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Fajr Golden Simorgh remains at home for "The Home"

A R T **TEHRAN** — The Golden Simorgh for best film at the 35th Fajr International Film Festival remained at home as Iranian drama "The Home" by producer/director/writer Asghar Yusefinejad won the award on Thursday.

Yusefinejad received the award from Cinema Organization of Iran (COI) director Mohammad-Mehdi Heidarian during the closing ceremony of the festival at Tehran's Vahdat Hall.

In his acceptance speech, Yusefinejad dedicated his award to world-renowned Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami and his homeland Tabriz.

In announcing the best film winner, Iranian actress Fatemeh Motamed-Arya, who was a member of the jury, said that all seven members of the panel were amazed by "The Home".

The film, which is Yusefinejad's directorial debut, also brought him the Silver Simorgh for best screenwriter.

The movie tells the story of Sayeh, who has broken off relations with her family after marriage. Her father dies and she returns home to attend his funeral, but in his last will and testament, he has asked that his remains be donated to an academic center for autopsy. However, Sayeh is diametrically opposed to the idea. **->16**

Rouhani writes to Pakistan PM over dead soldiers



Iranians carry a coffin at a funeral service for nine soldiers who were killed in a terrorist ambush in southeastern Iran, April 28, 2017.

Asia's March imports of Iranian oil rises 27% yr/yr

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran's buyers imported nearly 27 percent more oil from the country in March 2017 compared to March 2016 as Iran took advantage of its exemption from a production cut agreed by OPEC and some other major producers.

According to a report by Reuters, Iranian crude's top four Asian buyers - China, India, South Korea and Japan - imported 1.97 million barrels per day (bpd) last month, government and ship-tracking data showed.

This is marginally below February, when Iran sold the highest volumes overseas since at least 2010, International Energy Agency data showed.

Japan's trade ministry on Friday released official data, showing Iranian imports were at 224,604 bpd last month, up 13 percent from a year earlier and slightly down from the previous month.

Also, in the first quarter, these four countries imported 1.87 million bpd, a 47 percent rise from the same period in 2016.

Iran was exempted from a deal between the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and other producers, including Russia, to reduce output by 1.2 million bpd from January 1.

It was a victory for Tehran which had argued it needs to regain the market share it lost under Western sanctions over its nuclear program.

ARTICLE
 By Seyed Hossein Mousaviran
 Princeton University
 Researcher

Resolving the Afghanistan crisis

The U.S.-led war in Afghanistan has not only continued unabated for over 15 years, making it America's longest war, but has no end in sight.

Since their 2001 overthrow of the Taliban government, America and its allies have more than struggled to put the country back together. By early 2017, the situation had deteriorated to such an extent that the Afghan central government exercised control over just 52 percent of the country, with a resurgent Taliban and now even ISIS dominating the rest of the war-torn country. The depth of Afghanistan's vulnerability was demonstrated on Saturday, when the Taliban launched their deadliest attack ever on an Afghan military base, killing more than 140 unarmed soldiers and injuring over 60 and leading Afghan President Ashraf Ghani to declare a national day of mourning. More than 6,700 Afghan security forces were killed in just 2016 — about three times American casualties for the war.

While former President Obama opted for a "surge" of U.S. troops in his first term — with numbers reaching a peak of around 100,000 — his attempt at a military solution to the conflict proved unviable and by the end of his presidency U.S. troop numbers had dwindled to roughly 9,000. Rather than attempt a new strategy centered on inclusive diplomatic solutions, the Trump administration has seemingly opted for renewed military escalation. Trump National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster traveled to Afghanistan shortly after the "mother of all bombs" was dropped to deliver assurances of increased U.S. military support to the Afghan government.

Now is the time for global and regional powers to implement a comprehensive plan for peace in Afghanistan. "Everywhere you look, if there is trouble inside the region you find Iran," U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis recently declared. However, **->13**

Iran to resume Hajj pilgrimage late July after 2016 boycott

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran has announced it will resume sending hajj pilgrims to Saudi Arabia in July after boycotting the 2016 ritual in objection to Riyadh failing to soothe safety concerns.

"Flights will start on July 23 and will continue until August 26," Tasnim news agency quoted Hamid Mohammadi, the head of Iran's Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization, as saying on Friday.

"Nineteen Iranian airports will be engaged during the Hajj period," Mohammadi said.

Last year, Iran did not dispatch any of its citizens to the Hajj, first such decision in nearly three decades, after 464 of its nationals lost their lives in a crush in Mina in September 2015.

In March, Saudi Arabia announced that Iranian pilgrims would participate in this year's annual Hajj, ending lengthy negotiations between the two countries over the issue.

Iran was the last Muslim country that signed the Hajj contract with Riyadh, making it difficult for the country to book "standard"

hotel rooms, Mohammadi added.

More than 64,000 Iranians performed Hajj in 2015 as compared to 86,000 pilgrims standing in queue this year, up 35 percent.

More than 1,350,000 Iranians have filled out forms to make pilgrimage to Islam's holiest sites in Mecca and Medina over the next few years, the Iranian officials explained.

Iranian pilgrims will be carrying smart hand-cuffs in addition to IDs for easier tracking in emergency situations, the official further said.

Mohammadi said, "More than half of our pilgrims are in their fifties who are likely to

forget their IDs and get lost in the crowd.

"So, our experts concluded that we use hand-cuffs and IDs both, what other countries also do."

Additionally, more medical service centers will be made available, he said, adding pilgrims have been given training on how to react in emergency.

It took Tehran and Riyadh more than two years to bury the hatchet over the sticking point after the Mina crush.

The incident infuriated Tehran. Soon after, ties between the two regional rivals worsened further when Saudi Arabia executed a pro-democracy Shiite cleric.

Iran boycotted the hajj for three years between 1988 and 1990 after Saudi police killed around 400 Iranian pilgrims.

"The ministry of hajj and the Iranian organization have completed all the necessary measures to ensure Iranian pilgrims perform hajj 1438 according to the procedures followed by all Muslim countries," the official Saudi Press Agency reported in March.

More than 1,350,000 Iranians have filled out forms to make pilgrimage to Islam's holiest sites in Mecca and Medina over the next few years.

Iran, Russia review recent development in Syria

POLITICS TEHRAN — Top Iranian and Russian officials met each other on Thursday in Tehran to discuss the latest developments in the region particularly in Syria, which came under an air airstrike by the Israeli regime on the same day.

The meeting was between Alexander Lavrentiev, President Putin's point man on

Syria, and Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council.

Shamkhani is also senior coordinator for political, military and security affairs with Syria and Russia.

The two discussed the latest developments regarding the conflict in Syria and stressed the importance of further political and field coordination in the Arab country.

The meeting happened right on the same day as a warehouses near Damascus airport that the Israeli news media claimed housed weapons bound for the Lebanese Hezbollah were bombed by Israel's precision guided missiles.

Both Russia and Iran, which back the Syrian government, strongly condemned the airstrike. **->2**

Netanyahu: German minister refuses to take his call

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Friday slammed Germany's foreign minister as "insensitive" over refusing to cancel meetings with rights groups critical of Israel's government, amid rising tensions between the two allies.

