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Zarif: Era of regional and global hegemony is long gone

MOSCOW — Iranian Foreign said on Monday that the "era of regional and global hegemony is long gone".

Speaking at the Valdai Discussion Club in Moscow, Zarif said, "Hegemonic tendencies only lead to insecurity and instability."

Zarif also said the "hate ideology" of terrorists is still being spread by petrodollars.

Following is Zarif's remarks at the forum: It is a great pleasure for me to be here with my friend, Minister Sergei Lavrov

to exchange views and discuss difficult issues we all face at this critical juncture in West Asia. In the fight against extremism and dealing with the complex military and political environment in our wider region, our growing, strategic partnership with the Russian Federation, which stems from our common principles, interests and concerns, has been an important contributor to regional situation.

In my view, the major issues which demand our attention and require urgent solution, are seven-fold: **→2**

Aoun visits Baghdad for talks with Iraqi officials

Lebanese President Michel Aoun Tuesday held talks with his Iraqi counterpart Fouad Massoum after arriving in Iraq on an official visit.

Upon arrival in Baghdad, Aoun was received by Iraqi Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari before heading to meet with Massoum.

Aoun left Beirut to Iraq early Tuesday. He will head to Armenia later this week. During his time in both countries,

Aoun and the accompanying delegation will discuss ways of boosting bilateral ties and economic relations with the countries' top officials. The visit came in a response to official invitations from heads of both countries, a statement from the presidency said.

In addition to his meeting with Massoum, Aoun is expected to hold talks with Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi and Speaker Salim Al-Jubouri. **→13**

Transit income up 20%

ECONOMY **TEHRAN**— Iran's income from transit of goods increased 20 percent in the ten-month period ended on January 20, 2018, compared to the same period of time in the past year, according to an official at Trade Promotion Organization (TPO).

Mohsen Rahimi, the head of transit desk of TPO, said transit via roads accounted for the highest share of the increase during the mentioned period, TPO Public Relations Department announced.

The official also underlined the growth in transit of commodities via railway through offering some incentives. **→4**

Cult fanatics kill 5 policemen in northern Tehran

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Violent protests by members of a Dervish cult in the Pasdaran neighborhood in northern Tehran on Monday left five security forces killed.

The clashes occurred overnight when members of the Gonabadi Dervishes held an illegal gathering at a police station.

Three members of the security forces were killed when a bus was driven into their ranks and two members of the Basij volunteer force lost their lives in separate car-ramming and stabbing attacks at the site.

According to Press TV, the bus also struck several parked cars and injured several pedestrians.



trians. The assailants further damaged cars and broke the windows of nearby buildings.

What Trump needs to know about Iranians

By Hossein Mousavian

Ever since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the implicit goal of U.S. strategy toward Tehran has with rare exception been to subvert the Iranian political system. Under President Donald Trump, regime change has been adopted as official policy.

Trump's approach has been twofold: to increase sanctions and other pressures to weaken Iran while countering its defensive capabilities and regional influence, and to support Iranians who seek to overthrow the Islamic Republic.

Before the Islamic Revolution, Washington was the dominant foreign power in Iran, exercising decisive political, economic, military and cultural influence. The United States came into this position after orchestrating the 1953 coup ousting democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh and returning to power the dictatorial regime of the shah.

The 1979 revolution marked the end of U.S. influence in Iran and was a major setback for Washington in the region as a strategic ally suddenly turned into an enemy.

The most important reason for America's imbrolio in Iran was the misperceptions U.S. officials had of Iranian society. In a 1977 trip to Tehran, President Jimmy Carter praised the shah for making Iran "an island of stability" and for "the admiration and love which your people give you." Just months later, slogans of "Death to the Shah" and "Death to America" reverberated in protests that ultimately ended millennia of monarchy in Iran.

While Trump has encouraged the Iranian people to revolt against their government, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has said that the administration's aim is to bring about "peaceful transition," and Sen. Tom Cotton,

According to reports, 30 security forces and several rioters were also injured in the attacks.

More than 300 people, including the drivers of the bus and the car and also the main elements behind the incident, have been arrested, IRNA reported.

General Saeed Montazer-al-Mahdi, a police spokesman, said security forces managed to restore calm and order to the area in the early hours of Tuesday.

General Hossein Rahimi, Tehran's police chief, said on Tuesday that in the Pasdaran neighborhood is calm.

an influential Trump adviser, has called for covert action to "support internal domestic dissent." In the lead-up to the revolution, Washington misread the domestic situation in Iran to dramatic consequence. It is of no surprise then that after 40 years of no American presence in Iran whatsoever, the misunderstandings that Trump administration officials have of Iranian society are greater and herald potentially graver consequences. As such, a better US understanding of Iran is of utmost necessity.

The Iranian people are proud of their long history and view themselves as one of the few great civilizations. During his September 2017 address to the UN General Assembly, Trump underscored these "proud roots as a center of civilization." Yet a month later, he described Iranians as a "terrorist nation." **→7**



ARTICLE

By Payman Yazdani
Political analyst

U.S. multifaceted objectives in Syria

Just weeks after failure of the ISIL terrorist group in Iraq and Syria, the United States announced that it is going to create a security belt from Erbil to the Mediterranean under the pretext of "preventing the return of ISIL."

To this end, Washington announced the U.S.-led coalition is working with its Syrian militia allies to set up a new border force of 30,000 personnel, a move that has added to Turkish anger over U.S. support for Kurdish-dominated forces in Syria.

More than 50 percent of the mentioned forces would be Syrian Kurd militia. Turkey says they are offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers' Party terrorist group, PKK, and considers them a major threat to its security, while Washington finds them their most effective ally on the ground in Syria.

Supporting Kurdish separatist forces in Northern Syria, the U.S. is after its own goals in the country and region. Some of the objectives seem to be:

- To prolong the conflicts and crises in Syria in order to pave the way for the disintegration of the country which can be a beginning of more such breakdown in the region, while the U.S. hypocritically defends the territorial integrity of the Syria and Iraq. Indeed, some reports suggest that the U.S. wants bases and a permanent presence in eastern Syria as a way to confront Iran. Moreover, it has been suggested that the U.S. has sheltered some ISIL terrorists for further attacks on the Assad government in Syria.

- Any boost to the U.S. military bases will decrease U.S. dependence on Syria by building on Incirlik Air Base in Turkey.

- To inflict pressure and contain Turkey as well as Iran, Iraq and Syria by playing the Kurdish card.

- To provide Tel Aviv with yet more support by destabilizing regional security.

- To dominate the energy rich areas of Syria and future energy routes.

Turkey began its military operation in Afrin to thwart some parts of the U.S. plots.

Facing obstacles to its goals in the region because of cooperation between Russia and regional countries including Iran and Turkey, the U.S. state secretary Rex Tillerson arrived in Turkey with new promises. **→7**



ARTICLE

By Mehdi Sepahvand
Head of the Politics Desk of the TehranTimes

Zionist-Saudi hype set to overwhelm Iran's call for 'security networking'

The Iranian foreign minister took part in a Russian-hosted forum on regional security, the Valdai Discussion Club, on Monday, fast on the back of his attendance at the Munich Security Conference the day earlier. Many observers at the MSC said Mohammad Javad Zarif had been pressed between two anti-Iran speakers, namely Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Juberi, both of whom did not miss a breath to shout their anti-Iranian propaganda.

There, Netanyahu aired a new episode of his Iran shows, a metal plate which he claimed was part of an Iranian drone downed recently by Israel. The most famous of Netanyahu's Iran shows may be his drawing of a bomb he claimed was nuclear and under development by Iran during his address to the UN in 2012.

Jubeir also did not fail to depict Iran as the one and only cause of concern in the region, leveling at the country whatever accusations he could think of.

Despite all such hard talk, the top Iranian diplomat followed his path of diplomacy, saying after the successful conclusion of the nuclear deal with world powers, his country quickly put forth a proposal to tackle regional issues via dialogue and inclusive participation. He noted that although some regional players failed to consider this security network proposal, it remains "the only game in town" since hard approaches have all come to nothing so far.

In his Monday address in Moscow, Zarif elaborated on what Iran finds of much greater preference over military solutions to the ongoing regional issues. "Insistence on military solutions is a dead-end," he insisted, inviting regional players to stop "making wrong choices such as supporting Saddam Hussein or the Taliban, al-Qaeda, ISIS, or Nusra" and then "instead of looking at the results of their actions" taking the easiest way, namely blaming Russia or Iran. **→13**



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Iran mourns martyrdom anniversary of Hazrat Fatima (SA)

A woman holds a flag bearing an inscription reading "Peace Be upon Fatima" among a large group of women gathered in the Tehrani-Moqaddam Square in northwest Tehran on February 20, 2018 to mourn the martyrdom anniversary of Hazrat Fatima (SA), the daughter of Prophet Muhammad (S).

Similar gatherings were also held at numerous sites in the city as well as in mosques and other Islamic centers across Iran.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Leader offers condolences to Ahmad Tavakkoli over son's death

POLITICS TEHRAN – In a message on Tuesday, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei offered his condolences over the death of Mohammad Tavakkoli, son of the former senior lawmaker and presidential candidate Ahmad Tavakkoli.

“I offer my sincere condolences to you, his esteemed mother and others, and I ask for God’s mercy and blessings for his soul and patience for you,” Ayatollah Khamenei said, Mehr reported.

Mohammad Tavakkoli, 34, died on Friday night after suffering for three years from liver disease. He was a photographer, designer and graphic artist. He is survived by a son and daughter.



Zarif: ‘We’ll either win together or lose together’

POLITICS TEHRAN – After his speech at the Munich Security Conference (MSC) followed by question and answer on Sunday, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif wrote a tweet reiterated Iran’s proposal for establishing peace and security in the Persian Gulf.

“MunSecConf was excellent opportunity to continue to engage and reiterate #Iran’s proposal for multilateral approach to peace and stability in the Persian Gulf region. Our message is clear: we’ll either win together or lose together.”

Speaking at the MSC, Zarif called for a win-win approach to peace, saying, “We need to be realistic and accept our differences.”



Defense minister to visit Azerbaijan

POLITICS TEHRAN – Iranian Defense Minister Amir Hatami is slated to pay an official visit to Azerbaijan to improve ties with Baku, particularly in military areas.

At the head of a military delegation, Brigadier General Hatami will visit Baku at the official invitation of Azerbaijan’s Defense Minister Lieutenant General Zakir Hasanov, ISNA reported.

No date has been given for the visit. During his stay, he will hold talks with top political and defense officials of Azerbaijan on issues of mutual interest and ways to boost military cooperation as well as leading regional and international developments.

Hasanov paid a visit to Tehran in April 2017 at the invitation of former Iranian Defense Minister Hossein Dehghan.



Iran summons Swedish envoy over citizenship issue

POLITICS TEHRAN – The Iranian Foreign Ministry on Monday summoned Stockholm’s ambassador to Tehran Helena Sangeland after Sweden granted citizenship to an Iranian national found guilty of espionage for the Israeli Mossad spy agency.

“Following the Swedish government’s unconventional move to grant citizenship to Ahmad Reza Jalali, a security convict, the Swedish ambassador to Tehran was summoned to the Foreign Ministry,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said.

Qassemi said the Islamic Republic voiced its “strong protest” over Sweden’s measure to naturalize an individual that had confessed to spying for Mossad about Iranian nuclear scientists, including two who were assassinated in 2010.

The ministry said granting citizenship to Jalali was “unconventional, questionable and unfriendly”.

Iran does not recognize dual nationality.



All officials, bodies not immune from criticism: MP

POLITICS TEHRAN – All of the country’s authorities as well as the entire system can be criticized, MP Hossein Naqavi Hosseini has said, emphasizing that officials should be held accountable for their actions.

“When the Supreme Leader says even he himself can be criticized, this means that all of the establishment’s bodies and officials can be criticized and must respond to criticism logically,” Naqavi Hosseini was quoted as saying by ISNA on Tuesday.

However, he said, criticism should be fair and also distinguishable from slander because “criticism is beneficial but slander is detrimental”.



Governors living outside precinct will be fired: Interior Ministry

POLITICS TEHRAN – Interior Ministry spokesman Salman Samani has said that those provincial governors who live outside their precinct will be dismissed, Mehr reported on Tuesday.

Samani said according to an order of Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazi, the governors must reside where they work, otherwise they will be fired.

The Interior Ministry’s supervisory bodies are tasked to oversee the minister’s order, he added. He also said the governors should be committed to enshrining the rights of the people, finishing incomplete projects, and creating jobs.

Rouhani calls for closer Tehran-Ankara-Moscow consultation on Syria

POLITICS TEHRAN – Iranian President Hassan Rouhani telephoned his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Monday saying that Tehran-Ankara-Moscow cooperation and consultation on Syria have proven “positive” and “influential” and called closer interaction between the three countries to bring an end to the conflict in the Syria.

“Today, disintegration-seeking plots are being hatched and efforts are being made to settle puppet states in the region and we should make efforts in line with countering security threats through expanding comprehensive cooperation,” Rouhani said.

Iran has been saying that the U.S. motive in deploying troops in Syria is intended to partition the war-torn country.

Rouhani also said that dialogue on Syria within the framework the Astana and Sochi meeting should continue.

He added that the terrorist groups should not be given an opportunity to resume their



activities.

Elsewhere in his phone call with Erdogan, Rouhani said Syria’s territorial integrity and sovereignty must be respected.

For his part, Erdogan expressed hope that terrorists would be removed from all regions in Syria.

All the regional countries should be concerned about maintaining Syria’s territorial integrity, Erdogan noted.

He also highlighted the importance of Iran-Turkey-Russia cooperation and said any move to undermine the three countries’ efforts within the framework of the Astana and Sochi talks will not benefit the region.

The latest round of the Sochi meetings was held on January 29 and 30.

Iran, Turkey and Russia brokered the Astana dialogue on Syria and the first five rounds of the talks were held on January 23-24, February 15-16, March 14-15, May 3-4 and July 4-5, 2017.

The sixth round of talks were held on September 13-15 and the seventh round in October.

No one in Iran is against foreign investment: Jahangiri

Iranian First Vice President Es’haq Jahangiri has said that no one or organization in Iran including the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps is against attracting foreign investment.

“No one is against attracting foreign investment. Neither are the Guards, in my view. Attracting foreign investment is part of the general policies the Supreme Leader has approved of,” he told the Financial Times in an interview published on Monday.

He added, “The Guards’ capabilities [in business] should not disrupt the private sector. What we are sensitive about is that

the private sector should be the main player in the economy.”

He also said the economic situation is not as bad as people think it is.

The vice president noted that the Islamic republic can reform and survive.

“Opponents of the government have created an atmosphere to make people pessimistic about reforms without thinking that fuelling this dissent could upset the whole system,” Jahangiri remarked.

“We definitely get worried if people try to resolve their problems in the streets,” he said, adding, “Those who have an accu-

rate understanding of the Islamic republic know its flexibility in particular vis-à-vis its people is high”.

Protests which started in Mashhad on December 28 died down after a week. Groups of people held demonstrations in several cities to voice their anger over rising prices, unemployment and corruption. However, some rioters and hooligans misused the situation to commit acts of violence.

Elsewhere, he said, “I have very good relations with the Supreme Leader. But I went a bit far during the presidential election.” He added, “I will hopefully meet him soon.”



Iran rejects Yemen missile delivery claims as ‘poorly-written scenario’

POLITICS TEHRAN – Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi has dismissed allegations that Iran had sent missiles to Yemen, saying such “poorly-written scenario” is yet another lie, emphasizing that it is impossible to send missiles to Yemen while the war-torn country is under a complete blockade.

In a statement on Tuesday, Qassemi said the claims were lies that intended to whitewash the aggressors. “We have on numerous occasions responded to such baseless claims,” he said, adding, “However, I want to emphasize that Yemen’s army and popular forces do not need foreign military aid.”

Yemeni people are deprived of the basic

necessities of living including medicine, the spokesman said, condemning Saudi Arabia and its allies for their war against Yemen which has so far led to the death of thousands of civilians and the starvation of more than 10 million.

Yemeni Houthi fighters have been firing missiles in retaliatory attacks against Saudi targets every now and then.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman also called for an immediate halt to sale of weapons by the U.S. and European countries to Saudi Arabia.

The Saudi-led coalition launched the war against Yemen in March 2015. In addition to causing human catastrophe, the coalition has damaged the poor country’s infrastructure.

Zarif: Era of regional and global hegemony is long gone

Terrorists looking for new breeding grounds, Iranian foreign minister says

1 → Frist, despite the territorial defeat of Daesh and some other terrorist groups, and their eviction from much of the land in Iraq and Syria that they had occupied, we believe that we are still vulnerable to the formidable challenge presented by extremism. The heads and operatives of Daesh are at large with formidable weapons and hundreds of millions of dollars of stolen money. They have either returned to their insurgent and terrorist roots or joined sleeper cells.

Their networks are almost intact, and their hate ideology still being spread, by the same petrodollars.

The offshoots Daesh planted in the wider region from Libya to Afghanistan, including in northern Afghanistan on your and our doorstep, are death machines on rampage.

With such capacity still preserved, they look for new breeding grounds. And we must join together to deny them such fertile environments by addressing current crises and issues at hand.

Fighting extremism has undoubtedly a domestic component. Reducing its appeal requires promoting good governance, upholding the rule of law, eliminating corruption, rebuilding the social compact, and reducing poverty and social inequalities; as well as measures that can help prevent real or perceived marginalization and exclusion. The chronic failure of some States to satisfy the minimum demands of their populace for dignity has undermined their effectiveness and created widening social gaps for extremism to exploit.

Second, Syria continues to be the focus of attention in West Asia and beyond. For the past 4 years, Iran and Russia have both insisted that the Syrian crisis could only be resolved politically by Syrians themselves. Our joint efforts to defeat Daesh, and the cooperation between Russia, Iran and Turkey to reduce hostilities and start the political process in Sochi represent the sound forward strategy.

However, a new wave of foreign intervention, in defiance of international law, has become the major impediment in the way of stabilizing the country and threatening to further escalate and create even more permanent social and ethnic divisions.

The US announcement that it will maintain a military presence on Syrian soil and create a militia there constitutes flagrant aggression under international law. It emanates from an ill-conceived obsession coupled with impulsive uncalculated reaction with far reaching local, national and regional ramifications.

So is the almost routine violations of Syrian airspace and air raids by Israel in the past several years, which grabbed international attention only after the Syrian military was able to break the myth of invincibility of Israeli military by downing an F-16 on 10 February.

The attack on 7 February by the US against a Syrian contingent demonstrated that the US is now pursuing a short-sighted and mostly profiteering geo-economic agenda that has nothing to do with fighting terrorism.

If this dangerous policy continues, not only extremism stands to benefit enormously but also the risk of a conflagration in Syria will become ever more serious.

At the same time, while we understand the concerns of our Turkish neighbors about new US adventurism, we are confident that there are appropriate and lawful ways of addressing those concerns through the Syrian government. The current military operation doesn’t help the cause of stabilizing Syria, nor is it in the interest of peace and stability in the whole region. It is important that all parties



avoid situations that inherently increase the probability of more clashes.

Third, the impulsive U.S. occupation of parts of Syria directly and through hastily-found proxies is a major impediment to the political recovery and rebuilding efforts in that country that also adversely affect the reconstruction of Iraq; moves that are important prerequisite for the political stabilization of the whole region. We believe that the international community needs to attach sufficient attention to the rebuilding of all war-stricken parts of the region as it helps bar the regrouping and recruiting attempts of routed terrorist groups and neutralize the impact of their hate ideology on the population. It is also a moral requirement as we are all indebted to the Iraqi and Syrian peoples for the frontline combat they mounted against extremism on behalf of the whole world.

Fourth, the national cohesion and territorial integrity of Syria and Iraq should top our list of priorities. Ethnic restiveness in Syria and Iraq, tainted with secessionism, constitutes a threat to the whole region and beyond. This is an issue that national and local authorities and all relevant States must address prudently through dialogue and on the basis of national sovereignty, territorial integrity and national constitutions, trying to turn ethnic tension into cooperation and convergence.

Along the same line, it is imperative to restore respect for national frontiers and the nation-state system, both of which have been undermined by terrorist groups and their Takfiri ideology.

Fifth, the Palestinian question, with occupation at its root, remains the most critical issue facing the region and the whole world. The injustice done to and atrocities committed against the Palestinian people in the past 70 years have created a deep-seated sense of anger, resentment and powerlessness in the Islamic world. The recognition by the US president of Al-Quds as the capital of Israel amounted to offering by Trump of what he does not own to those who have no right to it. As such it had no legal or political value but

“We must all abandon the illusion that security can be bought from outside or achieved at the expense of insecurity of others.”

offered a new boost for the recruiting attempts by extremists.

Six, the aggression and indiscriminate airstrikes against the Yemeni people, which was delusionally perceived to achieve a military victory within weeks, is now entering its fourth year. It is another source of tension in the region and another breeding ground for extremists that requires immediate attention. Three years of senseless bombing campaign has made clear that it is a strategic failure with no military solution. Thus, we must encourage an immediate ceasefire and urgent humanitarian relief coupled with urgent national dialogue among Yemeni parties for the establishment of an inclusive government.

Seven, the campaign by the US and its regional clients to distract attention from the real problems by blaming Iran for their own endemic bad choices will certainly not resolve their problems or compensate for their persistent mistakes.

We in Iran believe that nothing can be gained from remaining prisoners of the past and perpetuating the old paradigm of purchasing security, bloc formations and alliances. For many years, we have insisted on searching for political solutions to the crises in Syria and Yemen. Focusing on our immediate volatile neighborhood of the littoral states of the Persian Gulf, we have proposed a Regional Dialogue Forum to move away from decades of war and conflict and forge a different future for our region. We believe two fundamental concepts, that I underlined yesterday (Sunday) at the Munich Security Conference, are essential in this journey. First, our neighbors in the Persian Gulf should join Iran in recognizing that we should strive for a “strong region” in the Persian Gulf rather than a “strong-man in the region”. The era of regional and global hegemony is long gone, and hegemonic tendencies only lead to insecurity and instability.

Secondly, we must all abandon the illusion that security can be bought from outside or achieved at the expense of insecurity of others. We need to move away from the defunct concept of coalitions and alliances which rest on the premise of attaining security through exclusion of and insecurity for others. We also need to address the fact of power and size disparities as well as divergence of interests. That is why we need new innovative concepts that are inclusive and non-zero-sum. Regional security networking is one way forward. It allows for small and large nations to contribute to a regional security architecture which promotes security for all. In order to enter this architecture, Persian Gulf states simply need to adhere to common norms and principles, 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.

With Russia’s sober strategic perspective and growing influence in the region, it can play an instrumental role to make such a historic paradigm shift in the Persian Gulf a reality.

