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Haniyeh writes to Leader to praise Iran's stance on Quds

POLITICS Ismail Haniyeh, head of the political bureau of the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), on Thursday sent a letter to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei praising Iran's stance on al-Quds (Jerusalem).
 On December 6 U.S. President Donald Trump declared that he recognizes al-Quds

as the capital of Israel and ordered the relocation of the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to al-Quds.
 "All the enduring people of Palestine appreciate the Islamic Republic's standing and worthy positions in regards to Palestine, Quds, and support of the Palestinian people's resistance with different types of aid," Haniyeh wrote, according to khamenei.ir. **->2**

HRW says Trump is 'disaster' for human rights

U.S. President Donald Trump's record on human rights in his first year in office has been a "disaster", the head of Human Rights Watch said in an interview.
 Kenneth Roth was speaking ahead of HRW's annual report launch in Paris, where he said French President Emmanuel Macron needed to fill a void with countries like Britain, which was distracted by

Brexit, and the United States which was largely absent from the rights' landscape.
 "Trump has been a disaster for the human rights movement, in part because he seems to have this insatiable desire to embrace people who have been able to govern without the checks and balances of democracy," Roth said in an interview. **->13**

CBI files \$4.9b complaint against Deutsche Boerse subsidiary

Deutsche Boerse AG said Thursday that Iran's Bank Markazi has filed a complaint against the German stock-exchange operator's subsidiary Clearstream, seeking restitution of assets worth about \$4.9 billion.
 The Iranian central bank filed the complaint against post-trade services provider

Clearstream and Italian bank Banca UBAE SpA at a court in Luxembourg, where the subsidiary is based, Deutsche Boerse said.
 The complaint seeks restitution for the Iranian bank's assets, which are allegedly held on accounts of UBAE and Bank Markazi with Clearstream and total around \$4.9 billion plus interest. **->4**

ARTICLE
 By Martin Love
 Political analyst from North Carolina

Ibn Khaldun's insight centuries ago applies today

Dr. Franz Rosenthal, was a Jewish man and scholar of great wisdom and repute. I happened to take a couple classes of his at Yale University in the U.S. in the early 1970s. Though deceased now, he was the top Western scholar of Islam, Islamic history and Semitic languages in his day, and also one lucky Jew who as a young man before World War 2 managed to exit Nazi Germany, but many of his elder relatives who never escaped in the 1930s died.

Rosenthal knew what caused the rise and fall of Islamic (or most any) polity. He was a translator in to English, for one thing, of Ibn Khaldun's magnificent and groundbreaking 14th century historical theories about the rise and fall of political dynasties summarized in the famous work called the "Muqaddimah". Rosenthal laid out Islamic history and Islam itself for his students at Yale in great detail, and lovingly. He considered Islam, as Muslims do, the "final" revelation of the monotheistic tradition earlier established by Judaism and then Christianity, and he did indeed consider it an improved manifestation of the tradition and Arabic, the language of the Qu'ran, the most expressive of languages. Had he not been born Jewish, I gathered from knowing him, he'd have been Muslim. He had a profound, enduring respect for Islam and its achievements over the centuries since Muhammad's death in the seventh century.

Given the demonization of Islam by some in the West, and particularly in Washington, for NO other reasons but that the Islamic Republic, to cite the prime example, officially abhors and rejects Western imperialism and its demands for control and hegemony in the Middle East, as well as Iran's valid rejection of Zionism and its cruelty to the Holy Land's natives, the Palestinians, one has to be concerned.

Another attempt to take down a country by the U.S. and allies, as happened with Iraq and Libya and Syria especially, could well be catastrophic and lead to a third world war. **->7**

Turkey: Operation in Syria's Afrin has started 'de facto'

BY staff & agencies
 Turkish Defense Minister Nurettin Canikli says no troops have gone into Syria's Kurdish-controlled Afrin region but the operation has started "de facto" with cross-border shelling.
 Canikli said in an interview with broadcaster A Haber Friday that Turkey was developing weapons systems against anti-tank missiles used by U.S.-backed YPG militants.
 He said the planned military operations in the northwestern Syrian region should be carried out with no delay to purge the territories of what he called terrorist elements.
 Amid its rising tensions with the U.S., Turkey said Thursday it would seek Russia's approval for the operation as the country's Chief of Staff

Hulusi Akar traveled to Moscow for negotiations.
 Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said Akar's trip was part of boarder efforts by Ankara to coordinate the campaign with Russia.
 He said the presence of Russian observers in Afrin was an issue that has to be discussed ahead of the operation.
 "When we carry out an intervention, we need to coordinate on this, it should not impact the Russian observers," said Cavusoglu, adding that the coordination will also cover the situation in Idlib, a militant-controlled region northwest of Syria where Turkey backs an array of anti-Damascus groups.
 "We are meeting the Russians and Iran on the use of air space," the top Turkish diplomat added.

Cavusoglu had earlier said the planned Syria operation may expand beyond Afrin to the nearby city of Manbij. Washington angered Ankara earlier this week when it announced a plan to work with U.S.-backed militants of the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to set up a new 30,000-strong "border security" force near the Turkish border.
 The force would operate along the Turkish border with Iraq and within Syria along the Euphrates River.
 Cavusoglu further reiterated Turkish concerns over Kurdish militant activities near its borders and said, "Our response to this is our legitimate right to retaliate. We told the United States this." **->13**

Killing the Iran nuclear deal will be bad for the U.S.

By Seyed Hossein Mousavian
 After months of threatening to undo the Iran nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Donald Trump once again opted to extend the deal by waiving economic sanctions on Iran. This was the "last chance," he declared in a Jan. 12 statement, "to either fix the deal's disastrous flaws, or the United States will withdraw."
 The U.S. president provided four conditions for a "supplemental agreement" to the JCPOA and called on Congress to ordain them into law. These include: Iran allowing "immediate" inspections of "all sites requested by international inspectors," Iran never coming "close to possessing a nuclear weapon," that there be "no expiration date" for these provisions, and finally, that the legislation explicitly state that Iran's "long-range missile and nuclear weapons programs are inseparable."

In the event that Congress or American allies in Europe fail to support the so-called supplemental agreement, Trump proclaimed, he would unilaterally "terminate" the JCPOA. This is a shocking attitude towards the European Union member countries, among others.
 The reality is that the JCPOA's text stipulates the highest standards on nuclear transparency and inspections ever negotiated and provides verifiable assurances that Iran's nuclear program cannot be diverted towards developing nuclear weapons. These measures already meet the first two of Trump's conditions and surpass anything agreed to by a member of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT).
 Furthermore, while the JCPOA's major restrictions are temporary, with expiration dates ranging from eight to 25 years, after the deal expires, Iran returns to monitoring under the

International Atomic Energy Agency's "Additional Protocol" safeguards. As noted by more than 90 nuclear scientists in an October 2017 letter supporting the JCPOA, these represent the "strongest set of generally applicable safeguards implemented by the IAEA."
 Trump's conditions seemingly seek to make permanent the JCPOA's major restrictions on Iran's nuclear program and connect the Iranian nuclear program to its missile program, despite the opposition of other world powers to any renegotiation of the deal and the conditions representing an egregious violation of the NPT. Indeed, Iran has a sovereign right to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes under the treaty, which states that there should be no discrimination in the right of signatories to benefit from peaceful nuclear technologies and in no way limits states' abilities to develop conventional weapons. **->13**

ARTICLE
 By Maryam Qarehgozlou
 Tehran Times journalist

Air pollution: not this again

You wake up in the morning and set for another working day. You may take a quick shower, have a breakfast, get dressed and head out.

Once you step out of the house you feel a strong urge to fill your lungs with some fresh air... don't, it will kill you, maybe not right now, but wait, it will.
 According to World Health Organization (WHO) more 90 percent of the population lives in places with higher pollution than what's considered healthy.

As estimated by Ecology Global Network some 55 million die every year worldwide. And again WHO estimates that 4.6 million people die each year from causes directly attributable to air pollution. Worldwide more deaths per year are linked to air pollution than to automobile accidents.

The number could be higher or lower, and no one can easily claim that their loved ones are directly died of air pollution, deaths can be 'linked' to air pollution.

In Iran around 33,000 people die each year because they are exposed to unhealthy environment. In Tehran, the capital which suffers the most from air pollution, some 4,810 deaths occurred in 2016 are attributed to air pollution.

The most harmful pollutant to human health is called PM 2.5, particulate matter smaller than 2.5 microns in diameter that's found in soot, smoke, and dust. PM 2.5 is especially dangerous because it can get lodged in the lungs and cause long-term health problems like asthma and chronic lung disease.

PM 2.5 starts to become a major health problem when there is more than 35.5 micrograms (µg) of PM 2.5 per cubic meter of air, according to the US Environmental Protection Agency. But the WHO recommends keeping yearly average PM 2.5 levels three times lower than that.

While based on WHO guidelines the PM2.5 must stand at 10 micrograms per cubic meter air annually in Iran it stands at 31.1 micrograms per cubic meter air which is pretty high.

While on January 19 we marked the national clean air day, we all very well know that this is just another day put on the calendar. **->12**



Tehran Symphony Orchestra gigs at Fajr

The Tehran Symphony Orchestra gives a performance under the baton of Shahrdad Rohani (R) during the 33rd Fajr Music Festival at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on January 18, 2016.
 The orchestra also reprised the performance last night.
 The festival comes to end tonight by announcing the winners during a special ceremony, which will be organized at the hall.

Mojtaba Mojtahed

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Cleric says Muslim world needs more courage and solidarity

POLITICS TEHRAN — A Tehran Friday prayer leader has called for boosting solidarity in the Muslim world in the face of enemies' divisive plots.

In an address to worshippers in Tehran on Friday, Ayatollah Mohammad Emami Kashani warned that the enemies have surrounded Iran with the aim of rooting out Islam.

"They want the destruction of Islam," he said, cautioning Muslims about the U.S. and the Zionist regime's conspiracies.

He emphasized that the Muslim world needs more courage and solidarity, adding that Muslims need to break their silence regarding the situation in Yemen and Palestine.



Ayatollah Alamolhoda rejects involvement in protests

POLITICS TEHRAN — Mashhad Friday prayer leader Seyyed Ahmad Alamolhoda has rejected involvement in igniting the recent widespread protests across the country, calling for thorough investigation of the causes of the unrest.

In a letter to Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani, Ayatollah Alamolhoda said there is plenty of evidence that the protests were sparked in Tehran, Mehr reported.

In protests, which first started in a few cities late in December and then spread to other cities, 25 people were killed. Security forces were among the dead. The protests lasted for a week.



Labor minister lauds China efforts in tanker incident

POLITICS TEHRAN — Labor Minister Ali Rabiei has praised the Chinese government for its efforts, though unsuccessfully, to save the crew of an Iranian oil tanker which went up in flames after it collided with a Chinese freight ship off east coast of China on January 6.

Rabiei, the special envoy of President Rouhani to investigate the incident, said China spared no efforts to rescue the 32 sailors including two Bangladeshis.

In a letter to China's envoy to Tehran Pang Sen, Rabiei thanked the Chinese rescue team who took risks during the operation. He also expressed gratitude to the Chinese government for its efforts in extinguishing the fire, IRNA reported.



IRIB budget greatly reduced in proposed bill: MP

POLITICS TEHRAN — Ehsan Qazizadeh Hashemi, a member of the Majlis Cultural Committee, says under the proposed national budget bill, the government has reduced the budget for the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) by more than 9 trillion rials (nearly \$200 million).

Warning of the consequences of the budget cut, Qazizadeh Hashemi said according to the sixth development plan, 0.7% of the annual budget should be allocated for the IRIB, adding that the Rouhani administration's budget bill fails to meet that plan.

He called on the administration to immediately find a solution for the issue as it could cause complications, Mehr reported on Friday.



Nephew: Trump hates JCPOA while he doesn't understand it

POLITICS Richard Nephew, program director at the Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University, told CNBC on Friday that "the simple reality is that Trump hates the JCPOA even as he doesn't understand it."

Nephew added, "And though his advisors are attempting to get him to think about it more pragmatically, their perennial struggles don't auger well for its survival."

Nephew, who served as the lead sanctions expert for the State Department negotiating with Iran from 2013 to 2014, said, "Mr. Trump has set an unreasonable list of demands out that I do not think any realistic European or Congressional agreement could satisfy."



U.S. lawmakers pushing bill to tighten terms of JCPOA

POLITICS TEHRAN — U.S. lawmakers have put forward a bill at the House of Representatives which they say is to tighten the term of the 2015 Iran deal, aka JCPOA, despite international warnings for Washington to stop attempts to undermine the accord.

Named "Iran Freedom Policy and Sanctions Act", the bill was tabled on Thursday by Republican representative Peter Roskam and backed by his fellow GOP member Liz Cheney, the daughter of former vice president Dick Cheney, according to Cheney's website.

The proposed legislation "makes clear what any effective agreement would have to contain," Cheney said in a statement.

Lavrov: JCPOA failure would send alarming message for 'international architecture'

UN chief warns against endangering nuclear deal

POLITICS Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned on Thursday that if the 2015 Iran nuclear deal - or Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) - collapses, it would send an "alarming" message to the world.

Advising signatories of the deal against abandoning it to pursue their own interests, Lavrov told a UN Security Council meeting on weapons of mass destruction that the deal between Iran and six world powers -- the U.S., the UK, France, China, Russia and Germany -- is "a genuine achievement of international diplomacy," RT reported.

Lavrov also denounced the United States' stance on the nuclear agreement as politically-motivated, saying the deal cannot be abandoned "for the benefit of political agendas of certain countries."

"Clearly the failure of the JCPOA, especially as a result of one of the parties... would be an alarming message for the entire international community architecture," Lavrov said at the Security Council.

UN chief warns prejudice against JCPOA

Meanwhile, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres on Wednesday urged nations not to damage the nuclear agreement because of concerns they may have with Iran's nonnuclear military activities.

"Issues not directly related to the [nuclear deal] should be addressed without prejudice to preserving the agreement and its accomplishments," Guterres said in a statement.

The deal is a "major achievement of nuclear nonproliferation and diplomacy, and has contributed to regional and in-



ternational peace and security," he said.

The administration of U.S. President Donald Trump has repeatedly criticized Iran's ballistic-missile development as well as support for Syria's government in a six-year civil war and its backing of Yemeni Houthi rebels, while demanding major changes in the nuclear deal.

On January 12, Trump threatened to pull out of the deal unless it is changed to

clearly prohibit ballistic-missile development, among other changes he is seeking.

Trump said he was waiving U.S. nuclear-related sanctions for another 120 days, as required under the deal in exchange for curbs on Iran's nuclear activities.

But he said he was doing so for the "last time" to give U.S. and European negotiators a "last chance" to enact measures to fix what he called the deal's "disastrous flaws."

Iran has ruled out any changes in the agreement, maintaining that Trump's demands violate terms of the deal sealed by the administration of former U.S. President Barack Obama and signed by Britain, France, Germany, China, and Russia.

Guterres noted that the International Atomic Energy Agency has repeatedly concluded that Iran is fulfilling its side of the agreement.

Tillerson to start European tour amid rising rift over nuclear deal

U.S. State Department spokesperson Heather Nauert said on Thursday that Secretary of State Rex Tillerson will visit London, Paris, Warsaw and Davos on January 21-27, as the trans-Atlantic ties have been challenged by widening division over the U.S. proposed revision of the Iran nuclear deal, among others.

According to her announcement, Tillerson will meet with British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson and National Security Advisor Mark Sedwill to discuss bilateral cooperation on such issues as Iran, Syria, Libya, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Ukraine.

While in Paris on January 23, Tillerson is expected to meet with senior French officials to discuss global issues of mutual concern. He will also attend the launch of the International Partnership against Impunity for Use of Chemical Weapons.

He will then travel to Davos, Switzerland, where he will participate in the 2018 World Economic Forum from Jan. 24-26. During the forum, he will follow President Donald Trump's schedule of meetings.



The last stop will take Tillerson to Warsaw on Jan. 26, where he will meet with senior Polish officials to discuss how to promote the U.S.-Poland bilateral relationship in issues regarding global challenges, regional security, and economic prosperity.

The trans-Atlantic ties between the United States

and Europe at large has been shaky ever since Trump assumed the presidency on Jan. 20, 2017. The two sides have also seen snowballing differences on multiple issues like Trump's retreat from the Paris climate accord, his decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital at the end of 2017 and his refusal to certify Iran's compliance with the historic nuclear deal in October.

Trump on Jan. 12 said he will extend sanctions relief on Iran under the landmark nuclear deal for the last time, threatening a U.S. withdrawal from the pact if the U.S. Congress and his European allies cannot fix the alleged "disastrous flaws."

One day ago, he made a sudden announcement that he has canceled his trip to Britain to inaugurate new U.S. embassy due to stated disappointment over the bad spot for the embassy, sparking further irritation in London, as many people and government officials asked British Prime Minister Theresa May to withdraw her invitation to Trump to pay a state visit.

(Source: Xinhua)

Haniyeh writes to Leader to praise Iran's stance on Quds



1 -> With the onset of a massive Intifada in the West Bank and Quds, we will, with God's grace, neutralize the conspiracy of today's tyrant (Trump) and the hypocritical rulers in the far and near capitals who seek to end the Palestinian cause," the Hamas official remarked.

He said that the conspiracy of recognizing al-Quds as the capital of Israel was aimed at destroying the basis of resistance.

"Although these conspiracies were clear to us since long ago, they have become more apparent than before, in recent months and days, with the Riyadh conference and the words of Donald Trump in which he called Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas their 'prepared enemies', and emphasized his Zionist attitude by labeling Quds as the 'Jewish capital'."

He also noted, "I strongly believe in the role your Excellency exercises, directing the Islamic Republic and its devout commanders in a direction to carry out the project of accomplishing the goals of Palestine, and also in your statements for mobilizing the Ummah, warning them to avoid the abyss towards which the people are misled by the rulers of hypocrisy and conspiracy."

Noting that Iran has been on the side of Palestine in difficult situations, Haniyeh appreciated Iran's performance in supporting the resistance movement.

"With great guidance of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Iran, undoubtedly, has had and will have a great privilege in strengthening the Mujahideen (fighters) and reinforcing the option of resistance and struggle in Palestine."

UN chief welcomes second anniversary of 'Implementation Day' for nuclear deal



United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres on Wednesday welcomed the second anniversary of the day when Iran was confirmed to have taken a series of nuclear-related actions under the nuclear agreement reached with key countries in 2015.

"This marks another significant milestone" in the historic agreement, said UN spokesman Stéphane Dujarric in a statement, noting that the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) - reached by Iran, China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union - constitutes a major achievement of nuclear non-proliferation and diplomacy, and has contributed to regional and international peace and security.

The day, known as "Implementation Day," occurred on 16 January 2016 when

the Security Council received the report from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) confirming that Iran has taken a series of nuclear-related actions specified in the JCPOA's annex.

"The secretary-general remains convinced that the JCPOA is the best way to ensure the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme and to realize the promised tangible economic benefits for the Iranian people," Mr. Dujarric said.

"The secretary-general calls for concerns regarding its implementation to be addressed through the mechanisms established by the agreement," and "believes that issues not directly related to the JCPOA should be addressed without prejudice to preserving the agreement and its accomplishments," Mr. Dujarric added.

(Source: www.un.org)

Iran, Russia to maintain co-op in terror fight: diplomat

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Hossein Jaber Ansari said on Friday that Tehran and Moscow will seriously continue cooperation in fight against terrorism.

During a meeting with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov in Moscow, Jaber Ansari called for more consultation and dialogue on developments in the Middle East.

"Developments in the Middle East and the Arab world

make it essential to hold consultations more often," he said.

Jaber Ansari said Iran-Russia consultations will definitely help solve problems in the region, because the two countries have many capacities to settle regional problems.

For his part, Bogdanov called for more talks on regional developments.

Bogdanov said that the two countries' presidents and foreign ministers have close cooperation and this indicates the "strong" and "strategic" between Russia and Iran.

He also said that the Iranian and Russian diplomats plan to meet in the Black Sea resort of Sochi to discuss arrangements for the Syrian Congress on National Dialogue.

The Syria government and opposition groups are expected to attend the conference.

Back in November 2017, Bogdanov said, "We hope that everyone who believes that the fate of the country, its unity, its territorial integrity and its sovereignty are important will participate."

Nasrallah: Security impossible without martyrs

Hezbollah Secretary-General Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah gave a televised address at a memorial ceremony Friday and addressed regional developments and security.

The event was held to commemorate Hezbollah commanders killed in the southwestern Syrian town of Quneitra in 2015 as well as the 40th anniversary of the death of Faye Mughniyeh, the father of slain senior Hezbollah commander Imad Mughniyeh and the grandfather of the Imad's son, Jihad.

"Today when an official in Lebanon talks about security, it should be known that security couldn't have been established without the martyrs [of Hezbollah]," Nasrallah said. "When we talk about a huge defeat to the American project [for the region] and the victories of the governments and the people of the region, it is due to those sacrifices and the martyrs."

Nasrallah praised Faye Mughniyeh and his family saying they were one of the families that had offered many martyrs.

Nasrallah called on families in Beirut who left their ancestral towns to continue to remember their families and return to their homes in their original hometowns.

He said that plans by the government and the civil society to lift the burden off the capital, in terms of trash, traffic and drugs. But he said there is a lot of negative impact from the overpopulation of cities in very tiny areas.

He said that even Hezbollah was thinking about this. "[We want] most of those who work in the south, to live in the south."

"If the issue of transportation was resolved...things would be easier [in the country]."

U.S. accusations of Narcoterror

Moving on to recent reports by U.S. news website Politico regarding international drug dealing networks and the recent news that the U.S. Justice Department had formed a special investigative team to investigate Hezbollah drug networks, Nasrallah denied any involvement.

"During the past few weeks, there have been American accusations that aren't new," he said. "The Justice Department formed a committee and it wanted to investigate how Hezbollah is related to drugs and there was a story [in Politico] about how [former U.S. President Barack] Obama opened the door for Hezbollah in this regard. I want to remind everyone about a position, that these are unfair accusations that are baseless."

"Hezbollah, when it comes to this, is not permitted by religion and we say that it is 'haram.' Even the 'Hallal' trade we aren't being involved in, even if it has to do with investments. For Hezbollah, we took the decision that we



don't want to be involved in this."

"Hezbollah doesn't have any money to invest anywhere and isn't involved in any [such] project."

"There are some rich people [in Hezbollah], but this is an individual thing. Hezbollah didn't allow anyone to speak in its name and as for the drugs, this comes within the war that we are subjected to."

Attack on Hamas official

Turning to Sunday's bombing that targeted a Hamas official in south Lebanon's Sidon, Nasrallah said: "We are following up the investigation and all signs indicate that Israel was behind implementing the attack."

"When the Lebanese security agencies find out that it was Israel, we hope that it is dealt with as a violation of the Lebanese sovereignty. This is a dangerous beginning. Know we began to understand why they were holding all of these meetings. Is it this [simple] to turn a blind eye to Israel's resumption of attacks in Lebanon? Why are we saying that there is security here?"

"I want to sound the alarm - the attack against the

Hamas official represents the beginning of a dangerous security phase in Lebanon."

Regional situation

Then Nasrallah turned to the situation in the region. "The Americans under the pretext of Daesh [ISIL] want to return and stay in Iraq and the same in Syria."

"There is a continuation of the American discrimination from the Trump administration, Trump says Muslim terrorism on purpose. He has now come to discriminate against African countries," Nasrallah said in apparent reference reports that the U.S. president referred to Haiti, El Salvador and nations in Africa as "shithole countries."

U.S. cuts to UNRWA

"Trump will continue to pressure Arab countries as it appears to have been pressuring the Palestinians. There also appears to be Arab pressure on Palestine for a deal that has been offered to them [by the U.S.] as long as the Palestinians refuse the deal. We have created victories and we will protect our country and side."

(Source: Daily Star)

Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh rally against repatriation to Myanmar

Hundreds of Rohingya Muslim refugees in Bangladesh have protested a joint plan to repatriate them to Myanmar, where they have faced a bloody crackdown by military forces and extremist Buddhists.

