



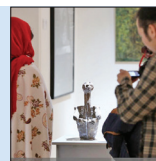
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Revolution inspired anti-colonialists



© Tehran Times/ Majid Haghdoust

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Olympics committee apologies to Iran over Samsung ‘misunderstanding’

Pyeongchang Olympic organizers said they had apologized to Iran on Friday after a diplomatic furor over its athletes being denied special Samsung phones issued for the Games.

The head of the Pyeongchang organizing committee, Lee Hee-beom, confirmed he had written to the Iranian team “to apologies for the misunderstanding”.

The problem started on Wednesday,

when Games organizers said Iranian and North Korean athletes would be refused the Galaxy Note 8 devices from sponsor Samsung, loaded with essential logistical and competition information.

Although the organizers later backtracked, it sparked anger in Iran, where Samsung has a major commercial presence, and its athletes refused to accept the phones until there was a full apology. **→15**

IAEA, EU reaffirm support for nuclear deal

POLITICS **d e s k** The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the European Union (EU) on Thursday reaffirmed their support for the Iran nuclear agreement and reviewed progress achieved in working together on a range of nuclear activities.

“The EU and the IAEA reaffirmed sup-

port for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) based on their respective mandates. The EU High Representative, as Coordinator of the Joint Commission established under the JCPOA, will remain in close contact with the IAEA regarding continued implementation of the agreement,” the IAEA said in a statement. **→2**

Syria: U.S. strike on pro-govt. forces is ‘war crime’

Damascus has strongly denounced as a “war crime” a deadly strike carried out by the U.S.-led military coalition against pro-government forces in Syria’s eastern Dayr al-Zawr province, saying U.S. presence in the country is “illegitimate.”

The Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates condemned the strike in two separate letters sent to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and the rotating president of the UN Security Council on

Thursday, saying the air raid was “a crime against humanity.”

It further lambasted Washington for using “the excuse of fighting terrorism to set up illegitimate bases on Syrian territory.”

The U.S. military said late Wednesday that it had killed at least 100 pro-government fighters in Syria to allegedly fend off an attack on the so-called U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Dayr al-Zawr province. **→13**



PERSPECTIVE

By **M.A.Saki**
Deputy editor-in-chief

Time ripe for Korean breakthrough

A unique opportunity has been created for deescalating tension on the Korean peninsula as

Pyeongchang on Friday sent a delegation - led by North Korea’s ceremonial head of state Kim Yong Nam - to Pyeongchang to attend the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics in South Korea.

Kim and his entourage including Kim Yo-Jong, the sister of North Korean leader, were welcomed by South Korean Unification Minister Cho Myoung-gyun at Incheon International Airport.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in is also going to have lunch with the pair - Kim Yong Nam and Kim Yo-Jong - on Saturday.

Now there are positive signs for a breakthrough in the turbulent relationship between Pyongyang and Seoul.

Anyone whose heart beats for peace on the peninsula extremely expects North and South Korea use this opportunity to set the stage for a rapprochement and hopefully a final reunification.

The Korean peninsula is a divided family and millions of people on both sides of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) are wishing a reunification of this family.

The statue of two brothers in the war memorial in Seoul - a young boy from North Korea and a military officer from South Korea - who have hugged each other when they face each other during the 1950-53 Korean War speaks volumes about the injured feelings of hundreds of thousands of families.

Washington seems to be unhappy about the Pyongyang-Seoul engagement. The rhetoric by U.S. Vice President Mike Pence who had attended the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics were in fact disruptive.

But President Moon has resisted pressure from the Trump administration by sending overtures to Pyongyang. Mr. Moon is well aware that in the event of a bloody conflict it is the Koreans who will suffer the most and not the United States which is very far away from the Korean peninsula.

Now it is extremely expected that the North Korean leader respond positively to the goodwill gesture of the South Korean president by starting the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and rob the opportunity from the United States who wishes to use the conflict in the region as a pretext to sell its weapons and maintain a military presence in Southeast Asia.

Rouhani wants ties with Turkey to be ‘strategic’

POLITICS **d e s k** TEHRAN — Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan held a phone conversation on Thursday discussing bilateral ties and international issues.

“We believe that relations between Iran and Turkey should be expanded to a strategic level at various spheres,” Rouhani said.

Rouhani noted that Iran is ready to expand economic ties with Turkey.

The two countries can expedite expansion of economic relations by using national currencies in economic transactions, the Iranian president suggested.

Rouhani also said Tehran attaches great importance to expansion of cooperation among Iran,

Turkey and Russia on regional issues.

“There are many threats against Iran, Turkey and other Islamic countries. So, given the two countries’ close views, political cooperation and consultations should continue,” he remarked.

For his part, Erdogan said new threats against the region entails close cooperation between Iran and Turkey. The Turkish president also expressed satisfaction over expansion of security cooperation in fighting terrorism.

According to Reuters, presidents of Turkey, Russia and Iran have agreed to meet in Istanbul to discuss the conflict in Syria.

Erdogan invited the Iranian president to attend the meeting.

Aoun: Lebanon military ready to confront Israel

Lebanese President Michel Aoun says he has ordered the country’s armed forces to confront any attempt by Israel to undermine Lebanon’s sovereignty, as Israeli officials stir more territorial tensions with Beirut. Addressing a cabinet session on Thursday, Aoun vowed to “prevent any Israeli aggression on Lebanon’s land and water” in the wake of disagreements with Israel over Mediterranean oil fields as well as a planned border wall.

“We hope to put an end to this matter through diplomatic channels, yet our military has been given the orders to confront any threat to our sovereignty,” Aoun asserted, noting that talks were underway “to prevent Israeli greed.”

The two sides have nearly come to blows over a tender by Lebanon in December for oil and gas exploration projects in two of the country’s 10 offshore blocks in the Mediterranean Sea, namely Block 4 and Block 9.

Israel, which claims sovereignty over the ninth block and claims it runs into its side of the Mediterranean, has blasted the move as “very provocative.” The Tel Aviv regime has also escalated the tensions by announcing plans for a wall to isolate the occupied Palestinian lands from Lebanese territories.

Lebanon has objected to the plan, saying the wall violates its sovereignty by passing through territory that belongs to the country but is located on the other side of a UN-designated Blue Line, which sets the limits for Israel’s 2000 withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

Present at Thursday’s cabinet session was Prime Minister Saad Hariri, who called on “all political parties to put aside their differences and stand united in the face of Israel’s aggression.”

He also said “communications with the international community are underway to confront

The latest round of the Sochi meetings on the Syrian crisis was held on January 29 and 30. Erdogan also called for expansion of relations in various areas. The Iranian president met with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu in Tehran on Wednesday.

Rouhani said that expansion of friendly and brotherly relations with neighboring countries, especially Turkey, is an important principle in Iran’s foreign policy.

Cavusoglu said that Turkey will continue cooperation with Iran in helping settle regional crises especially the one in Syria, adding that the U.S. seeks to hatch plots in order to influence Iran-Turkey relations negatively.

Israel’s ambitions.”

A day earlier, Lebanon’s Higher Defense Council, also chaired by Aoun, held an extraordinary session to double down on Beirut’s stance.

■ U.S. takes on mediation role

Following the recent escalation, the U.S. has sent David Satterfield, the acting assistant U.S. secretary of state, to the region on a mediation mission, Israeli media reported, citing Lebanese and Israeli officials.

The American official, who once served as the U.S. ambassador to Beirut, headed to Israel last week and spent this week meeting with the Lebanese president, prime minister and other officials.

Satterfield “held talks regarding the wall with Israel and said there is no call for concern, and there is no direction towards escalation,” an unnamed senior Lebanese government official told Reuters. (Source: agencies)

One film alone cannot tell the vast story of “The Lost Strait”: director

A R T **d e s k** TEHRAN — Director Bahram Tavakkoli said that the true story depicted by his latest movie, “The Lost Strait” on Iranian combatants in an epic battle in the last days of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, is too massive to be portrayed in one film.

“The events are so remarkable that no film can depict them entirely,” he noted during a press conference after a screening of his movie at the 36th Fajr Film Festival on Wednesday. **→16**



© Tehran Times/ Majid Asgarpour

Actor Javad Ezzati attends a press conference for his film “The Lost Strait” during the 36th Fajr Film Festival.

U.S. not to contribute money to Iraq rebuilding: officials

U.S. and Western officials say Washington has no plan to allocate money to the reconstruction of Iraq, ravaged by the war against the Takfiri Daesh terror group, at an upcoming international fund-raising conference in Kuwait.

The officials told Reuters on Thursday that Washington does not plan to contribute any money at the conference in Kuwait next week to fund the rebuilding of the war-ridden country.

“Absolutely nothing,” said a Western official, who was speaking on condition of anonymity, when asked whether Washington would announce any financial contributions at the conference to fund long-term reconstruction projects.

A U.S. official also said, “We are not planning to announce anything” at the conference, which will be attended by U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson.

The official, however, said Tillerson could still decide closer to the time to announce a contribution.

Commenting on the issue, State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said, “I’m not aware of any announcements that we will be making.”

Former head of the U.S. Agency for International Development’s (USAID) Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance, Jeremy Konyndyk, said by not contributing to reconstruction, especially in combat-ravaged areas, the Trump administration could help set the stage for new militancy.

“We’ve seen this movie before. There is a very real risk if the U.S. doesn’t put money into reconstruction, that having just won the battle, you lose the peace,” said Konyndyk, who now works for the Center for Global Development think tank.

James Jeffrey, a former U.S. ambassador to Iraq said, “The fact that we’re not putting any money up will weaken our case, and that’s unfortunate.”

An unnamed U.S. official in Baghdad said, “What we are trying to do in Kuwait next week is to put together companies that want to look at Iraq ... and possibly also talk about ways to finance projects.” U.S. President Donald Trump said during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign that if elected “the era of nation-building will be ended.”

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has said his country needs up to \$100 billion to rebuild territories that have been torn apart by Daesh. (Source: agencies)

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Shahroudi says Expediency Council's policies to undergo revision

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Chairman of the Expediency Council Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi said on Wednesday that the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has ordered a review of the council's policies.

In a decree, the Leader highlighted the necessity of reviewing the council's policies, Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi said, Tasnim reported.

He added the council is tasked with drawing up macro policies and giving advice to the Leader on important issues.

The ayatollah also said so far the Expediency Council has examined 217 disagreements between the parliament and the Guardian Council.



Tehran dismisses Bahrain's accusation about oil pipeline bombing

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi on Thursday vehemently rejected Bahrain's accusations of links between Tehran and a number of suspects in a 2017 bombing targeting an oil pipeline in the Arab sheikhdom in the Persian Gulf.

Qassemi said the Manama regime's fresh accusations are "fabricated and baseless," calling on the Bahraini rulers to stop the "awkward and delusional blame game" against Iranian institutions, Press TV reported.

"Instead of making repeated allegations and outdated scenarios, the Bahraini officials had better abandon [their] security-policing approach in suppressing the legitimate demands of the people and put an end to the crisis in the country through serious dialogue," he said in a statement



Envious enemies eyeing 40th anniversary of Revolution: IRGC

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) released a statement on Friday saying the enemies are witnessing the 40th anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution with envy.

Despite the enemies' conspiracies and seditions against the country, the Islamic Republic is moving on the path toward ideals, the statement read, Mehr reported.

The Islamic Revolution is a living, strong and inspirational "truth" that its anti-hegemonic and freedom-seeking discourse has awakened nations against the hegemonic powers, international Zionism and the U.S. which is worse than Daesh (ISIL).

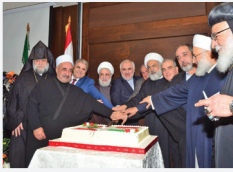


U.S. repeatedly slapped in the face by Iranians

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Ayatollah Kazem Sedighi, the interim Friday Prayer preacher of Tehran, said that the United States has been repeatedly slapped in the face by the Iranian nation, pointing to Washington's failures in the Middle East.

Addressing worshippers, Ayatollah Sedighi said the U.S. and Saudi Arabia were defeated in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon but Iran achieved victories in the region under the guidance of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution.

He also expressed congratulations on the 39th anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution and hailed the achievements of the revolution.



Envoy says Quds will remain the capital of Palestine

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran's ambassador to Beirut said on Friday that declaring Quds (Jerusalem) as the capital of the Zionist regime is against the international and Islamic consensus.

"Quds will remain the capital of Palestine, and the wars and conflicts in the region will not affect the Palestine cause," said Mohammad Fathali, IRNA reported.

Speaking at a ceremony commemorating the Islamic Revolution anniversary, he also said the best solution to conflicts in Syria, Yemen and Bahrain is to hold national dialogue between conflicting sides.



No ground for missile talks: IRGC

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Mohammad Sadeq Joka, the IRGC's point man for parliamentary affairs, has said there's no suitable ground for talks on Iran's missile program and other defense issues.

"Certainly, no one in Iran would accept such notion," Joka told ISNA in an interview published on Friday.

Pointing to Western calls for negotiations on Iran's missile program, he said the other sides did not respect their obligations under the nuclear deal and this proved that Iran should not negotiate with them on other issues.

He also called on the Iranian Foreign Ministry to firmly reject such calls that are being made by Europeans and Americans.

People have complaints about corruption, discrimination, Leader says

TEHRAN — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said on Thursday that the people have complaints about corruption and discrimination, urging three branches to counter corruption.

"The people have complaints about corruption and discrimination. The people will tolerate most of the problems, but they are complaining of corruption and discrimination and will not brook it; therefore, the officials of the three branches of government must seriously counter corruption," Ayatollah Khamenei said during a meeting with some of the commanders and personnel of the Air Force and the Army's Air Defense Base on the occasion of the historic pledge of allegiance by Homafaran (Air Force officers in the previous regime) to the founder of the Islamic Republic, the late Imam Khomeini, on February 8, 1979.

The Leader highlighted "understanding the people," adding, "Who are the people? The people are those who create the February 11 [rallies marking the anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution] epic every year; the people are those who, after rioters became involved, stepped back even if they had had a complaint and entered the fray on December 22. These are our people. Do not mistake them. Know the people and work for the people sincerely and to gain God's satisfaction, because God has requested us officials to be the servants of the people and serve them."

He also said that change and development are parts of the nature of the Revolution and added, "Now that the Revolution is entering its 40th year, the fundamentals and basics have remained stable and fixed; however, from this mighty tree with deep roots have emerged fresh and new fruits."

He said the key objective of the enemies in battling the Islamic Revolution is to prevent the emergence of new fruit and the continuation and endurance of the Revolution.

"They utilize self-proclaimed thinkers, fake theoreticians, mercenary journalists and writers, clowns and all of the facilities of cyberspace to affect the people; however, on some divine days such as February 11, December 22, 2009, or December 22 this year, and in the spontaneous, passionate and fervent rallies following those occasions, people flock to the streets and ruin the calculations of the enemy by chanting a single slogan in unisons," the Leader said.

He described the February 11 rallies this year as an example of the love and respect of the people for the



"By the grace of God, the participation of the people in February 11 rallies this year will be greater and more fervid than ever and everyone will attend."

Revolution and added, "Due to the nonsense words and blabber of some U.S. and non-U.S. statesmen this year, the people sense that the enemy is setting up an ambush and seeks to carry out hostile acts and, therefore, by the grace of God, the participation of the people in February 11 rallies this year will be greater and more fervid than ever and everyone will attend."

■ 'U.S. created Daesh'

Ayatollah Khamenei said that Daesh was created by the U.S. and that the incumbent U.S. president, Donald Trump, referred to this fact in his election campaign.

"As well as creating Daesh, the Americans supported

them and savage U.S. bodies such as Blackwater were likely responsible for the teaching of some violent and brutal methods; however, despite all these cruelties and hard-heartedness, the U.S. government lays claims to be a supporter of human rights and the oppressed and animal rights in international propaganda and they must be shamed through the expression of these realities," he said.

He also described the 70-year oppression against the Palestinian nation and the support for the massacre of Yemeni people and brutality against them as clear examples of the tyranny of the U.S.

(Source: leader.ir)

Iran can discuss other issues if nuclear deal succeeds: diplomat

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has said that Iran can discuss other issues if the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, succeeds.

"Now they ask Iran to enter discussions on other issues. Our answer is clear: Make the (deal) a successful experience and then we discuss other issues," Reuters quoted Araqchi as saying in Euromoney conference in Paris on Thursday.

He said that the West must ensure the nuclear deal succeeds before trying to negotiate other issues.

He noted that the Iran policy of U.S. President Donald Trump's administration was "destructive" and violated the terms of the nuclear deal.

On the sidelines of the conference, Araqchi told Reuters that there is no link between

Iran's role in the Middle East region and the nuclear deal.

"We have always fought against terrorism. Iran has always played a key role in bringing stability and peace to the region ... There is no link between the (nuclear) deal and our role in the region," he said.

Iran and six world powers - 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 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.

In a statement on January 12, 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.

Speaking at the same conference, Britain's Minister for the Middle East Alistair Burt said European powers were determined to save the agreement.

"We and our European partners are absolutely clear. We want the deal to succeed," Burt said. "We don't want to see the JCPOA (deal with Iran) go down and are working with our European partners to mitigate concerns the United States may have to ensure it continues."

■ Araqchi says U.S. seeks to mislead Iran out of JCPOA

In an interview with Italian newspaper La Repubblica on Wednesday, Araqchi also said the U.S. is seeking to mislead Iran out



of the JCPOA.

"The U.S. is trying to mislead us out of the JCPOA, but we will not fall into its trap," he noted.

He added, "If the U.S. leaves the deal, nobody will ever be willing to negotiate with it." (Staff and agencies)

Iranian officials react firmly to Samsung move

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Iranian foreign minister issued an ultimatum on Thursday to Samsung

Co. urging it to apologize for excluding the Iranian Olympians from receiving phones as a gift in the South Korea Winter Olympics, a source said.

If Samsung Electronics does not withdraw from its decision until Thursday afternoon, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad-Javad Zarif will not use Samsung any more as he has it now as

his cell phone, the source told Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA).

Also, Iran's Prosecutor General Mohammad Jafar Montazeri ordered his deputy to summon Samsung representatives in Tehran to protest at the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics organizers' move against Iranian athletes.

The senior judicial official further emphasized that in case the Samsung Electronics Co. pledges to compensate for "the spiritual damage" it has caused

IAEA, EU reaffirm support for nuclear deal

1 → It added, "The talks on 8 February at the IAEA's headquarters provided a forum for exchanging views on strengthening collaboration on nuclear safety, security, safeguards, sustainable development, nuclear energy research and increasing innovation."

Iran and six world powers — namely the U.S., Russia, China, France, Britain, and Germany — signed the nuclear deal, also called the JCPOA, in July 2015 and started implementing it in January 2016.

Under the accord, Iran undertook to apply certain limits to its nuclear program in exchange for the termination of all nuclear-related sanctions against Tehran.

U.S. President Donald Trump is opposed to the JCPOA, which was negotiated by his predecessor, Barack Obama. Last month, he extended sanctions waivers on Iran, lifted under the nuclear agreement, for another 120 days but said he was doing so "for the last time."



He further called on European allies and the U.S. Congress to work with him to fix what he called "the disastrous flaws" in the pact or face a U.S. exit.

■ 'Blocking regulations'

Meanwhile, an EU official said the 28-nation bloc

to Iran, a date should be determined and announced to the head office of the company.

Also, an informed source told the IRIB that ICT Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi had also demanded the South Korean company to apologize, saying the minister was considering revocation of registration service for Samsung devices on the Iranian network.

In the meantime, the Foreign Ministry summoned South Korea's ambassador to

could put in place "blocking regulations" to ensure that its companies continue doing business with Iran if the United States pulls out of the JCPOA.

Denis Chaibi, head of the Iranian task force at the EU's external action service, told the Euromoney Iran Conference 2018 in Paris on Thursday that in case of a U.S. withdrawal, one of the bloc's options would be to restore "blocking regulations," which were agreed in 1996 amid Washington's economic sanctions against Cuba.

"We are looking at a number of possibilities. It is not complicated to do it legally in that the legal instrument exists, but it doesn't require a huge internal debate," Chaibi said, according to Press TV.

The EU rules "could be revived or put back, but only if it is clear that the U.S. is putting back sanctions with extraterritorial sanctions and that they are being applied. It can't be done protectively," he added.

(Press release)

The Embassy of the Republic of Korea would like to forward the following an official statement of the International Olympics Committee (IOC) regarding the issue of providing mobile phones on the occasion of the Olympic Winter Games PyeongChang 2018:

"The IOC will provide mobile phones to all athletes of all countries participating at the Olympic Winter Games PyeongChang 2018. These phones contain essential logistical and competition information for the athletes. Regarding Iran, we can confirm that all participants will be able

to keep the phones."

The Embassy of the Republic of Korea confirms that the unwise decision yesterday (Feb 7) did come from neither the Korean government nor the Korean company in question. Due to the close cooperation between the Republic of

Korea and Iran, such a regrettable decision was quickly rectified. The Korean government and the company in question are always deeply grateful to the Iranian people for their support and affection toward the Korean people, culture and products.

North and South Korea heads of state meet, shake hands

South Korean President Moon Jae-in and the North's ceremonial head of state Kim Yong Nam met and shook hands Friday ahead of the Winter Olympics opening ceremony.

Kim Yong Nam, who is officially leading Pyongyang's diplomatic delegation to the Games, met Moon at a leaders' reception ahead of the opening ceremony in Pyeongchang.

Moon and his wife received their guests one by one and the two men smiled as they shook hands in a relaxed manner.

There was no sign of Kim Yo Jong, the influential sister of the North's leader Kim Jong Un, who is part of Pyongyang's delegation.

Kim Yong Nam is the highest-level Northern official ever to visit the South, and was meeting his third South Korean president after participating in North-South summits in Pyongyang in 2000 and 2007.

On his left lapel Kim wore a badge depicting the North's founder Kim Il Sung and his son and successor Kim Jong Il, Kim Jong Un's father.

Moon and his wife Kim Jung-sook both wore lapel badges of Soohorang, the dancing white tiger mascot of the Winter Games.

A seating plan for the dinner shown on South Korean television showed Kim Yong Nam seated at the top table, in between Olympics chief Thomas Bach and U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres, and directly opposite U.S. Vice President Mike Pence.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was also among the group.

Washington and its ally Tokyo are regularly threatened by nuclear-armed Pyongyang.

■ Pence avoids encounter with North Korean official as Olympics begin

Meanwhile, U.S. Vice President Mike Pence made only a brief appearance at a reception marking the start of the Winter Olympics on Friday, avoiding a potentially awkward encounter with the ceremonial leader of North Korea attending the same event.

