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File photo

French foreign minister 'absolutely wrong': Iran

By Mohammad Homaeefar

TEHRAN – The French foreign minister is “absolutely wrong” if he thinks Iran would give in to pressure and sanctions, the Iranian Foreign Ministry said on Monday, referring to Le Drian’s call for more pressure on Tehran over its missile program.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran would definitely not bow to pressure and would

not change its stances when facing strict policies,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said at a press conference in Tehran on Monday.

Earlier on the same day, France’s Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian accused Iran of not respecting part of a UN resolution that calls on Tehran to refrain from work on ballistic missiles. **→ 2**

UAE-backed group vows to ‘overthrow’ Saudi-backed Yemeni government

By staff & agencies

A group of Yemeni militants backed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has pledged to “overthrow” the “government” of a former Yemeni president whom Saudi Arabia has been attempting to prop up as the leader of the war-stricken country.

The separatist group, which calls

itself the Southern Transitional Council, said in a event that it would overthrow the “government” of Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, who has lost power in Yemen but whom Saudi Arabia has unsuccessfully been attempting to reinstall as Yemen’s president, Al Jazeera reported Monday. **→ 13**

Belarus underlines enhancing economic ties with Iran

ECONOMY

TEHRAN — Belarusian Industry Minister Vitali Vouk underscored boosting bilateral economic ties with Iran, IRNA reported.

He made the remarks in the 14th meeting of Iran-Belarus Joint Economic Committee at the place of Iran’s Trade Promotion Organization (PMO) on Monday. Calling for removal of financial barriers

on the way of expanding mutual economic ties, the Belarussian minister referred to the remarkable increase in bilateral trade saying that there is a long way for the two sides to go.

“Auto industry, agriculture and medicine are the fields with high capacities that Iran and Belarus can boost cooperation in,” he added. **→ 4**

ARTICLE
 By Hanif Ghaffari
 Political analyst

Austria-Germany dispute over immigration crisis

The differences between the two countries of Germany and Austria over the immigration crisis have entered a new phase. This difference was evident during the recent visit of the Chancellor of Germany, “Angela Merkel” and the Austrian Chancellor “Sebastian Kurz”. Although the Chancellors of Germany and Austria emphasized the need for the expansion of cooperation between the two countries, the attention of the media and analysts was related to the fundamental differences between Berlin and Vienna on the resolution of the immigrant crisis.

The crisis of immigration has now become a wide-spread crisis in the United Europe, an issue that shows itself even in the internal policies of Germany. Obviously one of the main reasons for the extremist party of “Alternative for Germany” entering the country’s parliament has been the dissatisfaction among German citizens as a result of Angela Merkel and Christian Democrats’ open policies regarding the issue of immigration. In the 2017 Austrian election campaign, the far-right Freedom Party has been able to attract many proponents through a massive maneuvering on the immigration crisis and maneuvering on nationalist doctrines in the Austrian political and social atmosphere.

Right now, the right-wing extremists in Austria (the Freedom Party), along with the People’s Party (led by Kurz), have formed a coalition government. Obviously, in the near future, we’ll witness more tensions between Vienna and Berlin over the crisis of immigrants. Of course, Austria doesn’t intend to retreat from its policies in contradiction to the United Europe’s plans regarding immigrants. Austria, along with countries like Hungary, doesn’t intend to participate in the joint European project (on resolving the crisis of asylum seekers and refugees). This will exacerbate the conflicts between the European countries over the crisis of asylum seekers. However, the issue does not end there!

Austria is scheduled to hold the Presidency of the European Union in the second half of 2018. Without a doubt, this six-month period will be full of crisis and disagreement among European authorities. **→ 13**

Iran will not accept giving up missile program: ex-CIA official

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
 By Fatemeh Mohammadi

TEHRAN — Professor Paul Pillar, who was CIA intelligence analyst for 28 years, tells the Tehran Times that “Iran will not accept giving up its own missile program when other states in the region have ballistic missiles and in some cases air forces that are superior to that of Iran.”

Pillar also says, “Iranians also remember being the target of Iraqi missiles during the Iran-Iraq War. Ballistic missiles are indeed a separate issue from nuclear weapons.”

“For many states, including ones that have nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles serve a variety of strategic purposes that have nothing

to do with nuclear weapons,” Pillar tells the Tehran Times.

Following is the text of the interview:

■ U.S. President Donald Trump approved the Iran nuclear deal only one more time before abandoning it if it is not changed. What are the changes that Trump insists on?

A: In his recent statement, President Trump mentioned four areas in which he wants changes. He mentioned them, however, in connection with new legislation that he would like the U.S. Congress to enact. Congress cannot by itself change an international agreement that already is in force, so any such legislation would not be a change in the nuclear agreement itself. For at least two of the four areas, it might be possible for Congress to enact something that would

appear responsive to Trump but would make no practical difference in the JCPOA and how it is implemented. One of those areas concerns inspections. The JCPOA already provides for requested inspections of undeclared sites as well as regular inspections of declared nuclear sites. Another of Trump’s demands is for Iran not to be even “close” to being able to make a nuclear weapon. The JCPOA already has moved Iran significantly farther away from that capability than it was before, so it is not clear what this vaguely worded demand really means. The other two areas that Trump mentioned would be harder to deal with: eliminating the “sunset” clauses or expiration dates, and treating ballistic missiles as if they were inseparable from nuclear weapons. **→ 13**

Americans are not trustworthy partners for Kurds: Turkish expert

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
 By Payman Yazdani

TEHRAN — Bora Bayraktar, Assistant Professor of Istanbul Kultur University, believes the U.S. is after its own geopolitical goals in the region and is not a trustworthy ally for Kurds.

Turkish forces on Saturday launched attack on the Afrin region of north-western Syria.

While Turkey says the operation is to eliminate terrorists from the region, the Syrian government considers it as a violation of its sovereignty.

To know more about the issue, we reached out to Dr. Bora Bayraktar.

Following is the full text of his interview:

■ What is the real goal behind the U.S. provocative acts in the region like creating a border security force in Syrian Kurdish

region or arming SDF?

A: I think the United States is still trying to control the North of the Persian Gulf region, which she failed in Operation Enduring Freedom in 2003. The American invasion to Iraq in 2003 did not bore the results that the Washington expected. The resistance in northeast of Baghdad caused great damages to U.S. plans and it terrorized that area.

It seems that the U.S. concluded that the Sunni Arab population and nationalist Shia groups as well will not support an American led leadership in Iraq. For this reason they want to contain any kind of anti-American settlement in Iraq and also in Syria. For this reason the U.S. is trying to build pro-American statelets, dominated by Kurdish groups.

Arming SDF is the first step of controlling a large area, dominating north of Arab Middle East.

The logic behind it is to build one or two garrison statelets in the area. Having trouble in convincing Turkey for their operations, and increasing awareness of national security threats states in the region, the U.S. is looking for alternatives. And PYD and other groups are providing that alternative for the U.S.

■ Is the U.S.’s real goal to fight ISIS or under this pretext the U.S. is after its own geopolitical interests?

A: I think one part of the story, yes every nation is trying to get rid of this ruthless, wild terrorist organization. But on the other hand many nations are trying to get advantage over the existence of this group. It would be naive to think that ISIS is the only reason for U.S. existence in Syrian territory. Eastern Mediterranean is on the fault line of global and regional power struggle. **→ 13**

PERSPECTIVE
 By Kim Seung-Ho
 Ambassador of S. Korea to Iran

Proper way to remember Sanchi sailors

Days ago, I was invited to attend at the Condolence Ceremony held in Shaheed Motahari High School for the tragically fallen heroes of the Sanchi. Sitting among the Iranians, I felt vividly their fathomless sorrow and grief emanated from the extraordinary emptiness of loss and sympathy. The reason why I was invited to the ceremony was that South Korea was one of rescue teams, I presume. I can only imagine the Korean rescuers’ sense of helplessness on the site when immense flame engulfed the ship. I was informed that the roaring fire and fume effectively foiled the desperate efforts of all rescuers from China, Japan and Korea. The trilateral teamwork and spirit was high but simply the heat was too hot and the smoke was too thick. Encircled among Iranians in mourning, I feel sorry that not even a single crew was able to be brought home.

The ship now lies in state in the deep seabed with the brave Iranian seamen. The sky once mostly covered by the pitch-black smoke returned to its normal cobalt blue. If the spilt oil will be either cleaned up or evaporated soon, there will be no more trace, at least on the surface, of the disaster. As time goes by, our grief will become diluted and normal life will appear to resume. The sea lanes will be crowded with many local and foreign, big and small vessels again, putting Sanchi and its crews in memory. Is this the way the story ends? No. It shall not. The sailors deserve more at least for the part of Korea.

At the time of collision, Sanchi, fully loaded with more than one million barrels of oil, was on the way to South Korea. Korea has depended on longer than a half century the carriers like Sanchi for the daily management of its economy. The full load of Sanchi covers only for a couple of day’s consumption for Korea. To maintain the whole economy in shape, hundreds of Sanchi should ship oil from Iran to Korea every year. Since the delivery has been always punctual and continuous, we often take the oil for granted without realizing the toil of the persons engaged in the oil supply to Korea. **→ 2**



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Boccia league gets underway in Tehran

Boccia league got underway on Sunday in Iran Sports Federation for the Disabled in Tehran, capital of Iran.

The name “boccia” is derived from the Latin word for “boss” – bottia.

The sport is contested at local, national and international levels, by athletes with severe physical disabilities. It was originally designed to be played by people with cerebral palsy but now includes athletes with other severe disabilities affecting motor skills.

In 1984, it became a Paralympic sport.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Palestine occupiers imitating Crusaders: advisor

POLITICS TEHRAN — Ali Akbar Velayati, a top foreign policy advisor to the Leader, on Monday slammed the occupiers of Palestine for repeating the actions committed by the Crusaders against Muslims, Mehr reported.

Velayati emphasized that the only path to rid the Muslim world including the Middle East region from “the wickedness of the Zionist regime” is to support the resistance front.

He also criticized the policy of leniency toward the Zionist regime, saying “Palestinians know well that their only hope is the resistance front”.

Velayati also said Iran has earned the trust of Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Qatar by supporting Palestinians, which has led to the empowerment of the resistance front.



Enemies' actions have empowered resistance front: general

POLITICS TEHRAN — The IRGC Qods Force deputy chief on Monday hailed the growing power of the anti-Israeli resistance front, saying the enemies' actions have backfired and helped strengthen the movement.

The conditions of the resistance front is improving day by day, General Esmail Qa'ani said in an address to a conference about Palestine and the liberation of al-Aqsa Mosque held in Tehran on Monday, Tasnim reported.

He said since the decision declared to relocate the U.S. embassy to al-Quds (Jerusalem), the process to arm the West Bank has sped up.



Diplomat denies reports on heavy water reactor

POLITICS TEHRAN — Fake reports that Iran has poured concrete into the core of its Arak heavy water reactor were fabricated by the “global Zionism” to overshadow the facility modernization plans and downplay Tehran's benefits from the JCPOA, Iran's ambassador to London has said.

In an article released on Monday, Hamid Baedinejad, a former nuclear negotiator, described the country's success to maintain its Arak heavy water reactor and plans to modernize the facility as a “glory of Iran” under the nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Tasnim reported.



Central bank governor warns speculators of betting against rial

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran's central bank chief on Monday warned investors speculating on the fall of the rial that they were heading for losses because the currency was likely to rebound in the next couple of months.

Valiollah Seif made the remarks as the rial sank to record lows versus the dollar.

“Those who are investing their resources in foreign exchange will suffer losses in the end,” Seif was quoted by Reuters as saying.

He added that rising oil prices had given Iran more resources to support its currency.



Interior Ministry okays formation of council for dialogue among parties

POLITICS TEHRAN — The interior minister has agreed to the formation of the council for dialogue among political parties, an Interior ministry official announced on Monday.

Bahram Sarmast, director general of the political department at the Interior Ministry, said the ministry will take the necessary measures for the formation of the council for talks on national political issues, ISNA reported.

He added that the ministry welcomes cooperation and consultation by political parties.



Washington won't certify 'ill-conceived' Iran deal: Pence

POLITICS U.S. Vice President Mike Pence on Monday warned that Washington will not certify the “ill-conceived” Iran nuclear deal, reiterating a previous threat from U.S. President Donald Trump to withdraw from the deal unless it is fixed.

“The Iran nuclear deal is a disaster and the United States of America will no longer certify this ill-conceived agreement,” Russia Today quoted Pence as saying in an address to the Israeli parliament, the Knesset.

“Unless the Iran nuclear deal is fixed, President Trump has said the U.S. will withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal immediately,” he added.

Larijani calls Iran-KRG ties 'strategic'

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said on Sunday that Iran has “strategic” relationship with the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (KRG) and seeks to protect it.

“We have a strategic relation with you and seek to protect it. This relation is valuable and should not be harmed by strategic mistakes,” he said during a meeting with Iraqi Kurdistan Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani who visited Tehran on Sunday.

Barzani's visit to Tehran was the first by a high-ranking KRG official since the autonomous Kurdistan region held an ill-fated independence referendum on September 25, 2017. The central Iraqi government strongly opposed the referendum, however then KRG president Masoud Barzani pushed for the vote.

Larijani said, “We have had and will have close and brotherly relations with our Kurdish brothers in the Kurdistan



Iraqi Kurdistan PM Barzani (L) talking to Majlis Speaker Larijani

region and the region's security is very important for us.”

He also said that Iran wants a “dynamic” Kurdistan which takes action within

the framework of the Iraqi constitution, highlighting the importance of maintaining unity in the Kurdistan region.

For his part, Barzani said, “Settle-

ment of issues between the Iraqi central government and us should be within the framework of Iraq's constitution, because we seek to maintain Iraq's integrity and territorial integrity.”

On Saturday, one day prior to his visit to Tehran, Barzani held talks with Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi to settle disputes which emerged after the referendum.

“We do not expect all the problems be solved in one session. However, based on Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, we are ready to solve the problems within the framework of the constitution and constant talks,” Barzani explained.

Elsewhere, he called for expansion of ties with Iran.

Barzani who visited Tehran on Sunday also held meetings with President Hassan Rouhani and Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Shamkhani.

French foreign minister 'absolutely wrong': Iran

1 → Speaking on arrival at a European foreign ministers meeting in Brussels, Le Drian also said the 28 ministers would reiterate their concerns over Iran's activities in Yemen, Lebanon and Syria, which he described as “destabilizing”.

“We will also have the opportunity of underlining our firmness on Iran's compliance with United Nations Resolution 2231, which limits access to ballistic capacity and which Iran does not respect,” Le Drian was quoted by Reuters as saying.

Under the UN resolution enshrining the 2015 nuclear deal with the U.S., Britain, China, France, Russia and Germany, Iran is “called upon” to refrain from work on ballistic missiles designed to deliver nuclear weapons.

Iran has repeatedly said its missile program is purely defensive and denied they are designed to carry nuclear warheads.

France, Qassemi said, is allowed to think as it wants to, and it's natural that “our stances” differ in some respects

with those of France or any other country.

He also said Le Drian “is not very familiar with the Iranian society. He should read the history of the Islamic republic and the way we handled pressure and sanctions, so [he] realizes that we can defend ourselves against pressure and at the same time have a more active presence in the region and across the world.”

Le Drian on Sunday said he would travel to Iran in early March and that France had begun talks with Tehran to discuss its missile program and regional activities.

But Qassemi rejected the French foreign minister's comments, saying, “We have not had any negotiations about our missile and defense capabilities and will not talk about these issues with others.”

On France's insistence to negotiate with Iran about its influence in the region, the spokesman said Iran will definitely hold in-depth talks with the French foreign minister

to make matters “clear”.

“We'll have plenty to talk about,” he said, adding, “Our influence in the region is definitely positive. Besides, regional and European countries, especially France, have certainly benefited from our influence.”

If it wasn't for Iran's influence and the role it played in the region, the bloodthirsty terrorists would have captured Damascus and Baghdad, conducting acts of terror in the heart of Europe, Qassemi stressed.

Asked about a report that Britain, France and Germany have begun talks on a plan to satisfy U.S. President Donald Trump by putting more pressure on Iran, the spokesman said he has not heard any statements by European officials confirming the report.

“Our relations with Europe are old and developing,” but Iran-Europe relations have always had their foes, who try to drive a wedge between the two sides, he added.

Top judge divides protestors into 'deceived' individuals and 'rioters'

POLITICS TEHRAN — Judiciary chief Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani said on Monday that prosecutors should separate “deceived” people from “rioters” in dealing with cases of persons who were arrested during the recent protests in some cities across Iran.

Sporadic protests, which first started in

Mashhad on December 28, spread to some other cities in the country. The demonstrations died down after a week. The protests were motivated by economic problems, corruption, and unemployment but vandals misused the situation to attack police stations and religious sites.

U.S. President Donald Trump took advan-

tage of the unrest and took to twitter to level accusations against Iran in numerous posts.

Amoli Larijani said the rioters will pay the price, otherwise they will pose threats against the country's security.

He also said, “The U.S. practicing animosity towards Iran and spending money to cause chaos in Iran are not something new. The fact

that they spent millions of dollars to cause unrest and insecurity in Iran, especially in recent protests, is an important issue.”

“The enemy insists on its enmity and seeks to change political system in Iran. The enemies have always sought to impose their favorable liberal system on the world,” the top judge remarked.

Iran strongly condemns Afghan Intercontinental Hotel attack

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi on Sunday strongly condemned attack on Afghan Intercontinental Hotel which left at least 22 people killed.

“Undoubtedly, those who cause fear and kill people in order to reach their plots should learn lesson from

the fate of Takfiri terrorism in the region during the past months,” he said.

Gunmen in army uniforms entered the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul on Saturday detonating explosives and taking people hostage. The attack left at least 22 people killed.

Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack.

The Intercontinental Hotel was attacked by the Taliban in June 2011, when a bombing killed 21 people, including 10 civilians.

Afghanistan has been target of terrorist attacks in past months including a bomb at a Shia cultural center last month that killed more than 40 people.

During drills, Iranian forces warn off U.S. battleships

The Iranian Army has warned off two U.S.-led coalition battleships during the first day of military exercises involving ground, naval, and aerial forces in southern Iran.

The military drills kicked off early on Monday on an order by Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari, the Army's deputy commander for coordination.

The exercises cover an expanse of three million square kilometers in area in Iran's south and southeast, the Makran Coast, and other areas in the Gulf of Oman.

The ground, marine, and air forces of Iran's Khatam al-Anbiya Air Defense Base will be drilling their defensive combat skills, practicing interoperability, and conducting self-evaluations.

Later on Monday, Rear Admiral Mahmoud Mousavi, the spokesperson for the drills, said two U.S.-led coalition warships that had approached the site of the drills for surveillance were identified by Iranian Navy drones,

which communicated data back to command and control. Iranian patrol and surveillance airplanes were then dispatched to the area and flew over the battleships, warning them to leave, he added. The battleships complied, according to Mousavi.

Mousavi also said that the ground forces fired a Fajr 5 rocket and a Naze'at missile as part of defense exercises during the first day of the drills.

Later in the day, he said, Special Forces and commando units guarding the coastline moved to destroy intruding enemy vessels.

Still later, ground forces moved in to backup the Navy in defending the coastline and preventing enemy forces from infiltrating into Iranian land; and the Fajr 5 rocket and Naze'at missile were fired during that phase, Mousavi said.

He said the Air Force conducted sorties to reinforce ground and naval forces, and the Khatam al-Anbiya Air Defense Base monitored the field of fight.

Proper way to remember Sanchi sailors

1 → Sanchi in a blaze clearly showed Koreans the risk that Iranian crew has to bear to keep the continuity and punctuality of oil on which our whole economy hinges. Koreans are tremendously indebted to the Iranian fleet that carries the highly flammable liquid that took its toll on the hardworking crew this time. It is no exaggeration to say their fortitude and seamanship is one of the cornerstones of Korean economy. We are more than partners but friends.

I reiterate our national condolence that was expressed by the foreign minister for the bereaved families and the Iranian people. We are deeply sorry for their loss and appreciate their service. We shall not make their sacrifice in vain. We have to start a new story in order that this tragedy shall not repeat, not only on the sea nearby Korea but

also in each and every sea route all over the world.

Sanchi is a strong evidence of the high and inherent risk engaged in sailing large tankers. A minor shock is devastating enough to fire and sink them. Even now many fully loaded Sanchis are sailing high seas along with non-oil carriers with potential risk of collision. Concerted efforts are required in order to strengthen the safety of major and crowded sea lanes. Oil tankers shall not be left solely responsible for their safety. No matter how well armored with safety gadgets and experienced crew, the huge thus not agile tankers are always vulnerable. Something shall be done to make sure that oil tankers can set sail safe and sound. That is the proper way to remember Sanchi sailors.

Iran can set a post-Isis security policy for the region

By Mohammad Javad Zarif

The defeat of Isis has not just heralded the return of stability to large swaths of territory. It is also fanning fresh conflict and tension — including a concerted effort to revive the hysteria which has long obscured the reality of Iran's foreign policy.

Isis displayed the darkest depths of human evil. Yet it also provided an opportunity to come together to battle an existential threat. The co-operative relationships forged in this fight can usher in a new era. We need new approaches and new terminology to make sense of a world which is transitioning to a post-western global order. Here are two concepts to shape the emerging paradigm in west Asia: the idea of a strong region, and security networking, whereby small and large countries — even those with historical rivalries — contribute to stability.

The objective of a strong region — as opposed to a quest for hegemony and the exclusion of other actors — is rooted in recognising the need to respect the interest of all stakeholders. Any domineering effort by one country is not only inappropriate but essentially impossible: those who insist on following that path create instability. The arms race in

our region is an instance of this kind of destructive rivalry: siphoning vital resources into the coffers of arms manufacturers has contributed nothing to achieving peace and security. Militarism has only served to fuel disastrous adventurism.

Most of the usual modes of forming alliances have also become obsolete. Given our interconnected world, the idea of collective security is now defunct, especially in the Persian Gulf, for one basic reason: it assumes commonality of interests. Security networking is Iran's innovation to address issues that range from divergence of interests to power and size disparities. Its parameters are simple but effective: rather than trying to ignore conflicts of interests, it accepts differences. Equally, being premised on inclusivity, it acts as a firewall against the emergence of an oligarchy among big states and allows smaller states to participate. The rules of this new order are straightforward: common standards, most significantly the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, such as sovereign equality of states; refraining from the threat or use of force; peaceful resolution of conflicts; respect for the territorial integrity of states; non-intervention in the domestic affairs of states; and respect for self-determination within states.

Security networking is not utopian. It is the only realistic way out of the vicious cycle of relying on extra-regional powers, exclusionary alliances and the illusion that security can be bought with petrodollars or flattery. One would expect other countries — especially our European neighbours — to see it in their own interests to urge allies in our region to

adopt this policy.

To move from turmoil to stability, we must first and foremost turn to dialogue and other confidence-building measures. At all levels we are facing a dialogue deficit in west Asia. Aspects of this are visible between the ruling and the ruled, between governments and between peoples. Dialogue should aim to make clear that we all have similar concerns, fears, aspirations and hopes. Such dialogue can and must replace rhetoric and propaganda. Dialogue must be coupled with confidence-building measures: promoting tourism; joint task forces on issues ranging from nuclear safety to pollution to disaster management; joint military visits; pre-notification of military exercises; transparency measures in armament; reducing military expenditures; and all leading eventually to a non-aggression pact.

As a first step, the Islamic Republic proposes establishing a Regional Dialogue Forum in the Persian Gulf. Our longstanding invitation to dialogue remains open, and we look forward to the day our neighbours will accept it, and their allies — in Europe and elsewhere in the west — will encourage it.

