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A scene from “The Elephant King” by Hadi Mohammadian



EDITORIAL

By Mohammad Ghaderi
Tehran Times editor-in-chief
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Moghaddasi remains in our hearts as an ethical journalist

Reza Moghaddasi, the former director of the Tehran Times and Mehr news agency, didn't just have high morals and values as a manager, he was also an ethical journalist.

Although he is no longer among us, his good personality is living with us.

As a senior journalist, he was admired by moderate principlists and reformists alike. Condolences have poured in since word of his demise on Friday morning.

All colleagues at the Tehran Times and Mehr viewed him as a very generous man. In difficult circumstances, colleagues counted on him for good judgment and fairness. For instance, when came a decision to reduce the number of pages in the Tehran Times from 16 to 12 due to budget constraints, there was concern that some journalists might be laid off, but Mr. Moghaddasi assured all that “nobody is going to be dismissed”.

His benevolent character was also noted by the families of journalists who had the opportunity to meet him.

One of the journalists at the Tehran Times says: “What made Reza Moghaddasi distinct from others was his humble behavior. Respect for others was a priority for him.”

Another colleague characterized him as a person who put great emphasis on “cultural issues”.

Yet, another Iranian-American female journalist at the paper remembers him advising her to practice patience and remain in Iran and help the country meet the challenges ahead.

In a ceremony held during the fasting month of Ramadan when the families of journalists were present, the public relations officer said, that “he knew no other managing director that paid so much attention to the matter of families of colleagues.”

As a manager his character fascinated people. Nobody was hesitant to approach him and discuss their concerns. Most colleagues were in contact with him even after he resigned from his post as director of these two media outlets.

We at the Tehran Times and Mehr remember him as a man of patience, honesty, endurance, and strong ethics. We hope that his deportment will serve as a model for other journalists. We also deeply empathize with his surviving family and grieve over the loss of this man of kindness and patience.

‘PGCC will never be the same’

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — A senior expert on Arab affairs who teaches international business at George Washington University believes that “Qatar can never again trust Saudi Arabia, and the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) will never be the same.”

Hossein Askari told the Tehran Times recently that division among the PGCC countries will pose political and military threats to the United States. Askari also added that the U.S. is trying to have a united front to oppose Iran and to persuade Iraq to join in.

“But if the PGCC is split apart, the U.S. has less persuasive power on Iraq and less ability to oppose Iran.”

Following is the brief text of the interview:

■ A summit is scheduled in the U.S. in May on the Qatar crisis in which the Emir of Qatar, the



crown prince of Saudi Regime and crown prince of the UAE will participate. Do you believe the objective of the summit is to solve the dispute between these countries and Qatar?

A: Yes, this is the goal, but I have my doubts that they will succeed. Saudi Arabia needs a solution

that saves face and Qatar cannot give in on issues that have to do with its sovereignty. Is there such a solution? I don't think so. They may come up with a short-term agreement. But the damage is done. Qatar can never again trust Saudi Arabia and the PGCC will never be the same.

■ U.S. Secretary of State Tillerson said that the negative consequences of the PGCC crisis is not only limited to the Arab countries but also includes the United States. What kind of losses is the U.S. facing in this crisis?

A: America has a big problem. It has bases in PGCC countries, especially in Bahrain and Qatar, but also thousands of personnel and pre-positioned military equipment and munitions in the other PGCC countries with the possible exception of Oman. If the PGCC countries are divided, it poses both a political as well as military problem for the United States. If the PGCC splits apart, the U.S. has less persuasive power in Iraq and less ability to oppose Iran. **→13**

Qatar ‘ready to participate’ in U.S.-PGCC summit

Qatar's foreign minister has said that his country is willing to participate in a United States-Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) summit next spring, provided that the blockading countries' motivation is based on real will and not coercion.

Speaking at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, DC, on Thursday, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani said that any solution to the dispute between the countries of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council must be premised on the principles of equality between the nations of the region.

The PGCC is a political and economic alliance of six countries in the Arabian Peninsula: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, the House of Saud regime

and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

But since June 2017, Qatar has been at odds with the Saudi regime, the UAE, and Egypt and Bahrain when the four countries cut off diplomatic relations with Qatar and imposed a land, sea and air blockade after accusing it of supporting “terrorism” and “extremism”. Qatar has strongly denied the allegations. The last U.S.-PGCC summit was held in May 2017, in the Saudi regime capital Riyadh, just before the crisis unfolded.

A recent report by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (OHCHR) found that the actions carried out by the four countries were discriminatory, without legal basis, and amounting

to “economic warfare”.

The OHCHR - whose members visited Qatar in November 2017 - conducted interviews with 20 government and non-governmental organizations, and 40 victims during their evaluation.

OHCHR representatives found that the blockade had a permanent effect on the union of families and the social fabric of the region as a whole.

Before the crisis, citizens of the PGCC enjoyed a great deal of freedom of movement between the six member states, and close tribal ties, meaning that over generations, thousands of intermarriages have been celebrated between Qataris and other PGCC citizens. (Source: Al Jazeera)



Reza Moghaddasi, former Tehran Times and Mehr managing director, dies at 50

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Reza Moghaddasi, the former managing director of the Tehran Times and Mehr news agency, passed away on Friday, after struggling with a gastrointestinal disease for a long time.

Moghaddasi was born in Mashhad in 1967 (1346 in the Persian calendar). He became interested in journalism in school by writing for a student journal, and started his professional career in the Quds newspaper when he was 20.

Before taking managerial post at the Tehran Times and Mehr news agency, Moghaddasi had served as the head of the political and social desks of Jaam-e Jam newspaper, deputy chief of the Hamshahri newspaper, the CEO of the Khabar newspaper. He had also worked in different posts in the editorial board of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB).

When he was in the hospital, many prominent political, cultural, and media figures visited him. **→2**

Russia rejects U.S. claim of Iran’s ‘lawless behavior’

UNITED NATIONS —Russia is pushing back against U.S. efforts to get the UN Security Council to take action against Iran over the Islamic Republic's ballistic missile program.

Russia's UN ambassador traveled to a U.S. military base near Washington D.C. this week to view what the Pentagon says are remnants of Iranian-made ballistic missiles that Yemeni rebels fired at Saudi Arabia, but he wasn't convinced.

“Everyone knows Yemen hosts a pile of weapons from the old days,” Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said, insisting there's no case against Tehran at the UN and citing, as his own evidence, Iran's own remarks “vehemently denying that it is supplying anything to Yemen.”

Nebenzia's remarks were published Wednesday by the UN Mission of the Russian Federation. **→2**

Development projects worth over \$2.2b inaugurated

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Several development projects worth near 100 trillion rials (over \$2.2 billion) were inaugurated during the trip of President Hassan Rouhani to Kerman Province in southeast of Iran on Thursday.

The president was accompanied by a

delegation of ministers and high ranking officials, IRNA reported.

As part of the inaugurations, President Rouhani and Agriculture Minister Mahmoud Hojjati inaugurated 1710 agricultural projects worth 4.16 trillion rials (about \$91.5 million), some through video conference and some in person. **→4**

Russia: U.S. ‘hunting’ for Russians to arrest around the world

Russia has issued a travel warning recommending its citizens think twice before traveling abroad, saying the United States was hunting for Russians to arrest around the world.

The Foreign Ministry statement warns Russian citizens that when abroad they face a serious threat of arrest by other countries

at Washington's request, after which they could be extradited to the United States.

“Despite our calls to improve cooperation between the relevant U.S. and Russian authorities ... U.S. special services have effectively continued” hunting “for Russians around the world,” the travel warning said. **→13**



ARTICLE

By Hanif Ghaffari
political analyst

The chancellor loses her power

The situation remains foggy for Europe right now because Germany, as the prime country that has political and economic dominance, continues to suffer from the lack of an “incumbent government”.

Angela Merkel as the German Chancellor has only focused on her country's internal affairs in recent months, and thus she has virtually lost her previous power in the European Union. Few consider her the “Grand Chancellor” in Germany any longer. According to recent surveys, half of German citizens are demanding Merkel's resignation. This is the worst time for Merkel ever as a political leader.

The general elections in Germany were held about four months ago. Since then, the coalition government has not yet been formed. The combined votes of the coalition of Christian parties (Christian Democrats and Social-Christian parties) have not been enough to form an integrated state. The worst news for the two traditional German parties is that, following negotiations, we're now witnessing a remarkable fall in the popularity of both these parties, which now barely exceeds 50 percent. Merkel could be facing a political dead-end in Germany.

During the coalitional negotiations with the Green Party and Liberal Democrats, we witnessed Merkel's defeat. Analysts and news sources had predicted that a coalition would be formed between the four negotiating parties in Germany. However, in the end, the Leader of the Liberal Democrats Christian Lindner, left the negotiation table, leaving Merkel in a difficult position.

Merkel knows well that the formation of a coalition government with the Social Democrats is the best possible option for her, but this option has never been her favorite. In the event of failed talks with Social Democrats and politicians such as Martin Schulz and Sigmar Gabriel, Merkel will have to form a minimalist government with the Green Party or face an early election. Any of these options will come at a heavy cost. Even if there is an election, the political crisis will likely continue in Germany and public pressure on Merkel to resign will ramp up if negotiations fail. The Social Democrats will then have a greater chance of gaining power. **→13**

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



No interference tolerated in defensive missile program: cleric

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami said at Tehran Friday prayers that the U.S. is seeking to reduce Iran's missile capabilities to appease the Zionist regime but Iran will continue with its missile program within the framework of its defense strategy.

Ayatollah Khatami said Iran will not negotiate with any country over its defense capabilities, and will continue strengthening its defensive missile power, Mehr reported.

He went on to say that another U.S. strategy is to make Iran stop supporting Hezbollah and the Palestinian resistance groups but Iran will not stop supporting liberation movements.



Iran will keep boosting defense capabilities: military chief

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Chief of the Iranian Armed Forces Mohammad Hossein Baqeri on Thursday condemned any foreign interference in the country's missile program, stressing the military will keep boosting deterrence power.

In a message on the beginning of the ten-day ceremonies marking the anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, General Baqeri assured the Iranian nation of the armed forces' preparedness for decisive reaction to hostile actions, Tasnim reported.

He said Tehran is monitoring the hostile stances of the U.S. and the Zionist regime as well as their regional and trans-regional allies against the Islamic Republic.



'Iran's environment not feeling good'

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran's Environmental Performance Index (EPI) is the lowest among 180 countries, Parliamentarian Mohammad Reza Tabesh said on Friday, noting that "today, the country's environment is not feeling okay."

Tabesh said although comprehensive plans have been implemented in order to protect the environment, the destruction process has put wetlands in serious danger, IRNA reported.

He also called on the three branches of government as well as the nation to do whatever they can in order to preserve the environment.



cleric: No Shia-Sunni conflict in western Asia

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Ayatollah Mohsen Araki, secretary general of the World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought, said on Friday that there's no Shia-Sunni conflict in western Asia.

There have been no conflicts between Shias and Sunnis in Iraq and Syria and they coexisted peacefully for centuries, but the Americans showed up and described the region's conflicts as religiously-driven, Araki was quoted by Tasnim as saying.

He also said there's no Buddhist-Muslim conflict in Myanmar, emphasizing that the oppressors who only seek their benefits create such conflicts by taking advantage of religions.

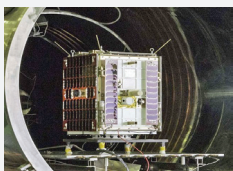


General syas Iranians will never forget U.S. animosity

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Farzad Esmaeili, commander of the Khatam al-Anbiya Air Defense Base, said on Friday that the Iranian nation will never forget the United States' animosity and mischievous acts.

"Numerous events in Iran have been the progenies of the arrogant imperialists, and the nation will never forget events like the 1953 coup to topple the popular prime minister in favor of the king, U.S. military attack on Tabas in 1980, and the downing of the Iranian passenger plane over the Persian Gulf by U.S. warship in 1988," Esmaeili was quoted by Mehr as saying.

"One of the reasons that that Iranian people always chant 'down with the U.S.' is these mischievous deeds of the imperialist enemy," he added.



Nine satellites waiting to be launched into orbit

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran has nine satellites waiting to be launched into orbit, ISNA said on Friday.

According to the report, Iran's Pars 1, Dusti (friendship), Nahid 1, Payam, Nahid 2, Zafar, Tolou, Soha and Mesbah 2 are waiting to be launched into orbit.

Back in October 2017, the head of Iranian Space Research Center Hassan Haddadpour announced that the country plans to place three remote sensing satellites and one communications satellite into orbit by 2021.

He added that Iran will launch Soha, a remote sensing satellite, into orbit within the next two years.

Russian experts set to visit Fordow nuclear facility

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Behrooz Kamalvandi, spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, has said that a team of Russian specialists will visit the Fordow enrichment facility on Sunday as part of a project on stable isotopes.

Tehran and Moscow reached a deal on stable isotopes about a year ago, Kamalvandi said on Thursday, adding that different Iranian delegates have traveled to Russia and Russian experts have visited Iran since then.

"Today, we are at the stage of installing some equipment and Russian experts will arrive in Iran on Sunday to begin the installation work," he told IRNA.

The project will probably begin on Sunday or the following day, he added.

Earlier on Thursday, the AP quoted Russia's RIA Novosti news agency as saying that Russian technical specialists were set to arrive this week at the Fordow nuclear facility.

Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Yukiya Amano said in January 2016 that Iran had removed "excess centrifuges and infrastructure" from the Fordow enrichment facility in line with its commitments under the 2015 nuclear agreement, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).



Amano made the remark in a statement issued on the first anniversary of the implementation of the JCPOA, which was signed between Iran and six world powers including the U.S., Russia, Britain, France, China and Germany.

The deal was reached in July 2015 and went into effect in January 2016.

Under the accord, Iran undertook to apply certain limits to its nuclear program in exchange for the termination

Iran wants Asian political parties notice how U.S. is trying to kill nuclear deal

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said on Friday that it is necessary the Asian political parties notice how the U.S. is seeking to scarp the landmark 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"The U.S. has violated some parts of the JCPOA in spite of Iran's commitment to its obligations," Araqchi said during a speech at the International Conference of Asian Political Parties in Tehran.

He added, "In its latest statement, the U.S. administration called on the European countries to ruin the nuclear deal, using a non-diplomatic language. The Asian parties in this conference should pay attention to this important issue."

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif tweeted on January 12 that the U.S. violated paragraphs 26, 28 and 29 of the JCPOA.

According to the mentioned paragraphs, the signatories to the JCPOA should refrain taking actions that undermine successful implementation of the nuclear deal and affect negatively the normalization of trade and economic relations with Iran.

In a statement on January 12, U.S. President Donald Trump gave Europeans only 120 days to agree to an overhaul of the nuclear agreement and said if the text of the nuclear deal is not revised he would unilaterally withdraw the U.S. from the agreement.

'Unique agreement'

Iran and six world powers, including the U.S., UK, France, Russia, China and Germany, struck the nuclear deal on July 14, 2015. The deal went into effect in January 2016. Since the nuclear deal went into



force, the United Nations' International Atomic Energy Agency has issued nine reports each time confirming that Iran has been living up to its nuclear obligations.

Araqchi described the JCPOA as a "unique" agreement within the framework of "diplomatic relations".

'U.S. is becoming more isolated'

On the sidelines of the conference, Araqchi told reporters that the U.S. is becoming more isolated and this has been admitted by the Western media outlets and U.S. allies.

"The U.S. has become more isolated any time it sought to make the UN Security Council counter Iran by bringing up issues such as Iran's missile program, Yemen or unrest in Iran," he said.

Nikki Haley, the U.S. ambassador to the UN, showed her Security Council colleagues on Monday what she called remnants of missiles shot from Yemen to Saudi Arabian territory.

The U.S. claims the debris displayed a "made in Iran" marking.

Araqchi described the move as "desperate show".

Tehran to stand by oppressed nations in region: Leader's advisor

A senior advisor to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah says Iran's regional presence is "inevitable," vowing that the country will stand by the oppressed nations in the region.

Ali Akbar Velayati, who advises Ayatollah Khamenei on international affairs, made the remarks on Thursday on the sidelines of a conference attended by university students in support of the ongoing Palestinian Intifada (Uprising) against Israeli occupation, Fars News Agency reported.

"Our regional presence is an inevitable issue, and we continue this process to remain the region's most determining element," he said.

"Iran has no intention to abandon the oppressed nations in the region... Our presence in Iraq, Syria, Palestine, and Lebanon is in coordination and with the consent of these countries' governments. Also, if we are helping Yemen, this is our humanitarian responsibility," Velayati added.

The official warned that "Saudi Arabia should know that if this trend continues, Yemen will turn to its Vietnam."

Riyadh and its allies have been engaged in a military campaign, accompanied by an all-out blockade, against Yemen since March 2015. The U.S.-backed coalition has defied international calls to stop the aggression, which has killed over 13,600 people and triggered the world's worst humanitarian crisis in the impoverished country, according to the UN.

Iran has played a crucial part in the region's fight against terrorism by providing military advisory support to neighboring Iraq and Syria. The Islamic Republic has also been a stalwart supporter of the Palestinian struggles in the face of Israeli occupation.

"Throughout history, Iran has been the



flag bearer both in civilization and culture, and is now the flag bearer in the region," he added.

Velayati further blasted the United States for seeking to disintegrate countries and said Iran is against such schemes.

"Can one sit in their house and say 'it does not concern me if the neighbor's house caught fire,?' " he said.

Velayati stressed that the Iranian nation has never "since the onset of its history" tolerated attempts by hegemonic powers to gain dominance over the nation and make it surrender to their demands.

"One [arrogant power] says 'we will keep the JCPOA, but you should place limits on your missiles,'" he noted, pointing by acronym to Iran's 2015 with world countries, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. "Another says 'limit your presence in the region,'" he noted.

"What for? Doesn't this amount to bullying?" he asked, adding, "You could bully Iran like this under its [former] monarch, not now, though."

(Source: Press TV)

'Sanctions violate right to progress'

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Es'haq Al-e-Habib, the Iranian deputy ambassador to the UN, has said that economic sanctions are impediment to sustainable development and violate the people's right to progress.

Speaking at the UN Commission for Social Development (CSocD) on Thursday, Al-e-Habib also said instability leads to growth of poverty in the world.

The Iranian envoy said that instability and bloody clashes, especially in the Middle East region, have caused an

exacerbation of poverty.

Al-e-Habib said that positive steps have been taken at the international level to counter poverty, however, there are a large number of people in the world who are living in extreme poverty.

"The importance of fighting poverty in the sphere of social development should not become a tool to exert political pressure," he remarked.

He also said, "The Islamic Republic of Iran continues to

follow and implement policies focusing on the eradication of poverty and deprivation through adoption of multiple approaches with a view to the specific nature, urgency, and severity of each situation of poverty."

The 56th session of the UN Commission for Social Development started work at the United Nations headquarters in New York on January 29. The session will run until February 7 with a focus on eradicating poverty for achieving sustainable development goals for all.

Russia rejects U.S. claim of Iran's 'lawless behavior'

1 → He said there is "nothing definite" on a push for a new Iran sanctions resolution, but his skepticism over the evidence of what U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley called Iran's "lawless behavior" means any new sanctions proposal would likely be nixed by the Kremlin.

Russia isn't the only skeptic on the Security Council. Kazakhstan's UN Ambassador Kairat Umarov, as well as other ambassadors on the trip, questioned the chain of custody of the missile parts, noting that the evidence was supplied by Saudi Arabia -- Iran's arch nemesis -- and was on loan to the U.S. Defense Department.

"We don't know how this weaponry was delivered to Yemen," he alleged.

The diplomats' trip to Washington was a follow-up to Haley's assertion to the Security

Council in mid-December that evidence is mounting that Iran is supplying arms to Yemen's Houthi rebels in violation of the terms of the Iran nuclear deal.

Speaking about the UN secretary general's report on Iran's compliance with Resolution 2231, Haley said, "It is the most damning report yet. This report makes the case that Iran is illegally transferring weapons."

Iran's response to the Council trip to the Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling was swift: Its Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif, tweeted that the Council was merely conveyed the Trump administration's "Iranophobic narrative" during the visit.

In spite of the skepticism of some council members, however, both Britain and France appeared convinced by the evidence.

The UK's acting UN Ambassador, Jonathan Allen, said in a tweet: "We have an independent expert UN panel. But as a non-expert, I understand that it's more than just factory stamps. Missile shape unique (no tail fins; valve positions) as is anti-tank missile design. Hard to see how they are 'tampered with' if that's the accusation."

Haley has been trying hard to convince the Security Council that Iran's actions have violated UN resolutions and that new sanctions are needed to curtail what she calls Iran's "malign behavior."

The U.S. push to sanction Iran's ballistic missile activity has received support from Paris. At a European Union meeting in Brussels this month, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said, "We will have the

opportunity of underlining our firmness on Iran's compliance with United Nations Resolution 2231, which limits access to ballistic capacity and which Iran does not respect."

UN Undersecretary General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman told the Security Council last month, "There are a few options that we can use to put pressure on Iran to adjust their behavior: The Security Council could strengthen the provisions of Resolution 2231; We could adopt a new resolution that makes clear that Iran is prohibited from all activities related to ballistic missiles."

Haley hasn't indicated what the next step would be, but Russia would be key to moving forward at the world body on any multinational sanctions against Iran.

(Source: CBS News)

Reza Moghaddasi, former Tehran Times and Mehr managing director, dies at 50

1 → Moghaddasi was considered a leading journalist in the Iranian media outlets, known for his expertise in field of journalism.

He also served as a member of the board of the Association of Muslim Journalists for two terms.

A number of Iranian officials and figures, including Guardian Council spokesman Abbasali Kadkhodaei, Foreign Minister's Special Assistant in Political Affairs Hossein Jaber Ansari, Supreme National Security Council spokesman Keyvan Khosravi, Presidential Office's Director for Communications and Information Parviz Esmaeili and Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi, expressed grief over Moghaddasi's demise.

"For he who was both Reza and Moghaddas (sacred)," Kadkhodaei said in his message, in reference to the sanctity of Imam Reza (AS), the eighth Imam of Shia Muslims who is buried in Mashhad.

He described Moghaddasi as an "honest" journalist who was concerned "not for himself, but for his country."

Remembering the last time he visited Moghaddasi in the hospital, Kadkhodaei said Reza (meaning contentment in Arabic) was content with his condition and only wanted the contentment of Allah.

"He also talked about his love for the Leader," he added.

Jaber Ansari expressed his condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of Moghaddasi in all media outlets he

had worked for, and wished patience for his bereaved family.

In a message, Khosravi also offered his condolences to Moghaddasi's family and the media community. He said Moghaddasi's relentless effort in defending the values of the Islamic Revolution and his strong resolve in "honest journalism" were among his distinctive qualities.

Esmaeili said in a message that Moghaddasi was an ethical journalist and a committed manager who sought to promote the Islamic and revolutionary values through his "honest" and "continuous" efforts.

Qassemi also sent his condolences to the Moghaddasi family, colleagues and the media community, wishing for God's mercy for his soul and patience for his family.

Israel strikes ‘ Hamas position ’ in north Gaza

Israel says its warplanes have hit a target belonging to the Palestinian resistance movement of Hamas in the northern Gaza Strip.

The attack took place on Friday against “a Hamas observation post,” AFP reported, citing an Israeli military statement. The spot hit was situated near the city of Beit Hanoun in the coastal enclave’s extreme northeast.

No casualties have been reported so far, but the offensive inflicted damage to some residential structures. The agency cited local resident Mohamed Abu Jarad as saying that he and his family had been forced to flee their home after the aircraft released two missiles onto the ground target.

The report said the strike had come hours after a rocket was allegedly fired at Israel from Gaza.

Israel has launched several wars on the Palestinian coastal sliver, the last of which began in early July 2014. The military aggression, which ended on August 26, 2014, killed nearly 2,200 Palestinians. Over 11,100 others were also wounded in the war. The Gaza Strip has been under an Israeli siege since June 2007. The blockade has caused a decline in the standards of living as well as unprecedented levels of unemployment and unrelenting poverty.