The reception hosted by South Korean President Moon Jae-in in the mountain resort of Pyeongchang was the culmination of months of work by Seoul, which seeks to use the Olympics to ease tension spurred by North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Ahead of the reception, South Korean media said Pence was expected to be seated opposite Kim Yong Nam, North Korea's nominal head of state, at the 12-seat head table.

However, South Korea's presidential Blue House said Pence had a meeting scheduled with U.S. athletes and had only planned to stay briefly to greet other officials.

Pence shook hands with other leaders, including close ally Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, but not Kim Yong Nam, according to a Blue House pool report.

Earlier on Friday, Pence said Moon gave his backing to additional measures the United States is planning to try to curb North Korea's missile and nuclear programs.



Pence spoke after paying tribute at a memorial for 46 South Korean sailors killed in the sinking of a warship in 2010 that Seoul blamed on a North Korean torpedo attack.

Kim Yong Nam landed in South Korea on Friday along with leader Kim Jong Un's younger sister, Kim Yo Jong, aboard her brother's private jet.

The white aircraft had the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, North Korea's official name, inscribed in black in Korean on its side, followed by the North Korean flag.

Kim Yo Jong and her delegation were greeted by government officials, including Unification Minister Cho Myong-gyon, before boarding a bullet train to Pyeongchang. A special train had been prepared just for the visitors, a Blue House pool report said.

■ North Korea stages show of force with new missiles during parade

North Korea showcased new intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) it tested last year and a new type of short range missile during Thursday's large military parade, analysts said on Friday.

The parade, marking the 70th anniversary of the founding of the North Korean army, was attended by leader Kim Jong Un and other senior officials.

Usually held in April, the parade took place this year on the eve of the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics

being staged in the South Korean mountain resort of Pyeongchang, just across the heavily fortified border.

North Korean state media broadcast the parade, showing what appeared to be the Hwasong-14 and Hwasong-15 - the ICBMs test-launched last year for the first time.

The two-stage, liquid-fuel Hwasong-15 made its parade debut, with four of the large missiles carried on nine-axle transporter-erector-launchers (TELs). The ICBM was successfully tested last November and analysts believe it to be capable of reaching the continental United States.

The Hwasong-14 ICBM, successfully tested twice last year, also made its first appearance at the parade.

The event unveiled a new short-range missile, which is based on the Russian Iskander ballistic missile but also shares many features of South Korea's Hyunmoo-2 ballistic missile, according to Michael Elleman, a missile expert at the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

North Korea's latest display of its military hardware focused on missiles and less on tanks and artillery, suggesting it was trying to project the image of a country with advanced capabilities in warfare.

A Reuters analysis shows there has been a gradual decline in conventional weapons on display since 2012, Kim Jong Un's first parade as leader, and a move to showcase more sophisticated weapons such as ballistic missiles.

(Source: agencies)

Iran's revolution inspired many anti-colonialists: ex-defense minister

By Mohammad Ghaderi

TEHRAN — Iran's former defense minister believes that the Islamic Revolution in Iran has inspired many anti-colonial states worldwide.

In a recent interview with the Tehran Times, Hossein Dehghan said that Iran proved that it practices Imam Khomeini's revolutionary concept of neither East nor West.

Read below the first part of the interview with the former defense chief:

In looking back at the 70s or 80s, during the presidency of Jimmy Carter, when Democrats were heading the U.S., and when the U.S. was raising the issue of human rights, the political system of U.S. allies particularly in the Middle East was set to meet the American interests. This brought about a series of developments in the reign.

In Iran, Mohammad Reza Shah decided to promote national and international political reforms. He made repeated attempts to make changes in government by removing some high officials from their posts and even throwing them in jail.

The message to the public was clear: the issues at hand were the result of a long-term, failed political system that was established prior to the Shah's time. In other words, they were seeking to create an "open political climate" where people could practice freedom of speech. During that time, Imam Khomeini published his famous article in Ettela'at newspaper which brought about a widespread movement in Iran that led to the overthrow of the Shahanshahi regime.

Americans falsely thought that since the Islamic Republic was anti-U.S. and anti-West, it would quickly swing to the East. However, Iran proved that it practices Imam Khomeini's revolutionary concept of neither East nor West policy. The Islamic Revolution of Iran was an inspiration to many colonized countries. The U.S. military, meanwhile, in the region had ulterior motives, one of which was to provide protection and security for Israel. The U.S. was trying to discount the fact that Israel is an aggressor and occupied regime, too.

The Islamic Republic declared just the opposite view; it didn't recognize the legitimacy of Israel as a state, expressed support for Palestinians' right to self-determination, and denounced the genocide of Palestinians in their own land. The Islamic Revolution's views were deemed threats by the West, the U.S., Israel and even some Arab states.

The successive changes caused by the Ira-



nian revolution in the region were out of the U.S. and Israel's hands; therefore, they made secret plans to regain power over the area. The best plan was to instigate the Iran-Iraq War. In the unfair war, almost the entire Western world as well as Russia, hoping not lose Iraq to the West, sided with Iraq. The eight-year war ended in 1988 after the UN Resolution 598 came into effect that called

term, introduced in the early 2000s, denoting a set of contiguously connected countries stretching from Morocco in the west all the way to the western edge of China in the east.)

The debate continued on when Barak Obama took over the Oval Office. He demonstrates a different face of the same policy by getting closer to the Islamic World. He chose Cairo as his first trip where he delivered a speech

[Interviewer's note]

The emergence of Arab revolutions in Southwest Asia and Northeast Africa, following a pseudo revolution in Tunisia in 2010, left a domino effect in the Arab world. The humiliation and frustration of Arab youths living under puppet rulers and dictators sparked the Arab Spring.

There was concern in this period of unrest that, as Hillary Clinton pointed out, the Arab Spring might transform itself into something like the Islamic Revolution in Iran. The Western puppet regimes warned as much, too.

Clinton says about her Middle East tours that she reminded these states' figure-heads to implement a series of reforms or else they and their governments would fall.

With the emergence of DAESH or ISIS, the Arab Spring took a different road while the U.S. attempted to co-opt revolutions and turn them around to support U.S. aims.

for an immediate ceasefire.

During George W. Bush's presidency, a few globe changing incidents took place. Bush as the former U.S. president started the war in Iraq which led to the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime. With the invasion of Kuwait in 1990, Saddam had turned into an unruly and uncontrollable power in the region which was threatening the security and independence of regional Arab countries.

During the Greater Middle East debate, a new Middle East was suggested. (The Greater Middle East is a political

affirming that peaceful coexistence with Islam and Muslims was possible.

■ 'Axis of resistance'

At the end of George W. Bush's presidency, Iran, Iraq and North Korea were the "axis of evil", while in reality the effective "axis of resistance" was growing in the political arena.

The axis of resistance movement ultimately brought resistance against Israel on the one hand, and on the other accelerated the Islamic awakening and unity. The West wanted to break the chain of resistance, but decided not to start with Iran. They started with the

most fragile group in the hope of breaking the rest. Thus, Israel launched the 33-day war on Hezbollah in Lebanon. From that point on, Israel realized that Hezbollah was no pushover and a force to be reckoned with.

The phenomena that came about in the region in the last two, or three decades had common objectives. First, they were geared to demonize Islam and demonstrate it as a harsh, violent and unacceptable religion to the world. The fact is that the profound concept of Islam from the school of Ahl al-Bayt (AS) is consistent with freedom lovers and righteous men regardless of race, color and background. Iran's Islamic Revolution, having taken the same school of thought, has attracted many regional and international followers, and that is why the arrogant powers portray Islam as a religion of radicalism and intolerance.

In line with demonizing Islam, the U.S., with the help of its allies Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, created the Taliban, a terrorist group that we all have been a witness to with their atrocities in Afghanistan. Then, they formed Al-Qaeda, and with their aid they brought down the twin towers in New York. That was the onset of a new chapter of animosity with Iran's Islamic Revolution. This is while Iran strongly condemned the September 11, 2001, attacks, and according to Americans, Saudi Arabia was the major player behind 9/11.

Following the 9/11 attacks in Manhattan, the U.S. chose a strategy to deal with the ongoing threats worldwide. They claimed Muslim is a threat to America anywhere. To reach their vicious and self-serving objectives, they needed groups with radical thoughts and ideologies drowning in racism and prejudice.

They first had to use extremist "religious" groups against real Islam and Muslims. Second, these radical groups had to leave a residue of hatred towards Islam with non-Muslims worldwide. Third, the same fanatical groups would fight in predominately Muslim countries claiming, albeit falsely, that they were against tyranny and corruption, just not their own kind of tyranny and corruption.

The U.S., during George W. Bush's presidency and under the new Middle East strategy, planned to forcefully replace the autocratic and dictatorial regimes with democratic systems. Rather, the true Bush aims were even more "security" for Israel, and control of resources and governments regionally. After Bush's presidency, the Islamic awakening began, but Americans sensed the loss of control over the affairs and movements in the Middle East, and thus, they made further attempts to gain control of the region again.

US Congress passes spending bill to end brief shutdown



A brief US government shutdown ended early on Friday after Congress passed a funding bill that will keep the government open through March 23.

The legislation will now go to President Donald Trump, who is expected to sign it before the start of the working day, ending the country's second shutdown this year.

The House narrowly passed the bill, 240-186, after the Senate approved it earlier on Friday.

The hours-long shutdown began after midnight on Thursday when the current government funding expired.

It came after Republican Senator Rand Paul delayed the Senate vote over his objections to the massive budget measure, which lifts spending caps on US defence and domestic programmes by about \$300bn. It also raises the government's debt ceiling until March 2019.

Paul told the Senate that the bill, which would raise the deficit, is the "definition of hypocrisy" and that it would "loot the treasury".

"I ran for office because I was very critical of [former] President [Barack] Obama's trillion-dollar deficits," Paul said.

The Republican senator did vote for a landmark tax overhaul bill in December that would add nearly \$1.5 trillion to the national debt over 10 years.

Despite Paul's objections, the Senate passed the bill shortly after 1:00am local time (6:00 GMT) on Friday, sending it to the House where it took about three hours to approve.

■ No deal on DACA

This was the second time this year that the government shut down. In January, members of Congress failed to reach a deal on immigration, which Democrats had initially said would need to be part of any spending agreement.

On Wednesday, Democratic House minority leader Nancy Pelosi, spoke for a record eight hours on the House floor, calling for a permanent measure that protects the nearly 800,000 undocumented people, known as "Dreamers", who were brought to the US as children.

In September of last year, Trump announced he was ending the Deferred Action on Childhood Arrival (DACA) programme, giving Congress until March 5 to come up with a permanent solution.

The budget agreement "does not have my support, nor does it have the support of a large number of members of our caucus," Pelosi said, as reported by the Associated Press earlier this week.

Senate Republicans have vowed to hold a debate on immigration later this month, but Dreamers and their supporters worry a solution will not be found before the March 5 deadline.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Israel hopeful about Saudi overflights for airliners to Tel Aviv



An Israeli cabinet minister voiced hope on Friday that Saudi Arabia would allow Air India to fly to and from Tel Aviv through Saudi airspace, a prospect so far played down by Riyadh although the carrier has said the new route is in the works.

Saudi Arabia does not recognize Israel and lifting the 70-year-old airspace ban would reflect what appears to be thawing ties between Israel and the kingdom, both U.S. allies with a shared concern over Iranian influence in the region.

But after Air India on Wednesday announced the planned thrice-weekly flights to Tel Aviv over Saudi soil, the General Authority of Civil Aviation in Riyadh said it had not granted such permission to the carrier.

"There is apparently progress on the matter of flights to and from Israel and India over Saudi Arabia," Israeli Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz, a member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's security cabinet, told Tel Aviv radio 102 FM.

Asked about the Saudi demurral, Steinitz said: "I hope that this matter will be worked out."

Israel's Airports Authority said on Wednesday that the new Air India service would begin in early March. Air India has said the service awaits clearance from the Indian aviation regulator.

El Al Israel Airlines, the country's flag carrier, flies four weekly flights to Mumbai. These take seven hours as they fly south toward Ethiopia and then east to India, avoiding Saudi airspace. Israel media have said that Saudi overflight routes could reduce travel time by more than two hours.

(Source: Reuters)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	98299.7
IFX	1103.76

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	45,350 rials
EUR	60,290 rials
GBP	67,800 rials
AED	13,240 rials

Source: Mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

Brent	60.32/b
WTI	64.19/b
OPEC Basket	59.25/b
Gold	\$1,316.30/oz
Silver	\$16.38/oz
Platinum	\$973.05/oz

Sources: Oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Nordic banks may team up on payments as competition heats up

The Nordic region’s biggest banks may form a joint regional system to facilitate payments, they said on Friday, in the latest sign of cooperation to stave off competition from fintech upstarts and Silicon Valley giants.

Recent regulatory changes in Europe open up parts of the banking market to companies that were not traditionally part of the industry, including the likes of Facebook and Amazon, triggering more competition for incumbents.

Despite close ties between Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark, the Nordic countries’ current payment infrastructure is highly fragmented along national borders, the region’s banks said. *(Source: Reuters)*

Barclays in U.S. set to join cryptocurrency credit card ban

Barclays (BARC.L) is likely to follow other major lenders in the United States in stopping customers from buying Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies with its credit cards, according to an interview with a senior executive at its credit card unit.

“We are making the decision that we will likely no[t] allow cryptocurrency purchases on the card,” Paul Wilmore, managing director at Barclaycard, told Bank Innovation blog.

A spokeswoman for Barclays in London said that the bank is reviewing its policy on a country-by-country basis and that it had not yet changed its policy.

Barclaycard is one of the biggest credit card providers in both Britain and the U.S. that is yet to formally announce a ban on card purchases of digital currencies.

Lloyds Banking Group Plc (LLOY.L), which issues just over a quarter of all credit cards in Britain, and Virgin Money (VM.L) announced such a ban last week, following the lead of JP Morgan Chase & Co (JPM.N) and Citigroup (C.N).

The moves are aimed at protecting customers from running up huge debts from buying virtual currencies on credit, if their values were to plummet, a Lloyds spokeswoman said last week. *(Source: Reuters)*

France, Germany call for joint G20 action on cryptocurrencies

The finance ministers and central bank governors of France and Germany called for the policy and monetary implications of crypto-currencies to be placed on the agenda of the upcoming G20 meeting of the largest advanced and developing economies.

In a letter to the finance minister of Argentina, current holder of the G20 presidency, the officials called for an international report on the implications of cryptocurrencies, an International Monetary Fund report on their financial stability implications and for work towards “trans-boundary” action to regulate them. “We believe there may be new opportunities arising from the tokens and the technologies behind them,” wrote French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire, his German counterpart Peter Altmaier, French central bank governor Francois Villeroy de Galhau and his German colleague Jens Weidmann.

“However, tokens could pose substantial risks for investors and can be vulnerable to financial crime without appropriate measures. In the longer run, potential risks in the field of financial stability may emerge as well,” they added. *(Source: Reuters)*

Why gold could soon get a boost from the wild market volatility

Conventional wisdom would suggest the wild market swings, triple- to quadruple-digit point drops in the Dow Jones industrial average, and major U.S. markets entering into corrections would portend higher gold prices as investors flock to safe havens. But it hasn’t.

In fact, gold is down. Early Friday, it was off 0.19 percent. Through Thursday, the precious metal had declined nearly 2 percent for the week after falling more than 1 percent last week. This weakness has come amid a stronger U.S. dollar, renewed inflation expectations and higher U.S. Treasury yields. This all theoretically would prove bearish for the yellow metal, even as markets are going haywire. *(Source” CNBC)*

France spurs its companies to Iran business despite JCPOA limbo

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — France encourages its companies to keep doing business in Iran in spite of objections raised by U.S. President Donald Trump over the landmark 2015 nuclear deal- known as the joint comprehensive plan of action (JCPOA), director of bilateral relations at the French Finance Ministry told a Euromoney Iran conference on Thursday.

“We are in limbo on the international scene. Nobody knows what will happen after May. This is the uncertainty our French companies are facing, and this is something you have to take for granted if you want to do business in Iran,” Reuters quoted Joffrey Celestin-Urbain as saying at the second round of the one-day Euromoney Iran Conference, which was held in Paris, co-hosted by Central Bank of Iran (CBI).

The conference, attended by different Iranian top officials including Iranian Deputy Finance Minister Mohammad



Khazaie and CBI Governor Valiollah Seif sought to bring together Iranian bankers and industrial leaders with their international counterparts to discuss

Starting gas export to Oman not in next year

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — Iran’s gas export to Oman will not start in the next Iranian calendar year (beginning on March 21, 2018), National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) Managing Director Ali Kardor announced.

Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh has previously announced that gas export to Oman will be started with a daily basis of 10 million cubic meters (mcm) in the next year, but Kardor said such thing is almost impossible.

In an interview with ISNA, the official said the issue is under the study and the pipeline path should be investigated.

In March 2014, Iran and Oman signed a memorandum of understanding under which Iran will supply Oman with 10 bil-



lion cubic meters of natural gas per year in a 25-year deal valued at around \$60 billion.

The Iran-Oman gas pipeline project is expected to connect Iran’s gas reserves with Omani consumers and LNG plants so that Oman could re-export the gas.

Asked about Gazprom’s participation in construction of the Iran-Oman gas pipeline, Kardor said: “The Russian company is going to investigate the issue, but its presence in the project is not determined.”

In an interview with the Gazprom magazine in last December, the official had said that Iran is interested in Gazprom’s participation in the construction of the Iran-Oman gas pipeline.

Saffron exports increase 33% in 10 months

ECONOMY **TEHRAN**— Iran’s exports of saffron increased 33 percent during the ten months ended on January 20, 2018, vice chairman of Iran’s Saffron National Council told Mehr news agency on Friday.

According to Gholamreza Miri, Iran exported 160 tons of the product during the said time span, registering 33 percent growth in comparison with the same period in the year before.

As previously reported, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Hong Kong, Spain, Afghanistan and China were the top importers of Iranian saffron.



Iran’s weight of saffron exports during the past Iranian calendar year (March 2016-March 2017) rose 60 percent compared to that of the preceding year.

Bank of England warns of earlier and larger rate hikes for the UK

The Bank of England (BOE) has signaled the need for interest rate rises earlier and potentially larger than previously predicted, preparing markets for impending higher borrowing costs.

In its first meeting of 2018, the Bank’s Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) judged that, were the economy to move broadly in line with its projections, “monetary policy would need to be tightened somewhat earlier and by a somewhat

greater extent over the forecast period,” than anticipated during its last report in November. This would be required to “return inflation sustainably” to its target and over a “more conventional horizon,” the report said.

Sterling spiked against the dollar on the news as higher rates in an economy tend to favor the local currency with the anticipation of more investment. The pound broke above 1.400 against the greenback after trading close to 1.388

Chinese stocks crushed as ‘bulls kill bulls’ in exit stampede

Chinese stocks suffered their worst day in almost two years on Friday, with blue-chip led carnage dragging the markets into correction territory after steep falls overnight in U.S. stocks.

The benchmark Shanghai Composite Index tumbled 4.0 percent and the blue-chip CSI300 ended the day down 4.3 percent. At one point, both were down more than

6 percent.

It was the biggest single-day dive for the two since February 2016, when the fallout from a botched attempt to introduce a circuit-breaker mechanism after a market meltdown was still rattling investors.

Hong Kong shares, meanwhile, slumped to their biggest weekly loss since the global financial crisis.

Russia’s central bank cuts key interest rate to 7.5%

Russia’s central bank cut its key interest rate to 7.5 percent on Friday after lower inflation gave it scope to reduce lending costs ahead of a presidential election next month.

The central bank said it would also consider further cuts to the rate this year as annual inflation, which stood at 2.2 percent in January, was “sustainably low.”

The bank cut its key rate six times last year as inflation, once stubbornly high and at double-digit levels, slipped below its target of 4 percent.

Friday’s 25 basis point cut was in line with predictions from 18 of 20 analysts and economists polled by Reuters beforehand.

“Annual inflation remains sustainably low. Inflation expectations are diminishing progressively. Short-term pro-inflationary risks have abated.

Therefore the balance of inflationary and economic risks has shifted slightly towards the risks to economic growth,” the central bank said in a statement.

“This year annual inflation is much less likely to exceed 4 percent. In this environment the Bank of Russia will continue to reduce the key rate and may complete the transition from moderately tight to neutral monetary policy in 2018.”

The rouble firmed to 57.92 versus the



Bank of Russia Governor, Elvira Nabiullina

dollar after the decision, compared to a rate of 58.11 shortly before.

Lower rates are beneficial for Russia as they spur economic growth by boosting consumer demand through cheaper lending.

That could please voters ahead of a presidential election on March 18 by making consumer credit and mortgages cheaper.

While incumbent Vladimir Putin is widely expected to be re-elected, some analysts say lower living standards could prompt voters to stay away from the polls in protest, frustrating the Kremlin which is keen to ensure a high turnout.

A decision by the United States to hold off imposing sanctions on Russian sovereign debt allowed the central bank to stick to its rate-cutting policy. *(Source: CNBC)*

Iran, Bulgaria hold specialized meeting on ports, maritime

ECONOMY **TERHAN** — The 2nd specialized ports and maritime meeting of Iran-Bulgaria was held in Sofia, IRNA reported.

The meeting, which was held between Iran Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) and Bulgarian maritime officials, studied possibility of announcing an Iranian and a Bulgarian port as sisters in future.

During the meeting, talks were also held about making an agreement under the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW) and an accord on expansion of mutual cooperation on ports.



The two countries reached the initial agreements about the three discussed issues and are to sign the affiliated finalized contracts in the future.

before the announcements.

At the same time as the inflation report, the Bank voted unanimously to keep interest rates unchanged on Thursday.

The rate decision and hawkish comments come on the back of significantly improved global growth, a modest improvement to the U.K.’s growth outlook and increasing domestic cost pressures as wages look to rise. *(Source: CNBC)*

Wall Street on course for worst week in 6 years

U.S. stock markets were set to open flat to lower on Friday, on course for their worst week in more than six years.

Stocks plunged another 4 percent on Thursday, overturning gains a day earlier and adding to the sense that a broader correction is firmly underway for Wall Street after nine years of almost uninterrupted gains.

Both the Dow Jones Industrial Average .DJI and the benchmark S&P 500 index .SPX are down more than 10 percent since hitting record highs on Jan. 26, and Thursday was the second time this week that the Dow fell more than 1,000 points.

By 6:40 a.m. EDT Dow e-minis 1YMc1 were down 32 points, or 0.13 percent, S&P 500 e-minis ESc1 were up 3 points, or 0.12 percent, and Nasdaq 100 e-minis NQc1 were up just 9.5 points, or 0.15 percent.

