



There is strong consensus that Iran complying with nuclear deal: Zarif **2**



Congress has not moved to reimpose sanctions on Iran: former congressman **7**



Jaber Sadeghzadeh crowned Iran's Pahlavan **15**



Fajr concertgoers thrilled by Parvez Khan's raga improvisations **16**

EU pressed Trump to keep JCPOA



See page 2

Landmine explosion leaves 3 soldiers dead in Saudi Arabia's Najran

At least three Saudi regime soldiers have been killed when a powerful landmine explosion ripped through their military vehicle in the regime's southwestern border region of Najran.

An informed source, requesting anonymity, told Yemen's Arabic-language al-Masirah television network that the incident occurred on Friday afternoon, identifying the deceased as Mohammed al-Fatih, Hazam

al-Farwan and Hayef al-Qahtani.

Later in the day, the Saudi regime fighter jets carried out five airstrikes against Samah military base in Yemen's southwestern city of Dhamar, located some 100 kilometers (62 miles) south of the Yemeni capital, Sana'a.

There were no immediate reports about possible casualties and the extent of damage caused. **→13**

Govt. firm to be honest with people: official

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Majid d e s k Takht-Ravanchi, who now serves as deputy director of the presidential chief of staff for political affairs, has said that the government of President Hassan Rouhani is determined to act transparently and be honest with the people. The people should be able to monitor the government's performance, Takht-Ra-

vanchi told IRNA in an interview published on Friday.

"The people have rightful demands. Mr. Rouhani has said that we should listen to the people and our decision should be based on the nation's demands," he said.

The comments by Takht-Ravanchi came days after protests hit certain cities in Iran. **→2**

Hariri lauds Hezbollah, wants 'best of relations' with Iran

Lebanon's Prime Minister Saad Hariri has called for his country to be kept out of regional conflicts, lauding the Hezbollah resistance movement for doing its part to de-escalate the tensions.

In an interview with The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) on Wednesday, Hariri said he was open to Hezbollah continuing to participate in the government following

the elections slated for May.

"Hezbollah has been a member of this government. This is an inclusive government that has all the big political parties, and that brings political stability to the country," Hariri said during Wednesday interview, defying pressure from the House of Saud regime to confront the resistance movement. **→13**



ARTICLE

By Hanif Ghaffari
Political analyst

U.S. look at Russian elections

Russia's national election is being held while the United States is trying to interfere in its internal affairs. In other words, the Russian authorities have repeatedly warned the United States about Russia's internal affairs. Recently Russian President Vladimir Putin has warned U.S. officials about this. However, American politicians seem to try to continue their intervention against Vladimir Putin. The ambitious goal of U.S. officials is to weaken Russia's power in the international system.

Meanwhile, American media are also trying to send incorrect addresses about Russian general elections. An overview of the recent report by the American newspaper USAtoday shows this.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has engaged in a nearly 20-year assault on democratic institutions in Russia and on U.S. allies in Europe, and poses a threat to future American elections, according to the first U.S. government report to address the issue.

The report, produced by the Democratic staff on the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, alleges a range of aggressive Russian behavior abroad that employs military invasions, cyberattacks, disinformation, support for fringe political groups and the manipulation of energy resources, organized crime and corruption across Europe.

"If the United State fails to work with urgency to address this complex and growing threat, the regime in Moscow will become further emboldened," the report said. "It will continue to develop and refine its arsenal to use on democracies around the world, including against U.S. elections in 2018 and 2020."

The 206-page document makes only a passing reference to Russia's role in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, which is still under several investigations by the Republican-controlled Senate and House of Representatives. Former FBI director Robert Mueller, who is investigating whether there was any collusion between candidate Donald Trump's presidential campaign and Russian officials, has charged four former Trump aides, and is expected soon to seek an interview with the president. **→7**

Western democracies face legitimacy problem : Peter Onuf

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Peter S. Onuf, a professor of history at the University of Virginia, says "the problem (in some places, crisis) of legitimacy is by no means a strictly American one -- nor, I shouldn't have to add, is it confined to Western "democracies."

Following is the text of the interview with Onuf:

■ Francis Fukuyama the contemporary political theorist used to be an ardent supporter of liberal capitalism. But in 2014, he wrote "Political Order and Political Decay" to modify his earlier position. In regard with the US's presidential elections and the rise of Clinton and Bush families



in the political scene of the country, Fukuyama believes that the US is experiencing the decay of a political system which made people feel so disappointed in American democracy. What's

your opinion about this?

A: Any historian knows that his or her subjects live in a fog that obscures the future (and distorts the past!) -- and we know that this applies to us, as subjects of future historians...

The idea that there is an "arc" to history -- that it's moving in a particular direction (whether forwards, as Fukuyama #1 claimed) or in reverse (as Fukuyama #2 prophesied in 2014) -- is hard to sustain. Even now, with Trump's setbacks & a brightening horizon for Democrats [and most Americans], the gloominess that prevailed in the wake of the 2016 election is beginning to dissipate. Perhaps we should be thinking in dialectical terms? But that's also reductive and misleading. **→7**

One view from afar

the primary chant: "The People Want the Fall of the Regime" (or specifically, in fact, the fall of dictator Hosni Mubarak) and in Arabic that chant was stirring. But again, the most important thing was that the protesters were almost entirely non-violent... as far as I could tell as a witness in Maidan Tahrir in central Cairo.

It is first important to mention that Iran's leader Ayatollah Khamenei is correct. Khamenei has noted that police in the U.S. have in recent years murdered nearly a 1,000 people annually, most of them innocents, and has used any means possible to suppress protests. Law enforcement in the U.S. often shoots first, and often enough, no one is really mounting any kind of threat against law officers. In fact, far fewer police personnel in the U.S. have been killed in recent years than ever before in the past half century or more. How

many people died in Iran's recent protests? Less than 30, I have read anyway, and we here in the U.S. don't even know who exactly was responsible for that.

And then in the mainstream U.S. media, uncritical organs of the State these days more often than not, we have major newspapers like the Wall Street Journal publishing commentary by the head of the terrorist organization Mujahadin-E-Khalq claiming that the current Iranian government is "unstable" and ill supported by most Iranians. That Maryam Rajavi got space in the Wall Street Journal says a lot about current establishment and Trumpist views in the U.S., and there's never been any question the MEK is nothing but an ugly terrorist organization responsible for tremendous mayhem in and near Iran for decades. **→7**



ARTICLE

By Maryam Qarehgozlou
Tehran Times journalist

Using fossil water is a soft option, reappraise it

First Vice-President Es'haq Jahangiri has recently ordered studying the possibility of tapping into the country's underground supplies of fossil water.

The term fossil water, or paleowater, refers to underground water reservoirs that have been geologically sealed. The water contained in them cannot be replenished and may have been locked in for thousands of years. The age of the water is what gives it the name 'fossil water'.

While it is quite clear that Iran, situated in an arid and semi-arid area, is suffering from water shortage, officials are trying to come up with various solutions to tackle the issue.

President Hassan Rouhani has emphasized the need for water reforms but the policies and measures adopted and implemented so far do not seem to be effective.

■ Iran's looming water scarcity

Long-term mismanagement and improper planning coupled with climate change, which has provoked low precipitation and accordingly drought spells in many regions, have exacerbated the situation and now the prospects of a gloomy future is raising. Widespread and unsustainable dam development as well as untenable farming practices have resulted in degradation, reduced land productivity, shrinking lakes and whole communities left without access to water.

Chief of the Department of Environment Isa Kalantari has said since the establishment of the Ministry of Energy in 1961 Iran's renewable water resources - total amount of water resources both internal and external resources including surface water and groundwater, which is generated through the hydrological cycle - amounted to 132 billion cubic meters and now the number is calculated at 88 billion cubic meters.

"At the time with 132 billion cubic meters of water we withdrew some 50 billion cubic meters annually, however, currently with only 88 billion cubic meters of water the water removed from available sources for human use is about 97 billion cubic meters per annum. Currently we withdraw more than 110 percent of our renewable resources while the number should be restricted to 40 percent," he noted. **→12**



© Tehran Times/ Iman Hamikiah

Egshiglen echoes Mongolian folk music at Fajr

The celebrated Mongolian folk music trio Egshiglen performs a concert during the 33rd Fajr International Music Festival at Tehran's Rudaki Hall on January 11, 2017.

Numerous bands and musicians from across the world are participating in the festival, which is currently underway in Tehran.

The event will run until January 20.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Cleric urges Majlis to boost people's living standards

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Ayatollah Kazem Seddighi, the interim Friday prayer preacher of Tehran, has called on the parliament to constantly observe the living conditions of the public to be able to boost the their economic well-being.

“The Majlis must show that it will not allow economic problems and the rise in expenses to bring people to their knees and increase social dissatisfaction,” Seddighi told worshippers on Friday, Mehr reported.

Hossein Naqavi Hosseini, spokesman for the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, also told worshippers that all branches of the government must focus on people's well-being.



IRGC missiles can cover areas beyond Gulf of Oman: commander

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps' missiles can cover areas beyond the Gulf of Oman, Real Admiral Ali Fadavi, the IRGC Naval Force commander, has said.

Noting that the IRGC missiles and drones provide security in territorial waters in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, Fadavi added the Islamic Republic's military is more powerful than ever.

He also praised the Islamic Republic's armed forces, saying they have humiliated the United States in the region.



Official hails change in anti-drug law as big human rights step

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Kazem Qaribabadi, High Council for Human Rights deputy chief for international affairs, has said changes to the anti-drug law is a major step in line with guarding human rights.

In an order released on Tuesday, the Judiciary chief asked all judges who have sentenced drug-related offenders to capital punishment to stop verdicts and reexamine the cases with regard to new changes to the law.

Qaribabadi said the new law is a test to see the reaction of European countries, which have always been criticizing Iran for implementing death sentence against drug traffickers.



Lawmaker warns of low defense budget

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Ardeshtir Nourian, head of the Defense Committee of the Majlis, said on Friday that the Rouhani administration's proposed budget bill has decreased the defense budget from 5% to 1.2%, warning that security and defense are a “red line” for the parliament.

Speaking with Mehr news agency, Nourian said under the sixth five-year development plan (2017-2022), the defense budget should be 5% of the whole budget.

Warning that the budget bill contradicts the development plan, the lawmaker said although the parliament is aware of the administration's budget restrictions, it won't give up on defense matters.



Allameh Tabataba'i University plans to promote free speech

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Allameh Tabataba'i University (ATU) plans to promote political pluralism by providing an environment for expression of different ideas.

Speaking with ISNA, ATU chancellor Hossein Salimi said he favored freedom of speech in universities, emphasizing that different groups and factions are active in the country's universities.

Free speech has been promoted in the ATU in recent years, he said.

He also pointed to the recent protests and riots across the country, saying such social phenomenon needs thorough examination.



Hezbollah parliamentary faction lauds Iranian stability

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Hezbollah faction in the Lebanese parliament has lauded Iran's stability in the region and congratulated the Islamic Republic for successfully overcoming the recent foreign-sponsored riots across the country.

In a statement released on Friday, the Hezbollah faction said that enemies “played their hands very soon” because they supposed that their dreams will come true, IRNA reported.

The faction added that the Islamic Republic has proved to be able to resolve its economic problems, the major motive for protest rallies.

Two weeks ago, protests in certain cities turned violent in some cases due to the provocation of some foreign states.

There is strong consensus that Iran complying with nuclear deal: Zarif

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has said that there is a strong consensus that Iran is complying with the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Zarif made the remarks after meetings with foreign ministers of Germany, Britain and France and EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini in Brussels on Thursday.

“Strong consensus in Brussels today: 1) Iran is complying with JCPOA, 2) Iranian people have every right to all its dividends, 3) any move that undermines JCPOA is unacceptable. E3 and EU fully aware that Iran's continued compliance conditioned on full compliance by the U.S.,” Zarif tweeted.

The tweet by the chief diplomat came



© ISNA/Amir Kholousi

Nuclear deal is working, Mogherini says

European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said on Thursday that the 2015 nuclear deal is working and it is essential to preserve a deal that is working.

In a press statement read after a meeting of German, French, British and Iranian foreign ministers and the EU foreign policy chief, Mogherini said that the EU remains committed to support the full and effective implementation of the agreement.

The statement came one day before U.S. President Donald Trump announced his new decision on the deal.

Following is full text of the statement published by the EU website:

I decided to convene today in Brussels a meeting of the European Union and the Foreign Ministers of France [Jean-Yves Le Drian], Germany [Sigmar Gabriel] and the United Kingdom [Boris Johnson] with the Foreign Minister of Iran [Mohammad Javad Zarif], in agreement with him - here in Brussels.

The focus of today's meeting was on the ongoing work to ensure the full and continued implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action [JCPOA],

the nuclear deal with Iran, by all parties.

The European Union has had and expressed a very clear position on the nuclear deal, as it was stated by the 28 European Union Member States' Ministers, already in October last year, and repeated again today.

The deal is working; it is delivering on its main goal, which means keeping the Iranian nuclear programme in check and under close surveillance.

The IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] has confirmed in nine reports that Iran is fully complying with the commitments made under the agreement. Its continued successful implementation ensures that Iran's nuclear programme remains exclusively peaceful. And by the way, this is regularly discussed in the framework of the Joint Commission [of the JCPOA] which I am coordinating.

The nuclear agreement is a multilateral agreement endorsed by the UN Security Council with a Resolution. It is a key element of the nuclear non-proliferation global architecture and it is crucial for the security of the region, but also for the security of Europe. It is in our key strategic security interest as Europeans. At a time of acute nuclear threat, the European Union is

determined to preserve the JCPOA as a key element of the international non-proliferation architecture.

The European Union remains committed to support the full and effective implementation of the agreement, including to make sure that the lifting of nuclear related sanctions has a positive impact on trade and economic relations with Iran, including benefits for the Iranian people.

The agreement has allowed for deeper cooperation and continuous dialogue with Iran on all issues. While we have expressed concerns related to other issues, such as development of ballistic missiles and increasing tensions in the region, these issues are outside the scope of the nuclear agreement and are and will be addressed in the relevant formats and fora. We also briefly obviously discussed internal recent events in Iran.

Let me conclude by saying that the unity of the international community is essential to preserve a deal that is working, that is making the world safer and that is preventing a potential nuclear arms race in the region. And we expect all parties to continue to fully implement this agreement.

Macron urges respect for nuclear deal

POLITICS French President Emmanuel Macron has said that all signatories to the 2015 nuclear deal should respect the agreement known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

In a phone conversation with U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday, Macron said that France is determined to see “the strict application of the deal and the importance of all the signatories to respect it,” AFP quoted the Elysee Palace as saying in a statement.

According to Reuters, Trump said that Iran must stop what he called “destabilizing activity in the region”.

On Thursday, senior European diplomats also urged the U.S. not to kill off the nuclear deal. Trump was scheduled to decide how to proceed on Friday.



The nuclear agreement was brokered by the Obama administration -- along with the European Union, Germany, Russia, China, France, and the UK.

The deal is one of several foreign policy issues where Europe's most powerful economies stand in opposition to the Trump administration. European countries are banking on the deal, as many began investing in Iran after the sanctions were lifted.

Govt. firm to be honest with people: official

1 → The protests first started in Mashhad on 28 and then spread to other cities with demonstrators complaining about inflation, unemployment, mismanagement, growing wealth disparity and corruption.

Takht-Ravanchi noted that the government's policies are in line with finding solutions to the people's problems.

In the next fiscal year, which begins on March 21, 2018, the government has dedicated budget for employment which is an important demand by the people, the political official added.

Elsewhere, he attached great importance to recognizing roots of the protests in the country.

During a cabinet meeting on Wednesday, Rouhani asked Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmanifazli to prepare a detailed report on the protests.



“The main approach of the administration in the budget bill for the year 1397 is to create jobs and move towards uprooting absolute poverty, and following the emphasis of the Leader, people expect all branches of the government, organizations and bodies to help the immediate realization of those goals and restoration of the rightful demands of people through sympathy and friendship,” Press TV quoted Rouhani as saying.

EU had pressed Trump to keep JCPOA

POLITICS On Friday U.S. President Donald Trump was set to announce his decision on the Iran nuclear deal as he had been strongly urged by Europeans not to scrap it.

Hours before he was to announce his decision, officials had said Trump would extend waivers on Iran sanctions, keeping the landmark 2015 nuclear deal alive for at least another several months despite his past vows to scuttle the deal.

According to AP, three officials, wishing to remain unnamed because they were not authorized to make official announcements, said the waivers would be accompanied by other, targeted sanctions on Iran and a stern warning that Trump would pull out of the deal negotiated by the Obama administration if fixes aren't made by spring. That's when the next deadline comes for extending sanctions relief for Iran.

After a meeting of European diplomats in Brussels on Thursday, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said Paris remained dedicated to the agreement.

“All parties should uphold the deal,” he said, according to CNN. “It is also necessary that our U.S. allies do the same and should be seen doing the same,” Le Drian said after meeting with his Iranian, British, German and French counterparts.

Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif said there was “strong consensus” on the deal but warned that Iran's continued compliance to the agreement depended on that of the United States.

The nuclear agreement was brokered by the Obama administration -- along with the European Union, Germany, Russia, China, France, and the UK.

Under the nuclear deal, Iran is obliged to limit its nuclear program in exchange for termination of nuclear-related sanctions.

Iran has threatened to surprisingly speed



French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, from left, German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel, British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson and EU High Representative of the Foreign Affairs Federica Mogherini.

Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif says “any move that undermines JCPOA is unacceptable”.

up its nuclear enrichment activities if the nuclear deal is ditched.

“Iran is ready to increase the speed of its nuclear activities in various areas, especially enrichment, several times more than the pre-JCPOA era,” asserted Behrooz Kamalvandi, the deputy chief of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran.

Majid Takht-Ravanchi, who was involved in crafting the nuclear deal, has also said,

“We are ready for any situation especially the worst scenario on the JCPOA and we have made planning in a way that the U.S. will be surprised by the speed of our response.”

Thursday's meeting in Brussels was convened by EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini.

“The deal is working, it is delivering on its main goal which means keeping the Iranian nuclear program in check and under

British Foreign Secretary Johnson calls the nuclear agreement a “considerable diplomatic accomplishment”.

close surveillance,” Mogherini said after the meeting. “Iran is fully complying with the commitments made under the agreement.”

Zarif said the Iranian people “have every right” to all the “dividends” resulting from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the official name for the nuclear deal.

“Any move that undermines JCPOA is unacceptable,” he said in a post on his official Twitter feed. He added that the European parties are “fully aware that Iran's continued compliance (is) conditioned on full compliance by the US.”

The deal is one of several foreign policy issues where Europe's most powerful economies stand in opposition to the Trump administration. European countries are banking on the deal, as many began investing in Iran after the sanctions were lifted.

It will be politically difficult for Trump to walk away from the deal without proving Iran has violated the agreement.

UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson insisted that Iran had not violated the deal, citing the International Atomic Energy Agency's assessment. He called the agreement a “considerable diplomatic accomplishment.”

“I want to stress that I don't think anybody has so far produced a better alternative as a way of preventing the Iranians from going ahead with the acquisition of its nuclear capability,” he said, challenging the deal's opponents to come up with a better solution.

“It is also clearly important to build worldwide support for this deal, that Iran should be able to show that it is a good neighbor in the region.”

Germany Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel also said, “It would send a very dangerous signal to the rest of the world if the only agreement which prevents us from the proliferation of nuclear weapons would be negatively affected.”

Trump cancels Britain trip, blames Obama for ‘peanuts’ London embassy deal

The United States President Donald Trump canceled a trip to London scheduled for next month to open a new embassy, blaming Barack Obama for selling off the old one for “peanuts” in a bad deal.

More than a year into his presidency, Trump has yet to visit London, with many British voters promising mass protests against a U.S. leader they see as crude, volatile and opposed to their values on a range of issues.

“(The) reason I canceled my trip to London is that I am not a big fan of the Obama Administration having sold perhaps the best located and finest embassy in London for “peanuts,” only to build a new one in an off location for 1.2 billion dollars,” Trump said in a tweet late on Thursday.

“Bad deal. Wanted me to cut ribbon-NO!” Trump said.

The decision to acquire a new London embassy site on the south bank of the Thames was announced in 2008 under George W. Bush along with the plans to put the Grosvenor Square site in Mayfair up for sale. A pillar of Britain’s foreign policy since World War Two, the so-called “special relationship” with Washington has taken on added importance as Britain prepares to leave the European Union in 2019 and seeks new major trade deals. But senior British officials have been dismayed by some of Trump’s pronouncements, particularly a proposed ban on Muslims entering the United States and most recently when Trump rebuked Prime Minister Theresa May on Twitter after she criticized him for retweeting British far-right anti-Islam videos.

A Downing Street spokesman declined immediate comment. May was the first foreign leader to visit Trump after his inauguration in January last year, and they were filmed emerging from the White House holding hands. She later said Trump took her hand in a gentlemanly gesture as they walked down a ramp.

During that trip a year ago, May extended an invitation to make a state visit - which includes pomp, pageantry and a formal banquet with Queen Elizabeth - by the end of 2017.

That state visit, which is different to his now canceled working trip, has still not yet taken place, though British officials insist it has not been canceled.

The American flag was this month removed from the U.S. embassy in Grosvenor Square - an area known as “Little



America” during World War Two, when the square also housed the military headquarters of General Dwight D. Eisenhower.

The new embassy on the south bank is a veritable fortress set back at least 100 feet (30 meters) from surrounding buildings - mostly newly-erected high-rise residential blocks - and incorporating living quarters for U.S. Marines permanently stationed inside.

The \$1 billion construction, overlooking the River Thames, was funded by the sale of other properties in London.

■ **Trump sparks British political dispute after cancelling London trip**

Meantime, British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson has warned that the relationship between the U.S. and Britain is at risk after Trump cancelled his upcoming trip to London amid warnings of mass protests.

Britain’s top diplomat suggested the decision to cancel the trip was prompted by the strong public and political

opposition to Trump in Britain, warning that critics “seem determined to put this crucial relationship at risk.”

Johnson also criticized London Mayor Sadiq Khan and the opposition Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn for opposing a presidential visit. Khan had earlier tweeted that he was happy when Trump called off the proposed visit, saying the U.S. president was not welcome in the city and “he’s finally got that message.”

The prospect of mass protests was raised last month after Corbyn urged his followers to turn out in force if Trump visited Britain. More than a million people in Britain signed a petition last year calling for the state visit to be cancelled.

Last month, Trump provoked a wave of anger and disgust from British politicians for re-tweeting incendiary anti-Muslim videos posted by Jayda Fransen, deputy leader of the far-right group Britain First.

(Source: agencies)

Turkey ‘summons top U.S. diplomat’ over Syria Kurd forces Erdogan: Extraditions to U.S. depend on Gulen’s handover

Turkey’s foreign ministry has summoned a senior United States diplomat to express Ankara’s “discomfort” over Washington’s support for Syrian Kurdish fighters, state media reported.

Citing an anonymous diplomatic source, Anadolu news agency said that the U.S. Embassy Charge d’Affaires Philip Kosnett was summoned on Wednesday, without offering any further details.

Kosnett is the most senior U.S. diplomat in Ankara after the departure of Ambassador John Bass in late 2017. His replacement has yet to be named.

The People’s Protection Units (YPG/ Yekineyen Parastina Gel), the armed wing of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party, (PYD/ Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat), is seen by the U.S. as the most effective ground partner for the U.S.-led coalition fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group in Syria.

The YPG has received arms shipments and training from the U.S., in a move that angered Turkey which considers the Kurdish forces to be a “terrorist group” that threatens its security.

Ankara says YPG fighters are linked to Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK/ Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê) separatists inside Turkey, who have waged an armed campaign since 1984 that has killed more than 40,000 people.

Wednesday’s move was not the first time Turkey has announced its displeasure with the U.S. about the issue. In May 2017, Deputy Prime Minister Nurettin Canikli called the supply of weapons to the Kurdish forces “unacceptable.”

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has also in the past called the U.S. arming of the YPG “a mistake.”

In October, the YPG and their allies announced the capture of ISIL’s self-declared



capital of Raqqa in Syria after a four-month operation.

■ **De-escalation zones**

Earlier on Wednesday, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu had warned Russia and Iran they should adhere to the joint accord they signed with Turkey last year in which the three countries announced a “de-escalation zone” in Idlib.

Russia’s ambassador to Ankara, Alexei Yerkhov and Iranian ambassador Mohammad Ebrahim Taherian Fard were called in to express Turkey’s discontent over the continuing attacks in Idlib.

Violence in Idlib region has recently escalated, with Syrian government forces, supported by Russia, trying to regain control of the rebel-held area.

Cavusoglu claimed about 95 percent of all violations of the joint accord were carried out by the Syrian government and the groups

backing the government.

The de-escalation zones were set up last September in an effort to scale back the conflict.

However, as the fighting continues, tens of thousands of civilians are fleeing the area, which is home to about two million people.

■ **Travel warning**

Meanwhile, Turkey has warned its citizens against traveling to the United States due to terrorism and arbitrary detentions, advising nationals to take precautions if they do decide to travel.

“Turkish citizens traveling to the United States may be subjected to arbitrary detentions based on testimonies of unrespected sources,” Turkey’s Foreign Ministry said in a statement dated on Thursday.

Turkey’s Hurriyet Daily News website also quoted the ministry’s statement as saying that there had been an increase in terrorist

attacks and violent incidents in the United States recently.

“We observe an increasing number of terror plots and acts of violence in the United States,” the ministry said, referring to several deadly incidents there over the past few months.

The travel warning came after the U.S. Department of State this week made a similar warning to its citizens, saying Americans planning to visit Turkey should reconsider plans due to “terrorism and arbitrary detentions.”

■ **Extraditions & Erdogan**

Turkey’s President Erdogan says Ankara will not extradite any suspects to the U.S. as long as Washington refuses to hand over Pennsylvania-based opposition figure Fethullah Gulen, whom the Turkish government accuses of having masterminded the mid-July 2016 coup attempt.