Netanyahu had scrapped talks with Sigmar Gabriel at the last minute, after Germany's top diplomat pressed on with plans to meet with Israeli rights groups Breaking The Silence and B'Tselem.

Netanyahu said he tried to telephone Germany's foreign minister to clear the air after cancelling talks during Gabriel's visit to Israel but the German minister would not take the call.

"I wanted to telephone Foreign Minister Gabriel to explain my position and to clear things up, but he would not take the call," Netanyahu told German mass-selling daily Bild.

"I hope Gabriel meets me on his next trip to Israel rather than a radical fringe group that undermines Israel's security."

In an interview with Germany's biggest selling Bild daily, Netanyahu defended his decision.

"Foreign diplomats are welcome to meet with civil society activists and members of the opposition and anyone else they'd like," he said.

"But my red line is that I will not meet diplomats who come to Israel and lend legitimacy to fringe radical groups that falsely accuse our soldiers of war crimes and undermine Israeli security," he added.

Netanyahu's decision to cancel the meeting with Gabriel was a rare step, but in line with the current right-wing government's stance against groups it accuses of having political agendas and unfairly tarnishing Israel.

Tensions have grown as Netanyahu has irked Berlin by pressing on with colony building in the Palestinian territories despite repeated warnings from world powers that it would harm any prospects for peace.

(Source: AFP)



Tabriz hosts Ashiqlar Music Festival

A group performs during the 3rd Ashiqlar Music Festival at the Tabriz Culture House in the northwestern Iranian city of Tabriz on April 26, 2016.

Ashiqlar is a unique style of traditional music, which is mainly common in Iran's Azarbaijan region, the Azerbaijan Republic and Turkey.

Ashiqlar music is performed by an ashig, also spelled ashik and ashug. He is a mystic troubadour or traveling bard, who blends together instrumental and vocal music, dance, poetry and storytelling in his performances.

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ELECTION COUNTDOWN



It is haram to undermine system: cleric

POLITICS TEHRAN — The interim Friday prayer preacher of Tehran cautioned presidential candidates that it is haram (religiously forbidden) to undermine the Islamic system in their debates.

"The debates should resemble debates of clergymen, be logic-oriented, reasoned, and free of grudges and complexes," Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami said, IRIB reported.

"The candidates should take care that their word is documented and there is no trace of slandering and undermining in it. They should not turn the atmosphere into one of disunity."



'Popular Front has no substitute candidate'

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Popular Front of Revolution Forces on Friday issued an announcement in which it stated that it has no substitute candidate in the presidential election.

"Qalibaf and Raisi have a shared objective, which is to save people and the economy from the current circumstances," the statement read, Mehr news agency reported.

Both of the endorsed candidates are valuable assets of the Islamic Revolution who have acted successfully in the past and left bright records each, the statement continued.



Rouhani to visit Kerman, Yazd, Hormozgan

POLITICS TEHRAN — President Rouhani is planning visits to Kerman, Yazd, and Hormozgan provinces as part of his presidential campaign.

The presidential candidate will start his three-leg trip on Saturday and end it on Sunday evening, the Iran Students News Agency reported on Friday.

Rouhani's trip to Hormozgan province had been planned for Friday, but was postponed as he had to attend the live presidential debates.

Rouhani's election headquarters has said this trip will not include any project inauguration.



Larjani urges candidates present plans for employment of the educated

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Majlis speaker has said the presidential candidates should present carefully studied plans about how they will create jobs for the educated people.

Ali Larjani, who was speaking in a conference in Fars province on Friday, also said that the election should be held as magnificently as possible and turn the hopes of enemies into dismay, Mehr reported.

The Majlis speaker also advised the candidates to avoid slanders in their debates and stage a good show of unity.



Guardian Council completes study of candidates for midterm parliamentary election

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Guardian Council has completed its probe of candidates for the midterm parliamentary election and reported the results to the Ministry of Interior.

Guardian Council spokesman Abbasali Kadkhodaei told ISNA on Friday that this was the first stage of the investigation and included study of the protests by those who had been disqualified.

He also said those candidates who still fail to be endorsed in this stage will have three days (Saturday, Sunday, and Monday) to protest the results once more.



Seven Tehran Council members disqualified

POLITICS TEHRAN — Seven members of the incumbent Tehran Council who had sought reelection have been disqualified, the head of the supreme body on council elections said on Friday.

The candidates have submitted their protests, but their protests have not been addressed yet, Alireza Rahimi told the Iran Labor News Agency, ILNA.

He added the body will have until May 6 to address the pleas and on May 7 it will announce the results to governorates.

Presidential candidates hold first live debate

POLITICS TEHRAN — The first debate among the six candidates of the May 19 presidential election was held on Friday afternoon.

The six candidates are Mostafa Aqa-Mirsalim, Mostafa Hashemi-Taba, Es'haq Jahangiri, Hassan Rouhani, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf and Seyyed Ebrahim Raeisi.

There will be three live televised debates in total.

Friday's debate focused on social issues while the next two will revolve around economic and political matters, Press TV reported.

The candidates drew lots to determine their seating arrangement for the debate, not to leave any room for accusations of partiality.

The first candidate to answer the first question was Mirsalim. He said immigration inside the country should be curbed before it gives rise to social crises and added that 350,000 illegal wells have wasted the country's water resources and intensified immigration to cities. The candidate said social facilities must be distributed evenly in cities and villages. He added that suitable housing must be provided in small towns and villages to prevent immigration.

Raeisi was next up on the podium. He said joblessness and shutdown of production units are major problems facing the country's economy. He added that the next administration must make plans to narrow social gaps in a bid to promote justice.

Hashemi-Taba was the third candidate who took to the podium. He said bank loans and mass construction would be good ways to tackle the housing problem, adding that job creation would help resolve the issue.

Rouhani was the next hopeful taking to the podium to respond to a debate question about his plans to encourage the youth marriage. He said unemployment was the main hurdle to youth marriage and added that boosting "hope" and avoiding "unnecessary limitations" in the society are key to solve problems. He said hope for future has increased in the Iranian society and employment rate has improved. Hope for future



and employment are the best ways to promote youth marriage in the country, Rouhani added.

Jahangiri was the fifth presidential candidate to use his four-minute time to outline his plans on reducing bureaucracy in executive bodies. He said the current administration has managed to change the security-based approach to social issues and added that most of the Iranian people are not satisfied with municipalities and banks. The current first vice president said the establishment of an e-government was the major step to reduce bureaucracy.

Jahangiri said forceful measures would fail to solve social problems and added that he took part in the presidential election as a representative of the reformist camp. The current first vice president emphasized that

the current administration has managed to increase petrochemical production by nine million tons.

Qalibaf was the last hopeful taking to the podium to answer a question about his plans to tackle the environmental challenges if elected president. He said the dust storm problem is currently plaguing 20 Iranian provinces and added that inappropriate measures taken inside the country has led to the crisis.

Qalibaf defended the performance of Tehran Municipality in the environment-protection sector, saying it has used garbage to generate power and produce compost. The mayor of Tehran added that over 20,000 hectares have been planted with trees around the capital.

