resources to support an effective response.

The World Health Assembly is the supreme decision-making body for WHO. It generally meets in Geneva in May each year, and is attended by delegations from all 194 Member States. Its main function is to determine the policies of the Organization, appoint the Director-General, supervise financial policies, and review and approve the proposed programme budget. The Health Assembly is held annually in Geneva, Switzerland. The 71st World Health Assembly is underway in Geneva on May 21-26.

Entry to southwestern protected areas prohibited

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — Considering the beginning of wildlife breeding season in Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad province’s protected areas, southwestern Iran, people are banned from entering the region, the provincial chief of the department of environment has said.

“Stricter conservation measures have been taken for the protected areas in the province where wildlife, including goats, are reproducing,” Tasnim news agency quoted Mohsen Ja’fari-Nejad as saying on Wednesday.

“In order to safeguard the wildlife, wildlife protection forces monitor and control the areas round the clock,” he explained.

Ja’fari-Nejad stated that visiting these sensitive areas is banned till the end of the breeding season. During this period, the province wildlife protection forces will be more vigilant than ever and patrol the area carefully to protect the areas and poachers will be severely punished.

Once a newborn animal is separated from the mother on their first days of birth, the mother will suffer from breast abscess (lactation mastitis) and the newborn will not grow properly due to the lack of proper nutrition, Ja’fari-Nejad said.

Any hunters or individuals who take action on separating newborns from their mothers will be handed over to the authorities, the official warned.

LEARN ENGLISH

Vaccinations

A: Hello Mrs Parker, how have you been?
B: Hello Dr Peters. Just fine thank you. Ricky and I are here for his **vaccines**.

A: Very well. Let’s see, according to his vaccination record, Ricky has received his **polio**, **tetanus** and **hepatitis B** shots. He is 14 months old, so he is due for hepatitis a, **chickenpox** and **measles** shots.

B: What about **rubella** and **mumps**?

A: Well, I can only give him these for now, and after a couple of weeks I can **administer** the rest.

B: Ok great. Doctor, I think I also may need a Tetanus **booster**. Last time I got it was maybe fifteen years ago!

A: We will check our records and I’ll have the nurse administer the booster as well. Now, please **hold Ricky’s arm tight**, this may **sting** a little.

Key vocabulary

vaccine: a medical substance that protects people or animals
polio: acute viral disease, usually affecting children and young adults

tetanus: an infectious, often fatal disease caused by a specific bacterium that enters the body through wounds

hepatitis: inflammation of the liver, caused by a virus or a toxin

chickenpox: a disease common of children, characterized by mild headache and fever, and eruption of blisters on the skin

measles: an acute infectious disease occurring mostly in children with red spots being a common symptom

rubella: a mild contagious viral disease characterized by fever, mild upper respiratory congestion, and a fine red rash lasting a few days

mumps: characterized by inflammatory swelling of the usually other salivary glands

administer: to give someone a medicine or medical treatment

booster: a small quantity of a drug that increases the effect of one that was given before, so that someone continues to be protected against a disease

hold tight: hold firmly

sting: to make something hurt with a sudden sharp pain, or to hurt like this

(Source: irlanguage.com)

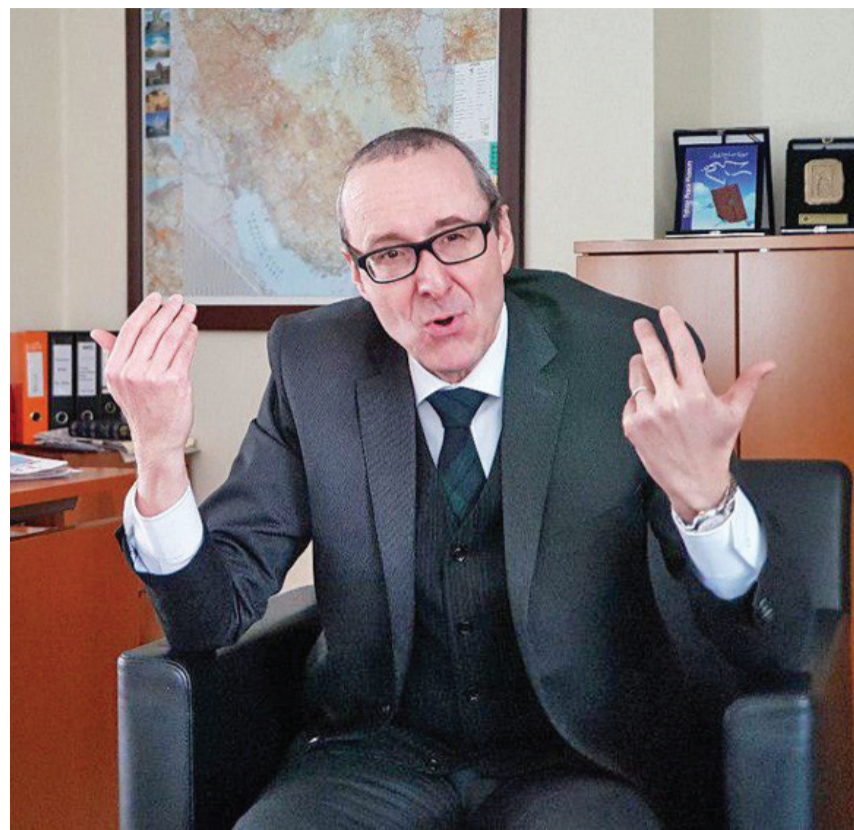
‘There is room for improving water resources by adopting smart regulations, technologies’

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — “We all know **d e s k** Iran faces water shortages, however, we still see there is lots of room for improving the present resources by adopting smart regulations and smart technologies for strengthening water resilience,” Stefan Scholz, Vienna’s ambassador to Tehran has said.

Still too much water in Iran is wasted and this requires a completely new approach to integrated water management, the Austrian ambassador told Mehr news agency.

“The top leadership is very enlightened. It has acknowledged this problem and the urgent need to build resilience within water security, but the message has to trickle down to street-level bureaucracy which is the subset of a public agency or government institution where the civil servants work who have direct contact with members of the general public. So I think even with the comparably low water quantities of minus 38 percent available this year, Iran could achieve a relatively better outcome. Still, if recent precipitation trends continue it will not be possible to avoid water shortages, on top of declining water quality and untreated waste water. But we could save time if the right policies are to be implemented now.”

Elsewhere in his remarks, Scholz said that “some 25 years ago we had a very dramatic policy change in Austria, this was when a rising awareness set in about the negative impacts of unchecked industrialization on the environment, particularly on our forests and lakes. So we started in a very systematic way to address the problem. We adapted our regulatory framework and our export oriented economy, as it turned out, strongly profited from this



policy reorientation.”

In the first phase there were segments of the population and vested interests who opposed the new theory of change, as they thought that green energy, clean environment and clean air are to the detriment of industrial output. It showed 25 years

later that this reorientation turned out a huge success for the Austrian economy as a whole, he said, stating, “Because now we have brightly established a number of niches where we became world champions for the technologies that we developed when we successfully cleaned

up the environment.”

“We have 40 major lakes in Austria all of them have drinking water quality today, which they did not have some 25 years ago. So it is a narrative that implies change is possible when you apply the right regulations and the right technology which Austria is willing to share with Iran. It is all about developing a theory of change that can propel societal development to the next level”

Inquired about transboundary water resources shared between countries and their management the ambassador explained that there are many analysts who claim that water will be the source of conflict in the next decades to come.

“In the case of Europe there are three countries that have a surplus of fresh water, Austria is one of them. There is quite some pressure on the level of the European Union and in Brussels that we make the privatization of water management and European Union competence. Austria is adamantly opposed to that. Here we seek to keep our sovereignty by deciding how we manage our own water resources. So this is an important point; you need the ownership by republic authorities.”

“When it comes to Iran water security could be one of the mottos of the future co-operation between Iran and Austria and high level visits. We very much think that this is a niche area which is of extreme importance to Iran and Iranian people where we could cooperate. I recently visited Mashhad and I agreed with the mayor that we led a business delegation together with the Austrian ministry of economic affairs to Tehran and Mashhad to discuss possible solutions for the water shortages,” he concluded.

Autism screening pilot scheme to launch in Iran

1 → Jaghtaei also said that Ministry of Health will also carry out screening programs for children aged 18 months.

“Screening program is done through a test designed with regard to contextual factors,” he explained, adding, “all children referred to health centers will be tested, and children suspected of having possible autism spectrum will be referred to specialized medical centers.”

“Children diagnosed with autism will be provided with rehabilitation, social and professional services by the Welfare Organization,” Jaghtaei highlighted.

He went on to say that some seven to eight thousand children with autism have been identified in the country, so far.

