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Actor Nasser Malakmotiei dies at 88 **16**

Economic think tank unveils 'Real Deal' package for EU



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Leader's conditions on JCPOA to become law: lawmaker

POLITICS TEHRAN — A member of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee said on Saturday that the conditions set by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei for saving the 2015 nuclear agreement will become a law. Abolfazl Hassan Beigi said the mo-

tion includes all of the conditions set by the Leader and that some lawmakers are collecting signatures to pass it over to the Majlis presiding board, Mehr reported. On Wednesday, Ayatollah Khamenei set out seven conditions for European powers if they want Iran to stay in the nuclear deal after the U.S. exit from the agreement.

463,000 foreign nationals studying in Iranian schools

SOCIETY TEHRAN — A total of 463,000 foreign nationals are studying in Iranian schools, Gholam Reza Karimi, head of the international affairs department of the Ministry of Education has said.

Out of the 463,000 foreign national students enrolled in Iranian schools, 433,000 are Afghan national students, Fars news agency quoted Karimi as saying.

According to the decree issued by the leader, all foreign nationals can go to schools in the country, Karimi said. The decree was issued by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei in May 2015, which allows all foreign nationals, even those who have no identification and are living in Iran illegally, to attend schools in Iran. **→12**

Black Cube: Inside shadowy Israeli firm accused of trying to undermine Iran deal

An NBC News investigation reveals a business intelligence company with governmental contracts and a special department for politically motivated work.

As Rebecca Kahl remembers it, something felt odd about the initial email. It came in May 2017 from a woman named Adriana Gavrilov, who claimed to work for a London-based private equity firm.

She was writing to Kahl with an offer: Her firm wanted to support the Washington public school where Kahl sends her daughter and helps lead a fundraising committee.

"I'm not sure how this woman found me," Kahl said in a recent interview with NBC News. "I wasn't employed by the school. I was not on the school's website." **→7**

ARTICLE
Hanif Ghaffari
 Political analyst

Europe and U.S. in a trade standoff

U.S. President Donald Trump continues to pursue his protectionist policies in international trade system. This has led to raising concerns and serious discontent among the United States' European partners. Many international analysts now talk about the conflicts between the United States and Europe over imposing sweeping steel and aluminum tariffs as a transatlantic "trade war". Conflicts that may extend in the near future and affect the widespread relations between Washington and Europe.

Though politicians such as Emmanuel Macron, Angela Merkel and Theresa May seek to manage the situation and prevent the exacerbation of tensions with Washington, but people, business owners and European opposition parties are so angry at Trump and the U.S. government that the European troika's authorities aren't capable to control or even hide it.

Under such circumstances, Europe has threatened to retaliate against the U.S. if Trump imposes steel and aluminum tariffs on European exports. After Trump made his first announcement on the tariffs, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker threatened to put tariffs on American goods in response to Trump's decision. That could decrease demand for those products inside EU borders and consequently lead to U.S. workers losing their jobs.

The German Chancellor has recently sent an indirect but significant warning to Trump about his commercial measures. German Chancellor Angela Merkel said during her eleventh official visit to China that the United States should "permanently" exempt the EU from unfair steel tariffs. However, at least for now, it seems that Trump doesn't intend to retreat against his European partners. Of course, Trump may consider temporary exemptions for European partners in this regard, but there will be no permanent exemptions.

The German Chancellor stated that European Union member states must give the EU trade commissioner a clear mandate for negotiations with the United States over a long-term exemption from U.S. metal tariffs. Markel added: "Of course, we think it's important that there are exemptions not only for a limited period of time... So far, we have had a very united stance, namely that we view these tariff demands as unjustified and that we want a long-term exemption." **→13**

EU finds mechanisms allow Iran to enjoy tangible benefits of JCPOA: Falk

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
 By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Richard Anderson Falk, professor emeritus of international law at Princeton University "Under present circumstances, the first contribution that can be made by the EU (and others) is to stand behind the agreement in a manner that demonstrates diplomatic resolve and political independence."

Former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights says "Obviously, this is not enough. The EU needs to find mechanisms that allow Iran to enjoy the tangible benefits of JCPOA in relation to economic policy and political interaction."

Following is the full text of the interview:
 ■ You recently signed an Open Letter to Federica Mogherini and the European Imperative to Save the Iran Nuclear Deal (<http://openlettertomogherini.world/>) what was the necessity of this letter?

A: The occasion for writing this Open Letter was to underscore the importance for world peace, the credibility of international law and diplomacy, and the wellbeing of the people of Iran that the JCPOA be respected despite the irresponsible repudiation of the agreement by the U.S. President, Donald Trump. The intention was also to remind Europe that it has a responsibility to its own peoples and to the wider world to do its best under these

conditions to reduce the damage caused by Trump's unilateralism. Europe has been given an opportunity, perhaps the first important one since the end of World War II, to play an independent global role that is not subordinate to the policies of the United States. If we wish to live in a multipolar world order, this crisis created by American unilateralism, should be addressed in the most constructive manner possible by all political actors. Nothing less will suffice. What happens now will test the resilience of the present arrangements of regional order in the Middle East to manage this series of developments without causing a breakdown that spreads human suffering and devastation. **→7**

Trump's strategy toward Iran is at the expense of U.S. credibility: Costello

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
 By Payman Yazdani

TEHRAN — Ryan Costello NIAC assistant policy director is of the view that Trump's apparent strategy is to punish Iran at the expense of nonproliferation, security in the Middle East, relations with European allies, the efficacy of future sanctions and the diplomatic credibility of the U.S.

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 Is-

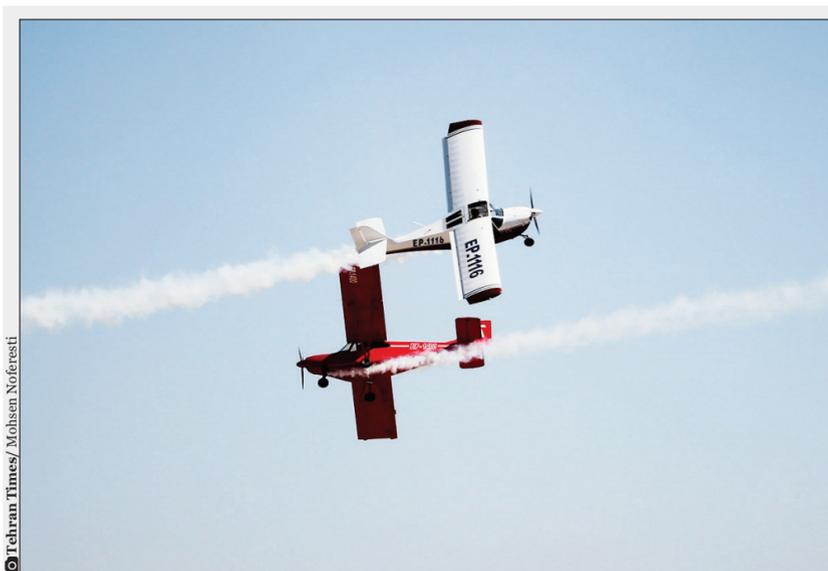
lamic Jihad.

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 the U.S. administration has not any new strategy towards Iran after its withdrawal from the JCPOA.

To discuss the issue we reached out to Ryan Costello NIAC assistant policy director.

Here is the full text of interview with him:
 ■ 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 Pompeo's promised sanctions? **→7**



© Tehran Times/ Mohsen Nofaresti

Flight festival in Birjand

At a flight festival on Friday morning, very light jets (VLJ) flew over Fodaj land in South Khorasan province. The aircraft, consisting of different models, took off from Birjand International Airport. VLJ are used mostly for sightseeing, photography, and other similar roles as well as personal use.

U.S. threatens 'firm' action as Syria plans to retake Dara'a

U.S., Turkey agree on 'roadmap' over Manbij city

The U.S. has threatened Syria with "firm and appropriate measures" as the Syrian army reportedly prepares to retake a strategic province on the border with Jordan and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

In a statement, U.S. State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert expressed concerns about the upcoming operation in southwestern Dara'a province, claiming that it falls within a de-escalation zone in Syria.

"As a guarantor of this de-escalation area with Russia and Jordan, the United States will take firm and appropriate measures in response to Assad regime violations," she said.

The warning came two days after the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported that the Syrian troops were moving into Dara'a after liberating all remaining militant-held areas near the capital, Damascus.

On Friday, Syrian state-run media reported that government aircraft had dropped leaflets in terrorist-controlled areas of Dara'a, urging foreign-backed militants to disarm.

One of the leaflets declares "the arrival of the Syrian Arab army's soldiers," according to SOHR, which is sympathetic to foreign-backed militants.

The UK-based monitor also said the Syrian government had sent reinforcements to Dara'a following the completion of operations near Damascus. "These forces are now stationed on the edges of Dara'a province," SOHR head Rami Abdel Rahman said. "The goal is a broad offensive, should the rebels reject a negotiated pullout as was the case in Eastern Ghouta." **→3**

Condolences

Dear Haghshenas brothers,
 We heard with great sadness about the sudden death of your beloved sister. We pray for patience and endurance at the time of sorrow. Your colleagues at Tehran Times and Mehr news agency

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Rouhani congratulates new Tehran mayor

POLITICS TEHRAN — President Rouhani met on Saturday with Mohammad Ali Afshani, congratulating him on starting his tenure as new mayor of Tehran.

In the meeting, Rouhani highlighted the need to improve the quality of citizens' life in Tehran as well as the urban standards of the capital, IRNA reported.

He also urged Afshani to accelerate projects aimed at urban development and renovation of the public transport system.

Earlier in May, Afshani was elected by Tehran city councilors as mayor, securing 19 out of 21 votes to beat Samiollah Makarem Hosseini



Senior MP: Iran may conditionally join CFT

POLITICS TEHRAN — Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Committee chief Alaeddin Boroujerdi said on Saturday that the parliament may conditionally approve the bill on joining the Countering Financing of Terrorism (CFT) convention.

Speaking to reporters after the committee's meeting, Boroujerdi said, "Today we spent three hours with representatives of relevant organizations to review this bill."

He said all the representatives who were present at the meeting expressed concerns over Iran's national interests. The lawmaker also emphasized that joining the CFT is necessary for Iran's banking transactions with the world, Mehr reported.



Putin: U.S. nuclear deal exit could trigger instability

POLITICS TEHRAN — Russian President Vladimir Putin warned on Friday that the U.S. exit from the 2015 nuclear deal could trigger dangerous instability.

"We can't sort things out with North Korea. Do we want another problem on the same scale?" Putin asked at a business forum, Fox News reported.

The Russian leader said the U.S. withdrawal from the 2015 agreement came even as the international nuclear watchdog confirmed that Tehran was fulfilling its obligations. "What should it be punished for, then?" Putin asked.



IMF chief urges Trump to review sanctioning Iran

POLITICS TEHRAN — Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Christine Lagarde has urged U.S. President Donald Trump to review his policies to impose sanctions on Iran and Russia.

Lagarde made the remarks Friday while addressing the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, the Iran Daily reported, citing IRNA.

U.S. has to change its policies regarding Iran and Russia since its aim is not clear, she said.

She also referred to withdrawal of capital from developing countries because of U.S. difficult monetary policies and creating obstacles by some countries in transferring goods and services as other problems of the world's economic system.



All agreements 'must be followed', France insists

POLITICS TEHRAN — All signed accords, including the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on the Iranian nuclear program, has to be adhered to, French President Emmanuel Macron stated on Friday.

"I want us to respect each other, so that there won't be any kind of interference," Macron insisted, Tass reported. "If we sign an agreement, we need to stick to it, no matter who chooses to leave. What is signed, must be followed."

Macron added he "is committed to the sovereignty of France and the choice it made when signing a nuclear agreement with Iran."



Post: Trump's nuclear deal exit has antagonized the world

POLITICS TEHRAN — Trump's dealings with North Korea and Iran have antagonized: Russia, China, Germany, France, Japan, Britain, Austria, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Spain, Slovakia, Portugal, Finland, Ireland, South Korea and so forth, the Washington Post said on Friday.

According to the daily, after Trump abandoned the Iran deal, the other agreement parties, Germany, France, Britain, China and Russia, vowed to uphold the deal, defying the United States.

It added that Trump's decision might isolate the U.S. as many countries around the world disagree with it.

'Iran would have destroyed U.S. warship in Persian Gulf in 1988 if it had had today's power'

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran's Defense Minister Amir Hatami said on Saturday that Iran would have destroyed the U.S. warship USS Vincennes in the Persian Gulf waters in 1988 if it had had the current military power.

"If we had today's defense power, we would have never let the U.S. warship to hit Iran's passenger plane, and we would have sent the warship to the bottom of the Persian Gulf," Hatami said at a ceremony held to mark National Day of Resistance.

On July 3, 1988, Iran Air Flight 655, a scheduled civilian passenger flight from Tehran to Dubai, was shot down by an SM-2MR surface-to-air missile fired from USS Vincennes, a guided missile cruiser of the U.S. Navy. All 290 people on board including 66 children were killed in the incident. Adding salt to the wound, the U.S. Navy awarded special commendation medals to two of the top officers who were serving on the USS Vincennes at the time



the cruiser shot down the Iranian airliner. Elsewhere, Hatami said that the Iranian military's advisory role in Syria helps stability in West Asia.

Pointing to new moves against Iran by the Trump administration, the defense chief said the U.S. seeks to restrict Iran's defense power through imposing sanctions.

He noted that Iran has boosted its defense capability with a reliance on domestic knowledge.

"The U.S. is well aware that we will protect our glory through relying on defense power," the brigadier general said.

The defense minister said Saddam Hussein's war against Iran in the 1980s proved that Iran had to rely on its own capacities and "stand on its own feet".

On May 8, President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. from the UN-endorsed nuclear agreement and vowed to reimpose sanctions on Iran.

Hatami said that the Iranians will respond the U.S. move through "unity" and "integrity".

According to Fars news agency, Hatami said that the U.S. had better fulfill its commitments under the agreement to help establish peace and security in the world.

The U.S. disloyalty towards the nuclear deal has proven disgraceful for the Trump administration.

Iran insists to resume enrichment if nuclear deal not saved



POLITICS TEHRAN — A top official at the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) has reiterated Tehran's position that Iran will resume nuclear enrichment activities with a greater speed if the remaining parties fail to save the 2015 nuclear agreement.

On May 8, Trump withdrew the U.S. from the internationally binding nuclear agreement and vowed to reimpose sanctions on Iran.

"We can say that we have everything in order if we want to go back to the activities we had before," Behrooz Kamalvandi, the AEOI deputy chief, said in an interview with Press TV part of which was released on Wednesday.

"To analyze what the Trump administration has done, it is something for international politicians to judge, because it is something against international law and of course it is something that is going to damage the reputation and credibility of the government of the United States," Kamalvandi explained.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Kamalvandi stressed that the International Atomic Energy Agency was the only international body entrusted with verifying Iran's compliance with its obligations under the deal.

The IAEA has reported 11 times that Iran has been committed to the

nuclear deal. It last report was released on Thursday.

Trump's withdrawal from the nuclear agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, has caused an international outcry.

"If there is any judgment, it should come through the agency not any other entity with regards to issues related to Iran's commitments," Kamalvandi said, noting, "Based on the (IAEA) reports, Iran has complied with its commitments."

After the U.S. withdrawal, Iran wants assurances from the remaining parties - especially the European Union trio of Germany, Britain and France - that its interests are guaranteed or it will resume its nuclear activities with a greater speed.

On Wednesday, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei issued a set of demands from Europe to save the nuclear deal. He warned that Iran would restart its nuclear activities if they failed to act swiftly.

Ayatollah Khamenei said the JCPOA could only continue if the Europeans fulfill these conditions including: Promising not to ask Iran about its ballistic missile program or its regional activities; guaranteeing that Iran's oil will continue to be sold; and having European banks guarantee financial transactions with Iran.

Reports of EU-Iran missile talks 'a complete lie': Zarif



Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has dismissed as "a complete lie" claims that the European parties to the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), plan to hold talks with the Islamic Republic on its missile program.

Speaking to the Tasnim News Agency in an interview, Zarif rejected a report claiming that the European Union (EU) plans to put forward a proposal to Iran outside of the framework of the JCPOA and start talks about the Islamic Republic's missile power and regional influence, describing it as "a complete lie."

"The EU, itself, dismissed the report," he said, adding that the report is part of "a psychological operation" launched by the Zionist regime of Israel to spread such lies.

"We have said times and again that we are merely negotiating about the JCPOA and have no demands or words beyond the JCPOA," the top diplomat said.

He further pointed to recent negotiations between the Iranian and European delegations to save the JCPOA following the U.S. withdrawal from the deal and said that it cannot be said whether the results of the talks have been good or bad.

It remains to be seen what the Europeans would suggest to Iran, the top diplomat added, referring to the guarantees that the European Union (EU) should give Iran so that the country's interests are protected after the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA.

The Europeans have pointed to all important parts of the JCPOA that should be implemented, he said, adding that now, the

question is how they would implement those parts.

The remarks came after a number of Iran's top diplomats and administration officials on Sunday attended a closed session of the parliament about the future of the JCPOA.

Earlier this month, Zarif made a tight diplomatic trip for negotiations on how to save the JCPOA in the wake of the U.S. withdrawal from the multilateral nuclear deal.

The foreign minister held meetings with Chinese and Russian officials in Beijing and Moscow and then traveled to Brussels for talks with the European parties to the JCPOA.

He was gauging international readiness to guarantee Iran's interests if it decides to remain in the nuclear pact a week after U.S. President Donald Trump announced that the U.S. was walking away from the JCPOA.

In a speech from the White House on May 8, Trump accused Iran of sponsoring terrorism and seeking nukes before announcing the U.S. withdrawal from the 2015 agreement between Iran and the Group 5+1 (Russia, China, the U.S., Britain, France and Germany).

Following the controversial decision, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said Iran weighs plans to remain in the agreement with the other five parties, provided that they ensure full benefits for Iran.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has underlined that any decision to keep the deal running without the U.S. should be conditional on "practical guarantees" from the three European parties to the JCPOA. (Source: Tasnim)

Tehran: Pompeo alien to diplomacy and Iranian nuclear program

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Saturday that Iran as a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) has the right to enrich uranium and has also mastered this technology.

"Both the right of Iran to uranium enrichment has been stabilized and its domestic

knowledge exists in the country," Qassemi said in response to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's remarks in an interview with VOA on Friday in which he said Iran should not have the capacity to enrich uranium.

"...we don't believe it's appropriate for Iran to have the capacity to create fissile material, to enrich uranium or have a plutonium facility," Pompeo said.

Qassemi said, "We welcome Mr. Pompeo to the world of diplomacy and foreign policy. However, it seems that he has entered such issues and this specific subject (nuclear enrichment) with delay and without essential study and he is very far from the international developments."

He advised the U.S. secretary of state to study this issue precisely.



After talks with Europe, Tehran says 'more confident' to salvage nuclear accord

Schmidt: Participants recall commitment to continued, full and effective implementation of the JCPOA

POLITICS TEHRAN — Following a meeting in the Austrian capital of Vienna on Friday, a senior Iranian Foreign Ministry official expressed hope on Friday about saving the landmark nuclear deal after the U.S. exit.

Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said that he was "more confident about preserving the nuclear deal" after the talks with the E3 (France, the UK, and Germany) as well as Russia and China, the remaining complying parties to the 2015 agreement.

"In the meeting all the member states in the JCPOA unanimously expressed their commitments to the deal," Araghchi was quoted as saying.

They also regretted the U.S. pullout from



the deal and announced their determination to adopt measures to preserve Iran's interests as well as normalizing economic ties with

Iran, he said.

Iran is waiting for the measures by Europe, Russia and China to safeguard national interests under the historic deal after the U.S. withdrawal, Araghchi was quoted as saying.

He added that the negotiations will continue in coming weeks at different levels, and the Islamic republic will then decide whether to stay in the 2015 nuclear deal.

On Friday, Araghchi met his counterparts from Germany, Britain, France, Russia and China to discuss the future of nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The meeting was chaired, on behalf of EU High Representative Federica Mogherini, by her deputy, Helga Schmid, who issued a

statement after the meeting.

"Participants recalled their commitment to the continued, full and effective implementation of the JCPOA, in good faith and in a constructive atmosphere, and recognized that the lifting of nuclear-related sanctions allowing for the normalization of trade and economic relations with Iran constitute essential parts of the JCPOA," Schmid said in the statement.

"Participants stressed their commitment to work to ensure that these benefits would continue to be delivered and agreed to this end to deepen their dialogue at all levels, including at the level of experts with a view to finding practical solutions to these problems [arising from U.S. exit]," the statement added.

U.S. threatens 'firm' action as Syria plans to retake Dara'a

1 → The recapture of Dara'a is highly important because it borders the occupied Golan Heights which Israel has used to treat wounded militants for years.

The territory's return to the Syrian government control would cut the much-reported collaboration between Israel and militants and deal a blow to Tel Aviv's plans to annex the Golan Heights.

Syrian army advances are also upsetting to U.S. plans in the Arab country where it has deployed about 2,000 troops to carve out a statelet in the country's north with the help of Kurdish militants.

With Syria's military gains gathering momentum, the U.S. has stepped up its attacks on army positions under numerous pretexts. On Thursday, Syrian state media reported that the U.S. struck Syrian army positions in eastern Syria, but the U.S. military denied knowledge of it.

"Some of our military sites between Abu Kamal and Humeima were exposed at dawn today to aggression launched by U.S. coalition jets," state news agency SANA reported, citing a military source.

SANA said the strikes came within 24 hours of a Daesh attack on Syrian army positions in the same region, where the Takfiri terrorists are fighting government forces to the west of the Euphrates.

The Syrian army managed to retake the Eastern Ghouta region, on the outskirts of the capital Damascus, late in March.

On Monday, the General Command of the Syrian Army and Armed Forces said complete security had been restored to Damascus and its countryside after al-Hajar al-Aswad district and al-Yarmouk camp were totally purged of Daesh terrorists.

Manbij

Meanwhile, the U.S. and Turkish officials have agreed on a roadmap to cooperate over the security of the northern Syrian city of Manbij following months of dispute between the two NATO allies over the presence of Kurdish militia in the region.

U.S. officials held talks with their Turkish counterparts in Ankara on Friday as part of a working group on Syria.

"The two sides outlined the main contours of a roadmap for their further cooperation in ensuring security and stability in Manbij," said a statement issued by the Turkish foreign ministry and the U.S. embassy in Ankara.

The working group was formed to resolve the disputes



between Ankara and Washington over Manbij after Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu and then U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson met in February. Later in March, Turkish officials visited Washington as part of the working group.

Cavusoglu and the new U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will "consider the recommendations" of the working group during their planned meeting on June 4, the joint statement said.

Last December, U.S. President Donald Trump approved providing weapons worth \$393 million to what Washington calls partners in Syria, including the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG).