(Source: Financial Times)

Siphoning vital resources into the coffers of arms manufacturers has contributed nothing to achieving peace and security.

We need new approaches and new terminology to make sense of a world which is transitioning to a post-western global order.

Russia: U.S. actions in Syria either provocative or ill-informed

Russia has slammed U.S. actions in Syria that "encourage separatist sentiments among Kurds" as either a provocation or ill-informed after Turkey launched a major operation against U.S.-backed militants in the Arab country.

"Washington has actively encouraged and continues to encourage separatist sentiments among Kurds," Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Monday.

"This is either a lack of understanding of the situation or an absolutely conscious provocation," he added.

Turkey launched the so-called Operation Olive Branch on Saturday in a bid to eliminate the U.S.-backed YPG, which Ankara views as a terror organization and the Syrian branch of the outlawed Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK). The latter has been fighting for an autonomous region inside Turkey since 1984.

The operation was launched days after Washington said it would work with the Kurdish militants to set up a 30,000-strong border force near Turkish soil, a move that infuriated Ankara.

The YPG is operating under the larger U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) militants without authorization from Damascus, which calls the force "traitors" to the Syrian nation.

"Kurds invited to join Sochi talks"

Lavrov said Moscow had invited Kurds to participate in an upcoming Syrian peace congress in Sochi despite the Turkish offensive.

"Kurdish representatives have been included on the list of Syrians invited to participate in the Syrian National Dialogue Congress which will take place in Sochi next week," Lavrov said.

Last December, Russia and Iran agreed with Turkey to hold a "Congress of National Dialogue" in the Black Sea resort of Sochi on January 29 and 30.

Syria's government immediately announced that it would attend the event, however, 40 Syrian "opposition" groups rejected the Russian initiative.

Operation Olive Branch in the Afrin region is Turkey's second major military intervention in Syria during an unprecedented foreign-backed militancy that broke out in 2011.



In August 2016, Turkey began a unilateral military intervention in northern Syria, code-named Operation Euphrates Shield, sending tanks and warplanes across the border.

Ankara claimed that its military campaign was aimed at pushing Daesh terrorists from Turkey's border with Syria

and stopping the advance of Kurdish forces.

Turkey ended its military campaign in northern Syria in March 2017, but at the time it did not rule out the possibility of another incursion into the Arab country.

(Source: TASS)

Syria forces totally liberate vital airbase in Idlib



Syria says it has totally liberated the strategic military airbase of Abu al-Duhur in the northwestern province of Idlib, wresting full control over the key airbase after flushing out militants from the area. "After a string of special operations, units from our armed forces in coordination with allied fighters succeeded in their military operation and took control of the Abu Duhur military airport in Idlib province," read a statement released by the Syrian Army on Sunday.

The important airbase was seized by militant outfits on September 2015, some three years after foreign-backed militants laid siege to it. "Engineering units are now dismantling and clearing mines, explosives, and bombs planted by terrorists in the area," the statement further said.

As they further press ahead with their offensive in multiple fronts against militant groups, Syrian ground forces, backed by aerial cover from the air force, also managed to recapture several villages following heavy clashes with the terrorists of al-Qaeda-linked Jabhat Fateh al-Sham Takfiri group, previously known as al-Nusra Front.

Russian military on Sunday also confirmed that Syria's government troops were at the time in full control of the airport.

To further complicate the already convoluted situation in the Arab country, Turkey launched the so-called Operation Olive Branch in the northern Syrian city of Afrin on Saturday in a bid to eliminate the US-backed Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) militia, which Ankara views as a terror organization and the Syrian branch of the outlawed Kurdish Workers Party (PKK). The latter has been fighting for an autonomous region inside Turkey since 1984. Shortly after commencement of the Turkish military intervention, Damascus "strongly condemns the brutal Turkish aggression on Afrin, which is an inseparable part of Syrian territory."

The Syrian government also said that Ankara did not obtain any official authorization from Damascus regarding the ongoing offensive. "Syria completely denies claims by the Turkish regime that it was informed of this military operation," it added.

Syria has been gripped by foreign-backed militancy since March 2011. The Syrian government says the Israeli regime and its Western and regional allies are aiding Takfiri terrorist groups that are wreaking havoc in the country.

(Source: SANA)

Bangladesh says start of Rohingya return to Myanmar delayed

Bangladesh has delayed the repatriation of Rohingya Muslim refugees to Myanmar, set to start on Tuesday, because the process of compiling and verifying the list of people to be sent back is incomplete, a senior Bangladesh official said.

The decision comes as tensions have risen in camps holding hundreds of thousands of refugees, some of whom are opposing their transfer back to Myanmar because of what they say is a lack of security guarantees.

Myanmar and Bangladesh agreed earlier this month to complete the voluntary repatriation of the refugees within two years, starting on Tuesday. Myanmar says it has set up two reception centers and a temporary camp near the border to receive the first arrivals.

But Abul Kalam, Bangladesh's refugee relief and rehabilitation commissioner, said on Monday the return would have to be delayed. "There are many things remaining," he told Reuters by phone. "The list of people to be sent back is yet to be prepared, their verification and setting up of transit camps is remaining."

A Bangladesh Border Guard official said it could be months before the transfers begin.

The International Organization for Migration says the number of Rohingya who fled to Bangladesh since late August now stands at 688,000. The exodus began when the Myanmar military launched a crackdown following insurgent raids on security forces on Aug. 25.

The United Nations has described the military operation as ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya, which Myanmar denies.

Myanmar said on Monday it was ready to take back the returning Rohingya.



"We are ready to accept them once they come back. On our part, the preparation is ready," Ko Ko Naing, director general of Myanmar's Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, told Reuters by phone.

He declined to comment on whether Bangladesh had informed Myanmar about the delay.

Guarantees

At the Palong Khali refugee camp, near the Naf river that marks the border between the two countries, a group of Rohingya leaders gathered early on Monday morning with a loudspeaker and a banner listing a set of

demands for their return to Myanmar.

These include security guarantees, the granting of citizenship and the group's recognition as one of Myanmar's official ethnic minorities. The Rohingya are also asking that homes, mosques and schools that were burned down or damaged in the military operation be rebuilt. The Rohingya have long been denied citizenship by Myanmar, where many in the Buddhist majority regard them as interlopers from Bangladesh.

Bangladesh army troops arrived at the Palong Khali camp and dispersed a crowd of at least 300 people who had gathered to

listen to the leaders, according to witnesses who said they saw the army take away one of the Rohingya leaders.

Bangladesh army spokesman Rashedul Hasan said he had not received any information about protests in refugee camps on Monday.

A Bangladesh Border Guard official said there would be no forced repatriation of the refugees to Myanmar and denied they would lose their food ration cards if they remained in the camps. "This is out of the question. It will be voluntary. But this is not going to be an easy task to send them back as they are reluctant," the official in the border district of Cox's Bazaar told Reuters.

"They want citizenship, guarantees for protection if they do go back, they want their properties back and they want to go back to their villages and they want jobs."

Myanmar has said it would build a transit camp that can house 30,000 returnees before they are allowed to return to their "place of origin" or somewhere "nearest to their place of origin".

The country's state media reported over the weekend that authorities in Rakhine were making final preparations to take back the first batch of refugees.

Rakhine state Chief Minister Nyi Pu "insisted on completion of the finishing touches on buildings, medical clinics and sanitation infrastructure" during a visit to repatriation camps in the state, the Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper said.

The UNHCR has cautioned that the refugees must not be rushed out of Bangladesh prematurely.

(Source: AP)

China's top paper says U.S. forcing China to accelerate South China Sea deployments



China's top newspaper, decrying Washington as a trouble-maker, said on Monday U.S. moves in the South China Sea like last week's freedom of navigation operation will only cause China to strengthen its deployments in the disputed waterway.

China's foreign ministry said the USS Hopper, a destroyer, came within 12 nautical miles of Huangyan island, which is better known as the Scarborough Shoal and is subject to a rival claim by the Philippines, a historic ally of the United States.

It was the latest U.S. naval operation challenging extensive Chinese claims in the South China Sea and came even as President Donald Trump's administration seeks Chinese cooperation in dealing with North Korea's missile and nuclear programs.

The ruling Communist Party's official People's Daily said in a commentary that, with the situation generally improving in the South China Sea, it was clear that the United States was the one militarizing the region. "Against this backdrop of peace and cooperation, a U.S. ship wantonly provoking trouble is single-minded to the point of recklessness," the paper said. "If the relevant party once more makes trouble out of nothing and causes tensions, then it will only cause China to reach this conclusion: in order to earnestly protect peace in the South China Sea, China must strengthen and speed up the building of its abilities there," it said. The commentary was published under the pen name "Zhong Sheng", meaning "Voice of China", which is often used to give the paper's view on foreign policy issues. The widely read Global Times tabloid, published by the People's Daily, said in an editorial on Monday China's control of the South China Sea is only growing and it is well placed to react to U.S. "provocations".

"As China's military size and quality improve, so does its control of the South China Sea," it said. "China is able to send more naval vessels as a response and can take steps like militarizing islands." The Scarborough Shoal is located within the Philippines' 200 nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone but an international tribunal in 2016 ruled that it is a traditional fishing ground that no one country has sole rights to exploit.

The U.S. military says it carries out "freedom of navigation" operations throughout the world, including in areas claimed by allies, and that they are separate from political considerations.

The Pentagon has not commented directly on the latest patrol but said such operations are routine.

(Source: Reuters)

Catalan crisis rekindled as parliament proposes Puigdemont as leader

The Catalan parliament on Monday proposed Carles Puigdemont as candidate for president, dealing a blow to central government efforts to derail an independence movement that has plunged Spain into political crisis.

As the legislature's speaker named Puigdemont as the sole candidate for a position he was fired from in October, Spain's legal system sought to tighten its net around him.

The state prosecutor in Madrid requested the reactivation of a European arrest warrant to detain him on charges of sedition and rebellion in Copenhagen, where Puigdemont touched down earlier on Monday on his first trip away from Belgium in three months of self-imposed exile.

He fled to Brussels in October after Spain's central government sacked him for spearheading an independence drive that culminated in an illegal referendum and a unilateral declaration of independence by the Catalan parliament.

He became the top candidate to lead the region again after regional elections last month, called by Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, that gave secessionists a majority.

"I confirm that the only candidate that has been proposed is Mr. Carles Puigdemont," said Roger Torrent, the newly-elected separatist speaker at the Catalan parliament.

"I am conscious of the warnings that weigh upon him, but I am also conscious of his absolute legitimacy to be can-



didate," said Torrent, calling for dialogue with Madrid to resolve the situation.

Puigdemont argues he could govern the region from exile abroad, an option that Rajoy has ruled out.

A Reuters reporter saw Puigdemont come through customs at Copenhagen airport a little after 0700 GMT and,

without being detained, get in a car and leave.

It was not clear where Puigdemont was headed. He is billed to appear at the University of Copenhagen at 2:00 p.m. CET (1:00 p.m. GMT) for a debate on the political situation in Catalonia.

According to the Danish parliament's diary, he has also been invited to a meeting there on Tuesday by Magni Arge, a deputy representing the Faroe Islands, which have their own independence movement seeking secession from Denmark.

Shortly after Puigdemont's arrival in Copenhagen, Spain's state prosecution service said it had asked the Supreme Court to reactivate the warrant, on charges of sedition and rebellion, originally issued against him - and later lifted - after he fled to Belgium.

The Danish state prosecutor declined to comment.

After weeks of uneasy calm, the political crisis triggered by Catalonia's independence drive flared up again last week when the new regional parliament elected Torrent as speaker at its first sitting.

Despite that tension, Spain's borrowing costs fell to six-week lows on Monday after credit agency Fitch upgraded its sovereign rating to give Spain its first "A-" grade since the euro zone debt crisis.

(Source: agencies)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	98628.4
IFX	1084.9

Sources: tse.ir, lfb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	46,720 rials
EUR	58,400 rials
GBP	63,400 rials
AED	12,590 rials

Source: Mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$68.48/b
WTI	\$63.20/b
OPEC Basket	\$67.20/b
Gold	\$1,333.15/oz
Silver	\$17.03/oz
Platinum	\$1,020.30/oz

Sources: Oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Belarus underlines enhancing economic ties with Iran

“Besides trade and economy, Belarus can collaborate with Iran on training and assembly,” he said.

Addressing the same gathering, Iranian Industry Minister Mohammad Shariatmadari referred to the current Iran-Belarus annual trade which stands at \$160 million, lamenting that the figure is much less than its optimum level.

He noted that the held joint committee meeting seeks to introduce a roadmap for expanding common ties in various sectors including politics, investment, trade, industry, transportation, agriculture, health, education, technology and science, and energy.

Over \$4b of agricultural products exported in 9 months

TEHRAN — Iran exported over 4.198 million tons of agricultural products worth more than \$4 billion during the nine-month period ended on December 21, 2017, according to the deputy agriculture minister.



Abdolhamid Bakhshandeh said the agricultural products account for 12.7 percent of the value and 4.74 percent of the weight of country's non-oil exports during the mentioned time span, IRNA reported.

In Tokyo meeting, officials seek to forge ahead with TPP even as Canada wavers

As trade officials gather in Tokyo this week to try and forge ahead with a trade pact that U.S. President Donald Trump abandoned last year, the new 11-member club risks getting bogged down by resistance from Canada.

The member countries of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), also known as TPP 11, reached a basic agreement on the pact in November.

But Canada is holding out to secure protection of its cultural industries, like movies, TV, and music, and has said it will not be rushed into signing a deal that other members hope to conclude by March.

That is casting a shadow over a meeting of trade officials from member countries this week in Tokyo and is raising questions about the economic benefits of a pact that doesn't bring Canada into the fold.

“The overall economic impact of the CPTPP would be significantly further eroded if Canada, which is a Group of Seven nation, decides to postpone its decision about joining,” said Rajiv Biswas, Asia-Pacific chief economist at IHS Markit.

After Trump pulled the United States out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement last year, Japan took a leading role in pushing for a replacement pact.

Along with Australia and Mexico, Tokyo has lobbied hard for the agreement, which aims to eliminate trading barriers and tariffs on industrial and farm products across the 11-nation bloc whose trade totaled \$356 billion in 2016.

“Our strong preference is for all 11 countries to join the first wave, but our focus is on bringing a new TPP agreement into force as soon as possible with those who are ready to move,” Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said in Tokyo last week.

The talks in Tokyo starting Monday are expected to iron out technical differences on rules for the treatment of labor and intellectual property but unlikely to yield a conclusive statement that member countries will quickly sign the pact.

Canada, which would be the second-biggest economy in the bloc after Japan, is also unhappy over the rules of origin for cars. (Source: Reuters)

Iran Polymer and Petrochemical Institute: where industry meets innovation

By Ebrahim Fallahi

TEHRAN — The head of Iran Polymer and Petrochemical Institute (IPPI) said the country's petrochemical industry could benefit significantly from the achievements and innovation provided by the institute.

Speaking in a press conference on Monday, Mehdi Nekoumanesh noted that the institute has a great potential in creating knowledge-based products which can be used in different areas in petrochemical industry.

“To be able to keep up with the world's latest innovations and achievements and also to have an optimal output, there should always be coordination and collaboration between the research and industrial bodies of any dynamic industry,” the official said.

Elsewhere in his remarks Nekoumanesh noted that IPPI is currently cooperating with various research institutes and companies from different countries including France, Italy and Germany.

According to the official, on the sidelines of 11th International Exhibition of Plastics, Rubber, Machinery, and Equipment (Iran



Plast 2017) in September 2017, IPPI signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with France's Union des Syndicats des PME du Caoutchouc et de la Plasturgie (UCAPLAST), to produce automotive rubber parts in Iran

in an agreement that is set to turn domestic producers into parts suppliers for French carmakers.

The MOU also called for sharing expertise of UCAPLAST member companies with

Iranian manufacturers.

IPPI also inked an agreement with German Evonik Industries for cooperation in research areas.

Nekoumanesh further expressed concern over the weak state of cooperation between IPPI and domestic industries saying that, in order to comply with the principles of resilient economy, industries should put more trust in domestic knowledge and technology.

“Iran has a very powerful petrochemical industry and for this industry to thrive even more we have to benefit from our young researchers and the knowledge they are providing; we are creating very advanced and innovative products here and the industry should make good use of such output,” he said.

Iran Polymer and Petrochemical Institute is a research organization which has been established to lead the country's scientific activities towards the fundamental needs of petrochemical industry.

IPPI is one the most advanced petrochemical and polymer research complexes in the country and region.

Inflation rate stands at 8.2%: statistical center

TEHRAN — The Statistical Center of Iran announced that the inflation rate for the 12-month period ended on the last day of the tenth Iranian calendar month Dey (January 20) compared to the same period in the previous year hit 8.2 percent.

The figure shows 0.2 percent rise compared to the 12-month period ended on the last day of the ninth calendar month Azar (December 21, 2017), IRIB news reported.

The center also put the inflation rate at 8.1 percent and 9.2 percent in the urban areas and rural regions, respectively, during the mentioned period of time and announced that the rates for the whole country and urban areas show 0.2 percent and 0.3 percent increase, respectively, while there is no change for the rural areas compared to the 12-month period ended on the last day of Azar.



Point-to-point inflation rate stood at 8.5 percent in the whole country and urban areas and at 8.2 percent in the rural regions, respectively, showing 0.4 percent fall in the whole country and urban areas and 0.8 percent decrease in the rural areas from the previous 12-month period.

The Statistical Center of Iran has put the country's inflation rate at 9.8 percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1395 (ended on March 20, 2017), showing 4.5 percent drop from its preceding year.

U.S. sanctions curb Microsoft sales to hundreds of Russian firms

Two of Microsoft's official distributors in Russia have imposed restrictions on sales of Microsoft software to more than 200 Russian companies following new U.S. sanctions, according to notifications circulated by the distributors.

While much of the focus around U.S. sanctions has been on ways they are being skirted, the moves by the Russian distributors show how tougher restrictions that came into force on Nov. 28 are starting to bite.

The new measures cut the duration of loans that can be offered to Russian financial firms subject to sanctions to 14 days from 30 days and to 60 days from 90 days for Russian energy companies on a U.S. sanctions list.

Previously, the restrictions had mainly affected Western banks lending to Russian firms but with such short financing periods, swathes of companies supplying goods and services to Russian clients fear they could fall foul of the rules too.

It is routine in Russia for suppliers to wait weeks or even months to get paid after submitting invoices for goods and services.

Some Western firms have been advised by lawyers that the U.S. Treasury Department could, in theory, take the view this constituted financing in violation of the sanctions, according to several people involved in the discussions.

One of the two Microsoft distributors, a Russian company called Merlion, said in its notification to partners that all sanctioned buyers of Microsoft licenses must pay within tight deadlines, or even pay upfront in some cases.

The second distributor, RRC, said in its notification, seen by Reuters, that “serious restrictions are being introduced” on Microsoft orders from firms subject to U.S. sanctions.

Both Merlion and RRC cited rules stemming from the new package of U.S. sanctions - signed into law on Aug. 2 for Russia's involvement in Ukraine and cyber attacks - as the reason for the additional restrictions.

Neither Merlion nor RRC responded to Reuters questions.

Microsoft said in a statement to Reuters: “Microsoft has a strong commitment to complying with legal requirements and has robust processes around the world to help ensure that our partners are in compliance as well.”

In response to Reuters questions, a spokesman for the U.S. Treasury Department, which oversees the enforcement of sanctions, referred to its published guidance.

The guidance from the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) states that U.S. firms can conduct transactions with companies on the sanctions list as long as the payment terms do not exceed the permitted loan duration.

“In the event that a U.S. person believes that it may not receive payment in full by the end of the relevant payment period, the U.S. person should contact OFAC to determine whether a license or other authorization is required,” it said. (Source: Reuters)

Gas production in South Pars hits 555 mcm/d

TEHRAN — Production of gas from Iran's South Pars gas field stands at 555 million cubic meters per day (mcm/d), according to the managing director of Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC), which is in charge of developing the field.

Mohammad Meshkinfam made the remarks in a meeting with Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh and the members of parliament's Energy Committee, who were visiting the development phases of South Pars on Monday, Tasnim news agency reported.

The POGC managing director said that \$69 billion has been already invested for development of the giant gas field and taking the infrastructural investment into account the figure reaches \$72 billion.

South Pars accounts for supplying 70 percent of the gas consumed inside the country, he further announced.

The giant gas field, which Iran shared with Qatar in the Persian Gulf, 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.

The field is divided into 24 standard phases of development in the first stage. Most of the phases are fully operational at the moment.

Completing development phases of South Pars is among the Oil Ministry's priorities outlined by President Hassan Rouhani in a decree in mid-September, 2017.

Expression of Interest

DRC is an International Non-Government Organisation assisting displaced people in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Danish Refugee Council (DRC.) Registration No. 20699310, is a humanitarian, non-profit, non-government organisation (NGO) working in more than 30 countries throughout the world since 1956. DRC has been operational in Iran since the spring of 2012 working in partnership with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran through the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrant Affairs (BAFIA) (Ref. 11/IRN/BAFIA/0004), the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Ministry of Education (MoE).

We are Inviting Interested Suppliers/ Wholesalers/ Importers/ Manufacturers/ Contractors and Service Providers who have the capacity to operate within Iran in the following areas to introduce themselves for consideration for future Tenders 2018-2019.

Interested parties should submit, in writing, a full company profile a valid Company Registration Certificate along with details of the service, resources, qualifications and experience offered. References may be sought. Those deemed suitable will be contacted in order to complete the DRC Supplier Profile and Registration Process. Successful completion will permit participation in the forthcoming Invitation to Bid tender process in 2018.

- Financial Service Providers (Cash Transfer Solutions)
- Mobile Communication Service Providers
- Building Trades (Electrical, Plumbing, Carpentry etc.)
- Transportation Services (Goods, Courier, Taxi)
- IT Equipment and Supplies
- Printing Services (Booklets, Banners)
- Cooking Pots and Utensils (Crockery, Cutlery etc.)
- Office Supplies and Stationary
- Cold Weather Provision (Heaters, Blankets, Clothing)
- Warehousing and Storage space for rental
- Legal Translation Services
- Building Contractors (Small Renovations & New Builds)
- Air Conditioning and Heating Contractors
- Travel Agent Services (International & Domestic Flights, Transfers, Hotels)
- Tailoring Equipment and Supplies
- Beauty Products and Equipment (Hairdressing etc)
- Furniture and Workshop Equipment
- Shelter Equipment (Tents, Tarpaulins, Mattress etc.)
- Hygiene Supplies (Feminine, Soaps, Toothpaste etc.)

Please note that DRC is an International organisation and as such all business transactions, contracts and correspondence are to be conducted in English. Responders to this call are to be aware that EOI submissions are not part of the contracting process and as such does not qualify as a contracting agreement.

86657811-EXT 105 - procurement@drc-iran.org - www.drc.ngo

DRC Iran Tehran Office. Unit 23, No. 12, Bagsara Alley, Shad St. Mollasadra St. Vanak Sq. Tehran, Iran.



OPEC, non-OPEC achieved 129% conformity in 2017

The OPEC/Non-OPEC Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMMC) has announced that the two groups achieved a record-breaking conformity level of 129 percent with their voluntary crude oil production cuts.

The two groups said monthly average conformity level for the first year of the declaration of cooperation was 107 percent, based on the report of the Joint Technical Committee (JTC) for the year end.

At their meeting convened in Muscat, the Sultanate of Oman, yesterday, the group said across a broad range of indicators, the first year of the declaration of cooperation was a great success.