Rouhani writes to Pakistan PM over dead soldiers

Iran summons Pakistani ambassador over terrorist attack

By Ali Kushki

TEHRAN — Iran's president followed up with a letter to Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif the killing of nine Iranian soldiers by terrorists in an attack launched from neighboring Pakistan.

Hassan Rouhani on Friday demanded a quick probe into the attack by the Pakistani government.

"I ask the Pakistani government to act responsibly and identify, introduce, and punish the terrorist-Takfiri groups that committed this crime," Rouhani's letter to Sharif read.

Reportedly, the Iranian ambassador to Pakistan has delivered the letter to Sharif.

The terrorist ambush came just hours after Speaker of Pakistan's National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq left Iran, calling for more security at the Pakistani frontier with Iran.

In the meantime, the Iranian police recognized Islamabad for bearing responsibility for wobbly security that allowed the terrorists to launch the attack.

On Thursday nine Iranian border guards were killed by terrorists in an ambush at the Pakistani border's zero-point, near the Iranian town of Mirjaveh in the province of Sistan-Baluchestan.

The soldiers were reportedly killed with long-range guns shot from inside Pakistan.

The militant group called Jaish al Adl (meaning the Army of Justice) claimed responsibility for the attack.

Jaish al Adl has carried out several attacks before against Iranian security forces with the aim of destabilizing southeastern Iran.

The group claimed responsibility for attacks that killed

eight border guards in April 2015 and 14 border guards in October 2013, as well.

In 2013, some sources linked to the terrorist group with the Pakistani and Saudi intelligences.

In his letter to the Pakistani prime minister, Rouhani made no explicit reference to any certain country, but accused regional countries of launching "proxy wars" and backing "terrorist acts, violence, and insecurity" to damage the Islamic world unity.

Previously, Iranian officials had rapped Riyadh for stirring up trouble among Iran's Sunni ethnic minorities like the Baluch in the southeast of the country as well as among Arabs in the southwest.

Rouhani also ordered the Supreme National Security Council and Foreign Ministry to follow up on the issue.

The Foreign Ministry said on Friday it had summoned the Pakistani ambassador to protest the attack.

"The ambassador was told that Tehran expects the Pakistani side to take serious measures to capture the terrorists and punish them," Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Ghassemi said.

"Countries which seek joining anti-terrorist coalitions must answer how they are incapable of countering armed bandits and terrorist groups on their own soil," Ghassemi stressed.

Jaish al Adl has carried out several attacks before against Iranian security forces with the aim of destabilizing southeastern Iran.

Iran, Russia review recent development in Syria

1 -> Tehran, Moscow and Damascus have been in close contact over their joint activities in regard to the ongoing conflict in Syria.

On Wednesday night, Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Hossein Dehqan sat down for talks with his Russian and Syrian counterparts, Sergei Shoigu and Fahd Jassem al-Frej, in Moscow.

During the meeting with Lavrentiev, Shamkhani said while the Islamic Republic will spare no effort in its fight against terrorism in Syria. However Shamkhani said Tehran was committed to exploring a political solution to the conflict in the Arab country.

"We deem the military approach as effective only against those groups that refuse to lay down arms," he said.

A nation-wide ceasefire deal has been in place in Syria since late last year. The deal, facilitated by Iran, Russia, and Turkey, excludes internationally-designated terrorist groups and other armed outfits that refuse to engage in a reconciliation process with the government.

Iran, Russia, and Turkey, which together act as the guarantor states for the Syrian ceasefire, have also been organizing political talks between the Syrian conflicting sides in a peace process in the Kazakh capital of Astana.

Turkey is a defender of the opposition groups in the talks.



Alexander Lavrentiev (L), who is Russian President Vladimir Putin's point man on Syria, shakes hands with Ali Shamkhani, the secretary general of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), before their meeting in Tehran, Iran, April 27, 2017.

Referring to those negotiations, Shamkhani said the armed opposition in Syria — which is a party to the Astana talks — should not be allowed to shrink from participating in the talks by inventing pretexts or as a result of incitement by certain countries opposed to peace.

The Iranian official also censured a recent U.S. missile strike on a Syrian airfield and said the case of that violation

of Syrian territory must be duly pursued.

The U.S. fired a salvo of missiles at the Shayrat air base in Syria's Homs Province in the early morning of April 7, alleging that the base had been used to launch what it said was a chemical raid on a militant-held town that killed over 70 people days earlier. Damascus, which has turned over its stockpile of chemical weapons under a deal between Russia

and the U.S., denied having carried out such an attack, saying that a conventional airstrike had hit a chemical arms depot run by the militants, causing the leak of the chemical agents and the deaths.

Shamkhani said the U.S. missile attack dimmed the prospect of reconciliation between Syrian sides and worked to encourage the terrorist groups in Syria.

He said an independent fact-finding mission had to be established to detect the paths through which chemical arms are delivered to the militants in Syria and in Iraq.

Elsewhere in his remarks, he said European countries, too, had to be concerned about the ongoing terrorism in Syria because, "like a dangerous virus, terrorism passes through borders and can't be used instrumentally."

Lavrentiev commended Iran's "constructive" role in the peace process for Syria. He also stressed Moscow's commitment to fight those groups that shun the political process and continue to engage in armed activities.

He said Russia would however continue to work on the political channels on a parallel basis.

Lavrentiev also met with Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Hossein Jaber Ansari later in the day.

Jaber Ansari and Lavrentiev head the Iranian and Russian delegations at the Astana talks.

Worst 100 days ever

By John Feffer

If I were a Trump supporter, I'd be furious at the coverage of the president's first 100 days. The mainstream media has engaged in a bout of competitive schadenfreude as headline writers and columnists vie for the distinction of deriving the most pleasure from the administration's failures.

Pundits and journalists have made much of the legislation unpassed, the positions unfilled, the appointments unseated, and the promises unmet. It is of a piece with the campaign coverage.

This was, after all, the un-president: a man without qualifications to serve, without a popular mandate from the voters, and, once elected, without much interest in the day-to-day slog of governing. At every opportunity, he seems to prefer to decamp to his Florida mansion, retreat to the nearest links, or set off on yet another "victory tour" of the states he won in the election.

In the lead up to the 100-day mark on April 29, ABC and The Washington Post published a poll demonstrating that Trump, at this juncture in his tenure, is also the most unpopular president in the modern age. Even the administration's last-minute efforts to tap into the more nationalistic sentiments of the electorate by bombing the Syrian Army, bombing the Taliban in Afghanistan, and threatening to bomb the North Koreans seemed to make little difference. Only 42 percent of the country approve of the president's performance (compared to Obama's 69 percent at the same point in his first term).

At the bottom of The Washington Post article on this poll, however, is a fascinating little tidbit. Pollsters asked the respondents which candidate they supported in the presidential election. Not surprisingly, the figures corresponded more or less to the popular vote. Respondents said that they favored Clinton over Trump by 46 percent to 43 percent.