It is anticipated that nearly 30,000 children under age five are suffering autism in the country, as prevalence is estimated at 1 in 250 births, and with 1.5 million births per year in Iran some 30,000 are possibly suffering autism, he explained.

Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are characterized by social-interaction difficulties, communication challenges and a tendency to engage in repetitive behaviors.



World Health Organization estimates that 1 in 160 children has an autism spectrum disorder worldwide.

Autism cannot be diagnosed at birth. A study, published in February 2010 in Science Daily, of the development of autism in infants, comparing the behavior of the siblings of children diagnosed with autism to that of babies devel-

oping normally, has found that the nascent symptoms of the condition -- a lack of shared eye contact, smiling and communicative babbling -- are not present at 6 months, but emerge gradually and only become apparent during the latter part of the first year of life.

According to Autism Parenting Magazine research is increasingly proving that children with an autism spectrum disorder benefit from the earliest interventions possible. In 2001, the U.S. National Research Council urged families not to use the “wait and see” method for early intervention as it was “likely to have significant and negative consequences.”

Evidence-based psychosocial interventions including behavioral treatment and parent skills training programmes, can reduce difficulties in communication and social behavior, with a positive impact on wellbeing and quality of life for persons with autism and their caregivers.

Globally, people with ASD are often subject to stigma, discrimination and human rights violations, and in general access to services and support for people with ASD is inadequate.

Road fatalities up 24% in New Year holidays

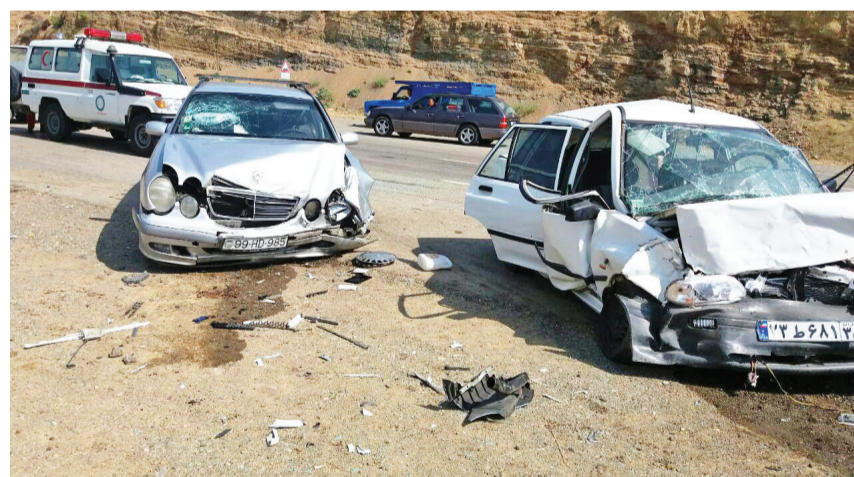
SOCIETY TEHRAN — Road **d e s k** crash fatalities have increased by 24 percent during the Iranian New Year holidays (from March 16 to April 4) compared to the corresponding period last year.

As per the data published on May 21 by Iran’s forensics organization, 1,034 individuals lost their lives in road crashes (both inside the cities and on intercity roads) over the aforesaid time span which demonstrates a 24-percent rise year on year.

In other words, traffic-related accidents claimed 51.7 lives on a daily basis on average over the holidays. Last year, 874 individuals were killed in road crashes, meaning 46.1 individuals per day on average.

Some 72 percent of the deaths occurred among men and the rest were women.

While in general men outnumber women in number of deaths resulted from traffic related fatalities, many families lose their



breadwinners in accidents.

The highest number of accidents resulting in deaths occurred on March 30 and April

2 with 65 individuals dead on each day. April 4 set the record low for the smallest number of deaths over the holidays with

34 people passed way.

Fars, Kerman and Khorasan Razavi with 99, 75 and 73 deaths were the provinces with the highest death rates in the same period while Ardebil, Bushehr, Ilam and Alborz with 6, 10, 11, and 11 deaths are the four provinces with the lowest number of deaths reported.

Distracted drivers are the top causes of car accidents. A distracted driver diverts his or her attention from the road, usually to talk on a cell phone, send a text message or eat food. traveling above speed limit, driving under the influence of drugs, reckless driving, poor weather conditions, running red lights, night driving, drowsy driving, defective automobiles, tailgating, and road rage are only some of the causes of fatal accidents.

Granted substandard vehicles and poor road conditions are also among the main causes of accidents, however, drivers play a bigger part in preventing or causing accidents.

ENGLISH IN USE

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A ← → ع

‘Pharmaceutical industry unfazed by U.S. withdrawal of nuclear deal’

Given Iran’s low volume of imports in pharmaceutical and medical equipment industry, the U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal won’t affect the industry, the Ministry of Health spokesman said on Wednesday. “Due to the technical know-how we possess we do not depend on import and we are capable of manufacturing many pharmaceutical products domestically,” ISNA quoted Harirchi as saying. Harirchi further highlighted that the country has enough foreign exchange reserves and ensured the public that the current conditions won’t raise any problems for the pharmaceutical industry.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“fore-”

- **Meaning:** before or in front
- **For example:** Can dreams **foretell** the future?

PHRASAL VERB

Go about something

- **Meaning:** to start to do something;
- **For example:** I want to learn German but I don’t know the best way to go about it.

IDIOM

Bright-eyed and bushy-tailed

- **Explanation:** a person who is very enthusiastic and full of energy
- **For example:** Gary was fantastic. He arrived bright-eyed and bushy-tailed at 7am and worked with us all day.

سخنگوی وزارت بهداشت: خروج آمریکا از برجام تاثیری در دارو ندارد

سخنگوی وزارت بهداشت تاکید کرد: خروج آمریکا از برجام تاثیری بر بازار دارو و تجهیزات پزشکی نخواهد گذاشت؛ چراکه وابستگی مان به دارو و تجهیزات وارداتی بسیار اندک است.

دکتر ایرج حریرچی در گفت‌وگو با ایسنا گفت: با تکیه بر توان دانشمندان خودمان و تولیدات مان، وابستگی دارویی مان به محصولات خارجی بسیار اندک است و میزان قابل توجهی از داروها را خودمان تولید می‌کنیم.

وی تاکید کرد: با توجه به توانی که دولت از حوزه ارز و منابعی که برای این حوزه دارد، مردم مطمئن باشند که مشکلی در این زمینه نخواهیم داشت.

At least 65 dead as Pakistan's Karachi sizzles in heat wave

At least 65 people have died of heat-related illnesses in the southern Pakistani city of Karachi in the last four days, rescue officials say, as temperatures soared to 44 degrees Celsius in the country's largest city.

The spike in temperatures has coincided with the month of Ramadan, with Muslims who fast in the coastal metropolis taking no food or water for almost 15 hours every day.

Most of those who have died so far during the heat wave were elderly or had existing health complications, said Faisal Edhi, chief of the Edhi Foundation rescue service, on Wednesday.

In June 2015, more than 1,200 people died of heat-related illnesses in Karachi during a similar heat wave.

The intense heat and deaths this year have sparked concerns that the situation could spiral, as it did during the 2015 heat wave, when hospital officials said that mortuaries were overflowing and public sector hospitals were overwhelmed with thousands of patients every day.

Prolonged power outages have also plagued parts of the city, as electricity consumption has risen, further exacerbating citizens' woes.

The government disputes the death toll, saying many of the deaths were due to underlying conditions, and not heat stroke or



dehydration.

Shahid Abbas, a senior official at Pakistan's Meteorological Department, said the heat wave was expected to continue for at least another 48 hours, and had been caused by an incoming northwesterly hot weather system and a corresponding drop in the coastal city's sea breeze.

Temperatures of up to 41 degrees Celsius

are expected to continue until at least Friday, the Meteorological Department said. Rescue officials are advising those who fast to avoid prolonged exposure to direct sunlight, and to keep their skin, particularly on their heads and faces, moist. Roughly 96 percent of Pakistan's 207 million population is Muslim, according to a government census, with many observing Ramadan.

The government says it has set up dozens of camps across the city where they are providing water and basic medication to those feeling the effects of the heat.

Experts point to the 'urban heat island' phenomenon as one reason why Karachi has experienced such intense heat waves in the recent past.

"Urban heat islands" are high population areas which typically see higher temperatures than their surrounding rural region, due to the build-up of excess heat by their inhabitants and industrial processes, and the clearing of trees and vegetation that can keep moisture in and provide shade to keep those areas cool.

Karachi, a city of roughly 18 million people, is Pakistan's largest metropolis and its economic backbone. Spread over 3,000 square kilometers near the Indus delta into the Arabian Sea, its sprawl consists of a mix of high-rise apartment buildings, vast low-income housing neighborhoods, industrial areas and luxurious homes in its richer southern district.