Turkey will lay siege to Syria's Afrin in coming days: Erdogan

Kurds deny Afrin agreement with Syrian government

By staff & agencies

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan says Turkey is set to "lay siege" to the northwestern Syrian region of Afrin, where the Turkish military has been fighting Kurdish militants over the past month.

"In the coming days, swiftly, we will lay siege to the center of the town of Afrin," Erdogan said on Tuesday to the lawmakers of his ruling Justice and Development Party on Tuesday.

The Turkish president said the siege will prevent militants of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) from "bargaining" with the Syrian government.

Erdogan, however, said, "We did not go there to burn it down," stressing that the so-called Operation Olive Branch is meant to "create a safe and livable area" for the Syrian refugees inside Turkey. Turkey began the offensive on January 19 against the YPG, which controls Afrin. It associates the Kurds there with the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has been fighting for autonomy on Turkish soil since 1984.

The offensive prompted local authorities to ask Damascus for help. The plan to besiege Afrin comes amid reports that the Syrian army is set to deploy troops to the region to support the Kurds in the face of Turkey's aggression.

A senior Syrian Kurdish official said on Sunday that the region's Kurdish authorities and the Syrian government had reached a deal for the Syrian army to enter Afrin to face the Turkish military. On Monday, Syria's state television said Damascus-backed forces would reach Afrin "within hours."

Meanwhile, the U.S.-backed People's Protection Units (YPG) have denied reaching an agreement with Damascus over Syrian troops being deployed to Afrin to fend off a Turkish offensive. "There is no agreement. There is only a call from us for the Syrian army to come in and protect the borders," YPG spokesman Nouri Mahmoud was quoted by



Reuters as saying on Monday. The announcement came several hours after Syria's official SANA news agency reported that government-backed "popular forces will arrive in Afrin in the next few hours to support the steadfastness of its people in confronting the aggression which Turkish regime forces have launched on the region."

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, however, claimed that the Syrian forces had not entered the region yet, and that it was unclear whether they would.

Ankara has said it would confront Syrian government forces if they came to the region. Syrian President Bashar

al-Assad has harshly denounced the Turkish incursion as an act of aggression. Ankara has threatened to expand the operation to the nearby city of Manbij, which is also controlled by the Kurdish militants, and beyond to the Iraqi border.

Reuters, however, reported that the Turkish military and its allies had "made limited progress" in more than a month that has passed since the onset of their attacks.

The agency said the allies had advanced in no more than 10 percent of Afrin's area "far away from Turkey's initial target" of clearing out an expanse reaching as far as 30 kilometers (18 miles) from the Turkish border.

Hashd al-Sha'abi vows revenge for ISIL ambush



A senior commander of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) has vowed "revenge" after 27 members of its troops were killed in a ISIL (Daesh) terrorist group ambush.

Hadi al-Ameri made the remark on Monday at a military airfield in Baghdad where the bodies of the killed PMUs were being flown in, he further called on security forces to be vigilant, stressing that "the war against terrorism is not over yet."

Late on Sunday, the PMU fighters, commonly known by the Arabic name Hashd al-Sha'abi, were killed when the remnants of the Daesh terrorist group staged an ambush on their convoy in the country's oil-rich northern province of Kirkuk.

Hashd al-Sha'abi said in a statement that the attack took place in the al-Saadounya area, southwest of the provincial capital city of Kirkuk, when the voluntary forces were conducting overnight raids. The assailants were disguised in army uniforms and pretended to man a fake checkpoint.

Brigadier General Yahya Rasool, an Iraqi military spokesman, announced that Daesh "sleepers cells" were behind the attack and that Iraqi troops are currently searching the area to locate the perpetrators.

The Daesh Takfiri terrorist group later claimed responsibility for the attack. Karim al-Nouri, a Hashd al-Sha'abi spokesman, described the attack as a "heinous crime," and called for thorough scrutiny for those returning to their liberated areas.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's office also released a statement offering condolences to family members of the victims. It also announced that orders to hunt down those responsible for the recent attack and other sleeper cells have been issued.

At least 11 of the troops killed in the ambush were from the southern city of Basra, where three days of mourning has been announced. Meanwhile, a mass funeral has been held for those killed in the attack in the country's southern city of Basra.

Hashd al-Sha'abi is an Iraqi state-sponsored umbrella organization composed of some 40 groups, which are mainly Shia Muslims. The force reportedly numbers more than 100,000 fighters. Iraqi authorities say there are between 25,000 and 30,000 Sunni tribal fighters within its ranks in addition to Kurdish Izadi and Christian units.

The fighters have played a major role in the liberation of Daesh-held areas to the south, northeast and north of the Iraqi capital Baghdad, ever since the terrorists launched an offensive in the country in June 2014.

Last November, the Iraqi Parliament approved a law giving full legal status to Hashd al-Sha'abi fighters. It recognized the PMU as part of the national armed forces, placed the volunteer fighters under the command of the prime minister, and granted them the right to receive salaries and pensions like the regular army and police forces. On December 9, 2017, Abadi declared the end of military operations against the Daesh terrorist group in the Arab country. The Iraqi forces took control of eastern Mosul in January 2017 after 100 days of fighting, and launched the battle in the west on February 19 last year.

Daesh began a terror campaign in Iraq in 2014, overrunning vast swathes in lightning attacks.

(Source: Press TV)

Tensions rise in Pakistan over Saudi deployment

Pakistan's Senate has blasted the government for the secrecy surrounding Islamabad's recent decision to deploy troops to Saudi Arabia, describing explanations by the Pakistani defense minister given to Senate representatives as insufficient and a "lollipop to a child."

Defense Minister Khurram Dastagir appeared at the Senate on Monday to explain the government's reasons for deploying the troops to Saudi Arabia. Pakistani lawmakers had questioned that decision, saying it might violate a parliamentary resolution that urges neutrality in the Saudi-led war on Yemen.

A resolution was unanimously passed at Pakistan's parliament in April 2015, stipulating that the Asian country had to stay neutral in the war on Yemen "so as to be able to play a proactive diplomatic role to end the crisis."

Dastagir, however, failed to provide details about the mission, causing more dissatisfaction at the Senate.

Senate Chairman said he rejected Dastagir's briefing to the upper house of the parliament after the minister said he could not divulge the "operational details" of the deployment.

Chairman Raza Rabbani told the defense minister that he could not hide any information. "The House is not satisfied with your response," he told Dastagir.

Dastagir said that it was Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi who had green-lighted the deployment.

Rabbani further said, "The parliament found out [about the deployment] through a press release. The executive has itself rubbed parliament's nose in the dirt."

"Why don't we proceed against you and the prime minister over contempt of parliament?" Rabbani asked Dastagir alarmingly.

The defense minister attempted to give the Senate assurance that the Pakistani troops would not be deployed outside of Saudi Arabia. Chairman Rabbani said this information was already known. "Don't give us a lollipop... we are not children," Rabbani told him, insisting that they wanted to know the details of the deployment, including whether they were sent to the Yemeni border. "Don't ask where in Saudi Arabia the troops will be deployed," Dastagir replied, a possible indication that the troops will indeed be deployed on the Saudi-Yemeni border.

Dastagir also revealed for the first time since the decision was announced that a total of 1,000 Pakistani troops were being sent to the Saudi Kingdom on a training mission, in addition to the 1,600 Pakistani soldiers who were already stationed in Saudi Arabia.

(Source: agencies)

Lebanon army vows to confront any Israeli aggression

Lebanon's army has warned Israel against staging a new war on the country, vowing that it will use every available means to deter such an act of aggression.

"I affirm again our categorical rejection of the Israeli enemy infringing on Lebanon's sovereignty and its sacred right to exploit all its economic resources," Lebanese army chief General Joseph Aoun said on Twitter on Tuesday.

"The army will not spare any method available to confront any Israeli aggression, whatever that costs," he wrote.

Earlier this month, Lebanese President Michel Aoun said he had ordered the country's armed forces to confront any attempt by Israel to undermine Lebanon's sovereignty.

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

The move angered Israel which claims sovereignty over the ninth block.

The Tel Aviv regime has also escalated the tensions by announcing plans for a wall to

isolate the occupied Palestinian lands from Lebanese territories.

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

Tel Aviv says the construction will go ahead as planned.

The Israeli regime has waged three wars on Lebanon — in 1982, 2000, and 2006. It

has also carried out assassinations in Lebanese territory.

Since its establishment in 1985, the Hezbollah resistance group has helped the army defend Lebanon against Israel's 2000 and 2006 wars.

The resistance movement warned Israel against the "grave consequences" of the regime's next war, vowing to defend the rights of Lebanon in oil and gas exploration in the eastern Mediterranean region against any new Israeli aggression.

(Source: al Alam)

Israeli police name Netanyahu confidants arrested in graft probe



Israeli police have revealed the names of two close associates of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who were arrested at the weekend as part of a wide-ranging corruption probe.

The police identified the pair as Nir Hefetz, a former Netanyahu spokesman, and Shlomo Filber, the ex-director of the communications ministry under Netanyahu. The two are suspected of promoting regulation worth hundreds of millions of dollars to Israel's Bezeq telecom company in return for favorable coverage of Netanyahu at the Walla news site.

Five others central figures at Bezeq, including the company's controlling shareholder, Shaul Elovitch, have also been arrested on suspicion of giving bribes.

Hefetz, Filber and Elovitch will all remain in custody until Thursday, Israeli daily Haaretz reported.

"As part of the investigation, suspicions accumulated on felonies concerning ethics, fraud, money laundering and securities violations, conducted over extended periods of time, frequently and systematically as part of relationships between Bezeq executives and public servants and their associates," the Israeli police said on Tuesday. The detentions came as part of Case 4000, which revolves around the alleged quid-pro-quo relations between Netanyahu and Elovitch.

The Israeli premier has not yet been named as a suspect in the case but is expected to be questioned.

The new probe comes days after the Israeli police told the attorney general that there was sufficient evidence for Netanyahu to be indicted for bribery, fraud and breach of trust in two separate cases.

Netanyahu is suspected of having received luxury gifts from businessmen overseas in Case 1000.

He is also being investigated in Case 2000 for an alleged media bribery scheme to help Yedioth Ahronoth newspaper against its competitor Israel Hayom in return for favorable coverage of the premier.

Another bribery scandal, called the "submarine affair" or Case 3000, also involves Netanyahu's associates.

Israelis have been holding weekly protests to demand Netanyahu's resignation over the corruption scandals, but the prime minister has described the events as part of efforts meant to topple him "at any cost."

(Source: Daily Star)

Performance of TEJARAT BANK in the Field of Social Responsibility Since the Beginning of Current Year in 1396

Measures Taken to Reduce Poverty



1,867

298,560,000,000 IRR

Imam Khomeini Relief Committee (IKRC) Interest-Free Loans
No. 1,867, Amounting to 298,560,000,000 Rials

192

72,298,000,000 IRR

Blood Money Headquarters Interest-Free Loans (Unintentional Crimes)
No. 192, Amounting to 72,298,000,000 Rials

684

98,244,000,000 IRR

State Welfare Organization (SWO) Interest-Free Loans
No. 684, Amounting to 98,244,000,000 Rials

TEJARAT BANK

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	98148.5
IFX	1098.15

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	46,680 rials
EUR	57,040 rials
GBP	67,700 rials
AED	13,110 rials

Source: mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

WTI	61.96/b
Brent	65.16/b
OPEC Basket	62.41/b
Gold	\$1,340.05/oz
Silver	\$16.59/oz
Platinum	\$1,007.65/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Transit income up 20%

1 → In last September, Iran announced a surprise rise of around 24 percent in transit of goods through its territories during the first five months of this calendar year (March 21-August 22, 2017).

Figures released by Iran's Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization (IRMTO) showed that above 4.17 million tons of goods had been moved through 32 active land and maritime borders over the period.

German investor sentiment slips as market volatility takes toll

A surge in market volatility took a toll on German investor confidence in February, damping the level of optimism.

The ZEW Center for European Economic Research in Mannheim said on Tuesday that its index of investor expectations declined to 17.8 from 20.4 in January. Economists in a Bloomberg survey predicted a drop to 16.



While a slide in global equity prices dragged down Germany's benchmark stock index by as much as 11 percent in the past weeks, the country's economy has been enjoying a strong run, supported by domestic spending and solid global trade. The Bundesbank says the expansion is booming, and industry continues to constitute a driving force of the upswing.

Bundesbank President Jens Weidmann has said the market fluctuations shouldn't be a cause for concern.

"The latest survey results continue to show a positive outlook for the German economy," ZEW President Achim Wambach said in a statement. "The assessment of the current economic situation is still on a very high level and the economy is expected to improve in the coming six months."

ZEW's measure for current conditions in Germany slid in February to 92.3 from 95.2. Expectations in the euro area decreased to 29.3 from 31.8. (Source: Bloomberg)

UK factories rein in price expectations from a 34-year high

UK manufacturers scaled back their expectations of output prices in February as the pound gained.

Expected prices, production and export orders are still well above long-term averages, though have slipped from the highs seen at the end of last year, the Confederation of British Industry reported on Tuesday. The measure of average prices seen in the next three months fell to 25 from 40, the highest since 1984.



The pound has appreciated more than 3 percent this year against the dollar, curbing the cost of imported goods and taking some of the edge off what the Bank of England has called a "sweet spot" for exporters. The 2016 decision to leave the European Union pushed the currency lower, but trading arrangements have yet to change.

Output increased in 16 out of 17 manufacturing sectors, led by food, drink and tobacco, and transport equipment, the CBI said. Respondents to the survey of 397 manufacturers, conducted between Jan. 26 and Feb. 13, expect production to slow somewhat in the next three months.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Intl. renewable energy exhibition to kick off today

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Tehran desk is going to be hosting the 10th International Exhibition of Renewable Energy and Energy Saving on February 21-24, ISNA reported.

As the country's most important event in this area, the exhibition is going to host numerous exhibitors both domestic and from foreign countries at the Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds.

On January 30, Iranian deputy energy minister put the country's current solar and wind farms capacity at 400 megawatts

(MW) saying that the figure will increase to 1.4 gigawatts (GW) in the next Iranian calendar year (March 2018-March 2019).

Homayoon Haeri said: "At the moment, Iran's power capacity is 80,000 MW and renewables have the potential to make up at least 20,000 MG of this number".

The official noted that the country plans to add 1,000 megawatts (MW) or 1 gigawatt (GW) of new renewable power capacity every year over the next five years.

Stock market index sinks 669 points in a month

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE)'s main index (TEDPIX) lost 669 points, or 0.7 percent, to 98,148 in the tenth Iranian calendar month Bahman (January 21-February 19), Tasnim news agency reported on Tuesday.

As reported, 22.278 billion securities worth 63.053 trillion rials (about \$1.355 billion) were traded through 1.622 million deals in the stock market.

Number of securities and number of trades show five percent fall and four



percent growth, respectively, while the worth of trades indicates ten percent rise compared to the previous month.

Australia's central bank says wage growth is needed for inflation recovery

Australia's central bank mapped out a steady course for rates at its first meeting of 2018 this month, and indicated a pick-up in wage growth was necessary to ensure a much-needed recovery in inflation.

Minutes of the Reserve Bank of Australia's (RBA) January meeting showed policy makers had become more confident about the domestic outlook, thanks in part to a synchronized upturn in the global economy.

However they needed to balance anemic inflation and slow income growth against high household debt, meaning interest rates were set to be at record lows for a while yet.

The RBA has left rates at 1.50 percent since August 2016, the longest spell of stable policy since the early 1990s.

That had helped in reducing the unemployment rate to 5.5 percent and bringing inflation closer to its 2 to 3 percent target band, minutes of the meeting showed.

"Further progress on these goals was expected over the period ahead but the increase in inflation was likely to occur only gradually as the economy strengthened," the RBA said.

"There was still a risk that growth in consumption might turn out to be weaker than forecast if household income growth were to increase by less than expected."

A major source of uncertainty is around consumer spending, which has been under pressure from record-high household debt and sluggish wage growth.

Just last week, RBA Governor Philip Lowe said he would like to see annual wage growth accelerate to around 3.5 percent, from the current 2 percent.

That seems difficult though as many firms remain reluctant to pay more, in part because they cannot raise prices.

As a result, recent wage deals across sectors, known as enterprise agreements, paid smaller increases than the ones

Iran-Uzbekistan Joint Economic Committee meeting slated for spring

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) Mojtaba Khosrotaaj, said Iran-Uzbekistan Joint Economic Committee meeting is slated to be held within early next Iranian calendar year (which begins on March 21).

Khosrotaaj met with Bakhodir Abdullaev, the Uzbek ambassador in Tehran, to discuss the holding of the joint committee meeting, the portal of TPO reported on Monday.

The meeting will cover fundamental areas such as banking, transportation and



transit, preferential tariffs, development of the tourism industry, and establishment of airlines between the two countries.

China would not be the only country hurt by U.S. steel tariffs

Heavy tariffs and quotas on steel will hurt China, but other countries may well bear the brunt of such measures.

"The fact is that China does export a lot of steel and aluminum to the United States, but frankly, Canada, Brazil, Mexico, other countries import more steel than does China," said Max Baucus, former U.S. ambassador to China, which is the world's top overall steel exporter.

On Friday, the Commerce Department recommended imposing heavy tariffs or quotas on foreign producers of steel and aluminum in the interest of national security, following a trade investigation of imports. The metals are used in a wide range of industrial applications including infrastructure and cars.

President Donald Trump and his administration announced the investigation into

steel and aluminum importation in April. It sought to determine whether the imports posed a threat to the country's national security.

The recommendations call for tariffs on multiple countries, although Trump could determine that specific nations should be exempt, based on the economic or security interests of the United States.

The president could also consider a country's willingness to work with the United States to address global excess capacity and other challenges facing the U.S. aluminum and steel industries.

The U.S. is the world's largest steel importing country. The top shipper of steel into the U.S. is Canada. Large Asian exporters — and American allies — that may be implicated include South Korea and Japan.

According to Commerce Department data,

Iran Sea Expo 2018 to be held in late Feb.

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran's 5th International Maritime Organizations Exhibition (Iran Sea Expo 2018) is due to be held on February 24-26 at the permanent exhibitions center of southern port city of Bandar Abbas.

Aiming for the representation of Iran's maritime and ports capabilities and achievements, the exhibition will be hosting 53 renowned domestic exhibitors along with foreign companies from four different countries, Tasnim news agency reported.

Iran Sea Expo 2018 will be held with the support of the Ports & Maritime Or-



ganization (PMO) as the Secretary of the Supreme Council of Senior Managers of Maritime Organizations.

China was not among the top 10 sources of U.S. steel imports in the period between January to September 2017.

China's Commerce Ministry said the U.S. investigation report was "baseless." Beijing will take necessary measures to protect its interests if the final decision affects the country, the ministry added.

South Korea's trade ministry said in a statement that it had met with executives from steelmakers, and agreed to make outreach efforts until Washington reaches a final decision, Reuters reported.

Separately, Seoul also plans to take a dispute to the World Trade Organization against the United States for imposing high anti-dumping duties on the country's steel products in 2016.

Baucus told CNBC it's more effective to target the issue of over-capacity together with

other countries than focus on punitive actions like tariffs that will lead to trade disputes.

"It's clear that's there's over capacity in the world ... it's also clear that China is very culpable here. China is the culprit, China is the country that causes the most overcapacity. I think the answer to this is basically: Go after the problem, go after over capacity," Baucus said.

U.S. steel stocks jumped immediately after the Commerce Department report.

Nomura said in a note on Tuesday that if Trump accepts all the recommended measures, U.S. steelmakers will become more profitable. The move will also hasten consolidation and streamlining in non-U.S. countries.

Trump must respond to the reports by April 11 and 19 for steel and aluminum, respectively. (Source: CNBC)



According to Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian, the country plans to

generate 7 gigawatts (GW) of electricity from renewable sources by 2030.

Fishery exports up 40% in 10 months yr/yr

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Fishery exports from Iran rose 40 percent during the ten-month period ended on January 20, 2018, compared to the same period of time in the past year, according to a fishery official.

Hassan Salehi, the head of Iran's Fisheries Organization, also said that fishery imports have fallen 10 percent during the ten-month period, Mehr news agency reported.

Iran plans to increase the value of



its fishery exports up to \$450-\$500 million by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2018).

Japan hopes U.S. returns to TPP but overhaul tough

Japan welcomes a positive stance by the United States toward an Asia-Pacific trade pact, but indicated that altering the agreement at this point would be very difficult.

Japan's chief negotiator for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), Kazuyoshi Umemoto, told Reuters that an agreement among the remaining 11 member nations, set to be signed next month, may have had an impact on the United States.

"We have been working, motivated by hopes that the United States would return to the trade pact soon. We welcome it becoming positive toward the TPP," Umemoto said on Tuesday.

Japan took the lead in forging the revised trade pact after President Donald Trump pulled the United States out of an earlier 12-nation version last year, saying he wanted to seek one-on-one deals that would be more beneficial to the U.S.

Eleven countries finalised the pact in January and are expected to sign it in Chile on March 8.

Last month, Trump told the World Economic Forum in Switzerland that it was possible Washington might return to the pact if it got a better deal.

"It probably was high-profile that we reached the agreement among the 11 nations since it was right before the Davos meeting. That probably had a certain impact," Umemoto said.



Japan's chief negotiator for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), Kazuyoshi Umemoto, attends a news conference at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan in Tokyo, Japan, February 20, 2018.

The final text of the revised TPP, now called Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement For Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), is expected to be published on Wednesday.

The new deal does not make changes in the area of market

access agreed on by the original 12 members and minimized the number of rule-related items that are frozen, he noted.

"Still, it took us half a year to reach the agreement (for the TPP 11) with intensive talks," he said, when asked whether there was room to reopen talks to lure Washington back.

Asked about suggestions Britain might join the trade bloc after it leaves the European Union, Umemoto said any country which endorses the agreement and is interested in joining would be welcome regardless of its geographical location.

Later on Tuesday, Umemoto told a news conference he hopes the TPP 11 will become effective during the first half of 2019 after at least six member nations complete their domestic procedures.

Asked about Canada, which showed resistance to a final agreement in November when ministers from the 11 countries gathered in Vietnam, Umemoto said he expects Ottawa will sign the deal in March.

"From my experience, I wish I could say 100 percent. But maybe 99.99999 percent sure. I'm sure Canada will sign... Mr. (Justin) Trudeau talked about the TPP in Davos and he sounded very committed," he said.

(Source: Reuters)

Oil markets mixed as U.S crude, Brent move in opposite directions

Oil markets were split on Tuesday, with U.S. crude still carrying momentum from Friday's gains due to a holiday on Monday while international Brent prices eased.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were at \$62.31 a barrel at 0740 GMT, up 63 cents, or 1 percent, from their last settlement.