But then, when asked whom they would vote for if the election were held again today, the respondents delivered a surprise. They actually favored Trump over Clinton, 43 to 40 percent.

That's astonishing. The candidate who lost the popular vote, who has done pretty much nothing since the inauguration other than put his foot in his mouth or on the putting green, who has the lowest approval ratings after 100 days of any president in the modern era, would still beat Hillary Clinton in a rematch — and probably not just in the Electoral College either.

There are three reasons for this cognitive dissonance. First, although her greatest sin is that she's a conventional politician, Hillary Clinton inspires considerable hatred across large tracts of American politics. Second, a certain fraction of Trump supporters will stand by their man even if he were to sweep aside his orange comb-over to reveal a pair of devil's horns. According to the same poll, although only 85 percent of Clinton voters pledged their continued allegiance to their candidate, a remarkable 96 percent of Trump voters refused to budge in their support. Talk about brand loyalty.

Which brings us to the third reason. The Trump administration has indeed displayed unprecedented incompetence in its first 100 days. But not everyone in the country views that incompetence the same way that the mainstream media does. Indeed, two separate and opposite theories have emerged to explain away what, according to the common-sense view, looks like a lot of people in high places who just don't know what they're doing.

■ The uses of incompetence

According to the adherents of the first theory, the administration of Donald Trump is so dedicated to the deconstruction of the state that it's using incompetence as a tool. What better way to tear down liberal social programs and undo the regulatory apparatus than to install the manifestly ill-equipped, like Scott Pruitt at EPA or Rick Perry at DOE, in agencies devoted to missions they either don't understand or don't appreciate?

Meanwhile, President Trump is making contradictory statements, changing his positions on a daily basis, and spouting outright falsehoods in order to throw off his adversaries, both do-



Are Trump's stumbles a brilliant ploy to "deconstruct the state," a political performance, or actual incompetence?

mestically and abroad. His enemies will underestimate him. They won't be able to predict his actions. They'll be scared into adopting conciliatory positions for fear that, like a ruthless and entirely unprepared narcissist, he'll lash out irrationally and without his country's best interests at heart.

In other words, what might seem like mental illness is in fact deliberate craftiness.

The second theory holds that the Trump administration is honestly trying to get things done, but a "deep state" — composed either of Obama appointees or national security operatives — is opposing him at every turn. Indeed, this deep state is so influential that it's turned Trump's head on Syria (to bomb Assad), China (to make nice), Russia (to destroy the promise of détente), and trade (to back away from a border-adjustment tax).

The "deep state," according to the

incomprehensible policy maneuvers. It mishandled its travel ban (twice), fumbled the health-care replacement bill, and alienated members of Congress on both sides of the aisle with its initial budget proposal. Trump has had embarrassing interactions with the leaders of Russia, Australia, and Germany (among others). The only obvious victory in its first three months has been the appointment of a Supreme Court justice, but that required Senate Republicans to deploy the "nuclear option" and confirm with a simple majority (rather than the hallowed tradition of the filibuster-proof 60 votes).

Then there have been the self-destructive appointments. The congressional confirmation process weeded out a few of the worst performers, like Labor Department designee Andrew Puzder, while scandal claimed others, like National Security Adviser Michael Flynn and would-be NSC communica-

Incompetence, in their view, is fake news. The first 100 days, as staged by fading reality star Donald Trump, has been practically a second American Revolution.

more conspiratorial sources, is aligned with a range of international actors, all arrayed against Trump. This list includes international financial institutions, transnational political entities like the UN, and liberal elites (who might not even be liberal, like Angela Merkel of Germany).

Certainly Trump advisers like Steve Bannon are committed to cutting back on all the parts of the government they don't like (while beefing up those parts they do). And certainly the administration has encountered considerable resistance inside the Beltway and in the world at large to its more radical programs. Yet these explanations are not fully satisfactory.

Which leaves the third possibility — that the incompetence of Trump and his cronies is neither a strategy nor the result of a counter-strategy. The U.S. government is a tremendously complex mechanism, and even smart policy wonks like Bill Clinton and Barack Obama made big mistakes in their first 100 days. Install an ignorant and incurious president who's brought in a coterie of the narrow-minded and what do you expect?

Thus, the Trump administration has engaged in a stunning display of ham-fisted, tone-deaf, and downright



Certainly Trump advisers like Steve Bannon are committed to cutting back on all the parts of the government they don't like (while beefing up those parts they do).

One of the problems with polling is that it doesn't capture the relative fervency of the respective constituencies. Hillary Clinton had fire in the belly, but many of her supporters did not. Trump's supporters, on the other hand, were more fired up than even their candidate.

That's why the latest poll out of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs is somewhat misleading. The headline is that the U.S. public sides more with the mainstream foreign policy establishment than with Donald Trump on issues from trade to NATO. Thus, according to the poll, a clear majority of Americans favor U.S. commitment to existing security alliances, embrace economic globalization and free trade, and support robust engagement in world affairs.

The Council acknowledges, however, that on certain key issues, the public diverges from the elite:

The American public and opinion leaders are in fact divided over several key issues, including the importance of protecting American jobs, U.S. immigration policy, and the importance of protecting U.S. allies' security. Perhaps not coincidentally, these areas where elite-public gaps exist are also the issue areas where Donald Trump's message has resounded the loudest.

Wait a second. These three positions are in fact the flip side of the three issues where the preferences of the public and the Blob supposedly overlap. Americans have a rhetorical commitment to globalization but they actually put American jobs first. They believe in NATO but they actually don't see the important of coming to the defense of allies, which is the essential element of the security alliance. And they want the United States to remain engaged in the world but not to the extent that the world engages with us by coming to our shores.

Then, if you look closer at the supposed overlap, it dissolves into the same problem of fervency that threw off the compasses of pollsters in November 2016. For instance, 41 percent of Republican voters view globalization negatively and 36 percent want the United States to stay out of world affairs. Meanwhile, 79 percent want to "build a wall" to keep out immigrants, and 75 percent see Islamic fundamentalism as a critical threat. The numbers are even starker for Trump's core supporters.

Now take another look at Trump's first 100 days from this perspective. The administration cancelled U.S. participation in the Trans Pacific Partnership trade agreement and made an expensive bid to keep U.S. manufacturing jobs. It has continued to press for the "Wall" on the border with Mexico in the face of congressional opposition. It signed executive orders to keep out people from seven (then six) predominantly Muslim countries.

Everything else is noise. Sure, some of Trump's far-right supporters were angry that he bombed the Syrian Army, didn't withdraw the United States from NATO, alienated Moscow, and banished Steve Bannon from the National Security Council. But Trump's core supporters don't care much about these issues. What the liberal media sees as failures, flip-flops, or sheer incompetence comes across, in Trump country, as good-faith efforts to upend the foreign policy consensus and fundamentally reorient U.S. priorities.

Incompetence, in their view, is fake news. The first 100 days, as staged by fading reality star Donald Trump, has been practically a second American Revolution.

But incompetence has very real effects. Domestically, the courts and Congress and civil society can contain the damage to a certain extent. Internationally, the damage could be catastrophic.

