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© Tehran Times/ Photo Illustration by Ila Moghanloo

Leader: Iran against WMDs but promotes defense power

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said on Sunday that Iran considers nuclear bomb and other weapons of mass destruction as religiously banned, but does anything necessary to increase its defense capability. “Of course we consider atomic bomb and weapons of mass destruction as haram but we strongly seek (to build) whatever necessary (to promote our defense power,”

the Leader remarked. “Without a moment of hesitation, the country should move towards anything necessary for defense even if the whole world opposes,” he said during a meeting a large number of group from East Azerbaijan. He strongly criticized the Westerns who threaten the human being by their sophisticated weapons but are against Iran’s defensive missile power. **→2**

Plane crashes in central Iran; 65 confirmed dead

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — A plane heading from Tehran to Yasouj, a city in the southwestern province of Kohgiluyeh-Boyerahmad, crashed into the mountain on Sunday morning, leaving 65 dead. The ATR aircraft which departed at about 8 a.m. local time was first dis-

appeared from radar and reportedly crashed into a mountainous region near Semirrom town, Isfahan province, due to the bad weather conditions. While there were speculation that the plane might have not crashed and landed in a remote area somewhere, local media reported that the plane has been spotted. **→12**

Two Palestinians killed by Israeli fire; Hamas fires at regime jets

Two Palestinian teenage boys have been found dead following Israeli attacks on the besieged Gaza Strip. The Health Ministry in Gaza identified the victims as Salam Sabah and Abdullah Abu Sheikha, both 17. Palestinian eye witnesses said the two were killed east of the city of Rafah in southern Gaza on Saturday after Israel launched a series of airstrikes and mortar

attacks on allied targets belonging to the Hamas. The assaults came after an explosive device wounded four Israeli soldiers on patrol near the border between the occupied territories and the Palestinian coastal enclave. The Israeli army also claimed that a rocket fired from Gaza had hit the roof of a house in an Israeli town. **→13**



EDITORIAL

By Mohammad Ghaderi
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Some Europeans complicit in possible trashing of JCPOA

The Munich security conference has been shadowed by a paradoxical policy on the nuclear deal with Iran. The German Foreign Minister has only asked Trump to stay in the nuclear deal, and the French Foreign Minister has preferred to remain silent. Meanwhile, a national security adviser at the Munich Conference announced that the time has come for substantial changes to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA, and there were agreements between France, Germany and Britain. The ideas may be in violation of the nuclear accord.

Last September at the UN General Assembly in New York, extensive talks were held between US, British, and French officials over the JCPOA. Britain, as America’s traditional ally, and France as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, apparently made deal with Washington. Although Paris and London have repeatedly voiced their opposition to the withdrawal of the US from the JCPOA and called for respecting the nuclear deal, in practice, we see France and Britain cooperating with the U.S. over proposed reforms of the deal. In other words, France and the United Kingdom intend to make these reforms look acceptable even though they breach the original terms of the JCPOA. Any modification to the JCPOA is equal to changing it, and any changes in the JCPOA constitute a breach. This is what neither France nor Britain can honestly deny, but they seem to be trying.

France plays an important role in the violation of the Iran deal. The evidence shows that Donald Trump and Emmanuel Macron have sought to redefine the “White House Policy towards the JCPOA”. Macron has voiced the “likelihood of completing the JCPOA,” that includes the issue of Iran’s missile power, and a new time limit on Iran’s nuclear program. **→7**

McMaster’s remarks are an example of Iranophobia

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Foreign Ministry said on Sunday that U.S. National Security Adviser Herbert Raymond McMaster’s remarks were in line with the United States’ “Iranophobic policies”.

The response by the Iranian Foreign Ministry came after McMaster accused Iran of escalating a campaign to increase its influence in the Middle East by building “Hezbollah-style” proxy armies in Iraq, Syria and elsewhere.

“So the time is now, we think, to act against Iran,” McMaster told the Munich Security Conference, calling on U.S. allies to halt trade that was helping underwrite the expansion of Iran.

McMaster also railed against the 2015 nuclear accord signed by Iran and six other countries,



claiming investments made by German firms and others were helping fund Iran’s missile program.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said, “Obstacles created by the U.S. administration, especially over the past year,

to prevent Iran from enjoying the benefits of the JCPOA and repetition of such remarks are a continuation of Iranophobic policies.”

Qassemi added according to the nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the U.S. is obliged not to impede the “successful implementation” of the agreement.

McMaster’s remarks prove the fact that the U.S. is uneasy about foreign investment in Iran, Qassemi said, adding that the U.S. seeks to impede economic interaction with Iran.

According to Reuters, the U.S. national security adviser said Iran’s biggest trading partners were Russia and China, Japan, South Korea and Germany.

The Foreign Ministry spokesman said McMaster’s remarks “run against the U.S. obligations under the JCPOA” and “international regulations”.

West Karoun: Fields with promise for Iran’s oil industry

By Ebrahim Fallahi

In the last few years, especially after the implementation of the nuclear deal (known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Actions or JCPOA), Iran’s oil industry has been strongly focused on developing joint oil and gas fields, aiming to increase the seven-percent share of such fields in the country’s oil production.

In this regard, West Karoun oilfields which Iran shares with Iraq at the western part of Iran’s southwestern region of Karoun, have been prioritized among the country’s top development projects.

After the implementation of JCPOA in January 2016, Iranian oil industry once again broke

free from the shackles of pressure which held it back from its full potential since January 2012, in which the EU agreed to an oil embargo on the country.

Immediately after the removal of the sanctions, Iranian government put it on the short term agenda to hastily increase its oil production to reclaim its oil market share lost to the fellow OPEC members due to the restrictions imposed by the West.

In doing so, plans were made for continuous increase in the country’s oil output and also development of new fields.

Following the new policies for attracting foreign

investors to develop the country’s fields, in 2016, Iran introduced the Iran Petroleum Contract (IPC), which replaced the old buyback model.

Shortly after, National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) announced that the company is in serious talks with potential foreign suitors in order to hold tenders to hand out the development projects mostly for shared fields.

According to the oil ministry’s planning, West Karoun region which includes five major fields namely North Azadegan, South Azadegan, North Yaran, South Yaran and Yadavaran, was introduced as the main candidate for the new IPC tenders. **→4**



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Torrential rain troubles quake-stricken Kermanshahis

Torrential rain in the southwestern city of Sarpol-e Zahab, Kermanshah province, which was hit hard by a strong tremor on November 12, 2017, has put the earthquake victims to major inconvenience.

Following the magnitude 7.3-earthquake many are now forced to live in tent and conex as their houses are razed to the ground.

The pouring rain also caused schools to shut down on Sunday.



ARTICLE

By Martin Love
Political analyst from North Carolina

The charges against Russians are Mickey Mouse

If it were not simply insane, you’d have to laugh: Months of investigation, many millions of bucks spent, and U.S. Special Counsel Robert Mueller, a former head of the FBI, announces last week an indictment of 13 Russian nationals and three Russian entities, accusing them of interfering in the 2016 presidential election and operating fake social media accounts.

After such scrutiny, THIS is all he’s got to condemn Russia for? These are Mickey Mouse charges. Not one of the Russians indicted is a member of the Russian government, for one thing. Putin and government colleagues had nothing to do with this “criminal” case brought to accuse Russia of trying to influence the 2016 Presidential election and boost Donald Trump’s prospects of winning by criticizing Hillary Clinton and supporting not just Trump, but also Democratic Senator Bernie Sanders.

The defendants reportedly worked hard to pump out messages into Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, controlling social media pages that targeted a range of issues, and they allegedly used servers inside the U.S. to hide the Russian origins of the various accounts. In fact, anyone who happened to disparage Clinton during the election process may also have been a “collaborator” of some sort.

It appears that the U.S. may be doing a good job of destroying itself with such hypocrisy and self-deceit and psychosis. In fact, the only known instances of American politicians teaming up with Russians involves operations between the Democratic Party National Committee and the Clinton campaign along with US “intelligence” services like the FBI and the CIA, which altogether helped pay for an incredible document of dubious content called the “Steele Dossier” claiming that Russia hacked the e-mails of Hillary and her campaign staffers. Robert Mueller has yet to examine this, and may not, and it involves misconduct of a number of senior people at the usual suspects such as the CIA, FBI and NSA. **→7**

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MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Leader offers condolences to plane crash victims

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Sunday offered his condolences to those families who lost loved ones in a plane crash in central Iran earlier in the day.

Ayatollah Khamenei said the demise of scores of fellow nationals in the plane crash has “made the hearts full of grief and regret”.

The Leader also urged all officials to follow up the case and proceed the necessary steps in regards to the accident which killed 66 people on board .



Tehran prosecutor urges close monitoring of prisons

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Abbas Jafari-Dolatabadi, Tehran’s prosecutor general, said on Sunday that the prisons and detention centers need to be supervised strictly.

Pointing to recent suicides that occurred in Evin Prison, Jafari-Dolatabadi said such incidents harm the Islamic republic, emphasizing that measures should be taken to avoid similar incidents.

He added that the prison need to protect the rights of prisoners, “because a prisoner, even if he committed the most violent crimes, has certain rights.”

The prosecutor also highlighted the need for judges to visit and inspect prisons.



No one after rooting out entire cyberspace: minister

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — No one in Iran is seeking to root out the entire cyberspace, Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli said on Sunday, emphasizing that the goal of the country’s authorities is to organize cyberspace to better use its potentials and reduce social problems.

Rahmani Fazli pointed to a meeting with the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, saying the Leader had emphasized that the cyberspace should be organized and used properly to achieve goals, IRNA reported.

He also called on relevant government bodies to support cyber activists.



Enemies trying to divide Iranians, Hatami says

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami said on Sunday that the enemies are using different methods including political and economic sanctions to create division in the Iranian society and turn the people against the government.

Hatami said the enemies are trying to direct people’s anger toward the Islamic establishment by putting political and economic pressures on the people, Mehr reported.

He also voiced his gratitude to the people’s massive turnout in the Feb. 11 rallies marking the Islamic Revolution anniversary and their renewed support for the Islamic establishment.



Araqchi talks Yemen with European diplomats

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi met with a number of his European counterparts on the sidelines of this year’s Munich Security Conference on Saturday to discuss the human catastrophe in Yemen, Mehr reported.

Araqchi met separately with deputy foreign ministers of France, Germany, Britain, and Italy. During the meetings, the sides exchanged views on how to put an end to the Saudi Arabia’s aerial bombardments against the civilians in Yemen.

The Munich conference this year focused on the European Union and its future role as a global actor, military conflicts in Europe and the Middle East, control of arms and tensions over North Korea.



Tehran’s role in Iraq reassuring: Fuad Masum

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iraqi President Fuad Masum has said that Iran’s role in Iraq is reassuring and in line with stability in his country, IRNA reported.

After a meeting on Sunday with Ali Akbar Velayati, a top foreign policy advisor to the Leader, President Masum said Iraq will never forget Iran’s valuable military support as well as humanitarian aid in the war against Daesh (ISIL).

He said in his meeting with Velayati the two sides discussed issues of mutual interests, adding that the two countries have no differences and that their historic ties are expanding.

Leader: Iran against WMDs but promotes defense power

Westerners want to deprive Iranians of missile power and then bully them, Ayatollah Khamenei warns

1 → “How this issue [Iran’s missile power] is related to you? You want to deprive the Iranian nation of missile and defense capabilities to bully them,” the Leader noted.

Elsewhere, the Leader attached great importance to economic priorities, saying that more efforts should be done in line with resistance economy.

He noted that relying on the people and domestic capacities are the solution to economic problems.

“We saw the result of relying on foreigners in the issue of Barjam [the Persian name for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action]. We trusted on them in the nuclear talks but did not gain benefits. However, the officials deal with the issue very well and the foreign minister [Mohammad Javad Zarif] should be thanked for his behavior towards the malignancy of the U.S. and ambivalent behavior of Europeans,” Ayatollah Khamenei stated.

“Some of these behavioral points were publicized, some weren’t; but, I am informed. Righteous and strong attitudes were shown. Yes, this the correct method: they should react. National dignity must be manifested,” khamenei.ir quoted



the Leader as saying.

Commenting on massive turnout in the February 11 rallies to mark the 39th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khamenei called the event a “miracle”.

“The 22nd of the month of Bahman [on the Persian calendar] was actually different this year,” Press TV quoted him as saying.

He added, “After 39 years, this massive popular movement looks like a miracle. It does not exist anywhere in the world that after four decades, people themselves come to the scene, fill the streets, chant slogans, show their presence and defend their revolution.”

Ayatollah Khamenei said that criticisms against the government, the Judiciary and the Leadership do not run contrary to defending the Islamic system and revolution.

The Leader also said “move toward aristocracy” and giving up to “wealthy class instead of paying attention of poor classes” are a retreat from the ideals of the Islamic Revolution.

He added people should monitor the “our behavior as responsible officials” with great sensitivity.

Iran FM calls Netanyahu’s theatrical move ‘cartoonish circus’

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — During a hateful speech at the Munich Security Conference on Sunday, Benjamin Netanyahu held up a remnant of what he said was a piece of an Iranian drone shot down by Israel earlier this month, a theatrical move which Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif likened to “cartoonish circus”.

“You were the audience for a cartoonish circus just this morning, which does not even deserve the dignity of a response,” Zarif told the Munich Security Conference later.

Netanyahu used the security conference to make military threats against Iran, saying “We will act if necessary

not just against Iran’s proxies that are attacking us but also against Iran itself.”

Earlier this month, the Syrian military shot down at least one intruding Israeli F-16 warplane that attacked positions inside Syria. Israel claimed that it had launched those assaults after it intercepted an “Iranian drone” launched from Syria, an accusation rejected by Tehran as “ridiculous.”

In addition to Netanyahu’s accusations, Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir claimed during his speech at Munich on Sunday that Iran has trained several terrorist factions and conducted terrorist operations around the world.

Zarif said, “The U.S. and its local clients in our region

are suffering from the natural consequences of their own wrong choices. But they use this and other fora to revive the hysteria on Iran’s foreign policy and obscure its reality.”

In his speech, Netanyahu also drew a parallel between the 1938 Munich Agreement, seen as a failed attempt to appease Nazi Germany, and the 2015 Iran nuclear deal. He said the deal had only “unleashed a dangerous Iranian tiger”, against which “we will act without hesitation to defend ourselves”.

Former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry later insisted that Netanyahu’s assertion that Iran would be on its way to a nuclear bomb within a decade was “fundamentally not accurate”.

Kerry: It is ‘absolutely critical’ to make sure nuclear deal will survive

Former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said on Sunday that it is “absolutely critical” to make sure that the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, will survive.

U.S. President Donald Trump has been making the harshest attacks on the inter-

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

However, Kerry, one of the leading

negotiators on the deal, told the Munich Security Conference that “this is untenable. It is not good diplomacy.”

“I believe it is absolutely critical for Europe, for the world, to make sure we hold on to this agreement,” Kerry noted According to AP. Iran, the five permanent members of the

UN Security Council - the U.S., UK, France, Russia, and China – Germany and the European Union struck the nuclear deal on July 14, 2015. Immediately after the forging of the nuclear agreement, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution turning the deal into an international law.

Zarif: Iran favors ‘strong region’ over ‘strong man’

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Sunday that Iran favors a “strong region” as opposed to a “strong man in the region”.

“We believe in, and have proposed, creating what we call a ‘strong region’ as opposed to a ‘strong man in the region’,” Zarif said in a speech at the Munich Security Conference (MSC).

He noted, “In a quest to create our ‘strong region’, we need to be realistic and accept our differences.”

Here’s the full transcript of the foreign minister’s speech:

Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen,
I am very happy to be able to make it to this final day of the Munich Security Conference, having just arrived from a historic state visit of President Rouhani to India. Last year, I repeated before this forum Iran’s proposal for a security arrangement in the Persian Gulf, founded on dialogue, common principles and confidence building measures. Some of our neighbors used their opportunity here last year to level accusations against Iran. Some have, and others will, do the same this year. You were the audience for a cartoonish circus just this morning, which does not even deserve the dignity of a response. So let’s move to more serious issues.

I’m happy that in contrast to the approach of some, the UN Secretary General chose to endorse the forward-looking approach that I outlined here last year. I am here to expand on that, and to tell you that unless there is a collective effort to bring inclusive peace and security to the Persian Gulf region, we will be engulfed in turmoil and potentially far worse for generations to come. And our turmoil, in this interconnected world, is everyone’s turmoil, as evidenced by events in both our region and in the west since the turn of this century.

Today, the territorial defeat of ISIS has heralded the return of some sense of stability to the territory it once occupied. But the defeat of one of the world’s most evil organizations does not mean that the threat of extremism has been removed from the region and beyond. The root causes – particularly its ideology of hate and exclusion – continue and may erupt somewhere else.

For too long, military powers have had multiple strategies to win wars. And for too long, they have ignored any strategy to win the peace. For too long, major powers and their regional allies have made the wrong choices in our region and then have blamed others, particularly Iran, for the consequences of their own short-sighted and trigger-happy strategic blunders:

From supporting Saddam Hussein’s invasion of my country in 1980 to aiding and abetting his use of chemical weapons; from the wars to evict him from Kuwait and then to remove him altogether; from first supporting Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, to waging a war to remove them from Afghanistan; from supporting the same brand of extremist terrorists bringing ruin to Syria to dangerously occupying parts of Syria under the guise of fighting the groups they have armed and financed; from Israel’s invasion and subsequent aggressions on Lebanon and its illegal occupation of Palestine to its routine incursions into Syrian airspace; and from the bombing of Yemen



“Today, the territorial defeat of ISIS has heralded the return of some sense of stability to the territory it once occupied. But the defeat of one of the world’s most evil organizations does not mean that the threat of extremism has been removed from the region and beyond.”

with western supplied planes. What have these actions brought the world?

The U.S. and its local clients in our region are suffering from the natural consequences of their own wrong choices. But they use this and other fora to revive the hysteria on Iran’s foreign policy and obscure its reality. But did Iran force them to make all those wrong choices as some of them ridiculously claim? Are we to blame because we were on the right side of history, fighting Saddam Hussein, Al-Qaeda, Taliban, ISIS, Nusra and the like, while the U.S. and company were financing, arming and supporting them?

Distinguished participants,
As I said before this forum last year, Iran believes that our Persian Gulf region requires a fresh regional security architecture. We believe in, and have proposed, creating what we call a “strong region” as opposed to a “strong man in the region.” A strong region where small and large nations—even those with historical rivalries—contribute to stability.

This is simply recognizing the need to respect the interests of all stakeholders, which by its very nature will lead to stability, while hic tendencies by any regional – or global – power will, by its very nature, lead to insecurity. The arms race in our region—and no country represented in this forum is completely innocent in perpetuating it—is an example of the destructive and unnecessary rivalry that has made our neighborhood unsafe and insecure.

In a quest to create our “strong region”, we need to be realistic and accept our differences. We need to move from collective security and alliance formations to inclusive concepts such as security networking which can address issues that range from divergence of interests to power and size disparities. Security networking is a non-zero-sum approach that accepts that security is indivisible, as opposed to alliances and blocks, which are fundamentally based on the defunct zero-sum approach of gaining security at the expense of the insecurity of others.

The nuclear deal was an example of such non-zero-sum thinking. Recognizing differences but also recognizing a common goal, and maintaining respect for the interests of all parties guided the difficult negotiations that led to the successful conclusion of the JCPOA. And that may be why those who see everything in terms of one-sided profiteering are so intrinsically opposed to it.

Immediately after the conclusion of JCPOA, Iran sought to use the same approach for the Persian Gulf and proposed to create a ‘Regional Dialogue Forum’. That proposal fell on deaf ears, but is still on the table. It is the only way out. It could become, if our neighbors join us, a forum that will be used as an instrument for helping organize and advance dialogue at all formal and informal levels in our region, and while encouraging inter-governmental and formal dialogue, it can also promote dialogue between scholars and thinkers.

Distinguished participants,
The parameters of Iran’s proposed regional architecture are simple but effective: rather than trying to ignore conflicts of interests, it will accept differences. Being premised on inclusivity, it can act as a firewall to prevent the emergence of an oligarchy among big states, and importantly, it allows smaller states to participate and have their interests protected.

Like the Helsinki process, the future security architecture in the Persian Gulf should be based on the “ticket principles” and “CBM baskets”. All countries around this strategic yet volatile waterway should be able to enter by committing to a series of common standards enshrined in the UN Charter, such as sovereign equality of states; refraining from the threat or use of force; peaceful resolution of conflicts; respect for the territorial integrity; inviolability of borders; non-intervention in the domestic affairs of states; and respect for self-determination within states.

We also recognize that we need confidence-building measures in the Persian Gulf: from joint military visits to pre-notification of military exercises; and from transparency measures in armament procurements to reducing military expenditures; all of which could eventually lead to a regional non-aggression pact. We can begin with easier to implement issues such as the promotion of tourism, joint investments, or even joint task forces on issues ranging from nuclear safety to pollution to disaster management.

At a time when we are dangerously close to escalating conflicts that will affect our children and grandchildren, I encourage my counterparts in the Persian Gulf to join Iran in making these proposals a reality.

18 killed in fresh Saudi regime strikes on Yemen’s Sa’ada

At least 18 people, including women and children, have been killed when the House of Saud regime warplanes carried out a number of airstrikes in an area of Yemen’s northern province of Sa’ada as Riyadh presses ahead with its devastating campaign against the conflict-plagued country.

According to Yemen’s Arabic-language al-Masirah television network, the Saudi regime aerial aggression conducted, hit the Aqi area of the Katak district on Saturday, adding that among the dead were some medics who had tried to save the wounded from the initial strike.

Earlier in the day, another Yemeni lost his life when his water-tank truck was directly hit by a Saudi regime airstrike in Wadi Moore Bridge on Hawdh Road in the northwestern province of Hajjah.

■ **Yemeni army, allies shoot down Saudi regime spy drone over Sa’ada**

Elsewhere, Yemeni army soldiers, supported by allied fighters from Popular Committees, have managed to shoot down a Saudi regime unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) as it was on a reconnaissance mission in Yemen’s northwestern province of Sa’ada.

An unnamed Yemeni military source told Arabic-language al-Masirah television network that the Saudi regime reconnaissance drone was shot down as it was flying in the skies over al-Buqa district on Sunday evening.

On December 30 last year, Yemeni troopers and Popular Committees fighters traced and targeted a Saudi regime reconnaissance drone over Hirz district in the northwestern province of Hajjah.

Yemeni forces, using a surface-to-air missile, shot down a Eurofighter Typhoon fighter jet belonging to the Royal Saudi Air Force on November 27 as it was flying east of the Yemeni capital city of Sana’a.

Earlier that month, the Yemeni army announced that it had managed to shoot down a United States-made General Atomics MQ-9 Reaper, a drone operated by the Royal Saudi Air Force. In June, the Yemeni air defense forces also intercepted and shot down a Saudi regime F-15 fighter jet in the skies over Sana’a.

Since March 2015, the House of Saud regime, together with a coalition of its allies, has been heavily bombarding Yemen as part of a brutal campaign against its impoverished southern neighbor. It has been attempting unsuccessfully to reinstall Yemen’s former president Abd Rabbuh Mansur



Hadi, a staunch ally of Riyadh.

Besides defending Yemen against the Saudi regime aggression, Ansarullah has also been running state affairs in the capital, Sana’a, in the absence of an effective administration.

The Saudi regime campaign has killed at least 13,600 people since its onset. Furthermore, much of the country’s infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, and factories, has been reduced to rubble in the Saudi war.

According to the World Health Organization’s latest tally,

the cholera outbreak has killed 2,167 people since the end of April 2017 and is suspected to have infected 841,906.

Additionally, the United Nations has described the current level of hunger in Yemen as “unprecedented,” emphasizing that 17 million people were food insecure in the country.

