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Iran's crude steel exports up 80% in 9 months

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran exported 4.614 million tons of crude steel during the nine-month period ended on December 21, with 80 percent rise from 2.565 million tons in the same period of time in the preceding year, Iranian Steel Producers Association announced. Also, the country's crude steel output

witnessed a 16-percent growth in the mentioned nine-month period and stood at 16.073 million tons, IRNA reported on Sunday. Iran's crude steel output stood at 18.466 million tons in the past Iranian calendar year 1395 (ended on March 20, 2017), showing 11 percent rise from 16.656 million tons in 1394. ➔4

IRGC arrests 16 ISIS militants in western Iran

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — In clashes on Saturday in western Iran, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) arrested 16 out of 21 militants affiliated to the ISIS, also called Daesh. Following several days of intelligence activities, the IRGC Ground Force on Sat-

urday mounted an operation against the terrorist cell in an area in western Iran, IRGC Ground Force Commander Mohammad Pakpour said, according to Tasnim. In the operation, the IRGC forces managed to lay siege to the hideout of the militants and arrested 16 members of the terror group, the brigadier general said. ➔2

Afghanistan still hunted by Taliban

INTERNATIONAL **TEHRAN** — In the aftermath of the terrorist attack in the Afghan capital city of Kabul which claimed scores of lives, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission, Federica Mogherini confirmed the European Union's support to the Afghan people and to the government, and its determination to cooperate in the fight against terrorism.

A statement by Federica Mogherini on the terrorist attack in Kabul read, for the third time in under a week, civilians in Afghanistan have been the target of terrible terrorist attacks. My thoughts and the thoughts of citizens of the whole European Union are with the Afghan people after today's attack in Kabul. We mourn those whose lives were lost, send our condolences to the families and friends affected, and wish a quick recovery to the injured. ➔13

U.S. making desperate efforts to tarnish Iran's image: lawmaker

POLITICS **TEHRAN** - Alaeddin Boroujerdi, chairman of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, said on Sunday that U.S. President Donald Trump is making desperate efforts to tarnish Iran's international image. "Trump is making desperate efforts to portray negative image from the Islamic Republic of Iran; in my opinion his actions are like flogging a dead horse," he told reporters on the sidelines of the parliament's open session. Trump is following this policy in line with Israel-Saudi-U.S. moves against Iran, the senior MP remarked. Aside from Israel, the new young royals at Riyadh along with the Trump administration

have formed an alliance to demonize Iran. This Iranophobia project was recently reflected in the views of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Trump, and Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir at the World Economic Forum in Davos. ■ **Tehran strongly backs Iraqi, Syrian territorial integrity** Elsewhere, Boroujerdi said that Iran strongly supports Iraq and Syria's territorial integrity. "The U.S. seeks to carry out project of disintegrating Syria and we hope that this plot would be defeated like the plot in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region," the veteran lawmaker stated. He added that the U.S. follows the policy of supporting terrorists, weakening regional secu-

arity and disintegrating countries in the region. Ali Akbar Velayati, a top foreign policy advisor to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, also said on Saturday that the U.S. military deployment in Syria is aimed at disintegrating the country. "The Americans, with the support of certain regional elements, the Zionists and the al-Saud, have made attempts since seven years ago to occupy Syria, overthrow its legal government and disintegrate the country to establish security for the Zionist regime," Velayati said at a meeting in Tehran with Jan Kubis, the UN special representative for Iraq and head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).

Russian opposition leader Navalny detained at Moscow rally

Russian police on Sunday detained opposition leader Alexei Navalny at a rally in Moscow which he had called to protest upcoming polls expected to extend President Vladimir Putin's Kremlin term to 2024. Surrounded by supporters, the 41-year-old chanted "Swindlers and thieves" before being detained by police shortly afterwards at an unsanctioned gathering in the city center amid heavy police presence. "I have been detained," Navalny tweeted. "This means nothing. Come to Tverskaya (Avenue)," he said, referring to Moscow's main thoroughfare. "You are not rallying for me, but for yourselves and your future." Heading a call by President Putin's bete noire, thousands rallied in dozens of cities to protest upcoming "pseudo-elections," with many chanting and brandishing placards saying "Voters' strike."

Several thousand turned up for the rally in Moscow where authorities dramatically beefed up security, dispatching police vans and passenger buses to the city center. Around 90 people were detained across the country, according to OVD-Info, an independent group which monitors crackdowns on demonstrations. In the second city of Saint Petersburg, the Russian leader's hometown, where at least 1,000 people rallied, some chanted "Russia without Putin" and "Putin is a thief." Earlier in the day opposition supporters protested in far eastern Russia and Siberia, including in the northern city of Yakutsk where Russians rallied despite temperatures of around minus 45 Celsius (minus 49 Fahrenheit). Navalny -- seen as the only politician with

enough stamina to take on Putin -- has built a robust protest movement despite constant police harassment, tapping into the anger of a younger generation yearning for change. He says the upcoming election will be little more than a coronation of Putin who is expected to win a fourth presidential term and extend his Kremlin stay until 2024. Ahead of the main Moscow rally police broke into Navalny's headquarters using a power saw, interrupting a live broadcast covering the protests in the east of the country. Police also detained several employees of his Anti-Corruption Foundation as well as supporters, Navalny's team said. "If you don't go, you won't forgive yourself later," Navalny's said in a video address before the start of the protest. ➔13



PERSPECTIVE

By Bahman Naghadeh
Journalist

Afrin war a rude awakening for Kurds

On January 20, 2018, Turkey and the Free Syrian Army launched an air and ground strike in the Afrin Region of Syria, a Kurdish controlled enclave located northwest of the country. The operation, codenamed "Operation Olive Branch," could be an eye-opening experience and valuable lessons for the Kurds. The operation against the Kurds continues and according to the latest news, the Free Syrian Army has gained control over certain areas around Afrin. The latest developments in Afrin illustrate that the Kurds have not learned from their past mistakes and have, once again, been duped by the U.S. The all-out war carried out against Syria seven years ago was aimed to destroy the country's significant central role in the Middle East. However, the Syrian government has persevered and with the aid of its allies, has defeated the enemy. Although, for a short while, there appeared to be an end of war in Syria, the U.S. backed terrorist armies refuse to surrender and have been concocting clandestine plans in an effort to continue the war. The Kurdish people, duped by the U.S. who instigated the war in Syria, should have aligned themselves with the Syrian government when Erdogan initially warned them that there would be consequences if they continued their aggression across Turkey's borders. Previously, they were seduced by Masoud Barzani in Iraq who, in the end, betrayed them. Notwithstanding the fact that U.S., through its operatives, has continually betrayed the Kurdish people, the Kurds in Afrin, once again, opted to side with the U.S. According to reports, Russia offered the Kurds protection if they relinquished control of Afrin to Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces, but the ethnic group refused, as they thought they could dominate the areas on the northern borders of Syria through the use of weapons supplied by the U.S. In a recent article, the New York Times has said that in all likelihood, Washington will stop backing the Kurdish militia in Syria. Former U.S. Vice President Joe Biden has demanded that the Kurds return to the region east of the Euphrates River, or else they will lose the support of the U.S. ➔7



ARTICLE

By Hanif Ghaffari
Political analyst

Europe's return to twentieth century

During the World Economic Summit in Davos, the Chancellor of Germany and the President of France both gave a significant warning about the return of nationalism and populism to Europe. This warning has been sent in a time when Far-Right movements in Europe have been able to gain unbelievable power and even seek to conquer a majority of parliaments and form governments. In her speech, Angela Merkel emphasized that the twentieth century's mistake shouldn't be repeated. By this, the German Chancellor meant the tendency of European countries to nationalism. Although the German Chancellor warning was serious and necessary, the warning seems to be a little late. Perhaps it would have been better if the warning was forwarded after the European Parliamentary elections in 2014, and subsequently, more practical and deterrent measures were designed. However, Merkel and other European leaders ignored the representation of over a hundred right-wing extremist in the European Parliament in 2014 and merely saw it as a kind of social excitement. This social excitement has now become a "political demand" in the West. The dissatisfaction of European citizens with their governments has caused them to explicitly demand the return to the twentieth century and the time before the formation of the United Europe. The recent victories of right wing extremists in Austria, Germany and...., isn't merely the result of the nationalist movement success in introducing its principles and manifestos. But it is also a result of the failure of the "European moderation" policy to resolve social, security and economic problems in the Eurozone and the European Union. In such a situation, European citizens find that the solutions offered by the moderate left parties didn't work in removing the existing crises in Europe. Obviously, in this situation "crossing the traditional parties" would become a general demand in the West. Under such circumstances, Merkel's and other European leaders' warnings about the return to the twentieth century and the time before the formation of the United Europe simply means the inability of the Eurozone authorities in preventing the Right-extremism in the West. ➔7



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Leader heading to Kharij class in snow

Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is seen in this photo, taken on Sunday, heading to his Kharij class. The snowfall which started late on Saturday in Tehran continued until late on Sunday. The heavy snowfall, which also blanketed northern and western Iran, heartened people after a long drought in autumn and early winter. Weather forecasts show that Iran will see rainy days in the coming days.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Zarif, UN envoy hold talks on Iraq

POLITICS TEHRAN – Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif met on Sunday with Jan Kubis, chairman of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), discussing the latest developments in Iraq. Zarif and Kubis highlighted the importance of maintaining stability and security in Iraq, IRNA reported.

The two diplomats also discussed the battle against the remnants of the Daesh (ISIL) terrorist group in Iraq and the upcoming parliamentary elections in the country. They also emphasized the need for all Iraqi political parties to participate in the elections.

Also on Saturday, Kubis met with a number of top Iranian officials to discuss the future of Iraq and the latest regional developments.



Majlis rejects general outline of budget bill

POLITICS TEHRAN – The Iranian Parliament (Majlis) on Sunday rejected general outlines of the national budget bill for the next Iranian fiscal year, which will start on March 21.

The bill was rejected during the open session of the parliament with 83 votes in favor, 120 votes against and 9 abstentions, media reported.

The bill will be returned to a joint parliamentary committee for revisions. The joint commission is a legislative body responsible for reviewing budget bills as well as the five-year development plans.

Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani said the joint committee must implement the proposed amendments within the next three days.



Raisi meets Hezbollah chief in Lebanon

POLITICS TEHRAN – Hojatolislam Seyed Ebrahim Raisi, custodian of the Astan Quds Razavi, held talks with Hezbollah Secretary General Seyed Hassan Nasrallah in Beirut on Sunday.

Raisi met Nasrallah after holding talks with Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and the head of Lebanon's Higher Islamic Shiite Council Sheikh Abdel-Amir Qabalan, Tasnim reported.

Accompanied by Iran's ambassador to Beirut, Raeisi talked about the latest regional developments as well as the social and cultural issues in his meeting with the Hezbollah chief.

Raisi came second in the May presidential election in Iran. In March 2016, he was appointed as custodian of Astan Quds Razavi the foundation that manages the shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad. Before taking as the chairman of the foundation, Raisi was national prosecutor general.



Iran warns against U.S. move to revive ISIL in Afghanistan

POLITICS TEHRAN – A senior foreign policy advisor to the Iranian parliament speaker on Sunday warned of the dangers of Washington's move to transfer Daesh (ISIL) militants to northern Afghanistan to revive the terrorist group in the future.

Hossein Amir Abdollahian made the remarks in a meeting with Jan Kubis, chairman of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).

He said despite UN's constructive efforts, Washington is transferring Daesh's leaders from Iraq and Syria to Afghanistan, IRIB news reported.

By continuing to make use of Daesh in Afghanistan, the White House is making a "strategic mistake", he added.



Adviser: No conflicting voices in Iran on Palestine

POLITICS TEHRAN – An adviser to the foreign minister has denied rumors about conflicting voices in Iran on the Palestinian resistance against Israel, stressing that no internal discord would prevent Iranians from supporting Palestine.

Iranian people are united and unanimous when it comes to major issues such as the Palestinians' struggle against occupation, even if there are disagreements on internal affairs, Hossein Sheikholeslam said in an interview with Al-Resalah, Tasnim reported on Sunday.

Denouncing the enemy's efforts to spread rumors about Iranian people's opposition to the Palestinian resistance movement, Sheikholeslam said such attempts will go nowhere.



Warship sinks in Caspian Sea

POLITICS TEHRAN – An Iranian destroyer that crashed into concrete wave breakers at a port in the Caspian Sea more than two weeks ago eventually sank into water on Sunday.

The navy's 100-meter long warship, called Damavand, crashed at the harbor town of Bandar Anzali during stormy seas on January 10, which claimed the lives of two crew members.

The home-grown Damavand destroyer, equipped with modern radar, electronic and reconnaissance systems, was delivered to the naval forces stationed in Anzali in March 2015.

Zarif: Renegotiation of nuclear deal impossible

POLITICS TEHRAN – Iran's foreign minister has said the European Union has some standards, based on which it is not possible to review the 2015 nuclear deal.

Speaking in an interview with famous German journalist Jurgen Todenhofer published on Thursday, Mohammad Javad Zarif said that Europe cannot maintain the nuclear deal by trying to violate it.

The chief diplomat called on Europe to support the nuclear deal as expected by the international community as well. Zarif said all parties must comply with the nuclear accord without making excuses.

In his latest attack on the nuclear deal, U.S. President Donald Trump delivered an ultimatum to his European allies saying: either fix the accord or he would walk away from it in less than four months.

Asked how peaceful solutions can be adopted to ease tensions in the region, Zarif stressed "there can only be peaceful solutions".

"There have been four wars in four decades and this we cannot take more," he underscored.

"From our point of view, the Persian Gulf issues require a dialogue that takes all aspects into consideration. It must be borne in mind that no one can dominate the region, and all sides must work together," stressed Zarif.

The Iranian foreign minister further mentioned that it is needed to trust each other, and this has to be done through military inspections and signing non-aggression treaties with all countries in the region, including Saudi Arabia.

"Saudi Arabia is one of the most important



countries in the Persian Gulf region; therefore, without Saudi Arabia we cannot reach a conclusion."

Zarif also highlighted that Iran has not attacked any country over the past 300 years, adding, "During the Iran-Iraq war, it was

Foreign Minister Zarif says: "Saudi Arabia has missiles with higher range than ours. These missiles are capable of carrying nuclear warheads, while our missiles are not designed so. Saudi missiles are Chinese intercontinental ones with a range of 2500 kilometers. But the original version of these missiles has a range of 12,000 kilometers."

European trio seeking to keep U.S. in JCPOA: Brookings senior fellow

A senior fellow with the Transatlantic Program of the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) believes a trio of European countries is engaged in a fresh round of talks with the U.S. over the JCPOA in a bid to help save Europe's "most significant foreign policy success".

A working group comprising American and European officials, namely Britain, France, and Germany have begun talks to develop a "side agreement" to the Iran nuclear deal supposedly aimed at easing U.S. President Donald Trump's complaints about the pact, according to U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson.

"It (the working group) is a way for the State Department and the E3/EU to keep the JCPOA in place, or at least to keep the U.S. in it," Riccardo Alcaro, an expert in transatlantic political and security relations with a focus on U.S.-European cooperation in Europe's neighboring regions, told the Tasnim news agency in an interview published on Sunday.

He added, "The way to do that is to give Trump something he can seize on to say: I've changed things and keep waiving JCPOA-related sanctions."

"Whether that is doable remains an open question. As you know, Trump wants the sunset clauses of the JCPOA extended - which cannot be done without Iran's consent -



and Iran's ballistic program curbed, which is unrelated to the JCPOA," the Brookings senior fellow noted.

Alcaro expressed the hope that the trio would do their best to convey the message that the JCPOA cannot be changed.

"My hunch or my hope is that the E3/EU will convey the message that the JCPOA cannot be changed but consensually and that change will have to involve not only more

demands on Iran but also more concession to Iran. Hard to see Trump do anything of the sort," he said.

Noting that Iran's ballistic missile program has nothing to do with the JCPOA, Alcaro said, "As for the ballistic program, perhaps the E3/EU will agree that it represents a source of concern, but will insist and probably not accept anything that links the fate of the JCPOA (including the sanctions relief mechanism) to measures against Iran's ballistic missile".

"In conclusion, I am confident that the Europeans want to engage with Tillerson so that they may find a way out for Trump to keep the JCPOA in place without losing face. I am not sure there is such a way, though."

The Italian analyst further said that if the Europeans agree to measures that run counter to the spirit of the international deal, they will have "squandered their most significant foreign policy success so far."

"As said, I am confident they will not do that, but my confidence has limits," he stressed.

Since the historic deal was signed in Vienna in July 2015, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has repeatedly confirmed the Islamic Republic's compliance with its commitments under the JCPOA, but some other parties, especially the U.S., have failed to live up to their undertakings.

IRGC arrests 16 ISIS militants in western Iran

1 → In the clashes, a number of the terrorists were killed and two of them are still at large but the area is surrounded by the IRGC forces, he explained.

On Sunday, Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli also said, "Basij forces, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps and the Intelligence Ministry arrested 16 members of a terrorist team."

Rahmani Fazil also said explosives and weapons were sized from the terrorists.

Also, both Pakpour and Rahmani Fazil confirmed three security forces were martyred.

A source from the Iraqi Kurdish security in Garmiyan told Rudaw on Saturday that they are the same group who entered armed clashes with their forces in Bamo Mountain, Halabja on the border with Iran.

Iraqi Kurdish officials have expressed concern about ISIS militants fleeing from places like liberated Mosul to Hamrin, as the rugged area provides many possible hideouts.

Back in August, the Iranian Intelligence Ministry said its forces had disbanded a terror cell affiliated with ISIS and arrested 27 terrorists before they could carry out acts

of terror deep inside Iran.

The terrorists were nabbed during a series of intelligence operations and through intelligence sharing with the intelligence service of a regional country, the ministry said.

Trained mostly at the Saudi-run school of Takfirism, ISIS operatives have been attempting terror attacks inside Iran in the past.

Last June, ISIS attacked the Iranian parliament and the mausoleum of the Islamic Republic's founder Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in southern Tehran, killing at least 18 and wounding dozens.



The IRGC fired several missiles at Daesh bases in Syria on June 18 in response to the twin attacks.

Armed forces ordered to help in relief operations after heavy snowfall

POLITICS TEHRAN – In an order issued on Sunday Major General Mohammad Baqeri, chief of the Iranian armed forces, called on security forces to join relief operations if needed after heavy snowfall caused disruption in some parts of the country.

General Baqeri said armed forces are ready to help in efforts to open roads across the country, Tasnim reported.

After sweeping western and northern Iran, a winter air mass lashed Tehran on Saturday night, grounding flights, shuttering schools, blocking highways, and above all surprising people to see heavy snowfall after ten years.

The snowstorm that has blanketed much of Iran's western and northern parts has also caused power outages



and rising gas consumption.

The snowfall has in the meantime raised hopes for better water reserves, as low precipitation had caused concerns among the public and officials as well.

Meanwhile, Tehran Mayor Mohammad Ali Najafi thanked his "hardworking colleagues" at the municipality for sparing no efforts in opening the roads and streets.

"One of our concerns is to protect this city's trees," Najafi tweeted, urging Tehrani citizens to help shake the trees in order to prevent fall of tree branches.

However, lawmaker Mohammad Reza Aref criticized the performance of Tehran's municipality and governorate.

He said it is regrettable that after such a normal snowfall, managers have failed to handle traffic competently.

MP says nuclear deal not renegotiable under any conditions

meeting between the U.S. and European officials in London on the nuclear agreement.

The nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), was signed in July 2015. It went into force in January 2016.

"The JCPOA is not renegotiable under any circumstances," Shahrour Barzegar told the Tasnim news agency.

He said during the negotiations all six powers - Russia, China, U.S., Britain, France, and Germany - had agreed on all of the articles of the agreement, Barzegar insisted.

The lawmaker further emphasized that Iran would never accept moves by some Western countries, the U.S. in particular, to deprive the Islamic Republic of the benefits of the JCPOA.

The remarks came as U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said America's European counterparts in the nuclear deal have finally begun talks to develop a "side agreement" to the agreement.

Speaking to reporters in Warsaw on Saturday, Tillerson claimed that Britain, France and Germany have all agreed to work on the JCPOA.

Earlier this month, U.S. President Donald Trump again waived sanctions against Iran that were lifted as part of the landmark nuclear deal, but threatened he would terminate the agreement if what he called "significant flaws" in the deal are not fixed.

Ali Akbar Velayati, an international adviser to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, has rejected Trump's calls for renegotiating the JCPOA, stressing that the nuclear deal will remain unchanged.

France has insisted all "signatories must stand by their word" on the nuclear deal.

"There is a basic principle on which we are very firm, it's the upholding of the (nuclear deal) to the extent it is respected," French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said.



POLITICS TEHRAN – A member of the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee has reiterated that Tehran would never renegotiate the nuclear deal with six world powers.

The remarks by Shahrour Barzegar came after a recent

Jordan king: East al-Quds must be Palestinian capital

Jordanian King Abdullah II bin al-Hussein has reiterated his support for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, stating that East al-Quds (Jerusalem) must be the capital of such a country.

During a meeting with German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier in Amman on Sunday, the monarch said his government has some major differences with the administration of the United States President Donald Trump on the central issue in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"We do believe in a two-state solution, with Jerusalem as the capital for the Palestinians," King Abdullah pointed out.

Last week also, the Jordanian king criticized the U.S. recognition of al-Quds (Jerusalem) as the capital of Israel, and emphasized that East al-Quds must be the capital of the Palestinian state.

During talks with the U.S. Vice Mike Pence in Amman on January 21, King Abdullah pointed to the so-called two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, saying the U.S. move would fuel radicalism and inflame Muslim and Christian tensions.

"For us, Jerusalem (al-Quds) is key to Muslims and Christians, as it is to Jews. It is key to peace in the region and key to enabling Muslims to effectively fight some of our root causes of radicalization," he said.

Jordan's King Abdullah says East al-Quds (Jerusalem) has to be the capital of a future independent Palestinian state.

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

On December 6 last year, Trump announced his decision to recognize al-Quds as Israel's capital and relocate the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to the occupied city.

The dramatic shift in Washington's policy vis-à-vis the city triggered demonstrations in the occupied Palestinian territories, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria, Iraq, Morocco and other Muslim countries.

On December 21, the United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly voted in favor of a resolution that calls on the U.S. to withdraw its controversial recognition of al-Quds (Jerusalem) as Israeli "capital."

In an attempt to avert the resolution, Trump had warned that "we're watching," threatening reprisals against countries that backed the measure, which had earlier faced a U.S. veto at the UN Security Council.

Israel, however, rejected the world body's resolution while thanking Trump for his decision to move the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to al-Quds (Jerusalem).



The United States holds back tens of millions of dollars in funding for a UN agency tasked with providing services for Palestinian refugees. On January 18, the United States reneged on a pledge to contribute \$45 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which supports more than 5 million registered Palestinian refugees and their descendants.

The announcement to cut aid to Palestinian refugees came after the U.S. president made a threat to cut off aid to the UN's Palestinian refugee agency.

In a series of tweets on January 2, Trump said that the U.S. paid "the Palestinians hundreds of millions of dollars a year" and yet gets "no appreciation or respect."

"But with the Palestinians no longer willing to talk peace, why should we make any of these massive future payments to them?" he asked.

Three Palestinian minors killed, 52 others detained so far this year

Meantime, the Information Ministry of the Palestinian National Authority says Israeli military forces have killed

three Palestinian minors and arrested 52 others since the beginning of the current year amid simmering tensions in the occupied territories over the U.S. recognition of al-Quds as the "capital" of Israel.

The ministry, in a statement released on Sunday, accused Israeli authorities of "escalating assaults against Palestinian children."