In December 2017, OPEC and



participating non-OPEC producing countries achieved an excellent conformity level, the highest since the start of the declaration of cooperation.

"This high conformity level has been validated by a diverse range of reporting agencies and media outlets," the group said.

The JMMC expressed satisfaction with the overall results and urged all participating countries to continue and, to the extent possible, intensify their collective and individual efforts, in the interests of bringing stability to the oil market. The JMMC will strive to maintain or exceed full conformity by all participating countries, throughout 2018.

(Source: Daily Trust)

Oil rises as Saudi Arabia says producers will cooperate beyond 2018

Oil prices climbed on Monday, pushed higher by comments from Saudi Arabia that cooperation between oil producers who are withholding supplies would continue beyond 2018.

Strong global economic growth and a drop in U.S. drilling activity also supported crude, traders said.

Brent crude futures were at \$68.84 a barrel at 0756 GMT, up 23 cents, or 0.34 percent, from their last close. Brent on Jan. 15 rose to \$70.37, its highest since December 2014.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were at \$63.53 a barrel, up 16 cents, or 0.25 percent, from their last settlement. WTI climbed to \$64.89 on Jan. 16, also its highest since December 2014.

Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil exporter

and leader of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), said on Sunday major oil producers were in agreement that they should continue cooperating on production after their deal on supply cuts expires this year.

"There is a readiness to continue cooperation beyond 2018... The mechanism hasn't been determined yet, but there is a consensus to continue," Saudi Arabia's Energy Minister Khalid al-Falih said in Oman.

A group of oil producers including OPEC and Russia, the world's biggest crude producer, started to withhold production in January last year to prop up prices. The deal is set to expire at the end of 2018.

In the United States, declining drilling activity for new oil production further sup-

ported crude.

U.S. drillers cut five oil rigs in the week to Jan. 19, bringing the count down to 747, energy services firm Baker Hughes said on Friday.

Despite this, the rig count in 2017 and early this year remains much higher than in 2016, resulting in a 16 percent rise in U.S. production since mid-2016, to 9.75 million barrels per day.

Beyond supplies, strong global economic growth was also supporting oil prices.

"During the last four quarters, the underlying global growth dynamic began to shift... Global growth has become synchronized and accelerated above trend," U.S. bank Morgan Stanley said over the weekend in a note.

In the latest indicator, Japanese manufacturing sentiment in January jumped to an

11-year high, the Reuters Tankan poll showed on Monday, highlighting the optimism driven by nearly two years of economic expansion.

Despite the well-supported market, analysts warned oil had lost some steam since last week.

Bernstein Energy said on Monday that oil inventories might start rising soon due to a slowdown in demand which typically happens at the end of the northern hemisphere winter.

"We expect... an end to the strong (inventory) draws we have seen... With the strong correlation between inventories and crude prices, this perhaps means we should expect crude prices to moderate in the near term," Bernstein said.

(Source: Reuters)

Biggest U.S. east coast oil refinery files for bankruptcy

Philadelphia Energy Solutions LLC, owner of the largest oil refinery serving the New York Harbor gasoline and diesel market, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection.

The company, a joint-venture between The Carlyle Group LP and a subsidiary of Energy Transfer Partners LP, filed a petition Sunday in U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Delaware. Chief Executive Greg Gatta said in a memo obtained by Bloomberg News that the company had a prepackaged reorganization plan and cited the more than \$800 million it paid since 2012 to comply with the U.S. government's Renewable Fuel Standard as a key factor for the decision.

The company's debt is between \$1 billion and \$10 billion, it said in its filing, without providing further details in its initial petition. Independent U.S. refiners that lack the

infrastructure to blend biofuel into gasoline and diesel have been hit hard by surging costs for the credits they must buy to meet Environmental Protection Agency quotas for ethanol and biodiesel. The Trump Administration in late November rejected a bid by fuel-makers including Valero Energy Corp. to relieve refiners of the obligation. Billionaire Carl Icahn, the majority owner of CVR Energy Inc., has complained that the program structure is "rigged."

Formed in 2012 as a result of a partnership between Carlyle and Energy Transfer subsidiary Sunoco Inc., PES drew government aid and was hailed by state, city and union leaders as it worked to save the plant, which accounts for more than one-quarter of operable capacity on the U.S. East Coast and faced shutdown due to dwindling margins.

The company was able to ride the back of the U.S. shale boom, building a terminal to take in train cargoes of cheap oil from North Dakota that couldn't be sold elsewhere.

The end of the U.S. crude export ban in late 2015 and the start of the Dakota Access pipeline last year, among other things, have made the rail shipments less attractive and forced East Coast refiners to turn back to more expensive imports. North Dakota's Bakken crude was about \$5 a barrel cheaper than spot prices for global benchmark Brent on Friday. It was more than \$30 cheaper in late 2013. Last year, plants along the Atlantic Coast imported the most crude since 2011.

Biofuel costs

Meanwhile, the company faced rising costs to comply with renewable fuel regulations. It spent \$218 million to do so in 2017, its

second-largest expenditure after crude oil purchases and more than double its payroll, Gatta said in the memo.

The company also said in the memo that the bankruptcy is part of a restructuring support agreement that will give it access to \$260 million in new financing. The refinery will keep operating and there will be no impact on jobs, salaries and benefits of the company's 1,100 employees, it said, adding that it expects to complete the recapitalization process in the first quarter.

PES split the refineries into separate business units and now operates them as two plants -- Girard Point and Point Breeze -- with a combined processing capacity of 335,000 barrels a day of crude oil. It remains the largest oil refining complex on the U.S. Eastern seaboard. (Source: Bloomberg)

China rushes to replenish gas supplies ahead of icy blast, holiday

Fuel demand in January and February typically slows as temperatures improve compared with the busiest month, December, but data suggests this year could buck the trend.

Another cold wave is about to hit North Asia, and Spring Festival, also known as Chinese or Lunar New Year, takes place later than usual this year in mid-February.

To ensure supplies before the longest holiday in the Chinese calendar, some 60 ships carrying more than 4 million tons of LNG are on their way to China this month, the third highest total behind December's 5.1 million and November's 4.36 million tons, according to shipping data in Thomson Reuters Eikon.

The shipments are coming from unusual origins - Equatorial Guinea and Angola in Africa, Peru in South America, and Trinidad and Tobago - and several are also coming from the United States.

"The Chinese have bought loads of short-term delivery cargoes to meet an expected spike in demand," the head of LNG trading at a major fuel merchant based in Singapore said.

Domestic producers are also churning out more gas. China's December gas output was the highest since at least 2014, with state energy majors boosting operations at key gas fields like Changqing and Fuling.

With temperatures in capital Beijing set to drop as low as -15 Celsius (5 Fahrenheit) this week, heating demand will soar and authorities want to avoid a repeat of December's chaos, which saw serious supply shortages.

Maintaining stability is a main priority for the Communist Party, particularly ahead of and during Spring Festival.

The rush for supply comes after Beijing ordered millions of households and some industrial plants in northern China to change to gas heating from coal as part of its war on pollution. The resulting jump in demand as well as inadequate storage and pipeline networks created a supply crunch in late 2017, leaving homes freezing.

"This year, we have a surge in residential and commercial demand," said Miaoru Huang of energy consultancy Wood Mackenzie.

The crisis eased over the past month after the government ordered big gas users like fertilizer makers to suspend operations to move supplies north, and reversed a ban on coal heating for some cities.

Industrial cutback

Asian spot LNG prices are at their highest in more than three years, at almost \$12 per million British thermal units, as buyers across North Asia order tankers in preparation for the cold snap.

The urgency for gas has lifted Chinese prices by 15-18 percent within a week to 6,650 yuan (\$1,039.87) per ton.

This has also cut into industrial use, said Li Ruipeng, a manager at trucked-LNG dealer Tangshan Huapu Gas based in Tangshan, a city in northern China's Hebei province.

Customers like steelmakers have stopped operations or switched to coal, as they cannot afford the higher LNG prices.

"We're only serving for heating purposes and gas refilling stations. Industrial users are out," said Li, who doesn't expect industrial demand to recover until after Spring Festival.

(Source: Reuters)



The No.1 challenge to the oil rally

By Nick Cunningham

The oil price rally could get derailed by "explosive" growth from U.S. shale in 2018, and "substantial gains" in Canada and Brazil will also add to the supply woes.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) acknowledged in its latest Oil Market Report that the recent rally in oil prices came on the heels of significant tightening, but that the supply picture still looks ominous.

The rally in Brent prices to \$70 was driven in part by some unexpected interruption and geopolitical tension, including the possible unraveling of the Iran nuclear deal, the closure of the Forties pipeline a few weeks back, disruption in Libya, and the steep decline in Venezuela's oil production.

Inventories also continue to decline (for the time being), and even picked up pace at the end of last year. The IEA said that OECD commercial stocks declined by 17.9 million barrels in November, a pace that was twice as fast as the five-year average. And, in December, preliminary data suggests the declines were even stronger.

In fact, inventories declined in three consecutive quarters in 2017. On average, inventories fell at a rate of 630,000 bpd, which the IEA said was exceptional. "Such a threesome has happened rarely in modern history: examples include 1999 (prices doubled), 2009 (prices increased by nearly \$20/bbl), and 2013 (prices increased by \$6/bbl)." This time around, the stock draw pushed up Brent prices by almost \$25 per barrel. "The oil market is clearly tightening," the IEA wrote.

In this sense, it is not as if the surge in positioning from hedge funds and other money managers is unjustified - the underlying fundamentals point to a real tightening underway in the physical market for crude oil.

However, soaring supplies from the U.S. and other non-OPEC countries threaten to stall the rally. The IEA raised its forecast for U.S. oil production growth this year from 870,000 bpd to 1.1 million barrels per day (mb/d). That comes on the heels of sharp

upward revisions from the EIA and OPEC, not to mention a slew of investment banks. Everyone is in agreement on one thing: U.S. shale is set for serious growth, much more than analysts predicted just one month ago.

"The big 2018 supply story is unfolding fast in the Americas. Explosive growth in the US and substantial gains in Canada and Brazil will far outweigh potentially steep declines in Venezuela and Mexico," the IEA wrote.

"It is possible that very soon U.S. crude production could overtake that of Saudi Arabia and also rival Russia's." Russia produces more than 11 mb/d. The U.S. EIA predicted earlier this month that the U.S. would top 11 mb/d by the end of 2019.

But it isn't just the U.S. adding new barrels to the market. Brazil and Canada are two other non-OPEC countries expected to post strong gains, although, unlike short-cycle shale, both countries have projects set to come online that were planned years ago.

Even after factoring in some non-trivial declines in output from Mexico and China, the IEA sees non-OPEC production rising by 1.7 mb/d in 2018, a figure that represents "a return to the heady days of 2013-2015 when US-led growth averaged 1.9 mb/d," the IEA wrote.

For oil bulls, that should be a pretty threatening figure because demand is only expected to grow by 1.3 mb/d this year. The IEA acknowledges that its demand estimate could be conservative, but it takes into account the fact that some demand destruction could occur from higher prices. OPEC pegged demand growth at a healthier 1.5 mb/d, but even that figure is swamped by the 1.7 mb/d of new supply.

The result could be a return to increases in inventories, testing the current rally in prices. The IEA sees a "modest surplus" in the first half of the year, followed by a "modest deficit" in the second half. As such, forecasts for \$60-\$70 for Brent seem reasonable, but that "we should expect a volatile year."

For now, oil prices are struggling to hold onto their gains - Brent has hit the \$70 per barrel threshold, but has fallen back at that resistance level.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Libya restarts Wintershall's oil fields to boost national output

Libya's state energy producer National Oil Corp. announced the restart of production at Wintershall AG's Sara oil fields more than two months after they were closed by protests, in the latest sign that the OPEC nation's oil industry may be stabilizing.

The fields will increase the North African country's crude output by 57,000 barrels a day, according to an NOC statement on Sunday. Wintershall confirmed that crude output at the fields resumed on Jan. 21, according to an emailed statement from the company on Monday.

The shutdown since November resulted in the loss of 4.4 million barrels of production at a cost to the economy of \$281.5

million, NOC said in the statement. The municipality of Jikharrha had decided to reopen the area following pressure from NOC and the public prosecution, it said. The fields, located in the Jikharrha area, were closed in early November due to protests by people demanding jobs and more local development projects.

Since the 2011 war that ousted former leader Muammar Qaddafi, Libya has been carved up among dozens of militias, with rival administrations in the east and in Tripoli. In fighting since 2014 crippled the production and exports of oil, Libya's main source of income, devastating the import-dependent economy. Oil output

has since been increasing and reached last year its highest level in four years. Output has stabilized at about 1 million barrels a day over the last quarter, hampered only by isolated disputes and shutdowns.

Crude exports

NOC Chairman Mustafa Sanalla said the restart in Jikharrha was a setback for a parallel Libyan oil administration based in eastern Libya, which for several years had tried to gain control over the country's central and eastern oil facilities and export the crude independently. It failed to do so as major international oil companies only recognize the Tripoli-based NOC.

(Source: Bloomberg)



N.I.O.C
1396.4960



National Iranian
Drilling Company

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

One-Stage(compressed)

TENDER GUARANTEE		ESTIMATED VALUE (Rial)	Subject of Tender	Tenders Portal Reg. No.	TENDER NO. / INDENT NO	No
Euro	Rial					
2,852	112,500,000	2,250,000,000	FLOW OUT PADDEL FOR MUD LOGGING UNIT.REF: VALCOM	3,148,717	TenderNo.:FP/12-95/044 Indent No.:08-23-9645036	1

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

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

B) Preparation of tender documents:
Purchasing of documents:
In order to receive the tender documents, 510,000 Rials should be paid to SIBA account number 2174652205004 of NIDC in Bank Meli Iran and providing the original deposit receipt.

Reciving of documents:
Tenderers must be obtain the quality evaluation documents along with tender documents maximum ten days after the date of second publication in person at the following address: Hall No.:113, 1thfloor, Foreign Procurement Dept., National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN

C) Delivery of envelopes of bids and call quality evaluating:
Tenderers shall submit simultaneously envelopes of bids including bank guarantees(A), financial offer(C) and stamped and signed of tender documts(B) along with qualificaiion worksheets in form of software in CD and documentary within 40 days from last day of document received deadline to the following address: Hall No.:107, 1thfloor ,Tender Committee, Building operations, National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN.

Notice: The deadline for the refusal of bidders participation in the the tender is the last day of determined for submission of bids.

D) Tender Guarantee:
Type of guarantee:
A)Bank guarantees or guarantees issued by non-bank institutions that have activites licensed by the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
B) The original cash deposit receipt paid to National Iranain Drilling Company.
Duration of credit guarantee & quotation:
This duration should be valid for 90 days and extendable maximum For one time in initial credit amount.

More on this & other tenders is accessible by click on. WWW.NIDC.IR
National Iranian Drilling Company
Contracts Department

تهران تایمز : نوبت اول ۹۶/۱/۳ نوبت دوم ۹۶/۱/۴

France inspires world on immigration debate



By Fareed Zakaria

Emmanuel Macron is today the most admired world leader among liberals, centrists and cosmopolitans around the globe. He has managed to win the French presidency, enact reforms and stay relatively popular – all while speaking positively about the free market, the European Union, globalization and trade. He has done all this in the face of a tide of populism that is still surging. What's his secret? One key area to watch him on is immigration. Macron announced Tuesday yet again that his government would be tougher on immigration, expediting asylum claims and then actually deporting those whose applications were rejected. (In 2016, France deported less than 20 percent of those denied asylum.) He insisted that he would never permit another "Jungle" to appear on his watch, referring to the enormous makeshift refugee camp that was cleared in 2016. Macron is being criticized from the left and congratulated by his former opponent in the presidential election, the populist right-wing leader Marine Le Pen.



Macron has been an extraordinarily shrewd politician, and has a chance to be one of the great presidents of France's Fifth Republic. He understands something about the popular mood, and not just within his nation's borders. In Germany, Angela Merkel has seen her once sky-high public support crater over one central issue – her decision in 2015 to allow in a million refugees, many from Syria. In the recent German elections, in which Merkel's party lost ground and the right-wing AfD won enough votes to enter the Parliament for the first time, exit polling showed that 90 percent of voters wanted those rejected for asylum to be deported faster, and 71 percent wanted to cap the overall number of refugees.

The central issue feeding populism around the globe is immigration. That's why you still see right-wing populism in such countries as Germany, Holland and Sweden, where economic growth is strong, manufacturing is vibrant and inequality has not risen dramatically. Donald Trump beat 16 talented Republican candidates because he outflanked them all on one issue – immigration. "The thing [my base] want[s] more than anything is the wall," Trump explained to the Associated Press.

Meanwhile, Democrats continue to move left on economics, believing that this will make them more credible populists. But polling shows that the public is already with them on economic issues. Where they differ – and especially with white working-class voters – is on immigration. And yet, the party is now more extreme on the topic than it has ever been.

Positions that dozens of Democratic senators took on immigration 10 years ago are now rejected by almost every party leader. Most back then, for example, would have agreed that America's current mix of immigration skews too heavily toward family unification and needs to attract more immigrants with skills. Now, none will speak on the issue. The party today embraces "sanctuary cities," suggesting that local authorities should ignore federal laws or even defy federal authorities that try to enforce the law of the land. Imagine if Republican mayors did the same with regard to laws they don't like on guns or abortions.

It is difficult to be moderate on any topic these days, most of all immigration. Trump discusses the issue in ways that seem, to me, racist. Factions of the Republican Party have become ugly and mean-spirited in tone and temper, demeaning immigrants and encouraging nativism and bigotry. To compromise with these kinds of attitudes seems distasteful, even immoral.

And yet, the issue is one that should allow for some sensible middle ground. The late Edward Kennedy was one of the most liberal senators in the country. Sen. John McCain is a staunch conservative. And yet they were able to agree on a set of compromises in the mid-2000s that would have largely resolved America's immigration deadlock and the rage surrounding it. Canada used to have strong nativist forces within it. But ever since its immigration system moved to a skills-based one – coupled with strong efforts at celebrating diversity, multiculturalism and assimilation – it has had few such voices. And this despite the fact that Canada now has a substantially higher percentage of foreign-born residents than the United States.

The scale and speed of immigration over the last few decades is a real issue. Just since 1990, the share of foreign-born people in America has gone from 9 percent to 15 percent. It has nearly doubled in Germany and the Netherlands and nearly tripled in Denmark. Most of the new immigrants do come from cultures that are more distant and different. Societies can only take so much change in a generation. If mainstream politicians do not recognize these realities and insist that those who speak of them are racists, they will only push the public in its desperation to embrace the real racists – of which there are many.

(Source: The Daily Star)

The central issue feeding populism around the globe is immigration.

Erdog'n's risky gamble could quickly turn sour

Turkish president defies Russia, the U.S. and Bashar al-Assad with assault on Kurds in Syria

Recep Tayyip Erdog'n's Kurdish vendetta has taken a dramatic new twist with the cross-border ground assault on the Afrin enclave in north-west Syria.

Defying Russia, the U.S., and Bashar al-Assad's government, Turkey's headstrong president is betting on a decisive victory over Syrian Kurd forces. But his risky gamble could quickly turn sour.

The initial incursion by Turkish troops and their Free Syrian Army (FSA) allies on Sunday, preceded by days of airstrikes and artillery shelling, appeared tentative and limited in scope. The Syrian Kurd People's Protection Units (YPG) militia, said to number 10,000 fighters in Afrin, is not giving an inch. They are dug in and they are defending the Rojava – the fabled Kurdish homeland.

In 2011, after the Syrian war erupted, Erdog'n adopted the west's aim of ousting Assad. When Islamic State (ISIS) emerged in Syria and Iraq, NATO member Turkey ostensibly prioritized its defeat. But since 2015, when a ceasefire with Turkey's Kurdistan Workers' party (PKK) militants broke down, the Kurdish "terrorist threat" emanating from Syria and Iraq has become Erdog'n's big obsession.

Erdog'n used a failed army coup attempt in 2016 to justify a crackdown on pro-Kurdish political parties, whose elected leaders remain in jail. He also cut a de facto deal with Assad's allies, Russia and Iran, accepting their Syria agenda. In return, they acquiesced in Erdog'n's first big Syria incursion in 2016.

For Erdog'n and likeminded nationalists, the idea of an autonomous or independent Kurdish entity stretching from northern Iraq to Turkey's Hatay province in the west, and



Turkish army tanks on the move near the Syrian border prior to the incursion into Afrin province.

Erdog'n's big problem, Kurdish resistance aside, is that none of the big players support him.

potentially embracing parts of south-east Turkey, is an existential nightmare. Preventing it has eclipsed other considerations. Now the president is chancing his arm again.

Erdog'n's big problem, Kurdish resistance aside, is that none of the big players support him. He was obliged to send officials to Moscow last week to obtain Russia's agreement. Even so, the Russian foreign ministry expressed

serious concern on Sunday.

Russia has pulled back its ground forces to prevent accidental clashes. But it still controls the airspace over Afrin and could step in at any time. Assad is furious with Erdog'n. Damascus has threatened to hit back militarily – especially if Erdog'n pursues his threat to advance east towards Manbij, another Kurdish stronghold.

How Obama gave us Trump

by Timothy P. Carney

By the grace of God, and thanks to our robust and decentralized system of government, the U.S. has survived nearly a year with an unprepared, under informed, incurious, incontinent narcissist as president.

In fact, in some regards, we've even thrived during this past year.

Still, the president's character – mostly his colossal self-regard, his lack of self-control, and his unwillingness or inability to learn what he ought – made the year at times aggravating, terrifying, and certainly divisive. Trump hasn't brought on any catastrophes yet, but he has frayed the nerves of his country. And there's still three more years of this.

I'm sure I'm not alone in the experience, regularly this year, of literally struggling to believe that this reality TV star is actually our president.

How did this happen? There are a million ways to answer that question, and just as many op-eds and books have tried. Since Trump began winning primaries, a fun parlor game has been "whose fault is Trump?" or "who gave us Trump?" Again, there are millions of answers to this, the most direct being "the people who voted for and endorsed Trump at any point."

If we wanted to blame one person, there are many possibilities: Ted Cruz, for embracing Trump early in the primaries, or endorsing him at the end of the general; Marco Rubio for not properly preparing himself for the run; Hillary Clinton, for poisoning her own candidacy through her greed (her highly paid speeches) as well as her arrogance and paranoia (the secret private server).

But it's probably best to start with the man who was the most powerful person in the world on Election Day 2016: Barack Obama.

How did Obama give us Trump? Many ways. But let's focus on three.

First off, Obama gave the country Trump by first giving the country the least likable Democratic nominee in modern history. Picking her as secretary of state put her in line as his successor. His refusal to pre-endorse Vice



Obama's administration helped Trump beat Hillary, because it scared conservatives into voting for Trump.

President Joe Biden in 2016 basically cleared old Uncle Joe out of the field. Also, Obama left behind a party so impoverished and indebted that party powerbrokers had no choice but to tilt the nominating process toward the corporatist fundraising behemoth that is Hillary. The fact that her campaign was sustaining the party's finances speaks to that.

Biden would have won, and others like Martin O'Malley or Bernie Sanders might have done better than Hillary. But Obama helped give us Hillary, and thus Trump.

Secondly, Obama helped Trump win during the campaign by lumping Trump in with all other Republicans. The intention was to make all Republicans seem icky and abnormal; the unintended consequence was to make Trump seem much more normal. In October 2016, when Clinton started posting double-digit leads in Michigan and finally pulled ahead in Ohio, Obama shifted from his tack of saying

Trump "sure wasn't conservative," to the tack of lumping Trump in with all Republicans. In Ohio in mid-October, Obama tried to lump Trump with Rob Portman, a staid and sensible establishment Republican senator. The aftermath: Portman maintained his huge leads, and Trump pulled ahead in Ohio, which he won in a blowout.