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

(Source: Press TV)

Calls for gun control grow louder after Florida shooting

Pressure is growing for tougher gun-control laws in the United States after a mass shooting at a Florida high school, with thousands of angry protesters at state rallies demanding immediate action from lawmakers, and more demonstrations planned across the country in the weeks ahead.

Organizers behind the Women’s March, an anti-U.S. President Donald Trump and female empowerment protest, called for a 17-minute, nationwide walkout by teachers and students on March 14. The Network for Public Education, an advocacy organization for public schools, announced a day of walkouts, sit-ins and other events on school campuses on Apr. 20, the anniversary of the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado that left 12 students and one teacher dead.

Plans for the protests circulated widely on social media on Saturday, as students, parents, teachers and neighbors gathered to express their grief over the fatal shooting of 14 students and three staff members at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School

in Parkland, Florida. Hundreds showed up at rallies in Fort Lauderdale, about 40 kilometers away, and in St. Petersburg, 400 kilometers northwest, to demand action on gun-control legislation.

The crowd at the rally chanted: “Vote them out!” and held signs calling for action. Some read: “#Never Again,” “#Do something now” and “Don’t Let My Friends Die.”

The rallies were held as new details emerged about the suspect, Nikolas Cruz. Authorities say Cruz, 19, was a former student at Stoneman Douglas who had been expelled, had mental health issues and had been reported to law enforcement before he used a legally purchased semiautomatic rifle to take the lives of 17 people on Wednesday.

From a mosaic of public records, interviews with friends and family and online interactions, it appears Cruz was unstable and violent to himself and those around him - and that when notified about his threatening behavior, law enforcement did little to stop it.

Cruz’s mother died in November and

his father died years ago. He reportedly left a suburban Palm Beach County mobile home where he had been staying after his mother’s death because his benefactor gave him an ultimatum: you or the gun.

The Sun-Sentinel reported that Florida’s Department of Children and Families investigated when Cruz posted a video on the social media network Snapchat showing him cutting his arms in 2016. “Mr. Cruz has fresh cuts on both his arms,” the Florida DCF abuse hotline was told in August 2016, the paper reported. “Mr. Cruz stated he plans to go out and buy a gun. It is unknown what he is buying the gun for.”

According to the paper, DCF’s investigation was completed that Nov. 12. The agency concluded Cruz had not been mistreated by his mother, was receiving adequate care from a mental health counselor and was attending school.

At school, Cruz routinely fought with teachers, was accused of swearing at staff and was referred for a “threat assessment” in January 2017, two months after the DCF

investigation concluded, The New York Times reported Saturday, citing school disciplinary records it obtained.

The records show he was suspended several times in the 2016-17 school year and was frequently absent. They also show Cruz attended at least six schools, including a school for students with emotional problems, the newspaper said.

Cruz had been diagnosed with autism, a neurological disorder that often leads to social awkwardness and isolation, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD (Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder).

The FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) said a person close to Cruz called the FBI’s tip line and provided information about Cruz’s weapons and his erratic behavior. The caller was concerned Cruz could attack a school. The agency acknowledged the tip should have been shared with the FBI’s Miami office and investigated, but it was not.

(Source: AP)

Tillerson to N. Korea on talks: I’m listening

The United States Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson said in an interview that he is “listening” for signs that North Korea is ready to engage in direct talks.

“My job as chef diplomat is to ensure that the North Koreans know, we keep our channels open,” Tillerson told the CBS news show “60 Minutes.”

“I am listening. I am not sending a lot of messages back because there’s nothing to say to them at this point. So I am listening for you to tell me you are ready to talk,” he said, according to excerpts of the interview.

An Olympic-driven thaw in relations between Kim Jong Un’s nuclear armed North Korean regime and South Korea has raised speculation that direct talks between Washington and Pyongyang could be on the horizon after months of sharp tension and heated rhetoric.

“They will tell me,” Tillerson told “60 Minutes.”

“We receive messages from them, and I think it will be very explicit as to how we want to have that first conversation.”

The top U.S. diplomat however stressed that no incentive was being offered to get Pyongyang to the table.

“We are not using a carrot to convince them to talk, we are using large sticks - and that is what they need to understand,” he said.



“This pressure campaign is having its bite on North Korea.” The North is subject to a series of United Nations Security Council sanctions over its banned nuclear and ballistic missile programs.

ity Council sanctions over its banned nuclear and ballistic missile programs.

The United States has previously indicated Washington is open to direct talks, but Tillerson stressed earlier this month that the ball was now in Pyongyang’s camp.

“We’ve said for some time it’s really up to the North Koreans to decide when they’re ready to engage with us in a sincere way, a meaningful way,” Tillerson said on Feb. 12, while on a stop in Cairo.

“They know what has to be on the table for conversations.” Washington says Pyongyang must take concrete steps towards denuclearization before talks can begin, while South Korean President Moon Jae-in has argued for closer involvement to engage the North in talks.

Moon last week received an invitation from Kim Jong Un for a summit in Pyongyang. The invitation was extended by the North Korean leader’s younger sister Kim Yo Jong, who was part of a high-level delegation attending the Winter Games in the South.

When asked on Saturday about a possible summit, Moon said that, despite the high hopes that have been raised, “I think it is a bit rushed.”

(Source: AFP)

Iraq court convicts ‘duped’ ISIL foreign widows

A court in the Iraqi capital on Sunday sentenced to death a Turkish woman and 11 other foreign widows to life in jail for belonging to Daesh (ISIL).

The 12 women, 11 Turks and an Azeri, some of whom appeared in the dock nursing infants, were convicted despite their pleas that they had been duped or forced by their husbands to join them in Iraq.

The women, aged between 20 and 50, were all arrested in Mosul or Tal Afar where their husbands were killed as Iraqi forces recaptured the northern cities from Daesh last year.

“I got to know my husband through the

internet. He proposed we meet in Turkey but an intermediary there told me he would drive me to my future husband without saying where,” said Angie Omrane, the Azeri woman.

“I thought we were staying in Turkey but I found myself in Syria and then my husband took me to Iraq.”

Leila, one of the Turkish women, said: “My husband forced me to come to Iraq by threatening to take away my two-year-old son if I didn’t follow him.

“I didn’t take part in any violent action. I stayed at home the whole time.”

Only the woman condemned to death,

speaking through an interpreter, acknowledged that she willingly travelled to Iraq with her husband and their children.

“We had to leave Turkey because my husband was a wanted man. I wanted to live in an ISIL where sharia is the law of the land.”

But “I regret having come,” said the 48-year-old Turkish woman whose husband and two sons were killed in air strikes.

The state-appointed defense lawyers argued that the women had all been duped into coming to Iraq and were not involved in any acts of violence.

But they were found guilty under Article

4 of Iraq’s anti-terrorism law against “any person who commits, incites, plans, finances or assists in acts of terrorism” and for illegal entry into the country.

The woman condemned to death broke down in tears while another Turk almost fainted.

A judicial source said the sentencing of the women by a three-judge panel had followed weeks or even months of questioning. They have one month to lodge an appeal.

A total of 509 foreign women, including 300 Turks, are being held in Iraq with 813 children, according to a security source.

(Source: AFP)

Biden, in public and private, tiptoes toward a 2020 run



The United States Former Vice President Joe Biden is tiptoeing toward a potential presidential run in 2020, even broaching the possibility during a recent gathering of longtime foreign policy aides.

Huddled in his newly opened office steps from the U.S. Capitol, Biden began a planning meeting for his new diplomacy center by addressing the elephant in the room. He said he was keeping his 2020 options open, considering it a real possibility. He insisted he had made no decision, and didn’t need to yet, according to five people who either attended the meeting or were briefed on it by those who did.

Biden also expressed interest in bringing those in the room onto his team if he decides to launch a campaign. At the same time, he gave them an out: There would be no hard feelings if they decided they were content in their current roles outside of government, said the people, who demanded anonymity to discuss a private meeting.

The political world has long tried to game out Biden’s plans for 2020. After all, he came close to running last time only to see President Donald Trump pull off a victory that many Democrats openly suggest wouldn’t have happened had he, not Hillary Clinton, been their nominee. Several people came away from the meeting with the impression that if no strong Democratic candidate emerges in the next year or so, Biden would feel strongly compelled to run.

A presidential candidate twice before, Biden would be 78 on Inauguration Day if elected in 2020, a concerning prospect for some Democrats even though he’s only a few years older than Trump. One possibility that Biden’s longtime advisers have discussed privately is that he could announce his intention to serve only one term, clearing the path for his running mate to take over in 2024 and potentially setting up Democrats for a 12-year White House stretch.

Biden’s brief discussion about his 2020 deliberations came as he brought foreign policy staffers together to set the 2018 agenda for the newly opened Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement - where many of them are now working, including Colin Kahl, his vice presidential national security adviser, and Steve Ricchetti, his former chief of staff. Eli Ratner, his former deputy national security adviser, and Mike Carpenter, the former Pentagon and State Department official who’s now the center’s senior director, also attended, as did Julianne Smith, a Biden adviser in the Obama administration’s first term who now works at the Center for a New American Security, a Washington think tank.

A Biden spokesman declined to comment. But in a recent NBC News interview, Biden said he’d decide on running in 2020 based on whether it was “the right thing to do.”

“I’m focused on one thing: electing a Democratic Congress to stop this erosion of the core of who we are,” Biden said. “I’ll look at that a year from now. I have plenty of time to consider whether or not to run.”

The meeting was one of several signs that Biden is beginning to position himself as an alternative to Trump. Biden has started denouncing the current president’s leadership more frequently in public, as he crisscrosses the United States and beyond to promote his new book, his cancer initiative, his new domestic policy institute in Delaware, the diplomacy center and his new political action committee, American Possibilities.

He’s also been gearing up to play a major role campaigning for Democrats seeking to retake the House and Senate in the 2018 midterms. “Donald Trump’s looking out for Donald Trump. Republicans are looking out for Donald Trump. Who’s looking out for everyone else? Democrats,” Biden wrote in a recent fundraising pitch to the PAC’s supporters. He said in 2018, he would “beat a path all across this country to stand up for leaders who will stand up for all of us.”

In 2015, Biden’s face was plastered across cable news channels and newspaper front pages for months as he carried out a lengthy deliberation about whether to challenge Clinton for the nomination. Ultimately, he decided he and his family weren’t in position to run so soon after his son, former Delaware Attorney General Beau Biden, died from brain cancer earlier that year. Yet many Democrats have argued that his “everyman” brand and blue-collar appeal would make him particularly well-suited to challenge Trump.

(Source: AP)

18 killed in massive explosion at wedding in India

Rescuers discovered nine more bodies Sunday beneath the ruins of an Indian hotel, bringing the known death toll from an explosion which tore through a wedding party to 18, an official said.

A gas cylinder exploded late Friday at the hotel in the city of Beawar, in the western state of Rajasthan, reducing the venue to ruins and sparking a huge fire.

By Saturday evening officials said nine bodies had been found. But the figure rose sharply Sunday as rescue teams, aided by the army, found nine more victims including women and children under rubble.

“So far 18 bodies have been recovered,” said Gaurav Goyal, a senior administrative official in Ajmer, the district where the blast occurred, about 200 kilometers from the state capital Jaipur.

“Five seriously injured people, with severe burn injuries, are being treated in hospital,” he told AFP.

Recovery teams were sifting through mangled heaps of concrete and steel, removing victims on stretchers covered with white sheets.

The blast all but leveled the three-storey hotel where a wedding was underway. Eyewitnesses told local broadcaster NDTV the explosion occurred as a chef tried to refill a cooking canister.

(Source: AFP)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	98300.7
IFX	1099.01

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	46,550 rials
EUR	57,120 rials
GBP	68,350 rials
AED	13,190 rials

Source: mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

WTI	61.55/b
Brent	64.84/b
OPEC Basket	62.09/b
Gold	\$1,348.40/oz
Silver	\$16.69/oz
Platinum	\$1,009.00/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



Sarajevo eager for expansion of economic ties with Tehran

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Bosnia and Herzegovinian Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations Mirko Sarovic has expressed his country's interest in expansion of economic ties with Iran, IRNA reported on Sunday.

The official made the remarks in a meeting with Iranian ambassador to Sarajevo Mahmoud Heidari on Saturday.

Headed by Mirhadi Seyedi, the deputy president of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), an Iranian delegation traveled to the European country for the second round of talks on preferential tariff agreements between the two countries.



Permanent expo of Iranian products to be inaugurated in Almaty

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — A permanent exhibition and trade center for Iranian products is due to be inaugurated in Kazakhstan's Almaty, the portal of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) announced.

The exhibition and center are scheduled to be opened in the second Iranian calendar month of Ordibehesht (April 21 – May 21) in the next fiscal.

"The center is to be established to promote Iranian goods and to provide a better context for the introduction, display and marketing Iranian products in Kazakhstan," the announcement reads.



Joblessness rate in autumn at 11.9%

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran's unemployment rate in autumn 2017, which corresponds to the third quarter of current Iranian calendar year (September 23-December 21, 2017), stood at 11.9 percent, down 0.4 percent compared to the figure in the same season in 2016, the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) announced.

The figure shows 0.2 percent increase in comparison with that of the previous season, summer.

Iran's unemployment rate in summer 2017, which corresponds to the second quarter of current Iranian calendar year (June 22-September 22), dropped to 11.7 percent, down 0.9 percent compared to the figure in the same season in 2016, according to an SCI report. Unemployment rate stood at 12.6 percent in summer 2016, the report said.

India State Banks reveal exposure in billion-dollar fraud case

India's state-owned UCO Bank said it has exposure of \$411.8 million in the nearly \$2 billion bank fraud perpetrated against Punjab National Bank, a case linked to billionaire jeweler Nirav Modi.

UCO Bank's Hong Kong branch granted loans against letters of credit issued by PNB, UCO Bank said in a filing with the Bombay Stock Exchange late on Saturday. Other banks, including State Bank of India and Union Bank of India, are also said to be at risk of loss.

In all, Indian banks could take a hit of more than \$3 billion from loans and corporate guarantees provided to diamond companies allegedly involved in the fraud at PNB, Reuters reported on Saturday, citing the tax department.

In its complaint to the Central Bureau of Investigation, PNB alleged that the fraud was led by Modi, who's dressed Hollywood actors including Kate Winslet and Bollywood actors such as Priyanka Chopra. Modi, 47, is No. 85 on Forbes's 2017 list of India's richest people.

Modi hasn't spoken publicly about the allegations. He is in New York City, and the ministry of external affairs on Friday suspended his passport, The Times of India reported.

(Source: Bloomberg)

IME trade almost \$22b since last Mar.

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — According to the latest released data, the total value of trade transactions in Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) from the start of current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2017) till February 15, 2018 stood at more than 1.013 quadrillion rials (over \$21.76 billion), showing 37 percent rise in terms of

value compared to the same time span in the previous year.

IME's worth of total trade transactions stood at 739.4 trillion rials (about \$15.8 billion) in the same period in the previous Iranian calendar year, IRNA reported on Sunday citing the data released by IME.

Since March 21, 2017, about 28.84 million

West Karoun: Fields with promise for Iran's oil industry



Karun oilfields will require about \$25 billion of investment, of which only about \$7 billion has been funded and spent in implementation and development plans so far.

Considering the fact that West Karoun fields are still young, pristine and untapped reservoirs (also called green fields), the government should increase the efforts to at-

OVL to bid for Iran's South Azadegan oilfield, rework Farzad-B cost

ONGC Videsh Ltd, the overseas arm of state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC), will bid for development rights of Iran's giant South Azadegan Oilfield in direct competition with the likes of global giants like Shell, France's Total, Petronas of Malaysia and Russia's Gazprom.

OVL will also rework the \$6.2 billion cost of developing the Farzad-B gas field in the Persian Gulf, which it had discovered a decade back, to get Iran to award rights of the field to it, sources privy to the development said.

OVL is one of the 34 companies Iran pre-qualified last year for development of South Azadegan field, which contains an estimated 33 billion barrels of oil in place, of which 6 billion barrels are deemed recoverable. The field currently produces about 80,000 barrels of oil per day (4 million tons per annum) and output is envisaged to touch 320,000 barrels a day (16 million tons).

Sources said OVL will make a formal bid when National Iranian Oil Co (NIOC) opens a tender for developing the South Azadegan

oilfield.

Other firms prequalified include Japan's Inpex Corp, China's CNPC, Eni of Italy, Sin-opec of China and Russia's Gazprom, Lukoil and Rosneft.

Sources said OVL had last year made its 'best' offer to invest \$11 billion in developing the Farzad-B field as well as in building the infrastructure to export the gas but Iran has deterred awarding the rights of the field to the Indian firm owing to differences over pricing of the fuel.

With the deal on the verge of collapsing, OVL has offered to do just the upstream part of bringing the field to production while leaving the marketing of the fuel to Iran, they said, adding that the upstream part is to cost \$6.2 billion while another \$5 billion will be required to build a liquefied natural gas (LNG) export facility.

Iran believes the upstream investment should not be more than \$5.5 billion.

Farzad B was discovered by OVL in the Farsi block about 10 years ago. The field in

the Farsi block has an in-place gas reserve of 21.7 trillion cubic feet, of which 12.5 tcf are recoverable.

Yesterday, Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan held talks with his visiting Iranian counterpart Bijan Namdar Zanganeh where he pressed for a stake for Indian companies in a producing oilfield and promised to raise crude oil import from the Persian Gulf nation in the year beginning April to reverse the reductions introduced in the current fiscal.

Zanganeh said he was "optimistic" about signing of an agreement awarding rights of Iran's giant Farzad-B gas field to its discoverer, OVL. A team of officials led by OVL will be visiting Tehran this week to renegotiate terms.

He said Indian public and private sector oil companies will in 2018-19 fiscal buy 0.5 million barrels of crude oil per day (25 million tons).

This will be 25 percent more than current fiscal imports estimated at 370,000 barrels per day (18.5 million tons).

India had for the current fiscal cut oil

tract the necessary investment for developing these fields.

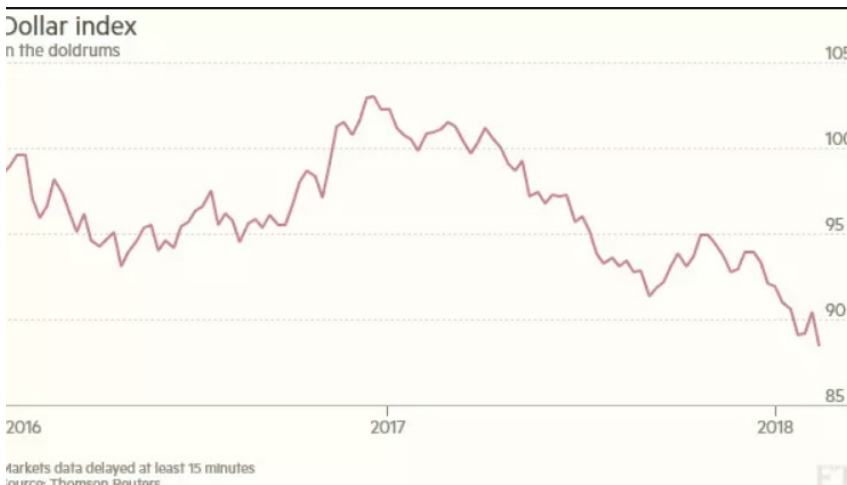
Since most of the country's already active fields are old and obviously with aging, the recovery factor decreases resulting in a lower production rate, increasing production level requires either new technologies to keep the recovery factor from falling or new fields coming on stream.

So, again considering the issues regarding banking relations, entering new technologies would be rather a challenge for the oil ministry, thus as it is already prioritized, young and untapped oilfields should be given extra attention in the ministry's future planning to increase oil output.

Having an estimated 67 billion barrels of in-situ oil, West Karoun fields definitely deserve the spotlight which has been put on them recently.

Hopefully, in the new Iranian fiscal (which starts on March 21), the tender for development of the Azadegan oilfield, which is the first of its kind, won't get postponed any further and the 10 IPC deals which were promised by the oil minister to be signed by March 2018 will go through by the yearend.

What's behind the weakening U.S. dollar



from central banks on currencies remains tricky work.

"Explaining and forecasting currencies is one of the most difficult tasks in economic and market analysis," notes BNP Paribas, which adds that fundamentals have been distorted by central banks' efforts at quantitative easing and China's use of capital controls.

"The moral is that when central banks distort rates, rates become less reliable indicators of relative monetary conditions and, therefore, poorer indicators of exchange rate pressures," says the bank.

■What did the Federal Reserve say about inflation at its January meeting?

The U.S central bank will on Wednesday publish the minutes of its January Federal Open Market Committee meeting, and here the focus will be on its views over the outlook for inflation.

In the wake of last month's policy meeting, we have seen a bout of market volatility that followed data showing the fastest rate of

in March.

■What's in store for South African assets?

The country's bond and currency markets reacted sharply to President Jacob Zuma's resignation last week, goosed by the promise of long-overdue change.

But compare the performance of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange index to that of the MSCI emerging markets index and you would be hard pushed to see that anything had happened in South Africa to differentiate it from EMs as a whole.

Expect more of the same this week: there is plenty coming up in the form of short-term news that will move bonds and the rand but, as Kieran Curtis of Aberdeen Standard Investments puts it, nothing that will "really move the growth outlook structurally".

In all asset classes, last week's change of president had long been priced-in to a large extent — it was only a matter of time. Stocks will take the longer view and, in any case, many of the companies listed on the JSE do a lot of their business outside South Africa.

Bonds and the rand are likely to be much more volatile. The yield on the benchmark government bond fell from 8.4 per cent to 8.1 per cent between Tuesday and Friday last week, bucking a move in the opposite direction by the JPMorgan EMBI-GD index of EM sovereign bonds.

Whether that pattern is repeated this week hangs on two main issues: what is in Wednesday's budget, and who is chosen as finance minister to deliver it. Other cabinet appointments will also be watched closely.

Once the week's immediate hurdles are overcome, John Ashbourne at Capital Economics expects the rand to weaken during the year. "There is a lot of optimism baked-in that won't survive contact with reality over the long term," he says. (Source: The Financial Times)

As oil stocks drain, OPEC searches for its next fig leaf

There is no doubt that the output cuts made by OPEC and its friends, aided by a collapse in production from group member and historic quota cheat Venezuela, have drained a lot of excess oil out of the supply chain. Tankers floating full of crude off the coasts of Iran and South Africa have disappeared and total U.S. stockpiles are close to their lowest in almost three years.

Draining the tanks

But now their goal is within sight, or it may already have been passed. And that creates problems for the producer group.

If inventories are back where they say they want them, but prices haven't recovered as much as they would like, they need to find a way to justify prolonging the cuts to boost their revenues.

Since November 2016, OPEC has been able to get away with the idea of trying to return oil inventories to a five-year average level. That seems a very clear and precise target, but, as I wrote last month, it isn't. And at this point, it's no longer possible to maintain the charade.

The Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee set up to oversee the OPEC+ output deal will discuss the inventory target when it meets in Saudi Arabia in April. My Bloomberg News colleague Grant Smith has written a very clear explanation of how they might shift the inventory goalposts. The trouble is, that some of the tweaks they might look at could end up indicating they have already overshot their target.

Inventories can be measured in many different ways: the simple volume of oil in storage, the number of days of demand that volume could meet, or, like the International Energy Agency's emergency stock-holding



obligations, the number of days of imports they could cover.

The choice of the period over which to average "normal" inventory levels will also have a big impact on determining when the target has been reached.

Comments made by oil ministers of Saudi Arabia and Russia last week suggest that the group and friends will land on a clarification of their oil inventory goal. But a less-widely reported comment by Khalid Al-Falih suggests that the target may shift away from just focusing on inventory levels.

