



UAE minister: Persian Gulf Arab states in crisis amid Qatar spat

2

IRAN DAILY



South Korea's Q1 Iran crude oil imports up

4

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EEU close to free-trade deal with Iran

The Moscow-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) aims to finalize a free-trade deal with Iran by the end of the year, in an attempt by Russia and its fellow members to deepen ties with Tehran.

Russia and Iran cooperate on a number of geopolitical issues. The two countries have sought to deepen relationship since the EU and US imposed sanctions on Moscow in 2014, FT reported.

Reaching a deal on free trade would represent a notable victory for the nascent EEU — a single market of Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia set up in 2015 — and mark a significant strengthening of relations between Iran and the former Soviet republics.

"We believe we can come up with something substantial by the end of the year... finished talks," said Timur Suleimenov, Kazakhstan's minister of economy.

The EEU prime ministers resolved in March to make talks with Tehran a priority, scenting an opportunity to expand beyond the bloc's combined market of 183 million people.

Continued on Page 4

US politicians challenge Trump's Saudi arms deal

Senator: Saudi Arabia 'breeds terrorism'



AFP

President Donald Trump's multibillion-dollar arms deal with Saudi Arabia could be held up by US politicians seeking to scrutinize its contents.

Members of both the US president's Republican Party and rival Democrats in both Congress and the Senate are hoping to block the sale of the weapons and equipment, The Independent reported on Monday.

Trump signed the \$110bn deal during a recent visit to Saudi Arabia.

In a letter to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Congressmen Ted Lieu, a Democrat, and Republican Ted Yoho urged their colleagues to reconsider the sale of precision guided munitions (PGMs) to the oil rich Middle Eastern kingdom.

They pointed out that former president Barack Obama's administration had halted a planned sale of PGMs to Saudi Arabia in December, "due to concerns over the widespread civilian casualties in Yemen" and "significant deficiencies" in the Royal Saudi Arabian Air Force's (RSAF) targeting capabilities.

They said: "This decision was the result of an internal review launched after the United Nations and a number of human rights organizations documented a series of RSAF airstrikes on civilian targets including hospitals, markets, schools and a large funeral."

They added that in March, the State Department had "reversed this policy without providing any justification for what had changed in its assessment."

In the Senate meanwhile, Senator's Chris Murphy, Al Franken and Rand Paul introduced a joint resolution of disapproval for the deal.

Under a provision of the Arms Export Control Act, they hope to block the sale of weapons and equipment to the Royal Saudi Air Force, although it represents only a portion of the total package.

However, they will have to wait for over a week before bringing their measure to the floor of the Senate.

Other Congressional leaders slammed the deal on account of Saudi Arabia's human rights violations and export of extremist ideologies.

Senator Patrick Leahy, the ranking member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, accused Trump of kowtowing to "one of the world's wealthiest and repressive regimes."

He also accused the Saudi royal family of "support for extremism that breeds terrorism" and "gross mistreatment of its own citizens."



MI5 opens inquiries into missed warnings over Manchester terror threat

3



Iran finishes second in IBSA judo championships

11



Guidebooks, selfie-sticks arrive as Rouhani declares Iran open to all

12

OPINION

Europe, US divided over policies toward Iran

By Bahram Qassemi*

Despite convergent views and fundamental unity which have persisted between the US and Europe in formulating policies against Iran, they have adopted different approaches toward Tehran in periods of times.

Presently, it seems that the convergence between the US and Europe towards Iran has turned into divergence.



IRNA

The Trump administration talks about reviewing the Iran nuclear deal and containing Iran's role in the region while Europe stresses on its commitments to stick to the agreement and interact with the Islamic Republic in the post JCPOA-era. This is a real difference though it may not be permanent.

The European Union and the White House are in disagreement about their ties with Iran on some important issues.

The most important and the main issue pertains to the JCPOA. The Trump administration has had no role in signing the nuclear accord. Although his government has remained committed to the deal, it has occasionally called for scrapping or reviewing the agreement, without mulling over the consequences.

However, the European Union considers the JCPOA as its biggest diplomatic achievement in the current century.

The EU regards maintaining the deal in line with its political interests due to the influential and useful steps it has taken to benefit from ties with Iran in the post JCPOA-era. The bloc has also warned the White House about the necessity to stick to the deal.

The second difference between the US and Europe over Iran is about the root causes of terrorism and instability in the region.

Continued on Page 2

UK Muslim community holds 'peace walk' after Manchester attack



GETTY IMAGES

Hundreds of people joined a peace walk in Manchester to pay their respects to those killed or injured in last week's arena attack.

The organizer, Manchester businessman Sajjad Haider, said nearly 200 marchers turned out to "show solidarity with the families of those who died", BBC reported on Monday.

Haider said: "The community have strong feelings about this and wanted a sharing of love with the victims."

"We feel the same upset and anger."

One woman who attended the walk, which began from Grosvenor Square and ended in St. Peter's Square, said: "We need

to be more open in regards to condemning it."

A man said he joined to walk to "show we're suffering as well as everybody else in Manchester and throughout the world".

Haider said people held red roses as a symbol of peace and banners with different messages on them along the walk.

"We are pleased with how it went."

Haider, an estate agent and prominent member of Manchester's Shia community, added: "The main thing is to show solidarity with the families of those who died and to give a strong message against terrorism, and a clear message that [the people who committed this act] are evil animals."

A gathering of imams took place at 15:00 in St. Ann's Square, where thousands gathered over the last few days to leave flowers, balloons and other messages of support for the victims and their families.

Hundreds of people turned out for a vigil at Heaton Moor Park on Sunday evening for Martyr Hett, one of 22 killed in the attack.

Balloons were released in the square on Saturday by the family of Georgina Callender.

Hundreds of Muslim children and their families marched from the Cheetham Hill area of the city to Manchester Arena on Friday.

Iraq presses Mosul assault, calls civilians to flee

Iraqi forces pressed forward on Monday with a broad offensive targeting Daesh-held areas in west Mosul and called for civilians to leave, the military said.

More than seven months into the massive operation to retake Mosul, Iraqi forces have recaptured the city's east and large parts of its western side, but the terrorists are still putting up tough resistance, AFP reported.

"Our units are continuing to advance... and entered Al-Saha al-Oula and Al-Zinjili and Al-Shifaa neigh-

also said Monday that Iraqi aircraft had dropped leaflets over Mosul urging residents to leave Daesh-held areas — the second time it had done so within the past week.

Overnight, planes dropped "thousands of leaflets on the Old Mosul, Al-Zinjili, Al-Shifaa and Al-Saha areas urging citizens to leave toward our security forces," it said.

Hundreds of thousands of people have already been displaced by the battle for Mosul, and that figure is likely to rise as Iraqi forces close



REUTERS

in the last Daesh-held areas of the city.

Daesh overrun large areas north and west of Baghdad in 2014, but Iraqi forces have since regained much of the territory they lost.

Meantime, the Republican Hospital, said Joint Operations Command spokesman Yahya Rasool.

Daesh was using "explosive-rigged vehicles and snipers and suicide bombers" to target Iraqi forces, he said.

The areas mentioned by Rasool — which are located north of Mosul's Old City, where Daesh also still holds significant territory — are the main targets of the offensive, which was announced on Saturday.

The Joint Operations Command

while, Shia paramilitary force said it had dislodged Daesh from a number of villages west of Mosul, scoring further progress toward the border with Syria.

The villages taken by the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) include Kojo, where Daesh terrorists abducted hundreds of Yazidi women in 2014.

Kojo and the other villages of the Sinjar mountain region will be returned to the Yazidi community, a PMU leader, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, said.

Putin visits France, hopes to mend strained ties



AP

On a visit likely to shape Russia-France ties for years, French President Emmanuel Macron hosted Russian President Vladimir Putin at the sumptuous Palace of Versailles on Monday for what the newly-elected French leader said would be "demanding" talks on Syria, the Ukrainian crisis and other thorny issues driving the rift between Russia and the West.

The leaders' first handshakes — relatively brief and cordial — after Putin climbed out of his limousine at Versailles, AP reported.

Monday's visit offered Putin and Macron a chance to reset a relationship that got off on a less-than-ideal foot during Macron's presidential campaign. Macron had strong words for Russia in his race for the presidency, saying France and Russia don't share the same values.

Macron is the first Western leader to speak to Putin after the Group of Seven summit over the weekend, where relations with Russia were a key topic.

The Kremlin hailed the visit as a chance for Putin and Macron to get to know each other and better understand their views on a range of disputed issues, including the Ukrainian crisis, the war in Syria and Russia's ties with the European Union.

During his G-7 news conference on Saturday, Macron promised to have a "demanding dialogue" with Russia, especially on Syria. He called it a failure that European nations were not involved in the talks over Syria's future but were being hit by the effects of that crisis, including the huge number of Syrian refugees trying to get to Europe.

Iran: No side can define nuclear deal based on its own interests

Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Monday that no government can define the terms of the nuclear deal selectively and based on its own interests, accepting some parts and rejecting the others.

Qassemi made the remarks during his weekly press conference while commenting on recent reports regarding possible new sanctions by the US Treasury Department against Iran's passenger planes deal, IRNA reported.

On Wednesday, the US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said it is reviewing licenses for Boeing and Airbus to sell aircraft to Iran, telling lawmakers he would increase sanctions pressure on Iran.

Iran's flag carrier, Iran Air, has agreed to buy 200 US and European passenger aircraft worth up to \$37 billion at list prices, though such deals typically include big discounts. They include 80 jets from Boeing, 100 from Airbus and 20 turboprops from Franco-Italian ATR.

Asked whether such decision is against the 2015 nuclear deal signed between Iran and world's six major powers, Qassemi said that the nuclear deal is a unified agreement approved by all signatories and cannot be redefined selectively by a single government.

The landmark nuclear deal was signed between Iran and members of the P5+1 group of countries – the US, Britain, Russia, China and France plus Germany – in 2015, under which Iran accepted to put limits on its nuclear program in return for removal of nuclear-related sanctions.

The international community has confirmed Iran's compliance with the deal so far.

'Unbelievable' accusations

Iran said US President Donald Trump's accusations of Iranian support for terrorism are "unbelievable" and "unacceptable," made in a country which is known for being "a haven and a promoter of violence and terrorism," Press TV reported.

Trump's claims were made during his recent visit to Saudi Arabia where he accused Iran of destabilizing the Middle East and supporting terrorist groups, meaning Hezbollah which is fighting terrorists backed by Riyadh in Syria.

"These misplaced, misguided and irrelevant positions by certain countries are nothing new. They are part of a blame-game and the remarks are unbelievable and unacceptable," Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Monday.

The US president's visit to Saudi Arabia



came during hotly-contested elections which gave President Hassan Rouhani another four-year term. Trump traveled to the kingdom on his first foreign visit during which he signed a \$110-billion arms deal.

Trump named Iran as the target of the deal and urged cooperative measures between the signatories and other Arab countries against what he called Iran's unfavorable regional role. "He travels to a country, which has been convicted in American courts," Qassemi said, referring to the criminal conviction of Saudi agents at US tribunals for their role in the September 11, 2001 terror attacks.

The Iranian spokesman said Saudi Arabia is "a country whose positions on extremism and terrorism over the past decades are clear."

Qassemi said Iran, Russia and Turkey are seriously continuing efforts as part of the Astana talks to maintain a cease-fire in Syria. The talks have been focusing on reinforcing the standing truce, which has resulted in the creation of four de-escalation zones in Syria.

Qassemi said once an agreement is reached, the guarantors are needed to dispatch troops

to the zones to monitor the cease-fire.

"The Astana debate is constantly underway and talks continue. There are negotiations among the three countries on reducing tensions and if the necessary conditions are met, the three countries are required to send troops in order to supervise the cease-fire," he said.

Qassemi also addressed the issue of the Arab-American summit at the King Abdulaziz Conference Center, which took place in Riyadh on May 21.

Riyadh issued a statement at the conclusion of the summit, also attended by Trump, which included some anti-Iran articles.

One article featured the Saudi-American agreement "on the need to stop Iranian intervention in other countries' internal affairs," while another called Iran's ballistic missile program "dangerous."

Qassemi said the statement was a "unilateral" one, issued either without the other Arab attendees' knowledge or contrary to their respective positions.

"The meeting was met with some setbacks and frustration, which will become clear in the future," he added.

"Our policy concerning neighboring countries is clear. We have always tried to speak with them in the language of friendship and amity to boost our commonalities..." Qassemi said.

"We do not dictate to others what they should do, but warned in advance of the meeting about the Zionist plot aimed at creating schism in the Muslim world," the official concluded.

Concerning the current anti-Iran movement within US political circles, the spokesman said Tehran will only react to those measures which receive the US administration's signature.

The congressional campaigns as well as two rounds of sanctions ratified since Trump's January inauguration have targeted Iran's missile program.

Qassemi reiterated that the missile work does not violate any UN Security Council resolution – as the projectiles are not capable of carrying nuclear warheads – and is completely of a defensive and deterrent nature.

"The [missile] policy is not going to undergo any changes," he asserted.

UAE minister: Persian Gulf Arab states in crisis amid Qatar spat

A United Arab Emirates minister said Persian Gulf Arab monarchies are going through a "severe" crisis, an apparent reference to a spat between a Saudi-led alliance and Qatar over ties with Iran.