■ **U.S. deploys troops to occupied territories for joint war games with Israel**

Meantime, the United States has deployed military forces to the Israeli-occupied territories ahead of a joint war game with the Tel Aviv as the regime ramps up its threats of a new war against Lebanon.

Israeli media outlets announced the arrival of the American troops on Thursday in preparation for the so-called Juniper Cobra biennial military drills, which will start next week.

The last edition of the drills enlisted more than 3,000 forces from the two sides. The sources said the maneuvers simulate engagement with the countries lying to the north and south of the occupied territories, including Lebanon.

Israel and Lebanon are technically at war since 1967 when the regime occupied the country’s Shebaa Farms.

Israel staged two wholesale wars against Lebanon in 2000 and 2006 to defeat the country’s resistance movement of Hezbollah, which is Lebanon’s de facto military power.

Tel Aviv fell short of the ambition in both cases in the face of strong resistance by Hezbollah, backed by the national army, and instead saw its myth of invincibility being dealt a serious blow.

On Wednesday, the Israeli minister for military affairs, Avigdor Lieberman, renewed the threat of a new war against Lebanon, saying Beirut would “pay the full price” for its ties with Tehran in a future military offensive.

Lieberman also warned companies not to engage in oil and gas exploration activities with Lebanon.

Hezbollah responded by saying the group would “decisively



confront any assault on our oil and gas rights.”

Lebanon’s Hezbollah vows to defend Lebanon’s oil and gas rights against new Israeli aggression.

Prime Minister Sa’ad al-Hariri and other Lebanese statesmen also reacted, with Hariri saying Lieberman’s remarks were one of several “threatening messages” from Israel over the previous days.

Hariri had on January 25 called Israel the greatest threat to Lebanon’s stability amid similar indications that the regime could be contemplating new military offensive against his nation. Lieberman suggested that a war with Lebanon would also likely involve Syria.

■ **EU: Israel using tourism to legitimize settlement expansion**

Elsewhere, a report by a group of European Union diplomats in the Israeli-occupied al-Quds (Jerusalem) has exposed that the Tel Aviv regime is using archaeological and tourism sites in order to justify the presence and expansion of settlements in the Palestinian neighborhoods of the holy city.

The report, acquired by the British daily The Guardian, stated that Israeli projects in East al-Quds (Jerusalem) are being used “as a political tool to modify the historical narrative and to support, legitimize and expand settlements.”

“East Jerusalem (al-Quds) is the only place where Israeli parks are declared on populated neighborhoods,” it pointed

out. The report also presented a bleak picture of the overall situation in al-Quds, warning that the prospects for peace have worsened.

It further pointed to the marginalization of Palestinians, who make up for about 37% of the city’s population, noting that Israeli officials have demolished more than 130 buildings and left 228 people with no place of residence.

“The city has largely ceased to be the Palestinian economic, urban and commercial center it used to be,” the report stated.

Less than a month before the U.S. President Donald Trump took office, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2334, calling on Israel to “immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem” al-Quds.

About 600,000 Israelis live in over 230 illegal settlements built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and East Jerusalem al-Quds.

Palestinians want the West Bank as part of a future independent Palestinian state, with East al-Quds (Jerusalem) as its capital.

The last round of Israeli-Palestinian talks collapsed in 2014. Among the major sticking points in those negotiations was Israel’s continued settlement expansion on Palestinian territories.

(Source: agencies)

Are you OK, Aunt May? China warms to British Prime Minister

British Prime Minister Theresa May landed in China earlier this week fending off questions about her future amid mounting accusations of poor leadership, boring policies, and weakness over Brexit.

By Friday the 61-year old leader was basking in a warm reception from the leaders of world’s second-largest economy, while concerned Chinese citizens affectionately nicknamed her ‘Aunt May’ and worried if her legs were warm enough in the Beijing cold.

“What’s past is prologue,” said President Xi Jinping during his one-to-one meeting with May, quoting British playwright William Shakespeare to signal his hopes for strengthening ties.

The three-day trade visit has seen May earn assurances from China that Brexit will not affect the country’s enthusiasm for the so-called “golden era” of relations and a promise to open up Chinese markets to new British business.

While words will mean little if not backed up with action, and there are scant details about the headline announcement of 9 billion pounds of trade deals signed during the trip, the mood music for May’s visit pointed to a Chinese state seeking to rally support around her.

There was no sign of a hangover from the 2016 diplomatic spat between the two nations caused by May’s decision to delay a part Chinese-funded nuclear plant over concerns about foreign investment in key British infrastructure.

Asked by Chinese state television about her new moniker - a common Chinese term of endearment for respected women - May said she was honored, and her officials were



privately thrilled that the name had stuck.

Diplomatic sources say while China has expressed concern about Brexit, it has also been reassured by messages that Britain’s door is wide open to Chinese investment - a marked contrast to the suspicious reception Chinese companies have recently received in Germany.

May brought up awkward issues like democracy in Hong Kong, human rights and ethical concerns about Xi’s Belt and Road initiative, but was praised as “pragmatic” by the Global Times for not pressing the issue in public.

On Chinese social media, concern about May’s visit focused on less weighty issues - like whether her exposed legs were warm enough after a photograph of her with husband Phillip

inside Beijing’s Forbidden City.

■ **May rejects criticism of Brexit plan**

Elsewhere, May insisted on Friday she was “doing what the British people want” and going nowhere despite growing pressure from her party over her leadership and Brexit strategy.

In a BBC interview at the end of a three-day trip to China, May declined to detail exactly what she wants from negotiations on future ties with the European Union, which begin in April.

Asked whether she would favor a deal that limited disruption to trade, or one that emphasized Britain’s power to forge its own path, she said: “These are not the options we have before us.”

“The option that we have before us is to

go in there with the EU and negotiate a good trade deal.”

May has faced growing public calls from across her Conservative party this week to set out her vision for Brexit more clearly, amid media reports of increasing discontent with her leadership.

Tensions were fuelled by a leaked internal government assessment suggesting that the options on the table so far for a trade deal with the EU would all leave Britain worse off.

The prime minister also sparked concern in Brussels by questioning the rights of EU citizens who arrive in Britain during a post-Brexit transition period.

“What the British people voted for is for us to take back control of our money, our borders and our laws and that’s exactly what we are going to do,” May said in Shanghai.

“We also want to ensure that we can trade across borders.”

“We’re at the start of a negotiation. At the end of the negotiation a deal will be presented to parliament and parliament will have a meaningful vote on that deal.”

Asked if she wanted to be leader in the next election in 2022, May repeated what she said at the start of the trip.

“I’m not a quitter... I am doing what the British people want, which is delivering on Brexit, but also getting out around the world ensuring that we bring jobs back to Britain,” she said.

Referring to business deals struck during the China trip worth \$12.7 billion, she said: “There will be more people in jobs in the UK as a result of this trip. That’s global Britain in action.”

(Source: agencies)

France sends more police to Calais after migrant gunfight



The French government will send more police to Calais to crack down on migrant gangs, the interior minister said on Friday, after gang rivalries erupted into a brawl that left five migrants suffering serious gunshot injuries

Interior Minister Gerard Collomb said he was sending more riot police to the northern port, where asylum seekers and economic migrants hoping to reach Britain continue to fall prey to smugglers undaunted by a long-running security operation.

Thursday’s explosion of violence was a stark reminder that the dismantling of a sprawling camp in late 2016 had failed to halt the arrival of migrants in Calais. It came weeks after Britain promised millions of pounds in extra border control support.

Eritreans and Afghans fought running battles in broad daylight, some armed with rods and metal poles, television pictures showed. It was not clear who was armed with firearms.

Calais Mayor Natacha Bouchart said her town was confronted by all-out gang warfare.

“There will be people here at their wits’ ends faced with this increasingly violent presence among a certain number of migrants, who it is plain to see are organized in gangs,” Collomb told reporters after spending the night in Calais.

“We know there are gang leaders ... and it is these networks we must dismantle,” the minister added.

Promising to ease the pressure on Calais, where Britain’s southern shores can be seen on a clear day, Collomb said that within two weeks the government would take over control of food distribution from local aid groups and conduct the handouts outside the town.

That, he said, would remove an incentive for the migrants to gather in Calais.

Francois Guennoc of the Auberge des Migrants charity told BFM TV that the government still lacked a coherent strategy. “Every time you arrest 10 people, another 10 fill the void.”

Collomb indicated the French government was concerned that hundreds of thousands of migrants would head to France after their asylum requests were rejected in other European countries, above all Germany.

He said half a million migrants, many of them people who had initially been allowed into Germany, had had their requests for asylum rejected.

“The situation’s untenable,” he told reporters, noting that France registered a record 100,000 asylum requests in 2017. Tens of thousands more had been turned around at the border, he said.

More asylum seekers in France came from Albania than any other country, according to official data. Collomb said that while Germany dealt with Albanian cases in several days, France took two to three years.

(Source: agencies)

Migrant boat capsizes off Libya, 90 feared dead, mostly Pakistanis

An estimated 90 migrants are feared to have drowned off the coast of Libya after a smuggler’s boat capsized early on Friday, leaving three known survivors and 10 bodies washed up on shore, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said.

Survivors told aid workers that most of the migrants on board were Pakistanis, who form a growing group heading to Italy from North Africa, IOM spokeswoman Olivia Headdon said.

“They have given an estimate of 90 people who drowned during the capsizing, but we still need to verify the exact number of people who lost their lives during the tragedy,” Headon, speaking from Tunis, told a Geneva news briefing.

“What has been reported to us is that it’s mostly Pakistanis who were on board the boat, but we still need to verify the nationalities and how many from what country,” she said.

Ten bodies have washed up on Libyan shores, two of them known to be Libyans and eight Pakistanis, she said.

Another IOM spokesman, Leonard Doyle, told Reuters Television that the boat was believed to have left shore on Thursday before capsizing early on Friday morning.

Earlier security officials in the western Libyan town of Zuwara said two Libyans and one Pakistani had been rescued from the boat. They said 10 bodies had been recovered, mostly Pakistani, but gave no further information.

Zuwara, located near Libya’s border with Tunisia, was a favored site for migrant boat departures over the past two years but of late has seen only occasional departures. A statement from the Zuwara coastguard said their initial information suggested there were some 90 people on board.

Libya is the main gateway for migrants trying to cross to Europe by sea, though numbers have dropped sharply since July as Libyan factions and authorities - under pressure from Italy and the European Union - have begun to block departures.

More than 600,000 people are believed to have made the journey from Libya to Italy over the past four years.

Prior to Friday’s incident, some 6,624 migrants are believed to have arrived in Europe by sea so far this year and a further 246 have died, according to IOM figures.

The Libyan coastguard, which receives European Union funding and training, has become more assertive in recent months in intercepting migrants and bringing them back to Libya.

Activists have criticized the policy, saying migrants often face extreme hardship and abuse in Libya, including forced labor, according to Human Rights Watch and other rights groups.

Migrants who are caught trying to cross to Italy are put in severely overcrowded detention centers authorized by the interior ministry.

(Source: Reuters)

UN chief urges release of Reuters journalists in Myanmar

United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres urged the international community “to do whatever it can” to secure the release of two Reuters journalists detained in Myanmar, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on

Thursday.

“The Secretary-General has expressed his concern at the erosion of the press freedom in Myanmar and he has called for the international community to do

whatever it can to secure the release of the journalists and to ensure press freedom in the country,” Dujarric said.

(Source: Reuters)

France army helicopters crash: at least five killed near Saint-Tropez

At least five people have been killed after two army helicopters crashed near a lake in southern France.

The French military helicopters belonging to an army flight training school crashed close to Saint-Tropez on Friday morning.

“The helicopters collided. There were three crew in one and two in the other. All are dead,” a police official said in the nearby town of Brignoles, adding that one body had still to be recovered from the wreckage.

Investigators said the circumstances of the crash, at Carcès lake in the southeastern Var region, were unclear.

A security source and an official from the local authority said five people were killed



in the crash.

The crash happened at Carcès lake in

southern France

A French army spokeswoman said the crash

happened near the town of Brignoles - about 30 miles (50km) northwest of Saint-Tropez.

Prefect Jean-Luc Videlaire, the top government official in the region, said on local television that the cause was unclear.

Some 20 troops joined two rescue helicopters and police at the crash scene, along with local officials.

The helicopters that crashed were based at the army’s light aviation school based in nearby Le-Cannet-des-Maures.

The school includes a special joint training program with German military pilots and its pilots are sometimes used for firefighting operations in the area.

(Source: The Telegraph)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	98133.5
IFX	1089.41

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	46,640 rials
EUR	59,000 rials
GBP	66,900 rials
AED	12, 900 rials

Source: Mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$69.46/b
WTI	\$65.90/b
OPEC Basket	\$66.28/b
Gold	\$1,339.75/oz
Silver	\$17.05/oz
Platinum	\$1,001.20/oz

Sources: Oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



Iran holds 3b tons of Iron ore reserves: industry official

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — Head of Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) put the country’s iron ore reserves at 3 billion tons, IRIB news reported.

According to Mehdi Karbasian, the country plans to increase its current 21 million tons of steel production to 55 million tons by the end of Iranian calendar year of 1404 (March 2026), so it needs to boost the amount of its iron ore extraction.



Turkey’s imports from Iran rise 59% in 2017

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — Increasing 59 percent, Iran’s exports to Turkey hit \$7.49 billion in 2017, according to the latest report of Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat).

Iran’s exports to Turkey was \$4.69 billion in 2016, the same report confirmed.

Iran-Turkey trade stood at \$10.75 billion in 2017, growing 11 percent in comparison with the previous year when the figure was \$9.66 billion.

Turkey’s exports to Iran decreased 34 percent from \$4.96 billion in 2016 to \$3.25 billion in 2017.

Europe’s next crisis may test ECB limits, push rates lower

Europe is not ready for another economic downturn and the next crisis could test the limits of the European Central Bank, potentially pushing interest rates much deeper into negative territory, ECB board member Benoit Coeure said on Friday.

Having fought off Europe’s debt crisis with a 2 trillion euro spending spree, some ECB officials are concerned that governments have used their time poorly, failing to improve the bloc’s shock absorption capacity and leaving it vulnerable to future shocks.

Arguing that many of the institutional failings that caused the last crisis are still unresolved, Coeure warned that even a small downturn could create large economic and social costs.

“The next crisis may well force the ECB to test the limits of its mandate,” Coeure, one of ECB President Mario Draghi’s top deputies, told a conference in Slovenia.

“Depending on the nature of the next crisis, policy action might require taking short-term rates much deeper into negative territory,” he said. “Or it might require purchases of assets that are riskier than public or corporate debt. Or it may draw us dangerously close to monetary financing of governments.”

Although the ECB has already reduced its stimulus measures since the height of the crisis, its deposit rate stands at a record low of minus 0.4 percent and it holds more than two trillion euros worth of sovereign and corporate debt, all with the aim of keeping borrowing costs super low. Coeure argued that flexible markets, including an integrated financial market, should be the first line of defense because they absorb shocks efficiently. But only a fraction of the European Union’s reform proposals have been accepted.

A finalised capital markets and banking union would also diversify and reduce risk by limiting the financial burden on governments and taxpayers, Coeure argued.

(Source: Reuters)

China’s banking regulator fines 19 banks over \$3-billion pledged loan fraud

China’s banking regulator has imposed fines of 52.5 million yuan (\$8.36-million) on 19 banks in the northwestern province of Shaanxi and the central province of Henan over a 19-billion-yuan (\$3-billion) pledged loan fraud, it said on Friday.

It is the third major penalty handed down since the start of the year as the regulator steps up a crackdown on illegal practices to fend off financial risk.

(Source: Reuters)

Development projects worth over \$2.2b inaugurated



President Hassan Rouhani inaugurated Gol Gohar iron ore concentrate factory’s production line 7 in Kerman Province, southeast of Iran on Thursday.

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The agricultural projects included under-pressure irrigation systems, cold stores and numerous factories.

During President Rouhani’s visit, Minister of Roads and Urban Development Abbas Akhoundi also inaugurated numerous road construction projects with an estimated value of 2.15 trillion rials (about \$47.15 million).

Rouhani also commenced nine projects in water and electricity sectors through a video conference with Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian, ILNA reported.

As reported by Shata news agency, 13 industrial projects worth over 35.2 trillion rials (about \$777 million) belonging to the National Iranian Copper Industries Company were also among the inaugurated projects.

In total, 4.2 trillion rials (about \$92.7 million) has been directly invested in Kerman’s copper industries during the past four years and it is expected that the figure will reach 162 trillion rials (about \$3.57 billion) within the next four years.

According to IRNA, on the sidelines of the president’s visit to Kerman, Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Masoud Karbasian put the country’s economic growth at six percent for the current calendar year (which ends on March 20, 2018) saying that investment making has increased by 70 percent compared to the previous year.

France looks to sidestep U.S. sanctions by offering Iran export loans

France is looking to sidestep U.S. sanctions by offering export credits to Iranian buyers later this year, according to the head of a state-owned investment bank, Bpifrance.

The bank’s chief executive Nicolas Dufourcq said Wednesday that the new loans will be financed entirely without any U.S. currency.

“This is a completely separate flow (of money),” he said. “There is no (U.S.) dollar in this scheme ... no one holding a U.S. passport.”

There are currently about 1.5 billion euros invested in potential contracts from French exports, Reuters reported



Bpifrance chief executive Nicolas Dufourcq said that France plans to offer export credits to Iranian buyers later this year.

citing Dufourcq.

The move could be risky as President Donald Trump has voiced his disappointment over the Iran nuclear deal, an agreement that France is a major partner in.

Trump has threatened to withdraw the United States from the deal unless France, Britain and Germany agree to strengthen the terms of agreement.

France and other European countries have made the argument that they should increase trade with Iran since the country has complied with all the parameters of the 2015 agreement.

(Source: Fox News)

Italy’s inflation rate rose more than expected in Jan.

Italian inflation increased above estimates in January, while monthly prices fell on post-holiday store sales. Consumer prices based on European Union criteria rose last month 1.1 percent from a year earlier, national statistics agency Istat said in a preliminary report on Friday in Rome. The median estimate in a Bloomberg survey of 16 analysts called for a 0.8 percent rise.

Italian consumer prices fell 1.6 percent on a monthly basis, as a result of winter sales. Core inflation, which strips out energy and some other price-volatile items, picked

up to 0.8 percent in January from 0.5 percent the month before.

The Italian inflation rate is getting closer to the 1.3 percent recorded for the euro zone as a whole last month. That in turn is below the area’s central bank target of just under 2 percent.

“The weakness of underlying price increases is unlikely to stop the European Central Bank from altering its forward guidance by dropping a commitment to keep expanding its asset purchases until inflation accelerates on a sustainable basis,” Bloomberg economists

including Powell said in a note this week.

The Italian figures for January were based on a revised basket of goods and services Istat uses to measure the monthly changes in Italy’s consumer prices.

Transportation and restaurants were given greater weights, while some specialty wines and electric dryers were among those sectors added. Education, tobacco products and communication were among those given lesser weight, according to Istat.

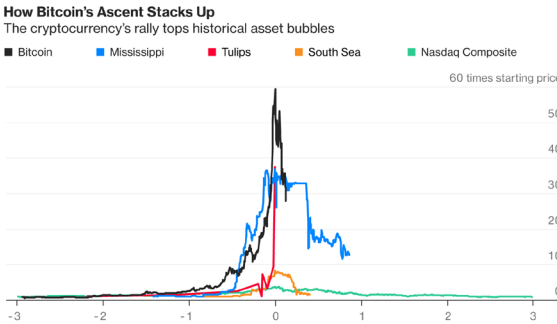
(Source: Bloomberg)

Bitcoin drops below \$8,000 as cryptocurrency pain continues

Bitcoin fell below \$8,000 as a miserable 2018 continued for cryptocurrencies, with investors confronting a mounting list of concerns about the future of the industry.

The largest digital currency dropped 12 percent to \$7982 at 11:45 a.m. in London, the lowest since Nov. 24, according to consolidated Bloomberg pricing. Rival coins Ripple, Ether and Litecoin tumbled at least 18 percent as losses continued to spread across cryptocurrencies.

Since reaching a record high of \$19,511 on Dec. 18 shortly after the introduction of regulated futures contracts in the U.S., Bitcoin has wiped out more than half its value amid waves of negative news. Setbacks included escalating regulatory threats from authorities around the world including



UK businesses seek opportunities in China after Brexit

As the terms of a Brexit remain uncertain, U.K. businesses are looking to tap into the Chinese market, more so than ever.

British Prime Minister Theresa May embarked on a trip to China on Wednesday with a 50-strong business delegation, featuring sectors ranging from health care to clean energy, in her bid to cement Britain-China ties. The trip comes amid British negotiations about an exit from the European Union, and those are giving the country an even greater need to look east, some observers said.

“Without detracting at all from the ongoing importance of EU trade to the U.K., there is an undoubted need to put much more effort into trade with the 93 percent of the world that does not live in Europe,” said Michael Sippitt, chairman of Clarkslegal, a commercial law firm in the U.K. “The geography is on China’s side, the U.S. was always going to struggle with competing in Asia, so right now for the EU and the U.K. the center of world economic gravity is moving east and the best response of British businesses to Brexit is to move east as well.”

Among the companies banking on this

new era is health technology artificial intelligence start-up Medopad, which on Thursday inked 15 trade deals worth over 100 million pounds (about \$143 million) with companies including Chinese tech giant Tencent, Ping An, GSK China and Lenovo.

Through remote patient monitoring apps and advanced analytics, Medopad offers health-care providers, pharmaceutical companies and insurance firms information, allowing them to improve medical diagnoses, develop more effective drugs and reward policyholders for healthy behavior.

Specifically, the partnership with Tencent will advance the use of AI in health-care platforms for research impact and clinical decision support.

“By working with the biggest names, Tencent being the largest technology company and doing collaborations on AI and areas that China is investing a lot of money into it, and us leveraging our medical knowledge, together we think we can add value to a lot of patients within China but also globally,” CEO Dan Vahdat told CNBC.

Against a backdrop of China’s ambitions for health-care reform and becoming

a global leader in AI, Medopad may have hit a sweet spot.

Even less obvious sectors reported optimism during the trip.

Karen Betts, chief executive of the Scotch Whisky Association told CNBC she sees a “massive growth opportunity” in China. “As people become more affluent and more middle class, their tastes change and we would expect them to want to try more of a range of foreign imported spirits and we think Scotch is a very strong category within that.”

Regulatory hurdles in the world’s second-largest economy are not deterring businesses.

Betts said Chinese authorities have been “extremely cooperative” and “very helpful” in removing counterfeit Scotch from the market. And despite health regulations and cost challenges in the consumer space, she said she continues to see great potential.

Vahdat said he was also unfazed. “Our core belief in our company is that you have to stay better than everybody else and just run as fast as you can and don’t worry too much about IP (Intellectual Property). Because in technology, your IP today, tomorrow

is expired IP anyway because things are moving really fast.”

■ **Ushering in a post-Brexit era**

As Britain re-orientates itself and seeks its own standing beyond the EU, a diversification strategy away from the bloc is key.

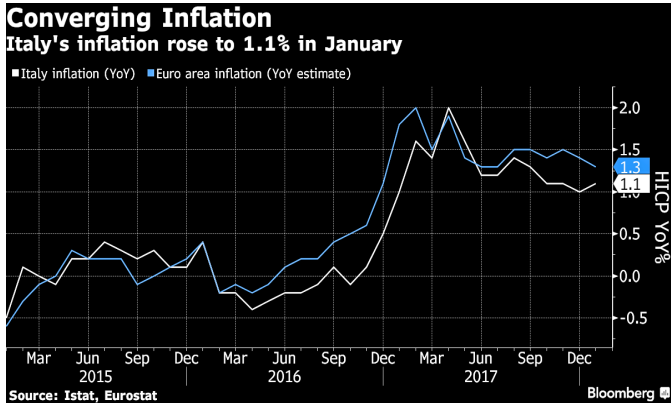
“As part of this new movement, new future that is coming, the government of the U.K. specifically, they are helping us even more to become an international company, working with China and other regions — probably Commonwealth countries — this is an area which we are also very focused. So for us, we haven’t seen any impact. It has been positive movement,” said Vahdat.