The refugees, living in overcrowded and squalid camps in southeastern Bangladesh, staged the protest on Friday, declaring that they did not want to be returned.

Chanting slogans and holding banners, the Muslim refugees demanded citizenship and guarantees of security before they would return to their home state of Rakhine in Myanmar.

One refugee told AFP by phone that they wanted "a UN peacekeeping force. We want fundamental rights and citizenship. We do not want repatriation without life guarantees."

Bangladesh and Myanmar have reached an agreement to send back the refugees to Rakhine within two years.

The program, which is expected to launch on Tuesday, is described by Amnesty International as "alarmingly premature."

"With memories of rape, killing, and torture still fresh in the minds of Rohingya refugees, plans for their return to Myanmar are alarmingly premature," said James Gomez, Amnesty International's Regional



Director for Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

The United Nations says nearly 655,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled Rakhine to Bangladesh since the military launched a new wave of bloody violence last August. The UN says any repatriation must be voluntary.

A Bangladesh official said the roughly 6,500 Rohingya refugees who are currently living in a no man's land between the two countries would be among the first group to be repatriated. This is while many Rohingya people are still waiting to cross the Naf River into Bangladesh, fleeing continuing state-sponsored violence in Myanmar.

Buddhist-majority Myanmar brands the minority Rohingya Muslims in the country as "illegal immigrants" from Bangladesh, refusing to accept them as citizens despite the fact that they have lived in the country for many generations.

(Source: al Alam)

Japanese hold sit-in Okinawa, try to obstruct construction of U.S. base

Japanese people have staged a sit-in protest, trying to obstruct the construction of a new American base on the southern island of Okinawa, which has been rife with anti-U.S. sentiment for years.

On Friday, the protesters tried to block 80 trucks carrying building materials on an access road, prompting police to intervene and break up the sit-down demonstration.

"Under the democratic fundamental principle which is an 'election,' the people of Okinawa said we don't need the base," said protester Shinichi Mura. "Unfortunately the Japanese government doesn't think of Japanese people as the priority."

The locals are concerned about potential noise pollution, and safety and environmental hazards.

The Japanese and U.S. governments have pursued the relocation of the Futenma air base to the less populated Henoko coastal area in the Okinawa city of Nago, saying the plan is "the only solution" to address noise problems and accident risks.

Many Okinawans, however, want the base to be relocated outside the prefecture.

According to the relocation plan, the state-of-the-art airbase will be built in the waters off the island over the next five years



to replace the Futenma base.

According to U.S. Forces Japan, nearly half of 100,000 U.S. troops in Japan reside on Okinawa.

Multiple cases of misconduct by U.S. forces, featuring several rape cases and rape and murder of a 20-year-old woman in 2016, has raised anti-American sentiment among the pacifist islanders.

Also on Friday, Japan criticized the U.S. military for breaking a pledge to avoid flying helicopters over a school next to the Futenma base.

The Marines insisted that their helicopters had avoided the school.

The school has become a focal point for discontent over the U.S. presence on the island since a window fell from a U.S. Marines helicopter onto its playground last month.

(Source: Kyodo)

HRW urges UN sanctions on Saudi crown prince over Yemen war

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has called on the United Nations to impose sanctions on Saudi Arabia's military leaders, including Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who also serves as the defense minister, over atrocities committed in the war on Yemen.

The New York-based rights organization said in its World Report 2018 on Thursday that Saudi Arabia, which has been waging a military campaign on Yemen since March 2015, has repeatedly attacked the impoverished country's populated areas.

The kingdom, it added, has deepened a humanitarian crisis in Yemen through imposing a blockade, destroying infrastructure and restricting humanitarian workers' access to the conflict-ridden state.

Sarah Leah Whitson, the Middle East director at HRW, denounced war crimes committed in Yemen over the past almost three years, noting, "United Nations Security Council sanctions on Houthi leaders should be extended to senior [Saudi-led] coalition military leaders, including Saudi Defense Minister Mohammed bin Salman, for their role in obstructing aid and other abuses."

The HRW accused Saudi Arabia and its allies of using Western-supplied arms and cluster munitions in their "indiscriminate and disproportionate airstrikes" in Yemen



that have killed thousands of civilians.

The rights group also noted that it had documented six deadly Saudi air raids since December 2017.

"Coalition military actions have violated laws-of-war prohibitions on restricting humanitarian assistance and on destroying objects essential to the survival of the civilian

population," HRW said in its report.

"These violations, as well as the coalition's disregard for the reported suffering of the civilian population, suggest that the coalition may be violating the prohibition against using starvation as a method of warfare, which is a war crime," the report added.

It further referred to the Western powers'

complicity in the war on Yemen, demanding the UN to include Saudi leaders in its blacklist.

Meanwhile, Whitson told reporters that "the U.S., UK, France and others are risking complicity in unlawful coalition airstrikes by continuing to provide weapons to Saudi Arabia."

"Faced with the world's worst humanitarian crisis, governments should be urging the UN to enact sanctions against Saudi leaders, not selling them more bombs to use on Yemeni markets, schools, and hospitals," she added.

More than 13,600 people have been killed since the onset of the Saudi-led war on Yemen. Much of the Arabian Peninsula country's infrastructure has also been reduced to rubble in military strikes.

The Saudi aggression was launched in a bid to reinstate a former Riyadh-friendly government and to eliminate the Houthi Ansarullah movement, but it has achieved neither of its goals so far.

A total of 22.2 million people in Yemen are in need of humanitarian aid, 8.4 million at risk of famine, with the country experiencing one of the worst cholera outbreaks on record.

(Source: Press TV)

'We will fight': 9/11 families renew bid to sue Saudi

Saudi Arabia has again defended its government against allegations of providing support to the perpetrators of the September 11, 2001, attacks in New York, as the kingdom's lawyers faced family members of victims in a Manhattan federal courtroom.

Thursday's hearing marked the third time a group of families of 9/11 victims and survivors have tried to sue the Saudi government for damages relating to the attack that killed nearly 3,000 people.

Fifteen of the 19 attackers were Saudi citizens. It was the first hearing since Congress passed legislation removing aspects of sovereign immunity that had prevented previous cases against the Saudi government from being heard.

Victims' relatives, survivors and insurance companies have claimed that members of the Saudi government supported the al-Qaeda-affiliated men who hijacked and crashed planes into New York's World Trade Center, the Pentagon outside Washington, and a Pennsylvania field.

They also accuse Saudi Arabia of funding charities that supported al-Qaeda.

Terry Strada, national chair of 9/11 Families and Survivors United for Justice Against Terrorism, fought for the legislation to limit sovereign immunity.

She said her group would keep pushing to expose what she sees as clear financial ties between the attack and the royal family.

"I'll never be tired of doing this," Strada told Al Jazeera. "We will fight until the end."

She said her life had not been the same since she lost her husband, Tom, the father of her three children.

"I don't have anything else. I'm going to take this as far as I can."

In 2015, the suspicion that the Saudi attackers had help from their government was investigated and dismissed for lack of evidence by the 9/11 Commission.

But lawyers for the plaintiffs say the commission's report was inconclusive, and new evidence has since come to light, including previously classified documents and supporting testimony from two former FBI agents and former Senator Bob Graham of Florida, who served on the 9/11 Commission.

'Hearsay and speculation'

Lawyers for Saudi Arabia say the accusations are "baseless" and are again trying to get the case dismissed, arguing in court documents that the new evidence is "hearsay and speculation, insufficient to support the findings required for jurisdiction over Saudi Arabia".

The families believe the evidence shows that US-based Saudi government agents helped the hijackers and that the government knowingly funded charities that supported "anti-Western, jihadist ideology".

Lawyer Sean Carter, who represents victims and their family members, told the judge that the charities were "the principal source of funding for al-Qaeda leading up to the 9/11 attacks".

He argued the judge should allow the case to move forward to the next phase, when the plaintiffs would be able to summon prominent members of the Saudi royal family and religious leadership to testify and provide documents.

Saudi officials are trying to stop that from happening and accuse the plaintiffs of equating Islam with "terrorism".

"To equate missionary work, building mosques, providing Qurans, with terrorism is not proper in this court," lawyer Michael Kellogg argued in court.

The judge could take up to four months to decide whether or not to let the trial proceed.

If the trial is allowed to continue, it is likely to strain diplomatic and economic relations between the US and Saudi Arabia.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Cross-border clashes escalate between India, Pakistan in Kashmir

Cross-border shelling has continued between Indian and Pakistani forces in Kashmir for a third day, reportedly leaving casualties on both sides of the disputed border in the Himalayan region.

Pakistan's military said in a statement on Friday that Indian troops initiated fire from across the border and targeted Pakistani villages along Kashmir, killing two civilians and wounding five others. The country's Foreign Ministry later said the fatalities were all women.



India rejected the claim, saying Pakistan initiated the fire, killing a teenage girl and a soldier on the Indian side of the disputed region.

An Indian paramilitary officer said soldiers were responding to Pakistani firing and shelling on dozens of border posts, which he called an "unprovoked" violation of a 2003 ceasefire accord.

Indian police officer S.D. Singh said at least six Indian civilians and a soldier were also wounded by Pakistani fire and that Indian paramilitary.

He added that Pakistani soldiers fired mortars and automatic gunfire at some 15 posts in the Jammu region.

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry summoned an Indian diplomat on Thursday, condemning the latest alleged ceasefire violation.

Both India and Pakistan lay claim to the entire Kashmir region and have fought three wars over it. Each controls only parts of the territory, however. In 2003, the two countries reached a ceasefire over but sporadic clashes continue.

The United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) has been monitoring the border for decades.

(Source: Press TV)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	98923.6
IFX	1093.05

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	44,340 rials
EUR	55,780 rials
GBP	62,750 rials
AED	12,550 rials

Source: Mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$68.68/b
WTI	\$63.37/b
OPEC Basket	\$67.07/b
Gold	\$1,334.45/oz
Silver	\$17.05/oz
Platinum	\$1,015.95/oz

Sources: Oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Iran Central Bank files \$4.9b complaint against Deutsche Boerse subsidiary

Alternatively, Bank Markazi seeks damages worth the same amount, Deutsche Boerse said.

The sought assets include about \$1.9 billion which was turned over to plaintiffs in the U.S. following a binding 2013 U.S. court order in a proceeding involving the Iranian bank, Deutsche Boerse said.

The bank's complaint also addresses around \$2 billion in customer assets which are held at Clearstream and are subject to litigation in the U.S. and Luxembourg.

Clearstream believes the complaint against it is without merit and the subsidiary will take «all necessary and appropriate measures to vigorously contest the claims.» Deutsche Boerse said.

(Source: foxbusiness.com)

Japan government upgrades economic view for first time in seven months

The Japanese government raised its assessment of the economy in January for the first time in seven months due to rising consumer spending, an encouraging sign that inflation could start to pick up this year.

“Japan’s economy is gradually recovering,” the Cabinet Office said in its monthly economic report on Friday. That marked an upgrade from December, when the Cabinet Office said the economy was on a recovery path.

The government also raised its assessment of consumer spending for the first time since June after retail sales, household spending, and new car sales gained momentum toward the end of 2017.

Consumer spending is “recovering,” which is an upgrade from the phrase “gradual recovery” used in last month’s report.

The assessment increases the chance that the government will declare an end to deflation, which would amount to a declaration of victory for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s ambitious campaign to reflate the economy.

“The difference between previous recoveries and the current recovery is that right now both the corporate sector and the household sector are steadily improving,” said Japanese Economy Minister Toshimitsu Motegi.

Data for November and December showed consumer spending bounced back from a lull caused by bad weather, a Cabinet Office official told reporters.

(Source: Reuters)

Iran, Pakistan in accord to revive Zahedan-Quetta railway service

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran and Pakistan agreed to revive passenger train service between Iran’s Zahedan in south eastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan and Pakistan’s Quetta in Balochistan till mid-September 2018, IRNA reported on Thursday.

During a two-day meeting held to collaborate on Iran-Pakistan railway transportation joint committee at the place of Pakistan Ministry of Railways, the two sides agreed on revival of the named railway when security situations are improved in Pakistan.

The meeting was headed by Head of Zahedan Railways Majid Arjouni and Pakistan’s Railways Board Secretary Zubair Shafi Ghauri.

The passenger train service will be developed between Quetta and Iranian cities of Mashhad or Qom, and will largely cater to the needs of pilgrims during Muharram.

Earlier, an international mixed passenger and freight service used to be operated twice a month by the Pakistan Railways between Quetta and Zahedan. The train service, named after the Iranian city, used to run on the first and fifteenth day of every month from Quetta to Zahedan and the third and seventeenth of each month from Zahedan to Quetta. It used to take 33 hours to cover a distance of 732km along the entire stretch of the Quetta-Taftan railway line.



Revision of the 1959 agreement between Pakistan Railways and Iranian Railways was also under consideration in this meeting, the report confirmed.

Iran’s oil revenue jumps near 50%

ENERGY TEHRAN — Iran’s revenues from crude oil and oil products exports reached 536.8 trillion rials (about \$12.128 billion) in the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-November 21, 2017) up 49 percent compared to its preceding year’s same period.

The country’s crude oil sales reached 402.4 trillion rials (about \$9.09 billion) in the mentioned time span while the figure stood at 270.4 trillion rials (about \$6.1 billion) in the preceding year, IRIB news reported on Wednesday.

Iran’s revenues from crude oil and gas condensate exports exceeded \$23 billion since the beginning of current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2017), IRIB news reported on Wednesday.

According to the report citing Shana,



Iran has exported 2.6 million barrels of crude oil and gas condensate on average on a daily basis.

China, India, Japan and South Korea are among the country’s main crude importers shipping in 60 percent of Iran’s total oil exports. The other 40 percent of the country’s crude exports heads to the European buyers.

Sri Lanka to settle \$42m oil dues to Iran by Feb.

ENERGY TEHRAN — Sri Lanka is going to pay \$42 million of its oil dues to Iran this February, Sri Lankan Daily Mirror reported citing the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

“Following the establishment of a payment platform, external arrears with the Export Development Bank of Iran are being paid based on a schedule shared with the Iranian authorities and will be cleared by February 2018,” the report quoted IMF as saying.

Sri Lanka had accumulated \$42 million in arrears by mid-2017 and \$13 million of this were accumulated in 2016 and 2017 due to continued difficulties in establishing the payment platform.

The arrears began in 2013 due to payment barriers arising from the sanc-



tions imposed on Iran by the U.S.

The continued increase in arrears over the last two years was a breach of the continuous performance criterion of the \$1.5 billion balance of payments loan provided to Sri Lanka, linked to economic reforms. The IMF had provided a waiver for the two breaches in mid-2017.

Ban on rice imports to be waived from Sunday

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran waived the ban on rice imports for a five-month period starting from Sunday, Tasnim news agency reported on Friday.

The waiver was announced to Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Mohammad Shariatmadari in a letter by Agriculture Minister Mahmoud Hojjati on January 14.

On December 31, 2017, the Islamic



Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) banned any registration for imports of rice until further notice, IRNA reported at the time.

“Regarding the mass imports of rice, more than one million tons, during the first five months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21- August 22, 2017), which surpassed domestic consumption and pulled

market into recession, no further order registration should be allowed,” Hojjati wrote to Shariatmadari on December 20.

Accordingly, IRICA announced that registration for imports of rice is forbidden until further notice due to the order of agriculture minister and exports and imports regulations of Iran Trade Promotion organization (TPO).

Trump is ‘determined to bite somebody, and China is the most likely target,’ trade expert says

A year after President Donald Trump took office, the United States’ trade deficit with China looms larger than ever.

Although both countries calculate the gap differently, the latest data from Beijing indicates a trade differential at a record high of \$275.81 billion in 2017. That figure does not bode well for bilateral relations, which many expect to take a turn for the worse in 2018 after a year of relative inaction from Trump.

“The prevailing view in Washington now is that, this year, he is determined to bite somebody, and China is the most likely target,” William Reinsch, the former president of the

National Foreign Trade Council, told CNBC.

Trump himself told Reuters in an interview on Wednesday the U.S. was considering a big “fine” as part of a probe into China’s alleged theft of intellectual property.

Experts in China are also widely expecting trade tensions to ratchet up.

Tu Guangshao, vice chairman and president of China Investment Corporation said he expects “trade friction,” but not a “serious trade war,” between the two major economies.

“The basic premise is that China-U.S. trade is not just benefits China, but in fact benefits the U.S. as well,” Tu told

delegates at The Asian Financial Forum on Monday, according to transcriptions of his comments.

Trump has consistently deemed trade with China unfair to America, but he’s indicated that he had held back from further action as he sought Beijing’s help in bringing North Korea’s nuclear ambitions under control.

Any broad-based action could be detrimental for both sides, as trade between the world’s two largest economies has been growing in spite of differences — China is America’s largest single trading partner.

(Source: cnbc)

Second Announcement

Government Trading Corporation of Iran G.T.C.

SINGLE- STAGE INTERNATIONAL TENDER

GOVERNMENT TRADING CORPORATION OF IRAN

Government Trading Corporation of Iran (hereinafter referred to as GTC), affiliated to the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad of the Islamic Republic of Iran, intends to purchase 45,000 M/Ts 10 pct M/L Indian 1121 sella rice, (in 3 separate cargoes of 15000 MTs M/L 10% each. cargoes to be shipped in 3 lots at 10 days interval during April, May, June 2018) on CFR basis, through single stage international tender.

All qualified companies and suppliers who are interested to bid above tender are invited to receive tender documents from 20/01/ 2018 until 28/01/ 2018 from Trades & Tenders Committee located on the 4th floor of GTC building no 2 , at No 225 Fatemi Avenue Tehran-Iran. along with an official letter of introduction.

The bidders are required to submit stamped and sealed envelopes containing their offers latest by 12:00 on 27/02/2018 to the Tender secretariat located on the 7th floor. The bid’s envelope will be opened at 27/02/2018 By13:00 In the presents of the bidder’s representative in GTC’s purchasing committee hall . (9th floor, No 12, Jahad Square, Tehran, Iran).

Bid bond: bid bond worth EUR 298,913 (IRR 13,750,000,000) for each 15000 MT cargo

Bid bonds may be deposited either cash in Rials or through an unconditional bank guarantee issued in Euros by renowned Iranian bank located in Tehran, with three months validity and extendible for another three months.

Note: participates who wish to bid for more than one cargo are obliged to deposit the above mentioned bid bond for each extra shipment.

For more information, you may refer to our website WWW.GTC-PORTAL.COM or contact us by phoneNo.00982188957477 (foreign trade department).

Second Announcement

Government Trading Corporation of Iran G.T.C.

ONE STEP INTERNATIONAL TENDER

GOVERNMENT TRADING CORPORATION OF IRAN

The Government Trading Corporation of Iran (hereinafter referred to as GTC), affiliated to the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad of the Islamic Republic of Iran, intends to purchase 30,000 M/Ts 10 pct M/L RBD palm olein , through single stage international tender

All of qualified companies and suppliers that are interested to bid above tender are invited to receive tender documents from 20/01/2018 until 28/01/2018

from the secretary of Trades & Tenders committee located on the 4th floor of GTC building no 2 , Iran, Tehran , Fatmei Ave . opposite of Water and Wastewater Co. along with an official letter of introduction.

The bid participants are required to submit their stamped and sealed envelopes containing their offers latest on 13:00(Tehran time) on 27.02.2018 to the secretariat of tenders committee located on the 7th floor. Meanwhile the meeting for the opening of the envelopes will be held on 27.02.2018 at 14:00(Tehran time) with the presence of bidder’s representatives in our purchasing committee (9th floor, No 12, Jahad Square, Tehran, Iran).

Bid bond: the bid bond worth EUR 325,313 (IRR. 14,964,400,000) in cash or unconditional bank guarantee with three months validity and extendible for another three months.

For more information, you may refer to our website WWW.GTC-PORTAL.COM or contact us by phoneNo.00982188957477 (foreign trade department).

OPEC frets about new flood of U.S. oil

OPEC increased its forecast for rival oil-supply growth for a second month running after a recovery in prices sent Brent crude to \$70 a barrel.

OPEC's output cuts -- now entering a second year -- have been successful in eroding bloated stockpiles and lifting prices to a three-year high. Yet the rally has prompted concern that competitors in the U.S. will be emboldened to expand production.

"Higher oil prices are bringing more supply to the market, particularly in North America," the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries said Thursday in its monthly report. The group raised its forecast for 2018 non-OPEC supply growth by 160,000 barrels a day, or 16 percent, to 1.15 million barrels a day.

Expected growth in total U.S. crude supply was revised higher by 110,000 barrels a day to 820,000 a day, led by conventional production. OPEC lowered its forecast for shale-oil output



by 1.1 percent from last month's report, to about 5.42 million barrels a day.

■ Upward revision
OPEC and partners including Russia

will meet this weekend in Oman to review their strategy for clearing the global oil glut. While soaring prices have prompted warnings -- from Iran's oil minister to Goldman Sachs Group Inc. -- of a fresh surge in U.S. production, ministers from the United Arab Emirates, Iraq and Kuwait insist there's no need to change tack and the cartel will stick with its plan to restrain output for the rest of the year.

OPEC lowered its forecast for demand for its own crude this year to 33.09 million barrels a day from 33.15 million a day. That still exceeds its average daily output last month of 32.42 million barrels a day.

The group's output cuts are aimed at bringing OECD commercial stockpile levels back to the five-year average. Levels were 133 million barrels above average in November, down from 137 million a month earlier.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Oil prices fall as U.S. output rise outweighs crude stock falls

Oil prices slid on Friday, putting them on course for the biggest weekly falls since October, as a bounce-back in U.S. production outweighed ongoing declines in crude inventories.

Brent crude futures were at \$68.70 a barrel at 0949 GMT, down 61 cents from their last close. On Monday, they hit their highest since December 2014 at \$70.37.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were at \$63.38 a barrel, down 57 cents from their last settlement. WTI marked a December-2014 peak of \$64.89 a barrel on Tuesday.

The International Energy Agency (IEA), in its monthly report, said that global oil stocks have tightened substantially, aided by OPEC cuts, demand growth and Venezuelan production hitting near 30-year lows.

But it warned that rapidly increasing production in the United States could threaten market balancing.

"Explosive growth in the U.S. and substantial gains in Canada and Brazil will far outweigh potentially steep declines in Venezuela and Mexico," the IEA said of 2018 production.

U.S. crude oil production stood at 9.75



million barrels per day (bpd) on Jan. 12, data from the Energy Information Administration showed. The IEA said it expects this to soon exceed 10 million bpd, overtaking OPEC behemoth Saudi Arabia and rivaling Russia.

Analysts also pointed to an expected demand slowdown at the end of winter in the northern hemisphere and excessive long positions in financial oil markets as a likely brake on any upward momentum in prices.

ANZ bank said "an upcoming soft patch in demand and extreme investor positioning does open up the possibility of some short-term weakness".

(Source: Reuters)

China says sunken Iranian tanker may be leaking bunker fuel

Bunker fuel may now be leaking from the Iranian oil tanker that sank in the East China Sea last Sunday, China's State Oceanic Administration (SOA) said, underlining fears for contamination from the world's worst oil ship disaster in decades.

In a statement issued late on Thursday, the SOA said several previously unreported slicks were spotted by planes, vessels and satellites near the disaster site. The SOA said one, seen 2.5 kilometers (km) east of the wreck site around 0600 local time on Thursday, may indicate leakage of extremely toxic bunker fuel, the heavy oil used in ship engines.

It remain unclear how much bunker fuel was left aboard the tanker, the Sanchi, when it sank. Experts estimated it may have been carrying about 1,000 tons at the time it collided with the CF Crystal grain freighter.

Bunker fuel is noxious to marine organisms and difficult to remove from the sea once spilled, unlike the condensate fuel - an extremely light form of oil - that was being shipped by the Sanchi at the time of the collision.

The Sanchi was carrying 136,000 tons



of condensate before the accident, most of which evaporated after the stricken shipped burned for days.

