

5 NITC leases out 30 tankers to foreign companies post sanction

12 Life, love, livestock

15 Iran football coach Carlos Queiroz resigns

16 Works by Iranian Christian pioneers of modern art on display at Tehran gallery

TEHRAN TIMES



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U.S. intel report claims Putin directed cyber campaign to help Trump Trump: Russian hacking had 'no effect' on election

Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an effort to help the United States Republican Donald Trump's electoral chances by discrediting Democrat Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential campaign, U.S. intelligence agencies said in an assessment.

Russia's objectives were to undermine public faith in the U.S. democratic process, denigrate former Secretary of State Clinton, make it harder for her to win and harm her presidency if she did, an unclassified report released on Friday by the top U.S. intelligence agency said.

"We assess Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the U.S. presidential election," the report said. "We further assess Putin and the Russian Government developed a clear preference for President-elect Trump. We have high confidence in these judgments."

Russian authorities, which have previously denied interfering in the U.S. elections, offered no immediate comment on the report on Saturday, and the reaction of the country's media was low-key. ➔13

"West Terminal" named best at Ammar filmfest



See page 16

Resistance economy won't bear fruit short of unity:VP

POLITICS TEHRAN—Vice-President Es'haq Jahangiri said in comments on Saturday that creating an economic opening won't be viable unless resistance economy guidelines are implemented by all responsible bodies.

"If resistance economy policies are implemented by all, the country's economy has the potential to flourish and enhance living conditions of people," Jahangiri said at a session in Tehran on the performance of the Central Bank of Iran in pushing forward projects framed within the resistance economy outlook.

"Advancing resistance economy is an important task that demands the participation of all governmental, official, and civil organizations."

The term "resistance economy" was used for the first time in 2013 by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to highlight the importance of domestic production as a tool to reduce dependence on foreign resources.

Also, it brings to the fore the need to support the Iranian private sector and workforce.

Jahangiri's comments make more sense once seen against a backdrop of reluctance shown by some private financial institutions and banks to steer resources toward achieving the goals of resistance economy, a point Jahangiri appeared mindful of. ➔2



ARTICLE

By Seyed Hossein Mousaviani
Princeton University
Researcher

What Trump needs to know about Iran

For as unnerved as many world leaders were with Donald Trump's election, they will have no choice but to work with the president of the world's most powerful country. One exception, however, will be Iran, which has come to develop one of the most hostile relationships in all international politics with the United States.

Fascinatingly, Trump's triumph over Hillary Clinton was anticipated by Iran's supreme leader, who just prior to the election declared that Trump had more support among Americans due to his frankness about the realities of the country. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, for his part, believes that America has a corrupt political system, has fostered the rise of terrorist groups like the self-proclaimed Islamic State and Al Qaeda, and has spurred instability through military intervention in the Middle East. Thus, he regularly argues that for Iran to engage in negotiations with such a country would have little value, and a formal diplomatic relationship would be actively harmful - a position some incoming senior U.S. officials feel about Iran.

Both Ayatollah Khamenei and President Hassan Rouhani have, however, urged calm over Trump's election. "If a president is changed here and there, it has no impact on the will of Iran," Rouhani said in a speech shortly after the election, adding that Iran would remain committed to the nuclear deal. Ayatollah Khamenei has also stated that Iran does not have "any judgment on the election," but is "ready for any possible incident."

The proclamations of Trump and other presidential candidates during the campaign validated important aspects of Ayatollah Khamenei's view of the United States. However, it remains to be seen whether this shared thinking on America's political system will result in Trump reforming past policies and ending the 38-year deadlock in U.S.-Iran relations, thereby attaining the diplomatic achievement of the century. ➔13

Daesh ideology more dangerous than its actions: IRGC adviser

The media adviser to the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) commander warned that Daesh has turned into an ideology that is even more ominous than the terrorist group's heinous acts, Tasnim reported on Saturday.

Operationally, the Takfiri group is on its last legs in Syria and Iraq, its main strongholds, Hamidreza Moqaddamfar said Saturday while addressing a ceremony held at the Tasnim News Agency's central office in Tehran to unveil a book titled "Daesh's Thoughts and Deeds."

But "Daesh has unfortunately turned into an ideology whose danger is even bigger than that of its operational (terrorist) activities," he said.

Daesh is a deviated ideology that has found itself some devotees who follow it out of total ignorance, Moqaddamfar added, stressing the need for countering this ideology.

He further referred to the origins of the Takfiri group, saying that it was created to present a distorted image of Islam to counter the growing interest in the religion in the

West.

Moqaddamfar went on to say that the Zionist regime of Israel and the likes of it are the ones that benefit from Daesh.

Daesh began its campaign of terror in 2014. The Takfiri group, which is believed to have received support from Western and certain regional countries, has been committing heinous crimes against all ethnic and religious communities in Iraq and Syria and carrying out acts of terrorism across the region and beyond.

Thousands more dismissed over failed coup attempt

Turkey has dismissed more than 6,000 people and ordered the closure of dozens of associations under the state of emergency imposed after the failed coup in July, in a purge that has shown no sign of slowing.

More than 100,000 people have already been suspended or sacked so far in a crackdown on those alleged to have links to coup plotters while dozens of media outlets have been shut down.

In the latest government decrees published in the country's official gazette late on Friday, 2,687 police officers, including 53 high-ranking commissioners, were dismissed.

Meanwhile, 1,699 civil servants were removed from the ministry of justice, including eight members of the Council of State and one from the Supreme Electoral Council, Anadolu, the state news agency, reported late on Friday.

Eight hundred thirty-eight health officials and hundreds of employees from other ministries were also dismissed, in addition to another 631 academics and eight members of the Council of State.

The dismissals are permitted under the state of emergency, which was extended by another three months in October, and was originally imposed in the

wake of the coup.

But its scope has been vehemently criticized by the European Union and human rights activists.

The three decrees also ordered the closure of more than 80 associations accused of "activities affecting the security of the state".

Critics have claimed that the crackdown goes well beyond the suspected coup plotters and targets anyone who has dared to show opposition to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Ankara blames the coup plot on United States-based Muslim preacher Fethullah Gulen and says an unrelenting campaign is

needed to root out his influence from public life. Gulen denies the allegations.

Turkey also argues the exceptional security measures are necessary in the face of rising threats from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK/Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê).

The country has been hit by two attacks this week, one claimed by the ISIL terrorist outfit against a high-end Turkish nightclub, and the other which authorities blamed on the PKK in the western city of Izmir.

(Source: agencies)

Car bomb kills at least 50 in Syria's A'zaz

At least 50 people have been killed in the Syrian city of A'zaz in a powerful car bomb explosion targeting civilians in the city.

The blast took place as a fuel tanker blew up in front of a courthouse in the city. Dozens of others were also wounded in the explosion.

According to initial reports, several government buildings were completely destroyed in the explosion. Dozens of other buildings were also damaged as a result of the blast.

The explosion was heard across the border in the Turkish town of Kilis, Turkey's private Dogan news agency said.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack, which was the latest in a string of bombings to hit A'zaz.

In November, 25 people, including civilians, were killed in a car bomb attack on a militant headquarters. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) Takfiri terrorist group was accused of being behind the attack.

At least 17 people were killed in a car bomb attack on a militant checkpoint in October, said the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

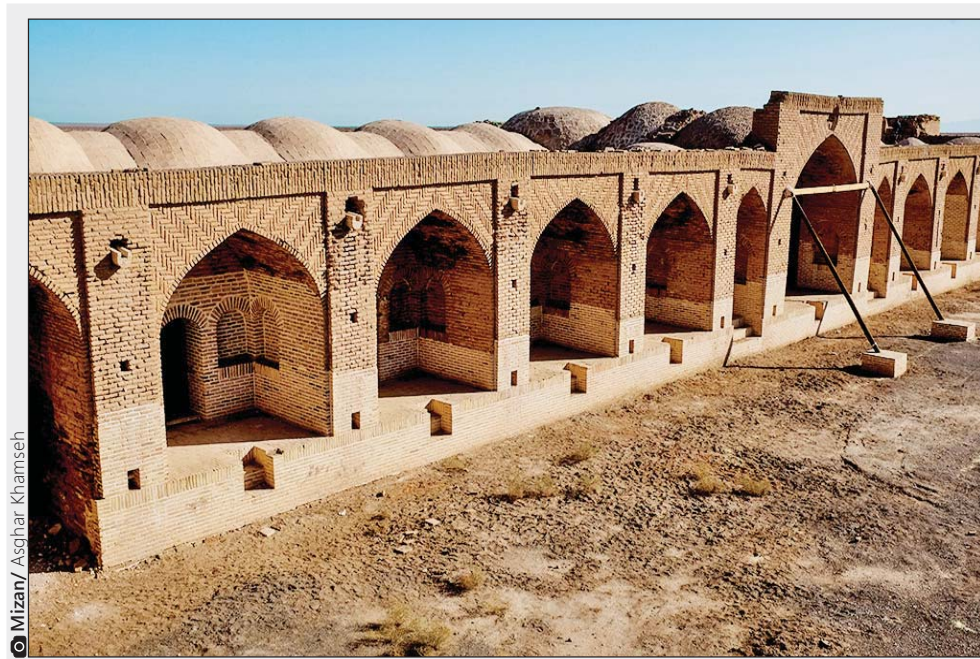
A'zaz is located to the north of the city of Aleppo, which has recently been liberated from militants. Evacuation deals saw the departure of the last pockets of militants in the east of Aleppo late last year.

The Saturday blast in A'zaz comes as a nationwide ceasefire is being observed across much of Syria.

The ceasefire deal between the militants and the Syrian government, which was brokered by Russia and Turkey, came into force in late December. ISIL and the Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (Front for the Conquest of the Levant), formerly known as the al-Nusra Front (Jabhat al-Nusra) are not part of the truce.

■ Scores of ISIL terrorists killed as Syrian army advances in Homs

Elsewhere, scores of ISIL terrorists have been killed when Syrian army soldiers launched a string of operations against the extremists' positions in the country's beleaguered Homs Province. ➔13



Deyr-e Gachin, mother of Iranian caravanserais

Detail showing the longstanding façade and chambers of the Deyr-e Gachin Caravansary, located 65 km south of Tehran in the heart of the Kavir National Park, on January 5, 2017.

Surmounted by mudbrick rooftop, Deyr-e Gachin (meaning plaster-covered monastery) dates back to the Sassanid era (224 to 651 CE). It is widely known as the mother of Iranian caravansaries.

Covering an area of 12,000 square meters, the caravanserai embraces a bathroom, a cistern, a mosque, and a vast backyard.

The complex has been repeatedly renovated in different eras.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Rouhani congratulates Ghana's Akufo-Addo on presidential victory

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has congratulated Nana Akufo-Addo on his victory in the Ghanaian presidential elections.

On Saturday, Rouhani wrote a congratulatory message to Akufo-Addo, felicitating him on winning the presidential race, Nasim reported.

Stressing his country's willingness to have close friendship with Ghana, Rouhani expressed hope that the Tehran-Accra ties would enhance in all areas under Akufo-Addo. Akufo-Addo beat incumbent leader John Dramani Mahama in elections in December 2016.



Qalibaf: Municipality, presidential office same to me

POLITICS TEHRAN — The mayor of Tehran, who has been running for presidency two times in the past, has said working in the municipality is no different to him than working in the presidential office.

"We have a duty to work. The place of it is not significant," Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf told reporters on Saturday in answer to the question whether he has any plan to run for president in the 2017 election, ISNA news agency reported.



Velayati says will not run for president

POLITICS TEHRAN — Ali Akbar Velayati, the director of the Strategic Research Center of the Expediency Council, has said he will not run for the post of president in the 2017 election.

Speaking to Tasnim news agency on Saturday, Velayati said, "I have no intention to participate in the electoral campaigns of 96 (2017)."

"Insha'Allah the revolution's forces unite so that they can vote for a dutiful candidate that will step on the path to the goals of the Islamic Republic," he said.

Hezbollah chief, senior Iranian MP confer on regional developments

POLITICS TEHRAN — Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah, secretary general of the Lebanese Hezbollah movement, and Iranian Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Chairman Alaeddin Boroujerdi held talks in Beirut on Saturday on the latest political developments in the Middle East.

The Beirut visit comes after Boroujerdi met top Syrian officials, including President Bashar al-Assad, in Damascus on Thursday.

Boroujerdi, who headed a parliamentary delegation to the two countries, told IRNA that Tehran and Beirut are determined to develop ties in different areas, especially in economy, commerce, and security.

The parliamentarian made the remarks after a meeting with Lebanese President Michel Aoun.

"In the meeting with General Michel



File photo

Aoun, we congratulated the new Christian year and his election as president of Lebanon," the lawmaker added.

"We also announced the warm greetings of the Iranian president and Majlis speaker to him."

The senior legislator also said the Ira-

nian parliamentary team presented a report on meetings with Syrian officials to the Lebanese side.

"In the meeting we insisted on the importance of the Syrian issue for the Islamic Republic of Iran and Lebanon and in terms of security."

Boroujerdi said President Aoun requested Iran to help "resolve the problems" of the Syrian refugees which a large number of them live in Lebanon.

He further said the Syrian president wanted to know about the planned talks, brokered by the trioka of Iran, Russia and Turkey, between the Syrian government and armed opposition groups in Astana, Kazakhstan.

The Lebanese president expressed hope that the Syrian conflict could be resolved politically, the lawmaker added.

Boroujerdi and his accompanying delegation were set to hold talks with Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri and Parliament Speaker Nabi Berri on Saturday, as well.

According to a separate story carried by IRNA, Aoun said, "We hope that efforts (for peace talks between the warring sides in Lebanon) lead to a solution to end the sufferings of the Syrian refugees."

Sensitive computer equipment confiscated in Tehran, two arrested

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran's Anti-Smuggling Headquarters announced on Saturday it had seized five containers containing sensitive filming and special computer equipment at a customs warehouse in Tehran.

"A large consignment of five containers containing minicomputers, professional filming cameras, and powerful computer servers were seized on Wednesday evening in Tehran," said Qassem Khorshidi, a spokesman with the country's Anti-Smuggling Headquarters.

"Each of the seized servers is so strong to be used for special purposes such as high-traffic banking systems."

The equipment are worth nearly \$3.7 million, accord-

ing to an initial assessment of an incomplete listing.

Reportedly, the containers had been imported via a border customs, and watched by intelligence forces until unloaded in Tehran, the spokesman explained.

The official gave no details on where the containers had been loaded.

Two have been arrested so far for further interrogation by police, one of whom already having a criminal record for smuggling activities.

The smugglers had used fake customs declarations to bypass border checks, the official explained.

"Owner of three of the containers had said in customs declarations the containers were containing thin clients

(lightweight computer desktops)."

Increasing smuggling over the past years has been draining the Iranian economy.

Only between March 2013 and March 2014, up to \$25 billion worth of contraband was smuggled into the country, a major blow to domestic production and employment.

In a speech delivered on Oct. 20, 2106, on the occasion of Iran's National Exports Day, President Hassan Rouhani announced a \$10 billion drop in smuggling into the county to \$15 billion, saying cutting smuggling would not be possible short of quality manufacturing and logical pricing inside the country.

Navy to practice 'modern warfare tactics' in future drill

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Iranian navy announced on Saturday that it plans to unveil modern warfare tactics in a war game that will be held in the southern regions of the country, Tasnim news agency reported.

Habibollah Sayyari, the navy commander, said the large-scale naval war

game, codenamed Velayat-95, will be staged in the Iranian month of Bahman, which will start on January 20.

He pointed out that the maneuver will cover a vast area of national and international waters in the northern parts of the Indian Ocean.

"The navy will practice up-to-date tactics during the drill including modern

warfare tactics, for the first time."

Sayyari also said new weapons, including a broad range of missiles, will be unveiled during the exercise.

In recent years, Iran has been seeking to upgrade its naval capabilities.

Less than two weeks ago, the country's navy announced plans to build an aircraft carrier as part of an

upgrade of its maritime warfare capabilities.

"Building an aircraft carrier is also among the goals pursued by the navy and we hope to attain this objective," Deputy Navy Commander for Coordination Admiral Peiman Jafari Tehrani was quoted as saying by Fars news agency.

Managing Director

Masoud Rohjani:

Taking Giant Stride towards Supporting Domestic Production, Atop Agenda of "VAYO" Company

With eight-year fruitful experience, this industrial and production unit started its activity in the field of producing manto (women's wear), suit (men's wear) and nightgown. At the unsparing and unflinching efforts of domestic professional seamstresses and dressmakers, this production unit managed to take giant stride in garment and apparel market of the country especially in recent years. Given its brilliant performance, this industrial and production unit managed to win prestigious titles since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year in 1395 (started March 20, 2016) as follows: Winning ISO 9001 certificate for designing and quality, ISO 10002 certificate for gaining customers' satisfaction and also top statue of the clothing brand in Festival of Fashion and Related Industries. The award-granting ceremony, Mr. Iman Masdari Director General of Specialists' Group also attended. After elapse of eight years successful experience, VAYO Company has been turned into a large and important industrial and production unit in the country.

Under the strict management of Mr. Masoud Rohjani, this industrial and production unit with its brand "VAYO" started its activity at the unflinching and nonstop efforts of Ms. Erfanian as veteran clothes' designer.

To learn more about the details, our correspondent has conducted an interview with the able and young entrepreneur of this industrial and production unit which comes as follows:

To begin with his interview, he pointed to the national production and said: "National production is one of the best factors for generation of employment and tackling with unemployment."

National production will eradicate unemployment in the country on the one hand and also will bring about a sense of competitiveness and diversity coupled with disseminating Iranian-Islamic culture on the other hand.

He further noted that the two mentioned factors should be taken into serious consideration.

Unfortunately, the country witnessed that most apparels, garments and clothing in particular were importing into the country from People's Republic of China or Turkey in previous years. With due observance to the said issue, culture of west was institutionalized in the country. Despite existence of widespread virtual networks, internet, etc. westernization or west-orientation issue has been penetrated into Iranian families as well.

Let's follow this promotional item in our next issue that will be published on Tuesday Jan. 10.

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مسعود رجحانی ،
مدیرعامل شرکت وایو اعلام کرد :

هدف شرکت گام برداشتن در راستای تولید ملی

این مجموعه تولیدی با سابقه ۸ ساله در زمینه تولید مانتو و کت شلوار، لباس شب فعالیت خود را شروع کرده و در سالهای اخیر با تلاش چرخ کاران عزیز کشورمان توانسته در بازار پوشاک متفاوت و خاص عرض اندام کند و در ابتدا سال ۹۵ عناوین معتبر و ارزشمندی همچون ایزو ۹۰۰۱ برای طراحی و کیفیت، ایزو ۱۰۰۰۲ برای رضایت مندی مشتری و همینطور تندیس برترین برند در جشنوار مد لباس و صنایع وابسته به آن با حضور آقای ایمان مصدري مدیرکل گروه متخصصین بدست بیاورد. تولیدی وایو که به مرور زمان باگذشت ۸ سال به یک تولیدی بزرگ تبدیل شده است این مجموعه با مدیریت آقای رجحانی و طراحی خانم عرفانیان شروع به کار کرده و در فکر گسترش توسعه این مجموعه و کارمندان این حرفه می باشند

در ادامه، مصاحبه با این جوان کار آفرین را مطالعه کنید:

مسعود رجحانی با ذکر اینکه تولید ملی یکی از بهترین عوامل برای اشتغال زایی و مبارز با بیکاری دانست خاطر نشان کرد تولید ملی از یک سو باعث از بین رفتن بیکاری میشود و این یکی از صدها فایدهای تولید ملی است با تولید و کار آفرین حس رقابت و تنوع و همچنین فرهنگ سازی پوشش ایرانی اسلامی میتوانیم قدمهای خوب و به سزایی برداریم. که این امر در سالهای گذشته که اکثر جنسها از چین یا ترکیه وارد میشد بر شانه کشورهای همسایه افتاده بود که همانطور که شاهد بودیم فرهنگ غرب در ایران عزیزمان نهادینه شد البته باید این امر را در نظر گرفت که با وجود شبکه های مجازی و اینترنت مد و غرب گرایی جای خود را در میان خانوادههای ایرانی باز کرده اند.

