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# No tolerance for assaults from Iraqi Kurdistan



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*Iraqi Kurdistan Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani(L) shakes hand with Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Shamkhani*



## PERSPECTIVE

By Bahman Naghadeh  
Journalist

## Trump against Schumer

Democrat and Republican rivalry in the Senate of America has intensified. Republicans accused Democrat senators of closing the Trump government. This is while the majority of the U.S. Senate is in the hands of the Republicans. Therefore, some Republicans have been involved with the Democrats in this regard.

In the last two days, the name of Senator Chuck Schumer has been widely heard in the U.S. media and political space. He is the Senate Democrat leader. However, Schumer believes that the closure of the federal government is just one culpable guy, and that is U.S. President Donald Trump.

As New York Times reported, President Trump and Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, the top Democrat in the Senate, came close to an agreement to avert a government shutdown over lunch on Friday. But their consensus broke down later in the day when the president and his chief of staff demanded more concessions on immigration, according to people on both sides familiar with the lunch and follow-up calls between Trump and Schumer.

The negotiations between Trump and Schumer, fellow New Yorkers who have known each other for years, began when the president called Schumer on Friday morning, giving the White House staff almost no heads-up. In a lengthy phone conversation, both men agreed to seek a permanent spending deal rather than the stopgap measure being negotiated by lawmakers on Capitol Hill.

Less than an hour later, Schumer was meeting with Trump over cheeseburgers in the president's study next to the Oval Office. The White House chief of staff, John F. Kelly, was there, as was Schumer's chief of staff, Mike Lynch.

As the meal progressed, an outline of an agreement was struck, according to one person familiar with the discussion: Schumer said yes to higher levels for military spending and discussed the possibility of fully funding the president's wall on the southern border with Mexico. In exchange, the president agreed to support legalizing young immigrants who were brought to the United States as children. ➔7

## Fascism is main rival of liberal democracy: professor

**EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW**  
By Fatemeh Mohammadi

**TEHRAN** — Professor Kevin Richards, chair of Liberal Arts Department at Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, tells the Tehran Times that "Fascism is the main rival of liberal democracy. Fascism uses the democratic process against its very premise, appropriating the language of populism, but not changing the material conditions of the people."

He also adds that "Socialism and anarchism, on the other hand, while both bearing a historical specter, have shown the ability to thrive potentially within a democratic system, as has been seen in some of the Scandinavian countries most recently."

Following is the text of interview:

■ Francis Fukuyama the contemporary political theorist used to be an ardent supporter of liberal capitalism. But in 2014, he wrote "Political Order and Political Decay" to modify his earlier position. In regard with the U.S.'s presidential elections and the rise of Clinton and Bush families in the political scene of the country, Fukuyama believes that the U.S. is experiencing the decay of a political system which made people feel so disappointed in American democracy. What's your opinion about this?

A: I would agree about the symptoms of decay within the American political system, but I would not attribute the cause to the rise of dynastic political families, such as the Clinton and Bush families. The history of American politics, after all, is marked by familial dynasties, from the Adams family to the Kennedy family. I would posit that a greater source of the present conditions of malaise surrounding American democracy is the role of corporate

wealth, banking, and lobbyists, all wielding huge amounts of capital. The influence of these financial interests underpins the two major political parties, each in their own particular ways. Thus, the political system represents the interests of corporations and big money, not the interests of everyday individuals. While some would correctly argue that corporations are comprised of the individual investors, employees, and other people that the corporation stands for, the wealth distribution belies this ideal, as corporate wealth is the concentrated source of oligarchic power for the super-wealthy in America. While there have been significant expression of opposition to these conditions, most notably Occupy Wall Street, little has materialized because of the grip that Wall Street has on the political system. One can trace this in the chain of figures with backgrounds in Wall Street who have comprised presidential cabinets both past and present. In this situation, average individuals, whether they feel it or not, are relatively powerless in comparison to large corporations and possess little influence on political matters.

I would, however, question whether the U.S. is experiencing 'decay,' as Fukuyama believes, as that would presume that American democracy was once an ideal. In his vision of the Hegelian 'end of history' announcing itself in the triumph of neo-liberal capitalism as embodied in American democracy during the late 1980s, Fukuyama's idealism blinds him to the material evidence of oppression and occlusion that has marked American history, especially when it comes to politics and voting rights. While from Fukuyama's idealist position, American democracy may once have been something to aspire to, such a position remains blind to

some systemic issues that have always existed within American democracy, something that necessitates adding an asterisk to the success of the American political system.

That is to say, the American political system has always been flawed. For starters, the occlusion of women and African-Americans from the voting process for a century and a half clouds a large part of American history. Even in the wake of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, there have been innumerable attempts and, at times, massive suppression of voting rights, especially in the American South. The Republican Party has legislatively worked to dismantle the Voting Rights Act and other legislative efforts have attempted to make it more difficult for people to vote in neighborhoods that typically vote heavily for the Democratic Party. In particular, African-American and Latino neighborhoods are targeted for suppression by conservative interests. Indeed, the suppression of registered voters impacted the 2016 election to a far greater extent than any fictitious claims of voter fraud made by Trump and his supporters.

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

A: I think, again, that Fukuyama is right to perceive decay, but I think it is not simply about a divide between Northeastern elites and Southern populists. While the Southern strategy is something that has orchestrated Republican presidential campaigns since the 1960s, ➔7

## Iran urges quick end to military operations in Syria's Afrin

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Sunday that Tehran is concerned about developments in Afrin, Syria, urging an immediate halt to operations in the region.

On Saturday, Turkey launched a new air and ground operation around the area of Afrin. The operations, being called by the Turkish government "Operation Olive

Branch", hit targets in the Kurdish-dominated district.

"Continuation of crisis in Afrin may strengthen Takfiri-terrorist groups in northern parts of Syria and refuel fire of war and destruction in the country," Qassemi warned.

He added, "The Islamic Republic of Iran attaches importance to protecting Syria's territorial integrity and respecting this country's national sovereignty. ➔2

## Fajr Music Festival announces winners

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — The 33rd Fajr Music Festival wrapped up by honoring winners in various categories at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on Saturday evening.

In the Classical Music Composition category, the Barbad Award was shared by Alireza Mashayekhi for his album

"Spectrum" and Karen Keyhani for his album "Garden of Leaflessness".

Milad Derakhani's "Talk!" won the Barbad Award in the Music without Vocals section. This album also received the award in the Fusion Music section.

Derakhani dedicated the later award to his parents and his brother, Pedram. ➔16

## Iran's steel production grows 21.4% in 2017

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iran's production of steel increased 21.4 percent in 2017, IRNA reported on Sunday.

According to the latest report released by World Steel Association (WSA), Iran produced 21.7 million tons of steel in 2017, which showed 21.4 percent rise in comparison with 17.8 million tons in 2016.

Among the 66 studied countries by the international association, Iran is named as the 14th producer of steel across the globe, the same report confirmed.

It is predicted that the country will reach the 13th place in 2018 in steel production.

China is currently the major producer of steel in the world with annual production of 831.7 million tons.

## China tried its best to handle Iranian tanker tragedy: envoy

Chinese officials and rescue workers did everything they could to handle the situation in a recent tragic incident during which Iranian oil tanker Sanchi sank in the East China Sea after burning for a week, China's ambassador to Iran said, according to Tasnim.

In a press conference at China's embassy in Tehran on Sunday, Pang Sen said the Chinese government attached great significance to the recent incident for the Iranian vessel, saying even the Chinese president and the prime minister issued special orders following the crash on January 6.

China's Ministry of Transport and Ministry of Foreign Affairs took action after the incident in accordance with international protocols, the envoy said, adding that the country's embassy in Tehran also tried to facilitate rescue efforts by giving visa to the Iranian special forces who travelled to the crash zone for help.

Highlighting the rescue attempts by the Chinese teams, the ambassador said the operation was hampered by huge flames, poisonous gas and rough sea.

Sanchi, with 32 people -30 Iranians and two Bangladeshis- on board, collided with a Chinese freight ship in the East China Sea on January 6 and caught fire after a huge explosion.

The Panama-registered tanker was carrying 136,000 tons of condensate, an ultra-light crude that is highly flammable, to South Korea.

It sank on January 14 after the spread of fire to new oil condensate tanks created blazes as high as 100 meters and increased temperature to 350 degrees Celsius.

The Chinese search and rescue teams could retrieve three bodies and the black box from the vessel.



## Nation mourns lost sailors

On Sunday, President Hassan Rouhani attended a memorial ceremony for crew members of an Iranian tanker who lost their lives when the ship burned and sank.

The ceremony, held in Shaheed Mottahari High School, was attended by other top officials, including Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani, Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri, Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazel and IRGC Chief Mohammad Ali Jafari.

The Panama-registered Iranian tanker, which was carrying 16,000 tons of gas condensate, collided with a Hong Kong-registered freighter in East China Sea on January 7. The tanker sank a week after the incident, and all the crew members died despite all efforts to save their lives.

Islamic Republic of Iran Ministry of Energy  
Khuzestan Water & Power Organization

**Invitation to International Bid**

**Request for Qualification**  
**EPC+F Bid for Construction of water treatment plants in Ahwaz (Kut Amir, Kian Abad and Sheiban)**

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MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Rouhani to address nation on TV

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani is scheduled to appear on TV at 9:00 pm local time (5:30 GMT) on Monday to address the nation.

Rouhani is expected to elaborate on the most important issues, especially the recent riots and the devaluation of national currency against dollar.

The protests, which first started on December 28 in Mashhad, spread to certain other cities in a matter of a few days. The protestors were complaining about unemployment, inflation, and corruption.



Iranian Army to stage massive drills on Monday

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — The Iranian Army plans to hold a large-scale war game in Makran coasts and the Sea of Oman on Monday.

Speaking to reporters on Sunday, Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari said the military exercise, dubbed Muhammad Rasulullah-5, aims to boost the capabilities of the Army and convey the message of peace and friendship to other regional countries, Tasnim reported.

Sayyari, who is in charge of coordination efforts in the Army, added all branches of the Army, including Navy, Ground Force, and Air Force as well as air defense unit will participate in the war game.



Six MPs to visit Evin Prison

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Deputy Majlis Speaker Ali Motahari said on Sunday that a team comprising six parliamentarians will soon visit the Evin Prison to see the condition of individuals arrested during the recent unrest.

It comprises of members of the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee as well as Legal and Judicial Committee, Motahari was quoted by IRNA as saying.

The lawmaker further said that only 20 individuals are still in prison and others have been released.

He also said the lawmakers will examine the case of a detained man who committed suicide in prison.



Interior Minister presents report on protests to Rouhani

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli announced on Sunday that he has presented a report on the recent protests in some cities to the president, Mehr reported.

Rahmani Fazli said based on information provided by law enforcement and security bodies, the Interior Ministry has addressed and identified the causes behind the unrest and has suggested solutions to prevent similar incidents from happening in the future.

It came days after President Rouhani ordered the interior minister to prepare and present a detailed report on the recent unrest, in coordination with other state bodies.



Tehran mayor backs investigation into municipality

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Tehran Mayor Mohammad Ali Najafi says he welcomes the city council's investigation into the performance of the municipality and the Hamshahri Institute.

"In my opinion, this measure is alright," Najafi was quoted by ILNA on Sunday. "In fact, we support any investigation that the council wants [to carry out]."

In August 2017, Najafi was unanimously elected as the new mayor of Tehran by the Tehran city council. He succeeded Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf.

For months, the investigation into the financial affairs of the municipality has been on the agenda of the city council.



Larijani urges expansion of ties with Guinea-Bissau

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani said on Sunday that the expansion of parliamentary ties between the Islamic Republic and the Republic of Guinea-Bissau would lead to better relations between the two countries.

He made the remarks in a meeting with Guinea-Bissau's Parliament Speaker Cipriano Cassama in Tehran, IRIB news reported.

Larijani also expressed the hope that his counterpart's visit to Tehran would help the expansion of economic ties between the two sides.

Cassama, for his part, said he was happy to be in Iran and highlighted the role Larijani can play in expansion of relations.

# Iranian general to Turkey: Syria's territorial integrity must be protected

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — The chief of staff of the Iranian armed forces in a phone conversation with his Turkish counterpart has stressed that Syria's territorial integrity should be safeguarded.

Major General Mohammad Hossein Baqeri, speaking to Turkey's Hulusi Akar, stressed that Ankara ought to give assurances that it has no intention of undermining Syria's sovereignty.

Baqeri made the remarks as Akar called him to ensure that Turkey respected Syria's territorial integrity and remains committed to agreements reached in trilateral talks with Iran and Russia on the situation in the Arab country.

Turkey launched the so-called Operation Olive Branch on Saturday in a bid to eliminate the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which Ankara views as a terror organization and the Syrian branch of the outlawed Kurdish Workers Party (PKK).

Baqeri told Akar that such measures should not set the ground for exploitation by the enemies of Syria and the Muslim world, especially the U.S. and its allies, to advance



their expansionist policies in Syria. Nor should they undermine the trilateral



negotiations between Tehran, Moscow and Ankara and the Astana peace talks on Syria that have produced some achievements so far, Iran's top general went on to say.

## No tolerance for assaults from Iraqi Kurdistan: Iran

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Shamkhani said on Sunday that Tehran will not "tolerate" attacks on Iranian security forces and citizens by some anti-revolutionary groups who use the Iraqi Kurdistan territory for the purpose, noting that security in the border region is Iran's "red line".

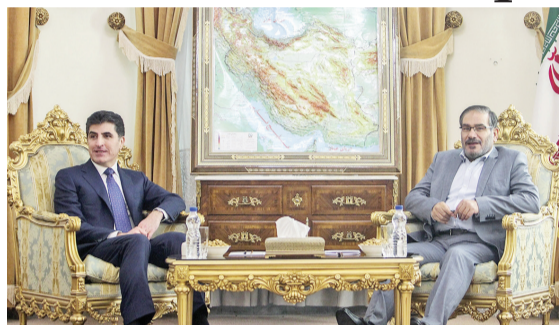
Shamkhani made the remarks in a meeting with Iraqi Kurdistan Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani.

"Iran will never tolerate the act of some anti-revolution's groups in killing the Iranian soldiers and citizens through the Kurdish lands and take the responsibility brazenly in interviews with the Kurdish media," Shamkhani asserted.

Certain Kurdish armed groups use bases in Iraq's remote mountainous north and launch sporadic raids into Iran.

For his part, Barzani said, "Relations between Iran and the Kurdistan region will not be influenced negatively by the ill-wishers and we will use all our power to prevent security threats against Iran."

Barzani is the first high-ranking Iraqi Kurdistan official visiting Tehran after the ill-fated independence referendum in the Kurdish region last year.



Relations between Tehran and the autonomous region strained after the referendum. Iran strongly opposed the referendum and closed its border with the region.

Shamkhani said some "regional and extra-regional countries" seek to weaken Iraq and other countries in West Asia.

Israel openly defended partition of the Kurdistan region from the mainland Iraq.

**■ Tehran ready to mediate between Baghdad and Erbil**

Elsewhere in his talks with Barzani, Shamkhani said

Iran is ready to help facilitate dialogue between the central Iraqi government and the Kurdistan region, noting that relations between Iran and Iraq are on the rise despite all plots.

Barzani also said that the Kurdistan region is proud of being a friend of Iran.

**■ Rouhani says Iran supports integrated Iraq**

In a separate meeting with Barzani on Sunday, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani called for boosting relations with the Iraqi Kurdistan as part of a united Iraq.

"President Rouhani stressed the historical and deep-rooted ties between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kurds of Iraq, and said all efforts should be made to strengthen the close relations between the two nations of Iran and Iraq," IRNA reported.

The Kurdish referendum on Sept. 25 angered Iraq's central government. The central government launched an offensive to recapture Kurdish held-areas, including the oil-rich city of Kirkuk.

On Saturday, one day before his travel to Tehran, Barzani held talks with Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi in Baghdad. It was the first meeting since conflict broke out over the independence referendum.

## Rouhani: Nuclear deal is cornerstone of Iran-Europe ties



**POLITICS** TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani said on Saturday that the 2015 nuclear deal can serve as a "cornerstone" for Iran and European countries to expand ties.

In a meeting during which Rouhani received credentials of Jaroslav Marcin Domanski, the new Polish ambassador to Tehran, the president said Iran will abide by the nuclear deal as long as the other signatories remain committed to it.

He added that undermining the nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, means undermining any diplomatic action.

"The international community, except for one or two countries, supports the JCPOA," Rouhani remarked.

The president said the Trump administration has miscalculations about the

multilateral agreement, noting Washington "will understand its political mistake if it pulls out of the agreement".

Rouhani also called for expansion of relations with Warsaw.

For his part, Domanski said that Poland seeks to have friendly relations with Iran based on "trust". He also expressed his country's support for the JCPOA.

"Poland, as an important member to the European Union and a non-permanent member to the UN Security Council, will make any effort to protect the JCPOA," Ambassador Domanski said.

Iran and six world powers, including the U.S., UK, France, Russia, China and Germany, struck the nuclear deal, also called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, on July 14, 2015. The deal went into effect in January 2016.

## Kamal Kharrazi meets Syrian president



**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Former Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi, who is the current chairman of Strategic Council on Foreign Relations, on Sunday held talks with Syrian President Bashar Assad to discuss regional issues.

Kharrazi arrived in Syria on Wednesday for holid talks with top Syrian political and religious figures.

In his meeting with the Syrian president, Kharrazi said the Syrian government's recent victories were achieved through the bravery of the Syrian armed forces with a backing by allies.

He called for more efforts so that all Syrian territories be cleared of the terrorists.

"The enemies of Syria and the resistance front will not cease to hatch plots, so [we] need to be aware of the enemies' plots," he was quoted by Pars Today as saying.

Assad, for his part, thanked the Islamic Republic's support for the Syrian nation and said the resistance of the Iranian forces and other allies in the war fronts played an important role in the victories of the Syrian army and nation.

Kharrazi and President Assad last met two years ago.

Prior to the on-going visit to Damascus, Kharrazi traveled to Lebanon and conferred with several Lebanese political and religious officials.

## Russia, Iran, Turkey agree on list of participants at Sochi forum on Syria

Russia, Iran and Turkey have agreed on the list of participants in the Syrian National Dialogue Congress to be held in the Russian resort city of Sochi on January 30.

The final formalities may take a couple more days, Alexander Lavrentyev, the Russian president's special envoy for Syria, announced on Saturday.

"The key question we have discussed is the Syrian National Dialogue Congress," Lavrentyev said, according to TASS news agency.

Lavrentyev said the decision was made after consultations between Russia, Iran, and Turkey.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Jaber Ansari was in

Moscow for talks on Syria.

"My opinion is the meeting was successful. We shall face work to finalize everything, which may take a day or two maximum," Lavrentyev remarked.

The presidential envoy also said Moscow is interested in the participation of Staffan de Mistura, the UN special envoy on Syria, in the conference.

"We want the UN representation at the forum at the highest possible level, and we hope the (UN) secretary general will send over to Sochi [...] de Mistura, who could participate in the event's opening."

He also said the situation on the ground in Syria should

not affect the National Dialogue Congress.

"The situation on the ground, on the battlefield in some Syrian regions remains rather tense," Lavrentyev said. "However, on the whole, it should on no account have any impact on results of the congress."

He also said the U.S. military must not remain in Syria without consent from Damascus.

"Our position is absolutely clear: the U.S. military must not remain in territory of an independent sovereign country without a permission from that country's leaders."

He added, "We expect participation of the U.S. as the UN's permanent member as an observer in the forum in Sochi."

## Iran urges quick end to military operations in Syria's Afrin

**1 →** Iran calls on all countries, especially Turkey, to remain committed to the Astana procedure and continue fulfilling its responsibility to settle the

Syrian crisis politically."

Qassemi also said that "provocative acts" and "illegal interferences" of extra-regional countries, especially the U.S. and the Zionist

regime, are the roots of the Syrian conflict.

The humanitarian crisis in Syria will not end as long as U.S. forces and its allies continue their illegal presence in Syria,

the Foreign Ministry spokesman added.

He called on Syria's neighboring countries to avoid taking any action which will lead to strengthening of terrorist groups.

# Turkey continues Syria offensive

## Syria slams Turkey's 'brutal aggression' on Afrin

By staff & agencies

Turkey pushes ahead with its operation against U.S.-backed Kurdish militants based in Afrin, saying its forces have crossed into the northwestern Syrian city and hit over 150 Kurdish militant targets so far.

Turkish media quoted Prime Minister Binali Yildirim as saying that the military forces had entered Afrin from the Turkish village of Gulbaba at 08:05 GMT on Sunday, the second day of the campaign.

He was also quoted as saying that the Turkish army aims to create a 30-kilometer safe zone in Afrin.

Turkey launched the so-called Operation Olive Branch on Saturday in a bid to eliminate the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which Ankara views as a terror organization and the Syrian branch of the outlawed Kurdish Workers Party (PKK).

Turkey-U.S. ties have hit a new low over Washington's support for the anti-Damascus Kurdish militants operating at the Turkish doorstep.

The operation was launched days after Washington said it would work with the Kurdish militants to set up a 30,000-strong border force near Turkish soil.

YPG rejects entry into Afrin

However, the YPG dismissed Yildirim's claim, saying Turkish troops had tried to enter Afrin, but were forced back.

Birusk Hasaka, the YPG spokesman in Afrin, said the Turkish forces were repulsed following fierce clashes.

Nouri Mahmoudi, another YPG official, also said "all the Turkish military's ground attacks against Afrin have been repelled so far and they have been forced to retreat."

153 militant targets hit

Meanwhile, the Turkish army said in a statement that it had targeted 153 hideouts, shelters and arsenals used by the Kurdish militants, adding that artillery fire continued from the ground.