Where there were once open areas and single storey homes, Hasan says, the space has vanished in the narrow streets of the city's neighborhoods, which traps hot air with nowhere to go.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Trump's fearing from future

According to the results, only Thirty-five percent of Americans polled said they believed Trump has the ability to get things done, while 33 percent of those polled said he was tough enough for the job. These results, which are also repeated in similar polls, are considered a disaster for Trump and his administration. It shouldn't be forgotten that during the 2016 Presidential elections, Trump could overcome his rival, Hillary Clinton, based on the Electoral College, and the unbalanced electoral structure in the United States. The fact is Hillary Clinton won more votes than Donald Trump in presidential elections.

Trump is now faced with a variety of internal and external policy crises in the United States. Many of them are the direct result of the policies of the President of the United States. Many American citizens are worried about the deepening gap between the two sides of Atlantic (America and Europe). On the other hand, Trump has walked out of Iran nuclear deal, which, according to recent survey, about percent of American citizens supported. The events that have taken place in recent weeks have also decreased Trump's popularity: Trump's involving an extramarital affair with the adult movie actress, and the reopening of the case on links between Trump and Russia during his presidential campaigns. All these issues led to the process of "crossing Trump" to be pursued even faster by American citizens.



Although traditionally American citizens have lower participation in Congressional elections compared to the presidential elections, it seems that this time there will be more participants on this political scene. Some U.S. analysts believe that Trump's opponents are looking for an opportunity to make their anger at Donald Trump and the Republicans public. Hence, many of Trump's opponents will participate in the upcoming Congressional elections. They believe that, with the help of a Democratic Congress, they could partly restrain Trump's actions in years between 2018 to 2020. However, the main focus of Trump's opponents remains on the presidential elections

in 2020. In recent months, whispers were heard that the former Vice President Joe Biden, the American Senator Bernie Sanders, and others are to stand before Trump in the future elections. However, it is not yet clear that Democrats will choose who to be their candidate in the 2020 electoral competitions.

At any rate, Trump's opponents plan to send a hard warning to the White House by attending the Congressional elections and voting for the U.S. president's political rivals.

Nearly half of the American voters overall said that they hope Democrats take control of the Senate in 2018, according to the Quinnipiac University poll. Polls conducted previously also suggest that Democrats are standing on higher steps in the Congressional election compared with rivals. Of course, Trump and his companions are trying to change the equation by November this year, and thus, reduce the heavy weight of their potential failure in the election. Indeed, Trump is deeply worried about "Democrats winning the Senate with Absolute Majority". But even Democrats' partial victory in the Senate (51 seats out of 100) seems to have serious psychological impact on the Republican camp. As noted above, some senators, politicians and even Republican leaders will openly confront Trump and his policies at the White House; something that will put the U.S. President under heavy pressure.

Israeli tanks target Hamas observation post in southern Gaza Strip

Israeli battle tanks have targeted the southern part of the Gaza Strip as the Tel Aviv regime goes ahead with its acts of aggression against the besieged Palestinian coastal sliver.

Arabic-language Palestine al-Yawm news agency reported that an artillery round struck an observation post belonging to the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas resistance movement, east of Bureij refugee camp on Tuesday.

An unnamed Israeli army spokesman said Israeli tanks bombed a Hamas monitoring post in the southern Gaza Strip after a group of Palestinians allegedly crossed the border fence between the Gaza Strip and occupied territories, and set an Israeli military post on fire earlier in the day.

There were no immediate reports of casualties and the extent of damage caused.

At least 65 Palestinians were killed and more than 2,700 others wounded near the Gaza fence on the eve of the 70th anniversary of Nakba Day (Day of Catastrophe), which coincided this year with the relocation of the

U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to the occupied city of Jerusalem al-Quds.

The occupied territories have witnessed new tensions ever since U.S. President Donald Trump on December 6, 2017 announced Washington's recognition of Jerusalem al-Quds as Israel's "capital" and said the U.S. would move its embassy to the city.

Muslim leaders have called for an international force to be deployed to protect Palestinian people against Israeli crimes.

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

Israel has also launched several wars on the Palestinian coastal sliver, the last of which began in early July 2014. The military aggression, which ended on August 26, 2014, killed nearly 2,200 Palestinians. Over 11,100 others were also wounded in the war.

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



The Israeli regime denies about 1.8 million people in Gaza their basic rights, such as freedom of movement, jobs with proper wages as well as adequate healthcare and education.

(Source: Press TV)

French PM cancels Israel trip, cites domestic priorities

French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe has cancelled a planned trip to Israel, an official at his office said on Wednesday, adding that the reason was domestic policy matters to be tended to in the coming days.

Philippe had been planning to visit at the end of May. **Israeli cabinet meetings held in underground bunker**

Senior Israel cabinet members have started convening their weekly meetings in a secure underground bunker located in Jerusalem al-Quds.

The forum, a round-table of senior ministers headed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, has started to use the "National Management Center," Israeli media reported on Tuesday. The facility is located under the Tel Aviv regime's fa-



cilities in Jerusalem and includes living quarters and command facilities.

"Cabinet ministers have told us that one of the main reasons for the move is Netanyahu's wish to try even harder to prevent leaks and because of fears of spying attempts by hostile foreign parties," said Israel's Channel 10.

The meetings were formerly held in the prime minister's office in al-Quds.

The move comes at a time of increased tension with Iran. Last month, a senior Iranian official pledged that the Islamic Republic will punish Israel for the recent airstrikes on Syria that killed over a dozen people, including seven Iranian military advisors.

(Source: agencies)

U.S. in contact with Iraqi ex-foe Sadr after his surprise election win: Sadr aide

The United States has contacted members of a political bloc in Iraq led by a former foe, the Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, after his election win put him in a strong position to influence the formation of a new government,

a top Sadr aide said.

The surprise victory by Sadr's political alliance Sairoon in a parliamentary election last week has put Washington into an awkward position. His Mehdi Army militia

fought violent battles against U.S. troops after Saddam Hussein was toppled in 2003.

Despite their past enmity, Washington and Sadr, an Iraqi nationalist, agree on their opposition to Iran's deep influence in Iraq.

Dhiaa al-Asadi, a top aide to the cleric, said U.S. officials had used intermediaries to initiate contact with members of his Sairoon alliance.

(Source: Reuters)

Cameroon summons U.S. envoy over anti-government remarks

Cameroon authorities have summoned the United States' ambassador to the Foreign Ministry to have him explain his earlier anti-government comments.

U.S. Ambassador Peter Barlerin was called in to the Cameroonian Foreign Ministry on Wednesday.

Earlier, on May 18, Barlerin had accused government forces of the "targeted killing" of separatists in the autonomy-seeking English-speaking regions of the country.

"On the side of the government, there have been targeted killings, detentions without access to legal support, family, or the Red Cross, and burning and looting of villages," he had alleged in a statement. He had also accused the separatists of "murders of gendarmes, kidnapping of government officials, and burning of schools."

In related news on Tuesday, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said around 160,000 people had been internally displaced by the fighting between government forces and separatists in Cameroon. Some 20,000 have sought refuge in neighboring Nigeria, according to OCHA.

In 2016, separatists from the Anglophone community in the country stepped up a campaign for greater autonomy.

The minority accounts for about a fifth of the country's population of 22 million.

Cameroon's President Paul Biya has rejected the Anglophones' autonomy demands, prompting radicals to issue a full-blown but symbolic declaration of independence last October.

Armed clashes then ensued between government forces and the separatists.

Many Anglophones in the northwest and southwest regions of Cameroon complain of marginalization in education, the judiciary, and the economy.

Since the end of 2016, at least 120 civilians and at least 43 security forces have been killed in the fighting, according to the International Crisis Group (ICG) think tank.

(Source: Press TV)

Syria: Iran, Hezbollah presence not up for discussion

Iran offers Syria advisory military support in its fight against terrorism. Hezbollah forces have also been aiding the Syrian government clear areas bordering Lebanon from terrorist groups.

On Monday, the United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo threatened Iran with the "strongest sanctions in history" if it does not comply with a list of 12 U.S. demands, including the withdrawal of "all forces under Iranian command throughout the entirety of Syria."

On May 17, Russian President Vladimir Putin told Syrian President Bashar al-Assad that the foreign forces in Syria had to leave the country because the Syrian government had succeeded in its fight against large-scale terrorism.

Mekdad said he "highly appreciates" the help of Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah in Syria's battle against terrorism.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Mekdad touched on a recent U.S. statement on the withdrawal of American troops from Syria, saying, "The main goal of such statements is to pump the money out of the Arab countries [by scaring them with a prospect of a U.S. pullout]."