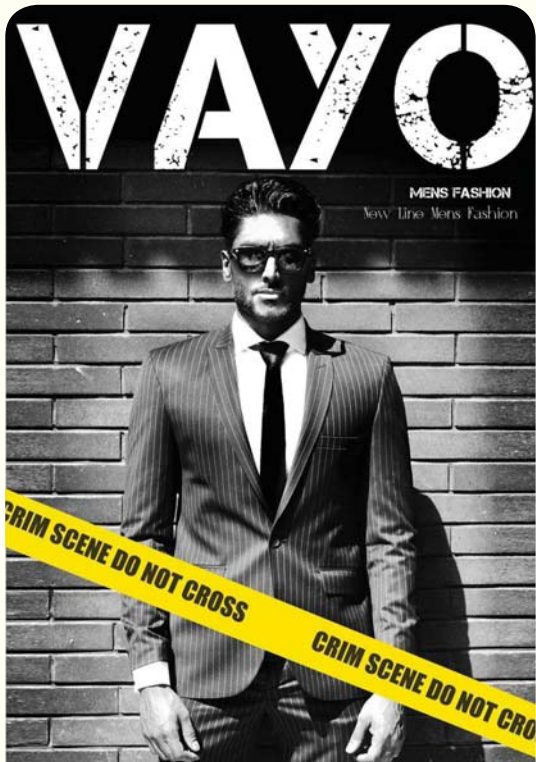
در ادامه مسعود رجحانی خاطر نشان کرد تولید ملی در کنار رسانه ملی میتواند به راحتی در کنار خانواده ایرانی حضور پیدا کند و برای هرچه بهتر بودن این حرکت ملی حمایت دولت و مردم را خواستار شد با سرمایه گذاری در زمینه تولید ملی میتوان درهای صادرات پوشاک ایرانی را به کشورهای همسایه باز کرد همانطور که شاهد بودیم در ابتدا کشور چین با صادرات بدلیجات و پوشاک به کشور عزیزمان توانسته در سالهای اخیر با صادرات خودرو و دیگر لوازم وابسته با کیفیت پایین به زندگی مردم عزیزمان بازار کار را برای هموطنان عزیزمان سخت و دشوار کند. نشانی بازار بزرگ چهار سوق کوچک و بزرگ پاساژ چهار سوق طبقه دوم شماره ۶۲۶

ادامه این مطلب روز سه شنبه ۲۱ دی منتشر خواهد شد.

موبایل: ۰۹۱۲۵۱۳۶۶۱۹

تلفن: ۵۵۶۹۸۳۲۶

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Top U.S. senator says Trump would not 'tear up' nuclear deal

POLITICS A senior Republican senator has said that the incoming Trump administration would not "tear up" the Iranian nuclear agreement, but would focus on enforcing the deal more strictly, the Guardian reported.

"In spite of the all the flaws in the agreement, nothing bad is going to happen relative to nuclear development in Iran in the next few years. It's just not," Senator Bob Corker of Tennessee said on Friday.

Corker also described the nuclear deal as "flawed", but at the same time warned that tearing it up could trigger a crisis.

"You've got a choice. You can come in and figuratively tear it up ... and you can create a crisis on the front end by doing so. Or you can understand that we have lots of challenges to deal with around the world," he said.

The nuclear deal, officially named JCPOA, was reached between Iran and six world powers – the U.S, Britain, France, China, Russia and Germany. Under the deal, Tehran agreed to curb certain aspects of its nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief.

Throughout his presidential campaign, Donald Trump railed against the deal and promised to either "tear up the deal" or negotiate "a better deal".

After Trump won the presidency in an upset victory over Hillary Clinton, he appointed several fierce critics of the Islamic Republic to top positions, including the head of the CIA.

This, in turn, has concerned many proponents of the nuclear deal, including the other parties involved in nuclear negotiations that led to the deal, as well as dozens of countries across the world that have entered into Iranian market right after the deal went into effect.

This is while Israel has shown itself to be one of the biggest critics of the historic accord.

Back in August 2015, U.S. President Barack Obama said "with the exception of Israel, every country supports the agreement."

Meanwhile, a new poll, carried out by the University of Maryland's Program for Public Consultation (PPC), has found that nearly two-thirds of the American public opposes withdrawing from the nuclear deal, LobeLog reported.

Also on Monday, 37 top U.S. scientists, Nobel laureates, veteran makers of nuclear arms and former White House science advisers, wrote to the president-elect to urge him to abide by the international nuclear agreement.

Resistance economy won't bear fruit short of unity: VP

➔ "This is by no means acceptable that certain private bankers who claim to support resistance economy don't participate in it."

Over the past years, Iranian banks have channeled resources to industrial activities themselves, falling short of their intrinsic responsibilities.

As a consequence of the market being cornered by banks, a huge number of medium and small businesses have been pushed to the brink of bankruptcy and massive layoffs.

Iraq: Deal reached over withdrawal of Turkish forces from Bashiq

Iraq's Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said on Saturday an agreement had been reached with Turkey over an Iraqi demand that Turkish forces withdraw from a town near Mosul in the north of the country, Iraqi state TV reported.

Abadi met his Turkish counterpart Binali Yildirim in Baghdad. State television did not provide further details about the agreement over the town of Bashiq, where Turkish forces have been stationed since a recent offensive against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group in northern Iraq.

Yildirim has arrived in Baghdad following a war of words between the two neighbors over the unauthorized presence of Turkish troops in northern Iraq.

The two-day visit is the first in its kind since the two governments quarreled over the incursion of Turkish troops into northern Iraq, straining relations to the point of a military face-off.

Yildirim was welcomed by Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi in Baghdad before heading to talks, but the Iraqi state TV didn't give details on schedule.

"We hope that his (Yildirim's) visit will open a new chapter in Turkey-Iraq relations," Turkey's Ambassador to Iraq Faruk Kaymakci said on his Twitter account.

Turkey's deployment of some 500 Turkish troops into the Bashiq region northeast of the ISIL-held city of Mosul has triggered a chorus of protest from the Iraqi government, political groups and people.

Last December, Turkey deployed a number of soldiers, equipped with heavy arms and backed by tanks, to the Bashiq military camp on the outskirts of Mosul.

Ankara claimed the deployment was part of a mission to train and equip Iraqi Kurdish forces in the fight against ISIL terrorists. However, Baghdad has repeatedly denounced the move as a violation of its sovereignty and called for the withdrawal of Turkish troops.

■ Troops close in on Tigris
A spokesman for the Counter Terror-



Turkish PM Binali Yildirim

Iraqi PM Haider al-Abadi

ism Service (CTS) says Iraqi forces have closed in on the Tigris River that divides the northern city of Mosul in half.

"Counterterrorism forces have been sent about 500 meters from the fourth bridge," Sabah al-Numan told reporters east of Mosul on Saturday.

Numan further noted that Iraqi troops were the closest they had been to the strategic river and were advancing as a result of new tactics and better coordination among different branches of the army.

Federal police and CTS forces "are now moving in parallel on both axes" in southeastern Mosul, where a major operation is underway to retake the city from ISIL terrorists, the official pointed out.

"We are proceeding side by side ... and advancing at the same level," he said, adding, "We have worn down the terrorist organization with this type of advance."

■ Almost 200 militants slain in Mosul

Meanwhile, on Friday, a total of 194 ISIL terrorists were killed in the Iraqi forces' push to recapture Mosul.

The Iraqi Defense Ministry said in a statement that 22 Takfiris died in the army's drone strikes in the city.

Meanwhile, Arabic-language al-Forat news agency reported the recapture of al-Asar village in western Mosul by the Iraqi popular forces. Separately, Commander of Federal Police Forces Lieutenant General Raed Shaker Jawdat said that ISIL prisons were uncovered in the recently liberated Mosul's al-Wahdah region, situated on the left bank of the Tigris River.

Additionally, an unidentified security source in the Iraqi Army's 7th Division in Anbar Province announced the liberation of the villages of al-Zawiyah and al-Sakrah in western Ramadi.

The Anbar operation left 13 ISIL terror-

ists dead and destroyed 105 improvised explosive devices (IEDs) as well as 11 rockets and three warehouses storing guns.

Iraqi forces also managed to hoist the national flag over buildings in Ghufra Khuser eastern Mosul. The Iraqi flag was further raised over two hospitals and a medical college in southern Mosul.

■ Terrorist attacks kill civilians in Salahuddin

Elsewhere, an IED was detonated targeting locals who were fleeing ISIL-held areas in the Jabal Hamrin district of Salahuddin Province (Saladin Governorate), killing two people and injuring 26 others, among them women and children.

Another booby-trap also went off in Baghdad's Yusufiyah, leaving one person dead and four others wounded.

Moreover, a similar blast hit Baghdad's Mushahid neighborhood where a tribesman was slain and three more sustained injuries.

(Source: agencies)

Taiwan's president heads to U.S. amid China dispute

Taiwan's President, Tsai Ing-wen, has left for the United States on Saturday on her way to Central America, a trip that will be scrutinized by China, incensed by her congratulatory call to the U.S. President-elect Donald Trump.

While the focus of the nine-day trip is to bolster relations with Taiwan's Central American allies, Tsai's U.S. stopovers will be closely watched amid speculation she may make contact with the president-elect and his team.

She is to transit in Houston this weekend and return to Taipei via San Francisco next weekend.

Beijing has asked Washington to bar Tsai from flying through U.S. airspace.

"A transit is a transit," the Taiwanese leader told reporters last week, in response to whether she would be meeting anyone from Trump's administration.

Trump himself appeared to have ruled out meeting Tsai this trip, saying it is "a little bit inappropriate" to meet anybody until he takes office January 20.

Last month, Taiwan's deputy foreign minister, Javier Hou, told a leg-

islative committee that the ministry wanted to arrange meetings with members of the U.S. Congress from both parties as per past protocols, according to Taiwan's state-owned Central News Agency.

The call in December almost upended decades of diplomatic practice in the U.S. Since then, China has stepped up military drills near Taiwan, with speculation its sole aircraft carrier may pass through the Taiwan Strait during or shortly after Tsai's trip.

The trip to Central America also serves as a way to create strong international relations that could help strengthen Taiwan's self-rule.

Taiwan is considered a breakaway state by China, and it is down to 21 allies, after the small African nation of Sao Tome and Principe switched recognition to Beijing last month.

Analyst Liao said Beijing would continue to woo the island's allies as a pressure tactic on Tsai, who refuses to acknowledge the concept that there is only "one China".

(Source: agencies)

Nana Akufo-Addo to be sworn in as Ghana's new president

Ghana's new president, Nana Akufo-Addo, will be sworn in on Saturday after beating incumbent leader John Dramani Mahama in elections last month.

The 72-year-old former human rights lawyer will take the oath of office at a ceremony in Independence Square in central Accra before more than 6,000 guests and members of the public.

Mahama had previously encouraged his citizens to support Akufo-Addo as his successor.

"I stand here today, Mr Speaker, holding the baton of leadership prepared to pass it on with pride, goodwill and determination to Nana Akufo-Addo," said Mahama in a farewell address on December 31.

The new president told AFP news agency that after smooth handovers of power in his home country and places such as Nigeria, leaders wanting to stay in office at all costs were "fighting the tide of history".

(Source: agencies)

Protest in Sri Lanka turns violent over Hambantota port deal

Clashes between protesters and government supporters have erupted in southern Sri Lanka during a rally against a port deal with China.

The clashes took place as Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe was attending an opening ceremony for an industrial zone near the port city of Hambantota, about 240km southeast of the capital, Colombo.

Government supporters armed with clubs first attacked protesters organized by the opposition and led by Buddhist monks in Amabalandota, 22km from Hambantota. The protesters responded by throwing rocks.

It was not clear how many people were injured, but several people were seen being taken away in ambulances.

The villagers marched against what they say is a plan to take over private land for the industrial zone in which China will have a major stake. Lawmaker DV Chanaka, one of the protest organizers, said he fears the port area will become a "Chinese colony."

"We are against leasing the lands where people live and do their farm-

ing, while there are identified lands for an industrial zone," said Chanaka, the district politician. "When you give away such a vast area of land, you can't stop the area becoming a Chinese colony."

Buddhist clergy will follow an ancient tradition and issue a decree, asking the government to stop the leasing, said Magama Mahanama, from the Monks' Organization to Protect National Assets.

Historically, kings in predominantly Buddhist Sri Lanka are said to have abided by decrees issued by Buddhist monks.

"Ninety-nine years means at least two generations. When they [the Chinese] take root here, what's the guarantee that we will have it back? There is a major threat of cultural erosion and demographic change," Mahanama said.

Prime Minister Wickremesinghe, speaking to reporters earlier this week, said the partnership arrangement was necessary to free the country from the debt incurred to build the port. He blamed the debt on former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, whose government was friendly to Beijing.

(Source: agencies)

Floods kill 12 in southern Thailand provinces

Floods have killed 12 people in Thailand, while heavy rains continued to ravage the country's south.

The flooding, which is roof-high in some areas, affected more than 700,000 people since it started a week ago, Thailand's interior ministry said in a statement on Sunday.

"We are coordinating relevant agencies to provide the necessities for the people affected by the flooding," Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha told reporters.

Neighboring Malaysia was also hit by severe flooding earlier this week, with thousands stranded in relief centers in two northeastern states. By Saturday, the number of evacuees had dropped as weather conditions improved and authorities forecast less rainfall over the weekend.

However, there are two more days of downpour in Thailand, according to the Meteorological Department, which also warned of flash floods in eight of the hardest-hit provinces.

The rain is unusually strong for this time of year in Thailand, which normally sees a three-month long stretch of relatively dry and cool weather from November through to January.

It is high season for tourists who flock to the kingdom's island resorts, powering a crucial sector of the economy.

But the deluge has already disrupted beach holidays in several traveler hotspots, including the popular islands of Samui and Phangan.

Hundreds of tourists have had their flights delayed, while train and bus services on the mainland have also been suspended in flood-hit areas.

Yet some travelers are refusing to let the storm stop the fun, with photos circulating on social media of tourists coasting through flooded streets on pool floats.

"Some tourists are enjoying the flooding, they're taking pictures and going swimming," said Nongyao Jirundorn, a tourism official on Samui island.

(Source: agencies)

Florida airport reopens after five shot dead

Florida's Fort Lauderdale International Airport was open again on Saturday after a shooting rampage by an Iraq war veteran that killed five people, wounded eight, and sent thousands scrambling for safety.

Police identified the suspect as 26-year-old Esteban Santiago, who was in custody and being questioned by the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) over the shooting that shut down the airport, a major gateway to the Caribbean and Latin America.

Santiago, who earlier complained that the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) was forcing him to watch the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group videos, allegedly opened fire randomly with a semi-automatic handgun on Friday shortly before 1 pm local time in the baggage claim area of Terminal 2.

The Fort Lauderdale airport announced at 5 a.m. on Saturday via Twitter that they were again open for business, but urged passengers to check with their airlines.

Witness John Schlicher told Fox News that he was picking up his first bag as he "heard the first shot. As I did, the person right next to me fell to the ground ... It was very surreal."

The shooter "was holding a handgun. He was firing into the crowd. Everyone was standing there waiting for the luggage," he said.

Santiago had traveled from Alaska to Fort Lauderdale, with a stopover in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the special agent in charge of Miami's FBI field office, George Piro, told reporters late on Friday.

"We're looking at several investigative leads not only in Alaska but other states that we have determined that he's either traveled to or has connections there," Piro said.

The suspect had a gun inside his checked luggage, after declaring the weapon with airport authorities, and then used it in the shooting rampage, law enforcement sources told U.S. media.

Santiago was detained without law enforcement firing any shots, Broward County Sheriff Scott Israel told reporters.

Piro said authorities were "looking at every angle, including the terrorism angle," but that it would take time to determine the nature of the attack.

■ Lone shooter

In November, Santiago had walked into the FBI's Anchorage office exhibiting "erratic behavior" that led agents to contact local police, who took him to a medical facility for a mental health evaluation, Piro said.

Santiago claimed he was being forced to fight for the ISIL terrorist group and that the CIA was controlling his mind to make him watch ISIL videos, several U.S. outlets reported, citing unnamed law enforcement officials.

Santiago, who was born in New Jersey and raised in Puerto Rico, is a former member of the Puerto Rico and Alaska National Guard. He served in Iraq from April 2010 to February 2011, and ended his service in August.

Santiago only reached the rank of private first class and was given a general discharge for unsatisfactory performance, ABC News reported.

An aunt, Maria Luisa Ruiz, told the NorthJersey.com news site that Santiago became a father to a baby boy in September – and that he was having mental problems.

"Like a month ago, it was like he lost his mind," Ruiz said. "He said he saw things."

She added: "My family and I are in shock right now ... It's sad but we have to confront the situation."

FBI agents later interviewed Ruiz, CNN reported.

Mayor Barbara Sharief told CNN that the gunman "was a lone shooter, and we have no evidence at this time that he was acting with anyone else."

■ Run and hide

In addition to those killed and wounded, up to 40 people went to the hospital for various other injuries such as falling and sprains.

U.S. President Barack Obama expressed "how heartbroken we are for the families who've been affected" during excerpts of an interview with ABC News.

Florida Governor Rick Scott, who rushed to the airport to be briefed, told reporters that those responsible would be "held accountable to the full extent of the law."

Scott said that he had contacted President-elect Donald Trump, who said that he was "monitoring the terrible situation in Florida."

"Thoughts and prayers for all. Stay safe!" Trump tweeted.

Airport personnel were also busy in the complicated task of returning nearly 20,000 pieces of luggage and other personal items abandoned by passengers fleeing at the time of the shooting, officials said.

(Source: AFP)

Gunfire rocks Ivory Coast's Bouake army camp after troops pay dispute

Heavy gunfire erupted early on Saturday near the main military camp in Ivory Coast's second largest city, Bouake, where disgruntled soldiers launched an uprising a day earlier over salaries and bonuses, a resident and a soldier said.

The renegade soldiers have controlled the city of around a half million residents since taking up positions at key entry points early on Friday.

The army has sent reinforcements to Bouake but the defense minister said in a statement late on Friday that the government was prepared to listen to the soldiers' grievances.

It was not immediately clear what provoked the gunfire, but a member of the uprising said soldiers had seen what they considered suspicious movements outside the camp in Bouake.

"This is gunfire to discourage them," the unnamed soldier said.

Similar mutinies also occurred in two of the West African nation's other main cities on Friday as the movement appeared to spread.

(Source: agencies)

Iran, Australia agree to launch direct flight

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran and Australia have reached **d e s k** an agreement to launch a direct flight between the two countries in near future, IRNA quoted Iranian ambassador in Canberra on Saturday.