This week, Trump invited the Senate to the White House for a briefing on North Korea. Virtually every expert on North Korea from across the political spectrum has called a preemptive strike a very bad idea. A competent administration would heed these words. An incompetent administration might decide to roll the dice because it doesn't understand the game, the odds, or the consequences.

If you thought the first 100 days were bad, prepare yourself for something incomparably worse, something that even Trump country would recognize as an epic fail.

Turkey's Kurdish agenda

By Dr. Binoy Kampmark

Any doubts that Turkey's involvement in the conflict against Islamic State is purely symbolic were dispelled by a latest round of air strikes against Kurdish positions in northeast Syria and Iraq's Sinjar region, killing at least 20 fighters. (The number from Ankara is a more inflated 70). Iraqi government officials were flayed by the action, infuriated by its audacity; the US State Department was troubled and confused.

"We are very concerned, deeply concerned," claimed spokesman Mark Toner, "that Turkey conducted air strikes earlier today in northern Syria as well as northern Iraq without proper coordination with the United States or the broader global coalition to defeat IS." Toner also explained that such strikes "were not approved by the coalition and led to the unfortunate loss of life of our partner forces in the fight against" Islamic State.

The Pentagon seemed less troubled, concerned more with logistical error and plain bungling among coalition members.

"We don't want our partners hitting other partners," came a statement from a senior US defence official. "We've got to figure out exactly who got hit. We don't know yet. We do know where the strikes were, but we don't know exactly who is dead."



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is very much on top of the world — his world, at least. On the home front, he continues a savage campaign against alleged coup plotters through mass detentions. He is beaming from the referendum results held this month that granted him new constitutional powers.

Refuting the suggestion that this latest round of belligerence was an act of introspective, isolated adventurism, he explained that,

"We shared this with the US and Russia and we are sharing it with Iraq as well. It is an operation that (Iraqi Kurdistan President Massoud) Barzani has been informed about." Such an interpretation stretches the meaning of sharing, to say the least.

A statement from the Turkish military justified the strikes on a long grounded and orthodox basis: that the groups in question had links with the Kurdish Workers' Party, or PKK, deemed by both Washington and Ankara as a terrorist group. The fighters in question had become targets as a preventative measure against the smuggling of weapons and munitions into Turkey that might end up being used by the PKK against the Turkish state. The agenda for liberation has no borders:

"To destroy these terror hubs which threaten the security, unity and integrity of our country and our nation and as part of our rights based on international law, air strikes have been carried out... and terrorist targets have been struck with success."

The PKK presence in Sinjar was yet another consequence of violence and its bitter fruit, a response to the murderous efforts of Islamic State militants against the local Yazidi population that saw genocide and enslavement practiced against thousands. Erdoğan is less sentimental about the reaction to IS exploits, concerned that the PKK presence risks creating a "new Qandil" reminiscent of the organization's base bordering Turkey, Iraq and Iran.

The bloody melange looks all the more complicated for having the US-backed Popular Protection Units (YPG), being targeted by a NATO and US ally, a point that underscores Turkey's ambivalent role in fighting various fundamentalist groups in the conflict. Turkey is keeping its enemies traditional.

The YPG was in little doubt what the actions had done, expressing its anger in a Twitter post.

"By this attack, Turkey is trying to undermine [the] Raqqa operation, give (IS) time to reorganize and put in danger lives of thousands of" displaced persons.

For some months now, Ankara has been insisting that Washington adopt a different approach to their YPG allies, one of studied disentanglement from the Kurdish temptation. Preference, at least from the Turkish side of things, is given to closer cooperation with Syrian units, notably in efforts to remove Islamic State forces from Raqqa.

An even more stern tone has been directed at Baghdad, accused of dragging its feet on the issue of dealing with the Kurdish problem. A statement by spokesman Saad al-Hadithi ventured a condemnation, claiming that the raids were "a violation of international law and of Iraqi sovereignty." Much of this will fall on deaf ears, given the porous, contingent nature of the current Iraqi and Syrian borders. Large powers trample and stomp, and the governments in question seem mere caretakers for the next hostile engagement.

The Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs in the Kurdish north had little time to lavish legitimacy on the Turkish assault, but it had a concession to make:

"PKK has been problematic for the people of the Kurdistan region and, despite broad calls to withdraw, refuses to leave Sinjar."

Accordingly, the "PKK must stop destabilising and escalating tensions in the area to allow life to return to the people of the area." A frightful mess and one that Erdoğan has every intention of complicating.

How many civilians were killed? I'll get back to you

By Micah Zenko and Jennifer Wilson

Last week, the U.S. military announced an accomplishment that has come to define progress in the war on terrorism — the death of yet another senior terrorist leader.

These now-routine reports are touted by officials as bringing "justice" to terrorists, delivering a "significant blow" to their ability to maneuver and operate, and even "eradicating" the threats they pose.

On Friday, a spokesman for U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), Colonel John Thomas, told reporters that special operations forces had killed a "close associate" of the ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

This announcement came fifteen days after the ground raid that killed him on April 6 — coincidentally, the same day as President Donald Trump's cruise missile strike on an airfield in Homs, Syria.

As the United States ramps up its airstrikes and targeted raids against ISIS in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, there has been a corresponding increase in reported civilian casualties.

At least 3/111 civilians killed

Airwars estimates that at least 3,111 civilians have been

killed in U.S.-led coalition airstrikes since the anti-ISIS air campaign began in August 2014. However, CENTCOM implausibly assesses that "at least 229 civilians have been unintentionally killed" in all 19,607 strikes.

CENTCOM publishes a monthly civilian casualty report including reported non-combatant casualties found credible (meaning a strike more likely than not resulted in the death or injury of a civilian), those found non-credible (meaning there is not sufficient information to determine whether a civilian was harmed) and ongoing investigations. There are currently forty-three open investigations, one of which has been going on for over a year.

On average, it has taken CENTCOM ninety-five days to announce whether a coalition strike resulted in a civilian casualty over the past six months. Meanwhile, on average, it has taken just eleven days for the Pentagon to announce that a strike has resulted in the death of a "key leader" of a terrorist organization over the past year.

(We averaged the time elapsed between the alleged incident and the U.S. military announcement of 115 cases of civilian casualties and 19 announcements of killed terror-

ists, after removing the highest and lowest number of days passed for both to avoid distorting the mean.)

We can only speculate why there is such a vast disparity between the time it takes to investigate the death of a civilian versus the death of a terrorist. However, what this inconsistency demonstrates is that publicizing the deaths of terrorists is a higher priority for the U.S. military than determining the deaths of civilians.

Rigorous investigations

For example, last week, a coalition spokesperson, Colonel Joe Scrocca, even acknowledged "we don't have any means of going and searching out people and, honestly, we don't have the manpower" to conduct rigorous investigations of reported civilian casualties.

A U.S. Air Force munitions team member uncases the laser-guided tip for a 500 pound bomb to be loaded onto an unmanned aerial vehicle for airstrikes on ISIS targets on January 8, 2016 at a base in the Persian Gulf Region used to launch airstrikes against ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Micah Zenko and Jennifer Wilson write that publicizing the deaths of terrorists is a higher priority for the U.S. military than determining the number of civilian deaths.