The Syrian official also accused Washington of financing and supplying terrorists with arms.

He said the U.S.-led coalition operating in Syria unauthorized had deliberately bombed oil wells in the country to render them useless for the Damascus government.

"I believe that the oxygen for terrorist groups comes from the United States," Mekdad said, urging Washington to "stop supporting terrorists and respect Syria's sovereignty and choice of the Syrian people."

A U.S.-led coalition has been conducting airstrikes against what are said to be the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group targets inside Syria since September 2014 without any authorization from the Damascus government or a United Nations mandate.

(Source: Sputnik)

'Mexico First' frontrunner uses Trump playbook in crunch election

AMLO has even discovered the power of humor this time around - he swatted away speculation earlier this year about being the favorite candidate of Russian interests by posting a video on social media that showed him (Andrés Manuelovitch, he called himself) standing by the Gulf of Mexico awaiting the submarine bearing his cash and instructions from Moscow.

But it is too early to proclaim AMLO the next president. A majority of Mexicans have opposed him over the last decade, presumably because they are still invested in Mexico's bet on embracing liberal economics and free trade. AMLO's electoral success is predicated on his continuing to face a fractured opposition; he is unlikely to command more than 50 percent of the vote. Mexico's first presidential debate therefore was reminiscent of early 2015-2016 Republican debates, when established candidates were attacking each other in order to ultimately go head-to-head against Trump.

In this sense, the needle did move considerably during the April debate, as Ricardo Anaya, the 39-year-old wunderkind of the center-right PAN made a strong claim with his dominant performance to turn this into a two-man race. The PRI's José Antonio Meade, a Yale-trained former finance and foreign minister who has worked across party lines during the past two administrations, may be the most qualified of the candidates, but he has failed to gain traction due to his inability to distance himself from the unpopular President Peña Nieto.

And don't forget about Trump. As Mexico's election season heats up, Mexican, American and Canadian negotiators are racing to "modernize" the North American Free Trade Agreement, a pillar of the Mexico AMLO is running against. By all accounts, they should be able to resolve outstanding technocratic issues such as the rules-of-origin formula for the automotive sector.

The real suspense lies in whether Trump will be in a mood to accept the draft of a renegotiated treaty. Whether he decides to tweet that he has "fixed" NAFTA, or tweet that he is rejecting it once and for all to Make America Great Again, will go a long way towards determining the fate of AMLO's desire to make Mexico Mexico again.

(Source: Reuters)

England captain Harry Kane says they can win in Russia

New England captain Harry Kane says the team can win the World Cup in Russia and "anything else is not good enough".

Striker Kane, 24, was informed about being made skipper by manager Gareth Southgate a few weeks ago and it was officially confirmed on Tuesday.

Kane scored 41 goals in all competitions last season as Tottenham finished third in the Premier League.

"It's impossible not to dream about lifting the World Cup. It's the biggest competition in the world," said Kane.

"I believe we can win it - anyone can. I cannot sit here and say we are not going to win it because we could do.

"It is my mindset and I want to win at everything I do. The players in the team want to as well. It is worth fighting for. I am sure we have all had dreams of lifting it and it is an opportunity for us.

"We are not favourites but you look at this season, no-one would have thought Liverpool getting to the Champions League final. You look at Manchester United back in the Sir Alex Ferguson days, they had a young team and dominated the Premier League for years to come.

"Being young is not an excuse - it could be a good thing. I believe we can and that is what we want to try and do. Anything else is not good enough."

England head to Russia on 12 June and face Tunisia in their opening game on 18 June, followed by matches against Panama and Belgium.

(Source: BBC)

'I have biological age of 23', says Ronaldo

Real Madrid forward Cristiano Ronaldo has no plans to slow down and feels a decade younger than his 33 years, the Portuguese declared ahead of the Champions League final with Liverpool, where he is targeting a fifth European Cup triumph.

"Right now I have a biological age of 23," the five-times world player of the year said in an interview with Spanish television program El Chiringuito broadcast on Wednesday.

"I've still got a long time left, I can keep playing until I'm 41. I'm feeling good, happy, I can't complain. We are playing another final on Saturday and the fans are behind Cristiano."

Ronaldo is top scorer in the Champions League for a remarkable sixth year in a row, with 15 goals in 12 games in this season's competition. If he hits the net against Liverpool on Saturday in Kiev, he will become the first ever player to score in four European Cup finals.

The Portuguese has had to take extra responsibility in attack this season for Madrid as Karim Benzema and Gareth Bale have struggled for form at various stages of the season.

Ronaldo, however, did not appear enthusiastic about press speculation linking Paris St Germain forward Neymar with a move to Real and gave his backing to his current team mates.

"I've been here for eight years and people always say 50 players are coming here but in the end no-one comes. In September people think lots of players are going to come but the ones who take us to finals are always the same ones," he said.

"The best players are already at Madrid. Bale, Benzema, (Lucas) Vazquez, (Marco) Asensio. They are all here."

(Source: Reuters)

Morocco write to Fifa as US territories permitted to vote

The Moroccan Football Federation has written to Fifa to complain about US territories being allowed to vote to decide the 2026 World Cup hosts.

Morocco are bidding to host the tournament, against a joint proposal from the USA, Mexico and Canada.

Guam, American Samoa, the US Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico are able to vote on 13 June, but Morocco claim that is a conflict of interests.

The 2026 World Cup finals will be the first to feature 48 teams.

The BBC has learned the Moroccan FA first wrote to Fifa on 26 April, explaining that residents of Guam, Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands are US citizens while those of American Samoa are US nationals.

It has now asked Fifa to inform the US territories of their inability to vote in order to allow for a fair bidding procedure.

(Source: BBC)

Argentina goalkeeper Sergio Romero ruled out through knee injury



Argentina goalkeeper Sergio Romero has been ruled out of the World Cup with a knee injury.

The 31-year-old Manchester United player has won 94 caps for the country and played in the 2014 World Cup final defeat by Germany.

Chelsea's Willy Caballero, with two caps, and River Plate's Franco Armani, who is uncapped, are Argentina's reserve goalkeepers.

Tigres' Nahuel Guzman has been called into the squad as Romero's replacement.

Argentina's Football Association said Romero will have surgery on his injured right knee.

Argentina begin their World Cup campaign against Iceland on 16 June before games against Croatia and Nigeria in Group D.

(Source: Euronews)

Unai Emery pledges to bring 'special moments and memories' to Arsenal

Unai Emery said he is 'thrilled to be joining one of the great clubs in the game' after he was announced as the new Arsenal manager, replacing Arsene Wenger on a three-year deal worth £15million.

The former Paris Saint-Germain boss pipped Mikel Arteta to the role after the ex-Arsenal midfielder had misgivings over the managerial structure at the Emirates Stadium.

Emery has now been tasked with filling the gigantic void left by Wenger, who was in charge of the north London club for 22 years.

Arsenal broke the news just after 9am on Wednesday morning, proclaiming that Emery's announcement marked: 'A new dawn. A new era. A new chapter.' The Spaniard will be formally unveiled at a press conference at 2pm on Wednesday.

'I am thrilled to be joining one of the great clubs in the game. Arsenal is known and loved throughout the world for its style of play, its commitment to young players, the fantastic stadium, the way the club is run,' Emery said.

'I'm very excited to be given the responsibility to start this important new chapter in Arsenal's history. I have met Stan and Josh Kroenke and it's clear they have great ambitions for the club and are committed to bringing future success.

'I'm excited about what we can do together and I look forward to giving everyone who loves Arsenal some special moments and memories.'

The Gunners majority owner Stan Kroenke said: 'We're delighted to welcome Unai to Arsenal. He's a proven winner. We're confident that he is the right person for the job and that he will work to deliver the triumphs our fans, staff and everyone who cares about Arsenal want.'

'Several things stood out during his interview and the entire process; his football knowledge, energy, determination and love of the game. His familiarity with our club and our players, the Premier League and the game in Europe were all very impressive.'

'He shares our vision to move forward, to build on the platform created by Arsene Wenger and help this club enjoy greater success.'



A club statement continued: 'We conducted a confidential, wide-ranging and rigorous search involving extensive background references, data and video analysis, and personal meetings with all the candidates we shortlisted.'

'All were interested in the position and we were unanimous in our choice of Unai to drive the next chapter of our history.'

The Spaniard appeared to have jumped the gun on Tuesday night, when he seemingly confirmed his appointment prematurely via a message on his official website.

An image of Emery on a red background next to the Ar-

senal badge was displayed on unai-emery.com - the website linked to his verified Twitter account.

