



Congratulation on Eid al-Mab'ath, anniversary of the appointment of Prophet Mohammad to prophethood.



Deal with Total probably finalized within a month: official **4**



Sustainable management, environment protection lead to urban health: Rouhani **12**



World poorer when people like Kiarostami die: Victor Erice **16**

Iran, China sign nuclear plant redesign contract

'Malaysians impressed by humanistic values of Iranian cinema'

By Manijeh Rezapoor

TEHRAN — Ho Hock Doong, the senior assistant at Malaysia's All-Asian Satellite Television and Radio Operator (ASTRO), has said Iranian movies impress Malaysian people for representing humanistic values.

"The people of my country like Iranian movies. They can relate to the humanistic values in the Iranian movies. We showed Asghar Farhadi's 'The Salesman' last month in the Malaysia International Film Festival, and all the seats were packed," Doong, who is currently in Tehran to attend the 35th Fajr International Film Festival, told the Tehran Times on Saturday.

Doong also plans to visit the Iranian Film Market underway on the sidelines of the festival.

"This is the second time I am attending the market; the first time was in 2015. I just arrived today but I see some differences and I think it is good," he said. **→16**



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Trump wavering between ripping, keeping nuclear deal

By Mohammad Homaeefar

TEHRAN — Following months of anti-Iran rhetoric, it appears that the new administration in the U.S. is changing its course towards Tehran and the international agreement it struck with six world powers.

U.S. President Donald Trump had repeatedly criticized the nuclear deal during his presidential campaign trail, calling it the "worst deal ever" and vowing to "tear it up" immediately after he becomes president.

However, after he assumed office, the world started to take him more seriously, with several world leaders reminding him that they strongly support the nuclear deal.

Just days into his presidency, Trump suddenly changed his mind and said he would "rigorously" enforce the nuclear deal.

According to the White House, President Trump and Saudi King Salman had a phone conversation, during which they "agreed on the importance of rigorously enforcing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran and of addressing Iran's destabilizing regional activities."

After months of flip-flopping on the issue, Trump recently claimed that Iran has not lived up to the "spirit" of the nuclear agreement. **→2**



PERSPECTIVE

José Graziano da Silva
FAO director general

Building resilient rural livelihoods is key to helping Yemen

People in Yemen are currently suffering from the world's largest humanitarian crisis.

More than 17 million people around Yemen's rugged landscape are acutely food insecure, and the figure is likely to increase as the ongoing conflict continues to erode the ability to grow, import, distribute and pay for food. More than 7 million people are on the verge of famine, while the rest are marginally meeting the minimum day-to-day nutritional needs thanks to external humanitarian and livelihoods support. Large-scale famine is a real risk that will cast an awful shadow for generations to come.

Only a political solution can end the suffering in Yemen, as there can be no food security without peace. And the longer the delay to draft an adequately funded recovery plan, the more expensive the burden will be in terms of resources and human livelihood.

Keep in mind that Yemen has a very young population, yet some 2.2 million children under the age of five are suffering from acute malnutrition. As inadequate nutrition in a child's early years can permanently damage an individual's lifetime potential, it is imperative to stop a generational doomsday loop.

To prevent the food security situation from worsening, immediate livelihoods support — mainly agriculture and fishing — must be an integral part of the humanitarian response. This year, FAO Yemen is appealing for USD 48.4 million in funding to reach 3 million people.

While Yemen is widely noted as being dependent upon imports for almost all of its wheat and rice demands, people can and do produce a lot of food on their own. This requires the provision of seeds, fertilizers and fuel for equipment and irrigation to the 2 million households who currently lack access to such basic agricultural inputs. **→13**

Top general hails IRGC as Iran's security shield

Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Hossein Baqeri praised the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) and said the forces have acted as a "security shield" for the country through cooperating with resistance forces in Iraq and Syria, Tasnim reported on Sunday.

In a statement released on Saturday on the occasion of the anniversary of the IRGC's establishment, Major General Baqeri said the forces have a record of playing "epic and momentous" roles in the history of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

With the passage of nearly four decades after the establishment of the IRGC, its record proves the fact that the forces have acted as "security shield" for the Iranian nation and even the Muslim community through taking the lead in hazardous battlefields, including the eight years of the Iraqi imposed war on Iran and now through cooperating with Islamic Resistance forces in Iraq and Syria, the commander noted.

The IRGC was established after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran to defend the country against foreign threats and to safeguard the values and accomplishments of the revolution.

According to Article 150 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, "The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, organized in the early days of the triumph of the Revolution (1979), is to be maintained so that it may continue in its role of guarding the Revolution and its achievements. The scope of the duties of this Corps, and its areas of responsibility, in relation to the duties and areas of responsibility of the other Armed Forces, are to be determined by law with an emphasis on brotherly cooperation and harmony among them."

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FAO offers water-scarce countries a new satellite tool to boost agricultural productivity

Measuring how efficiently water is used in agriculture, particularly in water-scarce countries including Iran, is going high-tech with the help of a new tool developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) with a fund from the Netherlands.

According to a press release published by the FAO Representation in the Islamic Republic of Iran, using real-time satellite data to track water productivity in agriculture, the FAO Water Productivity Open Access Portal (WaPOR) has gone live, tapping data to help farmers achieve more reliable agricultural yields and allowing for the optimization of irrigation systems.

It allows for fine-grained analysis of water utilised through farming systems, generating empirical evidence about how it can be most productively used.

Worldwide water utilization - the majority of which is used by agriculture - has outpaced the rate of population growth for most of the last century and some regions are close to breaching viable limits.

WaPOR sifts through satellite data and uses Google Earth computing power to produce maps that show how much biomass and yield is produced per cubic meter of water consumed. The maps can be rendered at resolutions of as little as 30 to 250 meters, and updated every one to ten days.

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The program uses a pixel-based methodology to produce comprehensive maps allowing for better use of natural resources. When coupled with real-time data, agricultural extension agents can help farmers obtain more reliable crop yields, both improving their livelihoods and making them more sustainable.

FAO's team of information technology and land and water officers has designed WaPOR - through a \$10 million project funded by the Government of the Netherlands - to cover Africa and the Near East, with a focus on key countries that are or are projected soon to face physical or infrastructural water scarcity. **→12**

West intervenes in favor of terrorists whenever army advances: Assad

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has accused the West of interfering in Syria's affairs in favor of terrorists whenever the army makes gains, citing Washington's missile attack on a Syrian military airbase earlier this month as an example.

Assad made the remarks in an address to a meeting of the central committee of Syria's ruling Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party in Damascus on Saturday, Syria's official SANA news agency reported. He is the regional secretary of the party.

The Syrian head of state said that the April 7 US missile strike against Shayrat Airfield in Homs Province came after terrorists' defeat in the west-central Hama Province and the army's advance in the country's north and east.

"Western states with the United States at their head interfere in favor of the terrorists whenever the Syrian Arab Army makes a significant advance," Assad added.

The Saudi-inspired Wahhabi terrorism and countries hostile to Syria have used all their means in the war, he pointed out.

President Assad further stressed that the battle between Syria and extremist currents is not a new thing, but rather dates back to the 60s of the 20th century.

The Syrian war on terrorism would not stop as long as terrorists remain in the Arab country, he noted.

Syria will continue to confront Western scenarios seeking to undermine its unity and sovereignty and pursue a political path through participation in peace talks in the Swiss city of Geneva and the Kazakh capital Astana, to stop the bloodshed gripping the Arab country, Assad concluded.

Washington claimed that Shayrat Airfield had been used to conduct what it said was a chemical attack on the town of Khan Shaykhun in Syria's Idlib Province on April 4. Over 80 people were reportedly killed in the town due to the attack.

The West held Damascus responsible for the suspected gas attack, but Syria denied the accusation and stressed that the incident was a "fabrication" to justify the subsequent U.S. missile strike on the airbase. (Source: SANA)



© IRNA/ Amirhossein Bani

'Student health ambassadors' gathering held in Tehran

Health Minister Hassan Qazizadeh Hashemi presents a package of educational items to a student during a gathering of one thousand girl students, titled 'student health ambassadors' which was held on Sunday at a high school in Shahr-e Rey, south of Tehran. The program aimed to promote self-motivated participation of students in activities for promoting health in the society and creating volunteer-based movements.

ELECTION COUNTDOWN



Presidential debates to be aired live, first on Friday

POLITICS TEHRAN — Presidential debates will be aired live following a decision adopted by the campaign committee of the Interior Ministry late on Saturday.

Accordingly, the first of the debates will be aired on Friday. The debate will last three hours, according to Ehsan Qazizadeh Hashemi, head of election committee, Mehr reported.

All six candidates will attend the program which will be cast on Channel 1, IRINN, and satellite.



Leader's website launches election page

POLITICS TEHRAN — Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's official website, khamenei.ir, has launched a special page about the May 19 election.

The web page will publish Ayatollah Khamenei's views on elections, said a post on the new page at farsi.khamenei.ir/entekhabat96 on Sunday.

The most recent post on the page summarizes the Leader's recent meeting with Army officials where he said "all should appreciate elections."

It continues to read, "The elections should be healthy and full of security and held with widespread participation, passion, vigor and vitality... which will lend much security to the country."



Shahroudi office rejects rumors of support for Ahmadinejad candidacy

POLITICS TEHRAN — Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi's office published an announcement on Sunday in which it rejected rumors that the ayatollah had requested an executive decree from the Supreme Leader to allow Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to contest the presidential election.

The announcement said that spreading such rumors are an attempt by enemies to affect the Islamic revolution's power in establishing religious democracy.



Banning minorities from councils out of Jannati's authority: presidential aide

POLITICS TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani's aide for ethnic and religious minorities has said it is out of the authority of Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, the Guardian Council chief, to ban minorities from seeking council seats in some constituencies.

The role of the Guardian Council is to interpret the Constitution, not ordinary laws which are enacted by the government according to Majlis legislations, Ali Yunesi told ILNA on Sunday.

In laws regarding minorities, he added, interpretations fall within the authority of the Majlis.



Qalibaf appoints Dehqan as his campaign chief

POLITICS TEHRAN — Tehran Mayor Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, who is racing for the presidential post, has made MP Mohammad Dehqan the director of his election campaign.

The announcement was made by Mehdi Zakeri, Qalibaf's representative in the committee for presidential campaigns, in an interview with Tasnim news agency.

This year it is Qalibaf's third attempt to become president. He was a candidate in the years 2005 and 2013 as well.



Electoral debates should not undermine JCPOA: Aref

POLITICS TEHRAN — Mohammad Reza Aref, the leader of the Hope parliamentary group, on Sunday cautioned that electoral presidential campaigns should be conducted in a way not to harm the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action - the official name for the nuclear deal - as an achievement of the Islamic Republic.

Speaking in the Majlis, Aref also said his parliamentary group welcomes a partial coalition among principlist groups.

"I hope that with powerful presence of both major political fronts of the country, we will see exciting, and high-turnout elections."

Iran, China sign nuclear plant redesign contract

By Ali Kushki

TEHRAN — Iranian and Chinese firms signed the first commercial contract on Sunday in Vienna to redesign the Arak heavy water reactor as part of the 2015 international deal over Iran's nuclear program.

The fate of the Arak reactor was a running theme of nearly two years of negotiations between Iran and United States, China, Russia, Germany, France and England, which resulted in the lifting of economic sanctions against Iran in reward for limits on its nuclear program, of which the West was skeptical.

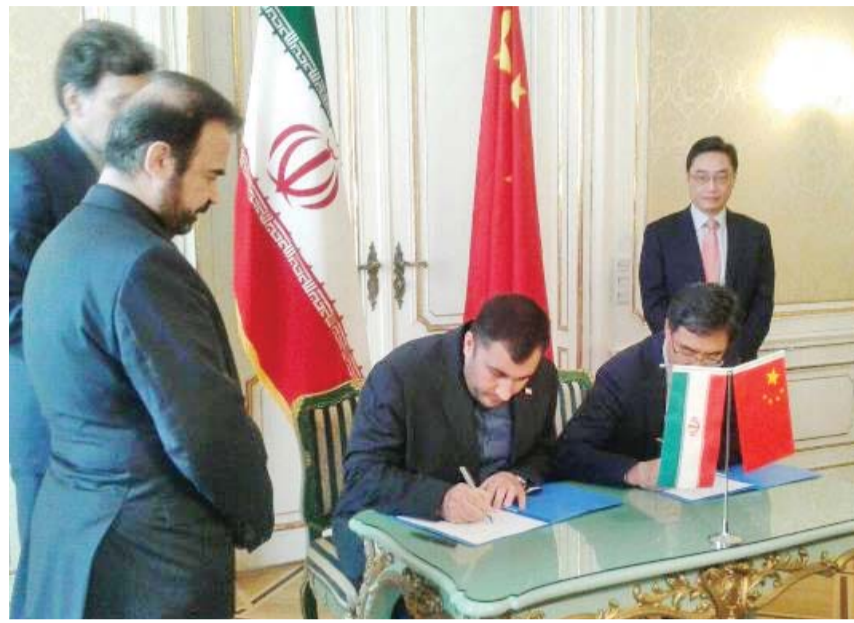
The contract was signed in Iran's representative office in Vienna between the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran and Chinese companies nearly two weeks after the sides finalized a draft deal in Beijing.

"The signing of the agreement will create favorable conditions for the start-up of renovation work in real sense," Lu Kang, a spokesman with China's Foreign Ministry, said days before the Vienna contract.

China and the U.S. are joint heads of a working group assigned by the nuclear deal to redesign the reactor based on an agreed conceptual design, using fuel enriched up to 3.67 percent, so that it will not produce weapons grade plutonium.

The redesign mechanism was agreed upon in a separate document on Nov. 13, 17 and 18 by the foreign ministers of the parties to the deal.

Iran denies ever having considered



China says signing of the redesign agreement will create favorable conditions for the start-up of renovation work in real sense.

producing plutonium to that level to produce nuclear weapons, saying the 40-megawatt plant is aimed at producing isotopes for medical and industrial purposes.

Under the redesign deal, the Chinese side will make sure if the conceptual redesigning already offered by Iranian technicians meets international safety measures and participate in the

construction of the reactor with the technical support of the U.S.

The agreement put an end to months of negotiations between China and Iran over the project.

Earlier in January, Tehran accused Beijing of acting opportunistically as it was demanding too much for the renovation, what it said was much beyond "international standards."

Last week, Alireza Kamalvandi, a spokesman with Iran's nuclear organization, said the contract took into account Iran's considerations.

The redesign accord will come just days before the 7th meeting of the Joint Commission of the nuclear deal in Vienna on April 25, a mechanism to address issues of mutual concern.

Also, the bargain comes days after Tehran and Washington traded barbs over the deal.

On Tuesday, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson affirmed that Tehran is keeping its ends of the accord, followed by President Donald Trump who doubled down on the administration's tough rhetoric on Iran, claiming that Tehran isn't "not living up to the spirit of the agreement".

Responding to the salvo, Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif mocked Trump's claim Tehran was "not living up to the spirit" of the nuclear deal, saying Washington was flouting the accord.

"We'll see if US prepared to live up to letter of #JCPOA (nuclear deal) let alone spirit," Zarif tweeted.

Soon, Trump must decide whether to extend executive order waivers the Obama administration used to suspend some of the non-nuclear sanctions imposed on Iran and how scrupulously to hold Iran to account for infractions of the JCPOA.

The test of that will come on May 19, when Trump must decide whether to extend executive waivers that the Obama administration used to suspend some sanctions."

Iran calls for cooperation with Afghanistan in fighting terrorism



POLITICS TEHRAN — Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani contacted Afghan national security advisor Hanif Atmar on Saturday to insist for cooperation with Afghanistan as Taliban raided a military base in northern province of Balkh on Friday killing over 130 army personnel.

Shamkhani highlighted the importance of fight against the terrorist movements by the Afghan government, political groups and the Afghan people.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid claimed responsibility for the assault in an email sent to media.

"Two suicide bombers detonated their vests full of explosive inside the mosque of the army corps while

everyone was busy with Friday prayers," Chicago Tribune quoted Mohammad Radmanish, deputy spokesman for the Afghanistan's Defense Ministry, as saying.

The top Iranian security official also warned that certain countries in the region are seeking to relocate the terrorists who suffered great casualties in Iraq and Syria to Afghanistan.

"Some of the regional countries seek to undermine security in Afghanistan to lay the ground for transfer of the defeated terrorists from Iraq and Syria to this country," Shamkhani said.

Atmar also called for continuation of consultation and cooperation between Iran and Afghanistan to eradicate terrorism and roots of insecurity and instability.

No letup in boosting missile power: defense chief



POLITICS TEHRAN — Defense Minister Hossein Dehqan said on Sunday that Iran will spare no effort in boosting its defense and missile capability.

The Iranian people tolerate no humiliation by any power, he said during a speech at the 22th national conference of police forces in Tehran.

"The vigilant and revolutionary Iranian people has not accepted any humiliation and imposition and will not accept and will spare no effort in strengthening defense and pre-emptive capability in line with the country's regional and international role," the military chief remarked.

Pointing to claims made by the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization

(MKO or MEK) that Iran has developed hidden nuclear activities in Parchin, Dehqan said the "devil plot" will "undoubtedly fail".

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi also said on Saturday that accusations levelled by the MKO are "farfetched" and repetition of a "failed scenario".

"The repetition of these outdated allegations by the aforementioned group is ridiculous and a repeat of a failed scenario whose absurdity has already been proven by the International Atomic Energy Agency," Araqchi stated.

Analysts say the MKO is making such remarks in order to win support by some hawks in the Trump administration and Congress.

Trump wavering between ripping, keeping nuclear deal

I → "I think they are doing a tremendous disservice to an agreement that was signed. It was a terrible agreement. It shouldn't have been signed," he said. "They are not living up to the spirit of the agreement, I can tell you that."

It came after Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's letter to the speaker of the House of Representatives, Paul Ryan, in which he confirmed Iran was compliant with its commitments under the nuclear accord.

Tillerson's reluctant admission was followed by yet another accusation against the Islamic Republic, claiming Iran is "the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism."

Subsequently, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif took to Twitter to respond to Tillerson's accusations, stressing that instead of repeating accusations against Iran, the U.S. should fulfil its obligations under the 2015 nuclear deal.

Trump's decision to either tear up or keep the



agreement will become clear around May 19 when he will have to decide whether or not to suspend some anti-Iran sanctions. The date corresponds with the presidential election in Iran.

If the U.S. does not sign off the waivers which will

expire on May 19, the sanctions will go back into place and this would be a serious violation of the nuclear deal, probably leading to profound consequences.

Analysts, however, say this is an unlikely scenario as it would be detrimental to the interests of the United States or that of Trump.

Before leaving office, former President Barack Obama warned against "tearing up" the deal, emphasizing that it could have "significant and concrete" consequences.

Senior Iranian officials have also dismissed Trump's inconsistent stance on the issue, saying Tehran reserves the right to "act accordingly" if Washington reconsiders the nuclear deal.

Iran "is fully prepared to return to the pre-JCPOA situation or even [to conditions] more robust than that if the U.S. reneges on its promises to the extent that the JCPOA's continuation harms our national interests," Zarif said in March.

Terrorism is result of hegemonic policies: general

POLITICS TEHRAN — The deputy chief of staff of Iran's Armed Forces said on Sunday that the policies adopted by the hegemonic system have led to emergence of terrorist groups.

"Emergence of the Takfiri and terrorist

groups in countries like Yemen, Iraq and Syria is a result of the hegemon's interferences and hypocritical policies," Brigadier General Massoud Jazayeri said.

However, he said, Hezbollah's resilience and the victory of the Afghan, Syrian, Iraqi and Yemeni forces in the "proxy wars"

waged by Washington indicate "collapse" of the U.S. hegemonic system.

The general said the U.S. and its allies seek to infiltrate into other countries because of their failure to achieve their "inhuman objectives".

He added that the U.S. and its allies

have lost their status as superpower at the international arena.

Jazayeri also said through unity and reliance on the Islamic Revolution Iran will be the "final winner" in confrontation against the "great Satan", a title Iran attributes to the United States.

French presidential poll a bellwether for Europe

France voted on Sunday in the first round of a bitterly fought presidential election that is crucial to the future of Europe and a closely-watched test of voters' anger with the political establishment.

Over 50,000 police backed by elite units of the French security services patrolled the streets less than three days after a suspected extremist gunman shot dead a policeman and wounded two others on the central Champs Elysees avenue.

The outcome will show whether the populist tide that saw Britain vote to leave the EU and Donald Trump's election in the United States is still rising, or starting to ebb. A high level of indecision adds to nervousness.

Hanan Fanidi, a 33-year-old financial project manager, was still unsure as she arrived at a polling station in Paris' 18th arrondissement.

Emmanuel Macron, 39, a centrist ex-banker who set up his party just a year ago, is the opinion polls' favorite to win the first round and beat far-right National Front chief Marine Le Pen in the two-person run-off on May 7.

For them to win the top two qualifying positions on Sunday would represent a huge change in the political landscape. The second round would then feature neither of the mainstream parties that have governed France for decades.

But conservative Francois Fillon is making a comeback after being plagued for months by a fake jobs scandal, and leftist Jean-Luc Melenchon's ratings have surged in recent weeks. Any two of the four has a chance to qualify for the run-off.

"It wouldn't be the classic left versus right divide but two views of the world clashing," said Ifop pollsters' Jerome Fourquet. "Macron bills himself as the progressive versus conservatives, Le Pen as the



patriot versus the globalists."

The seven other candidates, including the ruling Socialist party's Benoit Hamon lag behind in opinion polls.

By noon (6.00 a.m. ET), turnout amid sunshine and clear skies across much of France was 28.54 percent, according to official figures - around the same as in the 2012 first round, in which almost 80 percent eventually took part.

Some polls had been predicting a much lower turnout, closer to the 70 percent that took the then National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen into the second round in 2002. Pollsters are unclear about what a low or high turnout could mean in 2017.

President Francois Hollande and his predecessor Nicolas Sarkozy have failed through both of the past two five-year presidencies to tackle the high unemployment and sluggish growth.

That issue, and the general trustworthiness of politicians, stands out, polls say,

even though security has re-entered the debate since Thursday's killing of a policeman.

Some argue the incident increases Le Pen's chances; but previous militant attacks, such as the November 2015 killing of 130 people in Paris ahead of regional polls, have not appeared to have any impact on votes.

Earlier on Sunday a polling station in Besancon, eastern France was evacuated after a stolen vehicle was abandoned with the engine running while voting took place.

■ "Cheering madly"?

The possibility of a Le Pen-Melenchon run-off is not the most likely scenario but is one which alarms bankers and investors.

While Macron wants to further beef up the euro zone, Le Pen has told supporters "the EU will die". She wants to return to the Franc, re-denominate the country's debt stock, tax imports and reject interna-

tional treaties.

Melenchon also wants to radically overhaul the European Union and hold a referendum on whether to leave the bloc.