According to Abdolhossein Vahaji, the two countries signed an initial agreement in November 2016 and an executive meeting between Iranian airliner Mahan Air and the Australian side is scheduled for late-January to put the reached agreement into effect.

According to the agreement, the two sides' aircrafts can cross each other's airspace, land and get services and the establishment of direct flights between the two countries' cities, including flights between Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and Perth and the Iranian cities of Tehran, Mashhad, Shiraz and Isfahan is also covered in the document.

Tehran to host banking, insurance expo in April

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The 10th edition of Iran's International Exhibition of Exchange, Bank and Insurance (FINEX 2017) is due to be held April 15-18 in Tehran, IRNA reported quoting an official in Iran's Securities & Exchange Organization (SEO) as saying on Saturday.

According to Yaser Fallah, alongside the Iranian participants the event will be hosting exhibitors from Europe and Asia.

The 10th exhibition's main goals are "increasing social awareness about finance industry" and "familiarizing people with various services provided by banks and insurance companies" Fallah said.

Investors all ears as Trump set to break silence

By Hugh Lawson

U.S. and Chinese data and an expected news conference by U.S. President-elect Donald Trump in the coming week may shed some light on the state of the world's two biggest economies - and the outlook for relations between them.

Trump, who takes office on Jan. 20, has said he will hold a news conference on Wednesday. It will be his first since winning the November election, although he has been outspoken on Twitter.

Investors will welcome any insights he may give on his policies regarding China as well as the domestic economy.

"This occasion could be an opportunity for Trump to highlight key priorities, with markets especially alert to details regarding tax reform, infrastructure spending plans and his China trade stance," Standard Chartered said in a weekly note to investors.

Some analysts are concerned about the broad economic and political impacts of Trump's relations with the rest of the world.

"Trump's plans for trade and foreign policy in particular are fraught with considerable threats to the real economy," Commerzbank currency strategist Thu Lan Nguyen wrote, suggesting a trade war with China or Mexico may do the U.S. economy more harm than good.

On the U.S. domestic front, expectations of heavy spending under Trump to create jobs in the Rust Belt states that swung the election his way have helped lift consumer sentiment to multi-year highs and driven up Treasury yields in a burst of "Trumpflation."

One gauge of that sentiment will be U.S. retail sales data for December due on Friday. They are expected to show a 0.7 percent rise from the previous month, according to a Reuters poll of economists.

Another will be the University of Michigan consumer sentiment index, also out on Friday, which economists polled by Reuters expect to come in at 98.5, the highest reading since early 2004.

As 2017 progresses, some economists see U.S. wage growth and tax cuts outweighing the impact of higher interest rates and oil prices to keep shoppers driving the economy forward.

"Higher interest rates and rising gasoline prices will be headwinds for the consumer sector, but solid labour income and the prospects for personal tax cuts will eventually support decent consumption growth," Credit Suisse said in a weekly report.

China burning dollars

In a reflection of the prolonged weakness of China's yuan, data this Saturday is expected to show Beijing's forex reserves dwindled to just above \$3 trillion in December - the lowest level since February 2011.

While the yuan has soared in recent days, helping create a liquidity squeeze in Hong Kong, a Reuters poll showed it is expected to slide at least 4 percent more this year, hurt by fiscal stimulus and faster interest rate hikes in the United States.

"It remains to be seen whether tightening yuan liquidity conditions in Hong Kong and reports of capital controls being introduced will be sufficient to halt the slide" in the yuan, analysts at Investec said in a weekly note to clients.

Another fear for investors may be whether the prolonged slide of the yuan sets off a vicious cycle of more outflows, currency depreciation and rising inflation, on which China issues December data on Tuesday.

Adding to China's problems, Trump has vowed repeatedly to label Beijing a currency manipulator, a move that would heighten tensions between the two major trading nations.

Brexit blues

The fall in sterling since Britain voted to leave the European Union has so far failed to boost British industrial production, a poor sign for overall economic growth in the last quarter of 2016.

Manufacturing and broader industrial output data due on Wednesday are expected to show a rebound in November from a sharp contraction in October, although the rise may not be enough to have a positive effect on fourth-quarter GDP data due out at the end of January.

"We tend to the view that the manufacturing sector probably expanded only very modestly in Q4. However this is unlikely to be the case for industrial production, where a second successive quarterly decline appears virtually inevitable," Investec chief economist Philip Shaw said in a note.

(Source: Reuters)

Iran to negotiate revival of Arj, Azmayesh with Europeans, Americans

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran plans **d e s k** to discuss revival of two domestic home appliance manufacturers, Arj co. and Azmayesh co., with some renowned European and American home appliance manufacturers and marketers.

Some old Iranian home appliance companies, including Arj and Azmayesh, have not been revamped and modernized during the past decades, Abbas Hashemi an official in the Iranian Ministry of Industry told IRNA on Saturday, accordingly the Ministry of Industry has decided to hold talks with some foreign companies namely

the American multinational conglomerate corporation General Electric (GE), the American multinational manufacturer and marketer of home appliances Whirlpool Corporation, and the Italian Ariston Thermo Group in a bid to revive and update the named Iranian companies.

To secure the required financial resources for the companies' revival, as Hashemi further described, the Iranian ministry intends to offer their shares to the Iranian private sector so the new owners would make joint ventures with prominent foreign brands.

Iran-U.S. trade drops 20% in Nov.

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — According to the latest **d e s k** data released by the American Statistical Association (ASA), the value of trade between Iran and the U.S. stood at \$9.7 million in November 2016, registering a 20 percent fall from its preceding month, Tasnim news agency reported on Saturday.

As reported, Iran-U.S. trade stood at \$51.5 million in October 2016.

The exports of the U.S. to the Islamic Republic of Iran decreased about 16.6 percent and reached \$6.5 million in November, while the figure stood at \$37.6 million in October, 2016.

The imports of the U.S. from Iran was \$3.2 million in November, showing 20 percent decrease from \$13.9 million in October 2016.

According to the previous data released by ASA, the

German deputy fin. min. urges 'prudent start to exit' from ECB stimulus

The European Central Bank's expansive monetary policy has numerous side-effects and a "prudent start to the exit" of the stimulus is therefore desirable, Germany's deputy finance minister told Reuters on Friday.

The ECB aims for inflation of just under 2 percent, but it has undershot its target for years. To fight off deflation, the central bank has cut interest rates to zero and launched a massive but controversial bond-buying programme.

A jump in German inflation, announced on Tuesday, has stoked a debate about the ECB's accommodative policy and its low rates, which German media and some conservative lawmakers argue erode savings. Germans vote in a federal election in September.

Jens Spahn, who is a senior member of Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU), said the recent pick-up in consumer prices was not a surprise and overall inflation had not yet reached the ECB's target of nearly 2 percent.

"However ... the expansive monetary policy has numerous side-effects, which is why a prudent start to the exit is desirable," Spahn said in a statement e-mailed to Reuters when asked to comment on the latest rise in consumer prices.

Spahn did not spell out what side-effects he was referring to. But senior government officials and central bankers have warned of asset bubbles and overheating property markets.

German inflation jumped to 1.7 per-



cent in December, the highest level in more than three years and only a whisker short of the ECB's target of below but close to 2 percent.

Some German lawmakers have also warned the ECB risks fuelling support for eurosceptic parties if it does not change course soon, an argument that Finance Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble also made last year.

In the broader euro zone, price growth surpassed the 1 percent threshold for the first time in three and a half years in December.

The pick-up in inflation has sparked fresh calls from German economists this week for the ECB to dial back its unprecedented monetary stimulus, which includes a 2.3 trillion euros (\$2.43 trillion) bond-buying program.

Batting back the pressure from Germany, ECB director Yves Mersch said on Friday it was premature to declare victory over economic weakness in the euro zone despite the latest figures showing a pick-up in inflation.

(Source: Reuters)

President Obama's economic legacy has just been cemented

There is a lot you can say about the economy under President Barack Obama.

But any sober discussion about what was or was not accomplished during the Obama years needs to begin with the labor market. Because if there's one economic accomplishment you can't take away from Obama, who took office during the darkest days of the financial crisis, it is that a ton of jobs were added to the US economy during his time in office.

The December 2016 jobs report, covering Obama's final full month in office, showed that 156,000 jobs were added to the economy. The unemployment rate rose 0.1 percent to 4.7 percent, bouncing slightly off November's post-crisis low

of 4.6 percent. This is down sharply from 10.0 percent, where the unemployment rate peaked in October 2009.

Perhaps the most important part of this report for financial markets and Fed-watchers was the 0.4 percent month-on-month improvement in wages, which pushed year-over-year gains up to a new post-crisis high of 2.9 percent. This was the strongest pace of wage growth since June 2009.

With Friday's report, 2016 now marks the third-straight year the US economy added more than 2 million jobs. Since the beginning of 2010, 15.8 million private sector jobs have been added to the economy.

(Source: Yahoo Finance)



In sign of more hawkish Fed, Evans nods to three rate hikes

Chicago Federal Reserve President Charles Evans said the central bank could raise interest rates three times this year, faster than he had expected just a few months ago and in line with the majority of his colleagues.

The comments from Evans, a voting member of the Fed's policy committee this year, reinforced the view that the Fed could step up the pace of its rate hiking campaign if the incoming Trump administration unleashed a fiscal stimulus.

Evans has been an outspoken proponent of low-interest rate policy for several years.

"I still think two (Fed rate hikes) is not an unreasonable expectation," Evans told reporters in Chicago, adding that if the economic data comes in stronger than expected, "three is not going to be implausible."

Two other U.S. policymakers, Cleveland Fed President Loretta Mester and Richmond Fed President Jeffrey Lacker, said Friday they would support even faster rate hikes.

"I've been ... seeing a little more strength in the economy," Cleveland Fed's Mester told Fox Business Network, adding that more than three rate hikes this year is "probably" appropriate.

But Dallas Fed President Robert Kaplan said he supported a gradual and patient path for hikes, arguing it was too early to know whether

Trump policies would boost economic growth.

Kaplan and Evans were in Chicago for an economics conference.

The Fed raised interest rates last month by a quarter of a point and policymakers signaled they expect to raise rates three more times in 2017.

Minutes from that meeting showed policymakers might signal an even more aggressive path of rate increases if inflationary pressures rise.

Incoming President Donald Trump has promised to double America's pace of economic growth and "re-build" the country's infrastructure, and about half of the Fed's 17 policymakers factored a fiscal stimulus into their economic forecasts, according to the minutes.

Evans said he was among the policymakers including fiscal stimulus in his forecasts, while Kaplan said he had yet to incorporate expectations of future economic policies.

"I want to be judicious about that," Kaplan told reporters in Chicago, saying he does not want to "prejudge what is going to be positive or what is going to be negative."

Lacker said in a speech the Fed "may need to increase more briskly than markets appear to expect."

Prices for interest rate futures contracts suggest investors are betting on two or three rate hikes this year.

(Source: Reuters)

India expects economy to grow 7.1% this year

The Indian economy is expected to grow 7.1 percent in the year through March, the lowest level in three years, the country's statistics ministry said Friday.

That compares with a 7.6 percent expansion in gross domestic product a year earlier.

Mining output is expected to contract 1.8 percent, reversing from a 7.4 percent rise in the last fiscal year, according to data issued by the Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation. Manufacturing growth is expected to slow to 7.4 percent from 9.3 percent, while services such as trade, hotels and transport also are likely to show a slower 6 percent growth, compared with a 9 percent rise last year.

On the brighter side, farm output is expected to rise 4.1 percent, stronger than the 1.2 percent increase last year.

If growth in gross domestic product matches the estimate, it would reaffirm India's top position among the world's fastest-growing large economies.

Economists, however, caution growth could fall modestly short of the ministry's projection, as it is based mostly on data collected prior to the government's Nov. 8 decision to withdraw 86 percent of currency in circulation.

The move caused a severe cash shortage, affecting payments from factories to farm-supply chains and disrupting activity in Asia's third-largest economy.

(Source: MarketWatch)



China reserves hover above \$3t on govt. support

China's foreign currency holdings remained above \$3 trillion in December even as the yuan capped its steepest annual decline in more than two decades.

Reserves fell \$41.08 billion to \$3.01 trillion, the People's Bank of China said in a statement Saturday. That matched a \$3.01 trillion estimate in a Bloomberg survey of economists. China may take measures to keep its foreign-currency stockpile from slipping too far below the key \$3 trillion mark to avoid hurting investor confidence and spurring further declines in the yuan, according to economists at major banks. Policy makers have recently rolled out extra requirements for citizens converting yuan into other currencies after the annual \$50,000 quota for individuals reset Jan. 1.



Dow 20,000 fails to yield in best week for U.S. stocks in month

Yet again, investors watched the Dow Industrial Average stop just short of the 20,000 level, even as U.S. equities resumed their post-election rally with the best week of gains in a month.

Much of Wall Street spent Friday afternoon transfixed as the Dow made half a dozen passes at the milestone and each time fell excruciatingly short. The average, which vaulted about 140 points in the 2 1/2 hours before 12:30 p.m. in New York on Friday, spent the next 3 1/2 hours trapped in a 30-point range whose upper border was less than half-a-point shy of the 20,000 level.



U.S. trade deficit widened in Nov. to a 9-month high

The U.S. trade deficit widened to a nine-month high in November as exports fell and companies and governments imported the most since August 2015.

The gap grew by 6.8 percent to \$45.2 billion from a revised \$42.4 billion in the prior month, Commerce Department figures showed Friday. The November shortfall was in line with the Bloomberg survey median for a \$45.4 billion gap.

Weaker overseas sales of U.S.-made goods and stronger domestic demand for imported merchandise indicate trade weighed on economic growth in last year's fourth quarter. America's net export position has also been made even more tenuous given the dollar's rally in late 2016.

NITC leases out 30 tankers to foreign companies post sanction

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — National Iranian Tanker Company (NITC) has leased out 30 oil tankers to foreign companies since implementation of Iran's nuclear deal officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in January 2016, Tasnim news agency reported on Saturday quoting Sirous Kianersi, the managing director of company.

The official also announced that given the company's negotiations with the foreign sides the number of leased tankers will increase by the end of current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2017).

"Our priority is the shipment of Iranian oil to the export markets and additional tankers will be leased out," he noted.

While announcing that NITC has no plan at the moment for increasing the number of its tankers, the official said, "We have a five-year strategic plan for renovating the fleet through replacing old tankers with some new ones in line with reducing the average fleet age."

Kianersi went on to say that during the sanctions, NITC served the country's oil industry through applying over 90 percent of its operating capacity.

As the official had previously said his company is determined for a strong return to the European markets and also adding new countries to the list of its customers while it is preparing its fleet to achieve this goal.

NITC, which operates the largest tanker fleet in the Middle East and has the world's largest fleet of super



tankers, transports Iranian crude and also acts as an independent entity in contracts with foreign concerns for

crude oil transportation based on prevailing international freight rates.

Brent oil closes at 18-month high after positive U.S. jobs data

Brent oil rose to the highest close in almost 18 months after U.S. government data showed strong job and wage gains while Kuwait and Saudi Arabia signaled they are curbing output.

Futures climbed a third day after Labor Department data showed that the world's biggest crude-consuming country added 156,000 jobs in December, while wages rose the most since 2009. Kuwait is trimming slightly more than it promised under OPEC's Nov. 30 accord, while Saudi Arabia told Asian customers to expect additional oil export cuts in February after reducing output by the full required amount, according to people with knowledge of the situation.

"The jobs numbers were pretty good, which is good for oil demand," Bill O'Grady, chief market strategist at Confluence Investment Management in St. Louis, which oversees \$6.1 billion, said by telephone. "We've priced in an enormous amount of good news. Now, OPEC has to

deliver on its promises."

Oil last year capped its biggest annual gain since 2009 as the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and 11 nations from outside the group agreed on a plan to reduce production. While suppliers including Kuwait, Iraq and Oman say they have started to curtail output, an increase in volumes from countries such as Libya -- exempt from cuts -- could put pressure on others.

Brent for March settlement advanced 21 cents, or 0.5 percent, to \$57.10 a barrel on the London-based ICE Futures Europe exchange. It was the highest close since July 17, 2015. Total volume traded was 29 percent below the 100-day average at 3:41 p.m. in New York. The global benchmark crude closed at a \$2.23 premium to March West Texas Intermediate contracts.

WTI for February delivery rose 23 cents, or 0.4 percent, to settle at \$53.99 a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange.

Prices briefly dipped as the dollar advanced after the release of the jobs numbers. A stronger greenback reduces investor interest in commodities priced in the currency.

"The increase in wages and the number of employed point to stronger demand, which should be supportive," Carl Larry, director of oil and gas at consultant Frost & Sullivan in Houston, said by telephone. "On the other hand it strengthens the dollar, which may eventually send us lower. It's both good and bad for the market."

Saudi Arabia is staying in the contest for market share by maintaining supplies of the type of oil that's similar to rival U.S. and African supply, while fulfilling promised cuts by curbing production of other varieties. The nation plans to idle some fields producing Arab Medium and Arab Heavy crudes, according to people with knowledge of the matter.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Iran capitalizes on OPEC oil cut to sell millions of barrels: sources

Iran has sold more than 13 million barrels of oil that it had long held on tankers at sea, capitalizing on an OPEC output cut deal from which it is exempted to regain market share and court new buyers, according to industry sources and data.

In the past three months, Tehran has sold almost half the oil it had held in floating storage, which had tied up many of its tankers as it struggled to offload stocks in an oversupplied global market.

The amount of Iranian oil held at sea has dropped to 16.4 million barrels, from 29.6 million barrels at the beginning of October, according to Thomson Reuters Oil Flows data. Before that sharp drop, the level had barely changed in 2016; it was 29.7 million barrels at the start of last year, the data showed.

Unsold oil is now tying up about 12 to 14 Iranian tankers, out of its fleet of about 60 vessels, compared with around 30 in the summer, according to two tanker-tracking sources.

The oil sold in recent months has gone to buyers in Asia including China, India and South Korea and to European countries including Italy and France, according to the sources and data. It was unclear which companies bought the oil.

Iran is also looking to use the opportunity to push into new markets in Europe, including Baltic and other central and eastern European countries, said separate oil industry sources, though it was not clear if any oil had been sold there.

The state-run National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) could not be reached for comment. Tanker group NITC, which operates most of the country's fleet, could also not be reached.

Tehran scored a victory when it was exempted from the OPEC deal agreed in November to reduce production by 1.2 million barrels per day for six months, an accord aimed at addressing the global oversupply and bolstering low oil prices.

The country successfully argued it should not limit its production which was slowly starting to recover after the lifting of international sanctions in January last year.

While the deal did not come into effect until the beginning of 2017, industry sources said Tehran had already been offering aggressive discounts, aiming to coax buyers globally into stocking up for winter in anticipation of the OPEC cut.

Iran lacks enough land storage facilities for its oil and, to enable it to keep pumping crude, has relied on its tanker fleet to park excess stocks until it can find buyers. The tanker-tracking sources said it was unclear how much of the oil stored at sea was condensate, a very light grade of crude.

In another sign of the rising activity, Iran's oil ministry news agency SHANA reported in late December that the number of tankers able to berth at major terminal Kharg Island had reached a record in 2016 of 10 vessels at the same time.

