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© president.ir

Hezbollah chief: Trump after Syrian oil and gas riches

‘Assad ordered downing of Israeli F-16 fighter’

Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah in a speech on Friday said that the United States is seeking to plunder the Syrian oil and gas in East Euphrates.

He said the Trump administration is not ashamed to clearly announce that it is seeking to robe oil and gas riches in the Middle East region.

The major oil and gas wells in Syria are

located in East Euphrates, he explained.

The Hezbollah chief also said Israel is currently seeking to misuse the war in Syria as an opportunity to win Donald Trump's recognition for the capture of the Syrian Golan Heights.

Nasrallah also said the Trump administration looks at Iraq as an oil field and this has been understood by the Iraqi people. **→13**

EU ready to negotiate Iran's joining SGC initiative

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — European Commission Vice-President for Energy Union Maros Sefcovic said EU is ready to discuss Iran's joining to the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) with all partners of the project, IRNA reported on Thursday.

Sefcovic made the remarks in a press conference at the 4th Ministerial Meeting of the Southern Gas Corridor Advisory Council in Baku.

The official further noted that in order for Iranian gas to be delivered to Europe, necessary infrastructures should be provided in the country. **→4**

Iran to Macron: No one allowed to weaken Tehran's deterrent capability

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — In response to the French president's remarks against Tehran's missile program, the Foreign Ministry issued a statement on Thursday saying the “peace-seeking” Iran will not let any attempt to weaken its “deterrent” defense capabilities.

On Tuesday, French President Ema-

nuel Macron said that the international community needs “to put Iran under surveillance over its ballistic missiles”.

According to Sputnik, Macron also said, “And [We need] to put Iran under surveillance over its ballistic missiles. It's necessary for the regional security and so we need a mechanism of sanctions and control adapted to that.” **→2**

EDITORIAL
By Mohammad Ghaderi
Tehran Times editor-in-chief
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‘Guns don’t kill people, people kill people’: time to retire

Again, another mass shooting, again a school, again a troubled teen, a racist, a white supremacist, a Bloods or Crips gangster, a refugee, a war veteran, a mad policeman, a terrorist from al-Qaeda, al-Nusra Front or from the ISIL (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/Daesh) terrorist outfits ... what difference does it make and again dead bodies lying on the ground in their blood. Who believes they were alive seconds ago. The story goes on and to my surprise it is having less effect than it used to have years ago. Why?

We are getting bad. We are not hurt anymore. Too much violence has made us numb.

What does the motto on the entrance of the United Nations building says? A poem by the Iranian influential poet Sa'adi, from the 13th century, the medieval period. The poem has many translations however one is this:

The sons of Adam are limbs of each other,

Having been created of one essence.
When the calamity of time affects one limb

The other limbs cannot remain at rest.
If you have no sympathy for the troubles of others,

You are unworthy to be called by the name of a Human.

Give it a thought, try to put it in practice, politician and statesmen in the United Nations, New York, United States. It is ludicrous that almost all of them call for end of wars, urge foe peace and tranquil but at the same time produce and sell arms.

War, violence and killing is simply unacceptable, nasty and painful in any kind and form, whether it occurs in a house, street, city, countries like Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Palestine or the United States of America.

■ U.S. teen confesses to mass shooting at Florida Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School

A troubled teen with alleged ties to a white supremacist group confessed on Thursday to murdering 17 people at his former high school in Florida, as the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) admitted it had received a tip-off about the 19-year-old gunman yet failed to stop him. **→13**

Bahrainis resolute in anti-regime protests: cleric

The Bahraini nation will press on with the protests against the Manama regime, a member of the presiding board of Bahrain's Ulema (scholars) Council underlined, saying the harsh crackdown on dissent and the recent death sentences show the depth of the crisis the regime is facing.

Speaking to Tasnim, Sheikh Mohammad Hassan Khojasteh underlined the Bahraini nation's determination to continue holding anti-regime protests, regardless of international silence on the widespread violation of human rights in the country or foreign support for the ruling Al Khalifa regime.

Denouncing a rise in the number of arrests and death sentences handed down to dissidents in the Persian Gulf country, the



cleric stressed that people will maintain the uprising against the regime with the motto “our will is stronger.”

The harsh crackdown on protestors and the

death penalties reveal that the ruling regime's situation is like that of a drowning person grabbing at anything to survive, Khojasteh added.

Bahrain, a close ally of the US in the Persian Gulf region, has been witnessing almost daily protests against the ruling Al Khalifa dynasty since early 2011, with Manama using heavy-handed measures in an attempt to crush the demonstrations.

Scores of Bahrainis have been killed and hundreds of others injured and arrested in the ongoing crackdown on the peaceful demonstrations.

Amnesty International and many other international rights organizations have frequently censured the Bahraini regime for the rampant human rights abuses against opposition groups and anti-regime protesters.

(Source: Tasnim)

Admiral warns U.S. must prepare for possibility of war with China

The navy admiral nominated to be the next United States ambassador to Australia has told Congress America must prepare for the possibility of war with China, and said it would rely on Australia to help uphold the international rules-based system in the Asia-Pacific.

In an excoriating assessment of China's increasingly muscular posture in the region, Harry Harris said Beijing's “intent is crystal clear” to dominate the South China Sea and that its military might could soon rival American power “across almost every domain”.

Harris, soon to retire as the head of the U.S. Pacific Command in Hawaii, told the House armed services committee, the U.S. and its allies should be wary of Beijing's military expansionism in the

region, and condemned China's foreign influence operations, predatory economic behavior and coercion of regional neighbors.

Harris also warned of a “cult of personality” developing around Chinese president Xi Jinping.

Harris, the Yokosuka-born son of an American naval officer and a Japanese mother, has been nominated by President Donald Trump as the next ambassador to Australia. His appointment must be confirmed by the Senate.

Australia has been without a US ambassador since John Berry departed in September 2016.

Harris said he was alarmed by China's construction of military bases on seven disputed islands in the South China Sea that neighboring

countries lay territorial claims to.

In 2016, the permanent court of arbitration in The Hague, sided with the Philippines in the dispute it brought, saying there was no legal basis for China's claim of historic sovereignty over waters within the so-called nine-dash line in the sea.

Regardless, Chinese military build-up continues in the sea.

China is Australia's largest trading partner, but the U.S. is its primary defense and security ally, and Australia has been a vocal defender of the U.S. alliance network over issues such as the nuclear weapons ban treaty, which the U.S. opposes.

(Source: The Guardian)

ARTICLE
By Hanif Ghaffari
Political analyst

The crime that Trump partnered with!

The shooting in the state of Florida, killing and wounding dozens of people in the incident, once again showed that the United States is facing a security crisis. In other words, we are witnessing the institutionalization of violence in the American society. American politicians such as Donald Trump not only do it, but also exacerbate it.

As CNN reported, Donald Trump responded to the latest American school shooting on Thursday by speaking directly to children across the country, urging them to seek help if they feel “lost, alone, confused or even scared.”

Trump stressed the need to address mental health issues in America in his first public response to the shooting that killed 17 people at a Florida high school but steered clear of any discussion of gun laws in the U.S. “I want to speak now directly to America's children, especially those who feel lost alone confused or even scared. I want you to know that you are never alone, and you never will be,” Trump said in televised remarks from the White House Diplomatic Reception Room.

“You have people who care about you, who love you and who will do anything at all to protect you. If you need help, turn to a teacher, a family member, a local police officer or a faith leader. Answer hate with love. Answer cruelty with kindness,” he said.

Trump said he will discuss policies to make schools safer in a meeting with U.S. governors and attorneys general later this month, but said “it's not enough to take actions that make us feel like we are making a difference -- we must make that difference.”

Trump said he is “making plans” to visit Parkland, Florida, where the shooting took place.

Addressing a nation “in grief,” Trump said the entire nation “with one heavy heart is praying for the victims and their families” and promised that his administration is working closely with state and local leaders investigating the attack.

“To every parent, teacher and child who is hurting so badly, we are here for you, whatever you need, whatever we can do, to ease your pain. **→7**



© Tehran Times / Shahab Ghayoumi

Iran marks Imad Mughniyah's martyrdom

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — A commemoration ceremony was held in Tehran on Friday for Imad Mughniyah, a senior Hezbollah commander who was martyred by Israeli spy service Mossad in Damascus on Feb. 12 2008.

The ceremony was attended by the Quds Force Commander Major General Qassem Soleimani and Ali Akbar Velayati, a top advisor to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution.

Speaking at the ceremony, General Soleimani said Mughniyah's assassination shocked the world and caused a great dismay for the Muslim world. **→2**

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Cleric urges unity among political factions

POLITICS **TEHRAN** – Mohammad-Hassan Aboutorabi Fard, the new Tehran Friday prayer leader, has highlighted the importance of national unity, saying all people with different political tendencies should seek the ideals of the Islamic Revolution and the Leader.

Addressing worshippers, Aboutorabi Fard said one of the qualities of the Islamic community is unity, and unity is one of the achievements of the Islamic Revolution, IRNA reported.

He said the country has never experienced unity to the extent it is experiencing today. He also called for unity among the Iranian nation to counter the enemies’ threats.



India-Iran parliamentary group lauds Rouhani India tour

POLITICS **TEHRAN** – President Hassan Rouhani’s visit to India is in line with developing relations and it will bring about mutual benefits, members of Iran-India parliamentary friendship group have said.

Nazar Afzali, head of the parliamentary group, said on Friday that Rouhani’s trip to India will help increase political, cultural and economic ties, IRNA reported.

Since both countries have been the victim of terrorism, they have adopted common stance in fighting terrorism, Afzali added.



Govt. studying legal grounds for holding rallies

POLITICS **TEHRAN** – Interior Ministry spokesman Salman Samani has said that legal grounds and procedures for holding protest rallies have been discussed during a meeting of top Interior Ministry officials and the president office for legal affairs.

Samani said during the meeting, a report was issued on steps that should be taken to protect the nation’s rights in holding rallies, ISNA reported on Friday.

He also pointed out that there are still legal issues in this regard that need to be overcome, emphasizing that the Interior Ministry is serious in supporting the rights of people to hold civil activities.



Iranian diplomat says extremism is result of dogmatism

POLITICS **TEHRAN** – Alireza Esmaili, the Iranian cultural attaché in Spain, says extremism is the outcome of dogmatism and this is far from rationality and Islamic Sharia, IRNA reported.

Speaking at a conference on resistance and terrorism in Madrid on Friday, Esmaili said, “Iran is the victim of terrorism” and elaborated on the actions taken by the Islamic Republic in fighting extremism.

Pablo Sapag, the professor of Complutense University of Madrid, also spoke at the event, criticizing the U.S. for its role in creating crises in the Middle East.



Funeral procession held for 3 tanker crew

POLITICS **TEHRAN** – A funeral procession was held in Tehran on Friday for three crew whose bodies were recovered after their tanker went up in flames in China’s East Sea last month.

The funeral procession of the three sailors -Majid Naqian, Mohammad Kavosi and Milad Aravi - was scheduled after Friday prayers at Imam Khomeini Mosalla.

Later the bodies were buried in Tehran, Karaj and Shahin Shahr, Isfahan province, upon their families’ will, IRNA reported.

They were the only three bodies out of 32 crew members recovered from the sunken Sanchi tanker that arrived in the Imam Khomeini Airport early on Wednesday.



Iranian Navy’s flotilla docks at Sri Lanka port

POLITICS **TEHRAN** – The Iranian Navy’s 50th flotilla of warships berthed at Sri Lanka’s port of Colombo on Friday morning, the Navy’s public relations office said, Tasnim reported.

The operational-training naval fleet, comprising Shahid Naghdi and Bayandor destroyers and Tonb logistic-combat warship, has travelled to Sri Lanka to convey the message of peace and friendship between the two countries.

During their stay in Colombo, the commanders of the flotilla are planned to meet with senior Sri Lankan military officials. There will also be visits to a number of military centers as well as cultural and historical si

Rouhani says bears message of friendship to Indians

POLITICS **TEHRAN** – Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said on Thursday that he bears the message of friendship and brotherhood to the people of India.

Rouhani started his three-day tour of India on Thursday by first arriving in the southern city of Hyderabad.

“Iran seeks closer and friendlier relations with India in various areas,” he said during a meeting with religious scholars and leaders of the Islamic community of Hyderabad.

The president added his presence among the people in Hyderabad shows the “historical and cultural” links between India and Iran goes far beyond economic and political ties.

The two great Iranian and Indian nations who have a “common history and culture” have been on the side of each other for centuries, Rouhani pointed out.

He also pointed to efforts to cause division among Muslims, saying, “The Muslims are brothers and Islam is the religion for happiness of all human beings.”

The president also noted that Iran is following a “view to the East” policy.

Rouhani, who is visiting India upon an invitation by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is accompanied by Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, Vice President for Economic Affairs Mohammad Nahavandian,



“If the Muslims were united, the U.S. President [Donald Trump] could not dare to announce al-Quds as capital of the occupant Zionist regime. If we were united, this regime did not dare to violate the Palestinian nation’s rights,” Rouhani remarked.

Iran to Macron: No one allowed to weaken Tehran’s deterrent capability

1 → The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said, “The French president’s remarks are based on a kind of prejudice and unrealistic view on regional developments. Such approach is not of any help to the situation.”

Iran has “logical” and “realistic” view and expects the European countries to take steps on the path of “convergence” and “independence” and also take more “precise steps” in line with the international peace and security through adopting “realistic” approaches towards international developments, Qassemi remarked.

He noted that Iran’s missile capabilities are within the framework of the country’s military

doctrine which is based on “deterrent and defensive policies”.

Qassemi added, “The real danger is the U.S. and some European countries’ rivalry in selling sophisticated and advanced weapons to certain

countries in the region which is a provocative and destabilizing action.”

Qassemi said, “Those who are concerned about Iran’s defense and deterrent capabilities must review the history of the eight-year

“Those who are concerned about Iran’s defense and deterrent capabilities must review the history of the eight-year imposed war on Iran and their illogical actions against the great Iranian people,” the Foreign Ministry says.

Iran marks Imad Mughniyah’s martyrdom

1 → The commander said Mughniyah succeeded to improve the status of Lebanon who was constantly humiliated by Israel.

“One of the notable things Imad had done was to raise a society which was constantly beaten up by the enemy into to an elevated place,” Mehr quoted Soleimani as saying.

He added many resistance fighters in other countries were inspired by the ideologies of Imad Mughniyah.

“Imad was the first to discover an enemy’s drone and receive its images online during the Ansarieh operation,” the Quds Force chief said in reference to Hezbollah’s successful operation against the Israeli aggression in south Lebanon in 1997.

Calling Israel a “child killer regime”, Soleimani said today the Zionist regime feels insecure, naming Gaza and Lebanon as two anxiety-inducing points for Israel.



The general added, “The person who linked Palestinian groups to the center of resistance and for the first time brought Yasser Arafat to Iran was Imad Mughniyah.”

The general also said, “One can see the fingerprint of Imad Mughniyah on every missile that is launched from Palestine into Israel.”

Velayati also spoke at the event, expressing the hope that the Zionist regime would soon be annihilated.

He pointed to the historic relations between Iran and Sunni Muslims, saying historically Iran was formed during the Safavid dynasty through the help it received from the Lebanese people and prominent figures.

The veteran politician also said if it was not for the help of the resistance front, Daesh (ISIL) would have taken Baghdad, Beirut and other major cities.

EU envoy to Russia hails JCPOA as best possible deal

The European Union’s envoy to Moscow has described the 2015 Iran nuclear accord as the best possible agreement, saying the EU’s stance on the deal is closer to the positions of Russia and China than that of the U.S.

In an interview with Russia’s Kommersant daily on Thursday, Markus Ederer said that there were no reasons to cast doubt on Iran’s compliance with the nuclear deal, known officially as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The EU regrets that Washington’s stance on the nuclear deal is different from that of Brussels, which is “closer” to the positions of Beijing and Moscow, said the diplomat, according to Press TV.

Last month, the Russian envoy to the EU, Vladimir Chizhov, warned that U.S. President Donald Trump was blackmailing EU members that are signatory to the nuclear deal.

The multilateral agreement between Iran and the 5+1 group states, namely the U.S., the UK, France, China, Russia plus Germany, removes all nuclear-related sanctions against Iran in exchange for certain limitations on its nuclear program.

Trump has called the agreement, which

Tehran refutes as ‘baseless’ claim by Germany that blames Iran for Syria-Israel tension

The Iranian Foreign Ministry on Thursday dismissed as “baseless” a claim by Germany that Iran is responsible for recent escalation between Syria and Israel, saying Israel whose survival depends on chaos and confrontation is to blame for the rising tensions in the region.

Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said Iran, as “a stable and stability-giving” country, sees no need for a rise in tensions and confrontation in the already-troubled region, Press TV reported.

Qassemi was reacting to recent comments by the German government’s spokesperson, Steffen Seibert, who voiced “concerns” about Iran’s “military engagement” in the region and

claimed such a role “is leading to a dangerous escalation” in the conflict gripping Syria.

Seibert also called on Iran “to abandon its aggressive stance towards Israel.”

The German official made the remarks days after the Syrian military shot down at least one intruding Israeli F-16 warplane that attacked positions inside Syria, where Iranian military advisors and the Russian air force have been helping the national army in its battles against Takfiri militant groups, including Daesh.

Israel later claimed that it had launched those assaults after it intercepted an “Iranian drone” launched from Syria, an accusation rejected by Tehran as “ridiculous.”

‘Iran will remain loyal to JCPOA as long others respect it’

TEHRAN — Spokesman of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Behrouz Kamalvandi underlined that his country will continue to remain committed to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) as long as the other parties do not violate the international agreement.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran will fulfill its commitments as long as all sides to will also remain committed,” Kamalvandi said on Thursday.

He called on the western countries to fulfill their commitments as Tehran has done so far.

In relevant remarks on Wednesday, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araqchi renewed Tehran’s

commitment to the nuclear agreement also known as Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, and said that Tehran will pay no attention to the US’ agreement with other countries.

“Iran holds no regard for other countries’ agreements with the U.S. and will continue to insist on the full implementation of the nuclear deal without any change in its text,” Araqchi said.

“We are also in talks with the European side (on the nuclear deal), but obviously our talks with Russia and China have a more profound significance for us,” the Iranian deputy foreign minister reiterated.

Araqchi underlined that Russia has always been a staunch

was inked under the former administration, “embarrassing” for Washington.

Last month, Trump signed sanctions relief for Iran for the third time as part of Washington’s commitments under the JCPOA, but warned EU signatories that he was giving them “a last chance” to join the U.S. in fixing what he called “flaws in the deal”.

The remarks drew criticism from German, French and British officials, who have asked Trump to refrain from any action that would harm the landmark deal.

Officials from France, Germany and the



UK have been working with U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to explore different options to keep the deal in effect.

ganda campaign.

Over the past years, Israel, which is viewed as a supporter of anti-Damascus militants, has frequently attacked targets in Syria, often claiming that it hit positions or convoys belonging to Iran.

This is while the Islamic Republic says it has no military presence in the Syrian territory, only offering military advisory assistance to the Syrian government fighting terrorists.

Damascus says Israeli raids on Syrian soil are meant to boost the morale of the terror groups, which have been taking heavy blows from the Syrian army and its allied fighters on the battlefield.

supporter of the nuclear deal, and has contributed a lot during the process of negotiations, and said, “We hope that the current talks between the two sides will be able to assist Tehran and Moscow in meeting their mutual interests in the best possible way in the coming months.”

Under the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as JCPOA, Iran was relieved from international sanctions in return for curbs on its nuclear program.

President Trump called for a more restrictive nuclear deal and new constraints on Tehran’s missile development and regional clout, issues that are not covered by the JCPOA.

(Source: FNA)

Tillerson & Cavusoglu: U.S.-Turkish relationship ‘at a critical stage’

Tillerson claims U.S. had ‘never given heavy arms’ to YPG

By staff & agencies

The United States secretary of state has acknowledged that his country's relationship with Turkey is “at a bit of a crisis point”, as his Turkish counterpart, Mevlut Cavusoglu, demanded that the United States “turn words into actions” to resolve their differences in dealing with the Syrian crisis.

At a joint press conference in Ankara on Friday, Rex Tillerson said the U.S.-Turkey alliance “is too valuable” for the two countries not to take action together, particularly on their dispute over the U.S.’ support of the armed Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG/Yekineyên Parastina Gel), considered a “terrorist group” by the Turkish government.

“Ours is not an alliance of convenience or of temporary interest. It is a time-tested alliance built on common interest and mutual respect,” Tillerson said.

“Our two countries share the same objectives in Syria.”

Standing next to Tillerson, Cavusoglu said Turkey's relationship with the U.S. “is at a critical stage”, and the two allies need to decide whether “to mend fences, or go in a different direction”.

Cavusoglu said “some of the promises” the U.S. made “were not kept”, alluding to Turkey's demand that the U.S.-backed YPG leave the Syrian town of Manbij and move east of Euphrates River.

As part of the effort to mend the U.S.-Turkish relations, Cavusoglu announced that the two countries have agreed to establish a “joint mechanism” to deal with disputes and to take “collective response”.

But neither Cavusoglu nor Tillerson provided details about the plan.

A war of words between Turkey and the U.S. has escalated ever since Turkey launched a military offensive into the Afrin region of northern Syria in January, in an effort to root out the YPG.

Turkey had also reacted angrily to reports that the U.S. wanted to arm as many as 30,000 Kurdish troops in Syria's Manbij. The ongoing operation has left at least 30 Turkish soldiers and over a thousand of YPG fighters killed, according to reports.

Earlier this week, Turkey demanded the U.S. expel the YPG from the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) coalition, which has been fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) Takfiri terrorist group in Syria.

The Turkish government views the YPG as an extension of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK/Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê), which has fought a decades-long war against Turkey.

■ **Erdogan's Ottoman slap**

Earlier this month, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan accused the U.S. of sending stockpiles of weapons to the YPG in Syria, a claim Tillerson himself denied on Thursday.

Erdogan then threatened to deliver an “Ottoman slap” - a tactic used by Ottoman forces in the 17th century that, according to legend, could be instantly fatal - if the U.S. does not get out of the way.

Reflecting Turkish anger towards the U.S., hundreds of demonstrators marched through the streets of Ankara on Friday in protest against Tillerson's visit and demanded the U.S. cut ties with the YPG.

Turkish sentiments against the U.S. have also grown.



A recent poll found that 79 percent of Turks hold an unfavorable view of the US government, with only 18 percent having a favorable view.

Even people-to-people ties are affected with 67 percent of Turks having an unfavorable view of Americans.

■ **Tillerson, Erdogan meet amid heightened strain over Operation Olive Branch**

Elsewhere, Tillerson and Erdogan have had a meeting as relations between the two North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) partners have frayed in the wake of Ankara's ongoing cross-border offensive in Syria's northwestern region of Afrin against the YPG.

A Turkish presidential source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the top U.S. diplomat and the Turkish leader sought ways to improve strained ties during their Thursday meeting in Ankara, which lasted for more than three hours behind closed doors.

The source noted that Erdogan conveyed his priorities and expectations on Syria, and also discussed Iraq, regional developments and the fight against terror with the U.S. secretary of state.

Moreover, a U.S. State Department spokesman travelling with Tillerson said the top U.S. diplomat and Turkey had a “productive and open” talk.

Ahead of the meeting, Turkish Defense Minister Nurettin Canikli told reporters at a news briefing in the Belgian capital city of Brussels that Ankara expects Washington to expel the YPG from the U.S.-backed alliance of Arab and Kurdish militants, known as the so-called Syrian Democratic

Forces (SDF).