At a time she calls a “golden era” in relations between both countries, May says she is keen to explore all options for the future of the trade relationship.

Betts said she saw a “massive growth opportunity” for Scotch Whisky in China and she hoped to see tariffs go below the current 5 percent level.

With 61 million pounds (about \$87 million) of Scotch Whisky exported to China last year, a free trade agreement between both countries “could really help us,” she said.

(Source: cnbc)



Big banks accept OPEC was right as they embrace oil near \$80

Wall Street's biggest banks have changed sides and are embracing a surge in oil prices.

Goldman Sachs Group Inc., Morgan Stanley and JPMorgan Chase & Co. have all issued a flurry of bullish forecasts in the past fortnight. They've abandoned their skepticism and are accepting that OPEC's output cuts are finally succeeding in clearing a global glut.

This faith is a recent phenomenon. At almost every stage of OPEC's quest to end the industry's worst downturn in decades, there were a few prominent analysts ready to cast doubt on the effort.

Now, the "New Oil Order" that Goldman declared in 2014 -- effectively saying the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries was obsolete -- is officially "on hiatus."

Here are some of the ways the biggest banks have been proven wrong:

■ **OPEC won't reach a deal**

Goldman and others had predicted in 2014 that any effort by OPEC to curb supply would hardly amount to much -- the U.S. shale industry can raise production at such pace and volumes that it would fill the gap.

OPEC shared this view, but then surprised the market in September 2016 by announcing their intention to cut supply.

Skepticism persisted. Most analysts surveyed by Bloomberg in November that year expected member countries to fail to reach an agreement. BP Plc said the mood in the market



was "pessimistic."

Yet on Nov. 30, the pact was finalized. The bigger surprise came 11 days later as a number of countries outside the group joined the deal, including former rival Russia. It had once been thought unfeasible this could ever happen.

■ **OPEC will fail to deliver**

OPEC has a track record of backsliding on supply promises as the temptation to boost revenues leads members to cheat.

The latest initiative would go the same way, banks said. Morgan Stanley saw only a "small

chance" the targets would be implemented, expecting the agreement to unravel in six months. JPMorgan predicted it would "collapse" by the end of 2017 and Commerzbank AG said OPEC would "over-promise and under-deliver."

Yet the group implemented 95 percent of the cuts it promised last year, and its allies delivered 82 percent. OPEC's compliance improved through the year and reached 129 percent in December. Admittedly, unplanned losses in Venezuela and elsewhere helped, but the compliance rate is unheard of in OPEC's history.

■ **Cuts won't clear the glut**

Analysts earlier warned of a new surplus in 2018, and the need for OPEC to persevere with its alliance. They are now rethinking their pessimism.

Citigroup and Goldman have changed tack to say the inventory excess has disappeared. Others, including UBS Group AG and Societe Generale SA, said last month that OPEC and Russia should wind down the strategy earlier than scheduled, phasing out the cuts from the middle of the year.

■ **Shale will keep a lid on prices**

It wasn't just the banks which saw U.S. shale as a mortal threat to OPEC's plans.

Even the International Energy Agency, which remains neutral on market policy, cautioned that the cuts would only backfire as \$60 oil triggers a flood of American supply.

Sure enough, the boost to prices from OPEC's strategy has invigorated U.S. output, which surged to a 47-year high of 10 million barrels a day in November.

Nonetheless, forecasters are predicting prices will return to levels considered unthinkable during the downturn, despite the U.S. supply.

Goldman boosted its six-month price target by a third on Thursday, to \$82.50 a barrel. JPMorgan's estimate of \$70 a barrel for average Brent prices in 2018 is almost 50 percent higher than in early October.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Trump pulls the plug on clean energy with deep cuts to renewable research

The Trump administration is expected to propose severe budget cuts to the government's renewable energy and energy efficiency programs. The amount of money designated for such projects is set to be reduced by 72 percent for the fiscal year 2019.

President Trump had pursued cuts to the Department of Energy's funding for the current fiscal year, which runs until October 1. However, these plans were derailed because of struggles to put a budget in place, which prompted a series of temporary resolutions maintaining current levels of spending.

The Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) will spend \$2.04 billion in the current fiscal year. The Trump administration made an unsuccessful attempt to reduce this to \$636.1 million, and is now proposing an even smaller budget of \$575.5 million for the 2019 fiscal year.

Congress will likely block most of the sharpest cuts being proposed by the Trump administration, and it's possible that eleventh-hour revisions could make the budget more feasible. Still, these plans seem to be a clear

statement of intent from the president.

■ **Beautiful, clean coal**

It's no secret that President Trump is reticent to move away from fossil fuels -- he promised to bring jobs back to the coal industry on the campaign trail in 2016, and he made reference to "beautiful, clean coal" in this week's State of the Union address. However, the administration's will to favor fossil fuels and backtrack on clean energy development is likely to have repercussions across the globe.

Beyond the funding recommendations, the documents seen by The Washington Post propose cutting the amount of staff at the department from 680 in 2017 to 450 in 2019. With less money and less staff, it's difficult to imagine how EERE could maintain its current output.

One of EERE's greatest successes is the SunShot initiative, launched in February 2011 with the aim of reducing the cost of solar energy by 75 percent. By September 2017, the program had already met the goal it had set for 2020, bringing prices

down to six cents per kilowatt-hour.

This progress could be undone as in January 2018 President Trump ordered new tariffs for imported solar cells, which could raise their price by up to 30 percent in the U.S. This decision will make solar energy more expensive to implement, as well as costing the country as many as 23,000 jobs in the industry.

Reports indicate that these budget cuts are partially inspired by a shift toward nuclear energy, which is favored by Energy Secretary Rick Perry. Despite the fact that nuclear power is safe, and indeed getting even safer as technology develops, this strategy stands in contrast to the fact that solar capacity has been catching up with nuclear in recent years.

These budget cuts seem to reflect the energy preferences of those within the Trump administration. However, given the U.S. is the second biggest polluter in the world, its energy policies matter, and their potential consequences could be felt well beyond the national borders.

(Source: Futurism)

Oil from sunken Sanchi may have reached Japan shores: Coast Guard

Oil from the world's worst crude tanker disaster in decades may have reached the shores of Japan, the Japanese Coast Guard said on Friday.

Black oil clumps of have reached the shores of the island of Amami-Oshima, a coast guard official told Reuters by phone. Authorities are checking to see if it comes from the Sanchi tanker that sank in the East China Sea last month, after being alerted to its presence by the public.

Amami-Oshima is part of a chain of islands that includes Okinawa, an area famous for pristine beaches and reef systems. The Iranian tanker sank nearly three weeks ago, raising worries about damage to the marine ecosystem.

The bodies of two sailors were recovered from the ship while a third body was pulled from the sea near the vessel. The remaining 29 crew of the ship are presumed dead.

Earlier the Chinese government said the sunken tanker had left two oil slicks. The ship, which was carrying 136,000 tonnes or almost 1 million barrels of condensate - an ultra-light, highly flammable crude oil - sank after several explosions weakened the hull.

Japan's environment ministry had said last month it saw little chance that the spill would reach Japanese shores.

(Source: Reuters)



Polish offshore wind power generation could hit 8GW

Poland could have up to eight gigawatts (GW) of offshore wind capacity installed in the Baltic Sea by 2035, according to analysis by the Foundation for Sustainable Energy (FNEZ).

FNEZ, a Polish think tank, said that four GW could be built by 2030 together with the necessary grid connections in a report entitled 'Polish offshore wind energy and maritime industry development'.

It added that the local supply chain could deliver between 60 percent and 70 percent of future market requirements.

However, a stable regulatory regime and market incentives would be needed to realize these projections, said FNEZ management board president Maciej Stryjecki.

The results of the analysis will be discussed at the Baltic Energy Industry Forum in the Polish capital Warsaw between 28 February and 1 March.

(Source: renews.biz)



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The Longines Master Collection

The Saudi visit to Britain: Don't trade away values

Theresa May is expected to welcome Saudi Arabia's crown prince Mohammed bin Salman, the country's de facto ruler, to Downing Street in the coming weeks. The 32-year-old is now in control of a kingdom where flogging, torturing and not electing a central government are seen as building blocks of society. Little wonder there's already a campaign to stop him from coming. The crown prince has sold himself as a liberal reformer who has allowed women to drive, watch football matches and sing on stage. These are welcome but tiny steps forward in a nation where women cannot marry, divorce, travel, get a job or have surgery without male permission.



As leader of her country, May must hope to use the power of her nation as a force for good. The temptation will be for the prime minister, when she meets the crown prince, not to serve anything other than self-interest. Dispiritingly it has been reported that City rules are being bent to secure the flotation of a \$100bn slice of Saudi Arabia's national oil company. The war in Yemen, which was the brainchild of the crown prince, is now the world's worst man-made humanitarian crisis. It is one where, shamefully, British arms and British servicemen are providing support to prolong the war and increase civilian suffering. British arms sales to Saudi Arabia are running at £200m a month, something that seems to weigh on May's mind more than the deaths of children in faraway places.

Britain should not trade away its principles and values. The crown prince's anti-corruption crackdown is clearly less about graft than a purge of royal rivals. The ruthless consolidation of power highlights the Saudi regime's intolerance for dissent. The report by Ken Macdonald QC, a former DPP, and another leading human rights barrister into a wave of arbitrary disappearances of human rights activists, political dissidents and clerics in Saudi Arabia ought to be required reading in Downing Street. Britain and Saudi Arabia both sit on the UN human rights council. The latter's human rights record is being reviewed by the council this year. Within that context, May should raise the issue of freedom of expression with the crown prince, even if the lecturing grates.

The war in Yemen, which was the brainchild of the crown prince, is now the world's worst man-made humanitarian crisis. It is one where, shamefully, British arms and British servicemen are providing support to prolong the war and increase civilian suffering.

(Source: The Guardian)

Who can win the peace in Syria?

This long war is heading to a contest over which countries can afford to reconstruct the country and win over the Syrian people.

One lesson from the history of war is that a military victory may be no victory at all. What comes in the wake of war – resettlement of civilians, reconstruction of a nation, and reconciliation – is often the permanent victory. After seven years of fighting and 400,000 killed, Syria may be nearing this point. The war still continues in parts of the country. But the real battle now is over who defines the peace, and pays for it.

Last year, an estimated 715,000 Syrians returned to their homes. More are returning this year. The Bashar al-Assad government now controls about half the territory and population while its various opponents control the other half.

As war fatigue sets in and Syrians yearn for peace, a new contest has emerged. All sides to the conflict want to woo civilians to their side by rebuilding homes, reopening schools, and trading with the outside world. One estimate for Syria's reconstruction is \$200 billion to \$300 billion. The terms of any political settlement in ongoing negotiations will probably depend on which outside powers can afford that price tag.

The final victory, in other words, could lie with those countries with the economic strength and the humanitarian spirit to help stabilize Syria. France has already said it will contribute \$12.4 million to revive Raqqa. And in recent weeks, the Trump administration has committed to "stabilization initiatives" in areas liberated by American-backed local forces. In the past year, it has spent about \$1.5 billion.

"Consistent with our values, America has the opportunity to help a people which has suffered greatly," said U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson last month. For its part, Europe seeks to stem the flow of Syrian refugees and encourage some to return home.

This leaves the peace advantage to others. The U.S., along with the European Union and other partners, will not provide assistance to any area under the control of the Assad government. This helps deny political legitimacy to the regime.

"Our expectation is that the desire for a return to normal life and these tools of pressure will help rally the Syrian people and individuals within the regime to compel Assad to step aside," said Tillerson.

Will this postwar strategy work? Recent wars – in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya – would suggest that postwar compassion fatigue among Americans and their allies can be as troublesome as war fatigue. Those countries are still not at peace. Syria could be different. The lesson of war is that victory must be defined far beyond the use of force. Peace takes another kind of strength.

(Source: The CSM)

Egypt's allies shrug as Sissi ensures a sham presidential election

By Frida Ghitis

As Egypt's presidential election draws closer, the government of President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi has resolutely quashed any hope that it will allow even a hint of democratic legitimacy. Registration for the March election closed this week after authorities made sure every credible candidate was pushed out of the contest, either through arrest or intimidation. A token contender, whose party had already endorsed Sissi, was added at the last minute to avoid the embarrassment of a one-man race.

The spectacle has been thoroughly demoralizing not only for the opposition, but also for many of the Egyptians who welcomed Sissi nearly half a decade ago as a savior who could pull the country back from the increasingly illiberal policies of the Muslim Brotherhood-led government that was elected in the wake of the Arab Spring uprisings.

The former military chief, who came to power in a 2013 coup on the heels of mass protests, credited his rise to the will of the people and was wildly popular at first. Yet he has shown he no longer trusts them to give him their support. And he is making sure no one in the powerful military mounts a challenge.

If this harsh latest chapter in Egypt has been startling, the international reaction to the crackdown has been no less remarkable. As authorities removed one by one the men who dared to run against Sissi, the outcry from the international community, including from Western democracies with close ties to Egypt, has remained decidedly subdued.

While human rights groups have spoken up unambiguously – Amnesty International decried what it called a "brazen attack" on freedom of expression and political participation – world leaders have kept their criticism to barely audible levels. A United Nations spokesman urged Egypt to ensure the election is "credible, inclusive and peaceful." The European Union has been essentially silent on the matter. Just last week, the EU's foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, met with Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry in Brussels to discuss help for the Palestinians. The diplomats were all smiles, their official statements replete with praise. Mogherini lauded the "indispensable Egyptian role" in Gaza, calling it "extremely positive." Clearly, democracy in Egypt is nowhere on the crowded list of European concerns.

The U.S. State Department used comparatively strong words about the pre-election crackdown. Spokeswoman Heather Nauert said Washington is watching developments closely and called for a "credible electoral process" that "needs to include the opportunity for citizens to participate freely in Egyptian elections."

But the statements from the State Department briefing room were easily overshadowed by those of Vice President Mike Pence, who just visited Cairo, where he lavished praise on the Egyptian president and discussed the fight against terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian issue. There is no evidence that the elections came up, and



U.S. Vice President Mike Pence meets with Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi at the Presidential Palace in Cairo, Jan. 20, 2018.

As authorities removed one by one the men who dared to run against Sissi, the outcry from the international community, including from Western democracies with close ties to Egypt, has remained decidedly subdued.

it's unlikely that the Trump administration, which has shown little inclination to speak up for democracy, would have brought it up in private.

It is clear that in the current geopolitical climate, no world leader is prepared to make stern demands on the Egyptian strongman. The high hopes of the Arab Spring veered off into civil war and chaos in most places, with the notable exception of Tunisia, and outside powers are once again more interested in stability than democracy, especially given the continuing attacks by extremists in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula.

With two months to go before Sissi will almost certainly be re-elected by something approaching 100 percent of the vote, the field of candidates is all but deserted. Sissi has made sure there is no one in a position to mount even a remotely credible threat.

The elimination of candidates was so thorough, the democratic veil so threadbare, that on Sunday a group of prominent opposition leaders released a statement asking that the elections be scrapped. On Wednesday, a "visibly furious" Sissi, according to the Associated Press, threatened a harsher response to potential protests or attempts to disrupt the vote. "What happened seven or eight years ago will not be repeated," he warned, referring to the popular protests that brought down former President Hosni Mubarak.

For a brief time, it appeared that Egypt might have a feebly competitive election, one in which candidates – most with military backgrounds – had at least an opportunity to present themselves to voters and put

their names on the ballot. Instead, the country has seen an embarrassing string of aborted efforts.

Sami Anan, a former general and army chief of staff, announced he was running via Facebook on the same day Sissi made his candidacy official. Three days later, state television read a dramatic announcement accusing Anan of incitement and trying to create divisions between the military and the people. Anan was then arrested.

A few days later, one of Anan's top advisers, Hesham Genena, a well-known anti-corruption whistleblower, was hospitalized after surviving a life-threatening beating by thugs.

Back in November, former Prime Minister Ahmed Shafiq said he was running. Shafiq, a former air force commander, launched his short-lived campaign from the United Arab Emirates, where he had fled in 2012 after losing his presidential bid to the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohammed Morsi, who promptly issued a warrant for his arrest.

But just after his announcement, Emirati authorities detained Shafiq and deported him to Egypt. Earlier this month, he announced via Twitter that he had reconsidered his decision to run and would "not be the ideal person to lead the state's affairs during the coming period."

Another former military man, Col. Ahmed Konsowa, was arrested last month after announcing he was running. He was sentenced to six years in prison on charges of "stating political opinions contrary to the requirements of military order," according to his lawyer.

A potential contender, Mohammed Anwar Sadat, a prominent former legislator and nephew of the assassinated president who preceded Mubarak, said he opted not to run because of the threatening atmosphere.

The one candidate whose profile was a departure from the military men was human rights lawyer Khaled Ali. But he saw the writing on the wall. Last week, after Anan's arrest, he met with his campaign staff and made the decision to withdraw.

By then, Sissi was starting to look rather alone on the ballot. Still running was Mortada Mansour, the pugnacious head of the popular soccer team Zamalek SC. Before long he, too, withdrew his candidacy.

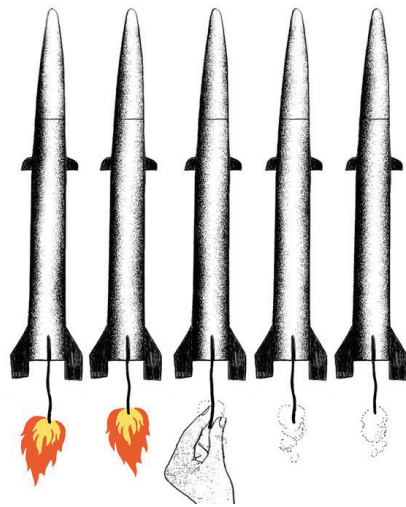
On Monday, with only hours until the 2 p.m. deadline for candidates to register, Sissi was the only one left – all credible would-be challengers were in prison or otherwise intimidated and vanquished.

That's when one of his supporters came to his aid, providing a face-saving candidacy for what is clearly a sham election. Mousa Mostafa Mousa, head of the Ghad, or Tomorrow, party, registered to run in time. Egyptians laughed. The Ghad party has been outspoken in its support for Sissi's re-election, making it obvious that this candidacy was meant to help, not challenge, the president.

Seven years after the pro-democracy uprising in Tahrir Square, most Egyptians have no taste for revolution, while the rest of the world is resigned to seeing Egypt ruled by a military man who has thrown away any semblance of democratic legitimacy.

(Source: WPR)

Playing with fire and fury on North Korea



Trump and his inner circle don't want people with contrary views to challenge them on the most consequential decision a president can make – sending Americans to war.

In the end, Cha was unceremoniously dumped because he voiced opposition to the administration's threat to carry out a pre-emptive military strike against North Korea before it can build a nuclear-armed missile able to hit the United States.

One can only read this as evidence that Trump and his inner circle don't want people with contrary views to challenge them on the most consequential decision a president can make – sending Americans to war. Has Trump already made it?

Cha took an extraordinary step by writing an opinion

article for The Washington Post in which he described his objections to what's being called the "bloody nose" strategy, a limited military strike on North Korean nuclear facilities that will supposedly persuade the country's leader, Kim Jong-un, to abandon his nuclear ambitions.

Cha noted the large number of Americans living in Japan and South Korea. He said a military strike on the North would be "putting at risk an American population the size of a medium-size U.S. city – Pittsburgh, say, or Cincinnati – on the assumption that a crazy and undeterrable dictator will be rationally cowed by a demonstration of U.S. kinetic power." Such action would only delay, not end, North Korea's program and would provoke Kim into a vengeful effort to sell nuclear technology to any "bad actors" who will buy it, Cha argued.

Cha is no dove on North Korea. He supports tough sanctions; beefing up of missile defense systems, intelligence-sharing and strike capabilities with South Korea and Japan; and even a maritime coalition to intercept nuclear technology leaving North Korea.

It's also important to emphasize that neither he nor Trump mentioned diplomacy, despite assertions by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis that the administration is open to talks with North Korea, although under unrealistic preconditions.

There are no easy or good options with North Korea. Enforcing economic sanctions and blocking deadly technology from entering or leaving North Korea are necessary parts of any reasonable strategy. But so is diplomacy, including negotiations.

Trump's preoccupation with military action and refusal to seriously pursue a diplomatic overture to North Korea are foolhardy, especially when South Korea is using North Korea's participation in the Winter Olympics to defuse tensions and open up space for dialogue.

The United States has been at war continuously since the attacks of Sept. 11 and now has just over 240,000 active-duty and reserve troops in at least 172 countries and territories. Enough.

(Source: The NYT)

Trump administration's aims to weaken Iran: Prof. Entessar

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Professor Nader Entessar from South Alabama University says that “the Trump Administration’s overriding concern is to weaken Iran and, ultimately, bring about a regime change in the country.”

“Anything that creates a distraction from Washington’s prime objective in Iran is viewed as a loss for Trump’s regional policy in the Persian Gulf,” Entessar tells the Tehran Times recently.

Following is the text of the interview:

■ A summit with the participation of the Emir of Qatar, crown prince of Saudi Arabia and crown prince of the UAE is to be held in the United States in May about the Qatar crisis. Does it mean the end of disputes between these countries?

A: Not necessarily. The meeting is designed as a first step to gauge methods by which the Qatar crisis may be addressed. Of course, the Trump administration will seek to interject U.S. interests in the discussion and will try to micro-manage the proceedings to strengthen U.S. interests.

■ U.S. Secretary of State Tillerson has said that the negative consequences of the Persian Gulf regional crises are not only limited to the Arab countries but also they include the United States. What kind of losses is he referring to?

A: Essentially what Secretary Tillerson was referring to was the weakening of the Arab bloc against Iran and the loosening of Washington’s iron grip on developments in the Persian Gulf. The Trump administration’s overriding concern is to weaken Iran and, ultimately, bring about a regime change in the country. Anything that creates a distraction from Washington’s prime objective in Iran is viewed as a loss for Trump’s regional policy in the Persian Gulf.

■ Qatari Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdul Rahman al-Thani said that Qatar is ready to attend the meeting. But he argued that Doha would not be willing to accept the pre-conditions and also demanded resolution of the crisis



on the basis of equality between countries. Is this possible?

A: If the 13 conditions that Saudi Arabia and its allies announced last are viewed as non-negotiable points, then the Qatari crisis will not be resolved. However, if the Saudi-led Arab protagonists are willing to indeed negotiate with Qatar on the basis of equality and desist from treating Qatar as a wayward child that needs to be disciplined, then the crisis with Qatar may be resolvable.

■ Which of the 13 terms announced by Saudi Arabia and

its allies may Qatar have to swallow?

A: Saudi Arabia, or more specifically Mohammad bin Salman (MbS), is fanatically obsessed with Iran. So, I think the first of the 13 conditions, namely scaling down Qatari-Iranian relations and calibrating them along the Saudi-UAE lines as dictated by MbS remains the most important item that Qatar may have to concede. This is where the Trump Administration’s heavy hand will be used to try to bludgeon Qatar into submission.

Saudi Regime's limited reform cannot fool anyone: American analyst

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — A senior American political commentator shrugged off recent social reforms in Saudi Arabia and said the monarchy, whose “core ruthless conservatism” has not changed, cannot fool anyone in the Arab world or elsewhere.

“The core ruthless conservatism of the Saudi leadership has not changed,” John Stepling, who is based in Norway, said in an interview with the Tasnim News Agency.

“Schools in Saudi Arabia still teach children to hate other beliefs and hate people of different cultures,” he said, adding, “And no amount of limited reform changes that and I do not think it really fools anyone, certainly not in the Arab world, not in Iran, and not in Russia.”

Stepling is a well-known author, playwright and an original founding member of the Padua Hills Playwrights Festival, a two-time NEA recipient, Rockefeller Fellow in theater, and PEN-West winner for playwrighting. He is also a regular political commentator for a number of media outlets around the world.

