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ARTICLE
 By Sondoss Al Asaad
 Political analyst from Beirut

Nabeel Rajab: The voice of the voiceless

Nabeel Rajab, a Bahraini prominent human rights advocate, is serving a pre-trial detention for exercising his right to freedom of expression, amid the international calls to immediately and unconditionally release him. The Bahraini authorities detained Rajab in relation to his activism, and to statements he posted on twitter. Rajab had been found guilty of 'spreading rumours and untruthful information' against the Bahraini government in TV interviews.

On 15 January 2018, Bahrain's Court of Cassation upheld the two-year sentence of Rajab for the case related to his participation in televised interviews. The Twitter case is adjourned the final hearing rescheduled to 21 February, for the 20th time since his detention on 13 June 2016.

Without a doubt, the trails of Rajab and many other human rights defenders in Bahrain illustrate the deterioration of the levels of freedom of expression, which has become, according to the authorities, a crime instead of being a right. Rajab faces a series of repressive trials and charges, and if convicted, he could be sentenced up to 18 years behind bars.

These charges involved the peaceful exercise of internationally protected rights to freedom of expression, which Bahrain acceded to. Indeed, Rajab's arrest contravenes his rights to freedom of expression and association, as protected by articles 19 and 22 of the International Protocol on Civil and Political Rights.

Rajab has been a human rights defender for over 15 years, in Bahrain and across the gulf, and he founded the Bahrain Human Rights Center. Charges brought against him have significantly hampered his active struggle, however, his great determination and unbreakable steadiness is abundant, and he has repeatedly demonstrated his firm stance to endure until the last breath, "I've spent a great part of my time in jail for the last few years because of my criticism against the government. However, it is a price I'm willing to pay for the freedom I'm fighting for." **->7**

Chaos in West Asia has affected Europe: Velayati

POLITICS TEHRAN — Ali Akbar Velayati, a top foreign policy adviser to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, said on Wednesday that chaos in West Asia affected the European countries.

Velayati made the remarks during a meeting with Spanish Foreign Minister Alfonso Dastis in Tehran.

The veteran politician said Tehran is ready to share views with other countries in bringing peace and stability to hotspots in West Asia.

"We are ready to exchange views on settling regional crises peacefully based on the international regulations and move towards peace," Velayati told Dastis.

The war in Syria is entering its eighth year. There is also no end in sight in the Saudi-led war on Yemen which started in March 2015.

Velayati added, "Those who understand sensitivity of the region should pay attention



to this point that their inappropriate presence in the region will be more harmful to themselves."

"We are ready to exchange views on settling regional crises peacefully based on international regulations," Velayati says.

Bodies recovered from plane crash site

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Four days after a passenger plane heading from Tehran to the southwestern city of Yasouj crashed into Dena mountain range, search and rescue teams on Wednesday found and recovered some of the bodies.

The bodies were not easy to identify, according to Tasnim news agency. While some news agencies reported that 7 bodies were transferred to Yasouj, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province, forensics director Kamrouz Amini has said that no bodies are transferred to the city yet.

The ATR-72 twin-engine turboprop, which was used for short regional flight, crashed into the mountaintop with 66 passengers and crews on board on Sunday morning.

Poor weather condition, snowstorm and freezing temperature have made it hard for the rescue teams to spot the wreckage or the bodies for three day. Eventually, on Tuesday morning a helicopter succeeded in finding the wreckage.

But again the bad weather has made it impossible for the helicopters to access the area. Therefore, search and rescue workers climbed

Iran, Turkey, and Russia have fiercely opposed the deployment of U.S. forces in Syria. Iran says the U.S. military presence in Syria is aimed to split Syria.

Velayati, who was Iran's foreign minister from 1981 to 1997, also called on European countries, especially Spain, to adopt more "positive" approaches towards the region.

He reiterated the long-held position by Tehran that the crises in the region can be settled politically and not militarily.

The people in regional countries should determine their destiny without any foreign interference, he added.

In a joint press conference with the Spanish foreign minister, Velayati also said economic ties between Iran and Spain are "growing".

The two countries have capacities to expand relations, he added.

Dastis called for expansion of cooperation.

Dutch, Spanish FMs hold talks with Rouhani

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Dutch and Spanish foreign ministers who made separate visits to Tehran on Wednesday held talks with top Iranian officials including President Rouhani, Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, Supreme National Security Secretary Ali Shamkhani and Ali Akbar Velayati, the foreign Policy advisor to the Leader.

In the meetings, Rouhani called for cooperation in areas of environment,

economy, science, banking, agriculture, transport, energy saving, etc. The president also insisted on the need to protect the nuclear deal. In the meetings, Rouhani also said Tehran welcomes closer cooperation with the European Union including the Netherlands and Spain.

Rouhani also talked about the need to fight terrorism and called for efforts to bring the Saudi-led war against Yemen to an end. **->2**

Pro-government fighters move into Syria's Afrin

By staff & agencies

A convoy of pro-government fighters entered Syria's Afrin region on Tuesday to support Kurdish fighters battling Turkey's military but immediately came under artillery fire.

Syrian state television showed video of the convoy of pro-government forces deployed to help fend off Turkey's assault against Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG/Yekineyên Parastina Gel) fighters. "The Syrian government has responded

to the call of duty and sent military units on this day ... to deploy along the border and take part in defending the unity of Syria's territory and borders." YPG spokesman Nouri Mahmoud said in a statement.

State TV showed about 20 vehicles with heavy weapons mounted entering Afrin from the nearby village of Nubul. Dozens of armed men were on the vehicles waving Syrian flags and chanting pro-government slogans. **->13**

Iran-proposed security architecture taken seriously: Zarif

POLITICS MUNICH — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has said his proposal for a new security architecture in the Persian Gulf region has been taken seriously "by serious people".

Zarif made the remark on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference on Sunday in answer to the Tehran Times' question

on how central Iran is regarded by world leaders in addressing regional security.

"I believe what was proposed by Iran on a new security architecture for the Persian Gulf area has been taken very seriously by everybody. I just refer you to the statement by the secretary general of the United Nations," Zarif pointed out. **->2**

Bahrain: Appeals court upholds death sentences handed to six Bahrainis, strips two others of citizenship

A court in Bahrain has convicted political activist Nabeel Rajab, and sentenced him to five years in prison for his comments online denouncing the House of Saud regime's role in the war in Yemen and for criticizing prison abuse in his country.

The Bahrain Center for Human Rights said Rajab was convicted on Wednesday for "disseminating false rumors in time of war", for "offending a foreign country" and for "insulting a statutory body" as codified in the Bahraini criminal code.

Rajab's charges include a social media post in March 2015, the day the Saudi regime launched in invasion of Yemen, criticizing wars that "bring hatred, destruction and horrors".

In a statement, Dimitris Christopoulos, president of the International Federation for Human Rights (IFHR), said the "outrageous sentence" on Wednesday "contributes to further shut down" the space for civil society and peaceful protest in Bahrain.

"Nabeel Rajab is not a criminal, he is a prominent human rights defender and political prisoner," Christopoulos said.

He and his organization called on the Bahraini government to "immediately release" Rajab and other human rights activists in detention.

The World Organization Against Torture also weighed in calling Rajab's trial "a mockery of justice" and his verdict as "surrealistic".

"This continuous harassment, which illustrates once more the government's relentless efforts to silence the whole Bahraini civil society, must stop," Gerald Staberock, the organization's secretary general, said.

Since June 2016, Rajab has been in "solitary detention" despite his health conditions, according to the Bahrain Center for Human Rights.

The human rights watchdog noted that Rajab's trial had been postponed 20 times, and that the government violated court procedures by failing to give his lawyers enough opportunity to defend their client.

The group also alleged that Rajab had been beaten and subjected to "humiliating and degrading" condition while in detention. **->13**



© Tehran Times/Mohammadreza Abbasi

People bemoan friend who lost life in terror attack

POLITICS TEHRAN — Shocked mourners at the Wednesday funeral of Mohammad Hossain Haddadian, the Basij guard who was killed by dervish rioters in Pasdaran St., uptown Tehran.

The rioters, members of the Gonabadi Dervishes, took to attacking police and Basij members who were inviting them to leave the location where they had staged an unauthorized gathering near a police station. The cult members engaged in clashes with ordinary people and police forces. One attacker ploughed a bus into a group of policemen, killing three of them. Also two members of the Basij volunteer force lost their lives in separate car-ramming and stabbing attacks at the site.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Zarif: JCPOA not a treaty between Iran and U.S.

POLITICS TEHRAN — In an exclusive interview with Sputnik published on Wednesday, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif spoke about the current situation around the nuclear deal (officially called the JCPOA) that is being heatedly discussed by the Trump administration.

“The international community, except the Trump administration, Israel and two or three Middle Eastern countries, understand that the JCPOA is an international agreement and not a bilateral treaty between Iran and the U.S.,” Zarif said.

“It’s clear that if the U.S. decides to withdraw from the deal unilaterally or break the deal, it will isolate itself, becoming an outsider.”



Judiciary says fast on pursuing Dervish atrocity

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Iranian Judiciary has said it will determinately pursue the case of Monday’s atrocious act of riotous Dervishes who killed 6 security and damaged much public and private property.

Addressing a press conference on Wednesday, spokesman Qolamhossein Mohseni Ejei said the issue is such that police and legal bodies cannot let it go unaddressed, YJC reported.

Underlining how ill-wishing foreign media misappropriated the incident in line with their Irano-phobia missions, Ejei said the Dervish cult followers were seeking to unlawfully release a criminal who was facing law suit filed by a private plaintiff.



Saudi Arabia releases Iranian sailors after two years

POLITICS TEHRAN — Nine Iranian sailors were freed on Wednesday after two years of captivity in Saudi Arabia, according to the director of a local branch of the Iran Fisheries Organization in the southern city of Bushehr.

Speaking to the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), Hassan Ahmadi said that the sailors were fishing in the Persian Gulf somewhere between Farsi and Arabi Islands two years ago when their vessel was seized by the Saudi coast guards.

The owner of the vessel was shot by the Saudi coast guard and no sign of him has been found yet, Ahmadi said.



Transport minister, others brief MPs on plane crash

POLITICS TEHRAN — Minister of Transport Abbas Akhondi on Wednesday attended a meeting of the Majlis Civil Committee explaining the circumstances surrounding a recent plane crash in southwest Iran that led to the deaths of all 65 people aboard.

Speaking to the Tasnim News Agency, Alim Yar Mohammadi, another member of the committee, said that in addition to the minister, high-ranking officials of the Civil Aviation Organization (CAO) and Red Crescent Society (IRCS) as well as the managing director of the Aseman Airlines participated in the Wednesday meeting.



