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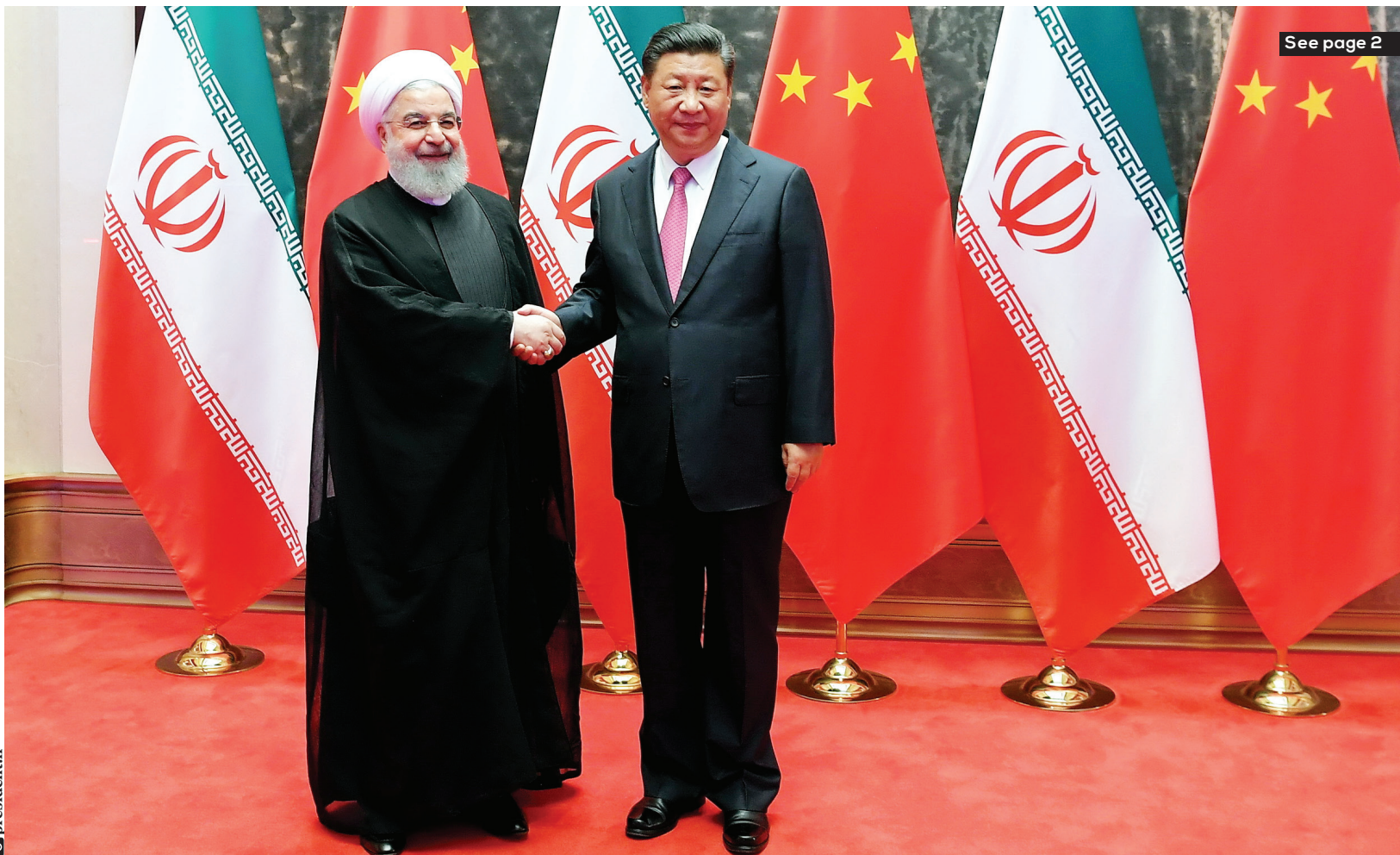
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Majlis suspends debate on CFT approval for 2 months

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran's parliament on Sunday decided to suspend debates on joining the convention on Combating the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) for two months until negotiations with the European Union on the fate of the 2015 nuclear agreement becomes clear. The decision came after 50 MPs issued a statement calling for suspending discussion on the bill for two months. 138 out of 253 MPs present in the par-

liament voted in favor of the proposal and 6 parliamentarians voted against. Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani told the open session of the parliament that the administration agreed with the suspension. Reformist MP Gholamreza Tajgardoan said that the decision will provide the administration with an opportunity to announce to Europe that it should give essential guarantees to preserve the 2015 nuclear deal. **->2**

AEOI, Iran University of Medical Sciences to set up cancer treatment center

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) and Iran University of Medical Sciences have joined hands in setting up an advanced cancer treatment center in Tehran, ISNA reported on Sunday. As per a memorandum of understanding signed between the AEOI and Iran University of Medical Sciences, affiliated to the Ministry of Health, the center will be established in two parts, Masoud

Naseripour, the university chancellor explained. In addition to treatment services the center operates an institute for cancer research, Naseripour said, adding that, practicing nuclear medicine for diagnosis and treatment of cancer, cellular therapy, radiotherapy, gene therapy as well as offering screening, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation services are of the main priorities of the center. **->12**

No Russia-Israel coordination on Syria strikes: Assad

By staff & agencies Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has rejected reports that Russia had coordinated or even known in advance about the recent Israeli strikes on the Arab country. "Russia never coordinated with anyone against Syria, either politically or militarily, and that's contradiction" Assad

said during an interview with the British Daily Mail newspaper released on Sunday. "How could they help the Syrian Army advancing and at the same time work with our enemies in order to destroy our army?" he added, rejecting the allegations mostly made in the Israeli media. **->3**



ARTICLE
Bahman Vakhshour
Tehran Times journalist

Republican's heavy defeat in California: Alarm for controversial president

The Republicans' heavy defeat in California's recent election has doubled the incentive for Trump's rivals to conquer Congress (House of Representatives and the Senate). "Primary voters in California, the U.S. most important blue state and a center of opposition to President Donald Trump, gave them the opportunities they need to recapture the House of Representatives in November" wrote Bloomberg.

Most of the American media focused on the elections and the defeat of Trump's companions. The American news sources also called the California's results a bad shock for Trump, and mentioned that it would be the beginning of the Republicans' failure in the November elections. Democrats need a net gain of 24 seats nationally to win a majority in the House. Although California is traditionally considered a Democratic state, the recent election was a serious opposition to Trump and his advocates.

Beside California, Strong Democratic challengers was seen in some of Republican-held districts, giving the doves a chance to pick up at least three or four seats in the midterm election. It is expected that in the November election, there will be widespread presence of Trump's supporters and opponents in this political scene.

Trump's opponents argue that the Democrats' victory in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate elections will limit the power of the U.S. President, and will create lots of barriers for him. It should be noted that according to the latest polls in the United States, Democrats are to win the Congress mid-term elections. For example, according to a survey conducted by Quinnipiac University the results of which were published in late March, Democrats have a 10% advantage over Republicans. Democrats are expected to win the majority of votes in most of the states where their residents voted for Trump in the 2016 presidential election. However, Trump will surely try his best to prevent his defeat against Democrats in the time remaining to November. **->7**

"Artificial Intelligence could be single greatest danger to human security"

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Professor Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, Chair of the Centre for Iranian Studies at the London Middle East Institute believes that Artificial Intelligence could be the single greatest danger to human security, if it is not interrogated and supervised by civil society.

Professor in Global Thought and Comparative Philosophies and Chair of the Centre for Iranian Studies at the London Middle East Institute, also adds that "Intellectuals have a duty to assess, and if necessary to resist, the militarisation of Artificial Intelligence and the robotization of warfare."

He adds that "The first technology that made the sudden end of humanity possible was the atomic bomb – the second is Artificial Intelligence." Here is the full text of the interview:

■ What will be your forthcoming book and which publisher may publish it? What is your main question in that book? What Hypothesis will you use to answer this question?

A: I am currently working on two projects at the same time. The first one will be my last study about Iran for now. It will give an analytical account about how to understand, study and explain contemporary Iranian domestic politics and international affairs. To that end, it employs what I call a discursive-musicological approach. Each chapter is introduced by a musical piece in

order to introduce the reader to the theme of the section of the book. For instance, I have chosen Thus spoke Zarathustra by Richard Strauss for the introduction, in order to represent the momentous and ancient presence of the topic of Persia in global history. This anthem by Strauss was also used in the movie Space Odyssey by Stanley Kubrick and as a prelude to the concerts of Elvis Presley in the 1970s. For the chapter about the revolution of 1979 I have chosen the anthem by Reza Rooygari (Allah Allah), because it indicates to me in a very powerful way the explosive force of the Iranian movement, and the utopian yearnings of that generation. As indicated, this will be my last book about Iran for a long time, perhaps forever. **->7**

Rouhani at SCO summit: Unilateral sanctions damage legal int'l business

Addressing the 18th summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) on Sunday in Qingdao, China, President Hassan Rouhani described the United States' move to impose its own policies on others as a growing threat, saying "unilateral sanctions damage the process of legal international business".

The text of President's address is as follows: In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

Your Excellency Mr Xi Jinping, honourable President of the People's Republic of China; Distinguished presidents; Honourable prime ministers; Ladies and gentlemen;

At the outset, I would like to express my gratitude to Mr Xi Jinping, President of the friend country of the People's Republic of China, for his warm hospitality and proper planning for holding this summit.

The 18th Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Summit is held at a time when the international community faces many unprecedented challenges: at the international level, the challenge of unilateralism, terrorism, extremism, the reduction of the role of international organisations and treaties; at the regional level, the challenge of transnational actors interference and the weakening of interaction and interconnectedness mechanisms based on common interests, and finally, at the national level, the challenge of interference and internal threats, which, from time to time, attack the security, political, economic and cultural infrastructures of the countries.

To counter these challenges at the regional level, we require closest regional cooperation in different fields. The ample commonalities, and not racial, religious, cultural and historical points of divergence; and long-term common interests, not attempt to secure short-term interests at the

expense of others, especially neighbours, must be the base for interaction and cooperation at the regional level so that we can have more secure, instable and developed region.

Poverty and underdevelopment are among the causes that lead to insecurity, instability and spread of terrorism and extremism in the region. At the same time, all-out development and cooperation and preventing damage to international trade and having legitimate economic relations based on irrelevant political considerations are definitely necessary to achieve this common goal and lead to balanced and sustainable development.

Here, I see it necessary to stress that unilateral sanctions are not only against international rules and regulations, but also damage legitimate international trade. In this regard, energy security and non-political approach to it is a must for regional and global development and it is essential that the international community stand up to abuse of energy. **->2**



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A glimpse at Lalejin, a world pottery capital

A photo depicts artisans doing their routine in Lalejin, a world pottery capital in west-central Iran, on June 10, which also marks the World Handicrafts Day.

Located in Hamedan Province, Lalejin is one of the most essential centers for production of the earthenware and ceramics in the country.

Lalejin celebrated its registration as the world pottery capital in 2016, a privilege given by jurors of the UNE-SCO-affiliated World Crafts Council.



ARTICLE
Yuram Abdullah Weiler
Analyst and journalist

Reflections on Quds Day: After 12 years has anything really changed?

"One must ask if Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Gaza is really a step in the direction of peace in the Middle East. Has anything really changed?"

It seems hard to believe that I began a long and fruitful relationship with Tehran Times in June of 2006 with an article titled "Unbalanced U.S. policy on Palestine." At the time, I never dreamed that, some 175 articles later, I would be not only lamenting the utter lack of progress toward a just peace for Palestinians, but also agonizing over the spread of violence and chaos throughout most of the Middle East.

Frankly, my despair over the current state of affairs is enough to cause a terminal case of writer's block. Clearly, placing my pen on the table and throwing my hands up in the air won't help the situation. But then after 12 years of writing, speaking, protesting, listening and learning, giving interviews and trying to educate myself and inform others of the injustices being perpetrated by the United States and the Israeli entity, watching the current criminal Washington regime shred the JCPOA and target the Islamic Republic of Iran is a little much to swallow. I've never felt such a sense of futility in my life.

12 years ago, I naively thought that if I can just find the right wording, construct my argument with irrefutable logic and keep striving in sending letters to newspaper editors, someone somewhere would see the light and things eventually would change for the better. At that time, the U.S. under the administration of George W. Bush was in a dither, along with the Israeli entity under Ariel Sharon, because Hamas had captured the majority of seats in the Palestinian legislative elections. Bush was threatening to cut off funding for Palestinians, and the Hamas win played right into the hands of Sharon and others, who, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, were trying to brand the Palestinian resistance organization as terrorists with ties to al-Qa'ida. **->7**

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Researchers, academicians meet Leader

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — On the 25th day of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, a host of researchers and academicians were received by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Sunday.

After a selection of researchers get the lectern to share their ideas and suggestions with the Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei was to address the gathering, Mehr reported.

At the end of the meeting the Leader hosted a banquet of Iftar for the researchers and academicians.



Salehi: AEOI proceeding with nuclear propulsion project

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) has made preparations for a mega project to build nuclear propulsion systems and that serious steps have been taken to complete it, AEOI chief Ali Akbar Salehi has said.

In an interview with Tasnim published on Sunday, Salehi pointed to the AEOI's latest measures regarding an order by President Hassan Rouhani to work on nuclear propulsion devices, saying, "This project is a huge one that will take some time to complete."

"We have started working on the preparations for the project and seriously seeking to complete it," he added.



Three destroyers to join naval fleet by year-end

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Navy Commander Rear Admiral Hossein Khanzadi has announced that the production of Sahand destroyer has been finished and the destroyer will join the naval fleet very soon.

Speaking with IRIB news on Sunday, Khanzadi said two other destroyers, namely Dena and Jamaran, will also join the fleet by the end of the current Persian year (March 20, 2019).

He also said all of the Navy's equipment has been produced by domestic experts.

In recent years, Iran's Navy has made great advances in making homegrown equipment and has increased its presence in high seas.



IRGC disbands two terrorist teams in northwestern Iran

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Commander of the IRGC Ground Force announced on Sunday that his forces have disbanded two terrorist teams in northwestern Iran in 24 hours, a day after disbanding a 7-member terrorist cell.

Speaking to reporters, Brigadier General Mohammad Pakpour said the IRGC troops successfully fought off an intensified wave of terrorist activities in the western and northwestern border regions of Iran in recent days, Tasnim reported.

According to the commander, the two terrorist teams have been smashed in armed confrontations in Oshnavieh and Sarvabad border areas, northwest of Iran.

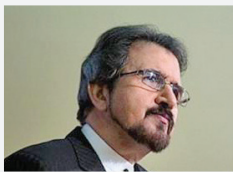


Iran to stay in Syria upon Damascus's request: advisor

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, a senior foreign policy advisor to the parliament speaker, said on Sunday that Iran will stay in Syria as long as the Syrian government asks for advisory help, Mehr reported.

The Islamic Republic will stay in Syria and it will carry out operations against terrorists upon the request of the legitimate Syrian government, Amir-Abdollahian said at a ceremony to commemorate the victims of last year's ISIL terrorist attacks on the Iranian parliament and the Imam Khomeini shrine in Tehran.

He further said the Americans were aiding ISIL, adding that the U.S. is a key sponsor of terrorism in the region.



Tehran welcomes Eid al-Fitr ceasefire in Afghanistan

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi has welcomed the Afghan government's decision to announce a ceasefire with the Taliban on the occasion of the Eid al-Fitr festivities.

"Iran regards this move as a positive step towards achieving bigger agreements and restoring long-lasting stability and security to Afghanistan," Qassemi said on Saturday, Press TV reported.

He also expressed the Islamic Republic's readiness to help Afghanistan promote peace under the current administration.

Earlier, the Taliban announced that it had agreed to a three-day ceasefire with Afghan security forces for Eid al-Fitr in the middle of June.

SCO summiteers back full implementation of JCPOA

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Leaders of countries member to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) issued a statement on Sunday urging a "full and efficient" implementation of the 2015 nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The statement comes as Donald Trump pulled the U.S. out of the multilateral nuclear agreement backed by the UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

"The member states deem it important to consistently implement the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on the Iranian nuclear program, and call for participants to strictly observe their obligations with a view to ensuring its full and efficient implementation and promoting peace and stability in the region and globally," read a paragraph of a statement issued at the end of the summit.

China and Russia as key members of the SCO are among the signatories of the nuclear agreement.

The European Union including its three heavyweight members - Germany, France and Britain - have also shunned the U.S. withdrawal of the JCPOA. EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini has also said the JCPOA is an international agreement and it is not just an agreement between Tehran and Washington.



Almost concurrent with the SCO summit in the Chinese city of Qingdao, the leaders of the Group of Seven (G7) met in Quebec, Canada. The G7 meeting ended in failure as leaders of Canada, France, Germany, and Britain clashed with

Donald Trump over imposition of tariffs on import of steel and aluminum from Europe and Canada. Also one of the main contentions of the other six nations in the G7 group with Trump was their support for the JCPOA.

Rouhani, Xi meet in China

Tehran, Beijing sign four cooperation documents

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and Xi Jinping, the Chinese president, met on Sunday in Qingdao, China, on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit.

The senior officials discussed expansion of relations especially in economic and political areas.

Four cooperation documents in the areas of research, fight against drug trafficking, stock market and road construction were signed between the two countries.

Rouhani was accompanied by his top economic team in visit to China.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh, Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Masoud Karbasian, Vice

President for Economic Affairs Mohammad Nahavandian and Valiollah Seif, the central bank's governor, accompanied Rouhani.

The Iranian president also met separately with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the fringes of the summit.

Rouhani said that Iran is ready to expand "strategic cooperation" with the "friendly country of India".

He also said that Iran welcomes India's participation in the development of Chabahar port. For his part, Modi said that India is determined to deepen relations with Iran in various areas.

Rouhani also held a separate meeting with Mongolian President Khaltmaagiin Battulga, discussing

economic ties.

Also, Rouhani met with a number of senior officials on Saturday on the sidelines of the summit including Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The SCO summit started on Saturday and ended on Sunday.

Rouhani addressed the summit on Sunday, elaborating on the Islamic Republic's stances on most pressing issues.

SCO member states are China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India and Pakistan. Observer states are Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia, and dialogue partners are Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia, Nepal, Turkey and Sri Lanka.

Larijani tells EU time running out to confirm stance on JCPOA

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Ali Larijani, the speaker of the Majlis (Parliament) said on Sunday that it is needed that the European Union to clarify stance on the 2015 nuclear deal (officially called the JCPOA) sooner.

"Time for negotiations is running out. If Europe sees itself able to preserve the nuclear deal, it should declare its stance sooner and more clearly," Larijani told a session of the parliament.

He said that if the EU fails to confirm its commitment to the preservation of Iran's

interests while the U.S. has abandoned the deal, they will have to accept the consequences.

"Otherwise, the Islamic Republic will make new moves, in the nuclear field as well as other issues."

He also censured Israel for lobbying European countries to walk out of the JCPOA endorsed by the UN Security Resolution 2231.

"The next issue is the wanderings of the

filthy prime minister of the Zionist regime across Europe trying to make Europe follow America in walking out of the nuclear deal. It seems that following the calamity that befell terrorists in Iraq and Syria, this adventurous regime is seeking to create another crisis in the region in order to put a cap on its problems at home and abroad."

Larijani says Trump has "mistaken the political arena for vegetable market bargaining."

Majlis suspends debate on CFT approval for 2 months

1 → "The administration will have two months to negotiate with Europe," Tajgardoost said.

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

Iran has warned the remaining parties to the nuclear agreement – the European Union, E3 (Germany, France and Britain), Russia and China – that if its interests are not guaranteed it will not remain in the deal.

■Iran's interests will be protected if it joins CFT

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said in his speech at the parliament that the country's interests



will be protected if it joins the CFT.

"In this critical situation, it will serve the country's national interests to join this convention," he said.

He noted that there are mechanisms to leave the convention if Iran's interests are jeopardized and that no country can question national sovereignty.

"It has been for two years that the bill has been discussed at the Supreme National Security Council, Intelligence Ministry, Foreign Ministry and Intelligence Organization of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and at the end the Supreme National Security Council said that there will be no problem given the country's conditions," Araqchi stated.

Rouhani at SCO summit: Unilateral sanctions damage legal int'l business

1 → Without a doubt, economic, political and legal unilateralism undermine regional convergence. In this regard, the United States' attempts to impose its own policies on others is a growing danger. A recent example of the United States' unilateralism and indifference towards the opinions of the international community is its decisions to withdraw from the JCPOA. The Islamic Republic of Iran has so far lived up to all his commitments under the JCPOA and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has so far confirmed my country's commitment to its obligations for 11 times.

All signatories to the JCPOA have a responsibility regarding the commitments of removing sanctions under the JCPOA, and also based on Resolution 2231 of the UN Security Council and Article 25 of the Charter of the United Nations are responsible to help full implementation of the JCOPA and prevent any move that poses an obstacle on implementation of the JCPOA.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has given a limited opportunity to remaining signatories to the JCPOA so that they can give

the necessary guarantee in action to help implement all the agreed conditions in the JCPOA and continue being a party to this agreement. Definitely, the U.S. has monitored the reactions to its withdrawal from the JCPOA and considers the lack of response to its unilateral withdrawal as not being costly, which will have very bad consequences for the international community.

Here, I would like to welcome efforts by Russia and China in maintaining the JCPOA.

Ladies and Gentlemen; Over the past few years, terrorism, separatism and extremism have struck different regions of the world, especially our surroundings including Central Asia and Western Asia. By taking advantage of the intelligence gap which exists among regional countries, terrorist groups they have created networks and recruited new troops. Therefore, an

increase in intelligence exchange between the countries of the region can play a role in weakening terrorist groups and their efforts to create regional networks. Hence, we need to draw up new mechanisms and offer new legal methods in order to counter these groups.