At the heart of the pullback is a rise in U.S. bond yields due to growing expectations that a robustly performing economy will lead to higher inflation and a steady rise in official interest rates over this year. The danger for stock market investors is that means the Federal Reserve - and other major central banks - reining in the vast supplies of cheap funds they have pumped into the global economy since the 2008-09 financial crisis.



The yield on benchmark 10-year U.S. Treasuries US10YT=RR, which tends to be the driver of global borrowing costs, was hovering at 2.846 percent just short of a four-year high of 2.885 percent hit during Monday’s selloff.

Investors also point to additional pressure from the violent unwinding of trades linked to bets on volatility staying low.

The market’s main gauge of volatility, the CBOE Volatility Index .VIX, opened at a relatively elevated 32.18 on Friday, nearly three times what it was a week ago but lower than a two-and-a-half-year high of 50.30 points hit on Tuesday.

The downturn in equities had been long awaited by investors, after a period of strong and fast gains. The S&P correction is the fifth of this bull market, according to Yardeni Research. The last bear market was during the 2008 financial crisis. *(Source: Reuters)*

Oil falls for sixth day as supply fears mount

TOKYO (Reuters) — Oil prices fell for a sixth day on Friday after Iran announced plans to boost production and U.S. crude output hit record highs, adding to concerns about a sharp rise in global supplies.

The falls come amid a rout in global share markets as inflation fears grip investors.

Brent futures were down 44 cents or 0.7 percent, at \$64.37 a barrel by around 0700 GMT. On Thursday, Brent fell 1.1 percent to its lowest close since Dec. 20.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude was down 62 cents, or 1 percent, at \$60.53 a barrel, having settled down 1 percent in the previous session at its lowest close since Jan. 2.

Both contracts have fallen more than 9 percent from this year's high point in late January.

"Bets on further rising oil and metals prices, for example by hedge funds, have climbed to excessively bullish levels," said Carsten Menke, commodities research analyst at Swiss Bank Julius Baer.

"We see oil prices dropping towards and below \$60 per barrel," he said.

OPEC member Iran on Thursday



announced plans to increase production within the next four years by at least 700,000 barrels a day.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) this week said crude production last week rose to a record high of 10.25 million barrels per day (bpd).

At that level, U.S. production would overtake the current output in Saudi Arabia, the biggest producer in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

OPEC and other producers, including Russia, have cut production since January 2017 to force down global inventories, but these cuts have been offset by rising U.S. oil production.

China plans to launch its long-awaited crude oil futures contract on March 26, two sources familiar with the situation said on Friday, a move that will potentially shake up the pricing of the world's largest commodity market.

The launch next month will mark the end of a push to create Asia's first oil futures benchmark, which would give China more clout in pricing crude in the region and a share of the trillions of dollars in the oil futures trade.

France brings online 2.8 GW of renewables in 2017

France connected 2,763 MW of renewable power plants, mainly wind and solar, to its mainland grid last year, bringing the country's cumulative capacity to 48,685 MW.

At the end of 2017, France had achieved 94% of its target of having 51,700 MW of renewable energy capacity in 2018, figures published by transmission system operator RTE show. Overall, some 89 TWh of its electricity came from renewable energy sources last year, meeting 18.5% of total power demand.

The shares of wind and solar in newly added capacity in 2017 stood at 65% and 32%, respectively. These are record-high results for both technologies, RTE said.

France put on stream 1,797 MW of wind

power capacity in 2017, or 15.3% more than a year ago. Thus, the country had 13,559 MW of wind at the end of the year. The wind output of 24 TWh, up 14.8% in annual terms, covering 5% of metropolitan power consumption.

As for solar, 887 MW of capacity was switched on last year, bringing the total to 7,660 MW. The output of 9.2 TWh marked an increase of 9.2% on the previous year. Photovoltaic power now accounts for 1.9% of France's metropolitan consumption.

The combined capacity of new bioenergy and hydropower plants (HPPs) was 31 MW and 48 MW, respectively. At the end of December 2017, France had 1,949 MW of bioenergy and 25,517 MW of hydropower plants in operation.

(Source: renewablesnow.com)

Eni, Total make promising gas discovery offshore Cyprus

Supermajors Eni and Total have made a promising gas discovery offshore Cyprus that confirms that the Zohr-like play where Eni found the biggest gas deposit in the Mediterranean offshore Egypt extends into the Cyprus Exclusive Economic Zone, the Italian group said on Thursday.

Eni has made a lean gas discovery in Block 6 offshore Cyprus, encountering an extended gas column with "excellent reservoir characteristics."

The discovery, named Calypso 1, will need additional studies to assess the range of the gas volumes in place and define further exploration and appraisal operations, Eni said in its statement.

Eni is the operator of Block 6 with a

50-percent interest, while Total is a partner and holds the other 50 percent.

"Cyprus is moving forward with its exploration program and quest to become a #NatGas producer," Georgios Lakkotrypis, Minister of Energy, Commerce, Industry & Tourism of Cyprus, said after Eni's announcement today.

Cyprus has boosted efforts to award drilling licenses in its waters, hoping that the geology of the giant Zohr discovery extends into Cyprus's exclusive economic zone. Calypso 1 lies about 80 kilometers (50 miles) from Zohr, and according to Eni, the "Zohr-like" play indeed extends into Cypriot waters.

(Source: oilprice.com)

OPEC-Russia deal could extend until H1 2019

Gazprom Neft—the Russian oil company that has publicly expressed frustration with the OPEC-Russian deal to curtail oil supply—does not rule out that the joint cooperation pact could last until the first half of 2019.

Gazprom Neft is basing its planning on that assumption, Sergey Vakulenko, head of strategic planning at the oil producing arm of Russia's gas giant Gazprom, told Reuters on Thursday.



Before the extension of the production cut pact in November last year, Gazprom Neft had been hinting that it was not happy with the deal as it had to sacrifice production growth plans as Russia and OPEC restrict oil supply to draw down the global overhang.

In October 2017, a month before OPEC and allies decided to extend the deal to the end of 2018, Gazprom Neft's first deputy CEO Vadim Yakovlev said in an interview with Reuters—also published on the corporate website—that the company sees the OPEC deal as short term. Gazprom Neft is holding its nose at the deal as it is forcing the firm to scale back production growth plans, Yakovlev said.

Months before that, in June 2017, Gazprom Neft CEO Alexander Dyukov had said in another interview published on Gazprom Neft's website:

"Gazprom Neft, as you know, has, in recent years, aggressively expanded production — by seven to nine percent per year — and, of course, we had planned to continue growing at that same rapid pace. Following the OPEC agreement, instead of growing at eight to nine percent, we have increased production by just 4.5 to five percent. Which is, without a doubt, a negative factor for us."

Gazprom Neft's oil and gas production increased by 4.1 percent year-on-year in 2017, the company said earlier this week, reporting growth in net profit as well.

As for the OPEC-Russian deal extending until the first half of 2019, the Saudi and Russian energy ministers, Khalid al-Falih and Alexander Novak, reaffirmed last month their commitment to the pact until 2018, and even hinted at some kind of cooperation beyond 2018.

But as oil prices hit three-year highs in January, speculation grew that the deal might end earlier, and several banks said they expected a gradual phase-out from the cuts in the second half this year.

(Source: oilprice.com)

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Trump and the decline of U.S. soft power



By Joseph S. Nye

How a government behaves at home, in international institutions, and in foreign policy can affect others by the influence of its example. In all of these areas, Trump has reversed attractive American policies.

The evidence is clear. Donald Trump’s presidency has eroded America’s soft power. Only 30% of people recently polled by Gallup in 134 countries held a favorable view of the United States under Trump’s leadership, a drop of almost 20 points since Barack Obama’s presidency. The Pew Research Center found that China, with 30% approval ratings, had reached near-parity with the U.S. And a British index, The Soft Power 30, showed America slipping from first place in 2016 to third place last year.

Trump’s defenders reply that soft power does not matter. Trump’s budget director, Mick Mulvaney, proclaimed a “hard power budget” as he slashed funds for the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development by 30%. For promoters of “America First,” what the rest of the world thinks ranks second. Are they right?

Soft power rests on attraction rather than coercion or payment. It co-opts people rather than coerces them. At the personal level, wise parents know that their power will be greater and will last longer if they model sound ethical values for their children, rather than relying only on spankings, allowances, or taking away the car keys. Similarly, political leaders have long understood the power that comes from being able to set the agenda and determine the framework of a debate. If I can get you to want to do what I want, then I do not have to force you to do what you do not want. If the U.S. represents values that others want to follow, it can economize on sticks and carrots. Added to hard power, attraction can be a force multiplier.

A country’s soft power comes primarily from three sources: its culture (when it is attractive to others), its political values such as democracy and human rights (when it lives up to them), and its policies (when they are seen as legitimate because they are framed with some humility and awareness of others’ interests.) How a government behaves at home (for example, protecting a free press), in international institutions (consulting others and multilateralism), and in foreign policy (promoting development and human rights) can affect others by the influence of its example. In all of these areas, Trump has reversed attractive American policies.

Fortunately, America is more than either Trump or the government. Unlike hard-power assets (such as armed forces), many soft-power resources are separate from the government and are only partly responsive to its purposes. In a liberal society, government cannot control the culture. Indeed, the absence of official cultural policies can itself be a source of attraction. Hollywood movies like “The Post,” which showcase independent women and press freedom, can attract others. So, too, can the charitable work of U.S. foundations or the benefits of freedom of inquiry at American universities.

It is true that firms, universities, foundations, churches, and other non-governmental groups develop soft power of their own which may reinforce or be at odds with official foreign policy goals. And all of these private sources of soft power are likely to become increasingly important in the global information age. That is all the more reason for governments to make sure that their own actions and policies create and reinforce rather than undercut and squander their soft power.

Domestic or foreign policies that appear hypocritical, arrogant, indifferent to others’ views, or based on a narrow conception of national interests can undermine soft power. For example, the steep decline in the attractiveness of the U.S. in opinion polls conducted after the invasion of Iraq in 2003 were a reaction to the Bush administration and its policies, rather than to the U.S. generally.

The Iraq War was not the first government policy that made the U.S. unpopular. In the 1970s, many people around the world objected to the U.S. war in Vietnam, and America’s global standing reflected the unpopularity of that policy. When the policy changed and the memories of the war receded, the U.S. recovered much of its lost soft power. Similarly, in the aftermath of the Iraq war, the U.S. managed to recover much of its soft power in most regions of the world (though less so in the Middle East).

Skeptics might still argue that the rise and fall of American soft power does not matter much, because countries cooperate out of self-interest. But this argument misses a crucial point: cooperation is a matter of degree, and the degree is affected by attraction or repulsion. Moreover, the effects of a country’s soft power extend to non-state actors – for example, by aiding or impeding recruitment by terrorist organizations. In an information age, success depends not only on whose army wins, but also on whose story wins.

One of the greatest sources of America’s soft power is the openness of its democratic processes. Even when mistaken policies reduce its attractiveness, America’s ability to criticize and correct its mistakes makes it attractive to others at a deeper level. When protesters overseas were marching against the Vietnam War, they often sang “We Shall Overcome,” the anthem of the U.S. civil rights movement.

America, too, will almost certainly overcome. Given past experience, there is every reason to hope that the U.S. will recover its soft power after Trump.

(Source: Project Syndicate)

War doesn’t have to be nuclear to kill indiscriminately

Over the past year, the escalation of tensions between the United States and North Korea has caused much anxiety about the possibility of a nuclear war. Since the creation of the first nuclear bomb and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, international diplomacy has focused its non-proliferation efforts on nuclear weapons.

In doing so, it has overlooked the proliferation of conventional weapons, which have killed millions since World War II and which continue to kill on a massive scale today.

As Amnesty International noted in a report released in late 2015, “reckless arms trading” encouraged atrocities committed by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other armed groups in Iraq. In 2016, more than 100,000 people were killed in conflicts in which conventional weapons were used.

And while the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty has limited the new production of nuclear weapons, the world has experienced an uncurbed proliferation of conventional weapons with no effective international legal tools to control it.

Since 1960 - the early days of the Cold War nuclear arms race - international military spending has increased twenty-fold from \$82bn to \$1.69 trillion; and year on year, it continues to grow. While some of it goes to infrastructure maintenance and salaries for personnel, a significant part is spent on the acquisition of conventional weapons.

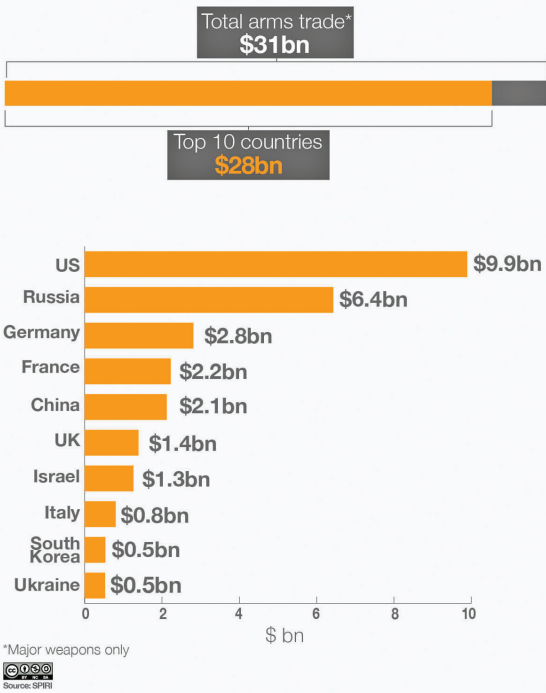
In 2015, the U.S., the country with the biggest defense budget in the world, spent \$90bn of its \$600bn defense spending on the procurement of conventional arms; it spent around \$20bn on maintaining its nuclear arsenal.

The growing demand for conventional weapons is making many providers very wealthy. The top 100 arms companies have sold over \$5 trillion worth of merchandise since 2002. In 2016, some \$31bn was generated by the international arms trade, the U.S. earning \$9.9bn of it, followed by Russia with \$6.4bn and Germany with \$2.8bn.

Although there is no international law on how much can be spent on conventional arms, the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) of 2014 sought to prevent weapons from being sold to countries that are under embargo or illegally transferred to state or non-state actors. According to the treaty, signatories should ensure the weapons they are selling are not going to be used in “terrorism”, acts of genocide, crimes against humanity,

Global arms trade in 2016

Ten countries account for 90 percent of the global arms trade.



While the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty has limited the new production of nuclear weapons, the world has experienced an uncurbed proliferation of conventional weapons with no effective international legal tools to control it.

Europe revives its power of attraction



The EU hopes to have some of the Balkan nations join by 2025, an ambitious goal given the “fatigue” within the bloc over absorbing current members in Eastern and Central Europe.

Five Star struggles to be Italy’s agent of change

By Bill Emmott

It is a sign of Silvio Berlusconi’s Trump-like talent that the wily 81-year-old has got everyone talking about him in the campaign for Italy’s general election on March 4, even when his party is running a distant third in the polls. The party that should really be the center of attention is the frontrunner, the Five Star Movement. For it, not Berlusconi, is both the country’s true hope and its greatest despair. Five years ago, when Italy held its last general election, two forces emerged proposing radical change, both from outside the mainstream. One was the young mayor of Florence, Matteo Renzi, who a year later stabbed his Democratic party colleague, Enrico Letta, in the back and took over as prime minister despite never having been elected to national office. The other was Five Star, which grabbed more than 25 per cent of the votes despite having been born only four years earlier and being led by a comedian, Beppe Grillo, who wasn’t even running for parliament. Renzi, like Nicolas Sarkozy when he was elected French president in 2007, promised a rupture with the old ways of politics that he struggled to deliver. After less than three years in office he crashed and burnt, losing a referendum on constitutional change on which he had unwisely bet his future. With Renzi’s centre-left Democratic party split and slipping in the polls, 11 per cent of the workforce unemployed, youth unemployment stuck at nearly 33 per cent and economic growth underperforming the rest of the eurozone, the way should now be clear for the other reforming force to sweep into power. If Renzi resembles Sarkozy, the party the Five Star Movement resembles most is Emmanuel Macron’s La République en



Five Star Movement’s Beppe Grillo, left, and Luigi Di Maio: the party is backed by nearly 30 percent of the electorate but needs 40 percent to form a government

The party lacks any cohesive team that looks like a credible government in waiting.

Marche. It too draws support and membership from both left and right, young and old and, crucially for Italy, north and south. Like En Marche, its activists and voters are mainly middle class. Now it has dropped Grillo’s former insistence on an (unconstitutional) referendum on Italy’s

serious violations of human rights, or the undermining of peace and security.

Unfortunately, over the years since its signing, the treaty has proven too weak to make a difference.

The first reason the ATT is failing is that the power of profit-seeking is trumping all other considerations. This is most evident with Saudi Arabia, which is currently the second largest weapons importer in the world. Although some countries like Germany have stopped selling weaponry to Riyadh - which stands accused of indiscriminate, reckless and wrongful targeting of civilians in the war in Yemen - others have not been able to resist the revenue to be made.

The UK, which has signed and ratified the ATT, made \$1.5bn in 2017 selling arms to Saudi Arabia, while the U.S., which has signed but not ratified the treaty, made windfall deals worth potentially \$110bn.

The second problem is that even if ATT signatories start implementing the commitments they made by signing the document, there are other countries that have either not signed or not ratified it, such as China, Russia and India. This means that a country like Myanmar, which is facing serious accusations of crimes against humanity, can still obtain a steady stream of weapons from some of these countries despite an ongoing European arms sales embargo.

The above point highlights the other difficulty with the ATT - namely, that it primarily deals with legal transfers. The problem is that many conflicts are now fuelled by weapons supplied via illegal trade, especially in small arms. Although the size of this trade is estimated at being between 10 to 20 percent of the value of the legal arms sales, in some conflicts, illegal sources of weapons dominate the supply.

For example in Mexico, 70 percent of guns seized in the country and traced by the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) from 2009 to 2014 came from illegal transfers from the U.S.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban is buying large amounts of illegal weapons, including but not limited to hundreds of thousands of diverted U.S. weapons.

This uncontrollable proliferation of conventional weapons will continue to take a heavy death toll each year unless the international community comes up with an effective international tool to control it - the way it did with nuclear weapons.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

make a “generational choice,” even at the level of how they teach their children.

The EU’s offer is designed to counter two troublesome trends. One is the rising influence of Russia, China, and Turkey in the region – all countries that lack the EU’s democratic credentials. The other is pervasive corruption and some autocratic tendencies in the Balkans’ young democracies.

The EU effort is being led by Bulgaria, whose proximity to the six compels it to seek a friendly neighborhood. But plenty of people within the Balkans still seek to join Europe. Among the post-communist countries of the former Yugoslavia as well as Albania, “EU membership remains the ultimate destination....” writes expert Dimitar Bechev in a new book, “Rival Power: Russia in Southeast Europe.”

The EU hopes to have some of the Balkan nations join by 2025, an ambitious goal given the “fatigue” within the bloc over absorbing current members in Eastern and Central Europe.

And the six aspirants have much work to do yet in reforming their policies. Yet their eagerness to join shows how much the world has shifted toward a type of competition where it is better to be liked than feared. Despite its many woes, the EU still has a positive narrative that proves the power of attraction.

(Source: The CSM)

euro membership, it even looks potentially constructive in European terms.

Moreover, let there be no doubt: Italy needs change. Burdened by a public debt of over 130 per cent of gross domestic product, inherited from the profligate 1980s but worsened by economic stagnation over the past 20 years, the country went backwards during the eight years Berlusconi served as prime minister in 2001-06 and 2008-11. The old vice of corruption revived, the justice system worsened and no significant reforms were even attempted by his governments. Five Star is the party that should be offering a new future, and the nearly 30 per cent of the electorate backing it are surely hoping for one. The trouble is it needs 40 per cent to form a government. The reason it does not look like getting it is that although it is Italy’s En Marche, it lacks a Macron. It is not just a matter of a person, although Five Star’s 31-year-old candidate for the prime ministership, Luigi Di Maio, plainly lacks Macron’s experience, expertise and savoir faire, and is being populist on the issue of trans-Mediterranean migration, putting off centrist voters. It is that the party lacks any cohesive team that looks like a credible government in waiting. This is the fault of Grillo and his insistence on running the party through a fake online democracy, with candidates chosen by handfuls of voters. With less than four weeks to go, there is scarcely time to make up for this. Announcing a potential cabinet, including a candidate for the crucial post of finance minister, could help. If the only viable government after March 4 proves to be a grand coalition for which Berlusconi acts as kingmaker, Five Star will have just itself to blame. It will have failed its change-hungry voters and it will have failed Italy.

(Source: FT)

Dangerous escalation: Why Trump's pressure tactics won't work on Iran

By Seyed Hossein Mousavian & Sina Toossi

President Donald Trump in his State of the Union address called on Congress to “address the fundamental flaws in the terrible Iran nuclear deal,” echoing a previous statement that he would walk away from the accord unless Congress and Europe agreed to new restrictions on Iran. The fate of the deal now rests on how Europe and America respond to each other and to Iran.

While Europe has been pressing the Trump White House to not leave the deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), European officials have latched onto U.S. criticisms of Iranian missiles and regional policies and have reportedly begun working group consultations with the United States to discuss Trump's wants.

Trump's withdrawal threat is aimed at creating Western consensus on imposing new multilateral sanctions on Iran for its regional and ballistic-missile policies. While Kamal Kharazi, Iran's Strategic Council on Foreign Relations chief, has stated that Iran could stay in the JCPOA if Europe remained committed and “continues economic activities” with Iran, the deal would collapse if Europe joins the United States in pursuing new sanctions.

The fact is that existing U.S. policies already curtail international trade with Iran in violation of the JCPOA. If Europe seeks to preserve the deal, then it must fill the gap in sanctions relief — not agree to more punitive measures. Putting Iran in the position of abiding by the deal's constraints while receiving none of its benefits would ensure its demise, which Trump has long yearned for.

To understand why a new coercive approach towards Iran is bound to lead to dangerous escalation, it is helpful to review the history of the negotiations that led to the JCPOA.

In a paper for the Washington Quarterly's Fall 2017 issue, we outlined the principal lessons offered by the nuclear negotiations for relations and future diplomatic engagement between Iran and the West. While Trump appears to believe that the United States can coerce Iran to its desired path, with only a matter of applying more pressure for a longer period, his untenable conditions to “fix” the JCPOA promise dangerous escalation.