It said Israeli attacks have sharply risen since the U.S. president's controversial move.

More than 7,000 Palestinians are reportedly held at Israeli jails. Hundreds of the inmates have apparently been incarcerated under the practice of administrative detention, a policy under which Palestinian inmates are kept in Israeli detention facilities without trial or charge.

Some Palestinian prisoners have been held in administrative detention for up to eleven years. Palestinian inmates regularly stage hunger strikes in protest at the administrative detention policy and their harsh prison conditions in Israeli jails.

(Source: Press TV)

1,500 evacuated in Paris as rising Seine poses flood risk



Nearly 1,500 people have been evacuated from homes in the Paris region, with authorities on alert for any major flood risk after the levels of the swollen River Seine rose further on Sunday.

Michel Delpuech, head of the Paris police body, told reporters that around 1,500 people had been moved out of homes in the Ile de France region comprising the French capital and its suburbs.

"The waters will only go away slowly," added Delpuech.

The Seine's waters were set to peak later on Sunday or early on Monday close to levels which led to similar flooding in 2016, authorities said.

The overflowing waters have already engulfed riverside walkways in Paris and led the world-famous Louvre museum to close a basement display of Islamic art.

Paris's "Bateaux Mouches" tourist boats have been shut down due to the high waters while swans have been seen swimming where there are usually pavements and rats forced up onto the streets.

Flooding caused destruction in Paris in 1910 when the Seine rose by 8.65 meters, although no deaths were recorded there.

(Source: Reuters)

Fierce Aden clashes split Saudi regime 'coalition' in Yemen



Several people are killed as mercenaries allied to the House of Saud regime fiercely fight pitched battles with separatists backed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in Yemen's southern city of Aden, deepening a rift between the two sides.

The worst clashes yet between the southern separatists and forces loyal to Yemen's former president Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi exposed fresh punctures in the House of Saud regime's relentless military campaign against the impoverished nation.

The Associated Press reported heavy gunfire between the two sides in Aden's Khormaksar district. Aden security sources said at least six people, including four from pro-Hadi forces, were killed and dozens injured in the skirmishes.

The sources said the UAE-backed separatists had taken over government headquarters in Aden after the clashes.

The report came as Hadi loyalists have been deployed across Aden ahead of a deadline given by the UAE-allied Southern Transitional Council to Hadi to dismiss his cabinet, led by self-proclaimed Prime Minister Ahmed Obeid bin Daghr.

Bin Daghr called on members of the Saudi-led coalition, in particular the UAE, to intervene in Aden as events were headed towards a "total military confrontation."

He also accused the separatists of staging coup in Aden. "A coup is ongoing here in Aden against legitimacy and the country's unity," he said.

The council, which was formed last year to push for a split between Yemen's southern and northern parts, has accused the Hadi administration of pushing the impoverished country to the verge of famine.

In a statement carried by the Saba news agency, the pro-Hadi Yemeni interior ministry announced a ban on gatherings, sit-ins or marches in Aden.

"These actions will be considered acts that target stability and calm," read the statement, adding that armed groups will also be banned from entering Aden.

Aden, Yemen's second largest city, used to be the capital of the once independent South Yemen before unification in 1990.

The port city has now turned into a scene where Saudi Arabia and the UAE, members of a Riyadh-led coalition that is waging a war on Yemen, are competing for influence.

The crisis has further deepened in Aden amid recent calls for the secession of South Yemen and bomb attacks by terrorists.

The Saudi regime aggression was launched in March 2015 in support of Yemen's former Riyadh-friendly government and against the country's Ansarullah (Houthi) movement, which has been running state affairs in the absence of an effective administration.

The offensive has, however, achieved neither of its goals despite the spending of billions of petrodollars and the enlisting of the cooperation of the House of Saud regime's regional and Western allies.

The Saudi regime-led campaign, which is accompanied by a land, aerial and naval blockade of Yemen, has so far killed more than 13,600 people and led to a humanitarian crisis.

Pro-Hadi forces launch Ta'izz operation

Elsewhere, on Thursday, Hadi loyalists launched an operation, with the help of the Saudi regime airstrikes, to capture Yemen's southwestern city of Ta'izz from the Ansarullah movement fighters.

The Saudi regime-led coalition has also sent armored vehicles, tanks and ammunition to Ta'izz in a bid to help the mercenaries advance against the Ansarullah, said a pro-Hadi commander.

(Source: Press TV)

Strike shuts Kashmir after Indian soldiers kill 2 civilians

People in Indian-controlled Kashmir have shut down businesses in protest against the killing of two young men at the hands of New Delhi forces.

On Sunday, almost all businesses and institutions, including government offices and schools, remained closed, and traffic stayed off the streets across the main city of Srinagar. The strike was called by independence fighters.

A large number of policemen and paramilitary soldiers in riot gear patrolled the streets across the Muslim-majority region. Authorities also imposed a curfew in the old parts of Srinagar, which is the urban center of protests against Indian rule. Mobile internet services were also shut down in the southern parts of the region.

On Saturday, two students were killed and nine other people were wounded after soldiers in Shopian area opened fire on stone-throwing protesters.



The Indian army said soldiers fired in "self-defense" as the crowd tried to "lynch" an officer and damaged at least four vehicles.

Local residents say Saturday's deadly incident began when troops came into a village and started removing banners hon-

oring recently killed fighters. Locals resisted the move, threw stones at the soldiers and chanted anti-India slogans.

Indian police have killed at least two protesters in the Kashmir region after troops opened fire to disperse stone-pelting dem-

onstrators.

India regularly accuses Pakistan of arming and training militants and pushing them across the restive frontier in an attempt to launch attacks on Indian forces. Pakistan strongly denies the allegation.

India has already deployed some 500,000 soldiers to the disputed region to further boost the security of the borderline and suppress pro-independence demonstrations in its share of Kashmir, where anti-India sentiments are high.

Kashmir has been divided between India and Pakistan but claimed in full by both since the two partitioned and gained independence from Britain in 1947.

The two countries have fought three wars over the disputed territory. Despite a ceasefire agreement that was reached in November 2003, sporadic skirmishes continue in Kashmir.

(Source: agencies)

Fresh attack kills four Malian soldiers

Suspected militants killed four Malian soldiers on Sunday in the second deadly attack this weekend in the country's troubled north, local and military officials told AFP.

Mali's deteriorating security situation is of growing concern as al-Qaeda-linked groups mount increasingly ferocious attacks on domestic and foreign forces.

"Terrorists have killed four soldiers in Menaka in an attack," a Malian military source said, adding: "They were not able to overrun the military camp. We are now in control of the situation."

The incident was confirmed by a second Malian military source, who said the armed attackers arrived "this morning on motorbikes and in cars", while a local official said the group had fired rockets.

French helicopters were circling the area, the sources said.

Fourteen soldiers were killed and 18 wounded on Saturday when suspected militants seized control of their camp



in Soumpi, near Timbuktu.

And on Thursday, 26 civilians including mothers and

babies were killed when their vehicle ran over a landmine in Boni, central Mali, leading President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita to cancel plans to attend an African Union summit in order to visit the area.

Keita told victims' families: "All of Mali was in mourning, all of Mali is appalled," over the high death toll among civilians.

"Everyone knows what we are going through... Every day we do what we can," he added.

Militants linked to al-Qaeda took control of the desert north of the former French colony in early 2012, but were largely driven out in an ongoing French-led military operation launched in January 2013.

In June 2015, Mali's government signed a peace agreement with coalitions of non-militant armed groups. But insurgents remain active, and large tracts of the country are lawless.

(Source: AFP)

Cyprus election: Presidential race heads for runoff

The race for president in Cyprus appears will go to a runoff after incumbent conservative Nicos Anastasiades won the the first round but fell short of the 50 percent needed to gain an outright majority, according to early estimates.

An exit poll on Sunday by the CyBC state broadcaster put support for Anastasiades at an average of 40 percent, within a range of 38 and 42 percent.

He is trailed by Stavros Malas, an independent candidate backed by the communist party AKEL, who is expected to secure between 27 percent and 31 percent of the vote, according to the projection.

Centrist Nicolas Papadopoulos, leader of the Democratic Party, is third, projected to win between 21.5 percent and 24.5 percent share of the vote.

A separate exit poll by Sigma TV put support for Anastasiades at an average of



34 percent; Malas at 28 percent; and Papadopoulos at 26.5 percent.

ELAM, a far-right party, will finish fourth, the exit polls showed.

The runoff will be held on February 4, where the top two contenders will seek a fixed five-year term.

The exit polls were released immediately after voting ended at 6pm (16:00 GMT). Final results are expected by 8:30pm (18:30 GMT).

A high level of abstention is expected, exceeding the almost 17 percent recorded in the first round of the last presidential vote in 2013.

Top issues

In all, nine male candidates were standing in the presidential race.

The election campaign has been dominated by the long-running Cyprus problem following the collapse of the latest round of peace talks in July 2017.

Cyprus, a small Mediterranean island, has been divided along ethnic lines since 1974 when Turkish troops seized its northern third in response to an Athens-inspired Greek Cypriot coup aimed at uniting it with Greece.

The state of the economy has also topped voters' concerns. In 2013, Cyprus clinched a deal to secure an emergency international rescue package to shore up its ailing banking sector and avert financial meltdown.

It successfully concluded its multi-billion-dollar bailout program three years later.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	99414.6
IFX	1085.47

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	45,530 rials
EUR	57,030 rials
GBP	66,500 rials
AED	12,270 rials

Source: Mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$70.15/b
WTI	\$66.14/b
OPEC Basket	\$68.46/b
Gold	\$1,350.85/oz
Silver	\$17.45/oz
Platinum	\$1,016.20/oz

Sources: Oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Crude steel exports up 80% in 9 months

1 → The country exported 5.5 million tons of crude steel in the past year, with 27 percent increase from the figure of its preceding year. 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.

Iranian Steel Producers Association's Secretary Rasoul Khalifeh-Soltan believes that while the country's steel industry's growth has been 5.7 percent on average in the recent years, the figure can reach 10 percent this year, given the promising condition the sector enjoys at present.

And, Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Mohammad Shariatmadari says over \$25.6 billion is needed to reach the country's 55 million-ton steel capacity envisaged in Iran's 1404 (March 2025-March 2026) Outlook Plan.

NEWS IN BRIEF



West Karoun's output surpasses 300,000 bpd

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — Production from five oilfields of West Karoun region in southwestern Iran has reached 305,000 barrels per day (bpd), Shana reported on Sunday quoting Iranian oil minister.

Bijan Namdar Zanganeh noted that the West Karoun oilfields output was 110,000 bpd in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 2017).

According to Iran's Petroleum Engineering and Development Company (PEDEC) Production from these fields is planned to reach 1.2 million bpd at the final stage.



Finnish agricultural delegation due in Tehran in mid-Feb.

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — A Finnish agriculture delegation is due to visit Tehran in mid-February to discuss expansion of mutual ties in the industry, IRNA reported.

The decision was announced during a meeting between the Finnish Ambassador in Tehran Keijo Norvanto and the Director General of the Office of International Affairs at Agricultural Ministry Houman Fathi.

During the meeting the two sides stressed the need for the expansion of ties between the two countries' private sectors.



Auto parts exports rise 10% in 9 months

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran's exports of auto parts increased 10 percent during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (ended December 21, 2017), an official from Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO) announced.

"During the said period, \$55 million of auto parts have been exported and Iraq has been the major customer of these products," Masoud Kamali Ardakani said, "Russia is the next main importer of Iranian auto parts."

Iran celebrates 50th anniversary of capital market establishment

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — In a ceremony on Sunday, Iran celebrates the 50th anniversary of establishing its capital market.

Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Masoud Karbasian, Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Governor Valiollah Seif, Head of Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) Shapour Mohammadi, and Central Insurance of Iran President Abdolnaser Hemmati, besides a number of directors and those active in the capital market attended the ceremony.

Addressing the ceremony, the head of SEO underlined that today benefiting from financial instruments rather than stocks is

not a dream anymore, Shada news agency reported.

"We have 585 bourse companies and near 600 financial entities at present and the number of trades at the stock market has risen," Mohammadi told the press on the sidelines of the ceremony.

He put the value of trades in the stock market at 1.9 quadrillion rials (about \$41.94 billion) in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20, 2017) and expressed hope that the figure will reach 2.15 quadrillion rials (about \$47.64 billion) in this year.

Finance minister, for his part, said: "We have two strategies of more capacity for capi-



Head of Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) Shapour Mohammadi speaking in a Sunday ceremony for celebrating the 50th anniversary of establishing Iran's capital market

tal market development and facilitation of attracting financial sources through capital market on agenda."

Putting emphasis on the necessity of using micro investments in the capital market, Karbasian said: "We should expand people's presence in the stock exchange market for more attraction of micro investments to the

capital market."

Addressing the same ceremony, CBI governor said transparency is undoubtedly one of the definite requisites for development and promotion of capital market and announced the central bank's readiness for cooperation with the Finance Ministry and SEO for creating more transparency in the capital market.

Iranian light oil price settles near \$69



E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — Iran's light crude oil price fell 60 cents in the week ended on January 19 to settle at \$68.81 per barrel, Shana reported on Sunday.

The country's light oil price was reported \$68.62 on average since the beginning of 2018 until January 19.

Meanwhile, the country's heavy crude oil experienced a 60-cent rise in the said week to settle at \$66.22 per barrel.

In the week ended on January 12, Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)'s basket price stood at \$67.21 per barrel with 40 cents increase compared to its preceding week.

Surging fourth quarter imports bring sudden slowdown to U.S. economy

The Commerce Department reported Friday that U.S. economic growth slowed to an annualized 2.6 percent last quarter, compared to an expansion of 3.2 percent in Q3, and 3.1 percent in Q2. Overall GDP expansion for 2017 — President Trump's first year in office — came in at 2.3 percent.

The slowdown was unexpected, as a post-hurricane recovery in Texas and Florida, as well as a Christmas holiday shopping spree and an increased private-sector investment over the past year were supposed to have lifted the overall GDP even higher than Q3's 3.2 percent.

Earlier, expectations were that the economy would expand by 3 percent in Q4, and the actual report could exceed expectations, pointing to a growth more in line with the previous quarters.

A massive increase in imports slashed per-

centage points off the Q4 GDP reading. Imports in the US skyrocketed by 13.9 percent during the October-December period alone, their fastest since 2010, erasing the positive effects of the rise in US exports.

This surge in imports slashed 1.1 percent off the Q4 GDP reading. This happened due to the dollar's strength and importers' hurried activity to deliver more goods to the US ahead of President Trump's looming crackdown on unfair trade practices.

The disappointing GDP report might prompt the Federal Reserve to delay its further interest rate hikes.

However, experts believe the economy will gain momentum this year.

"We expect the strong momentum in busi-

ness fixed investment to continue into 2018 as strong global growth, a weaker US dollar, low borrowing cost and reduced tax burdens following the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act support activity," Gregory Daco of Oxford Economics observed.

Almost every sector of the US economy posted a solid improvement last quarter. Household spending and domestic consumption were the key driver of the growth in Q4, with consumer spending expanding 3.8 percent — mainly due to the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays.

Consumer purchasing power was supported by an increase in salaries and wages, as well as by the stock market hitting one record high after another.

Government investment also increased to 3 percent year-to-year in Q4, mainly due to the

rebuilding efforts in Texas and Florida. Fixed investments rose 7.9 percent.

Whilst the Federal Reserve is currently expecting GDP growth to average at 2.5 percent by the end of this year, the new Fed Chair Jerome Powell is expected to raise interest rates in March. This comes as monetary policymakers believe economic expansion will gain momentum due to tax reform and increased business activity.

Some forecasts are more optimistic than others.

"We continue to forecast 3 per cent full-year growth for 2018," James Knightley of the Dutch multinational banking group, ING, said. "Strong domestic momentum will be boosted somewhat by tax cuts, while dollar softness puts the US in a great position to benefit from the global upturn in demand." (Source: Sputnik)

Every one of the world's big economies is now growing



Mexico, a major producer of avocados, has so far transcended fears that menacing trade rhetoric from the Trump administration would dent its economy.

are politically stable, while we accepted that frontier markets were risky," said Martin Scheepbouwer, chief executive officer of the OLX Group, which operates online classified advertising platforms in 41 countries. "Nowadays, with Brexit in Europe and the presidency in the United States, there's a new level of instability looming over the economy. That's something that concerns us."

The world economy is expected to grow by 3.9 percent this year and next, up from 3.7 last year, and 3.2 percent in 2016, according to the I.M.F. That is positive. Yet in the years before the crisis, global growth typically exceeded 4 percent.

As the World Economic Forum this past week released an assessment of risk factors featuring a survey of 1,000 experts, it found that 93 percent of respondents saw increased threat of political or economic confrontations. Some 79 percent fretted about heightened likelihood of military conflict and 73 percent saw rising risks of an erosion of world trading rules.

The report also warned of rising economic inequality, growing threats to cybersecurity and increased incidence of extreme weather enhanced by climate change.

"Many of these risks are increasingly systemic," said Margareta Drzeniek Hanouz, an economist at the World Economic Forum, adding that they threaten "catastrophic consequences for humanity, and for the economy."

Global businesses appear cautiously optimistic that the good times can last.

In Poland and Brazil, online job listings are growing rapidly, according to OLX, a clear indication of growth. Across Europe, real estate ads offering homes for sale have increased at more than double the pace of rental properties, another sign that people are operating with more money.

The global crisis began more than a decade ago with the calamitous end of an American real estate bonanza that set off a global disaster involving so-called derivatives.

As the reckoning played out from the United States to Europe to Asia, oil prices plunged, hitting Russia and the Middle East. Soybean farms in Brazil and Argentina saw orders plummet. So did mines in Australia and India, and computer chip fabricators in Malaysia and South Korea.

Washington engineered swift relief, with a bank rescue and an enormous injection of credit from the Federal Reserve.

But Europe prolonged the agony with bitter recriminations over who should clean up the mess.

As European governments bailed out national banks, foisting the costs on taxpayers, investors demanded higher interest rates to continue lending, raising existential questions about the euro. Not until the summer of 2012, after the European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi vowed to do "whatever it takes," did the siege lift.

This year, the 19 nations that share the euro are expected to see economic growth of 1.9 percent, according to I.M.F. That is not scorching. In Spain, Greece and Italy, young people still grapple with terrible rates of joblessness. Yet compared with the 4.5 percent decline in 2009, and smaller contractions in 2012 and 2013, it makes for a different era.

As recovery has spread, factories in Eastern Europe have bustled with additional orders. Auto plants in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Romania have sent growing volumes of cars toward Germany, France and the Netherlands.

DSM, a Netherlands-based multinational company that makes nutritional products, opened a \$60 million factory in Rwanda last May that is buying soy and corn from nearly 10,000 local farmers and using it to produce instant porridge.

"We are investing heavily in Asia and also in Africa because the growth of the population there is stronger," said the company's chief executive officer, Feike Sijbesma. "Africa, which always was the forgotten continent, is not the forgotten continent any longer."

The reawakening of Europe combined with growth in the United States has kept Chinese industry humming to satisfy demand for goods, from auto parts to tools to clothing. More factory production has lifted prices for commodities, and increasing revenues at copper producers in Chile and Indonesia, gold mines in South Africa and silver operations in Sweden.

The world is now enjoying a positive feedback loop, with growing business confidence leading to more hiring, delivering gains in consumer spending. More money in consumer pockets gives businesses more reason to expand.

"There's basically no country in the world where the consumer is not doing well," said Bart van Ark, chief economist at The Conference Board, a business and research association in New York.

The question now is whether new investment will materialize quickly enough to sustain expansion. Factories in Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Portugal were operating at close to full capacity at the end of last year, according to data analyzed by The Conference Board.

In the United States, investment is increasing, adding to momentum for expansion. In Europe, the growth is uneven.

The biggest concern comes from Washington, where the Trump administration has frequently vowed to punish Mexico and China for their lopsided trade balances with the United States — a step that would raise the cost of components used by American factories. In a sign that such talk has moved beyond rhetoric, the Trump administration this past week slapped protective tariffs on imports of solar panels and washing machines.

"You get into a trade war, that's the real worry," said Ben May, a global economist at Oxford Economics in London. "The impacts on global growth would be quite severe." (Source: New York Times)

Russian energy minister calls U.S. sanctions against oil industry ‘unlawful’: agencies

Newly-imposed U.S. sanctions against two Russian energy ministry officials are “unlawful” and Moscow will seek explanations from Washington, Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak said on Saturday, according to local news agencies.

The United States added Russian officials and energy firms to a sanctions blacklist on Friday, days before details of further possible penalties against Moscow are due to be released.

“We consider it to be absolutely unlawful, they haven’t presented us with any arguments. We will expect some explanations on this,” Novak was quoted as saying by TASS news agency.

One person added to the list was Russian Deputy Energy Minister Andrey Cherezov, who was put under sanctions by the European Union over his role in the delivery of turbines to Crimea last year.

Russia is already under U.S. sanctions over its annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 and support for separatist rebels



fighting in eastern Ukraine.

On Friday, the U.S. Treasury said it had added 21 people and nine companies to the sanctions list, including some that involved in the delivery of Siemens gas turbines to Crimea.

Novak dismissed the impact of the sanctions.

“The sanctions only create additional conditions for domestic industry development,” he said, according to TASS.

Novak also said he met U.S. Energy Secretary Rick Perry during an economic forum in Davos this week and invited him to visit Russian Yamal LNG plant, which started producing liquefied natural gas (LNG) in December.

Russia has been watching growing oil production in the United States with concern, as Moscow has curbed oil output jointly with the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries in order to reduce excessive inventories and prop up oil prices.

(Source: Reuters)

Australia’s top five oil and gas trends for 2018

This year will be the year of the oil and gas revival, as prices lift performance and major projects come online.

While Australia is increasing its focus on securing domestic gas supply, it is taking a greater role globally and evolving the industry.

Wood Mackenzie Australasia oil and gas leader Saul Kavonic has outlined the five trends that will mark LNG growth in 2018.

■ Australia leads LNG

Australia has been ramping up its LNG projects for a number of years, and 2018 will see it finally take the world’s number one spot from Qatar.

The Department of Industry, Innovation and Science has forecast LNG exports to reach \$35 billion in value 2018.

This will be driven by Chevron’s second Wheatstone LNG train coming online in the second quarter of the year, Inpex’s Ichthys project ramping up production, and Shell’s floating LNG ship Prelude coming into full operation.

The International Energy Agency forecast Australia will become the world’s largest gas supplier in the world in the coming years. It pre-

dicted that nearly 70 per cent of all gas produced in Australia would leave the nation’s shores. This is a major increase from the current share of production, which currently sits below half.

Australia will also become the world’s largest coal seam gas producer, accounting for nearly half of international output from the 2020s onward.

■ LNG price review

A contract renewal cliff is coming, and the price gap between existing legacy contracts and new agreements is beginning to widen.

Asia has around 20 million tonnes of contracted LNG underprice review, and with the ability of utilities to pass costs on to the consumer diminishing, this review activity is only likely to increase.

Gas buyers are pushing back against the market, seeing themselves as over-contracted and existing agreements as inflexible.

“Australian projects are particularly exposed, with many project sale and purchase agreements signed at linkages to oil above 14 per cent, compared to recent contracts signed at around 11 per cent,” Mr Kavonic said.

S&P Global Platts forecast volatility ahead

for Australia’s LNG sector and a shift to short-term flexible models.

“The traditional ways of doing business, based on destination-restricted, oil-indexed long-term contracts, are disappearing, making room for enhanced flexibility and interconnectivity,” S&P Global Platts LNG analyst Abache Abreu told Fairfax Media.

■ Government pressure remains

As energy prices continue to experience volatility the spotlight will remain on the gas industry and its ability to meet domestic demand.