The SOA said it will continue carrying out monitoring and environmental impact assessment works.

Three slicks covering a combined area of 20.7 square km were spotted by satellite, with the largest in size 17.4 square km, the SOA said in its statement.

That combined area was 80.3 square km smaller than the total reported a day earlier. But water samples taken at four of the total 22 spill sites detected so far were found to exceed petroleum substance standards.

(Source: Reuters)

\$70 oil cripples European refiners

In the latest indication of the strength of the recovery of global oil prices, European refineries are struggling to pay their crude bills as margins decline and demand weakens for some of their products, Bloomberg reports.

The profit curve for fuel oil, used by shippers and power stations, has fallen the most dramatically. High inflows of diesel in the Middle East are making that fuel difficult to bank on as well.

As a result of the capital crunch, refinery runs could become shorter, KBC Advanced Technologies, a research firm in the sector, says, though part of these fluctuations are owed to normal seasonal tendencies.

"Oil demand usually slackens in the first quarter and into the second quarter, so sooner or later refinery intakes will have to slacken and the usual signal for that is lower margins," KBC chief economist Stephen George said.

The timing of the revised production strategy comes just as refinery margins reach a three-

year low, Barclays says, which is particularly telling. The oil price crash in late 2014 largely shapes the market. Hydroskimming facilities, which refine fuels in a relatively unsophisticated process, have it tough because their techniques do not allow for diesel or gasoline production like complex refineries.

"Fuel oil cracks are paltry, which is impacting hydroskimming margins, with Urals margins in particular falling," Ehsan Ul-Haq, of the London-based Resource Economist Ltd. told Bloomberg. Russia's Urals crude grade is more sensitive to the strong markets because of its high fuel yield, he added.

Data compiled by Bloomberg captures the high fuel shipments from the Middle East that make it difficult for European refined goods to compete in domestic markets. January totals are set to be the highest in a year, tanker tracker figures show.

"Given refiners have been trying to maximize runs to take advantage of the especially good

margins in the last couple of years -- now with lower margins, we could see slightly lower run levels all around," says Salih Yilmaz, an analyst at Bloomberg Intelligence.

Though oil markets are gearing up for higher crude prices in the coming months, high production forecasts from the United States and foreboding statements from Russia regarding a potential withdrawal from the OPEC deal threaten to derail the recovery.

Countries in "OPEC are fearful of not only the shale response, but of deep water and of oil sands from Canada," Citigroup Commodities Research head Ed Morse said in an official note. "There could be an agreement on ramping production back up over the summer."

In November, the Vienna OPEC summit produced a pact to continue the 1.2-million-barrel-per-day reduction bloc-wide through 2018. An additional 600,000-bpd in cuts was promised by Russia and a group of allied countries with a major stake in world oil

prices. Canada and the U.S. were not part of this group.

The agreement states that countries party to the deal will get a chance to "review" the deal come June, though the implications of this clause are unclear. Will members be able to withdraw early if prices look stronger than anticipated?

Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak has suggested a Russian withdrawal could be a possibility sooner rather than later, but then reversed the volatility he caused with a simple statement of neutrality: "Right now, I think the agreement must continue and not react to momentary, passing changes."

Novak's counterparts from OPEC nations are all still onboard with the deal. Even countries like Iraq and Iran, both recovering from different kinds of economic ailments over the past decade, support continued cuts. European refiners will not see margins jump anytime soon. (Source: oilprice.com)

U.S. could topple Russia, Saudi Arabia as world's largest oil producer, IEA says

The U.S. is well-placed to overtake the likes of Saudi Arabia and Russia as the world's leading energy producer over the next 12 months, according to the latest monthly report from the International Energy Agency (IEA).

"This year promises to be a record-setting one for the U.S.," the IEA said in its closely-watched report published Friday.

"Relentless growth should see the U.S. hit historic highs above 10 million barrels a day (in production), overtaking Saudi Arabia and rivaling Russia during the course of 2018 -- provided OPEC and non-OPEC restraints remain in place," the Paris-based organization added.

■ 'Uncharted waters'

The latest monthly report from the IEA comes at a time when crude futures have climbed to highs not seen since the early days of a slump in December 2014. Brent crude futures hit a peak of \$70.37 a barrel on Monday, with the global benchmark since paring some of its recent gains to trade at \$68.69 on Friday morning.

"What we are trying to understand is the responsiveness of the U.S. shale producers. And because of the dynamism of the industry, the innovation and the vast number of players in that space ... to some extent, we are in uncharted waters," Neil Atkinson, head of the oil industry and markets division at the IEA, told CNBC on Friday.

Atkinson said that given the recent rally in oil prices, the IEA was expecting a "wave of



new production" from the U.S. in the coming months. He added OPEC would then need to "accommodate" for that and make its own judgment at its next meeting in June as to what its response should be.

The main price driver has been a supply cut from major oil producing group OPEC and Russia, who started to withhold output in January last year. The production cuts by OPEC and 10 other allied producers, which are scheduled to last throughout 2018, are aimed at clearing a supply overhang and

propping up prices.

One of the main beneficiaries of these cuts is the producers' major competitor, U.S. shale oil. U.S. oil producers are staging a dramatic comeback amid a recovering oil price that has allowed many of them to restart operations.

■ U.S. 'beat all expectations' in 2017
U.S. crude production stands at 9.9 million barrels a day, according to the IEA, which is the country's highest level in almost 50 years. That level of supply puts the U.S. neck-and-neck with OPEC kingpin Saudi Arabia -- the

(Source: CNBC)

BP returns to northern Iraq's recaptured oil fields

BP has marked its return to the oilfields of northern Iraq with an ambitious deal to help Iraq more than double crude flows from its "super-giant" oilfield after government troops recaptured the region from Kurdish forces.

The oil major was forced to withdraw from the battle torn region in 2015 but on Thursday signed an agreement with Iraqi government officials to restore the region's crude production to between 700,000 and 750,000 barrels of oil a day.

The Kirkuk oil fields were taken back under government control in October last year, paving the way for the deal, signed by BP's Middle East boss Michael Townshend and Iraqi oil minister Jabar al-Luabi at the Kirkuk headquarters of Iraq's state-owned North Oil Company (NOC).

The letter of intent pledges BP's support in redeveloping the field by carrying out seismic survey operations and studies to help overhaul the field's operations. It also commits BP to helping in the longer-term redevelopment of the field.

A BP spokesman said the deal is an extension of the agreement first signed in 2013 but derailed after Kurdish forces took control of the Kirkuk field to help fuel their battle against Isis fighters.

Genel Energy and Gulf Keystone were also among those stung by the bitter conflict between Kurdish militants and Isis fighters which has made securing payment for their crude extremely difficult in the past.

But BP's show of confidence in Baghdad's government is the latest in a flurry of returning interest to the oil-rich region.

Chevron said earlier this week that it would restart drilling in the region, and Russia's Rosneft has also begun work in Iraqi Kurdistan.

The revived co-operation also serves to deepen BP's relationship with Iraq, where the oil major has a long exploration and production history after first discovering oil there in the Twenties.

BP was also the first major international oil company to return to Iraq after 35 years of isolation in 2009 to ramp up production of the super-giant Rumaila oil field in the south of Iraq.

Since then BP, and its consortium partners, have managed to increase production at the field by 40pc to 1.45 million barrels of oil a day to become the government's biggest source of crude exports.

Iraq's ultra-low-cost oil is an increasingly lucrative export as the global market recovers from twelve year lows in early 2016. But it will need to keep a lid production to comply with a deal agreed between the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and other major oil producing nations to shore up oil market prices.

The group agreed to extend the cuts until the end of the year, causing oil prices to climb towards the \$70 a barrel mark. But a monthly report from the Vienna-based oil group warned that higher prices has increased the activity of oil frackers in North America which could erode the effectiveness of its supply pact.

The rise of oil production in North America, as well as Nigeria and Libya which are both exempt from the cap, is tempered by the steady decline in Venezuela's output.

The OPEC report said oil production from Venezuela has slipped further to hit its lowest level in decades amid its crippling economic crisis. (Source: The Telegraph)

The U.S. and China's battle over solar may actually benefit the industry worldwide

American solar manufacturers expect the White House to indicate whether or not it plans to impose a tariff on imported solar panel materials by next week.

In August 2017, American solar panel manufacturers Suniva and SolarWorld registered an official complaint with the United States International Trade Commission, claiming that foreign solar imports hurt American companies. The trade case, which was supported by the regulatory body, alleged cheaper imports of crystalline silicon photo voltaic cells and modules, namely those from China, were uninhibited by an undue absence of trade tariffs.

Since 2012, the U.S. has imposed tariffs on Chinese solar products, including a 31 percent import tax, which was a specific response to Chinese export dumping -- flooding the American market with discounted goods, which pushed domestic manufacturers to the margins. That same year, a report by the Information Technology & Innovation Foundation accused China, as well as India and Brazil, of taking part in "green mercantilism," including export dumping, currency manipulation, forced technology transfer and intellectual property theft.

The tariffs decreased imports from China by 45 percent in a year. While the price of solar has continued to drastically decrease, as it has since 2010, the price of the solar modules themselves has remained relatively flat since 2012.

In 2016, China exported \$14 billion of solar equipment, a 10 percent decline from 2015. Chinese investment in third-country exporters, however, was a factor in the decline. Suniva and SolarWorld's suggested a tariff should be levied against solar imports across the board.

■ Opposition from other domestic manufacturers

But other American solar manufacturers were quick to oppose the suggestion. The next week, in late August 2017, 27 manufacturers, spearheaded by Boston-based PanelClaw, published a letter to the U.S. International Trade Commission warning the tariffs would more than double the price of solar panels in the U.S.

"The solar industry is fundamentally different from both consumer products and other durable goods," the letter read. "If someone needs to buy tires, they can only put off the decision for so long. Few homeowners, businesses or utilities need to buy solar, although millions want to buy solar."

PanelClaw claims to represent more than 30 percent of the flat-roof solar racking in the country, and the 27 companies in the letter noted they represent more than 5,700 domestic manufacturing workers. Suniva and SolarWorld combine to represent less than 500.

In 2016, around 260,000 people worked in the U.S. solar industry, a 26 percent increase from 2015.

■ 'Every country outside the U.S. would benefit'

If solar module prices in the U.S. rise that may push solar manufacturers to overcapacity, and global module prices would likely follow downward. In emerging or underdeveloped markets for solar energy, overcapacity would catalyze development.

Alex Shoer, CEO of Shanghai-based Seeder Clean Energy, says that while the tariff would shrink the American market, impact non-U.S. solar manufacturers, and hinder solar development, it's unlikely to turn back present trends towards renewable energy.

"Right now, solar is a pretty economic choice in almost any market in the world," Shoer said. "The only question is, 'Are the financing mechanisms available? Is the utility rate high enough? And is there some level of contractual enforcement or creditworthiness of the off-takers?' If you can't enforce contract, then it's difficult to finance solar development." (Source: Forbes)

Can Turkey be part of the solution in Iraq?

By Gonul Tol

Tensions between the central government in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) soared after the latter held an independence referendum at the end of September. Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi responded by dislodging Kurdish forces from the disputed regions including the oil city of Kirkuk and imposed economic measures that could lead to a collapse of the KRG economy. Swift negotiations between the parties are needed to prevent further escalation. Many agree that that might not be possible without external mediation.



Turkey sees itself as the master of mediation. Under the ruling Justice and Development Party, Turkey used mediation in regional and global conflicts to exert its influence in international affairs. It even led the “friends of mediation” initiative at the United Nations along with Finland. Turkey tried tirelessly to mediate between Palestinian factions, Iraqi factions, Israel and Syria, Iraq and Syria, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia, even in the civil war in Somalia. Ankara’s mediation efforts, however, rarely yielded positive results, which was often due to Turkey’s lack of leverage over the parties or its image as a country with a neo-Ottoman agenda.

But Turkey insists on mediating. It recently signaled that it could step in to act as a go-between in Baghdad’s dispute with Erbil. In a recent statement, Turkish foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said that the KRG “has formally asked Turkey to contribute to normalization between Erbil and Baghdad.” Cavusoglu will discuss Turkey’s role in the negotiations and bilateral issues during his January 21 visit to Baghdad.

Renewed negotiations between Erbil and Baghdad are important for Turkey. Up until the KRG’s referendum decision, Erbil was one of the very few Turkish allies left in the region. It played a critical role in Turkey’s domestic and regional calculations. Through its close partnership with Erbil, Ankara sought to curb Iranian influence in Iraq. Turkey hedged its bet on Erbil in its efforts to counter the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) both at home and in the region. Masoud Barzani, former president of the KRG, tolerated Turkey’s cross-border operations against PKK hideouts inside KRG territory, and even allowed Ankara to build military bases in areas under his control where Turkey has been training peshmerga forces.

Turkey also benefited from trade with the autonomous region. The KRG has become Turkey’s third biggest export market and a supplier of oil and gas. Ankara quietly dropped its decades-old opposition to Kurdish control over the oil-rich town of Kirkuk to benefit from the oil pumped from Kirkuk via a pipeline through southeast Turkey to the Mediterranean. Turkey not only collected transit fees, but became reliant on imports to meet its own fast-growing energy needs.

The post-referendum dynamics, however, threaten all of those things. Particularly concerning for Ankara is the prospect of a stronger PKK in the absence of Barzani acting as a counterbalance. The economic measures imposed by Baghdad threaten a collapse of the Kurdish economy, thus threaten Turkish interests as well. Turkey supplies Iraqi consumer goods overland through the KRG using Kurdistan-based merchants. The KRG owes Turkey billions of dollars, but Erbil is struggling to even to pay its public servants. Ankara is also eyeing investment opportunities in Iraq as well as access to Iraq’s southern oil fields, which produce more oil than the Kirkuk fields.

Ankara wants parties to reach a swift consensus so that it can resume security partnership and oil flow. Turkey hopes that midwifing a workable arrangement between Erbil and Baghdad will provide Turkey a fresh start with both. But Abadi might not be as enthusiastic, not just about Turkish mediation but also about a swift resolution of the conflict with Erbil.

Parliamentary elections will be held in May. Once called a “traffic warden” by members of his own party, Abadi now enjoys wide popularity for reclaiming disputed territories from the Kurdish forces. Many in Iraq think that being tough on the Kurds might hand him another term in May. That means he might not be in the mood to give concessions necessary to negotiate a settlement to the Kurds before the elections.

Even if he decides to do so, Abadi will not allow Turkey to play a role at a time when he is trying to burnish his nationalistic credentials. There is a deep sense of distrust toward Turkey in Iraq. Suggestions in pro-government circles that Turkey could stake a claim to Kirkuk and Mosul, former Ottoman lands, has been deeply disturbing not only to the Iraqi government but also to Iraq’s nationalists.

Turkey’s close energy and military partnership with the KRG, its ethnic ties with the Turkmen in Kirkuk, and its relations with the major political actors in Mosul have raised suspicions about the intent of Turkey’s interventions. Many Iraqis view Turkey’s involvement with domestic Iraqi actors as a breach of Iraqi sovereignty.

Ankara’s interventions are not welcome even among Turkmen. Despite their cultural and linguistic links to Turkey, many Turkmen feel they are part of Iraq and view Turkey’s intervention on their behalf as counterproductive. Turkey’s troop presence in northern Iraq therefore sparked a strong reaction from Baghdad, which demanded Turkey withdraw troops immediately. It remains a flashpoint in bilateral ties.

(Source: The National Interest)

Turkey sees high stakes in Baghdad-Erbil reconciliation, but after being part of the problem for so long, it cannot be part of the solution now.

Britain should take inspiration from Norway’s principled stance on the UAE

By Joe Odell

The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs recently announced it has suspended sales of arms and ammunition to the United Arab Emirates. The ministry had expressed concern that these arms could be used in Yemen resulting in an intensification of the humanitarian crisis that has engulfed the country since the outbreak of the war in 2015.

According to the UN, which has been investigating war crimes in Yemen following pressure from rights groups, this crisis has claimed over 10,000 lives and has led to an epidemic of cholera, placing seven million people on the brink of famine in one of the poorest countries in the region.

■ A principled stance

This action by Norway constitutes one of the most principled stances yet taken by a European country with regards to the war in Yemen and one of its key participants, the UAE.

Norway has been selling arms and ammunition to the UAE since 2010 and according to Statistics Norway, Norwegian weapon exports to the UAE almost doubled from \$5.1m in 2015 to \$9.9m in 2016.

There has, however, so far been no signal that the British government is set to follow suit. Alongside France and the U.S., the UK has been one of the principal exporters of arms to the Persian Gulf region.

Since the bombing began in March 2015, the British government has licensed over £4.6bn (\$6.3bn) worth of arms to Saudi Arabia and over £350m (\$483.8m) to the UAE, fuelling a conflict that has so far, according to UN estimates, killed or injured over 3,500 children and led to the internal displacement of over three million people.

In the UK, significant pressure has been exerted on the British government to stop selling weapons to Saudi Arabia since the outset of the offensive. So much so that in July of last year, Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT) took the government to court in an attempt to block weapon sales by British companies to the country.

Though the High Court threw out the case, it placed an unwelcome spotlight on the UK’s increasingly close relationship with Saudi Arabia.

■ ‘An arms’ dealer’s Brexit’

It is no secret that with Brexit on the horizon, the UK’s relationship with the Persian Gulf has grown in importance. One of the first opportunities Theresa May has seized to plug the trade deficit gap has been the strengthening of the relationship with the Arabian peninsula, with states across the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council offering “signature-ready” deals on the table, just as soon as the UK leaves the EU in March 2019.

The subsequent £30bn (\$41.5bn) post-Brexit trade deal that was lined up on May’s visit to the Persian Gulf last year is a clear indication that the already heavily subsidized UK arms sector is set to receive a significant boost in the post-Brexit UK economy.

It is this vision of “an arms dealer’s Brexit” that currently holds sway within the halls of Westminster. Rather than addressing the deep structural problems



British Prime Minister Theresa May (L) shakes hands with Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Abu Dhabi’s Crown Prince and Deputy Commander in Chief of the Emirates Armed Forces (R).

Norway’s recent announcement to suspend arms sales to UAE will no doubt anger a number of British ministers who would like to keep Britain’s relations with UAE away from public scrutiny.

in the UK economy in relation to stagnant GDP growth and low productivity, the UK export economy will become increasingly reliant on the much outsourced and capital-intensive arms sector.

It is within this context that one should understand the comments made by the former Defense secretary, Michael Fallon, last year in which he bemoaned criticisms of Saudi Arabia’s human rights record as “unhelpful” to UK arms sales.

The more a state relies on its arms sector to form a key component of GDP growth, the more subordinated it becomes to this PR role where human rights abuses are airbrushed from the picture.

Though the UK’s relationship with Saudi Arabia is often in the spotlight, the same level of public scrutiny is not applied to its burgeoning ties with the United Arab Emirates. The announcement in 2015, that the UK is set to double bilateral trade with the Emirati state to a staggering £25bn by 2020, barely raised an eyebrow in the UK press.

It is, however, this lack of public scrutiny that the UK’s continued relationship with the UAE relies upon and it is why Norway’s recent announcement will no doubt anger a number of British ministers who would like to keep it that way.

■ Veneer of modernity

In recent years, the Emirati authorities have consciously reconstituted and marketed the UAE as a sort of consumer brand in the UK. For football fans, the term “The Emirates” is now inextricably

linked to the sponsorship of Arsenal Football Club.

For holidaymakers, the UAE is the luxury and grandeur of Dubai’s golden sandy beaches and five-star hotels. Few in Britain would associate it with the locking up of human rights activists or with war crimes and torture.

Scratch beneath the veneer of modernity on display at the Louvre Abu Dhabi or dizzying skyscrapers of Dubai, and one finds a tightly controlled police state that now has one of the highest rates of political prisoners per capita anywhere in the world.

A report released last week by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) slammed the UAE authorities’ recent human rights record, citing a prevalence in practices of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances and a suppression of freedom of speech in the country.

Moreover, on digging a little deeper, one begins to identify a hazy network of relations between UK corporations, the British state and UAE security forces. This was well illustrated a few months ago when UK minister for the armed forces, Mark Lancaster, refused to provide details of UK military activities in the area.

It is further illustrated by a War on Want report (2016) that identified British involvement with policing, military training and the encouragement of UK companies to provide security and surveillance

technologies to the Emirati regime.

In addition to this, last year BAE Systems exported surveillance technology to the UAE that has been used to clamp down heavily on freedom of speech and assembly in the country.

■ Tools of repression

All this has led to the arrest and detention of scores of people for such minor misdemeanors as a negative tweet or Facebook post. It is important to recognize that UK companies, as well as the British government, have provided the tools for the UAE to repress those within its borders and in this sense they are complicit.

The decision of the Norwegian government to suspend arms sales to the UAE is a cause for celebration for human rights campaigners everywhere.

As a non-EU member, albeit with single market membership, Norway has a solidly diversified economy with one of the highest rates of productivity in the world. On leaving the European Union, Britain should look to follow Norway’s model.

Instead of plugging the Brexit trade deficit by boosting arms sales to regimes around the world with appalling human rights records, Britain should seek to diversify its productive base around the high-tech industries of tomorrow, developing an export economy that enriches the world rather than helping to plunge it further into barbarism.

(Source: Middle East Eye)

The man-child in the White House reels wildly out of control

By Eugene Robinson

The rude, petulant man-child in the Oval Office is reeling ever more wildly out of control, and those who cynically or slavishly pretend otherwise are doing a grave disservice to the nation — and to themselves.

How do you like him now, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell? President Trump convened a made-for-television summit at the White House and said he’d sign any immigration bill Congress passed. “I’ll take the heat,” he boasted. So a bipartisan group of senators came up with a deal — and he rejected it out of hand, launching into an unhinged rant about “shithole countries.”

What about you, House Speaker Paul D. Ryan? You came up with a clever way to get Democrats to agree to a stopgap funding bill, dangling the possibility of a long-term renewal of the vital Children’s Health Insurance Program. But the president tweeted that “CHIP should be part of a long term solution” and not a short-term measure to keep the government from shutting down.

Is this what you signed up for, Chief of Staff John F. Kelly? In a meeting with members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, you said that some of Trump’s campaign positions on immigration were “uninformed” and that there will never be a wall along the entire U.S.-Mexico border. You reportedly added that whatever partial barrier gets built, Mexico won’t pay for it. But the president slapped you down with another series of tweets, claiming that his promised wall “has never changed or evolved from the first day I conceived of it” — and that Mexico will, too, pay for the wall, “directly or indirectly.”

How was your week, White House physician Ronny Jackson? You did what is expected of everyone who stands at the lectern in the briefing room: lavish the president with flowery, over-the-top, Dear Leader praise. He is in “excellent health,” you announced. But the test results



One year into the Trump presidency, we effectively do not have a presidency at all.

you released, according to many other doctors, indicate that Trump suffers from moderate heart disease and is on the borderline between overweight and obese.

Having fun, Stephen K. Bannon and Corey Lewandowski? As bigwigs in the Trump campaign, you helped a manifestly unfit blowhard get elected president. This week, you did the White House a favor by stonewalling the House Intelligence Committee in a way that angered even the Republicans on the panel, which is hard to do. But you remain in the crosshairs of special counsel Robert S. Mueller III’s investigation, and the best-case scenario is that you emerge unindicted and saddled with mountainous legal bills.

No one should feel sorry for those who choose to aid

and abet this travesty of an administration. They made their choices. They elected to trust a man they know to be wholly untrustworthy, and to lie shamelessly to massage his swollen ego. At this point, I wouldn’t believe Sarah Huckabee Sanders if she told me that water is wet and the sky is blue.

But the larger impact is something we all must worry about: One year into the Trump presidency, we effectively do not have a presidency at all.

As McConnell noted in frustration Wednesday, he can’t orchestrate passage of an immigration bill unless he knows what Trump is willing to sign. Likewise, Ryan can’t pass spending legislation unless he knows what Trump will and will not accept. But the president has no fixed positions. His word is completely unreliable. How are congressional leaders supposed to do their jobs?