Footage released on Sunday showed Turkish military convoys on the Syrian border.

The YPG said Turkey's strikes had killed six civilians and three of its members, and injured 13 civilians.

Earlier in the day, Turkish media reported four rockets fired from Syria had hit the Turkish southern border town of Kilis, wounding one person and causing damage to houses there.

Turkish security forces retaliated in kind, the reports said. Damascus has strongly condemned the most recent in a series of Turkish transgressions against Syrian sovereignty.

**Russia, U.S. FM's discuss N Syria**

Meanwhile, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson have discussed the Syria conflict over phone.

Russia's Foreign Ministry said the two sides "focused on the situation in Syria, including issues of stability in the country's north and promotion of the UN-brokered peace settlement which the Syrian National Dialogue Congress, which is due to be convened in [Black Sea resort of] Sochi bringing together a wide range of participants, should facilitate," the ministry said.

**We soon will finalize operation**

Meanwhile, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced on Sunday the republic's Armed Forces "soon" will finalize the operation in Syria's Afrin, the country's Yeniasak daily wrote.

"Our Armed Forces will finalize the operation in Afrin soon," the newspaper quoted the president as saying.

The president also said "Turkey's Armed Forces will follow the terrorists fleeing Afrin."



**■ Four stages operation**

The Olive Branch operation of the Turkish military against the Kurds' units in northern Syria will have four stages, the Milliyet newspaper reported Turkey's Prime Minister Binali Yildirim as saying on Sunday.

"The operation will have four stages, there will be a 30-kilometer buffer zone," the daily quoted the prime minister.

Besides, he continued in the Olive Branch operation the Turkish military "will destroy all 'terrorist organizations.'" "Prior to the operation's beginning, we had all necessary diplomatic negotiations," he added.

Yildirim also said on Sunday Russia does not object to the operation in Syria's Afrin, NTV reported.

"We are working to eliminate Iran's concerns, and Russia does not have objections," the television channel quoted the prime minister as saying.

Besides, he added, "Ankara supports communication with Damascus with mediation of Moscow and Tehran."

Earlier on Sunday, the prime minister confirmed beginning of the republic's military ground operation in Syria's Afrin. The Anadolu agency reports the Turkish military are moving forward jointly with units of the Syrian Free Army, opposing the Syrian government.

On Saturday, Turkey's General Staff announced beginning of the Olive Branch operation against the Kurds' units near Afrin, where about 1.5 million Syrian Kurds live. On the first day, the Turkish Air Force hit 108 targets in Afrin's seven locations and then returned home.

According to Sky News Arabia, six civilians and three military were killed in the air strike. The Turkish General Staff, however, insisted all the killed and injured "are terrorists."

**■ Syria slams Turkey's 'brutal aggression' on Afrin**

The Syrian government has condemned the "brutal Turkish

aggression" against the Kurdish-controlled enclave of Afrin, rejecting Ankara's claim about having informed Damascus of the operation.

Damascus "strongly condemns the brutal Turkish aggression on Afrin, which is an inseparable part of Syrian territory," state-run news agency SANA cited a Syrian foreign ministry source as saying on Saturday.

"Syria completely denies claims by the Turkish regime that it was informed of this military operation," the source added.

**■ 25,000 rebels back Turkish force in northern Syria**

Around 25,000 Free Syrian Army rebels are joining the Turkish military operation in northern Syria with the goal of recapturing Arab towns and villages seized by the YPG Kurdish militia almost two years ago, a rebel commander said Sunday.

Major Yasser Abdul Rahim, who is also the commander of Failaq al Sham, a main FSA rebel group in the operations room of the campaign, said the rebels did not seek to enter the mainly Kurdish city of Afrin but encircle it and expel the YPG, which controls it.

A main goal of the military operation was to recapture Tel Rifaat, a town southeast of Afrin and a string of Arab villages the YPG captured from rebels in February 2016, driving out tens of thousands of inhabitants, Abdul Rahim told Reuters.

**■ Turkish border town hit by missile from Syria**

A missile fired across the border from Syria hit the Turkish border town of Reyhanli Sunday, killing a Syrian national and wounding 32 people, broadcaster NTV reported the town's mayor as saying.

Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdog also told reporters in Istanbul Reyhanli had been hit by a missile from across the Syrian border.

# 1000s march across U.S. to protest Trump, promote women's rights

Thousands of protesters have taken to the streets and landmarks in major cities across the US, including its capital of Washington, DC, to rally against President Donald Trump and show support for women's rights, calling on citizens to get engaged on issues such as racial equality, sexual abuse, gun violence and immigrant protections.

The so-called Women's March on Washington was one of numerous such protest rallies waged on Saturday in hundreds of cities across the US as protesters gathered on the steps of the iconic Lincoln Memorial and stood along the lengthy Reflecting Pool, also urging more women to compete for public office.

Although Washington was the focus of last year's Women's March, with hundreds of thousands of protesters filling the streets of the US capital, the largest marches this year are taking place in other major cities, including in Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Chicago, Charlotte and New York.

The Women's March rally in Los Angeles alone drew an estimated 600,000 protesters on Saturday as people took to the streets of the city in what turned out to be a protest action mostly against the Trump administration and Republican lawmakers.

The protest rally in Washington took place just hours after the shutdown of the federal government that began at midnight, and was reportedly planned to revive the activism and civic participation sparked by the massive Women's March in the city held the day after Trump's inauguration in January 2017. According to local press reports, protest organizers said they hope to build on efforts that have also brought feminist issues to the forefront during the



politically hectic year since Trump rose to power.

A spokeswoman for the Women's March, Emily Patton, was quoted by the local media as saying that last year's march "was a rallying cry for a lot of women, who wanted their voices to be heard."

"This year," she added, "we really want to show support for women who are running for office and to encourage more women... to run for office, to register to vote, to be more civically engaged."

Patton further stated that the rally would show support for those who are providing voter information and challenging voter sup-

pression in Washington area communities.

She also insisted that "every politician and legislator needs to be put on notice," emphasizing: "We are not going away. We are demanding women's equality, women's rights, immigration rights, and we are going to continue to uphold the values that we hold dearly."

This is while Trump, at the White House, also weighed in on the protest march, saying on Twitter that, "Beautiful weather all over our great country, a perfect day for all Women to March. Get out there now to celebrate the historic milestones and unprecedented economic success and wealth

creation that has taken place over the last 12 months. Lowest female unemployment in 18 years!"

However, there were few Trump supporters at the protest rally in Washington. On the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, protesters held up a sign that spelled out "Impeach #45" on one side and "Narcissist" on the other.

Among public figures addressing the protesters in the US capital were senior Democratic Party leaders, who remained in Washington for the weekend due to the government shutdown.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi of California led more than a dozen Democratic lawmakers on the stage and told the demonstrators that they had "transformed the world."

"Your truth is never more important than now," she asserted.

Pelosi further underlined that many more people had turned out for last year's march than had attended Trump's inauguration. She then emphasized that the US president deserves an F for his first year in office.

Democratic Senator Kirsten Gillibrand of New York, who is often mentioned as a potential 2020 presidential candidate, also addressed the participants, saying: "It is women, who are holding our democracy together in these dangerous times."

One of the biggest protest events is due to take place Sunday in Las Vegas, where a concerted effort is being made to push for voter registration in bids to promote a Democratic Party Senate candidate against the state of Nevada's incumbent Republican Senator Dean Heller in November 2018 elections.

(Source: agencies)

## Trump: Senate should change rules if shutdown stalemate continues

U.S. President Trump said on Twitter Sunday that if the government shutdown stalemate continued, Republicans should fund the government by changing Senate rules - which currently require a super-majority for appropriations bills to pass.

"The Dems [Democrats] just want illegal immigrants to pour into our nation unchecked. If stalemate continues, Republicans should go to 51 percent [Nuclear Option] and vote on real, long term budget," Trump wrote on Twitter.

Funding for federal agencies ran out Saturday with Trump and Republican lawmakers locked in a standoff with Democrats. Republicans, who have a slim Senate majority, said they would not negotiate on immigration until the government was reopened. Democrats say short-term spending legislation must include protections for young undocumented immigrants known as "Dreamers."

(Source: Reuters)

## Taliban claims Kabul Intercontinental hotel siege

Afghan Taliban has claimed responsibility for an attack on Kabul's Intercontinental Hotel that left at least five civilians killed and six wounded.

Gunmen dressed in army uniform stormed the heavily-guarded hotel in the Bagh-e Bala area on Saturday evening, holding a siege that continued into Sunday.

Al Jazeera's Jennifer Glasse, reporting from Kabul, said the attack was declared over after 16 hours of fighting.

"Officials are inside [the hotel] now to conduct their investigations and to assess whether they will find any more casualties," she said. "We know the fighting went room-to-room, we know that many guests spent terrifying hours overnight hiding in their rooms as the gunmen moved through the hotel."

The Taliban group, which controls more than a third of the country, said there will be no peaceful solution unless international troops leave Afghanistan.

"Our five fighters, Bilal, Ayubi, Khalil, Bashar and Abid entered the building and conducted the operation that resulted in the death of 10 foreigners and Afghan government officials," Taliban spokesperson, Zabihullah Mujahid, told Al Jazeera.

The Taliban claim, however, was at variance with the government, which said at least four attackers involved in the brutal attack were killed. "We recovered the bodies of at least four attackers," said Interior Ministry spokesman Najib Danish.

A witness, Abdulhaq Karimi, told Al Jazeera that several dead bodies of security guards were near the gate of the hotel. Many were seen running out of the premises as the fighters barged in.

"The fighters can manage to attack anywhere they like. Nowhere is safe," Karimi said.

The interior ministry said a private firm assumed responsibility for the security of the hotel around three weeks ago, and were investigating how the attackers managed to enter the building that is frequented by government officials and foreigners.

The attack on the Intercontinental Hotel was just one of several assaults on Sunday. In a village in the northern province of Balkh, Taliban fighters raided houses in the middle of the night, pulling police officers from their homes and shooting them dead.

At least 18 officers were killed, deputy police chief Abdul Raziq Qaderi told local reporters.

In western Herat province, at least eight civilians were killed when a car hit a Taliban-planted roadside mine, officials said.

Afghan forces have struggled to combat the Taliban since the US and NATO formally concluded their combat mission at the end of 2014. The incident came days after the US embassy in Kabul issued a warning that armed groups may be planning attacks against hotels in the city.

This was the second time that the hotel came under attack.

In 2011, an overnight assault by Taliban fighters and suicide bombers on the hotel ended with security forces killing the attackers and the deaths of at least 10 civilians.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

## Iraqi PM presses Kurdistan over oil exports

The Iraqi prime minister has called on the country's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region to stop independent oil exports, saying the crude produced there must be placed under the central government's control.

Haider al-Abadi made the comments on Saturday during his first meeting with Nechirvan Barzani, prime minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), following the controversial secession referendum held in the northern region last September.

During the talks, Abadi further reiterated his conditions for lifting restrictions imposed on the Kurdistan region in the aftermath of the controversial plebiscite, including a direct international air travel ban.

According to a statement issued by Abadi's office, the Baghdad government wants the airports and border crossings in the Kurdistan region to fall back under the control of the federal power.

"They also discussed an oil-for-budget proposal, pending the approval of PM Abadi that will allow the KRG to receive its share of the budget in return for allowing the Iraqi government to export and sell oil produced by the Kurdistan government," the website of Kurdish-language Rudaw television network reported.

Abadi also reaffirmed the "position of the [Iraqi] government that it is necessary to commit to the borders of the [Kurdistan] Region as stipulated by the constitution," according to the statement.

In September 2016, the KRG defied stern warnings from Baghdad and overseas and held the referendum on separation from mainland Iraq. Kurdish officials said a majority of people said 'Yes' to secession.

However, Iraq's Supreme Federal Court, which is responsible for settling disputes between the central government in Baghdad and the country's regions, later ruled that the vote was unconstitutional. Among other things, Baghdad banned direct flights to the region, and conducted a military campaign to retake the areas overrun by Kurdish militants in the course of the fight with Daesh terrorists.

(Source: Press TV)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	98221.1
IFX	1083.87

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	46,650 rials
EUR	58,500 rials
GBP	63,390 rials
AED	12,850 rials

Source: Mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$68.61/b
WTI	\$63.31/b
OPEC Basket	\$67.20/b
Gold	\$1,333.15/oz
Silver	\$17.05/oz
Platinum	\$1,016.25/oz

Sources: Oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



Pistachio exports exceed \$677m in 9 months

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iran exported 84,000 tons of pistachio worth \$677 million during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2017), IRIB news reported citing the data by Islamic Republic of Iran customs Administration (IRICA). Pistachio was the country's seventh top non-oil product exported in the mentioned time span. Iran exported 130,000 tons of pistachio worth \$1.2 billion to 70 countries in the previous Iranian calendar year (which ended on March 20, 2017).



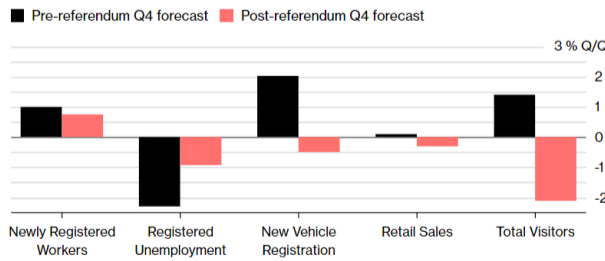
Stock market index rises 3.5% in a month

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE)'s main index (TEDPIX) gained 3,309 points or 3.5 percent to 98,817 in the tenth Iranian calendar month Dey (December 22, 2017-January 20, 2018), Tasnim news agency reported on Sunday. As reported, 23.515 billion securities worth 57.227 trillion rials (about \$1.271 billion) were traded through 1.56 million deals in the stock market. Number of securities and number of trades show three percent and two percent growth, respectively, while the worth of trades indicates nine percent rise compared to the previous month.

Trying to break up was costly for Catalonia

Catalonia will continue to count the cost of its drive for independence, according to BBVA Research. The Madrid-based bank sees the Catalan economy trailing the performance of Spain overall, as indicators point to weakness across the board from job creation to consumer spending. The lender's research department sees Catalonia, the biggest regional economy, growing 2.1 percent this year compared to a forecast of 2.5 percent for the whole of Spain. BBVA says political uncertainty pegged to the region's push for unilateral independence is weighing on growth. The expansion in the first half of 2018 will be below the average over the past three years – with all main economic indicators trailing their estimates before the illegal referendum in October, according to BBVA.

**■ Catalonia takes a hit**  
Main indicators show the Catalan economy underperforming since its October referendum



The BBVA predictions come as the Catalan parliament prepares to elect its next regional president with all eyes on ousted leader Carles Puigdemont who insists on taking office from his self-imposed exile in Belgium. Who forms the new administration will be key, according to BBVA. The central government in Madrid has warned Puigdemont can't govern if he's not physically in Spain. BBVA also slashed its growth forecast for Spain in November, citing the political tensions stemming from referendum. It predicts expansion of 2.5 percent this year, down from 2.8 percent in a previous report. It also trimmed its projection for 2017, forecasting growth of 3.1 percent. While keeping them unchanged at these lower levels in their latest report, it said the impact on the whole of Spain from the Catalan crisis had been limited.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Exports of dairy products up 30% in 9 months yr/yr

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Exports of dairy products from Iran increased 30 percent during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2017) compared to the same period of time in the past year, according to an agriculture official.

Deputy Agriculture Minister Hassan Rokni said the country has exported over 750,000 tons of dairy products during the mentioned time span, Tasnim news agency reported on Sunday. The official said that the neighboring countries as well as Europe were the export destinations of Iran's dairy products in



the nine-month period.

Dairy products exports stood at 850,000 tons in the past Iranian calendar year (which ended on March 20, 2017), while the figure was 600,000 tons

in its preceding year, Rokni has previously announced.

The official said that Russia joined the importers of Iran's dairy products in the past year.

Private sector to conduct loading, unloading operations in ports

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iran's parliament (Majlis) on Sunday approved the bill on amendment to the law for expediting the loading and unloading operations in the country's ports, IRNA reported. MPs approved the bill with 152 votes in favor, 23 against, and eight abstentions. The bill obliges the Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) to use its internal sources or private sector's investment for developing the ports and supplying port installations and equipment to expedite loading and unloading operations. Last December, private sector signed 13 memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with PMO to invest 100 trillion rials (about \$2.22 billion) in the country's northern and southern ports. Based on the MOUs, the private sector will make investments in Shahid Rajaie, Emam Khomeini, Khorramshahr, Bushehr



as well as Chabahar, Amirabad, Anzali and Noshahr ports.

Transport and Urban Development Minister Abbas Akhoundi, Mohammad Rastad, and Morteza Bank, the secretary of Free Zones High Council, attended the signing ceremony. The agreements oblige the related organizations and institutions to take necessary measures for facilitating the private sector's investment in the country's ports.

OPEC extends condolences over Sanchi tragedy

**ENERGY** **TEHRAN** — OPEC Secretary General Mohammed Sanusi Barkindo offered his condolences on the sad incident of the sunken Iranian oil tanker 'Sanchi' and demise of its crew members, Shana reported on Saturday. "I would like to convey my sincere condo-

lences and sympathy on the tragic and sad loss of life of 32 crew members of the Iranian oil tanker Sanchi, which sank so tragically in the East China Sea", Barkindo wrote to Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh. OPEC secretary general also expressed sympathy with the victims' families and Ira-

nian nation and added, "I stand by Iranian people in such painful moments." The Sanchi, carrying 136,000 tons of light crude oil from Iran, sank seven days after colliding with the CF Crystal on January 6, a Hong Kong-registered bulk freighter, some 300 kilometers east of Shanghai.



cooperation between the two countries saying, "Such collaborations can be escalated in various areas especially wind farm construction and solar farms after establishing a credit line between the two countries." The Ambassador noted that representatives of Export Credit Norway plan to travel to Iran in the near future to discuss facilitation of banking relations between the two countries.

Britain's tired old economy isn't strong enough for Brexit



There are windfall profits to be made when currencies fall: but these windfalls have been trousered by shareholders, not invested.

Banks, too, are a roadblock to growth and principally need to wean themselves off the property drug. This is why the shadow chancellor, John McDonnell, argues strongly for regional banks to bypass the existing high street lenders. Again, this appears like a new-world solution to an age-old problem. What could be more farsighted and lead to more diversity than supporting a new breed of financial lender with a remit to find successful entrepreneurs? But the risks are huge – not just of lending to people with dud business plans, but also of creating an institution that is stuck in the mire of British hope-for-the-best management from the moment it is launched. Without a revolution in the way companies and public sector institutions are managed,

there is little hope of a self-induced revival. That is why the car industry is now foreign owned and run. Brexit is also said to be the answer to Britain getting a pay rise. With fewer immigrants, the argument goes, the labour market will tighten and before too long workers will find themselves in the happy position of bidding up their wages. Not so fast. When so much growth over the past six years of recovery has been in the low-paid services sector, it is more likely that those businesses, confronted by angry staff, will close rather than pay up. They provide a discretionary service with a price ceiling: charge more and the customer will choose to do something else. That goes for hotels and coffee bars. They could all suffer hugely. So whether the solution to a more balanced and faster-growing economy is providing existing institutions with an incentive (a lower pound to exporters) or bypassing institutions, such as today's commercial banks, there is little guarantee the GDP dial will move. Power to the workers from lower immigration doesn't make a difference if all it means is that the jobs they are doing disappear. Brexit is only something – even if you accept the premise of socialism in one country or free-market bonanza – that works on paper. Which is a distinct problem when so much of what the UK has relied on for growth is running dry. There are not many state assets left to flog. Raw materials and energy costs are rising, while the foreign ownership and management of key industries could decline as Brexit cuts off easy access to the world's largest free-trade bloc. This week, GDP figures for the fourth quarter of 2017 will show the economy trundling along in the run-up to Christmas. If modest growth is all that is required, it can be achieved as long as borrowing remains cheap. Without cheap borrowing, predictions of the economy's decline will become real.

(Source: The Guardian)

Egypt shifting focus to private investments as growth driver



Mubarak. The flotation of the currency helped secure a \$12 billion International Monetary Fund and ended a dollar shortage that had crippled business activity. In a region riddled with political strife,

Egypt represents a "safe haven," El-Saeed said, adding "the economy is responding well to the government's reform plan." The economy grew by 5.2 percent in July-September with investments, rather than

consumption, driving the growth. While the IMF loan helped restore investor confidence, with foreigners pumping over \$19 billion into the local debt market, foreign direct investment has been slow to come. FDI fell by about 16 percent, to about \$1.6 billion, in the July-September period compared to a year earlier. Meanwhile, Egypt slipped six spots, to 128, in the World Bank's Doing Business Report 2018 that covers ease of operations in 190 countries. Inflation that had spiked on the back of the pound's flotation to almost 35 percent decelerated to 21.9 percent in December. In addition, the economy is forecast to grow by about 5.5 percent this fiscal year -- the highest level in about nine years, she said. The IMF is projecting growth rate of 4.8 percent.

(Source: Bloomberg)

# Saudi oil minister sees OPEC, allies cooperation past 2018

OPEC and non-OPEC producers should stick with their supply cuts throughout 2018 and continue cooperating beyond that, oil ministers from Saudi Arabia and Oman said.

The crude market will take all of 2018 to reach a normal level, and oil ministers shouldn't limit their efforts to this year, Saudi Energy Minister Khalid Al-Falih told reporters on Sunday in Muscat, Oman, before a meeting to assess compliance with the cuts. Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak said ministers need to see how the market develops before deciding if there's a need to adjust production caps.

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies see merit in maintaining their output limits into 2019 and probably won't discuss an exit strategy from their cuts agreement when the committee monitoring compliance meets on Sunday, Oman Oil Minister Mohammed Al Rumhly told reporters. Saudi Arabia's Al-Falih said the market won't re-balance in the first half, and ministers need to identify a normal inventory level more clearly before OPEC meets next in June.

