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Tehran warns U.S. not to 'play with fire' in Syria

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — A top **d e s k** Iranian security official warned on Wednesday that that Washington's "illogical behaviors in Syria are clear examples of playing with fire". The statement by Ali Shamkhani, secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, came after the White House claimed late on Monday that there are "potential preparations for another chemical weapons attack" by the Syrian government against opposition forces and warned Syria would "pay a heavy price" if it went ahead.

On April 6 the U.S. military attacked a Syria-government airfield with 59 Tomahawk missiles under the pretext that the Syrian Army had used the airfield to drop chemical weapons against people in the town of Khan Sheikhoun in Idlib province. At the time Syrian President Bashar al-Assad dismissed allegations of the chemical attack as "100% fabrication". Shamkhani said the repetition of such "hollow claims" is a continuation of the U.S.-engineered "scenario" primarily intended **→2**

Iran intended to show military power by firing missiles at ISIL: Richard Nephew

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — By firing missiles at ISIS positions in Syria on June 18, Iran intended to show its military power to countries inside and outside the region, says Richard Nephew who worked on Iran sanctions issues for the Obama administration. "Iran's missile strike against those targets in Syria may have been intended to warn states inside and outside of the Middle East about its capabilities -- in addition to attacking those targets," Nephew tells the Tehran Times. "The missile launch by Iran actually confirmed for those concerned about its missile program the physical capability it affords Tehran to strike distant targets at its discretion," he explains.

Iran has repeatedly said that its missile program is only for defensive purposes. In comments in March 2016, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said, "If we had missiles during Saddam's war on us, they may have discouraged or at least reduced his indiscriminate attacks on our civilians." Zarif was referring to former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein whose army invaded Iran in 1980 and even used chemical weapons against civilians. Regarding its size and population, Iran still spends the least on military. Just recently the United States signed a 110 billion dollars arms deal with Saudi Arabia, a country which its new tribal rulers are showing teeth to Iran. **→2**

Despite weak oil prices, OPEC still pockets more dollars

With world oil inventories swelling despite a global pact on cutting output and crude prices falling by a fifth in the past month, OPEC appears to be losing its battle to balance the market. But there is one crucial fight the oil-exporting group has been winning so far: its members have earned more money this year than last and the prospect of higher revenues is likely to motivate OPEC to stick with output cuts or even deepen them.

OPEC's first output cut in eight years has earned the group \$1.64 billion a day so far this year, up more than 10 percent from the second half of 2016, according to Reuters calculations based on OPEC figures for average production and its crude basket price up until June 20.

Compared with the first half of 2016, when oil prices sank to a 12-year low near \$27 a barrel, the increase in income is a dramatic 43 percent, even though production by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries was little changed.

Income could rise in the rest of the year if, as OPEC hopes, a supply glut is banished. OPEC plus Russia and other non-OPEC producers agreed on May 25 to extend supply cuts to March, after an initial deal to keep them in place for the first half of 2017.

OPEC's decision in late 2016 to return to a policy of limiting supply, in cooperation with Russia and other non-members, marked the end of a two-year period in which the group pumped at will in a Saudi-led shift to curb rival output and boost market share, which accelerated a drop in prices.

OPEC and non-OPEC allies led by Russia initially agreed to cut about 1.8 million barrels per day (bpd) in the first half of 2017. But with the supply glut proving slow to shift, they agreed on May 25 to prolong the deal to the first quarter of 2018.

Rising U.S. production has undermined some of the impact of the OPEC-led cuts. In addition, Libya and Nigeria, two OPEC members exempted from the curbs, have increased output although not by enough to alter the overall picture of lower OPEC output in the six-month period. (Source: Reuters)

Iran denounces as 'discriminatory' U.S. Supreme Court visa ban ruling

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Ministry strongly condemned on Wednesday the "discriminatory" decision by the U.S. Supreme Court to partially lift blocks on Trump's travel ban that prevents all entries from six majority-Muslim countries.

Although the Supreme Court's decision is temporary and will be revised in October, it reveals the fact that despite U.S. officials' claims, Washington is determined to have a discriminatory treatment of Muslims and adopt an unfair approach towards them, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Bahram Qassemi said on Wednesday.

"While nearly all Muslims living in the U.S. as well as those travelling to the country, including Iranians, are, according to their history, culture and civilization, typically conformist and tolerant people who keep extremism and violence at bay, the US officials have always treated them with pessimism and hu-

miliation," he stressed.

"The U.S. president's stances towards Muslims during his presidential campaign and after taking power are clear examples of such humiliating approach," Qassemi noted.

The spokesperson condemned such policies and said it is regrettable that the U.S. government is closing its eyes on the real perpetrators of terrorist attacks in the U.S. and misguiding public opinion just because of its short-sighted economic justifications.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran will give an appropriate response and adopt the required measures after closely studying the latest decision made by the U.S. Supreme Court," he said.

The U.S. Supreme Court issued an order on Monday, reviving parts of a travel ban on people from six Muslim-majority countries.

The new decision allows exceptions for foreign nationals who have a "credible claim of a bona fide relationship with a person or

entity in the United States."

President Trump signed the executive order on March 6, the most significant hardening of immigration policy in generations.

The March 6 order was revised to avoid the tumult and protests that engulfed the nation's airports after Mr. Trump signed his first immigration directive on Jan. 27. That order was ultimately blocked by a federal appeals court.

■ Muslim ban will not make U.S. safer: Zarif

Reacting to the decision, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said that the U.S. should stop adopting policies that empower terrorists, reminding the Trump administration that keeping Muslims out of the country will not make the U.S. a "safer" place.

"A bigoted ban on Muslims will not keep U.S. safer. Instead of policies empowering extremists, U.S. should join the real fight against them," Zarif tweeted on Tuesday.

Larijani: Facilitating banking ties essential to improve Tehran-Seoul ties

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said on Wednesday that facilitating banking ties is essential in expanding relations between Iran and South Korea.

During a meeting with South Korea Prime Minister Lee Nak-yeon in Seoul, Larijani said that Iran is ready to expand ties with South Korea in various areas.

Lee also welcomed expansion of relations. In a separate meeting with South Korean

National Assembly Speaker Chung Sye-kyun, Larijani said that facilitating banking ties is a firm step in boosting relations.

Chung also said that the relations are "progressing".

Larijani was in Seoul to attend the annual meeting of the parliament speakers of Eurasian countries. The three-day conference began on Monday.

In separate meeting with Russian State Duma Chairman Vyacheslav Volodin on Tues-

day, Larijani also said Iran and Russia are in real fight against terrorism.

"In a commotion in which some countries just chant slogans of fighting terrorism, Iran and Russia have successful common experience in fighting terrorism," Larijani remarked.

For his part, Volodin said the two countries have established "good" cooperation in fighting terrorism and helping promote international security.



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Iran's Reza summits Nanga Parbat

Iranian mountaineer Reza Shahlaei has reached the peak of Nanga Parbat.

Nanga Parbat is the ninth highest mountain in the world at 8,126 meters above sea level.

It is the western anchor of the Himalayas around which the Indus River skirts into the plains of Pakistan.

Nanga Parbat is located in the Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan and is locally known as Diamir or Deo Mir (deo meaning "huge" and mir meaning "mountain").



PERSPECTIVE

Mahmood Monshipouri
University of California professor

The new power shake-up in Saudi Arabia

The Saudi Arabia's succession battle took a new turn on June 21, 2017, when Prince Mohammed bin Salman, 31, was elevated to a higher status, namely, the crown prince. In a series of royal decrees, King Salman ousted his nephew Mohammed bin Nayef as crown prince and named his son Mohammed bin Salman as next in line of succession to the throne. The new crown prince's rise to power indicates a dramatic re-ordering of the Kingdom's power structure. The removal of Mohammed bin Nayef has presented new uncertainty for the West. Nayef has been known in the West as a key Saudi security partner in a crackdown against al-Qaeda especially since the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States. Having survived four assassination attempts, Nayef became permanently ill because of one of those attacks conducted by an al-Qaeda suicide bomber in 2009.

This significant reshuffling has pushed Prince Mohammed and his so-called "Vision 2030" plan to the forefront of Kingdom's political stage. Exactly where this vision takes Saudi Arabia in the future remains open to debate. Also uncertain is how far the new generation of young leaders in Riyadh will go to change the country's welfare state economy by restructuring its oil-dependent economy in the wake of slump in oil prices and persistent ultra-conservative cultural pressures. What is certain, however, is that Prince Mohammed's promotion to power comes at a difficult time, when the entire Middle East and North Africa region faces daunting challenges and the Saudi Arabia itself encounters numerous internal problems, ranging from low oil prices to a substantial increase in the size of younger cohorts of unemployed who are angry, vocal, and eager for social change. The lingering civil war in Yemen, which has tied down Saudi's hands in an unwinnable crisis next door, has also presented new problems to the Saudis leadership. **→3**

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Iran to develop native GPS

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran is going to develop a **d e s k** native system similar to the Global Positioning System (GPS), according to the deputy head of the Iran Aerospace Organization.

The project to develop the “Iran-specific Positioning Satellite System” will be a long-term project and this year, which ends on March 20, 2018, its strategic outlook will be drafted and related projects defined, Mojtaba Saradaghi said on Wednesday, Mehr news agency reported.



Rouhani congratulates Madagascar National Day

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran’s President Hassan **d e s k** Rouhani in a message on Wednesday congratulated the National Day of Madagascar to his Malagasy counterpart.

In his message to Hery Rajaonarimampianina, Rouhani congratulated the government and people of Madagascar and expressed hope that the political will of Iran and Madagascar for boosting ties will lead to the promotion of relations in various fields, according to the Iranian government’s official website.

Madagascar is an island country to the southeast Africa in the Indian Ocean.



16 tons of drugs seized in southern Iran in 3 months

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran’s anti-narcotics police **d e s k** have managed to seize more than 16,000 kilograms of various types of illicit drugs in the southern province of Hormozgan over the past three months, Tasnim reported.

In line with efforts to combat illicit drugs, the local police forces have managed to identify 219 vehicles carrying the drugs over the first three months of the current Iranian year (which started on March 21), Hormozgan police chief Azizollah Maleki said on Wednesday.



Iran may boycott Hajj

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Parliament’s **d e s k** Article 90 Committee is mulling changes to the functioning of the Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization, the outcome of which may verge on boycotting the hajj pilgrimage.

Bahram Parsaei, spokesman of the committee, told ISNA on Wednesday that issues such as Saudi Arabia’s growingly tense tone in relation to Iran, U.S. President Donald Trump’s recent trip to Riyadh, and the promotion of its hawkish deputy crown prince to the rank of crown prince are among considerations encouraging the changes.

He suggested that the hajj organization should adopt a “crisis management” outlook to curtail the recurrence of “past bitter experiences”.



U.S. official: Warning to Syria also aimed at Russia and Iran

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — A warning from the White **d e s k** House to Syrian President Bashar Assad about another possible chemical weapons attack was also aimed at two of President Beshar Assad’s key backers, Russia and Iran, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations said on Tuesday, ABC News reported.

“The goal is at this point not just to send Assad a message, but to send Russia and Iran a message,” Nikki Haley said. “That if this happens again, we are putting you on notice.”



Anti-Islam policies to spark Muslim nations’ hatred of U.S.

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The head of National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of the Majlis said on Wednesday that support for terrorist groups and imposing restrictions on travel of Muslims to the country are two sides of a coin and the contradictory and anti-Islamism policies of the U.S. government, which will provoke Muslim nations’ hatred of the U.S.

The contradictory and anti-Islamism policies of the U.S. government will provoke Muslim nations’ hatred of the U.S., Alaeddin Boroujerdi said.

The U.S. on the one hand promotes extremism in the Islamic world and on the other, it restricts entry of Muslim countries’ nationals, thus following contradictory policy, Fars quoted him as having said.

Iran: EU Parliament statement meant to hurt bilateral relations

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Tehran said **d e s k** on Wednesday the recent antagonistic statement by the European Parliament was lobbied by a “terrorist group” in an effort to mar thriving relations between Iran and the European Union.

In a strongly worded communique on Monday, a number of European parliamentarians rapped Iran for what they described as “human rights violations”, calling for the blacklisting of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), the country’s constitutionally enshrined military force.

“A few members of the European Parliament notorious for having links to some dissident groups and the MKO terrorist group have been trying to take advantage of their position to put forward untrue claims about the human rights situation in Iran,” Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi stated.

Designated by Iran as a terrorist organization, the MKO, otherwise known the People’s Mujahidin Organization of Iran (PMOI), took up arms against the Iranian government after the 1979 revolution and assassinated dozens of its top officials.

The MKO also sided with Saddam Hussein during the Iraqi invasion of Iran in the 1980s but fell out of favor with Baghdad after the then Iraqi president was de-throned by the U.S.-led invasion in 2003. “Continuing its past actions and fabricating untrue figures like in the past, the MKO has, in a hypocritical move, as always, published the names of certain European Parliament members as supporters of the aforesaid statement without their knowledge and signatures,” said the spokesman. The statement was backed by a list of



A few members of the European Parliament notorious for having links to some dissident groups and the MKO terrorist group have been trying to take advantage of their position to put forward untrue claims about the human rights situation in Iran.

265 parliamentarians from different political tendencies and groups.

The U.S. delisted the MKO from foreign terrorist organizations in 2012 after 15 years. Also, it was listed as a terrorist organization by the European Union until recently.

Under a deal brokered by the United States and the United Nations refugee agency, almost 2,000 MKO members were resettled in nearly a dozen European

countries since the start of 2016 after the closing of their camps in Iraq.

In July 2016, Iran summoned the French ambassador to protest about a meeting held in Paris by exiled MKO members who wished for the overthrow of the Islamic Republic.

Relations between Tehran and Europe has gone through conceptual, progressive shifts at the wake of the 2015 international nuclear deal.

IRGC to receive \$600m as offset to U.S. legislation

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran’s parliament, the **d e s k** Majlis, is preparing a legislation to grant 20 trillion rials (over \$600 million) to the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps in response to the new U.S. sanctions moves.

The decision follows a recent legislation by the U.S. Senate to impose new sanctions on the IRGC and any other entities involved in Iran’s missile program.

According to Kazem Jalali, head of the Majlis Research Center, the to-be legislation will go into boosting the IRGC’s missile program and empowering its subsidiary Quds Corps to “fight U.S. terrorist acts”.

Recently U.S. senators voted 98-2 to pass the “Countering Iran’s Destabilizing Activities Act,” which would

impose sanctions on entities involved in Iran’s missile program. Before it is signed into law by U.S. President Donald Trump, the measure has to pass the House.

A few days after the Senate move, Iran’s Majlis said it was devising a countermeasure that would concern “U.S. terrorist acts”, comprising 10 sections and 20 articles. The grant to the IRGC comes as part of the promised countermeasure.

According to the draft, the parliament has also put measures on its agenda to counter the U.S. violation of the 2015 nuclear agreement, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Under the JCPOA signed between Iran and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security

Council - the United States, France, Britain, Russia and China - plus Germany, Iran undertook to put limitations on its nuclear program in exchange for the removal of nuclear-related sanctions imposed against Tehran.

The chairman of the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, Alaeddin Boroujerdi, said on Saturday that the recent U.S. Senate’s move was a “blatant violation” of the JCPOA, vowing an appropriate response by the Islamic Republic.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi also on Friday defended the country’s “completely legitimate” missile defense program, emphasizing that nothing can prevent the Islamic Republic from exercising its right to defense.

Some regional states use terrorists as a tool: Kamal Kharrazi

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Kamal **d e s k** Kharrazi, head of Iran’s Strategic Council on Foreign Relations, said on Wednesday that some Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia use terrorist groups as a tool to reach their objectives.

Karrazi made the remarks during the second summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia held in Beijing, China.

“In addition to some regional countries, the Western countries, especially the U.S., have created atmosphere for activities of the terrorist groups be it in Iraq or Syria through military intervention,” he stated.

Karrazi who foreign minister from 1997 to 2005 said interventions by regional and extra-regional countries in the region rob the opportunity of

the people to make proper “political changes” by themselves.

He also said that “political structures” in some Persian Gulf Arab countries are formulated in a way that their “ideological products” cannot be anything other than terrorist groups such as Daesh.

“Such groups are combination of religious extremism such as Wahhabism and a kind of tribal sovereignty,” the former chief diplomat remarked.

Elsewhere, Kharrazi said military solution cannot settle crises.

Problems can only be solved through “collective efforts” and “multilateral dialogues”, he noted.

He also said that security in the Middle East region can only be established by healing the old Palestinian wound.

Tehran warns U.S. not to ‘play with fire’ in Syria

1 → to counter the Syrian Army’s “determining advances” against the militants and “cover up the repeated failures of the terrorism front”.

The security official said if the U.S. is right it must allow the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) investigate the issue.

“If the U.S. administration is sincere in its claims it must put the related information at the disposal of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons so that the issue is verified independently through cooperation with the Syrian government.”

Iran’s Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi also warned against a “possible unilateral and illegal” military moves by the U.S. under “hollow pretexts”, saying such acts would only lead to

“chaos and more insecurity” in the region and give new life to “failing terrorists”.

Also, a senior Russian lawmaker on Tuesday dismissed the U.S. claim as an “unprecedented provocation”.

Frants Klintsevich, first deputy chairman of the defense and security committee at the upper chamber of the Russian parliament, accused the United States of “preparing a new attack on the positions of Syrian forces.”

■ ‘U.S. aborted probe into alleged use of chemical arms by Syria’

Shamkhani said after the attack on the Syrian airfield, Iran and Russia “officially called for sending an international fact-finding team to investigate the claims by America, however Washington prevented it in order to halt a revelation of its false accusations.”

Iran intended to show military power by firing missiles at ISIL: Richard Nephew

1 → Nephew defends the Senate’s decision in approving legislation introducing new sanctions against Iran for its missile program.

“I believe that the sanctions passed by the U.S. Senate underscore the concerns felt by the United States -- as well as other countries -- with some aspects of Iranian policy and activity.”

The UN Security Council Resolution 2231, which endorsed the July 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and great powers, calls on Tehran not to test missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

In a tweet in March 2016 Zarif also said, “Neither #JCPOA nor SC Res prohibit Iran from missiles not designed for nuke warheads. Read the Document: It’s plain English not legalese.”

Under the nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran has given guarantees that it will not produce nuclear weapons, and the UN nuclear body - the International Atomic Energy Agency - which is tasked to monitor the implementation of the nuclear deal, is conducting the most comprehensive inspection of Iran’s nuclear activities.

■ ‘Better ties possible between Iran and U.S.’

However, Nephew says Washington and Tehran can bridge their differences through addressing common concerns.

“I believe that a better relationship between the United States and Iran is possible, but that resolution of some of these concerns would be a necessary component of doing so. Until such a relationship is possible, the United States will take national action to respond to its concerns, just as Iran has and will likely do in the future.”

■ ‘New U.S. sanctions do not violate JCPOA’

The former Obama administration also refutes remarks by certain experts that the new non-nuclear sanctions against Iran are intended to reinstate “dismantled nuclear sanctions” in a new way.

“It is not true that the sanctions adopted by the U.S. Senate restore ‘dismantled nuclear sanctions’. The sanctions passed by the Senate, which still need to be reviewed by the U.S. House of Representatives, do address other areas of concern, such as Iran’s ballistic missile program and human rights record. This is not prohibited by the JCPOA, though the JCPOA does affect how much the United States can do in the area of non-nuclear sanctions. I believe the text passed by the Senate strikes the right balance and is in compliance with the JCPOA.”

He goes on to say that “the specific sanctions contained in this legislation are sufficiently similar to what is already in law that, in my view, the practical differences to Iran and its missile program are very modest.”

On what policy should the U.S. adopt toward the rising tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia, he says, “I do think that the United States generally maintains a desire for states around the world to use diplomacy and dialogue to resolve their problems. This would apply as much to Saudi Arabia and Iran as anywhere else in the world.”

In a television interview in early May, Saudi Defense Minister Mohammed bin Salman accused Iran of coveting dominance of the Muslim world. He also said that “we won’t wait for the battle to be in Saudi Arabia.”

“Instead,” he continued, “we’ll work so that the battle is for them in Iran.”

■ ‘Very limited utility to empower any particular groups inside Iran’

Nephew also says he does not know what Secretary of State Rex Tillerson meant by saying that the U.S. will support “elements inside Iran” for regime change.

“Since I left the U.S. government, I’m not aware of what groups specifically Secretary Tillerson has in mind. I do think that it is possible that there is misinterpretation of what Tillerson said and has in mind... But, here, I must defer to whatever the State Department says in clarification. My own, personal view is that there is very limited utility in the United States seeking to empower any particular groups inside of Iran given the nature of our own history,” Nephew explains.

Ransomware attack causes disruptions across globe

A massive new international cyber-attack via a ransomware virus dubbed Petya has paralyzed businesses across Europe and is spreading elsewhere.

Several major corporations on Tuesday said they had been targeted in the cyber-attack which started in Ukraine and Russia before hitting other European countries.

Danish shipping giant Maersk, Russia's Rosneft oil firm, British advertising agency WPP and the French industrial group Saint-Gobain all said they came under attack and put protection protocols in place to avoid data loss.

One of the countries particularly hit was Ukraine, where serious intrusions at the power grid, banks and government offices were experienced. Boryspil Airport in the capital, Kiev, was also affected.

Artem Shevchenko, head of the communications department at the Ukrainian ministry of internal affairs, told Al Jazeera that authorities had launched a criminal investigation after the "unprecedented cyber-attack".

"Ukraine has never faced [such a cyber-attack] before," he said from Kiev, adding that "all state authorities are involved in the fighting" of the virus.

"The cyber police has received more than 200 reports about interferences in computers with damaging software. Under attack are the state and corporate sector: post offices, banks, transport infrastructure, the main office of the railway station, and other facilities."

Pavlo Rozenko, the country's deputy prime minister, posted a picture of a darkened computer screen to Twitter, saying that the computer system at the government's headquarters has been shut down.

The National Bank of Ukraine said in a statement it had warned banks "about an external hacker attack on the websites of some Ukrainian banks".

Banks were experiencing "difficulty in servicing customers and performing banking operations" due to the attacks, it added.

A cyber-attack was also reported by the Kyivenergopower Company in the capital. "We were forced to turn off all of our computers," a company representative told Interfax Ukraine agency.

Some radiation checks at the Chernobyl nuclear disaster site in Ukraine were being carried out manually as a result of



the attacks, state media said.

■ Ransomware suspected

Researchers with multiple technology companies identified the ransomware as Petya, malware that makes computers inoperable by encrypting their hard drives and demands ransoms in exchange for a digital key to restore access.

The cyber-attack comes as the world is still recovering from a previous outbreak of ransomware, called WannaCry or WannaCrypt, which spread rapidly since mid-May using digital break-in tools originally created by the United States National Security Agency (NSA) and recently leaked to the web.

The spread of the WannaCry ransomware which locked up hundreds of thousands of computers in more than 150 countries has slowed in June, but security experts have warned that new versions of the worm may strike.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security said it was monitoring the attacks and coordinating with other countries. It advised victims not to pay the extortion, saying that doing so does not guarantee

access will be restored.

■ Major impact

In Denmark, Maersk said a cyber-attack had caused outages at its computer systems across the world.