Charity market held in Japan to aid Iranian quake victims

POLITICS TEHRAN — A charity market has been held at the residence of the Iranian ambassador to Tokyo to aid victims of the earthquake in the province of Kermanshah in western Iran.

The fundraising market was held on Sunday, February 19, with participation of some Iranians residing in Tokyo including the embassy staff, Al-Mustafa International University, the Iranian Cultural Attaché’s office, the Persian Carpet Association, and a number of Iranian and Japanese businesspersons.

According to the IRIB, Iranian dishes, handicrafts, rugs and food products were put on the show and the Japanese welcomed the event.



MPs call on transport and labor ministers to resign before impeachment

POLITICS TEHRAN — Some Iranian MPs have in a letter to President Hassan Rouhani demanded the resignation of Transport Minister Abbas Akhondi and Labor Minister Labor Ali Rabiee over a recent plane crash.

The letter came around the time when spokesperson of Parliament Civil Development Committee Sodeyf Badri revealed the plan for impeachment of the transport minister, the Shargh daily reported.

A passenger airplane of Aseman Airlines, heading from Tehran to Yasuj, crashed in Mount Dena near Semirom in Isfahan Province on Sunday, leaving all 66 on board dead.

Dutch, Spanish FMs hold talks with Rouhani

Rouhani: Iranians rightly believe defense power is nonnegotiable

1 -> Rouhani criticizes commotion over Iran’s missile program

In the meeting with Dutch Foreign Minister Sigrid Kaag, Rouhani criticized “purposeful commotion” created over Iran’s missile program by certain countries, saying the Iranian nation’s mind is fresh with the “bitter” memories of Saddam Hussein’s missile attacks on Iranian cities in the 1980s and they believe that the country’s defense capability must not be open to negotiation.

Rouhani said while Saddam was targeting Iranian civilian targets with missiles, other countries refused to sell missiles to Iran to defend its people.

“Our people with this bitter historical experience and the national security of their country are sensitive to the raising of any issue in this regard and rightly believe that the country’s defense capability is not negotiable,” Rouhani insisted.

For her part, FM Kaag pointed to Iran’s missile program and said her country “recognizes” Iran’s “legitimate” weapons program for defensive purposes.

Rouhani: Mideast must not be turned into ‘arms depot’

In the meeting with Spanish Foreign Minister Alfonso Dastis, Rouhani criticized certain Western countries for selling sophisticated weapons to certain Arab countries in the region.

“All the countries should be committed to avoid turning the region into arms depot,” Rouhani noted. Rouhani said all should pre-



Sigrid Kaag



Alfonso Dastis



Hassan Rouhani

vent an “arms race” in the region.

Spanish FM: EU fully backs nuclear deal

For his part, the Spanish foreign minister said the EU fully supports the JCPOA, the official name for the nuclear agreement.

“Increasing ties with Iran is important for Spain and other European Union members, and through the survival and duration of the

JCPOA we can strengthen ties,” Dastis said.

The Dutch foreign minister also said that the EU is determined to expand ties with Iran.

Rouhani reprimands sale of ‘destructive weapons’ to regional states

Also in the talks with the Dutch foreign minister, Rouhani said Tehran is willing to talk with its “friends” in Europe about the massive sale of “destructive weapons” to

regional countries mainly by Western states.

Iran has been a vocal critic of the Saudi-led war against Yemen. The U.S. and Britain are the main arms suppliers to Saudi Arabia.

The president said the sale of “deadly fighter jets and missiles” to regional countries have killed and displaced Yemeni people and destroyed the country’s residential buildings and infrastructure.

Elsewhere, he said it is necessary to end war in Yemen and lay the grounds for inter-Yemeni dialogue.

“Iran supports any effort in this respect and is ready to hold talks with the European Union to boost regional security and stability and continue fighting terrorism,” Rouhani said.

The chief Dutch diplomat also said the Netherlands is seeking for an immediate ceasefire in Yemen and resolving the conflict through national dialogue.

Nothing can be added or reduced from nuclear deal

Commenting on the 2015 nuclear deal which has come under heavy attack by U.S. President Donald Trump, Rouhani said, “Nothing can be added to the agreement or reduced from it.”

Trump has said if the nuclear deal is not revised he will withdraw the U.S. from it.

He added, “The Islamic Republic of Iran will make any effort to protect the deal as long as the other sides remain committed to their obligations.” He also said, “Definitely, Iran will not be first to violate the deal.”

U.S. reviving terrorists in Mideast, North Africa: Shamkhani

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) has warned that Washington is reviving terrorist groups in the Middle East and North Africa.

“Extensive evidence suggests America’s endless effort to revive armed terrorist groups in the region and North Africa,” Ali Shamkhani said at a meeting with Dutch Foreign Affairs Minister Sigrid Kaag in Tehran on Wednesday.

He also condemned U.S. efforts to undermine the

nuclear deal, saying the U.S. National Security Strategy and Nuclear Doctrine is a major threat to global peace and violates the United Nations Charter.

During the meeting, the two sides also discussed the cooperation between Iran and the Netherlands in different fields and the latest developments in security area.

Shamkhani welcomed expansion of bilateral relations between Iran and the Netherlands in all economic, commercial and political arenas, adding

Iran-EU relations will benefit peace and stability in the world.

Sigrid Kaag, for her part, voiced her gratitude to the Islamic Republic’s compliance with its commitments under the nuclear deal, saying the implementation of the deal will benefit the people of the two countries politically and economically.

During her visit to Iran, Kaag also met with other top Iranian officials including President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

Iran, Azerbaijan discuss military co-op

POLITICS TEHRAN — Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami held high-profile talks with officials from the Republic of Azerbaijan on bilateral relations and closer military cooperation.

Heading a high-ranking military delegation, the defense minister traveled to Baku at the invitation of his Azeri counterpart Zakir Hasanov.

Hatami also met the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev during the visit. He was expected to hold talks on regional and international developments with the Azeri authorities.

Hailing the historic military ties between Tehran and Baku, he said a joint commission on Iran-Azerbaijan military cooperation has been established during President Rouhani’s second term in office.

He added that the commission has been holding routine sessions since November 2017.

The bulk of the issues to be discussed in the official visit have been already mooted in the sessions of the joint commission on military cooperation, he said, adding that his visit could contribute to regional security and stability and also to closer bilateral ties.



Iran’s UN envoy calls nuclear deal example of patient diplomacy

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran’s ambassador to the UN said on Tuesday that the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, is an example of “patient diplomacy”.

The JCPOA can serve as a model for “successful negotiation”, Gholamali Khoshroo said during a session of the UN Charter committee.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has shown good will during the talks and also implementation of the deal, he said.

Iran, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council - the U.S., UK, France, Russia, and

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

The nuclear deal took effect in January 2016.

However, Donald Trump, both during his presidential campaigns and since he took the helm at the White House, has made repeated attacks on the JCPOA. Congress has also adopted sanctions legislations against Iran which run counter to the spirit and terms of the nuclear agreement.

Ambassador Khoshroo said imposing unilateral sanctions is “immoral” and “unjustifiable”.

“It is regrettable that such illegal actions have started by one government. It seems that this government is addicted to imposition of sanctions and considers it a tool in foreign policy to gain benefits,” the diplomat remarked.

He said that the UN Security Council should impose sanction as the last choice in case of real threat against peace.

Khoshroo added even those UN sanctions which are politically motivated are “illegal” and “illegitimate”.

Violence against police intolerable, Rouhani warns

POLITICS TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani has strongly condemned violence against police forces, saying violent behavior against police “will not be tolerated under any circumstances”.

Rouhani made the remarks at a cabinet meeting on Wednesday when the interior and intelligence ministers presented reports on the Monday night riots in the wealthy northern Tehran.

The warning by the president came after an attacker aligned to the cult of Gonabadi Dervishes ploughed a bus into a group of policemen, killing three of them. The attack took place during an unauthorized gathering by the cult members near a police station in the Pasdaran neighborhood.

Two members of Basij force also lost their lives in other incidents at the site.

The president said any form of brutality and insults against the police force, which is in charge of maintaining public order and security, is “unacceptable”, ISNA reported.

The president condoled with the victims’ families, voicing gratitude to the country’s security forces, especially the Law Enforcement Force, for their management and tolerance in the face of the attacks.

“The government will support the defenders of the country’s security with all

its power,” he stressed.

He ordered responsible government bodies to investigate the root causes of such incidents.

The president also ordered his Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli to follow up on the issue and provide the public with a report on the details of the incident as soon as possible.

Rahmani Fazli has derided the attacks, saying all those behind the incident would be dealt with “decisively”.

Speaking to reporters after the cabinet meeting, the minister offered his condolences to the bereaved families of the slain security forces.

“All those disrupting the security would be treated decisively,” Tasnim quoted him as saying.

He maintained that there would be no dialogue with the rioters.

The minister further said the Judiciary is expected to bring to justice all those who broke the law.

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

The spokesman said 30 police forces were also injured and many public and private properties were destroyed in the clashes.

Iran-proposed security architecture taken seriously: Zarif

1 -> “We made the initial proposal last year here. But then I wrote an opinion piece in The Financial Times a few weeks ago. And now you hear the secretary general of the United Nations stating before this conference that that is the way out.”

The Iranian foreign minister said he “would not take the comments by some who are trying to blame others for their problems seriously, but... will focus on statements by serious people.”

Elaborating on his proposed security architecture when he addressed the Valdai Discussion Club in Moscow on Monday, Zarif called for abandoning “the illusion that security can be bought from outside or achieved at the expense of insecurity of others.”

He said countries 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.”

Inviting regional states to consider power and size disparities as well as divergence of interests, Zarif said they need to consider new innovative concepts that are “inclusive and non-zero-sum.”

He added, “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.”

The chief diplomat proposed that 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.

The Iranian foreign minister stressed that the countries need to take confidence-building measures, citing such examples as joint military visits, pre-notification of military exercises; and from transparency measures in armament procurements to reducing military expenditures.

All of these measures could eventually lead to a regional non-aggression pact, Zarif noted.

Zarif further said the countries 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.

Aoun meets Iraqi parliament speaker, former VP

Lebanese President Michel Aoun met with Iraqi Speaker of Parliament Salim al-Jabouri and former Iraqi Vice President Ayad Allawi in Baghdad on Wednesday as part of an official visit to the country.

During his meeting with Jabour, Aoun drew a parallel between the two countries' experiences with political strife. He said Lebanon has gone through "harsh experiences," but "we succeeded in overcoming them after ... defending the homeland, despite political differences," a statement from his office quoted him as saying.

"We hope that the brotherly Iraqi people will overcome all difficulties and start again to build their state," he said.

Jabour also noted that Iraq and Lebanon face similar challenges, including the fight against terrorist organizations, the statement said. The two reportedly agreed to coordinate in the fight against terrorism and the pursuit of "criminal" organizations, in addition to committing to the "common pursuit of stability in the region."