## Crude gains

Ministers from OPEC members are meeting with counterparts from Russia and Oman in the



Omani capital to assess compliance with the cuts deal that expires at the end of the year. The suppliers are seeking to clear a global glut and prop up prices. While benchmark Brent crude has gained 2.6 percent this month, U.S. oil output is set for strong growth this year as prices rally, the International Energy Agency said on Friday.

The oil market will return to balance in the

third quarter at the earliest if OPEC and its allies keep complying fully with their cuts and if production from Libya and Nigeria remains at December levels, according to people with knowledge of the matter. Their assessment came from a meeting on Saturday of the joint OPEC, non-OPEC technical committee and was made for the joint ministerial committee meeting in Muscat.

Libya and Nigeria were left out of the initial output accord that took effect in January 2017, due to internal conflicts. However, OPEC imposed caps on both countries in November. Nations participating in the output deal had a compliance rate of 129 percent in December and 107 percent for all of 2017, said the people with knowledge of the situation, who asked not to be identified because the information isn't public.

Excess oil inventories have declined by 220 million barrels from a level of 340 million barrels in early 2017, Al-Falih said in a speech before the monitoring committee meeting. Russia's Novak said he expects the oil market to re-balance this year.

Producers should maintain their agreement to cut output by 1.8 million barrels a day until the end of 2018, United Arab Emirates Energy Minister Suhail Al-Mazrouei said in a speech at the same event. Global inventories are 118 million barrels above their historical five-year average, and the positive trend in OPEC's compliance over the past five months will help to balance the market quickly, he said.

(Source: Bloomberg)

## Does \$70 a barrel mark the high point for oil?

By Michael Mackenzie

Here are the major questions for investors as a new trading week beckons for financial markets.

### Will oil continue its ascent?

Brent crude oil started the week with a bang, hitting a three-year high of \$70.37 a barrel. But the rapid run up in oil prices from below \$45 a barrel just seven months ago has led many investors to ask if \$70 a barrel will mark the peak for the market?

The reasons for caution are grounded largely in the resurgence of the U.S. shale industry, which after weathering three years of lower prices is expected to roar back with higher production this year.

The International Energy Agency on Friday raised its forecast for U.S. production growth to 1.35m barrel a day this year, making up by far the biggest chunk of supply growth outside OPEC countries. U.S. oil output should surpass Saudi Arabia this year.

The Paris-based agency said it felt like a return to the "heady days" of 2013-2015, when the rapid rise of shale helped end the \$100-oil era and led to oil's eventual crash to below \$30 a barrel.

But the difference this time is that demand is now growing much faster than it was in the first half of this decade, meaning it takes more supply to weigh on prices.

The strongest global economic growth in years

and (relatively) low prices are seen boosting global oil consumption by at least 1.3m b/d this year, a number the IEA acknowledges is "conservative" compared with some forecasts. Others have predicted demand growth could approach 2m b/d this year, more than the double the rate of 2011-2014.

That is the main reason hedge funds have continued to bet oil's rally may have further to run, with Brent's 2 percent slide between Monday and Friday seen as a healthy correction rather than the definitive start of a downtrend.

Supplies are also not without risk. The IEA said that if OPEC and its allies maintain their voluntary production cuts the market will be roughly balanced this year, but cautioned the deteriorating situation in OPEC member Venezuela remains a key risk.

Amid an economic crisis, output in Venezuela fell 490,000 b/d in the 12 months to December and is at a near 30-year low of just 1.6m b/d — or almost half the level when Hugo Chávez took office in 1999.

"It is reasonable to assume that the decline will continue, but we cannot know at what rate," the IEA cautioned.

While a short-term pullback in oil seems a possibility, there are strong reasons to believe the top is not in yet. David Sheppard

■ **Is the ECB's scale-back of bond purchases having an impact on prices?**

The European Central Bank has halved its quantitative easing program of bond-buying from this month, to €30bn monthly. This latest step in its gradual and cautious normalization of monetary policy is a precursor to ending the program entirely, which is widely expected to happen this autumn.

Weekly bond buying data, out later this week, will add to the limited information available for market watchers, who are seeking to discern how the ECB is implementing the cut across its corporate and public sector buying programs.

The ECB's monthly meeting, which takes place on Thursday, will also be closely watched, after minutes of its December rate-setting meeting indicated that it was preparing to cut its crisis-era stimulus program faster than previously anticipated.

With core Eurozone yields at ultra-low levels and in some cases deeply into negative territory, the central bank's step back from the market has been expected to feed through into pricing. However, the recent upward shift in U.S. Treasury yields may also be influencing the pricing of European government debt, making the impact of the ECB's purchasing reduction harder to distinguish. Kate Allen

■ **Can the pound crack the \$1.40 barrier?**

Sterling is getting closer to testing a key level versus the U.S. dollar. Last week the pound climbed

to a post-EU referendum peak of \$1.3945. In the modern era of floating currencies, the pound has rarely spent much time below \$1.40 and before the EU referendum result in June 2016, it was trading at \$1.50.

Having subsequently fallen briefly below \$1.20 in the wake of the referendum in 2016, the pound has slowly rebounded. Now the market will see whether the prospect of a soft exit from the EU can help push the pound back over its long standing floor against the dollar since the 1980s.

Positive UK data and further progress on a Brexit deal hold the key for further sterling strength versus the dollar say traders. Another factor is whether the U.S. dollar remains stuck in its striking bearish pattern.

The reserve currency has failed to find support from stronger U.S. economic data, the passage of tax cuts, let alone higher Treasury yields and rising market expectations of inflation. A weaker dollar is the key trend in currency markets and that has been a boon for the pound.

But if we look at sterling in trade-weighted terms, the currency remains tarred with the Brexit brush and this measure diverges notably from the performance of the pound/dollar pairing. The Bank of England's broad sterling index is up just 2 percent over the past year, while the pound has gained more than 12 percent versus the U.S. dollar.

(Source: Financial Times)

## India's ONGC to buy majority stake in refiner HPCL for \$5.78 billion



India's biggest explorer Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC) has agreed to buy the government's majority stake in state-refiner Hindustan Petroleum Corp for 369 billion rupees (\$5.78 billion), ONGC said on Saturday.

The logo of Oil and Natural Gas Corp's (ONGC) is pictured along a roadside in Ahmedabad, India, September 6, 2016. Picture taken September 6, 2016.

It will pay a premium of about 14 percent on HPCL's current market price for the 51.1 percent stake, the company said in a statement to the stock exchange. It expects to complete the transaction by end-January.

## New importers keep LNG markets tight

As the U.S. and Australia join Qatar as major natural gas exporters, the LNG supply surge that began to materialize in 2014 continues. Yet despite growing supply, the long-anticipated glut in global LNG markets hasn't occurred.

Indeed, physical markets haven't loosened, but remain tight as global demand continues to rise. This partly helps to explain this winter's spike in Asian spot market prices, with the spread between European and Asian spot prices rising from almost nothing last summer to between \$3 and \$4 per MMBtu.

The largely unexpected rise in global demand is explained in a new report from Columbia University's Center on Global Energy Policy. In "They Might Be Giants: How New and Emerging LNG Importers Are Reshaping the Waterborne Gas Market," researchers Akos Losz and Teddy Kott identify key demand and price factors shaping today's LNG markets.

Losz and Kott's analysis begins with the observation that when global supply

started taking off in 2014, European imports did not increase significantly during the period from mid-2014 through late 2017. They expected to see a large increase in cargos to Europe during a period of global oversupply, but this did not occur.

"Europe's hubs from Italy to England function like a global swing buyer," reports Losz, explaining how the continent's flexible gas hubs can absorb additional LNG when supply exceeds demand elsewhere.

As the researchers continued to pinpoint the cause of physical tightness in LNG markets, they tracked shipments to a group of small, relatively new importers. Here they found a surprising new source of demand. A dozen countries, each individually insignificant in scale, were collectively absorbing a large amount of the supply growth during the past three years. They are spread across Eurasia and the Caribbean, including Egypt, Jordan, Pakistan, Kuwait, UAE, Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, Poland, Lithuania,


Jamaica and Malta. Among them the largest importer, Egypt, accounted for just 2.3 percent of global imports in the first three quarters of 2017.

As an unexpected source of new demand, this group of emerging importers accounted for about 11 percent of global LNG trade as of the end of September 2017, up from just over 3 percent in mid-2014. By comparison, China — up until the third quarter of last year — accounted for 12 percent of global LNG consumption, although its recent demand spike has likely boosted its market share a few percentage points higher this winter. While booming Chinese demand has captured the headlines, the emerging dozen have accounted for nearly 60 percent of net global demand growth since mid-2014.


"Back in 2014, who would have foreseen another China appearing out of nowhere in the global LNG market?" asks Losz. "Expectations of oversupply would probably have been tempered dramatically."

(Source: oilprice.com)

**Second Announcement**



**N.I.O.C**  
**1396.4872**



**National Iranian Drilling Company**

Public Calls For Quality Evaluating Of Tender (One Publish-Seconded Publish)						
Two Stage (Semi Compressive)						
TENDER GUARANTEE		ESTIMATED VALUE	DESCRIPTION	Tenders Portal Reg. No. On http://iets.mporg.ir	TENDER NO. / INDENT NO	No
Euro	Rial	(Rial)				
29,950	1,295,160,000	25,903,200,000	Coring Tools	3,148,350	Indent No: 43-22-8804748053 TenderNo.: CGP/25-96/001	1

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

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

B) Preparation of tender documents:  
Purchasing of documents:  
In order to receive the tender documents, **510,000 Rials** should be paid to SIBA account number 2174652205004 of NIDC in Bank Meli Iran and providing the original deposit receipt.

Reciving of documents:  
Tenderers must be obtain the quality evaluation documents along with tender documents maximum 10 days after the date of second publication in person at the following address: Sector Tenders, Foreign Procurement of Capital Goods dept., end of the workshop No. 8, Karoon Industrial Area, Ahwaz, IRAN.  
Tel No.: 061-34142387 or Room #431, coordination office of NIDC, NIOC No. 8 center Building, Yaghma alley, Jomhoori St., Tehran, IRAN, Tel No.: 021-66700249.

Notice:  
Only the real or legal persons who apply to purchase and recieve tender ducments from foreign procurment department in due date will be known as tenderer from tender committee.

C) Delivery of call quality evaluating:  
Tenderers shall submit the completed documents including qualificaion worksheets in form of software in CD/DVD within 14 days from last day of document recived deadline to the following address: Hall No.:107, 1th floor ,Tender Committee, Building operations, National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN. Tel No.: 061-34148205-6 , 061-34148580

D) Tender Guarantee:  
**Type of guarantee:**  
A) Bank guarantees or guarantees issued by non-bank institutions that have activities licensed by the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran.  
B) The original cash deposit receipt paid to National Iranain Drilling Company.

Duration of credit guarantee & quotation:  
This duration should be valid for 90 days and extendable maximum For one time in initial credit amount.

More on this & other tenders is accessible by click on. WWW.NIDC.IR  
NIDC Telegram Channel: @nide\_pr  
**National Iranian Drilling Company**  
**Contracts Department**

تهران تایمز : نوبت اول ۹۶/۱/۱ نوبت دوم ۹۶/۱/۲

## Is promoting human rights in ASEAN an impossible task?

By Pavin Chachavalapongpun

Last month, the Philippines handed over the chairmanship of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission of Human Rights (AICHR) to Singapore. Immediately, Singapore’s representative to the AICHR, Shashi Jayakumar, vowed to take an active role in protecting human rights within the Southeast Asian region.

The AICHR was inaugurated in October 2009 as a consultative body of ASEAN on human rights protection. Its main responsibility is therefore to promote regional cooperation on human rights — an issue that has long been sensitive and still even considered a taboo among some ASEAN states.

As stipulated in the ASEAN Charter, AICHR meets at least twice a year. It is directed by a group of representatives, one per member state. Each member is nominated by and answerable to their government and serves a three-year term.

Since its inception however, and AICHR has been mired in endless controversies, mostly due to the challenges it has faced in protecting human rights. The problem partly lies in the design of the AICHR. The AICHR is not truly independent because its members are appointed by state leaders. Little surprise, then, that often, instead of addressing human rights violations committed by the state, the commissioners are obliged to protect their government at the expense of the people. There are other related issues too, including the fact that there is no electoral mechanism that ensures the members’ competency and qualification as human rights leaders.

Moreover, the bigger issue is the fact that the responsibilities of the AICHR are constrained by ASEAN’s golden rule of non-interference. It has been a strict tradition in ASEAN to avoid criticizing each other’s internal affairs, particularly those directly related to the issue of human rights.

Seen from this perspective, the real function of the AICHR is then reduced to an educational and awareness-building role on human rights, rather than tackling the problem and finding the solution. Rodolfo Severino, the former ASEAN Secretary-General, one told me that, at this stage, it was expected that the AICHR acted merely as an “information center” for human rights protection, and nothing else.

Singapore, the current chairman of the AICHR and the holder of this year’s annually rotating ASEAN chair, despite its earlier pledge to address human rights problems, is often itself accused of human right abuses in various forms. Press freedom and different political views from that of the state are still under threat today, while hanging is still the main method of execution and caning of prisoners for various offences has become a standard practice.

It therefore remains to be seen how Singapore will negotiate its agenda on human rights while upholding such practices that breach human rights.

Human rights are in jeopardy elsewhere in the region too. In Thailand, since the coup of 2014, the military government has suppressed rights in various realms including freedom of expression, press freedom, and freedom of assembly. The junta has arrested opposition politicians, harassed political activists and punished academics. My case, as an academic now in exile, is itself a testament to the fact that the academia in Thailand is not free from state’s intervention.

The military government of General Prayut Chan-o-cha has also censored the Internet, threatening to prosecute those who have been critical of the junta on social media. Right after the coup, it abolished the National Assembly and assumed law-making powers. Article 44 of a new constitution promulgated under the junta’s watch also grants absolute powers to the military to undermine its opponents in the name of defending national security.

In Vietnam, things do not look much better. Political parties, aside from the ruling Communist party, continue to be banned. Press freedom is curtailed. A large number of political prisoners, whose only crime is criticism of the government, are incarcerated, and they have been treated as enemies of the state.

While the outgoing chairman of the AICHR, a Filipino, was praised for initiating projects that raised human rights awareness during his country’s tenure, the overall human rights situation in the Philippines is not bright either, which is a shame given Manila’s previous role as an advocate within ASEAN on these issues. The current president, Rodrigo Duterte, has been accused of violating human rights, most clearly and prominently through his infamous war on drugs. Human rights groups have documented more than 12,000 extra-judicial killings as a result of the Duterte government’s anti-drug campaign.

But there are other aspects of Duterte’s record that deserve scrutiny too. In terms of freedom of the press, the country continues to be one of the most dangerous places for journalists to work, with journalists being harassed and killed and some media outlets subject to state intimidation, with Rappler being a case in point.

But the worst human rights violations in Southeast Asia today are taking place in Myanmar. The military has embarked on ethnic cleansing operations against the Rohingya Muslims. Multiple reports have emerged illustrating the rather grim picture, with Burmese soldiers raping women and young girls, massacring the Rohingya children, and looting and burning their homes in the Rakhine state. The situation has forced over half a million Rohingya to flee their community, and they have become refugees in Myanmar’s neighboring states, including Thailand and Bangladesh.

Aung San Suu Kyi, the de facto leader of the ruling government, continues to blatantly deny ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims in her own country, and she has also rejected the UN inquiry into crimes against the Rohingya. In her latest speech in September, she questioned why so many Rohingya Muslims had left when others were living peacefully in the state, pointing to an accusation that the Rohingya themselves are “troublemakers.”

Given the severe human rights situation around Southeast Asia, one wonders if defending human rights in ASEAN is at all possible. The crux of the problem is not just the state of rights, but the fact that the very concept of human rights remains foreign to most states in the region. Human rights are profoundly connected to more comprehensive notions of security such as human security. Yet most Southeast Asian governments continue to perceive security as being limited to preserving the regime rather than securing their people. Until that reality changes, we are unlikely to see huge inroads made on this front.

That being said, there are incremental steps that can be taken by member states. This includes making the AICHR more independent from member states to ensure that human rights issues will be addressed more critically. This is no easy task, since it will require countries like Singapore to essentially allow more criticism of their own behavior alongside that of their neighbors. But if ASEAN states truly care about making ASEAN an effective organization not just for themselves but for their people, there is no other option but to make defending human rights a top priority.

(Source: The Diplomat)

# Building a stronger African Union



By Paul Kagame

The President of the Republic of Rwanda

Despite the myriad challenges we still face, over the past two generations our world has become more prosperous and equitable, and also safer. Cooperation among nations has been a foundation of that progress, as well as the best mechanism for sustaining it.

This is nowhere truer than in Africa. At independence, our continent and our individual countries were profoundly divided and unable to capitalize on our own wealth. For decades, Africa only seemed to fall further and further behind the rest of the world.

Those days are drawing to a close, and closer regional integration within Africa is a major reason why. The benefits are already being felt as our markets become more visible to the global economy. Security issues are increasingly being handled constructively and sustainably by African institutions, in many cases in collaboration with partners, thereby reducing the burden on everyone.

But we still have a long way to go to build the Africa we want. This is why African leaders decided in 2016 to give full force to the African Union’s founding ambitions by bringing to term the institutional reform of the organization. The achievements of the African Union are significant and often unheralded, but it can and must do more.

The first pillar of the reform is to finance our activities ourselves. African Union programs are almost entirely financed by external partners. Africa’s interests and sense of ownership get lost, and the interests of donors could be better served as well.

It is also unsustainable. It is reckless for Africa to rely so heavily on sources of funding that are likely to dry up sooner rather than later, especially when we have the means to pay for programs that are beneficial to us.

In July 2016, African leaders adopted a plan to finance the African Union with a 0.2 percent levy on eligible imports, a formula that has been successfully employed in other regional organizations. Twenty member states



**The first pillar of the reform is to finance our activities ourselves. African Union programs are almost entirely financed by external partners.**

have so far implemented the mechanism, out of which 14 are already collecting funds.

This strong momentum is solid evidence that there is political will to strengthen the capacity of the African Union, despite the complex politics involved in coordinating among more than 50 member states.

The shift to self-financing has had another important consequence: increased attention to the efficiency and performance of the African Union Commission and associated organs. After all, when you’re spending your own money, you want to make sure it’s being used well.

Accordingly, African leaders decided to complete the institutional reform of the African Union, and mandated me to consult

with stakeholders around the continent and present recommendations, which was done at the AU Summit in January 2017.

More than 30 separate recommendations were formally adopted, grouped into five main areas: (1) focus on key priorities with continental scope, and improve the division of labor with Regional Economic Communities; (2) re-align African Union institutions to deliver on those priorities; (3) connect the work of the African Union more directly to citizens; (4) manage the business of the African Union more efficiently at both the political and operational levels; and (5) sustainably self-finance its activities.

This reform had been pending for several years, and indeed most of the organization’s

## The war in Syria



**The next phase in this intractable and bloody tragedy could prove the most dangerous yet.**

Blame can also be attached to the failure of Assad’s more mainstream political opponents to form a united front. But their splits and differences reflect in turn the shifting rivalries of their neighborhood sponsors, Turkey, Saudi Arabia or Qatar, all of which have conflicting agendas. Members of the pro-western Free Syrian Army were in Washington last week, pleading for help from the Trump administration. But as Rex Tillerson, the U.S. secretary of state, made plain in a speech in California, repulsing Iran and crushing a resurgent al-Qaida in Syria are Trump priorities. A tidy political settlement and post-Assad elections would be nice, but it is not the White House’s focus.

Turkey, too, has contributed to Syria’s bottomless misery, even as it has borne the brunt of the refugee exodus. After years of meddling, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Turkish president, has reduced his policy to one essential aim: suppressing Syria’s Kurds. For Erdoğan, it seems all Kurds – Turkish, Iraqi, Syrian – are terrorists. Now he is threatening to invade Afrin, close to Idlib, and is accusing Washington, which supports the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia that controls it, of backing a “terror force” on Turkey’s border. Assad’s government says it will retaliate if the Turks overstep.

The list of people to blame goes on and on. Why has the UN Security Council proved so weak and ineffective? As David Miliband, the former foreign secretary, said last week, Britain as a permanent council member should be much more engaged. The anti-war movement, perhaps overwhelmed by the complexity of the issue, perhaps lacking a clearly identifiable western target for its protests, is largely silent despite the horrific death toll. What is the EU doing in the face of a possible new surge of would-be migrants? And what about Syria’s supposed peace process? Talks will resume under UN auspices in Vienna this week. But expectations are zero.

In his speech, Tillerson pledged open-ended U.S. military commitment, more support for refugees and the internally displaced and new efforts to expand stabilization initiatives. He called on Russia to help create a de-escalation (or ceasefire) zone in Idlib, akin to that which has worked well in south-western Syria.

Perhaps this is the best that can be hoped for – piece by piece, province by province ad hoc fixes for a fragmented country split asunder by myriad external pressures. Because if the current dynamic does not improve soon, the next phase in this unending tragedy, hinted at by Tillerson, could be more anarchic still.

(Source: The Guardian)

## The U.S. no longer owns the future of freedom

**Democracy is worth fighting for. But only Europe can take the lead**

by Leonid Bershidsky

The many critics of Freedom House can finally gloat: The think tank has turned its well-calibrated guns on the U.S. in its 2018 report on “Freedom in the World”.

The past year brought further, faster erosion of America’s own democratic standards than at any other time in memory, damaging its international credibility as a champion of good governance and human rights.