Over the past decades, the Islamic Republic of Iran has faced with the scourge of terrorism both in the country and its surrounding regions and has invaluable experience in curtailing and weakening of extremist and terrorist currents, an example of which is cooperating with the government of Iraq and Syria in fighting ISIS terrorist. On the other hand, by relying on its valuable experiences over the past years, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation has offered good solutions to multifaceted challenges facing the region. The Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to cooperate with SCO in the fight against terrorism,

Poverty and underdevelopment are among the causes that lead to insecurity, instability and spread of terrorism and extremism in the region.

No change to Fordow plant as long as nuclear deal is preserved: Iran

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Behrooz Kamalvandi, spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, said on Saturday that there will be no change to the Fordow nuclear plant as long as the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, is preserved.

"Fordow will remain in this way as long as the JCPOA is preserved, however, we will have plans for Fordow if we exit the JCPOA," he told reporters on the sidelines of a ceremony.

Commenting on preparations to increase uranium enrichment capacity up to a level of 190,000 SWUs (separative work units), Kamalvandi said, "190,000 SWUs is



the least of our need in industrial enrichment which is enough for one power plant and our research reactors."

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on June 4 ordered the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) to take rapid steps to increase uranium enrichment capacities "up to a level of 190,000 SWUs for the time being within the framework of the JCPOA" if the nuclear agreement falls apart.

Kamalvandi said, "We take actions based on orders of the system's officials, and for the time being the Leader's view is being materialized within the framework of the JCPOA. We will announce the country's actual capacities if we exit the JCPOA."

No Russia-Israel coordination on Syria strikes: Assad

Assad: Douma chemical attack, a lie

➔ Assad further stressed that Russia's policy towards Syria is based on non-interference in the country's internal affairs.

"We've had good relations with Russia for more than six decades now, nearly seven decades. They never, during our relation, try to dictate, even if there are differences," he said.

The president described the Syrian army as "the main party" that has been fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) Takfiri terrorist group with the help of the Russians and Iranians over the past years.

However, he said, the Western military alliance led by the Americans has actually been supporting ISIL by attacking the Syrian military.

Assad said there is a "big difference" between Russian President Vladimir Putin's handling of the issues in the Middle East and those of the United States President Donald Trump and British Prime Minister Theresa May.

"The Russians were invited by the Syrian government, their existence in Syria is a legitimate existence, the same for the Iranians. While for the United States, the UK, it is illegal, it is an invasion, they are breaching the sovereignty of Syria – a sovereign country. So, their existence is not legal at all, it is an illegitimate existence," he said.

Last month, the U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo demanded the withdrawal of "all forces under Iranian command throughout the entirety of Syria."

In response, Syria's Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad said the issue was not up for discussion.

Iran offers Syria advisory military support in its fight against terrorism.

Russia has military advisers in Syria and runs a number of military bases, from which it has been carrying out an aerial bombardment campaign on behalf of the Syrian government.

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

In his interview, Assad emphasized that only Syria can make decision about the country, saying, "No one should have any doubt about this."

He also vowed to "liberate every inch of Syria" and stressed that the conflict in the country could be resolved "in less than a year."

The crisis "is not very complicated. What has made it complicated is the external interference," he said.

"So, we think the more advances we make politically and militarily, the more the West, especially U.S, UK, and France, will try to prolong it and make the solution farther from the Syrians. And in spite of this, we are closing the gap between the two," he pointed out.

Asked about a suspected gas attack in the town of



Douma in the Eastern Ghouta region on April 7, Assad said the incident "was staged" by the U.S., Britain and France "together."

"The UK publicly supported the White Helmets that are a branch of al-Qaeda and al-Nusra in different areas of Syria. They (the British) spent a lot of money, and we consider the White Helmets to be a PR stunt by the UK," he added.

Assad said the Douma chemical attack was "a lie."

"There was no attack; this is where the lie begins. Again, it wasn't about the attack; the crux of the issue is that they need to undermine the Syrian government, as they needed to change and topple the Syrian government at the beginning of the events of the war in Syria. They keep failing, they keep telling lies, and they continue to play a war of attrition against our government."

One week after the Douma incident, Washington, London and Paris launched a coordinated missile attack against sites and research facilities near Damascus and Homs with the purported goal of paralyzing the Syrian government's capability to produce chemicals.

They carried out the attack on the basis of an allegation without any proof even, ignoring pleas by Syria and Russia

to send independent investigators to the alleged site of the attack.

■ **Takfiri terrorists attack besieged Shia towns in Syria's Idlib: Monitor**

Elsewhere, Takfiri terrorists have attacked the besieged Shia-majority Syrian towns of Kefraya and al-Foua, sparking deadly clashes with pro-Damascus fighters, a Britain-based monitoring group says.

The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported that Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (Organization for the Liberation of the Levant/Levant Liberation Committee/Tahrir al-Sham/HTS/al-Qaeda in Syria) terrorists were "heavily shelling" the towns, both in northwestern Idlib Province, and had broken into them late on Saturday.

"This is the fiercest attack in around three years," SOHR head Rami Abdel Rahman told Agence France-Presse.

The fighting, which was continuing on Sunday, had killed six pro-Damascus fighters and at least three Takfiri elements, he added.

Around 10,000 people are estimated to live in Kefraya and Foua, which have been encircled by terrorists since March 2015.

Vienna being discussed as host for Putin-Trump summit: Kremlin

Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed during a visit to Austria this week the possibility of Vienna playing host to a summit with his U.S. counterpart Donald Trump, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Saturday.

"It was mentioned that Vienna could be such a city" Peskov was quoted as saying by the RIA Novosti state news agency after being asked if Putin discussed whether the city could hold such a meeting when he met with Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz on Tuesday.

Peskov's comments come a day after Trump called for Russia to be readmitted to the group of the world's leading nations, known as the

G7, a step that would end Russia's international isolation over its 2014 annexation of Crimea from Ukraine.

Speaking from China where Putin was attending a regional security summit, Peskov said that in their last telephone conversation on March 20 the Russian and U.S. leaders had also mentioned possibly meeting in Vienna.

"You know, the two presidents discussed the necessity of holding such a meeting in their last telephone call. Including that Vienna could be such a city" for the summit, said Peskov.

He added, however, that no concrete agreements have been reached and no concrete

discussions were underway.

Under the conservative Kurz, Austria has strived to act as a mediator between Russia and the West.

While the EU-state imposed sanctions on Russia over Crimea along with the rest of the bloc, Austria did not expel Russian diplomats like other Western nations following the March poisoning of a Russian former double agent and his daughter in Britain, an attack London has accused Moscow of being behind.

"We have continued our cooperation even during difficult times," Kurz said after his talks with Putin on Tuesday.

Putin said in a Russian television interview that a meeting with Trump would be "useful."

"Dialogue may prove to be constructive," he said in the interview, the full version of which was released on Saturday.

He added that Russia was ready to "develop, deepen and normalize ties with the United States," noting that the next move was for Washington to make.

Putin indicated that he did not like "a lot" of the U.S. authorities' decisions but praised Trump for his consistency.

"Trump fulfils his pre-election promises," he said.

(Source: AP)

Afghan forces seize huge bomb-making cache at Pakistan border

Afghan security forces on Sunday seized 156 sacks of ammonium nitrate, widely used in making explosives, from the back of a vegetable truck crossing from Pakistan, an official said, in one of the biggest such finds.

Intelligence officers found nearly eight tons of the chemical, "brought for insurgent activities", hidden under sacks of vegetables on the truck at the Torkham border crossing, at the end of the Khyber Pass, a spokesman for the governor of Nangarhar province told Reuters.

Ammonium nitrate is widely used as a fertilizer, but for security reasons, imports into Afghanistan are banned.

Afghanistan faces insurgencies by the Taliban, Daesh (ISIL) and the Taliban-linked Haqqani network. Pakistan and Afghanistan frequently accuse each other of harboring terrorists planning cross-border raids.

A massive truck bomb struck the Afghan capital, Kabul, in May, killing more than 150 people.

The Taliban on Saturday announced a surprise three-day ceasefire over the Muslim Eid holiday this month, their



first offer of its kind, days after the government declared an unconditional ceasefire of its own.

The governor of Nangarhar was dismissed last month as

part of an administrative shakeup in a region where security has sharply deteriorated.

Officials in Nangarhar said he had failed to tackle endemic corruption in the province, which includes the Torkham post, the main crossing point into Pakistan for both goods and people as well as major smuggling routes.

Foreign air strikes targeted two Daesh hideouts in the province, killing six insurgents, an Afghan military official told Reuters on Sunday. He did not say when the attack took place.

In southern Kandahar province, the Taliban stormed a security checkpoint on Saturday night, killing five police, a spokesman for the provincial governor told Reuters.

In August, U.S. President Donald Trump unveiled a more hawkish military approach to Afghanistan, including a surge in air strikes, aimed at forcing the Taliban to the negotiating table.

(Source: Daily Star)

Spain's Basques form 202-km human chain to call for independence vote

Tens of thousands of people from Spain's Basque Country joined hands to form a human chain running some 202 kilometers Sunday to call for the right to hold a regional independence vote.

Spain's Constitution, created in 1978 after the end of dictator Francisco Franco's regime, states that the country is indivisible and last-year's attempt by Catalonia to hold a secession referendum was met with a harsh legal crackdown. Former Prime Minister with the conservative People's Party (PP) Mariano Rajoy, who has been roundly criticized for his handling of the Catalan crisis, was ousted by Socialist leader Pedro Sanchez in a no confidence vote June 1.

Sanchez, who now heads the government following the vote, has called for renewed talks with the Catalan leadership.



While most from the Basque Country, which already has a high level of self-de-

termination and, like Catalonia, has its own language and culture, do not support independence, many believe the population should be given the right to vote.

The human-chain protest was organized by Basque group Gure Esku Dago (In Our Own Hands) and ran from Donostia (also known as San Sebastian) to the Basque parliament in Gasteiz (Vitoria).

The Spanish government, backed by the constitutional court, maintains that any ballot on regional independence is illegal.

An Oct. 1 ballot on Catalonia's separation from Spain and consequent unilateral declaration of independence by the regional government prompted Madrid to take control of the region and arrest the civil servants involved in the vote.

(Source: Reuters)

North Korea's Kim in Singapore on cusp of making history with Trump summit



Kim Jong Un and Donald Trump impersonators in Singapore.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un landed in Singapore on Sunday ahead of a summit with U.S. President Donald Trump that could end a nuclear stand-off between the old foes and transform the secretive, impoverished Asian country.

When Trump and Kim meet on the resort island of Sentosa on Tuesday they will be making history even before they start.

Enemies since the 1950-53 Korean War, the leaders of North Korea and the United States have never met previously - or even spoken on the phone.

Kim arrived at Singapore's Changi Airport after his longest trip overseas as head of state wearing his trademark dark "Mao suit" and distinctive high cut hairstyle.

He was greeted by Singapore's foreign minister, Vivian Balakrishnan, who posted a picture on Twitter of him shaking hands with Kim and the message: "Welcomed Chairman Kim Jong Un, who has just arrived in Singapore."

He disembarked an Air China jet followed by top officials including Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho and Kim Yong Chol, a close aide of Kim's who has been instrumental in the diplomacy that culminated in the Tuesday summit.

Later on Sunday, Kim left the St. Regis hotel in central Singapore in a motorcade that included his stretch Mercedes Benz limousine and traveled the short distance through Singapore's glitzy shopping streets to the presidential palace, known as the Istana, where he met Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

Kim, in his first public comments since arriving, said Singapore's role would be recorded in history if the summit was a success.

■ **Trump arrives in Singapore**

U.S. President Donald Trump also arrived in Singapore on Sunday ahead of a historic summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un over the future of Pyongyang's nuclear arsenal.

Trump flew into Singapore's Paya Lebar Air Base aboard Air Force One, looking to lay the groundwork for a nuclear deal with one of America's most bitter long-time foes, directly following his divisive meeting in Canada with some of Washington's closest allies that further strained global trade ties.

After a 20-hour journey from Canada, Trump was received at the air base by Singapore's Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan.

Asked by a reporter how he is feeling about the summit, Trump said: "Very good." He then got into his waiting limousine.

Trump's arrival came just hours after Kim, wearing his trademark dark "Mao suit" and distinctive high-cut hairstyle, landed

in the ultra-modern city-state on his longest trip overseas as head of state.

Such a meeting was unthinkable just months ago when Trump and Kim were exchanging insults and threats that raised fears of war in the region. But a series of diplomatic overtures involving North Korea, South Korea and the United States reduced tensions and led Trump in March to quickly accept Kim's invitation to meet.

Trump initially touted the potential for a grand bargain with North Korea to rid itself of a nuclear missile program that has advanced rapidly to threaten the United States, insisting he would swiftly achieve what previous U.S. administrations

have failed to do.

But he has since lowered expectations, saying the talks would be more about starting a relationship with Kim for a negotiating process that would take more than one summit. This has included backing away from an original demand for North Korea's swift denuclearization.

Kim has given little sign of any willingness to dismantle his nuclear program, which experts believe he sees a vital to the survival of his family's dynastic rule.

However, Trump and his aides insist that a U.S.-led "maximum pressure" campaign of the toughest-ever economic sanctions, diplomatic action and military threats is what has drawn Kim to the negotiating table.

Trump frequently has boasted of his negotiating prowess as a former real estate developer, and his ability to read people, even though his businesses have declared multiple bankruptcies.

He said on Thursday that he didn't think he had to prepare very much for the summit and that "it's about attitude." But some U.S. officials have questioned whether Trump was doing enough to get up to speed.

Trump told reporters in Canada on Saturday any agreement with Kim would be "spur of the moment," underscoring the uncertain outcome of what he called a "mission of peace."

That came as Trump threw the Group of Seven's efforts to show a united front into disarray after he became angry with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and said he might double down on import tariffs by hitting the sensitive auto industry.

Trump's bombshell announcement that he was backing out of the G7 communique, made after he left the summit in Canada early, torpedoed what appeared to be a fragile consensus on the trade dispute between Washington and its top allies.

(Source: agencies)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	95916.0
IFX	1107.74

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,100 rials
EUR	49,630 rials
GBP	56,550 rials
AED	11,494 rials

Source: mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

WTI	65.74/b
Brent	76.46/b
OPEC Basket	73.62/b
Gold	\$1,330.40 /oz
Silver	\$16.84/oz
Platinum	\$913.15/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



Over 500km to be added to Iran’s road network by late Sep.

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** – More than 500 kilometers of roads and highways are going to be inaugurated by the end of summer which is September 22 based on Iranian calendar, said an official at the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development.

According to Mohammad Reza Kadkhodazadeh, the deputy head of the Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructures Company, affiliated to the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, the ministry’s current priority in road construction is on finishing the projects which are in the country’s transit corridors.



Italy main export market of Iranian products during March-May

ECONOMY **TEHRAN**— According to the latest data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), during the first two months of the present Iranian calendar year 1397 (March 21- May 21, 2018), Iran’s exports of goods to Italy increased 156.56 percent in comparison with the same time in the preceding year, making the European country the top destination for Iranian exports.

In this period, 163,227 tons of goods at the value of \$82.252 million were exported from Iran to Italy, registering 249.47 percent rise in terms of weight and 156.56 percent growth in terms of value in comparison with the first two months of the previous Iranian year 1396.

According to the report, Turkey, Italy, Russia, Azerbaijan, Germany, Kazakhstan, Spain, Armenia, Georgia, Belgium, and England stood among the main 40 customers of Iranian products in the said period.

As earlier reported by IRICA, Iran’s non-oil exports from March 21 to May 21, 2018, stood at \$7.73 billion, showing 21.93 percent increase year-on-year from its previous level of \$6.347 billion.

Iran to increase oil production by 460m barrels in 3 years: Zanganeh

Iran is pursuing a plan to increase its oil output by 460 million barrels within three years, oil minister Bijan Zanganeh said on Saturday, according to SHANA, the news site of the Iranian oil ministry.

The plan will focus on increasing output from 29 oilfields, including in Ilam, Khuzestan, Gachsaran, Falat Qareh and Fars, Zanganeh said.

The bulk of the work to increase the output at the oilfields will be carried out by Iranian companies, Zanganeh said. “More than 75 percent of the equipment for developing the output is Iranian,” Zanganeh said, (Source: Reuters)

Singapore-N. Korea trade can grow if sanctions lifted

Trade between Singapore and North Korea could grow if U.N. sanctions against it are lifted, the city-state’s prime minister, Lee Hsien Loong, said on Sunday, as his country prepared to host a historic U.S.- North Korea summit.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un landed in Singapore on Sunday for a summit with U.S. President Donald Trump, which could end a nuclear stand-off between the old foes and transform secretive, impoverished North Korea.

Singapore, which was North Korea’s seventh largest trading partner, suspended trade relations with it last year amid surging tension over its nuclear and missile programs.

“Of course, if there is an agreement, there is progress, the sanctions are lifted, I expect our trade will grow,” Lee said in remarks posted on the Straits Times newspaper’s website. “And we used to have some trade with them, so there is some potential but it will take some time,” he said. (Source: Reuters)

Persian Gulf Star Refinery’s 1st LPG consignment traded in IRENEX

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — Persian Gulf Star Refinery’s first consignment of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) was traded in Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX) on Sunday, Shana news agency reported. The 2,000-ton consignment was offered at

the price of \$585 per ton in the international ring of the physical market of IRENEX.

Seyed Ali Hosseini, the managing director of IRENEX, mentioned the offering and trade as successful.

Iran’s Persian Gulf Star Refinery in the

Exports of oil, gas condensate hit 2.7m bpd in May

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — Iran exported 2.7 million barrels per day (bpd) of oil and gas condensate averagely in May, Shana news agency reported.

Of the mentioned figure, 2.4 million bpd was the share of oil exports while gas condensate accounted for 300,000 bpd of the exports during the mentioned month.

The country’s oil and gas condensate exports surged above the monthly average in May because of some overhaul at the domestic refineries and the figure is expected to fall back again in the upcoming months. Iran exported near 2.115 million bpd of



oil and gas condensate on average during the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20).

The country’s condensate export is also expected to reduce to 200,000 bpd due to domestic consumption.

Trump torpedoes G7 effort to ease trade spat, threatens auto tariffs

U.S. President Donald Trump on Saturday threw the G7’s efforts to show a united front into disarray after he became angry with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and said he might double down on import tariffs by hitting the sensitive auto industry.

Trump’s bombshell announcement that he was backing out of the Group of Seven communique, made after he left the summit in Canada early, torpedoed what appeared to be a fragile consensus on the trade dispute between Washington and its top allies.

“PM Justin Trudeau of Canada acted so meek and mild during our @G7 meetings only to give a news conference after I left saying that, ‘US Tariffs were kind of insulting’ and he ‘will not be pushed around.’ Very dishonest & weak. Our Tariffs are in response to his of 270% on dairy!” the U.S. president tweeted.

In his press conference, Trudeau had spoken of retaliatory measures that Canada would take next month in response to Trump’s decision to slap tariffs on steel and aluminum imports from Canada, Mexico and the European Union.

“Canadians, we’re polite, we’re reasonable but we also will not be pushed around,” Trudeau, the host of the two-day summit in La Malbaie, Quebec, told reporters.

Reacting to Trump’s tweets, Trudeau’s office said: “We are focused on everything we accomplished here at the summit. The Prime Minister said nothing he hasn’t said before—both in public, and in private conversations with the President.”

In Paris, a French presidency official said France and Europe stood by the G7 communique and anyone departing from the commitments made at the summit would be showing their “incoherence and inconsistency.”

“International cooperation cannot depend



Canada’s Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and G7 leaders Britain’s Prime Minister Theresa May, France’s President Emmanuel Macron, Germany’s Chancellor Angela Merkel, and U.S. President Donald Trump discuss the joint statement following a breakfast meeting on the second day of the G7 meeting in Charlevoix city of La Malbaie, Quebec, Canada, June 9, 2018. Adam Scotti/Prime Minister’s Office/Handout via REUTERS

on being angry and on sound bites. Let’s be serious,” the official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Reuters.

Trump’s salvo capped a dizzying two days of controversies that began with his suggestion Russia be readmitted to the G7, then what a French official described as a “rant” full of “recriminations” against U.S. trading partners, followed by Trump’s denial of any contention with leaders at the summit and his description of their relationship as a “10.”

By ordering his representatives to back out of the communique, Trump appeared to be asserting his oft-stated aim of upsetting the status quo whether by pulling out of the global climate accord or the international nuclear



southern province of Hormozgan is the first of its kind designed based on gas condensate feedstock recovered from South Pars gas field which Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf.

Construction of the refinery started in 2006, but the project was delayed as the result of some

Iran’s 2-month exports to Qatar five-folded on year

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran’s exports to Qatar during the two-month period from March 21 to May 21 increased by five folds in this year compared to the same period of time in the past year, according to the data released by Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA).

IRICA data shows that 216,585 tons of commodities worth \$47.666 million were exported from Iran to Qatar during the mentioned time span, ISNA reported.

It is while just 131,814 tons of goods valued at \$8.899 million were exported from Iran to the Arab country in the two-

mismangement and also financial limitation due to the West-led sanctions against Iran.

Planned to have a total crude oil processing capacity of 360,000 barrels per day, Persian Gulf Star is projected to be complete by the end of current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2019).



month time of the preceding year.

Exports to Qatar accounted for 1.15 percent of weight and 0.65 percent of the value of Iran’s exports during the two-month period, putting Qatar in the 19th place among the export destinations of Iran.

this week to find some semblance of consensus with Washington on trade and the other key issues that have formed the basis of the 42-year-old grouping of industrialized nations.

French President Emmanuel Macron had labeled the summit a success before Trump’s Twitter posts, saying there was relief within the G7 that an escalation of the trade dispute had been avoided.

“The nature of the debate we had was rather appeasement and it stopped the escalation in terms of behavior,” Macron, who had exchanged terse Twitter messages with Trump in the run-up to the summit, told reporters.