The following month, the U.S. announced plans to create a 30,000-strong force comprised of Kurdish militants, which would be deployed along the Turkish border.

The U.S. measures prompted Ankara to launch the ongoing Olive Branch offensive against the purported positions of the YPG in Syria's northwestern enclave of Afrin in January without permission from the Syrian government.

Later, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatened to take the offensive to Manbij, raising concerns over the likelihood of a confrontation between Turkish and American troops.

According to the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a UK-based monitor, more than 280 civilians have been killed during the Turkish offensive.

Ankara views the YPG as the Syrian branch of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militant group that has been fighting for an autonomous region inside Turkey since 1984.

This is while U.S. officials regard the YPG as the most effective fighting force against the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group in northern Syria, and have substantially increased their weaponry and technology support to the group.

About 2,000 U.S. troops are deployed in northeast Syria in territories under the control of Kurdish militants. Both Moscow and Damascus have repeatedly warned that the illegal U.S. presence in Syria is meant to disintegrate the country.

(Source: agencies)

South Korean president met North Korea's Kim Jong Un

Prospects of U.S.-North Korea summit brighten after Trump's tweet

South Korean President Moon Jae-in met North Korean leader Kim Jong Un on Saturday to discuss Kim's possible upcoming summit with U.S. President Donald Trump, the South said, the second inter-Korean summit in as many months.

Moon and Kim met just north of the heavily militarized border in the afternoon to exchange views to pave way for a summit between North Korea and the United States, South Korea's presidential office said.

Moon will announce the outcome of his two-hour meeting with Kim on Sunday morning, officials said.

Meanwhile, prospects that the United States and North Korea would hold a summit brightened after U.S. President Donald Trump said late on Friday Washington was having "productive talks" with Pyongyang about reinstating the June 12 meeting in Singapore.

Politico magazine reported that an advance team of 30 White House and State Department officials was preparing to leave for Singapore later this weekend.

Reuters reported earlier this week the team was scheduled to discuss the agenda and logistics for the summit with North Korean officials. The delegation was to include White House Deputy Chief of Staff Joseph Hagin and deputy national security adviser Mira Ricardel, U.S. officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Trump said in a Twitter post late on Friday: "We are having very productive talks about reinstating the Summit which, if it does happen, will likely remain in Singapore on the same date, June 12th, and, if necessary, will be extended beyond that date."

Trump had earlier indicated the summit could be salvaged after welcoming a conciliatory statement from North Korea saying it remained open to talks.



"It was a very nice statement they put out," Trump told reporters at the White House. "We'll see what happens - it could even be the 12th."

"We're talking to them now. They very much want to do it. We'd like to do it," he said.

The comments on the summit with North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un came just a day after Trump canceled the meeting, citing Pyongyang's "open hostility."

South Korea's presidential spokesman said in response: "It's fortunate that hope is still alive for U.S.-North Korea dialogue. We are continuing to watch developments carefully."

Threats, insults

After years of tension over Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program, Kim and Trump agreed this month to hold what would be the first meeting between a serving U.S. pres-

ident and a North Korean leader. The plan followed months of war threats and insults between the leaders over North Korea's development of missiles capable of reaching the United States.

Trump scrapped the meeting in a letter to Kim on Thursday after observing threats by North Korea to pull out over what it saw as confrontational remarks by U.S. officials demanding unilateral disarmament. Trump cited North Korean hostility in canceling the summit.

In Pyongyang, North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Kim Kye Gwan said North Korea's criticisms had been a reaction to American rhetoric and that current antagonism showed "the urgent necessity" for the summit.

He said North Korea regretted Trump's decision to cancel and remained open to resolving issues "regardless of ways, at any time."

Kim Kye Gwan said North Korea had appreciated Trump having made the bold decision to work toward a summit.

"We even inwardly hoped that what is called 'Trump formula' would help clear both sides of their worries and comply with the requirements of our side and would be a wise way of substantial effect for settling the issue," he said.

North Korea also went ahead with a plan to destroy its only known nuclear site on Thursday, the most concrete action yet since pledging to cease all nuclear and long-range missile tests last month.

Dozens of international journalists left North Korea on Saturday after observing the demolition of the underground tunnels in Punggye-ri, where all of the North's six nuclear tests were conducted including its latest and largest in September.

Diplomats at work

Trump's latest about-face sent officials scrambling in Washington. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis told reporters diplomats were "still at work" and said Trump had just sent a note out on the summit, which could be back on "if our diplomats can pull it off."

U.S. State Department spokeswoman Katina Adams declined to give details of any diplomatic contacts but said: "As the president said in his letter to Chairman Kim, dialogue between the two is the only dialogue that matters. If North Korea is serious, then we look forward to hearing from them at the highest levels."

White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders told reporters Trump did not want a meeting that was "just a political stunt."

"He wants to get something that's a long-lasting and an actual real solution. And if they are ready to do that then... we're certainly ready to have those conversations," she said. (Source: Reuters)

Berri and Nasrallah focus on corruption in economy, administration



Lebanese re-elected Speaker Nabih Berri and Hezbollah Secretary-General Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah met Friday evening and decided on a comprehensive approach towards combatting corruption in the economic, financial and administrative files, a statement from the Hezbollah media office reported Saturday.

Berri and Nasrallah, accompanied by caretaker Finance Minister Ali Hasan Khalil and Hezbollah party official Hajj Hussein Khalil, also expressed their satisfaction concerning the results of the Parliamentary elections held on May 6, the re-election of Speaker Nabih Berri and the re-appointment of Prime Minister Saad Hariri. They called for the swift formation of a new national government "that reflects the correct representation," the statement said, referring to the new proportional electoral law used for the "first time in the 2018 Parliamentary elections."

"The participation seen during the elections confirmed the people's commitment to the Resistance, and building the state and institutions the way it's carried out by Hezbollah, the Amal Movement, and their allies," the statement read.

Berri and Nasrallah also expressed their full support for the Palestinian people after Israeli armed forces shot and killed at least 60 Palestinian protesters in a single day in Gaza earlier this month.

(Source: Daily Star)

Putin, Macron bond over shared unease at Trump's actions



Russian President Vladimir Putin and his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron on Friday found a common cause in their shared unease at U.S. President Donald Trump's actions on Iran, climate change and international trade.

France is at odds with the Kremlin over its annexation of Crimea from Ukraine four years ago, and allegations that Moscow meddled in a French presidential election in support of one of Macron's opponents.

But there were only fleeting signs of those differences when Macron met Putin at the St Petersburg International Economic Forum, an annual showcase for investment in Russia that the Russian leader hosts in his home town.

Instead, the two leaders focused on concerns about the future of a multinational deal on Iran's nuclear deal program, now in jeopardy after Trump pulled the United States out of it.

Washington's withdrawal from the pact raises the prospect that Russian or French companies doing business with Iran could be hit with unilateral U.S. sanctions.

Speaking at a question-and-answer session in front of an audience of business executives and Russian officials, Putin said the U.S. withdrawal was damaging and counter-productive.

He also railed against the United States applying its laws beyond its borders to punish foreign companies. "This is unacceptable and it has to end," he said.

Macron, who had traveled to Washington in an unsuccessful bid to persuade Trump to keep faith with the Iran deal, did not explicitly criticize the U.S. leader.

He said he had a strong relationship with Trump, but he acknowledged there are "issues on which we have differences".

He said he would try to convince Trump to return to talks about Iran's nuclear program, and was also critical of Trump's decision to move the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, out of step with the stance of most European governments.

"That was not desirable," Macron said, adding that the embassy move played a part in sparking fatal clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli security forces.

Terms of endearment

During the session, Macron sat alongside Putin, referred to him as "Dear Vladimir", and the two men nodded in agreement with each other about a range of issues.

Macron said that Trump had, de facto, lost an international argument over the Paris climate change agreement because the international consensus in support of the accord had held, even though Trump had decided to exit the deal.

Trump's administration last month imposed sanctions on a raft of major Russian companies. The step also hurt European and other international firms who had to cut off business ties with the sanctioned entities for fear of punitive action by Washington.

As he sat alongside Putin, Macron referred repeatedly to the need to establish "European financial sovereignty" - a job at European economies' reliance on the U.S. financial system.

He also arrived in St Petersburg with a large delegation of French business executives keen to sign deals with Russia, despite the new U.S. sanctions.

Putin accused the United States of undermining global trade rules by using sanctions as a weapon in its drive towards protectionism.

The Russian leader pointed to the presence of large numbers of foreign executives at the event as evidence that the U.S. sanctions were failing to achieve their aim.

(Source: Reuters)

Vladimir Putin says he will step down as president in 2024

Vladimir Putin has said he will abide by a rule banning the Russian president from serving two consecutive terms, indicating he will step down from his post in 2024 when his term expires.

But his remarks, made to reporters at an economic forum in St Petersburg and broadcast on state TV, do not necessarily mean he will relinquish power in six years' time.

Putin stepped down as president in 2008 after serving two successive terms. He then returned in 2012 after a spell as prime minister - a manoeuvre he would be legally able to complete again.

Asked if and when he would be leaving office, he said: "I have always strictly abided by and abide by the constitution of the Russian Federation."

"In the constitution it's clearly written that nobody can serve more than two terms in a row... I intend to abide by this rule."

Putin won a landslide victory in elections in March that extended his tenure by six years. If Putin remains in power until 2024, he will have been either in direct or indirect control of



Russia for 24 years, making him Moscow's longest-serving leader since Josef Stalin.

The St Petersburg International Economic Forum

was also used by the Russian president to warn the U.S. exit from the Iran nuclear deal could trigger dangerous instability.

"We can't sort things out with North Korea. Do we want another problem on the same scale?" he asked.

The 65-year-old also attacked the harsh sanctions levied at Russia, which are starting to cut deep into the economy, saying they were a result of "protectionism", "arbitrariness" and "connivance" by Russia's enemies.

Putin said Russia understood the need to move away from confrontation with the West, adding officials "certainly can't be happy" with current Russia-U.S. relations and Moscow was "ready for dialogue".

But he also said Russia would always choose what it considered the greater good over immediate financial hardship.

"Every nation has national interests and priorities," he said. "But if we have a choice of sovereign state or restrictions, we will always go for the first one."

(Source: The Independent)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	95794.0
IFX	1110.92

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,090 rials
EUR	49,258 rials
GBP	56,238 rials
AED	11,461 rials

Source: mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

WTI	67.88/b
Brent	76.47/b
OPEC Basket	76.62/b
Gold	\$1,301.90 /oz
Silver	\$16.53/oz
Platinum	\$905.45/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



Inflation rate at 9.1%: CBI

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The Central Bank of Iran (CBI) 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 9.1 percent, IRNA reported on Saturday.

It is while the Statistical Center of Iran has put the inflation rate in the mentioned period of time at 8 percent.



Iranian crude oil exports to go on as before

ENERGY TEHRAN — Iran is continuing its exports of oil as it did before Trump's withdrawal from the nuclear deal, and exports 2.5 million barrels of the product per day, National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) Managing Director Ali Kardor announced.

"The U.S. does not play a role in exports of Iranian crude and in case Europeans fulfill their commitments about supporting oil export requirements including tankers, transportation, money transfer and insurance as well as Iran's nuclear deal, Iran will face no difficulties with crude oil exports and can preserve its exports level," Kardor was quoted by IRIB as saying on Saturday.

National Australia Bank apologises after outage affects customers

Services were slowly being restored to National Australia Bank customers after a countrywide outage to its online, mobile, Eftpos and ATM services left them unable to access their accounts on Saturday.

The outage began about 7.50am AEST. Angry customers complained on social media about being unable to pay for items such as fuel or food. (Source: The Guardian)

Iranian economic center unveils proposal package to save JCPOA

By Ebrahim Fallahi

TEHRAN — Since Trump announced U.S. withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal in early May and vowed to reimpose sanctions on Iran, the European signatories to the deal have been discussing plans to secure Iran's economic benefits to persuade Tehran to stay in agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

In this regard, an Iranian economic indicators studies center, known as MABNA, unveiled a package of proposals titled "Real Deal" on Saturday in which they provided solutions for saving the JCPOA and peace process in the Middle East.

Current proposals

According to the center, Europe has so far proposed a few solutions in order for assuring Iran's economic interests in staying in the nuclear deal.

Among such proposals, assuring oil purchases by central banks settlements to export goods to Iran, providing an OFAC standard general license and legal shield for European companies, threatening to impose tariffs on U.S. exports to Europe and establishing a Euro-based bank for Iran, could be mentioned.

According to economists at MABNA, most of such proposals are not practical and realistic, for instance they believe a Euro-based



bank for Iran will be an isolated institution which will have no power to withstand the U.S.-imposed sanctions.

They argue that what Europe is currently proposing suffers serious flaws and weaknesses and in the best case scenario will result in an economic structure which is dependent on unreliable, time-limited OFAC licenses.

The claim that the "Real Deal" proposal ensures the interests of all involving parties including, Russia, China and not only the three European signatories but also the EU in general.

The "Real Deal" proposal package

The proposed package includes four main sections, covering the commitments of the four major parties involved in the deal namely the Europeans, Russia, China and Iran.

The Europeans

1. They must guarantee the purchase of 760,000 barrels per day of Iranian oil, its revenues which will be spent for purchasing technological services and goods from Europe.

2. The European sides should also introduce state-owned banks for a contingency plan in case of further U.S. sanctions.

3. They are also required to take necessary measures to facilitate conversion of all Central of Bank of Iran (CBI) accounts in European banks into gold.

China

1. China must guarantee the purchase of 800,000 bpd of Iranian oil as well.

2. They should take necessary measures to facilitate conversion of all Central of Bank of Iran (CBI) assets in Chinese banks into gold.

3. The Chinese should guarantee the financing of Iran's East-West electric railway.

4. A joint venture will be established between Iran and China for expanding the mentioned railway further into the region.

5. China will continue cooperation with Iran in developing the country's oil fields.

Russia

1. Oil swap of 200,000 bpd oil with Russia which could be expanded to 400,000 bpd.

2. Russia will establish a joint venture with Iran to buy and transfer Iranian gas to Europe. In this joint venture Iran and Russia will each have a 45 percent ownership while Iraq and Syria each will own a 5 percent share.

Iran

Aside from all the benefits that Russia, China and the European sides will gain considering the above mentioned commitments, Iran as well will commit to stay in the JCPOA and will not pull out of NPT.

First platform of South Pars phases 22-24 installed

ENERGY TEHRAN — Platform SPD-22, which is the first platform of the phases 22, 23, 24 of developing Iran's South Pars gas field (in the Persian Gulf) was installed on its designated offshore spot at Friday night, Public Relations Department of Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC), which is in charge of the gas field development, announced.

The 2,300-ton platform had been loaded at Sadra yard in the southwestern province of Bushehr in early March and is expected to start operation by mid-November, according to Farhad Izadjou, the operator of phases 22, 23 and 24.

Four platforms have been envisaged for the mentioned phases and the three other platforms are scheduled to be installed on their designated offshore spots in the Persian



Gulf in the first half of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-September 22, 2018).

Phases 22-24 are expected to produce 56 million cubic meters of sour gas, 75,000 billion barrels of gas condensate, and 400 tons of sulfur per day, in addition to 50 million cubic meters of methane, 2,900 tons of LPG and 2,750 tons of ethane.

South Pars gas field, which Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf, covers an area of 9,700 square kilometers, 3,700 square kilometers of which, called South Pars, are in Iran's territorial waters. The remaining 6,000 square kilometers, called North Dome, are situated in Qatar's territorial waters.

The field is estimated to contain a significant amount of natural gas, accounting for about eight percent of the world's reserves, and approximately 18 billion barrels of condensate.

Iran's light crude price rise highest among benchmarks

ENERGY TEHRAN — Iran's light crude oil price rose \$2.81 in the week ended on May 18, to register the greatest increase among crude benchmarks.

The Iranian light crude price settled at \$76.60 per barrel in the mentioned week, Shana reported on Saturday.

The country's light oil price was reported \$66.91 on average since the beginning of 2018 until May 18.

Iran's heavy crude oil also experienced a \$2.03 rise in the said week to reach \$73.58

per barrel. During the said week, Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)'s basket price stood at \$75.61 per barrel with \$2.15 increase compared to the preceding week.

Oil prices got close to \$80 per barrel in May, a level it has not seen since November 2014, on strong demand, ongoing supply cuts led by producer cartel OPEC and looming U.S. sanctions against major crude exporter Iran.

Bank loans to economic sector rise 14.9% in a month yr/yr

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iranian banking system's offered facilities to domestic economic sectors during the first month of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-April 20) increased by 14.9 percent, in comparison with the same month in the year before, Public Relations Department of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) announced.

As reported, 250 trillion rials (about \$5.952 billion) of loans were granted

to Iranian economic sector in the said time, registering 33.3 trillion rials (about \$792.8 million) growth compared to the same time in the preceding year, the CBI website published.

Working capital loans paid to different economic sectors was above 175.7 trillion rials (about \$4.183 billion) accounting for 68.3 percent of the total provided facilities in the said period, registering a 10.9 percent increase year on year.

Crude steel output in Iran jumps 27.6% in 4 months on year: WSA

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Production of crude steel in Iran stood at 8.127 million tons during January-April of this year, indicating 27.6 percent rise from the figure of the same period of time in 2017, according to World Steel Association (WSA).

The country's crude steel output stood at 6.369 million tons during the first four months of the past year.

The WSA has previously announced that Iran's steel production in the first quarter of 2018 has risen 47 percent from the figure of the same period of time in 2017.

Iran produced 21.884 million tons of crude steel and 19.776 million tons of steel products in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20), showing 19 percent and 9 percent rise, respectively, year on year, according to

the data released by Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO).

The IMIDRO data also indicate that the country exported 6.872 million tons of crude steel and 1.623 million tons of steel products in the past calendar year, with 84-percent growth, and 10-percent fall, respectively, from the year before, IRIB reported.

Russian oil boss warns Donald Trump's Iran move may result in 'unpredictable' crude prices

U.S. President Donald Trump's unilateral decision to withdraw from the Iran nuclear accord could knock 5% of global oil production offline and drive the oil price to unpredictable highs, according to Igor Sechin, Chief Executive Officer of Russian oil giant Rosneft.

Speaking at the St Petersburg International Economic Forum on Friday, May 25, Sechin, who is reportedly close to Russian President Vladimir Putin, said the U.S.'s decision would cause an inevitable reduction of Iranian barrels in the global supply pool.

On a day when oil futures are sliding on expectation of higher Russian and Saudi production - amid signals that the ongoing OPEC and non-OPEC production cut agreement to the tune of 1.8 million barrels per day might be canned - Sechin opined that actually new price records might be on the horizon due to American unilateral action.

"Such sanctions and ultimatums applied to the hydrocarbons market will inevitably lead to a permanent 'sanctions

premium' in the price. I do not rule out that we will be able to speak about a sanctions-related commodity 'super cycle' after a while, and see new price records in the near future," the Rosneft boss said.

Drivers and industries across Europe and the U.S. will feel the effects of action taken by the White House, as the revoking of the Iran Nuclear deal - "a non-market factor" makes the global oil sector unpredictable, he added.

"I have to say that the U.S. has consistently pursued the policy of non-acceptance of international agreements, which would allow challenging their actions on global platforms. In fact, judicial protection and fair market arbitration are off the table."

Sechin did not mention Trump directly in his address but said the U.S. move had much to do with boosting its domestic oil market confidence.

Moving away from the politics of the Iran deal withdrawal by Trump, the Rosneft boss also dismissed suggestions of oil consumption peaking in 2030, adding that he expects oil and gas to remain core

of the global economy in the foreseeable future.

"Projections by leading analysts and companies, including an outlook on global energy development recently released by BP show that the demand for hydrocarbons will be higher by 2040 than it is today, even in most challenging scenarios."

According to Sechin, oil market participants will have to replenish up to 40 million barrels of falling volumes of resources per day by 2040, which will "require a stable and massive inflow of investment in the sector" that Russia was actively playing its part in.

The Rosneft CEO's comments come on a day of heavy declines in oil futures prices with the slide starting in Asia, extending well past European trading hours and into U.S. intraday calls. Further downside pressure came, after the weekly Baker Hughes rig count indicated the U.S. tally was up 13 rigs from last week to 1,059, with oil rigs up 15 to 859, indicative of rising U.S. crude production.

(Source: Forbes)

U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross to visit China

U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross will visit China early next month for another round of talks amid ongoing trade frictions between the world's two largest economies.

Ross will visit China from June 2 to June 4, the official Xinhua news agency reported on Friday, adding that Vice Premier Liu He, China's chief negotiator

in the trade dispute, had spoken with Ross over the phone. It gave no further details.

The trade dispute took on added complexity this week when U.S. President Donald Trump announced a national security investigation into imports of cars and trucks, a probe that could lead to tariffs against China as well as key U.S.

allies such as Canada, Mexico, Japan, and Germany.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin told CNBC on Monday that Ross is aiming to negotiate "a framework" that could then turn into "binding agreements ... between companies."

(Source: CNBC)

ONE STEP INTERNATIONAL TENDER GOVERNMENT TRADING CORPORATION OF IRAN

Second Announcement

The Government Trading Corporation of Iran (hereinafter referred to as GTC), affiliated to the Ministry of Agriculture **Jahad** of the Islamic Republic of Iran, intends to purchase 30,000 M/Ts 10 pct M/L crude sunflower seed oil through single stage international tender.

All of qualified companies and suppliers that are interested to bid above tender are invited to receive tender documents from **27/5/2018 until 9/6/2018**

from the secretary of Trades & Tenders committee located on the 4th floor of GTC building No. 2, Fatmei Ave (opposite of Water and Wastewater Co.), Tehran, Iran along with an official letter of introduction.

The bid participants are required to submit their stamped and sealed envelopes containing their offers latest at **13:00** (Tehran time) on **10/7/2018** to the secretariat of tenders' committee located on the 7th floor. Meanwhile the meeting for the opening of the envelopes will be held on **10/7/2018 at 14:00** (Tehran time) with the presence of bidder's representatives in **tenders committee** (2nd floor of GTC building No 2, Fatmei Ave (opposite of Water and Wastewater Co.), Tehran-Iran).

Bid bond: the bid bond worth EUR 344,525 (IRR. 17,570,740,000) in cash or unconditional bank guarantee with three months validity and extendible for another three months.

For more information, you may refer to our website www.gtc-portal.com or contact us by Phone No. 00982188957477

(Foreign Trade Department)

Oil drop below \$80 vindicates cautious investors trimming bets

Money managers' reluctance to get behind the oil rally is finally paying off.

Hedge funds trimmed their net-long position -- the difference between bets on a price increase and wagers on a drop -- in Brent crude by the most in almost a year. The cuts came as the global benchmark capped its first weekly drop since early April, sliding below \$80 a barrel after Saudi Arabia and Russia said OPEC and its allies may boost oil output in the second half of the year.