America’s “core institutions,” the think tank continues, “were attacked by an administration that rejects established norms of ethical conduct across many fields of activity.” They, according to Freedom House, “remained fairly resilient in 2017” but could end up weakened if the onslaught continues.

Freedom House’s indices, based on a detailed checklist of parameters that describe a country’s institutions, are widely used in academic literature when a reliable quantitative indicator of freedom and democracy is required. But many academics have long challenged the idea that the think tank acts independently of the U.S. government, which

funds most of its work.

In 1988, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman wrote it had “long served as a virtual propaganda arm of the government and the international right wing.” “Among the reasons for its growing authority, we find that the concept of freedom has been redefined by the rise of neoliberalism,” University of Salerno’s Diego Giannone wrote in 2010. To Andrei Tsygankov, now of San Francisco State University, and David Parker of King’s College in London, Freedom House “reflects foreign policy priorities of certain groups within the American establishment. Among these groups, security elites with neoconservative convictions stand out.” And in 2012, Nils Steiner of the University of Mainz showed Freedom House tends to rate U.S. allies as more free than other nations.

But dropping the U.S. down several pegs has created another set of problems for the list. The U.S. now has an aggregate score (indicating the degree of freedom and democracy) of 86 – just one point higher than Poland, ruled by the illiberal Law and Justice Party which runs state-owned media

as its own propaganda outlet and which is overhauling the court system to put it under government control. Trump hasn’t gone that far. The U.S. is now less free and democratic than Latvia, one of Europe’s most corrupt nations, where, according to Freedom House itself, teachers can be fired for “disloyalty” to the state and a large Russian-speaking minority doesn’t enjoy citizenship rights. If the current trend continues, Mongolia will overtake the U.S. in the ranking as soon as next year.

In 2016, \$24.8 million of Freedom House’s \$29.7 million budget came from U.S. federal grants. That it feels comfortable harshly criticizing a president who famously can’t stand criticism is a testament to how free the U.S. really is (certainly freer than Poland). But it’s also a symptom of an American identity crisis.

Freedom House bemoans what it sees as the Trump administration’s withdrawal from the global struggle for democracy. But could the U.S. credibly lead this struggle while sliding down the freedom scale, as it has done, in Freedom House’s estimation,

since 2010 -- that is, since Barack Obama’s first term?

Under Trump, of course, global approval of the U.S. leadership has fallen to the lowest level since Gallup began measuring it in 2007. U.S. leadership approval is well below Germany’s and almost level with that of China and Russia. No wonder variations of the Chinese and Russian models of government are gaining popularity from Egypt to the Philippines: They are far easier to establish and maintain than the German one.

But even when Trump is gone, it won’t be any clearer why the U.S., with a score in the mid-80s on the Freedom House scale, should play the role of global democracy promoter when Finland has a score of 100.

The U.S., of course, has more hard power and more opportunities to project soft power than any of the countries that stand higher in the freedom rankings. But if the Freedom House measurements are anything to go by, the European Union, with 23 out of 28 member states ranking higher or equal to the U.S., should take over the role of democracy promoter. ➔13



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# When motivation fades, these strategies will keep you going

By Adam Gilbert

Imagine a genie appears and grants you one wish: You can effortlessly change any of your bad diet habits.

Maybe you'd choose to skip those cookies after lunch, fly right past the drive-thru on the way home, or walk by the vending machine at work without giving it a second thought. Eliminating your worst eating habits would be powerful—maybe even life-changing.

Now, let me ask you: What's holding you back?

It's not that you don't know what to do: You know you should skip those cookies and avoid the drive-thru. And it's not that you don't know why, either—you know overeating doesn't make you feel good, it can cause all sorts of health issues, and you'll gain weight if you keep it up too.

But knowing the benefits of a healthy diet hasn't been enough to stop these habits. You already know that consistent healthy eating is the key to getting the body you want. It will help you live longer, enjoy life more, and can even help prevent illness.

You may have even said to yourself, I know what I need to do, and it's so simple—why can't I just quit?

## Motivation is not enough

This is so important, I'm going to say it again: Motivation is not enough. If we wait for motivation to carry us through to our goals, we're going to be waiting a long time. We also need to realize that many factors influence what we do: Some we can see, like easy access to tempting food, and some are almost invisible, like how the subtle way we've arranged our home can influence our decisions.

## Tipping the scale in your favor

Imagine you're in a tug-of-war battle. On one side, there's you, standing alone, and on the other side, there's a big group of the world's strongest people. It's pretty easy to see who is going to win this battle—and it's a good way of imagining the forces that influence our behavior.

When it comes to temptations, on the one side, there we are. And on the other side, there's a group of conveniently located temptations; impulsive, hunger-fueled decisions; and a lack of accountability. The trick is to get these forces working for you instead of against you. So let's talk about a few strategies you can use right now to start tipping



**Waiting to feel motivated is a form of wishful thinking. Instead, opt for accountability, which is what ties commitment to results. It creates follow-through, which is why investing in systems of accountability is worthwhile.**

the scales in your favor.

1. Why slay the dragon when we can avoid it?

If the temptation of the vending machine is too much, avoid walking by it—find a different hallway. If you want to stop by the drive-thru on the way home from work, try a new route. If there's candy hanging out on the kitchen counter, let's put it up high in the cupboard. The goal is to build tiny barriers between us and the foods we want to avoid; the more barriers we build, the easier it is for us to do the right things.

2. Make it nearly impossible to fail.

What if you can't avoid the vending machine because there's only one hallway, or you pass a drive-thru no matter which way you take home? Both of these behaviors have one thing in common: We need money to make them happen.

But what if we didn't have any money?

I don't mean throwing your money out the window—simply make it hard to access your money. If your credit card is stashed in your office when you're walking past the vending machine, or secured in the trunk of your car while you drive home, you've set yourself up for success—and you've made passing up those temptations much easier.

3. Make good decisions when you're in the right mindset.

You've heard the old advice before: "Never go to the grocery store hungry!" There's a reason those words of wisdom have stuck around; when we go to the store hungry, we are setting ourselves up for failure. Everything looks good when we're hungry, and we tend to buy too much (of the wrong stuff, usually).

Imagine you just woke up, you're starving, and you could eat anything placed in front of

you. You're not in the right mindset to make rational decisions, so you eat far too much. Instead of one slice of toast, you eat three. Instead of one slice of bacon, you have four.

At this moment, it's not helpful for someone to say, "How about we try just one slice of toast today?"

So what can you do?

Make decisions about what you're going to eat when you're thinking rationally. Go to the grocery store after a solid meal. And plan—even prepare—what you're going to have for breakfast after dinner. By doing this prep work, you make future decisions automatic and eliminate the need for willpower.

4. Use accountability.

Accountability bridges the gap between what we said we were going to do and what we actually do; it's what ties it all together. Here are some ways to create accountability for yourself:

.. Consider going public. Some people feel very committed to their goals when they tell others about them. But some people have to keep their goals private, otherwise, they lose their appeal. The more they tell people about their goals, the less likely they are to achieve them. Which kind of person are you? If you know that you're the first kind of person, this strategy can be very helpful.

.. Lock yourself into a decision. Buy a package of exercise sessions instead of just one—the pain of wasting exercise sessions can give you a jump-start.

.. Decide if you do better with peer or pro accountability. It's harder to miss a workout when you know someone is waiting for you. Even better? Trade sneakers with your exercise buddy at the end of every workout. Then you'll really feel bad not showing up.

.. Accountability partners often work better if you're not close to the person, though. It can be hard to take a friend or family member seriously. Even more importantly, it's hard for them to be brutally honest with you when necessary, whereas that's a professional's job.

.. Waiting to feel motivated is a form of wishful thinking. Instead, opt for accountability, which is what ties commitment to results. It creates follow-through, which is why investing in systems of accountability is worthwhile. The key is finding what kind of accountability works best for you.

(Source: greatist.com)

## When worry becomes a problem

Feeling afraid about life issues is common as you age, but if it takes over your life, you may have generalized anxiety disorder (GAD).

Everyone feels afraid or worried at times, but if these feelings begin to take over your life, then you may have crossed over into generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), which is the most common anxiety disorder among older adults, according to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA).

"The issue with many older men is they often just endure the discomfort of GAD, or think it's normal, and do not talk about the problem," says Dr. David Mischoulon, director of the Depression Clinical and Research Program at -Harvard-affiliated Massachusetts General Hospital. "However, left alone to manifest, GAD may lead to serious health problems, such as high blood pressure, depression, and addictive behavior like excessive drinking."

## GAD symptoms

GAD is defined as feeling anxious, fearful, or worried about multiple unrelated events or activities every day for at least six months. People with GAD constantly anticipate disaster and are overly concerned about issues like health, money, and family, even when there is no apparent reason for concern.

GAD tends to run in families and may be something you have always dealt with, but it also can be triggered by sudden changes, says Dr. Mischoulon. For instance, the death of a spouse or friend may make you feel vulnerable about being alone.

A minor health issue might cause anxiety about serious problems later. GAD also can keep you from engaging in a healthy lifestyle — you may refrain from any exercise for fear of injury, or avoid social outings.

One of the main issues with GAD is that men have trouble acknowledging it as a problem. Many believe it's natural to worry more about life issues as they age, and often they can



function well enough with a moderate level of anxiety. They even may rationalize their constant worrying by believing it prevents bad things from happening. This may explain why only about 43% of GAD sufferers get treatment, says the ADAA.

The first step to dealing with GAD is to acknowledge you have it. "Many men understand what's causing their fear and worry, but often don't want to face it," says Dr. Mischoulon.

Other times, the source is not clear. If you suspect your worrying is excessive, consult with your doctor. He or she can determine if it may be related to another health issue, and if not, refer you to a psychologist or therapist for further evaluation, diagnosis, and treatment.

## Generalized anxiety disorder and cancer risk

A study presented in 2016 by researchers in England looked at more than 7,000 men over a 15-year period and found that those who were diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) were twice as likely to die from cancer

as men without the condition. The researchers noted that this was only an association, but they added that people with GAD and other anxiety disorders often deal with their constant fear by adopting unhealthy behaviors, like smoking and excessive drinking, that may raise their cancer risk.

## Seeking help

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and medication are the standard ways to treat and manage GAD. With CBT, a psychologist or therapist works with you to uncover past experiences that may be the source of your anxiety.

Next, he or she explores negative thinking patterns that trigger your feelings of worry and helps you develop strategies to limit destructive thoughts and reinforce positive ones when anxiety occurs. Anti-anxiety medication is also used to help increase certain brain chemicals that are associated with a person's ability to relax and feel calm.

The type of treatment that is tried first is often guided by how long your fear or worry likely will last. For example, if it is related to some specific situations, such as a recent move to a new neighborhood or struggling to pay off a mortgage or other debt, then CBT alone would be a reasonable first step. If the source is more long-term, like a chronic illness or other health issue, medication is often prescribed along with CBT.

Lifestyle approaches are sometimes added to a person's treatment to help alleviate GAD. These might include exercise, mindfulness meditation, art therapy, or expressive writing (in which you write about your fears and worries).

When it comes to GAD, you should never feel pressured to "tough it out" and expect it to go away on its own, says Dr. Mischoulon. "GAD can worsen and lead to more complicated problems, and they certainly reduce quality of life. For older men, the right treatment can help them to maximize their golden years."

(Source: health.harvard.edu)

By Jonathan Cluett

Carpal bossing is the name given to a condition that causes a bony lump on the back of the hand. The carpal boss is a bump created by a small area of osteoarthritis occurring at the junction of the long hand bones and the small wrist bones. A carpal boss is most commonly seen as a bump on the back of the hand at the middle or index carpometacarpal joint—where the hand bones meet up with the wrist bones. The word boss comes from the French word *bosse*, which means a bump or swelling.

Carpal bossing is due to bone growth at the base of the metacarpal bones of the hand. It must be differentiated from other more common wrist conditions such as:

- Wrist ganglions
- Tendonitis

- Fracture

A carpal boss is not a cancer or a tumor. While there are very rare bone tumors that can occur in the hand, your doctor should be able to differentiate a carpal boss from something more concerning.

## Signs & symptoms

Most patients complain of a carpal boss after they bump or hit against the back of the wrist. This type of trauma can cause irritation around the carpal boss. The tendons over the back of the hand can also become irritated because of the carpal bossing. Sometimes you may experience tendon snapping as it moves over the bump. Lastly, some patients simply do not like the cosmetic appearance of the bump on their hand.

Your primary care physician may look further into the bump or you may be referred

to a hand specialist. If you are having pain and swelling, your doctor will want to rule out other causes such as ganglion cyst, tendonitis, fracture, and less common causes of bumps on the wrist.

A physical exam and listening to your history of when the bump appeared and your symptoms are used to make the diagnosis.

The tests that may be performed include X-rays and EMGs, which are hand electrical neurophysiology tests.

## Treatment

Most often, carpal bossing is a problem that can simply be watched—with no specific treatment. Anti-inflammatory analgesics such as ibuprofen may be suggested if it is painful or inflamed. If it is painful, the doctor may recommend a wrist splint to limit motion or a steroid injection if that doesn't provide relief.

(Source: verywell.com)

## Dad's depression may rub off on kids

By Amanda MacMillan

Doctors and researchers have known for years that children are more likely to develop mental-health problems if their mother has struggled with depression. But what if it's the father who's depressed?

According to a new study -- one of the first to examine mental-health patterns in a nationally representative sample of dads and kids -- a child's odds of developing emotional or behavioral problems increase by as much as 70% if the father shows signs of depression. That's smaller than the increased risk associated with depressed moms, but it's still cause for concern, researchers say.

"For years we've been studying maternal depression and how it affects children, but the medical community has done a huge disservice by ignoring fathers in this research," said the study's lead author, Michael Weitzman, a professor of pediatric medicine at New York University, in New York. "These findings reinforce what we already assumed -- that fathers matter, too, and they matter quite a lot."

The situation is predictably worse if both parents are depressed. Just 6% of children with two mentally healthy parents have serious emotional or behavioral problems, such as feeling sad or nervous, acting out at school, or clashing with family and peers, the study found. But that proportion increases to 11% if the father is depressed, 19% if the mother is depressed and 25% if both parents are depressed -- a strikingly high number, Weitzman says.

Although the study doesn't prove that a parent's depression directly causes problems in children, rather than vice versa, previous research on mothers and children has clearly shown that it's generally mothers who influence kids' mental health, not the other way around.

The idea that parents have an impact on their children's mental health is a "no-brainer," said Michael Brody, a spokesperson for the American Academy of Child Psychiatry and a visiting professor of American Studies at the University of Maryland, in College Park, Maryland.

Genes often play a role in passing depression and other mental-health problems from parent to offspring, Brody said, and the family environment is also important. "We learn how to adapt to situations by looking at our parents as models," he says. "So if either parent is depressed, a kid is going to be influenced by this."

The study, which appears in the December issue of the journal *Pediatrics*, included nearly 22,000 two-parent families who participated in federal health surveys between 2004 and 2008. During in-home visits, researchers interviewed one adult in each household -- typically the mother -- about the mental health of all family members.

The researchers used two separate questionnaires to record the overall mental health and depression symptoms of the parents. These questionnaires were used only for screening purposes, the study notes, and were not equivalent to the official symptom checklists doctors use to diagnose depression.

If the father displayed below-average mental health or depression symptoms, a child's odds of having similar problems increased by 33% and 70%, respectively. The child's odds increased even more -- by as much as 200% -- if the mother had mental-health problems instead.

Boys, 12- to 17-year-olds, and white children with depressed dads had higher rates of emotional and behavioral problems than did girls, younger kids, and children of other ethnicities. The study was limited to children who live with both parents, however, so the findings as a whole don't necessarily apply to all households and family situations, the authors note.

Doctors and mental-health professionals have to do a better job of looking at the entire family picture when one member shows signs of depression, and asking about what role the father plays in a child's upbringing, Brody says. "The good news is that dads are participating in their children's lives; they're active and they're interested," he says. "The bad news is that if they're participating in a negative way, it's going to affect the kids."

Men who are feeling depressed should seek treatment, if only for the sake of their children, Brody adds. "Women are more likely to seek medical treatment in general, and psychiatric health, specifically," he says. "This is just another reason for men who are feeling down or know they're experiencing depression...to seek help."

(Source: CNN)

## A new blood test may be able to detect early stage cancer

Imagine walking into a doctor's office for a simple blood test—and catching an early sign of cancer that saves your life. That might become a reality soon, thanks to new research published in the *Journal of Science*.

While this may sound like something straight out of a sci-fi novel, it's actually true. Nickolas Papadopoulos and his colleagues at the Johns Hopkins Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center have developed a new test that can screen and identify the earliest stages of cancer.

For their study, the researchers received blood samples from 1,005 patients diagnosed with cancers of the lung, breast, colon, pancreas, liver, stomach, ovary, or esophagus. Another 812 participants had not been diagnosed with cancer. All of the blood samples received the experimental test, called *CancerSEEK*.

The blood test found signs of cancer in about 70 percent of the participants, according to the researchers. It was also successful at detecting earliest stage 1 cancers about 40 percent of the time. Meanwhile, the test incorrectly diagnosed just seven (or less than 1 percent) of healthy participants with cancer.

Granted, the test missed cancer almost 60 percent of the time. And in some cases, the test failed to locate which part of the body was affected by the disease. Still, "we still think this is a very important milestone in detecting cancers in asymptomatic people," Papadopoulos told NPR. "That could save their life."

Couldn't have said it better ourselves! Unfortunately, the test hasn't been approved for sale yet. But in the meantime, you can lower your own risk with these 30 simple ways to prevent cancer.

(Source: NPR)

## 10 hot titles of IT world

By Alireza Khorasani

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

**1** Google CEO Sundar Pichai isn't rattled by former engineer James Damore's lawsuit against the tech giant for alleged discrimination against white, conservative men, at least according to remarks he made this week to MSNBC and Recode. Per CNBC, Pichai told both publications that Google's decision to fire Damore wasn't politically motivated, and he does not regret it.

**2** Twitter Alerts Nearly 680,000 Users They May Have Been Duped by Russian Accounts. Twitter admitted that its investigation into suspected Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential elections had turned up what it believes were over 50,000 automated accounts linked to the Kremlin—and that it had identified 677,775 other accounts that “followed one of these accounts or retweeted or liked a tweet from these accounts during the election period.”

**3** Apple's HomePod is coming and there's no stopping it now. About time, really - the smart speaker was unveiled on June 5 last year, with a market launch initially planned for December and then pushed back to early 2018. Well, early 2018 it is, and the HomePod has now received FCC certification. At least in the countries from the initial wave of availability, that is - the US, UK, and Australia.

**4** iPhone X may be discontinued this year. As we detailed earlier today, reputed analyst Ming-Chi Kuo recently issued a new investor note claiming that Apple's 2018 lineup will feature two brand new versions of the iPhone X. Interestingly, one model is said to feature a 6.5-inch OLED display while the second will reportedly boast a 6.1-inch LCD display.

**5** Instagram has added a new activity status feature in its iOS and Android app. Considering there isn't an official announcement from the company, it's likely the feature is still being tested and not available for everyone. However, it does seem to be available for most users right now. With this feature, enabled by default in the app settings, you can go into your direct message inbox and see the activity status of the people you have messaged below their name.

**6** With the G7 development restarted, LG is left with no new device to present at its MWC 2018 event. Instead, the Korean giant might introduce a refreshed V30 with enhanced AI features, sources report.

**7** WhatsApp may soon implement a new tool to prevent fake news from spreading. Reports about a new notification system that warns WhatsApp users they are at risk forwarding spam messages have just popped up online from various sources. Whenever the system detects that a message “has been forwarded many times,” it will start warning WhatsApp users that the message could be spam.

**8** The U.S. Federal Trade Commission has made a second request for information on chipmaker Broadcom Ltd's \$103 billion hostile bid for Qualcomm Inc, Broadcom said in a statement, a move that could indicate heightened antitrust scrutiny.

**9** Zuckerberg said that in order to combat “sensationalism, misinformation and polarization,” Facebook would be slipping some questions about media sources into its quality surveys.

**10** The U.S. video games industry earned \$36 billion in revenues in 2017, according to The NPD Group and Entertainment Software Association (ESA). This is an 18 percent increase from 2016. Revenues includes sales from hardware, peripherals, software (physical and digital), and in-game purchases.

## Tim Cook warns against technology “Overuse” and social media

The head of Apple, Tim Cook, believes there should be limits to the use of technology in schools and says he does not want his nephew to use a social network.

Cook was talking at Harlow college in Essex, one of 70 institutions across Europe that will use Apple's Everyone Can Code curriculum, it was announced on Friday.



“I don't believe in overuse [of technology]. I'm not a person that says we've achieved success if you're using it all the time,” he said. “I don't subscribe to that at all.”

Even in computer-aided courses, such as graphic design, technology should not dominate, he said.

“There are still concepts that you want to talk about and understand. In a course on literature, do I think you should use technology a lot? Probably not.”

The 57-year old chief executive, who took the reins at Apple after the death of Steve Jobs in 2011, said the company cared deeply about children outside the classroom.

“I don't have a kid, but I have a nephew that I put some boundaries on. There are some things that I won't allow; I don't want them on a social network.”

Born in Mobile, Alabama, in 1960, to a docker and a pharmacy worker, Cook grew up in the town of Robertsdale. He spent 12 years at IBM before Jobs asked him to join Apple in 1998.

(Source: Guardian)

# What is the IOT? Everything you need to know about the Internet of Things right now

By Steve Ranger

The Internet of Things, or IoT, refers to billions of physical devices around the world that are now connected to the internet, collecting and sharing data. Thanks to cheap processors and wireless networks, it's possible to turn anything, from a pill to an aeroplane, into part of the IoT. This adds a level of digital intelligence to devices that would be otherwise dumb, enabling them to communicate without a human being involved, and merging the digital and physical worlds.