“It allowed a dialogue, where for weeks there were uncoordinated unilateral actions and non-cooperation.”

Nervous investors

Trump says his tariffs are meant to protect U.S. industry and workers from unfair international competition as part of his “America First” agenda.

The prospect that he could be moving toward an even greater protectionist trade policy is likely to chill financial markets worried about tit-for-tit escalation that could lead to a full-blown global trade war.

Trump has announced tariffs of up to \$150 billion on Chinese goods over U.S. complaints of Beijing’s trade practices and its alleged theft of U.S. technology. China has vowed to retaliate in equal measure.

Canada, Mexico and the EU also are moving ahead with their own levies on U.S. goods.

But tariffs on U.S. imports of cars and auto parts would devastate the Canadian auto industry, which is highly integrated with the U.S. sector. They could also damage Japan and Germany.

(Source: Reuters)

First Announcement

SINGLE- STAGE INTERNATIONAL TENDER
GOVERNMENT TRADING CORPORATION OF IRAN



Government Trading Corporation of Iran (hereinafter referred to as GTC), affiliated to the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad of the Islamic Republic of Iran, intends to purchase 60,000 M/Ts 10 pct M/L raw sugar on CFR basis, through single stage international tender.

All qualified companies and suppliers who are interested to bid above tender are invited to receive tender documents from 12.06.2018 till 23.06.2018 from Trades & Tenders Committee located on the 4th Floor of GTC Building No. 2, at No. 225, Fatemi Avenue, Tehran-Iran along with an official letter of introduction.

The bidders are required to submit stamped and sealed envelopes containing their offers latest by 13:00 on 24.07.2018 to the Tender Secretariat located on the 7th Floor, No. 12, Dr. Fatemi Square, Tehran, Iran. The bid’s envelope will be opened at 14:00 on 24.07.2018 in the presents of the bidder’s representative in GTC’s meeting’s hall. (2th Floor, No. 225, Fatemi Avenue, Tehran-Iran).

Bid bond: bid bond worth **EUR 300,275 (IRR 15,314,020,000)**

Bid bonds may be deposited either cash in Rials or through an unconditional bank guarantee issued in Euros by renowned Iranian bank located in Tehran, with three months validity and extendible for another three months.

For more information, you may refer to our website www.gtc-portal.com or

contact us by Phone No. 00982188957477

(Foreign Trade Department)

New Italian economy minister vows to stay in euro, cut debt level

Italy’s government has no intention of leaving the euro and plans to focus on cutting debt levels, looking to boost growth through investment and structural reforms rather than deficit spending, the new economy minister said.



In his first interview since taking office a week ago, Giovanni Tria told Corriere della Sera newspaper that he aimed to meet existing debt targets for 2018 and 2019, adding that Italy’s debt commitments were fully sustainable.

“Our goal is (to lift) growth and employment. But we do not plan on reviving growth through deficit spending,” Tria said, adding that he would present new economic forecasts and government goals in September.

“These will be fully coherent with the objective of continuing on the path of lowering the debt/GDP ratio,” he said.

(Source: CNBC)

OPEC haves can overpower the have-nots in Vienna

OPEC and its friends can be divided up in many ways, but the most useful in the current environment is the “haves” and the “have nots.”

The first group consists of Russia, Saudi Arabia and the other countries of the Arabian Peninsula, who have the spare capacity to raise production if they wish. The rest fall into the other camp, with little, or no, ability to raise production.

■ To have and have not

Why does this matter? Because Saudi Arabia and Russia are trying to assemble support for lifting the group's output. They will likely find some allies, but face opposition led by Iran and Venezuela.

This means OPEC's June 22 meeting is likely to be stormy. Both Venezuela and Iran have written to the group urging unity against external sanctions, citing Article 2 of its statute, something I identified last week as potentially driving negotiations. Their move is unlikely to sway Saudi Arabia, which is facing growing U.S. pressure for a million-barrel-a-day increase in supply, or Russia, where the oil industry is urging restraint to be eased.

If anything gets agreed at all it may simply be to maintain the current deal on paper while committing to ensure adequate supply to the market – that would be vague enough to cover just about any eventuality without directly addressing any of them.

OPEC is already forecasting a big global oil deficit for the second half of 2018. This assumes that the group continues to produce



as much oil as it did last month. But if supply from Venezuela and Iran falls that deficit will get even bigger. Though Russia and the Arabian Peninsula should be able to make up the shortfall, doing so would undoubtedly stoke tensions in the Middle East and simultaneously reduce the spare capacity available to counter any further disruption to supply.

Venezuela's output will fall further in the coming months. While President Nicolas Maduro declares the country could boost output if OPEC relaxes output cuts, the truth is that output is well below the target level it agreed in 2016 and the state oil company may be considering a declaration of force

majeure on some of its oil supply contracts this month, according to Argus. The International Energy Agency said capacity could fall by several hundred thousand barrels a day by the end of the year.

Venezuela's oil output could fall by another 280,000 barrels a day by the time sanctions on Iran come into force.

There is still no clarity from U.S. authorities on how much buyers must cut their purchases of Iranian crude in order to secure waivers from sanctions. While they are maintaining volumes for now, refiners in Europe appear to be taking a cautious approach for the future.

■ **How much extra will the “Haves” need to produce just to keep things**

steady?

Russia, Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Arabian Peninsula would need to boost their output by 875,000 barrels a day over the next six months just to offset expected declines from Iran and Venezuela and prevent the anticipated second-half shortfall from getting any bigger. If President Trump demands bigger cuts to purchases of Iranian oil, that volume would increase.

That is not an impossible task. Russia's Rosneft has been testing capacity to bring new production into use and believes it can add 100,000 barrels “in just a few days,” according to analysts at Aton LLC. Gazprom PJSC's oil unit estimates the country has about 500,000 barrels a day of spare production capacity. Saudi Arabia says it has around 1.5 million barrels a day of spare capacity that could be brought into operation within 90 days – but it has never tried to sustain production at that level.

In the end, the “Have-nots” may be powerless to prevent Saudi Arabia and Russia from raising production without them. But doing so would undoubtedly stoke tensions in the Middle East and simultaneously reduce the spare capacity available to counter any disruption to supply.

An acrimonious OPEC meeting that breaks up without agreement may initially send the bearish price signal of an output boost from the “Haves.” But the bigger problems that would ultimately ensue would prove bullish as the Iranian sanctions deadline approaches.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Pope warns energy bosses of global destruction without fuel shift

Pope Francis warned that climate change risked destroying humanity on Saturday and called on energy leaders to help the world to convert to clean fuels to avert catastrophe.

“Civilization requires energy but energy use must not destroy civilization,” the pope told top oil company executives at the end of a two-day conference in the Vatican.

Climate change was a challenge of “epochal proportions”, he said, adding that the world needed an energy mix that combated pollution, eliminated poverty and promoted

social justice.

The conference, held behind closed doors at the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, brought together oil executives, investors and Vatican experts who, like the pope, back scientific opinion that climate change is caused by human activity.

“We know that the challenges facing us are interconnected. If we are to eliminate poverty and hunger ... the more than one billion people without electricity today need to gain access to it,” the pope told them.

“Our desire to ensure energy for all must not lead to the undesired effect of a spiral of extreme climate changes due to a catastrophic rise in global temperatures, harsher environments and increased levels of poverty,” he said.

The oil and gas industry has come under growing pressure from investors and activists to play a bigger role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions to meet goals set out in a 2015 climate agreement signed in Paris.

Companies are betting on increased de-

mand for gas, the least polluting fossil fuel, and to a lesser extent on renewable power such as wind and solar to meet global targets of net zero emissions by the end of the century.

Among the some 50 participants were Darren Woods, CEO of ExxonMobil, Claudio Descalzi, head of Italy's ENI, Bob Dudley of BP, Eldar Saetre, CEO of Norwegian oil firm Equinor (formerly called Statoil), Vicki Holub of Occidental Petroleum, and investors including Larry Fink of BlackRock.

(Source: Reuters)

Russia's Gazprom Neft readies for oil output hike as global deal seen easing

Gazprom Neft, the fastest-growing Russian oil major in terms of output, is ready to hike crude production if the global deal on output cuts is eased, company head Alexander Dyukov told reporters on Saturday.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and other leading oil producers including Russia have agreed to cut their combined output by 1.8 million barrels per day in order to smooth out global oil stockpiles and support oil prices.

The OPEC and non-OPEC ministers will meet in Vienna on June 22-23 to discuss the future of the deal, which is valid until the end of the year. Russia and OPEC leader Saudi Arabia have signaled there could be a need to gradually boost production to prevent any supply shortages.

“It is obvious now that the (production) quotas should be revised, the quotas should be increased, this will be beneficial both for producers and consumers,” Dyukov said after an annual general meeting.

He added that the company would be able to hike its oil production by 5,000 tons per day (36,650 barrels per day) if the restrictions are scrapped.

“We believe that the time has come that it makes sense to keep the deal in place but be more flexible on quotas,” Dyukov said.

He also said that if the deal is kept in place, Gazprom Neft's oil production will be stable, at 62.3 million tons (1.25 million bpd) this year.

(Source: Reuters)

China May crude oil imports ease from record as refiners curb operations

China's May crude oil imports eased away from record highs hit the month before, customs data showed, with state-run refineries entering planned maintenance and some independent plants told to curb operations ahead of a summit at a key port city.

May shipments were 39.05 million tons, or 9.2 million barrels per day (bpd), according to data released on Friday by the General Administration of Customs. That compared to 9.6 million bpd in April and 8.76 million bpd in May, 2017.

Imports for the first five months of 2018 were 190 million tons, customs said, without giving a comparison. Based on last year's figures, the year-to-date levels represent an increase of 7.8 percent over a year earlier.

Sinopec Shanghai Petrochemical, Sinopec Yangzi and PetroChina's Dalian and Jilin were scheduled for regular major repair works between April and May.

At least five independent plants in the eastern province of Shandong have been ordered to cut operating rates as Beijing aims for blue skies for a regional summit in the port city of Qingdao in June.

(Source: Reuters)

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AVENGER BANDIT

A failed Trump-Kim summit would be a catastrophe

By Dr. Ira Helfand

Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un are due to meet Tuesday in Singapore. President Trump impulsively agreed to the summit, has already canceled once, and has entered into these negotiations without any advance planning or apparent strategy for achieving success.

The summit may well end without major progress towards the elimination of nuclear weapons in Korea. But whatever the outcome, the summit must be seen as an early step in a complicated negotiation, and the diplomatic process must continue.

Unfortunately, some in the administration clearly see the summit not as a step towards peace but as a prelude to, possibly even a pretext for, war.



National Security Adviser John Bolton has grudgingly welcomed the summit because it will “foreshorten the amount of time that we’re going to waste in negotiations that will never produce the result we want.” In an interview last fall, Bolton argued that “more diplomacy with North Korea, more sanctions ... is just giving North Korea more time to increase its nuclear arsenal.”

So, what would happen if the United States were to abandon diplomacy and sanctions and instead pursue a military option?

The specific war plans of North Korea and the United States are not, of course, publicly available. But everything we know suggests that any military conflict would be a disaster on an epic scale.

Some 25 million people live in the Seoul metropolitan area, within range of the massive North Korean artillery batteries just north of the border. Casualties in the first days of a conventional artillery attack on Seoul could exceed 100,000, according to some estimates.

If nuclear weapons were used, the outcome would be even more catastrophic. A North Korean attack on Seoul involving a single, 20-kiloton weapon could kill about 100,000 people and injure nearly half a million, according to a model by Alex Wellerstein, a professor at the Stevens Institute of Technology in New Jersey.

If the North Koreans were able to deliver a 240-kiloton bomb -- the strength of the largest weapon they have tested so far -- that single bomb could kill more than 600,000 people and injured more than 2 1/2 million.

A U.S. nuclear attack on North Korea designed to “guarantee” the elimination of the North’s nuclear and missile programs would probably involve 30 or more weapons set to explode at ground level. The resulting clouds of radioactive fallout would envelop much of North Korea and heavily populated areas of South Korea, killing more than 780,000 people and injuring a million more, the model projects.

With the use of nuclear weapons, we would breach a firewall that the world has worked desperately to maintain since Nagasaki, and we have no idea what lies on the other side. Could such a war be contained? Do the North Koreans have the ability to deliver nuclear weapons to targets in the United States? Would China and Russia be drawn into the fighting? We simply do not know.

But we do know that whatever happens at the summit in Singapore, we must make sure that diplomacy is not abandoned because there is no acceptable military solution to this crisis.

We must learn from this dangerous situation and act to lessen the danger of nuclear war, both in Korea today and in future crises.

The current standoff has drawn attention to a particularly dangerous aspect of U.S. nuclear policy that must be changed. Currently, the president of the United States has the unchecked authority to launch nuclear war. Despite the Constitution’s clear provision that only Congress can declare war, a presidential order to use nuclear weapons does not require congressional, or even cabinet, approval.

Congressman Ted Lieu and Sen. Ed Markey, both Democrats, have introduced important legislation to provide a critically needed check by requiring the president to get congressional authorization to initiate the use of nuclear weapons unless the country is under attack.

Congress should pass this legislation now.

But the United States needs to go further. We need to recognize that the danger posed by the continued existence of nuclear weapons is the greatest threat to our national security and to the survival of humanity.

The United States currently plans to spend some \$1.7 trillion over the next 30 years to maintain and enhance its nuclear arsenal. We should instead be working for the security of a world free of these weapons.

A large coalition of civic and religious organizations, professional societies, and city and local governments has endorsed a platform of five common-sense policies that the United States should pursue, including the legislation to restrict presidential authority to launch nuclear weapons. “Back from the Brink: A Call to Prevent Nuclear War” also calls on the United States to adopt a policy of no first use of nuclear weapons, to take its nuclear weapons off hair-trigger alert, and to stop the \$1.7-trillion plan to enhance every aspect of its nuclear forces.

Most importantly, it calls on the United States to pursue negotiations among all nine nuclear weapons states for a verifiable, enforceable, time-bound agreement to eliminate their nuclear weapons.

We cannot know if such negotiations will be successful. But we do know what will happen if they fail and nuclear weapons are used: an unprecedented catastrophe.

(Source: CNN)

Trump’s blasts upend G-7, alienating oldest allies



Trump’s view of the world, and his country’s oldest and most important partners, is so infused by suspicion and grievance that he could not resist his pugilistic impulses even for a day.

abroad as a badge of honor, proof that he is representing the best interests of the United States. Supporters cheer his aggressive posture on the world stage.

Trump had already made clear before the Group of 7 summit that he had no intention of reconsidering his position on climate change or Iran. And he refused to ease steel and aluminum tariffs he just imposed on Europe and Canada, arguing that the allies have been dealing with the United States unfairly.

“There are disagreements,” Larry Kudlow, the director of Trump’s National Economic Council, conceded at one point during the summit meeting. “My view? We can get through this.”

No one got through it this weekend, however. Trump signaled his disdain for the Group of 7 meeting by arriving late and leaving early. During closed-door meetings on Friday, he went around the room, citing ways each of the other nations represented there had mistreated the United States in some fashion or another, according to a European official.

Just hours before Trump’s outburst, a senior administration official said the meetings had been less contentious than depicted and that the session with Trudeau in particular

had been much better than anticipated. The official, who insisted on anonymity to describe closed-door discussions, predicted the United States would sign the final communiqué.

But Trump, while en route to Singapore, evidently watched or was briefed on a news conference Trudeau held afterward and was offended by the Canadian’s defense of his country’s trade policies.

Even before then, Trump had left himself the outlier in the annual session. By departing before the end, he skipped sessions about climate change, oceans and clean energy — ceding not only America’s leadership on those topics, but also its very seat at the table.

Trump was at odds not only with America’s allies but also with many in his own administration. Even as he was clashing with European leaders on Friday about a Russian return to the Group of 7, his director of national intelligence was giving a speech in France condemning Moscow’s malign behavior and warning against allowing it to divide the allies.

“As Trump’s America is increasingly isolated and viewed as a rogue actor, the Kremlin is again preying upon ‘economic openness’ to buy silence for their crimes in Ukraine, Syria, and beyond, even as they attack our societies,” Ms. McKew said.

That may be true in the long run. But for now, Mr. Trump’s actions have united allies against the United States — not just because of policy but because of a personal style that has confounded and sometimes infuriated his counterparts, who never know quite what to expect.

“On a Monday, you could be his best friend, on Tuesday his worst enemy, and by Friday, you’re golf buddies again,” said Mark Dubowitz, the chief executive officer of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

The Group of 7 nations struggled to reach consensus for a joint statement that Mr. Trump could sign. The American delegation objected to including the standard phrase “rules-based international order” only to back down in the final talks. But the negotiations were for naught after Trump balked at signing.

“The G-7 should be our preferred venue to unify the free world to compete with and counter authoritarian kleptocracies,” said Damon Wilson, a former national security aide to President George W. Bush and now vice president of the Atlantic Council, which advocates trans-Atlantic cooperation. “Rather than prepare for that real battle, we’re distracted in a family dispute.”

(Source: The NYT)

SCO: From common security to shared prosperity

By Wang Shanshan

Eighteen marks the beginning of adulthood. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit, the 18th of its kind, has been marching into maturity, making the ongoing session in east China’s coastal city of Qingdao a milestone for the mechanism.

Being historic in a sense that the Qingdao session has made several records.

Bigger than ever. It is the first summit after India and Pakistan being accepted into the SCO in 2017, making the organization the world’s largest trans-regional organization.

Closer than ever. One example is that China’s trade with other SCO members totaled 217.6 billion U.S. dollars in 2017, up 20.7 percent year-on-year, higher than the 19 percent annual growth last year.

Thriving than ever. In the past year when China took up the rotating chair of SCO, more than 200 activities in political, financial, trade, security, environmental, agricultural and other fields have been carried out, among which, forums for women, political parties, cultural and art organizations and hospital cooperation were held for the first time. Just to name a few.

All these lead to the SCO putting forward the concept of building an “SCO community with a shared future,” announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping at the summit on Sunday. The notion represents an integral part of the concept “building a community with shared future for mankind” initiated by China.

The vision for a “community of shared future,” China’s vision of a better world order, features openness, inclusiveness, multi-polarity, globalization, cultural diversity, interdependence, common security and prosperity, and a clean world of lasting peace.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has made clear China’s commitment at many international occasions. In February 2017, “the community of shared future for mankind” was incorporated into a UN resolution for the first time, representing a world consensus to build a benefit-all future of peace, development, partnership and multilateralism.

More have come to agree and join in the efforts towards building a better future. An editorial published by the website The Diplomat says, “China’s vision is based on three pillars: cooperative security, common development and political inclusiveness.”

“In this new round of changes, it is important not only to carry on the traditional framework but also to modernize the existing order and systems by developing concepts using the latest trends, while ensuring the changes are not only attractive to all but are practical, viable, and resilient.”



An editorial published by the website The Diplomat says, “China’s vision is based on three pillars: cooperative security, common development and political inclusiveness.”

“Therefore, we may need to go beyond the traditional notions of security and grow out of the zero-sum mentality of the Cold War and pursue cooperative security through collaboration for the sake of long term world cooperation, stability and peace.”

To build an “SCO community with a shared future” is a solid step of the organization in dealing with world challenges, which is particularly pertinent amid the current international situations. It’s fair to say the year of 2018 is earmarked as the “Year of Tension.”

Though it’s still halfway through, the world has seen punishments, sanctions, ultimatums, rejections, standoffs... overshadowing the world with uncertainty and anxiety.

The world is searching for ways to play down uncertainty, ease anxiety and jointly tackle challenges.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization might serve as an example of how inter-state relations could go well. Starting from a regional bloc to fight against three “evil forces” of terrorism, extremism and separatism, besides drug trafficking and cyber crimes, the SCO has helped make

the region safer, more integrated and better prepared in the face of security threats.

It is entering into a new era of multilateral cooperation in many areas, including trade, energy, education, tourism and others, towards common development and lasting prosperity.

The SCO observes the principles of the “Shanghai Spirit,” the bedrock of cooperation, featuring mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, consultation, respect for diverse civilizations and pursuit of common development. The principles have been translated into actions, yielding concrete results, escorting the smooth sail of the organization.

Facts have proven that countries with different political systems, economic patterns or social values could cooperate under one umbrella, working for one purpose.

The SCO has provided a model for a new form of international relations, in which win-win cooperation is attainable. Hopefully the success of the practice of the SCO will help some countries think twice and act wisely.

(Source: CGTN)

Reflections on Quds Day: After 12 years has anything really changed?

➔ It was tempting to view George W. Bush as an aberration. After all, it seemed that a large segment of the American populace had been outraged by Bush's power grab in 2000 by means of legal maneuvering as well as his illegal, unilateral and unjustified invasion of Iraq. But then that fantasy crumbled with his re-election in 2004. By that time, I had made a solemn oath to do whatever I could to prevent the same fate from happening to Iran. To that end, I got in touch with the late Hamid Golpira, who was the editor at Tehran Times then, and he worked with me to polish my articles until finally, "Unbalanced U.S. policy on Palestine" was published. I felt like I had struck a blow for justice and peace in the Middle East.

Next came Barack Hussein Obama, but not until Bush and his neocon confederates had backed the Zionist regime in another war on Hezbollah and the Lebanese people. During the 2006 "War of Tammuz," the Lebanese resistance movement managed to crack the façade of Israeli invincibility, altering to the present the calculus of power in the region. Obama began with a disappointing show of silence, when the Israeli regime once again took to bombing Gaza with U.S. backing in December of 2008, shortly after his election that November. Once again, I found myself writing and taking to the streets in protest, marching with a Palestinian flag in front of the capital building in Denver, Colorado in the frigid December weather. Predictably, Bush supported the Tel Aviv regime, by then under Ehud Olmert, who insisted that the Israeli entity was in an "all-out war against Hamas and its proxies in Gaza." For his part, Bush showed no mercy to the besieged Gazans, and, referring to members of Hamas, said, "These people are nothing but thugs."