(Source: Reuters)



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Saudi Arabia's dream of becoming dominant Muslim power in world has gone down in flames

By Patrick Cockburn

As recently as two years ago, Saudi Arabia's half century-long effort to establish itself as the main power among Arab and Islamic states looked as if it was succeeding. A U.S. state department paper sent by former secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, in 2014 and published by Wikileaks spoke of the Saudis and Qataris as rivals competing "to dominate the Sunni world".

A year later in December 2015, the German foreign intelligence service BND was so worried about the growing influence of Saudi Arabia that it took the extraordinary step of producing a memo, saying that "the previous cautious diplomatic stance of older leading members of the royal family is being replaced by an impulsive policy of intervention".

An embarrassed German government forced the BND to recant, but over the last year its fears about the destabilizing impact of more aggressive Saudi policies were more than fulfilled what it did not foresee was the speed with which Saudi Arabia would see its high ambitions defeated or frustrated on almost every front. But in the last year Saudi Arabia has seen its allies in Syrian civil war lose their last big urban center in east Aleppo. Here, at least, Saudi intervention was indirect but in Yemen direct engagement of the vastly expensive Saudi military machine has failed to produce a victory. Instead of Iranian influence being curtailed by a more energetic Saudi policy, the exact opposite has happened. In the last OPEC meeting, the Saudis agreed to cut crude production while Iran raised output, something Riyadh had said it would always reject.

In the U.S., the final guarantor of the continued rule of the House of Saud, Obama allowed himself to be quoted as complaining about the convention in Washington of treating Saudi Arabia as a friend and ally. At a popular level, there is growing hostility to Saudi Arabia reflected in the near unanimous vote in Congress to allow families of 9/11 victims to sue the Saudi government as bearing responsibility for the attack.

■ The mercurial guidance

under the mercurial guidance of Deputy Crown Prince and defense minister Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the most powerful figure in Saudi decision making, Saudi foreign policy became more militaristic and nationalistic after his 80 year old father Salman became king on 23 January 2015. Saudi military intervention in Yemen followed, as did increased Saudi assistance to a rebel alliance in Syria in which the most powerful fighting force was Jabhat al-Nusra, formerly the Syrian affiliate of al-Qaida.

Nothing has gone well for the Saudis in Yemen and Syria. The Saudis apparently expected the Houthis to be defeated swiftly by pro-Saudi forces, but after fifteen months of bombing they and their ally, former President Saleh, still hold the capital Sanaa and northern Yemen. The prolonged bombardment of the Arab world's poorest country by the richest has produced a humanitarian catastrophe in which at least 60 per cent of the 25 million Yemeni population do not get enough to eat or drink.

The enhanced Saudi involvement in Syria in 2015 on the side of the insurgents had similarly damaging and unexpected consequences. The Saudis had succeeded Qatar as the main Arab supporter of the Syrian insurgency in 2013 in the belief that their Syrian allies could defeat President Bashar al-Assad or lure the U.S. into doing so for them. In the event, greater military pressure on Assad served only to make him seek more help from Russia and Iran and precipitated Russian military intervention in September 2015 which the U.S. was not prepared to oppose.

■ Vision 2030 project

Prince Mohammed bin Salman is being blamed inside and outside the Kingdom for impulsive misjudgments that have brought failure or stalemate. On the economic front, his Vision 2030 project whereby Saudi Arabia is to become less wholly dependent on oil revenues and more like a normal non-oil state attracted skepticism mixed with derision from the beginning. It is doubtful if there will be much change in the patronage system



Prince Mohammed bin Salman is being blamed inside and outside the Kingdom for impulsive misjudgments that have brought failure or stalemate.

whereby a high proportion of oil revenues are spent on employing Saudis regardless of their qualifications or willingness to work.

Protests by Saudi Arabia's ten million-strong foreign work force, a third of the 30 million population, because they have not been paid can be ignored or crushed by floggings and imprisonment. The security of the Saudi state is not threatened.

The danger for the rulers of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the other Persian Gulf states is rather that hubris and wishful thinking have tempted them to try to do things well beyond their strength. None of this is new and the Persian

Gulf oil states have been increasing their power in the Arab and Muslim worlds since the nationalist regimes in Egypt, Syria and Jordan were defeated by Israel in 1967. They found — and Saudi Arabia is now finding the same thing — that militaristic nationalism works well to foster support for rulers under pressure so long as they can promise victory, but delegitimizes them when they suffered defeat.

Previously Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf states had worked through allies and proxies but this restraint ended with the popular uprisings of 2011. Qatar and later Saudi Arabia shifted towards supporting regime change. Revolutions

transmuted into counter-revolutions with a strong sectarian cutting edge in countries like Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain where there were Sunni and non-Sunni populations.

Critics of Saudi and Qatari policies often demonize them as cunning and effective, but their most striking characteristic is their extreme messiness and ignorance of real conditions on the ground. In 2011, Qatar believed that Assad could be quickly driven from power just like Muammar Gaddafi in Libya. When this did not happen they pumped in money and weapons willy-nilly while hoping that the U.S. could be persuaded to intervene militarily to overthrow Assad as NATO had done in Libya.

Experts on in Syria argue about the extent to which the Saudis and the Qataris knowingly funded Islamic State (ISIL) and various al-Qaida clones. The answer seems to be that they did not know, and often did not care, exactly who they were funding and that, in any case, it often came from wealthy individuals and not from the Saudi government or intelligence services.

The mechanism whereby Saudi money finances extreme terrorist groups was explained in an article by Carlotta Gall in the New York Times in December on how the Saudis had bankrolled the Taliban after their defeat in 2001. The article cites the former Taliban Finance Minister, Agha Jan Motasim, as explaining in an interview how he would travel to Saudi Arabia to raise large sums of money from private individuals which was then covertly transferred to Afghanistan. Afghan officials are quoted as saying that a recent offensive by 40,000 Taliban cost foreign donors \$1 billion.

The attempt by Saudi Arabia and Persian Gulf oil states to achieve hegemony in the Arab and Sunni Muslim worlds has proved disastrous for almost everybody. The capture of east Aleppo by the Syrian Army and the likely fall of Mosul to the Iraqi Army means defeat for that the Sunni Arabs in a great swathe of territory stretching from Iran to the Mediterranean. Largely thanks to their Persian Gulf benefactors, they are facing permanent subjection to hostile governments.

(Source: The Time of India)



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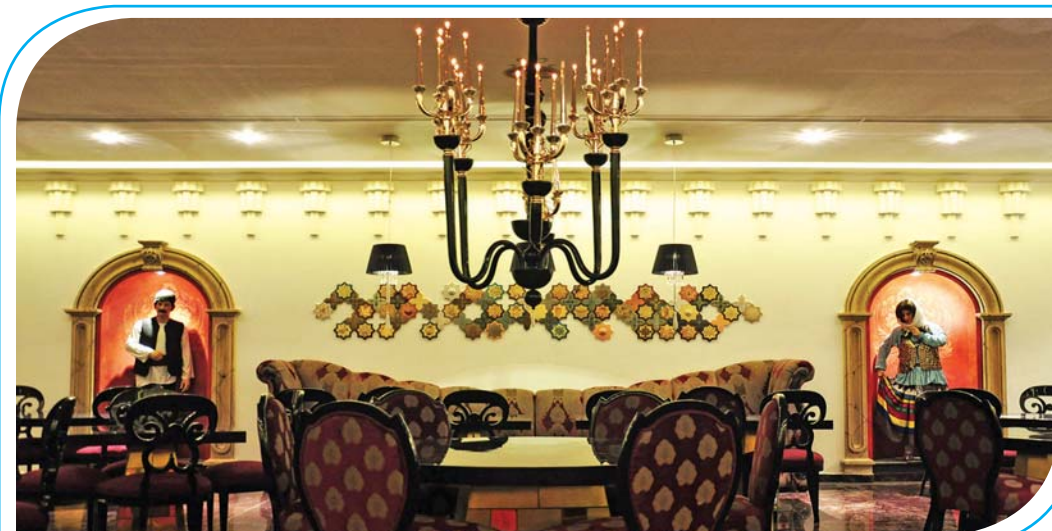


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By Setareh Sadeqi

Part 2

■ Incarceration

The United States has the highest rate of incarceration, and is the largest prisoner of the world, holding 20 percent of the world's prison population, while the country's population makes up only 5 percent of the world's total population. Not only is the U.S.'s world population the largest in the world, the country has witnessed an enormous growth in its inmate population over the past thirty years. According to The Sentencing Project the prison population of the United States was recorded at 2.2 million in the year 2013, which shows a 500% increase over the past thirty years.

The statistics show a 500% increase in U.S. prison population, while the U.S. population has just increased by 45%. Behind the scenes of the U.S. prison industrial complex you can find:

"The political and economic interests of America's elite: Laws; zealous prosecutors; the legislative, judicial, and executive branches at the local, state, and federal levels; the media; transnational corporations; schools; the church; the police; virtually every American institution; and the ideologies and rhetoric of racism, fear, and crime and punishment all work together to maintain the world's largest prison system."

The following chart provided by The Sentencing Project, based on data from the Bureau of Justice, shows the rapid growth in incarceration rates in the United States from 1925 till 2013. The chart does not consider the imprisonment rate at private prisons in the United States of America, a rate which is itself a unique one all across the globe.

One might contend that this hefty population of imprisoned people is, mainly, because they are real criminals, who deserve to be kept in prisons; this is not the case. The number of inmates kept behind bars continues to rise tremendously, while the crime rate reveals a downward trend. Despite the fact that violent crime has declined in the U.S., incarceration rate has tripled since 1980. About 13 million people are brought to American jails,

The gap between black life expectancy and white expectancy in the United States of America was once called "embarrassing" by Lauren Friedman of Business Insider.

in any given year. It is totally absurd to mention that more than six million people are under "correctional supervision" in the U.S. These statistics are surprising, as one in fifty Americans have experienced prison sometime in their life, either as inmates, or while on parole, or probation. Currently, 1 out of every 100 Americans is being imprisoned.

One of the most significant implications mass incarceration has for the American society is that a large number of children will grow up in families where fathers are absent, and thus chances of poverty, low educational competences, higher rates of violence and drug abuse—among many other issues—are much stronger.

Drug Policy Alliance published a report in June 2015 where the institute has raised concern over mass incarceration in America, and the discriminate rates of imprisonment which has largely targeted people of color in the United States. Accord-



According to a report, 6,412 per 100,000 black males, 2,457 per 100,000 Hispanic males, and 1,111 per 100,000 white males were serving in prison in December 2014.

ing to the report, 2.7 million children are growing up in U.S. households where at least one parent is incarcerated.

This is while on the word of the same report, two thirds of these parents are jailed for nonviolent offenses. The situation is even worse for Black or African American children. Reportedly, one in nine Black children has an incarcerated parent, while this numbers stands at one in 28 children for Latinos (aka Hispanics) and one in 57 for white children.

The fact that a major proportion of these parents were jailed for non-violent offenses has one significant implication that the article has been trying to shed light on and that is: racial discrimination in the American judicial system.

The rate of black incarcerations continued to record higher than all other races in the year 2014. The Bureau of Justice of the United States

of the white males and 1.4 to 3.1 times greater than rates for Hispanic males.

What exacerbates the situation for the black community and could have stern implications for black or African Americans, is that the largest disparity happens for black men imprisoned as young as 18 or 19. In fact, 1,072 per 100,000 black male residents aged 18 to 19 were imprisoned, which means black or African American males at this age are over 10 times more likely to be in state or federal prison than whites. White Americans aged 18 or 19 were imprisoned at the rate of 102 per 100,000.

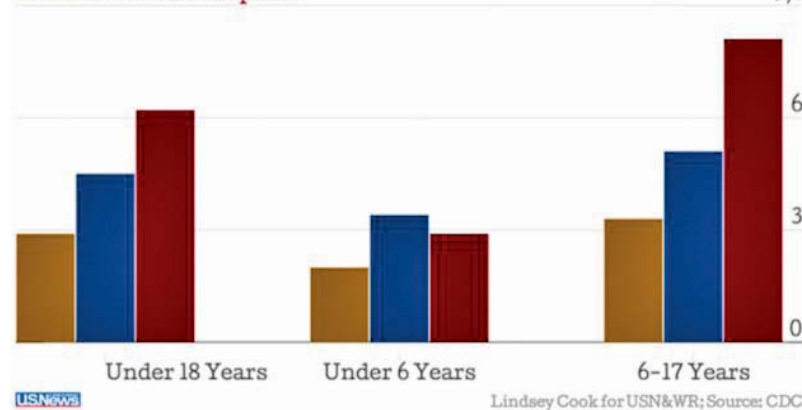
The mass incarceration of young black males has stern long-term results and affects employment rate, percentage of families headed by single mothers, black on black violence, educational competences, etc.

The highest total imprisonment rates by race and Hispanic origin were recorded for males ages 30 to 34. According to the abovementioned report, 6,412 per 100,000 black males, 2,457 per 100,000 Hispanic males, and 1,111 per 100,000 white males were serving in prison in December 2014.

More than 1% of white male Americans aged 30 to 39 were in

No Usual Source of Health Care Among Children

■ White ■ Black ■ Hispanic



state or federal prison at by the end of the year 2014. Black males of the same age group surpassed 6% of their total U.S. population in prison.

Moreover, a significant disparity also existed between the incarceration rate for black women than for women of other races. Women ages 30 to 34 had the highest incarceration rates among blacks or African Americans with 264 per 100,000 black females of the same age in prison. This is while white women of the same age recorded 163 per 100,000, and Hispanic females were imprisoned at a rate of 174 per 100,000. Hence, Black females were between 1.6 and 4.1 times more likely to be imprisoned than white females of any age group.

■ Mortality rates

A. Adolescents and teenage mortality

AstraZeneca Fact Sheet 2011 published by Department of Population, Family and Reproductive Health, and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health indicated that according to U.S. Census Bureau, in the years 2002 and 2003, the teen death rate among Native

American and Black teenagers in the United States displayed drastic differences with that of teenagers from other races with American Indian/Alaska Natives making up 91 percent and Black Americans comprising 82 percent of teenage deaths in the United States in those years.

One compelling explanation for higher mortality rates for African Americans is lower access to health facilities.

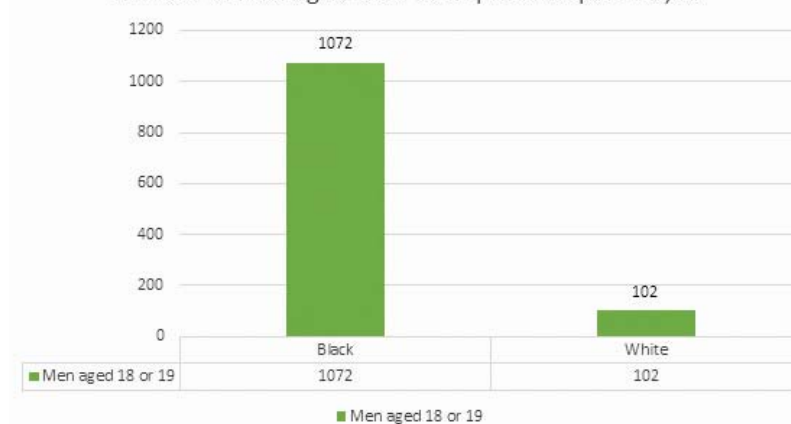
■ B. Infant mortality

The infant mortality rate for the United States has remained somewhere around 6, for 4 consecutive years, from 2011 to 2015, based on data provided by the World Bank official website.

Preterm-related deaths are a type of infant mortality where the infant is born preterm, which is before 37 completed weeks of gestation. According to data provided by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, as of the year 2004, nearly one-half or in other words 46 percent of infant deaths to non-Hispanic black women, and 41 percent of infant deaths to Puerto Rican women were due to preterm-related causes of death, whereas the percentage was to a certain degree lower for other race and ethnic groups.

The Infant Mortality Rate or IMR is generally considered as a good indicator of the overall health of a

Number of men aged 18 or 19 imprisoned per 100,000



One compelling explanation for higher mortality rates for African Americans is lower access to health facilities.

equal health facilities; thus, they lose their babies at a much higher rate than that of whites. This could also be due to higher rates of poverty among African Americans, which entails lower access to health facilities. Moreover, as the official website of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states, higher rates of infant mortality takes toll on the well-being of families—and since many of the families in the black community already suffer from social problems including poverty that exacerbates the living conditions for black families.

As said by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, while the infant mortality rate for white America is 5.2 infants out of 1,000 births dying before age 1, the infant mortality rate for black America is much higher – 11.5 per 1,000.

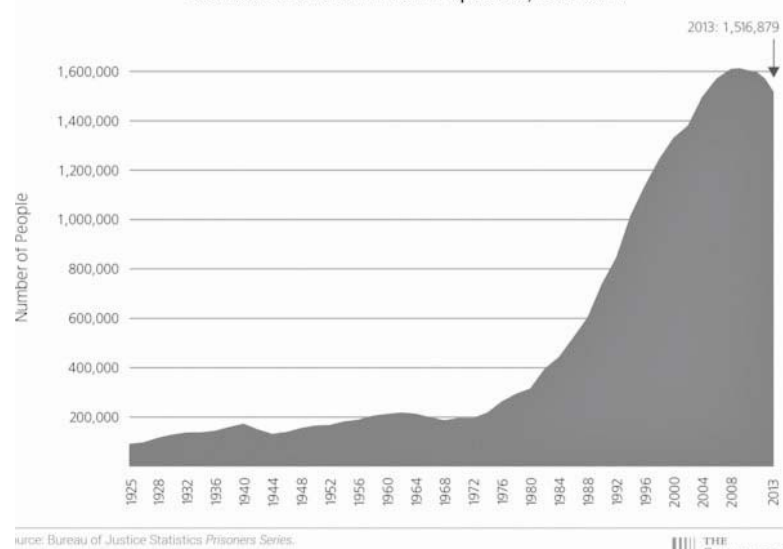
■ C. Maternal mortality

In the year 2013 the Maternal Mortality Rate or MMR in the United States of America increased to 18.5 women for every 100,000 births, including women who died within 42 days of childbirth.

This is mainly because American women are placed in poorer health conditions when they become pregnant, and do not receive proper care. The increase in maternal mortality rate is a result of cardiovascular conditions and other chronic

High infant mortality rate among African Americans implies that black mothers are not provided with, or rarely have access to equal health facilities; thus, they lose their babies at a much higher rate than that of whites. 5.2 white infants versus 11.5 African Americans out of 1,000 births dying before age 1.

U.S. State and Federal Prison Population, 1925-2013



source: Bureau of Justice Statistics Prisoners Series.

THE SENTENCING PROJECT

Mortality rates for the remaining leading causes of infant death do not show a significant change.

In the year 2014, more than 23,000 infants died in the United States. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention describes loss of a baby as "a sad reality for many families" which "takes a serious toll on the health and well-being of families, as well as the nation."

Thus, high infant mortality rate among African Americans implies that black mothers are not provided with, or rarely have access to

health conditions, including obesity, hypertension, diabetes, and heart disease, which are very common among American pregnant women, and these chronic problems have been on the rise.

These problematic health conditions are more frequent within the African-American community and for black women. In fact, 40% of black women are obese, compared with 22% of whites.

A study carried out, in multiple states in the U.S., found that eight percent of African-Americans live in a tract with a supermarket, while this number is 31 percent for white Americans. Another study conducted, nationwide, revealed that there are 418 rural "food desert" counties in the United States, residents live more than 10 miles away from a supermarket or supercenter. Only eight percent of Black Americans live in a community with one or more grocery stores, compared to 31 percent of white Americans.