Regarding foreign policy, how can other nations take seriously anything Secretary of State Rex Tillerson says when he is subject to being countermanded on Twitter at any moment? What is the point of Jared Kushner’s diplomacy, if you can call it that, in the Middle East? Does “America first” really mean anything, or is it just Trumpian hot air?

And why, at this point, do reporters even bother to attend Sanders’s briefings, unless perhaps for the entertainment value? Past press secretaries all delivered pronouncements that were loaded with spin, but Sanders concocts laughable fantasies out of thin air — usually to “justify” crazy things Trump has said or tweeted.

The nation has never faced a situation like this: It is unwise to take literally or seriously anything the president and his official spokesmen say. An administration with no credibility cannot possibly lead.

Trump is incapable of growing into the job; if anything, he is becoming more erratic. I fear the day when a crisis arises and we must face it with a bratty preteen at the helm.

(Source: Washington Post)

Endless suffering in Yemen

By Ramin Hossein Abadian

TEHRAN — Nearly 3 years have passed since the Saudi invasions of the defenseless people of Yemen. This is while the war crimes committed in this country are barely seen elsewhere throughout history.

On March 25, 2015, Saudi Arabia, with the cooperation of a number of regional allies, began a clear military invasion against the innocent Yemenis.

The Saudis along with their regional allies made this blatant aggression against Yemen under the pretext of 'restoring legitimacy' and targeted Yemeni civilians and the country's infrastructure in the first hours of the military attack.

Many hospitals, schools, universities, shopping malls, even beaches, agricultural fields, fishing boat - many of which are sources of livelihood for people - bridges, strategic communication centers, power plants, water supplies, and others have become targeted by their heavy attacks.

The aggressive fighters of the Arab-led coalition, steered by Saudi Arabia, began their hostile military operations against the Yemenis. In the attacks, civilians were reportedly targeted directly, while the world kept silent.

Although Saudi officials have claimed that these attacks targeted only military sites, all the evidence, including the high number of civilian deaths, proves the contrary.

On the other hand, damages to residential areas, available on thousands of video files, are yet another proof of the Saudi outright lies in targeting sheer military sites.

This is despite the fact that international laws all emphasize the need to avoid targeting civilians and the infrastructure of countries in the event of a war. The Saudis' attacks on the Yemeni infrastructure have caused so many problems for the people of the country and have prevented them from dealing with their ordinary affairs and continuing their daily lives.

The use of international 'prohibited weapons' is one of the other crimes committed by Saudi Arabia and its supporters over the past three years against the defenseless Yemeni people.

From the very early days of the attacks on Yemen, intruders exploited various types of weapons of mass destruction, most impor-

tantly 'cluster bombs'.

Many international human rights organizations have confirmed the usage of weapons of mass destruction by the Saudis and their allies particularly cluster bombs.

In this regard, Amnesty International on October 30, 2015, explicitly reported that Saudi aggressors used the banned cluster bombs in residential areas in Yemen. Since that date, Amnesty International has also published numerous reports on the use of banned weapons by Riyadh against Sana'a.

Meanwhile, the United Nations Human Rights Watch has also released reports on violation of humanitarian law by the Saudis in Yemen. According to these international human rights organizations and institutions, the prohibited weapons that the Saudis use against the Yemeni people will have devastating and long-term effects on the country and its future generations. Currently, many children born in Yemen have been affected by these weapons, and as a result, they are faced with disabilities and other severe physical problems.

These aggressive attacks have brought about humanitarian crisis in Yemen, and consequently many international organizations have voiced objections to the deteriorating conditions of the state. In this regard, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has said that 22.2 million Yemeni people (76 percent of the population) need humanitarian aid, and that figure has risen by 1.5 million over the past six months.

The risk of hunger is increasing in the country, 8.4 million people are suffering from starvation, up from 6.8 million last year. The United Nations has announced that hunger accounts for more than half of the country's provinces, with 72 out of 95 areas more exposed to hunger. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs also reported that more than 1,500 schools in Yemen were partially or completely destroyed.

However, the crimes of the Saudis and their allies, including the United Arab Emirates, have been surpassed by the media outlets. Many reports indicate the UAE maintains a network of secret prisons in the southern provinces of Yemen, especially in Aden, where Yemeni revolutionaries are being brutally tortured.

The report published by the Associated



Press on June 23 documented the existence of at least 18 secret prisons in southern Yemen which are run by the United Arab Emirates and by Yemeni forces it created. These prisons are located in military bases, ports, some airports and villas, and even night clubs.

The UAE also operates at least two 'illegal detention facilities' in Yemen, and reports indicate that detainees have been transferred to a base in Eritrea. Earlier, Senior U.S. Defense Forces confirmed that U.S. forces have participated in interrogations of detainees in Yemen, but have not accepted any interference in the violation of human rights.

So far, more than 400 people have disappeared in these prisons. It has been reported that numerous torture methods have been employed in these prisons, including the terrible torture technique of the "furnace", in which the victim is locked up and thrown around a circle of fire.

These disasters are happening while the international community expects the Yemeni army and committees to refrain from defensive and deterrent actions against the Saudis.

In line with that, Sadegh Al-Sharafi, a member of Ansarallah movement told Mehr news agency, "Why should stop the attacks against the Saudis? The perpetrators know that today there is decisive determination to confront their military aggression in Yemen. From now on, the Yemeni missile attacks

will continue. The missiles will be fired from now on and may even target the residence of princes in the UAE and Saudi Arabia."

The Yemeni official continued to say: "If the Saudis and the aggressors were able to stop the rocket attacks of the Yemeni forces, they would have done it in the first days or months of the attack. Thus, Yemeni missile attacks continue to target the Saudi and Emirati sites."

"We say to them that they should stop trying to halt the Yemeni incursions." The remarks came after Saudi Arabia demanded that the Yemeni people should surrender.

In any case, Yemen is faced with a full-blown human disaster today.

So far, more than 13,000 civilians have been martyred in Yemen, and thousands more have sustained severe injuries. Many residential areas and infrastructure in Yemen have been destroyed.

The number of cholera victims in the country has exceeded 2,000 and now about hundreds more are at risk of being infected with the continuing suicide attacks.

Millions of Yemenis are displaced and many more are in need of food and medical care.

Undoubtedly, the silence of the international community against these human disasters, which are less common in the history of mankind, will be another scum on their foreheads.

Europe's crisis in 2018

By Hanif Ghaffari

TEHRAN — 2018 is here. The last year ended while security, political, social, and economic crises remained strong in the United Europe. In other words, the United Europe started 2018 in a situation that lots of money should be expended to deal with the crises ahead. This issue is going to affect the maneuver power of many European authorities this year. No doubt this year again, we're going to witness social, economic, security and political crises in Europe. The national and federal elections in 2017 and the political knots in Berlin and Vienna showed that this year we should be waiting for many events in European countries. There are some points that need to be mentioned in this regard:



■ The intensification of political crises in Europe

Firstly, political crises in the European Union and the Eurozone will be intensified in 2018. The scope of these crises would be even wider than before as Europeans face the need for "strong and stable" governments to deal with a variety of social and security crises. The increasing popularity of extreme right-wing parties in different European countries has led to a reduction in the vote of many traditional currents, including the moderate right and the moderate left groups.

For example, in Germany, Social Democrats and Christian Democrats are still trying to hold talks on the formation of a coalition government. Meanwhile, the extremists of Alternative for Germany (AFD) gained about 13 percent of the vote in the run-up to the German parliament, becoming the third strongest party in the country. Many analysts believe that, even if the German coalition government is formed, it won't be a strong government, because Merkel will lose her power to a great extent.

This is while Merkel, as the Chancellor of Germany, plays an important role in managing the crises in Europe. The increasing popularity of right-wing extremists in European countries will definitely undermine the traditional parties and their governments. Even in some cases, political parties are forced into a coalition with extreme right-wing parties. We saw this in Austria. In Austria, the "Freedom" which is a radical party, formed a coalition with the moderate-right party of "People". This has led to the coming of the anti-immigration, anti-Islamist, and nationalist party of "Freedom" into power.

It is noteworthy that in the second half of this year, Austria will have the rotating presidency of the European Union. Undoubtedly, over the course of the second half of 2018, we will see the intensification of the conflicts between Austria and other European countries over managing the United Europe, an issue that could aggravate the crises of the United Europe.

■ The growth of extremist movements in European countries

In other European countries, far-right parties, and populist movements in general, have been able to grow their results in polls. For example, in Sweden, which its national elections are scheduled to take place in 2018, the Democratic Party, which is a nationalist and anti-Islamist party, has won the first place in the polls. Although traditional parties, through forming coalitions, would be able to prevent the Democratic Party enter the power, but in that case, we'll see a weak state in Stockholm.

On the other hand, the Swedish Democratic Party can play an important role in confronting the coalition government with up to 25 percent of the seats in parliament. In Italy, The Five Star Movement has won a large number of votes and became the first party in the polls. In this case, The Five Star Movement could become the most determining political movement in Italy (the third-largest economy in Europe), and it will affect the presence of the European Union and the Eurozone in future.

■ The Social Consequences of the Far-Right Parties Coming into Power in Europe

With no doubt, the presence of extremist movements in power can lead to many social and security crises in the Green Continent. As noted above, the growth of extremist parties in multicultural societies is going to lead to increased attacks on Muslims and immigrants in general. In this case, we will witness the occurrence of continuous security crises in the United Europe. The social and economic crises of Europe are now tied to each other. It means that as social crises in Europe are strengthened, the security crises would increase.

The common denominator of the Europe's security and social crises will be the creation of social insecurity in this continent. This is what many experts of political and security affairs in Europe have seriously warned about. If this trend continues, we'll see not only the collapse of the Eurozone, but also the fading of EU's existence. It is not without a reason that some political and security experts believe in the collapse of the European Union in the near future.

■ The economic crisis in European continues

The other crisis that still persists in Europe is the economic crisis. The European economic crisis began in 2007, and over the past ten years, has affected many of the European countries. Although austerity policies in Europe have been effective in some cases over the last decade, they have not completely eliminated the financial and commercial crises. In some countries like Greece and Spain, the economic crisis still remains strong.

Furthermore, one of the main reasons for European citizens' turn to Far-Right movements, is the economic reasons and the inability of the moderate Right and Left currents to resolve these financial problems. In such a situation, European citizens look for a "return to pre-EU time" as a way to "escape the existing situation." It seems that the austerity policies are going to continue for this year in Europe, especially in the Eurozone.

The cuts in general budget of the governments, strikes and economic protests, the entry of trade unions into the scene of confrontation with European governments, etc. are issues that the European citizens will face this year. Nevertheless, the weakening of European governments will certainly affect the economic equations of the Eurozone and will affect the European countries' joint economic and commercial policy. In such a situation, the willingness of some countries to conduct a referendum on exit from Europe (such as Brexit) would be predictable.

U.S. has "destroyed" Afghanistan, says former Afghan president

By Syed Zafar Mehdi

NEW DELHI — Addressing the Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi on Thursday, India's flagship foreign policy conference held annually, the former Afghan President Hamid Karzai lashed out at the United States, claiming that it had "destroyed" Afghanistan.

Participating in 'The Afghan Poser' panel session, Karzai said he had invited the U.S. to Afghanistan to bring peace and stability and defeat extremism, but after coming to the country, they destroyed it.

Karzai, who served as the president of Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014, fell out of favor with the US after he rejected the controversial bilateral security agreement between Washington and Kabul in the run up to 2014 Afghan presidential elections. Since then, he has repeatedly and vigorously criticized Washington's Afghanistan policy.

Slamming the U.S., Karzai said its Afghanistan policy has been a complete failure, which has given rise to dreaded militant groups like ISIS. "It is up to the United States and Pakistan to explain the rise of ISIS," the former Afghan President said. He said the militant group which has gained strong foothold in parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan in recent years sprouted in full presence of the U.S. forces.

A few months ago, Karzai had accused the U.S. of aiding ISIS in Afghanistan. "How did ISIS emerge in Afghanistan under the watch of US intelligence and military officials," he said in an interview on RT. "We have the right to ask these questions and the US government must answer." He also spoke of how the U.S. bases in Afghanistan are "used" and how "unmarked, non-military coloured helicopters" supply ISIS in many parts of the country.

Commenting on terror sanctuaries in Pakistan and Trump



administration's latest diatribe against Islamabad, Karzai said the U.S. knew it all along and how terrorism was being "used as an instrument of state policy", but little action was taken. "Now that the U.S. has admitted terror sanctuaries exist (in Pakistan), I hope they act," he said, in a sardonic tone.

On the issue of growing religious extremism in the region, without mincing words Karzai called it the "product of US-Pakistan collaboration against Soviet Union". It is pertinent to note that the militant groups like Afghan Taliban and Haqqani Network were born from the U.S.-led war against Soviet Union in Afghanistan in 1980s.

Karzai said the West is more corrupt than countries in the South-West Asia region. "I don't believe in western indices. They represent us as savages. We are a deeply cultured society," adding that the word "mafia" had western roots. He also said that "others" (the West) get the money from opium production while Afghans get the bad name.

Speaking on the same panel, Russian Deputy Foreign

Minister Igor Morgulov dismissed speculations about Russia's links with the Taliban. "We are offering to create conditions for talks (with the Taliban), but there is no evidence of Russian assistance to the Taliban, he stressed.

On Asia being a new power hub, Morgulov said it is no longer a geographical entity but "a dynamic political and economic concept".

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Seyed Kazem Sajjadpour also spoke at the conference and hailed Chabahar Port as an example of win-win cooperation, echoing what India's Shipping Minister Nitin Gadkari said last week during his meeting with Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Abbas Akhoundi.

"Chabahar is a major example of success in connectivity between Iran, Afghanistan and India. There is no competition between these orders. It's a win-win (situation) for all stakeholders", he said. India has pledged to invest \$500 million into the ambitious project in Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan province, besides an additional \$16 billion investment in Chabahar free trade zone.

Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj in her address denounced the use of terrorism as state policy. She said that it is high time world wakes up to this "global menace".

Indian Army Chief Gen. Bipin Rawat downplayed the border tension between India and China, saying the bonhomie between New Delhi and Beijing has returned to where it was prior to the Doklam incident. "I don't visualize a very serious trouble," he said.

Designed on the lines of Shangri-la Dialogue in Singapore, more than 150 speakers and over 550 delegates from around 90 countries are participating in the Raisina Dialogue.

Ibn Khaldun's insight centuries ago applies today

➔ Given this potential threat, anyone sympathetic with Iran's posture and empathetic about the difficulties of economic sanctions and other hostile moves, as one such as Dr. Rosenthal (I am reminded here) certainly would be if he were alive, suggests a desire, anyway, that whatever internal discontent there may be in Iran be minimized as much as possible, and NOT by forced suppression.

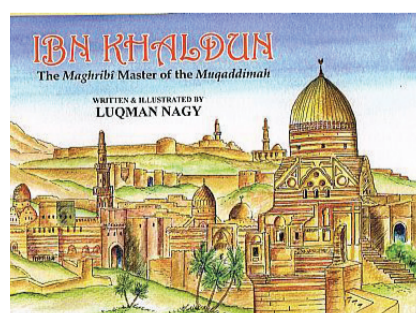
If in fact there are reasons for internal discord in Iran, those of us in the West who admire Iranians and the country's accomplishments over many centuries, feel obliged to hope fervently that the current Iranian government will correct whatever matters that exist that may be causing discontent, especially among young Iranians, who are Iran's future.

One big reason for this hope is that the U.S. or any country supportive of U.S., hostility be deprived of reasons to condemn Iran's governing authorities, even as Iran rightly maintains its rejection of imperialism and Zionism.

Consider, for example, how bad things have become in the U.S. with this micro-

cosmic anecdote: At a local school board meeting a teacher in a mid-sized city in the U.S. engages in a conversation with a school board member, but the conversation is interrupted by a policeman. The young teacher wants to know why the board members are voting themselves a huge pay raise but nothing for teachers? Then the police show up, the young woman is slammed to the floor and put in handcuffs and then carted off to jail. The teacher did nothing wrong and broke no laws, but someone did not want her challenging the school board at all. This in fact is an accurate picture of what is widespread in the U.S. today: it is corruption, obviously, backed by force. It involves entrenched authorities serving themselves rather than their constituencies. And these are the seeds of mass discontent and maybe, eventually, revolution, which under the right circumstances can happen in the U.S., just as it did in Iran in 1979.

Having never been in Iran, I do still know that there is wide gap between the haves and the have-nots. I know that the economy has been weak and there is high unemployment,



maybe 30 percent, among young people. This is also true in the U.S., where the percentage of the population is not so skewed to young people as in Iran. In the U.S., real reform is badly needed. This is also probably true in Iran. Can the current government leaders in either the U.S. or Iran be flexible enough, and unselfish enough, to permit real reform, and even to allow protest as a normal occurrence in a more open society? No one knows yet. But one thing is certain: by failing to allow evolution and reform in either country, however different the two cultures may be,

instability can be expected and at some point events might spiral out of control.

It was Ibn Khaldun's genius in the 14th century (that Franz Rosenthal at Yale recognized), that identified what Ibn Khaldun called "asabiyya", an Arabic word that roughly translates into the term "group solidarity" as the defining foundation of a strong, unified society. Every Islamic regime Ibn Khaldun studied that had fallen apart (and there were several in the North Africa of his day centuries ago) or become weak, had lost its "group solidarity" because leaders failed to address the needs of the governed and the society had become fragmented, even though it remained Islamic to the core. One only needs to reduce this to families: families are strong only to the extent that members support one another and cohesion among members remains strong, because fair dealing exists and internal corruption has been reduced or eliminated. Proper ongoing reform, as evolving circumstances warrant, is a vital task in virtually any country on earth.

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An Iranian native well-adjusted in Japanese world

By Marjan Golpira

Korouh Gilani is an Iranian man who migrated to Japan in the 1990s. Over the years he has managed to fully integrate and adjust himself in to a completely different Asian culture, however, as is in such cases, assimilating to the culture of Japan has not been an easy task.

Having spent almost three decades of his life in Japan, Gilani, now 51 years old, has lived longer in his adopted country than in Iran. One could argue that at this point he has become more Japanese than Iranian.

Gilani is among the faction of Iranian men who set out on a journey to Japan in the 1980s and 90s in the hopes of finding employment opportunities that offered better pay. Most of the jobs made available to Iranian immigrants at that time involved manual labor that offered better compensation than similar jobs that existed in Iran.

Many Iranian men who ventured off to Japan have since returned, but Gilani is among the very few who persevered and gained Japanese residency since leaving 27 years ago.

Gilani was born in 1967 in the town of Sari located in the north of Iran. His family eventually moved to Karaj, a city in the outskirts of Tehran, where he got through his primary school education.

His junior high and high school studies were all completed in Tehran and then came his mandatory military service. His two-year military service coincided with end of the Iran-Iraq war, a very difficult time for Iranians.

Facing many hardships and struggles throughout his conscription, which he refused to discuss, Gilani eventually completed his military service. At age 23, his burning desire was to leave his homeland.

"I decided to leave Iran, because I couldn't stand it any longer. I wanted to be anywhere but Iran."

Back then, it was very difficult for Iranians to obtain a visa to any of the developed countries, and to some extent, it still is. However, Japan was accepting foreign workers from Iran without a visa for blue collar work.

Except for one acquaintance in Tokyo, Gilani knew no one in Japan. Still, he was not deterred by the isolation he initially endured so far away.

It was in 1991 when Gilani finally got his plane ticket to Tokyo for 120,000 rials (\$3 at today's rate) and braved the new chapter in his life.

Finding a job was easier than he thought, as it took him only two days after arriving in Tokyo to find work. An Iranian headhunter who located jobs for Iranian immigrants found work for Gilani as a construction worker, charging him \$400 onetime fee for the service.

The young man was pleased to find himself earning around 8,000 Yen a day. "That was equivalent to a month's work in Iran," he explains, and a substantial boost to his income even though living costs in Japan were higher.

Gilani worked in construction for a year, until a new job opportunity was offered to him.



He moved to Kanagawa Prefecture, a coastal community just south of Tokyo, to excavate land for groundwater wells in residential and commercial areas, where there was a need to augment water supplies.

With the help of various machinery and industrial drills, they would dig down 100 meters to reach ground water. The work would take an average of one week to three months to complete, depending on the soil's density.

After this work experience, it took Gilani six months to land another job which tied in closely with his interests.

"A friend of mine who was returning to Iran offered me his job at a woodcutting company." He moved to Ibaraki Prefecture northeast of Tokyo, where he has been chopping wood for the same company for the past 26 years.

Today, Gilani is happily married to his long-term Japanese partner and he has a three-year-old biological son and an adopted teenage son from his wife's previous relationship.

Gilani applauds the people of Japan for being honest, sincere and hardworking, and appreciates their orderly and well-disciplined system.

Undoubtedly, Gilani has settled well in to his life in Japan, but to be where he is today he had to work very hard. When he first arrived in Japan, he had no prior knowledge of the language and culture. However, he knew all too well that the only way to realize his dreams was to learn Japanese, for one thing, which can be a challenge, for it is nothing like Farsi and is considered one of the most difficult languages to learn.

Additionally, Gilani had to familiarize himself with Japan's unique culture and ways of life. He managed over time to interact well with Japanese society. The Asian country's unique heritage and history was a source of inspiration and fascination for Gilani.

He applauds the people of Japan for being honest, sincere and hardworking, and appreciates their orderly and well-disciplined system.

Gilani returned home in 2012 after two decades of being an ex-patriot, and since then he has been making annual visits to the motherland. While in Iran, he likes to indulge in homemade Persian food, revisit his old stomping grounds, and his friends, and reminisce about his past life as a youth in his native country.

Notwithstanding the fact that Gilani has perfectly assimilated himself to the Japanese lifestyle, he has never lost the love and appreciation for his family, and Iranian food.

*Note:
The name of the main character has been changed to protect his privacy.*

Signs your aging loved ones need more care ASAP—and what to do about it

By Helaina Hovitz

When an elderly parent begins dropping pounds, you need to act quickly. Do they have mouth or tooth pain? Challenges chewing or swallowing? Feelings of nausea or fullness? Are they simply not enjoying food—or reluctant to drive to the grocery store due to declining vision? Any issues with the physical act of eating mean the two of you should get to a doctor right away.

If they simply don't enjoy eating as much, suggest small nutrient-dense snacks they can eat throughout the day—high-calorie options like peanut butter, cheese, Greek yogurt, or cottage cheese are good. Focus on foods your loved one likes and will eat: If oatmeal is a favorite, add butter, brown sugar, and raisins, dried cranberries, or nuts like almonds or walnuts for more calories and nutrition. Remind your parent that they're at an age when they should not be limiting calories.

"Also consider protein drinks," says Roth Maguire. "There are plenty on the market that offer good nutritional value in small amounts that taste great over ice or poured into coffee as a higher value creamer substitute." Protein powders can also be added to favorite food or beverages or even to recipes like those for pancakes, dessert breads, potato dishes, and soups.



If driving or transportation is an issue, explore "Meals on Wheels" or senior centers that offer meal programs in the community. You might even find a grocer who will deliver groceries. Depending on how severe the issue is, you may want to hire a home care agency to prepare meals and assist your parent with eating; the companionship will be a nice bonus.

■ Poor balance
Falls can be deadly for the elderly, so watch that your parents are still able to get around safely. Make sure their home is safe: You can cut the risk of falls by improving lighting, getting rid of throw rugs and unsteady furniture, and making sure appliance and lamp cords are out of harm's way. Here are some more ideas for keeping your parents' home safe.

If the balance issues came on suddenly or recently, schedule a doctor's visit: Potential culprits could be new medications, changes to existing medications, dehydration, inner ear infection, blood pressure alterations, and for diabetics, fluctuations in blood sugar.

Your parent may need a cane or a walker—another option you can discuss with a doctor or physical therapist. If their balance isn't too bad, suggest Tai chi, which research suggests can do wonders for balance in the elderly. "It's very important that unsteadiness is investigated quickly as it can lead to falls and for those that drive it could contribute to accidents. In addition, the older adult may limit activity and become socially isolated due to the dizzy spells," says Roth Maguire.