Obama, while an eloquent, mesmerizing speaker, did little to help the poor and oppressed in the U.S. much less the beleaguered Palestinians. By July of 2008 months before the November U.S. presidential elections from which he emerged the victor, Obama the candidate was receiving the financial backing of Goldman Sachs, Citigroup, JP Morgan Chase and other Wall Street notables. Meanwhile, foreclosure rates were skyrocketing, and, in particular, for subprime mortgages, over 50% were in default. So, what did Barack "The Audacity of Hope" Obama do? He organized a bailout package for his Wall Street backers, whose unbri dled greed urged them on to take irrational risks resulting in a narrowly-averted worldwide financial collapse, while those who lost their homes were left out in the cold, many of them literally.

And, of course in 2009, the Nobel Peace prize winner escalated hostilities in Afghanistan with his "surge," the idea for which he copied from Bush. At the time, I predicted that "the cascade of instabilities—political instability, economic collapse, and accelerating global climate change—will cause a tsunami of devastation, exceeding that of the current U.S. oil wars." Even so, I don't think I envisioned the scope of that devastation, which now has expanded to include Gaza, Libya, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen, just to name a few.

Somewhere in the summer of 2009, I began to realize that there were disturbingly clear parallels between what the Zionists were doing to the indigenous Palestinians with their colonization of Palestine and what the American settlers had done to the First Nations with their colonization of North America. An expression of this realization



appeared in an article titled "Parallels in Palestine," in which I explained how the early Anglo-European colonizers used exactly the same methods of justifying violence against the Native Peoples as do the Zionist leaders in their ethnic cleansing operations against Palestinians. The current situation in the Occupied West Bank, with the widespread intrusion of settlers of European descent, is virtually identical to that which prevailed in North America in the 1700s onward.

As time went on, the Zionist regime maintained their iron grip on the throat of Gaza, whose citizens maintained their steadfast resistance under the most trying of conditions. U.S.-supplied Israeli warplanes targeted power plants, schools and hospitals, causing a humanitarian crisis. By May of 2010, Gaza had become a huge, open-air prison whose inmates were in dire need of humanitarian relief, when the Turkish charity IHH sent a flotilla of ships in an effort to break the Israeli stranglehold. The Zionists responded to the Gaza Freedom Flotilla by unleashing a brutal commando attack on the ship Mavi Marmara while it was still in international waters, killing nine peace activists on board.

A year later in summer of 2011, another flotilla was attempted but then secretary of state Hillary Clinton gave a green light for a repetition of the initial bloodbath. As a result, the "Freedom Flotilla II" never set sail, except for one French ship, "Dignité Al Karama," which was again intercepted and prevented from delivering its cargo of humanitarian aid to Gaza. In 2015, the idea was revived with the "Freedom Flotilla III," but once again, the sole ship, a

Swedish-flagged vessel named "Marianne," was boarded and seized while in international waters by the Israeli navy.

The current criminal Washington regime has made its best efforts to squelch any hope of reaching a just solution in Palestine. What else can one call the current occupant of the Oval Office and his cruel collaborators except criminals for their blatant and repeated violation of international law? There is almost universal agreement that Trump's decision to place the embassy in Jerusalem/Al Quds is in violation of UN resolutions 181, 242, 303 and many others.

I was invited to an iftar for Gaza at a Sunni mosque; the same mosque I once attended for Friday prayers in winter when I happened to be wearing a jacket sporting a flag of Iran. Someone asked how I could wear the flag of such an "evil country" on my jacket. Later, a board member apologized for the incident, but what colossal irony. There is no nation on the face of the earth that supports the Palestinian cause more than the Islamic Republic of Iran, and yet I was ostracized for wearing the flag of that country! And it is precisely for the unwavering support of the Palestinian cause that Washington and Tel Aviv are out to bludgeon Iran into retreat.

Still despite years of valiant efforts by Iran to help the oppressed people of Palestine, their already grave situation continues to deteriorate while the U.S.-condoned, Israeli-executed carnage continues. Considering this as I reflected on the plight of the Palestinians on Quds Day, I asked myself, after 12 years, has anything really changed? I'm afraid not. And what else can I do, write more articles?

Artificial Intelligence could be single greatest danger to human security: Adib-Moghaddam

➔ I have recently extended my research focus in the direction of Artificial Intelligence and its impact on humanity. In my opinion, and I share this view with the late Stephen Hawking, AI could be the single greatest danger to human security, if it is not interrogated and supervised by civil society. Google only recently declined a Pentagon contract that would have added to existing forms of robotic warfare. This is a scary world that we are manoeuvring to. Intellectuals have a duty to assess, and if necessary to resist, the militarisation of AI and the robotization of warfare. In my own research, I see AI as the natural outcome of the scientific determinism embedded in western Enlightenment thought which was always also pregnant with dangers for humanity. The first technology that made the sudden end of humanity possible was the atomic bomb – the second is AI. So I intend to move most of my intellectual resources in this direction now.

■ What is the necessity of writing this book?

A: I don't write my books out of necessity. I write them in order to filter my ideas, understand the subject and to share my conclusions with my readers. Having said that, there is a normative ambition. In my



work about Iran, I have tried to battle against misperceptions about what the country is and what the country is not. As you know: There is a lot of nonsense that has been written about Iran. As a Persian proverb says: Everyone who broke off with their mother is writing about Iran. There is a market out there

which demands "Iran experts." The problem is that many of them are uneducated about the country or they follow an ideological agenda. So university scholarship, as in Europe it is mostly free from politics, remains the main driving force for a truer knowledge about the "other". In today's world is it a great luxury

to think and to write with relative freedom. In Europe, in the UK it is still possible to do so and many of us within academia have tried to stem the tide of anti-Iranian agitation beyond the university. I feel that I have contributed enough to that endeavour. It is time to let this research rest.

I am not entering a second phase in my interests and research priorities which is why I have started to focus on Artificial Intelligence. I find the topic intellectually challenging, fascinating and slightly disconcerting. For the trends for a new form of warfare which may threaten our security in a way that we can't even fathom at this stage, are already apparent. We shouldn't forget that Oppenheimer started out as a scientist of theoretical astronomy. Initially, nuclear physics was meant to bring about better energy not the Manhattan Project and the atomic bomb. The research into AI, already facilitated and sponsored by the military-industrial complex in a range of countries, is by far more brazen. Within a decade AI will be part of our daily lives and a major factor of the wars all over the world. We are entering a post-human phase of global history. I am very interested in the consequences.

Republican's heavy defeat in California: Alarm for controversial president

➔ The President of the United States is pursuing the November mid-term elections news with concern. Trump has previously stated that Democrats will impeach him if they win the midterm elections. This is what many of the Democrat members in the House of Representatives has confirmed. However, the Minority Leader of the United States House of Representatives «Nancy Pelosi» announced that the Democratic Party has no such intention. She asserted that impeachment would not be a Democratic priority if the party were to retake the House in the midterm elections, and has maintained her opposition to hastily impeaching Donald Trump. Pelosi believes that instead, The White House should be restrained. Analysts expect that his controversy is going to lead to a split between Democrats in near future.

Many of the U.S. affairs experts believe that Democrats don't have to move a heavy rock for winning the midterm elections and winning the majority of seats in the Congress. However, it seems that Democrats don't have the power to win the «absolute majority» of the Senate! Out of the 33 Senate seats, 25 seats now belong to Democratic and Independent Senators, while only 8 seats are currently held by the Republicans. In other words, even if Democrats could win the rest of the Senate seats which are to be voted for, and take eight other seats that now belong to Republicans, they will eventually hold 57 seats, but this amount of seats is not enough to impeach Trump.

However, some analysts believe that if the Democrats win the Republicans in the Senate, the «the front of Republican critics of Trump» would be formed in the U.S. Congress. In

this case, we will witness the company of some traditional Republicans with the Democrats in the process of opposing the decisions of the Donald Trump. It should be noted that Senators like Jeff Flake, Rand Paul and several other senators are now among the Republican opponents of Trump.

On the other hand, some Republican Senators are prepared to start the process of «dropping Trump out» in the event of the Party's failure in the congress elections. They know well that the defeat of Trump and his government in the mid-term elections is an introduction to their failure in the 2020 presidential election. It is not without a reason that the traditional Republicans and some of the Party's leaders believe that after the mid-term elections, there will be no reason for supporting Trump in the upcoming presidential elections.

What does Saudi Arabia want from Lebanon?



By Ramin Hossein Abadian

TEHRAN — Al Akhbar, a daily Arabic language newspaper, announced the imminent visit of Sa'd al-Hariri, the Lebanese prime minister to Riyadh. The trip was set for earlier time, but was postponed for unspecified reasons. Riyadh's Saudi charge d'affair Wahid al-Bukhari was in Lebanon the other day, but it remains unclear whether his trip has anything to do with Hariri's.

Al-Akhbar also wrote that Hariri is scheduled to form the upcoming cabinet of Lebanon, and it is not clear whether his trip to Riyadh would make the task any more difficult or easier. The newspaper also reported that Hariri's meeting with the Saudi Royal Court has been finalized, and it remains unknown whether the trip would involve Hariri's meeting with senior Riyadh officials like bin Salman.

What is puzzling here is the timing of Sa'd al-Hariri's traveling to Saudi Arabia. Considering Hariri's mission to form Lebanon's future cabinet, it is feared that Riyadh again plans to intervene in Lebanon's internal affairs and issue instructions on how Hariri's cabinet should be lined up. The public still remembers Saudis' malicious efforts that threw Michel Aoun out of Lebanon's presidential nomination and replaced Samir Farid Geagea, from the March 14 Alliance for the position.

Obviously, these interventions will continue until the formation of the Lebanese cabinet and the next presidential election which they hope to secure a place for Saad al-Hariri and the March 14 Alliance.

Lebanon's Foreign Minister Gibran Bassil had also referred to the involvement of Saudi ambassador Waleed Al-Yaqub on Lebanon's parliamentary elections and warned those in diplomatic career to know their limits and avoid interfering in Lebanon's internal affairs. In addition, the Al-Akhbar newspaper in a report also quoted Arab diplomats confirming Saudi Arabia's effort to influence Lebanon's elections with the goal of integrating the March 14 Alliance.

The newspaper also reported the imminent travel of a top Saudi delegation to Lebanon. They are scheduled to hold meeting with Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri, in order to prioritize his March 14 Alliance as well as a meeting with senior party Lebanese Forces, led by Samir Farid Geagea.

Another point here is the issue of the guaranteed victory of Lebanese Hezbollah and resistance in the latest parliamentary elections in the country, a problem that has deeply worried Saudis. Therefore, they are in such a situation seeking the most exploitation of their influence in Lebanon, including al-Hariri, to hit the resistance and overshadow its decisive victory. Hariri's impending journey to Riyadh is also around that topic.

The Saudis know well that the victory of Lebanon's Hezbollah and resistance group in the parliamentary elections is just one important and strategic message that the Lebanese people who are not affected by the participation of Hezbollah's military forces in trans-boundary wars, especially in Syria. They support Hezbollah and its military presence beyond the borders of Lebanon.

Saudi officials also know that Lebanese acceptance of Hezbollah means accepting Hezbollah's policy in confronting the Zionist regime. These are the same messages that Riyadh officials have received from the results of the Lebanese elections. Therefore, al-Hariri is the element that has always proved his dedication to the Saudis and is considered the best Lebanese figure Riyadh can count on.

Saudi Arabia and its allies have also recently banned Lebanese Hezbollah. This happened after the United States imposed economic sanctions on a number of Hezbollah senior officials. In fact, calling Saad al-Hariri to Riyadh at this time and on the eve of the formation of the cabinet is a piece of the same puzzle that confronts Lebanese Hezbollah and is part of the Hezbollah sanctions project.

One of the main goals of announcing the sanctions list against Hezbollah by the Saudis, a short while prior to the victory of the resistance in the Lebanese parliamentary elections, was the deviation of public opinion from this great victory. The Saudis tried to convey the message to the Lebanese people that the continuation of support for Hezbollah was not a good option, and did not result in the isolation of Lebanon from the Arab and international community, while distracting the public from the great achievement of the resistance.

Another purpose of Riyadh to engage in hostile sanctions against Hezbollah is to influence the process of forming a future government in Lebanon, which is due soon. What the Saudis want from the Lebanese future government is to respect the interests of Riyadh.

The Saudis have warned Hezbollah with imposed sanctions that it should also focus on the benefits of building a new government. The warning is that the election results clearly indicate that Hezbollah can establish a cabinet in line with its own approaches, especially in foreign policy, due to its decisive victory during the parliamentary elections. According to the above, it is by no means possible to consider two issues of "sanctions on Hezbollah" and "calling Hariri to Riyadh" by the Saudis as separate and unrelated issues.

In any case, as it seems, Saad al-Hariri has neither learned from the failure of the Lebanese parliamentary election, nor from the bitter experience of arrest in Saudi Arabia, an incident confirmed by the French President Emanuel Macron. In an interview with the BFM network, Macron pointed to this fact. However, Saad al-Hariri continues to be influenced by the indoctrination of the House of Saud who has no mercy on him or his political activities in Lebanon.

Undoubtedly, with the victory of Lebanon's Hezbollah and Lebanese parliamentary election resistance, the political equation in the country has changed completely, and the Saudis can no longer dictate their demands on their subordinate element, Saad al-Hariri, and change the political developments in Lebanon in their favor. Therefore, the conditions prevailing today in Lebanon are very different from what we witnessed before the parliamentary elections, and this is something that has been neglected by the Saudi authorities.

Democrats don't know anything about guns

By John Vrolyk

I am a Marine veteran, an infantry officer who carried an M4 in a combat zone. I am also a Democrat from San Francisco, who lived in New York, and believes in gun control. And as mass shooting follows shooting, I am frustrated by the paralysis on gun control. I am frustrated by the National Rifle Association (NRA), by hollow 'thoughts and prayers,' and by moments of silence. Yet as a Democrat, I am also deeply frustrated by my party's approach to guns. My party's positions are ineffective, unlikely to achieve policy changes, and politically short-sighted because they are fundamentally illogical.

I did not grow up with guns — except for Boy Scout camp. I'd hardly touched a gun until the Marines. Like most people from coastal cities, I found guns scary and off-putting, and wondered why, even given the right, anyone but the military or police would ever own guns.

Fundamentally, I maintained the irrational belief that guns somehow just go off and hurt people — all by themselves. I used to think of gun control — and especially measures aimed at seemingly military 'assault rifles' — as such an obvious public good that I couldn't help but see opponents as being intentionally perverse.

Three years and thousands of rounds later, I was in a sandbagged bunker in northern Syria. Between posts we spent our hours talking, about everything from Beyoncé to post-deployment plans. At the uncomfortable end of the 'pointy end of the spear,' we also talked a lot about politics.

It isn't surprising that Marines lean conservative. The military is a conservative place, from its focus on honor and patriotism to its haircut regulations. I expected the Marines from traditionally "red" states, who had pickups and parents in oil and gas, to vote for Trump. But the Marines

whose parents were undocumented immigrants, whose pre-military insurance was Obamacare, who hoped for financial aid for college so they could transfer their G.I. Bill to their children? They all leaned right, too.

Gun control. Not because my Marines were die-hard Second Amendment types, the type the Democrats can't and shouldn't court. But because, as infantrymen, we lived and breathed guns, because our lives depended on them. We attended schools on their functioning, maintenance, safe operation, and employment. We trained for months to develop the proficiency and confidence to fire machine guns in support of our friends, our rounds impacting just 50 meters in front of our fellow Marines.

My Marines were Republicans because on the issue they are true experts, the Democratic position just doesn't make sense. Logical gun control would consider weapons based on how they function, how deadly they

are, and how they could be used to commit mass murder. This is not the approach the Democratic Party has taken. Instead, Democrats have pursued measures to control weapons based on how they look.

Gun violence sweeping in U.S.

The intent isn't bad — we want to stem the tide of gun violence sweeping across America. It's a necessary and noble goal. The prevalence of mass shootings in America, especially those targeting schools and children, is a horrifying trend. Gun control is part of the answer.

However, in doing so, we have attempted to distinguish between murderous 'assault weapons' and 'reasonable weapons' owned by recreational gun owners and hunters. The Assault Weapons Ban of 1994 was such an attempt. It identified features to classify a rifle as an "assault weapon" — not one of which has anything to do with the weapon's function. Two are ergonomic (adjustable stocks

and pistol grips), one is irrelevant (bayonet lug), one is insignificant (flash suppressors), and one is already regulated (grenade launchers).

The M4s carried by my Marines in Syria had all of these features. If they had been modified to be compliant with the ban — with fixed length stocks, traditional trigger grips, no bayonet lugs, no flash suppressors, and no under barrel grenade launchers — we would have been, while slightly less comfortable using the weapons, no less deadly.

Looking domestically, the mass shootings with 'assault weapons' that rocked our country could just as easily have been committed with ban-compliant weapons.

There are obvious improvements—requiring universal background checks and making bump stocks as illegal as fully automatic sears. Most Americans agree on these reforms, and they should be enacted into law. ➔13

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Iran plans to use biotechnology to address SDSs at Hamoun wetland

TECHNOLOGY **TEHRAN** — The threat of sand and dust storms (SDSs) at Hamoun wetland can turn into an opportunity through science and technology solutions, said Mohammad Ali Latifi, the head of biotechnology headquarters at science and technology vice presidency.



Latifi made the remarks during a meeting with an expert team mulling over sand and dust storms at Hamoun wetland on Saturday in the southeastern city of Zabol, Tasnim reported. Conducting surveys in universities to respond to this predicament is very important, he said, adding that the elite should join hands to mitigate the problem of sand and dust storms using the national and international experiences.

He further suggested establishment of an executive committee to resolve the problem of sand and dust storms in the country. The Hamouns are transboundary wetlands on the Iran-Afghan border made up of three lakes: Hamoun-e Helmand, which is entirely in Iran, Hamoun-e Sabari on the border, and Hamoun-e Puzak, almost entirely inside Afghanistan. The three lakes are linked and fed by water from the Helmand River which starts in the Hindu Kush Mountains in Afghanistan.

When droughts occur in Afghanistan, or the water in watersheds that support lake is drawn down by other natural or human-induced reasons, the end result is a dry lake bed in Iran. In addition, when the lake is dry, seasonal winds blow fine sands off the exposed lake bed and give rise to crippling sand and dust storm in eastern and southeastern parts of Iran.

The sand is swirled into huge dunes that may cover a hundred or more fishing villages along the former lake shore. Wildlife around the lake is negatively impacted and fisheries are brought to a halt. Changes in water policies and substantial rains in the region hope to affect a return of much of the water in Hamouns. However, for the past few years the wetlands condition has only gotten worse.

Academic surveys will be very effectual to solve the problem hence University of Zabol should focus on this issue, he said. He also highlights the important role of elites in finding solution according to international models.

According to the Atlantic Council (an American think tank in the field of international affairs) disputes over water between Iran and Afghanistan date back to the 1870s when Afghanistan was under British control.

In an exclusive interview with the Tehran Times published in October 2017, Afghanistan's Ambassador to Iran Nasir Ahmad Nour explained that Afghanistan has always adhered to the agreements stating the water right of the two countries. The ambassador also stated that all these times the water have been flowing into Iran and the fact that Hamoun is still dry has nothing to do with Afghanistan and Iran must look into the problem and find the reasons for the lake dryness inside the country.

Hackers in India help keep the internet safe

George, 20, is what is known as a “white hat” hacker — someone who helps companies test their security systems to guard against intrusions from hackers with more nefarious motives. Over the past year, he has privately submitted 70 software bugs through so-called bug bounty programs, which offer cash rewards for each flaw found.

George is one of an increasing number of young, self-taught hackers in India who are making thousands of dollars through bug bounty programs, often more than they could make in a traditional 9-to-5 job.

Cybersecurity is already big business. Companies are projected to spend \$96 billion on digital safeguards in 2018, according to the market research firm Gartner. Bug bounty programs, also called vulnerability rewards programs, are just one part of that industry, but it is one that offers the opportunity for individuals to hone their skills and make money.

Most major tech companies have their own bounty programs and have paid millions of dollars to ethical “white hat” hackers. Google recently awarded a teenager in Uruguay \$36,000 for finding a bug.

Hackers can operate from anywhere in the world, with a majority of payouts being made in the U.S., according to a new report from Bugcrowd, a bug bounty platform used by MasterCard, Western Union, Twilio and dozens of other companies.

The U.S. may have the most participants in bounty programs, but hackers in India are submitting the most vulnerabilities, accounting for 30 percent of the submissions Bugcrowd reviewed last year, according to the report. That indicates that Indian hackers are finding the smaller bugs that are often missed by their American counterparts.

“India is a country that is full of very smart, driven people,” said Casey Ellis, chief technology officer and founder of Bugcrowd. “There’s an opportunity to make money, and for the folks who are there and think like hackers, they can engage pretty quickly and see a reward.”

Whether in India or around the world, Ellis said bug bounty programs are continuing to grow, largely based on the appeal of security-minded people who can “think like a criminal, but have no desire to be one.”

Pranav Hivarekar, 24, who lives in the western state of Maharashtra, hunts bugs full time.

“I tried for eight months without any bugs,” Hivarekar said in an email. “Then I read ‘Web App Hacker’s Handbook,’ then made my way into bug bounties.”

He’s scored sizable payouts for some of the bugs he’s found this year, from companies such as Facebook and Snapchat.

Both companies run bug bounty programs that reward ethical hackers. Facebook runs its program in-house, while Snapchat works with a Bugcrowd competitor, HackerOne.

(Source: nbnews.com)

Islamic startups see untapped religious market in Iran

TECHNOLOGY **TEHRAN** — Startups, as new business models which aim to meet market need, is now mingled with our everyday life.

We have already received several services and products through newly emerging startups.