The dispute poses a "grave danger" to members of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC), Anwar Gargash, the UAE minister of state for foreign affairs, said on Twitter. "Fending off strife needs a change in behavior, building confidence and restoring credibility", Bloomberg reported.



Tension has flared within the six-member bloc since state-run Qatar News Agency carried remarks criticizing efforts to isolate Iran after US President Donald Trump and Saudi Arabia's King Salman took turns to attack the Islamic Republic at an American-Muslim summit in Riyadh last week. Qatari officials said the statements, which have since been removed, were the work of hackers. The denial didn't stop UAE and Saudi media from accusing Qatar of breaking away from the PGCC's position against Iran.

The feud dominated Saudi newspapers on Monday. Okaz's headline declared, "Qatar breaks covenants, doesn't fulfill promises," while Al Eqtisadiah's pronounced, "Qatar: An economy of lost opportunities and investments connected to financial scandals." The website of the Qatari-owned Al-Jazeera television channel remained blocked by the Saudi Ministry of Culture and Information. Iran and Saudi Arabia, the two major oil exporters, are on opposite sides of conflicts from Syria to Iraq.

Qatar's ruler, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, spoke by phone with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani over the weekend. Rouhani, who was reelected to a second, four-year term last week, said his country was ready for talks to resolve the crisis, according to his website.

"We want the world of Islam, which is suffering from divisions, to advance toward peace and brotherhood and to this effect we are ready to negotiate to get a real agreement," he said.

OPINION

Europe, US divided over...

From Page 1

The US president in his first foreign trip to Saudi Arabia accused Iran of fueling the fires of sectarian conflict and terror.

Such an unrealistic and wrong stance adopted by Washington, which fuels Iranophobia, has helped in making a huge arms deal with Saudi Arabia.

Such a stance is tantamount to plunging the Middle East into growing insecurity, instability and terrorism.

While Trump was engaged in signing a multi-billion dollar arms deal with Riyadh, another terror attack hit Europe which led to the deaths of 22 people in Manchester.

Hence, it's vital for Europe to trace the real roots of terrorism. The European Union – unlike Trump's stance – cannot trace the security of its citizens for unstable political interests by misrepresenting the root causes of terrorism.

The widespread occurrence of terror attacks in Europe suggests that the perpetrators are the puppets of Wahhabis who train and organize their mercenaries in the region.

This sheds light on the difference between the EU and Washington. When there are differences about root causes of terrorism and instability, there will be differences on how to tackle them. Hence, one can understand why the European Union gives a cold shoulder to anti-Iran propaganda staged by the US and its regional allies, which seek to isolate the Islamic Republic.

In total disregard of such smear campaigns launched against Iran, the EU welcomed the results of Iran's May 19 presidential elections and called for establishing deep interaction and strong ties with the Islamic Republic to overcome the gloomy phenomenon of terrorism.

*Bahram Qassemi is the spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry.

Larijani: Israeli regime threat to Middle East nations, humanity

Iran's Parliament speaker, Ali Larijani, said the "aggressive and racist" nature of the Israeli regime has always been and will remain a source of threat to the nations in the Middle East and to humanity, in general.

In a message on Monday, Larijani offered his congratulations to the secretary general of the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, on the 17th anniversary of the liberation of southern Lebanon from Israeli occupation.

He said resistance was the only way to liberate Palestine from Israeli occupation.

"The multiple victories of the Islamic resistance [movement] against the Zionist regime (Israel) clearly demonstrate that the lofty aspirations of the Muslim Ummah for the liberation of occupied Palestinian territories can be achieved only through harmony, solidarity and resistance," Larijani added.

The top Iranian parliamentarian expressed confidence that unity and solidarity among different Lebanese groups would shape a "bright future" for people in Lebanon and the Islamic resistance movement.

The Israeli regime first invaded Lebanon in 1978 and later escalated the military operation into a full-scale offensive in 1982.

During the 22-year entanglement with Lebanon, the Israeli military took heavy blows from Lebanese resistance fighters and reportedly lost some 900 of its soldiers.

Following the 1982 offensive, known as the First Lebanon War, Tel Aviv refused to leave southern Lebanon and kept its military presence there in defiance of the UN Security Council Resolution 425 that called on the regime to immediately withdraw.

He added that the resistance has grown strong enough not to wait for support from the rest of the world or from inside or outside the country.

He also served as a source of inspiration for the Palestinians, who launched their second anti-Israel uprising, known as Al-Aqsa Intifada, in the occupied territories only four months after Tel Aviv's withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

Addressing the Lebanese nation from the southern city of Hermel on Thursday, Nasrallah said when southern Lebanon was occupied by Israel, no country in the world except Iran and Syria helped end the occupation.

He added that the resistance has grown strong enough not to wait for support from the rest of the world or from inside or outside the country.

However, the Zionist enemy eventually buckled under the resistance put up by Hezbollah fighters and pulled out its forces from the occupied areas overnight on May 24, 2000, in what observers call a humiliating defeat for the Israeli regime and a glorious victory for Hezbollah.

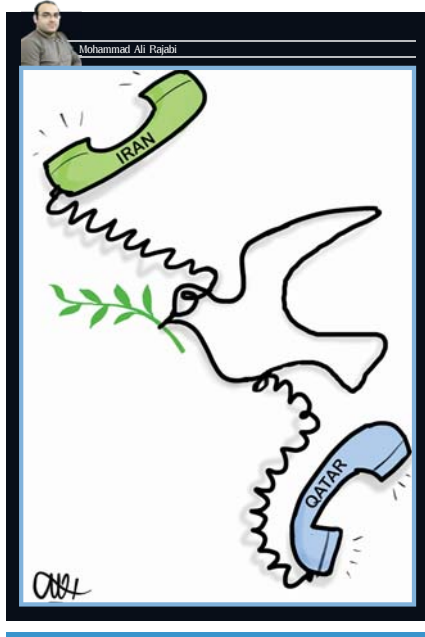
Hezbollah's victory also served as a source of inspiration for the Palestinians, who launched their second anti-Israel uprising, known as Al-Aqsa Intifada, in the occupied territories only four months after Tel Aviv's withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

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Wild weather

An intensifying cyclone churned north toward Bangladesh on Monday after heavy rain in Sri Lanka and thunderstorms in eastern India killed almost 200 people.



Police officers guard the entrance to a street in Moss Side, where raids took place outside the Manchester Arena in Manchester, northern England, on May 22, 2017. JOHN SUPER/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

M15 opens inquiries into missed warnings over Manchester terror threat

M15 launched two urgent inquiries into how it missed the danger posed by the Manchester bomber, Salman Abedi, amid claims his interest in being a potential terrorist killer was repeatedly reported to the authorities.

Britain's domestic security service started one review last week, which will aim to quickly identify any glaring errors, while the other will be more in depth, the Guardian has learned.

On Sunday, Home Secretary Amber Rudd refused to comment on whether opportunities were missed to spot the murderous intent of the 22-year-old before his deadly attack, as national security became the major issue in the general election campaign.

The reviews come with security officials warning that the threat from terrorism keeps rising and is at an "unprecedented scale", with other attack plots feared.

A 23-year-old man was arrested in the early hours of Monday in Shoreham-by-Sea, Sussex, on "suspicion of offenses contrary to the terrorism act", Greater Manchester police said, bringing to 14 the number in custody related to the Manchester attack inquiry.

The fallout from the attack has triggered an intense war of words across the political spectrum, with Rudd claiming that there would be a greater risk of another atrocity if Jeremy Corbyn became prime minister.

As she accused the Labour leader of voting against anti-terror measures, saying there was "no evidence he will keep people safe", Rudd's Labour counterpart, Diane Abbott, hit back by claiming that government cuts, including to the police and border force, have "consequences".

Investigators believe Abedi, whose parents come from Libya, may have received terrorist training in the country, where some areas are believed to be a safe haven for terrorists. He returned to the UK from Libya just days before exploding a homemade bomb packed with metal bolts and screws, carried in a rucksack, murdering 22 people after the Ariana Grande concert at Manchester Arena on May 22.

Teachers and religious figures in Manchester who knew Abedi raised concerns about his extremist views on multiple occasions and over several years.

M15 is believed to have conducted a quick review of the intelligence held about Abedi last week, but the inquiry was limited as the agency's focus and resources were poured into the manhunt and recovering the materials linked to the bomb.

The second review will be more detailed and look at the decision-making around Abedi before his attack. A source said the key question, given what is now evident about the danger Abedi posed, would be: "Would different decisions be made?"

The longer review will look at the processes and systems used to assess suspects and what was known about any of the other main conspirators. The system of assessing and managing risk used by M15 is coming under immense strain, given the service's unrelenting and rising workload.

Abedi had been examined by security service case officers in the past, but by May 22 was one of a pool of 20,000 one-time terrorist suspects. He was not one of the 3,000 people under active investigation.

M15 said it has to prioritize which suspects it deems most dangerous. Rudd, speaking on the BBC's

Andrew Marr Show on Sunday, said she did not want to "rush to conclusions" about intelligence failures.

But she added: "We won't shy away from looking at what we can do to keep people safe. We are in constant discussion with the security services and the police to make sure they have the right tools they need."

Rudd warned that further members of Abedi's network could still be at large. Speaking shortly before fresh raids were launched in Moss Side, Manchester, on Sunday afternoon, the home secretary warned: "We can't be entirely sure that [the Manchester operation] is closed."

Trump attacks 'fake news' following Kushner reports

US President Donald Trump attacked the news media and dismissed leaks from the White House as "fake news" on Sunday, following reports his son-in-law tried to set up a secret channel of communications with Moscow before Trump took office.

In a statement later on Sunday night, carried by the New York Times, Trump praised Kushner and the work he has done in the White House.

The White House faces mounting questions about potential ties between Russia and Trump's

"Meet the Press."

Kushner had contacts with Moscow in December about opening a secret back channel of communications, according to news reports published while Trump was away on his trip.

The 36-year-old Kushner, a real estate developer with no previous government experience, had at least three previously undisclosed contacts with the Russian ambassador to the United States during and after the 2016 presidential campaign, seven current and former US officials told Reuters.

"Whenever you see the words 'sources say' in the fake news media, and they don't mention names," Trump wrote, "it is very possible that those sources don't exist but are made up by fake news writers. #FakeNews is the enemy!"

Contacts between Trump associates and Russian officials during the campaign coincided with what US intelligence agencies concluded was a Kremlin effort through computer hacking, fake news and propaganda to boost Trump's chances of winning the White House.

White House officials defended the concept of secret communications channels without commenting specifically on the Kushner case. National security adviser H.R. McMaster told reporters on Saturday that so-called back-channeling was not unusual.



REUTERS

Shortly after Trump's remarks on Twitter, Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly made the rounds of Sunday television news shows to praise any so-called back channel communications, especially with Russia, as "a good thing," Reuters reported.

The Republican president returned to the White House after a nine-day trip to the Middle East and Europe that ended on Saturday to face more questions about alleged communications between Jared Kushner and Russia's ambassador to Washington.

"It is my opinion that many of the leaks coming out of the White House are fabricated lies made up by the #FakeNews media," Trump wrote in a series of Twitter posts on Sunday.

presidential campaign, which are also the subject of criminal and congressional investigations.

Trump officials were preparing to establish a "war room" to address an issue that has begun to dominate his young presidency.

Two Republican US senators played down the Kushner reports on Sunday, while the former director of national intelligence, James Clapper, took a darker view of such contacts with representatives of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"My dashboard warning light was clearly on and I think that was the case with all of us in the intelligence community - very concerned about the nature of these approaches to the Russians," Clapper told NBC's

Philippine military says close to defeating terrorists

The Philippine military said on Monday it was close to retaking a southern city held for a seventh day by terrorists, as helicopters unleashed more rockets on positions held by the armed men aligned with Daesh.

The occupation of Marawi city by the Maute, a group hardly heard of a year ago, has become the biggest security challenge of Rodrigo Duterte's 11-month presidency, with gunmen resisting air and ground assaults and controlling central parts of a city of 200,000 people, Reuters reported.

The military said the terrorists may be getting help from "sympathetic elements" and those they had freed from jail during the rampage that started on Tuesday and caught the military by surprise.



TED ALJIBE/AFP

Residents and commuters queue up at a police checkpoint at the entrance to Iligan on the southern island of Mindanao on May 29, 2017 after local authorities locked down the city due to a terror threat.

"Our ground commanders have assured that the end is almost there," military spokesman Restituto Padilla told reporters. "We're trying to isolate all these pockets of resistance."

More than 100 people have been killed, most of them terrorists, according to the military, and most of the city's residents have fled.

The military said the Maute group was still present in nine of the city's 96 barangays, or communities.

The Maute's ability to fight off the military for so long will add to fears that Daesh terrorist group's radical ideology is spreading in the southern Philippines and it could become a haven for terrorists from Southeast Asia and beyond, Malaysians and Indonesians were among the terrorists killed.

The government believes the Maute carried out their assault before the Muslim holy month of Ramadan to capture the attention of Daesh and earn recognition as a regional affiliate.

A Reuters photographer saw a Daesh flag in an oil drum in an abandoned street on Monday, where chickens roamed in front of damaged shops and homes.