Lower access to supermarket and grocery stores, and thus healthy food, partly explains the high rates of obesity and health issues among African-American women, which lead to higher rates of maternal mortality rates among the black community in the United States of America.

Moreover the higher rate of poverty among African-Americans, limited access to health care, and higher rates of unexpected pregnancies may explain why they are approximately four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than white women.

■ Life expectancy

The gap between black life expectancy and white expectancy in the United States of America was once called "embarrassing" by Lauren Friedman of Business Insider.

He reported in 2014 that the latest analysis by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) show that the average life expectancy for Americans in 2009 was 79 years, experiencing an increase from 68 in 1950 and 57 in 1929.

However, there exists a major gap between black life expectancy and white expectancy in the United States.

When an end was put to the slavery and when, later on, the Jim Crow laws were abandoned, the black community developed aspirations for justice, freedom and equality; however, it did not take them long to realize that things have not changed for them drastically.

Statistics, provided by governmental research bodies, reveal that people of color are still struggling for their basic rights. The most basic civil services are not available to the African American community, and black Americans continue to deal with more social justice issues than their white fellows.

While many blame blacks, for all the problems and trouble they have to deal with on a daily basis in the United States, official statistics and demographic information on the black American exposes racial and ethnic disparities, and thus explain black suffering.

Setareh Sadeqi is a PhD candidate in North American Studies in University of Tehran.

The colour of risk

United States maternal mortality rate, 2006-10
Per 100,000 live births



Sources: Creanga et al, Obstetrics & Gynecology

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How to quit sugar this year: 'It's a lifestyle change, not a diet'

It's Monday night, and I'm clutching an eight-pack of mini Kellogg's cereals in the queue of my local corner shop, hoping I don't see anyone I know. This is the next best thing to the full box of Coco Pops I've been craving all day.

Call it a regression to the simpler snap, crackle and pop of childhood, but there's refuge in a bowl of something sweet and crunchy, topped with ice-cold milk. And during a particularly trying few months (I'm about to get married, my mother's been diagnosed with cancer), it has become a welcome part of my evening routine.

From the World Health Organization halving its recommended daily sugar intake from 10 teaspoons (about 40g) to five in 2014, to the UK government's plans for a tax on sugary soft drinks in 2018, we've all had the memo: sugar is evil. But me? I'm a healthy eater. I juice in the mornings; I count my five a day. I keep a pile of snacks on my desk that have wholesome words written on them such as "raw", "natural" and "nutritious".

Yet I don't feel so smug when I'm wolfing down a bowl of chocolate-flavoured puffed rice, barely through the door, coat still on. I feel tired and grumpy. I've not been paying much attention to my diet lately; I just know that my moods are all over the place and my tummy is often bloated. Later that night, I log what I've eaten into the nutritional app, My Fitness Pal. A typical day – green juice and porridge for breakfast; baked potato for lunch; chicken, brown rice and salad for dinner; plus two pieces of fruit as snacks – comes in at a whopping 47g of sugar. I'm shocked.

Can I really cut out sugar completely, and is there any point? I sign up for an eight-week online program, I Quit Sugar, created by a glowing, sparky Australian journalist called Sarah Wilson. She's no



nutritionist: she quit sugar as an experiment, and found it so beneficial that she created a step-by-step program. One and a half million people have since signed up.

Every Thursday, I am sent a shopping list and a meal plan for the week ahead. On Sunday, I'll prepare in advance and freeze what I can, aka The Cook Off. There's a discussion forum on the site, as well as experts, including doctors, nutritionists and personal trainers, available to answer queries. It's a lifestyle change rather than a diet, the idea being that if you switch your palate to savoury, and replace sugar with fat, you'll eventually stop craving anything sweet. Follow the plan, and you cut down in week one, go cold turkey between weeks two and five, and gradually reintroduce a bit of sweetness between weeks six and eight.

My new breakfast is eggs and avocado, or buttery mushrooms on sourdough, while for dinner it's bangers and mash

I feel overloaded by information. First, what am I actually giving up? "When I talk about quitting sugar, I'm talking about quitting fructose," Wilson tells me. "Fructose is the enemy. It's added sugar hidden in processed foods such as fruit juice, ketchup and bread. It's addictive, makes us eat more and stores itself in the liver, making it harder to break down than fat."

To put this into context, full-fat yoghurt naturally contains around a teaspoon of sugar (4g), whereas fat-free fruit yoghurt contains around six teaspoons. Our bodies are designed to metabolize the fructose equivalent of two small pieces of fruit a day. A small bottle of apple juice contains nine teaspoons.

I approach week one feeling motivated (cleaning out every last raisin from the kitchen), until the prospect of cooking a batch of curried parsnip fritters followed by apple bircher muffins (and that's just on the first Sunday) pushes me over the edge. I fire off a panicky email to the I Quit Sugar site to explain this isn't for me.

They're clearly used to sugar-free slackers; I get a friendly email reminding me that all I really need to remember is the slogan Jerf: Just Eat Real Food. "You will be completely fine if you eat an abundance of fresh produce, meats, dairy and fats. If it comes in a packet, try and avoid it. If you can't, opt for the ones with the least number of ingredients, and always less than 5g of sugar per 100g." The complicated-looking meal plans are actually flexible, they say, and I am directed to helpful guides on the website (from an eating-out cheat sheet to a sand-wich-making guide).

Replacing sugar with fat is easier than it sounds. My new breakfast is eggs and avocado, or buttery mushrooms on sourdough, while for dinner it's bangers and mash or roast chicken. I don't find it hard to replace dessert with a cheeseboard, with dinner five times a week is encouraged, because it "helps digestion". But is it any healthier?

Week four is when most people experience a crash, and mine is monumental. I get very drunk on Jägerbombs (25g sugar per drink) at my hen do and nurse my hangover with pizza (7g sugar in just a single slice). I have headaches and emotional outbursts for days. But by week six, I feel as if I've come through the other side; I've not only stopped having cravings, I have a savoury palate.

I'm hardly a poster girl for the program – I've actually gained weight – but this wasn't about dieting. Eight weeks on, I'm in control of my cravings, I have more energy, and I can't even stomach a piece of fruit, let alone a bowl of Coco Pops. Alcohol is another story, but there's always 2018 to tackle that beast.

The I Quit Sugar program runs every eight weeks, and costs from £89; go to iquitsugar.com for details.

(Source: The Guardian)

Mental tricks to help you manage stress and be more 'mindful' in 2017

If there's one thing that 2016 has taught many of us, it's that it helps to have a way to calm our minds and quiet our hearts. Just how do you do that? Try "mindfulness."

That, essentially, means being more attuned to what's going on around you and inside of you. "Mindfulness is an open-hearted way of being aware of the flow of moment-to-moment experience as it's happening," explains Trudy Goodman Kornfeld, founding teacher of mindfulness center InsightLA.

If you're the resolution-setting kind of person, then employing mindfulness could help you find more success in reaching your goals.

Say exercise is on your 2017 to-do list but you keep avoiding the gym. Through practicing mindfulness, you can notice there is a feeling of dislike percolating inside and know that "you don't have to take it so seriously," says Diana Winston, director of Mindfulness Education at UCLA's Mindful Awareness Research Center and co-author of "Fully Present: The Science, Art and Practice of Mindfulness."

"It's just a feeling happening in the moment. It will pass, like all feelings do," she says.

Here are ideas experts Goodman Kornfeld and Winston offered via email on how to introduce the power of mindfulness to your routine in the coming year.

■ Just STOP

"When you're in the middle of a stressful moment, or just want to be more mindful, remember to STOP," Winston says. The acronym stands for slow into the moment, take a breath, observe what's happening before you proceed.

"Maybe your heart is racing or your stomach is clenched, or you're anxious," Winston says. "By taking breaths and noticing the emotion, we can calm our body and mind, we can observe what is happening without reacting, and can proceed with more awareness."

Goodman Kornfeld says, "You can simply feel your feet on the floor, your body in the chair, and take a conscious breath in to energize. Then, as you release the breath, you'll notice a shift into a bit more relaxation and calm." And then repeat it.

■ Breathe in and out

Whether walking down the hall or to your car, you can focus on how you're breathing as you do it, noticing how many steps happen with each breath and what's going on in your head — taking inventory of sense throughout your whole body as you go.

"We use the breath as a bridge from activities that are usually automatic," says Goodman Kornfeld, "to being more appreciative and aware of things we ordinarily don't even notice — thoughts, feelings, perceptions that are the landscape of our life."

Mindfulness, a meditation practice at its heart, "is also a quality of attention that you can develop at any moment, Winston says. Starting with a basic focus on breathing is key.

"The simplest instructions are to notice the sensation of your breath in your abdomen or chest, or nose. Try to stay with one breath at a time," she says. "When your mind wanders — and it will wander — simply bring it right back to the sensations of breathing."

UCLA's website offers free meditations you can download, including some five-minute ones to get started.

■ Snap to it

Sometimes, all it takes to break the cycle is a simple act. "There is nothing quicker to change than our minds," Goodman Kornfeld says. "Even if it's just the moment of a finger-snap, when you focus your mind on being attentive, with warmth, friendliness, and care, you're doing something good for yourself and your loved ones, and for our world."

(Source: The Los Angeles Times)

Grilled, barbecued meats may raise death risk for breast cancer survivors

By Honor Whiteman

Previous studies have linked a high consumption of grilled, barbecued, or smoked meats with an increased risk of breast cancer. Now, a new study finds that it may also increase the risk of all-cause mortality for women who have survived the disease.

After skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common cancer among women in the United States. This year, it is estimated that around 252,710 new cases of breast cancer will be diagnosed in the U.S., and more than 40,000 women will die from the disease.

But despite these troubling statistics, breast cancer incidence and death rates are falling, which is largely due to earlier detection through screening and better

treatments. According to the American Cancer Society, there are currently more than 2.8 million breast cancer survivors in the U.S.

The new study, however, suggests that the lifespan of women who have survived breast cancer may be cut short by eating high amounts of grilled, barbecued, or smoked meats.

■ Breast cancer and cooked meats

Previous research in animal models has shown that meats cooked at high temperatures – through grilling or pan frying, for example – may increase the risk of certain cancers, including breast cancer.

According to the National Cancer Institute (NCI), this is because such cooking methods can lead to the production of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons and heterocyclic amines, which are chemicals that can trigger

changes to the DNA that increase cancer risk.

Parada and colleagues note that, while many studies have linked meats cooked at a high temperature to a higher risk of breast cancer, no studies have looked at whether the intake of such meats may affect survival after breast cancer.

To address this gap in research, the team interviewed 1,508 women who had received a diagnosis of first primary invasive or in situ breast cancer in 1996 or 1997.

At study baseline, all participants were asked about their consumption of four different types of grilled, barbecued, and smoked meats in each decade of life. Five years later, the women were asked about their intake of these meats during the intervening 5 years.

(Source: Reuters)

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NEWS IN BRIEF



Traditional jewelry expo opens in Tehran

HERITAGE TEHRAN — Aria Gallery in Tehran is playing host to an exhibit of traditional jewelry which has been designed and crafted by young Iranian artisans.

Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization Deputy Director Bahman Namvar-Motlaq attended the opening ceremony on Friday.

The collection titled "Traditional Jewelry under a New Look" will be on show through Jan. 24 at the gallery located at 10 Zarrin Alley, near Beheshti St., Vali-e Asr Ave.



Shiraz to host 9th national handicraft exhibition

HERITAGE TEHRAN — The 9th national handicraft exhibition will be held at the historical Karim Khan Citadel (Arg-e Karim Khan) in Shiraz from Feb. 20 to 24, CHTN reported on Saturday.

Craftspeople from 27 provinces will offer visitors a wide range of handicrafts including woodcarving, needlework, leatherwork productions, glassware, traditional jewelries, miniatures, ceramics, potteries and handwoven rugs.

The citadel is an immense brick fortress that has dominated the southern Iranian city since the 18th century.



Susa Museum needs bigger space for abundant relics

HERITAGE TEHRAN — Susa Museum, embracing over 100 historical relics, needs to be expanded to make room for the items, Khuzestan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department Khosro Neshan said on Thursday.

Susa Museum covering 550 square meters is located in southwestern city of Shush, which was once a crossroads of various civilizations.

The city bears exceptional testimony to the Elamite, Persian and Parthian civilizations and cultural traditions.

UNESCO says the region contains several layers of superimposed urban settlements in a continuous succession from the late 5th millennium BC until the 13th century CE.



ROUND THE GLOBE

Church and Dominican Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie

The refectory of the Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan, Italy, forms an integral part of this architectural complex, begun in 1463 and reworked at the end of the 15th century by Bramante.

On the north wall is The Last Supper, the unrivalled masterpiece painted between 1495 and 1497 by Leonardo da Vinci, whose work was to herald a new era in the history of art.



A view of Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan, Italy

The complex, including the Church and Convent, was built from 1463 onwards by Guiniforte Solari, and was afterwards considerably modified at the end of 15th century by Bramante, one of the masters of the Renaissance.

The painting was commissioned in 1495 and completed in 1497. The representation by Leonardo da Vinci depicted the moment immediately after Christ said, "One of you will betray me."

Leonardo rejected the classical interpretation of the composition and had Jesus in the midst of the Apostles; he also created four groups of three figures on either side of Christ. The 12 Apostles reacted in differing ways; their movements and expressions are magnificently captured in Leonardo's work.

The genius of the artist is seen especially in the use of light and strong perspective. Unfortunately, Leonardo did not work in fresco but in tempera on a two-layered surface of plaster that did not absorb paint. It was as early as 1568 when Vasari first pointed out problems with this painting technique.

(Source: UNESCO)

Iranian handicrafts on display at New Delhi exhibit

HERITAGE TEHRAN — The Exhibition and Workshop of Iranian Crafts opened its doors to the public at Dilli Haat, an open-air craft bazaar in New Delhi, on Wednesday.

The 2-week-long event is introduced to celebrate 60 years of Indo-Iran cultural agreement as it embraces variety of workshops, meetings, and live performances as well, IRNA reported.

Amongst attendees to the opening ceremony were Indian Union Textile Minister Smriti Zubin Irani, Council for Cultural Relations Director Amarendra Khatua, Iranian Ambassador to India Gholamreza Ansari and some craftspeople from both nations.

The exhibit bears a range of Iranian handicrafts such as woodworks, illuminated manuscripts, miniatures, textile printings, enamels, handwoven products. It also includes calligraphy works and sculptures.

Over the past couple of years, dozens of Iranian handicrafts have gained the UNESCO Seal of Excellence. In 2010, a total of 65 crafts on various themes including enamel, tile, metalwork, leatherwork, wood carving received the privilege.



A number of Iranian and Indian officials attend the opening ceremony of the Exhibition and Workshop of Iranian Crafts in New Delhi, January 4, 2017.

Turkey's tourism industry takes a hit amid security concerns



The streets of Istanbul, normally full of tourists, have seen a dramatic drop in foreign visitors.

Turkey's tourism industry has taken a hit after a failed coup and a string of deadly terrorist attacks in 2016.

In the latest — a massacre of mainly foreign tourists at an Istanbul night club on New Year's Eve, 39 people were killed. It was followed days later by a car bombing outside the main courthouse in Izmir, Turkey's third largest city.

The continued security threats are a big concern for the country where tourism makes up 5% of GDP and represents around 8 per cent of the workforce.

"It's the easiest way to hurt the economy," explained the Head of VIP Event travel agency Yasemin Pirincio-

glu. "This is not the war like it's used to be, it's a different war, it's in the cities war type of thing, so this is why they hit tourism first," she added.

In 2016 visitor numbers slumped by almost 30 percent.

Not everyone is put off by security concerns. One tourist from Ukraine told a reporter that there is unrest in the world, noting that people say the same about her city in Ukraine being close to the front line, but she decided to visit Turkey anyway.

However, many more are staying away. The figures look stark for 2017. Even before the night club shooting on New Year's Eve, number of foreign visitors was expected to fall by a further 22%.

(Source: Euronews)

Tanzania tourist arrivals rise 10.4% in 10 months to October



The number of tourists visiting Tanzania rose 10.4 percent in the 10 months to October compared with the same period last year, the finance and planning ministry said on Friday, despite higher prices for some attractions.

Tourism is the main source of foreign currency in Tanzania, best known for its beaches, safaris and Mount Kilimanjaro.

As part of an initiative to boost revenue, the government lifted an 18-percent VAT exemption in July on some tourist attractions, including wildlife park entry.

Tour operators had opposed the tax, saying it would stifle the tourism sector which employs more than 500,000 people.

However, arrivals increased to

1,020,816 in the most recent period, according to the ministry of finance and planning.

Tanzania made \$2.23 billion in 2015 from 1.1 million tourist arrivals, a slight decrease from 1.14 million arrivals in 2014.

"Claims that tourists have run away from Tanzania because of the introduction of value added tax (VAT) on some tourism services are without merit," the ministry said in a report.

Last month, Tanzanian president John Magufuli announced plans to revamp the cash-strapped national carrier in a bid to boost the tourism and transport sectors, aiming to double annual foreign visitor arrivals.

(Source: Reuters)

Canada's tourism spending hits 20-year high on weak dollar

OTTAWA (Reuters) — Tourism spending in Canada jumped the most in nearly 20 years in the third quarter of 2016, official data showed on Thursday, pushed up in part by a weak Canadian dollar that has cut the cost of travel.

Statistics Canada said total spending by foreign and domestic tourists grew by 2.2 percent from the second quarter to hit C\$21.3 billion (\$16.1 billion), the largest percentage increase since the second quarter of 1997. The figures are seasonally adjusted.

"It is a perfect storm of a lot of great conditions," said Rob Taylor of the Tourism Industry Association of Canada, noting the sagging domestic currency had kept Canadians at home while attracting more foreigners.

The Canadian dollar has slumped in value on the back of a slide in oil prices. Last summer one U.S. dollar bought around C\$1.32, compared to C\$1.06 two years previously.