Finding reliable data for inventories remains a challenge, Al-Falih told reporters in Riyadh on Feb. 14. Fixing on a period of

"normal" inventory levels to target, or measuring in terms of days of cover, won't solve that problem.

OPEC's real problem is not whether to measure in days or in barrels, but whether it can ever adequately count inventories outside the developed countries of the OECD. And it is arguably these other countries that really matter. They already use over half the oil consumed worldwide and are expected to account for 80 percent of demand growth this year.

The bigger half

Non-OECD countries use more than half the world's oil and OPEC expects them to account for 80 percent of global oil demand

growth in 2018. But Al-Falih also said that looking at inventories alone isn't sufficient to assess market balance.

Could this presage a shift in the group's target away from one based on inventories? Perhaps not immediately, but it does suggest that, as inventory data show the job may be nearly done, producers could be starting to look for another fig leaf to justify extending the deal. That could be as simple as targeting an earlier five-year average.

But what really matters to the group is the revenue they generate from producing and selling the black stuff. Pursuing an overt revenue target, or its close cousin, a price target, is probably not feasible. Not only would it open them up to accusations of acting as a cartel, but each of the 24 members of the expanded OPEC+ group has different revenue needs and a different break-even price.

The group has been very successful in boosting oil prices since the middle of last year, and as they have risen, so have producers' assessments of the "right" level. When OPEC and friends met last May, several ministers were talking quite casually about \$50 a barrel as a good price for crude. No longer. Traditional price hawk Iran now finds itself at the dove-ish end of the spectrum, with oil minister Bijan Zanganeh seeing \$60 as a "good" price for oil. Others have more ambitious targets.

Setting a clear price target is unlikely, but don't expect OPEC and friends to rush to open the production taps, even if inventory levels suggests they should. They are not yet making as much as they want from their oil and will now embark on a process of finding another metric that will tell them that the time is not yet right to boost supply.

(Source: Bloomberg)

LNG prices remain strong despite oversupply concerns

With major new projects coming on stream in Australia and the rising output from the U.S. shale producers, the global liquefied natural gas (LNG) market was widely predicted to enter a period of oversupply between 2015-2020, with total supplies growing almost 50 percent.

But somewhat to everyone's surprise, or delight if the tone of Royal Dutch Shell chief executive Ben Van Beurden is anything to judge by, "The LNG glut — conspicuously absent isn't it?" he is quoted as saying in the Financial Times, a glut has failed to develop.

Rather than fall, LNG prices have remained robustly firm despite the predicted flood of new supply entering the market. The reason? The other side of the supply-demand equation has been outdoing itself.

Rising imports by China has been driving growth, pushing Asian prices above \$11 per million British thermal units — a three-year high, reports say.

China raised its imports of the fuel by 50 percent last year to around 38 million metric tons, according to the Financial Times, after Beijing strengthened measures designed to control pollution from coal use, overtaking South Korea as the second-biggest importer globally, behind only Japan.

The Financial Times goes on to report that Pakistan, Egypt, Jordan and a host of other countries, including in Latin America and Europe, have also become buyers. Some, like Egypt, have faced temporary fuel supply problems at home. Others, like Lithuania, have been pleased to show they have an alternative to Russian pipeline supplies. As far as the U.S. industry is concerned, Mexico, Brazil and Argentina have taken a large proportion of U.S. LNG exports since they started up on the Gulf Coast two years ago. But the U.S. has also been successful in developing a new kind of buyer.

Traditionally, LNG is sold on long-term contracts, directly to consumers. However, U.S. energy groups like Cheniere Energy have signed long-term supply deals with traders like Trafigura, who have joined other firms like Vitol, Glencore and Gunvor in securing long-term supply deals but developing a spot market for sales. The market as a whole benefits from the greater liquidity and price discovery that comes from a more active spot market; buyers benefit from having more supply options, particularly in the face of disruptions to their long-term supply contracts.

The LNG market is evolving and maturing as the fuel replaces less environmentally friendly alternatives like coal and competes head on with nuclear on price. The strength of LNG demand is coming at a time of unprecedented rollout of renewable energy generation, which suggests LNG will have a long-term future as part of the energy mix in the next decade despite the uptake of wind and solar.

(Source: oilprice.com)



Crude's pullback appears done for now, with gasoline set to spur prices higher

Oil bounced this week, climbing back to around \$61 on Friday after a recent selloff took it to its weakest levels since December. That rebound has one veteran energy analyst keeping an eye on a few developments that could keep oil afloat.

Tom Kloza, the head of global energy analysis for the Oil Price Information Service, called the correction in crude on January 31. Following Kloza's call, oil sank more than 10

percent to a low of around \$58 last Friday before staging a comeback.

Fortunately for oil bulls, Kloza believes that the pullback is over. "We think that probably much of the correction has happened, [though] there might be some seasonal weakness here in February and early March," he said this week on CNBC's "Futures Now."

What's more, there could be one other factor that moves

oil just a bit higher: The price of gasoline, which is on the rise as the economy gathers momentum.

"We think gasoline prices are going to spike higher," he said. "That's going to be the sherpa, perhaps, that brings crude oil not back to where we saw around late January, but certainly a bit above what we've seen in the last few years."

(Source: CNBC)

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South Africa's Zuma leaves behind a broken democracy

Jacob Zuma finally succumbed to growing pressure from the African National Congress and resigned as South Africa's president on Wednesday. Once a hero of the resistance to apartheid, Zuma became increasingly embroiled in sordid corruption scandals, prompting the ANC to elect another leader and to effectively force Zuma out of office.

That done, the question now is whether the ANC, the party of Nelson Mandela, which has had a near-monopoly on South African politics since the end of minority rule, can cleanse and revive itself under Cyril Ramaphosa, its new leader, who is now all but certain of being elected the nation's president by Parliament.



Jacob Zuma

Cyril Ramaphosa

Ramaphosa, a onetime labor leader and protégé of Mandela who made a fortune in business and leads the party's reformist wing, was elected president of the ANC in a hotly contested election in December. Since Parliament chooses the president in South Africa and the ANC controls Parliament, the expectation was that Zuma would step down. But he refused, until the party last week threatened a vote of no confidence to force him out.

There is nothing to regret in Zuma's fall. Though he spent time in prison with Mandela and in exile, on coming to power he succumbed to the sordid lure of power's perks and now faces multiple accusations of corruption and other unethical behavior. He also came to be identified with a nation economically adrift and unable to achieve the economic equality promised at the end of white rule. But the ANC continued to prop up Zuma, at least until the party itself began losing its once unassailable popularity and Zuma became a liability ahead of national elections in 2019.

On winning the leadership of the ANC in December, Ramaphosa vowed to "act fearlessly against alleged corruption and abuse of office within our ranks." Yet his victory over Zuma's ally (and former wife) in the ANC race was slim, and many Zuma loyalists retain senior posts.

That leaves an uphill battle as Ramaphosa takes on a deeply divided party in which too many years of unchallenged power have nurtured lethargy and a culture of corruption. He will need to act quickly and decisively to convince dubious voters that the ANC can clean its soiled house and deserves another chance.

(Source: The NYT)

The German coalition's most important job

The two main parties need to restore confidence in centrist government.

More than four months after German voters punished their coalition government at the polls, the two main parties have agreed to try again. If the Social Democratic Party's rank and file approve the proposed new pact with Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union, which cannot yet be taken for granted, Germany will be ruled once more by a "grand coalition."



It's a hopeful development -- another chance for the country's leaders to show Germany, and Europe as well, that pragmatic centrist government works better than populism and militant nationalism. Yet Merkel and her ministers have some pitfalls to avoid if they're to make GroKo, as the coalition is called, a success.

The composition of the new cabinet would tilt the coalition in the SPD's favor: The center-left party gets not just one of the powerful finance and foreign-affairs ministries,

but both. On paper, this could be a good thing. Germany could use a little less of the CDU's stern fiscal conservatism and a little more of what the SPD is calling for -- more public investment and bolder reform of the European Union.

The parties' policy agreement appears to tick these boxes. Putting it into effect, though, will be another matter. The more left-leaning mix adds to the risk that the promised increase in public spending will go too far, or be frittered away on unproductive programs.

It's to be hoped that the new finance minister, Olaf Scholz, can combine higher public investment with effective fiscal discipline. Greater emphasis on infrastructure would help. Germany spends a smaller share of national income on infrastructure investment than most other advanced economies -- and the country certainly isn't lacking in the savings needed to finance worthwhile projects.

The greatest threat, though, is that the coalition loses sight of the real prize -- restoring faith in German centrism and leadership.

Coalitions are loveless marriages at the best of times. And the SPD, dismayed by its performance in the election, is divided against itself: The party even forced its leader, Martin Schulz, to drop his bid to become foreign minister. Sealing the pact is only the first step. Making it work will demand effort and restraint all round.

A coalition that squabbles and fails won't just hurt the parties' prospects in the polls next time. It will strengthen the insurgent far-right AfD, endanger Germany's record of economic dynamism, and lessen the prospects for making the European Union work better for all its members. A lot is at stake if and when GroKo gets down to work.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Ending America's disastrous role in Syria



Much of the carnage that has ravaged Syria during the past seven years is due to the actions of the United States and its allies in the Middle East.

Israel, too, aimed to counter Iran, which threatens Israel through Hezbollah in Lebanon, Syria near the Golan Heights, and Hamas in Gaza. Qatar, meanwhile, wanted to bring a Sunni Islamist regime to power.

The armed groups supported by the U.S. and allies since 2011 were assembled under the banner of the Free Syrian Army. In fact, there was no single army, but rather competing armed groups with distinct backers, ideologies, and goals. The fighters ranged from dissident Syrians and autonomy-seeking Kurds to Sunni terrorists backed by Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

While vast resources were devoted to overthrowing Assad, the effort ultimately failed, but not before causing massive bloodshed and displacing millions of Syrians. Many fled to Europe, fomenting Europe's refugee crisis and a surge

in political support for Europe's anti-immigrant extreme right.

There were four main reasons for the failure to overthrow Assad. First, Assad's government had backing among not only Alawites, but also Syrian Christians and other minorities who feared a repressive Sunni Islamist regime. Second, the U.S.-led coalition was countered by Iran and Russia. Third, when a splinter group of terrorists split away to form the Islamic State (ISIS), the U.S. diverted significant resources to defeating it, rather than to toppling Assad. Finally, the anti-Assad forces have been deeply and chronically divided; for example, Turkey is in open conflict with the Kurdish fighters backed by the U.S.

All of these reasons for failure remain valid today. The war is at a stalemate. Only the bloodshed continues.

America's official narrative has sought

America's new nightmare: The deadly alliance of Islamophobia and gun culture

At approximately 2pm on Valentine's Day, a 19-year-old gunman opened fire on his former teachers and classmates at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida, killing 17 and seriously injuring dozens of others. The attack was not only the 18th gun-related incident on a U.S. school campus since 1 January, but also the deadliest school shooting, taking its place as the ninth deadliest on U.S. soil of all time.

At 6am the following morning, the gunman was identified as Nikolas Cruz by authorities, and charged with 17 counts of premeditated murder. While motive has not yet been established, a psychological profile of the mass killer is beginning to emerge, and its one the U.S. is all too familiar with.

All the familiar hallmarks

Described by former classmates as "weird", and a "loner", the headlines to this tragedy include all the familiar hallmarks: guns, mental health issues, an identification with the overt racism of the alt-right, an association with a white supremacist group alongside a particular hatred of Muslims.

Welcome to the new American nightmare.

Again, it's far too early to speculate which proverbial straw broke which camel's back in the killer's mind, as there are far too many possibilities, but the warning signs were there.

"A lot of people were saying it was going to be him," one student told a Florida television station. "A lot of kids threw jokes around saying that he was going to be the one to shoot up the school. It turns out everyone predicted it. That's crazy."

What led them to predict Cruz was capable of carrying out such an atrocity, the student did not say, but it's likely the prediction was based on Cruz being repeatedly suspended from school prior to being eventually expelled. And it's likely his social media posts boasting of his love for guns and knives, and hatred of Muslims had something to do with it.

"Everything he posts [on social media] is about weapons. It's sick," the student said, while another described Cruz as someone who would often wear a Trump cap, hyper-patriotic t-shirts that "seemed really extreme, like hating on Islam," and also known for deriding Muslims as "terrorists and bombers".

On Thursday, the leader of a white supremacist group, Republic of Florida -- which aims to turn Florida into a whites-only state -- said Cruz had participated in their paramilitary training activities, was "brought up" by one its members, and purchased his AR-15 assault rifle from the group.

Islamophobia and gun culture

Ok, so we are clear -- this article in no way is blaming Cruz's expressed hatred for Muslims or any other minority for the attack.

As noted earlier, motive is yet to be established by the authorities, but given most of the post-tragedy analysis



The Valentine's Day school massacre has all the hallmarks of a new type of killer, with a love of guns, and motivated by the ideology of white supremacy and hatred of Muslims.

will predictably examine the need for stricter gun laws and improved access to healthcare, this article will instead examine what has become all but completely ignored in popular discourse: the intersectionality between Islamophobia and gun culture.

The hatred of Muslims walks hand-in-hand with the almost perverted lust for high-powered weapons in America, and the all-powerful National Rifle Association (NRA) is cashing in on the country's rising animosity towards its 3.5 million American Muslims.

At the NRA's 2015 national annual conference, one session instructed members on what to do if Islamic extremists seize control of cities across the United States and enact Islamic law, suggesting that this is a real threat emerging upon American gun owners.

The presenter told the audience he had been to areas in the U.S. where only Muslims are allowed to go, areas that even police refuse to enter.

"The street signs suddenly went from English to Arabic. There wasn't a single English word on any shop or any street sign," said the presenter. "I have seen it with my own eyes, witnessed it in the backseat of a car and it is for real. No-go zones exist in the United States," he added while also falsely claiming there was more than "5,000 known terrorist cells in the United States".

The myth of these "no-go zones" was not only started by Fox News, but also debunked by the same network when it admitted later that "there is no credible information to support the assertion that there are specific areas" in the U.S. that "exclude individuals based solely on religion".

to conceal the scale and calamitous consequences of U.S. efforts -- in defiance of international law and the UN Charter -- to overthrow Assad. While the U.S. vehemently complains about Russian and Iranian influence in Syria, America and its allies have repeatedly violated Syrian sovereignty. The U.S. government mischaracterizes the war as a civil war among Syrians, rather than a proxy war involving the U.S., Israel, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Qatar.

In July 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump announced the end of CIA support for the Syrian rebels. In practice, though, U.S. engagement continues, though now it is apparently aimed more at weakening Assad than overthrowing him. As part of America's continued war-making, the Pentagon announced in December that U.S. forces would remain indefinitely in Syria, ostensibly to support anti-Assad rebel forces in areas captured from ISIS, and of course without the assent of the Syrian government.

The war is in fact at risk of a new round of escalation. When Assad's government recently attacked anti-Assad rebels, the U.S. coalition launched airstrikes that killed around 100 Syrian troops and an unknown number of Russian fighters. Following this show of force, U.S. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis disingenuously stated that, "Obviously, we are not getting engaged in the Syrian civil war."

The U.S. and its allies should face reality and accept the persistence of Assad's government, despicable as it may be. The UN Security Council, backed by the U.S., Russia, and the other major powers, should step in with peacekeepers to restore Syrian sovereignty and urgent public services.

Yes, the Assad's government would remain in power, and Iran and Russia would maintain their influence in Syria. But the U.S. official delusion that America can call the shots in Syria by choosing who rules, and with which allies, would end. It's long past time for a far more realistic approach, in which the Security Council pushes Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, and Israel into a pragmatic peace that ends the bloodshed and allows the Syrian people to resume their lives and livelihoods.

(Source: the Project Syndicate)

But debunked or not, these anti-Muslim conspiracy theories not only become accepted as fact but also go hand-in-hand with a media landscape that rewards those who peddle fear, hatred and suspicion of Muslims.

When you combine all of that with this country's ubiquitous and gratuitous devotion to weapons, you end up with a number of gun stores across the country advertising "Muslim-free zones".

Heavy militia activity

"Even though there is very little coverage on this issue, it is hardly surprising that some of the states with the most anti-Muslim activity are also the ones that have heavy militia activity and unchecked gun culture," Imraan Siddiqi, founder of human rights watch group Hate Hurts, told me.

"We can look back to the armed mosque protest in Phoenix, Arizona, as a clear cut example of that intersection between gun-culture and Islamophobia. Militia members stood outside a mosque, brandishing AR-15s and other high-powered weapons."

"These type of movements exist in places like Texas, South Dakota, Kansas -- not forgetting that a group of Trump-supporting white supremacy militia attempted to bomb a Somali community in 2016."

When I interviewed Omar Suleiman, a well-known American Muslim scholar and president of the Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, he told me how armed groups, waving Confederate flags, and brandishing "long rifles", routinely appear outside his mosque in Dallas, Texas.

"This is what our kids see when they go to the mosque, armed guys in masks, dipping their bullets in swine blood, promising one day they're going to shoot all of us Muslims dead," he said.

When Craig Hicks, an avowed New Atheist, murdered three Muslims "execution style" in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, he, like Cruz and others, had displayed a penchant for posting pictures of his guns and anti-Muslim memes on social media.

"It cannot be ignored that an overlap between gun culture and Islamophobia exists in our society," says Siddiqi. "This is seen in the increase in armed protests as well as horrific acts carried out against individual Muslims, such as the Chapel Hill shooting. Next, it is important to bring light to the issue of Islamophobia -- many people are unaware of the extent that individuals are willing to go to express their hate."

To that end, and while we await for a clear picture for how and why Cruz carried out this heinous act of merciless violence, it should be noted that murders by white supremacists more than doubled in 2017 compared to the previous year, according the Anti-Defamation League.

Hate rises while access to guns, meant only for the battlefield, becomes ever easier to procure. Welcome to the new American nightmare.

(Source: The Middle East Eye)

Analysis of Trump State of the Union address

By Pegah Smiley

Pegah Smiley is a 17-year-old student from Bloomington High School North in Indiana.

INDIANA — President Donald Trump’s State of the Union Speech was as empty as a dinosaur’s skull. He starts off throwing lies about what he has done in the past year, saying, “We have made incredible progress and achieved extraordinary success,” which brings up the question: what success exactly? No one knows the answer, because the media is all “fake news”, and the ones that are not “fake news”, don’t have any proof.

For example, he says that, “We enacted the biggest tax cuts and reforms in American history” and that “African-American unemployment stands at the lowest rate ever recorded, and Hispanic American unemployment has also reached the lowest levels in history.” But for some reason the data and proof either doesn’t exist or says the opposite. He also says that, “we have ended the war on clean coal,” but it’s confusing since “clean coal” does not exist. Maybe he was talking about his own imaginary world.

On the other hand, I respect his approach to the natural disasters that affected the country in the past year, thanking the heroes who helped each other through it. He finishes the topic by saying, “To everyone still recovering in Texas, Florida, Louisiana, the Virgin Islands, California, Puerto Rico, and everywhere else -- we are with you, we love you, and we will pull through together.” Stephen Colbert did not deny a caustic response to that, “I bet the people in Puerto Rico would be happy to hear that when they can turn on their TVs again.”

The president speaks with a lot of hope and positivity during his speech. It is as if he is leading a movement--oh wait! He is: Making America Great Again. But his definition of greatness is just a little different from the definition that most of America believes. Throughout his speech, he makes it fairly clear that his version of “America” is the America in the late 1700s where everyone used coal and had migrated from Norway.

But he hits everyone by saying, “So to every citizen watching at home tonight -- no matter where you have been, or where you come from, this is your time. If you work hard, if you believe in yourself, if you believe in America, then you can dream anything, you can be anything, and together, we can achieve anything.” At first it sounds like he is for immigrants and diversity, but the hidden truth in his words are: To everyone who was born in America to an American family, which should mostly be Caucasians, no matter from which 50 states you are coming from, you can do anything. Trump not only shows his love for Caucasian-Americans, but Christians as well.

He also says that, “We are rediscovering the American way. In America, we know that faith and family, not government and bureaucracy, are the center of the American life. Our motto is ‘in God We Trust.’” But he yet exclaims, “defending our Second Amendment” and “protect religious liberty” into his speech which contradicts his actions and last statements. Maybe for him, the “religious liberty” means that it’s okay if you want to be Protestant and not a Catholic.

President Trump’s two-faced, dissembling character makes it hard to believe or understand his intentions. As the speech goes on, Trump shifts his focus from what has happened to what he would like to happen. The one statement that I loved the most was his promise that, “I will not stop until our veterans are properly taken care of, which has been my promise to them from the very beginning of this great journey.” But as proved in the past year, his promises mean something different to him than what we think they mean.

Another hope given by Trump was about drugs and their prices. But he did not offer any plans to achieve fair pricing, because they’re just his hopes and not true goals. He does not truly care.

It gets even more interesting when he speaks of America being “the nation of builders.” And it’s one of the only things



I have to agree with him about. Throughout history America has been on the front lines of invading and stealing resources from countries around the world to maintain power. It’s crystal clear that Trump wants to keep up this activity.

His speech also includes one of the most sensitive and arguable topics: Immigration. Trump welcomes and denies immigrants at the same time. It looks like he has reached the conclusion that he cannot deport the Dreamers, but he can stop the future Dreamers. He says that, “The United States is a compassionate nation. We are proud that we do more than any other country to help the needy, the struggling, and the underprivileged all over the world. But as President of the United States, my highest loyalty, my greatest compassion, and my constant concern is for America’s children, America’s struggling workers, and America’s forgotten communities,” which proves his love for Caucasian-Americans even more, and leaves no doubt about his hate for foreigners from what he terms “shithole countries.” President Trump ended the reputation of America being the country of immigrants. And as Trevor Noah beautifully says, “Trump plays the AllLives-Matter card on DACA.”

Trump also blamed drug abuses, murders, and terrorism on immigrants from the “shithole countries.” And with his plan and four pillars of hardening the immigration process even more, he wants to solve all the problems in America.

I would like to wish the President of The United States luck. Because as “fake news” suggests, the economy of America is dependent on immigrants and only less than one percent of immigrants disobey the laws and commit a crime. But that’s “fake news” because Trump doesn’t agree with it.

Digging deeper into his Four Pillars of Immigration, they are based on Trump’s negative feelings towards anything supporting immigrants. He mentions a Lottery that, “randomly hands out green cards without any regard for skill, merit, or the safety of our people.” It would have been helpful if someone had told Trump that not all Lottery winners get to actually have Green Cards, because their background and skills are carefully checked. And about the chain migration, he shows his hate fully and with no shame.

Following his immigration plans, Trump brings up the topic of ISIS and how America has tried to defeat them completely by not being allied with Iran for the same goal, and by not letting the Syrian refugees in the United States. Then he mentions the protests of people in Iran against, in fact, its economy and how he wasn’t silent about it, thinking most Iranians hated the government, which is not the case.

It may be confusing about why he would care? It’s simple though. Iran is on the Neocon invasion list. This is his way of “building.” It begins with total destruction and never moves to the building part, since promises are cheap. One thing that proved to me that he could be daft at least is when he said that, “we must modernize and rebuild our nuclear arsenal.” Why? One tenth of the current arsenal could destroy the entire planet. He also stated: “I am asking the Congress to address the fundamental flaws in the terrible Iran nuclear deal.” What flaws? The deal is working fine. And of course, he doesn’t leave out North Korea. As always the President adds fuel to already burning fires.

What most impressed me about his speech was the diversity of heroes that he had picked out. It was a weird mix. As an immigrant myself, I found his speech funny and disgusting. But looking at the bright side, it’s a good thing that he shows what he thinks about certain groups of people. Yet, it’s undeniable that the empty part of the glass of Trump’s Presidency is deeper than the full part.