“If you’re not giving him (Gulen) to us, then excuse us, but from now on whenever you ask us for another terrorist, as long as I am in office, you will not get them,” Erdogan told local administrators at a conference in his presidential palace in the capital Ankara on Thursday. The Turkish leader further said that Ankara had so far extradited a dozen “terrorists” to U.S. authorities, “but they have not given us back the one we want. They made up excuses from thin air.”

Gulen has strongly rejected any involvement in the botched putsch against Erdogan, but Ankara has labeled his transnational religious and social movement, Gulen Hareketi, as the Fethullah Terrorist Organization (FETO).

The Turkish government has so far submitted a total of seven requests to the U.S. officials concerning the extradition of the 76-year-old cleric, but all to no avail. Washington argues that it has not yet received any sufficient evidence, required by the U.S. courts, to extradite the figure.

(Source: agencies)

Qatar’s foreign minister: Persian Gulf crisis, all over a woman

Qatar’s Foreign Minister has made the extraordinary claim that the diplomatic crisis in the Persian Gulf was all brought about by a dispute over a woman renewing her passport.

Speaking on Qatari national television Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdul Rahman al-Thani said that the country’s refusal to extradite the wife of an Emirati opposition figure led to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) taking an aggressive stance against its neighbor and launching attacks in the media. The woman and her husband moved to Qatar after leaving the UAE in 2013. The husband subsequently moved to Britain but the woman stayed in Qatar because of family ties. When she tried to renew her passport the Emirati embassy refused her application and demanded her extradition.

Minister Al Thani said the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, sent envoys to the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, to demand the woman’s extradition but the Emir refused the request.



“Prince Tamim refused to extradite the woman because she was not wanted in a criminal offense, and this would be contrary to international law and the Qatari Constitution,” the

foreign minister said.

Over six months ago Qatar’s neighbors, including the United Arab Emirates, the House of Saud regime, Bahrain and Egypt, cut off diplomatic relations with the Persian Gulf tiny state and blockaded it by land, sea and air.

Two months before the diplomatic crisis blew up the UAE stepped up media attacks on its neighbor and when Qatar sought an explanation for the attacks it claims it was told that if the woman was handed over they would stop. However Doha again refused to hand over the woman.

Al Thani explained that the UAE then briefed the House of Saud regime on the standoff. In a subsequent meeting with the Emir the then Saudi regime Crown Prince, Muhammad bin Nayef, who has since been relieved of all his positions, told the Qatari leader that there would be no dispute if the woman was handed over to the UAE.

(Source: RT)

U.S. general called, offered assurances: Pakistan army chief

Pakistan’s army chief says he received a phone call from the head of the United States Central Command, Gen. Joseph Vogel, offering assurances that the U.S. would not unilaterally hit targets inside Pakistan.

Friday’s statement from Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa says Vogel also reiterated Washington’s concern about Afghans using Pakistan as a staging arena for attacks inside Afghanistan. Bajwa says he told Vogel that Pakistan

wouldn’t request the U.S. resume military aid suspended earlier this month following President Donald Trump’s harsh New Year’s Day tweet in which he said Washington had “foolishly” given Pakistan \$33 billion in aid

in the last 15 years and in return received “deceit and lies.” According to the statement, both generals spoke of the need for continued cooperation in the war on terror.

(Source: Reuters)

‘Unauthorized foreign presence on Syria soil unacceptable’

Syria says the foreign forces who have made their way into the country and established bases there without the consent of Damascus are occupiers and should leave Syrian soil.

Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal al-Mekdad said it is “unacceptable” for any foreign troops to have a presence on the Syrian soil without the government’s approval, adding that Damascus will deal with this issue as a case of “occupation.”

Mekdad was referring to the presence of American and Turkish forces in Syria, whose respective countries have refused to pull them out in defiance of Damascus’ warnings.

Turkey and the United States have also their own troops on the ground in Syria. The comments come days after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey is to keep up its so-called Euphrates Shield military operation in northern Syria, which serves to keep the U.S.-backed Kurdish militants away from its borders. Mekdad called the Turkish presence “invasive,” and urged Ankara to stop intervening in Damascus’ affairs.

The United States led scores of its allies in an invasion of Syria in 2014, claiming it sought to root out the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) Takfiri terror group. The mission had no Syrian or the United Nations mandate.

In a unilateral mission, Washington has also deployed its own troops to Syria, where they support anti-Damascus militants.

■ **Russia: U.S. blocking aid flow**

Also on Friday, Russia’s Foreign Ministry said the Rukban refugee camp around al-Tanf, which houses an estimated 60,000 Syrian refugees, was “de-facto occupied by the U.S. armed forces,” with access to the district denied to the country’s lawful authorities, Russia Today reported. All limitations on the access of humanitarian convoys to the camp had to be lifted, the ministry emphasized. It stressed “the need to respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Syria in the implementation of humanitarian deliveries and the observance of international humanitarian law.” It further said, “The training of militants from illegal Syrian armed groups continues at the U.S. strongholds in the area.”

■ **UN envoy not serious**

The Syrian official, meanwhile, criticized the UN Syria envoy, Staffan de Mistura for not being “serious in resolving Syria’s crisis.”

Staffan de Mistura is a long-serving Italian-Swedish diplomat and former member of the Italian government. He is currently the director of Villa San Michele on Capri and United Nations special envoy for the Syria crisis.

(Source: SANA)

Merkel’s conservatives, SPD agree German coalition blueprint



German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s conservatives and the Social Democrats (SPD) agreed after all-night talks on Friday to a blueprint for formal coalition negotiations, party sources said, raising prospects of an end to months of political uncertainty.

The agreement between party and parliamentary leaders should pave the way for detailed negotiations, ending a stalemate that has undermined Germany’s role in international affairs and raised questions about how long Merkel will stay in her job.

After 24 hours of talks, the six leaders began presenting the 28-page blueprint to party members, party sources said.

A source involved in the negotiations said the two sides had agreed not to raise taxes if they form a governing alliance.

“We agree on the aim of a balanced budget without new debt,” read a draft of a coalition blueprint seen by Reuters, which was still subject to possible changes.

The blueprint showed they wanted to gradually abolish the ‘solidarity tax’ introduced after reunification in 1990 to support poorer eastern states.

On foreign policy, it said they would introduce further limits on arms exports and immediately end arms sales to countries involved in the Yemen conflict. They would also rein in progress in the European Union (EU) accession talks with Turkey.

Weakened by an election setback in September, Merkel turned to the left-leaning SPD to renew their so-called “grand coalition” after the collapse in November of talks on a three-way coalition with the Greens and Free Democrats (FDP).

■ **Merkel’s authority**

The chancellor, who commands wide respect abroad after more than 12 years in power, needs the talks to succeed to avoid further erosion of her personal authority and weakening of German international influence, not least in the European Union.

As Europe’s largest economy and pre-eminent power broker, Germany is crucial to the region’s fortunes. Berlin’s partners are eagerly awaiting a new German government to help drive forward Brexit talks, euro zone reform and EU diplomatic initiatives.

The euro climbed to a three-year high after news of the breakthrough in the talks. In early London trading, the euro rallied 0.7 percent against the dollar to hit its highest levels since January 2015 at \$1.212. The blueprint also foresaw Germany generating 65 percent of its energy from renewables by 2030.

Merkel has ruled with the SPD in two of her three terms in office, including in the last parliament from 2013-2017. A re-run of their partnership is not yet certain.

Before the two groups move to formal coalition negotiations, SPD leaders need to persuade party members to give a green light at a congress planned for Jan. 21.

Many SPD members fear governing with the conservatives again would further weaken their party after it suffered the worst result in September’s vote since the modern Federal Republic was founded in 1949. Kevin Kuehnert, head of the youth branch of the SPD, said on Thursday he planned a tour of Germany to persuade party delegates to vote against the grand coalition.

(Source: Reuters)

STOCK MARKET	
TEDPIX	96186.0
IFX	1076.63
Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir	

CURRENCIES	
USD	43,960 rials
EUR	53,900 rials
GBP	60,800 rials
AED	12,150 rials
Source: Mehrnews.com	

COMMODITIES	
Brent	\$69.16/b
WTI	\$63.52/b
OPEC Basket	\$67.24/b
Gold	\$1,326.90/oz
Silver	\$17.08/oz
Platinum	\$997.05/oz
Sources: Oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com	

3 intl. expos underway in Tehran

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The Iranian capital is simultaneously hosting three international exhibitions from January 11 to 14 at the Tehran Permanente International Fairground, IRNA reported on Thursday.



The three international exhibitions include the 8th edition of International Exhibition of Architecture, Interior Design, and Modern House (Midex 2018), the first edition of Iran's international business development exhibition called Tehran Business Show 2018, and the 7th International Exhibition of Office Furniture of Iran (HOFEX 2018).

As reported, some 193 Iranian exhibitors besides companies from Italy, Germany, China, France, and Turkey are showcasing their latest industry, equipment, products, and services in Midex 2018.

Tehran Business Show 2018 provides an opportunity to all attendees to have the face to face conversation with business supporters such as advisers and professional trainers and mentors, facing businesses with potential managers and potential brands visitors, the possibilities of investment and capitalism in the field of startups and communication with brand managers.

Some 75 Iranian exhibitors along with 12 foreign companies from Italy, China and Taiwan are showcasing their latest products and achievements in the 7th International Exhibition of Office Furniture of Iran (HOFEX 2018).

Dollar under pressure, euro bolstered by hawkish ECB minutes

The dollar slumped against rivals on Friday on the back of weak factory inflation data, while the euro enjoyed solid support after the European Central Bank hinted that it could be gearing up to trim its massive monetary stimulus.

The dollar index, which tracks the greenback against a basket of six major rival currencies, edged down slightly to 91.814 .DXY. A move below the Jan. 2 low of 91.751 would put it at its weakest since Sept. 20.

The index was on track to shed 0.2 percent for the week, pressured by data on Thursday that showed U.S. producer prices fell for the first time in nearly 1-1/2 years in December, which could temper expectations that inflation will accelerate in 2018.

Against the yen, the dollar was almost flat on the day at 111.27 JPY=, after plunging a six-week low of 111.05 yen on Thursday.

It was still down a steep 1.6 percent for the week in which the Japanese currency soared as a routine operational reduction in bond purchases by the Bank of Japan triggered speculation that the central bank would unwind its massive stimulus.

"Yen short positions had been building, and investors seem to be looking for opportunities to trim them," said Yutaka Miura, a senior technical analyst at Mizuho Securities.

While the domestic economy is in its best shape in years, tame inflation meant that most market participants aren't expecting Japan's central bank to explicitly shift its easy policy stance anytime soon.

Japan's economy minister on Friday suggested it is possible for the government to declare an end to deflation before consumer prices reach the BOJ's 2 percent inflation target.

"The market is very cautious about the Bank of Japan's policy changes, but it is not expected that they will change their policies any time soon, since CPI is still lower than 1 percent," said Harumi Taguchi, principal economist at IHS Markit in Tokyo.

"It's not only for Japan, but for the ECB and U.S., that markets are sensitive about anything that suggests tapering," she said.

The euro was up 0.2 percent at \$1.2050 EUR=, approaching its nearly four-month high of \$1.2089 set last week. It was up 0.2 percent for the week.

The single currency rallied on Thursday, after ECB policymakers said in minutes of the bank's December meeting that they could revisit their communication stance in early 2018, boosting expectations that they are preparing to reduce their vast monetary stimulus program.

Investors took the relatively hawkish statement as a further signal that the ECB will wind down its 2.55 trillion euro (\$3.07 trillion) bond purchase scheme this year if Europe's economy continues to hum along.

Bitcoin BTC=BTSP was up 2.8 percent at \$13,618.78 on the Luxembourg-based Bitstamp exchange. It skidded over 11 percent in the previous session after the government of South Korea, a crucial source of global demand for cryptocurrency, said it is considering a plan to ban cryptocurrency trading.

(Source: Reuters)

Tehran, New Delhi agree to sign \$2b railway deals

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran and India agreed to sign railway deals worth \$2 billion, Iranian Transport Minister Abbas Akhoundi announced.

In an interview with IRNA in New Delhi, the minister who visited India in a three-day trip from January 10 to 12, said in his meetings with the Indian officials three important issues have been discussed and mentioned the project of Chabahar-Zahedan railway worth \$1 billion as the first one.

He said in their recent visit to Iran the Indian officials have offered their plan for financial contribution to the railway project in southeastern Iran.

The second issue was manufacturing of 200 locomotives for cargo trains which will be a significant deal between the two countries, Akhoundi said, adding that India has announced its preparedness for financing the \$600 million project which is planned to be implemented in three years. Some of the locomotives will be manufactured in Iran.

Joint manufacturing of rail tracks was the third issue discussed between the two countries, the official said and explained that some part of the tracks will be purchased from India but the major part will be manufactured in Iran.

■ Chabahar to present a win-win situation for both countries

In a meeting between Akhoundi and Indian Minister of Shipping, Road Transport



Iranian Transport Minister Abbas Akhoundi

and Highways, Water Resources and River Development Nitin Gadkari on Wednesday, the Indian official said that Chabahar Port is very important for both India and Iran and offers a win-win situation to both countries, United News of India reported.

In last October, The Asian Age reported that the Indian government planned to set up a panel of secretaries on development of the Iranian southeastern port of Chabahar.

The panel would look into issues related to easing of financial terms and other con-

tractual issues, in order to make the project more lucrative for private investors which New Delhi plans to attract for assisting in the mega scale development of the Persian Gulf nation's major port, the report said.

Talking to the media after his talks with the Iranian minister, Gadkari termed the discussions as very fruitful and said Chabahar Port would be a growth engine for India as it opened up an alternate route for exports to Afghanistan and Russia.

It would also open up business opportu-

nities for investors of both India and Iran to invest in each other's country, he said.

The minister said the two countries have sorted out all issues pertaining to the Chabahar Port in their discussions (on Wednesday).

■ India-Iran Joint Business Seminar a fruitful measure

Gadkari also said the Indo-Iran Joint Business Seminar was a fruitful exercise for exploring business opportunities in the two countries.

He expressed confidence that his meeting with Akhoundi would help to further strengthen the good relations between the two countries.

The talks were preceded by an Indo-Iran Joint Business Seminar attended by officials and nearly a hundred delegates from the public and private sector and various trade bodies from both countries.

The seminar focused on Chabahar Port, opportunities in the free zone and transit corridors.

Also, Indian Minister of State for Shipping, Road Transport and Highways and Chemicals and Fertilizers Mansukh Mandaviya spoke about the initiatives taken by the government to enhance bilateral cooperation in the maritime sector.

The business event was attended by nearly a hundred delegates from the public and private sector and various trade bodies from both countries.

‘Iran-Italy €5b credit agreement represents Europe’s decisiveness in expanding Iranian ties’

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The signed 5-billion-euro credit agreement between Iran's Bank of Industry and Mine and Middle East Bank, and Invitalia Global Investment represents Europeans' tendency in development of their economic bonds with Iran, IRNA quoted Managing Director of Organization for Investment, Economic and Technical Assistance of Iran Mohammad Khazaei as saying.

The agreement which was signed in Rome on Thursday between Khazaei and Italian Minister of Economy and Finance Pier Carlo Padoan is the biggest foreign finance deal

reached between Iran and a member of the European Union and is expected to facilitate Italian companies invest in Iran i.e., the accord foresees the opening of lines of credit to the two Iranian banks by Invitalia, an Italian state-owned holding, in order to finance investment projects by Italian companies in Iran.

During his stay in Rome, Khazaei also visited Italian Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs Vincenzo Amendola on Friday, where the two sides discusses expansion of further bilateral ties.



China’s trade surplus with the U.S. hit a record high in 2017

China's 2017 trade surplus with the U.S. was \$275.81 billion, the country's customs data showed Friday, according to Reuters.

By that data, last year's surplus is a record high, the wire service reported. For comparison, the previous record was a surplus of \$260.8 billion in 2015.

The world's second-largest economy had a surplus of \$25.55 billion in December, data showed, compared to \$27.87 billion in November.

Trade with China is politically sensitive as the world's second-largest economy runs surpluses against many of its trading partners.

President Donald Trump has repeatedly signaled tougher action on what he calls unfair practices that have lead to a massive trade deficit with China.

Overall, China's trade balance for 2017 was a surplus of \$422.5 billion.

(Source: cnbc)

China’s trade with North Korea dropped sharply in 2017

China on Friday reported a sharp drop in trade with North Korea in 2017.

The overall trade between the two countries for the year fell 10.5 percent compared to 2016, Huang Songping, spokesman for the General Administration of Customs, said on Friday at a press briefing.

For the month of December, the change was even more dramatic: Overall trade for that month fell 50.6 percent from the

same period in 2016.

In December, China's imports from North Korea slumped 81.6 percent from a year ago to \$54.34 million, marking their lowest level in four years, according to Reuters records. Chinese exports to the reclusive nation fell 23.4 percent to \$260 million in the same period.

Friday's trade data reflects cooling ties between Beijing and Pyongyang.

(Source: cnbc)

UK inflation: four in five workers fear cost of living squeeze

Anxiety over future job and pay prospects has become entrenched among UK workers against a backdrop of falling living standards, Brexit uncertainty and the prospect of automation, a report has warned.

Four out of five working people are concerned that inflation will outstrip their pay in future, despite high levels of employment, the Royal Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce said.

The thinktank -- whose chief executive, Matthew Taylor, recently led an employment review for the prime minister, Theresa May, -- said anxiety about falling real pay was widespread across all income bands as it warned the link between employment and economic security

had been "fundamentally broken" since the 2008 financial crash.

"Having a job is no longer a guarantor of economic security: more than 7 million people in working households live in poverty, wage growth lagged behind inflation for most of the last decade, and close to eight million people in the UK live with problem debt," said Atif Shafique, a senior researcher at the RSA.

"Ten years after the crash, and we need a step change. Community, place, identity and personal responsibility all have an important role to play," he said.

The study of more than 2,000 adults, carried out by Populus for RSA, argues that a new

focus on economic security is needed to meet working Britain's challenges in the 2020s, as automation leaps forward. RSA also called for a universal basic income to complement paid work, providing everyone with a means to save.

Frances O'Grady, the general secretary of the TUC, said the pay crisis in Britain should be the government's first priority.

"Working people are in the middle of the longest pay squeeze since Napoleonic times, with real wages still lower than before the financial crisis," she said.

The financial crisis took a heavy toll on UK living standards, as prices roses faster than wages in the six years from 2008. Following a

brief respite in 2015 and 2016, falling real pay returned in 2017 as the sharp fall in the value of the pound, triggered by the Brexit vote, drove up the cost of imported goods and fed higher inflation.

Inflation rose from 0.5% in June 2016 -- the month of the referendum -- to 3.1% in November. Wage growth has failed to keep pace, despite low unemployment, and was 2.3% in October.

The TUC said its own analysis of figures from the Office for National Statistics found that while UK corporate profitability rose to 12.6% in 2017 from 11.4% in 2007, real wages over the same period fell by 4.4%.

(Source: The Guardian)

After suffering its longest economic contraction this century, Russia may just have had the shortest recovery.

JPMorgan Chase & Co. says the world's biggest energy exporter probably capped last year with two consecutive quarters of contraction -- or a technical recession -- a surprise cooldown that ranged from struggling consumer spending to a flop in industrial output.

Gross domestic product is still growing relative to a year earlier, with the central bank putting expansion at 1.7 percent to 2.2 percent in 2017 and predicting it will continue at a similar pace in 2018. No official GDP data is yet available past the third quarter.

■ Technical recession

Russian economic recovery is sputtering despite higher oil prices.

"Growth was driven by a number of one-off factors and now these are unwinding," said Liza Ermolenko, an economist at Barclays Capital in London. "It does look like the output gap is pretty much closed, so there is not a lot of scope for the recovery to continue."

The slip-up, which came against the backdrop of a recovery in oil prices, leaves the economy in a precarious position going into the new year. Although government-led efforts propped up investment in 2017 -- with Raiffeisenbank estimating that four state-led projects accounted for more than half of the total in capital spending -- some of them will

come to an end already this year.

While JPMorgan says the "weakness will be transitory," a letdown so soon after Russia moved past the slump in mid-2015 highlights the dilemma President Vladimir Putin now faces in making the economy a selling point in a campaign for another six-year term in March elections.

■ Worse and worse

Despite Russia's resilience to the twin challenges of cheaper oil and Western sanctions, state development lender Vnesheconombank estimates a drop in GDP accelerated on a monthly seasonally adjusted basis in September, October and November.

"The Russian economy lost momentum in the second half after a very strong first half," said JPMorgan analyst Anatoliy Shal. "The extreme weakness of the past couple of months comes as a surprise."

Putin has stayed upbeat, telling factory workers on Wednesday that the economy is still "on the upswing." As evidence, he pointed to a budget deficit running narrower than expected and growth in gold and foreign-currency reserves.

The broader drop-off in output went unmentioned, however. GDP contracted at



a seasonally adjusted annual rate of about 1.5 percent in the last three months of 2017 from the previous quarter, after a decline of 0.2 percent in July-September, according to JPMorgan. The economy hasn't suffered a technical recession since the first half of 2015, Vnesheconombank estimates.

The Economy Ministry has partly blamed the downbeat performance by industry on unseasonably warm weather late in the year and on oil-output curbs negotiated with the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. Industrial production shrank in November for only the second time in 2017 after zero growth in October.

Russia officially calculates GDP performance only on an annual basis. By that measure, growth peaked in the second quarter of last year at 2.5 percent, before easing in the following three months, Federal Statistics Service data show. While GDP probably added 1.9 percent in October-December before rising further this quarter, it's set to decelerate slightly until the final three months of 2018, according to analysts surveyed by Bloomberg.

"The rebound from the lowest point of the crisis didn't last long," said Natalia Akindina, director of the Development Center at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow. After mid-2017, "the trend of macroeconomic indicators reversed."

(Source: Bloomberg)

Oil prices set for fourth straight week of gains

Oil prices eased from three-year highs on Friday but were still on track to end the week higher for a fourth week in a row.

Brent crude futures traded 15 cents lower at \$69.11 a barrel at 1011 GMT. The contract broke above \$70 a barrel on Thursday for the first time since December 2014.

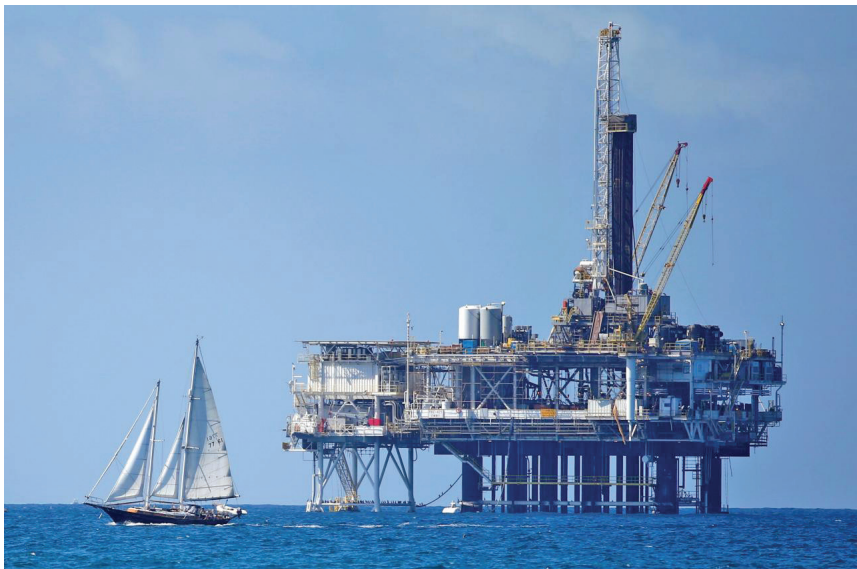
U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were at \$63.45 a barrel, down 35 cents. WTI the day before rose to its strongest since late 2014 at \$64.77.

“It is remarkable to see that most market analysts believe that prices have rallied too far since consensus forecasts is significantly lower than the current spot prices,” Hans van Cleef, senior energy economist at ABN Amro, said in a note.

“On the other hand, most investors are still positioned to benefit from further price gains,” he said.

Analysts and traders warned about the risks of a price correction since the start of 2018, but they say overall market conditions remain strong, mainly due to output cuts led by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and Russia.

In addition to the OPEC and non-OPEC



production cuts of 1.8 million barrels per day (bpd) that are expected to last until the end of 2018, oil prices have found support from eight consecutive weeks of U.S. crude

inventory drops.

U.S. commercial crude oil stocks fell almost 5 million barrels in the week to Jan. 5, to 419.5 million barrels, or slightly

below the five-year average of just over 420 million barrels, the target for OPEC and others involved in output cuts.

Relatively weak China December oil data weighed on prices, traders and analysts said. China's crude imports in December fell 9 percent month-on-month to 33.7 million tonnes, or 7.97 million barrels per day, customs data showed.

“The end of year decline is highly counter-seasonal, being the first m-o-m decline in December in at least five years,” analysts at Vienna-based consultancy JBC Energy said.

This has contributed to a fall in Singapore refinery profit margins DUB-SIN-REF to below \$6 per barrel this month, their lowest seasonal level in five years, leading some refiners to scale down crude runs.

An expected rise in U.S. oil production to above 10 million bpd from 9.5 million bpd now has also weighed.

A market survey of more than 1,000 energy professionals conducted by Reuters in January showed crude price expectations in a range of \$60 to \$70 per barrel for 2018.

(Source: Reuters)

The OPEC and non-OPEC alliance could be formalized, UAE oil minister hints

The United Arab Emirates' (UAE) oil minister has hinted that an alliance between OPEC and non-OPEC producers, including Russia, could continue in some shape or form beyond their current deal to curb oil output.