Le Pen or Melenchon would struggle, in parliamentary elections in June, to win a majority to carry out such radical moves, but their growing popularity also worries France's EU partners.

"It is no secret that we will not be cheering madly should Sunday's result produce a second round between Le Pen and Melenchon," German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schauble said.

If either Macron or Fillon were victorious, each would face challenges.

For Macron, a big question would be whether he could win a majority in parliament in June. Fillon, though likely to struggle less to get a majority, would likely be dogged by an embezzlement scandal, in which he denies wrongdoing.

(Source: Reuters)

Saudi king names son as U.S. envoy as ties boosted with Trump

Saudi Arabia's King Salman issued a decree late Saturday naming one of his sons, an air force pilot who has taken part in coalition strikes against ISIL, as the kingdom's new ambassador to the U.S.

The appointment of Prince Khaled bin Salman to Washington signals the kingdom's eagerness to strengthen bilateral ties under President Donald Trump. As the king's son, the prince has a direct line to the Saudi monarch.

Saudi Arabia is the world's third largest defense spender. Prince Khaled's appointment positions him as an influential broker in deals with U.S. manufacturers.

Saudi-U.S. relations had cooled under the Obama administration after Washington pursued a nuclear accord with Iran that the Sunni-ruled kingdom strongly opposed.

Relations with the Riyadh have improved since Trump took office. King Salman dispatched his most powerful son, Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who is also defense minister, to meet Trump at the White House last month. Saudi Arabia was quick to praise Trump's missile strike on a Syrian military base in response to an apparent chemical weapons attack on civilians.

Prince Khaled is a former F-15 pilot who graduated military-aviation training from Columbus Air Force Base in Mississippi in 2009 and took part in anti-ISIL strikes in 2014 as part of the U.S.-led coalition. He also participated in flight missions over Yemen, where the kingdom has been bombing a Yemeni faction for more than two years.

The Saudi-owned Al-Arabiya news website says the prince studied briefly at Harvard University and Georgetown Uni-



versity. The news website says he trained at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada, but that a back injury forced him to stop flying.

He has been an adviser at the Saudi Embassy in Washington since late last year.

U.S. officials say the Trump administration is considering ways to boost military support for the Saudi-led fight against Iran-backed rebels in Yemen. The U.S. already is helping the Saudis with intelligence and logistical support for the bombing campaign in Yemen, and could assist with greater intelligence support to counter Iranian influence there.

Prince Khaled will be replacing Prince Abdullah Al Saud, who served in the post for just 18 months. Though a member of the royal family, Prince Abdullah was not seen as part of the inner Al Saud circle and is not a direct grandson of Saudi Arabia's founder, King Abdulaziz.

Days before being relieved of his post in Washington, Prince Abdullah published an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal calling for continued U.S. resolve to end the conflict in Syria.

He said Saudi Royal Air Force jets operating out of a base in southern Turkey have conducted more than 340 strikes against ISIS targets in Syria since February. (Source: AP)

Furious Afghans call for resignations after Taliban base attack

Afghanistan on Sunday observed a national day of mourning after at least 100 soldiers were killed or wounded in a Taliban attack on a military base, prompting angry calls for ministers and army chiefs to resign.

The exact toll from Friday's assault in the northern province of Balkh remains unclear, with some local officials putting the number of dead as high as 130.

The assault, the deadliest-ever by the Taliban on a military base, underscores their growing strength more than 15 years after they were ousted from power.

Flags flew at half-mast throughout the country and special prayers were said for the dead.

The defense ministry gave a figure of at least 100 soldiers killed or wounded. It ignored media calls for a complete breakdown of casualties following the five-hour attack near the provincial capital of Mazar-i-Sharif.

But local officials including, Mohammad Ibrahim Khairandish the head of the provincial council, put the death toll as high as 130 and said about 60 were wounded.

Ten gunmen dressed in soldiers' uniforms and armed with suicide vests entered the base in army trucks and opened fire at unarmed troops at close range in the base's mosque and dining hall.

Ordinary Afghans vented their anger at the government for its inability to counter a series of brazen Taliban assaults, including a raid on the country's largest military hospital in Kabul in March that left dozens dead.

"Mothers lost their sons, sisters lost



their brothers and wives lost their husbands. What is the government doing to prevent such atrocities, only condemning? I am so tired, I can't do anything but to cry," a user called Zabiullah posted on Facebook.

"The best way to honor them is to fire and punish those who failed to do their jobs and/or cooperated with the enemy. Some leaders must go!" said another user on Twitter.

Many called for the resignation of Defense Minister Abdullah Habibi and the commander of the 209th Corps stationed at the base.

"This was no act of desperation. The Taliban infiltrated an Afghan military base. That's a major sign of strength," tweeted Washington-based analyst Michael Kugelman.

A military source at the base indicated the assault was an insider attack, and the militants were "young recruits who had come for training".

Afghan troops and police, beset by killings and desertions, have been struggling to beat back insurgents since U.S.-led NATO troops ended their combat mission in December 2014.

Afghan security force casualties soared by 35 percent in 2016, with 6,800 soldiers and police killed, according to U.S. watchdog SIGAR. (Source: AFP)

Russia prepared to provide Syria with air defense missile systems

A senior Russian official says Moscow would not hesitate to supply the Damascus government with the air defense missile systems it needs to protect war-ravaged Syria against any future foreign military aggression once a bilateral agreement is struck.

"The necessary quantity [of air defense systems] can be supplied on a priority basis. It will not place an onerous burden on our defense industry," Viktor Ozerov, chairman of the defense committee in the Federation Council, Russia's upper house of parliament, told Sputnik news agency in an exclusive interview on Saturday.

He added, "There is nothing special about such deliveries [if the deal is reached] as Syria is at war with terrorists, and Russia helps it ... fight terror."

The Russian official further noted that the delivery of surface-to-air missile systems to the Syrian government was not in violation of UN Security Council resolutions as they were defensive not offensive in nature.



The remarks came a day after Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said Damascus and Moscow were engaged in negotiations to put into operation more air defense systems inside Syria.

"Damascus has always been interested in the latest generation of military hardware, but that depends

on the accessibility of the systems, Russia's policies of the supplier and prices," he said.

The Syrian president also warned of new allegations of chemical attacks in Syria similar to the claims made following the suspected chemical incident in the town of Khan Shaykhun in Idlib Province on April 4, which reportedly killed over 80 people.

On April 7, the Pentagon said 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles had been fired from two warships in the Mediterranean Sea at Shayrat airfield in Syria's central province of Homs.

U.S. officials claimed that the alleged chemical attack in Khan Shaykhun had been launched from the military site. Syria has vehemently dismissed the allegations of being behind the attack.

Syria's official news agency, SANA, reported that at least nine people had been killed in the early morning strike on the Syrian airfield. (Source: RT)

Syrian troops capture central town after heavy clashes

Syrian state media and an opposition monitoring group say government forces have captured a central town and adjacent villages, boosting security in nearby areas loyal to President Bashar Assad.

The SANA state news agency quoted an unnamed military official as saying Sunday that troops and pro-government fighters captured Halfaya and nearby villages after days of intense clashes.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights says insurgents, including members of the al-Qaeda-linked Fatah al-Sham Front, withdrew from Halfaya and nearby villages as a result of the intensity of the ground attack and scores of airstrikes.

Saturday's capture of Halfaya and nearby areas came after government forces captured the nearby town of Taybet al-Imam on April 17.

Assad's forces lost Halfaya in the summer of 2016.

(Source: AP)

Thousands of protesters rally in UK against Trump policies

Thousands of protesters have taken to the streets across the United Kingdom to join a global protest against U.S. President Donald Trump's policies, which they see as a serious threat to the academic world.



Demonstrators, including scientist and academics, rallied from the Science Museum to Parliament Square in London on Saturday.

The March for Science, is part of a global movement that is aimed at challenging Trump's questioning of climate change and proposed budget cuts to federal science programs.

The rally organizers in the UK said they were concerned that rhetoric about academics threatened to override research.

They said that the rise of misinformation makes it crucial to highlight "the vital role that science plays in each of our lives and the need to respect and encourage research that gives us insight into the world."

"Science and everyday life cannot and should not be separated," said one protester.

The first ever March for Science, which coincided with Earth Day, is also aimed at calling on politicians to protect the environment.

"Climate targets have been missed. Listen to the scientists," the marchers in London chanted.

Trump has not only denied climate change, but also referred to it as a plot targeting the U.S. economy. He argued that global warming was "created by and for the Chinese" to attack American industries.

The main event is due to take place in Washington later on Saturday. (Source: Press TV)

Labor leader Corbyn says could suspend Syria air strikes if elected

The leader of Britain's main opposition Labor Party Jeremy Corbyn said on Sunday he could suspend British involvement in air strikes against Syria if he was elected prime minister at a June 8 election.



The veteran peace campaigner, whose Labor Party is around 20 points behind the ruling Conservatives in opinion polls, set out his position on a range of security and foreign policies, saying he would look again at Britain's nuclear deterrent and was against using nuclear weapons.

His comments were pounced upon by the Conservatives, who said that Corbyn posed a threat to British security and was the best reason "for sticking with the strong leadership of (Prime Minister) Theresa May".

Corbyn told the BBC's Andrew Marr Show that he believed that "the only solution in Syria is going to be a political one".

"I want us to say 'Listen, let's get people around the table quickly' and a way of achieving that - suspending the strikes, possibly".

The leftist leader, whose views on foreign policy have often been at odds with those held by other lawmakers in his party, also said he would have to consider whether he would authorize a drone strike against the leader of Islamic State to limit civilian casualties.

May, who said she had called the early election to shore up support for her divorce plan with the European Union and heal divisions in the country, looks set to win a large majority, with some polls putting support for her party at 50 percent. (Source: Reuters)

NEWS IN BRIEF



Iran to host 13th ICA Regional Summit

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran will host the 13th Regional Summit of Asia-Pacific International Cooperatives Alliance (ICA) in autumn 2018, the Head of Iran Chamber of Cooperatives Bahman Abdollahi announced.

As Mehr news agency reported on Sunday, the 2017 ICA Global Conference will be held in Malaysian capital in autumn.

The ICA is a non-profit international association established in 1895 to advance the co-operative social enterprise model. The Alliance is the apex organization for co-operatives worldwide, representing 284 co-operative federations and organizations across 95 countries. The members of the Alliance are national level co-operative federations, individual co-operative organizations and government offices concerned with co-operatives.



Tehran to host Iran-Europe banking forum in late-April

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The fourth edition of Iran-Europe banking and business forum is due to be held at IRIB international conference center in Tehran on April 29 and 30, Mehr news agency reported.

According to Ali Divandari, the head of Iran's Monetary and Banking Research Institute (MBRI), representatives of more than 35 European banks, companies and financial firms will be attending this event which is mainly focused on "development of banking and financial processes" and "investment opportunities in Iran".

IMF panel adopts G-20 view on trade as Trump considers options

The IMF's steering committee adopted the position on trade taken by the Group of 20 last month in an effort to accommodate Donald Trump's administration, which is considering how far to go in fulfilling the president's campaign pledges to impose tariffs and reshape international accords.

A communique from the International Monetary and Financial Committee, released Saturday in Washington, said that officials "are working to strengthen the contribution of trade to our economies." Such language echoes a statement last month from G-20 nations, which have a similar makeup as the IMF panel, reflecting the Trump administration's call to rethink the global order for commerce.

Like the G-20 communique, the committee's statement omits a call from its previous missive in October to "resist all forms of protectionism." Asked about that change, Agustin Carstens, the Mexican central bank governor who serves as chairman of the IMF committee, said the statement still reflects broader agreement that nations want a level playing field on trade.

"What we try to do in these types of meetings is to strike a positive, constructive balance," Carstens said at a press briefing on Saturday. "And the use of the word protectionism is very ambiguous." The main goal is to take advantage of trade, and "I think everyone is in line that we need free and fair trade," which is reflected in the communique, he said.

It's unclear how far Trump will go in shaking up the workings of the global economy. For example, Trump backed down from a campaign promise to label China a currency manipulator this month, and proposed changes to NAFTA circulated in Congress fall short of his earlier get-tough message.

Since the joint statements at gatherings such as the G-20 and the IMF require assent from members, the change in the U.S. position on trade from the Obama administration is forcing modifications in language that was previously uncontroversial.

Climate change

In addition to the trade stance, the latest communique omits language from October that welcomed "the entry into force of the Paris Agreement on climate change." Trump is contemplating whether to make good on his campaign promise to withdraw from the deal.

IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde, speaking at the same briefing as Carstens, said the statement reflects support for her global policy agenda, which includes a call for countries to "not leave the mounting economic consequences of climate change for future generations."

The IMF panel released the statement during the spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. The IMFC is the IMF's top advisory panel, and is composed of 24 ministers and central bankers from nations including the U.S., China, Germany, Japan and France.

Some positions remained little changed. The IMFC statement reiterated pledges from October to "refrain from competitive devaluations" of currencies and to avoid targeting "our exchange rates for competitive purposes."

Global outlook

The outlook for the world economy is sunnier than six months ago, with the statement saying that the "global economic recovery is gaining momentum, commodity prices have firmed up, and deflation risks are receding." At the same time, "while the outlook is improving, growth is still modest and subject to heightened political and policy uncertainties."

The differences in some countries' positions on protectionism were evident in comments delivered by officials at the IMFC's meeting.

Germany, holder of this year's G-20 presidency, "commits to keep the global economy open, resist protectionism and keep global economic and financial cooperation on track," Finance Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble said in his statement to the IMFC. "There is evidently a need to better communicate the benefits of trade and globalization."

(Source: Bloomberg)

Deal with Total probably finalized within a month: official

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iranian Deputy Oil Minister in International Affairs and Trading Amir Hossein Zamaninia said the deal with Total based on the new oil contracts (known as IPC) will be probably finalized at most within a month, ISNA reported on Sunday.

As the official told ISNA, Total was waiting for feedback from the United States and apparently there has been some positive signs in that regard so Total will con-

tinue negotiations with Iran.

Asked about the exact time of the deal finalization, Zamaninia said it depends on the contract preparation and the two sides' readiness, "It shouldn't take long, at most a month I think," he added.

Earlier in February, Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh had said that the deal with Total will be at most within two months.

According to a Reuters report, Total



plans to make a final investment decision on a \$2 billion gas project in Iran by the summer, but the decision has been halted because "The decision hinges on the renewal of U.S. sanctions waivers," according to Total's Chief Executive Patrick Pouyanne.

Total was the first Western energy company to sign a major deal with Tehran since the lifting of international sanctions against Iran. Its project aims to develop phase 11 of South Pars, which is part of the world's largest gas field.

Iran, EU to broaden agricultural cooperation

ECONOMY TEHRAN — In their first joint meeting with officials of Iranian Agriculture Ministry in Tehran, the visiting members of the European Parliament's Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI) voiced readiness for transferring new technologies and inno-

ventions in agriculture sector to the Islamic country, IRIB news reported on Sunday.

During this meeting, Director General of Directorate-General (DG) for Agriculture and Rural Development in the European Commission Jerzy Bogdan Plewa, expressed his organization's willingness for

assisting Iran with improving its standards of food production with modern technology.

Iranian Deputy Director of Agricultural Planning, Economic and Rural Development Research Institute at the Ministry of Agriculture Ali Kiani presented a report on

capabilities, capacities and plans of the Iranian agriculture sector, which accounts for 6.11 percent of country's GDP.

Iranian officials participating the meeting emphasized on the need to bolster partnership in agricultural, technical, and research fields with the EU.

India tax reform may help accelerate GDP growth above 8%

India's economic expansion is tied to the global economy, but it could grow faster than 8 percent as the nation prepares to implement a national sales tax from July, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said.

The goods and services tax will eliminate multiplicity of taxes and make India a single common market, Jaitley said, addressing G-20 finance ministers and central bank governors in Washington Friday night. India's growth is resilient, he said.

The goods and services tax will replace an archaic web of levies and improve ease of doing business in a

country with more than 1 billion consumers. Proposed over a decade ago and then refined several times to win bipartisan support under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the tax is scheduled to be rolled on July 1.

India's economy may expand 7.2 percent in 2017 and 7.7 percent in 2018, according to the GDP updated forecasts from the April 2017 World Economic Outlook by the International Monetary Fund.

India's medium term growth is poised to rise above 8 percent, Jaitley said, citing the IMF projections.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Germany not worried by U.S. corporate tax reform plans: Schaeuble

German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble is not worried by the prospect of cuts to corporate tax rates in the United States he told German magazine Wirtschaftswoche on the sidelines of the IMF and World Bank spring meetings in Washington.

U.S. President Donald Trump on Friday promised a big announcement about tax reform shortly and ordered a review of Obama-era tax rules written to discourage U.S. companies from relocating overseas to cut their tax bills.

"U.S. corporate tax rates are among the highest in the world," the magazine quoted Schaeuble as saying. "If the

United States lowers its corporate taxes to European or international levels that won't bother me a bit. Just the opposite."

At the same time, Schaeuble said he opposed plans for a systemic change to taxation of companies based on their country of origin and a protectionist border tax favored by U.S. House Speaker Paul Ryan, the magazine reported.

The Trump administration has criticized Germany for its large trade surpluses with the United States, while Germany has said its companies make quality products that customers want to buy.

(Source: Reuters)

China's trade with North Korea targeted by Trump

When North Korean traders give Li Jian long lists of the goods they want to buy, he checks the items against a 236-page Chinese translation of the UN sanctions imposed after Kim Jong Un's regime conducted a fifth nuclear weapons test in September.

"If it's on the sanctions list, we can't provide it," Mr Li said from his office in downtown Dandong, the Chinese border city through which about 70 per cent of Sino-North Korean trade passes. "Even if we did, the goods would be detained at [Chinese] customs."

At the weekend, US President Donald Trump said that the Chinese government could, and should, do more to rein in Mr Kim's nuclear and ballistic missile programs. "China is very much the economic lifeline to North Korea," he wrote in a tweet. "So while nothing is easy, if they want to solve the North Korean problem, they will!"

On the Australian leg of his 10-day re-

gional tour, Mr Trump's vice-president implied that Beijing was already doing more to apply pressure to North Korea. "We are encouraged by the steps that China has taken so far," Mike Pence said on Saturday.

The US and its allies are maintaining the military pressure on Pyongyang as well as urging China to use its trade ties to rein in North Korea's nuclear ambitions. On Sunday, Japan's Maritime Self-Defence Force, its navy, confirmed that two of its destroyers would rendezvous with the US aircraft carrier Carl Vinson for exercises in the western Pacific.

China, however, is ambivalent about the benefits of tighter commercial sanctions. Amid reports of fuel shortages in the North Korean capital Pyongyang, China's foreign ministry refused to comment on Friday as to whether Beijing was applying pressure beyond that prescribed by the UN.

Traders in Dandong also say that it has been business as usual for non-sanctioned products, although sales of some permitted

goods have been affected by apparently tougher economic conditions across the border in North Korea.

Gao Shengye said his Chinese trading company's sales of steel and other products with potential "dual-use" applications (for military and civilian purposes) had been halted by the sanctions. "Trade in autos, rice, beans and cooking oils have also been affected because sometimes they can't pay us," he said.

Late last week, the economic lifeline Mr Trump referred to was on display just outside Mr Li's and Mr Gao's offices in Dandong, which lies on the north bank of the Yalu river.

Dozens of lorries clogged the city centre, awaiting entry to a walled-off Chinese customs facility for final checks before crossing the Friendship Bridge into North Korea. Most of their cargo was hidden in containers or under tarpaulins, although some flatbed trucks made no attempt to conceal loads including steel pipes and industrial

equipment. At a much larger staging area on Dandong's north-west outskirts, hundreds of additional North Korea-bound vehicles waited their turn to continue into the city center and then across the Yalu into North Pyongan province.

Guards prevented visitors from entering the staging area. But many of the trucks were being loaded in the open, revealing the huge range of products — from apples to lumber — that North Korea still imports from China.

"China must do something to show the world that we are actually helping stop North Korea from developing nuclear missiles," said Tian Yuzhou, whose company sells cold storage equipment. "But our business is running OK. North Korean traders still come to us with lists of things they want to buy and we have to help ordinary people in North Korea survive. It's a humanitarian issue." (Source: Financial Times)

Conservatives promise to cap prices in UK energy market

The Conservative party has promised to intervene in the gas and electricity market if it wins a general election in June, capping prices for two-thirds of British households.

Damian Green, former work and pensions secretary, confirmed that price caps would be in the Conservative manifesto, which will be published next month. "Some people feel the energy companies have taken advantage of them," he told the ITV Peston on Sunday program.

Iain Conn, the chief executive of Centrica, Britain's biggest supplier of energy to homes, said the government's plan would "reduce competition and choice, stifle innovation and potentially impact customer service."

Analysts at Bernstein have calculated that in the first year, Centrica's operating profits would take a £332m hit. The company, which owns British Gas, recorded pre-tax profits of £2.2bn for 2016 and increased Mr Conn's pay package by nearly 40 per cent to £4.2m.

Theresa May signalled last autumn at the Conservative party conference in Birmingham that she was prepared to intervene in dysfunctional markets. Mrs May is keen to capture the political center ground by appealing to "ordinary" working families.

"Where companies are exploiting the failures of the market in which they operate, where consumer choice is inhibited by deliberately complex pricing structures, we must set the market right," she said. "It's just not right that two-thirds of energy customers are stuck on the most expensive tariffs."

The intervention will shake the confidence of companies, said Lawrence Slade, chief executive of Energy UK, a lobby group. "Intervention on this scale will additionally create huge uncertainty around government intentions, potentially putting at risk the billions in investment and jobs needed to renew our energy system," he said.

Ed Miliband, the former Labor leader, promised in the



run-up to the last general election in 2015 that he would freeze people's energy bills, to the derision of Conservatives, who panned the idea as "shocking" and a return to 1970s-style interventionism.

Mrs May will pledge to cap bills for the two-thirds of households that are on standard dual fuel variable tariffs, with Ofgem, the energy regulator, setting a maximum price for energy bills in different regions. That follows a cap introduced this month for those on pre-payment meters, who tend to be on low incomes.

The Conservatives said the average family could save more than £100 a year.

Tom Baldwin, a former spokesman for Mr Miliband, pointed out that Labor's similar policy had been depicted in 2015 as "communism" and "a bigger threat to its future than Cameron pledge for a referendum".

But Mr Green insisted that the Tory policy was different to the one proposed by Mr Miliband two years ago.

"The difference is we would have Ofgem setting the limit, it would be a cap, would be more flexible, it would reflect market conditions," he said. "So the market would still have an influence. If the oil price fell again, consumers would benefit in the way that they wouldn't under

Ed Miliband."

Michael Gove, a former Tory cabinet minister, said the action did not amount to "price controls" and said it was right to take action against the energy companies' cartel.

The determination of Tory ministers to take action against energy bills has hardened in recent months after five of the big six energy companies imposed price rises of up to 10 per cent.