Following is the full text of the interview:

■ Recently, the Saudi regime led by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) has announced dramatic social reforms. The oil-rich kingdom, which has some of the world’s tightest restrictions on women, has long barred women from sports arenas. The kingdom’s General Sports Authority announced in October that stadiums in Jeddah, Dammam, and Riyadh will be set up to accommodate families from early 2018. The announcement is in line with bin Salman’s ambitious reforms shaking up the kingdom, including the historic decision to allow women to drive from June. What is your assessment of the dramatic changes in the Saudi regime’s domestic policy? What objectives is the kingdom pursuing by such social reforms? Do not you think that the increasing protests in the Arab country



have led to them?

A: I am not sure the protests were necessarily the main factor here. Remember that Thomas Friedman’s fluff profile of MBS in the NY Times, this was the launch of this new remake of the kingdom and the painting of MBS as some bright forward-looking reformer. Failing to mention the destruction of Yemen, the fights with Qatar, and the growing dependence on US military assistance (the US were in Riyadh from day one of this attack on Yemen). Also the crown prince is just exporting a lot of the hardliners and headline policies to other places. Algerian papers criticized the export of radically conservative doctrines by the Saudis while showing a new face of limited reforms. But also it should be born in mind that the Saudis were under global scrutiny for their backward medieval culture, one of acute inequality. That inequality is causing great unrest in the kingdom itself. The truth is the monarchy has been living on borrowed time for a decade or two. The desperate cooperation with the US and Israel

speaks to this. All the PR in the world (and even some genuine reform....albeit limited in scope) does not change the basic imprint of Saudi tradition.

■ Do not you think that one of the objectives behind the reforms is to silence the voices of dissent and the human rights defenders? In your opinion, are these reforms only a show by bin Salman to ingratiate himself with the US as his staunch ally?

A: The relationship with the US is interesting and slightly contradictory. The US loves to sell weapons to anyone and the Saudis know this and they buy a lot. Same with the UK. But there is a lot of criticism in the US and Europe about the Saudis. I mean nobody likes them. NOBODY. They are a ruthless corrupt monarchy. And that criticism has taken a toll. The coup by MBS has actually destabilized the country further and was mostly a theft of assets and cash. The third factor is that the Saudi economy is not in great shape. These wars cost money. Funding ISIS costs money. There is a lot of

PR going on now. The US Congress passed a law that demands accountability for Saudi reform. This is all show of course. But yes while there is some pressure on the monarch to live up to his reputation now, the bigger issue is the global influence. Iranian influence has grown, and Saudi influence has waned. Even with Israeli and US assistance, the kingdom is very shaky now.

■ The reforms are in apparent contradiction with systematic genocide of Shiites and violations of human rights in the Shiite-populated city of Awamiyah. Saudi military bulldozers have recently almost razed the besieged town to the ground amid the deadly crackdown there, forcing hundreds of its residents to flee their homes. Do not you think that the Wahhabi ideology is behind this genocide?

A: Yes of course. Saudi legitimacy has always come from their claim of being the spiritual home of Wahhabism and the site of Mecca. But for all of this new charm offensive with the young crown prince, the reality is a genocide in Yemen, with the largest cholera outbreak in history, and 2 million starving children....and in general a continuation of cooperation with US imperialism. Look -- they see the handwriting on the wall in the halls of the palace. Iran and China and Russia now form a massive economic force and it is obvious to most everyone the US is in crises, economically and politically. The core ruthless conservatism of the Saudi leadership has not changed. Schools in Saudi Arabia still teach children to hate other beliefs and hate people of different cultures. And no amount of limited reform changes that and I do not think it really fools anyone, certainly not in the Arab world, not in Iran, and not in Russia. The purge by MBS and his associates has not signaled any end to beatings or torture. It means nothing to the poor of the kingdom.

Trump's confrontation with American politicians

By Saeed Sobhani

TEHRAN — The latest polls indicate a steady decline in Donald Trump’s approval rate which is down to 36%. It appears that the U.S President has lost 14% of his supporters since the 2016 elections. This could have dire consequences during his tenure in the Oval Office.

It is difficult to determine whether or not Trump will be able to overcome the public’s backlash against his domestic and foreign policies. The shutdown of the U.S. federal government is a clear indication of the opposition and contempt certain members of the Congress have for their president. The Senate’s disapproval is not only from the residing Democrats but a good number of senior senators of the Republican Party are also adversary to Trump’s politics.

Arizona State Senators Jeff Flake and John McCain, both of whom are long standing members of the GOP have been outspoken critics of Donald Trump. Senior U.S. Senator from South Carolina, Lindsey Graham who is also a Republican, has continually voiced his discontent with Trump’s policies and administration, as well as the president’s behavior and inflammatory rhetoric.

These Republican Congressmen realize that the politics and conduct of Donald Trump could cause a devastating blow to their party at the upcoming congressional elections set to be held this year. Consequently, this could mean that Republicans will lose control of the Senate.

Once the Senate is taken over by the Democrats, Trump will face a good deal of resistance in Congress as the subsequent take over of the House of Representatives by the Democrats is imminent. This will create a problem for the

U.S. president when it comes to passage of bills and other legislation.

Currently, in spite of the Republican majority in the Senate, there has been a government shutdown. Undoubtedly, if the Democrats dominate the Senate, Donald Trump will face unprecedented hostility from Congress.

Many analysts believe that the growing disapproval of President Trump will continue and even gain momentum in the coming year. Since recent polls indicate that Democrats will have an easy victory in the Congressional elections, Trump is bound to find himself in one compromising position after another.

The Democrats’ victory in Congress this year could quite possibly be a prelude to their victory in the 2020 presidential election. Therefore, the Republicans have decided to act quickly by distancing themselves from Donald Trump’s administration and policies.

In polls conducted in late 2017, it was revealed that 31% of Republicans were no longer willing to vote for Trump in the next presidential election. This is good tidings for the Democrats, and especially politicians like Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders who are considered likely candidates for the Democratic Party in the 2020 presidential election.

Many analysts of U.S. politics believe that if this trend continues, Trump will not beat his Democratic rival in the 2020 presidential election. In the 2016 presidential election, Hillary Clinton won the popular vote, but Trump took over the White House as a result of the Electoral College.

Currently, Trump’s constituents in states like Florida (which played a significant role in his victory in 2016) are decreasing in number. Many Republicans believe that the

President of the United States has to change his political and overall approach if he wants a chance at a second term in the White House. However, it seems that Donald Trump has no intention of changing his refractory approach.

It is likely that the conflict between the Republican Party and Donald Trump will enter an even more severe phase. This struggle will likely be amplified once the Democrats takeover the Senate and the Republican Party will blame their president for the defeat in Congress. So, in the near future, we will see two types of divergence between the Democrats and Republicans:

Firstly, Democrats in the Senate will stand against Donald Trump by blocking passage of the president’s bills and legislation. It is likely that Congress and, in particular, the Senate will devise plans that would conflict with the principles and objectives of Trump’s domestic and foreign policies. This could have grim consequences for Trump in the presidential election of 2020.

Secondly, the discontent of Republican politicians with their president will reach new heights after their party is defeated in the upcoming Congressional elections. Several Republican Senators say that if there are no major changes in Trump’s behavior and policies, the Republican Party will consider nominating another candidate for the 2020 presidential election.

It is well known that during the 2016 presidential elections, Trump repeatedly threatened the Republicans that he would independently nominate himself in case the GOP nominated another candidate instead of him. Some believe that this ultimatum led to Donald Trump’s nomination after he beat rivals like Ted Cruz in the primaries.

U.S. mission creep in Syria?



TEHRAN (FNA) — War-party Washington plans to expand its dangerous path of mission creep beyond its original goals of so-called war on ISIL in Syria.

The ambitious attempt hasn’t gone so well with Turkey, which demands that the US immediately and unconditionally withdraw from the Syrian city of Manbij. Washington has said no, with Central Command Chief Gen. Joseph Votel saying that the US has no intention of withdrawing just because Turkey says so.

Gen. Votel claims that US is not looking at pulling back in Syria, adding that the US remains focused on fighting ISIL, despite ISIL having very little remaining territory in Syria. Turkey invaded Northern Syria earlier this month in Afrin District, and has indicated that Manbij will be invaded next. Deputy Premier Bozdogan has said US troops may be targeted by Turkish forces for helping the Kurds.

This has been a problem long coming, as Turkey has been complaining about US support for the Kurdish YPG for years, and has telegraphed that they would eventually invade Syria to get them. The US has mostly just ignored those warnings, all while urging Turkey to focus on ISIL. The reality, however, is that Turkey believes Syria and its Iranian-Russian allies have already defeated ISIL, and the YPG, which it considers as terrorists, are their only focus now. On that note:

- The Trump administration wants US occupying troops to stay in Syria for the foreseeable future to partition the Arab country and counter Iran’s influence. This raises legal questions about the US military presence in Syria.

- The mission creep in Syria raises questions about violations of international, as well as the trajectory of the United States’ failed regime-change war on the pretext of fighting ISIL and humanitarian concerns that has included dozens of countries

The US already has 2,000 to 3,000 occupying troops in Manbij and nearby regions in the same Kurdish canton in Northern Syria, and that number is likely to keep growing as the US entangles itself more deeply in that country. An open-ended deployment in the territory of an unfriendly government that is supported by Iran and Russia is a recipe for a pointless and easily avoidable conflict.

and terror proxy groups with no end in sight.

- The open-ended occupation of Syria could only mean one thing: US moving the goal posts and raising the stakes of armed conflict with Russia, Syria, Iran, and as events in Afrin recently show, even with NATO ally Turkey.

- Unlike Russia and Iran, key backers of the Syrian government in the war against various foreign-backed terrorist groups, the US is not in Syria at the invitation of Damascus, which accuses Washington of “aggression on Syria’s sovereignty.”

- Washington justifies a continued US military presence in Syria on “ensuring ISIL cannot re-emerge.” This is not a valid argument. Many reports and eyewitness accounts, even official statements by American officials suggest the CIA has been one of the main suppliers of arms to ISIL and Qaeda-allied “moderate rebels” from day one.

The US is committed to a never-ending war on Syria, with the ISIL threat simply a cover for a continued military occupation.

In any event, the US-led regime-change campaign is to a considerable extent a reflection of an inability to live up to the excessively ambitious goals Americans set for themselves - partition of Iraq and Syria on sectarian lines. It matters little whether this goal-setting is due to an idealistic American commitment to human rights and democracy, to falling prey to the Zionist lobby, to a lack of realism, or to sheer arrogance and hubris. ISIL has been defeated in Syria and the US has no business to be there anymore. It has no power left for good purposes.

Which leads us to this conclusion:

The US military presence in Syria is illegal. It cannot continue indefinitely. The Trump administration has no right to expand its goals in Syria beyond the ISIL war to include a political settlement of the country’s crisis, a daunting and potentially open-ended commitment that could draw the United States into conflict with Syria, Iran, Russia and Turkey.

The US already has 2,000 to 3,000 occupying troops in Manbij and nearby regions in the same Kurdish canton in Northern Syria, and that number is likely to keep growing as the US entangles itself more deeply in that country. An open-ended deployment in the territory of an unfriendly government that is supported by Iran and Russia is a recipe for a pointless and easily avoidable conflict. At worst, it is the start of a steadily expanding mission creep that will embroil the US in yet another futile war. That will do nothing to make the US or its allies more secure, and it could contribute to further instability in the region and beyond.

It almost goes without saying that the US mission creep in Syria for any purpose has no legal justification whatsoever and has not had any for the last seven years. The United Nations has never authorized military action there against ISIL or Syrian forces, the Syrian government has never given the US permission to operate on its territory, and further US military presence there has absolutely nothing to do with self-defence and suchlike.

How millennials are changing German politics

By Anna Sauerbrey

You have probably never heard of Kevin Kühnert, the 28-year-old head of the Social Democratic Party's youth organization. But he recently burst into the news after leading an internal revolt against his party's plans to enter a "grand coalition" with Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union party.

The revolt is likely to fail; coalition talks will wrap up this weekend. But remember Mr. Kühnert — if he loses the battle, he and his generation may yet win the war over the future of German politics.

Much has been written about the public's growing fatigue with Ms. Merkel and about the chancellor's own fatigue with her position atop the German government. But it is not just Angela Merkel who looks weary. After four months of

coalition talks, Germany's policy elite altogether looks, well, bad.

The most telling moment was when Martin Schulz, the 62-year-old head of the Social Democrats, and Mr. Kühnert clashed at a recent Social Democratic convention. Mr. Schulz, who was advocating a coalition (and his continued leadership role within it), stuck to the script, uninspired.

Schulz's leadership assailed

Mr. Kühnert's response, however, was passionate and convincing, and made his point clear. He assailed Mr. Schulz's leadership as "Spiegelstrich-Politik" — bullet-point politics. The term, Mr. Kühnert's invention, cleverly captures the pragmatic, unideological, unconvincing style of the Merkel and Schulz generation. While the rest of the world is in

tumult, in Germany it still feels like the end of history: Germany is economically strong and politically stable, and politics reverts to maintenance.

In contrast, Mr. Kühnert's generation longs for a cause, a task bigger than, say, tweaking how much employers must contribute to their employees' insurance. Nils Heisterhagen, a 29-year-old Social Democrat, has been leading a push for the party to embrace its left-wing roots.

This generational angst spans the political spectrum. Alexander Dobrindt of the Christian Social Union, the sister party of the center-right Christian Democrats, recently published an essay calling for a "conservative revolution" promoting a "Leitkultur," or "leading culture" — a common term in German for a politics focused on assimilating immigrants and promoting the nuclear family,

among other things.

And Christian Linder, 39, head of the pro-business Liberal Party, backed out of coalition talks late last year, accusing Ms. Merkel of favoring process over principles. "No ideas whatsoever," he complained recently. "Just Merkel's method. Any compromise, just to get by."

At the same time, the new generation's stance is different from the identity politics of many young American political activists; if anything, these young Germans agree with Mark Lilla's argument that liberalism has slipped "into a moral panic about racial, gender and sexual identity" that prevents it "from becoming a unifying force capable of governing." Instead, they long for a "unifying" policy approach that focuses on the economic grievances of the masses — or their alleged need for cultural homogeneity.

Postmodern politics

After decades of postmodern politics, they long for grand narratives, on both sides. Call it solidarity in partisanship — a longing for clear lines that cut across policy issues, rather than a wet blanket of consensus that covers over sociopolitical fractures.

It is conventional wisdom that the consensus politics of Ms. Merkel, Mr. Schulz and their generational peers strengthened the political fringes, especially the far right. That's not entirely true, though: Polls show that Germans, even if they're tired of Ms. Merkel, still value consensus.

"Germans are generally oriented toward compromise, not polarization," said Andrea Wolf, a board member of Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, a major German pollster. **213**

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Things about lung cancer doctors wish you knew

By Tina Donvito

■ Lung cancer causes the most cancer deaths

The 23 best ways to stop smoking can reduce your chances of getting lung cancer. But if you're still lighting up, here's exactly what it's doing to your body to cause the condition: "Smoking introduces various toxic substances into the lungs that can affect the DNA of lung cells," says Jacob Sands, MD, an oncologist and lung cancer researcher at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. "These toxins increase the chance of mutations, or changes, developing in the DNA of lung cells." When certain mutations replicate out of control, that's cancer. According to the American Cancer Society, lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in U.S. adults—more than colon, breast, and prostate cancers combined.

■ Your risk is dose-dependent

The more you smoke (or did in the past), the greater the risk of lung cancer. "Although quitting is the best way to decrease the risk of being diagnosed with lung cancer, it does not make the risks go away," Dr. Sands says. Fifty percent of those diagnosed with lung cancer are former smokers, he says. But this doesn't mean you shouldn't bother quitting. "The risk decreases the longer the person has refrained from smoking," he says. According to Harvard Medical School, a former smoker's lung cancer risk is cut by 50 percent in ten years, but is still elevated after 15 years. Find out other mind-blowing ways your body heals after you quit smoking.

■ Social smokers* are still at risk

One of the rampant health myths that need to die is that smoking just a little when you're out with friends doesn't mean you're a smoker. "It is common for people to believe that 'social smoking' will not affect them," Dr. Sands says. "Each cigarette one smokes actually creates measurable changes that can be observed." The risk for developing lung cancer increases after 100 lifetime cigarettes, he says. "Many people find that to be a shockingly low number," he says. But even light and intermittent smoking can cause substantial health risks, according to a review of research.

■ Second and third-hand smoke can lead to cancer

Twenty-five percent of lung cancer victims have never smoked, says Bernard Park, MD, Deputy Chief of Clinical Affairs of the Thoracic Surgery Service at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. But, secondhand smoke—and



potentially thirdhand smoke, which is nicotine residue left on clothing and surfaces—can increase your risk. "It is well-documented that secondhand smoke exposure is associated with increased lung cancer risk in never smokers, particularly those who live with active smokers," Dr. Park says. "The risk, much like with direct cigarette smoking, is dose-dependent and can be as high as 25 percent compared to never smokers who live in a smoke-free environment." If you live with a smoker, have them go outside to smoke, wash their hands afterward and their clothes frequently. And yes, thirdhand smoke is real.

■ All kinds of smoke can cause lung cancer

Quitting smoking is the number one thing you can do to reduce your risk—find out what helped ex-smokers actually quit for good—and that means all types of lighting up. "Other tobacco exposure, such as cigars, pipes, or marijuana, [also cause the disease]," Dr. Parks says. According to the American Cancer Society, there is no "safer" tobacco product, including hand-rolled, herbal, menthol, clove, and those marketed as "natural." Hookahs are also linked with cancer; although the jury is still out on e-cigarettes, your best bet is to avoid them, too. This "harmless" teen habit could be as dangerous as smoking a pack a day.

■ Beware of radon

There are things every homeowner should know about radon testing. "Radon, a colorless and odorless gas present in soil and fairly common in the United States, is the second leading

cause of lung cancer," Dr. Sands says. When radon becomes trapped in enclosed spaces such as the low floors of homes and basements, it can cause radon levels to increase to unhealthy amounts. "It is important to test radon levels, and kits are available at hardware stores and often through state departments of public health," Dr. Sands says.

■ Other surprising causes of lung cancer

"Radiation exposure—environmental or occupational; asbestos; chronic inflammatory lung disease like bronchiectasis or chronic bronchitis; environmental exposures including pollution and dust" can all lead to lung cancer, Dr. Park says. "Wear protective respiratory gear if engaged in an occupation where respiratory exposure to particulate matter is high." In addition, there may be a genetic element to lung cancer, but that probably doesn't come into play unless you actually smoke, Dr. Sands says.

■ Early lung cancer symptoms are rare

You may be ignoring the signs of lung cancer. But unfortunately, the symptoms frequently show up only after the cancer is advanced. "This is why so many people diagnosed with lung cancer have metastatic disease [cancer that's spread]," Dr. Sands says. "Seventy percent of lung cancers diagnosed from symptoms are stage 4 and not curable." Plus, symptoms of lung cancer are so common among smokers, they're not reliable for diagnosis. Even so, see your doctor

if you have symptoms under the acronym BREATHE: Blood when coughing, recurring respiratory infections, enduring cough, aches in the shoulder, back, or chest, trouble breathing, hoarseness or wheezing, or exhaustion.

■ Some people should be screened

Many serious cases of cancer could be avoided with preventative screenings. "If one meets criteria of high risk used in the recent National Lung Screening Trial—age between 55 and 75; history of cigarette smoking one pack per day for 30 years; or quit smoking less than 15 years ago—one should have annual screening with a low-dose CT chest scan," Dr. Park says. This will greatly increase the chances of catching cancer in an earlier, and curable, stage, Dr. Sands says. "About 70 percent of people diagnosed in a lung screening program are discovered at stage 1," he says. "Unfortunately, less than five percent of people who qualify are currently getting these scans."

■ Recovery is possible

If you're diagnosed, your first thought is probably what your prognosis is. "Patients who do the best are diagnosed at early stages and have excellent lung function and overall health such that they can tolerate any of a number of treatments, including but not limited to surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, targeted therapy, and immunotherapy," Dr. Park says. "In addition, there are many sub-types of lung cancer that are extremely slow-growing and very treatable." A stage 1 lung cancer diagnosed in a lung-screening program has a 90 percent five-year survival rate, Dr. Sands says. These are other hopeful cancer statistics everyone should know.

■ New advances in treatment

The most groundbreaking cancer research of the past decade includes new treatments for lung cancer. "It is almost an entirely different field from what it was," Dr. Sands says. "We now have various medications that can target cancer cells with specific DNA mutations more common in people with a limited smoking history." These targeted therapies work better and longer than chemo with fewer side effects, he says. In addition, "every oncologist that treats lung cancer has patients alive specifically due to the impact of immunotherapy, medications that help a person's immune system recognize the cancer," he says. Current studies are trying to increase the number of patients that benefit from this remarkable therapy.

(Source: rd.com)

Spinal motion restriction

By Rod Brouhar

Spinal motion restriction is used to reduce manipulation of the spinal column and protect, as much as possible, the spinal cord from further insult after a potential spinal injury. The term has been around since the 1980's, but has evolved to mean something very different than its original definition.

In modern prehospital care, the idea of spinal motion restriction is to keep the spine in a neutral position relative to the patient's baseline.

Maintaining the patient's baseline is extremely important in spinal motion restriction. Every patient is different, and any attempt to move a patient's spine to what is considered the "typical" anatomical position runs the risk of putting pressure on areas of the patient's spine that are not injured or to move an injured spine too far out of its normal alignment.

To truly understand the tenets of spinal motion restriction and what we are trying to accomplish, it's helpful to know the history and evolution of prehospital spinal injury treatments.

■ Evolution of spinal precautions

In the beginning, there was spinal immobilization. That was the standard expectation of any prehospital caregiver in emergency medical services (EMS) to treat suspected spinal injury. In most early textbooks and industry journals, the specific injury was nearly always referred to as cervical spine injury and the actual procedure was often called cervical spine (or c-spine) immobilization.

Suspected spinal injury started as a presentation-based assessment. That means that patients' spines were not immobilized simply as a response to their mechanisms of injury. Instead, spinal immobilization was applied to patients with neck pain after a significant injury (long fall or motor vehicle collision, for example), evidence of paralysis, or unconsciousness.

Early first responders had a wide range of mechanisms they considered significant enough to warrant spinal immobilization. In many parts of the country, ground-level falls were not considered enough of a reason to immobilize a patient's spine, often even in the presence of neck pain and clear evidence that the patient struck her head.

In the last half of the 1980s, anecdotes of patients with what later became known as "occult" cervical spine fractures drove emergency physicians to routinely x-ray patients following nearly any mechanism of injury with the potential for blunt trauma to the head or a whiplash effect (whipping the head back and forth, putting pressure on the neck). Patients would present to the emergency department complaining of neck pain after being discharged from an earlier visit. Most of these patients had been treated for what, at the time, were considered minor mechanisms of injury with minor complaints. Some of these patients were found to have cervical spine fractures on x-ray after they had returned to the ER.

As more patients' necks were filmed in the x-ray department, more fractures were found. Assumptions were made that it was easier to fracture the vertebrae than originally thought possible.

Driven in some cases by fear of malpractice litigation, emergency docs increased the frequency of cervical spine



x-rays until they were ubiquitous in everything from ground-level falls to gunshot wounds.

Prehospital training broadened to specify that any possible mechanism that could place pressure on the neck indicated the need for spinal immobilization. EMT's and paramedics were taught to assume spinal injury on any patient who fell and to assume falls as a mechanism of injury for any patient who initially presented as unconscious.

The term spinal immobilization gave way to spinal precautions as the treatment became as common as oxygen.

Spinal immobilization was considered to have equal footing with airway control and bleeding control in the traumatic patient.

■ Reducing X-rays leads to change

All of those x-rays were expensive and potentially exposed patients to unnecessary radiation. Two independent groups of doctors developed assessment tools to help emergency physicians identify the patients who really needed to have their necks x-rayed. The NEXUS rule and the Canadian C-Spine rule were somewhat hesitantly implemented in emergency departments around the US and Canada.

Paramedics grew suspicious of the ER docs ripping off their cervical collars and twisting the patients' heads from side to side. Once the practice gained widespread use, paramedics began to question why the patient should be placed in spinal precautions in the field simply to have emergency physicians remove the equipment in the ER hallway.