Some troops tried to eliminate Maute snipers on Monday as others guarded deserted streets, taken back block by block.

Helicopters circled the lakeside city and smoke poured out of some buildings. Artillery explosions echoed.

WHO: Yemen cholera death toll rises, but number of infections drops

The number of people who have died in a cholera epidemic affecting Yemen has risen to at least 471, according to World Health Organization (WHO) figures released on Monday.

But the latest WHO bulletin covering the period from April 27, said that there was a "significant decrease" in the daily average number of cases recorded in the week up to May 27 compared to the previous seven-day period, Reuters reported.

The epidemic began in October and grew until December. It then dwindled but was never brought fully under control, and a new surge in cases began in April.

Yemen has been hit hard by war, with 19 million of its 28 million people needing humanitarian aid and many of them on the brink of famine. Fewer than half of the country's health facilities are fully functional.



ABDULJABBAR ZEYAD/REUTERS

A nurse attends to a boy infected with cholera at a hospital in the Red Sea port city of Hodeidah, Yemen, on May 14, 2017.

The WHO said on Monday that the average daily number of cases recorded between May 21 and May 27 was 2,529 - down from 3,025 in the previous seven days.

The bulletin said that the total number of suspected cases stood at 51,832.

Saudi Arabia has been incessantly pounding Yemen since 2015 in a bid to reinstall the country's ex-government and crush the Houthi Ansarullah movement.

Caused by ingesting bacteria from water or food contaminated with feces, cholera usually manifests itself with sudden acute diarrhea and can kill within hours, although three-quarters of infected people show no symptoms.

The short incubation period means outbreaks can spread with speed, especially in places without safe water and proper sanitation, according to the WHO.

SPECIAL NEWS

Domestic Economy Desk

Italian bank approves ties with Iranian counterparts

Domestic Economy Desk

An Italian bank has confirmed that it has approved banking ties with 20 of its Iranian counterparts, said Iran's Foreign Ministry in a letter to Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIM).

The approval has paved the way for direct money transfer to the branches of Banca Popolare di Sondrio of Italy, IRNA reported.



AP

The TCCIM says the measure will cut costs and reduce risks involved in money transfer via currency exchange bureaus.

Monetary relations will also be conducted in a transparent manner and in line with the regulations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

The Italian bank said not only businessmen but also Iranian students in Italy can transfer money via its branches noting that the commission for transferring money is €1.5 for every €1,000.

It announced last year that it would set up direct ties with Iranian banks to facilitate trade between the two countries.

The Italian bank cited anti-Iran sanctions and lack of direct banking ties between Tehran and the West as reasons contributing to the transfer of money through currency exchange bureaus over the past years.

On May 24, Saman Bank, a leading private Iranian lender, opened its first branch in Italy.

The branch opened in Rome following meetings between officials of the Central Bank of Iran and members of an Italian delegation.

The Iranian bank said it seeks to provide financing, investment, banking as well as legal and consulting services, create conditions for investment and introduce investment opportunities to the Europeans, especially Italian investors.

The branch openings come amid efforts made by President Hassan Rouhani's administration to open up to the West following the removal of sanctions in January last year.

The lifting of sanctions was part of the Iran nuclear deal signed between Tehran and major world powers in July 2015.

Philippines, Iran to explore possible energy sector investments

Philippines state-owned PNOC Exploration Corp. has teamed up with an Iranian oil firm to explore possible investments in oil and gas prospects in the Middle East and in a refinery in Mindanao.

PNOC signed a memorandum of understanding with National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC). The deal was signed by NIOC's Deputy Managing Director for Development and Engineering Affairs Gholamreza Manouchehri and PNOC EC President Pedro Aquino Jr., philstar.com reported.

The MoU will cover a preliminary review, evaluation, assessment of several proposed projects in the Philippines and Iran.

These include investment for the development of Pazanan (oil and gas) fields and third phase of Darkhovin field to supply gas to the proposed liquefied natural gas (LNG) liquefaction plant; investment in the construction of an LNG liquefaction plant in Iran; supply of oil as feedstock of the proposed refinery in Mindanao.



IRNA

The Darkhovin oilfield is located 30 kilometers north of Khorramshahr and 100 kilometers south of Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province. The field has a reserve of about 3.6 billion barrels of in-situ oil.

Meanwhile, Pazanan oilfield is an Iranian oil and natural gas field that is located 170 kilometers south east of Ahvaz in Khuzestan Province and between Aghajari and Bibi Hakimeh fields.

Being one of huge retrograde gas condensate reservoir in Iran, Pazanan oilfield is estimated to have total proven reserves of around 50 trillion cubic feet and production is slated to be around 750 million cubic feet/day and around 31,000 barrels per day.

At home, PNOC is planning a refinery in Mindanao, which is projected to be built and put into operation within the next three years.

Last year, the company revealed plans to study overseas oil and gas opportunities in Nigeria and Iran for long-term profitability.

South Korea's Q1 Iran crude oil imports up

A hike in Iranian crude imports led an increase in imports by South Korea which purchased 46.7 million barrels of oil from the Middle East country over the first quarter of 2017 — a surge of 104.5 percent from a year earlier, South Korean government data showed Monday.

As a result, Iran became the second biggest oil exporter to South Korea at the end of March, followed by Saudi Arabia, according to the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy, Yonhap reported.

South Korea's imports of crude oil continued to rise in the three-month period from a year earlier amid a downturn trend in oil prices.

The combined inbound purchase of crude oil reached 278.18 million barrels in the first three months — up 4.9 percent year-on-year.

The import of oil products, however, fell 4.2 percent on-year to 78 million barrels during the cited period.

Meanwhile, South Korea's export of oil products amounted to 126.9 million barrels through March — up 8.7 percent from a year ago — on the back of an increase in the shipments to Asia and the United States.

Exports to China, the biggest buyer of South Korean oil products, climbed 2.6 percent on-year to 22.5 million barrels in the first quarter, while those to the US soared 45 percent to 11.4 million barrels on strong demand for aviation fuel.

Iran has signed a flurry of deals with Western companies over the past year since the easing of international sanctions on Tehran after an accord was reached over its nuclear program.

Iran needs foreign investment to repair and upgrade its oil and gas fields. It also seeks the transfer of technology to its oil industry after a decade of sanctions.

In November 2016, France's Total became the first oil major to sign a big deal with Tehran since the lifting of sanctions and agreed to help it develop the world's largest gas field, South Pars.

Shell signed a provisional deal in De-



REUTERS

cember to develop Iranian oil and gas fields South Azadegan, Yadavaran and Kish in December 2016.

Iran has named 29 companies from more than a dozen countries as being eligible to bid for oil and gas projects using the new, less restrictive contract model.

The firms include Shell, France's Total, Italy's Eni, Malaysia's Petronas and Russia's Gazprom and Lukoil, as well as companies from China, Austria, Japan and other countries.

Russia's Zarubezhneft signed an MoU to conduct feasibility studies on two joint fields in the west of the country.

Norway's International Aker Solutions

Company signed an MoU to modernize Iran's oil industry.

Last May, Austria's OMV signed an MoU for projects in the Zagros area in western Iran and the Fars field in the south.

South Korean Daewoo Engineering and Construction (Daewoo E&C) signed an MoU to construct an oil refinery in Bandar Jask, on the southern coast of Iran.

Italy's Saipem signed MoUs to cooperate on pipeline projects, upgrading of refineries and development of Tous gas field in the northeastern province of Khorasan Razavi.

Norwegian oil and gas company DNO said it was the second Western energy company after Total to sign a deal with Iran under which it agreed to study the development of the Changuleh oilfield in western Iran.

Lukoil, Russia's second biggest oil producer, hopes to reach a decision on developing two new oilfields in Iran.

Germany's Siemens AG signed an MoU in May to overhaul equipment and facilities at Iran's oil operations and refineries. BASF's Wintershall oil and gas exploration subsidiary signed an MoU with the National Iranian Oil Company in April 2016.

MPP to ink deals with European firms

Maroon Petrochemical Plant (MPP) is to sign deals with Royal Dutch Shell and two Italian companies to develop two projects, said the company's managing director.

Rahim Sharif Mousavi said one of the projects envisaged is the development of the facility's ethyl oxide unit, adding Italy's engineering company Maire Tecnimont will take part in the project as one of its developers, Shana reported.

He said the company may also sign another deal with Royal Dutch Shell within the next few weeks.

MPP officially became operational in 2006. Touted as one of Iran's biggest petrochemical producers, the company supplies 1.1 million tons of ethylene, 200,000 tons of propylene, 300,000 tons of heavy density polyethylene, 300,000 tons of polypropylene and over 443,000 tons of glycol annually.

Recently, German industrial group Siemens has negotiated with Iran on track technology and intercity trains that could be worth over €2 billion.

Unconfirmed Iranian media reports last year said German chemicals giant BASF held talks with Iranian officials on investing in a multibillion-dollar petrochemical complex.

The company has said it welcomed the lifting of sanctions and was strictly adhering to international rules and agreements. BASF has a sales office in Iran and its activities include some polyurethane foams operations for finished products with "currently very limited commercial activities". It says it is observing the situation very closely.



AP

EEU close to free-trade deal with Iran

From Page 1

"We would like to have a framework signed then," said Suleimenov, who became minister in December after previously working as the minister in charge of economy and financial policy at the EEU Commission in Moscow. At the same time, Suleimenov warned that any souring of US-China trade relations under Trump would be harmful for Central Asia.

Trump's campaign for the White House was marked by strong anti-free trade rhetoric and heavy criticism of China, which he threatened with import tariffs and a move to label it a currency manipulator.

However, his recent meetings with President Xi Jinping and a trade deal this month to give US companies more access to the Chinese market, while scorned by experts, have raised hopes that he will be less aggressive towards Beijing in office.

China's 'One Belt - One Road' policy to aggressively expand trade relations with Central Asian countries is seen in the region's capitals as a crucial driver of their economic growth.

"I am personally afraid of [Trump's] dealings with China," Suleimenov said.

"The US is an important strategic political partner for Kazakhstan, its political importance is much, much bigger than its economic role. But China is both. It is a political partner and economic partner," he added.

"And if something bad happens to the US-China relationship, it is going to affect us. Whether it is a trade war, and there is dumping by Chinese companies to Kazakhstan, to the EEU, whether it is a depreciation of the yuan," the 39-year-old US-educated minister said, adding, "There are lots of other consequences that will affect us."

China is Kazakhstan's biggest invest-

ment and its top export destination. Beijing sells about \$6 billion of goods to the country every year.

China has also surpassed traditional regional heavyweight Russia as the most important trading partner for some of Kazakhstan's neighbors.

Russia's President Vladimir Putin said last August that Moscow wanted Iran to join the EEU — a move that was seen as crucial in bringing the two countries closer in their plans to form a strategic partnership.

Putin underlined that a study had already started over the possibility of creating a free-trade zone between Iran and the EEU.

"Iran is Russia's longtime partner. We believe that bilateral relations will benefit from the reduction of tensions around Iran following the comprehensive agreement on the Iranian nuclear program," Putin was quoted by the media as saying.

OECD: Universal basic income would fail to cut poverty



A universal basic income paid at a flat rate to all citizens would fail to reduce poverty levels in higher advanced economies and require substantially higher taxes to fund its simplicity, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development has concluded in a detailed study of the idea.

The prospect of swapping existing social support for a basic income has gained traction in countries as diverse as the US, Switzerland and France. Limited trials have started in Finland and the Netherlands although no country has decided fully to take the plunge, FT reported.

Proponents of basic incomes argue that they would provide security for everyone in society, reduce inequality and provide insurance against robots replacing humans in the labor market.

These claims receive short shrift in the detailed modeling exercise undertaken by the OECD, the Paris-based international organization that specializes in cross-national comparisons of policy ideas.

Its modeling shows the simplicity of basic income schemes would come at the cost of a need for large increases in taxation, less effective targeting of support on the poorest and large numbers of gainers and losers.

James Browne and Herwig Immervoll, authors of the report, said that basic incomes at a meaningful level "would require tax rises as well as reductions in existing benefits and would often not be an effective tool for reducing income poverty".

The study noted that social security systems in advanced economies vary greatly with some much more targeted on the poor than others. Social insurance systems, which pay out according to contribution histories, often provide significant incomes to higher-income groups, particularly in countries such as Italy with significant early retirement.

But if these varying systems and tax-free allowances in income tax systems were replaced by a single payment to all individuals under pension age, the OECD found that payments per person would be far below the level necessary to raise their living standards above the national poverty line in all countries. Spreading out payments to people currently not entitled would lead to very low levels of income.

If instead a basic income were paid at the level of minimum guaranteed income in that country, higher taxes would generally be needed.

"Large tax-revenue changes are needed to finance a basic income at meaningful levels," the report concluded. "Tax burdens would go up for most people as a result, further increasing tax-to-GDP ratios that are currently already high in the OECD area."

Italy and Finland were outliers among OECD countries. In both countries, a basic income paid at the level of the country's existing guaranteed minimum income would result in national budget savings rather than costs.

Because everyone would receive a guaranteed payment, there would also be many gainers and losers, the OECD calculations find, with gainers across the income distribution depending on how social security systems work.