The Pentagon claims that it "takes all reports of civilian casualties seriously and assesses all reports as thoroughly as possible." If this were the case, though, then there would be sufficient surveillance and analytical resources dedicated to thoroughly and more quickly investigate reported civilian casualties.

As the former U.S. Air Force's deputy chief of staff for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, Lieutenant General Bob Otto (ret.), observed in October 2015, "If you inadvertently — legally — kill innocent men, women and children, then there's a backlash from that. And so we might kill three and create ten terrorists."

If Otto's concerns are to be believed, then investigating claims of civilian harm, holding those in the chain of command responsible to account and assuring that past errors are not repeated should be as high a priority as is killing yet another in the seemingly inexhaustible supply of senior terrorist operatives.

Unfortunately, the military is more committed to boasting about killing alleged terrorists than determining when non-combatants are harmed in the process.

(Source: Newsweek)

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10 hot titles of IT world

By Alireza Khorasani

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

- Google's umbrella company Alphabet brought in \$24.75 billion in revenue and \$7.73 earnings per share in the first quarter of 2017, according to the company's earnings release out today. Analysts expected less from Alphabet: about \$24.19 billion in revenue and \$7.40 earnings per share.
- Intel reported earnings that beat analysts' earnings for the first quarter ended March 31. Revenues for the quarter were \$14.8 billion and non-GAAP earnings were \$3.2 billion, or 66 cents a share.
- Apple started rolling out the fifth beta version of iOS 10.3.2, a point update to iOS 10.3 that will be going out to everyone in the next few weeks.
- The worldwide digital gaming market grew 7 percent year-over-year in March, according to research firm SuperData. This brought it to a new high of \$8 billion.
- The long-awaited update by Win 10 fans named Windows 10 Mobile Redstone 2 started rolling. The main accent, per Microsoft, is that anyone will be able "to create, share and experience in 3D and mixed reality, connect people faster and empower every gamer to be a broadcaster.
- Samsung Electronics reported its financial results for Q1 2017 and the results look quite well. The company generated KRW50.55 trillion or about \$45 billion in revenue.
- Microsoft and Harman Kardon are working together to bring a personal assistant powered by Cortana. The device, named Harman Kardon Invoke, will support Spotify and other music platforms, according to an update of the Cortana app.
- Amazon said that its Amazon Web Services (AWS) public cloud business brought in \$890 million in operating income on \$3.66 billion in revenue during the quarter. That means AWS revenue was up 42 percent year over year.
- Huawei and Google team up for the first Android development board, similar to the Raspberry Pi. The community wanted an ARM-based development platform for quite some time now.
- Apple is once again rumored to start a P2P money transferring network similar to Venmo and PayPal.

LG Q1 fiscal results: profit is good, but mobile division still lagging

LG Electronics posted its Q1 financial numbers and it had the best result in almost a decade. Sadly, the Mobile Communications division wasn't a big part of that as its revenue only rose 2% YoY.



Total smartphone shipments were up 10% on a yearly basis to 14.8 million units. It was mostly mid-range smartphones like the K-series that bumped those numbers. Because of the slow LG G5 sales and the niche LG V20, the division still lost KRW200 million or \$176,000 between January and March. That's still huge progress over the previous quarter that saw the mobile division bleed over \$1 billion. LG's expects to post profits in Q2 2017 thanks to the LG G6. The company realizes that the competition in the mid-end class is fierce, but it expects to maintain its position there. Consolidated operating profit reached an 8-year peak of KRW921.5 billion, or about \$811 million, so it's great news for the company. Here's hoping that the Mobile division goes back in the black next quarter as well.

(Source: LG)

Google Home's Assistant now knows 5 million recipes, will help you cook

Google has announced that the Assistant inside the Home is going to learn 5 million recipes over the coming week. Once this rollout is complete, the device will be able to help you cook, by giving you instructions for any of those recipes. To use the functionality, go to Google Assistant on your Android phone or use Google search to find a recipe. Pick what you like and hit the "Send to Google Home" button.

(Source: google)

Microsoft reports \$23.6 billion in Q3 2017 revenue: Azure up 93%, Surface down 26%, and Windows up 5%

By Emil Protalinski



Microsoft reported earnings for its third fiscal quarter of 2017, including revenue of \$23.6 billion, net income of \$5.7 billion, and earnings per share of \$0.73. The company's Intelligent Cloud and Productivity and Business Processes operating groups countered the decline from its More Personal Computing unit. In Q3 2016, Microsoft saw \$22.1 billion in revenue, net income of \$5.0 billion, and earnings per share of \$0.62. For Q3 2017, analysts had expected Microsoft to earn \$23.6 billion in revenue and earnings per share of \$0.70. In short, the company surpassed results for last year's quarter, met analyst expectations for revenue, and outperformed estimates for earnings per share. The company's stock was up 0.65 percent in regular trading, but was down about 1 percent in after-hours trading (likely because revenue was not beaten and because Surface seriously suffered). Microsoft also said it returned \$4.6 billion to shareholders in the form of share repurchases and dividends during the quarter. "Our results this quarter reflect the trust customers are placing in the Microsoft Cloud," Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella said in a statement. "From large multi-nationals to small and

medium businesses to non-profits all over the world, organizations are using Microsoft's cloud platforms to power their digital transformation." Personal Computing, which includes results for Windows licensing and devices (Surface, phones, and Xbox), declined 7 percent to \$8.8 billion. Windows OEM revenue increased 5 percent. Breaking that down further, Pro revenue was up 10 percent and non-Pro revenue was down 1 percent, though both outperformed the overall market. Surface revenue decreased 26 percent, from \$1.11 billion in Q3 2016 to \$831 million in Q3 2017. The Surface Pro 4 and the Surface Book aren't cutting

it anymore. The Surface Book i7 wasn't enough to move the needle — buyers want a Pro 5 and a Book 2. Phone revenue declined by \$730 million. Microsoft is not calling out a percentage anymore because the company wants to de-emphasize the division. Advertising revenue from search, excluding traffic acquisition costs, grew 8 percent. Microsoft has previously attributed this to Windows 10, which includes tighter Bing integration. Gaming revenue grew 4 percent, thanks to Xbox Live. This is surprising given that many gamers are waiting for Project Scorpio.