Ofgem referred the energy market to the Competition and Market Authority in June 2014. The CMA found that 90 per cent of UK domestic energy customers were disengaged and either unable or unwilling to switch energy providers.

However it rejected calls for a price cap and said it had not found evidence of energy companies using cartel-type behavior to push up prices.

Energy companies have partly blamed green initiatives from the government for the rise in their bills in recent years.

Mr Conn said that British Gas's average dual-fuel bills had risen by just over 3 per cent per annum since 2007, or in total by £273.

"Of this: energy costs have not risen; transmission, distribution and metering cost increases have been about £150; and environmental and social policy costs about £100," he said.

"Our profits have been flat to slightly falling. Increases have been because of the costs of changing the energy system and policy costs, not profiteering from suppliers."

Octopus Energy, a small supplier, said the big six had brought the action upon themselves. "For too long, they've been able to pass the costs of their gross inefficiency on to their customers," said Greg Jackson, founder of Octopus.

(Source: Financial Times)

Iranian oil price hikes 99 cents per barrel in a week

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The price of Iran's light crude oil in the week ending April 14 experienced a \$0.99 increase to reach \$52.42 per barrel, IRNA reported on Sunday.

According to the report, Iran's heavy oil price in the same week experienced a \$1.82 growth per barrel to stand at \$53.1.

Iran sold its heavy crude at \$51.75 on average since the beginning of 2017.

Meanwhile, with \$1.79 rise from its preceding week, Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)'s basket price stood at \$53.38 per barrel in the mentioned week.

According to Reuters, in recent weeks oil prices experienced some rise on talk that OPEC could extend supply cuts.

"Sources within the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries have indicated that its members increasingly favor extended production cuts but want the backing of non-OPEC oil producers, such as Russia, which have yet to deliver fully on existing reductions," Reuters said.

Earlier this month, Shana reported that the price for Iranian oil witnessed an almost \$12 rise in the first half of the first Iranian calendar month Farvardin (March 21-April 4) compared to the same period last year.



China March fuel exports soar as LNG imports jump

China's gasoline, diesel and kerosene exports jumped in March as refiners continued to turn to foreign markets to sell their excess product, while liquefied natural gas imports jumped 18 percent to 1.99 million tons, customs data showed on Sunday.



Gasoline exports rose 25 percent in March compared with the same month a year earlier to 840,000 tons, while diesel exports jumped 53 percent to 1.91 million tons, data from the Chinese cus-

tom's authority showed.

Kerosene shipments abroad were up 21.4 percent at 1.25 million tons.

China became a net exporter of fuel products in late 2016. (Source: Reuters)

Backstone buys into Permian for \$2 billion

EagleClaw Midstream Ventures, LLC and its financial sponsor, EnCap Flatrock Midstream, have entered into a binding agreement to sell the company to funds managed by Blackstone Energy Partners and Blackstone Capital Partners for approximately \$2 billion.

The all-cash transaction is expected to close by the end of July 2017 and includes approximately \$1.25 billion in stapled debt financing provided by Jefferies LLC.

EagleClaw is the largest privately held midstream operator in the Permian's Delaware Basin. The company's assets are located in Reeves, Ward and Culberson counties, with processing facilities located primarily in Reeves County, Texas. (Source: Bloomberg)

Solar Technologies gaining traction in oil-rich Qatar

At the end of March, Qatar Solar Technologies – a joint venture (JV) between Qatar Solar (a subsidiary of Qatar Foundation), Germany's SolarWorld AG and Qatar Development Bank – announced that the first poly-silicon had been produced at its new production plant in Ras Laffan Industrial City, 80 km north of Doha. Poly-silicon is a high-purity form of silicon and a key component in a range of solar photovoltaic (PV) technologies.

The factory, which is currently in the final stages of being commissioned, will have an annual production capacity of 8000 tons and is expected to start exporting later this year.

Speaking to OBG, Khalid Klefeekh Al Hajri, chairman and CEO of QSTec, said that the plant's poly-silicon would initially be for export to meet global demand for high-purity, Tier 1 poly-silicon. (Source: oilprice.com)

Bankers' fading fear of oil lending is latest boon for shale

Wall Street banks' growing optimism about the energy industry is the latest boost for U.S. oil and natural gas producers already enjoying higher prices.

JPMorgan Chase & Co., Wells Fargo & Co. and Citigroup Inc. said in their first-quarter earnings results that rising oil prices have helped them free a combined \$370 million they previously set aside to cover bad loans.

If the optimism turns into an increase in lending, it would be a boon to shale firms from Texas to North Dakota that rely on borrowed money to finance their drilling and fracking. That could further accelerate U.S. oil production, which is already expected to rise above 10 million barrels a day for

the first time in late 2018, and put more pressure on OPEC's efforts to restrain supply.

"Cautious optimism is the theme," said Kraig Grahmann, a partner at Dallas-based law firm Haynes & Boone. "Banks will still be a lot more prudent and conservative than they were when the price drop happened."

The spigots are starting to open. In the first quarter, U.S. energy companies raised \$26.8 billion in so-called leveraged loans — loans that are extended to those already holding significant amounts of debt — up roughly 86 percent from the same period last year, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

Companies are already looking to spend more. According to a Haynes & Boone April 4 survey that questioned 163 executives at oil companies, banks and private equity firms, 76 percent of respondents said they expect credit lines to stay steady or grow, and 89 percent predicted U.S. shale drillers will spend more in 2017.

"With low cost of capital loans, there will be more programs for oil producers that will get them the desired rate of return," Grahmann said. "Companies will be able to drill more oil and gas wells, which will increase production and thus increase U.S. supply."

Last year, U.S. lenders reduced credit to the U.S. energy sector after crude dropped near \$26 a barrel, sparking fear that indebted shale producers would default. With prices double that level now, the worries about bad loans have eased.

"If oil stays where it is for the next 12 months, there is not a big concern for credit quality," Spencer Cutter, a U.S. Credit Bloomberg Intelligence Analyst. "[But] big banks will be more selective when choosing who to extend loans and will increase lending to better producers." (Source: Bloomberg)

پنجم و ششم اردیبهشت ماه ۱۳۹۶ • ایران، مشهد الرضا (ع.ه.) پایتخت فرهنگی جهان اسلام

The first Summit of Mayors of the Islamic World April 25-26, 2017
Mashhad, Cultural Capital of the Islamic World

Second Announcement

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National Iranian Drilling Company

Public Calls For Quality Evaluating Of Tender (First Publish/Second Publish)
Two-Stage (Semi-compressed)

TENDER GUARANTEE		ESTIMATED VALUE (Rial)	DESCRIPTION	Tenders Portal Reg. No.	TENDER NO. / INDENT NO	No
Euro	Rial					
80,915	2,832,000,000	81,569,520,000	DRILL PIPE	1,482,704	TenderNo.:FP/17-96/003 Indent No.:48-22-9422018	1
149,200	5,222,000,000	201,060,000,000	DRILL PIPES	1,482,707	TenderNo.: FP/17-96/004 Indent No.: 48-22-9422020	2
157,155	5,579,000,000	218,916,000,000	DRILL PIPES	1,482,712	TenderNo.: FP/17-96/005 Indent No.: 48-22-9422021	3
99,530	3,533,000,000	116,640,000,000	DRILL PIPES	1,482,714	TenderNo.: FP/17-96/006 Indent No.: 48-22-9422023	4

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

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

B) Preparation of tender documents:
Purchasing of documents:
In order to receive the tender documents, 510,000 Rials should be paid to SIBA account number 2174652205004 of NIDC in Bank Meli Iran and providing the original deposit receipt.
Receiving of documents:
Tenderers must be obtain the quality evaluation documents along with tender documents maximum one week after the date of second publication in person at the following address: Hall No.:113, 1th floor, Foreign Procurement Dept., National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN
Notice: Only the real or legal persons who apply to purchase and receive tender documents from foreign procurement department in due date will be known as tenderer from tender committee.

C) Delivery of call quality evaluating:
Tenderers shall submit the completed documents including qualification worksheets in form of software in CD and documentary within 14 days from last day of document received deadline to the following address: Hall No.:107, 1th floor, Tender Committee, Building operations, National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN.

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

More on this & other tenders is accessible by click on WWW.NIDC.IR
Foreign Procurement Dept. (DRILLING PROJECTS)
National Iranian Drilling Company

Palestinian prisoners' protest in Israel is a rallying call to the international community

Last Monday saw the launch of a mass hunger strike by Palestinian prisoners held by Israel, one of the largest in recent years. Israeli authorities are on edge, not just because of the sheer scale of the strike – which began with some 1,500 prisoners and is expected to rise considerably – but because its ramifications go well beyond prison walls.

Solidarity protests have been held throughout the occupied territories, and there have been clashes with Israeli forces trying to quell the demonstrations. The strike, launched to coincide with the annual Palestinian Prisoners Day, has been galvanized by three factors.

Firstly, it is being led by Marwan Barghout, the elected MP and hugely popular figure who is serving five life sentences. Secondly, despite a woefully divided Palestinian polity, it has received support from across the political spectrum, which is itself represented by the hunger-strikers.

■ The Balfour Declaration

The third factor is its timing, taking place in the run up to the 50th anniversary of Israel's occupation, the 10th anniversary of the Gaza blockade and the centenary of the Balfour Declaration, in which Britain pledged to facilitate "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people."

These factors will add considerably to Palestinian passions over a national issue that strikes a unifying chord. Since Israel's occupation began in 1967, more than 750,000 Palestinians – men, women and even children – have been imprisoned. Every Palestinian family under occupation has been affected. Approximately 20 per cent of the Palestinian population in the occupied territories "has, at one point, been arbitrarily detained or imprisoned by Israel", according to the Negotiations Affairs Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization. This represents "the highest rate of incarceration in the world".

Israeli security minister Gilad Erdan has held meetings with security officials from the prison service, the military and the Shin Bet internal security service. This indicates the level of Israeli concern over the hunger strike.

But on its own, it is unlikely to have significant implications for the Palestinian liberation struggle because the prisoners' demands are not national. They are focused on the conditions of their imprisonment, with demands including access to phones, extended visiting rights, better medical service and an end to the policies of administrative detention and solitary confinement.

Even though the demands are issue-specific, Israel has already reacted with characteristic intransigence, refusing to negotiate, putting Barghout and other hunger-strikers in solitary confinement, separating prisoners, and confiscating clothes and personal belongings. Erdan has described the demands as "unreasonable", adding: "I have instructed the prison service to act in any way to contain the strike within the walls of the prisons and the Israel police to prepare and provide any help needed to the prison service for any scenario that is likely to develop." Intervention units have reportedly been put on standby.

Israeli authorities at times agreed to certain demands during past hunger strikes when a prisoner was close to death – not out of compassion, but to avoid a popular backlash among Palestinians and international condemnation.

■ The force-feeding

This would result in the prisoner in question being hailed a hero and victor. That led to Israel's Knesset (parliament) passing a law in July 2015 that formally legalizes the force-feeding of Palestinian prisoners on hunger strike.

The law is a message to prisoners that "hunger-striking is not a way out of prison or a way to fulfil any goals", said Yoel Hadar, legal adviser for the public security ministry. This despite two UN special rapporteurs stating days before the law was passed that force-feeding a hunger-striker is "tantamount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment", and that "under no circumstance" does it "comply with human rights standards".

As such, Israeli authorities will feel less encumbered this time to make concessions to hunger-strikers because force-feeding will be used if necessary to avert possible death. Furthermore, sick prisoners will not be taken to civilian hospitals, meaning that Israeli authorities can limit media access to the hunger-strikers and avoid shocking photos of their poor health or treatment, which would no doubt go viral online.

To maximize the effectiveness of the current hunger strike, and to give it national and even international resonance, there must be a concerted domestic and global campaign to highlight the fact that all Palestinians in the occupied territories are in effect prisoners. This is due to the myriad ways in which their movement is curtailed within and beyond their own homeland, in violation of international law. A UN report in December said such restrictions on Palestinian movement had increased in 2016.

The starkest example is the Gaza Strip, whose 2 million Palestinians have been under a tight blockade by air, sea and land for a decade.

Even some of Israel's allies, such as former British Prime Minister David Cameron, have described Gaza as an "open-air prison".

If the occupied territories are a large open-air prison, the Knesset's passing of a law in March denying entry to foreign nationals who have publicly called for a boycott of Israel and/or settlements, or who belong to an organization that has called for a boycott, is a means of denying visitation rights.

Activists have already been barred under this law, as are diaspora Palestinians such as myself.

Launching a national and international campaign of this kind this year will be particularly effective given the three aforementioned anniversaries. It would also go against the unfortunate, dangerous and increasingly common tendency to split the Palestinian cause into issues to be dealt with piecemeal, rather than seeing and treating it as a singular struggle.

In a year of such huge significance to the Palestinian people, the international community must be made aware that they are all prisoners, captives to the longest military occupation in modern history. The world must realize that whether they are behind bars, checkpoints or barriers, their fundamental right to live in freedom and dignity has been denied for far too long.

(Source: The National)

100 days of failure for Trump?

President Donald Trump doesn't care what the experts have to say. "No matter how much I accomplish during the ridiculous standard of the first 100 days, & it has been a lot (including S.C.), media will kill!" he tweeted.

While his critique of the concept of the first 100 days might be fair, it is hard to look at how Trump has performed in the first months in office and not conclude that he and the Republicans face a serious problem.

He doesn't have any major legislation to speak of. The only significant bill he attempted to move through Congress, the repeal and replacement of Obamacare, collapsed under the weight of conservative opposition. He's attempting to revive it, but chances are dubious. His travel ban executive orders stalled twice in the courts.

On foreign policy, he has flipped and flopped without any major diplomatic or military breakthroughs. He has stimulated an energized opposition movement that has caused Republican legislators attending their own town halls to think twice about supporting anything that he says.

Just maybe, however, the failures of these months are not as devastating as some might think.

The first 100 days is a construct, an artificial period of time that doesn't have any intrinsic meaning but is routinely used to grade presidents.

There have been presidents such as Barack Obama (on health care) and George W. Bush (counterterrorism programs) who have done big things after the 100 days are over.

Richard Nixon went to China in 1972, a visit that defines his presidency in some ways. There have also been presidents such as Jimmy Carter who earned high marks for accomplishments during the 100 days only to struggle for the remainder of their presidency. If Trump and the Republican Congress are able to move legislation in the coming months, the failure won't be that important in defining his legacy.

■ Normalizing the presidency?

And notably, the normalization of a presidency that seemed so tenuous in January is an accomplishment in itself for Trump. With many observers wondering if he would be able to handle the day-to-day challenges that come with the job and whether he would last for very long with his twitter-storms and tirades, it is worth noting that as we enter into the summer most of the discussion now centers on what comes next with his policy agenda. What will he do with North Korea? How will he handle relations with China? Can he move forward with tax reform or an infrastructure package? The shift in discussion has been a remarkable turn of events for this controversial former reality television show star. All the talk about the conflict of interest with his family business and new political business has generally subsided.



It is easier for the President to shift the national agenda to new issues and confuse public understanding of what is going on.

We are now back in the realm of learning about behind-the-scenes power struggles, the normal grist of presidential politics.

One of the measures that matters to him, and to many of his Republican supporters, is how the economy is doing. They will find relief from the fact that the stock market remains strong and the major economic indicators continue to move in the right direction. That might be the work of President Barack Obama, but Trump can easily point to it as proof the nation is strong.

■ Trump's agenda

The administration has been able to destabilize the standing of the media. Trump's incessant attacks on news organizations as "fake" and his ability to flood the country with misleading or false statements via Twitter and his advisers have made it more difficult for Americans to tell the difference between fact or fiction.

He has built on trends that have been gathering strength over decades, such as the increasingly partisan news and distrust in the media, to undermine confidence in what people hear from established sources. In this kind of atmosphere, it is easier for the President to shift the national agenda to new issues and confuse public understanding of what is going on. Reporters are having

difficulty serving as "watchdogs" when more people don't believe what they are saying.

Executive power, though not as long-lasting as legislation, has served as a potent tool in Trump's arsenal. At the same time he has shown almost no interest in working on legislation or even engaging members of Congress, he has tapped into his CEO instincts by using executive orders with increasing ferocity.

While the ban on refugees stalled in the courts, other measures such as accelerated deportations and deregulations of energy markets have moved forward at a Rooseveltian pace. He has staffed many key agencies with top opponents of the programs they now run. Senate Democrats were unable to stop the confirmations.

The measures will have a big effect on the lives and industries being regulated, while his appeals to the mainstream Republican Party -- at the same time he drops his populist facade -- will shore up his support with Republicans.

The confirmation of Neil Gorsuch for the Supreme Court was a major success for a President who has been promising since day one he would deliver a more rightward court. Though Democrats have been competitive in some of the special elections that have taken place,

at least thus far they have not been victorious, suggesting that some of the anticipated electoral gains might be more limited.

According to CNN, Trump has also been raising tens of millions of dollars for a re-election bid in 2020, including 7.1 million for the Donald J. Trump for President Inc. This means he can easily command a formidable war chest going into the primaries that would scare off any Republican challengers and create immense pressures on a Democratic opponent. The numbers should not be taken lightly.

Still Trump can't be boasting about what's happened since January. In the list of presidential 100 days, his will be low on the list. If he wants to be part of the pantheon of productive presidents, there is no way to make that case convincingly.

His opponents though shouldn't be so confident either since a closer look at what's happened since inauguration suggests this President might be in much better shape than they think, with a lot of time still left on his political clock. For those who initially asked if impeachment or resignation would happen soon, they might start thinking about what the odds are for a second term.

(Source: CNN)

Prosecuting WikiLeaks: Don't do it

The freedom to embarrass the powerful, even in a bad cause, is vital to journalism and to a free society

"I love WikiLeaks," President Donald Trump last year told an adoring crowd on the campaign trail. At around the same time, one of his supporters, Representative Mike Pompeo, tweeted triumphantly that emails from the Democratic National Committee provided "further proof ... the fix was in from President Obama on down". To give his lies authority, he added: "Leaked by WikiLeaks." Those cloudy and insubstantial allegations have been widely credited with helping Trump win his election, but times are different now. Pompeo is director of the CIA and has denounced WikiLeaks as "a non-state, hostile intelligence service often abetted by state actors".

This would be just another example of the shameless dishonesty of the Trump administration, if there were not credible reports that the U.S.

■ Champion of liberty

Department of Justice is considering an attempt to prosecute WikiLeaks' founder, Julian Assange. This would threaten one of the core freedoms of the press. Assange is in many ways an unattractive champion of liberty. But he is right to claim that at least sometimes his organization serves a journalistic function and should be protected in the U.S. by the first amendment. Some of the documents that WikiLeaks has published, and that other media organizations, including the Guardian, have also used, were obtained by means that may have been illegal. But there is a longstanding principle that this does not in itself make their publication illegal. If we, as journalists, had to rely solely on public-spirited and scrupulously honest sources, some very important stories would be missed. Key stories that hold the powerful to account in a democracy would no longer be heard. The defense of a free press is that it doesn't necessarily make its participants virtuous, but it harnesses some of their vices to the public good. The dumping of unreacted documents, as WikiLeaks did with the Turkish ruling party's internal



emails, is wrong, and so is the apparent refusal to offend powerful patrons. Nonetheless offending or embarrassing the wealthy and the influential – even if they are your friends – is an important function of journalism. It is also constitutionally protected in the US.

If Assange is charged with conspiracy or espionage under the new administration, it would set an alarming precedent. Many news organizations now advertise ways in which whistleblowers can contact them anonymously and safely. Are we then to be charged with conspiracy when a whistleblower takes us at our word? That kind of abuse of the law would cripple the protections

necessary for a free press to function. The grounds for optimism lie more in the Trump administration's difficulties with reality than with its principles. Assange is not an American citizen. He is protected both in England and in Sweden from extradition on political grounds. The European convention on human rights protects him from extradition anywhere he might face the death penalty. Back in 2010, when savagery was to his advantage, Trump demanded the death penalty for Assange. The law of civilized countries protects us all against the whims of would-be tyrants.

(Source: The Guardian)

Trump, a symptom of what?

A radical message from a half-century ago

By Ira Chernus

Part two
“The Long and Bitter But Beautiful Struggle for a New World”

What's the remedy for this malady, now as lethally obvious at home as it once was in Vietnam?

“The end of domination [is] the only truly revolutionary exigency,” Marcuse wrote.

True freedom, he thought, means freeing humanity from the hierarchical system that locks us into the daily struggle to earn a living by selling our labor. Freedom means liberating our consciousness to search for our own goals and being able to pursue them freely. In Martin Luther King's words, freedom is “the opportunity to fulfill my total capacity untrammelled by any artificial barrier.”

How to put an end not only to America's war in Vietnam, but to a whole culture built on domination? King's answer on that April 4th was deceptively simple:

“Love is somehow the key that unlocks the door... The first hope in our inventory must be the hope that love is going to have the last word.”

The simplicity in that statement was deceptive because love is itself such a complicated word. King often explained that the Greeks had three words for love: eros (aesthetic or romantic love), philia (friendship), and agape (self-sacrificing devotion to others). He left no doubt that he considered agape far superior to the other two.

The emerging counterculture of those years certainly agreed with him on the centrality of love to human liberation. After all, it was “the love generation.” But its mantra — “If it feels good, do it” — made King's rejection of eros in the name of self-negating agape a non-starter for them.

King, however, offered another view of love, which was far more congenial to the counterculture. Love unites whatever is separated, he preached. This is the kind of love that God uses in his work. We, in turn, are always called upon to imitate God and so to transform our society into what King called a “beloved community.”

Though few people at the time made the connection, King's Christian understanding of love was strikingly similar to Marcuse's secular view of erotic love. Marcuse saw eros as the fulfillment of desire. He also saw it as anything but selfish, since it flows from what Freud called the id, which always wants to abolish ego boundaries and recover that sense of oneness with everything we all had as infants.

When we experience anyone or anything erotically, we feel that we are inherently interconnected, “tied together in a single garment of destiny,” as King so eloquently put it. When boundaries and separation dissolve,



What's the remedy for this malady, now as lethally obvious at home as it once was in Vietnam? How to put an end not only to America's war in Vietnam, but to a whole culture built on domination?

there can be no question of hierarchy or domination.

Every moment that hints at such unification brings us pleasure. In a revolutionary society that eschews structures of domination for the ideal of unification, all policies are geared toward creating more moments of unity and pleasure.

Think of this as the deep-thought revolution of the Sixties: radically transformed minds would create a radically transformed society. Revolutionaries of that time were, in fact, trying to wage the very utopian struggle that King summoned all Americans to in his April 4th speech, “the long and bitter but beautiful struggle for a new world.”

■ **50 years later: the thread that binds**

At this very moment 50 years ago, a movement resisting a brutal war of domination in a distant land was giving birth to a movement calling for the creation of a new consciousness to heal our ailing society. Will the resistance movement of 2017 head in a similar direction?