Looking at the speech as a whole, he used pathos to generate emotional reactions. This helps keep the audience engaged, but it doesn’t help so much if you want them to agree with you. Trump’s comments may be the worst and most pathetically amusing parts of his Presidency and bring something new, or just bizarre, to the table often. You have to wonder who writes such occasional drivel for him. His State of the Union address seemed hopeful to some, but it killed the future hopes and opportunities for many, many others.

Many are unhappy about Trump in the White House, and I personally believe that he brought back an aspect of America which had been relatively hidden: racism. Trump has provoked and maybe even inspired racism, and his speech adds to the tensions around it. It’s a fact that the roots of racism are deep in this country and racists show themselves horribly at times.

Obviously, America isn’t the only country with racism, but it is the only country that has been long known as the land of immigrants, too. America could actually be a role model, but right now it’s little but a disappointment to the world. What remains for now are primarily hopes for a different and better future, in which not only America, but every country, is in a better situation than currently exists. Just like Trump mentioned, “Perhaps someday in the future there will be a magical moment.” But his magical and retrograde thinking, if you can call it “thinking” at all, is no panacea.

The charges against Russians are Mickey Mouse



➡ And meanwhile, the interminable witch hunt about Russian collusion in the election processes is making it difficult, if not impossible, for the U.S. to deal with much more important and dangerous issues such as a financial system that seems to be headed towards the most horrific train wreck in the history of the U.S. Of course, the Trump Administration and GOP morons in the U.S. Congress have set this in motion with the recent tax cuts that are bound to result in trillion dollar fiscal deficits for many years into the future. That alone is probably going to derail Trump if not the entire government, while the vast majority of Americans will be desperately trying to keep their heads above water in a very different humbled and hobbled economy.

But here’s what’s really galling and evidence of such massive

hypocrisy as to choke a horse, or an entire herd of them.

The U.S. is near bankruptcy if it hasn’t already arrived unrecognized. The current fiscal and monetary set up will not last, and when it implodes, the U.S. will have no options but, for one thing, the closure of the mechanisms of overseas interference, such as the many hundreds of military bases overseas, and maybe much of the federal government itself.

Carnegie Mellon University has put together a database concerning U.S. interference in elections of other countries. It’s been a common practice for decades. The database cites 81 instances of U.S. interference overseas between the end of World War II and just the year 2000. You can bet that if the database were expanded to include the years since 2000, the numbers would go up dramatically. The interferences cited were also largely carried out in secret. Only a third of them were public, and in some 60 percent of the interventions, the candidate(s) that had received U.S. assistance won the election even though the action swayed the actual vote by an average of just 3 percent.

Since 2000 “interventions” have been far worse, including “regime change” by military means which

everyone knows about, especially some seriously damaged, if not destroyed, countries in the Middle East and I need not name them. And millions have been murdered as a result. Back in 2006 Hillary Clinton, in an interview, argued that just allowing elections in some overseas locations was a mistake.

She said, for example, that Palestinians should not be permitted to hold elections “unless the U.S. did something to determine who was going to win”. (There were elections in Palestine and Hamas candidates did quite well. They were even monitored by one of the few former Presidents in recent decades who seemed to be a decent, moral person – Jimmy Carter.)

What possible solace can be derived from the unpleasant, depressing and unproductive actions and hypocrisies of the U.S. government and military overseas now? Maybe there’s only one: that it can’t continue very much longer, and this is why I have suggested or counseled patience and endurance to beleaguered friends or any kind overseas.

The U.S. is near bankruptcy if it hasn’t already arrived unrecognized. The current fiscal and monetary set up will not last, and when it implodes, the U.S. will have no options but, for one thing, the closure of the mechanisms of overseas interference, such as the many hundreds of military bases overseas, and maybe much of the federal government itself. Governance will become much more local and rational in the U.S., too, and real democracy where the average citizen has a say in how things are managed may blossom like the fruit trees and the abundant flowers in Spring that Iranians love and tend so beautifully.

Some Europeans complicit in possible trashing of JCPOA

➡ Although some time ago Macron explicitly stated that the JCPOA is unchangeable, today, he talks about “completing” the nuclear deal. Trump has called for the inclusion of new conditions, even inspections of Iranian military sites. Obviously, applying any changes to these clauses, even in the form of a complementary agreement, means a violation of the JCPOA.

In any final analysis, the Munich Security Conference showed the unwillingness of the United States and its three European allies to deal fairly with Iran.

The conflict continues in the United States

By ALI Alemi

TEHRAN — Russia’s interference in the U.S. presidential election (2016) is still open. This is while Russian officials have said they have not intervened in the presidential election. A review of the Reuters news agency in this regard suggests that in the near future, we will witness intense conflicts between the American security authorities and the White House officials.

As Reuters reported, A Russian propaganda arm oversaw a criminal and espionage conspiracy to tamper in the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign to support Donald Trump and disparage Hillary Clinton, said an indictment released on Friday that revealed more details than previously known about Moscow’s purported effort to interfere. The office of U.S. Special Counsel Robert Mueller charged 13 Russians and three Russian companies, including St. Petersburg-based Internet Research Agency known for its trolling on social media. The official who oversees Mueller’s work said the investigation was not finished.

The court document said those accused “had a strategic goal to sow discord in the U.S. political system, including the 2016 U.S. presidential election.”

The indictment said Russians adopted false online personas to push divisive messages; traveled to the United States to collect intelligence, visiting 10 states; and staged political rallies while posing as Americans. In one case, it said, the Russians paid an unidentified person to build a cage aboard a flatbed truck and another to wear a costume “portraying Clinton in a prison uniform.”

The surprise 37-page indictment could alter the divisive U.S. domestic debate over Russia’s meddling, undercutting some Republicans who, along with Trump, have attacked Mueller’s investigation. “These Russians engaged in a sinister and systematic attack on our political system. It was a conspiracy



to subvert the process, and take aim at democracy itself,” said Paul Ryan, Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives.

The indictment is silent on the question of whether the Trump campaign colluded with the Kremlin, which Mueller is investigating. In a tweet on Friday, Trump gave his most direct acknowledgement that Russia had meddled in the election, which he has frequently disputed. “Russia started their anti-U.S. campaign in 2014, long before I announced that I would run for President. The results of the election were not impacted. The Trump campaign did nothing wrong - no collusion!” Trump wrote.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova denounced the allegations as “absurd” and ridiculed the notion that so few Russian nationals could undermine U.S. democracy.

“13 against the billions’ budgets of the secret services?” she asked in a Facebook post.

The accused Russians are unlikely to be arrested or to appear in a U.S. court on the charges, which include conspiracy to defraud the United States, wire fraud, bank fraud and identity theft. There is no extradition treaty between the United States and Russia.

The indictment broadly echoes the conclusions of a January 2017 U.S. intelligence assessment, which found that Russia had meddled in the election, and that its goals eventually included aiding Trump. In November 2016, Trump won a surprise victory over Democratic Party candidate Clinton.

Mueller’s indictment did not tie the meddling effort to the Russian government. But the earlier U.S. intelligence assessment said Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered a campaign to influence the U.S. election.

Trump has never unequivocally accepted the U.S. intelligence report and has denounced Mueller’s probe as a “witch hunt.”

Some of those charged, posing as Americans, “communicated with unwitting individuals associated with the Trump campaign,” the indictment said.

Last year, Mueller charged Trump’s former campaign manager and his deputy with money-laundering and other crimes, and accepted guilty pleas from two former foreign policy aides for lying to the FBI. Friday’s indictment of the Russians, coupled with the FBI disclosure that it failed to heed a warning about the Florida high school shooter, were blows to the White House, still reeling from

the fallout of a scandal involving a former aide accused of domestic abuse by two ex-wives. U.S. stocks had been up over half a percent but lost nearly all those gains after the indictment came out.

U.S. Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein told a press conference that the defendants allegedly conducted “what they called information warfare against the United States, with the stated goal of spreading distrust towards the candidates and the political system in general.” The indictment describes a sophisticated, multi-year and well-funded operation, dubbed “Project Lakhta,” by Russian entities to influence the election, beginning as early as May 2014.

Russians unlawfully used stolen social security numbers and birth dates of Americans to open accounts on the PayPal digital payment platform and to post on social media using those fake identities, the indictment said.

Mueller also on Friday reached an agreement with an American named Richard Pinedo, who pled guilty to aiding and abetting interstate and foreign identity fraud by creating, buying and stealing hundreds of bank account numbers that he sold to individuals to use with large digital payment companies.

According to a source familiar with the indictments, Pinedo is the person cited in the document as helping the Russian conspirators launder money, as well as purchase Facebook ads and pay for rally supplies, through PayPal Holdings Inc.

Pinedo’s attorney, Jeremy I. Lessem, said in a statement that “Mr. Pinedo had absolutely no knowledge of the identities and motivations of any of the purchasers of the information he provided.”

The Russians sought to measure the impact of their online social media operations, tracking the size of U.S. audiences reached through posts and other types of engagement, such as likes, comments and reposts, according to the indictment.

Scottish nationalists are already salivating over the spoils of Brexit

By Kevin McKenna

Like a drunk man leaving the dance floor, the UK's slow, anarchic exit from the EU continues and the Scottish nationalists can scarce believe the abundance of fresh opportunities that have landed at their feet. Their biggest task now is to decide how to deploy them and when?

More than three years after the first referendum on Scottish independence, the 45% who voted to leave the UK have never wavered, with polls consistently showing a slight increase. On its own, this ought to concern unionists. They had convinced themselves that a Tory resurgence in Scotland had occurred under Ruth Davidson's energetic leadership and that this had finally put independence beyond the reach of the nationalists for the time being. However, the "resurgence" had been built on sand. The new intake of Scottish Tory MPs and

local councilors began to resemble a 19th-century freak-show accompanied by an unlovely symphony of flutes and banjos; accordingly, they have since assumed their normal third place in the polls.

At the same time, the UK government's chaotic and feckless approach to Brexit has unraveled gloriously before Scottish nationalist eyes. Each week brings a fresh windfall and these are being banked by SNP strategists. Boris Johnson's unhinged speech last week failed to mention the critical post-Brexit relationship between the north and south of Ireland.

Yet any ringfenced status for Ulster in respect of trade and a border with the Republic of Ireland would be at the expense of Scotland and seen to be so.

Not that the Irish are complaining much. They are already relishing the prospect of being accorded their own special status within the EU as its main English-speaking trading post and one happily

located at the heart of the British Isles. Last year, Ireland made a formal bid for the European Medicines Agency to relocate to Dublin from its London office. This was part of an EU-wide feeding frenzy to snap up the spoils of Brexit at the expense of the UK. In the event, it lost out to Amsterdam.

■ Plugging the huge gaps

Thus, an agency with around 800 high-earning and taxpaying employees will leave the UK. Many of the UK nationals on its staff won't locate and will become unemployed. The European Banking Authority has gone the same way. This might even cost lives as the British Medical Association seeks to plug the huge gaps in validating medicines that will ensue. The trickle will soon become a spate.

Underpinning all of this is the recent economic impact report that showed every region of the UK and Scotland would suffer grievously as a result

of Brexit. This was the report whose existence the Brexit secretary, David Davis, had denied and which Theresa May had tried to suppress.

The hard-right vanguard driving Brexit had expected the remaining 27 EU states to fragment and waver in the face of the UK's democratically backed resolve. They would fall into two camps – those with a surplus and those with a deficit – and begin to falter. This was to grievously underestimate the sense of unity and purpose of the remaining states. Do these people never read the European press?

The Brexiters are deluding themselves, too, if they don't believe the EU will warn their main trading partners to make life as difficult as possible for the UK in trade negotiations. May might talk fondly of a warm and friendly post-Brexit relationship with the EU but that ship sailed as soon as the likes of Boris Johnson, Jacob Rees-Mogg and Liam Fox

began to squawk. The collective arrogance of these men has hardened the resolve of the EU.

The SNP is now faced with a dilemma, although it is one it could only have dreamed of a year ago, when May refused to permit a second independence referendum. Her reasons for rejecting the sovereign will of the Scottish parliament then were that for the good of the entire UK, Brexit trumped everything. That's going well, isn't it?

■ Pro-independence majority

So, does the SNP go for an early referendum in spring 2019 or wait two years, when the full extent of the Brexit apocalypse will have become apparent to all? The smart money favors the latter. With that option, though, comes the uncertainty of a Holyrood election that may not deliver an overall pro-independence majority. Both options will be scrutinized in the forthcoming contest to be SNP deputy leader. ➔13

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اطاق خواب جهت سکونت کارمندان
یک شرکت بین المللی در شمال و شمال

غرب تهران جهت اجاره نیازمندیم

خانم دبیا: ۰۹۱۲۸۱۰۳۲۰۶

دفتر: ۲۸۱۴۱ - ۲۲۶۶۲۴۵۴

حدود ۳۰۰۰ متر بنا سند اداری در
شمال شهر تهران جهت اجاره به یک
کمپانی اروپایی، فوری نیازمندیم.

خانم دبیا: ۰۹۱۲۸۱۰۳۲۰۶

دفتر: ۲۸۱۴۱ - ۲۲۶۶۲۴۵۴

مالکین محترم

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Top reasons to get a second opinion

By Sherri Gordon

People make mistakes every day, and doctors are not immune to this fact. What’s more, some doctors are more conservative while others tend to be more aggressive. So their findings and recommendations can vary dramatically. For this reason, more and more patients are getting second opinions after a diagnosis. Whether your doctor recommends surgery, makes a cancer diagnosis or identifies a rare disease, there are many benefits to getting a second opinion.

These benefits include everything from peace of mind and confirmation, to a new diagnosis or a different treatment plan.

Even if your second opinion just confirms what you already know, it can still be beneficial. Afterwards, you will know that you have done everything you can to ensure that you have the correct diagnosis and a treatment plan that feels right to you. A second opinion also can offer insight into additional treatment options that the first doctor may not have mentioned. As a result, you become more informed about what is available to you and can make an educated decision about your healthcare and your treatment plan.

■ **What does research say about second opinions?**

A study conducted by the Mayo Clinic found that as many as 88 percent of patients looking for a second opinion will leave the office with a new or refined diagnosis. Meanwhile, 21 percent of the people will leave with a “distinctly different” diagnosis.

Conversely, the study, which was published in the Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice, discovered that 12 percent of patients will learn that the original diagnosis was correct. This means that one out of every five patients they saw was incorrectly diagnosed.

During the study, researchers reviewed records of 286 patients referred from primary care physicians to Mayo Clinic’s General Internal Medicine Division in Rochester.

The study took place from the beginning of 2009 to the end of 2010. The factors that motivated people to get second opinions included getting confirmation of their diagnosis, being dissatisfied with a consultation, wanting more information, and dealing with persistent symptoms. Meanwhile, a controversial study conducted by researchers at Johns Hopkins Medicine say that medical errors should rank as the third leading cause of death in the United States, further supporting the need for second opinions. In their study, they estimated that more than 250,000 Americans die each year from medical errors, making errors the third leading cause of death behind heart disease and cancer. But they claim these errors are not accurately documented by the Centers for Disease Control.

■ **When should you get a second opinion?**



One study estimated that more than 250,000 Americans die each year from medical errors, making errors the third leading cause of death behind heart disease and cancer.

While you do not need a reason to get a second opinion, there are times when getting a second opinion may be the best course of action. What’s more, if the two doctors you see vastly disagree, then it might be wise to get a third opinion. Keep in mind, too, that the second opinion is not necessarily the right opinion. The key is to keep digging until the diagnosis and treatment make sense to you:

- Get a second opinion if you have undergone treatment but your symptoms continue. No one knows your body better than you do. And if your symptoms are persistent even after treatment, it may be time to seek the advice of different doctors and specialists. Too often, people do not advocate for themselves. Instead, they assume that they will always have to live with the chronic pain or uncomfortable feelings. But remember, the only way you are going to get treatment that works is if you get the right diagnosis. So if you are not feeling better and your symptoms are not going away, do not settle for that. Reach out to other doctors for their opinions.

- Get a second opinion if you are diagnosed with a rare disease. Sometimes diseases are so rare that there is very little research behind them. When this happens, it can be frustrating and frightening to discover you have been diagnosed with something so rare. But you are not alone. Approximately 1 in 10 Americans is diagnosed with a rare disease. What’s more, there are nearly 7,000 known rare disorders with more discovered each year according to the National Organization for Rare Disorders. Because there is so little

information available regarding rare diseases and disorders, it is important to do your research, because the risk of misdiagnosis is significant. Look for doctors and specialists who have treated your disorder and get their opinion. You want to be sure you are getting the best treatment possible for your condition.

- Get a second opinion if the recommended treatment is risky, involves surgery, is invasive or has lifelong consequences. It is never wise to agree to surgery or another invasive procedure without exploring your options. Yet, some people feel that if a doctor suggests a procedure, they have to agree to it. But remember it is your body and your life. You absolutely have a say in what treatments you agree to. As a result, it may be wise to get a second opinion if your doctor is recommending something as serious as surgery. Being proactive and gathering more information will give you a greater degree of control over your treatment in the end.

- Get a second opinion if you are diagnosed with cancer. With something as serious as cancer, having the input from another expert simply makes sense. Not only can a cancer diagnosis be confusing and overwhelming, but it also is a life-changing event. Therefore, it is important to be as informed as possible about your prognosis and the possible treatment options available to you. Keep in mind that no one doctor is completely informed about the findings from every single study and clinical trial in the country. Doctors are only human. That’s why you need to advocate for yourself. Getting additional opinions just

improves the likelihood that you will walk away with the best treatment plan possible. What’s more, some insurance providers require a second opinion when it comes to a cancer diagnosis.

- Get a second opinion if your gut reaction tells you something is off. By all means if you are not comfortable with the diagnosis or the recommended treatment, get a second opinion. You should never agree to a procedure or treatment plan when you don’t feel good about it. Trust your gut and gather more information. Ask questions about your prescriptions. Talk to friends. Meet with a new doctor. And read about your condition. No one should ever feel like they have to follow the doctor’s orders without asking questions and gathering more information. Very few healthcare decisions have to be made on the spot. So if something doesn’t feel right, then by all means, research your situation and talk with another doctor.

■ **A word from verywell**

Remember, you are not being difficult nor are you in denial about your situation when you ask for a second opinion. You are being smart and empowered. You should always take an active part in your health care, and getting a second opinion is an important part of that process. What’s more, most doctors expect and encourage second opinions. So, be up front with your physician about your desire to gather more information. And if he doesn’t support you or gives you a difficult time, it might be time for a new doctor.

(Source: [verywell.com](#))

Ways to get the metabolism of a 25-year-old

By Kim Bussing

Instead of envying 20-somethings for their ability to seemingly keep weight off with zero effort, follow these tips to help speed up your metabolism.

■ **Drink more H2O**

Ensuring you get the proper amount of water every day is probably one of the oldest health tricks in the book, but it’s not just because it keeps our skin hydrated or helps prevent overeating by helping us feel fuller. A small study in the journal Frontiers in Nutrition found that drinking water can actually lead to weight loss, possibly because it can increase metabolism. “It takes calories to process water, because everything we do takes calories,” says nutritionist Lauren Pincus. “The more water, the more calories you need to expend.” She suggests aiming for around two liters a day, but the exact amount depending on your activity level and age.

■ **Start strength training**

While nutritionists agree that there is no magic food to revving up your metabolism, getting enough exercise, especially the right kind of exercise, is key. Experts suggest strength training two or three times to build lean muscle mass. “A pound of muscle burns up to nine times more calories than a pound of fat,” says nutritionist Lisa Stollman. “Lifting weights is a great way to build muscle mass.” However, the point is not just to build lean muscle mass, but to maintain it. “As we age, we start to lose muscle,” says Pincus. “Strength training not only builds muscle groups to burn more calories, but also helps preserve them and prevent loss.”

■ **Up your protein intake**

Eating a sufficient quantity of protein at each meal is almost unanimously agreed upon as a critical component of maintaining a rapid metabolism. A recent study by the American Society of Nutrition attested to a higher protein diet making you feel more satiated after eating and maintaining lean muscle mass. But that doesn’t mean you should go to town on a juicy steak every night. “You can only absorb about 30 grams of protein at a time to utilize it for muscle group and repair,” says Pincus, who recommends that you spread protein consumption throughout the day, about 4 ounces with each serving. Not sure how to incorporate healthy lean protein into your mealtime routines? Stollman suggests 2 tablespoons of nuts or nut butter, 8 ounces of low-fat yogurt, either dairy or soy, 2 ounces of tuna, 4 tablespoons of hummus, 4 ounces of tofu, or 1 egg, with each meal or snack.

■ **Be mindful when eating**

While most of us might wolf our meals down at our desks or in front of the TV, savoring your food may be better for achieving a healthier weight. Recent research shows that the faster people ate, the more they ate because the hormone that signals that you’re full, cholecystokinin (CCK), takes



“Set a timer to walk around your office every half an hour, do a few squats, something to keep the body moving.”

about 20 minutes to kick in. If you inhale your food, you might consume more than you mean to without realizing you’re full. Nutritionist Keri Gans also suggests maintaining a regular dining schedule as an important component to mindful eating habits.

■ **Don’t underestimate the importance of sleep**

Don’t cave into that extra episode of Stranger Things: Getting a quality night’s asleep is a critical component of a healthy metabolism. “Too little sleep appears to wreak havoc with leptin and ghrelin, two hormones that regulate appetite,” says nutritionist Elisa Zied. “When you don’t sleep well, you feel hungrier and you tend to eat more and choose more nutrient-poor foods.”

■ **Limit screen time before bed**

It’s no secret that experts recommend putting away blue-light devices, such as smartphones, tablets, and laptops, at least an hour before bed to improve sleep quality. However, a recent pilot study from Northwestern University shows that exposure to blue-light at night can impact glucose metabolism. Although the exact correlation is still being studied, John La Puma, MD, suggests ceasing exposure to blue light two hours prior to hitting the sack. “It resets melatonin levels so that getting to sleep becomes harder, and too little sleep means weight gain for most people,” says Dr. La Puma.

■ **Enjoy a cup of coffee and tea**

“Caffeine can increase your metabolism up to 8 percent,” says Stollman. “Brewed tea kicks it up another notch by

boosting your metabolism by 10 percent.” Green tea goes above and beyond thanks to its catechins, and the effects add up. Pincus recommends three to four cups a day to potentially burn up to 50 to 100 calories. However, it’s important to refrain from using this an excuse to indulge in flavored lattes or sugary green tea drinks from the store. “Don’t make it into dessert—that defeats the whole purpose,” says Gans.

■ **Don’t overly restrict calories**

Severely limiting caloric intake can tricking your body into thinking it’s starving. In her book Thin for Life: 10 Keys to Success from People Who Have Lost Weight and Kept it Off, Anne Fletcher writes that “if you cut back on calories, your body protects itself from this state of semi-starvation by slowing down the rate at which it burns food.” While skipping a meal or two might see positive short-term effects, it can be harmful in the long run.

■ **Don’t forego breakfast**

Running out the door instead of chowing down on some eggs could slow down your metabolism throughout the day. “If you skip protein at breakfast, you lose the opportunity in your day to feed your muscles,” says Pincus. “You can’t double up at dinner since your body can’t utilize more than four ounces at a time.”

■ **Spice it up**

Capsaicin, present in spicy foods like chili and red pepper flakes, might boost metabolism by up to 8 percent. As always, don’t use this as an excuse to eat unhealthier foods like greasy takeout. “Sprinkle on red pepper flakes on eggs in the morning,” advises Gans. “You could even make fish, chicken, or lean beef a little spicier for dinner.”

■ **Keep moving, even if you’re at your desk**

It’s not just about being a gym rat. A study in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found that non-exercise related activity, such as tapping your foot or fidgeting at your desk, can help keep off fat. To integrate more movement into your everyday routine, Pincus suggests opting for a standing or transitional desk, or just making sure you don’t spend the entire workday sedentary. “Set a timer to walk around your office every half an hour, do a few squats, something to keep the body moving,” she says.