During the Bush era and Obama's first term, maximalist U.S. demands such as zero uranium enrichment did not result in Iran capitulating, even in the face of an unparalleled international-sanctions regime. Instead, Iran expanded its own bargaining chip of nuclear capacity—including by increasing its number of centrifuges and level of enrichment — and attained a breakout window of as short as one month.

Similarly, to pressure Iran now for its regional and missile policies will not result in Iran backing down, but rather will create a new escalation cycle as Iran will seek to secure



Iran may respond to efforts to isolate it by strengthening regional anti-Western alliances.

its core interests. For example, while Iran has voluntarily limited the range of its ballistic missiles to two thousand kilometers, Iranian military commanders have said this could be increased in response to foreign pressure. Likewise, Iran may respond to efforts to isolate it by strengthening regional anti-Western alliances.

What led to the JCPOA was President Obama leaving the war-path escalation entailed and both sides deciding to cash in their respective bargaining chips of nuclear capacity and sanctions. They met each other's demands half way: the United States accepted Iran's right under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT) to use the nuclear fuel cycle for peaceful purposes, and Iran agreed to transparency and inspection measures beyond anything agreed to by an NPT signatory to boost confidence in the peaceful nature of its nuclear program.

Accordingly, if Europe and the United States seek re-

gional cooperation with Iran, then they must acknowledge that Iran — as any sovereign state — has legitimate security concerns and a right to defensive capabilities. Realistic U.S. and European efforts to foster regional peace must focus on promoting a balance of power between regional powers such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, not on inflaming their differences. Regional stability will also not be served by scuttling the JCPOA, which could spark an arms race, but can be enhanced by drawing on its tenets to realize a Middle East free of nuclear weapons.

The JCPOA showed that constructive engagement between the Iran and the West is possible, provided there is mutual acknowledgement of legitimate interests and solutions are “win-win.” With that said, Iran has no reason to trust in any new negotiation unless the West fully and properly implements its JCPOA obligations.

(Source: *The National Interest*)

In wake of protests, Iranian officials call for large turnout to mark revolution

February 11 — 22 Bahman in Iran — marks the 10 days between the return of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to the country after 15 years in exile and the victory of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Every year for the occasion, government-organized gatherings across the country rally conservatively inclined Iranians and a handful of unique characters who attend for the spectacle or to be the spectacle themselves. The rallies are an important opportunity for Iran's leadership to demonstrate the popularity of the Islamic Republic to both domestic and foreign critics. With Iran recently having been rocked by its largest protests in nearly a decade, officials of all stripes are calling for an impressive turnout.

During a Cabinet meeting Feb. 7, President Hassan Rouhani said, “At this rally, in creating a new epic, the will, solidarity, unity and commitment to national sovereignty must be shown, and to those who wish ill on Islamic Iran across the world, we must say that the path of Imam Khomeini still continues.” He added, “[I am] happy that after the 39th anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution, and on the threshold of the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Republic of Iran, that the people of Islamic Iran are continuing on the path of the goals of the revolution with more strength and enthusiasm.” He asserted that a large turnout would “for months



disappoint the enemies” of Iran.

In an indirect reference to the recent protests, Rouhani said that this year's rallies will be especially significant, stating, “In the last few months, enemies with incorrect

calculations designed plots against Iran.” Therefore, he said, “With more determination than previous years, we must show our decisive support for our culture and religion and our goals for the revolution.”

(Source: *Al Monitor*)

Saudi Arabia, Iran compete in Sahel

By Javad Heiran-Nia & Somayeh Khomarbaghi

TEHRAN — Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirate are supporting the Sahel Joint Military Force, the latest indication of a competition for influence with Iran in West Africa.

The force falls under the rubric of G5 Sahel, which brings together Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Chad for regional cooperation on political and security issues.

To bolster the finances of this organization, France invited UAE, Saudi Arabia, Germany, and Italy to coordinate with this organization. Saudi Arabia committed \$118 million and the UAE offered \$35 million to fund the joint military force. In addition, the UAE has promised to establish a “school of war” in Mauritania. Support for this joint force allows Saudi Arabia to claim that it is leading the fight against global terrorism, alongside the creation of the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition of 40 Islamic states. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, in particular, wants to prove his leadership in this fight. It also allows both Saudi Arabia and the UAE to plan for a long-term presence in the region, with an eye toward countering Iran.

Iranian Presence in Africa

The presence of Iran in Africa dates to the 1980s. During the Cold War, Iran was located in the bloc of U.S.-aligned states. After the Islamic Revolution, Iran became interested in spreading Shiite thought in West Africa through cultural, economic, diplomatic, and media initiatives.

Most African countries are rich in natural resources such as gas, oil, gold, iron, copper, diamond, platinum, and phosphate. Poverty in the Sahel Region and West Africa, however, opened the doors of the region to Iran. Iran implemented



Iranian President Hassan Rouhani meets with Speaker of the Senegalese Parliament Moustapha Niassé.

hundreds of economic projects in many African states like Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Sierra Leon, Benin, Nigeria, and Ghana. Iranian leaders — Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani, Sayyed Muhammad Khatami, and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad travelled to these states and signed many bilateral agreements.

Iran also benefitted from these deals, and not just the expansion of Shiite thought. The deals allowed Iran to break

out of the international isolation generated by its nuclear activities. They created new markets for Iranian products, particularly the oil that was under global sanctions, and provided access to raw materials, like uranium. Iran earned billions of dollars from the implementation of joint projects, including facilities that refined Iranian oil.

Saudi Concerns

Saudi Arabia's concerns about increased Iranian influence have prompted it to push back, particularly after the ascension of King Salman. Saudi Arabia poured investments into the public and private sectors in West Africa and the Sahel. But Saudi penetration also extended into the religious realm, with a focus on the Maliki Muslims who compose the majority of West African population. Since 78% of African Muslims are Sufis, their beliefs generally stand in contrast to a Saudi culture that features elements of Salafism.

To compete for influence, then, Saudi Arabia has gone beyond economic projects and religious programming. That's why it has created an unofficial coalition with Mauritania and Senegal and is also preparing a new coalition with Libya and Chad. The presidents of Senegal and Mauritania travelled to Riyadh in April 2015, and Senegal has committed to sending hundreds of troops to the Asefah Al-Hazm military operation under Saudi command.

Saudi Arabia has contributed to the joint military force of the Sahel to earn international legitimacy in the fight against terrorism and to further its political and economic interests in West Africa. But countering Iran is the main rationale. Stemming Iranian influence in this region and globally remains one of the cardinal pivots of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy.

Germany's new coalition comes with risks for Europe — and Brexit



By Alan Posener

So Germany has almost got a new government. “Almost”, because a referendum among the members of the Social Democratic party (SPD) could still derail the Groko, the Grosse Koalition with chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU) and their Bavarian sister party, the CSU. And don't bank on that not happening. Politics used to be top-down thing in Germany. Not any more.

Having said that, the Social Democrats would have to be stupid to refuse the deal. Consider this: in last September's general election, they went down to historical defeat. As of writing, they are polling a risible 18% or so, not much more than the far-right newcomer Alternative für Deutschland (AfD).

Now you can argue that this is precisely because the SPD has been in government for so long — since 1998, with a break of only four years between 2009 and 2013 — and that a spell in opposition would do it good. And this is what the SPD's youth organization wants. They gaze with envy at Jeremy Corbyn's populist appeal and dream of a rejuvenated party with a hard-left approach winning big in 2021 or 2025 and giving them lots of career opportunities, maybe in a coalition with the Greens and the radical Left party. If I were a budding career politician in the SPD, I might think the same way. But for the present middle-aged leadership, four to eight years in opposition watching the rise of a new generation is hardly an attractive option. And there is no guarantee that moving

Given the resistance of the Visegrad group — Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic — to further European integration, Schulz could see himself faced with a serious European split within months of taking office.

to the left will do the SPD any good. That ground is already occupied by the Left party.

What's more, the SPD's soon to be ex-leader Martin Schulz has managed to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat (and from his own fit of pique on election night when he vowed that the party would go into opposition).

The new coalition agreement has a decidedly social-democratic flavor. And the SPD gets the treasury, which Merkel's tight-fisted henchman Wolfgang Schäuble used to scuttle ambitious plans in Germany and to throttle Europe in the name of financial discipline. They're breaking out the champagne in the Élysée and the Berlaymont.

Poker game loser

Indeed, the loser in the poker game of the past weeks and months is Merkel. The only party that honestly wanted to govern with her were the Greens. The liberal Free Democrats (FDP) walked out of negotiations, and the SPD had to be enticed back with a deal that leaves Merkel's own party without a single key ministry. Horst Seehofer, who is being forced out of his office as prime minister of Bavaria by his own party, the CSU, is being rewarded for his constant sniping at Merkel's refugee policy with the thankless job of interior minister, where he can take responsibility for future terror attacks. Everyone expects the chancellor to leave in the middle of her term and hand over to a successor. As the leader of a so-called Jamaica coalition between the Christian Democrats, the FDP and the Greens, she might have gained a new lease of life. As the leader of her third Groko, she looks tired. The concessions she has made to the SPD give superficial credence to the claims of the AfD that it is the only truly conservative force in the country and that it has stepped into the shoes abandoned by the CDU under Merkel.

This isn't true. The populist AfD is anti-globalist, Eurosceptic and Russophile, all of which the CDU never was. But if the AfD can avoid further self-radicalization, scandals and personal vendettas (which doesn't seem likely), it might be able to break the current mold of German politics and form a coalition with a post-Merkel CDU/CSU, which is sure to tack to the right. Think the Austrian model: 2021 could see a revitalised right re-energizing the moribund left, and a return to what the Germans call “Lagerpolitik”, the politics of opposing ideological camps. Not necessarily the worst thing that could happen, by the way.

The SPD referendum

For the moment, however, and assuming the SPD referendum doesn't chuck a spanner in the works, it's Merkel and the Groko. What does this mean for Europe and Britain? Martin Schulz will be foreign minister. As ex-president of the European parliament he is as Europhile as they come. Indeed, he recently proposed aiming for the “United States of Europe” by 2025.

These are not empty words. Schulz is an idealist, and this is probably his last chance at real politics. Emmanuel Macron could not have a more fervent — and impatient — ally. So expect to see the euro area become more integrated, possibly with its own finance minister and minister for economic development. Expect more funds to assist the ailing economies in the south, maybe eurobonds or similar forms of debt mutualisation.

Given the resistance of the Visegrad group — Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic — to further European integration, Schulz could see himself faced with a serious European split within months of taking office. But don't expect him to give up on his integrationist ideas or to soften his stance on Brexit.

He believes that restarting the German-French “motor” and reviving the eurozone will exert a pull on the peoples of the Visegrad states, who will, sooner or later, throw out their nationalist governments. And if not, he wants Brexit to prove to the pesky Hungarians, Poles, Slovaks and Czechs that leaving the EU is not a cosy option.

(Source: *The Guardian*)

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What an ‘Impossibility Clause’ can make possible



By Mehrnoosh Aryanpour

Mehrnoosh Aryanpour is the manager partner of the Tehran office of Gide Loyrette Nouel, the first and only branch of a foreign law firm in Iran.

Ensuring business continuity for Iranian joint venture projects with foreigners under changing international sanctions regimes is the question.

Since the implementation of the JCPOA in January of 2016, and throughout the current period of accelerating investment by foreign enterprises in Iran, many participants have taken for granted that in the event of a “Snapback” or the reimposition of UN, U.S. and EU sanctions under the provisions of the JCPOA, foreigners must perform exit all investments in Iran and Iran’s major industries would be relegated to the shadows as an unlawful destination for foreign capital.

The operative assumption has been that any such reimposition of sanctions under a Snapback scenario would make it “impossible” for such foreign participants to maintain, lawfully, their investments in the various projects within Iran, investment they have made a huge effort to structure and uphold in the still-new era of significantly relaxed sanctions. In fact, the very idea of the impossibility of maintaining significant investments in Iran under such sanctions has become something of a fixation. To the dismay of Iranian partners in various ventures, their foreign partners tend to focus on securing their own interests, rights, and recompense under a Snapback. An efficient exit strategy is often sought.

In reality, those who are here on the ground in Iran know that, regardless of the whims of the American President or the vicissitudes of foreign capital flows, the continued development and renovation of Iran’s domestic economy, both in terms of absolute production, as well as in terms of sophistication, efficiency, and integration, will continue apace, and therefore, the wiser among the stewards of foreign investment in Iran understand that it is as much a question of ensuring business continuity for their Iranian-Foreign joint venture projects despite changing international sanctions regimes, which have been imposed by the West against Iran for decades.

As a result, the most basic and fundamental considerations for any prospective foreign project participant and its Iranian partner become:

1. How the foreign participant can, through appropriately drafted “Impossibility Clause(s)”, remain invested in the Iranian venture for as long as possible under the threat of renewed or reimposed sanctions, and without incurring unacceptable risk.
2. How the foreign participant can contractually envision the broadest range of adverse sanctions scenarios through a single and efficient impossibility mechanism.
3. How the foreign participant can provide for a gradual approach to any putative withdrawal procedure, as opposed to the simplistic solution of outright termination upon Snapback after a period of suspension.
4. How the foreign participant can, in the event of the extinguishment of impossibility, subsequent relaxation or obtained exemption of sanctions, reasonably provide for the right, or at least the option, for itself to reenter an investment project which it may have exited because of Snapback.

The legal thought process underpinning successful solutions which industry practitioners may be likely to embrace is beyond the scope of this article, but the conceptual summary can be a useful guide for all of us as we come to grips with what can be made possible by “Impossibility Clauses”.

1. Remaining invested, minimizing risk: Of course, it is true that for many projects, a direct investment by the foreign participant though its stake in an Iranian joint venture entity may be the most straightforward means of effecting the transfer of capital that allows the foreign party to have a stake in a project. It also allows for the simplest mechanism by which a foreign party may apply for and successfully obtain an investment license in accordance with the Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Act.

Nonetheless, such a direct investment may, particularly in the case of European entities which also do business in U.S. jurisdictions or in jurisdictions which have significant links with the U.S. financial system, provide little or no cushion under even the most benign reimposition of any form of secondary sanctions. This is because the direct



investment leaves the foreign party little room to maneuver by way of restructuring or otherwise allocating its participatory interest in the project as sanctions change.

For this reason, a more effective solution could include the formation of a foreign special purpose vehicle to act for the project entity. In the case of a joint venture, an SPV incorporated in a jurisdiction less likely to be adversely affected by reimposition of sanctions would allow for a more flexible platform to facilitate intelligent solutions such as exit and re-entry options, trustee or agency relationships, and contingent sale-repurchase strategies to prepare for the worst outcome of a sanctions scenario which may force a foreign party to exit Iranian investment.

2. Knowing unknowns, counting uncountables: Even now, with the most recently

continued to see since Trump’s October 2017 decertification, or those which may apply only to certain economic sectors or types of goods or projects, to those which render further financial flows in support of such a project functionally impracticable. Most challenging of all would be the failure of the UN to continue to waive the imposition of sanctions against Iran.

Thus, a single mechanism to classify sanctions in some way as materially adverse changes and evaluate consequences seems a more pragmatic solution than contemplating what may constitute an “impossibility” event, and including it under grounds for termination.

Under a scenario in which the foreign party has made appropriate structuring preparations as suggested, the determining exit remedies depends on compliance with mandatory applicable laws of

kind of scenario of project impracticability caused by sanctions, certain or envisioned, termination shall be the one and only prescribed remedy.

But this is likely to disadvantage the foreign party in the context of negotiations over comprehensive project terms with its Iranian counterparty, and it may limit the scope of the project work itself and fail to allow for a more complex investment structure which cannot survive the threat of termination overnight due to a “Snapback” of one kind or another.

Aside from termination, and its precursor remedy, suspension, there should also be the possibility to contemplate a variety of concepts including assignment, agency and delegation, in order to benefit from the vagaries of sanctions regulations and their exemptions. In some cases, project obligations which would be in violation of



issued ultimatum by the American President declaring that the end of the JCPOA as we know it is nigh (to be either amended or abrogated, if Mr. Trump is to be believed), there exists a wide variety of circumstances involving the reimposition of sanctions, ranging from those that would make the maintenance of an interest in a project by a foreign party merely inconvenient to those which would make maintaining such an interest lawfully untenable. These may range from largely toothless, otherwise symbolic targeted secondary sanctions which apply only to the entities of specific countries, as we have

the project vehicle’s jurisdiction. To put it another way, the most straightforward test of whether the foreign party may have to adjust, or exit from its participation, comes down to whether it can fulfill project obligations while abiding by all applicable regulations that may apply to it. Beyond such a litmus test, imagining or prognosticating about the myriad complexities of a possible Snapback scenario may be fruitless and contractually inefficient.

3. Avoiding the black-and-white trap: Of course, a foreign project participant can easily avail itself of the opportunity to stipulate that under any

sanctions for some foreign entities may not be so for others. As has been shown by the agreements between foreign export credit agencies (“ECA”) such as EKF, BPI and Invitalia, developments at an international level, especially where adequate sovereign support and sufficiently ringfenced banking facilities exist, are being contemplated to facilitate the kind of continuity required for the decades-long projects now underway in Iran. In addition to these ECAs, other parties such as quasi-sovereign corporations, particularly those from less dollarized jurisdictions, can play a role as fallback transferees of the exiting foreigner’s

project interest or shares under Snapback. Moreover, it should always be noted that under even the most negative circumstances, the potential for a foreign party to obtain a waiver does exist and can be specified for the benefit of all parties.

4. Saving face, weighing options: Although some foreign entities have a checkered past derived from cutting and running under the threat of or the actual imposition of sanctions against Iran, time has shown that many of the same foreign parties which were forced, or chose, to exit their project ventures are the first ones to have returned since the JCPOA. Such is the compelling nature of Iran as a destination for foreign capital.

Iranian parties to a project know both this history itself and its implications. Foreign participants may wish to keep close to the exits, but foreign companies that have been victimized by their own government’s whims regarding sanctions, and the slippage inherent in exiting and reentering, cannot be understated.

For this reason, foreign project partners may choose to consider the solution of exit and entry “options” for themselves under adverse sanction scenarios, and thus it is important for all parties involved to understand what an “option” precisely means, and how to value such an option.

In financial speak, an option is defined as the right but not the obligation to sell (or buy) an asset in a fixed quantity at a fixed price on (or before) a fixed date in time. In the case in question, the asset is the participatory interest of the foreign party in the Iranian project, and the date is that point in time at when the parties to a project agree that the foreign party must leave due to sanctions (or is able to re-enter due to easing of sanctions).

However, it is not obvious immediately what the fixed price should be for foreign project interest at the time of exit or re-entry, and, most importantly, what may be overlooked is the tremendous value that such an option has. In finance, the greater the underlying uncertainty about an asset, the more valuable any option on that uncertain asset is. Similarly, the longer the life of an option on an asset, the more valuable that option is. In the context of long term investments, any option to exit (or re-enter) should be linked with a significant premium (that is, the worth of the option), and the contract parties should ensure that they successfully negotiate an appropriately fair value for the flexibility the options offer. As an illustrative example, the alternative to any exit put option for the foreign party is a fire-sale in the face of illiquid conditions for its share interest under the menace of reimposed international sanctions, or more problematic still, the inability to exit its share interest altogether, which an option is supposed to protect against.

Absent a foreign investor’s legal immunity to the whims of the UN, OFAC, or other authorities, there is no perfect panacea for fool proofing long-term Iranian projects against the kind of uncertainty which the spectre of sanctions create. But although this threat, to a certain extent, has forestalled the growth in Iran’s industry and economy despite the strengthening of Iran’s relationships with the international community, it is now apparent, moreso than ever before, that foreign parties can be expected to take an increasingly pragmatic approach in efforts to remain engaged with their Iranian projects for as long as possible. They can effectively do so by allowing for the most flexible and broad classification of sanctions-related termination risks, by specifying a menu of contractually stipulated responses to reimposed sanctions (in conjunction with intelligent and pre-emptive project structuring) and by exchanging due consideration with the Iranian party for the invaluable options which allow them to remain confident that they can, if absolutely necessary, exit the project and someday re-enter, at a fair price.

Thus, it seems that the operative watchword for all foreign investors in Iran is continuity: continuity of the progression towards innovation, development and growth, and continuity of the participation of foreign interests in that process, bolstered by intelligent structuring solutions, both legal and financial, for dealing with the complicated reality of international economic sanctions. With a measure of foresight, and a functional, flexible contractual framework, all participants in long-term, large-scale project joint ventures can move closer to the ideal of mitigating most, if not all, of the adverse consequences of sanctions regulations on investment decisions and risk management.

Iran tops in “human development” improvements since the revolution



By Martin Love

Western countries like the U.S. and Middle Eastern ones such as Israel and Saudi Arabia like to put the Islamic Republic of Iran down as some kind of medieval state that presents a threat to the region and, at least from the standpoint of the U.S. government, the world, but it’s all a big lie unless “threat” literally means an Iran that has or is becoming a relatively more prosperous and powerful country that internally at least has been improving the lives of its citizens.

Consider the latest published report (2016) by the UN which addresses what it calls “human development” in all the member states of the UN.

According to this most recent published report, between 1979 and 2016, Iran overall has enjoyed the greatest growth in the Human Development Index of any country in the UN. Since 1980 life expectancy since birth has rocketed up 54 to



76 years. Expected years of schooling has climbed from less than 10 years to almost 15, while mean years of schooling has gone from 2.3 to almost 15 years, to cite just a couple items.

So what is “human development”? According to the UN, “human development is about the freedom to realize the full potential of every human life, not just of a few, nor of most, but of all lives in every corner of the world – now and in the future”.

Relatively, Iran has seen more progress in this regard than any other country in recent decades, claims the UN report.

Iran falls in the rank of all countries at number 69. (Norway is number 1, the U.S. is ranked at 10.) In the Middle East among Arab countries, Saudi Arabia is ranked at 38, Bahrain at 47, Kuwait at 51 and Oman at 52.

But consider that these Mideast countries are not nearly the size of Iran, and because of resource wealth can generate for their relatively small numbers of citizens considerably higher per capita incomes than Iran, with over 81 million people.

No other Mideast country is ranked above Iran but these four above, and among all the countries ranked, 188 of them, Iran stands just below the top third in the rankings.

Think, do we rule technology, or does tech rule us?

By James M. Connolly

A nugget in CompTIA's predictions for 2018 raises awareness of a somewhat dark side of technology, and the questions we should be asking ourselves.

Stashed in the middle of a 2018 predictions report from the industry group CompTIA is an entry that provides a ton of perspective, not just for the computer industry but for many thousands of organizations that acquire and implement technology, and even those of us who buy and use tech and data as individuals.