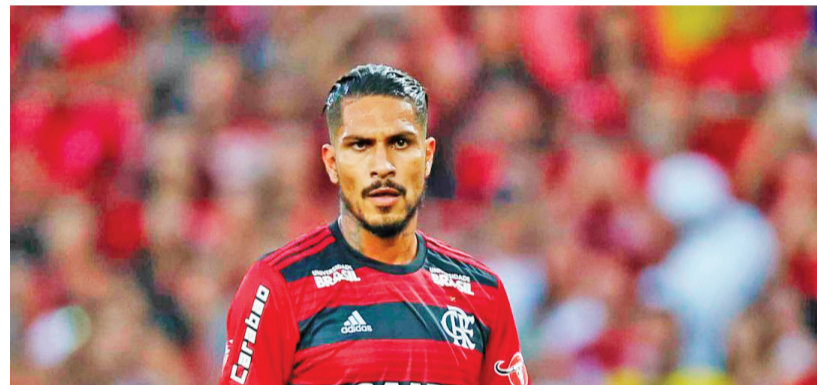
'Proud to be part of the Arsenal family,' the message said against a backdrop of the Emirates Stadium.

The early release of the image appeared to be a gaffe by Emery's media team as it was removed shortly after 11pm on Tuesday.

Clicking the link for Emery's website thereafter instead brought up an error message.

(Source: Daily Mail)

Star striker's World Cup drug ban enrages South American nation



It's a story involving an alleged drugs violation and Inca mummies that's enraged a South American nation about to make its first World Cup appearance since 1982.

Thousands have taken to the streets of Peru in protest and three rival national team captains have signed a letter calling for leniency in the case of the Peruvian forward Paolo Guerrero.

Peru's all-time top scorer is presently banned from the Russia 2018 World Cup after testing positive for the cocaine metabolite benzoylcegonine, following a World Cup qualifying match away to Argentina in October 2017. Initially banned for a year by FIFA -- the substance is on the World Anti-Doping Agency's prohibited list -- Guerrero protested his innocence, contending the metabolite was only found in his system as a consequence of a simple cup of coca tea, a common drink in South America.

In court, Guerrero's lawyers invoked the story of three Inca mummies -- the Children of Llullaillaco -- discovered by mountaineers in 1999.

The mummies' perfectly-preserved bodies had gone undisturbed since the 16th Century and contained traces of the same substance -- despite cocaine only being isolated as psychoactive alkaloid hundreds of years later.

If the metabolite could hang around on a person for centuries before cocaine

even existed, surely, the lawyers argued, an adverse finding in Guerrero's case wasn't so unusual. The player posted on his Facebook page in November: "I trust that the truth will soon be known and I will return to the fields to defend with soul and heart the colors of my country."

On 20 December 2017, FIFA reduced Guerrero's ban to what it considered a "proportionate sanction" of six months, meaning Peru's talismanic captain would get a chance to play in the World Cup.

Job done, or so it appeared, as Peru manager Ricardo Gareca named the 34-year-old in his provisional squad on May 14.

The World Anti-Doping Agency Agency had other ideas.

Later that day, the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) announced it had decided to increase the suspension from six to 14 months, as WADA sought to impose a stricter ruling.

CAS accepted that Guerrero "did not attempt to enhance his performance by ingesting the prohibited substance," adding there was no "significant fault or negligence," but the court's panel insisted the player could have taken measures to prevent the violation.

Guerrero had also taken his case to CAS, seeking to prove his innocence once and for all. The verdict left him back at square one.

(Source: CNN)

French Open organizers launch assault on tardy diners



The French Open is mostly a picture of elegance -- well-dressed spectators in Panama hats watching the ball sizzle across the red clay in searing sunshine. The problem is when most of the crowd disappears for a long Mediterranean lunch.

While numbers at Roland Garros have been climbing steadily in recent years -- there were a record 472,000 visitors in 2017, up 16,000 from 2016 -- the stands are often half-empty during the lunch hour, which at the French Open can run from around 11:30 a.m. until 3 p.m.

Early round women's matches have been particularly affected but even the 2016 semi-final between Serena Williams and Kiki Bertens did not escape. Photos showed Philippe Chatrier, the main show court, largely deserted. The other semi-final between Garbine Muguuruz and Sam Stosur was not much better attended.

As well as disappointing players -- Frenchman Jo-Wilfried Tsonga has expressed irritation -- it does not look good on TV and is a source of embarrassment for the French Tennis Federation, which has been looking at ways to resolve it.

Wimbledon, with its hordes of tennis fans arriving from the world over to camp out for days or even weeks to get hold of tickets, has not faced the same problem.

Last year, Roland Garros sold tickets to the men's semi-finals separately, so rath-

er than someone being able to buy a day pass and fit in a liquid lunch in between matches, spectators had to buy a ticket for one semi-final or the other.

This year, with the main tournament beginning on May 27 and running until June 10, organizers are hoping other minor tweaks will keep the show courts nicely filled. "The problem arises especially during the first week with games starting at 11 a.m.," a spokesman for the French Tennis Federation acknowledged.

"To help fill the courts, we're giving our hospitality customers a lot of flexibility in the ticketing, so they are able to host several guests on the same ticket at different times during the day," he explained.

That means that while one guest may be enjoying one of the famously lavish hospitality lunches, another invited by the same sponsor could be sitting in the stands watching a game.

Of course, the federation is also keen to ensure sponsors can entertain as they see fit, and that everyone has a good time.

Top-notch hospitality tickets for the men's semi-finals, including a gourmet lunch, all-day open bar and direct access to Philippe Chatrier, cost around 2,500 euros per ticket this year. At that price, punters want to make the most of everything -- both the tennis and the hospitality.

(Source: Eurosport)

Returning Serena Williams ready to deny Paris convention

Convention would have it that to succeed on the grueling clay courts of Roland Garros requires playing a stack of matches and having miles in your legs.

But then Serena Williams has never been one to take too much notice of convention.

The 23-times grand slam singles champion will be back at Roland Garros having missed last year's event as she prepared to have her first child, Alexis Olympia, who was born in September.

Following a tumultuous birth, when she needed emergency surgery after suffering a blood clot, just being back on the court is a remarkable achievement.

When she returned to the Tour in March, playing in Indian Wells and Miami, she looked short of fitness and form, going out in the third round and first round respectively.

Her coach, Patrick Mouratoglou, admits she returned too soon but the pair have been working hard together ever since.

At 36, Williams is chasing the record of 24 grand slam title wins, held by Australia's Margaret Court, and if she lines up at Roland Garros, she will be fitter, fresh and dangerous.

"Serena will play the French Open to win it," Mouratoglou told the WTA website recently.

"Can she do it? Serena can achieve anything -- after



being her coach for six years, I'm even more sure of that statement."

It was the arrival of Mouratoglou as Williams' coach in 2012 that sparked the most successful period of her career.

Having been knocked out of the French Open in the first round, Williams turned to the Frenchman to revive her fortunes; they have won 10 grand slam titles together since.

With organizers sticking strictly to the world rankings, Williams, currently ranked 453, will be unseeded in Paris, which means she could face any of the highest-ranked

players in the first or second round.

But even with her lack of match practice, if anyone can hit the ground running it is Williams, the winner there in 2002, 2013 and 2015.

"I hear when she was down in Palm Beach she was training very hard with her physical trainer (Mackie Shilstone)," seven-times French Open champion Chris Evert, an analyst for broadcaster ESPN, told Reuters.

"At the end of the day she knows how to play tennis. It's more about fitness, getting the cardio up, the first step.

"We know she will have the fire, the fight and the heart and the drive but you don't know about seven matches in a row to keep that level up. That's what it's going to take."

Jim Courier, who twice won the title at Roland Garros, also believes Serena can defy logic.

"One can never count Serena out if she's in a draw," the American, who will be part of ITV's French Open coverage, said.

"She lacks match play and will be vulnerable in the early rounds as she seeks form and confidence. If she does reach the second week she will be hard to stop."

Last weekend, Williams was a guest at the Royal wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle.

(Source: Reuters)

Persepolis, Esteghlal know rivals at AFC Champions League quarters



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iranian giants Persepolis and Esteghlal have learned their fate in the 2018 AFC Champions League quarter-final.

Qatar's Al Duhail boast impressive domestic successes this year and will look to maintain their immaculate record and add a Continental club silverware to their collection but will first welcome Iran Professional League champions, Persepolis.

Persepolis have yet to win the AFC Champions League and after a semi-final exit in 2017, Branko Ivankovic's charges will be aiming for the title.

It's been well over 27 years since Islamic Republic of

Iran's Esteghlal FC were crowned the Asian champions and Winfried Schaefer's side will be aiming to return to glory and a third title as they go up against two-time champions, Al Sadd of Qatar.