Speaking to CNBC Thursday, the Energy and Industry Minister Suhail al-Mazrouei said the partnership between global oil producers to try to stabilize oil markets, by curbing output, was working and could go further than a December 2018 deadline.

“I am expecting that this group of countries that stood and have become responsible for helping the market to correct,

(that) there is a very good chance that they could stick together and put a shape around that alliance,” al-Mazrouei said.

Last November, OPEC and 10 non-OPEC producers led by Russia agreed to extend cuts to their oil output in an attempt to push prices higher. Starting in mid-2014, a slide in global demand combined with a boom in U.S. shale production to severely undercut prices.

UAE Energy Minister Suhail al-Mazrouei (C) speaks to journalists as he attends the 173rd OPEC Conference of Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in Vienna, on November 30, 2017.

UAE Energy Minister Suhail al-Mazrouei (C) speaks to journalists as he attends the 173rd OPEC Conference of Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in Vienna, on November 30, 2017.

The OPEC/non-OPEC deal is due to run out in December 2018, although the producers will review the agreement at their next meeting in June to assess how it is impacting prices and global crude

stockpiles.

There have been rumors that Russia might want to end the deal earlier rather than later due to jitters among Russia's oil industry about the duration of the curbs.

Speaking to CNBC at the 9th Persian Gulf Intelligence UAE Energy Forum in Abu Dhabi, al-Mazrouei said he was impressed at how well the OPEC and non-OPEC partnership was working, particularly with production data showing a high level of compliance to the agreement.

“OPEC will continue to be a strong organization and I think this phenomena of getting others to join OPEC in their cause of market recovery, and achieving enough to incentivize investments into this industry, is something in which interest is growing,” he said.

(Source: CNBC)

Stricken Iranian oil tanker drifts into Japan's economic zone - coast guard

A stricken Iranian oil tanker drifted into Japan's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) on Wednesday afternoon, a spokesman for Japan's Coast Guard told Reuters on Friday, as strong winds pushed the burning ship away from the Chinese coast.

The ship, which has been ablaze for almost a week since it collided with another vessel on Saturday night in the East China Sea, was about 300 km (186 miles) northwest of Sokkozaki on the island of Amami Oshima as of Thursday afternoon, a spokesman from the Coast Guard's 10th region based in Kagoshima said.

The spokesman said that Chinese authorities turned down an offer from the Japanese Coast Guard to help, saying it would ask for help when needed.

The Coast Guard has sent patrol boats and aircraft to monitor the situation, he said.

State media Xinhua said on Friday that the oil tanker keeps exploding, hampering efforts to extinguish the fire and rescue

survivors, as the blaze raged and worries grew the ship may break up and sink.

The tanker Sanchi, owned by Iran's top oil shipping operator National Iranian Tanker Co, was carrying almost 1 million barrels of condensate, an ultra-light, highly flammable crude oil, to South Korea.

According to China's state-owned China Central Television (CCTV), the tanker drifted about 25 miles (40 kms) to the south over the past two days, as of 9 a.m. (0100 GMT) on Friday.

About 14 rescue vessels are attempting to put out the fire and searching for missing crew members from the tanker, CCTV reported citing Shanghai Maritime Search and Rescue Centre.

The Sanchi had a crew of 32 sailors at the time of the collision. The body of a mariner suspected to be from the ship was recovered on Monday and sent to Shanghai for identification. The rest of the crew, which included 30 Iranians and two Bangladeshis, remains missing.

(Source: Reuters)

Wind and solar prices continue to fall

The green energy company Xcel Energy reported low bids on orders for wind and solar installations with storage in 2016.

Bids for wind energy alone stood at just \$18.10/MWh, which is considered a record low for the industry. This median price garnered orders worth 17,380 MW, according to the company's figures.

Wind and solar energy orders, with storage, saw the lowest bid values, with the median bid at \$30.60 for a total of 4,048 MWh worth of projects.

“The response to this Solicitation is unprecedented with over 430 total individual proposals (238 total projects) received from bidders,” the company said in a statement. “Over 350 of these individual proposals are renewable energy proposals or renewable energy with storage proposals.”

The string of low prices in the wind and solar sectors illustrates the potential that renewables have to replace coal, oil, and natural gas in the global energy supply mix. U.S. President Donald Trump has tried to prop up coal and oil plants through a

recent plan to fund aging facilities, but the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), which regulates the U.S. electricity market, shot down the proposal.

FERC unanimously rejected the proposal, despite President Trump having appointed four of the five members on the commission. The panel concluded that under the proposal, coal and nuclear plants would be compensated “regardless of need or cost to the system,” an idea that would not be “just or reasonable.”

“There's agreement at the commission that the DOE proposal wasn't sufficient,” Richard Glick, one of the FERC commissioners, told Bloomberg. “It was unanimous.”

The decision is a huge blow to the coal and nuclear industries, which hoped to receive an economic lifeline from the move by compensating economically distressed power plants. A November 2017 study found that the DOE proposal would keep 25 GW of coal capacity from shutting down, and delay the retirement of 20 GW of nuclear capacity.

(Source: oilprice.com)

As oil hits \$70, warning lights flash up in Asia

Oil prices have risen above \$70 per barrel for the first time since 2014 as investors bet supply cuts led by OPEC will dominate the market this year.

But some traders are sounding a warning - the world's biggest crude consuming region, Asia, is showing signs of an impending downward correction.

Prices for Brent crude oil futures, the international benchmark for oil prices, have risen by more than 50 percent since mid-2017 and hit \$70 per barrel this week for the first since December 2014. Average Asian physical crude oil prices also moved over \$70 per barrel in January.

“A healthy (price) correction could be on the cards,” said Stephen Innes, head of trading for Asia/Pacific at futures brokerage Oanda in Singapore.

One reason, traders say, is that the supply of oil products remains ample. In the last three years, refiners enjoyed high profits because of relatively cheap crude oil, which is used to make fuels like diesel or gasoline.

As a result, Asian refiners processed an unprecedented 23 million barrels per day (bpd) of crude oil in late 2017.

China, by far Asia's biggest oil consumer, is now producing so much fuel that its refiners have turned to exports to find buyers. And their purchases of crude could fall.

Chinese diesel exports have surged by almost 3,000 percent since early 2015, to a record of more than 2 million tonnes last December, according to customs data. Its gasoline exports are up by 365 percent since early 2015, to more than 1 million



tonnes in December.

Its total December refined oil products reached a record 6.17 million tonnes, according to customs data announced on Friday.

“This drop in margins could reduce Asian refiners' demand for incremental crude in the near term and weigh on global (crude) prices,” said Sukrit Vijayakar, director of energy consultancy Trifecta.

Singapore refining margins, which act as Asia's benchmark, have slumped by 90 percent from their 2017 high, to below \$6 per barrel this week - the lowest seasonal level in five years.

BMI Research said in a note this week: “In Q1, the balance of risk to Brent (prices) lies to the downside.”

What fueled the rally

The crude market's focus has so far been on signs of tightening supplies as the Middle East dominated Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and Russia lead production cuts aimed at propping up prices.

With global oil consumption also strong amid healthy global economic growth, investor sentiment has been positive.

Ole Hansen, head of commodity strategy at Saxo Bank, said this week that “bullish

news tends to get more attention than potentially bearish signals.”

Yet, another of the bearish signals is rising U.S. oil production, which is threatening to derail OPEC's and Russia's efforts to tighten supplies.

Despite a recent drop due to extreme cold, U.S. crude oil output is widely expected to break through 10 million bpd soon, largely thanks to shale production, which would take it to similar levels as top producers Saudi Arabia and Russia, who hit peak output of over 11 million bpd and about 10.7 million bpd respectively in recent years.

“Oil prices have been undeniably bullish this week despite the lingering concerns over the current bull rally running out of steam . . . It must be kept in mind that rising production from U.S. shale has the ability to expose oil to downside risks,” said Lukman Otunuga, Analyst at futures brokerage FXTM.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) expects U.S. output to surpass 11 million bpd by 2019.

Soaring U.S. supplies mean U.S. WTI crude prices are over \$5.5 per barrel cheaper than Brent, off which most international crude supplies are priced.

Taking advantage of their competitive prices, U.S. crude oil exports are rising, including to faraway Asia.

Feeling the pinch from mounting competition and the pressure from refiners, OPEC's No. 2 and No. 3 producers, Iran and Iraq, cut their crude oil prices this week to remain competitive with customers struggling from lower profits.

(Source: Reuters)

Five of the biggest planned renewable energy projects in the world

As renewable energy is no longer considered a niche technology, countries and energy companies have embarked on a race to impress the world with majestic clean energy projects of all kinds and demonstrate their true potential.

Some projects are destined to meet increased national energy needs in the wake of phasing out fossil fuel power plants. Others are seeking to use a country's competitive advantage and create energy export opportunities. After all, the charm of renewable energy sources is that they have the ability to change the world energy landscape, and give prominence to the new 'energy exporters'.

Here are some of the world's largest proposed renewable energy projects which demonstrate that the energy transition is well underway and renewable energy is nothing but the future.

The TuNur project- 4,000 MW solar: Tunisia

TuNur is a solar power project in Tunisia aiming to exploit the country's competitive advantage in solar radiation and available space in order to power Europe. Located in a newly established solar complex in Southwest Tunisia, the project will use the Concentrated Solar Power (CSP) technology deploying parabolic mirrors connected to molten salt energy storage in a surface of more than 5,000 hectares- an area almost 3 times the size of Manhattan.

Submarine cable systems will then transfer clean electricity to Europe via 3 different routes which represent the correspondent phases of the mega project.

The endeavor is attempting to revive Europe's plans to import cheap clean energy from North Africa to further its Energy Union vision. It builds upon the Desertec initiative, the first ambitious initiative led by German investors to import immense amounts of solar electricity from Tunisia to Europe.

Desertec was abandoned mainly due to political instability in the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) region. Since then, however, the cost of renewable energy has also fallen steeply, making such investments look significantly more attractive than 7 years ago.

TuTunur Ltd already filed a request to the Tunisian Ministry of Energy, Mines and Renewable Energy for authorization to build the project last July. If everything goes well, the first phase could be running by 2020.

Asian renewable energy hub (AREH) – 6,000 MW solar/wind: Australia

An international consortium of energy companies has recently presented its plans to export colossal amounts of solar and wind energy from Western Australia to Southeast Asia via Indonesia and Singapore.

The hybrid power plant would be spread over 14,000 square km in flat desert land on the Northwest coast of Australia. It would comprise approximately 1,200 wind turbines supplied by Vestas, and 10 million solar panels with an aggregated capacity of 6,000 megawatts (MW). 4,000 MW would be supplied by wind energy, and 2,000MW from solar. It is estimated that this amount of power will be enough to supply electricity to more than 7 million households.

Grand Inga hydroelectric project- 40,000 MW hydro: DR Congo

Located in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Inga Project is the world's largest proposed hydropower scheme. If completed, it will be double the capacity of the Three Gorges Dam in China, which is 22,500 MW and currently holds the record. The proposed location is on the Congo River, the world's second largest river in terms of flow which due to its location close to the equator provides an excellent source of hydropower.

Due to its potential to cover Africa's significant energy deficit, the project has been on the agenda of many international development banks and energy companies worldwide for many years. The organic competitive advantage of the location can offer cheap energy across the continent spurring economic development across the whole region.

However, the project is also shadowed by several concerns. For example, given the particular political circumstances of the country potential investors are constrained by fears over corruption. In addition, many have stressed the environmental and social impact of such a big hydro project including biodiversity loss and affected communities.

The river already accommodates Inga I and Inga II, of 351 MW and 1,424 MW installed capacity respectively.

Tidal Lagoon Cardiff- 3,400 MW tidal: Wales, UK

Tidal Lagoon Power (TLP) is the power project developer for this innovative renewable energy project to be located in between Cardiff and Newport. Once completed, the project will be able to provide electricity to every single household in Wales, which is more than 3 million people, by only using the powerful tides of the UK's west coast.

The development process began in 2013 and the project received approval for grid connection last September. The impressive element of the project is that it attempts to scale up a relatively niche technology. If completed, it will harness the second highest tidal range in the world and will change the global landscape of tidal energy once and for all.

The project will comprise of around 108 tidal lagoon turbines. For its completion, it is estimated that more than £8 billion will be needed.

Whether the project will manage to start construction will be based upon the success of the 320MW pilot scheme located in Swansea, known as Tidal Lagoon Swansea Bay, which is being developed.

Gansu wind farm project- 10,000 MW wind: China

The Jiuguang Wind Power Base, also called Gansu Wind Farm Project, was approved by the Chinese Government in 2008 and epitomized China's ambition to become a global leader in renewable energy. It comprises a series of large wind farms- either in operation, under construction or planned, located in the western Gansu province in China.

The project will be completed in several phases. Currently, at an installed capacity of more than 6,000 MW, Gansu Wind Farm is already considered the biggest wind farm in the world. The aim is to grow to a total of 10,000 MW, requiring investments of \$16 billion.

The first 3,800 MW phase consisted of 20 wind farms of 200MW and 100MW. The second 8,000 MW phase consists of 40 additional 200MW wind farms.

However, the almost 7,000 wind turbines that are currently commissioned operate at low capacity. Because of strong dependency on coal, China still under-utilized its renewable energy projects wasting a significant amount of clean electricity. Local officials show persistent favoritism toward the coal industry, while transmission lines across the country are still weak.

(Source: climateactionprogramme.org)

16 years on, Guantanamo Bay remains a blight on the U.S.

By Khalil Dewan

11 January marks the 16th anniversary of the controversial prison Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, a place where the U.S. government has held 779 men suspected of fighting with Al-Qaeda without trial.

The notorious detention center now holds 41 men, 31 of whom have endured more than a decade of imprisonment without charge. Five have been recommended for release by a high-level government review process.

“It’s shameful that 16 years after the opening of Guantánamo, we are still holding people without charge or trial on the basis of faulty ‘intelligence’ extracted through torture. Guantánamo is a violation of America’s strongest-held principles concerning the rule of law,” Shelby Sullivan-Bennis, attorney for the human rights NGO Reprieve, said.

“If our current President really wants to make America great again, he should make 2018 the year that we close this legal black hole. It is the responsibility of the courts and Congress to hold him to account in doing so” Sullivan-Bennis continued.

Reprieve says its client Khalid Qasim, who has been held in prison for 15 years without charge or trial, has been refused medical treatment.

Opened under the authority of former President George W. Bush in 2002 after the horrific 9/11 attacks in New York, Guantánamo – or Gitmo as it has also become known – has been engulfed in stories of human rights abuses with far reaching calls for it to be closed down and detainees to receive fair trials and access to the legal system.

Former President Barrack Obama promised to close the prison facility, however failed to follow through with his campaign pledge. Some 196 prisoners were released by Obama; however none were freed after January 2011. Current U.S. President Donald Trump has vowed to “fill it up... We’re not closing Gitmo.”

At least 17 British citizens and residents were held in Guantánamo Bay and released over the years. The last British prisoner to leave was Shaker Aamer in 2015, having been held without charge for 13 years. In an interview with the BBC, he said the best thing about being free was “just to wake up and known that nobody’s going to tell you what to do”.

The remaining prisoners include three men who are cleared for release back in 2009 by Obama’s review task force.

Of the 41 detainees remaining, 11 prisoners are from Yemen, eight from Saudi Arabia, four from Pakistan, including nationals from Palestine, Libya, Iraq, Somalia, Morocco, Algeria, Malaysia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates.

In a statement to mark the 16th anniversary, Amnesty International said: “The laws of war never envisioned the sort of endless conflict the U.S. government is waging. The Guantánamo detainees must either be charged and transferred to the United States for fair trials, or sent home or to another country where they’ll be safe.”

To continue to imprison these men, many of whom the U.S. also tortured, is unconscionable.

(Source: Middle East Monitor)

A pang of conscience in Myanmar

The military’s admission of a mass atrocity perpetrated against the minority Rohingya may hint at a desire to end one of the world’s worst cases of human rights abuse.

If coming clean about one’s mistakes is a first step toward remorse, Myanmar’s military deserves praise for a rare moment of honesty. On Jan. 10, the country’s top brass admitted its security forces murdered 10 Rohingya Muslims last September and buried them in a mass grave. After months of flat-out denials about committing such atrocities, the news may be telling.



This bit of truth, however, could simply be a “limited hangout” to contain international concerns over the Army’s campaign of ethnic cleansing against the country’s minority. Yet it might also serve as an opening for Myanmar to finally uncover and end one of the world’s

worst cases of human rights abuse. Over the past year, the military has driven more than 650,000 Rohingya refugees from Rakhine State into Bangladesh. It is also accused of killing more than 6,000 despite the fact that Rohingya have lived in the country for generations. Last October, United States Secretary of State Rex Tillerson warned, “The world can’t just stand idly by and be witness to the atrocities.” In addition, human rights groups seek to bring the country’s generals before the International Criminal Court.

Any hint of contrition would be welcome. It might also be helpful in bringing peace to Myanmar’s other long-simmering ethnic conflicts. Over three decades, Myanmar’s military has steadily been forced to relinquish its dictatorial powers. But it still holds the reins on what it views as security issues. It grants little authority over the Rohingya issue to Aung San Suu Kyi, the de facto leader of the civilian side of an elected government.

Still, the military has lately felt the pinch of diplomatic isolation and economic sanctions, such as a loss of revenue from declining tourism. The generals are also sensitive to complaints from other Southeast Asian countries. In 2015, Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi offered this advice to her people about dealing with the Army: “Whatever mistake they have made in the past, we need to give them the chance to change.”

For countries long ruled by a military, the task of easing generals from power must be done with skillful and peaceful means. One tactic in overcoming such institutional resistance is to encourage an army to admit past wrongs, especially mass killings. At the least, such honesty may lead to remorse, which suggests empathy toward victims. That method may be a possible path to end the civil violence in Myanmar.

(Source: The CSM)

U.S. caught in crossfire amid flaring Jordan-Saudi tensions

by Jack Detsch

U.S. Vice President Mike Pence heads to the Middle East next week in an effort to quell regional tensions over the Donald Trump administration’s decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. But Pence will also face rising turmoil between Saudi Arabia and Jordan, two longstanding American allies.

Last month, Jordan’s King Abdullah II was forced to shoot down rumors that he had arrested two of his brothers because of their alleged communications with Riyadh. The crisis came amid rising Jordanian distress over Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s policies, including his reported support for revoking Jordan’s custodianship over Islamic sites in Jerusalem as part of a potential U.S.-backed peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians.

Abdullah has insisted that the departure of Prince Faisal bin Hussein and Prince Ali bin Hussein were part of long-scheduled retirements from Jordan’s army – an effort to bring younger blood into the force, not the defusing of any Saudi plot. But Pence’s visit has raised questions about where the United States stands amid the rivalry.

“I’m intrigued by the fact that Pence is going to be in Jordan, which I suspect is a recognition that the Jordanians were feeling a bit unloved recently and it would feel that it is a friend of the U.S. and it should not be treated callously,” said Bruce Riedel, the director of the intelligence program at the Brookings Institution and a 30-year CIA veteran. “The [Trump] administration certainly understands that the Saudis have been reckless in their treatment of Lebanon, Qatar and Jordan. The more sane parts of the administration don’t see it as being in our national interest to have our allies devouring each other.”

Tensions between Saudi Arabia and Jordan may also be animated personal enmity, spurred by King Abdullah’s pride in his military service, said Riedel, who is an Al-Monitor columnist. The king has commanded Jordan’s Special Forces and he graduated from Sandhurst, Britain’s elite army training academy.

“He always felt that he was a real soldier’s soldier, that he’d trained with Jordan’s Special Forces,” Riedel told Al-Monitor. “I can imagine the image to him of this pampered Saudi prince becoming defense minister and pretending he was a general at 29, he must find that odd.”

If Jordan is feeling unloved, it hasn’t shown up in U.S. arms commitments to the region, which continue to surge in the Trump era. U.S. security assistance to Jordan for fiscal year 2016 topped \$921 million after the Global Train and Equip fund provided for



Jordan’s Prince Faisal bin Hussein (R) and Saudi Arabia’s Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (L) review Bedouin honor guards upon their arrival to meet Jordan’s King Abdullah at the Royal Palace in Amman, Jordan, Aug. 4, 2015.

Trump’s Jerusalem decision could threaten Saudi Arabia’s role as a longtime financial guarantor for resource-poor Jordan, which relies on international loans to stay afloat.

UH-60 helicopters and other equipment, according to data obtained by the Security Assistance Monitor. And the State Department is seeking \$350 million in foreign military assistance for Jordan in its fiscal year 2018 request, while Congress wants even more.

But Trump’s Jerusalem decision could threaten Saudi Arabia’s role as a longtime financial guarantor for resource-poor Jordan, which relies on international loans to stay afloat. While the Saudis have maintained some distance from Turkey-led efforts to organize the Islamic world against Trump’s decision, the Jordanian king was among several Muslim heads of state who attended an Organization for Islamic Cooperation gathering in December that recognized East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine.

“What these events portray are a more complicated environment for U.S. allies to play in,” said Theodore Karasik, a senior

adviser to Persian Gulf State Analytics, a Washington-based consultancy with a focus on the Persian Gulf. “What was once seen to be a very tight relationship may be interrupted by regional politics.”

Karasik believes that Jordan might scale back partnered military operations in the region, such as efforts to back the Saudi-led air campaign against Houthis in Yemen.

“Jordan now knows what it’s up against in the neighborhood,” Karasik told Al-Monitor. “They’re probably going to pull out of Saudi operations in Yemen to send a message that we’re brothers, but there are limits.”

But the Pentagon still sees Jordan as a key partner in the counterterrorism fight in the Middle East and Africa, particularly as the Islamic State is pushed out of its safe havens in Iraq and Syria. In early December, U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis attended the Aqaba Conference in Jordan,

where Arab and African leaders discussed strategies to undercut violent extremism.

The United States also has a significant troop footprint in the country, with more than 2,300 U.S. forces in Jordan. New satellite imagery published in the past year indicates a base on the border with Syria that could support drones, helicopters and special operations.

In light of turmoil stemming from the Jerusalem decision, experts say, Pence will want to use his trip to strengthen U.S. military ties in the region.

“Trump has already thrown gasoline on the stability of the kingdom with the Jerusalem issue,” Riedel said. “The fact that Pence is now adding Jordan to his agenda is a recognition that there’s a problem and the U.S. wants to demonstrate support for the king.”

(Source: Al Monitor)

The Middle East could do without Trump’s vision

Trump governs on gut instinct and eschews expertise - the less his administration does in the Middle East, the best for all

By Chris Doyle

Michael Wolff’s international best-selling book on the Trump White House’s first year, *Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House*, confirms much of the dysfunctional, chaotic accounts leaked to the media with a few telling insights into how foreign policy including towards the Middle East is conducted.

■ Trump First

American politics can be neatly divided into those who think Wolff’s book on President Donald Trump is fact or fiction. Leaving aside then the debate as to whether Trump is a stable genius or jaw-droopingly bonkers, does Wolff’s book shine any light on how the Trump administration conducts foreign policy not least on the Middle East?

It does so only in patches and is most enlightening in how decisions get made or more often than not, not made, and by who.

The book reveals far more about the ensemble cast of characters that have surrounded Trump than the man himself. Trump’s views are, after all, blasted out at all hours on Twitter and in his speeches.

Trump’s approach is - as we know - America First or perhaps Trump First; anti-globalist, anti-immigration (unless it is European), largely non-interventionist, against nation-building, mostly anti-China and mostly pro-Russia and in denial of climate change.

Much of these positions tie in with those of his erstwhile Rasputin figure, Steve Bannon, once an “entertaining oddity” who after the election was for Wolff a “miracle worker”. It was Bannon, sacked in August 2017, that pushed the America First strategy, the anti-immigration themes as well as protectionism.

Bannon derided compromise and embraced conflict, the supreme plotter. Bannon had his supporters in the West Wing, but Wolff outlines how various factions lined up against each other, not least his crowd against Jarvanka, the nickname given to the circle around Ivanka Trump and her husband, Jared Kushner.

The book charts the ups-and-downs of both camps, measured almost solely by how much in favor they were in the eyes of the president. Favor is achieved not by policy successes and grand strategies but almost solely by positive media coverage even in the “fake news” or “lamestream” media.

■ Not fit for president

In this manic quest for coverage, all parties spun and leaked furiously against each other, making the White House the most open to the media in history. In Wolff’s



The Trump White House in Wolff’s portrait is hyper-dysfunctional, reflected in Trump’s international relations. Unpicking how decisions are made is nigh impossible because there is no system, no policy process or debate.

depiction, every single one of them had one thing in common – they all believed Trump was not fit to be president.

The Bannon-Kushner loathing is a constant, reflected in a whole raft of foreign policy issues, including China and the Middle East, attitudes to Jews and Israel. The latter concluded, according to Wolff, that Bannon was an anti-Semite. Henry Kissinger saw the inside of the Trump White House as “a war between the Jews and the non-Jews”.

Kushner was handed the Middle East file by Trump despite zero qualifications. Bannon took delight in slamming Kushner for being soft on Israel, and not doing enough to defend it. Like much of the so-called “alt-right”, Bannon’s defense of Israel was more motivated by a visceral loathing of Muslims than any respect for Jews.

Bannon recruited and used Sheldon Adelson, the multi-billionaire casino magnate who Trump continually defers to on Israel seeing him as the “toughest tough-guy Jew”. Bannon told Wolff “day one we’re moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem”, and perhaps more revealingly that “let Jordan take the West Bank, let Egypt take Gaza.

Let them deal with it or sink trying”. As it stands, the chances of Egypt being the main power in Gaza cannot be ruled out.

■ Middle East’s key players

The chemical weapons attack on Khan Sheikhun in Syria in April 2017 provided Trump with his first major international test only 10 weeks into his presidency. While most of the world was trying to second-guess what this president would do, so too were all his White House circle.