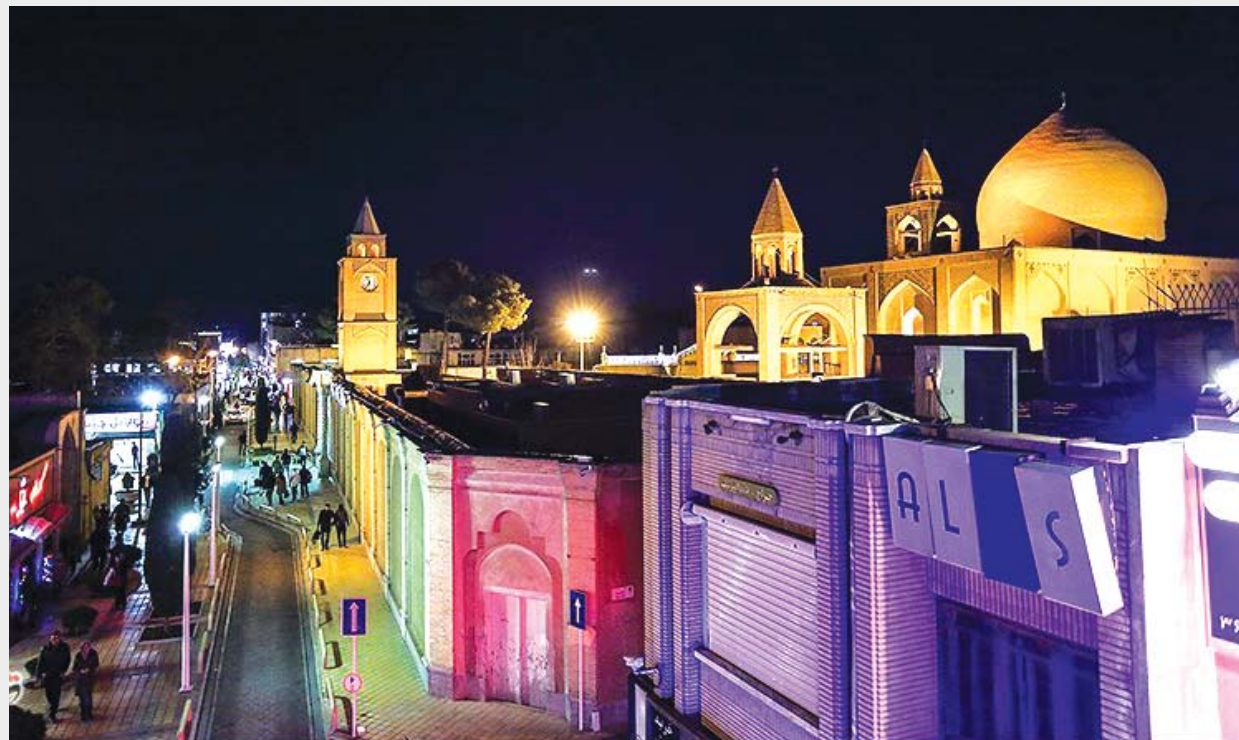
Taylor suggested another reason for Canada's popularity could be Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, a close ally

of U.S. President Barack Obama who has traveled the world to promote Canada as a progressive nation.

The Lonely Planet travel guide last October named Canada as the world's top tourist destination for 2017, saying one reason was Trudeau's "wave of positivity."

Gregory Hermus, associate director of the Canadian Tourism Research Institute, said there had been double digit year-on-year growth from regions such as Europe and Asia last summer.

IN FOCUS Tasnim/Morteza Salehi



Vank Cathedral lit at sunset

HERITAGE The dome, towers, and spires of the Vank Cathedral are lit at sunset in the Jolfa district of the central Iranian city of Isfahan on Dec. 31, 2016.

The interior is covered various gorgeous frescos and intricate tilework. The ceiling overhead the entrance is painted with delicate floral motifs in the style of Persian miniature.

Two bands of murals encircle the interior walls as the top section depicts events from the life of Jesus, while the bottom section depicts tortures inflicted upon Armenians martyred by the Ottoman Empire.

The historical monument was completed in the mid-17th century, dedicated to the tens of thousands of Armenian deportees who were resettled by Shah Abbas I during the 1603-1618 Ottoman-Safavid War.

Porous, 3-D forms of graphene developed at MIT can be 10 times as strong as steel

A team of researchers at MIT has designed one of the strongest lightweight materials known, by compressing and fusing flakes of graphene, a two-dimensional form of carbon. The new material, a sponge-like configuration with a density of just 5 percent, can have a strength 10 times that of steel.

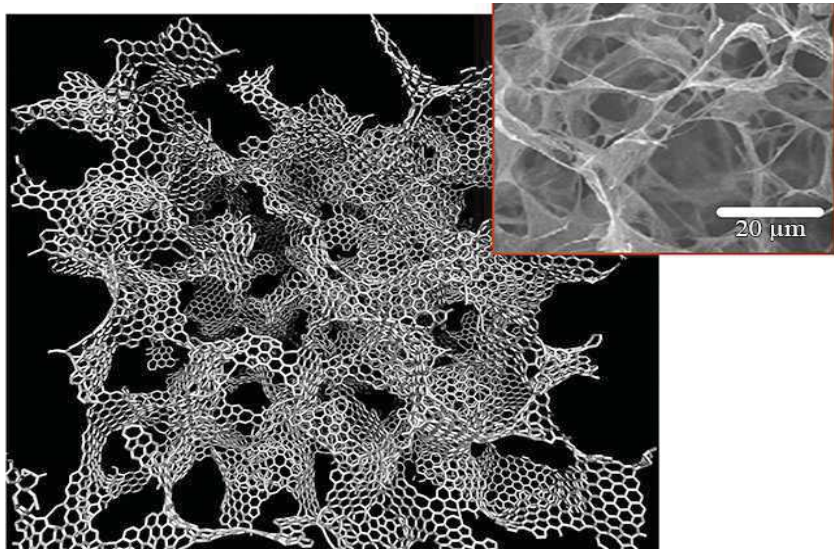
In its two-dimensional form, graphene is thought to be the strongest of all known materials. But researchers until now have had a hard time translating that two-dimensional strength into useful three-dimensional materials.

The new findings show that the crucial aspect of the new 3-D forms has more to do with their unusual geometrical configuration than with the material itself, which suggests that similar strong, lightweight materials could be made from a variety of materials by creating similar geometric features.

The findings are being reported in the journal *Science Advances*, in a paper by Markus Buehler, the head of MIT's Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering (CEE) and the McAfee Professor of Engineering; Zhao Qin, a CEE research scientist; Gang Seob Jung, a graduate student; and Min Jeong Kang MEng '16, a recent graduate.

Lightweight structures

Other groups had suggested the possibility of such lightweight structures, but lab experiments so far had failed to match



predictions, with some results exhibiting several orders of magnitude less strength than expected. The MIT team decided to solve the mystery by analyzing the material's behavior down to the level of individual atoms within the structure. They

were able to produce a mathematical framework that very closely matches experimental observations.

Two-dimensional materials — basically flat sheets that are just one atom in thickness but can be indefinitely large in

the other dimensions — have exceptional strength as well as unique electrical properties. But because of their extraordinary thinness, "they are not very useful for making 3-D materials that could be used in vehicles, buildings, or devices," Buehler says. "What we've done is to realize the wish of translating these 2-D materials into three-dimensional structures."

Flakes of graphene

The team was able to compress small flakes of graphene using a combination of heat and pressure. This process produced a strong, stable structure whose form resembles that of some corals and microscopic creatures called diatoms. These shapes, which have an enormous surface area in proportion to their volume, proved to be remarkably strong.

"Once we created these 3-D structures, we wanted to see what's the limit — what's the strongest possible material we can produce," says Qin. To do that, they created a variety of 3-D models and then subjected them to various tests.

In computational simulations, which mimic the loading conditions in the tensile and compression tests performed in a tensile loading machine, "one of our samples has 5 percent the density of steel, but 10 times the strength," Qin says.

(Source: *phys.org*)

The new findings show that the crucial aspect of the new 3-D forms has more to do with their unusual geometrical configuration than with the material itself, Qin says.

Spacewalking astronauts tackle battery work outside station

Astronauts went spacewalking Friday to hook up fancy new batteries on the International Space Station's sprawling power grid.

Before venturing out, Commander Shane Kimbrough and Peggy Whitson got a hand from a robot that took care of most of the grunt work.

Remotely using robotics aboard the 250-mile-high lab, flight controllers in Houston spent the past week replacing decade-old, nickel-hydrogen batteries with better charging lithium-ion ones. Handling all those batteries — each about half a refrigerator in size — was cumbersome and time-consuming.

On Friday, it was up to Kimbrough and Whitson to wire up the three new lithium-ion batteries, delivered last month by the Japanese. Spacewalkers will plug in three more next Friday, part of a long-term effort to energize the station's aging solar power system.

Nickel-hydrogen batteries

NASA expects it will take two to three years to change out all 48 nickel-hydrogen batteries that make up the solar power system. The lithium-ion batteries are so efficient, only 24 will be needed altogether, saving space for other items during supply runs.

The space station's robotic handyman, long-armed Dextre, removed the old batteries and popped in the

new ones in a series of maneuvers that began on New Year's Eve. Dextre — short for dexterous — also loosened bolts holding down special metal plates that were launched with the new batteries. Installing these plates, along with power and data cables, fell to Kimbrough and Whitson.

NASA's chief astronaut, Christopher Cassidy, said from Mission Control that sticky bolts often stymie astronauts, so everyone was grateful to hand over the chore to Dextre. Riding on the end of the station's robot arm, Dextre and its 11-foot arms also made easy work of the battery transfers from one end of the station to the other, a distance spanning approximately half a football field.

"Most of that's behind us," Cassidy said as the spacewalk got underway, "and we're looking forward to a relatively, hopefully, I don't want to jinx us, but a smooth day of battery operation."

High-risk activities

Spacewalks are high-risk activities, NASA managers noted, and so reducing crew time outside is always preferable. In fact, almost as a reminder, Mission Control's main contact for the spacewalkers was Italian astronaut Luca Parmitano, who nearly drowned in 2013 when his helmet flooded with water from his space suit's cooling system. He directed Kimbrough and Whitson's every



move.

Most of the old batteries will be junked along with other station trash, burning up in the atmosphere later this month in the Japanese supply ship that delivered the new batteries. More lithium-ion batteries will arrive on future cargo craft.

Whitson, meanwhile, now ties the record for most spacewalks by a woman — seven. At age 56, she's the world's oldest and most experienced spacewoman ever.

(Source: *Business Insider*)

World's coral reefs are headed for major die-off

Unless we do something about greenhouse gas emissions, say bye to these incredibly important ecosystems.

If humans do not take swift action to curb greenhouse gas emissions, annual coral bleaching events will soon decimate nearly all of the world's coral reefs, a United Nations-backed study has found.

And as Australia's Great Barrier Reef has shown, bleaching can result in serious mortality.

The new research, published last month in the journal *Nature Scientific Reports*, predicts that if current trends continue, "annual severe bleaching" will impact 99 percent of the world's reefs within the century. On average, the yearly events would start hitting reefs in 2043.

Perhaps more alarming is that the pledges countries made to reduce carbon emissions as part of last year's historic Paris climate pact would "do little to

provide reefs with more time to adapt and acclimate," according to the report. Even if those pledges were exceeded, it found, more than 75 percent of reefs would still experience annual severe bleaching before 2070.

Fish swim among bleached corals in Australia's Great Barrier Reef.

Coral bleaching

Coral bleaching is a phenomenon in which stressed corals expel algae and turn white, often as a result of warming ocean temperatures. If not given time to recover, bleached corals can perish.

Today, reefs around the globe are being devastated by the "longest and most widespread" bleaching event on record — just the third global bleaching event in recorded history. The Great Barrier Reef, for example, suffered its worst coral die-off last year. There, 93 percent of corals were impacted by the bleaching, and some 22



percent of the reef perished.

Often called "rainforests of the sea," coral reefs provide habitat for more than 25 percent of the planet's marine species and generate goods and services valued at \$375 billion each year.

But massive bleaching would "invariably cause major changes in the ecological function of coral reef ecosystems," Ruben van Hooidonk, an assistant scientist at

the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the study's lead author, said in a statement.

Coastal protection

"Further, annual bleaching will greatly reduce the capacity of coral reefs to provide goods and services, such as fisheries and coastal protection, to human communities," he said.

Erik Solheim, head of the United Nations Environment Program, stressed the importance of using the study's high-resolution projections, calling them a "treasure trove" for those working to protect reefs from the impacts of climate change.

"They allow conservationists and governments to prioritize the protection of reefs that may still have time to acclimatize to our warming seas," he said in a statement. The "projections show us where we still have time to act before it's too late."

(Source: *The Huffington Post*)

Survival capsule could save lives in tsunami

They look a bit like something you'd see in space.

But they could save your life in the event of a tsunami. At least, that's according to Seattle aerospace engineer Julian Sharpe.

"I had the idea while weekend in Cannon Beach and I thought ... what if a tsunami comes now," Sharpe said.

That idea turned into what is now called the Survival Capsule.

Here's how it works: When an earthquake hits offshore, instead of running to higher ground to escape the tsunami, you would strap yourself inside the pod.

The capsule would be tethered to the ground, most likely on your property, so it would float on top of the water and rise and fall with the waves.

Air vents on top allow those inside the floating pod to breathe.

If it ever goes under the water, the vents can close and air tanks kick in.

The capsule is also designed to handle the impact of a tsunami and all the resulting debris.

Opinions on the pods are mixed.

"I think it's an interesting concept, an interesting idea," said Calanthe Wilson, who lives in Manzanita. But at a cost of about \$13,000 a capsule, Wilson said it's not a realistic option. "Probably not in my budget these days, but if it were, I might look into it," she said.

Jason Cook, who has a vacation time-share in Seaside, said he would rather find higher ground.

"I don't like the idea of riding a ball throughout the tsunami," Cook said.

But Sharpe maintains he's done extensive testing and his survival capsule will do the job and more.

(Source: *king5.com*)

Giant iceberg set to break off of Antarctica

A giant iceberg larger than Rhode Island is set to break off of Antarctica, British scientists announced Friday. If it occurs, it would be one of the biggest icebergs on record.

Scientists have been keeping a close eye on a crack in an Antarctica ice shelf that could break off, creating an iceberg and indirectly lead to rising sea levels.

The crack grew by 11 miles in December. Only a final 12 miles of ice now connects the iceberg to its parent ice shelf, according to Project MIDAS, a British Antarctic research project.

The crack in the Larsen C Ice Shelf is more than 1,000 feet wide and has grown by 50 miles since 2011, according to the British Antarctic Survey. Once the crack goes all the way across, the iceberg will break off.

"If it doesn't go in the next few months, I'll be amazed," project leader Adrian Luckman of Swansea University told BBC News. It would be among the top 10 biggest icebergs ever recorded.

"There's no need for alarm," however, according to a tweet from Project Midas. "This is a fairly normal event, although it is spectacular and quite rare," the tweet said.

(Source: *USA Today*)

A bright new star will burst into the sky in five years, astronomers predict

A team of astronomers is making a bold forecast: A binary star found in the summer constellation Cygnus the swan will burst into a red nova sometime in 2022.

When the two stars in the binary system crash into one another, they will create a brick-red beacon so bright that sky gazers will see it with the naked eye, Larry Molnar of Calvin College said Friday at the American Astronomical Society meeting in Grapevine, Tex.

As the constellation Cygnus glides gracefully along the Milky Way every late spring and summer, the cosmic bird's left wing houses a faint binary star called KIC 9832227. The two stars spinning around one another are merging, on a path to an explosion that will result in a red nova, said Molnar and his colleagues.

For KIC 9832227, the orbital period is currently just under 11 hours, he said, and "as that period gets shorter, we infer that the separation between the stars is getting smaller. Hence they are spiraling in together."

The astronomers first presented this star's red nova prognostication at the January 2015 American Astronomical Society meeting, but the predictions teemed with unknowns.

The "core of this (new) scientific presentation is that we have done two strong tests and that our hypothesis (from 2015) is holding up," he said. "We have eliminated the alternative interpretations and we have also refined the predicted time to 2022, plus or minus one year."

To refine the prediction, the astronomers examined a recent red nova — a star called V1309 Scorpii, discovered in September 2008. Using V1309 Scorpii research (conducted by Polish astronomer Romuald Tytenda) as a sort of cosmological blueprint, Molnar and colleagues found similar characteristics — from before the earlier explosion occurred.

(Source: *The Washington Post*)

IME Deal at 7,311b Rials in Current Week

Over 7,311 billion rials worth of products were transacted at Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) in the second week of Iranian month of Day (Dec. 31 – Jan. 6), Public Relations Dept. of IMF reported.

With due observance to the said issue, 140,025 tons of various industrial and mineral products, worth 3,373 billion rials, were traded at IMF, the report added.

In addition, 229,403 tons of various oil and petrochemical products, worth more than 3,594 billion rials, were sold at this market.

It should be noted that 84,260 tons bitumen, 40,355 tons of polymer products, 57,500 tons of vacuum baton, 15,168 tons of chemicals, 6,420 tons of sulfur, 100 tons of moisture insulation and 100 tons of argon were transacted at Iran Mercantile Exchange

(IME) in the same period.

It is worth mentioning that IMF witnessed transaction of 29,273 tons of various types of products, valued at approx. 342 billion rials, as follows: 18,754 tons of livestock corn, 118 tons of livestock barley, 5,500 tons of wheat, 1,000 tons of rice, 100 tons of white sugar and 3,800 tons of crude vegetable oil, the report ended.

MP Pays a Visit to "MA" Insurance Co.

Member of Iranian Parliament for Agriculture, Water and Natural Resources Commission Dr. Ahmad Ali-Keykha visited "MA" Insurance Company (PJS), Public Relations Dept. of the company reported.

He, who is the representative of people of Zabol, Zahak, Nimruz, Hirmand and Hamoun in the Islamic Consultative

Assembly (Iranian Parliament also called Majlis), held talks with the chief executive, member of Board of Directors and deputies of "MA" Insurance Company on the important issues related to the insurance industry in the country.

People are responsible for protecting constructive elements of the creation i.e. water, air, soil and living creatures of

environment, he said, adding: "Natural resources should be protected properly in line with delivering them intact to the rising generation."

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Member of Parliament expressed his special thanks to the salient activities and achievements of "MA" Insurance Company in line with supporting stricken-hit

villagers in provinces across the country.

In the end, he once again praised activities and performance of the insurance company in the current year named after "resistance economy, action and implementation" which managed to take giant strides in supporting people living in underprivileged and disadvantaged areas of country."

Life, love, livestock

Avaz Galan, 55, is a horse breeder living in Raz and Jargalan, North Khorasan province. His father was an immigrant from Turkmenistan.

Avaz lost his wife eight years ago and now he is living with his two daughters, Zeinab and Khadijeh, his old aunt, Shah-Soltan, and his two nephews, Mohammad and Ahmad.

Zeinab, 19, and Khadijeh, 23, are like mothers to Ahmad and Mohammad who lost their father to hepatitis and their mother left years ago. Shah-Soltan is a pretty old widow who is paralyzed and is suffering vision loss due to cataract and has been living with Avaz's family since her husband died.

Despite all the hardships and the severe poverty Avaz loves horse breeding and has a deep affection for horses. He has devoted his life to his fondness for his job and currently he owns seven horses.

However, he can't afford a stable for his horses so he keeps his horses kilometers away from his house and visits them twice a day. He feeds them by the wild grasses grown in nature. He earns an honest living by selling the mares' foals.



PHOTO

Laleh Khajoei

Tehran Times and Mehr news agency photographer



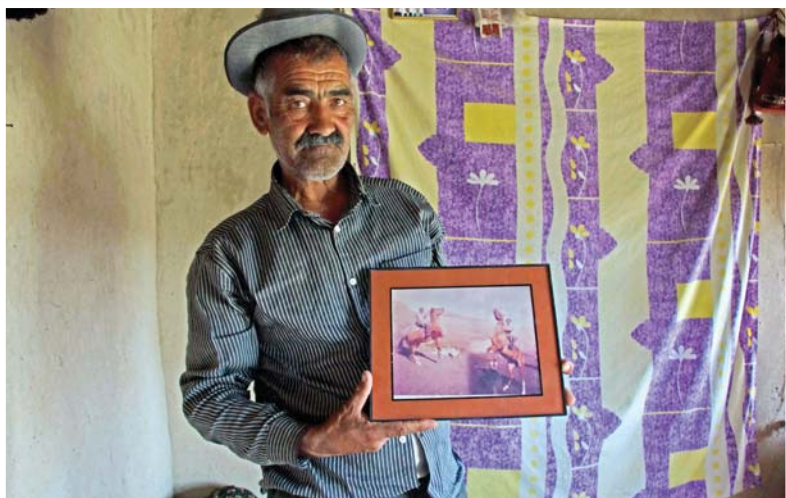
Avaz is embracing Ashkan, his 19-year-old mare. He cares too much about his horses and he says he would never let them feel hungry because he considers them as his family members.