Kashima Antlers from Japan, who have not gone beyond the quarter-final stage, will welcome China PR's Tianjin Quanjian, who have performed spectacularly in their first appearance in the AFC Champions League, and are certainly looking to extend their run.

Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors, champions in 2006 and 2016, will lock horns with fellow Korea Republic side Suwon Samsung Bluewings, who have also won the title twice - in the

2000/01 and 2001/02 seasons.

AFC General Secretary Dato' Windsor John, who opened the draw ceremony, began by praising the progress the prestigious tournament has made since its rebranding, with the introduction of a new format, increased prize money and expanded competition from 28 to 32 teams.

"A decade later, we have a club competition few in the world can match," said Dato' Windsor.

"From record attendances to greater fan engagement, the AFC Champions League continues to capture imaginations in Asia and beyond. Above all, it provides the ultimate stage for the stars of the Asian game to shine."

Winfried Schaefer satisfied with Esteghlal draw in ACL quarters



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Esteghlal coach Winfried Schaefer is satisfied with their draw in the 2018 AFC Champions League Knockout Stage facing Al Sadd of Qatar.

Two-time champions Esteghlal set to face off against Qatar's Al Sadd in the West Zone.

The Iranian giants will host Al Sadd on Aug. 27 in Tehran and play the Qatari team in return leg in Doha on Sept. 17.

"I am satisfied with our draw and I think Persepolis have a hard task facing Al Duhail in quarters. I like both Iranian teams qualify for the semis," Schaefer said.

"I liked to host Al Sadd in the return leg but we are a united team and could advance to the semis," the German added.

"We will do our best in our first leg in Tehran in front of our fans," Schaefer said.

Persepolis coach Ivankovic wary of Al Duhail in ACL quarters



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Persepolis coach Branko Ivankovic says that they have a difficult task to book a place in the AFC Champions League semis.

Persepolis will have to face Qatar's Al Duhail - who have won all eight of their matches in the ACL this year - in ACL quarters.

"Al Duhail are the Qatar champions and have shown their strengths in the previous stages, however, I believe in my players,"

Ivankovic said.

"We have good memories of Al Duhail (Lekhwiya) in the previous seasons. We want to repeat our success against them," he added.

"We have a lot of respect for Al Duhail but I wish my deserved team all the best," Ivankovic said.

Persepolis play Al Duhail on Aug. 28 in Doha and host the Qatari giants on Sept. 18 in Tehran.

Iran beat Malaysia at Women's U17 Volleyball Championship

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iran defeated Malaysia 3-1 (25-27, 25-20, 25-22, 25-21) at the 2018 Asian Women's U17 Volleyball Championship on Wednesday and advanced to the tournament's quarter-final.

The Iranian team will face powerhouse Japan on Thursday.

"I am satisfied with the way my players played in this match. We have come here to learn and I think this competition is a great opportunity for my girls to learn more," Iran coach Mitra Shabani said.

Also, South Korea will meet India, China face Kazakhstan and host Thailand play Chinese Taipei in the stage.



The 2018 Asian Women's U17 Volleyball Championship is a biennial international volleyball tournament organized by the Asian Volleyball Confederation (AVC) with Thailand Volleyball Association (TVA) for the girls' under-17 national teams of Asia.

The tournament is being held in Nakhon Pathom, Thailand, from 20 to 27 May 2018.

In terms of the previous results of the Asian Women's U17 Championship, only Japan and China captured the title.

Japan had won 7 titles including six successive times and the 2017 edition in Chongqing, China. China had won 4 titles.

Fifa finds 'insufficient evidence' of doping among Russian World Cup players

Fifa says it has found "insufficient" evidence of doping among Russian footballers set to compete in this summer's World Cup.

It investigated after the McLaren reports found 1,000 Russian athletes across 30 sports benefited from state-sponsored doping between 2012 and 2015.

The World Anti-Doping Agency (Wada) said it agreed with Fifa's decision to close the cases.

The 2018 World Cup finals start in Russia next month.

"Investigations concerning all Russian players named for the provisional squad of the Fifa World Cup in Russia have been completed, with the result that insufficient evidence was found to assert an anti-doping rule violation," said a Fifa statement.

However, it added investigations of several players unrelated to the World Cup were continuing.

Wada, in a statement to the BBC, said: "Wada is satisfied with the process followed by Fifa, and the conclusion of all cases related to Russian players named for the provisional squad of the World Cup.

"The agency will also review the outcomes of all the remaining football cases that are still under investigation."

The announcement came as a new documentary by German broadcaster



ARD alleged the samples of the Russian 2018 World Cup squad were not properly investigated.

Fifa said its investigation included analysis by scientific and legal experts, reanalysis of stored samples - the returned results were all negative - and testing for tampering of samples.

It corresponded with Dr Grigory Rodchenkov, the Russian scientist turned whistleblower who exposed the full scale of the scandal, and carried out unannounced target tests.

Fifa said the Russian squad "has been one of the most tested teams" before the World Cup.

(Source: BBC)

Bayern should consider offers for Thiago Alcantara - Matthaues

Bayern Munich legend Lothar Matthaues has criticized Thiago Alcantara's big game displays and said the German champions should consider selling the Spain international for the right fee.

Thiago, 27, signed for Bayern from Barcelona at the start of Pep Guardiola's three-year reign in 2013. The Spain international has won the Bundesliga title five times in succession, and the DFB Pokal twice, but has never progressed past the Champions League semifinals with the Bavarians.

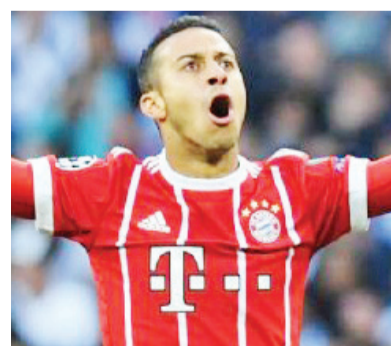
Thiago faced heavy criticism after Bayern's narrow 4-3 exit on aggregate to defending champions Real Madrid and their 3-1 DFB Pokal loss to Eintracht Frankfurt on Saturday.

"Thiago hasn't made the difference in the big games," Matthaues told Sport Bild. "I actually rate him but he's been a shadow of his former self recently."

"Thiago has disappointed me in the past few weeks."

With the scores tied at 1-1 against Eintracht, the Spain international (two goals in 27 appearances) had to make way for record signing Corentin Tolisso after the hour mark. But not before gesturing frustratedly to retiring coach Jupp Heynckes that he wasn't happy at being substituted.

After calming down, Thiago applied



an ice pack to his knee on the bench and Heynckes told reporters that Thiago had apologised for his actions.

"I don't know where his head is," Matthaues said. "With these performances, he's not a player for Bayern Munich."

While Arturo Vidal will use the summer to step up his recovery from knee surgery, new signing Leon Goretzka will arrive from Schalke after the World Cup to further intensify competition for midfield places. Matthaues stressed that Bayern could be open to moving Thiago on as they are well-stocked in midfield with the likes of Thomas Muller, James Rodriguez, Tolisso and Sebastian Rudy all battling for a spot.

(Source: ESPN)

Amir Ghalenoei appointed Iran's Sepahan coach

TASNIM — Most successful coach in the Iran Professional League (IPL) Amir Ghalenoei has been named as new head coach of Sepahan football team.

Sepahan, who escaped relegation last season, has penned a two-year contract with Ghalenoei.



Ghalenoei helped Zob Ahan finishes runner-up in IPL and the team advanced to AFC Champions League Round of 16 under tutelage of the 54-year-old coach.

Sepahan started the season with currently Iran Olympic coach Zlatko Kranjcar but parted ways with the Croat in January following the poor results.

Ex-Zob Ahan coach Mansour Ebrahimzadeh was named as new head coach of Sepahan but he also failed to keep team on the track.

Ghalenoei has won IPL title three times with Esteghlal and has led Sepahan to title two times.

Everton forward to meet MLS side DC United this week

Everton forward Wayne Rooney is to travel to Washington this week to meet Major League Soccer side DC United.

The 32-year-old has already agreed a deal in principle with the club, although he still has a year left on his contract at Goodison Park.

The trip to the capital of the United States is understood to be a fact-finding mission.

Rooney rejoined Everton in July 2017 having spent 13 seasons at Manchester United.

He is the Red Devils' record goalscorer and won five Premier League titles and the Champions League.

It is understood Rooney has been offered a contract until the end of the 2020 MLS season. The US transfer window does not open until July.

Rooney, who is halfway through a two-year deal at Goodison Park, made 40 appearances for the club last season and was Everton's top scorer with 11 goals.