■ A declining mood
A sudden mood shift downwards can be a dangerous sign, warns Roth Maguire. It could signal hormonal imbalance, a problem with medication, loss of friends, or just plain loneliness. If the issue persists or is particularly bleak, you may want to look into psychotherapy or counseling sessions—and be sure to look for someone who specializes in aging. "Depression can be serious—the rate of suicide in older adult males, in particular, is very high," says Roth Maguire. "Declines in mood or function should be taken very seriously," says Roth Maguire. "I would not hesitate to ask about thoughts of self-harm or suicide and to take steps, especially with older adult males, to remove guns from the home."

Make sure your parents are staying socially engaged—most senior communities offer lots of social opportunities. Does the local church, synagogue, or temple have programs for older adults? Is there a senior center in the community that offers meals or programs, or social events?

If your parents can get around on their own and are physically capable, check into volunteering opportunities at a venue older adults tend to enjoy—church, performing arts center, school, library, museum, humane society, or food pantry, for example.

■ They're missing their meds
When the daily organizer is still full on Thursday, ask your parent or relative if they forgot or they just don't want to take their pills. Either way, you'll need to seek help. "If there are issues related to dementia or memory loss, the use of an outside home care agency may be your best bet," says Roth Maguire. They can assist not only with taking medications, she says, but they can watch for side effects and medication interactions.

There are apps for smartphones to remind your parents whether they've taken medications, and some can even be programmed to send an alert to you to let you know they're keeping up.

"If sleep is the issue, explore current sleep patterns and practices," says Roth Maguire. Is pain the reason they're not sleeping? "Talk with the pharmacist or healthcare provider for options, but something as simple as acetaminophen prior to bed may help" advises Roth Maguire. If they're turning to alcohol to fall asleep or relax, she suggests relaxing drinks like herbal tea with honey instead, or listening to soft music, taking a warm bath, or soaking the feet to help create a good sleep environment.

If your elderly parent can't relax, have a chat to brainstorm about solutions. The knowledge that they are not alone and have someone to talk with to problem-solve goes a long way to reducing stress. Suggest massage therapy, as well, which is often available at athletic clubs or senior centers.

"For some, reading books is the answer. If reading is difficult, there are many options on audio books and of course, podcasts," Roth Maguire says.

If they're still struggling, take a look for the nine signs that an elderly parent shouldn't be living alone.

(Source: CNN)

(Source: rd.com)

Can your smartphone tell you if you have depression?

By Carina Storrs

Getting a diagnosis of depression usually involves filling out questionnaires about your mood and undergoing lengthy interviews with a psychiatrist. But smartphone apps might be able to handle some of that work, and at least tell you if you are at risk of depression, simply by collecting GPS and other data, according to a new study.

Researchers at Northwestern University in Illinois tested an app they developed called Purple Robot. It uses data from a number of sensors in the smartphone that detect location, movement, phone usage and other activities to assess if a user is likely to have depression.

"The main reason for the development of the app is to see if we can objectively and passively identify if people are depressed," said Sohrab Saeb, a postdoctoral research fellow at the Feinberg School of Medicine at Northwestern University who is one of the developers of Purple Robot.

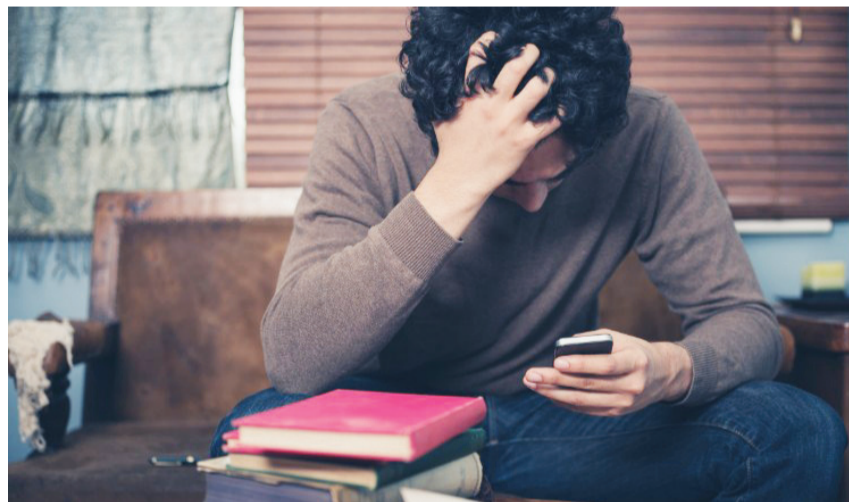
In the study of Purple Robot, Saeb and his colleagues at Northwestern and Michigan State University looked at GPS or phone usage data among 28 participants for two weeks.

They found that Purple Robot could identify 87% of the participants in the group who were determined to be at risk of depression according to PHQ-9, a nine-question test for depression, based only on GPS data on how much users moved between their regular locations. The more users moved around, the less likely they were to fall into the at-risk category.

In addition, by identifying the participants who used their phone the most, including everything from texting and playing games but not talking on the phone, Purple Robot could detect 74% of those in the at-risk group. Data on both GPS and phone usage were not available for enough participants to let the researchers see how well Purple Robot performed when both data sets were available, Saeb said.

However, PHQ-9 is only a screening tool that tells you if you have an above-average chance of having depression and is not enough to diagnose depression, said Dr. Scott Monteith, clinical assistant professor of psychiatry at Michigan State University, who has not been involved in developing or researching Purple Robot or other smartphone apps.

The way the test was used in the study, with a low cutoff score, it probably incorrectly identified many of the participants



as being at risk of depression who were not, he added.

To get a better idea of the effectiveness of Purple Robot, the researchers are going to do a study involving more participants over a longer period to see if the app can detect changes in behavior over time, Saeb said. In addition, the group will see if they can improve Purple Robot's ability to spot depression by including additional data, such as how long people talk on the phone and who they talk to.

Depression is a debilitating illness that affects about 17% of people at some point in their lives. Meanwhile, it is estimated that by 2025 more than 5 billion people in the world will have a smartphone, and their sensing capability will be above and beyond that of today's iPhones, Androids and Blackberries.

There are probably hundreds of apps that promise to improve your mental health, from offering tests to gauge your depression risk to providing information about depression treatments. Others, like Purple Robot, are in the development stage.

Optimism and DBSA Wellness Tracker are

two of the apps on the market that track your mood. Ginger.io goes further and analyzes data such as how much users move around on the weekends and how long they talk on the phone, as well as users' reports of their health, to alert them and their health care providers about concerns with their behavior and mental health. Ginger.io, which is in use at about 30 medical centers, is available through health care providers and as part of research studies.

However the problem with all the apps that are designed to warn about depression risk is that their effectiveness has not been demonstrated, Monteith said.

It is not clear how good these apps are at picking out people who have depression, Monteith said. What's more, it is not clear how these apps would be "embedded into a broader continuum of care" to ensure that a person or their doctor went from getting an alert from the app, for example, to that person getting a diagnosis of depression and getting proper care, he added.

Even if researchers can get a better handle on the effectiveness of these apps, there are still numerous questions regarding risks,

Depression is a debilitating illness that affects about 17% of people at some point in their lives. Meanwhile, it is estimated that by 2025 more than 5 billion people in the world will have a smartphone, and their sensing capability will be above and beyond that of today's iPhones, Androids and Blackberries.

10 hot titles of IT world

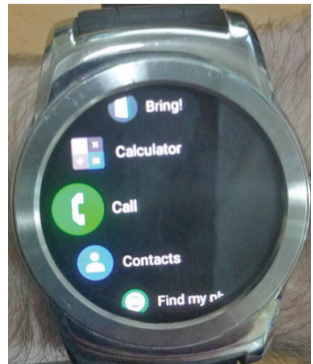
By Alireza Khorasani

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

- Software developer Abraham Masri found the bug, called "chaiOS," and posted it on GitHub. Masri told BuzzFeed News that he found the vulnerability while "fuzzing with the operating system." This vulnerability can freeze your iPhone, and, in some cases, crash it, if someone sends you a link containing malicious code on iMessage.
- China's innovation patents surge in number and quality in 2017. New patent filings numbered 1.38 million last year, up 14.2 percent. About 420,000 have been accepted, said Hu Wenhui, spokesperson for the State Intellectual Property Office. "As of the end of 2017, the number of patents in China hit 1.35 million. That is nearly 1 patent per 1,000 people," Hu said.
- France and Germany will make joint proposals to regulate the bitcoin cryptocurrency at the next summit of the G20 group of major economies in Argentina in March, French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said. The world's biggest and best-known cryptocurrency has fallen to half its record peak of almost \$20,000 in recent days on fears that regulators could seek to curb speculation.
- Italy's antitrust body said on Thursday it had opened a probe into allegations that Apple Inc. and Samsung Electronics Co Ltd used software updates to slow their mobile phones and push clients into buying new handsets. The watchdog said in a statement that the two companies had not told clients that the updates might have a negative impact on the performance of their phones.
- A group of investors led by SoftBank Group Corp closed a deal with Uber Technologies Inc, making SoftBank the largest stakeholder in the ride-services firm and providing a much-needed boost to controversy-ridden Uber. The deal includes a large purchase of shares from existing Uber investors and employees at a discounted valuation for the company of \$48 billion, a 30 percent drop from Uber's most recent valuation of \$68 billion. These secondary stock sales will be completed by the end of the day Thursday on the Nasdaq Private Market, an Uber spokesman said.
- Amazon.com Inc's inclusion of Canada's largest city on a list of 20 finalists for a massive new campus could escalate tensions between the tech giant and U.S. President Donald Trump. Amazon said that Toronto and 19 U.S. locales made the first cut in a contest to find a second headquarters where it promises to invest \$5 billion and create 50,000 jobs. Trump has already criticized Amazon and its founder Jeff Bezos, who owns the Washington Post, in tweets suggesting the U.S. Postal Service ought to raise shipping rates for the online retailer and describing the newspaper as a purveyor of fake news.
- A South Korean consumer group has filed a criminal complaint against Apple Inc CEO Tim Cook over slower iPhone devices, after probes in Europe into allegations the firm had deliberately shortened the life of its handsets. Apple is already facing lawsuits in the United States and elsewhere over accusations of having defrauded iPhone users by slowing down devices without warning to compensate for poor battery performance and to push clients into buying new phones.
- Intel has released two ready-to-use RealSense depth cameras, the D415 and the D435, that can add 3D capabilities to any device or machine. They both come in a USB-powered form factor and are capable of processing depth in real time, thanks to the chipmaker's new RealSense vision processor D4. The models work indoors and outdoors in any lighting environment, so they can be used for almost any machine that needs a depth camera. Those include drones meant to soar the skies and robots with AR/VR features.
- Facebook is testing the ability for users to upload images and videos via desktop, reports TechCrunch. Soon, users will be able to select an upload button for photos and videos similar to the way they would for news feeds, or add a video to their story from a webcam.
- The Senate has voted to reauthorize a controversial legal authority that enables vast government surveillance programs, including spying operations used by the NSA. The bill allows for continued spying operations under Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. Critics charge that the bill, which renews 702 and powers National Security Agency spying, is nominally for foreign targets, but allows the government to sweep up American communications with few safeguards.

Android Wear 2.8 app update adds darker background

Gone are the days when OTA updates were necessary to add new features to your Android Wear watch. Now, Google can add new features via the Android Wear app. A new version of the Wear app is rolling out with a few notable changes. The theme is darker, and notifications are getting some potentially interesting changes. The new version is staged, so we don't have it to test yet. From the language in the changelog, it sounds like notifications will have less unused space when you read them. I would like desperately to believe this change involves re-bundling notifications like they were prior to Wear 2.0, but it doesn't seem likely. The darker background appears to be as dark as they come—it's black. See the above pic from a tipster. The black background might improve battery life a bit on OLED watches, which is most of them now. Google says it'll improve readability. (Source: androidpolice)



Digital technology must empower workers, not alienate them

By Sundar Pichai

It's clear that people need more options to thrive in the digital world. The next generation of workers will depend on how we evolve education and tech in the coming years.

When you think of how to help our workforce thrive and find opportunities in the digital world, the first word that often comes to mind is "code." Nearly every digital-skills program over the past decade has focused on computer science, with a lot of emphasis on young students. Coding, of course, is vital and a core skill for America to invest in. Google has focused resources and employee time helping people from all backgrounds to code — from helping introduce students to the basics, to offering 10,000 free Udacity courses in coding for apps, to training other businesses in how to become experts in programming artificial intelligence. All of this will help meet the growing need for workers who can write the software that will power everyone's businesses. And it will help countless people more move into in-demand, high paying careers.

But the focus on code has left a potentially bigger opportunity largely unexplored. In the past, people were educated and learned job skills, and that was enough for a lifetime. Now, with technology changing rapidly and new job areas emerging and transforming constantly, that's no longer the case. We need to focus on making lightweight, continuous education widely available. This is just as crucial to making sure that everyone can find opportunities in the future workplace.

There are two areas that are relevant here. The first is around basic digital skills training. An office admin, for example, now needs to use online programs to run budgets, scheduling, accounting and more. While digital technology should be empowering people, it can often alienate them from their own jobs.

Some of these skills didn't exist five years ago, yet workers are today expected to have them. A recent report by the Brookings Institute says that jobs in the US requiring "medium-digital" skills in America have grown from 40 percent of jobs in 2002 to 48 percent of jobs in 2016.

The digital skills necessary to do these jobs are far easier to learn than code, and should be easier to deliver at scale. For example, we rolled out a "Grow with Google" program, and partnered with Goodwill last year to incorporate digital skills training into its already amazing training infrastructure for



job seekers. One trainee spoke of the value of her own experiences. "Before I learned digital skills, I felt unsure of myself," she says. "Now I feel confident. You have to feel confident in what you do in order to be successful and move on in life."

Through these trainings, people learn about using technology to research, to plan events, analyze data and more. They don't require a formal degree or certificate. We think there's great scope to expand this model, and teach hard and soft skills that can empower a workforce that has access to constant, accredited learning opportunities as job requirements change.

Second, we have a huge opportunity to rethink training for jobs that are core to the digital economy, but that don't require coding. IT support is a clear opportunity, here. Just as anyone has a clear path to becoming an auto mechanic, we need a similar path to the 150,000 open positions for IT support, in which people maintain the machines and software that underpin technology services. Yet no training today efficiently connects people to that opportunity.

We learned this ourselves through an

IT-support apprenticeship program we offered, with the Bay Area's Year Up job-training program. Over 90 percent of the young adults met or exceed Google's expectations as apprentices, but we noticed they didn't return to apply for full-time jobs. It turned out that the standard, two-year computer science degree cost too much time and money, teaching skills that those former apprentices simply didn't need to start their careers.

So we developed, and just announced, a new IT certificate program alongside Coursera that's far more focused and flexible. We believe in just 8 to 12 months, it teaches everything you need to be an IT support technician. IT support jobs are predicted to grow by 10 percent from 2016 to 2026, faster than most other occupations the government tracks. We're giving 10,000 people free access to the course and will connect graduates to job opportunities at places like Bank of America, Walmart, Sprint, GE Digital, Infosys, TEK-Systems, and the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center — as well as Google. If the program works, the payoff will be substantial. The median annual wage for IT support is close to the median salary in America.

You can imagine this lightweight, focused model being applied to other tech-related jobs of the future: Robust certification programs for project management, delivery fleet operation, and other jobs no one can imagine today, but that will be obvious — and ubiquitous — in five years' time.

Moving beyond code and intensive degrees to these constant, lightweight and ubiquitous forms of education will take resources and experimentation. But that effort should help close today's skills gaps, while making sure future skills gaps don't open. That's part of the reason Google has invested \$1 billion over five years to help find new approaches to connect people to opportunities at work and help small and medium businesses everywhere grow in the digital economy.

We should make sure that the next generation of jobs are good jobs, in every sense. Rather than thinking of education as the opening act, we need to make sure it's a constant, natural and simple act across life — with lightweight, flexible courses, skills and programs available to everyone. (Source: Recode)

Next wireless speaker will listen to your every word

Speakers with integrated voice assistants like Alexa and Google Assistant will soon become the norm, not the exception.

There will come a day, and probably pretty soon, where pretty much every standalone speaker will have a voice-operated assistant inside of it. In the same way that most TVs today have integrated "smarts" in the form of streaming apps for video, "smart speakers" will simply be the default, offering streaming audio apps and music at your voice's beck and call.

Even for people who crave good audio, the convenience of being able to ask for a song or artist by name is powerful. It's enough, for example, to force just about every speaker maker to follow Sonos' lead, and sign on with one of the two major digital assistants. But what does having Alexa and Google inside everything really mean?

Much like Smart TV, a big reason voice assistants will be so widespread is that they aren't prohibitively expensive to add. We spoke to one manufacturer recently who told us that it costs around 10 dollars to add a "smart" microphone to each speaker.

As the technology improves and price comes down, having an assistant onboard shouldn't pass much extra cost on to the consumer.

Lebanese security agency turns smartphone into selfie spycam

Lebanon's intelligence service may have turned the smartphones of thousands of targeted individuals into cyber-spying machines in one of the first known examples of large-scale state hacking of phones rather than computers, researchers say.

Lebanon's General Directorate of General Security (GDGS) has run more than 10 campaigns since at least 2012 aimed mainly at Android phone users in at least 21 countries, according to a report by mobile security firm Lookout and digital rights group Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF).

The cyber attacks, which seized control of Android smartphones, allowed the hackers to turn them into victim-monitoring devices and steal any data from them undetected, the researchers said on Thursday. No evidence was found that Apple (AAPL.O) phone users were targeted, something that may simply reflect the popularity of Android in the Middle East.

The state-backed hackers, dubbed "Dark Caracal" by the report's authors - after a wild cat native to the Middle East - used phishing attacks and other tricks to lure victims into downloading fake versions of encrypted messaging apps, giving the attackers full control over the devices of unwitting users.

Michael Flossman, the group's lead security researcher, told Reuters that



If you want to see where we see the future of wireless speakers heading, look at the humble headphone. The microphone in a set of portable headphones has become so ubiquitous that most people simply forget about them. You buy a portable headphone and the mic is built right into the cable.

The same thing is likely going to happen with portable and tabletop speakers -- they'll all get microphones eventually. It's not just table speakers that will get mics either

-- for example, the Polk Command Bar brings a fully formed Echo Dot to a sound bar.

For clarification here, we're specifically talking about bringing voice assistants to Wi-Fi-connected speakers -- the kind that let you stream Spotify Connect, for example -- and see this feature as an evolution of the hands-free microphone now available in most Bluetooth speakers. But there's no reason Bluetooth speakers themselves can't get assistants and microphones too, provided they're high-end enough to justify the (falling) cost.

While smart toilets are also a thing for some reason, smart speakers are far more useful because of where they sit at the intersection of music replay and voice control. These devices bring the user experience back to the fore, something that has suffered since wireless speakers started ditching user interfaces for smartphone control.

Smart speakers are so much more than on-demand jukeboxes though. They control your lights, help organize your calendar, dictate recipes while you cook or help you load up the latest season of "Black Mirror." They're a lot more "fun" than a simple remote control, and not only that but they're also more featured and getting better all the time. (Source: Cnet)



EFF and Lookout took advantage of the Lebanon cyber spying group's failure to secure their own command and control servers, creating an opening to connect them back to the GDGS.

"Looking at the servers, who had registered it when, in conjunction with being able to identify the stolen content of victims: That gave us a pretty good indication of how long they had been operating," Flossman

said in a phone interview.

Dark Caracal has focused their attacks on government officials, military targets, utilities, financial institutions, manufacturing companies, and defense contractors, according to the report.

The researchers found technical evidence linking servers used to control the attacks to a GDGS office in Beirut by locating wi-fi networks and internet protocol address in

or near the building. They cannot say for sure whether the evidence proves GDGS is responsible or is the work of a rogue employee.

The malware, once installed, could do things like remotely take photos with front or back camera and silently activate the phone's microphone to record conversations, researchers said.

Responding to a question from Reuters about the claims made in the report, Major General Abbas Ibrahim, director general of GDGS, said he wanted to see the report before commenting on its contents. He added: "General Security does not have these type of capabilities. We wish we had these capabilities."

The EFF/Lookout team said they uncovered spy tools and a massive trove of hundreds of gigabytes of data stolen from the phones of thousands of victims that included text messages, contacts, encrypted conversations, documents, audio and photos.

Targets were located mainly in Lebanon and the surrounding region, including Syria and Saudi Arabia, but not Iran or Israel, two frequent targets of government cyber spy attacks. Victims also lived in five European countries, Russia, the United States, China, Vietnam and South Korea, researchers said. (Source: Reuters)

Researchers find human impact on forest still evident after 500 years

Tropical forests span a huge area, harbor a wide diversity of species, and are important to water and nutrient cycling on a planet scale. But in ancient Amazonia, over 500 years ago, clearing tropical forests was a way of survival to provide land for families to farm and villages to prosper.

Researchers at the University of New Hampshire (UNH) used high-tech tools to more precisely view where these cleared sites were and how much lasting impact they had on the rainforest in the Amazon Basin in South America.

“One of the key mysteries in this area of the world is that no one knows how many people lived in Amazonia before European contact,” said Michael Palace, an associate professor in the Earth Sciences Department and Earth Systems Research Center at UNH.

Determining lasting impact

“Once the Europeans arrived, indigenous populations were devastated due to disease, slavery and displacement so it’s often hard to determine lasting impact. It is important to understand the resilience or fragility of these forests to past human disturbance, which allows for appropriate planning on the use of natural resources.”

One of the few indicators of human settlements are the terra preta, or Amazonian Dark Earths (ADEs). These are black, human-made soils that are enriched by materials left behind from past



It is important to understand the resilience or fragility of these forests to past human disturbance, which allows for appropriate planning on the use of natural resources.”

societies, pottery remnants, charcoal and other artifacts frequently associated with human origin.

There is very little rock and metal in

that part of the world (a former ocean bottom), and wood, bone and other organic materials decay quickly in the humid tropics.

In their study, recently published in the journal *Ecosphere*, the researchers used imagery from NASA’s terra satellite, MODIS, and geospatial modeling to predict the ADE probability across six million square kilometers of the Amazonia. They found that biomass (primarily weight of trees in forests), tree height, and tree cover were all lower at ADE sites than adjacent random non-ADE locations. The ADE sites were also more susceptible to drought.

Intensity of dry seasons

Indigenous people most likely used slash-and-burn techniques to clear the forests so the ADE sites may have been pre-selected due to the propensity for drought or intensity of dry seasons.

Researchers also observed differences in spectral properties (reflective light) between ADE and non-ADE sites that are likely driven by forest structure and tree species, indicating that remnant forests are still showing impacts from past human settlement patterns.

Researchers further explain that the high spatial heterogeneity in ADE sites across the Amazon suggests that pre-Columbian occupation by indigenous people was complex and varied substantially across this ecologically diverse region. But they speculate that because of their proximity to the rivers, ADEs may have become areas of interest for other groups to settle and reoccupy, further impacting the forests and vegetation in the ADE areas.

(Source: eurekalert.org)

Microwave ovens are cooking the environment: study

Small electrical appliances such as microwave ovens, kettles and hair dryers harm the environment in a dozen different ways, and consumers can do far more to reduce the impacts, researchers said Thursday.

In the European Union, the electricity used by 130 million microwaves puts 7.7 million tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere each year, equivalent to the annual emissions of nearly eight million cars, they reported in the journal *Science of the Total Environment*.

“Electricity consumption has the biggest impact,” said lead author Alejandro Gallego-Schmid, a research associate at the University of Manchester.



“This is because of the fuels used to generate the electricity.”

Add 150 million vacuum cleaners, 144 million kettles and more than 100 million hair dryers in Europe alone, and the carbon footprint becomes significant.

Clearly, banishing fossil fuels from the energy mix would slash emissions ascribed to small household appliances.