"We are talking about a cyber-attack," said Anders Rosendahl, a spokesman for the Copenhagen-based shipping giant. "It has affected all branches of our business, at home and abroad."

Rosneft, Russia's leading oil producer, also said on Twitter that a powerful hacking attack has been carried out against the company's servers.

It said the attack "could have had serious consequences" but said that thanks to a back-up system "the production and extraction of oil were not stopped."

Russian steelmaker Evraz said it was also affected by cyber-attacks, adding that production was not affected.

Britain's WPP, the world's biggest advertising agency, said on Tuesday that it had been hit by a cyber-attack, one of many major companies to face major disruption.

A spokesman confirmed it had been

affected without giving any further details. The company's website was not available.

U.S. pharmaceutical giant Merck said it had been hit, posting on Twitter that its "computer network was compromised today as part of global hack. Other organizations have also been affected."

In Germany, the country's federal cyber agency said German companies were also affected and urging firms to report any issues to authorities.

The BSI agency did not name the companies affected, although German postal and logistics company Deutsche Post earlier said its systems in Ukraine had been affected.

The cyber-attack had also affected an unnamed "international company" in Norway, the country's national security authority said.

"We see there is a ransomware attack that is actually ongoing. Only one international company has been affected in Norway," said a spokeswoman for the authority, who declined to name the company. (Source: Al Jazeera)

Fresh U.S.-led strikes leave 30 dead in eastern Syrian village

A so-called monitoring group says at least 30 civilians have been killed and dozens more sustained injuries when the United States-led coalition purportedly fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) Takfiri terrorist group carried out an airstrike in Syria's troubled eastern province of Dayr al-Zawr.

The Britain-based so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said the aerial attack hit the village of al-Dablan, located about 20 kilometers (13 miles) southeast of Mayadin town, early on Wednesday.

The deadly airstrike is the second in 48 hours that the U.S.-led coalition has conducted in Dayr al-Zawr province.

On Monday, dozens of people lost their lives when a string of coalition strikes targeted a jail run by ISIL terrorists in Mayadin, located some 45 kilometers (28 miles) southeast of the provincial capital of Dayr al-Zawr.

The observatory said the aerial assaults left 42 prisoners and 15 ISIL terrorists dead.

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

The military alliance has repeatedly been accused of targeting and killing civilians. It has also been largely incapable of fulfilling its declared aim of de-



stroying ISIL.

Syria has been fighting different foreign-sponsored militant and terrorist groups since March 2011. UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura estimated last August that more than 400,000 people had been killed in the crisis until then.

■ Turkey 'fires back' at U.S.-backed Kurds in Syria

Meanwhile, the Turkish military claims it has fired back at U.S.-backed Kurdish militia after they targeted the anti-Damascus militants it supports in Syria.

It said on Wednesday that the Turkish forces had retaliated with artillery fire and destroyed targets belonging to the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG/Yekineyên Parastina Gel?) overnight.

The Kurds had earlier opened fire on the Turkey-backed Free Syrian Army (FSA) militants in the

Maranaz area south of the town of Azaz in northern Syria.

Turkey considers the YPG to be associated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK/Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê) militants, who have been leading a decades-long deadly war against Ankara in quest for an independent Kurdish state in southeastern Turkey.

The country has invaded Syria without Damascus' approval to drive the YPG back from its borders.

Turkey has also locked horns with the United States, which supports the Kurds against the Takfiri ISIL terrorist group, pressing Washington to stop its arms support for the fighters.

The United States supports the YPG in the fight against ISIL in Syria, despite repeated protests from NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) ally Turkey, which sees the Syrian Kurdish fighters as terrorists and fears their advance will inflame Kurdish militancy at home.

James Mattis, the U.S. secretary of defense, addressed Ankara's concerns in the area, saying Washington would take back all the weapons provided to the Kurds once Raqqa is liberated.

The ISIL terrorist outfit named Raqqa as its so-called headquarters in Syria in 2014, when it started its terror campaign against the country.

His Turkish counterpart Fikri Isik reacted by saying Ankara wanted a "joint mechanism" with Washington to ensure full reclamation of the weapons.

(Source: agencies)

UAE envoy: Persian Gulf states considering new Qatar sanctions

A House of Saud regime-led bloc is considering fresh sanctions against Qatar that may include asking trading partners to choose between them or Doha, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) ambassador to Russia said.

In an interview with The Guardian newspaper, envoy Omar Ghobash said the expulsion of Qatar from the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) was "not the only sanction available" for the UAE and its allies.

"There are certain economic sanctions that we can take which are being considered right now," Ghobash said in the interview, which was published on Wednesday.

"One possibility would be to impose conditions on our own trading partners and say: you want to work with us then you have got to make a commercial choice," he added.

The House of Saud regime, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt cut diplomatic ties with Qatar and imposed sanctions on the country on June 5, accusing it of supporting "terrorism".

The four countries have not provided any evidence for their claim, while Qatar has repeatedly rejected the allegation.

Ghobash said that if Qatar "was not willing to accept the demands, it is a case of 'Goodbye Qatar' we do not need you in our tent any more".

■ We don't claim to have press freedom

On Thursday, the Saudi regime-led bloc issued a 13-point demand list in exchange for the end of the anti-Qatar measures and gave a 10-day deadline.

The demands included, among others, that Qatar shut down the Al Jazeera media network, close a Turkish military base and scale down ties with Iran.

When asked if the closure of Al Jazeera was a valid demand, Ghobash told The Guardian that the UAE does not "claim to have press freedom".

"We do not promote the idea of press freedom. What we talk about is responsibility in speech," he said.

He added that speech in the Persian Gulf "has particular context, and that context can go from peaceful to violent in no time simply because of the words that are spoken".

Ghobash also said that the UAE was willing to hold itself to the same standards it was asking of Qatar.

He echoed previous statements by UAE officials that the Gulf states do not wish to escalate the conflict with military action.

"We can escalate with more information, because we are not going to escalate militarily. That is not the way we are looking at things."

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Helicopter attacks Venezuela court, Maduro denounces coup bid

A Venezuelan police helicopter strafed the Supreme Court and a government ministry, escalating the OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) nation's political crisis in what President Nicolas Maduro called an attack by "terrorists" seeking a coup.

The aircraft fired 15 shots at the Interior Ministry, where scores of people were at a social event, and dropped four grenades on the court, where judges were meeting, officials said.

However, there were no reports of injuries.

"Sooner rather than later, we are going to capture the helicopter and those behind this armed terrorist attack against the institutions of the country," Maduro said.

"They could have caused dozens of deaths," he said.

The 54-year-old socialist leader has faced three months of protests from opposition leaders who decry him as a dictator who has wrecked a once-prosperous economy. There has been growing dissent from within government and the security forces.

At least 75 people have died, and hundreds more been injured and arrested, in the anti-government unrest since April.

Demonstrators are demanding general elections, measures to alleviate a brutal economic crisis, freedom for hundreds of jailed opposition activists, and independence for the opposition-controlled National Assembly legislature.

Maduro says they are seeking a coup against him with the encouragement of a United States government eager to gain control of Venezuela's oil reserves, the largest in the world.

Venezuela's government said in a communique the helicopter was stolen by investigative police pilot Oscar Perez, who declared himself in rebellion against Maduro.

Images shared on social and local media appear to show Perez waving a banner from the helicopter reading "Liberty", and the number "350" in large letters.

The number refers to the constitutional article allowing people the right to oppose an undemocratic government.

A video posted on Perez' Instagram account around the same time showed him standing in front of several hooded armed men, saying an operation was underway to restore democracy.

Perez said in the video he represented a coalition of military, police and civilian officials opposed to the "criminal" government, urged Maduro's resignation and called for general elections. "This fight is ... against the vile government. Against tyranny," he said. (Source: Reuters)

The new power shake-up in Saudi Arabia

➡ Saudi airstrikes have irreparably demolished Yemen's already inadequate and dilapidated infrastructure, leaving the country on the brink of famine, starvation, and epidemics such as cholera. The ensuing humanitarian crisis in Yemen has significantly undermined Saudi Arabia's image both in the region and on the global scene, while also strengthening the resolve of a generation of young Yemenis to violently resist the Saudi military intervention in their country.

Perhaps most significantly of all, the prospect of a young prince—to become the king in not-too-distant future—with the potential to rule the country for decades has now become real. Such an eventuality carries worrisome implications. Consider, for example, the recent Saudis' ill-fated policy of isolating Qatar following the accusation that Doha has kept financing extremist

"The lingering civil war in Yemen, which has tied down Saudis' hands in an unwinnable crisis next door, has also presented new problems to the Saudis leadership."

groups—a policy with which many of the region's Arab countries, as well as the U.S. State Department, fundamentally differ. In fact, the U.S. State Department officials have pointed out that many Arab countries of the Persian Gulf allow funding to groups and organizations that foster extremism or underwrite terrorism. "Saudi Arabia, for instance, has long underwritten mosques around the world that teach a stark form of Islam strongly associated with extremism" (The New York Times, June 21, 2017:A13).

Given that Qatar is an important military partner of the United States and home to the largest U.S. air base in the region, the boycott of Qatar has wreaked havoc on the region and intensified further divisions there. The control of the House of Saud by young and aggressive princes bodes ill for a country that is consumed by taking a hawkish stance toward Iran and yet at the same time claiming to lead the campaign against Sunni extremists, including Daesh. The Trump administration's unbridled support for the new prince is likely to invite further controversy and discord in the coming months and years.

To successfully fight against Sunni militants linked to terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and Daesh—not to mention ending civil wars in Libya, Syria, and Yemen—the United States needs regional stability, calm, and co-operation. That said, for both the United States and Saudi Arabia the priority, at least for now, seems to be not to frontally confront al-Qaeda and/or Daesh, but rather to fend off Iran's pervasive influence in the region. Such urgency is fundamentally misplaced, for a strategy that allows for the simultaneous isolation of Iran and confrontation with al-Qaeda and/or Daesh makes little or no sense.

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NEWS IN BRIEF



Near \$800m projects underway in Shahid Rajaei Port

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Managing Director of Ports & Maritime Department of Iran's Hormozgan Province announced on Wednesday that tens of projects worth 30 trillion rials (about \$799 million) are underway in the country's southern Shahid Rajaei Port, IRNA reported.

Among these projects, Allah-Morad Afifipour, referred to establishment of three oil terminals as well as access roads at the value of 600 billion rials (about \$15.9 million).

Having the docks constructed within the next two years, Shahid Rajaei's capacity of oil products exports will increase up to 34 million tons.

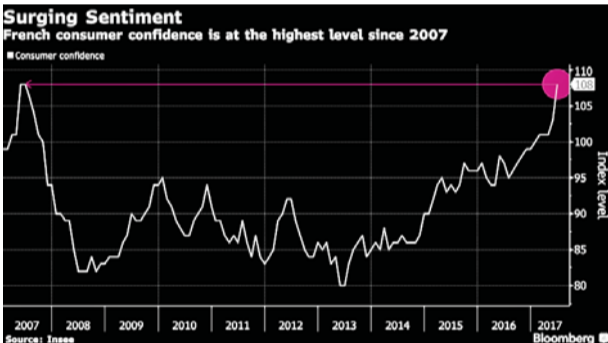


Horticulture output to reach 22m tons by Mar. 2018

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran's annual output of horticultural products is anticipated to reach 22 million tons by the end of current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2018), according to an official at the Ministry of Agriculture.

Mohammad-Ali Tahmasbi, the deputy agriculture minister, said the production of different kinds of fruits has been very good in the country since the beginning of current calendar year (March 21) and this process is forecast to continue by the yearend, ILNA reported on Wednesday.

French consumer confidence jumps to highest in decade



French consumer confidence surged to its highest level in a decade after Emmanuel Macron's first month in office. Sentiment rose to 108, it's best reading since June 2007 when Nicolas Sarkozy was just beginning his five-year term as president, national statistics office Insee said. Consumers reported improvements in personal finances, ability to save and readiness to make significant purchases.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Ready or not, Indian businesses brace for biggest-ever tax reform

Businessman Pankaj Jain is so worried about the impending launch of a new sales tax in India that he is thinking of shutting down his tiny textile factory for a month to give himself time to adjust.

Jain is one of millions of small business owners who face wrenching change from India's biggest tax reform since independence that will unify the country's \$2 trillion economy and 1.3 billion people into a common market.

But he is simply not ready for a regime that from July 1 will for the first time tax the bed linen his 10 workers make, and require him to file his taxes every month online.

On the desk in his tiny office in Meerut, two hours drive northeast of New Delhi, lay two calculators. Turning to open a metal cabinet, he pulled out a hand-written ledger to show how he keeps his books.

"We will have to hire an accountant - and get a computer," the thickset 52-year-old told Reuters, as a dozen ancient power looms clattered away in the ramshackle workshop next door.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government says that by replacing several federal and state taxes, the new Goods and Services Tax (GST) will make life simpler for business.

To drive home the point, Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan has appeared in a promotional video in which he weaves a cat's cradle between the fingers of his hands - symbolizing India's thicket of old taxes.

With a flourish, the tangle is gone and Bachchan proclaims: "One nation, one tax, one market!"

****By tearing down barriers between India's 29 states, the GST should deliver efficiency gains to larger businesses. HSBC estimates the reform could add 0.4 percent to economic growth.

Yet at the local chapter of the Indian Industries Association, which groups 6,500 smaller enterprises nationwide, the talk is about how to cope in the aftermath of the GST rollout.

"In the initial months, there may be utter confusion," said chairman Ashok Malhotra, who runs one firm that manufactures voltage stabilisers and a second that makes timing equipment for boxing contests.

A big concern is the Indian GST's sheer complexity - with rates of 5, 12, 18 and 28 percent, and myriad exceptions, it contrasts with simpler, flatter and broader sales taxes in other countries. (Source: Reuters)

Over \$2b allocated to 411 transport projects

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The national budget law for the current Iranian calendar year (March 2017-March 2018) has allocated 80 trillion rials (about \$2.1 billion) for implementing 411 transport projects across the country, the deputy transport minister announced on Wednesday.

As IRNA quoted Amir Amini, most of the projects are semi-finished.

By the end of the Sixth Five-Year

Socio-Economic Development Plan (March 2021), 5,000 kilometers of highways and 1,000 kilometers of railroads will be constructed by domestic private sector, he added.

Expressing hope about the expansion of infrastructure projects in road sector, Amini said that by the present time, 15,000 investment contracts have been signed with private sector on development of railway, highways, and air



transportation in Iran.

During President Hassan Rouhani's first tenure, started in August 2013, 470 trillion rials (about \$11.9 billion) of investments have been made in the

country's railway projects by domestic private sector, while the current unfinished projects in this sector worth 670 trillion rials (about \$17.7 billion), he added.

China said to plan coal import ban at some ports starting July 1

China plans to ban coal imports starting July 1 at ports that were set up through approvals by provincial authorities, the latest move by President Xi Jinping's government to exert stricter control on the market.

Ports in the world's largest consumer of the fuel that were approved under the authority of the State Council will still be able to receive overseas shipments, said the people, who asked not to be identified as the information isn't public. China's largest ports are typically approved by the State Council when they are developed,

while smaller ports usually only received provincial or local approvals.

The duration and impact on imports of the ban are unclear, said the people. The country's General Administration of Customs didn't respond to faxed questions, while a Beijing-based spokesman didn't answer two calls to his office seeking comment.

The ban is the latest attempt by the government to manage the nation's coal supply and prices, which have swung in the last year amid a series of regulations aimed

at keeping prices high enough to support miners while not letting them rise to a level that hurts power producers. The National Development and Reform Commission, the top economic planner, last month was considering stricter quality restrictions on imports of thermal and coking coal, Bloomberg reported.

While the impact on China's overall coal supply may be minimal given its domestic overcapacity, regional sellers in countries like Australia and Indonesia may feel a hit.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Deutsche bank faces possible \$60m derivative loss

Deutsche Bank AG, the German lender seeking to overhaul how it manages risks, made a bet on U.S. inflation that puts the firm on course to lose as much as \$60 million, people familiar with the matter said.

The trade used derivative products tied to U.S. inflation, said the people, who requested anonymity because the details aren't public. The Frankfurt-based lender has been examining whether Deutsche Bank traders breached risk limits on the deal, some of the people said. The case has been escalated to the bank's supervisory board, one person

said.

Chief Executive Officer John Cryan has been trying to improve the lender's risk and operational controls that have drawn scorn from regulators around the world. A risk limit violation could indicate a weakness in the bank's oversight of its traders in a business that earned about \$270 million in the first quarter. Just two months ago, the Federal Reserve fined the firm for failing to ensure that traders abide by the Volcker Rule, a U.S. law that restricts lenders from using their own funds to make speculative trades.

"If it is true that a single trade could

cause such a loss at Deutsche Bank, then this would be a clear setback to Cryan's efforts to improve controls," said Michael Seufert, an analyst with NordLB who has a sell recommendation on the stock. "He has vowed to end such control failures."

An official for Deutsche Bank in New York declined to comment.

Deutsche Bank made the trade in anticipation of how clients were going to transact and isn't expecting the bet to reverse, one of the people said. Inflation traders buy and sell bonds linked to inflation, such as Treasury Inflation-Protected Securities, and other derivatives

such as options.

In a separate case, the bank last year began a review into whether it misstated the value of derivatives used to bet on inflation, known as zero-coupon inflation swaps. The bank shared its findings with U.S. authorities, Bloomberg reported.

The German lender's fixed-income pretax profit was driven by 2.3 billion euros (\$2.6 billion) in revenue in the first quarter, an 11 percent increase on the year earlier. Revenue from products tied to interest rates was "significantly higher," Deutsche Bank said.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Japan, EU press ahead on free trade pact to counter U.S. protectionism

Japanese and European Union negotiators meeting in Tokyo aim to reach a free trade deal that would stand against a protectionist tide threatening the global economy, and make the United States think twice over pursuing inward-looking policies.

Japan and the EU have been negotiating since 2013, but talks have intensified since last week, with almost daily meetings to overcome key hurdles, including tariffs on Japanese automobiles and car parts and European wine, cheese, pasta and other foods.

A Japan-EU deal could leave U.S. firms at a disadvantage, especially after President Donald Trump's withdrawal of the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, or TPP, earlier this year.

"There is an atmosphere among negotiators that Japan and the EU need to stop protectionism that is prevailing in the world," said a source familiar with the issue who declined to be identified because talks are ongoing.

"The momentum is building for Japan and the EU to take leadership in promoting and executing free trade."

In a sign of optimism, EU trade chief Cecilia Malmstrom said on Monday she could sign a provisional deal with Japan as early as next week.

An agreement between the EU and Japan would "send a strong message to the United States that free trade is important and that you shouldn't be too inward looking," said another source, who declined to be named while negotiations were underway.

Trump favors bilateral trade deals over multilateral



EU chief negotiator and Director General of the Directorate General for Trade Raffaele Mauro Petriccione (L) meets with Japan's chief negotiator Yoichi Suzuki, Representative of the Government of Japan for Free Trade and Economic Partnership Agreements Negotiations

accords and his decision to walk away the TPP, left the other 11 members of the Pacific Rim trading bloc, including Japan, in limbo.

Although, together Japan and the EU account for about a third of global GDP, their trade relationship has a lot of room to grow - EU forecasts reckon by as much as a third.

Bank of England deputy says it is not time for interest rate hike

The battle lines for a key Bank of England decision on interest rates have been made clearer after deputy governor Sir Jon Cunliffe became the latest Threadneedle Street official to voice publicly his opposition to higher borrowing costs.

Cunliffe came to the support of the governor, Mark Carney, in saying that it was not yet time to raise interest rates - setting the scene for one of the most closely fought decisions of the Bank's monetary policy committee when it meets early next month.

The MPC voted 5-3 in favour of leaving rates on hold at 0.25% at its most recent meeting, but the City was taken aback when the Bank's chief economist, Andy Haldane, said he had been close to abandoning his no-change stance.

Haldane's comments raised speculation that the Bank is coming close to reversing the emergency quarter-point cut in official borrowing costs made in August 2016 when the MPC was seeking to shore up confidence in the wake of the Brexit vote.

But Cunliffe said that raising interest rates at the current time was not desirable because it would add to the squeeze on living standards caused by prices rising more quickly than wages.

Speaking on the BBC Radio 4 Today programme,

Cunliffe said consumer spending was slowing as households' real incomes were squeezed by higher inflation. "We expect some of that slowing to be offset by growth in business investment, growth in exports. And I want to see how that plays out.

"[We] do have to look at what's happening to domestic inflation pressure, and I think that, on the data we have at the moment, [it] gives us a bit of time to see how this evolves."

Inflation as measured by the consumer prices index is 2.9% and expected to rise further above the government's 2% target over the coming months.

The three MPC members who voted for a rate rise at the last meeting believe the lowest unemployment rate since the 1970s will generate pressure for higher wages and that, unless policy is tightened now, there is the risk that a more aggressive stance will have to be announced later.

One of the three "hawks" - Kristin Forbes - is no longer an MPC member and has been replaced by Silvana Tenreiro, whose views on the necessity of a rate rise are unknown.

With Haldane indicating that he might join Ian McCafferty and Michael Saunders in voting for higher borrowing costs, and Cunliffe siding with Carney, the result



Sir Jon Cunliffe, deputy governor of the Bank of England, wants to avoid a further squeeze on living standards. Photograph: WPA/Getty

will be decided by another deputy governor, Ben Broadbent, Jan Vlieghe, the former hedge fund economist, and Tenreiro.

The MPC normally has nine members but is down to eight as a result of the resignation of Charlotte Hogg for failing to declare that her brother worked at Barclays.

In the event of a 4-4 tie at the next meeting, Carney would have the casting vote. (Source: The Guardian)

Oil slips further below \$47 as U.S. inventory report revives glut worries

Oil traded further below \$47 a barrel on Wednesday after an industry report said U.S. inventories increased, reviving concerns that a three-year supply glut is far from over.

The American Petroleum Institute (API) said on Tuesday U.S. crude inventories rose by 851,000 barrels, while analysts expected a decline. Inventories of gasoline and distillates also increased, the API said.

"The report was disappointing," said Tamas Varga of oil broker PVM, although he added that the downside reaction of prices to the API figures had been "muted" so far.

Brent crude LCOc1 was down 15 cents at \$46.50 a barrel at 0846 GMT. It reached a seven-month low of \$44.35 on June 21. U.S. crude fell 24 cents to \$44.00.

A rise in U.S. stocks would suggest global supplies are still ample despite the effort led by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries to cut output by 1.8 million barrels per day (bpd) from January 2017.

The producers are trying to get rid of a supply glut which prompted prices to slide from above \$100 a barrel in mid-2014.

OPEC and its allies agreed on May 25 to extend the supply cut into 2018, but Brent has fallen from as high as \$54 then on rising production from the United States and from Nigeria and Libya, two



OPEC members exempt from cutting output.

Nonetheless, some analysts believe that the selloff was overdone.

Ian Taylor, head of the world's largest independent oil trader Vitol, said Brent

will stay in a range of \$40-\$55 a barrel for the next few quarters as higher U.S. production slows a rebalancing of the market.

Analysts at JBC Energy in a report saw room for prices to recover.

"While the physical crude market remains steady at best, it is worth noting there is now significant room for speculative support for prices to develop if a catalyst were to emerge," JBC said.