Jabour also reportedly acknowledged the efforts of both countries to "consolidate principles of peaceful coexistence and grant rights to all [parts of the population] and minorities."

He also touched on the importance of Lebanon's potential future contributions to the reconstruction of Iraq, and called for expanding the "horizons" of bilateral cooperation at the economic and developmental levels.

Aoun's delegation included Industry Minister Hussein Hajj Hasan, Interior Minister Nuhad Machnouk, Minister of State for Combating Corruption Nicolas Tueni and Tourism Minister Avedis Guidanian. It also included officials from the business sector, such as the president of the Lebanese-Iraqi Businessmen Council, Abdul Wadood Nsouli.

Aoun and Jabouri also discussed easing the entrance of citizens between the two countries because it would reflect "positively on the development of their economies and activation of the tourism sector and aviation."

Aoun also stressed the importance of Iraq's "unity and cohesion," and spoke of the importance of the development of parliamentary cooperation with Baghdad through the establishment of "friendship committees." The committee would exist to trade legislative and oversight experiences,



the statement said.

The Iraqi Foreign Relations Committee reportedly participated in Aoun's meeting with Jabouri, recommending the Arab League as an avenue for the revival of Arab solidarity. The committee also reportedly noted Aoun's role in preserving national sovereignty and his "struggle for the dignity of Lebanon and Lebanese people."

Jabouri reportedly asked Aoun to convey his greetings to his Lebanese counterpart, Speaker Nabih Berri.

During his meeting with Allawi, Aoun called for strengthening bilateral cooperation and resolving outstanding issues between Iraq and Lebanon, in addition to facilitating the work of Lebanese and Iraqi businessmen.

The meeting reportedly included various representatives of the Iraqi people, the state-run National News Agency reported.

Aoun had begun the day with a visit to the Tomb of the

Unknown Soldier in Baghdad, where he attended a ceremony with local officials. Aoun reportedly placed a ceremonial wreath of flowers at the monument's base and stood for a minute of silence. Aoun left Iraq midday for Armenia, arriving in Yerevan for a two-day official visit.

Aoun met with the Iraqi president and prime minister in Baghdad on Tuesday.

On the sidelines the Iraq visit, Interior Minister Nuhad Machnouk on Wednesday met with his Iraqi counterpart Qasim al-Araji in Baghdad, discussing security coordination between the two countries, a tweet from Machnouk's official account said. The pair also discussed preparations for a conference for Arab Interior Ministers in Algeria next month.

The two also agreed on acting on "the principle of reciprocity" between the two nations, Machnouk added in a tweet.

(Source: Daily Star)

Netanyahu confidant agrees to testify against him



One of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's closest confidants has agreed to testify against him in a graft probe in a fresh blow to his long tenure in power, Israeli media reported on Wednesday.

Two new corruption investigations announced this week, hot on the heels of a police recommendation that Netanyahu face charges in two other cases, have fuelled growing speculation he could call an early election.

Shlomo Filber, a Netanyahu ally for more than 20 years and a former communications ministry director general, is expected to agree to turn state witness in exchange for avoiding jail, Israeli media reported.

Police did not confirm any deal.

Filber was arrested on Sunday over allegations the owner of Israeli telecommunications giant Bezeq gave Netanyahu positive coverage on his Walla news site in exchange for policies benefiting the business.

Filber is suspected of mediating between Netanyahu and Elovitch and promoting regulatory changes worth millions to Bezeq. The prime minister himself has not been named as a suspect in the investigation.

In another case announced this week, two Netanyahu allies are alleged to have offered a judge promotion in exchange for dropping a case against the premier's wife.

The two men have been identified as Nir Hefetz and Eli Kamir, both former media advisers for the Netanyahu family.

Their alleged offer was to Hila Gerstel, a judge involved in a graft probe into Sara Netanyahu over alleged misuse of public funds.

Last week, police said there were grounds to indict the prime minister himself in two other cases for bribery, fraud and breach of public trust.

Netanyahu has repeatedly rejected all the allegations, and released a new video on his Facebook page late on Tuesday strongly denying any wrongdoing.

He is due to address American Jewish leaders in Jerusalem later on Wednesday.

While Netanyahu's coalition partners have so far said they will stand by him, Israeli media speculated he might call an early election.

Under the headline "The smell of elections", the pro-Netanyahu newspaper Israel Hayom published a poll suggesting he might even increase his support in parliament despite the allegations hanging over him.

Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party currently holds 30 seats in the 120-seat parliament, but that could rise to 34 if an election were called today, the poll found.

(Source: AP)

China deploys warships to East Indian Ocean amid rivalry with India

A Chinese news portal says 11 Chinese warships have entered the East Indian Ocean this month, in what seems to have been a show of strength amid a rivalry in the region with India and a crisis in the Maldives.

A fleet of Chinese destroyers and at least one frigate, a massive amphibious transport dock, and three support tankers sailed into the Indian Ocean in February, sina.com.cn reported on Sunday.

"If you look at warships and other equipment, the gap between the Indian and Chinese navy is not large," it said.

The news portal did not say when exactly the fleet had been deployed or for how long, but Indian defense sources said on Tuesday that a Chinese flotilla of a destroyer, frigate, and tankers did enter the region around February 10 after conducting some drills in the South China Sea.

The flotilla, which according to the sources was well over 3,500 kilometers away from the Maldives, went back through the Lombok Strait after several days.

"Indian satellites, warships, and long-range maritime surveillance aircraft like P-8I kept close tabs on the Chinese flotilla, which was in international waters towards Australia," The



Times of India quoted a defense source as speaking on condition of anonymity.

The Chinese Defense Ministry did not respond to requests by Reuters for comment. But last week, the People's Liberation Army posted photos and a story on rescue training exercises taking place in the East Indian Ocean on its official Twitter-like Weibo account.

Regional countries, including Australia

and India, associate China's recent naval deployment with an ongoing constitutional crisis in the Maldives, with which New Delhi has had longstanding political and security ties.

The Maldives plunged into crisis when President Abdulla Yameen declared a state of emergency and ordered the arrest of judges who had ordered the release of his political opponents.

Maldivian opposition leaders have urged India to intervene in the crisis. Despite New Delhi's calls for ending the state of emergency, the Maldives extended it by another 30 days on Tuesday.

China, however, said on Tuesday that the Maldives has "the wisdom and capabilities to cope with the current situation independently."

Beijing signed a free trade agreement (FTA) with the Maldives last year. It has also been striking deals with countries in Asia and Africa in line with its Belt and Road initiative to improve imports of key commodities, upgrade infrastructure, and trade routes in the region.

The multi-billion-dollar Belt and Road initiative aims to connect Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa with a vast logistics and transport network, using roads, ports, railway tracks, pipelines, airports, transnational electric grids, and even fiber optic lines.

The United States, Japan, Australia, and India are planning to establish an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative in an effort to counter Beijing's growing influence. The Australian Financial Review reported.

(Source: agencies)

Mueller ups pressure on Trump campaign aides with new charge

U.S. Special Counsel Robert Mueller on Tuesday stepped up pressure on two former Trump campaign aides to cooperate in his probe into possible collusion with Russia, unsealing a criminal charge against a lawyer for lying to Mueller's investigators.

The attorney, Alex van der Zwaan, the son-in-law of one of Russia's richest men, pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., to a charge of lying to the Special Counsel's office. A U.S. judge set his sentencing for April 3.

The case involves work that van der Zwaan, a 33-year-old Dutch citizen, performed in 2012 about Ukraine for Paul Manafort and Rick Gates, senior officials in Donald Trump's 2016 election campaign.

The two former aides have been charged with conspiracy to launder money and failure to register as foreign agents in connection with work for a pro-Russia Ukrainian party.

The charge against van der Zwaan make no reference to Trump's campaign or the 2016 election.

But legal experts said the charge would put more pressure on the former Trump aides to cooperate with Mueller as he looks into whether Russia tried to influence the election in favor of Trump by hacking the emails of leading Democrats and distributing disinformation and propaganda online.

Last year, U.S. intelligence agencies found that Russia had meddled in the election and that its goals eventually included aiding Trump who won a surprise victory over Democrat Hillary Clinton.

The lawyer's case appears to underscore the extent of Mueller's probe and of his interpretation of how far and wide he can investigate.

Manafort, who was Trump's campaign manager for almost five months in 2016, and Gates, who was deputy campaign manager, pleaded not guilty last year to Mueller's charges.

Lawyer van der Zwaan's father-in-law is Russian billionaire German Khan, the founder of the privately-owned Alfa Bank.

Even if van der Zwaan "is only cooperating against Paul Manafort, that could be very valuable in the big picture.

Prosecutors typically very methodically start with low level offenders and try to work their way up the chain," said Barbara McQuade, a former U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan. "My guess is he is cooperating."

■ 'BOA Constrictor'

A one-time associate of Mueller described the former Federal Bureau of Investigation director as a "boa constrictor," whose investigative strategy involves progressively increasing the pressure on his targets. The associate spoke on condition of anonymity.

A trial of Manafort and Gates is tentatively expected this fall, though recent media reports have said that Gates is expected to plead guilty in the near future. If Gates agrees to cooperate in the probe, that could put more pressure on Manafort and others who worked in the Trump campaign.

Trump has called Mueller's probe "a witch hunt" and Putin denies that his government conducted an operation to influence the U.S. election.

Manafort and Gates worked as political consultants to Ukraine's former pro-Russia president, Viktor Yanukovich, who was forced from office in 2014. Manafort was close to Ukrainian and Russian political and business figures with ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The charging document unsealed on Tuesday concerned a report prepared at Manafort's behest by attorneys at the prominent U.S. law firm Skadden Arps, Slate, Meagher and Flom. The attorneys included van der Zwaan.

Andrew Weissmann, a prosecutor with Mueller's office, told the court that Manafort and Gates funneled \$4 million through offshore accounts to pay the law firm - which he did not identify by name - and Washington-based lobbying firms in connection with the report.

Yanukovich's government used the report to justify to the European Court of Human Rights the pre-trial detention by the Ukrainian government of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, a Yanukovich rival, who was convicted in 2011

of embezzlement and corruption charges and sentenced to seven years in prison.

The charging document said that while answering FBI agents' questions about his work on the report, van der Zwaan lied that he last communicated with Gates in mid-August and another unnamed person, only identified as "Person A," in 2014.

He also told the agents that he did not know why an email between him and Person A was not produced to Mueller's office.

In fact, the document said, Zwaan's last spoke to Gates and Person A in September 2016 and secretly recorded both calls. Moreover, he "deleted and otherwise did not produce emails sought by Mueller's office" and an unidentified law firm, the document continued.