"Traders thought that the market was in the process of topping out," John Kilduff, a partner at Again Capital LLC, a New York-based hedge fund, said by telephone Friday. Oil prices had a "swift reaction today to the musings by OPEC to potentially add more supply to the market. We will be very headline-driven over the next few weeks."

Oil retreated from the highest prices in almost four years as Russian and Saudi energy ministers signaled that the coalition led by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries may gradually raise oil production to assuage consumer anxiety about higher prices. Their comments mark a major shift in strategy for the historic alliance forged in 2016 to erase a global crude glut.

"I think in the near future there will be time to release supply" smoothly to avoid shocking the market, Saudi Energy Minister Khalid Al-Falih said at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum in Russia. When OPEC, Russia



and other major producers meet in June "we will do what is necessary" to reassure buyers, the minister said.

He spoke after talks with his Russian counterpart Alexander Novak, who said the output boost would start in the third quarter, if it's approved by other members of the group. Both men said the size of the increase was still subject to negotiation.

Hedge funds lowered their Brent net-long position by 8.6 percent in the week ended May 22 to 501,634 contracts, according to ICE Futures Europe data on futures and options

released Friday. That was the biggest decline since June 2017.

Money managers' net-long position in West Texas Intermediate crude fell by 2 percent to 377,520 futures and options, the lowest since November, according to U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission released Friday. Longs slipped less than 0.1 percent, while shorts climbed 23 percent, the biggest jump since April.

"You want to get out of the long positions if you are expecting that OPEC is going to increase production," James Williams, president

of London, Arkansas-based energy researcher WTRG Economics, said by phone. "It makes perfect sense for the folks that are long to say, 'How much longer can this thing continue to grow?'"

Disruption threat

Crude had rallied earlier this month on the dual threat of supply disruptions from Iran and Venezuela, which together account for about 14 percent of OPEC's production. Still, the coalition is weighing the possibility of easing output limits at a time when drillers are pumping record amounts of crude from American shale basins.

"The market kind of overextended itself," Gene McGillian, manager of market research for Tradition Energy in Stamford, Connecticut, said by phone. "With the Saudis now saying they're limiting their production cuts and geopolitical risk already priced in, there is going to be some uncertainty."

A dearth of pipelines in West Texas' Permian Basin, the most prolific U.S. oil play, is leaving supplies trapped in the region. That's expanding the nation's surplus of the fuel as American production tops 10 million barrels a day.

U.S. inventories climbed by 5.78 million barrels to about 438 million barrels in the week ended May 18, data from the Energy Information Administration showed. That was a surprise increase compared with the 2 million-barrel decline predicted in a Bloomberg survey.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Oil output increases: five things to watch

OPEC and Russia are in discussions with a view to raising oil production by up to 1m barrels a day as they move to cool concerns that crude prices have risen too fast.

Here are the key points to watch ahead of their meeting in Vienna next month where the plans will probably be formalized.

Why are they talking about raising output now?

The jump in oil prices to above \$80 a barrel this month was driven by two key events: sharp production falls in OPEC member Venezuela, where an economic and political crisis has hammered state oil company PDVSA, and the prospect of renewed U.S. sanctions on Iran -- the third largest OPEC producer -- which added to fears the oil market was rapidly tightening.

So while OPEC and Russia have been working together since the start of 2017 to reduce oil supplies to end the glut that had depressed prices for the previous three years, output has now fallen far further than they initially intended.

The price rise was good for the bottom line of leading oil producers, but it has drawn an angry response from U.S. President Donald Trump, with Americans facing higher prices at the pumps (though the country's shale producers were less concerned).

OPEC kingpin Saudi Arabia, while wanting strong prices to fund its ambitious economic and social reform programs, is unlikely to want to anger Washington -- especially when the U.S. is targeting Iran, Riyadh's biggest rival, after withdrawing from the nuclear deal.

How far are they likely to increase supplies?

For oil traders, this is the million (possibly billion) dollar question. The details of production increases are likely to be thrashed out between now and June 22, the next official meeting between OPEC ministers and the broader Russian-led coalition that has signed up to the output deal since late 2016.

On Friday, people familiar with the discussions between Saudi Arabia and Russia said a figure of up to 1m barrels per day had been floated. But it is possible that the final

number comes in lower.

Both Alexander Novak, Russia's energy minister, and his Saudi counterpart, Khalid Al Falih, said that all options were on the table and that any increase would be gradual. That is a clear sign that while they may wish to cool prices they do not want to trigger an aggressive sell-off.

Energy Aspects, a consultancy, estimated that the increase would be between 300,000 and 1m b/d, depending on whether they target country specific levels or group-wide targets.

They could ask members to bring output more closely in line with their original targets, in which case the increase would be at the lower end of the range -- as members such as Venezuela would be unable to respond.

The other option is for countries with spare capacity to fill the gap left by falling output in some members, which would lead to an increase closer to the upper end of the range.

"Nothing has been decided yet??.?.?this is not a discussion about exiting the co-operation agreement. Rather, it is about fine-tuning supply," said Amrita Sen at Energy Aspects.

How much spare capacity is there?

It is one thing saying you want to raise production but a key question is just how much extra firepower OPEC members and their allies have.

Bullish traders are warning that by raising output in the second half of the year, OPEC and Russia could cut into their spare capacity before the market desperately needs it.

That could actually turn out to be bullish for prices if traders become spooked that there was little left in reserve should another supply disruption take place.

The International Energy Agency said that as of March, OPEC had 3.4m b/d of spare production capacity, with Saudi Arabia accounting for 64 percent of the total, suggesting there is some breathing room.

But many traders think this number is far lower when calculated as output that countries can comfortably maintain without damaging their fields by running them too hard.

Saudi Arabia, even when it was raising output to squeeze out rivals between 2015 and 2016 never raised production

as high as 11m b/d -- just 1m b/d above where they are now.

How will hedge funds react?

Hedge funds betting on the oil rally to continue are sitting on a position just shy of 1bn barrels of crude across the two benchmark contracts.

Traders and analysts said some might now choose to head for the exit, although a number of bullish factors remain.

Olivier Jakob at Petromatrix said the core assumption that Saudi Arabia would allow prices to keep rising -- which has supported the belief that crude could keep rallying towards \$100 a barrel -- was a view that will now have to be revised.

"Saudi Arabia has started to do some downside jawboning, hoping that the change in tone will already act as a cap on prices," Jakob said.

He calculated that if they had gone long Brent at the beginning of 2018 they were up almost 22 percent, including returns from rolling their positions forward each month.

"The risk profile is changing and if they were to cash the mark-to-market profit to the bank, they would still materialize a solid over-performance compared to other assets for the first-half of the year," Jakob said. "The risk of profit-taking on speculative length is increasing."

Bankers have said, however, that a lot of the investor money that has poured into commodities this year has a longer-term horizon, with many investors looking to hedge inflation in their broader portfolios.

Where will oil prices go?

Oil prices fell immediately after the news of output increases, with Brent losing almost 3 percent to \$76.62 -- the lowest in almost two weeks.

Banks that have been raising their average price forecasts may take a pause as the extent of the coming output increase becomes clearer. All eyes will be on Vienna on June 22 when the energy ministers next meet, with decisions made there likely to set the course for prices over the rest of 2018.

"A lot of nail-biting is likely to be the norm," said Stephen Brennock at oil brokerage PVM.

(Source: Financial Times)

Putin says oil at \$60 suits Russia with OPEC weighing more supply

Oil prices at \$60 a barrel fully suit Russia and the country doesn't want them to spiral higher, President Vladimir Putin said.

"We're not interested in an endless rise in the price of energy and oil," Putin told reporters at the International Economic Forum in St. Petersburg, adding that Russia and OPEC didn't plan to stick to existing output cuts. "If you asked me what is a fair price, I would say we're perfectly happy with \$60 a barrel."

Oil plunged on Friday as it emerged Russia is talking to members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries about a plan to boost production for the first time since 2016. Brent futures in London slumped \$2.78 a barrel, while the U.S. benchmark fell even more.

Crude prices had rallied as a result of the U.S. decision to withdraw from the Iran nuclear pact and re-impose sanctions, Putin said. Crude at \$60 a



barrel is a "balanced price" and enough to make necessary investments, he said.

Anything above \$60 "can lead to certain problems for consumers, which also isn't good for producers," Putin said. The future of the OPEC+ pact with Russia and other oil producers will depend on whether it's possible to preserve a deal on Iran's nuclear program, he said.

"What will happen next will depend on the Iran nuclear deal and how that affects the world energy market," Putin said.

(Source: Bloomberg)

U.S. drillers add most rigs in week and month since Feb.: Baker Hughes

U.S. energy companies added the most oil rigs in both a week and a month since February as drillers continued to return to the well pad with crude prices at their highest since late 2014.

The total oil rig count rose by 15 to 859 in the week to May 25, the highest level since March 2015, General Electric Co's Baker Hughes energy services firm said in its closely followed report on Friday.

For the month, the rig count rose by 34, its second increase in row, after rising 28 in April.

The U.S. rig count, an early indicator of future output, is much higher than a year ago when 722 rigs were active as energy companies have been ramping up production in tandem with OPEC's efforts to cut global output in a bid to take advantage of rising prices.

On Friday, however, U.S. crude futures fell by almost \$3 to around \$68 a barrel after OPEC and Russia said they were considering an increase in output. Earlier in the week, U.S. crude traded over \$72, their



highest since November 2014.

Looking ahead, crude futures were trading around \$67 for the balance of 2018 and around \$63 for calendar 2019.

In anticipation of higher prices, U.S. financial services firm Cowen & Co this week said the exploration and production (E&P) companies they track have provided guidance indicating a 13 percent increase this year in planned capital spending.

Cowen said those E&Ps expect to spend a total of \$81.2 billion in 2018, up from an estimated \$72.1 billion in 2017.

(Source: Reuters)

Saudis say Aramco IPO 'most likely' in 2019

Saudi Aramco's much-hyped initial public offering is "most likely" to take place in 2019, Saudi Energy Minister Khalid Al-Falih said on Friday, likely confirming that plans for the IPO have been pushed from this year to next.

"We're simply waiting for a market readiness for the IPO," al-Falih said at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum in Russia.

Since the Saudis initially floated the idea to list 5 percent in their state oil giant, officials had been insisting that the IPO will take place in the second half of 2018, until in March al-Falih himself hinted that there might be a delay and the share sale could slip to 2019.

As early as in March, al-Falih told Bloomberg that the

H2 2018 deadline was "artificial" and that "The only certain thing about the Saudi Aramco IPO is that a) it will happen, b) the anchor market will be the Tadawul exchange in Saudi Arabia."

Two months later, oil prices have reached the level that Saudi Arabia is said to have been aiming all along to boost the valuation of Aramco -- Brent Crude at \$80 a barrel.

Various analysts have been wondering whether the Saudis will manage to pull off the listing of 5 percent of Aramco this year, amid speculation as to which foreign stock market the Saudis will choose, if any, and if the price of oil would be high enough to support a high valuation for the company.

The planned sale of 5 percent of Aramco -- in what would

likely be the world's largest IPO ever -- could bring Saudi Arabia \$100 billion if Saudi officials' valuation of the company at \$2 trillion stands. Analysts, however, value the Kingdom's oil giant at much less, with the majority putting the valuation at between \$1 trillion and \$1.5 trillion.

Analysts have also been concerned over how the Saudi domestic stock exchange could single-handedly manage an Aramco listing amid reports that plans for a foreign venue have been shelved. Some of the biggest concerns for investors about a Saudi-only listing are the possible lack of sufficient liquidity due to the small total market capitalization of the Tadawul stock exchange and an oversized weighting of Aramco in the index.

(Source: oilprice.com)

China to tackle wasted energy in new wind farm rules

China's energy regulator has ordered local authorities to take heed of the grid capacity when selecting new wind power projects, in an attempt to ensure that no more than 5 percent of the electricity they generate is wasted, it said in a notice.

China's renewable energy law compels grid firms to absorb the power generated by clean sources such as wind and solar. However, many projects have been left with inadequate grid access, a problem commonly known as "curtailment".

Regulators have sought to manage the pace of construction in order to give grids more time to expand transmission capacity, but 12 percent of total generated wind power was still wasted last year, as well as 6 percent of solar, according to official figures.

The new guidelines published by China's National Energy Administration on Thursday said priority should now be given to cross-regional wind power bases that can deliver electricity to different regional grids.

The projects should be backed by cross-regional power supply agreements as well as commitments from the end-user provinces to build the required transmission capacity.

Projects on unused and untaxed land will also be favored this year, the guidelines said, as well as those on established wind power bases, where weather conditions are most favorable and subsidies are not required.

From 2019, all large-scale onshore and offshore wind power plants must be subject to a competitive tender process, with bids based on construction costs as well as power prices, the regulator said. The tariff for each project must not exceed the benchmark set by the government.

Last month, environmental group Friends of Nature said it was suing two regional power grid companies for failing to abide by rules that require them to maximize purchases of renewable power.

(Source: CNBC)

Japan's Kansai Electric to cut LNG deals as it boosts nuclear power

Japan's Kansai Electric Power Co will cut spot purchases of liquefied natural gas and is cautious on signing long-term LNG supply contracts as it slowly lifts the share of nuclear power in its generation mix, a senior official said.

The Osaka-based utility was the most reliant on nuclear energy in Japan, using reactors for about half of the power it produced before the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011.



Of the eight reactors that have resumed generating power in Japan -- a fifth of available units -- after passing tougher safety standards imposed following the disaster, four were from Kansai Electric.

The company, which has seven reactors in all, ramped up its nuclear plant utilization rate to a six-year high of 18 percent in 2017/18, after three years of almost nil usage. That helped reduce its LNG consumption by 16.3 percent to 7.56 million tons.

The utility will adjust LNG volumes by first cutting spot and short-term LNG purchases, which now account for about 20 percent of total, Shingo Shimada, general manager of fuel planning group, told Reuters in an interview.

"We see LNG requirements to be declining slightly," Shimada said when asked whether the company's still keen on signing new long-term LNG contracts.

"That is because it's difficult to project demand due to the power liberalization and the restart of nuclear plants. We have to be cautious on that."

Kansai Electric expects to boost the ratio of nuclear, hydro and renewables in its power generation mix to more than 50 percent of total in the future, from about a quarter in the year ended March 31, with the most increase coming from nuclear energy.

In existing long-term LNG supply deals, Shimada said the company will work to remove destination clauses that restrict where the cargoes can be sold, but added that negotiations with sellers would take time.

(Source: Reuters)

Eni CEO debunks rumors exiting joint Rosneft ventures over sanctions

Italian Eni did not make a decision to leave joint ventures with Russia's Rosneft because of sanctions, reports about this are pure speculations, company's CEO Claudio Descalzi told Sputnik Friday.

"We don't quit the joint venture with Rosneft [in the Black sea, called Shatskorneftegaz]. We have other projects in the Barents sea, we have other stuff to do. So, we are still remaining in the JVs with Rosneft. This is just rumors," Descalzi said on the sidelines of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum.

Several media outlets alleged in mid-May, citing reports from joint ventures of the two companies, that contrary to the declarations of the parties the US sanctions called into question the possibilities of the Italian Eni to finance oil projects with Rosneft on the Russian shelf.

In May 2017, Rosneft and Eni signed a deal to expand cooperation on oil production. The document reinforced the companies' previous agreements, specifically those concerning offshore drilling in the Black and Barents seas. In addition, the parties agreed to consider further expanding their international cooperation.

In December, Rosneft's CEO Igor Sechin said that Rosneft and Eni have started drilling the exploration well in the Zapadno-Chernomorskaya license area, having estimated in-place oil of up to 60 million tonnes and around 100 billion cubic meters of natural gas.

Moreover, Russian Ministry for Natural Resources and Environment said in February that both energy giants have planned to complete drilling of the first deepwater exploration well in the Russian Black Sea area in the first quarter of 2018.

(Source: Sputnik)

Bangladesh: 'disappeared' reappear all the time

The prime minister's son responds to concerns over enforced disappearances

By Sajeeb Wazed

Bangladesh's main opposition party and several otherwise well-intentioned human rights groups have accused the government of kidnapping hundreds – and possibly thousands – of citizens for nefarious reasons, mostly political. The claim is false and reckless.

The truth is the government is investigating the so-called disappearances – every one of them. Several have turned out to be ruses staged by individuals who were trying to evade the law because charges were pending against them. In general, however, the accusation is obviously exaggerated; no one, not even the government, can hide several hundred people in a country as densely populated as Bangladesh.



The Bangladesh police have investigated every instance of a reported disappearance. They have not uncovered any evidence that suggests the government is behind them. Rather, the police have located many of the "disappeared" in hiding. They were wanted by Bangladeshi authorities for violent felonies, including the rampant fire bombings around the time of the last national election.

Bangladeshis have suffered too much violence in recent years, ranging from the overturning of railway cars to the burning of buses. Many of the incidents, sadly, were conducted by members of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which opposes the government. In other words, many of the "disappeared" are leaders of the opposition who are accusing the government of kidnapping them while they are, in fact, trying to avoid arrest by disappearing. Ironic – and sad.

No one in Bangladesh is surprised by the BNP's willingness to spread such false rumors. For the BNP though, it is a dramatic change in strategy. No longer much of an electoral threat, they now play the victim.

The BNP boycotted the 2014 elections. Instead of contesting for seats in the parliament, it instigated nationwide strikes and other disruptions. They bombed polling booths. Armed with Molotov cocktails and gasoline bombs, BNP-backed attacks killed 231 people and injured 1,180 others. The government deployed troops to stop the violence and arrested the ringleaders. The BNP's popularity dropped to an all-time low while the ruling Awami League continued to lead Bangladesh along a secular, democratic path.

Some of the "disappearances" are almost comical. Take the case of Salahuddin Ahmed, who was reportedly abducted by Bangladesh police in 2015. He was found two months after he was reported missing, hiding in India where the police quickly concluded that he concocted the entire episode in an attempt to avoid trial in Bangladesh.

Another noteworthy example involves the case of Syed Sadat Ahmed, who was wanted by Bangladesh police in connection to an arson attack. Ahmed was reported missing in August 2017, but was miraculously found, unharmed, in December in Dhaka's Shahjadpur district. BNP-linked intellectual Farhad Mazhar was found just hours after he was reported missing, travelling on a bus to the capital from the southwestern city of Khulna.

Bangladesh police deserve credit for their diligent approach to this complex issue. They have been quick to act on reported disappearances and have done a remarkable job tracking down the people who have vanished.

The police have conducted themselves in accord with both domestic and international laws. Bangladesh is a signatory to the 1984 United Nations Convention Against Torture, and Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Bangladesh also has anti-cruelty laws and constitutional prohibitions.

In addition, police and law enforcement authorities in Bangladesh are heavily regulated and scrutinized. There's simply no way for them to be randomly kidnapping opposition politicians in broad daylight and get away with it.

This is not to say that Bangladesh has never dealt with enforced disappearances before. Successive military juntas and caretaker governments used the tactic, so it's familiar to Bangladeshis as a possibility. But history isn't repeating itself. The BNP's deceptions might have the ring of truth. But they are false and cynical. The world should reject the fairy tale of Bangladesh disappearances as the lie that it is.

(Source: The Diplomat)

Europe gets a grip on graft

Even as the EU sets a new standard on digital privacy, it is playing catch-up with the U.S. in preventing bribery of its firms overseas. Together, the U.S. and EU can raise anti-corruption standards.

One of the healthy competitions between Europe and the United States is over which one can set a new global standard. On May 25, the European Union began to win on one standard – digital privacy – with the start of stiff rules on how companies handle personal data. The impact, though limited to firms operating in Europe, is being felt globally.

In another type of standard, however, Europe has only begun to compete with the U.S.

Corruption still pervades many countries on the Continent. The latest example is the May 24 sentencing of 29 people in Spain's ruling Popular Party related to a massive scheme involving kickbacks. Another is the alleged bribery of members of the Council of Europe's parliamentary assembly by Azerbaijan for remaining silent on discussions of human rights violations in that Central Asian country.

Yet one by one, more European nations from Ireland to Slovakia are tightening enforcement of anti-graft rules, especially against companies that operate overseas. For years, many governments have turned a blind eye toward bribery of foreign officials on a dubious assumption that their domestic firms might lose business. →13

Trump's and Bolton's instincts form a toxic combination

The interplay between the two helps explain the confusion whirling around the North Korea summit

By Peter Beinart

Why did the Trump administration cancel its much-hyped nuclear summit with North Korea? And why the confusing semi-backtrack the following day, in which Trump embraced North Korea's "warm and productive statement" regretting the cancellation, and left the door open to a meeting he'd ditched barely 24 hours before? The answer lies in the toxic interplay between Donald Trump's instincts and John Bolton's. Each man's foreign-policy views are dangerous enough in and of themselves. Put them together and you have the perfect cocktail for the decimation of American power.

Bolton is a Manichean in the tradition of his hero, Barry Goldwater. He has spent his career depicting America's adversaries – the Soviet Union, Cuba, Saddam Hussein's Iraq, and these days, Iran and North Korea – as evil. He denies that they have any legitimate security concerns. He abhors compromise. He demands maximum American economic, political and, if necessary, military pressure. He basic negotiating posture is: Once you give in on everything, then we'll start talking.

But while Bolton's Manicheism is dangerous, it's also targeted. Bolton wants to turn the screws on Iran and North Korea. He doesn't want to turn the screws on American allies like Germany, France, South Korea, and Japan – except to the degree that they resist a hardline posture towards North Korea and Iran. Bolton has little use for international law but he likes America's alliances.

Trump is different. He doesn't divide the world into virtuous, pro-American regimes, which the United States should support, and villainous anti-American ones, which the United States should crush. Trump is less ideological. Instinctively, he believes that almost every regime is ripping America off – the adversaries and the allies too. That inclines him to pick a broader array of fights. But it also makes him more willing to resolve them. Trump is not moralistic and he's not a stickler for detail. Bolton seems to want to be the 21st-century version of Reagan (as he's imagined in conservative mythology): standing up to the evil enemy and bringing about its downfall. Trump seems to want to be the political version of Trump the real-estate whiz (as he's imagined in Trump's own mythology): cutting great deals that make everyone rich.

The Trump administration's North Korea policy is what happens when you put these two instincts together. On his own, it's unlikely Bolton would have agreed to a summit with Kim Jong Un in the first place since it violates one of his core principles: Never concede anything until the other side does first. Bolton's maximalism would have made any diplomatic deal with Pyongyang unlikely. But Bolton – because he draws a clear distinction between America's enemies and its allies – would probably not have picked a fight with South Korea over steel tariffs. Nor would he have risked a trade war with China while seeking its help in pressuring North Korea. Bolton is a national-security hardliner, not a trade hardliner.

Trump, on the other hand, was elected as much to confront America's economic partners as to confront its national-security adversaries. So he threatened trade wars with China,



The combination of Trump and Bolton's maximalism is alienating public opinion across the world – which will sooner or later produce populist anti-American leaders.