Bannon was the only one to argue against a military response to Syria, believing that such standard responses had caused the quagmire in the Middle East, not solved it. In part Trump agreed with him, as it appealed to his transactional side, “what was in it for him?”

That Bannon lost out was largely due to Ivanka, who, avoiding a detailed briefing which just bores Trump, showed him graphic images of dying children.

Kushner was alarmed not just at Bannon’s hyper-isolationism world view but his apocalyptic one, that the world was burning and you should just let it. Of course, a key element was another facet of Trump’s thought process – to do exactly the opposite of what his predecessors had done, both Obama and the neocons.

In time, Trump came to see four key players in the Middle East – Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iran - with the key being to unite the first three against the fourth. It was General Michael Flynn who won Trump over to his view of Iran as being the root of all evil.

So fixed were these views that any party that opposed Iran must therefore be good.

Saudi Arabia and its new Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman struck up a vital relationship with Jared Kushner. That Trump warmed to Saudi was never guaranteed not least if you consider his anti-Saudi campaign rhetoric. Billions of dollars in weapons sales were clearly a factor, far more than any battle against extremism.

The Trump White House in Wolff’s portrait is hyper-dysfunctional, reflected in Trump’s international relations. Unpicking how decisions are made is nigh impossible because there is no system, no policy process or debate.

Competing parties inside and out jostle for the attention of one man, fact-resistant, who decries expertise, and believes that his gut instincts alone top any professional advice.

For international statesmen reading this, it sounds every bit as bad as so many feared. It may be that the less the Trump administration does in the Middle East, the best for all.

(Source: The Middle East Eye)

Congress has not moved to reimpose sanctions on Iran: Former congressman

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Former U.S. Congressman James Charles Slattery says “I detect a growing sense in the congress that the JCPOA should be complied with as long as Iran complies.”

“Congress has not moved to reimpose sanctions. This is important,” Slattery tells the Tehran Times in an exclusive interview.

Following is the full text of the interview:

A: President Trumps statement about moving the Capital of Israel to Jerusalem is very carefully written. It does not preclude East Jerusalem from being recognized as the capital of a Palestinian State. Nearly all of the practical issues are left to future negotiations. So it is important that stakeholders not over react.

■ Nikki Haley, the U.S. representative to the UN showing remnant of a missile alleged that it is Iranian by origin and was given to the Houthis in Yemen which was used against KSA. Farhan Haq, Deputy Spokesman for the Secretary-General, refuted the claim. France, too, didn’t accept Haley’s claim by taking careful measures. What are the reasons behind her show?

A: Regarding Yemen. I do not know where the missiles fired at Saudi Arabia came from. The situation in Yemen is a humanitarian disaster as best I can determine. All powers in the region should be focused on caring for the victims. I’m pleased that Pres Trump has asked the Saudis and others to cooperate in the delivery of humanitarian aid.

I hope he will ask for a cease fire to make the delivery of aid easier.

■ Trump defended his stance toward Iran and North Korea. As he hasn’t certified the JCPOA, how do you see the fate of the JCPOA?

A: I detect a growing sense in the congress that the JCPOA should be complied with as long as Iran complies.

Congress has not moved to reimpose sanctions. This is important.

I hope Iran and the U.S. can move forward



I detect a growing sense in the congress that the JCPOA should be complied with as long as Iran complies.

with negotiations to address the remaining issues in the region like The future of Syria Iraq Yemen Hezbollah and Hamas.

■ New U.S. security strategy announced by Trump is based on 4 principals: protecting the country, improving public wealth, displaying peace resorting to the US power and influence. To what extent in this new strategy the soft security aspects have been considered?

A: I believe the Trump Admin is committed to strengthening the U.S. military but is going to ultimately be cautious and careful about using military force except to protect vital U.S. interests. I remain hopeful that progress can be made toward an improved relationship between Iran and the U.S. in spite of opposition from Saudi Arabia and from some quarters in the U.S. and Israel.

This is a time to patiently seek common

ground and areas of cooperation where interest align like fighting ISIS.

I have not had the opportunity to carefully review the Presidents speech from yesterday about his administrations defense policy. I do not detect any major shifts in spite of the rhetoric used. Friends and foes alike should not over react. It is time to be thoughtful and seek areas of mutual interest while taking a long term view.

Western democracies face legitimacy problem : Peter Onuf

1 → ■ The Competition between the Northeastern elites and the Sothern populists led into the rise of Trump indicating that establishment slogans from both democratic and republican parties don’t sell anymore. In regard with Fukuyama’s argument, shall we think of such developments as a sign of the U.S. political decay?

A: The distinction between «Northeastern elites» and «southern populists» is also overdrawn. Look closely and you’ll see lots of blue in supposedly red states -- and, of course, the reverse.

Thinking in sectional terms is misleading, except to the extent that the American electoral system has been effec-

tively manipulated by Republicans over the last generation.

If that manipulation (gerrymandering, voter suppression, the domination of campaigns by big donors) is not redressed in the next few cycles, that system may well be doomed as voters lose faith in the legitimacy of their supposed representatives.

But this is not a new phenomenon in American history.

Yes, the problem (in some places, crisis) of legitimacy is by no means a strictly American one -- nor, I shouldn’t have to add, is it confined to Western «democracies.» What every regime will have to deal with is growing inequality (which neo-liberal globalists consider «structural,» but is

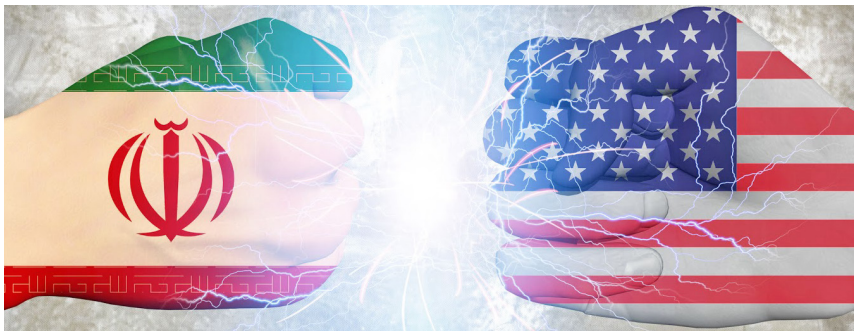
surely amenable to state action) and externalities (such as the genuine degradation of the global commons: climate changes, etc.).

The challenges are linked. In hopeful moments, I imagine that expanded state capacity (look at Estonia!) will enable us to deal with both. More often, I’m inclined to envision our collective failure. Or perhaps more accurately, to fear that there is no «us,» and that mankind (organized--if that’s the word--in a plurality of radically imperfect nation-states) will destroy itself and the world.... But that’s doubtless much too pessimistic. It’s more likely that we’ll «mutate» into some state we cannot now imagine (remember that fog!)

One view from afar

1 → On a more positive note, those governments that stood behind and endorsed the nuke deal with Iran, thanks to the efforts of former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and former President Barack Obama, are utterly appalled with some members of the U.S. Congress and the Trump administration for failing to stand firmly in support of the deal, which Iran has adhered to completely and sincerely by all responsible accounts. And the U.N. has lately been adamant that the U.S. NOT interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. And also live up fully to the deal itself. It’s about time.

But no right minded person can claim any government anywhere is perfect and is fully addressing the ideal of “democracy” and the needs of its people. The U.S. in recent years certainly is a gross offender in this regard, and U.S. citizens are irate about this fact. A recent poll, for one thing, showed a big



majority of U.S. citizens are firmly set against further U.S. military adventures overseas. Will they be heard? One can only hope. Consider that every government over time anywhere, like the human body itself, ossifies, ages, becomes rigid and maybe even riddled with some corruption that results in the neglect of

average citizens and their needs or demands for representation and reform. At such times change is warranted. Iran is no exception. Iranians, engaged in active protests or not, must show the world through peaceful actions it remains a civilized nation, one that understands and wants democracy, that can learn

from the past, and that can be hopeful about the future. The revolutionary Iranian chant of “Marg Bar” may be superseded by “Nang Bar” with respect to addressing grievances. That would seem to make sense.

Ever since the Iranian Revolution in 1979 that overthrew the Washington installed dictator, the U.S. in spite has been trying to regain control in Iran. Now, the Trump Administration seems to be at work, along with the Zionists and the Saudis, against the Iranian people, not merely the Iranian government. Foreign agents, if they exist in Iran or anywhere, should never be permitted to attempt the overthrow of a government. The Trumps and Nikki Haley’s and Netanyahu’s of this world are loudmouths who admit they use bribes and insane threats against other countries. These clowns could well destroy American power and influence in the world. If that happens, it will be well deserved and can’t come soon enough.

U.S. look at Russian elections

1 → Democratic committee staffers who presented the report to journalists Tuesday said the document shows that what happened in 2016 was not an isolated incident. Sen. Ben Cardin of Maryland, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Committee of Foreign Relations, called on Trump to lead the charge against Russia. “When you attack a country you’re not at war with, that’s an act of war,” Cardin said.

He criticized Trump, saying the president has ignored the Russian threat. “The current president of the United States has barely acknowledged the threat,” Cardin said. “Never before has a U.S. president ignored such a clear and present threat.”

Trump on Wednesday assailed the Russia investigation as a distraction, a waste of time and a «witch hunt» — and called on Congressional Republicans to do something about it.

Republicans, who control both the House and Senate, are leading three separate congressional investigations into Russia’s interference in the presidential election and possible collusion with Trump associates.

Micah Johnson, communications director for the foreign relations committee Chairman Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tenn., said the committee received the Democrats’ report and will review it, but «no further full committee activity is planned at this time.»

Over 200 journalist around the world were targets of phishing emails by the Russian hacking group “Fancy Bear” during the 2016 election. Josh King has the story (@abridge-toland). Buzz60

Corker has worked with the Senate Banking Committee



to expand sanctions against Russia «in response to its continued aggression, including its brazen cyber-attacks and interference in elections,» Johnson said.

Putin and his administration have steadfastly denied any meddling in such things as the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

The Democratic report describes how Putin, who is running for re-election in March, has used a combination of propaganda and suppression to maintain public support for Russia’s wars abroad, and how he used a range of similar techniques abroad. It describes:

— A still-unresolved bombing campaign of apartment buildings that left hundreds of civilians dead across Russia, which

began three weeks after Putin became prime minister in 1999. Putin blamed the bombings on Chechen separatists, but no evidence was ever presented, and no Chechen ever claimed responsibility for the blasts, according to the report.

— The murder of at least 28 journalists in Russia since Putin took office in 1999, at least \$24 billion stolen from the Russian state by Putin’s inner circle and the neutering of political opponents by the creation of “rubber-stamp opposition parties” and harassing legitimate opponents.

— The targeting of former Soviet states, such as Georgia, Ukraine and Montenegro, who seek to join the European Union or NATO, with a range of tactics including propaganda, cyber-attacks, money laundering and corruption aimed at politicians and military invasion.

— When the Kremlin’s attempted to politically influence Montenegro’s election in advance of its decision to join the EU, Russian intelligence agents allegedly tried to launch a coup.

— In more established democracies in Western Europe, the Russian government has sought to undermine support for sanctions, interfere in elections through overt and covert support for sympathetic political parties and spread fake news stories and confusion to exacerbate existing political or social divisions. Its influence was felt last year in the Brexit campaign in the United Kingdom to exit the EU, and in French and German elections, according to the report.

What is certain is that the confrontation between both Democratic and Republican parties with the Russian authorities and the Kremlin is undeniable. A matter that the two main U.S. parties agree on.

The collapse awaits Britain



By Sajad Abedi

TEHRAN — Britain’s vote and decision to withdraw from the European Union is undoubtedly the most important event in the history of the European Union. What will now happen to both the UK and the remaining members of the E.U. and also to other countries?

Europe’s coming together has faced a major challenge with the departure of Britain. Britain never wanted to become a completely integrated member of the E.U., and the country took a different approach to monetary union, Schengen and issues related to the creation of a European currency.

Some argue that Britain’s decision will prompt other countries to leave the E.U. To what extent is this a valid concern? Of course, we should look forward to future developments. The early impact on the British economy will test whether the decision was a good one, and we know some British citizens resented their country’s withdrawal from the union. Europe showed that the process of separation would be difficult. Residents of No. 10 Downing Street will have to witness Scotland, Wales and Ireland ignoring London’s policies and also suffer the reduction of British political clout in Europe.

Britain may have little choice but to align itself more closely with the United States. This, of course, has been addressed.

German Foreign Minister Frank Walter Steinmeier described it as “a sad day for Europe and Britain,” but Donald Trump, the then Republican candidate, said that “today, Britons have seized their country.”

While Trump responded to Britain’s withdrawal from the E.U., Barack Obama, the US president traveling to London two months before the referendum, supported the British as an E.U. member. “Britain as a member is able to fight much more effectively against its terrorists,” Obama claimed. He also argued that Britain would have more influence throughout the E.U. if it stayed a member. But many obviously rejected Obama’s views.

On the other hand, Scottish Autonomous Liberals, who demanded a separation from Britain, had left behind the unfortunate pre-election experience, and were again given the opportunity to defend their independence along with the Irish. The Scottish and Irish people, who are part of a “unified kingdom”, remain in the European Union, revealing a number of fault lines in the kingdom that may in time endanger its survival. This is a complex concern for many citizens, whether young or old, rich or poor in the U.K.

Internationally, the referendum outcome has had an impact on London. The British role in the Middle East may have already been weakened somewhat by Britain’s withdrawal from the E.U. giving more influence to countries such as Germany or Italy within the E.U. in the Mideast. The British role, its support of Zionism, its alliance with the U.S. have long been important factors shaping the region, and the Brits have had a privileged position. Although these communications may still be preserved for London, London’s key strength is in the interface between the E.U. and Mideast countries, and it seems that this aspect of British foreign policy could be weakened going forward. Of course, it should be kept in mind that British membership in the European Union forced the country to observe restrictive norms in human rights issues and the limitation of arms sales to some countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE. But now the UK has removed the restrictions and may further expand its ties with these allies.

Along with all the leading consequences for the British, other European countries were also involved in the aftermaths of the referendum. In a country like France, some of the country’s politicians were thinking of launching a referendum called Frexit. In the same vein, Dutch populist leader Garrett Wilders also stated that “it’s now the Netherlands’ turn to say farewell to the European Union.” It’s still unclear whether those who want to leave the E.U. in France, the Netherlands, or elsewhere will be successful in pushing the breakup of the E.U.

However, many members of the union remain keen to keep the E.U. alive, but they themselves know that this may be a challenge. The EU needs to change its economic policies and deal with the countries of Eastern Europe, or Southern Europe and to provide financial support for the weak countries of the Union in order to save their economies from bankruptcy. To prevent further weakening and the collapse of the European Union, a serious overhaul of the laws, mechanisms and interactions of the member states seems necessary. Naturally, Britain will pursue policies to maintain its economic status among European countries. Continued consultation and dialogue with counterparts in the European Union is one of these solutions, so that Britain can continue to be one of the most effective decision-making states. On the other hand, the probability of Britain moving closer to the European Free Trade Association (FTA), including countries such as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Sweden, will be higher. Among the European countries, Britain has maintained its traditional relations with the Netherlands and Portugal.

British ties, in economy and politics, with the Islamic Republic of Iran during the post-revolutionary period have been marked by a strict approach. Britain has been main driver of anti-Iranian resolutions or statements in various international institutions, including the European Union, which pursued hostile policies directly or on behalf of the United States. These policies have targeted the national interests and political independence of Iran. The withdrawal from the E.U. by Britain may or may not help improve relations with Iran. It remains unpredictable.

On the one hand, Britain has been a member of the P5 + 1 in nuclear talks with Iran and has signed an agreement, and naturally has commitments that it expects to fulfill, but on the other hand its proximity to the United States has erected many uncertainties, especially with Donald Trump in the White House. Trump has been backing away from the nuclear agreement, to the chagrin of many.

Poroshenko is targeting Ukraine's anti-corruption campaigners

By Oleksandra Ustinova, Brian Dooley

The anti-corruption posters at Kiev's Borispol airport, reminding passengers and staff that bribery is a criminal offense, look dated and cynical.

They're supposed to be a declaration of the authorities' public commitment to end Ukraine's rule by oligarchy. They're designed to look good for visiting tourists and businesspeople.

But after four years of unmet government promises after the popular protests that brought down the corrupt regime of Viktor Yanukovich, the official PR campaign against corruption seems tired and toothless.

The long awaited and vital anti-corruption court has still not been established. In recent weeks, political attacks by those supporting powerful business interests have undermined

NABU, the National Anti-Corruption Bureau, Ukraine's only independent anti-corruption institution created after Maidan.

Foreign governments correctly see these assaults on NABU as alarming indicators of powerful hostility against reform.

■ Anti-corruption institutions

But the oligarchs are also aggressively pushing another, underreported, line of attack. It's not just the new official anti-corruption institutions that are being targeted.

In recent months, anti-corruption activists and NGOs have been visited and threatened by various government officials. Ukraine's security service, the SBU, has brought criminal charges against the Anti-Corruption Action Center (AntAC) and other leading reform groups.

In March 2017 a law was passed specifically aimed at activists who work against corruption, requiring them to publicly declare their assets. Exposing government fraud is increasingly dangerous, and in recent months activists have been smeared in the media, harassed, physically attacked, and warned to stop their work.

This is not what President Petro Poroshenko promised when he was elected after the Euromaidan revolution. He was supposed to lead a reform program to tackle the country's deep-rooted corruption.

But officials in his administration are now dragging Ukraine back to the dark days of a decade ago, when government threatened and intimidated civil society.

Victories against bribery won in the last few

years are now under threat as criminals find ways around the new rules.

Some NGOs successfully fought to bring down the price of medicine by opening government tenders to international bidders. While this new centralized process scored real wins, regional procurement of drugs remains wide open to abuse.

A report released by AntAC last month reveals that regional oncology centers and state institutions are paying up to 400 percent more than international organizations for the same prostate cancer drug. The price differences are the result of kickbacks to doctors, distributors and officials of tender committees.

The government's failure to properly tackle corruption, and its attacks on those who are trying to, is making the public angry again.

Large-scale street protests are back.

While recent international press attention has focused on the dramatic arrest of political opposition leader Mikheil Saakashvili, and the clashes between his supporters and the police, popular discontent is far wider than that coalescing around Saakashvili.

A few weeks ago, 300 cars in Kiev joined a drive-in to the house of Prosecutor General Yuriy Lutsenko to protest at his part in the targeting of NABU. The motorcade echoed the car rallies to Yanukovich's house four years ago, a key part of the Euromaidan movement.

■ Large-scale demonstrations

Large-scale demonstrations against corruption are bigger than at any time since 2014, and could escalate to crisis point well before the next scheduled elections in 2019. ➔13

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‘Iranian women are yet to discover their self-worth’

By Marjan Golpira

She is a sharp minded, talented, attentive physician whose broad smile and simple yet polished and chic attire grabs your attention immediately.

Azam Saeidi has been in practice as an OB-GYN, an obstetrician-gynecologist, for the past 21 years and after three years of doctoring she opened her own office.

The fifty-three-year old doctor sees an average of 200 patients per month. It is thus is safe to say that when it comes to female patients she has pretty much seen it all.

She is not just a great doctor but a consultant for many women who need to discuss their medical or sometimes psychological concerns and worries with her, tell their untold stories, and share secrets and painful tales. Over all, they seek refuge in her.

To that end, you can say she is a psychologist in addition to being a physician, but without the degree in psychology, and just through a lot of experience.

Saeidi can write entire books on women and not just in biology but psychology and her every word can have impact on patients.

I recently sat with her in a grand, modern coffee shop in Tehran, very close to her not very long ago office, over a cup of coffee in the company of her son, Amir Reza.

The well-respected Saeidi worked 16 years in a state-run medical facility, Najmieh, where she was officially hired with full benefits. She held various management positions in the center given her skills. She made many changes in the center, opened a painless labor and delivery ward and brought the place to prosperity.

It was informative to hear what Dr. Saeidi had to say on Iranian women’s issue, giving them a list of valuable tips.

1. Saeidi believes that 50 percent of her clients are not physically sick but are in desperate need of consultation.

“After years of experience, I discovered clients referred to me with pelvic pain mostly suffered from psychosomatic disorders.”

She believes part of the problem is that when women receive no love and attention at home from husbands, they tend to get some attention back by expressions of pelvic pain, all related to their emotional needs.

2. She believes when a woman is valued in a society, she enjoys higher self-esteem.

“If a woman is respected in her own society, she can make a better family and consequently a society, as it is known the foundation of a society is practically put in the hands of mothers.”

3. She believes if a woman is capable of understanding her community and has the smarts to analyze her society, she is put in a higher seat of power, because after all, she can examine ideas which can shape the world she lives in.

4. She believes that Iranian women are yet to discover their own self-worth.

“I can say with conviction that out of every 100 women I meet maybe only five to six believe in themselves.”

“If Iranian women believe in their skills, talents, capabilities, wisdom, and the capacity to work out their problems, express their bottled up emotions and feelings and release them properly, our society will certainly show signs of improvement.”

5. She believes that a woman who seeks cosmetic surgery like in rhinoplasty or nose jobs, or gets breast augmenta-



“Young women in Iran have limited themselves to academic books and more religious types have restricted themselves to religious books and teachings. This is while sociology, psychology and self-help books, as well as novels, are left to collect dust.”

tion, has forgotten that her true beauty lies inside and she no longer should seek it outside her.”

Saeidi brought up her mother as a clear case of a strong woman who was well-aware of her self-value.

“She gave births to nine, 5-kilo babies out whom one died. She never considered any plastic surgery on her body because she was comfortable with herself. She always was very well-respected by my father because she cared for herself.”

5. She believes Iranian women are not well acquainted with books and don’t read enough.

“Young women in Iran have limited themselves to academic books and more religious types have restricted themselves to religious books and teachings. This is while sociology, psychology and self-help books, as well as novels, are left to collect dust.”

She says reading broadens one’s perceptions and expands mind. This helps women to think outside the box, while it improves analytical thinking and general knowledge.

6. She believes Iranian women are luxury oriented, and waste money to live in expensive and exclusive styles, expensive clothes and jewelry. “This type of lifestyle leads a woman to feel run down, and even worse, that she lives in a rut as if she has been running on a treadmill going nowhere.”

7. She also believes women ought to stay active and play a strong role when it comes to social affairs and gatherings. But she admits that social functions are not much encouraged in the country.

“Women themselves are blamed for being ignored as they have taken a passive role in the family and society.”

8. She believes Iranian women lack management skills in various aspects of life such as in managing time, finances and even love relationships.

“Some women even asked me to speak to their husbands and ask them to be attentive and kind to them. That obviously shows they have not mastered communication skills with their hubby.”

9. She says Iranian women don’t pay enough attention to their personal hygiene. She believes that is partly due to the separation of less costly state-run health care centers versus more expensive private medical hubs.

“Economic distress has pushed less fortunate women to seek medical treatment in less expensive but more crowded health care centers where they may not receive enough training for self-care.”

Saeidi’s comments didn’t end there. She had a few words with her own colleagues in the medical profession.

She strongly believes satisfaction in the field of medicine in Iran ends with MONEY.

She says some physicians seek fame, some seek wealth, while some are after both, but among Iranian doctors there are those who love their job for just the sake of tending patients.

“The trend has had Iranians lose faith and trust in doctors, and not to seek medical care until it might be too late to help a sick woman.”

It’s not always Alzheimer’s: what causes memory loss?

By Esther Heerema

Most of us have, either occasionally or more frequently, had the unpleasant experience of forgetting something. These episodes of memory loss can cause irritation and frustration, as well as a fear that we’re “losing it” and beginning to develop Alzheimer’s disease.

While Alzheimer’s and other kinds of dementia are responsible for many cases of memory loss, the good news is that there are other, non-permanent factors that can also cause memory loss.

Better yet, some of them are easily reversed.

So, what causes us to forget? What prevents us from mentally storing that piece of information or being able to recall it? Here are some of the many reasons we can’t remember.

Emotional causes

Because our mind and body are connected and affect each other, our emotions and thoughts can impact our brain. The energy it takes to cope with certain feelings or life stress can get in the way of storing or remembering details and schedules.

Often, these emotional triggers of memory loss can be improved by support, counseling, lifestyle changes, and even just being aware of—and limiting exposure to—things that increase stress.

Stress

Too much stress can overload our minds and cause distraction and brain drain.? While short-term, acute stress can trigger a momentary memory problem, chronic, long-term exposure to stress may increase your risk of dementia. Stress management is an important strategy to maintaining quality of life and improving the health of your body and your brain.

Depression

Depression can blunt the mind and cause such disinterest in your surroundings that memory, concentration, and awareness suffer. Your mind and emotions may be so weighed down that you are just not able to pay much attention to what’s happening. Consequently, recalling something that you weren’t paying attention to is difficult.

Depression can also cause problems with healthy sleep, which can make it more difficult to remember information.

Pseudodementia is a term that describes this combination of memory loss and depression. If you think you’re experiencing



pseudodementia, cognitive testing can be helpful in reassuring you and ruling out a true dementia. Despite feeling “out of it” in daily life, the person with pseudodementia will be able to perform quite well on cognitive tests.

Depression is usually highly treatable. Often, a combination of counseling and medication can be very effective.

Anxiety?

If you’ve ever completely blanked out when taking a test, even though you knew the information, you can blame anxiety. Some people have anxiety in certain situations, like this test-taking example, and others have a more pervasive generalized anxiety disorder that continually interferes with healthy functioning, including the ability to remember in day-to-day activities. Identifying and treating anxiety can significantly improve your quality of life, and possibly your memory, as well.

Grief?

Grieving requires a high amount of physical and emotional energy, and this can reduce our ability to focus on events and people around us. Consequently, our memory can understandably suffer. Grief can be somewhat similar to depression, but it’s often triggered by a specific situation or acute loss of something or someone, while depression may seem to be without a specific cause. Deep grief takes time to process, and it’s appropriate and necessary to spend time in your grief. You can expect to feel drained—both physically and mentally—when you’re going through grief. Give yourself extra time and grace while you’re grieving. Individual counseling and support groups can help you to effectively cope with grief.