Last year saw the Turnbull government take almost unprecedented action in threatening private gas companies with legislation to keep Australian gas from being exported and this governmental pressure will likely remain, Kavonic believes.

“The industry is unlikely to see any reprieve from populist energy policy in 2018,” he said.

“Three policy themes will manifest: ongoing uncertainty, increased regulatory control, and more government subsidies.”

■ A year of M&A

Late last year saw a flurry of mergers, acquisitions and divestments, as AWE and Lattice

Energy were both acquired, and Santos became a major takeover target.

Looking globally, Oil Search expanded beyond its historical Papua New Guinean tropical playing fields into the Arctic north, acquiring a range of Alaskan assets.

This movement will continue.

“Anyone with a proven or plausible gas project supplying into the tight east coast markets will also become attractive, putting Senex, Cooper, and Central Petroleum on the radar,” Mr Kavonic said.

■ Domestic gas relaxes

The threat of the Australian Domestic Gas Security Mechanism changed industry focus from exporting to ensuring domestic supply, helping to reduce fears of possible domestic gas shortfalls.

However, the market will likely to move short term, more volatile contracts, providing less security and access to cheaper legacy gas supply.

However, Kavonic warns that export control issues are likely to resurface towards the end of 2018.

(Source: The Sydney Morning Herald)

Saudi’s SABIC Q4 net profit falls 18.6% as output, sales drop

Saudi Basic Industries Corp (SABIC), the world’s fourth-biggest petrochemicals company, reported an 18.6 percent drop in fourth-quarter net profit on Sunday, citing lower output and sales.

SABIC made a net profit of 3.67 billion riyals (\$979 million) in the three months to Dec.31, down from 4.51 billion riyals in the year-earlier period, the company said in a bourse statement.

SABIC, which aims to be the Number 3 petrochemicals producer, attributed the fall in profit to planned turnarounds at certain plants which hit output, and also noted that 2016’s quarterly profit was helped by the recognition of deferred tax assets. A turnaround is a scheduled event where an industrial plant is shut down to be revamped.

SICO Bahrain had projected a net profit of 5.34 billion riyals and NCB Capital had a forecast of 5.41 billion riyals for net profit in the fourth quarter.

The company’s results are closely tied to oil prices and global economic growth because its products -- plastics, fertilizers and metals -- are used extensively in construction, agriculture, industry and the manufacturing of consumer goods.

Last week, SABIC bought a 25 percent stake in Clariant, ending the Swiss specialty chemical group’s fight with activist investors but raising further questions about its future. (\$1 = 3.7498 riyals)

(Source: Reuters)

Hackers create “perfect virus,” put oil companies on edge

Russian security services have arrested a local hacker who planted malware at gas stations across Russia’s southern regions that had been cheating drivers out of the gasoline that they pumped in their cars in a major fraud scheme that later resold the stolen fuel.

Russia’s Federal Security Service (FSB) have arrested the creator of the malware, Denis Zayev, who had gas stations employees working with him to trick the software systems to selling less fuel to the customers, while reselling the fuel that was stolen.

This fraud was one of the largest such scams uncovered by the Russian services, a source in law enforcement told news outlet Rosbalt. The scheme extended to almost all regions in the south of Russia, with dozens of gas stations infected with the malware. Zayev has created a “perfect virus” that couldn’t be detected by either security controls that oil companies have used to remotely monitor gas stations, or by specialists at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, according to the police source who spoke to Rosbalt.

The virus planted in the systems allowed the hacker and his accomplices to steal up to 7 percent of the fuel. Zayev acted not only as the “seller” of the malware at some stations, but also as co-owner of the channel to steal fuel, and received a cut from the proceeds from the re-sale of the stolen fuel.

(Source: oilprice.com)

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Three steps Myanmar should take to turn the Rohingya disaster around

By Bill Richardson

For the past two months, I have served on an international panel designed to help the Myanmar government arrive at just and reasonable policies for its conflict in Rakhine state, including its long-suffering Rohingya minority. This week I resigned. The reason: I have little confidence in the body's ability to address the critical challenges facing the region and the country.



Aung San Suu Kyi, the country's effective leader, is isolated and unwilling to listen to constructive criticism. Her government is focused on getting things done quickly instead of getting them done right. If Myanmar, also known as Burma, is to have any hope of preventing a further downward spiral to the crisis in Rakhine state and restoring its international reputation, immediate and dramatic changes are required. A continuation of the current approach is likely to lead to a dangerous cycle of violence that threatens both Myanmar's hopes for peace and democracy and broader regional stability.

To be sure, Myanmar faces daunting challenges on Rakhine. Coordinated attacks by a new Muslim militant group triggered a brutal and sustained "security clearance operations" by the Myanmar military that, in just 15 months, forced nearly 800,000 people to flee to Bangladesh. Deep-seated mistrust festers between Buddhist and Muslim communities in Rakhine, as well as between each of these communities and the government. Systemic discrimination against minority groups, especially Muslims, remains rampant. Major drug-smuggling and human-trafficking networks plague the region. And chronic underinvestment in health, education and the economy exacerbate the problems.

These challenges are compounded by Myanmar's botched efforts to address them. Though the Kofi Annan-led Rakhine Advisory Commission's final report provides the foundation, Myanmar has yet to develop or articulate a strategy for Rakhine. The government is focused on outputs at the expense of impact and rapid implementation to show progress rather than efforts to design processes that help to build trust and confidence. Moreover, Aung San Suu Kyi's lack of moral leadership in a domestic political environment that is increasingly nationalistic, anti-Muslim and hostile to the changes required to de-escalate the situation in Rakhine is particularly troubling. Myanmar's renewed penchant for attacking freedom of the press, highlighted by the recent arrest of two Reuters journalists investigating the conflict in Rakhine, surely does not help.

Myanmar is rightly facing tremendous international pressure to implement changes, but this does not justify the government's siege mentality and its resistance to constructive criticism from an international community that wants to see Myanmar succeed in its efforts to establish peace and development in Rakhine and to entrench democratic norms.

To begin to turn the situation around, the government of Myanmar should take three steps immediately. First, Aung San Suu Kyi must establish her moral leadership on the Rakhine issue. Although her popularity is lower than when her party swept elections two years ago, she is still widely respected in Myanmar, particularly among the majority ethnic Burmese. She should use her stature to unequivocally condemn hate speech and discrimination in her public communications to the people of Myanmar. It would also be helpful if she ensured that state media, which has referred to Muslims from Rakhine as "human fleas," does not exacerbate the potential for conflict.

Second, Myanmar must establish effective accountability mechanisms for perpetrators of violence. The signal that impunity is tolerated is a threat to the rule of law that Aung San Suu Kyi has repeatedly stated she seeks to instill. I am encouraged by Myanmar's seeming willingness to establish an independent and credible investigation into the discovery of mass graves in Rakhine, and I hope that this will be the first of several steps to further understand and account for the violence that has occurred there since October 2016.

Finally, Myanmar must develop a strategy to deal with Rakhine that appropriately prioritizes and sequences among the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission. The government's focus on infrastructure and development, while important, is insufficient to address the structural changes necessary.

To ensure that key challenges such as freedom of movement, citizenship and the closure of internally displaced persons camps are addressed effectively and in the spirit in which they were intended, the Myanmar government should work closely with international partners to develop clear and public plans that lay out the step-by-step process by which these issues will be addressed and benchmark met.

Left unaddressed, the situation could quickly become an even bigger headache for Myanmar, the region and the world. In the short term, the repatriation process that Myanmar is racing to implement is sure to be symbolic at best: Provided returns are safe, voluntary and dignified, few refugees will go back to a country in which they have been violated, which does not respect their basic rights and which offers no means of redress for wrongs. That leaves a large, destitute and aggrieved population just across the border in Bangladesh that is susceptible to radicalization. For the sake of its own interests and those of the region, Myanmar must immediately correct course and recognize that the international community wants to help it to do so.

(Source: The Washington Post)



ARTICLE

By Joschka Fischer

Former German foreign minister

The first year of Donald Trump's presidency brought many scandals, and even more incendiary tweets, but not a fundamental overhaul of U.S. foreign policy. The big question for 2018 is whether the U.S. will maintain foreign-policy continuity in the face of Trump's incentives to shake things up.

In the first year of Donald Trump's presidency, the damage wrought by his administration's foreign policy fell well short of what had been feared.

Despite his thundering rhetoric and tweets dubbing North Korean leader Kim Jong-un "little rocket man," the new U.S. president did not start any wars, whether on the Korean Peninsula or in the South China Sea. There was no conflict over Taiwan, either, following Trump's questioning of America's longstanding "one China" policy.

In fact, rather than clashing with China, Trump seems to have forged a close personal relationship with Chinese President Xi Jinping. China's leaders could hardly believe their luck when one of Trump's first official acts was to withdraw the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which would have excluded China and shored up Western trade rules in the Asia-Pacific region. It was as if Trump wanted to make China, not America, great again.

Moreover, Trump did not start a trade war by imposing high tariffs on imports from major U.S. trade partners such as China, Germany, and Japan. Despite his refusal to recertify the Iran nuclear deal, it remains in place. And the long-term consequences of his unilateral decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital remain to be seen.

Trump's hope of cooperating more closely with Russia at the expense of U.S. allies also went unrealized, and the official U.S. position in the Ukrainian conflict has not changed. Of course, that is largely due to Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to interfere in the



There is still a big question mark hovering over U.S. foreign policy in the form of Trump himself. It is entirely unclear what the president wants, what he actually knows, and what his advisers are and are not telling him.

2016 U.S. presidential election, which has made it impossible for Trump to reorient America's Russia policy without triggering a domestic political firestorm.

Similarly, despite having been deemed "obsolete" by Trump, NATO has actually gained strength and legitimacy during the past year, owing to Russia's military buildup and continued war in Eastern Ukraine. To be sure, Europeans will have to see to their own defense more than in the past. But that would have been no different under a Hillary Clinton presidency (though the message would have been couched in friendlier terms).

All told, the White House "adults in uniform" — Secretary of Defense James Mattis, National Security Adviser H. R. McMaster, and Chief of Staff John Kelly — have ensured continuity in U.S. foreign policy. And the same seems to be true for economic and trade policy.

Does that mean the world can rest easy? Of course not. There is still a big question

mark hovering over U.S. foreign policy in the form of Trump himself. It is entirely unclear what the president wants, what he actually knows, and what his advisers are and are not telling him. A coherent foreign policy may not withstand Trump's mood swings and spontaneous decisions.

Making matters worse, the administration's shrinking of the U.S. State Department has weakened the institutional base for implementing official foreign policy to an almost mission-critical degree. And the White House's recently published National Security Strategy is no more reassuring. In a departure from America's official position since September 11, 2001, the U.S. will now view its global power rivalry with China and Russia, rather than terrorism by non-state actors, as the primary threat to national security and world peace.

So, looking back at 2017, one gets the impression that while U.S. foreign policy remained largely intact, it has also become

completely unpredictable. To that extent, 2018 seems likely to be a year of substantially increased risks, especially given the tensions in the Persian Gulf and Lebanon, the war in Syria, the hegemonic struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and the nuclear brinkmanship on the Korean Peninsula.

On the Korean Peninsula and in the Persian Gulf, the central aim must be to prevent the nuclear armament of dictatorships that threaten regional stability and the prevailing balance of power. As matters stand, the risk of a military confrontation with either North Korea or Iran cannot be discounted.

In the case of North Korea, which is quickly working toward an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of reaching the mainland U.S., such a conflict could even entail the use of nuclear weapons. Nothing about this situation inspires optimism, especially now that the U.S. is led by a president whom few can trust, and whose policies must be divined from the muddle of his tweets.

In fact, the Trump factor could be the single most significant source of uncertainty in international politics this year. The U.S. is still the world's foremost power, and it plays an indispensable role in preserving global norms. If America's policies are difficult to predict, and if Trump's behavior undermines the reliability of the U.S. government, the international order will be vulnerable to immense turmoil.

As the U.S. approaches its midterm elections in November, it will be important to consider how domestic political events might shape the country's foreign policy. If the Republicans lose their majorities in either or both houses of Congress, and if Robert Mueller, the Special Counsel in the Russia investigation, presents his findings around the same time, then Trump will feel his power quickly eroding.

The critical question for 2018, then, is what Trump will do if he finds himself threatened domestically at the same time that a foreign-policy crisis erupts. Will the "adults in the room" still be able to handle their charge? One need not be a doomsayer to regard the coming months with considerable skepticism and concern.

(Source: Project Syndicate)

Erdogan's plans for Afrin might not sit well with Syria

by Fehim Tastekin

As casualties rise on both sides in Turkey's offensive in Syria, Ankara is pursuing a plan that goes beyond putting an end to the domination of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG). President Recep Tayyip Erdogan incessantly refers to a project to settle "the real owners of the area" in Afrin province.

He has two groups in mind: the band of militias that the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) employs in the field called the Free Syrian Army (FSA), and the crush of Syrian refugees in Turkey.

Explaining his plans for Afrin at a Jan. 24 meeting at the presidential complex, Erdogan said, "First, we will wipe out the terrorists and then make the place livable. For whom? For 3.5 million Syrians who are our guests. We cannot forever house them in tents."

Erdogan claimed, "In Afrin, 55% are Arabs, 35% are Kurds and the rest are Turks." But Afrin has always been a Kurdish-dominated area. Although reliable figures aren't available, local sources insist that the Kurds constitute 70-90% of the population. In Afrin and its rural periphery, where Kurds make up the overwhelming majority, there are some Arabs, small groups of Turks in the northern rural area, Alawite Kurds in Mabata, Yazidi Kurds in Kastel Cindo and Ezaze and minor groups of Armenians and Circassians. With its longstanding relative stability, Afrin became a refuge for people escaping the Islamic State (ISIS) from Raqqa, Manbij, al-Bab and Jarablus.

Local officials told Al-Monitor that the population in Afrin's seven townships and 365 villages once stood at 400,000 but has nearly doubled with the refugees. In other words, until now Afrin has not been a source of refugees, but a recipient.

In addition to Turkey's ruling party, there are other quarters who support the idea of settling more refugees in Afrin. For example, former Chief of General Staff Ilker Basbug told Hurriyet news, "If Afrin is cleared of YPG and the PKK [Kurdistan Workers Party, which Turkey considers a terrorist group], we can easily settle some of those who had escaped to Turkey." His comments drew broad interest.

Erdogan's blatant misinformation and desire to settle refugees there raises the disturbing question of whether this a plan to modify the demographic structure of this heavily Kurdish-populated area. Such schemes have often been used as a means to eliminate social restlessness against the government since the Ottoman days.

The plan to settle in Afrin the anti-Syrian government FSA elements — as was done after Operation Euphrates



President Recep Tayyip Erdogan incessantly refers to a project to settle "the real owners of the area" in Afrin province.

Shield ended in March — is also disturbing The YTSK says it has 25,000 FSA elements fighting alongside it. Erdogan recently said, "We will succeed in this operation with God's blessing, together with our nation and the Free Syrian Army."

Erdogan then detailed his FSA thinking: "The opposition elements believing in Turkey will participate in this operation, this struggle is for their benefit. We are helping our brothers to own their own land."

In response to Kurdish claims that this approach could put Turkey in the position of an occupier, Erdogan replied, "Who is an occupier? All those who massacred more than a million Syrian women and children are the occupiers. Can there be a worse occupier than those who massacred nearly a million Syrians?"

On Thursday, Kurdish authorities asked Damascus to send troops to "protect its borders with Turkey from attacks by the Turkish occupier."

It worries many people that even as Erdogan claims to be ridding Afrin of "terrorists," that's how Syria describes some of the groups he wants to move into the area. Many have backgrounds, ideologies and attitudes that are unfavorable to Kurds. Those groups include former al-Qaeda members, Salafist terrorists, a variety of Islamists such as the Muslim Brotherhood, mercenaries and some volunteers controlled by Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MIT).

A global wish for honest leaders

Solberg, one of the co-chairs, who are all women, at Davos.

The #MeToo movement does indeed have three key aspects that inspire imitation: It is largely grass roots. It is global in scope. And it started with empathy (or "me too") for a set of victims, specifically those who have experienced sexual misconduct.

In recent years, many countries, from Romania to South Korea, have seen popular uprisings against corrupt rulers. These national

movements did not go global. Nor did they come with a catchy hashtag. Yet they were all grass roots. They reflect a rising expectation for honesty and transparency in government.

If there is any cross-border movement against corruption, it is in Latin America. Several countries such as Brazil and Guatemala have demonstrated dramatic shifts in public thought against graft in high places. One reason is that a regional construction firm, Odebrecht, has been caught bribing

officials in several countries. Another is that Pope Francis has visited Latin America twice with an anti-corruption theme. "This is a battle that involves all of us," said the head of the Roman Catholic Church on his latest visit.

And a survey last year by the watchdog group Transparency International revealed that 70 percent of people in the region believe ordinary people can make a difference in fighting corruption, which is defined as the abuse of public office for private gain. ➔ 13

Europe must fight to preserve the Iran deal

By Ellie Geranmayeh

The last time Europe was tested so heavily by a U.S. president was prior to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Ever since, members of the European foreign-policy elite have questioned whether the continent failed to adequately push back against this disastrous decision, which proved so costly for European interests. European leaders should heed past experience and take a firmer stand against Donald Trump’s dangerous policy toward Iran that risks another confrontation in the Middle East.

In his latest attack on the Iran nuclear deal, Trump delivered an ultimatum to his European allies: either fix the accord or he would walk away from it in less than four months. This public cornering of European allies, together with Washington’s increasingly hostile trajectory on Iran, should serve as a wake-up call for Europe.

This month, Trump issued the latest round of sanctions relief required by the nuclear deal, but it was accompanied by a poison pill. He threatened to withdraw the United States from the agreement unless Europe and the U.S. Congress agreed to work on a supplemental deal (seemingly without Iran’s involvement). In other words, Trump wants Europe to agree to reimpose joint sanctions on Iran based on triggers that did not exist in the 2015 nuclear agreement. This includes “snapping back” sanctions after certain provisions approach their predetermined expiration dates. Trump also asserted that nuclear-related sanctions should be reimposed in response to Iranian missile testing — an issue that the Europeans have clearly stated should be delinked from the nuclear deal.

Iran has repeatedly rejected any backdoor attempts to reopen the nuclear agreement. Knowing this, Trump has set a trap for Europe to help collectively kill the nuclear deal and absolve him of responsibility.

So far, Europeans have been willing to contradict Trump over Iran policy. The nuclear agreement enabled Europe to address its overriding concerns with Iran’s nuclear program while averting another military conflict in the Middle East. The deal is a success story for Europe and its global influence. Protecting it, and the decadelong process that achieved the deal, also preserves Europe’s fundamental belief that diplomacy is preferable to confrontation.

Europeans spent much of last year trying to convince Trump to do no harm to the nuclear deal. But Trump’s policy toward Iran is now clearly at odds with European interests. Even if Trump can be persuaded to renew the U.S. sanctions waivers next due in May, he is very likely to continue the charade of unpredictability. This uncertainty has chilled the business appetite of European companies doing business with Iran.

Some European officials state in private that the best option is for Europe to muddle through in the hope that Trump will eventually shift his position. But muddling through just won’t do. Trump is likely to continue increasing his maximalist demands unless Europe flexes its political muscle.

In order to protect its economic and security interests, Europe must not only reject Trump’s ultimatum — which would be a kiss of death for the nuclear deal — but also push back. Europe should put in place a viable contingency plan if the United States continues backtracking on the deal and let Washington know it’s ready to use it.

As parties to the nuclear deal, France, Germany, and Britain are best placed to coordinate such a strategy. Europe will need to present a package (together with China and Russia) that can entice Iran to continue abiding by the core elements of the current nuclear agreement.

Iranian officials have signaled that Tehran would consider remaining in the nuclear deal even if the United States walks away so long as it serves the country’s national interests. The Iranian leadership is likely to carefully consider if Europe can offer a pathway for Iran to continue its gradual political and economic reintegration with the world.

The most fundamental aspect of such a deal will rest on whether non-American companies are able and willing to do business with Iran. If Trump refuses to reissue the next sanctions waivers required by the nuclear deal, U.S. secondary sanctions that impact non-American companies would snap back into place. Should such sanctions be reimposed, European companies with commercial interests in the United States would be significantly impaired from importing Iranian oil and undertaking financial transactions with the



country. Should they decide to ignore such secondary sanctions — their assets in the United States (which far outweigh existing business with Iran) would be subject to penalties.

To prevent such an event, European governments will have to take steps to shield their companies from the punitive reach of these sanctions and create an environment where companies such as Total, Airbus, Shell, and Siemens can continue their business in both Iran and the United States. To do so, Europe should focus on four priorities.

First and foremost, European governments and businesses should privately consult with U.S. officials and Congress on creating exemptions to the enforcement of any nuclear-related secondary sanctions that may impact them. The model of the Russia sanctions package last year can be adopted to urge U.S. lawmakers to put in place a warning and waiver system to exempt European companies from enforcement. If Washington refuses this approach, European governments should publicly warn that in any instance where the U.S. Treasury actively enforces secondary sanctions targeting European companies dealing with Iran, the European Union will revive measures similar to its “blocking regulation.”

The EU blocking regulation was introduced in 1996 in response to attempts by the Bill Clinton administration to extraterritorially enforce U.S. sanctions prohibiting certain trade with Libya, Iran, and Cuba. Europeans resisted these attempts, which were very costly for their energy interests. They did this first through political channels and then through legal pushback (which finally worked, and Clinton issued waivers suspending the impact of these sanctions on European companies).

The blocking regulation essentially made it illegal for European companies to adhere to U.S. extraterritorial sanctions (and thereby provided them with some legal cover not to pay their U.S. fines). The EU regulation was accompanied by measures that allowed European companies to claw back costs imposed on them by U.S. regulators. Today, attempting to use these mechanisms will not be cost-free for European companies (many of which have considerable assets in the United States that could be subjected to Treasury Department penalties). Nor will it be cost-free for transatlantic relations. European companies are not likely to do business with Iran at the possible expense of forfeiting their market share in the United States. But this sort of legal pushback can boost Europe’s political leverage in negotiating with the Trump administration and making it think twice. It is worth it given the alternative costs of expansion of Iran’s nuclear program and rising possibility of military confrontation.

Put simply, EU officials must tell Trump: If you fine our companies’ assets in the United States, we will reclaim those costs by penalizing U.S. assets in Europe.

This would cause a major trade conflict that the Europeans want to avoid by all means. But the option and the precedent exist.

Second, to bolster the EU’s bargaining position, European governments should increase their coordination with China, Russia, and Asian economic powers such as India, South

Korea, and Japan. All share a concern about the overreach of U.S. secondary sanctions. France and Britain should coordinate with Russia and China at the UN Security Council, particularly on how to prevent the reimposition and enforcement of UN nuclear-related sanctions against Iran so long as Tehran is fulfilling its obligations.

Third, Europe and Iran must resolve the banking and financial deadlocks that have significantly impaired economic ties. This has become a problem even for major European companies such as Airbus. European governments can step up efforts to provide companies with paths to financing deals with Iran that are an alternative to current banking structures exposed to the U.S. financial network. Some European countries have already issued credit lines and started to consider how to introduce banking mechanisms exclusively for deals with Iran. The EU can also lay the groundwork to allow the European Investment Bank, founded with the mission to contribute to EU policy objectives, to extend financing to medium-sized European companies struggling to undertake projects inside Iran. The EU can offer greater technical assistance and expertise to Iran in this effort. But the tough decisions must be made in Tehran. And as the recent protests in Iran showed, the country is in urgent need of economic reforms, particularly in its banking sector.