A holiday in the United States on Monday meant that Friday's gains were being pushed into Tuesday for WTI, traders said.

Ongoing supply reductions from Canada to the United States due to pipeline reductions were supporting WTI, traders said.

Outside North America, Brent crude eased on the back of a dip in Asian stocks and a stronger dollar, which potentially curbs demand as it makes fuel more expensive for countries using other currencies domestically.

Brent crude futures were at \$65.54 per barrel, down 13 cents, or 0.2 percent, from Monday's close.

The opposing price direction of the two main crude benchmarks had reduced WTI's discount to Brent, to around \$3.30 per barrel on Tuesday, down from over \$7 in late 2017.

Overall, oil markets remain well supported due to supply restraint by the Organization of



the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which started last year in order to draw down excess global inventories.

OPEC Secretary-General Mohammad Barkindo said on Monday the organization registered 133 percent compliance with agreed

output reduction targets in January.

Global oil demand for 2018 is estimated to grow 1.6 million barrels per day due to an "encouraging environment", Barkindo added.

"OPEC and Russia continue to support the production cuts that are due to expire at the

end of this year, and they assure markets that there will be an orderly ramp up of production once the cuts expire," said William O'Loughlin, analyst at Rivkin Securities.

Saudi Arabia - not least in an attempt to give the planned listing of its state-owned oil giant Saudi Aramco - a boost, is keen for Russia and other producers to keep withholding supplies to prop up prices.

However, soaring U.S. production is threatening to erode OPEC's efforts.

Last week, the amount of U.S. oil rigs drilling for new production rose for a fourth straight week to 798, in an indication that U.S. crude output, already at a record 10.27 million bpd, may rise further.

The United States late last year became the world's second biggest oil producers, only slightly behind Russia and ahead of top exporter Saudi Arabia.

"If it was astonishing that they (the United States) ramped up production in a \$50 per barrel market, what makes the market think they won't carry on when we are in the mid \$60s," asked Matt Stanley, a fuel broker at Freight Investor Services in Dubai.

(Source: Reuters)

Shale oil will contribute to future crude price instability

The consensus view that crude oil prices will range around \$60 a barrel in coming years, with flexible U.S. shale oil acting as a "swing producer" to prevent spikes, is comforting.

Neither the oil industry nor governments, consumers and investors have enjoyed the return of boom-bust oil prices over the last 15 years.

But \$60 is no more likely to be a "new normal" than \$100 was thought to be five years ago.

Recent history, shale's intrinsic attributes, and looming supply and demand trends strongly suggest shale oil is likelier to contribute to price instability than dampen it.

It is crucial to distinguish between short cycle and swing production.

Short cycle shale production ebbs and flows faster than conventional oil production — quarters instead of years.

But U.S. shale production is comprised of many dozens of highly idiosyncratic public and private companies, each competing with each other to maximize reserves and production.

Shale's shorter cycle ebb and flow can stabilize prices, but only coincidentally and depending on prevailing, broader market fundamentals.

For instance, shale oil's galloping arrival after 2010 was fortuitous, coming just in time to offset a tightening market — exacerbated by the disruption of Libyan supplies — and helping cap oil prices around \$100 a barrel.

But three years later, shale's relentless growth contributed to oil's shocking bust from \$100 to below \$30 after OPEC producers declined to accommodate shale by cutting their production.

True swing production is a very different animal: swing producers comprise a relatively small number of government-sanctioned entities controlling the bulk of low-cost wells that collude under a policy mandate to stabilize oil prices.

Historical examples include the Texas Railroad Commission and other oil states, Seven Sisters, and OPEC. Swing producers subordinate profit maximization to price stability and bear the costs of holding idle or spare production capacity to contend with disruptions and unexpected demand surges.

They adjust production proactively, at lightning speed by oil industry standards — weeks — and indefinitely to reduce price volatility and anchor long-term price expectations.

Shale has unquestionably impacted global crude oil prices, quality mix, and trade flows. But shale is too small, too slow, and too competitive (if shale chief executives tried to collude, they would face prison) to play the swing producer role. Other than abhorring boom-bust price cycles, shale and swing producers share little in common.

Looking ahead, shale is unlikely to sustainably grow enough to quench the world's raging thirst for oil. Three years of lower oil prices have boosted demand, and the vaunted energy transition from oil to electric vehicles will arrive much later than advertised.

A world economy growing at the nearly 4 percent rate the IMF projects will require nearly 2m barrels a day of net supply growth per year, which means adding 4-5m b/d of new gross supply considering declines from existing fields. Even if shale grows 1m b/d annually, it will not unilaterally meet global supply needs.

Thus, barring an economic downturn, by early in the next decade the world economy will need but lack new oil production from longer-cycle conventional projects cancelled or delayed since the 2014 bust.

(Source: Financial Times)

Iraqi oil minister to visit Turkey: statement

Iraqi Oil Minister Jabar al-Luaibi will visit Turkey at the end of the week at the invitation of his Turkish counterpart to discuss the resumption of oil exports through Turkey's Ceyhan port, the Iraqi oil ministry said in a statement on Monday.

Oil exports from Iraq's north have been halted since Iraqi forces took control of the Bai Hasan and Avana oilfields north-west of Kirkuk, after Kurdish Peshmerga fighters pulled out from the region.

Oil minister Luaibi's visit to Turkey will target reaching an agreement to resume shipping Iraqi crude "exclusively through Iraq's state oil marketer SOMO", said oil ministry spokesman Asim Jihad.

Iraqi oil officials accuse Kurdish authorities of not responding to requests made by the oil ministry to use the Kurdish pipeline to resume exports from Kirkuk.

The Kurdish region operates a pipeline that connects to the twin Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline at Khabur on the border with Turkey.

Iraq plans to build a new export pipeline from the Kirkuk oilfields which will replace an old and severely damaged section of the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline. It will start from oilfields near Kirkuk and extend to the Fish-Khabur border area with Turkey.

(Source: Reuters)

Canada's oil crisis continues to worsen

Canadian oil producers can't get a break. First it was the pipelines — there are not enough of them to carry the crude from Alberta's oil sands to export markets. This pipeline capacity problem has been forcing producers to pay higher rates for railway transportation, which has naturally hurt their margins in no small way. Now, there is a shortage of rail cars as well.

The situation is going from bad to worse for Canadian producers who can't seem to catch a break. Canadian railway operators are fighting harsh winter weather and finding it hard to supply enough cars to move both crude oil from Alberta and grain from the Prairies.

The harsh weather is just the latest factor, however. Before that, there was the 45-percent surge in demand for rail cars from the oil industry, Bloomberg reports, citing Canadian National Railway. The surge happened in the third quarter of last year, and Canadian National's chief executive Ghislain Houle says that it took the company "a little bit by surprise." This surprise has led to "pinch points" on the railway operator's network, further aggravating an already bad situation.

As a result, crude oil remains in Alberta and prices fall further because Alberta is where the local crude is priced, Bloomberg's Jen Skerritt and Robert Tuttle note. In fact, Canadian crude is currently trading at the biggest discount to West Texas Intermediate in four years, at \$30.60 per barrel. The blow is particularly severe as it comes amid improving oil prices elsewhere driven by the stock market recovery.

(Source: oilprice.com)



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A placeholder prime minister departs. What comes next?

By Mohammed Ademo & Hassen Hussein

A day after Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn of Ethiopia abruptly resigned, the country declared a state of emergency on Friday. The second such decree in less than two years, martial law was reimposed amid reports of a bitter succession struggle, a worrying development for a country buckling under years of political unrest.

Hailemariam came to power in 2012 after the death of Meles Zenawi, who had presided over the country since 1991 with an iron fist. Hailemariam was largely seen as an ineffective placeholder and from the outset, he faced difficulties, lacking a political base of his own. Hailing from a small minority group in the south of the country, the Wolayta, he quickly fell out with Ethiopia's three dominant ethnic groups — the Oromo, the Amhara and the Tigrayans.

Neither the grass roots nor the leaders of the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front were particularly enamored of him, but they couldn't agree on an alternative. In theory, the party, in power for nearly 27 years, is a coalition of four ethnic-based parties. In reality, it is dominated by ethnic Tigrayans, who, despite making up only 7 percent of the country's population, control the economy, the military and the security sectors.

Hailemariam eventually became a man without allies; his resignation was hardly a surprise, it just came earlier than anticipated. He was widely expected to be replaced later this year when the EPRDF holds its congress.

At least one million people in Ethiopia were internally displaced in 2017, according to the United Nations, amid widespread unrest and an economy in free-fall. In a December meeting, the party's executive committee blamed Hailemariam's poor leadership for the country's and the party's woes — thereby sealing his fate. As the humanitarian, political and security crisis turned into calamity, he took personal responsibility for failing to stabilize the country rocked by stubborn protests from Oromo and Amhara ethnic groups, who together make up two-thirds of the population.

These protests, initially started by the Oromo, Ethiopia's largest ethnic group, began in 2014 over opposition to a controversial plan to expand the jurisdiction of the capital, Addis Ababa. Security forces responded to peaceful protests with excessive force, provoking outrage and further protests, which eventually spread to the Amhara region. This culminated in the declaration in October 2016 of a state of emergency lasting 10 months. Tens of thousands were arrested in the ensuing crackdown. However, as soon as martial law was lifted in August 2017, the protesters, mostly young, returned to the streets, demanding regime change and the release of political prisoners, estimated to number in the tens of thousands.

Hailemariam resigned a day after some of these prisoners were released, including prominent opposition leaders and journalists. (More than 6,000 detainees have been freed in the past month in a government amnesty that Hailemariam and his party promised in January.) The pardoned leaders were met with euphoric freedom rallies and homecoming celebrations across the Oromia region and in the capital, Addis Ababa. The outpouring of support for the freed leaders showed that the country can no longer be governed as it has been for the past 27 years — in the palm of one party.

More than Hailemariam's departure, what is important is how the transition will shake out. The EPRDF needs a leader who can unify the party, gain popular legitimacy and calm widening political and ethnic tensions. Moreover, beyond the change of guard at the top, a major policy shift is needed. Repression has outlived its usefulness. Unfortunately, the restoration of martial law suggests that the EPRDF is still not prepared to learn its lesson. But continued authoritarianism in the face of fierce and determined protests will be futile.

To end the succession battle, the choice is clear: The new reformist leaders of the Oromo People's Democratic Organization, led by Lemma Megersa, enjoy substantial public support. Everywhere they go, Lemma and his entourage receive a hero's welcome, on a par with that received by the just-released opposition leaders — itself a significant change for a party whose support is often either bought or coerced. The OPDO's youthful leaders relate easily to a generation now in revolt. Their support base cuts across political, ethnic and religious fault lines partly because they adopted the demands of the protesters and made bold commitments to democratization and unity.

Still, the transition is unlikely to be straightforward, as the imposition of a new state of emergency vividly demonstrates. The EPRDF Council, which has the power to choose Hailemariam's replacement, is expected to meet shortly to pick a successor. The Constitution stipulates that the prime minister be a member of the federal Parliament. This could be a source of further complication: Lemma isn't a member of Parliament. There would have to be a snap election or an extraordinary political decision to facilitate his rise. That is unlikely in the short run, but not impossible — if the party so chooses.

The powerful military and intelligence services have to agree to such an arrangement and help pave the way for the emergence of a credible and competent leadership. In the end, this may be the deciding factor: The top military leaders, who are heavily involved in the country's construction sector and implicated in rampant corruption and gross human rights abuses, have much at stake and may opt to resist change and maintain the current system. The declaration of martial law, which will put the country effectively under military command, does not bode well for the reform process that Hailemariam cited as a reason for his early exit.

Regardless, the winds of change sweeping across Africa have arrived in Ethiopia. The country's future is shrouded in so much doubt and uncertainty, but it is impossible to imagine business as usual. The status quo is no longer tenable. And Ethiopia's allies, including the United States, its biggest donor, can help mitigate these risks by pressing the regime to choose the correct path.

The EPRDF can't do it alone. In his televised address on Thursday, Hailemariam emphasized the need for a national consensus, but consensus is not a single-party affair. The country's next leader must chart an inclusive transition that encompasses good-faith negotiation with the opposition. Otherwise Ethiopia is staring at years of instability.

(Source: The NYT)

Abu Dhabi's quest for an eighth emirate in Yemen

South Yemen, with its strategically important location and infrastructure, could enable the rise of the UAE as a global energy superpower

By Jakob Reimann

The recent capture by southern Yemeni separatists of the port city of Aden was just the latest twist in a brutal war that has killed more than 10,000 people since the start of a Saudi-led coalition's relentless bombing campaign on Houthi in March 2015.

As the war grinds on, the United Arab Emirates has been increasingly breaking ranks with the Saudi coalition to pursue its own agenda. The most recent events illustrate once again that the UAE and Saudi Arabia are standing on hostile sides in this complex, multi-layered war.

■ Network of torture prisons

While Riyadh has been reluctant to send ground forces to Yemen, the UAE has had large-scale ground troops there for quite some time. The Emiratis played a key role in recapturing the port city of Aden from the Houthis in July 2015, and have played a leading role in the fight against al-Qaeda in southern Yemen for more than two years. Abu Dhabi is responsible for training tens of thousands of Yemeni troops in the south and importing hundreds of highly skilled mercenaries from South America to fight on its behalf.

The UAE is operating a network of torture prisons in southern Yemen, where thousands of terror suspects are "disappearing" and where, in the strict division of labor, the "UAE tortures and U.S. interrogates". The UAE has well and truly established a parallel security structure in southern Yemen, whose local troops solely answer to Abu Dhabi.

The UAE's Yemen presence should be viewed from a meta-perspective. By controlling strategically important trade hubs, the Emiratis are pursuing the establishment of trans-regional structures in the Middle East and beyond in order to further expand their fossil-fuel trade to Europe and North America. To that end, Abu Dhabi is forcing its way into the region's energy and security infrastructure at a rapid pace: from Eritrea and Somaliland to Cyprus and Libya's Benghazi.

In Yemen, these ambitions have manifested in several strategically important ways: the recapture of Perim island in the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, the transformation of the island of Socotra in the Gulf of Aden into the UAE's very own tourism and military colony, and successful efforts to gain control over a network of ports in Yemen.

■ Emiratis as occupiers

Emirati troops, however, are mostly regarded as occupiers. President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi has accused them of behaving more like an occupying power



In August 2017, emails from two former high-ranking U.S. officials leaked to Middle East Eye showed that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman “wants out” of the costly war in Yemen, which he had started more than two years earlier.

than a force of liberation.

Since the beginning of the war, the call for a division into North and South Yemen has been getting louder; however, all major parties to the conflict, at least officially, have stressed their commitment to the territorial integrity of Yemen. But for over a year now, secessionist forces have been gaining momentum domestically, with strong support from the UAE.

The UAE is ambitiously pursuing the project of a divided Yemen. The rift became apparent in all its absurdity when the Emiratis denied Hadi entry to Aden, his hometown - a memorable symbol of the balance of power in the country.

After investing billions in infrastructure and arming separatist militias in southern Yemen, the UAE is now harvesting its secessionist crops. The Emiratis have in mind a vassal province – a kind of eighth emirate of South Yemen – which, with its strategically important geography and provision of energy infrastructure, could enable the rise of the UAE as a global energy superpower.

■ The fall of Aden

Abu Dhabi's key tool to achieve that goal has been the Southern Transitional Council

(STC) formed in May 2017. After Hadi ignored the STC's ultimatum for the dismissal of Prime Minister Ahmed bin Daghr, whom it accused of “rampant corruption”, fierce fighting erupted in Aden last month, killing more than 36 people and wounding hundreds more. The STC ultimately took control of the de facto capital, Aden.

Flags of the former South Yemen were raised at the entrance gate of the presidential palace. Daghr spoke of a “coup” while a high-ranking STC official announced that the “uprising” would continue until the Hadi government was “toppled”.

The STC is backed by the UAE through arms deliveries, financial support and military advice. The council's leader, the former governor of Aden, Aidarus al-Zoubaidi, is known to have been under the UAE's patronage for years.

The strategic military component of this collaboration manifested in the conquest of the military base of Hadi's presidential guard in January. Only after Emirati fighter jets bombarded the base and weakened troops loyal to Hadi was the facility able to be seized by STC forces on the ground. The UAE acts as the STC's air force.

■ Relentless pursuit of energy goals

The most recent events illustrate once again that the UAE and Saudi Arabia are standing on hostile sides in this complex, multi-layered war. While the Saudis stand firmly by Hadi's side, a senior Emirati security official openly calls for his overthrow.

In August 2017, emails from two former high-ranking U.S. officials leaked to Middle East Eye showed that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman “wants out” of the costly war in Yemen, which he had started more than two years earlier. Apparently realizing that Hadi's reinstatement is an unreachable goal, Riyadh has shifted its attention to the very limited task of securing its southern border against the Houthis.

Abu Dhabi, in turn, is not really interested in the Houthis. From the outset, the fight against them was the pretext to set a military foot in southern Yemen. The UAE's sole interest is controlling the 2,000 kilometres of Yemeni coast – a central pillar of Abu Dhabi's plans to become a global energy superpower, which it is relentlessly pursuing instead of negotiating the legitimate co-use of Yemeni ports and investments in the country's energy infrastructure.

(Source: The Middle East Eye)

Pakistani guard returns to Saudi Arabia

By Bruce Riedel

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, often referred to by his initials MBS, is arranging the deployment of a Pakistani praetorian guard to the kingdom. Its size and purpose is unclear, but it is a revival of a military practice from the 1980s designed to protect the royal family from enemies at home and abroad.

The Pakistani military announced Feb. 15 that it would deploy a force to Saudi Arabia to assist and train Saudi forces. The Pakistani press is reporting that a composite brigade-size force will be sent. They will join 1,000 army trainers and advisers already in Saudi Arabia.

The announcement follows two trips this year to the kingdom by Pakistan Chief of Staff Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa to meet with the crown prince, who is also defense minister and the main proponent of the deployment.

In 1982, Pakistani dictator Gen. Zia ul-Haq sent a reinforced armored brigade to Saudi Arabia at the request of King Fahd. The 12th Khaled bin Walid Independent Armored Brigade was stationed near Tabuk in northwest Saudi Arabia, but its principal purpose was to be an elite fighting force to defend the monarchy from any foe at home or abroad. The Saudis paid all of the expenses of this loyal palace guard, which remained in the kingdom for more than a decade. It was named after one of Prophet Muhammad's greatest generals who defeated the Byzantine and Sassanian empires in the early expansion of Islam out of the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century.

The Pakistani announcement made it clear that the new force will operate only inside the kingdom's borders and not join the Saudi war in Yemen. Three years ago, King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud and his son pressed the Pakistani leadership very hard to join the war, but Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif refused. The Pakistani parliament voted unanimously against sending troops to join the war as popular opinion was strongly opposed to joining the Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen.

Sharif was concerned that the Saudi war plans were hastily conceived and poorly thought through. He doubted they would achieve the “decisive storm” MBS promised. Worse, they would land Pakistan in the midst of a Sunni-Shiite sectarian conflict that would alienate Pakistani Shiites at home as well as its neighbor Iran. While the Saudis are currently making a few modest advances in Yemen against the Houthis, time has proven the



The Pakistani parliament voted unanimously against sending troops to join the war as popular opinion was strongly opposed to joining the Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen.

wisdom of Sharif's doubts. The war is an expensive stalemate with enormous humanitarian consequences, and over 95 Houthi missile attacks on the kingdom have underscored how dangerous the conflict is today.

The Pakistanis clearly do not want to be drawn into Saudi Arabia's quarrels with its neighbors. For this deployment, Bajwa consulted in advance with the Turkish and Iranian ambassadors in Islamabad to inform them directly and assure both that the deployment was not a threat. Reportedly, he also secretly traveled to Doha to assure the Qatari emir that the Pakistani forces are not a danger to Qatar.

The mission of the new force is likely to remain somewhat ambiguous. The Saudis will not want to portray it as a hedge against any internal threat, and Pakistan is eager for it to have no regional dimension, so training is a safe cover.

It's also unclear whether the contingent will be connected in any way to the multinational Islamic

counterterrorism alliance that MBS has spearheaded in the kingdom. Notably, Iran is not a member of the alliance. Retired Pakistani Chief of Staff Gen. Rahul Sharif is its commander.

There is some opposition in the Pakistani legislature to the deployment, and the army leadership will be questioned about its purpose. One senator has argued that the deployment is a violation of the parliament's decision three years ago.

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are longstanding allies. The disagreement over Yemen has been a rare disruption to the decades-old relationship and one both countries have sought to minimize. Sharif has traveled to the kingdom since he lost office last year to maintain his own longtime ties to the House of Saud. A carefully designed military presence in the kingdom is in Pakistan's interest. For his part, the king is joining his predecessors in getting a Pakistani insurance policy.

(Source: Al Monitor)

Cultural considering New Silk Road: one belt one road one culture

By Vahid Pourtajrishi & Elaheh Shirvani

TEHRAN — One Belt One Road policy as Xi Jinping's initiative is not just an economic plan but a cultural one which could create an integrated and unified culture along entire the route.

The history of traditional Silk Road dates back to thousands years ago. But initiation of Xi Jinping, the president of China to introduce a new silk road in the name of One Road One Belt which includes more than 60 countries, expanded the efficiency of this route into a global and not just continental scale.

The effects of this route will not be only on economic affairs of the included states but also on their cultural conditions. This affects the coordination between these 60 countries while it is an unavoidable process. In the other hand, people of these countries have to increase at least their interrelations and trade deals with each other if they want to fulfill their economic interests from this new chance. This issue helps to increase multilateral cultural effects of the new Silk Road on cultural conditions of the concerned nations.

This paper is based on the analysis of diverse nations' cultural similarities and differences and at the same time there exists cohesion between them. Based on the Central Committee of Communist Party's (CCP) proposal in November 15, One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative was decided to be constructed in three phases with two major goals:

1. To participate actively in global economic governance and supply public goods

2. Promotion of cooperation in diverse fields of mutual interests with the countries alongside OBOR, cooperation in manufacturing equipment and building capacity in China and abroad and opening up land and sea routes to East and West.

Two points here need clarifications which are "opening up to both East and West" and "institutional Discourse".

1. Opening up to the East and West

President Jinping's Silk Road contains the Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road (MSR). The first one brings China, Central Asia, Russia and Europe (the Baltics) together and the latter passes from China to Europe and from China to the South Pacific.

OBOR initiative is a redefinition of China's Geopolitics since through OBOR China will be both a Central Asian and an Indian Ocean country. With constructing ports in Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean, China enters a "Two Ocean" era. Around peaks of Pamir, Karakorum and Himalayas, Turkish, Arab, Persian and Chinese cultures have coexisted for centuries. If you stand in the border town of Tashkorgan which is between China, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan, you come to know that China is so rich in diversity of cultures and it is difficult to differentiate Chinese and foreigners.