But that isn’t going to happen overnight: coal and gas still account for more than 40 percent of electricity generation in the EU. For the rest of the world, that figure is about 70 percent.

Until that changes, there are other ways to limit the environmental damage caused by the energy-hungry devices that have become part of everyday life, Gallego-Schmid said.

To start with, consumers can be less wasteful.

“On average, kettles boil 50 percent more water than people need,” he told AFP.

“There are about 144 million kettles in the European Union. The environmental impacts -- and the margin for improvement -- is huge.”

An analysis by other researchers of 100 cast-off microwaves at a recycling point in Britain showed that half still worked, and most of the rest could be easily repaired, Gallego-Schmid said.

(Source: AFP)

Neutron star merger that produced gravitational waves are getting brighter: study

Following the merger of two neutron stars, the gamma-ray burst that is produced would get brighter for a short period of time, and then fade away, according to other observations of short gamma-ray bursts. But that is not what happened in the case of GW170817, the first neutron star merger observed by scientists in August last year, an event that also sent gravitational waves rippling through the universe.

If anything, the X-ray emission from the merged object has continued to grow in intensity, as have radio emissions from it.

Radio wave data from the merger was tracked since the event occurred, but X-ray observations had to be suspended just over two weeks after it happened because the object’s location in the sky was too close

to the sun.

Various theoretical methods

In a paper published Thursday, researchers led by a team from Canada’s McGill University considered the various theoretical models that would allow for the afterglow of the merger to keep getting brighter (it has become about four times brighter since the merger). They used data collected by NASA’s Chandra X-ray Observatory.

“When the source emerged from that blind spot in the sky in early December, our Chandra team jumped at the chance to see what was going on. Sure enough, the afterglow turned out to be brighter in the X-ray wavelengths, just as it was in the radio,” John Ruan, a postdoctoral researcher at the McGill Space Institute and lead author of the

new paper, said in a statement Thursday.

Graphic shows the X-ray counterpart to the gravitational wave source GW170817, produced by the merger of two neutron stars. The left image is the sum of observations with NASA’s Chandra X-ray Observatory taken in late August and early September 2017, and the right image is the sum of Chandra observations taken in early December 2017.

Cocoon formation theory

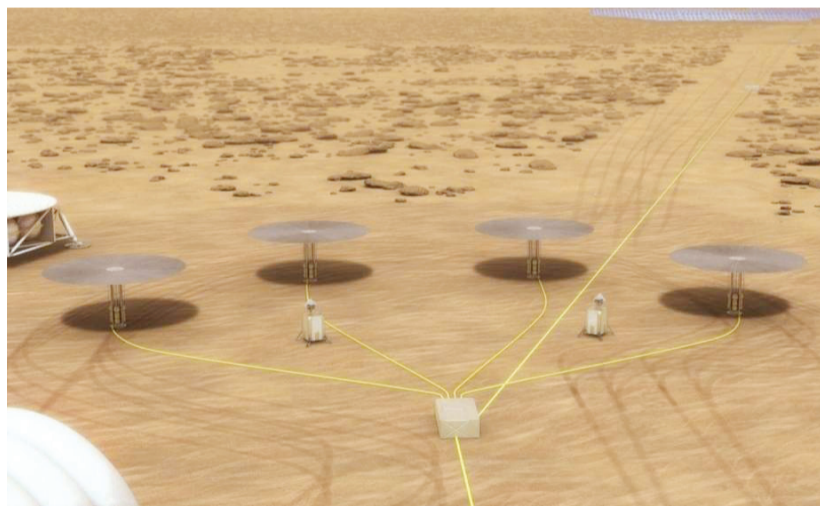
One of the models they considered was the cocoon formation theory, which was posited by another team of researchers in December. In brief, the theory suggests that the black hole which likely formed as a result of the merger was surrounded by debris that resulted from the collision between the neutron stars.

The high-energy jets that would flow outward from the black hole’s poles, and would be observed as short gamma-ray bursts, got trapped by the debris, and the interaction shaped the debris into a cocoon that absorbed all that energy, making the object glow brighter in X-ray and radio wavelengths.

“Usually when we see a short gamma-ray burst, the jet emission generated gets bright for a short time as it smashes into the surrounding medium -- then fades as the system stops injecting energy into the outflow. This one is different; it’s definitely not a simple, plain-Jane narrow jet,” McGill astrophysicist Daryl Haggard, whose research group led the new study, said.

(Source: IBT)

Nuclear reactors the size of wastebaskets could power our Martian settlements



The cylinder of uranium is the size of a coffee can. Even with its shielding and detectors, the device is still no larger than a wastepaper basket. But this little prototype, soon to be tested in the Nevada desert, fuels a dream of an off-world future for humanity.

The Kilopower project, a joint venture between NASA and the Department of Energy, is set to be the first nuclear fission reactor to reach space since the SNAP 10A project in the 1960s. A prototype is in testing, which makes it closer to launch than any of the other projects that popped up in the intervening decades.

The Kilopower reactor is designed to operate at two sizes, a one kilowatt (1,000 watt) model and a 10 kilowatt model.

Hundreds of watts

“Your toaster uses about a kilowatt,” Pat McClure, Kilopower project lead at Los Alamos, says with a laugh. “In your average household, you use about 5 KW on average a day, at any given time. Realize, though, that this is a lot of energy for NASA. At NASA they’re used to tens to hundreds of watts. So to have a kilowatt or 10 kilowatts is a lot of electricity.”

NASA’s New Horizons mission has a maximum power of 240 watts, and the power source on the Curiosity rover only provides 120 watts of electricity. Both of these are so-called nuclear batteries, converting heat from naturally decaying plutonium directly into electricity. But plutonium is in short supply, and 1,000

or even 10,000 watts is a big step up from what those power sources could pack, even if it’s small compared to our power needs here on Earth. Unlike those nuclear batteries, Kilopower’s system creates a fission reaction, splitting uranium atoms to release energy that is then converted into electricity by attached engines.

Cooled reactor

A “traditional light water cooled reactor makes a gigawatt in electricity. It’s a million times bigger, it’s very complicated, and it’s designed so it utilizes the fuel very well,” McClure says. At the size of the little Martian reactor, things get a lot less fuel-efficient.

“Melting fuel would be difficult if not impossible for the applications that we’re doing,” McClure says. “The way we’ve got the physics designed, the reactor will basically put out as much heat as is being asked of it. So if we lose cooling and are just radiating a little bit of heat energy away, the reactor will drop in power to match that.”

It’s also designed to operate in the odd environment of space. We think of space as cold, but keeping a reactor cool in a vacuum isn’t so easy. There’s no material like air or water flowing by that can transfer heat away from your generators. Instead, the system relies on eight heat pipes, each filled with about one tablespoon of sodium, which has a high boiling point.

(Source: Popular Science)

Ocean waters prevent ancient methane from reaching the atmosphere



Scientists have found that ancient reservoirs of methane do not reach the atmosphere due to a role played by ocean waters. The study was conducted to understand the origin of methane in the Arctic Ocean.

There are ancient methane reservoirs, referred to as methane hydrates, which lie near continents. The methane hydrates are trapped in ocean sediments, which are a huge storehouse for the powerful greenhouse gas.

Researchers have given a warning that even if a bit of the massive reservoir is released, it could significantly aggravate the current state of climate change. The waters of the ocean help in preventing the ancient methane from reaching the atmosphere but the warming waters could release the methane gas.

Katy Sparrow, who is an environmental scientist from the University of Rochester, studied methane’s origin in the Arctic Ocean to see if the ancient methane was being released and if it would travel to the atmosphere.

The Arctic Ocean

“Our goal was to fingerprint the source of methane in the Arctic Ocean to determine if ancient methane was being liberated from the seafloor and if it survives to be emitted to the atmosphere,” Sparrow said.

Sparrow and her team chose a spot just off the shore of Alaska’s North Slope, close to Prudhoe Bay, to conduct their fieldwork. The researchers referred to this area as the ground zero for ocean warming that resulted in methane emissions from the ocean.

The shallow areas near continents in

certain regions of the Arctic Ocean might be one of the environments where warming processes have been breaking down methane hydrates for the last 15,000 years.

Along with the ancient methane reservoirs, carbon-rich permafrost, which dates back to thousands of years and found all over the land and seafloor sediments in the Arctic, can generate methane once it thaws due to warming.

The mix of the incessant warming taking place in the Arctic and the shallow depths of water means that any methane released has a small area to travel, from being emitted from the seafloor to getting released into the atmosphere.

Increasing methane amounts

The team, however, noticed that even if increasing methane amounts are released from degrading hydrates as a result of climate change, catastrophic emission to the atmosphere is not an inherent outcome. Although the research team did not analyze what prevented the released seafloor methane from going into the atmosphere, they think that microorganisms could be biodegrading the methane in the ocean before it reached the surface waters.

Kessler explained that the emission of ancient methane to the atmosphere, in the region which is going through some of the greatest present-day warming activities, is relatively quite small especially in comparison to emissions that come from human activities.

(Source: Tech Times)

James Webb Space Telescope completes deep-freeze testing

NASA’s long-running James Webb Space Telescope project is nearing completion, but it needs a lot of testing before the agency sends it up into space where any undetected issues could prove disastrous. Several months ago, the completed telescope optical hardware was loaded into a vacuum chamber and cooled to extremely low temperatures. After removing Webb from the deep freeze, NASA now reports that all systems are go.

About \$10 billion has been spent building the James Webb Space Telescope, but the construction phase was finished way back in late 2016. Since then, NASA has been conducting tests on the hardware to ensure it will operate correctly once in space. It would obviously like to avoid a repeat of Hubble’s launch, which required a Space Shuttle mission to correct its blurry vision in the early 90s.

Webb will be subjected to frigid temperatures at the L2 Lagrangian point, so the deep freeze test is a necessary step before launch. Engineers loaded the telescope into Chamber A at Johnson Space Center, which was depressurized and cooled to almost absolute zero (20-40 Kelvin). First on the agenda, NASA tested to make sure the 18 individual mirror segments would move and operate as a single unit in a cold vacuum -- they worked perfectly.

This phase of testing ended in late 2017 as the telescope was removed from the vacuum chamber, but the results give NASA confidence all the optical systems will work correctly in space. However, there’s still more testing to do. While construction of the Webb is complete, the hardware isn’t all integrated yet. The telescope’s next stop is Northrop Grumman’s facilities in Los Angeles.

(Source: extremetech.com)

Mushrooms could solve America’s crumbling infrastructure

Mushrooms could solve America’s crumbling infrastructure. Yes, mushrooms -- or at least a type of fungus scientifically known as *Trichoderma reesei*. A new technique uses fungi to fill the cracks in concrete -- creating a self-healing concrete. The self-healing concrete would be low-cost, pollution-free and sustainable, according to the researchers.

The “idea was originally inspired by the miraculous ability of the human body to heal itself of cuts, bruises and broken bones,” Congru Jin, mechanical engineering professor at Binghamton University--State University of New York, said in a statement.

The human body repairs its damaged skins and tissues with nutrients -- and similarly, Jin and her colleagues have developed a way for concrete to heal itself with some fungi and nutrients to help it grow. The fungi homes in on micro-cracks, which are often the start of much larger structural issues in buildings and bridges.

“If micro-cracks expand and reach the steel reinforcement, not only the concrete will be attacked, but the reinforcement will be corroded,” Jin said. The steel is exposed to outside elements -- like oxygen, water, carbon dioxide and chlorides -- which causes the reinforcement to rust and break down more quickly.

The process works by mixing *T. reesei* into the concrete along with nutrients that help the fungus grow. When structures begin to break down, the micro-cracks leave room for water and oxygen to seep their way into the concrete. The once-sleeping fungal spores can then sprout and grow throughout the cracks, filling the gaps.

“When the cracks are completely filled and ultimately no more water or oxygen can enter inside, the fungi will again form spores,” Jin said.

(Source: Newsweek)

German ambassador enjoys 'Ab Gusht cooking lesson'

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Michael Klor-Berchtold, the German ambassador to Tehran, posted a photo on his Twitter account on Thursday depicting him stirring Ab Gusht (Iranian stew made with lamb, chickpeas, white beans, onion, potatoes, and tomatoes, and dried lime) in a big pot.



"Ab Gusht cooking lesson for me by real experts! Delicious!" he wrote on his twitter account.

The ambassador didn't include the time and place of his cooking lesson, but seems quite enjoying himself.

Air pollution: not this again

1-2 In fact every year the onset of cold seasons and rise of polluted days only rekindle the old debates on methods to mitigate air pollution and organizations start fighting over who is the most responsible and placing the blame on one another which constitute no impressive achievement. The best they could do so far was adopting clean air law and it is still too soon to decide its effectiveness.

We all know what we should do: developing greener auto industry, improving fuel quality, relocating pollutant industries, promoting public transit, and limiting high-rise buildings.

So what went wrong that we are surrounded by the thick smog all winter long and have to pray for wind or rain to come to rescue us? Who's benefiting the current situation? Most certainly not the public.

Donald Trump is hampering fight against climate change, WEF warns

The World Economic Forum delivered a strong warning about Donald Trump's go-it-alone approach to tackling climate change as it highlighted the growing threat of environmental collapse in its annual assessment of the risks facing the international community.

In the run-up to the U.S. president's speech to its annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, next week, the WEF avoided mentioning Trump by name but said "nation-state unilateralism" would make it harder to tackle global warming and ecological damage.

The WEF's global risks perception survey showed Trump's arrival in the White House in 2017 had coincided with a marked increase in concern about the environment among experts polled by the Swiss-based organization.

It said all five environmental risks covered by the survey — extreme weather events, natural disasters, failure of climate-change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse, and human-made natural disasters — had become more prominent.

"This follows a year characterized by high-impact hurricanes, extreme temperatures and the first rise in CO2 emissions for four years. We have been pushing our planet to the brink and the damage is becoming increasingly clear.

"Biodiversity is being lost at mass-extinction rates, agricultural systems are under strain, and pollution of the air and sea has become an increasingly pressing threat to human health."

Trump has threatened to withdraw the US from the 2015 Paris agreement under which nations agreed to take steps to limit the increase in global temperature. He has said the commitments made by his predecessor, Barack Obama, would damage the American economy.

(Source: The Guardian)

IAU plans to establish universities in Iraq, Syria

SOCIETY TEHRAN — The Islamic Azad University (IAU) is planning on expanding overseas branches through setting up units in Iraq and Syria, Khabaronline reported on Tuesday.

Having great cultural and historical capacities allows Iran to have a strong presence in different fields, including the academic realm, said Ali Akbar Velayati, the head of the university's board of founders.

Praising the growing capacity of IAU, Velayati went on to say that around 10,000 foreign students are studying at different branches of IAU across the country.

Plans for branches in Iraq

He went on to say that Humam Hamoudi, head of Iraq's Islamic Supreme Council, has expressed interest in establishing Azad University branches in "all cities" of Iraq, adding, as per memorandums of understanding signed with Ammar Hakim [previous chief of the Islamic Supreme Council], Islamic Azad University will set up branches in Karbala, Najaf, Baghdad, Basra and Erbil in near future.

The project of constructing the first branch of Islamic Azad University (IAU) in Iraq with the name of 'Al-Mustafa Al-Amin' kicked off in the Kadhimiya district [in northern Baghdad] on August 14, 2017. The university will be built in an area of 22,500 square meters and is expected to host 3,000 students initially, Donya-e Eqtesad Persian language daily newspaper reported on August 14, 2017.

New branches in Syria

Velayati further noted that after correspondences with the Syrian President expressing the readiness of Azad University for setting up branches, Bashar al-Assad has



Islamic Azad University in Dubai

called for establishing IAU branches in all cities of Syria.

Other active international branches of IAU

According to IAU international affairs website, the Lebanon IAU branch officially started its activities in 1990 and is now offering 22 courses, including Islamic education, educational sciences, political sciences, and computer engineering through 5 campuses

in different levels of studies.

Another branch is in UAE founded in 1995. IAU-UAE Branch can be regarded as the most active international branch of the Islamic Azad University, offering a host of programs at bachelor's, master's as well as doctoral levels in several disciplines of engineering, law, humanities, arts and management.

Also there are two other branches active in Kabul and Oxford as well.

Mere presence not enough

Although the chair of the board of trustees of the Islamic Azad University Velayati described the activities of foreign IAU branches as "successful," surely, the mere presence of international branches is not enough and IAU should focus on attracting the brightest students of the regions through enhancing its academic standards and performance in order to have a stronger influence on this arena.

Health Ministry to promote traditional foods, limit fast food

SOCIETY TEHRAN — The Ministry of Health is planning schemes to encourage consumption of traditional foods and is seriously reconsidering issuance of license for fast food restaurants, Mehr reported on Thursday.

Zahra Abdollahi, director general for the ministry's nutrition improvement department, said the ministry is implementing schemes to promote consumption of traditional foods as they are being forgotten.

Over the past two years, in a collective collaboration with nutrition experts in all provinces of Iran various kinds of traditional and local foods were recognized and analyzed regarding their salt, fat, and hydrocarbon content as well as their calories, Abdollahi said, adding, so using the data collected on the traditional foods in addition to some food advices a book titled "Iran's local food" was published.

"Another measure that we are taking is to convince Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade to reconsider immethodical and irregular issuance of license for fast food



restaurants and instead encourage granting license for restaurants serving local and traditional food," she noted.

One of the reasons as to why people are taking more fast food and junk foods is that fast food restaurants are increasing by leaps and bounds, even the number of fast food restaurants are shooting up in rural areas, she regretted.

If by issuing fast food restaurants license the industry ministry is planning to create more jobs they had better do it by advocating opening restaurants offering local and traditional foods which are healthier, she suggested.

She went on to say that Iranians love traditional and local foods and such foods have higher nutritional values compared to fast food. "They are lower in food contents which increase the risks of non-communicable diseases," she added.

Iranian fast foods such as kuku sabzi (made with a various vegetables mixed with eggs and fried) and kotlet (meat and potato mixed with eggs cooked in hot oil) are easy to make and can replaces sausage and deli meat, she added.

Long-term warming trend continued in 2017: NASA, NOAA

Earth's global surface temperatures in 2017 ranked as the second warmest since 1880, according to an analysis by NASA.

Continuing the planet's long-term warming trend, globally averaged temperatures in 2017 were 1.62 degrees Fahrenheit (0.90 degrees Celsius) warmer than the 1951 to 1980 mean, according to scientists at NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies (GISS) in New York. That is second only to global temperatures in 2016.

In a separate, independent analysis, scientists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) concluded that 2017 was the third-warmest year in their record. The minor difference in rankings is due to the different methods used by the two agencies to analyze global temperatures, although over the long-term the agencies' records remain

in strong agreement. Both analyses show that the five warmest years on record all have taken place since 2010.

Because weather station locations and measurement practices change over time, there are uncertainties in the interpretation of specific year-to-year global mean temperature differences. Taking this into account, NASA estimates that 2017's global mean change is accurate to within 0.1 degree Fahrenheit, with a 95 percent certainty level.

"Despite colder than average temperatures in any one part of the world, temperatures over the planet as a whole continue the rapid warming trend we've seen over the last 40 years," said GISS Director Gavin Schmidt.

The planet's average surface temperature has risen about 2 degrees Fahrenheit (a little more than 1 degree Celsius) during the

last century or so, a change driven largely by increased carbon dioxide and other human-made emissions into the atmosphere. Last year was the third consecutive year in which global temperatures were more than 1.8 degrees Fahrenheit (1 degree Celsius) above late nineteenth-century levels.

Phenomena such as El Niño or La Niña, which warm or cool the upper tropical Pacific Ocean and cause corresponding variations in global wind and weather patterns, contribute to short-term variations in global average temperature. A warming El Niño event was in effect for most of 2015 and the first third of 2016. Even without an El Niño event — and with a La Niña starting in the later months of 2017 — last year's temperatures ranked between 2015 and 2016 in NASA's records.

In an analysis where the effects of the

recent El Niño and La Niña patterns were statistically removed from the record, 2017 would have been the warmest year on record.

Weather dynamics often affect regional temperatures, so not every region on Earth experienced similar amounts of warming. NOAA found the 2017 annual mean temperature for the contiguous 48 United States was the third warmest on record.

Warming trends are strongest in the Arctic regions, where 2017 saw the continued loss of sea ice.

NASA's temperature analyses incorporate surface temperature measurements from 6,300 weather stations, ship- and buoy-based observations of sea surface temperatures, and temperature measurements from Antarctic research stations.

(Source: NASA)

LEARN ENGLISH

Bowling

A: Alright, so the first thing that you need to know about **bowling** is that you should never cross that line where the lane begins.

B: Why not?

A: Because they **polish** and oil it to make the ball slide down. If you step there you will slip and fall.

A: OK, so I got my bowling shoes, my ball, our names on the scorecard, so now, how the heck do I play this?

A: You throw the ball down the **lane** and try to **knock** down all the pins. If you do, that is called a strike. If you don't knock them all down on the first try, then you get a chance to get the spare. After ten frames, we add up the points and see who has the most. Three hundred is a perfect score, but very hard to get.

B: Got it! OK, I'm gonna give it a go. Oh no! My ball went in the **gutter**!

A: I told you, its harder than you think. Now let a **pro** show you how it's done.

Key vocabulary

bowling: a game where you try to knock pins down with a ball
polish: to make smooth and glossy, esp. by rubbing or friction
lane: any narrow or well-defined passage, track, channel, or course

knock: to strike in collision

gutter: a sunken channel on each side of the lane

pro: an expert player

Supplementary vocabulary

split: separate or apart

perfect game: a game in bowling of 12 consecutive strikes.

pin: a small, slender, often pointed piece of wood, metal

strike: to hit, collide

gutter ball: A ball that goes into the gutter

(Source: irlanguage.com)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

INOTEX hosting 40 overseas Iranian companies

About 40 Iranian companies, which are active abroad, are participating in the 6th International Innovation and Technology Exhibition (INOTEX) which opened on Wednesday at the Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds.

The goal of INOTEX is in line with the government's plan for encouraging Iranian experts abroad to come back to the country, the vice president for science and technology affairs Sorena Sattari said, Tasnim reported. INOTEX is the premier regional event for professionals engaged in technology and innovation.

Cosponsored by the presidential office for science and technology, the presidential center for innovation and technology cooperation, and the national innovation fund, the exhibition runs until May 26.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

"chloro-, chlor-"

■ **Meaning**: green or chlorine

■ **For example**: Breathing **chloroform** can cause dizziness, fatigue, and headaches.

PHRASAL VERB

Filter something out

■ **Meaning**: to remove words, information etc. that you do not need or want:

■ **For example**: Net users can filter out unwanted emails with software.

IDIOM

Blow a fuse

■ **Explanation**: if you blow a fuse, you suddenly lose your temper and become very angry

■ **For example**: Charlie blew a fuse yesterday when he discovered that his iPod had been stolen.

۴۰ شرکت ایرانی خارج از کشور به نمایشگاه نوآوری اینوتکس آمده‌اند

۴۰ شرکت ایرانی خارج از کشور از روز چهارشنبه همزمان با آغاز به کار ششمین نمایشگاه بین‌المللی فناوری و نوآوری اینوتکس در محل دائمی نمایشگاه‌های بین‌المللی تهران حضور دارند.

به گزارش خبرگزاری تسنیم سورنا ستاری معاون علمی و فناوری رئیس‌جمهور گفت: در راستای برنامه حمایت از بازگشت متخصصان ایرانی خارج از کشور، امسال در ششمین نمایشگاه فناوری و نوآوری شاهد حضور ۴۰ شرکت از این بخش هستیم. این نمایشگاه که تا ۶ خرداد ماه ادامه خواهد داشت با همت معاونت علمی و فناوری ریاست جمهوری، مرکز همکاری‌های فناوری و نوآوری ریاست جمهوری، و صندوق نوآوری راه‌اندازی شده است.

Turkey: Operation in Syria's Afrin has started 'de facto'

I→ The White House later denied the plan, with Secretary of State Tillerson saying that the issue, which has incensed its NATO ally Ankara, had been "misportrayed, misdescribed. Some people misspoke."