The Turkish defense minister also said that his American counterpart Jim Mattis had told him the United States was working on a plan to retrieve weapons given to the YPG, especially heavy weapons.

■ **Tillerson: Washington had “never given heavy arms” to the YPG**

Tillerson, however, later said that Washington had “never given heavy arms” to the YPG, and there was therefore “nothing to take back.”

The remarks came as the Pentagon had earlier confirmed the existence of heavy weapons in the YPG's hands, which had been provided by the U.S.

“It is our intent to regain large vehicles and heavy or crew-served weapons once specific threats have been defeated,” Pentagon spokesman Colonel Rob Manning said last November.

The controversy over a possible Syria border force first started on January 14 when a report emerged on Reuters saying that the military coalition led by the United States in Syria was planning to set up a large border force of up to 30,000 personnel with the aid of its militia allies.

The Syrian government has already condemned the “brutal Turkish aggression” against Afrin, rejecting Ankara's claim about having informed Damascus of the operation.

Damascus “strongly condemns the brutal Turkish aggression on Afrin, which is an inseparable part of Syrian territory,” Syria's official news agency, SANA, cited a Syrian Foreign Ministry source as saying on January 20.

Egypt's opposition condemns detention of Aboul Fotouh

Egypt's opposition has condemned the detention of Abdul Moneim Aboul Fotouh, the Strong Egypt Party leader and former presidential candidate, and accused the government of a “fierce hatred campaign” against political dissent.

Aboul Fotouh was transferred to a detention center in the infamous Tora complex on Thursday, a day after his arrest from his home in Cairo along with six of his party members, who were later released the same night.

State Security Prosecution has ordered Aboul Fotouh's detention for 15 days in prison pending investigations on charges related to leading a “terrorist” organization and spreading false news inside and outside the country, according to media reports.

In a statement on Thursday, Strong Egypt Party said: “In the shadow of the escalating repressive measures practiced by the Egyptian regime against peaceful political opposition, the party holds the government fully responsible for the personal safety of Mr. Aboul Fotouh and Mr. Kassas.”

The Strong Egypt Party's deputy head, Mohamed al-Kassas, along with several other opposition figures, was detained last week.

The opposition party urged all political



entities and public figures to “stand united against the regime's repressive practices towards peaceful opposition”, as it temporarily suspended all political activities.

Aboul Fotouh's arrest came just days after

an Egyptian lawyer submitted a complaint to the public prosecutor, calling for the arrest of Aboul Fotouh after the politician appeared on an Al Jazeera television show from London.

In his complaint, lawyer Samir Sabry

accused Aboul Fotouh of “spreading fake news” and demeaning Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

A former member of the Muslim Brotherhood and leader of the Strong Egypt Party, Aboul Fotouh ran as an independent candidate in the 2012 presidential elections, gaining nearly a fifth of the vote in the first round.

The vote six years ago marked Egypt's first competitive elections following the 2011 revolution, which overthrew long-time leader Hosni Mubarak.

Aboul Fotouh has become the latest detainee in a string of arrests of political figures, government critics and former officials.

Egyptians will go to the polls next month in a presidential election in which incumbent President Sisi looks poised to extend his term in office. Several potential candidates have either been arrested or faced threats, intimidation and physical violence, forcing them to drop out. In the interview with Al Jazeera last week, Aboul Fotouh condemned Sisi's crackdown on opposition and said that the upcoming presidential elections were not fair, transparent, or “democratic”, especially with the absence of real opposition.

(Source: Al Jazeera)



The United States President Donald Trump's former chief strategist Steve Bannon has been questioned by investigators examining alleged Russian meddling into the 2016 U.S. elections.

Bannon, who left his position last August, was interviewed by Special Counsel Robert Mueller behind closed doors on Thursday for at least the second time this week, according to local media reports.

Mueller's team is probing whether Trump's presidential campaign colluded with Russia in its bid to influence the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

■ **Bannon ‘stonewalls’ congressional panel**

Bannon also appeared for the second time before a congressional panel probing the same issue earlier on Thursday.

Like his first appearance in January, Bannon was reported to have cited “White House privilege”, while refusing to answer a large number of questions by the House of Representatives Intelligence Committee.

Frustrated Democrats slammed Bannon, saying that his refusal to answer questions should be considered contempt.

“There was a refusal to answer any questions that would have brought out the full facts,” said Adam Schiff, the Democratic leader of the panel said. “That is not how privilege works. That's how stonewalling works,” he added.

The probe began in May 2017 to investigate any links or coordination between the Russian government and individuals associated with the Trump campaign.

In December, Michael Flynn, the former U.S. national security adviser, became the fourth known person connected to the Trump campaign to be charged in connection to the investigation on possible Russian meddling.

He pleaded guilty to making false statements in relation to his conversation with the Russian ambassador before Trump took office.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Turkish court sentences six journalists to life in prison over 2016 failed coup

Turkey's state-run Anadolu news agency says an Istanbul court has sentenced six Turkish journalists accused of involvement in a 2016 coup attempt to life in prison.

Those sentenced on Friday include Ahmet Altan, the former editor-in-chief of Taraf newspaper, his brother, economics professor and journalist Mehmet Altan, and prominent journalist Nazli Ilıcak.

The Altan brothers were charged with giving coded messages in a television talk show a day before the abortive July 15, 2016, military coup against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Turkey's highest court had ordered the release of Mehmet Altan in January but a lower court refused.

Three other defendants were also sentenced to life for trying to abolish the constitution and overthrow the government, TRT Haber television reported.

The journalists are also accused of having links to the United State-based Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen, whom Turkey blames for the failed coup. Gulen denies the accusation.

The defendants were charged with attempts to subvert Turkey's constitution and membership in a terror organization.

Earlier on Friday, a Turkish court accepted an indictment seeking up to 18 years in prison for German-Turkish journalist Deniz Yucel and released him from custody pending trial.

(Source: agencies)

Cyril Ramaphosa sworn in as South Africa's president

Cyril Ramaphosa, head of the ruling African National Congress (ANC), has been sworn in as South Africa's president, fewer than 24 hours after the resignation of embattled ex-leader Jacob Zuma.

“I will try very hard not to disappoint the people of South Africa,” Ramaphosa said on Thursday as he ended his speech to parliament, shortly after ANC politicians elected him.

Zuma's nine-year presidency came to an end on Wednesday, when the 75-year-old announced that he would heed an ANC order and stand down ahead of a scheduled no-confidence vote against him in parliament.

His resignation in a televised address to the nation came after weeks of pressure to step down due to long-standing corruption allegations.

The election of Ramaphosa was largely ceremonial, with no other candidates put forward for the presidency.

South Africa's two main opposition parties, the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), refused to vote for Ramaphosa, who served as deputy president under Zuma.

A number of EFF members also left the parliamentary chamber as proceedings began.

The EFF has called for the dissolution of parliament and fresh elections, citing no faith in the ANC government who they accuse of protecting Zuma.

But in his address to parliament, Ramaphosa pledged to work with the opposition and tackle corruption while finishing his predecessor's term, which ends with elections next year.

“Leave 2019 aside, let us deal with the current moment and work together on how we are going to improve the lives of our people, rather than grandstanding,” Ramaphosa told the members of parliament.

“Issues that have to do with corruption, of how we can straighten out our state-owned enterprises and how we deal with state capture are on our radar.”

(Source: agencies)

Nicolas Maduro vows to attend Summit of Americas

Venezuela's president vowed on Thursday to show up at the Summit of the Americas in Peru in April after he was told this week not to bother coming.

Maduro has accused conservative governments in Latin America - specifically Argentina, Colombia and Peru - of siding with the United States in allegedly planning his overthrow and takeover of the country's vast oil resources.

“They're the most unpopular governments on the planet,” said Maduro.

Venezuela is home to the world's biggest crude reserves. Despite years of spiraling oil prices, detractors also accuse the Venezuelan leadership of financial mismanagement as the country is gripped by hyperinflation, food shortages, and economic turmoil.

The Venezuelan government accuses rival states of imposing devastating economic warfare through sanctions.

Asked about not being invited to the April meeting in Peru's capital Lima on Thursday, Maduro promised he'd be there.

“Do you fear me? You don't want to see me in Lima? You're going to see me. Because come rain or shine, by air, land, or sea, I will attend the Summit of the Americas,” Maduro said during a press conference with foreign journalists.

Venezuela's leader announced last week an election will be held on April 22. Critics, including the United States and other regional governments, accuse Maduro of sidelining opposition leaders and say the vote won't be free and fair.

While criticized by some world powers over Venezuela's April election call, Maduro announced on Wednesday he wants nationals living in the U.S. city of Miami to vote, even though there's a strong opposition presence there.

Reversing a move by his predecessor Hugo Chavez, Maduro ordered the reopening of Venezuela's consulate in Miami.

Maduro said he made the decision after receiving requests from the Venezuelan community in Florida state's largest city to open the consulate so they could vote.

Venezuela's Miami consulate was closed in 2012 by Chavez, just before his final presidential election before dying of cancer early the following year.

(Source: agencies)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	98347.9
IFX	1107.76

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	46,970 rials
EUR	60,970 rials
GBP	68,800 rials
AED	13,340 rials

Source: mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

WTI	61.53/b
Brent	64.80/b
OPEC Basket	61.04/b
Gold	\$1,356.40/oz
Silver	\$16.86/oz
Platinum	\$1,010.50/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

EU ready to negotiate Iran’s joining SGC initiative

1 → “Europe wants rich countries in natural resources to join the Southern Gas Corridor, within these meetings, negotiations have been conducted with Turkmenistan and Iran,” he said.



The Southern Gas Corridor is an initiative of the European Commission for the natural gas supply from Caspian and Middle Eastern regions to Europe. The goals of the Southern Gas Corridor are to reduce Europe’s dependency on Russian gas and add diverse sources of energy supply.

The route from Azerbaijan to Europe consist of the South Caucasus Pipeline, the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline, and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline.

The total investment of this route is estimated \$45 billion.

NEWS IN BRIEF



IRU to provide technical assistance to Iran

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** —The International Road Transport Union (IRU) is going to provide technical assistance to the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) member countries, Iran in particular.

The decision was made during the 9th meeting of the road committee of Transit Transport Coordination Council (TTCC) which was attended by a delegation from Iran in Islamabad, Pakistan, IRNA reported on Thursday.

Joining of Iran to the European Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road (ADR) and the Agreement on Carriage of Perishable Foodstuffs was also among the topics discussed in this meeting.



Iranian, French auto parts associations ink co-op agreement

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN**- The auto parts associations of Iran and France signed a cooperation agreement on the sidelines of the 5th edition of Iran’s Automotive Industry International Conference (IAIIC).

The agreement was signed by the chairmen of the associations in the presence of Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Mohammad Shariatmadari, IRIB news reported on Thursday.

As reported, representatives from the world’s renowned carmakers including Peugeot, Renault, Nissan, Mercedes Benz, Volkswagen, Hyundai, Volvo and Scania participated in IAIIC which was held in Milad Tower of Tehran on February 13 and 14.



Iranian market in Russia’s Volga region to be established

ECONOMY d e s k **TERHAN**— Experts believe that establishment of an Iranian market in Russia’s Volga region can ease Iran’s entrance to Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), Russian Viewer reported.

During a meeting at Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Saratov Region in Russia, under the title of Regional Cooperation in Eurasian Economic Union: Collaboration with Iran, the experts and representatives from socio-political unions, governmental organizations, and trade societies of Iran, Russia, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan investigated possibilities of regional cooperation between Iran and Volga region.

The participants unanimously backed the idea of establishing an Iranian market in the Russian region, which will smoothen the path for Iran’s membership in EEU.

India allows investment in rupees in Iran

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN**—Indian government sources have said that New Delhi has recently allowed investment in Indian rupees in Iran, the Again Age reported on Friday.

The announcement was made simultaneously with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani beginning his visit to India from Hyderabad on Thursday.

Sources said this will not violate U.S. sanctions on Iran since the transaction will not be

in U.S. dollars. The Indian move will hugely help the Iranian economy as it will draw in more Indian investment into Iran.

If an Indian businessman wants to invest a certain amount in rupees, he can deposit the money in rupees in the bona fide concerned Iranian account in one of the Indian banks and the equivalent amount of Iranian rials will then be deposited in the venture in Iran, sources said.

As previously reported, India’s contribution

Iran’s Euro 5 gasoline output to increase 12m liters by Mar. 20

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Completing the second phase of Persian Gulf Star Refinery by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2018) will add 12 million liters of Euro 5 gasoline to Iran’s capacity of the product, according to an oil official.

Alireza Sadeq-Abadi, the managing director of National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC),

made the remarks in the inaugural ceremony of the distillation unit of the second phase on Wednesday.

He put the country’s average gasoline production at 78 million liters per day for the time being and said the figure was 60 million liters in the same time of the last year; noting that the amount of production and the volume of consumption are now very close to each other.

Bitcoin hits \$10,000 in accelerating recovery from plunge



weekly gain in six. Optimism for cryptocurrencies is increasing this week as a flood of news on regulatory crackdowns earlier this year has been replaced with more positive headlines.

Coinbase Inc., one of the largest U.S. token exchanges, said it was releasing a service for merchants to accept cryptocurrency payments. South Korean officials signaled they will focus on making digital-assets trading transparent rather than outlawing it altogether, as some traders feared. Last week U.S. regulators articulated a relatively lenient approach to cryptocurrencies in a Senate hearing, as they advocated shutting down unlawful projects and securing investor protections rather than a blanket ban on the sector.

The positive developments are helping digital coins take in stride the latest reports of hacking and suspected fraud at firms holding the assets. (Source: Bloomberg)

World shares set for best week since 2011, dollar hits lowest since 2014

World shares were set to post their best week of gains in six years on Friday after two consecutive weeks spent in the red, shrugging off a rise in global borrowing costs while the dollar hit its lowest level since 2014.

The MSCI world index of stocks, which tracks shares in 47 countries, was up 0.4 percent after European bourses opened. .MIWD00000PUS After suffering its biggest weekly drop since August 2015 last week, this week’s recovery puts the index on track for its best weekly showing since early December 2011.

The index has now reclaimed more than half of the 10.7 percent plunge from a record intraday high on Jan. 29 to a four-month intraday low a week ago.

Investors have been puzzled at this week’s quick rebound in stock markets, which has also coincided with a rise in bond yields on evidence that inflation is starting to creep

up globally.

The argument most commonly offered by economists has been that historically, it’s not unusual for stocks and bond market borrowing costs to rise in tandem with a rapidly expanding economy.

“For me it’s really a question of maybe. Markets are taking a look at the inflationary outlook and saying OK, maybe rates are going up and maybe the economy will compensate for that,” said Michael Hewson, chief markets analyst at CMC Markets.

“That might change if we move to 3 percent on the 10-year (Treasury).”

The global rise in borrowing costs has been led by the U.S. 10-year Treasury, which hit a four-year high of 2.944 percent this week. It last stood at 2.8932 percent. US10YT=RR

Yields across the euro area were mostly steady, although Germany’s benchmark

bund yield was within sight of 2-1/2 year highs and set for its biggest weekly rise in eight weeks. DE10YT=RR

Investors were also watching for a sovereign debt rating on Greece from Fitch Ratings, set for release later in the day.

European shares were set to chalk up healthy weekly gains, snapping a three-week losing streak as earnings updates continued to impress, and volatility and jitters over rising inflation eased. Among country benchmarks, the UK’s FTSE .FTSE was up 0.6 percent and Germany’s DAX .GDAXI added 0.8 percent, while Italy’s FTSE MIB .FTMIB outperformed, up 1.2 percent.

MSCI’s broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan .MIAPJ0000PUS rose 0.4 percent, though many Asian markets were closed on Friday for the Lunar New year.

Japan’s Nikkei .N225 rose 1.2 percent, with investors relieved to see the government

appoint Bank of Japan Governor Haruhiko Kuroda for another term, suggesting the central bank will be in no rush to dial back its massive stimulus program.

The pan-European benchmark is up 3 percent so far this week, set for its best week since December 2016, but still down around 6 percent from the 2-1/2-year peak it hit in January.

Some put the rebound in equities down to investors being reassured by a fall in the VIX .VIX index - a measure of implied volatility on the S&P 500 index, also known as Wall Street’s “fear gauge”. The index dropped below 20 for the first time since its spike to a 2-1/2-year high of 50.3 last week, a jump that caused massive losses among investors who bet equity markets would be stable on a combination of solid economic growth and moderate inflation.

(Source: Reuters)

Bank of Japan chief Kuroda reappointed for second term



Japan’s government on Friday reappointed Bank of Japan Governor Haruhiko Kuroda for another term and chose an advocate of bolder monetary easing as one of his deputies, a sign the central bank will be in no rush to dial back its massive stimulus program.

The selection of the new BOJ leadership comes at a crucial time for Japanese and global markets, which have been rattled in recent weeks on expectations major central banks will whittle down their crisis-mode stimulus.

In a widely expected move, the government nominated Kuroda to serve another five-year term when the current one ends in April, a sign of premier Shinzo Abe’s confidence over the governor’s efforts to pull Japan’s economy out of stagnation.

The government also submitted to parliament its nomination of Masazumi Wakatabe, a professor at Waseda University and an advocate of aggressive monetary easing, as deputy governor. The other deputy governor post went

to BOJ Executive Director Masayoshi Amamiya, a veteran central banker known for masterminding various monetary policy steps. The choice of Wakatabe, a professor at Waseda University, could complicate Kuroda’s task of engineering a slow but steady exit from the BOJ’s radical monetary stimulus.

But it could help the BOJ dispel market speculation it may dial back stimulus earlier than expected, and allow it to shift gear back toward more easing if continued yen rises threaten Japan’s economic recovery, some analysts say.

While Kuroda has pledged to maintain the BOJ’s ultra-easy policy, he has refuted arguments that the stimulus programme needs to be expanded and has signaled the possibility of raising interest rates if inflation prospects brighten.

The nominations need approval by both houses of parliament, which is a near certainty as Abe’s ruling coalition has a comfortable majority. (Source: CNBC)

Basic income plan proposed in the UK where everyone under 55 gets \$14,000



Everyone in Britain under the age of 55 should be entitled to £10,000 (\$14,127) from the government, a leading think tank has proposed.

The report, published by the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) on Friday, claimed the payments could potentially lay the foundations to all citizens eventually getting a basic state wage.

Britain’s Labour Party, led by opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn, has already said the party is assessing the merits of similar arguments for a Universal Basic Income (UBI).

The RSA said payments of £5,000 each year for two years would stimulate innovation, encourage retraining and help people who have caring responsibilities to be in a more prosperous position.

■ ‘Storm clouds on the horizon’

While most benefits would be cut under the scheme, the RSA said the dividends would support people through the challenges of automation over the next decade.

The research suggests pooling a new

sovereign wealth fund that would be invested to make a profit. Similar basic income payments are already used in Norway, Finland and Alaska with these schemes being publicly supported by several notable advocates, including Nobel Prize-winning economist Angus Deaton and Elon Musk, CEO of SpaceX and Tesla. “The simple fact is that too many households are highly vulnerable to a shock in a decade of disruption, with storm clouds on the horizon if automation, Brexit and an ageing population are mismanaged,” Anthony Painter, director of the RSA’s Action and Research Center, said.

“Without a real change in our thinking, neither tweaks to the welfare state nor getting people into work alone, when the link between hard work and fair pay has broken, will help working people meet the challenges ahead,” he added.

The think tank said the payments would not be means tested, with applicants only needing to show how they intended to use the money. (Source: CNBC)

U.S. oil hits one-week high as dollar sags; many Asian markets shut

U.S. crude extended gains in subdued trade on Friday as the dollar slipped to a three-year low, with many Asian markets closed for the Lunar New Year holiday.

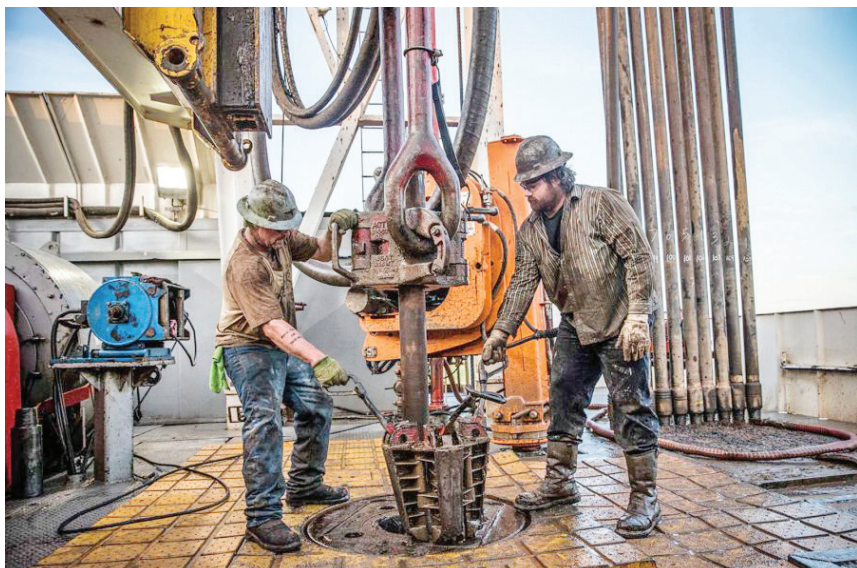
NYMEX crude for March delivery was up 17 cents, or 0.3 percent, at \$61.51 a barrel by 0750 GMT, after earlier touching a one-week high of \$61.82. For the week, the contract has risen about 4 percent after losing nearly 10 percent last week.

London Brent crude was up 25 cents, or 0.4 percent, at \$64.58 after settling down 3 cents. Brent is up nearly 3 percent for the week after falling more than 8 percent last week.

“Oil is getting support from a rebound in global stock markets and a weak dollar, but the upside is limited due to a projection for rising U.S. production,” said Tomomichi Akuta, senior economist at Mitsubishi UFJ Research and Consulting in Tokyo.

“The market is quiet due to a slew of holidays in Asia.”

The dollar slipped to a three-year low against a basket of currencies on Friday. A



weaker dollar often boosts prices for oil and other dollar-denominated commodities.

Oil producers led by Saudi Arabia and Russia aim to draft an agreement on a long-

term alliance by the end of this year, United Arab Emirates energy minister Suhail al-Mazroui said on Thursday.

OPEC and non-OPEC producers including Russia have been restraining production by a total 1.8 million barrels per day (bpd) in a bid to prop up prices under a deal that is to expire at the end of 2018.

The move comes at a time when Asian demand is on the rise. India imported a record 4.93 million bpd in January to feed its expanded refining capacity and meet rising demand, data showed.

Oil won support earlier in the week after Saudi Energy Minister Khalid al-Falih said OPEC hopes to keep limiting crude output to leave the market tight.

However, surging U.S. production is offsetting OPEC's efforts to curb supplies. U.S. crude output hit a record 10.27 million barrels per day last week, the Energy Information Administration (EIA) said on Wednesday, making it a bigger producer than Saudi Arabia.

(Source: Reuters)

China's oil demand set to slow down after high growth in 2017

China's apparent oil demand rose 5.5 percent year on year to 11.77 million barrels per day (b/d) in 2017, but analysts said that they expected rising crude prices and an anticipated slowdown in economic growth to take a toll on consumption of oil products.

In addition, as China focuses more on quality and energy efficiency, analysts said that policy changes would also cap oil consumption.

S&P Global Platts China Oil Analytics expect the apparent oil demand to rise by 500,000 b/d in 2018, equivalent to a year-on-year growth of 4.2 Percent.

This is in line with forecasts by Sinopec's and CNPC's research institutes, saying that oil demand growth would slow from over 5 Percent last year to over 4 Percent in 2018.