In CompTIA's IT Industry Outlook 2018, which highlighted a dozen tech trends for the year, the organization included: "Growing up: Tech may no longer automatically be given the benefit of the doubt."

For decades the industry mantra often has amounted to three little words: better, faster, cheaper. (Substitute "smarter" for "better" if you so choose.)

Of course that mantra applied to chip companies, guided by Moore's Law, and the computer manufacturers who implement those chips, as well as the software and networking firms that have taken advantage of faster, smarter silicon products to give us greater access to knowledge in our daily lives and across the globe. All of this is presented as something miraculous in the overused statement along the lines of "I have more computing power in my pocket ... blah, blah, blah."

We do love our boom times in tech. Today, we have access everywhere. The Web and the massive databases it reaches satisfy our information needs in seconds, whether we are solving a business problem or looking for a bit of entertainment. Tech changes the way we work and generates business, reshaping established companies and spawning thousands of new tech companies. We see opportunity in analytics, AI, IoT, 5G, cloud, and software-defined everything.

The funny thing about boom times, though, is that there is always a downside. For every millionaire who emerged from the gold rush there were hundreds of broken dreams. The age of the automobile gave us mobility and business opportunities, but we have paid a price for the freedom of the road through environmental challenges and more than 30,000 highway deaths in the U.S. each year.

Along those lines, CompTIA shared a cautionary note. In expanding on its "Growing up" observation, it highlighted the industry achievements of the past 20 years but said:

"However, signs point to changing expectations and a different environment unfolding. Questions surrounding security, privacy, and screen time continue to intensify. Concerns over market concentration and the power imbalances of gatekeepers loom. Reports of toxic corporate cultures and a lack of inclusiveness in certain quarters of the industry bring much needed attention to structural problems.

"Further advances in artificial intelligence and automation will likely ratchet up the level of scrutiny of their impact on work and society. To be clear, technology will continue to overwhelmingly be viewed as a force for good, but the industry will need to spend more time looking at itself in the mirror to ensure this sentiment continues."

Our race to adopt every bit of technology regardless of need, and to embrace every byte of data without questioning its accuracy come with the same dark side as any other boom. We need to find a balance, something that tells us when to tap the brakes and when to step on the gas.

As InformationWeek blogger James Kobiulus of Wikibon wrote last week in Make AI Safe for Civilized Society, there still is growing concern about the impact that AI and automation will have on a workforce.

Yes, jobs will be created. Yes, jobs will be lost, but which jobs should be lost? I find it ironic that I hear people talk about how much they hate their job, and then about how they fear they will lose that job. Don't wait to lose that job, carve a path to a new job, now. For those who don't hate their jobs, let's hope they can retool for those jobs that are created.

As CompTIA notes, we can see the dark side of technology every day. Companies misuse or fail to protect data from hackers. Bad data leads to bad decisions. Then, consider our personal lives. Walk into almost any restaurant and see couples on "date night." No talking, just two people looking at their screens. I wonder if some people spend more time talking to Alexa than they do to other humans. "Balance" is about spending an hour without tech. It also means questioning tech decisions.

Balance also is about applying the right technology solution to the right problem or opportunity. The saw about "technology for technology's sake" rings true when you see data scientists working on a corporate island soaking up data that holds no relevance to the business. It surfaces when executives say, "We need the IoT," when they have no clue as to why they need it or what IoT really is.

The vast majority of technology adoption is for the better, but we still need to ask a few simple questions along the way. Does everyone need it? In fact, does anyone need it? Are we talking about a need, or just a want? Is it better, or just cheaper and smaller? What data will it involve? How do we protect that data? How does it change the business or our lives, for good or not so good? How do we do it right?

Back in 1911, NCR's (later IBM's) Thomas J. Watson promoted the simplest of mottos: Think. Sometimes in our rush to adopt tech we just might forget to think.

(Source: informationweek.com)

First person to walk untethered in space gives a final interview



Astronaut Bruce McCandless hangs high above Earth during an untethered spacewalk in February 1984.

Photos of a dummy named Starman casually taking a luxury car on a spin through space may have captivated Earthlings some days ago, but 34 years ago, a similarly surreal photo of an actual astronaut commanded attention.

On February 7, 1984, Bruce McCandless became the first human to float free from any earthly anchor when he stepped out of the space shuttle Challenger and flew away from the ship. In a still-startling NASA image from that mission, untethered McCandless hangs 320 feet from Challenger, suspended above our impossibly blue planet and appearing paradoxically powerful and fragile against the yawning vastness of the cosmos.

McCandless, who died on December 21, 2017, had a long and storied history in NASA's space program. Before his famous spacewalks, he was mission control communicator during 1969's Apollo 11 moonwalk. That experience left him famously grumpy with Neil Armstrong for not revealing ahead of time what Armstrong planned to say when his boots first hit moon dust. He later helped deploy the Hubble Space Telescope into orbit from the space shuttle Discovery in 1990.

But McCandless's most memorable spacewalks, immortalized by a photo taken later during the mission, took place on his very first spaceflight. He'd been asked to test a new 300-pound Manned Maneuvering Unit, or MMU, which is basically a nitrogen-powered jetpack that allows astronauts to twist and turn through space as George Clooney's character did in the movie Gravity. But this was no feature film, and to say that people were nervous about an unrecoverable malfunction is no overstatement.

So, McCandless decided to crack an inside space joke as he began talking with mission control in Houston.

"I think I can assert that my comment—that it may have been one small step for Neil, but it's one heckuva of a big leap for me—was a) consciously thought out, b) a form of revenge for Neil not sharing his thoughts on stepping on the moon with me, and c) a way to say that things are going OK, don't worry about it," McCandless said. "It set the right tone, and on we went."

Here, on the anniversary of his first untethered

spacewalk, are McCandless's thoughts about that photo, recorded during his last interview with National Geographic in July.

■ What do you think of when you see yourself in that photo?

I had my sun visor down, in reality, for no particular reason other than keeping the sun out of my eyes, and so it could be just about anybody in there. And I think that's part of the attraction. I guess it's fair to say I've been amazed by the number of different folks who've come up to me and said, Hey, I have your picture in my bedroom. It's really become iconic of the space program, and in some ways, it seems to represent the embodiment of humanity's desire to be free from gravity and to be able to fly around in the cosmos.

■ I know a million people have asked you this, but ...

What was it like out there? The single thing that disturbed me the most was when I got away from the shuttle, I got extremely cold. Shivering, teeth chattering. The reason for

that is that the H, or hot, position on the life support system isn't really hot. It's just sort of minimal cooling, and the suit was designed to keep an astronaut cool and comfortable in a warm environment when working hard. [On this untethered walk], you're really not doing any significant labor. Flying the MMU is like moving your fingertips. You're not generating a significant amount of metabolic heat, and the remedy for that is just to turn the cooling system off completely.

■ Was it fun being out there anyway?

It was fun. But I tell you, I thought it would be sort of ethereal in terms of quietness, and I was wrong. I had radio communications, and there were three different people talking to me ... it was anything but peaceful and quiet.

■ You've been in space twice. Is it true that seeing Earth from space can alter an astronaut's perception of the planet?

As a blanket statement, I believe I'm OK in saying that just about everyone who has flown in space and looked down on the Earth

has altered their perception of it. And the prevailing feeling seems to be that when we look down from space, we really can't see the political subdivisions, and we wonder, why us—meaning everybody that's on spaceship Earth—why we can't learn to work with each other and get along.

■ How about when you were free-floating in space? Were you more aware of the planet below you?

With regard to my flying in the MMU, I've gotta be honest with you, I did not look down very much. My frame of reference was the space shuttle Challenger, and I oriented myself with respect to Challenger, like one airplane flying in formation with another. At one point, I did look down just to see if I could recognize anything, and by the luck of the draw or by chance, we happened to be passing over Florida. There is no feature on Earth that resembles the peninsula of Florida—its distinctive shape, Lake Okeechobee—so it was immediately and unequivocally recognizable. From there, we blew down along the Bahamas and across the South Atlantic and came ashore again over Namibia.

■ Do you think we'll ever go back to the moon, or to Mars?

Transportation from the Earth's surface is being commercialized, and I think that's a good thing. We are on the verge of starting commercial crew launch, but I think it is the role of the government to pioneer. George Bush, on July 20, 1989—with me in the audience and thousands of others—pledged to go back to the moon and on to Mars in 30 years; 2019 is 30 years from then. I'm sure we're not going to be headed to Mars by then.

[NASA's next-generation space capsule] Orion is gearing up and should eventually take us to the moons of Mars. They're probably the first step, because they are a lot easier to get to and from there, you can control things on the surface with almost zero time delay. Plus, when you land people on Mars, you already need to have a good idea of whether there's life on Mars. With no offense intended, people are dirty.

(Source: National Geographic)

Giving your child a smartphone is like giving them a gram of cocaine, says top addiction expert

Giving your child a smartphone is like "giving them a gram of cocaine," a top addiction therapist has warned.

Time spent messaging friends on Snapchat and Instagram can be just as dangerously addictive for teenagers as drugs and alcohol, and should be treated as such, school leaders and teachers were told at an education conference in London.

Speaking alongside experts in technology addiction and adolescent development, Harley Street rehab clinic specialist Mandy Saligari said screen time was too often overlooked as a potential vehicle for addiction in young people.

"I always say to people, when you're giving your kid a tablet or a phone, you're really giving them a bottle of wine or a gram of coke," she said.

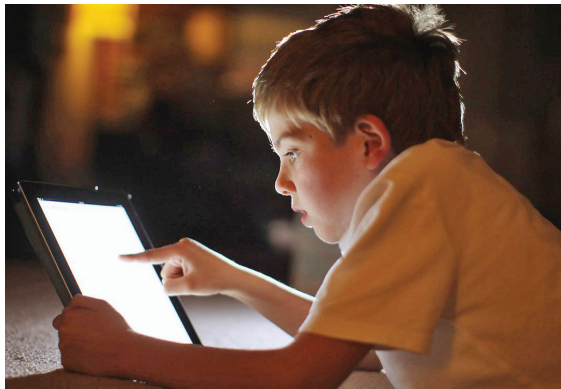
"Are you really going to leave them to knock the whole thing out on their own behind closed doors?"

"Why do we pay so much less attention to those things than we do to drugs and alcohol when they work on the same brain impulses?"

Her comments follow news that children as young as 13 are being treated for digital technology – with a third of British children aged 12-15 admitting they do not have a good balance between screen time and other activities.

"When people tend to look at addiction, their eyes tend to be on the substance or thing – but really it's a pattern of behavior that can manifest itself in a number of different ways," Ms Saligari said, naming food and obsessions self-harm as examples.

Concern has grown recently over the number of young people seen to be sending or receiving pornographic images, or accessing age inappropriate content online through



their devices.

Ms Saligari, who heads the Harley Street Charter clinic in London, said around two thirds of her patients were 16-20 year-olds seeking treatment for addiction – a "dramatic increase" on ten years ago - but many of her patients were even younger.

In a recent survey of more than 1,500 teachers, around two-thirds said they were aware of pupils sharing sexual content, with as many as one in six of those involved of primary school age.

More than 2,000 children have been reported to police for crimes linked to indecent images in the past three years.

"If children are taught self-respect they are less likely to exploit themselves in that way," said Ms

Saligari. "It's an issue of self-respect and it's an issue of identity."

Speaking alongside Ms Saligari at the Highgate Junior School conference on teenage development, Dr Richard Graham, a Consultant Psychiatrist at the Nightingale Hospital Technology Addiction Lead, said the issue was a growing area of interest for researchers, as parents report struggling to find the correct balance for their children.

Even three and four year olds consume an average of six and half hours of internet time per week, according to the broadcasting regulators.

Greater emphasis was needed on sleep and digital curfews at home, the experts suggested, as well as a systematic approach within schools, for example by introducing a smartphone amnesty at the beginning of the school day.

"With sixth formers and teenagers, you're going to get resistance, because to them it's like a third hand," said Ms Saligari, "but I don't think it's impossible to intervene. Schools asking pupils to spend some time away from their phone I think is great.

"If you catch [addiction] early enough, you can teach children how to self-regulate, so we're not policing them and telling them exactly what to do," she added.

"What we're saying is, here's the quiet carriage time, here's the free time – now you must learn to self-regulate. It's possible to enjoy periods of both."

Ofcom figures suggest more than four in ten parents of 12-15 year-olds find it hard to control their children's screen time.

(Source: Independent)

Technology can hurt students' learning, research shows



Giving school students access to iPads, laptops or e-books in the classroom appears to hurt their learning, new research has found.

However, putting this technology in the hands of a teacher is associated with more positive results.

These are the findings of a major report by the consulting firm McKinsey on the performance of 15-year-old students across Europe.

It is based on an analysis of data gathered as part of Pisa (Program for International Student Assessment).

The findings may influence a rethink of approaches to technology in schools, as well as ambitious Government policies to boost access to technology in the classroom.

While technology can support student learning outside of school, the report found its record inside school is mixed.

In some countries, adding one teacher computer per classroom had more than 10 times the impact on improving educational performance of adding a student computer to that same classroom.

Giving students access to e-books, tablet computers and laptops inside the classroom was associated with significantly lower educational performance in the review.

However, providing access to technology for teachers, rather than students, worked best.

For example, in some countries, adding one teacher computer per classroom had more than 10 times the impact on improving educational performance of adding a student computer to that same classroom.

These results, however, evaluate only hardware, not software, and only describe the impact of education technology as currently implemented.

Nevertheless, the report says European leaders should not assume the impact of technology will always be positive or even neutral.

"Systems should ensure that ICT programs are integrated with curriculum and instruction and are supported by teacher professional development and coaching," the report states.

Teaching approaches

The report also examined teaching approaches and found that students who received a blend of inquiry-based and more traditional teacher-directed instruction had the best outcomes.

Teacher-directed learning is where the teacher explains and demonstrates scientific ideas, discusses questions, and leads classroom discussions.

"Inquiry-based teaching" can include a diverse range of practices, from conducting practical experiments to encouraging students to create their own questions.

McKinsey's research found that if all students experienced this blend of instruction, average Pisa scores in Europe would be significantly higher, a rise equivalent to more than half a school year of learning.

Supporters of reforms being rolled out at second-level as part of the junior cycle say the changes are aimed at precisely this type of balanced learning.

The study also indicates that student "mindsets" can have more influence on outcomes than socioeconomic background.

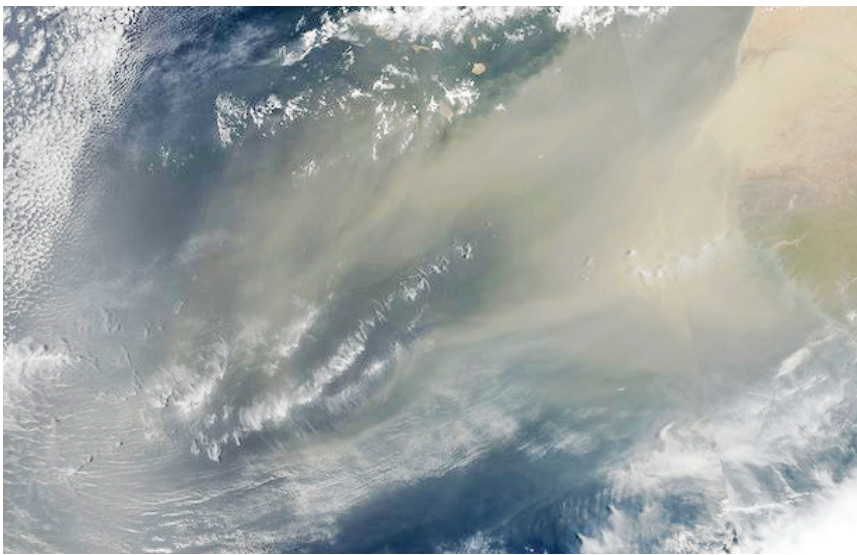
It found that students from poorer backgrounds who were focused on doing more than was expected and working on tasks until everything was perfect performed better than students from the most affluent areas who had poor motivation.

(Source: The Irish Times)

Billions of viruses are falling to Earth right now, scientists find

You can't see them or feel them, but millions of airborne viruses are wafting around you each day, and billions more microbial travelers are descending everywhere on Earth, after riding air currents around the world. For the first time, scientists have analyzed the vast quantities of viruses that are swept up and swirling about in the atmosphere, sometimes traveling thousands of miles from their point of origin before seeing the planet's surface again. At this height, approximately 8,200 to 9,840 feet (2,500 to 3,000 meters) above sea level, viruses hitch rides on air currents and on particles of soil or vapor from sea spray, and travel much farther than would be possible at lower elevations.

Deluge of airborne microbes
The scientists discovered a deluge of airborne microbes, finding that a single square meter of the planet's surface could be showered with hundreds of millions of viruses — and tens of millions of bacteria — in a single day. "Every day, more than 800 million viruses are deposited per square meter above the planetary boundary layer — that's 25 viruses for each person in Canada," study co-author Curtis Suttle, a virologist and professor with the Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries at the University of British Columbia, said in a statement. However, this virus "rain" has nothing to do with flu season. Viruses — clusters of



genetic material in a protein envelope that can't reproduce on their own — have been around for at least 300 million years and are abundant on Earth (as well as in your

The scientists discovered a deluge of airborne microbes, finding that a single square meter of the planet's surface could be showered with hundreds of millions of viruses — and tens of millions of bacteria — in a single day.

body, as part of your microbiome). In fact, viruses are the most abundant microbes on the planet, the study authors reported. The total estimated number of viruses is so staggeringly large that if all Earth's viruses were collected together they would cover an area spanning 100 million light-years, the journal Nature Reviews Microbiology reported in 2011. **Types of bacteria**
Some viruses, such as influenza and Ebola, do sicken people, but many infect only bacteria. Though it's unknown exactly how many types of viruses there are, approximately 320,000 types of viruses infect mammals alone, according to a study published in 2013 in the journal American Society for Microbiology. To track the invisible microbial highways in the sky — and find out how many viral passengers they carried — the authors of the new study ascended platforms in Spain's Sierra Nevada Mountains, and collected samples from the atmosphere at altitudes of about 9,840 feet (3,000 m) above sea level, scooping up free-floating microbes and those attached to airborne dust and water vapor. When the scientists separated and analyzed the microbial hitchhikers, they found that not only were billions of microbes showering Earth's surface on a daily basis, but that viruses could be up to 461 times more abundant than bacteria. (Source: Live Science)

The dinosaur-murdering asteroid maybe also triggered an underwater volcano meltdown



The cataclysmic asteroid that wiped out the dinosaurs might have also triggered massive volcanic eruptions deep beneath the ocean, new research says. It's yet another way the extraterrestrial impact could have killed off more than 70 percent of life on Earth — that is, if the timing isn't just a coincidence. Roughly 66 million years ago, a 6-mile-wide asteroid crashed into Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula — causing a massive, worldwide earthquake. That Earth-shaking impact might have made underwater volcanoes spit up magma even more ferociously than usual, according to a study. These events might have added to the asteroid's apocalyptic aftershocks — which include wildfires, global cooling, and acid rain — that caused the mass extinction of roughly three quarters of Earth's species, including dinos. **Intense volcanic eruptions**
The findings back up earlier reports of more intense volcanic eruptions in India also roughly 66 million years ago. But other scientists are skeptical about the link between the asteroid and the underwater volcanic eruptions, because the paper doesn't propose exactly how they happened. "Why would that much earthquake energy cause eruptions like that?" says Sean Gulick, a geophysicist at the University of Texas at Austin who did not participate in the study. For decades, scientists have been arguing about whether volcanoes or an asteroid caused the massive climate shifts that spelled doom for the dinosaurs. The

evidence supporting the asteroid hypothesis kept mounting. But then, a few years ago, scientists at UC Berkeley asked, why pick one flavor of apocalypse? Both might have been on the menu 66 million years ago: the asteroid, for instance, might have intensified eruptions from a particularly volcanic region in India called the Deccan Traps. So Earth scientists Joseph Byrnes at the University of Minnesota and Leif Karlstrom at the University of Oregon went looking for more signs of ancient eruptions, in easy-to-spot stretches of the seafloor. **Mid-ocean ridges**
Gaps in the Earth's crust called mid-ocean ridges weep magma to create the ocean floor, churning out material at a pretty even pace of up to several inches each year. That allowed Karlstrom and Byrnes to pinpoint the sections produced roughly 66 million years ago. But searching for signs of volcanic eruptions isn't as easy as looking for bumpy tracts of hardened lava on the bottom of the ocean. "It's hard to get to the sea floor because the ocean is sitting on it," Byrnes says. Instead, the team turned to satellite maps of the peaks and valleys in the ocean's surface. These bumpy spots produced by, say, an underwater volcano belching out magma have more mass, and therefore a bigger gravitational pull, than valleys or flat regions. So underwater peaks pull more ocean around them, creating wrinkles in the surface that can be seen from space. (Source: theverge.com)

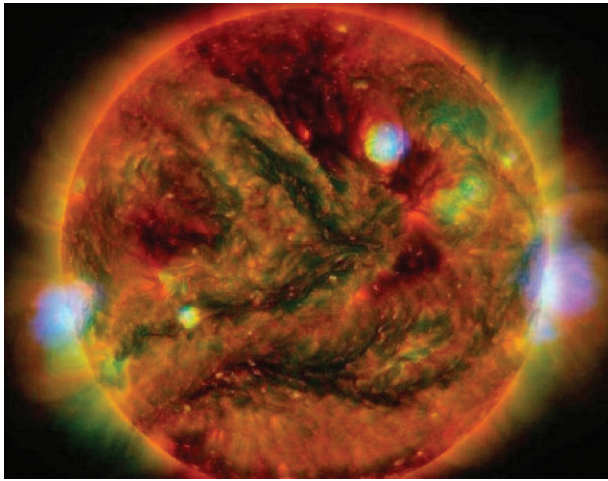
Stronger than steel, able to stop a speeding bullet -- it's super wood!