Turkey said the denial was "important," but that it "cannot remain silent in the face of any formation which will threaten its borders."

Ankara views the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), an offshoot of SDF, a terrorist organization linked to the homegrown Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) militant group, which has been fighting for independence inside Turkey.

Wary of the YPG's activities at its doorstep, Turkey has repeatedly called on the U.S to stop supporting the Kurdish militants and take back the arms it has supplied to them under the pretext of fighting the Daesh terror group.

However, Syria has censured both the American and Turkish plans for a fresh wave of unilateral military operations on its soil. Damascus views such measures as an assault on the country's sovereignty.

The Syrian government has also indicated that it would shoot down any Turkish planes entering its skies.

Turkey, Iran and Russia are the guarantors of a countrywide ceasefire in Syria. The three have been mediating a peace process since January 2016 among Syria's warring sides in Astana, Kazakhstan.

As part of the Astana format, four de-escalation zones have been established across Syria amid ongoing political efforts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict gripping the Arab country since 2011.

The zones have helped reduce fighting



significantly, while giving Turkey a breath to beef up security along its southern borders.

Syria threatens to 'destroy' Turkish warplanes

Syria threatened on Thursday to "destroy" any Turkish warplanes that fly into its territory as Ankara prepares to launch a cross-border military operation to wipe out Kurdish fighters it calls "terrorists".

Turkish officials have repeatedly vowed to attack the Syrian-Kurd militia known as the YPG at any moment in the Afrin region in northern Syria, near the border with Turkey.

The move comes after the United States announced this week it would train the YPG-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to be part of a 30,000-strong "border force" - a statement US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said on Thursday was "misportrayed".

Syria's government warned Turkey it would shoot down Turkish fighter jets and bombers that flew into its airspace.

"We warn that the Syrian Air Force is ready to destroy Turkish air targets in the skies of Syria," Deputy Foreign Minister

Faisal al-Mikdad was quoted as saying by the official SANA news agency.

"We warn the Turkish leaders that if they start fighting in the region of Afrin, it will be seen as an aggression by the Turkish army against the sovereignty of Syria."

Al-Mekdad added a military incursion into Afrin would be "no picnic" for Turkey.

The YPG has been a favoured military force on the ground in Syria for the United States, which has trained, armed, and supplied the militia as it battled the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS).

The Kurdish militia now controls nearly 25 percent of Syrian territory.

Russia 'moving' military observers in Syria's Afrin

Russia has started moving military observers away from an area in northwestern Syria where Turkey is planning an offensive against Kurdish fighters, a Turkish official told Al Jazeera.

Moving the observers comes as Turkey's defence minister on Friday said his country would go ahead with the offensive in the enclave of Afrin, saying Syrian Kurdish fighters there pose a "real" threat to his country.

Ahmet Berat Conkar, a ruling party MP and head of the Turkish delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, said: "Russia is taking steps to move its forces in Afrin away from the areas where there might be clashes [during Turkey's operation]."

Earlier this week, the Turkish government announced the offensive into Kurdish-held areas in northern Syria, starting with Afrin, after reports that the US plans to create a 30,000-strong border army predominantly made up of Kurdish militias.

HRW says Trump is 'disaster' for human rights

I→ "Trump seems to wish he could do that himself. That makes it much harder for the human rights movement to uphold human rights, because we gain our power from our ability to shame abusive governments."

Roth singled out Russia and China for conducting an "intense crackdown" on opponents and, after Trump was reported to have described African countries as "shitholes", said the U.S. president had "found political advantage in acting as a racist".

The New York-based group had issued its report in Paris to underline Macron's role in curbing the rise of the far-right in Europe, Roth said, but also to send the French leader a signal that the world was expecting more from him on rights.

Since he came to power in May, Macron has been criticised for only raising human rights with countries when there was little at stake for France, but shying away when its national interests could be hurt.

While Macron has been forceful with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Turkey's Tayyip Erdogan and Venezuela's Nicolas Maduro, he has shown weaknesses elsewhere, Roth said.

He cited Macron's visit to China, where he barely spoke of rights, his failure to support an investigation of Saudi actions in Yemen, and his telling Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi that he would not lecture him on human rights.

"It's easy to defend human rights when it's free, when there's no real cost in doing so. But when you're dealing with Chinese or Saudi (business) contracts, or you're dealing with Egypt's potential assistance in fighting terrorism ... Macron has been more resistant to standing up for human rights."

(Source: Reuters)

Ukraine declares Russian 'occupation' in eastern region

Ukraine's far eastern region is "occupied" by Russia, the parliament announced on Thursday, as Moscow warned the declaration could reignite a new war.

Ukraine's parliament adopted the "Donbass reintegration law" with 280 lawmakers voting in favor in the 450-seat body. The bill was submitted by Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko.

The law outlines the legal responsibilities of Russia after it backed separatist forces in the country's Donetsk and Luhansk provinces, known as the Donbass region, four years ago, the Kyiv Post reported.

It declares Russia to be an "aggressor" state and that parts of the Donbass are under "temporary occupation". The law also gives Ukrainian citizens the right to sue Moscow for damaging their property. "We will continue to pave the way for reintegration of the occupied Ukrainian lands through political and diplomatic steps," Poroshenko said on Twitter.

The law creates a legal framework to "remove the Russian army from Ukrainian territory" through a peacekeeping force sanctioned by the United Nations, politician Arseniy Yatseniuk said. The move drew quick condemnation from Russia.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Israel army considers taking over security in East Jerusalem al-Quds



The Israeli military is reportedly considering a plan to take over from police the control of the situation at a Palestinian refugee camp and an Arab neighborhood in East Jerusalem al-Quds amid ongoing tensions there over a controversial U.S. policy shift on the occupied city.

Citing unnamed sources, Haaretz said the Israeli ministry for military affairs has confirmed the army is studying the plan to assume responsibility for the situation in the Shuafat refugee camp and the Kafr Aqab district in East Jerusalem al-Quds.

Those areas are in the jurisdiction of Jerusalem al-Quds, but are cut off from the rest of the occupied city by Israel's Apartheid Wall, which has been under construction since 2002.

The International community designates Israel's administrative control over East Jerusalem al-Quds as occupation since the regime invaded the area during the 1967 Arab War and then annexed it.

Clashes have intensified in the area since last month, when US President Donald Trump ignored a consensus about the fate of the city, which many say should be decided in talks with Palestinians, and declared that Washington was recognizing the entire Jerusalem al-Quds as Israel's "capital."

Report say there has been almost daily clashes between Israeli forces and the Palestinian protesters, especially the youths from the Shuafat refugee camp and the district of Kafr Aqab. That has prompted the Israeli army intervene and

control the situation in the neighborhoods of Jerusalem al-Quds, according to Haaretz.

Israeli authorities have indicated that if the army takes control, the municipality of occupied Jerusalem al-Quds may no longer have a jurisdiction, and local councils will take over.

Some 150,000 people, most of them Arabs, live in Shuafat and in Kafr Aqab and all have ID cards and residency status.

The East Jerusalem al-Quds is home to the al-Aqsa Mosque compound, the third holiest site in the Muslim world and a focus of decades of Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation.

US embassy relocation accelerates

Meanwhile, new reports suggest the Trump administration is moving faster than expected to relocate the American embassy from Tel Aviv to a facility in West Jerusalem al-Quds that has been providing visa and other consular services.

US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson insisted last month that the move would not happen until the end of Trump's term.

The fresh reports, however, said the US State Department is working on a plan to retrofit an existing U.S. diplomatic facility in Arnona in instead of constructing a completely new embassy in the Jerusalem al-Quds as proposed last month by Tillerson.

The top U.S. diplomat had said the construction would take at least three years to complete.

(Source: agencies)

African UN envoys ask Trump to meet leaders after vulgar remark



African UN envoys have suggested that U.S. President Donald Trump meet with African leaders in Ethiopia this month after he was reported to have described some immigrants from Africa and Central America as coming from "sh*thole" countries.

African envoys met with U.S. Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley on Thursday, telling her that "it could be useful" for Trump to address African leaders directly when they meet in Addis Ababa at the African Union.

That meeting is due to take place on January 28-29, according to the African Union website.

The African diplomats said that South African UN Ambassador Jerry Matjila spoke on behalf of the group.

Haley said she regretted the political drama around Trump's reported vulgar remarks at a White House meeting on immigration, according to diplomats at the UN meeting.

Trump referred to Haiti, El Salvador and African nations as "sh*thole countries" during a White House meeting last week, dismissing a congressional immigration proposal, according to those at the meeting. During the meeting, Trump also allegedly expressed preference for accepting European immigrants from countries such as Norway.

The president has denied using that language, but others present insist he did.

Dozens of former U.S. ambassadors to African countries have written to Trump expressing "deep concern" over his comments about the continent and warning that respectful engagement is crucial to protecting American interests.

(Source: agencies)

Lavrov slams Western 'resistance' on action against chemical terrorism

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has accused the West of "resisting" Moscow's efforts to take away the ability of Syrian terrorists to develop and use chemical weapons.

Speaking at a UN Security Council meeting on non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction on Thursday, Lavrov warned that foreign militants in Syria were spreading "the very real danger of chemical terrorism" beyond the Middle East while some Western countries looked the other way.

"We have repeatedly suggested passing a resolution of the UN Security Council or at least a statement by its chair denouncing concrete incidents of chemical terrorism in Syria and Iraq," the top Russian diplomat said.

"Unfortunately, all our proposals have been always met with tough resistance from a number of our Western colleagues, who prefer to turn a blind eye to the facts of use and even production of chemical weapons by terrorists, and come forward with unfounded accusations against Damascus," he said.

Lavrov called for a "new mechanism" to objectively investigate chemical attacks in Syria by taking into account "the provisions of the convention on the prohibition of chemical weapons."

The United States and its allies have repeatedly accused Syrian government forces of carrying out chemical attacks in civilian areas without providing any substantial evidence.

This is while Damascus has handed over its entire stockpile of chemical weapons under a 2013 deal negotiated by Russia and the U.S. The operation was overseen by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

Russia has dismissed Washington's claims against Syria as "attempts to politicize the situation" in the conflict-ridden Arab country. It has also vetoed a number of U.S.-drafted resolutions in this regard at the Security Council.

In April last year, the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump used a suspected chemical attack that killed dozens of people in the western Syrian town of Khan

Shaykhun as a pretext to fire some 60 cruise missile at a key Syrian airbase.

Damascus condemned the Khan Shaykhun attack and blamed it on terrorists. A few months later, the Syrian army backed up the claim by discovering a large stash of chemical weapons and explosive devices during mop-up operations against the Daesh terror group in the country's eastern city of Dayr al-Zawr.

The Russian military's branch for protection against chemical weapons also announced last year that it had dismantled a number of chemical weapons facilities in the formerly militant-held areas across Syria.

(Source: TASS)

Killing the Iran nuclear deal will be bad for the U.S.

I→ Iran also has a sovereign right to possess missiles to defend itself. There are no international treaties banning conventional missiles. "President Trump has no right to dictate limits or restrictions over and beyond those just described," said Peter Jenkins, a former UK ambassador to the IAEA.

If Trump follows through with his ultimatum and chooses to leave the JCPOA, his decision will have long-term consequences not only for the United States but also for global attempts to control nuclear proliferation.

First, in the domestic arena, all vital political organs from Congress to Trump's own national security agencies, including the National Security Council, Pentagon, State Department, and Department of Energy, oppose unilateral American withdrawal because they believe the agreement prevents Iran from developing nuclear weapons and that withdrawal will isolate the United States internationally.

Second, scuttling the JCPOA will increase global mistrust of the United States and remove any incentive for North Korea to negotiate a deal to curtail its own nuclear program. Washington could also find it harder to win support for any military campaign it may launch against Pyongyang if U.S. allies hold it responsible for re-igniting the Iranian nuclear crisis.

Third, the JCPOA was endorsed by the UN Security Council - which includes the United States -- and its other members continue to support the deal. Based on the UN charter, it is the obligation of all members to enact Security Council resolutions. Outright U.S. violation of UNSC Resolution 2231 will damage the credibility of other Security Council resolutions and be seen by other member states as hurting its consensus-driven model.

Fourth, the IAEA has on numerous occasions confirmed Iran's adherence to the deal and has emphasized that U.S. withdrawal will foment a crisis in the agency's ability to carry out its inspection duties. The JCPOA represents a major achievement for the IAEA because it is the most comprehensive non-proliferation agreement in history. It is a new standard for resolving nuclear crises and its tenets may even have prevented countries such as North Korea from developing nuclear weapons in the first place.

Fifth, the majority of Washington's allies, including the EU, Japan, Australia, Canada, and South Korea, strongly oppose the United States abandoning the JCPOA. This represents a significant break in America's alliance system and, going forward, could affect future collaboration on issues such as Russia's annexation of Crimea.

These factors are presumably the reason Trump has again waived sanctions on Iran. But they will still exist in mid-May - the next deadline for Trump's sanctions decision - and for every 120 days after that.

Trump's quest to sabotage the Iran deal is in line with his broader antipathy for Barack Obama's policies. However, rather than challenging his predecessor's legacy Trump should endeavor to use it as a model to bolster multilateral diplomacy and resolve crises in places such as Yemen, Syria, and Afghanistan. Today more than ever, the world needs a balanced and rational White House to promote peace and security rather than to flout international norms.

If Trump's mantra of "America first" means undermining the rules and will of the international community, it will ultimately result in American interests being taken into account last in global decision-making bodies. On the other hand, Trump still has the opportunity to recognize that facilitating the JCPOA is a chance to help burnish his own legacy too.

WADA welcomes rejection of legal challenge to whereabouts rule

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) has welcomed the rejection of a legal challenge to the whereabouts rule which it says is a key element in the fight against doping.

French unions representing rugby, football, basketball and handball players had filed a complaint against the rule at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), saying it violated the right to respect for private and family life.

The complaint was rejected on Thursday, the ECHR said in a statement. It said that the judges accepted the rule had an impact on the athletes' private lives but "took the view that the public interest grounds which made it necessary were of particular importance and justified the restrictions" on their freedom.

The rule requires targeted athletes to file information on where they will be for at least one hour of every day to allow drug testers to locate them for random out-of-competition tests.

WADA director Olivier Niggli said in a statement that out-of-competition tests were "one of the most powerful means of deterrence and detection of doping."

"Accurate whereabouts information is crucial to the success of anti-doping programs," he said.

"The only way to perform out-of-competition testing is by knowing where athletes are, and the way to make it most effective is to be able to test athletes at times when cheats are most likely to use prohibited substances or methods."

He said that the inconvenience caused to athletes was "entirely proportionate to the wider benefits for global sport."

(Source: Reuters)

Schalke's Goretzka signs contract to join Bayern next season

Bundesliga champions Bayern Munich have signed a contract with talented Germany international Leon Goretzka, who will join them in July, the two clubs said on Friday.

The 22-year-old midfielder, who won the Confederations Cup with Germany last year and is set to be part of their World Cup squad in June, is considered among the finest talents in Germany.

"We are delighted that Leon Goretzka, a Germany international with great prospects, decided for Bayern Munich despite competition from big-name clubs from abroad," Bayern CEO Karl-Heinz Rummenigge said in a club statement.

"This means Leon Goretzka will remain in the Bundesliga." The versatile player is out of contract with Schalke at the end of the season and will be a free transfer.

"Leon Goretzka informed us at the start of this week that he wanted to leave the club and join Bayern," Schalke sports director Christian Heidel told reporters.

Heidel said the player had passed a medical at Bayern on Thursday and Rummenigge had called to let Schalke know.

"We are losing a very, very good player," Heidel said.

(Source: Mirror)

Team Sky should suspend Froome, says UCI chief

Team Sky should suspend Chris Froome until an investigation into his failed drugs test for an asthma medication is over, according to International Cycling Union (UCI) president David Lappartient.

The four-time Tour de France winner, who denies breaking any rules, could potentially be stripped of his Vuelta a Espana title after a urine test he took during the race in September showed excessive levels of Salbutamol.

Salbutamol is permitted as a legal asthma drug by the World Anti-Doping Agency and the UCI said Froome's failed urine test did not necessitate a mandatory provisional suspension even if analysis of his urine sample showed a concentration of 2,000 nanograms per millilitre (ng/ml), double WADA's threshold.

"Team Sky should suspend Froome," Lappartient told daily Le Telegramme.

"However, it is not up to me to interfere. Without going into the question of guilt, it would be simpler for everyone," said the Frenchman, who was elected last September.

"It's up to (team manager Dave) Brailsford to take his responsibilities. Apart from that I think that it is what the other riders wish."

Lappartient, who said he was notified of Froome's test result an hour after being elected in Bergen, Norway, on Sept. 21 last year, believes that "in the eyes of the wider public (the Briton) is already guilty."

(Source: Reuters)

Emery refuses to indulge Neymar-Cavani penalty debate

Paris Saint-Germain's penalty taker remains an issue for within the dressing room according to Unai Emery, following the latest controversy involving Neymar and Edinson Cavani.

World-record signing Neymar turned in a dazzling display against Dijon in midweek, hitting a hat-trick as the Ligue 1 leaders established a 7-0 lead in the second half.

Cavani was also on target, bringing him level with Zlatan Ibrahimovic's all-time mark of 156 goals in PSG colours, but Neymar grasped the ball when the Uruguayan striker was brought down to win an 83rd-minute penalty.

Neymar dispatched his fourth goal of the game to whistles from the Parc des Princes crowd that continued after full-time.

This weekend sees PSG face Lyon, the opponents when Neymar and Cavani had an on-field spat over a spot-kick back in September, but Emery sees no need to bring public clarity to the issue.

"In the locker room, it is not about individual statistics," he told a pre-match news conference when asked about Neymar denying Cavani his record tilt.

"I don't have to say who the penalty takers are. We talk about it in the locker room, not on the outside.

"[Cavani] is one of the experienced players. All players are important. Each have their own personality and all are very involved in the locker room."

(Source: Goal)

Pele collapses: Brazil football legend hospitalised due to 'severe exhaustion'

Football legend Pele is in hospital after he collapsed on Thursday with severe exhaustion.

The 77-year-old was due to travel to London this weekend for a dinner held in his honour by the Football Writers' Association (FWA).

However the three-time Fifa World Cup winner collapsed before his journey and was taken to a hospital in his native Brazil.

"In the early hours of Thursday morning, Pele collapsed and was taken to hospital in Brazil where he has undergone a series of tests which appear to point to severe exhaustion," a FWA statement read. "He remains on fluids while doctors monitor his recovery."

"Thankfully, there is no suggestion of anything more serious than exhaustion and everybody at the Football Writers' Association wishes Pele a swift and full recovery."

Pele has been taken to hospital for kidney and prostate problems in recent years, and in November 2014 was treated for a urinary infection after having kidney stones removed.

In a glittering 21-year career, he scored 1,281 goals in 1,363 appearances for club and country and was named by Fifa as their Player of the Century.

The FWA statement continued: "Understandably, his medical situation prevents him from travelling to London for the Football Writers' Association Tribute Night on Sunday evening at The Savoy. But after discussions with Pele and his team, he has insisted the event should continue, not least because many of Pele's friends are travelling from overseas to be with us on Sunday."

"While it is incredibly sad Pele cannot attend the function, the FWA are grateful that all those who have been asked to pay tribute on the night - Gareth Southgate, Cliff Jones, Gordon Banks and Steve Hunt - are determined to help make the evening a memorable one."



"Pele's team have also asked that we film the event and send a copy to Brazil in the knowledge it will lift the great man's spirits to see his friends are thinking of him and sending their best wishes. With that in mind, we want to do Pele proud and make Sunday night as memorable as possible."

"It goes without saying, Pele has an open invitation to any of our functions once he regains his health and we are already discussing the possibility of him joining us in May for the Footballer of the Year dinner."

(Source: Independent)

Ruthless Rafael Nadal storms past Damir Dzumhur

Top seed Rafael Nadal stormed into the fourth round of the Australian Open with a bludgeoning 6-1 6-3 6-1 defeat of Bosnia's Damir Dzumhur on Friday.

Melbourne's heatwave had relented by the time the 31-year-old Nadal walked on Margaret Court Arena, but the Spaniard was on fire as he battered the 28th seed into submission.

The sole blemish was a dropped service game early in the second set but it only briefly slowed his charge.

"I am in the fourth round. That's because I am doing the right things. Let's see how far I can go," Nadal, beaten in the final by Roger Federer last year, told reporters.

Nadal arrived in Australia with question marks over the state of his knees after he was forced to withdraw mid-tournament from the ATP Finals in November.

Yet back in the kind of sleeveless top in which he launched his spectacular assault on the grand slams in 2005, and wielding his trusty forehand like a lethal weapon, doubts about Nadal's title prospects have quickly been cast aside.

"I needed hours on court, hours of practice, hours of playing sets with different players," Nadal said of his build-up to the year's first grand slam.

"I think I did a good preparation. I feel I'm playing well."

Argentina's 24th seeded Diego Schwartzman, who Nadal plays next, might prove a tougher obstacle than Dzumhur.

The 25-year-old from Sarajevo had actually walked off court a winner against Nadal in 2016 when the Mallorcan retired from their match at the Miami Masters with an illness.

This time it was Dzumhur who might have sought a quick way out after being allowed two points in the first four games as Nadal started like the scorching wind that had blown through Melbourne Park earlier in the day.

Nadal was 5-0 up in no time before Dzumhur managed to hold serve, prompting a sympathetic cheer from the crowd.

Another flurry of forehand winners helped Nadal into a 2-0 lead in the second set but Dzumhur, who became the first Bosnian to win a Tour level title last year, broke back with a dipping backhand that was too good for Nadal.



(Source: Reuters)

Sanchez to United not done at all, insists Mourinho

Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho has confirmed talks are ongoing over a swap deal involving Alexis Sanchez and Henrikh Mkhitaryan but insists an agreement has not been reached.

Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger claimed on Thursday that the clubs were "close" to a breakthrough in negotiations, with United reportedly prepared to offer a transfer fee and Mkhitaryan in order to secure Sanchez's signature.

Mourinho says there is little point denying United's interest in the Chile star after Wenger spoke openly about the discussions but he maintains he is waiting "calmly" for updates.

"I think clearly everybody knows that we are there and especially when the Arsenal manager speaks so clearly like he did, there is no point in trying to hide or deny," he told a news conference.

"But it is not done at all, so in this moment Mkhitaryan [is] our player, Sanchez [is] an Arsenal player and with a match tomorrow I want to switch off and focus on the most important thing, which is the match."

"Sometimes people think transfers involve the managers a lot in the negotiations. I think it depends on the profile of the clubs, the way we establish our jobs. In my case, when it goes to the table of negotiations, I like to be out. I will just be calmly waiting for news."

"I will speak if one day we sign him. I will speak about him and what he can bring to our team. At this moment, there is no point, he is an Arsenal player and not my player."

Mourinho did confirm Mkhitaryan will not be involved against Burnley on Saturday, however, despite being at full fitness.

"No, not selected," he said. "But [he is] in very good condition, training really well and in perfect condition like the others."

Reports have also claimed Mourinho is on the verge of signing a contract extension at Old Trafford but the former Chelsea boss says there is no need to rush through a renewal.

"My contract ends July 2019, so plenty of time to speak," he said.



Fatigue & Pressure could see Zidane quit Real Madrid

Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane is under increasing pressure at the Bernabeu after a disastrous defence of the Spanish title Los Blancos won last season, with suggestions the Frenchman could walk away from the club by the end of the campaign.

Real have only won two of their last seven La Liga games, even losing twice in successive home fixtures. It means they are 19 points behind fierce rivals Barcelona, while their biggest challenge is to stay in the top four amid pressure from Villarreal and Sevilla.

But it is not simply that Zidane, who delivered two Champions League titles in his first 18 months in charge, could be sacked by demanding president Florentino Perez for a sub-par season.

According to Marca, there is a belief at Real that the former three-time FIFA World Player of the Year and 1998 Ballon d'Or winner is increasingly likely to quit of his own accord.