With a basic income less clearly targeted on poor families, poverty levels would rise in the UK, France and Finland and would be unchanged in Italy — the four countries studied in detail in the report.

The authors also expressed concern that the right to a basic income would undermine the incentives to work because it would "sever links between carefully balanced rights and responsibilities of job seekers".

Main Indices of TSE

Index	Value	Change	Percent
Total Index	80599.6	0	0
Industry Index	69258.0	(18.3)	(0.03)
Free Float Index	88047.1	86.3	0.1
First Market Index	55704.9	(34)	(0.06)
Second Market Index	179943.6	192.8	0.11

Overall Index details on 20170529

First	80713.2	Change end of year(%)	918.32%
High	80730.0	Historical highest	89500.6 (20140105)
Low	80599.6	Historical lowest	100 (1369/1/6)
Close	80599.6	Base Value	100 (1369/1/6)
Change	0		

Industry Index details on 20170529

First	69333.1	Change end of year(%)	1027.74%
Max Value	69348.7	Historical highest	75181.9 (20140105)
Max Value	69610.5	Historical lowest	1226.8 (1377/8/25)
Closing	69258.0	Base Value	
Closing	(18.3)		

Free Float Index details on 20170529

First	88359.9	Change end of year(%)	
Max Value	88753.6	Historical highest	105040 (20140105)
Max Value	88687.9	Historical lowest	
Closing	88047.1	Base Value	
Closing	86.3		

Main Board Index details on 20170529

First	55755.5	Change end of year(%)	777.1%
Max Value	55772.5	Historical highest	67441.4 (20140105)
Max Value	55990.5	Historical lowest	
Closing	55704.9	Base Value	4740.4 (1381/6/2)
Closing	(34)		

Secondary Index details on 20170529

First	180356.0	Change end of year(%)	1345.03%
Max Value	180383.6	Historical highest	181353 (20170522)
Max Value	181452.5	Historical lowest	
Closing	179943.6	Base Value	4740.4 (1381/6/2)
Closing	192.8		

Is China's economy turning Japanese?

There are few things studied as closely by the Chinese Communist party as how to avoid the fate of its Soviet counterpart. In an internal meeting after he assumed power in 2012, President Xi Jinping said no one in the Soviet Union

policy. Seven years on, China's total debt is 250 percent of GDP and climbing, officials are trying to rein in sky-high real estate prices and the government is still grappling with the aftermath of a stock



wordpress.com

had been 'man enough' to stand up to Mikhail Gorbachev and glasnost.

But for Jinping another historical event from the same era may warrant more immediate attention. It is just over 30 years since Japan began inflating a property and stock market bubble whose implosion ravaged public confidence, cowed corporations and scarred an economy for decades. China's priority today is to avoid that fate, according to FT.

It is not a new concern for Beijing. In 2010, as China's overall indebtedness was approaching 200 percent of gross domestic product, Jinping, then the country's vice-president, asked scholars at the Central Party School to research the subject, according to two Chinese academics familiar with his request.

A subsequent paper outlined some of the lessons of the Japanese bubble, including the need for Beijing to raise awareness of financial risks, safeguard 'economic sovereignty' and not give in to pressure to change its currency

market bubble that burst in 2015. Jinping last month warned the country's leaders of the need to "safeguard financial security".

But how great is the risk of China turning Japanese? Does China — the world's second-biggest economy in 2017 — run the risk of repeating the fate of what was the world's second-biggest economy in 1989 — Japanese-style 'lost decades'?

If Japan's fate were to befall its giant neighbor, the consequences would be devastating for the global economy. China provides 40 percent of its annual growth. China also supplies just over 20 percent of US imports — the same percentage as Japan in the mid-1980s. Goldman Sachs' Naohiko Baba and other analysts suggest that there are lessons for Beijing to learn from Japan's bubble experience, when laid out against spookily similar reference points ranging from corporate debt levels to average white-collar commuting times in China.

If bad debt doesn't rise during hard times, banks aren't doing enough

Many banks in Asia have seen asset quality deteriorate in a difficult post-crisis climate, but the rise in non-performing loans should be assessed in the context of that environment, Singapore's central bank chief said on Monday.

"Banks are in the business of mediating risks. When risks materialize, as they sometimes do, those who borrow get into difficulties. NPLs must rise," Ravi Menon, managing director of the Monetary Authority of Singapore, said in his opening remarks at the 2017 Symposium on Asian Banking and Finance in the city state, CNBC wrote.

"This is odd for a regulator to say, but if NPLs did not rise at all during difficult times, then the banks are probably not lending enough, they're not

weaker economic growth and prolonged easy monetary policy, have also affected returns by Asian banks, Menon noted.

But Asian banks are in a better position to grow compared to their European counterparts, some of which have withdrawn from the region by selling their Asian business units, Menon said.

He noted that Asia's growth is expected to average around six percent in the next five years, compared to the global average of 3.7 percent.

On bad debt, he said, it is more important that banks manage that risk by 'proactively and conservatively' setting aside enough money to cover those loans.

"Take for example Singapore. NPLs have risen amid the weakening environment and emerging asset quality risks



uk.finance.yahoo.com

taking on sufficient risks to promote business expansions and the economy," he added.

A Reuters data analysis last year found bad loans at 74 major listed Asian banks, excluding Indian and Japanese lenders, reached \$171 billion at the end of 2015. That was the highest since 2008 and 28 percent higher than a year earlier. Concerns over mounting debt levels in Asia have resulted in several changes in the region, including a recent downgrade in China's rating by Moody's.

Rising levels of bad loans, coupled with

in the oil and gas sector, which has been weighed down by low oil prices.

Banks in Singapore have made adequate provisions. The overall provisioning cover for the banking system as a percentage of total unsecured NPLs is about 100 percent. The local banks' provisioning cover is even higher at above 200 percent," he said.

"The good news for Asian banks is these cyclical headwinds will pass in time. Growth is recovering, monetary policy is normalizing and commodity prices are stabilizing."

Major Currencies

Currency	To USD	Currency	To USD
Turkish Lira	0.2793	Chinese Yuan	0.1458
Euro	1.1184	UAE Dirham	0.2721
British Pound	1.2845	Kuwaiti Dinar	3.2893
Australian Dollar	0.7438	Iraqi Dinar	0.0008
Japanese 100 Yen	0.0898	Saudi Riyal	0.2665

Major Commodities

Crude Oil	\$49.63	Silver	\$17.37
Gold	\$1267.10	Platinum	\$960.00
Copper	\$2.56	Wheat	\$438.25

Kabwe in Zambia is the world's most toxic town, according to pollution experts, where mass lead poisoning has almost certainly damaged the brains and other organs of generations of children.

Trump keeps world waiting on Paris deal

Donald Trump has said he will decide whether to pull out of a key climate change deal in the next week, having apparently shrugged off pressure from US allies in recent days.

The US president tweeted he would make his 'final decision' on the Paris accord after his return to Washington, BBC reported.

Trump left the G7 summit in Sicily without reaffirming his commitment to the accord, unlike the other six world leaders in attendance.

He previously threatened to pull out.

Trump, who has called climate change 'a hoax' on occasion, has reportedly indicated this is still his position to key members of his inner circle.

The uncertainty over his position on the Paris agreement puts him at odds with other members of the G7.

The Paris deal is the world's first comprehensive climate agreement, set out in 2015, with the aim of keeping the global average rise in temperatures below 2°C.

In order to do that, countries pledged to reduce their carbon emissions.

UK lobbies Europe to dilute flagship energy efficiency law

The UK is lobbying Europe to water down a key energy-saving target despite the fact it will not take effect until after Brexit, according to leaked documents that sparked warnings that energy bills could rise and jobs put at risk.

On the day, Prime Minister Theresa May triggered Article 50, government officials asked the European commission to weaken or drop elements of its flagship energy efficiency law, according to The Guardian.

Green campaigners warned that the efforts to undermine the energy efficiency directive were a sign the Conservatives would dilute or abolish European energy and climate policies after the UK leaves the EU.

In the past, the UK has publicly welcomed the targets, which end in 2020, as an important driver for reducing consumer bills and reliance on energy imports.



TIM PHILLIPS/GETTY IMAGES

The European Commission wants a binding target of improving energy efficiency 30 percent by 2030, compared with business-as-usual.

But documents obtained by Greenpeace, dated March 29, show the UK urging the commission to lower the goal to 27 percent and make it non-binding on the EU's 28 members. A more recent version, dated May 22 and seen by The Guardian, shows the UK has maintained its stance.

Great barrier reef bleaching worse than first thought

Coral bleaching on Australia's Great Barrier Reef is worse than first thought and the impact will accelerate unless global greenhouse gas emissions are cut, scientists said on Monday.

The 2,300-kilometer (1,400-mile) World Heritage-listed reef suffered its most severe bleaching on record last year due to warming sea temperatures during March and April, phys.org wrote.

Initial aerial and in-water surveys showed 22 percent of shallow water corals were destroyed in 2016, but it has now been bumped up to 29 percent and with the reef currently experiencing an unprecedented second straight year of bleaching, the outlook is grim.

"We're very concerned about what this means for the Great Barrier Reef itself and what it means for the communities and industries that depend on it," Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) chairman Russell Reichelt said.

"The amount of coral that died from bleaching in 2016 is up from our original estimates and, at this stage, although reports are still being finalized, it's expected we'll also see an overall further coral cover decline by the end of 2017."

Bleaching, which occurs when abnormal conditions such as warmer sea temperatures cause corals to expel tiny photosynthetic algae, draining them of their color, also extended to deeper corals beyond depths divers can typically survey.

But mortality of those reefs could not be systematically assessed.

The most severely impacted region was an area north of the popular tourist town Port Douglas, where an estimated 70 percent of shallow water



inhabitat.com

corals have died.

Cairns and Townsville, also hugely popular tourist destinations, are among the regions hardest-hit from the 2017 bleaching event, although southern parts of the natural wonder escaped the worst.

Corals can recover if the water temperature drops and the algae are able to recolonize them, but it can take a decade.

The reef is already under pressure from farming run-off, development and the crown-of-thorns starfish, with the problems compounded this year by powerful cyclone pummeling the area.

Reichelt said the storm impacted a quarter of the

reef but a complete picture for 2017 would not be available until next year.

The GBRMPA hosted a summit last week of more than 70 of the world's leading marine experts to work on a blueprint on how best to respond to the threats.

Among options explored was developing coral nurseries, strategies to boost culling of crown-of-thorns starfish, expanding monitoring systems and identifying priority sites for coral restoration.

Key to the talks was the need to slash greenhouse gas emissions to prevent warming sea temperatures.

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Daughters bring out 'softer side' in fathers

Mom, it's not all in your head: Dad does respond to toddler daughters and sons differently. Brain scans and random recordings of their times together prove it.

Fathers are not only more attentive to little girls, a new study found, they're also more accepting of their feelings, UPI reported.

Dads sing more to their daughters, play harder with their sons and speak to their little ones in strikingly different — and important — ways.

Lead researcher Jennifer Mascaro, an assistant professor in family and preventive medicine at Emory School of Medicine in Atlanta, said, "The really interesting and significant thing to me is these differences are showing up very early."

"We really need to think about unintended [gender] biases that we may have in our interactions."

The researchers wanted to learn if different brain responses to boys and girls might affect how dads treat their sons and daughters.

Mascaro said, "The new study doesn't resolve whether those brain differences mean fathers are hardwired to treat sons and daughters differently or if they are simply trying to behave as they think society expects them to."

But it offers an unfiltered look at how fathers behave with their 1- and 2-year-olds, and some lessons for parents.

For the study, researchers asked 52 dads to clip a small computer to their belts for 48 hours.

The device turned on randomly to record their daily interactions with their toddlers — 30 girls and 22 boys.

The recordings show dads responding swiftly and supportively when their daughters were sad or anxious, but paying less attention to their sons' feelings.

Mascaro said, "When a child is expressing emotions — rather than ignore it or try to distract them or try



huffingtonpost.com

to undermine some of those really intense feelings — validating those emotions, naming them and having the child sit with those emotions and identify them on their own is important."

"The idea that fathers and other adults are doing that less with boys is really important."

How dads talked to their toddlers differed, too.

With their sons, they used the language of achievement — words like 'proud', 'win' and 'top'.

With their daughters, they coaxed more complex chat with words like 'all', 'below' and 'much' — analytical language tied to future academic success.

Dads of girls also were more likely to refer to their daughter's body in

conversation.

That intrigued the researchers, because body stigma takes root in early childhood and girls are more apt than boys to say they are unhappy with the way they look.

In addition to the recordings, dads also had brain scans while viewing photos of their kids.

Although their brains reacted the same to sad-faced photos of their boys and girls, daughters' smiles elicited stronger responses in areas of the brain key to visual processing, reward and emotion control, the study found.

That meshes with other studies suggesting fathers are more apt to link happiness with girls.

One finding researchers didn't expect: Dads' brains lit up when they saw pictures of their sons with

neutral expressions, ones whose meaning hinges on context.

Researchers suspect it's because dads get a kick out of roughhousing. That's a time when their boys' faces probably have just such an expression.

An expert on parent-child communication who was told of the study called it "very exciting work", but cautioned against easy explanations.