South Korea and Japan even as he threatened a real one with Pyongyang.

But Trump's love of the deal also led him to embrace a summit with North Korea that he believed might bring him the adulation and vindication he craves. Left to his own devices, he might have attended the summit, agreed to some vague, flowery language about denuclearization, demanded the Nobel Prize, and moved on to other subjects even as North Korea didn't actually eliminate its nuclear program. And indeed, all it took was an expression of North Korean regret to get Trump to start speculating that the June 12 summit could be back on, and that "we'll see what happens." Given the importance of avoiding war on the Korean Peninsula, and the benefits of opening up North Korea to South Korean influence, that would constitute progress.

But not for Bolton, who laid down a marker by declaring that his model was Libya, wherein Muammar Qaddafi utterly capitulated. The North Koreans – who are terrified of the Libya model because they believe Qaddafi's denuclearization left him vulnerable to Western regime change – responded with fury. And while Trump tried to keep the summit on track by declaring that America wasn't seeking regime change, he managed to threaten it nonetheless, as did Mike Pence. As North Korea's rhetoric grew more belligerent, Trump reportedly began to fear that the summit would bring him not glory but embarrassment. As Trump's biographer, Tony Schwartz, told *The New York Times*, "Trump has a morbid fear of being humiliated and shamed. This is showing who's the biggest and the strongest, so he is exquisitely sensitive to the possibility that he would end up looking weak and

small." This analysis was corroborated by an NBC report suggesting Trump pulled out of the summit because he feared the North Koreans would first.

In the end, Trumpism and Boltonism have produced an outcome that's worse than either on its own. The summit is or maybe isn't off, and the U.S. is back to threatening war but confusingly somehow seeking talks. None of this enhances Trump's credibility as a negotiating partner. Meanwhile, North Korea still has its nuclear weapons, and could resume testing them. By confronting Beijing on trade, the U.S. has squandered some of the leverage it needs to convince China to keep imposing tough sanctions on Pyongyang. And with his initial letter cancelling the summit, Trump surprised and humiliated South Korean leader Moon Jae In, who may still pursue détente with the North whether or not Trump rescinds his cancellation, thus undermining Trump and Bolton's maximum-pressure campaign. South Korea may also draw closer to China, which would leave the U.S. more isolated in Northeast Asia than it has been in decades.

Something similar has happened in Europe. First, the Trump administration's threats of steel and aluminum tariffs infuriated European leaders. Then its Boltonesque maximalism led America to withdraw from the Iran deal, aggravating and humiliating the Europeans all over again.

The problem here isn't merely personal. It's structural. Trump won the Republican nomination, and the presidency, in part because he realized that, after the Iraq disaster, national-security maximalism was no longer a political winner. John McCain and Mitt Romney had pushed a hard line

against Iran's nuclear program and a soft line against China's widgets and lost. Trump outperformed them in the upper Midwest because he ran as a trade hawk, and he knows that maintaining that image is crucial to his political fortunes.

Yet national-security maximalism still dominates the Republican foreign-policy and media ecosystem. There are no more Brent Scowrofts, Colin Powells, and Richard Lugas. And so, as his national-security adviser, Trump chose Bolton, who had spent the previous years demanding on Fox News that North Korea and Iran capitulate.

We have seen the results this spring: An administration that, in both Asia and Europe, pursues geopolitical and geoeconomic confrontation at the same time. It demands that America's economic partners impose sanctions on America's political adversaries even as America threatens economic sanctions on them. Even George W. Bush, for all his hubris, didn't try this. He didn't hand over his military policy to Dick Cheney and his trade policy to Pat Buchanan at the same time.

It hasn't worked. America doesn't have the power to force China, Japan, South Korea, Germany, France, Britain, and others to capitulate on trade while it forces North Korea and Iran to capitulate on nukes. Instead, the combination of Trump and Bolton's maximalism is alienating public opinion across the world – which will sooner or later produce populist anti-American leaders. And it's exposing America as a paper tiger, a country that demands things it can't compel. Trump may not be able to distinguish bluster from genuine power, but the rest of the world is catching on.

(Source: The Atlantic)

Reform in reverse in Saudi Arabia

Since rising to power as the crown prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman has cultivated a reputation as a savvy young reformer, dragging his hidebound country into the modern age with a new vision.

Much of his focus has been on economic change, but the prince, a 32-year-old son of the Saudi king, has also promised more enlightened social policies, including for women, and drawn praise for this in the West.

In just a few weeks, on June 24, Saudi Arabia is set to lift the longstanding ban on women drivers, putting into effect the most visible social reform that Prince Mohammed has championed.

All to the good, right? Not so fast. Over the past two weeks, the prince reversed course, unleashing and then expanding a crackdown on the very activists who had promoted the right of women to drive.

The government rounded up an initial group of activists and then after an international uproar, redoubled its efforts. At least 11 people, mostly women but also a few men, have now been arrested and interrogated without access to lawyers. One woman was said to have been held incommunicado.

Saudi prosecutors have not disclosed the names of those arrested or the charges filed against them. But news reports said the list includes one of Saudi Arabia's most high-profile feminists, Loujain al-Hathloul, who was previously detained for more than 70 days in 2014 for trying to post an online video of herself driving into the kingdom from the United Arab Emirates.

Late Thursday, Amnesty International reported that Saudi authorities had released four of those arrested, but Ms. Al-Hathloul apparently was not among them.

Saudi analysts say the reversal is a reflection of Saudi politics and the prince's desire to portray the lifting of the driving ban as a gift of the monarchy to Saudi women rather than a concession to international or domestic pressure.



Saudi analysts say the reversal is a reflection of Saudi politics and the prince's desire to portray the lifting of the driving ban as a gift of the monarchy to Saudi women rather than a concession to international or domestic pressure.

But the crackdown also raises doubts about the prince's commitment to women's equality and freedom of movement. Pro-government media outlets publicized photos of the detained activists and accused them of being traitors, a shocking attack on a group whose only apparent offense was peaceful protest. They should be released immediately. The episode also calls into question Prince Mohammed's

ability to deliver on his promises to bring fundamental change to a patriarchal society where men exert legal control over women.

The clerical hierarchy that administers Saudi Arabia's ultraconservative version of Islam, known as Wahhabism, oppose allowing women to drive and other proposals to soften Saudi culture and religion that are part of Prince Mohammed's plans.

If Prince Mohammed cannot take the heat for lifting the driving ban, one can only imagine how much harder it will be for him to deliver on tougher promises. Chief among them is getting rid of the guardianship law, which says that every woman must have a male guardian – husband, father, brother, even a son – who can make critical decisions on her behalf including applying for a passport, traveling outside the country, studying abroad on a government scholarship and getting married.

This is not the first time Prince Mohammed has undermined the reformist credentials on which he is trying to build a new image of his country. Last year, he oversaw the arrest of dozens of writers, intellectuals and moderate clerics who were seen as critics of his foreign policies.

Prince Mohammed also engineered the detention of about 200 wealthy princes and businessmen, forcing them to surrender significant amounts of their wealth, in exchange for their freedom in a questionable anti-corruption campaign.

By raising doubts about the kingdom's commitment to human rights and the rule of law, such behavior is unlikely to be attractive to the foreign companies the prince is wooing to invest in his country.

Then there's this: Studies show that economies that exclude half the population, which is to say women, can't reach their full potential. It will be impossible for Prince Mohammed to legitimately claim the reformist mantle and achieve his economic goals as long as women are prevented from taking their full and rightful place in Saudi Arabia's future.

(Source: The NYT)

EU finds mechanisms allow Iran to enjoy tangible benefits of JCPOA: Falk

1 → ■ What can the European Union do to save the JCPOA and guarantee Iran Interest under this agreement?

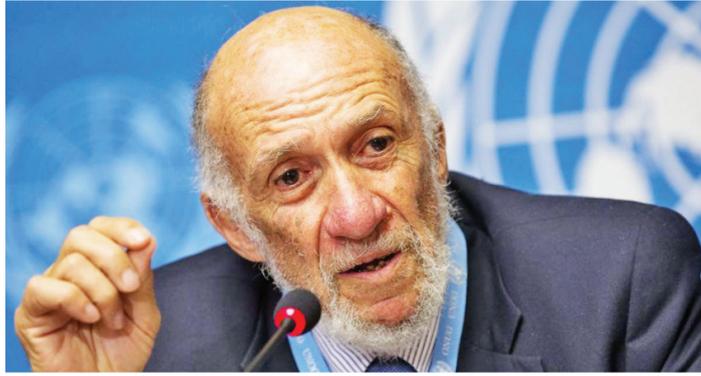
A: Under present circumstances, the first contribution that can be made by the EU (and others) is to stand behind the agreement in a manner that demonstrates diplomatic resolve and political independence.

Obviously, this is not enough. The EU needs to find mechanisms that allow Iran to enjoy the tangible benefits of JCPOA in relation to economic policy and political interaction.

What would be most desirable and beneficial would be for the EU to treat Iran as a normal state, with the benefits of normalcy in international relations.

The mechanisms for achieving these ends would have to be developed by economists and others, but for the sake of peace and justice the path for the EU to take is clear.

■ U.S. official says that will impose penalty to European companies if they trade



with Iran. Under this condition, will European companies dare for working with Iran, especially big companies?

A: This is a question that depends on many uncertainties, including whether the U.S. Treasury will really adopt a punitive

approach and the degree to which international companies will be intimidated by threats.

It would seem to be a case of unlawful intervention in Iranian society to prevent foreign corporations and other actors from doing business in Iran, and a setback for a cooperative international order.

A great deal is at stake as a result of this dangerous confrontation that extends beyond the viability of JCPOA, including heightened risks of war and the loss of trust in diplomacy as a reliable means to achieve conflict resolution.

It may be that experts on trade and international regulation can devise ways to circumvent the American sanctions programs. It may also be necessary to have recourse to the UN, and to the WTO, if interferences with the international trading rights of Europe or Iran are adversely affected by American policies.

Black Cube: Inside shadowy Israeli firm accused of trying to undermine Iran deal

1 → ■ Kahl responded by connecting Gavrilov with school administrators. But Gavrilov's reply made it clear that she wanted to meet only with Kahl.

At that point Kahl mentioned the exchange to her husband, Colin, who had been an assistant to President Barack Obama and national security adviser to Vice President Joe Biden. They agreed that it smelled fishy, and Rebecca stopped responding. The exchange died.

A year later, it turns out that the Kahls were right: Something was amiss. Gavrilov was a fake identity, one of several assumed by an operative working for Black Cube, a shadowy Israeli private security firm.

Internal Black Cube documents obtained by NBC News and interviews of sources with direct knowledge of Black Cube's operations reveal a business intelligence company with governmental contracts and a special department for politically motivated work.

A source familiar with Black Cube's outreach to the Kahls told NBC News that it was part of an effort to discredit Obama administration officials who had worked on the Iran nuclear deal – and, by extension, the deal itself. Black Cube sought evidence of nefarious behavior, such as financial or sexual impropriety, by the deal's architects, including Colin Kahl. Operatives hoped to obtain such evidence by befriending their targets or their targets' associates.

Also targeted was Ben Rhodes, a deputy national security adviser under Obama, whose wife, Ann Norris, was approached by a Black Cube operative about consulting on a political drama for TV. Norris had previously worked at the State Department.

The undercover campaign to discredit the Iran deal was first reported by the British newspaper The Observer and by The New Yorker.

In a statement to NBC News, Black Cube said it has no relationship to the Iran nuclear deal.

«Anyone who claims otherwise or anyone suggesting Black Cube is targeting U.S. officials is misleading their readers and viewers,» the statement said.

«Luckily,» it continued, «the Mossad and the CIA are capable to deal with the Iran nuclear deal and other issues of national security without relying on the expertise of Black Cube.»

The firm added that it «always operates in full compliance of the law in every jurisdiction in which it conducts its work.»

In the end, Black Cube's Iran-deal spying yielded no compromising information, and in early May, Trump announced the U.S. would withdraw from the nuclear deal. But the use of the shadowy firm continues to draw scrutiny. On Friday, Democratic members of the House Oversight Committee wrote to the founders of Black Cube requesting documentation related to its Iran work.

■ Marketing its links to israeli intel

Black Cube made headlines last fall after revelations that it had been hired to intimidate and disparage accusers of Harvey Weinstein, as well as reporters investigating the Hollywood producer.

The firm was founded by former Israeli military officers in 2011. It retains close ties to the Israeli intelligence community, and many of its recruits are former Mossad agents.

Those links are part of its pitch to clients.

«The insinuation is that «we're so powerful, we have these links, and we can call on them,» said the source, who asked not to be identified, fearing reprisal from Black Cube. «They want that veneer of «we're still the state, but we're not really the state.»»

The firm has two divisions: one catering to corporate clients and one to governments and political actors.

Its website advertises its corporate work, such as performing due diligence on clients' competitors or acquisition targets. «We help our clients identify their adversaries' sensitive points or vulnerabilities, or evidence of their misconduct,» its website reads. It boasts of its ability to provide «otherwise unobtainable information.»

Its government work has occasionally landed Black Cube at the center of sensitive political disputes across the globe, while raising serious ethical and legal questions. For example, in Romania, two Black Cube operatives were arrested on suspicion of spying on the country's anti-corruption prosecutor in 2016.

«When the Romania affair came out in the news, several people on the corporate side left,» said another source – a former Black Cube insider – who spoke on the condition of anonymity since he also feared reprisals. «It created a rift in the company and several people quit almost immediately.»

The campaign to discredit the Iran deal is the first public case of the firm's apparent meddling in U.S. politics.

Black Cube's political work frequently intersects with Israel's foreign policy priorities. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, for example, has campaigned vociferously



against the Iran deal.

«They would never work against Israeli interests,» said the source who was familiar with Black Cube's Iran work. He likened the firm to an «almost privatized wing of Mossad.»

He also suggested there was little chance that the Israeli government or its intelligence agencies were unaware of Black Cube's work to discredit the Iran deal.

The same source said the Iran operation was launched just days after President Donald Trump visited Israel in May 2017. The source said he was told that the work was being carried out «for Trump,» but there is no evidence that the Trump administration had anything to do with the operation, which may have been commissioned by an outside group or agency with no connection to the administration. The identity of Black Cube's client on the Iran work remains a mystery. «You'll never find their name on a contract,» the source said. «I can't prove that it was the administration other than what I was told.»

But, he added, «Why spend time and money to make the whole deal look rotten, unless you're obsessed with destroying Obama's legacy?»

The Black Cube statement said the company «has no relation whatsoever to the Trump administration, to Trump aides, to anyone close to the administration, or to the Iran nuclear deal.»

The White House did not respond to a request for comment.

■ A nasty, nasty business

In their first joint interview about the undercover operation, the Kahls expressed dismay at Black Cube's tactics. Colin called it a «nasty, nasty business.» To come after him through his wife and daughter «crosses so many lines,» he said.

NBC News obtained Black Cube's research file on the Kahls, which contained their address, the names of their relatives and other personal details. But it also had mistakes, such as the make of their car and their daughter's birth year.

«It's creepy to know that someone was trying to dig up your profile and the names of your in-laws and your kids and your wife and where you live,» said Colin, when presented with the file. «That's pretty sleazy.»

The idea that the couple could be the target of a foreign intelligence operation had occurred to the Kahls, but it seemed unlikely with Colin out of government. «We're also just not that important of people,» Rebecca joked.

When asked why Black Cube didn't target others more senior in the Obama administration, the source familiar with the firm's Iran work explained that Kahl and Rhodes were more accessible targets. «It's easier to get to people lower down.»

Kahl said it wasn't entirely surprising that he and Rhodes were targeted despite the fact that others higher in the Obama administration had helped craft the Iran deal.

The two had become something of a «fixation» for members of the Trump administration, Kahl believes, thanks to their active social media presence and willingness to be quoted in the press criticizing the president.

«There was this kind of fever dream that emerged among a number of senior aides to President Trump,» said Kahl, «which was that Ben and I were actually responsible for being the puppet masters behind the deep-state conspiracy to undermine the president and leak things.»

Indeed, Trump adviser Sebastian Gorka decried the «Ben Rhodes-Colin Kahl nexus» in an interview on Fox News in May 2017. Then in June, the conservative Washington Free Beacon quoted an anonymous Trump Administration official singling out Kahl and Rhodes for leaking to the press.

As part of its work on Iran, Black Cube also targeted journalists and advocates of the Iran deal working outside government, according to documents obtained by NBC News. One of those documents was a Black Cube list of reporters whose work often dealt with Iran, including Andrea Mitchell, NBC's chief foreign affairs correspondent.

Another target of Black Cube, according to the documents, was Trita Parsi, a Swedish-born Iranian who heads the National Iranian American Council, a Washington nonprofit group that backed the nuclear deal. Parsi says that he was warned by someone within the U.S. intelligence community, through an intermediary, that he was a likely target for critics of the deal. Sure enough, a Black Cube operative, posing as a reporter, called Parsi about a year ago and pressed him on whether anyone within the Obama administration had profited financially from the deal. NBC News obtained audio and a transcript of the call.

When Parsi denied that financial incentives had motivated the deal, he said the operative «just gave up and cut the interview short.»

■ A now-familiar playbook

Black Cube's tactics relating to the nuclear deal – including its use of aliases and its targeting of journalists – resemble its approach in its work for other clients.

As part of the company's work for Weinstein, a Black Cube operative befriended the actress Rose McGowan while posing as an investment manager focused on women's empowerment at a London-based firm, according to emails between her and McGowan obtained by NBC News. The operative used the alias Diana Filip in the Weinstein scheme, according to the emails. That bogus firm was the same that Gavrilov, in reaching out to Rebecca Kahl, claimed as her employer.

The identity of Diana Filip was revealed to be an Israeli army veteran named Stella Penn Pechanac by the British tabloid The Daily Mail.

Elsewhere, Black Cube's underhanded tactics have been revealed to the embarrassment of its clients.

Hired by a Canadian investment company in a dispute with another firm, a Black Cube operative attempted to embarrass an Ontario superior court judge who had ruled unfavorably for Black Cube's client by trying to induce him to make anti-Semitic comments. The effort went nowhere, and Black Cube's client in that case is now mired in lawsuits.

Rebecca Kahl said her experience as a Black Cube target felt like what life would be like in an authoritarian country, where civil society groups and political activists are routinely harassed.

«It certainly has an authoritarian feel to it – to target your political opponents or try to smear them or discredit them,» she said.

For his part, the source familiar with Black Cube's Iran work believes that all the recent publicity around the company will only bring in more clients. «The more we talk about it, the more business they get,» he said.

(Source: NBC)

Trump's strategy toward Iran is at the expense of U.S. credibility: Costello



1 → ■ A: U.S. sanctions have tremendous power, particularly over European businesses with ties to the American economy. If fully implemented, as the administration has vowed, European companies will be forced to choose between doing business in Iran or the United States. The Obama administration brought Europeans on board with sanctions previously, though that effort was eased by shared concerns regarding Iran's nuclear program. This time, the Trump administration will be attempting to use brute force alone to enforce sanctions, which will have bite. The main question is how far Europe can go to protect its companies in order to try to sustain relief under the JCPOA.

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

A: Russia and China seem well positioned to swoop in and take business from European companies forced to depart Iran as a result of U.S. sanctions. Russia, in particular, is likely watching happily as the U.S. targets its European allies over sanctions – weakening the North American Treaty Organization (NATO) and the future efficacy of U.S. sanctions in the process, and potentially paving the way toward another disastrous war of choice in the Middle East.

■ 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: Trump's apparent strategy is to punish Iran at the expense of nonproliferation, security in the Middle East, relations with European allies, the efficacy of future sanctions and the diplomatic credibility of the United States. The Iranian people are likely to once again bear the brunt of the sanctions, not the Iranian government or the Revolutionary Guard Corps that are the supposed targets. I'm also deeply concerned that Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and National Security Advisor John Bolton will be pushing Trump for military confrontation, as they've advocated in the past.

■ 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: The idea of a new security architecture for the Middle East is a good idea. For it to be sustainable and inclusive, Iran would need to be a participant and not a subject. President Obama hinted his preference for such an arrangement, indicating that Saudi Arabia and Iran need to learn how to share the region and make some sort of cold peace.

The problem is this isn't the sort of security architecture that Trump and his team are looking for. After reneging on America's word on sanctions relief under the nuclear deal, Pompeo demanded additional Iranian concessions well beyond what nations endorsed under the JCPOA in addition to far-reaching

Russia and China seem well positioned to swoop in and take business from European companies forced to depart Iran as a result of U.S. sanctions.

between the U.S. and Iran.

I would, however, caution that nothing is ever preordained under the Trump administration. Advisors are hired and fired on whims, and Trump clearly wants a big foreign policy win that he is willing to re-write the political rule book in order to get. Even though his administration has done everything possible to alienate Iran away from the negotiating table, I wouldn't rule out engaging the Trump administration at some point to see if they'd be willing to meet in the middle on some of their demands. We've already seen Trump go from threatening «fire and fury» on North Korea to praising Kim Jong-Un as «honorable.» It's not impossible that Trump could similarly flip if he perceived engagement with Iran to be politically beneficial.

■ Some believe what Pompeo asked for yesterday somehow is declaration of war against Iran. What do you think of this?

A: Pompeo and Bolton appear ideologically inclined to use force against Iran. Pompeo was careful to demand almost everything conceivable from Iran, thereby making a deal on any issue almost impossible, while also stopping short of openly calling for war or regime change which would be politically toxic. Their goals appear to be to limit diplomatic prospects and provoke Iran into actions that will help justify their disastrous policies.

Where Trump stands, however, is anyone's guess. He clearly has internalized antipathy toward Iran, as has been made evident through his Muslim ban and his repeated attacks on the deal. The danger is that even if he wants to avoid war in the Middle East, at least in theory, he is surrounded by hawkish advisors who are trying their hardest to push him toward military confrontation.

What's the matter with Europe?

ARTICLE

By Paul Krugman



If you had to identify a place and time where the humanitarian dream — the vision of a society offering decent lives to all its members — came closest to realization, that place and time would surely be Western Europe in the six decades after World War II. It was one of history's miracles: a continent ravaged by dictatorship, genocide and war transformed itself into a model of democracy and broadly shared prosperity.

Indeed, by the early years of this century Europeans were in many ways better off than Americans. Unlike us, they had guaranteed health care, which went along with higher life expectancy; they had much lower rates of poverty; they were actually more likely than we were to be gainfully employed during their prime working years.

But now Europe is in big trouble. So, of course, are we. In particular, while democracy is under siege on both sides of the Atlantic, the collapse of freedom, if it comes, will probably happen here first. But it's worth taking a break from our own Trumpian nightmare to look at Europe's woes, some but not all of which parallel ours.