CNPC's institute expects oil demand growth to slow from 5.9 Percent to 4.6 Percent based on the assumption that China's GDP would grow 6.7 Percent in 2018, slower than the government target of 6.9 Percent for 2017.

“Higher oil prices and weaker GDP growth will inevitably lead to weaker oil demand,” Bernstein said in a report.

“The focus is shifting from quantity to quality and (from) economic growth to environment,” it added. “This means energy consumption would be capped due to improving energy efficiency and tight environmental control.”

The growth in oil products consumption in 2017 was led primarily by strong growth in LPG and bottom-of-the-barrel fuels, including fuel oil, S&P Global Platts calculations based on official data showed.

China's apparent demand for LPG rose 8.4 Percent on the year in 2017 to 1.71 million b/d. The 133,000 b/d year-on-year increase accounted for 22 Percent of the country's total growth in apparent oil demand, which was at 615,900 b/d.

However, demand growth for LPG is estimated to slow to 6 Percent in 2018 due to weakening demand from MTBE plants. China is promoting the use of E10 gasoline containing 10 Percent ethanol,

which will gradually replace MTBE.

Two new PDH plants will come online this year, which will increase total propylene production capacity by 700,000 million tons per year (mt/year), lower than the 830,000 mt/year of incremental propane demand added in 2017.

Meanwhile, demand for fuel oil is expected to continue to be strong in 2018, driven by growing bunker demand, while refinery feedstock demand is expected to recover because of tighter tax monitoring.

In 2017, apparent demand for fuel oil jumped 11.2 Percent on the year to 797,000 b/d.

Bonded bunker fuel oil supplies from Zhoushan port in eastern Zhejiang province surged 30 Percent year on year to 2.4 million mt in 2017, making it the largest bunkering port in China, according to the provincial communication department.

Gasoline demand is expected to see downward pressure in 2018 because of growth in alternative and renewable fuels, expansion of vehicle sharing, and rising ethanol-based

gasoline supply.

Expansion of high-speed rail networks would also hit gasoline and jet fuel demand.

COA said that gasoline demand growth was expected to fall to less than 150,000 b/d year on year in 2018, compared with around 200,000 b/d in 2017.

Sinopec's research institute has estimated the supply of gasoline blending components to see slower growth of around 3 Percent in 2018 amid changes in tax monitoring rules, down 8 percentage points from 2017.

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China's apparent gasoline demand edged up 0.8 Percent on the year to 2.85 million b/d in 2017, S&P Global Platts calculations showed.

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(Source: Platts)

Oil and gas sector recovery ‘not yet certain,’ says OCBC CEO

The risk that banks face within the oil and gas sector is currently “contained,” but the outlook for the segment remains far from certain, according to the CEO of Singapore's oldest bank.

OCBC's Samuel Tsien said that rising oil and gas prices indicate a more optimistic picture for the market, but banks would likely remain cautious for the foreseeable future.

“The recovery is not yet very certain,” Tsien told CNBC on Wednesday. “I would describe the risks that the banks have in the oil and gas sector as now contained.”

The industry crossed a significant milestone late last year when oil traded above \$60 per barrel for the first time since mid-2015.

However, Tsien said OCBC had yet to see the improved outlook translate into sufficient real activity in the industry, which influences a bank's willingness to lend.

“The recovery is not yet very certain,” he continued, “which explains why, across the board, I think most of the banks have taken more provisions against their portfolio.”

(Source: CNBC)

Clean energy stocks outperform oil and gas

The top 200 companies who generate the bulk of their revenue from clean energy have offered juicier returns to investors over the past 18 months than their counterparts in fossil fuels.

A new report from As You Sow and Corporate Knights finds that not only is the clean energy sector growing quickly, but investors are better off putting their money into renewable energy and other clean energy stocks than oil and gas. The largest 200 companies that generate at least 10 percent of their revenues from clean energy have generated a total return of 32.1 percent in the past year-and-a-half, compared to just 15.7 percent for fossil fuel companies in the S&P 1200 Global Energy Index.

The top 200 companies are spread out across 29 countries, and they generate an estimated \$363 billion in combined annual clean energy revenues. The top five in terms of revenues include: Siemens, Toyota, Schneider Electric, Abb Ltd-Reg and Panasonic.

The shift toward clean energy is driven by a variety of factors, but as investors reap better returns from cleaner forms of energy, the transition could accelerate.

Surely, however, the better performance for clean energy stocks are the result of the depressed nature of the oil market, with oil companies suffering from several years of low oil prices? The report's authors point out that oil prices have actually be on an upswing over the last 18 months, the period of time that they studied. “Oil prices (WTI) have went up by almost 40% over the time period we are measuring,” Toby Heaps, CEO of Corporate Knights and report co-author, told Oilprice.com. “If someone had told me a year and half ago that oil prices were going up almost 40%, I would have been really surprised if somebody would have told me the Clean200 would outperform fossil fuel stocks over this period.”

(Source: oilprice.com)

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To stop migration, stop the abuse of Africa’s resources

By Lorenzo Kamel

On January 17, Italy’s parliament approved the deployment of up to 470 troops in Niger to combat “irregular migrant flows” and the trafficking of people towards Libya, and, from there, to Europe. A number of other European countries are pursuing similar policies, including France, Germany, and Spain.

These policies have been preceded, in recent years and months, by a plethora of studies and articles. Many of them were focused on measures that differentiate between distinct migratory waves, with the purpose of “divert[ing] migration rather than attempting to stop it”. Others investigated the costs and benefits of “outsourcing” migration control, the European Union’s strategy for “Sahel Security”, and the “financial” cost of the “migration crisis” for European countries.

No less attention was given to the “lucrative business” of NGOs in relation to migratory waves, to the role of organized crime in the “smuggling of migrants” to Europe, and, last but not least, to the importance of “showing solidarity towards these desperate people”.

But none of these claims or efforts, nor the related policies carried out by European countries in the region, offer long-term solutions to, and deep understanding of, the key structural conditions at the base of the ongoing migratory waves. These short-term policies and analyses speak to the “gut” of European public opinion but fail to provide structural answers to present and future generations.

■ Structural problems

The acronym OPL 245 means little, if anything, to most people. Yet, it is the name of the deal for the acquisition of the largest oil block (over 9 billion barrels of crude) in Africa. It is situated off the coast of Nigeria, from where, historically speaking, 12 million slaves were exported to European colonies in the Americas beginning in the 15th century. It is the most populous country in the continent and the one from which the largest number of migrants have arrived by sea to Italy in 2016.

The \$1.1bn invested by European oil and gas companies in the acquisition of this oil block would have covered over 80 percent of Nigeria’s entire health budget for 2015. The ordinary citizens of Nigeria did not see a penny from the deal. The acquisition, finalized through blackmail, benefitted only a very limited number of corrupt officials and money launderers.

OPL 245 is hardly an exceptional case. Indeed, the natural resources (fuel, gold, gas etc) of most, if not all, African countries and a number of the states in the Eastern Mediterranean are still being syphoned off through offshore companies that, to a large extent, are linked to European and American companies and businessmen. As the Panama Papers confirmed, anonymous companies (about 1400) and tax havens are used to exploit the natural wealth of some of the world’s poorest countries.

Only by opening Europe to African products beyond raw materials - while guaranteeing an equal share of the benefits to African populations - and addressing the structural conditions that undermine the development capacity of millions of people, will the EU be able to implement a vision based on sustainable solutions.

The search for these solutions also involves the need to put pressure on rich Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, Kuwait and others, to assume concrete responsibilities.

Some of these countries are among the major recipients of the almost \$1.5bn in rifles, rocket launchers, heavy machine guns, mortar shells and anti-tank weapons currently exported from Europe (largely via the Balkans) to the Middle East: some of these arms are currently being in used in Syria and Yemen, contributing to the destabilization of the region as a whole.

And “destabilization” is indeed another key aspect to be considered when addressing the structural conditions that are fostering “migration and the trafficking of people”. It is a story as old as the world: People tend to migrate when they feel unsafe or unable to fulfil their needs. In this context, it is enough to mention that, according to data provided by the U.S. State Department, “incidents of terrorism” increased by 6500 percent (199 attacks in 2002, 13,500 in 2014) since George W Bush started the so-called “war on terror” in 2001.

Despite the fact that 15 out of 19 hijackers who flew passenger jets into the Twin Towers were Saudi citizens, the Bush administration decided to respond to the 9/11 attacks by striking Afghanistan and Iraq. It is not by chance that these two countries are the ones that suffered half of the total number of the “incidents of terrorism” mentioned above. The destabilization of a large part of the Middle East and North Africa and the profound influence that this has had on the stability of neighboring regions is partially, if not mainly, a direct result of decisions taken at the time.

■ The future ahead: structural solutions

How will migration affect Africa and Europe in the coming decades? The answer is to a large extent bound to demographics. The total population of Africa will grow from the current 1.2 billion to 2.5 billion by 2050, while some European countries will see their populations decline or stay relatively stagnant over the same period. For example, the EU predicts Italy’s population to decline from nearly 61 million to under 59 million by 2050.

This further explains why tackling migration and the trafficking of people by deploying troops or diverting human flows is a red herring. Only structural solutions will enable the EU and other international players to turn the challenges that these numbers bring with them into opportunities. From the perspective of the EU, these structural solutions include five main policies:

1. Exposing and sanctioning the ongoing exploitation of Africa’s natural resources by private and public European companies in order to tackle some of the structural causes of migration - those hindering the development of many countries in the region.
2. Overcoming the self-serving cliché of “investing in African countries”, while opening Europe - including by involving multinational corporations - to African products and enabling local populations to sustain their economies.
3. Monitoring and stemming the flow of weapons produced in European countries and sold in African and Middle Eastern countries affected by wars (Yemen first and foremost). →13

Turkey’s drift away from the West won’t stop under Erdogan

By Frida Ghitis

The contentious relationship between Turkey and the West hit a little-noticed but significant milestone last week, when the Dutch government announced it was formally downgrading diplomatic ties and officially withdrawing its ambassador from Ankara. Turkey and the Netherlands remain NATO allies, and diplomatic relations continue at the level of charges d’affaires. While not garnering the attention of the escalating confrontation between Turkey and NATO in Syria, the Dutch move is an important marker of Turkey’s continuing drift away from the West under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The decision was also unexpected because Turkey and the Netherlands had been in talks to try to resolve their differences. But those talks suddenly collapsed, and now the Dutch say they will not allow a Turkish ambassador into the Netherlands. While Turkey’s differences with its allies over strategic priorities and objectives in Syria are well understood, the failure to resolve political differences that have no relation to that conflict suggests that the prospects for genuine reconciliation with the West are all but dead for the foreseeable future.

The spat with the Dutch has much in common with Ankara’s problems with other European countries. Tensions had been rising, but they burst into full, televised live view last March, when Erdogan was campaigning for a referendum to boost his powers as president.

Erdogan’s Freedom and Justice Party, known as the AKP, tried to campaign for the referendum in Turkish expatriate communities across Europe.* The Dutch, like many of their neighbors, banned Turkish campaigning, even refusing permission for Turkey’s foreign minister to land in the country. When Fatma Betül Savaş Kaya, Turkey’s minister of family affairs, arrived by car to attend a rally in Rotterdam, she was escorted out by Dutch police, triggering violent clashes between Erdogan supporters in Rotterdam and Dutch riot police, all broadcast live on Turkish television.

The drama boosted Erdogan with his nationalist base, as did the aftermath. Turkey barred re-entry to the Dutch ambassador, who had been away on vacation. Erdogan repeatedly threatened the Netherlands and insulted the Dutch, calling them “Nazi remnants.”

While the details may vary, Erdogan has



Turkey’s troubles with the West go far beyond differing views on the Syrian war.

had similar disputes with other European governments. As Europe has winced watching the Turkish president’s assault on press freedoms, his crackdown on the opposition and his amassing of power, Erdogan has responded by declaring that “Nazism is still widespread in the West.”

European officials and publics have grown particularly worried about Erdogan’s efforts to mobilize the large Turkish diasporas in Europe for his own political ends — an effort that is contributing to ethnic tensions. In Rotterdam, for example, where around 7.5 percent of the population is ethnic Turkish, a strongly pro-Erdogan party called Denk is contesting next month’s hard-fought municipal elections. Erdogan could soon have a strong ally in Rotterdam’s government.

Erdogan’s interference in Europe has caused other problems. Turkey has arrested ethnic Turks who are citizens of European countries after they criticized him. Erdogan has pushed to extend his intolerance of dissent into Europe, demanding that Germany prosecute a comedian who wrote an obscene poem about him.

But those are just symptoms of a larger problem. Under Erdogan, Turkey and Europe have grown politically incompatible. That means Turkey’s chances of becoming a part

of the European Union, a process that started in 1987 when Ankara formally applied to join the bloc, are all but nonexistent as long as Erdogan remains in power.

Last April, the European Parliament called for Turkey’s EU membership process to be suspended. Although a number of EU members still want Turkey to join, many have spoken out against its membership, and the process is now frozen.

During Germany’s election campaign last fall, the Social Democrat’s candidate for chancellor, Martin Schulz, said he would be a much more outspoken critic of Erdogan’s violations of human rights and democratic norms. Chancellor Angela Merkel, who had previously been a supporter of Turkey’s EU accession, responded by declaring during a debate with Schulz that she would work to bring an end to Turkey’s EU membership talks.

Turkey’s troubles with friends, of course, are not limited to Europe. Relations with Washington have hit turbulence that shows no sign of abating. After the attempted coup in July 2016, Erdogan accused the exiled cleric Fethullah Gulen, who lives in Pennsylvania, of orchestrating it all, and demanded that the U.S. extradite him. Washington has refused, arguing that the evidence for culpability and extradition does not warrant forcibly remov-

ing Gulen from the country. That has only added to a contentious relationship.

Since then, Erdogan’s government has detained American citizens in Turkey, suggesting one of them is being held essentially as a hostage until Gulen is extradited. When Erdogan’s bodyguards attacked a crowd of protesters in Washington last spring, Americans paid more attention. But security officials and democracy activists had already raised red flags about developments in Turkey.

Turkey’s plans to buy Russia’s advanced S-400 defense system have outraged NATO officials. NATO members are supposed to have equipment that is fully compatible with each other’s. The S-400 would mark another move in Turkey’s military cooperation with Russia, which increasingly troubles the U.S. and NATO.

It is on the battlefield, particularly in Syria, where the conflicting goals of Turkey and the West are playing out most dramatically.

Turkey views America’s closest allies in Syria, Syrian Kurds, as the enemy. In recent weeks, Ankara launched the ironically named Operation Olive Branch, a massive assault aimed at removing the Kurds from areas in Syria near its border. As the offensive continues, Turkish forces are coming face to face with U.S.-backed Kurdish fighters, including members of the Syrian Democratic Forces who are already peeling away from their objectives of fighting the Islamic State [ISIS] to take on Turkey. On the battlefield, the U.S. and Turkey — two NATO allies — are drawing closer and closer to confrontation.

As Turkey becomes an increasingly unreliable and even disloyal ally, the question for NATO is whether Ankara would be more or less troublesome if it were expelled from the alliance. The Turkish operation in Syria, which has resulted in heavy civilian casualties, is only aggravating these tensions with Europe. On Wednesday, the European Parliament held a special meeting on the subject.

Turkey’s concerns about the Kurds have predictably put it at odds with NATO in Syria, but the troubles with the West go far beyond differing views on the Syrian war. The breakdown of talks with the Netherlands highlights a more fundamental compatibility problem. Eventually, Ankara and Amsterdam will likely find a middle ground, but the gap between Turkey and the West is unlikely to narrow as long as Erdogan is in power.

(Source: WPR)

Is North Korea causing trouble or giving peace a chance?



After its charm offensive at the Olympics, North Korea’s delegation has returned home from South Korea, leaving some questions behind. Chief among them: Can the new opening between the two Koreas, begun amid the feel-good spirit of the Winter Games, be nudged and nurtured into serious dialogue over North Korea’s nuclear program?

While still a long shot, there’s a somewhat better chance of engagement now owing to two developments since President Moon Jae-in of South Korea, Vice President Mike Pence, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan and the North Korean delegation, including Kim Yo-jong, the only sister of the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, attended the Olympic opening ceremony.

First was Kim’s surprise decision to dispatch his sister, his most trusted envoy, to carry his personal invitation for Moon to join him in a summit meeting in the North. Moon and Ms. Kim met four times during the Olympics, the highest-level contact between the two Koreas in years. Moon’s visit would be an even rarer event, since Kim has never met another foreign leader.

While many officials fear that North Korea’s primary goal is to drive a wedge between South Korea, which has been eager to engage the North, and the United States, which has resisted engagement, close coordination between Washington and Seoul would keep the alliance strong.

At the very least, the North-South contacts provide a communications channel for Seoul to directly explain to Pyongyang what it and the United States are doing and saying and why, thus hopefully avoiding any miscalculation that could lead to military confrontations in this fraught period.

The other seemingly positive development was Pence’s telling The Washington Post that the Trump administration was willing to hold preliminary talks with North Korea even as Washington continues to toughen sanctions

and apply other pressures. Only days earlier Pence insisted there would be no talks until the North made concessions, including taking steps to give up its nuclear weapons.

The new iteration would align Pence with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis. President Trump, who has dismissed engagement with North Korea as “appeasement,” hasn’t repudiated Pence’s comments.

The administration has long been hostile to the North and critical of its participation in the Games. In recent days, Pence used increasingly hostile language, calling the North the most tyrannical regime on the planet.

Pence did not shake hands with, or even smile at, Ms. Kim, as he sat in front of her at the opening ceremony. He could have at least stood when South Korean and North Korean athletes marched in together.

Pence might have used the occasion to raise American concerns with Ms. Kim directly, although the South Koreans say she didn’t seem to want to speak with him, either.

All of which leaves unresolved the question of whether North Korea is exploiting South Korea’s desire for peace in order to secure economic or other benefits and break the alliance with the United States, or it wants to resolve the nuclear crisis and other disputed issues.

Neither does anyone know whether Trump, who has been effective at winning international support for tougher sanctions against North Korea, is serious about pursuing negotiations. Both are wild cards. Much will depend on how the North-South dialogue evolves.

But a special burden rests with North Korea, whose nuclear program violates United Nations Security Council resolutions and is a real threat. If Kim is serious about resolving the crisis, he could send an early signal by releasing the three Americans still held in North Korean prisons or announcing a pause in his nuclear and missiles testing.

(Source: The NYT)

A welcome change, but a long road to travel



The goodwill surrounding Cyril Ramaphosa’s swearing-in as the new president of South Africa today was in direct proportion to the relief that his predecessor had finally departed. In his nine years at the top, Jacob Zuma showed himself to be utterly unfit for the job in every way: facing multiple corruption charges, encouraging the spread of clientelistic politics and assaulting South African institutions. On his watch, the economy suffered, inequality and unemployment soared (to almost 27%) and violent crime rose. His country’s international standing has tumbled. Nothing about his presidency became him as the leaving of it, even if he had to be dragged kicking and screaming to the exit.

There is widespread hope that Ramaphosa will turn things around. He too is an anti-apartheid veteran, boasting both prominent trade union service and a very lucrative business career reassuring to the foreign investors that South Africa must woo. He is seen at home and abroad as an able leader serious about tackling the problems; his first speech promised to fight what has become known as “state capture”. But to believe that one man can fix the woes that his predecessor introduced, exacerbated or ignored is to make a fundamental error. One analyst compares Zuma’s departure to deadheading a rose bush. It may be necessary, and the bush may look a lot better as another bud comes into bloom — but unless the roots are watered and the blight is tackled, the bush will die.

In the end, Zuma’s removal was effected by his party, in an act of self-preservation. While many inside it opposed him from the start or have spent years seeking his departure, as an institution the ANC at best endured him for far too long and at worst colluded with him. Corruption has become

deeply embedded both within the party and within the state, at every level; many people have benefited from his patronage. Tackling this will be a long struggle and will challenge many people’s interests — and Ramaphosa has an election to fight next year, as well as immense problems to face in the economy and society. How much will he be able to do?

Others wonder whom exactly he will help. Despite his trade union service, he is very much a market-minded reformer — “Mr Davos” — and has faced criticism over the Marikana massacre, in which police shot dead 34 striking miners. Ramaphosa was a director of the strikers’ employer. But technocratic ability is as important as ideology. Zuma was adept at populist rhetoric, but he failed those at the bottom of society. Social welfare provision, a vital source of poverty alleviation, almost collapsed under him and desperately needs an overhaul.

Despite his efforts to infiltrate, intimidate or undermine any potential sources of challenge, Zuma was weakened by good investigative journalism, the courage of the former public protector and parts of the judiciary, and the effective use of parliament by the opposition. Underlying all these is a progressive constitution. His demise hints at the greater impact those could have in a system where a single party is no longer so dominant (though his disappearance has diminished the prospect of a split in the party — thought to be its most likely source of defeat in the nearer term — and will boost the ANC’s popularity).

The very act of Zuma’s removal reminds the public that it has the power to choose its leaders and hold them accountable. That in itself bolsters democracy. It should also sharpen the minds of the ANC about the task ahead.

(Source: The Guardian)

Iranians celebrate another year of countering U.S. imperialism: American analyst

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — A senior political expert and activist based in the U.S. city of Atlanta praised Iranians' rallies marking the anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution and said they celebrated their freedom from the yoke of U.S.-led Western imperialism.

"On the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, the Iranian people celebrated another year of refusing to accept U.S. Imperialism," Jim W. Dean said in an interview with the Tasnim News Agency.

"While the U.S. Israel Lobby and the NeoCons have end-lessly tried to paint Iran as a security threat, it was the U.S. and British neo-colonial power that overthrew an elected Iranian government (in 1953), installed a puppet regime, and proceeded to loot the country for decades," he said.

Jim Dean is the managing editor of VeteransToday.com and a regular geopolitical commentator on various media outlets around the world. He and Sr. Editor Gordon Duff have begun their own bridge building campaign with Iranian university youth via Skype conferences. Jim comes from an old military family going back to the American Revolution.

Following is the full text of the interview:

■ As you may know, the Iranian people toppled the U.S.-backed Pahlavi regime 39 years ago, ending 2500 years of monarchic rule in the country. Since then, on February 11 each year, Iranians from every walk of life pour into the streets by the millions to commemorate the great victory of the Islamic Revolution and voice their support for the country's Establishment. The rallies held across Iran in recent years on the anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution have remained in place despite some ups and downs, including economic difficulties created for the people by the U.S. sanctions. In your opinion, what are the factors behind the people's massive presence in the rallies and how did you see the turnout on Sunday?

A: On the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, the Iranian people celebrated another year of refusing to accept U.S. Imperialism. I would pose that the people consider some evolutionary approaches in their presentation. The purpose would be to counter the Western reaction that it is an offensive revolution when it is really a defensive one.