Makeba Parramore Wilbourn, an assistant professor of psychology and neuroscience at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, said that cultural influences rather than biology probably underpin the way fathers behaved.

"Though we might get clear scans of the brain, behavior is complex and it's important for us not to lose sight of that and to remember that there are a lot of factors playing a role."

Mascaro agreed, adding further study is needed.

She said, "I think it would be overstepping it to say we can make any predictions about how these differences would play out in the life of a child."

Both suggested, however, that girls develop empathy because they are encouraged to express their emotions, which would also benefit boys.

Suppressing their feelings can do lasting harm. It makes grown men feel depressed, isolated and dissatisfied with their marriages, studies have shown.

Fathers, meanwhile, might want to consider more rough-and-tumble play with their little girls — not only because it's fun, but because it helps kids manage their emotions, according to the study.

Wilbourn said, "Being there for your kids is what matters most."

"If I had to pick, I don't care what a dad is saying as long as he's there and saying something."

The most important thing for dads and moms to recognize is that kids need your presence."

How to stay cool in bed with no air conditioning

It seemed like summer had been and gone with those nice sunny days in June a distant memory — but now it seems to be back in a heartbeat.

Yesterday was the hottest day of the year so far, and the Sun is out again today, mirror.co.uk wrote.

So after digging out the Sun cream and finding where you put your sunglasses to help you get through the day, here is our guide to coping with those stifling hot nights when sleep seems like an impossibility.

Sleep School's expert Dr. Guy Meadows works with Bensons for Beds and has these top tips to keep you cool and get you to sleep, rather than be hot and bothered, counting sheep.



pbs.org

• **Keep a cool head:** Getting frustrated and restless because you're hot only generates more heat and keeps you up longer. Keep a cool head by lying still — only by accepting the heat can you move your mind and body closer to sleep.

• **Frozen bedding:** When bedroom temperatures soar drastically, action is often needed. Pop your sheets and pillows into bags and put them in a freezer ready for bedtime.

• **Choose cotton:** Save satin, silk or polyester sheets for a cooler day. Cotton bed linens are lightweight and breathable, promoting airflow in your bedroom.

• **Make your own breeze:** Humans sleep best in a cool bedroom, with the ideal temperature being 17°C. Open a window or invest in an electric fan to add an extra breeze.

• **Late night entertaining:** Warmer nights lead to delayed bed times, which can lead to later eating and drinking close to bedtime.

This is all good summer fun, but the downside is trouble sleeping.

For best quality sleep aim to leave at least two hours between eating and sleeping.

• **Reach for the H₂O:** Have a glass of water by the bed to drink if and when needed. Drinking a full glass of water before bed can lead to multiple toilet visits throughout the night.

• **Cool shower:** Take a cool shower before bed for a quick and easy way to cool down. Avoid freezing showers as these can be over stimulating and wake you up.

Let's hear it for the written word. Learning to read can have profound effects on the wiring of the adult brain, even in regions that aren't usually associated with reading and writing.

That's what researchers found when they taught a group of illiterate adults in rural India to read and write, according to washingtonpost.com.

Michael Skeide and colleagues at the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Science in Leipzig, Germany, wanted to study how culture changes the brain, so they focused on reading and writing.

These cultural inventions have appeared only recently in our evolutionary history, so we haven't had a chance to evolve specific genes for such skills.

The team recruited 30 people whose average age was about 31. Twenty-one were taught to read and write the Devanagari script, which is used in Hindi and other Indian languages, over six months.

Nine people weren't taught anything. All had their brains scanned before and after the six-month period.

Learning to read and write alters brain wiring within months



washingtonpost.com

By the end of the study, the team saw significant changes in the brains of the people who had learned to read and write.

These individuals showed an increase in brain activity in the cortex, the outermost layer of the brain, which is involved in learning.

Learning to read also seemed to change brain regions that aren't typically involved in reading, writing or learning.

In particular, two regions deep in the brain appeared more active after training: Portions of the thalamus and the brainstem.

These two regions are known to coordinate information from our senses and our movement, among other things.

In those who had learned to read, both areas made stronger connections to the part of the brain that processes vision.

The most dramatic changes were seen in those people who progressed the most in their reading and writing skills.

The brainstem and thalamus are also known to control attention, so this may also be enhanced by learning to read and write.

Gianluca Baldassarre of the Institute for Cognitive Sciences and Technologies in Rome, said, "This clearly shows that reading, which

involves important cognitive processes, also involves the development of important sensorimotor skills, namely the need to finely control eye movements to scan the text lines and to [move the eyes] onto most informative parts of text."

Team member Falk Huettig of the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen, the Netherlands, said, "Such changes are probably happening in children as they learn to read and write — possibly faster and more widely than was seen in the Indian adults — but no such studies have been done in children."

The findings might help shed light on dyslexia. In people with that condition, the structure and function of the thalamus can be different from what is typical.

If the wiring of the thalamus can change with an intensive literacy course, it is possible that a lack of reading experience may explain these differences.

Huettig added, "The real cause of dyslexia may lie elsewhere."

As Shakespeare said, "Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them."

But could it be that there are things you can do when raising your children that will set them up for success in later life, independent.co.uk reported.

Edgar 'Injap' Sia II is one of the richest people in the Philippines and was the youngest dollar billionaire in Forbes Asia's list of wealthiest in 2016.

Aged 26, Injap founded Mang Inasal, a barbecue fast food restaurant chain in the Philippines. He's now sold it for billions, Smart Parenting explained.

In his new book, 'Life Principles', Injap reveals his top tips

that might help parents raise future billionaires.

Be a role model for child

Injap said, "As a second-generation descendant of immigrants, my parents struggled, but they instilled in my siblings and me the value of hard work and integrity."

"We saw how their dedication helped build their business brick by brick, and I saw how their day-to-day dealings shaped the way it grew."

"My entrepreneurial spirit was nourished by watching my parents do everything on their own."



independent.co.uk

Give children responsibilities

By working at his parents'

grocery store from the age of eight, the family realized Injap was a natural when it came to

business.

One of his jobs was sealing bags of sweets and sugar.

He wrote, "We used a candle to seal the repacked bags one by one."

"Upon my suggestion, we started to use an electric sealer for the plastic bags — it was a small change (and it was perhaps less fun than working with a candle), but that little tweak improved our work."

First steps to wealth are hard work and effort

Injap explained, "My parents

didn't start out rich. When they were beginning to raise a family, and for many years afterward, they had to work very hard for whatever they had."

With a humble upbringing, Injap learned the value of hard work and was inspired by his parents, who started their grocery store from scratch.

"That was many years of learning, watching how my parents ran their business so precisely. I think they subconsciously gave me a lot of insights."

And he took this work ethic to later life, working incredibly

hard to start Mang Inasal. "We had little sleep all throughout the startup years. We had zero long vacations for many years."

Teach your children values

Becoming a billionaire at the age of 33 could have gone to Injap's head, but it didn't, because of how he was raised.

He said, "Having that sum of money in front of you, at 33, can make or break you."

"It's an acid test of your personality, your character, your sense of self. I think the values that our parents have instilled in us, their children, that made me able to stay whole and grounded."

Glowing golden-leaf brains show the absolutely awesome nature of minds

Your brain is terrifyingly complicated and is made up of approximately 86 billion neurons which work together as a biological machine to create who you are.



metro.co.uk

But it takes some real cranium contortion to get your head around what those billions of signals and connected web of cells look like, according to metro.co.uk.

Artist and neuroscientist Dr. Greg Dunn combined talents with artist and physicist Dr. Brian Edwards to produce this unprecedented work of wonder.

Self-Reflected offers a powerful insight to the elaborate nature of our brains fused with a beautiful explosion of color.

But the shimmering never-before-achieved works of art are not as they appear.

They are not brain scans but have been painstakingly created using a combination of neuroscience research, hand drawing, computer simulations and all finished off with glistening gold leaf.

Both the artists said they wanted the work to remind people that the most marvelous machine in the Universe is in our own heads and hope that the brilliant display will reveal the root of our shared humanity.

They said, "Self-Reflected was created not to simplify the brain's functionality for easier consumption, but to depict it as close to its native complexity as possible so that the viewer comes away with a visceral and emotional understanding of its beauty."

"Though the neuroscience of the piece was painstakingly researched to give the piece a level of reality not seen on this scale before, Self-Reflected's deeper meaning is to elevate the consciousness of the average person to the exquisite machine that most defines our humanity."

The designs are a large 2.4mX3.65m representation of a slice of the human brain.

They magnificently map and bring to life the billions of neurons which appear in that single brain slice.

But to represent those billion neurons is not an easy job.

The artists used actual MRI scans and brain maps, but had to take it a stage further in order to truly create a work of awesome complexity.

They ended up drawing each neuron after mapping out where they connected with each region of the brain.

After this, they used data from special scientific imaging machines which map areas of white matter which are connecting to other areas of the brain.

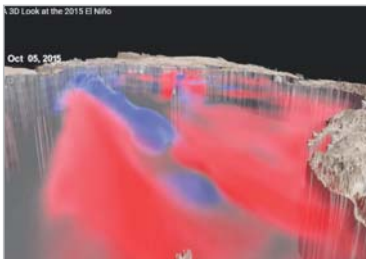
Once they had a finished picture, the results were scanned into a computer and etched into a panel covered in gold leaf.

The final results show how our brains are constantly alive with activity during every moment of our lives.

NASA shares 3D model of El Niño

NASA has released a three-dimensional model of El Niño, a climate pattern marked by a mass of warm water in the Pacific Ocean.

The animated model presents the full life cycle of El Niño, beginning with its formation in January 2015 and ending with its dissipation in April 2016, UPI reported.



UPI

As trade winds blow east-to-west across the ocean, warm surface waters accumulate in the Western Pacific. When this happens, upwelling often occurs in the east, bringing cool, deep water to the surface.

The phenomenon slows the trade winds, or even reverses them, pushing the mass of warm water slowly eastward along the equator. Likewise, cooler water migrates westward.

The new 3D model shows warm surface water moving eastward during the summer months of 2015.

Eventually, cooler water moving westward hits a boundary, spreads out and reflects back east. When the cooler water reaches the mass of warm water, temperatures become moderated and the climate pattern ends.

Both wind and water currents are featured in the 3D visualization. A series of pulsing winds can be seen traveling eastward toward South America during El Niño, before normalized trade winds return in 2016.

New technology could revolutionize 3D printing

A technology originally developed to smooth out and pattern high-powered laser beams for the National Ignition Facility (NIF) can be used to 3D print metal objects faster than ever before, according to a new study by Lawrence Livermore researchers.

A team of Lab scientists report the findings in the latest issue of Optics Express, phys.org reported.

This new method — Diode-based Additive Manufacturing (DiAM) — uses high-powered arrays of laser diodes, a Q-switched laser and a specialized laser modulator developed for NIF to flash print an entire layer of metal powder at a time, instead of raster scanning with a laser across each layer, as with conventional laser-based powder-bed fusion additive manufacturing (PBFAM) systems.

The result, researchers said, is the possibility that large metal objects could be printed in a fraction of the time needed for metal 3D printers on the market today, expanding possibilities for industries requiring larger metal parts, such as aerospace and automotive.

The combination of speed and degree of design flexibility afforded through the DiAM method, the team concluded, is potentially "far beyond" that of current powder-bed fusion-based systems.

Ibo Matthews, a Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) scientist heading the research and the paper's lead author, said, "By cutting the print time and having the ability to upscale, this process could revolutionize metal additive manufacturing."



phys.org

By using high-powered arrays of laser diodes and a specialized laser modulator developed, researchers could potentially 3D print large metal objects in a fraction of the time needed for metal 3D printers on the market today.

"The illumination time savings, we estimate, is such that a one cubic meter build that would require 10 years of raster-scanned illumination to make would require only a few hours with DiAM, because you can image each layer at once."

"Printing with a gray-scale image may also allow you to reduce residual stress because you can tailor the thermal stresses spatially and temporally."

The 'magic' of the process, Matthews said, is the implementation of a customized laser modulator called an Optically Addressable Light Valve (OALV), which contains a liquid crystal cell and photoconductive crystal in series.

Much like a liquid crystal-based projector, researchers explained, the OALV is used to dynamically sculpt the high-power laser light according to pre-programmed layer-by-layer

images.

But unlike a conventional liquid crystal projector, the OALV is un-pixelated and can handle high laser powers.

The technology was originally designed for and installed in NIF as part of the LEOPARD (Laser Energy Optimization by Precision Adjustments to the Radiant Distribution) system, which was deployed in 2010 and won an R&D 100 award in 2012.

In NIF, the OALV is used to optimize the profile of the laser beams and locally shadow and protect optics subjected to higher intensities and fluences (or energy density — the amount of laser energy for a given unit area).

With LEOPARD, NIF electronically protects regions of its beams containing potentially threatening flaws on its final optics, as identified by the Final Optics Damage Inspection

(FODI) system.

This enables NIF to continue firing until the schedule allows those optics to be removed, repaired and reintroduced into the beamline.

The team that first demonstrated the light valve could be used for printing parts was led by James DeMuth, a former LLNL researcher.

John Heebner, the LLNL scientist that led the development of the OALV described its use in metal 3D printing as a 'natural synergy'.