Third, and most importantly, Obama's administration helped Trump beat Hillary, because it scared conservatives into voting for Trump.

Two days after Election Day, as I walked down K Street, I ran into a priest friend. He said he saw Trump's victory as providing "a reprieve" for the Church. After Obama went to court to force nuns to procure contraceptive insurance for employers, and argued in court for narrower readings of the free exercise clause and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, religious conservatives were worried about what would come next.

Democratic politicians on the state level were trying to drive Christian florists, photographers, and bakers out of business for following their consciences. The ACLU was suing Catholic hospitals for not aborting babies.

Obama, by weaponizing the federal government against religious institutions and individuals, escalated the culture war to the point that many conservatives realized no peace was possible. They were willing to vote for a man like Trump if that's what it took to keep HHS and the DOJ from shutting down their schools and businesses. A judge on the Supreme Court who would overturn Hobby Lobby and rule against the Little Sisters of the Poor would leave freedom of conscience mortally vulnerable.

Obama's culture warfare raised the stakes, and made Trump seem a necessary evil to many religious conservatives, probably enough to flip Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, and thus the election.

As we hang on tight with white knuckles for three more years, which will hopefully provide no more drama than the past year, there are plenty of people to blame. But because he was the most powerful person in the world at the time, Obama deserves special mention.

(Source: Washington Examiner)

With forgiveness, a need for economic justice

In Liberia and Colombia, civil conflict has been halted by programs that aid former rebels. South Africa has avoided civil war but it also needs to help those who don't share in its wealth.

In the 1990s South Africa preached reconciliation and forgiveness in its successful and largely peaceful transition out of apartheid.

Today, Liberia, long torn by civil wars, has peacefully elected a new president, George Weah, who'll take office Jan. 22. And Colombia, after a half-century of conflict, has made peace with rebels from FARC (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), who have laid down their arms and begun an assimilation back into society. Some of these guerrilla fighters now are becoming politicians.

South Africa never fell into a civil war, though many worried that could happen. Countries that do emerge from civil war have about a 40 percent chance of falling back into chaos, according to one expert. But for every year a nation can maintain peace the potential for a lasting peace goes up another percentage point.

Hopes for peace in places like Liberia and Colombia often rest heavily on so-called

DDR programs (disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration), points out a recent article in The Economist.

DDR programs use incentives, mostly monetary, to induce insurgents to turn in their weapons, disband their militias, and help them reenter civil society by providing work opportunities, job training, or other educational programs.

Funding from international aid groups often sweetens the deal. (In 2008, for example, 15 DDR programs around the world were underwritten by \$1.6 billion in aid.)

Such programs can be fraught with problems. In some cases rebels who have been given funds for training spent them frivolously. Instead of learning new work skills some joined a drug gang instead. In Nigeria rebels who were blowing up oil fields were essentially bribed by the government

by being paid a monthly stipend to stop their attacks. But when the payments were cut back, the attacks resumed.

But despite a far from perfect record, DDR programs remain a valuable way to integrate those at the margins of a society into the economic mainstream.

South Africans have lived a different story. In the 1990s as white rule and apartheid collapsed, it's Truth and Reconciliation Commission allowed those who had committed crimes – even murder – under apartheid to publicly confess, ask forgiveness of their victims, and at the same time avoid prosecution. Truth was deemed more important than retribution.

The commission did much to dissipate anger, promote healing, and recognize human dignity. A bloody civil war was avoided. Truth and reconciliation commission have

since sprung up in dozens of other countries.

Cyril Ramaphosa is now in line to replace Jacob Zuma as South African president by 2019. He has pledged to root out corruption and promote transparency, both badly needed reforms.

But he can't succeed unless he finds a way to spread the country's economic prosperity more widely. Unemployment among black South Africans, the vast majority of citizens, is at 31 percent, while less than 7 percent for whites.

While South Africa's poor aren't an armed rebel group, they need the kind of aggressive programs of jobs and training that DDRs have given around the world, programs that will offer new hope.

Apologies given – and accepted – for past offenses were an essential step. But the healing must also include a recognition of the economic devastation for the majority of South Africans left in the wake of apartheid. The country needs to promote the kind of economic and educational opportunities that are bringing insurgents in places like Colombia and Liberia back into society.

(Source: The CSM)

Hopes for peace in places like Liberia and Colombia often rest heavily on so-called DDR programs (disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration), points out a recent article in The Economist.

IMIDRO Chief in 25th Inaugural Ceremony of Esfahan's Mobarakeh Steel Company (EMSCO):

EMSCO Plays a Significant Role in Economy of Country

Last week, 25th Foundation Anniversary of Esfahan's Mobarakeh Steel Company (EMSCO), as the largest industrial achievements of the Islamic Republic of Iran, was observed.

As held in Negin Amphitheater of Naqsh-e Jahan Square, this prestigious ceremony was attended by the deputy minister of industry, mine and trade and Chief Executive of Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), governor general of Esfahan Province and a number of senior officials of the province, representatives of the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Iranian Parliament also called Majlis), industrial and economic activists as well as media companions.

In addition, 10 volumes of books related to the salient achievements and activities of the company, which were published in the past three years, were unveiled.

In the beginning of this prestigious ceremony, a brief history of construction operation of the company besides its expansion projects done in the past 25 years were showcased.

Chief Executive of Esfahan's Mobarakeh Steel Company (EMSCO) was the first speaker who pointed to the current and past situation of this industrial and production unit as well as its salient achievements gained by the company during its a quarter of century activity.

■ Certain Strategy of EMSCO to Complete Production Chain

Bahram Sobhani Chief Executive of Esfahan's Mobarakeh Steel Company pointed to the necessity of calculation of construction period of this industrial and production unit and added: despite many ups and downs, this industrial and production plant was constructed during eight years of Sacred Defense which is considered as one of the largest industrial and production units in the Middle East region."

He expressed his special thanks on the unflinching and unsparing efforts of functionaries and officials who supported objectives of the company in this respect.

His special thanks also went to the late Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani who managed to materialize most objectives of this industrial and production unit in the best form possible.

As the largest steel production factory in the country and Middle East region, he said: "EMSCO accounts for 22 percent share of steel production in the region."

Moreover, this industrial and production unit is the largest producer of Direct Reduction (DR) iron (sponged iron) in the region with producing 12 million tons.

In addition, EMSCO also is considered as the largest stock-paneled company at Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE) with 7,500 billion toman reg-

a comprehensive plan is designed every year in the company meticulously."

Statistics show that steel production in this company has hit from 2,400,000 tons in 1992 to 7,200,000 tons in the current Iranian calendar year in 1396 (to end March 20, 2018), he maintained.

The steel production capacity of the company will hit 8,630,000 tons in the current year, he reiterated.

Most steel products of the company are used in various industries, he stressed.

■ Direct and Indirect Employment in EMSCO at 1,400,000

About 1,400 people are working directly and indirectly with the company, he said, adding: "the company managed to supply more steel products in the current year as compared to a year earlier in a way that the company registered eight percent production growth."

■ Export Volume of Products Means Quality and Commitment of EMSCO

The managing director of the company pointed out that his company managed to produce 100 million tons of steel product which is a record in all-time history of steel production in the country.

Given the above issue, 75 percent of products of this industrial and production company is used inside the country while the rest i.e. 25 percent of products are exported to other countries, he opined.

■ Indigenizing, Main Strategy of Company

Commissioning an indigenized and localized industrial unit is one of the main policies of the company. Although this industrial and production unit was first manufactured by Italian firms, the domestic engineers of the company attained construction maps using reverse engineering.

Currently, more than 85 percent of raw materials of the company are procured by the very company which is a solid evidence of the materializing objectives of resistance economy, the managing director opined.

However, the management of the company has taken giant strides in line with materializing most objectives of resistance economy in the country.

■ Saving Water Consumption in EMSCO at 75% over Past 25 Years

Elsewhere in his remarks, the managing director of the company said that his company has thus far taken effective steps in line with saving water consumption through its equipped systems such as construction of equipped water and wastewater treatment plants, etc.



strides in these years, one of which is the construction of a sport stadium in Naqsh-e Jahan Square which was commissioned in the past year

materializing most objectives of the company.

Turning to the key role of steel industry in development of the country, he said, "Both economy and employment have been intermingled in the contemporary world of today."

If a country like China managed to stand at the second economic powerhouse in the world, it is because of taking its rich mineral and industrial sector into serious consideration, he maintained. Statistics show that China managed to increase its level of steel production in the world significantly in a way that steel production volume in China hit from 10 percent to 50 percent in the global level.

■ Necessity of Paying Due Attention to Planning and Maintaining Production in Resistance Economy Field

He also expressed his special thanks on the measures taken in Esfahan's Mobarakeh Steel Complex and said, "Unfortunately, some affiliated

vital and important for all sectors in the country, the issue of which should be taken into serious consideration."

With the application of new technologies, water consumption pattern should be taken into serious consideration, he said, adding: "if the water shortage problem is not taken into consideration, production and employment will not be actualized."

■ Membership in Large Family of World Steel, an Honor for EMSCO and Islamic Establishment

Governor General of Esfahan Province Mohsen Mehrizadeh was the next speaker who commemorated the commander of reconstruction of the country the late Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani who said: "Relying upon the assistance of the Almighty God, the company will take giant strides in coming years in order to materialize most of its objectives."

"I am very glad that EMSCO is a company which is a progressive which is incomparable with the previous years," he opined.

■ Effective Steps Taken by EMSCO in Field of Observing Water Consumption Pattern



in 1395 (ended March 20, 2017)."

Of the other activities in this regard, he pointed to launching Relief and Rescue Base of Red Crescent Society in Mobarakeh Fork, helping construction operation of grand Mosalla (congregational prayers site) in Isfahan, construction operation of Hosseiniyah (an open-air area for holding religious ceremonies), etc.

■ Winning Dozens of National and International Awards under Unity and Amity

At the end of his remarks, the managing director of the company pointed to some honors and achievements of the company in national and international arenas and added: "Salient achievements of the company include as follows: "selection of EMSCO as the 10th leading steel-makers in the world according to World Steel dynamic, winning 11th rank as top knowledge-based organization in World MAKE Award in 2017, winning title of exemplary and leader organization in country in 2014, sole holder of golden trophy in EFQM, exemplary national exporter in 2015, winning top rank among top 100 companies in country in the sector of basic metals, winning a statue as environment-friendly company in 2015, winning a statue in terms of supporting rights of consumers in 2016, winning a statue as exemplary unit of IRIRI both in national and provincial levels in 2017, etc."

■ Key Role of MESCO in Industry and Economy

Deputy Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade and Chief Executive of IMIDRO Mehdi Karbasian was the next speaker who pointed to the key role of the company in booming national economy of the country and expressed his special thanks to the industrious laborers and workers of the company in taking effective steps in line with



industrial and production units in this company have faced with serious problems, the main reason of which is due to the lack of accurate planning and production chain in this company."

■ Booming Production and Exports by Launching Large Companies

Deputy minister of industry and chief executive of IMIDRO also pointed to the issue of water shortage problem in the country and added: "It should be kept in mind that the issue of water is

Elsewhere in his remarks, Mehrizadeh said that effective steps have been taken by EMSCO in various sectors such as water consumption pattern and reiterated: "water consumption in EMSCO has decreased from 40 to 20 million cubic meters/annum which is a salient characteristic of the company in this respect."

■ Necessity of Planning to Reduce Water Consumption Rate Seriously in All Sectors

This year, the country faced with critical water shortage problem due to meager precipitation, he said, adding: "It is hoped that water shortage problem will be solved by the yearend."

■ Significant Performance of EMSCO in Fulfilling Social Responsibilities

Representative of people of Mobarakeh in the Islamic Consultative Assembly Zahra Saeedi was the next speaker in the ceremony who pointed to the unemployment problem overshadowed various parts of the country and said: "Most economic problems facing the country date back to the mismanagement of managers and directors in the previous administrations."

Steel industry is one of the salient parameters of development, she said, adding: "this significant level of production and sales in Mobarakeh Steel Complex indicates unsparing efforts taken by the staff and personnel of the company."

He seized this opportunity to express her special thanks to all staff, personnel and industrious engineers of the company who managed to materialize most objectives of this company.



istered capital.

■ Over 4,000 Firms and Workshops Are Major Customers of EMSCO

Sobhani pointed to this issue that EMSCO has 2,800 upstream companies in the supply chain, adding: "the company has also 1,000 direct customers and more than 3,000 indirect customers."

He pointed to Hormozgan Steel Production company as one of the subsidiaries of the company and said: "Of the other subsidiary companies, it should be referred to: Mobarakeh steel Technical and Engineering Services Company, Sangan Mineral Industrial company, Foolad Sang Mineral and Industrial Company, Chaharmahal-o Bakhtiari Car Sheet Production Unit, Sepid Dasht steel Production Company, Amirkabir of Kashan steel Company, TARA Steel Production Plant, TAMCO Company, Sepahan Cultural and sports Club and also three holdings companies."

He went on to say that Justice Shares, IMIDRO, SHASTA (Social Security Organization Investment Company, real and legal entities are major shareholders of the company.

■ Production Chain of EMSCO Is Complete

The managing director of the company pointed to the completion of production chain as one of the salient characteristics of the company and added, "this chain includes all the production processes. Presently, this company is not dependent either in upstream or downstream parts."

He pointed to the numerous capacities of the company and reiterated, "Planning accurately is one of the main salient capacities of this industrial and production unit and for this purpose,



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Cleric mesmerizes children by story, color, ball

Setareh Behroozi

Story, color, ball; these are words written by cleric Esmael Azarinejad in his bio on Instagram account.

Exploring his page, you encounter a young cleric with a book in his hands reading out for children in deprived area.

The magic of reading book for children is something, which cannot be overlooked by anyone. The doors, which open to you via this magical world, should not be ignored. Once you realize the pleasure of book reading, you feel responsible for transferring it to others.

Azarinejad is not an exception. A cleric whose costume and possible adverse comments cannot deter him from advertising book reading among children in deprived area.

Azarinejad, 38, is the father of a 12 year old son named Hossein and a 6 year old daughter, Arghavan said that he has witness that book reading works like a magic on his children and he cannot deprive other children from it.

"I've read a book about a turtle who learns to stop himself from acting out and to calm down by pulling himself into his shell when Arghavan was only four," he explained in an interview with the Tehran Times.

"Months later, she advised an older person who got angry to 'pull himself into his shell' and since he had no shell, a blanket or another room is a perfect choice.

"You see, so children learn from books and inspired by the stories we read to them," he continued.

Azarinejad said that he has faced several same stories during his career about reading out to children.

In addition to his Hawza studies, he got his B.A. in sociology and M.A. in mysticism. He is now Imam of the Jama'at, praying



Instagram: @esmael_azarinejad

in congregation, at a mosque in his hometown Dehdasht, southwestern Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad province, and also university professor at his city.

"I felt complete despair with university students who only studying to gain a degree and unfortunately highschoolers only think about the entrance exam," he lamented.

Hence, he comes to conclusion that the pleasure of book reading should be discovered in early ages.

"I decided to launch a cultural activity at the mosque and my choice was book reading for children," he explained.

"Unfortunately book reading and cultural activities are ignored in deprived area," he said.

Azarinejad said that his family accompany him during his program in deprived villages. He said that his son promote book reading at his school as well.

"I was a bookworm in my childhood. I have more than 200 volume of book when I was a teen," he explained.

He said that the pleasure of book reading he experienced in his early age makes him to promote children book reading these years.

■ Story, color, ball: Crucial devices to develop relationship

He named story, color and ball as important elements for establishing relationship with children in rural areas.

"Playing football with children is a great

way to befriend with them and to play it cool," he said. He said that he befriend with children in deprived rural areas through games and painting.

"I ask them to paint on stones and in this way they trust me and then it is the time for introducing books to them," he said.

Through discussing the stories, they gain self-esteem and understand that their idea and thought is important.

He said that he also do some sideline activities like theater performance and painting about the book they have read.

In traditional view, a cleric should promote Islamic rules and the Holy Quran. However, he has a different view.

"I do not agree with memorization of surah of Holy Quran in early ages. The Holy Quran contains several stories and even God ordered Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to teach people through stories," he explained.

He said that he dispatches Hawze students to villages at the weekend.

He said that people has a very positive reaction to his activities.

"Since I have an Instagram and Twitter account, I receive several feedbacks about the issue and most of them are positive," he said.

Azarinejad said that many people support him by sending books or money to promote book reading.

"I try to read books with high quality to children about social behaviors and I believe that they should benefit from up to date books in these areas," he concluded.

People like cleric Azarinejad make other to feel hopeful about the future. They understand the worthy of childhood and try their best to make the world a better place to live. May we all take a small step to have a better world!

Foods you should never, ever eat raw

You know to avoid raw meat and eggs. But there are plenty of other foods that you definitely want to cook before eating, and some of them might surprise you.

■ Potatoes



Yes, this tuber-iffic mealtime staple should never be eaten raw! "Eating potatoes raw can cause bloating and undesirable gastrointestinal effects, because potatoes contain starches that are resistant to being digested," says Dr. Lisa Davis, the chief nutrition officer at Terra's Kitchen. Even scarier, if raw potatoes spend a long time in a warm or damp area, they can turn green and develop a toxin called solanine. If a potato appears to have green spots on it, you should avoid eating it altogether, because the solanine could cause food poisoning. Here are some other foods that are bad for your digestive health.

■ Kidney beans



Here's another normally healthy food that can be dangerous if eaten the wrong way. Red kidney beans are packed with protein, fiber, and antioxidants, but eating them raw can wreak havoc on your stomach.

"Uncooked kidney beans contain the toxin phytohemagglutinin, which can cause unpleasant gastrointestinal discomfort and symptoms similar to food poisoning," says Dr. Davis. Make sure you boil kidney beans for at least ten minutes before eating them. Here are some more health benefits (and risks) of eating beans of all types.

■ Hot dogs



Hot dogs aren't the most nutritious food as it is, but eating them raw can be downright dangerous. It's a common misconception that, since they're pre-cooked, hot dogs can be eaten right out of the package like lunch meat. This isn't the case at all. According to the FDA, packaged hot dogs can become contaminated with the bacteria Listeria, which can only be killed by reheating the dogs. Here are some foods you might want to avoid eating altogether (because nutritionists avoid them).

■ Milk



You might hear "raw milk" and wonder what that could possibly mean. You don't cook milk! But raw milk is real, and it's dangerous. Milk that comes straight from a cow, without being pasteurized, can contain harmful bacteria like E. coli and Salmonella. According to the FDA, raw milk is 150 times more likely to cause foodborne illnesses than other dairy products. The sale of raw milk at grocery stores is still legal in several states, so be sure that you're always buying pasteurized milk. Learn more about the dangers of raw milk.

■ Bitter almonds



The almonds that we know and love are also called "sweet almonds," and there are some excellent health reasons to eat them. Bitter almonds are kind of like their evil cousin. They're a variety of sweet almonds, but they contain hydrocyanic acid, which is a dangerous combo of hydrogen cyanide and water. According to The Spruce, it would only take about 70 raw bitter almonds to kill a fully grown adult. Yikes! Thankfully, they're safe to eat if they've been cooked, and most U.S. grocery stores don't sell them. The likeliest places you'll encounter them are in almond extract and almond-flavored liqueurs. Can you guess the five healthiest nuts you can eat?

Gift-giving ideas to show your love

People love the idea of love, and no one wants to be left out or come up short. In fact, it can be quite competitive when people compare how their loved ones came through for them.

During this holiday, couples, friends, parents, and children shower others with love notes, candy, flowers and more as a show of their love and appreciation for them. There are many opportunities to participate in the Valentine's Day festivities; however, not every gift is appropriate for every person or in every situation.

Here are some helpful suggestions for buying and receiving Valentine's Day gifts.

■ Married couples

For married couples, the sky is the limit on what you can or should give. Some of the more traditional gifts include a bouquet of roses, diamonds, and candy. A fur coat or another extravagance is always well-received and usually much unexpected. For a unique twist why not try tickets to

the theater, or a trip to the big city. You might want to hire a housekeeper for the week or sponsor a day at an expensive day spa.

■ Children

For children who are buying for teachers, you might want to purchase a nice pin or some stationery. You can also send a flower or a box of chocolates. For the class exchange, let them bring candy and little homemade or store bought notes. Keep them appropriate and find out how the teacher has specified they are to be distributed. He or she may want you to leave them unaddressed so that they can place them all in a basket so they can be distributed evenly.

■ Children and parents

For parents who want to buy for their children or parents, the options are limitless. Most children love surprises. You might want to take them out to dinner and a movie. Children might also enjoy learning the history of the day

and celebrating together with family and friends during a family dinner party in honor of love.

For older parents, perhaps you can send them on an all-expense paid trip or a romantic weekend in the country at a bed and breakfast. They might also enjoy a thoughtful card accompanied by a fruit basket or tickets to symphony. If your parents are sports fans, you might buy them some tickets to see their favorite team play.

■ Widows and widowers

It's always nice to think about these people and drop them a special note. If you are widowed, perhaps you can get together with other singles and have dinner out as a group.

The important thing to remember is to show love and appreciation for your loved ones. What a great opportunity to find unique and creative ways to bless them with your kindness, generosity and love.

(Source: The Spruce)

Sabzi Khordan: Persian assortment of fresh herbs



Sabzi khordan refers to an abundant mixture of fresh herbs and vegetables served every day alongside most main meals. The word "sabzi" means herbs/vegetables and the word "khordan" means eating. Eating greens and vegetables with almost every meal is an essential part and deep-rooted tradition in the Iranian culture.

Iranian cuisine revolves around using fresh and seasonal vegetables in cooking and serving them fresh on a daily basis.

A traditional Persian plate of fresh herbs usually consists of basil (rayhan),

mint (naana), tarragon (tarkhoon), chives (tareh), radish (torob-cheh), scallion (piazh-cheh), cilantro (geshniz), parsley (jaafari), dill (shevid), and Iranian watercress (shaahi).

Typically, a platter of washed, cleaned and trimmed herbs is placed on the table and is passed around for each person to take a handful. This aromatic, flavorful, and nutritious side enhances the taste of any dish including all polow and khoresh dishes.

(Source: turmericaffron.blogspot.co.uk)

How to allergy-proof your home in simple steps?



■ Clean up clutter. The less stuff in your house, the fewer places for allergens to hang out. And, just as important, the easier it will be to clean thoroughly once a week.

■ Making your home inhospitable for allergens sounds like a daunting task. In a particulate sense, it's going to be you against millions of mold spores, dust mites and pollen. Fortunately, though, you're smarter than these minute microbes, and following these tips can help you keep allergies at bay.

■ Your bathroom is for mold what your bedroom is for dust mites — heaven at home.

■ Fabrics and carpeting generate help create dust by the breaking down of fibers. Consider pitching curtains, high-pile carpeting and upholstered furniture in the bedroom: all cozy accommodations for allergens.

■ Make smart selections for the landscape. The yellow, sticky pollen that bees carry from plant to plant rarely causes allergic reactions.

(Source: diynetwork.com)



101 ITEMS FOR YOUR BUCKET LIST!

#29. Run barefoot

In early human history, barefoot running was widespread, but this became increasingly less so following the growth of footwear usage. Barefoot running is near non-existent in modern-day populations of industrialized and wealthier countries, although it remains relatively common in many poorer nations, especially within third world countries.