(Source: Reuters)

\$30 oil could spark contagion in energy markets

By Nick Cunningham

If oil prices continue to fall, the financial damage could start to become a concern.

A new analysts from Deutsche Bank finds that the high-yield energy market could start to suffer from contagion if oil prices drop to the mid-\$30s. At \$35 per barrel, for example, the debt-to-enterprise value jumps to over 55 percent for a lot of high-yield energy companies. The result could be a surge in yields that put a lot of pressure on companies. Yields are already up 1 percentage point over the past month, corresponding with the plunge in oil prices. But if prices fall further, yields could rise to more worrying levels.

For now, the recent gains in oil prices from the ten-month lows hit last week could ease concerns. But if oil traders are just taking a breather before another downturn, then there could be trouble ahead for the high-yield market. The pain suffered by sub-investment grade energy companies could bleed over into broader junk bonds. "Oil weakness to this point is

problematic directly to energy valuations but is not yet a cause for credit-loss concerns in energy or the broader high-yield market," Deutsche Bank analysts said in a recent research note. "We are getting closer to the point where this narrative could begin to change."

The investment bank went on to add: "We would become mindful of implications for the broader high-yield market if oil were to drop under \$40, and particularly if it were to head toward \$35."

If yields spike, it will be a lot more difficult for struggling energy companies to access the debt markets. Ultimately, that could put them in a bind. "The high-yield bond market is waking up," Ryan Kelly of PGIM, the investment management arm of Prudential Financial Inc., told the Wall Street Journal. "There's been a change in tone."

Other analysts share similar sentiments. UBS says that WTI staying at or below \$40 for a year would "elevate 2015-style risks for [high-yield] energy."

We have seen this story before. In early 2016, when oil prices dropped below \$30 per barrel, it started to drag down stock

indices around the world. Some are even speculating that the latest downturn in prices is not just a problem for the high-yield market, but perhaps an indicator of a coming economic recession.

Still, the predictions about financial contagion could be overblown. Many of the least-efficient shale companies already went bankrupt over the past several years. The survivors are better suited to survive low oil prices.

Moreover, unlike past oil price downturns, this one is a supply-driven phenomenon. As CNBC notes, the 2008 plunge in prices was a result of the global financial crisis and a meltdown in demand. Other past recessions have also led to a downturn in prices. If global GDP slips, for example, demand will slow, which will push down oil prices.

But the dips since 2014 are the fallout from a surge in supply. That difference could be why the financial carnage from another crude oil meltdown stays isolated to the energy sector. "This time around it's supply driven, and low oil prices are only a problem for oil companies and one-trick-pony oil-producing countries," John Kilduff

of Again Capital told CNBC. "If the oil price slide were an early indicator of a slowing global economy, then stocks would follow suit but that does not appear to be the case."

In fact, lower oil prices could juice the economy, not only by leading to lower costs for consumers, but also dragging down inflation, which could deter the Fed from further rate hikes. CNBC also notes that the energy sector makes up a smaller share of the S&P today – about 6 percent – than it did back in 2008 when it was 15 percent. A deeper plunge in oil prices would have less of an effect today than it did in the past. "If energy prices are falling, it may be detrimental to energy companies but it's materially beneficial to everyone and everything else," Dennis Gartman, editor of the Gartman Letter, told CNBC.

This debate could be a moot point if oil prices stabilize and rise back to the upper-\$40s. But with a growing number of analysts seeing oil heading below \$40, we may find out if it starts to drag down other parts of the financial sector.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Russian gas giant Gazprom withdraws from Turkish market

Gazprom, a gas holding headquartered in Russia, is likely to completely withdraw from the domestic market of Turkey, being the only exporter of gas, Kommersant newspaper reports on Wednesday.

According to sources familiar with the situation, Gazprombank completes the withdrawal from Promak, which owns a controlling stake (60%) in two companies importing Russian gas to Turkey — Enerco and Avrasya.

Promak is a joint venture of Russian Gazprombank and the trader Akfel Holding, established in 2014. Gazprombank owned 40% stake in the company, the remaining share belonged to its partner.

Earlier, Deputy Chairman of Gaz-



prom Alexander Medvedev spoke about the company's plans to sell another Turkish asset, Bosphorus Gas. According to Medvedev, the Turkish market is "unpredictable" and loses its appeal due to the weakening of the lira and the regulated tariffs.

(Source: russianconstruction.com)

Venezuela's largest refining complex to work at 42% capacity in July

Venezuela's largest refining complex plans to operate next month at 42 percent of its 955,000-barrel-per-day capacity, a level that would require state-run oil company PDVSA to keep increasing fuel purchases, according to internal documents seen by Reuters.

Petroleos de Venezuela last week launched one of its largest offers on the open market in recent years to buy more than 6 million barrels of fuel and up to 9 million barrels of diluents for the second half of 2017.

The tenders come as the company known as PDVSA struggles to pay suppliers for previously imported cargoes, which in some cases have been waiting for months to discharge at Venezuelan



ports.

PDVSA has few options to supply Venezuela's domestic market and feed some of its refining units other than importing what it has been unable to produce domestically, according to the documents.

(Source: Reuters)

Oil pipeline firms' discounts rile clients, roil markets

U.S. pipeline operators are selling their underused space at steep discounts to keep crude flowing - angering shippers and distorting an already opaque market for oil trading.

Pipeline firms such as Plains All American and TransCanada Corp move about 10 million barrels of crude around the United States every day.

For pipeline operators to secure financing to build pipelines and storage facilities, they need oil producers, refiners and traders to sign long-term contracts to use space on the pipelines.

Pipeline firms can then use the guaranteed revenue from those contracts as collateral. Firms shipping on

the pipeline have historically benefited from the long-term deals because they offered a discount compared to the price of buying space occasionally.

But now, in the wake of a two-year oil price crash, pipeline firms are still struggling to keep their lines full. So their marketing arms are offering steep discounts to ad-hoc buyers of pipeline capacity - which irritates customers whose long-term contracts are now more expensive than spot purchases.

"If I were a producer with a long-term contract, I would be very unhappy at the present time," said Rick Smead, managing director of advisory services at RBN Energy in Houston. "But, the reality is that when they (signed con-

tracts), they were trapped."

Eight pipeline operators contacted by Reuters for this story declined to comment on their discounted spot pricing or the secondary market for pipeline capacity.

Some of those pipeline firms are offering prices as low as 25 percent of federally regulated rates, creating a secondary market that undercuts shippers with long-term contracts, according to four sources at companies that regularly ship on the pipelines.

The discounts emerged after a global glut and crashing oil prices caused many shippers to let their pipeline contracts lapse or declare bankruptcy.

More than a dozen producers, trad-

ers and refiners told Reuters they were angry and frustrated that these discount deals have become a mainstay. They declined to be named because they were not authorized to speak publicly.

The contract and regulatory framework of the industry makes it difficult for them to bargain down their own long-term contracts, leaving them paying more for the pipeline space than occasional shippers competing to send oil through the same lines.

This gives the occasional shippers the edge in delivering cheaper crude to potential buyers at the end of the line.

(Source: Reuters)

Chinese province runs on 100% renewable energy for a week

A Chinese province with a population of 5.8 million has run entirely on renewable energy for seven days in a row as part of a test to show if the electricity grid can cope without fossil fuels.

Hydro-electric schemes provided more than 72 percent of the electricity in Qinghai between 17 and 23 June, with wind and solar supplying most of the rest, according to Climate Action, a group which works with the United Nations Environment Program to share knowledge about new technologies that can help combat climate change.

Quan Shenming, general manager of the Qinghai Electric Power Corporation, said: "Being the first trial of this kind in the country and a major step in the transformation of energy supply, it will be of great importance in promoting the use of clean energy in China in a sustainable and effective way."

The company said 1.1 billion kilowatt hours of electricity was used during the period; about 535,000 tons of coal would be needed to generate the same amount.

In May, nearly 83 percent of the province's electricity came from solar, wind and hydro power.

The province's power grid has a total installed capacity of about 23 million kilowatts, but there are plans to increase the combined solar and wind capacity to 35 million kilowatts by 2020.

There are plans to supply parts of central and eastern China with green electricity generated in the area.

Han Ti, vice general manager of the power company, told China's state-run news agency Xinhua: "Clean energy is the ultimate way. We need to reduce reliance on fossil fuel, improve our energy structure, and reduce carbon emissions."

China's National Energy Administration plans to invest 2.5 trillion yuan (about £288 billion) in renewable energy technology by 2020, Xinhua reported, saying this would create more than 13 million jobs.

(Source: The Independent)

European utilities primed for consolidation in shift to renewables

A year after the break-up of Eon and RWE in a sweeping restructuring of Germany's power industry, investors are bracing for the next wave of upheaval in European utilities. Bankers and industry executives say further deals look certain as electricity companies scramble to adapt to the accelerating shift towards renewable energy.

The £318 million sale last week of two UK gas-fired power stations by Centrica to EPH of the Czech Republic was the latest example of a utility reshaping its portfolio. Now, expectations are growing of bigger transactions to come.

Much of the anticipation is focused on the new companies created by the separation of Eon and RWE. Both German utilities split themselves in two, with one unit focused on traditional thermal generating businesses — dominated by coal and gas-fired power — and the other comprising "cleaner" businesses, such as renewables, electricity distribution and consumer services. Uniper, the conventional power business spun out of Eon, has been touted by analysts and bankers as a potential target for Fortum, the Finnish utility. Meanwhile, Innogy, the clean energy business split from RWE, has been linked with Engie of France.

Isabelle Kocher, Engie's chief executive, has denied interest in such a deal and her counterpart at Innogy, Peter Terium, last week said there had been no contact between the companies. Uniper and Fortum declined to comment. However, anticipation of mergers and acquisitions has been one of the factors behind a 10 per cent increase in the valuation of European utilities this year, outperforming the broader market by a third.

Johannes Teyssen, chief executive of Eon, says the case for consolidation is most obvious among traditional thermal generators as they seek strength through scale in the face of rising competition from wind and solar. "In the conventional energy world, scale matters a lot so I'm sure that we will see more consolidation steps," he told a recent FT energy conference. "As more and more [fossil fuel] assets are retired, the smaller players will become smaller and less competitive and less able to deliver value."

Europe's 12 biggest utilities have written off more than €100 billion of assets since 2010, according to Jefferies, as scores of coal and gas-fired plants have been closed or mothballed. Those that remain have fallen in value.

Julian Critchlow, partner at Bain & Company, the consultancy, says growth in renewables has created excess capacity of about 25-30 percent in the European power sector, depressing profit margins for generators. He predicts mergers of equals through which companies will share synergies from closing uneconomic plants.

Some companies still see value in buying traditional power stations. EPH's deal with Centrica last week was the latest in a series of similar acquisitions by the Czech group from larger European utilities, including German assets of Sweden's Vattenfall and Eon in Italy.

Although renewables are gaining share, conventional thermal generation remained the biggest source of EU electricity last year at 49 percent of output. Good profits can still be made from coal and gas plants, especially during periods when wind and solar output is low.

While EPH scavenges for unwanted assets, Fortum is seen as a potential driver of larger scale consolidation. The Finnish group has plenty of cash after the €9 billion sale of its Nordic electricity distribution assets two years ago and Pekka Lundmark, chief executive, has made no secret of his appetite for deals. Uniper is seen as a prime target because, although hard coal and lignite are its biggest fuel source, the group also has scale in cleaner gas, nuclear and hydro generation.

Analysts at Macquarie wrote last week that they saw "a very high likelihood" of Fortum buying the 47 percent stake in Uniper held by Eon, and this "could be the first step to a full takeover". Others have highlighted potential synergies between Uniper and its domestic rival RWE. "The big problem with RWE is they are overweight in coal and lignite in particular," says Mark Lewis, head of European utilities research at Barclays. "That means Uniper's asset base, which is more tilted towards gas, becomes a very attractive way of hedging your lignite exposure."

(Source: Financial Times)

Why supporting Saudi Arabia over Qatar would risk America's security

By Anthony Harwood

Last Friday, Saudi Arabia and her allies published a list of 13 demands Qatar must meet in order to end the embargo against it and resolve the most significant regional crisis since the Second Persian Gulf War.

Qatar has been stranded from its neighbors since June 5, when escalating tensions led to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt and Bahrain taking the unprecedented move of severing all diplomatic ties and transportation links with the state. The Saudi blockade has caused significant upheaval to food, fuel and flights throughout the region, with many residents fearful of being separated from their families and losing their jobs.

The Saudi-led alliance demands not just limitless financial reparation and the closure of respected media outlet Al Jazeera, but total submission to their Persian Gulf neighbors. Overall it reads somewhat like the Arabic proverb: "He who does not wish to give his daughter in marriage exaggerates her dowry." Put simply, the demands are designed to be impossible to comply with.

Tackling terrorism

The alliance was emboldened to take action on Doha earlier this month due to President Donald Trump's public commitment to tackling terrorism in the region. Since then, however, both President Trump and, more emphatically, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson are now recognizing the inaccuracy of these claims and attempting to end the blockade.

International observers agree the motivating factors for isolating Qatar were based on a complex set of issues and resentments which are far more significant than the simplistic and ostensible rationale: Qatar's alleged support for extremism.

As James Dorsey, senior fellow at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore, recently observed, the Saudi-UAE demands appear to fall far short of a call by the U.S. State Department that the conditions for lifting the diplomatic and economic embargo be "reasonable and actionable." Indeed, the set of demands being made by the Saudi-led coalition is plainly designed not to seek a peaceful resolution, but to inflict punitive and open ended reparations in an effort to cripple a small but vocal neighbor.

As Qatar's foreign minister travels to Washington this week, it is time for the U.S. to heal this rift with a long-standing ally before the crisis escalates further, but it is also an opportunity for a renewed effort against extremism wherever it exists. Though Saudi Arabia, UAE and their allies exaggerated their reasons for isolating Qatar, the unintended consequences of refocusing American efforts on extremism in the Persian Gulf could bring about genuine change. If President Trump and his administration is truly committed to this issue, now is the time to act.

Ironically, continuing support from Qatar is an essential part of the fight against extremists. Qatar's Al Udeid Air Base hosts 11,000 U.S. troops and is the largest American base in the region, making it critical in the fight against the Islamic State terrorist group (ISIS). Indeed, throughout 2016 the site was used to launch strikes in Iraq and Syria, and prior to this it was a key base for the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan.

Military cooperation between the two nations is at its highest level in history, and President Trump's \$12billion deal to supply F-15 jets to Qatar, signed after he criticized the nation for supporting terrorism, indicates there are strong pragmatic allegiances that are unlikely to shift in the near future. Furthermore, Secretary of State Tillerson said last week the blockade is already hampering the campaign against ISIS in the region.

U.S. and Western policy

Perhaps the most significant support Qatar can give to the U.S. is ideological. Though funded by the Qatari government, Al Jazeera commands international respect as a media outlet, and is of value to U.S. and Western policy aims in the region. Compare this to new legislation in the UAE that penalizes those who "show sympathy" for Qatar with sentences of up to 15 years. The U.S. cannot surely even passively sanction the brutal suppression of media and personal freedoms.

Saudi Arabia hailed the recent \$110billion arms deal with the U.S. as a break with the Obama years, during which tensions rose over his deal with Iran, and welcomed President Trump's implied support for Riyadh's agenda in the Middle East. However, the U.S. must adopt a more nuanced approach that balances the multitude of interests in the Persian Gulf. Crucially, a misstep by the U.S. at this stage risks conflict now and in the future in a place which has seen Western intervention in recent history.

Recent events should serve as a constant reminder that each nation in the Middle East supports a complex agenda that renders useless the adage "an enemy of my enemy is my friend." It is no doubt true that Saudi Arabia views Iran as the greatest threat to its sovereignty, and equally that President Trump views Tehran with a similar level of suspicion, but the wholesale support of Saudi policy would result in serious risks to the U.S. and indeed the Western world.

We must not ignore the reality that the ideology which inspires many of the most violent terrorist organizations is Wahhabism, an extreme orthodox Sunni creed which has its historical roots in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Regardless of allegiances with Riyadh we must call out the sources of funding of hate preaching worldwide.

As observers have noted, the only possible conclusion of the current impasse is either for Qatar to capitulate entirely and become nothing more than a Saudi client state, or to face expulsion from the [Persian] Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) and to be driven into the waiting arms of Iran.

The solution should be clear: invite an internationally respected panel of legal experts to examine the claims that Qatar is promoting terrorism. If the evidence is there, invite the Qataris to deal with this openly and transparently. But don't jeopardize the beacon of hope that the [PGCC] represents in the region, and the world. (Source: Newsweek)

by Patrick Wintour

A clash between Angela Merkel and Donald Trump appears unavoidable after Germany signaled that it will make climate change, free trade and the management of forced mass global migration the key themes of the G20 summit in Hamburg next week.

The G20 summit brings together the world's biggest economies, representing 85% of global gross domestic product (GDP), and Merkel's chosen agenda looks likely to maximise American isolation while attempting to minimise disunity amongst others.

The meeting, which is set to be the scene of large-scale street protests, will also mark the first meeting between Trump and the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, as world leaders.

Trump has already rowed with Europe once over climate change and refugees at the G7 summit in Italy, and now looks set to repeat the experience in Hamburg but on a bigger stage, as India and China join in the criticism of Washington.

Last week, the new UN secretary-general, António Guterres, warned the Trump team if the U.S. disengages from too many issues confronting the international community it will be replaced as world leader.

On climate change, Merkel has prepared the ground carefully, hosting in Berlin the two allies she most needs – the Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi, and the Chinese premier, Li Keqiang.

China is the single largest emitter of carbon, and India the third. If they followed America in rejecting the Paris agreement, the whole process would unravel. Both countries have said they will not pull out of the treaty, and will beat their Paris commitments.

Germany insists it is not seeking confrontation at the summit. Sigmar Gabriel, the German foreign minister, points out there will be many far more rightwing governments present in Hamburg than Trump, and they will receive far less obloquy from the expected tens of thousands of street protesters.

Nor does he pretend his country wishes to set itself up as a rival to America, saying



German chancellor plans to make climate change, free trade and mass migration key themes in Hamburg, putting her on collision course with U.S.

Germany has got enough responsibilities already. "As German foreign minister, you wake up in the morning with a demand for leadership, and in the evening you go to bed with it," Gabriel said.

Leader of western liberal vales

Merkel is reluctant to be cast in the role of leader of western liberal vales, although a poll published last week by Pew Research found Merkel's favorability ratings on the rise, especially on the left, with an impressive 52% of all Europeans surveyed confident she would "do the right thing in world affairs".

But the G7, and Trump's subsequent decision to shun the Paris climate change treaty, clearly left a permanent mark on

her, leading to her famous declaration of independence four days later at a Christian Social Union (CSU) rally in a Bavarian beer tent. In remarks seen in the U.S. as marking a new chapter in the trans-European alliance, she said: "The times in which we could completely rely on others are over to a certain extent. That is what I experienced in the last few days. That is why I can only say: We Europeans must really take our fate into our own hands."

European voters' decisions to give a commanding parliamentary majority to Emmanuel Macron, and not to provide the same to Theresa May, will have confirmed Merkel's belief that Europe once again can

The new UN secretary-general, António Guterres, warned the Trump team if the U.S. disengages from too many issues confronting the international community it will be replaced as world leader.

Japan's delicate balancing act in the South China Sea

By Benoit Hardy-Chartr & J. Berkshire Miller

Sino-Japanese relations have long been marred by a maritime and territorial row in the East China Sea as well as a historical dispute over Japan's wartime memory, which has prevented sustainable rapprochement. Further complicating the situation, bilateral ties are now increasingly strained by Japan's growing presence in the South China Sea, where overlapping territorial and maritime disputes have pitted China against several Southeast Asian neighbors.

At the recent Shangri-La Dialogue, Asia's most important defense and security summit, Japanese defense minister Tomomi Inada delivered pointed criticisms of China, deploring its attempts to "upend the rules-based order" and "alter the status quo based on assertions incompatible with existing international norms." While never directly referring to China, Inada's remarks were some of the most vivid official expressions in recent years of Japan's concerns regarding China's foreign policy. The following day, Beijing issued a rebuttal, expressing its "strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition" to what it deemed "irresponsible remarks."

The JS Izumo, the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force's largest warship, is currently sailing through the South China Sea for three months, making port calls to Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka. The cross-ocean trek comes just as the warship is preparing to take part in a multilateral naval exercise in the Indian Ocean in July, along with India and the United States. The Izumo's itinerary is meant to serve as a sign of Japan's commitment to its Southeast Asian partners and is a clear response to what it perceives as China's overbearing approach to the South China Sea. Notably, the trip also comes on the heels of Tokyo's November 2016 announcement of the so-called Vientiane Vision, which lays out Japan's plans for increased defense cooperation with members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Despite not being a claimant the South China Sea disputes, Japan is thus poised to become a major player in the body of water, which is likely to heighten tensions with Beijing. With already frayed ties due to the East China Sea's Senkaku Islands dispute, which shows no sign of subsiding, one may wonder why Japan would risk escalation by increasing its visibility in an area that Beijing sees as vital to its national security.

While the sustained presence of military assets is a relatively new phenomenon, Japan has long been concerned with maritime safety and the security of sea lines of communication in the South China Sea, through which 90 percent of its oil imports transit. As a major maritime trading nation, Japan has seen maritime transport as critically important for national security, and successive Japanese governments since the 1960s have invested heavily in securing sea lines of communication. Japan has founded or given impetus to organizations or agreements whose aims were to enhance maritime safety, such as the Malacca Strait Council in 1968 and the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) in 2001. Japan has also consistently brought up maritime security in multilateral settings such as the ASEAN Regional



Tokyo knows that any acceleration of its moves in the South China Sea will likely be reciprocated by Beijing's tightening of the screws in the East China Sea.

Forum, the East Asian Summit and the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus.

Beijing's approaches

However, more recently, the main driver of Japan's involvement in the South China Sea has been the territorial disputes with China and the latter's growing assertiveness in the maritime domain. Tokyo sees strong normative parallels between Beijing's approaches to the South and East China Seas, leading to worries that Chinese gains in one area could embolden it in the other. In 2013, former Japanese defense minister Itsunori Onodera explicitly made the connection between the two locales, stating that "the Japan side (was) very concerned that this kind of situation in the South China Sea could affect the situation in the East China Sea." Since that point, the Abe administration has consistently prioritized the South China Sea issue and has spent significant investment and political capital in strengthening its commitment to the other littoral states in ASEAN.

Since 2012, when the East China Sea dispute flared up following an incident involving a Chinese fishing trawler and Japanese coast guard vessels, the number of Chinese patrols around the Senkaku Islands has dramatically increased. Through sustained patrols, with creative mixes of commercial, fishing and government vessels, and incremental steps aimed at normalizing its presence, China is employing similar gray-zone tactics as those used in the South China Sea. Japan's outlook has changed significantly in light of these perceived parallels, and as a result the Japanese government believes that undermining China's approach to the South China Sea will lead to more favorable outcomes in the East China Sea.

Japan's South China Sea strategy

While the presence of military hardware — currently illustrated by the JS Izumo voyage — is the most conspicuous element of Japan's South China Sea strategy, Tokyo's

be master of its own fate.