At first glance, it seems unlikely. After all, ever since the Vietnam War ended, progressives have had a tendency to focus on single issues of injustice or laundry lists of problems. They have rarely imagined the American system as anything more than a collection of wrong-headed policies and wrong-headed politicians. In addition, after years of resisting the right wing as it won victory after victory, and of watching the Democrats morph into a neoliberal crew and then into a failing par-

ty with its own dreary laundry lists of issues and personalities, the capacity to hope for fundamental change may have gone the way of Herbert Marcuse and Martin Luther King.

Still, for those looking hard, a thread of hope exists. Today's marches, rallies, and town halls are packed with veterans of the Sixties who can remember, if we try, what it felt like to believe we were fighting not only to stop a war but to start a revolution in con-



sciousness. No question about it, we made plenty of mistakes back then. Now, with so much more experience (however grim) in our memory banks, perhaps we might develop more flexible strategies and a certain faith in taking a more patient, long-term approach to organizing for change.

Don't forget as well that, whatever our failings and the failings of other past movements, we also have a deep foundation of victories (along with defeats) to build on. No, there was no full-scale revolution in our society — no surprise there. But in so many facets of our world, advances happened nonetheless. Think of how, in those 50 years just past, views on diversity, social equality, the environment, healthcare, and so many other issues, which once existed only on the fringes of our world, have become thoroughly mainstream. Taken as a whole, they represent a partial but still profound and significant set of changes in American consciousness.

Of course, the Sixties not only can't be resurrected, but shouldn't be. (After all, it should never be forgotten that what they led to wasn't a dreamed of new society but the “Reagan revolution,” as the arc of justice took the first of its many grim twists and turns.) At best, the Sixties critique of the system would have to be updated to include many new

developments.

Even the methods of those Sixties radicals would need major revisions, given that our world, especially of communication, now relies so heavily on blindingly fast changes in technology. But every time we log onto the Internet and browse the web, it should remind us that — shades of the past — across this embattled Earth of ours, we're all tied together in a single worldwide web of relations and of destiny. It's either going to be one for all and all for one, or it's going to be none for 7.4 billion on a planet heading for hell.

Today is different, too, because our movement was not born out of protest against an odious policy, but against an odious mindset embodied in a deplorable person who nonetheless managed to take the Oval Office. He's so obviously a symptom of something larger and deeper that perhaps the protesters of this generation will grasp more quickly than the radicals of the Vietnam era that America's underlying disease is a destructive mode of consciousness (and not just a bad comb-over).

The move from resisting individual policies to transforming American consciousness may already have begun in small ways. After all, “love trumps hate” has become the most common slogan of the progressive movement. And the word love is being heard in hard-edged political discourse, not only on the left, but among mainstream political voices like Van Jones and Cory Booker. Once again, there is even talk of “revolutionary love.”

Of course, the specific policies of the Republicans and this president (including his developing war policies) must be resisted and the bleeding of the immediate mo-

ment staunch. Yet the urgent question of the late 1960s remains: What can be done when there are so many fronts on which to struggle and the entire system demands constant vigilant attention? In the age of a president who regularly sucks all the air out of the room, how do we even talk about all of this without being overwhelmed?

In many ways, the current wave of regressive change and increasing chaos in Washington should be treated as a caricature of the system that we all have been living under for so long. Turn to that broader dimension and the quest for a new consciousness may prove the thread that, though hardly noticed, already ties together the many facets of the developing resistance movement.

The largest mobilization for progressive politics since the Vietnam era offers a unique opportunity to go beyond simply treating symptoms and start offering cures for the underlying illness. If this opportunity is missed, versions of the same symptoms are likely to recur, while unpredictable new ones will undoubtedly emerge for the next 50 years, and as Martin Luther King predicted, we will go on marching without end. Surely we deserve a better future and a better fate. (Source: Common Dreams)



The move from resisting individual policies to transforming American consciousness may already have begun in small ways. After all, “love trumps hate” has become the most common slogan of the progressive movement.

Details of Israeli air strike on Syria's Quneitra

By Sophie Mangal

The details of the Israeli Air Force attack on the position of the Syrian Arab army (SAA) in the in Quneitra Governorate have been disclosed.

As it turned out, Israeli aviation attacked the Syrian gov-



ernment troops with unmanned aerial vehicles. The soldiers of SAAs 90th Infantry Brigade were under fire.

The Israeli Air Force planes struck a missile attack at the positions of the Syrian army in the Khan Arnabeh district of Quneitra Governorate. It was also reported earlier the blow was carried out to the east of the village of Ein Ayshaa.

Two missiles were fired at 06.45 p.m. when government forces were repulsing Al-Qaeda's attacks in the vicinity of the city of Quneitra.

The incident led to heavy losses of equipment and material in the Syrian Arab army.

There are reports that Al-Qaeda terrorists infiltrated Quneitra from the Golan Heights occupied by Israel with the aim to strengthen the front in Madinat al-Ba'ath.

Apparently, Israel had prepared and launched a missile strike in order to provide artillery support to Al-Qaeda terrorists. The Israeli drones recorded in the province of Quneitra make it possible to conclude that Al-Qaeda is

provided with reconnaissance information from the battlefields with Israel help too.



The remnants of an Israeli missile that hit SAA Golan regiment's tank.

U.S. Def. Sec. targets Syria with chemical weapons allegations

By Bill Van Auken

Speaking on a visit to Israel on Friday, US Defense Secretary James “Mad Dog” Mattis charged that the Syrian government has violated an agreement brokered by Moscow in 2013 by holding onto chemical weapons.

“The bottom line is there can be no doubt in the international community's mind that Syria has retained chemical weapons in violation of its agreement and its statement that it had removed them all,” Mattis said during a press conference standing alongside his Israeli counterpart, the extreme right-wing Zionist Avigdor Lieberman.

Mattis refused to provide any estimate of what quantity of chemical weapons he believes are in Syrian hands, claiming that it would compromise intelligence sources. He charged, however, that Damascus was in violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions and warned that it would be “ill-advised to use any again. We've made that very clear with our first strike.”

The US defense secretary's accusations come just two weeks after American warships rained 59 cruise missiles on the Syria's Shayrat air base, killing 15 people, the majority of them civilians.

The April 7 strike was launched in supposed retaliation for a chemical weapons incident in the village of Khan Sheikhun in Syria's Idlib province that reportedly killed scores of people. Within hours of the first reports of the incident—relayed to the West by Western-funded “media activists” linked to the Syrian Al Qaeda affiliate that controls the area—Washington and its allies pinned the blame on government of President Bashar al-Assad.

Since then, the US and its allies have provided no substantive evidence that the Syrian government launched the attack, which served no rational motive, given the militarily inconsequential nature of the target and the inevitability that it would serve as a pretext for Western retaliation. Since then, the US has systematically blocked demands by Syria and its two principal allies, Russia and Iran, for an objective investigation of the alleged chemical attack by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov Friday condemned the US and its allies for blocking a resolution on the OPCW executive council to send a fact-finding mission “to establish whether chemical weapons were used in Khan Sheikhun and how they were delivered to the site of the reported incident.”

Syria's President Assad also denounced the US and its allies for blocking any impartial investigation of the Idlib chemical incident.

“We formally sent a letter to the United Nations, we asked them in that letter to send a delegation in order to investigate what happened in Khan Shaykhun,” the Syrian told the Russian news agency Sputnik. “However, until this moment they didn't send any group since the West and the United States blocked any delegation from coming because if they come, they will find out that their narrative about what happened in Khan Shaykhun... was a false flag and a lie.”

It is apparent that the US and the other Western powers backing regime change in Syria fear what such a mission would uncover. One US authority on missile attacks, the MIT physicist and national security consultant Theodore Postol, has issued a report that establishes, based on evidence provided by Washington, that the chemical weapon was not delivered by a missile fired from the air, but rather set off by an improvised explosive device on the ground, meaning it was almost certainly the work of those who control the area, the “rebel” forces tied to Al Qaeda.

Like the allegations over this staged chemical weapons attack, Mattis' charge that Syria has kept its chemical weapons is totally unsubstantiated and designed to provide the pretext for further US military aggression.

The chemical disarmament of Syria was carried out under a deal brokered by Moscow in 2013 when the Obama administration backed down from a threat to launch airstrikes against Syria over another alleged chemical weapons incident in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta. That incident was also exposed as a deliberate provocation staged by Turkish intelligence in league with Islamist “rebels” for the express purpose of provoking a US attack. The US participated directly in the destruction of Syria's chemical stockpiles, and the OPCW certified that all of the country's chemical weapons had been destroyed in January 2016.

Mattis' allegations against Syria came just a day after President Donald Trump charged Iran with failing to live up to the “spirit of the agreement” negotiated between Tehran and the major powers over Iran's nuclear power. On Tuesday, the US State Department certified that Iran was in full compliance with the agreement, but indicated that the administration was conducting full review of its sanctions regime to determine whether its waiver of sanctions under the terms of the deal remained “vital to the national security interests of the United States.” US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson followed up on Wednesday with a bellicose denunciation of Iran and the clear indication that Washington was prepared abrogate the deal and escalate military confrontation.

Mattis' Middle East tour has essentially consisted of a consultation with an axis of regional enemies of Iran, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Israel.

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu Friday praised what he termed:

“a great change in the direction of American strategy” which he said had been “made clear by Mattis' clear and forthright words ... and very forthright deeds against the use of chemical weapons by Iran's proxy, Syria.”

He said Israel welcomed the “strategic change of American leadership and American policy.” The Netanyahu government viewed the Obama administration as insufficiently supportive, even as it raised the annual military aid from Washington to some \$3.8 billion.

The main bone of contention was the Iran nuclear deal, which the Israeli government, the region's sole nuclear power, bitterly opposed. Now, with the Trump administration's escalating campaign of worldwide militarism and its bellicose denunciations of Tehran, the Israeli government is clearly hoping that it can scuttle the nuclear agreement and ratchet up military provocations against Iran, seen by both Tel Aviv and Washington as the principal rival for regional hegemony.

In the same statement charging Syria with keeping chemical weapons, Mattis also said that the Syrian army had “dispersed their aircraft in recent days.” US intelligence officials have reported that Damascus has redeployed its warplanes to Russia's Hmeimim airbase near Latakia on the Syrian coast in order to intermingle them with Russian planes. Another US strike against them would inevitably mean hitting Russian personnel, raising the threat of a military confrontation between the world's two major nuclear powers.

(Source: WSWS)

With unexpected crackle and snap, Theresa May becomes Theresa will

Moving boldly to enforce Brexit, she could become a new iron lady

By Suzanne Fields

Prime Minister Theresa May is giving herself a new identity. Suddenly she's no longer "Theresa Maybe," showing her mettle by moving toward Margaret Thatcher's politics of the bold and unexpected. She still has a way to go to transform that mettle into the steel of the Iron Lady, but she may be on her way.

Britain's feminists did not embrace Mrs. Thatcher as their own. They complained that when she smashed the glass ceiling she pulled the ladder up behind her, with no helping hand to younger women yearning to try out a pair of her no-nonsense shoes. But Theresa May, who got to be prime minister without an election when David Cameron stepped down after losing the Brexit vote, is about to become her own man, so to speak, in the snap election she called for June 8.

"May in June," the London tabloids cried.

She and the Conservative Party are heavily favored to win; some polls give her a lead of 30 points over Jeremy Corbyn and the Labor Party. Such remarkable numbers are likely unsustainable because "it's a long, long time from May to June," to paraphrase an old song, but barring a collapse the land seems likely to slide beneath her critics. No one's calling her Theresa the Timid.

Her new power and authority is traced to several sources, and comes from many directions. Foremost is her willingness to change her mind. Maybe that's "just like a woman," as an unkind critic might say, but maybe it's a reflection of a confident leader. Only a month ago Mrs. May said there would be no early election that she would serve until the end of David Cameron's five-year term in 2020. The law establishes the fixed term of five years, but the parliamentary system enables a prime minister with an uncomfortable



majority to change the law easily.

When the polls showed a strong likelihood of expanding her small majority of 17, she moved quickly after a weekend walk with her husband in the woods in Wales.

Critics, including Nicola Sturgeon, leader of the Scottish National Party, accused her of putting party above country, but she brushed it aside as standard political rhetoric. She regards the Brexit vote taking Britain out of Europe, which she initially opposed, as the will of the people, and if she takes a mandate from a smashing election victory to the negotiations with the European Union she thinks she will get

a better deal for Britain.

■ No turning back

"Britain is leaving the European Union and there can be no turning back," she says. "And as we look to the future, the government has the right plan for negotiating our new relationship with Europe."

Her splintered opposition doesn't quite see it that way and threatens to divide if not conquer. She knows she can't afford to negotiate without a strengthened mandate.

The Labor opposition threatens to vote against the

deal, the Liberal Democrats threaten to gum up the works of government in whatever way a spirited third party can, the Scottish National Party threatens to mount a second referendum on Scottish independence, and the House of (unelected) Lords, with its opposition to leaving Europe still intact, threatens to continue a dissonant voice against her.

Mrs. May called the assorted threats "game-playing," all to promote "division and disunity." The game-players underestimated her. Brexit continues to divide Britain, so she now offers the public something simpler, a new and clear choice: "It will be a choice between strong and stable leadership in the national interest, with me as your prime minister, or weak and unstable coalition government, led by Jeremy Corbyn, propped up by the Liberal Democrats, who want to reopen the divisions of the referendum." That put the games in check, if not quite checkmate.

If she wins with the expected large majority Mrs. May will take a strong hand to Brussels, further frightening the bureaucrats of the EU who have established themselves as the masters of the continent. Donald Tusk, the president of the European Council, frets that Brexit is encouraging "Frexit," pushing France toward an exit from the EU. Who knows where that might lead. He compares the muddle to the plot of an Alfred Hitchcock movie: "First an earthquake, and the tension rises."

Mrs. May summoned courage and a cool head after her walk in the woods, risking three sure years to reach for five. "Fortune favors the fair," writes John O'Sullivan, the English pundit, "but there are no guarantees." This does not seem to frighten a prime minister who only yesterday was called Theresa the Cautious. Her call for a snap election is the earthquake shaking up a continent. She might be an iron lady in the making.

(Source: The Washington Times)

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7 signs you may have a vitamin D deficiency

By Dr. Mercola

Vitamin D deficiency is incredibly common in the US, but many Americans mistakenly believe they aren't at risk because they consume vitamin-D-fortified foods (such as milk).

There are very few foods that actually have therapeutic levels of vitamin D naturally and even fortified foods do not contain enough vitamin D to support your health needs.

Despite its name, vitamin D is not a regular vitamin. It's actually a steroid hormone that you are designed to obtain primarily through sun exposure, not via your diet.

Just how widespread is vitamin D deficiency?

Before the year 2000, very few doctors ever considered the possibility that you might be vitamin D deficient.

But as the technology to measure vitamin D became inexpensive and widely available, more and more studies were done, and it became increasingly clear that vitamin D deficiency was absolutely rampant. For example, according to one of the leading vitamin D researchers, Dr. Michael Holick:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that 32 percent of children and adults throughout the US were vitamin D deficient -- and this is grossly underestimated as they used vitamin D levels that were not consistent with optimal health.

- The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey found that 50 percent of children aged one to five years, and 70 percent of children between the ages of six and 11, are deficient or insufficient in vitamin D.

- Researchers such as Dr. Holick estimate that 50 percent of the general population is at risk of vitamin D deficiency and insufficiency.

Researchers have also noted that vitamin D deficiency is prevalent in adults of all ages who always wear sun protection (which blocks vitamin D production) or limit their outdoor activities.¹ People with increased skin pigmentation (such as those whose ancestors are from Africa, the Middle East, or India) are also at risk, as are the elderly.

It's estimated that over 95 percent of US senior citizens may be deficient in vitamin D, not only because they tend to spend a lot of time indoors but also because they produce less in response



There are very few foods that actually have therapeutic levels of vitamin D naturally and even fortified foods do not contain enough vitamin D to support your health needs.

to sun exposure (a person over the age of 70 produces about 30 percent less vitamin D than a younger person with the same sun exposure).

■ **7 signs you may be vitamin D deficient**

The only way to know for sure if you're vitamin D deficient is via blood testing. However, there are some signs and symptoms to be aware of as well. If any of the following apply to you, you should get your vitamin D levels tested sooner rather than later.

■ **1. You have darker skin**

African Americans are at greater risk of vitamin D deficiency, because if you

have dark skin, you may need as much as 10 times more sun exposure to produce the same amount of vitamin D as a person with pale skin!

As Dr. Holick explained, your skin pigment acts as a natural sunscreen, so the more pigment you have, the more time you'll need to spend in the sun to make adequate amounts of vitamin D.

■ **2. You feel "blue"**

Serotonin, the brain hormone associated with mood elevation, rises with exposure to bright light and falls with decreased sun exposure. In 2006, scientists evaluated the effects of vitamin D on the mental health of 80 elderly

A person over the age of 70 produces about 30 percent less vitamin D than a younger person with the same sun exposure.

How much exercise do I really need?

By Dr. Jordan D. Metz

Between work commitments, family responsibilities, and the stress of everyday life, we have legitimate reasons to fall short of our fitness goals. That's why, for many, the pre-goal should be maximizing the efficiency of your workout regimen.

Two and half hours a week of moderate intensity exercise is what is recommended by the American College of Sports Medicine and the American Heart Association. Ideally, this means 30 minutes, five times per week, of activities such as jogging, ballroom dancing, biking or swimming. Moderate intensity means you're working in the intermediate zone. If you're able to hold a conversation with the person next to you while doing that activity, you're in the zone.

If you don't have time for five workouts per week, recent evidence in the Journal of the American Medical Association suggests that cramming 150 minutes into the weekend, the so-called "weekend warrior" model, transfers similar health benefits to spreading out fitness across the week. The only risk here is overuse injury, such as a case of Achilles tendinitis from running 10 miles on a Saturday after not doing any exercise all week.

■ **If you're time crunched, intensity matters**

Newer evidence about high intensity workouts known as HIIT (High Intensity Interval Training), shows that intensity minutes reduce required exercise time by almost half. This means if you'd like 30 minutes of exercise but you only have 15 to spare, you're in luck. As I've outlined in my book "The Workout Prescription," ramping up intensity minutes reduces time requirements, and is safe for anyone.

Unlike moderate intensity, high intensity exercise means you're huffing and puffing and conversation is difficult. Although they're tough, HIIT workouts don't have to be fancy. They can be set up anywhere, a living room, a garage, or a basement. All that's needed is an open space, a light set of dumbbells, and a strong dose of motivation.

HIIT programs are generally safe for all ages but we generally recommend touching base with your physician if you're over 40 and haven't been previously active before starting this type of program.

■ **Why it matters so much**

There are obvious benefits to exercise. People feel better, they look better, and they perform better in all aspects of

their lives when they exercise regularly. Seen through the prism of the medical community, the medicine of exercise has strong scientific benefits that go far beyond the desire to fit into that new suit or pair of yoga pants.

Across the spectrum of the human body, irrefutable evidence shows that exercise isn't just about getting a good workout, it's about staying healthy in a broader sense. Exercise can treat depression, anxiety and sleep disturbances. For your heart, it lowers blood pressure, cholesterol levels, the risk of heart attack and stroke. Exercise reduces the risk of inflammatory bowel disease and both prevents and treats type 2 diabetes, the most expensive health problem in the United States with annual costs over



In terms of body maintenance, most exercise recommendations involve a combination of endurance training such as walking or swimming, flexibility training such as yoga, and strength training.

patients and found those with the lowest levels of vitamin D were 11 times more prone to be depressed than those who received healthy doses.³

■ **3. You're 50 or older**

As mentioned, as you get older your skin doesn't make as much vitamin D in response to sun exposure. At the same time, your kidneys become less efficient at converting vitamin D into the form used by your body and older adults tend to spend more time indoors (i.e. getting even less sun exposure and therefore vitamin D).

■ **4. You're overweight or obese (or have a higher muscle mass)**

Vitamin D is a fat-soluble, hormone-like vitamin, which means body fat acts as a "sink" by collecting it. If you're overweight or obese, you're therefore likely going to need more vitamin D than a slimmer person -- and the same holds true for people with higher body weights due to muscle mass.

■ **5. Your bones ache**

According to Dr. Holick, many who see their doctor for aches and pains, especially in combination with fatigue, end up being misdiagnosed as having fibromyalgia or chronic fatigue syndrome.

"Many of these symptoms are classic signs of vitamin D deficiency osteomalacia, which is different from the vitamin D deficiency that causes osteoporosis in adults," he says. "What's happening is that the vitamin D deficiency causes a defect in putting calcium into the collagen matrix into your skeleton. As a result, you have throbbing, aching bone pain."

■ **6. Head sweating**

According to Dr. Holick, one of the first, classic signs of vitamin D deficiency is a sweaty head. In fact, physicians used to ask new mothers about head sweating in their newborns for this very reason. Excessive sweating in newborns due to neuromuscular irritability is still described as a common, early symptom of vitamin D deficiency.

■ **7. You have gut trouble**

Remember, vitamin D is a fat-soluble vitamin, which means if you have a gastrointestinal condition that affects your ability to absorb fat, you may have lower absorption of fat-soluble vitamins like vitamin D as well. This includes gut conditions like Crohn's, celiac and non-celiac gluten sensitivity, and inflammatory bowel disease.

(Source: mercola.com)

\$100 billion. Regular exercise has even been shown to reduce the frequency of 13 types of cancer including breast, colon, ovarian and endometrial in a large, recent study of 1.44 million subjects.

The major health benefits of exercise kick in at 150 minutes per week of moderate intensity, or at 75 minutes per week of high intensity work.

Exercise is the most efficacious drug known to humankind, works for everyone who takes it, has no side effects, and is free.

That's why there's a push to include exercise, as determined through a fitness tracker, as a fifth vital sign along with height, weight, pulse and blood pressure. Movement promotes health and wellness, so why not start tracking it?

■ **The best exercise for you**

The ideal form of exercise for you is ... something that you'll actually do! As I discussed in my previous column, smiling and fun promote exercise compliance. If you're smiling, keep doing exactly what you're doing.

In terms of body maintenance, most exercise recommendations involve a combination of endurance training such as walking or swimming, flexibility training such as yoga, and strength training. Although there's no exact science here, finding the correct formula usually means picking some of each of these activities. This might mean jogging twice per week, trying a HIIT workout once or twice per week, and taking a yoga class. There's no exact answer, the key is to find what works for you, smile and work hard.

Do as much exercise as you can, there's no upper limit. When possible, try and keep your total above the recommended weekly "dose" and you'll be more likely to stay out of the doctor's office and on your field of choice.

(Source: CNN)

How to have more comfortable mammograms

No more painful mammograms

By Tracee Cornforth

Do you dread your yearly mammogram? What if we told you it didn't have to be an uncomfortable experience? You might be relieved because mammograms are a proven way to help catch breast cancer early, and yet some women skip them because they fear the pain and discomfort. Instead of skipping out, here are five things you can do to have more comfortable, less painful mammograms.