Some varieties of wood, such as oak and maple, are renowned for their strength. But scientists say a simple and inexpensive new process can transform any type of wood into a material stronger than steel, and even some high-tech titanium alloys. Besides taking a star turn in buildings and vehicles, the substance could even be used to make bullet-resistant armor plates. Wood is abundant and relatively low-cost—it literally grows on trees. And although it has been used for millennia to build everything from furniture to homes and larger structures, untreated wood is rarely as strong as metals used in construction. Researchers have long tried to enhance its strength, especially by compressing and "densifying" it, says Liangbing Hu, a materials scientist at the University of Maryland, College Park. But densified wood tends to weaken and spring back toward its original size and shape, especially in humid conditions. **Two-step process**
Now, Hu and his colleagues say they have come up with a better way to densify wood, which they report in the February 7 Nature. Their simple, two-step process starts with boiling wood in a solution of sodium hydroxide (NaOH) and sodium sulfite (Na2SO3), a chemical treatment similar to the first step in creating the wood pulp used to make paper. This partially removes lignin and hemicellulose (natural polymers that help stiffen a plant's cell walls)—but it largely leaves the wood's cellulose (another natural polymer) intact, Hu says. The second step is almost as simple as the first: Compressing the treated wood until its cell walls collapse, then maintaining that compression as it is gently heated. The pressure and heat encourage the formation of chemical bonds between large numbers of hydrogen atoms and neighboring atoms in adjacent nanofibers of cellulose, greatly strengthening the material. The results are impressive. The team's compressed wood is three times as dense as the untreated substance, Hu says, adding that its resistance to being ripped apart is increased more than 10-fold. It also can become about 50 times more resistant to compression and almost 20 times as stiff. **Impact-resistant wood**
The densified wood is also substantially harder, more scratch-resistant and more impact-resistant. It can be molded into almost any shape. In lab tests, compressed samples exposed to extreme humidity for more than five days swelled less than 10 percent—and in subsequent tests, Hu says, a simple coat of paint eliminated that swelling entirely. A five-layer, plywoodlike sandwich of densified wood stopped simulated bullets fired into the material—a result Hu and his colleagues suggest could lead to low-cost armor. The material does not protect quite as well as a Kevlar sheet of the same thickness—but it only costs about 5 percent as much, he notes. (Source: Scientific American)

The sun will be dimmer by 2050

Physicist predicted that the sun will emit less radiation by the mid-century because of an event known as Grand Minimum. What happens when the sun emits less UV radiation than normal? The sun will be cooler and dimmer a few decades from now as researchers predicted that it might emit less radiation by the mid-century. Scientists said that the cool-down would happen because of the "grand minimum," a period when sunspots form less frequently, the Sun's magnetism is reduced, and less ultraviolet radiation makes it to the surface of our planet.



Scientists think this event is triggered at irregular intervals by random fluctuations linked to the magnetic field of the sun. Physicist Dan Lubin, from Scripps Institution of Oceanography, and colleagues predicted a significant probability of a grand minimum occurring in the near future because of the downward sunspot pattern they observed in recent solar cycles that resembles those in the past grand minimum events. They were also able to estimate how much dimmer the sun would likely be during the next grand minimum. In their study published in the Astrophysical Journal Letters, the researchers Lubin and colleagues studied almost 20 years of data collected by the International Ultraviolet Explorer satellite mission. They compared the radiation emitted by stars that are similar to the sun and identified which ones were experiencing grand minimum to get an idea of the extent the sun would dim in the next grand minimum. The sun goes through an 11-year cycle in which its ultraviolet radiation peaks and declines because of sunspot activity. The researchers estimated that the UV radiation is reduced by 7 percent more than the lowest point of the cycle when a grand minimum takes place. (Source: Tech Times)

Sweet route to greater yields

Three years ago, biotechnologists demonstrated in field trials that they could increase the productivity of maize by introducing a rice gene into the plant that regulated the accumulation of sucrose in kernels and led to more kernels per maize plant. They knew that the rice gene affected the performance of a natural chemical in maize, trehalose 6-phosphate (T6P), which influences the distribution of sucrose in the plant. But they were keen to discover more intimate details of the relationships governing the increased productivity. "Now we know far more about how this yield effect has been achieved," says Matthew Paul, who led the anglo-american team from Rothamsted Research and Syngenta, a biotechnology company that also funded the work. The team's findings are published today in Plant Physiology. The transgenic maize depressed levels of T6P in the phloem, a major component of the plant's transportation network, allowing more sucrose to move to developing kernels and, serendipitously, increasing rates of photosynthesis, thereby producing even more sucrose for more kernels. The team also chose to target the phloem within the plant's reproductive structures. "These structures are particularly sensitive to drought - female kernels will abort," says Paul, a plant biochemist at Rothamsted. "Keeping sucrose flowing within the structures prevents this abortion." He adds: "This is a first-in-its-kind study that shows the technology operating effectively both in the field and in the laboratory. We also think that this could be transferred to other cereals, such as wheat and rice." (Source: eurekalert.org)

Chicxulub crater prompted lava surge and global winter

Sometimes it feels like the sky is falling and the oceans are boiling, but when you start to get stressed out, remember the dinosaurs had it worse than you do: A new paper in Science Advances adds another apocalypse scenario to the nightmare that unfolded at the end of the Cretaceous period. About 66 million years ago, the infamous Chicxulub asteroid struck off what's now the coast of Mexico, vaporizing huge amounts of plant life and causing a global winter — wave goodbye to your favorite T. rex. More bad news: The giant magma tanks known as the Deccan Traps, one of the largest volcanic regions on Earth located in what's now India, erupted. Now the new paper suggests that when the asteroid struck, the sheer force of the impact may have also triggered a massive surge in volcanic activity at the bottom of the ocean. (Volcanic activity, like the asteroid strike itself, can cause temperatures to plummet.) This also makes the researchers think the asteroid strike might have made the Deccan Traps eruptions — which likely began before the asteroid — more severe. Their hypothesis is pinned on analyzing tiny changes in gravity along the surface of the seafloor. Those can mark places where a spike in volcanic activity has produced a dense lump of rock. The team behind the new paper looked at million-year-wide slices of the seafloor emanating out from the mid-ocean ridges, where different chunks of the Earth's crust move apart and new rock is created. When they got to about 66 slices out from the mid-ocean ridges — around when the Chicxulub asteroid hit — the researchers found a spike in gravity anomalies, reflecting a spree of ocean-floor creation. (Source: Newsweek)

Official reveals good news for exporters in tumultuous currency days

Deputy Export Guarantee Fund of Iran (EGFI) Arash Shahr-Aeini in an interview with our correspondent revealed the good news for exporters in the field of covering foreign exchange fluctuations, the Public Relations Dept. of Export Guarantee Fund of Iran (EGFI) reported.

If exchange rate is reduced between 3 to 30 percent, fluctuations of exchange rate will be covered for exports, he added. Shahr-Aeini revealed the bylaw ratified by the Cabinet of Ministers to cover fluctuations of exchange rate for exporters of the country and added, "covering fluctuations of exchange rate will be considered as one of the bylaws that will help promote export activities in the country."

This package has been designed especially for exporters, neither speculators not importers, he said, adding, "hence, this bylaw will insure exporters from damages caused by reduced exchange rate."

For instance, if exchange rate is considered 47,000 rials at the present condition and/or if the exchange rate is reduced as much as 1,500 rials, the very exporter should cover but if exchange rate is reduced more than the said rate, the Fund will cover it, he emphasized. In the end, Shahr-Aeini pointed to the commission envisioned for covering fluctuations of exchange rate and added, "the commission has been set according to a one- or six-month period."

Parsian Insurance Company was introduced as the most profitable insurance company in the 9th National Productivity Festival, the Public Relations Dept. of the company reported. For this purpose, a Plaque of Honor was awarded to Parsian Insurance Company in the related field. With due observance to the said issue, the company was selected as the most profitable insurance company based on two indexes of per capita income and margin of net profit. These companies are evaluated according to the financial and economic indicators and productivity of economic enterprises according to the information disclosed in financial statements of the economic enterprises. It should be noted that about 3,000 jurors have been registered through internet, the report concluded.

Parsian Insurance Co. Named Most Profitable Insurance Firm

German workers win right to 28-hour week

Millions of German workers are winning the fight for a 28-hour work week. Labor union IG Metall secured an unprecedented deal this week to give a large portion of its 2.3 million members more flexible working hours and a big pay rise.



From next year, workers at many of Germany's top engineering firms -- such as Mercedes-Benz owner Daimler (DDAIF) -- can opt to work 28 hours a week for up to two years, before returning to the standard 35-hour week. The deal was negotiated with representatives of more than 700 companies in southwest Germany. It is expected to have ripple effects across German industry.

"This sets the standard for everyone else," said Megan Greene, chief economist at Manulife Asset Management.

IG Metall said the flexibility would help employees who want to care for children or relatives. Pay will be reduced to reflect the shorter working week. The deal also gives workers the option to work 40 hours to earn more.

German workers are taking advantage of low unemployment and strong economic growth to flex their muscles.

"You can expect similar deals to come in other sectors and regions soon," said Famke Krumbmüller, a partner at OpenCitiz, a political risk consultancy.

And non-unionized workers could also benefit from the agreement as firms that employ IG Metall workers offer the same terms to their wider workforce.

Daimler said it would offer the new flexible hours to all its employees starting in 2019, but noted it already offered many flexible working options.

Bosch, which employs 138,000 people in Germany, said it would offer the same pay rises and perks to the majority of its German workers. It said the flexible hours wouldn't be disruptive.

"Bosch already has about 100 different working hour models to ensure an optimum work-life balance," said Simon Schmitt, a company spokesperson.

But other companies may find it harder to swallow. Südwestmetall -- the employers' association that agreed the deal -- said it was a compromise with some "painful elements." It would be "hard to bear for many firms," it added.

Südwestmetall spokesperson Volker Steinmaier said the shorter working week could lead to labor shortages. However, most workers are likely to want to work extra hours to make more money, he said.

"A couple of companies [already] give their employees a choice to work 30, 35 and 40 [hours]. Most of the employees choose to work longer and earn more," he said.

Germany's surging economy could be the ultimate winner as workers covered by the deal go out and spend more.

IG Metall said its members would get a 4.3% raise, starting in April. That equates to a rise of about 3.5% on average in 2018, according to Florian Hense, an economist at Berenberg bank.

"This is good for workers," said Hense. "They [will] see their pay rise by far more than inflation. This raises their disposable income and spending power." (Source: CNNMoney)

Air pollution could be as harmful to our minds as it is to our bodies

Breathing in polluted air makes us more likely to commit crimes and cheat, new research shows.

Scientists suggest this is because exposure to pollution makes us more anxious, which is known to trigger unethical behaviour.

Nearly 40 million people in the UK live in highly polluted areas, while this number is as high as 142 million in the United States, and the researchers suggest air pollutants may drive up crime rates in these regions.

Researchers at Columbia Business School in New York examined air pollution and crime data for 9,360 American cities collected over a nine-year period.

Air pollution data included information about six major pollutants and the crime data accounted for seven types of major offence, including murder and robbery.

The major pollutants were particulate matter, carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, ground-level ozone and lead.

(Source: Daily Mail)

LEARN ENGLISH

Making a Collect Call

A: This is the **operator**, how may I help you?
B: Yes, I would like to make a collect call.
A: Ok sir, please dial the number. Now please state your name.
B: Tommy.
A: Please wait a moment. Hello, you have a collect call from Tommy. Would you like to accept the **charges**?
C: Yes of course.
A: Dad?
C: Yeah Tommy, what happened are you ok?
A: Yeah dad everything is ok. I'm calling you because I want to know if it's ok for me to go to my friend's house today after school.
C: Yeah sure no problem. You scared me to death! I've told you to make a **collect call** in case of an emergency only! Why didn't you call me from your mobile phone?
B: I ran out of **credit** and I also didn't have twenty five cents for the **payphone**. Sorry dad.

■ **Key Vocabulary**
operator: a person who operates a telephone switchboard
charge: amount of money to be paid
collect call: a telephone call that the receiving party is asked to pay for
credit: the positive balance in a person's mobile phone account
payphone: a public telephone operated by coins or a phone card
■ **Supplementary Vocabulary**
network: telephones interconnected by telecommunication equipment or cables
landline: a home telephone
connect: to establish communication between
reception: the quality attained in receiving radio or television broadcasts

(Source: irlanguage.ir)

National governments neglecting development needs of cities: report

Only one quarter of the world’s governments have urban development policies and most are not enough to make cities sustainable

National governments around the world are neglecting the needs of their major cities with non-existent or inadequate development policies, a new report has found.

National governments are keys to making cities more sustainable, because cities are limited in the policy measures they can take for themselves, the report points out. However, only a quarter of the world's governments have urban development policies at all, and most of those that do exist are not sufficient to make cities sustainable.

The report looks at the key measures of energy generation, transport, waste management and infrastructure. For instance, putting in adequate public transport can transform the lives of citizens and the carbon footprint of the cities they live in. Encouraging the use of electric vehicles above petrol or diesel-driven cars can also have a large effect, not just on greenhouse gas emissions but also on removing some of the key causes of air pollution.

The report, from the Stockholm Environment Institute and the Coalition for Urban Transitions and funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies, suggests national governments are neglecting the needs of their major cities even when they have in place national policies on issues such as climate change and greenhouse gas emissions. Derik Broekhoff



National governments are neglecting the needs of their major cities even when they have in place national policies on issues such as climate change and greenhouse gas emissions.

‘Let us not wait for the government’: Nigerian man leads cleanup in world’s most polluted city

A Nigerian man living in one of the world’s most polluted cities has been hailed for “leading by example” and cleaning up his community in the face of government inaction.

Chris Junior Anaekwe, 28, drew the applause of the internet for leading a group of local teenagers in tackling rubbish in their neighborhood in Onitsha, a port city in southern Nigeria.

“It is good to always lead by example, not by talking talking talking,” he wrote on Facebook.

Onitsha has by far the largest urban area in Anambra state, and is a densely populated industrial and commercial hub. Anaekwe, a graduate of the University of Nigeria in Nsukka, told NPR in an interview published on Tuesday he had been “inspired to do something” after seeing the city’s intensely polluted market.

He said he hoped the exercise had shown

his neighbors they had some role to play in cleaning up the area. “I wanted the kids to be the ones to clean up. I believe it will go a long way to teach them a lesson: that they are the protectors of their own environment...”

“We need to help ourselves. We must not wait for the government.”

The challenge, however, is greater in Onitsha than it is in many places. The city recently gained notoriety for the staggering levels of PM10 particulate matter recorded in its air: an annual mean concentration of 594 micrograms per cubic meter. The World Health Organization’s annual guideline is 20.

PM10s are small, coarse dust particles that penetrate deep into the lungs and the cardiovascular system, posing a great risk to human health.

However, reporting on the air quality in Onitsha for Guardian Cities last year, journalist Hadassah Egbedi found that residents were

either not aware of the health risks posed by their environment, or did not take them seriously.

Some residents also believed that individuals’ efforts to clean up the environment were negated by local and state governments’ inaction. “It is the government’s responsibility to keep the city clean, not the work of the residents,” Ikechukwu Obizue, a businessman, told Egbedi.

Anaekwe – who described himself to NPR as a self-appointed “ambassador” of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals for Nigeria – challenged this attitude in this call to action on Facebook in late January: “Health is wealth. Health is everything.

“Onitsha people, it is [time] for us to say no to dirty environment for it poses great danger to our health. Let us not wait for the government to clean our gullies for us. It is us that is going to suffer [health] damages.



Khorasan razavi
Water and Wastewater company

Call for identification of investors for Completion of a section of wastewater system in Torghabe through Buyback contract (Auction)

According to Article 37 of the sixth development plan, Article 2 of the law on establishment of water and wastewater companies approved in 1990 and article 27 of the Law for annexation of some articles to the law on drafting part Water and Wastewater company intends to of the government’s financial regulations (2), the **Khorasan razavi** concede the completion of a section of the wastewater collection and treatment system in **Torghabe** against the allocation of the determined volume of treated effluent for specific use for a limited and predetermined period through Buyback contract according to the following conditions to a qualified investor.

A- Brief description of the project:

- Subject: completion of a section of the wastewater system in **Torghabe**, including: **WWTP and sewer**
- Concessioner: The **Khorasan razavi** Water and Wastewater Company
- Construction period: **3** years
- Commercial operation period: Financial model to be submitted
- Treatment efficiency: **Surface water discharge**
- Population coverage: **110000 person**
- Project site: City **Torghabe** Province **Khorasan razavi**

B- General conditions for investment:

- The investor must be a real or legal entity in possession of acceptable management experience to ensure and allocate the required investment.
- Date, deadline and address to collect the qualification documents: Qualified investors may submit their letter of intent for investment in the plan and collect the qualification

documents from **10/02/2018** until the end of office hours on **19/02/2018** from: **mashhad-sadaf-vakil abad blvd- The Khorasan razavi Water and Wastewater Company- the technical support unit (TSU)**

- Address and deadline for submission of the required documents: The completed

evaluation forms should be submitted at 15.00 on **sunday** dated **11/03/2018** to: **The Khorasan razavi Water and Wastewater Company Secretariat**

- Following the review of the evaluation documents submitted by the interested parties, the qualified investors shall be invited for contract negotiations.

- The concessioner has the right to accept or reject the technical or financial proposals of

the investors at any stage of the proceedings.

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'U.S., France mulling over new military action against Syria'

The U.S. is considering new military strikes against Syrian government positions, while France is keen to support such an operation, diplomatic sources say.

A diplomatic source close to the Syrian opposition told the Middle East Eye (MEE) news portal on Thursday that some in the U.S. administration are "keen to take a tougher line on Russia in Syria."

The new stance comes as U.S.-led coalition forces on Wednesday night launched an aerial attack on pro-Damascus forces in Syria's eastern Dayr al-Zawr province during a military operation against Daesh and the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

A U.S. official said the attack killed over 100 pro-government forces.

The Syrian government has denounced the deadly strike as a "war crime," lambasting Washington for using "the excuse of fighting terrorism to set up illegitimate bases on Syrian territory."

The U.S.-led coalition has been conducting airstrikes against what are said to be Daesh targets inside Syria since September 2014 without any authorization from the Damascus government or a UN mandate. The military alliance has repeatedly been accused of targeting and killing civilians. It has also been largely incapable of fulfilling its declared aim of destroying Daesh.

Damascus has on several occasions called for U.S. troops to leave Syria now that the fight against Daesh is over.



The Syrian government, backed by Russian air cover, has managed to push back the terrorists turf after turf. The Arab country flushed Daesh out of its last stronghold in November.

According to the sources, the planned U.S.-French action on Syria would likely be carried out under the pretext of responding to the ongoing use of chemical weapons, which the White House blames on the Syrian government.

The sources said the "rhetoric from the U.S. is changing," and the administration is weighing up something similar to its cruise missile attack on an Idlib airbase last April.

More than 80 people died in the April 4, 2017 sarin gas attack on Khan Shaykhun in Idlib Province.

The United States and the militants operating in the area blamed the Syrian government for the deadly incident. Syria and Russia, however, rejected the claims,

suggesting that a militant weapon may have detonated on the ground.

Damascus argues that it has no reason to resort to chemical weapons while its forces have the upper hand in the fight against terrorists.

The Syrian government surrendered its stockpiles of chemical weapons in 2014 to a joint mission led by the UN and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which oversaw the destruction of the weaponry. The deal was negotiated by Russia and the United States.

Senior US officials cautioned last week that the administration is again prepared to take military action against Syrian government forces if necessary to deter what they called the use of chemical weapons.

The sources close to the opposition said French President Emmanuel Macron is keen to support the U.S. militarily in any new targeted attack.

Asked by MEE whether Paris was ruling out military action or supporting U.S. military action against Syrian government positions, a French diplomatic source said, "no further comment."

French academic and Syria expert, Thomas Pierret, told MEE that if U.S. President Donald "Trump decides to act, France will follow."

The U.S. Central Command said that, "We don't announce future military plans for operational security reasons."

(Source: MEE)

Palestinians want China in Mideast talks amid U.S. 'bias'

The Palestinian envoy to the UN suggests that China and Arab League (AL) could also be part of any future "peace process" on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which should be "collective" and not dominated by the U.S.

"We're saying a collective approach involving several players at minimum would have a better chance of succeeding than the approach of only one country that is so close to Israel," Riyadh Mansour told reporters on Thursday.

The so-called peace process could involve the UN Security Council, said the diplomat, adding that the Middle East Quartet of mediators, namely the UN, the EU, Russia and the U.S., could also expand to include China and the Arab League.

"The Quartet plus China plus the league of Arab states plus maybe others ... we could also look at that," Mansour said.

The comments come amid anger among Palestinians at U.S. President Donald Trump's latest hostile measures in favor of Israel, including his decision last December to recognize Jerusalem al-Quds as the "capital" of the regime and begin work to transfer Washington's embassy from Tel Aviv to the occupied city.

Trump's declaration prompted Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to formally declare that Palestinians would no longer accept the U.S. as a mediator to resolve the decades-long conflict as Washington is "completely biased" towards Tel Aviv.



In response to Abbas' position, the Trump administration said in January that it would withhold \$65 million of a \$125 million aid installment to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA).

All rounds of talks between Israelis and Palestinians so far have stalled mainly due to the Tel Aviv regime's refusal to stop its unlawful settlement expansion on occupied territories.

Mansour further said such collective approach could also "of the nature of the French Paris conference or international conference."

Early last year, scores of countries joined a gathering in Paris to discuss potential means of addressing the conflict. U.S. President Donald Trump has said his administration had a peace proposal in the works.

Sounding dismissive of any renewed U.S. push at dictating the process, the Palestinian official said, "The old approach failed, and we're looking for a new approach."

"But of course if they started with 'Jerusalem [al-Quds] is off the table' and punishing UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency)... what is left on the table?" he asked.

"They lost the neutrality that is required of any broker that helps two parties to reach a peace treaty," Mansour said.

After break with the U.S. as a peace broker, the Palestinian Authority sent delegations to China and Russia to ask them to take a greater role in the Middle East negotiation process.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Abbas plan to discuss a possible new mediation mechanism to replace the Quartet when they meet next week, the Interfax news agency said Wednesday, citing a Palestinian diplomat in Russia.

In late January, Abbas addressed an African Union meeting in Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa, also calling on African states to join a multilateral mechanism to discuss the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

(Source: Press TV)

Russian diplomat: U.S. allowing ISIL into Afghanistan

The Russian presidential envoy to Afghanistan says there are indications that the U.S. military is allowing members of the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group, who have suffered serious defeats in Syria and neighboring Iraq, to infiltrate Afghanistan.

"It's noteworthy that the extremists themselves and weapons for them, according to numerous witness accounts, are often transferred to the territory of Afghanistan by helicopters without identifying insignia," Zamir Kabulov said on Thursday.

Kabulov added, "With the U.S. and NATO fully controlling the skies over Afghanistan, there is every reason to believe they had a hand in that, or at least, did not hamper these flights, despite the fact that Washington and Brussels deny that."

Last November, former Afghan President Hamid Karzai told Qatari al-Jazeera television news network that the U.S. is colluding with Daesh in Afghanistan, and allowing the



Takfiris to flourish in his conflict-stricken country.