■ **Change up your commute**

A recent study by the Royal Society for Public Health found that while a long commute to work obviously decreases physical activity and might eat into time spent at the gym, it can also lead to decreased sleep time and a 29 percent increase in food consumption—and usually unhealthier food at that, since there is less time to prepare meals. Though some people might not have the means (or the climate) to avoid driving or public transportation, subbing in walking or biking for part of the trip could have you feeling more energetic and lean.

(Source: [rd.com](#))

Flu now blamed for 84 child deaths this season, CDC says



By Susan Scutti

The deaths of 22 more children from flu-related causes were reported Friday by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in its weekly surveillance report.

Those deaths bring the total number of children reported to have died to 84 since October, when the current flu season began. Three out of four children who died from the flu had not gotten a flu vaccine, the acting director of the CDC said in a Thursday news conference.

“We continue to recommend parents get their children vaccinated even though it’s late in the season,” Dr. Anne Schuchat said. The season may continue for several more weeks, she added.

Caused by viruses, flu is a contagious respiratory illness with mild to severe symptoms that can sometimes lead to death. The vaccine’s performance in children was “better than we expected,” Schuchat said after the release of the CDC’s midseason report of estimated vaccine effectiveness rates.

Overall, the vaccine was found to be just 36% effective against circulating flu strains; however, in children, the effectiveness rate was 59%.

This means a vaccinated child has reduced his or her risk of getting sick and going to the doctor’s office by more than half.

CDC spokeswoman Kristen Nordlund said that flu activity is still high, but it did not increase significantly over the past week.

“While this may mean that we’ve peaked, we won’t know until know more until we see the data for the coming weeks,” Nordlund said.

Still, Schuchat noted that levels of flu-related illness across the nation are reaching peaks observed during the H1N1 pandemic season in 2009, though this year’s flu is not pandemic.

“Hospitalization rates are significantly higher than what we’ve seen for this time of year since our current tracking system began almost a decade ago,” Schuchat added.

■ **Hospitalization and illness**

Flu-related hospitalizations rose to about 68 people out of every 100,000 in the sixth week of 2018 from about 60 out of every 100,000 last week, the CDC estimated in its weekly surveillance report.

A total of 19,398 laboratory-confirmed flu-associated hospitalizations have been reported between the season’s start on October 1, through February 10, according to the CDC.

Meanwhile, during the sixth week of the year, 7.5% of people who visited their doctors complained of flu-like illness. This high rate of flu-related illness occurred across most of the nation, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and New York City, the CDC said.

Among adults, the proportion of pneumonia- and flu-related deaths fell from 10.1% of all deaths occurring during the week ending January 20 to 9.8% of all deaths for the week ending January 27 (these data are always two weeks delayed). This rate, however, is higher than the anticipated 7.3% pneumonia- or flu-related deaths estimated for the week.

In 48 states, flu activity is “still widespread,” Nordlund said. “Hawaii and Oregon are still the outliers.”

Circulating flu strains this season are a mix of H3N2, H1N1 and B viruses. H3N2 strains are continuing to be dominant during the sixth week of 2018 as they have throughout the season, which began in October. H3N2 commonly leads to more severe illness and more hospitalizations, according to Schuchat.

The CDC confirmed 18,716 new infections for the week ending February 10, bringing the total for the season to 178,040.

(Source: [CNN](#))

Eating a daily serving of nuts linked with lower risk of heart disease

Eating nuts has been linked with a lower risk of heart disease. Now, the largest study to date on the subject suggests that regular consumption, and not any specific nut, offers the greatest benefit. The research, published online Nov. 13, 2017, by the Journal of the American College of Cardiology looked at more than 210,000 people who shared information on their eating habits and health over a 32-year period.

The results showed that those who ate nuts — such as peanuts or tree nuts like walnuts, almonds, and cashews — on a daily basis had a much lower risk of developing cardiovascular disease or coronary artery disease compared with people who rarely or never ate nuts.

Researchers did not find that any individual nut stood out in terms of heart health, but frequency and amount did. For example, eating just one serving of walnuts (14 halves, or 28 grams) daily, five times per week, was associated with a 19% lower risk of cardiovascular disease and a 21% lower risk of coronary artery disease.

Those who ate one serving of peanuts (about 28 peanuts) or tree nuts (24 almonds or 18 cashews), two or more times per week, lowered their risk for both diseases by 13% to 23%. People who ate five or more servings per week lowered their risk for both by 14% to 20%. So, do your heart a favor and try to eat a serving of nuts every day.

(Source: [health.harvard.edu](#))

Apple’s Tim Cook: ‘I don’t want my nephew on a social network’

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Despite having just walked off a plane on a whistle-stop tour of Europe, Cook put the teachers and students at ease. Dressed in a blue jumper, grey jeans and blue suede shoes, he scarcely appears a tech billionaire (Apple is on track to be the first \$1tn firm).

“He’s is the most famous person we’ve had here as a guest,” said one teacher. “The second? Oh, David Cameron.”

Born in Mobile, Alabama, in 1960, to a dockerman and a pharmacy worker, Cook grew up in the town of Robertsdale. He spent 12 years at IBM before Jobs asked him to join Apple in 1998. It was Jobs’ passion and purpose to “serve humanity” that Cook said drew him to the company. “After 15 years of searching, something clicked. I finally felt aligned.”

As senior vice-president of worldwide operations, he closed factories and warehouses, replacing them with contract manufacturers in Asia. He also kept costs under control and secured long-term deals in soon-to-be-crucial parts for the company, including flash memory storage for the iPod Nano, iPhone and iPad, which locked out competitors.

He became chief operating officer in 2007, covered Jobs’s role during his illness in 2009 and took charge two years later.

Since then, he has put his own stamp on Apple. In a 2014 profile to mark Cook’s announcement as person of the year, the Financial Times noted his passion for doing “things for other reasons than a profit motive, we do things because they are right and just”. As CEO, he has championed health, e-waste and renewable energy initiatives (claiming to run its own facilities mostly on renewable sources) plus Apple’s educational coding projects.

The one-year coding curriculum adopted by Harlow college, half an hour north of London, is intended to teach students computing skills through the use of a variety of games, lessons and interactive materials.

Every student is given an iPad loaded with coding apps and tools, and the teachers guide them through the concepts of coding. Pupils are able to see their progress and get feedback, finishing the year with two qualifications.

One student, Athena, 17, said: “In secondary school it was mainly about designing websites in bright colors, but this focuses on real coding and gaming.”

Cook said: “I think if you had to make a choice, it’s more important to learn coding than a foreign language. I know people who disagree with me on that. But coding is a global language; it’s the way you can converse with 7 billion people.”

The Apple of 2018 remains private and closely guarded, but also willing to accept that it isn’t perfect, including apologizing for the recent iPhone slow-down battery debacle.

Little is known of Cook’s personal life except that he starts sending emails at around 4.30am and goes to a private gym before heading to the office. He apparently enjoys cycling.

He was also the first chief executive of a Fortune 500 company to come out as gay, in a Business Week op-ed in 2014. Since then he has been a powerful advocate for LGBT rights, and become a vocal proponent of privacy against global surveillance, and education to fight issues around gender diversity.

“I’ve believed this for a long time, and it is an intersection with Apple which has a deep belief in this as well, that education is a great equalizer of people,” Cook said.

“Introducing coding at an increasingly early age will help gender diversity too. Looking at many university computer science courses, the gender diversity is not good.”

Cook has publicly defended the DACA immigration program, describing Donald Trump’s actions to end it as unacceptable and “not who we are as a country”.

He has also supported the Democrats, hosting fundraisers for senators and raising money for the 2008 Barack Obama and 2016 Hilary Clinton campaigns. He was reportedly considered as the latter’s potential running mate.

On Wednesday, Apple announced it would spend \$30bn in the U.S. over the next five years, creating 20,000 new jobs, a decision the U.S. president attributed to his tax reforms.

During his election campaign, Trump had used the company as a symbol of all that was wrong with corporate America, promising: “We’re going to get Apple to build their damn computers and things in this country instead of other countries.”

Cook said this week: “We have a deep sense of responsibility to give back to our country and the people who help make our success possible.”

The company will also make a one-time \$38bn payment to repatriate some of its vast overseas cash holdings. The world’s largest taxpayer remains subject to fierce criticism of its tax affairs, including revelations in the Paradise Papers that, after Ireland tightened taxation rules, it secretly shifted two subsidiaries to Jersey.

Of the Paradise Papers, Cook told the Guardian: “I probably haven’t read everything that’s been written, so I wouldn’t want to pass judgment on it.

(Source: The Guardian)

Ex-tech workers plead with Facebook: consider the harm you’re doing to kids

The leaders of Facebook should consider their own children when they make decisions that could harm millions of young people hooked on the social network, activists said on Wednesday.

A gathering of Silicon Valley alumni and whistleblowers and Washington lobbyists in the US capital heard warnings of potential links between tech addiction and sleep disruption, poor academic performance, anxiety, depression, obesity, social isolation and suicide.

Conference organiser James Steyer, chief executive and founder of Common Sense Media, a not-for-profit promoting safe technology and media for children, criticized giants such as Facebook, Google and Twitter. He said: “Talk is cheap. Show me the money. Period.”

There were pleas for Mark Zuckerberg, the Facebook co-founder and chief executive, and Sheryl Sandberg, the company’s chief operating officer, to apply values they advocate for their own families. Steyer added: “Mark and Sheryl at Facebook are good people. They are parents too. They have to think about their own kids when making a big picture decision there.”

Roger McNamee, an early investor in Facebook, echoed this sentiment. He said: “What I’d like [Sheryl Sandberg] to do is to bring the same values she has at home into the office. Remember that you have to have empathy. If you view your users as fuel stock for your profits you’re not going to make the world a better place.”

McNamee is among a group of former tech employees behind the Center for Humane Technology, committed to “reversing the digital attention crisis and realigning technology with humanity’s best interests”, raising alarms about the effects of smartphones and social networks on people’s emotional and intellectual development. Their lobbying campaign to combat tech addiction is reminiscent of past anti-smoking drives, with adverts targeting 55,000 schools in the US.

As a backlash against Silicon Valley gathers momentum, Salesforce chief executive Marc Benioff last month called for Facebook to be regulated like a cigarette company because of the addictive and harmful properties of social media.

McNamee said: “Marketing was used to convince a whole generation, particularly women, that smoking was a really good thing for them. Franklin Foer in his book [World Without Mind: The Existential Threat of Big Tech] talks about how after the second world war the convenience was applied to food, so we went to TV dinners and nobody told us they were loading them up with sugar fat and salt and now we have an obesity epidemic. I hope it’s not too late here.”

McNamee was one of the speakers at a Truth About Tech conference in Washington on Wednesday. Among the issues



raised was how school teachers use Facebook groups for homework assignments, making it unavoidable for many pupils.

Tristan Harris, a former Google design ethicist and founder of the Center for Humane Technology, was introduced by Steyer as “the first major whistleblower who came out of the really key Silicon Valley companies to come forward and say, ‘Some of what we’re doing is really not OK’”

Harris said he saw how Google’s Gmail service was “hijacking the mind”. He warned of the “existential threat” posed by a digital world that is completely unregulated “like the wild west: build a casino wherever you want”.

In an interview, Harris pointed to examples such as Snapchat streaks which shows the number of days in a row that each teenager has communicated with each friend. “It creates this false sense of, ‘I’ve got to keep this thing going’,” he said. “It starts to really go deep into them and actually redefine their identity and their meaning of friendship. They think that they’re not friends if they don’t keep that streak going.”

Harris said he was hopeful media pressure can force reform. “We just have to get clear about what we don’t like.”

Sandy Parakilas, an operations manager on the platform team at Facebook, said he became concerned about the impact on children and how their interests appeared to be secondary. “My opinion is that they treated the opportunity of children

as basically an opportunity to get customers at a very young age,” he said.

“I think there is very clearly a negative impact. I don’t think these companies have the business incentive to regulate themselves. They need some external pressure and regulation”

Aza Raskin, a veteran of Mozilla and Firefox who is now chief strategy officer at the Center for Humane Technology, said: “We end up replacing children’s sense of identity and self-worth with how many likes they get.

Raskin said the tech sector’s conduct is worse than that of cigarette manufacturers.

He said: “Tobacco only gets so addictive and tobacco doesn’t know anything particularly about you or your habits. ... Imagine three years or five years from now when our new digital tobacco knows all of your habits. That’s the world that we’re thinking about, like if you think about when you point AI [artificial intelligence] at a chessboard. Once it wins, it wins; humans can never get better.”

This article was amended on 11 February 2018 after initially stating that Common Sense Media would give \$7m in funding to the Center for Humane Technology. CHT plans to raise \$7m toward the \$60m Truth in Tech campaign that will launch with Common Sense Media.

(Source: phoenixscoop.com)

Belgian court orders Facebook to stop tracking web users



A Belgian court on Friday ordered Facebook to stop tracking internet users in Belgium who have no accounts with the social network, or face fines of 250,000 euros a day.

The California-based firm vowed to appeal the ruling amid increased efforts in Europe to boost privacy protections in a digital economy dominated by US giants.

Facebook must “stop following and recording internet use by people surfing in Belgium, until it complies with Belgian privacy laws”, the Brussels court said.

It based its verdict on a probe by Belgium’s privacy watchdog into Facebook’s use of pixels and cookies, tracking devices that follow a user’s internet activity.

The court warned Facebook it could face fines of 250,000 euros per day or a maximum of 100 million euros (\$125 million) if it failed to heed the ruling.

“Facebook must also destroy all personal data obtained illegally,” the court ordered.

Finally, it said, the social network must publish the complete 84-page verdict on its own website and excerpts in Belgium’s Dutch-language and French-language newspapers.

The court said it “determined that Facebook does not respect Belgian privacy law”, basing its ruling on the investigation of Belgium’s privacy watchdog CPVP.

In 2015, the watchdog lodged a legal complaint over Facebook’s tracking of internet users when they visit pages on the site or click “like” or “share”, even if they are not members.

The court said Facebook used its cookies to track people not only on its own website but also on third-party websites.

It added that the investigation showed that “Facebook can still follow your surfing behavior”, even if you have never visited its website, through invisible pixels the firm has placed on 10,000 other websites.

Echoing the privacy watchdog’s conclusions, it said that the social network does

not properly inform people about the fact it is gathering information about them.

■ ‘Big win’

Without obtaining the user’s “valid” consent, the court said, Facebook not only fails to say what kind of information it collects, but does not make clear how it uses it or how long it stores it.

The European Consumer Organisation (BEUC) welcomed the court verdict.

“This is a big win for internet users who don’t want tech companies to monitor every step they make online,” BEUC spokesman Johannes Kleis said in a statement.

“What Facebook is doing is against Europe’s data protection laws and should be stopped throughout the EU,” Kleis added.

■ ‘Intend to appeal’

“We are disappointed with today’s verdict and intend to appeal,” Facebook said in a statement.

“Over recent years we have worked hard to help people understand how we use cookies to keep Facebook secure and show them relevant content,” it added.

“We’ve built teams of people who focus on the protection of privacy—from engineers to designers—and tools that give people choice and control,” it said.

It said the cookies and pixels it uses are “industry standard technologies,” allowing hundreds of thousands of businesses to grow and reach customers across the bloc.

Facebook, it said, requires any business using its technologies to give “clear notice to end-users”.

People, it added, also have the right not to have data collected on sites and apps off Facebook being used for ads.

Facebook said it was making preparations for the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)—a new EU law designed to protect privacy online—to come into force on May 25.

(Source: phys.org)

Ireland enjoying strong technology investment



Investment in Irish technology companies had its second strongest performance in more than a decade last year - as the presence of multi-national companies continues to transform the capital.

Google, Facebook & Twitter are just some of the recognizable names with European headquarters in the Grand Canal Dock area of Dublin, otherwise known as Silicon Docks.

Ireland’s low corporate tax rate has long made it an attractive hub for them but the start-up scene there is also thriving.

Some €458m was invested in the Republic in 2017, according to figures by PitchBook.

Figures from The Irish Venture Capital Association showed that tech firms raised a record €1bn last year - that’s more than £870m.

Although there’s no shortage of investment and the tech giants have helped bring attention to the city, some start-ups and financial investors say their presence also presents challenges for young companies.

Girl Crew, a social network app for women, is one of the start-up success stories.

Founder Elva Carri told Sky News: “We have raised over €650,000 since launching in June this year.

“There are pros and cons to sharing the city with the big multi-nationals.

“Pros: we got to be a part of Google’s Adopt A Start-Up program, and that has been very beneficial.

“But then there is the downside, like it drives rent up for people.”

Health tech business webdoctor.ie is another success story - it has raised just under £2m.

Its co-founder Oisín Kim also thinks the multi-nationals have a positive overall impact but said the increased demand for high quality labor is a challenge.

“Obviously having the big multi-na-

tionals drives up salary costs but some of them make a real effort to engage with the community and to encourage them.”

Financial experts in Dublin said they have also observed other trends, as VC investor Nicola McClafferty of Draper Esprit explained.

“I believe it creates a virtuous circle, we see people coming out of these companies after a period of time, having worked in a large multi-national that fosters a culture of growth and scale and innovation.

“And they come out of those and then into early stage start-ups so whilst it creates competition for labor, it creates a positive flowing labor market,” she said.

At Google, Paddy Flynn is in charge of helping to bridge the gap and support new companies within the community scale and grow on a global stage.

He told Sky News: “We have a bunch of programs that we have. We do a lot work at a community engagement level first off.

“A good example of that would be, we run a support event at Dogpatch Labs - a co-working space at the center of the community in the Docklands.

“We send mentors down there, any start-up can apply across the country, they have people dropping in so we do a lot of that kind of stuff and we run events here on a monthly basis.

“We support those kind of events at a ground level,” he said.

He also told Sky News about Google’s Adopt A Start-up program where the firm takes in 30 new companies twice a year.

For start-ups in the city, Mr Flynn’s advice is: “You have to think internationally very quickly”, because scaling just for the Irish market has its challenges.

However, as a result, it is forcing entrepreneurs there to think and pitch to a global audience early on.

(Source: sky.com)

Surprising innovations happening in the plastics industry, say researchers

We use products made from plastic every day, but we rarely think about the material and the work that goes into producing it. It's even less likely we think about the research that's underway in the plastics industry and the many innovations currently taking place.

Whether or not we realize it, researchers are coming up with new ways to create and use plastics that could benefit the plastics industry -- as well as society and the environment -- by reducing the costs of consumer goods, making renewable energy more available and reducing plastic waste.

The solar energy industry is growing at a rapid rate, and new technologies keep popping up that improve efficiency and reduce costs. There are many different types of solar cell technologies.

■ Photovoltaic solar cells

One type, known as plastic, organic or polymer photovoltaic solar cells, uses conductive organic polymers or organic molecules to absorb light, transfer the charge and produce electricity.

This type of solar cell is lightweight and affordable, but requires very careful processing so the materials used mix and crystallize properly into thin films.

Researchers from Osaka University, in collaboration with the Max Planck Institute for Polymer Research, recently found a way to



produce polymer solar cells without the need for these specialized treatments, while improving its conductivity, by using amorphous polymer blends and adding a component.

Organic solar cells work because light excites the electrons in the polymer. These

electrons then move to the positive side of the cell. To complete the circuit, the space left by electrons, referred to as holes, must also move to the positive part of the cell.

The researchers noticed one of their polymers did not transport these holes effectively,

so they added a component that improved the hole conductivity.

These advances could simplify the production process and reduce its costs, leading to more widespread adoption of plastic solar cells.

■ Major concerns

One of the major concerns regarding plastic is its disposal. We have produced 6.3 billion metric tons of plastic waste. We've recycled just 9 percent of that waste, and incinerated 12 percent. The remaining 79 percent ended up in landfills or in the natural environment, where it takes a long time to degrade.

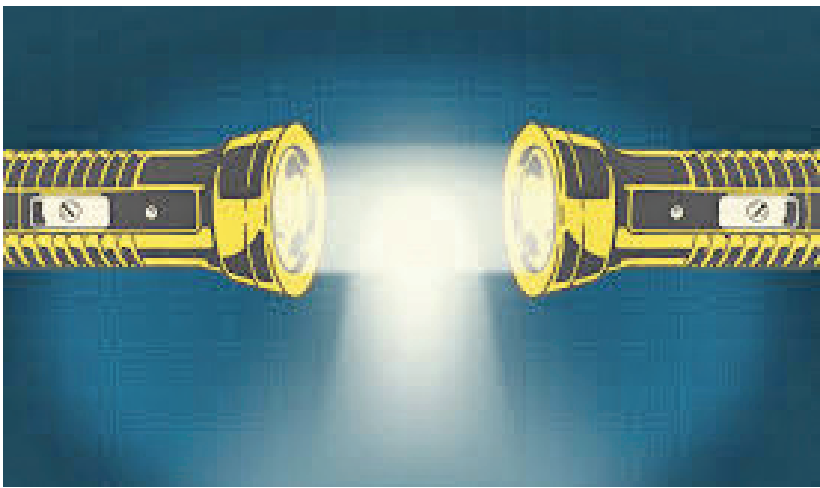
To help combat these issues, various companies around the world are developing and using plastics made from plant-based materials such as cornstarch, potato starch and cellulose. These alternative plastics degrade much more quickly and don't release toxins into the environment.

Creating plant-based plastics, also known as bioplastics, that function as effectively as oil-based plastic products can be a challenge. A company called Biome Bioplastics is tackling one of those challenges -- creating a bioplastic that can hold hot liquids. The company has developed a coffee cup made entirely of natural materials that can compose in a food waste bin or a paper recycling bin.

(Source: Inc Magazine)

Creating plant-based plastics, also known as bioplastics, that function as effectively as oil-based plastic products can be a challenge.

Physics create new form of light, suggest scientists



For the first time, scientists have watched groups of three photons interacting and effectively producing a new form of light.

In results published in Science, researchers suggest that this new light could be used to perform highly complex, incredibly fast quantum computations.

Photons are tiny particles that normally travel solo through beams of light, never interacting with each other. But in 2013 scientists made them clump together in pairs, creating a new state of matter. This discovery shows that interactions are possible on a greater scale.

"It was an open question," Vladan Vuletic from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), who led the team with Mikhail Lukin from Harvard University, said in a statement. "Can you add more photons to a molecule to make bigger and bigger things?"

■ Rubidium atoms

The scientists cooled a cloud of rubidium atoms to an ultralow temperature to answer their question. This slowed the atoms down till they were almost still. A very faint laser beam sent just a few photons through the freezing cloud at once.

The researchers think the particles might flit from one nearby atom to another as they pass through the rubidium cloud--like bees in a field of flowers. These passing photons could form "polaritons" -- part photon, part atom hybrids. If more than one photon passes by the same atom at the same time, they might form polaritons that are linked. As they leave the atom, they could

stay together as a pair, or even a triplet.

"What's neat about this is, when photons go through the medium, anything that happens in the medium, they 'remember' when they get out," said co-author Sergio Cantu from MIT.

■ Ultra-powerful machine

This research is the latest step toward a long-fabled quantum computer, an ultra-powerful machine that could solve problems beyond the realm of traditional computers. Your desktop PC would, for example, struggle to solve the question: "If a salesman has lots of places to visit, what is the quickest route?"

A "(traditional computer) could solve this for a certain number of cities, but if I wanted to add more cities, it would get much harder, very quickly," Vuletic previously stated in a press release.

Read more: What did the Big Bang look like? The physics of light during the formation of the universe

Light, he said, is already used to transmit data very quickly over long distances via fiber optic cables.