Opening up to East and West will speed up the formation of OBOR which will lead the global economy enter a new era. Previously Trans-Atlantic and Trans-Pacific trade played an important role in economic activities, but today by China becoming the Center of world's economy, OBOR will link China to East, Central and West Asia and Europe thus changing the definition of international economy.

China's economic development is increasingly dependent on foreign oil and gas resources and approaching almost 60 percent. Saudi Arabia, Iran, Russia, Oman, Iraq, Sudan, Kazakhstan and Kuwait are the Eight of top ten oil importing countries which are located along OBOR. Therefore, peace and stability in the Gulf countries play an important role in China's energy supply and trade.

2. Institutional Discourse

CCP has announced that in order to play a key role in international affairs, China needs a civilizational belt besides economic belt along the New Silk Road. For 37 consecutive years of economic growth in China, its Per capita GDP has increased 30 times but in 2014 there was a 7.4 percent decline in China's GDP growth. Since China is the second-largest economy center in the world and it continues to be the largest one, China needs to devise new rules for the coming years.

Establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) can be regarded as the primary step for China towards increasing its geopolitical and economic influence. The first step to raise institutional voice is to break the po-



litical, cultural and intellectual barriers that United States has created around China. China has lost the community of common destiny with its neighboring countries and countries along OBOR.

Unlike U.S. which has troops and military bases around the world, China does not have the needed military allies and bases to secure OBOR. Here one question is raised that how China will defend the thousands of billions investments in different sections of OBOR project? By changing its approach, The United States has focused more on coalition building instead of paying attention to the United Nations, UNESCO, WTO and other international organizations. To strengthen its global power and influence, the U.S. started to speed up the disintegration of the Eurasian region. Many countries along OBOR are either allies of the U.S. or they host its military bases which causes several political, economic and diplomatic obstacles for China to promote OBOR.

3. Constructing a civilizational Belt along OBOR

China has initiated OBOR based on its cultural power. Historically China managed to govern even the farthest frontiers and culturally affect the border regions. By OBOR proposal, China has started to establish new ties with its neighboring and also western countries. After 100 years of playing a passive role in the world order, China eventually decided to play an active role in world order shaping. China and countries along OBOR will engage in geopolitical and geo-economic cooperation and form a community of common destiny, interests, values, cultures and security. China in not only linked to Central and South Asia by mountains, roads, rivers, bridges and corridors but also is connected by languages, beliefs and common cultural heritage.

Since ancient times, the Silk Road culture has maintained and supported multi-nationalities. Accordingly, China needs to maintain regional and cultural relationship with the countries of the ancient Silk Road civilization which contains Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Iran.

Constructing a civilizational belt along OBOR will reshape China's geopolitical and geo-civilizational power and influence. OBOR is not only an economic channel but also it is a platform for social interaction where diverse ethnicities, religions and cultures will fuse together. The winner of the new Silk Road will be the economic leader and a leader for building a new Silk Road civilization.

The reason for Silk Road decline in the 19th century was not the emergence of the Maritime Silk Road but the "Great Game" between Russia and Great Britain. In this game, the borders in Central, West and South Asia were redrawn and artificial barriers were built at the Silk Road Passage.

By investing and building OBOR, China hopes to establish a community of common interests, destiny, values and security which ultimately forms the civilization belt. It is interesting that how the opposing and diverse elements of

Chinese culture which are Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism can merge and form a common destiny? The answer to this question lies on the 2500 years of Chinese culture which is based on middle course, loving peace, seeking calm life, respect for nature, pursuit of harmony, avoiding extremes and not involving in ethnic and religious wars.

Common Values

OBOR has nothing to do with Sino-centrism. Countries along OBOR are proud of their own cultures, religion, history and social values. China should clearly mention the goals it advocates in building OBOR and these need to be in line with everyone's interests. For this reason it should design a clear slogan for its OBOR initiative. Premier Zhou Enlai proposed a two-word slogan "harmony and benevolence" which clearly expresses the idea of peaceful coexistence. President Xi proposed "community of common interest" as the slogan to express the idea of OBOR as profoundly as possible. Cooperation among the nations along OBOR must be based on the principles of peaceful coexistence, mutual caring, win-win cooperation and common development which bring about common prosperity. Countries along OBOR must oppose conflicts, bloodshed, war and confrontation which are created by superpowers for their own interests.

Countries along OBOR can be divided into three categories: resource-based, geopolitically important and multi-religion and multi-ethnic countries. Superpowers have eye on the rich economic resources in Muslim world specially Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Yemen, Afghanistan and Pakistan but at the same time, the geopolitical assets of these countries are valued more than economic resources by the superpowers.

Many countries along the new Silk Road have their own cultures and traditions. However the One Belt One Road civilization belt is heterogeneous in nature but shares a couple of historical and cultural similarities. Most of the OBOR countries are nonwestern countries which were colonized by western powers in the past hence responded strongly to be controlled. Now they attempt to create a new, yet their own, national, political and Cultural identity.

Conclusion

Although OBOR is a combination of diverse cultural and traditional systems hence it can be a civilizational system across multiple countries. OBOR civilization does not advocate a single ideology nor does it encourage opposition which brings about conflicts and violence.

Only by the Silk Road civilization, the diversified cultures will treat one another by respect and can coexist calmly. Chinese need a civilizational belt along the OBOR project. China should try its best to maximize the identity, cohesion and creativity of the diverse cultures, nations and people to integrate the various resources along OBOR and ensure all the stakeholders of mutual benefits that lies in the establishment of the New Silk Road.

What Trump needs to know about Iranians

1 → Looking ahead, Trump must clarify whether he is speaking with a civilized or a terrorist nation — and if he wants to use the language of respect or humiliation toward Iranians.

The U.S. administration must also gain a more nuanced and accurate understanding of the Iranian people's demands. In late December, many Iranian cities became sites of protests, at the root of which were economic grievances. In some cases, these protests became violent. Trump lauded the demonstrations from the get-go and proclaimed that the Iranian people were "finally getting wise."

But there was a disconnect between the reality of the protests and their coverage in U.S. and Western media. While limited in magnitude, the unrest was large in scope. Moreover, after scenes of violence and vandalism promulgated in the Iranian press, counterdemonstrations took place across the country. In particular, during the Feb. 11 demonstrations marking the 39th anniversary of the revolution, thousands turned out. But these events drew practically zero coverage in US media. This skewed coverage of events reinforces misunderstandings of important social and political realities inside Iran and ultimately results in miscalculations and counterproductive policy.



Indeed, a recent poll conducted by the University of Maryland's Center for International and Security Studies found that while there are widespread and deep-seated economic grievances among Iranians, they by and large oppose regime change. Moreover, directly clashing with Trump's rhetoric and policies, most of those polled also expressed support for the nuclear deal, Iran's defense capability — including the country's ballistic missile program — and regional policies. Remarkably, Quds Force commander Qasem Soleimani enjoys the highest approval rating among Iranian public figures, even as the United States has designated him as a "known terrorist."

Most of the Iranians who were polled also blamed the Trump administration for not living up to U.S. commitments under the nuclear deal.

In addition, public sentiment in Iran is strongly opposed to Saudi Arabia and Israel. By allying so closely with these countries against Iran, Trump is thus further increasing the antipathy of Iranians toward the United States. The University of Maryland poll also showed that while over 80% of Iranians had a negative view of the US government, a majority for the first time had positive opinions of Russia and China. This dramatic shift in the Iranian public's perceptions cannot be understated.

In the past 200 years, Iran has been subject to both Russian and British military encroachment and has been forced to cede large parts of its territory. After the establishment of the Islamic Republic, it was invaded by Saddam Hussein's Iraq, sparking a brutal eight-year war during which the United States and its regional allies supported Baghdad. The conflict cost hundreds of thousands of lives and hundreds of billions of dollars in damage. This is while Iran has not launched a war of aggression in over 250 years. This grander historical backdrop drives Iranians to instinctively unite in the face of foreign interference.

If the United States wants to one day improve its relations with Iran, it must gain the trust of the Iranian people and adopt policies that reflect the realities on the ground in Iran. To this end, the Trump administration ought to take note of the momentous shifts in public attitudes among Iranians. If not, renewed hawkishness may cause a serious backlash with unpredictable consequences.

(Source: Al-Monitor)

Why Netanyahu wants war with Iran?

TEHRAN (FNA) — At the annual Munich Security Conference on Sunday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu held a piece of what he claimed to be a drone in hand to talk about the need for region-wide military action against what he called the "Iranian empire."

Netanyahu claimed the part was from a drone which crossed into Israeli airspace, and was Iranian, and was shot down. He played up the idea that Israel must be prepared to destroy not just Iran's allies, but Iran itself.

Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif was quick to react, though, at the same conference. He mocked Netanyahu's baseless claim, saying it was a "cartoonish circus" for Israel to make such threats. Zarif further faulted Israel for treating aggression like a standard policy, noting how often Israeli warplanes violate the airspace of Lebanon and Syria.

This can be studied from several angles:

A- As maintained by Foreign Minister Zarif, the shooting down of the Israeli jet has shattered Israel's "so-called invincibility." Israel can no longer send its warplanes into Syria to hit targets and expect them to return in one piece. There will be reprisals.

B- The advances of the Iraqi and Syrian armies and their Iranian-Russian allies against ISIL and other terrorist groups herald a major breakthrough in the region. Resolving the conflicts in these Arab nations could restore regional peace and stability, and attract full attention to Israel's crimes against Palestinians. Hence, a new military confrontation could help Tel Aviv pursue its policies in the occupied Palestinian territories more vigorously.



C- The US - Israel's one major ally, their primary source of economic and military aid, the only reason the international community hasn't forced them to stop committing crimes against the Palestinians — is to get dragged into this long and discretionary war. To this end, Netanyahu is playing with fire and may not only ignite a regional war in the Middle East, but also try to ruin years of close, intimate strategic cooperation between Syria, Iran, Russia and Hezbollah to defeat the terrorist group of ISIL. Thanks to this historic victory, the remnants of ISIL no longer pose any threat to Europe. This should illustrate just how dangerous a war with Iran is, given that Iran refuses to be the one to start it.

D- Netanyahu's "cartoonist circus" in Munich is just the latest ominous sign from Israel that the unholy alliance of Donald Trump, Benjamin Netanyahu and the Saudi Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, may be planning to greatly expand war in the Mideast, targeting Hezbollah in Lebanon, and its ally Iran. In the words of Foreign Minister Zarif, "Well, if they try to exercise that threat, they will see the response."

E- Israel is still pursuing an "iron fist" policy against Palestinians, including deportations, demolition of homes, collective punishment, curfews, and the suppression of political institutions to undermine Palestinian resistance, which is morally supported by Iran and the international civil society.

F- Israel's clout has seen substantial erosion among public opinion in Europe. A resolution passed by the UN Security Council against Israeli settlements in December last year was an indication that Europe is not satisfied with Tel Aviv's expansionist and aggressive approach. Netanyahu is under the illusion that a new military confrontation will push Europe to avoid criticizing Tel Aviv and once against throw its weight behind the regime.

G- Netanyahu needs a war, any war, because the Israeli political reality is turning against him. He is desperate, losing ground fast in the latest opinion polls. He sees he may be out of power soon without having any legacy, and he provokes war to distract from the ongoing probes into his corruption.

H- Netanyahu believes that provoking a war against Iran will drive some Arab nations to stop their hostile approach toward Tel Aviv and join the fight against Tehran. This could help Israel press ahead with its radical policies. US President Donald Trump's plan to relocate the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem Al-Quds is in line with such radical policies, a plan which failed to win any support from the UN, let alone the Arab-Muslim nations.

All said, it remains to be seen whether the international civil society is prepared to give in to Netanyahu's selfish motives and whether he can trigger a new war in the Middle East that might also drag in the United States and destabilize the entire planet. It's a dream come true for ISIL, Al-Qaeda and their affiliates. Iran is wise, but it never let any threat go unanswered. And they know it.

U.S. multifaceted objectives in Syria



1 → The regional countries should learn lessons from the past that the U.S. is not a trustworthy ally and it is just following up its own geopolitical ambitions with empty promises and support from allies.

The Turkish President in April 2017 in an interview with Aljazeera said, «With President Obama, we had a mutual agreement about the PKK - but Obama deceived us. I don't believe the Trump administration will do the same.» But during Trump's presidency not only did the U.S. not relieve Turkey's concerns, but it also intensified its support to the Syrian Kurds.

The only way to foil the U.S. designs in the region, which are a direct threat to the all regional countries, is further close cooperation between Iran, Turkey, Iraq, and Syria with the help of Russia. We have been witnessing the fruits of this cooperation over the past several months, including foiling the Erbil independence referendum and creating de-escalation zones in Syria.

It is noteworthy that the U.S., in line with Samuel Huntington's advice, is cooperating with other regional powers like Saudi Arabia to confront and weaken both Iran and Turkey.

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Marwa Osman: Saudis intentionally target civilians to pressure Yemeni resistance

TEHRAN (FNA) — Political Analyst Marwa Osman says the Saudi-led coalition repeated strikes on residential and civilian sites are carried out in an attempt to pressure the resistance and the Yemeni army to surrender, but the move has only motivated the Yemenis to stay loyal to their country and their tribes and fight back harder.

Speaking in an exclusive interview with FNA, Osman said that the Saudi-led coalition deliberately targets civilians to pressure the Yemeni resistance to surrender.

According to the analyst, the coalition uses the same tactic that the Israeli regime has been using to justify its war crimes and that is falsely accusing resistance forces, in this case Ansarullah fighters, of using civilians as human shields.

Marwa Osman is a journalist, political analyst and a university lecturer at the Lebanese International University. She has been frequently interviewed by international news outlets such as RT and Press TV to comment on issues related to the Middle East.

FNA has conducted an interview with Marwa Osman about the ongoing Saudi aggression against Yemen and the possible motives behind the war which resulted in the humanitarian catastrophe which is taking place now in the poor Arab country.

Below you will find the full text of the interview.

■ What do you think about the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Yemen caused by the Saudi war and blockade on the country?

A: Yemen is currently the worst humanitarian disaster on this planet. The Arab world's poorest country has endured nearly three years of aggressive Saudi led war. The conflict is having a devastating effect, causing widespread food shortages and a major cholera outbreak as well as leaving millions in need of humanitarian assistance. The cholera outbreak is probably the worst the world has ever seen with a million suspected cases up to the end of 2017. Add to that a terrible new epidemic of diphtheria, a bacterial disease which should be completely preventable by immunization, has already affected up to 500 people with dozens and dozens of deaths in the past few weeks. There is no way out of this unless the war completely stops and the blockade is lifted off the airports, seaports and border crossings to enable scale up of much needed lifesaving assistance for the Yemeni public directed towards famine prevention, as well as assisting civilians affected by the ongoing heinous and unnecessary war.

■ What are the Saudis' objectives in their war on Yemen?

A: The ultimate objective that Riyadh is pursuing against Yemen is eliminating the actual existence of any resistance that would dare to say no to their demands like that of Ansarullah. The stated objective is to return the internationally recognized government of the already resigned president Abdrabuh Mansour Hadi back to power in Yemen. The international community, since it still recognizes president Hadi as the legitimate ruler, seems to be a supporter of that despite



the fact that millions have taken to the streets since 2011 to protest against Hadi who ended up resigning not only once but twice. The second and the most important objective of the Saudi-led military aggression is to crush forces allied with the Ansarullah while making sure that no internal political solution is to be reached with the remaining factions inside of Yemen. To impose their power and steal Yemen's resources without allowing anyone to stand in their way Saudi Arabia and the UAE with direct help and arms from the UK and the US, and several other European countries who all have Yemeni blood on their hands, are willing to see Yemen flooding in the blood its poor citizens who have had to endure multiple hardships throughout the years that no other nation has had to tolerate at this day and age.

■ It seems that the Saudis expected an easy-to-win combat when they first stepped into the war. What do you think has caused Saudi Arabia's continued failure in Yemen?

A: The Saudi led war against the people of Yemen have been an utter failure and was not able to achieve any of its military or political objectives due to the unity and steadfastness of the nation in the face of this vile aggression. If the Saudis are to settle down and allow the Yemeni people to sit together and talk through their own internal issues I am more than sure that all tribal factions and political blocs will support an honorable peace in Yemen that would guarantee the sovereignty of the country, because at the moment and especially after all the suffering that the country went through, surrendering to the enemy pressures is no option for the Yemeni nation. The Saudi-led coalition only seem now seeking to change the result of their failed war in its favor through a new plot aimed at sowing discord among the Yemeni political factions, but I am pretty sure the wise command of Ansarullah will not see that plan through.

■ Why do the US and the UK continue

to supply Saudi Arabia with arms despite international criticism with regard to civilian casualties?

A: Reports in late 2017 have been published claiming that UK weapons companies have made £6bn from Saudi Arabia since it started bombing Yemen while the US has agreed to sell Saudi Arabia \$7bn worth of weapons for its war against Yemen. So both imperial states are not only selling arms to Saudi forces but maintaining them as well. Major Yemeni cities are now barren and lifeless due to the war incited by the UK and the US and implemented by the KSA. We see devastation of once busy souks destroyed by Saudi coalition airstrikes. Skeletal structures of buildings and stalls lying empty where once vibrant businesses flourished. By contrast, on the other side of the world a lucrative market in high-tech weaponry is positively thriving. The UK and US claim to have supported Yemen with around £371.5m in aid during the past three years which are considered bread crumbs even if deemed true. On the other, British and American arms companies, with the authorization of the UK and US governments, have busily supplied much of the weaponry that Saudi Arabia has used for its devastating attacks in its southern neighbor.

■ Why have the international organizations, particularly the UN, remained passive in the face of the ongoing Saudi atrocities?

A: The United Nations' track record on the Saudi-led war against Yemen shows that it has often dodged key issues, leading us to conclude that it is beholden to state interests. Several reports by international Human Rights groups show that all belligerent parties in the Saudi-led coalition have committed atrocities that could amount to war crimes. Nonetheless, these reports have made remarkably little difference at the UNHRC or other top UN bodies. The UN has obviously betrayed the Yemeni people which mirrors as a failure of the UN's leadership.

For over 2 year now, powerful UN member states have helped insulate the Saudi-led coalition from liability and, in so doing, fueled its righteous outrage at attempts to hold it to account. Since its intervention in Yemen began, the coalition has found the UN a highly convenient venue in which to be absolved of human rights abuses, thanks largely to the enabling of Saudi Arabia's powerful allies, the US and the UK.

■ The Saudi-led coalition has recently increased its airstrikes on Yemen. These airstrikes have mostly killed Yemeni civilians, including thousands of women and children. What do you think is the objective of the airstrikes targeting civilians?

A: Time and again the Saudis have targeted civilians intentionally while falsely accusing Ansarullah of setting up command and communications centers in the middle of residential area to use civilians as human shields. See that is the same lame and false excuse that Israel always used when it bombed us here in Beirut. All this at a time when at the frontline in Jizan and Najran the Saudi army has been facing one blow after the other from Ansarullah and the Yemeni army while seeing swaths of land taken by the Yemeni fighters while the Saudi mercenaries flee the battlefield. This only infuriates the monarchs in Riyadh and pushes them to further attack the same residential and civilian sites over and over again in an attempt to pressure the resistance and the Yemeni army to surrender or at least to back off. This has proven to be a complete failure and has only motivated the Yemenis to stay loyal to their country and their tribes and fight back even harder.

■ Why is the Saudi regime continuing its attacks on Yemen despite its failures and cash-strapped economy? What do you think about the future of the war?

A: Saudi Arabia and its partner, the United Arab Emirates have discovered the hard way what the Romans, Ottoman Turks and Egyptians before them learned from their own ill-conceived invasions: Yemen is an abyss for invaders. Yemen's cultural and physical geography defies and confounds foreign military forces. Saudi Arabia's autocratic rulers have long viewed Yemen's large and well-armed population, as well as its democracy, as threats. For years, the House of Saud pursued a careful policy in Yemen that preserved Saudi Arabia's influence, largely through cash payments to tribal and political leaders, and sought to ensure that Yemen remained stable yet weak. Since March 2015, KSA's so called Operation Decisive Storm began but after nearly 3 years there was nothing decisive about the campaign and the only storm is the one threatening Saudi Arabia itself as we all have been witnessing since MBS's coup against the former crown prince Mohamad Bin Nayef and then in October against a large number of his cousin princes. Having destabilized the country and set back Yemen's development by decades, the blowback from the war in Yemen is now hitting back with grave consequences for the House of Saud and the kingdom they rule.

U.S. and company won't help to rebuild Iraq – what next?



TEHRAN (FNA) — While Baghdad says more than \$100 billion is needed to rebuild the immeasurable damage the United States inflicted on Iraq, Washington insists it can only offer just about \$3 billion in loans, loan guarantees and insurance funds to American firms investing in the war-torn country!

The offer came at the donor conference for the "post-ISIL reconstruction" of Iraq which just ended in Kuwait. There, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson talked about Iraqi corruption and insecurity, which he claimed had to be tackled for rebuilding investments to be feasible. He said nothing about donations or reparations for the immeasurable damage the US and its allies inflicted on Iraq since the first Persian Gulf War in 1991, let alone since their illegal invasion in 2003.

The US "aid" offered by Tillerson is a financial package from the US Export-Import Bank in the amount of \$3 billion in loans, loan guarantees, and insurance funds to American firms investing in Iraq. This amounts to far less than the totality of Iraq's needs as estimated at this moment. Worse still, there are many strings attached and this shouldn't surprise anyone:

- After Saddam's fall in 2003, the US apparently promised some \$20 billion in reconstruction money in the form of credit against Iraq's future oil revenues. This never materialized despite further pledges. Far from it, the illegal US occupation of the country and drone war paved the way for emergence of the terrorist group of ISIL with even more devastating consequences for Iraqi people. Sadly, there is no reason to assume this time it will be any different.

- The US government is not the only hypocrite in this matter. The overwhelming majority of the reconstruction pledges concerns credit and investments by NATO allies as well. The only exception seems to be the nearly half a billion in donations from the European Union. This is insulting, because the US-NATO coalition had no trouble spending untold billions on the destruction of Iraq and murdering its people, but cannot afford to help the surviving families rebuild their country.

- There will also be far less contributions from Iraq's Arab neighbours – if anything - and if there's any, there will be many strings attached. Such as

To that end, Iraq needs about \$100 billion to insure the reconstruction of areas destroyed by the US-led coalition and later recaptured from ISIL, including Mosul, Tikrit, and Ramadi. Baghdad will not be able to afford the reconstruction of these cities without international efforts and aid. Even the United Nations agrees.