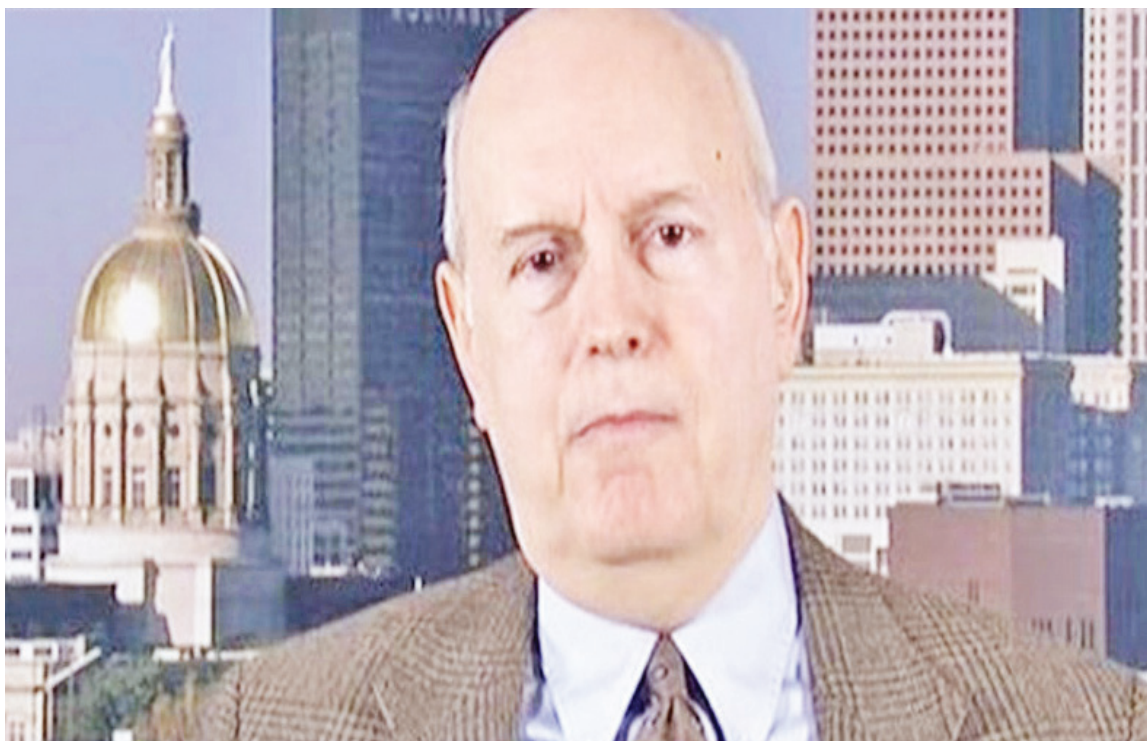
The masses of Iranians in the streets could counter the Western fear propaganda with a new twist that no one would be expecting, by replacing "Death to America", which paints an offensive motive, with a completely new message. I would express their motivation in two simple, but familiar words... "Never again!" Although the Zionists feel this term is their private property, it is not.

While the U.S. Israel Lobby and the Neo Cons have end-lessly tried to paint Iran as a security threat, it was the U.S. and British neo-colonial power that overthrew an elected Iranian government (in 1953), installed a puppet regime, and proceeded to loot the country for decades.

The U.S. attacked Iran again by supporting Saddam Hussein in the eight-year devastating war, where not only medium-range missiles were used as terror weapons against Iran's cities, but also chemical weapons which were supplied by the U.S.

During the first (Persian) Gulf War, U.S. troops hunting for Saddam's WMD found old chemical weapons buried in the desert with a well-known U.S. defense contractor's name on them. They were quickly removed, and the discovery was hidden from the public, but this became known within the military community.

Although all countries, under international law and the UN charter have the right to self-defense, the war crimes



committed against the Iranian people by the U.S. and Iraq, its ally at the time, give Iran even more right to have all the conventional military defense it deems necessary, as that right has been paid for by the blood of its innocent victims.

Most Americans are not familiar with this part of the story, as it is generally censored from any discussion on "the Iran threat" because it would reveal who the real threat is. Iran needs no one's permission to defend itself. The battle flag of the martyrs says "Never Again!", and is permission enough.

■ Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran has managed to stand up against the U.S. hostility and presence in the region and insisted on its independence. Iran has also made positive impacts on some regional countries through adopting anti-imperialist policies. What are the reasons behind Iran's increasing influence on the countries despite U.S. pressures?

A: Those countries who have been targeted by the Neo-colonial imperialists will naturally seek an allied relationship with countries that have survived the threat. During the dark days when Iran was in the depths of the sanctions, with even Press TV being taken off European satellites, who could have foreseen the successful outcome of the JCPOA talks, due in large part to the leadership of the key countries involved?

Although some in Iran have viewed Iran's regional defensive support as having hurt the country economically, I disagree. When the U.S., Israel, and Sunni Persian Gulf States attacked Iraq using ISIL to take control of Western Iraq while Balkanizing Syria using similar terrorist proxies, the Iranian leadership wisely knew they were all front lines for Iran itself.

Divide and conquer has always been an imperialist game, and that was defeated, narrowly with the key addition of the Russian airpower when Syria was within a few months of being lost. The security of all four countries was greatly enhanced by defeating the offensive plot.

The battle now will be for the victors to form a regional security coalition, their own NATO, to nip future aggression in the bud to prevent the huge destruction incurred during the (Takfiri) wars. And last, there is the difficult politico-religious issue of having the Wahhabi religious extremists formally designated as terrorists by the UN with the appropriate punishments due them.

■ If the Islamic Revolution had not occurred in Iran and the anti-imperialistic thinking had not spread, what would have happened then and what situation would have been created in Iran and the region?

A: The end of the Cold War was just a moment in time. The declassified intelligence and that not released yet reveal that the West, especially the U.S., attempted to turn Russia into a colony to exploit to its fullest.

The usual tactics were used; buying off greedy, unpatriotic Russians off to act as proxies. Because Yeltsin was such a pitiful leader, this was actually easy to do. It took a Putin to save the day, which is why he is hated by the American imperialists so much. The punishment for Putin's saving Russia was for the NATO not moving east agreement to be broken.

The NeoCons in Congress were bitter at Obama getting the JCPOA deal done by the slightest of margins. So what we are seeing now is their revenge via Trump, the Israelis and the (Persian) Gulf states to punish Iran for helping defeat the imperialists from destroying Syria and Iraq politically and economically.

Iran played a key role in saving Iraq through the Popular Militias, and hence itself. So together with Syria and other allies, it must continue the united front against the new plots of the recent losers who are bitter at their defeat after spending \$130 billion to take over Syria. They aim now to defeat the peace

The crime that Trump partnered with!



1 → We are all joined together as one American family and your suffering is our burden also," Trump said. "No child, no teacher should ever be in danger in an American school. No parent should ever have to fear for their sons and daughters when they kiss them goodbye in the morning."

The President's focus on mental health issues on Thursday marked his latest attempt to steer the debate in the wake of mass shootings toward that issue, rather than wading into the pernicious policy discussions surrounding gun laws in the U.S.

In the wake of the Texas church shooting in November, Trump also emphasized mental health, saying "mental health is your problem here ... this isn't a guns situation."

While willing to wade into policy after terrorist attacks, Trump and the White House have repeatedly rejected a debate on gun laws in the immediate aftermath of mass shootings.

After the Las Vegas mass shooting -- the deadliest in modern American history -- Trump signaled a willingness to discuss gun laws "as time goes by."

But in the four months since, neither Trump nor officials in his administration have entertained that discussion, even as several more mass shootings have taken place.

Earlier Thursday, Trump suggested on Twitter that the shooting could have been prevented, noting that those who knew the shooter "knew he was a big problem."

"So many signs that the Florida shooter was mentally disturbed, even expelled from school for bad and erratic behavior. Neighbors and classmates knew he was a big problem. Must always report such instances to authorities, again and again!" Trump tweeted.

He also offered condolences on Twitter hours after the massacre took place on Wednesday and issued a statement ordering flags to be lowered to half-staff on Thursday morning.

There were some discussions at the White House on Wednesday night of a presidential statement on the shooting, but ultimately Trump and his team decided it was too early in the proceedings for him to appear on-camera, according to an official.

The White House is still collectively working through how to best strike a "comforter in chief" tone after a year in office, this official conceded.

Some advisers encouraged Trump to speak Wednesday night to demonstrate leadership but ultimately the decision was made that Trump was better off waiting until more facts were known about the massacre.

Trump has had some missteps in this area since becoming President, which the official attributed to his personality.

"He can be a warm guy but doesn't always say the right thing," the official said.

Trump's tweet Thursday morning wasn't run through top aides or advisers before he posted it, as is often the case.

Trump's aides are in the initial planning stages of a visit to the Parkland community over the weekend when he's staying at Mar-a-Lago, less than 50 miles away from the shooting scene, the official said.

A second official said the White House wants to determine if a presidential visit would hamper law enforcement efforts before making a final decision.

The mayor of Parkland, Christine Hunschofsky, reacted to Trump's tweet on Thursday when it was read to her by CNN's Alisyn Camerota on "New Day."

"If a solution was simple for these things, we would have found one already," she said.

Hunschofsky added that she hopes a shooting like the one in her town "never happens anywhere again" and going forward vowed to be more vigilant in talking to her community about posts on social media or disturbing behavior.

The only gun measure Trump has signed since taking office revoked an Obama-era rule that required the Social Security Administration to disclose information quarterly to the national gun background check system about certain people with mental illness. It's not clear whether that measure would have prevented Wednesday's massacre.

The suspect, Nikolas Cruz, a 19-year-old former student, is in custody. Cruz was previously expelled from the school for unspecified disciplinary reasons, officials said.

Cruz had a variety of gun and violence-related postings on social media sites, and Broward County Sheriff Scott Israel said his digital profile contained what he called "very, very disturbing" content.

Postings under the name Nikolas Cruz included threatening comments under videos on YouTube and other sites, including "I whana shoot people with my AR-15" (sic), "I wanna die Fighting killing s**t ton of people" and "I am going to kill law enforcement one day they go after the good people."

On his Instagram page, Cruz posted a photo of a shotgun, and in another photo, he is shown brandishing a pistol that appears to be a type of BB gun.

In other pictures he is covering his face with a kerchief and brandishing long knives.

Police say Cruz was armed with multiple magazines and at least one AR-15 style rifle.

The suspected shooter bought the firearm in the past year and had passed the background check to make the purchase, according to a U.S. official briefed on the investigation.

What does Trump tell?

The report by CNN and other U.S. media shows that the United States does not intend to take action against the freedom of arms transportation. In other words, Trump is basically not planning to limit the activity of U.S. arms lobbies. However, these lobbies were among the main sponsors of the Trump in the 2016 presidential election.

What is obvious is that the lives of American students and people are not a particle of tramp and he only thinks of his survival in the political equations of his country.

Yemen War: Trial time for Saudi Arabia?




TEHRAN (FNA) — Saudi Arabia is fast approaching trial time on its illegal war on Yemen, as the international humanitarian community will soon have to respond against them. This includes the United Nations and the International Criminal Court in The Hague.


While the United Nations and the international civil society insist they want a peaceful resolution to the worst humanitarian crisis in the 21st century, Riyadh dismisses the idea of diplomacy in the assessment, saying they wouldn't be willing to bargain away their stated goal, which is regime change in Sana'a.

However, since many people are dying and the country is facing famine, there is no time in which the Saudis and their allies can threaten Yemen any further. Simply put, Yemen is dying and time is almost here. There is an increasing rate of civilian casualties. According to the UN aid agencies, the upsurge in fighting is of particular concern. Civilians are under fire, as Saudi-led forces carry out airstrikes and indiscriminate bombing, without taking care to spare the civilian population, much less respecting the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution.

This is while any intentional, direct attack against civilians or civilian objects is considered a serious violation of International Humanitarian Law and the UN Charter. The warmongers refuse to take any feasible precautions to avoid, or in any event, minimise, the impact of violence on civilians. And that's when it's safe to conclude that the UN and the International Criminal Court in the Hague will have to step in to stop the protracted conflict and hold to account those who want this crisis to continue apace – one way or another: →13



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دفتر: ۲۸۱۴۱ - ۲۲۶۶۲۴۵۴

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Steps to a pain-free back

Low back pain has many different causes, including the normal wear and tear that comes with aging. While you can't turn back the clock or prevent every type of painful back disorder, in most cases there are things you can do to help keep your back healthy.

1. Stay fit
Weak back and abdominal muscles — due to deconditioning or age — cause or exacerbate many cases of low back pain. That's why stretching and strengthening both your back and abdominal muscles is important not only for treating low back pain, but also for helping to prevent a recurrence of the problem.

Exercise strengthens and lengthens the muscles that support the spine. A good exercise regimen should target the back, abdominal, and buttock muscles. Strong abdominal or hip flexor muscles, for example, help people maintain an upright posture, as do strong extensor muscles, which run the full length of the back and maintain alignment of the vertebrae.

Stretching is a valuable component of any treatment plan, too. Supple, well-stretched muscles are less prone to injury. And shorter, less flexible muscle and connective tissues restrict joint mobility, which increases the likelihood of sprains and strains.

Certain aerobic activities are safer for your back than others. For instance, bicycling (either stationary or regular), swimming, and walking lead the list of low-risk, high-benefit activities for most people's backs. All are low- or minimal-impact exercises that strengthen muscles which support the back. None involve awkward or stressful actions that are detrimental to back muscles.

However, sports and activities such as football, tennis, gymnastics, wrestling, weight lifting, rowing (crew), running, aerobic dance, and ballet involve a relatively high risk for back injury because of the extension, lifting, or impacts involved.

2. Maintain a healthy weight
Although carrying too much weight per se has not been proven to be a primary cause of back pain disorders, being overweight or obese can slow your recovery. Those extra pounds also increase the risk that back pain will return.

The heavier you are, the greater the load your spine must carry. To make matters worse, if the bulk of your weight comes in the form of abdominal fat, rather than muscle, your center of gravity can shift forward — a condition that puts added pressure on your back. By maintaining a healthy weight, you can ease the burden on your spine. To see if you are at a healthy (normal) weight, calculate your body mass index (BMI), which takes both your height and weight into consideration. Not only will you help your back if you maintain a normal BMI (in the range of 19–25), but you'll also lower your risk for many diseases, including heart attack, stroke, diabetes, and high blood pressure. You can find a BMI calculator here.

3. Kick the habit
You've undoubtedly heard this message before: smoking harms your health. Not only does this habit raise your risk for lung cancer, heart disease, hypertension, and a plethora of other health problems, it also jeopardizes



Strong abdominal or hip flexor muscles, for example, help people maintain an upright posture, as do strong extensor muscles, which run the full length of the back and maintain alignment of the vertebrae.

your back.

Research shows that smokers have more frequent episodes of back pain than nonsmokers, and the more a person smokes, the higher the risk that he or she will experience such an episode, according to one study.

Scientists believe that the nicotine in cigarettes contributes to low back pain in two ways. First, nicotine hampers the flow of blood to the vertebrae and discs. This impairs their function and may trigger a bout of back pain. Second, smokers tend to lose bone faster than nonsmokers, putting them at greater risk for osteoporosis, another common cause of back pain.

4. Lighten your load
Backpacks have become ubiquitous — at school, at work, at play. But an overstuffed backpack can be a harbinger of back pain.

If you use a backpack, you can take steps to protect yourself. For starters, use both of the pack's straps instead of slinging one strap over a shoulder. Try to carry only the essentials, and lighten your load whenever possible. Opt for backpacks that have different-sized compartments to help distribute weight evenly. And look for wide, padded straps and a padded back. When carrying a heavy load, put the heaviest items as close as possible to the center of

the back, and use the hip strap for support. For very heavy loads, use a backpack with wheels. Above all, remember to bend from your knees when picking up your pack.

5. Develop back-healthy habits
Everyday activities, from vacuuming your house to sitting in front of the computer for hours, can take a toll on your back, particularly if you aren't schooled in proper body mechanics. But you can take some of the pressure off your back by following these simple tips:

- While standing to perform ordinary tasks like ironing or folding laundry, keep one foot on a small step stool.
- Don't remain sitting or standing in the same position for too long. Stretch, shift your position, or take a short walk when you can.
- When bending from the waist, always use your hands to support yourself.
- When sitting, keep your knees a bit higher than your hips and bend them at a 90-degree angle. Sit with your feet comfortably on the floor. If your feet don't reach the floor, put a book or a small stool under them.
- Because vacuuming can take a toll on your back, tackle rooms in chunks, spending no more than five to 10 minutes at a time doing this task.

(Source: health.harvard.edu)

Ultra-processed foods linked to increased cancer risk



By Jen Christensen

Ultra-processed foods are not known for their health qualities. We know this, yet it's hard to resist the doughnuts your kind colleague brought into the office. Now, research published Wednesday in the BMJ may give you at least a longer pause before you pick the pink one with sprinkles.

Researchers discovered that people who eat more ultra-processed foods have a higher risk of cancer. Such foods are the ones with unrecognizable and unpronounceable words on the list of ingredients -- anything from the candy that turns your tongue blue to healthier-sounding canned soups packed with artificial flavors,

A 10% increase in the proportion of ultra-processed foods in the diet was associated with a significant increase of greater than 10% in risks for overall cancer and breast cancer.

additives or emulsifiers. Most food is processed to some degree, but ultra-processed foods are typically much more calorie-, sodium- and sugar-packed.

Research has long showed that people who live on ultra-processed food tend to be more obese and overweight. They're also more likely to have heart and circulation problems or diabetes, studies have found. Eating a lot of processed

meat like hot dogs has also been tied to an increased risk of colorectal cancer.

Researchers saw this new cancer link when they analyzed 24-hour dietary records of nearly 105,000 adults in the NutriNet-Sante cohort, a general population group in France. The individuals recorded what they ate from a list of 3,300 food items that were then categorized by how processed they were, using a system called NOVA.

What the scientists found was that a 10% increase in the proportion of ultra-processed foods in the diet was associated with a significant increase of greater than 10% in risks for overall cancer and breast cancer.

"Ultra-processed fats and sauces, sugary products and drinks were associated with an increased risk of overall cancer," the study says. "Ultra-processed sugary products were associated with an increased risk of breast cancer."

People who tended to eat more ultra-processed food also tended to smoke more and exercise less than the others, but the authors controlled for these issues and still found the elevated cancer risk.

"It was quite surprising, the strength of the results. They were really strongly associated, and we did many sensitive analysis and adjusted the findings for many co-factors, and still, the results here were quite concerning," study co-author Mathilde Touvier said.

"What people eat is an expression of their lifestyle in general and may not be causatively linked to the risk of cancer. So it is necessary to rule out what are called co-founding factors," said Tom Sanders, scientific governor of the British Nutrition Foundation and an emeritus professor at King's College London.

Sanders, who was not involved in the study, said the authors made statistical adjustments to accommodate for some of that, but he cautions that "the approach of categorizing dietary patterns that depend on industrially processed food in relation to disease risk is novel but probably needs refining before it can be translated into practical dietary advice."

The nonprofit trade group Association of Food Industries did not respond to requests for comment.

Marji McCullough, strategic director of nutritional epidemiology at the American Cancer Society, suggests caution about interpreting what is responsible for the cancer risk associated with ultra-processed food.

"This study doesn't mean that people should think 'if I eat this cracker, I'm going to get cancer,'" McCullough said. "The overriding message of this study was really to look at an overall diet pattern rather than a specific ingredient, and it supports a lot of what we already know."

For example, she said, people eating more highly processed foods are probably eating fewer healthy foods, which may help prevent cancer. Nutritionists recommend a diet rich in whole grains, whole fruits and vegetables instead of foods that have little nutritional value.

Touvier also noted that it's an observational study, meaning scientists don't know what exactly is causing the increased cancer risk, but her group at the Sorbonne Paris Cité Epidemiology and Statistics Research Center plans to look closer at what the connection may be. "The challenge now is to disentangle the different foods and understand this relationship to see what specifically is having this effect."

Animal studies have shown that some additives are "quite good candidates" for being carcinogenic, Touvier said, "but that would need to be seen if they are also carcinogenic in the human population."

If you are starting to worry about what you've brought for lunch, Touvier cautions not to be "too alarmist" about this research.

However, ultra-processed foods occupy a growing part of the world's diet. A 2016 study found that 60% of the calories in the average American diet come from this kind of food. A 2017 study found that they make up 50% of the Canadian diet, and they make up more than 50% of the UK diet. And more of the developing world is starting to eat this way.

A balanced and diversified diet should be considered one of the most important public health priorities, the author's advised. "Eat real food and try to limit ultra-processed items," Touvier said. "At least until we know more."

(Source: CNN)

Can you become addicted to chocolate? Science explains

By Abbey Perreault

Do you have a chocolate bar in your fridge at all times for those "emergency situations" when you desperately need something sweet or you'll die? You rip open the package and promise yourself you're only going to have one little square... oh wait, just one more... nope, there goes the whole damn bar. Is it an addiction? Or is it just really, really good? Let's talk.

Chocolate has played both the superhero and the super villain in national health and wellness conversations recently. One day, word on the dessert aisle was that cocoa could benefit heart health, and the next, we were told that chocolate is—no joke—akin to heroin. What gives?

The research can get confusing, but one thing is for sure: We (the general population) love chocolate—and sometimes, we love it in absurdly large quantities. It's not just since Hershey's started its factory either. Apparently, our obsession dates back to ancient times, when cacao beans were offered up in Mayan dowries (nice to see that our wooing techniques haven't changed all that much) and even exchanged as currency in some early American civilizations (now that would be the dream).

Today, it's become the most commonly craved food for teens in the U.S., and even us adults gobble up about nine and a half pounds per year. Not surprising when you think about how much we self-prescribe chocolate to treat general sadness; give it to others to show affection; and keep emergency stashes on-hand for late nights, breakups, or particularly bad bouts of PMS.

So, yes, we're well aware that we've got a chocolate infatuation. The larger question is—why? And, for some of us, can it spiral out of control?

■ Are you addicted to chocolate?

With the national obesity rate rising above 35 percent, scientists have been digging deeper into the ways in which food affects the brain—and, in turn, how the brain can dictate our intake of food. Symptoms of food addiction can look a lot like drug addiction: going to great lengths to acquire the goods (midnight chocolate run, anyone?), continuing to eat despite negative consequences, and trying and failing to quit on several occasions.

But the similarities don't stop there—both addictive drugs and particularly tasty foods have been found to cause a release of dopamine, a neurotransmitter associated with



Both addictive drugs and particularly tasty foods have been found to cause a release of dopamine, a neurotransmitter associated with pleasure, in a region of the brain that's been dubbed the "reward circuit."

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After a while, the reward circuit starts reacting to just thinking about these pleasurable things. Once you start associating these feel-good things with good feels, your brain begins to demand them. In one study, a group of women exhibited this response while looking at a picture of a chocolate milkshake.

Also seen in drug addicts, this anticipatory dopamine rush is thought to play a role in driving addictive behavior. What happens once a craving is satisfied? The women who were given the chocolate milkshake after looking at its picture showed a decrease in activity in the part of the brain associated with control and willpower. This is probably why we can swear off chocolate for life, only to find ourselves devouring a brownie one hour later. (Not that we would know.)

Although you can begin to develop these kinds of relationships with lots of different

foods (and all sorts of feel-good human experiences), chocolate seems to have some qualities that scientists and chocoholics alike have pinpointed to be particularly seductive.

This could just be that the chocolate we eat is typically loaded with sugar and fat, but according to one recent study, it may have to do with its interaction with a particular molecule called enkephalin that exists in our brain, looks a lot like endorphins, and may be causing our addiction.

In this case, researchers gave rats a few M&Ms to munch on (don't try this at home!) and, lo and behold, enkephalin levels in the brain started to rise (yes, they are rats, not humans, but it's still interesting). To see the effects of the mystery molecule, scientists injected the rats with more enkephalin, and they started bingeing like there was no tomorrow, indicating that this substance that's naturally in chocolate is also associated with compulsive eating. In other words, if you give a mouse a (chocolate) cookie, you better

have more on hand.