Being able to manipulate these photons could enable the distribution of data in much more powerful ways.

"It's completely novel in the sense that we don't even know sometimes qualitatively what to expect," Vuletic says. "With repulsion of photons, can they be such that they form a regular pattern, like a crystal of light? Or will something else happen? It's very uncharted territory."

(Source: Newsweek)

Student research team accelerates snow melt with 'Melt Mat'

Snow storms often leave behind reminders of their presence for days - sometimes weeks - after warmer and sunnier weather returns. Snowbanks, often created by snow plows as they clear major roadways, can linger in parking lots, on sidewalks, and in driveways even when temperatures rise well above freezing.

Fresh snow's highly reflective surface is the culprit of this phenomenon, dramatically minimizing any potential melting effects from the sun's heat.

Cities in cold regions typically resort to

active methods to remove snowbanks, such as hauling the snow to disposal sites or using gas-powered heaters. These efforts can rack up an annual bill somewhere in the range of \$25 million to \$125 million per city, making snow removal a perennial problem.

■ Student research team

A Virginia Tech student research team has discovered the solution, both for municipalities looking to save millions and also for the homeowner hoping to avoid snow shovel duty: the Melt Mat.

The product of a senior design team in the Department of Biomedical Engineering and Mechanics within the College of Engineering, the Melt Mat is a thermally absorptive blanket made from a thin sheet of aluminum that has been spray-coated with an ultra-flat black paint. When draped over snow, the Melt Mat increases melting time by threefold, all without any effort or energy input.

The results of the students' Melt Mat design, fabrication, and testing research have been recently published in the journal

Birds and beans: Study shows best coffee for bird diversity



It's an age-old debate for coffee lovers. Which is better: Arabica beans with their sweeter, softer taste, or the bold, deep flavor of Robusta beans?

A new study by WCS, Princeton University, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison appearing in the journal Scientific Reports has taken the question to unlikely coffee aficionados: birds.

The researchers, led by WCS Associate Conservation Scientist Dr. Krithi Karanth, surveyed for bird diversity in coffee agroforests in India's Western Ghats region.

Previous research has demonstrated that shade-grown coffee (typically Arabica) can harbor substantial levels of biodiversity.

But coffee production is globally shifting toward Robusta, which uses a more intensive full-sun agricultural systems, which may pose deleterious impacts for forest wildlife.

■ Biodiversity benefits

What the researchers found was surprising: although Arabica avian assemblages were more species rich, Robusta nevertheless offered substantial biodiversity benefits, and supported higher densities of several sensitive avian populations such as frugivores.

In addition, farmers use less pesticides in the more disease-resistant Robusta farmlands.

The authors found a total of 79 forest dependent species living in the coffee plantations they surveyed, including three IUCN Red-Listed species: Alexandrine parakeet (Psittacula eupatria), grey-headed bulbul (Pycnonotus procerus) and the Nilgiri wood pigeon (Columba elphinstonii). Plan-

tations can harbor a diversity of mammals, amphibians and tree species, too.

The study has important implications as coffee production is an increasingly important driver of landscape transformation, and shifts between different coffee bean species are a major dimension of agroforestry trends.

The authors say that coffee certification efforts should prioritize maintaining native canopy shade trees to ensure that coffee landscapes can continue providing biodiversity benefits.

Said Dr. Karanth "Coffee farms already play a complementary role to protected areas in a country like India where less than four percent of land is formally protected.

■ Additional habitats

Therefore, building partnerships with largely private individual and corporate land holders will provide much needed safe-passage and additional habitats for birds and other species."

Indian robusta has relatively high "cup scores" (i.e. flavor ratings) by coffee experts, is disease-resistant, and commands a price premium.

Said lead author Charlotte Chang, who analyzed the data while a graduate student at Princeton University and is now a post-doctoral researcher at the National Institute for Mathematical and Biological Synthesis (University of Tennessee, Knoxville): An "encouraging result of the study is that coffee production in the Western Ghats, a global biodiversity hotspot, can be a win-win for birds and farmers." (Source: Science Daily)

Langmuir. The students have also been granted a provisional patent for the Melt Mat through Virginia Tech Intellectual Properties.

The "idea for a thermal absorptive blanket is novel, but also very practical," said Jonathan Boreyko, an assistant professor of biomedical engineering and mechanics and the team's faculty advisor. "For novelty's sake, the team really needed to go for a journal publication.

(Source: eurekalert.org)

NASA to return Mars meteorite to Red Planet in 2020 rover mission

Earth is going to place a Mars meteorite back where it belongs: the Red Planet. This chunk rock, which had once been a part of Mars, will head to its home planet via a NASA rover scheduled to fly into space in 2020.

The Martian rock in question is called Sayh al Uhaymir 008 -- SaU008 -- discovered in Oman way back in 1999, which geologists later determined to have originated from Mars.

How could that have happened, though? Well, scientists believe Mars colliding with other large bodies in our Solar System during the early days may have caused chunks of Mars to float in space, eventually landing on Earth by chance eons later.

The aforementioned rover that will carry SaU008 back home is now being built inside NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in California, but more than returning to its original home, NASA is going to use the small rock as target practice for a high-precision laser on the rover's arm.

The Mars 2020 mission is an ambitious one. NASA aims to collect samples from the Red Planet's surface that astronauts could potentially send back to Earth when humans eventually fly to Mars at some point in the near future. The rover itself is incredibly sophisticated, it's worth noting: it's got a built-in tool that can scan rock features as tiny as a strand of hair.

"We're studying things on such a fine scale that slight misalignments, caused by changes in temperature or even the rover settling into sand, can require us to correct our aim," JPL's Luther Beegle said, the principal investigator for a laser tool called Scanning Habitable Environments with Raman and Luminescence for Organics and Chemicals, or SHERLOC.

As such, NASA scientists are using SaU008 to calibrate this tool, which uses forensic science methods to identify chemicals present in rock samples from Mars.

(Source: Popular Mechanics)

A person's genes can reveal the time of their death, says study

Every single piece of information about us is contained in our genes. It turns out, our genes can also provide clues about when, precisely, we die.

A study from the Center for Genomic Regulation (CRG) in Barcelona, Spain surveyed the gene activity that occurs in human tissue after death, and found distinct patterns that could be traced back to a person's time of death.

The results, published in the journal Nature Communications, came from a combination of extensive sample analysis and machine learning.

In order to determine the changes in gene activity that took place after death, CRG computational biologist Roderic Guigó and his colleagues took 9,000 tissue samples from 39 donors.

These came with information about a donor's time of death and when the samples were preserved.

The "response to the death of the organism is quite tissue specific," Guigó told Science.

After death, over 600 muscle genes either quickly increased or decreased activity. Meanwhile, there was minimal change in gene activity in the brain or spleen.

The software, which they tested to predict the time of death of 129 other people, showed that the majority of increases and decreases in gene activity happen between 7 and 14 hours after death.

One example is in blood, where decreased gene activity involved in DNA production, immune response, and metabolism indicated a time of death around six hours before samples were preserved.

Guigó and his team's study was possible thanks to recent advances in genetic analysis facilitated by recent studies of the human genome. In any case, this work is only the beginning of what the researchers can accomplish by harnessing genomic clues.

(Source: sciencelert.com)

Netherlands to build first solar farm that will float in the ocean

The Netherlands has a problem. There's no space in the country to put a giant solar farm. Land is at a premium in the Low Countries, and so the cost of building large solar farms is much higher than practically anywhere else in the world. So far, this trouble has caused the Netherlands to lag behind other countries when it comes to transitioning to renewable energy.



As a solution, the Netherlands is considering building its solar farms on the surface of the ocean. Reuters is reporting that an offshore seaweed farm will be turned into a floating solar farm over the next three years, paving the way for a solar-powered Dutch future.

The project will begin with a test, a 30 square meter solar farm about nine miles off the coast of The Hague. The farm will be positioned between two existing offshore wind turbines and connected to the same cables, meaning the project won't require any additional infrastructure.

If the test project is successful -- that is, if the panels prove rugged enough, and the electricity generated is cheap enough -- the farm will be expanded to its full size of 2,500 square meters. The project backers hope that this full-size solar farm will be finished by 2021.

Offshore solar farms do have several advantages over land-based ones. In addition to the lack of land costs, offshore panels tend to receive more sunlight due to the lack of obstacles, and the water acts as a coolant, increasing efficiency.

Offshore solar panels have already been pioneered in China, where several such farms have been built on large lakes.

(Source: Popular Mechanics)

EGFI reveals obtaining bylaw to set up EGFI's foreign branch

Chief Executive of Export Guarantee Fund of Iran (EGFI) Seyed Kamal Seyed Ali revealed the obtaining of first bylaw for the establishment of a branch office of the Fund in abroad and said, "Iran's credit rating will be improved certainly, the Public Relations Dept. of the Fund reported.

Speaking in the Nationwide Seminar to Finance Exports, he said, "removal of currency pact in 2002, moving

towards unification of foreign currency, and removal of redundant and additional rules are of the salient factors for the growing trend of export in the country."

Country's trade balance was turned positive over the past two years and this year, Iran's trade balance will experience a considerable decline due to the more import of products into the country, Chief Executive of EGFI concluded.



\$2b of foreign finance to help fight air pollution

ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** — Majlis (the Iranian parliament) approved \$2 billion in foreign finance for developing subways and tackling air pollution in line with the budget bill for the next Iranian fiscal year (starting on March 21). Guaranteed by the administration, repayments will be made by municipalities, ISNA reported on Saturday.



A special committee [which monitors the budget bill before its final approval] had earlier cut the budget put forward by the administration for development of public transportation for the next year by 50 percent, causing great concerns among citizens and urban management.

This is a great opportunity for municipalities of megacities which are dealing with air pollution to pursue their environmental plans.

Intl. conference on transportation opens in Tehran

SOCIETY d e s k **TEHRAN** — The 17th International Conference on Traffic and Transportation Engineering began on Sunday in Tehran’s Milad Tower Conference Hall. This is considered as Iran’s greatest scientific event in the field of transportation which is held by Tehran Municipality. Senior transportation and urban managers, professors and students of the related field are among the primary audiences of this conference.



According to the official website of the conference, more than 30 different workshops are organized in the event. Also a special exhibition on ‘the scientific and technological achievements and requirements of the transportation sector’ has been held in the sideline of this 2-day event.

Public transportation, transportation and urban planning, traffic safety and engineering and non-motorized transport are among the main topics of this conference.

The most important objectives of this conference are using the capabilities of both Iranian and international transportation experts, planning to exchange the viewpoints of transportation activists with university and research institutes and make interaction between them, providing the opportunity for researchers to present their innovations and opinions and directing them with the help of the experts’ experiences.

LEARN ENGLISH

Dry Cleaners

A: Thank God you are open! I have an emergency!
B: Hello Mr. Henderson what can I do for you?
A: I need this dress and this suit **dry cleaned** ASAP!
B: OK, I can have it ready by the end of the week.
A: No you don’t understand, I need this tomorrow morning! I accidentally **spilled** soda all over my wife’s dress and we have a wedding to attend tomorrow! She’s gonna kill me!
B: Ok, I can have it ready tomorrow afternoon, but this suit is also very **stained**. I can’t guarantee we can remove it completely.
A: Fine! Can you also **iron** and **starch** this shirt?
B: Certainly.
A: Great! This is our secret! If you see my wife, say nothing to her about this!
■ **Key vocabulary**
dry clean: way to clean clothes without water using chemicals
spill: to allow something to fall from the container
stained: marked or dyed or discolored with foreign matter
iron: to smooth clothes with a heated iron
starch: stiffen (clothes, etc.) with starch
■ **Supplementary vocabulary**
delicate: easily damaged
fabric: cloth
neighborhood: the surrounding area
to press: to iron
hanger: a shoulder-shaped frame with a hook at the top for draping and hanging a piece of clothing when not in use
(Source: irlanguage.com)



Plane crashes in central Iran; 65 confirmed dead

1 → According to Borna news agency, while snowstorm is sweeping the area where the crash has occurred, remains of the plane are spotted. The report was then denied by other news agencies.

Because of the foggy weather and inaccessibility of the mountainous areas, emergency medical services have not succeeded to reach the area yet. However, it is confirmed that all 59 passengers as well as the 6 crew members, including two flight attendants, two pilots and two members of security forces have passed away.

One of the passengers is said to miss the flight.

Currently dozens of Red Crescents Society rescue and relief forces, as well as police and other officials are dispatched to the area.

Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, President Hassan Rouhani, Russian President Vladimir Putin, and some

other high ranking officials and celebrities have extended their condolences for the tragic incident.

■ Aged aircraft fleet

The carrier was Aseman Airlines, a semi-private firm, which according to Flight Radar 24 has a fleet of 29 aircrafts including 6 ATR aircrafts.

Over the 17th International Conference on Traffic and Transportation Engineering held here on Sunday, concurrent with the plane crash, Transport and Urban Development Minister Abbas Akhoundi regretted the fact that some 200 aircrafts in Iran age above 20 years.

Iran’s air transport fleet requires some 500 aircrafts, Akhoundi said, stating, the problem is not only with air transport fleet, the road conditions as well as the rail transportation sector are facing the same issue.

He further highlighted that in order to renovate the aged aircraft fleet some \$50 billion must be allocated to the sector.



JICA aims to improve energy efficiency, mitigate air pollution in Iran

ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** — Japan International Cooperation Agency has begun surveys as well as a pilot project aiming to both improve energy efficiency and mitigate air pollution in Iran in association with the Japanese private sector.

The project titled “Verification Survey with the Private Sector for Disseminating Japanese Technologies for Improving the Output of Existing Gas Turbine with Inlet Air Cooling System on Islamic Republic of Iran”

was officially initiated over a ceremony held at Thermal Power Plants Holding Company (TPPH) with officials from Ikeuchi [the Japanese enterprise in charge of implementing the pilot project in Iran] in Tehran on Wednesday.

The project is in the framework of JICA’s support to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

The rate of electrical energy demand is expected to be increased by 6.5 percent annually and additional 25.6GW electrical energy is required until 2020. Considering a future economic development that can lead to improvement in living standards, it is essential to reinforce power generation capacity.

Installation of new gas turbine combined cycle power plant construction plan, which can increase in production of natural gas, has been delayed due to labor shortage and economic slump caused by foreign currency shortage. Additionally, the Health Ministry announced that, due to air pollution, up to 4,450 Tehran residents died last year and number of patient increased roughly by 30 percent. Under such circumstances, in order to decrease negative environmental impacts power plants must be equipped with modern facilities.

Furthermore, in the Islamic Republic of Iran roughly 20 percent of power generation source is oil, without exhaust gas treatment facility equipped in the city, which results in discharge of sulfur oxide and dust causing severe air pollution.

This survey aims to verify effectiveness of the inlet air cooling system for improving the output of existing gas turbine. The survey also aims to explore ways to disseminate the product in Islamic Republic of Iran.



The system use hydraulic nozzles (LYOHM Nozzles) with atomization performance in the world’s highest level. It automatically sprays appropriate volume of water as a function of outside air temperature and humidity.

If additional products such as gas turbine protection are required due to installing the system, Thermal Power Plants Holding Company is responsible for providing and installing these products. In this process, JICA Survey Team will provide Thermal Power Plants Holding Company advice on how to minimize the negative impacts on existing equipment.

“Iran now faces the drastic increase of the energy demand. In order to fulfill the demand of economic development and ensure the quality of living standards of the population, it is essential to reinforce power generation capacity,” Chief Representative, JICA Iran Office Yukiharu Kobayashi said on Wednesday.

Furthermore, in the Islamic Republic of Iran roughly 20 percent of power generation source is fuel oil, without exhaust gas treatment facility equipped in the city, discharge sulfur oxide and dust caused severe air pollution, Kobayashi noted.

He went on to say that considering this situation, Government and executive agencies, such as TPPH is required to develop and implement the proper policies and measures

for balanced energy demand and supply and increase of the efficiency of power generation in Iran.

For the achievement to this purpose, Japanese enterprises’ highly developed technological resources can assist this country, he highlighted.

Ikeuchi [the Japanese enterprise in charge implementing the pilot project in Iran] has an outstanding advantage in fog technology which plays a significant role in quality improvements of electronic device manufacturing and printing. Fog serves to improve the global environment, from combating global warming, to dust pollution control contributes to our industries, and to mankind.

I expect TPPH to introduce this effective technology in the framework of this cooperation firstly, and then, enhance to spread it to the territory in Iran in the future, Kobayashi concluded.

■ Electricity is important for life

Ikeuchi General Manager for Cooling Division Nobuaki Umeda, for his part, explained about the importance of electricity saying “In 2011, we had a huge earthquake, many of Japanese passed away. In addition, all nuclear power plants were shut down. Therefore, we realized that electricity is Important for the life throughout Japan.”

“We had installed our spray nozzle system in most of gas turbines in Japan to decrease the temperature of inlet air, therefore we could play a part to increase the power output from the gas turbine,” Umeda said.

■ Improving power generation efficiency ‘essential’

Gholamerza Mehrdad, General Manager of Generation Technical Support Thermal Power Plants Holding Company, also said that energy demand in Iran is increasing and therefore it is very essential to take some measures to increase the efficiency of power generation.

“We believe the technology of Ikeuchi in manufacturing the nozzles for the cooling system can be very helpful and hope in the future, other power plants can buy the technology from the Japanese Company after receiving the good result from this study as a pilot project,” he pointed.

Iran to set up palliative care centers for cancer patients

SOCIETY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Some palliative care centers will be developed in the country in the next [Iranian calendar] year 1397 (March 2018–March 2019) to serve patients who suffer from advanced cancers, said the deputy health minister for nursing.

In a bid to better serve those people with life-limiting illnesses, the Health Ministry has planned to inaugurate centers for palliative care, and the first such centers will be dedicated to patients who have advanced cancers, IRNA quoted Maryam Hazrati as saying on Sunday.

She went on to say that required guidelines have been set out and palliative care training courses have been already developed for nursing students.

There are unfortunately many patients whose illness has considerably advanced and there remain faint hopes – if any – for their full treatment, she highlighted, adding that these individuals go through great pains and their hospitalization will only lead to enormous costs and bed occupancy.

The critical need of these patients is being beside their families during their tough illness period, she highlighted.

According to the first official report of cancer status in Iran, some 300,000 individuals with cancer live in the country, said deputy health minister Alireza Raeesi based on the data collected in the year 1393.

Some 109,000 individuals are added to this number on a yearly basis and 30,000

cancer patients pass away in the country annually.

WHO defines palliative care as an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problem associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial, and spiritual.

Palliative care provides relief from pain and other distressing symptoms, affirms life and regards dying as a normal process, intends neither to hasten nor postpone death and integrates the psychological and spiritual aspects of patient care.



ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ◀ ▶ ع

Iran’s first membrane bioreactor comes on stream

The first membrane bioreactor in Iran was inaugurated at University of Tehran on Wednesday, IRNA news agency reported. Mohammad-Reza Mehrnia, a member of the university’s chemistry engineering faculty and the project manager, explained that it took a year to complete the project and now the plant operates at capacity of 5 cubic meters of water per day.

This is the first time that a membrane bioreactor wastewater treatment plants is built in Iran and it can pave the way for the future growth in this field, Mehrnia said, adding, the plant is aiming at recycling the wastewater by removing 99 percent of the common pollutants.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-esque”

■ **Meaning:** resembling
■ **For example:** They are represented as beautiful, **statuesque**, shaded men.

PHRASAL VERB

Fold something in

■ **Meaning:** to gently mix another substance into a mixture when you are preparing food:
■ **For example:** Next, fold in the sugar.

IDIOM

Scream blue murder

■ **Explanation:** someone who screams blue murder shouts or complains very loudly as if something very serious has happened
■ **For example:** The crowd started screaming blue murder when the football match was interrupted.

اولین تصفیه‌خانه بیوراکتور غشایی ایران به بهره‌برداری رسید

به گزارش خبرگزاری ایرنا اولین بیوراکتور غشایی ایران روز چهارشنبه در دانشگاه تهران به بهره‌برداری رسید.

محمدرضا مهرنیا عضو هیأت علمی دانشکده مهندسی شیمی مجری طرح توضیح داد: این طرح با ظرفیت ۵ متر مکعب در روز از حدود یک سال قبل آغاز و امروز به مرحله بهره‌برداری رسید.

به گفته مهرنیا تصفیه‌خانه بیوراکتور غشایی برای اولین بار در کشور اجرا شده و الگویی برای توسعه در این زمینه به شمار می‌آید. این تصفیه‌خانه به منظور بازچرخانی آب از فاضلاب با قابلیت حذف ۹۹ درصد آلاینده‌های متعارف ساخته شده است.

Ex-CIA operative: U.S. has long meddled in elections, but it's OK since it's for the greater good

As the United States Democrats indict Russians over "election meddling," former CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) officers say the U.S. has been interfering in foreign elections for decades and "hopefully" will keep doing so because it has the moral high ground.

In an article published in the New York Times, former CIA officers and several researchers, who have been studying covert U.S. intelligence operations for years, say that while methods allegedly used by Russians to meddle into the U.S. elections might slightly differ from the old school CIA operations overseas, there is nothing in the allegations against Russians that Americans haven't done themselves.

"If you ask an intelligence officer, did the Russians break the rules or do something bizarre, the answer is no, not at all," retired CIA veteran Steven Hall told NYT's Scott Shane.

Hall, who left his job as CIA Chief of Russian Operations in 2015 after 30 years of service, noted that the U.S. has never shunned attempting to meddle in other countries' elections.

Saying that the CIA had "absolutely" engaged in such operations in the past, Hall added that he hopes "we keep doing it."

Thirteen Russian nationals and three entities were indicted on Friday as part of the special FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) counsel Robert Mueller's lingering probe into alleged Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections, and collusion between Moscow and the U.S. President Donald Trump's campaign. As proof to support either of the two allegations is still scant, the Russians listed in the indictment were accused of waging "information warfare against the United States



of America," including by sowing discord on social media with "divisive" posts on Facebook and Twitter.

While the social media boom is a recent phenomenon, the U.S. intelligence has a long record of weaponizing information, albeit in a more conventional form, Loch Johnson, a scholar at the University of Georgia, who has been investigating the CIA since the 1970s, told the Times.

"We've used posters, pamphlets, mailers, banners — you name it. We've planted false information in foreign newspapers. We've used what the British call 'King George's cavalry': suitcases of cash," Johnson said, recounting that in the late 1980s he was told by CIA operatives that they used to plant reports that fit the U.S. agenda or bluntly fake

news in foreign newspapers by the dozen. The number of such daily "insertions" ran in as many as 70 to 80 publications, he recounted.

But when the U.S. does it, it's for the greater good, the scholar and the CIA officers claim.

Likening the American operations to what Russia is accused of, "is like saying cops and bad guys are the same because they both have guns — the motivation matters," Hall said. Because, just like the bloody wars the U.S. is waging around the world, it is being done for the sake of democracy.

Contrary to the supposed Russian onslaught on the American democracy, which, according to Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, did not affect the outcome of the presidential elections, some U.S. meddling did lead to actual changes of power

across Latin America, Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

According to a survey by Researcher Dov Levin of Carnegie Mellon University's Institute for Politics and Strategy, the U.S. meddled in elections at least 81 times from 1946 to 2000, including in Yugoslavia in the 2000 against Slobodan Milosevic.

The number, however, does not include the military coups orchestrated by the U.S., or regime changes as a result of the U.S. interventions, some of which had precious little to do with democracy, such as the rise of Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet after the violent overthrow of President Salvador Allende in 1973. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the U.S. did not give up on its interventionist policy. The most recent examples include the U.S.-led NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) intervention in Libya that brought down strongman Muammar Gaddafi, but failed to deliver a semblance of democracy. The war-ravaged country is being torn between three different power centers seven years after the military incursion.