Just like Europe, these not so caring neighbours enthusiastically joined the unholy US coalition in 2003 to bomb Iraq, gain more importance in NATO, later train and fund the proxy militants of ISIL in field conditions, and benefit from America's "Shock and Awe" doctrine and regime change.

In the prevailing environment, it should be kept in mind that Western-Arab donations and initial reconstruction efforts are indeed insufficient and unacceptable. The regime changers should be held to account for turning Iraq into ruins and they should pay for it. They cannot expect others such as Iran, Russia and China to step in and fill the gap. These nations are not beneficiaries of the US and its endless wars. They never funded and armed terrorist groups, and they never invaded Iraq to exploit its destruction and partition for their regional, sectarian, and political purposes. The reality is that the United States and its NATO-Arab allies are responsible for turning Iraq into a failed state. The staggering devastation of the country requires international response, otherwise it will remain a breeding ground for new brands of terrorist groups and extremist outfits. The US-led military operations and indiscriminate airstrikes destroyed many cities and towns, including tens of thousands of houses, hospitals, bridges, and dams, as well as public buildings and schools. The country was already neglected by the US-led coalition after 2003, and now it is witnessing difficult circumstances after the defeat of ISIL. It is time for the United Nations to call on the US government and its NATO-Arab allies to cooperate with the international community to help reconstruct post-ISIL Iraq and not to undervalue their previous and ongoing destruction and devastation. The nation requires large sums of money, and it shouldn't be abandoned, as reconstruction is an essential and positive step for the return of its displaced people and refugees.

To that end, Iraq needs about \$100 billion to insure the reconstruction of areas destroyed by the US-led coalition and later recaptured from ISIL, including Mosul, Tikrit, and Ramadi. Baghdad will not be able to afford the reconstruction of these cities without international efforts and aid. Even the United Nations agrees. The word body acknowledges the significant challenges facing Iraq in the future, including massive destruction and widespread contamination of improvised explosive devices left behind Washington and company.

This is a confirmation of the international community's support for Iraq in overcoming its US-instigated crisis. In this respect, the United States and its NATO-Arab partners - the main perpetrators behind the crisis - need to get on board as well. Under International Law, they are required to show their desire in practice to help reconstruct Iraq by providing financial aid, without determining the method of spending such aid, and insuring there are no regional or political strings attached. They are no way allowed to make decisions for a sovereign state.

Iran, Russia, Turkey and the Acrimony with the U.S. in Syria

TEHRAN (FNA) - The leadership of Iran, Russia and Turkey have all agreed to attend an upcoming summit in Istanbul on the topic of Syria, with the date for the meeting to be decided soon. Looming large over this is US relations.

The three nations have met in the past on trying to get a peace process going in Syria, but right now the big issue on all their minds is increasing hostility from the US. However, the acrimony with the US is a major unifier for them, with countering the US agenda in Syria a top priority for all:

1- The three nations have agreed to continue their support for Syria's efforts fighting against various terrorist groups and separatists. They also agree there is no military solution to the conflict and call on all parties to take part in the Istanbul summit.

2- The three nations agree that there can be no outside pressure to determine the political future of post-ISIL Syria.

Syrian President Bashar Assad and his government are committed to the peace process, in line with a UN Security Council resolution, that implies "constitutional reform and free and fair elections" in which all Syrians can participate.

3- The three nations have confirmed their support for de-escalation zones, including one in the southwest. They have also called on UN member states to increase humanitarian aid contributions for Syria. Quite the contrary, the US has run a major bombing campaign in Syria since 2011, when it stepped in to support terror proxies' fight against the Syrian government - most of them ISIL and Qaeda allies - all at the expense of millions of innocent civilians. The US is merely pretending to fight ISIL and is hindering the allied forces' offensive in eastern Syria.

4- The three nations have affirmed their commitment to Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence, territorial integrity, and non-sectarian character. It was the allied forces of Iran, Syria,

Russia and Hezbollah who sacrificed their lives to push armed groups and terror proxies from their main strongholds in recent months. True, the US-backed Kurdish and Arab proxies are in control of some parts of the country, but that's not in the best interests of Syria's territorial integrity. They are there to get political concessions from Damascus and justify US military occupation of Syria permanently.

5- The military presence of Iran and Russia in Syria is legitimate and based on the invitation of Damascus. Undoubtedly unwelcome by Syrians in any event, US forces must leave the country. Despite proclamations to the contrary, they are there without the permission of the Syrian government. The global community is firmly against the continuation of the US military occupation of Syria, by virtue of its long regime change agenda, its alliance with various terrorist groups and separatists, and its illegal airstrikes against civilian objects.

6- In a perfect world, the US is in Syria for freedom and democracy. But this is not the world we live in. It should now be apparent to all that regime change and disintegration of Syria is what the US and its proxies are after. This is not encouraging. As much as the US would like to believe that everyone in the world prefers Western-style democracy in Syria, that is not in fact the case either. The West should be very careful what it wishes for in Syria, because it is unlikely to get what it wants.

7- The leadership of Iran, Russia and Turkey see that end is in sight in Syria. That's why they are attending the peace summit in Istanbul, which seeks to end the war. That's also why the Syrian government is part of the peace process. The talks are to make substantive progress, and everyone knows it. Not only because of the wide international support, but because the process itself is deeply favoured by all Syrians and better reflects reality on the ground.

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viii.	TV trolley (wooden)	01
ix.	Almirah for books (wooden)	01
x.	office chairs	05
xi.	side rack	01
xii.	steel Almirah	01

All interested parties are invited to submit their offer in a sealed envelope between 0900-1500 hrs before 14th March 2018. The tenders will be opened at 1200 hrs on 15th March 2018.

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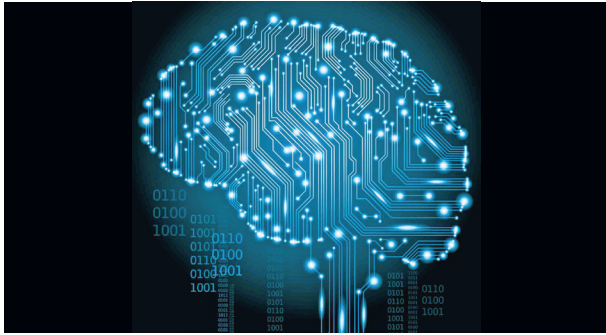
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Creative, curious and decidedly human: a different kind of information technology

What's the difference between implementation and adoption? Or better yet, what's the difference between a digital product that is beloved rather than just tolerated? Emotional engagement. The best products in our lives connect with us. We applaud their convenience, marvel at their usefulness, celebrate their ingenuity and we tell our friends about them.

But how do we connect with an end user when, historically, human emotions and IT are two subjects that have rarely shared the same space? The more technical skills become commoditized, the more limiting and counterproductive this disparity becomes. In today's reality, emotional intelligence -- the ability to identify and manage your own emotions and the emotions of others -- is the key to engaging your audience and is an increasingly necessary quality for IT professionals. When IT teams focus on enhancing emotional intelligence, they can better design platforms and products that generate user loyalty and increase adoption.

■ Checking the boxes but missing the mark



Today, technology can open the door to innovative experiences and enable new capabilities for customers and businesses alike. However, technology by itself cannot deliver on those promises. To create such moments requires not only technological know-how but also a sense of what it feels like to be the person who will ultimately use it. The most successful IT teams not only understand requirements but also the context and unspoken desires of their clients.

Unfortunately, the typical development process looks a bit like this: Step 1: The user outlines their needs. Step 2: IT implements those requirements. The hitch? In most cases, the IT team does not understand the activities that come before and after the requirements it's received. It understands what the user needs but not the context that surrounds it.

When the product is finished, the IT team then delivers it to users and files the project away as complete. However, due to its limited view of the user's needs for the product, the IT team is unable to paint a picture of the future and can't tell the user exactly how to make use of the new product. Instead, the traditional development process leaves the burden of those activities squarely on the shoulders of the client.

Here's an example: Imagine hearing an announcement about a new reporting tool. Your imagination immediately runs rampant with all the ways that this platform is going to make your life easier. Suddenly, a world of data is right at your fingertips, and the possibilities seem endless. But now you're looking to pull a specific query? That's when reality sets in and your dreams of productivity begin to plummet. What's the implementation team's answer? "All the reports that were requested are present on the platform."

While this particular scenario may be slightly exaggerated, it still underscores the issue. Did the team technically deliver on the requirements? Yes. All of the data and reports that were requested are present. Is it useful? Can a new user look at it and intuitively understand how to find what they need? Not really, and this leaves the users to determine their own ways to use the product. A handful will bravely forge onward and became the office gurus of the product. But most, after trying a few times, will simply throw their hands up and forget about the tool. Whether the tool technically fulfills user requirements becomes a moot point because, without user adoption, its usefulness and potential remain untapped.

■ A human-centric approach to design

But what if IT shifted the burden from the user to the team designing the solution and created an interface and features that inherently made sense to its audience? One way to do this is to take a human-centric approach to product design (i.e., focusing on what it would be like to use the product and how activities might be strung together instead of making lists of features). Being cognizant and empathetic toward other perspectives is critical when developing platforms and tools to meet the needs of users. New software development models argue the importance of a human-centric approach and that the responsibility of implementation belongs upstream -- in the hands of researchers and user experience and interface designers.

When development teams focus equally on functionality and usability, they can produce contextually relevant tools that are intuitive to their audience. This approach requires a new perspective. IT departments should consider applying traditional go-to-market strategies, such as prototyping, observational learning and providing an easy-to-use feedback mechanism for the end consumer. It's the mastering of these techniques that will bring the next generation of insights and perspectives. So ask yourself, is your team delivering a great user experience? Or are they just meeting the minimum requirements?

Technical expertise is table stakes now. The real differentiator among IT professionals is genuine curiosity and the ability to connect with others. These qualities open doors to new conversations and new modes of operation. These individuals ask questions, yes, but more importantly, they take an interest in the answers.

■ Identifying emotionally intelligent IT teams

How are emotionally intelligent IT teams distinguished? They explore, forging relationships across the entire organization, and in the process, they change the perception of their entire team. They not only listen to the answers that people provide but also get excited about their ideas.

With an emotionally intelligent IT team, no project or idea is off limits. With a deeper understanding of problems, members of the team can work purposefully to develop solutions and products that users didn't even know they needed. They will become the team you seek out when you have a new idea or even an inkling of an idea. They will motivate, excite and find a way to make it happen.

At its core, IT is a creative discipline. Now more than ever, technology teams need explorers, dreamers, mad scientists and people who can continually adapt to their environment. Technologies will come and go, along with their corresponding skills. However, empathy, curiosity and creativity will be how the next generation of IT teams differentiate themselves.

(Source: Forbes)

Technology should not replace your role as a parent, says expert

Technology cannot replace your role as a parent. While it plays a significant role in our everyday lives and makes life a lot easier, parents should carefully consider the negative impact tech devices can have on a child's overall development.

That's the view of creative parenting expert Nikki Bush, who works for Toy Kingdom.

"Yes, technology is part of the fabric of our lives. But we need to curb the use of tech devices in a child's routine, and find that middle ground when it comes to screen time. This is crucial for a child's developmental needs," Bush says.

Child obesity and diabetes have become national epidemics in some countries, causally related to technology overuse. Diagnoses of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), coordination disorder, developmental delays, unintelligible speech, learning difficulties, sensory processing disorder, anxiety, depression and sleep disorders have also all been associated with technology overuse.

"Children are increasingly viewing the world from a screen, but for personal development they need to engage with real people on real things and not just the virtual world as seen on screen. Moderation between on-screen and off-screen is so important," she says.

This is her advice on how not to use technology:

■ As a babysitter

Bush says using a tech device as a babysitter for children is a big no-no. She says children enjoy interaction with their parents, and when mum and dad are not around, an emotional void that a screen cannot fill occurs.

"A laptop or cellphone is no substitute for mum and dad. Children need yes or no answers, and they need engagement. When sidelined by a device, they don't get the answers they need, and that's problematic for them."

She also cautions parents to limit technology where applicable, as it can be quite addictive. It stimulates the secretion of chemicals from the pleasure center of the brain.



■ As a disciplinarian

Developing self-regulation and self-discipline are two of life's fundamentals, and Bush encourages parents to avoid using a handheld device or computer as an emotional crutch.

"We should not be using a cellphone as the draw card to get our children to sleep, or even to eat. Often parents indicate that children can't do anything without the device and as parents, we need to work on changing that," Bush adds.

■ As a real-life experience replacer

Technology can rob children from real-life experiences essential for their development. According to Bush, children

learn best through concrete learning experiences with real people and real toys in real time.

"These experiences give our children those multisensory experiences of the world, and while technology has so much to offer, we need to ensure that the foundation necessary for their development is set first," Bush says.

Further, too much time spent watching movies on the laptop, or playing video games on the tablet, stunts a child's social skills and ability to interact with friends, family members and even their teachers.

(Source: Huffingtonpost)

Lawmakers worry about rise of fake video technology



Lawmakers are concerned that advances in video manipulation technology could set off a new era of fake news. Now legislators say they want to start working on fixes to the problem before it's too late.

Technology experts have begun to sound the alarm on the new software, which lets users take existing videos and make high-quality altered video and audio that appears real. The emergence of the technology opens up a new world of hoaxes driven by doctored audio or video, and threatens to shake faith in the media even further.

Senator Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), one of the most vocal members of Congress on tech issues, painted a grim picture about what the advances could mean for the future of discerning truth in media.

"Since we can't rely on the responsibility of individual actors or the platforms they use, I fully expect there will be a proliferation of these sorts of fictions to a degree that nearly drowns out actual facts," Wyden told The Hill.

"For those who value real information, there will still be some reliable publications and news outlets, and their credibility will need to be guarded all the more intently by professional journalists," he added.

Rep. Adriano Espaillat (D-N.Y.), who has targeted fake news in the past through legislation, also told The Hill that he's concerned.

Espaillat said that he is worried about the potential for foreign governments to use counterfeit audio and videos to manipulate the American public.

Lawmakers' fears are backed up by concern from experts, who say that manipulated videos are another dangerous addition to the rising trend of fake news.

"Democracy depends on an informed electorate, and when we can't even agree on the basics of what's real, it becomes increasingly impossible to have the hard conversations necessary to move the country forward," said Renee DiResta, one of the first researchers to sound the alarm on how social media platforms were being manipulated by foreign actors.

"The cumulative effect of this is a systemic erosion of trust, including trust between people and their leaders," she added.

And widely available video faking technology is getting closer to becoming a reality.

Researcher Aviv Ovadya showed BuzzFeed new software that blurs the lines between genuine video and doctored footage that appears real. Meanwhile, researchers at Stanford and the University of Washing-

ton are currently developing technology that allows people to alter footage of world leaders like Russian President Vladimir Putin and former President George W. Bush, making them appear do things they've never actually done.

Ovadya predicts that such technology could be used to manipulate diplomacy, and even goad countries into making decisions based on fake information.

"It doesn't have to be perfect -- just good enough to make the enemy think something happened that it provokes a knee-jerk and reckless response of retaliation," Ovadya, the chief technologist for the University of Michigan's Center for Social Media Responsibility, told BuzzFeed.

Sen. Mark Warner (D-Va.), the ranking Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee and a leading lawmaker in the push to respond to Russian social media manipulation in U.S. politics, thinks that counterfeit videos could have impacts beyond politics.

"I'm much more worried about what could come next -- could bad actors target kids with fake videos from people they trust?" Warner questioned during an event earlier in February addressing the dangers technology can pose for children.

"This ultimately begs the question -- how do you maintain trust in a digital-based economy when you may not be able to believe your own eyes anymore?" he asked rhetorically.

Such algorithms are already beginning to take on a darker life. People have begun to make pornographic videos, known as "deepfakes," using software that superimposes celebrities' faces onto adult-film actors.

Warner didn't specify what action should be taken, but did say that "the federal government must step up and update our laws to address emerging threats to Americans." He also pressed platforms to "commit more resources to identifying bad actors."

It's still difficult to easily produce video and audio together that can actually fool people, but at least one lawmaker believes that there is concrete action the government can take. Rep. Ro Khanna (D-Calif.), who represents Silicon Valley, called for the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) to create some way to authenticate genuine audio and video.

"I think we should task DARPA with figuring out how to create a secure internet protocol that requires authentication," Khanna told The Hill.

(Source: thehill.com)

Globalization, technology, and inequality: It's the policies, stupid



We are living in a time of mounting societal discontent and political divisiveness—a "fractured world," as captured in the theme of the recent World Economic Forum meeting in Davos. In many countries, social disaffection with economic outcomes is up sharply, roiling the political landscape and stoking populist and nationalist sentiment. Brexit and the outcome of the 2016 United States presidential election are but the more dramatic examples of these socio-political dynamics that hold wider sway.

What explains the rising tide of socio-economic unhappiness? The world has not become less prosperous. It is true that the global financial crisis caused major setbacks, but economic growth has recovered. The economic pie is growing—although not as fast as before, as economic growth is being held down by a longer-term decline in productivity growth. The increasingly unequal sharing of the economic pie lies at the heart of the rising social discontent.

Income and wealth inequalities have risen practically in all major economies, and sharply in several of them. In the U.S., for example, the income share of the richest 1 percent has more than doubled since the early 1980s to around 22 percent, with the wealth share rising to almost 40 percent. Those with middle-class incomes have been squeezed and the typical worker has seen largely stagnant real wages. In the "land of opportunity," social mobility has been stalling. Even as economic growth gathered steam in 2017, economic disparities continued to mount. According to a report released on the eve of the Davos meeting, 4 out of 5 dollars of the increase in global wealth in 2017 accrued to the top 1 percent.

In the cauldron of political debate, much of the blame for the rise in inequality is heaped on globalization—often from both ends of the political spectrum. The popular backlash against globalization has been fed by a negative political crescendo. Another factor blamed is technological change—digitization, the rise of robots, artificial intelligence—that is seen to favor capital and higher-level skills at the expense of ordinary workers. More and more, we hear calls to throw sand in the wheels of technological change, reflecting an ascendant neo-Luddism.

Most dynamic economic change inevitably creates winners and losers. Globalization and technology are no exceptions. They are key forces that drive innovation, productivity, and economic growth. But they also have been important factors behind the rise in inequalities we have witnessed—with technological change playing a stronger

role. The distributional consequences of these forces, however, are not pre-ordained. Outcomes that are more inclusive are certainly possible. Much depends on policies. Sadly, policies for the most part have not risen to the new challenges. Indeed, they have often exacerbated rather than ameliorated the outcomes.

Attempting to inhibit globalization or technological change would be the wrong response to the rising popular discontent with their distributional outcomes. Instead, policies must do better to ensure that the economic gains are more widely shared. This means improving the enabling environment for firms and workers—to broaden access to opportunities that come with globalization and technological change and to enhance capabilities to adjust to the new challenges. Fresh, out-of-the-box thinking is needed to bring policies in step with today's economic transformations.

Competition must be strengthened in industry and finance to check the growth of monopolistic structures and abuse of market power. Competition policies must be revamped for the digital age marked by the rise of winner-take-all technology giants. Technology policies must be reformed so that they promote innovation and wide diffusion rather than serve primarily to lock in incumbents' advantages as under the current patent systems.

Access to quality education and training must be greatly improved, including putting in place stronger and smarter programs for worker up skilling and reskilling and lifelong learning to respond to the shifting demand for skills. New models of public-private partnerships and technology-enabled solutions must be explored. Labor market policies and social protection systems must be adapted to the realities of a dynamic job market with more frequent shifts between jobs and more diverse work arrangements.

Governments must reorient expenditure priorities and find the fiscal space to restore public investment programs in infrastructure and research and development that have been allowed to run down. They must also review tax and transfer systems that have seen erosion of their redistributive role.

Reforms are needed at the international level as well, so that rules of engagement between countries in trade and other areas are fair. But the dominant part of the agenda to make globalization work well and for all rests with policies at the national level. A few years ago, Richard Haass wrote a book entitled "Foreign Policy Begins at Home." In the same vein, globalization begins at home.

(Source: brookings.edu)

Scientists have figured out how to make wood even stronger than steel

Wood is a pretty awesome material, but it's certainly lacking the strength and toughness of other materials such as the stronger metals. That could change, however, thanks to research coming out of the University of Maryland, College Park, where engineers have found a way to make wood more than 10 times stronger than titanium alloys.

The results mean that everyone's favorite tree-based material could be used as an alternative to the ultra-tough likes of steel while remaining significantly lighter.

Faster growing softwoods like pine and balsa could also be treated to replace some of the applications which currently require slower growing but denser woods like teak.

"We (developed) a totally new densification technique by combining chemical modification and hot-pressing," Liangbing Hu, the leader of the research team, told Digital Trends.

■ **Densified wood**

"Our resulting densified wood features a highly dense and laminated structure with intertwined cell walls that are fully collapsed without gaps.

Most of the densified wood consists of well-aligned cellulose nanofibers, which greatly enhance hydrogen bond formation among neighboring nanofibers. The mechanical performance of the resulting densified wood is more than one order of



Faster growing softwoods like pine and balsa could also be treated to replace some of the applications which currently require slower growing but denser woods like teak.

magnitude better than that of the natural wood."

The chemical modification Hu refers to involves partially remove lignin, the organic polymer that forms an important structural material in plants, and hemicellulose, a component in plant cell walls. The densification technique was then completed by hot-pressing to a temperature of 100 degrees Celsius.

To put the new material through its paces, the team tested its resilience to bullet-like projectiles by firing at it. While the projectile was able to completely pierce natural wood, in the case of the new reinforced wood material it only penetrated part of the way through.

■ **Potential integrations**

"We are (currently) investigating its potential integrations into multiple applications which requires the material to meet the complete performance matrix," Hu said, concerning the next step of the project.

A University of Maryland startup called "Inventwood" has been created to help commercialize the university's advanced wood technologies, including this one.

A research paper on the work, titled "Processing bulk natural wood into a high-performance structural material," was recently published in the journal Nature. (Source: Digital Trends)

Anthropocene began in 1965, according to signs left in the world's 'loneliest tree'

On Campbell Island in the Southern Ocean, some 400 miles south of New Zealand, is a single Sitka spruce. More than 170 miles from any other tree, it is often credited as the "world's loneliest tree". Planted in the early 20th century by Lord Ranfurly, governor of New Zealand, the tree's wood has recorded the radiocarbon produced by above ground atomic bomb tests – and its annual layers show a peak in 1965, just after the tests were banned. The tree therefore gives us a potential marker for the start of the Anthropocene.

But why 1965? The 1960s is a decade forever associated with the hippie movement and the birth of the modern environmentalism, a sun-blushed age in which the Apollo moon landings gave us the iconic image of a fragile planet framed against a desolate lunar surface.