Heebner said, "The DiAM project marries two technologies that we've pioneered at the Lab — high-power laser diode arrays and the OALV."

"Given that we put all this time and development into this light valve, it became a natural extension to apply it to this project."

"We went through some calculations and it was clear from

the outset that it would work (with 3D printing)."

"The ability to change a serial process to a parallel process is critical to ensuring that as parts increase in complexity or size that the patterning process speed can be increased to catch up."

Besides the ability to potentially produce larger parts, using such a valve results in imaging quality that rivals and could exceed today's metal 3D printers, and the ability to fine-tune gradients in the projected image means better control over residual stress and material microstructure.

With DiAM printing, the laser light is sourced by a set of four diode laser arrays and a nanosecond pulsed laser.

It passes through the OALV, which patterns an image of a two-dimensional 'slice' of the desired 3D part.

The images go from a digital computer file to the laser in a two-stage liquid crystal modulation process.

For the study, the researchers used tin powder, successfully demonstrating the printing of two small 3D models — an impeller (a small turbine blade structure) and LLNL logo.

While speeding up the metal additive process was a main driver for pursuing the technology at LLNL, the larger build size could potentially have significant value for the Lab's core mission of stockpile stewardship.

The laser diodes — which provide most of the energy compared to the pulsed laser system — are also cheap to purchase, so such a system would be more cost-effective than fiber laser-based machines on the market today.

Russia thinks microorganisms may be living outside the space station



UPI

Officials with Russia's space agency, Roscosmos, said their scientists have identified plankton and other microorganisms among dust samples collected from the outside of the International Space Station (ISS).

Quoting Roscosmos officials, UPI reported. "The micrometeorites and comet dust that settle on the ISS surface may contain biogenic substance of extra-terrestrial origin in its natural form."

"The ISS surface is possibly a unique and easily available collector and keeper of comet substance and, possibly, of biomaterial of extra-terrestrial origin."

NASA officials said they couldn't confirm the story.

NASA spokesman Dan Huot said, "As far as we're concerned, we haven't heard any

official reports from our Roscosmos colleagues that they've found sea plankton."

"Russian cosmonauts did recently collect dust samples from the outside of their space station module's window."

"What they're actually

looking for is residues that can build up on the visually sensitive elements, like windows, as well as just the hull of the ship itself that will build up whenever they do thruster firings for things like re-boots."

"That's what they were taking

samples for. I don't know where all the sea plankton talk is coming from."

Russian officials claim cosmonauts have been collecting dust samples — 19, so far — from the outside of the International Space Station since 2010.

Russian scientists believe the ISS spends the majority of its time orbiting through dust left behind by the tails of comets.

Scientists have long hypothesized that comets carry the secret ingredients for life and may have delivered the building blocks that sparked life's beginnings on Earth.

Scientists with both NASA and the European Space Agency have proved microorganisms can survive in space.

Tardigrades, or water bears, a resilient invertebrate, can withstand a variety of harsh conditions. Researchers have also found microbes in Earth's upper atmosphere.

Despite such discoveries, researchers have yet to announce the discovery of extraterrestrial life.

How did dinosaurs evolve into birds?

Scientists may have finally worked out how dinosaurs evolved into birds.

Experts have isolated a genetic sequence which they believe was present in dinosaurs before and during their evolution into birds, foxnews.com reported.

Modern birds descended from a group of two-legged dinosaurs called theropods, whose members included the fearsome T-Rex and smaller Velociraptors.

Fossils show bird-like traits including feathers, light bones, air sacs and three-digit forelimbs.

But identifying genomic DNA changes during this evolutionary transition has remained a challenge.

Tohoku University researchers have isolated a gene sequence they believe was present in dinosaurs before and during their transition to the feathered creatures we recognize today.

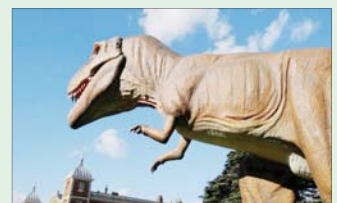
The international group of researchers have found a specific gene sequence which could be associated with the evolution of flight feathers in the dinosaur era.

In a journal published in Nature Communications, lead author Ryohei Seki wrote, "Flight feathers are one of the most prominent evolutionary innovations in the avian lineage, conferring not only the ability for flight but also, in some species, important roles in other biological functions, such as territorial displays and courtship ritual."

"Birds have two regions that have flight feathers: Along the posterior edges of the wings and in the tail."

"Feathered dinosaur fossils have provided significant new information on the evolutionary origin of flight feathers."

A new species of enormous dinosaur that was as long as two-and-a-half double decker buses was recently discovered.



REUTERS

An animatronic life-size dinosaur is seen ahead of an interactive exhibition, Jurassic Kingdom, at Osterley Park in west London, the UK, March 31, 2017.

Spoon-fed babies more likely to end up overweight



express.co.uk

Spoon-fed babies are more likely to end up overweight or obese than babies who are allowed to feed themselves, according to a study.

Professor Amy Brown, an expert in infant feeding, believes that some spoon-fed babies are being forced to overeat by their parents, express.co.uk wrote.

Research found more than twice as many babies spoon-fed from six months were overweight by the time they were toddlers compared with tots who fed themselves 'finger foods'.

Almost 20 percent of the spoon-fed sample group were overweight by the time they were two, compared with just eight per cent of self-fed babies.

This led to an average difference in weight between the two groups of 210s (907.18 grams), independent of other factors like birth weight, weaning age, breastfeeding and mother's background.

In her book 'Why Starting Solids Matters', published this week, the academic highlighted the study of 300 babies and their feeding habits.

Professor Brown suggests babies allowed to feed

themselves stopped eating when they became full, meaning they were less likely to overeat.

The study also found that babies allowed a range of solid foods from the age of six months — a process known as 'baby-led weaning' — were often trim, healthy and adventurous eaters.

In contrast, she said parents could be overfeeding their babies by making them finish a meal, despite them rejecting the food.

Professor Brown, an associate professor at Swansea University, said: "Let them eat as little as they want. A jar of baby food is too big for what a little baby needs."

"When you are waving the spoon around and saying 'here comes the big aeroplane — let's finish it', if they clamp their mouth shut, forget about it. They will not starve."

And addressing the issue of messy mealtimes, she added: "Kids need to learn about food."

"They need to find out, for instance, what happens if they squish it or drop it on the floor."

Professor Brown's advice is similar to that of doctor

Benjamin Spock, who recommended in the 1960s that babies should be allowed to feed themselves from as young as possible.

In the early 2000s, the Department of Health released advice suggesting that babies should be fed a mixture of purees and finger foods from the age of six months.

That advice remains today, with current NHS weaning guidelines suggesting babies should be offered soft finger foods that they can feed to themselves, alongside spoon-fed purees from six months old.

Finger foods can include mashed or soft cooked fruit and vegetables.

Parents can then introduce more advanced foods later, including small pieces of meat and rice.

A statement on the NHS website explained: "It's a really important step in their development and it can be great fun to explore new flavors and textures together."

"Babies don't need three meals a day to start with — so you can begin by offering foods at a time that suits you both."

China's war on pollution means little to chemical park's neighbors

Hebei Province, home to many of China's most polluted cities, has promised to close down companies that are poisoning the environment, but after years of protests villagers living in the shadows of the Guantao chemical park remain skeptical.

Though festooned with banners calling for the construction of 'beautiful villages' and the 'upgrade' of Hebei's highly-polluting heavy industries, the sprawling complex of chemical plants shadowing the villages of Nansitou and East Luzhuang often operates unchallenged by environmental regulators, residents said, reported Reuters.

They said local authorities turn a blind eye to factories that pollute air, water and land. In particular, they claim that the plants do a lot of their dirtiest work at night when inspectors are rarely seen.

"They just don't come," said a resident who would only identify himself by his surname Zhang. Near his home was a patch of burnt undergrowth, the result of a vehicle carrying hazardous chemicals catching fire earlier this year, sending plumes of pungent smoke through the streets.



reutersmedia.ne

"I gave them a call but none of them came," he said. "We can't stand the smell and there's suddenly smoke everywhere."

Provincial and municipal environmental authorities did not respond to requests for comment, but an inspector surnamed Liu, who is responsible for monitoring Guantao Park, told Reuters by telephone that the facilities were under 24-hour surveillance.

In a bid to tackle the environmental impact of four decades of untrammeled growth, China is in the fourth year of a 'war on pollution' and has promised to take action against persistent offenders and the local governments that protect them.

Hebei's proximity to Beijing — it virtually surrounds the capital and produces about a third of the particulate matter that often chokes the city — has put it on the front line. In an archive of nearly 11,000 complaints submitted to the Hebei government in the past nine years and made available online around 700 cases from across the province involved incidents of nocturnal pollution, with many complainants saying that local environmental bureaus did not have the clout to tackle the problem.

Universities are wrong to lower entry requirements for disadvantaged students

Undergraduates don't think UK universities should drop entry requirements for disadvantaged students, but should help them get better A-level exam results instead, a new study claims.

In a survey of just under 1,000 Russell Group university undergraduates, researchers found almost three-quarters (73 percent) believed university access budgets would be better spent helping potential students succeed at school by improving their A-level and GCSE results, independent.co.uk wrote.

State-school educated students, who made up over 80 percent of the survey sample, were just as likely as those who were privately educated to disapprove of lower grade offers.

The findings come amid debate over how the UK's top ranking universities can or should improve diversity on campus by supporting candidates from less advantaged backgrounds in undergraduate admissions.

Last year, the gap between rich and poor students being granted university places was found to have reached a record high, according to the most recent figures released by Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS).

Students who received free school meals — a long-time indicator of family poverty — are currently less than half as likely to enter higher education as their more affluent peers.

In response to the concerns, the government's Social Mobility Advisory Group argued the case for bright students from poorly-performing schools in disadvantaged areas being given offers that require lower A-level grades than their more socially advantaged peers.

A number of institutions have since entertained the idea, including the University of Bristol, whose vice chancellor, Hugh Brady, said he was keen to make 'a step change' in opening up to students from all backgrounds.

However, according to the student opinion survey — commissioned by online service MyTutor, a community of over 3,500 tutors from the leading UK universities — nearly two-thirds (63 percent) said lower entry grades for disadvantaged students could be perceived as patronizing.

Over half (58 percent) went so far as to suggest such a move could be counterproductive, as the students targeted were disproportionately at risk of dropping out.

Henri French, an aerospace engineering student at Bristol University, said giving prospective students lower offers risked students getting places on courses that they 'weren't necessarily academically equipped to handle'.

"Studying for a degree can be stressful and I've seen situations where students have become overwhelmed by a course, quickly fall behind and drop out when they don't get the same support they did at school," he said.

Latest data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency suggested there has been a steady rise in the first-year dropout rate for young first-degree entrants from the most disadvantaged areas.

"I am going back to Panama with many ideas," said Gilda Montenegro, a nutritionist with the Panamanian Education Ministry, after getting to know the school feeding system in the city of Vitoria, in central-eastern Brazil.

According to Ipsnews, she said she was impressed with how organized it is, the resources available to each school and "the role of played by nutritionists, in direct contact with the lunchrooms, training the cooks in hygiene and nutrition, educating everyone while fulfilling a key educational function".

Montenegro and 22 other visitors from throughout Latin America and the Caribbean met with Brazilian representatives in the city of Vitoria, for a tour through schools and centers of production and distribution of food that supply the municipal schools.

The May 16-18 technical visit was organized by the Strengthening School Feeding Programs in Latin America and the Caribbean program implemented by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), as part of a cooperation agreement signed with the Brazilian government in 2008.

The aim was a first-hand look at the implementation in Vitoria of the Brazilian National School Feeding Program (PNAE), which has become a model replicated in a number of countries around the world. The program serves 43 million students in public pre-schools and primary schools, which are municipal, and secondary schools, which are the



ipsnews.net

Brazil drives new school feeding model

responsibility of the states.

The PNAE was first launched in 1955. But the significant impact it has had in terms of food security, nutrition and social participation has been seen since a 2009 law established that at least 30 percent of the funds received by each school had to be devoted to buying food produced by local family farms.

"This decentralization favors local producers and students gain in better-quality, fresh food at a lower cost. It promotes cooperatives and stimulates the local economy, through small-scale farming, while benefiting the environment by reducing

transportation time," said Najla Veloso, the regional project coordinator for FAO.

"In most of the municipalities, the suppliers are parents of the students," which help forge closer ties between local families and the schools and improves the quality of the food. All of this constitutes an important help for keeping people in rural areas," Veloso told IPS.

Buying local could rekindle the ancestral agricultural knowledge of the Ngäbe and Buglé people, who live in western Panama, said Montenegro. Since 1997, the two ethnic groups have shared an indigenous county with a population of about 155,000.

"They provide 80 percent of the food for four schools, but they have not been able to expand, because of the system of purchases by tendering process, and are almost limited to producing for their own consumption," lamented the Panamanian nutritionist. More school purchases could "rescue their traditional methods of harvesting and preserving their typical products," she said.

The technical visits organized by FAO "show successful experiences for building knowledge in other countries, stimulating innovation," said Veloso.

A new generation of school feeding programs is emerg-

ing in the region, combining healthy nutrition, public purchases, family agriculture and social integration.