■ **Schedule strategically**

Keep track of your periods and schedule your mammogram appointments accordingly.

Most women experience the least amount of breast tenderness during the first two weeks of their menstrual cycle, which means you would experience less discomfort from a mammogram during this time. Some women find that marking their cycle on their calendar, writing it in a journal or keeping a note in their cell phone can help them keep track of their flow.

■ **Avoid caffeine**

Some women find that caffeine increases breast tenderness. Even small amounts of caffeine can have an effect. Even if you aren't sure if this is you, experiment with avoiding caffeine in the week leading up to your mammogram to see if it helps lower the pain you experience. Coffee, tea, soft drinks, sports drinks, and chocolate are common sources of caffeine.

■ **Consider OTC painkillers**

An over-the-counter painkiller such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen taken about an hour before your mammogram may help to reduce any pain or discomfort you may feel during the mammography procedure.

Taking OTC painkillers ahead of time is also a good way to prevent any discomfort you might normally feel following your mammogram.

■ **Ask about padding**

Some mammogram centers offer padding designed to make your mammogram more comfortable. One example is the MammoPad, which is a soft, white, single-use foam pad that is invisible to X-rays.

It secures to the lower metal plate, providing a soft and warm spot for the technician to place your breast.

■ **Try numbing gel**

While it can be messy, numbing gel applied to the breast has been found to relieve pain from the pressure of mammograms. Lidocaine, a local anesthetic and anti-rhythmic drug, is one option. It can be used directly on your skin to help relieve itching, burning and skin inflammation, and can help with the pain associated with mammograms. It's the same formula your doctor or dentist might use to numb you before getting a tooth pulled or a minor surgery.

(Source: verywell.com)

Coffee health benefits



■ **1. Cut the pain**

Two cups of coffee can cut post-workout muscle pain by up to 48%.

■ **2. Increase your fiber intake**

A cup of brewed coffee represents a contribution of up to 1.8 grams of fiber of the recommended intake of 20-38 grams.

■ **3. Protection against cirrhosis of the liver**

A recent study showed coffee's liver protecting benefits. Yet another study showed that both coffee and decaffeinated coffee lowered the liver enzyme levels of coffee drinkers.

■ **4. Lowered risk of Type 2 Diabetes**

Those who consumed 6 or more cups per day had a 22% lower risk of diabetes. A recent review of research conducted by Harvard's Dr. Frank Hu showed that the risk of type II diabetes decreases by 9% for each daily cup of coffee consumed. Decaf coffee decreased risk by 6% per cup.

■ **5. Lowered risk of Alzheimer's disease**

There is considerable evidence that caffeine may protect against Alzheimer's disease.

■ **6. Reduces suicide risk and depression**

A 10-year study of 86,000 female nurses shows a reduced risk of suicide in the coffee drinkers. Another study conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health found that women who drink 4 or more cups of coffee were 20% less likely to suffer from depression.

■ **7. Protection against Parkinson's**

People with Parkinson's disease are less likely to be smokers and coffee drinkers than their healthy siblings. Just make sure you don't get lung cancer on the way. Drinking coffee reduces the risk of Parkinson's even when genetic factors come into play.

■ **8. Coffee drinkers have less risk of heart disease.**

Korean researchers found that study participants who consumed 3 to 5 cups of coffee a day were less likely to show the beginning signs of heart disease. Other dietary factors should also be noted as Koreans typically have a different diet than do Westerners.

(Source: caffeineinformer.com)

10 hot titles of IT world

By Alireza Khorasani

Here are high rated IT titles in the world that reviewed by savvy tech users:

1 HTC U 11 is the name of the company's upcoming flagship. The U 11 will be made official at an event on May 16. According to past leaks, it should come with a 5.5-inch QHD touchscreen, the Snapdragon 835 chipset, a 12 MP main camera, a 16 MP selfie snapper, and 64 or 128GB of expandable storage. It will run Android 7.1 Nougat.

2 Nokia 3310 (2017) is hitting shelves in Europe next week. EUR 49 is what HMD cited at MWC. However, prices in Austria, Norway and the Czech Republic all seem to hover around the EUR 59 mark.

3 Xiaomi Mi 6 to be available in 11 colors. The Xiaomi Mi 6 and Mi 6 Plus were unveiled just past Wednesday with a Snapdragon 835 and 6GB of RAM, all wrapped in a package that fits a 5.15-inch display.

4 According to benchmark site AnTuTu, the OnePlus 3 (rating of 95.66%) and the Apple iPhone SE (98.74%) were the most highly rated Android and iOS powered handsets in China during the month of March.

5 You can finally save and listen to podcasts on your Apple Watch via the Overcast app. With the latest 3.1 update to Overcast, saving podcasts to your Apple Watch is as easy as opening the app on your iPhone, selecting the episode you'd like to download, and then pressing the "Send to Watch" option within the Queue menu.

6 LG is getting ready to launch its 2017 flagship — the LG G6 — in India on April 26. According to one retailer in Mumbai, the LG G6 will be priced at INR 51,990 (\$805), which is a good deal cheaper than the Galaxy S8 India pricing of INR 57,900 (\$896).

7 The next version of uTorrent will run in your browser. TorrentFreak reports that the app will eventually run in your web browser, based on comments from BitTorrent creator Bram Cohen in an interview with the Steal This Show podcast.

8 IBM puts deep learning to work on diabetic eye disease. Diabetic retinopathy is one of the leading causes of blindness in the US: now IBM is using machine learning to help diagnose and grade the condition.

9 YouTube will fight fake news by offering workshops to teens. A YouTube effort in the UK will teach teens to spot bogus stories.

10 Reuters says it has obtained a draft European Commission document proposing that the EU implement measures that harmonize how online firms remove hate speech, child porn and other illegal content.

Huawei Watch 2 is now on sale in the United States

The second generation of Huawei Watch is now being sold in the United States.



Huawei Watch 2 is now available for purchase in different retailers such as Amazon, BestBuy, NewEgg, and Walmart. The second iteration of the smartwatch is slightly bigger than its predecessor, but it comes with a new fitness tracker feature. With this, the new wearable has a global positioning system (GPS) that can track the user's runs or movements, as well as other workouts.

In terms of cost, the standard Huawei Watch 2 is sold at \$299.99. Interested buyers may choose between gray and black for the color. On the other hand, a Classic design is expected to be sold soon at \$369.99, but the company has yet to confirm the color options available for this.

For those who purchase the standard Huawei Watch 2, they also get a 10-week free subscription from Google Play music, which is bundled to the smartwatch for a limited period of time.

(Source: christiantoday)

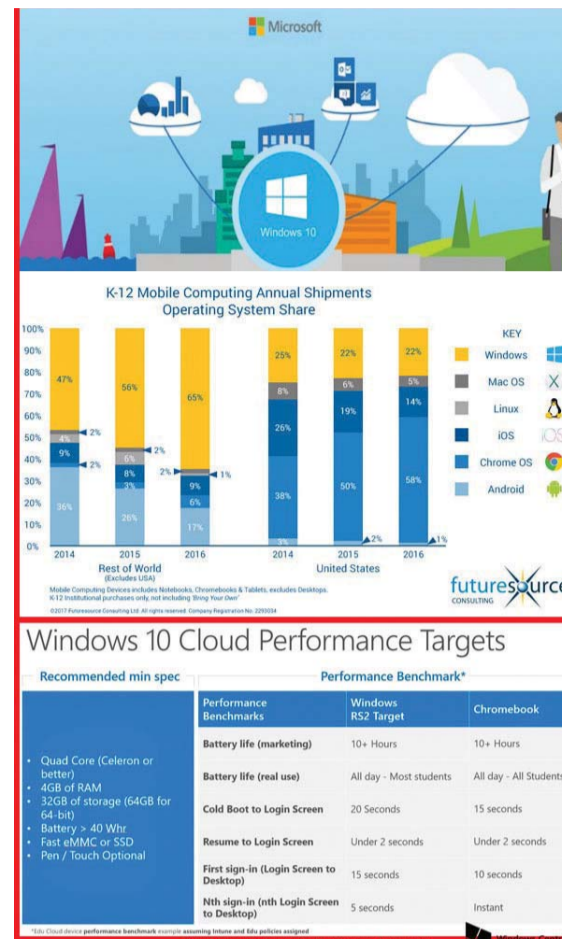
Microsoft to out cloud-based Windows 10 S, take on Chrome OS

Google's web-based Chrome OS and the accompanying array of affordable Chromebook devices are hardly chart-toppers when it comes to overall market shares on today's tech scene. Still, there is one specific market niche, where Google's brainchild really reigns supreme. And a pretty important and prospective one at that. At the end of last year, Chromebooks comprised a whopping 49% of the K-12 education sector, up from 40% in 2015 and only 9% in 2013.

Clearly the web giant is on to something and it seems Cupertino wants in. Windows Central recently obtained some insider information, hinting that Microsoft's upcoming May 2 event, will see the release of a new cloud-based variant of Windows 10. One designed specifically to take Chrome OS head on in the classroom. Rumors suggest it will go by the name "Windows 10 S" and that it is thankfully a lot closer to Microsoft's current Universal Windows Platform apps and advanced cloud services, than the company's last misguided attempts at budgets ARM-based solutions - the dreaded Windows RT.

Judging by the minimum specs sheet, as well as some additional leaked info, Windows 10 S indeed appears to be intended for standard x86 PC hardware and should run on the unified Windows 10 kernel. This theory is further backed up by the fact that it is said to offer an upgrade path to Windows 10 Home or Pro, through the purchase of an additional license.

Microsoft's game plan here will be to offload a lot of tasks from the machine on to the cloud, just like Google does with its Chrome OS. This shouldn't be hard either, since Microsoft's lineup of cloud services, like OneDrive and Office 365 have really come a long way. If Cupertino plays its cards right, it could benefit from the long-



standing Windows compatibility and versatility arguments as well. Not only is Win32 compatibility for regular desktop applications possible with this approach, but the company's ongoing push towards the UWP model has created tools like Desktop Bridge, or "Project Centennial", for easy

Surprise! Your online banking password might not be as secure as you thought

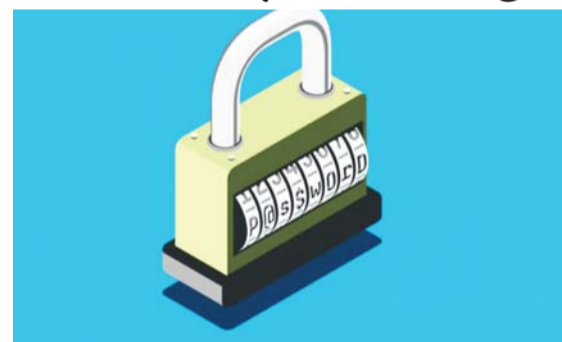
It turns out several leading US banks do not require case-sensitive passwords, which could make it easier for someone to access your account.

A thread on Reddit on Friday pointed out that Wells Fargo, the third largest bank in the US, doesn't require its customers to enter a case-sensitive password. Other users confirmed the issue, whereas other banking customers began checking their own accounts and noted that Wells Fargo isn't the only banking giant to follow such a policy.

Among those, Chase is confirmed to not require case-sensitive passwords, and some accounts belonging to Capital One and American Express are known to not require case-sensitive passwords.

But other banks, such as Bank of America, HSBC, and USAA, required customers to enter exact, case-sensitive passwords.

The financial industry isn't the only one that doesn't enforce strict password rules. Blizzard, a video games developer, doesn't require players to enter a case-sensitive password, and Facebook's rules are more complicated. It allows passwords in a reverse case, which indicates the user left the caps-



lock key on.

But does that put a user's security at risk? Long answer short, it depends.

"Case-insensitivity by itself doesn't have to be much of a security problem," said Per Thorshheim, a password expert and security researcher.

"Case-insensitivity does make things easier for hackers, but there's a lot of other factors that must be part of the equation for a definitive yes or no," he said, such as not rate-limiting the number of

password attempts per second or minute.

"Length [of passwords] trumps any other password parameters," he said.

He gave an example: The number five, typed out 248 times. "In most cases [it's] a good password, but most systems won't accept you trying to use it," he said.

In other words, a lack of case sensitivity is not necessarily a bad thing on its own, but adding it together with other poor security requirement factors could lead to serious problems.

There are a number of theories about why banks in particular still use case insensitive passwords. The most common one is that many older banks will be running decades-old back-end systems, which in many cases don't support case-sensitive passwords.

On the bright side, most banks -- including Chase and Capital One -- allow two-step security, so even if someone has your password, they still need to jump through several other hoops in order to log into your online bank accounts.

(Source: zdnet)

Nokia unveils the Withings Steel HR Leather Special Edition watch



Nokia has just released a special version of its Withings Steel HR connected analog health watch. The Finnish company believes that the Special Edition Leather of Steel HR would make a wonderful gift for Mother's Day.

Unlike the regular version, the Steel HR Edition Leather comes with a state-of-the-art gift box. The box contains the watch, a leather wristband, a charger, as well as a silicone wristband that makes it perfect for sports, swimming, or wet weather.

Also, the watch comes with an Italian hazelnut leather wristband and a free silicon wristband. The Steel HR includes a heart rate monitor, and it can be fully synchronized with the Health Mate app, so users can view trends, gain insights, and unlock various rewards.

The Withings watch supports notifications for text messages, calls, and events, which will be displayed on its screen. According to Nokia, the Steel HR provides up to 25 days' battery, plus 20 more days on power reserve mode. It's also worth mentioning the watch is compatible with both Android and iOS phones.

(Source: phonearena)

Nike announces limited edition Apple Watch NikeLab



Seven months after the launch of the first Apple Watch Nike+, Nike has launched a new variant called the Apple Watch NikeLab. As can be inferred from the name, this will be part of Nike's NikeLab range of products, which means it is also limited edition.

The Apple Watch NikeLab is functionally identical to the Apple Watch Nike+. What's new here is the color palette; while the Nike+ comes in a black or white color options, the NikeLab variant combines both to form a stunning new design, with a Space Gray aluminum body and Light Bone/Black band. Apart from that it has all the features of the standard Apple Watch Series 2, along with the Nike exclusive extras, such as Nike+ Run app and exclusive Siri commands, found on the Nike+ variant.

The limited edition Apple Watch NikeLab will be available starting April 27 at NikeLab doors and at an Apple Tokyo pop-up in Isetan.

(Source: Nike)

Android Wear 2.0 will arrive on the remainder of watches by late May



Despite the fact that Android Wear 2.0 was said to be ready in February, which is when updates for it should have started, even today there still are a lot of supported watches that don't run the latest software.

Thankfully though, today Google has unveiled a time frame for when you're to expect the Wear 2.0 update to finally grace your device, if it hasn't already. And it looks like you'll only have a few more weeks of waiting, tops. Google says the remainder of watches should receive Android Wear 2.0 in late April to late May.

So yeah, the patience test that this rollout has proven to be for smartwatch owners continues. These are the devices that are yet to get Wear 2.0 updates: Moto 360 Gen 2, Moto 360 Sport, LG Watch Urbane 2nd Edition LTE, Huawei Watch, Huawei Watch Ladies, Asus ZenWatch 2, and Asus ZenWatch 3.

On the other hand, the watches that aren't ever receiving the new software are the LG G Watch, Samsung Gear Live, Moto 360 v1 from 2014, Sony Smartwatch 3, and Asus ZenWatch v1.

(Source: androidpolice)

Earth was hit with a devastating comet strike around 11,000 BC

Ancient stone carvings, found in what is widely considered to be the "world's first temple", have revealed that the planet was likely hit with a devastating comet strike over 13,000 years ago.

According to researchers, who analyzed symbols on carvings found on a pillar called the Vulture Stone in Turkey's Göbekli Tepe temple, a swarm of comet fragments hit the Earth in around 11,000BC. Researchers suggest that the historical event may have sparked the rise of civilization.

Experts from the University of Edinburgh studied and decoded the symbols found in Göbekli Tepe, which is an ancient megalithic site located in southern Turkey, not far from the Syrian border. Researchers say that the evidence uncovered indicates that Göbekli Tepe, which was constructed "on a top hill," may have served as an observatory.

"It is very likely the people of Göbekli Tepe were making accurate measurements of Earth's precession from around 10,950 BC onwards, and they had a good understanding of this process, at least from an observational perspective," researchers said in their study, which has been published in *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry*. "It is very likely that the people of GT (Göbekli Tepe) had been keen astronomers for a very long time."

Researchers noted that the "evidence



and proposed mechanisms for this event are keenly debated right now." However, the researchers matched the animal carvings, interpreted as astronomical symbols, to stars and constellations, us-

ing computers and concluded that the event occurred around "10950 BC ± 250 yrs", which they said "corresponds closely to the proposed Younger Dryas event, estimated at 10890 BC."

According to researchers, who analyzed symbols on carvings found on a pillar called the Vulture Stone in Turkey's Göbekli Tepe temple, a swarm of comet fragments hit the Earth in around 11,000BC.

Quantum mechanics are complex enough, for now ...

Quantum mechanics is based on a set of mathematical rules, describing how the quantum world works. These rules predict, for example, how electrons orbit a nucleus in an atom, and how an atom can absorb photons, particles of light.

The standard rules of quantum mechanics work extremely well, but, given that there are still open questions regarding the interpretation of quantum mechanics, scientists are not sure whether the current rules are the final story. This has motivated some scientists to develop alternative versions of the mathematical rules, which are able to properly explain the results of past experiments, but provide new insight into the underlying structure of quantum mechanics.

Some of these alternative mathematical rules even predict new effects, which require new experimental tests.

In everyday life, if we walk all the way around a park we end up back at the same place regardless of whether we choose to walk clockwise or counter-clockwise.

Physicists would say that these two actions commute. Not every action needs to commute, though. If on our walk around the park, we walk clockwise, and first find money lying on the ground and then encounter an ice cream man, we will exit the park feeling refreshed. However, if we instead travel counter-clockwise, we will see



the ice cream man before finding the money needed to buy the ice cream.

■ Mathematical description

In that case, we may exit park feeling disappointed. In order to determine which actions commute or do not commute physicists provide a mathematical description of the physical world.

In standard quantum mechanics, these mathematical rules use complex numbers. However, recently an alternative version of quantum mechanics was proposed

which uses more complex, so-called "hyper-complex" numbers. These are a generalization of complex numbers. With the new rules, physicists can replicate most of the predictions of standard quantum mechanics. However, hyper-complex rules predict that some operations that commute in standard quantum mechanics do not actually commute in the real world.

A research team led by Philip Walther has now tested for deviations from standard quantum mechanics predicted by the alternative hyper-complex quantum theory. In their experiment the scientists replaced the park with an interferometer, a device which allows a single photon to travel two paths at the same time. They replaced the money and ice cream with a normal optical material and a specially designed metamaterial.

The rules of standard quantum mechanics dictate that light behaves the same no matter whether it first passes through a normal material and then through a metamaterial or vice versa. In other words, the action of the two materials on the light commutes. In hyper-complex quantum mechanics, however, that might not be the case. From the behavior of the measured photons the physicists verified that hyper-complex rules were not needed to describe the experiment.

(Source: EurekAlert)

Cassini has made Earth feel small, but part of something bigger

Earth is exhausting — excruciatingly so. At times, performing even the most mundane tasks, like commuting on a crowded, smelly subway car, feels like an Olympic marathon designed to test one's patience. Space compels us because it forces us to think outside this myopic view of ourselves — not in a "Dust in the Wind" way, but in the sense that we're tiny flecks of star stuff lucky to be members of something so vast and incredible. And in recent years, one of the greatest reminders of this is the volume of research and images sent back to Earth from NASA's Cassini spacecraft, which first entered Saturn's system in 2004.

In the 20 years it's spent in space, this intrepid orbiter has enabled the publication of over 3,000 scientific reports. Cassini's unprecedented views of Saturn and its 62 moons are widely regarded as some of the most sublime images from space — it's shown us methane lakes on Titan, the gaps in Saturnian rings, and

even pasta moons that seem too delicious to be real. But after a decades-long Saturnian sojourn, the spacecraft is running out of fuel — so on April 23rd, it will embark on its Grand Finale mission before plunging into Saturn's atmosphere on September 15th.

■ Cassini's mission

This five-month-long farewell tour is perhaps the most dramatic and heart-wrenching of Cassini's missions. Kicking off with a final Titan flyby this weekend, the spacecraft will perform 22 weeks of dramatic dives into the never-explored region between the planet and the rings, beaming scientific data back to Earth throughout. Even as it plunges into Saturn's atmosphere, Cassini will be sending information about the end of its life until it can't. While we're expecting incredible new insights into the gas giant, including some ultra-precise measurements of its gravity and magnetic field, among those who've followed the



mission closely, there's a profound sadness as Cassini's final act draws near.

"There's a sense of loss," Earl Maize, Cassini project manager at JPL, said earlier this month at a NASA press conference. "We, humankind, have been at Saturn for 13 years. You can get up in the morning, get the weather report, see what the images look like...we are con-

nected, and we've connected the entire planet. That's going to go away ... and unfortunately, there's not a substitute for that for some time."

Indeed, the world has been along for the entirety of Cassini's wild ride. On its Twitter alone, the orbiter has garnered 1.19 million followers. Some of Cassini's major discoveries, most recently the discovery of molecular hydrogen in Enceladus' ocean, trended on Twitter and validated extraterrestrial enthusiasts.

Even the spacecraft's thousands of routine image dispatches have engaged people from around the world, who can check in any time on Cassini's NASA page or on social media. Countless space enthusiasts will feel a Saturn-shaped void in their hearts when these regular postcards suddenly stop.

For reporters who've followed the mission closely, writing about Cassini's discoveries and incredible images, there's an added layer of loss.

(Source: Gizmodo)

Pardis Tile Mfg. Factory Goes on Stream Using BIM's Facilities

Pardis Tile Manufacturing Company, based in Abadeh, Fars Province, became operational in the presence of President Rouhani using loans and facilities of the Bank of Industry and Mine (BIM), the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

The report put the cost spent for launching this industrial and Production Company at €9,300,000 (equivalent to 325 billion rials) as fixed capital and 40 billion rials as working capital.

It should be noted that this giant project generated employment opportunities for 150 job-seeking people.

In addition, ground was broken for the construction operation of Pasargad Steel Company in the presence of President Rouhani with the production capacity of 2.5 million tons of concentrate, 2.7 million pellet (conglomerate) and 1.8 million tons of sponge iron (DRI), costing \$280 million, the report

observed.

Once this giant project is put into operation, 10 percent will be added to the existing capacity of steel volume in the country.

It is necessary to mentioned that small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Fars Province received 1,200 billion rials loans and facilities from the Bank of Industry and Mine (BIM) within the framework of "Production Boom Plan".

Bank Shahr Comes 1st in Supporting Cultural Activities in Country: Official

Giant steps have thus far been taken by the Bank Shahr in the field of supporting cultural activities.