### What is an example of an Internet of Things device?

Pretty much any physical object can be transformed into an IoT device if it can be connected to the internet and controlled that way.

A lightbulb that can be switched on using a smartphone app is an IoT device, as is a motion sensor or a smart thermostat in your office or a connected streetlight. An IoT device could be as fluffly as a child's toy or as serious as a driverless truck, or as complicated as a jet engine that's now filled with thousands of sensors collecting and transmitting data. At an even bigger scale, smart cities projects are filling entire regions with sensors to help us understand and control the environment.

The term 'IoT' is mainly used for devices that wouldn't usually be generally expected to have an internet connection, that can communicate with the network independently of human action. For this reason, a PC isn't generally considered an IoT device and neither is a smartphone -- even though the latter is crammed with sensors. A smartwatch or a fitness band might be counted as an IoT device, however.

### What is the history of the Internet of Things?

The idea of adding sensor and intelligence to basic objects was discussed throughout the 1980s and 1990s (and there are arguably some much earlier ancestors), but apart from some early projects -- including an internet-connected vending machine -- progress was slow simply because the technology wasn't in place.

Processors that were cheap and power-frugal enough to be all but disposable were required before it became cost-effective to connect up billions of devices. The adoption of RFID tags -- low-power chips that can communicate wirelessly -- solved some of this issue, along with the increasing availability of broadband internet and cellular and wireless networking. The adoption of IPv6 -- which, among other things, should provide enough IP addresses for every device the world (or indeed this galaxy) is ever likely to need -- was also a necessary step for the IoT to scale. Kevin Ashton coined the phrase 'Internet of Things' in 1999, although it took at least another decade for the technology to catch up with the vision.

Adding RFID tags to expensive pieces of equipment to help track their location was one of the first IoT applications.

### How big is the Internet of Things?

Big and getting bigger -- there are already more connected things than people in the world. Analyst Gartner calculates that around 8.4 billion IoT devices were in use in 2017,



up 31 percent from 2016, and this will likely reach 20.4 billion by 2020. Total spending on IoT endpoints and services will reach almost \$2tn in 2017, with two-thirds of those devices found in China, North America and Western Europe, said Gartner.

Out of that 8.4 billion devices, more than half will be consumer products like smart TVs and smart speakers. The most-used enterprise IoT devices will be smart electric meters and commercial security cameras, according to Gartner.

Another analyst, IDC, puts worldwide spending on IoT at \$772.5bn in 2018 -- up nearly 15 percent on the \$674bn that will be spent in 2017. IDC predicts that total spending will hit \$1tn in 2020 and \$1.1tn in 2021.

According to IDC, hardware will be the largest technology category in 2018 with \$239bn going on modules and sensors, with some spending on infrastructure and security.

### What are the benefits of the Internet of Things for business?

Occasionally known as the Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT), the benefits of the IoT for business depend on the particular implementation, but the key is that enterprises should have access to more data about their own products and their own internal systems, and a greater ability to make changes as a result.

Manufacturers are adding sensors to the components of their products so that they can transmit back data about how they are performing. This can help companies spot when a component is likely to fail and to swap it out before it causes damage. Companies can also use the data generated by these sensors to make their systems and their supply chains more efficient, because they will have much more accurate data about what's really going on.

While industry-specific products will make the early running, by 2020 Gartner predicts that cross-industry devices will reach 4.4 billion units, while vertical-specific devices will amount to 3.2 billion units. Consumers purchase more devices, but businesses spend more: the analyst group said that while consumer spending on IoT devices was around \$725bn last year, businesses spending on IoT hit \$964bn. By 2020, business and consumer

spending on IoT hardware will hit nearly \$3tn.

### What are the benefits of the Internet of Things for consumers?

The IoT promises to make our environment -- our homes and offices and vehicles -- smarter, more measurable, and chattier. Smart speakers like Amazon's Echo and Google Home make it easier to play music, set timers, or get information. Home security systems make it easier to monitor what's going on inside and outside, or to see and talk to visitors. Meanwhile, smart thermostats can help us heat our homes before we arrive back, and smart lightbulbs can make it look like we're home even when we're out.

### The Internet of Things and smart homes

For consumers, the smart home is probably where they are likely to come into contact with internet-enabled things, and it's one area where the big tech companies (in particular Amazon, Google, and Apple) are competing hard.

The most obvious of these are smart speakers like Amazon's Echo, but there are also smart plugs, lightbulbs, cameras, thermostats, and the much-mocked smart fridge. But as well as showing off your enthusiasm for shiny new gadgets, there's a more serious side to smart home applications. They may be able to help keep older people independent and in their own homes longer by making easier for family and carers to communicate with them and monitor how they are getting on. A better understanding of how our homes operate, and the ability to tweak those settings, could help save energy -- by cutting heating costs, for example.

### What about Internet of Things security?

Security is one of the biggest issues with the IoT. These sensors are collecting in many cases extremely sensitive data -- what you say and do in your own home, for example. Keeping that secure is vital to consumer trust, but so far the IoT's security track record has been extremely poor. Too many IoT devices give little thought to basics of security, like encrypting data in transit and at rest.

Flaws in software -- even old and well-used code -- are discovered on a regular basis, but

many IoT devices lack the capability to be patched, which means they are permanently at risk. Hackers are now actively targeting IoT devices such as routers and webcams because their inherent lack of security makes them easy to compromise and roll up into giant botnets.

### Internet of Things and big data

The IoT generates vast amounts of data: from sensors attached to machine parts or environment sensors, or the words we shout at our smart speakers. That means the IoT is a significant driver of big data projects because it allows companies to create vast data sets and analyse them. Giving a manufacturer vast amounts of data about how its components behave in real-world situations can help them to make improvements much more rapidly, while data culled from sensors around a city could help planners make traffic flow more efficiently.

In particular, the IoT will deliver large amounts of real-time data. Cisco calculates that machine-to-machine connections that support IoT applications will account for more than half of the total 27.1 billion devices and connections, and will account for five percent of global IP traffic by 2021.

### The Internet of Things and smart cities

By spreading a vast number of sensors over a town or city, planners can get a better idea of what's really happening, in real time. As a result, smart cities projects are a key feature of the IoT. Cities already generate large amounts of data (from security cameras and environmental sensors) and already contain big infrastructure networks (like those controlling traffic lights). IoT projects aim to connect these up, and then add further intelligence into the system.

### How do Internet of Things devices connect?

IoT devices use a variety of methods to connect and share data: homes and offices will use standard wi-fi or Bluetooth Low Energy (or even Ethernet if they aren't especially mobile); other devices will use LTE or even satellite connections to communicate. However, the vast number of different options has already led some to argue that IoT communications standards need to be accepted and interoperable as wi-fi is today.

One likely trend is that, as the IoT develops, it could be that less data will be sent for processing in the cloud. To keep costs down, more processing could be done on-device with only the useful data sent back to the cloud -- a strategy known as 'edge computing'.

### Where does the Internet of Things go next?

As the price of sensors and communications continue to drop, it becomes cost-effective to add more devices to the IoT -- even if in some cases there's little obvious benefit to consumers. As the number of connected devices continues to rise, our living and working environments will become filled with smart products -- assuming we are willing to accept the security and privacy trade-offs. Some will welcome the new era of smart things. Others will pine for the days when a chair was simply a chair.

(Source: zdnet)

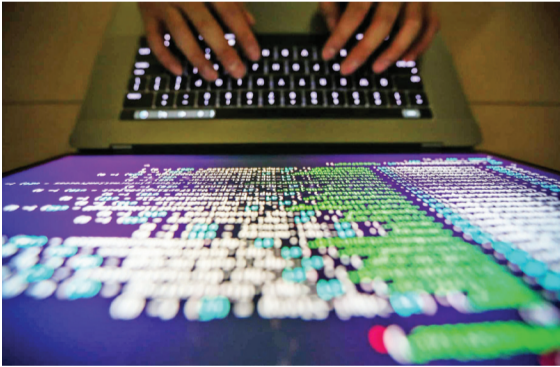
## UK and France agree artificial intelligence tie-up

Ministers have agreed a technology tie-up with Emmanuel Macron's government that will see the UK unite with France in areas such as artificial intelligence and cyber security.

Matt Hancock, the Culture Secretary, will this morning announce the two countries plan to work together to pool industry and academic research. Britain and France will host a conference later this year to encourage cross-Channel investment, targeting work on AI in particular.

It comes as France's new government tries to shake off its reputation for protectionism and onerous employment rules that has held back start-ups in the country and seen Paris lose out to London as a tech hub.

Last year more venture capital deals were signed involving French tech companies than British ones, the first time this has happened in half a decade, although

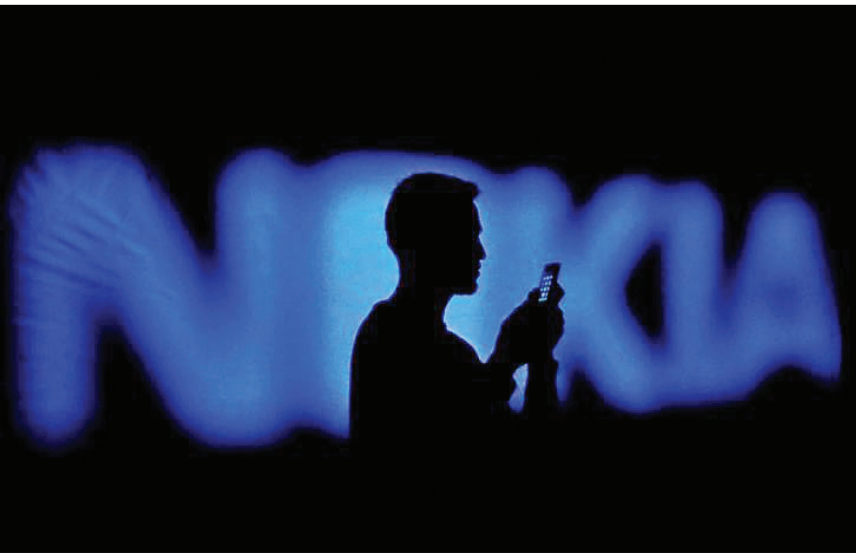


the UK raises far more money in total and dominates rankings of European “unicorns”, start-ups with val-

## NTT Docomo taps Nokia for Japan's 5G launch in 2020

Japan's largest mobile operator, NTT Docomo, has chosen Nokia to supply key hardware for a 2020 rollout of 5G cellular services in the country, the companies announced in a joint press release today. Though the release correctly notes that Japan has “a long and proud history of technological achievements and early technology adoption,” it places the country's largest carrier a year behind 5G deployment timelines in the United States.

5G cellular technology promises speeds up to 100 times greater than 4G/LTE, with dramatically lower latency, higher security, and the ability to integrate into vehicular and manufacturing infrastructures. Tests of 5G in Japan have included broadcasts of 4K video and the safe remote control of construction machines, neither of which is practically feasible on 4G networks. The Japanese government has notably been pushing carriers for a 2020 5G rollout since 2014, hoping to beat other countries to the punch.



The agreement anticipates that Nokia will support NTT Docomo's network evolution from 4G to 5G, using technology that meets the semi-finalized 3GPP 5G

lution from 4G to 5G, using technology that meets the semi-finalized 3GPP 5G

uations of more than \$1bn (£720m).

Although Mr Macron has made no secret of French ambitions to lure IT workers from London after Brexit, launching a new tech visa programme and using state cash to sponsor start-ups, cross-border work could help Europe challenge the giants of Silicon Valley.

AI is seen as a rare area where European countries can challenge the US, thanks to the mathematics heritage at British universities and institutions such as Paris-Saclay in the French capital.

A clutch of British and French AI companies have been snapped up by US tech giants including DeepMind, now owned by Google, Magic Pony, which was acquired by Twitter two years ago, and Wit.ai, a company founded by three French graduates bought by Facebook in 2015.

(Source: telegraph)

New Radio (5G NR) standard. Specifically, Nokia will provide new 5G baseband units (BBUs) and integrate 5G AirScale hardware within the existing NTT Docomo network. In a footnote, Nokia added that the 5G standard is presently unfinished but that Nokia 5G hardware is currently undergoing over 50 customer tests around the world, with the expectation of 2019-2020 commercial launches.

While the agreement is significant both in establishing a timeline for Japan's rollout of 5G services and Nokia's place as a supplier of 5G hardware, it isn't a complete surprise. In fact, NTT Docomo has previously purchased Nokia hardware for 3G and 4G/LTE rollouts, and the companies have worked together to test 5G for deployment in Japan. NTT Docomo notes that Nokia's support formalizes the carrier's intention to launch 5G by 2020 and will “accelerate co-creation of new services and businesses with vertical industry partners.”

(Source: Venturebeat)

# Scientists have figured out how to recycle waste CO<sub>2</sub> back into plastic

It's been clear for a while now that there's too much carbon dioxide in Earth's atmosphere, heavily contributing to a warming planet, and now scientists have come up with a new plan for dealing with all this excess CO<sub>2</sub> – converting it into plastic.

Plastic itself isn't the most environmentally friendly of materials, but not only would it mean that CO<sub>2</sub> gets converted into something useful, it could also reduce the need to produce plastics out of fossil fuels, giving us a better chance of hitting targets for limiting climate change.

The new approach is the most efficient method yet that scientists have devised for converting carbon dioxide into ethylene, the raw material used to make the most commonly used plastic, polyethylene.

## ■ Conversion system

And it brings the possibility of a practical CO<sub>2</sub>-to-plastic conversion system a whole lot closer.

"I think the future will be filled with technologies that make value out of waste," says lead researcher Phil De Luna, from the University of Toronto in Canada.

"It's exciting because we are working towards developing new and sustainable ways to meet the energy demands of the future."

The team used a technique involving X-ray



**The new approach is the most efficient method yet that scientists have devised for converting carbon dioxide into ethylene, the raw material used to make the most commonly used plastic, polyethylene.**

spectroscopy and computer modelling techniques at the Canadian Light Source (CLS) facility at the University of Saskatchewan – analyzing matter with electromagnetic radiation to identify their key catalyst.

And it was thanks to a new piece of equip-

ment developed by CLS senior scientist Tom Regier that the researchers were able to study both the shape and the chemical environment of the catalyst in real time.

"This has never been done before," says one of the team, Rafael Quintero-Bermudez,

also from the University of Toronto. "This unique measurement allowed us to explore a lot of research questions about how the process takes place and how it can be engineered to improve."

"This experiment could not have been performed anywhere else in the world, and we are thrilled with the results," adds De Luna.

## ■ Carbon dioxide reduction

The catalyst is necessary to power a carbon dioxide reduction reaction, converting CO<sub>2</sub> into other chemicals when it gets hit with an electrical current. While many metals can act as catalysts, we already know that copper is the only one that can produce ethylene.

"Copper is a bit of a magic metal," says De Luna. "It's magic because it can make many different chemicals, like methane, ethylene, and ethanol, but controlling what it makes is difficult."

Armed with this new knowledge and a suitable carbon capture technology, we could potentially remove CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere while producing plastics in an environmentally-friendly way at the same time.

As long as the energy required for the conversion can be provided by a renewable source, and the resulting plastics can be reused or recycled later in life, the overall impact should be a positive one. (Source: sciencealert.com)

## Breakthrough study shows how plants sense the world



Plants lack eyes and ears, but they can still see, hear, smell and respond to environmental cues and dangers -- especially to virulent pathogens. They do this with the aid of hundreds of membrane proteins that can sense microbes or other stresses.

Only a small portion of these sensing proteins have been studied through classical genetics, and knowledge on how these sensors function by forming complexes with one another is scarce. Now, an international team of researchers from four nations -- including Shahid Mukhtar, Ph.D., and graduate student Timothy «TC» Howton at the University of Alabama at Birmingham -- has created the first network map for 200 of these proteins.

The map shows how a few key proteins act as master nodes critical for network integrity, and the map also reveals unknown interactions.

## ■ Plants' resistance to pathogens

"This is a pioneering work to identify the first layer of interactions among these proteins," said Mukhtar, an assistant professor of biology in the UAB College of Arts and Sciences. An «understanding of these interactions could lead to ways to increase a plant's resistance to pathogens, or to other stresses like heat, drought, salinity or cold shock. This can also provide a roadmap for future studies by scientists around the world.»

The international team, based in Europe, Canada and the United States, was led by Youssef Belkhadir, Ph.D., Gregor Mendel Institute of Molecular Plant Biology, Vienna, Austria. The study has been published in the journal Nature.

The novel comprehensive interaction

network map focused on one of the most important classes of these sensing proteins -- the leucine-rich repeat receptor kinases, or LRR-receptor kinases, which are structurally similar to human toll-like receptors.

The LRR-receptor kinases are a family of proteins in both plants and animals that are largely responsible for sensing the environment. In plants, they have an extracellular domain of the protein, extending beyond the cell membrane, which can recognize chemical signals, such as growth hormones or portions of proteins from pathogens. The receptor kinases then initiate responses to these signals inside the cell, using an intracellular domain of the protein.

## ■ Plants growth

The model plant Arabidopsis thaliana contains more than 600 different receptor kinases -- 50 times more than humans -- that are critical for plant growth, development, immunity and stress response. Until now, only a handful had known functions, and little was known about how the receptors might interact with each to coordinate responses to often-conflicting signals.

For the Nature study, the Belkhadir lab tested interactions between extracellular domains of the receptors in a pairwise manner, working with more than 400 extracellular domains of the LRR-receptor kinases and performing 40,000 interaction tests.

Positive interactions were used to produce an interaction map displaying how those receptor kinases interact with one another, in a total of 567 high-confidence interactions.

(Source: eurekalert.org)

## Pancakes and maple syrup may not survive climate change: new study



Climate change could threaten breakfast. According to a new study, sugar maples that provide sap for syrup may not survive the hot and dry climate caused by global warming.

Sugar maples in the northern hardwood forests across eastern North America are particularly drought-sensitive. As global temperatures rise, the lack of enough water could stunt their growth, a new, decades-long study found. The number of sugar maple trees will decrease, diminishing the amount of maple syrup available and eliminating the stunning colors of these forests during autumn.

"This is probably the most striking species in these forests," Inés Ibáñez, forest ecology professor at the University of Michigan, told Newsweek. "When people go to see the foliage, they pretty much go to see the sugar maples because they are the ones that have these incredible colors -- almost like the forest is in flames."

## ■ Worth of data

Ibáñez was the lead author of the study, which was published in Ecology on Wednesday. She and her colleagues analyzed nearly 20 years' worth of data from four forest sites in Michigan, totaling 1,016 trees between 1994 and 2013.

The researchers were specifically hunting down the effects of two factors. They wanted to know how a warmer and drier climate would affect the trees and how excess nitrogen from human activities could curb the negative effects from a warming climate.

The data came from a study that began in 1987 to find out how climate and atmospheric deposition affect forest

growth and the ecosystem in the Great Lakes region. Back in 1994, they began adding excess nutrients to simulate what is expected in natural forests by the end of the century.

## ■ Human activities

In real life, such excess nutrients often result from human activities such as cars, power plants, factories, and fertilizer used in agriculture. These excess nutrients often result in negative effects for certain ecosystems.

In Michigan, the alkalinity of the soils in that region protects them from the negative effects of excess nitrogen. Researchers were hoping the excess nutrients would offset the negative effects of a warmer and drier climate in the future.

But the results proved worrisome for the famous trees. According to the scenarios the researchers used, if the climate remains the same as it is now, tree growth would not be adversely affected, the study found. But if the changes are more extreme, Ibáñez said, "then growth rates are going to go down quite a bit for this species."

The abstract concept of climate change becomes a lot more personal when you think of how it might affect the color of autumn leaves or pancake syrup. But the northern forests of the world have another crucial benefit to keeping global warming from worsening even more. The forests soak up the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide, removing about one-quarter of the gas that is emitted from fossil fuel burning each year, according to the researchers.

(Source: Newsweek)

## Potentially hazardous asteroid to fly by close to Earth next month

A massive asteroid NASA labeled as "potentially hazardous" is set to fly by Earth on Feb. 4. What can happen if a space rock as big as AJ129 strikes our planet?

Astronomers said that the space rock known as 2002 AJ129 will fly by at a distance of about 2,615,125 miles away from Earth on Feb. 4. While this may seem a great distance, the proximity is relatively close in galactic terms.

NASA has classified the asteroid as potentially hazardous. The U.S. space agency gives this label to space objects that may come within 4,600,000 miles from our planet.

The asteroid is one of the most massive space rocks anticipated to skim past Earth this year. The chances of the asteroid striking Earth, however, are remote. Astronomers have so far detected over hundreds of large asteroids set to fly by our planet but none appears to pose immediate threat.

Although scientists are confident that the flyby won't result in any impact, any object the size of AJ129 that strike Earth could have devastating consequences. An ancient impact of a massive asteroid, is in fact, widely attributed for the extinction of the dinosaurs and smaller space rocks that hit Earth have been known to cause damages.

Earlier studies suggest that if this happens, large amounts of debris would be thrown up into the atmosphere, which could block out light from the sun for many years and cause temperature drops that can trigger a mini ice age.

The immediate effect of the impact would be catastrophic. If the asteroid strikes on land, the initial blast wave may flatten everything for miles around the impact area. If the space rock crashes into the ocean, the impact would generate giant tsunamis.

(Source: Tech Times)

## This electronic skin lets you manipulate objects without touching them

A newly developed electronic skin lets the wearer manipulate virtual objects without touching them -- like typing on a keypad, or adjusting a dimmer just by moving your wrist.

Standard VR devices need to be able to see an object to track motion. This usually involves cameras, which is fine for detecting large movements, but the resolution is usually too low to work with finer detail like the movement of fingers.