Finally, as a recent report from the European Council on Foreign Relations outlines, it is critical for Europe to address remaining concerns related to the ongoing conflict in Syria, the stabilization of Iraq, transfer of missile technology, and de-escalating tensions with Saudi Arabia.

There is a danger that in trying to persuade Washington to stand by in the nuclear deal, Europeans will take harmful steps aimed at appeasing Trump. For example, in recent months France and Germany have reportedly both pressed for the EU to introduce new sanctions targeting Iran’s missile program. This approach is unlikely to persuade Tehran to negotiate over its missile program. Nor are such steps likely to gain support from China and Russia as the nuclear-related sanctions did. This is especially true now due to rising U.S.-Iranian tensions and increasing Western arms sales to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Israel. A more pragmatic approach would be for the EU to facilitate a dialogue with all regional powers with the goal of limiting the range of ballistic missiles and their transfer under existing international arms control regimes.

The fallout over the nuclear deal is taking place against the backdrop of increasing unpredictability in the Middle East. Trump’s anti-Iran rhetoric, coupled with his unequivocal support for Saudi Arabia, has only added to regional polarization. French President Emmanuel Macron recently warned that the current rhetoric of the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Israel is pushing the region toward conflict with Iran. Instead of joining this disastrous approach, European governments must step up their efforts to defuse tension through relentless diplomacy with all regional actors, including Iran.

(Source: Foreign Policy)

Europe’s return to twentieth century

I → Speaking at the Davos summit, «Emanuel Macron» the French President warned of the victory of nationalists and extremists in Europe and said:

«In my country, if I do not make sense of this globalisation then in five, 10, 15 years time it will be the nationalists, the extremes which win -- and this will be true of every country.»

The commonality of Merkel’s and Macron’s remarks is their concern about the return of European citizens to nationalism. As noted, this process has intensified in Europe. The extremist party of Freedom found way to the Austrian coalition government, and the increase in radical far-right votes in countries like France, Sweden and Germany, is a serious crisis in Europe. The recent warnings by the German Chancellor and the French President should therefore be seriously analyzed and evaluated.

It should be noted that now about 4 months have passed since the general election in Germany. During this period, due to the weakness of Christian parties, no coalition government has yet been formed. On the other hand, during the negotiations with the Green party and the Liberal Democrats, we also saw the defeat of Merkel and her companions. While news sources in Germany predicted that the Jamaica coalition would be formed between the four negotiating parties, the Liberal Democrat leader, «Christian Lindner», eventually left the negotiating table.

Merkel is in a difficult situation now. She knows well that the formation of a coalition government with the Social Democrats is the best possible option for her right now. Although this option has never been Merkel’s favorite, but if the negotiations with the Social Democrats and people such as «Martin Schulz» and «Sigmar Gabriel» in forming a coalition government fail, Merkel would have to form a minimal government with the Green Party, or run an early election. In case of an early election, the political crisis will continue in Germany.

Meanwhile, in the event of failure of the Christian parties and Social-Democrats, general pressure on Merkel will increase to resign of her post as the German Chancellor. In such a situation, the Social Democrats will have a greater chance of being in power. More importantly, according to recent surveys conducted in Germany, more than 50 percent of German citizens believe that Merkel should step down and let other politicians to try their chance for this post.

Hence, the negotiations between the Christian parties and the Social Democratic Party over the formation of a coalition government (called the Great Coalition) is of great importance for Merkel. However, this rule isn’t true of the Social-Democratic Party. During the recent general election and with about 20% of the vote, the Social Democratic Party has gained one of the weakest and most unexpected election results in recent decades.

The Social Democratic Party then announced it plans to serve as Merkel’s opposition party and the coalition government. But the failure of the talks on the Jamaica coalition, has once again led the two traditional parties of the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats to the negotiation table.

Merkel and the leaders of the Social-Democratic Party have already begun negotiations over the great coalition. However, there is a lot of opposition within the Social-Democratic Party. The agreement of a small number of representatives of the Social-Democratic Party with official talks over forming the great coalition, indicates that there is no positive view towards the formation of a coalition government with Merkel among this party’s members.

In any case, Merkel now feels a strong need for the cooperation of Social Democrats and regards the coalition with this party as a way for her effective survival in Berlin. The same thing has made the Social-Democrats hands even more open in negotiating with the coalition of Christian parties.

Afrin war a rude awakening for Kurds

I → The recent development in Afrin is a testimony to U.S. double standards, taking advantage of its allies to reach its objectives. U.S. allies have seen the consequences of participating in wars instigated by America in various parts of the world. Yet, they willingly continue to be victimized by U.S. led geopolitical aggression. America’s allies in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and other regions of the world have paid a high price for siding with the U.S., but they should steer away from Washington’s military advances as U.S. intervention will continue for years to come.

The most significant development in Afrin, as of late, is that the Kurds have called on to Syrian forces for reinforcement. Although some Kurdish news sources deny this new development, field reports have confirmed it. It appears as though the Kurds have finally come to the realization that they will need the assistance of the Syrian army to protect Afrin.

As it was expected, the U.S. government has not offered reinforcement to the Kurds in Afrin. The White House alleges that they only armed the Kurds to fight ISIS and that Afrin is not strategically significant to the U.S.

Washington abandoned the Kurds in their fight against Turkey and the Free Syrian Army. The Kurds, too, lost Russia’s support, who withdrew their troops from the region following the Kurds opposition to the Free Syrian Army in Afrin.

It appears that the Kurds have had a rude awakening as of late, as they have recently sought reinforcement from the Syrian army now that the Turkish army has withdrawn from combatting Syrian, Russian or American forces.

The presence of the Syrian army in Afrin is beneficial to the Kurds and the anticipated Kurdish participation in the peace process in Syria, as it can set the ground for the Sochi Summit.

The fact that Kurds have urged Damascus to intervene and protect Afrin is an important turning point in the Syrian war. This development can also mean the Kurds have abandoned hopes of having an autonomous Kurdish region in northern Syrian.

Once the Syrian Kurds sense pressure, they urge the Syrian government to intervene and demonstrate support for Syria’s sovereignty. However, when the U.S. offers them a deal, the page turns quickly and they have a change of heart. It seems that American elements oppose any agreement between Damascus and the Afrin representatives. Kurds appeal to the Syrian government for reinforcement.

Why U.S. and Saudi are world’s worst Human Rights Violators

TEHRAN (FNA) — Amnesty International has once again censured Saudi Arabia for being the worst human rights violator in the world when it comes to freedom of speech, press, religion and movement along with freedom from death, torture and slavery.

Amnesty says jail sentences handed down to prominent Saudi human rights defenders and similar other verdicts show Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s resolve to suppress the civil society. The London-based rights group says the Specialized Criminal Court in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, sentenced Mohammad al-Otaibi and Abdullah al-Attawi to 14 and seven years in prison, respectively, adding that the Saudi crackdown “has continued unabated, with almost all the country’s most prominent human rights defenders now behind bars.”

It goes on to state that “the harsh sentencing of Mohammad al-Otaibi and Abdullah al-Attawi, who should never have been prosecuted in the first place, confirms our fears that the new leadership of Mohamed bin Salman is determined to silence civil society and human rights defenders in the Kingdom.”

No doubt the Saudi reign of terror in the region and human rights violations at home continue on the back of US support and complicity - with complete impunity and unaccountability. The US government has always been the first to call out other nations with poor track records on human rights abuses. Invariably they are the two nations viewed most threatening to America’s global hegemony and power – rivals Russia and China. Other loudly criticized countries include Iran that most defies US dominance



and Saudi war crimes and state terrorism in places like Yemen and Syria.

At any rate, any nation on earth is at risk of America’s wrath that fights to protect its own self-interest over and above the global bully’s in a noble effort to minimize economic exploitation in the plundering of precious natural resources and subjugating. But any country going against the world’s worst human rights violator is automatically deemed an enemy of the US and subject to such labels as axis-of-evil and a serious threat to regional peace.

No surprise that countries like Iran and Syria are all targeted in the crosshairs of the next war or next regime change living under decades of heavy-handed economic sanctions designed to break the will of these

independent nations bold enough to resist US aggression, state terrorism, superpower control, and full frontal dominance.

On the other hand, when a corrupt despotic regime like Saudi Arabia with the worst human rights records in the entire world encourages and willingly allows a strong US presence with active duty military installations, it is merely given a free pass and even a seat at the UN Human Rights Council, immune from any US criticism and threat. The Saudis continue to succumb and are openly complicit in the murdering and pillaging of Yemen and its people by the global bully, all because they are assured the War Party has their back and always turns a blind eye to their heinous crimes against humanity and human rights violations of the most vile kind.

Salvaging the legacy of the FBI

By John Ligato

The FBI is experiencing its greatest crisis in our history. J. Edgar Hoover may have kept "intel" files on enemies but never attempted a government coup. Recent leadership at headquarters allowed politics to seep into our DNA, and field agents were smeared with the same brush.

What happened and, what can we do to regain our reputation? The Bureau is about to take some major hits to its legacy and Director Christopher Wray is the only individual who can limit the damage. It's called leadership.

Several ongoing investigations into alleged FBI wrongdoing may result in years of a continuing news cycle of negativity and a further erosion of the Bureau's reputation. Mr. Wray has expressed a hesitancy to act in the meantime. Why?

If Mr. Wray does not take action, there may come a time that the FBI can never fully regain public trust. I had been spoiled by the excellent leadership in the Marine Corps. Marine NCO's and

officers led from the front, but recent FBI leadership actions have involved self-serving back room deals and secret societies.

■ Bogus technical glitch

Leadership is not transferring Peter Strzok to Human Resources and having Lisa Page disappear within the bowels of the FBI headquarters. Leadership is not stonewalling congressional requests for information. Leadership is not accepting a bogus technical glitch excuse involving the disappearance of months of texts that have just reappeared. Leadership is not waiting for other government agencies to do your job.

How did we reach this point? We surrendered our independence. The FBI had always maintained an arms-length distance from the politically infested Justice Department. But 20 years of oversight produced an impotent Bureau that required Justice permission to open cases against politicians, clergy, public figures and others. It wasn't exactly a hostile takeover

but rather a seamless merger that began when Robert Mueller was appointed FBI director and culminated with the toxic marriage of FBI staff, Mr. Strzok, Ms. Page, Mr. McCabe, Mr. Comey and Mr. Baker, with Justice attorney's Bruce Orr, Rod Rosenstein and others.

The FBI and Justice have separate functions, and once you blur responsibilities, bad things happen. FBI cases should be referred to Justice only at the conclusion of the investigation. Currently, agents must seek Justice approval at various phases during an active case. Since Justice is a political entity, they occasionally prohibit FBI agents from opening cases on individuals who share their political views. This accusation would have been unthinkable 30 years ago, but the actions of Loretta Lynch, Eric Holder, Bruce Orr and Rod Rosenstein are exhibits A through D.

Recent occupants of the FBI executive suite include James Baker, James Comey and Robert

Mueller, all of whom were Justice Department attorneys. There is a misguided notion by every administration that judges and U.S. attorneys are the best fit for the FBI seventh floor. But, agents are investigators and federal attorneys are prosecutors. When you place partisan attorneys in charge of law enforcement officers the result is labeling an investigation a "matter."

Just for the record. Loretta Lynch never intended for Justice career prosecutors to judge evidence in the email evidence; she had James Comey do her dirty work.

Mr. Wray should order an immediate OPR investigation. FBI agents can only evoke Fifth Amendment rights in targets of criminal investigations. But if they are granted immunity and refuse to answer routine questions, they can be terminated for insubordination. Mr. McCabe, Mr. Strzok, Ms. Page and others have not yet qualified for retirement benefits, so all would be motivated to talk. But if you do nothing, they will join Lois

Lerner with a healthy pension and lawyer up.

The Hillary email case is a classic example of why the FBI is no longer an independent entity. Mr. Comey made a declination announcement, which he had no authority to make, in order to appease the attorney general and the party in power.

■ Investigative techniques

Once he publicly proclaimed Hillary innocent, he poisoned any potential jury pool if Justice did decide to prosecute. He took a dive, no different than some palooka who throws a fight. But the writing was on the wall when the FBI disregarded standard investigative techniques.

Investigations are normally conducted by our field offices. Mr. Comey's decision to oversee the investigation at headquarters and assign Peter Strzok as a default case agent was highly questionable. Mr. Strzok conducted a bogus investigation because:

• An experienced case agent would have never offered immunity to Cheryl Mills, Huma Abedin and Brian Patagiliana. ➔13

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5 signs your excessive sweating is more than just embarrassing

By Claire Gillespie

Hyperhidrosis—excessive, uncontrollable sweating—affects more than just your clothes. It can have an extremely negative impact on your quality of life.

■ **How much is too much?**

We all get a bit hot and sweaty from time to time (if you're wondering why you get night sweats, here are some possible causes.) But excessive sweating is a medical condition known as hyperhidrosis (or primary hyperhidrosis), and it can be extremely isolating and distressing. "There is secondary hyperhidrosis, which is excessive sweating that's a symptom of another medical condition or a side effect of a medication," explains Angela Ballard, RN, communications director, educator and advocate with the International Hyperhidrosis Society.

"However, when we talk about hyperhidrosis, we are talking about the stand-alone condition or primary hyperhidrosis."

Hyperhidrosis is also more common than you might think. A 2016 article published in the journal Archives of Dermatological Research estimates the prevalence of hyperhidrosis at 4.8 percent, which represents approximately 15.3 million people in the United States.

If you're sweating how much you sweat, here are the signs of hyperhidrosis.

■ **You sweat beyond what is necessary or expected**

The main sign of hyperhidrosis is that you sweat in a way that is extreme and unnecessary given the situation. "It's sweating beyond what the body needs to control temperature or react to stimuli," says Ballard.

"For many affected, hyperhidrosis sweating can be drenching and four or five times what may be considered a 'normal' reaction to stress, exercise, or heat." Hyperhidrosis is often unpredictable, says Ballard. While a person with hyperhidrosis may certainly sweat even more during hot weather, they may also sweat just as much in an air-conditioned room. If you're sweating that much, you might need these nine easy solutions for getting rid of sweat stains.

■ **You can't control your sweats**

Common areas of the body affected by hyperhidrosis are the palms of the hands, the soles of the feet, the underarms, the face or scalp, and the groin or buttocks region. It can be constant, or come on suddenly without warning, says Ballard. In many cases, the sweating is so excessive that it drips, soaks clothing, or ruins objects held in the hands.

■ **You spend time (and money) trying to hide your sweats**

If you have hyperhidrosis, you may have to use towels, fans, special clothing, pads, make-up, or powders to attempt to "hide" your sweating, says Ballard. You may also have to change clothing or shoes several times during the day, and carry multiple identical items of clothing so these wardrobe changes are not noticeable.

■ **Worry about sweating is severely impacting your quality of life**

Hyperhidrosis can affect confidence or cause psychosocial issues like fear, anxiety, sadness, or isolation. It can cause a person to avoid situations, change careers, or lose opportunities due to social stigma. In a 2017 report published in the journal Health and Quality of Life Outcomes, 69 percent of hyperhidrosis patients reported an impact on their psychological well-being. Additionally, concerns related to other people's negative reactions and judgment were reported by 64 percent. Many of them



Excessive sweating is a medical condition known as hyperhidrosis (or primary hyperhidrosis), and it can be extremely isolating and distressing.

revealed that their condition affected their enjoyment of hobbies and interfered with daily activities, and most of them reported low self-esteem and a negative self-image because of their condition. Be aware of these warning signs of depression.

■ **Your sweating has serious consequences**

Through her work with the International Hyperhidrosis Society, Ballard has heard stories of people whose sweating put them or others at physical risk—some to the point where their lives were threatened.

"Individuals with hyperhidrosis have lost control of the steering wheels in their cars due to extremely sweaty hands, nurses with hyperhidrosis have been unable to start IVs or give injections, and mothers have literally dropped their babies or been unable to hold their children's hands as they cross the street," she says.

"Walking barefoot can be dangerous for people with plantar/foot sweating, due to wet, sweaty feet causing slips and falls."

■ **Getting help for hyperhidrosis**

The Mayo Clinic advises seeing your doctor if you suddenly begin to sweat more than usual, it disrupts your daily routine, or you experience night sweats for no apparent reason.

"Only your doctor, who knows your medical history and can perform a full assessment and any necessary tests to rule out secondary causes, can tell you whether you have hyperhidrosis—and this is the crucial first step," adds Ballard. And if your heavy sweating is accompanied by chills, lightheadedness, chest pain, nausea, or a body temperature of 104 degrees F (40 degrees C) or higher, you should seek immediate medical attention.

■ **Treating hyperhidrosis**

Unfortunately, there is no ideal treatment for many people with hyperhidrosis. Your physician may recommend injectables (like Botox), which may be used for hands, feet, face/scalp, underarms and other relatively contained areas like in the groin or on the back. Because Botox wears off, the treatment must be repeated one to three times per year, depending on the person and part of the body being treated. (Here's everything you need to know about Botox.)

Daily application of topical antiperspirants, either prescription or over the counter, is usually the first-line therapy, explains Ballard. But many people with hyperhidrosis need an additional treatment like miraDry, a medical device that uses non-invasive microwave technology in the underarms to destroy the sweat glands; it can be used once or twice for long-lasting effects.

Another possible short-term treatment is an oral medication (such as the class of drugs known as anticholinergics—these include glycopyrrolate, oxybutynin, benztropine, and propantheline).

However, these drugs aren't a great long-term solution as they can have unpleasant side effects like dry mouth, muscle cramps, and urinary issues.

A strong support network is crucial for those living with hyperhidrosis, says Ballard. Through the International Hyperhidrosis Society Facebook page, you can connect with others and feel more supported and understood, as well as find out how to get involved to advocate for better treatments and increase public awareness about this damaging health condition.

(Source: Reader's digest)

Mixing herbal remedies and conventional drugs ‘could be harmful’

Herbal remedies such as St John's wort, ginseng and ginkgo biloba could have harmful interactions with conventional drugs, scientists have warned.

In an extensive review of the medical literature, the team uncovered dozens of cases in which alternative treatments appeared to have altered the effects of prescription medication, either diluting it, making it more potent or causing potentially dangerous side effects.

The paper turned up examples of patients who had suffered serious problems after taking herbal medicines alongside drugs including antidepressants and medication for HIV, epilepsy, heart disease.

Edzard Ernst, emeritus professor of complementary medicine at the University of Exeter, said the findings highlighted that natural ingredients could still have potentially potent biological effects. "They might cause harm to many patients who use herbal treatments," he said. "It is therefore important that consumers are warned of the danger and think twice before self-medicating with herbal remedies."

In one case report, a 55-year-old man died of a seizure while swimming. The autopsy concluded that ginkgo biloba supplements that the man was taking – to boost cognitive function – may have inhibited the effects of his anti-seizure medication. Several cases documented patients with heart problems who were on warfarin or statins, who appeared to suffer complications linked to sage, flaxseed, St John's wort and green tea. The majority of patients were diagnosed with cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and kidney transplants.

Recent studies have shown it is possible for some active ingredients in herbal medicines to affect drug metabolism, speeding up the rate at which other medicines are broken down in the liver and reducing their effectiveness.

Previous research has suggested that St John's wort, an over-the-counter herbal remedy for depression, could interact with a large number of medicines. It is thought to increase side effects of antidepressants and there is evidence it could reduce the effectiveness of drugs including warfarin, statins, antihistamines, birth control and HIV medication.

"If you are taking herbal remedies you should disclose it to your clinician," said Awortwe. "A potential interaction and its consequences can be very detrimental to the health of the patient." (Source: The Guardian)

How long does the flu last?

By Heidi Godman

The best treatment is to take steps to prevent illness.

Few common illnesses are more unpleasant than the flu. The aches and pains, chills, fever, and cough are bad enough; add in the other potential symptoms of flu, including runny nose, vomiting, diarrhea, fatigue, or sore throat, and you'll want the illness to be over as soon as possible. How long does the flu last? And does treating flu help make it go away faster? The answers depend on your particular health.

■ **Understanding flu**

The flu—or influenza—is a highly contagious respiratory virus caused by one of three different virus types: influenza A, B, or C. It spreads quickly by way of droplets of saliva that become airborne when someone sneezes or coughs, according to the Harvard Special Report Viruses and Disease. You can also get the flu by exposure to saliva passed by routine contact, such as kissing or sharing eating utensils.

■ **How long does the flu last?**

For most healthy people, the flu is an uncomfortable but short-term illness that resolves itself as the immune system fights it off. Symptoms usually appear from one to four days after exposure to the virus, and they last five to seven days. For people who've had a flu shot, the symptoms may last a shorter amount of time, or be less severe. For other people, the symptoms may last longer. Even when symptoms resolve, you may continue to feel fatigued.

Some people are at increased risk for complications from influenza. These people include:

Supercharge your cold and flu defenses!

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- the very young
- people 65 or older
- people with chronic illnesses, such as asthma, heart disease, HIV, or diabetes
- pregnant women
- people with a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or higher

People in those groups may have weakened immune systems, and are at increased risk for the complication of pneumonia, which can be deadly.

■ **Treating flu**

If you get the flu, you should get rest and drink plenty of fluids. Take pain relievers to lower your fever and relieve the aches, such as:

- acetaminophen (Tylenol)
- ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin)
- naproxen (Aleve)

If you are at high risk of complications, and if it is early in the infection, your doctor may prescribe an antiviral drug for treating flu. The CDC currently recommends oseltamivir (Tamiflu) or zanamivir (Relenza).

■ **Prevention**

To better predict how long the flu will last, take steps to reduce your risk of contracting the virus and experiencing severe symptoms. Consider the following steps, as suggested in the Harvard Special Report A Guide to Women's Health:

- Get an annual flu vaccine.
- Wash your hands with soap and water before eating or touching your face.
- Contact your doctor for promptly if you get flu symptoms.
- Quit smoking. Smokers are more likely to get the flu than nonsmokers.

These steps won't guarantee that you'll escape the flu this year, but they may help prevent it. And they may help reduce the amount of time the flu lasts if you do become infected with the virus.

(Source: health.harvard.edu)

Should you try ‘souping’?

By Lisa Drayer

When I first heard of "souping," it brought me back to my clinical days working in a hospital, where pureed soups and other easy to digest foods -- also known as "full liquids" -- would be prescribed for patients recovering from gastrointestinal surgery, or those who had difficulty chewing or swallowing.

Then I reflected upon how much I regularly enjoy soup, especially for the comfort it provides on cold, dreary days -- even though, thankfully I have no health issues that would require such an easily digestible meal. Soup is often my go-to in the winter, especially varieties made with beans or skinless chicken, nutritious veggies, noodles and tasty broth. And I've always liked the fact that even though I feel full and satisfied after a bowl of broth, it's not like the fullness I experience after eating a bowl of pasta.

Among nutritionists, I'm not alone in my feelings about this comforting, filling, yet not-so-high calorie food. "Soup can be a healthy and delicious way to create balance after a season of heavy meals or even a particularly indulgent weekend," said Robin Foroutan, a registered dietitian and spokeswoman for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. "It gives your digestive system a chance to reboot and de-bloat."

Regularly eating soup might help you shed some unwanted pounds, too. Several studies have shown that when soup is eaten before a meal, it fills you up and helps you eat fewer calories for the entire meal. In one study, when people consumed soup for a snack instead of chips and pretzels, they lost 50% more weight -- even though both the soup and snacks, as well as the total day's diet, had the same amount of calories.

What's the slimming secret of soup? Binding water into food slows down gastric emptying, keeping your stomach fuller for longer, according to Barbara Rolls, a professor of nutritional sciences at Pennsylvania State University who has authored studies on soup and its effects on satiety, and wrote "The Ultimate Volumetrics Diet." Plus, she added, "the water in soup adds weight and volume so that you can have a satisfying



amount without too many calories."