It's funny putting this as a bucket list item, because I see barefoot running as a lifestyle activity — I've been running barefoot since 2010! Do you know that barefoot running improves your landing, gives you better posture, and creates less stress on your knees/feet/joints as compared to running with shoes? Don't just take my word for it — try it for yourself.

Here we share 101 items to consider for your bucket list. Look through the list — any item that resonates with you? Take the items that resonate with you and use them for your own list!

(Source: personalexcellence.co)



#IRANIANLIFESTYLE



A woman picks herb on heights of Rudbar city, Gilan Province (Instagram/@aboozar_jana-lipoor)

Tehran Intl. Tourism Exhibition kicks off

TOURISM TEHRAN — The 11th Tehran International Tourism Exhibition (TITE 2018) opens its doors to the public today at the Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds.



A total of 430 domestic travel companies and tour operators and 70 foreign ones from 21 countries including Italy, Germany, Brazil, England, Switzerland, Spain, Russia, Cyprus, Nepal, Thailand, Malaysia, and Cyprus are taking part in the four-day event, IRIB reported.

The presence of 48 e-travel companies is a distinguishing feature of the current edition that also turns the spotlight on ecotourism, health tourism, various Iranian tribes and their rituals.

The total area dedicated to the event has increased 15 percent compared to the year before, the report added.

A poster for the 11th Tehran International Tourism Exhibition

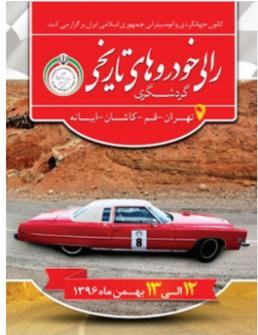
Adopting "Iran, Beyond Expectation" as its motto, the exhibit runs through January 26.

With rich history, picturesque sceneries, centuries-old traditions and cuisine, hospitable people and 22 World Heritage sites, Iran has many to offer its avid visitors.

The country's ultimate goal is to attract 20 million foreign tourists annually by 2025. However, with only eight years to go, according to some experts, the target seems to be somewhat unachievable.

Tehran-Abyaneh car rally to promote tourism

TOURISM TEHRAN — The Touring and Automobile Club of Iran is organizing a vintage car rally, with an itinerary studded with a variety of tourist spots across Tehran and Isfahan provinces.



"The Tehran-Abyaneh rally is aimed to promote both the tourism development and the safe motoring culture," CHTN quoted Salman Yarmohammadi, the club director, on Sunday.

"Dedicated to cars older than 40 years, this rally is scheduled for February 1 and 2 and will be held on a round trip from Tehran to Abyaneh village."

"A total of 40 vehicles, each boarding a driver, a mapper and an auxiliary driver, will compete during the event," he added.

Kashan and Tepe Sialk, a large archeological site in its vicinity, will be amongst other stopovers for the rally.

Dominated with reddish hues and lost in labyrinth of heights, Abyaneh village is one of the oldest in Iran. It is an example of human adaptation to nature, wherein one can redraw the boundaries of time and feel a flavor of ancient Iranian culture and civilization.

Russian tour operators weighing Iran destinations

TOURISM TEHRAN — A cluster of Russian tour operators and travel marketers have commenced tours across Iran to weigh its diverse destinations in a bid to deepen tourism cooperation with the southern neighbor.

A total of 32 tour operators from Moscow, Ufa and Tatarstan arrived in Tehran on Friday upon the invitation of several Iranian private travel companies and airlines, Mehr reported on Saturday.

They primarily visited UNESCO-registered Golestan Palace in downtown Tehran before embarking a weeklong familiarizing tour to Isfahan, Kashan, Abyabeh village and Kish Island.

The situation will help tour operators to evaluate the costs of tour packages to the country yet draw their attention to the potential shortcomings that would be scrutinized in a meeting, which is to be held in Tehran.

Russian Federal Agency for Tourism Director Oleg Safonov had earlier proclaimed that Iran is one of the safest destinations for Russian travelers, estimating some 30 million of Russians are willing to travel to Iran, the report said.

Familiarizing with Iran, its rich history, culture and opportunity to buy Persian carpets and handicrafts can be amongst main objectives for such passengers, Safonov was



A Russian traveler poses for a photo during her trip to Yazd, central Iran.

quoted as saying by Mehr.

Last June, Iran tourism body urged the need to achieve a reasonable balance in the two-way tourist exchange.

In 2017, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin inked a visa-free agreement for tourist groups in Moscow.

Based on the agreement tour groups of 5 to 50 people heading to Russia from Iran or vice versa will be granted a visa-free stay of up to 15 days.

JICA helps drafting Tabriz tourism development plan

TOURISM TEHRAN — Japan International Cooperation Agency will assist Iran formulating a comprehensive plan for tourism development of its northwestern city of Tabriz, IRNA reported on Monday.

During a follow-up session held on Sunday, a delegation of JICA Iran Office discussed ways to achieve an inclusive scheme with Tabriz tourism chief and mayor, travel associates and representatives from the private sector.

The meeting also addressed cultural heritage and untapped capacities of the city along with attempts to sketch a roadmap for forthcoming assistance.

Tabriz is not just a city but an influential adherent of the Silk Road corridor and a gateway to Europe, so that it should be familiarized appropriately, IRNA quoted JICA Iran Office Chief Representative Yukiharu Kobayashi as saying.

The plan is in line with tourism devel-



A couple passes by an official logo that reads "Tabriz 2018" which refers to the selection of northwestern Iranian city as the capital of Islamic tourism in 2018

opment project in Iran, which commenced last year and currently its third examination session is going on, Kobayashi said, adding JICA intends to help improve employment prospects and economic prosperity in the region based on a qualitative scheme.

Morteza Abdar, director of the provincial Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department, for his part said that the department is fully prepared to launch joint projects by means of the Japanizes how-know in the field of cultural heritage and tourism.

UNESCO-registered properties, brand names and vast tourism potentials will be subjected to the JICA studies, an earlier report by IRNA says.

Capital of East Azarbaijan province, Tabriz now holds the title of 2018 Islamic Tourism Capital. The city 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.

Chinese and Russians shore up Middle East tourism

The Mideast region as a whole drew 58 million foreign tourists in 2017, a 4.8 percent rise on the previous year

Chinese and Russian visitors boosted Middle Eastern tourism last year following a 2016 slump as Europeans gave the area a wide berth on security fears, according to the World Tourism Organization (WTO).

The Mideast region as a whole drew 58 million foreign tourists in 2017 — a 4.8 percent rise on the previous year — the Madrid-based WTO said in its latest figures released midweek.

Extremist attacks on tourist sites in Egypt, Tunisia and Turkey in recent years particularly hit the industry.

But "over time, people forget and return", said Jalel Gasmî, head of Granada Travel

Services, a tour operator attending the Fitur international tourism gathering in the Spanish capital.

Despite the annual rise, Marcus Lee, heading the Welcome China agency, said the sector could not rest on its laurels.

For Chinese visitors, security "is the first thing they ask about" beyond visa regulations and often poor flight connections in the Middle East, said Mr Lee.

Security concerns aside, Mr Lee said rising purchasing power means the Chinese tourist takes a different approach compared to 20 years ago when, "for example ... coming to Europe they wanted to see ten countries in ten days".

"That's no longer the case and we are

concentrating on one country over ten days," said Mr Lee.

In the case of Egypt, tourist numbers soared 55 percent last year, even as European numbers dipped, with Chinese and visitors from Egypt's neighbors taking their place.

Visitor profiles have changed since military man Abdel Fattah El Sisi came to power in 2014 and especially since the 2011 overthrow of longtime Hosni Mubarak.

Before then, "the European market, including Russia, accounted for almost 80 percent [of tourists] but now, 52 percent," said Hesham El Demeiry, head of the Egyptian tourist authority, adding Chinese and Indian visitors rose from 5 to 12 per cent while tourists from Egypt's neighbours doubled their share

from 15 to 30 per cent.

Turkey, meanwhile, is back in business after the fallout from the July 2016 coup saw visitor numbers slide by a third, before a similar rise last year.

Ankara is out to keep on attracting more visitors from Russia — whose tourists poured in during 2017 — as well as neighbors including Iran and Ukraine.

The downside, according to Turkish tour operator Ahmet Okay, is that the newcomers are likely to spend fewer tourist dollars than their EU or U.S. counterparts.

Tunisia is also on the way back thanks to a surge in Russian and Chinese visitors with a 23 percent rise in visitors last year over 2016.

(Source: The National)

ROUND THE GLOBE

Centennial Hall in Wrocław

The Centennial Hall in Poland's Wrocław, Poland, a milestone in the history of reinforced concrete architecture, was designed by the architect Max Berg and built in 1911-1913.

The hall has a symmetrical quatrefoil ground plan with a huge circular central space covered by a ribbed dome topped with a lantern. It can accommodate up to 10,000 people.



The Centennial Hall is an outstanding example of early Modernism and the innovative use of reinforced concrete structures in the building industry. At the time of its construction, it was the largest ever reinforced concrete dome in the world.

It played a significant role in the creation of a new technological solution of high aesthetic value, which became an important point of reference in the design of public spaces and in the further evolution of this technology.

Drawing on historical forms, the building was a pioneering design responding to emerging social needs, including an assembly hall, an auditorium for theatre performances, an exhibition space and a sports venue. The building is a significant watershed in the history of Modern architecture.

The Exhibition Grounds, whose main feature the Centennial Hall, stands at the intersection of its principal axes, constitutes an integral spatial whole. The design of the Exhibition Grounds combined new elements with the southern part of the 19th-century Szczytnicki Park, which was used as the setting for thematic garden exhibitions, such as the Japanese Garden, as well as for the temporary Exhibition of Cemetery Art, an extant reminder of which is an 18th-century wooden church relocated from Upper Silesia in 1912.

(Source: UNESCO)

Tourism booming in Cuba despite tougher new Trump policy

On a sweltering early summer afternoon in Miami's Little Havana, President Donald Trump told a cheering Cuban-American crowd that he was rolling back some of Barack Obama's opening to Cuba in order to starve the island's military-run economy of U.S. tourism dollars and ratchet up pressure for regime change.

That doesn't appear to be happening. Travel to Cuba is booming from dozens of countries, including the U.S. And the tourism dollars from big-spending Americans seem to be heading into Cuba's state sector and away from private business, according to Cuban state figures, experts and private business people themselves.

The government figures show that 2017 was a record year for tourism, with 4.7 million visitors pumping more than \$3 billion into the island's otherwise struggling economy. The number of American travelers rose to 619,000, more than six times the pre-Obama level. But amid the boom — an 18 percent increase over 2016 — owners of private restaurants and bed-and-breakfasts are reporting a sharp drop-off.

"There was an explosion of tourists in the months after President Obama's detente announcement. They were everywhere!" said Rodolfo Morales, a retired government worker who rents two rooms in his home for about \$30 a night. "Since then, it's fallen off."

The ultimate destination of American tourism spending in Cuba seems an obscure data point, but it's highly relevant to a decades-old goal of American foreign policy — encouraging change in Cuba's single-party, centrally planned system. For more than 50 years, Washington sought to strangle nearly all trade with the island in hopes of spurring economic collapse. Obama changed that policy to one of promoting engagement as a way of strengthening a Cuban private sector that could grow into a middle class empowered to demand reform.

Cuba's tourism boom began shortly after Obama and Cuban President Raul Castro announced in December 2014 that their countries would re-establish diplomatic relations and



move toward normalization. U.S. cruise ships began docking in the Bay of Havana and U.S. airlines started regular flights to cities across the island. Overall tourism last year was up 56 percent over Cuba's roughly 3 million visitors in 2014.

While the U.S. prohibits tourism to Cuba, Americans can travel here for specially designated purposes like religious activity or the vaguely defined category of "people-to-people" cultural interaction.

Obama allowed individuals to participate in "people-to-people" activities outside official tour groups. Hundreds of thousands of Americans responded by designing their own Cuban vacations without fear of government penalties.

Since Cuba largely steers tour groups to government-run facilities, Americans traveling on their own became a vital market for the island's private entrepreneurs, hotly desired for their free spending, heavy tipping and a desire to see a "real" Cuba beyond all-inclusive beach resorts and quick stops on tour buses. The surge helped travel-related businesses maintain their role as by far the most successful players in Cuba's small but growing private sector.

Trump's new policy re-imposed the required for "peo-

ple-to-people" travel to take place only in tour groups, which depend largely on Cuban government transportation and guides.

As a result, many private business people are seeing so many fewer Americans that it feels like their numbers are dropping, even though the statistics say otherwise.

"Tourism has grown in Cuba, with the exception of American tourism," said Nelson Lopez, a private tour guide. "But I'm sure that sometime soon they'll be back."

While Trump's new rules didn't take effect until November, their announcement in June led to an almost immediate slackening in business from individual Americans, many Cuban entrepreneurs say.

The situation was worsened by Hurricane Irma striking Cuba's northern coast in September and by a Cuban government freeze on new licenses for businesses including restaurants and bed-and-breakfasts. Cuban officials say the freeze was needed to control tax evasion, purchase of stolen state goods and other illegality in the private sector, but it's had the effect of further restricting private-sector activity in the wake of Trump's policy change.

Cuban state tourism officials did not respond to requests for comment.

Trump's policy changes did not touch flights or cruise ships. Jose Luis Perello, a tourism expert at the University of Havana, said more than 541,000 cruise ship passengers visited Cuba in 2017, compared with 184,000 the previous year. Even as entrepreneurs see fewer American clients, many of those cruise passengers are coming from the United States, he said.

Yunaika Estanque, who runs a three-room bed-and-breakfast overlooking the Bay of Havana, says she has been able to weather a sharp drop in American guests because a British tour agency still sends her clients, but things still aren't good.

"Without a doubt our best year was 2016, before the Trump presidency," she said. "I've been talking with other bed-and-breakfast owners and they're in bad shape."

(Source: VOA)

Flu virus can spread simply by breathing, scientists say

The influenza virus is actually transmitted faster just by breathing rather than by coughing or sneezing, a new study reveals.

Scientists have uncovered strong evidence that infected people exhale the virus out through their mouths and noses in the form of aerosol particles that are tiny enough to remain suspended in the air for hours.

This new discovery on how the flu is spread comes as the United States is in the midst of a devastating influenza season and allows healthcare service providers to fine-tune their recommendations for disease prevention.

Flu-like symptoms

From December 2012 through March 2013, a research team led by the University of Maryland recruited college students at the institution's College Park campus who were experiencing flu-like symptoms.

Out of the 355 participants that were tested, a total of 142 were confirmed to have the flu virus. Then from among the infected participants, the scientists obtained nasopharyngeal samples during the first three days after the onset of symptoms.

To measure aerosol transmission, each of the participants sat inside a chamber with their faces placed in a large metal cone for half an hour. This cone instrument is a part of the Gesundheit machine, which captures exhaled breath to detect and measure virus content.

Participants were asked to cough, sneeze,



and utter the alphabet for three times. Overall, the team collected 218 samples within 218 breathing sample sessions. The team reports that after analyzing

Surprisingly, 11 of the 23 samples taken when the participants weren't coughing or sneezing contained detectable viral RNA. Of these samples, eight had the virus itself.

samples, they determined that a significant number of the participants routinely shed influenza virus into small airborne droplets.

Surprisingly, 11 of the 23 samples taken when the participants weren't coughing or sneezing contained detectable viral RNA. Of these samples, eight had the virus itself.

"So when someone is coming down with influenza, they should go home and not remain in the workplace and infect others," said Dr. Donald Milton, professor of environmental health at the University of Maryland's School of Public Health and the study's lead researcher.

Spread of virus

Currently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend annual vaccination, as well as good health habits to stop the spread of the virus. However, the recent study proves these measures are no longer enough.

The "study findings suggest that keeping surfaces clean, washing our hands all the time, and avoiding people who are coughing does not provide complete protection from getting the flu," said Sheryl Ehrman, Don Beall Dean of San Jose State University's Charles W. Davidson College of Engineering and coauthor of the study.

According to Ehrman, staying confined at home and out of public spaces would make a significant difference in preventing the spread of the influenza virus.

(Source: Tech Times)

How did a deadly tropical fungus get to the temperate environs of the Pacific Northwest?

In what is being described as the "Teddy Roosevelt effect," a deadly fungus in the Pacific Northwest may have arrived from Brazil via the Panama Canal, according to a new study led by the Translational Genomics Research Institute (TGen).

Cryptococcus gattii -- which until a 1999 outbreak in British Columbia's Vancouver Island was considered primarily a tropical fungus primarily found in places like Brazil, New Guinea and Australia -- can cause deadly lung and brain infections in both people and animals.

Researchers used genomic analysis and advanced statistics to trace the likely evolution of the disease, correlating it in time to the 1914 opening of the Panama Canal and a surge of shipping trade between Brazil and the Pacific Northwest. The results were published today

in the journal *mSphere*.

Anti-fungal drugs

C. gattii infections first appeared in Washington in 2007, and in Oregon in 2010, with isolated incidences in Idaho and California. Symptoms include cough, shortness of breath, chest pain, fever, headache, neck pain, nausea, vomiting, sensitivity to light and confusion or changes in behavior. Treatment can include months of intravenous and oral anti-fungal drugs, and in some cases surgical removal from the lungs and central nervous system.

"Understanding the emergence and continual evolution of this pathogen into a new environment is critical to the understanding of the ongoing spread of cryptococcal disease, and may be important to studying the evolution of other emerging health threats," said Dr. David

Engelthaler, Director of TGen's Pathogen and Microbiome Division, TGen North, in Flagstaff, and the study's senior author.

Researchers performed whole genome sequencing on 134 *C. gattii* samples. They then estimated fungal mutation rates and used evolutionary analysis to calculate the arrival of *C. gattii* in the Pacific Northwest within the past 60 to 100 years, which the authors posit, "makes a strong case for an anthropogenic (human-caused) introduction."

The source and timing of the emergence of *C. gattii* in the Pacific Northwest have been a challenge to public health researchers since cryptococcosis seemingly first appeared in British Columbia in 1999.

The Isthmus of Panama

Nearly 3 million years ago, the Isthmus of

Panama rose to create a land bridge between North and South America, and a barrier between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

The study results suggest that the completion of the Panama Canal in 1914 may have provided the perfect migratory path for the fungus. Trade between North and South America via the Panama Canal initially included hardwood lumber, minerals, coffee and rubber. However, researchers in this study propose that contaminated ballast water -- which has spread animals, algae and microbes across the globe -- is one hypothetical way *C. gattii* may have moved from Brazil to the Pacific Northwest. *C. gattii* fungus survives in seawater and has caused infections in marine mammals in the Pacific Northwest, and elsewhere.

(Source: eurekalert.org)

Propellantless propulsion system could keep satellites in orbit, reduce space junk



One of the main factors limiting the life of satellites is how much propellant they can carry to execute orbital corrections. Now scientists in Spain have come up with a propellantless propulsion system that also doubles as an electric generator. Using the Earth's magnetic field interacting with a 2-km long aluminum tether, the system could be used to dispose of space debris and boost the orbit of the International Space Station (ISS).

The recipient of two Spanish patents, the new propulsion system developed at the Universidad Carlos III de Madrid (UC3M) and the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid is based on the principle of Lorentz drag. That is, using a long conducting tether that is lowered from a satellite and builds up an electrical potential as it passes through the Earth's magnetic field. Put simply, what this does is allow the satellite to convert the spacecraft's orbital momentum into electricity, causing it to lose altitude as its orbit decays. On the other hand, if electricity is pumped into the tether, this generates thrust, causing the satellite to increase in altitude.

Vacuum of space

The idea isn't a new one. In fact, variants of it have been tested over the past decades, but its application has been limited because the tethers have been complex, expensive, and very prone to contamination even in the vacuum of space. Where the new tether differs in that it consists of an aluminum tape only a few centimeters wide feature what is called a "low work" coating, which has enhanced electron emission properties when exposed to sunlight or heat.

(Source: New Atlas)

"Space tethers have been investigated for decades and have flown in more than twenty space missions," says Claudio Bombardelli, from the UPM Space Dynamic Research group and one of the inventors. "Our contribution to this technology comes from a strikingly simple design in which two lightweight aluminum tape deployed from a satellite without any active electron emitter are able to supply power and/or propulsion to a spacecraft. Besides, to make things more efficient, we thought about exploiting the photoelectric effect of the tapes exposed to sunlight. We believe that this is an extremely important simplification which can boost tether technology."

The orbits of satellites

The researchers see the technology as having a number of applications. Aside from boosting the orbits of satellites and even the ISS, it could also be used as a way of deorbiting satellites when they reach the end of their service lives, or as an onboard power source. They are currently working on extending the existing patents into the European area and building small-scale prototypes.

The "biggest challenge is its manufacturing because the tether should gather very specific optical and electron emission properties," says Gonzalo Sánchez Arriaga, Ramón y Cajal researcher at the Bioengineering and Aerospace Engineering Department at UC3M. "We have been awarded very recently a small research grant by the Ministry of Economy, Industry and Competitiveness of Spain to investigate promising materials.

Epilepsy might be linked to structural differences in brain: new study



Epilepsy might be involved in rather widespread structural differences in our brain in comparison with the previous estimations. A recent study led by the researchers at UCL along with Keck School of Medicine of USC stated that the condition known as 'Epilepsy' is linked with the volume as well as thickness based differences present in grey matter from several regions in the brain.

The study of this research was published in the journal named 'Brain' which involved the largest neuroimaging ever conducted for the brains of people suffering from epilepsy.

The study showed that the condition is involved with vast differences in the structural pattern of the brain which is also applicable for the benign epilepsy type with controllable seizures. The abnormalities in the brain identified by the researchers were actually subtle with no noticeable loss of brain function.

The potential impact

Sanjay Sisodiya, the lead author of the study from UCL Institute of Neurology & Epilepsy Society stated that the researchers found that even the common epilepsies which were considered benign have vast differences in the brain matter. The study has not yet assessed any potential impact of the differences in brain structure; however, there is more to the study of epilepsy than previously assumed.

Epilepsy affects a global population of up to 0.6 to 1.5 percent with numerous symptoms and conditions with a particular tendency for each seizure type. The study for this medical condition involved

the participation of global ENIGMA-Epilepsy Consortium with headquarters at Keck School of Medicine of USC. The study brought together the data from 24 different research centers located across North as well as South America, Europe, Australia and Asia.

Brain measures for more than 2,149 people were extracted with MRI scans that suffered from epilepsy. The same was compared to the healthy control group that was 1,727 in number.

Subcortical regions

The team located a reduced thickness of the grey matter in the outer brain section (cortex) with a reduced volume for the subcortical regions of the brain in comparison with the control group. A reduced thickness and volume meant epilepsy attacks of longer duration.

The people suffering from epilepsy also exhibited a lower volume in the right area of the thalamus which is responsible for motor and sensory signals. This was previously associated with only certain epilepsies. A reduced thickness of the motor cortex impacts the control for body movement.

The subtle differences in the brain of epileptic patients could be detected only due to the large data provided to the researchers. The study also defined the differences between subgroups in the epileptic patients which reflect the genetic pattern of the patients. The structural differences in various regions of the brain conclude that this neurological disorder is a network-based disorder that is spread all over the brain.

(Source: The TeCake)

Can new Arctic analysis assist discover life on Mars?

A team from McGill University in Canada used miniaturized scientific instruments and specialized microbiology analysis techniques to examine permafrost -- a permanently frozen layer below the Earth's surface -- in the Arctic, the most similar environment to the Red Planet on Earth.

Instead of having to return samples to a laboratory for analysis -- which would be almost impossible on Mars -- the tool allows researchers to detect and analyze life.

"Mars is a very cold and dry planet, with a permafrost terrain that looks a lot like what we find in the Canadian high Arctic," said Dr. Jacqueline Goordial, from the team.