Member of Majlis Development Commission Mohammad Damadi announced the above statement and termed unsparing support of the bank from Tehran Intl. Book Fair (TIBF) as a "courageous and outstanding" act and said: "As a prestigious economic enterprise, Bank

Shahr's unflinching support from such cultural event should be appreciated duly."

Elsewhere in his remarks, Parliament Development Commission Member emphasized: "Supporting and disseminating culture of book and book reading is an appreciable act which is unique of its kind in Bank Shahr as compared with other banks."

He called on all senior officials at the economic enterprises of the country to take effective steps in the field of sociocultural activities.

In the end, Member of Majlis Development Commission Mohammad Damadi expressed his special thanks to the senior officials of the bank who managed to materialize most objectives of the bank in cultural field."

Isfahan to host international workshop on technology-based entrepreneurship

Isfahan Regional Center for Technology Incubator and Science Park Development under the Auspices of UNESCO (IRIS) is organizing a training workshop on "Technology-Based Entrepreneurship for Developing Countries".

The event will be held from April 25-28, 2017 in collaboration with the International Science, Technology and Innovation Centre for South-South Cooperation under the Auspices of UNESCO (ISTIC), and the Economic Cooperation Organization's (ECO) Science Foundation (ECOSF).

The workshop targets interested individuals from developing countries including Iran who assume active roles in areas related to technology management and also professionals from research universities and institutes of these countries. It is designed to provide the necessary knowledge on how to commercialize research findings for participants who are involved in inventions or patents. The program also aims to familiarize participants with the elements of entrepreneurship in relation to the demand of knowledge in an innovative economy.

The workshop aims to create awareness and motivation in participants by presenting materials on technopreneurship (technology-based entrepreneurship) and its role in creating an impact on technology development, idea validation, opportunity assessment, business models, business planning and financing. The event organizers hope to increase the realization of technological solutions to social needs and demands in developing countries by exposing individuals with key roles with the concepts of technology-based entrepreneurship.

Participants from different countries including Oman, Nigeria, Malaysia, Pakistan, Italy, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, South Korea, Bangladesh, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Iraq, Lebanon, and Iran have already registered for this workshop.

(Source: IBT)

Debris orbiting Earth threaten future of spaceflight, warn experts

More than 750,000 pieces of dangerous debris are now orbiting Earth and threatening the future of spaceflight, the largest ever conference on space rubbish has heard.

The European Space Agency (ESA) appealed to satellite operators and space agencies to clear up their retired crafts, many of which could impact launches, and are in danger of hitting the International Space Station.

"Only about 60 per cent of the satellites that should be disposed of at the end of their missions under current guidelines are, in fact, properly managed," Dr. Holger Krag, head of ESA's debris office told the European Conference on Space Debris in Germany.

Many derelict craft have exploded or broken up, generating an estimated 750,000 pieces larger than 1 cm and a staggering 166 million larger than 1 mm.

"In orbit, these objects have tremendous relative velocities, faster than a bullet, and can damage or destroy functioning space infrastructure, like economically vital telecom, weather, navigation, broadcast and climate-monitoring satellites," added Dr. Krag.

"Space debris threaten all working satellites, including Europe's Sentinels and the Galileo navigation constellation, and any loss of space infrastructure would severely affect modern society.

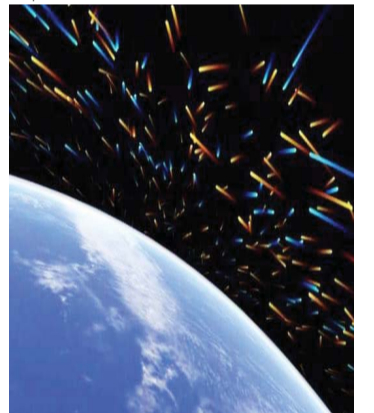
The "sustainable use of space has been persuasively shown to be at risk, and the status quo is obviously no longer acceptable. We must now start removing dead satellites."

The ESA is currently developing a Space Situational Awareness (SSA) program to monitor the debris.

But ESA Director General Jan Woerner said space agencies must try to keep Earth's orbital environment as clean as possible.

"We must sustain the dream of future exploration."

(Source: The Telegraph)



Meet Steve, your new favorite astronomical phenomenon

Steve isn't a person. Steve is actually the unofficial name of a mysterious purple streak of light observed by some social media savvy skywatchers keeping an eye out for the northern lights.

The Alberta Aurora Chasers — a Facebook group devoted to the northern lights — caught sight of Steve in photos taken of the curtains of the auroras (and decided to name him).

The one issue is that no one was quite sure what Steve was. That is, until a high-powered spacecraft got involved.

One of the three European Space Agency's Swarm satellites actually flew through a Steve phenomenon, according to Eric Donovan of the University of Calgary. Donovan matched up images taken of Steve from the ground with observations taken by the satellite and found something surprising.

"As the satellite flew straight through Steve, data from the electric field instrument showed very clear changes," Donovan said in a statement.

It looks like Steve is actually a flow of hot gas moving much more quickly than the air around it, and while there's still a lot more to learn about the astronomical phenomenon, this is a good start.

And Steve's not all that rare.

"It turns out that Steve is actually remarkably common, but we hadn't noticed it before," Donovan said.

(Source: Mashable)

Campaign calls for paperless presidential election

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — A recently launched public-spearheaded campaign aiming to help preserve the environment has demanded presidential candidates not to use paper posters during the election process.

Conventionally the candidates use posters in an attempt to influence the public, however this year people have urged the candidates to use social media to receive publicity in order to respect the environment.

"As currently efforts to save and protect the environment is a priority and a genuine concern for the public one of the criteria for choosing a president is how socially responsible they are for the environment and that's why the public are calling for a poster-free election," the campaign says, adding, "Regardless of the posters people have other standards for choosing the best person who fits for the position"

Iran's presidential election is due to be held on May 19, 2017.

LEARN ENGLISH Office Gossip

Pam: Psssst! Psssssssst! Hey! Eric, have you heard?
Eric: Hm? No . . . Go on, tell me, what's the latest office gossip?

Pam: Well, you didn't hear this from me but the **rumor** is that Paula is getting a **promotion**!

Eric: No way! But she's a terrible worker and you can't trust her. She's so **two-faced** – you can't believe anything she says!

Paula: Hey guys, what are you two **whispering** about?

Eric: Oh Hi Paula! How are you?

Paula: I've got some good news! I'm getting a promotion!

Pam: Congratulations! Eric and I were just saying that you are the best person for the job.

Eric: Yes! You're the best!

Key vocabulary

gossip: rumor or talk of a personal, sensational nature

rumor: a mixture of truth and untruth passed around

promotion: act of raising in rank or position

two-faced: changing what you say according to who you are talking to, in a way that is insincere and unpleasant

whisper: soft speech produced without full voice

Supplementary vocabulary

praise: to speak very well about someone

bad mouth: to speak poorly about someone

(Source: irlanguage.com)

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

Sad stories on the Earth

By Farnaz Heidari

Environmental issues have increasingly become an essential topic not just in newspapers but also on TV too. Some experts believe that it is an urgent priority to use the power of TV for helping to heal the scars the Earth is bearing.

On the occasion of the Earth Day, April 22, a TV program gathered a group of environmentalist narrating stories about Iran's vulnerable environment. Some of these stories must go around because this revolution in awareness has led to a much deeper understanding and appreciation of interrelationships or connections in nature as a major theme.

Davood Namayandeh, as a famous speaker pinpointed to degradation of crucial sources of biological wealth that are coming under increasing pressure from population growth and economic development.

"Saving the Earth rests on principles such as integrity and making adequate strategies for preserving that integrity but we all know that today our Mother Nature is sick and there is absolutely no balance on the Earth," Namayandeh regretted.

Dr. Hossein Akhane, associate Professor from the Department of Botany of University of Tehran was one of the guests as well. He addressed the disastrous rates of plant extinction in Iran.

"An updated and much more through systematic synopsis of plant's extinction reveals that more than 5,000 species have invaded foreign countries and are causing billions of dollars of damage every year," Akhane said, adding, "But the rate of plant extinction is unclear because the study method is quite different; however, habitat destruction in Iran is the biggest factor threatening plant species with extinction."

Dr. Iman Memarian, chief vet of Pardisan Rehabilitation Center, addressed some of

extremist approaches such as hordes of feral dogs and cats in natural habitats of Iran. He mentioned it as a challenge for wildlife conservation saying "These problems have taken their toll on wildlife extinction and unfortunately nobody pays attention to them, even responsible institutions such as Department of the Environment (DoE) prefer to be neutral just because it has costs."

Dr. Mehdi Zare, head of International Institute of earthquake engineering seismology explained that "knowledge brings a bounty of benefits to both our own health and planet; if we take a look to our works on the Earth, we understand even some of our seemingly good works have possibilities of posing threat against us and the environment, for instance, construction of Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch which is located on a fault and also it caused upheaval changes in Farahzad Region."

Saman Golriz, an environmentalist and a celebrity chef also said that "we don't even come close to being self-sustaining, we just exert significant adverse effects on the Earth."

"Why Earth has no right? Why don't we let it to heal? How much sea food we need? Why tones of foods are discarded around the world?" Golriz added.

Here are sad stories of how ignorant we are towards Earth

It's early morning in Caspian Hyrcanian Forests. Suddenly loud roars that trail off into wheezing moans-territorial calls of jungle cat (*Felis chaus*) - wake up everyone. A female jungle cat trying to escape something went to the road where vehicles don't usually pass. Her bitter fate resulted to another sad story of loss and death. Now this cat cubs are kept in the zoos. The Mother Nature just cries.

Rhinoceros horns are carved into ornate dagger handles that sell for \$500-12,000 in Yemen and other parts of the Middle East. In china and other parts of Asia, powdered



rhino horns is used for medical purposes, particularly as a proven fever reducer, and occasionally as an alleged aphrodisiac. All five species of rhinoceros are threatened with extinction because of poachers (who kill them for their horns) and loss of habitat. From 1973 to 1990 the population of African black rhinos dropped from approximately 63,000 to about 2,400. The Mother Nature just cries.

Archeological surveys in Abu Dhabi have recovered various items such as shark vertebrae and teeth from sites that are over 7,000 years old. The demand for shark products, including meat and fins, is increasing in Asia and also in Persian Gulf region. Some of the species that are most in demand are the various species of hammerhead sharks and the sharks from the Carcharhinidae family that have 'black fins'. It's difficult to say which species are most vulnerable because we don't have a regional assessment on the status of any of the species. Some of the most common species captured in the fisheries include the spot-tail shark, *Carcharhinus sorrah* and the milk shark, *Rhizoprionodon acutus*

Reports from many countries in the Persian Gulf show that fish stocks are depleting and have reached worrisome levels. It is probable that many shark stocks are also facing declines due to overfishing and other threats. The Mother Nature just cries.

Unfortunately our Earth is not happy, she is terribly sick. We just use natural resources with absolutely no respect to the Mother Nature.

Sustainable management, environment protection lead to urban health: Rouhani

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — Sustainable management and environment protection pave the way for urban health, President Hassan Rouhani said on Sunday.

Rouhani made the remarks at the 5th International Summit of the World Assembly of Islamic Cities in Qazvin.

"We must invest in environmental issues and one of the easiest and most lucrative ways is to allocate the money we spent on low-quality petrol in vehicles to improve the status of urban areas," president.ir quoted Rouhani as saying.

"It is not like that we cannot stop any of the environmental predicaments, rather we can control and handle some of them and with effective management we would be able to resolve some of the problems people are struggling with to make their lives easier," he noted.

The president went on to say that "with integrity and synergy between bodies, and public opinion we can better manage metropolises, achieve long-term development goals, provide people with better income, and reduce inequality."

"One of our primary responsibilities is to facilitate the development of new technologies and utilizing them in urban management and in a nutshell creating smart cities," Rouhani suggested.



"Today we are witnessing how using new technologies have positively affected urban life in metropolises such as Tehran," he stated.

Urban management specifically of metropolises is a complex task to accomplish, Rouhani said, adding, cities must be safe places for everyone and the citizens' peace and safety must come

before anything.

The worst way to raise fund for urban management is to trample on citizens' rights by demolishing and destroying gardens, green spaces, and cutting trees, Rouhani lamented, adding, similar to oil which belongs to everyone urban areas, plains, mountains, wetlands, and lakes are owned by everyone.

"We are not allowed to sell the beautiful gardens around the cities and develop urban areas by building more tunnels, bridges, and highways as urban sprawl result in dense population and those highways we have constructed would turn into parking lots due to constant traffic congestions," Rouhani explained.

Some urban and environmental problems need long-term planning to resolve, Rouhani said, adding, but some of them such as scrapping of clunkers, eliminating low-quality gasoline, and switching to less pollutant fuel for power plants can be addressed in a shorter amount of time.

"Nonetheless tackling such problems need comprehensive measures," the president noted.

The 5th International Summit of the World Assembly of Islamic Cities with main themes of sustainable development goals (SDG) and city prosperity initiative (CPI) was held in the historical city of Qazvin on Sunday with representatives from United Nations, ambassadors, mayors, and urban and religious studies scholars from Turkey, Iraq, India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Palestine, Afghanistan, China, Morocco, and Pakistan in attendance.

At the end of the summit, Rouhani was awarded with a plaque of honor from UN-Habitat.

FAO offers water-scarce countries a new satellite tool to boost agricultural productivity

1 -> WaPOR measures evapotranspiration, a key phase in the natural water cycle consisting of water that directly evaporates into the atmosphere and water that returns to the atmosphere after moving through a plant and emerging as vapor exuded by foliage.

The tool can produce detailed assessments to monitor the functioning of a selected set of irrigation schemes, supporting modernization plans as well as helping assure that improvements do in fact result

in all water users receiving more reliable and cost-effective water services that are more adapted to increased climate variability.

Water accounting is increasingly promoted as an indispensable tool, particularly in water-strained areas. This include coherent assessments of water resources availability, which must incorporate climate factors and require consideration of equitable entitlement - in particular allocation of water for domestic and industrial uses and for broader ecosystem services.

FAO offers technical advice on setting up appropriate water accounting and auditing frameworks.

It is estimated that for each 1 °C of global warming, 7 percent of the global population will experience a decrease of 20 percent or more in renewable water resources. Improved management of water resources are mentioned as a critical area for intervention in the vast majority of the national climate-change adaptation and mitigation plans submitted to fulfill commitments under the Paris Climate Agreement.

'50,000 tons of trash generated a day in Iran'

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — Iranians throw away around 50,000 tons of trash a day, director general for municipalities and rural management organization, affiliated with the Ministry of Interior, said.

Masoud Ahmadi made the remarks over a ceremony held on the occasion of the Earth Day on Saturday.

"This means that some 800 grams of trash is produced by an average Iranian in metropolises," Ahmadi said, adding, "Per capita waste production amounts to 710 grams and 470 grams in cities and villages respectively."

Statistics say the country sustains loss of 370 trillion rials (nearly \$9.25 billion) excluding the loss in the health regarding current condition of waste management, he lamented.

However, Ahmadi announced, a five-year plan to streamline waste management was proposed and approved in the past Iranian calendar year, which ended on March 20, 2017, the whole plan will be monitored by the Interior Ministry.

He further expressed hope that the plan would lead to positive changes in the waste management sector.

Majlis passes general outlines of 'wetlands restoration bill'

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — Majlis (the Iranian parliament) passed the general outlines of the wetlands restoration bill on Wednesday.

The bill which was brought forward by the Department of Environment earlier puts a great emphasis on restoration and protection of the wetlands that are of great ecological values, Mehr news agency reported.

While hammering out and discussing various articles of the bill in detail on Sunday, MPs have put a ban on importing invasive plants which can harm the

wetlands. Additionally the Department of Environment is tasked with preparing a list of existing invasive plants and is obliged to revise the list every two years.

Invasive plants grows aggressively, spreads, and displaces other plants and tend to appear on disturbed ground, and the most aggressive one can actually invade existing ecosystems.

Another article of the bill authorizes the Department of Environment to determine the water right of each wetland and mandates the Ministry of Energy to allocate the predetermined amount of water to them.

N.I.O.C
1396.250

National Iranian Drilling Company

Public Calls For Quality Evaluating Of Tender(First publish/seconded publish)
Two-stage(semi-compressive)

TENDER GUARANTEE	ESTIMATED VALUE (Rial)	DESCRIPTION	Tenders Portal Reg. No.	TENDER NO. / INDENT NO	No
Euro 51,885	Rial 1,816,000,000	P/F:"YANCHE NG SANYI"ANNUAL AR BLOWOUT PREVENTER	1482119	Tender No. :FP/12-96/002 Indent No.: 08-22-9145318	1

Brief description of subject:
National Iranian Drilling Company(NIDC) address pasdaran Blev., Airport Sqare, Ahvaz, Iran hereby intends to purchase its requirements from qualified and interested tenderers through two-stage public tender (semi-pressed) upon following terms and conditions:
A) Qualitative evaluation of tenderer:
The evaluation is based on article (J) implementing regulations of the law of tenders and also carried out base on worksheets qualitative evaluation inquiry in the tender documents. Minimum acceptable point of quality is 60.
B) Preparation of tender documents:
Purchasing of documents:
In order to receive the tender documents, 510,000 Rials should be paid to SIBA account number 2174652205004 of NIDC in Bank Meli Iran and providing the original deposit receipt.
Receiving of documents:
Tenderers must be obtain the quality evaluation documents along with tender documents maximum one week after the date of second publication in person at the following address: Hall No.:113,1 th floor, Foreign Procurement Dept. National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahvaz, IRAN
Notice: only the real or legal persons who apply to purchase and receive tender documents from foreign procurement department in due date will be known as tenderer from tender committee.
C) Delivery of call quality evaluating
Tenderers shall submit the completed documents including qualificaion worksheets in form of software in CD and documentary within 14 days from last day of document recived deadline to the following address: Hall No.:107, 1th floor ,Tender Committee, Building operations, National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahvaz, IRAN.
D) Tender Guarantee:
Type of guarantee:
A)Bank guarantees or guarantees issued by non-bank institutions that have activites licensed by the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
B) The original cash deposit receipt paid to National Iranian Drilling Company.
Duration of credit guarantee:
This duration should be valid for 90 days and extendable maximum For one time in initial credit amount.
More on this & other tenders is accessible by click on WWW.NIDC.IR
Foreign Procurement Dept.(DRILLING PROJECTS)
National Iranian Drilling Company

North Korea says ready to strike U.S. aircraft carrier

North Korea said on Sunday it was ready to sink a U.S. aircraft carrier to demonstrate its military might, as two Japanese navy ships joined a U.S. carrier group for exercises in the western Pacific.

U.S. President Donald Trump ordered the USS Carl Vinson carrier strike group to sail to waters off the Korean peninsula in response to rising tension over the North's nuclear and missile tests, and its threats to attack the United States and its Asian allies.

The United States has not specified where the carrier strike group is as it approaches the area. U.S. Vice President Mike Pence said on Saturday it would arrive "within days" but gave no other details.

North Korea remained defiant. "Our revolutionary forces are combat-ready to sink a U.S. nuclear powered aircraft carrier with a single strike," the Rodong Simun, the newspaper of the North's ruling Workers' Party, said in a commentary.

The paper likened the aircraft carrier to a "gross animal" and said a strike on it would be "an actual example to show our military's force".

The commentary was carried on page three of the newspaper, after a two-page feature about leader Kim Jong Un inspecting a pig farm.

North Korea will mark the 85th anniversary of the foundation of its Korean People's Army on Tuesday.

It has in the past marked important anniversaries with tests of its weapons.

North Korea has conducted five nuclear tests, two of them last year, and is working to develop nuclear-tipped missiles that can reach the United States.

It has also carried out a series of ballistic missile tests in defiance of United Nations sanctions.

North Korea's growing nuclear and missile threat is perhaps the most serious



security challenge confronting Trump.

He has vowed to prevent the North from being able to hit the United States with a nuclear missile and has said all options are on the table, including a military strike.

Worry in Japan

North Korea says its nuclear program is for self-defense and has warned the United States of a nuclear attack in response to any aggression. It has also threatened to lay waste to South Korea and Japan.

U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said on Friday North Korea's recent statements were provocative but had proven to be hollow in the past and should not be trusted.

"We've all come to hear their words repeatedly, their word has not proven honest," Mattis told a news conference in Tel Aviv, before the latest threat to the aircraft carrier.

Japan's show of naval force reflects growing concern that North Korea could strike it with nuclear or chemical warheads.

Some Japanese ruling party lawmakers

are urging Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to acquire strike weapons that could hit North Korean missile forces before any imminent attack.

Japan's navy, which is mostly a destroyer fleet, is the second largest in Asia after China's.

The two Japanese warships, the Samidare and Ashigara, left western Japan on Friday to join the Carl Vinson and will "practice a variety of tactics" with the U.S. strike group, the Japan Maritime Self Defense Force said in a statement.

The Japanese force did not specify where the exercises were taking place but by Sunday the destroyers could have reached an area 2,500 km (1,500 miles) south of Japan, which would be waters east of the Philippines.

From there, it could take three days to reach waters off the Korean peninsula. Japan's ships would accompany the Carl Vinson north at least into the East China Sea, a source with knowledge of the plan said.

U.S. and South Korean officials have been saying for weeks that the North could soon stage another nuclear test,

something the United States, China and others have warned against.

South Korea has put its forces on heightened alert.

China, North Korea's sole major ally which nevertheless opposes Pyongyang's weapons programs and belligerence, has appealed for calm. The United States has called on China to do more to help defuse the tension.

Last Thursday, Trump praised Chinese efforts to rein in "the menace of North Korea", after North Korean state media warned the United States of a "super-mighty preemptive strike".

North Korea detains third U.S. citizen

Meanwhile, North Korea detained a U.S. citizen, South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported, bringing the total number of Americans held by the country to three.

The man, a Korean-American in his fifties identified only by his surname Kim, had been in North Korea for a month to discuss relief activities, Yonhap said on Sunday. He was arrested at Pyongyang International Airport on his way out of the country.

The man was a former professor at Yanbian University of Science and Technology (YUST), Yonhap said, citing unnamed sources. YUST, a university in neighboring China, has a sister university in Pyongyang.

An official at South Korea's National Intelligence Service said it was not aware of the reported arrest. Calls to YUST went unanswered.

North Korea, which has been criticized for its human rights record, has in the past used detained Americans to extract high-profile visits from the United States, with which it has no formal diplomatic relations.

North Korea was already holding two Americans.

(Source: agencies)

Iraqi forces liberate another western Mosul neighborhood from ISIL

Iraqi government forces have managed to liberate another neighborhood in Mosul from the clutches of the ISIL (Daesh) terrorists as they are engaged in joint operations with allied fighters from the Popular Mobilization Units to push the extremists out of their last urban stronghold in the country.

The commander of Nineveh Liberation Operation, Lieutenant General Abdul Amir Yarallah, said on that soldiers from the Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) had reclaimed control over al-Sihha al-Thaniya district in western Mosul, Arabic-language al-Sumaria television network reported.