Vitoria, the capital of the Brazilian state of Espírito Santo, was chosen to receive technicians and authorities from 13 countries because of "its strong implementation of the PNAE, its organized team, and because it has been a pioneer in this area", explained Veloso.

Before the new law went into effect in 2008, Vitoria already prioritized healthy food produced by small-scale local farmers, said Marcia Moreira Pinto, coordinator of the School Food and Nutrition Sector in the Municipal Secretariat of Education.

It also always surpassed the minimum proportion of purchases set for family agriculture, she said. In 2016, 34 percent of the purchases were from small-scale farmers.

This aspect has only recently been recognized as key to food security.

"This integration between education and family agriculture benefits society as a whole, it's fantastic, I will try to do it in my town," said Mario Chang, director of education in the department of San Marcos, Guatemala.

"The visit gave me new ideas," said Rosa Cascante, director of Equality Programs in Costa Rica's Ministry of Public Education.

The challenge, she said, "will be to adapt Brazil's local purchases system" to her country, where all supplies for public institutions go through the state National Production Council.

Foxy Lady's dramatic belly landing

A pilot had a lucky escape after the last remaining Sea Vixen plane, known as the Foxy Lady, did an emergency landing at an airfield in Somerset.

The pilot was unharmed after the aircraft, which served in the Royal Navy in the 1960s, did a 'belly-landing' on return to its base in Yeovilton.

Scott Dabinett, 32, captured incredible photos of the heart-stopping incident, which saw the pilot touchdown without landing gear after flying back from the Duxford Air Show in Cambridgeshire.

Dabinett said the aircraft had taken off at 4:15 p.m. and they waited an hour and 10 minutes for it to return.

He said: 'The aircraft returned from Duxford and flew up the runway. We then heard radio communications between



The pilot had to do a belly landing on the runway after the landing gear failed to drop.

Another Sea Vixen plane in flight above the aircraft carrier Victorious in the English Channel in September 1959.

the tower and the pilot asking for visual of the landing gear.

'The response was your undercarriage is clean, which means it is still up. After several more passes and discussion between pilot and tower and other emergency personnel, it was soon announced that this was going to be a gear-up belly landing.'

'The feeling between the few

of us standing by was that this does not look good. On the final approach we all crossed our fingers and held our breaths whilst pointing our cameras at the Sea Vixen. As soon as she touched the runway the canopy was released and engines were shut down.'

'She slid up the runway very smoothly and under control.

It was much quieter than I was expecting. Eventually she came to a stop. We kept waiting for movement from the pilot.'

He added: 'As soon as we saw the pilot was OK we all started breathing again. Everyone was shaking. The emergency guys were on the scene straight away and took control of the situation.'

Angry pedestrian hurls abuse at motorist while crossing street — but triggers laughter

A hapless pedestrian has become a global sensation after a dashcam clip of him yelling abuse at a motorist ended in laughter — when he accidentally walked into a post.

Worse still, the embarrassment was captured on the motorist's dashcam.

The man has gone viral online with five million views on YouTube as the world laughed at his bad luck. The video begins with a car driving down a street in Adelaide, South Australia, towards an intersection.

The dashcam shows that as the car stops at a set of a traffic light a man walks across the street from right to left in front of the vehicle with his dog.

But the pedestrian is not happy.

He begins making rude gestures to the driver and screaming at him, all the while still walking across the street and not looking where he is going.

He then walks straight into a lamppost on the other side of the street.

The run-in triggered laughter in the car.

But the pedestrian was still not embarrassed enough to go on his way.

He ran back towards the car for another spray at the motorist before finally continuing on his way.

Amid more than 5,000 comments on YouTube, one viewer said: 'Definitely the best 19 seconds of my day, hahahahahahaha.'

Another said: 'Lucky there were no POLE-ice there...'



CHRISSMITHONE77/YOUTUBE

Mother elk kicks bear in the face to rescue her calf

A couple out observing nature in the Arizona Mountains captured video of a mother elk kicking a bear in the face to rescue her calf.

Shannon Seville of Flagstaff said she and her friend, Joel Floyd, were cruising the Forest Service roads near the city in their new Toyota Land Cruiser earlier this week when they stopped to observe a bear, UPI wrote.

The video shows the bear menacing a crying creature concealed by a fallen branch, but is soon revealed to be a baby elk.

The bear's intentions toward the calf

seem clear, but its meal plans are foiled when the mother elk appears and chases it partway up a tree.

The bear appears to decide it isn't afraid of the mother elk and makes another attempt to get the baby, leading the mother to kick it in the face.

The mother elk and calf flee as the bear climbs back to the safety of the tree.

'The animals left our line of vision and we weren't about to get out of the vehicle to follow. I imagine nature took its course, however it was meant to,' Seville told The Arizona Republic. 'The calf didn't appear injured, and the mother stayed near.'



UPI

The fir-tree and the bramble

A fir-tree said boastfully to the bramble, 'You are useful for nothing at all; while I am everywhere used for roofs and houses.'

The bramble answered: 'You poor creature, if you would only call to mind the axes and saws which are about to hew you down, you would have reason to wish that you had grown up a bramble, not a fir-tree.'

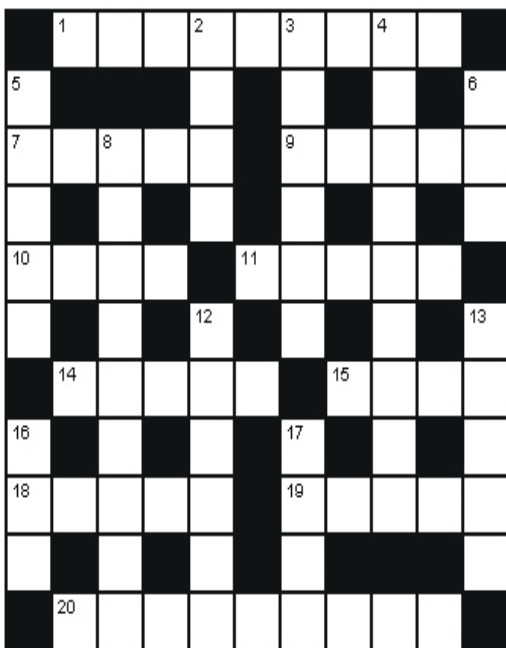
Better poverty without care, than riches with.



A man takes part in the annual Duellen wild horse catching event in Duellen, Germany.

HENNING KAISER/APP/GETTY IMAGES

Quick Crossword



DOWN

2. Profit (4)
3. Country (6)
4. Moderate (9)
5. Performer (5)
6. Pig pen (3)
8. Rotund (9)
12. Downhill ski race (6)
13. Lance (5)
16. Make a request (3)
17. Hard work (4)

ACROSS

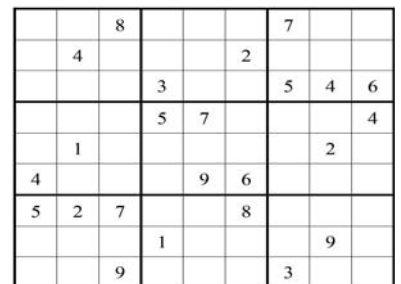
1. Come into existence (9)
7. Desert plants (5)
9. Entice (5)
10. Paddles (4)
11. Pugilist (5)
14. Brass instrument (5)
15. Wood file (4)
18. Magical incantation (5)
19. Last letter of the Greek alphabet (5)
20. The history of a word (9)

Yesterday's solution



Sudoku

Sudoku was inspired by the table devised by Iranian mathematician Khwarazmi. Fill 9x9 grid with digits so that each column, each row and each of the nine 3x3 sub-grids that compose the grid, contains all of the digits from 1 to 9.



Iran finishes second in IBSA judo championships



Iran's blind judo team finished second in 2017 IBSA Judo Asian and Oceanian Championships in Tashkent, Uzbekistan on May 29, 2017 after defeat against South Korea.

Iran's blind judo team claimed the second spot at the 2017 IBSA Judo Asian and Oceanian Championships in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

The team category of the tournament was held in two groups and Iran's team had to overcome Kazakhstan and India to qualify from the group and reach the final contest, only to suffer defeat against Paralympics champion, South Korea to settle as runner-up.

Meysam Bani-Taba and Mohammadreza Kheirollah were the winning Judokas for Iran in the final, however Iran eventually lost it by an overall 3-2 score line to finish second in the tournament.

Kazakhstan and host country, Uzbekistan jointly finished third in the team competitions.

Prior to this, Iran had claimed two gold medals, one silver and a couple of bronzes in the individual contests to finish in third place of the overall table.

The International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA) judo tournament took place in Tashkent, Uzbekistan on May 22-29.

Four fans die ahead of Honduran final

At least four people are believed to have died and many others been injured in a stampede at a game in Honduras.

The incident occurred at a sold-out match between Motagua and Honduras Progreso in the Honduran capital, BBC reported.

News agency Associated Press reports that a police statement claimed too many tickets had been sold.

Motagua denied too many tickets were sold and said they warned "responsible authorities immediately that fake tickets were being circulated".

They said the fake tickets "enabled people to enter the stadium illegally to watch the final between Motagua and El Progreso - people who apparently occupied seats that were not theirs, forcing others to leave the area".

The game went ahead, with Motagua winning the title playoff match, held at the 35,000-capacity national stadium in Tegucigalpa, 3-0 on the day and 7-1 on aggregate.

In a statement, Motagua expressed "its deepest condolences to the family and friends of the four people who sadly died in the accident at the start of the final" and wished "a speedy recovery to those injured".

However, the club added: "It is important to bear in mind that all the ticket sales are supervised, and in this case approved, by the national commission for sports facilities (Conapid), which is an agency of the Honduras government."

"The club is helping in the investigation into what happened at the stadium, which was under police control - according to the rules - as always 48 hours before any sports event."

The Gladiator's fairy tale comes to an end

Francesco Totti tried to raise a smile. Striding out on to the Stadio Olimpico pitch for a farewell address at the end of his last ever match for Roma, he shushed the home crowd and then teased that staying quiet "ought to be easy for you".

Some fans chuckled. More of them sobbed. The tears had been flowing from before kickoff - Totti confessed that crying has been a daily occurrence in his own household of late - but by now it seemed there was not a dry eye left in the house, The Guardian reported.

"You know I'm a man of few words," he continued, but Totti had prepared some for this occasion. At the start he was not sure if he would be capable of reading out the letter he had written for his supporters, suggesting his daughter might have to take over. But, in the end, he made it through.

"Do you know that feeling of being a kid, and dreaming about something beautiful, but then your mum wakes you up to go to school when you only wanted to carry on sleeping?" he asked. "You try to hold on to the thread of the story you were caught up in, but you can't do it. This time it's not a dream. It's real life."

What a life it has been so far. Totti has, at different times, fired Roma to a Scudetto, won a World Cup with Italy and earned a European Golden Shoe. Only Paolo Maldini has played more than his 619 Serie A games. Only Silvio Piola can trump his 250 goals in that league.

There will always be those who insist on pointing out that he could have won more, could have pushed his limits further by moving elsewhere. But how

could a few measly medals ever mean more than doing all this in the service of your boyhood club? Sunday's pre-game choreography in the Curva Sud declared that "Totti is Roma". It is still hard to imagine the two of them apart.

And what other city would have thrown a retirement party like this one? Totti Day had the feel of a public festival in Rome, buses commandeered to display a "Thanks Captain" message in lieu of their destination, while fans flocked to take their photo with "selfie statues" commissioned by Corriere dello Sport. Planes trailed messages of support overhead.

Inside the Stadio Olimpico, it felt as though we had gone back in time. Average attendances for Roma's home games this season have hovered around the 33,000 mark, but this clash with Genoa was sold out long in advance. To hear the roar that greeted Totti's introduction by the stadium PA before kickoff was to remember how this place used to feel on an almost weekly basis back when his career began.

He was not in the starting XI on Sunday, Roma still needed one more win to be certain of second place, and with it a direct route to the Champions League group stage. The prize money on offer was too important to the club's financial plans to be overlooked for sentiment's sake.

Roma's iconic No10 was sent on with just under 10 minutes played in the second half. The score was still level and, in truth, his arrival did cost the host some momentum. Now the buildup

play became slower, more ponderous. At times he dropped so deep that he seemed to be playing in mid-field.

There were glimpses of class to admire. One moment Totti was taming a high ball over his shoulder with a first-time pass, the next shifting the ball effortlessly between his left and right feet before slipping a through ball.



Francesco Totti salutes fans after his final game for Roma on May 28, 2017 after 619 league appearances, a tally only bettered by Paolo Maldini.

tween two defenders. He completed one pass off the back of his shoulders. Totti might have had an assist in the 69th minute, when he floated a 40 yard ball over the defense for Stephan El Shaarawy - whose close-range header was saved by Eugenio Lamanna at close range. And perhaps he would have had a goal of his own in the 75th, had Daniele De Rossi not beaten him to a loose ball inside Genoa's penalty area, driving it into the bottom corner.

The tears would follow soon afterwards. Totti was granted a guard of honor by his teammates, took a slow lap of the stadium and gave his final address. Cynics might scoff at the melodrama, but beneath the pageantry lay something that most of us can relate to: that feeling of a happy chapter of life ending, of saying goodbye to the familiar and stepping into the unknown.