Prescription medications?

Just because a medication is legally prescribed by a physician doesn’t mean it can’t hurt your body or impair your memory. You may be taking the medication exactly as ordered by the doctor, but if you combine too many drugs, prescription medicines can significantly affect your ability to think and remember clearly. If you go to different doctors for multiple conditions, make sure each one has your complete list of medications so they don’t order a medication that could interact with one you’re already taking. It’s worth asking your physician if any of your medications can be slowly reduced to eliminate this cause of forgetfulness.

Chemotherapy

If you’re receiving chemotherapy as a treatment for cancer, you might experience “chemo-brain”, described as brain fog from the medicines targeting your cancer. Knowing that this is a common, and often temporary, effect from chemotherapy can be reassuring.

Heart surgery

Some research has indicated that following bypass surgery on the heart, there may be an increased risk of some confusion and memory impairment. This may improve as you recover, and typically the need for this type of heart surgery is greater than the possible risk. Be sure to discuss your concerns with your physician.

Anesthesia

Some people report memory loss or confusion, typically lasting for a few days, following the use of anesthesia. Research, however, has been unclear in determining if there’s a direct correlation between the anesthesia

or if other factors may be causing the brain to function less effectively.

Electroconvulsive therapy

Sometimes referred to as “shock” therapy, ECT can be very helpful for those suffering from severe depression, but it may also cause some memory loss. You should talk with your physician about the risks and benefits of ECT. Because it has been effective for some people, the risk of some memory loss maybe worth it for your quality of life.

Physical and medical conditions

Fatigue and sleep deprivation

The benefits of getting a good night’s sleep are many: less weight gain, more energy, and the ability to think more clearly. Being tired because you didn’t sleep well last night and being chronically short on sleep both have been shown to affect memory and learning. It’s worth trying some easy ways to improve your sleep habits.

Concussions and head injuries

Concussions and traumatic head injuries can cause short-term memory impairment, but some research has found that they can also increase the likelihood for the development of dementia over the years.

Be sure to take steps like wearing protective headgear and helmets when playing sports. And, if you do receive a concussion, it’s important to let your head fully heal before returning to regular activities and participating in sports. Discuss any headaches and concentration difficulties after a head injury with your doctor.

Low vitamin B12

Vitamin B12 is a very important vitamin. In the more extreme cases, deficits in vitamin B12 have caused symptoms that have been mistaken for dementia. Upon receiving adequate vitamin B12, those symptoms may improve and even resolve in some people.

Thyroid problems

Both hypothyroidism and hyperthyroidism can cause cognitive problems such as memory loss and mental fog. If you’re noticing that it’s more difficult to remember things or brain sluggishness, consider mentioning this to your doctor. It may be appropriate to test your thyroid functioning, especially if you’re experiencing other symptoms of thyroid issues as well. Treating thyroid problems could improve your memory and concentration. (Source: verywell.com)

This is the only way you should remove skin tags, according to a dermatologist



By Marissa Laliberte

As you get older, little growths called skin tags might start popping up on your body. You’ll recognize them because they’re thinner at the base and get wider at the top. They aren’t painful or dangerous like cancerous moles, but there’s a very good reason you’ll want them removed. Experts think friction—like from your shirt’s underarms or a necklace—can cause the growths over time, though it’s unclear why some people get more than others, says Anthony Rossi, MD, FAAD, dermatologic surgeon at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center and assistant professor of dermatology at Weill Cornell Medical College. People have used all kinds of crazy methods to try removing skin tags on their own, says Dr. Rossi. He’s heard of people tying strings around them, burning them, trying to pick them off with their fingers, and even slamming books against them. “It’s wild what people will do,” he says.

A dermatologist, on the other hand, can snip away skin tags quickly and cleanly. Sounds easy enough for you to try it on your own, right? Not so fast. “It’s like when people try to cut their own hair,” says Dr. Rossi. “It never goes the way they want it to.”

For one thing, dermatologists have sterile instruments, but using your own could lead to an infection. Plus, while derms can use local anesthesia and have supplies to stop the blood, you could bleed uncontrollably with at-home methods.

Even OTC medications claiming to dissolve the skin tags could be bad news, says Dr. Rossi. “You could burn the skin or make marks,” he says. “There could be unintended consequences.” If you hate the idea of anyone snipping your skin, ask a doctor to freeze or melt it instead. But there’s an even bigger reason you should visit an expert. After dermatologists remove a growth, they’ll look at it under a microscope. “There are things that look like skin tags but are cancerous,” says Dr. Rossi. That doesn’t mean you should freak out if you do find a skin tag. Most will just be benign, but you won’t know for sure until you’ve asked. Plus, checking a skin tag is a “good excuse” to get your doctor to check the rest of your body for skin cancer and atypical or malignant growths, says Dr. Rossi. (Source: rd.com)

Only one in 10 people know that this common drink can cause cancer

By Brooke Nelson

Nothing tastes better than a tall glass of wine after a long day—but you often finish your drink way too quickly. Just a few more can’t hurt, right? Well, not so fast. Truth be told, binging on booze could put you at risk for several forms of cancer, doctors say.

Surprised? You’re not the only one. In a recent survey by the Alcohol Health Alliance UK (AHA), a British charity, most people admitted they weren’t aware how damaging alcohol can be for their bodies.

The charity’s data crunchers asked over 2,000 people across the United Kingdom about their attitudes toward alcoholic beverages. Only 10 percent of people know alcohol can cause cancer, the results revealed. Meanwhile, just 16 percent of people are aware of the guidelines for healthy alcoholic consumption.

“We urgently need to raise awareness,” AHA’s expert on cancer prevention, Professor Linda Bauld, told HuffPost UK. “Requiring warning labels on alcohol products making clear the cancer link would be one way to do this.” While the AHA only surveyed British adults, the connection between alcohol and cancer is well-established across the board. Recent research has found that regularly consuming white wine can increase your risk of skin cancer by 14 percent, and drinking just one alcoholic beverage per day could lead to breast cancer. Overall, alcohol use has been linked to at least seven different types of cancer, according to the American Cancer Society.

Now that you’re clued in on alcohol’s link to this deadly condition, it might be time to cut back on your boozy beverages. The USDA recommends limiting your intake to one drink per day for women and two drinks for men. Want to do more? Here are 37 expert-approved ways to cut your cancer risk.

(Source: HuffPost UK)

The real reason why some people are left-handed, according to science

Raise your hand if you’re a lefty. Congrats! Being left-handed has some surprising perks, including higher levels of creativity and ambition. As a bonus, just 10 to 12 percent of the world’s population is left-handed—making you a rare commodity, too.

Previous research has suggested that left-handedness is due to genetic differences in the brain. But according to scientists at Ruhr-Universitat Bochum, the spinal cord determines one’s dominant hand, instead.

To reach these findings, the German researchers recruited mothers who were eight to 12 weeks pregnant and examined the gene expression in their babies’ spinal cords. Here’s what they discovered: The motor cortex (which controls arm and hand movements via signals to the brain) and the spinal cord do not connect until the 15th week of pregnancy. However, babies show signs of right or left-handedness at just eight weeks. This suggests that the brain can’t control hand preferences; it must be the spinal cord, instead.

Translation? Your dominant hand is determined by genetic differences in your spinal cord before you are even born. So if you’re a proud lefty, you now have science-backed proof that your genes are extra-special. Here is even more good news: You’ll love these hilarious tweets only left-handers will understand. (Source: International Business Times)

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 SS&C Technologies Holdings Inc said it would buy DST Systems Inc in a \$5.4 billion deal, expanding its financial technology software prowess through its largest deal to date. DST is SS&C's first large deal since its \$2.3 billion takeover of accounting software maker Advent Software in 2015. A year earlier, SS&C had bought DST's investment data analytics unit for \$95 million.

2 General Motors Co is seeking U.S. government approval for a fully autonomous car - one without a steering wheel, brake pedal or accelerator pedal - to enter the automaker's first commercial ride-sharing fleet in 2019, executives said. For passengers who cannot open doors, the Cruise AV - a rebranded version of GM's Chevrolet Bolt EV - has even been designed to perform that task.

3 The U.S. House of Representatives on Thursday passed a bill to renew the National Security Agency's warrantless internet surveillance program, overcoming objections from privacy advocates and confusion prompted by morning tweets from President Donald Trump that initially questioned the spying tool. The legislation, which passed 256-164 and split party lines, is the culmination of a years-long debate in Congress on the proper scope of U.S. intelligence collection - one fueled by the 2013 disclosures of classified surveillance secrets by former NSA contractor Edward Snowden.

4 Advanced Micro Devices Inc said its microprocessors are susceptible to both variants of the Spectre security flaw, days after saying its risk for one of them was "near zero". In a subsequent statement Thursday, AMD said there was "no change" to its position on the susceptibility of its chips to Spectre, but shares fell as much as 4.0 percent after the first AMD announcement.

5 China's Bitmain Technologies is eyeing bitcoin mining sites in Quebec, a company spokesman told Reuters, as expectations of a potential Chinese crackdown on cryptocurrency mining make the energy-rich Canadian province an attractive alternative.

6 Apple recently disseminated iOS 12.2.2 to patch the operating system and protect it from problems that could be caused by security flaws Meltdown and Spectre. The update was sent out and should be installed on every iPhone, iPad and iPod touch that receives it.

7 Google buys company that uses vibrations to make sounds come from a smartphone display Last year, on the sly, Google purchased U.K. startup Redux. This is a company that has technology that allows the display on your mobile phone to act like a speaker. By vibrating the screen using tiny actuators, sound is created from the display.

8 Speaking in Manhattan at the International Conference on Cyber Security, FBI forensic expert Stephen Flatley called Apple "jerks" for making the iPhone harder to break into. "Apple is pretty good at evil genius stuff," the FBI expert said.

9 Samsung found guilty of infringing on 4G technology patents owned by Huawei Back in May 2016, Huawei filed a lawsuit against Samsung in China for infringing upon some of its patents.

10 Uber will pay New York drivers \$3 million in class-action settlement. The agreement also says drivers will be classified as independent contractors.

CDs and human hair can stop deer hitting cars, say students

The number of accidents in which deer collide with cars in Ireland is hugely underestimated, students at St Brendan's College in Killarney, Co Kerry, have concluded.

Combining official statistics on such incidents and their own survey using a crowdsourcing app, they believe they have come up with a more accurate picture.



Their research found that there were more than 101 incidents in the Killarney area in the past five years, with an average of more than 300 collisions a year in Ireland. Most went undocumented unless there was significant personal damage or injury, said Darragh Fleming.

With classmates Colm Looney and Ethan O'Neill, they identified two areas where deer were most frequently to be found in their area: Gortroe in Fossa and Loughitane near Muckross. Motion sensors and cameras were deployed to detect the animals.

The team went on to prove the effectiveness of "cheap deterrents" used in Scotland and the US in the form of CDs hung from trees and human hair (sourced from a local barber and packed into tights). The CD shines when illuminated by car lights while the scent from the hair puts the deer off.

In a third phase of their project, they developed a prototype sign that lights up with different colors depending on how recently deer have been in the area; red indicating to a motorist when they are most likely to face an encounter.

"We believe that all three measures together will reduce collisions," Fleming added. They are submitting their work to the Road Safety Authority, the local Garda, and Kerry County Council. (Source: irishtimes.com)

IDC: Q4 PC shipments rise for first time in six years



The PC market is beginning to show some signs of stabling, with traditional PC shipments recording a slightly positive 0.7 percent year-over-year growth worldwide in Q4 2017 and total year-over-year decline of 0.2 percent in full year 2017, according to research released by IDC.

IDC said 2017 marked the most stable year for the PC market since 2011 with annual shipment volume of 259.5 million units.

In the holiday quarter, PC vendors shipped 70.6 million units, out performing estimates of a 1.7 percent decline. However despite the small quarterly growth of 0.7 percent, mobile devices are continuing to have a dampening effect on the global PC market.

HP continues to lead as the top PC vendor worldwide with 8.3 percent growth year-over-year in Q4 shipments. Lenovo remained flat as the second PC vendor, followed by Dell, Apple, ASUS, and Acer.

"The fourth quarter results showed some potentially encouraging headway against the difficult environment in retail and consumer PCs," Jay Chou, research manager with IDC's Personal Computing Device Tracker, said in a statement. "Enticed by a growing array of products that promise all-day battery life, high

portability, and address emerging use cases that require more compute power, pockets of the consumer base are taking a serious look at these revamped PCs. However, the overall PC market remains a challenging one."

In the US market, IDC reported the overall

PC market performed below expectations in the Q4 2017, with a drop in notebook and desktop sales. Total PC shipments in the US reached 16.5 million units, lead by HP with a 34 percent marketshare.

In separate preliminary figures, research

firm Gartner said worldwide PC shipments totaled 71.6 million units in Q4 2017, a 2 percent decline year over year. Unlike IDC, Gartner said Q4 2017 marked the thirteenth consecutive quarterly decline for the PC market.

For the year, 2017 PC shipments surpassed 262.5 million units, a 2.8 percent decline from 2016, according to Gartner's research.

Like IDC, Gartner said the US PC market lagged compared to growth in Asia/Pacific, Japan and Latin America.

"The fourth quarter results confirmed again that PCs are no longer popular holiday gift items. This does not mean that PCs will disappear from households," Mikako Kitagawa, principal analyst at Gartner, said in a statement. "Rather, the PC will become a more specialized, purpose-driven device. PC buyers will look for quality and functionality rather than looking for the lowest price, which will increase PC average selling prices (ASPs) and improve profitability in the long run."

Until the increased profitability in the long run, Kitagawa said the PC market will have to go through the shrinking phase caused by fewer PC users.

(Source: zdnet)

How chip flaws Spectre, Meltdown work and what's next

By Paresh Dave

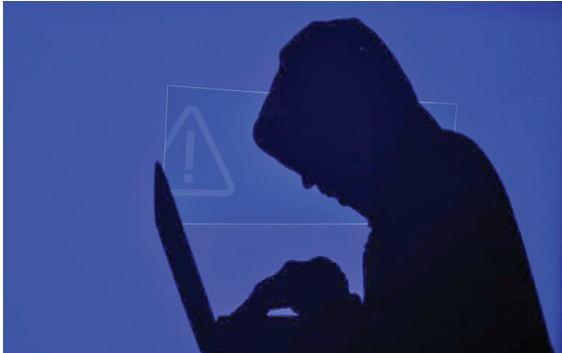
Smartphones, PCs and servers across the world have received software updates in recent days to plug security gaps on computer chips that cyber security researchers have described as the most serious threat in years.

Researchers identified the problem last year, shared details with chip manufacturers last summer, and then made a public announcement Jan. 3.

The vulnerabilities, known as Meltdown and Spectre, can allow passwords and other sensitive data on chips to be read. The flaws result from the way computers try to guess what users are likely to do next, a process called speculative execution.

Simon Segars, the chief executive of chip designer ARM Holdings, described speculative execution as the equivalent of spinning a bunch of plates in the air, with the plates holding data.

Watching the order in which the plates land lets observers infer the data, he told Reuters during an interview on Wednesday at the tech industry's CES conference in Las Vegas. Affected chipmakers and large technology companies



including Alphabet Inc's Google say they have not seen any malicious hackers use Meltdown or Spectre in attacks, but the vulnerabilities affect most modern computing devices.

Security analysts have said that Meltdown, which affects Intel Corp chips and one processor from SoftBank Group Corp's ARM, is easier to exploit because the program to steal passwords and other data can be hidden on a website.

A brief history and a look into the future of fitness technology



Have you recently taken ownership of a shiny new activity tracking device? For many people, the essential fitness kit now includes gadgets designed not for sitting and staring at a screen, but for encouraging users to get up and move.

Health and fitness technologies also have a long history.

At the beginning of the 20th century, physical activity was seen by some as a bulwark against the ills of modernization, such as the increasingly sedentary nature of work. As the American educator Dudley Sargent put it in his 1906 book Physical Education: A large portion of the population never use half their faculties, and if they pursue the same employment for a term of years they are apt to acquire defects of structure, if not of constitution and character, that are transmitted to the next generation.

Physical activity as a leisure pursuit became highly significant. Mechanical apparatus such as wall-attachable weight-pulley devices were designed to guard against such "defects of structure" - and of character, too. In other words, the point was to bolster the body and mind. According to some, this would ensure the well-being of the population.

These were not just devices for men. The 1904 book Physical Culture for Women, authored by the world champion woman bag-puncher Belle Gordon, featured an advertisement for the "Fox Exerciser" weight-pulley machine. As a resistance training device, the Fox Exerciser was similar to exercise equipment promoted by other proponents of physical culture,

such as famous strongman Eugen Sandow.

Nearly a century later, another movement was afoot: the fitness boom of the 1970s and 1980s. At this point, electronic technology became especially important in combating the sedentary nature of modern living.

Electronic technology meant communication devices like the VCR (videocassette recorder).

Meanwhile, devices such as electronic treadmills and exercise bikes became staples in fitness gyms, and were also widely available as home equipment. In its July 1989 edition, outdoors magazine Field and Stream highlighted the merits of these electronic devices, claiming they were "smoother and quieter, more convenient to use than most mechanical systems, and provide a workout customized to your fitness level".

■ The future of fitness

Today, digital and wearable health and fitness technologies are seamlessly integrated

into our everyday lives. Your smartphone itself is a fitness tracking device. So what makes our present day technologies unique?

For one thing, their personalization. The health and fitness entrepreneurs of the early 1900s spoke to the masses, but while the treadmills of the 1970s and 1980s marked an important step towards customization, today's wearable devices and health and fitness apps are deeply personal. They track and monitor seemingly everything, from what we eat, to how we sleep, to how often we move, to the composition of our bodies.

Then there's portability. In the late 1800s, the American orator, preacher, and educator Charles Wesley Emerson lamented that while exercise equipment such as dumb bells had value, they hindered mobility: "We cannot carry gymnasiums about with us." Even near the end of the 20th century, health and fitness practices were largely confined to the gymnasium and the home.

Today's technologies are for anywhere and anytime. They travel with us wherever we go. Technology facilitates, rather than hinders, mobility.

Whereas in the past it was just the technologies themselves that were sold for profit, today, so is our data. A study by the U.S. Federal Trade Commission found that 12 health and fitness apps shared user data with 76 third parties, advertisers among them. Or, as a Wall Street Journal report bluntly put it: "Your apps are watching you."

So where next? We should expect the health and fitness technologies of the future to be even more personalized in assessing our bodies and daily habits. We should also expect them to be further integrated into our daily lives, to the point where their presence is undetectable. And we should expect technologies to be more sophisticated than ever in producing data from which value can be extracted (such as helping companies know consumer habits and preferences).

For the UK government, the future of health and fitness technology is cause for optimism. But ever more personalization should not overshadow what we know about the social determinants of health, meaning the wider conditions in which people are born, grow, live and work.

The combination of ever more intimate data and the profit motive to mine these data is also cause for concern when it comes to privacy and security. So while trackers might make us feel like we have more control and a more personal relationship with fitness, a degree of skepticism would be healthy.

(Source: theconversation.com)

Plans to set up US\$2.1 billion technology park dedicated to AI in Beijing

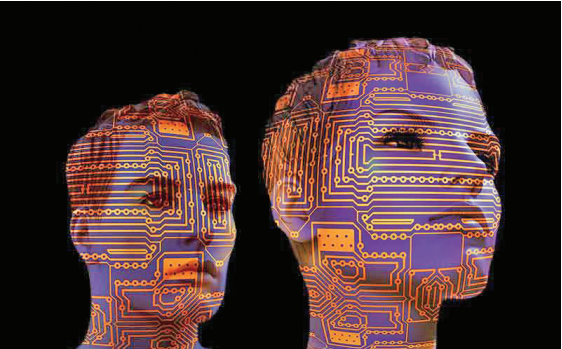
Chinese state news agency, Xinhua, reported recently that a new technology park dedicated to the development of artificial intelligence technologies will be built in Beijing in five years, with an investment of 13.8 billion Yuan or around US\$2.1 billion.

The park, covering 54.87 hectares, will be situated in suburban Mentougou district in western Beijing and it will be developed by a company of Zhongguancun Development Group (ZDG). ZDG is a State-Owned Enterprise funded by the Beijing Municipal Government.

According to Xinhua, the developer will seek partnership with Chinese and overseas universities, research institutes and large companies to establish various research centers in the park, including a national-level artificial intelligence lab.

The park is expected to attract about 400 enterprises, with an estimated annual output value of about 50 billion yuan (about US\$7.7 billion). It is expected to become a venue for smart pilot demonstrations.

Areas of focus will include ultra-high-speed big data,



cloud computing, biometric identification and deep learning. Its technological infrastructure would include a 5G mobile network, supercomputing centers and specialized cloud services. Industry data resource sharing platforms will be developed for sectors such as healthcare and education.

China's AI industry grew by 43.3 percent during 2016,

surpassing 10 billion Yuan (USD 1.47 billion), and it is expected to reach 15.21 billion and 34.43 billion Yuan in 2017 and 2019 respectively. 15,745 AI patents were filed from the country, ranking second worldwide.

Last year, the Chinese State Council laid out an AI strategy, with the aim of growing the country's core AI industries to a scale of over 1 trillion Yuan (USD 150 billion); a 100 times increase over the 2016 number), driving related industries to exceed more than 10 trillion Yuan by 2030.

The plan seeks to leverage China's advantages, but it also recognizes the current shortcomings, such as lagging the US in basic research. It goes on to lay out steps to deal with the problems. The plan identifies six tasks, including the establishment of an open and collaborative AI technology innovation system, cultivation of high-end and efficient intelligent economy, building a safe, convenient and intelligent society, strengthening civilian-military integration in AI field and building an extensive, safe, efficient, intelligent infrastructure system.

(Source: opengovasia.com)

Climate change could turn Earth into Venus: Stephen Hawking

The British physicist said Venus was once an inhabitable Earth-like planet, but greenhouse gases raised its surface temperatures to boiling point – and beyond.

In the second episode of his new series “Stephen Hawking’s Favorite Places,” the British physicist warns Earth could soon become as hot as Venus if action to halt climate change is not taken immediately.

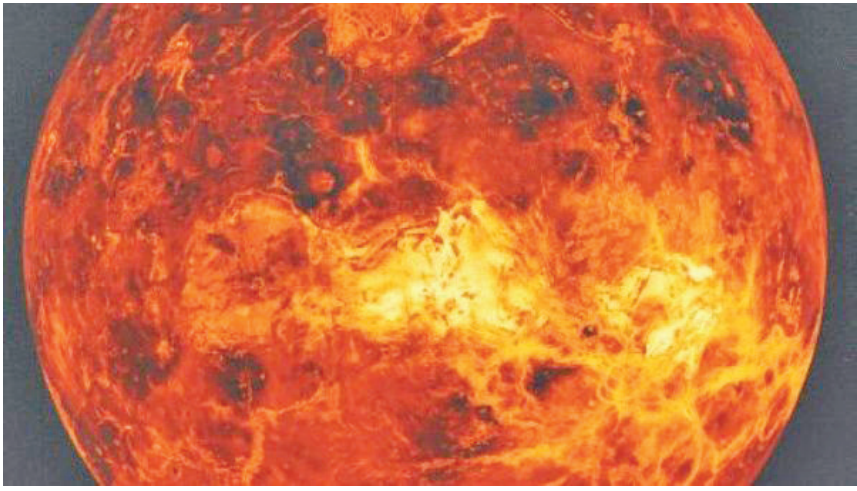
Hawking says Venus was once an Earth-like planet with surface water, mild temperatures and an appropriate atmosphere. According to NASA, Venus was an inhabitable planet for a period of about two billion years as recently as four billion years ago.

■ **Greenhouse effect**

Now temperatures on Venus reach 250°C with powerful 300mph winds. Hawking says a greenhouse effect burned the planet’s oceans and lands, and that something similar could happen right here on Earth if climate change continues unabated.

“Next time you meet a climate-change denier, tell them to take a trip to Venus; I will pay the fare,” says the physicist in his show.

Hawking has severely criticized Trump’s decision last year to pull the United States out of the Paris Agreement. The U.S. president has stated before that this climate pact puts the U.S. economy at a disadvantage, even



Hawking says Venus was once an Earth-like planet with surface water, mild temperatures and an appropriate atmosphere.

denying that climate change is a real thing and stating that he cares not for the citizens of Paris, but only those of the United States.

The Paris climate agreement is an international effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and was signed by 195 nations

Why did the passenger pigeon die out?

Why do species die out? This is the overarching question being asked by many leading researchers. Knowing more about what leads to a species’ becoming extinct could enable us to do something about it. The passenger pigeon is a famous example and the species has been studied extensively.

The passenger pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*) was once found in huge numbers in North America. Records tell of passing flocks that darkened the skies for several days at a time. The species may have peaked at five billion individuals. A more conservative estimate is three billion.

Within a short time, the species disappeared completely. “Given the huge size of the population, it’s simply amazing that the species disappeared so quickly,” says Tom Gilbert.

Gilbert is a professor at the University of Copenhagen’s Center for GeoGenetics, but he also has a part-time position as an adjunct professor at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU).

■ **Passenger pigeons**

The history of the passenger pigeon is interesting, partly because it can tell us something about how and why species become extinct.

Native Americans also relied on passenger pigeons for food. But at least in parts of the passenger pigeons’ range, people had learned to harvest the species at a sustainable level that didn’t threaten to eradicate it.



It was common in some parts of North America to only eat young pigeons that were hunted at night, since this did not seem to scare away the adult birds or prevent them from re-nesting.

But starting around 1500, a more aggressive variant of humans came to the continent with the arrival of Europeans. The hunt for passenger pigeons grew and culminated in a massive hunt for the species throughout the 1800s, before the species finally collapsed and disappeared.