It was also a time when the world was fast globalizing, with rapid industrialization and economic growth driving population expansion and a massive increase in our impact on the environment.

■ **Great Acceleration**

This postwar period has been called the "Great Acceleration". So the question we're interested in is whether this step change



in human activity left an indelible mark on our planet, one which, if we disappeared today, would still leave a permanent signature in the geological record.

The concept of a human-dominated geological epoch has been around since the 19th century, but the idea that we

have created an Anthropocene has recently become more popular in the face of long-term global changes in the environment far beyond what may be considered "natural". While humans have long had an impact on the planet at the local and even continental level, the scale of

modern change is sufficiently large that geologists are considering the evidence to recognize the Anthropocene officially in the geological timescale. They have set the scientific community a major challenge to find a global-wide environmental marker or "golden spike" that represents this crucial change.

■ **Radioactive elements**

A major contender for defining the start of the Anthropocene Epoch is the peak in radioactive elements produced from above ground thermonuclear bomb tests, the majority of which occurred at the height of the Cold War in the early-1960s.

The problem from a geologist's point of view is most of the records of this spike in radioactivity (for example preserved in lake sediments and the annual growth of tree-rings) have been reported from the Northern Hemisphere where the majority of the tests took place.

To demonstrate a truly global human impact requires a signal from a remote, pristine location in the Southern Hemisphere that occurs at the same time as the north. This is where our new study comes in.

(Source: The Conversation)

BIM Chief: Salient Achievements, Result of Teamwork

Chief Executive of Bank of Industry and Mine (BIM) Afkhami said that salient achievements taken at the bank are the result of teamwork, empathy, unity and amity of all industrious laborers and personnel, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

Speaking in the nationwide gathering of managers of the branch offices of the bank, he pointed to the salient achievements of the bank in the current Iranian calendar year in 1396 (to end March 20, 2018) and said, "Core-Banking system is one of our salient achievements taken by the bank in this year. The bank managed to materialize most of this objective using this advanced system."

Activities and measures of the bank is monitoring in the world level by the validation and financial institutions, he opined.

He pointed to the opening Letter of Credit (L/C) and activation of contract, valued at \$1.5 billion, inked between the bank and Exim Bank of China (for



electrification of Tehran-Mashhad Railway) and said, "this contract was concluded between the two sides as the first contract in post-JCPOA period."

After a landmark nuclear deal inked between Iran

and P5+1 (the five permanent members of UN Security Council plus Germany), rosy and bright future was opened for the Islamic Iran in the international level, he opined.

The chief executive pointed to the construction operation of three water desalination units in southern part of the country in the current year as financed by the bank and added, "giant steps have been taken by the bank in the field of supply of water disadvantaged and underprivileged areas of the country."

The senior official of the bank pointed to the increased ranking of Iran by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and said, "Dent of the country to German Hermes Company and also Italy's SACHE Company was paid fully by the Bank of Industry and Mine."

Salient steps taken by the bank is effective for improving economic status of our country in the international level, Afkhami concluded.

Ayandeh Bank Stands at 10th Rank among Top 100 Domestic Companies

AYANDEH Bank placed in the 10th rank among top 100 companies in the country. Moreover, the bank stood at 6th rank in terms of added value, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

With due observance to the said issue, Ayandeh Bank was selected as the first and leading bank in the current Iranian calendar year in 1396 (started March

21, 2017).

Industrial Management Institute (IMI) ranks top Iranian companies every year.

Moreover diagraming a more transparent space from economy of the country, the institute presents a more accurate comprehension from the scale, financial and economic structure of economic enterprises of the country.

In 20th edition of ranking Iran's Industrial Management Institute (IMI) in 2017, the bank managed to be introduced as one of the leading companies in the country in terms of sales index in a way that the bank increased its rank from 18th rank in the past year to 10th rank in the current Iranian calendar year. Hereunder are the credits of the bank:

selection of the bank as the top bank in the Middle East by International Euromoney Institute, introduced as the Bank of the Year in 2017 by the International BANKER Magazine affiliated to the Financial Times, winning three national awards as leader bank in the country, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank concluded.

109.2% Objective of Plan to Increase Oil Production Materialized in Karun Oil Co.

The five-year prediction meeting for the operation of oil wells, production, distribution and injection of gas in Karun Oil and Gas Operation Company was held in the presence of Managing director of South Oilfield Company, the Public Relations Dept. of the company reported.

As held on Feb. 17, performance of production of oil and gas in Karun Oil and Gas Company was scrutinized meticulously in 2017.

In the beginning of the meeting, the Chief Executive of the company enumerated the production volume of the company as the most important events of the company

and emphasized: "results and achievements of these meetings were approved as the production plan in the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC)."

For his part, Eng. Bijan Alipour appreciated the measures taken in Karun Oil and Gas Operation Company for the materialization of production plans and added, "with commissioning the first desalination phase, this company prevented 75,000 oil barrels' loss."

The scheduled plan for the production of oil and gas at the company was materialized as much as 109.2 percent, he maintained.



For his part, Eng. Mohsen Dehanzadeh added: "In this period, production of crude oil of the company realized 1.5 million barrels."

NASA's Opportunity rover surpasses 5,000 Martian days on the Red Planet

On Saturday, NASA's Opportunity rover celebrated a monumental anniversary all by itself on the surface of the Red Planet: surviving 5,000 Martian days. It's an incredibly significant milestone for the little-wheeled robot, given the fact that it was only expected to last just 90 days. Opportunity is just one of two rovers currently functioning on the Red Planet, along with NASA's Curiosity rover.

Opportunity launched on top of a Delta II on July 7th, 2003, along with a twin rover called Spirit. The pair then landed on Mars three weeks apart in January 2004, both going to opposite sides of the planet. The day of Opportunity's landing, January 25th, was considered Sol 1 – or the first Martian day for the rover. The term "sol" is used to describe one "solar day" on Mars, which is how long it takes for the planet to rotate once around its axis.

NASA only planned 90 sols for both Opportunity and Spirit because the mission teams didn't think the vehicles would survive their first winter on Mars – a season that lasts nearly twice as long as winter on Earth. The two rovers landed in Mars' southern hemisphere, which doesn't get a lot of sunlight during the planet's winter, so NASA didn't think they'd get enough power to function throughout the season.

Spirit was eventually lost when it got stuck in a sand trap and couldn't tilt northward during its fourth winter in 2009. Yet Opportunity is still kicking, currently enduring its eighth winter on Mars. It has driven more than 28 miles from where it originally landed and is responsible for making some big discoveries about the Red Planet, such as evidence that ancient Mars likely had ground and surface water.

(Source: The Verge)

How pollution is snuffing out plants' scent messages

In the classic post-apocalyptic novel The Day of the Triffids, giant carnivorous plants terrorize humanity. Triffids can walk and are equipped with venomous stingers, but their real power lies in their ability to communicate and so plot against us.

It sounds far-fetched, but since John Wyndham's book was published in 1951, one aspect of this fiction has proved to be science fact: plants do talk to one another. If you stroll through a forest and take a deep breath, you can smell the "words" – complex volatile chemicals such as beta-pinene, which smells fresh and piney. Plants produce thousands of these, combining them to create "sentences".

However, this fragrant language is under threat. Air pollution is disrupting floral scents, turning their messages into gibberish. Not only is this having an impact on plants' abilities to survive, it is also bad news for pollinating insects – and for us, because it affects everything from crop yields to the smell of our favorite flowers. Luckily, there is a way we can help our botanical friends fight back.

It has long been known that insects such as pollinators and pests can distinguish between plants by the unique bouquet of chemicals they release. What's new is the idea that plants use their emissions to talk among themselves. "Plants release volatile chemicals into the atmosphere – these can be viewed as a language in the sense that a plant releasing the chemicals can be viewed as 'speaking' and the plant receiving them as 'listening' and then responding," says chemical ecologist James Blande at the University of Eastern Finland.

(Source: newscientist.com)

Japanese researchers develop ultrathin, highly elastic skin display

A new ultrathin, elastic display that fits snugly on the skin can show the moving waveform of an electrocardiogram recorded by a breathable, on-skin electrode sensor. Combined with a wireless communication module, this integrated biomedical sensor system - called "skin electronics" - can transmit biometric data to the cloud.

This latest research by a Japanese academic-industrial collaboration, led by Professor Takao Someya at the University of Tokyo's Graduate School of Engineering, is slated for a news briefing and talk at the AAAS Annual Meeting in Austin, Texas on February 17th.



Thanks to advances in semiconductor technology, wearable devices can now monitor health by first measuring vital signs or taking an electrocardiogram, and then transmitting the data wirelessly to a smartphone. The readings or electrocardiogram waveforms can be displayed on the screen in real time, or sent to either the cloud or a memory device where the information is stored.

The newly-developed skin electronics system aims to go a step further by enhancing information accessibility for people such as the elderly or the infirm, who tend to have difficulty operating and obtaining data from existing devices and interfaces. It promises to help ease the strain on home healthcare systems in aging societies through continuous, non-invasive health monitoring and self-care at home.

The new integrated system combines a flexible, deformable display with a lightweight sensor composed of a breathable nanomesh electrode and wireless communication module. Medical data measured by the sensor, such as an electrocardiogram, can either be sent wirelessly to a smartphone for viewing or to the cloud for storage.

The skin display, developed by a collaboration between researchers at the University of Tokyo's Graduate School of Engineering and Dai Nippon Printing (DNP), a leading Japanese printing company, consists of a 16 x 24 array of micro LEDs and stretchable wiring mounted on a rubber sheet.

(Source: eurekalert.org)

Green development not a “choice” but an “obligation”: industry minister

ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** — The world is increasingly approaching toward low-carbon economy and the move toward green development is not a “choice” but an “obligation,” said Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Mohammad Shariatmadari.

The minister made the remarks on the ‘19th National Conference of Green Industries and Services’ held on Monday with the chief of the Department of Environment Isa Kalantari, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (the German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation), also known as GIZ, representatives and selected green industries and units in attendance.

In order to achieve sustainable development, domestic industries should take environmental issue into account, Shariatmadari added.

Environmental conditions governing the industry sector are changing in a way that without planning for the environment, one cannot develop industries in the long run, he said, adding, “Overlooking the environment will definitely cause problems for the industry.”

Reducing the consumption of non-renewable energies, lowering the use of natural resources in industry, boosting the efficiency of natural resources, diminishing pollutants via implementing new technologies and moving toward smart production and distribution were among the measures which Shariatmadari called for pursuing in the country.

He went on to say that Iran’s CO2 emissions per capita is 66 percent above the global average and this is a major problem that needs to be resolved.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the minister highlighted that the establishment of wastewater treatment plants in industrial units have grown by 30 percent.

■ Appropriate location of industries

There are some principles which should be taken into account when deciding to locate an industry in a region, ISNA quoted the minister as saying.

Mines cannot be transferred to water-rich regions but industries which are related to mining such as steel industry can be moved to such regions, said Shariatmadari. “Unfortunately, due to the establishment of water-demanding industries in the central [arid] regions of the country, we have to transfer water from the Persian Gulf with considerable costs.”

Improper locating of industrial units in some regions of Iran have caused not only economic and environmental issues but also some political and social ones, added the minister.

■ Automotive industry

Touching on the standards of the automotive industry, the minister claimed that ‘100 percent’ of domestically produced cars meet euro 4 standards, although some 4 years ago, only 40 percent of them had achieved the standard. Also the number of cars which reach euro 5 standard is on the rise in a way that it has increased from 2,280 cars in [Iranian calendar] year 1390 (March 2011 – March 2012) to 19,120 cars today, he added.

Kalantari, the chief of environment, for his part, touched on the fact that 80 percent of air pollution in metropolises is caused by vehicles and said, “As long as automotive and fuel industries are not converted to green industries, we won’t have clean air in metropolitan areas.”

He also hoped that the interaction between industry and environment would be in such a way that “We won’t be forced to shut down industrial units due to causing pollution.”

■ Green industries conference

The conference aims to acknowledge green industries and services, encourage their development and make use of their experience for other units, said Masoud Tajrishi, DOE’s deputy director for human environment.

67 green industries and 22 green service producing unites were selected in this event based on criteria such as establishment of HSE units, monitoring real-time pollutants’ parameters, boosting the knowledge of employees and developing green spaces.

The cooperation of UNIDO and GIZ in this years’ conference made the criteria for selecting top green businesses stricter, Mehr reported.

Tehran Urban and Suburban Railway Operations Company was one of the four top green industrial units acknowledged in the event.

LEARN ENGLISH

New Furniture

A: How about this **floor lamp**?

B: Fine just get it! We have been shopping for furniture for five hours! I’m so tired!

A: We still need to find an **armoire** and a **dresser**.

B: Fine! I am going to go home and **drop off** this **nightstand**, coffee table and **love seat** while you look for the rest of the things.

A: Great! Pick me up in about an hour because I think I’ll also get a **bean bag** and a dining set.

B: **While you are at** it can you **pick out** a nice **recliner**? I really want one so I can watch TV.

A: Recliner? In my beautifully decorated living room? I don’t think so!

■ Key vocabulary

floor lamp: a tall lamp with a base that stands on the floor

armoire: a large wardrobe or cabinet

dresser: a set of shelves usually used for holding clothes

drop off: to take someone or something to a place by car and leave them there on your way to another place

nightstand: a small table or stand placed at a bedside

love seat: small sofa that seats two people

bean bag: a large cushion filled with polystyrene beads and used as a seat

while you are at it: during the time you are there

pick out: to choose something from a group

recliner: a chair in which you can lean back at different angles

■ Supplementary vocabulary

sectional: one large couch with different sections

coffee table: a table that is set in the middle of a living room

bar stools: chairs that are placed at a bar

family room: the room where the family spends time together
(Source: irlanguage.com)

Iran plane crash: Wreckage, bodies found

SOCIETY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Search and rescue teams finally managed to find the wreckage of a plane that crashed into the Dena mountain range, southwestern Iran, on Sunday, recovering bodies of some of the victims, ISNA news agency reported.

The ATR aircraft with 66 passengers and crew on board went missing and due to bad weather conditions search for finding the wreckage of the plane continued for three days.

The wreckage was spotted by a helicopter on Tuesday morning.

Right after finding the wreckage rescue and relief teams as well as well-trained mountaineer were dispatched to the area to find the bodies, however, as the mountains are impassable the searches might become lengthier.

“The first group of rescue forces have arrived in the area and found some of the bodies,” Mehr news agency quoted mountaineer Qorban’ali Sayyadi as saying.

“Many of the bodies are spotted and some are buried under the snow,” he noted.

Morteza Salimi, head of Rescue and Relief Organization, said rescue and relief forces have already discovered some of the bodies, Tasnim news agency reported.

Some of the bodies are recognizable and some are not. However, the climatic conditions as well as the inaccessibility of the area have made it difficult to find all the bodies and the process might take days to complete.

Shahin Fat’hi, deputy head of Rescue and Relief Organization, also said that rescue teams might be forced to camp in the area to resume searching operation as well as transferring the bodies the next morning.

Law adopted on selling national land area may endanger environment

ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** — The recently-approved law on selling national land area will

seriously endanger the environment and jeopardize the integrity of the protected areas, according to the Forests, Range and Watershed Management Organization.

Last week Majlis (the Iranian parliament) adopted a law that authorizes those who have once illegally, or legally made changes to national land areas, to purchase and own the land lawfully, according to ISNA news agency.

Therefore, as per the new law, land-use change, which can actually contribute many environmental predicaments, such as worsening greenhouse gas emission, is now permitted and even awarded by the law.

So, those who have either illicitly or even lawfully made changes to the national land areas for building settlements, commercial uses and forestry activities, are now allowed to purchase the lands provided that the constructions are hard to demolish or evict.

The law had clearly forbidden selling national land areas since 2010, Masoud Mansour, an official with Forests, Range and Watershed Management Organization said on Tuesday.

Before that, Mansour explained, all those who have lived up to their contract to use the land sustainably, were allowed to buy the land, however, due to the implications and detriment effects of such law it was revised since then.

Even at that time, selling national land areas, was in line with country’s policy to create job and facilitate development, but now land-use change is awarded by letting trespasser to purchase the lands, he regretted. “The newly adopted law is even prioritizing those who have change the land-use over those who have legally and sustainably used it by selling the lands to them.”

He finally expressed hope that the Guardian Council would overturn the law.

■ Land use, land-use change, forestry

Land use, land-use change, and forestry (LULUCF)



A mine construction site in Rudbar, northern province of Gilan

Those who have either illicitly or even lawfully made changes to the national land areas for building settlements, commercial uses and forestry activities, are now allowed to purchase the lands provided that the constructions are hard to demolish or evict.

is characterized by the United Nations Climate Change Secretariat as a “greenhouse gas inventory sector that covers emissions and removals of greenhouse gases resulting from direct human-induced land use such

as settlements and commercial uses, land-use change, and forestry activities.”

LULUCF has impacts on the global carbon cycle and as such, these activities can add or remove carbon dioxide (or, more generally, carbon) from the atmosphere, influencing climate. LULUCF has been the subject of two major reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Additionally, land use is of critical importance for biodiversity.

Land-use change can be a factor in CO2 (carbon dioxide) atmospheric concentration, and is thus a main contributor to global climate change.

The extent, and type of land use directly affects wildlife habitat and subsequently impacts local and global biodiversity. Human alteration of landscapes from natural vegetation to any other use typically lead to habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation, all of which can have devastating effects on biodiversity.

■ National protected area system

According to the book titled “review of forests, wood products and wood biotechnology of Iran and Germany, part II” co-authored by Ali Reza Kharazipour, Christian Schöpfer, and Cora Müller the protected area and reserve system provide the core areas for biodiversity conservation. This reserve system is not sufficient in itself for long term conservation and must be harmonized with conservation efforts in other areas and land-uses.

In Iran, areas protected by the Department of Environment (DOE) cover 8.2 million hectares. Limited tourism and research occurs in these areas which fall into four categories: national parks (11 sites), wildlife refuges (25 sites), protected areas (47 sites), and national nature monuments (5 sites).

In addition Forests, Range and Watershed Management Organization affiliated with Ministry of Agriculture, manages 131 reserves with a total area of 111,000 hectares of these 19 are natural forest parks, 91 are forest reserves, and 21 are natural parks.

We have made mistakes in protecting the environment: Kaveh Madani

ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** — The nature is a proof of the fact that

we have made mistakes in protecting the environment and we have to put them right, Kaveh Madani, deputy environment chief for international affairs, innovation and socio-cultural engagement said on Monday.

“We need to pay attention to research programs in order to address [environmental] issues. We have to talk based on well-documented facts and try to rightly follow them up,” Madani suggested.

He made the remarks during a con-

ference held in the southwestern province of Khuzestan on Monday with the theme of discussing new techniques to protect the environment, Department of Environment official website reported.

Madani also commented on the recurrent sand and dust storms which is haunting the region creating serious disturbance to the residents.

The whole country is feeling sorry for the people of Khuzestan and such environmental issues must be tackled, he said, stating, “We should strive to restore the environment. We should be able to be accountable to the next generation

and invest for their future.”

The environmental disasters remind us of the fact that the environment matters, what needs to be changed to restore the environment is the mindset, and unless we manage to modify the mindset the environment won’t be saved, he highlighted.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Madani spoke on the significance of introducing environment into school curriculum as a big step. He further expressed hope that environmental education would help the next generation to use it to the benefit of the environment.



ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → €

Healthcare reform plan reduces C-section in Iran: minister

The number of cesarean sections to deliver babies has dropped by 11 percent in Iran since launching the healthcare reform plan in the country in 2014, the health minister has said.

However, the number is still big as some 40 percent of women choose C-section over natural birth on average, ISNA news agency quoted Hassan Qazizadeh-Hashemi as saying.

“We are determined to cut the number to some 25 percent same as developed European and North American countries,” Qazizadeh-Hashemi highlighted.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“out-“

■ Meaning:

go beyond

■ **For example:** Stocks generally *outperform* other investments.

PHRASAL VERB

Call off

■ Meaning:

to cancel something

■ **For example:** The picnic was called off because of the rain.

IDIOM

Be glad to see the back of somebody/something

■ **Explanation:** to be pleased when someone leaves or when you get rid of something, because you do not like them

■ **For example:** I’ll be glad to see the back of him.

وزیر بهداشت: کاهش ۱۱ درصدی آمار سزارین در کشور در راستای اجرای طرح تحول نظام سلامت

وزیر بهداشت با اشاره به اجرای طرح تحول سلامت از سال ۹۳ اعلام کرد: از ابتدای اجرای این طرح آمار زایمان سزارین در کشور ۱۱ درصد کاهش یافته است. به گزارش ایسنا، حسن قاضی زاده هاشمی ادامه داد: با این وجود هنوز آمار سزارین بالا است و به طور متوسط حدود ۴۰ درصد از خانم ها زایمان سزارین را انتخاب می کنند. قاضی زاده هاشمی خاطرنشان کرد: مصمم هستیم که متناسب با کشورهای پیشرفته دنیا در عرصه پزشکی گام برداریم. در بیشتر کشورهای اروپایی و آمریکای شمالی آمار سزارین حدود ۲۵ درصد است.

Over Dozen civilians killed in new U.S.-led strikes in Syria's Dayr al-Zawr

More than a dozen civilians have lost their lives when the U.S.-led coalition purportedly fighting the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group carried out a series of aerial assaults in Syria's eastern province of Dayr al-Zawr.

Local sources told Syria's official news agency SANA that 16 people, including 9 women, were killed in the U.S.-led aerial attacks against residential buildings in al-Bahra village on Tuesday afternoon.

The sources noted that the death toll is expected to rise as some people had been critically wounded in the airstrikes.

The London-based Airwars organization, which tracks civilian deaths in U.S.-led airstrikes, reported earlier this year that a total of at least 5,961 civilians had been killed as a result of the attacks in Iraq and Syria.

The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported on November 23 last year that 2,759 civilians, including 644 minors and 470 women, had been killed in U.S.-led aerial attacks against civilian areas in Syria over the past 38 months.

The monitoring group added that the U.S.-led air raids had claimed the lives of 98 people, including four children and as many women, between October 23 and November 23 this year.

The SOHR went on to say that the civilian fatalities had been mostly recorded in the northern provinces of Hasakah, Raqqah, Aleppo and Idlib in addition to the eastern province of Dayr al-Zawr.

The U.S.-led coalition has been conducting airstrikes against what are said to be ISIL (Daesh) targets inside Syria since September 2014 without any authorization from the Damascus government or a UN mandate.



The military alliance has repeatedly been accused of targeting and killing civilians. It has also been largely incapable of achieving its declared goal of destroying Daesh.