Soon, studies were conducted to evaluate the use of the tools as predictors for which patients need to be immobilized in the first place. Paramedics were tested to see if we could identify patients as well as the ER docs. Midway through the first decade of this century, EMS systems around the US were as likely as not to "clear" cervical spines in the prehospital setting.

■ Questioning the status quo

As the light shone brighter on the practice of spinal immobilization or spinal precautions, some prehospital providers and physicians began to question the practice completely. The use of hard backboards was particularly bad, leading to pressure sores and pain in patients who had to lie on the boards in ER hallways for hours.

Cervical spine collars (also known as extrication collars or c-collars) are intended to secure the cervical spine

and restrict movement of the head after a potential spinal injury. They are often misapplied or sized incorrectly and there is some evidence suggesting that they could increase intracranial pressure in patients with closed head injuries.

Lying on a hard backboard with the head secured to the device, even when the torso is also securely fastened, still provides significant movement during transport to the hospital. Simple physics holds that the weight distribution and shape of the patient's body is going to allow her torso to shift much more than her head, putting force on the cervical spine laterally as well as compressing and distending the vertebrae.

The lack of randomized, controlled trials for the use of hard backboards and cervical spine collars has led some EMS systems to significantly reduce the use of these two modalities. San Joaquin County, California was the first EMS system in the country to refuse to allow EMT's and paramedics to use or carry backboards on ambulances at all.

■ Modern spinal motion restriction

As hard backboards find new lives as surfboards and snow toboggans, spinal immobilization has followed a similar path, moving from being rigid and structured to something more loosely defined and harder to quantify. Indeed, many paramedics are finding it difficult to accurately document the procedures used to "restrict" motion, which could include something as simple as reminding a patient not to move his head.

Best practices include the use of assessment techniques similar to those of the NEXUS or Canadian C-Spine Rule. The patient is questioned to determine latent pain. If the patient has no pain or pain that appears to be lateral to the midline so as to indicate that it is not in the direct vicinity of the spinal column, the paramedic palpates the spinal column. If no tenderness or deformity is found, the paramedic will guide the patient through a series of flexion and extension, rotation, and lateral movement of the neck. If, during this movement, the patient does not complain of new or increased midline pain, spinal motion restriction will most likely be omitted.

Adequate and accurate assessment relies on the patient's ability to communicate with the caregiver. If the patient is under the influence of alcohol or drugs, the paramedic must maintain and high degree of suspicion for spinal injury. Even in that instance, however, the paramedic might not choose to use a backboard and rigid c-collar for spinal care.

A tenet of spinal motion restriction rather than spinal immobilization is the ability for the patient to restrict her own cervical spine movement. Instead of lying supine and strapped securely to a backboard, patients are often left sitting up on the gurney and a soft collar is placed more for a reminder not to move than for any significant restriction of motion.

Patients who are not able to follow commands and who have a high suspicion for unstable spinal fractures would benefit from a device known as a vacuum splint. Vacuum splints conform to the contours of the patient's body and can immobilize more effectively without the negative impacts of backboards.

The use of spinal motion restriction rather than spinal immobilization is a step in the right direction for spinal injury care.

(Source: verywelll.com)

Blood test detects proteins linked to Alzheimer's disease

By Zahid Mahmood

A team of scientists from Australia and Japan has developed a blood test to detect early signs of Alzheimer's disease.

The noninvasive test was developed to detect the presence of the toxic protein amyloid beta, known to be present in people affected by the disease, and did so with 90% accuracy, according to the study, published Wednesday in the journal Nature.

The team trialed the test on 121 patients from Japan and 252 from Australia with varying levels of health, ranging from healthy to mild cognitive impairments or Alzheimer's disease.

The idea behind the test is to predict the presence and levels of amyloid beta in a person's brain. Buildup of the abnormal protein in the brain is one sign of Alzheimer's disease, the most common form of dementia.

Other teams have developed similar tests to detect Alzheimer's, with one 2017 study proving to have 86% sensitivity and specificity.

"This test is at least as good as current brain scan techniques and far surpasses existing blood tests," said Colin Masters, professor of dementia research at Melbourne's Florey Institute of Neuroscience and Mental Health, who led the study.

But the researchers cautioned that they were still far from practical clinical application.

The onset of Alzheimer's can come as early as 30 years before the patient experiences any symptoms, such as memory loss.

There is no concrete test to determine early onset of dementia, and patients with cognitive impairment are diagnosed based on a careful evaluation using brain scans and concise mental testing, according to the Alzheimer's Society UK.

The study used blood samples from patients to detect levels of the toxic protein in the blood and in turn predict how much of it is in the brain. There is no treatment available for Alzheimer's disease, but early detection can speed access to therapy.

"Progress in developing new therapeutic strategies for Alzheimer's disease has been disappointingly slow. None of the three drugs currently on the market treat the underlying disease," Masters said in a statement.

The team highlights that more research needs to be conducted across a wider population to make the results more conclusive -- and applicable clinically. "This is not a blood test for dementia that people who are worried about their memory and concentration should be asking their doctors about," said Rob Howard, professor of old age psychiatry at University College London, who was not involved in the study. "Not everyone with amyloid in their brains will turn out to have dementia, and not everyone who has dementia will be found to have amyloid in their brains."

Alzheimer's disease affects over 5 million people in the US, where the estimated cost of caring for Alzheimer patients in 2017 was \$259 billion. In the UK, there are more than 520,000 people affected by the disease, costing £26.3 billion, according to the Alzheimer's Society. Though the new study provides a breakthrough in research, it is performed only in laboratories in Japan, where it will take up to a year to conform it to a level suitable to distribute to other laboratories and apply it to clinical trials.

"We need to see whether the test works in a larger population, but it has the potential both to speed up clinical trials and help people in the very early stages of Alzheimer's to access new treatments if and when they become available," said Doug Brown, policy and research officer at the Alzheimer's Society UK.

Carol Routledge, director of research at Alzheimer's Research UK, said that "further work with more people will need to build on this study to understand how well this approach could predict those who will go on to develop symptoms of Alzheimer's in the future."

(Source: CNN)

Ways to keep your brain young

Every brain changes with age, and mental function changes along with it. Mental decline is common, and it's one of the most feared consequences of aging. But cognitive impairment is not inevitable. Here are ways you can help maintain brain function.

1. Get mental stimulation

Through research with mice and humans, scientists have found that brainy activities stimulate new connections between nerve cells and may even help the brain generate new cells, developing neurological "plasticity" and building up a functional reserve that provides a hedge against future cell loss.

Any mentally stimulating activity should help to build up your brain. Read, take courses, try "mental gymnastics," such as word puzzles or math problems Experiment with things that require manual dexterity as well as mental effort, such as drawing, painting, and other crafts.

2. Get physical exercise

Research shows that using your muscles also helps your mind. Animals who exercise regularly increase the number of tiny blood vessels that bring oxygen-rich blood to the region of the brain that is responsible for thought. Exercise also spurs the development of new nerve cells and increases the connections between brain cells (synapses). This results in brains that are more efficient, plastic, and adaptive, which translates into better performance in aging animals. Exercise also lowers blood pressure, improves cholesterol levels, helps blood sugar balance and reduces mental stress, all of which can help your brain as well as your heart.

3. Improve your diet

Good nutrition can help your mind as well as your body. For example, people that eat a Mediterranean style diet that emphasizes fruits, vegetables, fish, nuts, unsaturated oils (olive oil) and plant sources of proteins are less likely to develop cognitive impairment and dementia.

4. Improve your blood pressure

High blood pressure in midlife increases the risk of cognitive decline in old age. Use lifestyle modification to keep your pressure as low as possible. Stay lean, exercise regularly, limit your alcohol to two drinks a day, reduce stress, and eat right.

5. Improve your blood sugar

Diabetes is an important risk factor for dementia. You can help prevent diabetes by eating right, exercising regularly, and staying lean. But if your blood sugar stays high, you'll need medication to achieve good control.

6. Improve your cholesterol

High levels of LDL ("bad") cholesterol are associated with an increased risk of dementia. Diet, exercise, weight control, and avoiding tobacco will go a long way toward improving your cholesterol levels. But if you need more help, ask your doctor about medication.

(Source: health.harvard.edu)

E-cigarettes may harm DNA and cause cancer

The nicotine in e-cigarettes may damage DNA in ways that could cause cancer, new research on mice has suggested.

The main cancer risk with tobacco cigarettes is caused by the release of a number of carcinogenic compounds when they are burned and inhaled.

This is avoided in e-cigarettes, with nicotine delivered through aerosols without burning tobacco.

But a new study suggests that may not be enough. It says that nicotine itself and the way the body metabolises it may cause cancer by damaging string DNA - and also the way that the body repairs them.



“Further studies are needed to substantiate this proposal,” write the researchers from New York University School of Medicine, but their work suggests that e-cigarettes could put users at risk of cancer - at least compared with non-smokers.

The study was published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences in the US, just as MPs in the UK are holding an inquiry into the health effects of e-cigarettes to address gaps in research.

“It’s the first evidence we have that nicotine can be carcinogenic in and of itself,” said Dr Roy Herbst, chief of medical oncology at Yale Cancer Centre, and chair of the American Association for Cancer Research’s Tobacco and Cancer sub-committee.

“It’s certainly concerning, and certainly gives pause if one were to say e-cigarettes were safe and could be used by all people without consequences.”

The researchers say that more work is needed, however, because research in animals can produce very different results in humans.

Laboratory mice were exposed to e-cigarette vapour, which contains both nicotine and liquid solvents, at the normal level it would be consumed by a human user.

“We found the solvent alone does not cause DNA damage. Nicotine with e-cigarette solvent caused the same damage as nicotine alone,” said lead researcher Moon-shong Tang, a professor of environmental medicine.

Professor Tang’s team also exposed cultured human lung and bladder cells to nicotine, and found the same effects there: DNA damage and suppressed DNA repair.

The next step of the research is under way, in which the mice will be exposed to e-cigarette vapour for a long period to see if they develop diseases caused by the DNA damage, Professor Tang added.

He said he was not able to say whether e-cigarettes were safer than traditional cigarettes because of a lack of data on the subject.

In the UK, the Royal College of Physicians issued a report in 2016 stating that public health policy should encourage tobacco users to switch to a substitute nicotine product.

It said that “the hazard to health arising from long-term vapour inhalation from the e-cigarettes available today is unlikely to exceed 5% of the harm from smoking tobacco”.

Martin Dockrell, Public Health England Tobacco Lead told Sky News: “Studies using mice have limited use in telling us about e-cigarette risks to humans. We know that e-cigarettes are not risk free, but there is much evidence and agreement that they are a fraction of the risk of smoking.”

“A recent UK study suggest that the lifetime cancer risk from vaping is around 1% of that from smoking.”

(Source: skynews)

Female founders got 2% of venture capital dollars in 2017

All-women teams received just \$1.9 billion of the \$85 billion total invested by venture capitalists last year, according to data on the from M&A, private equity, and VC database PitchBook. That’s equal to about 2.2% of 2017’s total pot. Meanwhile, all-male teams received about \$66.9 billion—roughly 79%. (Of the remaining 19%, 12% of funds were raised by mixed-gender teams, while 7% was raised by teams whose gender makeup PitchBook was unable to confirm.)

The size of the gap is staggering, but there is a sliver of a silver lining: It’s smaller than last year’s. In 2016, female founders raised just \$1.4 billion—or 1.9% of total VC funding. In fact, with the exception of 2014, 2017 marks the largest percentage of total venture dollars that has gone to female founders since PitchBook started tracking the data in 2006.

In terms of deal count, women-founded companies set a record last year, making up 4.4% of all VC deals—the largest percentage since 2006. Of course, the actual number of deals involving female-led startups still dismally low (368 compared to 5,588 for all-male teams), and the gap between the percentage of deals and percentage of dollars that go to women hints at the fact that VCs are writing smaller checks for female founders. The average deal size for a woman-led company in 2017 was just over \$5 million. For a man-led company, that number is a little less than \$12 million.

Consider the 10 biggest deals raised by female founders compared to the 10 biggest rounds landed by men. While the largest round invested in a woman-led startup was \$165 million (Moda Operandi’s Series G), the largest that went to a male-led company (WeWork, also a Series G) was \$3 billion. And the co-working space is not an outlier. Even the tenth-largest deal on the list comes in at half a billion dollars, or more than four times larger than the largest round raised by a women-led company.

(Source: Fortune.com)

This ‘cosmic GPS’ tech will help us explore the furthest reaches of space

By Tyler Berrigan

Anyone who has tried their hand at sailing, or even read about the exploits of maritime explorers, understands the importance of the lighthouse. Indeed, the solitary beam of light emanating from a lighthouse’s crest is a valuable navigational aid, especially when seafaring at night.

NASA engineers have developed a somewhat similar approach—recently demonstrated in an X-ray navigation experiment called Station Explorer for X-ray Timing and Navigation Technology (SEXTANT). But it’s not for guiding ships through the night; it’s for guiding unmanned robotic spacecraft through space.

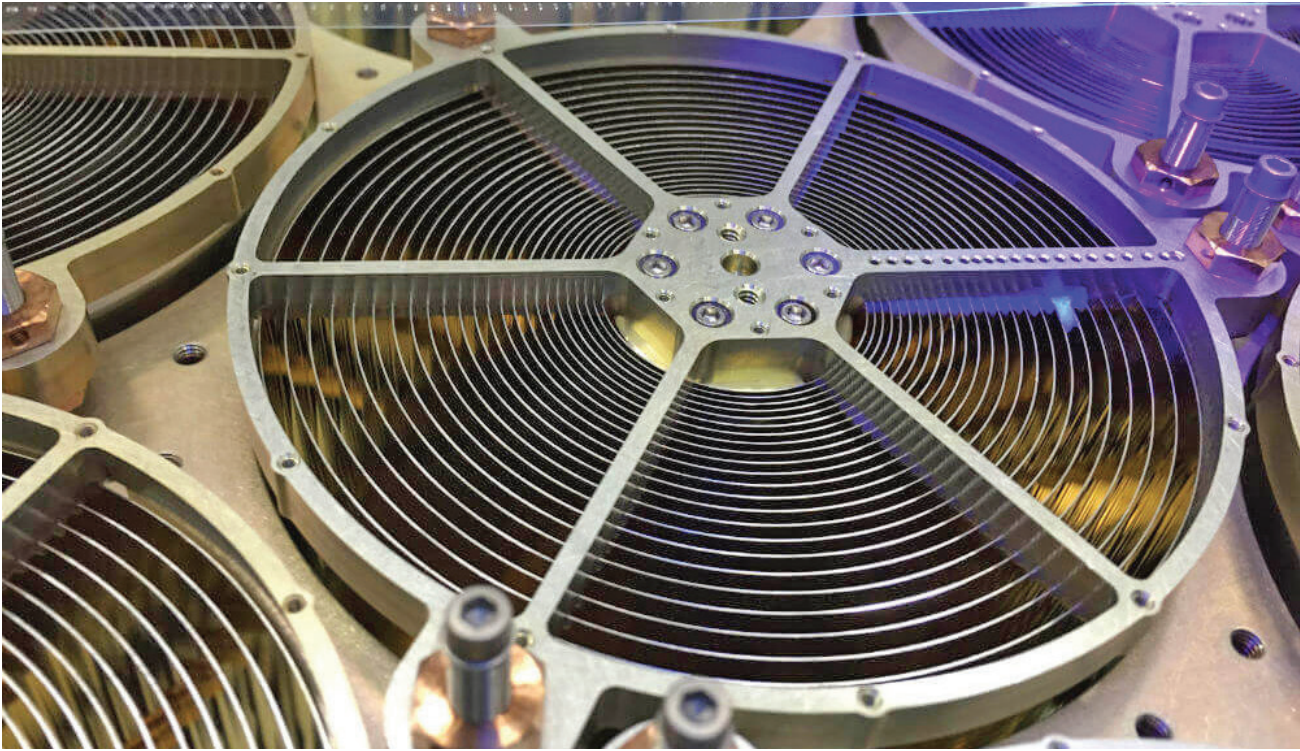
First, SEXTANT requires a source of radiation at a fixed location in the universe, much like a lighthouse that emits a beam of light. And second, it requires a piece of equipment that can detect that radiation and deduce its source.

Pulsars—dense, rotating hunks of material that form as a result of the death of a larger star—are the sources of radiation. This radiation is not a beam of white light, however, but another type of electromagnetic radiation known as X-rays. And much like the flashes of light from a lighthouse, the X-ray emissions from pulsars occur at regular, precise intervals.

The piece of equipment NASA used in the initial experiment to detect X-rays emanating from pulsars is called the Neutron-Star Interior Composition Explorer (NICER). NICER is located on the International Space Station (ISS) and is made up of 52 X-ray telescopes and silicon-drift detectors.

In a nutshell, SEXTANT is proof-of-concept for a large-scale cosmic GPS. In the same way GPS can triangulate the location of a mobile phone using satellites orbiting the earth, SEXTANT’s specialized onboard algorithm used the NICER instrument’s pulsar data to locate the space station in space. And the technology worked extremely well.

In fact, within just eight hours of starting the experiment on November 9, 2017, SEXTANT was able to detect the location of NICER as it zoomed around the earth on the ISS at speeds of over 17,500 miles per hour. In a NASA press release, SEX-



NICER’s mirror assemblies concentrate X-rays onto silicon detectors to gather data that probes the interior makeup of neutron stars. (Credits: NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center/Keith Gendreau)

TANT project manager Jason Mitchell, an aerospace technologist at NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center, also pointed out that “a good portion” of the determinations were accurate to within three miles.

Three miles may not sound so impressive when you consider that GPS can locate a mobile phone to within a few feet. But such a high level of accuracy is not required for measurements in space, where distances between celestial bodies are astronomical. “In deep space, we hope to reach accuracies in the hundreds of feet,” Mitchell said.

So what does it all mean for the future of space travel and exploration?

As scientists continue to search for other potentially habitable planets on which humans could “set up shop,” SEXTANT could prove to be a valuable tool. Imagine if you could fix something similar to NICER to an unmanned robotic spacecraft. The

spacecraft could be sent out and used to make observations and measurements anywhere in our solar system, or the cosmos, and we’d know its exact location.

That is a significant improvement relative to current positioning systems. Using GPS, for example, only allows us to position objects that are in and around the earth. Signals rapidly become weaker as objects move away from GPS satellites. But with an X-ray navigation system, using pulsars as reference points, self-navigating spacecraft would be able to venture much further.

Mitchell elaborates, “This successful demonstration firmly establishes the viability of X-ray pulsar navigation as a new autonomous navigation capability. We have shown that a mature version of this technology could enhance deep-space exploration anywhere within the solar system and beyond.” Basically, anywhere there are

pulsars, the X-ray navigation technology could be used. That covers virtually every conceivable flight plan, from Earth to the deepest, darkest corners of space.

But there is a little work to be done yet to get it up to scratch. The team of NASA engineers hopes to fine-tune the equipment, focusing on reducing the size, weight, and power requirements, and improving the sensitivity of the instruments. The first port of call is to improve the operational software in preparation for a second experiment in 2018.

The team is very hopeful about SEXTANT’s prospects. “This demonstration is a breakthrough for future deep space exploration,” Mitchell stated. Indeed, much like the nautical explorers of long ago, NASA engineers are eager to see just where SEXTANT will take them.

(Source: singularityhub.com)

Amazon patents a wristband that can track workers’ movement



Staff at Amazon’s warehouse in Piacenza in Northern Italy preparing for Black Friday. (Emanuele Cremaschi/Getty Images)

By Jennifer Bisset

The vibrating wristband will monitor a worker’s hand movements and reduce time wasted searching for the correct inventory bin.

Amazon apparently wants to crack the whip.

The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office awarded Amazon two patents on Tuesday for a wristband that would track where its workers put their hands in relation to inventory bins and for a “haptic feedback system” to signal if they have the right bin to retrieve an item. The patent documents were first spotted by GeekWire.

The “ultrasonic bracelet,” designed to be a time- and labor-saving device, would work by periodically emitting ultrasonic sound pulses to a receiver, tracking which bin a worker is reaching for and monitoring how efficiently they fulfill orders. The wristband would also send and receive radio transmissions, pinning a worker’s

location and giving a burst of “haptic feedback,” a vibration similar to those found in phones or game controllers, which would tell the employee if they’re reaching for the right bin.

The approach would eliminate the need for extra time-consuming acts, “such as pushing a button associated with the inventory bin or scanning a barcode associated with the inventory bin,” one patent’s description reads.

The idea of being tracked by their bosses might not sit well with Amazon workers, 500 of whom went on strike last November on Black Friday at Italy’s main distribution hub after disappointing talks over pay. Six warehouses in Germany saw strikes on the same day.

Amazon has already embraced faster employees in the form of worker robots and delivery drones, as well as no employees at all with its Amazon Go, a convenience store that does away with cashiers.

(Source: CNET)

Automotive recalls cost \$22 billion in 2016



Takata’s faulty airbag inflators accounted for a huge chunk of all vehicles recalled in 2016. Joe Raedle/Getty Images

A staggering 53.1 million vehicles were recalled in the US in 2016. According to Automotive News, citing a study by AlixPartners, this resulted in \$22.1 billion in claims and warranty accruals by automakers and suppliers, a 26 percent increase over the previous year.

That 53.1 million number represents a 4.5 percent increase over the 50.8 million vehicles recalled in 2015, making 2016 the highest year on record. But remember, 2016 was also the year of Takata’s massive airbag recall, as well as General Motors’ infamous ignition switch fiasco, both of which accounted for around 23 million vehicles.

As in-car tech has become a bigger and bigger focus for automakers, those components have been the subject of more and more recalls in the past several years. Automotive News says recalls of electronics and electrical systems have risen 30 percent each year since

2013, whereas for a period of years before that, this annual increase rate was about 5 percent.

The big reason comes down to globalization of platforms and technologies. Without local variation in vehicle content, when something goes wrong, it can be a more widespread issue.

“As the number of vehicles using similar systems increases, so do the number of issues detected since the larger production volumes attract closer observation. As a result, recall notices are increasingly likely to involve not thousands but millions of vehicles,” the AlixPartners study says.

The study, “The Auto Industry’s Growing Recall Problem -- and How to Fix It”, suggests that automakers and suppliers have cut as much as 50 percent of quality control spending in recent years, directly leading to the larger number of recalls.

(Source: CNET)

Telegram back on App store after removal for ‘inappropriate content’

Messaging app Telegram has returned to the App Store after being temporarily yanked for “inappropriate content.”

Telegram and the new Telegram X apps were removed from Apple’s store on Wednesday, Telegram Founder and CEO Pavel Durov confirmed.

“We were alerted by Apple that inappropriate content was made available to our users and both apps were taken off the App Store,” Durov wrote on Twitter. “Once we have protections in place we expect the apps to be back on the App Store.”

By 11 a.m. on Thursday, Durov tweeted that the apps

had returned.

“Telegram is back in the AppStore after being absent there since midnight CET. Every day 500,000+ users download Telegram for Android and another ~100,000 download Telegram for iOS,” he wrote.

The app vanished from the App Store around the same time the company launched Telegram X for Android, an experimental app that’s “faster and more battery-efficient than the original.” In the future, Telegram X “may or may not eventually replace the existing official app,” Telegram wrote in a blog post yesterday.

There’s no word as to what type of “inappropriate content” was circulating on Telegram that led to the removal, or what protections the company put in place, if any, to have the apps reinstated.

Apps with user-generated content, like Telegram, must include a “method for filtering objectionable material from being posted,” a “mechanism to report offensive content,” a way to “block abusive users from the service,” and “published contact information” so users can easily reach out with questions and concerns.

(Source: PCmag.com)

Further reducing injections of oilfield wastewater can prevent larger earthquakes

In a new study, Virginia Tech researchers have found that efforts to curb earthquakes triggered by the injection of oilfield wastewater into the ground in Oklahoma are not targeting the most dangerous tremblers, and that a larger reduction in injection volumes is needed.

Prior to 2011, Oklahoma averaged one magnitude 3-plus earthquake per year, but in 2015 there were more than 900 such earthquakes, making Oklahoma the most seismically active state in the mainland United States.