■ **The 'souping' trend**

The weight loss benefits of soup have led to soup cleansing -- a trend that has become increasingly popular over the last few years. In fact, according to Pinterest, "souping" is one of the top 10 food trends for 2018.

And unlike juicing, which removes fiber from fruit, soup can help to stabilize blood sugar for more sustained energy, especially when it includes tons of fiber-rich veggies, protein and healthy fat, according to Foroutan.

"Soups still contains the whole food, so fiber is still intact, but it's easier to digest because it's cooked," said Foroutan. Juice is high in phytonutrients and antioxidants, but if it's made from all fruit, it can be very high in sugars (even though they're natural sugars), and this can cause one's blood sugar to spike and drop, which can lead to feeling more tired overall, she explained.

Don't know how to get started? Companies such as Splendid Spoon, Soupure and Los Angeles-serving Souplina take the guesswork away by offering consumers various soup-based meal plans which can be delivered directly to your doorstep.

For example, a single souping cleanse day on Splendid Spoon includes five soups, such as beet balsamic bisque, fennel consommé, cauliflower coconut, butternut turmeric and red lentil dal. After the cleanse, you continue the week-long plan with the company's breakfasts and lunches for five days, which include smoothies and bowls. Dinner is your choice. Day 7 is a "wander day" to enjoy eating as you typically would.

The convenience factor of soup delivery is a big draw for those with busy schedules.

"I choose my order, it comes delivered to my apartment and all I need to do is heat it up. I never have to worry about eating or having a bad meal," said Morgan Hagney, who was in the throes of grad school and working full time when she started souping with Splendid Spoon about a year ago. "The recipes are delicious. They offer a variety of choices no matter the time of year, my mood or hunger level."

Soupure offers soup only packages, like a three-day soup-only cleanse that includes kale minestrone and pumpkin miso, along with chicken or beef broth. But you can also get soups a la carte. "Many of our regulars have made souping part of their regular diet,

and they cleanse on a regular basis or they simply incorporate soup into their regular everyday diet as a meal replacement," said Soupure founder Vivienne Vella.

Customers of Soupure and Splendid Spoon say the programs have helped them maintain healthier, more nutritious diets, and lose weight, too.

■ **Calorie check**

Soup cleanses tend to have fewer calories than what you would eat on a typical day, which helps to explain how pounds may drop quickly for some. For example, calories for the cleanse day on Splendid Spoon range from 800 to 950, and breakfasts and lunches on the following five days contain approximately 300 calories per meal. On Soupure, cleanses range from 1,000 to 1,200 calories per day, depending on the type of cleanse you choose. Such a low amount could leave you irritable and hungry.

"It could be too low in calories for some people, but you can always add more to the soup or have an extra serving," said Foroutan. "Plus, it's the quality of the calories that count." They key, she said, is to include a lot of vegetables, herbs and spices, along with protein such as lentils, beans or tofu for vegetarian options, or chicken, fish and bone broth for omnivores and flexitarians.

Foroutan said having only soup for a few days or only soup for dinner for a week is fine -- she even does it herself -- as long as you pay attention to your body and listen to its cues.

She often finds herself souping periodically in the winter, from a variety of soups made in her kitchen.

"I love homemade miso soup with bok choy, napa cabbage, seaweed and shiitake mushrooms; kale and white bean soup with turmeric, bay leaves, thyme, garlic, onion, crushed tomato, celery and carrots, which I sometimes top with organic spicy chicken sausage; my veggie 'detox' soup with kale, daikon radish, celery, bok choy, broccoli and turmeric; and even a simple broth with whichever vegetables are in my fridge simmered in organic bone broth. The options are endless."

(Source: CNN)

George Soros: Facebook and Google a menace to society



Facebook and Google have become “obstacles to innovation” and are a “menace” to society whose “days are numbered”, said billionaire investor and philanthropist George Soros at the World Economic Forum in Davos on Thursday.

“Mining and oil companies exploit the physical environment; social media companies exploit the social environment,” said the Hungarian-American businessman, according to a transcript of his speech.

“This is particularly nefarious because social media companies influence how people think and behave without them even being aware of it. This has far-reaching adverse consequences on the functioning of democracy, particularly on the integrity of elections.”

In addition to skewing democracy, social media companies “deceive their users by manipulating their attention and directing it towards their own commercial purposes” and “deliberately engineer addiction to the services they provide”. The latter, he said, “can be very harmful, particularly for adolescents”.

“The power to shape people’s attention is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few companies. It takes a real effort to assert and defend what John Stuart Mill called ‘the freedom of mind’. There is a possibility that once lost, people who grow up in the digital age will have difficulty in regaining it. This may have far-reaching political consequences.”

Soros warned of an “even more alarming prospect” on the horizon if data-rich internet companies such as Facebook and Google paired their corporate surveillance systems with state-sponsored surveillance – a trend that’s already emerging in places such as the Philippines.

“This may well result in a web of totalitarian control the likes of which not even Aldous Huxley or George Orwell could have imagined,” he said.

The companies, which he described as “ever more powerful monopolies” are unlikely to change their behavior without regulation.

“The internet monopolies have neither the will nor the inclination to protect society against the consequences of their actions. That turns them into a menace and it falls to the regulatory authorities to protect society against them,” he said.

He said Davos was a good place to announce: “Their days are numbered.”

He also echoed the words of world wide web inventor Sir Tim Berners-Lee when he said the tech giants had become “obstacles to innovation” that need to be regulated as public utilities “aimed at preserving competition, innovation and fair and open universal access”.

During the same speech, Soros also criticized Donald Trump’s leadership, saying he had put the U.S. on course for a nuclear war with North Korea.

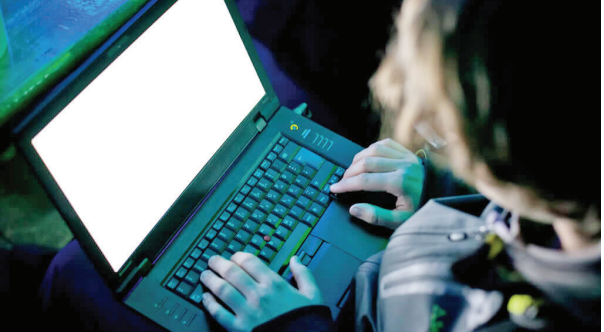
Soros is the latest high-profile business person to speak out about these internet platforms at Davos. Earlier this week, Salesforce’s chief executive, Marc Benioff, said that Facebook should be regulated like a cigarette company because it’s addictive and harmful.

In November, Roger McNamee, who was an early investor in Facebook, described Facebook and Google as threats to public health.

In the same month Facebook’s founding chairman, Sean Parker, criticized his former employer: “God only knows what it’s doing to our children’s brains,” he said.

(Source: The Guardian)

Hackers stole \$400 million from cryptocurrency exchange Coincheck



One of Japan’s largest cryptocurrency exchanges has revealed that it’s lost nearly \$400 million in a security breach. Coincheck says that it has restricted deposits and withdrawals for a cryptocurrency called NEM, and Bloomberg reports that 500 million NEM tokens have been sent from the company “illicitly,” and that it’s not sure how.

The company has since suspended most trading and withdrawals, and is working to trace where the missing digital currency ended up. In a Tweet, the exchange said that it was considering compensating those who lost money.

NEM is a digital currency like Bitcoin, Ethereum, or Litecoin, and is presently the eight largest cryptocurrency by volume. TechCrunch describes the currency as a “distributed ledger platform primarily aimed at enabling payments and other financial services.”

The hack appears to be roughly the same scale as the 2014 Mt Gox theft, in which thieves made off with \$400 million in bitcoin, causing the Japanese coin exchange to file for bankruptcy. However, while the dollar amount is comparable, the online economy for digital currencies has grown considerably in the last four years, and likely won’t have the same impact as the Mt Gox hack.

(Source: The Verge)

Children are tech addicts – and schools are the pushers

By Eliane Glaser

As a culture, we are finally waking up to the dark side of new technology. “The internet is broken”, declares the current issue of Wired, the tech insiders’ bible. Last month Rick Webb, an early digital investor, posted a blog titled “My internet mea culpa”. “I was wrong,” he wrote. “We all were.” He called on the architects of the web to admit that new technology had brought more harm than good.

Yet while geeks, the public and politicians – including Theresa May – grow disenchanted, schools, and those responsible for the national curriculum, seem stuck in an earlier wide-eyed era. My instinct tells me that this innocence is perverse. As a friend memorably described it, when he gave his three-year-old his phone to play with, it was as if a worm had found its way into her head.

I flinch internally when my five-year-old tells me she plays computer games in what primary schools call “golden time” rather than enjoying some other more wholesome reward; and when my eight-year-old says that he’s learned to send an email when I sent my first email aged 20, and email has since taken over my life and that of every other adult I know.

Our kids don’t use computers at home. They watch a bit of television, but we don’t own a tablet. Their school is by no means evangelical about technology, but I nonetheless feel like it is playing the role of pusher, and I’m watching my children get hooked. When they went suspiciously quiet the other day, I found them under the kitchen table trying to explore my phone. Unfortunately for them, it’s a brick. I’m wary of sounding sanctimonious, and corroding much-needed solidarity between busy parents with different views on screen use. But when I see an infant jabbing and swiping, I can’t help experiencing what the writer James Bridle calls in a disturbing recent essay a “Luddite twinge”; and the research suggests I should trust it.

Earlier this month the children’s commissioner for England warned that children starting secondary school were facing a social media “cliff edge” as they entered an online world of cyber-bullying and pornography. According to Public Health England, extended screen use correlates to emotional distress, anxiety and depression in children. The American College of Paediatricians associates it with sleep problems, obesity, increased aggression and low self-esteem.

And not only is screen technology harmful to children per se, there’s little evidence that it helps them to learn. A 2015 OECD report found that the impact of computers on pupil performance was “mixed, at best”, and in most cases computers were “hurting learning”. The journal Frontiers in Psychology identifies “an absence of re-



According to Public Health England, extended screen use correlates to emotional distress, anxiety and depression in children. The American College of Paediatricians associates it with sleep problems, obesity, increased aggression and low self-esteem.

search supporting the enthusiastic claims that iPads will ‘revolutionize education’”. Researchers at Durham University found that “technology-based interventions tend to produce just slightly lower levels of improvement” compared with other approaches. Even for the head of the e-Learning Foundation, proving technology improves results remains the “holy grail”.

Education technology is often justified on the grounds that it boosts disadvantaged children, yet research shows it widens rather than bridges socioeconomic divides. The One Laptop per Child program, which distributed 25m low-cost computers with learning software to children in the developing world, failed to improve language or maths results.

Such evidence does not dent the faith of ed tech’s proselytisers. Children need to be prepared for the future, we are told. But companies don’t want children who learned PowerPoint aged 10, they want employees who know how to think from first principles. All those mind-numbing software programs will soon be obsolete anyway. Most coding

classes only teach children to assemble pre-made building blocks. Silicon Valley executives restrict their own social media use and send their own kids to tech-free schools.

Technology does not evolve naturally; programs and devices are promoted by those with a commercial interest in selling them. Ed tech is projected to be worth £129bn by 2020. This week, the world’s biggest ed tech convention, Bett, is in London, “Creating a better future by transforming education”. Google, Microsoft and Facebook are flogging expensive kit to cash-strapped schools using buzzwords such as “engagement” and “interactivity”. The traditional teacher-pupil hierarchy must be “flipped”, they say, “empowering” pupils to direct their own learning.

In reality, children tap on tablets whose inner workings are as arcane and mystical to them as any authoritarian deity – and stare, blinds down, at the giant interactive whiteboard. Children may be temporarily gripped, but their attention spans will shrink in the long term. Cyber-utopianism promises

magic bullets for poverty and the crooked timber of humanity. But it’s old-school solutions that really work in the classroom: good teachers, plenty of fresh air and exercise, and hands-on exploration of the real, physical world. This is even what “digital natives” themselves actually want: a Canadian study of e-learning in universities revealed that students preferred “ordinary, real-life lessons” and “a smart person at the front of the room”.

I don’t want my kids fed into the sausage machine of standardized testing and the bureaucratic “information economy”. I don’t want them to become robotic competitors to the robots we are told are taking their future jobs. I can opt my children out of RE, but where technology is concerned, I feel bound by a blind determinism. Surely we have a choice, as humans, over the direction technology is taking us, and education is the perfect illustration of this capacity. Our children turn up as blank slates, and learn to design the future. It’s time for schools to join the backlash. It’s time to think again.

(Source: news.ycombinator.com)

How to return a lost phone to its owner

If you’ve ever misplaced your smartphone, you know how hard it can be to retrieve a lost device. So when you find a deserted device, you should return it as soon as possible.

However, most people lock their phone screens for security, so when you need to track down the owner, you can’t simply fire up the Contacts app and start calling friends and family. Unless they printed their name and address in big letters on the back of the device, you’ll have to rely on other methods to restore the lost phone. Here are some tips we came up with, including a few from this Reddit thread.

■ Check the area

Don your detective hat and look around the area where you found the phone. Is a wallet or a coat, which could carry some contact details, nearby? Also look at the case, if there is one, because it might contain a business card, a credit card, an inscription, or another clue that will help identify the device’s owner.

While you’re examining the area, do you see anyone looking around forlornly for their missing device? Checking the people around you is the quickest way to restore the phone, and it also ensures that you don’t accidentally steal somebody’s device while their back is turned! The owner also might come rushing back to the area in search of their phone, so if you have time, hang around for a little while.

■ Keep the phone on

Before you start toying around with the lock screen, make sure to keep the phone switched on and the battery charged. You should leave it on because its owner will likely find another handset and call their own number as soon as they can. This way, you can pick up right away and arrange a meeting.

Of course, it’s impossible to keep a phone on if it dies. While you not find the charger next to the lost phone, you can use your own cables, or those of a friend, to juice up the handset. You’ll need a Lightning connector charger for iPhones and a microUSB or USB-C charger for Android devices. If you don’t have a compatible charger lying around somewhere, go on and buy another—it’s cheap, and the original owner will probably reimburse you.

■ Study the lock screen carefully

If the lost phone’s owner has saved emergency contact details in their device, you can access these friends from the lock screen. On an iOS device, tap the Emergency link in the lower left corner, then choose Medical ID. If you’ve picked up an Android phone, tap Emergency then Emergency Information. If you see an emergency contact listed, get in touch with them to find out whose phone you’ve found.

While you’re at it, you should probably add emergency contacts to your own phone’s lock screen—just in case. On an iPhone, open the Health app and tap the Medical ID button followed by Edit. On Android, you can find the relevant



screen by opening Settings, choosing Users & accounts, and selecting Emergency information.

■ Ask a digital assistant

By default, both iOS and Android let you access their digital assistants—Siri and Google Assistant, respectively—right from the lock screen (unless the phone owner has disabled the feature).

To pull up the assistant on an iPhone other than the X, press and hold the Home button (for the iPhone X, press and hold the Power button instead). On Android, tap and hold in the bottom left corner of the display (where the microphone icon appears) and then drag your finger up to the middle of the screen.

Once you’ve accessed Siri or Google Assistant, try saying “Call mom,” “Call home,” or another command that might access one of the phone’s owner’s contacts. Siri also has a trick that Google Assistant doesn’t: Ask “Whose phone is this?” to bring up contact details for the owner.

■ Take a photo

At this point, you’ve exhausted the options for reaching a phone’s owner through his or her contacts. Now it’s time to get creative. For example, this person might have some kind of photo and video backup system in place. This means

all pictures and movies shot on the phone will sync to the cloud—and to the owner’s other devices.

You can usually access a smartphone’s camera from its lock screen: On iOS, swipe left; on Android, tap the camera icon in the lower right corner and drag it toward the center of the display. To use this to your advantage, snap an image of your personal contact details. If the photo syncs to the phone owner’s backup system, he or she can easily reach out to you.

■ Set a reminder

In a similar vein, you can use Siri or Google Assistant to set a reminder that the phone’s owner will be able to see from another device. On iOS, press and hold Home (on the iPhone X, hold the Power button); on Android, tap and hold the microphone icon on the bottom left and then swipe up. When the assistant app appears, say, “Set a reminder for 2pm every day to call...” and then state your name and number.

If the owner of the phone is signed into their Apple or Google account on any other devices, they should have access to their reminders there. In that case, they’ll see the note you’ve left pop up at 2pm (or whatever time you choose) every day. After that, it’s up to them to get in touch.

(Source: Popular Science)

Cleaning up air pollution may strengthen global warming, scientists say

Pollution in the atmosphere is having an unexpected consequence, scientists say — it’s helping to cool the climate, masking some of the global warming that’s occurred so far. That means efforts worldwide to clean up the air may cause an increase in warming, as well as other climate effects, as this pollution disappears.

New research is helping to quantify just how big that effect might be. A study published this month in the journal *Geophysical Research Letters* suggests that eliminating the human emission of aerosols — tiny, air-polluting particles often released by industrial activities — could result in additional global warming of anywhere from half a degree to 1 degree Celsius.

Climate targets
This would virtually ensure that the planet will warm beyond the most stringent climate targets outlined in the Paris climate agreement. World leaders have set an ambitious goal of keeping global temperatures within 1.5 to 2 degrees Celsius of their preindustrial levels. But research suggests the world has already warmed by about 1 degree — meaning even another half a degree of warming could push the planet into dangerous territory. The research also suggests that removing aerosols could have striking regional consequences by causing major changes in precipitation and other weather patterns in certain parts of the world. Aerosols don’t linger



in the atmosphere for very long, meaning they don’t have time to spread around the world the way carbon dioxide and some other greenhouse gases do. Their effects tend to be strongest in the regions where they were emitted in the first place. This means the places where air pollution

is most severe are likely to experience some of the greatest effects if that pollution were to disappear. East Asia, where aerosol emissions are some of the highest in the world, would be likely to experience a strong increase in precipitation and extreme weather events. To a certain extent, these effects might carry

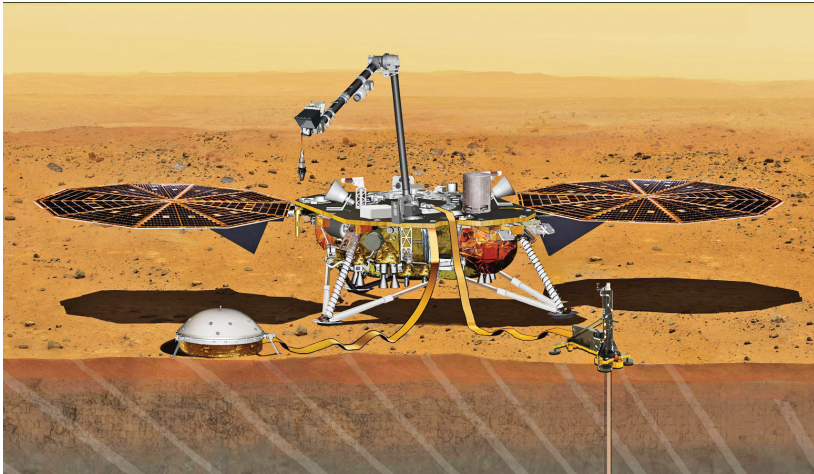
Aerosols don’t linger in the atmosphere for very long, meaning they don’t have time to spread around the world the way carbon dioxide and some other greenhouse gases do.

over to other parts of the Northern Hemisphere, which are connected to Asia via major atmospheric currents.

Changes in aerosols
“We also see that the impact that these aerosols have on temperature in Asia really transports northwards to the Arctic region, northern Europe, Norway, the northern U.S.,” Samset noted. “That part of the world is also quite sensitive to the changes in aerosols in Asia.”
The new study relied on four global climate models, which the researchers used to simulate the effects of removing all human-caused emissions of the major aerosols, including sulfate and carbon-based particles like soot. The resulting global warming, they concluded, would be anywhere from 0.5 to 1.1 degrees Celsius.
These results are in line with other studies that have investigated the cooling “mask” of aerosols. A 2016 paper published in *Nature Geoscience* found that up to a half-degree Celsius of the warming that has been observed in the Arctic — the most rapidly warming region on the planet — since 1980 was caused by pollution reductions in Europe. Like the new study, those findings speak to both the considerable cooling effect aerosols have had on the climate and to the atmospheric linkages between different regions of the Northern Hemisphere.

(Source: *Scientific American*)

NASA is sending a robot to Mars this spring to understand how planets are born



In 2018, NASA hopes to put a robot spacecraft on Mars in an attempt to understand how the Red Planet, Earth and other rocky planets are born.

NASA has made about a dozen and a half successful voyages to Mars since the 1960s. However, the robot on this trip will be the first to have two particular technologies designed to understand what goes on under the surface of the planet, Sue Smrekar, the deputy principal investigator of the mission, dubbed «InSight,» tells CNBC Make It.

“We have yet to look inside of Mars. We have only seen less than one percent of Mars,” says Smrekar. “What we are going to do now is look under the hood. We are going to look at the rest of Mars, the other 99.9 percent that we have never seen before.”

Spacecraft robot
A hypersensitive seismometer, which measures tremors in the ground, and a heat flow probe, which measures the temperature, will travel to Mars on a lander (a stationary spacecraft robot, as opposed to a rover, which moves around the surface on wheels) and will give NASA new insight into how Mars was created, says Smrekar, who works at the Jet Propulsion Lab in Pasadena, Calif.

Similar instruments have been used on the Moon, but they were operated by astronauts. On Mars, a robot arm will operate the seismometer and heat flow probe without any humans.

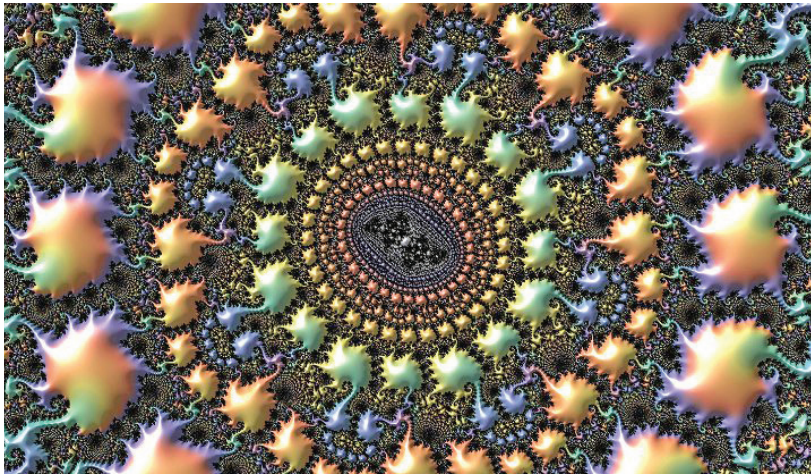
Both tools being sent are of exception-

ally high quality. The seismometer was developed and contributed by the French space agency Centre National d’Etudes Spatiales and the heat flow probe, which will stretch between three and five meters underground, is from the German Aerospace Center.

Mission to Red Planet
“Previous missions to Mars have investigated the surface history of the Red Planet by examining features like canyons, volcanoes, rocks and soil, but no one has attempted to investigate the planet’s earliest evolution — its building blocks — which can only be found by looking far below the surface,” NASA says of its mission to Mars in an overview statement.
“By studying the size, thickness, density and overall structure of the Red Planet’s core, mantle and crust, as well as the rate at which heat escapes from the planet’s interior, the InSight mission will provide glimpses into the evolutionary processes of all of the rocky planets in the inner Solar System.”
In particular, the mission will help NASA learn where there is ice and whether there is liquid water under
The rocket that takes the lander to Mars is scheduled to depart from California on May 5 and is due to arrive on Mars on Nov. 26, the Monday after Thanksgiving. To bring the robot to Mars, a rocket launches from the Earth’s orbit and a parachute lowers the spacecraft down onto the surface of the planet.