In Iran, as an Islamic country, religious beliefs and thought is a great part of everyday life of most people.

However services and products related to religious affairs are mainly provided in the market traditionally.

Recently some young entrepreneurs have initiated Islamic startups to see untapped potential of bazaars.

Today, halal food, navigation apps for religious sites, and religious products, are parts of Islamic tourism, which holds a major share of the market.

The head of a religious startup accelerator Mohammad Amin Samimi, and the founder of a religious application, Bijan Lotfi, which promotes Islamic audio and video file discussed their ideas with other entrepreneurs during a meeting held by the Persian language Shanbeh Magazine last week.

There is no exact definition for religious startup in Iran, Samimi said in the meeting, Shanbeh magazine reported.

Personal intent of the startup founder and services and products provided by the startup are two important factors, which define whether a startup is religious or not, he said. Islamic startups should promote religious habits and rituals based on the Holy Quran and hadiths, he explained.

Unfortunately people do not used to pay extra fee for religious services in Iran, they believe that they should be free of charge, Lotfi said.

Our target market is not limited to very religious people, many ordinary people also use our services, he said.

The religious startups aims to promote their belief but that is not all. They also plan to hit the market.

Generally speaking, startups are formed according to demands and religious startup is not an exception, Lotfi said.

“We should consider religious needs and



demands in order to have a market,” he said.

There is already such a market for religious services for example people who wants to go to Hajj pilgrimage or Arba'een Trekking pilgrimage, Samimi said.

He highlighted the financial independence of religious startups as an important factor.

“We do not benefit from any state-run organization and our activity is based on entrepreneurship,” he announced.

Samimi said that there are several untapped potential market in the field of religious services and products in Iran.

Lotfi said that the founder of startups should not be very religious people. All 80 million people can do that.

The Iranian Islamic startups has a long way to go. As discussed, people are not used to pay for religious information and services.

However, Islamic habits and rituals is a great part of everyday life in Iran, which cannot be ignored and technology will have effect on it.

■ Islamic startups booming in Southeast Asia

According to The Low Down website, from halal fashion to food, there is a mushrooming number of Islamic startups in Southeast Asia.

Specifically, these Islamic-related startups in Southeast Asia are coming from Brunei, Singapore, and Malaysia, pandering to the demands of Muslim consumers across the region.

There is a growing number of Muslim technopreneurs today, especially in Southeast Asia region.

It is an indisputable fact that due to globalization, there is an ever-increasing number of people gaining access to the internet.

Cellphone registration scheme was profit-making

TECHNOLOGY **TEHRAN** — Iran’s cellphone registration scheme was a Telecom Infra Project (TIP) of e-government which earned 16 trillion rials (about \$380 million) for the government, Communications and Information Technology Minister announced.

Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi made the remarks during his visit to University of Tehran Technology Park on Sunday, ILNA reported.

Iran performed the long-awaited national scheme to stop growing market for smuggled cellphones in early 2018.

Iran Customs Administration has imposed a 5-percent customs duty on the imports of cellphones and the importers should pay the 9-percent value added tax (VAT).

Those devices which are not registered with the database will be considered contraband and will be rendered unusable in the country.

During his speech, Azari Jahromi pointed to the important role of universities in development of the country.



“Any expenditure on academic affair is considered as an investment, since it returns to society in near future,” he added.

Has technology changed cultural taste?

pioneers] Punchdrunk have turned those conceits on their head. Rather than devaluing the traditional approach, it just shows there is another way of doing it.”

Another significant change is the freeing up of the means of production. It has never been easier to at least attempt to make your creative dreams come true. Shrinking costs have created a wealth of opportunity, but sometimes it’s hard to convey that sense of excitement to those at the top of traditional media industries. One constant thread throughout my own career as a journalist has been the sometimes thankless task of educating print hacks about the possibilities of digital.

Where you see an opportunity, your superiors all too often see a threat. The idea that the audience has gained control of the conversation, or at least has the opportunity to influence it through comments and clicks, is anathema to traditional editors convinced of the superiority of their own curatorial decisions. “But, we’re the experts,” they splutter, while projects such as Guardian Witness empower thousands of users to document real world events in real-time, seamlessly blending the newspaper experience with the digital experience. This is storytelling in the modern age: immersive, engaging and immediate.

The digital audience is more fickle: we have multiple subscriptions to magazines and newspapers; we leave a spray of comments on different websites. But that just means titles have to work harder on getting and keeping readers, with subscriber benefits, content extras and a sense of added value. What’s fascinating is the speed at which digital media insurgents such as Vice – which began as a provocative pop culture magazine and is now famed for

its youth-focused video output with more than 150m monthly users – are becoming part of the media establishment. Vice was named media company of the year at the 2014 British Media Awards, with the judges citing its ability to “disprove the myth that digital content needs to be short-form or throwaway to be successful.”

As the YouTube generation matures, their hunger for hard news is proving just as healthy as that of their pre-internet parents. The only thing to have changed is the method of delivery and the ability of the audience to join the debate. As Vice’s co-founder Shane Smith told The Guardian: “Young people, who are the majority of our audience, are angry, disenfranchised and they don’t like or trust mainstream media outlets. They’re leaving TV in droves, but music and news are the two things that Generation Y in every country are excited about and interested in.”

It’s worth noting that technology has improved access to culture and in doing so, created a broader context. In terms of music – the industry perhaps most transformed by technology – this means that the opportunity for music junkies to indulge their obsessions has never been greater. “When I was growing up, all that was available to me was the local record shop or the odd radio show,” says Penny. “My son has just started university and his attitude to culture is completely different. He has grown up with access to any music he chooses and has an encyclopaedic knowledge. If he finds a band he likes, he will trace all their influences and listen to all those bands too. There is a library of culture that is readily available to young people, which my generation just didn’t have.”

But with this sense of cultural enrich-

The large percentage of internet penetration meant that there is a widening opportunity for emerging businesses to target the internet users within the region. With Brunei emerging as the largest percentage of internet users in the region, it provides ample opportunity for local startups to emerge.

While the internet has proven to be a viable platform for aspiring entrepreneurs to enter the Muslim market, government boards in these countries have played helpful roles in facilitating these businesses. In order to help emerging entrepreneurs to venture into the Muslim market, the Bruneian government has well-established funding bodies such as Rice Bowl Startup Awards to assist the financial needs of a startup across the region.

Apart from supporting Islamic startups with funds, Malaysia endeavors to create an Islamic silicon valley to promote Islamic startups across the region. By revamping parts of Kuala Lumpur into an Islamic silicon valley, Malaysia aims to create an incubator for Islamic business partnership, mentoring for new startups, and increased interaction between Islamic businesses.

With the generous support from local and regional organizations, many Islamic startups managed to gain a foothold in the region. Many of these Islamic startups aim to cater to both Muslim and non-Muslim clientele in the region, offering halal products to the halal advisory for its consumers. One of such is HalalTrip, which mirrors TripAdvisor, providing Halal directory and trip advice for Muslim consumers. It was started in Singapore and now it has branches across the world. Similarly, Islamic startups like Hijup aims to cater stylish and modest outfit to Muslim women and men. Like many startups based in Asia, these startups do not usually have a brick-and-mortar store and are based online. In most cases, orders are shipped from the main headquarters to the consumers.

With the growing number of people gaining access to the internet across the region, it is little wonder why many Islamic startups could develop at a fast speed. As we become more integrated in the years to come, Islamic startup will certainly become a salient field.

He also talked about the impact of digital transformation on the society saying that the first sign of digital transformation appears in economic field, however, it affects social and cultural issues, he said.

Cultural concerns should not make us to object [technological] achievements, which have great impacts on the country, he said.

Then he explained about entrepreneurship plan, which is proposed to the Majlis [Iranian parliament].

The plan is developed by Iran’s Ministry of Communication & Information Technology, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade, Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, State Administrative and Recruitment Organization and science and technology vice presidency.

Establishment of digital economy park is one part of the plan, he said.

“The park provided a space for active companies to be supported in their early stages,” he explained.

ment and depth comes a feeling of information overload and the need to filter out the noise. It’s this that has triggered the rise of the online curator, propelling bloggers and vloggers such as beauty queen Zoella, 24, to internet stardom. With her first book, Girl Online, due out in November and an audience estimated to be 26 times that of the circulation of British Vogue, Zoella is a key example of what the advertising world call a “crowdsourced people’s champion” – one who earns hundreds of thousands of pounds a year and is paid by brands such as Unilever to connect with the ever-elusive 18-30 demographic.

What can cultural organizations and mainstream media learn from these youthful tastemakers? Their rise is attributed to technological advances that enable interaction and accessibility – the increased importance of trust among digitally savvy consumers and the intimate connection that exists between vlogger and viewer. Ways that institutions can look to replicate that is through live-streaming events, behind-the-scenes video blogs and “masterclass” clips from big names associated with the venue or company.

So has technology changed cultural taste? It’s clear that the way we consume, create and think about culture is constantly evolving, as it has throughout history. New forms of media always spark some moral and intellectual panics. The printing press, newspapers, paperbacks and television were all once denounced as threats to consumers’ brainpower and moral fibre.

It’s not technology shaping taste, but the human desire to connect, share and evaluate culture. Technology provides the tools but it is still society that shapes taste.

(Source: theguardian.com)

In desert trials, next-generation water harvester delivers fresh water from air

Last October, a University of California, Berkeley, team headed down to the Arizona desert, plopped their newest prototype water harvester into the backyard of a tract home and started sucking water out of the air without any power other than sunlight. The successful field test of their larger, next-generation harvester proved what the team had predicted earlier in 2017: that the water harvester can extract drinkable water every day/night cycle at very low humidity and at low cost, making it ideal for people living in arid, water-starved areas of the world. “There is nothing like this,” said Omar Yaghi, who invented the technology underlying the harvester. “It operates at ambient temperature with ambient sunlight, and with no additional energy input you can collect water in the desert. This laboratory-to-desert journey allowed us to really turn water harvesting from an interesting phenomenon into a science.”

Field test of water
Yaghi, the James and Neeltje Tretter chair in chemistry at UC Berkeley and a faculty scientist at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, and his team will report the results of the first field test of a water -- collecting harvester in the June 8 issue of the journal Science Advances. The trial in Scottsdale, where the relative humidity drops from a high of 40 percent at night to as low as 8 percent during the day, demonstrated that the harvester should be



easy to scale up by simply adding more of the water absorber, a highly porous material called a metal-organic framework, or MOF. The researchers anticipate that with

The researchers anticipate that with the current MOF (MOF-801), made from the expensive metal zirconium, they will ultimately be able to harvest about 200 milliliters (about 7 ounces) of water per kilogram (2.2 pounds) of MOF, or 3 ounces of water per pound.

Scientists find dozens of hidden earthquakes buried under Antarctica’s ice

Hundreds of hidden earthquakes may be buried beneath Antarctica’s ice, new research suggests. To prove that, nearly a decade ago, a team of scientists spent months flying around East Antarctica. Their results have finally been published, and they contradict an older established geologic hypothesis.

Even now, the U.S. Geological Survey’s (USGS) website reports that the continent has uncommonly few quakes compared to other continents, though the USGS acknowledges that the handful of seismic sensors in the region might not be enough to pick up all the quakes. But the new results suggest that East

Antarctica has just as many earthquakes as other, physically similar parts of the planet. “Ultimately, the lack of recorded seismicity wasn’t due to a lack of events but a lack of instruments close enough to record the events,” lead author Amanda Lough, now an assistant professor in the Department of Biodiversity, Earth and Environmental

Science at Drexel University in Pennsylvania, said in a statement. Lough and her fellow researchers traveled from point to point around the continent, setting up an array of sensors that detected 27 small earthquakes in 2009, ranging from magnitude 2.1 to magnitude 3.9. (Source: Live Science)

Antarctica already polluted with plastic, hazardous chemicals, team finds



A recent Greenpeace expedition has found that microplastics from consumer products and hazardous industrial chemical waste have already penetrated Antarctica, the “world’s last wilderness.” With this recent discovery, it could be said that humans already polluted all corners of the Earth’s oceans, from the north pole to the south pole. The team behind the expedition said that trashes were easily visible to them. There were discarded fishing buoys, nets, and even tarpaulins drifting between small icebergs. The team, thinking that these were the only type of garbage found in the supposedly pristine region, collected all items they found. Sadly, the team discovered that the pollution was more than the visible trashes. Instead, ice, water, and even snow samples from the region revealed all forms of known human pollution that could have come from all over the world. **Protecting from human pollution** With its extremely cold climate and massive icebergs, people could easily assume Antarctica could protect itself from human pollution. Even experts presumed that with its distance from the world and the ocean currents surrounding the region, Antarctica could act like a buffer zone against contamination. In fact, the Greenpeace team that conducted the expedition was originally out there to witness Antarctica’s amazing wildlife. The expedition was part of the initiative to build the Antarctic Ocean Sanctuary. The team was looking for an area to be assigned as off-limits to the people, where

penguins, whales, and seabirds could live freely. Instead, the team found a concrete demonstration of how gravely the humans have polluted the environment. “We may think of the Antarctic as a remote and pristine wilderness but from pollution and climate change to industrial krill fishing, humanity’s footprint is clear,” said Frida Bengtsson, from the Greenpeace Protect the Antarctic campaign. The team, therefore, gathered samples from the region to determine the extent of the destruction that both microplastic and toxic chemical wastes have brought to Antarctica. The expedition team collected samples from January to March. **Hazardous chemicals** The snow samples gathered, even the freshly-fallen ones, contained traces of hazardous chemicals. This means that even the atmosphere in Antarctica is not spared from the pollution despite the region being located far away from industrial establishments. Specifically, the analysis found that seven out of nine snow samples collected were contaminated with measurable concentrations of both per -- and polyfluorinated alkylated substances. These harmful chemicals are found in industrial wastes and major consumer products. Other waters and ice samples were contaminated with microplastic or microfiber. The Greenpeace team said that it is not the first time that traces of microplastics were found in Antarctica. What bothered them, however, was the “measurable amount” they found. (Source: Tech Times)

Researchers reveal secret to whale shark hotspots



A study has uncovered the secret to why endangered whale sharks gather on mass at just a handful of locations around the world. The new insights into the habits of the world’s largest fish will help inform conservation efforts for this mysterious species, say the researchers. Large groups of whale sharks congregate at only around 20 locations off the coasts of countries including Australia, Belize, the Maldives and Mexico. Why the sharks, which can reach more than 60 feet in length, choose these specific locations has long perplexed researchers and conservationists. The new study, by researchers at the University of York in collaboration with the Maldives Whale Shark Research Program (MWSRP), has found that the shark “aggregation sites” show many common characteristics -- they are all in areas of warm, shallow water in close proximity to a sharp sea-floor drop off into deep water. The researchers suggest that these sites provide the ideal setting for the filter-feeding sharks to search for food in both deep water and the warm shallows, where they can bask near the surface and warm up their huge bodies. Supervising author of the study, Dr. Bryce Stewart from the Environment Department at the University of York, said: “Sharks are ectotherms, which means they depend on external sources of body heat. Because they may dive down to feed at depths of more than

1,900 meters, where the water temperature can be as cold as 4 degrees, they need somewhere close by to rest and get their body temperature back up. **Upwelling of sea currents** “Steep slopes in the sea bed also cause an upwelling of sea currents that stimulate plankton and small crustaceans such as krill that the whale sharks feed on.” However, these perfectly contoured locations are not without their drawbacks due to human activity. Sharks swimming in shallow waters close to the surface are vulnerable to boat strikes caused by vessels ranging from large ships to tourist boats hoping to spot them. Lead author of the paper Joshua Copping, who carried out the research while studying for a masters in Marine Environmental Management at the University of York, and is now working on a PhD at the University of Salford, said: “Individual whale sharks can be identified by their unique pattern of spots and stripes which allows researchers to follow specific sharks that visit these aggregation sites. That means we have a good idea of the rate and extent of injuries at each of these locations and sadly it’s generally quite high.” Boat strikes, along with accidental trapping in fishing nets, and the targeted hunting of the species for their fins and meat, have contributed to an alarming decrease in global whale shark numbers in the past 75 years. (Source: Eurasia Review)

New Horizons probe is awake and ready to explore the Kuiper Belt

NASA launched the New Horizons probe to visit Pluto, and it became the first-ever spacecraft to do that several years ago. With that phase of the mission complete, what was a deep space robot to do? NASA decided to keep New Horizons going and take a look at objects in the Kuiper Belt, and the probe has just awoken from a long slumber to prepare for its next flyby. The Kuiper Belt is a ring of icy objects out past the orbit of Neptune. After being a planet for decades, scientists realized Pluto was just a large Kuiper Belt object and downgraded it to a dwarf planet. The New Horizons mission marked the first time humanity had ever seen such a distant object up close, but the probe is going to break its own record early next year. New Horizons is perfect for studying other Kuiper Belt objects for several reasons. For one, it’s already out there. It takes years for a spacecraft to reach the outer Solar System -- New Horizons launched from Earth back when Pluto was still a planet. In addition, its Pluto mission was just a flyby. It would have taken too much fuel to slow the probe down so it could enter orbit of Pluto, so the entire data-gathering phase was just a few hours long. With the spacecraft still perfectly capable of doing science after that, it was an easy choice to keep the probe alive for a Kuiper Belt mission. According to NASA’s Alan Stern, New Horizons has successfully woken up from hibernation. The probe went into hibernation in late 2017; all main systems powered down, and the computer only sent periodic status updates to Earth. NASA previously confirmed the probe was operational from these signals, but now it’s fully back online. The power-up process went flawlessly, and all systems are functional. (Source: extremetech.com)

AI is being developed which can smell illness in human breath: new study

Artificial intelligence (AI) is best known for its ability to see (as in driverless cars) and listen (as in Alexa and other home assistants). From now on, it may also smell. My colleagues and I are developing an AI system that can smell human breath and learn how to identify a range of illness-revealing substances that we might breathe out. The sense of smell is used by animals and even plants to identify hundreds of different substances that float in the air. But compared to that of other animals, the human sense of smell is far less developed and certainly not used to carry out daily activities. For this reason, humans aren’t particularly aware of the richness of information that can be transmitted through the air, and can be perceived by a highly sensitive olfactory system. AI may be about to change that. For a few decades, laboratories around the world have been able to use machines to detect very small amounts of substances in the air. Those machines, called gas-chromatography mass-spectrometers or GC-MS, can analyze the air to discover thousands of different molecules known as volatile organic compounds. In the GC-MS machine, each compound in a sample of air is first separated and then smashed up into fragments, creating a distinctive fingerprint from which compounds can be recognized. Among the several hundred compounds present in the human breath, a few of them might reveal the presence of various cancers, even at early stages. Laboratories around the world are therefore experimenting with GC-MS as a non-invasive diagnostic tool to identify many illnesses, painlessly and in a timely manner. Unfortunately, the process can be very time-consuming. Large amounts of data need to be manually inspected and analyzed by experts. (Source: Newsweek)

Neuroscientists accidentally discovered a whole new role for the cerebellum

One of the best-known regions of the brain, the cerebellum accounts for just 10 percent of the organ’s total volume, but contains more than 50 percent of its neurons. Despite all that processing power, it’s been assumed that the cerebellum functions largely outside the realm of conscious awareness, instead coordinating physical activities like standing and breathing. But last year neuroscientists discovered that it plays an important role in the reward response - one of the main drives that motivate and shape human behavior. Not only does this open up new research possibilities for the little region that has for centuries been primarily linked motor skills and sensory input, but it suggests that the neurons that make up much of the cerebellum - called granule cells - are functioning in ways we never anticipated. “Given what a large fraction of neurons reside in the cerebellum, there’s been relatively little progress made in integrating the cerebellum into the bigger picture of how the brain is solving tasks, and a large part of that disconnect has been this assumption that the cerebellum can only be involved in motor tasks,” said one of the team, Mark Wagner, from Stanford University, at the time. “I hope that this allows us to unify it with studies of more popular brain regions like the cerebral cortex, and we can put them together.” Tucked into the back of the brain, the cerebellum maintains a massive amount of connections with the motor cortex - a region of the cerebral cortex in the brain’s frontal lobe that’s involved in the planning, control, and execution of voluntary movements. While there have been hints of the cerebellum’s connection to cognitive processes such as attention and language function, previous research on granule cells has only ever linked them to basic sensory and motor functions. (Source: sciencealert.com)



IRANOL’s Operating Profit Up by 28% in Last Year

IRANOL Oil Company’s operating profit grew 28 percent (28%) in the last Iranian calendar year in 1396 (ended March 20, 2018), the Public Relations Dept. of the company reported. In the same direction, financial statements of IRANOL Oil Company’ audited main and consolidated company was published for the fiscal year closing on March 20, 2018. With due observance to the said issue, 1,076 rials divided per share (DPS) was divided among shareholders of the company. The consolidated profit and loss account of the main company includes considerable growth in all fields than a year ago such

as 20% increase in sales volume, 17 percent gross profit, 28 percent operating profit and net profit after the deduction of tax with eight percent growth as compared to a year ago. Accordingly, net profit of each share of IRANOL Oil Company in the previous fiscal year equaled to 1,990 rials with 1,000,000 million rials capital. Considering the increased capital in 2017-18 Fiscal Year, the dividend has been estimated at 1,076 rials. According to data published in Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), the first share for the fiscal year ending March 20,

2018 was announced at 961 rials and finally, the amount of 1,076 rials was materialized, showing a considerable 12% as compared to the anticipated figure. It should be noted that total net profit amount of the company is equal to 2,152,632 million rials with the registered capital amounting to 2,000,000 million rials. Also, total accrual profit of the company stood at 3,031,605 million rials, showing a considerable 9 percent increase as compared to the same period of last year, the Public Relations Dept. of the company concluded.

‘53 died per day in road accidents last summer’

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Last summer, 53 individuals lost their lives on average on a daily basis in road accidents across Iran, amounting to 4,939 deaths, the traffic police chief Taqi Mehri has said.