Increased seismic activity has occurred simultaneously with the increased retrieval of unconventional oil and gas, which uses hydrofracturing, commonly referred to as fracking, to unlock previously inaccessible oil and gas resources. This rapid proliferation of unconventional oil and gas recovery has also resulted in millions of gallons of highly brackish wastewater, which comes up with the retrieved oil and gas. To dispose of this wastewater, the liquid is re-injected into geologic formations deep underground.

Seawater injections

Such wastewater injections have been taking place for decades, but the rapid increase in oil and gas production via fracking means substantially more oilfield wastewater is now being re-injected. In Oklahoma, the injections triggering earthquakes are taking place in the Arbuckle formation, a deep and highly porous sedimentary rock layer.

The new study shows that locations that experienced earthquakes are tied in proximity and timeliness to mass waste water injection sites. Further, the study indicates



The new study shows that locations that experienced earthquakes are tied in proximity and timeliness to mass waste water injection sites.

that tracking annual data on the injection well locations can help predict how corresponding earthquake activity will change. This new finding builds on previous studies showing that earthquake activity increases when wastewater injections increase.

“Our results show that average annual

injection well locations are a predictor of increasing earthquake activity,” said Ryan M. Pollyea, an assistant professor with the Virginia Tech College of Science’s geosciences department, and director of the Computational Geofluids Laboratory, who spearheaded the study, published online in the journal *Geology*.

The research team includes Martin Chapman, a research associate professor of geosciences and director of the Virginia Tech Seismological Observatory; and Neda Mohammadi, a postdoctoral scholar and John E. Taylor, a professor and director of the Network Dynamics Lab, both at Georgia Tech.

Triggering earthquakes

Earthquakes became so frequent in Oklahoma, that in April 2015, the Oklahoma Geological Survey acknowledged that wastewater injections are likely triggering earthquakes in the north-central portions of the state. In April 2016, Oklahoma Gov. Mary Fallin signed a law authorizing the Oklahoma Corporation Commission to limit injection volumes in the immediate aftermath of earthquake swarms.

The “number of magnitude 3-plus earthquakes decreased in 2016, but there were still more than 600 earthquakes, far above the historical average,” said Pollyea, who specializes in groundwater modeling and simulation. “Previous research in this area used seismological and groundwater water modeling methods, but we thought that geospatial analysis might help us understand the situation on the ground.”

The results showed that the spatial correlation between earthquakes and wastewater injection volume indeed decreased in 2016.

“When we compared the spatial correlation using datasets that include only magnitude 3-plus earthquakes, there was no change,” said Pollyea, adding that a larger reduction in wastewater injection volumes is needed to reduce the dangers of large magnitude earthquakes.

(Source: Science Daily)

It turns out our galaxy isn’t as special as we thought: new research

Powerful, influential figures exert an irresistible pull, gathering an entourage around them. It’s a pattern that repeats on celestial levels. Our planet has the moon, but also a host of other artificial satellites that we’ve used to boost Earth’s follower count. The sun has planets, moons, asteroids, and comets. But neither can compare to galaxies like our Milky Way, which not only hosts hundreds of billions of stars but also has additional satellites, entire dwarf galaxies that chill in our galaxy’s neighborhood.

Astrophysicists used to think that the Milky Way’s followers were a little strange, because many of them acted a lot like planets around a sun—orbiting our galaxy in a plane, perpendicular to the distinctive spiral.

If the dwarf galaxies were following the standard model of cosmology — a theory which underpins most of our understandings of how the universe was formed — they should have been all over the place, scattered around our galaxy’s perimeter like autograph seekers mobbing a TV star, not arrayed in an orderly line, like a string of bodyguards.

Then researchers noticed that Andromeda also had dwarf galaxies arrayed in a plane around its center. Still weird, they thought, but maybe these two were just outliers.

Patterns may be odd

But now, a study suggests that these patterns might not be as odd as they first appeared. A similar row of dwarf galaxies was discovered in 2015 around Centaurus A, a galaxy 13 million light years away.

With three galaxies all showing signs of a similar pattern, cosmologists are trying to figure out how to reconcile new observations with established theories.

“We showed that these structures are more common than we thought. Until now it was thought that, okay, this is just a peculiar thing around the Milky Way and Andromeda. But now we show that these things show up in other isolated systems. So now we need an explanation for this kind of structure,” says Oliver Müller, the lead author of the paper. “I’m excited to see what people will come up with now to explain it.”

Interaction of galaxies

“If we have interaction between two bigger galaxies, then in this interaction there will be some bridges or tidal bridges (between the galaxies),” Müller says.

The “gravity of the larger galaxy will just rip out stars and gas similar to the gravity of the moon, which makes the tides on the Earth.” The resulting dwarf galaxies would orbit the larger ones in a plane and along the same direction, similar to what Müller and colleagues observed.

But researchers have no idea how long these tidal dwarf galaxies would last after a collision, and that does have implications for cosmology. The “thing about tidal dwarf galaxies is that we don’t know how long they live.

Can they be stable? This is in contrast to the standard model, where we think that the dwarf galaxies are the building blocks of the universe — they are the first galaxies that are created and they merge [to form larger galaxies], so they are the oldest objects. But with tidal dwarf galaxies, they would be the youngest objects,” Müller says.

(Source: Popular Science)

Shocking level of pollutant rises from farmed soils, new study finds

Air pollution was responsible for one in eight deaths across the world in 2012. But most likely associate this smoggy mess with smokestacks, cars spitting out black smoke, or massive cities. There is, however, an unlikely source of pollution coming from right beneath your feet. A new study in California revealed that more air pollution than we previously thought is emanating from the soil.

The study, published Wednesday in *Science Advances*, found that between 25 and 41 percent of nitrogen oxide is coming from agricultural lands in California. “We were sort of blown away by the number at first because California has always thought of emissions from soils as being very low,” Maya Almaraz, postdoctoral fellow at University of California, Davis, told *Newsweek*.

Smog-filled skies in California aren’t only within the haze that sits over Los Angeles on a hot summer day—agricultural lands in the Central Valley are also emitting air pollution due to a combination of excess fertilizer, hot and dry climate conditions and the geographical conditions.

Fertilizers are food

Fertilizers are food for crops, but only half



of the nitrogen in fertilizers is eaten up by the plants. The remainder sinks into the soil, where microbes digest nitrogen and spark the release of a waste product in the form of nitrogen oxide, or NOx.

Maya Almaraz, a National Science Foundation postdoctoral fellow at University of

California Davis, samples soils for nitrogen oxide emissions in Palm Springs, California in January, 2018. Almaraz is the lead author of a new study that found nitrogen oxide emissions from agricultural lands are higher than previously understood. Nitrogen oxide on its own is only dangerous at high concentrations.

The reason it becomes deadly for humans is the way it contributes to smog, or a form of pollution called ground level ozone. Ground level ozone is associated with heart disease, asthma and other respiratory illnesses.

Deadly impacts

“We don’t know in our study how much of this NOx is converted into smog, and we’re working on that question right now,” Ben Houlton, senior author and director of UC Davis’s John Muir Institute of the Environment, told *Newsweek*. While scientists understand the deadly impacts of air pollution from smog, ozone and other pollutants, this odd source is more difficult to grasp.

“Since you can’t see it coming from the soils, it’s very easy to miss,” Houlton said. “It’s very easy to say, ‘Well, I don’t imagine these soils and systems are producing pollution because I always think that pollution comes from vehicles or fossil fuel combustion or smokestacks.’”

Reducing this previously underestimated source of air pollution is a challenge, as we need fertilizer to grow food. “We absolutely need to grow food, and California does a great job of doing that,” Almaraz said.

(Source: Newsweek)

Mosquitoes remember human smells, but also swats, scientists say

Your grandmother’s insistence that you receive more bug bites because you’re ‘sweeter’ may not be that far-fetched after all, according to pioneering research from Virginia Tech scientists.

The study, published Jan. 25 in the journal *Current Biology*, shows that mosquitoes can rapidly learn and remember the smells of hosts and that dopamine is a key mediator of this process. Mosquitoes use this information and incorporate it with other stimuli to develop preferences for a particular vertebrate host species, and, within that population, certain individuals.

However, the study also proved that even if an individual is deemed delicious-smelling, a mosquito’s preference can shift if that person’s smell is associated with an unpleasant sensation. Hosts who swat at mosquitoes or perform other defensive behaviors may be abandoned, no matter how sweet.

Aversive learning

Clément Vinauger, an assistant professor of biochemistry in Virginia Tech’s College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and Chloé Lahondère, a research assistant professor in the Department of Biochemistry, demonstrated that mosquitoes exhibit a trait known as aversive learning by training female *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes to associate odors (including human body odors) with unpleasant shocks and vibrations.



Twenty-four hours later, the same mosquitoes were assessed in a Y-maze olfactometer in which they had to fly upwind and choose between the once-preferred human body odor and a control odor. The mosquitoes avoided the human body odor, suggesting that they had been successfully trained.

By taking a multidisciplinary approach and using cutting-edge techniques, including CRISPR gene editing and RNAi, the scientists were also able to identify that dopamine is a key mediator of aversive learning in mosquitoes.

For example, they targeted specific parts of the brain

involved in olfactory integration by fitting mosquitoes with helmets that allowed for brain activity recordings and observations. By placing mosquitoes in an insect flight simulator and exposing the mosquitoes to various smells, including human body odors, the scientists observed how the insects, trained or not, reacted.

Olfactory information

What they saw is that the neural activity in the brain region where olfactory information is processed was modulated by dopamine in such a way that odors were easier to discriminate, and potentially learn, by the mosquitoes.

“Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing exactly what attracts a mosquito to a particular human -- individuals are made up of unique molecular cocktails that include combinations of more than 400 chemicals,” said Lahondère. “However, we now know that mosquitoes are able to learn odors emitted by their host and avoid those that were more defensive.”

“Understanding these mechanisms of mosquito learning and preferences may provide new tools for mosquito control,” said Vinauger. “For example, we could target mosquitoes’ ability to learn and either impair it or exploit it to our advantage.”

(Source: eurekalert.org)

Physicists found a new way to bend a fundamental rule of light waves

One of the more well-known rules in physics is that light can only ever go one speed, so long as nothing stands in its way.

But new research has found there could be an interesting exception to this rule, where the mixing of light waves could bring them to a complete standstill.

The discovery hints at new ways of wrangling not just photons but nearly any kind of wave, which could be useful in technology that relies on information sent and stored using light.

Chill those particles right down so they lose their individual identities, and light can be set into slow motion and even stopped completely as it passes through the cloud.

More recently, it’s been shown that light’s pathway can be affected by changing its angular momentum, effectively twisting it so it takes longer than its usual 299,792,458 meters per second to get from A to B. A small group of physicists from the Israel Institute of Technology and the Institute for Pure and Applied Mathematics (IMP) in Brazil have now come up with another method, showing it’s theoretically possible to weave waves of light together in such a way that they stop dead in their tracks.

The trick relies on tuning the light waves so they meet at what’s called an exceptional point – mathematical jargon that describes how the features of different waves match one another at a given coordinate.

Exceptional points were little more than mathematical concepts until fairly recently, when researchers demonstrated experimentally that they could be created by confining microwaves within a narrow grid.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

New smart material to help fight tooth decay



Researchers have developed a smart material to minimize new cavities caused by bacteria digging under the dental fillings.

These recurrent caries affect 100 million patients every year and cost an additional USD 34 billion to treat, researchers said.

In the study published in the journal *Scientific Reports*, researchers from the University of Toronto in Canada have proposed a novel solution.

They have developed a filling material with tiny particles made by self-assembly of antimicrobial drugs which is designed to stop bacteria in its tracks.

These particles may solve one of the biggest problems with antibacterial filling materials: storing enough drug within the material to be effective for someone’s entire life.

“Adding particles packed with antimicrobial drugs to a filling creates a line of defense against cavity-causing bacteria,” said Professor Ben Hattton. “Traditionally there has only been enough drug to last a few weeks. We discovered a combination of drugs and silica glass that organize themselves on a molecule-by-molecule basis to maximize drug density, with enough supply to last years,” said Hattton. The discovery of using antimicrobials which self-assemble means the team can pack 50 times as much of the bacteria-fighting drugs into the particles, researchers said.

“We know very well that bacteria specifically attack the margins between fillings and the remaining tooth to create cavities,” said Professor Yoav Finer.

“Giving these materials an antimicrobial supply that will last for years could greatly reduce this problem,” said Finer.

The research team plans on testing these new drug-storing particles in dental fillings, monitoring their performance when attacked by bacteria and saliva in the complex environment in the mouth. With some fine-tuning, the new smart material could create a stronger filling and fewer trips to the dentist, researchers said.

(Source: indiatoday.in)

Earth’s magnetic poles may flip, and the effects could be deadly

The Earth’s magnetic field is due for a flip and is showing signs of shifting at a rate of 5 percent every century. A full reversal could happen in 2,000 years, according to scientists.

It is usual for the north and south magnetic poles to flip over the course of the planet’s history. For the past 20 million years, the pattern of pole reversals take place every 200,000 to 300,000 years. The last time a full reversal took place was approximately 780,000 years ago based on paleomagnetic research.

In between swaps, the poles sometimes attempt to flip and then go back to its original position.

The European Space Agency said the Earth’s poles are preparing for a shift, and the impacts could be devastating.

We are aware of the north and south geographic poles of the Earth. There are two other poles looping out of them, known as the geomagnetic poles of the planet.

Magnetic fields originate from magnetic dipoles, which are swirling magnetic currents of molten iron located deep in the Earth’s core. The fields extend more than 10 Earth radii, or 63.7 million meters, out into space on the side facing the Sun extending all the way to the Moon’s orbit at 384.4 million meters on the opposite side.

“Most of the field is generated at depths greater than 3000 km by the movement of molten iron in the outer core. The remaining 6% is partly due to electrical currents in space surrounding Earth, and partly due to magnetized rocks in the upper lithosphere — the rigid outer part of Earth, consisting of the crust and upper mantle,” according to ESA.

(Source: Tech Times)

Rouhani pays visit to quake-hit villages in SE Iran

On the second day of his tour to south-eastern province of Kerman, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani paid visit to Hejdak villages in Ravar County to have face-to-face contact with the people affected by recent earthquakes.

Concurrently, Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli, the Iranian Interior Minister, visited Jowr villages in Kouhbanan County of the same province to represent President Rouhani’s administration in extending sympathies and offering help to the quake-hit people of the region.



On Thursday, Mr. Rouhani started his provincial tour landing in Sirjan county as the first stop of his visit where he addressed the local residents at Takhti Stadium and attended the opening of some industrial and mining projects.

The 6.1-magnitude quake hit the area, near Hojdak, in Kerman on December 1. It left no casualties but caused damage to the buildings.

(Source: Mehr News Agency)

Thailand bans smoking and littering on tourist beaches

Thailand has issued a ban on smoking and littering at 24 popular tourist beaches to tackle environmental concerns.

The law, instated by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, comes into force on Thursday 1 February.

“Starting today, smoking and cigarette-butt littering are prohibited on beach areas,” Bannaruk Seronthong, a director at the Office of Marine and Coastal Resources Management, told Reuters.

“Anyone who wants to smoke must do so in designated smoking areas, not on the beaches.”

The move comes after the ban was trialed on 20 beaches in the provinces of Phuket, Prachuap Khiri Khan, Chon Buri and Songkhla, including Koh Samui and Pattaya. The pilot launched in October 2017 after Jatuporn Buruspat, head of Thailand’s Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (DMCR), reported his team had collected up to 138,000 cigarette butts on a 2.5km stretch of Patong beach in Phuket.

According to the DMCR, cigarette butts accounted for a third of all beach waste.

Designated areas for smokers located further inland were created at beaches with the ban, with containers provided to drop butts into.

Those caught contravening the ban will be taken to criminal court and face up to one year in jail, a fine of up to 100,000 baht (nearly \$3,200), or both.

(Source: The Independent)

LEARN ENGLISH

I Need More Time

A: So, Casey, how are things going with the photos for the **press kit**?

B: Yeah, **I’ve been meaning to** talk to you about that. I might need to ask for an **extension** on that **deadline**.

A: You’ve had over a month to get this **finalized**! Why are things **delayed**?

B: Well, the thing is, we **ran into** a lot of problems...

A: I’m not looking for excuses here. I just want to get this finished on time!

B: I know, and I apologize for the delay. But some things were just **beyond my control**. I had trouble booking the photographer, and then Michael was sick for three weeks, so I couldn’t include him in the photos, and the design team lost all the files, so I had to redo the pictures.

A: I’m not going to **put this off** any longer, Casey! I want those photos ASAP!

■ Key vocabulary

press kit: group of photos, documents, articles, and information about a company given to reporters, newspapers, magazines, etc.

I’ve been meaning to: intend, plan to do something
extension: make a deadline longer, extra time to do something

deadline: the date when something must be finished

finalize: finish, decide on all the details

delay: late

run into: meet or encounter

beyond someone’s control: not able to control something

put (something) off: plan to do something later

■ Supplementary vocabulary

due: the date when something must be finished or happen

postpone: not to do something now that should be done;

do something later procrastinate

behind: late with a project or things you have to do

hold up: delay or slow something

tight deadline: a deadline that is really difficult to meet

(Source: irlanguage.com)



Ebtekar, Akhtar discuss women’s empowerment in IT sector

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The Iranian **d e s k** vice president for women’s and family affairs Masoumeh Ebtekar and the UN under secretary-general Shamshad Akhtar discussed the role of women in disaster risk reduction and resilience through empowering them in various areas including IT.

During a meeting which was held in Tehran on Wednesday, Ebtekar touched on the attempts to organize an international conference on women’s empowerment with the cooperation of ESCAP in the near future.

Akhtar, for her part, said women have a principal role in mitigating the damages caused by natural disasters, wars and terrorism and also preventing violence and establishing peace.

Ebtekar, the former chief of the department of environment, further emphasized the important role of women in improving the environment by dealing with water shortage crisis and climate change and enhancing efficiency in agriculture.

The meeting was held on the sidelines of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) conference, ISNA reported on Thursday.

Concurrent with UNESCAP conference, the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management (APDIM) office was inaugurated in Tehran raising hopes for improved fight



Shamshad Akhtar (L) and Masoumeh Ebtekar discussing women’s empowerment in IT

against natural disasters in the country.

APDIM is mostly focusing on risk

managements for earthquakes and other

natural disasters, as well as regional

cooperation for combating sand and

dust storms in Asia and the Pacific.

Polar bears could become extinct faster than was feared, study says

Polar bears could be sliding towards extinction faster than previously feared, with the animals facing an increasing struggle to find enough food to survive as climate change steadily transforms their environment.

New research has unearthed fresh insights into polar bear habits, revealing that the Arctic predators have far higher metabolisms than previously thought. This means they need more prey, primarily seals, to meet their energy demands at a time when receding sea ice is making hunting increasingly difficult for the animals.

A study of nine polar bears over a three-year period by the US Geological Survey and UC Santa Cruz found that the animals require at least one adult, or three juvenile, ringed seals every 10 days to sustain them. Five of the nine bears were unable to achieve this during the research, resulting in plummeting body weight – as much as 20kg during a 10-day study period.

“We found a feast and famine lifestyle – if they missed out on seals it had a pretty dramatic effect on them,” said Anthony Pagano, a USGS biologist who led the research, published in Science.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature estimates that there are approximately 26,000 polar bears in the Arctic today.

“We were surprised to see such big changes in body masses, at a time when they should be putting on bulk to sustain them during the year. This and other studies suggest that polar bears aren’t able to meet their bodily demands like they once were.”

Pagano’s team studied the bears in a period during



© Getty Images/ Wolfgang Kaeher

April over the course of three years, from 2014 to 2016, in the Beaufort Sea off Alaska. They fitted the bears with GPS collars with video cameras to measure activity levels. Blood chemistry was also taken from the bears.

Previously, polar bears were thought to expend relatively little energy during days where they often wait for hours beside holes in the ice, which seals emerge from in order to breathe. But the researchers found that they actually have an average metabolism 50% higher than prior estimates.

With previous studies showing recent drops in polar bear numbers, survival rates and body condition, scientists said the new research suggests the species is facing

an even worse predicament than was feared.

The Arctic is warming twice as rapidly as the global average, diminishing the sea ice that polar bears rely upon for food and forcing many to embark from water on to land where they desperately forage for goose eggs or rubbish from bins in far-flung towns.

■ Trump’s ignorance aggravating the situation

Polar bears are listed by the US government as a threatened species but the Trump administration has reversed measures that tackle climate change, with the president himself seemingly unaware of the situation in the Arctic.

During an interview on Sunday, Donald Trump said that “the ice caps were going to melt, they were going to be gone by now, but now they’re setting records. They’re at a record levels.”

In fact, when measured at its September minimum, Arctic sea ice has declined by around 13% per decade since 1979. Last year was the eighth lowest minimum extent in the 38-year satellite record.

The huge glacial ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica are reacting more slowly to the warming atmosphere and oceans but scientists are watching them closely as they will heavily influence sea level rise if there’s significant melting. In just the past decade, Greenland has lost two trillion tons of its ice mass.

“I hope we will have an awakening, but we haven’t really done much to save polar bears over the past decade,” said Amstrup. “With this administration, I’m not exactly confident we’ll see a major switch in that.”

(Source: The Guardian)

The simple way this Japanese town has become nearly zero-waste

At times, separating trash between paper and plastic can be time-consuming. But it’s nothing compared to the recycling efforts of residents in Kamikatsu, a small village in southwestern Japan.

Residents sort their trash into 34 separate super-specific categories, like aluminium cans, steel cans, paper cartons, and paper flyers.

In 2003, the city embarked on a rigorous zero-waste program. The city used to incinerate its trash, but eventually realised how damaging it was to the environment. Waste incinerators have been shown to emit vast quantities of greenhouse gases and toxins that can damage the food supply.

It took time for residents to adjust to the tedious task of washing, sorting, and bringing their trash to the town’s sorting centre. (Although the residents do sort their trash before they bring it the centre, workers there make sure the trash goes into the right bins.)

This process is now routine.

The town also has a store where people can leave clothing or furniture they don’t want, exchanging their old stuff for free items that others have dropped off.

Down the street, there’s a factory where local women make products from discarded products, like teddy bears from old kimonos.

“We are trying to focus more and to-

tally change our lifestyles,” said Akira Sakano, deputy chief officer of the Zero Waste Academy, a non-profit that works towards Kamikatsu’s sustainability goals.

Now 80% of the town’s garbage is recycled, reused, or composted, with the rest going to a landfill.

The process saves the village a third of its former costs from waste incineration. By 2020, Kamikatsu hopes to be completely zero-waste.

Globally, the amount of trash produced is growing faster than the rate of urbanization, according to a 2015 World Bank report. By 2025, the organisation estimates that 1.4 billion more people will live in cities world-



wide, with each person producing about 3 pounds of waste per day - more than double the current average.

(Source: The Independent)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

Belgium sees scientific co-op with Iran ‘valuable’

“Scientific cooperation with Iran would be valuable to us,” said Claire Tillekaerts, CEO of Flanders Investment and Trade, a Belgian agency promoting sustainable international business.

“Iran has high scientific potentials and has done some thorough research works which are valuable to the world, so we are willing to return to Tehran with representatives of Flanders’ universities in January to develop scientific cooperation,” IRNA news agency quoted Tillekaerts as saying on Wednesday.

She went on to say that Flanders has scientist and academic ties with different parts of the world and is among the leading countries in nanotechnologies and biotechnologies.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-escent, -escence”

- **Meaning**: slightly, beginning or resembling
- **For example**: She doesn’t understand the emotional problems of **adolescents**.

PHRASAL VERB

Flick through something

- **Meaning**: to look at a book, magazine, set of photographs etc. quickly
- **Foe example**: Will flicked through Carla’s photo album.

IDIOM

Blue in the face

- **Explanation**: if you do something until you are blue in the face, you try unsuccessfully to do something for a very long time
- **For example**: I explained the situation until I was blue in the face but she wouldn’t change her mind.

Saudi regime and UAE move to end standoff in Yemen's Aden

The House of Saud regime and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have called on Yemeni government fighters and southern secessionists to focus their efforts on fighting the Ansarullah (Houthi) movement forces, in an apparent attempt to end a standoff between the two sides in Aden.