The fact that the only country Trump will visit in Europe before the G20 is Poland — the bad boy of Europe and its greatest carbon emitter — is symbolic of a president uneasy with Europe's new confidence. Poland and Trump also both oppose Russia's Nord Stream 2 pipeline, due to double the amount of gas being sent from Russia to Germany.

On protectionism, Merkel was blunt in speaking to German business this week about her belief in open markets. "We'll do all we can to get as broad an agreement on this as possible in Hamburg. Given the new American administration that's not easy, but nonetheless we need to make the effort."

But Europe's leaders are not the only ones re-evaluating their relationship with the U.S. The Canadian foreign minister, Chrystia Freeland, told her parliament last week the fact that the U.S., under its new administration, "has come to question the very worth of its mantle of global leadership," means Canada, like other countries, must "set our own clear and sovereign course."

Australia's foreign minister, Julie Bishop, in March claimed many regional partners were locked in a "strategic holding pattern", waiting to see where Trump will go.

Argentina, the next host of the G20, has also told Trump that it has tried isolation and it does not work.

So at the broadest level, the G20 summit will be a first test of whether other leaders can, or indeed want to, escape from America's shadow.

But it is Merkel's compact for Africa that most animates her, according to foreign ministers that have seen her recently.

Merkel fears that long term demographic trends mean 100 m Africans could come to Europe driven by climate change, poverty, and Europe is wholly unprepared.

Combating poverty upstream in Africa as a way to stem the mass migrant flow to Europe downstream is her guiding idea. Her specific initiative is to team up African nations which have committed to economic reforms with private investors who would then bring jobs and businesses.

(Source: The Guardian)

approach focuses heavily on capacity-building and defense cooperation with Southeast Asian claimants. Since the election of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2012, the government has most notably deepened defense ties with Vietnam and the Philippines, two of the major South China Sea claimants. In addition to providing military training and conducting joint exercises, Japan has been transferring equipment — such as patrol vessels and maritime surveillance aircraft — to both countries.

Despite these clear imperatives for a deeper involvement in the South China Sea, Tokyo remains cautious on the scope of its engagement in the disputed waters. For example, while Inada expressed her support for U.S. freedom of navigation operations (FONOPS) in the South China Sea during her speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue, she also refrained from commenting directly on Tokyo's position with regard to potentially joining such operations with its U.S. ally in the future. Instead, Japan's defense policymakers carefully craft their message to tailor their engagement to support states in the region — and principles such as freedom of navigation and respect for international law — as much as possible without actually deepening their defense engagement to an extent that might impact Tokyo's own national interests.

One of the main reasons for why Japan is reluctant to sign on for FONOPS (for example) in the South China Sea is due to a capacity issue. Currently, Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) is stretched thin with its active deployments both in the Sea of Japan and in Okinawa, among other places. Tokyo permanently has at least two JMSDF Aegis-equipped destroyers positioned in the Sea of Japan in order to deter and potentially defend the country against the growing ballistic missile threat from North Korea. Moreover, the JMSDF is stretched thin with its active role in deterrence and also in its role of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance in the East China Sea. Nevertheless, despite these constraints, the Japanese government is intent on ensuring the JMSDF's regular presence in the South China Sea, as the Izumo's deployment illustrates.

But while the capacity argument is sometimes touted by officials in Tokyo, the real concern about upping the stakes in the South China Sea, either through engaging in FONOPS or more measures, is that Japan knows that any acceleration of its moves in the South China Sea will almost surely be reciprocated by Beijing's tightening of the screws in the East China Sea. While the situation in the East China Sea also remains unstable, Japan is working — both domestically and alongside its treaty ally in Washington, DC — to manage the risks of escalation and Chinese encroachment. There is no question that these risks would increase exponentially if Japan were to engage in FONOPS in the South China Sea.

This is not to underplay the significance of the Izumo deployment or the considerable efforts Japan has contributed to the region in recent years to shore up the capacity of littoral states in ASEAN. It is important, however, to keep in mind that Tokyo has to delicately calibrate its approach in the region to ensure a proper balance of its regional security interests alongside its national-security imperatives.

(Source: National Interest)

Saudi-UAE demands challenge fundamentals of international relations

By James M. Dorsey

A list of 13 conditions for lifting the Saudi-UAE led embargo of Qatar handed to the Persian Gulf state this week by Kuwaiti mediators offers a first taste of newly-promoted Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's foreign policy approach that if endorsed by the international community would call into question fundamental principles governing international relations.

The demand, that if accepted by Qatar would turn the Persian Gulf state into a Saudi vassal, were unlikely to facilitate a quick resolution of the three-week-old Persian Gulf crisis. In fact, they may complicate a resolution that would allow all parties to claim victory and save face.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE have reportedly given Qatar ten days to comply with their demands, according to the list that was reviewed by The Associated Press and The Wall Street Journal. Persian Gulf states have yet to comment on the list. It was also not clear what steps the two states might take if Qatar rejected the demands.

Qatar has insisted that it would not accept any demands that compromised its sovereignty or amounted to interference in its internal affairs. It has also denied various Saudi and UAE allegations against it. The Persian Gulf state said further that it would only negotiate an end to the crisis once the embargo had been lifted.

The demands go far beyond the declared aim of Qatar's protractors that it halts its support of jihadists and Islamists. Acceptance of the demands would not only compromise its political sovereignty but could also jeopardize its economic independence if Iran were to retaliate for Qatari compliance. Compliance would further create a dangerous precedent for freedom of the press and expression.

The Saudi-UAE demands appeared to fall far short of a call by the U.S. State Department that the conditions for lifting the Saudi-UAE diplomatic and economic embargo of Qatar be "reasonable and actionable."

The United States and other democracies would likely find it difficult to support shuttering of Qatari-funded media, including the Al Jazeera television network. Al Jazeera revolutionized the Arab media landscape by introducing more free-wheeling, critical news reporting and debate that has irked autocratic Arab leaders for more than two decades.

The network drew the ire of Saudi Arabia and the UAE for its support of the 2011 popular Arab revolts that brought Islamist forces, including the controversial Muslim Brotherhood, to the fore. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have gone to great length to roll back the fallout of the revolts.

Similarly, the two Persian Gulf state's demand that Qatar reduce the level of, if not break off, its diplomatic relations with Iran could endanger the Persian Gulf state's economy that is dependent on its oil and gas exports. Qatar shares with Iran ownership of the world's largest gas field and cannot afford an open

conflict with the Islamic republic.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE are demanding that Qatar shut down diplomatic posts in Iran, expel members of Iran's elite Revolutionary Guard, and only conduct trade and commerce with Iran in compliance with U.S. sanctions that are not internationally binding.

The demands put Qatar in a separate category from others in the six-nation Persian Gulf Cooperation Council, including the UAE, Kuwait and Oman, that maintain diplomatic relations with Iran. The UAE, which has a territorial dispute with Iran over three islands in the Persian Gulf, is home to a large Iranian community and serves as an important economic hub for the Islamic Republic.

Similarly, acceptance of a demand that Qatar close a military base of NATO member Turkey in the Persian Gulf state would also undermine the Persian Gulf state's sovereignty. Turkish Defense Minister Fikri Isik said his country had no plan to close its base in Qatar.

Other NATO members have military bases in the Persian Gulf, including the United States' largest military facility in the Middle East in Qatar, and British and French bases in the UAE. Turkey, like Qatar, supported the 2011 revolts as well as the Brotherhood.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE are further demanding that Qatar cut ties to a host of organizations ranging from jihadists like Al Qaeda and the Islamic State to Lebanon's Hezbollah and the Muslim Brotherhood. Qatar has denied contacts with the jihadists but has been open about its relations with non-violent Islamists, including the Brotherhood and Palestinian group Hamas.

U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson last week suggested that banning the Brotherhood was all but impossible. Speaking to the House Committee on Foreign Relations, Mr. Tillerson cautioned that designating the Brotherhood, with an estimated membership of 5 million, as a terrorist organization would "complicate matters" with America's relations with foreign governments.

"There are elements of the Muslim Brotherhood that have become parts of governments. Those elements... have done so by renouncing violence and terrorism," Mr. Tillerson said. He said

In a bid to garner U.S. support for their demands, Saudi Arabia and the UAE insisted that Qatar stop funding groups designated as terrorist by the United States.



Saudi Arabia and the UAE's demands constitute an effort to rewrite the rules of international relations that uphold the sovereignty of nations and their right to graft their own policies.

groups affiliated with the Brotherhood that commit violence had already been added to the U.S. terrorism list.

In a sign that compliance with the demands would not restore confidence among Persian Gulf states, Saudi Arabia and the UAE together with Egypt and Bahrain insisted that Qatar expel their citizens, including those who had adopted Qatari nationality, and no longer offer their nationals citizenship as a way of ensuring that the Persian Gulf state not meddle in their internal affairs. They also demand that Qatar be audited for a period of ten years.

In a bid to garner U.S. support for their demands, Saudi Arabia and the UAE insisted that Qatar stop funding groups designated as terrorist by the United States, extradite people wanted by the kingdom, the Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt on charges of terrorism, and provide details of its funding of Saudi and other Arab dissidents.

Qatar's distractors differ with the Persian Gulf state as well as the United States on which groups and individuals classify as terrorists. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have declared the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization, the United States has not. Bahrain's Sunni

minority government relies on support of members of the Brotherhood.

Things get even more complicated when it comes to Hamas, an offshoot of the Brotherhood that controls the Gaza Strip. Hamas has been designated a terrorist organization by the U.S., the EU and Israel but not the United Nations, the arbitrator of which designations are internationally binding.

Egypt, financially dependent on Saudi Arabia and the UAE, this week came to Hamas' aid by supplying Gaza's only power plant with fuel. The plant was shut in April because of a dispute between Hamas and the Palestine Authority (PA) on the West Bank headed by President Mahmoud Abbas. The Egyptian supply came as Israel reduced its supply of electricity to Gaza at the request of the PA.

The Egyptian move also came as a Hamas delegation visited Cairo not only for talks with authorities but also with Mohammed Dahlan, a Abu Dhabi-based, UAE backed former Palestinian security chief who has ambitions to succeed Mr. Abbas as the leader of the Palestinians. Mr. Dahlan advises UAE strongman Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed on issues of national security. A deal between Hamas and Mr. Dahlan, who is at odds with Mr. Abbas and cannot return to the West Bank, would offer him a way back into Palestine.

In sum, Saudi Arabia and the UAE's demands constitute an effort to rewrite the rules of international relations that uphold the sovereignty of nations and their right to graft their own policies. They effectively would put Qatar under guardianship and undermine the principle of freedom of expression and the media.

The demands complicate efforts by the United States and others to resolve the Persian Gulf crisis. They reopen an unresolved debate about the definition of terrorism and the ability of countries to adopt independent decisions on policies regarding media, citizenship, diplomatic relations, and economics. In short, at stake in the Persian Gulf crisis is far more than the fate of a tiny Persian Gulf state.



Not a surprise if the United States after a series of similar incidents again decided to talk about ensuring the notorious no-fly zones.

there was at least an attempt to strike the blow as a preventive measure, although Assad hadn't committed the crimes for which he had been accused of. In addition, do not forget At-Tanf, where the threat to the forces of the coalition still needs to be proven.

The key point of the latest incident is that Damascus carried out a blow at those who were not legitimate in terms of international law. Thus, the U.S. openly stated that there is neither this international law nor Syria as an independent state for them.

Not a surprise if the United States after a series of similar incidents again decided to talk about ensuring the notorious no-fly zones. Especially since Washington's urgent redeploying of the aviation to the northeast of Syria has become a new reality. The Pentagon took extremely seriously the statements of Assad's allies of considering any western aircraft as an air target.

In fact, the U.S. actions are absolutely predictable within the framework of the policy they are pursuing in the Middle East. The downed aircraft is only a reflection of the multi-stage model, which

represents Syria as a 'former state'. Apparently, the Trump administration will continue to raise the degree of the Syrian conflict, and this Syrian aircraft is a vivid confirmation.

Paradoxically, this is happening, despite the promises of the U.S. president. During his election campaign, Trump stated not to get involved into the wars in the Middle East.

Trump threatens escalated aggression on Syria

By Stephen Lendman

Trump escalated Obama's war on Syria, naked aggression against a sovereign independent country threatening no others – based on a litany of Big Lies.

According to his press secretary Sean Spicer on Monday, further escalation may be coming, saying:

"The United States has identified potential preparations for another chemical weapons attack by the Assad regime that would result in mass murder of civilians, including innocent children."

"The activities are similar to preparations the regime made before its April 4, 2017 chemical weapons attack."

"As we have previously stated, the United States is in Syria to eliminate (ISIS). If...Assad conducts another mass murder using chemical weapons, he and his military will pay a heavy price."

Neocon U.S. UN envoy Nikki Haley outrageously tweeted "(a)ny further attacks done to the people of Syria will be blamed on Assad, but also on Russia & Iran who support him killing his own people."

Assad, his government and military are combating U.S.-supported terrorists to liberate the country, restore peace and stability, along with freeing its people from the scourge of U.S. imperial ravaging.

No April 4, 2017 CW attack occurred. The alleged incident was fake. The Trump administration knew this but attacked Syria's Shayrat airbase anyway.

A previous article explained Al-Qaeda-connected, Western-supported, anti-Assad White Helmets alone provided unverified images of the alleged attack's aftermath.

No evidence suggests area residents were victims of toxic sarin or any other CW. None sought medical treatment.

Nothing proves an attack actually occurred, just unverified reports claiming one, falsely blaming Damascus for what appears not to have happened.

Trump ordered the attack on Syria's Shayrat airbase "despite having been warned by the U.S. intelligence community that it had found no evidence that the Syrians had used a chemical weapon."

Russian Defense Ministry Spokesman General Igor Konashenkov said Khan Sheikhoun areas residents weren't evacuated to protect them from alleged toxic exposure.

"Neither locals nor pseudo-rescuers have even asked for medicines, antidotes, decontaminants," or any other help, he explained.

"(T)here are simply no plans to carry out a qualified investigation...by the current 'schemers' of the

(alleged) chemical attack."

"(T)he only (so-called evidence of CW use comes from al-Qaeda-connected) White Helmets videos."

Images of them in Kahn Sheikhoun showed them with no protective clothing, indicating no need because no CW attack occurred, just a fabricated report of one – a pretext for Trump's aggression.

According to investigative journalist Seymour Hersh, Trump ordered the attack on Syria's Shayrat airbase "despite having been warned by the U.S. intelligence community that it had found no evidence that the Syrians had used a chemical weapon."

"The available intelligence made clear that the Syrians had targeted a jihadist meeting site on April 4 using a Russian-supplied guided bomb equipped with conventional explosives."

"Details of the attack, including information on its so-called high-value targets, had been provided by the Russians days in advance to American and allied military officials in Doha, whose mission is to coordinate all U.S., allied, Syrian and Russian Air Force operations in the region."

According to one unnamed U.S. intelligence official, "(w)e KNOW that there was no chemical attack...The Russians are furious."

"Claiming we have the real intel and know the truth...I guess it didn't matter whether we elected Clinton or Trump."

Hersh explained he learned of a "total disconnect" between Trump and "many of his military advisors and intelligence officials, as well as officers on the ground" with first-hand knowledge of the phony Khan Sheikhoun incident.

Fact: No evidence suggests Syrian responsibility for any CW attack throughout over six years of war – not in Khan Sheikhoun, Ghouta in August 2013, or any place else.

Fact: Plenty of evidence proves U.S.-supported terrorists used CWs numerous times, falsely blamed on Syria and Bashar al-Assad.

Fact: The Organization for the Prohibition (OPCW) of Chemical Weapons confirmed the destruction of Syria's CW stockpile – under its supervision. No evidence suggests any remain.

Fact: Spicer lied claiming U.S. possession of evidence, suggesting a planned Syrian CW attack. No evidence exists. Accusations without verifiable proof are baseless.

What's going on is clear. Washington wants Syrian sovereignty destroyed, pro-Western puppet rule replacing Assad.

Russia's intervention at the behest of Damascus turned the tide of battle in favor of liberating the country from the scourge of U.S.-supported terrorism.

Trump and hawkish generals given warmaking authority appear determined to press on – ominously risking possible U.S./Russia confrontation at some point, pitting the world's dominant nuclear powers against each other militarily if it occurs.

Instead of being noninterventionist as promised, Trump resembles war goddess Hillary with a gender difference.

America's rage for unchallenged global dominance under his leadership risks unthinkable nuclear war, humanity's greatest threat if launched.

By Firas Samuri

The SAA aircraft was shot down on June 18 by a F-16 fighter of the U.S.-led international coalition in the province of Raqqa. While the Americans accused the Syrian pilot of attacking the so-called moderate opposition, official Damascus claims that the mission's goal was to strike a blow at ISIS.

Despite the real cause of the accident, a Syrian aircraft shot down by other countries' alliance in the Syrian sky is quite a serious provocation. This incident seems as part of the U.S. plan to assist various groups opposing government authorities in Syria. It must be understood that the SDF and FSA are the structures unleashed a civil war in the country.

This argument is correct when speaking about a series of attacks on Assad. First was conducted by Israel on the land. Then the Shayrat airbase was under attack of the U.S. And now we can observe fight in the air that has become the fourth clash between the U.S. and Syrian troops during last month.

In the case of the Shayrat air base

Tensions rising in Balkans as hopes for EU future fade

By Walter Mayr and Jan Puhl

The man who hopes to become the prime minister of Kosovo has a past, documented under case file IT-04-84 at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague. Forty-eight-year-old Ramush Haradinaj, aka Smajl, was accused of crimes against humanity in 37 cases, including murder and torture.

The allegations are from the 1990s, when he was a field commander for the Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK) in the war against the Serbs. The court ultimately found Haradinaj not guilty, a product of witnesses declining to testify at the last moment or, in some cases, dying suddenly. The United Nations police force in Kosovo has accused the UÇK veteran of dealing cocaine, while Germany's foreign intelligence service, the BND, described him in a 2005 analysis as being the head of a group involved in the "entire spectrum of criminal activities."

Despite his past, though, Haradinaj's alliance of former fighters managed to emerge victorious in Kosovo parliamentary elections earlier this month. With 34 percent of the voters supporting his alliance, it is now up to him to form a governing coalition.

■ Waiting for EU membership

The news from Kosovo, the mini-republic located north-

east of Albania, is consistent with the atmosphere in the Western Balkans these days. Kosovo, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, all part of former Yugoslavia, have spent years waiting to become members of the European Union, but it seems in the early summer of 2017 as though they have almost been forgotten. And people there are beginning to lose their patience. The result: increasing numbers of people leaving the region, accelerated Islamization and rising nationalism. Violent protests recently in the Macedonian capital of Skopje along with ranting about a Greater Albania in both Tirana and Pristina, the capitals of Albania and Kosovo respectively, have served to demonstrate just how tense the situation has become.

Located at the historical intersection between the Orient and the Occident, the Western Balkans are something of a geopolitical no-man's-land. Between the territories of EU member states Croatia and Greece, there are six countries in the region whose chances of joining the European bloc any time soon are extremely limited.

Kosovo, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania: All were promised a future in the European Union at the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003, a time when optimism was widespread in the Balkans. But their hopes have been dashed: Not long after that summit, the

EU switched from expansion to naval gazing, its energies being rerouted to the euro crisis and the dangers presented by populism and, more recently, Brexit.

■ West's lack of action

Way back in 2010, then-Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg blasted the lack of attention paid to the Western Balkans, saying the region threatened to become "nitroglycerine under our behinds." And now, it has become increasingly apparent that others are taking advantage of the West's lack of action, including autocratically governed countries with historic ties to the Balkans like Russia and Turkey, in addition to new sponsors and mentors from the Persian Gulf.

The Balkans, a region that has produced numerous crises in Europe, is once again threatening to become a security risk. The attraction of the EU is fading and the nationalist rhetoric of the past is returning. If the EU had a joint foreign and defense policy, this would be its test case: the sustainable pacification of the Balkans.

As a commander during the war, Kosovo President Hashim Thaçi's codename was Gjarpri, Albanian for "snake," because he hardly left any tracks. But for years now, criminal prosecutors have been on his tail.

In the 1990s, Thaçi was one of the founders of the paramilitary liberation army UÇK and has been president of Ko-

sovo since 2016. And now, just as he has been handed the privilege of granting his old comrade Haradinaj the task of forming a government, he faces potential prosecution for war crimes by a special tribunal in The Hague.

Seemingly by chance, books about streetfighters-turned-politicians, such as Joschka Fischer and Gerry Adams, lie strewn about on Thaçi's desk in the capital of Pristina. The president of Kosovo is intent on demonstrating that the Thaçi of today no longer has anything in common with the man who, as a German intelligence report once claimed, controlled a "criminal network active in all of Kosovo."

Sitting amid the gold-gilded, Rococo chairs and crystal chandeliers in his office, the head of state makes it clear that he is interested in talking about Kosovo's future, and not about his own past. The "main threat," he says, "is that the EU will come too late to this region, thus leaving space for others, including Islamists." He says he is also concerned about "rising nationalism in the region and the increase of Russian influence wherever Serbs live." In April, Thaçi even threatened the unification of all Albanians in the Balkans in a joint state if the EU was to close its doors. Now, though, he says his comments were misunderstood.

(Source: Spiegel)

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Weight loss that works: A true story

By Monique Tello

Many people struggle with being overweight, or even obese. It's a common topic at office visits. As a doctor, I know that excess weight is associated with potentially serious health conditions — high blood pressure, high blood sugar, high cholesterol — not to mention sleep apnea, fatty liver disease, and back and knee problems, among other things. Patients may also worry about their appearance.

Whether a patient is at risk for medical problems due to being overweight, or if it's a personal health goal, then it's my job to provide counseling.

In my experience, most patients consider weight loss drugs or surgery only as a last resort. "I want to lose weight naturally," they say. Once we screen for (and treat) any contributing medical problems that could be causing weight gain (low thyroid function, polycystic ovarian syndrome, prediabetes, among others), or psychological issues (bulimia, binge-eating disorder, depression, anxiety), I encourage a diet-and-lifestyle approach for many reasons, among them my own personal experience.

A real-life weight loss story

A few years ago, I embarked on a personal weight loss journey. I had had two pregnancies back-to-back, and had gained considerable weight, to the point where my own body mass index was over 30 (obesity range). I was many months postpartum, and realized that the "baby weight" wasn't going anywhere. As a matter of fact, I had gained even more weight since my daughter was born.

At that point, I had a quandary many people can identify with: I was one of two working parents, with two kids under two. How on earth does one tackle weight loss when one is busy and distracted? What I did was fairly basic, and there is research to back up this approach:

Here's what worked for me:

.. I resigned myself to the fact that, hey, it took me 18+ months to put on the weight, so it would probably take 18+ months to lose it. As much as I knew about nutrition, I felt like I needed guidance. So I researched a bunch of popular diets and philosophies.

.. I chose a well-rounded, nutritious diet plan consisting of a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and healthy fats (and also very low in carbohydrates). It was a popular commercial diet, which I modified to



Diets that are the most successful in terms of both weight loss and nutrition consist of "real food," meaning plants, whole grains, nuts and seeds, as well as meat (ideally, from animals that ate plants). Basically, foods closer to nature.

suit my preferences (most of the diets out there are fairly similar). I never bought any of their prepared foods, and used their menu only as a guide, substituting what I liked or had in the pantry where necessary.