The description given by prosecutors for Person A appears to match Russian-Ukrainian political operative Konstantin Kilimnik, a long-time employee of Manafort's political consulting operations.

Media reports say that a man referred to in court documents by the special counsel's office has having ties to Russian intelligence is Kilimnik but he has denied such ties. He could be not be immediately reached for comment on Tuesday.

"Mueller is sending a signal to witnesses in this investigation that he is going to charge false statements," said Renato Mariotti, a former federal prosecutor who is running for Illinois attorney general as a Democrat.

The charge against Zwaan and reports that Gates may plead guilty suggest "that Mueller is putting even more pressure against Manafort, which is interesting because Manafort is already buried in an indictment with very serious charges," Mariotti said.

In a statement on Tuesday, a spokeswoman for the firm said it had terminated van der Zwaan's employment in 2017 and "has been cooperating with authorities in connection with this matter."

(Source: Reuters)

PMU calls for withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraqi territory

A senior commander of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU/Hashd al-Sha'abi) has said now that the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group has been defeated in the country there is no need for the presence of the United States troops.

During an interview with Press TV, Hadi al-Ameri called on the Iraqi government to announce the actual number of the U.S. troops present in the country.

"We are told that the presence of U.S. forces in Iraq is on the request of the government in Baghdad. We are yet to get a clear statement from the government regarding the number of U.S. troops which is said to be a large number," he added.

Ameri stressed that the PMU will not permit foreign interference in the country's affairs.

"Therefore, our hope is that the government announces the number of American troops which it demands to be in Iraq and the others be asked to leave," he noted.

The U.S. first deployed forces to Iraq in 2003 under the banner of war on terror two years after invading Afghanistan under the same pretext. The deployment was followed by rampant violence and chaos, which set the stage for the emergence of ISIL in 2014.

Washington then mobilized scores of its allies in another mission to purportedly root out the terrorists. The U.S.-led coalition, however, was suspiciously slow in progress, while its airstrikes against purported terrorist positions led to heavy civilian casualties and damage to Iraqi infrastructure.

The volunteer forces helping the Iraqi army said on numerous occasions that they have documented evidence showing Washington provides the ISIL terrorists with weapons and military support.

On Friday, NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) agreed to deploy a larger military mission to Iraq after the U.S. urged the Western military alliance to look into a long-term stay in the country only after the defeat of the ISIL terrorist group there.

ISIL unleashed a campaign of death and destruction in Iraq in 2014, overrunning vast swathes in lightning attacks. Iraqi army soldiers and allied fighters then launched operations to eliminate the terrorist group and retake lost territory.

Last December, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared the end of the anti-ISIL campaign in the country.

The PMU, 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.

(Source: Press TV)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	98157.3
IFX	1097.05

Sources: tse.ir, lfb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	45,170 rials
EUR	55,280 rials
GBP	67,330 rials
AED	13,070 rials

Source: mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

WTI	61.48/b
Brent	64.87/b
OPEC Basket	62.89/b
Gold	\$1,329.35/oz
Silver	\$16.49/oz
Platinum	\$1,001.05/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



Spain mulling trade with Iran in national currencies

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Spanish Foreign Minister Alfonso Dastis has said his country is mulling to switch to national currencies in bilateral trade with Iran, IRNA reported.

He made the remarks in a meeting in Tehran with Ali Akbar Velayati, a senior advisor to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

"Madrid intends to expand such transactions with Iran," the Spanish envoy said.



Inflation rate stands at 8.3%: statistical center

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The Statistical Center of Iran announced that the inflation rate for the 12-month period ended on the last day of the eleventh Iranian calendar month Bahman (February 19) compared to the same period in the previous year hit 8.3 percent.

The center also put the inflation rate at 8.2 percent and 9.1 percent in the urban areas and rural regions, respectively, during the mentioned period of time, with 0.1 percent increase for the urban areas and the whole country, while 0.1 percent decrease for the rural regions, IRIB news reported on Wednesday.



31,500 industrial units to be renovated by Mar. 2019

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization has renewal of 31,500 industrial units on its agenda by the end of the upcoming Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2019), the organization's managing director announced.

As shata news agency quoted Sadegh Najafi on Wednesday, there are 85,000 active industrial units in Iran, while 50,000 new ones are under construction and will start their activity in near future.



66,196 cars imported in 11 months

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran imported 66,196 cars valued at over \$1.756 billion during the eleven-month period ended on February 19, IRNA reported on Wednesday citing the data by Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA).

In last June, the Iranian government shut down the online auto import registration system saying that the import regulations are being revised.

The system was run in late December 2017 and the government boosted import tariffs which seem to increase imported cars prices, but there are still controversies over the issue of tariffs in the country.



Loans to economic sector increase 8% in 10 months

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iranian banks gave 6.42 quadrillion rials (about \$102.3 billion) of facilities to domestic economic sector during the 10 months ending to January 20, 2018, which shows eight percent growth in comparison with the same time span in the previous year, ILNA reported on Wednesday.

In the said period, Iranian banks could manage to offer about 340 trillion rials (about \$7.5 billion) of facilities more than that of the preceding year to domestic economic sector, according to the latest report of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI).

First train of SP phases 22-24 sweetening refinery comes online

ENERGY TEHRAN — The first train of sweetening refinery of phases 22, 23 and 24 of Iran's South Pars gas field was put into operation and the phases are ready to receive sour gas, according to the operator of the phases. Farhad Izadjou further put the onshore and refinery progress of the three mentioned development phases at 92 percent, Shana news agency reported on Wednesday.

South Pars, which Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf, is estimated to contain a significant amount of natural gas, accounting for about eight percent of the world's reserves, and approximately 18 billion barrels of condensate.

The field is divided into 24 standard phases of development in the first stage. Most of the phases are fully operational at the moment.

For the moment, production of gas



from the giant gas field stands at 555 million cubic meters per day (mcm/d), according to Mohammad Meshkinfam,

the managing director of Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC), which is in charge of developing South Pars.

Total to maximize Iranian share in South Pars project

ENERGY TEHRAN — Total has created a comprehensive database of Iranian contractors and equipment manufacturers to maximize the use of Iranian capacities in the development of phase 11 of Iran's South Pars gas field, Shana reported on Wednesday quoting an oil official.

According to Habibollah Bitaraf, the Iranian deputy oil minister for engineering, research and technology, the maximum contri-

bution of Iranian contractors and equipment manufacturers in the South Pars project has been emphasized in the contract with Total, and the oil ministry and National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) are closely monitoring the process.

In July 2017, a consortium comprising France's Total, China's CNPC International and Petropars Company from Iran signed a contract with NIOC for developing phase 11

of the supergiant South Pars gas field, with Total holding 50.1 percent interest in the project, CNPC owning a 30 percent stake and Petropars holding the remaining 19.9 percent.

According to the Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh Total had pledged 56 million euros (\$66 million) for the South Pars project and work is progressing as specified in the contract.



Euro zone business growth lost some steam in Feb. but still robust

Euro zone business growth remained robust this month, with firms at their most optimistic in at least 5-1/2 years in a purchasing managers' survey, despite indications that higher prices and a stronger currency were taking a toll.

The euro zone emerged as one of the best-performing major economies last year, and its businesses started 2018 by ramping up activity at the fastest rate in well over a decade.

But February's preliminary Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) implied that the blistering growth pace set in January, the fastest in well over a decade, has lost a little momentum.

IHS Markit's composite flash PMI for the euro zone, seen as a guide to economic health, fell to 57.5 this month, below all forecasts in a Reuters poll, which had predicted a more modest dip to 58.5 from January's final read-

ing of 58.8.

Nevertheless, this month's reading was still one of the most expansionary - or farthest above 50 - in more than 11 years.

"February's fall in the euro zone composite PMI still left the index at a very high level and consistent with continued healthy growth in early 2018," said Jessica Hinds at Capital Economics.

"All in all, with the euro zone economy continuing to perform strongly and signs of a little inflationary pressure, we expect the ECB to signal in the coming weeks that its asset purchase program will end this year."

Economists polled by Reuters expect the European Central Bank to end its asset purchase program by the end of 2018.

(Source: Reuters)

S. Korea will sign trade deals with five Central American countries

South Korea said on Wednesday that it is signing trade agreements with five Central American nations aimed at boosting market access for the Korean automotive and electronics sectors.

Trade Minister Kim Hyun-chong will meet representatives from Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama in Seoul on Wednesday to sign five separate bilateral agreements which will eliminate duties on about 95 percent

of traded goods and services, South Korea's trade ministry said in an e-mailed statement.

The agreements are subject to parliamentary approval in each country, and is likely to take effect at different times depending on the ratification process.

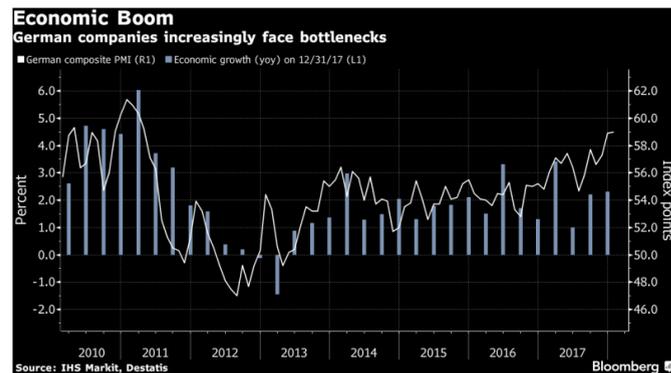
The five trade pacts will give South Korea access to key Central American countries, following its deals with the U.S., the European Union and China which helped boost exports.

"The South Korea-Central America free trade deals will enable the countries to build a more comprehensive, strategic partnerships going forward," Kim said.

The ministry expects the five deals to accelerate South Korea's economic growth by an overall 0.02 percent in the next 10 years, by boosting exports of cars, steel, cosmetics products, and auto components.

(Source: CNBC)

German economy on track for fastest quarterly growth since 2011



After a month in which economic momentum slowed, Germany is still on track for the fastest quarterly growth in seven years.

Europe's largest economy is heading for an expansion of 0.9 percent in the first quarter, according to Phil Smith, an economist at IHS Markit. A drop in the composite Purchasing Managers' Index to 57.4 in February from 59 in January doesn't change the fact that the country's private sector is growing at a "robust pace."

While Germany's economy continues to boom, companies are increasingly facing bottlenecks amid healthy demand from within the country, its European neighbors and trading partners across the world. The Bundesbank warned on Monday that a shortage of skilled workers could become

an obstacle for an even faster expansion, adding that it anticipates more private investment and continuously strong consumption.

Output, employment and new orders all increased at a slower pace in February, though business confidence surged to the highest level since records began in mid-2012, according to the report. Output-price inflation was the second-fastest since 2008.