(Source: *cnn.com*)

Scientists have confirmed a brand-new phase of matter



For months now, there’s been speculation that researchers might have finally created time crystals - strange crystals that have an atomic structure that repeats not just in space, but in time, putting them in constant oscillation without energy.

Now it’s official - researchers have just reported in detail how to make and measure these bizarre crystals. And two independent teams of scientists claim they’ve actually created time crystals in the lab based off this blueprint, confirming the existence of an entirely new phase of matter.
The discovery might sound pretty abstract, but it heralds in a whole new era in physics - for decades we’ve been studying matter that’s defined as being ‘in equilibrium’, such as metals and insulators.

Time crystals
But it’s been predicted that there are many more strange types of matter out there in the Universe that aren’t in equilibrium that we haven’t even begun to look into, including time crystals. And now we know they’re real.
The fact that we now have the first example of non-equilibrium matter could lead to breakthroughs in our understanding of the world around us, as well as new technology such as quantum computing.
“This is a new phase of matter, period, but it is also really cool because it is one of the first examples of non-equilibrium matter,” said lead researcher Norman Yao from the University of California, Berkeley.
“For the last half-century, we have been exploring equilibrium matter, like metals and insulators. We are just now starting to

explore a whole new landscape of non-equilibrium matter.”

Let’s take a step back for a second, because the concept of time crystals has been floating around for a few years now.

First predicted by Nobel-Prize winning theoretical physicist Frank Wilczek back in 2012, time crystals are structures that appear to have movement even at their lowest energy state, known as a ground state.

Usually when a material is in ground state, also known as the zero-point energy of a system, it means movement should theoretically be impossible, because that would require it to expend energy.

But time crystals have a structure that repeats in time, not just in space. And it keeps oscillating in its ground state.

The big difference
Imagine it like jelly - when you tap it, it repeatedly jiggles. The same thing happens in time crystals, but the big difference here is that the motion occurs without any energy.
A time crystal is like constantly oscillating jelly in its natural, ground state, and that’s what makes it a whole new phase of matter - non-equilibrium matter. It’s incapable of sitting still.
Yao and his team have now come up with a detailed blueprint that describes exactly how to make and measure the properties of a time crystal, and even predict what the various phases surrounding the time crystals should be - which means they’ve mapped out the equivalent of the solid, liquid, and gas phases for the new phase of matter.

(Source: *sciencealert.com*)

Why scientists still can’t define ‘modern’ human

On January 25, scientists announced the discovery of the oldest modern human fossil ever found outside of Africa — a nearly 200,000-year-old jawbone, complete with teeth, unearthed at Misliya Cave in Israel.

The Misliya fossil is the first real, tangible, physical evidence that humans left the African continent at least 50,000 years earlier than previously believed. It also supports the larger theory that modern humans, meaning humans who appear physically the way humans do today, became modern much earlier than we’d originally thought, a theory which is hard to fully grasp in and of itself because we still can’t pinpoint what defines a ‘modern’ human in the first place.

The idea that the modern human species is around 200,000 years old was our prevailing narrative of Homo sapiens evolution — right up until last year, when a team working in Morocco found modern Homo sapiens fossils more than 300,000 years old.

Of all the unresolved ideas to which the Misliya fossil pertains, Rolf Quam, a biological anthropologist at Binghamton University and a co-author of the Science paper on the Misliya discovery, said the definition of a ‘modern’ human is the most contentious.

There are physical signposts, sure. Brow ridges in modern humans are softer and smaller than in archaic humans. Our skeletons are narrower, Quam said, and overall less rugged. Our brains got bigger and our teeth got smaller.

The problem, though, is that early modern humans were no more identical to one another than we are to the other humans around us now. Our tooth size, for instance, varies widely from one person to the next, and it did back then, too; there were Homo sapiens with big teeth and Neanderthals with small ones.

(Source: *Newsweek*)

GOLD mission will observe how weather on Earth and in space interact

NASA’s Global-scale Observations of the Limb and Disk (GOLD) launched on January 25, and researchers hope it will help them better understand how space and the Earth’s upper atmosphere interact. The goal is to better protect satellites and astronauts aboard the International Space Station.

The pretty auroras that sometimes dance across northern skies are also an indication of intense space activity. The lights you see are actually charged particles from our sun interacting with the magnetic fields surrounding our planet. During periods of intense activity, the sun’s charged particles can disrupt satellite communications.

Events from below can also affect the atmosphere, like hurricanes or tsunamis. These weather events can change wind patterns in the upper atmosphere, causing dramatic shifts that are still poorly understood.

Scientists plan to use GOLD to better map the thermosphere — the atmospheric zone where Earth’s weather and the weather in space meet. It will be the first time that scientists can watch the two systems interact with each other with high-resolution imagery. Greater insights into the workings of the thermosphere will help improve forecasts and help keep astronauts and satellites safe from solar flares.

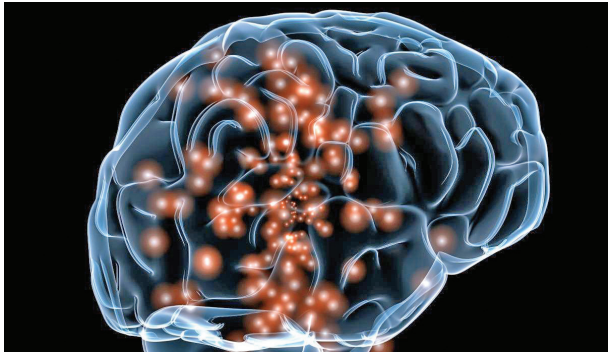
The \$66 million GOLD is about the size of a mini-fridge and is designed to measure far ultraviolet light. It will examine the Earth from above the Western Hemisphere and generate full-disk maps of atmospheric patterns.

“Just like an infrared camera allows you to see how temperatures change with different colors, GOLD images ultraviolet light to provide a map of the Earth that reveals how temperature and atmospheric composition change by location,” Richard Estes, GOLD principal investigator at the Laboratory for Atmospheric and Space Physics at the University of Colorado, Boulder, said in a statement.

(Source: *Seeker*)

Researchers used VR to gain insight into brain’s assembling of memories

Researchers are using virtual reality (VR) to better explore how human brains assemble memories and organize them in context. In a new study, published in the journal *Nature Communications*, researchers put human volunteer subjects into a VR experience and then observed the activity in their hippocampus.



Researchers from the University of California, Davis, studied how our brains assemble memories within context of time and space by immersing participants in a VR experience. Afterwards, the scientists used functional magnetic resonance imaging, or fMRI, to observe activity in the hippocampus while the subjects recalled their memories of the experience.

In the VR experience, the subjects “went” into different houses that had different objects in them. They tried to memorize the objects in two separate contexts — which video and which house. This tested both episodic (video) and spatial (house) memory, which each activated different regions of the hippocampus.

This study allowed the researchers to identify a region of the hippocampus that is involved in recalling shared information about contexts (such as virtual objects that were in the same video) and another distinct area that is involved in remembering differences in context. Additionally, the experiment revealed that hippocampus is involved in episodic memories that link time and space, contradicting the previous thinking that the hippocampus codes mostly for spatial memories.

Additionally, VR systems could allow for surgeons to better assess and view the operating area before a procedure is performed. The tech could even be further applied as a diagnostic tool to provide a 3-dimensional, immersive look at patients’ bodies that could reveal aspects of a diagnosis that might have otherwise gone unseen.

(Source: *Popular Science*)

Eye-Catching Success of Bank Pasargad in Establishing Intl. Relations and Brokerage

Bank Pasargad gained significant achievements in establishing international relations and brokerage, the Public Relations Dept. of Bank Pasargad reported.

As a successful bank in the domestic and international arena, Bank Pasargad has established excellent relationship with other banks and financial institutions abroad, the report added.

Establishing brokerage relationship with more than 75 banks actively and concluding financing contracts with numerous banks and finance-credit institutions are of sa-

lient achievements of the bank.

For his part, Khosrow Rafiei Advisor to the Chief Executive of Bank Pasargad said: “after the implementation of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the official title of nuclear deal, Bank Pasargad managed to establish new relationship with more than 60 banks in countries including Austria, Belgium, China, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Oman, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Liechtenstein, Thailand, Taiwan, Turkey, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and UK.

Also, after the implementation of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Bank Pasargad succeeded in opening 29 new accounts (with 21 foreign brokers) and also activating 14 previously opened accounts (with nine foreign broker banks), Rafiei maintained.

With regard to the measures of this bank taken in the field of financing projects, he reiterated: “The bank concluded separate contracts with a number of international banks and financial institutions with regard to the midterm financing and short-term financing (refinance),” Rafiei concluded.

Over 493,000 tons of goods transacted in IME

About 493,726 tons of goods, valued at over 11,964 billion rials, was traded at Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) during the week ending Jan. 25, Public Relations and International Affairs Dept. of the Exchange reported.

In the industrial and products’ hall, 148,919 tons of various types of goods, valued at 4,636

billion rials, was traded in the same period.

Given the above issue, 131,707 tons of steel, 7,540 tons of copper, 3,400 tons of aluminum, 12 tons of concentrate of precious metals, 160 tons of molybdenum concentrate, 6,100 tons of cement and also 20 kg of gold bullion were purchased by customers in Iran

Mercantile Exchange, the report added.

Also, 247,036 tons of various types of oil and petrochemical products, valued at 5,958 billion rials, was sold in the same period.

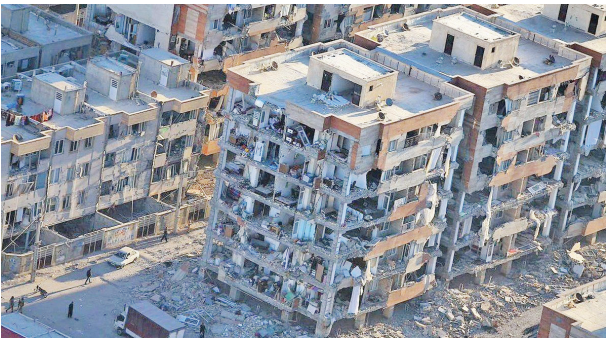
It should be noted that 68,468 tons of bitumen, 62,299 tons of polymer products, 68,075 tons of bottom vacuum, 19,000

tons of lube cut, 22,091 tons of chemicals, 2,320 tons of sulfur, 950 tons of humid insulation and 2,200 tons of slap wax and also 1,633 tons of heavy wax paraffin oil were purchased at this market, the Public Relations Dept. of the Iran Mercantile Exchange reported.

‘Only 10% of Tehraners ready for earthquake’

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Just around 10 percent of citizens in Tehran are prepared for earthquakes, the director of Tehran’s Disaster Mitigation and Management Organization said on Saturday.

This is all due to the fact that provided instructions are inadequate and/or ineffective, Tasnim news agency quoted Ahmad Sadeqi as saying.



Emphasizing on the need for providing the public with more practical education about earthquake, he highlighted that factors such as habitation of 1.5 million Tehraners in rundown areas, high population density, narrow passages and lack of equipment are increasing the potential dangers of any earthquake in Tehran.

Need for better emergency transport

According to a hypothetical scenario for a massive tremor in Tehran, if main streets and highways are blocked, the lives of 100,000 badly injured citizens who need to be transferred to medical centers will be seriously endangered, increasing the number of fatalities, Sadeqi added.

He went on to say that one of the prioritized projects of Tehran Municipality regarding earthquake is developing and improving emergency transport system.

Recently, Tehran Municipality proposed 20 prioritized projects which are believed to strengthen the metropolis against a possible massive earthquake, naming it as ‘Tehran’s comprehensive plan for disaster mitigation and management.’

Donald Trump says he might sign back up to a revamped Paris accord

President Donald Trump would be willing to sign the U.S. back up to the Paris climate accord, but only if the treaty undergoes major change, he has said in comments published on Sunday.

Trump was met with global condemnation when he announced in June 2017 that the United States was pulling out of the Paris climate agreement, painting it a “bad deal” for the U.S. economy.

While the president remains firm in his criticism of the historic accord, which was signed by his predecessor Barack Obama, he said he would be willing to sign up to a revamped deal.

“The Paris accord, for us, would have been a disaster,” he told Britain’s ITV channel in an interview to be aired late on Sunday in the UK.

“If they made a good deal... there’s always a chance we’d get back,” Trump added, describing the current agreement as “terrible” and “un-fair” to the U.S.

The landmark treaty was agreed by 197 nations in 2015 after intense negotiations in Paris, where all countries made voluntary carbon-cutting pledges running to 2030. *(Source: irishtimes.com)*

LEARN ENGLISH

Turn Left Here!

A: **Hurry up**, get in!
B: I’m in, let’s go!
A: OK, **make a left** here...no wait, I meant make a right. Come on **speed up**!
B: Geeze! What’s the **rush**?
A: Don’t worry about it, just drive. Oh, no, the light is about to change... **step on it**!
B: Are you **nuts**? I’m not going to **run a red light**!
A: Whatever. Just turn right here. The freeway will be **packed** at this hour.... Let’s take a **side street**. Go on! Get out of our way! Move, move!
B: What’s your problem? Geez. **Having a fit** is not going to help!
A: Here, I know a **short cut**... just go down here and we’ll **cut through** Ashburn Heights. Let’s go, let’s go! **Watch out** for that lady!
B: I’m going as fast as I can!
A: Yes! We made it. 5:58, just before the library closes.
B: You’re such a **geek**!
■ **Key vocabulary**
hurry up: move faster
make a left: turn left
speed up: go faster
rush: a situation in which you need to hurry
step on it: drive a lot faster
nuts: crazy
run a red light: to drive quickly through a red traffic light instead of stopping
packed: full, having lots of cars
side street: a street that is smaller than a main street, but is often connected to it
have a fit: get very angry
short cut: a quicker and more direct way of getting somewhere than the usual one
cut through: quickly go past or though something that blocks you
watch out: used to tell someone to be careful
geek: a person who is single-minded or accomplished in scientific or technical pursuits but is felt to be socially inept
■ **Supplementary vocabulary**
road rage: be very angry at other drivers while driving
back street: small street that is away from the main streets
U-turn: a 180 degree turn in the car
to back up: to move backwards, the opposite of go forwards
to pass: to drive past another car on the road to pass a car on the road
to park: to stop the car and turn off the engine
(Source: irlanguage.com)



Generous sky blankets Iran with heavy snow

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Heavy snow has covered the Iranian capital, Tehran, and other cities in 17 provinces across the country.



ISNA/ Borna Ghasemi



TASNIM/ Mohammad Ali Marizad

Snow began falling on Friday in western provinces and reached central regions by Saturday night, causing disruption in road and air transport.

East and West Azarbaijan, Ardabil, Zanjan, Alborz and Tehran provinces were swept by snow over the past two days. Some high-altitude regions are buried in more than 1.5 meters of snow.

Schools and universities of most snow-hit provinces were closed on Saturday and Sunday. Even government offices were shut down in Alborz province on Sunday. Power cuts were also reported in some neighborhoods of Tehran province.

All flights were cancelled in both Tehran’s Imam Khomeini and Mehrabad international airports until further notice.

Thousands of cars got stuck and were unable to move on Tehran-Karaj highway, western Tehran, on Saturday night. One of the passengers told the Tehran Times that he had reached his home in Karaj after going through 12 hours of standstill traffic. “Many cars have run out of gas,” he regretted.

Some highways were closed by the police in Zanjan and Qazvin provinces as icy roads were causing traffic accidents.

More than 1,400 individuals who were stuck in snow storm have been provided with temporary shelter, Fars quoted head of Relief and Rescue Organization of Iran’s Red Crescent Society Morteza Salimi as saying on Sunday. Salimi has added that rescue teams were doubled to handle the situation.

Caught by surprise

Once again, the lack of necessary infrastructure in order to ease traffic congestion, especially in roads linking central Tehran to its provincial cities and other provinces such as Zanjan, Alborz, and Qom as well have caused a great deal of discomfort for the citizens.

However, despite all troubles people are going through they are all delighted by the heavy snow after months of low precipitations in the country.

Nonetheless the urban management certainly needs to be more prepared to manage the aftermaths of a snowfall and we also need to pray the sky to be kinder to us.



TASNIM/ Masoud Shahrestani



Air pollution linked to ‘extremely high mortality’ in people with mental disorders

The risk of death for people with mental and behavioral disorders rises sharply on days when air pollution reaches toxic peaks, a major study in Hong Kong has found.

Researchers analyzed a decade of death statistics and revealed a strong link, with the mortality risk rising 16% on the first day of haze and 27% on the second day compared to normal days. If the haze was accompanied by high ozone pollution, the risk of death increased by 79%.

The new research tallies with other recent work that has found links between short-term increases in air pollution and suicides. However, scientists do not yet understand how air pollution may cause these effects and they are urging more research, as well as immediate help for those at risk.

“First of all we need more support to those high-risk groups,” said Lin Yang, at Hong Kong Polytechnic University and one of the research team. “Currently we have a lot of social workers to give support to people with mental disorders. But they probably need to pay attention to the fact that haze events could be a trigger for acute onset of symptoms.”

“Of course, as a priority, what governments need to do is control air pollution. That is the best way to eradicate the problem – from

the source,” she said.

Prof Jonathan Grigg, at Queen Mary University of London in the UK and not part of the research team, said: “The association between poor air quality and mortality due to mental and behavioral disorders reported in this study is very disturbing.”

The Hong Kong research, published in the journal Environment International, is the first to analyses the link of haze days and risk of death. Haze days are those on which pollutants gather in the air and cut visibility, usually dry days with low winds. In the study period from 2007 to 2014, there were 111 haze days when particle pollution was on average twice as high.

The scientists examined more than 284,000 deaths, including those among people with mental and behavioral disorders including depression, bipolar, schizophrenia and dementia.

“Although a hazy day generally has 2.9% higher risk [of death] than a day without haze, a very intense adverse effect is found on the mortality associated with mental and behavior disorders,” the researchers reported. “A combined influence of haze, extreme weather/air quality and urban environment can result in extremely high mortality.”

World’s oceans rise to hottest temperatures ever recorded ‘by far’

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“From the mechanism point of view, for now, we don’t have very solid evidence or hypotheses,” said Yang. But she said earlier work may provide clues: “Haze days are very likely to trigger an acute depression response in people. This has been shown in surveys in 2013 in Indonesia, where there was a big disaster of haze from forest fires.”

(Source: The Independent)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ↔ چ

Rangers’ protection bill aims to crack down on poachers

Iran’s Department of Environment will put forward rangers’ protection bill to the cabinet next week, which aims to make\ regulations and restrictions more stringent on poachers.

“The bill proposes harsh punishments for poachers who attack rangers and help to expedite the decision-making process for the cases involving rangers,” the deputy DOE director for legal affairs said.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-acity (-ocity)”

■ **Meaning:** quality of
■ **For example:** The speedboat reached a *velocity* of 120 mph.

PHRASAL VERB

Flash back

■ **Meaning:** to suddenly think about or show something that happened in the past, especially in a film, book etc.
■ **For example:** From here the movie flashes back to Billy’s first meeting with Schultz.

IDIOM

Go back to the drawing board

■ **Explanation:** start over
■ **For example:** The current system just isn’t working – we need to go back to the drawing board and start afresh.

ارائه لایحه حمایت از محیط بانان برای مجازات شکارچیان غیرقانونی

سازمان حفاظت محیط زیست لایحه حمایت از محیط بانان را که در جهت ایجاد سازوکار قانونی و اعمال محدودیت های جدی تر بر شکارچیان غیرقانونی می باشد را هفته آینده تقدیم دولت خواهد کرد. معاون حقوقی و امور مجلس سازمان حفاظت محیط زیست کشور گفت: این لایحه خواستار اشد مجازات برای ضاربان محیط بان و تسریع در روند رسیدگی به پرونده های متخلفان است.

Afghanistan still hunted by Taliban

➡ These acts are against the people of Afghanistan, against reconciliation, against peace. For too long, the aspiration of many to live in peace has been hijacked by the struggle for power of a few. As the European Union, we have always worked and will keep working with the people of Afghanistan, with its government, with the many who seek peace.

■ Trump demands ‘decisive action’ against Taliban after Kabul blast

Elsewhere, the United States President Donald Trump has called for “decisive action” against the Taliban terrorist group by “all countries” in Afghanistan following yet another terrorist bombing attack in the country’s capital Kabul that killed about 100 people.

“I condemn the despicable car bombing attack in Kabul today that has left scores of innocent civilians dead and hundreds injured,” Trump said in a statement released on Saturday. “This murderous attack renews our resolve and that of our Afghan partners.”

“Now, all countries should take decisive action against the Taliban and the terrorist infrastructure that supports them,” he emphasized.

“The Taliban’s cruelty will not prevail,” Trump further claimed. “The United States is committed to a secure Afghanistan that is free from terrorists who would target Americans, our allies and anyone who does not share their wicked ideology.”

■ Tillerson censures “senseless” Kabul attack

The U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson also censured the “senseless” attack, insisting there can be “no tolerance for those, who support or offer sanctuary to terrorist groups.”

“The Taliban’s use of an ambulance as a weapon to target civilians represents inhumane disregard for the people of Afghanistan and all those working to bring peace to the country,” Tillerson emphasized, adding that the attack breached “the most basic international norms.”

The top U.S. diplomat further stated, “All countries who support peace in Afghanistan have an obligation to take decisive action to stop the Taliban’s campaign of violence.”



■ Trump: Islamabad’s “lies” & “deceit”

Trump administration has repeatedly accused Pakistan of neglect in cracking down on Taliban-linked militant groups such as the Haqqani faction.

Trump has also lashed out at Pakistan in early January, slamming what he referred to as Islamabad’s “lies” and “deceit” in the fight against terrorism -- with Washington suspending hundreds of millions of dollars in military assistance to the country.

The Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and military are widely alleged by the international community and the Afghan government to have provided support to the Taliban during their founding and time in power, and of continuing to support the Taliban during the insurgency. Pakistan states that it dropped all support for the group after the September 11 attacks.

■ Kabul still hunted by fear of Taliban

An explosives-packed ambulance was used for the latest Kabul bombing. Terrified survivors fled the crowded area of the Afghan capital, which was scattered with

body parts, blood and debris, and hospitals were overwhelmed by the large number of wounded, estimated to number at least 158.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the fatal attack a week after it claimed an assault on the Intercontinental Hotel in the Afghan capital, in which over 20 people lost their lives.

Many parts of Afghanistan remain plagued by terrorism despite the presence of thousands of foreign troops.

■ Taliban, recognized only by three states: Pakistan, UAE and the Saudi regime

The Taliban meaning “students”, which refers to itself as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), is a Takfiri terrorist group in Afghanistan currently waging war within that country. Since 2016, the Taliban’s leader is Mawlawi Hibatullah Akhundzada.

From 1996 to 2001, the Taliban held power over roughly three quarters of Afghanistan, and enforced there a strict interpretation of Sharia, or Islamic law. The Taliban emerged in 1994 as one of the prominent factions in the Afghan Civil War, and largely consisted of students recently trained in madrassas in Pakistan.

Turkey’s Syria operation damages ancient temple in Afrin

An ancient temple has seriously been damaged in Syria’s northwestern city of Afrin, where Turkey is leading an operation against the United States-backed Kurdish militants.

The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said the Iron Age Ain Dara Temple was exposed to Turkish shelling.

The shelling had caused significant damage but no casualties, the Britain-based monitoring group added. Pictures circulating online also showed damage to the site.

Meanwhile, the General Directorate for Antiquities and Museums at the Ministry of Culture condemned “the Turkish aggression on archaeological sites in Afrin.”