On December 14, 2017, Syria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates stated that the U.S.-led coalition is indeed targeting civilian facilities and providing Daesh terrorists with cover.

It noted that Daesh terrorists have been purged from most regions in Syria only through counter-terrorism operations conducted by government troops and allied fighters from popular defense groups.

The Syrian foreign ministry also criticized the so-called advocates of human rights and rule of law for turning a blind eye to the atrocities the U.S.-led coalition is perpetrating in Raqqah and Dayr al-Zawr provinces.

■ **Militant rocket attack kills several civilians in, around Damascus**

Meanwhile, at least five civilians have lost their lives in separate rocket attacks by foreign-sponsored Takfiri militants against residential districts in and around Syria's capital city of Damascus.

A woman was killed on Tuesday after-

noon when several rockets fired by Takfiri terrorists struck Jaramana city, located 3 kilometers southeast of Damascus.

A little girl also lost their life after projectiles slammed into another district in the same Syria city.

Two projectiles also slammed into the campus of Faculty of Science in the capital, though there were no immediate reports of casualties and the extent of damage caused.

Militant rocket shells also fell near a school in the capital, claiming the lives of three school children.

(Source: agencies)

South Korea to announce joint military drill plan with U.S. before April

South Korea and the United States will announce plans before April for a postponed joint military drill, South Korea's defense minister said on Tuesday.

Seoul and Washington had agreed to postpone the regular joint military exercise until after the Winter Olympics and Paralympics being hosted in South Korea, which end on March 18.

After the decision to delay the joint exercise, North Korea agreed to hold the first official talks with South Korea in more than two years and send athletes to the Winter Games, easing a standoff over Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programmes.

Asked when the two countries will hold the postponed drill, Song Young-moo told parliament he and his U.S. counterpart, Jim Mattis, would make an announcement between March 18 and the start of April.

"The exercise was postponed according to the spirit of the Olympics," Song said. "We have agreed to uphold the basis until after the Paralympics...and not to confirm nor deny anything regarding what we would do after that until we announce it".

Song added inter-Korean talks had not come about as a direct result of the postponed drill.

Pyongyang has warned it would not sit idle if the United States and South Korea push ahead with the postponed military exercises.

North Korea denounces the drills as preparations to invade it, and it has at times conducted missile tests or taken other aggressive action in response.

The South Korean and U.S. militaries usually hold military exercises called Key Resolve and Foal Eagle in March and April, which can involve as many as 17,000 U.S. troops and more than 300,000 South Koreans.

South Korea's Unification Minister Cho Myong-gyon said talks to stage the postponed military drill were moving forward.

"I'm aware negotiations are moving towards a direction where the drills will be held," Cho said in a separate parliamentary session on Tuesday, without elaborating.

A restart of the joint drill is an "act of ruthlessly trampling even a small sprout of peace that has been now seen on the Korean peninsula", the North's official KCNA news agency said in a commentary on Monday.

"It is a provocative act of chilling the active efforts of the DPRK and enthusiasm of the international community to defuse tension and create a peaceful environment".

North Korea's official name is the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

Tensions on the Korean peninsula have eased since last year resulting in inter-Korean talks and the North sending a high-level delegation led by Kim Yo Jong, the sister of leader Kim Jong Un, and athletes to the Winter Olympics.

South Korea has also floated the idea of co-hosting the 2021 Asian Winter Games with North Korea, and a North Korean official said on Tuesday this may be possible, reported the South's Yonhap news agency.

North Korea may make the North's Masikryong ski resort available for the Games, said Chang Ung, the North's representative on the International Olympic Committee.

The host city for the 2021 event has not yet been decided. Speaking to a Yonhap reporter at an airport in Beijing, the Chinese capital, Chang said it would be easier for the two sides to co-host the 2021 Asian Winter Games because there is less competition to host them, compared to the Olympics.

As to how that could come about, Chang declined to say, according to Yonhap. He was on his way back to North Korea after observing the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang.

(Source: Reuters)

U.S. protesters rally outside White House for gun control



Dozens of young people and their families have taken their demands for stricter gun control laws to the White House, less than a week after a school shooting killed 17 people in the U.S. state of Florida.

About 50 protesters held signs that read, "Enough is Enough" and "Change gun laws or change Congress", at a protest in Washington DC on Monday.

The rally comes amid a growing movement calling on U.S. President Donald Trump and other lawmakers to strengthen U.S. gun laws in the wake of one of the deadliest school shootings in the country's history.

At least 17 people were killed when a gunman opened fire on students and teachers at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School on Wednesday.

Al Jazeera's Alan Fisher, reporting from Washington, said the protesters were reading out the names of victims of school shootings that have taken place in the U.S. since 1999.

"They are here because they say enough is enough and there now comes a point where children in schools have to be protected and if that means changing the gun laws, that's what's going to have to happen," Fisher said.

■ **Trump under pressure**

Trump and other US officials have

also been under pressure to sever ties to the National Rifle Association (NRA), a powerful gun lobby group that has been blamed for the unwillingness of U.S. lawmakers to pass gun control legislation.

"NRA: Stop killing our kids!" read one sign at the rally on Monday.

While the president sent his condolences to the victims of the Florida attack, he has largely avoided talking about changes to U.S. gun laws.

In a statement on Monday, White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said the president "is supportive of efforts to improve the federal background check system" for gun purchases, however.

About 300 school shootings have taken place across the U.S. since 2013, gun control advocacy group Newtown estimates.

The protesters, Fisher reported, have "decided that they want to talk about it and they want politicians to talk about it and they want there to be some sort of action".

Students have emerged at the forefront of the calls for gun control, threatening to hold mass walk-outs to get the government to take action. Nationwide protests are also being organized on March 24.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Trump ranked worst president in U.S. history by nearly 200 political scientists



Nearly 200 of America's top political scientists have voted Donald Trump the worst president in US history.

According to the 2018 Presidents & Executive Politics Presidential Greatness Survey, Trump ranks even lower than disgraced President Richard Nixon – even among conservatives. Abraham Lincoln, unsurprisingly, takes the top prize. Nixon sits at 33.

The study, conducted every four years, surveys social science researchers from the American Political Science Association's section on presidents and executive politics. It asks the experts to rank each president's greatness on a scale of 0 to 100, with 100 being great, 50 being average, and 0 being a total failure.

Trump averaged a score of 12.34, bumping James Buchanan – the president who saw the US descend into the Civil War – out of the bottom spot. The result comes just months after Trump finished his first year in office as the most unpopular president in modern history.

Trump's predecessor, Barack Obama, jumped 10 places since the survey was last conducted in 2014, to spot number eight. George W Bush also climbs in the rankings, making it five places up to number 30.

Bill Clinton did not fair as well as the other living presidents, dropping five places down to 14th. Only Andrew Jackson dropped

more – down six places – possibly owing to increased attention on how he treated Native Americans.

The top seven presidents remained the exact same, with Abraham Lincoln on top, followed by George Washington, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt, Thomas Jefferson, Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower.

Mr Trump was accompanied in the bottom five by Andrew Johnson, Franklin Pierce, William Harrison, and Buchanan.

Researchers Brandon Rottinghaus, of the University of Houston, and Justin Vaughn, of Boise State University, said they surveyed 170 political science experts for the study. Of those experts, 57.2 per cent identified as Democrats, 12.7 per cent as Republicans, and 27.1 per cent as independents.

While Republicans and Democrats differed on how they viewed figures like Obama and Bush, they were in fairly close agreement on My Trump: Conservatives voted him 40th out of 45.

The one area where Trump did come out on top was in the "most polarizing" section, in which the researchers asked the scientists to list the five presidents they found most divisive. Trump was ranked most polarizing by 90 of the 170 respondents, and second-most polarizing by another 20.

(Source: Independent)

Egypt puts prominent politician critical of Sisi on terrorism list

An Egyptian court put former presidential candidate Abdel Moneim Abol Fotouh on a terrorism list Tuesday, state news agency MENA reported, following his arrest for alleged contacts with the banned Muslim Brotherhood.

Abol Fotouh, a former Islamic who leads the Strong Egypt party, was arrested last week a day after returning from London, where he had given interviews sharply critical of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi ahead of next month's presidential election.

The Interior Ministry said at the time that Abol Fotouh held secret meetings with leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood while in London to implement a plot to stir unrest and instability in the country, accusations he denied.

Sisi is almost guaranteed to win a second term in a presidential election slated for March 26-28, but the vote has been criticized by rights groups after a number of potential competitors called off their campaigns, citing intimidation, and a top challenger was arrested.

The electoral commission has said that it will ensure the vote is fair and transparent.

Abol Fotouh was among the first of several high-profile Egyptians to call last month for a boycott of the election.

Individuals added to the terrorism list are generally subjected to an asset freeze and a travel ban and are permitted 60 days to appeal the decision.

Abol Fotouh's lawyer, Abdelrahman Haridy, told Reuters he had not yet been notified of the court's decision but that the designation could "easily" be appealed in court.

"It's clear that there is an insistence on tacking charges on to political figures in order to intimidate all politicians, even for just saying their opinions," Haridy said.

Abol Fotouh along with 15 others were added to the list after an investigation by the state security prosecution found they had joined an outlawed organization "aiming to harm the interests of the state," MENA said, without naming the organization.

In an interview with Al Jazeera Mubasher, a Qatar-based channel banned in Egypt, Abol Fotouh last week criticized Sisi in unusually pointed terms, accusing him of pulling the army into politics, failing to curb deadly attacks by Islamist militants and mismanaging the economy.

The 67-year-old physician quit the Muslim Brotherhood in 2011 after disagreements over the role of religion in politics and founded the more centrist Strong Egypt party.

(Source: Reuters)

Aoun visits Baghdad for talks with Iraqi officials



1→ The Lebanese delegation Wednesday will then leave Baghdad to Yerevan for talks with Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan, Speaker Ara Babloyan and Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan.

Aoun is being accompanied by the ministers of industry, interior and tourism Hussein Hajj Hasan, Nouhad Machnouk and Avedis Guidanian respectively, and the Minister of State for Combating Corruption Nicolas Tueni along with MP Hagop Pakradounian.

(Source: Daily Star)

Zionist-Saudi hype set to overwhelm Iran's call for 'security networking'

1→ "We need to establish a new mechanism for security in the Persian Gulf region," he said. "I believe we have to abandon the old ideas.... Collective security, alliance formation, bloc formation have all been led to the production of enemies.... We need to change that logic based on two fundamental concepts. First, we need a strong region, not a strong man in the region.... All of us need to work together in a strong region. Second, we cannot forget our differences. We cannot forget disparities of size and power.... What can we do so that the smaller powers are not afraid of the big powers? Using the old metaphor, we need a network. We need security networking rather than security alliances. We need to move. Security alliances are based on zero sum approach.... And we have done that for a much long time.

"We are ready to take part in confidence building measures.... Confidence building measures can be ambitious, from military visits to reduction of armaments, to transparency in armament procurements.... They can also be modest. The easier to implement, modest ones are promotion of tourism, promotion of economic investment, promotion of joint task forces to give the issues ranging from nuclear safety to disaster management. We can do all of that to pave the way for a regional dialogue forum to advance this cause."

It seems as much as Netanyahu and Jubeir try to depict Iran as the bully in the region with an iron fist, Iran's insistence is on dialogue, confidence building, and regionally concluded agreements. Iran has already proved its willingness to work for diplomatic and win-win situations like the nuclear deal.

Recently, President Hassan Rouhani expressed grief that the Trump administration, pushed by regional allies not least of which being Netanyahu and Jubeir, has ruined the chance to grab the deal and build atmosphere for talks on more issues.

Despite its experience with the nuclear deal, Iran is still insistent that soft approaches to regional concerns are valuable and worth considering. May the message be taken and the effectiveness of its idea tested.

United States dominate ski halfpipe qualifying

PYEONGCHANG, South Korea (Reuters) — Aaron Blunck led the United States' domination in the qualification for the men's ski halfpipe final at the Pyeongchang Olympics with the Americans securing the top three spots on Tuesday.

Blunck top-scored on the day, scoring 94.40 in his second run to edge compatriots Alex Ferreira and Torin Yater-Wallace into second and third respectively.

It means the United States will have the last three skiers to drop in when the final takes place on Thursday.

The fourth American to qualify, Sochi gold medalist David Wise, finished in eighth place.

The other two men on the podium four years ago, Canada's Mike Riddle and France's Kevin Rolland, also qualified comfortably.

The 27 competitors all had two runs to record their best score, with the top 12 skiers progressing to the final.

It was a good afternoon for New Zealand, who saw brothers Byron and Beau-James Wells qualify in fourth and fifth place respectively.

Their brother Jackson competed in the slopestyle earlier in the week. There was a worrying moment mid-way through the second round, as Switzerland's Joel Gisler came down hard on the lip of the halfpipe, popping out of his skis and falling into the pipe headfirst. Fortunately, Gisler was able to get to his feet and walk out of the pipe, with assistance from medical staff. Gisler failed to qualify in the top 12.

Jones, 17, becomes latest American to sign for Schalke

United States prospect Zyen Jones has signed with Bundesliga club Schalke after a successful trial.

Jones, a product of Atlanta United's academy, will join Schalke's under-19 team in the summer once he turns 18.

The forward has played for the United States under-17 team and scored twice at the CONCACAF U-17 Championship last year.

He is the latest American addition to Schalke, who have signed U.S. youth internationals Haji Wright, Nick Taitague and Weston McKennie in recent years. McKennie has become a fixture in the senior squad and won his first senior U.S. cap in November, while Wright is on loan at second-tier club SV Sandhausen.

Taitague is in his final year with Schalke's Knappenschmiede youth academy, which has developed players including Manuel Neuer, Mesut Ozil, Julian Draxler and Leroy Sane.

Last year, Schalke executive Alexander Jobst said he believed there was a "growing number of talents with necessary skills who want to make it in Europe" in the U.S.

And in December, McKennie urged young talents to follow in his and Christian Pulisic's footsteps by coming to Germany to take the next step in their careers.

"If it's the right choice, if everything fits, if everything makes sense, I would say come," he said. "You don't want to start in MLS and always have the question in the back of your head if you could have made it over there? I didn't want that."

During his trial, first reported by ESPN FC last month, sources at Schalke describer Jones as "definitely an interesting player."

Chris Gloster, another American teenager, was also on trial at Schalke, but a contract offer does not appear to be forthcoming for the New York Red Bulls product.

(Source: ESPN)

Ronaldo nominated for Portuguese Player of the Year award

Cristiano Ronaldo has been nominated for the Portugal FA's Player of the Year award for 2017 along with his national teammates Bernardo Silva of Manchester City and Sporting Lisbon goalkeeper Rui Patricio.

Ronaldo, 33, had a tremendous year in which Real Madrid won five trophies -- including the Champions League and La Liga double -- and he won a fifth Ballon d'Or as well as FIFA Best Player and UEFA player of the year.

Portugal's Quinas de Ouro (Golden Shields) awards are in their third year and are organized jointly by the Federaco Portuguesa de Futebol (Portuguese FA), the Associacao Nacional dos Treinadores de Futebol (National Football Coaches Association) and the Sindicato dos Jogadores Profissionais de Futebol (Professional Football Players Union).

In addition to the complete list of nominees, voting will be held online ahead of a gala at Lisbon's Pavilhao Carlos Lopes on March 19 -- the start of the next international break. Ronaldo is heavy favorite to win again this year, having taken the prize in both 2015 and 2016.

Nominated for the "revelation" young player of the year award are Valencia's Goncalo Guedes, who is on loan from Paris Saint-Germain, as well as Benfica defender Ruben Dias and futsal star Edgar Varela.

The coach of the year award will be given to one of Monaco's Leonardo Jardim, Shakhtar Donetsk's Paulo Fonseca and Benfica's Rui Vitoria.

(Source: Soccernet)

Curling: S. Korea earn playoff spot with win over U.S

South Korea qualified for a place in the Olympic women's curling semi-finals with a 9-6 win over the United States on Tuesday as Canada's hopes of defending their gold medal hung by a thread following a 7-5 loss to China.

A near-capacity crowd at the Gangneung Curling Centre erupted in wild cheers when the U.S. walked over to shake hands after the South Koreans scored a pair in the ninth end to leave them top of the standings with a 6-1 win-loss record.

Kim Eun-jung's foursome became the first Korean rink to reach the Olympic semi-finals and they could be followed into the last four by Japan (5-3) who continue to occupy a playoff spot despite an 8-6 loss to Britain.

(Source: Reuters)

Aguero fan clash, Guardiola row to be probed by FA



majority of supporters who ran on to the pitch did so spontaneously to celebrate a famous victory, we were disappointed with the action of a minority of supporters who acted in an inappropriate manner," Jackson said in the statement. "Player and staff safety is of paramount importance and we will conduct a full investigation."

Croatian children learn from experts and Paralympians



Children with an impairment in Croatia got to try out athletics, table tennis and swimming, all under the guidance of expert trainers and Paralympians, as the first Orientation Innovation Camp was held in late January in Zagreb.

Around 50 children attended the camp organised by the Croatian Paralympic Committee and supported by long-standing partner Allianz, whose employees were volunteering during the implementation of the camp.

Only 5.9 per cent of sports clubs in Croatia have sports programmes for children with an impairment, and the Croatian Paralympic Committee and Allianz Zagreb hope to change that and give children more opportunities to try out Para sports.

"Sport is an extremely brave and big step for people with disabilities, and it is particularly crucial for children with disabilities. By participating in sport, children discover themselves as optimistic, confident and brave people who are not afraid to face life, and this is what the project 'Treneri Velikog Srca' (Big Heart Trainers) aims to accomplish," said President of the Croatian Paralympic Committee Ratko Kovacic.

At hand helping the children were four-time Paralympic swimmer Ana Srsen, three-time Paralympic table tennis player Dragan Rakic and two-time Paralympic sprinter Goran Zvezelj.

A film was also shown about the history of

the Paralympics and motivational speeches by Croatian Rio 2016 Paralympians Ivan Katanusic (who competed in athletics), table tennis silver medallist Anđele Muzinic and swimmer Kristijan Vincetic. Playrooms and various other entertainment programmes were also organised, and one of the best Croatian gymnasts Mario Moznik also joined the programme.

Katanusic said in the video: "Parental [support] is very important. For example, when I was a child my father did not go easy on me even though I do not have a leg. Now I'm grateful because he wanted to let me know how I can accomplish everything just like my peers. Parents and coaches with children that have a developmental disability must not disregard their abilities, they have to adapt the programme -- even if they only run five circuits."

The Orientation Innovation Camp is an upgrade to the 'Treneri Velikog Srca' project that was launched in 2013 to help children with an impairment throughout Croatia and provide equal opportunities for their inclusion in sports. As part of the project, 20 sports schools (athletics, swimming and table tennis) were established. To this date, more than 450 children with impairments have participated in the programme, of which 17 are involved in competitive sports.

(Source: Paralympic.org)

An advertising hoarding thrown from the City section, which appeared to hit a police officer, will also be studied.

The pitch invasion led to an alleged confrontation between City forward Sergio Aguero and a supporter, which was caught on television camera.

The referee's report will also be studied,

with the police also potentially involved if a complaint is made by either party

Sources have told ESPN FC that any action is unlikely on Tuesday, with the organisation determined to study the referee's report and further evidence and footage before potential charges are issued.

(Source: ESPN)

Former referee accuses Taylor of 'weakness' after FA Cup chaos at Wigan



Former Premier League referee Mark Halsey believes Anthony Taylor 'looked weak' as he appeared to change his decision and send off Manchester City's Fabian Delph in Monday's dramatic FA Cup fifth round tie at Wigan.

Taylor was preparing to hand Delph a yellow card following his challenge on Max Power before changing his decision and sent off the City star after appearing to be swayed by the protests of Wigan players.

Now Halsey has told Yahoo Sport that Taylor's indecision was a far bigger mistake than the final decision he delivered.

"The moment Anthony Taylor pulled out a yellow card out and started the cautioning procedure and writing Fabian Delph's number on the back, that should have been his final decision, but he was influenced by the protests of the Wigan players and coaching team and that appeared to change his mind," believes Halsey.

"That can never happen. You have to stand by your decision whatever pressure you may come under and stay mentally strong. A referee looks weak if it appears he is being influenced by players surrounding him on the field.

"When a player make a challenge of the nature Delph did, he runs the risk of being sent off when he went into that challenge and he gave the referee a decision

that could have gone either way. It was between a yellow and red card, maybe an orange card you could say, but that does not explain the way the referee handled the situation.

"The first mistake he made was pulling the yellow card out so quickly. The referee should have taken time to assess the situation, replay the incident in his mind and seek additional information from his colleagues to come to right conclusion.

"Instead, Anthony Taylor appeared to get confused by the Wigan players around him and maybe even influenced by the Wigan bench, who were very vocal in their protests to the fourth official Jeremy Simpson.

"Both the referee and the fourth official have to be strong despite the pressure of that situation and on this occasion, both appeared to lack that conviction to stand by the initial decision, which was a yellow card.

"The fourth official could have added to the uncertainty in the mind of the referees by giving him additional information after his initial decision was made. Once the referee is going through a cautioning procedure, the fourth official should not give any additional information, but it appeared that protocol was broken on this occasion."

(Source: Yahoo Sports)

Slovenia ice hockey player suspended for doping violation

Slovenia ice hockey player Ziga Jeglic has accepted an anti-doping rule violation and been suspended from the Winter Olympics.

Jeglic, 29, tested positive for asthma medication fenoterol in an in-competition test, the Court of Arbitration for Sport (Cas) said.

He is the second athlete to be banned from Pyeongchang 2018 and this is the third anti-doping case of the Games.

Forward Jeglic now has 24 hours to leave the Olympic Village.

Slovenia finished second in Group B of the men's ice hockey preliminary round and face Norway for a place in the quarter-finals on Tuesday.

Jeglic, who plays in Russia's Kontinental Hockey League, scored the game-winning goal in a 3-2 shootout victory over Slovakia in the group stage.

Fenoterol is an anti-asthma drug that opens up the airways to the lungs and is on the World Anti-Doping Agency (Wada) prohibited list.



It can be taken with a therapeutic use exemption, which allow an athlete, for medical reasons, to take a prescribed substance or have treatment that is otherwise prohibited.

Cas' anti-doping division will provide a final decision

on Jeglic's case after the Games.

Japanese speed skater Kei Saito was the first athlete to be suspended from the Games after testing positive for acetazolamide, a banned diuretic which is considered a masking agent.

Cas has also opened an anti-doping case against Russian medal-winning curler Alexander Krushelnitsky, who is suspected of testing positive for meldonium.

Jeglic has been a key part of the Slovenia team since 2009 and has scored a goal in every major tournament he has played in.