The Spanish report notes that Zidane has already achieved everything he can hope to since taking over, while also



suggesting that the 45-year-old is 'struggling to cope' as a result of fatigue and having to deal with having the lofty expectations on his shoulders.

It is reminiscent of Luis Enrique walking away from

Barcelona at the end of last season.

Marca claims Germany coach Joachim Low and Tottenham boss Mauricio Pochettino are early favourites for the potentially vacant Bernabeu hot-seat.

Speaking after a narrow 1-0 win over Leganes in the Copa del Rey on Thursday night, Zidane expressed hope that the positive result may now act as a catalyst for the coming weeks.

"We've got a long way to go. We need to get our confidence back, score goals and stop conceding," he explained (via RealMadrid.com).

"We cannot sit here and say we played well but we got an important result for the tie and that is positive. There are moments when the going gets tough, but we need to have a little patience and know that together we can move forward."

"This win could well be a turning point for us and we may well go on to get three or four positive results."

(Source: Sports Illustrated)

Iran drop two place at FIFA ranking

S P O R T S Iran national football team started the New Year as the world's 34th placed football team in the FIFA ranking.

Team Melli, who have been drawn along with Spain, Portugal and Morocco in the 2018 World Cup Group B, are still the best Asian team.

Portugal and Spain are third and sixth respectively in the ranking and Morocco have moved one place up to 39th.

Australia (36), Japan (56) and South Korea (39) follow Iran in the ranking.

With just 22 matches played, all friendlies, since the December edition, it is no surprise to see few significant changes in the first FIFA World Ranking of 2018.

Germany remain at the summit of a static top ten, while Iceland (20, up 2) are the only team to enter the top 20, with the Netherlands (21, down 1) dropping out.

Croatia (15th, up 2) also made some ground, and there were more substantial rises further down the order. Tunisia (23rd, up 4), for example, built on the gains made during their successful FIFA World Cup qualifying campaign, while Kuwait (174, up 15), Sudan (124, up 12), and El Salvador (90, up 10) all registered double-digit jumps.

The next FIFA World Ranking will be published on 15 February 2018.



Iran beat Uzbekistan at Asian Men's Handball Championships



S P O R T S Iran defeated Uzbekistan 37-18 in their first match of the 2018 Asian Men's Handball Championships at the Seo-Suwon Chilbo Gymnasium in Suwon.

Japan had also defeated Uzbekistan 38-27 in Group A. Iran, headed by Slovenian coach Borut Macek, have been scheduled to meet Japan on Saturday. On Friday, Australia lost to Oman 33-19 in Group B, hosts South Korea, winners of the Championships

a record nine times, defeated India 35-23 in Group C, and defending champions Qatar beat China 34-19 in Group D.

The top two in the four groups will qualify for the second set of group games, due to start on Monday.

The championship is being held at Suwon, South Korea from January 18 to 28, 2018. It acts as the Asian qualifying tournament for the 2019 World Men's Handball Championship.

Tractor Sazi deserve better place: Ertugrul Saglam



S P O R T S Ertugrul Saglam says Tractor Sazi football team deserve a better place in the Iranian Professional League (IPL) on Friday.

Saglam has traveled to Tabriz to negotiate with the club to take charge of the Iranian team.

According to Iranian media, the former Besiktas coach has reached an initial agreement with Tractor Sazi.

Under leadership of Yahya Golmohammadi, Tractor Sazi are in 11th place on 21 points, eight points above the relegation zone.

"I had heard about Tractor Sazi in Istanbul. For me, it's a great honor to work at such a big club. Also, I feel a great responsibility to the Tractor Sazi's fans," Saglam said.

"We have to do our best to move up in the table and I am optimistic about moving up in the table," the 48-year-old Turkish coach added.

Physically extraordinary Djokovic is battle ready, says Agassi

MELBOURNE (Reuters) — Novak Djokovic is "physically extraordinary" and can emulate Roger Federer by winning the Australian Open in his first tournament for six months, mentor Andre Agassi said on Friday.

The Serb arrived in Australia with question marks over his elbow injury and has played two rounds in Melbourne wearing a compression sleeve on his serving arm.

The 12-times grand slam champion has re-modelled his serving action to take the pressure off the joint but it held up during a four-set win over Gael Monfils in brutal heat on Thursday.

"If you haven't played for a long time, anything that isn't quite the centerpiece of your game, can go through a bit of a challenge," former world number one Agassi, who flew in to be in Djokovic's corner, told AAP on Friday.

"With a new service motion and the pressure and



the big match and not playing in a while, that was the time for it to get tested and, getting through it, he'll be a lot better for it moving forward."

Djokovic had not played a competitive match for six months before his first round clash with American Donald Young and while that was a breeze, his clash with Monfils in 40 degrees heat proved to Agassi that the 30-year-old is battle ready.

"Recovery is not something I worry about with him," said Agassi, who added he is not working with Djokovic for 'personal gain'.

"Novak is physically extraordinary and he has a recovery ability that is unlike mine, probably just because the nature of how his body is made and how efficient he is.

"The guy has a capacity for pushing himself that is unique."

Liverpool still open to transfers after Virgil van Dijk capture - Klopp

Jurgen Klopp says Liverpool are still open to making signings in the January transfer market, but stressed that he will continue to focus on the players currently at the club.

Liverpool broke their transfer record in signing Virgil van Dijk from Southampton for £75 million earlier this month, but went on to lose Philippe Coutinho to Barcelona in a deal that could reach £142m with add-ons.

Speaking at a news conference to preview Monday night's trip to Swansea City, Klopp said: "If something jumped in my face then we think about it."

"First of all, we have to use the high quality players we have. [Adam] Lallana isn't the replacement for Coutinho, but he's a fantastic player."

In terms of outgoing, sources have told ESPN FC that Inter Milan and Sevilla have both expressed an interest in signing Liverpool's Daniel Sturridge in this window.

Sources have told ESPN FC that Liverpool would be willing to let the striker depart this month if the offer is right, but Klopp refused to specifically address the speculation surrounding the 28-year-old.

"We don't discuss the transfer market here," he said. "If there are any rumours, I'm not aware of that, but it's not too important. We'll see what happens until the 31st."



"What I can say is we have a long, very decisive part of the season still to play. In this transfer window, it always looks like the season is already over and everybody who didn't play often enough wants to leave. But we still have games to play and we need all the players for this. We will see how it will be on the 31st."

Meanwhile, Liverpool will head to Swansea City on Monday night with Loris Karius continuing as the team's first-choice goalkeeper. Karius took permanent command of the

No. 1 jersey for the win over Premier League leaders Manchester City last weekend, although he was criticised for conceding Leroy Sane's equaliser at his near post in the first half of the 4-3 victory.

"Do you really think that I change my mind that quick?" Klopp said. "How I said, it's a very difficult job to be a goalkeeper or a centre-half at Liverpool because no one forgives you [after] one mistake."

"Obviously, since I'm in, it feels like 'wow' if our goalkeeper makes a mistake and it's

a disaster. If any other goalkeeper makes a mistake then he's still a fantastic goalkeeper and we should still buy him."

"I'm really fine with our goalkeeper situation. Loris Karius could have made a save around the first goal, even though I think it was a world-class finish in this moment. It's always makes sense to say the truth."

"We changed a lot of positions during the year, but only with the goalkeeper it looks like we have to stick to our opinion for 20 years if we made a decision one time. I changed not my opinion, but the situation now. That's all."

"But of course, Loris has to deliver. He knows that. Now he is the No. 1 and that means he can play again and he can concede a goal like he conceded against Manchester [City]. It's not like we want that, but it's still possible. All the good things, I like to see again. I saw a lot of good things in the games he played in the last few weeks. That's why he's in."

Liverpool expect to have Virgil van Dijk (hamstring) available for the game at the Liberty Stadium, in addition to Mohamed Salah and Ragnar Klavan, who have both been unwell, while Dejan Lovren is doubt for the trip to Wales because of illness. (Source: ESPN)

Persepolis, Esteghlal held in Iran Professional League

S P O R T S Iranian popular football teams Persepolis and Esteghlal were held by their opponents in Iran Professional League (IPL).

Siamak Nemati's 94th-minute equalizer rescued a point for Persepolis in Tehran's Azadi Stadium on Thursday.

Esmail Farhadi had scored a goal in the 74th minute. Esteghlal also played out a goalless draw with Padideh in Mashhad on Friday.

Esteghlal captain Omid Ebrahimi failed to convert his penalty with two minutes remaining.

"We were held by Padideh but it doesn't matter. I am satisfied with the way we played in this match," Winfried Schaefer said in the post-match news conference.

■ **Here are IPL results in full:**

- Tractor Sazi 1 - 2 Saipa
- Zob Ahan 2 - 1 Sanat Naft
- Pars Jonoubi 1 - 1 Esteghlal Khuzestan
- Naft Tehran 4 - 1 Siahjamegan
- Sepidrood Rasht 2 - 1 Sepahan
- Foolad - Paykan (Postponed)

Persepolis are IPL pacesetters with 45 points. Pars Jonoubi sit second with 33 points.

Mkhitarian would suit Arsenal way of playing - Xhaka

Granit Xhaka has backed Manchester United midfielder Henrikh Mkhitarian to be a success at Arsenal if he joins in exchange for Alexis Sanchez.

Mkhitarian has struggled to make an impact at United since joining in 2016 and is set to move to the Emirates Stadium with Sanchez going the other way.

Xhaka, who played against Mkhitarian during his time in the Bundesliga with Borussia Monchengladbach, said: "I read that in 2009 he said that he likes Arsenal."

"I'm sure the style of play here would suit him. Every player has their own qualities. He is a great footballer, so let's just see what happens."

"It was tough to play against him. To be honest, I would rather have played alongside him. He is a player who is obviously very good and has lots of good qualities as well."

Xhaka was referring to a UEFA interview with Mkhitarian during his spell at Armenian side Pyunik in which he praised Wenger and said Arsenal were his "favourite team" and he would "want to play there one day."

Speaking ahead of Saturday's clash against Crystal Palace, Wenger said Mkhitarian, who turns 29 on Monday, saw how good Arsenal were during their Champions League clashes.

"We played many times against him when he was at Dortmund," Wenger said.

"He certainly appreciated the quality of our game and the way we play football. That's why certainly he loves the club as well."

Speaking to Sky Sports, Xhaka also praised the attitude shown by Sanchez, saying: "We all see that he always gives everything on the pitch. He wants to win all the time and obviously last season he scored well over 20 goals and this season he is scoring goals as well." (Source: ESPN)

I would reject such players - Heynckes slams 'selfish' Aubameyang

Jupp Heynckes slammed Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang for being "selfish" at Borussia Dortmund and insisted he would refuse the chance to sign players who only want to follow their own goals.

Aubameyang's relationship with the Dortmund hierarchy appears to be at breaking point, with the Gabon international being strongly linked with a move to Arsenal.

The striker incurred the wrath of club officials by missing a team meeting before last weekend's 0-0 Bundesliga draw with Wolfsburg, resulting in head coach Peter Stoger dropping him from the squad.

When asked at his news conference about football's decline in terms of morality, Heynckes said: "That exists all along, but at the moment there are totally different dimensions, I see that very critically. I think footballers are very privileged, all the more if you see how hard many people have to work for their salary. So, I think professional ethics and morals belong to this. You have to see what's going on in the society."

"Things which happened with Aubameyang and [Ousmane] Dembele I see very critically. The clubs which sign those players have to be aware; they [Aubameyang and Dembele] could do the same to them."

"I would refuse to sign such players. Football is a team sport; you can't just be selfish and follow your own goals. You have to think about the fans as well. We have to pay attention so that the fans don't turn their backs on us and football."

"If I see that Arsenal was not really successfully in the last years but their tickets became more and more expensive, that's a problem. In Anderlecht our fans protested against the ticket prices - and they were totally right." (Source: Guardian)

IOC tests over 14,000 athletes ahead of Winter Olympics

The taskforce, which was set up to monitor and optimize the testing, has placed extra scrutiny on Russian athletes.

Twice the number of Russian athletes were tested in November and December, as compared to those from any other country.

The IOC last month banned Russia from the Pyeongchang Games as a result of its "unprecedented systematic manipulation" of the anti-doping system, though individual athletes will be able to compete effectively as neutrals if they can prove their anti-doping credentials.

Widespread doping by Russian athletes at the 2014 Sochi Winter Games was exposed by an independent report for the World Anti-Doping Agency.

Apart from increased testing, the IOC is also aiming to improve testing methods by focusing on factors such as high-risk disciplines and nationalities, suspicious changes in performance and adverse testing history. (Source: Reuters)

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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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Farhad Hassanzadeh nominated for Hans Christian Andersen Award

A R T TEHRAN — Iranian author Farhad Hassanzadeh has received a nomination for the 2018 Hans Christian Andersen Award as the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) announced nominees last week.

Marie-Aude Murail from France, Eiko Kadono from Japan, Joy Cowley from New Zealand and Ulf Stark from Sweden are the other nominees for the award that is the highest international recognition given to an author and an illustrator of children's books.

Hassanzadeh has authored over 80 books, including "The Backyard", "The 7th Bench by the Lake", "Bambak's Scorpions", "Watermelon with Love" and "Call Me Ziba".

Farhad Hassanzadeh in an undated photo

IBBY presents the Andersen award to a living author and illustrator whose complete works have made a lasting contribution to children's literature.

The two winners will be announced at the IBBY press conference at the Bologna International Children's Book Fair on March 26.

The medals and diplomas will be presented to the winners during the 36th IBBY Congress in Athens, Greece on August 31.

WHAT'S IN ART GALLERIES

Illustration

An exhibition of illustrations by a group of artists is currently underway at Farda Gallery.

Sara Atash-hoosh is the curator of the exhibition entitled "My Imaginary Friend", which will run until January 26 at the gallery located at 2 Araabi Alley, Hosseini St., off Karim Khan Ave.

Photo

Photos by Kimia Najjarium are on display in an exhibition at Persian Idea Gallery.

The exhibit titled "Forgotten Green" will run until January 24 at the gallery, which can be found at 28 Azar Alley, Kolahdüz St., Shariati Ave.

Photographer Jila Mokhtari is currently showcasing one of her collections named "Insanity minus a Second" in an exhibit at Shirin Gallery.

The exhibition will run until January 31 at the gallery located at No. 5, 13th St., Karim Khan Ave.

Painting/calligraphic painting

Mojdeh Gallery is displaying in an exhibition a collection of paintings and calligraphic paintings by a large group of artists, including Ali Shirazi, Keykhosro Khorush, Shahin Arvin, Abbas Katuzian and Sedaqat Jabbari.

The exhibit will continue until January 24 at the gallery, which can be found at 27 North Allameh Blvd., in the Saadatabad neighborhood.

Watercolor

Watercolors by Saeideh Soruri are on display in an exhibition at Golestan Gallery.

The exhibition will be running until January 24 at the gallery located at 34 Kamasai St. in the Darus neighborhood.

Drawing/painting

Arte Gallery is displaying to an exhibition of drawing and paintings by Kasra Sharifi and Elnaz Alizadeh.

The exhibit entitled "Calvary" runs until January 28 at the gallery that can be found on Molla Sadra St. near Vanak Square.

Malaysia's "Ola Bola" tops at Tehran sports film festival

A R T TEHRAN — "Ola Bola" by Chiu Keng Guan from Malaysia won the award for best film at the 11th Tehran International FICTS Festival, the organizers announced on Thursday.

Najwa Abu Bakar, Tung Yow Kong, and Datuk Steven Lim are the producers of the drama, whose story is set in the 1980s. The film was inspired by the glories of the Malaysia national football team, which successfully entered the 1980 Summer Olympics.

The winners were announced during the closing ceremony of the event, which was held at Tehran's Olympic Hotel on Thursday.

Turgay Sahin, the producer of "One Day One Child" by Turkish director/writer Sinan Sertel, won the special jury award. Sertel was presented with the award for best screenwriter.

"One Day, One Child" focuses on Mete, a rich, successful pedagogue who cannot find true happiness despite having everything financially. The film follows Mete as he experiences a drastic change in life and perspective after he visits an orphanage.

Anushka Sharma and Salman Khan won the awards for best actress and actor respectively for their roles in "Sultan" by Ali Abbas Zafar from India.

In the documentary section, "Sachin: A Billion Dreams" by James Erskine from India was selected as the best feature-length documentary. The film also received the special jury award in this category.

"K2 and the Invisible Footmen" by director and producer Iara Lee from Pakistan and "Adventure Not War" by director Max Lowe and producer Lindsey Hagen from the U.S. shared the award for best mid-length documentary.

A lineup of feature-length, short and documentary films from around the world went on screen during the 4-day event which opened at Felestin Cinema on Monday.

In addition, a collection of sports photos by photographers from around the world were showcased in the exhibit,



A scene from "Ola Bola" by Chiu Keng Guan from Malaysia.

which opened on the sidelines of the festival.

The festival is organized by the Federation Internationale Cinema Television Sportifs (FICTS) and is a part of the World FICTS Challenge that runs in 16 countries

around the world.

The festival is held in collaboration with the National Olympic and Paralympic Committee, the Ministry of Sports and Youth, IRIB and the Tehran Municipality.

More films from Iran to compete in Berlin festival

A R T TEHRAN — Two more film from Iranian cinema will be screened at the 68th Berlin International Film Festival, the organizers announced on Wednesday.

"Dressage" by Puya Badkubeh and "Hendi & Hormoz" by Abbas Amini will go on screen in the Generation 14plus competition.

The festival calls "Dressage" a "radically staged story about control, blackmail and the power of money" that "holds an uncompromising mirror up to Iranian society."

Motivated primarily by boredom rather than greed, Golsa and her friends rob a corner shop. But while evaluating the booty, they are dismayed to realize that they forgot to take the security camera footage. One of them must return to the crime scene and retrieve it. The vote falls on Golsa, who bravely completes the mission. Her friends' behavior makes her think, and she hides the hard drive somewhere in secret. But her accomplices and their well-to-do families, worried about their social standing, put more and more

pressure on Golsa.

"Hendi & Hormoz", a co-production between Iran and the Czech Republic, portrays the existential struggle of two young people who must abandon their carefree youth in a harsh world.

It takes place on Iran's Hormuz Island in the Persian Gulf, where hematite deposits in the soil turn the ocean waves blood-red. 16-year-old Hormoz is married to Hendi, three years his junior, after he promises that he can work as a miner. But the young man finds closed doors instead of a job. When Hendi becomes pregnant unexpectedly, Hormoz is forced to make an ill-advised pact with a smuggler.

A total of 65 full-length and short films have been invited to compete in the Generation Kplus and Generation 14plus competitions.

Earlier last week, the organizers of the Berlin festival announced that "Pig" by Iranian director Mani Haqiqi will screen in the official competition of the festival, which will be held from February 15 to 25.



A poster for "Dressage" by Puya Badkubeh

Rotterdam festival to screen films from Iran

A R T TEHRAN — The 47th edition of the Rotterdam International Film Festival will screen several films from Iran, the organizers announced last week.

Mohsen Qarai's debut feature "Blockage", which won an award at the 22nd Busan International Film Festival in South Korea, will go on screen in the Bright Future section dedicated to first feature-length films.

Director Mohammad Rasoulof's drama "A Man of Integrity", the winner in the Un Certain Regard category of the 70th Cannes Film Festival, and Vahid Jalilvand's acclaimed movie "No Date, No Signature" that won two top awards at the 74th Venice



Hamed Behdad acts in a scene from "Blockage" that will screen at the Rotterdam International Film Festival.

International Film Festival will go on screen in the Voices, a section dedicated to films with powerful stories, captivating subjects and important themes.

Maryam Tafakkori's "Absent Wound" will be screened in the Bright Future Short, and her "I Have Sinned a Rapturous Sin" will go on screen in the Ammodo Tiger Short Competition.

Iranian director Alireza Khatami's film "Los versos del Olvido" ("Oblivion Verses") co-produced by France, Germany, the Netherlands and Chile will also compete in the Perspectives section.

The Rotterdam International Film Festival will be running in the Dutch city from January 24 to February 4.

The Eagles settle lawsuit against Hotel California

NEW YORK (Reuters) — There can evidently be only one Hotel California.

The Eagles have settled a lawsuit to stop a Mexico hotel from using the name "Hotel California", arguably the country-rock band's most famous song, after the hotel's owners withdrew their application to trademark the name in the United States.

A joint dismissal of the band's lawsuit against Hotel California Baja LLC, which runs the Todos Santos hotel in Baja California Sur, was filed on Wednesday with the U.S. District Court in Los Angeles.

"This case has been settled by mutual agreement of the parties," Thomas Jirgal, a lawyer for the Eagles, said in an interview on Thursday.

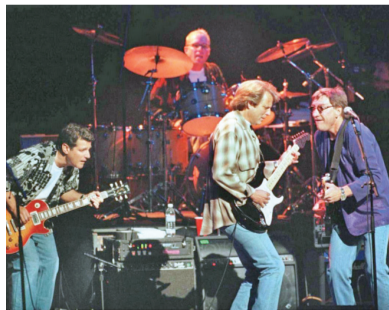
The dismissal came on the same day the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office accepted Hotel California Baja's request to permanently abandon its trademark application.

Neither the hotel nor its lawyer immediately responded to requests for comment.

"Hotel California" is the title track from the 1976 Eagles album of the same name, and won the 1977 Grammy award for record of the year.

It is known for a long guitar outro by Don Felder and Joe Walsh, and abstract lyrics that lead singer Don Henley told CBS News in 2016 depict "the dark underbelly of the American dream."

Hotel California Baja was accused of



American rock group The Eagles, shown performing in 1998 in London, Britain. (Reuters/David McNew)

wrongly encouraging guests to believe the Eagles authorized using the song's name, such as by playing the band's songs throughout its property.

The Eagles said this was done in part to spur sales of T-shirts, posters, refrigerator magnets and other merchandise for guests to take home after they check out and leave.

In court papers, Hotel California Baja denied it was trying to mislead guests, and said they were unlikely to be confused.

Located about 1,000 miles (1,609 km) south of San Diego and 48 miles (77 km) north of Cabo San Lucas, the hotel had been called Hotel California when it opened in 1950.

It underwent some name changes, but the original name was revived after John and Debbie Stewart, a Canadian couple, bought the property in 2001.

Buyers jockey for indie films at Sundance without Weinstein

PARK CITY, Utah / LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — For the first time in three decades, producer Harvey Weinstein did not trudge down Park City's snowy Main Street when the Sundance Film Festival opened Thursday, leaving the independent movie festival marketplace without its most-watched tastemaker.

His absence will be filled by streaming services, upstart studios and veteran production houses scrambling to buy the most buzzed-about films at the festival in an industry undergoing dramatic change.

"Some of the old guard, the usual suspects at Sundance, have stepped aside or have fallen back a bit," said Ian Bricke, director of content acquisition for Netflix Inc (NFLX.O).

"There's a whole range of new players," he added. "It creates excitement and some degree of chaos in the marketplace."

Weinstein was an unmissable presence in previous years, at times loudly negotiating deals in the foyers of theaters just after movie premieres. The producer built a career on finding awards-worthy gems at Sundance. Competitors watched his picks closely, often launching bidding wars and driving up prices.

This year, Weinstein is out of the mix, fired as chief executive of the Weinstein Co after more than 70 women accused him of harassment or assault, allegations that spanned three decades. He has denied having non-consensual sex with anyone.



The marquee on the Egyptian Theatre is pictured before the opening day of the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah, U.S. January 21, 2015. (Reuters/Jim Urquhart)

Sundance, founded by Robert Redford's Sundance Institute and now in its 33rd year, has become the independent film industry's premiere U.S. gathering.

Evolving movie-watching habits have brought new buyers in recent years, with Netflix and Amazon.com Inc (AMZN.O) leading the march of digital outlets to Sundance.

The streaming services had started to outbid Weinstein Co for standout films. Filmmakers prospered as Amazon paid \$12 million for "The Big Sick" and Netflix paid \$12.5 million for "Mudbound" in 2017.

This year, it was unclear whether those outlets will replace Weinstein as the pacesetters.