In a statement carried by Syria’s official SANA news agency, the directorate further called for international pressure on Turkey “to prevent the targeting of archaeological and cultural sites in Afrin area, which is one of the richest areas in antiquities and cultural heritage in Syria.”

The statement said the attack “reflects the extent of hatred, malevolence and the barbarism of the Turkish regime against the Syrian identity and against the past of the Syrian people and their present and future.”

Turkey launched the so-called Operation Olive Branch in Afrin last week in a bid to eliminate the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG/Yekineyên Parastina Gel), which Ankara views as a terror organization and the Syrian branch of the outlawed Kurdish Workers Party (PKK/Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê).

Turkey has warned that its operation in Afrin could expand to the nearby Syrian city of Manbij.

The Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu says the United States forces need to withdraw from Syria’s northern Manbij region immediately.

The U.S. military, however, has called on Turkey to halt its military action against Kurdish militants and focus on combating the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist outfit.

Speaking on Saturday, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said the U.S. military forces need to immediately withdraw from Manbij. He also noted that Ankara wanted to see concrete steps by Washington to end its support for the Syrian Kurdish force.

■ Syria Kurds boycott Russia peace talks over Turkish incursion

Elsewhere, Syria’s main Kurdish militant group has announced that it will boycott upcoming peace talks in Russia over a military incursion by Turkey into territories held by Kurds in northern Syria.

Fawza al-Yussef, an official in Syria’s Kurdish region, said delegates from the enclave will not attend talks in Sochi next week only due to Turkey’s offensive against Afrin, a Kurdish city in the Syrian province of Aleppo.

“We said before that if the situation remained the same in Afrin we could not attend Sochi,” said Yussef, adding that the operation in Afrin “contradicts the principle of political dialogue.”

The talks in Sochi on Monday and Tuesday are sponsored by Russia, Iran and Turkey. Ankara had opposed the contribution of the Syrian Kurds to the initiative since it was launched last year. The operation in Afrin, which drew condemnations from Washington, began on January 20 in an apparent bid to protect the Turkish-backed militants in and around Afrin against YPG.

Russia, Iran and Turkey hoped the talks in Sochi could compensate for lack of progress in UN-brokered talks to end Syria’s seven-year war. The three countries have coordinated the establishment of de-escalation zones in Syria; a separate initiative which many say has helped drastically reduce fighting in the country.

However, Sochi’s prospects of success hit a fresh snag Saturday when the Syrian Negotiation Commission, an umbrella opposition group supported by the House of Saud



regime, announced that its representatives will be absent from the negotiations.

■ France: Thousands protest in Paris against Turkish offensive in Afrin

Meantime, thousands of protesters marched through central Paris, on Saturday, to condemn the Turkish military operations against Kurdish militias in Afrin, northern Syria.

Afrin is a district as well as a city in northern Syria. As a district (mantiqah) of the Syrian Arab Republic, it is part of the Aleppo Governorate. However, since 2012, the Syrian government has lost control of the district, and as the capital of Afrin Canton it is now part of the de facto autonomous region of Rojava. The total population of the district as of 2005 was recorded at 172,095 people, of whom 36,562 lived in the town of Afrin itself. The town and district are named for the Afrin River. The town of Afrin is located next to a bridge of the Aleppo road. The city is split into two distinct halves by the river.

(Source: agencies)

BBC accused of silencing harassment victims

The BBC is facing multiple investigations after being accused of “silencing” gender discrimination and harassment victims through its use of non-disclosure agreements, The Independent can reveal.

Tony Hall, the director general, will be questioned on the issue by the influential Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee next week, while the Women and Equalities Select Committee would also now debate the issue, its chair Maria Miller said.

Dozens of cross-party MPs have also

written to the National Audit Office (NAO) demanding it too launch a formal inquiry.

The broadcaster stopped using so-called “gagging” clauses in 2013 in the wake of the Jimmy Savile scandal. But there are fears the BBC is using public money to fund court confidential settlements, known as non-disclosure agreements (NDAs), in order to keep allegations secret.

In a joint letter signed by 30 MPs including senior Conservative Nicky Morgan, the former Education Secretary, and parliamentarians from

Labour, the SNP and the Liberal Democrats, they suggested the BBC’s use of the legal documents was “silencing the voices of victims”.

The letter said: “In our view the use of public money – collected from our constituents through the license fee – to conduct legal proceedings which pay off and silence victims whilst covering up wrongdoing would be wholly unacceptable and we feel that this matter must be investigated as a matter of urgency.”

Last night, the BBC confirmed that it continues to use settlement agreements

that include confidentiality clauses to stop employees speaking out. It refused to disclose how many have been issued in recent years and said their use was “limited”.

Tory MP Damian Collins, chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, told The Independent “the issue was likely to be raised” on Wednesday, while Miller, a former Conservative culture secretary, said the use of NDAs was an issue “we should all be concerned about”.

(Source: agencies)

On first anniversary, protesters decry Trump’s Muslim ban outside White House

On the one-year anniversary of President Donald Trump’s executive order on travel ban, protesters have rallied in front of the White House under the banner of “No Muslim Ban EVER.”

A week after taking office, Trump signed an order on January 27, 2017, banning citizens of seven Muslim-majority nations from entering the United States.

The ban, which the administration said was for national security reasons, sparked mass protests in airports across the country and triggered swift moves by courts to block the order.

That nationwide backlash joined the ranks of the historic

Women’s March in Washington, which rocked Trump’s inauguration and became a defining moment in organized opposition against the new administration.

Protesters on Saturday decried the ban, holding signs that read, “No Muslim Ban” and “Refugees welcome.”

A group of Muslims held a mass prayer in front of the White House in Washington DC, to protest the U.S. President Donald Trump’s travel ban on the one year anniversary of its signing.

“We strongly condemn, like you, the racist and white supremacist beliefs reflected in President Trump’s remarks, actions and programs by this Muslim ban, the cancelling of DACA, the labeling of Black Lives Matter as identity extrem-

ists — a false designation,” Robert McCaw of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) said at the protest.

“We will fight the white supremacy of this administration,” he added.

Trump has said the travel restrictions are needed to tighten security and prevent terrorist attacks. Opponents say the ban violates the U.S. Constitution because it discriminates against Muslims and certain nationalities.

During the 2016 presidential race, Trump campaigned for “a total and complete shutdown” of Muslims entering the United States on the pretext of preventing attacks.

(Source: Press TV)

2 officers killed in Colombia police station bombings

Two overnight bombings that targeted police stations in Colombia’s Caribbean region killed two officers and wounded seven other people, authorities said on Sunday, a day after a similar attack killed five officers and wounded 40.

One of the new attacks killed two officers and wounded a third just before midnight in rural Bolivar province, police said in a statement, while the other occurred in Soledad about four hours later, according to a police source.

Six people were wounded by the explosion there, five of them police officers, the police source said.

Dumek Turbay, the governor of Bolivar province, wrote on Twitter that the violence was “disgusting and vile”.

Authorities have arrested one person in connection to Saturday morning’s bombing in the port city of Barranquilla, which officials said could have been retaliation for police raids targeting criminal gangs.

Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos visited the wounded after that explosion and vowed the government would not rest until the perpetrators were caught. Colombia has myriad crime gangs, some of which operate across large swaths of rural territory and others in major cities. Many are involved in the production and trafficking of cocaine, largely to the United States and Europe, as well as extortion and other crimes.

(Source: Reuters)



Russian opposition leader Navalny detained at Moscow rally

➡ “Sooner or later they will cut your door too.”

■ Police are everywhere

Ahead of his detention Navalny said police officers had been watching his residential building and garage. “Police, police, police are everywhere,” he added.

Putin’s spokesman Dmitry Peskov warned earlier this week that unsanctioned rallies would lead to “certain consequences” -- a thinly-veiled promise of punishment.

Last year Navalny mounted a forceful bid to run for president but officials ruled him ineligible due to a criminal conviction which he says is politically motivated.

Navalny has said he would use the full force of his campaign -- including over 200,000 volunteers -- to organize “voters’ strikes” and encourage Russians to stay away from polling stations on Election Day.

After 18 years of leadership, both as president and prime minister, Putin fatigue is spreading across Russia.

The Kremlin’s biggest headache is the possibility of a low turnout which will harm Putin’s hopes for a strong new mandate, analysts say.

Navalny seeks to take the shine off Putin’s expected victory and highlight voter apathy in his crusade against the 65-year-old leader.

Putin won the previous election in 2012 on a turnout of 65 percent and authorities are pulling out all the stops to boost the figures this year.

(Source: AFP)

A global wish for honest leaders

➡ Brazil has made the most progress in exposing corruption, even up to the presidency. “Impunity is no longer the rule,” writes Sérgio Moro, the judge overseeing the so-called Car Wash investigations that have felled dozens of top leaders, in Americas Quarterly.

Lately, Argentina has taken the spotlight. Since the election of Mauricio Macri as president in 2015, and after a renewed mandate in 2017, the country has seen social and economic reforms that reflect a popular demand against corruption. At least five prominent former officials, including a vice president, have been charged with corruption.

“People showed in [the] 2015 and 2017 elections that they were tired of decay, inefficiency and corruption but ready and hungry for a different and effective recipe for individual and national progress,” states Laura Alonso, the head of Argentina’s national anti-corruption office, in the same publication. Mr. Macri’s reforms are built on “a sustained social demand,” she adds.

This year, Argentina assumed the presidency of the Group of Twenty, a club of wealthy countries that has helped set higher global standards against corruption over the past decade. If Argentina can use the experience of Latin America to propel this cause into a truly global movement, then perhaps Norway’s prime minister might get her wish.

(Source: The CSM)

Salvaging the legacy of the FBI

➡ • An experienced case agent would have demanded a grand jury, and interviewed Hillary for a minimum of two full days based on the amount of contradictions in previous testimony and recovered emails.

• An experienced agent would never allow a subject in an investigation (Cheryl Mills) to witness the interview of another subject (Hillary Clinton). This is akin to providing answers to an exam.

It appears that Mr. Strzok is either a totally incompetent FBI agent or in the bag for Hillary. My guess of the latter is based on the facts and circumstances presented above.

The media is reporting that Mr. Wray threatened to resign rather than reassign Mr. McCabe. If that’s the case, then it is my belief that his resignation would be the first step in restoring the FBI’s Fidelity, Bravery and Integrity.

Mr. McCabe’s continued presence in his position not only presents the appearance of a conflict of interest but is also another sign that Mr. Wray will not take action and demonstrate leadership. If the FBI permanently loses the trust of the American public, then what next?

(Source: The Washington Times)

IOC confirms 169 Russians cleared to compete in Pyeongchang

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has confirmed that 169 Russian athletes have been cleared to compete at next month's Pyeongchang Winter Olympic Games.

The IOC banned Russia last month from Pyeongchang over "systematic manipulation" of the anti-doping system at the 2014 Sochi Games. It left the door open to athletes with no history of doping to compete as neutrals, officially known as "Olympic Athletes from Russia". The Olympic body this week said the exclusion of certain athletes from the list of eligible Russians did not necessarily mean they had doped. "Following a detailed and comprehensive invitation process, the IOC confirmed today invitations to 169 athletes who can compete as "Olympic Athlete from Russia", " the IOC said on Saturday. "They were chosen from the pool of 389 athletes who could potentially be invited to the Games depending on available quota places."

The IOC's statement confirmed an announcement by Stanislav Pozdnyakov, Vice President of the Russian Olympic Committee, on Thursday. He said 169 athletes had been cleared, adding that the top athletes "did not make it on to this list".

Russia has repeatedly denied any state involvement in doping. *(Source: Reuters)*

Former Real Madrid star Kaka scores twice for Barcelona

Former Real Madrid and AC Milan attacker Kaka scored twice as Ecuadorian side Barcelona defeated Peru's Sport Boys 6-2 in an exhibition match. Kaka retired from football in December after leaving MLS outfit Orlando City as the curtain came down on a decorated career for the Brazilian star.

However, Kaka put on the boots again, the 35-year-old a special guest for Noche Amarilla – "Yellow Night" in Spanish – as Barcelona presented their squad in Guayaquil on Saturday.

And more than 60,000 fans packed into Estadio Monumental to watch Kaka net a brace. Former Uruguayan international Diego Forlan was a guest in 2017, while Ronaldinho featured the year before.

(Source: Goal)

Messi: Barcelona more balanced without Neymar

No Neymar? No worries for LaLiga leaders Barcelona, who are more balanced without the Brazilian star, according to Lionel Messi.

Barca lost Neymar in the off-season after French giants Paris Saint-Germain sensationally activated his €222million release clause in August. Neymar was a key member of Barca's famed 'MSN' forward trio, alongside Messi and Luis Suarez, helping the club to two LaLiga titles and the Champions League among others.

But five-time Ballon d'Or winner Messi said Barca are better without the Brazil star.

"Without Neymar we are more balanced," Messi told World Soccer. "His departure meant a change in our way of playing, we lost a lot of attacking potential, but it helped in the defensive sense. "We are currently very well armed in the midfield; this makes us stronger in defence."

Barca are also preparing for the last 16 of the Champions League, where they will meet Chelsea for a spot in the quarter-finals.

However, Messi believes another English side – Pep Guardiola's Manchester City – are the team to watch, along with PSG.

"Manchester City are one of the strongest teams in the world at the moment," the Argentina attacker said. "The same goes for PSG.

"However, there's a lot of football still to play and I don't rule out Real Madrid yet as they have a lot of quality and experience. Then there's Bayern Munich, another great team who will fight till the end. But right now, City and PSG are the best."

(Source: Daily Star)

Ronaldo open to joining Chelsea in shock transfer from Real Madrid



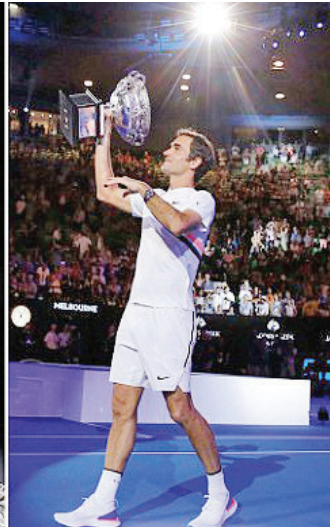
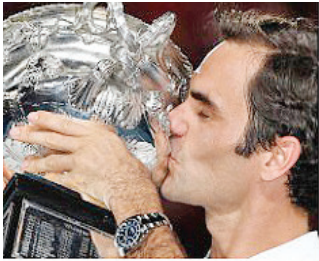
Cristiano Ronaldo is keen to leave Real Madrid and would be open to joining Chelsea this summer, according to reports. The 32-year-old is in his ninth season with Madrid but reports have claimed that the Spanish champions would be willing to sell the forward at the end of the season in order to pave the way for Neymar's arrival from Paris Saint-Germain.

Ronaldo had been linked with return to Manchester United but Jose Mourinho is no longer in the market for a new attacker after completing the signing of Alexis Sanchez from Arsenal earlier this week. According to The Sun, Ronaldo is considering a move back to the Premier League and would consider the prospect of a move to Chelsea.

The report also claims that Ronaldo could be potentially used as part of a deal which sees Eden Hazard join Madrid. Ronaldo, meanwhile, has a contract with Madrid until 2021 and insists he is happy to stay in the Spanish capital. "Of course I want to stay here, I love this club," he said earlier this week.

(Source: Metro)

Roger Federer wins sixth Australian Open and 20th Grand Slam title



Roger Federer won his sixth Australian Open and 20th Grand Slam title with a five-set victory over Marin Cilic.

The Swiss lost five games in a row as he dropped the fourth set but recovered to win 6-2 6-7 (5-7) 6-3 3-6 6-1.

Federer, 36, becomes only the fourth player after Margaret Court, Serena Williams and Steffi Graf to win 20 or more major singles titles.

"It's a dream come true and the fairytale continues," said Federer, who has won three of the last five majors.

The final was played under the Rod Laver Arena roof as the tournament's extreme heat policy was invoked.

Despite starting at 19:30 local time in Melbourne, the conditions were if anything more testing than 24 hours earlier, when Caroline Wozniacki and Simona Halep played to the point of exhaustion in the women's final.

With the roof closed and air-conditioning taking the edge off the temperature, Federer and Cilic played out a gripping contest over three hours and two minutes.

After a poor start, Cilic looked to have the momentum when he won five games in a row to force a fifth set, but Federer clung on to his serve at the start of the decider and got the key break in the following game.

The Swiss ties the record for men's Australian Open titles at six with Novak Djokovic and Roy Emerson, and moves four clear of Rafael Nadal in the all-time list for male Grand Slam champions on 20.

"I'm so happy, it's unbelievable," Federer added. "After the year I had last year, it's incredible."

■ **Federer holds off Cilic fightback** Cilic, 29, had come into the final brimming

with positivity after an impressive run to the final that included a quarter-final win over Nadal, but he made a desperate start.

He won just four points in losing the opening four games, and Federer fired down back-to-back aces on his way to serving out the set after 25 minutes.

The Swiss saw off two break points early in the second, roaring "come on!" as he pulled a forehand winner down the line, and then resumed his assault on the Cilic serve.

Three break points were saved, the third with a second-serve ace, as Cilic edged his way into a tie-break and a chance to claw his way back into the match.

The 2014 US Open champion did just that after a huge cross-court forehand brought up two set points, and he smashed away the

second to level.

Federer appeared to have regained control when a deep return drew an error as he broke for 4-2 in the third, and a fabulous half-volley pick-up said the confidence was flowing as he moved ahead again.

With a point for a double-break early in the fourth, Federer appeared as good as home, but his first-serve began to falter and Cilic ripped into the second serve with his huge forehand.

After two hours and 10 minutes he finally broke the Federer serve, and a jolt of adrenaline coursed through the Croat - and the crowd - as this unexpected fightback took him to two sets all.

Federer was now struggling to contain the world number six, and was relieved to see a

return hit the net on break point at the start of the fifth, before roaring as a serve saw off a second chance for the Croat.

The Swiss had halted the momentum and in the next game he grabbed it for himself with a deep, fizzing return that Cilic could not handle.

Nerves were still apparent as the eight-time Wimbledon champion urged himself on during the changeover, but he was not about to let his opponent back in, and another break of serve all but made sure.

There was time for one more moment of uncertainty for Federer when, just as in last year's final, he was forced to wait on match point for Hawk-Eye to confirm that he had indeed retained the title.

(Source: BBC)

Man United boss Mourinho lauds 'cheap' signing Sanchez



Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho said Alexis Sanchez is a "cheap" signing after his man-of-the-match debut against Yeovil Town in the FA Cup.

United beat neighbours and Premier League leaders Manchester City to Sanchez, who arrived from Arsenal in a swap deal involving out-of-favour playmaker Henrik Mkhitaryan. Chile international forward Sanchez showed why United were so desperate to sign him with two assists in Friday's 4-0 rout of Yeovil.

"He was cheap wasn't he? Free transfer! He was free," Mourinho said with a smile. "So for that price he's fantastic.

"I think everybody thinks the same in this country. Everyone has to agree that he is a fantastic player and the team that got him has a plus.

"We have a good group of attacking players you could see today we played with three of them, [Jesse] Lingard was on the bench, [Romelu] Lukaku was on the bench, Zlatan [Ibrahimovic] at home, [Anthony] Martial at home. So we have a good group.

"His [Sanchez] quality is a plus and his

experience is another plus."

United boss Mourinho also insisted no one was at fault after Sanchez missed a drugs test Monday.

Authorities were apparently not adequately informed of Sanchez's whereabouts, though Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger said the confusion was purely down to the "special" circumstances of completing his move to United.

Mourinho said: "I think Arsenal were very honest in the way they approached the situation. "We all know we must tell the whereabouts of our players where they are 24 hours per day [clubs have to tell testers if players miss training and the players must give their location for one hour every day]. But I think everyone understands that no-one knew where he was going to be, where he was going to train, where he was going to sleep.

"It was just a period of transfer so I think it is easily understandable and that was no-one's mistake and just a consequence of the moment."

(Source: Guardian)

Klopp wants Liverpool to begin another unbeaten run at home



Liverpool must quickly forget the disappointment of their 3-2 home defeat by West Bromwich Albion in the FA Cup fourth round on Saturday and begin another lengthy unbeaten run at Anfield, manager Jurgen Klopp said.

West Brom forward Jay Rodriguez's brace and an own goal by defender Joel Matip handed Liverpool their first loss at Anfield since a 2-1 defeat by Crystal Palace last April, ending a 19-game unbeaten run at home.

Asked if his team had to regroup to begin a similar run, Klopp said: "Yes, that would be a good idea.

"Look, it's not the first game I've lost, it's not the first game I've wanted to win really desperately and I lost it... it's deserved, for me, for the boys, it's deserved.

"I thought the crowd did really, really well. Obviously they remembered the good performances here than we did and at the end they appreciated that we at least tried to sort our problems."

Liverpool took the lead through forward Roberto Firmino's early goal before Rod-

riguez responded with a double. Firmino then missed a penalty that was awarded after the referee's use of VAR technology.

The hosts then went behind 3-1 after Matip's own goal before forward Mohamed Salah pulled one back late on.

"We had big aims in this competition, we wanted to show that at least that we really wanted to stay in this competition," Klopp added.

"That's the job to do, you cannot go out there and be completely without a plan or an idea, you have to show up in a game like this, you need to be ready, even if you make three big, big, big mistakes in the first half.

"...We have to really think about what happened tonight and make ourselves ready for Huddersfield. A long run starts with the first game and that's on Tuesday.

Liverpool, who are fourth in the Premier League with 47 points, were beaten 1-0 at Swansea in their last league game and travel to 14th-placed Huddersfield Town on Tuesday.

(Source: Mirror)

Michigan special prosecutor to probe university in Nassar case

Michigan's attorney general on Saturday named a special prosecutor to lead an "open and ongoing" investigation of Michigan State University after campus sports doctor Larry Nassar sexually assaulted athletes over nearly 20 years.

Retired Kent County Prosecutor William Forsyth was named independent special prosecutor and will produce a public report on his findings. He will work closely with Michigan State Police Director Kriste Kibbey Etue, Attorney General Bill Schuette said.

"My department and this investigation will find out who knew what, and when," said Schuette, who promised the probe would speak with each of the 156 known victims.

The case of Nassar, 54, has rocked Michigan State University, where he was a faculty member and physician at an on-campus clinic. He also worked for USA Gymnastics as a doctor to Olympic athletes, leading to the resignation of the entire board of the sport's governing body.

Michigan State University President Lou Anna Simon stepped down under pressure on Wednesday, and Athletic Director Mark Hollis announced his retirement on Friday. Both said they were unaware of Nassar's abuse until it was reported publicly.

Congress and the U.S. Olympic Committee are also investigating the Nassar case, with the U.S. House of Representatives examining allegations of sexual harassment by officials in other sports, including swimming



and taekwondo. Ingham County Judge Rosemarie Aquilina sentenced Nassar to 40 to 175 years in prison on Wednesday after he had pleaded guilty to sexual assault charges and some 150 victims told their stories in raw and unflinching terms.

Many described how he penetrated their bodies with his fingers without permission, gloves or lubrication, claiming it was treatment for sports injuries. Nassar's sentencing came amid a wave of sexual abuse and harassment allegations leveled against powerful men during the past year. Changing attitudes have led more women to denounce their abusers

and be believed.

At Michigan State, athletes had been complaining about Nassar since the 1990s, but the university did not open an investigation until 2014.

"Let's be very clear. No individual and no department at Michigan State University is off limits," Schuette said on Saturday, without commenting on whether he expected the probe to produce more criminal charges.

He did not take questions from reporters at the televised address, during which he was flanked by Forsyth and Etue. Forsyth served as Kent County prosecutor for 40 years and chose not to seek re-election in 2016.