"For this reason, we chose a site about 900km from the North Pole as a Mars analogue to take samples and test our methods."

As part of a study published in *Frontiers in Microbiology*, the scientists used a portable, miniature DNA sequencing device called the Oxford Nanopore MiniON to detect life.

The researchers showed the device was capable of working under extreme environmental conditions, and that it could be combined with other techniques to detect microbial life.

"By using the DNA sequencer with the other methodology in our platform, we were able to first find active life, and then identify it and analyze its genomic potential, that is, the kinds of functional genes it has," Dr. Goordial said.

The "types of analyses performed by our platform are typically carried out in the laboratory, after shipping samples back from the field.

"We show that microbial ecology studies can now be done in real time, directly on site -- including in extreme environments like the Arctic and Antarctic."

"Successful detection of nucleic acids in Martian permafrost samples would provide unambiguous evidence of life on another world," said fellow researcher Professor Lyle Whyte.

(Source: Luxora Leader)

Ultrasonic sound tornadoes levitate objects in a soundless void

Researchers at the University of Bristol have been able to levitate objects using ultrasonic waves larger than the wavelengths of sound used by the device.



This could enable touchless control of drug capsules or micro-surgical implements inside the human body using sound. This could enable production lines where delicate objects are assembled without any physical contact.

Sound tornadoes are created and a soundless void holds the objects.

Acoustic vortices can transfer angular momentum and trap particles. Here, we show that particles trapped in airborne acoustic vortices orbit at high speeds leading to dynamic instability and ejection. We demonstrate stable trapping inside acoustic vortices by generating sequences of short-pulsed vortices of equal helicity but opposite chirality.

This produces a (virtual vortex) with an orbital angular momentum that can be tuned independently of the trapping force. We use this method to adjust the rotational speed of particles inside a vortex beam and for the first time create three-dimensional acoustics traps for particles of wavelength order (so called Mie particles).

(Source: NextBigFuture)

Chronic drinking in adolescence adds risks of liver diseases in adulthood: study

Swedish researchers confirmed in a study published Sunday that chronic consumption of alcohol during adolescence can lead to greater risk of developing liver diseases later in life.

The research by the Swedish scientists with Karolinska University Hospital of Sweden showed that young men who drank 20 grams or more of alcohol each day during their adolescence have higher risks of developing liver diseases, including liver cirrhosis or even liver-related deaths, later in their adult life.

The study, published in the *Journal of Hepatology*, was based partly on the retrospective statistics of more than 49,000 Swedish young men aged between 18 and 20. The data were collected in a nationwide survey conducted from 1969 to 1970 on Swedish males conscripted then into military service.

The Swedish researchers examined the link between alcohol consumption early in life and later development of severe liver disease.

After 39 years of follow-up research, the scientists found that 383 men developed severe liver diseases later in their life, such as liver cirrhosis, decompensated liver disease, liver failure, or were killed by liver diseases.

In some countries, recommended cut-off levels suggest that safe alcohol consumption for men to avoid alcoholic liver disease is 30 grams per day, roughly equivalent to three drinks. However, the latest study indicates that the risk is dose-dependent and young men consuming only two drinks, or about 20 grams or more of alcohol every day, would face greater risks of developing liver diseases in adulthood.

It is generally known that alcohol is the leading cause of liver cirrhosis and liver-related deaths, and a 2014 report by the World Health Organization says that alcohol-related cirrhosis leads to 493,300 deaths globally each year.

(Source: xinhuanet.com)

Roadmap seeks to support nomad women

W O M E N TEHRAN — In a cross-sectoral cooperation a roadmap to address nomad women's challenges and shortcomings will be drawn up, said Masoumeh Ebtekar, the vice president for women's and family affairs.



In a meeting between Ebtekar and Karamali Qandali, head of Iran Nomad Affairs Organization and heads of some other related organizations the officials made arrangements for training nomad women, helping nomad girls who had left school and developing nomad women's health, Mehr reported on Saturday. Supporting nomad women's handicrafts and traditional arts was emphasized in the meeting. About 35 percent of handicrafts made during the current Iranian calendar year (started on March 21, 2017) are created by the nomads, the report added. Nomad women have a great role in preservation and utilization of environment and nomad women's empowerment helps deal with climate change and preserve water and soil resources, Ebtekar the former head of the Department of Environment concluded.

RECIPE OF THE WEEK

Lemon Squares

Ingredients

- 1 cup unsalted butter
- 2 cups sifted all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup sifted confectioners' sugar
- 2 cups white sugar
- 4 eggs
- 1 lemon
- 6 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 1/2 cups chopped walnuts
- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour



Directions

Preheat oven to 325 degrees F (160 degrees C). Grease a 9x13 inch pan.
To make crust: In a large mixing bowl, beat together the butter, 2 cups of the flour, and confectioners' sugar until fluffy. Scrape mixture into the pan and smooth. Bake 15 minutes.
In a medium bowl, beat the eggs and sugar. Grate the rind of the lemon and add the rind, along with 6 tablespoons of lemon juice, to the egg mixture. Sprinkle 1 tablespoon of flour and the baking powder over the mixture. Fold in the nuts and mix until well blended. Pour the lemon mixture into the crust.
Bake for another 35 minutes, until filling is set. Let cool before cutting.

(Source: allrecipes.com)

LEARN ENGLISH

Family Barbecue

A: Is everything ready for the big family **barbecue** tomorrow?
B: Yep. The steaks and chicken are **marinated** and I also bought **hamburger buns**.

A: We should also cook a couple **dozen** hot dogs and **kebabs**.
B: Yeah, good idea. We can put some **lawn furniture** outside next to the **grill**. I also set up the **tent** outside so we can hide from the sun if it gets too hot.

A: Great! I asked Grace to bring cups and **serviettes** as she is also bringing two big **coolers** for the drinks.
B: This is gonna be a great barbecue!

Key vocabulary

barbecue: a meal cooked out of doors over an open fire
marinate: to be soaked in marinade, a mixture of oil and spices in which meat or fish is put for a time before cooking
hamburger bun: a round bun shaped to hold a hamburger patty
dozen: a group of twelve
kebab: pieces of roasted meat, fish, and vegetables on a skewer
lawn furniture: furniture intended for use outside in the yard
grill: utensil with a metal grate (parallel metal bars) for cooking food over a fire
tent: portable shelter of canvas held up by poles, rope, and pegs
serviette: a small square of cloth or paper; napkin
cooler: a container, vessel, or apparatus for cooling

Supplementary vocabulary

tongs: device with two arms that are joined as a hinge at one end, used for grasping, holding, or lifting something
charcoal grill: grill used for barbecuing using charcoal as a fuel, which gives the food a smoky taste
gas grill: grill used for barbecuing using gas as a fuel, as from a propane tank or from a natural gas pipeline
skewer: long pin of wood or metal for inserting through meat or other food to hold or bind it while cooking
basting brush: brush used to moisten food periodically with a liquid or sauce, especially while cooking

(Source: irlanguage.com)

A nurse, a mother, an angel

By Naghmeh Mizanian

I was looking for her for twelve years. She was not working at the same hospital anymore. None of her colleagues knew where she was working. "Maybe she is retired and she is no longer working," one of her colleagues told me. "No, she is transferred to one of the hospitals in her hometown, Shahsavari, you can find her there," said another old colleague of her. I searched in the hospitals in the city of Tonekabon, previously called Shahsavari, in the northern province of Mazandaran. I called there. "I am looking for a nurse who saved my son's life," I said, "her name was Mrs. Shahsavari, may I talk to her?" "What is her first name?" asked the operator. "I don't know," I replied. Here everybody's family name is Shahsavari, you should know her first name. I was upset but not disappointed. Again I went to the hospital in which she had saved my son's life. All of her close friends had left there. Nobody knew her first name. Twelve years passed. I was working as a tour guide. In any tour, when the passengers introduced themselves, and I found a nurse, I eagerly asked her whether she knew a nurse by the name of Mrs. Shahsavari. But nobody knew her. Finally one of my nurse passengers told me that she maybe find her. I excitedly asked her to find her. It is twelve years that I wanted to thank her. One week later my friend called me:



"I have found Mrs. Shahsavari's cell number. She is retired now and she is living in the city of Shahsavari. Immediately, I added her phone number to my contact list and looked at her profile picture. Yes, she was her. I fully remembered her loving face. Then I couldn't call her. What can I tell

her after twelve years? How can I thank her? Which words can show my sincere feelings? Every day I tried to call her but I couldn't. Finally, on the National Nurse Day [falling on the birthday of Hazrat Zainab (SA) the daughter of Imam Ali (AS), the first Shia Imam] I decided to call her. "This is Mrs. Shahsavari. Who is speaking?"

Who is speaking?" she replied the call, but I couldn't talk. I became dumb. "You don't know me. You cannot remember me. But I remember you every day when I look at my son. You are the angel who saved his life," I told her. She was surprised. I tried to remind her of that day. The day when my 3-day old baby couldn't breathe and she ran all the stairs from the third floor to the sixth, carrying the heavy suction machine. She removed obstructions from my son's airway and cleared his chest, so that he could breathe again. She didn't ask permission from anybody for bringing the machine upstairs. There was no time to ask permission. Maybe she would lose her job because of what she did without permission. But she saved my son's life. I was crying from my whole heart. I don't remember that day, she said. "Such events have happened many times in my job. It was my duty to save a patient's life." No, not everything a nurse does is her duty. It is a feeling of kindness, a feeling of motherhood, a feeling of humanity, a feeling of sacrifice which may not exist in many other jobs. No word, no gift and nothing can compensate the troubles that a nurse burdens during her job. The only thing that I can do for Mrs. Shahsavari is to pray for her health and happiness every day. May all nurses who sincerely sacrifice their life for the sake of sick people, gain the best happiness and health in their life and Happy Nurse Day.

Iranian, German businesswomen eye co-op opportunity

W O M E N TEHRAN — The Iranian vice president for women's and family affairs and the chairwoman of Germany-the Middle East Friendship Association discussed the ways for boosting cooperation between Iranian and German businesswomen in the future. Creating economic opportunities for educated women is one of the most important strategies of the current administration in the field of women and family affairs, said VP Masoumeh Ebtekar here on Sunday. Speaking at a meeting with Helen Rang, the chairwoman of Germany-the Middle East Friendship Association, in Tehran, Ebtekar put emphasis on the capacities of Iranian women and their effective presence in educational and social affairs, Mehr reported.



Ebtekar went on to explain about utilizing modern information and communication technologies in order to increase women's economic contribution and facilitate the electronic jobs. Ebtekar touched upon what she called the huge capacities of cooperation between Iran and Germany and boosting extended contribution of women in Iranian society. The German side, for her part, referred to the long history of cooperation between Iran and Germany and voiced content that women area can be one of the areas that Iran and Germany can work on jointly. Germany has experience in information technology, communications, and successful startups, Rang said, adding, various potentials exists in these fields in order to develop women's position in trade and business.

Hazrat Zainab (SA), ornament of the father

Today, is the 5th of the Islamic month of Jamadi al-Awwal, the day in 6 AH, when a noble lady was born in a blessed household. She grew up into a paragon of virtue, and when circumstances demanded, she patiently endured such terrible adversities that to this day her selfless services to humanity and humanitarian values, has earned her immortal fame. She was none other than Hazrat Zainab (SA), the grand-daughter of Prophet Mohammad (S), who nursed Islam back to life after the calamitous tragedy of Karbala. No doubt, her birthday is marked as Nurse Day in the Islamic Republic of Iran, in honor of the brave Iranian Muslim ladies, who treaded the path blazed out by Hazrat Zainab (SA) to provide valuable behind-the-frontlines-support for Iran's Muslim combatants during the 8-year the U.S. had imposed in the 1980s through Saddam. But don't get the wrong notion that the Prophet's granddaughter had anything to do with the profession of the paramedics. True, her diligent care for her sick, bedridden 23-year old nephew, Imam Zain al-Abidin (AS), during the tragic aftermath of the tragedy of Karbala, restored him to health and she also provided solace to the orphans and widows, but the real task of Hazrat Zainab (SA) was to nurture Islamic teachings and demonstrate their practicability in society. "You are by the grace of God a scholar, unschooled by anyone and a sage by connotation." This phrase is indeed the fitting tribute to the Lady Zainab (SA) by her nephew, Imam Zain al-Abidin (AS), the son and successor of her martyred brother, Imam Hussein (AS). It is acknowledgement of her dynamic personality that continues to transcend history and all historical developments. Otherwise we would not have been celebrating her birthday today despite the passing of a millennium and four centuries. Here, it would be interesting to note that her name, which means Ornament of the Father, was neither chosen by her parents nor by her grandfather, the Almighty's Last and Greatest Messenger. In fact, as the Prophet told the proud parents the name "Zainab" for the newborn girl was from God Himself and conveyed through the Archangel Gabriel. No wonder, Hazrat Zainab (AS), spent her life in the unsullied enclosure of virtue and infallibility without any blemish, thereby setting a lasting example of flawlessness that on each and every occasion, even under the most adverse conditions, displayed the realities and finer points of God-given intelligence and knowledge which the most erudite scholars are unable to comprehend. She married her first cousin, Abdullah, the eldest son of her paternal uncle, Ja'far at-Tayyar, the first-ever Muslim to undertake migration for the sake of protecting and propagating Islam — to the court of King Negus



(Najashi) of Abyssinia (modern Ethiopia). On his return from Abyssinia, when Ja'far was martyred in the Battle of Mu'ta against the Byzantine aggressors in what is today known as Jordan, Abdullah was brought up by the Prophet (S). As a result he greatly resembled the Prophet in manners. The Prophet had prayed to God to grant prosperity in Abdullah's affairs, and history bears witness that he never suffered loss in his trade activities and earned fame as Bahr al-Joud (or Sea of Bounty) and Manarat as-Sakhawa (or Minaret of Generosity). But the greatest honor for him, for which he was thankful to God all his life, was his marriage to Hazrat Zainab (SA). He greatly respected the Prophet's grand-daughter as the Aqeel al-Bani Hashem or the Wise Lady of the Hashemite Clan. When the fateful journey of Imam Husain (AS) commenced in 60 AH, Abdullah allowed her to accompany her brother along with two of his sons, Aoun and Muhammad, who were eventually martyred in Karbala in defense of humanitarian values, leaving their middle-aged mother the gargantuan task of nursing Islam back to life with her young nephew, standing steadfastly beside her in captivity. In fact, she and Imam Zain al-Abidin (AS), not only internationalized the tragedy of Karbala, but as was the goal of her martyred brother, they immortalized it for the salvation of humanity, so that mankind in every age, era or geographical place could sift truth from falsehood by contemplating on the uprising of Imam Hussein (AS). Thus, when any conscientious mind turns to the Epic of Ashura and the equally trou-

matic aftermath of history's greatest-ever tragedy, it will acknowledge that Islam and all humanitarian values, without the least doubt, are also indebted forever to the lady whose indefatigable role earned her the title of Sharikat al-Hussein or partner in the mission of Imam Hussein (AS). It is also not for no reason that the heroine of Karbala, who salvaged Islam, is rightfully called Sani-e Zahra or second only to the noblest lady of all time, her mother, Hazrat Fatema Zahra (SA). Her patience, her sufferings and her martyrdom were prophesied by her grandfather. It is said that when she was born, the Prophet took her in his arms and pressing the newborn to his cheek cried until his beard was soaked with tears. Asked by his daughter the reason of grief, he said: (the archangel) Gabriel has just informed me that after you, she will suffer great afflictions. When the caravan of the noble captives was taken through Kufa, the former capital of her illustrious father, Hazrat Zainab (SA), the teacher of the Kufan women that she once was, brought tears to the eyes of every onlooker and made them repent of their cowardice in deserting the Prophet's Household. When the tyrannical Omayyud governor, Obeidollah ibn Ziyad tried to mock at the heads of martyrs by saying that this was the will of God against all those who rise against the rulers, Zainab retorted that the Almighty had bestowed her household with the glories of faith and martyrdom against infidelity. She was so content with Divine Will that she boldly said that whatever she had seen in Karbala was nothing but beautiful. Part of her sermon reads:

"O son of Ziyad, we are the sisters of Hussein (AS), the grand daughters of Muhammad whom you acknowledge as your prophet. You and the other henchmen of Yazid have, for the sake of worldly gains, flouted all the principles of Islam, have desecrated the dead bodies of the martyrs, despite the fact that it is strictly forbidden by religion, and subjected to us to the worst kind of ill treatment, although the Prophet had enjoined on all believers to treat the captives and particularly the women and the children with sympathy and consideration. Today you are gloating over your success and rejoicing; today you are thinking that you can insult and humiliate us to your heart's content because there is nobody to say a word to you on our behalf, because you see us in this helpless condition with no one to befriend us, none to protest against the treatment you are meting out to us. But O' tyrant, let me warn you that you will find your success ephemeral and very soon the wrath of God will descend on you and on those whose cause you are espousing. very soon the nemesis will overtake you and all the others who have ruthlessly killed my brother and other members of my family without the least compunction simply because they stood steadfast in their belief; because they refused to surrender their principles or compromise their ideals; because they refused to accept Yazid, whose stooge you are, as the caliph of Muslims on account of his being a known profligate, who had flouted all principles of Islam, trampled underfoot all ethical concepts and reduced all human beings to an abject state." Her sermons unnerved the tyrant and he send the caravan of the noble captives towards the Omayyud capital, Damascus. Here also she gave a remarkable display of her faith, virtue and knowledge, as could be gleaned from her memorable sermons that finally forced Yazid to release the noble household and allow them to return to Medina. Upon release, the noble lady laid the foundations of the mourning ceremonies for Martyrs of Karbala, ceremonies that continue to inspire the faithful in the months of Muharram and Safar. It was thus the sister's patience that made the message of the brother resound with glory in the courts of the perpetrators of history's greatest tragedy and ensured that as long as the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (AS) will be commemorated, the name of Zainab (SA) will also shine with radiance. Soon Yazid and the Omayyuds were cast into the dustbin of history. As for Zainab and the Prophet's Household, her sprawling shrine in Damascus and the pilgrims that throng it day and night, is proof indeed of the righteousness of Imam Hussein's (AS) cause. (Source: hajji.com)

UAE-backed group vows to 'overthrow' Saudi-backed Yemeni government

1→ Aidarous al-Zubaidi, the leader of the militant group, said the Yemeni parliament that has likewise been ousted but continues to claim legitimacy would be barred from convening in the city of Aden unless Hadi removes his prime minister Ahmed bin Daghr and his entire cabinet.

Zubaidi used to be Hadi's "governor" for Aden Province before the former president fired him reportedly over his close links with the UAE.

In his Sunday remarks, Zubaidi accused Hadi's regime of "rampant corruption."

"The Southern Resistance Forces (SRF) declare[s] a state of emergency in Aden and announce[s] that it has begun the process of overthrowing Hadi's government and replacing it with a cabinet of technocrats," read a statement by the SFC.

The statement gave Hadi a one-week deadline.

The ragtag grouping of militants headed by Zubaidi receives backing from the Emirates, which is nevertheless a member of the Saudi-led coalition waging war on Yemen to reinstall Hadi. But reports have recently revealed schisms between the UAE and Saudi Arabia on matters related to the war.

Al Jazeera said several commanders of units set up by the UAE attended the Sunday event where Zubaidi spoke and "declared their support for the announcement."

Saudi Arabia has been leading a coalition of its vassal states in waging war on Yemen since March 2015 to reinstall Hadi, who resigned from presidency in January 2015 amid popular outcry over corruption and mismanagement of the economy. Houthi Ansarullah fighters then took over state matters to prevent the country from descending into chaos.

But Hadi, who initially fled to Saudi Arabia, started to reclaim a right to power when Riyadh agreed to form the coalition to drive out the Houthis, whom the Saudi regime accuses of being "Iranian-backed."

That war has been unsuccessful to this day, and reports have recently revealed cracks in the coalition in the form of differences between Hadi and the UAE, which has reportedly gained oversized influence in southern Yemen.

Citing sources close to Hadi, the Middle East Eye news website said in a report in May last year that Hadi was angry at Emirati forces for acting "like an occupation power" in Yemen.

Yemeni turf for a war between Saudi Arabia & the UAE

Those differences led to tensions between



rival militant groups over the control of Aden's airport in February and May last year, when Hadi ultimately sacked Zubaidi as Aden's governor.

UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash criticized the sacking of Zubaidi — and another individual close to the Emirates — at the time.

Saudi Arabia attempted to mediate but publicly endorsed Hadi, deepening the Emiratis' anger.

"Among the rules of political action is that you should build trust with your allies, that you should not stab them in the back, that your decisions should be commensurate with your capabilities and that you put public interest ahead of personal ones," Gargash said in a tweet, without naming Saudi Arabia. Tensions between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi — yet to play out in full display — could have major consequences for the Saudi-led coalition, which has for almost three years been fighting a war it hoped to finish in a matter of weeks.

The war has so far killed 13,600 people. Saudi Arabia has come under pressure both over the mounting civilian casualties and a famine and cholera outbreak in Yemen, which was already the Arab world's poorest country before the war began.

Germany on Saturday stopped the sale of weaponry to Saudi Arabia and all of the Riyadh-led coalition members except Jordan.

UN demands \$3 billion in aid for Yemen

Meanwhile, the United Nations is calling for what it refers to as a record \$2.9 billion aid for war-ravaged Yemen where Saudi airstrikes, looming famine, and cholera have

claimed the lives of thousands of people.

According to a statement released by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) on Sunday, the aid will be used to respond to the crisis in Yemen.

Currently, 1.3-million people "urgently require assistance to survive...a generation of children is growing up in suffering and deprivation," added the OCHA.

"Nearly two-million children are out of school, 1.8-million children under the age of five are acutely malnourished, including 400,000 who suffer from severe acute malnutrition and are 10 times more likely to die if they do not receive medical treatment," it said.

Humanitarian Coordinator in Yemen Jamie McGoldrick noted that Humanitarian assistance would not solve the crisis in the country, but it would be a lifeline for millions of people.

"Today, humanitarian partners appeal to the international community to support this critical lifeline," he added.

Last week, the UN announced that the number of the Yemenis who are dependent on assistance has risen to 22.2 million.

More than 13,600 people have been killed since the onset of the Saudi-led war on Yemen in 2015. Much of the Arabian Peninsula country's infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, and factories, has been reduced to rubble in military strikes.

The Saudi-led war has also triggered a deadly cholera epidemic across Yemen.

According to the World Health Organization's latest count, the cholera outbreak has killed 2,167 people since the end of April

and is suspected to have infected more than one million people.

Yemeni diphtheria toll to rise

The non-governmental charity organization Save the Children has warned that the number of deaths of Yemeni children over diphtheria will increase if the Saudi blockade on the country continues.

While stressing that Yemeni children are bearing the brunt of what it referred to as the "the worst diphtheria outbreak for a generation", the group noted that at least 52 people, mostly children under 15, have been killed by the disease.

"Any tightening of the blockade could have a devastating impact on children," said the group.

Mostly children killed in new Saudi airstrikes in Yemen

Saudi warplanes have conducted fresh airstrikes against the impoverished country of Yemen, leaving seven people, including five children and a woman, dead and five others injured in the northwestern Province of Sa'ada.

According to Yemen's Arabic-language al-Masirah television network, the air raids hit a house in Sahar district of Sa'ada on Monday.

Al-Masirah reported that the death toll is expected to rise due to the severity of the injuries. It said rescue and recovery operations were still ongoing.

The Saudi fighter jets also carried out seven airstrikes on Mahdah area near Sa'ada but there were no immediate reports of casualties.