The data follow an earlier release showing business activity in France slowed in February even as companies continued to step up hiring to work through a growing backlog of orders. Economists predict a similar gauge for the euro area will also inch lower, to 58.4 from 58.8. Those data are due at 10 a.m.

(Source: Bloomberg)

World's 4th largest iron ore producer wants to drive production costs even lower



After its production costs hit a record low in the last quarter, Fortescue Metals wants to drive costs even lower this financial year, according to the CEO of the Australian iron ore producer.

Speaking to CNBC on "Street Signs," Elizabeth Gaines, CEO of Fortescue Metals, talked about the strategies that she believes will help the iron ore company to cut costs.

The measures that the company is taking is largely around automation, she said.

"We're rolling out our autonomous haulage system to our Chichester operations. That's a conversion of over 100 trucks from man to autonomous. We have automated drills, we have a new relocatable conveyor system," Gaines said.

"It's largely around innovation, that's the way we will continue to drive our costs

lower," she added.

Gaines said the company, one of Australia's largest iron ore producers, is aiming for costs of production to be even lower this financial year.

She said: "We did come out at a record low \$12.08 per wet metric tonne for our December quarter, so we're well on track for that guidance of between \$11 and \$12 a tonne for this financial year."

"There are some factors such as the Aussie dollar exchange rate and fuel prices that will determine where we stick within that \$11 and \$12," she added.

On the outlook for the future, the CEO also promised that Fortescue will "continue along our path to be the safest, lowest cost, and most profitable iron ore producer in the world." (Source: CNBC)

Slowing U.S. auto sales prompts Japan automakers to rethink discounts

A second year of slowing growth in the U.S. auto market is forcing Japanese automakers to look beyond discounts to grow market share and focus more on boosting profitability in their largest market.

Global automakers have been battling for dominance in the world's No. 2 market as annual sales continue to slide from a record high 17.55 million vehicles in 2016. Many have resorted to price cuts to boost market share in the growth segments for SUVs and pick-up trucks, while also shoring up sales in the struggling sedan segment.

The costs of U.S. discounting has cut into operating profits at most Japanese automakers, including Toyota Motor Corp (7203.T), and Mazda Motor Corp (7261.T), where North American earnings are poised to fall for the third straight year this year. Nissan Motor Co's (7201.T) profits in the region are on track to fall for the second consecutive year.

In an interview earlier this month, Nissan CEO Hiroto Saikawa said that the days of its high incentives would end once the automaker unloads inventories of 2017 models by the end of the financial year in March, as big discounts were unsustainable in a market where growth had stalled.

"Competition for sales will be difficult in this environment,

and improving the quality of sales will be important. We can't compete only with incentives. We need to raise our marketing and brand value," he told Reuters.

Hitting a ceiling? After focusing on growing U.S. sales aggressively since 2011, Nissan is putting the brakes on that strategy, though it is looking to grow strongly in China.

While Nissan's U.S. growth strategy boosted its market share to around 9.2 percent at the end of 2017, up from around 7.8 percent in 2010, it has also raised its marketing expenses to levels which are among the highest in the industry.

Figures from data and analytics company J.D. Power show that in 2017, Nissan offered incentives averaging 16.7 percent of the price of each vehicle sold - higher than an industry average around 10.6 percent.

Nissan discounts in 2017 were second highest only to Hyundai Motor Co's (005380.KS) 18.6 percent, and were higher than 13.6 percent at Ford Motor Co (F.N) and 14.1 percent at FCA. They were also significantly higher than 9.6 percent for Toyota Motor Corp (7203.T) and 7.9 percent at Honda Motor Co 7627.T. Nissan says that overproduction of its struggling Altima sedan

before the release of the new 2018 model had led to a ramp-up in discounts, while it also cut prices on its Rogue line of SUV crossovers to gain market share in the popular segment.

Incentives are a key part of vehicle sales as they attract new business while also rewarding brand-loyal customers, but market experts say that incentive levels above 10 percent are a cause for concern, as that can lower the residual value of vehicles.

Mazda, one of Japan's smaller automakers, increased its spending on marketing promotion per car by 31 percent last year, and acknowledged that spending to increase sales can only go so far.

"Raising incentives beyond these levels won't necessarily translate into higher sales. We need to grow sales by promoting our products better," managing executive officer Yasuhiro Aoyama told reporters at a results briefing earlier this month.

While automakers flag the need for more discipline on discounts, industry experts are skeptical as to whether they can keep spending in check as an expected 2.3 percent slide in annual sales to around 16.8 million vehicles this year will likely keep the race for market share fierce. Sales dropped 1.5 percent to 17.2 million in 2017.

(Source: Reuters)

OPEC roars into 2018 oil cuts, allies stumble, shale soars

OPEC roared into its second year of crude oil cuts in January, but a tandem effort from non-OPEC suppliers led by Russia faltered. All the while, U.S. shale drillers keep pumping more oil, undermining any efforts by the petrostates to end a global glut.

How each nation fared

Majority have at least 80 percent compliance as second year of cuts begins. OPEC and its allies agreed in November to extend their oil cuts through 2018. For the past three months, OPEC has set a fresh record for compliance, while non-OPEC adherence slipped.

OPEC shines, allies slip

The two groups have diverged in reaching their targets recently. Twenty-one nations are cutting supply in attempt to curb output by almost 1.8 million barrels a day, in most cases from October 2016 levels. OPEC members Libya and Nigeria have agreed to limit production to a combined 2.8 million barrels a day, and they did what they said they would in January.



January crude oil production

OPEC members Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Algeria, Angola, Kuwait

and Venezuela slashed crude production in January by at least as much they pledged, OPEC secondary source data show. Iraq, the

group's second largest producer, hasn't yet adhered to its promised supply cuts in 13 months of trying.

By how much did countries reduce crude production?

Russia, responsible for more than half of the non-OPEC group's reductions, routinely has a compliance level above 90 percent. However, it hasn't cut by more than pledged since September, Bloomberg calculations from preliminary International Energy Agency data show. Mexico, Brunei and Sudan adhered to their promised cuts. The other non-OPEC producers didn't.

Price and production

OPEC is making headway in its efforts to curb the glut, but the group this month again raised its estimate for rival supply growth. U.S. shale output is set to reach a record 6.7 million barrels a day in March, according to Energy Information Administration data. Still, OPEC's latest monthly report showed that it's helping to shrink the oversupply.

(Source: Bloomberg)

U.S., Canada face off for LNG dominance

Considering that the North American shale revolution is the key global energy development of the past decade, it's surprising that Canada's natural gas production has actually been falling. Canada is still the world's fifth largest gas producer, but output has dropped around 15 percent over the past 15 years to 16 billion cubic feet per day (Bcf/d).

As a free market economy without the over-influence of a national oil company, Canada's future gas production is desired by the rapidly globalizing gas market. According to BP, Canada has about 80 Tcf of proven gas reserves, and with low incremental needs, this large endowment could make the country a worldwide gas exporter at some point in the 2020s.

The main problem for Canadian gas production is the decline of its sole export market, the U.S., where dry gas production has risen 35 percent to nearly 80 Bcf/d since 2010. In turn, over the past decade, Canada's gas exports to the U.S. have been sliced in half to 5.5 Bcf/d. This decline will continue: The EIA projects that U.S. gas production will increase 40 percent by 2040.

Enter Canada's necessity for LNG, the fastest-growing way to trade gas and a market that constitutes a rising 12 percent of all global use. There is great potential to export LNG off the coast of British Columbia, where cargoes can ship gas produced in western Canada to fast growing Asian markets. Western Canada accounts for around 70 percent of the country's gas production.

Now already online, U.S. LNG will be a competitor for Cana-

dian LNG. But, even with the Panama Canal expansion, the trip from British Columbia to Asia is still approximately two-thirds shorter than from the U.S. Gulf. Hampered today by a global supply glut, potential western Canada's LNG projects should come online early next decade, right when expected higher oil prices will make Canada's oil-linked LNG profitable, and the end of many long-term existing contracts will allow Asian buyers to seek new sources of supply. Additionally, the global market is expected to go into deficit around that time, reversing back to a seller's market supporting LNG shippers from Canada and elsewhere.

Centered on Asia, Canada's National Energy Board has projected that LNG exports could reach 2.5 Bcf/d by 2023, being the driving force behind increased production in the country. Currently, that seems optimistic for Canadian LNG, considering that no potential export terminal has even passed the final investment decision (FID) stage. LNG Canada has tentative plans to make a FID late this year, and construction could take four years.

As for production, Canada has greater shale opportunities than others because the country retains many of the same conditions that enabled the U.S. renaissance, such as a free and highly competitive marketplace, an unmatched skilled labor force and service sector, and surface and mineral rights that can be owned by private individuals. Technological improvements and "learning by doing" expertise are upping the productivity

of new wells.

Tight gas from shale is expected to account for 70-75 percent of Canada's production in 2025. Most of this will come from the Montney shale formation in British Columbia and Alberta. The Montney has been appraised with 450 Tcf of recoverable shale gas, putting it on par with Pennsylvania's mighty Marcellus shale play, likely the largest gas field in the world. Thanks to long-term forward sales contracts and other marketing agreements, full cycle break-even costs in the Montney can be less than C\$2.00 per thousand cubic feet.

There are, however, a few variables to the Canadian LNG export story that could serve as limitations. For example, if new production is strong enough, even without the LNG outlet, which beyond currently poor market conditions also confronts strong environmental opposition and political pushback, gas from Canada could once again become competitive via pipeline to the U.S., particularly Midwest markets.

And a large expansion of tar sands development in Alberta, which is helped by higher oil prices, would mean much more domestic gas demand and less surplus to export. Tar sands account for about 30 percent of Canada's total natural gas usage. Natural gas is heavily used in the industry to (1.) heat water to separate the bitumen (the viscous form of the oil) from sand, and (2.) create steam to produce the hydrogen that converts bitumen into synthetic crude oil. (Source: oilprice.com)

An EU law change could render home solar panels worthless

European governments have tried various schemes over the past decade to incentivize the installation of home solar panels. Some countries, like the Netherlands, have offered feed-in tariffs – special rates for these consumers to feed electricity into the grid when they don't need it.

Most governments have treated these small installations differently from big generators, to make it more economically interesting for individuals and communities to install solar panels. For instance, they give their energy "priority dispatch" in the grid system. Without these special conditions, solar panels could end up costing people more than if they bought their electricity from the grid.

But such incentives could disappear or be severely curtailed under a change in EU law that would treat big utilities and small-scale generators the same. The renewable energy industry is warning that this would pull the rug out from under consumers who have invested in solar panels, and it would discourage potential new installations if they are suddenly subject to lower payments for feeding into the grid, or having to fulfill the same bureaucratic requirements as a large energy utility.