Many of Europe's problems come from the disastrous decision, a generation ago, to adopt a single currency. The creation of the euro led to a temporary wave of euphoria, with vast amounts of money flowing into nations like Spain and Greece; then the bubble burst. And while countries like Iceland that retained their own money were able to quickly regain competitiveness by devaluing their currencies, eurozone nations were forced into a protracted depression, with extremely high unemployment, as they struggled to get their costs down.

Europe's troubles

This depression was made worse by an elite consensus, in the teeth of the evidence, that the root of Europe's troubles was not misaligned costs but fiscal profligacy, and that the solution was draconian austerity that made the

depression even worse.

Some of the victims of the euro crisis, like Spain, have finally managed to claw their way back to competitiveness. Others, however, haven't. Greece remains a disaster area — and Italy, one of the three big economies remaining in the European Union, has now suffered two lost decades: G.D.P. per capita is no higher now than it was in 2000.

So it isn't really surprising that when Italy held elections in March, the big winners were anti-European Union parties — the populist Five Star Movement and the far-right League. In fact, the surprise is that it didn't happen sooner.

Those parties are now set to form a government. While the policies of that government aren't completely clear, they'll surely involve a break with the rest of Europe on multiple fronts: a reversal of fiscal austerity that may well end with exit from the euro, along with a crackdown on immigrants and refugees.

Some scary precedents

Nobody knows how this will end, but developments elsewhere in Europe offer some scary precedents. Hungary has effectively become a one-party

autocracy, ruled by an ethnonationalist ideology. Poland seems well down the same path.

So what went wrong with the "European project" — the long march toward peace, democracy and prosperity, underpinned by ever-closer economic and political integration? As I said, the giant mistake of the euro played a big role. But Poland, which never joined the euro, sailed through the economic crisis pretty much unscathed; yet democracy there is collapsing all the same.

I would suggest, however, that there's a deeper story here. There have always been dark forces in Europe (as there are here). When the Berlin Wall fell, a political scientist I know joked, "Now that Eastern Europe is free from the alien ideology of Communism, it can return to its true path: fascism." We both knew he had a point.

What kept these dark forces in check was the prestige of a European elite committed to democratic values. But that prestige was squandered through mismanagement — and the damage was compounded by unwillingness to face up to what was happening. Hungary's government has turned its back on everything Europe stands for — but it's still getting large-scale aid from Brussels.

And here, it seems to me, is where we see parallels with developments in America.

True, we didn't suffer a euro-style disaster. (Yes, we have a continentwide currency, but we have the federalized fiscal and banking institutions that make such a currency workable.) But the bad judgment of our "centrist" elites has rivaled that of their European counterparts. Remember that in 2010-11, with

America still suffering from mass unemployment, most of the Very Serious People in Washington were obsessed with ... entitlement reform.

Meanwhile our centrists, along with much of the news media, spent years in denial about the radicalization of the G.O.P., engaging in almost pathological false equivalence. And now America finds itself governed by a party with as little respect for democratic norms or rule of law as Hungary's Fidesz.

The point is that what's wrong with Europe is, in a deep sense, the same thing that's wrong with America. And in both cases, the path to redemption will be very, very hard.

(Source: The NYT)

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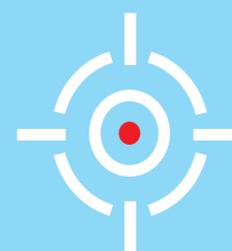
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Meshgin-Shahr home to 200 historical forts

HERITAGE TEHRAN — Ruins and remains of over 200 historical strongholds and fortresses have so far been identified across the city of Meshgin-Shahr and its surroundings in Ardabil province, northwestern Iran.

“Such numbers of defensive fortifications chronicle previous history of this county while the oldest of which is being identified in Shahar Yeri, an archaeological site that dates back to 2600 BC,” CHTN quoted Moharram Jafari, the provincial tourism chief, as saying.



Jafari added that study, rehabilitation and revival of the ancient forts is being carried out regularly in order to attract credit.

Meshgin-Shahr embraces a variety of tourist attractions, including spa complexes, ancient bas-reliefs, Islamic structures and a massive suspension bridge. The region is also one of the main jumping-off points into the towering Mount Sabalan.

Indonesia eyes French market to boost tourism

Indonesia is eyeing France, a major tourism market in Europe, to further boost foreign tourist arrivals in Indonesia through collaboration with French travel organizers, an official at the Indonesian Tourism Ministry said, Xinhua reported.

Deputy Tourism Minister Nia Niscaya, who supervises marketing development in Europe, said collaboration with local French travel agents and organizers was a strategic move to increase the number of French tourists.

The progressing contacts with five prominent French travel agencies and organizers resulted in the commitment of those agencies and organizers to survey places and accommodations in Bali from July to August and bring significant number of French tourists to the renowned Indonesian resort island from September to November, she said.

“The French market is very interesting. It has good profile and market potentialities. Now it’s a matter of how we can seize this opportunity,” Nia said, adding that around 23.5 million French people travel abroad each year.

Most of those travel agencies and organizers called for direct flights from France to Indonesia to ensure increasing visits of French tourists to Indonesia, Nia added.

She said French travelers contributed significantly to global tourism spending as the country was ranked fifth with 40 billion U.S. dollars in 2016.

Together with Germany and Britain, France became a major propeller of Europe tourism spending in the year, which accounted for 48 percent of the global tourism market.

Indonesian Tourism Minister Arief Yahya supported the ministry’s efforts to tap the French market by intensifying the collaboration with French travel agencies and organizers.

“This is a good move as France is apparently a promising market in Europe. We expect to see significant number of French tourist arrivals as the outcome of this concept,” he said.

(Source: Trend)

Classic cars museum to open in Tabriz

HERITAGE TEHRAN — A museum for displaying vintage and classic cars is due to open in the city of Tabriz, northwestern East Azarbaijan province.

The museum is to contain noteworthy classic vehicles that Iranian collector Khalil Ghaffari has gathered over the span of four decades, ISNA reported.

“All cars to go on show at this private museum are attributed to prominent personalities,” said Morteza Abdar who presides over the CHHTO provincial office.

Iran is a heaven for veteran cars and motorcycles. On May 16, the Touring & Automobile Club of the Islamic Republic of Iran (TACI) staged a parade of such vehicles across Tehran on the occasion of the national cultural heritage week.

Earlier this year, another private museum devoted to sound and music gear made its debut in Tabriz.

Tabriz hosts a number of renowned historical and religious sites, including Jameh Mosque of Tabriz and Arg of Tabriz, and UNESCO-registered Tabriz Historic Bazaar Complex.

In 2015, the inter-governmental Organization of Islamic Cooperation selected Tabriz as the capital of Islamic tourism for 2018.



Iranian arrivals to Azerbaijan fall 5.4%

TOURISM TEHRAN — The number of Iranian nationals visiting Azerbaijan dropped by 5.4 percent in the first four months of 2018 over the same period last year, AzerNews reported.

Of the total visitors to the country, 28.3% were from Russia, 21.9% from Georgia, 13.4% from Iran, 11.3% from Turkey, 4.6% from the United Arab Emirates, 2% from Ukraine, 1.9% from Iraq, and 16.5% were citizens of other countries, the report said.

Currently, citizens of 15 countries including Iran can obtain Azerbaijan visas via self-service terminals upon arrival at the Heydar Aliyev International Airport in Baku. A total of 99,158 Iranian nationals visited the country during the first three months of 2018.



Ancient gold artifacts seized from smugglers

HERITAGE TEHRAN — Iranian authorities have seized a set of gold necklace and bracelet estimated to date from Sassanid era (224-651), Mehr reported.

The jewelry was confiscated from two smugglers of historical relics in Tehran following reports obtained from cultural heritage advocates, the report said.

Under the Sasanians, Iranian art experienced a general renaissance. Metalwork and gem engraving became highly sophisticated. Another characteristic feature of the Sasanian art is rock sculptures carved on limestone cliffs, for example at Bishapur, Naqsh-e Rostam, and Naqsh-e Rostam in Fars province.



Centuries-old roof drain structure found in Isfahan

HERITAGE TEHRAN — A centuries-old roof drain structure has recently been found on a north-wing rooftop of the Ali Qapu Palace in Isfahan, IRIB reported.

Isfahan provincial tourism chief, Fereydon Allahyari, explained that a ducting structure and a stone pond were exposed while an archaeological task was underway to lay out a map for the palace’s water canals.

“The pool, measuring 100 cm by 86 cm with a depth of 40 cm, is attached to water well via a stone canal.” Built at the very end of the 16th century as a residence for Shah Abbas I, a Safavid king, the six-storey palace overlooks the UNESCO-registered Imam Square.

Profusion of tree-lined boulevards, Persian gardens and important Islamic buildings give Isfahan a highly touristic appeal that is unmatched by many other Iranian cities.



Trump’s strict travel policies causing America to ‘fall behind competitors’, U.S. travel chief warns

The president of the U.S. Travel Association, Roger Dow, has warned that the country is in danger of “falling behind” its competitors.

The U.S. share of global long-haul travel fell from 12.9 percent to 11.9 percent between 2016 and 2017, with a five percent drop in arrival numbers between 2015 and 2017, reports the Travel Trade Gazette.

North America saw an overall rise of 2 percent in tourism numbers, largely in Canada and Mexico, but the U.S. witnessed a decrease, according to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

During this period, the U.S. is one of only two top global destinations to witness a decline in long-haul arrivals, according to the U.S. Travel Association. The other is Turkey, which has experienced a number of highly publicized terrorist attacks in recent years, but is now enjoying a resurgence.

Speaking at the IPW travel trade conference on 22 May, Dow said: “More people around the world are travelling than ever before – but too many are visiting places other than the U.S.”

“Bottom line: we’re falling behind our competitors. France – up. Germany – up. China – up.”

He added: “From 2015 to 2017, the U.S. share of the global travel market slipped from 13.6 percent to 11.9 percent. That may not sound like a lot, but it translates to \$32bn in lost visitor spending and 100,000 fewer U.S. jobs.”

Dow also referenced President Trump’s strict travel policies, arguing that the U.S. must commit to “pursuing pro-travel policies” and embrace processes to make travel easier.

“We are hopeful [Trump] will make it clear that he wants more business and leisure travelers here,” said Dow. “And we think he will.”

Dow added that tight security could be combined with

maintaining “robust international visitor numbers” and homed in on the “extreme vetting” of U.S. visa applicants as a cause for concern.

“This proposal would demand the social media profile information and travel history from 14 million visa applicants,” said Dow. “That’s a vast expansion of private data collection with dubious security value.”

“Making the U.S. visa system unnecessarily intrusive or burdensome will impact global interest in travel to the U.S. Even a small decline could cost the U.S. economy millions, which is why we are engaged on this issue.”

While the U.S. has seen a drop in its share of the long-haul market, other countries have witnessed a large rise. Canada’s share of the market has gone up by 21.2 percent, Spain’s 32.7 percent and the UK 17.5 percent.

(Source: Independent)

5 ways to get involved in ecotourism, foster a more sustainable travel experience

By Ashley Williams

From transportation and accommodation choices to how travelers spend their money, many people may not consider their vacation’s potentially negative consequences for environment and local communities.

That’s why sustainable tourism is starting to catch on, as more travelers become aware of those impacts and simple steps they can do to minimize them.

A recent survey of 1,000 Americans found that 45 percent of travelers consider ecotourism and conservation when making their travel plans, according to the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI).

The concept, which is referred to as a number of additional terms including responsible travel, conservation travel and ecotourism, involves respecting the environment and not contributing to its degradation.

Below are five ways to incorporate sustainable practices into one’s travel plans.

■ Purchase locally made souvenirs and crafts

Choosing to buy goods produced in the locations that travelers visit rather than picking up imported souvenirs helps keep money circulating through the local economy. These items may be more expensive than imports, but purchasing them provides more direct impact.

Souvenirs or other items that are shipped in from other places also have a larger carbon footprint, according to Green Global Travel.

■ Research your accommodation and tour operator

One of the first steps an eco-friendly traveler can take is carefully choosing where they plan to stay as well as the tour guides they’d like to show them around throughout their trip. Experts recommend looking into their practices and sustainability initiatives.

“What’s their energy usage? Where are they getting their electrical supplies – from wind or solar,” said Jonathan Brunger, general manager of adventure travel company, Adventure Life. “Who are the staff? Are they from the local communities?”

Taking into consideration the answers to these and similar questions will help travelers find accommodations that promote sustainable practices which respect the local culture and environment.

However, travelers should be aware of greenwashing, which occurs when companies or hotels merely use the jargon of sustainable practices through advertising and marketing without actually implementing practices that reduce their impact on the environment.

■ Opt for public transportation

“A lot of travelers want to look at their transportation options,” Brunger said. “How are you moving around? Are you taking private transfers? Are two people in their own car, or are you sharing transfers?”

Ridesharing is a more sustainable travel option whenever possible, experts say. Using public transportation, walking or biking not only benefits the environment, but it saves

travelers money.

Before your journey begins, experts also recommend selecting non-stop flights whenever possible, as it uses less fuel. Green Global Travel recommends flying with airlines that are members of the International Air Transport Association, as they offer carbon offset programs to neutralize their aircraft’s emissions.

■ Minimize waste and avoid plastic

With an estimated 91 percent of plastic going unrecycled, it’s better for the environment if travelers cut out usage of plastic altogether. Most experts recommend avoiding products wrapped in plastic to help minimize waste.

Bringing along reusable water bottles and ditching the plastic water bottles also helps the environment.

■ Be respectful of wildlife

Native wildlife and plants in most countries, including the United States, are protected through the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), according to the World Wildlife Fund.

When traveling, people are strongly discouraged to purchase souvenirs made from various animals like elephants, birds and snakes. Selling and purchasing these items are part of the illegal wildlife trade that further compromises the futures of animals whose existences are already at stake.

It’s also important to avoid touching or feeding animals in the wild, experts say. Doing so might make them more reliant on people as a food source and might lead to attacks.

(Source: accuweather.com)

ROUND THE GLOBE

Asante Traditional Buildings

To the north-east of Kumasi, Ghana these are the last material remains of the great Asante civilization, which reached its high point in the 18th century. Since the dwellings are made of earth, wood and straw, they are vulnerable to the onslaught of time and weather.

Arranged around courtyards, the buildings are constructed of timber, bamboo and mud plaster and originally had thatched roofs. The unique decorative bas-reliefs that adorn the walls are bold and depict a wide variety of motifs. Common forms include spiral and arabesque details with representations of animals, birds and plants, linked to traditional “Adinkra” symbols. As with other traditional art forms of the Asante,



these designs are not merely ornamental, they also have symbolic meanings, associated with the ideas and beliefs of the Asante people, and have been handed down from generation to generation.

The buildings, their rich color, and the skill and diversity of their decorations are the last surviving examples of a significant traditional style of architecture that epitomized the influential, powerful and wealthy Asante Kingdom of the late 18th to late 19th centuries.

A UNESCO World Heritage, the Asante Traditional Buildings reflect and reinforce a complex and intricate technical, religious and spiritual heritage.

The traditional religion, still practiced in the Asante shrines, takes the form of consulting with the deities to seek advice on specific situations, or before an important initiative. That is why the shrines have been maintained complete with all their symbolic features.

(Source: UNESCO)

HIV can lurk in the brain and increase risk of dementia, even if you're not sick



The HIV virus, which causes AIDS, has long been known to target and disable cells of the immune system, which are responsible for fighting off invading microorganisms and for suppressing malignant cancers.

More recently, researchers also learned HIV not only targets immune cells in the bloodstream but also in the brain and spinal cord and that HIV can lie dormant in a person's body for many years.

My mentor, Dr. Habibeh Khoshbouei, has been working on this problem and learned that one consequence of HIV in the brain is that age-related diseases develop much earlier.

This includes neurological conditions such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, as well as an increased susceptibility to drug addiction.

Powerful drug combinations

For more than 20 years, powerful drug combinations of antiretroviral drugs have been available to treat people with HIV infection, and these agents have dramatically raised life expectancy for HIV-infected patients from 36 to 49 years of age.

Though combinatorial antiretroviral therapies (CART) reduce viral loads to undetectable levels in the blood, HIV can hide

within the central nervous system, where it can integrate into the genomes of brain cells called microglia – the immune cells of the brain.

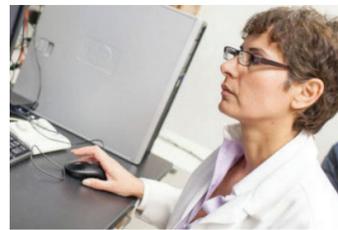
In the brain, HIV continues to produce viral proteins and damage both infected and non-infected cells in the brain, boosting the risk for dementia, addiction and other neurological problems.

Everyone with HIV will experience this, since HIV integrates into the genome and CART has issues crossing into the brain. The question is: why?

To answer this, we used a mouse in which we can control the levels of HIV viral protein in order to probe the link between HIV infection and neurological disease.

Our lab discovered that an HIV protein, called HIV-1 Tat, reduces the level of an important protein required for the production of a dopamine, a neurotransmitter, in the brain.

Dopamine is produced by neurons in the central nervous system and by immune cells in the blood.



Dr. Habibeh Khoshbouei

A confocal microscope

Using a confocal microscope to see fine details, my colleagues and I carefully examined the dopamine producing areas in the brains of mice containing HIV-1 Tat protein and were surprised to discover that the neurons were alive.

But, many that normally produced dopamine were unable to produce as much. We also found that an enzyme necessary to make dopamine, called tyrosine hydroxylase, was no longer detectable in some neurons.

When microglial cells secrete the HIV-1 Tat protein, it is able to enter dopamine neurons and lower their activity so that they produce less dopamine.

That reduces their ability to communicate with other cells in the brain, which can disrupt the ability to move and reward related behaviors. (Source: sciencealert.com)

In the brain, HIV continues to produce viral proteins and damage both infected and non-infected cells in the brain, boosting the risk for dementia, addiction and other neurological problems.

Mongoose inherit behavior from role models rather than parents



Young mongooses learn lifelong habits from role models rather than inheriting them from genetic parents, new research shows. Banded mongooses live in social groups where pups are consistently cared for one-to-one by a single adult known as an "escort" – not their mother or father.

They develop "niche" diets and, by studying these, University of Exeter researchers showed pups inherit the behavior of their escort, rather than parents.

The findings offer a fascinating insight into one of the great puzzles of evolution – how diversity persists rather than disappearing with passing generations.

"It was a big surprise to discover that foraging behavior learned in the first three months of life lasts a lifetime," said Professor Michael Cant, of the Centre for Ecology and Conservation on the University of Exeter's Penryn Campus in Cornwall.

"This is pretty remarkable, since we have no evidence that pups and escorts preferentially hang out together after pups become independent.

Cultural inheritance

"Cultural inheritance, the transmission of socially learned information across generations, is a huge influence on human behavior: we behave the way we do not just because of our genes but also because of what we learn from parents, teachers and cultural role models.

"It is less well appreciated that cultural inheritance is a major force shaping behavior

in a wide range of non-human animals, from insects to apes – and mongooses."

To explore the influence of escorts on eating habits, the researchers chemically analyzed the whiskers of individual mongooses.

The findings help explain how diverse behavior persists in nature.

Early critics of Darwin's theory of natural selection argued that, if his theory was correct, the result should be the erosion of the very variation he suggested as the engine of evolution.

Genetic reasons

The genetic reasons why this does not happen have long been understood, but the same criticism could be made of cultural inheritance: when everyone learns from the same teacher, or where each individual learns from everyone, variation should disappear.

But the new research on mongooses shows that where individuals learn from their own personal teacher, cultural inheritance can work to maintain diversity.

"Cultural inheritance is usually expected to lead to uniformity within groups," said Dr. Harry Marshall of the Centre for Research in Ecology, Evolution and Behavior at the University of Roehampton, a co-author of the study.

"But our work confirms a classic theoretical prediction that where individuals learn from their own personal teacher, cultural inheritance can work to maintain diversity."

(Source: eurekaalert.org)

22 percent of the world's population to be obese in 27 years: new research



As the obesity epidemic worsens around the world, new findings reveal that it will get worse in the future and more people will get diagnosed with diabetes.

Researchers project that 22 percent of the world's population will be obese by 2045. The findings were presented at the 2018 European Congress on Obesity in Vienna. These numbers are up from 14 percent in 2017.

The obesity rate in the United States is also projected to increase from 39 percent in 2017 to 55 percent in 2045.

In addition to obesity, the researchers believe that diabetes will also sharply increase from 9.1 percent in 2017 to 11.7 percent by 2045. That means that one in eight people around the world will have diabetes. In the United States, diabetes is projected to jump from 14 percent to 18 percent.

"These numbers underline the staggering challenge the world will face in the future in terms of numbers of people who are obese, or have Type-2 diabetes, or both," said Alan Moses, chief medical officer at Novo Nordisk, a Denmark healthcare company.

Medical data

"(In addition to) the medical challenges these people will face, the costs to countries' health systems will be enormous."

To conduct this study, the researchers analyzed global medical data from the

World Health Organization. They examined populations between 2000-2014. The data was organized by country, age, and body mass index (BMI). The researchers examined the diabetes risk for each group and estimated potential growth.

BMI is a measure of body fat based on height and weight. It is a common statistic in the medical community, but it has been scrutinized for not being a good indication of health.

Although the data was peer-reviewed for selection at the 2018 European Congress, it has not been published in a scientific journal yet.

On a positive note, the researchers believe that humanity can reverse the global obesity trends if there is an aggressive and coordinated effort to reduce the problem. Each government must take action to tackle the issue.

"Individual countries must work on the best strategy for them," said Moses. "Each country is different based on unique genetic, social and environmental conditions which is why there is no 'one size fits all' approach that will work."

The researchers said that the global obesity level must be reduced by 25 percent in order to keep diabetes under 10 percent. In the United States, the obesity level would have to drop to 28 percent in order to bring down diabetes rates.

(Source: Tech Times)

Export, production growth, ESCO's top priorities in current year

Chief Executive of Esfahan Steel Company (ESCO) Eng. Sadeghi said that increasing production and export volume of steel products has been considered as top priorities of his company in the current Iranian calendar year in 1397 (started March 21, 2018), the Public Relations Dept. of the company reported.

This giant industrial and production unit managed to increase its production and export volume in the past Iranian calendar year in 1396 (ended March 20, 2018) at the unsparing effort of its industrious engineers



and laborers, he maintained.

He went on to say that his company experienced a considerable 79 and 120 percent export growth in the past year in terms of volume and value respectively.

Optimal use of relevant equipment and machinery and indigenization of parts and equipment have been cited as one of the main factors in production growth of this industrial and production unit, Sadeghi emphasized.

For the first time in the country, Esfahan

Steel Company managed to receive UK CAREA certificate which is regarded as one of the most reliable export certificates, he added.

By receiving UK CARES certificate, Esfahan Steel Company managed to export its products to the countries including England, Thailand and Burma, the manager stressed.