The U.S. role in the coup in Ukraine, which paved way for bloodshed in the country's east, has been widely reported. Last year, former U.S. Vice President Joe Biden admitted in his memoir that he demanded former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich resign in 2014, telling him that his "time was over."

Biden also boasted that he played a part in the firing of a Ukrainian prosecutor during a meeting with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and former Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseny Yatsenyuk in March 2016.

(Source: RT)

Libya marks 7th anniversary of revolution that brought mixed results

Thousands of people in Libya have marked the seventh anniversary of a revolution that led to the fall of longtime slain Dictator Muammar Gaddafi but ushered in an era of instability in the country.

Libyans took to the streets of the country's capital, Tripoli, and other major cities on Saturday to mark the anniversary of the 2011 uprising, which saw the overthrow and death of their ruler.

Crowds gathered in the capital's Martyrs' Square, waving Libyan flags and chanting slogans as a tribute to the revolution, with security forces deployed to ensure that the commemoration remained peaceful.

Similar rallies were also held in the eastern city of Benghazi and Misrata in the west.

While it removed a dictator, the Libyan revolution did not bring stability to the country. Rival militia groups have since been vying for power, and no effective government has been in place.

In a televised speech on Saturday, Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj acknowledged his government's shortcomings and said national reconciliation was a solution to end divisions



in Libya and ease the crisis facing the North African country.

"Maybe a regime has ended, but the truth is we have not managed to rid ourselves of a culture that has dominated the minds and behavior of many people, who today are at the forefront of politics and who consider the homeland as booty," Sarraj said.

He accused other countries, without naming any, of

"fueling" the conflict in Libya and called on them to stop intervening in his homeland.

On February 17, 2011, people across Libya took to the streets, calling for freedom and democracy. The uprising was marred by violence after a NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) intervention in March that year and bloody clashes between pro- and anti-Gaddafi forces later.

The former ruler was ousted from power after a 42-year-long dictatorship in August 2011 and killed two months later.

Libya has been struggling with instability since then, with two rival governments ruling in different parts of the country — the Government of National Accord (GNA) and a rival administration backed by military strongman Khalifa Haftar. The country's executive and legislative branches have also been paralyzed by fierce rivalries between political movements, ideologies, and tribes.

The rise of extremism and the presence of terrorist groups in the oil-rich country have also resulted in the deterioration of living conditions.

(Source: agencies)

EU needs 'steel tanks, not think tanks' to counter ISIL & Russia: Polish PM

The "Russian threat" may not have topped the Munich Security Conference's agenda this year, but it didn't stop the Polish Prime Minister from saying Europe needs more "steel tanks" rather than "think tanks" to counter both the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist outfit and Moscow.

"We should have more traditional types of military forces, more cooperating with each other, so Poland supports... more steel tanks and not only think tanks," Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said.

He went on to single out ISIL terrorist group and Russia as two threats facing Europe. "We have more think tanks in Europe, but maybe we have too little of those tradi-

tional forces which are very important vis-à-vis some hybrid-type warfare like ISIL, or traditional and hybrid [threats] like Russia."

"Chair forces or Power Point rangers" are not enough to build common European defense policy, he said, adding that the EU's conventional forces should be complemented with cyber-warfare and consistent military expenditures.

Earlier, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who was one of the keynote speakers in Munich, slammed the "irrational myth about the almighty Russian threat" that has captured the minds of European policymakers.

Russian involvement, Lavrov said, is being looked for everywhere, be it Brexit referendum or the 2017 Catalan independ-

ence vote. "This is profoundly wrong, and it speaks of the lack of common sense and understanding of our country."

Speaking in Munich, Morawiecki added that NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) members in Europe should do their utmost to meet the two-percent defense spending target, "so that we do not have those free riders who live under Pax Americana but pretend to be sufficient in the context of security."

The prime minister, who started his career at Deutsche Bundesbank back in the 1990s, chose not to specify who the "free riders" are, but in an earlier interview with Die Welt, he implied that Germany benefits from NATO but is reluctant to share the de-

fense expenditure, and is "a free rider which threatens the unity of the West."

The Polish government, led by the right-wing nationalist PiS party, has long sparred with Berlin and Brussels over a range of issues, including the EU's refugee resettlement quotas and Poland's controversial judicial reforms. Earlier this week, German Chancellor Angela Merkel welcomed Morawiecki to Germany, hoping that his visit would help the two countries mend ties.

However, ahead of the visit, Morawiecki said the row is far from over, adding that Warsaw disapproves of plans for the NordStream 2 Russia-Germany gas pipeline that would run through the Baltic Sea and bypass Poland.

(Source: RT)

EU's Juncker to Britain: EU does not want 'revenge' for Brexit

The head of the European Commission Jean Claude Juncker vows to uphold security ties between the European Union and Britain after Britain leaves the bloc, saying he does not want to take "revenge" on Britain for Brexit vote.

In a reaction to British Prime Minister Theresa May's calls for a new security partnership with the European Union at the annual Munich Security Conference in Germany, Juncker said on Saturday that he wanted to see security cooperation continue, but warned security cooperation should not be "mixed up" with other Brexit-related issues.

"I believe since we are not at war with the UK and since we do not want to take revenge on the UK for what the British people have decided, so this security alliance, this security bridge between the UK and the EU will be maintained, we still need it," he said at the Munich Security Conference.

Just prior to him, May told the conference, "We must now move with urgency to put in place the treaty that

will protect all EU citizens wherever they are in Europe... To make this happen will require real political will on both sides."

May, who has for months been pushing for a deep and special economic partnership with the EU after Brexit, now has focused of security. The prime minister has consistently said that she will not use security as a bargaining chip and that her offer is "unconditional."

Britain, which will be outside the EU as a "third" country after the exit, wants a treaty to protect what May's government describes as real, tangible benefits of cooperation.

The Downing Street says failure to sign up such a treaty "will play into the hands of our enemies who would like nothing more than to see Europe divided."

A new security deal, however, has yet to be negotiated for after Brexit.

(Source: agencies)



Trump blames FBI's focus on Russia probe for Florida school shooting

The United States President Donald Trump has criticized the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) for the recent mass shooting in a Florida high school, saying the agency was too preoccupied with the ongoing probe into the alleged Russia meddling in the 2016 election.

The FBI admitted it had failed to stop a gunman who opened fire at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, killing 17

people on Wednesday.

Trump blamed the agency's focus on Russia investigation for its failure to stop the shooting that also left at least 14 injured.

Following the tragedy, the FBI admitted it had received a tip-off about the gunman, but failed to stop Nikolas Cruz, 19. Apparently, a person close to Cruz had contacted an FBI tip line on January 5, weeks before

the shooting, to report concerns about him, the FBI said in a statement.

Trump himself is under harsh criticism for signing a bill last year — just over a month after his inauguration — overturning an Obama-era regulation restricting certain people from buying guns.

Critics said at the time that removing the legislation made it easier for people with mental illness to purchase guns.

Trump's election campaign has been under investigation after the United States spy officials said last year that Russia had helped Trump win the White House.

Trump has repeatedly denied allegations that his campaign colluded with Russians and has condemned the investigation. Russian President Vladimir Putin has also denied the allegations.

(Source: agencies)

Two Palestinians killed by Israeli fire; Hamas fires at regime jets

1→ Hamas said it "holds Israel responsible for any escalation in the Gaza Strip."

Meanwhile, the Ezzedeen al-Qassam Brigades, the Hamas military wing, said in a statement that its anti-aircraft defenses had been used against Israeli strikes.

The Brigades also affirmed its right to respond to Israel's ongoing aggression against the Palestinian citizens in Gaza.

Additionally, a spokesman for the Islamic Jihad resistance movement said, "The land of Gaza will not serve as a picnic for the forces of the enemy. The sons of Gaza will respond with rage to the Israeli aggression and the continuation of the siege."

The Gaza Strip has been under an Israeli siege since June 2007. The blockade has caused a decline in living standards as well as unprecedented unemployment and poverty.

Tel Aviv has waged three wars on the coastal enclave since 2008, including the 2014 offensive, which left more than 2,200 Palestinians dead.

Israel claims Hamas uses Gaza underground tunnels to stockpile weapons and infiltrate into the occupied lands.

The resistance group, however, says the tunnels are needed to defend Gaza against Israeli attacks and transfer essential supplies, including food and fuel, into the blockaded Palestinian territory.

■ Hundreds attend funeral of Palestinian killed by Israeli forces

Elsewhere, Palestinians have held a funeral ceremony for a teenager shot dead by Israeli forces ten days ago in the south of the occupied West Bank.

Hundreds of Palestinian mourners gathered on Saturday for the funeral of Hamzeh Youssef Zamaareh, 19, in the town of Halhul, north of al-Khalil, also known as Hebron.

Residents responded to a call by authorities to hold a general strike and attend the funeral.

Israeli soldiers killed Zamaareh ten days ago, but refused to return the body to his family until Friday night.

Regime forces killed Zamaareh following an alleged stabbing attack on Israeli troops.

Also on Saturday, 37-year-old Palestinian Nimr al-Jamal, who was killed by Israeli forces five months ago, was laid to rest in the West Bank.

Al-Jamal was killed on September 26 last year after he allegedly carried out a shooting attack in an illegal Israeli settlement that left two guards and a police officer dead.

His body was returned to his family on Friday night in the village of Beit Surik.

His family's home had been demolished by Israeli forces in November.

Hundreds of Palestinians have been killed in similar circumstances. Rights groups have denounced Tel Aviv's extrajudicial killings in situations where they say alleged assailants could have been detained in a non-lethal manner.

According to the Palestinian human rights group, the Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center (JLAC), Israel is currently holding the bodies of 19 Palestinians killed in the past two years, along with 260 bodies of those killed since 1967.

(Source: Press TV)

Kosovo celebrates 10th anniversary of independence

Kosovo has been holding two days of celebrations to mark one decade of independence from Serbia.

The Muslim-majority country declared independence from Serbia on February 17, 2008, nine years after NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) conducted a 78-day airstrike campaign against Serbia to stop a bloody crackdown against ethnic Albanians.

Celebrations began on Saturday but the main independence ceremony is taking place on Sunday.

Kosovo's independence is currently recognized by 117 countries, including the United States and most members of the European Union (EU).

Five of the 28 EU member countries — namely Spain, Slovakia, Cyprus, Romania, and Greece — haven't recognized Kosovo's independence from Serbia.

Serbia still sees Kosovo as part of its territory and has the support of Russia and China.

Meanwhile, around 300 people took to the streets of Serbia's capital city, Belgrade, on Saturday to oppose the independence of Kosovo.

The protesters sang patriotic songs about Kosovo and held Serbian flags as well as giant flags of Kosovo with "No surrender" written on it. They chanted "Kosovo is the heart of Serbia."

In the border city of Mitrovica, which is divided between Serbia and Kosovo, posters declaring "10 years of the occupation" were put up in many places, reports said.

(Source: Press TV)

Scottish nationalists are already salivating over the spoils of Brexit

8→ From this position, the Scottish nationalists can only lose the second independence referendum. One prominent west of Scotland financial figure I spoke to last week is moving to a pro-independence position, having voted No in 2014. "Brexit has removed the union's most potent weapon in any new referendum. The nationalists can now afford to be realistic about the risks of independence. For no matter how big are the risks, they are as nothing compared to life outside the EU." He didn't even get round to mention the resurgent price of oil or recent discovery of new oilfields off the Scottish coast.

A network of Yes groups all across Scotland has begun to regroup and reform. I was sent a list of more than 150 of them and this was by no means complete. This time, they will be demanding more autonomy from SNP central control. There will be no further need for a white paper as Brexit has already fulfilled much of the promise of the first one. If Yes activists and their internet wing can stop their abuse of independence supporters who do not favor the SNP, then independence is theirs for the taking.

(Source: The Guardian)

Russian medalist at Games suspected of doping: source

A Russian medalist at the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics is suspected of having tested positive for a banned substance, a source at the Games said on Sunday, in a potential major blow to Russia's efforts to emerge from a drug-cheating scandal.

Alexander Krushelnitsky, a bronze-medalist along with his wife in mixed-doubles curling, is suspected of having tested positive for meldonium, the source said. Meldonium increases blood flow which improves exercise capacity in athletes.

Krushelnitsky did not respond immediately to a request for comment. A spokesman for the Russian delegation at Pyeongchang said he had no immediate comment.

Russia has been accused of running a state-sponsored and systematic doping program for years, an allegation Moscow denies.

Russian sports officials are to meet anti-doping officers at Pyeongchang, the source said, adding that any violation would only be confirmed after analysis of a "B" sample.

An official for the International Olympic Committee (IOC) declined to comment, saying an independent testing authority was in charge of drugs testing at Pyeongchang.

Russian athletes are banned from competing for their country at Pyeongchang due to allegations of systematic doping. They are listed as neutral Olympic athletes, unable to have the Russian anthem played in medal ceremonies or use national symbols.

The IOC has said it may allow the Russians to march with the Russian flag and in national uniform at the Games closing ceremony on Feb. 25, provided they will have complied with its code of conduct on neutrality.

The code requires compliance with IOC anti-doping rules. *(Source: Reuters)*

‘Furious’ US hockey coach skips handshake with Russian coach

The coach of the US men's hockey team Tony Granato was so mad over Saturday's defeat he refused to shake hands with Oleg Znarok, the coach of the Russian team.

Team USA played Team OAR (Olympic Athletes for Russia) in the group stage of the Olympic hockey tournament at Gangneung Hockey Centre in South Korea, losing 4-0.

NBC analyst Pierre McGuire said during his broadcast that Granato was 'furious' when that Team OAR tried to score some last minute goals when they had already won the game, according to the New York Post. When it came time for the two coaches to meet and shake hands at the end of the bout, Granato refused.

With only seconds left in Saturday's game, the Russian coach pulled a power play and sent 34-year-old Ilya Kovalchuk on the ice. The left winger scored two backbreaking goals less than 33 seconds apart at the end of the second period and start of the third.

During a post-game interview, Granato was asked if he was upset that Znarok pulled the last-second move. 'Yes,' the US coach said sternly, the Washington Post reports.

He later added: 'I thought we played well enough to deserve better than a 4-0 game. I was really happy with the effort and the confidence that we gained in knowing that we could play with them. We just didn't get the results.'

Team USA will now play in the qualification round on Tuesday, while Russia will move on directly to the quarterfinals. *(Source: Daily Mail)*

Alex Sandro goal wins Turin derby for Juve

Juventus lost Gonzalo Higuain to injury as they claimed a 1-0 derby win over Torino on Sunday to move top of Serie A, temporarily at least.

Alex Sandro scored the only goal of the game in the first half at the Olimpico Grande Torino to make it just one defeat in 24 league meetings for Juve with their city rivals.

However, the loss of Higuain after quarter of an hour will be a cause of concern for Massimiliano Allegri, even though Paulo Dybala was able to make his return from a hamstring injury.

Torino, who had won three and drawn one of their previous four home matches without conceding a goal, were the better of the two teams in the opening exchanges before Higuain went off after failing to run off a knock. Juve, who started with Wojciech Szczesny in goal as one of four changes to the team that drew 2-2 with Tottenham in the Champions League, looked short of their best but struck the decisive blow through Alex Sandro in the 33rd minute. *(Source: Four Four Two)*

If it isn't Madrid, it's Paris - Hazard tires of speculation

Eden Hazard offered a weary response to fresh speculation linking him with a departure from Chelsea, affirming his commitment to a Stamford Bridge stay. The Belgium star is the key man in Antonio Conte's squad and is the Blues' top-scorer this season with 15 strikes to his name in all competitions. His routine star turns since joining from Lille in 2012 has reportedly drawn interest from Real Madrid, Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain.

However, Hazard has grown accustomed to seeing his name linked elsewhere and is able to focus fully on affairs at his current club. "Yes, but they are interested in me for several years," Hazard told Telefoot. "We talk about it for a long time. When it is not Paris, it is Real. And when it is not Real, it is Paris.

"Today, I am good where I am. If one day I have to move, I will move. But for now, I am good here. I am well-rounded and I will give my best for Chelsea.

"For now, I am here. There are still games to play. There are competitions we are trying to win. And then, there is the World Cup.

"I am here. I still have two and a half years on my contract at Chelsea. I am good here. I play every game. And I manage to play well in every game. "The fans like me. My family is good here. We will see what will happen. In football, everything can happen, but also nothing can happen."

(Source: Mirror)

VAR decision went against protocol, says Jose Mourinho

Jose Mourinho was bemused by the video assistant referee's controversial intervention as Manchester United secured safe passage to the FA Cup quarter-finals at Huddersfield.

Romelu Lukaku netted early in both halves at the John Smith's Stadium to secure the visitors a 2-0 win on a night when technological teething problems reared their head once more.

Juan Mata wheeled off in celebration after netting from an acute angle just before half-time, only for referee Kevin Friend to eventually chalk the goal off as the narrowest of offside calls was revisited.

United boss Mourinho is happy to see technology utilised and pointed to its relative success in Portugal, but felt it was wrong for video review assistant Neil Swarbrick to get involved given it was not a clear and obvious error.

"It is amazing when the truth comes," the United manager said.

"But also (there are) problems and one of the problems is exactly what happened today, which goes a little bit against the words of the protocol. "The words of the protocol are something like a clear and obvious situation and for sure it was not a clear and obvious situation.

"But we know that it is experimental, and we have to accept. But I am speaking after a 2-0 victory."

Mourinho laughed so was then asked whether his view would be different had it cost United. "I am close to winning the best-behaved manager in the Premier League, so nothing that can make me lose that trophy this season," he said, smiling once more.

"The feeling is a bit strange and I was sharing it with David (Wagner, the Hud-



dersfield boss) on the touchline and (fourth official) Anthony Taylor, which is the moment of the doubt.

"We score a goal, I cannot be happy.

"David concedes a goal but he doesn't know if he goes to half-time with 2-0 or 1-0, and it takes time and then the decision comes.

"So, we have to adapt to that waiting time and cope with the frustration when that decision goes against you.

"At half-time I had to say 20 times to my

analysts and assistants to shut up because I don't want the players to know what happened.

"I want the players to feel, 'Yes, it is off-side and to move on', without being sad or unhappy.

"Shut up, we have to move on', but one day it will go in our favour."

United midfielder Mata said it was a "very tight" decision, but was philosophical about the decision, whereas Huddersfield boss Wagner is not a fan of VAR at all.

"The emotion was killed," the Huddersfield boss said.

"I said this immediately to Jose during the incident that, 'Whatever will now be decided, whether this decision goes in our favour or not, I don't like this', and I've said this before.

"The emotion is killed, the emotion in the stadium in the stands, for us managers in the dugout. This is why I don't like this system. Maybe I am too traditional."

(Source: Sky Sports)

Marcel Hirscher makes Olympic history with second gold



Marcel Hirscher had never won an Olympic gold medal before PyeongChang. Now he has two.

The Austrian skier made history after winning the men's giant slalom Sunday, becoming the first man to win that and the men's alpine combined skiing event in the same Winter Games.

Hirscher went into Sunday's race as a heavy favorite as one of the most successful skiers of his generation.

"Wow. It was not so easy to be the absolute favorite in this discipline, then sitting up there as the leader from the first run knowing that Henrik (Kristoffersen) ripped it. I had no choice, I knew I have to give 100% and I have to go into this battle," Hirscher said, reflecting on his win.

Hirscher also spoke about how his efforts have finally paid off.

"The first Olympics, they were not so successful. I mean, finishing fourth and fifth, it was OK. The next Olympics, in Sochi, second and fourth place. So a lot of fourth place. And now, I think it pays off."

Going into the Games, Hirscher had won 55 World Cup races and a record six consecutive World Cup overall crowns. He is a six-time world champion across

four disciplines and is well on course for a seventh World Cup overall title this season.

That dominance was on full display Sunday. Hirscher skied two nearly flawless runs to finish 1.27 seconds ahead of silver medal winner Henrik Kristoffersen, the second-ranked giant slalom skier.

That's the largest margin of victory in the competition since Jean-Claude Killy won it by 2.22 seconds in 1968.

And he's not done. Hirscher will line up as favorite for the slalom Thursday -- he's already won six slaloms this season.

For Kristoffersen it was yet another runner-up spot behind Hirscher -- the Sochi slalom bronze medalist has finished second eight times this season.

France's Alexis Pinturault finished third for a second medal of the Games after winning silver in the combined.

Sunday was a disappointment for the reigning Olympic men's giant slalom champion, Ted Ligety, who finished tied for 15th place.

The American has been attempting to return from a nasty back injury that required surgery in January 2017.

(Source: CNN)

Real Madrid hurt you with nothing – Xavi says PSG loss an injustice



Former Barcelona star Xavi did not hold back in his assessment of Paris Saint-Germain's defeat at the Santiago Bernabeu, describing the 3-1 Champions League loss to Real Madrid as an "injustice".

European titleholders Madrid scored twice in the final seven minutes to take command of the last-16 tie after Wednesday's opening leg in the Spanish capital.

PSG broke the deadlock thanks to Adrien Rabiot in the 33rd-minute before Cristiano Ronaldo converted a penalty on the stroke of half-time. The French visitors controlled proceedings in the second half but sensationally collapsed during the closing stages as Ronaldo and Marcelo condemned PSG to a two-goal defeat.

Reflecting on the result, Xavi – now playing for Al Sadd in Qatar – was less than impressed with Madrid's performance against the Ligue 1 leaders.

"Madrid have something," Xavi told So Foot. "Against them, you can never lose your chance, otherwise they will punish you, but the worst thing is that they hurt the opponent with nothing.

"A counterattack was enough to take the victory... F***

"You almost think it's an injustice that

PSG lost by such a big margin because it was a game that should have ended 1-1, 2-2 or 2-1 for PSG."

"It's inexplicable, Real Madrid didn't play, but still won..." Xavi continued. "I saw the broadcast on Spanish television with Valdano and he said something very true.

"In this match, there were several phases, very different from each other, and there was a moment in which PSG dominated clearly. "During those siege minutes in the Madrid area, it was at that precise moment that PSG should have scored the second."

Xavi added: "Were Madrid superior to PSG? For me, no, but they don't care if they are superior, if they dominate or are dominated. "Their philosophy is simply to win. That is what makes them so difficult to play against in the [Estadio Santiago] Bernabeu, for example. PSG played like Barca."

Former Barcelona midfielder Xavi denied Ronaldo was superior to Neymar in the Spanish capital.

"They said that Cristiano was still better than Neymar," Xavi said in an interview with So Foot. "No, no, it's unfair.

"What did Ronaldo do in the game? He scored a penalty and a knee goal..."

(Source: Goal)

Rio de Janeiro Games legacy incomplete, says IOC

Some venues for the Rio de Janeiro 2016 Olympic are decaying as Brazil has so far fallen short of its own legacy plans for sports facilities, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said on Sunday.

In a surprisingly frank comment, the Olympic Games Executive Director Christophe Dubi admitted plans for the post-Games use for several venues, including the aquatics center in the Olympic park, had largely remained on paper.

"A very well planned legacy that did not materialize in full," Dubi told reporters.

He said while the city had benefited from the post-Games use of what he said was an improved transportation and telecommunication systems, some sports venues were standing idle.

"Dismantle the venues," Dubi said of temporary structures that were supposed to be moved away from the park in Barra de Tijuca after the 16-day competition in 2016.

"It has not happened because of the political landscape, because of the social and economic situation."

Brazil was experiencing near double-digit annual growth when it was awarded the first Olympics in South America



back in 2009. But when the Games came round in 2016 the country was in its worst recession in decades and locked in a maelstrom of political uncertainty.

Crime has also spiked with deadly violence in Rio up in recent years, with an eight percent increase in killings last year over 2016 and a 26 percent jump since 2015, according to statistics from the Rio state government.