■ Chocolate vs. drugs

But while there are a lot of similarities between drug use and chocolate consumption, there are also some key differences. For one thing, there isn't a whole lot of evidence to show that we can develop chocolate dependence in the same way that we can develop drug dependence. And even though some of us think it's a medical issue, menstrual chocolate cravings and "chocoholism" are pretty predominantly American phenomena. While other countries produce and consume more chocolate than the U.S., very few others feel as simultaneously passionate and defenseless about it as we do.

Although eating chocolate nonstop might not be quite the same thing as having a drug addiction, it's still important to examine the factors—physiological, cultural, and environmental—that might increase our consumption to the point of abuse. Chocolate is often depicted as a go-to indulgence as well as something we're supposed to feel guilty about, and the image of the helpless chocoholic surfaces again and again, often in good fun, in advertising and across the media. So maybe the feeling that we're going cuckoo for cocoa comes, at least partly, from outside of our bodies too.

■ Seeking (and getting) the reward

We're reward-seeking creatures by nature—we had to be at one point to survive long enough to throw down in the gene pool. Sugary, high-fat foods like chocolate are natural rewards, so our brain responds to them by saying, "get more of that—if you can!" But now, we can. Pretty much all the time. Especially in a society where we can find chocolate of all shapes and sizes everywhere, even delivered ASAP to our doorsteps.

And with research suggesting that constant exposure to stress can hike up your intake of highly caloric and fatty foods, it's safe to say we're living in an environment where all signs point to chocolate. After we get that dopamine rush, we feel we've done a bad, bad thing. Yet somehow, we do it again.

At the end of the day, it's important to remember that chocolate alone isn't the enemy. It's got some addictive properties for sure, but so does exercise. (And we're definitely not going to tell you to cut that out of your life!) As frustratingly inconclusive as this sounds, there are a lot of elements at play here—but having an awareness that there are a lot of things pushing us to eat (and overeat) the sweet treat might at least help us develop a healthier relationship with it.

(Source: greatist.com)

Charging ahead: how Australia is innovating in battery technology

Lithium-ion remains the most widespread battery technology in use today, thanks to the fact that products that use it are both portable and rechargeable. It powers everything from your smartphone to the “world’s biggest battery” in South Australia.

Demand for batteries is expected to accelerate in coming decades with the increase in deployment of electric vehicles and the need to store energy generated from renewable sources, such as solar photovoltaic panels. But rising concerns about mining practices and shortages in raw materials for lithium-ion batteries – as well as safety issues – have led to a search for alternative technologies.

Many of these technologies aren’t being developed to replace lithium-ion batteries in portable devices, rather they’re looking to take the pressure off by providing alternatives for large-scale, stationary energy storage.

Australian companies and universities are leading the way in developing innovative solutions, but the path to commercial success has its challenges.

■ Australian alternatives: Flow batteries

In flow batteries the cathode and anode are liquids, rather than solid as in other batteries. The advantage of this is that the stored energy is directly related to the amount of liquid. That means if more energy is needed, bigger tanks can be easily fitted to the system. Also, flow batteries can be completely discharged without damage – a major advantage over other technologies.

ASX-listed battery technology company Redflow has been developing zinc-bromine flow batteries for residential and commercial energy storage. Meanwhile, VSUN Energy is developing a vanadium-based flow battery for large-scale energy storage systems.

Flow batteries have been receiving considerable attention and investment due to their inherent technical and safety advantages. A recent survey of 500 energy professionals saw 46% of respondents predict flow battery technology will soon become the dominant utility-scale battery energy storage method.

■ Ultrabatteries

Lead-acid batteries were invented in 1859 and have been the backbone of energy storage applications ever since. One major disadvantage of traditional lead-acid batteries is the faster they are discharged, the less energy they can supply. Additionally, the lifetime of lead-acid batteries significantly decreases the lower they are discharged.

Energy storage company Ecoul has been formed around CSIRO-developed Ultrabattery technology – the combination of a lead-acid battery and a carbon ultracapacitor. One key advantage of this technology is that it is highly sustainable – essentially all components in the battery are recyclable. Ultrabatteries also address the issue of rate-dependent energy capacity, taking advantage of the ultracapacitor characteristics to allow high discharge (and charge) rates.

These batteries are showing excellent performance in grid-scale applications. Ecoul has also recently received funding to expand to South Asia and beyond.

■ Repurposed storage solutions

Rechargeable batteries are considered to have reached their “end of life” when they can only be charged to 80% of their initial capacity. This makes sense for portable applications – a Tesla Model S would have a range of 341 km compared to the original 426 km. However, these batteries can still be used where reduced capacity is acceptable.

Startup Relectrify has developed a battery management system that allows end of life electric vehicle batteries to be used in residential energy storage. This provides a solution to mounting concerns about the disposal of lithium-ion batteries, and reports that less than 5% of lithium-ion batteries in Europe are being recycled. Relectrify has recently secured an A\$1.5m investment in the company.

■ Thermal energy storage

Energy can be stored in many forms – including as electrochemical, gravitational, and thermal energy. Thermal energy storage can be a highly efficient process, particularly when the sun is the energy source.

Renewable energy technology company Vast Solar has developed a thermal energy storage solution based on concentrated solar power (CSP). This technology gained attention in Australia with the announcement of the world’s largest CSP facility to be built in Port Augusta. CSP combines both energy generation and storage technologies to provide a complete and efficient solution.

1414 degrees is developing a technology for large-scale applications that stores energy as heat in molten silicon. This technology has the potential to demonstrate very high energy densities and efficiencies in applications where both heat and electricity are required. For example, in manufacturing facilities and shopping centers.

■ Research and development: Sodium-ion batteries

At the University of Wollongong I’m part of the team heading the Smart Sodium Storage Solution (S4) Project. It’s a A\$10.5 million project to develop sodium-ion batteries for renewable energy storage. This ARENA-funded project builds upon previous research undertaken at the University of Wollongong and involves three key battery manufacturing companies in China.

We’ve selected the sodium-ion chemistry for the S4 project because it sidesteps many of the raw materials issues associated with lithium-ion batteries. One of the main materials we use to manufacture our batteries is sodium chloride – better known as “table salt” – which is not only abundant, but also cheap.

We’ll be demonstrating the sodium-ion batteries in a residential application at University of Wollongong’s Illawarra Flame House and in an industrial application at Sydney Water’s Bondi Sewage Pumping Station.

■ Gel-based zinc-bromine batteries

Gelion, a spin-off company from the University of Sydney, is developing gel-based zinc-bromine batteries – similar to the Redflow battery technology. They are designed for use in residential and commercial applications.

The Gelion technology is claimed to have performance comparable with lithium-ion batteries, and the company has attracted significant funding to develop its product. Gelion is still in the early stages of commercialisation, however plans are in place for large-scale manufacturing by 2019.

■ Challenges facing alternatives

While this paints a picture of a vibrant landscape of exciting new technologies, the path to commercialisation is challenging.

Not only does the product have to be designed and developed, but so does the manufacturing process, production facility and entire supply chain – which can cause issues bringing a product to market. Lithium-ion batteries have a 25 year headstart in these areas. Combine that with the consumer familiarity with lithium-ion, and it’s difficult for alternative technologies to gain traction.

(Source: theconversation.com)

Child development experts urge Facebook to pull Messenger Kids app

More than 110 child-health advocates have called on Facebook chief executive Mark Zuckerberg to pull the firm’s Messenger Kids app aimed at under 13s, warning of the dangers of social media for children.

In an open letter led by the Boston-based Campaign for Commercial-Free Childhood, signed by doctors, educators and child health experts including baroness Susan Greenfield, warn that “younger children are simply not ready to have social media accounts”.

The authors write: “At a time when there is mounting concern about how social media use affects adolescents’ well-being, it is particularly irresponsible to encourage children as young as pre-schoolers to start using a Facebook product.”

The standalone Messenger Kids app was launched in December targeting children under 13 with strict parent controls that include contact approvals, screened content and safety filters to prevent children sharing inappropriate material. It contains no ads and Facebook says data collected from it will not be used for advertising purposes.

But the launch of the app was attacked by commentators and British health secretary Jeremy Hunt, who said the firm should “stay away from my kids”.

The open letter authors said Messenger Kids was likely to increase the amount of time pre-school and elementary age children spend with their devices.

“In a landscape of ubiquitous technology that undermines children’s emotional growth, the last thing the youngest among them need is a powerful enticement to move their friendships online” said Dr Sherry Turkle, Abby Rockefeller Mauzer professor of the social studies of science and technology at MIT, and author of the book Reclaiming Conversation.

“It’s galling to see Facebook target young children at a time when evidence is mounting that excessive social media use negatively impacts kids and teens’ wellbeing,” said Josh Golin, executive director of the Campaign for Commercial-Free Childhood.

Facebook said it developed Messenger Kids with the help of online safety experts including the National PTA and Blue Star Families. It is designed to connect children to relatives and friends through text, photos and video chat while making parents the gatekeepers. It is fully compliant with the US Children’s Online Privacy and Protection Act, the social network said.

“As children spend more and more time on digital devices,



they lose the healthy capacities to cultivate moments of quiet and solitude that are so crucial for developing empathy and healthy relationships,” said Turkle.

Jenny Radesky, MD, a developmental behaviour paediatrician and media researcher at the University of Michigan, said those under 13 years old find it hard to grasp concepts such as privacy and personal data. “They’re just starting to build awareness about their identity, their role in relationships, and morality,” she said. “Combine that with immaturity with the problematic interactions that often happen on social media, and it could be really messy.”

U.S. federal law prohibits companies from collecting personal information on those under 13 without parental consent. However, millions of children are already on Facebook, with or without their parents’ permission, said Stephen Balkam, chief executive of the nonprofit Family Online Safety Institute, who saw the launch of Messenger Kids as a pragmatic approach to the situation.

The open letter joins a chorus of discontent directed

towards the impact of social media, and in particular Facebook, on society and the young.

Industry insiders including former Facebook president Sean Parker, Salesforce CEO Marc Benioff and Apple chief executive Tim Cook have all recently expressed concerns over the use of social media by children.

“Parents, health professionals, and even investors are standing up to tell tech giants that they’ve gone too far,” said Golin. “This is a pivotal moment, and Silicon Valley executives must decide if they care about the welfare of children, families and society, or only about hooking users and pursuing profits.”

A Facebook spokesperson said: “We worked to create Messenger Kids with an advisory committee of parenting and developmental experts, as well as with families themselves and in partnership with the PTA. We continue to be focused on making Messenger Kids be the best experience it can be for families. We have been very clear that there is no advertising in Messenger Kids.”

(Source: The Guardian))

Bill Gates warns Silicon Valley of technology’s dangerous potential



As the founder of Microsoft, Bill Gates is certainly no stranger to technological advancement. In a recent interview with Axios, however, the businessman and philanthropist voiced his concerns over the potential negative impact such advances could have – issues that he’ll delve more deeply into with the release of the annual letter from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation later today.

“There’s always the question how much technology is empowering a small group of people to cause damage,” Gates said, his words primarily directed at the large technology companies currently dominating the market, such as Apple.

Gates continued, pointing out that such monopolies aren’t just about computers and smartphones. “A small group can have an impact – in the case of nuclear [weapons], on millions; and in the case of bio[terror], on billions. That is scary to me.”

The warning was directed at those in Silicon Valley, as Gates worries the companies’ activities could hinder the ability of the government to do its job (that is, “under appropriate review,” he was careful

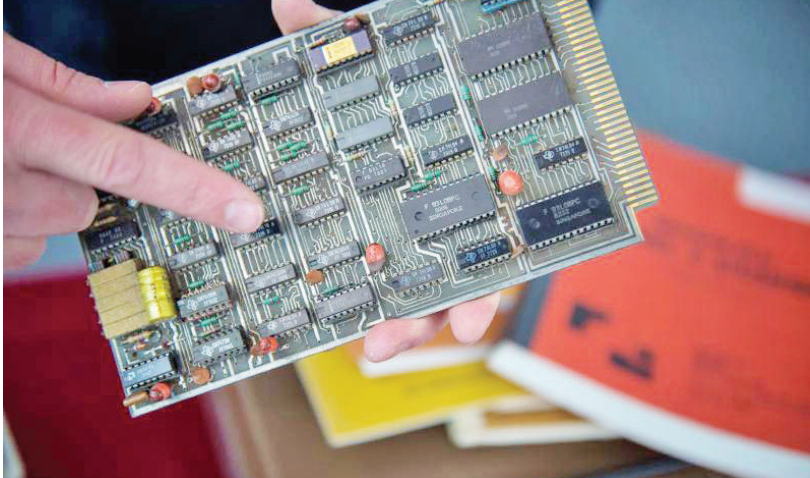
to note). Gates specifically honed in on the issue of information access, alluding to tech giants like Facebook, Google, and Apple, who may have an “enthusiasm about making financial transactions anonymous and invisible, and their view that even a clear mass-murdering criminal’s communication should never be available to the government.”

Gates suggests the companies self-evaluate to see if the issues they’re facing could be solved by utilizing government oversight – and he’s not offering advice with a lack of experience to back it up. Gates told Axios that if these companies heed his warning, they might avoid what Gates described as the “nightmarish government intervention” he contended with for Microsoft.

Whatever a company’s goals, values, and ideals may be, they are not above or aside the law. “The tech companies have to be ... careful that they’re not trying to think their view is more important than the government’s view,” Gates said. “Or than the government being able to function in some key areas.”

(Source: futurism.com)

The future of technology is uncertain as Moore’s law comes to an end



In 1965, Gordon Moore, co-founder of Intel, came up with a theory of technology progression that held true for more than 50 years. Coined “Moore’s law,” the theory suggested that the speed of computer processors would double every two years. The transistors inside of computer chips would continue to decline in cost and size but increase in power. Those predictions held true for decades, but a new study suggests that Moore’s law may have finally run out.

The study, published in Nature Electronics, suggests that technology can no longer get any smaller and innovators will have to figure out a new way to make it better. What this new way is, no one yet knows. As outlined in the new study, the future of microprocessors, the tiny computer chips that help run our lives, is complicated.

“The underlying science for this technology is as of yet unknown, and will require significant research funds—an order of magnitude more than is being invested today,” said Hassan Khan, a researcher at Carnegie Mellon University who specializes in engineering and public policy, Tech Explore reported.

Computer chips are complex devices made up of layers of transistors. The more transistors a computer has, the faster it can make complex calculations. This is why making them smaller and fitting more into a single chip is so important for technology advancements.

Moore’s law predicted that technology would continue to shrink at a rate that meant every year, twice as many transistors would be able to fit into a single computer chip, Technology Review reported. In 1975, this prediction was adjusted slightly to doubling happening once every two years.

“Half of economic growth in the U.S. and worldwide has also been attributed to this trend and the innovations it enabled throughout the economy,” said Erica Fuchs, study researcher and professor of Engineering and Public Policy at Carnegie Mellon University, Tech Explore reported.

But the law is changing. Making transistors smaller is becoming increasingly more expensive. And as Technology Review previously reported, computers and mobile devices may not be able to keep pace with new software if transistors cannot be made any smaller.

(Source: newsweek.com)

Is gaming technology ‘medicine’s new frontier?’

The Internet is rife with articles about the potentially harmful effects of gaming. Psychologists and parents have been debating the pros and cons of the issue for decades now—namely whether video games promote violence, social isolation and obesity, or on the other hand, boost cognitive development, perception, attention, memory and decision-making.

Although that particular discourse may go on forever, the truth is that some pretty amazing stuff has come out of an industry that was founded on entertainment. In fact, a simple idea of using gaming technology could very well revolutionize the way medicine is practiced and taught.

Take for instance the story of a radiologist and an IT guy from one of the most distinguished universities in the country who thought it just might be possible to use virtual reality to tackle tangible problems in medicine.

Dr. Nadeem Parkar, M.D., Saint Louis University (SLU) radiologist and assistant professor of radiology, and Kyle Collins, assistant vice president of ITS Enterprise Resources at SLU, have taken the properties of gaming and applied



them to real-world health care needs at SSM Health Saint Louis University Hospital and SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Children’s Hospital.

They’ve dubbed it “The Science of Healing.” But in reality, or rather virtual reality, it is what they’re referring to as “Medicine’s New Frontier.”

Using gaming technology, doctors at SLU are virtually stepping inside the human body to improve care.

Parkar plays down the notion that he came up with the

idea, saying instead that a gamer friend of his suggested he take his 3-D printing sideline to the next step. “I started two years ago 3-D printing organs—the heart, kidneys, etc.,” Parkar said. “I started off doing it for pediatric congenital heart patients.”

Parkar was trying to make it easier for surgeons to visualize the organs they would be working on. “As a radiologist, I am trained to see things in two dimensions. My brain is trained to see things in two dimensions. I take two-dimensional MRIs and CT scans and describe what I see. I then put it in a report for surgeons and others doing procedures on patients. But surgeons then have to convert that into three dimensions in their brains when they operate on patients. I thought if we can figure a way to convert those images, especially in very complicated cases, it could help. But 3D printing takes time. I had to find out something that was quicker. When my friend asked what was next, I thought, ‘I have to do something in virtual or augmented reality.’ But I needed engineering help. So I went to the IT people at SLU.”

(Source: Forbes)

Deforestation in the tropics plays key role in global carbon cycle: new research

Scientists at the Helmholtz Center for Environmental Research (UFZ) have adapted a method from physics to mathematically describe the fragmentation of tropical forests. In the scientific journal *Nature*, they explain how this allows to model and understand the fragmentation of forests on a global scale. They found that forest fragmentation in all three continents is close to a critical point beyond which fragment number will strongly increase. This will have severe consequences for biodiversity and carbon storage.

In order to analyze global patterns of forest fragmentation, a UFZ research group led by Prof. Andreas Huth used remote sensing data that quantify forest cover in the tropics in an extremely high resolution of 30 meters, resulting in more than 130 million forest fragments.

To their surprise they found that the fragment sizes followed on all three continents similar frequency distributions. For example, the number of forest fragments smaller than 10,000 hectares is rather similar in all three regions: 11.2 percent in Central and South America, 9.9 percent in Africa and 9.2 percent in Southeast Asia.

Large forest areas

“This is surprising because land use noticeably differs from continent to continent,” says Dr. Franziska Taubert, mathematician in Huth’s team and first author of the study. For instance, very large forest areas are transformed into agricultural land in the Amazon region. By contrast, in the forests of South-



east Asia, often economically attractive tree species are taken from the forest.

When searching for explanations for the identical fragmentation patterns, the UFZ

modelers found their answer in physics. The “fragment size distribution follows a power law with almost identical exponents on all three continents,” says biophysicist Andreas

“In a certain phase of deforestation the forest landscape exhibits fractal, self-similar structures, i.e. structures that can be found again and again on different levels,” explains Huth.

Huth. Such power laws are known from other natural phenomena such as forest fires, landslides and earthquakes.

The breakthrough of their study is the ability to derive the observed power laws from percolation theory. “This theory states that in a certain phase of deforestation the forest landscape exhibits fractal, self-similar structures, i.e. structures that can be found again and again on different levels,” explains Huth.

“In physics, this is also referred to as the critical point or phase transition, which for example also occurs during the transition of water from a liquid to gaseous state,” added co-author Dr. Thorsten Wiegand from UFZ.

Percolation theory

A particularly fascinating aspect of the percolation theory is that this universal size distribution is, at the critical point, independent of the small-scale mechanisms that led to fragmentation.

The UFZ team compared the remote sensing data of the three topical regions with several predictions of percolation theory. In support of their hypothesis they found agreement not only for the fragment size distribution, but also for two other important indicators - the fractal dimension and the length distribution of fragment edges.

Using scenarios that assume different clearing and reforestation rates, the scientists modelled how many forest fragments can be expected by 2050.

(Source: eurekalert.org)

Startling orangutan population decline recorded in Borneo, researchers say



Hunting by people and habitation destruction by oil palm, paper, logging and mining industries helped drive a startling drop of about 50 percent in the orangutan population on the island of Borneo from 1999 to 2015, scientists said on Thursday.

The researchers calculated a population decrease of about 148,500 during that 16-year period and projected another drop of 45,000 by 2050, painting a bleak picture for the future of these shaggy reddish tree dwellers that are among the world’s most imperiled great apes.

Orangutans inhabit lowland forests on Borneo, an island shared by Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei, and Indonesia’s island of Sumatra, eating wild fruits, insects, bark, flowers and leaves.

Deforestation part of danger

Deforestation was only part of the danger. Around 70 percent of the loss in Borneo’s populations may have resulted from orangutan killings by people in forested areas, the researchers said.

“People have hunted orangutans for their meat on Borneo since they colonized the area, as they hunt any other edible animal,” said biologist Maria Voigt of the German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research and the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology.

The “orangutans are not their preferred prey species. This is, rather, pigs

and deer. But they also take one when encountered.

Killing also occurs in situations where humans are frightened or startled by orangutans, for example when orangutans enter gardens or plantations to eat the crop,” Voigt added.

The researchers tallied arboreal nests for these apes and used satellite images to appraise forest loss, determining there were between 200,000 and 300,000 Borneo orangutans in 1999 and between 70,000 and 100,000 in 2015.

Conservation efforts

“It is disheartening that despite all the conservation efforts we still see these declines. But we need to remain optimistic because if the forests remain and we can reduce killing to zero we can, over time, see a rebound of orangutan numbers,” Liverpool John Moores University ecologist Serge Wich said. “Even though the numbers are bleak there is a reason for hope,” Voigt added. “We don’t think that it is likely that the species is going to go extinct soon, because we are seeing some stable populations in the larger national parks in the Indonesian part of Borneo and the some areas of the Malaysian part.”

Borneo has one orangutan species and Sumatra has two.

Wich said Sumatran population declines probably are also steep, though that data is less comprehensive.

(Source: Reuters)

How one vital coastal ecosystem is expanding with climate change



Tropical coastal mangroves are increasingly found in the world’s temperate zones. Samantha Chapman, a biologist at Villanova University, explains how her research has documented their dramatic growth into Florida’s salt marsh turf and why that raises questions about the future of coastlines.

With the help of technology, humans can traverse virtually every part of our planet’s surface, but animals and plants are less mobile. Most species can only live in zones where temperature and rain fall within specific ranges.

As regions become warmer due to climate change, plants and animals in those areas will either move to more appropriate climates or be replaced by newcomers who are well-suited to the new conditions. These changes are already occurring. For example, many plants, animals and birds in the Northern Hemisphere have shifted their ranges northward.

Salt-tolerant trees

My research team studies mangroves – salt-tolerant trees with branches that intertwine like dense jungle gyms. Mangroves line the world’s coastlines and prefer warm temperatures, so they have traditionally been restricted to subtropical and tropical environments. But they have many features that have enabled them to survive major climate shifts in the past. Now, in a harbinger of climate change, mangroves are expanding from tropical zones into temperate areas. Scientists are finding them at higher and higher latitudes

in North America, South America, Asia, Africa, Australia and Latin America.

Working with other ecologists in the shadow of the huge launch complex at Florida’s Kennedy Space Center, we have found that mangroves have increased in abundance by 70 percent in just seven years over an area of 220 square miles (567 square km). This is a dramatic change in the plant community along this stretch of the Atlantic coast. Unlike many other impacts of climate change, we expect these shifting ranges to produce some benefits, including increased carbon storage and storm surge protection.

Reproductive structures

Plants have less ability to move than animals, but some – particularly mangroves – can disperse via water over thousands of miles. Mangroves release reproductive structures called propagules, similar to seeds, which can produce new plants. They float and are distributed by ocean currents and, sometimes, big storms.

As mangrove propagules drift north along the Atlantic coast, they are reaching areas where winter freeze events that could kill them are becoming less common due to climate change. Similar movements are occurring in other locations around the world.

In the Gulf of Mexico and Florida, mangroves are increasingly found in areas recently dominated by salt marshes, which typically occur in cooler zones.