- I got a small pocket notebook, and started keeping track of everything that I ate. Each page represented a day's intake, and I counted calories, as best I could. Once a week, I weighed myself, and jotted that down as well.

- Exercise in those early days consisted of only a few minutes of sit-ups, pushups, and other in-place calisthenics at nighttime, after the kids had gone to sleep (and before they woke up again overnight).

- Yes, I had the occasional slice of cake, chunk of chocolate, piece of baklava (a major downfall), or other treats. I forgave myself those indiscretions, as well as any "vacations" from my dieting, logging, and exercising. I would just pick up where I left off and keep going. And going.

- There were stops and starts, and the scale went up and down, but over time, the pounds slowly, slowly came off. As the months went on, I was able to rejoin my gym and add once or twice-weekly workout sessions. As my muscle tone increased, so did my metabolism, and the weight came off faster.

- It took over two years, but I lost

50 pounds. In the three years since, I've maintained that weight loss within five pounds.

What does the science say about my approach? Let's take a look.

Diet and weight loss

Studies have shown that just about any diet will result in weight loss, if it's one that someone can follow. Esteemed Yale physician and nutrition expert David Katz examined over 58 popular diets and found that the most successful in terms of both weight loss and nutrition consist of "real food." By that he means plants, whole grains, nuts and seeds, as well as meat (ideally, from animals that ate plants). Basically, foods closer to nature. The other key is minimizing processed foods, including sugars and flours.

Without realizing it, I followed Katz's advice: I ate mostly fruits and vegetables, nuts, seeds, and dairy. I occasionally had whole grains like quinoa or farro, even rice or corn chips. And, of course, an occasional treat. But I had sworn off sugars and flours, for the most part.

Behavior change and weight loss

It's hard to keep track of how much we eat. But a lot of research shows that when we keep track of intake, we eat less. This is called self-monitoring, and why writing down what I ate and weighed helped me. There are so many

ways to do this nowadays: from the old-school paper-and-pencil method, to apps like MyFitnessPal, or the Weight Watchers points system.

Another key approach: forgive your failures. Studies show that people who "mess up" their diet plan and then "give up" end up gaining, while people who forgive themselves and move on continue to lose. It's called self-acceptance. Look, we're human. Birthdays, office parties, weddings, random movie nights: they happen, and we celebrate by having the amazing chocolate cake, or Betsy's famous buffalo chicken dip, waaaay too much champagne, or buttered popcorn. Expect this, enjoy, and then move on.

Exercise and weight loss

Most major weight loss is followed by weight gain, as people revert to their old habits. But, some folks manage to keep it off. How do they do it? Researchers have found that maintaining a healthy diet, ongoing self-monitoring, plenty of self-acceptance, as well as a high level of physical activity are all associated with keeping the pounds off.

When I feel like I'm slipping, I start logging again. Nowadays, I use an online fitness app on my phone to more easily keep track of my daily food intake. Dark chocolate is always in stock in our house, and that's OK. Exercise is important, too, but in my book, any and all physical activity counts. Two or three workouts a week help me maintain muscle tone and cardiovascular fitness. If I can't get to the gym, I run. If I can't run, I do something at home, like five minutes of in-place kickboxing moves, or dancing around the living room like a crazy person with my kids. I take the stairs wherever I am as often as possible. I use a carry basket at the grocery store, and switch from arm to arm while I shop: biceps curls! Hey, it all counts.

Staying at a healthy weight for life

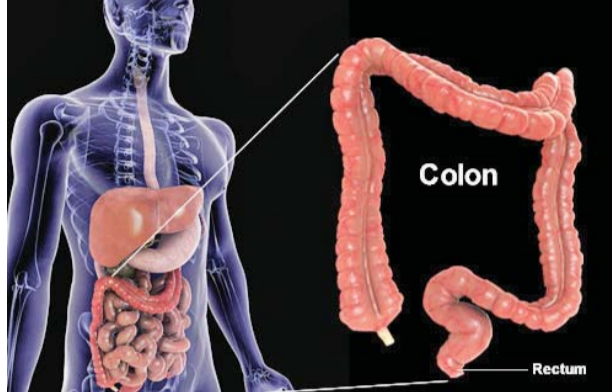
The old adage is "eat less, exercise more," and this is still true, to some extent. But human beings are psychologically and sociologically complex creatures, and that adage is a lot harder to follow than it sounds. For average adults who do not have contributing medical or psychological issues, a nutritious plant-based diet low in processed foods and carbohydrates, consistent self-monitoring of intake and progress, forgiving oneself when expected lapses occur, all combined with regular physical activity, can result in weight loss for life.

(Source: health.harvard.edu)

Colorectal cancer: what is it?

When doctors find this disease early, it's highly curable. It happens when abnormal cells grow in the lining of the large intestine (also called the colon) or the rectum. It can strike both men and women, and it has the second highest rate of cancer deaths in the U.S.

Risk factors you can't control



Some things you just can't help, such as:

- Your age -- most people with it are older than 50
- Polyps or inflammatory bowel disease
- Family history of colorectal cancer or precancerous colon polyps

Risk factors you can control

Try to avoid these things that can raise your odds of getting the disease:

- Eating a lot of red or processed meats, or those cooked at high temperatures
- Obesity (having too much fat around the waist)
- Not exercising enough
- Smoking
- Heavy alcohol use

Symptoms of colorectal cancer

Unfortunately, colorectal cancer may strike without symptoms. For this reason, it is very important to have regular examinations, called colorectal screenings, to detect early problems.

However, not all colorectal cancers are without symptoms. One of the early symptoms of colon cancer may be bleeding. Often, tumors bleed only small amounts, off and on, and evidence of the blood is found only during chemical testing of the stool. When tumors have grown larger, other symptoms may develop. They include:

1. Change in bowel habits. Constipation, diarrhea, and bowel incontinence, although usually symptoms of other, less serious, problems, can also be a sign of colorectal cancer.
2. Blood on or in the stool. By far the most alarming of all the symptoms, blood on or in the stool can be a symptom of colorectal cancer. But, it does not necessarily indicate cancer. Numerous other problems can cause bleeding in the digestive tract, including hemorrhoids, ulcers, ulcerative colitis, and Crohn's disease, to name only a few. In addition, iron and some foods, such as beets, can give the stool a black or red appearance, falsely indicating blood in the stool. However, if you notice blood in your stool, see your doctor to rule out a serious condition and to ensure proper treatment is received.
3. Unexplained anemia. Anemia is a shortage of red blood cells, the sort that carry oxygen throughout the body. If you are anemic you will most likely feel tired and sluggish, so much so that rest does not make you feel better.
4. Unusual stomach or gas pain
5. Unexplained weight loss
6. Fatigue
7. Vomiting

If you experience any of these symptoms, it is important to see your doctor to ensure proper diagnosis and treatment. For a patient with colorectal cancer, early diagnosis and treatment can be a lifesaver.

(Source: webmd.com)

Wallpaper may breed toxins: study

By Robert Preidt

Wallpaper may contribute to "sick building syndrome," a new study suggests. Toxins from fungus growing on wallpaper can easily become airborne and pose an indoor health risk, the researchers said.

In laboratory tests, "we demonstrated that mycotoxins could be transferred from a moldy material to air, under conditions that may be encountered in buildings," said study corresponding author Dr. Jean-Denis Bailly.

"Thus, mycotoxins can be inhaled and should be investigated as parameters of indoor air quality, especially in homes with visible fungal contamination," added Bailly, a professor of food hygiene at the National Veterinary School of Toulouse, France.

Sick building syndrome is the term used when occupants start feeling ill related to time spent in a particular building. Usually, no specific illness or cause can be identified, according to the U.S. National Institutes of Health.

For the study, the researchers simulated airflow over a piece of wallpaper contaminated with three species of fungus often found indoors.

"Most of the airborne toxins are likely to be located on fungal spores, but we also demonstrated that part of the toxic load was found on very small particles -- dust or tiny fragments of wallpaper, that could be easily inhaled," said Bailly.

Mycotoxins are better known for their occurrence in food. But "the presence of mycotoxins in indoors should be taken into consideration as an important parameter of air quality," he said. The study was published in Applied and Environmental Microbiology, a journal of the American Society for Microbiology.

Creating an increasingly energy-efficient home may aggravate the problem, Bailly and his colleagues said.

(Source: webmd.com)

By Jacqueline Howard

The future of flu vaccines just might come in a tiny, prickly patch.

A phase 1 clinical trial, the results of which were published in the medical journal Lancet on Tuesday, has deemed the dissolvable microneedle flu patch to be "well tolerated" and safe for possible use.

Instead of receiving a flu vaccine with the typical prick of a syringe, the petite patch comes equipped with 100 microneedles that deliver a vaccine when pressed onto your arm.

"They're really small; you can barely see them," said Dr. Nadine Rouphael, an associate professor at the Emory University School of Medicine and lead author of the trial, which was a collaboration with the Georgia Institute of Technology.

She described the microneedles as minuscule enough to not cause as much pain as a traditional flu shot; however, collectively, they were associated with itchiness at the injection site in the trial.

"We also looked at the efficacy of the vaccine. Is it able to induce a similar immune response to the regular flu shot? And it did, actually," Rouphael said.

The patch contains the same type of vaccine that would be found in a traditional needle and syringe, but it is placed within tiny needles in the patch instead of being placed in only one large one for a flu shot, she said.

"They are placed on a Band-Aid-like structure, and then that Band-Aid is applied, in this case, to the wrist," she said. "There is an audible snap that you hear when you apply enough pressure to ensure that the microneedles will actually penetrate the skin. ... After few minutes, we remove the patch. By then, those microneedles will be completely dissolved within the skin, along with the vaccine."

'They were impressed by how tiny it was'

For the clinical trial, 100 adult volunteers were vaccinated between June and September 2015 at the Hope Clinic of the Emory Vaccine Center in Atlanta. They were randomly separated into four groups before being treated.

One group received a flu vaccine via the patch, administered by a health care worker; another received

a flu vaccine via a traditional flu shot; another group received a placebo microneedle patch, administered by a health care worker; the fourth group used the patch to self-administer a flu vaccine.

The researchers found that, immediately after vaccination, 96% of adults who received the patch reported in a questionnaire that they felt no pain, whereas 82% of those who received the traditional flu shot reported no pain.

At a 28-day followup, about 70% of the participants who received the patch vaccine reported in a questionnaire that they'd prefer the microneedle patch vaccination over a traditional flu shot or intranasal vaccination.

"We had 25 participants that were in the self-administer group who could do it themselves, and they felt like it didn't bother them as far as pain or tenderness in particular," Rouphael said. "They were impressed by how tiny it was, how easy it was to administer."

The researchers also found that reactions to the vaccinations were similar among the patch and flu shot groups, as some participants in both groups experienced mild cases of tenderness at the injection site, headache and fatigue.

The users of the patch, however, experienced much more itching and redness at the injection site that lasted two to three days, Rouphael said.

When comparing the immune responses to the patch and traditional flu shot among the participants, the researchers found similar results.

"We conclude that influenza vaccination with microneedle patches is well tolerated, well accepted, and results in robust immunological responses, whether administered by healthcare workers or by the participants themselves," the researchers wrote in the study.

Stephen Morse, professor and director of the infectious disease epidemiology certificate program at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, said the side effects associated with the patch surprised him.

Overall, "it looks remarkably comparable to what happens when you give it the standard way," Morse said of the patch's effects, compared with

flu shot effects.

The microneedle patch could be useful in situations in which many people must be immunized at once, such as during a widespread influenza outbreak, he said.

"The technology is limited by the stability of what you're trying to administer and the volume. It has to be a small volume, because you know, the patches are not that big; they can't hold that much," Morse said.

However, "now that you know you can give the vaccine this way and you have a suitable product, then I think it would be very useful in a mass-immunization situation," he said. "The flu being the most straightforward example."

Similar vaccines that can be administered through the skin have been developed, including a dissolving microneedle patch in development in Japan and the short-needle Fluzone intradermal vaccine available in the United States.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends an annual flu vaccine for everyone 6 months and older. Between 2014 and 2015, fewer than half -- about 47% -- of those people in the US were vaccinated against the flu, according to the CDC.

In Canada, among adults 18 and older, 34% reported receiving the 2015-16 influenza vaccine, according to the Public Health Agency of Canada.

In the US, the CDC recommended against the available needleless flu vaccine option, FluMist nasal spray, during the 2016-17 flu season because it was found to be less effective than the traditional flu shot.

Just last week, a CDC advisory committee recommended against FluMist again for the upcoming flu season. The pharmaceutical company behind the product, AstraZeneca, said it is working to be able to change that recommendation during the flu season so that the nasal spray is available for consumers who want it.

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that can infect the nose, throat and lungs. Though mild in most cases, the infection can become severe and at times even deadly. Health officials recommend flu vaccines to prevent such infections each year.

(Source: CNN)

Iran event to address shielding cultural heritage against terrorism

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — Ways to maximize protection of cultural heritage and museums against terrorism or in wartime will be scrutinized at the International Council of Museums Asia-Pacific Alliance Conference and General Assembly, which will be held in the southeastern Iranian city of Chabahar in autumn.



INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF MUSEUMS

"The 2017 ICOM-ASPAC Conference aims to investigate the formation of a special forces in order to protect museums against terrorism as part of its timetable," IRNA quoted the ICOM-Iran director Seyyed Ahmad Mohit-Tabatabaei as saying on Sunday.

The official emphasized the importance of holding such events in the country, saying it will raise international credibility of the Iranian museums and will promote their cultural relations at the international level.

ICOM-ASPAC is a regional alliance of the International Council of Museums. It provides a forum for the exchange of information and cooperation between museums and museum professionals of the member states.

300-foot-wide ancient altar excavated in China

In a remote corner of northwest China, a recently excavated 3,000-year-old sun altar offers clues to how the region's tribal cultures practiced religion thousands of years ago.

The ruins were first discovered in 1993, in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, but were not excavated until last year. Archaeologists can now confirm their initial suspicions that the site was used as a sun altar during the Bronze Age.

Nomads once dominated this grassland region, which sits in between Kazakhstan and Mongolia. While similar sun altars had been previously found in the east, the complex in Xinjiang is unique to the region.

The altar itself is comprised of three layered circles of stone. The outer diameter of the largest circle is just over 328 feet long, and archaeologists believe this suggests people and horses would have been used to haul the stones from miles away.

Archaeologists believe the find is significant because it suggests a strong cultural link between nomadic regions and ancient Chinese ruling dynasties.

"This proves that central plain culture had already long reached the foot of Mount Tianshan, in the Bayanbulak Grassland, the choke point of the Silk Road," said Liu Chuanming, one of the archaeologists studying the ruins, in CCTV video.

(Source: National Geographic)



ROUND THE GLOBE Kronborg Castle

Kronborg Castle is located north of Elsinore on a strategically important site commanding the Sound, a narrow stretch of water between Denmark and Sweden. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, Kronborg Castle played a key role in the history of Northern Europe.

The Sound is the gateway to the Baltic Sea and from 1429 to 1857, Denmark controlled this passage thanks to Kronborg Castle, positioned at the narrowest part of the Sound, which is only four kilometres wide.



Around 1.8 million ships passed through the Sound during this period and all of them had to pay a toll at Kronborg Castle. For this reason Kronborg Castle and its fortress became a symbol of Denmark's power.

The Sound toll was not just a source of income; it was also a political instrument. By favoring the shipping trade of selected nations or by allowing their navies free passage, Denmark was in a position to create important alliances.

The castle itself is a Renaissance building with four wings surrounding a spacious courtyard. The bright sandstone facades are characterized by horizontal bands and the front walls are balanced by towers and spires.

Kronborg Castle was admired for its beauty as a castle and feared for its strength as a fortress. The castle was protected by tall ramparts and strong angular bastions. The overall impression of Kronborg Castle is closely associated with its architecture and location, which stress the castle's symbolic, commercial, and strategic importance.

(Source: UNESCO)

World Cup expected to draw many Iranians to Russia

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — The 2018 FIFA World Cup is anticipated to lure many Iranian fans to Russia as Iran national team has been qualified for the prestigious event which will be held next year.

Iranians have expressed their happiness and are proud over their victorious national squad, yet willing to travel to the neighboring country to support Team Melli.

"I'm happy that the Iranian team will be going to the 2018 World Cup in Russia, which is our neighbor. I'm sure to go there to support our national squad. I'm not afraid of going to Moscow or any other city in Russia," the Sputnik quoted Pouria, an Iranian fan from Lorestan province, on Thursday.

Ali, a soccer buff from the city of Ramsar, has said: "As an Iranian, I'm glad that our footballers are going to play at the world championship. I'm also glad that the World Cup will be held in Russia, which is just a 3.5-hour flight from here. If I have the chance, I'd be happy to come to Russia to support our team."

Despite all Western attempts to bad-mouth next year's World Cup in Russia, Iranian fans are foursquare behind it, Abbas Ismail Beigi, leader of the Persepolis football club's fan told the Sputnik.

"We just can't wait to go to Russia. Iranian fans never listen to the lies some countries are telling [about the 2018 World Cup in Russia]. The only thing that bothers us is the high cost of our stay in Russia. Still, with the financial support we've been getting from the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran and special offers from Russia, we hope



A general view of Kazan Cathedral in St Petersburg, Russia

that many Iranians will be able to come to Russia," he said.

■ Russia introduces visa-free scheme for certain fans

Russia has introduced a new scheme that will allow football fans to enter the country for the Confederations Cup without a visa, ESPNFC.com reported earlier this month.

The "FAN ID" document will enable supporters to save hundreds of dollars as not only does it mean they will not need to purchase a visa, but it also grants free travel in both the cities that the Confederations Cup games are being played and for inter-city match travel as well.

FAN ID is mandatory for all support-

ers wishing to attend any Confederations Cup games and only is valid if they have tickets for the tournament, the report added.

Supporters from over 100 countries around the globe have already applied for the document. The 2018 FIFA World Cup will be held across venues in over 10 Russian cities in June and July 2018.

ICCIMA to host startup demo on tourism

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) seeks to commercialize technological ideas associated with tourism by setting up a startup demo in Tehran on August 3.

"We have decided to fulfill technology needs [in tourism sector] through indigenous approaches and methods and startups are the best option in this regard," IRNA quoted Iman Mehdizadeh, the secretary of the event, as saying on June 25.

Recognizing the necessities for promoting tourism as well as introducing talented designers and innovators to investors in this field are amongst the main goals the event pursues, Mehdizadeh added.

The startup demo will be organized under the auspices of the private sector and the Pardis Technology Park in close collaboration with the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, Mehdizadeh explained, adding that 10 similar events are to be held in other cities in the near future.

Following a landmark nuclear deal Tehran and world powers clinched in 2015, Iran is repeatedly named as a hot travel destination by a circle of international media outlets in terms of its rich history, picturesque sceneries, indigenous traditions, cuisine and hospitable people.



picturesque sceneries, indigenous traditions, cuisine and hospitable people.

Florida tourism officials consider Trump impact on travel

ALLAHASSEE, Fla. (NSF) — Attracting more than 120 million visitors before the end of the calendar year remains a goal of the state's tourism-marketing arm, now that Visit Florida's funding won't be slashed.

But Visit Florida board members, whose agency continues to undergo belt-tightening as a result of new operational guidelines ordered by state lawmakers, expressed concern Tuesday over the potential international impact of President Donald Trump on the travel industry.

Vice Chairwoman Maryann Ferenc, a Tampa restaurateur who will take over as chairwoman on Saturday, openly wondered if the board should consider a goal based on the economic impact of tourism on the state, rather than the individual number of visitors.

"If we were budgeting for our own businesses, we would look at the things that have happened in this year, both in terms of the state of Florida as well as we know that we're seeing (a) potential to an international drop in business," Ferenc said. "We've seen that at the international shows that we've gone to. It's a variable that we really have not a lot of control over and we're going to suffer from."

Visit Florida President and CEO Ken Lawson said he and others have heard "anecdotal" reports, both positive and negative, about international travel due to the new president, but the agency doesn't expect to

have hard data until information for the first half of the year comes out in August.

"I just don't know how much of the international evaluation is anecdotal or how much of it real," Lawson said. "We've heard Trump slump. We've heard Trump bump. I'll tell you the only true data I've seen to date in April was U.S. visitation was actually up 4 percent and we're very eager to see what that translates into as far as Florida's proportional share."

While the goal of 120 million visitors remains a "cautiously optimistic" figure as they revamp their year-round marketing plans, agency officials expressed a desire to attract a better class of visitors, winter travelers, families and those undertaking weekend get-aways, who spend more per person while in the Sunshine State.

"We also understand that at the end of the day it's all about yield," Nelson Mongiovi, interim chief marketing officer, told the board of directors during a teleconference Tuesday. "We would certainly rather have 80 million of the right visitors in the state versus 120 million of the wrong ones, that aren't spending money and are just applying pressure on infrastructure."

That doesn't mean they're abandoning the goal, he added.

The calendar year benchmark could justify the battle waged by Gov. Rick Scott against House leadership to maintain \$76

million in funding for Visit Florida, after legislators sought to slash the agency's budget to \$25 million during the regular session that ended early in May.

Scott, who signed a special session bill on Monday (HB 1A) that included the governor's original \$76 million request for Visit Florida, argued that the money was needed to boost the state's tourism numbers from the nearly 113 million estimated in 2016.

"With full funding of \$76 million and important accountability and transparency measures in place, this legislation puts Visit Florida on the right track to continue supporting Florida jobs and attracting record numbers of visitors to our state," Scott said Monday in a press release.

Florida drew 31.1 million visitors during the first three months of the year, the highest number during any quarter in state history, according to the governor's office.

Florida's tourism numbers were bolstered by a 3.2 percent increase in domestic travelers, who make up the vast majority of the state's visitors. Meanwhile, there was a 2.2 percent drop in Canadians --- due in part to a weaker Canadian dollar --- and a 1.8 percent decrease in overseas visitors. Both are trends that have been underway for more than a year.

Before the marketing changes were outlined to the board on Tuesday, Visit Florida had already announced it had severed its

\$2.875 million sponsorship of an auto racing team, with \$1 million left on the deal, and was negotiating for a better agreement with an English football club.

Those sponsorship deals were among a number of the agency's marketing agreements --- including a \$1 million contract with Miami rapper Pitbull --- that drew questions from state lawmakers.

The agency is also expected to undergo its latest executive re-organization in the next 30 to 45 days.

Alfredo Gonzalez, Visit Florida's onetime vice president of global meetings and trade, and Shari Bailey, formerly the international marketing program director, both submitted their resignations on June 12. Neither expressed a reason for their exits.

Their resignations came days after the state Legislature upped the funding level for Visit Florida during a special session earlier this month.

As part of the bill, Visit Florida also received new operational guidelines that include a cap on the annual pay for its executive director, new cash contribution requirements from local tourism boards and a requirement that contracts valued at \$500,000 or more be posted online. Contracts in excess of \$750,000 will have to go before the Joint Legislative Budget Commission and could be voided within 14 days by the House speaker or Senate president.

Amsterdam Airport tests express lane for light travelers

Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport is looking to give travelers with little or no baggage speedier passage through security, responding to checkpoints clogged with an increasing number of passengers loaded with carry-on bags.