He was among their star players in Sochi four years ago and now he will leave his team-mates after accepting the ruling that he tested positive for fenoterol.

This news has come just before Slovenia's game against Norway and will be a huge distraction as the rest of the team try to reach the quarter-finals without one of their best players.

(Source: Reuters)

Klopp sparks speculation after being pictured with Azmoun

LIVERPOOL boss Jurgen Klopp has sparked transfer speculation after being pictured with a former target.

The Reds were heavily linked with striker Sardar Azmoun last January, who has been dubbed the 'Iranian Messi'.

The 23-year-old now plays for Rubin Kazan but was at FC Rostov when the Premier League giants were interested.

Klopp reportedly wanted to bring Azmoun to Anfield as cover for Sadio Mane, who was on international duty for Senegal at the African Cup of Nations.

And while the deal never materialized, the forward is being linked with a move to Liverpool again after posting a picture on Instagram alongside the German boss.

Azmoun put the photo up two days ago alongside the caption 'The best'.

The Iran international revealed last year that Liverpool did approach to sign him but he was not prepared to settle for a place on the bench.

"There were talks of Liverpool having expressed an interest in me during the past winter transfer window," he told Qatari website SC.

"However, I did not feel the time to move was right.

"I would have ended up playing a few games and then spent a great deal of time on the bench as Liverpool were only looking to fill a void for a particular part of their season.

"I want to move to a big club to develop as a player and therefore I will time the move with great precision.



"I am sure I will be playing for a top European club in the near future." Azmoun has managed just one goal in 21 games since moving to Russia so a move to Liverpool is unlikely.

The Reds are currently third in the Premier League, two points behind second-placed Manchester United.

(Source: daily Star)

ACL: Esteghlal of Iran defeat Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Esteghlal d e s k of Iran football team defeated Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia 1-0 in Group D of the 2018 AFC Champions League on Tuesday.

In the match held in Muscat's Seeb Stadium, Abdullah Al-Hafith scored an own goal just before the halftime.

In the 67th minute, Al Hilal goalkeeper Ali Al Habsi was shown a straight red card and the last year's runners-up went down to 10-man.

Esteghlal could have scored more goals but their strikers missed their chances.

Esteghlal remain top of the table with 4 points, followed by Al Rayyan of Qatar



(two points), the UAE's Al Ain (one point) and Al Hilal (one point).

Esteghlal will meet Al Ain in the UAE on March 6 and Al Hilal will entertain Qatar's Al Rayyan in Riyadh.

ACL: Iran's Persepolis beaten by Al Sadd of Qatar

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Persepolis d e s k football team of Iran suffered a 3-1 defeat against Al Sadd of Qatar in Group C of the AFC Champions League.

Baghdad Boundjah gave Al Sadd a lead with a header from the center of the box to the top left corner in the 36th minute.

Boundjah was on target once again in the 56th minute after receiving a pass from Xavi into the box. Boualem Khoukhi scored Al Sadd's third goal in the 66th minute following dreadful mistakes by Persepolis's defenders.

Substitute Siamak Nemat scored a consolation goal for Persepolis in the dying moments of the match.

Al Sadd move top of the table with six



points, followed by Persepolis (three points), Nasaf (three points) and Al Wasl (without point). Persepolis will host Al Wasl of the UAE on March 5, while Al Sadd travel to Qarshi to face Nasaf.

Wenger: Guardiola wanted to play for arsenal

Arsene Wenger has said Pep Guardiola visited his house during his time as a player because he wanted to move to Arsenal. Wenger and Guardiola face each other in the Carabao Cup final on Sunday as the Gunners take on Manchester City at Wembley.

The Arsenal manager told beIN SPORTS that Guardiola could have played for the Londoners after his time as a Barcelona midfielder had come to an end.

"I talked to him a few times, and once he came to my house when he was a player because he wanted to play for

Arsenal," Wenger said.

Those hopes came to nothing, however, and Guardiola eventually ended his playing career in 2006.

He took over as manager in Barcelona in 2008, winning three straight league titles and two Champions Leagues, before leading Bayern Munich to three straight Bundesliga crowns.

He is now poised to lead City to the Premier League title, although they were knocked out of the FA Cup by League One Wigan on Monday.

But Wenger said: "He's won much more than I did.

"I think he has done much better than I have, and he's knowing very well what to do. He has exceptional teams and he is managing them very well.

"I respect what he does because he has a clear vision of the game, he has a positive attitude, a positive philosophy.

"Even if he doesn't win I have as much respect as when he wins because I think the people who have an influence in the game, it's very important they have a positive attitude towards the game."

(Source: ESPN)

Zob Ahan ease past Lokomotiv of Uzbekistan



Goals from Morteza Tabrizi and Mohammad Reza Hosseini saw Iran's Zobahan clinch a 2-0 home win over Uzbekistan's Lokomotiv in their 2018 AFC Champions League Group B game on Monday.

Although the visitors dominated possession during the early parts of the game, Zobahan seemed likelier to make the breakthrough as both Kiro and Tabrizi came close to scoring within the opening half-hour.

The first period ended goalless but within two minutes of the restart, the hosts finally took the lead. Tabrizi was well positioned to power home a header after Hosseini floated in a pin-point free kick.

Zobahan proceeded to hold on to their

one-goal cushion for the remainder of the half, despite the best efforts of Lokomotiv who were unable to break through a resolute defensive barrier set up by Amir Ghalenoei's men. In the second minute of added time, Hosseini made it 2-0 to Zobahan with a close-range strike after the Uzbek defence failed to clear Mehdi Rajabzadeh's corner.

The result gave Zobahan their first win of the campaign, putting them level on points with Lokomotiv in the Group B standings. Zobahan host United Arab Emirates side Al Wahda on Matchday Three while Lokomotiv travel to Doha to face Al Duhail.

(Source: AFC)

Taremi fires Al Gharafa to victory over Tractor Sazi



A Mehdi Taremi brace fired Al Gharafa to a 3-0 home victory over Tractorsazi Tabriz in Matchday Two of the 2018 AFC Champions League Group A on Monday.

Al Gharafa got off to a flyer and were in front after just 11 minutes when Taremi powered in a header from Othman Al Yahri's cross. Back-to-back defensive mistakes from Sime Gregov cost Tractorsazi another goal in the 21st minute.

The Croatian was first dispossessed by Taremi who out-muscled him to move clear on goal before selflessly squaring for Wesley Sneijder who had the empty goal at his mercy. However, Gregov has recovered just in time to intercept Taremi's pass, only to fluff his lines and watch the ball roll into the

back of the net from his attempted clearance. Tractorsazi were thrown a lifeline six minutes before the break when Rubert Quijada was fouled by Mohammad Naderi inside the box, but Mehdi Mehdi pour saw his powerful strike from the spot parried away by goalkeeper Yousef Hassan.

Taremi had the chance to double his tally for the night, but his 75th minute penalty was saved by goalkeeper Jordi.

The Iranian international, however, made up for it with a close-range finish to round the scoring in the dying seconds of the game. The Qatari side welcome Saudi Arabia's Al Ahli to Doha in Matchday Three while Tractorsazi travel to Abu Dhabi to face Al Jazira.

(Source: AFC)

Wolfsburg coach Schmidt resigns after five months

BERLIN, Feb 19 (Reuters) — VfL Wolfsburg coach Martin Schmidt resigned on Monday after five months and 22 games in charge and only four days before a key Bundesliga relegation battle against Mainz 05.

The club, announcing the decision in a statement on its website, said it was surprised by Schmidt's decision but had accepted it reluctantly.

Schmidt, the fourth coach to leave the club since October 2016, was appointed in September. Wolfsburg drew 11 out of their 19 league matches under him with five defeats and three wins. They also won two matches in the German Cup before losing to Schalke 04 in the quarter-finals.

"We cannot entirely understand his motives," said chairman Tim Schumacher.

Wolfsburg, who won their only Bundesliga title in 2009, are 14th in the table, two places and one point above Mainz who are in the relegation playoff spot and host the Wolves



on Friday. Sporting director Olaf Rebbe added: "Martin

Schmidt wanted to leave the way open for a new coach so that VfL could make sure of retaining top flight status as soon as possible."

"We would like to have achieved that with him but we couldn't dissuade him from his decision," he added.

"I have to admit his decision has disappointed me because he was the coach we really wanted."

There was no immediate comment from Schmidt himself

It was the eighth coaching change of the Bundesliga season, with two at Wolfsburg and one each at Bayern Munich, Werder Bremen, Cologne, Borussia Dortmund, Hamburg SV and VfB Stuttgart.

Wolfsburg's hardcore fans staged a protest against the club management during Saturday's 2-1 defeat at home to runaway Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich, only entering the stadium after 19 minutes and 45 seconds of the first half - a reference to the year in which the club was founded.

Iran recurve junior men's team win gold medal



The Iranian recurve junior men's team secured 2018 World Archery Indoor Championship title at the NFAA Easton Archery Center in Yankton, USA on recurve Sunday.

The Iranian team consists of Reza Shabani, Kiyan Moradi and Seyedabolfazl Hosseini from Iran defeated Ukrainian men Roman Sheremet, Oleksandr Pantsyru and Ivan Kozhokar in a shoot-off.

"We tried our best. We were four points down but we didn't think that the match was over. We came back and found the way to beat them," said Reza Shabani.

"We were full of stress in the shoot-off but the will to see the Iranian flag rising was stronger. We did what we could."

The Ukrainian men's team took the first two sets with totals of 57 and 58 points. Then Iran scored a pair of 58s to Ukraine's 57s, to tie the match at four points each. In the shoot-off Ukraine scored 10-6-9; Iran: 9-9-8.

The USA's junior men's team won bronze.

(Source: World Archery)

Iran one game away from West Asian Women's Handball Championship title

TASNIM — Iran will win the 2018 West Asian Women's Handball Championship title if beats Syria on Wednesday.

Iran defeated Jordan 28-15 on Monday at the Princess Sumaya Hall in Amman, Jordan.

The Iranian team has defeated Iraq (43-8), Lebanon (29-19), Qatar (38-16) and Jordan (28-15) so far.

The competition began in Jordan's Amman on February 15 and will be underway until February 21.

The tournament has brought six teams together, namely Jordan, Iran, Qatar, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.

'Shahid Chamran of Larestan' club represents Iran in the six-day tournament.

Alonso defends impossible 2018 schedule

Fernando Alonso says he has no concerns about being able to cope with an unprecedentedly busy racing programme in 2018.

Alongside F1's longest-ever season of 21 races, the Spaniard will contest the full world endurance championship, including fabled Le Mans. Asked if at the age of 36 it might be too much, Alonso laughed to Marca sports newspaper: "No, I'm not grey yet.

"Seriously, I'm physically well. Ok, ten years ago facing a challenge like this would have been very difficult or even impossible or a mistake. "But now I am 100 per cent sure I can face it. With the way I know formula one, other categories like the Indy 500, even the way I need to travel, I'm ready now.

"That's why a programme like this has never been done," Alonso explained. "It's almost impossible. Only at certain moments of your sports career, such as where I am now, can it be done, and then not everyone can do it."

Indeed, Alonso was speaking from his latest Toyota LMP1 test, having just been at McLaren's Woking factory to see his new F1 car. "This year it will be important to have every detail clear," he continued.

"Now, the whole year will have to be designed almost day to day to get to November for the last grand prix in a very strong condition." Meanwhile, Alonso declined to comment on the account of a former McLaren mechanic, who confirmed that back in 2007, Ron Dennis wanted Lewis Hamilton rather than the Spaniard to win the title. "One story always comes out and then another follow it," Alonso said. "It's a long time ago and water under the bridge but we all saw what happened. But when my book comes out at the end of the year, you will read everything."

(Source: grandprix.com)

Eintracht Frankfurt fans protest game with tennis ball toss

Eintracht Frankfurt fans protested against the German football federation (DFB) for staging games on a Monday night, delaying the game against RB Leipzig for several minutes.

The second half was delayed when Frankfurt fans threw thousands of tennis balls onto the pitch and covered one of the goals with toilet paper. The club was apparently aware in advance of the action as a large team of helpers came out to clear the pitch with leaf blowers.

"It was peaceful and then everyone went back. It was OK," injured Frankfurt forward Alexander Meier said at half-time.

Before kickoff, supporters left the terraces and surrounded the pitch to protest, while others displayed banners blasting the federation, including "Football-mafia DFB."

Kickoff was delayed for six minutes and the game began to a cacophony of whistles from the home supporters.

The whistling finally subsided in the 22nd minute when U.S. international Timothy Chandler equalized for the home side, poking the ball home from close range after a corner, four minutes before Ante Rebic set up Kevin-Prince Boateng to complete the turnaround as Frankfurt won 2-1.

Fans resumed their whistle-protest once the celebrations died down. The fans' ill temper transferred onto the pitch, with the referee showing six yellow cards in a hard-fought second half alone. His final whistle finally ended the fans' whistling.

(Source: ESPN)

INTERNATIONAL DAILY
www.tehrantimes.com

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Tel: 88911433
» Webmaster: webmaster@tehrantimes.com
» Printed at: Rooztab - ISSN: 1017-94

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P.O. Box: 14155-4843
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Brazilian guitarist Yamandu Costa to perform in Tehran

A R T **TEHRAN** — The renowned Brazilian guitarist and composer Yamandu Costa will give a concert at Tehran's Azadi Tower on February 26.



Yamandu Costa in an undated photo

The performance has been organized in collaboration with the Embassy of Brazil.

Yamandu's main instrument is the Brazilian seven-stringed classical guitar. He uses a mixture of all styles and creates rare, personalized interpretations on his seven-stringed guitar.

“Three Billboards” leads the pack at politically edged BAFTA awards

LONDON (Reuters) — Dark comedy “Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri” was the biggest winner at the BAFTA Film Awards, held in London on Sunday, an event which saw the campaign for women's rights in the entertainment industry take center stage.

“Three Billboards” won five awards, including best film, best actress for its lead performer Frances McDormand and a supporting actor award for Sam Rockwell. Writer-director Martin McDonagh also won for the film's original screenplay.

The U.S.-set film also won the best British film honors, qualifying on the basis of its creative team and the companies involved in producing it, many of whom are British.



Martin McDonagh, Peter Czernin, Sam Rockwell and Graham Broadbent, pose with Frances McDormand, as they hold their trophies for Best Film for “Three Billboards Outside Ebbing Missouri” at the British Academy of Film and Television Awards (BAFTA) at the Royal Albert Hall in London, Britain February 18, 2018. (Reuters/Hannah McKay)

Though “Three Billboards” took home the most trophies, it did not dominate proceedings, with a number of critically well-received films also garnering recognition.

Mexican director Guillermo del Toro took the directing honors for his fantasy “The Shape of Water,” Gary Oldman took the top male acting prize for his portrayal of Winston Churchill in “Darkest Hour,” and Allison Janney was honored for her supporting turn in “I, Tonya.”

Pixar animation “Coco” won for best animated film, while Christopher Nolan's “Dunkirk” won for best sound, and Edgar Wright's “Baby Driver” won for editing. Daniel Kaluuya, the British star of “Get Out” took the rising star award.

The “Time's Up” campaign against sexual misconduct was a recurring theme throughout the evening. Many of the female attendees wore black outfits in a gesture of protest.

In his acceptance speech, McDonagh expressed the hope that such protests would bring about change.

“Our film is a hopeful one in lots of ways but it's also an angry one, and as we've seen this year, sometimes anger is the only way to get people to listen and to change, so we're thrilled that BAFTA has recognized this,” he said.

In addition, many in attendance wore badges citing the campaign against sexual harassment, while honorees and presenters, including Sam Rockwell and British actress Lily James expressed support for the movement.

The night's biggest female winner, McDormand, did not join in the sartorial protest, saying in her acceptance speech that though she supported the movement, she had “a little trouble with compliance.”

Other notable winners included cinematographer Roger Deakins, who won for his work on “Blade Runner 2049.” Deakins is also nominated at next month's Academy Awards for his work on the film.

He has been nominated 13 times for Oscars prior to his nomination this year, but has never won before, giving him more unsuccessful nominations than any other cinematographer in Oscars history.

Tehran center to scrutinize Iranology in Turkey

A R T **TEHRAN** — The prospect of Iranian studies in Turkey will be scrutinized in a session, which is scheduled to be held at Tehran's Book City Institute on February 26.

Turkish scholar Kaan Dilek has been invited to speak during the session, which will begin at 4 p.m., the Book City announced on Tuesday.

In the announcement, the institute called Turkey a country that has many things in common with Iran in the cultural fields.

“Iranian studies in the modern style has a century-long history in Turkey and

it needs to be developed in the future,” it wrote.

The study of affinities between Iran and Turkey has always received a special attention from the Book City.

In August 2012, the institute organized a session to review Iranian scholar Nader Entekhabi's book “Nationalism and Modernism in Iran and Turkey”.

The Book City also teamed up with a number of Iranian organizations to collaborate with Ankara Yildirim Beyazit University in organizing a seminar at the Turkish university in November 2017 to scrutinize the role of women literati in contemporary Persian literature.

Doc on tattooing in Iran to compete in Dublin Silk Road filmfest



A scene from “Tattooing in Iran”

A R T **TEHRAN** — A documentary by director Hushmand Honarkar will be competing in the Silk Road International Film Festival in Dublin, Ireland in March.

“Tattooing in Iran” is more concerned about traditional tattooing in Iran rather than modern tattoos.

The film, based on lengthy research, focuses on traditional tattoos throughout many regions of Iran. It also highlights tattooing from social, artistic, religious, historical and medical points of view.

The 7th edition of the Silk Road International Film Festival will be held from March 7 to 11.

Tehran gallery displays paintings by young art students

A R T **TEHRAN** — Paintings by a group of young art students that feature their personal perceptions of a still life and a woman's figure are on display in an exhibit at Tehran's Mojdeh Gallery.

The exhibition titled “Small Colorful Experiences” is showcasing 120 works created by 37 students under the supervision of painter Babak Etminani for the second time.

A vase and a figure of a woman standing behind a curtain are the themes of the paintings, the gallery announced in a press release on Tuesday.

“One of our main policies is to provide the facilities for the young artists to enter the world of the professionals through displaying works,” Etminani said in the announcement.

“This will help encourage the youth and novices to gain more experience,” he added.

Yeganeh Ahmadi, Jila Barzegar, Anahita Piruzmand, Nadia Davari, Mina Rashidi, Zohreh Karimi, Morvarid Nazari and Shiva Nayyeri are among the artists whose works are on display at the gallery.

The exhibition will run until February 23 at the gallery that can be found at No. 27, 18th Alley off North Allameh Blvd. in the Saadatabad neighborhood.

Trump blasts Oprah over 60 Minutes episode

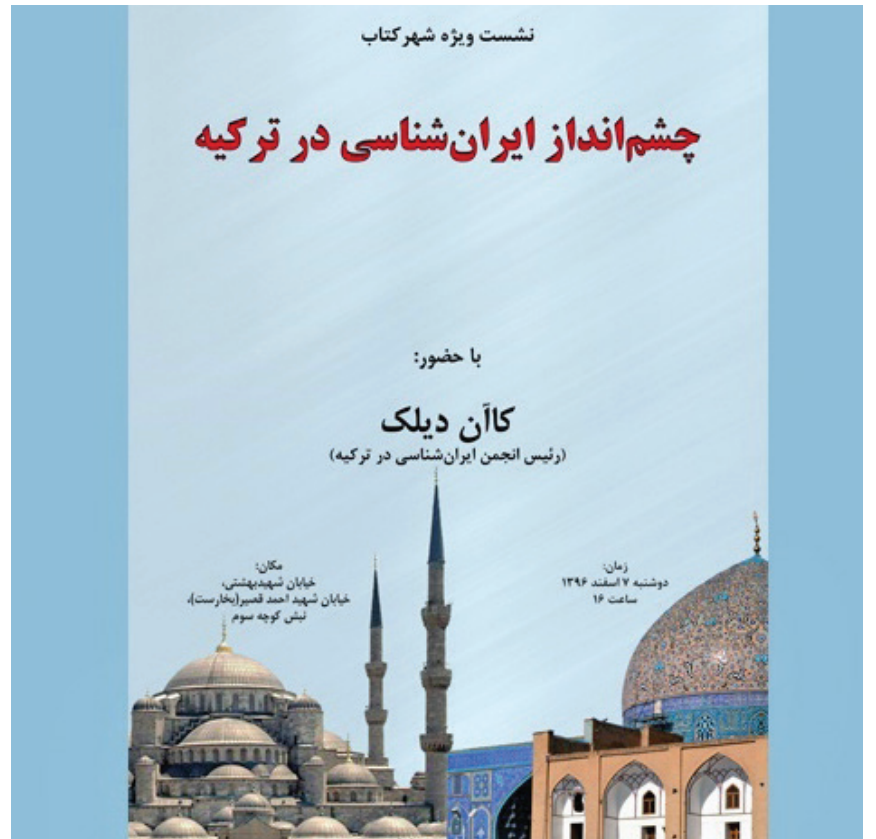
NEW YORK (Reuters) — U.S. President Donald Trump blasted media mogul Oprah Winfrey on Twitter on Sunday night over a segment on CBS's 60 Minutes program and again said he hoped she would face him as an opponent in the 2020 presidential race.

Actress and television host Winfrey, now a contributor to the CBS program, led a panel of 14 Republican, Democrat and Independent voters from Grand Rapids, Michigan in a wide ranging discussion about Trump's first year in office.

Trump tweeted: “Just watched a very insecure Oprah Winfrey, who at one point I knew very well, interview a panel of people on 60 Minutes. The questions were biased and slanted, the facts incorrect. Hope Oprah runs so she can be exposed and defeated just like all of the others!”

Winfrey has told various media outlets, including Entertainment Weekly, that she is not running for president, but has considered it, after there was much recent media speculation.

The panelists ranged from voters who said “I love him more and more every day,” to others questioning Trump's stability, saying, “All he does is bully people.”



A poster for a session that is scheduled to scrutinize the prospect of Iranian studies in Turkey

Athens AnimFest to screen Iranian shorts



A scene from “Genesis” by Abtin Mozaffari

A R T **TEHRAN** — A lineup of eight Iranian short movies will go on screen at the Athens AnimFest, which will be held in the Greek capital from March 15 to 21.

“Alphabet” by Kianush Abedi, “Blows with the Wind” by Hajir Asadi, “Empty View” by Ali Zare Qanatnoei, “Genesis” by Abtin Mozaffari

and “Kitchen Dreams” by Arvin Medqalchi are in the collection.

Also included are “Run Rustam Run” by Hossein Molayemi, “The Train” by Javad Maturi and “Wuthering Heights” by Shirin Ashtari.

Films from Germany, Denmark, Spain, France, the U.S., Estonia and several other countries will be screened during the event.

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