Yarallah added that Iraqi troops raised the national flag over several buildings in the area after inflicting heavy losses on the Daesh ranks and destroying their military hardware.

Meanwhile, an unnamed security source told Sha-faaq news agency that the CTS troopers had gained control of almost 90 percent of al-Tanak district, expressing hope about the full liberation of the territory within the next few hours.

Daesh sniper trainer killed in western Mosul

A security source, requesting anonymity, also said

Iraqi military aircraft had carried out an airstrike against the southern flank of al-Sihha district, killing a high-ranking Daesh commander.

The source added that the slain commander, identified as Abu Abdullah al-Kuwaiti, was in charge of training Daesh snipers.

Daesh executes over dozen civilians in western Mosul

Separately, the Daesh extremists killed 15 residents of western Mosul after they did not allow the terror group to deploy its snipers and rocket launchers on their rooftops.

The United Nations says nearly half a million civilians have fled fighting since the offensive to retake Mosul from the Daesh terrorists started on October 17, 2016.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said on April 17 that 493,000 people had been displaced from the city, located some 400 kilometers north of the capital Baghdad.

As many as 500,000 civilians are still trapped in Daesh-controlled neighborhoods of western Mosul.

Iraqi army soldiers and pro-government popular fighters have made sweeping gains against the Takfiri elements since launching the operation to retake Mosul.

peace," Gabriel said in a statement released as he departed for the region.

"Only a two-state solution will be sustainable," he said.

Gabriel's visit, his first since becoming foreign minister in January, comes as German concerns about Israeli settlement building have dragged ties to their lowest point in years.

German governments have made strong relations with Israel a top priority

ever since World War Two, going to great lengths to make amends for the killing of six million Jews by the Nazis.

Gabriel will visit the Yad Vashem memorial on Monday and meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Israel and Palestinian government officials, his spokesman Martin Schaefer told reporters on Friday.

"We do not believe that the current sit-

uation is sustainable," Schaefer said. "We think it's necessary to make another attempt to revive talks and negotiations in the framework of the Middle East process."

Lack of progress on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict poses a long-term threat to Israel, Norbert Roettgen, head of Germany's parliamentary foreign affairs committee, told broadcaster Deutschlandfunk on Sunday. (Source: Reuters)

Building resilient rural livelihoods is key to helping Yemen

➔ In 2016, agricultural production and area under cultivation shrank by 38 percent due to this lack of inputs. Livestock production fell by 35 percent. The situation in 2017 is not expected to improve without the international community's intervention.

FAO is on the ground in Yemen, working around the clock to deliver emergency livelihood assistance to kick-start food production. This assistance comprises inputs like quick turnaround backyard food production kits, which includes vegetable seeds, egg-laying chickens and rainwater storage tanks, solar pumps, feed, fertilizer, fishery boats, engines, fishing nets and continuous operational equipment and material support.

These home production kits, designed to help feed a household of 20 people for six months, constitute cost-effective humanitarian assistance that can be scaled up to reach more people more quickly. This is especially pertinent for internally displaced people – who now constitute more than 10 percent of the population, and the vast majority of whom traditionally relied on agriculture and livestock. They now live in camps, with relatives or on empty lots and helping them relieve pressure on host communities can pay a double dividend in terms of food and social cohesion.

The kits also have the virtue of being simple, and in the case of Yemen – enduring a combination of several worst-case scenarios at once – simple translates into being implementable.

Simplicity is especially essential to support isolated rural households, almost half of whom live more than six kilometres from any local market at a time when travel is dangerous and roads have been destroyed. For many of these families, these food production kits are their only lifeline to food.

In a bid to restore agricultural livelihoods, FAO is also offering starter kits for beekeepers, replacing fishing equipment that has been destroyed or lost, and giving rural households modern butter churns that enable the production to increase tenfold and help offset Yemen's serious dairy deficit.

As many families have had to sell their animals, a key productive asset, and restocking has slowed down due to lack of access to fodder, FAO is also distributing

Only a political solution can end the suffering in Yemen, as there can be no food security without peace.

vouchers to distressed households in order to purchase livestock. At the same time, FAO is bolstering veterinary networks to vaccinate and treat ailing livestock as well as monitor and contain potential transboundary livestock diseases, which pose an enormous risk both for households living in Yemen's remote and isolated areas as well as livestock trade across the region.

Making Yemen's food system more sustainable will be a long-term effort, requiring important changes to which crops are grown and the rebooting or creation of value chains and improved logistics for what is destined to be the country's primary economic sector. Agriculture already employs more than half of the workforce and is the main source of income for around 60 percent of households.

Even in peacetime, Yemen will face huge challenges, as only 4 percent of its land is arable and water resources are extremely limited. However, its people can and must be enabled to create a viable and more sustainable food system. This requires a simultaneous approach of providing humanitarian assistance along with resilience-building initiatives.

There is no time to lose. The alternative is dismal and threatens to catalyse more conflicts in the future, for there can be no peace without food security.

Israel deadly attack targets Syrian military camp

Three Syrian forces have been killed in a fresh Israeli attack on a military camp near the southwestern city of Quneitra, a military official says.



The attack hit the al-Fawwar camp on Sunday, wounding two others, the unnamed official told the French news agency AFP.

It was not clear whether the assault was an airstrike or shelling. The attack comes after Israel struck a Syrian army position in the province of Quneitra on the Golan plateau on Friday, "causing damage."

A Syrian military source told the official SANA news agency that the Israeli aggression came after an attempt by terrorists to infiltrate military positions in Quneitra was foiled and the assailants suffered heavy losses.

The Israeli military confirmed the raid in a statement, saying it was conducted shortly after three mortar shells allegedly fired from Syria hit an open area in the northern occupied Golan Heights.

The Tel Aviv regime regularly hits positions held by the Syrian army in the Golan Heights, claiming that the attacks are retaliatory. Syria says the raids aim to help Takfiri militants fighting against government forces.

In the past, the Syrian army has confiscated Israeli-made arms and military equipment from terrorists fighting the government forces. There are also reports that Tel Aviv has been treating the extremists wounded in Syria.

Israel seized the Golan Heights from Syria after the 1967 Six-Day War and later occupied it in a move that has never been recognized by the international community.

The regime has built tens of illegal settlements in the area ever since and used the region to carry out military operations against the Syrian government.

Army advances against militants

Separately on Sunday, Syrian forces recaptured Halfaya town in the west-central Hama Province, the Lebanon-based al-Mayadeen TV channel reported.

Meanwhile, pro-opposition media reported fierce clashes between the so-called Free Syrian Army (FSA) militants and US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the northern countryside of Hama.

U.S. defense officials also told Fox News that the Daesh terrorist group is now centered in the city of Dayr al-Zawr, some 144 kilometers southeast of Raqqa, the Takfiri outfit's de facto capital in Syria.

They said that US military drones have watched hundreds of Daesh "bureaucrats" or administrators, leaving Raqqa in the past two months.

(Source: Press TV)

Venezuelans march in memory of those killed in unrest

Thousands of Venezuelans have staged a "silent" march in Venezuela's capital Caracas and other cities to pay tribute to the 20 people who have been killed in political violence in the country in recent weeks.

The protesters, dressed in white shirts, marched peacefully to the headquarters of Venezuela's Catholic bishops' confederation on the west end of Caracas on Saturday, carrying Venezuelan flags.

The rally came amid weeks of turmoil and protests against the government of President Nicolas Maduro, whose failure to address the acute economic crisis in the country as well as to meet opposition demands has led to the upheaval in the Latin American country.

"We've got nothing left to lose. The government has already taken everything, all possibility of living our lives with dignity," said a 33-year-old protester attending the Saturday march. "The government has to back down. It has to listen to the people."

Similar demonstrations were also held in the other Venezuelan cities of Maracaibo, Barquisimeto, and San Cristobal, with no major violence reported between police and the protesters in those rallies, either.

Over the weekend, at least 12 people lost their lives during clashes in the capital, and eight others were reportedly electrocuted in a looting incident after a protest.

The opposition claims that the government in Caracas has hired armed gangs to foment violence in the country, while Maduro's government accuses the right-wing opposition forces of working with criminal gangs in an attempt to remove the leftist leader from power.

Anti-government protests intensified in Venezuela on April 1, when the Supreme Court decided to strip Congress of its powers. The court later reversed that decision but protests have continued.

The embattled Maduro is blamed for Venezuela's economic woes. People have been facing acute shortages of foodstuffs and medicine in recent months. Looting has been repeatedly happening in the country. This is while Venezuela has the world's largest oil reserves.

Maduro has also increasingly been accused of a lack of tolerance for dissent.

He says the opposition is working at the behest of the United States to unseat him.

(Source: agencies)

Sharapova's return to tennis would sit more easily if she showed contrition

A week or so ago, the legal definition of British prisons was changed: they are no longer places of punishment. The new prison and courts bill, put forward by the justice secretary, Liz Truss, proposed that it was more important that they reform and rehabilitate offenders, and prepare them for a return to society. The news was not universally greeted with Nordic cool reasoning. The Sun called the legislation "alarming", while Paul Nuttall, this week's Ukup leader, said that it "beggars belief".



Stories of "holiday camp" inmates drinking, drugging, even frying steaks in their cells were reshaped.

But it makes you wonder – what should be the purpose of drugs bans in sport? Here, I find myself in an uncomfortable position: instinctively, I'm kind of with Nuttall. I want the doping cheats to be punished. Reforming and rehabilitating them, ah, less bothered about that. Individuals will always use illicit means to improve their performances, but if they are busted, they should know that real, stinging deprivations await them.

And ideally – let's go full Nuttall now – I would like some contrition. Doping offences are not a victimless crime: most obviously, the legitimate winner or medalist who is presented with their reward years after the event to the sound of no hands clapping. And for us, the sports fans, it's just really tedious to have to replay events you have watched and speculate on what part banned substances played. I had seven years of that with Lance Armstrong, and frankly now I'm cooked.

All of which brings us to the return on Wednesday of Maria Sharapova. Of course, Sharapova is not an Armstrong-level villain: she tested positive last year for meldonium, an over-the-counter cardiac supplement – which is thought to improve exercise capacity – that had recently been banned by the International Tennis Federation. We can't even call her a "doper": she was not trying to gain an unfair advantage, according to the court of arbitration for sport, but had simply made an administrative mistake, failing to read a bunch of emails that were sent to her.

So what's the problem? Everyone skims their emails and we don't have the excuse of being world-class tennis players. Sharapova blundered, she sat on the sidelines for 15 months and now she's free to return. She's been given a wildcard to the Porsche Grand Prix in Stuttgart, an offer that tournament is perfectly entitled to make. Roland Garros and Wimbledon will presumably extend a similar invitation in due course. Sharapova will be back on the world's biggest courts, whatever anyone's misgivings, and doubtless as formidable and noisy as ever.

This is only an issue if we hold on, somewhat indignantly, to the idea of punishing offenders. Certainly everything seems to be falling into place rather nicely for Sharapova right now. Stuttgart has delayed her first-round match against Roberta Vinci until Wednesday, the day her ban expires. She will have been further buoyed by the news this week that Serena Williams is pregnant and will miss the rest of the season. Sharapova, who turned 30 this week, hasn't beaten Williams since the Russian was a teenager.

Sharapova is a ferocious competitor and would not have enjoyed missing a calendar year of grand slams, but objectively things could be much worse. Of her major sponsors, only Tag Heuer dropped her; Nike, Evian, Head and Porsche – who, by happy coincidence, bankroll the event in Stuttgart – all stuck with her. And during her ban, she's had plenty of frying-steak-in-her-cell moments: she was on front rows at New York Fashion Week, in selfies with Elton John at a tennis event in Las Vegas, glammed up for the Vanity Fair Oscar Party.

She's also, presumably, had plenty of time to work on her forthcoming autobiography. The title, appropriately enough: Unstoppable.

Where the Sharapova situation is trickier for me is the bit about being contrite. She's not. She gives no indication of feeling that she has done anything wrong. In fact, her strongest criticism is saved for the ITF, which she believes should have taken her aside and – "just an official to an athlete" – told her about the positive doping test and worked out how to handle it. Instead, she feels, they chose to make an example of her.

There is a problem here. Tennis has a reputation as a clean sport: nearly all of the very few positive tests have been for recreational drug use. Martina Hingis had a small amount of cocaine in her system; so did Richard Gasquet, although he argued (successfully, bizarrely) that it entered his system after he had kissed a woman in a Miami nightclub and had his ban reduced. Sharapova, in fact, is the first real case regarding a name player and a potentially performance-enhancing substance.

The truth is that, should you be so inclined, tennis is an excellent sport to cheat at. It is, in Ukup parlance, legendarily "soft on crime". With the exception of one journeyman player – Wayne Odesnik, an American now banned for 15 years – authorities have never caught a player using EPO, human growth hormone or synthetic testosterone. Last year, an ESPN survey of 31 professional tennis players found that almost a quarter personally knew a player who had used performance-enhancing drugs. Two-thirds believed that the sport did not do enough testing.

A World Anti-Doping Agency report in 2014 revealed that the ITF found a comparatively tiny number of miscreants in tennis: one in 985 drug tests was positive, versus one in 274 in track and field and one in 296 in pro cycling.

Sharapova has skilfully sidestepped this controversy, though to be fair she has worked really hard during her career to improve her movement. There have been a few grumbles from fellow players about the decision to offer her wildcards, rather than making her earn her ranking points again – "disrespectful" said Caroline Wozniacki – but they have been easy enough for tournament organisers to ignore. There's a countdown to Sharapova's return on her Twitter page, almost as if a gross injustice will soon be overturned. "I'm a gentle soul," she has told us. "I'm not made of anger, hostility or resentment."

I'm not made of anger, hostility or resentment either, but why, then, does it feel as if no lessons are being learned?

(Source: Guardian)

Lewis Hamilton hopes for McLaren and Williams Formula 1 revivals

Lewis Hamilton hopes McLaren and Williams can revive their flagging Formula 1 fortunes and fight him for world championship titles before he retires.

Hamilton, 32, left McLaren at the end of 2012 and has gone on to win 33 F1 races and two world championships in four seasons with Mercedes.

McLaren hasn't won a race since Hamilton departed Woking for Brackley, while Williams hasn't fought for the world championship since 2003.

McLaren-Honda is struggling to even score points so far in 2017, lacking power from the engine and reliability overall, while Williams is trying to rebuild again with former McLaren and Mercedes technical director Paddy Lowe at the helm, having also not won a race since 2012.

Hamilton has spoken repeatedly of the extra satisfaction he feels from fighting against multiple drivers, rather than simply his own team-mate, and hopes both McLaren and Williams can find a way to join the fight at the front while he remains in Formula 1.

«What's sad for me watching Formula 1 is you see the depth of teams, Williams, McLaren, and they're not back there.» Hamilton said.

«Williams hasn't been right in the fight for years - they had that real slump, and now McLaren's having it.

«There's a passion with Ferrari, there's a passion with Mercedes, passion with McLaren - because of the drivers, experiences and championships they've had while I've been watching Formula 1.

«I hope in my time left in Formula 1 there is a period of time where Williams is up there with us and McLaren is up there with us and there's a real strong front line of the top teams - which I think is magical.

«I hope that comes back into the mix at some stage.»

(Source: Auto Sport)



Antoine Griezmann will consider Man United, Real Madrid offers - agent



Antoine Griezmann's adviser has told Telefoot that the France international will consider offers from Manchester United and Real Madrid.

Griezmann has been strongly linked with both clubs throughout the season but has stressed that he is happy at Atletico Madrid.

Adviser Eric Olhats, who emphasised that his client has a €100 million release clause in his contract, also poured cold water on speculation that Paris Saint-Germain could move for him.

Griezmann scored his 100th La Liga goal as Atletico beat Espanyol 1-0 on Saturday, and Olhats said: "There is an existing clause of €100m, which is unavoidable.

"We're thinking right now about the most suitable offer. Real Madrid

and other clubs are part of this thinking process.

"Antoine doesn't want to leave the club at any cost. That is false."

Olhats said United "told us about their project" and had been the "first and the most solid" in expressing an interest in signing Griezmann.

But he said there had been no contact with PSG, adding: "Last year, there was a real interest, but not this year. He might not be in their plans any more."

An irritated Griezmann walked away from a postmatch interview with beIN SPORTS on Saturday when asked about his future.

He said: "That's it I've already spoken. I do not want to talk any more."

(Source: ESPN)

Kenya's Keitany breaks women's only world record at London Marathon



Mary Keitany of Kenya has broken Paula Radcliffe's women's-only world record to win the London Marathon on Sunday.

Keitany, 35, crossed the finish line on The Mall in two hours 17 minutes one second, the second-fastest time in history.

That was 41 seconds quicker than four-time British Olympian Radcliffe ran in winning the event in 2005.

Kenyan Daniel Wanjiru, 24, won the men's race in 2:05:56, with Kenenisa Bekele of Ethiopia second.

Bekele - the 5,000m and 10,000m world record holder - looked to be mounting a challenge in the final stages, but Wanjiru found enough pace to finish strongly and eventually win by nine seconds.

Tirunesh Dibaba of Ethiopia was the runner-up in the women's race, clocking a time of 2:17:56.

Britain's Alyson Dixon finished 12th

with a personal best time of 2:29:06 to secure her place at this summer's World Championships.

However, Jo Pavey, who needed to finish as one of the top two British women to qualify for August's championships in London, was forced to retire after about 17 miles.

Radcliffe still holds the women's world record of 2:15:25, set at the London Marathon in 2003 when she ran against men and women. Robbie Simpson was the fastest of the British men, finishing in 2:15:04, followed by Andrew Davies seven seconds later.

Speaking before the race, Simpson said he needed to go under 2:15:30 to put himself in the frame to represent Scotland at the Commonwealth Games.

Both men have run the required time to secure their places in the British squad for the World Championships.

(Source: BBC)

Conte says benching Hazard was always part of the plan against Spurs

Antonio Conte revealed that he always planned for Eden Hazard to make a decisive impact off the bench after the Belgium star's inspired second-half cameo secured Chelsea a 4-2 win over Tottenham in a thrilling FA Cup semifinal at Wembley.

Hazard and Diego Costa were surprisingly omitted from Chelsea's starting XI to take on their bitter London rivals, but both were introduced in the 61st minute with the score level at 2-2 after strikes from Harry Kane and Dele Alli had cancelled out Willian's first-half free kick and penalty.

The match tilted in Chelsea's favour in the 75th minute, when Hazard fired in through a mass of bodies after Tottenham had failed to clear a corner, and the midfielder then laid the ball off for Nemanja Matic to settle the game with a 30-yard thunderbolt 10 minutes from time.

"Our plan was this," Conte said. "I tried also to tell our players to stay in the game, because [if] we pass more time [on the clock], it was better for us. Then I decided last 30 minutes to put Eden and Diego in, and then Cesc [Fabregas], because don't forget Cesc was very important also for us.

"I must be pleased because in this game I involved all my players in our idea, in our football," the manager added. "I think it's very important in this part of the season that everyone, every single player, feels a part of this project.

"In this part of the season when you know you have to play three tough games [in a week], you must make strong decisions and take responsibility to make these decisions. It's not easy to decide to start the



game without two important players, Hazard and Diego, but I think you must take this responsibility and you must involve your players in your plan and then take this risk."

Hazard later revealed that he was told in advance of the manager's plans, and that he was happy to contribute in any way he could.

"I think it's the choice of the manager. He told me and Diego [on Friday] because Tuesday we play such an important game [against Southampton]," the Belgium international said. "We have a lot of players in the squad. Willian played in my position and scored

two goals, so they deserved to play.

"When I go on the bench, when I am on the pitch, my thing is always the same. I'm trying to win games, to create some chance, to score some goals, and I did."

Conte insisted that reaching the FA Cup final was always Chelsea's "top priority" and praised the performances of Michy Batshuayi and Nathan Ake, who were both handed their first starts since January on the Wembley stage.

"I'm pleased because Michy started the game, a really important game," said the boss. "It's very important for him, for his confidence. Ake is a young player from our academy. He must be proud to see his commitment, to see the level he played at in this type of game. It's not easy for Ake to go and play [so well here]."

"I trust them, [as well as] every single player, and I think I showed this today."

Chelsea and Tottenham remain locked in a close Premier League title race with just four points separating them heading into the final six matches of the season, but Conte does not believe this win will give the Blues a psychological edge.

"I think the FA Cup and league are two different competitions, and for this reason it's important to be focused," he said. "We have two days to be focused and prepare very well."

"Against Southampton, we have to play a tough game and we know Tottenham want to fight until the end. I think they have all the possibility to do this."

(Soccer.net)

Bright future for Iran volleyball

S P O R T S Iran volleyball have leapfrogged the desk Asian teams in recent years thanks to talented players in the country who have been encouraged to take the sport.

Big stars, namely Amir Ghaffour, Shahram Mahmoudi, Saeid Marouf, Mohammad Mousavi and Farhad Zarif have played a leading role in the eye-catching growth since they are role models for the youth players who want to start the sport.

Iran volleyball recovered lost glory in 2008 AVC Cup in Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand after winning the title.

Under leadership of late Hossein Madani, the Iranian team defeated Asian giants Japan and South Korea to start a glorious era for the coming years.

Argentina's legendary coach Julio Velasco cemented Iran's position in the continent and made Team Melli a new Giant in the world.

Velasco helped Iran win Asian Championship in 2011 and 2013 respectively and the Persians came fourth in the 2013 FIVB Volleyball Men's World Grand Champions Cup in Japan.

Finally, Iranian team made history, achieving first-ever Olympic qualification and came fifth in the prestigious event.

Investing in young children is not only the right thing to do from an ethical point of view, but it is also the smart thing to do for the future.

In early April, seven-time champion Iran finished in fourth place in the 11th Asian Boys' U-19 Volleyball Championship but talent scout Alireza Khoshroei, who has worked as a coach in Iran youth team, says that the team's performance in Myanmar was satisfying.

"We failed to win the title for the eighth time but booked a berth in the 2017 FIVB Boys' U-19 World Championship. Iran took part in the event



with a very young and inexperienced team. But I hope the situation can significantly improve so that young people can devote themselves fully to sports," Khoshroei told Tehran Times.

"We will try to find new young players who could continue the success that we've achieved so far. That is

one of our main goals," he added.

Igor Kolakovic has replaced Raul Lozano after the 2016 Olympic Games.

Khoshroei says it takes time to find out that the Serbian coach is a good replacement for Argentine or not.

"Let's just wait and see what happens," he said.

Nadal wins historic 10th Monte Carlo title

Rafael Nadal captured an incredible 10th Monte-Carlo Rolex Masters crown on Sunday in beating fellow Spaniard Albert Ramos-Vinolas 6-1, 6-3 in the 76-minute final. Nadal's 29th ATP World Tour Masters 1000 title, one shy of record-holder Novak Djokovic (30), marks the first time in the Open Era (since April 1968) that any man has won a singles tournament on 10 occasions.