Beginning in July, the airport will start a trial to streamline processing for passengers with no more than a laptop case, small backpack or handbag, according to a statement on Wednesday. Signs at security checkpoints will direct people to a separate entrance for "Small bags only," with airport employees determining if the luggage is indeed suitable.

Airports have been stepping up efforts to ease the mounting inconveniences of travel. In addition to more stringent security controls, checks have become more cumbersome as more and more people opt for hand baggage instead of checking luggage at airlines to avoid extra costs and waiting times at carousels. That strains resources



A view of Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport

for all passengers, even those who travel light.

Schiphol has been embroiled in a public spat with its

largest user KLM, the Dutch part of Air France-KLM Group, after the May holiday caused long waiting lines at checkpoints. Delays cost "several million euros," KLM said last month, adding that it has "in vain" been calling on Schiphol's management to take adequate measures for some time.

"This trial will speed up the boarding process for passengers with little baggage, which in turn contributes to a smooth process at the airport," Schiphol said in the statement. "These days, due to costs and convenience, an increasing number of people are choosing to travel with hand baggage only --- which leads to more work at security checkpoints."

The test is scheduled to start July 1 at departure halls 1, 2 and 3, and will continue during the summer. Following the trial, the airport will review the results.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Predicting eruptions using satellites and math

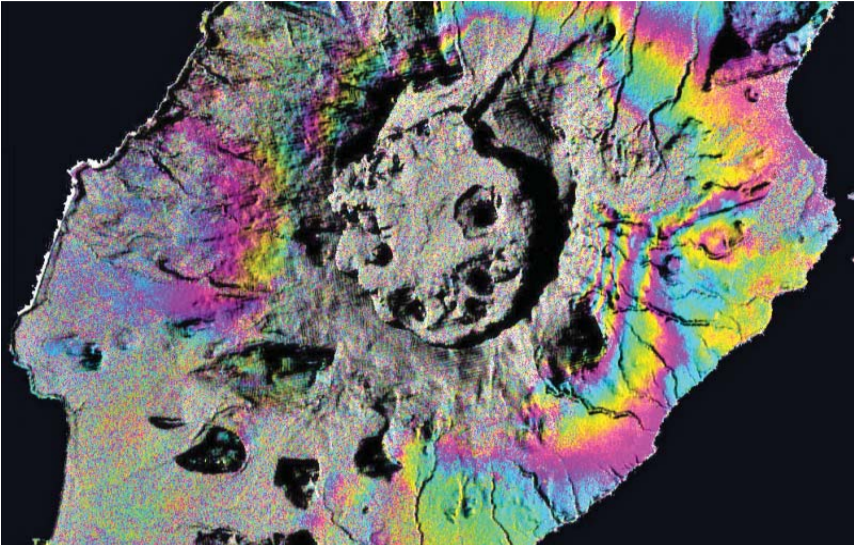
Volcanologists are beginning to use satellite measurements and mathematical methods to forecast eruptions and to better understand how volcanoes work, shows a new article in *Frontiers in Earth Science*.

As magma shifts and flows beneath the earth's surface, the ground above flexes and quivers. Modern satellite technologies, similar to GPS, can now track these movements, and geoscientists are beginning to decipher what this reveals about what's happening underground -- as well as what is likely to happen in the future.

"We're the first to have developed a strategy using data assimilation to successfully forecast the evolution of magma overpressures beneath a volcano using combined ground deformation datasets measured by Global Navigation Satellite System (more commonly known as GPS) and satellite radar data," explains Mary Grace Bato, lead author of the study and a researcher at the Institut des Sciences de la Terre (ISTerre) in France.

Dynamic models

Bato and her collaborators are among the first to test whether data assimilation, a method used to incorporate new measurements with a dynamical model, can also be applied in volcano studies to make sense of such satellite data. Meteorologists have long used a similar technique to integrate atmospheric and



oceanic measurements with dynamical models, allowing them to forecast the weather.

Climate researchers have also used the same method to estimate the long-term evolution of the climate due to carbon emissions. But volcanologists are just beginning to explore whether the tech-

nique can also be used to forecast volcanic eruptions.

The "amount of satellite and ground-based geodetic data (i.e. GPS data) has tremendously increased recently," says Bato. The "challenge is how to use these data efficiently and how to integrate them with models in order to have a deeper under-

Meteorologists have long used a similar technique to integrate atmospheric and oceanic measurements with dynamical models, allowing them to forecast the weather.

Scientists just powered on a laser that's 1b times brighter than the sun

A super laser could have applications in X-ray technology, allowing for better resolution while emitting far less radiation.

Scientists at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln recently fired up its ultra-high intensity Diodes laser that is brighter than anything seen in the history of planet Earth.

The Diodes laser will be used for studying the interactions of light with matter at the highest attainable field strengths. In the university's test, it was fired at electrons suspended in helium to see how light scatters.

The "secret sauce" behind Diodes' high power is a compression stage, during which the laser's stretched, amplified pulse is compressed into an extremely short, powerful pulse. This pulse then hits a parabolic reflector which focuses it into a laser beam with, frankly, bonkers levels of intensity.

Powerful laser

"We used (this) powerful laser to study one of the most basic interactions in nature: Scattering, and found that it changes dramatically when light has the highest brightness," Professor Donald Umstadter, from the university's Extreme Light Laboratory, told *Digital Trends*. "Because light scattering is essential to vision, it is also

essential to life itself.

Without it, day would look as dark as night. Normally, matter appears brighter as the brightness increases. However, as we turned up the brightness beyond a certain threshold, the appearance of matter changes as well. The scattered light has a different color and shape than the original light."

While a super-powerful laser is cool enough, Umstadter said that Diodes does come with some pretty exciting real-world uses. These may include X-ray applications since the team has demonstrated that the scattered X-ray light makes it suitable for imaging with higher resolution and a 10-times lower radiation dose than from conventional sources.

Laser pointers

And, just hypothetically, what would happen if it was accidentally shone in someone's eye like those pranksters used to do with their laser pointers in high school?

"It is 20 orders of magnitude brighter than room light or sunlight on Earth," Umstadter patiently explained. "It is also a billion times brighter than light at the surface of the sun. To be safe, we conduct the experiments from a

standing of what occurs beneath the volcano and what drives the eruption so that we can determine near-real-time and accurate predictions of volcanic unrest."

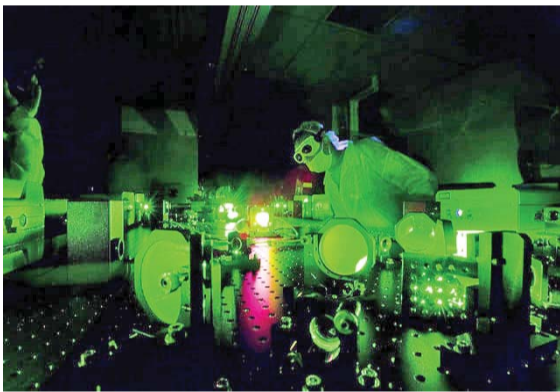
Types of volcano

In their latest research, Bato and her colleagues have begun answering these questions by simulating one type of volcano -- those which erupt with limited "explosivity" due to the build-up of underlying magma pressure. Through their exploratory simulations, Bato was able to correctly predict the excess pressure that drives a theoretical volcanic eruption, as well as the shape of the deepest underground magma reservoir and the flow rate of magma into the reservoir. Such reservoirs are typically miles below the surface and, as such, they're nearly impossible to study with existing methods.

Geoscientists still need to improve current volcanic models before they can be widely applied to real-life volcanoes, but Bato and her colleagues are already beginning to test their methods on the Grímsvötn Volcano in Iceland and the Okmok Volcano in Alaska. They believe that their strategy will be a key step towards more accurate predictions of volcanic behavior.

"We foresee a future where daily or even hourly volcanic forecasts will be possible -- just like any other weather bulletin," says Bato.

(Source: Eureks Alert)



separate control room."

Between this, projects like the development of the world's largest X-ray laser in Germany, and nifty applications like the use of lasers to test for food quality or zap underwater lice on moving fish, lasers are finally living up to the sci-fi potential we always knew they had!

(Source: Digital Trends)

Climate change causes sea level rise to accelerate 50 percent in past 20 years

A study published in the journal *Nature Climate Change* shows that global sea level rise jumped by 50 percent from 1993 to 2014, the most recent year for which data are available. In 2014, sea levels rose 3.3 millimeters -- more than an eighth of an inch -- while in 1993 they ticked up 2.2 millimeters.

The paper found that melting of the Greenland ice sheet is the major new contributor. In 1993, it accounted for only 5 percent of the rise, but in 2014 it was responsible for one-quarter of the increase. The paper looked at satellite measurements and tide gauges, which measure sea levels around the world.

The acceleration is particularly intense

on the U.S. East Coast, especially for Virginia and North Carolina. Some measurements suggest that in those locations sea levels are rising three times more quickly than the worldwide average.

Sinking of the land

There are several reasons for this, including a sinking of the land, caused in part by the removal of groundwater.

Due to complex ocean currents, the water level is also higher in this area than elsewhere, and the addition of freshwater to the North Atlantic from Greenland ice melt accelerates this dynamic, explains Larry Atkinson, a professor of oceanography at Old Dominion University who wasn't involved in the paper.

"This new evidence of accelerating rates is concerning to us as we try to advise local cities and regions on what they're going to have deal with," Atkinson says.

The biggest factor driving sea level rise is thermal expansion. As the Earth warms, the ocean warms, and warmer water takes up more space.

Sea level rise

The Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that this phenomenon accounts for 30 to 55 percent of global sea level rise, while melting glaciers account for 15 to 35 percent. Chief sources for this water are the ice sheets covering Greenland and Antarctica.

Astronomers verify existence of orbiting supermassive black holes

A galaxy 750 million light-years away from the Earth has not one but two supermassive black holes at its center and they form a binary system, orbiting each other. The discovery, announced Tuesday in a paper published in the *Astronomical Journal*, is the first confirmation of orbital motion between two supermassive black holes, even though the phenomenon has been theorized for a long time.

Greg Taylor, a professor at the University of New Mexico and a co-author of the paper, said in a statement on the university's website: "For a long time, we've been looking into space to try and find a pair of these supermassive black holes orbiting as a result of two galaxies merging. Even though we've theorized that this should be happening, nobody had ever seen it until now."

The galaxy where this cosmic dance is taking place is called 0402+379, and the two dancing objects together

have a mass of 15 billion times the sun. The massive size of the two black holes makes their orbital period extremely long, at about 24,000 years. Consequently, the team that has been observing them for 12 years has not seen even a slight curvature in the orbit.

Lead author of the paper, Karishma Bansal, is a graduate student at the University, and in the statement, she said of the discovery: "As I learned there was data going back to 2003, we plotted it and determined they are orbiting one another. It's very exciting."

Supermassive holes

She added it will be another three or four years before the team makes more observations of the binary supermassive black hole system to plot its precise orbit.

Putting the size of the orbit and its observation from Earth in perspective, Roger W. Romani, professor of

physics at Stanford University and member of the research team, said in the statement: "If you imagine a snail on the recently-discovered Earth-like planet orbiting Proxima Centauri -- 4.243 light-years away -- moving at 1 cm a second, that's the angular motion we're resolving here."

The discovery is significant because it could tell us a lot about both supermassive black holes and the galaxies they inhabit. And somewhat closer home, it could also give us a glimpse of where our home galaxy, the Milky Way, could be headed in the future. The nearby Andromeda galaxy, which like the Milky Way, has a supermassive black hole at its center, is on a collision course with us. So what is being observed in 0402+379 now could be happening here in a few billion years.

(Source: IBT)

Bank Pasargad Offers Various Exchange Services to Exporters, Producers and Importers

Bank Pasargad is ready to present various types of currency services to exporters, producers and importers in line with spurring economic growth, promoting non-oil exports, generating employment opportunities, increasing competition power among exporters of technical and engineering services, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

For his part, Advisor to the Chief Executive and Public Relations Dept. Director of the bank Khosrow Rafiei said: "Benefited from the most experienced human capital and expert manpower, Bank Pasargad has expressed its read-

iness to present different types of legal and consultation services to exporters and producers for the conclusion of contract and also issuance of proforma."

Moreover, the bank offers similar services such as issuance of various types of currency guarantee letters in the field of exporting goods and technical-engineering services, admission of relevant guarantee letters, notification of various export Letters of Credit (L/Cs), etc.

In the meantime, the bank grants export currency facilities entitled "validity of vendor" within the framework of pre-shipment and post-carrier facilities, he ob-

served.

In the end, Advisor to the Chief Executive and Public Relations Dept. Director of the bank Khosrow Rafiei stated: "Presenting pre-control of shipping documents, opening currency account in the name of issuers for depositing currencies obtained from export of goods and services, shopping currencies obtained from exports according to the free market rate, etc. are of the other salient services which have been presented by the bank to dear importers, exporters and producers."

China's verdant 'forest city' will fight pollution with a million plants

If tree-covered skyscrapers act like enormous air filters, this cluster of buildings will be a clean air oasis.

China has broken ground on a "forest city" in the southern city of Liuzhou. The development, which will span two-thirds of a mile along the Liujiang River, involves blanketing offices, apartments, hotels, and schools with more than a million plants and about 40,000 trees.

The verdant towers will help soak up urban air pollution, produce clean oxygen, and boost local biodiversity. The greenery also provides shade on sunny days and acts as an insulating blanket during winter, allowing tenants to use less heating and electricity.

If the concept sounds familiar, that's because these buildings are the work of Stefano Boeri Architetti, the same architecture firm behind the two "vertical forest" buildings planned for Nanjing in eastern China.

Liuzhou city officials commissioned the Italian company to build the development, which will host about 30,000 people and be connected to the main Liuzhou city -- population 3.8 million -- via a fast-rail line used by electric cars.

The forest city, now under construction, is expected to be completed by 2020, the Milan-based architects confirmed by email.

The development is a flashy but tiny effort to combat the dangerous smog and toxic air pollution that's choking China's industrialized cities. It comes as China is building more wind and solar power than any country in the world to slash emissions from coal plants, factories, and vehicles, and to combat climate change.

Stefano Boeri's firm, which recently completed two verdant towers in Milan, is planning to expand into other smoggy cities, including China's Shijiazhuang, Guizhou, Shanghai, and Chongqing.

(Source: Mashable)



Scientists can now read your thoughts with a brain scan

Your innermost thoughts might not be so secret after all. At least, if you're thinking them inside an MRI machine.

Researchers at Carnegie Mellon University developed an algorithm that can decode a person's thoughts using data from a brain scan. The researchers used this algorithm to gain insights into how our brains work and form complex topics.

Our thoughts can range from simple to highly complex. A simple thought might just consist of a single concept, like "store," or a more complex group of concepts, like "I went to the store last Saturday in the rain." Research shows that the brain breaks down these complex thoughts into smaller pieces, each corresponding to a different aspect of the thought.

Essentially, the brain uses an alphabet of around 42 different elements, each referring to a specific concept like size, color, or location. The brain combines those together to form complex thoughts.

Each of the "letters" in the brain's alphabet is handled by a different part of the brain, so by studying brain activity with an MRI machine it's possible to determine what a person is thinking about.

The researchers developed an algorithm to do exactly that, though they didn't put it to work literally reading minds. Instead, they gave it MRI scans and their corresponding thoughts, and the algorithm would then predict what a completely different thought would look like in the MRI.

Nobody is going to use this tech to secretly read your mind anytime soon. But neuroscientists should be excited about this glimpse into the inner workings of our own brains. This study goes a long way toward figuring out how we think, which helps to solve one of the many mysteries of our own minds.

(Source: Popular Mechanics)

Beautiful new parrot species with very loud voice discovered in Mexico

The term parrot encompasses many bird species. A group given the scientific name *Amazona* includes about 30 species of parrots native to the New World. With the discovery of a new parrot species in Mexico, that group just got bigger. And louder.

Researchers from the United States, Poland and Mexico have just reported their discovery of a new species of parrot living in the Yucatán Peninsula. Now named the Blue-winged Amazon, this parrot is distinctly different in both appearance and call than its winged compatriots.

The Blue-winged Amazon has a green crown, whereas others in the *Amazona* category have blue crowns. It lives in flocks of fewer than 12 birds that tend to stay together in their own parrot cliques. Like other *Amazona* parrots, it eats seeds, fruits, flowers and leaves from the tree canopy of its tropical home.

The call, which is loud and sharp, is one of its most distinguishing features. Researchers say its repetitive and monotone squawk, made during flight, is more like a hawk than a parrot. When it's resting, the Blue-winged Amazon chirps a more mellow and prolonged call.

(Source: Newsweek)

Tehran to host Intl. Conference on Combating Sand and Dust Storms

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — In a global effort toward mitigating effects of sand and dust storms Tehran will host the International Conference on Combating Sand and Dust Storms on July 3-5.

International participants will include ministers, senior officials and experts, international resource persons and policy makers from all regions as well as experts from regional and international organizations and UN entities.

To date, representatives from 31 countries comprising France, Germany, China, Italy, Mexico, Serbia, Slovakia, South Korea, Belgium, the U.S., Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, and Azerbaijan have announced readiness to attend the conference.

There has been a growing awareness of the global phenomenon of sand and dust storms and their global, regional, transboundary and multi-faceted impacts on the environment, climate, health, livelihoods, agriculture and socio-economic well-being of societies in the past decades.

The United Nations Environment Program, the United Nations Development Program and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, as well as other relevant United Nations entities, such as WMO, UNCCD, the RAMSAR Convention, UNOOSA, WHO and FAO will collaborate in hosting the conference, according to the UN official website.

Raising awareness, sharing knowledge and best practices and enhancing advocacy—to deliver an overview of the key challenges facing the affected region and countries emanating from the sand and dust storms phenomenon, identifying practical and integrated solutions and recommending a set of concrete actions and tools to mitigate sand and dust storms and build resilience to achieve SDGs, and promoting regional and international partnerships in order to enhance increased international and regional collaboration to combat the sad and dust storms phenomenon are of the objectives of the three-day event.

The themes to be addressed at the International Conference will include the following:

1. Overview of global and regional trends of sand and dust storms combined with a Ministerial dialogue;
2. Social, economic and environmental impact of sand and dust storms and their costs;
3. Observation, monitoring, prediction and early warning systems;
4. Policy options, technology innovation and investment opportunities, considering cross-sectoral integrated approaches;
5. Global, regional and cross-sectoral cooperation; and
6. Conclusion and way forward.

LEARN ENGLISH

Daily Life - Making a Collect Call

A: This is the **operator**, how may I help you?

B: Yes, I would like to make a **collect call**.

A: Ok sir, please dial the number. Now please state your name.

B: Tommy.

A: Please wait a moment. Hello, you have a collect call from Tommy. Would you like to accept the **charges**?

C: Yes of course.

A: Dad?

C: Yeah Tommy, what happened are you ok?

A: Yeah dad everything is ok. I'm calling you because I want to know if it's ok for me to go to my friend's house today after school.

C: Yeah sure no problem. You scared me to death! I've told you to make a collect call in case of an emergency only! Why didn't you call me from your mobile phone?

B: I ran out of **credit** and I also didn't havetwenty five cents for the **payphone**. Sorry dad.

■ Key Vocabulary

operator: a person who operates a telephone switchboard

charge: amount of money to be paid

credit: the positive balance in a person's mobile phone account

payphone: a public telephone operated by coins or a phone card

collect call: a telephone call that the receiving party is asked to pay for

■ Supplementary Vocabulary

network: telephones interconnected by telecommunication equipment or cables

landline: a home telephone

connect: to establish communication between

reception: the quality attained in receiving radio or television broadcasts

(Source:irlanguauge.ir)



Have an idea?
Be in touch!
lifestyle.tehrantimes@gmail.com

‘Light and simple life opens windows to beautiful places every morning’

INTERVIEW

Setareh Behroozi

Mohammad Tajeran, 41, packed his life in a 60-liter rucksack 11 years ago and began cycling around the world aiming to promote the protection of environment.

He initiated WeNeedTrees, a non-profit association based in Geneva, Switzerland, in 2014.

“Living a light and simple life is very important. It gives you an opportunity to be dynamic,” he explained.

He has traveled to 51 countries so far. During his trips, he has visited schools, speaking and dialoguing with students. He has planted about 1,000 trees in cooperation with students, depicting tree as a universal symbol of life.

“God’s pocket covers costs of my travelling,” he told the Tehran Times.

For the past 11 years, he has travelled 11 months a year and stayed in Iran for one month.

■ I dreamed of cycling!

“I dreamed once that I should travel and be in service of nature. So, I decided to do that,” he said.

Tajeran has studied mechanical engineering, working in this field for some years. However, he began cycling to different countries in 2006 with just 300 dollars in hand.

“For me cycling around the world was not a spontaneous decision. It was a ten-year process,” he explained.

He said that he began to think deeply about himself and his life since he was 19.

“I was searching for the meaning of life and what is all about through perception and intuition in life of myself and others,” he said.

Tajeran said that except for academic books he has never read any other book and has followed up on his instinct during life.

“I was raised in a middle class family. I lost my father when I was three and my mother was uneducated. So I did not have any book around to read for many years and I always feel bad about this issue.

“However, when I begin to think deeply about the purpose of existence through intuition, I come to conclusion that lack of book reading makes my natural instinct sharper,” he said.

“At the beginning I thought of life as a big puzzle, in which each of us is a piece but after a time I changed my mind,” Tajeran explained.

He said that he missed the “dynamicity” of life in this allegory.

“I prefer to resemble life to theater, in which any of us has a role and has potentiality to perform that,” he said.

Tajeran has explored his life by details. He explained that all the happenings in his life are connect-



ed to each other.

“I understand that whenever we are synchronized with our role, all the universe accompany us to be successful,” he said.

One should trust in instinct and listen to his or her inner voice, he added.

“My family lived in Mashhad and I moved to Tehran when I was 25. I was really depressed that time. However I began to study my own life and understand that whenever I was synchronized with universe everything is great but in other cases, you have no achievements,” he said.

■ Traveling makes you wise!

What you need for taking major decisions is your wisdom, he said.

“Knowledge is not enough for human being and what turns your knowledge to wisdom is experience,” he said.

Traveling makes you to avoid routines of life and makes you a lot of experience, which is essential for life,” he explained.



He said that whenever you don't want to be in other shoes that means that you are in right place!

■ We Need Trees!

From the very first day of cycling I aims to use experience, credits and relationships to promote nature, he said.

“The renovation of nature is either impossible or very expensive so it is better to teach children how to protect the environment,” he said.

Tajeran said that Iran is chosen as pilot for the project.

“I have been here in Iran for the past nine months to start some projects for the association in the near future,” he explained.

As it is mentioned on the website of association, the mission of WeNeedTrees is to educate and build awareness of the importance of each individual's role in sustaining a healthy environment through Love and Respect for nature. Love and Respect for nature provides Hope for a better world.

International Day of the Tropics

The International Day of the Tropics celebrates the extraordinary diversity of the tropics while highlighting unique challenges and opportunities nations of the Tropics face. It provides an opportunity to take stock of progress across the tropics, to share tropical stories and expertise and to acknowledge the diversity and potential of the region.

The Tropics are a region of the Earth, roughly defined as the area between the tropic of Cancer and the tropic of Capricorn. Although topography and other factors contribute to climatic variation, tropical locations are typically warm and experience little seasonal change in day-to-day temperature. An important feature of the Tropics is the prevalence of rain in the moist inner regions near the equator, and that the seasonality of rainfall increases with the distance from the equator.