So were the Europeans then really the ones to blame for the collapse?

In 2014, a study in published in the scientific journal PNAS strongly suggested that humans were simply the final straw in

destroying a species that was already vulnerable and headed to oblivion.

The researchers asserted that despite their enormous numbers, the passenger pigeons were already in trouble. The population of the species varied greatly, similar to lemmings, but over a longer period of time.

When the Europeans arrived, the species was already in a strong decline. The population was plummeting long before Europeans arrived, and perhaps Europeans even contributed to a short-term increase in numbers.

■ **Genetic variation**

Studies of the genetic variation of the species using an investigative method called PSMC formed the background for these assertions. And now we have to concentrate a bit.

All of an individual’s genes are called a genome. You have a genome, your mom has her own genome, your dog has one and the neighbor’s cat has yet another. These can be broken down into chromosomes and genes and base pairs, but you only have a single genome.

So, all of your chromosomes and genes are found in this one genome, but at the same time this genome is unique to just you and only you. Unless, that is, you have an identical twin or are a termite or belong to another species where the individuals are largely identical clones.

(Source: eurekaalert.org)

Singing to your baby is good for mental health, study finds



Singing loud for all to hear isn’t just the secret to spreading Christmas cheer, it can also help mothers recover from postnatal depression (PND), new research suggests.

The study found that new mothers with PND symptoms – characterized by feeling tearful or anxious after the first week or so of giving birth – who took part in singing sessions recovered quicker from their depression symptoms than others who did not take part in these sessions.

The study, published online now in the British Journal of Psychiatry, sought to investigate if organized singing classes with mother and babies could serve as a novel and effective treatment for PND. To study this, Rosie Perkins, a research fellow at Imperial College London and Daisy Fancourt, a senior research associate in behavioral science and health at University College London, had 134 mothers with symptoms of PND either participate in group singing workshops with their babies or continue with normal activities for 10 weeks.

■ **Learning lullabies**

Mothers in the singing groups were encouraged to learn lullabies with their babies as well as compose new child songs, the BBC reported. Although women in both groups reported improvement in their PND symptoms after the 10-week period, women in the singing group reported that their depression symptoms had decreased by an average of 35 percent.

“Additionally, some of our other research with mothers has shown that singing led to greater decreases in anxiety and enhanced perceptions of emotional closeness than

other social interaction,” Perkins told Newsweek.

Although the reason for this improvement is not entirely clear, Perkins told Newsweek that singing groups may have given mothers an outlet to feel a sense of identity and achievement, and may have contributed to improvement in their depression.

Although this is the first time that singing has been suggested as a potential treatment for PND, singing’s effect on the brain – particularly the depressed brain – has been previously noted.

■ **Reducing singers’ anxiety**

For example, in 2013 a study published online in Psychology of Music found that singing in a choir reduced singers’ psychological indicators of anxiety.

An even earlier study from 2005 tested the effects of singing on certain marginalized groups, such as homeless individuals, and found that group singing had a positive effect on participants’ emotional, social and cognitive health, regardless of whether or not they had any musical training or were even musically inclined.

PND, though common according to the National Health Service, can have a lasting effect on both the mother and child if symptoms aren’t treated quickly. Perkins explained that the Breathe Arts Health Research, an organization that creates health care programs based on the combination of art and science, has already implemented this finding in to some of their workshops for women with PND across London, and hope the program will expand even further in following years.

(Source: Newsweek)

Triassic Lepidoptera fossils show butterflies are more ancient than flowers



Butterflies and flowers did not originate in the same epoch. In fact, a new discovery by fossil scientists revealed that the colorful winged insects were fluttering around the world’s forests even before flowers existed.

A species of butterflies and moths identified with the lineage Lepidoptera have existed 70 million years than previously known.

An advanced team of scientists has unearthed fossilized bits of ancient butterflies preserved in rock cores.

The discovery revealed that the earliest butterflies and moths may have existed between the Triassic and Jurassic period even before flowering plants bloomed, technically refuting the ancestral association of butterflies with flowers.

■ **Oldest evidence**

This novel discovery of fossilized wing scales and fragments is the oldest evidence of moths and butterflies. About 70 insect scales with different shapes and forms were found in drilled rock cores.

Paleontologist Timo van Eldijk from the Utrecht University dated the scales at approximately 200 million years old.

The Lepidoptera moths and butterflies have likely evolved during the second half of the Triassic period when the climates were believed to be hot and dry.

“So we think the adaptation to develop mouthparts to suck fluids - the butterfly ‘tongue’ - was driven by their need to maintain fluids,” says geoscientist Bas van de Schootbrugge, coauthor of the study.

Eldijk’s team stumbled upon the scales of ancient butterflies and moths as they were investigating sediments from an ancient

lagoon in northern Germany.

The scientists were investigating ancient pollen in the fossil record during the mass extinction between the Triassic and Jurassic periods 200 million years ago.

This novel discovery extends the range of these insects’ known existence. Before this discovery, the moths from the suborder Glossata were the oldest known insects that have straw-like proboscis or mouth used for sucking fluids in flowers.

The discovery’s abstract indicated that the evolution of butterflies and development of a proboscis may be regarded as an adaptive innovation to sucking liquids. Insects that lived during the Triassic period had to maintain its water balance due to very dry conditions. Also, Butterflies and moths are considered survivors of the Mass Extinction era.

■ **Ecological niches**

“If anything, these butterflies probably profited from the ecological niches left open by vanished species. If we are to understand how this mass extinction, might affect insects right now, look to the past,” says van Eldijk. It is possible that Lepidopterans fed on gymnosperms such as flowerless cycads, conifers, and ginkgo trees when they first existed. Based on earliest fossil flowers, plants evolved flowers some 130 million years ago.

When angiosperms and flowering plants became the dominant vegetation during the Triassic and Jurassic period, butterflies and moths may have shifted their source of food as an adaptation to their environment.

(Source: Tech Times)

An extra 90 minutes in bed can stop sugar cravings, study finds

Spending an extra 90 minutes in bed may not seem like the obvious way to lose weight, but according to a new study, it could be the key to shedding excess pounds.

Scientists from King’s College London have discovered that people who sleep for longer are less likely to pick sugary treats, or reach for comforting carbohydrates.

Lack of sleep was already known to be a risk factor for obesity because it alters levels of hormones which control appetite.

But a new study showed that by getting more sleep, people naturally choose healthier foods within a week, eating on average 10 grams less sugar each day.

Principal investigator, Dr. Wendy Hall, of the Department of Nutritional Sciences said: The “fact that extending sleep led to a reduction in intake of free sugars, by which we mean the sugars that are added to foods by manufacturers or in cooking at home as well as sugars in honey, syrups and fruit juice, suggests that a simple change in lifestyle may really help people to consume healthier diets.”

In the trial, 21 volunteers who slept for less than the recommended seven hours a night, were sent to counselling to learn how to change their habits so that they could sleep for longer.

They were asked to keep a constant bedtime, resist caffeine and food before bed and try and relax in the evenings. On average the groups were able to add 90 minutes to their daily sleep patterns over the seven day study period.

(Source: The Telegraph)

Scientists identify what genes most profoundly shape your face

The face is one of the most dynamic tools we have to successfully live and interact with other humans. We are evolutionarily designed to pay attention to other people’s face, scanning their mug discern what their social class is, if they’re healthy, if they’re friend or foe, and much more. There’s a reason we can pick out a friend in a crowd through their face instead of their arm. But what determines the wide variability between faces hasn’t been exactly known.

According to a paper published Thursday in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences it comes down to single gene variants that have large effects on facial features.

“Facial features, such as the shape of the nose, a receding chin or the ‘Hapsburg lip,’ are often passed on in families from generation to generation,” senior author Sir Walter Bodmer, Ph.D., said in a statement sent to Inverse. “Our success in being able to do this (identify specific genetic variants), which has not been done before, has depended on using complicated statistical procedures to analyze facial images of human volunteers.”

Scientists already have a comprehensive view of what genes determine what sort of facial features. They just didn’t know to what extent those genes augur more significant changes in the face. To figure that out, the research team analyzed 3D camera images of identical and non-identical twins (an extremely useful proxy for gene studies, since identical twins are genetic replicas of one-another), using facial data collected from 1,832 volunteers from the People of British Isles project and 1,567 participants from the Twins UK cohort study (as well as the faces of 33 volunteers of East Asian descent).

(Source: Inverse)

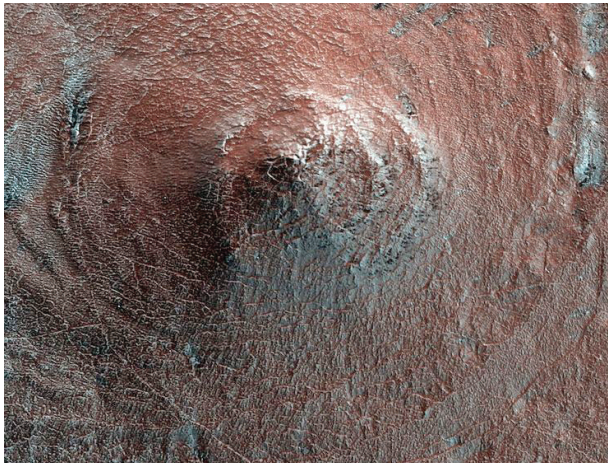
Thick, ‘rather clean’ ice sheets are spotted on Mars

Scientists say that images from Mars show large slopes of ice – and provide a hint at how they were formed. One likely theory involves snowfall on the Red Planet.

The researchers say that the size and accessibility of the ice sheets, as well as the fact that they are made of relatively clean water, could be an important resource for astronauts who might travel to Mars in the future.

We’ve known for years that Mars has significant ice deposits. But this new research, published Thursday in the journal Science, reveals key information about the ice’s layering, thickness and purity.

The researchers noticed that some of the cold, dry hillsides on Mars have naturally eroded to reveal vast deposits of ice, some of them more than 100 meters thick (around 330 feet). And because the steep slope showed the ice’s vertical structure, the cross section also tells a story about their history.



Billions of years ago, Mars was likely much wetter than it is today. The ice has a series of layers, says Colin Dundas, a planetary geologist at the U.S. Geological Survey and the paper’s lead author. Those newly detected layers suggest that the ice was laid down over a period of time, through a process that happened repeatedly.

“Something caused it to be deposited and then deposited again,” says Dundas. That thing was likely snowfall, Dundas says, which was eventually compacted into these deposits. The snowfall could have happened as recently as tens of millions of years ago, he says.

Scientists are now talking about the valuable information they might learn by drilling a core out of one of these deposits and bringing it back to Earth.

“That preserved record would be of extreme importance to go back to,” G. Scott Hubbard, a space scientist at Stanford University, tells Science in a separate article about the research.

(Source: NPR)

Tehran’s population doesn’t fit its area: environment official

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — The population density (a measurement of population per unit area) of Tehran is near 10,000 people per square kilometer which is considered high and inevitably raises environmental issues, said chief of Tehran’s department of environment.



A view of Tehran grand bazaar situated in downtown

High population level and concentration of [education, health care and economic] infrastructures of the country in Tehran can be regarded as one of the culprits of air pollution and high rate of domestic waste production, ISNA quoted Mohammad Hossein Bazgir as saying on Friday.

He went on to say that near 30 percent of Iran’s industrial units operate in Tehran province. Moreover, some medical services are just offered in the metropolitan, making all the nation dependent on this city and increasing its population continuously.

The population of the city of Tehran has been steadily growing over the last few decades and according to Iran’s 2016 census Tehran hosts some 9 million people in its land area of 730 km2.

High population density can cause a range of problems including water, air and land pollution, shortage of resources, potential loss of ‘green-belt’ lands, etc.

\$500m required for installing traffic cameras

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — New traffic restriction regulations, proposed by Tehran’s municipality, can only be implemented by increasing the number of traffic cameras which requires some 20 trillion rials budget (nearly \$500 million), said the deputy mayor of Tehran for traffic and transport affairs.



Currently the city center is closed to all cars except for a certain number of cars which have permits issued by the municipality. Also in parts of the city which are farther from the city center cars are allowed to enter the zone every other day based on the last digit of their license plate.

If approved, the new traffic scheme will divide the metropolitan into three zones of A to C. All citizens, regardless of their license plate, who wish to enter all traffic zones with their personal car will be charged accordingly, with zone A being the costliest.

The aforesaid budget is needed to cover 100 percent of Tehran highways and 80 percent of its main streets with traffic cameras to track down the violators, ISNA quoted Maziar Hosseini as saying on Tuesday.

LEARN ENGLISH

Silence please!

A: Those people in front of us are making so much noise. It’s so **inconsiderate**!
B: Don’t worry about it; it’s **not such a big deal**.
A: Oh... I **can’t hear a thing**! Excuse me, can you **keep it down**?
C: Sure, sorry about that!
A: Someone’s phone is ringing!
B: Honey, I think it’s your phone. Did you forget to **switch it off**?
A: Oh, no! You’re right. That’s so **embarrassing**!
C: **Do you mind** keeping it down? I’m trying to watch a movie here!
■ **Key vocabulary**
inconsiderate: not thinking of the feelings of other people; not thoughtful
not such a big deal: not a big problem
can’t hear a thing: unable to hear
keep it down: be quiet
switch off: turn off
embarrassing: making you feel ashamed, nervous, or uncomfortable
do you mind: could you please
■ **Supplementary vocabulary**
Noisy: very loud
Rude: impolite
to disturb: to interrupt, bother, or upset
to interrupt: to speak or make noise when someone else is speaking
to whisper: to speak very softly

(Source: irlanguage.com)



Be kind to me!

Using fossil water is a soft option, reappraise it

1 → This is also an indicator of pressure on the renewable water resources, with 88 billion cubic meters of water we are allowed to withdraw some 35 billion cubic meters to meet international standards.

■ Stop looking for easy options

And after depleting groundwater resources as well as the surface water the government is looking for another source to drain and exhaust: fossil water.

While drilling underground water is a hard job regarding the depth of the water, however, it seems to be an easy option for the government to empty yet another sources of water instead of revising the current longstanding and unsustainable practices.

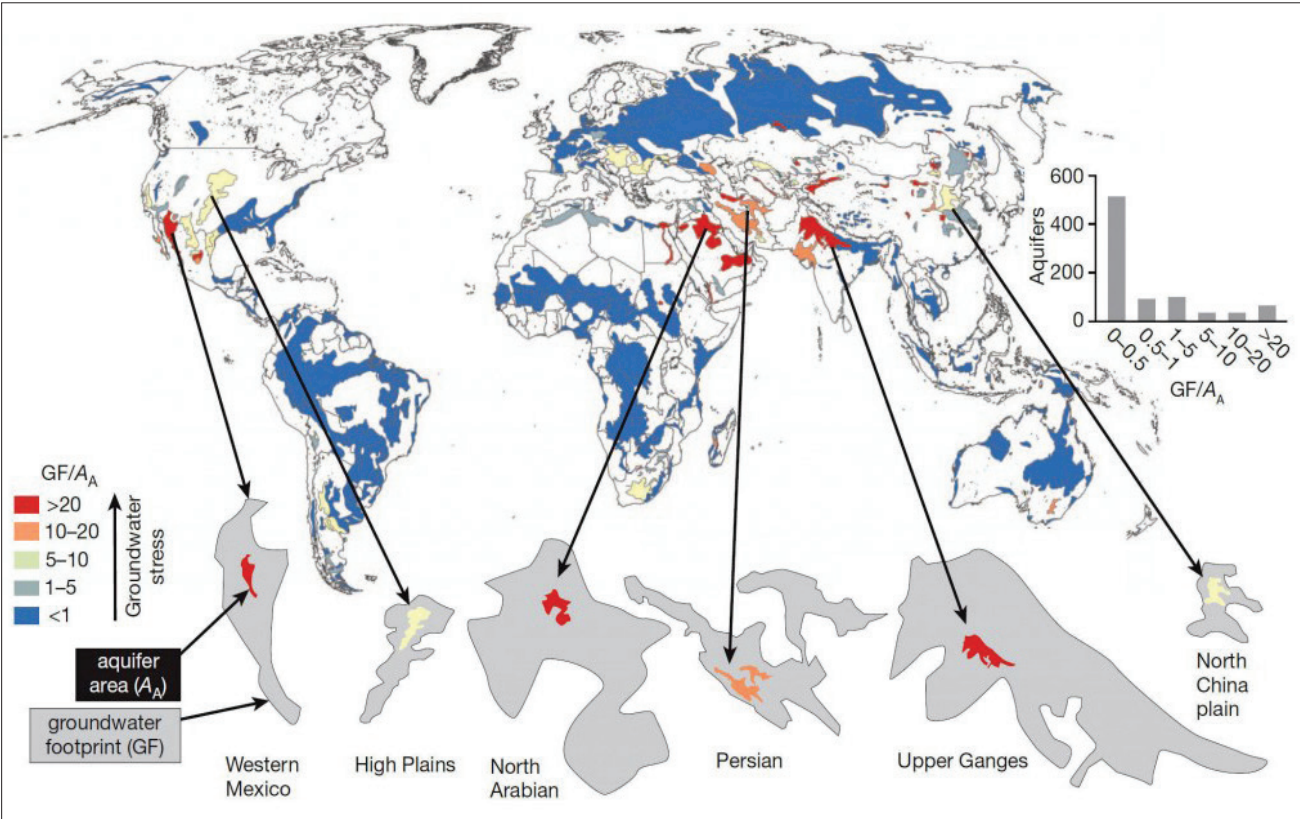
Last November Deputy Energy Minister Sattar Mahmoudi said that Iran was working on a plan to look for underground fresh water resources in cooperation with Russia. The project envisages looking for underground water resources as deep as 2,000 meters with Russia’s help for this.

Mahmoudi added that the government has allocated a budget of 200 billion rials (\$5.7 million) to conduct the required studies. He noted that eastern parts of Iran are specifically believed to contain underground formations that hold significant volumes of water – what is technically referred to as the ‘fossil water’ remaining from ancient seas.

The problem is that this water is a finite resource and often comes with dangers in addition to the water running out after the population has come to rely upon it. For over 50 years Libya has relied on fossil water supplies that are now dwindling. Perhaps no other water policy issue has greater philosophic disagreement than the exploitation of these non-renewable groundwater. Use of non-renewable groundwater is thus inherently unsustainable under strict definitions of the term.

In arid areas fossil water is becoming as valuable as fossil fuels and like oil, no one knows how much there is—but experts do know that when it’s gone, it’s gone.

In an article titled “underground fossil water running out” published by National Geographic it is stated that while fossil water can fill critical needs, experts warn that it’s ultimately just a temporary measure until



In many places farmers have overused underground aquifers that have taken thousands of years to form, drawing down the fossil water much faster than it can be replaced. The Ogallala aquifer in the American high plains, along with similar aquifers in Mexico, Eastern Europe, Egypt, Arabia, Iran, India and China, represent the crisis zones for humanity’s groundwater footprint, according to an analysis published in Nature on August 9, 2012. The map shows what the world’s groundwater footprint looks like.

conservation measures and technologies become status quo.

Mike Edmunds, a hydrogeologist at Oxford University in the Great Britain has told National Geographic that globally, wells are often drilled to about 320 feet (100 meters). “Quite possibly only the top couple of meters of that are recent water.” People think about quantity when they are pumping, they don’t ask about renewability as much—and that’s the big issue, Edmunds regretted.

According to AZoCleantech, an online publication for the Clean Technology community, the prospect of fossil water

reserves running out is not limited to the Middle East or northern Africa. Parts of the former USSR, India, China and Mexico all depend on non-renewable water taken from ancient aquifers. In the United States a number of the Great Plains states take a considerable amount of their water from a fossil water aquifer.

Moreover, according to Spiegel the Middle East and North Africa which suffer from water shortages pump millions of liters a day from ancient aquifers. But the water contains high levels of naturally-occurring radioactive contamination. Experts fear this will increase the cancer

risk for millions of people.

While in Iran depleting groundwater resources has already given rise to many serious issues such as land subsidence and wetlands dryness it seems greatly imprudent to try to use another resources which are non-renewable and proved to be ineffective or even hazardous in a long-run.

It is certainly wiser to forget about easy options which are already tried by other nations and didn’t simply resolve the problem of water scarcity and make collaborative attempts to revise the current water usage policies by using the modern technologies and improving the water sector.

Over 50 earthquakes hit Iranian city on Thursday

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — More than 50 consecutive tremors, with different levels of severity, shook the city of Sumar in the western province of Kermanshah on Thursday.

The chain of earthquakes began at 10:29 a.m. (local time) with a magnitude 5.6 tremor. Till the end of the day, consecutive tremors kept hitting the region, five of them measuring more than 5 on

the Richter scale.

Professor of engineering seismology Mehdi Zare said to Khabaronline on Thursday that if all these tremors had accumulated and occurred in one earthquake, most likely a massive magnitude 7 tremor could have resulted.

The quakes could be triggered by the magnitude 7.3 earthquake of Kermanshah which hit Azgaleh on November 12; this could be domino effects of that

earthquake, Zare explained.

Such chain of quakes are not farfetched in Zagros region and are totally normal, he added.

No damage and fatalities have been reported, said the Rescue and Relief Organization spokesman Mostafa Mortazavi, adding that the epicenter of earthquakes were an area largely home to nomads, Fars reported on Thursday.

VP Ebtekar visits St. Mary Church, Armenians anthropology museum



SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Masoumeh Ebtekar, vice president for women’s and family affairs, paid a visit to Saint Mary Church as well as Arch Bishop Ardak Manoukian museum in Tehran on Thursday.

Saint Mary Church is an Armenian Apostolic church in Tehran, Iran completed in 1945.

From 1945 to 1960, the church was the main office and residence of the Archbishop of the Armenians, which was later transferred to the new Saint Sarkis Cathedral completed in 1970. On February 13, 2002, the church was registered by the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization of Iran as a national monument.

Arch Bishop Ardak Manoukian museum also known as Armenians anthropology museum houses collection of ritual objects used in rituals, ceremonies, and practices in the conduct of Christianity.

The museum also features pictures and paintings as well as information about ancient Armenian churches, Armenian women costumes in various historical periods, etc.



ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → چ

Iran plans to halve plastic bags usage in 3 years

By regulating a three-year national plan Iran is determined to make cutbacks in the plastic bags usage by 50 percent, an official with the Department of Environment (DOE) has said. The national plastic bags reduction plan [which is already approved but not executed yet] will result in less plastic bags litter by March 2019, Sa’eed Motesaddi said, Mehr news agency reported.

According to the new regulations all units which are producing plastic bags are legally bound to reduce their plastic productions by 10 percent annually and replace them with eco-friendly productions, Motesaddi noted.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-dom”

- **Meaning**: a word ending that indicates status or condition
- **For example**: **Freedom** of expression is one of the most fundamental rights that individuals enjoy.

PHRASAL VERB

Fess up

- **Meaning**: to admit that you have done something wrong, although it is not very serious; own up
- **For example**: Come on, fess up! Who ate that last cookie?

IDIOM

Makes your blood run cold

- **Explanation**: if something makes your blood run cold, it shocks or scares you a lot
- **For example**: The look in the prisoner’s eyes made my blood run cold.

کاهش مصرف کیسه های پلاستیکی در ایران به نصف در سه سال

یکی از مسئولین سازمان حفاظت محیط زیست از برنامه سه ساله ایران برای کاهش مصرف کیسه های پلاستیک به میزان ۵۰ درصد خبر داد.

به گزارش خبرگزاری مهر سعید متصدی یکی از اهداف برنامه ملی کاهش مصرف کیسه پلاستیک (که در حال حاضر به تصویب رسیده ولی اجرا نشده است) در ایران را کاهش میزان مصرف و تولید زباله کیسه پلاستیک تا سال ۹۸ دانست.

متصدی خاطرنشان کرد: بر اساس این ضوابط، واحدهای تولید کننده کیسه های پلاستیکی موظف به کاهش سالیانه ۱۰ درصد از تولید محصولات پلاستیکی خود و جایگزینی آن ها با محصولات سازگار با محیط زیست هستند.

Netanyahu planned to give Palestinians lands in Sinai in exchange for West Bank

Former United States officials say Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu asked the administration of former U.S. President Barack Obama in late 2014 to consider a plan to offer Palestinian lands in the northern parts of Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula in exchange for annexing large swaths of the occupied West Bank.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, four U.S. officials, told the Israeli Haaretz newspaper on Wednesday that Netanyahu raised the idea with Obama and then-Secretary of State John Kerry on a number of occasions.

According to the officials, who had direct knowledge of the relevant conversations, the Israeli premier told Obama and Kerry that he could convince Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to accept the plan.

However, when the U.S. looked into the idea, they received a negative response from Egypt.

“It started shortly after the 2014 Gaza war,” one of the officials said. “Netanyahu came to meet Obama in the fall of 2014, and his pitch was basically: ‘John Kerry’s peace talks fell apart a few months ago, we just had a war, and now the peace process is stuck. So I want to offer you a different kind of idea.’”

“We all thought this idea was a waste of time,” one of the officials said. “We knew it would be a complete non-starter for the Palestinians – why would they trade agricultural lands in the West Bank, close to their largest cities, for sand dunes in Sinai?”

Netanyahu’s office denied the account. The report came a few weeks after The New York Times reported that the House of Saud regime’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman had presented a plan along Trump’s Middle East peace plan to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas during a meeting in Riyadh.

According to Palestinians, Arab and European officials who have heard Abbas’s version of the conversation, bin Salman presented a plan that would be more tilted toward the Israelis than any ever embraced by the American government, one that presumably no Palestinian leader could ever accept.

Palestinian officials have repeatedly expressed worry that the House of Saud regime is forgoing important Palestinian rights as it acts behind the scenes to advance a U.S. “grand bargain” over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that heavily favors Israel.

The Saudi regime’s maneuvering over Palestine comes amid increasing reports that the Riyadh regime is preparing a normalization of ties with Tel Aviv.