"In my view, under the full [U.S.] presence, surveillance, military, political, intelligence, Daesh has emerged. And for two years, the

Afghan people came, cried loud about their suffering, of violations. Nothing was done," he said.

Karzai further noted that U.S. officials used Daesh as an excuse to drop an 11-ton

GBU-43 Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB) bomb, nicknamed the 'Mother of all Bombs', in Achin district of Afghanistan's eastern province of Nangarhar on April 13, 2017.

On December 23, 2017, Kabulov warned that an estimated 10,000 members of the Takfiri terrorist group were present in Afghanistan, and that their number was growing.

He stressed that Moscow was particularly worried about Daesh's expanding foothold in northern Afghan provinces bordering Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

"Russia was among the first to be sounding the alarms in connection with the emergence of Daesh in Afghanistan," the high-ranking Russian diplomat said.

"Daesh has significantly increased its power in the country recently. According to our estimates, the number of militants exceeds 10,000 and continues to grow, particularly due to new militants arriving from Syria and Iraq," Kabulov said at the time.

(Source: Press TV)

Reuters: Journalists held for probing Rohingya massacre

Two Reuters news agency journalists held for two months by Myanmar authorities were arrested over their investigation of a massacre of 10 Rohingya men, the news agency said in a report that detailed the killings.

It is the first time Reuters has publicly confirmed what Myanmar nationals Wa Lone, 31, and Kyaw Soe Oo, 27, were working on when they were arrested on December 12 on the outskirts of Yangon. The pair are now facing up to 14 years in prison on charges of possessing classified documents in violation of the colonial-era Official Secrets Act.

Their plight has sparked global alarm over withering press freedoms in Myanmar and government efforts to curb reporting in northern Rakhine state - a crisis-hit region where troops are accused of waging an ethnic cleansing campaign against Muslim-majority Rohingya.

Nearly 700,000 Rohingya have fled the area since last August, carrying stories of atrocities at the hands of troops and vigilante groups in the Buddhist-majority country.

Myanmar authorities deny the allegations but have virtually cut off northern Rakhine, barring independent media from accessing the conflict-hit areas.

On Thursday Reuters published a report describing how Myanmar troops and Buddhist villagers executed 10 Rohingya men in Rakhine's Inn Din village on September 2, 2017 before dumping their bodies into a mass grave.

"The Reuters investigation of the Inn Din massacre was what prompted Myanmar police authorities to arrest two of the news agency's reporters," the report said.

The account was based on testimony from Buddhist villagers, security officers and relatives of the slain men.

It included graphic photographs of the victims, hands bound kneeling on the floor before the killing - and of their bodies in a pit after they were shot.

Their ages ranged from 17 to 45. Among them were students, fishermen, farmers and shop owners. They were all part of the same Rohingya community in Inn Din.

"The actual number of incidents is therefore likely to be much higher than reported," she told reporters in Geneva, acknowledging that the U.N. has only a "very partial picture of what the reality is."

Pouilly said the situation was most worrying in the reception and identification centers of

Moira on Lesbos, and Vathy on Samos, "where thousands of refugees continue to stay in unsuitable shelter with inadequate security."

These centers are currently holding around 5,500 people -- double their capacity, she added.

(Source: AFP)

Syria: U.S. strike on pro-govt. forces 'war crime'

Syria urges UN to condemn U.S.

'massacre' in Dayr al-Zawr

▶ "We demand that the international community ... condemn this massacre and hold the [U.S.-led] coalition responsible for it," added the ministry in the letters, as cited by Syria's official news agency, SANA.

It also demanded, once again, that "this illegitimate coalition" be dissolved. "This aggression reveals once again, without any doubt, the real function of this alliance and the role played by Washington in supporting the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group, as it did in the past," the ministry further said.

Meanwhile, the Russian Defense Ministry said in a statement that the raid once "again showed that the U.S. is maintaining its illegal presence in Syria not to fight the Daesh group, but to seize and hold Syrian economic assets."

Back in December, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that all foreign forces, including those of the U.S.-led coalition that are present in Syria without any authorization from the Damascus government, had to withdraw from the Arab country after the total defeat of Daesh.

The U.S.-led coalition has been conducting airstrikes against what are said to be Daesh targets inside Syria since September 2014 without any authorization from the Damascus government or a UN mandate. The military alliance has repeatedly been accused of targeting and killing civilians. It has also been largely incapable of fulfilling its declared aim of destroying Daesh.

Damascus has on several occasions called for U.S. troops to leave Syria now that the fight against Daesh is over.

The Syrian government, backed by Russian air cover, has managed to push back the terrorists turf after turf. The Arab country flushed Daesh out of its last stronghold in November.

(Source: agencies)

Egypt begins major military operation in Sinai, Nile Delta

Egypt has begun a sweeping military operation against the militants active in violence-torn North Sinai Province in the extreme northwest and the nearby Nile Delta.

The army announced the launch of 'Operation Sinai 2018' on Friday, putting the police and military forces on "maximum alert," AFP reported. The goal is to tighten control of border districts and "clean up areas where there are terrorist hotbeds," it added.

The campaign involves the air force, navy and army as well as police, he said.

"The armed forces calls upon the Egyptian people in all parts of the country to closely cooperate with law enforcement forces to confront terrorism, uproot it and immediately report any elements threatening the security and stability of the country," the military spokesman, Colonel Tamer al-Rifai, said in a televised address.

Last week, The New York Times reported that President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi had kept northern Sinai a closed military area, barring reporters from the region.

The Associated Press has reported that the Egyptian army was bulldozing homes and olive groves to build "a buffer zone" around North Sinai Province's only airport in the city of el-Arish.

The report said the buffer zone will destroy dozens of hamlets around the airport, forcing thousands of people to leave their homes for an unknown future, sparking some protest by residents despite the government promises of compensation.

Sisi, who is preparing to seek a second term in the upcoming March elections, has vowed that the army will employ "absolute force" in a bid to eliminate terrorism in the Sinai Peninsula.

The Sinai Peninsula has been under a state of emergency since October 2014, after a deadly terrorist attack left 33 Egyptian soldiers dead. Over the past few years, terrorists have been carrying out anti-government activities and fatal attacks, taking advantage of the turmoil in Egypt that erupted after the country's first democratically-elected president, Mohamed Morsi, was ousted in a military coup in July 2013.

The Velayat Sinai group, which is affiliated with the Daesh Takfiri terrorists, has claimed responsibility for most of the assaults.

(Source: agencies)

China says U.S. bill on Taiwan ties threatens stability

A U.S. bill that encourages reciprocal visits by U.S. and Taiwanese government officials threatens stability in the Taiwan Strait and the United States must withdraw it, China's Foreign Ministry said on Friday.

The bill passed the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations this week and will now move to the Senate.

Beijing considers democratic Taiwan to be a wayward province and integral part of "one China", ineligible for state-to-state relations, and has never renounced the use of force to bring the island under its control.

The United States has no formal ties with Taiwan but is bound by law to help it defend itself and is the island's main source of arms. China regularly says Taiwan is the most sensitive issue in its ties with Washington.

Speaking at a daily news briefing in Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said though the clauses in the bill are not legally binding they are a serious violation of the "one China" principle.

"If it is passed and put into effect, it will cause serious disturbances to Sino-U.S. relations and the situation in the Taiwan Strait," Geng said.

"China is extremely dissatisfied and resolutely opposed to this and has already lodged stern representations with the U.S. side," he added.

"The 'One China' principle is the political basis of Sino-U.S. relations."

The United States should stick to its promises made to China about Taiwan, cease discussion of this bill and protect relations between the two countries and stability in the Taiwan Strait, Geng said.

Taiwan has welcomed the bill, which would allow senior U.S. government officials to travel to Taiwan to meet with their Taiwanese counterparts.

The passage of the bill by the committee shows the strong bipartisan support to deepen two-way exchanges and interactions of officials from both sides, Taiwan's foreign ministry said in a statement. "The Foreign Ministry expresses its welcome and its thanks," it said.

(Source: Reuters)

UN warns of rampant sexual violence in Greek refugee camps

Asylum seekers in Greece suffer widespread sexual violence and harassment in the country's sub-standard, overcrowded reception centers, the U.N. said on Friday.

In 2017, the U.N. refugee agency (UNHCR) received reports from 622 survivors of sexual and gender-based violence on the

Greek islands, around one third of whom said they had been assaulted after arriving in Greece.

But UNHCR spokesman Cecile Pouilly said that there is a reluctance to report such violence out of fear, shame and concerns about discrimination, retaliation and stigma.

Sochi winner Podladtchikov out of Pyeongchang with brain injury

Swiss snowboarder Iouri Podladtchikov will not be able to defend his Olympic halfpipe title in Pyeongchang due to a brain injury suffered at the Winter X Games last month.

Podladtchikov won halfpipe gold at Sochi four years ago and, despite suffering a head injury and nasal fracture during the fall in Apsen, he had hoped to compete this time around in Pyeongchang.

The Swiss posted a picture on his Instagram account of himself at Pyeongchang's Phoenix Snow Park on Friday morning but, after training on the slope and further tests to determine the extent of the injury, Podladtchikov decided to pull out.

"When I received this diagnosis, it was clear to me that I had sustained a serious and dangerous injury and that participating in the Olympic Games would pose a great risk to my health," the 29-year-old said in a statement released by the Swiss ski federation.

"After all the tests that I have had on the way to the present day in the last two weeks - including my first practice this Friday - I can say for sure that starting and participating in the Olympic Games is in no way safe and responsible."

Podladtchikov will return to Switzerland on Saturday, the statement added.

(Source: Guardian)

North Korean martial arts display met with silence

A marital arts display by North Korean athletes at the opening ceremony for the 2018 Winter Games was met with silence at the Pyeongchang Olympic Stadium, with the only supportive noises coming from North Korean cheerleaders high in the stands.

The display of the traditional martial art of taekwondo was part of a joint effort with South Korea as the stadium filled up, and the host nation's segment was accompanied by a pop version of a traditional Korean folk song.

The hosts performed a fast-paced routine choreographed to the music, delighting the crowd as they smashed planks of wood in time to the music.

But when the North Korean athletes took over, it became a more austere affair.

Their display also featured much breaking of wood and the smashing of some concrete blocks, but it was accompanied by guttural shouts from the martial artists as the majority of the crowd looked on in silence.

The only support for the North Korean section seemed to come from two groups of red-and-white clad female cheerleaders sitting in orderly rows and waving Korean unity flags, who whooped and cheered loudly during the entire display.

Barefoot in the freezing temperatures, some of the athletes needed several attempts to break their objects, but the arena floor was littered with broken timber by the time the South Koreans joined them for a joint finale.

(Source: Reuters)

‘Trump’ and ‘Un’ thrown out of Opening Ceremony

People dressed up as U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un caused a commotion when they appeared in the stands at the Olympic Games Opening Ceremony on Friday before swiftly being shown out by security staff.

"We're getting along great," said the Un lookalike, who declined to give his name.

"We wanted to surprise everyone and bring world peace and then we're being escorted out by security guards, which I think is really unfair," he added. "Doesn't everyone want peace?"

The ceremony was marked by a show of unity between North and South Korea.

Athletes from both countries entered the arena under a flag depicting a unified Korea as American Vice President Mike Pence and Un's sister, Kim Yo Jong, watched on from a VIP box.

"Is my sister getting the same treatment?," the Un lookalike said as he was escorted out of the stadium.

(Source: Mirror)

Norway Olympic team orders 15,000 eggs, by mistake

The Norwegian Olympic team's breakfast order went sunny side up after it was delivered 15,000 eggs — 10 times the number it ordered.

The team chefs blamed a translation error for the massive delivery.

They thought they were ordering 1,500 eggs from a local distributor in Pyeongchang, which is hosting the 2018 Winter Games, but ended up ordering thousands more after using of Google Translate to render the order into Korean.

"The eggs were more like a misunderstanding than something that we needed. It was an extra zero on the order, so 1,500 to 15,000," Norwegian chef de mission Tore Ovrebø said.

Ovrebø struggled to suggest what the team would do with the eggs. But he did not rule out finding ways for the team to consume them, which means each person in the 121-member delegation would have to eat 124 eggs during the 17-day event.

"They will probably use them, I guess," Ovrebø said. "Maybe the people that supplied us with them will take them back I don't know. It's not a big issue."

However, one of the team chefs later told a Norwegian newspaper Aftenposten they were able to return the excess eggs, ensuring the players and officials did not have to endure a rather limited menu.

The incident took place last week but only now has attracted international attention.

(Source: AP)

Awkward diplomacy on show as ‘peace’ Games get underway



The Winter Olympics sparked to life in a vivid, colorful ceremony of fire and ice in South Korea on Friday, though the diplomacy was tougher to choreograph in the stadium where leaders from nations that are sworn enemies sat close together.

South Korea, which is using the Pyeongchang Games to break the ice with North Korea, seated its presidential couple alongside U.S. Vice President Mike Pence and his wife, with two of the North's most senior officials sitting in the row behind.

President Moon Jae-in, who wants to harness the Olympic spirit to pave the way for talks over the North's nuclear and missile programme, warmly shook hands with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's smiling sister as well as the North's nominal head of state.

The South is still technically at war with the North after the 1950-53 Korean War ended in a truce, and the United States and North Korea have recently swapped nuclear threats. Pence vowed only this week to tighten sanctions on the North.

Underlining Moon's efforts to re-engage with the North, the opening ceremony followed the story line of children wandering through a mythical landscape and discovering a world where people live in peace and harmony.

The Olympics have provided some respite from years of tense relations between Seoul and Pyongyang, though just hours before the ceremony hundreds of anti-North Korean protesters scuffled with riot police outside the stadium, burning North Korean flags and pictures of its leader, Kim Jong Un.

South Korea's frigid February, where temperatures have plummeted to minus 20 degrees Celsius (~4 Fahrenheit) at night, has come as a shock to the system for athletes and

visitors alike in the leadup to these Games, prompting concerns about hypothermia at the opening ceremony.

The weather was a little milder than forecast on Friday, but spectators still huddled near heaters, holding hot packs and slurping down steaming fishcake soup to ward off the chills.

Bundled up in a scarf, mask and knitted hat, with hot packs tucked into her knee blanket, office worker Shin Hye-sook said she and her three colleagues were coping with the cold. "It's okay unless the wind blows," said the 60-year-old. "We're sitting as close as we can and trying not to move a lot to save our energy."

English Premier League rights bonanza kicks off with focus on Amazon



England's multi-billion pound Premier League rights auction kicked off on Friday with soccer fans waiting to see if a digital giant such as Amazon would enter the fray against pay-TV players Sky and BT.

Officials running one of the most lucrative rights auctions in the world were assessing bids on Friday to determine who would screen matches showing Manchester United, City and Liverpool for the three seasons beginning 2019/20.

The result could come later on Friday or, if it goes to a second round, on Tuesday.

Rupert Murdoch's Sky, which built its business around the English Premier League, and BT smashed forecasts in 2015 when they agreed to pay 5.1 billion pounds (\$7.1 billion) for domestic rights over three years, 70 percent higher than the previous deal. That enabled the league to go on a huge shopping spree, with players such as Paul Pogba, Romelu Lukaku (both bought by Manchester United) and Virgil van Dijk (signed by Liverpool) all joining clubs for at least 75 million pounds each.

Analysts do not expect to see such a jump in the cost this time however as both companies near the limit they can pay. One factor that could unnervethat is the speculation that Amazon could bid for rights

to boost its Prime subscription service.

Amazon, the world's biggest retailer, has already bought rights for tennis and America's National Football League to bolster its Amazon Prime membership service which offers free delivery and content for a flat monthly fee. All the groups have declined to comment on their approach to the auction. The Premier League auction will make 200 live games available out of the 380 played each season, divided into seven lots, with five big packages and two smaller ones. The auction will include occasions when a whole round of matches will be shown at the same time, a proposal that may be more attractive for a digital player than one of the pay TV groups.

Analysts believe Sky and BT would be happy to retain a similar line-up of games to the one they have now, with Sky showing Sunday afternoon matches that pit the likes of Arsenal, Chelsea and Tottenham Hotspur against each other, while BT could retain Saturday games.

In 2015 Sky paid 4.2 billion pounds for its three-year package, equivalent to 11.1 million pounds per game, while BT paid 960 million pounds for its games, equivalent to 7.6 million pounds a match.

(Source: Independent)

Long wait finally over

Pyeongchang has waited a long time for this moment.

The alpine town first bid for the 2010 Games but narrowly lost out to Vancouver, and suffered similar heartbreak when it was beaten to the 2014 Olympics by Sochi.

After announcing its arrival on the international stage by hosting the 1988 Seoul Olympics, South Korea now wants to show the world just how far it has come over the last 30 years with a Games showcasing its culture and technological prowess.

According to Olympic tradition, the Greek contingent headed the parade of athletes into the open-air stadium, followed by the

other delegations in order according to the Korean alphabet.

Pence stood to welcome the U.S. athletes as the Korean pop hit Gangnam Style blared around the stadium, sparking the 'Horse Dance' in the crowd and among the volunteers.

The moment failed to elicit even a smile from the two senior North Korean officials in the VIPs box, however, as they sat stony-faced in black fluffy hats and long coats.

Elsewhere in the stadium, a Kim Jong Un impersonator was not made as welcome as the North Koreans in the VIP box and was ejected by security. "Well is my sister getting the same treatment?" he demanded to know.

(Source: Reuters)

Ronaldo fired up as Zidane tries to avoid PSG talk



Cristiano Ronaldo is extra motivated as Real Madrid enter a pivotal week of their season, according to head coach Zinedine Zidane. Five-time Ballon d'Or winner Ronaldo has fallen below his usually prolific goalscoring standards this season, with Madrid's title defence in LaLiga coming in woefully below par at this stage — they lie fourth, 19 points shy of leaders Barcelona.

Madrid host Real Sociedad on Saturday before welcoming Paris Saint-Germain to the Santiago Bernabeu in midweek for the type of mouth-watering Champions League showdown Ronaldo, who turned 33 this week, has long relished.

"He's extra motivated this season. He wants to show what he is capable of," Zidane told reporters at a pre-match news conference where he strained, often in vain, to bring the conversation back to Sociedad and away from PSG. "I'm not concerned, I'm not worried. He is an outstanding footballer

"There have been some times this season when he hasn't been able to get on the scoresheet but he is there when needed

"On the big stage he performs. We've got a game on Saturday. That's the one I'm concerned about and then we will look ahead to Wednesday's game."

Madrid fans voted Wales forward

Gareth Bale their player of the month for January but the other member of their famous attacking trident, Karim Benzema, has fallen on hard times in terms of form and goals.

"I think we all have pressure. We're all in this together," Zidane replied when asked about the French striker, who has a paltry two LaLiga goals to his name this season.

"We all just need to contribute more to the team, and Benzema also.

"We have to do the talking on the pitch."

Zinedine Zidane wants Isco at Real Madrid for "his whole life" and insists claims the player could leave at the end of this season are false.

"I said I've always believed in my team and I will do until the very end. When I start something I get involved, I believe where I'm going, what I should be doing and I back the people I'm working with.

"Isco's one of them. He a very good footballer. He's proven that in the past and will do that again

"I want Isco [in my team] and I want him to spend his whole life here.

"It's a lie that I want Isco to be sold in the summer. Hopefully we won't hear any more of this."

(Staff & Agency)

CAS dismisses 47 appeals from Russian athletes, coaches



suspended the Russian Olympic Committee (ROC).

Welcome news

Among those appealing on Friday were athletes who were not sanctioned for doping in their careers and were not named specifically in the investigations but were still excluded from the Games, with the IOC saying the evidence was there as was suspicion of wrong-doing.

"These decisions come as welcome news for WADA as they will, for athletes and all others worldwide that care for clean sport and the integrity of the Games," said World Anti-Doping Agency chief Craig Reedie.

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Vitaly Mutko said on Friday the CAS ruling was understandable but disappointing.

"It was difficult for CAS to render a decision on the backdrop of past pressure," Mutko was quoted as saying by the Interfax news agency. "Had they been cleared, it would have been a shock. The Olympics have started. We need to support the team. There are promising athletes."

"We support the guys who did not go. There will be competitions for them. And begging for invitations all the time is beyond reasonable," he said.

The IOC had been criticized in 2016 for not banning Russian from the Rio de Janeiro Games following the information provided by three whistleblowers who essentially exposed Russian doping.

On Friday, Jim Walden, the lawyer of whistleblower Grigory Rodchenkov — the former head of the Russian anti-doping lab who has fled the country and lives in hiding in the United States — said IOC President Thomas Bach should resign. "Today's decision by the CAS... is a small semblance of justice for clean athletes. The IOC and CAS have been complicit in enabling Russian doping," Walden said in a statement.

"I am confident that today's decision is mostly a reaction to the outcry from clean athletes against Olympic corruption and complicity. I hope IOC President Thomas Bach is listening. For the sake of the Olympic ideal, he needs to resign."

The Games officially open later on Friday and run to Feb. 25.

(Source: Reuters)

Four Iranian athletes to receive Samsung phones

S P O R T S **d e s k** Organizers for the Winter Olympics said they will hand free Samsung smartphones to four Iranian athletes without the condition of returning them, amid looming anti-Samsung sentiment in Tehran.

“The International Olympic Committee (IOC) decided to allow the provision of the Galaxy Note 8 smartphones to four Iranian athletes without the condition of handing them back,” an official from the PyeongChang Organizing Committee for the 2018 Olympic & Paralympic Games said.

The decision apparently came amid looming anti-Samsung sentiment in Iran after reports that their athletes will not be getting the smartphones reached the Middle East country.

The United Nations’ sanctions ban providing North Korea and Iran with luxury goods or devices that can potentially be used for military purposes.

Samsung Electronics has provided some 4,000 units of the Galaxy Note 8 Olympic Edition to all athletes and International Olympic Committee officials visiting PyeongChang. There are 22 North Korean and four Iranian athletes at the 2018 Winter Games. Tehran’s foreign ministry on Thursday summoned South Korea’s ambassador to Iran, demanding Seoul and Samsung deliver an apology. The South Korean tech giant is a worldwide Olympic partner company.

North Koreans will still not be getting the smartphones. Through a statement provided to Yonhap News Agency on Thursday, the IOC said it has asked North Koreans to return the free handsets after the event.

“Regarding North Korea, all participants are requested not to take the phones back to their home country but to only use them during their stay in PyeongChang, since that is required to allow them to participate in the Games,” the IOC said.

But another official said North Koreans still refused to



receive the smartphones.