The Tropics account for 40 per cent of the world's total surface area and are host to approximately 80



per cent of the world's biodiversity and much of its language and cultural diversity. The tropical region faces a number of challenges such as climate change, deforestation, logging, urbanization and demographic changes.

■ The ecosystem

The Tropics host nearly 95% of the world's mangrove forests by area and 99% of mangrove species. The area of mangrove forest has decreased in all tropical regions since 1980.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ↔ ع

Human error blamed for Tehran metro collision

The collision of two trains at Tehran's urban subway on Tuesday has been caused by human error, a city councilor has announced.

A technical failure in automatic train protection (ATP) system caused the incident and the train conductor turned the system off without any arrangement, ISNA quoted Eqbal Shakeri as saying.

About 50 passengers were injured during the incident, which occurred when a train struck another, which stopped at the station.

ATP ensures safe operations in the event of driver's failure. It monitors train location, traffic condition and gives signal to follow certain speeds.

The Tehran metro has five active lines with nearly 200 kilometers of track carrying hundreds of thousands of passengers per day.

ENGLISH PROVERB (A) wonder lasts but nine days

■ **Explanation:** The effects of an amazing or stirring event last only nine days; after that, life goes on as before

■ **For example:** We fear to spend a day without our cellphones, wonder lasts but nine days!

PHRASAL VERB Yammer on

■ **Meaning:** Talk continuously, especially if it is an annoying way

■ **For example:** Television critics are always yammering on how unreal most shows are.

ENGLISH IDIOM Yoke around one's neck

■ **Explanation:** An obligation, commitment or restraint that becomes an oppressive burden

■ **For example:** When John lost his job, the repayments on the house became a yoke around his neck

Russia warns U.S. against unilateral acts on Syria

Russia has cautioned the United States against any unilateral action in Syria after Washington claimed Damascus may be preparing for a chemical attack.

On Wednesday, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov assured that Syrian army troops pose no threat to U.S. forces, Russia's RIA news agency reported.

He also denounced U.S. attacks on Syrian armed forces, saying "these actions are provocative in nature."

Earlier this month, a U.S. Navy F/A-18 Super Hornet shot down a Syrian SU-22, which was conducting an operation against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorists on the outskirts of the city of Raqqa.

On two occasions in June and May, U.S. warplanes targeted Syrian military forces near the town of At-Tanf, claiming they posed a threat to U.S. forces, an allegation rejected by Damascus.

Elsewhere in his comments, Gatilov said the U.S. statements accusing the Syrian government of a chemical weapons attack would hinder the intra-Syrian



talks.

"These speculations are not backed up by anything. No one is putting forward any facts," he said.

The U.S. statements are unacceptable, he said, adding, "This complicates the negotiation process, negatively affects

the efforts being made in Astana and Geneva."

Earlier this week, a statement by White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer said the U.S. had "identified potential preparations for another chemical weapons attack" by the Syrian government, noting

that it would "pay a heavy price" if such an assault took place.

Pentagon spokesman Navy Captain Jeff Davis further said that Washington had seen "activity" at Shayrat airfield in Syria's Homs Province that "indicated active preparations for chemical weapons use."

Washington claimed that the air base had been used by Syria to conduct an alleged gas attack on the town of Khan Shaykhun in Syria's Idlib Province on April 4.

Using the incident as a pretext, the U.S. carried out cruise missile strikes against Shayrat airfield on April 7.

Additionally, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley has said the U.S. administration had issued a warning to Syria over a possible chemical weapons attack after seeing preparations similar to those in April.

On Tuesday, President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, dismissed the U.S. warning on a chemical attack plan, saying "such threats to Syria's legitimate leaders are unacceptable."

(Source: RT)

Europe's NATO members, Canada to raise defense spending in 2017

Europe's NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) members and Canada will jointly raise defense spending by 4.3 percent in 2017, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on Wednesday, partly aimed at showing the United States they are committed to shouldering more costs.

The United States President Donald Trump has made more expenditure his priority for NATO, using his first alliance meeting in May to scold European leaders about spending, which is at historical lows and does not meet NATO's goal of 2 percent of GDP (Gross domestic product).

This year's increase represents the fastest spending growth since cuts stopped three years ago. Growth was 1.8 pct in 2015 and 3.3 percent last year, but it was unclear how near the new increase takes spending to the alliance's target.

Figures for individual allies will be released on Thursday, after approval by NATO ambassadors, but overall 2017 spending will be some \$280 billion, a cumulative \$46 billion jump since cuts left Europe without vital capabilities, such as refueling airborne fighter bombers.

Only four of NATO's 27 European members - Greece, Britain, Poland and Estonia - met the spending target in 2016. Romania will do so this year, followed by Latvia and Lithuania in 2018, Stoltenberg said.

Twenty five of NATO's 29 allies plan to lift spending this year, he said, a day before NATO defense ministers meet in Brussels to discuss greater security spending on rising threats including deterring a resurgent Russia, dealing with failed states on its borders and protecting against cyber-attacks.

"To keep our nations safe, we need to keep working to increase defense spending and fairer burden-sharing across our alliance," Stoltenberg said.

The new figures are part of a broader rise in military spending in Europe, as the United States commits billions more dollars to return troops and heavy weaponry to the continent to deter Russia, and as the European Union seeks to set up a multi-billion-euro defense fund.

"We have really shifted gears, the trend is up and we intend to keep it up," Stoltenberg said.

He said the increase in funds would be spent on more military exercises and equipment, partly aimed at allowing



NATO troops to deploy at ever faster notice, as well as salaries and pensions for personnel.

NATO officials stressed that while Trump's tough stance had put the spotlight on defense spending, Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula in 2014 had a bigger impact, with allies agreeing to end years of defense cuts.

(Source: Reuters)

Mattis rebukes Putin for international 'mischief'

The United States Pentagon Chief Jim Mattis accused Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday of making international "mischief" and said America's commitment to NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) remains unwavering.

Speaking to students in Germany to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Marshall Plan to rebuild a ravaged Europe after World War II, Mattis said Russia had chosen to challenge the "secure and peaceful" post-war order.

The Russian people's "leader making mischief beyond Russian borders will not restore their fortunes or rekindle their

hope," he said, in an apparent reference to the Ukraine conflict and Moscow's alleged meddling in the U.S. electoral process.

Mattis' visit to Germany is his fourth to Europe since becoming U.S. defense secretary in January.

Jittery European partners have looked to him for reassurance about America's international intentions after the U.S. President Donald Trump on the campaign trail repeatedly questioned long-established alliances.

Matters haven't improved much since Trump entered the White House, with his administration embroiled in a simmering

scandal about alleged ties to Russia.

The U.S. president further stoked concerns when he visited NATO and the G7 summit in Europe last month, where he upbraided allies over their levels of military spending.

Any message of reassurance his presence was intended to provide was overshadowed by images of the billionaire tycoon shoving his way past other leaders at the NATO summit in Brussels.

But Mattis stressed that America and Trump should be judged by their actions.

He pointed to continued U.S. support through 2020 for NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence in the alliance's east to

counter Russia.

And he said Trump had requested a huge increase for the European Reassurance Initiative, up from \$3.4 billion last year to \$4.8 billion this year.

"Beyond any words in the newspapers, you can judge America by such actions," Mattis said.

He also pointed to Article 5, NATO's mutual defense guarantee, calling U.S. commitment to the measure "iron-clad".

Mattis is a former four-star Marine Corps general who fought with NATO and Western allies in Afghanistan and Iraq.

(Source: AFP)

Protesters burn flag in protest at U.S. sanctions on Kashmir militant

Hundreds of demonstrators in Pakistani-administered Kashmir burned an Indian flag on Tuesday in protest of Washington putting the leader of an anti-India militant group on its list of global terrorists as Pakistan condemned the designation.

Pakistan's government said the State Department designation of Syed Salahuddin as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist was unjustified.

Salahuddin heads the Hizbul Mujahideen militant group, based in the Pakistan-administered side of Kashmir, the Himalayan region divided between India and Pakistan and claimed in whole by both.

Hizbul Mujahideen is the biggest militant fighting group Indian forces in Kashmir. Unlike Lashkar-e-Taiba and other groups operating from Pakistan soil, the Hizb is a largely indigenous Kashmir group.

The United States announcement came on the day Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the White House on Monday for his first talks with the U.S. President Donald Trump.

In Muzaffarabad, capital of Pakistani Kashmir, hundreds staged a rally to condemn the move and burned an Indian flag on the ground.

"Syed Salahuddin ... is not a terrorist, but a freedom fighter," read a huge banner.



India, which blames Pakistan for stoking the 28-year-old revolt in Muslim-majority Kashmir, has stepped up efforts to put pressure on Pakistan under Modi.

Pakistan denies giving material help to Kashmiri separatists but reiterated on Tuesday it would continue to provide diplomatic and moral support to the Kashmiri struggle for self-determination.

Indian security forces have been accused by activists and rights groups of killing up to 100 separatist protesters since new mass anti-India demonstrations broke out in September.

adan.

More than 12,000 people have died in Yemen since March 2015, when the House of Saud regime started an invasion of the poorest country among Arab states to restore a Riyadh-allied government. Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, the head of that government, had resigned earlier that year and fled to Saudi Arabia.

The Ansarullah (Houthi) movement has been defending Yemen against the Saudi regime-led invaders and hordes of their mercenaries, while also carrying out retaliatory missile strike on the parts of Saudi Arabia that border Yemen.

Dozens of Saudi regime troops and Saudi regime-backed militants have died in the counterstrikes.

(Source: Press TV)

North Korea vows to execute former South Korean president

North Korea on Wednesday vowed to execute South Korea's former president and her spy director, accusing them of planning to assassinate its supreme leadership.



The official Korean Central News Agency said North Korea will impose a "death penalty" on ousted South Korean President Park Geun-hye and former spy chief Lee Byoung Ho, and they could receive a "miserable dog's death any time, at any place and by whatever methods from this moment."

It accused Park of pushing forward a secret operation to "replace the supreme leadership" of the North beginning in late 2015 in a plan spearheaded by the South's National Intelligence Service that included an assassination plot. It said the plan was automatically scrapped when lawmakers impeached Park last December over a corruption scandal.

The North's statement was issued under the name of the country's Ministry of State Security, the Ministry of People's Security and the Central Public Prosecutors Office.

North Korea also demanded that South Korea hand over Park and Lee under "international convention" because they committed "state-sponsored terrorism."

An official from the South's National Intelligence Agency said the allegations were untrue. She didn't want to be named, citing office rules.

North Korean propaganda often contains extreme claims. In May, it accused the United States and South Korean spy agencies of an unsuccessful assassination attempt on leader Kim Jong Un involving biochemical weapons.

Following months of massive protests, Park was formally removed from office and arrested in March over the corruption scandal. She was indicted in April on bribery and other charges.

Relations between the rival Koreas deteriorated under Park's conservative government, which maintained a hard line toward North Korea. The North conducted two nuclear tests and a series of missile launches during her presidency as it expanded its nuclear weapons program. North Korea frequently used invectives toward Park, once calling her a "murderous demon" destined to meet "a sudden and violent death."

North Korea's statement Wednesday came hours after new South Korean President Moon Jae-in left for the United States for meetings with President Donald Trump that are likely to be dominated by North Korea's growing nuclear threat. Moon, a liberal who took office in May, has expressed a desire to reach out to North Korea, but its continuing missile tests pose a difficult challenge for him.

(Source: AP)

Scotland postpones 2nd independence referendum until after Brexit

Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon says she will postpone plans for a second independence referendum until after negotiations over Britain's exit from the European Union have concluded next year.

Sturgeon made the announcement in the Scottish parliament on Tuesday, saying that she was putting on hold her plans to introduce legislation that would demand a second referendum until autumn 2018 when Brexit terms are supposedly clear.

"The Scottish government remains committed strongly to the principle of giving Scotland a choice at the end of this [Brexit] process but I want to reassure people that our proposal is not for a referendum now, or before there is sufficient clarity about the options, but rather to give them a choice at the end of the Brexit process when that clarity has emerged," Sturgeon said.

"We will not seek to introduce the legislation for an independence referendum immediately," she added. "The Scottish government will reset the plan I set out."

Leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP) noted that the "uncertainty" of the Brexit process is now her priority and her party is focused on getting "the best deal out of Brexit - the best deal for Scotland."

"Instead, we will - in good faith - redouble our efforts and put our shoulder to the wheel in seeking to influence the Brexit talks in a way that protects Scotland's interests," she noted.

The pro-independence Scottish Greens called on the SNP leader not to back down on her bid to have a second referendum and to "continue fighting" for another vote on the issue.

Talks of a new referendum gained momentum following a spat between Britain and Scotland over Britain's withdrawal from the EU.

Although nearly 52 percent of Britons opted to leave the bloc during the EU referendum in June last year, some 62 percent of the Scottish people voted against the decision.

Sturgeon's calls for an independence vote have been firmly rejected by British Prime Minister Theresa May, who argues Scots have already taken a shot at secession and failed.

Scotland held its first referendum in 2014, when over 55 percent of the people voted against independence.

(Source: AP)

The House of Saud regime's warplanes have targeted a residential building in southwestern Yemen, killing at least 10 civilians.

The aircraft carried out the attack against Ta'izz Province's Dhubab District, Yemen's al-Masirah television network reported. An unidentified number of people also received injuries in the attack.

The television said the Saudi regime

airstrikes had also inflicted some damage on the province's al-Wazi'iyah District.

At least nine civilians, including two women, were killed in Saudi regime airstrikes on residential buildings in Yemen's central province of Ma'rib last Sunday. The strikes took place as Yemenis were celebrating Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of the holy fasting month of Ram-

Trailblazing jockey Payne fails dope test

Michelle Payne, the first woman jockey to ride a Melbourne Cup winner, has been stood down after failing a doping test, racing stewards said on Wednesday.

Payne had tested positive to Phentermine, a banned appetite suppressant, after submitting a urine sample at a regional meeting in Swan Hill in Australia's southern state of Victoria on June 11.

Racing Victoria stewards will conduct an enquiry on Friday into the results, the state authority said in a statement.

«Ms Payne was advised of (the) findings and stood down from riding in races and trackwork by stewards on 23 June 2017,» RV said.

The 31-year-old shot to international fame in 2015 when she won the Melbourne Cup, Australia's richest and most famous horse race, on Prince of Penzance.

The trailblazing ride on the 100-1 outsider earned her the Don Award last year, the nation's top prize for sporting achievement.

Her remarks to local broadcaster Channel Seven after the race also went down in sporting folklore, as she spoke of her battle for respect in a «chauvinist» industry.

«I want to say to everyone else, get stuffed, because women can do anything and we can beat the world,» she said.

Payne had surgery after a heavy fall during a ride in Mildura last year and had a long period of rehabilitation before returning to the track last September.

Last week, she rode Kaspersky to a fifth place finish in the Group One Queen Anne Stakes at Royal Ascot.

(Source: Reuters)

Los Angeles FC close to deal for Wesley Sneijder - sources

Los Angeles FC, the expansion team due to enter the MLS in 2018, is close to agreeing a two-year deal for Wesley Sneijder to become its first Designated Player, sources have told ESPN FC.

Former Netherlands midfielder Sneijder, currently with Turkish club Galatasaray, has been offered a contract worth \$3.5 million-a-year to move to the Banc of California Stadium.

Senior management at LAFC believe that the capture of the former Ajax, Real Madrid and Inter Milan star will deliver a clear statement of intent of the club's determination to become a new powerhouse in the MLS.

Sneijder, 33, still has 12 months to run on his contract with Galatasaray, but with LAFC not due to start its MLS campaign until March 2018, Sneijder would remain in Istanbul for the remainder of 2017 before moving to Los Angeles in the New Year.

ESPN FC revealed in November that LA FC was chasing players of a "global stature," similar to LA Galaxy's capture of David Beckham from Real Madrid in 2007, to enable the club to make its mark on and off the pitch in the crowded American sporting landscape.

(Source: Soccer.net)

Ledecky punches ticket to worlds with 800m win

Katie Ledecky qualified for next month's world championships in style by winning the 800 meters freestyle in the year's best time on the opening night of the U.S. National Championships on Tuesday.

Ledecky, twice Olympic and world champion in her signature event, was well clear of the field for the entire race in Indianapolis and clocked eight minutes 11.50 seconds to punch her ticket to the July 14-30 worlds in Budapest.

"I didn't rest too much for this (meet)," the 20-year-old said after notching her 11th national title.

"Compared to other trials and selection meets, this might be the least tapered that I've been over the past couple of years. I'm getting in and racing. I have confidence from training that I can get up and go times like that."

The win for Ledecky, who swam a world record 8:04.79 in the event at last year's Rio Olympics, came shortly after she had finished sixth in the 100 freestyle final.

Mallory Comerford won that race in 52.81 seconds, pushing Olympic champion Simone Manuel into second place and qualifying for her first major international competition.

Nathan Adrian, who won 100m freestyle gold at the London Olympics by a fingertip, claimed his eighth national title in the blue riband sprint in a time of 47.96, beating Caeleb Dressel by a hundredth of a second.

Dressel and Manuel also earned Budapest tickets, as did Zach Apple, Hali Flickinger, Townley Haas, True Sweetser, Jack Conger, Lia Neal and Kelsi Worrell.

The meet resumes on Wednesday with men's and women's 200m freestyle, breaststroke, backstroke and 50m butterfly.

(Source: Reuters)

Djokovic bumped up to two in Wimbledon seedings

Three-times champion Novak Djokovic has been bumped up to second seed for next week's Wimbledon championship despite slipping to fourth in the ATP world rankings while seven-times champion Roger Federer has also benefited.

The seedings, released by the All England Club on Wednesday, have defending champion Andy Murray number one in the men's singles with Germany's Angelique Kerber the women's top seed.

Wimbledon differs from the other grand slams, in the men's singles at least, with previous form on grass in the previous two years coming into play to re-order the top 32 in the world rankings -- a system agreed by the ATP.

Spaniard Rafa Nadal, who won a 10th French Open last month, is second in the ATP rankings but will be seeded fourth at Wimbledon after a mediocre record there in recent years.

Despite winning the title twice, the 31-year-old has not been past the fourth round since 2011.

Favorite Federer, fifth on the ATP rankings, is seeded third which means he will avoid one of his biggest rivals for the title until the semi-finals.

Fellow Swiss Stan Wawrinka, runner-up at the French, drops to fifth seed, from his world ranking of three.

Other beneficiaries of the system include Luxembourg's grasscourt expert Gilles Muller who is seeded 16th compared to an ATP ranking of 26. Muller won the recent Den Bosch tournament and reached the semi-final at Queen's Club last week.

Queen's Club champion Feliciano Lopez, ranked 25, is seeded 19th.

The women's seeds stick strictly with the current WTA rankings. Romania's Simon Halep, who could take over the top spot this week if she wins the Eastbourne title, is seeded two.

(Source: Reuters)



Qatar says Garcia report 'vindicates' 2022 World Cup bid



Qatar World Cup organizers said on Wednesday that the surprise publication of FIFA's Garcia report "vindicated the integrity" of its successful bid to host the 2022 tournament.

In a statement, the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy also questioned the timing of the publication, which comes as Qatar faces political isolation from many neighboring countries.

"We believe that the extent of our co-operation with this investigation and the conclusions drawn represent a vindication of the integrity of our bid," read the statement.

"We will continue to dedicate ourselves toward delivering on the promises we made during our bid and hosting an historic first FIFA World Cup in the Middle East."

Although the long-awaited report from US independent investigator Michael Garcia highlighted an array of potentially suspect financial dealings, there appeared to be no "smoking gun" which could end up denying Qatar the World Cup in five years' time.

His report referred to a payment of £2 million (\$2.6 million) allegedly sent by a consultant for Qatar, Sandro Rosell, to the 10-year-old daughter of a FIFA official.

But Garcia concluded that no proof existed to link Qatar to the payment.

Rosell, an ex-Barcelona president, is currently in prison under investigation for money laundering related to the sale of the Brazilian national football team's television rights.

Garcia's investigation also revealed that one former FIFA executive committee member thanked Qatar by mail for a transfer of several hundred thousand euros just after Qatar was awarded the 2022 tournament.

And it also documents that three executive members of FIFA were flown to Rio de Janeiro for a private party ahead of the vote to decide who would host the 2022 World Cup.

Garcia's report was commissioned in 2012 and presented to FIFA in 2014.

FIFA -- which had previously only published a 40-page summary of the report - finally made the document public after it was obtained by German newspaper Bild.

Qatar's statement added that "we question the timing of the leak", which comes at a time of high political tension in the Gulf.

(Source: Daily Mail)

Six people charged over Hillsborough stadium disaster in 1989



BRITISH prosecutors charged six people Wednesday in the 1989 Hillsborough stadium disaster where 96 football fans were crushed to death.

Those charged include the police commander on the day, David Duckenfield, who is accused of gross negligence manslaughter. The former chief of South Yorkshire Police, Norman Bettison, is charged with misconduct in public office for lying about the disaster and its aftermath.

The attorney for the South Yorkshire Police was charged with acting "with intent to pervert the course of public justice" relating to changes in witness statements during an inquiry into the tragedy.

"Criminal proceedings have now commenced and the defendants have a right to a fair trial," said Sue Hemming, the head prosecutor for special crime and counter terror.

The tragedy at the Hillsborough stadium in Sheffield unfolded when more than 2,000 Liverpool soccer fans flooded into a standing-room section behind a goal, with the 54,000-capacity stadium already nearly full for the match against Nottingham Forest. The victims were smashed against metal anti-riot fences or trampled underfoot. Many suffocated in the crush.

At the time, hooliganism was common, and there were immediate attempts to defend the police operation and assign blame to the Liverpool fans. A false narrative circulated that blamed ticketless and rowdy Liverpool fans -- a narrative that their families have challenged for decades.

The original inquest recorded verdicts of accidental death. But the families challenged it and campaigned for a new inquiry. They succeeded in getting the verdicts overturned in 2012 after a far-reaching inquiry that examined previously secret documents and exposed wrongdoing and mistakes by police. Some 23 suspects, including individuals and organizations, had faced the possibility of charges.

The Hillsborough disaster prompted a sweeping modernization of stadiums across England. Top division stadiums were largely transformed into safer, all-seat venues, with fences around fields torn down.

"All we want is accountability, nothing more and nothing less," said Margaret Aspinall, whose 18-year-old son, James, died in the disaster.

(Source: Fox Sports)

Serena Williams says 'heart dropped' at surprise pregnancy

Serena Williams was completely taken aback by her pregnancy, taking six home tests before believing she was expecting her first child, the tennis superstar told Vanity Fair magazine.

Williams, who poses nude on the cover of the magazine for its August issue, said she still had not come to terms with the prospect of being a mother, and said she plans to be back on court in January.

"It just doesn't seem real. I don't know why. Am I having a baby?" Williams, 35, said in the interview released on Tuesday.

The No. 1 ranked tennis player, interviewed in May when she was six months pregnant, said she had made no preparations.

"I don't know what to do with a baby... I've done absolutely nothing for the baby room," she said.

Williams, who is engaged to Reddit co-founder Alexis



Ohanian, confirmed in April that she was expecting a baby in the fall after posting on Snapchat, and then deleting, a picture of herself in a swimsuit with the caption "20 weeks."