"People would just say, 'Forget it,'" says James Watson, CEO of the Brussels-based industry association SolarPower Europe.

Equal access

The European Commission, the EU's executive branch, has proposed that as part of a reform of the EU's electricity market design rules to take effect after 2020, national governments should be required to give equal access to all energy providers and end the practice of regulating prices, leaving the rates paid for feeding energy into the grid to market forces. It would place new obligations on energy generators.

The Commission included an exemption to such "balancing responsibility" requirements for solar installations that have a generation capacity of less than 500 kilowatts, in order to protect the investments made in home and community solar installations.

However, Krišjānis Karins, the center-right Latvian member of parliament who is in charge of the file, is skeptical of these

exemptions. An avid free marketeer, he has pushed against these exemptions for small installations, saying Europe's energy market needs to be free of state intervention.

"A level playing field for all is the key element in ensuring that prices are based on competition," he stated in his report. He has proposed to get rid of the minimum thresholds that would exempt smaller actors from assuming balancing responsibility, and delete provisions that would allow specific characteristics of local energy communities to be taken into account when developing balancing markets.

But the Community Power Coalition, a group of environmental NGOs and renewable energy associations, says this is the opposite of equality. "Removing the threshold will discriminate against and overly burden consumers and new small energy communities from being able to develop renewables production," the coalition said in a statement. "Equal treatment means that similar market participants should be treated the same, while market participants in sufficiently different positions or situations should, in certain situations, receive different treatment."

Diluted protections

After months of intense negotiations, political parties in the European Parliament are close to reaching a compromise which would maintain the Commission's exemptions for small solar. The parliament's energy committee will vote on the legislation tomorrow, with a full parliament vote expected next month.

The legislation will then be subject to negotiations between the parliament and national governments represented in the Council of Ministers – the EU's upper chamber. It is this stage that community solar advocates are worried about.

Even if the energy committee votes tomorrow to maintain the small-scale exemptions, and this is confirmed by the full parliament next month, it will be Karins who will lead negotiations on behalf of the parliament. And given that he has opposed the exemptions, he may be only too willing to negotiate them away, says SolarPower's Watson. (Source: Forbes)

National governments agreed on a position in the Council in December to shrink the exemption threshold to 250 kilowatts, which might shield people with a few solar panels on their homes but wouldn't shield community installations or small businesses.

"The Council's position is weak in that it leaves the door open for member states to decide for themselves whether to maintain or remove priority dispatch and balancing responsibilities," says Watson. "If the Council's position is left unchanged, consumers and SMEs will be subject to heavy technical and administrative burdens in many countries. There is also a potential risk for increased costs for consumers as there is no guarantee that renewable investors will have access to competitive offers when delegating balancing responsibilities to third parties."

Hoping to avoid a situation where the exemption is diluted in the negotiations between parliament and council, SolarPower Europe has teamed with other stakeholders to launch the 'Smart is Beautiful' campaign to maintain pressure on maintaining the 500 kw exemption.

"Seventy percent of all European solar is small," says Watson. He adds that small installations are also the biggest job providers in the solar sector.

Environmentalists are also putting the pressure on members of the energy committee ahead of tomorrow's vote. "The community power movement is a coiled spring ready to unleash Europe's energy transition, and these votes help determine whether that movement can fulfill its potential, or whether the rules stay rigged in favor of climate-changing fossil fuels," says Molly Walsh, a renewable energy campaigner for Friends of the Earth Europe.

Trashing the exemptions could shut down one of the most promising and fast-growing segments of renewable energy, renewable energy advocates warn, one that is putting the fight against climate change in consumers' hands. Lawmakers will be under pressure, both in tomorrow's vote and in the negotiations to follow, to make sure an effort to maintain free-market principles doesn't result in negative side-effects for small solar. (Source: Forbes)

The UK had a record year for wind generation

Wind farms produced a record 15 percent of Britain's electricity last year, helping damp emissions from power.

Wind generation was double the output of coal as new sites started and several storms swept through Britain, boosting turbine speeds by 5 percent compared with 2016, according to a report published by Imperial College London and Drax Plc. The UK power grid was free from coal for 618 hours last year, the equivalent of almost 26 days, it said.

"As the share of fossil fuels falls and more intermittent renewables come onto the system, we need to think about how

we maintain stable, secure power supplies," said Andy Koss, chief executive office of Drax Power. "We can expect more days without coal on the system as we gear up to the UK coming off coal in 2025."

Facts from the report:

50 percent of Britain's electricity came from low carbon sources, making it the greenest year for the nation's power system; carbon emitted in the power sector fell 12 percent.

Power demand has fallen 11 percent since 2010 as generation from fossil fuels dropped 46 percent. (Source: Bloomberg)

Oil falls as dollar firms, U.S. oil output expected to rise

Oil prices fell on Wednesday, weighed down by a rebound in the U.S. dollar from three-year lows hit last week and an expected rise in U.S. oil production.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were at \$61.07 a barrel at 0446 GMT, down 72 cents, or 1.2 percent, from their last settlement.

Brent crude futures fell 60 cents, or 0.9 percent, from their last close to \$64.65 per barrel.

Wang Tao, Reuters technical commodity analyst, said Brent could fall into a range of \$63.92 to \$64.41 per barrel, as suggested by its wave pattern and a projection analysis.

Traders said the declines were driven by a recovery in the dollar, which potentially hits fuel demand as it makes greenback-denominated oil imports more expensive for countries using other currencies.

The dollar index, which measures the greenback against a basket of six major currencies, rose for a second day on Wednesday, moving further away from the three-year lows reached last week.

"The U.S. dollar continues to find firmer footing," said Stephen Innes, head of trading for Asia-Pacific at futures brokerage OANDA in Singapore.

Also pressuring prices is surging U.S. production, now the world's second-largest oil stream at more than 10 million barrels per day (bpd), only slightly behind Russia and ahead of top exporter Saudi Arabia.

"Bulging U.S. production will weigh on prices," said Singapore-based Phillip Futures in a note on Wednesday.

The next set of weekly U.S. oil production data is due to be published by the Energy Information Administration (EIA) on Thursday after a one-day delay because of the President's Day holiday on Monday.

That data will also include U.S. inventory figures that are expected to show crude oil stockpiles rose 1.3 million barrels in the week to Feb. 16, according to a Reuters poll. Oil product stockpiles, including gasoline and distillate fuels, are all expected to decline.

Despite the rising U.S. output, overall oil markets remain well supported due to healthy demand growth and supply restraint by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) that started last year to draw down excess global inventories.

"A roughly balanced market is anticipated in calendar year 2018, with the risks around that view tilted toward surplus," mining and energy giant BHP said in its economic and commodity outlook for the year, published this week.

(Source: Reuters)



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Turkey's violence-tinged foreign policy

By Uzay Bulut

Speaking recently about his military's ongoing invasion of the Kurdish-ruled Afrin region in northern Syria, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan taught much of the world a rather bizarre term.

"It is clear that those who say 'we will respond aggressively if you hit us' have never experienced an Ottoman slap."



He was referring to Lt. Gen. Paul E. Funk, commander of the U.S.-led coalition against ISIS.

The pro-government news website Hur Haber describes an "Ottoman slap" as "a type of strike used by Ottoman soldiers during unarmed defense or attack. It could be done with both sides of the hand and could muddle, strike unconscious or even kill the one on its receiving end. Only specialized persons could give this slap and it could only be learned after having undergone years-long training."

The Ottoman slap has also come to mean a violent, national action by Turks to someone they consider their enemy. The slap is so powerful and effective it provides Turks with absolute victory and the enemy with utter defeat and shame.

The term is commonly used in Turkey. From 2013 to 2014, the government-funded TRT channel aired a TV series titled "The Ottoman Slap," glorifying the Turkish invasion of the Christian Byzantine Empire in the 1300s.

Erdogan also threatened the Republic of Cyprus and eastern Mediterranean companies that are exploring for energy resources, forbidding them to "engage in activities that exceed their limits and powers" and warning them to avoid "trusting the Greek side in Cyprus," adding that Cyprus' courage will only last "until they see our army, our ships and our planes."

The Ottoman Empire's occupation of vast lands and Islam's flag of conquest still influence Turkey's foreign policy, including its invasions and ethnic cleansings. Cyprus was occupied by the Ottoman Empire from 1571 to 1878. And the northern part of the island has been illegally occupied by Turkey since 1974.

Even today, Turkey continues to target the Republic of Cyprus. Most recently, in a string of aggressions in Cyprus's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the eastern Mediterranean, Turkish warships blocked a rig belonging to the Italian energy firm ENI from reaching Cypriot waters to start exploring for gas.

The American Hellenic Institute has condemned Turkish aggression in the eastern Mediterranean, saying, in part: "The Republic of Cyprus has the sovereign right under international law to explore and exploit its natural resources within its exclusive economic zone. The United States has stated repeatedly it supports Cyprus' sovereign right to explore energy in its offshore areas."

Erdogan seems to disagree. "Whatever Afrin is to us, our rights in the Aegean and Cyprus are the same. Do not ever think that the natural gas exploration in the waters of Cyprus and the opportunistic attempts in the Aegean Sea drop off from our radar," he said, and then threatened Cyprus with yet another military invasion: "Just as we disrupt the plots [in the region] through Operation Euphrates Shield [in Syria] and Operation Olive Branch [in Syria], and soon in Manbij and other regions, we can and we will disrupt the plots of those who engage in miscalculations on our southern border. Our warships and air force are keeping an eye on the area in order to intervene in any way whenever required."

Since 1974, Turkey has refused to comply with UN Security Council resolutions demanding the immediate withdrawal of its troops from Cypriot soil. The global inaction in response to Turkish aggression encourages Erdogan, the president of a so-called "ally" of the West, to threaten Cyprus with yet another military assault.

Erdogan dreams of giving Americans the Ottoman slap, for he is a proud Ottomanist. The pro-government news website A Haber posted a photo of Erdogan giving U.S. President Donald Trump the Ottoman slap.

"Those who think that we've erased from our hearts the lands from which we withdrew in tears a hundred years ago are wrong," he declared, referring to the Ottoman-occupied lands that Turks lost with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in 1922.

There is nothing shocking in Erdogan's words: He is a consistently honest who speaks and acts according to his beliefs. What enables him get away with his intimidating rhetoric and ongoing hostility is the apparent weakness and confusion of the West in the face of violent Turkish supremacism.

(Source: The Washington Times)

Erdogan dreams of giving Americans the Ottoman slap, for he is a proud Ottomanist. The pro-government news website A Haber posted a photo of Erdogan giving U.S. President Donald Trump the Ottoman slap.

Qatar's European charm offensive after the Munich Security Conference

By Thembisa Fakude

The Munich Security Conference has become one of the important annual platforms for global political leaders. Since its inception in 1963, the MSC has provided space for politicians and stakeholders to discuss the world's pressing issues in the spheres of politics, defense and security. It differs from the World Economic Forum (WEF), which as the name suggests is more concerned with global economics, including business networking.