On Monday, Israeli newspaper Maariv also reported that an Israeli-Palestinian peace plan, drafted by Trump’s son-in-law and presidential advisor Jared Kushner, also includes land swaps in the Sinai.

Washington however, strongly denies such reports, dismissing them as, “a mix of ill-informed speculation and utter nonsense” and unrelated to the actual content of the peace plan.

Palestinians want the West Bank as part of their future independent state, with East al-Quds (Jerusalem) as its capital, while the Israeli occupiers of Palestinian territories deem the West Bank as “liberated land,” saying formal annexation is only a matter of time.

More than half a million Israelis live in over 230 settlements built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and East al-Quds.

The UN and most countries regard the Israeli settlements as illegal, because the territories they are built on were captured by Israel in the 1967 war and are hence subject to the Geneva Conventions, which forbid construction on occupied lands.

Nevertheless, the Israeli regime continues to build more settlements and expand existing ones.

On December 6, the U.S. announced decision to recognize al-Quds (Jerusalem) as Israel’s capital and relocate the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to al-Quds.

The dramatic shift in Washington’s policy vis-à-vis the city triggered demonstrations in the occupied Palestinian territories and

the entire Muslim world.

■ Erekat slams Trump’s green light to Israel settlements

Elsewhere, the secretary general of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) has lashed out at Trump for giving a green light to accelerated Israeli settlement activities by recognizing al-Quds as the regime’s capital.

“President Trump’s decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital did not only disqualify the US from playing any constructive role towards achieving peace, but it provided the extremist Israeli government with an opportunity and a green light to speed up their plans of the disposition of the Palestinian people,” Saeb Erekat said on Thursday.

Erekat pointed to planned meetings of the Palestinian leadership on Sunday and Monday to formulate a response to Trump’s al-Quds decision and “discuss several recommendations toward holding Israel accountable to advance with the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.”

■ EU, UN slam Israel settlement bids

Meanwhile, the European Union condemned the settlement approvals as “further jeopardizing the prospect of a contiguous and viable future Palestinian state.”

“The European Union’s position on Israeli settlement construction and related activities is clear and has not changed: all settlement activity is illegal under international law, and it undermines the viability of the two-state solution and the prospects for a lasting peace. The EU expects the Israeli

authorities to reconsider and reverse these decisions,” an EU spokesperson said in a Thursday statement.

The UN special coordinator for the Middle East peace process, Nikolay Mladenov, also condemned the new settlement approvals as an obstacle to peace.

“In the aftermath of the decision to advance over 1,000 housing units in the occupied West Bank, I reiterate that Israeli settlement construction is illegal under international law and is one of the major obstacles to peace. I urge the Israeli authorities to cease and reverse such actions,” Mladenov said in a statement.

“Settlement-related activities undermine the chances for the establishment of a viable, contiguous Palestinian state as part of a negotiated two-state solution,” he added.

The Israeli minister of military affairs, Avigdor Lieberman, said Tuesday he would present for approval a plan to build 1,285 housing units in West Bank settlements this year.

Wednesday’s approvals came just days after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s Likud party voted for a resolution that calls for the formal annexation of parts of the occupied West Bank.

A few days earlier, the Israeli cabinet approved \$11 million in funding for settlement activities in the West Bank.

Tel Aviv has stepped up its land grab policies since January 2016, when Trump took office.

Less than a month before Trump took office, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2334, calling on Israel to “immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem” al-Quds.

Much of the international community regards the Israeli settlements as illegal because the territories were captured by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War and are hence subject to the Geneva Conventions, which forbid construction on occupied lands.

The last round of talks between Israelis and Palestinians collapsed in 2014. Tel Aviv’s settlement activities and its refusal to release senior Palestinian prisoners were among major reasons behind the failure of the negotiations.

About 600,000 Israelis live in over 230 illegal settlements built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and East Jerusalem al-Quds.

(Source: Press TV)

Landmine explosion leaves 3 soldiers dead in Saudi Arabia’s Najran

➔ Separately, the Saudi regime warplanes launched two aerial attacks against Sahar district in Yemen’s mountainous northwestern province of Sa’ada. No casualties or injuries were reported.

■ Yemeni forces fire missile at Saudi regime military facility

Elsewhere, Yemen’s Ansarullah (Houthi) movement says it has fired a ballistic missile at a special forces camp and a facility for gunships in the southwestern Saudi regime border province of Najran.

Ansarullah announced on Thursday that the projectile was a Qaher M-2 ballistic missile, without providing further details.

The House of Saud regime-led coalition fighting against Yemen has not made any immediate comments with regard to the missile launch.

Yemeni forces regularly fire ballistic missiles at Saudi regime positions inside the country in retaliation for its military strikes on Yemen.

On Wednesday, Yemeni forces captured a Saudi regime military base in Najran during a retaliatory operation, killing several of the troops stationed there.

There has been no exact information about the number of the Saudi regime casualties during Riyadh’s war on Yemen, as the regime has sought to cover up the issue.

The House of Saud regime, backed by a coalition of its allies, started the war on Yemen in March 2015, hoping that with blunt force, it would be able to restore power in a matter of weeks to a former Riyadh-friendly Yemeni regime.

The Saudi regime has, however, been unable to accomplish the objectives of its military aggression some three years into the war, which has claimed around 13,600 lives.

Despite the coalition’s superior aggregate military power, Riyadh has been bogged down in the war against mostly tribal fighters with limited fighting equipment.

The House of Saud regime, already economically challenged, has decided to pay out an extra 5,000 Saudi riyals (1,333 U.S. dollars) monthly to the troops fighting on the front lines in the war on Yemen, where reports have painted a grim picture of the Saudi regime-led military personnel’s morale.

At least 13,600 people have been killed since the onset of the Saudi regime’s military campaign against Yemen in 2015. Much of the Peninsula country’s infrastructure, including hospitals, schools and factories, has been reduced to rubble due to the war.

The Saudi regime-led war has also triggered deadly epidemics of infectious diseases, especially diphtheria and cholera, across Yemen.

On November 26, the United Nations children’s agency (UNICEF) said that more than 11 million children in Yemen were in acute need of aid, stressing that it was estimated that every 10 minutes a child died of a preventable disease there.

Additionally, the UN has described the current level of hunger in Yemen as “unprecedented,” emphasizing that 17 million people are now food insecure in the country.

It added that 6.8 million, meaning almost one in four people, do not have enough food and rely entirely on external assistance.

(Source: Press TV)

Hariri lauds Hezbollah, wants ‘best of relations’ with Iran

➔ “My main goal is to preserve this political stability for the unity of the country,” said Hariri, who reached a power-sharing deal with Hezbollah in 2016.

Hariri abruptly declared his resignation from Saudi Arabia and from the Saudi regime-owned television on November 4, accusing Iran and Hezbollah of interfering in the region and signaling that that was his reason to quit.

New details emerge of the House of Saud regime’s degrading treatment of Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri during a recent forced stay in Saudi Arabia, where he was coerced into resigning.

But Lebanese President Michel Aoun, who suspected that Hariri had been forced to step down, refused to accept his resignation and demanded his return from Saudi Arabia first. Lebanese intelligence sources soon concluded that Hariri was under restrictions in Riyadh.

Sayed Hassan Nasrallah, the Hezbollah secretary general, said back then that the Saudi regime authorities had clearly and openly declared a war on Lebanon by holding Prime Minister Hariri hostage and forcing him to quit.

The Hezbollah chief said the House of Saud regime has openly declared a war on Lebanon by keeping Prime Minister Saad Hariri under house arrest.

That drama ended when Hariri returning to Lebanon on November 22 — partially after a diplomatic intervention by France — and rescinded his resignation on December 5.

In the Wall Street Journal interview, Hariri declined to discuss the details of his stay in Saudi Arabia.

The Lebanese prime minister then outlined in his interview a vision under which Lebanon will finally focus on its own affairs and reject foreign interference.

“We cannot accept interference from anyone in Lebanese politics,” Hariri said, adding “Our relationship with Iran — or with the Persian Gulf — has to be the best relationship, but one that serves the national interests of Lebanon.”

Hariri further highlighted Hezbollah’s willingness to comply with a policy of “disassociating” Lebanon from regional conflicts.

Hariri, however, admitted that Hezbollah’s withdrawal from Syria will take time as the situation there is more complex.

Hezbollah has been helping the national Syrian army in the fight against terrorists in an effort to prevent the spillover of the crisis into Lebanon.

The Lebanese premier also cautioned Israel against any military action against Lebanon, saying any such war would be counterproductive.

Hezbollah is Lebanon’s de facto military power, and has been fighting off recurrent acts of Israeli aggression against the homeland. Riyadh, which reportedly maintains clandestine ties with Tel Aviv, however, has made no secret of its opposition to the group, and has been trying for more than a decade to weaken it.

Lebanon has repeatedly praised Hezbollah’s key role in the war against terrorism, with Lebanese President Michel Aoun defending the resistance movement’s possession of arms as essential to Lebanon’s security.

(Source: Press TV)

Trump questions taking immigrants from ‘shithole countries’

The United States President Donald Trump questioned why the United States would want to have immigrants from Haiti and African nations, referring to some as “shithole countries,” according to two sources familiar with the comments.

Trump’s remarks, made in the White House, came as Democratic Senator Dick Durbin and Republican Senator Lindsey Graham briefed the president on a newly drafted immigration bill being touted by a bipartisan group of senators, according to the sources, who asked not to be identified.

Other government officials were present during the conversation, the sources said.

The lawmakers were describing how certain immigration programs operate, including one to give safe haven in the United States to people from countries suffering from natural disasters or civil strife.

One of the sources who was briefed on the conversation said that Trump said, “Why do we want all these people from Africa here? They’re shithole countries ... We should have more people from Norway.”

The second source familiar with the conversation, said Trump, who has vowed to clamp down on illegal immigration, also questioned the need for Haitians in the United States.

Many Democrats and some Republican lawmakers slammed the president for his remarks.

Republican U.S. Representative Mia Love, a daughter of Haitian immigrants, said the comments were “unkind, divisive, elitist, and fly in the face of our nation’s values” and called on Trump to apologize to the American people and to the countries he denigrated.

Another Republican Representative, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, who was born in Cuba and whose south Florida district includes many Haitian immigrants, said: “Language like that shouldn’t be heard in locker rooms and it shouldn’t be heard in the White House.”

Democratic Senator Richard Blumenthal, a frequent Trump critic, said the president’s comment “smacks of blatant racism, the most odious and insidious racism masquerading poorly as immigration policy.”

In an apparent response to his critics, Trump took to Twitter late on Thursday night.

“The Democrats seem intent on having people and drugs pour into our country from the Southern Border, risking thousands of lives in the process,” he tweeted.

“It is my duty to protect the lives and safety of all Americans. We must build a Great Wall, think Merit and end

Lottery & Chain. USA!”

■ Temporary Protected Status program

The program that was being discussed at the White House is called Temporary Protected Status (TPS).

In November, the Trump administration decided to end the status for immigrants from Haiti and Nicaragua. It gave the approximately 59,000 Haitian immigrants who had been granted the status until July 2019 to return home or legalize their presence in the United States. Nicaraguans were given until January 2019.

This week, Trump moved to end the status for immigrants from El Salvador, which could result in 200,000 Salvadorans legally in the United States being deported, beginning in September of next year.

The bipartisan Senate plan would attempt to maintain TPS in return for ending or changing a “diversity” lottery program that has been aimed at allowing up to 50,000 people a year from countries with few emigres to the United States.

Asked about Trump’s comments, White House spokesman Raj Shah said: “Certain Washington politicians choose to fight for foreign countries, but President Trump will always fight for the American people.”

“Like other nations that have merit-based immigration, President Trump is fighting for permanent solutions that make our country stronger by welcoming those who can contribute to our society, grow our economy and assimilate into our great nation,” Shah said.

Another source familiar with the meeting said Trump was questioning why the United States should take in unskilled laborers from the countries under discussion and should instead welcome immigrants from nations that can offer skilled workers.

■ Trump’s ‘shithole’ remarks spur international anger

Meantime, International organizations including the UN and African Union (AU), politicians and ordinary Africans and Caribbeans are outraged over Trump’s latest racist remarks.

Rupert Colville, spokesman of the UN human rights office, said: “You cannot dismiss entire countries and continents as shitholes ... I’m sorry, but there’s no other word one can use but racist.”

Colville said the story wasn’t “just a story about vulgar language, it’s about opening the door to humanity’s worst side”.

The African Union said it was “frankly alarmed”.



“Given the historical reality of how many Africans arrived in the United States as slaves, this statement flies in the face of all accepted behavior and practice,” said AU spokeswoman Ebba Kalondo.

South Africa’s ruling ANC party said Trump’s comments were “extremely offensive”, with a spokeswoman saying the party would never deign to make such derogatory remarks.

Following the publication of the media reports, the White House issued a statement in which it did not directly challenge the authenticity of the comments.

Trump denied the racist remarks, tweeting on Friday that the language he used “was tough, but this was not the language used”, as he called for a “merit-based system of immigration and people who take our country to the next level”.

The development came as the U.S. president also came under fire for rejecting an invite to open a new U.S. embassy in London.

Many took to social media to condemn the president, including members of his own Republican party.

Democratic State Senator Linda Dorcena Forry said on Twitter: “I have to first express how demoralizing & upsetting it is to have to register my outrage again and again over hateful remarks made by my own president.”

She then posted a statement saying: “I’m very disappointed in us, the people of the United States, who saw fit to elect an ignorant, mean-spirited, white supremacist to the most powerful office in the world.”

(Source: agencies)

Poroshenko is targeting Ukraine’s anti-corruption campaigners

➔ Ukraine and its international allies can’t afford more disabling volatility. The war with Russia’s proxies in Donbas is debilitating enough, and corruption is fast decaying the country from the inside.

As U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson says, “It serves no purpose for Ukraine to fight for its body in Donbas if it loses its soul to corruption. Anti-corruption institutions must be supported, resourced, and defended.”

The attacks on civil society are a dangerous signal that the oligarchs intend to exert full control. It will take more

than a public poster campaign at airports to win this struggle and convince investors that Ukraine’s economy is a sound and stable bet.

It’s time for Ukraine’s allies to take immediate action to help steer Ukraine’s institutions onto the path of real reform.

They should push for an independent court system to judge top officials accused of corruption. Judicial reform until now has been weak, with too many old judges still in jobs, some of whom sentenced activists to jail for their part in Euromaidan.

What’s needed is for international experts to have a decisive role in the selection of new judges to deal with anti-corruption cases. Too many cases of corruption uncovered by NABU lie moribund in the court system without hearings.

The U.S. and other governments who want to end this dangerous spiral should publicly call for the repeal of laws targeting anti-corruption activists, and impose visa bans and asset freezes on Ukraine government officials and their cronies credibly linked to corruption.

(Source: Newsweek)

South Korea proposes talks on North Korea’s participation in winter Olympics

SEOUL (Reuters) — South Korea has proposed holding working-level talks with North Korea on the latter’s participation in the winter Olympics set for next month, the south’s unification ministry said on Friday.

It suggested a date of January 15 for a meeting with a three-member delegation from the South to discuss the North’s participation in the Pyeongchang Olympics, the ministry said in a statement.

Schweinsteiger in talks with Chicago Fire over new contract

Former Germany international Bastian Schweinsteiger says he is in talks with Chicago Fire over a new contract.

Schweinsteiger, 33, joined the Fire on a one-year-deal in 2017 and made 25 appearances in his debut season but is now a free agent. However, as he wants to continue his career, he has confirmed talks with the MLS club and is confident he will return for the new season. “I want to continue playing football,” he said at a PR event in Germany. “We are currently in talks. And I definitely want to continue playing football.”

“I am always happy when I am out there on the pitch or working with my team in training.”

The 2014 World Cup winner joined the Fire from Manchester United in March 2017 after the midfielder became surplus to requirements under Jose Mourinho.

In early January, MLSSoccer.com reported that the Fire and Schweinsteiger were in talks over a new deal which could bring the German back to Chicago for the upcoming season, with an option for another year. Earlier this week, a German minor-league club, SG Buna Halle, offered Schweinsteiger a contract in a tongue-in-cheek posting on Facebook. However, the club warned that -- while they were able to offer a piece of land, and a training court for his tennis professional wife Ana Ivanovic -- he would also need to bring a crate of beer to his first training session.

Schweinsteiger has yet to reply to the offer.

(Source: Soccer.net)

Everton are in talks with Walcott

Sam Allardyce has confirmed that Everton are in talks with Arsenal’s Theo Walcott over a possible move.

Everton are reportedly battling with Southampton for Walcott’s signature and it is understood the Gunners may consider letting the England international leave during the January transfer window.

Allardyce has openly declared his desire to bring in more attacking players at Goodison Park, having already signed Cenk Tosun from Besiktas for £27m, and the Everton boss says Walcott would be “a great addition” to the team.

“If that is possible to get over the line, I would be delighted but obviously there is negotiations that are happening at the moment.

“If that can all be sorted out, which is one of the most difficult things to do then that would be a great addition in my opinion to come and join us from an attacking point of view.

“If that is at all possible it would be very nice, but it is not imminent at the moment but some negotiations are going on.

“It is permanent we are hoping to negotiate. I don’t think there is any chance of a loan.”

(Source: Skysports)

Ryan Giggs interviewed as Wales continue manager search



Ryan Giggs has been interviewed for the vacant Wales national team manager’s job, according to Sky sources.

Wales have been without a manager since Chris Coleman stepped down in November to take over at Sunderland.

Giggs, a former captain of his country, told Sky Sports last month that Wales was one of the jobs which could tempt him back into football. The 44-year-old earned 64 Wales caps during his distinguished playing career with Manchester United, who he managed for four games on an interim basis in 2014.

He subsequently worked as an assistant at United for two years under Louis van Gaal but left when Jose Mourinho took charge in the summer of 2016. Giggs has been without a club since then, although he held meetings with Swansea about their vacancy in the autumn of 2016, before the Swans ultimately went in another direction. Asked last month if he would consider the Wales job, Giggs told us: “Of course I’m interested.

“I played for Wales, I’ve said that I want to go back into coaching, and that is obviously one of the top jobs.

“I played for United, I played for Wales, those are the two jobs. I’ve not spoken to anyone at the moment but I’d definitely be interested.”

(Source: BBC)

IOC accused of ‘backroom deals’ with Russia over doping scandal



The film-makers behind the documentary which exposed Russia’s state-sponsored doping programme have accused the International Olympic Committee (IOC) of doing “backroom deals” with Moscow ahead of next month’s winter Games in south Korea.

In December, the IOC banned Russia’s Olympic committee from taking part in the games in Pyeongchang, and disqualified 43 Russian athletes following a report by the World Anti-Doping Agency which revealed a massive doping operation at the 2014 Sochi Olympics, masterminded by Vladimir Putin’s FSB spy agency.

The whistleblower who exposed the programme, Dr Grigory Rodchenkov, is currently in hiding in the US. Rodchenkov – the former director of Moscow’s anti-doping centre – is the subject of the Netflix documentary Icarus, which was nominated for a Bafta on Tuesday.

Rodchenkov’s insider testimony played a key role in the IOC’s decision to ban Russia, and was subsequently confirmed by several forensic investigations. The film’s director Bryan Fogel and producer Dan Cogan said that the IOC was backsliding on its commitment to exclude Russian athletes. “The more you get into the details of the ban the more you and can see the backroom deals with Moscow,” Cogan told the Guardian.

Forty-two Russians are now appealing their Olympic bans. Their cases are due to be heard by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) on 22 January, and a decision is due on 31 January – nine days before the Games open. However, Cogan said the IOC is insisting that Rodchenkov attend the hearings in person. If he fails to do so, CAS may allow the athletes to take part as neutral competitors.

“They will be wearing shirts that say: “Olympic athlete from Russia” and will be allowed to parade in the closing ceremony,” Cogan said. “It’s a gift to Putin so he can put images of triumphant Russian athletes on TV so it looks like nothing happened here.”

He added: “It has the patina of a ban. In fact they [the athletes] can get around it. The IOC is choosing to protect Russia rather than defending the integrity of the Olympic ideals which it’s supposed to uphold.”

Cogan called on the IOC president Thomas Bach to threaten to exclude Russia from Olympic sport for 20 years, should anything happen to Rodchenkov. There is little prospect of Rodchenkov flying to Switzerland. Russia has accused him of lying and issued an arrest warrant. Putin has suggested the FBI drugged the scientist, and says the doping allegations are part of an American plot to damage him politically. A top Russian Olympic official has called for Rodchenkov to be executed.

Rodchenkov’s lawyer Jim Walden described his client – whose whereabouts are unknown – as “extremely brave” and “an incredible man”. Rodchenkov was grateful to WADA for recognising that “he was telling the truth the whole time”. But he was now “distressed” that the IOC was considering lifting the suspension of some Russian athletes.

“He sees this is as a symptom of the need for reform, not just in Russia but inside the IOC,” Walden said, adding his interactions with Rodchenkov were “extremely limited and highly controlled”.

The scientist who fled to the US from Moscow in 2016 was still hoping to make a “meaningful contribution” and have “a second act,” the lawyer said.

Fogel – whose documentary began as an investigation into sports doping – said that what happened during the Sochi games was an “unimaginable fraud”.

Rodchenkov told the New York Times that FSB officers switched positive doping samples for clean ones, in dead-of-night exchanges at state-controlled laboratories.

“This system was in place in London and Beijing,” Fogel said. “It goes back 30 or 40 years of sport history. Rodchenkov inherited what was an anti-anti-doping system. The system was set up to allow Russian athletes to cheat across all sports in international competitions.”

He added: “If there is no punishment for fraud on this scale and level why hold the Olympic games at all?”

The IOC said last month it banned Russia because of its “unprecedented systematic manipulation” of the anti-doping system. Individual athletes will be able to compete effectively as neutrals if they can prove their anti-doping credentials, it has said.

No coaches or medical doctors of athletes involved in doping will be accredited. Russia’s sports minister Vitaly Mutko, and his then deputy minister Yuri Nagornyykh, have also been banned from taking part in all future Olympic games.

(Source: Guardian)

Raiders face Seahawks in first game at new Tottenham stadium



Tottenham Hotspur’s new stadium will host it’s first NFL game when the Oakland Raiders take on Seattle Seahawks on Oct. 14, the North American league announced on Thursday.

The NFL signed a 10-year deal with the Premier League club in 2015 to host two matches a season at Spurs’ new stadium, due to be ready for the 2018-19 campaign, which features a retractable grass field with an artificial surface underneath.

“We continue to be very excited by the growth of the NFL in the UK,” NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell said in a statement.

“... A key feature of our success is playing in iconic, world-renowned venues like Wembley and Twickenham, and we look forward to playing in what will be another incredible setting for NFL football at Tottenham’s new stadium.”

NFL executive vice-president Mark Waller said that only one game will be held at the under-construction stadium this year but an extra contest will be hosted in a future season to make up the deficit.

“This is a milestone year for the club as we look ahead to the opening of our new stadium and all that it will bring to the area of Tottenham,” Spurs chairman Daniel Levy said.

“The announcement of the first game of the NFL’s 2018 London Games to take place at our new home heralds the commencement of our 10-year partnership... “The NFL will bring a whole new audience to the local area, showcase Tottenham and bring further economic and social benefits with truly global coverage and attraction.”

Wembley, where Spurs are playing until the new stadium is completed, will host two more NFL games on Oct. 21 and 28, with the Philadelphia Eagles due to face the Jacksonville Jaguars and the Tennessee Titans taking on the Los Angeles Chargers.

The NFL have yet to finalize which match-ups will take place on the pencilled-in dates.

(Source: Reuters)

FIFA, Council of Europe establish partnership



FIFA President Gianni Infantino and Council of Europe Secretary General Thorbjorn Jagland met today in Strasbourg to discuss how to better promote human rights in sports. The meeting followed an exchange of views between the FIFA President and the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers.

Jagland and Infantino underlined the importance of the Council of Europe’s sports conventions in protecting human rights in sport – in particular the conventions on anti-doping, match-fixing and on safety, security and service at football matches.

The FIFA President stressed to the gathered representatives that FIFA’s Statutes, which were confirmed almost two years ago, have allowed for greater reform, transparency and accountability at the governing body. He also laid out the work that the organisation has done to achieve a number of larger goals, from increasing gender diversity to facilitating dialogue with football’s various stakeholders and more.

Significantly, the two organisations agreed to start working on a Memorandum of Understanding between FIFA and the Council of Europe, which should set out in detail the areas of cooperation between the two organisations. The aim is to have the Memorandum of Understanding ready for signature by the end of 2018.

What they said

“It seems clear to me that FIFA and the Council of Europe share many common goals. Good governance, respect for human rights and a resolute stance against doping, match-fixing and violence are a top priority for world football’s governing body.”

“Our sports conventions reach beyond Europe and many other countries have expressed interest in joining them. Closer cooperation with FIFA will help to promote respect for human rights in sports both in Europe and worldwide. I am also pleased that FIFA wants to work with us on the subject of governance. The role of sports in our society -- for example, in boosting integration -- cannot be underestimated. Good governance will help ensuring that the benefits of sport can be enjoyed by everyone.”

(Source: FIFA)

U.S. men look forward after missing World Cup finals



CARSON, California (Reuters) - Failing to qualify for this year’s World Cup finals had been buried and the focus had now shifted to getting back to the global stage in Qatar in 2022, players from the United States’ men’s soccer team said on Thursday.

“The whole focus is on the future,” forward Jordan Morris told Reuters at the end of a sun-drenched first day of the team’s training camp in Carson, California.

“We can’t change the past, we can only move forward.”

The U.S. surprisingly failed to qualify for the finals in Russia when they were beaten 2-1 by Trinidad and Tobago last October. It was the first time since 1986 they had failed to qualify for the finals, which cost coach Bruce Arena his job and created calls for a complete overhaul of the team.