Scientists built an e-skin that's essentially a thin film with sensors inside that interact with a magnet. It doesn't need to be in the line of sight (because it uses magnets) and doesn't use much energy. It's soft and bendable, and could one day be used in medical devices like prosthetics or in soft robots.

By wearing the e-skin on your hand, the sensor works by interacting with a nearby magnet. Depending on the angle of your hand, it can produce various levels of voltage.

The researchers programmed software that controls what happens at each angle of the sensor, explains study author Gilbert Cañón Bermúdez, a researcher at Helmholtz-Zentrum-Dresden-Rossendorf Institute for Ion Beam Physics and Materials Research in Germany. That way, users wearing the skin can turn a virtual light on or off, and type symbols on a keyboard.

The technology isn't meant to replace current VR, says Cañón Bermúdez, but to complement it by adding more detail. Right now, the authors are working with magnetic fields about the size of a fridge magnet, so the next step is to work on smaller fields for more detailed manipulations.

(Source: The Verge)

## Scientists showcase how to create low-cost solar cells

A team of scientists at Stanford University, including a researcher of Indian origin, has shown how nanotechnology can be used to create crystalline silicon (c-Si) thin-film solar cells that are more efficient at capturing solar energy.

The discovery can reduce the cost of solar energy production globally, they noted.



Dr. Shrestha Basu Mallick, working with her advisors Dr. Mark Brongersma and Dr. Peter Peumans, developed a new method of producing a cheaper and more efficient solar cell.

The team used optical modelling and electrical simulations to show that a thin-film crystalline silicon solar cell with a 2D nanostructure generated three times as much photo current as an unstructured cell of the same thickness.

This is because the nano-structured surface traps incoming light more effectively causing it to spend more time within the silicon material.

The longer the light spends inside the solar cell - the greater its chance of getting absorbed.

"Light absorption in crystalline silicon solar cells can be significantly enhanced by nanostructuring and this reduces the thickness of silicon required," said Dr. Basu Mallick.

"This is important because it helps countries be competitive against imported cells and paves the way for new solar applications such as flexible or transparent cells," she added.

The discovery reveals a simple method to improve the efficiency of all silicon solar cells.

The work was published in the journal Optics Express and has garnered close to 200 citations including multiple book chapters.

(Source: The New Indian Express)

## IRIB Conferences Center Hosts Organizing 12th Edition of OPEX Conference

The 12th Annual Conference of Iranian Oil, Gas and Petrochemical Products Exporters Union dubbed "OPEX" was held at Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) Conferences Center with the motto of "Private Sector, National Governance and Economic Diplomacy", the Public Relations Dept. of the Center reported.

Abbas-Ali Eslami Chairman of the Board of Directors of OPEX was the first speaker in the Conference who pointed to lack of enough information as one of the main problems facing exporters of oil and petrochemical products to enter new target markets and said, "unfortunately, all organizations which are doing trade and business activity show lackluster performance and practically, there is not a comprehensive information on the trade and business activities. In general, there is not a certain mechanism available to use these data."

Eslami also referred to the lack of a regulatory organization as the most important challenge facing exporters of oil and petrochemical products.



Attracting foreign investment, necessity of compiling a guaranteed bylaw for the development and promotion of this sector, institutionalizing regulatory rules and regulations in the oil products exporters' industry, problems facing private sector in export of products such as gas,

bitumen and oil, etc. are of the most important topics in this Conference.

The key speakers of this prestigious Conference included: Dr. Zamaninia Deputy Ministry of Oil for International and Trade Affairs, Dr. Shiva Chairman of National Council of Competition and Dr. Soltani Vice Chairman of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCI-MA), the Public Relations Dept. of the Center concluded.

Another speaker was Dr. Araqchi Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs who placed special emphasis on setting up an Economic Deputy Office at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to support export with the activation of economic diplomacy.

It should be noted that Iranian Oil, Gas and Petrochemical Products Exporters Union dubbed "OPEX" started its activity in 2003. Presently, more than 300 companies are active members of the Union tasked with exporting oil derivatives and is considered as the largest export union of the private sector in the country.

## Tehran Municipality planning to boost waste-to-energy capacity

**ENVIRONMENT d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Tehran Municipality is trying to encourage domestic and foreign investment to expand the capacity of waste-to-energy units, said the head of waste management organization of Tehran Municipality.



Currently, near 200 tons of waste is processed in waste-to-energy units per day, producing 3 megawatt electricity, Mehr quoted Reza Abdoli as saying on Sunday.

However, compared to 9,000 tons of domestic waste produced in Tehran on a daily basis, the figure is “not significant,” added the official.

He went on to say the municipality believes in waste recycling and processing and especially emphasizes on converting waste to electricity, adding, the aim is to convert 3,000 tons of waste to energy per day.

Also, speaking on the 50,000 tons of construction waste daily produced in Tehran, Abdoli highlighted that only around 3,000 tons of these are being processed and converted to bricks, gravel, asphalt and floor coverings, despite the fact that all construction waste is recyclable.

Proper waste management and processing can have many benefits including reduction of consuming fresh raw materials, limiting air and water pollution [through eliminating the need for dumping the waste in landfills] and decline of greenhouse gases emissions.

## Iranian philanthropists free 8,100 prisoners in 10 months

**SOCIETY d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The money donated by Iranian philanthropists was enough to free 8,100 prisoners in 10 months (March 21, 2017-January 20, 2018), IRNA reported on Sunday.



The contributions were made to Blood Money Organization to free 8,100 prisoners, including 260 women, who had committed involuntary crimes.

All the 8,100 prisoners' debt amounted to some 6 trillion rials (nearly \$130 million). However, plaintiffs altogether agreed to receive half their claims.

Since the establishment of Blood Money Organization in 1990 some 111,101 prisoners were released with the financial support from the benefactors.

## LEARN ENGLISH

### Nationalities

A: Hey! How was your first day of class? I'm in level two and I'm loving my class this **semester**! It's great being in a class of international students!

B: Mine was ok, except that no one in my class speaks English. I guess it will force me to **converse** in Chinese more in class so at least I should improve a lot this semester.

A: That's both fortunate and unfortunate. It's the **United Nations** in my class! We have people from all over the world! There are three Germans, a Pole, a Scottish, two French, an American, a Brazilian, a Chilean, a New Zealander, though he prefers to call himself a **Kiwi**. Who else do we have? Oh, we also have a Moroccan, a Togolese, a Pakistani, and two Indonesians!

B: That's quite the **array** of nationalities. Everyone in my class is from Asia, except me. There are a few South Koreans, several Japanese, Malaysian, Thai, Singaporean, Filipino, Kazakhstan, and one Russian.

A: Well, I think you're pretty lucky actually. You'll have the **opportunity** to learn so much about Asian culture.

B: I guess so, but I think it's going to be hard to **relate to** my classmates, especially with the **language barrier**. I think I might change classes.

A: Don't! **Stay the course**! Your spoken Chinese will be eternally grateful. I bet you it will even **surpass** mine with all that practice.

B: I highly doubt it. Your fiancé is Chinese.

A: Well, there is that, yes.

#### ■ Key vocabulary

**semester**: one of the two periods of time that a year at high schools and universities is divided into, especially in the U.S.

**converse**: to have a conversation with someone

**United Nations**: an international political organization

**Kiwi**: someone from New Zealand

**array**: a large group or quantity of people or things

**opportunity**: chance

**relate to someone**: to feel that you understand someone's problem, situation etc.

**language barrier**: trouble communicating because speak different languages

**stay the course**: remain or persevere to the end; to finish something in spite of difficulties

**surpass**: to be even better or greater than someone or something else

#### ■ Supplementary vocabulary

**Dutch**: relating to the people of Netherlands

**Finn**: a person from Finland

**Dane**: a person from Denmark

**naturalize**: process by which a person becomes a citizen of another country

**ethnic**: relating to groups of people that have common racial, tribal or religious traits

(Source: [irlanguage.com](http://irlanguage.com/))

# Iran’s environmental body takes unprecedented step in fight against plastic pollution

**ENVIRONMENT d e s k** **TEHRAN** — In a bid for public engagement Iran’s Department of Environment (DOE) has banned bottled water at the DOE offices and all other organizations affiliated with it nationwide.

Following a formal request submitted by DOE’s deputy director for international affairs, innovation and socio-cultural engagement Kaveh Madani, DOE’s chief Issa Kalantari has mandated all organizations associated with it to ban the use of bottled water throughout the whole country.

The world renowned water scientist has explained in his proposal to ban bottled water, that large-scale waste production, particularly non-biodegradable plastic waste, is currently one of the main environmental challenges in the country and plastic bottles accounts for a great share of the waste.

While bottled water is banned from all DOE’s offices across the country (except for a limited number of locations without access to safe piped drinking water) DOE is going to invite all other governmental organizations to voluntarily join the environmental campaign against use of bottled water, as suggested by Madani.

The proposal also suggests adoption of a law in the cabinet to ban bottled water in all governmental bodies.

As Madani has said, doing so, especially at an organization which is in charge of protection of the environment, would create a culture in the society and encourage people to feel responsible for



Kaveh Madani

the environment.

According to the Water Footprint Calculator, it takes 22 gallons of water to make one pound of plastic. In fact, it takes at least twice as much water to produce a plastic water bottle as the amount of water contained in the bottle.

The Pacific Institute, a non-profit research organization, estimates that the energy used in the production and use of plastic bottles, such as water bottles, is equivalent to filling the plastic bottles one-quarter full with oil. Oil affects global warming by producing high quantities of

## Majlis committee cuts Khuzestan’s sand and dust storms budget

**ENVIRONMENT d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The budget proposed for fighting sand and dust storms in the southwestern province of Khuzestan in the next year’s budget bill is facing a big “no” by the special committee of Majlis [the Iranian parliament].

The administration had proposed \$150 million in the budget bill for the next [Iranian calendar] year 1397 (starting on March 21) for combating sand and dust storms in southwestern Iran, including Khuzestan, but the Majlis committee studying the national budget bill has rejected this proposal, said Karim Shafei, the deputy director of

the Department of Environment for legal affairs, ISNA reported on Sunday.

This disapproval comes as a surprise since the people of southwestern provinces, specifically Khuzestan, are experiencing severe air conditions caused by sand and dust storms for the fourth consecutive day.

Ali Sari, MP who represents Khuzestan in the parliament, told ISNA “We will certainly object to the elimination of this budget in an open session of the parliament.”

Criticizing the measures taken by the administration to tackle Khuzestan’s sand and dust storms, the MP added that

these measures are “remedial, not preventive.”

#### ■ Khuzestan is in dire straits

According to Khuzestan provincial department of environment, the concentration of fine dust in Ahwaz, Behbahan and Masjed Soleyman stood at 627, 2926 and 2056 micrograms per cubic meter at 9 a.m. local time.

This is while the normal level of fine dust concentration is 150 micrograms per cubic meter.

Schools, universities and even offices were closed in some southwestern cities to temporarily protect the health of citizens.

## Anzali wetland’s water dropping significantly

**ENVIRONMENT d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The water level of Anzali wetland, in northern Gilan Province, has dramatically reduced due to the decrease of precipitation.

According to reports published by Iran’s meteorological organization, the average precipitation of Gilan Province has dropped 23.2 percent from September 23-December 25 compared to the corresponding period last year.

The report also demonstrates that the average precipitation of the province in long run has reduced by 9 percent.

Covering more than 19,000 hectares, the Anzali wetland is located near the port city of Bandar Anzali. The wetland was designated as a Ramsar site on June 23, 1975. It is fed by several rivers and separated from the Caspian Sea by a dune system. The lagoon is home to submerged and floating vegetation and also extensive reed beds. It bears international importance in terms of breeding, staging and wintering water birds.

Degradations such as change in water level of the Caspian Sea, sedimentation, and water pollution caused the wetland to be enlisted in the Montreux Record in 1993.

According to the official website of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, Montreux Record is part of the Ramsar Convention and lists the wetlands “Where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring, or are likely to occur as a result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference.”



© IRNA/ Mojtaba Mohammadi

### ENGLISH IN USE

#### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → E

## Healthcare reform plan available to Islamic, regional countries: minister

Iran’s healthcare reform plan is available to Islamic and regional countries, Health Minister Hassan Qazizadeh-Hashemi said on Tuesday.

Iran’s healthcare reform plan which was endorsed by the World Health Organization twice has led to a decrease in medical and health-related expenses for Iranians, Qazizadeh-Hashemi added, IRIB reported.

He further highlighted that “as Iran’s Health Minister I declare our readiness to share our achievements and experiences with world leaders and my colleagues, active in healthcare sector, worldwide.”

### PREFIX/SUFFIX

#### “chole-, chol-”

■ **Meaning**: bile or gallbladder

■ **For example**: Understanding the facts about **cholesterol** will help you take better care of your heart.

### PHRASAL VERB

#### Fit in with

■ **Meaning**: if something fits in with other things, it is similar to them or goes well with them:

■ **For example**: A new building must fit in with its surroundings.

### IDIOM

#### Blow hot and cold

■ **Explanation**: to constantly change your opinion about something

■ **For example**: The boss keeps blowing hot and cold about the marketing campaign - one day he finds it excellent, the next day he wants to make changes.

## وزیر بهداشت : طرح تحول سلامت قابل عرضه به کشورهای اسلامی و منطقه

وزیر بهداشت حسن قاضی زاده هاشمی روز سه شنبه گفت: طرح تحول سلامت قابل عرضه به کشورهای اسلامی و منطقه است.

به گزارش خبرگزاری صدا و سیما، وزیر بهداشت با بیان اینکه طرح تحول سلامت در دو نوبت متوالی از سوی سازمان بهداشت جهانی مورد تقدیر قرار گرفت، افزود: این طرح سبب کاهش هزینه های درمانی مردم ایران شده است.

وی در ادامه خاطرنشان کرد: به عنوان وزیر بهداشت ایران اعلام آمادگی می کنم که با رهبران کشورها و همکارانم در حوزه سلامت، بتوانیم دستاوردهای طرح تحول سلامت را به اشتراک بگذاریم و تجارب این طرح را به آنها منتقل کنیم.

# Seven years of protest and crackdown

Bahrain arrests 47, charges 290 in mass crackdown

By staff & agencies

Bahrain continues to be the scene of anti-regime protests on an almost daily basis, as people in the Persian Gulf kingdom gear up to mark the seventh anniversary of their uprising.

Although the rallies against the Al Khalifah dynasty, which started in mid-February 2011, are in the form of peaceful pro-democracy protests, the regime has utilized a constant heavy-handed crackdown against demonstrators.

In the small island of approximately 1.5 million citizens, the Shia majority population have long complained that they are discriminated against in employment and housing by the Al Khalifah regime.

In March 2011, the Bahraini regime asked Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf Arab countries to assist with the crackdown on the popular protests.

The Bahraini regime, backed by forces from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Pakistan, began a violent, deadly crackdown on protests, which has led to thousands of arrests, scores of deaths, and systematic torture of detainees.

Crackdown intensifies

Since the start of the popular protests, the Manama regime has dissolved key opposition factions, including al-Wefaq National Islamic Society and the National Democratic Action Society (Wa'ad), arrested prominent opposition figures and rights activists and conducted mass trials of civilians at military courts.

Rights activists have lashed out at Manama for the rampant torture and sexual abuse of political prisoners as well as numerous death sentences, lengthy jail terms, revocation of citizenships, enforced deportations and hefty financial penalties against political activists and Shia scholars in the country.

Critics of the Bahraini regime say defend-



ants in the mass trials, all Shia Muslims, are victims of torture and denied access to any legal representation during the investigation period.

In March 5, 2017, Bahrain's parliament approved the trial of civilians at military tribunals in a measure blasted by human rights campaigners as being tantamount to imposition of an undeclared martial law countrywide.

Bahraini monarch King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifah ratified the constitutional amendment a month later.

Human Rights Watch says the Manama regime authorities have stripped 105 persons of Bahraini citizenship since October 2017, effectively placed more than 20 rights activists, lawyers, and political opposition figures under a travel ban, ordered the closure of the country's only independent newspaper al-Wasat, and upheld a two-year prison sentence against distinguished human rights activist Nabeel Rajab over TV interviews

between 2015 and 2016.

According to the latest report by the Sweden-based human rights NGO, SALAM for Democracy and Human Rights (SALAM DHR), Bahraini security authorities have arbitrarily arrested 89 Shia clerics and summoned 156 others over their political views since 2011.

The report, titled "Kingdom of Persecution," noted that the sentences against the Shia scholars included three death sentences, eight life terms, 19 citizenship revocations, including that of Bahrain's most prominent cleric Sheikh Isa Qassim.

Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have repeatedly expressed deep concern over deterioration of human rights in Bahrain, saying the situation reveals the regime's campaign to silence voices of dissent in the sheikhdom.

■ **U.S., UK silence**

Meanwhile, not only have the U.S. and UK governments kept silence over Manama's

crackdown on dissent, they have also continued their colossal arms sales to the Arab monarchy despite massive rights concerns.

Bahrain is home to the U.S. Fifth Fleet. The Persian Gulf country concluded a \$3.8-billion deal with a U.S. aerospace and military equipment giant to purchase 16 upgraded F-16 warplanes on October 17, 2017. U.S. President Donald Trump has eased restrictions on arms sales to certain countries, including Bahrain.

The U.S. State Department removed human rights conditions on the sale of F-16 aircraft to Bahrain, after Trump announced in May 2017 that Washington's relations with Manama were set to improve. The announcement came after Trump met the Bahraini King during a visit to Saudi Arabia.

The UK government has also been under fire domestically and by international rights activists over violation of its own laws by selling arms to Bahrain.

Under British law, London cannot export weapons to countries that will use them in violation of international humanitarian law.

According to data from the Stockholm international Peace Research Institute, Britain sold at least \$85 million worth of arms to Bahrain between 2000 and 2016.

Rights groups contend that American and British leaders are ignoring the massive rights violations in Bahrain because the sheikhdom is an export market for their weapons.

■ **Mass crackdown**

Meanwhile, Bahraini police said Sunday they had arrested 47 people on charges linked to terrorism, including plots to assassinate "public figures", as well as filing charges against another 290.

Authorities have cracked down hard on dissent since mass street protests in 2011 which demanded an elected prime minister and constitutional monarchy in the Sunni-ruled, Shia majority kingdom.

## Israeli protesters urge PM resignation over corruption scandals

Some 2,000 Israelis have once again taken to the streets of Tel Aviv to demand the resignation of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over a series of corruption scandals.

Saturday's event was the eighth consecutive weekly anti-corruption demonstration in Tel Aviv, where the protesters carried placards reading, "Crime Minister."

They also chanted slogans such as "Shame," "Bribe, bribe, bribe," "Corporate power, organized crime," "The most important thing is not to be afraid," "The people demand social justice," "We won't give up," "We are obliged [to rally every week]" and "Bibi Netanyahu to the Ma'asiyahu prison."

The Ma'asiyahu prison is specifically designated for illegal immigrants and others awaiting deportation.

The protesters are angry at a notice issued by Tel Aviv earlier this month for thousands of African migrants to leave the occupied territories or face imprisonment. The threat sparked condemnations by human rights groups.

"This is a struggle that is persisting, Saturday after Saturday," said Idad Yaniv, protest organizer.

Demonstrator Aylon Vaidya said he attended the rally to save Israel "from the corruption, from the fascism, from going down. They are trying to deport foreigners - asylum seekers - and the prime minister and his friends are full of corruption."

In addition to Tel Aviv, the cities of Haifa, Afula and Petah Tikva witnessed similar anti-corruption demonstrations on Saturday.

In Petah Tikva, the demonstrators heckled Israel's Attorney General Avichai Mendelblit as he left a synagogue. He is accused of foot-dragging in investigations against the prime minister.

Netanyahu is suspected of being involved in bribery, fraud and breach of trust.

He has been questioned in two separate cases, involving allegations that he received lavish gifts from wealthy businessmen and negotiated a deal with a newspaper owner for more favorable coverage. He has denied any wrongdoing.

Another bribery scandal, called the "submarine affair,"



also involves Netanyahu associates.

The Israeli premier has described the weekly events as part of efforts meant to topple him "at any cost."

(Source: al Alam)

## Jordan's king says East Jerusalem must be capital of Palestinian state

Jordan's King Abdullah voiced concern Sunday over a decision by Washington to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, saying East Jerusalem had to be the capital of a future Palestinian state.

In remarks during talks with U.S. Vice Mike Pence in Amman, the king said the only solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was a two-state one.

"The U.S. decision on Jerusalem ... does not come as a result of a comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict," the monarch told Pence at the start of the talks in the royal palace.

Jordan lost East Jerusalem and the West Bank to Israel during the Arab-Israeli war in 1967.

Pence was in Amman on the second leg of a three-country tour that concludes in Israel.

In comments delivered in Egypt, he said

Washington would support a two-state solution for Israelis and Palestinians if the two sides agreed to it.

Last month's endorsement of Israel's claim to Jerusalem as its capital by President Donald Trump drew universal condemnation from Arab leaders and widespread criticism elsewhere.

It also broke with decades of U.S. policy that the city's status must be decided in negotiations with the Palestinians, who want East Jerusalem as the capital of their future state.

Pence told the king that Washington was committed to preserving the status quo of holy sites in Jerusalem.

"We take no decision on boundaries and final status, those are subject to negotiation," he said.

Pence's is the highest-level visit by a



U.S. official to the region since Trump made his declaration on Jerusalem last month.

Jordanian officials fear Washington's move on Jerusalem had also wrecked chances of a resumption of Arab-Israeli peace talks which

the monarch had sought to revive.

King Abdullah said the U.S. move on Jerusalem would fuel radicalism and inflame Muslim and Christian tensions.

King Abdullah's Hashemite dynasty is the custodian of the Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem, making Amman sensitive to any changes of status of the disputed city.