Intelligent Cloud, which includes results from server products and services (including Windows Server and Azure), grew 11 percent to \$6.8 billion. Server products and cloud services revenue grew 15 percent. But the big highlight as always was Azure revenue, which grew 93 percent. Azure compute did not double year over year as in past quarters. Two quarters ago, Microsoft's commercial cloud business exceeded a \$10.0 billion annual run rate. This quarter, the company shared it now sits at \$15.2 billion. The projection for this number is still \$20 billion by 2018. Productivity and Business Processes, which includes results from Office and Office 365 (commercial and consumer customers), grew 22 percent to \$8.0 billion. Microsoft also broke out LinkedIn, which it acquired for \$26.2 billion last year. The social network contributed \$975 million in revenue (which is not bad, given expectations were around \$950 million). This was a solid quarter for Microsoft, but investors clearly want to see more from the company's devices. 2017 will see a lot of focus on new Surface and Xbox products, while Azure and Office continue to keep the company plowing ahead. (Source: venturebeat)

Samsung says nature of AMOLED displays causes red tint



Samsung has shared some more details about the red tint on some Galaxy S8 units. In a conference call the company said it has inspected the device and is confident about the product's quality. Here's what the tech giant said regarding the display issue: "Due to the nature of Super AMOLED displays, there can be natural differences in color. Users can optimize the color depending on their preferences." (Source: theandroidsoul)

Nintendo sells 2.74M Switches, 10M more expected in 2018



Nintendo posted its results for the fiscal year 2016, which for the company ends in March. Numbers revealed that the company sold 2.74 million units of the new console Switch. Interestingly enough Zelda: Breath of the Wild for Switch reported 2.76 million sales. Yep, some people bought the game even before owning the console. Another 1.1 million people bought it for Wii U, totaling to 3.84 million. (Source: nintendo)

Instagram proudly announces it's got 700 million users



Instagram now has 700 million users, 100 million more than it did last December. So those last 100 million users were added in just four months. That number is amazingly almost equivalent to Snapchat's entire 161 million user base. The recent growth is the fastest in Instagram's history. Going from 500 million to 600 million took five months in 2016. (Source: instagram)

Vivo launches V5s with 20 megapixel front camera



vivo has launched a new smartphone in the Indian market, the V5s. The phone is priced at INR 18,990 (\$296) and can be pre-ordered on Flipkart. The vivo V5s has a 5.5-inch 720p IPS display and a MediaTek MT6750 chipset with 4GB of RAM. It only has a 13 Megapixel rear camera, but a 20 megapixel front one with flash, suggesting that selfies are its forte.

The smartphone comes with 64GB of storage, fingerprint sensor and a 3000mAh battery. It runs on Android 6.0 skinned with the company's own Funtouch OS 3.0 launcher. The phone will be available in Rose Gold and Matte Black online as well as in retail outlets. (Source: gsmarena)

Casio Pro Trek F20 with Android Wear 2.0 is now available for \$500



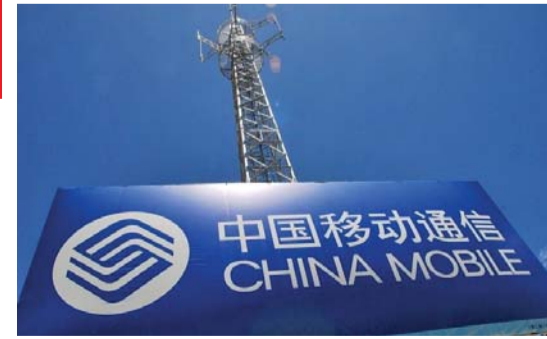
The new F20 is finally up for grabs in either black or orange for \$500. The Casio F20 runs Android Wear 2.0 out of the box, and it's water resistant up to 50m and complies with the MIL-STD 810G spec for durability. Its circular 1.32-inch touchscreen is of the dual-layer variety, with both a monochrome mode for high visibility and low power use, as well as a color mode for full functionality. The F20 has a power sipping GPS sensor, a digital compass, altimeter, and barometer. It features 512MB of RAM and 4GB of storage, and it's 0.8 mm thinner than its predecessor. (Source: androidauthority)

Facebook Messenger Lite is now available in 150 additional countries



Facebook has now finally decided to expand Messenger Lite. It's now out in 150 additional countries, including Germany, Colombia, Italy, Vietnam, Algeria, Morocco, Nigeria, Peru, Turkey, Japan, Taiwan and the Netherlands. Messenger Lite needs less memory and processing power to operate, and it even uses less data than the full-fledged app. If you use this you'll be missing out on certain features, such as Messenger Day, the camera effects, as well as the entire third-party dev platform. (Source: facebook)

836M people in China use 4G



836 million people use 4G in China according to local authorities. That's 10.85% more than the quarter ending in December 2016. Chinese users today consume 1.28 GB data/monthly, which is 28% increase over Q4 2016. The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology plans to add 2 million 4G base stations in rural areas by 2018. By the end of Q1 2017 China also had 310 million users of fixed-line broadband network, almost 80% of them using fiber broadband products, said an official from the MIIT. (Source: xinhuanet)

Alonso says Indy 500 is even bigger than he thought

Fernando Alonso had a hunch that entering next month's Indianapolis 500 was going to be a big deal but on Thursday he confessed to a misjudgement - the race was even bigger than he had imagined.

Speaking to reporters at the Russian Grand Prix after attending an IndyCar race in Alabama at the weekend, the double Formula One world champion expressed surprise at the level of interest in the United States.



"What is for sure is that the impression of how big is the Indy 500 has increased in my opinion after these days, how the people get super-excited about the race," said the McLaren driver.

"These last three or four days, I walked in the airport in Indianapolis or Chicago and everyone was stopping me and shaking hands and wishing me good luck. It was like being in Spain for a moment."

Alonso is missing next month's showcase Monaco Grand Prix, a race he has won twice before, on May 28 to compete at Indianapolis on the same day in a bid to match the late Graham Hill's 'Triple Crown'.

Britain's Hill, also a double Formula One world champion, is the only man to have won the Monaco Grand Prix, Indy 500 and Le Mans 24 Hours sportscar race.

The 35-year-old said that while he had been surprised by the fan reaction, he had not changed his view on the challenge he faced in adapting to racing on oval circuits.

"I remain very open of how difficult it will be to drive those cars, at those speeds and in traffic," he said. "But I am ready to learn as much as I can and hopefully be competitive."

Alonso has set himself a punishing schedule for the next few weeks, flying to the United States immediately after the Bahrain Grand Prix.

He will heading back across the Atlantic next week for practice before coming back to his home Formula One race in Barcelona.

Travel problems last weekend, with his return flight canceled due to bad weather in New York, had not made life any easier.

"A couple of hours in the airport, went through Chicago to Milan and then Milan to here. I arrived this morning and after this press conference I go to bed," he said.

(Source: Reuters)

Kenya says another 'high-profile athlete' failed doping test

The chairman of Athletics Kenya (AK) has told Reuters that another "high-profile athlete" has failed a doping test, just weeks after it emerged Rio Olympics marathon champion Jemima Sumgong tested positive for performance enhancing drugs.

Jackson Tuwei told Reuters that the IAAF, the sport's global governing body, had found the positive test but said the identity of the athlete could not yet be revealed.



Kenya's middle and long distance success has been marred by doping cases involving elite athletes. Officials estimate the number of positive tests at about 50 in the past four years.

"There is another high-profile athlete who has also failed a doping test but we have to wait for legal procedures to be followed," Tuwei told Reuters in an interview on Thursday.

"Obviously we cannot say who the athlete is."

News of the test comes after Sumgong, who last year became the first Kenyan woman to win Olympic gold in the marathon, tested positive for the banned blood-booster EPO (erythropoietin) in an out-of-competition test carried out by IAAF.

Doping was made a criminal offence in Kenya in June 2016.