She said she would take maternity leave through the remainder of 2017.

Williams told Vanity Fair she found out she was pregnant about a week before winning her record 23rd Grand Slam tournament singles title at the Australian Open in January.

She said she had felt off her game but thought her hormones were acting up. A friend suggested she take a pregnancy test and when it came back positive she "did a double take and my heart dropped. Like literally, it dropped."

She took five more home tests and later presented all six to Ohanian, who was as shocked as she was. She said her fiancé now was earnestly preparing and already has a tip jar he puts money into whenever he uses profanity so he will not utter it around the baby.

Williams gave no dates but said she expects to return to the circuit as soon as January, adding "I don't think my story is over yet."

(Source: Reuters)

Iran beat China at FIVB Volleyball U21 World Championship

Captain Rasoul Aghchehli was Iran's hero again as the team snatched a 3-2 (25-17, 23-25, 26-24, 20-25, 15-10) victory over China despite the phenomenal blocking performance of the opponents in a Pool E match at the FIVB Volleyball Men's U21 World Championship in Brno.

The Chinese blocking contributed a fantastic 30 points to the squad's tally, but this was not enough for the victory.

Iran's Aliasghar Mojarad himself scored nine kill blocks, while Rasoul became the overall best scorer of the match with 24 points. Lijiang Zhou was China's top scorer with 22 points. He and his teammate Yuntai Yu made seven blocking points each.

In the first three sets, China played very well at blocking, but only in the second this led them to the eventual success – 25-23. In the first and the third sets, Iran's spikers, led by captain Rasoul Aghchehli, still managed to outplay the opponents en route to the final scores of 25-17 and 26-24. In set 4, the Chinese block was not just good, it was phenomenal, delivering as many as 10 stuffs towards the 25-20 win. The tie-breaker was quite one-sided, although the Chinese blockers were still able to sneak in three of the team's 10 points in the set – 15-10 Iran's way.

"It was a very hard match, because now every loss means not to be qualified in top four. We made fewer mistakes than the opponents and I am happy for the victory," Iran coach Behrouz Ataei told FIVB.org in the post-match news conference.

Rasoul Aghchehli, captain of Iran, also said: "It was a really hard match - we know how strong China are. They play a lot of combinations with all their 12 players."

(Source: FIVB)



Iran's Manavinezhad joins Italy's BluVolley Verona



S P O R T S Italian Serie A1 volleyball club BluVolley Verona have completed the signing of Iranian outside hitter Mohammadjavad Manavinezhad.

The 21-year-old player has joined the Italian club on a one-year contract.

The details of the contract have not been released.

Manavinezhad was one of Iran's key

players in the 2017 FIVB World League.

The good performance of Manavinezhad in the competition caught the eye of Serbia and BluVolley Verona coach Nikola Grbic.

Manavinezhad made his debut for Iran national volleyball team in the game against the U.S. in the 2015 World League.

He was invited to Iran national team by Slobodan Kovac.

Five Iranian judokas to participate at IJF Grand Prix of Hohhot



S P O R T S Iran will send five judokas to the International Judo Federation (IJF) Grand Prix in China.

From 30 June – 2 July Hohhot will be at the center of the judo world for the first time and there are high expectations from all parties for this new event.

The IJF Grand Prix of Hohhot is the biggest annual IJF World Tour judo

competition in China, until 2017 held in Qingdao.

Mohammad Rashnonezhad (-60kg), Mohammad Mohammadi Barimanlou and Mehdi Fathipour (-73kg), Saeid Mollaei (-81) and Vahid Nouri (-90kg) will represent Iran in the competition.

The team will be headed by Mohammad Mansouri.

IOC says Tokyo budget efforts key for future bidders



International Olympic Committee (IOC) Vice President John Coates praised efforts by Tokyo organizers to lower the budget for the 2020 Summer Games, saying cost control was important for attracting future bid cities.

Figures released last month showed organizers had trimmed budget estimates to 1.685 trillion yen (\$15.7 billion) including contingencies, from 1.8 trillion yen in their initial budget unveiled in December.

Coates, speaking Wednesday at a meeting of the IOC Coordination Commission on its fourth visit to Tokyo, said the IOC was pleased with the reduction as well as organizers' emphasis on reducing costs further.

"It is important to us that with these costs of the Games and the final analysis that become public, they are going to be a reason to attract candidate cities," he said. "To attract them to bid, rather than to scare them off."

In September last year, a Tokyo city government panel had warned

that expenses could balloon to 3 trillion yen.

That would have been some four times the estimate Tokyo had made when it won the bidding in 2013, and prompted a worried IOC and local organizers to form a working group on cutting costs.

The IOC is worried soaring costs could scare off future bidders, after four cities dropped out of the 2024 race over such concerns.

"That is not only important to you, your taxpayers and the public, but it is very important to the IOC," Coates said of reducing costs. "It's for our own future that we're doing it, just as much as you want to do it for your taxpayers."

The latest budget figures also show a reduction in the amount of public money to be used. Meanwhile, the organizing committee has increased its portion - paid through sponsorship, IOC contributions and other private funds - to about 43 percent of the budget excluding contingencies.

(Source: Reuters)

Pacquiao wants Horn knockout to lure Mayweather: Roach



Manny Pacquiao is seeking a dominant win over Australia's Jeff Horn to try and coax Floyd Mayweather Jr into a rematch, the Filipino's long-time trainer Freddie Roach has said.

Pacquiao, who was defeated by American Mayweather in an unanimous points decision in Las Vegas in 2015, will defend his WBO welterweight belt against former schoolteacher and rank outsider Horn in Brisbane on Sunday.

"He wants a re-match with Mayweather," Roach told Sky News of 38-year-old Pacquiao.

"To get Mayweather, you have to look good."

"Against Horn, he's got to look good, he has to be impressive."

Mayweather, who retired in 2015 with an unbeaten record of 49-0, has agreed to come out of retirement for a 12-round fight against mixed martial arts champion Conor McGregor.

Pacquiao has failed to win by knockout since a 12th round TKO win over Miguel Cotto in 2009 but Roach said the fighter was primed to cause a stoppage

against 29-year-old Horn, who is undefeated in 17 fights against mostly obscure opponents.

"(Pacquiao) doesn't like to predict knockouts and so forth but I do," Roach said at a media conference on Wednesday.

"I think it's going to be short and sweet. If our opponent comes out like he says he's going to, Manny will fire back and I think it's going to be great fight (but) it won't last too long. And someone will get knocked out."

The 'Battle of Brisbane' at Lang Park, a 55,000-seat venue used mainly for professional rugby matches, is the biggest fight in decades 'Down Under', throwing Pacquiao's unheralded opponent Horn into a huge spotlight.

Horn reminded Pacquiao of his 2012 knockout loss to Juan Manuel Marquez and said the Filipino had lost some of the power in his punches.

"Ever since that knockout loss against Juan Manuel Marquez, Manny doesn't pull the trigger like he used to when he was on his big run of wins," the 29-year-old told local media.

(Source: Reuters)

Zob Ahan reaches agreement with Georgian defender Gvelesiani

Iranian football club Zob Ahan is set to hire Georgian defender Giorgi Gvelesiani.

The 28-year-old player is a member of Dinamo Tbilisi from 2010.

Zob Ahan's newly-appointed coach Amir Ghale-noei traveled to Georgia last month to see Gvelesiani's performance.

According to Iranian media, Gvelesiani has already played for Georgia national football team.

Last season, Zob Ahan finished in fourth place, 20 points adrift of Iran Professional League leader Persepolis.

Former Esteghlal and Tractor Sazi coach Ghale-noei replaced Mojtaba Hosseini last month.

(Source: Tasnim)



Emergency services offered free London 2017 tickets

Mayor of London thanks workers for response to recent tragedies in UK capital.

London's emergency services and their families have been offered free tickets to attend the IPC World Para Athletics Championships to thank them for their tireless efforts in responding to recent tragedies in the capital.

The Mayor of London is making tickets available in recognition of the bravery and dedication of the capital's emergency services following the recent terrorist attacks at Westminster, London Bridge and Finsbury Park, and the horrific Grenfell Tower fire earlier this month.

Tickets have been offered to staff at London Ambulance Service, London Fire Brigade, Metropolitan Police, British Transport Police, City of London Police and those working at hospitals involved in responding to the incidents. Up to five tickets are available to each member of staff for themselves and family members for the opening weekend of the championships, which start on 14 July at the Olympic Stadium.

The tickets are available for the opening night and the morning sessions on 15-16 July. City Hall will ensure those working shifts during this period will be accommodated. Staff will be able to apply through their organization before the closing date of 7 July.

It has also been confirmed that the British Red Cross will be the official charity for the IPC World Para Athletics Championships. The British Red Cross has been co-ordinating the relief efforts from the recent terrorist attacks in London and Manchester, and the Grenfell Tower fire

(Source: Paralympic.org)

John Terry offered one-year contract by Aston Villa and Birmingham

Rivals Aston Villa and Birmingham have both offered John Terry a one-year contract, Sky sources understand.

The former England captain favors a move to Villa Park to work with Steve Bruce despite Premier League interest, Sky Sports News HQ understands, and a deal could be completed in the next week.

West Brom, Swansea and Bournemouth were all interested in the 36-year old, but Terry is reluctant to play against Chelsea, where he spent two decades as a player.

Terry's contract at Stamford Bridge expires in three days' time, though the departing Blues skipper has uploaded social media posts showing himself in pre-season at the club's Cobham training ground.

Birmingham manager Harry Redknapp had confirmed an offer to Terry had been made and admitted he had been trying to persuade the player into a move to St Andrew's when the pair took part in Michael Carrick's testimonial earlier in June.

Redknapp told Talksport: "I had a chat with him [Terry] and said to him come in - he's doing his coaching badges - have a year or two and who knows what he wants to do in the future?"

Terry has since posted pictures playing golf with Bruce, as well as workout videos with the Villa boss' son, Alex.

(Source: Sky Sports)

Ronaldo: I still have Inter Milan in my heart

Former Brazil and Inter Milan forward Ronaldo has said he would be tempted by the possibility of working at the club again but has not "dreamed as far" as that happening yet.

Ronaldo spent five years with Inter, scoring 59 goals in 99 matches before moving to Real Madrid in 2002.

He is currently an ambassador for the Liga champions but told La Gazzetta dello Sport: "I'm extremely happy in Madrid but I feel ready for a new, let's say managerial experience."

"That is why I am considering the opportunity of buying a club in the Segunda Division -- there are a few options -- a bit like I have done with the Ronaldo Academy, my soccer schools."

"They've had an extraordinary impact in China. Working with China these days means having unlimited opportunities."

"I've not dreamed as far [as collaborating with Inter's Chinese owners, the Suning Group], but I have always said that I have a piece of Inter in my heart."

(Source: Soccer.net)

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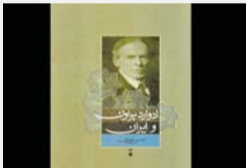
NEWS IN BRIEF



Iranian society to honor Fereshteh Taerpur, Turaj Mansuri

A R T TEHRAN — Cinema producer Fereshteh Taerpur and cinematographer Turaj Mansuri Will be honored with lifetime achievement awards at the 3rd Iranian Society of Still Photographers Celebration, which will be held in Tehran on July 4.

The organizers will also honor the best film photographer of the year, veteran photographers and new talents.



“Edward Browne and Iran” appears in Iranian bookstores

CULTURE TEHRAN — Iranian author and scholar Hassan Javadi's book “Edward Browne and Iran” has recently been published by Now Publications in Tehran.

The book is about British orientalist Edward Browne and his numerous articles and books, mainly in the areas of Iranian history and literature.



Culture minister to honor art and literary figures

CULTURE TEHRAN — Iranian Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Reza Salehi-Amiri will honor 110 Iranian cultural figures during a ceremony at the National Library of Iran on July 4.

“The Lasting Memorial”, a book containing the portraits of the honorees, will also be unveiled at the ceremony, which is organized by Iran's Book House.



Iran's “Lunch Time” honored at the U.S film festival

A R T TEHRAN — Iranian director Alireza Qasemi's “Lunch Time” won the best student short film award at the 6th edition of the Snake Alley Festival of Film, an international festival of short movies, which was held in Burlington, Iowa, in the U.S. from June 21 to 24.

“Lunch Time” tells the story of a 16-year-old girl, who deals with the harsh bureaucracy to fulfill her responsibility of having to identify the body of her mother.

Pandora Media's CEO Tim Westergren to step down

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Pandora Media Inc's co-founder Tim Westergren stepped down as chief executive and board member, less than a month after Sirius XM agreed to invest in the music streaming company.

Westergren, who co-founded Pandora in 2000, served as CEO and president for about two years until July 2004, before returning to lead the company in March last year. Since his return, the stock has tumbled 22 percent. Pandora's shares were down 0.6 percent at \$8.41 on Tuesday.

Sirius XM Holdings Inc, controlled by media mogul John Malone's Liberty Media Corp, had said it would invest \$480 million in the company, get three board seats and the right to pick the chairman.

“We expect the new CEO of (Pandora) to come from (Sirius) directly, or from John Malone's extensive rolodex,” Needham & Co analyst Laura Martin wrote in a note.

Westergren's departure implies Sirius XM is quickly getting its own people in place at the top of Pandora, she said.

Reuters had previously reported that talks about Sirius XM buying the company outright ended unsuccessfully over price disagreements.

Pandora also said on Tuesday that President Mike Herring and Chief Marketing Officer Nick Bartle were leaving the company.

French Iranologist Gilbert Lazard to receive Mahmud Afshar Award

A R T TEHRAN — French linguist and Iranologist Gilbert Lazard will receive Iran's Mahmud Afshar Historical Literary Award for his lifetime endeavors and research on various Iranian languages and translations of classical Persian poetry.

The award committee of the Mahmud Afshar Foundation selected Lazard for the 24th edition of the award this year.

Seyyed Mostafa Mohaqeq-Damad, the Head of Mahmud Afshar Foundation Trusteeship Council, will present the award, which includes a medal and a Persian carpet bearing the name of Gilbert Lazard, to the French scholar.

The award-giving ceremony will take place in Iran's Cultural Center in Paris on July 4.

The 97-year old Lazard is the author of Grammaire du Persan Contemporain (A Grammar of Contemporary Persian, 1957) and the Persian-French dictionary (1990).

Lazard studied at the École Normale

Supérieure and graduated in 1946. He became a professor of Persian at (Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales) INALCO from 1958 to 1966.

From 1951 to 1969, he was in charge of the Iranian civilization course at the Sorbonne, where he became a lecturer and a professor of Iranian language and civilization.

His teachings and works on Persian language and literature have had a very strong influence on the whole of Persian studies in France since 1960. His work covers many fields, particularly early Persian language and literature. He has also translated several works by ?adeq ?edayat including “Haji Aqa” into French.

The Mahmud Afshar Foundation annually awards scholars who have contributed valuable literary work or research.

French Orientalist and expert on Hafez, Charles-Henri de Fouchecour and Austrian Iranologist Bert Fragner

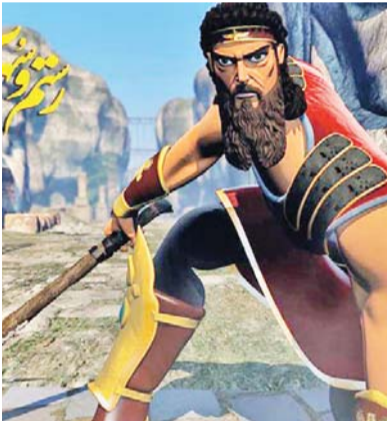
Isfahan festival to release children films' package

A R T TEHRAN — The organizers of the 30th International Film Festival for Children and Youth, will release a package containing 30 children's movies by Iranian directors.

“Little Bird of Happiness” (Puran Derakhshandeh), “Rustam and Sohrab” (Kianush Dalvand), “The Sweet Jam” (Marzieh Borumand), “Bashu, the Little Stranger” (Bahram Beizai) and “Bread and Poem” (Kiumars Purahmad) are among the films to appear in the package.

The package will be released by the Iranian Visual Media Institute.

The festival will be running in Isfahan from June 30 to July 6.



A poster for “Rustam and Sohrab” by Kianush Dalvand

Eurimages to support 27 films including Asghar Farhadi project

STRASBOURG (Screen Daily) — Eurimages, the council of Europe's fund for co-production, distribution and exhibition of European cinema, has announced it will support 27 films (including a documentary and an animation) for a combined €7,104,430.

The projects selected by the Eurimages board at its 147th meeting held June 19-23 are:

The Beast in the Jungle (Netherlands, Luxembourg) - Clara Van Gool (Netherland)

A Woman At War (France, Iceland) - Benedikt Erlingsson

Asghar Farhadi's Spanish Project(France, Spain, Italy) - Asghar Farhadi (Iran - France)

The Man Who Surprised Everyone (Russia, Estonia, France) - Natalya Merkulova, Alexey Chupov

The Guest (Italy, Switzerland) - Duccio Chiarini

Is This What You Were Born For? (Romania, Czech Republic, France, Bulgaria) - Radu Jude

Jade (Netherlands, Belgium, Ireland) - Sacha Polak

Motherland (Lithuania, Latvia) - Tomas Vengris

The Magic Quill (Czech Republic, Slovakia) - Marek Najbort

Alice T. (Romania, Sweden) - Radu Muntean

History of Love (Slovenia, Italy, Norway) - Sonja Prosenc

Dogman (Italy, France) - Matteo Garrone

Gomera (Romania, Spain, France) - Corneliu Porumboiu



Caravan (Germany, France) - Sebastian Schipper

1999 (Wish You Were Here), (Canada, Switzerland) - Samara Chadwick, Documentary

The DB Campaign (Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia) - Dana Budisavljevic

The Last Ones (Estonia, Finland) - Veiko Õunpuu

The Humorist (Russia, Latvia) - Michael Idov

The Tree Of Blood (Spain, France) - Julio Medem

Sibel (France, Germany, Turkey) - Çağla Zencirci,

Guillaume Giovanetti

Cook, Kill (Czech Republic, Slovakia) - Mira Fornay

Buñuel In The Labyrinth Of The Turtles(Spain,

Netherlands) - Salvador Simó, Animation film

Stupid Young Heart (Finland, Netherlands, Sweden) - Selma Vilhunen

Border (Sweden, Denmark) - Ali Abbasi

Daughter Of Mine (Italy, Switzerland, Germany) - Laura Bispuri

Yuli (Spain, Cuba, Germany, United Kingdom, France) - Iciar Bollain

Animas. The Other Side (Spain, Belgium) - Jose f. Ortuño, Laura Alvea

Asghar Farhadi's untitled Spanish film is one of the high-profile projects on the list.

The \$12-13m production stars Ricardo Darin, Penelope Cruz and Javier Bardem and is due to shoot in Madrid from mid-August. Farhadi won this year's best foreign language Oscar for The Salesman.

Eurimages also decided to award 24 distributors a combined €777,252 from their distribution support programme, which helps projects with marketing and publicity costs.

The organization has supported 1,862 European co-productions, totalling approximately €553m, since it was set up by the council of Europe in 1988.

This cycle 31% of the funding (€2,649,135) went to films with female directors.



French linguist and Iranologist Gilbert Lazard in an undated photo

have received the award in previous editions of the event.

Scholars Ahmad Monzavi, Manuchehr

Sotudeh, Mohammad Dabir-Siaqi and Gholamhossein Yusefi are other Iranian recipients of the award.

Children's festival announces animated movies jury

A R T TEHRAN — The jury panel of the animated movies section of the 30th International Film Festival for Children and Youth has been announced.

Ferenc Varsanyi (Hungary), Natalia Chernysheva (Russia), Alexandra Sun (Hong Kong), Gerhard Klein (Germany) and Saeid Tavakolian (Iran) have been invited to judge the animations, the organizers have announced.

Seven animated films from different countries will be competing in this section.

They include “The Boy and the Beast” by Mamoru Hosoda and “Chieri and Cherry” by Makoto Nakamura, both from Japan, “Long Way North” by Remi Chaye



From Left to right: Saeid Tavakolian, Gerhard Klein, Alexandra Sun, Natalia Chernysheva and Ferenc Varsanyi in a combination photo.

from France, “Hero Quest” by Maksim Fadeev from Russia and “Release from Heaven” by Ali Nuri-Oskui from Iran.

The festival will be held from June 30 to July 6 in Isfahan.

Swedish actor Michael Nyqvist dies after lung cancer battle

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Swedish actor Michael Nyqvist, best known for a leading role in “The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo” Swedish film series, died in Sweden on Tuesday after a year-long battle with lung cancer, his representative said. He was 56.

Nyqvist “passed away quietly surrounded by family” in Stockholm, his spokeswoman Alissa Goodman said in an emailed statement that called him “one of Sweden's most respected and accomplished actors.”

“Michael's joy and passion were infectious to those who knew and loved him. His charm and charisma were undeniable, and his love for the arts was felt by all who had the pleasure of working with him,” the statement said.

Nyqvist rose to prominence as the complex investigative journalist Mikael Blomkvist in film adaptations of Swedish author Stieg Larsson's gritty “Millennium” novel series that spawned “The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo” franchise.

More recently, he played menacing



File picture of Swedish actor Michael Nyqvist, known for his role in the “Millennium” series, in Stockholm January 4, 2017. (Henrik Montgomery/TT News Agency/via Reuters)

villains in Hollywood action films “Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol” and “John Wick”.

Nyqvist made his debut as an actor in 2010 with an autobiographical memoir “Just After Dreaming”, which detailed his quest to find his biological parents three decades after he was adopted as a baby.

The actor is survived by his wife and two children.

Miranda Kerr returns jewelry gifted in alleged Malaysian scheme

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Australian model and actress Miranda Kerr has handed over millions of dollars worth of jewelry that U.S. authorities say was given to her as part of a Malaysian money laundering scheme, her spokesperson said on Tuesday.

Kerr, a former Victoria's Secret model, was given diamond pendants, earrings and other jewelry worth about \$8 million in 2014 by Malaysian financier Jho Low, according to a June 15 U.S. Department of Justice civil lawsuit.

Kerr is not accused of any wrongdoing and her spokesperson said she has co-operated fully with U.S. authorities from the start of the inquiry.

“The transfer of the jewelry gifts from Ms. Kerr's safe deposit box in Los Angeles to government agents was completed on last Friday afternoon,” the spokesperson said in a statement.

The gifts of jewelry were detailed in the Justice Department's lawsuit, in a long-running case over an

alleged conspiracy to launder money misappropriated from the 1Malaysia Development Berhad fund, known as 1MDB, which was set up by Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak in 2009 to promote economic development.

The Justice Department alleges that more than \$4.5 billion was taken from 1MDB by high-level fund officials and their associates.

Kerr, who was in between marriages to actor Orlando Bloom and Snapchat co-founder Evan Spiegel at the time, was given a heart-shaped diamond necklace worth \$1.8 million, with her initials inscribed on the back, as a 2014 Valentine's Day gift from Low, according to the lawsuit.

Later in 2014, investigators said, Low gave Kerr a second, pink diamond, pendant worth \$4.8 million, followed by matching earrings, a bracelet and a ring worth almost \$2 million.

The lawsuit said the funds for the jewelry were misappropriated from the 1MDB account.