“There was a confusion as the IOC and organizers had to review legal issues on giving the Galaxy Note 8 smartphone

to athletes from countries under international sanction,” an official from the organizing committee said, apologizing to Samsung for being accused despite its good intentions.

Olympics committee apologies to Iran over Samsung ‘misunderstanding’

The source of the misunderstanding was not explained.

The committee had initially claimed the phones were denied “because of existing UN sanctions”, even though all UN sanctions on Iran were lifted in 2015 apart from those linked to arms and nuclear technology.

Samsung billboards and flagship stores are seen all over Iran, and the South Korean company has sponsored many large-scale cultural events, including the current exhibition at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art.

Samsung sought to distance itself from the spat, saying in a statement that it was “not responsible for the distribution of the phones” and referring questions to Olympics organizers.

Prior to the apology, Iran’s official IRNA news agency reported that Telecoms Minister Mohammad-Javad

Azari Jahromi was looking into the issue, and was considering whether to block imports of Samsung phones.

IRNA reported Thursday that “an informed source” had said Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif would stop using his Samsung mobile if there was no apology.

Although this was not confirmed, the report appeared to trigger a series of “No to Samsung” protests on Twitter.

“If I were a famous person, in response to Samsung’s big insult, I would have thrown my Samsung mobile away on camera, and would have asked other famous people to join me,” wrote one Twitter user.

Others had a more light-hearted response, with one saying he had slammed the door of his Samsung fridge particularly hard after hearing the news.

(Source: Daily Mail)



Iran to face Japan at AFC Futsal Championship final



Iran will look to defend their AFC Futsal Championship title as they go on to meet Japan in the final, after beating Uzbekistan 7-1 on Friday.

Iran piled on the pressure from the beginning, keeping Uzbekistan in their half, and it paid off early with Mahdi Javid finding the back of the net with his strike to the bottom left corner in the third minute.

A minute later, Uzbekistan crossed to the attacking third without their full force and were punished when Ahmad Esmailpour regained possession and surged down the flank before passing it off to skipper Ali Asghar Hassanzadeh for a fine finish to double their lead.

The 11-time champions showed their prowess once again with their quick ability to move down the pitch, and in the 11th minute, Hassanzadeh turned provider as his blind pass into the box found Hossein Tayebi for a close range strike.

Hassanzadeh and Javid formed Iran’s

dynamic duo, as the captain earned two more assists to his name in the 16th minute with Javid completing his hat-trick with back-to-back goals in similar fashion.

In the second half, Uzbekistan returned with aggression and were more synergized in their movements and passes, which limited Iran’s opportunities on target.

Mohammad Nazemasharieh’s side showed that they were formidable in set-pieces as well, and Hassanzadeh earned his second with a simple tap in to make it 6-0 in the 31st minute, before Tayebi also scored his second of the match four minutes later.

Anashkhon Rakhmatov scored a consolation goal in the last 20 seconds of the game, courtesy of Farkod Adbdumavlyanov’s pass, but it was too little too late as Iran sealed a 13th final appearance.

Iran will meet Japan in the final on Sunday, while Uzbekistan will play Iraq in the third place play-off.

(Source: AFC)

FIFA reveals training bases for each team in Russia



S P O R T S **d e s k** World Cup organizers FIFA have revealed details of where each nation will be based for the tournament in Russia this summer.

World football’s governing body have laid down a specific set of rules and regulations regarding team base camps for the Finals.

The camps will become the 32 teams’ main headquarters during the tournament in June and July and all of them will include a hotel and training site located a short distance from each other.

The camps also have to be an hour’s drive from an airport capable of landing a medium-sized plane.

During the group stages, all teams will train between matches at their respective bases and travel to the host city for their games.

Teams will be expected to stay in allocated hotels and train at those facilities before and after group matches.

Those that progress to the knockout

stages will have the choice between still using their original training bases or relocating to the city that will host their next game.

All teams are also expected to arrive in Russia at least five days before their opening match.

Iran have been drawn in Group B and will use the facilities of the ‘Lokomotiv Bakovka Training Center’ in Moscow.

Carlos Queiroz’s men will train and accommodate at the same training center.

Team Melli’s opening group game will be against Morocco in Saint Petersburg on June 15.

Iran, meanwhile, face Spain in Kazan on 20 June before meeting Cristiano Ronaldo’s Portugal in Saransk five days later.

World Cup holders Germany will be based at the Moscow Country Club and will train at Guchkovo sports complex on the outskirts of the Russian capital.

Brazil will be based at the Swissotel in Sochi, while Spain will be based at the Krasnodar Academy in Krasnodar.

Blanc: France 1998 in three words? Work, joy and victory

France would like nothing better than to see Kylian Mbappe, one of world football’s brightest young stars, inspire Les Bleus to a second world title at the 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia™. The Paris Saint-Germain striker was not even born when the first was won, on home soil on 12 July 1998, a day on which Laurent Blanc hoisted the Trophy aloft.

Yet like all French football fans, the young Mbappe is very familiar with the story of how that legendary triumph took shape, not least the part that the man they call Le Président played in it. The scorer of a golden goal in the Round-of-16 tie against Paraguay, Blanc went on to pick up a red card in the semi-final against Croatia, causing him to miss out on the Final.

In the two decades since then, the former central defender has forged a successful coaching career, and recently took part in the Final Draw for Russia 2018, an occasion on which he was able to get close once more to a Trophy that has brought him so much joy and so many happy memories. To mark the 20th anniversary of French football’s finest hour, Blanc looked

back on France 1998 in an exclusive interview with FIFA.com.

■ Twenty years on from France 1998, give us three words that sum up the whole experience?

Laurent Blanc: ‘Work’, a lot of work, especially ahead of the World Cup. Our success also came down to near-perfect preparation. The coaches put us through a tough preparation schedule but it got us in great physical shape; you only have to look at that last match against Brazil, where we were physically stronger. The longer the tournament went on, the fitter the team got. Then there’s ‘joy’, because we experienced a lot of things together and over a long period of time, which is not easy. Bonds are formed and you come together as a group. And there’s ‘victory’ too. Victory is the ultimate. It’s the most important thing in sport. You can put a lot of effort in but there’s only ever one team that comes out on top in the end. And we had the joy of being that team. Winning a World Cup is a wonderful thing, and winning for your country is even more special. It brings more joy, more

excitement, more everything.

■ You were the hero of the last-16 tie against Paraguay, scoring the all-important golden goal. What special memories do you have of that match?

I remember it being very tough before I scored. The opposition posed us more problems in that match than in any other. It was probably the only game in the competition that we didn’t control. The relief we felt at getting the goal was only matched by the struggle we’d had during it. ■ What were you doing that far forward at that stage of the game?

I had no business being there, but there comes a time when you have to try and take responsibilities. And if it comes off it’s great. If we’d conceded, though, then I think I would have got blamed for it. But we wanted to win the match because it was the gateway to the quarter-finals. I think the country knew that France, having taken so much criticism before the competition, could go on and win the World Cup.

(Source: FIFA)

Iran Coach Expects Title in AFC Futsal Championship

Tasnim — Iran futsal coach Mohammad Nazemasharieh says they have to meet expectation in the 2018 AFC Futsal Championship with winning the title.

Iran sealed a 13th final appearance in the AFC Futsal Championship with a 7-1 win over Uzbekistan at the Xinzhuang Gymnasium, New Taipei City on Friday.

“Our main target was the final, and just after this game, our work has now begun. Because that it what everyone in Asia is expecting us to reach the final,” Nazemasharieh told the-af.

“We are third in the world, and we have to live up to that expectation,” he added.

FIFA increase initial World Cup squad size number to 35

The number of players that coaches can select in their initial squad selection for the FIFA World Cup has increased from 30 to 35, the world governing body has announced.

The Organizing Committee for FIFA Competitions, chaired by UEFA President Aleksander Ceferin, made the announcement after a meeting at FIFA’s headquarters in Zurich.

The increase in initial squad size is a result of feedback from coaches who attended a team seminar at the Russia 2018 World Cup draw in December.

This amendment, however, is still subject to approval by the FIFA Council who will meet in Bogota, Colombia, on March 16.

The deadline for participating World Cup nations to submit their 35-man release lists remains May 14 with the final 23-man list due on June 4 before the tournament kicks off 10 days later.

FIFA also said in a statement that “a great deal of work is going on behind the scenes to ensure that everything runs smoothly for all 32 participating teams [at Russia 2018], including the final selection of the team base camps and matchday operations in the 11 host cities”.

FIFA have also announced updates on two women’s World Cup tournaments. The schedule for the 2019 FIFA Women’s World Cup in France, which will take place from June 7 to July 7 in nine host cities, has been announced with matches finalized at the draw in December 8. The match schedule has also been announced for the 2018 Under-17 Women’s World Cup in Uruguay, which will take place from November 13 to December 1 in the cities of Colonia, Maldonado and Montevideo.

(Source: Inside the games)

Esteghlal Downs Sepidrood of Rasht: IPL

Tasnim — Esteghlal football team defeated Sepidrood of Rasht 3-0 in Iran Professional League (IPL) on Thursday.

Farshid Esmaili opened the scoring for Esteghlal in the 14th minute and Omid Ebrahimi doubled the Blues’ extend in the 64th minute. Jaber Ansari scored the third goal in the 77th minute.

Also, Saipa defeated Zob Ahan 4-2 and moved up to IPL third place. Stanley Kiros scored for the visiting team Zob Ahan just 10 minutes into the match but Mehdi Torabi equalized the match from the penalty spot.

Mohammad Daneshgar made it 2-1 for Saipa in the 39th minute and Ali Gholizadeh was on target in 73rd minute.

Reza Jafari scored Saipa’s fourth goal in the 84th minute. Ghasem Haddadifar scored a consolation goal for Zob Ahan in the injury time. Zob Ahan remains at the second place with 38 points and Saipa is third due to difference goal.

Persepolis leads the table with 54 points.

Messi Becomes the Face of Alfa-Bank

The FC Barcelona superstar has signed a one-year deal to become the face of Russia’s largest private bank and on? of the official 2018 World Cup sponsors.

A spokeswoman for the bank confirmed the one-year contract with one of the greatest players in history, but declined to disclose any particulars of the deal.

A video of the Argentinian striker signing autographs dressed in Alfa-Bank’s colors has already been circulating on Instagram for several days.

Last year, Messi, 30, made a cool \$80 mln with 27 mln coming from endorsement deals, finishing third on the Forbes’ list of highest-paid athletes.

(Source: Sputnik)

Iran wins Takhti Cup

IRNA — Iranian wrestling team ranked first at the 38th Takhti Cup, International Freestyle Wrestling Tournament held in Tabriz, northwestern Iran.

Iranian squad with 4 gold medals stood on the first place. Turkey and Georgia ranked second and third respectively.

The tournament hosted wrestlers from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia, Hungary, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Romania, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Turkey, Ukraine, and Iran.

A total of 160 wrestlers in 10 weight classes competed in the tournament held on February 8-9.

Gholam-Reza Takhti was born in 1930 and was called “Jahan Pahlavan,” which means “World Champion” due to his huge success in wrestling and his chivalrous behavior and sportsmanship during competitions.

Takhti won his first Iranian championship in 1950, and later became the highest ranked wrestler in the history of the Iranian wrestling, winning one gold (1956 Melbourne) and two silver medals in Helsinki (1952) and Rome (1960) Olympic Games, as well as two gold medals in Tehran (1959) and Yokohama (1961) and two silver medals in Helsinki (1951) and Toledo (1962) World Championships. He is in the United World Wrestling (formerly known as FILA) Hall of Fame.

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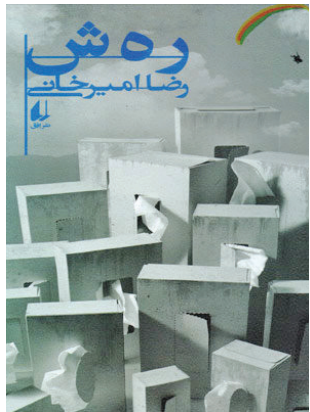
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Reza Amirkhani's new novel on urban life published

A R T TEHRAN — “Re He Sheen”, a new novel by Reza Amirkhani centering on urban life in a metropolis like Tehran, was unveiled during a ceremony at the Ofoq bookstore in Tehran on Thursday.



Front cover of the book “Re He Sheen” by Reza Amirkhani.

“Re He Sheen” is about the consequences of urban development for a young couple that live in Tehran.

Re he sheen are the Persian characters making the word “shahr” (city) in Persian, which have been arranged in reverse order.

The ceremony was warmly received by book readers and fans, who stood in a long line to get into the bookstore to buy copies of the book autographed by the author.

“Those who are here might think this book is the outcome of efforts by the writer, but I must say that many have tried to publish the book and I want to express my thanks to the publisher,” Amirkhani said in his short speech at the ceremony.

“The Good Smell of Oil”, “Ego” and “Ermia” are among Amirkhani’s noteworthy credits.

WHAT’S IN ART GALLERIES

Painting

■ Katia Darab is showcasing her latest paintings in an exhibition at Haft-Samar Gallery.

The exhibit, which opened on Friday, runs until February 14 at the gallery located at No. 8, Fifth Alley, Kuh-e Nur St., Motehari Ave.

■ Asar Gallery is hanging paintings by Alireza Masumi in an exhibition named “From Behind the Automobile Windows”.

The exhibit will run until February 23 at the gallery located at No. 16 Barforushan St., Iranshahr St.

Sculpture

■ Saless Gallery is playing host an exhibition of sculptures by Alireza Rashidi.

The exhibit named “Live” runs until February 14 at the gallery located at 148 Karim Khan Ave.

Photo

■ Nader Davudi is hanging a collection of his photos at E1 gallery.

The exhibit will continue until February 16 at the gallery located at 1 Hamid Dead End, off Lesani Alley, Jebbeh St., off Mahdiah St. in the Elahieh neighborhood.

Multimedia

■ An exhibition of calligraphic paintings and ceramic works by Behruz Zindashti is underway at Seyhun Gallery on Friday.

Entitled “Gold Line”, the exhibit will run until February 28 at the gallery located at No. 11, 4th St., Vozara.

Installation

■ Sets of installations by Ali Etebar are on display in an exhibition at the Vista Plus Gallery.

The showcase will be underway until February 19 at the gallery located at No. 11, 12th Alley, Miremad St.

It’s alive! Tom Hardy waxwork with beating heart unveiled in London

LONDON (Reuters) — Madame Tussauds waxwork museum is offering fans of actor Tom Hardy a new and unusual chance to get close to their idol - launching a waxwork figure of the actor with a beating heart, that visitors can pose with and even cuddle.

The figure depicts Hardy seated on a couch, his arm resting on the back, to allow visitors to get close enough to feel or listen to its heartbeat. The museum said in a statement that it features a beating heart and a “soft, warm torso.”

The museum, which has branches around the world, allows visitors to touch the waxwork replicas of celebrities, occasionally leading to excessive familiarity.

The New York branch of the attraction had to retire its figure of Canadian singer Justin Bieber in 2014 due to it being excessively touched by fans, local media reported.

One film alone cannot tell the vast story of “The Lost Strait”: director

1 → Starring Javad Ezzati, Amir Jadidi and Hamidreza Azarang, the film shows how Iran’s Ammar battalion fought against the Iraqi soldiers in an unequal battle to hold the Abu Ghuraib Strait.

The story is set in the last days of the war just before Iran accepted UN Resolution 598, which ended hostilities on July 20, 1988.

“The screenplay was written based on intensive fieldwork and interviews. The film only covers one and a half days of the battle,” Tavakkoli said.

Producer Saeid Malekan said that “The Lost Strait” is the outcome of “a top team” and added, “There was a general consensus in the team that today, our society needs such a film.”

“This strait is the symbol of many things such as national unity, which we should try to protect,” he stated.

He said that Iranian younger generation is the target audience of the film.

Actor Mehdi Pakdel said, “At a public screening of the film, a young woman told me that, after watching the film, she has accepted the war as part of her national identity.”

He added, “My colleagues and I engaged in a real war in ‘The Lost Strait’ not mere acting.”

The film produced at the Owj Arts and Media Organization, a Tehran-based institution producing revolutionary works in art and cinema, has won



Producer Saeid Malekan (L) and director Bahram Tavakkoli attend a press conference for their film “The Lost Strait” during the 36th Fajr Film Festival at Tehran Mellat Cineplex on February 7, 2018. (FFF/Moein Baqeri)

received great acclaim from cineastes and critics attending the festival.

Tavakkoli called Malekan “an artist producer” and added, “Engagement of

an artist producer causes the quality of a film to be raised to such an extent.”

Fajr festival of visual arts showcases international entries

A R T TEHRAN — The international section of the 10th Fajr International Festival of Visual Arts opened at the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Cultural Institute (ECI) on Wednesday.

About 70 works by 39 artists from 15 countries including Afghanistan, Switzerland, Greece, Italy and Germany are on view at the event that will run until March 16, the organizers announced.

Most of the works being shown were created by artists from Afghanistan. Winners will be granted a short-stay residency at the Cite Internationale des Arts in Paris.

The Cite Internationale des Arts is a foundation recognized as a public utility whose mission is to host foreign and French professional artists in residence.



Art enthusiasts visit the international section of the 10th Fajr International Festival of Visual Arts at the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Cultural Institute (ECI) in Tehran on February 7, 2018. (Honaronline/Mojtaba Arabzadeh)

Zarif impressed with “At Damascus Time”

A R T TEHRAN — Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif has called Ebrahim Hatamikia’s Daesh drama “At Damascus Time” peerless.

In a post published on his Instagram on Thursday, Zarif said, “On Thursday, I along with my wife and a number of my assistants were the guests of Mr. Ebrahim Hatamikia and his friends at the Owj Arts and Media Organization and watched the new masterwork by the outstanding filmmaker of our country.”

“It was really unmatched,” he exclaimed.

“At Damascus Time” recounts the story of an Iranian

pilot and his copilot son who are seized by Daesh forces in Syria when they are in the country to deliver a cargo of humanitarian relief supplies to people in a war-torn region.

The movie is competing at the 36th Fajr Film Festival, which is currently underway in Tehran.

The organizers also published a video depicting Zarif as very emotional while he is talking about the movie.

“The film is about the valor of the heroes who fought for all of us,” he said and added, “This film is a perfect image of men and women who strived to remove this disaster [Daesh] that struck the region.”



Director Ebrahim Hatamikia (L), Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif and his wife pose after watching “At Damascus Time” at the Owj Arts and Media Organization in Tehran on February 8, 2018.

Robin Williams’ death linked to rise in copycat suicides

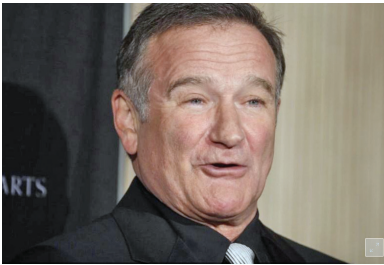
LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Suicide rates in the United States spiked almost 10 percent following the death in 2014 of actor Robin Williams, and spiked even more among men and those who ended their lives, like Williams, by suffocation, according to a study published on Wednesday.

The study, published in the scientific journal PLOS One, found that in the five months from August to December 2014 some 18,690 deaths by suicide were recorded - an increase of 9.85 percent from the expected number of cases for the period.

Williams, the Oscar-winning star of “Good Morning, Vietnam” who was beloved for his humor, died in August 2014 at age 63 in a suicide that shocked fans worldwide. Authorities said he died of asphyxia after hanging himself at his home in northern California. An autopsy found that Williams was suffering from Lewy body dementia, which causes a progressive decline in mental ability.

Suicides following Williams’ death arose by 12.9 percent in men aged 30-44, and the study found a 32 percent increase in the number of deaths from suffocation.

Although the study could not prove a definitive link, it said there appeared to be a connection. Extensive media coverage of Williams’ death “might have proved the necessary stimulus for high-risk segments of the U.S. population



Actor Robin Williams poses as he arrives at the British Academy of Film and Television Arts Los Angeles Britannia Awards in Beverly Hills, California November 30, 2011. (Reuters/Fred Prouser)

(e.g. middle-aged men in despair) to move from suicidal ideation to attempt.”

While the effects of widely reported celebrity suicides have previously been linked to increases in the wider population, the study said media coverage of Williams’ suicide was particularly detailed and sensational and was amplified through social media.

The suicide in 1994 of Nirvana lead singer Kurt Cobain, for example, appeared to have a minimal impact on suicide rates in his Seattle home town, partly because of more restricted reporting, the study said.

“The media industry can positively or negatively influence imitation suicides,” the study said. “Popular news media headlines suggest that media guidelines for suicide reporting were not followed in the case of Mr. Williams.”

Los Angeles prosecutors review three assault accusations against Weinstein

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Los Angeles prosecutors are reviewing three accusations of sexual assault against Harvey Weinstein, a step toward possible criminal charges for the movie producer, a spokesman for the county District Attorney’s office said on Thursday.

Los Angeles is one of three cities, along with New York and London, where police are investigating claims against the co-founder of the studio Miramax, who was one of the most influential men in Hollywood before more than 70 women accused him of sexual misconduct, including rape.

Weinstein, 65, has denied non-consensual sex with anyone and Reuters has not been able to independently confirm the allegations.

“Three cases were presented to our office on Feb. 1 by the Los Angeles Police Department regarding Mr. Weinstein and are under review,” Greg Risling, a spokesman for the Los Angeles District Attorney’s Office, said in a statement.

A spokeswoman for Weinstein did not immediately respond to requests for comment and an attorney for the producer could not immediately be reached for comment.

Representatives for the Los Angeles Police Department declined immediate comment on the three cases cited by the District Attorney’s Office.

Since last October hundreds of women have accused powerful men in business, politics and entertainment of sex abuse, joining the #MeToo social media movement that has shone a light on misconduct across



Harvey Weinstein speaks at the UBS 40th Annual Global Media and Communications Conference in New York, NY, U.S. on December 5, 2012. (Reuters/Carlo Allegri)

the United States.

Los Angeles police in October said they were investigating a 2013 allegation of sexual assault against Harvey Weinstein.

The following month, Los Angeles District Attorney Jackie Lacey said she had assigned some veteran sex crime prosecutors to a task force to look into allegations of sexual assault in Hollywood.

The cases involving Weinstein have been forwarded to that task force, Risling said in an email.

The New York Times in October reported on allegations of sexual misconduct by Weinstein, before the Los Angeles Police Department revealed its investigation. That led the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the group behind the Oscar awards, to expel Weinstein.

Weinstein’s studio, Miramax, was behind such projects as the 1994 film “Pulp Fiction” and the “Project Runway” television series.