Avaz, his aunt, Zeinab, Khadijeh, and his two nephews all live together and Avaz does his best for them to feel happy and live a peaceful life.



Aside from helping their father, doing house chores and taking care of Mohammad and Ahmad, Khadijeh and Zeinab weave carpet to help their father financially.



Avaz is posing in front of the camera holding the photo of his favorite horse he had to sell due to financial problems.



In spite of his financial worries Avaz is always kind to his late brother's sons and is like a father to them.



Every day he takes his mares to the plains kilometers away from his house to feed.



Avaz breeds his horses in the nature. Some believe this is the best way to breed the animal while it is the most difficult method too but what keeps him doing this is his deep love for them.



Avaz has his horses drink from the springs and feed in the plains.



He loves horse racing and he always attends the races but it's been so long since last he participated in one because it is pretty expensive to hire a horse trainer and a jockey.

U.S. intel report claims Putin directed cyber campaign to help Trump

➡ The report, although it omitted classified details, was the U.S. government's starkest public description of what it says was an unprecedented Russian campaign to manipulate the American body politic.

Reports of Russian interference in the already divisive election have roiled Washington, even as the U.S. Congress on Friday certified Trump's victory in the Electoral College. Clinton won the popular vote by nearly 3 million ballots.

The report's conclusions, though lacking details of how the Russians may have relayed the material to WikiLeaks and others, will give ammunition to Democrats and Trump's fellow Republicans in Congress who want tougher action against Russia, setting the scene for a potential showdown with Trump.

It could also give a boost to members of Congress seeking an independent, bipartisan investigation of Russian hacking.

Trump, who has developed a rocky relationship with U.S. spy agencies and at times disparaged their work, defended the legitimacy of his election victory after receiving a nearly two-hour briefing on Friday on the report.

The report neither assessed "the impact Russian activities had on the outcome of the 2016 election" nor did it provide details on the evidence underpinning its conclusions, a fact likely to keep alive the controversy over what Moscow may have done.

In Moscow, state TV Channel One briefly covered the report, focusing on Trump's comments that the interference had no impact on the outcome of the election.

The broadcaster, which led its news program on Orthodox Christmas celebrations and unusually low temperatures in the Russian capital, also said the arguments used in the U.S. report had been widely mocked by Internet users.

Russian military intelligence agency

The report said U.S. intelligence agencies believe Russian military intelligence, the (GRU/Glavnoye razvedyvatel'noye upravleniye), used intermediaries such as WikiLeaks, DCLeaks.com and the Gucci-



fer 2.0 "persona" to release emails that it had acquired from the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and top Democrats as part of the effort.

The release of the emails led to embarrassing media coverage for Clinton and triggered the resignation of the DNC's chief.

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange said he did not receive emails stolen from the DNC and top Clinton aide John Podesta from "a state party." However, Assange did not rule out the possibility that he got the material from a third party.

Russian actors were not found to have targeted U.S. systems that are involved in tallying votes, the report said. The report was produced by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the National Security Agency (NSA).

Also on Friday, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security designated U.S. election infrastructure as critical infrastructure, widening the options the government has to protect voting machines from cyber-attacks.

While the report found Russia had conducted cyber-attacks on both the Democratic and the Republican parties, it made clear that the primary aims were to harm Clinton whether or not she won the election and evolved over time.

"When it appeared to Moscow that Secretary Clinton was likely to win the election, the Russian influence campaign began to focus more on undermining her future presidency," it said.

"We also assess Putin and the Russian Government aspired to help President-elect Trump's election chances when possible by discrediting Secretary Clinton and publicly contrasting her unfavorably to him," it said. The CIA and FBI had high confidence in this judgment and NSA moderate confidence, the report said.

Neither the Russian Embassy in Washington, nor Clinton aides immediately responded to requests for comment.

The report suggested Putin was motivated in part by personal animus toward Clinton.

"Putin most likely wanted to discredit Secretary Clinton because he has publicly blamed her since 2011 for inciting mass protests against his regime in late 2011 and early 2012, and because he holds a grudge for comments he almost certainly saw as disparaging him," it said.

Troubling chapter in ongoing story

In a statement after his intelligence briefing, the United States President-elect Trump did not squarely address whether he was told of the agencies' belief Russia carried out the hacking.

Instead, he said: "Russia, China, other

countries, outside groups and people are consistently trying to break through the cyber infrastructure of our governmental institutions, businesses and organizations" including the DNC.

"There was absolutely no effect on the outcome of the election including the fact that there was no tampering whatsoever with voting machines," Trump said.

The businessman, who is to be inaugurated as president on Jan. 20, also said he would appoint a team to give him a plan within 90 days of taking office on how to prevent cyber-attacks but suggested that he would keep their recommendations secret.

The report did not reveal how the intelligence agencies collected the evidence underpinning their conclusions or the evidence itself, including the means by which Russian military intelligence "re-layed" the materials filched from the DNC and other hacking targets to WikiLeaks and others, omissions likely to leave the report open to criticism.

Representative Adam Schiff, the top Democrat on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence who was briefed on the report on Friday, took issue with Trump's comments.

"The President-elect's statement that the Russian hacking had 'absolutely no effect on the outcome of the election' is not supported by the briefing, report, or common sense," Schiff said.

"It is one thing to say that there was no tampering with vote tallying - which is true - it is another thing to say that the daily dumping of documents disparaging to ... Clinton that was made possible by Russian cyber operations had no effect on the campaigns," he said. "The consequence of these disclosures was hugely beneficial to the President-Elect and damaging to the Clinton campaign, just as the Russians intended."

Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Richard Burr, a North Carolina Republican, said his panel would continue to compile "facts surrounding Russia's active measures," adding: "This is a troubling chapter in an ongoing story"

(Source: Reuters)

Bomb attack leaves six Saudi mercenaries dead in southern Yemen

At least six militiamen loyal to Yemen's former Saudi-backed president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, have been killed when a bomb explosion targeted a checkpoint in the country's southern province of Abyan.

A local source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said a bomber detonated his explosive vest in the al-Wadea district of the province, located more than 270 kilometers south of the capital, Sana'a, on Saturday.

No individual or group has claimed responsibility for the blast yet, but al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) Takfiri terrorist groups have carried out acts of terror in the region in the past.

The explosion came on the same day as Saudi warplanes targeted several areas across the impoverished conflict-ridden country.

At least one civilian was killed and ten others, including women and children, sustained injuries, when Saudi military aircraft struck a residential building at the Khiwan area of Huth



district in Yemen's northwestern province of Amran.

Saudi fighter jets also bombarded Sarwah district in the central province of Ma'rib, leaving one civilian dead and two others injured.

Saudi jets also pounded al-Manzala district in the al-Dhaher district of the northwestern Yemeni province

of Sa'ada, with no immediate reports of casualties.

An unnamed military source also said Yemeni forces and fighters from allied Popular Committees managed to purge Tawal al-Sadah area in Usaylan district of the central province of Shabwah of pro-Saudi gunmen following fierce exchanges of gunfire between the two sides.

Additionally, scores of Saudi mercenaries were killed and wounded as Yemeni forces and their allies thwarted their assaults against Dhubah and Kahboub districts in Yemen's southwestern province of Ta'izz.

The House of Saud regime war on Yemen, which has killed at least 11,400 Yemenis, was launched in March 2015 in an unsuccessful attempt to bring back Hadi's government to power and undermine the Ansarullah movement.

The Saudi war has taken a heavy toll on the country's facilities and infrastructure, destroying many hospitals, schools, and factories.

(Source: Press TV)

What Trump needs to know about Iran

➡ On the other hand, Trump can easily end President Barack Obama's engagement policy towards Iran and put Washington and Tehran on the path to full-spectrum confrontation. Deal opponents in Washington are already fervently pursuing a path of reintroducing non-nuclear sanctions to incentivize Iranian leaders to discard the accord. Since the 115th U.S. Congress has sworn in recent days, several anti-Iran bills have already been introduced, including one that would impose sanctions over Iran's ballistic missile program. Whichever approach he decides, there are a number of things Trump should know about Iran. Here are a few:

1. America played a role in sabotaging Iranian democracy.

The United States ended Iranian democracy in its cradle. Together with British intelligence, the CIA orchestrated a coup d'état in 1953 against Mohammad Mosaddegh, Iran's popularly-elected prime minister guilty of nationalizing the Iranian oil industry. The result was the end of Iran's democratic movement and 25 years of dictatorship under the shah. Iran's 1979 revolution was the Iranian people's reaction to decades of tyranny and American dominance over Iran.

2. A regime change policy already proved counterproductive.

After the Iranian revolution, America adopted an approach of regime change towards Iran, predicated on applying every conceivable pressure on the post-revolutionary government. This included supporting Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein during his war of aggression against Iran, which saw Saddam killing or injuring upwards of 100,000 Iranian with chemical weapons. The years since then have also seen America deploy the world's first cyberweapon against Iran and im-

pose draconian and collectively-punishing sanctions. In parallel, Iran has used all its capabilities to confront the United States. Despite all this, Iran today stands as one of the region's most powerful and stable countries, while U.S. allies, who have benefited from immense American support over the years, have either collapsed or are wavering due to their own shortcomings.

3. The nuclear deal is the greatest non-proliferation victory.

Importantly, Trump has stated that past U.S. policies of regime change in the region have been mistakes and should not be repeated. However, he has been hostile towards the Iran nuclear deal, which he recently tweeted was "horrible." Quite to the contrary, the landmark deal serves as the most comprehensive deal on nuclear non-proliferation in history; containing the highest international standards on nuclear transparency and sealing off all pathways to a bomb. Trump can either destroy it or build on it by working to win regional implementation of the deals' principles; making the 50-year dream for a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East a reality.

4. U.S. wars in the Middle East are a source of instability.

Wars in the past four decades, including Saddam's invasion of Iran (1980) and Kuwait (1990), America's in-

The U.S. president-elect has the option of engaging Tehran and bringing stability to a region that has not known it for decades.

vasion of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), NATO's overthrow of the Libyan government (2012), the Saudi invasion of Yemen (2015) and the inflow of foreign fighters from around the world into region, have brought the Middle East to the verge of total collapse. Trump and Obama in fact share a belief that past U.S. mistakes and U.S. regional allies have played key roles in fostering the rise of these groups. Trump has declared that his main goal in the region is to destroy ISIS, not topple the Syrian government. This position increases the chances for U.S.-Russia cooperation in the region. Iran and the U.S. can also form a very effective front against ISIS, given Iran is the leading regional power fighting the group and the United States, the leading global power.

5. Cooperation, not confrontation will lead to success.

While it might sound counterintuitive, Republican control of Congress and the presidency presents an opportunity for successful U.S.-Iran diplomacy. The U.S. government is now able to act in unison, enabling for novel approaches towards the region that may have previously been politically impossible. Trump has the option of engaging Iran and bringing stability to a region that has not known it for decades. While distrust between the two countries remains thick in the aftermath of the nuclear deal, the key to broader cooperation is to abandon self-defeating aspirations for regime change and engage in diplomacy based on mutual respect, shared interests and non-interference in each other's political affairs.

Seyed Hossein Mousavian is a Middle East security and nuclear policy specialist at Princeton University and author of "Iran and the United States: An Insider's View on the Failed Past and the Road to Peace."

International airport resumes work in Syria's Aleppo

A first airplane has taken off from the international airport in the Syrian city of Aleppo in four years, during which the airport was closed due to the militancy in the country.

The flight by a government airplane on Friday was a trial attempt in preparation for the total reopening of Syria's second largest airport in the near future.

Government sources said the Aleppo International Airport was likely to reopen to the public by February but cautioned that things will be contingent on the military situation in the province of the same name.

If the airport in Aleppo resumes work, Syria will have at least four functioning airports open to the public. Authorities started rehabilitating Aleppo's airport a few days after the city was fully liberated from Takfiri terrorists in late December 2016.

Aleppo's liberation is seen as a crushing blow to the militants and their foreign supporters, who have been actively working to topple the Damascus government since March 2011.

Turkish airstrikes

Separately, six Syrian civilians were killed in Turkish airstrikes on Syria's northwestern city of al-Bab. Turkey has been conducting unauthorized sorties over Syria to target Kurdish militants, whom it considers enemies of the Turkish state.

Clashes to restore water supplies to Damascus

Meanwhile, Syrian military forces have launched an operation to recapture 11 villages from Takfiri terrorists in the Wadi Barada Valley, where springs and water facilities providing water for millions in the capital city are located.

Water supplies from the militant-held area of Wadi Barada near Damascus have been cut since December 22, when Syrian army soldiers and fighters from popular defense groups launched a major offensive to recapture the mountainous area near the Lebanese border.

The Takfiri militants had also earlier contaminated Damascus' drinking water supply with diesel. The city's water authority had to cut supplies to Damascus and resort to using water reserves over the act of sabotage, which saw extremists polluting the Ain al-Fijah spring in Wadi Barada.

On Friday, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) expressed concern about the risk of waterborne diseases among children in Damascus.

The head of the United Nations-backed humanitarian taskforce for Syria, Jan Egeland, told reporters in the Swiss city of Geneva on Thursday that just in December 2016 "5.5 million people have had their water supplies cut or minimized."

He stressed that "to sabotage and deny water is of course a war crime," warning that civilians "will be affected by waterborne diseases" if clean water is not supplied to them.

Syria 'ready to purge Idlib of terrorists'

On Friday, the Syrian national reconciliation minister, Ali Haidar, said the country is prepared for an "open war" against the foreign-backed militants in the northern city of Idlib.

Idlib, which is currently considered the biggest remaining militant stronghold in Syria, has become home to thousands of Takfiri terrorists evacuated from key areas under reconciliation agreements with the government.

Haidar said Syria would not allow Idlib to remain under militant control indefinitely unless there was an international deal to resolve the situation.

Over the past almost six years, Syria has been fighting foreign-sponsored militancy. UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura estimated in August that more than 400,000 people had been killed in the Syrian crisis until then. The UN has stopped its official casualty count in Syria, citing its inability to verify the figures it receives from various sources.

(Source: Press TV)

Car bomb kills at least 50 in Syria's A'zaz

➡ Syria's official news agency, SANA, reported that an army unit engaged ISIL terrorists in al-Tiyas Hills, situated about 90 kilometers east of the provincial capital city of Homs, early on Saturday, killing and injuring a large number of the Takfiris.

A battle tank and several sport utility vehicles belonging to the terrorists were destroyed as well.

Two civilians killed in U.S.-led airstrike near Raqqah

Meantime, two civilians were killed on Friday evening in a fresh airstrike carried out by the United States-led coalition purportedly fighting ISIL in Syria.

Local sources said the aerial attack targeted Ghazban village near the country's ISIL-held northern city of al-Raqqah, located on the northeast bank of the Euphrates River and about 455 kilometers northeast of the capital, Damascus.

The air raid came on the same day that nine people were killed in a U.S.-led strike on the village of Suwaydiyah al-Kabirah, which lies approximately 55 kilometers west of Raqqah.

SANA reported that there were five children among those dead.

Raqqah was overrun by the Takfiri terrorists in March 2013, and was proclaimed the center for most of the terrorists' administrative and control tasks the next year.

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

The coalition has repeatedly been accused of targeting and killing civilians. It has also been largely incapable of fulfilling its declared aim of dislodging terrorists.

Nearly twenty civilians were killed on December 8, 2016, when a U.S.-led strike targeted al-Msheirfeh region north of Raqqah. Several people also sustained injuries in the blitz.

On October 4 last year, at least 20 civilians were killed and 40 others sustained injuries after U.S.-led coalition warplanes bombed the Kurdish-majority village of Thulthana in the northern province of Aleppo.

(Source: Press TV)

Real Madrid smash five past Granada to equal Barcelona’s record run

Real Madrid continued their blistering start to 2017 with a commanding 5-0 win over Granada, equalling Barcelona’s record for the longest unbeaten run of any La Liga side.

Cristiano Ronaldo, Isco, Karim Benzema and Dani Carvajal all found the net in the rout at the Santiago Bernabeu, with Zinedine Zidane’s side establishing a six point lead over Barcelona at the top of La Liga.

Isco opened the scoring after just 12 minutes and the capital club never looked back from that moment on. Benzema turned home a close range finish following a Luka Modric shot, with Ronaldo putting Real Madrid 3-0 up after 27 minutes.

And it was 4-0 after 31 minutes when Isco bundled home from Modric’s cut back, settling the contest before the half time break. Casemiro netted a rare goal in the second half, with Isco withdrawn with a minor knock.



Real Madrid have now gone 39 games without losing in all competitions, and on the basis of this performance they won’t be losing any time soon.

When will Real Madrid’s unbeaten run end?

This result stretched Real Madrid’s lead at the top of La Liga to six points and underlined their standing as the favourites to win the title this season. Zidane’s side have now gone 39 games without losing, and on the standard of

their past two performances that run could go on a while longer. Real Madrid are imposing themselves on the Spanish game in the way Barcelona did not so long ago.

■ Man of the match - Isco

It was somewhat surprising that Isco was favoured over James Rodriguez given the level of the Colombian’s performance against Sevilla in the Copa del Rey during the week, but he vindicated his selection. The playmaker bagged a brace and could have netted his first ever senior hat-trick, but everything Real Madrid did well flowed through him.

■ Key stats

Real Madrid have now equalled Barcelona’s Spanish record of 39 games unbeaten in all competitions.

James Rodriguez has now been directly involved in 64 goals in 96 games for Real Madrid in all competitions.

(Source: Eurosport)

Aguero: Messi makes it look so easy

Lionel Messi and Sergio Aguero have much in common. Argentinian, talented and prolific goalscorers, they have built up a perfect understanding, despite one being left-footed and the other right. Together they have won a FIFA U-20 World Cup title and Olympic gold and have appeared in various finals with the senior national team. Now the firmest of friends, there was a time when Aguero did not even know who Messi was, as he admitted to FIFA.com.

“We were having lunch with the national U-20 team,” explained a smiling Aguero. “Lionel was sitting next to me.



All my team-mates were talking about the boots he’d brought from the USA, and I just couldn’t work out how he’d got hold of them. Who was this kid?”

Already a first division player with Independiente, the 17-year-old Kun had evidently not been keeping a close eye on the latest developments in Spanish football, as he acknowledged: “I asked him his name and he said: ‘Lionel, Lionel Messi,’ but I had no idea who he was.

I was just trying to work out how he’d managed to get those boots. Then one of my team-mates said to me: ‘You don’t know who he is? It’s Messi, the kid from Barcelona’. That’s when I realised who he was. I tell you one thing, though: he knew who I was!” As Aguero went on to explain, the story still brings a smile to the face of the Barcelona star, with whom he has since built up the firmest of friendships and a fierce rivalry when it comes to video games.

“You only have to say hello to Leo to realise what a good kid he is,” said the Manchester City striker. “A lot of people don’t know that, because he doesn’t like to show it on TV or in public. He’s just an ordinary guy, though. He’s a good mixer and he cracks jokes just like any Argentinian. He gets on well with everyone and he’s as normal as they come.”