Also on Monday, two Saudi aerial attacks targeted the building of Yemen TV satellite channel in the capital Sana'a, causing heavy damage to the building and equipment with no immediate report of casualties.

The Saudi aerial attacks targeted the TV station last December, leaving four people dead and five others injured.

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Turkey has deal with Russia, will not step back from Afrin operation: Erdogan

Turkish president Tayyip Erdogan said Monday that Turkey had an agreement with Russia regarding its military operation against a U.S.-backed Kurdish militia in Syria's Afrin region and that Ankara would not take a step back from the operation.

In a speech in the capital Ankara, Erdogan said Turkey would take control of Afrin, as it had done in the Syrian towns of Jarablus, al-Rai and al-Bab, and that Syrians would be able to return home.

Erdogan's comments came two days after his country launched the so-called military Operation Olive Branch in a bid to eliminate the US-backed YPG, which Ankara views as a terror organization and the Syrian branch of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The latter has been fighting for an autonomous region inside Turkey since 1984.

The operation was launched days after Washington said it would work with the Kurdish militants to set up a 30,000-strong border force near Turkish soil, a move that infuriated Ankara.

The YPG, which is operating as part of the larger US-backed Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) militant coalition, is purportedly fighting against terrorists without obtaining any official authorization from Damascus, which calls the forces "traitors" to the Syrian nation.

No confirmation from Moscow yet

No official confirmation from the Kremlin regarding the existence of such an agreement has been given yet.

The Turkish leader also asserted that Ankara had spoken with other powers, including the US, about the military intervention but acknowledged that "we couldn't convince the US on some things," Erdogan, however, did not give further details.

"We as Turkey have no intention to occupy anywhere. We have one single goal - to win hearts," he added.

No exact timetable set for operation: Erdogan

Erdogan also said that he was impatient with demands, including from some officials in the White House, to outline a timetable for the length of the offensive, noting that it would be over "when the target is achieved."

"How long have you been in Afghanistan? Is that over in Iraq?" he said, referring to the current U.S. military presence in those countries which commenced with 2001 and 2003 invasions, respectively.

"There is no math in such a war. How dare you ask us? We will stay as long as we need, we have no interest in staying there, and we know when we will leave," the Turkish president further said.

3 killed in purported Kurdish missile attacks
Meanwhile, Turkey's Dogan news agency reported that earlier in the day a rocket purportedly fired from the Afrin

region had hit a Turkish camp where Free Syrian Army (FSA) militants were located near the border, killing two people and injuring 12 others. In a separate report, Dogan, citing unnamed security sources, said that later in the day, one person was also killed and two others sustained injuries in a purported cross-border attack by YPG militants in the southern Turkish province of Hatay. It added that the Kurdish militants allegedly targeted Hatay with a mortar shell.

On Sunday, Major Yasser Abdull Rahim, a commander of the Turkish-backed anti-Damascus FSA militants, had announced that some 25,000 FSA members were joining the Turkish military operation in Syria with the goal of recapturing Arab towns and villages seized by the YPG forces.

He noted at the time that the FSA forces would not seek to enter the YPG-held Afrin but encircle the northern city and expel the Kurdish militants.

SDF mulling over sending back-up forces

In another development on Monday, the SDF said that it was studying the possibility of deploying reinforcements to the Afrin region to help fend off the Turkish offensive.

"We are in the framework of looking at the possibility of sending more military forces to Afrin," SDF spokesman Kimo Gabriel said in a televised presser, calling for international efforts to end the Turkish attack.

(Source: agencies)

Americans are not trustworthy partners for Kurds: Turkish expert

1→ Russia is looking for its classical goal of having ports in warm seas, and Syria provides it. Russia wants to have a strong navy operating in two oceans. China, again is looking for ports in the West. The U.S. in their recent National Security Document regarded Russia and China as rivals. So, this is no conspiracy theory, it is obvious and declared in official documents.

To counter Russian and Chinese expansion the U.S. wants to control the Persian Gulf Region and ISIS is being used as pretext to deploy American Troops in Syria.

Till now the U.S. particularly in Trump's term has not been a trustworthy ally or partner for any of the country's allies including Turkey. Will Americans be a trustworthy partner for Kurds, too?

A: Absolutely no. Kurds feel betrayed by the U.S. for many times. The latest striking example is the Kurdish independence referendum last year. Barzani, KRG president was sure that he would achieve independence via referendum and he sought for support of the Western countries, including the U.S. But Turkish, Iranian and Iraqi governments came together and denied this act of dividing Iraq. Three countries were able to keep Iraqi territorial integrity and prevented a proxy-Kurdish state.

In Syria, during the latest Afrin operation of Turkey, Americans said they have nothing to do with the area and accepted Turkish move against its so called close allies. PYD/SDF felt betrayed already. Also Turkish reaction to U.S. attempts to form a border force by using SDF, forced US officials to deny this policy.



When things are normalized in Syria and Iraq, the U.S. will withdraw its support from these groups and unfortunately Kurds will pay the price of this mistake.

What is the Turkey's goal of hitting Afrin? To what extends the U.S. provocative acts forced Turkey to begin Olive Branch Operation?

A: Afrin was posing a strategic and immediate threat to Turkish security for long time. The PKK affiliated PYD organization sent its men to Turkey. After infiltrated they launched many terrorist attacks in Turkey. Afrin region also provided human resources and training camps to terrorist organization. Turkey was planning to neutralize this region for long.
But U.S. statement of building a Border Security Force

from Kurdish groups affiliated with PKK was alarming for Turkey. Within a year PYD quadrupled the area it controlled with support of U.S. They received 4900 trucks full of military equipment. And now U.S. is trying to legitimize them and also violating Syrian territorial integrity. Turkey thought that same thing might happen in Afrin too, and acted.

How successful can this operation be? Wasn't it better for Turkey to try to solve the issue via diplomacy first?

A: Soon this operation will be completed with certain defeat of PYD. Turkey cleared its way diplomatically, got support from Russia and now can use Syrian air space. The proximity to Turkey is also helping Turkey. After the operation is complete Syrian locals will return their homes and as the example of Euphrates Shield the life will turn to normal soon.

When it comes to war on terror there is no diplomatic choice. Does France talk to ISIS or did Americans talk to Al Qaida. So, PKK, PYD are the same as ISIS and Nusra. From Turkish point of view, the only solution is the elimination of all terrorist groups.

Will Turkey's operation affect Syria peace talks?

A: I think it will affect the talks in a positive way. PYD issue was poisoning Turkish-Russian relationship. Having solved this issue Turkey will contribute more. Also after securing its back Turkey can contribute in controlling of Idlib region with more check points and political commitment.

I think keeping the Sochi photo consensus among Iran, Turkey and Russia works for the good of all the parties. Turkish-Russian cooperation and Iranian consent in Afrin operation will strengthen this front further.

Austria-Germany dispute over immigration crisis

1→ It is not unreasonable that dozens of former European politicians have recently asked in a letter to current European leaders to prevent the Austrian presidency of the European Union.

The presence of the Freedom Party as the president of the European Union is the worst possible news for its members. This is while the Brussels-Ankara agreement on the refugee crisis is on the verge of resignation, and the official announcement by European officials that Turkey's full membership in the European Union is not going to be accepted, has paved the way for a cancellation of the treaty. In such a situation, many analysts of the European affairs believe that 2018 will be the year when the crisis of immigrants will again be highlighted. In the meantime, the only way to resolve this crisis is to adopt a common approach by the EU member states.

However, the recent visit of the two European Chancellors showed that Merkel and Kurz have fundamental differences regarding the immigrants' crisis and the role of the European Union in resolving it. Besides Sebastian Kurz's view towards the United Europe should be taken into consideration. Unlike Merkel, the Chancellor of Austria is in favor of limiting the power of the European Union. This is while Merkel stands for the direct role-making of EU in all the crises and issues related to this collection.

On the other hand, in recent days, European authorities have emphasized that Turkey's membership in the European Union is basically impossible, and that this country has to think on other alternative. However, Turkish authorities have insisted that they would never accept options such as "partnership with Europe" as an alternative for "full membership in EU". It seems that once again the same old dialogue between Ankara and Brussels is going to be repeated!

Turkey's EU Minister Ömer Çelik has accordingly emphasized: "The current impasse gave Turkey no reason to maintain its migrant deal with the bloc. A privileged partnership or similar approaches, we don't take any of these seriously. Turkey cannot be offered such a thing," Çelik said.

"Whatever it would be called, a privileged partnership or cooperation against terrorism, such an offer will not even be considered by Turkey."

However, European officials seem to have decided not to accept Turkey as an EU member state. Senior European officials have explicitly stated that Turkey can think of options like special partnership with Europe, but there is no other option. In other words, Turkey should say farewell to its goal and dream of becoming an EU member state! This means the failure of the project that Rajab Tayyip Erdogan and other Turkish authorities have been investing on for many years. The former Turkish Prime Minister, Ahmed Davutoglu, played an important role in reinforcing the project. However, Turkey is now faced with closed doors of Europe.

It should be said that Austria's opposition to Turkey's membership in EU is due to the extremist and far-right tendencies in the government. Some countries, like Greece and Cyprus, are also opposed to the country's membership in the European Union due to political and geographic conflicts with Turkey. In any case, there is no longer a positive prospect for Turkey joining the European Union. The former French President, "Nicolas Sarkozy" had explicitly mentioned the option of "Turkey's strategic partnership with Europe" between 2007 and 2012, but at the time, Sarkozy's proposal was strongly opposed by Turkish authorities. However, now "Emmanuel Macron", as the new French president who appears to have a more open approach towards Turkey, suggests the same thing.

Macron believes that the path and prospect of the talks between Turkey and the European Union should change so that it doesn't eventually lead to Turkey's EU membership. In any case, it looks like Turkey's full EU membership is already closed, or that at most, it's soon going to be closed.

Iran will not accept giving up missile program: ex-CIA official

1→ The White House wants a deal with EU signatories to make restrictions on Iran's uranium enrichment permanent. Under the current deal they are set to expire in 2025. Do you think EU will accept this condition? If so, Will Iran accept it?

A: Expiration dates, as well as withdrawal clauses, are standard provisions in arms control agreements. They reflect the fact that governments rarely want to commit themselves forever to something, given the likelihood that relevant circumstances will change in the intervening years. The Europeans realize this, besides realizing more generally that it is infeasible to renegotiate an agreement that was as carefully and laboriously negotiated as the JCPOA. Iran will not accept changes in the time limits; if it were willing to make these enrichment provisions permanent, it would have accepted such a provision when the JCPOA was first negotiated. The whole discussion about these sunset clauses has been misleading about what will happen when the expiration dates are reached. Iran and the other parties will face the same choices that they did when reaching the original bargain that is incorporated in the JCPOA. If they still believe that bargain is in their interests, they will agree to an extension of the JCPOA. If they don't believe that, they will not extend. The fine print in an agreement that had been negotiated a decade earlier will not be what determines how they choose.

Trump also wants Iran's ballistic missile programme to be addressed. Iran frequently has emphasized that ballistic missile is not related to JCPOA and will not negotiate about it. According to this, do you think that this condition meaning the end for JCPOA?

A: Of all Trump's demands, the one involving missiles probably is most likely to become the occasion, or rationale, for his administration to pull out of the JCPOA. Iran will not accept giving up its own missile program when other states in the region have ballistic missiles and in some cases air forces that are superior to that of Iran. Iranians also remember being the target of Iraqi missiles during the Iran-Iraq War. Ballistic missiles are indeed a separate issue from nuclear weapons. For many states, including ones that have nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles serve a variety of strategic purposes that have nothing to do with nuclear weapons.



Ronaldo borrows doctor's phone to check facial injury on pitch

Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo broke his dry spell in a superb performance on Sunday - but it wasn't his goalscoring that made headlines.

Coming off with an injury, he borrowed a mobile phone camera from his doctor - to check his face in the "mirror".

As commentators laughed, declaring they had "seen everything now", Ronaldo shook his head with displeasure.

"Ronaldo took his obsession with his image to new heights," Reuters sports news wrote after the match.

"The most Ronaldo moment ever, simply incredible," offered sports site Benchwarmers.

"Ronaldo staring at himself in the mirror even while he's on the pitch," offered one commenter on BBC Sport's report.

Despite the rampant mockery on social media, Ronaldo's injury - caused by a boot to the head from Deportivo La Coruna's Fabian Schar - was deemed serious enough that he could not continue. If it seems that fans and the media gave Ronaldo a hard time for checking a significantly bloody injury, the star does have some history of talking about his looks.

In 2011, he famously declared that opposition supporters booed him because he was "rich, handsome and a great player".

"People are envious of me," he said. "I don't have any other explanation."

Sunday's performance bore out his claim of being a great player - the striker managed to score twice before being led off the pitch. Real's 7-1 victory was enough to move them back up to fourth place in La Liga.

(Source: BBC)

Vermaelen sidelined for two weeks

Barcelona defender Thomas Vermaelen has been ruled out for two weeks with a left hamstring injury sustained during Sunday's 5-0 win at Real Betis.

The centre-back pulled up in discomfort in the 38th minute at the Benito Villamarín after chasing down Sergio Leon near the halfway line.

Vermaelen was replaced by Samuel Umtiti, who came on for his first LaLiga appearance since December 2 after recovering from a hamstring problem of his own.

Barca later tweeted to say Vermaelen would undergo further tests on Monday to determine the severity of the problem.

And the club have now confirmed the results of those checks indicate the Belgium international will be out of action for a fortnight. The former Arsenal defender, who has struggled with repeated injury problems in recent seasons, has been involved in all of Barca's last 13 matches after working his way back to full fitness. He spent last season on loan at Roma but managed only nine Serie A appearances.

(Source: Goal)

Robinho set to join Sivasspor

Robinho has reached an agreement to join Sivasspor, the Turkish Super Lig side have announced.

The former Real Madrid and Manchester City forward was released by Atletico Mineiro when his contract expired at the end of last month.

A statement on Sivasspor's official website read: "The Brazilian striker Robinho, whom we have been seeing for a long time [and] who we have agreed to [sign] in principle, will be in Sivas tomorrow [Tuesday]."

"After the final negotiations, he will sign a formal contract with us."

The length of Robinho's intended deal with Sivasspor, who are eighth in the table after winning promotion to the top flight as TFF First League champions last season, has not been disclosed.

In December, a court in Milan sentenced Robinho to nine years in prison for an alleged incident of group sexual assault on a 22-year-old woman involving five other men in January 2013.

The 33-year-old, who played for AC Milan between 2010 and 2014, entered a not-guilty plea and denies the charges, with the case likely to be the subject of a lengthy legal process in Italy.

(Source: Four Four Two)

Messi makes football better, says beaten Real Betis goalkeeper

Lionel Messi makes football better, according to Real Betis goalkeeper Antonio Adan, even after the Barcelona superstar piled misery upon him on Sunday.

Messi inspired a devastating second-half performance from Barcelona, scoring twice and creating another for Luis Suarez as Ernesto Valverde's LaLiga leaders stormed to a 5-0 win at Estadio Benito Villamarín.

The result extended Barca's advantage at the summit over Atletico Madrid to 11 points and Real Madrid youth graduate Adan was left in awe, having mistakenly felt his team-mates might have had Messi under control.

"It's spectacular. In the first half he had not appeared. He seemed to be walking," the 30-year-old told Cadena Ser.

"But he takes four balls to score two goals and give two assists. He makes this sport better."

Betis vice president Lorenzo Serra Ferrer also felt it had been a privilege to witness Messi at his brilliant best.

"Messi deserves that because it is a show, what he has done in the second half," he said.

"Not only in attack but claiming balls in their own half of the field."

"His humility and ability make him bigger and the public of the Villamarín has been able to appreciate the extraordinary player that is Leo Messi."

(Source: Mirror)

Novak Djokovic upset by 'Professor' Hyeon Chung at Australian Open

Six-times champion Novak Djokovic bowed out of the Australian Open in the fourth round as relentless South Korean Chung Hyeon ground him down to claim a stunning 7-6(4) 7-5 7-6(3) victory on Monday.

The 21-year-old Chung, ranked 58th in the world, proved an immovable object, absorbing everything the former world number one could throw at him and returning it with interest. Two years after losing in straight sets to Djokovic on the same Rod Laver Arena, the bespectacled Chung turned the tables to claim the biggest victory of his career.

He is also the first South Korean to reach a grand slam quarter-final and will be favorite to reach the semis with unseeded American Tennys Sandgren up next.

Nicknamed the "Professor" because he is one of the few tennis players to wear glasses on court, Chung out-slugged Djokovic in a three-hour battle at Rod Laver Arena.

"I didn't know how I'd win tonight. I was just honored to play against Novak and happy to see him back on the Tour," Chung said on court as his compatriots cheered in the stands.

"I try to copy Novak in the way I play, he is my idol."

Djokovic wore a compression sleeve on his serving arm, a legacy of the elbow injury that sidelined him last year.

The Serb grimaced occasionally and needed treatment on his feet after losing the first set.

"Congratulations to Chung on an amazing performance," the 12-times grand slam champion said.

"He deserved to win. Whenever he was in trouble he came out with some great passing shots and at the back of the court he was like a wall."

Djokovic made a dreadful start as a spate



of double-faults cost him his first two service games and he trailed 4-0.

He clawed back the deficit but Chung took the opening set on the tiebreak.

Chung moved 4-1 ahead in the second set but again Djokovic recovered, only to falter when serving at 5-6, netting a forehand on set point after Chung had shown incredible

defensive skills to stay alive in the rally.

Djokovic battled back from a break down in the third but he inexplicably put an angled volley out when he had break point on the Chung serve at 3-3.

Chung saw a 3-0 lead disappear in the night's second tiebreak but he refused to let Djokovic off the hook.

He showed miraculous court coverage to hook a mind-boggling forehand winner past Djokovic to take a 5-3 lead in the tiebreak and when Djokovic netted a return it brought up three match points.

One was enough as Djokovic hit a backhand into the tramlines.

(Source: Staff & Agency)

Sports tribunal begins hearing appeals from 39 banned Russians



The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) began to hear appeals on Monday from 39 Russian athletes who were given lifetime Olympic bans for doping violations at the 2014 Sochi Games.

The athletes were among 43 disqualified from their events, banned from participating in future Olympics and in some cases stripped of their medals following the International Olympic Committee's investigation of widespread doping in Sochi.

The IOC has banned Russia from the Pyeongchang Winter Games next month as a result of its "unprecedented systematic manipulation" of the anti-doping system. However, individual Russian athletes will be able to compete as neutrals if they can prove their anti-doping credentials.

Russia has repeatedly denied any state involvement in the doping which was exposed by an independent report commissioned by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).

Lawyers representing the athletes said in a statement that they had been banned "despite a lack of specific evidence against any of them and in breach of their fundamental due process rights."

"The athletes are hopeful that the CAS

panels will grant them a fair hearing."

The banned athletes compete in speed skating, bobsleigh, skeleton, cross-country skiing, ice hockey, luge and biathlon.

CAS said that Grigory Rodchenkov, Russia's former anti-doping chief who turned whistleblower, and Richard McLaren, the Canadian sports lawyer who wrote the WADA report, were expected to testify by video or telephone.

CAS secretary general Matthieu Reeb said that three speed skaters would be the first of the 39 athletes to address the hearing on Monday.

"(The 39 athletes) will be heard one by one during the week. I can confirm that the hearing will last at least until next Saturday," he told reporters. A decision is due by Jan. 31 - nine days before the start of this year's games in Pyeongchang.

CAS has said it received applications from 42 of the 43 banned athletes and that the cases involving three biathletes had been suspended and would not be heard this week. Maxim Belugin, part of the two and four-man bobsleigh teams which finished fourth at Sochi 2014, is the only banned athlete not to have lodged an appeal.

(Source: Guardian)

FIFA chief Gianni Infantino and Sebastian Coe face IOC snub



The presidents of world soccer and world athletics are set to be snubbed by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) next month when the body is likely to again overlook them for membership, a source told Reuters on Monday.

Neither FIFA chief Gianni Infantino nor IAAF counterpart Sebastian Coe are expected to be proposed for IOC membership despite taking up their posts two and three years ago respectively, the source said.

For years, membership of the IOC for the heads of soccer and athletics was seen as almost automatic.

But the two international federations - among the Olympics' most popular sports - have been left out in the cold as they struggled with widespread corruption and doping scandals which tarnished their images.

"My understanding is they will not be recommended," a source with knowledge of the membership procedure ahead of the IOC session in Pyeongchang, South Korea next month, told Reuters on condition of anonymity. The IOC elects new members at its annual session with the list of proposed names being published a few days before the vote.

Now, another snub of two of the world's biggest sports federations who held IOC seats for decades before their current leadership, will do little to mend ties that have been strained by the ongoing corruption and doping investigations.

The source said the IOC had discussed the matter of Infantino and Coe, and a final decision had yet to be taken but they were "unlikely" to be proposed for membership.

Infantino was elected head of FIFA in February 2016 to succeed scandal-plagued Sepp Blatter and lead the federation out of its biggest graft crisis.

Former double Olympic champion Coe took over the IAAF in August 2015 against a backdrop of doping and corruption among the organization's most senior officials, severely damaging the organization's credibility.

Coe's predecessor Lamine Diack is currently facing a bribery and embezzlement investigation in France while his son, Papa Massata Diack is banned for life from the sport. Coe triggered the ire of the IOC when the IAAF blocked Russian track and field athletes from competing at the Rio de Janeiro Olympics over the doping affair.

(Source: Euro Sport)

Federer makes light of day shift to ease into last eight

Roger Federer was a strictly nocturnal beast throughout the first week of the Australian Open but proved just as effective with the sun on his back as he sauntered into the quarter-finals for the 14th time on Monday.

The defending champion did not require his dazzling best against 80th-ranked Hungarian Marton Fucsovics in his first match scheduled during the day session but still emerged a comfortable 6-4 7-6(3) 6-2 winner.

After his earlier-than-usual finish, the 36-year-old world number two said he might even be able to make the most of a night off and take his wife Mirka out for dinner.

"I was considering sunglasses and a towel for the beach but, no, the only thing is the racket strings are a bit tighter but it's not crazy hot today," Federer told former champion Jim Courier in a knockabout post-match chat on court.

"It's a different rhythm playing in the day and not going to bed at 3 a.m. We might go out for dinner tonight but Mirka has left already -- she must have other plans!"

Federer's light mood matched the sunny conditions and he was even reduced to giggles during one point late in the second set when he miss-hit a forehand high into the air, then defended three consecutive Fucsovics smashes to win a bizarre rally.



"This one was the biggest joke of a point maybe I have ever played," he said later. "Thankfully it didn't decide the outcome of that second set. That would have been too much of a joke, to be honest."

Federer is yet to drop a set and did not even face a break point against the 25-year-old Fucsovics, who arrived in Melbourne without a grand slam main draw victory to his name.

Yet his unheralded opponent, bidding to become only the third Hungarian man to reach a grand slam quarter-final in the professional era, offered an all-round display that belied his record, even if it did not surprise Federer.

"I practiced with him for a few days in a row in Switzerland. That helped, you know, knowing his strength and weaknesses a little bit," he said.

"He was not completely the unknown opponent that maybe people thought he was."

"He hung with me for a long time. So it was a good match." Federer was in cruise control in the first set but struck decisively when Fucsovics served at 4-5, squeezing the throttle enough to earn a set point converted with a smash.

Fucsovics kept Federer honest in the second set and played his part in some entertaining rallies to extend the 19-times grand slam champion to a tiebreak.

Federer rifled a running forehand pass to earn three set points and again finished the set at the net, with a smash.