In the end, he said, "once considerable 20 percent export growth of the company is realized, half of products of this company will be exported into other countries in the current year (to end March 20, 2019)."

7,000b Rials worth of participation bond sold by Mashhad Municipality: official

Economic Deputy Municipality of Mashhad and Head of Mashhad Municipality's Investment Organization Reza Khajeh Naeini said that totally 7,000 billion rials worth of participation bond envisioned for the completion of construction operation of Mashhad Urban and Suburban Railway Company, Lines No. 2 and 3 was sold in due date, the Public Relations Dept. of the municipality reported.

He went on to say that offering participation bonds for the completion of construction operation of subway lines in the shrine city

of Mashhad, valued at 7,000 billion rials, started in all branches of Ayandeh Bank on May 12.

Over 4,000 billion rials worth of participation bonds was offered to applicant at the first stage of this plan which was lasted by May 17.

Given the high welcome of people from stock subscription bidding procedure, the time for offering participation bond was extended for a period of another four days i.e. by May 22.

He reiterated, "yesterday, whole par-

ticipation bonds for the construction of metro lines in Mashhad were offered to applicants before termination of the renewed deadline, based on which, its 20 percent on-account interest will be paid in every three months."

He expressed his special thanks to officials at the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) and noble people of the country who embarked on purchasing participation bonds in line with strengthening and improving urban transport infrastructures, the Public Relations Dept. of the municipality concluded.



Scientists introduce cosmochemical model for Pluto formation

Scientists integrated NASA's New Horizons discoveries with data from ESA's Rosetta mission to develop a new theory about how Pluto may have formed at the edge of our Solar System.

Ralph Instrument Pluto Maps. New Horizons not only showed humanity what Pluto looks like, but also provided information on the composition of Pluto's atmosphere and surface. These maps – assembled using data from the Ralph instrument – indicate regions rich in methane (CH₄), nitrogen (N₂), carbon monoxide (CO) and water (H₂O) ices. Sputnik Planitia shows an especially strong signature of nitrogen near the equator.

Southwest Research Institute scientists integrated NASA's New Horizons discoveries with data from ESA's Rosetta mission to develop a new theory about how Pluto may have formed at the edge of our Solar System.

"We've developed what we call 'the giant comet' cosmochemical model of Pluto formation," said Dr. Christopher Glein of SwRI's Space Science and Engineering Division. The research is described in a paper published online today in Icarus. At the heart of the research is the nitrogen-rich ice in Sputnik Planitia, a large glacier that forms the left lobe of the bright Tombaugh Regio feature on Pluto's surface. "We found an intriguing consistency between the estimated amount of nitrogen inside the glacier and the amount that would be expected if Pluto was formed by the agglomeration of roughly a billion comets or other Kuiper Belt objects similar in chemical composition to 67P, the comet explored by Rosetta."

In addition to the comet model, scientists also investigated a solar model, with Pluto forming from very cold ices that would have had a chemical composition that more closely matches that of the Sun.

(Source: Science Daily)

Antarctica's giant canyons could make melting worse, say scientists

When you picture Antarctica, you probably see vast white ice stretching evenly into the distance. But below all that ice, the terrain is surprisingly rugged, which could have serious consequences for how the continent's glaciers melt.

That's according to a recent paper published in the journal Geophysical Research Letters. In the paper, a team of scientists reported that they'd discovered three massive canyons in the land beneath Antarctica's ice.

"Massive" is no understatement: The largest of the three is more than 200 miles long, its width in places spanning 20 miles, and certain parts more than a mile deep. The scientists named it "Foundation Trough." The other two aren't anything to sniff at, either: One is 180 miles long and the other 90 miles.

"If climate conditions change in Antarctica, we might expect the ice in these troughs to flow a lot faster towards the sea," first author Kate Winter, a scientist at Northumbria University in the UK, told the BBC. "That makes them really important, and we simply didn't know they existed before now."

To understand the landscape beneath Antarctica's ice, the scientists used a radar. Beams of light were shot at a surface, and the time it took for the signal to bounce back was measured, producing a map of the hidden terrain.

Winter and her colleagues were particularly interested in an area scientists dubbed the "bottleneck" zone, where the east and west Antarctic ice sheets come together.

(Source: Newsweek)

Could eating more seafood help couples conceive?

Couples may have an easier time conceiving if both the man and the woman eat seafood more frequently, a new study suggests.

In the study, the researchers found that couples who included more seafood in their diets had sex more often, and tended to get pregnant faster, than couples who ate less seafood.



However, the study only noted an association among seafood intake, sexual activity and fertility; it didn't prove cause and effect.

What's more, couples didn't have to eat very much seafood – such as shrimp, canned tuna and salmon, among other types – to see an association between the consumption of these foods and their odds of getting pregnant. Couples in which both partners consumed two or more 4-ounce servings of seafood a week while they were trying to conceive took less time to become pregnant, and had sex more frequently, than couples who ate less seafood, according to the study in The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism.

The findings stress the importance of both the woman's and the man's diet in the time it takes them to conceive, and suggest that both partners should incorporate more seafood into their diets for maximum fertility benefits, lead author Audrey Gaskins, a nutrition researcher at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health in Boston, said in a statement.

There has not been much research on the possible links between seafood and fertility, but the few studies that have investigated the relationship may have focused on the potential harms of seafood on fertility, such as exposure to mercury and other environmental chemicals that could have reproductive consequences, according to the study authors. These concerns may have led some women to shy away from eating fish when attempting to become pregnant, the researchers added.

(Source: Live Science)

Iran unveils European-made SAR helicopters

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Six European-made search and rescue (SAR) helicopters which are to be used for the first time in Iran were unveiled on Saturday at Payam Airport in Alborz province, IRNA reported.

The SAR helicopters, which are used to search for and provide aid to people who are in distress or imminent danger, are European-made and have been purchased over the past two years.

These Airbus helicopters have advanced equipment such as modern stretcher and special devices for patient's resuscitation.



Air medical services necessary

"Given the geographical features of Iran and high rate of road accidents in the country, providing urgent medical service to victims of traffic-related accidents is necessary. To do so, it is essential to develop and strengthen air medical services," Ali Sadr-o-Sadat, deputy health minister for management and resources development said on the sidelines of the unveiling ceremony.

"Every year, some 40,000 deaths in Iran are related to different accidents and traffic-related accidents are the leading causes of such deaths," Sadr-o-Sadat regretted.

"Despite the efforts taken to improve road safety, increase the safety of vehicles and promote safe driving culture, the death toll is still high among Iranian citizens," he said.

"Iran is one of the largest countries worldwide, which is covered with deserts, mountains, plains, and coasts. Due to such geographical features, providing medical services through roads could be difficult. For this reason, the air medical service requires to be developed," Sadr-o-Sadat explained.

"Currently, ninety percent of the world's medical emergencies use this type of helicopter in air medical services. And we strive to purchase a number of them in the near future," he highlighted.

On May 21, Iran's forensics organization reported that 1,034 individuals lost their lives in road crashes during the New Year holidays from March 16 to April 4, indicating a 24-percent rise year on year.

LEARN ENGLISH

Working Out

A: Do you want to go catch a movie tonight?

B: I can't, I have to go to the **gym**.

A: Come on! You can go tomorrow, just **skip** it today. It's not as if you are gonna get in trouble!

B: Actually I will! I am **working out** with a **personal trainer** that **gets on my case** if I don't go. I like it, because it makes me feel more **obligated** to go and get healthy.

A: That's cool, does your personal trainer basically teach you how to work out?

B: Yeah. He makes a work put plan depending on the areas I want to work on, or the **muscles** I want to build. Like for example in order to get better **muscle tone** in my **abs**, **pecs** and **biceps**, he makes me work out with free weights. Then for my **quads**, **calves** and **hamstrings**, I do leg lifts or **squats**.

A: Sounds like you are really getting in shape!

Key vocabulary

gym: a place where you go to exercise

skip: to not do something that you usually do or that you should do to work out: to make your body fit and strong by doing exercises

personal trainer: professional who educates people about physical fitness

be/get on somebody's case: to be criticizing someone continuously

obligate: do something because you feel it is the right thing to do

muscle: tissue composed of fibers capable of contracting to effect bodily movement

muscle tone: strength or firmness of muscles and skin

abs: abdominals; muscles of the front area of the stomach

pecs: pectoral; the chest or breast area

bicep: a large muscle at the front of the upper arm

quads: quadriceps; the large muscle at the front of your thigh

calf: the part of the back of your leg between your knee and your ankle

hamstring: any of the tendons at the rear of the human knee

squat: a lift or a weightlifting exercise in which one squats and stands while holding a weighted barbell supported by the back of the shoulders

Supplementary vocabulary

steroids: compounds that help to grow muscles at a fast rate and help in recovery

deadlift: lift in which one pulls a bar from the ground to the waist

bodybuilder: a person who practices bodybuilding.

locker room: a room containing lockers, as in a gymnasium, factory, or school, for changing clothes and for the storage and safekeeping of personal belongings

(Source: irlanguage.com)

Mushroom poisoning kills 18 in Iran

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Toxic mushrooms have killed 18 and poisoned 1,151 people in the country over the past few days, Emergency Medical Services Organization spokesman Mojtaba Khaledi has said.

The poisonous mushrooms targeted their first victims in western province of Kermanshah with 7 people died of the poisoning and 389 people were admitted to the hospitals, Khaledi said, adding that most of those affected were from western parts of the country.

So far provinces of Lorestan, Kordestan, West Azarbaijan, Zanjan, Ilam, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer Ahmad, Qazvin, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, Fars, Markazi and Hamedan reported mushroom poisoning cases, he added.

Some 1,151 became ill eating the mushrooms and admitted to the hospitals and unfortunately 96 are still hospitalized and some are now on organ transplant waiting list to receive a liver or kidney, Khabaronline quoted Khaledi as saying.

Health ministry has banned buying loose mushrooms to avoid further complications. Citizens are also warned against picking wild mushrooms which may even resemble the edible ones.

Oliya Sami, an official with Hamedan province emergency medical services has linked the recent events with recent heavy rainfalls and considerable growth of wild mushrooms particularly in western parts of the country, YJC reported on Saturday.



Destroying angels contain a complex group of poisonous substances called amatoxins which initially cause gastrointestinal disorders with symptoms such as diarrhea, nausea and stomach pains occurring within five to twelve hours.

"Right now it is better to avoid purchasing and consuming mushrooms and in case one started experiencing symptoms such as nausea and diarrhea after eating mushrooms they should refer to a hospital in no time," Sami explained.

Amanita virosa, the recent serial killer

The Food and Drug Administration has announced that Amanita virosa, commonly referred to as the destroying angel, is the deadly poisonous fungus which has been killing people off for the past days.

The destroying angel is found infrequently in the lowlands but is more plentiful in mountainous areas.

Destroying angels contain a complex group of poisonous substances called amatoxins which initially cause gastrointestinal disorders with symptoms such as diarrhea, nausea and stomach pains occurring within five to twelve hours. Cruelly, the symptoms usually fade away for several hours or even a day or two, tricking the victim into thinking that they are recovering. When in due course the symptoms return with a vengeance, it may well be too late: kidney and liver damage is already underway. Without treatment, coma and eventual death are almost inevitable.

Often, people hospitalized late into a poisoning episode can be saved only by major surgery and a liver transplant, and even then recovery is a precarious, painful and protracted process.

Extreme use of renewable resources worsens water stress: official



A chick is floating on water in Shadegan wetland, southwestern province of Khuzestan. Wetlands dryness in southern and southwestern areas, caused by ignoring the water right of the wetlands coupled with drought spells, Iran has given rise to sand and dust storms in the region.

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — Iran is withdrawing some 88 percent of its renewable water resources which is exacerbating water shortage in the country, Hedayat Fahmi, an official with the Ministry of Energy has said.

Natural renewable water resources are the total amount of a country's water resources (internal and external resources), both surface water and groundwater, which is generated through the hydrological cycle. The amount is computed on a yearly basis. Water withdrawal refers to water that has been removed from its source for a specific use. The major sectors that withdraw water are irrigated agriculture, industries and municipalities.

"We should accept the fact that Iran has limited renewable water resources and the recent droughts are resulting in severe water shortages in the country," Fahmi explained.

Moreover, population growth intensifies water shortage, meaning that even with adequate water resources the water is only enough to quench the needs of a limited population, he added.

Withdrawing some 40 percent of the renewable water resources is acceptable and won't pressure

on water resources but exploiting 60 percent or more of the resources would result in water stress and even crises, he warned.

Fahmi went on to say that water shortage can threaten food and even national security, as water-related challenges have the potential to constitute environmental, economic and social predicaments in the region.

He further highlighted that reforming irrigation practices is the main solution to resolve the problem.

"We had warned about water shortage in (13)70s [falling on 1990s], and had we taken heed of water use at the time in industrial and agriculture sector the situation would be different now," he regretted.

"Building dams is neither good nor bad, what we should know is where to construct a dam and how many dams we are allowed to build as they can prove to be effective in managing water resources or they can lead to severe water shortages," he stated.

The most important things is to provide the water right of the wetlands to avoid bigger problems, he concluded.

463,000 foreign nationals studying in Iranian schools

Since the issuance of the decree some 115,000 more foreign national students have enrolled in Iranian schools, he highlighted.

Although, there are no problems for enrollment of Afghan national students in Iranian schools, whether they are documented or illegally living in Iran, we need the help of international entities to provide the necessary support for Afghan national students because some of them are underprivileged and struggling financially that can't afford to pay for books and stationery, Karimi added.

"We are calling on NGOs to pay more attention to the education of Afghan children in Iran," he said.

"We are also preparing a guideline for registering Afghan students for the next school year (starting on September 23)," he stated.



ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

Iran urges Afghanistan to resume talks on Hamoun wetlands

Iran and Afghanistan should resume negotiations on the water rights of Hamoun wetlands, YJC quoted Masoud Tajrishi, deputy chief of the Department of Environment, as saying on Friday.

Commenting on Afghanistan's injudicious dam construction on its tributaries Tajrishi also noted that low precipitation levels in the region has added insult to the injury.

"Iran and Afghanistan should reopen talks over the remaining water in Helmand River and discuss the water rights of the wetlands in Iran."

He further underscored the importance of reaching a formal agreement with Afghanistan as the exposed lake bed is the main hotspot for debilitating sand and dust storms which cause great discomfort both for Iranians and Afghans as well.

افغانستان برای دادن حقایق هامون باید به میز مذاکره بازگردد

به گزارش روز جمعه باشگاه خبرنگاران جوان مسعود تجریشی معاون محیط زیست انسانی سازمان حفاظت محیط زیست گفت: ایران و افغانستان برای برای دادن حقایق هامون باید به میز مذاکره بازگردند.

تجریشی با اشاره به سیاست های مسئولان افغانستان برای سد سازی در بالادست تالاب اظهار کرد: متأسفانه وضعیت بارش ها در منطقه در شرایط مطلوبی نبود و به همین علت شرایط وخیم تر شده است.

ایران و افغانستان برای حل مشکل آب باید به میز مذاکره بازگردند تا برای آب باقی مانده در رود هیرمند مذاکره کنند.

وی ادامه داد: ما باید پیگیر این آب باشیم و به یک تفاهمی برسیم چرا که این گرد و غباری که در سیستان و بلوچستان وجود دارد، حتی مردم افغانستان را نیز تحت تاثیر قرار می دهد.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

«galacto-, gala-, galact-»

■ **Meaning:** milk

■ **For example:** The Milky Way is the **galaxy** which is the home of our solar system.

PHRASAL VERB

Grasp at something

■ **Meaning:** to try to hold on to something

■ **For example:** His foot slipped and he grasped at the top of the wall.

IDIOM

Bring nothing to the table

■ **Explanation:** to have nothing of interest to offer the other side in a negotiation

■ **For example:** We'll never reach an agreement if we don't all bring something to the table.



Without water, everything withers

Iraqi cleric Sadr: No change in anti-U.S. stance

Iraqi cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, whose coalition won the largest number of seats in Iraq's parliamentary elections, has reiterated his anti-United States policy, saying there has been no change to the position.

Sadr was asked on Saturday about Washington's indirect contact with his Sairoon (Marching Towards Reform) bloc through some of the alliance's members about the formation of a new Iraqi government.

The cleric responded that he had already addressed the issue in one of his tweets.

"We are a nation whose principles and positions have not changed and will not change," Sadr's official website quoted him as saying.

Iraq's parliamentary elections were held on May 12.

Sadr's Sairoon bloc won 54 out of 329 seats in the Iraqi parliament. The Fatah (Conquest) alliance, led by secretary general of Badr Organization Hadi al-Ameri, and



incumbent Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's Nasr (Victory) coalition finished second and third with 47 and 42 seats, respectively.

Negotiations are underway between Iraqi parties to form the new government.

■ **Erdogan, Sadr speak on phone**
Elsewhere, late on Friday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan congratulated Sadr on his election victory.

During a telephone conversation, Er-

dogan wished Sadr well on forming the new government and highlighted Ankara's support for Iraq's unity, according to Turkish presidential sources.

Erdogan also demanded an investigation into suspected voting irregularities in Turkmen areas of Iraq's Kirkuk province.

■ **Iraq probes voting irregularities**

Separately on Friday, Abadi ordered the creation of a high-powered commission to look into the alleged irregularities in the parliamentary elections.

An official statement said a recent cabinet meeting chaired by the premier had named the Iraqi anti-graft chief as the head of the commission. The statement further suggested that hackers may have manipulated the election results.

There have been complaints about irregularities at some polling stations linked to a new electronic voting system in Iraq.

(Source: Press TV)

Palestinian dies of Israeli gunfire wounds in Gaza

A Palestinian man has died of his wounds sustained during a recent Israeli attack in the Gaza Strip.

The Palestinian Health Ministry said 41-year-old Hussein Salem died in Gaza's Shifa hospital early on Saturday days after he was shot, the Palestinian-run International Middle East Media Center reported.

Hussein had issued a video message after the attack, saying he was only selling refreshments when he came under fire.

"I call on the entire world, and [the Palestinian Authority's] President Mahmoud Abbas, to have mercy on me; I want to walk again" he said. "Am here at the Shifa hospital, I am [a] paralyzed man. I pray for help, pleading for help - calling on them to see my difficult condition... and nothing more," he said.

Israeli forces killed at least 62 Palestinians protesters near the Gaza fence on the eve of the 70th anniversary of the Nakba Day (Day of Catastrophe), which coincided with the relocation of the United States embassy from Tel Aviv to occupied al-Quds (Jerusalem).

Also on Saturday, Israeli paper Ha'aretz reported that the regime forces were to demolish an entire Bedouin village in Tel Aviv-occupied West Bank.

The village of Khan al-Ahmar is at the center of the Palestinians' fight against Tel Aviv as Israeli forces are forcing them out of the so-called Area C in the West Bank.

The area constitutes about 61 percent of the entire West Bank and is directly controlled by the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), which demands permits for new building projects.



■ **Israeli soldiers injure 109 Palestinian protesters with live fire, tear gas in Gaza**

Elsewhere, over a hundred Palestinian protesters have been injured at the border of the besieged Gaza Strip with the occupied territories by Israeli gunfire and tear gas, as the latest round of protesting rallies drew several thousand Palestinian demonstrators to the flashpoint frontier.

According to figures provided by the Gaza Health Ministry, on Friday, at least 120 demonstrators were injured, about 10 of whom by Israeli live fire.

The occupied territories have been the scene of new tensions ever since the U.S. President Donald Trump on December 6, 2017 declared Washington's recognition of al-Quds (Jerusalem) as Israel's "capital" and promised that the U.S. would move its diplomatic mission to the city.

The highly provocative move caused outrage among

Palestinians, who want the occupied West Bank as part of their future independent state with East al-Quds (Jerusalem) as its capital. Israel, on the other hand, lays claim to the whole city as its "capital."

In the hours leading up to the inauguration of the embassy in al-Quds on May 14, Israeli troops engaged in clashes with Palestinian protesters, killing over 60 unarmed demonstrators and wounding more than 2,700 others, either through direct shooting or firing tear gas canisters. The death toll is so far the highest in a single day since a series of Palestinian protests demanding the right to return to ancestral homes began on March 30.

The embassy inauguration also coincided with the climax of a six-week demonstration on the 70th anniversary of Nakba Day (Day of Catastrophe), May 15, when Israel was created and hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forcibly evicted from their homeland by Israelis in 1948.

The Gaza Strip has been under an Israeli siege since June 2007, causing a decline in living standards as well as unprecedented unemployment and poverty there.

In addition, the Israeli regime has imposed increasing power cuts and shortages in fuel in the sliver, hugely disrupting water and sanitation services. Medicines and health equipment are also in dire short supply, straining an already fragile health system.

Israel has also launched several wars on the Palestinian sliver, the last of which began in early July 2014 and ended in late August the same year. The Israeli military aggression killed nearly 2,200 Palestinians and injured over 11,100 others.

(Source: Press TV)

Guatemala: U.S. billionaire arranged Israel trip for embassy move

Guatemala has admitted that the United States casino mogul Sheldon Adelson provided a plane for a delegation's trip to Israel to attend the embassy relocation ceremony in al-Quds (Jerusalem).

Speaking on a radio show on Friday, Guatemalan Foreign Minister Sandra Jovel said that Adelson had provided the Boeing 767 aircraft, which carried the Latin American country's government officials and guests, including religious leaders, to the occupied lands last week.

She also claimed that Adelson had no business interests in Guatemala.

The revelation, however, sparked criticisms about a possible breach of the law by the Guatemalan government.

Manfredo Marroquin, director of civil society organization Citizen Action, said Guatemalan President Jimmy Morales'

administration had violated the law that prohibits such gifts.

Additionally, Guatemala's human rights prosecutor expressed concerns over the arrangement with Adelson.

Guatemala opened its embassy in the occupied al-Quds (Jerusalem) on May 16, with Morales and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu attending the ceremony.

"It's not a coincidence that Guatemala is opening its embassy in Jerusalem (al-Quds) right among the first. You were always among the first. You were the second country to recognize Israel," Netanyahu said at the event.

The Guatemalan embassy inauguration came two days after the U.S. transferred its mission from Tel Aviv to al-Quds (Jerusalem) in defiance of

international condemnation.

The relocation took place months after the U.S. President Donald Trump recognized the occupied city as the "capital" of Israel.

Israel lays claim to the whole al-Quds (Jerusalem), but the international community views the city's eastern sector as an occupied territory and Palestinians consider it as the capital of their future state.

■ **Sheldon Adelson owner of Israel Hayom paper**

Sheldon Gary Adelson is an American business magnate. He is the founder, chairman and chief executive officer of Las Vegas Sands Corporation, which owns the Marina Bay Sands in Singapore, and is the parent company of Venetian Macao Limited, which operates The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino and the Sands Expo and Convention Center.

He also owns the Israeli daily newspaper Israel Hayom and the American daily newspaper Las Vegas Review-Journal.