The Conference also provides parallel fringe sessions which bring together non-governmental institutions, including major think tanks. The discussions at these sessions are key in setting the agenda for future political debates.

The Emir of Qatar, Shaikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, was given VIP status at the MSC, afforded the honor of being the first head of state to give a speech at this year's conference. The MSC does not have a keynote speaker's slot, but the positioning of Shaikh Tamim on the first day's agenda confirmed the significance of his presence.

The Emir came to power following an unprecedented handover by his father, Shaikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani in 2013. Shaikh Hamad is credited with the political and economic transformation of Qatar and the creation of Al-Jazeera Media Network. His son's speech at the MSC was largely directed at the "bullying tactics" of the countries blockading Qatar: the UAE, Egypt, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. "Preserving the sovereignty and the independent decision-making of countries like Qatar ensures accelerated development," he told the conference. "Developments such as free media and free speech that the blockading countries insist we surrender."

The blockade and sanctioning of Qatar by its neighbors since June last year has forced the government in Doha to court new alliances in Europe. Qatar's politicians, led by Foreign Minister Mohammed Bin Abdul Rahman, have been engaged in a diplomatic offensive since the blockade began. Its counter-narrative has been extremely effective. This was further strengthened



Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani gives a speech during the 54th Munich Security Conference in Munich, southern Germany, on February 16, 2018.

The blockade and sanctioning of Qatar by its neighbors since June last year has forced the government in Doha to court new alliances in Europe.

by its ambitious and pragmatic foreign policy which emphasizes the championing of freedom of expression in the region.

Qatar has also used sports diplomacy to open up its society to the world, adding to the effectiveness of the official narrative. The country has invited and hosted a number of international sporting events, including the Qatar Total Open tennis tournament which ended on Monday. Furthermore, the hosting of the FIFA World Cup tournament in 2022 will be counted as a diplomatic boost for the state.

These events have placed Qatar in a very different position in world politics. They have also encouraged some positive political and economic developments in the country. The large-scale infrastructure development has created job opportunities for thousands of foreign workers and Qataris alike, and injected a note of positivity into the economy. It has also enabled the government to self-regulate when it comes to the implementation of workers' rights; human rights of all kinds are still something of a rarity in the region. This might help to transform Qatar into

a democratic model for the Middle East and attract more European support for the country.

However, there is one major political complication that Qatar will have to overcome as it continues to entrench itself in Europe; it will have to democratize itself as a matter of urgency. The country's political leadership must also find ways of selling its new political trajectory to the rank and file in society. Unfortunately, there is still a lack of political messaging plus limited political engagement in the media in Qatar. Moreover, society remains conservative and is still very skeptical about "foreign" political ideas.

Democratization may compel Qatar to extend equal rights to all of its residents. At the moment, Qatari citizens have the upper hand over expatriates and it is very difficult to imagine a scenario whereby they might regard themselves as equal to foreigners. Extending equal rights to expatriates will undoubtedly limit the powers that Qataris have over them. In order to keep up with the dictates of democracy, Qatar may be compelled to allow the presence of human rights institutions to have an oversight role in the country. These political possibilities may also lead to a serious backlash as the country's government and governance systems come under intense domestic and international scrutiny.

In conclusion, it is clear that Qatar has been forced by the Saudi-led blockade to look for new alliances beyond the Middle East. However, the country has entered new political territory as it tries to ensure its survival amidst hostile neighbors. Whilst it can be argued that the actions of Qatar's government are in the best interests of its people, the top-down politics involving the Europeans could backfire if not managed carefully. Qatar's conservative society still regards the people of the region as their allies rather than Europeans. Indeed, many Qataris would prefer to mend rather than build new walls. In the meantime, the charm offensive led by the Emir of Qatar, boosted by his appearance at the Munich Security Conference, will no doubt continue.

(Source: The Middle East Monitor)

The dangers of ignoring Yemen

In the weeks following President Trump's first State of the Union speech, much has been written about the topics on which the president chose to speak. However, one topic of concern that noticeably received no mention during the speech was Yemen, a country in which the United States has carried out several military operations yearly since 2010. While the Trump administration criticized Saudi Arabia for blockading Yemeni ports in December 2017, the White House has been otherwise silent regarding the damage inflicted by the Saudis on civilian targets during Yemen's ongoing civil war. Additionally, the United States has consistently provided assistance enabling Saudi Arabia's sustained military operations in Yemen. Instead of remaining silently compliant towards the bulk of Saudi Arabia's mistakes in Yemen, the United States should utilize its considerable sway with the Saudis to convince them to take the necessary precautions to minimize the impact of their bombing campaign on Yemen's civilian population, which risks further exacerbating the existing civil conflict.

While Yemen's civil war initially began in 2014 as a struggle between the government of Yemeni president Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi and the Houthis, the list of combatants quickly grew to include participants outside of Yemen's borders. The fall of Hadi's government in Sana'a prompted the entrance of a ten-nation coalition led by Saudi Arabia into the conflict to help Hadi reassert control over the fractured country. Given their desire for stability on their southern border and clear preference for Hadi's Sunni rule over that of the predominantly Zaydi Shia Houthis, Saudi Arabia's decision to intervene on behalf of Yemen's beleaguered president was hardly a surprise to observers of the region's politics.

The United States' choice to provide support for both the Saudi-led coalition and the Hadi government was equally unsurprising. Saudi Arabia has long been considered among America's most trusted and important allies in the Middle East due to its significant petroleum exports, strong regional military presence. Additionally, both Saudi Arabia and the United States have a vested interest in preventing a Houthi victory in Yemen. Because of these interests, America's support for the coalition has increased under the Trump administration, as noted by the approval of a \$110 billion arms deal to Saudi Arabia and an increase in American efforts to refuel Saudi planes to enable their attacks on Yemeni rebels.

While the establishment of peace in Yemen under Hadi's leadership is in the best interest of the United States, the collateral damage that Saudi Arabia has inflicted on the war-torn country is a serious cause for concern. Nearly three hundred Yemeni civilians were killed by Saudi airstrikes in December 2017 alone, while the recently-ended Saudi blockade of Yemen's Houthi-controlled ports left seven million Yemenis on the brink of famine. Saudi Arabia killed 140 civilians during a single airstrike in 2016 after it mistook a funeral for a gathering of Houthi leaders. Despite offers by the Obama administration to help Saudi Arabia minimize their civilian casualties by improving the accuracy of strikes and thoroughly investigating the conditions that enabled previous mistakes, the Saudi military leadership showed little willingness to alter its tactics on its own accord.

There is also mounting evidence that Saudi Arabia has deliberately targeted civilian infrastructure to manufacture a food insecurity crisis in Yemen's Houthi-controlled areas. Hundreds of airstrikes have purposefully targeted farms, marketplaces and food-storage facilities, while over two hundred fishing ships have been destroyed in coalition



The Saudi military risks inspiring future generations of extremists dedicated to disrupting the established order in the Arabian Peninsula.

bombings. While Saudi Arabia did lift its blockade in December after receiving significant pressure from the United States and the international community, many ports have been rendered nearly unusable by previous coalition attacks, resulting in significant delays in the delivery of essential food and medical supplies to Yemen's beleaguered populace. Yemen held the pitiable label of the most impoverished Middle Eastern nation even before the outbreak of civil war, and the Saudi strategy of starving the Houthis into submission has left Yemen among the most food-insecure nations on Earth without bringing the conflict any closer to an end.

Unfortunately, the negative ramifications of Saudi Arabia's actions in Yemen go beyond the considerable humanitarian concerns. Al Qaeda, which has long had a significant presence in Yemen, has seen its influence grow over the course of the civil war, a period during which Saudi Arabia has focused nearly all its military efforts on attacking the Houthis at the expense of targeting the terrorist organization. Al Qaeda was significantly bolstered by the transfer of weapons from Saudi Arabia to a number of Al Qaeda-affiliated Sunni militia groups in Yemen, which naturally resulted in the diffusion of many of those weapons into the hands of the group's operatives. Furthermore, the aggressive tactics of the Saudi military has led many Yemenis to view the Saudis as a destabilizing colonial force within their country, which has enabled Al Qaeda to bolster its recruitment on the Arabian Peninsula. The longer the conflict drags on and the more damage is inflicted upon civilian populations by the Saudis, the greater the risk of Al Qaeda re-establishing and expanding its foothold on the peninsula becomes.

Additionally, for all the destruction it has caused, the Saudi intervention in Yemen has created very little positive momentum towards ending the conflict. Nearly three years into the Saudi campaign, Yemen is more divided now than it was when the coalition entered the conflict, as evidenced by the recent outbreak of violence in the city of Aden between various groups who had ostensibly been allies on the side

of the coalition. Even after their break with the supporters of the recently deceased former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, the Houthis have shown no signs that they are close to defeat, and the government's push to reclaim the Houthi-controlled capital of Sana'a has largely been stalled. As the international community rallies in support of the upcoming peace talks to be held in Oman, the Houthis seem to be just as empowered as they have been during previous failed attempts at dialogue between the combatants.

In the interest of preventing Yemen's further descent into chaos, the United States should begin consistently applying both public and private pressure on the government of Saudi Arabia to adjust their military tactics in Yemen. The United States is not likely to convince Saudi Arabia to abandon their campaign entirely, nor is it necessarily in the best interest of either country for them to do so. However, Saudi Arabia has shown some willingness to respond to public pressure on this issue in the past, as evidenced by their acquiescence to sustained public calls by the United States for an end to their blockade in December.

Furthermore, the United States has significant leverage over Saudi Arabia that it could use to influence the kingdom's behavior. American assistance in refueling Saudi planes has allowed them to partake in longer, more ambitious aerial assaults in which the Saudi air force uses American-made missiles to attack their targets. Conditioning the continuation of such support upon a change of tactics meant to minimize the damage to civilian targets would give Saudi Arabia a significant incentive to alter its behavior, as the Saudis would find it substantially more difficult to carry out their coalition's campaign with diminished American support.

Finally, the recent tensions between Saudi Arabia and their leading coalition ally, the UAE, regarding the desired end of the conflict presents the perfect opportunity for the Trump administration to meaningfully engage the Saudis on a change in tactics. Between the Saudi support for Yemen's Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated al-Islah party to the UAE's arming of the southern secessionist movement that attacked government forces in Aden in early February, it has become increasingly clear that the coalition's most prominent members have little in common in regards to Yemen beyond their mutual distaste of the Houthis. Present circumstances have left Saudi Arabia more desperate than ever for stable allies in the conflict and have forced them to reconsider the efficacy of their overall strategy in Yemen. If ever there was a time for the United States to exert its influence to encourage a change in the kingdom's military tactics, that time is now.