"The legacy is still not perfect," Dubi said. "They (venues)

need to be dismantled. These are not venues designed and built to last. I hope the city and government will do the right thing and dismantle those venues that were not built to last."

To add to Rio's woes, Games chief Carlos Nuzman, a long-time former IOC member, is to stand trial for his role in a corruption case involving alleged bribery in Rio's successful bid to host the Games. Nuzman, who faces racketeering and money laundering charges among other, has denied wrongdoing.

Police raided his home and seized gold bars, computers as well as a Russian passport among other items.

The iconic Maracana football stadium has been looted after the Games, with seats ripped out, while the entire Olympic park remains shut for much of the 18 months since the Games.

The velodrome has been damaged by two fires, the most recent one in November last year.

In August 2017 IOC President Thomas Bach had urged to give Brazil more time to implement legacy plans due to the country's political and economic woes.

(Source: Reuters)



Ashkan Dejagah's knee injury doesn't look good, Nottingham Forest coach says

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Nottingham Forest coach Aitor Karanka says Iranian international midfielder Ashkan Dejagah has taken a knock to his knee in the training and they are waiting to find out how serious it is. The 31-year-old is expected to be missing for at least a month – and it may be for longer than that. Dejagah has made only one appearance for Forest following his arrival as a free agent in January, ironically against his former club Fulham, where he played during their time in the Premier League. “We are waiting to find out how serious it is,” Forest coach Karanka told

Nottingham Post. “He took a knock to his knee and we are trying to know what the outcome is.

“It is a shame, because he was desperate to play, he was desperate to help us and desperate to earn his chance in the World Cup, with his country.

“We will see what happens. I don't know how much it will impact his time here. I am not a doctor. We will see what happens. But it does not look good and it is a shame for him and us.”

Dejagah signed a deal until the end of the season when he arrived at the City Ground, as one of a flurry of 10 new additions.

Neymar exit has made Barcelona stronger - Marc-Andre ter Stegen

BARCELONA — Marc-Andre ter Stegen has told ESPN FC that Barcelona's response to losing Neymar last summer has helped them become an even better team this season.

Barca's prospects for the season took a hit in August when, after seeing Neymar move to Paris Saint-Germain in a world record €222 million deal, they were beaten 5-1 by Real Madrid over two legs in the Spanish Super Cup.

However, they have defied expectations since that defeat, losing just once in their last 38 games, remaining unbeaten in La Liga and reaching the final of the Copa del Rey for a fifth consecutive season.

Ter Stegen acknowledges the importance of Neymar during the Brazil international's four years at the Camp Nou, but says Barca's new signings -- Paulinho, Nelson Semedo, Ousmane Dembele and Philippe Coutinho -- have made the Liga leaders a stronger team overall.

“The quality of Ney, you can't explain it...” the goalkeeper told ESPN FC at Barca's training base in San Joan Despi. “Because he was super important for us, as a person [and] in the team, as a footballer.

“Now, everyone needs to understand what he did because maybe he wants to win something else, also personally. His decision only he knows but in the end we had to compensate all this and this is not easy because he had so much quality, but we did it in a different way and now we have a very, very strong team.

“I think we've got some new players who have made us even stronger and hopefully they feel good and comfortable

in the team and they adapt very fast. But at the same time we want to give them the time, Dembele didn't play very often because he was injured [and] Coutinho just came. We always need to give them time and be patient because they are young and they have some great years ahead.”

Barca could end up spending over €300m on Dembele and Coutinho if all the add-ons are met, but neither player has yet made a significant impact.

Between them they have made just 15 appearances, the majority as substitutes, with Dembele missing most of the campaign injured and Coutinho only joining in a club-record €160m deal last month.

Both players are now fit and available for selection, though, and ter Stegen expects them to play an important role as Barca continue to compete on three fronts this season.

“Coutinho's very calm I think,” the Germany international said. “He's very grounded and a good person. He can easily concentrate now on football, you see his quality and you need to give him time to adapt to the style of Barca, the way how we play and [it's] the same for Dembele.

“For Coutinho it is a bit easier as he is speaking Spanish already, Dembele needs to learn the language as soon as possible, to feel good in the locker room with all his colleagues. We want to give him a good feeling, so they can show everything they can.”

However, perhaps the biggest change at Barcelona in respect to last season has been the appointment of

Ernesto Valverde in place of Luis Enrique. The Catalans are yet to taste defeat in La Liga under their new coach, who has made them more solid in defence with a 4-4-2 formation -- they've conceded just 11 goals in 24 league games this season.

Valverde joined Barca having previously coached in Spain's top flight with Athletic Bilbao, Espanyol, Villarreal and Valencia and that has enabled him to come in with a different perspective which, along with his honesty, has been one of the biggest differences, according to ter Stegen.

“[Valverde] has been very important because we are playing how he wants us to play,” the former Borussia Monchengladbach keeper said.

“He is very straight with what we are doing wrong or right. From my point of view, he always tries to see it from another direction, not just of a coach who is always seeing his team playing or adapt or change small things, he tries to see it as another coach or [he thinks] ‘how would you face Barca?’

“This is good because he was at Bilbao before and he knew exactly where we were struggling sometimes... and we were always struggling against Bilbao! It was very interesting to see how he was seeing us and maybe at the beginning this was a bit difficult but then step-by-step we have seen what he wants us to do and now we are doing what he wants us to do.”

(Source: Soccer.net)

Former Iran champions Pas relegated to third tier



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Former Iran champions Pas were relegated to the country's third tier league.

The former giants were sent to the third division after suffering a 2-0 defeat to Shahr-dari Bam football team on Saturday.

Pas are one of the oldest Iranian football clubs founded in 1963.

Pad along with Esteghlal are only two

Iranian football teams have won the AFC Champions League so far.

Pas edged past Al Shabab of Saudi Arabia in 1993 to win the AFC Champions League.

The team have won Iranian league five times and have introduced so many legends to Team Melli including Nasser Noamooz, Heshmat Mohajerani, Hassan Habibi, Mohammad Ranjbar, Homayoon Shahrokhi, Hossein Faraki and Javad Nekounam.

Karate 1-Premier League in Dubai: Iranian fighters take four bronzes



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Four Iranian fighters seized four bronze medals at the Karate 1-Premier League in Dubai.

In Male Kata, Abolfazl Shahrjerdi beat Moroccan Mohammed El Hanni 3-2 and came third.

Hamideh Abbasali defeated Maria Torres Garcia from Spain 2-1 in Female Kumite +68 Kg and took the bronze medal.

Ali Asghar Asiabari seized a bronze, beating Erman Eltemur from Turkey 5-3 at the Male Kumite -75 Kg

And, Iran's Amir Reza Mirzaei beat Kazakhstan's Didar Amirali 7-1 in bronze medal match of the Male Kumite -67 Kg division.

A total of 626 karate fighters from 75 countries took part in the competition.

Matchday Two: West Zone Preview

Kuala Lumpur: The opening games in the 2018 AFC Champions League did not disappoint, with the fixtures in the West Zone seeing an average of more than three goals per match.

Just a week after the big kick off, the action returns with Groups A and B taking to the field on Monday, before Groups C and D follow suit a day later.

Al Jazira claimed their first victory in 16 AFC Champions League games when the Emirati side ran out 3-2 winners over Qatar's Al Gharafa last week and will be full of confidence ahead of their trip to Jeddah to face Al Ahli on Monday.

Al Ahli also won their opening game of the campaign by claiming a 1-0 victory over the Islamic Republic of Iran's Tractorsazi Tabriz, meaning the winner of the top-of-the-table clash will open up a clear lead at the Group A summit.

Elsewhere, both Al Gharafa and Tractorsazi will be desperate to get off the mark after suffering disappointing defeats in their opening games so as to avoid losing touch with the other teams of the group when they square off in Al Rayyan.

■ **Al Gharafa (QAT) v Tractorsazi Tabriz (IRN)**

Venue: Thani Bin Jassim Stadium, Al Rayyan

■ **Al Ahli (KSA) v Al Jazira (UAE)**

Venue: King Abdullah Sports City, Jeddah

Lokomotiv will look to build on their stunning 5-0 victory over Al Wahda on Matchday One when they travel to Iran to take on Zobahan on Monday.

Zobahan held the lead for over an hour against Al Duhail on their opening game, only to suffer a 3-1 defeat that leaves them chasing their first points of a campaign that looked to have got off to a great start.

Al Duhail, meanwhile, will make the short journey from Qatar to the United Arab Emirates, where Al Wahda will be aiming for a positive response from a result that was the heaviest defeat across the eight AFC Champions League groups last week.

■ **Zobahan (IRN) v Lokomotiv (UZB)**

Venue: Foolad Shahr Stadium, Isfahan

■ **Al Wahda (UAE) v Al Duhail (QAT)**

Venue: Zayed Sports City Stadium, Abu Dhabi

The 2011 AFC Champions League winners Al Sadd came from a goal down to beat Al Wasl in Dubai last week and now return to Doha to take on last year's semi-finalists Persepolis on Tuesday.

The Iranian side began their campaign in style by posting a 3-0 victory over Uzbekistan's Nasaf in Tehran and a healthy lead at the top of the standings will be on offer to

the victor in Qatar.

Both Nasaf and Al Wasl be look to avoid being cast away at the foot of the table after just two games, with the game in Qarshi already taking on extra significance.

■ **Nasaf (UZB) v Al Wasl (UAE)**

Venue: Qarshi Markaziy Stadium, Qarshi

■ **Al Sadd (QAT) v Persepolis (IRN)**

Venue: Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium, Doha

All four teams in Group D remain level pegging after Al Rayyan and Esteghlal played out a 2-2 draw before Al Hilal and Al Ain ended goalless in last Tuesday's opening round of fixtures.

Al Ain will now welcome Al Rayyan to the UAE on Tuesday as the sides aim to build on results where there were plenty of positives and put themselves in a strong position after two matches.

Last year's runners-up Al Hilal, meanwhile, will take on Esteghlal in Oman as two of the continent's biggest and best supported teams renew acquaintances once more.

■ **Al Ain (UAE) v Al Rayyan (QAT)**

Venue: Hazza Bin Zayed Stadium, Al Ain

■ **Esteghlal (IRN) v Al Hilal (KSA)**

Venue: Seeb Stadium, Seeb

(Source: the-afc)

Iran's NPC offer condolence over plane crash

Paralympic.ir — Iran's national Paralympic Committee (NPC) expressed its deep regrets over the “extremely tragic” crash of Aseman Airline's passenger plane, which claimed dozens of lives on Sunday.

A total of 66 people have been reportedly killed in a passenger plane crash in the Zargos mountains in Iran.

The Aseman Airlines plane, en route from Tehran to the south-western city of Yasuj, came down near the city of Sem-riom in Isfahan province.

Sixty passengers, two security guards, two flight attendants and the pilot and co-pilot were on board.

Tavakoli wins AFC Futsal Championship goal of the tournament

Farhad Tavakoli's goal against Japan in the final match of the 2018 AFC Futsal Championship was voted the best goal of the tournament by the fans on the AFC website.

Voters could choose between 10 goals scored during the tournament, which finished in Chinese Taipei on February 11.

Tavakoli received 5076 votes and finished in first place with 58 percent.

Apiwat Chaemcharoen from Thailand and Lebanon's Mo-hamad Kobeissy came second and third with 1620 and 1313 votes respectively.

Iran claimed the title for the 12th time after beating Japan 4-0 in the final match.

(Source: AFC)

Poland to host blind football development event

Poland has been selected to host the third IBSA Blind Football Euro Challenge Cup between 10 and 12 May. Krakow will be the venue for this major European development tournament, which will feature six new national teams on the continental scene.

The tournament will take place within the framework of the UEFA-supported IBSA Blind Football Development Project Europe and is the showcase event for this project year.



The International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA) is partnering with local club Tyniecka NWP Kraków to deliver the tournament.

Countries which have recently received support from the project will be invited to take part, with IBSA covering their accommodation, meals and local transport while in Krakow.

A referee training course open to officials from all over Europe will be held in the city immediately prior to the tournament.

The Krakow event will be the third Euro Challenge Cup, following the successful first edition in Prague, Czech Republic, in 2014, won by Belgium, and the second tournament in Thessaloniki, Greece, in 2016, with Romania coming victorious.

(Source: Paralympic.org)

Moazzami pockets silver in 2018 Asian Track Cycling Championships

Press TV — Iranian cyclist Arvin Moazzami Goudarzi has put on acceptable performances at the 2018 Asian Track Cycling Championships in Malaysia, and claimed a silver medal at the continental event.

Moazzami Goudarzi participated in the scratch race at the Velodrom Nasional Malaysia of the western Malaysian town of Nilai on Saturday, and finished as the vice champion.

A Chinese cyclist took the gold medal, and a contestant from Mongolia had to settle for the bronze.

The 2018 Asian Track Cycling Championships kicked off on February 16, and will finish on February 20.

Big clubs avoid each other in FA Cup draw

Manchester United were drawn at home to Brighton in an FA Cup quarterfinal draw which saw all the big guns avoid each other on Saturday evening.

Jose Mourinho's men learned they would face the Seagulls shortly after sealing their place in the last eight with a 2-0 fifth-round win at Huddersfield.

Wigan or Manchester City, who meet on Monday night, will host Southampton, while Chelsea visit Leicester and the winners of Sunday's Rochdale-Tottenham tie will travel to Sheffield Wednesday or Swansea.

Chelsea and Leicester advanced on Friday night, with respective 4-0 and 1-0 victories over Hull and Sheffield United.

Sheffield Wednesday and Swansea face a replay after their fifth-round clash at Hillsborough ended goalless on Saturday.

■ **Ties to be played March 16-19:**

Sheffield Wednesday or Swansea vs. Rochdale or Tottenham Manchester United vs. Brighton

Leicester vs. Chelsea

Wigan or Manchester City vs. Southampton

(Source: ESPN)

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Loneliness inspires actress Niki Karimi photo collection

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — Actress/director Niki Karimi has said that “a feeling of loneliness in a gloomy and unsafe world” has inspired her latest photo collection “Doomed Bloom” that is currently on display at a Tehran gallery.



Niki Karimi poses during her photo exhibition at Tehran's Etemad Gallery on February 16, 2018. (Khabaronline/Ramona Mirian)

“This collection reflects the concerns I have had over the past few years and also illustrates the sad events my generation has experienced over these years,” she said at the opening ceremony of her exhibition at Etemad Gallery on Friday.

The collection is composed of seven negative photos each depicting a single dead flower.

Karimi said that the start of working on the collection coincided with the death of auteur Abbas Kiarostami, whom she had collaborated with in several projects.

The collection was highly affected by events, she added. “Meanwhile, the news about the wars in the Middle East made me more involved in the concept of death and nonexistence,” she stated.

“All these led me to ‘Doomed Bloom,’” Karimi noted.

The exhibit will run until March 6 at the gallery located in the Negarestan Garden, Daneshsara St. near Baharestan Square.

In her first exhibition held at Tehran's Golestan Gallery in October 2009, Karimi focused on Iran's nature.

“Nature gives me peace and I have tried to share this peace with the viewers,” she said at that time.

“Breath” director planning for love story

A R T **TEHRAN** — Director Narges Abyar, whose acclaimed movie “Breath” was Iran's submission to the 2018 Oscars, plans to make a love story that is tentatively titled “The Night When the Full Moon Was Seen”.



Director Narges Abyar attends the 36th Fajr Film Festival at Tehran's Mellat Cineplex on February 9, 2018. (Maryam Razavi)

The story of the film is about a girl from a poor neighborhood in southern Tehran who falls in love with a boy. Meanwhile, the girl has to emigrate from Iran.

Abyar is now visiting some southern and western Iranian cities to choose a location where the movie will be shot.

The 20th Black Nights Film Festival in Estonia awarded Abyar the Golden Wolf for best director for her “Breath”. She also won the award for best director for the film at the Vancouver International Women in Film Festival in 2017.

Weinstein Company removes president and chief operating officer Glasser

NEW YORK (Reuters) — The board of the Weinstein Company has dismissed the beleaguered film studio's president and chief operating officer, less than a week after he was cited for failing to act on employee harassment complaints.

In a statement, the studio said its board “has unanimously voted to terminate David Glasser for cause.”

A spokeswoman for the Weinstein Company was unavailable for immediate comment. Glasser could not immediately be reached for comment.

On Sunday, New York's Attorney General Eric Schneiderman sued the Weinstein Company and Harvey Weinstein alleging years of sexual misconduct by the movie producer. The civil suit also accused executives of repeatedly failing to protect employees from Weinstein.

Weinstein, 65, was one of Hollywood's most influential men before more than 70 women accused him. He has denied having non-consensual sex with anyone and Reuters has not been able to independently confirm the allegations.

Culture minister sees breakthrough in Iranian visual arts



Culture Minister Seyyed Abbas Salehi visits the 10th Fajr International Festival of Visual Arts at the Saba Art and Cultural Institute on February 17, 2018. (IRNA/Faraj Samadi)

A R T **TEHRAN** — Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi has said that he has seen a major breakthrough in Iranian visual arts.

He made the remarks on Sunday after paying a visit to the 10th Fajr International

Festival of Visual Arts underway at the Saba Art and Cultural Institute of the Iranian Academy of Arts.

“I saw that there has been significant progress in the interdisciplinary arts via the Fajr International Festival of Visual Arts,” Salehi said.

“It seems the interdisciplinary arts are moving forward step by step leading to the creation of new arts, and the progress is quite clear in this exhibit,” he added.

New ideas are also seen among the displayed artworks, he stated.

The 10th Fajr International Festival of

Visual Arts opened in Tehran on January 23.

The festival has also organized exhibitions in dozens of cities in over 20 provinces.

The international section of the festival is also underway at the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Cultural Institute (ECI). The festival will be running until February 23.

Beirut festival to screen two films from Iran



A scene from “Weavers of Imagination” by director Sadeq Jafari

A R T **TEHRAN** — “Weavers of Imagination” and “Crimson Trauma”, both from Iranian filmmakers, have been selected to go on screen at the Beirut International Women's Film Festival running from March 13 to 18, the organizers have announced.

“Weavers of Imagination” directed by Sadeq Jafari is a documentary about a number of visually impaired men and women in Iran who weave intricately patterned carpets by using Braille.

“Crimson Trauma” by Esmaeil Mihandoust is a romance scene in the context of a city trip in Tehran, where the main character of the film is trying to maintain a balance between the four personality dimensions of a woman.

Beirut festival under the theme “Women's Empowerment” tackles issues such as gender equality, identity and domestic violence among others through the power of the lens and cinema.

French star Isabelle Huppert glad women are speaking up about harassment

BERLIN (Reuters) — French actress Isabelle Huppert said on Saturday she was pleased that women were speaking up about their experiences of sexual abuse and harassment after staying silent for so long.

Huppert, who has starred in more than 100 films, was speaking at the Berlin film festival, where a movie called “Eva” in which she plays is premiering.

There is a growing debate on harassment driven by the #MeToo movement on social media and Time's Up, launched by more than 300 Hollywood industry figures in January in response to sexual assault and harassment allegations against powerful men in entertainment, politics and other fields.

“I have looked on everything that has happened with this movement with a lot of sympathy and hope because it's so long that all this stuff should have been said and it

finally has been said for the last few months,” Huppert said.

“And that's been one of the reasons why I've been doing cinema - to speak of women in a certain way - and personally speaking I'm very happy that some things have finally been brought out into the open, definitively I hope,” she added.

French actress Catherine Deneuve and 99 other French women signed a column in Le Monde in January saying the #MeToo campaign had gone too far and was fueled by a “hatred of men”.

But the movement is in the limelight at this year's Berlinale - several discussion events are being held, guests can visit a counseling corner, and festival director Dieter Kosslick has said some films were cut from the program due to sexual abuse allegations against people involved.

South Korean filmmaker hopeful Olympics will improve ties with North

BERLIN (Reuters) — South Korean filmmaker Kim Ki-duk said on Saturday he hoped for an improvement in relations between North and South Korea given both countries were taking part in the Olympics on the southern part of the peninsula.

North Korea is participating in the Pyeongchang Games at the invitation of the South, which is using them to help ease tensions between the two countries, still technically at war.

Speaking at a news conference at the Berlin film festival, where his movie “Inkan, gongkan, sikan grigo inkan” (Human, Space, Time and Human) is premiering, Kim was upbeat.

“The Winter Olympics are currently being held in Korea and the North Korean representatives were there as well. The atmosphere is rather positive currently and we hope there will be a lot of improvement on the Korean peninsula,” he said.

Kim said South Korean President Moon Jae-in, who was elected in 2017, has the ability to guide the South through tensions with the North and that made him hope that “in the



Director Kim Ki-duk attends the photocall for the movie “Geumul” (The Net) at the 73rd Venice Film Festival in Venice, Italy September 1, 2016. (Reuters/Alessandro Bianchi)

very near future Korean history will change dramatically”.

“The situation does need to improve. We're surrounded by major powers but our current president will get to grips with this difficult situation, I'm sure of that,” said Kim, who has made three films about North Korea.

“Women Who Changed the World” comes to Persian bookstores



Front cover of the Persian version of “Fantastically Great Women Who Changed the World” by Kate Pankhurst.

A R T **TEHRAN** — British children's book writer and illustrator Kate Pankhurst's “Fantastically Great Women Who Changed the World” has recently been published in Persian.

Naria Publications in Tehran is the publisher of the book that has been translated into Persian by Neli Mahjub.

Pankhurst has created this wildly wonderful and accessible book about women who really changed the world. It helps

readers discover fascinating facts about some of the most amazing women who changed the world.

Bursting full of beautiful illustrations and astounding facts, “Fantastically Great Women Who Changed the World” is the perfect introduction to just a few of the most incredible women who helped shape the world including Jane Austen, Gertrude Ederle, Coco Chanel, Frida Kahlo, Marie Curie, Mary Anning, Mary Seacole, and Amelia Earhart.

Russian film set in Soviet era highlights continuing tensions: director

BERLIN (Reuters) — Russia always seems to be on the brink of war and conditions there now are much like they were in the 1970s, when people worried that an international conflict would break out and largely sided with the government, the director of a new movie set in that era has said.

Current relations between Russia and the West are often compared with those of the Cold War due to clashes between Washington and Moscow over Russia's actions in Ukraine, the war in Syria and allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

Russian director Alexey German Jr., whose biopic “Dovlatov” about the 20th century writer Sergei Dovlatov is premiering at Berlin's film festival, told Reuters his country's biggest tragedy was that it always seems to be in a pre-war state.

“The more people feel like the war is about to start or has already started, the more they unify with the ruling party or the government and this is what

On Saturday, European film industry workers launched a campaign called “Speak Up!” to try to put an end to sexual harassment and abuse being tolerated in workplaces.

It encourages people to point out incidents of sexism, harassment and abuse of power and wants to ensure businesses know what inappropriate behavior and sexual misconduct is.

“Eva” is one of 19 films competing for the Berlinale's Golden and Silver Bears to be handed out on Feb. 24.

Directed by Benoit Jacquot, it tells the story of young man called Bertrand who shoots to fame with a manuscript he stole from a dead writer.

Bertrand is under pressure to write a second piece that will enjoy the same kind of success so when he meets the attractive yet distant Eva he begins transcribing their conversations to form the basis of his next literary work.

Russian film set in Soviet era highlights continuing tensions: director

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Actor Milan Maric attends news conference to promote the movie “Dovlatov” at the 68th Berlinale International Film Festival in Berlin, Germany, February 17, 2018. (Reuters/Hannibal Hanschke)

we can see now,” he said, adding it was much the same during the 1970s, when his film is set.

Depicting a drab grey Leningrad, “Dovlatov” follows the eponymous writer over a depressing six-day period as he struggles to get his work published because it does not conform with the ideals and standards set by the Soviet authorities.