Interim coach Dave Sarachan selected 29 players, many of whom have not played for the national side, for the training camp where he could conduct fitness tests and training drills and get a look at the next generation.

The team, however, were keen to move on from what happened last year and midfielder Gyasi Zardes, who at 26, is one of the older players at the training camp, also deflect-

ed questions about the World Cup qualifying campaign.

“I’m always a positive person,” Zardes said. “We’re moving forward, which is what we’re doing in this camp.”

Sarachan, however, told reporters that he may never fully get past the disappointment of failing to qualify.

“When you go through something like that, you don’t

ever quite get over it,” Sarachan said. “I get reminded about it all the time, whether it is in the media or when I see teams getting ready for the World Cup.”

“So it’s never going to leave my mind, but it’s not going to distract me from what the focus is.

“As professionals, we have to move on.”

Sarachan compared the experience to when he was part of the coaching set up at the 2002 World Cup when the U.S. made the quarter-finals.

While delighted at that team’s performances in Japan and South Korea, that was also something he left in the past.

“It’s not like I dwell on that experience either,” he said. “But that’s an experience I’ll never forget, and I’ll never forget this one either.”

Defender Walker Zimmerman also added there was no need to completely overhaul the national team and its systems, as some fans have suggested as they build towards Qatar. “I don’t think we’re blowing anything up,” he said.

“There’s a lot of motivation to make sure that this doesn’t happen again. “We can become a team that sticks together and we approach 2022 from this day right here.”

Siahjamegan 0 – 1 Persepolis: Last gasp win

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Ali Alipour gave Persepolis football team a last gasp win in Iran Professional League (IPL) against Siahjamegan on Friday.

The IPL leader moved 11 points clear at the top of the table with this 1-0 victory in Mashhad's Samen Stadium.

"We always try to make our fans happy. Persepolis deserved to win and I am very happy to return to Tehran with three points. We could have scored more goals," Persepolis coach Branko Ivankovic said in the post-match news conference.

In Tehran, Esteghlal were held to a 1-1 draw by Saipa at the Azadi Stadium.

Dariush Shojaeian gave the Blues the lead in the 23rd minutes but Reza Asadi headed past Esteghlal goalkeeper Mohsen Hosseini with five minutes remaining.

Hosseini also set a new Iran football record by going 845 minutes without conceding a goal.

Gostareh Foolad drew 1-1 with Foolad, Sepahan lost to Zob Ahan 2-1 in Isfahan's derby, and Sanat Naft were held by Pars Jonoubi Jam 1-1.

On Thursday, Paykan played out a goalless draw by Sepidrood Rasht, Naft Tehran defeated Tractor Sazi 2-0 and Esteghlal Khuzestan edged past Padideh 1-0.

Persepolis cemented their place at top of the table with 44 points, followed by Foolad with 33 points.



Jaber Sadeghzadeh crowned Iran's Pahlavan

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Jaber Sadeghzadeh won Iran's Pahlavani Wrestling Championship in the country's north-eastern shrine city of Mashhad on Thursday.

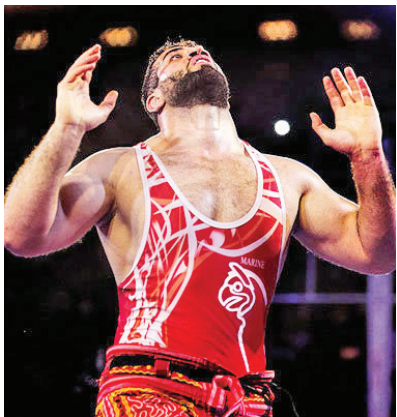
In the final match held at the Beheshti Hall, Sadeghzadeh defeated Ahmad Mirzapour in the +100kg weight category and won the Pahlavani armband.

The final match was attended by Iranian Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs Masoud Soltanifar, President of the International Pahlavani Wrestling Federation Alireza Heidari and the sport enthusiasts.

The Pahlavani wrestling competition held annually in Iran, in which athletes from across the country participate to achieve the title.

Though the competition has ancient roots, its modern form has been held since 1944. Winner of this title is called Pahlavan and wears the special Bazouband (Armband).

The United Nations Educational,



Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) registered Pahlavani and Zourkhaneh rituals in the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2014.

Aidin Aliyari's positive doping test confirmed by UCI

S P O R T S The doping positive of Iranian cyclist Aidin Aliyari has been confirmed by the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI).

The cyclist, who is a member of Iran national cycling team, has failed for a positive test for testosterone in December 2017.

Aliyari, 17, has used prohibited substance testosterone.

Testosterone is a hormone that is responsible for many of the physical characteristics specific to adult males. It plays a key role in reproduction and the maintenance of bone and muscle strength.

It is suggested that this increase in muscle mass is a result of testosterone increasing muscle protein synthesis.

Another Iranian cyclist Mahmoud Rasouli had tested positive for Stanazol.

Shahab Jadidoleslam also tested



positive for human chorionic gonadotropin (HCG) in November.

Jadidoleslam is ineligible from all sports from July 22, 2017 until July 21, 2021.

Asian Cup qualification sends young Vietnam soaring

As usual, the end of the past year was relatively quiet on planet football, with little change happening among the top teams in December's FIFA/Coca Cola World Ranking. There were, however, ups and downs in South-east Asia, with Vietnam's giant move up the global ladder the most notable. Under the guidance of Korean coach Park Hang-seo, the Golden Dragons surged 13 places to 112 and emerged as Asia's best movers after finishing the year on a high.

The double-digit climb not only marked their best position since 2012, but also saw them reach the summit in South-east Asia, dislodging Philippines as the top-ranked side in the region. By doing so, the Vietnamese rounded off a memorable year during which they continued their upward trajectory by rising 24 places in the world pecking order.

Asian Cup return

The driving force behind their significant upwards move was their successful qualifying campaign for the 2019 AFC Asian Cup. They have so far maintained an undefeated record after five games, results which have sealed their place among the top two in their qualifying group, and with it, a berth in the continental finals.

Vietnam improved game after game in qualifying, despite getting off to a slow start.



They came away with a point in Afghanistan before sharing the spoils again in a goalless draw with Jordan at home. However, they found their feet in their next outing against Cambodia by registering a 2-1 victory before a 5-0 drubbing of the same side put them on the verge of qualification.

The deciding match came on 14 November, when they entertained Afghanistan. With both sides facing must-win scenarios, the visitors took the game to the Vietnamese and carved out far more chances. The hosts, however,

defended gallantly to keep Afghanistan at bay, as they secured the point that sealed their fourth Asian Cup appearance.

"We did not win the game, but one point is enough to go to the Asian Cup," Park said after the draw with Afghanistan. "We did not play well today, but our players tried their best. We did not have enough time to show our ability. But everything will be better when we have more time working together."

Changing of the guard

Even more impressive was the fact that

Vietnam achieved qualification success with a transitional side. The changing of the guard began two years ago with a series of veterans, including the legendary Le Cong Vinh, making way for younger talent. Inheriting the captain's armband from Le was Nguyen Van Quyet, who is currently the team's top scorer in Asian Cup qualifying with two goals.

No.1 goalkeeper Nguyen Tuan M?nh put in a pair of brilliant displays against Afghanistan, while the experienced Dinh Thanh Trung was the man driving the midfield, alongside emerging star Luong Xuan Truong, who plies his trade with K League club Gangwon FC in Korea Republic.

With half of the team under 23 years of age, Park has a promising squad at his disposal. It includes young goalkeeper Bui Tien Dung, defender Tran Dinh Trong, midfielder Nguyen Quang Hai, and striker Ha Duc Chinh, all of whom featured for their country at the FIFA U-20 World Cup Korea Republic 2017.

Having had their international baptism at youth level, the quartet graduated to the senior squad, with which they hope to make further progress. Blessed with such a young crop of talent, Vietnam should be well capable of making further gains in the FIFA World Ranking in the future.

(Source: FIFA)

Sanchez move in January not ruled out by Wenger

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger has left open the prospect of Alexis Sanchez leaving this month, but insisted that the club would not let him leave without signing a replacement first.

Sanchez is being targeted by Premier League leaders Manchester City in the January transfer window despite the Chile forward becoming a free agent at the end of the season when his contract expires. Sources have told ESPN FC that Manchester United will monitor Sanchez's situation this month but Old Trafford chiefs still expect him to sign for City.

Wenger didn't deny those claims at his news conference on Friday, or rule out the prospect of a January move, but said he couldn't disclose anything about the discussions being held about Sanchez.

"Honestly I cannot tell you much more at the moment about this situation, because nothing is really concrete at the moment," he said. "It's not that I don't want to inform you, I don't want to give you wrong information. And at the moment, I must say nothing is decided one way or the other."

"Normally he would stay at the club until the end of the season but we'll see."

Asked if a bidding war would be beneficial to Arsenal, Wenger replied: "A bidding war is always beneficial to the club that can take advantage of it, but we're not in that... Normally he should stay until the end of the season, but we'll see."

Arsenal came close to selling Sanchez to City in August,



but the deal fell through when the club failed to sign Monaco's Thomas Lemar as a replacement. And Wenger confirmed that finding a replacement is still a prerequisite for letting the forward leave this month.

"Yeah it's [still] the case now," he said. "You sum it up very well."

One player who has been mentioned as a possible replacement is Bordeaux's Brazilian forward Malcom, but Wenger downplayed those reports as well.

"He's a good player, but at the moment, there as well,

nothing is happening," he said. "We are not on that case at the moment."

Sanchez was Arsenal's leading scorer last season and would leave a massive hole in the squad if he does leave, despite his form having dipped in recent months. Wenger did insist, though, that there are ways to replace the Chilean.

"Is he replaceable in the way that if that happens, do we find exactly the same player? Certainly not. But there's always a way to find a different balance," he said. "Sanchez is an exceptional football player, he is a world class player. If that happens, we have to find a different balance in the team."

Arsenal travel to Bournemouth on Sunday in the Premier League, a fixture that finished 3-3 last season after the Gunners rallied from a 3-0 deficit. Jack Wilshere, who spent last season on loan at Bournemouth, initially looked likely to miss the game after spraining his ankle against Chelsea on Wednesday, but Wenger said there's now a chance the midfielder will be fit.

"We had very good news yesterday morning. I saw him walking normal, his scan was good," Wenger said. "He's not out yet for the game on Sunday."

The Frenchman also said Aaron Ramsey will return to the squad after recovering from a muscle injury, while Mesut Ozil has a "50-50" chance of playing because of a slight knee injury that ruled him out the game at Stamford Bridge. (Source: ESPN)

Iranian retired international football referee dies of heart attack

Press TV — Iran's retired international football referee and former representative of the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) in the Persian Gulf Pro League, Mostafa Hekmat Shoar, has died of a heart attack.

Haidar Soleimani, a veteran Iranian football referrer and one of close friends of the deceased, said Hekmat Shoar passed away at his home in the Iranian capital city of Tehran on Thursday.

Hekmat Shoar, who was living alone, had been suffering from Parkinson's disease over the past few years.

He was famous for strictly carrying out official duties at the highest level of Iran's football league system.

Hekmat Shoar was laid to rest at Behesht-e Zahra, Iran's largest cemetery located in southern Tehran, on Friday.

Khaled Shafiei parts company with FC Seoul

Tasnim — Iranian defender Khaled Shafiei has cancelled his contract with FC Seoul by mutual consent on Thursday.

The 29-year-old player joined FC Seoul on 25 June 2017 from Tractor Sazi, becoming the first Iranian player in the K League Classic.

Iranian media reports suggest that Shafiei has been linked with a move to the Qatari football clubs.

The K League Classic is one of South Korea's professional association football leagues. At the top of the South Korean football league system and currently contested by 12 clubs, it is the country's highest level of football competition.

Free agent Beitashour leaves TFC

Free agent defender Steven Beitashour has left Toronto FC to sign with expansion club Los Angeles FC.

Beitashour was close to a deal with LAFC, who are coached by Bob Bradley, father of TFC captain Michael Bradley. Sportsnet has since learned that it's a done deal, and that the Beitashour has signed with LA.

Beitashour, 30, entered free agency at the end of a 2017 MLS season that saw the Reds cap off a record-setting year by winning its first MLS Cup.

According to the MLS players' union website, Beitashour earned \$264,000 US last season. TFC made Beitashour a contract offer, but he turned it down as it would have meant taking a pay cut.

Beitashour's departure means Toronto has now lost two players this off-season. Canadian wingback Raheem Edwards was picked by LAFC in last month's expansion draft and then traded to Montreal. Also, veteran midfielder Benoit Cheyrou retired.

(Source: Sportsnet)

Farnoosh Sheikhi linked with Charleroi Volley

Iranian women's volleyball team player Farnoosh Sheikhi has been linked with a move to Charleroi Volley.

Sheikhi is Kaveh Rezaei's wife who currently plays for Charleroi football team.

"She is on the same level as a Belgian player. It is an interesting reinforcement. It does not cost us anything. The transfer can also help Kaveh to be in shape," Charleroi Volley president Marc Wauters said.

Sheikhi plays for Iran women's national volleyball team since 2009. She was a member of the national team in 2012 Asian Women's Cup Volleyball Championship. Sheikhi plays for Sarmayeh Bank VC as a middle blocker.

(Source: La Province)

Argentina to face Spain, Italy in FIFA World Cup warm-up matches

The Argentina national football team, nicknamed La Albiceleste (The White and Sky Blue), will play Italy and Spain in March as part of its World Cup preparations.

The Argentine Football Association said the team will face the Italians on March 23 in Basel, Switzerland, then Spain four days later in Madrid.

Argentina had a troubled campaign in South American World Cup qualifiers. It secured a spot in Russia only in the very last match against Ecuador.

Italy did not qualify for the World Cup for the first time in decades and Spain is among the favorites to win it.

The Argentines are in Group D with Iceland, Croatia, and Nigeria. (Source: AFP)

Iranian skier runner up in int'l ski league

IRNA — Iranian skier Morteza Jafari ranked 2nd in the international ski league which was held in Darband Sar ski resort in northern Tehran.

"Jafari in Slalom field stood second," Head of Alborz Alpine Committee Sadeq Kalhor.

"The event was held for receiving 2018 Winter Olympics slated to be held in South Korea on Feb 9," he added.

Slalom is an alpine skiing and alpine snowboarding discipline, involving skiing between poles or gates.

These are spaced more closely than those in giant slalom, super giant slalom and downhill, necessitating quicker and shorter turns. Internationally, the sport is contested at the FIS Alpine World Ski Championships, and at the Olympic Winter Games.

The 2018 Winter Olympics, officially known as the XXIII Olympic Winter Games and commonly known as PyeongChang 2018, is a major international multi-sport event scheduled to take place on February 9-25, 2018 in Pyeongchang County, South Korea.

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■ Managing Director: Ali Asgari
■ Editor-in-Chief: Mohammad Ghaderi

» Editorial Dept.: Fax: (+98 21) 88808214 — 88808895
editor@tehrantimes.com
» Switchboard Operator: Tel: (+98 21) 43051000
» Advertisements Dept.: Telefax: (+98 21) 43051450
» Public Relations Office: Tel: (+98 21) 88805807
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No. 18, Bimeh Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran
P.o. Box: 14155-4843
Zip Code: 1599814713



Good teamwork, Ali Rafiei's main concern

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Veteran stage and screen director Ali Rafiei has said that good teamwork has always been his main concern.

He made the remarks before a large number thespians from different generations who gathered at the 60s Art House in Tehran on Thursday to celebrate his 80th birthday.



Ali Rafiei in an undated photo

"I am full of energy and motivation to work and regret those works I did not stage years ago and I want to remain useful for the theater.

"Therefore, I am planning a workshop to try out a new idea, which has been implemented in Europe for the past few years," he added.

"I am determined to invite 20 to 25 actors to the workshop and begin constant rehearsals. In this workshop we will be working on 9 different plays by different playwrights and the actors will perform the plays in different venues," he explained.

Rafiei also added that in his recent visit to France, he met a professional physical theater expert who will be invited to Iran to help the actors in the workshop.

"I am not saying there will be a revolution in the theater of Iran, but the major thing happening would be that the life of the plays will not be short, and that the plays will not be staged only once," he added.

Born in 1938 in Isfahan, Rafiei got a Ph.D. in theater from Sorbonne University in France in 1974.

He is the director of the acclaimed plays "Fox Hunting", "It Does Not Snow in Egypt", "Crime and Punishment", "Blood Wedding", "The Maids" and "Nightmares and Memories of a Bath Attendant about the Life and Murder of Amir Kabir".

WHAT'S IN ART GALLERIES

Collage

■ A collection of collages by Majid Asgari is on display in an exhibition at Seyhoun Gallery.

The exhibit entitled "Art" will run until January 24 at the gallery located at No. 11, 4th St., Vozara Ave.

Sculpture

■ Sayeh Gallery is playing host to an exhibition of sculptures by Meysam Rezainia.

The exhibit named "Telepathy of Lines" runs until January 17 at the gallery located at 3 Aqakhani Alley, Omidvar St. in the Niavaran neighborhood.

Multimedia

■ Dena Gallery is showcasing sets of installation art and photos by Hamed Daei.

The exhibition titled "Nightmare of Form" runs until January 17 at the gallery, which can be found at 4 Sussan Alley off Qarani St.

Photo

■ Photos by Tahmineh Nasuri are on display in an exhibition at Golestan Gallery.

The exhibition will be running until January 17 at the gallery located at 34 Kamasai St. in the Darus neighborhood.

Painting

■ An exhibition of paintings by Akbar Yadegari is underway at Atbin Gallery.

The exhibit entitled "Trauma from Cologne" runs until January 23 at the gallery located at 42 Khakzad Alley, Vali-e Asr Ave near Parkway Intersection.

■ Negar Gallery is playing host to an exhibition of paintings by Sussan Sharifi, Mojdeh Harati, Ehsan Seifi and four more artists. The exhibit named "Surreal" will run until January 17 at the gallery that can be found at 33 Delaram Alley, Roshanai St. in the Qeitarieh neighborhood.

Fajr concertgoers thrilled by Parvez Khan's raga improvisations

By Manijeh Rezapoor

TEHRAN — Shahid Parvez Khan, the Indian sitar player known for his raga improvisations, charmed the audience by the dance of his nimble fingers on his instrument during a Thursday night performance at Tehran's Vahdat Hall.

Parvez Khan is famous for his inspiring performance of raga, a style of Indian music based on an ancient pattern of notes. His dazzling virtuosity and innovative genius have earned him a legacy as a giant of the sitar.

Addressing the audience at the hall, the maestro called it a privilege to perform in Tehran during the Fajr Music Festival in the company of musicians from around the globe.

The first part began with a non-stop performance by the maestro, which received a wild sustained applause.

Afterwards, tabla virtuoso Akram Khan joined Parvez Khan performing some uplifting melodies.

The last part was a folk music from Afghanistan. "That was the main course and now this is the dessert," Parvez Khan quipped.

The Iranian Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Abbas Salehi, was also among the audience.

Numerous performances will be held by Iranian and foreign musicians during the 10-day festival, which opened in Tehran on Wednesday.

Since the early days of the festival, there has been a 30 percent growth in the ticket sales, director of the festival Hamidreza Nurbakhsh told the Tehran Times before Parvez Khan's concert.

"We have added several additional billboards across the capital to cover the news of the performances, and newspapers and news agencies have been of great help, of course," he added.



The Indian musicians Akram Khan (L) and Shahid Parvez Khan pose for a photo before their concert at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on January 11, 2018. (Mehr/Iman Hamikhah)

"The advertisement for the concerts are completely defined in the virtual spaces. That is, the music fans do not have to search for music concerts on billboards or in newspapers advertisements any longer. The main media today has become people's cellphones, so naturally individuals can find their interests by means of the social media networks they follow and buy tickets," Nurbakhsh asserted. However, he regretted that in the best

of prime times, the social media networks and applications were blocked, which made it hard for the organizers.

"The pop concerts also faced some problems. We cannot say people and particularly the youth have lost their interest; they have not been informed of the event, but fortunately, we were able to manage through advertisements across the city.

"On the whole, each concert has its own

audience and naturally, each different genre has its own audience, so we do not expect the same number of people for each concert. The concerts have been warmly received and since the first day the number of festival revelers has increased. The news and photos have helped us a lot, as well," he noted.

He also added that all the foreign musicians have been eagerly taking part and all the programs are continuing.

Payam Mofidi wins Vista Contemporary Art Prize



This photo shows the Vista trophy best artistic idea during the 2nd Vista Contemporary Art Prize at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art on January 11, 2018. (Honaronline/Sara Sassani)

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — A plan by young Iranian artist Payam Mofidi was selected as the best artistic idea at the second edition of the Vista Contemporary Art Prize on Thursday.

He won the prize for "Body, Colonial Islands and Strategic Depth" that features a sharp focus on social and humanistic sensitivities and the sacrifice of the body during immigration, and its reflection on the idea of the artwork, the jury said in a statement read during a ceremony at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art.

The prize, which is a check for 300

million rials (about \$6,800), was established by the Vista Gallery in Tehran to praise the best artistic idea.

The director of the gallery, Parisa Pahlavan, expressed her hope that Vista finds its real position and that the program will be held in a wider artistic range.

The ceremony ended with the presentation of the check and the Vista trophy to the winner to accomplish his new project at the gallery. However, Mofidi was absent from the ceremony and the award was presented to his representative.

Director Guild embraces women, minorities in awards nominations

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Hollywood directors nominated a woman and two people of color for their 2018 movie awards on Thursday in a line-up that favored newcomers over veterans like Steven Spielberg.

"Lady Bird" director Greta Gerwig was among four first-time nominees announced by the Directors Guild of America (DGA), one of the most influential groups in Hollywood because many of its members also are voters in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, which chooses the Oscars.

Only one woman - Kathryn Bigelow - has ever won a best director Oscar despite efforts by women to make inroads into behind the camera positions in Hollywood in recent years. Several Latino men and Taiwan's Ang Lee have won the award.

Gerwig, 34, was joined by Mexican Guillermo del Toro for "The Shape of Water", black first-time director Jordan Peele for racial horror satire "Get Out", and Britain's Martin McDonagh for dark comedy "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri". British director Christopher Nolan won a fourth



Guillermo Del Toro wins Golden Globe for Best Director for "The Shape of Water"

Italy's Berlusconi hails Deneuve's 'blessed words' on harassment

ROME (Reuters) — Former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi hailed French actress Catherine Deneuve on Thursday for defending men accused of sexual harassment in the wake of the Harvey Weinstein scandal.

"Catherine Deneuve spoke blessed words," said the 81-year-old Berlusconi, who resigned in 2011 mired in scandal over his wild "Bunga Bunga" parties with young women.

"It's natural that women are happy if a man tries to seduce them," he said in a television interview. "I don't have much experience with this because it's always women who try to seduce me."

Deneuve and 99 other French women on Tuesday denounced a backlash against men, saying the recent international campaign against harassment amounted to "puritanism" and was fueled by a "hatred

of men."

In the aftermath of accusations against the U.S. movie producer Weinstein, millions of women took to social media to share their stories of being harassed or assaulted, using the #MeToo hashtag.

Berlusconi still leads his conservative Forza Italia (Go Italy!) party and is mounting a political comeback ahead of elections on March 4, even though he is personally barred

from office because of a 2013 conviction for tax fraud.

The billionaire media tycoon was eventually cleared in his sex trial in 2014 because the judge ruled it could not be proved he knew the age of the teenage nightclub dancer, Karima El Mahroug, better known by her stage name "Ruby the Heartstealer".

However he is now on trial accused of bribing witnesses in the case.

Movies from Iran competing in intl. festivals



Negar Javaherian acts in a scene from "Negar" by Rambod Javan

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Twelve Iranian films are competing in two international festivals in Bulgaria and Switzerland.

"A Special Day" by Homayun Asadian, "Negar" by Rambod Javan, "Season of Narges" by Negar Azarbajani and "Lina" by Ramin Rasuli are screening in the main competition of the 10th Sofia MENAR Film Festival, which opened in the Bulgarian capital on Friday.

"Invisible Point" by Tanin Torabi, "Retouch" by Kaveh Mazaheri, "The Man Who Forgot to Breathe" by Saman Hosseinpour and "The Servant" by Farnush Abedi are competing in the short film section of the festival, which will run until January 28.

The festival will also screen "Boarding

Pass" by Mehdi Rahmani, "Immortality" by Mehdi Fard-Qaderi and "Italy, Italy" by Kaveh Sabbaghzadeh in the New Iranian Directors category.

MENAR stands for the Middle East and North Africa Region, and the festival spotlights top cinema productions from these regions. In addition, the Black Movie - Geneva International Independent Film Festival, which will run from January 19 to 28, will screen Iranian director Kazem Mollai's drama "Kupal".

Starring Levon Haftvan, the film tells the story of a hunter and a taxidermist called "Dr. Ahmad Kupal". On the last day of the year, just moments before the arrival of the New Year, he faces an unexpected challenge.

DGA nomination for his war drama "Dunkirk".

Spielberg, whose press freedom movie "The Post" attracted strong Oscar buzz last month, "Wonder Woman" director Patty Jenkins, and Italian Luca Guadagnino, whose romance "Call Me by Your Name" is high on critics' list, were all passed over by the DGA.

Peele, 38, got a second nomination in the first-time director category for "Get Out", along with "West Wing" creator Aaron Sorkin, who made his directorial feature film debut with drama "Molly's Game".

All five of the DGA nominees also won nods last week from the Producers Guild of America (PGA), which also has a track record of honoring the movie that goes on to win best picture at the Academy Awards, the industry's top prize.

In addition, the PGA recognized "The Post", "The Big Sick", "Wonder Woman", "I, Tonya", "Molly's Game" and "Call Me by Your Name" on its 2018 nominations list.

The DGA announces its winners on Feb. 3. Oscar nominations are announced on Jan. 23 and the Academy Awards ceremony takes place in Hollywood on March 4.