We still do not know, officially, what Totti will do next. Perhaps he has not decided yet, either. There is a deal on the table for him to become a director of Roma, but many have suggested that he will end his status as a one-club man by jetting out to America for a season with Miami FC.

At one point during his post-game monologue, he admitted candidly that "I'm afraid." No wonder. For 28 of his 40 years on this planet, Totti has spent his life doing the same thing: kicking a ball around with his Roma team-mates. He quite literally does not know what another life might look like.

What we do know is that Serie A will not be the same without him, a player whom Diego Maradona described as "the best I have ever seen". A man of few words, but many goals. The inimitable Francesco Totti.

Djokovic starts new era under Agassi

Defending champion Novak Djokovic won his first match under new coach Andre Agassi to reach the second round of the French Open in Paris.

The 12-time Grand Slam champion teamed up with American Agassi after parting company with his entire coaching team, BBC reported.

The world number two Serb, who could meet Rafael Nadal in the semifinals, beat Marcel Granollers 6-3 6-4 6-2.

Spaniard Nadal, bidding for a 10th French Open title, eased past France's Benoit Paire 6-1 6-4 6-1.

Nadal will take on Robin Haase of the Netherlands in the second round.

Also in action in the first round, Spain's Garbine Muguruza started the defense of her French Open title by beating 2010 champion Francesca Schiavone 6-2, 6-4.

Fourth seed Muguruza went into the match having won only three times on clay this season, but she cruised through the first set.

Italian Schiavone, 36, won three games in a row to lead the second set but Muguruza fought back to win.

Muguruza will face Estonia's Anett Kontaveit in the second round.

Germany's Angelique Kerber became the first women's top seed to lose in the opening round of the French Open with defeat by Ekaterina Makarova.

Kerber went down 6-2, 6-2 in one hour and 22 minutes, leaving her number one status in the balance.

Kerber, a first-round loser last year as well, barely figured among the favorites on the eve of the tournament.

Although her defeat might have been a shock in terms of rankings, with Russia's Makarova at number 40 in the WTA standings, it was no great surprise.

The 29-year-old from Bremen has been struggling for form this year, reaching just one final and winning only three matches on clay heading into Roland Garros.

Kerber only regained the number one ranking from Serena Williams after the American stepped away from the tour as she awaits the birth of her first child.

A final tally of just two break points converted from 16 illustrated that lack of certainty on the part of Kerber in the key moments.

"Last year was a completely different year," said Kerber after the game. "The pressure is always there but this year the expectations are much bigger, especially in the big tournaments and the Grand Slams."

"And the expectations are also from me really big, of course, because I know what I can do, what I did last year."

"But right now I think I have to find myself again and just try to forget the clay-court season as soon as possible and then

reset and start from the grass courts again."

Makarova, 28, goes on to face Ukraine's Lesia Tsurenko in round two, and will feel she has as good a chance as anyone to fea-



Novak Djokovic's former coach Boris Becker (R) wished new coach Andre Agassi good luck at 2017 French Open on May 29, 2017.

ture in the latter stages.

American Venus Williams beat China's Wang Qiang 6-4, 7-6 (7-3) on the 20th anniversary of her debut at Roland Garros.

The 10th seed hit 44 unforced errors in

an untidy display but goes on to face Japan's 90th ranked Kurumi Nara.

Nara beat American wildcard Amanda Anisimova who at 15 years and nine months is the youngest player in the women's main draw since France's Alize Cornet in 2005.

burglary at her home in December.

The Czech, 27, looked impressive in beating American Julia Boserup 6-3, 6-2 to reach round two of the French Open.

Kvitová suffered career-threatening injuries to her left hand in the attack, but recovered quicker than expected to play in Paris.

The two-time Wimbledon champion said: "It's a pleasure to be here and I'm happy I made the decision to play."

She had initially targeted Wimbledon for her comeback but, despite admitting she was "still not 100% ready", decided she was fit enough to play in France.

The 15th seed won the opening point of the match with a cross-court forehand and only needed 74 minutes to overcome world number 86 Boserup.

Her parents and brothers were in the stands on Court Philippe Chatrier - the main court at Roland Garros.

"Thank you for everything, you helped me through this difficult time," said Kvitová.

"I'm glad with how I played. There are a few things to improve but what can I expect after such a long time."

"I was happy that I didn't have any pain. I promised my doctor, who gave me the green light, that if I feel pain in my hand during the match or in the practice, I'm stopping immediately."

French Open semifinalist in 2012, Kvitová will face American Bethanie Mattek-Sands in the next round.

Cannes Palme d'Or goes to Ostlund's 'The Square'

Cannes Film Festival awarded its coveted Palme d'Or award to Ruben Ostlund's Swedish comedy 'The Square', while Sofia Coppola became only the second woman to win the best director award.

"Oh! My God! OK," the Swedish filmmaker exclaimed after he bounded onto the stage to collect the prestigious Palme, in a rare and somewhat surprising win for a comedy, AFP wrote.

In 'The Square', Claes Bang plays a museum director whose manicured life begins to unravel after a series of events that upset him, and the museum's, calm equilibrium. The movie's title comes from an art installation that Bang's character is prepping, which invites anyone who enters a small square to be kind and generous.



AFP

The film's satire and exploration of moral dilemmas culminated in one of the festival's most eye-catching scenes. A muscled, grunting man pretending to be a gorilla upsets a black-tie dinner for the museum, snuffing attendees and dragging a woman by the hair. The president of the Cannes jury, Spanish filmmaker Pedro Almodovar, praised the film for exploring the 'dictatorship' of political correctness and those trapped by it.

"They live in a kind of hell because of that," Almodovar said. "It's clever. It's witty. It's funny. It deals with questions so important," said French actress and filmmaker Agnes Jaoui, a member of the jury that also included Americans Will Smith and Jessica Chastain.

Most odds makers didn't have 'The Square' as a favorite to win the prestigious Palme d'Or, the top prize awarded at Cannes.

Coppola won best director for 'The Beguiled', her remake of Don Siegel's 1971 Civil War drama about a Union soldier hiding out in a Southern girls' school. Hailed as Coppola's most feminist work yet, the remake thriller told from a more female point of view stars Nicole Kidman and Kirsten Dunst, with Colin Farrell playing the wounded soldier.

Coppola was one of three female filmmakers out of 19 in competition for the Palme this year. The first — and until now, only — female winner of the best director prize was Soviet director Yuliya Ippolitovna Solntseva in 1961.

Diane Kruger was named best actress and Joaquin Phoenix best actor as the festival celebrated its 70th anniversary.

Kruger was honored for her performance in Fatih Akin's 'In the Fade'. She played a German woman whose son and Turkish husband are killed in a bomb attack. The film alludes to a series of actual killings that shook Germany six years ago, when it came to light that police had spent more time investigating the possible mob connections of migrant victims than the tell-tale signs of the far-right plot eventually uncovered. Phoenix was recognized for his role in Lynne Ramsay's thriller 'You Were Never Really Here', in which he played a tormented war veteran.

Iran's 'Bodyguard' nominated in four categories in Madrid

Iranian film 'Bodyguard', directed by Ebrahim Hatamikia, was nominated in four categories of foreign language feature at Madrid International Film Festival.



In its latest presence in international event, Hatamikia's 'Bodyguard' was nominated for best actor (Parviz Parastouei), best supporting actor (Babak Hamidian), best foreign language feature (Ehsan Mohammad Hassani) and best editing (Mehdi Hosseini) at the Spanish film festival, ISNA wrote.

'Bodyguard' narrates the story of a middle-aged man who protects high-ranking political figures. However, he gets into trouble when a suicide bomber wearing an explosive jacket approaches the vice president.

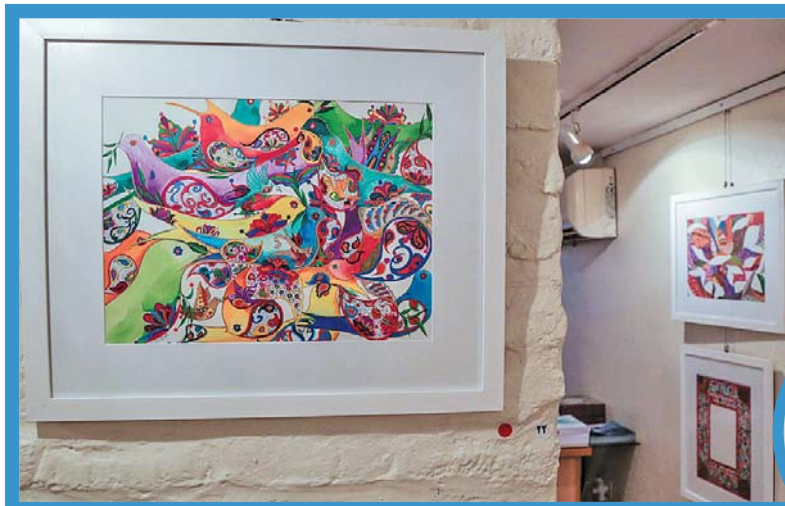
The 6th Madrid International Film Festival will be held July 8-15, 2017.

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RAMONA MIRIAN/honaronline.ir

Tehran's Golestan Gallery is hosting an exhibition of paintings by the 86-year old artist Ra'fat Sarraf. She is inspired by her childhood house.



Guidebooks, selfie-sticks arrive as Rouhani declares Iran open to all

Standing in the blue-tiled shadows of one of Iran's greatest mosques, armed with a dish of sesame caramel snacks, Mohammedreza Zamani is a cleric on a mission to repair the country's image in the West, one tourist at a time.

"Free Friendly Talks" a billboard announces in English, at the entrance to a historic religious seminary-turned-museum, in the central city of Isfahan, a former imperial capital so beautiful that even today Iranians describe the city as "Half of the World".

According to The Guardian, tourism brings both money and a more positive international image for Iran, says Zamani, 36, a theology student, who is keen to ensure that visitors who might once have been alarmed by his clerical turban and robes feel welcome in his city.

"I think the moment they set foot in Iran (foreigners) find it totally different from what they expect, and their minds are changed by the people when visitors talk to us," he said, as he took a short break between explaining marriage traditions to a group of Italians and discussing millenarian religious beliefs with a man from the Netherlands.

Iran's reformist president, Hassan Rouhani, staked his government and reputation on opening Iran to the world, sealing a nuclear deal that ended sanctions and courting foreign investment in its wake.

Rouhani was reelected for a second term in a landslide victory last weekend, a sweeping endorsement of his policy from the Iranian people. And for many Iranians the growing flood of foreigners armed with guidebooks and selfie-sticks is one of the most visible signs of change and re-engagement.

"Isfahan lives by tourists," said Masoud Mohammadian, a former lorry driver who this year gambled all

his savings on opening a small cafe serving traditional snacks just off the main square. "I am 100 percent happy with Rouhani as president."

Europeans from countries including France, Italy and Germany, who account for the majority of Western tourists, can now get visas on arrival in Tehran, and at the main sites they mingle with sightseers from China, Japan and elsewhere.

cuisine that is winning increasing recognition in the West, with dishes such as 'fesenjan' — a rich, tart and sweet chicken stew thick with walnuts and pomegranate molasses.

There are also bazaars packed with carpets and handicrafts for shoppers, a thriving contemporary arts scene and spectacular natural beauty ranging from beaches to stark deserts and snow-capped mountains.

Together these factors have fueled a dramatic rise in Western tourists to Iran, although the majority of its two million visitors are still religious pilgrims visiting its major shrines.

Isfahan, the jewel in Iran's heritage crown and more a destination for tourists than pilgrims, counted just over 5,000 visitors a month in 2013, when Rouhani came to power. By spring 2017, that number had risen to 85,000 in a single month, the newspaper Isfahan Today reported.

The surge in visitors has been so dramatic that some nights in high season every single hotel room in the city is taken, according to the receptionist at the newly built Zenderod Hotel.

Foreign hotel chains are eyeing the market enthusiastically, particularly since some of the biggest American players are still in effect barred. US sanctions have stayed in place after the nuclear-linked bans were lifted, leaving the field clear for European and other groups. Dubai-based Rotana Hotels is the latest firm to unveil plans for a new hotel in Isfahan, following the likes of the French chain Accor.

Spanish heritage hotel company Paradores is also looking at opportunities in the country, whose famous hotels include a former caravanserai that housed traders bringing lucrative goods to market in the 16th century.



theguardian.com

"When the sanctions were lifted, I decided to come as soon as possible," said Simonetta Marfoglia, an Italian tourist who was halfway through a two-week trip.

"I had read a lot of Iranian poetry, and I am very interested in the history of the region. I am really very happy to be visiting. The people are wonderful, there is great hospitality, and it's very friendly."

The country boasts an extraordinarily rich cultural heritage, from the ruins of ancient Persepolis to Isfahan and other historic cities, such as Kashan, Tabriz and Shiraz.

Food-lovers can feast on dishes from a sophisticated

Weather

27 19	44 27	36 23	29 17	31 16	33 [^] 22 ^v	29 14	24 12	17 9	29 14	27 18
Bandar Anzali	Dezful	Yazd	Mashhad	Tabriz	Tehran	Kabul	Minsk	Stockholm	Tashkent	Tripoli