Emirati-backed separatists took over large parts of the southern port city earlier this week, including military bases, but stopped short of advancing on the presidential palace after clashing with pro-government forces and briefly surrounding the building while Prime Minister Ahmed bin Daghr and his ministers were inside.

The move exposed potential divides between the Saudi regime, which finances and arms the fugitive Yemeni government, and the UAE, which is providing direct financial and military aid to the separatist Southern Transitional Council and its armed militia.

Yemeni government officials accused the Emirati government of deploying fighter planes to help the separatist fighters.

In a statement published by the Saudi Press Agency on Thursday, the Saudi regime-led coalition said Riyadh and Abu Dhabi shared "one goal and a shared vision for Yemen".

The separatists want greater autonomy for South Yemen, which was an independent state until reunification with the north in 1990.

They complain that the government has presided over rampant corruption and neglected southern regions.

The fighting in Aden has left at least 36 people dead and wounded more than 185 people since Sunday, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross.



Yemeni retaliatory attacks leave five Saudi soldiers dead

Elsewhere, at least five Saudi regime soldiers have been killed when Yemeni army soldiers and fighters from allied Popular Committees launched separate attacks in Saudi Arabia's southwestern border region of Jizan as they continue their retaliatory raids against the Riyadh regime's aerial bombardment campaign.

A Yemeni military source, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Arabic-language al-Masirah television network that Yemeni forces and their allies fatally shot the soldiers in Hamezah village, al-Farizeh

military base, and near another village called Quwa on Thursday evening.

The source added that Yemeni sources also sprayed a Saudi regime military vehicle with machine gun fire in Hamezah village.

Yemeni army soldiers and Popular Committees fighters also fired a salvo of artillery rounds at a gathering of the Saudi regime forces in Qais Mountain and al-Haskoul base in Jizan. There were no immediate reports on the number of possible casualties and the extent of damage caused.

Separately, Yemeni artillery units targeted a Saudi regime battle tank in al-Sadis military base of the kingdom's Najran region,

located 844 kilometers (524 miles) south of the capital Riyadh.

Moreover, the Saudi regime military aircraft carried out four airstrikes against Harf Sufyan district of Yemen's northwestern province of Amran, with no reports of casualties immediately available.

The Saudi regime fighter jets also launched two aerial attacks against Haydan and Saqayn districts in the northwestern Yemen province of Sa'ada, though no casualties have so far been reported.

At least 13,600 people have been killed since the onset of the House of Saud regime's military campaign against Yemen in 2015. Much of the country's infrastructure, including hospitals, schools and factories, has been reduced to rubble due to the war.

The Saudi regime-led war has also triggered a deadly cholera epidemic across Yemen.

According to the World Health Organization's latest tally, the cholera outbreak has killed 2,167 people since the end of April 2017 and is suspected to have infected 841,906.

In November 2017, the United Nations children's agency, UNICEF, said more than 11 million children in Yemen were in acute need of aid, stressing that it was estimated that every 10 minutes a child died of a preventable disease there.

Additionally, the UN has described the current level of hunger in Yemen as "unprecedented," emphasizing that 17 million people were food insecure in the country.

The world body says that 6.8 million, meaning almost one in four people, do not have enough food and rely entirely on external assistance.

(Source: agencies)

Afghan president vows revenge after 11 detained over deadly attacks

Eleven people have been detained over a spate of deadly attacks in Afghanistan, President Ashraf Ghani said on Friday, as he vowed to take revenge for the bloodshed.

The government is under growing public pressure to improve security in the Afghan capital after three major attacks in the past two weeks demonstrated the ability of militants to strike at the heart of the country.

Since January 20, militants have stormed a luxury hotel, bombed a crowded street and raided a military compound in Kabul, killing more than 130 people.

A British charity in the eastern city of Jalalabad was also attacked. Officials said five people were killed.

"People will not forget. Even if it takes a hundred years, the Afghans will take their revenge," Ghani said in a televised address to the nation after Friday prayers. He gave no further details about the 11 detained.

Officials would submit a new security plan for Kabul on Sunday, Ghani said, speaking inside the heavily fortified presidential palace — eight months after a devastating truck bomb in the city triggered a similar move.

Afghans "demand" peace and wanted "practical actions (from Pakistan)", he added.

His remarks came a day after Afghan officials said they had handed "undeniable" evidence to Pakistan that they claimed showed the recent attacks were planned on Pakistani soil.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack on the Intercontinental Hotel on January 20 and the street bombing last Saturday.

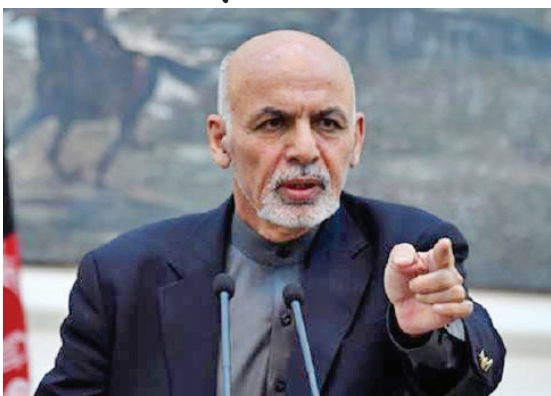
The Pakistani embassy in Kabul said the information was "being examined for its authenticity".

Kabul, along with Washington, has long accused Islamabad of providing safe havens to leaders of the Taliban and other militant groups.

Pakistan denies the charges, insisting it has eradicated safe havens in the tribal region along the border with Afghanistan. The area is largely inaccessible to foreign journalists.

But Islamabad is widely believed to retain links to the Taliban as a bulwark against arch-nemesis India, which it rivals for influence in Kabul.

The United States President Donald Trump has ratcheted up the pressure on Pakistan in 2018 with a freeze on aid.



But some analysts warn there may be no real way to pressure Islamabad, which believes keeping Kabul out of India's orbit is more important than clamping down on cross-border militancy.

(Source: AFP)

North Korea warns U.S. military drills will threaten improving inter-Korean relations

North Korea's foreign minister is warning the United States that its deployment of nuclear-powered aircraft carriers and planned military exercises immediately after the Winter Olympics threaten improving relations between the two Koreas.

Ri Yong Ho said the United Nations shouldn't remain silent about what he called "the U.S. dangerous game of aggravating (the) situation in and around the Korean peninsula and driving the whole world into a

possible disaster of nuclear war."

In a letter to Secretary-General Antonio Guterres circulated late on Thursday, he also accused the U.S. authorities of "misleading public opinion" to believe the inter-Korean dialogue is the result of

the U.S. sanctions and pressure.

Ri said it was North Korea's Leader Kim Jong Un who launched peace efforts on the Korean peninsula, "where a touch-and-go war danger was prevailing."

(Source: TIME)

U.S. has become 'flawed democracy' under Trump: study

The United States is no longer considered a "full democracy" as a result of deteriorating freedoms and declining trust in public U.S. institutions, according to an annual report by a British research firm.

The U.S. retained its position as a "flawed democracy" for the second consecutive year, due to "a further erosion of trust in government and elected officials," the Economist Intelligence Unit said in a report.

The report's annual Democracy Index showed the U.S. ranking 21st in 2017, the same as the previous year and tying with Italy.

The group had demoted the U.S. in 2016 from a "full" to "flawed" democracy, citing a "serious decline" in public trust in American institutions.

In 2017, the United States didn't fare any better, retaining its same rank and score.

The index is based on five categories: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, the functioning of government, political participation, and political culture.

The report's authors noted that years of declining trust in public U.S. institutions began well before President Donald



Trump took power, but the decline has intensified under Trump's administration.

Trump has further polarized an already divided country and Americans remain far apart on issues such as immigration and economic and environmental policy, the report said.

reality of Palestinian political life."

The U.S. moves come as Hamas, which has controlled the Gaza Strip for more than a decade, reached a national reconciliation deal with rival party Fatah in October 2017 with the aim of ending a decade-long political rift mainly over the governance of Gaza.

Following a fresh round of Egypt-brokered unity talks, rival Palestinian factions reach a unity deal that would end a 10-year political rifts between them.

"Fatah and Hamas reached an agreement at dawn today upon a generous Egyptian sponsorship," Haniyeh said in a statement on October 12 without elaborating on the deal.

Haniyeh replaced Khaled Meshaal, who was the Hamas political bureau chief and lives in exile in the Qatari capital city of Doha.

The U.S. move comes as tension is already high in the occupied Palestinian territories following the U.S. recognition of al-Quds

(Jerusalem) as the capital of Israel and his plan to relocate the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to the holy city.

The U.S.'s al-Quds shift was a break from decades of the U.S. policy that left the occupied city's status to be decided in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

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

In January, Haniyeh warned against the "rash decisions" of the U.S. and Israel with regard to al-Quds (Jerusalem) as a historic threat against Palestine.

The Hamas chief warns that the U.S. and Israel's decisions on al-Quds threaten the entire Palestine.

(Source: Press TV)

Russia: U.S. 'hunting' for Russians to arrest around the world

→ "Considering these circumstances, we strongly insist that Russian citizens carefully weigh up all the risks when planning trips abroad," the Foreign Ministry said.

It said more than 10 Russians had been detained in foreign countries with the U.S. involvement since the start of 2017.

By way of example, it pointed to at least four Russians arrested on the U.S. cyber-crime charges in Spain, Latvia and Greece. The U.S. action against suspected Russian cyber criminals surged to a record high last year.

Seven Russians were arrested or indicted in 2017 in the United States and abroad, compared to an average of two a year in the preceding six years.

The ministry pointed to the case of Stanislav Lisov, accused of creating a computer virus that targeted customers of financial institutions, causing millions of dollars of damage, who was extradited from Spain to the United States last year.

It mentioned earlier cases as well, including the detention of Roman Seleznev for cyber-crime in the Maldives in 2014, which it described as a kidnapping by American agents.

The statement, published on Thursday, also warns Russian citizens that upon extradition they will face biased treatment at the hands of the U.S. justice system.

The U.S. State Department declined to comment.

(Source: Reuters)

The chancellor loses her power

→1 According to recent surveys, more Germans believe that Merkel should resign, and few regard her now as a "strong European leader." Even with the formation of a coalition government with the Social Democrats, she's not going to have the clout and power she used to have. Herr best option may be to just resign now, but she is tenacious and hardly wants to be forced to do that.

Although coalition talks between the Christian parties and the Social Democratic Party over the formation of a coalition government (known as the Great Coalition) are crucial to Merkel, this is not true for the Social-Democratic Party. With about 20 percent of the vote, the Social Democrats have been weakened at the polls, and the failure of negotiations on the Jamaica coalition has once again brought the two traditional parties of Christian Democrats and Social Democrats to the negotiation table. Merkel and the Social-Democrat leaders have already begun the negotiations over the Great Coalition. Re-establishment of a coalition government with Merkel is not a given.

One big question is whether Merkel's "minimal survival" in power can sustain Germany's leadership in Europe? The answer is probably not, because "minimal survival" differs from "effective survival" in power. A coalition with the Social Democrats does not mean that Merkel will enjoy the power she once had, and this is what worries Germany's European partners. The growth of right-wing extremists in European countries, including in Germany and France, has worried many. In any case, even if the German coalition government is formed, obstacles abound. Merkel's salad days look to be over.

'PGCC will never be the same'

→1 Qatari Foreign Minister "Mohammed bin Abdul Rahman al-Thani" said that Qatar is ready to attend the meeting. But he argued that Doha would not be willing to accept the pre-conditions and also demanded resolution of the crisis on the basis of equality between countries. However, is the Qatar crisis resolvable?

A: To my mind, both sides need to make concessions. Also, they cannot say that one side has conceded on this item or that item. Publicly they have to say that they have resolved their misunderstandings. But in private, Qatar would have to distance itself from Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood. Their differences in other countries would be left unresolved.

■ On which of the 13 terms announced by Saudi Regime and its allies may Qatar have to concede?

A: As I have said above, the only solution is to say something publicly and agree to a few critical points privately. Privately, Qatar would have to concede on Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood and tell Al-Jazeera not to say negative things about any PGCC country. Qatar cannot shut down Al-Jazeera and let Saudi Arabia be in charge of its foreign policy. Qatar has important bargaining chips in its corner. It is home to the biggest U.S. base in the region and the U.S. can pressure Saudi Arabia. The Turkish soldiers would defend Qatar and thus Saudi Arabia will hesitate to start a military conflict. And if there is no agreement, Qatar would move closer to Iran and Iraq. This would derail U.S. ambitions in the Persian Gulf.

How millennials are changing German politics

8→ Though Ms. Merkel's poll numbers dipped during the refugee crisis, they have rebounded. "I doubt that the policy approach of the younger generation of policymakers is what voters really want," Ms. Wolf said. "It's possibly rather just what they want."

Real politics always consists of bullet points. You want to lift up the lower middle classes? You have to pass tax relief, restructure social security contributions, bolster the education budget — which is what the next grand coalition will vow to do, if the negotiations are successful.

The challenge for German politicians, moving forward, will be to come up with a narrative big enough to create a sense of direction, of being based on values more fundamental than raising the gross domestic product a few percentage points, but avoiding the sort of utopian visions that German voters rightly distrust.

If they succeed, they could set free a new era of political energy. If they fail, we could see a dark turn toward the sort of fractured, incoherent politics haunting the rest of the world, full of holes that the far right can move through. There's a trap, however.

In raging against the slow and boring politics of compromise, the members of the new generation are joining the very populist chant they are setting out to defeat.

(Source: The NYT)

CAS overturns doping bans on 28 Russian athletes

Twenty-eight Russian athletes have had their Olympic doping bans overturned and results from the 2014 Winter Games in Sochi reinstated after their appeals were upheld by sport's highest tribunal on Thursday.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) said there was insufficient evidence of anti-doping violations against the athletes, but the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said they would not necessarily be invited to the Pyeongchang Games this month.

Eleven other athletes were confirmed to have committed doping offences although CAS said it had reduced their lifetime Olympic bans to a suspension from this year's Games.

The original bans were imposed by the IOC following an investigation into alleged systematic doping at the Sochi Games which Russia hosted four years ago.

The IOC has also banned Russia from Pyeongchang as a result of its "unprecedented systematic manipulation" of the anti-doping system, although individual Russian athletes can compete as neutrals if they can meet stringent IOC criteria. Russia has repeatedly denied state involvement in doping.

Russian President Vladimir Putin welcomed the CAS ruling. "This, of course, cannot but give us joy," he told reporters. "It confirms our position on the fact that the vast majority of our athletes are clean."

Putin added that Russia still needed to continue its fight against doping along with the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). "We will do this in determined fashion," he said.

Russian sports minister Pavel Kolobkov said the IOC would be asked to allow the 28 athletes to compete in Pyeongchang.

"We really hope that the IOC make a decision in favor of all clean athletes who earned the right to compete at the Olympics," he told reporters.

But the IOC, which has cleared 169 Russians to compete, said that "not being sanctioned does not automatically confer the privilege of an invitation".

(Source: Reuters)

Referee who kicked Nantes' Carlos banned for six months

Referee Tony Chapron has received a six-month ban - half of which is suspended - after kicking and then sending off Nantes' Diego Carlos in a January defeat to Paris Saint-Germain, the French Football Federation (FFF) has confirmed.

Chapron left players, fans and pundits stunned on January 14 when he appeared to kick Carlos, having previously been accidentally tripped by the defender.

When the ball next went out of play, Chapron proceeded to show Carlos a second yellow card for his reaction to the kick, resulting in Nantes officials publicly calling for the referee to be banned.

Carlos' suspension was duly rescinded, but Chapron will have to take a break, as the FFF revealed a six-month ban, with three months suspended, had been handed down by a disciplinary committee.

A brief statement from Pascal Garibian, technical director of France's refereeing body, said: "We take note of the decision of the Disciplinary Committee of the Professional Football League.

"After he has served his suspension, Tony Chapron will again be available to the DTA [France's refereeing body] who can designate him Ligue 1 or Ligue 2 games."

(Source: Four Four Two)

Nacional apologize after fans taunt Chapecoense



Nacional have apologized to Chapecoense after supporters appeared to make mocking gestures during their Copa Libertadores match about the Brazilian club's tragic plane crash.

During their second-stage clash - which Nacional won 1-0 in Chapeco - some visiting supporters were shown taunting their hosts about the accident that killed 19 of Chapecoense's players in 2016.

In a letter to their opponents, Nacional described the behavior as "sick" and "horrific" and asked for forgiveness from Chapecoense.

"On behalf of Nacional Football Club, we ask the president our deepest sympathy and deep sense of shame. We urge you to accept our deepest apologies to the horrific gesture," a statement read.

"Unfortunately, many sick minds channel their irrationality to sporting scenarios, and all the teams, not just in our continent, are facing this problem, despite the efforts to fight against them.

"It is a big problem, and difficult to control it, and the institutions are worried that they can't control every single act.

"National made great efforts, as in general the clubs of the continent [have done], to avoid such episodes.

"To be true with this, the institution is working with the appropriate investigations and hope that those responsible receive the most severe penalties.

"They will immediately be banned, between many other sanctions. Between them, the Uruguay Football Association, and the security authorities, will prevent them to go to any sport event."

(Source: Soccerway)

No Samsung phones, Nike uniforms for North Koreans? Sanctions cloud Olympic perks



hospitalities don't run afoul of sanctions or other laws, according to several South Korean officials.

Just raising the North Korean flag alongside other national banners in the Olympic Villages required an exemption from South Korean laws banning praise of the North Korea regime, a Pyeongchang organizing committee official told Reuters.

The officials all declined to be identified due to the sensitive nature of the matter.

■ **No Galaxy Note 8, no Nike?**

Samsung Electronics, an official sponsor of the Winter Games, is offering 4,000 Galaxy Note 8 smartphones specially designed for the Olympics to "all" of the participating athletes.

The International Olympic Committee will distribute them, a Samsung Electronics spokesman told Reuters.

But South Korea is not sure if North Korean athletes will be eligible for the treats because of U.N. Security Council sanctions, an Olympics organizer told Reuters.

The official declined to elaborate, but experts say providing the \$1,100 Samsung phone could violate U.N. sanctions that ban the sale of luxury items and electronics with a potential "dual" commercial and military use.

Meanwhile, the joint women's hockey team will wear uniforms made by a Finnish company instead of official sponsor Nike, because of concerns about U.S. sanctions, another South Korean government official

More victims of ex-USA Gymnastics doctor to testify as scandal widens



Dozens of victims of former USA Gymnastics doctor Larry Nassar are expected to detail their traumatic ordeals in a Michigan courtroom on Friday, as fallout from the sex abuse scandal widens.

Nassar, 54, has already been sentenced to 40 to 175 years in prison for molesting young female gymnasts under the guise of medical treatment, after more than 150 victims offered anguished accounts of his years of abuse. He is also serving a 60-year federal term for child pornography convictions.

The latest sentencing hearing in Eaton County, which saw around 30 women testify during its first day on Wednesday, is related to a separate set of charges to which Nassar pleaded guilty as part of an agreement with prosecutors.

His case has sparked broader outrage after numerous victims accused USA Gymnastics, the sport's governing body, and Michigan State University, where Nassar worked, of failing to investigate complaints about him going

back years. U.S. Olympic officials have also been criticized by some of the sport's biggest stars, including gold medalists Aly Raisman, Simone Biles and McKayla Maroney.

On Thursday, the police department in Meridian, Michigan, apologized publicly to one victim for declining to press charges against Nassar in 2004 when she reported that he abused her. The Wall Street Journal also said on Thursday that U.S. Olympic officials did not intervene after being told in 2015 that USA Gymnastics had uncovered possible abuse by Nassar.

USA Gymnastics' board of directors resigned en masse last week in the wake of Nassar's sentencing, as did the president and athletic director of Michigan State. The scandal has prompted several investigations into those institutions.

Nassar faces a minimum of 25 years in prison in Eaton County, even though he is already assured of spending the rest of his life in prison.

(Source: Reuters)

In December, we knew four champions' Money destroying competition, says Wenger



Competition in Europe's biggest leagues is being "destroyed" by clubs who have "huge financial power", says Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger.

Frenchman Wenger pointed to examples in France, Germany, England and Spain.

Paris St-Germain are 11 points clear in Ligue 1. Bayern Munich have a 16-point advantage in the Bundesliga and Manchester City are 15 points ahead at the top of the Premier League.

Wenger said it was clear that "unpredictability has gone down".

He added: "When you look at the five big leagues in Europe, in December we already knew four champions.

"That means something is not right in our game. The huge financial power of some clubs is basically destroying the competition."

In Spain, Barcelona have an 11-point lead over Atletico Madrid. Defending champions Real Madrid - suffering a surprisingly difficult season - are 19 points behind Barca in fourth place. The other league that usually figures in Europe's 'top five' is Italy - where

told Reuters.

Unilateral U.S. sanctions go far beyond the U.N. sanctions, effectively banning U.S. companies and individuals from trading with North Korea.

"We are trying to figure out ways to live up to the sanctions," the official said.

Nike did not immediately respond to request for comments.

North Korean athletes will also have to return Finnish hockey sticks, skates and other equipment "rented" for them when they leave South Korea, the official said.

■ **FLIGHT RISK**

South Korea's unification ministry said it had sought and received temporary permission from the United States to fly an airliner to North Korea this week.

The flight took South Korean athletes for training in a ski resort in the North on Wednesday, and brought North Korean athletes to the South on Thursday.

Any aircraft or ship visiting North Korea is banned for 180 days from entering the United States. The exemption granted this week only applies to the latest flight, meaning U.S. approval is needed any time North Korean officials visit during the Olympics by airplane or ferry.

A spokesman for the U.S. State Department said Washington was in "close contact with the Republic of Korea on our unified response to North Korea."

A U.S. Treasury official said the department evaluates applications "for certain prohibited transactions and activities, which can include those related to the upcoming Olympics", without giving more detail.

(Source: Reuters)

Why Conte's Chelsea future can now be measured in weeks, not months



of his reign as Chelsea supremo. But even by the Russian's standards, the way that the current campaign has played out has been chaotic with uncertainty now casting a shadow over the entire club.

With reports now linking former Barcelona boss Luis Enrique with the Stamford Bridge hot-seat, we could even have a situation where Conte will not even be at the club at Easter, never mind the end of the season.

A Champions League double-header against Barcelona is hardly the opponent you'd want to play to ensure job security, but the news from Italy this week, that a new head of the FIGC (Italian Football Federation) has been appointed, could be Conte's passport out of England.

The new man at the helm is Roberto Fabbricini, who is also the General Secretary at CONI (the Italian Olympic

Committee) and he has been given the task of choosing a successor to Gian Piero Ventura, who was sacked following the Azzurri's failure to qualify for this summer's World Cup in Russia.

According to latest reports from Italy, Conte is in a four-man race for the job alongside former Inter and Manchester City, now Zenit St Petersburg boss, Roberto Mancini, the ex-Chelsea boss and currently unemployed Carlo Ancelotti and another former Blues tactician and Premier League winner with Leicester City, Claudio Ranieri.

Ancelotti has already stated that he prefers to go back into club management; Ranieri is having fun in France with Nantes, which really narrows the contest down to two.

Conte seems to have unfinished business with the national team, having acquitted himself rather well in the European Championships in 2016. There is also the fact that with no tournament football to prepare for this summer, the new Head-Coach will have time to put together a squad ahead of qualification for the 2020 Euro's which will not start until March 2019.

Fabbricini will entrust the help of former AC Milan and Italy legend Alessandro Costacurta in his search for a new boss, but with Conte having previous experience in the role and the fact that he seems ready to pack his bags at a moment's notice; his days in England may be measured in weeks, not months.

(Source: Calcio Mercato)

Joining Nottingham Forest was an easy decision: Dejagah

S P O R T S **d e s k** Iranian international winger Ashkan Dejagah says it was an easy decision to join English Championship side Nottingham Forest.

Nottingham Forest have signed him on a deal until the end of the season.

The 31-year-old Iranian international was a free agent and is keen to get straight into the action for The Reds. “I am really happy to be here and back in the UK. Nottingham Forest is a big, traditional club and I am happy to be here,” Dejagah told nottinghamforest.co.uk.