(Source: BBC)

Tottenham, Everton interested in Lille midfielder

Tottenham and Everton are interested in Lille midfielder Yves Bissouma this summer, according to Sky sources.

The 21-year-old Mali international is also on target lists at Schalke, who need to replace Bayern Munich-bound Leon Goretzka, and Monaco, who could lose Fabinho.

Spurs have been tracking Bissouma throughout the season as they scout for a long-term replacement for Mousa Dembele, whose future at the club is uncertain heading into the transfer window.

They have also been monitoring Watford's Abdoulaye Doucoure, RB Salzburg's Amadou Haidara and Internazionale's Geoffrey Kondogbia, who has been on loan at Valencia.

However, the club's transfer plans will not be finalised until the outcome of talks between manager Mauricio Pochettino and chairman Daniel Levy - the first round of which are understood to have gone well.

But Spurs' priorities for the window remain a new central-midfielder, another forward to play behind Harry Kane, and a left back. They may also sign a new centre-back.

Meanwhile, Everton's interest in Bissouma was thought to have been held by ex-head of recruitment Steve Walsh before he was sacked along with manager Sam Allardyce last week.

Marcel Brands has since taken over as sporting director and the club remain keen to strengthen their midfield with a player of Bissouma's profile.

Bissouma has been statistically one of the best central-midfielders in Europe this season, and the eighth-best in Ligue 1, according to Wyscout, having made 30 appearances.

(Source: Sky Sports)

Japanese Olympic swimmer fails doping test

Japanese Olympic swimmer Junya Koga has tested positive for substances banned by the World Anti-Doping Agency.

Koga revealed at a news conference on Wednesday that he failed a doping test in Tokyo on March 2nd, and a follow-up test as well.

He was suspended from competition by the International Swimming Federation on May 15th.

Koga said the banned substances may have been in nutritional supplements he began taking in February of this year.

He claimed he did not take the banned substances intentionally, and said he is ashamed to have tested positive.

Koga competed in the Rio de Janeiro Olympics in 2016. He will not take part in the Japan Open that begins in Tokyo on Thursday. The Japan Swimming Federation will not send Koga to compete in the Asian Games to be held in Indonesia in August.

(Source: NHK)

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Asghar Farhadi to hold master class in Portugal

A R T TEHRAN – Two-time Oscar-winning director Asghar Farhadi will hold a master class in the Portuguese city of Espinho during June.



Asghar Farhadi in a poster designed by the FEST New Directors, New Films Festival

The master class is part of the Training Ground, an educational program arranged by the FEST New Directors, New Films Festival, the organizers have announced.

The Training Ground will take place from June 19 to 24.

The program hosts more than 30 master classes and 10 workshops during the festival where the participants, emerging filmmakers, film students, and film enthusiasts from all over the world will experience first-class training through workshops and master classes.

Besides learning from the experts, participants are able to share their experience and widen their contacts with other trainees in an energetic environment.

Farhadi won his first Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film with "A Separation" in 2012. In 2017, his film "The Salesman" received the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film.

In 2016, Farhadi won the award for best screenplay for "The Salesman" at the 69th Cannes Film Festival. It also brought Shahab Hosseini the Palme d'Or for best actor.

Farhadi's latest film "Everybody Knows" starring Javier Bardem and Penélope Cruz premiered at this year's edition of the Cannes Film Festival.

"Samira's Dried Cookies" shortlisted for Gourmand World Cookbook Awards

A R T TEHRAN – Iranian writer Samira Jahandost's "Samira's Dried Cookies" has been nominated for the Gourmand World Cookbook Awards.



"Samira's Dried Cookies" by Samira Jahandost

The book received nominations in the two categories of "Cooking School/Education" and "Pastry/Desserts", the organizers have announced.

The winners will be announced during the Gourmand Awards annual ceremony, which will be held in Yantai, China from May 25 to 28.

"Samira's Dessert Book" was named best in the Pastry Section of the Gourmand World Cookbook Awards in 2016. Her "Samira's Iranian Cookbook" also shared the second prize in the Silk Road Cookbook Section with "With Our Own Hands" by Fredrik Van Oudenhoven and Jamila Haider from the Netherlands.

The Gourmand World Cookbook Awards was founded in 1995 by Edouard Cointreau who is the president of Paris Cookbook Fair and president of the World Association of Food TV Producers.

Pulitzer-winning author Philip Roth dies at 85

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Author Philip Roth, who was both hailed and derided for laying bare the neuroses and obsessions that haunted the modern Jewish-American experience, died on Tuesday at the age of 85, his agent said.

Roth died in New York City at 10:30 p.m. local time of congestive heart failure, his literary agent Andrew Wylie said.

Roth wrote more than 30 books, including the 1991 memoir "Patrimony", which examined his complex relationship with his father and won the National Book Critics Circle Award.

In his later years, Roth turned to the existential crises of middle age, never abandoning his commitment to exploring shame, embarrassment and other guilty secrets of the self, although usually with a heavy dose of humor.

After more than 50 years as a writer, Roth decided that 2010's "Nemesis," the story of a polio epidemic in the Newark, New Jersey, neighborhood where he grew up, would be his last novel. He then went back and reread all his works "to see whether I'd wasted my time," he said in a 2014 interview published in the New York Times Book Review.

For his conclusion, he quoted Joe Lewis, the heavyweight boxing champion of the 1930s and '40s: "I did the best I could with what I had."

In 2017 he published "Why Write?," a collection of essays and non-fiction works written between 1960 and 2013.

Petgars coming together in "Dreams and Fantasies"

A R T TEHRAN – An exhibition entitled "Dreams and Fantasies" will showcase works by the Petgar artistic family at Salam Gallery in Tehran.

The exhibition, which is scheduled to open on Friday, will put on display about 90 paintings by Ali-Asghar Petgar (1918-1992), his brother, Jafar (1920-2005), and his sons, Nima (1947-2015) and Nami (1948-2008).

"Works by these four members of the Petgar family have never been showcased altogether before in any exhibition," Ahmadreza Nuri, the curator of the exhibition, told the Persian service of ILNA on Wednesday.

"The development process of Iranian painting can be observed in the works of these artists who represent different currents of painting in Iran," he added.

A collection of the Petgars' personal effects and painting tools will also be on view at the exhibition. A slide show will feature a collection of their works inaccessible to the exhibit organizers.

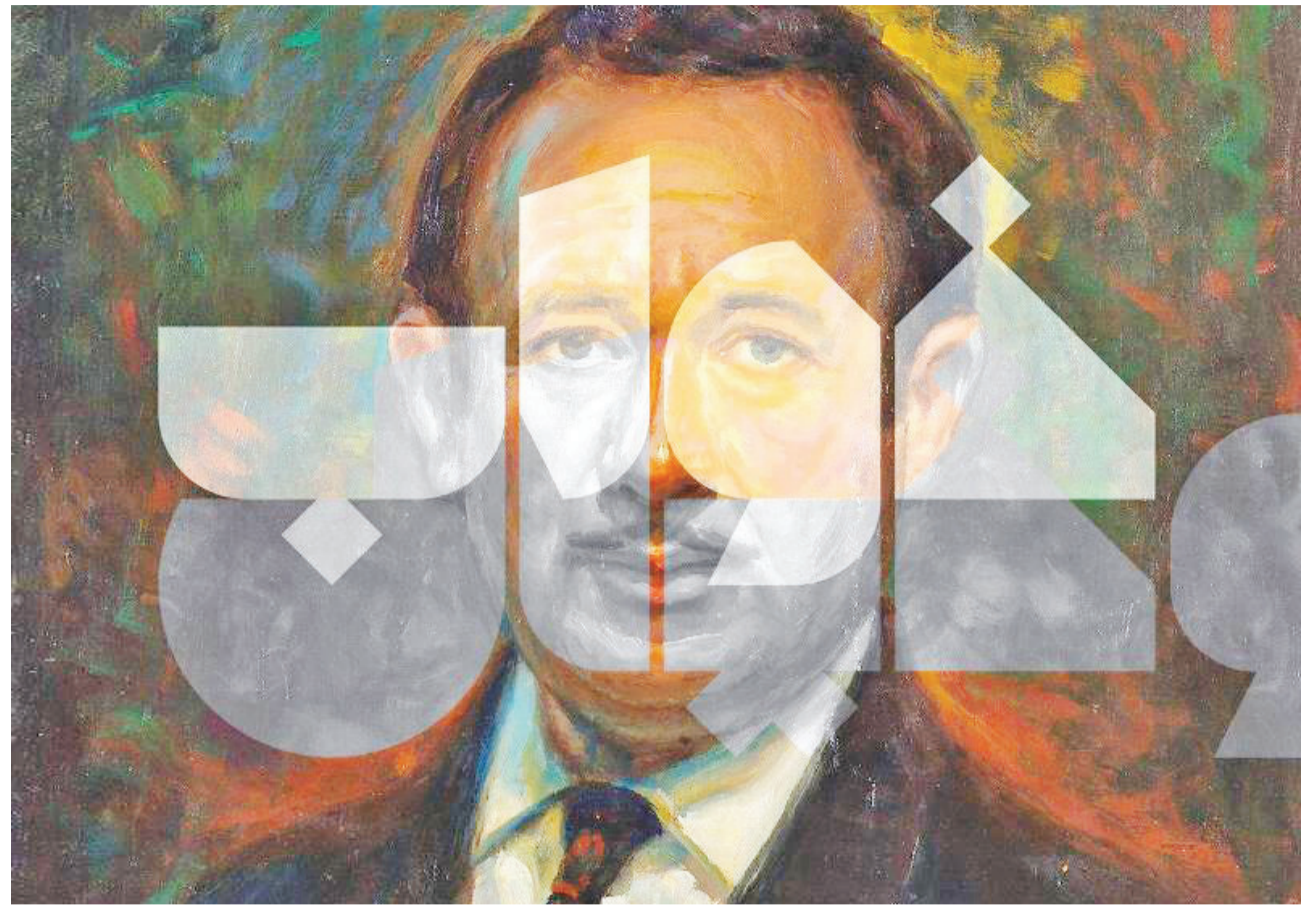
Nuri called Ali-Asghar and Jafar the missing links of Iran's modern painting history and said, "The artists have not yet been scrutinized properly in any art review or exhibition."