Adelson, is a member of the U.S. Republican Party, and made the largest single donation ever to an incoming president's inauguration when he gave the Trump inaugural committee five million dollars.

He is a major contributor to Republican Party candidates. He has been the largest donor, of any party, in both the 2012 and 2016 presidential campaigns. He had sat out the Republican primary season for the 2016 presidential election and on September 23, he announced a \$25 million dollar donation to Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, making him the largest donor to the Trump campaign and the largest donor in the presidential election.

(Source: agencies)

Fifty dead after boat capsizes in DRC river

At least 50 people have died in a boat accident in the northwestern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), according to officials.

The boat which had been transporting passengers and goods tipped over in the Mombovo River as it made its way from Monkoto to Mbadanka on Wednesday night.

"We found 49 bodies on Thursday and another one this morning," Tshuapa Vice-Governor Richard Mboyo Luuka was quoted as saying on Friday by AFP news agency.

It was still not clear how many people were on board or

how many had survived, with search and rescue missions still under way.

"The causes of the sinking and the number of people missing are not yet known. The provincial government has already sent a team to find out more," Mboyo said.

He pointed out that the boat had been travelling by night and without light, which is illegal under government safety measures.

River transportation is common in the DRC where fewer roads means travelers often have no option but to rely on

boats as a low-cost form of transportation.

Accidents on the country's rivers and lakes are a frequent hazard, due to dilapidated boats, overloading and a lack of safety equipment.

Earlier in February, at least 14 people were reported missing after two boats collided.

The DRC is currently is also having to deal with an Ebola outbreak with 31 confirmed cases and another 21 described as either probable or suspected.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Riyadh to exclude German firms from govt. tenders

The House of Saud regime Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, or MBS as he is also known, has ordered that no more government contracts be awarded to German companies, in a sign of continued irritation over Berlin's foreign policy in the Middle East, German magazine Der Spiegel reported on Friday.

Citing no sources, it said the move was likely to hit major companies such as Siemens, Bayer and Boehringer Ingelheim as well as carmaker Daimler.

Relations between Germany and the

Saudi regime have been strained, and Saudi Arabia last year summoned its ambassador in Germany home for consultations over comments by then-Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel about the political crisis in Lebanon.

The House of Saud regime is a significant trade partner for Germany, generating 2017 exports worth 6.6 billion euros (\$7.7 billion), according to Germany's statistics office.

Siemens last year won an order worth around \$400 million to deliver five gas turbines for a combined heat and power plant

being built in Saudi Arabia. Daimler soon after secured an order for 600 Mercedes-Benz Citaro buses from the Saudi bus operator SAPTCO.

A senior German businessman in Saudi Arabia, who asked to remain anonymous, told Reuters on Friday that especially the healthcare sector was currently feeling added scrutiny when applying for Saudi tenders.

Bayer, Boehringer and Siemens declined to comment on the report by Spiegel. Daimler said it could not confirm the report and that its business was ongoing.

A Saudi regime government media office did not immediately reply to request for comment. Bloomberg News had reported in March that government agencies had been told not to renew some non-essential contracts with German firms.

At the time, it cited sources as saying that Deutsche Bank's mandates in the kingdom were among those at risk, including a potential role in Saudi Aramco's initial public offering, which could be the largest share sale ever.

(Source: Reuters)

Afghanistan registers candidates for long-delayed elections

Afghanistan launched the registration of candidates for parliamentary and district elections on Saturday, taking another step towards a long-delayed ballot that has been threatened by deadly attacks on voter registration centers.

Gula Jan Badi Sayad, head of the Independent Election Commission, told a news conference registration would be open for the next 12 days. Hundreds of candidates are expected to come forward.

The elections for the national parliament and district councils are due to be held on Oct. 20, more than three years after parliament's original five-year term ended in 2015.

As well as giving the assembly a legal mandate to sit, they are seen as a dry run for a presidential election expected in 2019.

The elections have been strongly backed by Afghanistan's international partners, which see them as a key test

of democratic legitimacy, but they have faced a series of hurdles including technical problems, worries over voter fraud and major security concerns.

About 60 people were killed last month when a suicide bomber attacked a voter registration center in the capital Kabul and there have been a string of smaller incidents elsewhere.

(Source: Reuters)

EU's Barnier urges UK to accept EU court deal for Brexit

EU Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier warned Britain on Saturday that failing to agree a deal on the governance of a withdrawal treaty which preserves the primacy of the EU court would mean no treaty and no transition period.

Barnier also described British delays in spelling out what kind of trade relationship London wants as "a game of hide and seek" in remarks prepared for delivery to a gathering in Portugal of jurists specialized in EU law.

He chided British criticism of EU positions as a "blame game", urging London to recognize that it could not retain many elements of EU membership after Brexit.

The sharp tone of the former French minister's remarks follow several days of talks in Brussels between his team of EU negotiators and British counterparts, after which a senior EU official dismissed as "fantasy" both London's overall proposals for future close relations and an offer to avoid a disruptive "hard border" between Northern Ireland and EU member Ireland.

British ministers said those remarks were not "helpful". Barnier said he was ready to have "political level" talks to try to advance in three key areas where uncertainty remains, 10 months before Britain is due to leave in March 2019 - how to rule on future disputes over the withdrawal treaty, a "backstop" solution for the Irish border and a framework for future ties.

Referring to discussions within Prime Minister Theresa May's government on whether to drop an insistence on having no customs union, he said: "If the United Kingdom would like to change its own red lines, it must tell us. The sooner the better."

"We are asking for clarity," he added. "A negotiation cannot be a game of hide and seek."

On the issue of the governance of a withdrawal treaty, which both sides hope to have ready around October, Barnier repeated the EU's insistence that primacy of the European Court of Justice inside the Union be maintained in regulating any dispute that could not be resolved by a joint committee appointed by the political leadership of the two sides.

"We cannot accept that a jurisdiction other than the Court of Justice of the European Union determines the law and imposes its interpretation on the institutions of the Union," he said.

The role of British judges would be respected, he added. But without an agreement on this, the whole deal would collapse: "Without an agreement on governance, there will be no withdrawal agreement and so no transition period."

Many businesses are counting on an interim accord to maintain a broad status quo between Britain and the EU after Brexit until the end of 2020.

Barnier, who has been hoping to making substantial progress on key issues before May meets fellow EU leaders at a Brussels summit in a month, also criticized what he called a "blame game" in which British officials were accusing the EU of failing to show flexibility to allow continued close cooperation in areas such as security, the economy and research.

This, Barnier said, was to ignore the close legal framework within the EU which was the basis for trust and cooperation among its nation-state members. "We cannot share this decision-making autonomy with a third country," he said.

"The United Kingdom must face up to the reality of the Union ... It is one thing to be inside the Union and another to be on the outside."

(Source: Daily Star)

Europe and U.S. in a trade standoff

➔ The fact is that Merkel's implicit threat, which she didn't address directly and explicitly because of her conservative policy towards the United States, is the same as the "European countermeasures" against the United States. Measures that at the lowest level, could include imposing tariffs on U.S. imported goods, and thus increasing the costs of exports for the United States. Though over the past months European officials have had intensive negotiations with the U.S. President on their permanent exemption from steel and aluminum tariffs, Trump has shown that he doesn't intend to easily retreat from his positions.



Indeed, the prolonged U.S.-EU talks on steel and aluminum tariffs is going to increase the dissatisfaction and anger among the European public opinion. It will also affect the performance of American companies in Europe. Many of the U.S. affairs analysts have warned that the implementation of conciliatory policies towards Washington at this period can't change the negative and deterrent economic measures of the Donald Trump's government; a warning that Angela Merkel, Emmanuel Macron and Theresa May have overlooked in action.

Europe gets a grip on graft

➔ In France, for example, people were shocked in April when a powerful businessman, Vincent Bolloré, was held in jail and questioned over suspected graft in Africa. The move, however, is the result of what is considered a cultural revolution in France. A new law that took effect last year, known as Sapin II, set up a new anti-corruption agency and gives prosecutors new tools to deal with corporate corruption abroad. At least three companies have already settled with the new agency in cases involving bribery of a foreign official.

The new French law is similar to Britain's Bribery Act of 2010, which itself is based on a ground-breaking law in the U.S., the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act of 1977. The U.S. law has been effective in catching many European companies, an embarrassment that has proved an incentive for EU member states to toughen up their own laws. Germany, for example, has cracked down on its firms after the U.S. settled a case with the German engineering firm Siemens in 2008.

With each new anti-graft law in Europe, the U.S. finds it easier to work with European officials on cases of transnational corruption. On both sides of the Atlantic, governments are rising to higher standards of honesty, transparency, and accountability. Together, they may ultimately set a new global standard.

(Source: The CSM)

Romanian former world number one Nastase 'arrested twice in one day'

Former world number one tennis player Ilie Nastase was arrested twice on Friday, Romanian authorities have said.

The 71-year-old was arrested on suspicion of drink-driving, before later being pulled over for driving a scooter without a valid licence.

Bucharest traffic police stopped Nastase at 4.45am local time and he gave a positive test at the station, officers said.

He was released, but arrested for a second time hours later.

Head of the Bucharest traffic police Victor Gilceava told a news conference Nastase attempted to drive away when flagged down by police in the first incident.

After being taken to the station, he was allowed to leave police custody after being fined £189 and having his licence suspended for three months.

Nastase was later arrested for a second time by traffic police after he was spotted riding the scooter. Police said an investigation into the second offence was now under way.

Last year, Nastase was banned from official roles by the International Tennis Federation (ITF) until 2021 and fined \$10,000 (£7,700) following his tirade at a Fed Cup tie in Bucharest.

He swore at an umpire, insulted British number one Johanna Konta and her captain Anne Keothavong and made a derogatory comment about Serena Williams' unborn child.

On appeal, his ban was reduced to eight months - Nastase will be able to work at ITF events from April 2020 - but his fine was doubled.

(Source: BBC)

Marijuana charge against 49ers' Foster dismissed

Two days after domestic violence charges against him were dropped, San Francisco 49ers linebacker Reuben Foster got some more good news.

A pending misdemeanor marijuana case in Alabama was dropped on Friday after Foster completed a diversion program, according to 49ers beat writer Matt Barrows.

"Per Tuscaloosa district attorney's office, Reuben Foster's misdemeanor marijuana case there has been dismissed after he completed a diversion course there," Barrow tweeted.

Foster joined the club's voluntary organized team activities in Santa Clara, Calif. on Thursday, the first time he was with the team in an official capacity in more than a month.

On Wednesday, Santa Clara (Calif.) County Judge Nona L. Klippen dropped two felony domestic violence charges against Foster. A week earlier, Foster's ex-girlfriend had recanted her Feb. 11 accusation that he hit her in the head eight to 10 times, causing facial bruises and a ruptured eardrum.

Elissa Ennis told that court that she lied about Foster after he broke up with her, trying to ruin his career and "end him."

Ennis won't face charges for making false statements. According to the Sacramento Bee, the Santa Clara County District Attorney's office issued a statement that read: "We don't charge domestic violence victims who falsely recant. We empathize with them, we support them, and we advocate for them."

Foster's legal troubles aren't completely behind him. He still faces a pre-trial hearing in Santa Clara on June 6 for an assault-weapon change that was reduced to a misdemeanor from a felony.

(Source: Euronews)

Platini says cleared by Swiss authorities, plans return



Former European soccer chief Michel Platini has said he has been cleared by Swiss authorities of any criminal wrongdoing over payments he received from FIFA that resulted in a ban for ethics violations and that he now plans to return to the game.

The Frenchman was banned from all soccer-related activities over a two million Swiss francs (\$2.02 million) payment FIFA made to him in 2011, with former chief Sepp Blatter's approval, for work done a decade earlier.

FIFA's ethics committee said the payment, made at a time when Blatter was seeking re-election, lacked transparency and presented conflicts of interest. Both men denied wrongdoing.

A criminal investigation was opened against Platini, but the former France captain said on Saturday he had been told by the Swiss authorities that had now been closed.

"After (three) years of investigation, the Public Ministry of the (Swiss) Confederation has just restored the truth by officially confirming that no charge has been at any time or will be in the future held against me in connection with my activities for FIFA," Platini said in a statement.

"This official information from an authority of justice attests definitely of my innocence."

Platini was initially banned from all soccer-related activities for eight years. The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) reduced the suspension to four years.

The 62-year-old added he and his family had been living a nightmare for the last three years.

"These years were difficult and painful," Platini said.

"My honour and integrity have been tarnished. I was robbed for three years of professional life."

"I will come back: where, when, how? It is too early to tell. But I will come back to football."

(Source: Reuters)

French Open hikes prize money as Brexit eats Wimbledon purse

The French Open will this month serve up the largest prize money pot in Grand Slam tennis so far this year, taking advantage of Brexit's hit on Wimbledon's purse as it shakes off its old reputation as the poorer cousin of the big four tournaments. This year's clay-court slam will award prize money totaling 39.20 million euros (\$45.73 million). That trumps the Australian Open and Wimbledon, though it will almost certainly be knocked off the top spot by the U.S. Open.

In a year in which Swiss great Roger Federer said he was "bored" with having to push the Grand Slams to increase the levels of prize money, the French Tennis Federation (FFT) is increasing its overall pot by 8 percent on 2017.

First round losers will see the biggest rise of 14.3 percent and take home 40,000 euros. Winners of the men's and women's singles tournaments will each receive a cheque for 2.2 million euros - just shy of a five percent increase.

Nonetheless, the FFT acknowledges it will be difficult in what is a grueling wage battle to maintain the near double-digit increases in the coming years.

The modernization of Roland Garros, including a new center court with retractable roof, will cost up to 400 million euros, according to Le Monde, financed by the federation itself.

"We have the burden of debt, so we will not be able to continue increasing prize money at the rhythm of previous years," FFT chief Bernard Giudicelli told Reuters.

He added that the French Open was leading the way in narrowing the gap between how much the champions and early losers take home.

"We're happy to see other Grand Slams follow our example in reducing the winnings ratio between champion and first-round losers," Giudicelli said.

Fierce competition

Competition among the grand slams is fierce - from crowd numbers to roof-top technology to television ratings. But it is on prize money where rivalries are perhaps the hard-



est fought. As the smallest of the four Grand Slam venues, Roland Garros has the lowest attendance and generates the least revenue. A decade-long stalemate over expansion plans have left it trailing its peers.

In 2015, the U.S. Open at Flushing Meadows pipped Wimbledon as the most lucrative Grand Slam event, with the French Open trailing a distant fourth.

However, Britain's vote in 2016 to exit the European Union battered the pound, and wiped some 12 percent off the

grass-court tournament's prize money in U.S. dollar terms.

Two years on, the pound remains under pressure and it is Wimbledon that now trails the French Open, and almost certainly the U.S. Open, in the wage race.

Australian Open prize money rose by 10 percent this year to A\$55 million (\$41.50 million), while Wimbledon, the oldest Grand Slam, has a prize fund of 34 million pounds (\$45.27 million) for 2018, up 7.6 percent from last year.

(Source: Reuters)

Japan's Vissel Kobe Unveils Iniesta



Barcelona legend Andres Iniesta on Saturday made his first appearance at Vissel Kobe since signing for the Japanese side, greeting thousands of fans and vowing to make his new club the biggest in Asia.

Wearing the number eight shirt - like he did at Barcelona - the 34-year-old World Cup winner attended a welcome ceremony at the J-League club's home stadium in the western port city of Kobe, together with team owner Hiroshi Mikitani.

"This is a big challenge for me," Iniesta told some 4,000 fans through an interpreter two days after signing his contract at a glitzy unveiling in Tokyo.

He displayed his ball-juggling technique and kicked footballs into the crowd, delighting fans.

"I aim to contribute to the team as much as possible," said Iniesta, who is reported to have agreed a three-year deal with an annual salary of \$30 million, a J-League record.

"I think I should pursue the best objectives in both football and my life," he added, saying he wants Vissel to win the league

and "if possible, conquer Asia".

The midfielder, who famously scored Spain's winning goal against the Netherlands in the 2010 World Cup final, lifted 32 major trophies and made 674 appearances for Barcelona.

The Spain icon's decision to choose Kobe arguably represents Japanese football's biggest transfer coup, with many top players now moving to cash-rich Chinese clubs in the twilight of their careers.

Iniesta had said earlier this month that moving to a Chinese club was also an option for him.

His signing is a timely boost to the J-League, which used to attract luminaries such as Brazilian great Zico and former England star Gary Lineker when it began in 1993 but has struggled to attract marquee players in recent years.

Following the World Cup in Russia, Iniesta will join former Arsenal striker Lukas Podolski at Vissel, currently sixth in the J-League first division after 15 games.

(Source: Japan Times)

Donald Trump issues posthumous pardon for boxing legend Jack Johnson



Legendary black boxing champion Jack Johnson has received a posthumous pardon from US President Donald Trump. Johnson's 1913 conviction for sex trafficking had long been considered racially motivated.

US President Donald Trump has granted a rare posthumous pardon to legendary black boxer Jack Johnson.

Johnson, the first African-American to hold the world heavyweight title, from 1908 until 1915, was found guilty of sex trafficking in 1913 - a conviction which is widely seen as a racially charged legal travesty.

Johnson's crime was having crossed a state border with his white girlfriend, considered by the all-white jury to be in violation of the Mann Act, a federal anti-prostitution law which made it illegal to transport women across state lines for "immoral purposes" - although the law had not actually passed at the time of the alleged offense.

"I am taking this very righteous step, I believe, to correct a wrong that occurred in our history and to honor a truly legendary

boxing champion," said President Trump on Thursday at a ceremony in the Oval Office.

After his conviction, Johnson initially fled the country while on bail, first to Canada, then to France, living as a fugitive for seven years before returning to the United States in 1920 and handing himself in. He then served 10 months in jail for what Trump described as "what many view as a racially-motivated injustice."

Trump said the case was first brought to his attention by "Rocky" star Sylvester Stallone, whom he credited with championing the pardon.

Stallone attended the Oval Office ceremony along with retired heavyweight title holder Lennox Lewis, WBC heavyweight champion Deontay Wilder and other dignitaries from the world of boxing.

Linda Haywood, a great-great-niece of Johnson who also attended, thanked Trump for "rewriting history" after former presidents George W Bush and Barack Obama had failed to act on previous calls for a pardon.

(Source: DW)

How clean is Russian football?

German investigative journalist and doping crusader Hajo Seppelt can travel to Russia after all. His World Cup visa was ultimately approved - following an intervention from the German government - after Seppelt had at first been declared persona non grata in Russia, which would have prevented him from traveling there for the tournament. Yet this might not be the end of the story.

Seppelt is likely to be questioned by a Russian investigative committee on arrival if he does travel to the World Cup. The committee has said it wants information pertaining to its investigation into Grigory Rodchenkov. Rodchenkov, the former head of the anti-doping agency in Moscow, who was a key whistleblower for Seppelt in a documentary aired on German public broadcaster ARD in January.

Reporting by Seppelt and his colleagues in other countries led to Russia's track and field athletes being banned from the 2016 Olympics in Rio, and to Russia competing under a neutral flag at the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang this year. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) issued lifetime bans on 19 Russian athletes last year. Seppelt's investigation uncovered evidence of Russia systematically switching positive doping tests for clean samples at the 2014 Winter Olympics on home turf in Sochi.

Is the football squad affected?

According to FIFA's findings published on Tuesday, the players in Russia's provisional World Cup squad are not known to have failed any doping tests.

However, Richard McLaren, the author of the 2016 report that supported Seppelt and his colleagues' findings, said it appeared likely that had Russia employed a similar system in football. At Sochi, McLaren's report said, failed doping tests were swapped for clean samples through "mouse holes," with Russia apparently having a clean urine bank.



The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) told FIFA late last year that of the 157 Russian football doping samples it had analyzed, 34 might have been manipulated.

An article published in Britain's weekly The Mail on Sunday reported that everybody on Russia's 2014 World Cup squad was on a list of 1,000 athletes whose doping tests had been doctored on the order of Russia's sports ministry. Deputy Prime Minister Vitaly Mutko, who is no longer Russia's sports minister, rubbished the report at the time.

FIFA said on Tuesday that it found no past evidence of failed doping tests against the current World Cup squad and would close its investigation into them. Some other Russian players remain under investigation.

■ Criticism from doping crusaders Seppelt, Franke Seppelt told ARD after Tuesday's news that he was unimpressed by FIFA's findings: "We asked FIFA in the past

weeks whether they had tested the suspicious samples for all banned substances and for all banned methods," Seppelt said. "We received and still have received no answer from FIFA. Only then would their retroactive tests have any real meaning."

Another German doping researcher, Werner Franke, was similarly skeptical.

"This is institutional corruption, but of course that pervades the entire history of FIFA," Franke told DW. "In football it's all been done before, only nothing has been done about it. For example in the case of Juventus [in the 1990s], when investigations were strung out for long enough that the statute of limitations on the charges eventually passed. And just before a World Cup, allegations of doping would be an unwelcome distraction."

(Source: Deutsche Welle)

We must stay focused at World Cup: Mehdi Taremi

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iran national football team striker Mehdi Taremi says they must stay focused on achieving collaborative success at the 2018 World Cup.

Iran have been drawn in Group B of the 2018 World Cup along with Morocco, Spain and Portugal.

The Iran national football team will open the campaign with a match against Morocco at Saint Petersburg on June 15.

Team Melli, meanwhile, face Spain in Kazan on 20 June before meeting Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal in Saransk five days later.

"We must stay focused on achieving collaborative success in the 2018 World Cup. We are in the training camp in Istanbul now and are preparing well for the World Cup," Taremi said in an interview with ffiri.ir.

"We need to be united ahead of the competition because we can be stronger. For me and the other Iran players the 2018 World Cup has started four months ago. I am truly surprised how some people don't care about the World Cup," Al Gharrafa striker added.

"We have to put aside our differences and support our national team. Without a doubt, World Cup is the most important event in the world and all players take advantage of this opportunity and are committed to succeed," ex-Persepolis striker added.

"The friendly match against Turkey will help us and the coaching staff to be more prepared for the World Cup," Taremi concluded.

The matches of the 2018 World Cup will be held between June 14 and July 15 at 12 stadiums.



International friendly: Turkey vs Iran

Iran's friendly match against Turkey is the first of a double header of friendly fixtures for the team who were second to qualify for the World Cup after Brazil (Russia, of course, qualifying automatically).

Despite their manager Carlos Queiroz announcing that he will step down after the competition ends, Team Melli are at a high point in their recent history, comfortably topping their group in the AFC qualifying stages. Although their group contained South Korea, fans of Iran will be aware that the AFC is somewhat lacking in competition at least toward the top end. As a result, this fixture against Turkey will be a good litmus test for exactly where the Iranian side are in the pecking order.

Turkey, however, may not pose them the stiffest of tests. Coming fourth in Group I — a group that contained Iceland, Croatia and Ukraine — the Turkish Men's national team has declined over the course of the last two decades or so.