Last year (March 21, 2017 to March 20, 2018) on average some 1,350 were killed every month while the number grew to 1,646 during the summer, indicating that 53 people died in road crashes every day, YJC quoted Mehri as saying on Sunday.



Mentioning the sharp increase in the number of road trips during summer holidays in Iran Mehri regretted the fact that in the [Iranian calendar] month of Shahrivar (August 23-September 22, 2017) alone some 1,746 died in the accidents.

Some 66 percent of the accident occurred 30 kilometers away from the cities, he said, adding that 73 percent of all accidents appear in intercity roads.

Distracted driving, over speeding and carless overtaking were the cause of some 78 percent of the accidents, he explained.

The summer traffic scheme, to control road accidents and provide the victims of such incidents with proper emergency services, will kick off on June 14, a three-day holiday concurrent with Eid al-Fitr [a religious holiday celebrated by Muslims worldwide that marks the end of Ramadan], he added.

Head of Iran’s forensics organization, for his part, explained that the number fatalities increased by 1.7 percent last year compared to the same period a year before that.

While in the [Iranian calendar] year 1395 (March 2016-March 2017) some 15,532 individuals were killed in road crashes, while the number increased to 16,201 last year, Ahmad Shojaei said.

■ Impact of road crashes on poverty

According to the World Bank, road crashes are becoming a global health crisis and, as such, require comprehensive measures to prevent them.

Globally some 1.3 million people die on the road every year and up to 50 million suffer injuries. And overall economic costs of road crashes range from 2-5 percent of GDP in many countries.

The results of a survey on the situation in South Korea conducted by the Korea Transport Institute (KOTI) in 2013 clearly show the impact of road crashes on household income, unemployment, home ownership, divorce rate, and income gaps for surviving victims of road-crashes.

For one the survey indicates that 70.7 percent of the disabled and 27.6 percent of the non-disabled victims of road crashes experienced job losses after a traffic incident. Furthermore, 67.9 percent of the disabled and 24 percent of the non-disabled who lost their jobs remain unemployed for long periods of time.

Traffic crashes can also break up a family. Almost 37 percent of the victims of traffic accidents who suffered disabilities have experienced divorces (or separations) after a traffic crash. This is compared to a five percent divorce rate for non-victims of road crashes. Some of the reasons that couples cite for breaking up include economic difficulties and frustrations resulted from road crashes.

Therefore, it is of utmost importance to better understand the social impacts of road crashes in developing countries. And likewise it is equally important to ensure an improvement in road safety, as well as promoting a culture of safe driving around the world as a way of mitigating its negative effects on poverty reduction and economic growth.

LEARN ENGLISH

Common Presentation Mistakes

Mr. Ford: So as I mentioned previously the campaign advertisement will focus on those key elements that every consumer looks for in a quality laptop: affordability, quality, speed and reliability. We have pulled out all the stops to produce a product that really rivals all our competitors. Mr. Ford: Actually, just to **illustrate** my point let me give you an anecdote here. I remember last year I was playing golf with one of our key suppliers. It was a lovely summer afternoon. Anyway, I invited our supplier for a game of golf, and wanted to get his input on the new x420. Mr. Ford: Actually, I often get together with him for a good game of golf. It really is a wonderful way to relax. To be honest, I’m not that great at golf, but I have improved in the last few years. But the key to golf is practice, practice, practice. I’ve lost my thread. What was I talking about again? Jonathan: I think you were discussing the campaign advertisement Michael.

Mr. Ford: Yes, excuse me. I’m afraid I got **sidetracked** there. Yes, anyway, the campaign. Well, erm. let me see. Is the projector working yet Jonathan? Jonathan: No sorry, IT are still fixing it. Mr. Ford: Ahh okay, erm... all the information on the campaign is on the PowerPoint. I haven’t actually got my notes with me...erm, let me see, erm....

Audience Member: Mr. Ford, could you at least tell us the schedule for the campaign? When are the first advertisements scheduled for?

Mr. Ford: That’s a good question. Unfortunately, I erm... don’t have that information on me. I will have to **get back to you** on that point.

Jonathan: Okay Michael, the projector is fixed. I think we’re ready. Mr. Ford: Thank goodness. Okay everyone, sorry for the delay. So without further ado the new x420 marketing campaign! Enjoy! oh ermmm. I’m terribly sorry, this is not the advert, this is my golfing holiday in Barbados. I think I must have brought the wrong file. Can we **take five**?

■ Key vocabulary

illustrate: to give examples to make something easier to under

sidetrack: change topic

get back to you: to talk to or write to you at a later time

take five: have rest

■ Supplementary vocabulary

tangent: a separate, loosely related train of thought

befuddle: to confuse, make unclear

(Source: irlanguage.com)

AEOI, Iran University of Medical Sciences to set up cancer treatment center

1 → The 350-bed center will be equipped with modern technologies, he added. Well-trained oncologists as well as other physicians specializing in cancer treatment will offer various services at the center.

In addition to the aforementioned center a polyclinic for outpatient services as well as a dental center will be set up in a land area stretching over 10,000 square meters, he added.

Naseripour expressed hope that the center will become fully operational within the next three years.

Ebrahim Raeesiyoun, an advisor to Ministry of Health in economic affairs, for his part explained that within the framework of aforesaid the memorandum of understanding AEOI will allocate a land area of 18,000 square meters in northwestern Tehran and will fund the construction project of the center.

Earlier in April Deputy Health Minister Reza Malekzadeh has said that population-based cancer registry of the Islamic Republic of Iran shows a cancer incidence rate of 158 per 100,000 of the population and 143 per 100,000 of the population (excluding non-melanoma skin cancer) in 30 provinces of Iran annually.

In the Iranian calendar year 1393 (March 21, 2014 to March 20, 2015) some 112,000 individuals were diagnosed with cancer, he added. However he noted that the database indicates that the rate for all cancers (excluding non-melanoma skin cancer) for men and women combined was 182 per 100,000 in 2012 worldwide which means that the rate of cancer in Iran is well below the



Ali Akbar Salehi, director of Iran’s Atomic Energy Organization (L), and Health Minister Hassan Qazizadeh Hashemi

world average.

Setting up such centers would certainly increase the

chances of early diagnosis and intervention for cancer patients which result in lower mortality rate in the country.

Tehran Municipality implementing environmental scheme

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — On the

occasion of World Environment Day, June 5, Tehran Municipality launched a scheme aiming to familiarize the public more with environmental problems, Sadr-o-din Alipour, the director of environment and sustainable development department of Tehran Municipality, has said.

Being held from June 9-15, the scheme will focus on providing citizens with green purchasing guides, identifying and eliminating environmental problems of areas with the help of environmental centers, encouraging municipality’s officials to use public transportation, notifying the public about water crisis, fixing the defects of green spaces utilities, and creating some gardening booths for parents in parks to familiarize children with the nature are some of the objectives of the plan, Alipour explained.

It is also to address banning plastic bottles and disposable utensils, mentioning environmental values, disseminating educational environmental clips in public places, holding painting workshops, environmental contests, and puppet shows are some of the programs which are being held in all 22 districts of the capital under the scheme, he added.

“Training citizens is conducted in the presence of an expert and under the supervision of the municipality,” he noted, Mehr news agency reported on Sunday.

World Environment Day was marked



on June 5 in India with the theme of “Beat Plastic Pollution”. It is the UN’s most important day for encouraging worldwide awareness and action for the protection of our environment. Since it began in 1974, it has grown to become a global platform for public outreach that is widely celebrated in over 100 countries.

Above all, World Environment Day is the “people’s day” for doing something to take care of the Earth. That “something” can be focused locally, nationally or globally; it can be a solo action or involve a crowd. Everyone is free to choose.

According to UN, discarded plastic is one of the biggest environmental threats facing the planet. An estimated 8 million tons of plastic waste enter the world’s oceans each year which is killing marine life and entering the human food chain.

First school for autistic girls to open in Tehran

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The first

school for autistic girls will be opened in the new school year, starting on September 23 in Tehran, deputy director for educational planning department of the Special Education Organization has said.

The lack of a specific school for girl students suffering autism in Tehran was one of the important issues for the organization, Mohsen Ghafourian said, ILNA reported on Sunday.

Currently, students with autism are studying at 25 public schools and 15 private schools, he stated.

One of the best schools for children suffering autism, equipped with the standards facilities in Iran, has been set up in Ahvaz, southwestern province of Khuzestan, and the second one is under construction, he remarked, adding that some autism schools are under construction in other provinces, including Qazvin, Kermanshah, and Khorasan Razavi.

Also, some of the northern provinces of the country are looking forward to build autism schools. “To do so, we need the help of donors and contributors,” Ghafourian added.

“This year, we will assign an appropriate amount of money to education and rehabilitation of autistic students,” he highlighted.

He further explained that standard conditions are required for students with autism, but Special Education Organiza-



tion’s approach is to allow some autistic students [who are high-functioning], to study in ordinary schools.

Where specific training is required, it is essential to have specific structures, special classes and well-trained teachers, so observing the basic rights of special students is our priority, he remarked.

He stated that parents and community play an important role in children with autism lives and education. “So, this year, we have produced good content to raise awareness and improve people’s attitudes towards these children.”

“We plan to train teachers for autism schools, to provide students with high quality services. In this regard, universities and higher education institutes should be further supportive so that we can succeed in this manner,” he concluded.

British government to announce beefed-up measures to tackle fly-tipping

Michael Gove has pledged to crack down on illegal waste-dumping and fly-tipping by organized crime gangs costing Britain hundreds of millions of pounds each year.

The environment secretary announced a consultation on ways to bolster the fight against criminals who fly-tip or operate illegal waste sites, creating a nuisance for residents and local businesses, with offensive smells, fly infestations and fires.

Those involved also evade landfill tax, harm wildlife, export waste illegally and undercut reputable waste-disposal businesses, according to environment officials.

Fly-tipping is already punishable by a fine of up to £50,000 or 12 months’ jail if the case is heard by magistrates, but can attract an unlimited fine and up to five years’ imprisonment in a crown court.

Such activity is estimated to have cost the English economy more than £600m in 2015. In Northern Ireland, illegal waste dumping has cost taxpayers more than £500,000 over the past two years, figures this month showed.

In 2016-17 councils spent about £58m clearing away fly-tipped waste.

Mr Gove’s review will consider what else the Environment Agency, the environment department, local authorities, the private sector and police can do, and make recommendations on tackling organized waste crime, which particularly affects rural areas.

The secretary of state said: “Organized criminals running illegal waste dumps and fly-tipping are blighting local communities. They cost our economy vast amounts of money, pollute our environment and harm our wildlife.

“We must crack down on these criminals who have no regard for the impact they have on people’s lives. The time is right for us to look at how we can best tackle these antisocial and inexcusable crimes”.

The Environment Agency shut down more than 850 new illegal waste sites in 2016-17 – an average of at least two a day.

The Home Office believes criminals may also be operating illegal waste sites as a cover for theft, human trafficking, fraud, supplying drugs and firearms, and money-laundering.

Ben Wallace, the economic crime minister, said: “Organized crime groups exploit any opportunity to make money. Our local communities are being scarred by the illegal dumping of waste, while at the same time people are being conned into placing contracts with dodgy waste firms.”

(Source: Independent)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ج

‘Welfare organization supports cafés run by disabled people’

Iran’s Welfare Organization provides financial support to set up cafés which are run by people suffering from different kinds of mental and physical disabilities, an official with the organization has said.

Commenting on Downtism Café, a café in Tehran run by teenagers with autism and Down syndrome, Hossein Nahvinejad explained that such deeds would not only create job opportunities for these groups of people but also empower them to become contributing members of society, Tasnim reported. Financial support is not the only way to help people who are physically or mentally challenged, Nahvinejad said, adding that being functional within society and contributing work can make society more inclusive for people with disabilities.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-aholic, -oholic”

■ **Meaning:** addiction or obsession

■ **For example:** I have always been a *workaholic* and slowing down is killing me!

PHRASAL VERB

Hang out

■ **Meaning:** to spend a lot of time in a particular place or with particular people

■ **For example:** I don’t really know who she hangs out with.

IDIOM

Pass the buck

■ **Explanation:** to accuse someone of not taking responsibility for a problem and expecting someone else to handle it

■ **For example:** Sam takes the easy way out. Whenever a problem arises, he immediately passes the buck!

حمایت مالی بهزیستی از راه اندازی کافه‌های خود گردان توسط معلولان

معاون امور توانبخشی سازمان بهزیستی کشور گفت: سازمان بهزیستی از راه اندازی کافه‌های خود گردان توسط گروه های مختلف معلولان حمایت‌های مالی خواهد داشت.

حسین نحوی نژاد در گفت‌وگو با خبرگزاری تسنیم ضمن اشاره به افتتاح کافه دان‌تسیم (داون و اوتیسم)، کافه ای در تهران که توسط نوجوتسان مبتلا به اوتیسم و سندروم داون گردانده می شود، گفت: جدای اشتغال چنین فعالیت هایی شرایطی را فراهم می آورد تا آنها در جامعه حضور پررنگی را داشته باشند.

وی تصریح کرد: تنها با پرداخت تسهیلات نمی توان مشکل اشتغال معلولان را بر طرف کرد و از تسهیلات مهمتر اجتماعی شدن این افراد است و برای بستری فراهم شود که معلولان در سطح جامعه راحت‌تر زندگی کنند.

Trump pulls out of joint G7 statement, calls Trudeau ‘weak’

The G7 summit in Canada has ended in the escalation of a row over trade with US President Donald Trump withdrawing support for a communique, citing “false statements” by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Trump was on board Air Force One when he issued a series of tweets on Saturday, attacking Trudeau who he called “very dishonest” and “weak” and apparently pulling out of the joint statement.

Shortly before, Trudeau had announced the G7 countries had all agreed on the statement.

Trudeau also said Canada would move forward with retaliatory measures on July 1 in response to tariffs on steel and aluminum imports into the US from Canada, Mexico and European Union (EU) countries announced by Trump on May 31.

Trudeau called the fact that the US had based the tariffs on a national security reason “kind of insulting”.

“As Canadians, we are polite, we’re reasonable, but also we will not be pushed around,” he said.

The remarks apparently upset Trump, who had left the conference early to travel to Singapore for a highly anticipated meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un.

“Based on Justin’s false statements at his news conference, and the fact that Canada is



charging massive Tariffs to our US farmers, workers and companies, I have instructed our US Reps not to endorse the Communique as we look at Tariffs on automobiles flooding the US market!” he tweeted.

Responding to Trump, Trudeau’s spokesperson Cameron Ahmad said: “We are focused on everything we accomplished here at the G7 summit.”

Ahmad added: “The prime minister said nothing he hasn’t said before - both in public, and in private conversations with the president.”

■ ‘Unfair’ trade deals

Ahead of his departure, Trump had criticized his predecessors for negotiating “unfair” trade deals.

“The United States has been taken ad-

vantage of for decades and decades,” Trump told reporters, reiterating his long-standing view that Washington has been exploited for too long by existing trade arrangements.

“I congratulate leaders of other countries for so crazily being able to make these trade deals so good for their countries,” Trump said, while insisting that his relationships with Europe and Canada were “outstanding”.

He also said relationships with his G7 partners were a “10” before he left.

UK Prime Minister Theresa May stood with Trudeau on the issue of trade.

“When we disagree with our allies on something it is right that we say so and air the issue openly and frankly,” she said at a news conference.

“We have done just that at this summit, registering our deep disappointment at the unjustified decision by the US to apply tariffs to EU steel and aluminum imports.”

The now mooted communique acknowledged the importance of “free, fair and mutually beneficial trade and investment”.

“We strive to reduce tariff barriers, non-tariff barriers and subsidies,” it said.

This year’s G7 summit had been dubbed “G6-plus-1” by many, referring to US isolation over issues including trade and the Iran nuclear deal.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Britain accused of failing to pass on fears over Saudi regime arms deal

An arms sales watchdog has accused London of a serious failure to disclose intelligence that could save the lives of thousands of people involved in ongoing global conflicts.

The Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) highlighted the dangers of the “diversion” of arms and ammunition legally supplied to the House of Saud regime but then passed on to third-party “proxy fighters” including terror groups, and said the practice was fuelling conflicts.

The warning comes at a time when Britain is attempting to expand the multibillion pound arms trade with the Persian Gulf regime, which has led coalition forces engaged in the Yemen war since 2015.

The Labor MP Lloyd Russell-Moyle told the Observer: “At best the UK government is turning a blind eye to arms exports to Islamist groups in Syria; at worst it is complicit in these transfers. Despite the government’s boiler-plate comments that it is robust, something is very badly wrong with Britain’s arms control regime.”

The allegation relates to applications for standard individual trade control licenses submitted to the Department for International Trade (DIT) in 2014 by two unnamed British arms brokers. The applications sought government approval for the brokers to act as intermediaries in an arms deal involving 30m rounds of ammunition – including 13,492,927 AK-47 bullets and 3,063,276 rounds of sniper ammunition – to be supplied by arms manufacturers in Bosnia to the Saudi government, which was listed as the “end user”. At the same time, the Bosnian government received an arms export license application for the same consignment, which it began processing.

The DIT, which normally processes applications within 20 days, considered the applications under the European Union and national arms export licensing criteria, which allows for applications to be rejected if they relate to the supply of armaments to countries under embargos or sanctions or where it is believed that the “end user” will divert the weapons to terrorists or criminals in countries such as Yemen or South Sudan.



In this case London took 14 months to investigate before deciding to reject the applications, citing the reason for refusal as “a determination that the stated end user was not the intended recipient” and that there was “an unacceptable risk that the items would be diverted within the buyer country or re-exported under undesirable conditions”.

It is alleged in the report that suspicions surrounding the consignment arose as a result of establishing that the Saudi army does not use AK-47 assault rifles, and therefore the 13m bullets that formed part of the consignment were likely to be diverted to proxy fighters engaged in the Yemen conflict.

The Bosnian government was not told of the DIT’s suspicions and approved the export license, allowing the ammunition to reach the Saudi regime in two parts in November 2015 and January 2016.

Freedom of information requests submitted to DIT by BIRN questioned why the UK government failed to notify the Bosnian government of its suspicions and refusal of the brokering licences. The FoI response stated: “Bosnia-Herzegovina is not party to the European Union mechanism of denial notifications. Consequently, there is no established mechanism through which the Export Control Organization could have informed the Bosnian authorities.”

While this statement is true in part, such mechanisms do exist under the arms trade treaty, which came into force in 2014, to which both Britain and Bosnia are signatories. The treaty obliges member states to monitor arms exports and ensure that weapons do not cross existing arms embargos or end up being used for human rights abuses including terrorism, the purpose being to limit the flow of weapons that fuel conflicts in places such as Syria, Yemen and South Sudan.

Questioned as to why, if Britain did not trust the Saudi regime not to divert arms to prohibited third parties, it was continuing to supply arms and authorize export/broker licenses that authorize trade with the Saudis, the DIT responded: “Saudi Arabia is a valued trading partner of the UK. An end-user certificate is only one element in the assessment of an export or brokering license application.”

The department declined to explain whom they believed the ammunition was destined for and why it had taken so long to refuse the export licenses.

Bosnian officials have since confirmed that Britain failed to disclose its concerns and refusal, which they indicated would have caused them to refuse the export license and prevented the diversion.

The report by BIRN, which has reported extensively on the billion-euro arms trade that has developed between Balkan countries and Saudi Arabia, outlines how western governments rely on Balkan states to crack down on the issue of diversion of the weapons they manufacture.

Currently there are no sanctions in place to prevent the sales of arms to the House of Saud regime.

Since the start of the Saudi regime war on Yemen, Britain has completed more than £3.3bn in arms sales to the House of Saud regime. The FoI response confirmed that this was the only refusal of a brokers’ license by Britain in the last 10 years relating to arms destined for the Persian Gulf regime.

(Source: The Guardian)

Sudanese mercenaries fight alongside Saudi regime-led forces in Yemen

A video shows Sudanese mercenaries fighting alongside the Saudi regime-led forces against Ansarullah (Houthi) forces in Yemen’s eastern province of Hudaydah.

The footage shows the Sudanese forces patrolling near the city of al-Jah, 50 kilometers from the port city of Hudaydah, on Thursday, firing mortar shells against Ansarullah positions.

The presence of Sudanese forces in Yemen comes despite Sudan’s announcement last month about assessing whether to continue its participation in the Yemen war or downgrade its presence in the military campaign

led by the House of Saud regime.

Domestic voices in the North African country have long urged a withdrawal from the Saudi regime-led coalition and those calls gained momentum after three senior Sudanese officers and scores of soldiers were killed during a battle in northern Yemen on April 10.

Nearly 15,000 people, mostly civilians, have been killed in the Saudi regime-led airstrikes and other attacks since the war started in March 2015. The campaign lacks any international mandate and rights groups and governments around the world continue to criticize those involved in the war,

including the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Sudan.

Sudan’s Akhbar el-Youm newspaper has quoted informed sources as saying that there is a strong trend among the leaders of the state to withdraw Sudanese forces from Yemen amid mounting pressure.

The report has also revealed that the Sudanese troops fighting in Yemen have not received their salaries from Riyadh.

However, a full withdrawal is unlikely to happen as President Omar al-Bashir, who has cultivated close ties to Riyadh in the hope Saudis could help shore up economic

situation in Sudan, has on several occasions stressed his intention to continue participating in the Yemen war.

■ Ansarullah missile attack kills three in Jizan

Elsewhere, three civilians have been killed in the south of Saudi Arabia by incoming fire from Yemen’s Ansarullah movement forces, according to Saudi state media.

Citing military coalition spokesperson Colonel Turki al-Malki, the state-run Saudi Press Agency announced the deaths in Jizan province on Saturday night.

(Source: agencies)

Saudi Arabia, allies meet to talk Jordan crisis after unrest

Saudi Arabia met with arch-ally the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait and Jordan to address Amman’s deep-running financial woes.