“The manager spoke to my agent and he was interested in signing me, and for him and the club to want me made it an easy decision. I didn’t have to think about it, it was an easy ‘yes’ and hopefully I can help the manager, my teammates and the team.”

Dejagah is no stranger to English football, having spent two years with Fulham in the Premier League, and he said he is really happy to be returning to the UK.

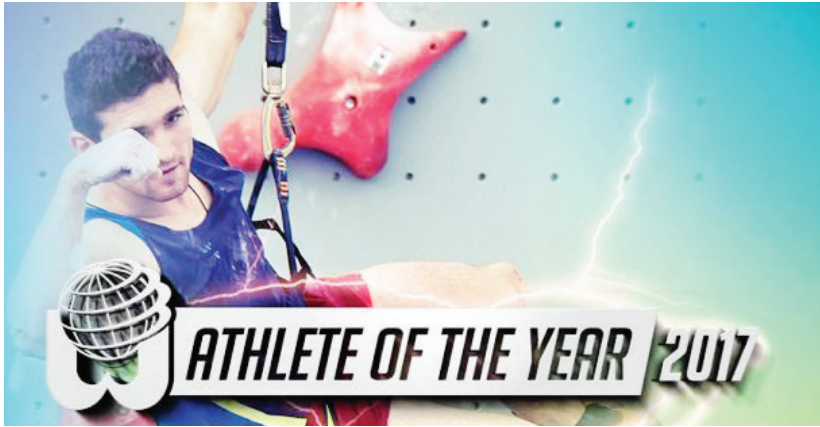
He added: “When I played in Germany I always said it was my dream to play in England. I played in the Premier League with Fulham and now in the Championship with Forest. I love it and I know how hard English football is but I am looking forward to playing my first game for the club.

“I am a player who likes to attack. I am aggressive on the pitch and always want to win so hopefully I can give the fans something to cheer about,” Dejagah concluded.

The 31-year-old midfielder has made 44 appearances for Team Melli and scored eight goals.



Reza Alipour named 2017 IWGA Athlete of the Year



S P O R T S **d e s k** Iranian speed climber Reza Alipour has been crowned the 2017 International World Games Association (IWGA) Athlete of the Year.

Alipour, nicknamed the ‘Persian Cheeta’, received 90,790 votes in the contest with second place going to Ukrainian powerlifter Larysa Soloviova, who scored 90,036.

Speed skater Fabiana Arias from Colombia finished third with 48,014 votes. Reza Alipour did not only win The World Games title in Speed Climbing in July 2017, he also holds the World Record in this discipline.

The 23-year-old faced his final race at the Games alone – his competitor had a false start – but was able to keep himself together and finish with the fastest time, 5.57.

His medal was the first ever gold medal for Iran at The World Games.

A total of 21 athletes, all of whom competed at The World Games last summer, were nominated for the Athlete of the Year vote.

Last year, Muaythai fighter Sofia Olofsson (Sweden) won the title Athlete of the Year with 15,816 votes. She received her award in an award ceremony at the Sport-Accord Convention.

Iran overpower Myanmar at AFC Futsal Championships



S P O R T S **d e s k** Iran underlined their title credentials with a comprehensive 14-0 victory over Myanmar in their Group C opener at the 2018 AFC Futsal Championships on Friday.

Mahdi Javid and Ali Asghar Hassanzadeh scored four goals each.

Hossein Tayebi was on target three times and Mehran Alighadr, Saeid Ahmad Abbasi and Moslem Oladghoba scored once each for Team Melli.

Iran will next play China on Sunday, while Myanmar will play Iraq, who enjoyed a confidence-boosting 4-2 win

over China in the earlier Group C match.

The competition is being held in Taiwan from Feb. 1 to 11.

Iran, champions of 11 of the 14 editions of the competition, have won seven straight editions before their streak was broken by Japan.

Japan have won the other three editions of the competition.

The 2018 AFC Futsal Championship is the 15th edition of the AFC Futsal Championship, the biennial international futsal championship organized by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) for the men’s national teams of Asia.

Socceroos struggle to lock in Iranian Daniel Arzani

Melbourne City young gun Daniel Arzani is the hottest property in the A-League, bursting onto the scene with a stellar January.

One goal, two assists and an accumulative 293 minutes saw the 19-year-old earn the month’s nomination for the A-League’s Young Player of the Year Award.

Arzani marked four weeks of attacking intent with his first A-League goal, a coolly converted penalty against Newcastle Jets nine days ago.

With a stuttered run-up, the spot kick showed the Iran-born rising star has confidence in spades and was unfazed by the second versus third occasion.

And for that, you have to hand it to him, even when, by his own admission, the nerves were not visible.

“I just grabbed the ball and I went up to (Michael) Jakobsen and I said, ‘can I take it?’ and he said, ‘yeah no worries’, and I said ‘sweet’,” Arzani revealed to a media conference on Thursday.

“He wasn’t too keen on letting me take it at the beginning because I missed a couple in training the day before.

“But I said, ‘I got this’, and he said, ‘yeah alright’.

“Of course (I was nervous) ... imagine if I missed.” It is tough to remember so much buzz around an A-League youngster, or any A-League player in the past, than there is around Arzani right now.

City coach Warren Joyce has stressed the player must remain grounded, still with plenty to work on, but when judging Arzani’s performances on their merits, it is justified.

Such is Arzani’s form that he has been touted as a bolter for Bert van Marwijk’s World Cup Socceroos squad.

With just over four months to run until the flight to



Russia, efforts have stepped up across the board to catch the new manager’s attention.

Arzani is not unfamiliar to international football having represented Australia at youth level – Under-17s, 20s and 23s – so has already tasted the global stage.

But Arzani’s Iranian roots mean he is also eligible to play for Iran, currently Asia’s No.1 regional force and also entrants in the World Cup.

Arzani said he is hardly focused on anything beyond City, but faces a big decision of who he might represent in future.

“For me, I just want to focus week in, week out on football for City,” he added.

“A lot of the things we’re talking about now, they wouldn’t be talked about if I wasn’t doing well.

“So I’ve got to continue doing well if I want any chance of being in the World Cup squad or achieving anything, really.

“It’s any kid’s dream, growing up, you want to play at

a World Cup, you want to play in the A-League, you want to play in all the top leagues everywhere.

“I’m just happy to be getting my opportunity.

“I haven’t really thought about it, I was raised in Australia but I was born in Iran.

“I have to talk to my parents, I have to talk to my father and we have to decide together.”

As if those calls were not enough, Arzani was reportedly the subject of a new – and vastly improved – contract offer from the powerful City Football Group (CFG), according to News Corp.

Such a deal could see Arzani take a similar path to Aaron Mooy in joining a CFG sister club with a loan move elsewhere to follow.

Arzani refused to get too caught up in those reports, insisting he still has plenty to improve before he chases a move overseas.

“You see so many Australian players, they go to Europe and they come back early,” Arzani said.

“Sometimes they go too early. They should spend another year in the league, work on their game, their fitness, their physicality and that’s what I want to try and do.

“I’ve definitely got to get fitter. I run out about 70, 75 minutes every game, but I also think I’ve got to get a bit stronger.

“I really want to dominate the bigger defenders and I think that’s what you see from the little guys in the big leagues.”

A clause in Arzani’s deal could see him re-signed by City at the end of the season in any case.

He and City will be back in action on Sunday night against Brisbane Roar at Suncorp Stadium.

(Source: DailyFootballShow)

Persepolis one step closer to IPL title

S P O R T S **d e s k** TEHRAN – Persepolis football team moved one step closer to reclaim Iran Professional League (IPL) title after beating Sepahan 2-0 on Friday.

The Reds wasted little time asserting their authority with a goal inside the 10th minute to immediately take control of the match in Tehran’s Azadi Stadium.

Ali Alipour scored his 15th goal for Persepolis just 10 minutes into the match with a powerful left-footed strike from the edge of the box.

Former Sepahan defender Shoja Khalilzadeh extended the lead in the 68th minute, finding the back of the net with a header.

“I am very satisfied with the performance we did. We could have scored more goals and I think Persepolis were deserved to win the match,” Persepolis coach Branko Ivankovic said in the post-match news conference.

Also, Padideh suffered a 3-0 home defeat to Tractor Sazi, Sepidrood drew 1-1 with Esteghlal Khuzestan and Pars Jonoubi and Saipa shared the spoils in a 0-0 draw.

Persepolis moved clear 15 points at top of the table with 51 points.

Foolad sit in second place with 36 points but the Ahvaz-based team have two matches in hands.

Iran win two gold medals at Asian Indoor Athletics Championships

S P O R T S **d e s k** Hossein Keyhani and Hassan Taftian of Iran won two gold medals in the Asian Indoor Athletics Championships.

In the men’s 60 meter, Taftian, last year’s Asian 100m champion, dominated the race with his 6.51 run, knocking 0.04 from the national record he set last September in Ashgabat.

Tosin Ogunode of Qatar was second in 6.63 with Elakkiyadasan Kanadasan of India taking bronze in 6.67.

Keyhani also won a gold medal in the men’s 3,000 meters of the event.

The Iranian runner clocked 8:37:68 to win a gold medal in the event.

Yaser Salem from Qatar won the silver medal with a time of 8:38:02 and bronze medal went to Iran’s Homayoon Hemmati with 8:38:97. The eighth edition of the Asian Indoor Athletics Championships are being held at the Aftab-e Enqelab Sports Complex in Tehran, Iran.

Iran participate in the competition with 39 athletes. Competition is due to conclude on Saturday (February 3).

Tennis player Fernando Verdasco thanks Iranians for kind messages

TASNIM — Spanish professional tennis player Fernando Verdasco has thanked Iranians for all the kind messages about his picture.

Verdasco posted a picture of Iran’s Zagros mountain range on his Instagram account and wrote, “Flying over the Iranian Mountains for more than 30 min.”



Soon after, his Instagram posts were flooded with positive comments by Iranian users.

The Iranians adored the Spaniard and asked him to travel to the Persian Gulf country.

Verdasco published another post on his Instagram account and wrote, “Thanks Iran for all the kind messages about my picture.”

Iran’s national flag raised in Pyeongchang

TASNIM — Iran’s national flag was raised in South Korea on Thursday for the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics.

Iran will participate in the Games with four skiers.

Sattar Seyd and Samaneh Beirami Baher will take part at cross-country skiing and Mohammad Kiadarbandsari and Forough Abbasi will represent Iran in Alpine skiing.

The prestigious competition will be held in Pyeongchang from Feb. 9 to 25.

Pyeongchang is the third Asian city to host the Winter Games. The first two were in Japan, at Sapporo (1972) and Nagano (1998).

Tehran to host Workers Open World Martial Arts Championship

Press TV — The Islamic Republic of Iran is going to host the first edition of International Workers and Amateurs Open World Martial Arts Championship in early March.

The International Workers and Amateurs in Sports Confederation (CSIT) recently agreed to the Amateur Federation of Worker’s Sport of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s bid to host the international event, and the tournament will be held between March 7 and 11 in the Iranian capital city of Tehran.

Male athletes from various world countries, including Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Georgia, Germany, Great Britain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Pakistan, Russia, South Africa, Syria, Tajikistan and Turkey, will participate in kickboxing and self-defense contests.

The Paraguay Paralympic Committee (PPC) has been approved by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) Governing Board as a provisional member. The decision still needs to be ratified by the membership at the 2019 General Assembly.

Provisional members have the same rights as full members except that they cannot nominate candidates and vote at the General Assembly.

“Three officials from the Sports National Secretariat have been working for five years

to develop and promote Para sports across the country,” explained PPC President Higina Giosa.

“To create the National Paralympic Committee is a dream come true and means the Paraguayan Para athletes will now have legal national and international representation.

“It would not have been possible without the support of the Sports National Secretariat, the IPC, the Americas Paralympic Committee (APC), the Paraguayan Olympic Committee

(POC), Arcangeles Foundation and many professionals who worked hard for it.”

Apart from having been named first PPC President, Giosa is a former athlete, physical education teacher and POC Governing Board Member.

“Our confirmation as provisional members by the IPC is very important for sports in Paraguay since we were one of the few South American countries without membership. It is a big joy, and a huge and beautiful responsibility,” she said.

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NEWS IN BRIEF



Iranian movies to compete in Tampere festival

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Three Iranian movies will be screened at the Tampere Film Festival in the southern Finnish city from March 7 to 11. “Whales” directed by Behnam Abedi, “Exit Toll” by Mohammad Najjarian Daryani, and “The Rebel” by Kurosh Asgari will compete with over 50 shorts from across the world.

Time to explore world after acting, triple Oscar winner Day-Lewis says

ATHENS (Reuters) — Three-time Oscar winner Daniel Day-Lewis says he has come to accept his decision to quit acting even if he doesn't quite understand it himself.

“If I knew the answer I would probably avoid trying to answer it anyway, but as it happens I can't answer the question,” Day-Lewis told reporters in Athens ahead of the screening of his final film “Phantom Thread.”

Day-Lewis, 60, the only man to have won three lead actor Oscars, shocked the film world in June by announcing, without explanation, that he was retiring as an actor.

His decision came after he finished filming “Phantom Thread”, a dark romance set in 1950s postwar London which took Director Paul Thomas Anderson two years to research and write.

“I don't fully understand it but it came to me with a sense of conviction and so I choose to move forward in acceptance of that rather than struggling with it,” he said.

The British actor, whose career has won him best actor Oscars for roles as a paraplegic Irish writer in “My Left Foot” (1989), a greedy early 20th century oil baron in “There Will Be Blood” (2007), and U.S. President Abraham Lincoln in “Lincoln” (2013), described acting as a sanctuary that “in a way, saved me from myself when I was a kid.”

“But I just feel it's time to explore the world in a different way now,” he said.

In “Phantom Thread”, which if he stays true to his word will be his swan song, Day-Lewis plays a self-centered fashion designer whose world is turned upside down when his muse falls in love with him. He studied with designers for months to immerse himself into the character.

“I'm only learning by speaking to people that apparently I've been playing an absolute prick in this film and I'm really sorry to hear that, because, who thinks of themselves in that way?”

“Phantom Thread” has been nominated for six Oscars, including best picture, best actor and best director.

Competing against Day-Lewis will be Gary Oldman, who has also been nominated for best actor for portraying Winston Churchill in “Darkest Hour”. The role earned Oldman the award for best actor at the Golden Globes.

Does thinking about winning take up much of Day-Lewis' time? “Take a guess,” he quipped.

“I'm perfectly happy to do the rounds and applaud Gary at every event I go to,” he said. “Gary has done very fine work for many years and he's been recognized for it now so I'm delighted for it. I don't have to worry about it now just sit back and relax.”

Nintendo to produce Super Mario animation film with Illumination

TOKYO (Reuters) — Japanese videogames maker Nintendo Co Ltd said on Thursday it would team with U.S. film studio Illumination Entertainment to produce an animation film using its Super Mario Bros characters.

The film would be distributed by Universal Pictures, President Tatsumi Kimishima said at a meeting with analysts on Thursday. The launch date has not been decided.

It is part of Nintendo's efforts to diversify revenue sources as the firm's earnings are heavily reliant on the gaming console business.

On Wednesday, the company reported its biggest third-quarter operating profit in eight years, driven by smashing demand for its new Switch games console, and said it expected annual earnings to outstrip its previous estimate.

Director: “The Elephant King” would be considered incredible by animation giants

By Seyyed Mostafa Mousavi Sabet

TEHRAN — Hadi Mohammadian, the promising young director of the animated movie, “The Elephant King”, who claims that his movie has over 60 percent of the quality of the latest works produced by world-renowned companies, has said that Pixar and many other similar companies would consider his movie to be incredible if they knew how a small group in Iran was able to do the project on a tight budget.

He directed “The Elephant King” at the Pooya Honar Group, a small Tehran-based private group that he cofounded in 2007 with a number of his friends and colleagues.

“Princess of Rome”, a computer-animated movie about the life of a Christian princess, Malika, mother-to-be of Imam Mahdi (AS), the 12th Shia Imam, and granddaughter of Caesar of Rome, was the group's first full-length movie that Mohammadian helmed in 2015.

“Princess of Rome” was ranked the fourth movie of the year in terms of box office receipts by grossing over 5 billion rials.

Now, the 36-year-old director and his colleagues have attended to a fantasy story in “The Elephant King”, which is set in Africa where the leader of the elephants has a baby that is named Shadfil, who must quickly find the courage to be a leader of the elephants. Despite all expectations, Shadfil is clumsy and his bulky figure always causes destruction.

The movie had its premiere on the first day of the 36th Fajr Film Festival in Tehran. It is contending for a Crystal Simorgh at the event.

“People judge our works with the standards applied to those movies that are being produced at many old-line overseas companies... but they should know that, for example, Pixar spent over \$200 million to make the acclaimed movie ‘Coco’, while we only spent one-200th of that amount to make ‘The Elephant King’,” Mohammadian told the Tehran Times.

“That sum of money would not even cover their expenditures for coffee and cake for their staff when they were working on



A scene from “The Elephant King” by Hadi Mohammadian

‘Coco,’” he added.

However, he said that he is happy that his movie has been compared with animated productions by major overseas companies. “This attitude pushed us to improve our works over and over again,” he stated.

In “The Elephant King”, Mohammadian followed the common template of a hero's journey, which is mostly used in Hollywood productions, to write the screenplay along with his colleagues Mohammad-Baqer Mofidikia and Mohammad-Ali Ramezanpur.

“This pattern has always been successful and people and children, in particular, get in touch with it easily,” he said.

They wrote the screenplay in consultation with writers and filmmakers Behruz Afkhami, Hadi Moqaddamdoost and Vahid Amirkhani, whom they said are well versed in storytelling in cinema.

As writer and director, Mohammadian said that he failed to narrate the story well in “Princess of Rome”, but “The Elephant King” doesn't suffer from this problem.

“All dialogues, events and the atmosphere in the story have been created based on Iranian culture, so these all seem to help

Iranian children feel themselves in the movie, and also empathy with the characters and to enjoy the film even more,” he added.

The sound effects for “The Elephant King” were recorded in the United States and the rendering process of it was done in Ukraine.

Rendering or image synthesis is the automatic process of generating a photorealistic or non-photorealistic image from a 2D or 3D model by means of computer programs.

The founders of the Pooya Honar Group are dreaming up a plan to develop their company so that they can complete all the various processes of production within their group.

The group was formed by a combination of three organizations: Pooya Honar, Haft Sang and Soluke Aflaki. Mohammadian said that having box-office success for their productions can help them acquire all the necessary equipment to realize their dream.

“We are trying to live up to the modern standards of the world in animation cinema, but we need time to increase our experience and to develop our team,” Mohammadian said. “We are at the beginning of the task

of laying a solid foundation for modern animation cinema for children so we welcome any one who can help us progress and create a proper atmosphere for children,” he added.

He said that his team in “The Elephant King” has sacrificed themselves to draw children into theaters to enjoy watching a genuine Iranian animated movie.

“We did our best and we hope that people back us by taking their children to cinemas to watch ‘The Elephant King’, because we are totally independent and need their support to make better movies for their children,” he stated.

“We can tell the world proudly that ‘The Elephant King’ is the outcome of the artistic and technological abilities of an Iranian team,” he noted.

The founders of the Pooya Honar Group believe that animated movies produced overseas have something in their content that may challenge the indigenous culture in the country. They assure parents that they would never find anything harmful to their children, so they have chosen the motto “Bring Your Children to the Cinema with Peace of Mind.”

Veterans receive career awards at Fajr Film Festival

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The 36th Fajr Film Festival opened at Tehran's Milad Tower on Thursday with honoring cineastes Mohammad-Ali Najafi, Manuchehr Esmaeili and Akbar Abdi, and a tribute to the late producer, Ali Moallem.

Moallem's widow, Azar Memarian, and his two sons, Iman and Omid, were called on stage to receive an award presented by Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi.

Omid talked of his grief over the death of his father who died of a heart attack in March 2017.

“I always remember him saying we must continue his way. And now I am happy to see the cineastes united to this extent and that no one can divide them,” Omid said.

For his part, the minister expressed his happiness over the celebration of Iranian cinema that is organized every year to mark the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

“I express my congratulations to the noble family of cinema. Iranian cinema has had dynamic participation in international events over the past 40 years and has turned out to be the art and cultural ambassador of the country,” the minister said.

The ceremony was followed by honoring director Najafi. In his acceptance speech, Najafi said that 47 years ago where one could hardly talk about cinema in religious gatherings, he pursued cinema and theater seriously.

Esmaeili said, “Tonight, you responded to the hello I said to you in all the films that I worked as a dubber.”

Esmaeili received his award from his colleague Abolhassan Tahaminejd and actor Saeid Raad.

“In those years when I was younger and the films were dubbed in studios, I used to become so excited when I heard that Esmaili was going to lend his voice to my characters in the films,” Raad said.



This combination photo shows dubber Manuchehr Esmaeili (L), actor Akbar Abdi (C) and director Mohammad-Ali Najafi after being honored during the 36th Fajr Film Festival at Tehran's Milad Tower on February 1, 2018. (IRNA/Fars/Abdollah Heidari/Soheil Sahranavard)

He asked the audience to stand and applaud for one minute in honor of Esmaeili.

Actor Akbar Abdi was the last to be honored with the lifetime achievement award presented by director Rasul Sadr-Ameli and several other cineastes.

Sadr-Ameli called Abdi a genius in acting and added, “He has not been a mere actor all these years. He has been a phenomenon. He made us believe in his roles and we have no other way but to love him. He is a national asset.”

Abdi also in his words expressed his thanks to his mother and his wife.

Iranian artists voice concern on global warming on Lys d'Or



A photo by Iranian photographer Majid Hojaji

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Artworks by a number of Iranian artists participating in the international online group exhibitions named “Global Warming & Water Wars: Your Vision of the Future” have been selected to go on display online on Lys d'Or.

Lys d'Or is an art web gallery born as spin-off of blog of art and culture, which hosts solo and group exhibitions.

Works by artists from Spain, the U.S., Italy, Austria, India and the UK are also seen in different categories including poster, graphic design, video art, sculpture, drawing and installation, the organizers have announced.

Iranian artists have the most works on view in the photography section. Works by Abdorrahman Mojarad, Ahmad Ve-

jdanzadeh, Amir-Reza Vahhabi, Kurosh Sadati, Majid Hojaji, Maryam Alemomen and several other photographers have been selected for the exhibition.

Also included are video arts by Arezu Baghsheikhi and Niknaz Niknejad.

In poster category, works by Hossein Abdi, Majid Aqapur and Navid Talebi can be seen.

Sculptures by Hamid Forughirad and Nazi Arian are also on display.

What the exhibition presents is how each artist interprets the vision of a possible future determined by the behavior of man towards the planet earth. The scarcity of water, the advance of the desert, the inundation by water of territories and the disappearance of glaciers are among the highlighted topics on display for one month in February.

“At Damascus Time” star Hejazifar dissatisfied with his performance



Hadi Hejazifar acts in a scene from “At Damascus Time” directed by Ebrahim Hatamikia.

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Hadi Hejazifar, a leading actor in the acclaimed Iranian dramas “Standing in the Dust” and “The Midday Event”, has said that he is not satisfied his performance in his latest movie, “At Damascus Time” directed by Ebrahim Hatamikia.

He made the remarks in an interview on Cinema 2, a TV program, on Thursday after a screening of the film at the 36th Fajr Film Festival.

In “At Damascus Time”, Hejazifar portrays an Iranian pilot who, along with his son as copilot, is seized by Daesh forces in Syria.

Hejazifar and Babak Hamidian are the sole Iranian actors of the cast, which

is composed of a number of Syrian and Iraqi actors.

“The film is a good one with moments, which I believe we will see for the first time in Iranian cinema. I see Babak; I see the other actors. I like the entire film but I don't like my performance; I am saying this honestly,” he said.

“You know my main interest is directing, I have learned a lot from Hatamikia. He has a good command of his work and over everything and the cast and crew,” he added.

“I must admit it was one of my wishes that came true to work with Hatamikia. We lived for four months together and to me the complete satisfaction of the director is the main thing,” he added.