He said that the two artists were ignored in Iran's art market since they never agreed to sell any of their works during their lifetime.

The works selected for the exhibition will feature the painters' families and self-portraits, and ordinary people and public places.

Nuri said the paintings of public places, which depict scenes of ordinary life in Tehran and other places where the artists lived, were created with an anthropological view.

"The works represent a special outlook over the poor and working classes, and provide a



A poster for the Petgars' exhibition "Dreams and Fantasies" at Tehran's Salam Gallery

real insight into the condition of the social classes – a way of thinking that is close to the leftist and socialist ideas that dominated

Iranian society at the time when the artists lived," he added.

The exhibition will run until June 22 at the

gallery that can be found at the Sam Center, Fayyazi St. off Vali-e-Asr Ave. near the Parkway Intersection.

Iranian photographers honored at Finnish exhibition



"Loyalty" by Kiarang Alai won the Vision Bronze Medal in Finland.

A R T TEHRAN – Two Iranian photographers have been honored at the 2nd International Digital Exhibition Vision in Finland.

Kiarang Alai won the Vision Bronze Medal for his photo "Loyalty" at the event organized by the Photo Club Vision.

"Loyalty" was competing in the Open Monochrome category, which gave the Vision Bronze to the Best Friendship photo, the organizers

have announced.

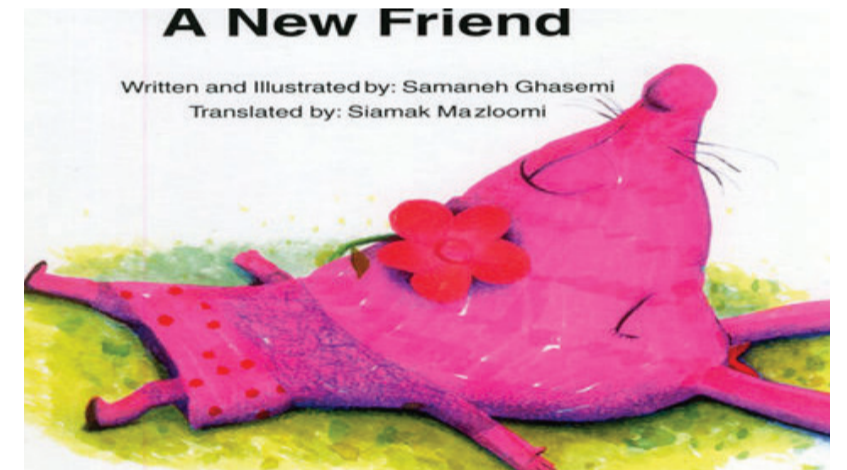
The PSA (Photographic Society of America) Ribbon was also given to Hamidreza Helali for "Single" competing in the Open Color (color digital) category.

A team of experts judged the submissions from May 18 to 20.

Veijo Rio from Finland won the FIAP Blue Pin, the top award of the exhibition.

The selected works will go on view in an exhibition from June 4 to 30.

English version of "A New Friend" comes to Tehran bookstores



Front cover of Iranian children's book writer and illustrator Samaneh Qasemi's "A New Friend"

A R T TEHRAN – An English translation of Iranian children's book writer and illustrator Samaneh Qasemi's "A New Friend" by Siamak Mazlumi has recently been published in Tehran.

Children between 3 and 6 are the target audience of the book, which has been published at the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA).

The book tells the story of Khargushak and its friends Parghazak, Muchak and

Qurak, who get up every day early in the morning, eat breakfast and do their favorite jobs.

The Persian version of "A New Friend" was among the collection of books the IIDCYA displayed during the Bologna Children's Book Fair in Italy in March.

Qasemi's "Goody" won one of the three silver prizes at the Flying Turtle Awards, literary honors that are presented by the Book City Institute and the Children's Literature Studies Periodical.

Paris exhibit takes a look at 'forgotten' Impressionist Cassatt

PARIS (Reuters) — A Paris museum is shining a light on the work of Mary Cassatt, an American woman whose paintings made a profound and often-overlooked contribution to the male-dominated Impressionist movement in France.

"An American Impressionist in Paris" at the Jacquemart-Andre museum is showcasing 50 works by the artist, who was born in Pennsylvania but lived in France for more

than 60 years.

She was a friend and contemporary of Edgar Degas, and her works were exhibited with those of other Impressionist masters, but are less known today than those of many of her male peers.

"Mary Cassatt has been kind of a forgotten painter of our French Impressionism. She arrived in Paris in 1865, and she was very important, in the very heart of French

Impressionists," exhibition curator Pierre Curie said. She is known in particular for paintings of women and children, often in domestic surroundings.

"She's not exactly a typical Impressionist because landscape is the heart of the Impressionist. She is like Degas. She is a figure painter. What interests her is the human being, and especially the mother and the children."

The exhibition runs until July 23.

Swedish DJ Avicii to have private funeral

STOCKHOLM (Reuters) — Swedish DJ and music producer Avicii, who was found dead last month in Oman at the age of 28, will be given a private funeral, his publicist said on Tuesday.

Avicii, whose real name was Tim Bergling, was one of the biggest stars in electronic dance music.

"The Bergling family has now confirmed that the funeral will be private, in the presence of the people who were closest to Tim," his Swedish publicist Ebba Lindqvist said in a statement, without providing any more details.

No cause of death has been released, but in a statement last month Bergling's family appeared to suggest he took his own life, saying that he struggled with his thoughts and "could not go on any longer."

Avicii, known for international hits such as "Wake Me Up" and "Hey Brother", announced in 2016 that he was retiring



DJ Avicii performs during a concert at Brooklyn's Barclay's Center in New York June 28, 2014. (Reuters/Eduardo Munoz)

from touring for health reasons, but he kept making music and was nominated for a Billboard music award in April.

News of his death shocked fans, particularly in Europe where he had for years been a popular headline act at festivals and dance clubs before retiring.

Official World Cup song to feature Will Smith, Nicky Jam and Era Istrefi

LONDON (The Guardian) — Will Smith is making a return to music, recording the official 2018 World Cup anthem with Colombia-based reggaeton star Nicky Jam, and Kosovar pop singer Era Istrefi.

According to reports in Billboard and other publications, the track is to be released on May 25, and is being produced by Diplo, the U.S producer behind hits with his group Major Lazer including Lean On and Cold Water.

Alongside his burgeoning acting career in the late 1980s and 90s, Smith was a successful pop-rapper, first with DJ Jazzy Jeff and then as a solo artist. He had nine UK Top Five hits in all, including No 1s with "Boom! Shake the Room" and "Men in Black". He hasn't released an album since 2005's Lost and Found, and a new track with Jazzy Jeff in 2017, Get Lit, was a flop.

Nicky Jam, meanwhile, is one of Latin



Will Smith posted this picture of him with Nicky Jam on Tuesday. (Pic: Will Smith/Instagram)

America's biggest stars – his most recent single, X, has been streamed almost 800 million times on YouTube, while previous hits like El Amante and El Perdón have over a billion each. Istrefi is a rising star whose track BonBon was a dance hit across Europe in 2016, and who has worked with rapper French Montana.