With a number of talented youngsters coming through the ranks — Cengiz Under and Caglar Soyuncu, to name a couple — the hope will be that the side can return to the levels that they hit in the late 90s and early 2000s.

After playing Iran, Turkey have a couple more friendlies to look forward to: the first against Tunisia, the second against Russia.

With Carlos Queiroz announcing a reduced 25-man squad for this set of international friendlies, it is hard to say how he will proceed.

The Portuguese manager is something of a tinkerer and so don't expect him to go for the most obvious options. Do expect him to adopt a 4-3-3 formation though.

Key Battle: Cengiz Under (Turkey) vs Alireza Jahanbakhsh (Iran)



Two of the most exciting youngsters in European football could come head to head in this match. Cengiz Under, a 20 year old playing for Roma in Serie A, has impressed in his debut season: a season which saw him playing 25 times and scoring seven times.

Signed for just under £12 million on his 20th birthday, Under made a name for himself in the Turkish Super Lig, making his full debut for the national side when he was still in his teens.

Jahanbakhsh has had a similar meteoric rise, becoming a regular in the AZ Alkmaar side in the last few seasons after signing in 2015.

Although he was not unimpressive in the first couple of campaigns, the most recent campaign was a break-out season for the young Iranian who became the first Asian

to win the golden boot competition of a top European league.

His performances were enough to carry his side to the final of the KNVB Cup in the last two seasons where AZ lost to Vitesse both times.

If Jahanbakhsh has a good tournament, expect to see him gracing the football pitches of one of the big five European leagues before too long.

To go old or young?

Carlos Queiroz has the managing of a squad that contains old heads and young pretenders. The question is: who will he rely on?

Controversially, the Portuguese manager left out 36-year-old Jalal Hosseini but has included 34-year-old Pejman Montazeri and an almost-certainly-kneeless and 31-year-

old Ashkan Dejagah.

Elsewhere, there is youthful talent in Ali Gholizadeh, weighing in at 22 years old, Sardar Azmoun who is 23 and Majid Hosseini who is one of the babies of the team at 21 years old.

No doubt Queiroz will go for a blend of maturity and vim but, at this point, it's impossible to second guess which way it will go.

A new era for Turkey?

Mircea Lucescu has been tasked with preparing Turkey for a new generation of footballers.

Looking at the players available to him, there is an exciting crop of youngsters coming through — players like Freiburg's Caglar Soyuncu who is making waves for himself in the Bundesliga and turning a few heads in the Premier League whilst doing so.

At this point, though, Turkish football does not have enough players operating in the big five leagues in Europe. In fact, only six players from the 27-man squad for this fixture are playing in the big five: Cenk Tosun in the Premier League, Cengiz Under in Serie A and four other players featuring in the Bundesliga.

Unless they can integrate more players into the big league, then Turkey could find themselves hamstrung going forward.

Prediction: Turkey 1-2 Iran

Although Turkey might be considered de facto favorites here, under Queiroz, Iran are a good side and should come through in the end.

With both Sardar Azmoun and Alireza Jahanbakhsh up front, they should cause problems to the Turkish backline. Expect there to be goals both ways but Iran to come out on top.

(Source: Realsport101.com)

The legacy of the late Samuel—the PL player who left to play in Iran

On the 15th of May this year the tragic news was reported that former Aston Villa and Bolton defender Jilloyd Samuel had died in a car crash. Samuel is remembered mainly for his 181 Premier League appearances but in 2011 he moved to Tehran, the capital of Iran, to play in the Persian Gulf Pro League with Esteghlal Football Club. He remained at the club until 2014 before moving to another Tehran based team called Paykan where he played for another year.

A shock move

Samuel initially signed for Esteghlal on a five-month contract under the recommendation of his former Bolton teammate Andranik Teymourian who had since moved to the Tehran outfit. Whilst it was not unheard of for players to move to the UAE at this time, Samuel became the first British-based player to move to Iran, a statistic he described as "a bit of history for me and Iranian football". Despite media depictions of the Iranian capital as unstable and dangerous, Samuel reported no unrest and a welcoming atmosphere. He also talked of his interest in Iranian music and a general affection towards Iran and its football fans.

Silverware and success

On March 15th 2012, Jilloyd Samuel grasped his first ever piece of silverware with a Man of the Match performance that saw him score in a penalty shootout to help Esteghlal lift the Hafzi Cup for the 6th time. After a six-year drought they won the cup again this year, just 12 days before Samuel's tragic death.

The team went on to win the 2012/13 Iranian Pro League title to cap off a successful year for the former Premier League star. The 2013 AFC Champions League offered a new challenge and Samuel played a key role in Esteghlal's journey to the semi-finals where they lost to FC Seoul.

A bitter taste

Unfortunately, after two and a half seasons, a thus far



enjoyable experience at the club came to an unfortunate end. In 2014 Samuel thanked the fans for their support but informed them via Facebook that his future at Esteghlal was in serious doubt. He had been paid less than 50% of his wages over a five-month period and after patiently waiting for a resolution he decided it was time to go. Fan tributes were numerous as the former Bolton and Aston Villa left back went down in history as one of the best players to grace the pitches of Iranian football.

Jilloyd the pioneer

This departure from Esteghlal did not spell the end for Samuel in Iran, however, as he moved to newly promoted Paykan, resulting in another year in Tehran. In recent years players have moved to increasingly unlikely destinations due to excessively lucrative contracts, the rise of the Chinese Super League and the American MLS League being prime destinations.

For Samuel, it seems the move to Iran was more about exploration and broadening of horizons and less about high wages. He compared the standard of football to that of the Championship and frequently talked of the massive fan followings and the Champions League games that filled stadiums with over 80,000 people.

He also took it upon himself to learn the Iranian language (Farsi) as well as possible to try and decrease his reliance on interpreters.

Sheepish but respectful

Nevertheless, there were of course a few cultural clashes. For example, when he first arrived he was greeted by the sacrificing of a sheep for good luck, a ceremony that was also performed before important matches. He admitted that the tradition was hard to get used to but soon accepted it as part of the culture and he simply turned away to avoid it. Samuel was such a hit with the fans that he was given his own nickname, the "Black Diamond", a label that to most would seem problematic but was never brought up by the man himself. He acknowledged and accepted the inevitable cultural differences and didn't let them impact his time in Iran.

What's changed in 7 years?

When Jilloyd Samuel left for Iran there was much less of an international football market than there is today. Whilst the transfer market has expanded rapidly to include different leagues and different cultures, it has done so due to the attraction of money. Everyone has seen the videos of Carlos Tevez walking around Chinese pitches earning £615,000 a week and everyone knows that the MLS has become a retirement home for European footballers seeking a final pay day. If a country doesn't provide the attraction of big money then it generally doesn't attract foreign players, yet Jilloyd Samuel proved that the jump into the unknown can be well worth the risk and perhaps this is an attitude that needs rekindling.

On top of his impressive longevity in the Premier League, Jilloyd Samuel has left behind an internationalist legacy that deserves to be talked about and should inspire footballers on the lookout for their next club to think twice before rejecting an offer from an unusual part of the globe.

(Source: Society)

Neymar: I have always wanted to work with Pep Guardiola

Brazil and Paris Saint-Germain star Neymar has again said he wants to work under Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola at some point in his career.

Neymar, 22, joined PSG for a world-record £222 million last summer from Barcelona — but only arrived at Camp Nou

12 months after Guardiola had left the club in 2012.

In 2016, the Brazilian said: "Guardiola is a guy that I really admire and who I would love to work with" and he has reiterated that sentiment again.

"I have always wanted to work with Guar-

diola," Neymar told ESPN Brasil, speaking to former Brazil midfielder Alex for his talk show talk show 'Papo Cabeça'.

"He's different. I arrived [at Barca] a year after he left. I'd love to work with him."

The chances of Neymar moving to City

this summer, however, are slim. City have a well-stocked attacking unit including Leroy Sané, Raheem Sterling, Kevin De Bruyne, David Silva, Bernardo Silva and are reportedly looking to add Leicester City winger Riyad Mahrez to the mix.

(Source: ESPN)

Mehdi Mahdavia writes his name in history book



Iran's Mehdi Mahdavia is among five Asian players who left their mark at the World Cup.

The FIFA World Cup is an occasion in which players can turn into heroes for their nations, writing their names in the history books for decades.

When it comes to Iranian milestones at the FIFA World Cup, it's hard to look beyond the famous match against the USA at the 1998 edition. Hamid Estili's opener was iconic,

but the man who secured the famous victory was the exciting speedster Mehdi Mahdavia. With Iran holding a slender 1-0 with just under 10 minutes remaining, the ball was played out wide to Mahdavia, who had found space on the left touchline, the-afc.com wrote.

Mahdavia powered his way into the box and produced a fine finish to beat Kasey Keller and put Iran 2-0 ahead. While Brian McBride was able to pull one back for the USA, Mahdavia's goal was enough to secure Iran its first, and so far only, win at the FIFA World Cup.

The Iranian went on to have a hugely successful career in the Bundesliga for Hamburger SV and was named AFC Player of the Year in 2003.

(Source: the-AFC)

Ali Gholizadeh joins SC Charleroi

PLDC — Iranian midfielder Ali Gholizadeh joined SC Charleroi of Belgium. The 22-year-old player, who has been invited to Iran national football team for the 2018 World Cup, was a member of Iranian top-flight football team Saipa.

Saipa General Manager Reza Darvish has confirmed his player's transfer and wished him all the best.

Gholizadeh started his career with Saipa youth levels. He promoted to first team by Engin Firat and made his debut for Saipa in last fixture of 2013-14 Iran Pro League against Saba Qom as a substitute.

The Belgian top-flight football team had already shown interest in signing Esteghlal midfielder Omid Noorafkan.

Gholizadeh reunites his countryman Kaveh Rezaei in SC Charleroi.

Ostersunds' Ghoddos could follow Graham Potter to Swansea City

Swansea City look set to prepare for life in the Championship by hiring Ostersunds manager Graham Potter, according to reports.

Swansea City appear to have chosen Carlos Carvalhal's replacement. The Guardian stated that the relegated Swans had considered Jaap Stam, Dean Smith and Lee Johnson, all who have experience in the Championship, but it seems that they have instead gone for a man who has never managed in English football.

The Mirror (24th May, 11.30am) reports that Ostersunds boss Graham Potter believes he will be Swansea's next manager after holding positive talks with the South Welsh side.

The 43-year-old Englishman, who took the Swedish minnows from the fourth tier to the Europa League knockout stage in seven years, is set to be announced next week. And The Mirror (25th May, page 72) is reporting that Potter is already planning to bring two of his Ostersunds stars with him to Swansea.

24-year-old Iranian forward Samman Ghoddos has been Ostersunds' talisman for the last few seasons and scored 10 goals in 27 games in the previous campaign, though he is more an all-round attacker than an out-and-out goalscorer.

Ghoddos, who The Mirror claim is on the radar of Crystal Palace, West Ham, Southampton, West Brom and Brighton, is understood to be valued at around £5 million.

The powerful left winger Ken Sema, however, will come cheaper with his contract due to expire this summer, according to Transfermarkt.

A five-time Sweden international, Sema scored against Arsenal in a famous 2-1 win at the Emirates in last season's Europa League, a game in which Ghoddos set up both goals.

(Source: HTC)

AFC President discusses with Infantino the cooperation between AFC and FIFA

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) President Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa met with FIFA President Gianni Infantino during the FIFA President's visit to the Kingdom of Bahrain.

They discussed further cooperation between the AFC and FIFA at all levels, and the possible ways to strengthen the relationship in order to achieve the joint goals in developing the game and provide support for Member Associations in Asia.

Shaikh Salman congratulated Infantino in Manama, on keeping an open relationship with all global game stakeholders and stressed the role of FIFA and its leadership to achieve the success.

The AFC President explained the AFC's future plans to continue developing football in Asia and to establish the AFC as a leader among other confederations.

Shaikh Salman confirmed the AFC's support in efforts to maintain unity in the global football family, as it is important for maintaining FIFA's role in developing the world game in an efficient and transparent way.

The AFC President also supported the continuation of the reform process which was crucial in keeping the fans on side.

On the other side, Infantino thanked the AFC President for the reception, and hailed the AFC's efforts to develop the game in Asia, confirming that FIFA will continue to work with the AFC to achieve common goals.

(Source: the-AFC)

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Iranian films line up for Sydney festival

A R T TEHRAN — Five Iranian movies will be competing in the Sydney Film Festival, which is scheduled to be held from June 6 to 17.

The films are "Dressage" by Puya Badkubeh, "Pig" by Mani Haqiqi, "No Date, No Signature" by Vahid Jalilvand, "24 Frames" by Abbas Kiarostami and "3 Faces" by Jafar Panahi.



Hedyeh Tehrani acts in a scene from "No Date, No Signature" by Vahid Jalilvand.

"The Breaker Uppers", a comedy by Jackie van Beek from New Zealand will be opening the festival.

Australian filmmaker Lynette Wallworth will preside over the jury of the official competition.

Filipino producer and writer Bianca Balbuena, South African composer Chris Letcher, Australian actor Ewen Leslie and Japanese programming director Yoshi Yatabe are the members of the jury.

NEWS IN BRIEF



Pop singer Farzad Farzin to give concert in Saint Petersburg

A R T TEHRAN — Iranian pop singer Farzad Farzin will give a concert in Saint Petersburg, Russia on June 16.

His concert will take place at DK Vyborgsky Hall, the singer has announced in a post published on his Instagram on Friday.



"The Agenda" published in Persian

A R T TEHRAN — French writer Eric Vuillard's novel "The Agenda" (L'Ordre du Jour), the winner of the 2017 Prix Goncourt, has been published in Persian.

Fatemeh Qahremani is the translator of the book, publisher Majid announced on Saturday.

"The Agenda" is a historical work about shady business dealings behind the Nazi annexation of Austria in 1938.

Oscar winner Danny Boyle to direct next Bond film

LONDON (Reuters) — Academy Award winner Danny Boyle will direct the next James Bond film, the movie's producers said on Friday, with actor Daniel Craig returning for his fifth outing as Britain's famous fictional spy, the smooth-talking 007.



Daniel Craig poses for photographers as he attends the world premiere of the new James Bond 007 film "Spectre" at the Royal Albert Hall in London. (Reuters/Luke MacGregor)

Production on the 25th installment in the Bond movie franchise will begin in December at Britain's Pinewood Studios. The film will be released in autumn 2019.

In a statement, producers Michael G. Wilson and Barbara Broccoli describe Boyle, who won an Oscar for heart-warming drama "Slumdog Millionaire" and is also known for "Trainspotting" and "Steve Jobs", as "exceptionally talented".

Boyle previously worked with Craig on a short film for the opening ceremony at the 2012 London Olympics, in which the actor, as Bond, entered Buckingham Palace, where he was greeted by Queen Elizabeth.

The as-yet-unnamed Bond film's screenplay will be written by John Hodge, who worked with Boyle on "Trainspotting".

Craig has played Bond since 2006's "Casino Royale". After months of speculation on whether he would reprise the role after 2015's "Spectre", the 50-year-old actor confirmed last year he would put on Bond's tuxedo for a fifth time.

Actor Nasser Malakmotiei dies at 88

A R T TEHRAN — Iranian actor Nasser Malakmotiei who appeared in over 100 movies and TV series, in most of which he played the roles of virile characters, died at Tehran's Aatieh Hospital on Friday night, he was 88.

He was suffering from a kidney disorder, Persian media outlets announced.

Born in Tehran in 1930, he studied physical education at the Tehran Higher Education Center and pursued a teaching career as a sports theater at several of Tehran's primary schools.

He later shifted onto cinema and made his debut in 1949 with "Spring Variety, an episodic film directed by Parviz Khatibi.

"I entered cinema with empty hands and lack of knowledge and unsupported, but with love. People ignored our mistakes, and it would be a pity if we do not appreciate them," Malakmotiei once said.

He worked in numerous movies such as "Baba Shamal" and "Toqi" by Ali Hatami and "Qeisar" by Masud Kimiai. The movies all were produced before the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

"The Imperiled", directed by Iraj Qaderi in 1982, was the first film Malek-Motiei acted in after the victory of the revolution.

Afterwards, he faced an unofficial ban due to the new conditions dominating the post-revolution cinema.

In 2013, he returned to the silver screen in the role of an old man in Ali Atshani's family drama "Negar's Role" after a 31-year hiatus.

"I cannot describe how pleased I am that I have appeared in cinema again," Malek-Motiei said during a ceremony the



Actor Nasser Malakmotiei in an undated photo

film crew organized to celebrate his return.

"I was the bad boy of cinema, who has returned to his home. I do not know how to express my happiness like that which

child would," he added.

"Over the years, I was far from cinema. It was like I was far from my beloved. I always thought about the beloved, and

now I do not know whether the beloved will accept me or not," Malek-Motiei said.

The movie turned out to be his swansong.

Iranian paintings with bird motifs on display at Tehran exhibit

A R T TEHRAN — An exhibition opened on Saturday at Tehran's Garden Art Museum is displaying a large collection of paintings with bird motifs.

The collection, which is composed of 63 tableaux by various artists, has been loaned by the Malek National Library and Museum Institution for the showcase named "Simorgh", the institute announced on Saturday.

The exhibit takes its name from the mystical bird in Iranian literature and art.

Birds enjoy prominent status in Iranian art and literature. Persian mystic and poet Attar

has made numerous allusions to Simorgh (Phoenix) in his masterpiece Manteq al-Teyr (The Conference of the Birds).

The exhibition also is showcasing copies of Persian manuscripts, rare copies of the Holy Quran and pencil cases, which have been decorated with bird motifs.

The exhibit will be running until June 20 at the garden located on Hesabi St., in the Tajrish neighborhood.

Located in the vicinity of Bagh-e Melli, the Malek Museum is affiliated with the Astan-e Qods Razavi Museum and Library in Mashhad.



A miniature painting by Mahmud Farshchian

Film mogul Weinstein appears handcuffed in court



Film producer Harvey Weinstein leaves criminal court following his arraignment in Manhattan in New York, U.S., May 25, 2018. (Reuters/Mike Segar)

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Movie mogul Harvey Weinstein appeared in handcuffs in a New York court on Friday to face charges of rape and other crimes against two of the scores of women who have accused him of misconduct, ending his reign as a Hollywood kingpin.

Weinstein, the 66-year-old co-founder of the Miramax film studio and the Weinstein Co, intends to plead not guilty to the charges, his attorney, Benjamin Brafman, told reporters outside the Manhattan courthouse.

Prosecutors charged him with two counts of rape and one count of a criminal act following a months-long investigation with the New York Police Department. They did not identify the two women, but said the crimes took place in 2004 and 2013. If convicted on the most serious charges, Weinstein could face between five and 25 years in prison.

Weinstein has been accused of sexual misconduct by more than 70 women, with some of the allegations dating back decades. He has denied ever.

The accusations, first reported last year by the New York Times and the New Yorker, gave rise to the #MeToo movement, in which hundreds of women have publicly accused powerful men in business, government and entertainment of sexual misconduct.

"This defendant used his position, money and power to lure young women into situations where he was able to violate them sexually," prosecutor Joan Illuzzi said at Weinstein's arraignment on Friday in Manhattan Criminal Court.

Weinstein, wearing a dark jacket over a blue sweater and white open-collared shirt and dark jeans, appeared pale, and stood next to Brafman, staring into the middle distance with his mouth ajar while prosecutors described a bail agreement.

Judge Kevin McGrath ordered Weinstein released on \$1 million cash bail and the case was adjourned to July 30. Weinstein surrendered his U.S. passport and agreed to wear a monitoring device that tracks his location, confining him to the states of New York and Connecticut.

Weinstein earlier turned himself in at a

lower Manhattan police station around 7:25 a.m. EDT (1125 GMT). He carried thick books under his right arm, including biographies of Broadway musical duo Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, and Elia Kazan, the director of "A Streetcar Named Desire" and other classic Hollywood films.

About 90 minutes later, Weinstein was led by officers into court in handcuffs, grimacing, with his head bowed and his books nowhere in sight.

Speaking to reporters after the hearing, Brafman signaled he would defend Weinstein by undermining the credibility of his client's accusers.

A jury would not believe the women, Brafman said, "assuming we get 12 fair people who are not consumed by the movement that seems to have overtaken this case."

Actress Rose McGowan, among the first to accuse Weinstein of sexual assault, said seeing images of him in handcuffs was surreal. "I actually did not believe this day would come," she said on NBC's "Megyn Kelly Today" program. "This is a big strike into the heart of abuse of power."

After the accusations became public, entertainment industry heavyweights distanced themselves from Weinstein. The Weinstein Co's board fired him, and the company filed for bankruptcy in March.

In 2017, Weinstein was expelled from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. He had racked up Oscars for a string of films that helped define independent cinema in the 1990s, including "Shakespeare in Love" and "Pulp Fiction."

Weinstein was a fixture of elite Manhattan and Los Angeles society until his accusers came forward. He sought treatment for sex addiction at a facility in Scottsdale, Arizona, the New York Times reported.

London's Metropolitan Police and Los Angeles prosecutors have said they are reviewing accusations of sexual assault against him.

Brafman said in a May court filing that federal prosecutors in New York had opened a separate criminal investigation into the allegations.

World Cup divides fans with 'Live It Up' Will Smith anthem

LONDON (Reuters) — Soccer's World Cup organizers divided fans by releasing the tournament's official song on Friday - a fast-paced dance tune titled "Live It Up" featuring American actor and rapper Will Smith.

Some on social media asked how the tune's Latin American feel fitted in with the tournament's host country Russia - and compared it unfavorably with past efforts including Shakira's "Waka Waka" theme for the 2010 contest in South Africa.

Some more were puzzled by the choice of performers - Will Smith is joined by Puerto Rico-born Reggaeton artist Nicky Jam and singer Era Istrefi, who describes herself as "Albanian-Kosovar" - none of them from countries competing in this year's contest.

"The World Cup song doesn't have any football ring to it. Blegh. How is Messi gonna dance to Live it up?!" Twitter user



Actor Will Smith speaks during the 6th International Jazz Day at the Grand Theatre of Havana Alicia Alonso, Cuba, April 30, 2017. (Reuters/Alexandre Meneghini)

@arla_I said, referring to Argentina star Lionel Messi.

Others were won over by the energetic track, with its affirming chorus "One life, live it up/Cos we got one life."

"This one definitely has the World Cup vibe to it," one user wrote, calling the song "awesome".

The trio will perform "Live It Up" in front of spectators before the World Cup final in Moscow on July 15.

"It's an honor to be asked to perform at the 2018 FIFA World Cup," Smith said in a statement.

"Collaborating with Nicky, (producer) Diplo and Era on this track represents harmony, eclectic flavors and genres coming together. At the end of the day, we just want to see the world dance."

Smith has focused on his acting career for years, but the "Independence Day" star has recently hinted about a return to music.