Saudi King Salman called Emirati and Kuwaiti rulers, urging the meeting, which he held in the Saudi holy city of Mecca on Sunday, the official Saudi Press Agency said.

“They agreed to hold a meeting comprising the four countries...to discuss means of supporting Jordan to overcome its current crisis,” it said.

Protests engulfed the cash-strapped Jordan earlier in the month after the government announced a fuel prices rise of up to 5.5 percent and a 19 percent hike in electricity prices. The price of fuel has risen on five occasions since the beginning of the year.

The spikes are required by the International Monetary Fund, from which the country secured a \$723-million loan in 2016.

The people have been calling for the “fall of the government,” and riots have spread throughout the country.

The government has ordered a freeze and withdrawn a similarly-controversial income tax law it had planned. Prime minister Hani Mulki has also resigned in the wake of the protests.

Observers have, meanwhile, warned Amman against seeking help from parties that could seek to direct its policies in return.



Saudi Arabia and the UAE are accused of seeking to monopolize power in the Middle East region, including the Persian Gulf, by pooling their resources and trying to exclude the other members of the regional Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

On Wednesday, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi unveiled a raft of economic deals, signing 20 memorandums of understanding for over 60 joint projects, including in the oil and gas, banking, nuclear energy, and defense.

The deals, approved at a meeting of the Saudi-Emirati Coordination Council in the Saudi port city of Jeddah, did

not involve the four other GCC members -- Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait.

Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Bahrain, and non-member Egypt imposed an all-out blockade against Qatar last year, accusing it of supporting terrorism. Doha has strongly denied the allegation.

■ EU foreign policy chief assures Jordan of continued aid

European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini announced Sunday 20 million euros (\$23.5 million) in aid for Jordan following a wave of anti-austerity protests that led to the prime minister’s resignation.

The EU will support Jordan “with all possible means at our disposal including economic and financial means,” Mogherini said during a visit to Amman.

“This is a country that has a vital role to play in the region,” she told a news conference.

“You will have always the EU at your side fully supporting your reform work.”

The funds would “address in particular the needs of Jordanians that are particularly vulnerable,” Mogherini said.

Cash-strapped Jordan, a close U.S. ally that relies heavily on donors, is struggling to rein in its debt after securing a \$723-million loan from the International Monetary Fund in 2016.

(Source: agencies)

Former Pakistan President Musharraf to run for parliament

The party of Pakistan’s former military dictator Pervez Musharraf announced Saturday that he will run for a seat in parliament in July 25 national elections.

The move comes after the country’s Supreme Court conditionally allowed Musharraf to return from Dubai, where he has been living in self-exile to avoid arrest on criminal charges. Musharraf’s party said he will campaign for a seat representing the northern town of Chitral.

Also on Saturday, the party of popular longtime opposition politician Imran Khan said he will run for a seat in the National Assembly, which was dissolved May 31 upon completing its five-year term. Khan is seeking to become the next prime minister.

Khan’s party is expected to face a tough challenge from candidates backed by former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who was disqualified from holding office in July by the Supreme Court on corruption charges.

The party of former President Asif Ali Zardari is also fielding candidates across the country in hopes of getting a majority in parliament. Zardari has said he will run for a seat representing southern Sindh province.

The July 25 elections for seats in the National Assembly and four provincial legislatures will be supervised by the interim government of caretaker Prime Minister Nasir-ul-Mulk, a former chief justice who has said he will ensure free and fair elections.

The party that wins a majority in parliament will name the next prime minister.

Most of Pakistan’s political parties want Musharraf arrested. He has not set any date for his return, but the court wants him back before June 13 to avoid arrest in connection with several criminal cases pending against him.

Musharraf seized power in 1999 by ousting the government of former Prime Minister Sharif. In 2008, he was forced to resign after the party of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto came into power.

(Source: AP)

Terrorists attack besieged Shia towns in Syria’s Idlib: Monitor

Takfiri terrorists have attacked the besieged Shia-majority Syrian towns of Kefraya and al-Foua, sparking deadly clashes with pro-Damascus fighters, a UK-based monitoring group says.

The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported that Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham terrorists were “heavily shelling” the towns, both in northwestern Idlib Province, and had broken into them late Saturday.

“This is the fiercest attack in around three years,” SOHR head Rami Abdel Rahman told Agence France-Presse.

The fighting, which was continuing Sunday, had killed six pro-Damascus fighters and at least three Takfiri elements, he added.

Around 10,000 people are estimated to live in Kefraya and Foua, which have been encircled by terrorists since March 2015.

Last year, the Syrian government and militants reached a deal, known as the “Four Towns Agreement,” that allowed the evacuation of residents of the two towns.

In return, people in two militant-held towns near Damascus, Madaya and Zabadani, were given safe passage to evacuate to territories under the control of terrorists or the Syrian government.

On Saturday, Russia’s Defense Ministry spokesman Major General Igor Konashenkov warned that the last pockets of the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group in Syria wreak havoc and perpetrate acts of terror only in areas controlled by U.S. military forces.

Takfiri terrorists have lost much of the territory they once held in Syria amid sweeping gains by government forces on the ground.

(Source: Press TV)

Democrats don’t know anything about guns

➡ The real conversation, though, isn’t so obvious. The hard, honest truth is that real gun control—if we care about reducing access to weapons that enable mass murder—will require us to target weapons based on how they function. Unfortunately, there is no simple functional distinction between ‘assault weapons’ and the rifles used by responsible shooters. What makes an AR-15 deadly for a mass shooter—that it is a semi-automatic, detachable magazine rifle firing a medium-power centerfire round — are also likely characteristics of your grandfather’s wooden stock deer rifle.

■ Corrosive role of NRA

Gun control isn’t just difficult because of the corrosive role of the NRA and the gun industry in politics. Gun control is hard because it requires real trade-offs between the rights of responsible individuals versus the access of criminals to murder weapons.

We must stop hiding from this hard conversation. We should talk about regulating semi-automatic rifles more stringently than bolt-action rifles. We should talk about different regulations for weapons with detachable or high-capacity magazines. We should talk about these things — even when they impact hunters or recreational shooters — because they affect how weapons function.

We will face opposition, not just from the NRA and the industry, but also from responsible Americans who own guns. My Marines might be among them. But we don’t need to convince them to accept our position on gun control — only to recognize that our approach is honest.

America already has a party that dissembles about the impact of its policies, deflects hard decisions by grandstanding, and panders to special interests. That’s Donald Trump and Paul Ryan’s party. We must be better than that. The recent Special Elections — Doug Jones in Alabama, Conor Lamb in Pennsylvania—prove that Americans reward us for being better than that. Let’s be the solution to the dysfunctional debate. Let’s stop pandering to a base that is unfamiliar with weapons by claiming a distinction that does not exist. Let’s stop pretending that we can enact gun control without impacting responsible gun owners. Let’s ask Americans, honestly, to bear the real costs of reducing gun violence.

This is an opportunity for Democrats. There are too many single-issue Second Amendment voters in this country, and we have the opportunity to fix that. If we take a logical position on function-driven gun control, we can convince those voters that, while we might differ on gun policy, our position makes sense. Then we can move the conversation to the economy, education, immigration, trade, healthcare, unions — all the other challenges that we face today. Because based on what my Marines said about these issues — they would have been Democrats. Let’s make that possible.

(Source: The Newsweek)

Swiss voters seen rejecting funding bid for 2026 Winter Olympics

Swiss voters may have dealt a fatal blow to their country’s chances of hosting the 2026 Winter Olympics on Sunday after provisional results from a poll showed they rejected giving financial support for the bid.

Some 54 percent of voters in the southern canton of Valais rejected granting 100 million Swiss francs (\$101.52 million) towards the event, according to provisional results from the Valais government.

It was not immediately clear whether this decision would sound the death knell for the Swiss campaign. *(Source: Reuters)*

France’s Macron says he was a soccer player who ‘would not let go’

French President Emmanuel Macron said on Sunday he was a determined soccer player in his youth who “would not let go” and would motivate his team mates.

“I played left back. I was nasty though not very skillful. On the pitch, I was the sort that would not let go and would motivate the others,” he told the Telefoot programme on French channel TF1.

Macron lunched with the French squad at their training camp of Clairefontaine earlier this week, a presidential visit that has become a ritual for French leaders ever since Jacques Chirac visited the squad in the run-up to the 1998 tournament.

France went on to triumph on home soil and Chirac’s popularity soared - just what the tonic Macron might be wishing for his own ratings. After a year in power, a raft of economic and social reforms have earned him the tag “president of the rich” among left-wing voters.

“A winning team gives back a lot of confidence,” Macron said. “I feel the team wants to succeed and bring back the cup.”

Macron has defied calls from rights groups to boycott this summer’s World Cup because of Moscow’s involvement in Syria’s civil war.

Macron, a fan of southern France’s Olympique Marseille, has said he would travel to Russia for the soccer World Cup if France reach the semi-finals.

“I said I’d come to see you when you got through the quarter final. Note that I said ‘when’ and not ‘if,’ he told players.

France has been drawn to face Australia, Denmark and Peru in Group C at the World Cup, which runs from June 14 to July 15.

France salvaged a late 1-1 draw against the United States in their final World Cup warm-up game on Saturday in Lyon. *(Source: Reuters)*

Griezmann: My future will be announced this week

Linked to Barcelona ahead of the World Cup, Antoine Griezmann said he was close to announcing his future.

Atlético Madrid and France star Antoine Griezmann has confirmed that he will announce his future in the coming days.

Griezmann, 27, continues to be linked with a move to LaLiga champions Barcelona after another fine season at Atlético.

The forward has been expected to confirm his future before the World Cup and said on Saturday that was still the case.

“It’s good that you’re taking an interest,” Griezmann said after France’s 1-1 friendly draw with the United States. “There’s a week to go. I think we will find out this week.”

Griezmann is contracted at Atlético - the club he joined in 2014 - until 2022, but Barcelona are reportedly prepared to trigger his 100-million-euro release clause.

Reports on Saturday suggested France coach Didier Deschamps had told Griezmann and Monaco midfielder Thomas Lemar to clarify their futures by the end of the week.

France begin their World Cup campaign against Australia on 16 June, before facing Peru (21 June) and Denmark (26 June). *(Source: Marca)*

Mohamed Salah appears at Egypt training session

Liverpool winger Mohamed Salah made an appearance at Egypt’s final training session in Cairo before the team heads to the World Cup in Russia. Salah did not, however, fully participate in training alongside his teammates, and the team’s medical staff emphasized that there is still some uncertainty over whether the player can be called upon when Egypt take on Uruguay in their first match of the tournament on Friday.

Not that anyone has forgotten, but Salah suffered a shoulder injury in a tangle with Real Madrid’s Sergio Ramos during Liverpool’s Champions League final last month. There were serious concerns that the injury might keep Salah out of the World Cup, but those appear to have alleviated. Salah himself appeared upbeat during the training session in Cairo, and it now seems he will have some role to play, even if he’s ruled out against Uruguay. Matches against Russia and Saudi Arabia will follow.

“Everything looks good,” said team doctor Mohamed Abou El-Ela. “[Salah’s] condition is comfortable, but playing against Uruguay is uncertain.”

“We’ll take our decision after two days as everything will be clear. Our goal is to keep him safe and he will play if he’s 100 per cent fit.”

Liverpool will likewise hope that Egypt take a cautious approach with Salah’s health during the tournament. *(Source: Liverpool)*

Simona Halep beats Sloane Stephens to win French Open and first major

Seeing her opponents come back against her in Grand slam finals, this time Simona Halep turned the tables to end her drought.

The Romanian rallied from a set and break deficit to beat Sloane Stephens 3-6 6-4 6-1 and win the French Open on Saturday along with her first grand slam title following three near misses.

With chants of “Si-mo-na, Si-mo-na” reverberating around Philippe-Chatrier court and Romanian flags in abundance, the majority of fans in attendance in Paris -- including Romania’s gymnastic trailblazer Nadia Comaneci -- certainly approved. They, along with Stephens, knew of the 26-year-old’s past heartbreak.

Twelve months ago at Roland Garros, the world No. 1 relinquished a set and 3-0 lead against Jelena Ostapenko in the final. That was the most painful memory.

And then this January, Caroline Wozniacki overturned a break hole at 3-4 in the final set at the Australian Open.

If that wasn’t enough, in her other grand slam final in 2014 at the French Open, Halep succumbed in a three-set battle to Maria Sharapova.

That angst, though, will be largely forgotten now. If there were tears for Halep, they were tears of joy.

“Well, it’s an amazing moment,” she told reporters. “I was dreaming for this moment since actually I started to play tennis. It’s my favorite grand slam. I always said that if I’m going to win one, I want it to be here.”

The reversal was all the more impressive considering Stephens had never lost any of her six finals. In her lone prior grand slam final, the 25-year-old eased past friend Madison Keys last September at the US Open.

Her disappointment didn’t stop Stephens from expressing happiness for her older peer. Fellow players including twice Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova congratulated Halep, too.

“I think she’s had a tough journey,” said Stephens. ‘I think winning here is very special for her and I’m glad she finally got her first slam. It’s a beautiful thing.

“No matter how hard the adversity that you go through, there is always light at the end of the tunnel, and I’m glad she finally got her light,” added Stephens, who won in New York after undergoing foot surgery.

Halep’s influential coach Darren Cahill said all those difficult defeats contributed to Halep’s victory Saturday.

“I think she’s grown up a lot in the last 12 months,” Cahill



told a group of reporters. “Sometimes the losses make you mature pretty quickly. You can go one way with your career and go downwards or you can suck it up, work a little bit harder and try to do it again -- and that’s the way she went.”

Halep entered the final as the favorite given her clay-court prowess, higher ranking and holding a 5-2 head-to-head record against her rival.

But in the contest of two of the best movers in tennis, Halep had to work hard for her first hold, prevailing in a 25-shot rally for 1-1. It was an indication of things to come -- in the first set.

■ Better start for Stephens

A composed looking Stephens was indeed the first to break through, gaining a 3-1 advantage.

Stephens regularly threatened the Halep serve, though finally faced a break point at 5-3. To Halep’s dismay, she

sent a backhand into the net.

A rattled Halep was broken to start the second and Stephens built on the lead by digging out of a 0-30 hole. On the last point of the second game, Stephens scampered and put up a superb lob that prompted a Halep smash error.

The final threatened to be over in quick time.

“Well, we were very, very worried,” Virginia Ruzici, Halep’s Romanian manager who won the title 40 years ago, told a group of reporters. “Sloane was playing really well. I think Sloane also got a little bit tired at one point and she started to miss a few. And so Simona could immediately get back into the match.”

Halep reeled off nine straight points to lead 3-2 on serve, then broke for 4-2. Stephens got back to 4-4 but that was the end of her resistance. *(Source: CNN)*

Pep Guardiola rubbishes Yaya Toure’s claim that he favours white players



Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola has emphatically refuted Yaya Toure’s allegations that he favours white players, branding the midfielder’s comments ‘lies’.

Toure left City at the end of the season following eight hugely successful years but he brew up a storm earlier this week by claiming in an interview with France Football that Guardiola does not like picking African players. Kevin De Bruyne quickly leapt to Guardiola’s defence and now the City manager has himself moved to quash Toure’s serious allegations. “They were lies and he knows it,” he told TV3 in Spain. ‘We were together for two years and he says it now – he never told me to my face.’

Toure fell out of favour under Guardiola last season, making just one Premier League start all campaign as City marched to the title in record-breaking fashion.

And the Ivory Coast midfielder claims the former Barcelona and Bayern Munich boss was ‘cruel’ to him in his final year at the Etihad. ‘Pep did everything to spoil my last

season. He was cruel with me,’ Toure told France Football. ‘Do you really think he could’ve been like that with Andres Iniesta?’

‘It got to the point I asked myself if it was because of my colour. I am not the first. Other Barcelona players asked the question. ‘Maybe us Africans aren’t always treated the same by certain people. When you see the problems (Pep) has often had with African players, everywhere he has been, I ask myself questions.

‘He is too intelligent to be caught. He will never admit it. But the day he picks a team with five Africans in it, I promise I will send him a cake.’

The pair could come face-to-face again soon, with the 35-year-old Toure currently in talks with West Ham over a move to the London Stadium this summer.

He was paid £220,000 a week by City and would have to accept a pay cut at West Ham, but the Hammers are confident of getting the deal done. *(Source: Daily Mail)*

Messi: You need the best to win the Champions League... and Griezmann is!



After Madrid won the Champions League and Barcelona, there’s been a debate about who had the better season. What do you think?

We had a great year with the double. It’s true that the Champions League excited everyone because of what it means to win it. But there’s no need to take anything away from what we have done. Winning La Liga and the Champions League are different things. Barça’s year was spectacular. We lost three games all season and unfortunately one of them knocked us out of the most exciting competition. The double is really good.

Would you change it for the Champions League?

No. Winning La Liga and the Copa is really important. It’s not easy. Like I said, despite what happened in the Champions League, the season was really good.

What did you think of Zidane’s exit?

I was surprised. Really surprised. I didn’t expect it. I suppose no one did. He will

have his reasons. It’s also good to know when to leave. No one can reproach him. I don’t know why he left...

As one of the captains, what signings do you think Barça need this summer?

I’m not the person to say who needs to come in. There are people who take care of that. Last year was a great year. We only lost three games. I repeat, it was strange for how we went into the season and it was strange to lose that game in Rome.

Is Antoine Griezmann what’s needed at the club?

I don’t know if he’s the priority. I am in agreement that to win the Champions League again we need to have the best players. And Griezmann is one of them. If the club sign him, brilliant. I don’t know if he’s the priority. That depends on the signing committee and the coach. I can only say that to win the Champions League you have to have the best players. And he is very good. *(Source: AS)*

Marco Reus, the key to Germany’s title defense?

Despite a lackluster 2-1 victory against Saudi Arabia, the German team had a shining light in Leverkusen in Marco Reus. The injury-prone winger is ready to make up for lost time.

Marco Reus has been waiting four years for his moment – the Borussia Dortmund player is only days away from playing at his first World Cup and after his performance against Saudi Arabia, he can possibly expect to be a starter in Joachim Löw’s team.

“I’m happy that Marco is part of our team this time around, he can make an impact and will play an essential role in helping us get far in this tournament,” the Germany coach said after the match.

Read more: Germany leave for Russia with victory as Saudi Arabia offer stern test

Injuries have plagued Reus throughout a large part of his career. Most famously in 2014 when an ankle injury ruled him out from the German squad that went on to win the tournament in Brazil. Back then a devastated Reus said that his dream ended from one second to the next. But this time it was a different story. “I didn’t really think about getting hurt tonight, I was just concentrated on the game,” said Reus after the 2-1 victory against Saudi Arabia. Reus was actively involved in both German goals – he provided an assist in Germany’s first goal and it was one of his passes that lead to the second goal as well.



■ A different player

Earlier this week, Löw’s decision to omit Manchester City’s Leroy Sané from his World Cup squad sent shock waves through the footballing world. But Löw can brush off the PFA Young Player of the Year winner due to Germany’s talent, namely the caliber of Marco Reus.

The 29-year-old played just shy of an hour but it was during that time that Germany looked most dangerous. His speed and control on the ball set the pace of the German attack along with the likes of RB Leipzig striker Timo Wer-

ner. He is the type of player that can make the difference for Germany in crucial moments.

Reus is making a strong case for starting at his position ahead of Paris Saint-Germain’s Julian Draxler and Bayer Leverkusen’s Julian Brandt and will most likely be expected to link up as a playmaker with Arsenal’s Mesut Özil.

“I’m still not sure how the starting eleven will look like next week,” said Löw reluctantly when asked about Reus making his World Cup debut against Mexico. “What I do know is that the team that will play the first match won’t play throughout the whole tournament. What’s important to us is to have people who can change the game off the bench,” added Löw.

■ Successful comebacks

Marco Reus was not the only injury-hit player in the starting line-up. Goalkeeper Manuel Neuer and defender Jerome Boateng got 45 minutes under their belts as they continue on the road back to full fitness. With the Bayern duo back in action and Reus looking sharp Germany are getting close to full strength as the tournament nears.

Although this performance may not have looked like the world champions getting up to full flow, Germany are famous for hitting peak form at major tournaments. The return of this trio makes that a dangerous proposition for the pretenders to their crown. *(Source: Deutsche Welle)*

Iran’s Mehdizadeh takes gold at Karate 1-Premier League

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Amir Mehdizadeh from Iran claimed a gold medal at the fifth stage of Karate 1-Premier League on Sunday.

In the Male Kumite -60 Kg, Mehdizadeh defeated Oleg Melekhin from Belarus and Russia’s Stepan Efimenko 4-0 in his first two matches.

He also beat Nenad Dulovic from Montenegro 2-1 and advanced to the semi-final.

Mehdizadeh defeated Angelo Crescenzo 1-0 and qualified for the final match. The Iranian representative defeated Turkey’s Eray Samdan 3-1 in the final and won the gold medal.

Earlier on the day, Taravat Khaksar won the bronze medal after defeating Poland’s Dorota Banaszczyk at Female Kumite -55 Kg.

She started the competition with a 4-0 win over Italian Federica Riccardi and then beat Turkey’s Tuba Yakan 3-in her second match.

Taravat defeated Sabina Zakharova from Kazakhstan 1-0 but failed to advance to the final after being defeated by Chinese Taipei Tzu-Yun Wen 3-1.

In the Male Kumite -67kg, Amir Reza Mirzaei defeated Italian Gianluca De vivo 5-0 but lost to Japanese Hiroto Gomyo 5-4 in his second match.

Mirzaei earned his first win over Belgium’s Jess Rosiello in repechage.

In his second and third repechages, Mirzaei defeated Turkey’s Omer Kemaloglu 2-0 and Uzbekistan’s Ikboljon Uzakov 3-0.

He also defeated Azerbaijan’s Tural Aghalarzadeh in the bronze medal match.