Tuwei said the IAAF had rejected Sumgong's explanation about the circumstances that led to her positive test.

"Her explanation has been rejected and she has been ordered to send a more convincing explanation before further action is taken," Tuwei said.

Sumgong's positive test came in the wake of a four-year ban handed to Kenya's multi-marathon champion Rita Jeptoo, Sumgong's former training partner, after she tested positive for EPO in 2014.

"We also wish to send a very strong message to athletes representatives, doctors, coaches and all athletes support personnel that those found culpable or proved to be encouraging our athletes in this line of sporting subterfuge will be charged as prescribed by the law of the land," AK said in a separate statement on Thursday.

Sumgong, 32, was among the six Kenyan gold medalists in Rio, which was the country's best performance at an Olympics.

(Source: Reuters)

Jorge Sampaoli is our 'chosen coach' to manage Argentina - AFA president

Jorge Sampaoli is the only candidate for the vacant Argentina coaching position, Argentine Football Association (AFA) president Claudio Tapia has said.

Argentina need a new coach following the AFA's dismissal of Edgardo Bauza on April 10 after eight months in charge that have left the country's 2018 World Cup qualifying hopes in jeopardy.

Sampaoli, who was born in Argentina, is under contract with Sevilla until June 2018 but can leave this summer provided his €1.5 million release clause is met.

Asked about former Chile coach Sampaoli, Tapia told ESPN Argentina: "He is the chosen coach. We have to wait for the contractual terms to discuss things with Sevilla.

"We have chosen a coach that has a contract. We want to be respectful and wait because he has a release clause which is once the tournament ends. We will communicate it to the club and we will sit down and negotiate his departure and release clause. We want things to go well in the final games he has left [Malaga, Real Sociedad, Real Madrid and Osasuna]."

Sampaoli, who is completing his first campaign as a coach in Europe, announced last week he had an offer to manage Argentina, but would only consider it once the La Liga season is over.

Reports in Spain claim Sampaoli will be unveiled as the new Argentina coach on May 22, one day after Sevilla's final game of the season at home to Osasuna, thus allowing the new coach to make the squad announcements for the national team's international friendlies against Brazil on June 6 and against Singapore a week later.

Argentina are fifth in South American World Cup qualifying with four games to play. Only the top four are assured of spots for the competition in Russia with the fifth-placed team heading to a continental playoff.



Sampaoli is hoping to lead Sevilla to a third-place finish in La Liga to clinch direct Champions League qualification for the Andalusian outfit. Sevilla beat Celta Vigo 2-1 on Thursday to move level on 68 points with Atletico Madrid, who are third and hold the last direct Champions League qualifying spot.

"We knew this was a key game for

our fight for third place," Sampaoli told his club's official website after the win. "We were able to move level and now we are thinking about Monday's game [at Malaga]."

Sampaoli says he expects a thrilling end-of-season battle with Atletico, coached by his compatriot Diego Simeone.

"We know that the fight with this team [Atletico] that is great is going to be very difficult," Sampaoli said. "But we are hopeful of playing our remaining games as we did against Celta. Our duty is to go out and win the last four games. We have to think of ourselves and see what happens at the end."

(Source: Soccerbet)

London Marathon unveils new half-distance mass race for 2018



London Marathon organizers have announced plans for a mass participation half-marathon next year as part of a campaign to encourage the city's communities to interact.

A statement on Friday said leading athletes will run with amateurs in a mass participation event across closed roads in London on March 4.

A total of 7,500 places will be reserved for community groups from the four host boroughs in the race.

"We are creating an event that is unique, that is fun, that people will

want to come back to year after year," said event director Hugh Brasher. "The Big Half is a celebration of community and life."

As part of the campaign, plans have also been announced for a run for younger competitors, a relay for community groups and a festival in Greenwich.

The London Marathon was co-founded by Brasher's father Chris, in 1981. Around 40,000 runners took part in last Sunday's race, with an estimated 800,000 supporters lining the route.

(Source: Reuters)

Neymar hints at Man United buyout



Jose Mourinho has been enquiring about a possible deal that would see Neymar make a move to Old Trafford this summer. According to whom, you ask? None other than the Brazilian sensation himself, says the Daily Record.

The outlet suggests that Neymar has told friends that both Manchester United and Chelsea have been asking the Barcelona brass if they might part with the 25-year-old, with Mourinho "particularly persistent in his courtship" as he looks to chart a way forward next season after losing Zlatan Ibrahimovic to a long-

term injury last Thursday in the Europa League.

Fantastical? Yes. A long shot? Surely. But consider this: Neymar is still dealing with a court case and possible fines related to his transfer to Barcelona from Santos in 2013, and it's not outside the realm of possibility that a cash windfall from a team like United -- reportedly ready to pay his €200 million release clause and meet any salary requirements -- could help Neymar cover everything he could be forced to pay and a whole lot more.

(Source: Soccerbet)

Injury to Warriors coach Kerr runs deeper than basketball

The back pain that threatens to keep Golden State Warriors coach Steve Kerr out for the rest of the NBA playoffs is a setback for the team, but colleagues on Thursday said they were more concerned about seeing someone they admire suffer so much.

News that the pain and headaches that kept the 51-year-old coach away from the team for the first 43 games last season had returned earlier this month shocked fans in the Bay Area, where Kerr is a beloved figure.

It is even more difficult for those inside the organization, who have developed a deep bond with the coach who is as well known for his ability to connect with players as he is for his high basketball IQ.

"It's hard to see a friend go through it," Warriors general manager Bob Myers said in an interview with CBS Sports Radio's Jim Rome on Thursday.

"When you look at a health issue -- with a friend, family member, your own -- everything else stops," he said.

"It leaves you feeling a little helpless."

The deeply competitive Kerr initially hurt his back during the 2015 NBA championship series.

Kerr did not immediately miss any time and went on to lead the Warriors to their first NBA title in 40 years. But two back surgeries followed during the off season,



as did bouts of unbearable pain.

Myers said it might be difficult for people to realize that even someone as successful as Kerr, who won five championships as a player and has worked as a general manager and television broadcaster, is not immune to life's struggles.

Kerr has certainly known adversity.

His father Malcolm was assassinated by Islamic militants in 1984 while he was serving as president of the American University of Beirut, when Kerr was just an 18-year-old college freshman.

Myers said Kerr's resiliency is one reason the Warriors have been able to return to the playoffs after a humiliating loss in the NBA Finals last year, when the team became the first in NBA history to blow a 3-1 lead to the Cleveland Cavaliers in the best-of-seven series.

"Sometimes people don't recover. We're moving on," Myers said.

Stepping into Kerr's place is assistant coach Mike Brown. "It's tough. I look at him as a friend first and a guy I work for second," Brown told 95.7 The Game radio show.

"To see him or anyone you care about go through anything that's not good is a tough situation to deal with."

Myers insisted the back issues were "fixable."

"Basketball is what provides him with the most happiness," Myers said.

"I'm very, very confident he'll be back coaching, but I can't say when," he said.

"And when he does, I think he'll coach for a long, long time."

(Source: Reuters)