(Source: newsdeeply.com)

What the human kind knew about the Andromeda Galaxy may change again. A new discovery suggested that the neighboring galaxy is just about the same size of the Milky Way and not two or three times bigger as previously assumed.

Existing information about the spiral Andromeda galaxy may not be accurate anymore. A new study has reduced the size of Milky Way’s neighboring galaxy.

In a pre-published study, Astronomers from the International Centre for Radio Astronomy Research based in Australia revealed that they used a new technique for measuring the mass of galaxies and found that the Andromeda Galaxy is similar in size to the Milky Way.

Escape velocity

The technique, which involved observation of escape velocity and dynamical mass modeling of stars within the galaxy, found that the mass of Andromeda is roughly 800 billion times than the mass of the sun. The sun has a mass that is comparable to the Milky Way.

To measure the dynamical mass of the galaxy, the astronomers measured the rotation curve, velocity dispersion, dynamical model, and the tidal stream orbit modeling of the Andromeda. The Andromeda shines 25 percent brighter and has twice as many stars as the Milky Way. On a clear night away from city lights, the galaxy can be seen next to a bright band of the Milky Way.

“When a rocket is launched into space, it is thrown out with a speed of 11 km/s to overcome the Earth’s gravitational pull,” says Dr. Prajwal Kafle from The University of Western Australia branch of ICRAR.

“Our home galaxy, the Milky Way, is over a trillion times heavier than our tiny planet Earth so to escape its gravitational pull we have to launch with a speed of 550km/s. We used this technique to tie down the mass of Andromeda,” adds Kafle.

Early research and observations pegged Andromeda’s size as two to three times bigger than the Milky Way.

Following this latest discovery, new simulations are needed on what could probably happen if the two galaxies collide. In the past, it was said that due to its size, Andromeda would devour and make a cosmic snack out of the Milky Way.

Gravitational pull

It is believed, however, that the Andromeda is being sucked by Milky Way’s gravitational pull at a speed of 250,000 miles per hour and collision is due in 4 billion years.

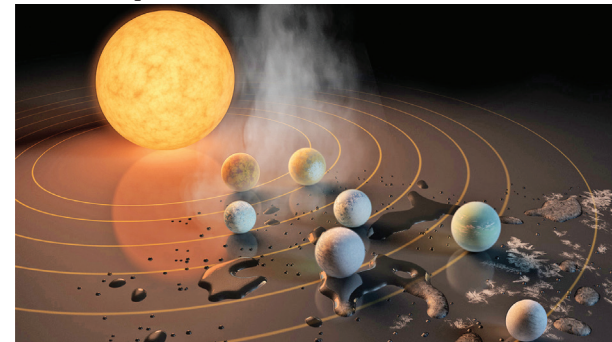
Meanwhile, a separate new study by French and Chinese astronomers concluded that Andromeda was formed after star systems, one much bigger than the other, collided with each other between 1.8 billion to three billion years ago.

The astronomers led by Francois Hammer of the Paris Observatory reportedly simulated the reconstruction of Andromeda by using the most powerful available computers in France to analyze massive information on the galaxy and its stars.

(Source: Tech Times)

Scientists discover 95 planets beyond our Solar System

Kepler is the gift that keeps on giving. After suffering a major malfunction five years ago, the rejiggered space-based telescope continues to churn away, scanning the heavens for signs of distant worlds. An international team of astronomers has now released the results of its latest survey, confirming the existence of nearly 100 new exoplanets.



Back in 2013, a mechanical failure placed the Kepler mission in jeopardy. Scientists managed to salvage the planet-hunting mission by periodically shifting its field of view. Specifically, Kepler’s thrusters are now fired about once every six hours, allowing the satellite to maintain its balance against incoming solar radiation. It’s not a perfect solution, as it can only point its eye to a specific spot in space for roughly 83 days before it has to look away to prevent sunlight from interfering with its operations. But at least it works, and it’s still pulling in immensely valuable information. This rebooted phase of the mission is called K2.

Kepler performs its search for planets by sniffing for minute dips in a star’s brightness, which are suggestive of a planet orbiting in front of it. Astronomers have to validate these dips in luminosity to prove they’re actually caused by exoplanets, and not other sources such as a nearby asteroid, interfering star systems, a distant cloud of gas and dust, or human-caused mechanical interference.

Now, this doesn’t mean that all of the other exoplanets aren’t actually exoplanets — it just means more work is required to confirm them as such. This latest K2 data investigation is the culmination of four years of meticulous researching, requiring the additional help of astronomers from NASA, Caltech, UC Berkeley, the University of Copenhagen, and the University of Tokyo.

(Source: Gizmodo)

This new graphene invention makes filthy seawater drinkable in one simple step

Using a type of graphene called Graphair, scientists from Australia have created a water filter that can make highly polluted seawater drinkable after just one pass.

The technology could be used to cheaply provide safe drinking water to regions of the world without access to it.

“Almost a third of the world’s population, some 2.1 billion people, don’t have clean and safe drinking water,” said lead author Dong Han Seo.

“As a result, millions - mostly children - die from diseases associated with inadequate water supply, sanitation and hygiene every year. In Graphair we’ve found a perfect filter for water purification.

“It can replace the complex, time consuming and multi-stage processes currently needed with a single step.”

Developed by researchers at the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO), Graphair is a form of graphene made out of soybean oil.

Graphene - a one-atom-thick, ultrastrong carbon material - might be touted as a supermaterial, but it’s been relatively expensive to produce, which has been limiting its use in broader applications.

Graphair is cheaper and simpler to produce than more traditional graphene manufacturing methods, while retaining the properties of graphene.

One of those properties is hydrophobia - graphene repels water. To turn it into a filter, the researchers developed a graphene film with microscopic nanochannels; these allow the water through, but stop larger pollutants with larger molecules.

Then the team overlaid their new film on a typical, commercial-grade water filtration membrane to do some tests.

When used by itself, a water filtration membrane becomes coated with contaminants, blocking the pores that allow the water through. The researchers found that during their tests using highly polluted Sydney Harbour water, a normal water filter’s filtration rate halved without the graphene film.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

Bed bugs may make us sick long after their removal: new study

The parting gift of a bed bug infestation may be to leave us allergic to our own homes. A new study found that their waste contains a chemical that lingers after the insects have been exterminated, and these histamines may cause allergic reactions such as rashes and breathing problems.

According to a new study conducted by scientists at North Carolina State University, histamine levels from bed bug feces can remain high for months after a home has been professionally treated.

The findings raise the stakes for infestations of the dreaded *Cimex lectularius*. “Bed bugs are typically regarded as a nuisance pest, with limited medical importance because they are not known to transmit diseases,” Zachary DeVries, study author and post-doctoral entomology researcher at NC State, said.

DeVries and his colleagues collected dust from 140 apartments located in the same building in Raleigh, North Carolina, which was known to be infested with bed bugs despite pest control efforts. The researchers also gathered samples from five other homes thought to be pest-free and located about five miles away from the apartment building. The levels of dust were measured before and after a professional pest control company used a heat treatment and insecticide spray to eradicate the bugs.

A variety of substances can be found in dust—pollen, human skin cells, bacteria — but the scientists were specifically analyzing the levels of histamine.

But more surprising was just how dramatic the difference was. “Histamine levels in bed bug infested homes were at least 20 times higher than histamine levels in homes without bed bugs,” DeVries said in a statement.

(Source: Newsweek)

Andromeda Galaxy is the same size as Milky Way

The low interest rate environment

by Jordan Portelli

Over the past years, the wave of economic weakness, primarily following the recession way back in 2008, has led major Central Banks to take action by deploying certain measures in an attempt to trigger an economic recovery.

To this extent, following the recessionary period, in order to propel inflation higher and thus ultimately economic growth, Central Banks had lowered interest rates to low levels.

However, what are the implications of such monetary easing? In my view, the impact is twofold. The monetary decision of lower interest rates has an impact on both the consumer and corporations.

From the consumer perspective, the low interest environment has offered the opportunity for many to borrow at lower rates.



However, it is important to note that such monetary decision is not an imposition on consumers, but solely an opportunity.

This is one of the reasons, why the economic recovery might take a prolonged period, as many still fear another downturn. Consumers might primarily opt to save more, rather than borrow and spend.

In this context, the savings rate preposition is an important aspect when looking at the macro environment, as this differs across geographical areas. Case in point are the differentials experienced in the US when compared to the Eurozone area.

The former savings rate is currently at 2.4%, while the latter is currently at lows of 12.02%. Thus, the perception of the economic trends has indeed an impact on people's perceptions. In all fairness, over the years we did see a pick-up in inflation triggered through consumer demand.

However, what's more interesting is how this low yielding environment affected corporations. Looking at the high yield bond market, the low interest rates have offered huge opportunities to many companies to re-finance at lower rates, and thus save on interest expense at the detriment of investors.

The more interesting bit is the fact that through low interest rates, companies restructured their balance sheets, and now they have a healthier balance sheet. In fact, fundamentally those who managed to restructure have now more strong and disciplined balance sheets.

Looking at key metrics as per industry practice, we have seen a major improvement across the board. For instance, leverage metrics, a measure of debt vs earnings being generated, prior to interest and tax payments, are at lows of 3.8x versus the highs experienced in 2010.

Likewise, interest coverage, a metric that shows the company's ability to pay its interest payments, is at highs of 2.4x as opposed to the lows of 1.4x way back in 2009. Furthermore, the generation of cash flow to debt has also improved drastically.

From a bond picking and portfolio management perspective, throughout 2016-2017 I have seen a wave of companies re-financing at much lower rates, which obviously affected the ability of a portfolio manager such as myself, to generate the high returns, which were previously being generated.

From an Investment Manager's perspective, more sanity in balance sheets is undoubtedly a positive. That said, in my view, many companies who have taken the opportunity to re-finance at lower rates, are still not paying investors a decent rate of return given the specific risks they carry.

Ultimately, despite a low interest rate environment, being an important monetary tool to stimulate economic growth, its repercussions might at times put investors at a disadvantage from a risk-reward perspective. It is imperative that prior to investing, the risks versus the returns are analyzed. Do not be fooled, don't let companies take advantage of the low interest rate environment at your expense.

(Source: timesofmalta.com)

LEARN ENGLISH

What Do I Wear?

A: Honey come on! We are going to be late! Honestly, you take longer getting ready than I do!

B: I was drying my hair and ironing my shirt! Can you come here for a sec? I need your help.

A: What is it? Why are all these clothes on the bed?

B: I don't know what to wear! Ok, give me your opinion. Do you like the way this looks? The **striped** short sleeved shirt with this **checkered** sweater and my lucky **sandals**. I like the **cut** and **hemline** of these shorts so I think I'll wear these as well.

A: Are you joking? What am I going to do with you? We are going to a **dinner party** not the beach! Wear the shirt with the silk tie I bought you and these **corduroy** pants. It's **chilly** outside so you can wear this coat.

B: Thanks honey! You have such great **fashion sense**. Now, what am I going to do with my hair?

■ Key vocabulary

striped: having stripes or bands of color

checkered: a pattern with alternating squares

sandal: a type of footwear with open toes

cut: the shape and style of a piece of clothing

hemline: the line formed by the lower edge of clothing

dinner party: an event where you eat at a friend's house

corduroy: a ribbed cotton clothing material

chilly: hilly weather or places are cold enough to make you feel uncomfortable

fashion sense: an idea for what clothing looks good

■ Supplementary vocabulary

sneakers: casual tennis shoes

polka dot: a fabric pattern with many circles

denim: a type of fabric used to make jeans

out of fashion: used to describe something that is no longer popular

tailor: a person who makes clothes, adjusts the fit

(Source: irlanguage.com)

It takes 3 years to eliminate internal SDS hotspots: DOE chief

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — Eliminating internal **d e s k** hotspots for sand and dust storms (SDSs) in southwestern provinces of Iran requires a 3-year period, ILNA quoted the chief of the Department of Environment Isa Kalantari as saying on Friday.

Referring to recent meeting on tackling sand and dust storms crisis in Khuzestan Province that was held on Thursday with some MPs and administration representatives in attendance, Kalantari noted that in-depth discussions were followed and one of its results was that this challenge cannot be resolved in a short-term period.

Providing the water right of the environment for moisturizing internal SDS sources was one the decisions taken in this meeting, said the environment chief, adding that this will need at least 7 or 8 months of work and cannot be implemented in the current [Iranian calendar] year [ending on March 20].

He also went on to say that the water right of Khuzestan's environment is estimated to be around 4.5 billion cubic meters which must be granted to the area.

"80 percent of sand and dust storms in winters are fed by internal hotspots," he highlighted.

■ SDS is a national problem

"This is a critical issue and needs the cooperation between government bodies," said Parliament (Majlis) speaker Ali Larijani over the aforesaid meeting on Thursday.

He urged the Ministry of Energy to provide the environment water right in Khuzestan and other provinces.

Larijani also called on the Agriculture Ministry to adopt required measures to guide water to SDS resources.

According to the special decree of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei and the cooperation between Majlis and the administration, appropriate budget will be allocated to SDS challenge in the next fiscal year 1397 (starting on March 21), Larijani highlighted.



■ 'No comprehensive plan to fight SDS'

MP Majid Naseri-Nejad criticized the administration for not offering any comprehensive plan to Majlis for the fight against SDS crisis in Khuzestan Province, Tasnim reported.

"The citizens of [Iran's] metropolitan areas, especially those situated in southern regions, are suffering substantial damages from SDS and air pollution, however, the Department of Environment just releases statements and doesn't provide any practical solution," he added.

No human cases of avian flu reported in Iran

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — Despite **d e s k** the outbreak of avian flu among the birds in the northern province of Gilan and also Tehran, no human cases of avian flu has been reported in Iran, head of communicable diseases department of the Ministry of Health has said.

Following the news of finding three dead birds diagnosed with avian flu in Tehran Chitgar Lake, the fear over human outbreak grow.

However, Mohammad Mahdi Guya, has recently explained that the birds found dead in Tehran were diagnosed with a different and type of avian flu (H5N8) rather than the one found in northern cities (H5N6).

"Anyhow there is no need to be worried about human outbreak as there has been no human cases reported in Iran ever," ISNA quoted Guya as saying.

All those who are in direct contact with birds and poultry receive vaccination, however, people should avoid purchasing or haunting wild birds for the time being.

The National Health and Family Planning Commission (NHPPC) of China has notified World Health Organization (WHO) in 2016 of two laboratory-confirmed cases of human infection with avian influenza A (H5N6) virus.

■ WHO risk assessment

According to the WHO official website

the organization, through its Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System (GISRS), continues to closely monitor the avian influenza A (H5N6) virus and other zoonotic influenza events. So far, the overall public health risk associated with the avian influenza A (H5N6) virus has not changed. Avian influenza A (H5N6) viruses have caused severe infection in humans, and thus far, human infections with the virus seem to be sporadic with no ongoing human-to-human transmission. However, the specific risk associated with the virus strains infecting the reported cases will be assessed when the viruses are

received and characterized in the GISRS laboratories.

The risk of international disease spread is considered to be low at this point in time.

Meanwhile, WHO advises that travelers to countries with known outbreaks of avian influenza should avoid, if possible, poultry farms, contact with animals in live bird markets, entering areas where poultry may be slaughtered, or contact with any surfaces that appear to be contaminated with feces from poultry or other animals. Travelers should also wash their hands often with soap and water, and follow good food safety and good food hygiene practices.

Air pollution: Chemicals in soap and paint contribute as many toxic pollutants as car emissions

Chemicals in everyday consumer products including soaps and paints have been revealed as a major source of air pollution comparable with emissions from the transport sector.

Research suggests products like soap and paints emit significant quantities of petroleum-based chemicals, rivalling cars and other vehicles as the top source of urban air pollution.

Air pollution has been ranked as the fifth highest health risk in the world and is estimated to kill 40,000 people in the UK every year.

Governments around the world are under increasing pressure to clean up their air and the UK has faced legal threats both at home and from the EU over its dangerous levels of pollutants, particularly nitrogen dioxide.

The study comes on the day the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) released its latest emissions figures, which showed an overall decline in air pollution. This has been attributed largely to tighter vehicle regulations.

However, the new research suggests a need to diversify regulatory efforts beyond road traffic in order to make a dent in some of the toxic chemicals infiltrating urban environments.

"As transportation gets cleaner, those other sources become more and more important," said Dr Brian McDonald, a researcher in the Chemical Sciences Division at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which led the study. The NOAA is a scientific agency within the US government that focuses on the oceans and atmosphere.

"The stuff we use in our everyday lives can impact air pollution."

The study, published in the journal Science, looked specifically at the contribution these substances make to air pollution by releasing volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

VOCs are chemicals that, upon entering the air, can react to produce both fine particulate matter and ozone – two substances that are regulated widely due to their severe effects on lung health.

These compounds are found in a variety of places, including commonly used household and industrial products such as pesticides, printing inks, adhesives, cleaning agents and personal care products, all of which contain petroleum.

Dr McDonald and his colleagues concluded these products were responsible for half of fossil fuel VOC emissions in industrialized cities. This is particularly surprising considering only around 5 per cent of raw oil is refined into chemicals for consumer products, while 95 per cent ends up in fuels.

The scientists found that, in the US, the amount of VOCs emitted by consumer and industrial products is up to three times greater than estimated by current air pollution inventories. These inventories also overestimate the contribution made by road vehicles.

While it seems unusual that something as innocuous as a perfume can have an impact on air pollution comparable with road traffic, the researchers said this can partly be explained by the role some of these consumer products are designed for.

"Gasoline is stored in closed, hopefully airtight, containers and the VOCs in gasoline are burned for energy," said NOAA atmospheric scientist Dr Jessica Gilman, a co-author of the new paper.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

Iran, Cyprus agree on boosting genetics, metabolomics co-op

Tehran University of Medical Sciences Endocrinology and Metabolism Research Institute and Cyprus Institute of Neurology and Genetics inked a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to bolster cooperation on genetics and metabolomics here on Tuesday.

The MOU was signed between the Cypriot Chief Executive Medical Director Leonidas A. Phylactou and Mohammad-Baqer Larijani, the director for teaching affairs at the Health Ministry with Cypriot envoy to Iran Andreas P. Kouzoupis and Iranian deputy health minister Mohsen Asadi-Lari in attendance, according to Khabaronline.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“colo-, col-”

■ **Meaning:** intestine

■ **For example:** Colonoscopy is usually performed on an outpatient basis.

PHRASAL VERB

Fob somebody off

■ **Meaning:** to tell someone something that is not true in order to stop them from complaining

■ **For example:** She fobbed him off with a promise to pay him the money next week.

IDIOM

Out of the blue

■ **Explanation:** if something happens out of the blue, it happens very unexpectedly

■ **For example:** I had nearly given up hope when out of the blue I was offered a job.

تفاهم ایران و قبرس برای توسعه همکاری های ژنتیک و متابولومیکس

روز سه شنبه پژوهشگاه علوم غدد و متابولیسم دانشگاه علوم پزشکی تهران و مرکز پژوهش های نورولوژی و ژنتیک قبرس برای توسعه همکاری ها در زمینه ی ژنتیک و متابولومیکس تفاهم نامه همکاری امضا کردند.

لئونیداس فیلاکتو رئیس مرکز پژوهش های نورولوژی و ژنتیک قبرس و محمد باقر لاریجانی، معاون آموزشی وزارت بهداشت تفاهم نامه همکاری امضا کردند. به گزارش خبر آنلاین این نشست با حضور آندریاس کوزوپیس سفیر قبرس در ایران و محسن اسدی لاری قائم مقام وزیر بهداشت برگزار شد.

‘Guns don’t kill people, people kill people’: time to retire

U.S. teen confesses to mass shooting at Florida High School

➡ As Americans reeled from the country’s worst school massacre since the horror at Sandy Hook six years ago, the U.S. President Donald Trump suggested the root cause of the violence was a crisis of mental health -- and defied calls to address gun control.

Terrified students hid in closets and under desks on Wednesday at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, texting for help as the gunman, Nikolas Cruz, stalked the school with a semi-automatic AR-15 rifle.

Cruz has been charged with 17 counts of premeditated murder, appearing on Thursday afternoon before a judge who ordered him held without bond.

After being read his legal rights, “Cruz stated that he was the gunman who entered the school campus armed with a AR-15 and began shooting students that he saw in the hallways and on the school grounds,” court documents showed.

Cruz also admitted he discarded his rifle -- which he bought legally in Florida -- and tactical gear in order to blend in with the crowd to flee the campus, the documents showed.

The recent mass shooting at a school in Florida is the latest reminder that the United States is a “very violent country,” a journalist in Detroit says.

After the shooting, he stopped at a Wal-Mart store and then McDonald’s, Broward County Sheriff Scott Israel told reporters. He was detained 40 minutes later, after police identified him using school security camera footage.

Expelled from school for disciplinary reasons, Cruz was known to be fixated on firearms -- and had reportedly been identified as a potential threat to his classmates.

In a somber televised address to the nation in response to the 18th school shooting so far this year, Trump vowed to make mental health a priority -- after tweeting about the “many signs” the gunman was “mentally disturbed” -- while avoiding any talk of gun curbs.

Earlier in the day, Trump had asserted that “neighbors and classmates knew he was a big problem. Must always report such instances to authorities, again and again!”

But U.S. authorities themselves were under scrutiny, after the FBI confirmed it was alerted last September to a message posted



on YouTube, in which a user named Nikolas Cruz vowed: “I’m going to be a professional school shooter.”

In a statement, the FBI said it had carried out “database reviews and other checks” but was unable to identify the person who made the post.

■ **Trump cites mental health, not guns, in speech on shooting**

Declaring the nation united and grieving with “one heavy heart,” Trump promised on Thursday to tackle school safety and “the difficult issue of mental health” in response to the deadly shooting in Florida. He made no mention of the scourge of gun violence.

Not always a natural in the role of national comforter, Trump spoke deliberately, at one point directly addressing children who may feel “lost, alone, confused or even scared.”

“I want you to know that you are never alone and you never will be,” Trump said. “You have people who care about you, who love you, and who will do anything at all to protect you.”

However, the ones killed were alone when they were shot in cold blood in fear and hope. The ones who lost their precious lives had many hopes and ambitions.

Now they are dead, and it could be every and each one of us, at a school, stadium, concert hall, cinema, home, Middle East, Americas... anywhere, it could be.

Such incidents are cause of sorrow and pain, I cannot explain how I felt when I saw the horrible pictures of the Florida High School shooting, just like how I felt when I saw the massacre committed by the ISIL terrorists killing cadets in Camp Speicher in Tikrit, Iraq. At the time of the attack there were between 4,000 and 11,000 unarmed cadets in the camp. ISIL terrorists singled out Shia and non-Muslim cadets from Sunni ones and murdered them.

Who arms and supports terrorist groups like ISIL? No one can be so naive to believe that they have just popped out. I recall the U.S. President Trump as saying on his election campaign to Hillary Clinton that the U.S. created ISIL. Well done!

While Trump stressed the importance of mental health and school safety improvements, his latest budget request would slash Medicaid, the major source of federal funding for treating mental health problems, and cut school safety programs by more than a third. Last year, he signed a resolution

blocking an Obama-era rule designed to keep guns out of the hands of certain mentally disabled people.

Trump’s silence on guns was noted with displeasure by many who are seeking tougher firearm restrictions. But the White House said the president wanted to keep his remarks focused on the victims.

Before he was a candidate, Trump at one point favored some tighter gun regulations. But he embraced gun rights as a candidate, and the National Rifle Association spent \$30 million in support of his campaign.