■ “He deserves it”

One place where Messi is not normal is on the pitch, as Aguero confirmed. “He’s ahead of the rest, including the other nominees,” he said in reference to Cristiano Ronaldo and Antoine Griezmann, his rivals for The Best FIFA Men’s Player of 2016 award. “And I’m not just saying that because he’s my friend. I train with him and I see it with my own eyes. He does things I don’t see anyone else doing. He’s the best there is.”

Listing the skills that make Messi the player he is, Aguero pointed to his ability to accelerate with the ball at his feet and the ease with which he takes chances when running at full speed. “He makes it look so easy. It’s incredible,” said El Kun.

The winner will be revealed on 9 January in Zurich, following the vote by football writers, fans and the coaches and captains of the national teams affiliated to FIFA. Though the sense of expectation will continue to rise ahead of the announcement, Aguero is in no doubt: “Messi is the best in the world.”

(Source: FIFA)

Pogba: I’m very proud of Griezmann

Paul Pogba is certainly one of France’s best. After captaining his side to FIFA U-20 World Cup glory in 2013, he has since stepped up to represent his country at the highest level, featuring at the 2014 FIFA World Cup™ in Brazil and reaching the final of UEFA EURO 2016 in his homeland. The 23-year-old has also represented Les Bleus admirably by becoming one of the world’s standout midfielders at club level, winning four consecutive Serie A titles with Juventus before becoming the most expensive player on the planet with a multi-million pound move to Manchester United last year.

The imposing midfielder is emblematic of a new generation of French talent, perhaps the finest collection of players since the country hosted and won the 1998 World Cup, led by one of Pogba’s idols Zinedine Zidane. Like his friend and France team-mate Antoine Griezmann, the Manchester United man was nominated for The Best FIFA Men’s Player, making the shortlist of 23. The Atleti forward went one step further though, making it into the final three, alongside Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi. Pogba sat down with FIFA.com to discuss Grizou’s chances of usurping Ronaldo and Messi, as well as discussing Zidane, a nominee for The Best FIFA Men’s Coach Award, and giving his take on the FIFA Puskás Award finalists.

■ **FIFA.com: Antoine Griezmann has been nominated for The Best Men’s Player award alongside Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi – how does it feel to see a French national team-mate, and friend, up for such an award?**

Paul Pogba: I’m very proud of him. I know what he’s been through. When he arrived at Atletico Madrid the first year, he wasn’t playing all the time, he was on the bench. He talked to me, saying he was frustrated, that it was hard as he wasn’t playing. After that he kept working hard, and now he’s one of the three nominees for The Best award. I’m very happy for him, especially to see a French player doing so well. You can see the French players are going back to the basics, like our predecessors.

■ **What would you say are Griezmann’s main qualities?**

I think it’s his finishing. He wasn’t a striker before but now he scores so many goals. He’s very clever and he plays with his body. He’s not that big, he’s small, he’s fast and agile and he scores goals. That makes him Griezmann, the very good player that he is.

■ **What’s he like in the dressing room?**

You would be surprised! He’s one of the funniest guys I’ve met and played with. He is someone who always has fun in training, he works hard but with pleasure, as a game. We have fun. He sometimes goes in goal, doing some amazing saves, other times he’ll act like he’s Didier Drogba, holding the ball up.

■ **You often show some impressive dance moves on social media, what about Antoine?**

He’s got something! (laughs). He’s got some moves. But he won’t show it! He doesn’t want me to say it, he’s someone who doesn’t want to show his skills. He’s a good dancer for sure.

■ **As far as goal celebrations go, you seem to have made ‘the dab’ your own. What do you make of Griezmann’s goal celebrations?**

You know what? His [‘Hotline Bling’ goal celebration at EURO 2016] was special because he was the only one to do it. But my dab was more powerful around the world than his ‘Hotline Bling’ celebration. To be honest though, even I was doing his ‘Hotline Bling’! I think that shows it’s good... (laughs)

■ **Messi and Ronaldo have shared the top award between them since 2008. When do you see an end to their dominance?**

When they stop scoring goals, and they stop playing at the level that they are – or when you have other players who will play as well as them, or even better. Even if they are as good as Cristiano Ronaldo or Lionel Messi, the style, the way they play,

the way they act off the pitch, it’s more than football now, I would say. When you have someone who can go above them, into that level on the pitch and outside the pitch that’s when it will happen. I don’t know when though because they’re still at the highest level.

This is football, I love seeing them play, I love seeing them score goals, they make me love football even more. When I see them, it makes me improve even more. It makes me want to try to catch them.



Chinese Super League ‘to offer £800k a week’



The Chinese Super League are reportedly preparing an offer of £800,000 a week for a top English player, with Tottenham Hotspur duo Harry Kane and Dele Alli top of the wishlist.

Shanghai Shenhua made Carlos Tevez the world’s highest-earning player last month with a £615,000-a-week deal, but according to the Daily Mail, the league are now prepared to top that figure, having set their sights on “an England player in his prime”.

Everton’s Ross Barkley and Liverpool

forward Daniel Sturridge have also been linked with a switch to the Far East as clubs look to add a “credible” talent to the developing league.

Many of the players who have made the switch to the CSL are in the latter stages of their playing careers, with the likes of Tevez, Jon Mikel Obi, Graziano Pelle and Demba Ba all making the move in the last 12 months.

CSL side Shanghai SIPG have also been linked with a world-record £127m bid for Borussia Dortmund frontman Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang.

(Source: sportsmole)

Jose Mourinho hails “amazing” Wayne Rooney



Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho has heaped praise on Wayne Rooney after the forward drew level with Sir Bobby Charlton as the club’s record goalscorer in all competitions.

Rooney notched his 249th goal in United colours to set Jose Mourinho’s side on their way to a 4-0 win over Reading in the third round of the FA Cup this afternoon.

“A more special day will arrive. It was great but I want one more goal! He is an amazing guy in the group and we all want him to do that. To have Wayne as the top scorer in a club like this is magnificent for him,” he told BT Sport.

■ **Who do you think can break up their hold on the award?**

Of course, there are other players who can do that. We have Zlatan [Ibrahimovic] at Manchester United. Even he could do it. He’s 35 years old, but the way he’s playing, the way he’s scoring goals, you can see that he’s been in the top level for more than ten years. [Eden] Hazard, Neymar, [Luis] Suarez are doing so well and scoring goals, these are great players who – if they keep scoring – can do that. They need to keep scoring though, because that’s the case with Cristiano and Messi, whose performances are always on top.

■ **You were on the shortlist of 23 again for The Best this year. How close do you feel you are to being in the final three?**

I’m still far away. It’s good to be in the top ten, five or three but that’s not really what I’m about. If I’m in the top three, I want to be the number one – so that means I’m still very far away. I have to keep working hard and playing well because I don’t like to be second, or third, they’re the worst places to be. You would be proud, of course, because it means you’re on the way, but you want to finish first.

■ **Another Frenchman, Zinedine Zidane, is nominated for The Best Men’s Coach this year. How much of an idol was he for you growing up?**

I admire him a lot. When I was younger, I was watching his videos, the way he was playing. I love big players, but there are some players who have something extra. On the pitch you have 11 players, in the squad, 22, and you see only one or two. You always see him doing something special, the way he’s playing, it’s beautiful to see. Ronaldinho was the same, these are players who have something special – he has that. I was always watching him. The ball was in one place but I was always looking for Zidane.

■ **You were just five years old when he scored his headers in the 1998 World Cup Final against Brazil. How much of that tournament do you remember?**

Zidane was Zidane. He saved France. Everybody was talking about Zidane. But we don’t often speak about [Fabien] Barthez, and [Lilian] Thuram’s goals [in the semi-final against Croatia]. They had a very good team, they were complete. We speak about Zidane because he scored those two headers in the final. To be honest, I would applaud the other players as well.

■ **He once said that you could “become one of the best players ever.” How does it feel to receive praise like that from him?**

When somebody like that says something like that, you flop and go down to the floor! You have to be positive and take it in a good way. You have to be focused because if you go in the other direction, backwards, people will say: “ah, now, you see – people were speaking about him in that way, and look where he is.” You have to be focused, know where you want to go. I have my goals, and I won’t stop until I reach them.

■ **You’ve scored some spectacular goals in your time, so you’re well-placed to give your judgement. Which of the three FIFA Puskás Award finalists would you vote for, and why?**

Because she’s playing at U-17 level, scoring such a beautiful solo goal, I would say my vote would go to Daniuska [Rodriguez]. The free kick, and the overhead kick are both brilliant, but I’d go for hers.

■ **Are there any goals you’ve scored which you think are worthy of being nominated for the Puskás Award?**

If it was the Pogba Award, instead of the Puskas Award? (laughs). Third place, because of the technique, would be my volley against Swansea. This is because of the technique, it wasn’t easy (laughs). (Editor’s note: in Manchester United’s 3-1 win against Swansea, 6 November 2016). Second one, against Napoli for Juventus. I missed my touch first, the ball went high and I smashed it in (Editor’s note: in a 3-0 win against Napoli, 10 November 2013). The first one, my favourite, was against Udinese. Look it up! (Editor’s note: in a 4-0 win, 19 January 2013).

(Source: FIFA)

Iran football coach Carlos Queiroz resigns

TSPORTS TEHRAN — Carlos Queiroz **d e s k** has resigned from Iran national coach on Saturday, according to a member of the board of directors of Iran's Football Federation.

Amir Abedini said that they have received the Portuguese coach's resignation letter on Saturday.

Queiroz lost his cool after Persepolis coach Branko Ivankovic criticized him over holding a training camp in Dubai, the UAE.

Queiroz expelled seven Persepolis's players from the camp in response to Croatia's allegations.

The Iranian national football team was scheduled to play a friendly with Morocco but the match was cancelled.

Ivankovic had said Persepolis's players need to rest in mid-season instead of taking part in a useless camp.

The Reds are favorite to win Iran Professional League and also they will represent the country in the AFC Champions League.

Queiroz has already resigned several times but the Iranian football federation rejected them.

Team Melli, who is currently top of Group A in the Asia's 2018 World Cup qualifying with 11 points, will take on Qatar on March 23 before facing China five days later.



Jahanbakhsh top on Ajax's January wishlist

TSPORTS The first half of the season has largely been a success for Ajax, but manager Peter Bosz has said that he is still looking to improve the squad, especially on the wings. After performing well last season, Amin Younes hasn't been able to provide the same spark to the Ajax attack for much of this season.

It is widely believed that Bosz wants to bring in a player to compete with Younes for a starting position on the left wing. On the right side, Bertrand Traoré has taken over the starting role after Hakim Ziyech moved to a midfield position, with Anwar El Ghazi and Vaclav Cerny competing for a backup role.

Traoré has been far from spectacular this season, and Bosz has clashed with El Ghazi in the past. While a rotational player transfer is on the cards for the left wing, a starter may be required for the right wing.

Alireza Jahanbakhsh is regarded as one of the main priorities for Ajax in the winter transfer window.

A familiar name to those who follow Dutch football, Jahanbakhsh is a 23-year-old Iranian right winger who got his start in Holland at NEC Nijmegen before making the step up to AZ in the summer of 2015. After two stellar seasons for NEC, one in the Eredivisie and one in the Jupiler League, the winger



has cooled off slightly since moving to AZ.

Nevertheless, Alireza has amassed 12 goals and 14 assists in his two and one-half seasons in the Eredivisie. Just by looking at him run down the wing, you can see how physically fit and powerful he is. The Iranian has shown a great ability to deliver accurate crosses into the box, but also has the ability to use his weaker left foot and drive towards the middle of the pitch.

His finishing can definitely be improved, but he has still tallied an impressive number of goals with

both his left and right foot for a player mostly utilized as a winger. Jahanbakhsh is definitely not scared of doing his defensive duties either, as evidenced by his 14 yellow cards since his move to Holland.

His manner on the pitch can be likened to that of a bull: he is constantly charging down the right flank, stopping at no challenge until he either makes a play or draws a foul. Jahanbakhsh would be a great signing for Ajax, a club in dire need of that sort of passion and talent on the right side of the pitch. But with over 3 years left on his contract, don't expect Ajax to walk out of the deal without having spent quite a few million euros.

While there are a couple other problems the club needs to address to start playing at its full potential, the wings are definitely at the top of the list. With Kasper Dolberg playing great at the apex of Ajax's attack, he needs some consistency in his sides to aid his goal scoring capability.

If Ajax is able to complete one or two of these signings, the club would undoubtedly be in a much stronger position coming out of the winter break. The club-record summer sale of Milik brought a lot of funds to the club, and it would be surprising if Overmars decided not to use some of them to strengthen these positions in January.

Dinamo Zagreb won't allow me to leave, says Ali Karimi

TSPORTS Iran's Ali Karimi who joined Croatian champion Dinamo Zagreb last summer stated that despite having a couple of offers the club won't allow him to leave.

The 23-year old midfielder didn't get a decent chance to show his skills as he has been mostly among the reserve players.

"I've still three years left on my contract with Dinamo Zagreb and they won't allow me to leave the club after just six month. However I've received a couple of offers from Iranian and European sides but I'm committed to my contract," Karimi said.

"I would like to stay and fight for a place in the starting lineup. No player want to be a bench warmer and I'm not an exception. If I'm forced to leave Dinamo Zagreb I'll go somewhere to play more," he added.

On 1 July 2016, Karimi joined Dinamo Zagreb from Iran's Sepahan on a five-year contract for a reported US\$400,000 transfer fee.

He is the first Iranian to play in Croatian Prva HNL.

The 22-year-old midfielder made his league debut on 13 August 2016, coming on as second half substitute in a 2-1 victory against Inter Zapresic.



Panathinaikos eager to sign Masoud Shojaei

Greek top football club Panathinaikos has expressed an interest in signing Iranian international midfielder Masoud Shojaei.

Shojaei, 32, joined Panionios in July 2016 and was a key player for the Greek Super League team along with his fellow Karim Ansarifard.

Shojaei has caught the eye of Panathinaikos following a good performance at the Greek Super League.

Newly-appointed coach Marinus Ouzounidis is eager to sign the Iranian player.

Shojaei has played at Spanish club Osasuna from 2008 to 2013 and was a member of Las Palmas as well.

He has also played at Iranian clubs Saipa, Sanat Naft and Qatar's Al-



Shahania and Al-Gharafa.

Shojaei has made 68 appearances in Iran national football team and scored eight goals.

(Source: Tasnim)

Andranik Teymourian links with Esteghlal

Former Bolton Wanderers and Fulham midfielder Andranik "Ando" Teymourian has been linked with a move to the Iranian popular football team, Esteghlal.

The 33-year-old player, who currently plays in Machine Sazi at the moment, had two stints with Esteghlal.

Teymourian started his playing career with Oghab F.C. in Iran's Azadegan League, and continued his professional career playing for F.C. Aboomoslem in the Iranian Premier League.

He represented Iran national football team in 2006 and 2014 World Cups.

Teymourian signed a two-year deal with FA Premier League club Bolton Wanderers after the 2006 World Cup and has also played at Fulham and



Barnsley.

Ando has played in Iranian clubs Tractor Sazi and Saipa and Qatari clubs Al-Kharitiyath and Umm Salal.

(Source: Tasnim)



Brazilian coach Tata appointed as Iran's Bitasabzevar handball club

Brazilian coach Marcus "Tata" Oliveira has been appointed as new head coach of the Iranian handball club, Bitasabzevar, on Saturday.

He was named as coach of Brazil's Handebol Clube Taubaté in 2007 and inspired the team to three titles at the Brazilian National League.

Tata also won Pan American Men's Club Handball

Championship four times.

He has participated in the IHF Super Globe with the Brazilian club four times.

He is the first Brazilian coach in Iran handball.

Bitasabzevar is seventh in Iran handball league with seven points from eight matches.

(Source: Tasnim)

Samir Nasri could face four-year WADA ban over IV treatment at LA clinic

Manchester City midfielder Samir Nasri could be banned for up to four years by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) if found guilty of breaching its rules.

Nasri, on a season-long loan at Sevilla, is being investigated by the Spanish Agency for Health Protection in Sport (AEPSAD).

He will have to explain the intravenous drip treatment he is said to have received at a Los Angeles clinic amid concerns he may have violated anti-doping rules.

AEPSAD, which handles doping issues, said last month on its official Twitter feed: "AEPSAD has initiated the appropriate steps to clarify what treatment was received by the player Samir Nasri."

According to the Drip Doctors clinic, Nasri received its "Immunity IV Drip."

The clinic stated that the treatment involves one litre of hydration and is designed to "combat superbugs and common viruses."

WADA rules state that there is a 50 millilitre limit for active athletes.

The agency's prohibited list includes "intravenous infusions and/or injections of more than 50ml per six-hour period except for those legitimately received in the course of hospital admissions, surgical procedures or clinical investigations."

WADA is awaiting the AEPSAD report on this matter before making a ruling.

"As with all anti-doping matters, we will be monitoring the work conducted by the applicable anti-doping organisation," spokesman Ben Nichols told The Independent.

"It is important that information is provided to and gathered by the investigating anti-doping organisation as quickly as possible and in as much detail as possible, because the longer the period between the incident and the investigation, the greater the risk that certain evidence may no longer exist.

"Anti-doping organisations are required to come to a decision efficiently and without undue delay as to whether the proceedings should be brought against the athlete or other person."

Violation of article 2.2 of WADA's code could result in a punishment of up to four years, Nichols told the newspaper.

Sevilla have not commented on Nasri's case because the investigation is ongoing, although El Pais reported that the Spanish club was unaware the player had undergone a treatment.

Nasri, who has made 10 league starts for Sevilla, has not been suspended while the investigation is carried out and played in the Copa del Rey defeat at Real Madrid on Wednesday.

(Source: ESPN)

Chapecoense return to training for first time since tragic plane crash

Brazilian football club Chapecoense have held their first training session since the devastating air crash late last year which killed most of the team.

In total, 19 players and coaching staff were among 71 people to die when their plane ran out of fuel and crashed into a mountain just outside of Colombian city Medellín on November 28.

The team had been en route to the city in order to play Atletico Nacional in the final of the Copa Sudamericana.

Chapecoense, who earlier this week claimed they wanted to sign up to 20 new players in order to rebuild their side, begin their domestic campaign due on January 26, where they are scheduled to face Joinville at home.

Prior to the start of the season, the club will also welcome Brazilian league opponents Palmeiras for a friendly match on January 21.

"Today we set out on a new path," the club's new president Plinio David De Nes Filho told local media.

"May it be filled with hope, optimism, determination, effort and much solidarity."

Cruzeiro centre-back Douglas Grolli, who was part of the Chapecoense squad between 2008 and 2011, was the first loan signing to be announced after having spent last season also on loan at Ponte Preta.

He also had another spell on loan with the club in 2014.

Three players - goalkeeper Jackson Follmann, centre-back Neto and full-back Alan Ruschel - all survived the crash.

It is hoped that Neto and Ruschel will ultimately return to the first team squad, but Follmann will be unable to after having part of his leg amputated.

Neto was on hand to welcome the new players on the first day of training inside the dressing room.

Colombia's Civil Aeronautics agency concluded in its investigation that the plan for the fatal flight did not meet international standards.

They said a series of errors were made including the decision to allow the plane to take off without enough fuel to make the flight safely.

The pilot failed to refuel en-route and did not report engine failures caused by the lack of fuel until it was too late, according to preliminary results of the investigation.

(Source: insidethegames)