Zabihollah Poorshab earned Iran’s third bronze medal in the fifth stage of Karate 1-Premier League.

In the Male Kumite -84 Kg, Poorshab defeated Anton Isakau from Belarus 3-1 and then defeated Daniyar Yuldashev from Kazakhstan 4-3 in his second match.

Poorshab beat Panah Abdullayev from Azerbaijan 5-4 but failed to qualify for the final match after losing to Macdonian Berat Jakupi.



Poorshab defeated Turkey’s Ugur Aktas in the bronze medal match.

The fifth stage of Karate 1-Premier League started in

Istanbul, Turkey on Friday and concluded on Sunday.

Paris, Rotterdam, Dubai and Rabat have all hosted Karate 1-Premier League events so far this season.

Iran beaten by Russia in Volleyball National League

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran lost to Russia 3-1 (28-30, 25-23, 27-25, 25-21) in week three of the Volleyball Nations League (VNL) on Sunday.

The competition is being held from May 25 to July 8 in 22 host cities.

The 16 teams compete in a round-robin

format with every core team hosting a pool at least once. The teams are divided into four pools of four teams at each week and compete five weeks long, with a total of 120 matches.

The top five teams after the preliminary round join the host of the final round to compete in the final round.

The relegation takes in consideration only the 4 challenger teams. The last ranked challenger team plays the promotion play-off against the Challenger Cup winners. The winners of the play-off will qualify for the next edition as a challenger team.



Five players Iran need on fire at the 2018 World Cup

FOX Sports Asia football editor Gabriel Tan picks the five players that are likely to play pivotal roles for Iran at the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

With four previous appearances at the FIFA World Cup to their name, Iran are one of Asia’s most-successful nations in the tournament – behind only Korea Republic and Japan.

While 2018 will be their fifth time gracing world football’s biggest stage, they are still looking to advance past the group stage for the first time having won just one of their 12 previous games.

Having been the most-impressive side throughout qualification, Team Melli were looming as Asia’s strongest contenders until the draw put them in Group B, where they will face powerhouses Spain and Portugal, as well as Morocco.

Still, hope springs eternal but they will need these five players to be at the top of their game for them to stand any chance of springing an upset.

■ Morteza Pouraliganji

Pouraliganji is arguably Iran’s steadiest centre-back option. As a team, Spain are likely to cause Team Melli the most problems but, individually, their biggest test will come in the form of Portugal captain Cristiano Ronaldo.

Given Morteza Pouraliganji stands at 1.84 metres – six centimetres shorter than Rouzbeh Cheshmi, it is likely that the latter gets the job on Ronaldo in the air.

But, in general play, Pouraliganji is more complete than his oft-criticised centre-back partner and Iran will need him to marshal the backline with authority.

■ Saeid Ezatolahi

Iran’s defence’s one-man shield. In a team brimming with attacking quality, it is often



easy to overlook those doing the defensive duties but Saeid Ezatolahi’s importance should not be undervalued.

Not only is the 21-year-old a one-man shield for his defence, he is also tidy in possession and is usually the starting point of many an attack.

Unfortunately for Team Melli, Ezatolahi will be suspended for the opening match and his place in the starting XI is likely to be taken by Omid Ebrahimi, but expect the FC Rostov starlet to be reinstated as soon as he is available.

■ Ashkan Dejagah

Dejagah taking on Lionel Messi at the last World Cup in Brazil...

At his peak, Ashkan Dejagah was Iran’s best player and, while he has not played much club football in the past year, it was impossible for Iran coach Carlos Queiroz to leave him out.

Given Team Melli have plenty of options in the at-

tacking third, the former Wolfsburg and Fulham star will probably have to settle for a place on the bench.

But, should the Iranians need an injection of creativity and finesse, Dejagah would provide the perfect option – along with the up-and-coming Saman Ghoddos.

■ Alireza Jahanbakhsh

Asia’s two best players at the moment?

Few would argue that Korea Republic’s Son Heung-min is not currently the best Asian footballer in the world but, following a remarkable campaign with AZ Alkmaar, Alireza Jahanbakhsh is not far behind.

Despite being primarily deployed as a winger, the 24-year-old finished the past season as the top scorer in the Dutch top flight with 21 goals, as well as providing 12 assists.

If Jahanbakhsh can replicate his Eredivise form in Russia, Team Melli could just have a real trump card.

■ Sardar Azmoun

Azmoun’s familiarity with Russia could be an advantage for Team Melli.

With Jahanbakhsh hogging the headlines in 2017/18, and Reza Ghoochannejhad doing the same last season, Sardar Azmoun has fallen off the radar slightly.

Nonetheless, the mercurial striker continues to grow in stature and netted five goals in 26 league games in his first season back with Russian Premier League giants Rubin Kazan.

Azmoun’s uncanny ability to work as the focal point in attack will also enable to likes of Jahanbakhsh and Mehdi Taremi to work their way in from the wings and deal damage of their own.

Real Sport’s World Cup one to watch: Alireza Jahanbakhsh

The 24-year-old Iranian winger might have had a lesser role to play in Iran’s 2014 World Cup campaign but, this year, he’ll be the main feature.

Iran will go into this year’s World Cup finals as clear underdogs but, unlike in past years, they have Alireza Jahanbakhsh to add attacking flair to their somewhat defensive setup.

The 24-year-old Iranian winger, now in his fifth season in the Netherlands, became the first Asian to win the Dutch league golden boot in 2018, scoring 21 goals in 33 appearances for his team AZ Alkmaar.

His performances across the season, helped them clinch third spot, ensuring Europa league football next season as his side picked up a points tally of 71: their best since the 2008/09 season.

Jahanbakhsh was noticed and tracked by Napoli in his third season with the club. However, with his contract with AZ Alkmaar not running out until 2020, there is no chance that the Dutch side will let him go cheaply.

If Iran do the unthinkable and make it out of the group stages this summer, there’s a big chance that Jahanbakhsh will turn the heads of owners and managers around the world.

■ Past Season

The 2017-18 season has been something



of a whirlwind for Alireza Jahanbakhsh.

Apart from a hamstring injury picked up in March which saw him sidelined for two weeks, he has been in the thick of the action for Alkmaar, his 21 goals making him the club’s as well as the league’s top scorer.

In big games, in particular, Jahanbakhsh has provided goals and assists for AZ, helping them win games sometimes at the death.

For example, his hat-trick in their 4-3 win against Vitesse in the latter stages of the season proved to be pivotal in their securing of third place.

The young Iranian continued this form into May, providing clinical assists and crucial goals and finishing the season strong.

■ International Experience

Despite being prolific for his domestic side, Jahanbakhsh has struggled to repro-

duce this form for Iran over the last year in qualifiers.

He failed to score in five of Iran’s qualifiers before breaking this drought in November 2017, sealing a 1-0 victory against Venezuela.

Since the win, he has slowly improved for his national side and national coach Carlos Queiroz will be pleased with his form in the build-up to the World Cup.

In the previous World Cup campaign, Queiroz gave Jahanbakhsh, then 20 years old, 49 minutes across the entire tournament. This year, though, he will hope to be a feature of every game.

■ Tactical Profile

In recent months, Carlos Queiroz has shifted Iran from the 4-2-3-1 formation he had favoured into a 4-3-3.

This is, in part, the result of having a number of very good wide forwards to choose from – not just Jahanbakhsh but Saman Ghoddos and Mehdi Taremi.

Shifting to the 4-3-3, then, will allow Jahanbakhsh to play further up the pitch with no shackles and test the full limits of the opposition’s defense.

Proficient with both feet, Jahanbakhsh can cause all kinds of problems for full backs who don’t know whether to show him outside or encourage him to cut inside.

(Source: Real Sport 101)

Iran start Asian Women’s U-19 Volleyball C’ship on high note

Iran defeated Hong Kong 3-1 (19-25, 25-13, 25-18, 25-18) in the 2018 Asian Women’s U-19 Volleyball Championship on Sunday.

Iran will play Macau and Australia on Monday and Tuesday respectively in Pool C.

Defending champions China are in Group A along with Japan, Thailand and Vietnam; Group B consists of South Korea, Chinese Taipei, Kazakhstan and India; Group C includes of Hong Kong, Macao, Australia and Iran; and Group D has Malaysia, New Zealand, Sri Lanka and Uzbekistan.

At the previous championship in 2016 in Thailand, China finished first, followed by Japan, Thailand and Vietnam.

The 2018 Asian Women’s U-19 Volleyball Championship is a biennial international volleyball tournament organized by the Asian Volleyball Confederation (AVC) with Volleyball Federation of Vietnam (VFFV) for the women’s under-19 national teams of Asia.

The tournament is being held in B’c Ninh Province, Vietnam, from 10 to 17 June 2018.

Spanish Ambassador to Iran Busquets optimistic over Iran’s match in World Cup

TASNIM — The Spanish Ambassador to Iran, Eduardo López Busquets, believes the Spain football team can defeat Iran in the 2018 World Cup.

La Roja has been drawn in Group B along with Iran, Portugal and Morocco.

The Spanish football team will start the competition with a match against Portugal on June 15.

“World Cup, undoubtedly, is one of the greatest sporting events. We won our first ever title in the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, however, we had not a good performance in the 2014 World Cup in Brazil and UEFA Euro 2016 in France. Now, we have changed a lot and I believe that it’s a good opportunity for us to win the title for the second time in Russia,” Busquets said.

“I think to be drawn with Portugal, Morocco and Iran is a special opportunity. We should not forget that there will be so many strong teams including Brazil, France, Argentina and Portugal in this edition,” he said.

“Iran participates in the World Cup for the second time in a row. It’s a good opportunity for Team Melli to show its potential in the competition. I wish all the best for Iran and I hope that they qualify for the knock out stage.”

“Julen Lopetegui has a difficult task in Spain football team because he must compose a team with experienced and young players with new strategies and tactics. Lopetegui has already led the Spain U-19 and U-21 football teams to titles in European championship and has already worked with many current players,” Busquets said.

Iran will face Spain on June 20 in Kazan and Busquets is optimistic about the match.

“It is difficult to accurately predict but I think Spain will beat Iran 2-0. However, Iran surprised all the teams in the 2018 World Cup qualifiers and could also surprise Spain. Spain has not recently lost and on the other hand Iran takes advantage of a strong offensive line. Both teams have a chance of winning the match but I hope that Lopetegui’s team defeats Iran,” the Spanish Ambassador to Iran said.



Persepolis sign Mehdi Sharifi

PLDC — Mehdi Sharifi joined Persepolis football team on Saturday.

The 26-year-old forward has penned a two-year contract with Persepolis and the details of the contract have not been revealed.

Sharifi started his playing career at Sepahan in 2012 and played for the Isfahan based team six years.

He also played in Tractor Sazi from 2016 to 2018 to spend his military conscription.

Persepolis are not allowed to sign new player in the summer transfer window but the club can loan their new signings to other Iran Professional League’s clubs.

Also, Omid Alishah has extended his contract with Persepolis for two more years.

Iranian para swimmers bag seven medals in IDM Berlin 2018

Press TV — Iranian Paralympian swimmers have shown their outstanding performances at the Internationale Deutsche Meisterschaften Swimming (IDM) Berlin 2018, and received seven medals at the tournament.

Pejman Ataei clocked 54.13 seconds in the men’s 50-meter individual breaststroke heat, and finished runner-up to get the silver medal.

Shahin Izadyar set the time of 25.73 seconds in the men’s 50-meter freestyle contests, and claimed the second spot. Izadyar also took part in the S10 men’s 100-meter individual medley heats, and registered 57.10 seconds to pocket a silver medal.

The Iranian team also came third in the 4×100 meter relay event.

Earlier in the competitions, Ataei earned the S6 men’s 200-meter freestyle bronze with 3:26.78 minutes.

The same Iranian Paralympian swimmer also clocked 2:04.17 minutes in the men’s 100-meter backstroke contests, and scooped a bronze.

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The Hague studios to host Iranian artists for intl. symposium

A R T d e s k TEHRAN — Two studios in The Hague will be playing host to a group of Iranian for an international painting symposium in the Dutch city.

The symposium organized by the Mythra Art Gallery in The Hague will open at Moof Studio on Tuesday, the gallery has announced.

The symposium titled “Putting Color on the Face of the World” will then go on at Pulchri Studio from June 16.



Visitors exit from Pulchri Studio in The Hague, which will host an international painting symposium on June 16.

Zahra Sajjadifar, Nazanin Nabavi, Manuchehr Gholami, Atefeh Mohammadpur, Sanaz Ahadi, Tina Bateni, Samira Alborzkuh and Yusef Abdinejad are among the Iranian artists selected to participate in the event.

Diana Valarezo from Ecuador, Claudette van de Rakt from the Netherlands, Larissa Oksman from Russia, Salam Djaaz from Iraq and Tawab Safi from Afghanistan will also attend the symposium.

“I organized the first international symposium of painting apart from all the conflicts of today’s world to give an opportunity to the avant-garde artists from different countries to work together with artists from Iran, get close, exchange, become friends and see the dynamics and effect of this colorful atmosphere on their artwork in the process,” Mythra Art Gallery director Mitra Jashni wrote in a catalogue for the symposium.

The subject of the symposium is “Artists for Interaction and Artistic Integration.”

Blue Vision Photography Festival opens in Tehran

A R T d e s k TEHRAN — The second edition of the Blue Vision Photography Festival, which aims to optimize the use of available resources and raise awareness of clean energy, opened at the Negarestan Garden Museum of the University of Tehran on Sunday.



A poster for the 2nd Blue Vision Photography Festival

Photos by 69 Iranian and 13 foreign photographers have been put on view, the director of the festival, Masud Makkar, said in a press conference on Sunday.

The photos will be competing in the three sections of cellphone, professional and international.

Photographer Mahmud Kalari, actress Niki Karimi, art scholar Mojtaba Aqai and photographer Shadi Qadirian are the Iranian members of the festival’s jury.

Also included is Nicolai Niemann, an environmental activist, producer and director, and the founder and administrator of the Berlin International Green Film Festival.

The photos will be displayed for 10 days at the Ruholamin Gallery of the museum.

2 grown up Harry Potters will compete on Broadway soon

NEW YORK (AP) — This fall, Broadway-goers will get a chance to see both Harry Potter and “Harry Potter.”

Daniel Radcliffe, who played the boy wizard in the J.K. Rowling franchise, will return to Broadway in “The Lifespan of a Fact,” co-starring Bobby Cannavale and Cherry Jones. Leigh Silverman will direct.

The show will begin performances on Sept. 20 and will officially open on October 18. It will face-off against the Tony-nominated play “Harry Potter and the Cursed Child”, which picks up 19 years from where Rowling’s last novel left off and portrays Potter and his friends as grown-ups.

“The Lifespan of a Fact” centers on the investigation of a Las Vegas teen’s suicide. Radcliffe’s Broadway credits include “Equus,” “How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying” and “The Cripple of Inishmaan.”

“Dressage” receives two nominations at Shanghai filmfest

A R T d e s k TEHRAN — Iranian director Puya Badkubeh’s debut drama “Dressage” has been nominated for best film while the film’s star Negar Moqaddam received a nomination for best actress at the 21st Shanghai International Film and TV Festival, the organizers have announced.

The film is competing in the Asian New Talent Award section of the festival, which will be held from June 16 to 25.

“Blue Amber” and “The Road Not Taken” both from China, “Born Bone Born” from Japan and “Guang” from Malaysia will be screened in the section.

“Dressage” is about Golsa and her friends who rob a corner shop. But while evaluating the booty, they are dismayed to realize that they forgot to take the security camera footage. One of them must return to the crime scene and retrieve it. The vote falls on Golsa, who bravely completes the mission. Her friends’ behavior makes her think, and she hides the hard drive somewhere in secret. But her accomplices and their well-to-do families, worried about their social standing, put more and more pressure on Golsa.

“Hattrick” by Iranian director Ramtin Lavvafi will be screened in the official competition of the festival. Seven other films, including “Friday’s Child” by American director A.J. Edwards and “The Way to Mandalay” by Ole Bornedal from Denmark, will also compete for a Golden Goblet in this section.



Negar Moqaddam acts in a scene from “Dressage”.

Castiglia in Saluzzo has artworks in Persian Diary



A painting by Mohammad-Hadi Fadavi

A R T d e s k TEHRAN — Castiglia, an ancient monument in the Italian town of Saluzzo, hosted a group of Iranian artists’ exhibition titled “Persian Diary” from May 20 to June 10.

The exhibition was part of a program for the new edition of START — Storia Arte a Saluzzo (History and Art in Saluzzo), a month-long initiative set up for one of the ten most beautiful towns in Italy, the organizers announced.

Twenty-one works by Firuzeh Akhlagi, Mohammad-Hadi Fadavi, Shahram Karimi, Alireza Karimpur, Alireza Saadatmand, Sahar Salehi and Amir Bakhtiar Sanjabi were showcased at the exhibit

that was curated by Persian art expert Vahid Malek.

Castiglia organized the exhibition in collaboration with the Tehran Art Center, the Turin-based Istituto Garuzzo per le Arti Visive (IGAV - Garuzzo Institute for Visual Arts).

“This is an important event for the IGAV, which has always believed in Saluzzo, site of our permanent collection and exhibition,” IGAV President Rosalba Garuzzo said during the opening ceremony of the showcase.

“It is all very much in the same spirit that has always infused our projects, which have cultural diplomacy as their basic objective,” she added.

Ilyas Yalcintas has permission to perform on Kish: organizer



Turkish pop singer Ilyas Yalcintas performs in an undated photo.

A R T d e s k TEHRAN — Exir Novin, an Iranian agency that is the organizer of Ilyas Yalcintas’s concerts in Iran, said on Sunday that the Turkish pop singer has the necessary permission from the Kish Free Zone Organization to perform on Kish Island.

The agency made the remarks in response to an announcement from the Music Office of Iran’s Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance that Yalcintas doesn’t have the office’s permission to perform on the Iranian island.

It also said that musicians do not need to obtain permission from the Music Office for their performances

in free zones and Yalcintas concerts will be held as planned.

However, the Music Office on Saturday denied Yalcintas permission to perform any concerts on Kish Island, declaring the concert program is not compatible with the cultural standards of the country.

Yalcintas in a post published on his Facebook in late May announced that he has obtained permission from the Iranian government to perform concerts on the southern Iranian island on July 4 and 5.

Yalcintas is popular in Iran for songs like “Icimdeki Duman”, “Yagmur” and “Gel Be Gökyüzüm”.

HBO gives go-ahead to “Game of Thrones” prequel

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — HBO said on Friday it is moving ahead with a prequel for its hit television series “Game of Thrones,” the first green light for five potential spinoff projects for the award-winning medieval fantasy.

HBO said it had given a pilot order to a prequel that will take place thousands of years before the events of “Game of Thrones,” the biggest international hit for the Time Warner channel.

If all goes well with the pilot, the network will order a full TV series.

The as yet untitled prequel was created by British screenwriter Jane Goldman with author George R.R. Martin, whose novel series “A Song of Ice and Fire” is the basis for the “Game of Thrones” television series, HBO said in a statement.

It will chronicle “the world’s descent from the golden Age of Heroes into its darkest hour,” and look at the secrets of the history of the warring families in the fictional kingdom of Westeros.

News of the prequel comes ahead of the eighth and final season of “Game of Thrones”, which is due to be broadcast in 2019.

The series, which has won multiple Emmy awards, is HBO’s biggest hit ever with some 30 million viewers in the United States and an army of devoted fans worldwide.

HBO gave no timescale for when the



The Iron Throne is seen on the set of the television series “Game of Thrones” in the Titanic Quarter of Belfast, Northern Ireland, Picture taken June 24, 2014. (Reuters/Phil Noble)

prequel series might air but executives have said any spinoffs would not be broadcast until at least a year after the final season of “Game of Thrones” in 2019.

Martin said a year ago that he is working with at least four other writers on ideas for other spinoffs but details have remained under wraps.

But HBO and Martin have said some of them may not even be set on Westeros, and that fans should not expect them to feature the same characters as “Game of Thrones.”

“This story, ‘A Song of Fire and Ice,’ is done. There’s no revival, reboot, spinoff talk,” HBO programming president Casey Bloys told the Hollywood Reporter earlier this year.

U.S. actors, TV networks agree to end casting couch

NEW YORK (Reuters) — The largest U.S. actors’ union and the four major television networks on Saturday agreed to limit auditions in private hotel rooms and homes, ratifying a guideline the screen actors’ guild had enacted on its own following the #MeToo uproar, the union said.

SAG-AFTRA, which represents 160,000 actors, and management from ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox reached a tentative agreement on a three-year contract that also includes an array of pay increases, the guild said in a statement. The deal is subject to approval by the guild’s board of directors next month.

The networks and union agreed to language similar to that from the union’s own Guideline No. 1, issued in April, which called for an end to auditions, interviews and similar professional meetings in private hotel rooms or at private residences.

SAG-AFTRA President Gabrielle Carteris said at the time the goal was to eliminate the potential for “predators to exploit performers behind closed doors under the guise of a professional meeting.”

The so-called casting couch has long been used by men seeking sexual favors from actresses in exchange for parts.

The measures followed the industry outrage that resulted from news reports that numerous women accused Hollywood



A demonstrator takes part in a #MeToo protest march for survivors of sexual assault and their supporters in Hollywood, Los Angeles, California U.S. November 12, 2017. (Reuters/Lucy Nicholson)

producer Harvey Weinstein of sexual misconduct. Weinstein denied the allegations.

The Weinstein reports led to a wave of accusations against high-profile men in politics, the media and show business, transforming the U.S. conversation about sexual harassment and assault.

Women told stories about how they had been harassed using the #MeToo hashtag on social media.

The scrutiny of Weinstein led to criminal charges against the producer last month. On June 5, Weinstein pleaded not guilty in Manhattan Supreme Court to charges of rape and sexual assault based on allegations from 2004 and 2013.