The third set was all over in 31 minutes as Federer raced into the 52nd grand slam quarter-final of his career, booking a last eighth encounter against 19th seeded Czech Tomas Berdych.

(Source: Reuters)

JANUARY 23, 2018

S P O R T S

Sanchez passes Manchester United medical



Alexis Sanchez is set to be unveiled as a Manchester United player after passing a medical, sources have told ESPN FC.

The Chile international was at the club's Carrington training headquarters on Sunday to tie up the final details of his move from Arsenal. He is set to be announced as United's latest signing -- with Henrikh Mkhitaryan heading to the Emirates -- in the next 48 hours.

After flying to Manchester on board a private jet and visiting Carrington, Sanchez was also at Old Trafford on Sunday to film segments for his unveiling while wearing United's No. 7 shirt.

And pictures have leaked on Twitter of the player in his new kit, the images taken by someone watching on from the stands.

He is expected to sign a four-and-a-half-year

deal with Man United, while both Mkhitaryan and Sanchez will need new work permits before the deal can be completed.

Sources have told ESPN FC that the agreement between United and Arsenal is a straight swap with no additional fee involved.

According to sources close to the deal, it has been especially complicated because talks with Sanchez and Mkhitaryan have had to run simultaneously.

Jose Mourinho has given his players two days off following their 1-0 win over Burnley at Turf Moor on Saturday. Mourinho said after the game that the move is "so close."

Sanchez is in line to train with his new teammates on Tuesday before a debut against Yeovil in the FA Cup fourth round on Friday night.

Asian Handball Championship: Iran lose to S. Arabia



S P O R T S Iran started the 2018 Asian Men's Handball Championship Group 1 with a loss to Saudi Arabia on Monday.

Team Melli lost to their opponent 23-26 at the Suwon Gymnasium in Suwon, South Korea.

Iran, coached by Borut Macek, will play powerhouse South Korea on Tuesday.

Iran had defeated Uzbekistan (37-18)

and Japan (37-32) in Group A.

The competition is being held at Suwon, South Korea from Jan. 18 to 28.

The teams from the Oceania region are competing in the event for the first time.

The championship acts as a qualifier to the 2019 World Men's Handball Championship which will take place in Denmark and Germany from Jan. 9 to 27.

Iran's Mahjoub wins silver at IJF Tunis Grand Prix



S P O R T S Iranian judoka Javad Mahjoub claimed a silver medal on the final day of the International Judo Federation Grand Prix in Tunis.

In the men's over 100kg category, Mahjoub lost to Oleksandr Gordienko of Ukraine with just over 30 seconds remaining.

Both bronze medals went to Russians as 2016 European junior champion Ruslan Shakhbazov defeated Romania's Vladut

Simionescu and Tamerlan Bashaev overcame Tunisian Faicel Jaballah.

After three intense days of competition, a total of 24 countries won medals and a record of 12 nations won gold in the 14 weight categories.

The three-day tournament brought 335 athletes with 197 men and 138 women from 46 countries together.

Iran took part in the competition with seven participants.

Chelsea star Eden Hazard plays down father's Real Madrid claims

Eden Hazard said he had spoken to his father after he suggested the Chelsea star hoped to get an offer from Real Madrid.

In an interview with Belgian newspaper *Le Soir* last month, Thierry Hazard said his son had rejected a contract offer from Chelsea and was keeping his options open with the aim of encouraging Madrid.

The reigning European champions, known to be admirers of Hazard, are likely to revamp their squad in the summer if they cannot salvage a difficult season with further Champions League success.

Speaking after his two goals helped see off Brighton 4-0 on Saturday, Hazard reiterated that he was happy at Stamford Bridge but stopped short of saying he would extend his contract, which runs until June 2020.

"My dad says some bad things," he said with a smile.

"I talked with him, no worries. I'm focused with Chelsea.

"I've got two years contract left and I'm happy here. Like I said 10 times before, I want to finish this year and then we'll see. But I'm happy here."

Hazard's first goal against Brighton was the 100th league strike of his career, and he has now been directly involved

in 102 Premier League goals for Chelsea -- 65 goals and 37 assists -- overtaking Gianfranco Zola (101) in third place on the all-time list behind Didier Drogba (159) and Frank Lampard (237).

"He does that in training and, on his day, he's probably one of the best players in the world," teammate Victor Moses told the *London Evening Standard*.

"He's unbelievable. He's so talented. We're very happy to have him here and we're happy that he's enjoying his football. Hopefully, he'll keep scoring goals."

(Source: ESPN)

England mourns former captain Jimmy Armfield



Former England captain Jimmy Armfield has died at the age of 82 following a battle with cancer.

The Blackpool legend made 43 appearances for the Three Lions, 15 of them as captain, starred at the 1962 FIFA World Cup™ and was an unused squad member when England won the Trophy four years later. He was awarded a winner's medal in a special ceremony in 2009.

Armfield played his entire club career for Blackpool, making a staggering 627 appearances for the Seasiders, and went on to manage Bolton Wanderers and Leeds United. More recently, he was a respected football pundit with the BBC.

A Blackpool statement read: "Blackpool Football Club is deeply saddened to learn of the passing of its record appearance holder and vice-president Jimmy Armfield at the age of 82. Our heartfelt condolences go out to Jimmy's wife Anne, his two sons, Duncan and John, and the rest of the Armfield family at this time."

The Armfield family also released a statement, saying: "After a long and courageous battle, our beloved husband, father, grandfather and father-in-law Jimmy Armfield, has passed away peacefully surrounded by his immediate family. (Source: FIFA)

Toronto mayor recommends city bid to co-host 2026 World Cup



The mayor of Canada's most populous city says he wants Toronto to start the process of bidding to co-host the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

John Tory released a statement early Monday supporting a staff report that recommends the city enter as a host into a joint bid for the games by Canada, the U.S. and Mexico.

Canada joined the shared proposal -- branded "United 2026" -- in December, with news that if the countries are chosen, Canada and Mexico would get 10 games apiece and the U.S. would host the other 60.

Tory writes in the statement that co-hosting the World Cup would be a "once

in a generation opportunity to showcase Toronto to the world."

He says city staff estimate that it would cost between \$30 million and \$45 million to co-host the games, and that the costs are expected to be shared between the city, the province and the federal government.

Soccer Canada had already listed Toronto as a potential candidate to host games should FIFA select United 2026 as the winning bid.

The proposal will be submitted to FIFA on March 16 and the bid winner will be announced at the FIFA Congress in Moscow on June 13.

Andrey Shturbabin named Iran judo coach

S P O R T S Andrey Shturbabin, the head coach of the Uzbekistan team, has been named as new head coach of Iran national team on Monday.

The 45-year-old coach is under contract at Uzbekistan team until the end of January but will join Team Melli from February.

Shturbabin has penned a one-year contract with Iran judo team for an undisclosed fee.

Iran judo federation has also reached an agreement with Uzbekistani Nellya Kiyamova.

She will coach Iran's women judo team.

Ansarifard scores twice as Olympiakos beat Xanthi

Karim Ansarifard scored a goal in each half as defending champion Olympiakos easily beat visiting Xanthi 3-0 Sunday in the Greek league.

Ansarifard opened the scoring in the 26th with a penalty and added a header in the 57th off Diogo Figueiras' cross, before Costas Fortounis added a third in the 69th.

Xanthi played with 10 men for the last half-hour when Jorge Casado was shown his second yellow card in five minutes.

Olympiakos is a point ahead of PAOK -- also a 3-0 winner over Apollon on Sunday -- and three points ahead of AEK, which stumbled to a scoreless draw at Larissa on Saturday.

Also, Lamia beat Asteras 1-0 and Panionios drew 1-1 at Panetolikos. Giannena vs. Atromitos ended 2-2, with three of the goals coming in the final three minutes.

(Source: AP)

Faryabi appointed technical chief of Asian Junior and Cadet Fencing Championships

The Fencing Confederation of Asia (FCA) has elected the director of the Competitions Committee of the Islamic Republic of Iran Fencing Federation as the head of the technical commission for the upcoming Asian Junior and Cadet Fencing Championships in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

FCA President Celso L. Dayrit, in an official letter addressed to Abbas Faryabi, appointed the Iranian sports official to the post.

The Asian Junior and Cadet Fencing Championships will kick off in Dubai, the UAE, on February 24, and will conclude on March 4, 2018.

The competitions will be held in the men's and women's épée, sabre and foil categories.

The épée is the modern derivative of the dueling sword used in fencing. As a thrusting weapon, the épée is similar to a foil, but has a stiffer blade, which is triangular in cross-section with a V-shaped groove called a fuller, has a larger bell guard, and is heavier.

There are no rules regarding priority and right of way in the épée competitions, and the entire body is a valid target area.

Sabre is a light cutting and thrusting weapon in the sport of fencing. In the sabre section, the entire body above the waist, except the weapon hand, is targeted. Hits with the entire blade or point are valid. Touches that land outside of the target area are not scored.

(Source: Press TV)

Nine footballers from Saudi Arabia to play in Spain

MADRID, Jan. 22 (Xinhua) -- The Spanish Football La Liga Santander, the Saudi Arabian General Sports Authority and Saudi Arabian Football Federation have signed an agreement which will see nine Saudi players join Spanish sides on loan deals, as well as allow for the launch of football academies and coaching programs.

The loan deals see three Saudi Arabian internationals, Salem Al Dawsari, Fahad Al Mowallad and Yahia Sahari move to the Liga Santander sides with Levante signing Al Mowallad, Al-Shehri joining Leganes and Al Dawsari moving to Villarreal.

Other Saudi players will sign for sides in Spain's second division and youth sides.

"Football is the most popular sport in Saudi Arabia. Along with the Saudi football federation we are committed to give the youth the chance to achieve their objectives and play football at the highest level possible," said H.E. Turki Al-Ahsheikh, chairman of the General Sport Authority of Saudi Arabia.

La Liga says it believes that the arrival of Saudi players to Spain, where no Saudi has ever played in either the top flight or the second tier, will expand the marketing opportunities of the league that is already very popular in the region.

Kepa pens new Athletic Bilbao deal amid Madrid speculation

Athletic Bilbao goalkeeper and reported Real Madrid target Kepa Arrizabalaga has signed a new contract at San Mames running until June 2025.

The 23-year-old's release clause has been set at €80million -- up from a rumoured €20million under the one-cap Spain international's previous terms.

Earlier this month, Athletic coach Jose Angel Ziganda claimed he was in the dark over speculation Kepa had undergone a medical at Madrid, insisting the player had not been given permission to do so.

Despite suggestions the Spanish and European champions were set to test Athletic's resolve, their head coach Zinedine Zidane maintained they had no interest in entering the January market -- something Kepa's renewal with the Basque side makes more likely.

Kepa has impressed as Athletic's first-choice goalkeeper since returning from a loan stint with Real Valladolid at the start of last season. Manchester United and Spain keeper David De Gea has long been linked with a move to Real Madrid, with Chelsea's Thibaut Courtois also a mooted target.

However, for now at least, Kaylor Navas' grasp on the number one shirt at the Santiago Bernabeu remains secure.

(Source: Daily Star)

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Greek director Georgina Kakoudaki to hold workshop at Fajr

A R T TEHRAN — Greek director and theater theorist Georgina Kakoudaki will hold a workshop during the 36th Fajr International Theater Festival in Tehran on Wednesday.

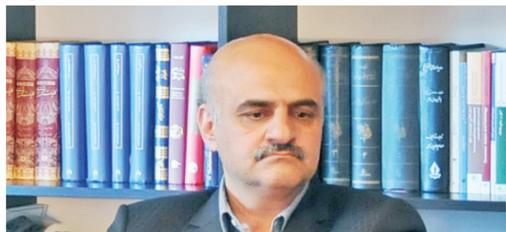


Greek director Georgina Kakoudaki in an undated photo

The workshop titled “Antigone, Right of Speech” will be organized at the Samandarian Hall of the University of Tehran. The ideas of Sophocles’ Antigone are scheduled to be discussed during the 7-hour program, which will start at 10 a.m. Kakoudaki focuses on adolescent audience education through theatrical productions and creative workshops.

Iran’s cultural attaché in Serbia Mohsen Soleimani dies at 58

A R T TEHRAN — Iran’s cultural attaché in Serbia Mohsen Soleimani died of heart failure in the capital of Belgrade on Monday, the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization announced.



Mohsen Soleimani in an undated photo

He was also a prolific writer and translator. Among his credits are “Eye to Eye with Mirror” and “How to Write a Biography”. Born in 1960 in Tehran, Soleimani was a graduate of English language. He also worked for several Persian newspapers such as Hamshahri.

NEWS IN BRIEF



Milad Tower to welcome Fajr Film Festival next week

A R T TEHRAN — Tehran’s Milad Tower will be playing host to Iranian cineastes on February 1 for the opening ceremony of the 36th Fajr Film Festival, the organizers announced on Monday.

Dubber Manuchehr Esmaeili, filmmaker Mohammad Ali Najafi and actor Akbar Abdi will be honored with lifetime achievement awards during the ceremony.

In addition, creators of top advertising materials, including trailers and film posters, will be honored at the ceremony.

The director of the opening ceremony is Majid Barzegar. The 36th Fajr Film Festival will be held in Tehran from February 1 to 11.



Shusaku Takeuchi’s “Package” unwrapped at Fajr festival

A R T TEHRAN — German director Shusaku Takeuchi staged his play “The Package” during the 36th Fajr International Theater Festival at Tehran’s Vahdat Hall on Sunday.

The play, produced at the German theater company Antagon TheaterAKTION, is a dance-theater performance.

A highly expressive creation, rich in aesthetic moments and situations that seem to come directly from everyday office life, “The Package” mirrors the “uninformed” people in suits, and portrays their lives through dance.

The 36th Fajr International Theater Festival, which opened at several theaters in Tehran on January 18, will be running until January 29.

Dhaka festival honors Iranian cinema

A R T TEHRAN — Iranian films garnered three awards at the 16th Dhaka International Film Festival in Bangladesh, the organizers announced on Saturday.

The Best Children Film Badal Rahman Award was presented to “White Bridge” by Ali Qavitan.

The film tells the story of Bahareh, an Iranian girl who is disabled in an accident just a few months after the start of the school year. According to the Ministry of Education, she must continue her education in a special school. Bahareh refuses to go to the special school and tries to convince her former school to accept her. However, existing laws prevent Bahareh’s return to the regular school and she remains suspended. Bahareh and her mother fight to solve this problem.

Masud Salami won the award for best cinematographer for his collaboration in “Asphyxia” directed by Fereidun Jeirani.

Parinaz Izadyar and Mina Sadati shared the award for best actress for their roles in “Searing Summer” directed by Ebrahim Irajzad.

“Asphyxia” and “Searing Summer” were screened in the Australasian Film Section, in which Onur Saylak from Turkey received the award for best director for “More” and “Zer” by Kazim Oz from Turkey was picked as best film.

The award for best actor went to Allen Dizon for his role in “The Bomb” directed by Ralston Gonzales Jover from the Philippines.



Bahareh Noruzi acts in a scene from “White Bridge”.

Fajr Intl. Festival of Visual Arts kicks off

A R T TEHRAN — The 10th edition of the Fajr International Festival of Visual Arts, displaying over 90 works from Iran and different countries, opened in Tehran on Monday.

The ceremony was attended by Deputy Culture Minister for Artistic Affairs Mojtaba Hosseini and the secretary of the festival, Mojtaba Aqai.

The works are on display at the Saba Art and Cultural Institute of the Iranian Academy of Arts. The festival has also organized exhibitions in cities in over 20 provinces.

The festival is showcasing works by artists from Mexico, Turkey, Russia, Greece, Spain, Turkey and several other countries.

In addition, a selection of works displayed over the past nine editions of the festival is being exhibited at the Palestine Museum of Contemporary Art in Tehran.

Tehran’s Niavaran Cultural Center also is hanging works by those Iranian artists who have won prizes at national and international events.

Each participating country has a chance to celebrate a day during the festival as its national day.

Cartoonist Kambiz Derambakhsh, who

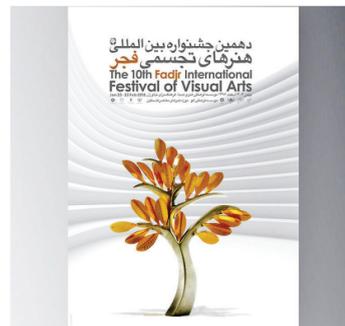
is also a member of the festival’s Artistic Council, has said that the festival has provided an opportunity for young Iranian artists to showcase their works alongside veteran artists in an exhibition at the same time.

The festival helps the young artists to flourish, he added.

He also noted that a good point about the festival is that artists from across the country are taking part in the event.

“We should not limit the entire festival to artists from Tehran,” he said.

A selection of works by Derambakhsh is also on display during the festival that will run for one month.



A poster for the 10th Fajr International Festival of Visual Arts

“Three Billboards” biggest winner at female-flavored SAG awards



Frances McDormand accepts the award for Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Leading Role for “Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri” at the 24th Screen Actors Guild Awards – Show in Los Angeles, California, January 21, 2018. (Reuters/Mario Anzuoni)

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Dark comedy “Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri” won three prizes at the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) awards on Sunday in a ceremony marked by women and their stories amid the misconduct scandal that has swept Hollywood.

The Fox Searchlight film about a furious woman seeking justice for the murder of her daughter was named best ensemble, the top SAG honor.

Frances McDormand won best actress and Sam Rockwell took home the best supporting actor statuette for their roles in the film.

Britain’s Gary Oldman won best actor for playing wartime leader Winston Churchill in Focus Features’ “Darkest Hour.”

Allison Janney won for her supporting actress role as a demanding mother in independent ice-skating movie “I, Tonya.”

The SAG awards are indicators of likely Oscar success in March because actors form the largest group of voters in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

The SAG ceremony took place after two days of marches by hundreds of thousands of women throughout the United States.

Host Kristen Bell said women were having a “watershed moment.”

“Let’s make sure we lead the charge with empathy and diligence because fear and anger never win the race,” said Bell, star of television’s “The Good Place.”

Accusations of sexual misconduct have

forced dozens of powerful men in Hollywood to step down, be fired or dropped from creative projects.

Women, many of them leading actresses, have responded by breaking their silence through the #MeToo social media movement and the Time’s Up campaign for legal support of victims.

On the red carpet, women swapped the black gowns that marked support for victims of sexual harassment at the Golden Globes two weeks ago for brighter blues, green and metallic hues.

Women were the dominant theme inside the Shrine Auditorium.

Nicole Kidman, 50, won for playing a battered wife in HBO’s female-centric TV series “Big Little Lies.”

“How wonderful that our careers today can go beyond 40 years old. Twenty years ago we were pretty washed up by this stage in our lives. This is not the case now,” Kidman said.

Aziz Ansari, nominated for his Netflix comedy series “Master of None,” was a no-show on Sunday after making headlines last week when a woman described feeling violated following an awkward date last year.

Ansari lost the television comedy actor statuette to William H. Macy for “Shameless.”

James Franco, a best actor nominee for “The Disaster Artist,” did show up but skipped the red carpet and did not win. Franco had kept a low profile since describing allegations against him by five women two weeks ago as “not accurate.”

“Jumanji” stays strong, topping “12 Strong,” “Den of Thieves” with \$20 million



Cast member Dwayne Johnson attends a news conference promoting his new film “Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle” in Beijing, China, January 4, 2018. (Reuters/Jason Lee)

LOS ANGELES, (Variety) — Sony’s “Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle” has won its third weekend box office title with ease, topping newcomers “12 Strong” and “Den of Thieves,” with \$20 million at 3,704 North American locations.

Afghan war drama “12 Strong” took second with \$16.5 million at 3,002 sites for Warner Bros. and STXfilms’ “Den of Thieves” followed with \$15.3 million from 2,432 venues. Fox’s “The Post” finished fourth with \$12 million at 2,851 venues and its fifth weekend of “The Greatest Showman” remained a solid draw in fifth with \$11 million at 2,823 screens.

“Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle” has shown remarkable staying power, declining only 28% this weekend and lifting its 33-day North American total to \$317 million — the 61st highest of all time. It’s Sony’s fifth highest domestic grosser of all time, trailing only the first three Spider-Man titles and last summer’s “Spider-Man: Homecoming.”

“Jumanji” is also singular in winning the box office in its third, fourth and fifth weekends after finishing second in its first two weekends to “Star Wars: The Last Jedi.” “This is an unprecedented and unusual box office trajectory for a wide release blockbuster,” said Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst with comScore.

The action comedy, starring Dwayne Johnson and Kevin Hart, has also kept overall domestic business healthy with the year-to-date total at \$730.1 million through Sunday, up 2.1% from a year ago. The weekend’s total hit about \$137 million, down 6% from the

same frame in 2017 when “Split” opened with \$40 million.

“Another great performance by the seemingly unstoppable ‘Jumanji’ powers the pre-Oscar nominations weekend while bolstered by a pair of solid debuts from ‘12 Strong’ and ‘Den of Thieves,’ but this was not enough to beat a tough weekend over weekend comparison to the year ago stellar performance of M. Night Shyamalan’s ‘Split,’” Dergarabedian said.

“12 Strong,” starring Chris Hemsworth and Michael Shannon, had been tracking in the \$14 million to \$17 million range. The movie is based Doug Stanton’s 2009 bestseller “Horse Soldiers,” which centers on CIA paramilitary operations officers and U.S. Special Forces sent to fight the Taliban in Afghanistan immediately after the Sept. 11 attacks. Prospects for ongoing business are solid, given its A Cinemascore.

Production companies for “12 Strong” are Alcon Entertainment, Black Label Media, and Jerry Bruckheimer Films with Nicolai Fuglsig directing. Bruckheimer began developing the film in 2009 while at Disney.

The R-rated “Den of Thieves,” starring Gerard Butler, O’Shea Jackson Jr., and Curtis “50 Cent” Jackson, finished well above forecasts, which had been in the \$9 million range. The film follows the intersecting lives of an elite unit of the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department and a successful bank robbery crew as the outlaws plan a seemingly impossible heist on the Federal Reserve Bank in downtown Los Angeles.

Razzie ‘worst film’ nods is an Oscar-studded affair

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Adventure movie “Transformers: The Last Knight” led nominations on Monday for the annual Razzie Awards for the worst films on a list packed with previous Oscar winners Jennifer Lawrence, Tom Cruise, Mel Gibson and Russell Crowe.

The tongue-in-cheek Razzies, created in 1980, serve as an antidote to Hollywood’s Oscars ceremony. Winners of the year’s worst films — if they turn up — are given a gold, spray-painted trophy at a ceremony held on the eve of the Academy Awards in March.

“Transformers: The Last Knight,” the latest in the action

franchise based on toys that change from robots to vehicles, earned nine nominations, including worst picture and worst acting nods for many of its star-studded cast, including Anthony Hopkins and Mark Wahlberg.

Despite lackluster reviews, the 5th film in the series earned a healthy \$605 million at the worldwide box office in 2017.

Johnny Depp — a perennial Razzie target — was singled out for what Wilson called “his worn out drunk routine” in “Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales,” the fifth entry in the franchise in a summer of Hollywood sequels and remakes.

Lawrence and director Darren Aronofsky also felt some

Razzie wrath for their horror movie “Mother!,” which some movie reviewers viewed as the work of a genius and others found laughable. The movie earned a rare F score from audiences and less than \$45 million at the global box office.

Cruise and Crowe were among the worst actor nominees for “The Mummy,” while Gibson got a Razzie nod for his role in “Daddy’s Home 2.”

Nominees and winners of the Razzies are voted for online by around 1,000 Razzie members from 24 countries, who sign up online and pay a \$40 membership fee. The winners will be announced on March 3.