"For us, Jerusalem is key to Muslims and Christians, as it is to Jews. It is key to peace in the region," he said.

Jordanian officials are further worried the move could trigger violence in the Palestinian territories and a spillover into Jordan, a country where many people are descendants of Palestinian refugees whose families left after the creation of Israel in 1948.

(Source: Daily Star)

## Syrian military encircle Jabhat Al-Nusra's big grouping

The Syrian military encircled a big grouping of the Jabhat Al-Nusra terrorist organization in eastern Idlib, and liberated from militants the Abu Duhur airport, Russia's Defense Ministry reported on Sunday.

"Assault troops of the Syrian governmental forces under command of General Hassan Suhel, while advancing along the road connecting Hama and Aleppo, joined the militia units near Herbet al Ghajar and Rasm al Harmal," the ministry said. "Thus, they have completed encirclement of a large group of terrorist belonging to the terrorist organization Jabhat Al-Nusra in the eastern part of the Idlib Province."

Besides, the ministry said, during the assault, the Syrian military repelled militants from the Abu Duhur airport, which had been under the terrorists' control since September 2015.

Earlier reports said the militants' defense was broken after fierce battles, the terrorists were knocked out of seven villages located in the airfield's vicinity. Three years earlier, Abu Duhur was the Syrian army's last stronghold in that northwestern region. The bandits continued the siege for six months.

Military actions against Jabhat Al-Nusra's terrorists and their allies continues for more than a month in Syria's north-west. Over this period, the armed forces and militia destroyed more than 600 militants.

---- 'Freezing weather kills 13 Syrian refugees'

The UN's refugee agency has confirmed that at least 13 Syrians, including women and children, have lost their lives during a snowstorm while trying to flee their war-stricken



country into neighboring Lebanon.

A group of Syrians had tried to enter Lebanon through a rugged route late on Thursday, but were caught in a fierce storm.

"The victims were trying to cross an arduous and rugged passage in freezing temperatures," the UNHCR said in a statement on Saturday.

It said that "others in the group, including a pregnant woman, were discovered in time and assisted by nearby residents and the Lebanese Armed Forces and Civil Defense to reach hospitals before they froze to death."

The Lebanese army and civil defense said on Friday they

had retrieved the bodies of 10 Syrians, including two children and six women. However, the toll has since increased.

Meanwhile, a Lebanese army source told AFP on Saturday that the toll had reached 14.

"The army retrieved a total of 12 bodies on Friday, and one person died at the hospital. Another body was found on Saturday, bringing the total to 14," the source said.

Some 1.5 million Syrian refugees have been living in Lebanon since a foreign-backed war started in Syria in 2011.

Many of the refugees live in informal tented settlements in the country's east and struggle to stay warm in the winter.

The UN's children's agency, UNICEF, said on Saturday it was distributing blankets, warm clothes and heating fuel.

"More children could be among the dead as residents in the area and the Lebanese authorities continue to look for people who are reportedly trapped in the mountainous in freezing temperatures and snow," a UNICEF statement said.

The UN agency further called on the international community to step up assistance for the most affected children.

Many in Lebanon, a country of around six million people to the west of Syria, are demanding that the government facilitate the return of Syrians who have arrived in the country since 2011, arguing the Syrian government has managed to purge many areas of terrorists and refugees can now safely return to their homes.

(Source: agencies)

## Assad slams Turkey offensive as 'support for terrorism'

President Bashar Assad Sunday condemned Turkey's offensive against Kurdish militia in the northern Syrian region of Afrin, saying it was part of Ankara's support for extremist groups.

Turkey and allied Syrian rebels entered the Afrin region on Sunday, a day after launching their offensive against the Kurdish-controlled area. "The brutal Turkish aggression on the Syrian town of Afrin cannot be separated from the Turkish regime's policy from the first day of Syria's crisis, which was essentially built on supporting terrorism and terrorist organizations, whatever their names," Assad said in statements carried by state news agency SANA.

Since Syria's conflict broke out in 2011, the government has repeatedly slammed Ankara for its support of rebels, accusing it of funding extremist factions.

As Turkish threats of a potential attack escalated last week, Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad warned that Syria could shoot down Turkish warplanes used in an assault.

But the Damascus has also previously taken a hard line against the Kurdish authorities, which have implemented semi-autonomous institutions across parts of northern Syria, including Afrin.

On Saturday, a foreign ministry official denied claims by Turkish authorities that it had been informed of the Afrin offensive and called the attack "the latest move in Turkey's attacks on Syria's sovereignty".

(Source: AFP)

## Iraq's supreme court rules against election delay

Iraq's Supreme Federal Court Sunday ruled against calls by Sunni and Kurdish lawmakers to delay a parliamentary election, expected to be called for May, to allow hundreds of thousands of people displaced by war to return home.

Shia politicians, including Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, argued delaying the election would be unconstitutional.

The election must be held "within the timeframe provided by the constitution," the court said in a statement.

Parliament is expected to meet on Monday to validate May 12 as the date for the ballot, as suggested by the government, or agree another date in May.

Abadi is seeking re-election, building on a surge in his popularity among Iraq's majority Shiite Arab community after leading the three-year fight against Daesh (ISIL) terrorist group, supported by a U.S.-led coalition.

"Postponing the elections would set a dangerous precedent, undermining the constitution and damaging Iraq's long-term democratic development," the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad said in a statement on Thursday.

The United States had shown understanding for Abadi's move in October to dislodge Kurdish fighters from the oil rich northern region of Kirkuk, even though the Kurds are traditional allies of Washington and played a key part in the war against Daesh militants.

(Source: Reuters)

## Europe readies riposte to Trump's 'America First' push in Davos

European leaders will be out in force at the World Economic Forum in Davos this week to defend multilateralism before U.S. President Donald Trump arrives to deliver his "America First" message.

Politicians, business chiefs, bankers and celebrities will meet in the Swiss Alps under the banner "Creating a Shared Future in a Fractured World" for the four-day gathering against an unsettling global backdrop.

A decade after the bankruptcy of U.S. investment bank Lehman Brothers helped trigger a global financial crisis, economic growth has returned and stock markets are hitting record highs.

Yet there is a nagging fear among many in Davos that the brighter economic outlook could turn out to be little more than a mirage if the daunting array of geopolitical threats - from protectionism and climate change to cyber attacks and outright war - gather pace in 2018.

"Not all geopolitical threats are threats to financial markets," Axel Weber, the chairman of Swiss bank UBS and former president of the German Bundesbank told Reuters. "But I agree that there may be a disconnect, which has been going on for some time already and may well continue for some time."

The Global Risks Report published by the WEF last week showed that many see a heightened risk of political and economic confrontations between major powers this year.

Trump, the first sitting U.S. president to attend the forum since Bill Clinton in 2000, is a source of much of this anxiety after a volatile first year in office in which he has turned American foreign policy on its head.

The forum will open on Tuesday with a speech by India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and end on Friday, when Trump is due to address the massive auditorium where Chinese President Xi Jinping spoke last year, offering to fill the global leadership void created by an inward-looking Washington.

White House officials said over the weekend that a government shutdown in the United States was unlikely to prevent Trump from making the trip, although the budget director Mick Mulvaney said it was now "in flux".

In the days between Modi and Trump, the leaders of Europe's biggest countries, absent from Davos last year and emboldened by their own economic recovery, will offer an alternative vision to Trump and Xi, who the Europeans say has failed to deliver on his promise of a year ago to open China up to foreign investment.

(Source: Reuters)

## The U.S. no longer owns the future of freedom

It, too, has plenty of soft power, as the German leadership's global approval rating shows. Europe can be as good as the U.S. at exporting culture. It's home to two nuclear powers, though it probably won't use its military might for "democracy promotion" as the U.S. has done. That, perhaps, is a good thing. Why should the U.S. set itself up as an authority on freedom and democracy, even post-Trump, if even a think tank it funds, with a bias toward the U.S. foreign policy line, admits Europe's leadership?

The U.S. once captured the imagination of much of the world. Europe's example may not be as compelling. But if you believe democracy is superior to authoritarianism, the ascendancy of Russian- and Chinese-style models cannot be allowed to spread.

(Source: Bloomberg)

## Watford sack manager Silva, blame rival club’s approach

Watford sacked manager Marco Silva on Sunday after a poor run of results and blamed a rival Premier League club’s “unwarranted approach” to sign the Portuguese earlier this season as the catalyst for the decision.

British media reported that Everton had targeted Silva in their quest to replace Dutchman Ronald Koeman before they appointed former England manager Sam Allardyce in November. “This has been a difficult decision and one not taken lightly,”

Watford said in a statement on their website (www.watfordfc.com).

“The club is convinced the appointment of Silva was the right one and had it not been for the unwarranted approach by a Premier League rival for his services we would have continued to prosper under his leadership.

“The catalyst for this decision is that unwarranted approach, something which the board believes has seen a significant deterioration in both focus and results to the point where the long-term future of Watford FC has been jeopardised.”

Silva, 40, joined Watford from Hull City on a two-year deal in the close season and took them to fourth in the table after eight matches. Watford have since struggled for consistency, winning just once in the past 11 league games.

Watford, who are 10th in the table after 24 matches, were beaten 2-0 by Leicester City on Saturday, their third league defeat in four games. The club said they would appoint Silva’s successor shortly.

(Source: Mirror)

## Klopp: Liverpool wouldn’t sell to rivals during season

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp insisted he would never sell a player to a rival Premier League club during the season like Arsenal are set to with Alexis Sanchez.

Sanchez is believed to be close to completing a move to Manchester United, with Henrikh Mkhitaryan set to join Arsenal.

The transfer would be a huge boost to United, who are second in the table and have Mkhitaryan out of favor.

However, Klopp said there was no chance he would let a star leave for a rival English club during a campaign.

“No Liverpool player of this squad would leave – and not just because we say it but because of their commitment to the club,” he told UK newspapers. “No-one would leave to any other Premier League club during the season. “I’m not just confident of that – I know it. It is just impossible. No player who is here will say, ‘OK, come on, in the middle of the season I go there or there.’ I really cannot see that situation.”

While Klopp said he still had a developing squad, the German believes Liverpool are heading in the right direction.

“It’s how I see the commitment of the players. We are not together for 10 years or so,” he said. “It’s not just starting but it’s still all fresh and the direction and the development is the right direction. “I know it’s far away from being perfect but it’s on a good way.”

(Source: Daily Star)

## No mercenary? Sanchez endorses article defending imminent Man Utd move

Alexis Sanchez appears to have offered a rebuttal of accusations that his move from Arsenal to Manchester United is motivated by money after retweeting an article defending his imminent switch.

The Chile forward’s transfer to Old Trafford is expected to be completed soon, with Sanchez posting a video on Instagram on Sunday showing him boarding a private plane ahead of a reported medical. It is also thought Henrikh Mkhitaryan has agreed to move to the Emirates Stadium in a swap deal.

Many have criticized Sanchez, whose salary is set to increase markedly at United, with former Arsenal defender Martin Keown labelling the former Barca forward as “the biggest mercenary in football”. However, British journalist Oliver Holt defended United’s decision to spend big, stating in a Daily Mail article that it is the nature of the market, while also claiming that Sanchez – who was previously a target for Manchester City – will also be taking a step up in his career.

Sanchez retweeted the link to the article on Sunday, the first activity from his official Twitter account since January 7.

(Source: Independent)

## Hamburg already know new man after Markus Gisdol dismissed

A defeat to the worst side in the Bundesliga table proved one step too far for Hamburg. Head coach Markus Gisdol was fired the morning after the defeat. Some familiar names are in line to replace him.

Having fired Markus Gisdol after a disappointing defeat to bottom-of-the-table Cologne, Hamburg’s chairman Heribert Bruchhagen has already confirmed the arrival of a new head coach is imminent.

“We already know who will be head coach,” Bruchhagen said on Sunday at a press conference just hours after Gisdol’s dismissal. Bruchhagen said the new man would be appointed “soon” but refused to give any specific names.

BILD reported later on Sunday afternoon that Bernd Hollerbach was going to be named as new HSV head coach, on a contract until the summer of 2019.

The 48-year-old was most recently head coach of second-division Würzburger Kickers until last summer, taking the club from the regional leagues to the second division. In his playing days, Hollerbach was a defender for Hamburg between 1996 and 2004.

After 19 Bundesliga games, Hamburg have just 15 points and are six games without a win.

“It wasn’t an easy decision, but we’re convinced that today, we had no other option,” Bruchhagen said. After 55 years, the fear is that Hamburg’s time in the top flight might finally be up.

(Source: Deutsche Welle)

# Sepp Blatter phoned Barack Obama before the FIFA World Cup vote



‘He wasn’t supposed to run in 2011,’ Blatter told me, referring again to Bin Hammam. ‘He went against his Emir.’

Blatter continued: ‘In December 2010, soon after the vote, I went to a meeting in Doha at the palace with the Emir, the young one who is now the Emir, Sheik Jassim and Bin Hammam.’

Sheik Jassim is the new Emir’s older brother who renounced his rights as heir apparent in favor of his younger brother in 2003. He is the patron of the Aspire Academy. Blatter continued: ‘The Emir knew that I wasn’t happy that they won. He knew I wanted America to win, but he also knew that FIFA couldn’t have a World Cup in Qatar in 2022 and a Qatari as president of FIFA.’

‘He wanted to keep the World Cup. He told me in front of Bin Hammam that Bin Hammam would not run. I thought that was that. I returned to Zurich.’

‘Next thing,’ he continued, breaking some bread, ‘he is running. He gave an interview. I read it in the paper one morning.’

‘What did you do?’ I asked.

‘I wrote an email and asked them, ‘What

is going on? Why is he running?’ We had an agreement.’

‘Did they respond?’

‘Sheik Jassim did. He told me, “Don’t worry. We will fix it”.’

Blatter picked up a piece of prosciutto and tore another corner of his bread roll. ‘And that was that,’ he said.

‘When did you know that Qatar was going to win?’ I asked. ‘As soon as Michel told me his votes had shifted,’ he replied, referring to Michel Platini, the former footballer who was head of UEFA. ‘We had talked about the bidding contest in the executive committee, that it would go to Russia and America.’

‘When did Platini tell you his votes shifted?’

‘He told me that his votes were shifting. Him, Lefkaritis [the ExCo voter from Cyprus], Erzik [of Turkey], D’Hooghe [Belgium]. They all went to Qatar. After the meeting with Sarkozy.’

Platini was reported to have met with the then French president, Nicolas Sarkozy, on November 23, 2010, nine days before the FIFA executive committee meeting. Also at the meeting was Sheik Tamim of Qatar, who

would later become the Emir, succeeding his father in 2013.

In 2011, Qatar Airways purchased 90 aircraft at the annual Dubai Air Show: 88 of them were French-manufactured Airbus aircraft, two were US-manufactured Boeing aircraft. Al Jazeera subsequently purchased the TV rights to the French Ligue 1 and Qatar Sports Investments purchased Paris Saint-Germain. ‘I didn’t believe D’Hooghe until I saw the job his son got,’ added Blatter.

Michel D’Hooghe’s son, Pieter, also a medical specialist, was offered a role as a surgeon at a private hospital in Qatar in 2012.

‘What did you do when you found out?’ Blatter said: ‘I called President Obama. With Sunil.’ He was referring to the then long-standing president of US Soccer and head of the US bid, Dr Sunil Gulati.

‘We phoned President Obama together the night or two before and I told him, ‘It is going to be very difficult for you to win’.

‘What did President Obama say?’ I asked.

‘He understood what had gone on. He thanked me for telling him.’

(Source: Daily Mail)

## American hero Tennys is good for tennis, says Wilander



American outsider Tennys Sandgren’s fairytale run at the Australian Open is just what the sport needs to make it less predictable, according to former champion Mats Wilander.

The 97th-ranked Sandgren arrived in Melbourne without a grand slam match win on his CV but the man from Gallatin, Tennessee is now one victory away from the quarter-finals.

“It’s great for Tennys, and tennis,” Eurosport commentator Wilander told Reuters ahead of 26-year-old Sandgren’s last-16 clash with Austrian fifth seed Dominic Thiem.

“He came through the hard way playing college tennis and Futures and Challengers. We need these guys to break through because to do what he is doing gives hope for the journeyman.

“It shows you can be 100, 200 in the world and make it through to the second week of a slam. It shows if you keep pushing you can have your day.”

Sandgren has spent most of his career

traveling the American circuit, often making overnight road trips.

Before his shock victory over 2014 champion Stan Wawrinka in round two, he admitted he had often stood in bars watching on TV as the likes of Wawrinka, Novak Djokovic and Roger Federer slugged it out at the majors.

“I used to watch them and think “jeez these guys are pretty damn good,” Sandgren, who is guaranteed A\$240,000 (\$192,000) in prize money, said this week.

Now he is mixing it with the best and Wilander believes it adds a touch of unpredictability to the men’s game.

“It helps illustrate to fans the depth of tennis and maybe tennis could become a bit more like golf,” he said.

“The PGA Tour has benefited from the fact that, yeah, they have the stars but there is the whole field that can win any event, that’s why we need guys like Sandgren in tennis.”

(Source: Reuters)

## Nadal weathers blast from pocket rocket Schwartzman



Top seed Rafa Nadal was rattled by a feisty challenge from Diego Schwartzman but held firm to fend off the diminutive Argentine 6-3 6-7(4) 6-3 6-3 and reach his 10th Australian Open quarter-final on Sunday.

In an often breathtaking clash laden with sumptuous shot-making, the Spaniard was rocked by the hard-hitting Schwartzman who broke him three times to claim the second set at Rod Laver Arena.

But the 16-times grand slam champion responded with typical grit, bolstering his defense to blanket the 24th seed’s firepower and counter-punching brilliantly to book a match with Croatia’s Marin Cilic.

After three cakewalks in the previous rounds, the three-hour 51-minute workout was timely, said Nadal, who came into the tournament with some queries over a knee injury.

“You can’t expect easy matches when you’re playing in big tournaments,” the world number one told reporters after saving all his seven break points in the final set.

“It’s always better winning in two hours

than in four. But that’s it. It was a good test for me. It was a lot of hours on court. Moments under pressure.

“A lot of positive things that I managed well. “But being honest, too, moments like this helps to be more confident in yourself, in your body.”

The victory ensured Nadal, who lost a five-set classic to long-time rival Roger Federer in the final last year, will retain his world number one ranking.

It also put the Mallorcan equal second with Stefan Edberg on the number of quarter-final appearances in the Australian grand slam in the professional era. Federer, naturally, leads with 14.

The jet-heeled Schwartzman joined the grand slam quarter-final club at the U.S. Open, a milestone moment during an impressive rise up the rankings in 2017.

Nadal had seen off his first three opponents without dropping a set but it was soon clear at Rod Laver Arena that Schwartzman was cut from a different cloth.

(Source: Reuters)

## Wozniacki gallops into Melbourne quarter-finals



a between the legs ‘tweneer’ in the first set.

“I think you can tell my confidence is pretty good, I was pretty proud of that,” she said of the trick shot that failed to earn her a point but delighted the Rod Laver crowd.

Second seed Caroline Wozniacki said she is playing with “nothing to lose” after galloping into the quarter-finals of the Australian Open for the first time in six years on Sunday.

The 27-year-old Dane crunched 25 winners in a 63-minute masterclass as she thrashed Slovakia’s Magdalena Rybáriková 6-3 6-0 to move a step closer to a long-awaited first grand slam title.

Wozniacki dropped a mere six points in the second set against the 19th-ranked Rybáriková and said her free-hitting approach was the result of almost losing in the second round.

The former world number one saved two match points against Croatia’s Jane Fett in the second round, recovering from 5-1 down in the decider to reel off six consecutive games. She has not looked back since.

“I feel good. I think being almost out of the tournament, you have nothing to lose after that,” she told reporters. “You just go out there and you enjoy yourself. I played really well from being down 5-1.

“Since then I’ve just kept that going basically.

Such is her confidence that Wozniacki even attempted

# Iran's friendly fixtures announced

**S P O R T S** Iran national football team will play several friendly matches as part of preparation for the 2018 World Cup.

Team Melli will start their friendlies with a match against Libya on March 14 in Tehran's Azadi Stadium. The warm-up match was originally scheduled to be played behind closed doors but the Iranian football federation announced the fans could attend the game.

Carlos Queiroz's team will play one of Tunisia, Senegal and Bosnia & Herzegovina teams on March 22 in Tehran and meet Algeria five days later in the same location.

Team Melli will face Uzbekistan on May 8 and meet one of Syria, Lebanon and Jordan teams three days later at the Azadi Stadium.

On May 20, the Iranian national football team will play Turkey in Istanbul.

Team Melli have been scheduled to meet as-yet unnamed team on May 28 in Tehran before leaving the country for their European training camp in Austria.

Iran will face Greece in Austria on June. 2. Noting that it's possible one of Albania or Poland teams could replace Greece.

Finally, the Persians will face a team who have qualified for the 2018 World Cup in Moscow on June 8.

Queiroz's team have been drawn in Group B along with Spain, Morocco and Portugal.

Iran will open the campaign with a match against Morocco at Saint Petersburg on June 15.

Team Melli, meanwhile, face Spain in Kazan on 20 June before meeting Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal in Saransk five days later.



## Iran futsal team to play Azerbaijan



**S P O R T S** Iran national futsal team will travel to Baku, Azerbaijan on Monday to play two friendly matches with Azerbaijan team.

Iran will play the European team on Jan. 23 and 24 in Baku.

Team Melli are preparing for The 2018 AFC Futsal Championship which will take place in Taiwan (referred to as Chinese Taipei by the AFC) between 1 and 11 February 2018.

Iran are in Group C along with Iraq, China, and Myanmar.

The 2018 AFC Futsal Championship will be the 15th edition of the AFC Futsal Championship, the biennial international futsal championship organized by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) for the men's national teams of Asia.