The victory also sees Nadal clinch his 50th clay-court crown (50-8), breaking the record he shared with Guillermo Vilas since 24 April 2016, when Nadal lifted his ninth trophy at the Barcelona Open Banco Sabadell.

His Serene Highness Albert II, Sovereign Prince of Monaco presented Nadal with the trophy after he improved to a 63-4 match record at the Monte-Carlo Country Club. World No. 7 Nadal earned 1,000 Emirates ATP Rankings points and will now travel to Barcelona, where he will look to further add to his legacy as the undisputed 'King of Clay', with €820,035 in prize money.

Nadal has now won an ATP World Tour title for the 14th year in a row (since 2004) and has a 70-35 mark in title matches during his illustrious career.

Fourth seed Nadal, who had practised first-strike tennis on Court Rainier III hours before the afternoon final, put Ramos-Vinolas under immediate pressure in



his first service game, but he could not convert three break point opportunities. In targeting Ramos-Vinolas' backhand with his heavy topspin forehand, Nadal created space and in the fourth game secured a 3-1 advantage with a break to love. A second service break followed at 1-4, 15/40, when Ramos-Vinolas struck a forehand into the net. Nadal, who had been quick to move up the court for the short ball, clinched the 30-minute set with an ace.

Ramos-Vinolas, who attempted not to be pushed back farther behind the baseline, settled down in the

early stages of the second set, but at 2-2 the relentless depth and pace of Nadal saw the World No. 24 get broken for a third time (to 30) with a mis-timed backhand that sailed long.

Nadal experienced a brief wobble when leading 4-3, dropping to 0/30, but clever placement ensured short responses for routine groundstroke winners. At 3-5, Ramos-Vinolas buckled under tremendous pressure. Having saved two championship points, courtesy of Nadal errors, Ramos-Vinolas hit a double fault on Nadal's third championship point.

It was the pair's third FedEx ATP Head2Head meeting (Nadal leads 3-0), following on from victories in 2013 and 2014 at Barcelona. Nadal extended his perfect 14-0 record of never having lost to a fellow Spaniard in an ATP World Tour final.

It was the first all left-handed Monte-Carlo Rolex Masters final since 2010, when Nadal swept past his compatriot Fernando Verdasco, and the fourth all-Spanish final in the tournament's history - 2002 Juan Carlos Ferrero d. Carlos Moya, 2010 Nadal d. Verdasco and 2011 Nadal d. David Ferrer. Three-time former finalist and former World No. 1 Boris Becker watched Nadal's historic win unfold.

(Source: atpworldtour)

Fabregas says Chelsea's FA Cup win over Spurs will not affect the title race

Cesc Fabregas has downplayed the potential impact of Chelsea's FA Cup semi-final win over Tottenham on the Premier League title race.

Chelsea beat Spurs 4-2 at Wembley on Saturday, but Fabregas is wary of Mauricio Pochettino's men, who sit four points behind with six games to play.

"(We have) six games where every

single one of them we need three points, because I don't believe Spurs will drop too many," Fabregas said.

Chelsea's full focus is now on the league prior to the May 27 Wembley FA Cup final.

Chelsea head coach Antonio Conte has bemoaned the proximity of Tuesday's Premier League clash with Southampton

and the fact Spurs have 24 additional hours to prepare for their game at Crystal Palace on Wednesday.

Fixture congestion has been something of a rarity for Chelsea this season, as Manchester United boss Jose Mourinho has been only too keen to point out.

(Source: skysports)



Zlatan Ibrahimovic deserves new Man Utd contract

Zlatan Ibrahimovic's sensational campaign at Manchester United warrants a new contract, despite the striker's season-ending knee injury, argues Oliver Holt.

Ibrahimovic's future at Old Trafford was plunged into doubt on Saturday when United confirmed the Swede had sustained "significant knee-ligament damage" in Thursday's Europa League quarter-final victory against Anderlecht.

Under contract until the end of the season, and with the injury likely to rule him out for the rest of the campaign, United are left in a conundrum whether to offer Ibrahimovic a new deal.

The Daily Mail's chief sports writer, Holt, was clear in his stance though, urging United to stand by the man who was single-handedly carried the club this term.

"All the talk this season was about Zlatan was defying age and how he was getting better as he got older," he told the Sunday Supplement.

"He has had a fantastic season, he has been one of the buys and performers of the season, so it's a really difficult situation for United.



"One would like to think United would stand by him and offer him a new contract. I'm not sure if football works like that anymore, though."

With Ibrahimovic's injury likely to rule him out for the rest of the season, and potentially longer, the Swede could well have played his last game for United.

Matt Dunn of the Daily Express questioned whether

the Swede's long-term future rested at Old Trafford, or whether he would choose to join one of the host of clubs that would be desperate to sign him once he returned to fitness.

"Only one person knows if it's the end for Zlatan, and that is Zlatan himself," Dunn added.

"He's got a tough period of rehabilitation to go through to make it back, not helped by his age.

"People will pay him to play football if he wants to, that's unlikely to be United but people will want to have Ibrahimovic in their team when he does get back to fitness.

"But does he want to do it? He's had a fantastic career, what has he got left to give?"

"In this country especially, people weren't expecting this season from him - the way he has taken it by the scruff of the neck.

"It's a sad end to the season but the last seven months are a decent high for him to go out on if he chooses too."

(Source: Skysports)

Anelka and Domenech reignite feud over future of Mbappe



Nicolas Anelka and his former France coach Raymond Domenech have reopened the feud that saw Anelka sent home from the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

Ex-Arsenal, Chelsea and Real Madrid forward Anelka hit back after Domenech had urged teenage Monaco star Kylian Mbappe not to follow his example.

When asked about the potential of 18-year-old Mbappe, who has been linked with some of Europe's biggest clubs after a dazzling season, Domenech

was scathing about Anelka.

He told L'Equipe: "I remember Ronaldo at the Olympics in 1996, and Mbappe is of this level -- a world-class player.

"It is up to him to manage this well. He has the choice between being Ronaldo or Anelka."

But an angry Anelka hit back, telling JD that if Mbappe followed his example he would be "among the best attackers, with a strong character."

He added: "If he follows Ronaldo, Il Fenomeno, my model in football, he will be among the legends and will have marked the history of his sport. That is what I wish him.

"He can also follow Raymond Domenech's career -- that of a small player of the French championship who has become a coach without winning any trophies and then unemployed since 2010. It is for Mbappe to choose."

(Source: Soccernet)

Stalteri's starlets have eyes on India

Former players passing on their wisdom is an invaluable part of educating the next generation of footballers looking to make it to the top. With that in mind, following a decorated playing career in Europe, Canada's U-17 coach Paul Stalteri makes a convincing mentor for his aspiring charges.

As a full-back, Stalteri helped Werder Bremen to a Bundesliga and German Cup double in the 2003/04 season before moving to the English Premier League for a spell with Tottenham Hotspur. As a Canadian international, he sits second on his country's all-time appearance list with 84 caps and won the 2000 CONCACAF Gold Cup title with the Canucks.

Such a level of experience is rare among Canadian players, which makes Stalteri's knowledge of the game a real asset to the youngsters in his U-17 squad. "It's been a great experience so far after finishing my career," the 39-year-old said in an interview with FIFA.com. "Having been involved with the program from U-15 has given me a good grasp on this current group, having seen them all at 14 and 15 years old. I don't think we've missed any player across the country in that process, so it's been very good."

Stalteri's work is about to be put to the test, as Canada will be in Panama this weekend for the 2017 CONCACAF U-17 Championship. At stake in the competition, which takes place from 21 April to 7 May, is qualification for the FIFA U-17 World Cup India 2017.

"First and foremost, the youth [national team] programs are there for developing players and helping them into that situation of becoming a professional and members of the [Canadian] senior men's national team," he said. "With that, playing games at the highest level and getting the most experience you can in a CONCACAF and international environment is important. There's no doubt we want to go down to Panama and be successful and qualify for the [U-17] World Cup."

Road to India

Canada are one of 12 teams eyeing CONCACAF's four qualifying spots for India 2017, being split into three initial groups at Panama 2017. The top two sides from each will advance to the Classification Stage, with the leading pairs from two final groups qualifying for this year's U-17 World Cup.

The draw has already laid out an interesting combination of match-ups. In Group A, the hosts will face central American rivals Honduras and Caribbean opposition in the form of Curacao and Haiti. "We played against Panama in Panama and they're obviously very good, they're very athletic," Stalteri said. "Their program has come on leaps and bounds in the last five to ten years and you just have to look no further than their senior team to know how difficult of an opponent they are. Having watched Haiti, they look very organised and look like they have been playing together for quite a long time."

The big challenge for Stalteri's Canadian side in Group B will be Costa Rica, though Cuba and Suriname are sure to offer stiff competition as well. "Everyone will look at Costa Rica as the biggest opposition in terms of its name, but then you have Cuba as well, who got to the finals of the Caribbean qualifiers," he said. "They will be organised and difficult for us."

Group C is sure to attract plenty of interest, with two-time defending champions Mexico drawn with arch-rivals USA, central American side El Salvador and Jamaica from the Caribbean. "We played three of those four teams in recent international friendlies, and I'm sure that I'm not throwing any surprises out there by saying the US and Mexico are probably the clear favourites," Stalteri said. "They put a lot of resources into those two teams and I would imagine in my mind that they would come through that group, but the games have to be played and you just never know what can happen in that kind of a group."

(Source: FIFA)

Clippers' Griffin to miss rest of playoffs with toe injury

Los Angeles Clippers star forward Blake Griffin will miss the remainder of the NBA playoffs because of a big toe injury, the team announced Saturday.

The news came less than 12 hours after the injury to the plantar plate of his right big toe suffered during the Clippers' 111-106 win over the Utah Jazz on Friday night in Game 3 of their Western Conference first-round playoff series.

The five-time All-Star forward will be re-evaluated upon the team's return from Salt Lake City to Los Angeles.

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The 6-foot-10, 251-pound Griffin injured the toe after landing awkwardly with 3:18 left before halftime. He went to the locker room during a subsequent timeout and had X-rays taken on the toe.

Griffin scored 11 points on 5-of-9 shooting from the field and collected six rebounds in 18 minutes. He averaged 25.0 points and 6.0 rebounds during the first two games of the series against the Jazz.

During the 2016-17 regular season, Griffin averaged 21.6 points, 8.1 rebounds and 4.9 assists in 61 games.

Griffin, 28, has been plagued by injuries throughout his career. In last year's playoffs, he aggravated a left quadriceps injury in Game 4 of the Clippers' first-round series against the Portland Trail Blazers and did not return for the remainder of the series. The Clippers eventually were eliminated in six games.

Griffin missed 18 straight games earlier this season after undergoing surgery on his right knee.

With Griffin out in the second half, Clippers point guard Chris Paul sparked the team's second-half rally Friday night, finishing with a season-high 34 points, seven rebounds and 10 assists.

"One of the biggest adjustments is, we probably won't be able to play through the post so much," Paul explained after the game how different the Clippers' offense will be without Griffin.

"He's such a dynamic player. We go to him in the post, and we cut and move off him. ... He's our other assist guy. Just his leadership, it's just a different feeling when he's on the court."

The Clippers have a 2-1 lead in the best-of-seven series. Game 4 will be Sunday night in Utah.

(Source: Reuters)

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Italian translator working on "Bearing 270 Degrees"

A R T TEHRAN — Italian translator Michele Marelli **d e s k** is working on Iranian novel "Bearing 270 Degrees" by Ahmad Dehqan.

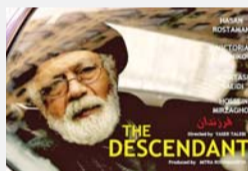


"Bearing 270 Degrees" is a novel about the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, which is known as the Sacred Defense in Iran. Marelli, who got his diploma in Persian from the Tehran University, is fluent in Persian and English.

Mimesis International Publishing House in Italy is scheduled to release the book in the near future.

An English translation of "Bearing 270 Degrees" by U.S. translator Paul Sprachman was released in 2006.

NEWS IN BRIEF



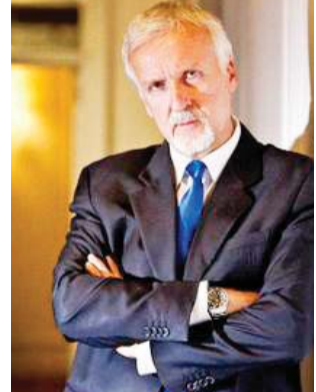
"The Descendants" to compete in Longleaf Film Festival

A R T TEHRAN — Iranian director Yaser **d e s k** Talebi's short film "The Descendants" will be screened at the Longleaf Film Festival, which will be held in Raleigh, in the U.S. state of North Carolina on May 12 and 13.

"The Descendants" is about Jacob, an Iranian Jewish man who leaves Iran for Sweden to find his son, Farrokh, who was in the country to continue his studies but has not been in touch with his family for a long time.

"Avatar" sequels now scheduled to start in December 2020

NEW YORK (AP) — James Cameron has set the release dates for the next four "Avatar" sequels, with the first coming in 2020.



The movie's Facebook page Saturday posted a photo of Cameron and his massive film crew, who have been working on all four films simultaneously. The post said "Avatar 2" will hit theaters Dec. 18, 2020, and "Avatar 3" comes a year later, on Dec. 17, 2021.

The franchise then takes a three-year hiatus before returning with "Avatar 4" on Dec. 20, 2024, and "Avatar 5" on Dec. 19, 2025. The first sequel had been expected in 2018 but Cameron this year said that timetable wouldn't be met.

The original 2009 "Avatar" film has netted over \$2.7 billion, centering on the conflict between humans and the blue-skinned alien race Na'vi of Pandora.

"Genius" TV series shows drama of Albert Einstein's life

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Philosopher, humanitarian and physicist Albert Einstein is the subject of new TV series "Genius", which delves into the drama and passion of the man who developed the theory of relativity and helped initiate the U.S. effort to build an atomic bomb.

Executive producer Ron Howard told reporters at the TV show's launch at the Tribeca Film Festival that he had always been fascinated by Einstein.

"But I never realized how many twists and turns and, you know, there were in his life, and how much drama there was," Howard said on Thursday.

The 10-part series for the National Geographic channel shows Einstein's personal struggles and "how complicated, you know - kind of bohemian - a lot of his relationships were," Howard said.

World poorer when people like Kiarostami die: Victor Erice

A R T TEHRAN — Spanish filmmaker **d e s k** Victor Erice who was a close friend of the late Iranian auteur Abbas Kiarostami has said that the world gets poorer when people like Kiarostami die.

In 2006, the two filmmakers showcased their works of photography, installations and screenings during a series of exhibitions titled the Erice -- Kiarostami Correspondences in Spain and France.

Speaking on the opening day of a three-day tribute to Kiarostami at the Fajr International Film Festival in Tehran on Saturday, Erice said that he became familiar with Kiarostami after he saw his 1990 movie "Close-up" in Madrid.

After watching the film, Erice felt that a new view had been born in cinema.

When European cinema had become worn out, he taught European filmmakers to revise their outlook on the world, he said.

Erice says that besides air pollution, the world is suffering from visual pollution. He said that Kiarostami found a solution for the latter when he connected innocence with knowledge.

In addition, American critics Godfrey Cheshire and Jonathan Rosenbaum, Icelandic filmmaker Fridrik Thor Fridriksson, and Turkish director Semih Kaplanoglu delivered speeches at the meeting.

The closing day of the commemoration of Kiarostami will be held today with a speech by Colombian film expert Estephania Bonnett Alonso.

She is the co-founder of the Black Factory Cinema, a production house devoted to film production and



Spanish filmmaker Victor Erice speaks during a commemoration of Iranian auteur Abbas Kiarostami at the 35th Fajr International Film Festival at Tehran's Charsu Cineplex on April 22, 2017.

filmmaking training, which also organized Kiarostami's workshops in the Spanish-speaking countries.

In addition, Negar Eskandarfar, the director of the

Karnameh Art and Cultural Institute in Tehran, will also deliver a lecture today. Kiarostami arranged his workshops in Iran under the auspices of the institute.

Persian literature scholar Hakemi-Vala dies at 81

A R T TEHRAN — Persian **d e s k** literature scholar Esmail Hakemi-Vala died at his home in Tehran on Friday. He had been suffering from Parkinson's disease for several years.

Born in 1936, Hakemi-Vala was a prominent scholar teaching Persian literature at the University of Tehran.

He was selected and honored as an Eternal Figure in Persian literature in 2005.

The books "Rubai (quatrains) and Rubai Composers from the Beginning until the 13th Century" and "The Rituals



of Generosity and Magnanimity" are among his noteworthy credits.

His funeral procession took place at the University of Tehran on Sunday and he was buried in the Luminaries Section of Tehran's Behesht Zahra Cemetery.

Tehran gallery debut to showcase art elites' works

TEHRAN — Tehran's newly-established gallery Farmanfarma will hold its first show by displaying works by prominent Iranian artists.

Works by Aidin Aghdashlu, Jazeh Tabatabai, Hanibal Alkhas, Iraj Zand, Parvaneh Etemadi, Mehdi Sahabi and dozens of other artists have been selected to be showcased at the exhibit entitled "Figure and Figuration".

The exhibit will be organized from April 28 to May 19 at the gallery located at the Second Araabi St., North Kheradmand St. in the Karim Khan neighborhood.



The gallery is owned by Toktam Farmanfarma who is a graduate of cultural programing management. She has been doing painting since she was a child and has so far held several solos and group exhibits.

Malaysians impressed by humanistic values of Iranian cinema: ASTRO assistant

1 -> He expressed satisfaction with the easy access that the organizers provide to the various sections of the event. "I think the location is very good. Everything is here, the market is here, the food court is here, the festival is here, everything is available."

He next explained the process of purchasing Iranian movies and said that he is planning to acquire some Iranian movies for his country. "We need Iranian movies for our audiences in Malaysia."

"We work through the companies here in Iran and they recommend the films to us. For example, we communicate with the companies like Iran Novin Company and the Iran ArtHouse Film by email, they recommend us the movies, and then we watch the movies to see if they are suitable for us," he explained. When asked if they select the films for only public



ASTRO Senior Assistant Ho Hock Doong is seen at Tehran's Charsu Cineplex during the 35th Fajr International Film Festival on April 22, 2017.

screenings or just the festivals, he replied, "The films will go through our channels. We have this

TV movie channel, the name of which is A-List. So this is a channel we launched in 2013. This movie channel plays all the world famous movies screened at international festivals from Cannes to Berlin. It is a Satellite movie channel.

"For example, 'The Salesman' went on screen in the festival, then it will go on screen in the cinemas and then on this channel," he said.

He also named several Iranian movies his company had acquired in previous years like "Barcode" by Mostafa Kiai, "The Painting Pool" by Maziar Miri and "A Cube of Sugar" by Reza Mirkarimi.

The 20th Iranian Film Market opened last Friday. Representatives of 18 international distributors from around the world are in Iran taking part in the film market, which will be running until April 27.

Hollywood agent and producer Sandy Gallin dies at 76

NEW YORK (AP) — Sandy Gallin, an agent and talent manager who guided the careers of such luminaries as Barbra Streisand, Dolly Parton, Cher and Nicole Kidman, as well as being a TV, movie and Broadway producer, has died in Los Angeles. He was 76.

Gallin died Friday after a long battle with multiple myeloma, according to close friend Bruce Bozzi. "We lost a shining light this morning," Bozzi wrote on Instagram in tribute.

Other Gallin clients included Neil Diamond, Joan Rivers, Mariah Carey, Whoopi Goldberg, Renee Zellweger, Lily Tomlin, Martin Lawrence, Paul Lynde and Howie Mandell.

He helped produce such films as 1991's "Father of the Bride" and 1994's "I.Q." starring Tim Robbins, as well as the TV shows "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" and "Angel." He earned a Primetime Emmy Award in 1980 for producing "The Miracle Worker," starring Melissa Gilbert.

On Broadway, Gallin produced the 2002 Tony Award-nominated revival of "Man of La Mancha," starring Brian Stokes Mitchell and Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio, and a revival of "Hedda Gabler" with Kate Burton.

Gallin was raised in New York City and was a graduate of Boston University. He broke into the agency business in the traditional manner, starting in the mail room of the G.A.C. agency. He took typing and shorthand in night school, became a secretary, then an agent.

"I booked the Sullivan show for seven years," he told The Associated Press in 1983. "I saw how Ed operated, how he gave talent the best possible exposure. It was a brilliant operation."

Gallin continued up the agency ladder, later joined with Raymond Katz in the powerhouse Katz-Gallin agency. He appeared in front of cameras in the mid-1980s as host for "Live ... and In Person," NBC's hourlong extravaganzas. In later life, he sold houses and did luxury renovations.

North Dakota's 'water protectors' bring their pipeline story to film

NEW YORK (Reuters) — They call themselves "water protectors" and describe the Dakota Access pipeline ferrying crude oil across America as "the black snake."

In "Awake: A Dream From Standing Rock", the Standing Rock Sioux tribe and those who flocked to windswept tribal lands in North Dakota last year to protest the pipeline, get to tell their story on their own terms.

They also hope to build on the impetus of the months-long standoff, despite the \$3.8 billion project by Energy Transfer Partners LP (ETPN) eventually going ahead.

"The ambition of the film is really to get people to understand the issue and feel it in a way that's emotional," said director Josh Fox, an environmental activist and filmmaker.

The film, comprised of three parts by different directors, premiered on Saturday - Earth Day - at the Tribeca Film Festival. It also will be streamed online at awakethefilm.org on a pay-what-you-can basis with all proceeds going to the cause.

"It's really about pushing the movement forward. We also want to say, you guys did something unbelievable, and this is one way of giving a debt of gratitude," Fox said.

The 1,172-mile (1,885-km) Dakota Access line running



Construction equipment sits near a Dakota Access Pipeline construction site off County Road 135 near the town of Cannon Ball, North Dakota, U.S. on October 30, 2016.

(Reuters/Josh Morgan)

from North Dakota to Illinois drew international attention in 2016 after the Standing Rock Native American tribe sued to block completion of the final link, saying it would desecrate a sacred burial ground.

Environmentalists also argued that potential leaks along its length would risk poisoning the water supply for

some 17 million Americans.

In February, U.S. President Donald Trump gave the go-ahead to complete the project. The protest camps were demolished and oil is expected to start flowing in mid-May.

The film contrasts the water cannon, rubber bullets, helicopters and riot gear used by law enforcement officials against the protesters with idyllic scenes of sparkling water, sunsets, starry skies and communal camp life. More than 700 people were arrested during the protests.

"The film initiates as a dream, as if the last 500 years of civilization didn't happen," said Fox.

"It was an amazing place, and it ran on very different principles than our society - those of sharing mutual respect and non-violence," said Fox, who spent several weeks there at the suggestion of "Divergent" actress Shailene Woodley.

Although the protesters ultimately lost the battle over the pipeline, their spirits remain high.

"Our camp is gone, but our spirit is not broken," says Sioux member Floris Bull White. "Will you wake up and join us?"