He had overseen more than 40 murder trials and occasionally handled high-profile prosecutions himself, such as the 2008 murder conviction of a man who shot and killed a Grand Rapids police officer, according to the Grand Rapids Press.

Forsyth said he was "outraged" by the Nassar case and wanted to know why nobody stopped his "predatory conduct" for almost 20 years.

"Who at Michigan State knew and was aware of what he was doing because they had been told by some of these victims? And once told what did employees of Michigan State University do with that information?" Forsyth said.

(Source: Reuters)

Iran’s Safdarian makes history to win Ice Climbing World Cup gold

S P O R T S Mohammadreza Korouyeh Safdarian made history at Rabenstein in Italy this evening becoming the first Iranian athlete to win an Ice Climbing World Cup gold medal.

Having proved himself the best performer in the afternoon’s lead semi-finals in this second leg of the International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation (UIAA) World tour, Safdarian continued his impressive, composed and calculated form into the final itself.

The last climber to attack the ice wall of Rabenstein, Safdarian fell when one clip from topping the route with 60 seconds to go – a performance that was enough to earn the 25-year old a gold medal, inside the games. biz reported.

South Korea’s Kwon YoungHye claimed

the bronze medal with Alexey Tomilov earning silver and in the process bettering his fourth position the previous weekend in Saas-Fee.

“I am very happy. The crowd gave me a lot of energy,” explained Safdarian who had already set a first by becoming the first Iranian athlete to medal in the competition with his bronze in Saas-Fee last weekend.

Reigning World Tour champion Han-narai Song again took the gold medal in the women’s competition.

Repeating the podium of Saas-Fee, the South Korean finished ahead of compatriot Woonseon Shin and Russia’s Maria Tolokonina.

Action continues on 3-4 February as the competition returns to China with a first event in Hohhot, located in the Inner Mongolia region.



Rasul Khadem named Iran’s freestyle wrestling team coach



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Rasoul Khadem has been named as new head coach of Iran’s freestyle wrestling team on Sunday.

Khadem replaces Mohammad Taleai in the wrestling national team.

He is currently President of Iran Wrestling Federation, being elected for the position on 4 January 2014.

Khadem won a bronze medal in the 1992

Summer Olympics and a gold medal in the 1996 Summer Olympics.

He is also the 1994 and 1995 world champion and the 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995 and 1996 Asian champion.

He was trained by his father Mohammad Khadem, and he is the brother of Amir Reza Khadem.

Khadem was previously also a Tehran City councilor from 2003 - 2013.

Sajjadi appointed as Team Iran Chef de Mission at the 2018 Asian Games



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Nasrollah Sajjadi has been appointed as the chef de mission to Team Iran for the upcoming 2018 Asian Games.

Sajjadi has been appointed as the chef de mission to Team Iran by the National Olympic Committee’s newly-elected President Reza Salehi Amiri.

Sajjadi is an Iranian sports administrator who served as vice and acting minister of

sports. He was acting Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports from Oct. 19 until Nov. 1, 2016.

He was also a member of financial committee of Olympic Council of Asia and deputy Head of Physical Education Organization.

The 18th edition of the Asian Games will be held from 18 August to 2 September 2018 in Indonesia.

Iran beat Ukraine at Persian Beach Soccer Cup

S P O R T S Iran national beach soccer team defeated Ukraine 6-3 at the 2018 Persian Beach Soccer Cup on Sunday.

The competition is being held from January 27 to 29 in

Bushehr, south of Iran

Earlier in the day, Spain defeated 3-1.

Iran will play Spain on Monday in the final match, while Azerbaijan face Ukraine in the third-place match.

Marco Octavio’s team take part in the tournament with a mix of experienced and young players.

Iran won the title in the first edition which was held with the participation of Poland, Ukraine and Italy.

The IPC makes key decisions for future Games

The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) Governing Board concluded two days of meetings in Bonn, Germany, on Saturday (27 January) having made a number of key decisions regarding the PyeongChang 2018, Tokyo 2020 and Paris 2024 Paralympic Games.

The Board discussed the suspension of the Russian Paralympic Committee and reached a decision regarding the PyeongChang 2018 Paralympic Winter Games. This will be announced at a press conference on Monday (29 January).

Following deferment in September, the Board approved the final athletics and swimming medal event programmes for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games. Having stated that triathlon would have between six and 10 medal events in Tokyo, the Board decided the sport will have eight medal events. There will be four events for men and four for women with each event featuring 10 athletes. The IPC has requested that the International Triathlon Union (ITU) selects the eight events.

A full list of the Tokyo 2020 medal events can be found here.

The Tokyo 2020 Para athletics programme catering for 1,100 athletes will feature 168 medal events - nine less than Rio 2016 - and will be made up of 93 events for men and 74 for women. For the first time at a Paralympics, athletics will include a mixed gender, mixed class 4x100m relay. Made up of two men and two women, the relay team must include one athlete from the T11-13 vision impairment classes, one from either the T33-34 or T51-54 wheelchair racing classes, one from the T33-38 co-ordination impairment classes, and an athlete with a limb impairment from the T42-47 or T61-64 classes.

The athletics programme offers seven per cent more athlete slots for female athletes compared to Rio 2016.

In swimming there will be 146 medal events at Tokyo 2020 – six less than Rio 2016. These will be comprised of 76 for men, 67 for women and three mixed gender relays. Two of the mixed gender relays are new additions to the programme and are a 4x100m freestyle relays for athletes with a vision impairment and a 4x100m freestyle relay for athletes with an intellectual impairment. There will be a maximum of 620 athlete slots available for the sport and the programme includes two additional medal events for athletes with high support needs compared to Rio 2016.

Other highlights on the programme include the addition of two individual events in the S14 class for athletes with an intellectual impairment, with both the men’s and women’s 100m butterfly S14 included for the first time. The swimming event programme will have a balance stroke programme with no more than six events per class.

Andrew Parsons, IPC President, said: “Following the decisions on athletics, swimming and triathlon, the medals event programme for Tokyo 2020 is almost finalised, with just the eight triathlon medal events to be decided.

“For both athletics and swimming, we have created programmes that ensure a good cross section of events for athletes in all classes. By reducing the number of events in both sports from Rio 2016, we also aim to increase the depth of talent in each field and ensure greater long-term event viability. The addition of mixed gender relays will also enable more countries to participate.”



In relation to the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games sport programme, the IPC Governing Board approved which sports and disciplines that expressed an interest for inclusion in the Games in November should proceed to the next stage of the application process.

Going forward to Phase 2 will be CP Football, Golf, Powerchair Football and Sailing. All of these sports according to their applications appear to meet certain core requirements of the IPC Handbook including compliance with the World Anti-Doping Code, IPC Athlete Classification Code, quadrennial competition calendar and worldwide reach.

Karate and Para Dance Sport will move to the next stage as well to be potentially considered as additions outside of the official Paris 2024 Paralympic sport programme.

The Board decided that Surfing and the Taekwondo Poomsae discipline will not proceed to Phase 2 as both currently are not widely and regularly practiced in 32 countries, the minimum number required for individual sports and disciplines to be considered for Paralympic Games inclusion. Trap Shooting will not proceed to the next stage for the same reason; in addition the discipline has no quadrennial competition programme in place. Arm wrestling and wheelchair basketball 3-on-3 also have no quadrennial competition programmes and therefore will not be considered for the next phase.

Andrew Parsons said: “I would like to thank and congratulate all International Federations that put forward new sports and disciplines for consideration in the Paris 2024 Paralympic Programme. The fact that six of the 11 applicants will go forward to the next stage underlines the growing strength of sports within the Paralympic Movement.

“These six new sports, together with the 22 existing Paralympic sports, will now take part in the most compre-

hensive application process in Paralympic history as we aim to ensure that the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games features the best possible sports with the strongest global appeal.”

Sports will have until 9 July to complete application packs that feature a series of questions that aim to give the IPC detailed information regarding each sport’s governance, rules and regulations, associated costs, anti-doping programme compliance and activities, worldwide reach, quadrennial competition programme and procedures to ensure athlete welfare.

Following a thorough review of all applications, including full agreement from the IOC and Paris 2024, the IPC Governing Board will announce its final decision on the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games sport programme in January 2019.

During the course of the weekend the IPC Governing Board approved the provisional membership of the National Paralympic Committee of Paraguay, pending ratification at the 2019 IPC General Assembly. It was also informed by the IPC Classification Committee which International Federations and recognised International Federations have Classification Rules in compliance with the 2015 IPC Athlete Classification Code. This full list will be published by the IPC in February.

Finally, the IPC Governing Board gave the go ahead to full review of the IPC Governance structure and all relevant sections of the IPC Handbook, including the IPC constitution, relevant bylaws, codes and policies. A working group will be established under the leadership of IPC Vice President Duane Kale to review the structures and key rules and regulations that have been in place since 2004.

The 78th IPC Governing Board meeting will take place in PyeongChang, South Korea, on 7 March, ahead of the PyeongChang 2018 Paralympic Winter Games.

(Source: Paralympic.org)

Navid Nasseri joins Gillingham



Iranian under-21 midfielder Navid Nasseri has joined English Football League Gillingham on a contract until the end of the season.

The 21-year-old has been on trial at the club this month and featured in the Kent Senior Cup defeat at Maidstone as a second-half substitute.

“I like to be creative and make chances for the team,” said Nasseri. “I can play out wide or as a central midfielder.”

“There’s a good buzz around the place and hopefully my quality can add to that.”

Nasseri has penned a contract until May and has been given squad number 37.

Nasseri, who has represented Iran at under-21 level, spent a season with Swedish side Syrianska and has also been at Birmingham, Bury and Macclesfield.

(Source: gillinghamfootballclub.com)

Iran team kata wins bronze at Karate1 Premier League

TASNIM — Iranian male team kata claimed a bronze medal at the Karate1 Premier League Paris Open on Sunday.

Iranian team, consists of Milad Delikhoun, Abolfazl Shahrjerd and Ali Zand, defeated Malaysian team 3-2 in the bronze medal match.

The event has brought a total of 756 competitors from 81 nations together in Paris.

The competitions are being held at the Pierre de Coubertin from Jan. 27 to 29.

A total of 22 male and 11 female karate athletes from Iran are taking part in the event.

Initiated in 2011, the Karate1 Premier League is the most important league event in the world of karate. It includes some of the most prominent competitions and endeavors to bring together the best karate athletes in the world.

Alpine skiing: Vlhova wins slalom after Shiffrin slips up

LENZERHEIDE, Switzerland (Reuters) — Overall World Cup leader Mikaela Shiffrin missed out on her seventh successive World Cup slalom win when she lost her balance meters from the finish line on Sunday, handing victory to Slovakia’s Petra Vlhova.

In the last slalom before the Pyeongchang Olympics, Shiffrin was quickest on the first leg and was nearly one second inside Vlhova’s time on the second when she lost her balance and missed a gate within sight of the finish.

Shiffrin also failed to finish the Super G at Cortina one week earlier and the giant slalom at Kronplatz on Tuesday. She was a modest seventh in Saturday’s giant slalom at Lenzerheide.

Vlhova completed her two runs in a combined time of one minute 50.53 seconds to win by one tenth of a second from Sweden’s Frida Hansdotter and claim the fourth World Cup win of her career. Swiss Wendy Holdener was third.

Shiffrin is widely expected to retain the Olympic slalom title she won at the 2014 Games in Sochi, as well as having a shot at gold medals in the giant slalom and Super G.

Although Shiffrin has won 10 World Cup races this season and is runaway leader in the overall standings, she has suffered a dip in form in the run-up to Pyeongchang.

Batshuayi stars as Chelsea ease through against Newcastle

Michy Batshuayi scored two first-half goals as Chelsea beat Newcastle 3-0 at Stamford Bridge to ease into the fifth round of the FA Cup.

But the Magpies had chances of their own before the break only to find home keeper Willy Caballero in fine form.

Caballero made an important stop to deny Jonjo Shelvey with the score at 0-0 - and soon afterwards Batshuayi took the game by the scruff of the neck.

The striker opened the scoring after 31 minutes, firing home from close range after Pedro, Eden Hazard and Marcos Alonso had linked superbly to create the chance.

Shelvey was again thwarted by Caballero before, with seconds remaining until half-time, Batshuayi struck again, Pedro and Hazard involved again and the striker’s shot hitting Jamaal Lascelles and looping over keeper Karl Darlow.

Pedro shot narrowly over after some hesitant Newcastle defending as Chelsea looked to put the game beyond anydoubt early in the second period, with Darlow called into action soon afterwards to repel a sharp Alonso volley.

And they did put it beyond doubt when Alonso bent a free kick over the wall, past Darlow and into the corner to make it 3-0 after 72 minutes.

Moments later, Hazard made way for Ross Barkley as Antonio Conte opted to make a change, and with time running out Ethan Ampadu, who had come on for N’Golo Kante, almost created a fourth for Pedro only for Darlow to intercept his through ball.

Conte then gave 17-year-old Callum Hudson-Odoi his senior Chelsea debut, bringing him on for Pedro, and there was still time for Darlow to twice deny Batshuayi a hat-trick.

(Source: ESPN)

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Play chronicles life of Iranian pirate ruler Mir Mohanna

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — A play that centers on the life story of Mir Mohanna, an Iranian pirate ruler who is viewed as a national hero for his struggle against the English and Dutch colonialists in the Persian Gulf during the 18th century, was staged at Tehran's Sarv Theater on Saturday.

Sirus Kahurinejad is the director and writer of the play, which will be on stage for 30 nights.

A cast of 15 actors, including Jalil Farjad, Hamid Ebrahimi, Hadiseh Tehrani and Davud Soleimani, are performing the play.

The play was also staged at the 36th Fajr International Theater Festival, which ended on Sunday.

In 1768, Mir Mohanna Zaabi, the pirate ruler of Bandar Rig and Kharg Island, who had defied and harried the Zands and both the English and the Dutch East India Companies, was ousted by a mutiny, fled to the coast near Basra, and was captured by the Ottoman governor and executed.

His career had begun with a campaign against the Dutch, who in 1753 leased a commercial base on Kharg Island from Mir Mohanna's father but neglected—their landlord claimed—to pay rent. Mir Mohanna captured their fort by trickery on New Year's Day 1766 and set them adrift, thereby obtaining an impregnable stronghold and a rich haul of merchandise.

A poster for "Mir Mohanna" from director/writer Sirus Kahurinejad

Post-Sundance, female filmmakers find Hollywood dream elusive

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Sundance, the premiere U.S. independent film gathering, this week saw a record number of female filmmakers showcased and it has championed women for four decades, but the Hollywood success that so often comes for male directors has proven elusive.



Director Reed Morano arrives at the 75th Golden Globe Awards in Beverly Hills, California, January 7, 2018. (Reuters/Mario Anzuoni)

A study published this month by University of Southern California's Annenberg Inclusion Initiative analyzed 1,100 Hollywood films from 2007 to 2017 and found that out of 1,223 directors, women accounted for only 4 percent of honorees.

In contrast, women made up 37 percent of directors represented across the 122 films debuting at Sundance this week.

"The biggest problem is that it is so much harder to convince studios ... that we can also make the bigger movies," said Hannah Fidell, who wrote and directed "The Long Dumb Road", debuting at Sundance.

Michael Barker and Tom Bernard, who co-founded Sony Pictures Classics and often usher Sundance movies to Oscar success, said they have produced films by 59 female filmmakers, but that a lot of those filmmakers have struggled to find success elsewhere.

"I don't think women have been given those opportunities after their experience with us from all these other companies, and I think it's right to stand up and say they deserve more attention than they were given," Barker said.

Male directors, such as Quentin Tarantino, David O. Russell, Darren Aronofsky and Damien Chazelle, who all got their starts at Sundance, have gone on to enjoy studio success.

This year's Sundance festival comes amid the rise of the Time's Up movement in Hollywood, launched by more than 300 industry figures to fight against sexual misconduct and discrimination in the workplace.

Several panels at the festival focused on the gender gap in Hollywood with actresses such as Octavia Spencer speaking out about pay parity. Spencer said she and Jessica Chastain had teamed up to negotiate five times her asking salary for an upcoming film the two are working on together.

Along with pay issues, many filmmakers are looking for stories that move beyond female typecasts.

Reed Morano first came to Sundance in 2008 as the cinematographer for "Frozen River". This year, she returned to Sundance with her film directorial debut "I Think We're Alone Now," centered on a man (Peter Dinklage) and a teenage girl (Elle Fanning) in a post-apocalyptic world.

"Out of 10 projects I get sent, seven or eight are female protagonists and that's not the only thing I'm interested in," Morano said.

TMCA to host Intl. Festival of Radical Performance

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (TMCA) will host the first edition of the International Festival of Radical Performance.

The festival that focuses on interdisciplinary arts will be held from February 1 to March 1, the TMCA New Media Department announced on Sunday.

Art projects on alternative performance, performance art, video performance, and cyberformance will be implemented during the festival.

Azam Tabatabai, Parisa Sadeqi, Mehdi Asadi and Pejman Hosseini will carry out projects in the performance art category.

In the alternative performance art section, Jalal Hashemi and Hossein Mohajer will display their works.

Faraz Fallah and Hesam Nazari both from Iran, Alejandro Zertuche from Mexico,

Manuel López from Spain, Zlatko Cosic from Serbia and Tony Schwensen from Australia will showcase their works in the video performance art category.

Yolanda Benalba from Spain and the international group of Distant Feeling(s) are taking part in the cyberformance section.

Several other artists from Turkey, the U.S. and Germany will participate in the event.

The organizers also plan to hold the 7th edition of the International Festival of 30 Performances 30 Artists 30 Days on the sidelines of the festival at the same time.

A jury composed of Nasim Ahmadvir, Azadeh Ganjeh, Elyas Aminian, Saeid Behnam, Asghar Dashti, Mehdi Sadr, Reza Ghayur and Ali Firuzjang will judge the works in the various sections.

The best work in each category will be awarded a Golden Radical.



Iran's Book of the Year Awards releases nominees in literature category

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The organizers of the 35th Iran's Book of the Year Awards have announced the nominees in the literature category.

The nominees will be competing in the history and critic section, the classical text section and the literature of other languages section.

"Essays on Style and Language: Linguistic and Critical Approaches to Literary Style" by Roger Fowler and translated into Persian by Maryam Moshref, "How to Read Literature" by Terry Eagleton and translated by Mohsen Maleki and Behzad Sadeqi, as well as "Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics" by Mikhail Bakhtin and translated by Saeid Solhju are the three nominees in the history and critic section.

The nominees for the classical text section are "Dastoor ul-Katib Fi Ta'yeen il-Maratib" by Muhammad Bin Hindu Shah Nakhjivani and translated by Ali-Akbar Ahmadi Darani, "Hayat al-Hayawan" by Kamal ud-Din al-



Damiri and translated by Mohammad-Taqi Tabrizi and "New Correction of Rumi's Writings" composed by Tofiq Sobhani. Books also competing in the classical

Movies from Iran competing in intl. events



A scene from "With Me" by Azadeh Qochaq.

Colossus of ancient Egyptian King Ramses moved to new home, carefully



The Statue of King Ramses II is seen on the way to the Grand Egyptian Museum in Cairo, Egypt January 25, 2018. (Reuters/Mohamed Abd El Ghany)

CAIRO (Reuters) — Egypt moved an 83-tonne, 3,200-year-old statue of King Ramses II to the atrium of Cairo's new Grand Egyptian Museum on Thursday in a complex operation undertaken by army engineers and specialist contractors.

The ancient colossus was taken on its 400-meter (437.45-yard) journey inside a cage mounted on a truck and suspended like a pendulum from a steel beam to help offset any jolts from the ground during transport.

The road surfaces were treated with special materials to ensure they could adequately bear Ramses's huge weight. The transfer operation cost 13.6 million Egyptian pounds (\$770,000).

Speaking at a ceremony to mark the move, former antiquities minister Zahi Hawass underlined the importance of the museum project to Egypt's tourism sector, which has been damaged in recent years by political violence.

"It will tell people that Egypt is safe

and you can come and visit us because we need the tourism for the preservation of the Egyptian antiquities."

At its new location the statue will be the first thing visitors see as they enter the museum, part of which will open later this year ahead of its expected official launch in 2022.

The colossus was unearthed at the Mit Rahina archaeological site in 1820 by the Italian adventurer Giovanni Caviglia. Thursday's move was the fourth it has seen over its several millennia of existence.

It was first moved from the quarry where it was made to Mit Rahina before being shifted in 1955 to Ramses Square in Cairo. Increasing pollution and congestion at the square prompted its next move in 2006 to safekeeping in a storage area where it was kept of public view until now.

Egypt's tourism sector is one of the country's main sources of foreign currency but it has struggled since a 2011 uprising that led to years of violent instability.

Four senior BBC male journalists agree pay cuts after inequality row



A pedestrian walks past a BBC logo at Broadcasting House in central London October 22, 2012. (Reuters/Olivia Harris)

LONDON (Reuters) — Four of the highest paid male BBC journalists have agreed to pay cuts, the broadcaster said on Friday, following revelations that its top male news reporters and presenters were earning significantly more than women doing similar jobs.

Radio broadcasters Jeremy Vine and John Humphrys, news anchor Huw Edwards and North America editor Jon Sopel had all agreed either formally or in principle to salary cuts, the BBC said on its website.

The broadcaster was forced to disclose last year that two thirds of the highest earners on air were men.

Funded by a license fee levied on TV viewers, the BBC is closely scrutinized and held to exacting standards by the public and rival media. The pay disclosures, which it had resisted, highlighted a broader debate about gender inequality.

Director-General Tony Hall pledged to close the gender pay gap by 2020, but the organization has been criticized by its

text section are "Epic of Qiran-i Habashi" corrected by Milad Jafarpur, and "Ancient Ship of Rubaiyat" compiled by Arham Moradi and Mohammad-Afshin Vafai.

"Americanah", a novel by the Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, translated into Persian by Ruhollah Sadeqi, has been nominated in the literature of other languages section.

"Four Quartets" written by T. S. Eliot and translated by Javad Danesh-Ara, "Curfew" by José Donoso and translated by Abdollah Kowsari, and "The Box: Tales from the Darkroom" by Gunter Grass and translated by Kamran Jamali are competing in this section.

Also included are "The Buried Giant", a fantasy novel by British writer Kazuo Ishiguro translated by Amir-Mehdi Haqiqat, and "White Noise" by American author Don DeLillo translated by Peyman Khaksar.

No works merited a nomination for the award in the Arabic literature section.

In addition, "With Me", Azadeh Qochaq's short film telling the indecisive story of a girl who runs from her past, will be screened at the Cinequest Film & VR Festival in the United States, the organizers announced.

The festival will be running in the Silicon Valley in the northern part of the U.S. state of California from February 27 to March 11.

The festival will also screen "Mother, I'm Joseph", a coproduction of Iran, Iraq and Kuwait by Mohammadreza Partusi.

Based on true events, Joseph decides to hide in a hole for 21 years to avoid fighting in the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war.

own journalists and by lawmakers for not acting fast enough.

Its China editor Carrie Gracie, who was paid significantly less than her male counterparts, resigned her role last month to fight against what she called the "secretive and illegal BBC pay culture".

North America editor Sopel, one of the four who had agreed to a salary cut, earned between 200,000 pounds and 249,999 pounds (\$285,100-\$356,373) in 2016/17, the disclosures showed.

Gracie said she was paid 135,000 pounds a year as China editor.

The highest paid of the four was Jeremy Vine, who earned between 700,000 pounds and 749,999 pounds for radio and TV work. Today radio program presenter Humphrys earned between 600,000 pounds and 649,999 pounds, while news anchor Edwards was paid between 550,000 pounds and 599,999 pounds.

The BBC said the level of the cuts was not yet known.