A total of 16 teams are divided into four groups of four teams with the top two in each section will advance to the knockout phase. Iran claimed the title of the last edition in 2016, where they defeated the host, Uzbekistan, 1-2 in the final match.

## Dejagah rules out Iranian clubs move



**S P O R T S** Ashkan Dejagah is not going to join an Iranian football team, his agent said.

Iranian media have reported that the former Wolfsburg midfielder has been linked with the Iranian teams.

According to the local media, Esteghlal, Zob Ahan and Tractor Sazi are shown their interest in signing the attacking midfielder.

Dejagah's agent has said the player will not join an Iranian team and would rather continue his football overseas.

Dejagah is without a team since parting

company with Wolfsburg in early June. He was recently in Doha, Qatar on a personal visit.

A Germany-born Iran international represented his country at the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil.

Dejagah made his professional debut for Hertha BSC in 2004-05, and also played for VfL Wolfsburg, Fulham, and Al Arabi of Qatar.

In May 2014, Dejagah donated his DNA profile for scientific research on sports-related injuries and training.

# Seoul says North Korea's Olympic participation will aid peace and ease tensions

**EOUL (Reuters)** - Seoul welcomed confirmation by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) that 22 North Korean athletes would compete in next month's Winter Olympics, saying on Sunday it would aid peace and the easing of tensions on the Korean peninsula.

In the first of a series of preparatory visits, North Korean music and arts officials arrived in South Korea on Sunday to inspect sites for performances during the Olympics.

"North Korea's participation in the Olympics will be a catalyst for building peace and easing tensions on the Korean peninsula," said South Korea's presidential Blue House in a statement released on Sunday.

The visit to the South marks the first by North Koreans since South Korean President Moon Jae-in took office in May last year and sought to re-engage with the North.

"President Moon has previously stressed that the Pyeongchang Olympics should be an important turning point in solving North Korea's missile issues," the Blue House statement said.

he seven-member North Korean delegation, led by musician Hyon Song-wol, will check venues for performances by a 140-strong art troupe at the Olympics.

The officials are scheduled to spend two days inspecting art centers in Seoul and Gangneung city, which will also host several of the Olympic events.

South Korean broadcaster YTN reported the delegation had arrived in Seoul early Sunday under a heavy police presence, then boarded a train to Gangwon province, where the Olympics will be held from Feb. 9-25.

The two sides also agreed on Sunday to plans for another team of North Korean sports officials to inspect Olympic venues and accommodations from Jan. 25-27,

South Korea's unification ministry said.

In a diplomatic breakthrough after a year of escalating tension over the North's nuclear and missile program, the IOC announced on Saturday that North Korea will send 22 athletes to the Winter Games and compete in three sports and five disciplines.

North Korea's state-run KCNA news agency released a commentary on Sunday criticizing some South Korean politicians and media who have questioned Pyongyang's motives in reaching out even as it refuses to honor repeated United Nations Security Council resolutions targeting its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile program.

"There is no doubt about the sincerity and authenticity of the DPRK to improve the North-South relations and to ensure successful Olympics," KCNA said, referring to North Korea by its official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

## Tottenham would resist world-record bid for Kane

Tottenham Hotspur will reject even a world-record bid from Real Madrid for Harry Kane in the summer, a source close to the London club has told ESPN FC.

Newspaper reports on Sunday suggested that Real are prepared to make the striker the first £200 million player at the end of the season but the source said Spurs would not sell the 24-year-old, who has a contract until 2022, for any price.

Real are languishing in fifth in the La Liga table and their front three of Cristiano Ronaldo, Karim Benzema and Gareth Bale, who was prised from Spurs for a then-world record £86m in 2013, have scored 10 league goals between them this season.

Kane has already scored 28 goals in all competitions this term -- with 20 of those in the league -- and he finished 2017 as the highest goal scorer in elite European football with 56, the first player to outscore Ronaldo and Lionel Messi in a calendar year since 2009.

Earlier this month, Tottenham chairman Daniel Levy reiterated that the club would not sell any stars ahead of next season, when the club are scheduled to move into their new £800m stadium.

"I'm 100 percent confident every single player that we want to keep I can assure you will be playing for Tottenham Hotspur



next season," Levy told Sky Sports.

The homegrown forward has previously suggested that he could remain at Spurs for his entire career but, when asked about Kane's future a fortnight ago, Spurs manager Mauricio Pochettino said he could not force any players to stay against their will.

Asked what Spurs need to do to keep him, Kane then said: "I've always said, just keep progressing, keep getting better. We want to start winning trophies -- that's the aim. As long as the club keeps doing that, then I'm happy here."

(Source: Soccernet)

## Australia's cycling event guarantees equal pay for men and women

Men and women who competed in Australia's premier cycling race have been awarded equal prize money for the first time in the event's history.

The South Australian government announced on Sunday that it would contribute 90,000 Australian dollars (72,000 U.S. dollars) to the Tour Down Under (TDU) prize pool to guarantee equality.

The men's TDU was set to conclude on Sunday after five grueling days of riding in temperatures exceeding 40 degrees Celsius.

The women's event was held before the men's with Australian Amanda Spratt winning the event as well as being named Queen of the Mountain as the best climber.

Initially the women's prize pool for the event was just 12,000 U.S. dollars but South Australian Sports Minister Leon Bignell said that female competitors could now look forward to cheques that would bring their pay in line with their male counterparts.

"This is the first major bike race in the world where there'll be equality amongst men and women, where the pay cheques will be exactly the same," Bignell told reporters in Adelaide on Sunday.

"So terrific news for women's cycling -- when they go out there they train just



as hard as the men.

"When they break bones it hurts just as much as the men."

David Lappartient, president of the Union Cyclist Internationale (UCI), said that the initiative would lead the way as the sport sought global equality.

"I am a strong advocate for women's empowerment in sports in general and cycling more specifically," he said.

"The UCI has indeed introduced equal prize money for men and women across all UCI world championships and world cups.

(Source: Xinhua)

## Safdarian wins bronze at UIAA Ice Climbing World Tour

**TASNIM** — Mohammadreza Safdarian from Iran claimed a bronze medal at the 2018 International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation (UIAA) Ice Climbing World Tour on Saturday.

Safdarian finished in third place with a time of 16.272sec in the Men Lead.

Russian climbers Dengin Alexey and Tomilov Maksim won the gold and silver medals, clocking 17.292sec and 16.290sec respectively.

The three-day competitions featured some 300 athletes from more than 20 countries in Saas-Fee, Switzerland.

Iran took part in the competition with nine ice climbers.

## Iran to co-host 2020 Senior U23 Wrestling World Championships

**Press TV** — Iran is going to host the freestyle competitions of Senior U23 Wrestling World Championships in 2020, after United World Wrestling (UWW) accepted the Islamic Republic's proposal for the event.

The decision was recently made after the Islamic Republic of Iran Wrestling Federation (IRIWF) proposed collaborative holding of the tournament during the annual UWW Congress in the Hungarian capital city of Budapest in 2016, and later during a session in Paris the following year.

The proposal was approved by the board of directors of the international governing body for the sport of amateur wrestling.

During the Paris session, Iran's representative pointed to the decline in the number of countries willing hosting the international wrestling competitions due to financial and executive difficulties. The UWW officials then agreed to let two countries co-host the games.

Iran will now host the freestyle contests of the Senior U23 Wrestling World Championships in 2020, while Finland would hold the Greco-Roman and women's wrestling bouts. The dates for the events are yet to be announced.

The Islamic Republic of Iran had been unable to host the Senior U23 Wrestling World Championships since 2002, after the UWW stated that the championships must be held concurrently in the three categories of freestyle, Greco-Roman and women's wrestling.

## Ethiopia's Bekele to race London Marathon

Ethiopia's triple Olympic track champion Kenenisa Bekele will race the London Marathon in April and line up alongside Briton Mo Farah and Kenya's Eliud Kipchoge for what promises to be a mouth-watering contest.

Bekele, 35, regarded by many as the greatest distance runner of all time and holder of the 5,000m and 10,000m world records, finished second in London last year and was third in 2016.

A pre-race favorite last year, Bekele had hoped to break Dennis Kimetto's men's world record of 2:02.57 but had trouble with blisters on his feet and crossed the finish line behind Kenya's Daniel Wanjiru.

"I am thrilled to be returning to London for the third year in a row and would love to go one better than last year and win the race," Bekele said in a statement.

"Once again London has brought the best distance runners in the world together so I know it will not be easy... I have been training very hard with the aim of arriving in London in April in the best possible condition."

The trio of Bekele, Farah and Kipchoge have a combined total of eight Olympic gold medals and 12 world championship gold medals between them.

"This is a mouth-watering prospect," said event director Hugh Brasher. "Sir Mo, Eliud and Kenenisa could all put forward a persuasive case for being the greatest of all time and now they meet for the first time over the marathon distance."

The London Marathon will be held on April 22.

(Source: Reuters)

## Arsenal talks for Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang yet to being

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang's move from Borussia Dortmund to Arsenal has not moved any further forward with negotiations between the two clubs yet to begin.

On Saturday, Dortmund chief executive Hans-Joachim Watzke revealed that Arsenal had made their first enquiry to sign Aubameyang, who is currently suspended from first-team duty for missing a pre-match meeting.

But Watzke said he has had no contact yet from his opposite number at Arsenal, Ivan Gazidis.

He told Bild on Sunday: "We were contacted by Arsenal CEO Ivan Gazidis, where he informed us that he intends to talk to us. That, however, did not happen yet. There are no current talks."

German football magazine kicker reported that Arsenal had submitted an official offer in the region of €50 million, an amount which they say would not be acceptable to Dortmund. Bild says the Bundesliga club are holding out for a figure closer to €70m.

Aubameyang is under contract at Signal Iduna Park until 2021. The 28-year-old has been heavily linked with a move to Arsenal as a potential replacement for Alexis Sanchez, who is expected to move to Manchester United in a swap deal with Henrikh Mkhitaryan.

Aubameyang was the Bundesliga's top goal scorer last season as he finished the campaign with 31 goals and has hit 13 in 15 games so far this year.

However, he has been suspended twice by Dortmund this season, and three times in 14 months, for disciplinary reasons and sporting director Michael Zorc revealed last week he was not focused enough to play.

Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger was accused of being "disrespectful" by Zorc when he spoke about the links with Aubameyang last week.

(Source: ESPN)

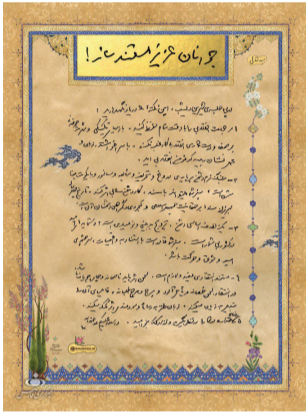
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Leader’s letter to filmmakers published

**A R T d e s k** TEHRAN — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei has formulated guidelines for Iranian documentary filmmakers in a letter, which has been referred to by Persian news agencies as “The Revolution’s Charter of Documentary”.



This photo shows Ayatollah Khamenei’s letter to Iranian documentary filmmakers. The letter, which is a handwritten calligraphic document, outlines guidelines for filmmakers. It emphasizes the importance of preserving the revolutionary morality and the role of art in society. The letter is signed by Ayatollah Khamenei and is dated January 11, 2018.

He sent the letter to the documentary filmmakers just one day after a meeting with a group of them on January 11. The letter, which is comprised of five guidelines, was unveiled during a special ceremony at the Art Bureau on Sunday evening. In his first advice, the Leader asked filmmakers to “Preserve carefully the revolutionary course. Do not displace the revolutionary morality with technical effects or professional renown. Confirm honorably by your tongue and your actions that you are a revolutionary believer.” “The enemy’s soft war has been set up based on lies, distortion, rumors, censorship and boycotts. Your art can neutralize the enemy’s actions,” the second advice reads. In his third guidance, the Leader said, “An intention of the enemy is to stimulate disappointment and pessimism. Reasons for hope are numerous in the country. Your art is able to kindle hope, zeal and movement based on the realities.” “A critical documentary film is useful and also necessary. It should be conscientious and redemptive in approach. An aggressive, demeaning and anarchistic manner of criticism turns its advantage into damage. Satirical language helps the documentary be more useful and efficient,” the fourth guide reads. “Consider God’s satisfaction in your works and ask Him for help,” the letter concluded.

Fragment of flag Nelson flew at Trafalgar sells for almost 300,000 pounds

**LONDON (Reuters)** — A piece of the Union Jack flag believed to have been flown from the flagship of Britain’s Lord Horatio Nelson’s ship during the Battle of Trafalgar sold for 297,000 pounds (\$410,000) at an auction in London last week.

The item was part of a collection of Nelson memorabilia that went up for sale at auctioneers Sotheby’s and included weapons, his “grog chest” and personal letters.

Another item, a portrait of Nelson’s mistress Emma Hamilton, sold for 369,000 pounds, significantly more than the estimate price of between 150,000 and 200,000 pounds.

The 86 cm by 92 cm flag fragment (34 inches by 36 inches), dubbed “The Victory Jack”, had an estimated price of between 80,000 and 100,000 pounds.

“The flag has a wonderful story,” Gabriel Heaton, specialist for books and manuscripts at Sotheby’s told Reuters.

“It was used as part of the great ceremonial funeral of Nelson after his death at the battle. And pieces of it were broken up and kept by the loyal sailors who had lost their very, very deeply loved commander.”

The last surviving complete Union Jack flag flown at the battle fetched 384,000 pounds in 2009, more than twenty times its estimated price.

The battle of Trafalgar was a naval clash that took place in 1805, and saw the British defeat a numerically superior French and Spanish fleet. Nelson was fatally wounded during the battle, which cemented his status as a national hero in Britain.

British PM May says honored by French loan of Bayeux Tapestry

**SANDHURST, England (Reuters)** — British Prime Minister Theresa May said she was honored that France will lend Britain the Bayeux Tapestry, an 11th century treasure that tells the story of William the Conqueror’s invasion of England in 1066.

“Our shared history is reflected in the loan of the Bayeux Tapestry to the UK in 2022, the first time it will be on British soil in more than 900 years,” May said in a statement as she welcomed French President Emmanuel Macron on a visit to Britain.

“I am honored at the loan of such a precious piece of our shared history which yet again underscores the closeness of the UK-France relationship,” May said.

The loan would be part of a wider cultural exchange between Britain and France over the next four years, she said.

The 70-meter-long work, the precise origins of which are obscure and which has not left France in its nearly 950-year known history, is currently on display in the town of Bayeux, in the northwestern French region of Normandy.

Macron told reporters that the France and Britain were now fighting wars together, a reference to cooperation between the two former European adversaries against ISIS movements including in countries Mali.

Fajr Music Festival announces winners

**1 →** The award in the Vocal Music Composition section went to Kaveh Salehi for his collaboration on the album “This Is also a Tale”.

The awards ceremony began with a performance by the National Orchestra, which performed pieces composed by Ali Tajvidi. Vocalist Salar Aqili accompanied the orchestra.

Afterwards, the secretary of the festival, Hamidreza Nurbakhsh, gave a report on organizing the festival.

He called Iranian musicians “the noblest artists” of the country because they still hopefully persist on their work despite the fact that their problems have remained unresolved over the past four decades.”

He referred the decisions by certain groups to halt organizing concerts in the country and an unofficial ban for women’s activities in music as a few of many obstacles the Iranian musicians face and expressed his hope that the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance would step in to settle them soon.

The organizers then intervened to refresh the tense atmosphere with a solo performance by the Italian violin virtuoso Luca Ciarla.

The award ceremony went on with honoring Alireza Qorbani with the award for best singer of Iranian music for his album “Blaze”.

“Giving prizes and ranking artists in the world of art is not very fair, as awards and rankings are not their priority,” Qorbani said after accepting his award.

“Thus, I’m not so very happy, because I believe that all the musicians here deserve to receive such an award,” he added.

The festival also honored the 87-year-old Kurdish singer Ebrahim Qaderi and Faraj Alipur, a veteran singer from the Lorestan region, for their lifetime achievements in Iranian regional music.



Vocalist Salar Aqili (C) acknowledges the audience after a performance with the National Orchestra during the closing ceremony of the 33rd Fajr Music Festival at Tehran’s Vahdat Hall on January 20, 2108. (Mehrf/Masud Saki)

In the Dastgahi Music category, the Barbad Award was presented to Qasem Rahimzadeh for his collection “River Song”.

Pop singer Kaveh Yaqmai received a Barbad Award for best composition in his latest album

“Suddenly Gone” and Mehdi Yarahi won the award for best pop singer for his album “Full-Length Mirror”.

The ceremony came to an end with a performance by Yarahi.

The organizers of the 31st edition of the festival in 2016 named their award after Barbad, a renowned musician at the court of Sassanid king Khosrow II who ruled from 590 to 628 CE.

Fajr livens up capital Tehran with more performances



A scene from “Khayyam” opera puppet show directed by Behruz Gharibpur. (Mehrf/Asghar Khamseh)

**A R T d e s k** TEHRAN — The fourth day, Sunday, of the 36th Fajr International Theater Festival saw a number of performances from Iran, Germany, France, Belgium and Azerbaijan.

“Hamlet” by Christopher Ruping from Germany went on stage in the main hall of the City Theater Complex. Charsu hall of the complex hosted the play “7 p.m. on the Seventh Day of Autumn” by Ayyub Aqakhani from Iran, and “Laundry of Legends” by Jassem Hindi from France was staged in the other hall of the complex.

Iranshshar Theater Complex played host to “Big Mouth” by Valentijn Dhaenens from Belgium.

Spanning history from 400 BC up to 9/11, “Bigmouth” juxtaposes speeches from different people who advocated the same themes or were attempting to achieve the

same result. He has left events from the last decade alone so that the audience has some sense of objectivity and distance from the subjects.

In addition, director Behruz Gharibpur took the “Khayyam” opera puppet show on stage at Tehran’s Ferdowsi Hall on Sunday. The puppet show focuses on the life story of the Persian mathematician, astronomer and poet, Omar Khayyam (1048-1131).

Other Sunday performances included “Tehran, Under the Wings of the Angels” by Nader Borhani Marand and “Household Chores” by Narges Behruzian.

“Entre-Cabanes”, an exposition by Ramona Poenaru and Gael Chaillat from France set up at the Tehran Book Garden in the off-stage section, is one of the highlights of the festival.

The 36th Fajr International Theater Festival will be running until January 29.

Storytellers bringing delight to children in Tehran



The Organizers set up the venue (IIDCYA) for the 20th International Storytelling Festival ahead of the festival opening today. (IIDCYA/ Yumes Panahi)

**C U L T U R E d e s k** TEHRAN — Narrators from Iran and other countries will delight children in Tehran as the International Storytelling Festival opens today at several venues across the city.

Children, grandmothers and grandfathers, storytellers from across the country as well as several foreign storytellers will tell their stories to the children during the 4-day event.

The festival is organized every year by the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA).

Stories from Ferdowsi’s masterpiece Shahnameh, folktales from various regions of Iran as well as stories from Persian books are scheduled to be told during the event.

In addition, a group of foreign storytellers will familiarize Iranian children with stories from their own native cultures.

Beatriz Montero from Spain, Fatima Farhat from Lebanon, Barbara Amaral from Brazil, Nor Azhar Ishak from Malaysia and Beyza Akyuz from Turkey are among the storytellers invited to the event. Other storytellers are coming from Afghanistan, India and Kenya.

The stories will be judged by a number of Iranian and foreign jury members.

Akram Qasempur, Moslem Qasemi and Mohammad Simzari will judge the national section, and the stories in the international section will be judged by Reza Fayyazi, Hamid Jebelli and Hassan Dowlatabadi from Iran, as well as Rukhsana Khan, a Pakistani Canadian children’s writer and storyteller, and storyteller and actor Djalma Madelar Menes from the Philippines.

Venues including IIDCYA, Art Bureau, Melal Cultural Center, Ameneh Nursery and several schools will be hosting the event.

Indonesian journalists met Iranian press official



Indonesian journalists meet Iran’s Deputy Culture Minister for Press Affairs Mohammad Soltanifar in Tehran on January 20, 2018. (ILNA)

**A R T d e s k** TEHRAN — A group of Indonesian journalists met Iran’s Deputy Culture Minister for Press Affairs Mohammad Soltanifar in Tehran on Saturday evening.

The journalists were from the Jakarta Post, Republika, Rakyat Merdeka, Kompas, Antara News and Metro TV.

Soltanifar briefed the delegation on press in Iran and said that the representatives of over 150 foreign press agencies from 33

countries are working in Iran.

He also pointed to the active involvement of the female journalists working for the Iranian press and added, “The editorials in the Persian news agencies and newspapers are dominated by female journalists and over 1200 news media are presided over by women.”

Soltanifar also said that Iran welcomes any plan from Indonesian news organizations to establish offices in the country.

Kolkata festival to screen films from Iran



A scene from “The End of Dreams” by Mohammad-Ali Talebi

**A R T d e s k** TEHRAN — The 7th edition of the Kolkata International Children’s Film Festival will be screening several films from Iran, the organizers have announced. “Where is the Friend’s House” by Abbas Kiarostami, “The End of Dreams” by Mohammad-Ali Talebi, “White Bridge” by Ali Qavitan and “The White Balloon” by Jafar Panahi are some of the Iranian films to be screened at the festival.

Also included are “Hura” by Gholamreza Sagharchian, “Kelileh & Demneh” by Alireza Tavakkoli-Bina, “Weavers of Imagination” by Ahmad Feizi and “Helmsman” by Majid Esmaeli Parsa.

Over 200 films from 32 countries, including the U.S, France, Germany, Iran and Kazakhstan, will be screened during the festival.

The festival, which opened on January 19, will be running until 27.