During his brief, televised statement, Trump said he wanted to work to “create a culture in our country that embraces the dignity of life,” a phrase likely to resonate with his conservative base.

In contrast, former President Barack Obama tweeted out a call for “long overdue, common-sense gun safety laws.” Obama wrote: “We are grieving with Parkland. But we are not powerless. Caring for our kids is our first job.”

In reacting to previous mass shootings, Trump has largely focused on mental health as a cause, dismissing questions about gun control. After a shooting at a Texas church in November left more than two dozen dead, the president said, “This isn’t a guns situation.”

The US has averaged one school shooting every 60 hours since the beginning of 2018, data shows.

Trump was criticized in early August for saying that both white nationalists and counter-protesters were responsible for the violent clashes at a white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.

While Trump has offered somber responses to some tragedies, he has also drawn criticism for other reactions.

After the Orlando shootings at a gay nightclub that left 49 dead in June 2016, then-candidate Trump tweeted, “Appreciate the congrats for being right on radical Islamic terrorism.” In the wake of a deadly terror attack in London last June, he went after Mayor Sadiq Khan on Twitter.

Sadiq Khan compares the US president’s rhetoric against Islam to tactics used by ISIL to inspire terror attacks in Western cities.

EU’s new military pact poses no threat to NATO: Mogherini

The European Union has dismissed a call by the United States “to include in written EU documents” that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO) role in protecting Europe would not be threatened by the EU’s newly-established massive military pact.

“This is already clearly stated in black and white in the EU treaties, so no need further to speculate on that,” the union’s diplomatic chief Federica Mogherini told reporters on Friday in the Bulgarian capital of Sofia.

The EU launched a massive military pact on December 11 as it seeks to coordinate policies and projects among member states in the face of alleged threats from the east of the continent.

The EU launches a massive military pact which includes modern and sophisticated projects.

The European Commission, the executive arm of the EU, unveiled the Permanent Structured Cooperation, known as PESCO, which was signed by 25 participating EU member states.

The commission said the states are also set to endorse the European Defense Fund (EDF), a project with an annual budget of 1.5 billion euro.

The PESCO was signed at the European Council in Brussels on November 13 and is part of efforts led by Germany and France to bring the EU closer to having a permanent joint military force parallel to NATO but exclusive to the EU.



Mogherini, who is in Sofia to participate in a meeting of EU foreign ministers, emphasized that the new pact does not seek to replace or compete with NATO.

“NATO is mentioned in the EU treaty as the responsible organization for collective defense for those EU member states that are NATO allies, so it’s clear the work we’re doing on European defense in the EU is not aiming at substituting for NATO when it comes to collective defense,” Mogherini pointed out.

The US is concerned that EU plans for closer military ties between the bloc’s members risk undermining NATO

as the alliance confronts Russia.

NATO members will discuss strains in the U.S.-Turkey relations and Washington’s concerns over EU plans for closer defense ties between the bloc’s members.

“Certainly we do not want this to be a protectionist vehicle for the EU and we’re going to watch carefully, because if that becomes the case then it could splinter the strong security alliance that we have,” she told reporters.

The top EU diplomat pointed to a meeting in Brussels on Wednesday among NATO defense ministers including the U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and said the talks had allowed her to reassure that the EU military pact has no intention of replacing the alliance.

Unlike similar efforts in the past, PESCO is not being opposed by the U.S.-led NATO, which aims to benefit from stronger militaries.

Some members have also brandished the new union as an attempt to counter Russia. Western governments have been at odds with Moscow since the Crimean Peninsula, formerly territory of Ukraine, voted to unify with Russia in 2014.

Moscow has already been unnerved by NATO’s increased military activities on Russia’s western borders. Moscow says the military alliance seeks to establish permanent presence near Russia by gradually building up forces there.

(Source: Press TV)

Hezbollah chief: Trump after Syrian oil and gas riches

➡ He added there is also speculation that the crisis in relations between certain Persian Gulf Arab states with Doha is over the possession of Qatar’s abundant gas reserves.

Elsewhere in his speech, the Hezbollah chief said Syrian President Bashar al-Assad had personally ordered the downing of the Israeli F-16 fighter on Feb. 10

“Beshar Assad ordered the downing of the Zionist regime’s fighter.”

He added, “It was a Syrian decision... and Iran and any other party had no role in it.”

Nasrallah also called the downing of the fighter a “unique military achievement” which will have negative consequences for Israel.

Iran, harbinger of unity, amity among Muslims: Chairman of Southern India Ulema Council

Chairman of Southern India Ulema Council Seyed Taghi Reza Abedi pointed to the key role of Iran in the Islamic world and said, “Islamic Republic of Iran is harbinger of unity and amity among Muslims across the world.”

In an interview with MNA correspondent on Friday, he referred to the outstanding and prominent role of Iran in promoting unity and amity among Muslims across the globe and said, “Iran is the only country in the world that resisted strongly against oppression and tyranny of vo-

racious governments such as Zionist regime. Under such circumstances, Iran invited all Muslims to empathy, unity and amity in a safe environment.”

Given the above issue, Iran is a paradigm for all Muslims in the world, he said, adding, “broadly speaking, Islamic Republic of Iran has currently been turned into a religious and cultural hub in the Islamic world.”

Turning to the recent trip of Iranian President Rouhani to India, he said, “Iran and India have age-old cultural and historical relationships in a way that the two countries have

stood firmly by each other in all spheres.”

The India’s religious scholar pointed out that Iran is the only country in the world that has stood by all Muslims and has established very amicable and intimate relationship with Indian Muslims as well.

Abedi added, “it is hoped that President Rouhani’s maiden visit to India will open a new chapter for broadening bilateral cooperation in line with spreading peace and security for all countries in the world.”

(Source: MNA)

To stop migration, stop the abuse of Africa’s resources

➡ 4. Providing legal protection and opportunities - possibly using some of the 6bn euros (\$7.5bln) allocated by the EU to strengthen Europe’s external borders - for “climate migrants”, that is those (millions of people) who flee African countries because of the effects of climate change.

5. Moving from crisis management to crisis prevention. This includes rejecting the policy of “outsourcing” migration management, a short-term “solution” that has created

an economic boom in a number of centers, some located in desert areas, becoming an industry that profits off the most vulnerable.

It could be claimed that none of these policies is realistic, or fully feasible. If so, it is necessary to at least deconstruct the common image of a generous Europe committed to finding humanitarian solutions to “millions of migrants”, and that has to cope with the consequences of “others’ problems”.

Indeed, too often we tend to approach the

dramatic present of many Middle Eastern and African countries as something that pertains to peoples and contexts that are largely detached from our political, historical and economic past and present.

This mindset is often part of an ongoing medievalization of these regions, that is, the tendency to juxtapose an allegedly “medieval” Middle East and Africa with a modern, secular, normative West.

It is necessary to overcome this seg-

regated interpretation of “our history” and “their history”, paving the way for a more humble approach towards the peoples’ region and their suffering. This new attitude will help to reshape the paradigmatic schemes through which to look at the “European Neighborhood” and to realize Eric Hobsbawm’s wish to rescue not only “the stockinger and the peasant, but also the nobleman and the king”.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

1000s of Israeli protesters call for Netanyahu’s resignation over bribery

Thousands of people have staged a demonstration in the occupied Palestinian territories to demand the resignation of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu after police recommended he be charged with bribery in connection with illegal gifts he received from a number of wealthy businessmen.



Between 1,000 and 2,000 protesters rallied in a Tel Aviv square, some with signs saying “crooks go home” and “crime minister”.

Israeli police investigators have been grilling Netanyahu for corruption over his involvement in cases 1000 and 2000.

Police said on Tuesday enough evidence had been found for the 68-year-old Chairman of the Likud party to be charged.

Case 1000 revolves around alleged illicit gifts given to Netanyahu and his family by different businessmen, most notably the Israeli-born Hollywood producer Arnon Milchan.

The Israeli prime minister and his wife, Sara, have denied wrongdoing in the case, claiming that the value of the items was significantly lower than reported, and that they were only “trifles” exchanged between close friends.

Case 2000 focuses on an alleged clandestine deal made between Netanyahu and Yedioth Ahronoth publisher and owner Arnon “Noni” Mozes, in which the 68-year-old chairman of the Likud party promised Mozes he would support a bill to reduce the circulation of Yedioth’s main commercial rival, the Hebrew-language freebie Israel Hayom, in exchange for favorable coverage of himself in Yedioth.

Reports emerged earlier this year that the president of the World Jewish Congress and Netanyahu’s long-time ally, Ronald Lauder, had given the premier and his son gifts, including expensive suits. The accounts prompted Israeli police to interrogate the prime minister.

Netanyahu is currently under probe over suspicions that he accepted 1 million euros (about \$1.1 million) from accused French fraudster Arnaud Mimran for campaign funds during the 2009 elections.

There are also calls for Netanyahu to be investigated for his role in a billion-dollar deal to purchase three submarines from German shipbuilder ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems GmbH.

(Source: Press TV)

Yemen War: Trial time for Saudi Arabia?

➡ - It is true that in the wake of unlawful US-backed, Saudi-led bombing, some Western governments have decided to suspend the sale of weapons worth tens of billions of dollars to Saudi Arabia. It is a recognition, a long time in coming, that the Saudi-led coalition’s military campaign in Yemen have devastated the country, killed thousands of civilians and brought it to the brink of famine. However, unlawful airstrikes still continue, which means the decision by some Western governments to suspend arms sales has sent no message to the Saudis. US President Donald Trump, in his first trip to Riyadh for instance, sent an alternative, deeply troublesome message. He sold American weapons to the Saudis worth \$110 billion - nearly as much as President Obama authorized during his eight years in office.

- The deals include Raytheon bombs, Lockheed Martin missile defense systems and BAE combat vehicles, and some of the weapons whose sales had been suspended. Thanks to these weapons, the scars of unlawful airstrikes can be found across Yemen, where the Saudi-led coalition has carried out scores of attacks that hit homes, schools, markets, and hospitals since March 2015, when it began its military campaign against the Ansarullah resistance movement and forces loyal to the former President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

- Human Rights Watch has documented numerous unlawful coalition attacks over the last three years, many war crimes. In many of these cases, including the attacks on funeral halls and markets, the organization’s investigators were able to identify the US weapons that were used. These are the very same weapons that continue to drive Yemen, already the poorest nation in the Middle East, toward humanitarian catastrophe.

- Both the Saudi-led coalition and their American allies have blocked or restricted critical relief supplies from reaching civilians. Seven million people face starvation and cholera ravages parts of the country. The UN should be urging the Saudis to shift course by abiding by the laws of war and holding those responsible for past abuses to account.

- Without Washington’s much-needed support and consent this war can never continue. By going to Riyadh to sell the Saudi weapons worth over \$110 billion, President Donald Trump effectively told them to continue as before and not to worry about any international backlash at the UN - the flow of US weapons would not stop. This makes the US government complicit in Saudi war crimes. Continued US arms sales to a country that has repeatedly violated the laws of war expose US officials to legal liability for aiding and abetting Saudi war crimes.

It is against this backdrop and others that the UN and The Hague should step in, introducing a resolution intended to end the US-backed, Saudi-led war on Yemen. The resolution should end US arms transfers to Saudi Arabia, as requiring the White House to certify that the Saudi-led coalition is taking all feasible precautions to minimize civilian casualties is not going to mean anything at all -- let alone end the human suffering there.

The UN and the International Criminal Court in The Hague are in the know that the people of Yemen can take no more and that they need to react fast. Innocent people are suffering from unlawful airstrikes because the US supports the Saudi-led coalition and because US weapons have been used against civilian populations. This is an international legal problem the UN and the ICC should be paying more attention to. If they won’t try to curtail the ongoing US-backed war crimes by Saudi Arabia and the rest of the coalition, no other world body would ever step in to make clear - by using its own power to end the war - that the lives of Yemeni civilian can no longer be disregarded.

Footballer gets five-game ban for racially abusing opponent

Clyde defender Ally Love has been banned for five games for racially abusing an opponent during a league match.

Love was found to have directed a stream of racial insults towards opposition winger Rabin Omar throughout Clyde's draw with Annan on January 2.

The 26-year-old was alleged to have called 20-year old Dutchman Omar a "P**j b*****d" among other insults and the incident was reported to referee Scott Millar at full time.

That prompted an investigation by the Scottish FA compliance officer and a notice of complaint for Love, who was making his debut for Clyde after moving from Brechin.

Detail of the incident were included in Millar's match report and witnesses backed up the claims.

Love was charged with breaching rule 202, which covers excessive misconduct and the case was heard by an independent panel. Eleven hours of evidence were heard on the first day of the hearing, with the panel then taking further time to consider the case.

The panel has now handed down a five-match suspension, which takes immediate effect.

(Source: stv.tv)

Pique's gesture at Espanyol to be probed

The competition committee of the Royal Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) has opened an investigation against Barcelona defender Gerard Pique regarding his goal celebration at Espanyol that was deemed offensive by the home supporters.

Pique celebrated by raising his finger to his lips to hush the home supporters at the RCDE Stadium after scoring the equalizer in his team's 1-1 league draw at Espanyol on Feb. 4.

The Spain international's gesture was considered "provocative" by La Liga president Javier Tebas, who admitted that no action could be taken as it was not mentioned in the referee's game report.

The RFEF confirmed to ESPN FC on Thursday that the competition committee has opened a "classified investigation process" on Pique for his goal celebration against Espanyol and will listen to all parties before deciding whether to open disciplinary proceedings.

After the game, Pique said that telling the Espanyol fans to be quiet was the least he could do given insults they had aimed at his family. That was reflected in La Liga's weekly report sent to the RFEF.

Tebas said after Pique's gesture that it would notify the RFEF's competition committee of all "provocative goal celebrations and clear simulations" even when not mentioned in the referee's report.

(Source: Soccernet)

Ice Hockey: Russia beat Slovenia in 2018 Olympics Hockey



The Russian men's ice hockey team bounced back from a shock opening defeat to Slovakia by thrashing Slovenia 8-2 at the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea, on Friday.

The Gangneung Hockey Centre was treated to an ice hockey clinic by the Russians as they took the lead late in the first period and never let up.

Kirill Kaprizov, 20, had a hat-trick, and veteran Ilya Kovalchuk scored two in an inspired performance from the 34-year-old.

Sergei Mozyakin, Ilya Kablukov and Alexander Barabanov were the other Russian scorers against a Slovenia side who were helpless to stop their overwhelming opponents.

Their only consolations were captain Jan Mursak's goal in the second period that came when Slovenia were already trailing 5-0 and Ziga Pance's late finish.

The first period was relatively tight and looked as though it may end goalless until Slovenia lost a man to the penalty box with barely two minutes remaining.

OAR took advantage of their power play to go ahead through a Mozyakin rocket before Kovalchuk doubled their lead 22 seconds later, firing home via a deflection.

The Russians came out pumped up for the second period and produced 20 minutes of incredible quality to put the game out of sight.

A deft finish from Barabanov finished a fine move for the Russian athletes' third six minutes into the second period.

Some pure class from Kovalchuk then set up Kablukov for the fourth as he breezed through the Slovenia defence before putting it on a plate.

A tight-angle, first-time finish from Kaprizov made it 5-0 as he netted the third Russian goal in just over four minutes, before Mursak pulled one back.

Perhaps the goal of the game came from Kovalchuk, who slapped a bullet shot high into the net for 6-1 after superb one-touch hockey in the build-up.

Kaprizov scored two more early in the third period to complete his treble before the Russian athletes finally let up the intensity. Pance's slap shot earned Slovenia their second goal of the game 32 seconds from time.

(Source: Bleacherreport)

Yamaha boss confident Rossi will race beyond 2018



year deal. When asked if the two sides were waiting to understand Rossi's level of competitiveness, Jarvis said it was difficult to say.

"I think these three tests are important," he explained. "We've done one and Valentino's

feeling comfortable straight away.

"We haven't set ourselves a timeframe at the moment. We wanted to get Maverick sorted out because Maverick expressed a desired to be able to decide his future, to

relieve himself of that pressure, obviously being just 23 years of age he was somebody that we definitely wanted to keep, and we see a long career for him."

(Source: Racer.com)

Egyptian powerlifter suspended for four years for anti-doping violation



The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) has suspended Egyptian powerlifter Zeinab Oteify for four years for committing an anti-doping violation.

The three-time Paralympian returned an adverse analytical finding for Pralmorelin and metabolite, a Growth Hormone Releasing Peptide, in a urine sample provided on 5 September 2017 after an out-of-competition test in Cairo, Egypt.

This substance is included on the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) 2017 Prohibited List under the category S2: Peptide Hormones, Growth Factors, Related Substances and Mimetics. It is prohibited at all times, both in and out of competition.

As a result of her violation, Oteify - who competes in the women's up to 45kg class - will be ineligible for competition for four years from 6 October 2017, the date of the provisional suspension, until 16 October 2021.

All Oteify's results obtained from 5 September 2017, the date of the test and onwards will be disqualified including forfeiture of any medals, points, records and prizes.

World Para Powerlifting continues to

deliver the information and awareness programme "Raise The Bar" to educate athletes and their support personnel about anti-doping matters.

The IPC would like to remind all athletes about the risks associated with using supplements, and that the principle of strict liability applies to anti-doping matters. Therefore, each athlete is strictly liable for the substances found in his or her sample, and that an anti-doping rule violation occurs whenever a prohibited substance (or its metabolites or markers) is found in his or her bodily specimen, whether or not the athlete intentionally or unintentionally used a prohibited substance or was negligent or otherwise at fault.

As a signatory of the World Anti-Doping Code (WADC), the IPC remains committed to a doping-free sporting environment at all levels. The IPC, together with the International Federations and the National Paralympic Committees, established the IPC Anti-Doping Code to prevent doping in sport for Paralympic athletes, in the spirit of fair play. The IPC Anti-Doping Code is in conformity with the general principles of the WADC.

(Source: Paralympic.org)

Wenger salutes Arsenal adaptation after Europa League stroll at Ostersunds



Arsene Wenger praised his Arsenal side for the way they performed in unfamiliar surroundings as they left Ostersunds with one foot in the last 16 of the Europa League.

Surrounded by snow drifts at the Jamt-kraft Arena and playing on an unfamiliar 4G pitch, a strong Arsenal side overcame trying conditions to win 3-0.

Wenger got out of the group stages by largely utilizing his fringe players and young prospects but, now sitting eight points off the top four, winning the Europa League arguably presents the Gunners with their best shot of returning to the Champions League.

That explains why the likes of Mesut Ozil and Henrikh Mkhitaryan were included here and it was the former who rounded off a straightforward win after a Nacho Monreal effort and a Sotirios Papagiannopoulos own goal had set Arsenal on their way, with Ostersund missing a last-gasp penalty.

"I think we adapted quite well to the pitch," Wenger said after the game.

"They (Ostersund) were maybe a bit cautious at the start and we took advantage of it. I feel that at 2-0 at half-time, it was

important for us not to concede a goal and win the second half.

"I felt there was more to score one or two more in the second half but we were in control and once we went 2-0 up... overall we won in a comfortable way.

"The risk at the start was that I didn't know how tough the pitch would be for our players. But overall we have no game over the weekend, so it was an easier decision.

"The only risk was the injuries. I'm happy we had no problems and the pitch was quite good."

The manner of this victory, with Ostersunds unable to register a goal as Arsenal's captain on the night David Ospina kept out Tom Petterson's weak stoppage-time penalty, means the pressure is off the Gunners in next week's return leg at the Emirates Stadium.

That will suit Wenger as Arsenal have the Carabao Cup final against Manchester City three days later and the Frenchman admits he is likely to shuffle his pack.

"We'll try to win the game again," he said.

"Maybe we'll rotate the players who did not play tonight and rest one or two who played tonight."

(Source: Skysports)

Grandmother's strength inspiring Amanda Dennis



she says is important to develop teamwork, communication and spatial awareness. "People don't really realize how hard it is to put on a blindfold and orientate themselves on a court," she said.

Family inspiration

Dennis, who is one of the few left-handed goalball players, has not stopped improving ever since, pushing herself to be the best. A key figure in that journey was her grandmother, who inspired her in her everyday life.

"She went through hell and back with having cancer for over ten years," said Dennis. "They gave her six months to

live when she first found out she had cancer, and she fought and lived far more than that. Her will to live, and fight and her desire to support me in absolutely everything I do inspires me. "When she passed away it was one of the most devastating moments for me, but I could use her strength as an individual to fight carcinogenic cancer for 10 years, and use her as inspiration in my hardest moments.

"Her fight was my fight in Rio, and I was sad that I couldn't share my first Paralympic medal with her, but I know she's somewhere watching and seeing that I achieved my goal, and I'm hungry for more.

"Her strength lives within me every day to work harder and to be better, but not just better as an athlete, but being a better person and working on having a good character and being a good leader for my teammates, because I always had a leader in my life".

Fun facts

Besides sports, she also shared some unknown facts about her. "I am a Harry Potter fan and one of my favorite moments from London 2012 was getting the opportunity to go on the Harry Potter Studio Tour, and explore the wizarding world."

She also describes herself as a really picky eater, and most of the time at tournaments Dennis is not keen on the food given. Her favorite food is chicken alfredo or her grandma's homemade macaroni and cheese.

"If you ask any of my teammates they'll say that I love dessert," she said. "If I could live on just that and still perform well, I would."

(Source: Paralympic.org)

Iran up to 33rd in latest FIFA world ranking

S P O R T S Team Melli have moved up one spot to 33rd in the latest FIFA world ranking released on Thursday.

The Iranian national football team still are the best Asian football team.

Australia are second, followed by Japan, South Korea and Saudi Arabia.

Germany retain top spot in all confederations ahead of Brazil.

Iceland have climbed to an all-time high position of 18th in the latest ranking.

Iran's opponents in Group B of the 2018 World Cup Portugal and Spain are third and sixth respectively.

Morocco also sit at 42nd place in the ranking. There was some significant movement further down the order, though, with Venezuela (48th, up 4), Hungary (49th, up 5) and Jamaica (50th, up 5) all entering the top 50 at the expense of Cameroon (51st, down 6), Ghana (54th, down 4), and Burkina Faso (57th, down 13).

The next edition of FIFA's ranking list is due to be published on March 15, 2018.

Queiroz's team have been drawn in the 2018 World Cup Group B along with Spain, Morocco and Portugal. Iran will open the campaign with a match against Morocco at Saint Petersburg on June 15.

Team Melli, meanwhile, face Spain in Kazan on 20 June before meeting Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal in Saransk five days later.



Qataris, Saudi Arabian teams interested in Persepolis's Mensha: Report

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** – Nigerian media reports suggest that Qatari and Saudi Arabian football clubs have shown interest in signing Persepolis's striker Godwin Mensha.

Mensha scored Persepolis's first goal against Nasaf of Uzbekistan in Group C of the AFC Champions League on Tuesday, where they won the match 3-0.

The 28-year-old striker, who joined Persepolis in May 2017 on a two-year contract, helped the Iranian giants to achieve their best AFC Champions League performance ever in reaching the semi-final last year.

The Nigerian forward had been also linked with a move to Turkish football club Bursaspor.

Persepolis have been banned from



registering players for two windows for breaching rules in September and it seems the Reds are reluctant to sell their striker.

Nikkhah Bahrami invited to Iran basketball national team

S P O R T S Iran basketball newly-appointed coach Mehran Shahintab has invited Samad Nikkhah Bahrami to the national team.

Shahintab has invited 15 players for the match against Kazakhstan in the Asian Qualifiers for FIBA Basketball World Cup 2019, slated for Feb. 22.

Iran will face Kazakhstan in their home. In second game of this time window Iran will meet Iraq in Tehran.

Squad:

1- Hamed Haddadi (218-C-85), 2- Mohammad Samad Nikkhah Bahrami (199-F-83), 3- Rouzbeh Arghavan (214-C/F-88), 4- Farid Aslani (183-PG-88), 5- Mohammad Jamshidi (199-SF-91), 6- Mohammad Hassanzadeh (203-PF-90), 7- Saeid Davarpanah (190-G/F-87), 8- Aren Davoudi (185-PG-86), 9- Navid Rezaeifar (185-G-96), 10- Oshin Sahakian (200-PF-86),



11- Arsalan Kazemi (200-SF-90, college: Oregon), 12- Asghar Kardoust (212-C-86), 13- Sajjad Mashayekhi (180-PG-94), 14- Navide Niktash (203-G/F-91), 15- Meisam Mirzaei (210-C-92)

Ri Hyang Ok aims for rare double-double

Zurich: Being part of a FIFA World Cup is something that everyone involved in football dreams of. Be it as a fan in the stadium, cheering on your team and enjoying the atmosphere, or even as a player, vying for the ultimate prize and representing your country.

This dream came true for Ri Hyang Ok in a number of different ways. She played for her home country of DPR Korea at two FIFA Women's World Cups, in 1999 and 2003 in the USA.

She did not get her hands on any silverware, with her team bowing out after the group stages both times, but that was not the end of the World Cup adventure for Ri.

Twelve years later, she was again part of a tournament, this time in Canada and in a completely different role. And she aims to be suiting up again with the whistle in hand during next year's FIFA Women's World Cup in France.

"As a player I never made it through to the final. The group phase was as good as it got and then we were on

the plane back home. But I really wanted to experience another World Cup, so I asked myself, 'how can I do that?' "the Korean said in an interview with FIFA.com. And then inspiration came to her.

"I experienced the 1999 and 2003 World Cups as a player, and I was surprised to see female referees. That was so exciting, since I'd usually only seen male referees. I watched them during the matches and thought to myself: I'd like to follow in their footsteps and be like them, so I became a FIFA referee."

Ri was in charge of four matches in Canada, including the last 16 tie between Germany and Sweden and the third-place match, where England edged Germany 1-0.

Ri has also found that the two activities have more in common than you might think.

"My experiences as a player and as a referee are actually quite similar," she said. "I'm in a big stadium, out on the

pitch and all around me are players, referees, coaches, other officials and plenty of spectators.

"There are differences though of course. As a player, I needed to know all about the opposition, whereas as a referee, I need a knowledge of both teams. And although I'm a former player, I'm still constantly learning new things, out on the pitch or in the classroom. I'm learning wherever I go."

One thing that has changed significantly is the game itself, which has become quicker, more athletic and more direct. And this is another reason why the 40-year-old loves the sport.

"To be honest, football is something that I simply find wonderful. Being a player in the stadium was my whole world. I felt free-spirited and liberated, and it was a feeling that I wanted to keep hold of. As a referee, I can sense the excitement and the emotions of the players, and feel what the spectators are feeling. It's really special."

(Source: the-afc)

Speed skating: Canada's Bloemen wins 10,000m, Kramer fails again

Canada's Ted-Jan Bloemen produced an inspired display of impeccable technique to claim gold in the men's 10,000 metres on Thursday in an Olympic record time of 12 minutes and 39.77 seconds.

Defending champion Jorrit Bergsma of the Netherlands had to settle for silver and Italian Nicola Tumolero took the bronze medal.

Sochi silver medalist Sven Kramer of the Netherlands, one of the favorites for gold, finished in a disappointing sixth place as his curse in the longest Olympic distance struck again.

Bloemen was overcome by emotion when he realized Kramer, who raced in the last pair, was not going to beat his time.

The 31-year-old sank to the side of the track and covered his face in his hands as tears streamed down his cheeks. He found the energy to leap into the air in celebration after taking his place on the podium.

"I always felt from deep inside that I was able to do something special on the ice but I was never able to show it," Bloemen told reporters.

Bloemen was born and raised in the Netherlands but opted to race for Canada in 2014 after failing to qualify for the last Olympics. He was the first Canadian to win an individual Olympic speed skating event since Gaetan Boucher in 1984.

"I had to find a different way to do it because I kind of hit a wall in my career (in the Netherlands)," he added. "I found that different way and I got way more than I ever would have hoped."

Bloemen, the world record holder, faced a daunting task as Bergsma, who raced in the pair before him, shaved 2.46 seconds of the Olympic record he set in Sochi.

But the Canadian displayed nerves of steel, producing a tremendous effort to beat the Dutchman by 2.22 seconds.

He was a picture of poise on the ice,



skating evenly and staying under the punishing pace set by Bergsma through the grueling 25-lap race, before ending with a late burst of speed.

"It was a good time but I wasn't sure it was going to be enough," Bergsma said. Ted-Jan was skating a really good race.

"He was skating under my time and I knew if he kept going like he was he would beat me and he could also push it a little bit to the end. He's the deserving champion."

Kramer, roared on by an entire Dutch nation willing him to victory, ran out of steam in the Olympic event in which gold has consistently eluded him.

At the Vancouver Games eight years ago, Kramer finished first but was disqualified for choosing the wrong lane after his coach gave him the wrong instructions.

He struggled to hold on to third place on Thursday before steadily losing pace over the last quarter of the race.

"It wasn't good enough. I had a pretty tough race," Kramer said. "I didn't come in the flow right away and I couldn't bring the laps down. Nothing went my way today."

(Source: Reuters)

Alpine skiing: Swede Hansdotter wins gold, no medal for Shiffrin

Sweden's Frida Hansdotter won gold in the women's slalom as defending champion and clear favorite Mikaela Shiffrin of the United States failed to even reach the podium.

Shiffrin has utterly dominated women's slalom, winning four of the last five World Cup season titles and the last three World Championships, as well as the gold in Sochi four years ago.

But her performance was well below her usual standards and she said she had been unwell prior to her first run.

Hansdotter's combined time from the two legs was one minute 38.63 leaving her just 0.05 seconds ahead of Switzerland's Wendy Holdener, who had led after a brilliant first leg run.

"I knew it would be tough, Mikaela has been so strong this season. I was maybe a little bit surprised. It's nice for me to beat her for once because she has been beating me so many times," said Hansdotter.

"It's completely magic. I've battled so hard for this medal. Winning Olympic gold is a dream."

Austria's Katharina Gallhuber, who has never reached the podium in a World Cup race and is ranked 10th in slalom in the World Cup, was in the bronze medal position with Shiffrin fourth, 0.40 behind Hansdotter.

Shiffrin had been aiming to become the first skier to defend an Olympic slalom title but she looked flat in her first leg and needing to make up time in her second run, she was actually slower.

After the race the 22-year-old stepped back from her suggestion that she was struggling with her health and said she had no excuses.

"The only one who can beat myself in slalom is me and I beat myself in the wrong way today," she said.

"It's a really big bummer but I will learn. Coming here and skiing the way that I did, really conservative, was a huge, huge dis-



appointment. It's hard to explain how that feels but that's how life goes."

Hansdotter, a 32-year-old veteran of the World Cup circuit, will become the second Swedish woman to win Olympic slalom following Anja Paerson in Turin in 2006.

She was the season World Cup winner in slalom in 2006 and had won slalom silver in the 2015 World Championships in Beaver Creek.

Holdener wasn't able to capitalize fully on beautiful first run of 48.89 seconds, as the first skier of the day, but she was delighted to have a silver medal.

"My legs weren't that fast on the second run, I felt the pressure so I fought to the end and I'm really happy to get the second place," she said.

The biggest upset was 20-year-old outsider Gallhuber finishing ahead of Shiffrin into bronze after a near perfect second run of 48.83 -- the fastest leg of the day.

"After the first run I was a bit behind so I knew I needed a really good second run and I had to all in. Yeah, unbelievable that it happened. I am speechless and I can't believe it," she said.

(Source: Reuters)

Shoja Khalilzadeh signs Persepolis contract extension

TASNIM — Persepolis defender Shoja Khalilzadeh signed a one-year contract extension with the Tehran based football team on Thursday.

It is good news for the Iranian giant since it has been banned from registering players for two windows for breaching rules in September.

Persepolis striker Mehdi Taremi had been locked in a contract dispute with Turkish club Çaykur Rizespor dating back to June 2016, when the player reached an agreement to join the club and later returned to Persepolis.

Afterward, FIFA banned Persepolis from signing players for the next two transfer windows.

Also, Young midfielder Hamid Reza Taherkhani extended his contract with Persepolis.

Iran claim title at FIBA Asia U18 WABA Qualifier 2018

IRNA — Iran won the title of the 2018 FIBA Asia U18 West Asian Basketball Association (WABA) qualifier.

The Iranian team defeated host Jordan 108-72 in Amman's Prince Hamza Hall.

Ehsan Dalirzahan top scored for Iran with 28 points and Jordan's Tarjali scored 12 points.

Iran had already defeated Lebanon, Syria and Iraq in the competition.

The FIBA Asia U18 WABA qualifier 2018 kicked off on Feb. 11, and finished after four days in the Jordanian capital.

Esteghlal captain Montazeri misses Al Hilal match

TASNIM — Esteghlal captain Pejman Montazeri will miss the crucial match against Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia due to foot injury.

He was substituted in the last minutes of the Al Rayyan match after suffering the foot injury.

Esteghlal will host the Saudi Arabian giants in Group D of the AFC Champions League at the Al-Seeb Stadium in Oman on Feb. 20.

The Esteghlal football team defender has reportedly returned to Tehran to determine the extent of the damage.

Esteghlal sit the top of the group.

Ronaldo practiced 'volley' penalty at Man United - Rio

Real Madrid forward Cristiano Ronaldo used to practice taking penalties so that the ball moves before he strikes it, former Manchester United teammate Rio Ferdinand has said.

Ronaldo scored the equalizer from the spot as Real Madrid beat Paris Saint-Germain 3-1 at the Bernabeu in a Champions League round-of-16 first leg match on Wednesday. But the ball appeared to pop up on the spot fractions of a second before the Portugal captain fired it past PSG goalkeeper Alphonse Areola.

Slow-motion replays showed that, rather than touching it with his standing foot, Ronaldo had disturbed the turf under the ball, making it move and effectively volleying it at Areola.

And Ferdinand, speaking in his role as a pundit for BT Sport, said: "He used to do that in training, you know."

"He used to mess about in training and do it but to do it in a game. I'm not saying he means it but he used to do it, I swear to you."

"Crazy, but he used to do it."

Had the match officials seen the ball move, the rules of the game mean they would have had to order the penalty to be retaken.

Former Premier League referee Graham Poll told the Daily Mail: "You cannot blame the officials for missing it, as it would have been almost impossible to spot in real time."

"But with the benefit of slow-motion replays, we can see that the ball bobbed up as Ronaldo planted his left foot before slamming it home with his right."

(Source: Soccernet)

Neymar will be at Paris Saint-Germain next season

Paris Saint-Germain CEO Nasser Al-Khelaifi again rubbished speculation that Neymar will leave for Real Madrid in the summer after PSG lost at the Bernabeu on Tuesday.

The Ligue 1 leaders were beaten 3-1 in the first leg of their Champions League round-of-16 tie and face a tough task to turn things around at the Parc des Princes next month.

Speaking to beIN SPORTS after the game, Al-Khelaifi said: "One hundred percent, Neymar will be a PSG player next year."

Asked in the mixed zone whether there was any chance that the Brazil star could leave he said that was "impossible. No chance" and stressed that he was "2,000 percent" sure he would stay.

Asked the same question, Neymar told reporters: "I am under contract with PSG. I am concentrated on PSG and I am happy."

Speaking to SFR Sport, PSG team coordinator Maxwell also said Neymar was contented and praised the team's unity.

"We got to know each other as international teammates and we immediately established a relationship based on respect," Maxwell said.

"He is very happy in Paris. He shows that each match through his performances and in training each day."

"The dressing room atmosphere is magnificent -- they are always happy and joyful."

Maxwell said the squad had been wounded by the jeering Neymar received from some PSG fans during the 8-0 home win over Dijon.

"Everybody was hurt," he added. "We never want to see our supporters whistling our players, it does not matter who."

"The players represent the club and give their best for the club. The full support of the fans is needed."

PSG are at home to Strasbourg in Ligue 1 on Saturday before facing bitter rivals Marseille in both the league and the Coupe de France.

(Source: ESPN)

INTERNATIONAL DAILY
www.tehrantimes.com

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» www.eshtarak.ir Distributor: Padideh Novin Co.
Tel: 88911433
» Webmaster: webmaster@tehrantimes.com
» Printed at: Rooztab - ISSN: 1017-94

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Lahore, Karachi hosting festivals of Iranian films

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iran's Cultural Office has organized festivals of Iranian films in the Pakistani cities of Lahore and Karachi.

A festival opened in the Iranian Cultural Center in Karachi on Thursday with a screening of Majid Majidi's "The Weeping Willow".



A scene from "A Cube of Sugar" by Reza Mirkarimi

A number of films have been selected to go on screen during the event running until Sunday.

In addition, the Royal Palm Golf and Country Club, a social club complex in Lahore hosted another festival of Iranian films on Thursday and Friday.

"The Bodyguard" by Ebrahim Hatamikia, "Crazy Rook" by Abolhassan Davudi, "So Close, So Far" and "A Cube of Sugar", both by Reza Mirkarimi, and "Where Are My Shoes?" by Kiumars Purahmad were the film screened at the festival.

WHAT'S IN ART GALLERIES

Painting

■ An exhibition of paintings by Fatemeh Amirahmadi, Mahru Melaki and Samanta Sabetnia is currently underway at Naqsh-e Jahan Gallery.

The exhibition runs until February 21 at the gallery located at 9 Ayatollah Mahmudi St. in the Niavaran neighborhood.



■ Sona Abdolazimzadeh is displaying her latest paintings in an exhibition at Farmanfarma Gallery.

The showcase will run until March 2 at the gallery located at the Second Araabi St., North Kheradmand St. in the Karim Khan neighborhood.



■ Yasin Baqerian, Hedyeh Tahmasbi, Marjan Qadiri, Ebrahim Nabizadeh and dozens of other painters are showcasing their works in an exhibit at Yasmin Gallery.

The exhibition runs until February 21 at the gallery, which can be found at 70 Southern Kheradmand, near Karim Khan St.



■ Paintings by Sahar Biglari are on display in an exhibition at Shalman Gallery.

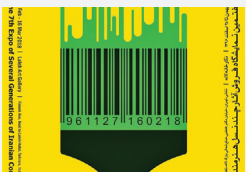
The exhibition runs until February 21 at the gallery located at 27 Kavusi Alley, West Rudbar St., off Mirdamad Blvd.



Multimedia

■ A large group of artists from different generations is displaying their latest works in various media in an exhibition at Laleh Gallery.

Among the artists are Reza Bangiz, Kambiz Derambakhsh, Mina Nuri, Behzad Shishegarraan, Reza Hedayat, and Maneli Manuchehri. The exhibit will continue until March 16 at the gallery located on Fatemi St., near Laleh Park.



■ Afrand Gallery is showcasing works by a group of artists in an exhibition entitled "96+".

Works by Aidin Aghdashlu, Ahmad Esfandiari, Hanibal Alkhas, Manuchehr Motabar and a large number of other artists have been selected for the exhibition.

The exhibit will run until March 16 at the gallery located at 48 Jalal Hosseini St., Jahan Ara St., off Jalal Ale-Ahmad Highway.



36th Fajr Intl. Film Festival unveils official poster

A R T
d e s k

TEHRAN — The 36th Fajr International Film Festival unveiled an official poster on Friday.

Ali Khorshidpur has designed the poster that features an old photo of an Iranian girl and a boy dating back to the advent of cinema.

The poster celebrates the 120-year history of Iranian cinema.

"The Fajr festival is Iran's most important art and cultural event," the secretary of the festival, Reza Mirkarimi, said in a statement published on Friday.

He added that the festival's main focus is Asian cinema, and movies from some top filmmakers of the region will be selected to screen this year.

Mirkarimi also said that the festival plans to reinforce its academic and educational aspects.

He also noted that a variety of educational programs, workshops and meetings will be organized during the event, which will be running from April 19 to 27 in Tehran.

The Cinema Organization of Iran, which is affiliated with the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and is also the main organizer of the Fajr International Film Festival, decided in 2015 to organize the international competition of the festival separately from the national section to provide greater opportunities to exchange experiences and thoughts with the world's cinema.



An official poster for the 36th Fajr International Film Festival

Top Russian-language studies on Iran honored

C U L T U R E
d e s k

TEHRAN — Top works were honored during the second edition of the Book Awards for Russian-Language Studies on Iran on Wednesday.

The winners received their awards during a special ceremony at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Science in Moscow, the Persian service of IRNA reported on Thursday.

"Khorasan, the Land of Art" by Sharif Shakurov, "Interpretations on Manuscripts and Artists" by Oleg Akimushkin and "Najmiddin Kukabi Bukharai" by Alexander Jumayev are among books.

Alexi Khumatullin for "Muhammad al-Ghazali" and Ismail Ibadulin for translating Khwaja Abdullah Ansari's



Winners of are seen on the stage during the Book Awards for Russian-Language Studies on Iran at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Science in Moscow on February 14, 2018. (IRNA)

Wes Anderson's tale of deported dogs opens Berlin film festival

BERLIN (Reuters) — U.S. director Wes Anderson's "Isle of Dogs" - a quirky movie about a Japanese city that deports its dogs to a garbage dump island during an outbreak of canine flu - became the first animation to open the Berlin film festival.

The stop-motion feature, shown on Thursday, follows the adventures of the mayor's 12-year-old adoptive son Atari, who flies a plane to the island to rescue his beloved pet Spots.

The mayor stops a scientist from curing the pets and a U.S. exchange pupil at the local school has her visa withdrawn when she suggests he is trying to turn people against dogs.

Anderson said his first idea was just to do a story about dogs and combine that with his love of Japan. Only later did he start developing the politics swirling around the science-fiction style Megasaki City.

"It's our fantasy of the politics of this made-up place in Japan but then, because we've been working on this movie a long time, the world began to change... and all of a sudden it seemed kind of right for the moment," Anderson said at a post-screening news conference.

"So maybe there were tiny places along the way where we were getting new inspirations from real life that were finding their way into the movie but ... it was a story that we sort of felt could happen anywhere and it could happen at any time," he said.

Bryan Cranston, who provides the voice for one of the dogs, said the film tapped into current concerns. "It has a lot of resonance in today's society globally about immigration reform and fear and farmomgers," he told Reuters.



Cast members arrive for the screening of the movie "Isle of Dogs" at the 68th Berlin International Film Festival Berlinale in Berlin, Germany, February 15, 2018. (Reuters/Christian Mang)

Though filming actually started long before the debates on immigration and border walls now dominating the U.S. airwaves. "Back when we started Donald Trump was someone that we thought would just be a guy that was on TV every day," co-star Bill Murray said.

Asked about how he managed to pull together such a star-studded cast - the voices of Oscar nominee Greta Gerwig, Jeff Goldblum and Scarlett Johansson all feature - Anderson said he had worked with or admired many of them for years.

"One thing about an animated movie is you can't really say you're not available. We can say: 'Ok well we can do it anytime - we can do it at your house, we can do it any hour of day and it's just no excuse' and so that helped," he said.

Anderson also opened the 2014 Berlinale with his movie "Grand Budapest Hotel", which went on to win four Oscars. "Isle of Dogs" is one of 19 films competing for the prestigious Golden and Silver Bears, which will be awarded on Feb 24.

Male stars at Berlin film festival say #MeToo movement is making them think

BERLIN (Reuters) — Male stars attending the Berlin film festival on Thursday told Reuters they were reassessing their own behavior in light of the #MeToo movement by women against sexual harassment and abuse.

Actor Bob Balaban whose voice featured in the opening movie of the Berlinale - Wes Anderson's "Isle of Dogs" - told Reuters he was starting to think more about his own actions, such as when fans asked him for photographs with them.

"I think about things differently," he said.

"When somebody says: 'let's take a selfie', do you go like that or do you stand there like this because you're thinking about it," he said as he made a hugging gesture, then pulled his arm back.

Dozens of powerful men in the film industry, politics, entertainment and business have been fired or resigned in the face of allegations they abused their power.

Actor Bryan Cranston, best known for his role in the "Breaking Bad" series, said he was optimistic that the #MeToo movement would result in people being more respectful.

"I'm very hopeful and pleased that anytime there is someone who was exposed to be an aggressor or who is behaving abhorrently is brought down because that kind of institutionalized misogyny needs to come to an end," he said.

Cranston said he had no problem apologizing to people if he had said anything that might be offensive.

"But yes it does make me think of how have I been. Have I been contributing to this in some way? When I hear of someone behaving badly have I tried to just calm



Bryan Cranston, Bob Balaban and Bill Murray attend for the opening ceremony of the 68th Berlinale International Film Festival in Berlin, Germany, February 15, 2018. (Reuters/Fabrizio Bensch)

it down? Now I feel like: no, let's get to the root of that and get that person out."

Actor Jeff Goldblum, who starred in the "Jurassic Park" movies, said he was seeking to make sure that "every encounter and relationship I have is founded in maximum respect and sensitivity".

Organizers of the Berlinale turned down a call to have movie stars walk a black, rather than red, carpet as a symbol of support for the campaign against sexual harassment, but are hosting discussion events.

Most of the stars wore black for the opening night of the Berlinale and festival director Dieter Kosslick eschewed his usual red scarf to show his support for victims.

"I think a festival like ours should show solidarity with this movement and with these people," he said on the red carpet.

"We have a lot of discussion in the world and we have a lot of discussion at the Berlinale in the next week and tonight I thought a black scarf would say maybe more than a red one."

The Berlinale, where around 400 films are being screened, runs until Feb. 25.

Daniel Craig puts his Bond car up for auction

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — James Bond is parting with his personal Aston Martin.

Actor Daniel Craig, who has played the British spy known as 007 in four films, is auctioning for charity the limited-edition vehicle made for him by Aston Martin four years ago, Christie's auction house said on Thursday.

Aston Martin cars have appeared in Bond films over nearly 50 years, beginning with 1964's "Goldfinger" in which Sean Connery drove a silver Aston Martin DB5. The brand has appeared in all four Bond films starring Craig.

Craig's personal car is a 2014 Vanquish that Aston Martin produced just 100 examples of to celebrate its 100th anniversary. Craig's vehicle is, naturally, number 007.

"It was an homage, really, to his career," Becky MacGuire, director of Christie's The Exceptional Sale, said in an interview. "What he's brought to the Bond character has been so appreciated by the company and,



Actor Daniel Craig's limited edition centennial 2014 Centenary Edition Vanquish, numbered 007, is seen in an undated photo released by Christie's auction house February 15, 2018. (Christie's Images Ltd 2018/Handout via Reuters)

of course, zillions of fans."

The vehicle has a midnight blue exterior and dark blue luxury leather interior chosen because of Craig's preference for denim and dark colors, Christie's said.

Proceeds from the sale will benefit New York-based charity The Opportunity Network, which helps students from disadvantaged communities achieve their college and career goals. Craig and his wife, actress Rachel Weisz, both sit on the organization's board of directors.

The car's value is estimated at \$400,000 to \$600,000. It will be displayed at Christie's showroom in Los Angeles from Feb. 27-March 3 before moving to New York, where it will be auctioned on April 20 as part of Christie's annual decorative arts masterpiece sale called The Exceptional Sale.

Last year, Craig said he will reprise the role of James Bond one last time. The film is expected to be released in U.S. cinemas on Nov. 8, 2019.