The Trump administration missed the opportunity to use the State of the Union to publicly highlight the coalition's collective failure in Yemen, and it should not compound that error by continuing to ignore the mistakes being made by Saudi Arabia in Yemen. The targeting of civilian populations and critical infrastructure by the Saudi military has created a humanitarian crisis in Yemen and risks inspiring future generations of extremists dedicated to disrupting the established order in the Arabian Peninsula, all while failing to meaningfully resolve the ongoing conflict. While Saudi Arabia remains a crucial regional ally, the United States must use its significant sway with the Saudis to convince them to change their military tactics in Yemen before the present situation devolves even further into instability and chaos.

(Source: The National Interest)

Sayed Abbas Al Moosavi: A Revolutionary Hero

By Sondoss Al Asaad

BEIRUT — Each time a man stands up for a stance or strikes out against prejudice and tyranny, he sends forth a ripple of hope, which builds a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of subjugation. Sayed Abbas Al Moosvai, one of the major founders of Hezbollah movement in Lebanon and the former Secretary General of Hezbollah, witnessed the cruelty of his time. He felt the pain and experienced the agony of the Lebanese and the other oppressed nations. Al Moosvai perceived the tragedy of the people of Palestine since he was young and participated actively to remove the two brotherly peoples' occupation nightmare; the Palestinians and the Lebanese.

Sayed Abbas Al Moosvai was an influential Lebanese Shia cleric, co-founder and Secretary General of Hezbollah. He was born into a Lebanese family, in the village of Al-Nabi-Sheath in the Beqaa Valley, in 1952. He studied theology in Iraq and was deeply influenced by the views of the two influential Shiite clerics, philosophers and political leaders of his time; Imam Khomeini and Sayed Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr. During his stay in Iraq, he witnessed the anguish of the Iraqi people, who patiently tolerated the oppression of their rulers. Sayed al-Sadr repeatedly said about him, 'Sayed Abbas is a precious part of me'.

In 1978, Sayed Al Moosvai returned to Lebanon with the determination to fight the Zionist occupation and oppression. Besides, in April 1980, Sayed Mohammed Baker al-Sadr was assassinated, which increased the fortitude of Sayed Al Moosvai. He spearheaded the formation of Hezbollah movement in 1982, along with other revolutionary figures and clerics. Later, Imam Khomeini sent the Iranian revolutionary guards, to Lebanon, to mobilize people against the Zionist regime and the international tyrannical powers. From 1983 to 1985, he is reported to have served as operational head of the Hezbollah Special Security Apparatus. In 1985, he resided, in a modest house, in the city of Tyr, in the Lebanese-South, after assuming the responsibility of the consultative council of Hezbollah. Sayed Al Moosvai was resolute to conquer the Israeli entity, proclaiming that it is not the legend that cannot be defeated.

He headed to the Lebanese-South, in spite of the Zionist invasion, to preach the teachings of Imam Khomeini, which emphasize on the elimination of Israel. He met Sheikh Ragheb Harb, a Shiite cleric and resistance leader, and he passed on to him Imam Khomeini's religious order [Takleef Shara'a'ie]. Imam Khomeini's order stated that fighting Israel, everywhere and in all possible means, is everyone's obligation. Sheikh Ragheb Harb's response was, 'Our stance is resistance, for the reconciliation with the enemy is disgraceful.'

In 1991, Hezbollah movement had entered a crucial era with the end of both the Iran-Iraq War and Lebanese Civil War, and the Taif Agreement. A new leader was thought to be needed to boost Hezbollah's focus on resistance activity against Israel. Sayed Al Moosvai intensified Hezbollah's military, political and popular action. Sayed Al Moosvai was elected as Secretary General of Hezbollah, in May 1991, for nine months, before his martyrdom. Nevertheless, he established social, national, political, educational and informational significant advances.

Sayed Abbas Al Moosvai's concern was greatly concerned about the affairs of all Muslim and vulnerable peoples, predominantly the oppressed of Palestine, Algeria, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Kashmir. He was affectionate with those peoples and was fearless in expressing his firm stances. Further, he participated in many Islamic conferences, festivals, and political, social and cultural meetings, in Damascus, Tehran, and Islamabad. He sought unity among Muslim in the world, and he established relations with various prominent revolutionary leaders.

The Palestinian revolution was an important aspect of Sayed Abbas Al Moosvai's life; he lived the wounds of Palestine and the sufferings of its people. At the age of ten, he joined several military training camps along with the Palestinian rebels. He was wounded in one of the military operations



that made him even more attached to his sacrificial ambitions. After Imam Khomeini's call to commemorate Al Quds Day, Sayed Al Moosvai pioneered many demonstrations in solidarity with Al Quds.

On 21 March 1990, the Jaafari Jurisprudence Implementation Movement, in Islamabad, invited Sayed Abbas Al Moosvai to an Islamic international conference on Kashmir. His Eminence was at the head of Hezbollah's delegation in which he asserted that the Muslims, everywhere, must decide their fate, be free and not to be subjected to any pressure or a global arrogance. Regardless of the dangers that accompanied the visit, Sayed Al Moosvai emphasized that the struggle with the arrogant powers is long and bitter and the price of blood is dear.

After attending the conference, Sayed Al Moosvai visited Kashmir and inspected the immigrant camps in Muzaffarabad. He met a group of Kashmiri rebels [Mujahedeen] and urged them to follow the path of Allah; the path of Jihad. He addressed them, 'we are under your service, we stand beside you.' Additionally, he sent a radio message to the rebels, in which he pledged to support their cause, which is the cause of Islam, and asked them to stay firm in their positions, saying, 'As long as you are with God you are strong. As long as you rely on Him, you will be victorious.' Sayed Al Moosvai went also to Afghanistan and met the revolutionaries urging them to unite to achieve their goals and emphasizing on the choice of resistance [jihad]; the path of truth and victory.

Sayed Al Moosvai was a remarkable spiritual hero of strong principles and he faithfully believed that the next world's privileges are the outcome of this life. He used to frequently recite this supplication, 'My Lord! If you insist on treating me with Your justice and holding me accountable for the misdeeds committed with every one of my organs, I demand that You grant me a purified martyrdom. A martyrdom that I personally choose as an atonement for my sins; a martyrdom with rare equals, with which my body is shredded and every one of my organs receives the punishment and penalty it deserves. A martyrdom which, my Lord, becomes definite that You inhabit me near You and near your saints. I say definite because of my belief in Your justice and not to mention my belief in Your kindness.'

Eventually, Sayed Abbas Al Moosvai's was granted his wish on 16 February 1992, when the Israeli Apache helicopters fired missiles at his motorcade the Lebanese-South. The attack targeted him, his wife, his five-year-old son, and four guards. Immediately, Israel admitted that the assassination had been planned to retaliate the kidnapping and death of missing Israeli technicians, in 1986, and the abduction of the UN peacekeeping officer William R. Higgins, in 1988.

According to reports, two Israeli helicopters descended

on a seven-vehicle convoy carrying Sayed Al Moosvai after he deliver a speech during the annual commemoration re-making the martyrdom of Sheikh Ragheb Harb, who was also assassinated by the Israelis, on 16 February 1984. At the rally, in the southern Lebanese village of Jibchit, Sayed Al Moosvai denounced the Arab-Israeli peace talks and accused the United States of being power mad. He stressed that America wants to control the fountains of water, exactly as it controlled the oil fountains.

From Israel's vantage, the assignment was a settling of old scores for countless raids on its soldiers in Lebanon. Hezbollah issued a statement in Beirut calling the attack a vengeful and cowardly assault. In retaliation, on 17 March 1992, Hezbollah bombed the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina, killing 29 and wounding 242. Immediately, Sayed Hassan Nasrallah succeeded Sayed Al Moosvai as Secretary General of Hezbollah.

Uzi Benziman, the chief political correspondent of Ha'aretz, reported that the assassination of Sayed Al Moosvai was pre-scheduled several months before and that Israel had awaited the suitable opportunity to carry it out. He added that the apparent Israeli reason for promptly admitting responsibility was to demonstrate to the Lebanese how firmly the United States supports everything Israeli occupation does in Lebanon.

Ehud Barak, former Israeli chief of staff, convinced then that the Israeli Prime Minister Shamir to order his assassination. Ran Edelist, a colonel in charge of Israeli troops in the security zone, at that time, said, 'Hezbollah men know what they are doing. They have superb military intelligence and are good in planning. They do not knock their heads against the wall. They do not attack right where the Israeli or South Lebanese troops are stationed in force, but study the area and prepare their actions carefully. They operate in cells, they know what field and communications security mean, and their explosive charges are nasty and murderous. Their fighters are local inhabitants. One cannot attack Hezbollah bases because none exist.'

The martyrdom of Sayed Abbas Al Moosvai was a conspiracy attempted at putting an end to his courageous actions, a conspiracy that backfired against it. His followers continued and still continuing their struggle against the imperialist and Zionist powers. Sayed Al Moosvai legacy and Martyrdom promoted thousands of courageous soldiers to heroically fight and scarify their lives for the sake of their cause. He led a short life, 39-years-old occupied by piety and bravery that manifested in most of his tendencies, approaches, and attitudes. Sayed Al Moosvai was aware of the tyrannous powers' conspiracies and resistance was his ultimate approach to withstand oppression.

Ahed Tamimi's arrest breach of Geneva convention: UN expert

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — A UN rights expert said the detention of Ahed Tamimi, a teenage girl who became a hero to Palestinians after she was filmed slapping and kicking an Israeli soldier in the occupied West Bank, is in obvious violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

"The offenses that Ms. Tamimi has been charged with, even taken at their highest, would not appear to present a danger to the public order, and could instead be dealt with during her pre-trial period with an order to be in her village and report to a neighboring police station on a regular basis. She has been incarcerated for almost two months for offenses that, in most countries which follow the rule of law, would have been handled with minimal, if any, imprisonment. As such, there appears to be no proportionality between the alleged offenses and the length of her incarceration," Michael Lynk, the UN Special Rapporteur on situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory, said in an interview with the Tasnim News Agency.

Michael Lynk is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Law, Western University, in London, Ontario. He joined the Faculty in 1999, and has taught courses in labour, human rights, disability, constitutional and administrative law. He served as Associate Dean of the Faculty between 2008-11.

The following is the full text of the interview.

■ Do you believe that Israel is violating the international Convention on the Rights of the Child by detaining a Palestinian teenager for slapping an Israeli soldier?

A: Article 37(b) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child expressly states, "No child shall be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. The arrest, detention or



imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time;" As well, Article 37 requires that the best interests of the child be a primary consideration. The offenses that Ms. Tamimi has been charged with, even taken at their highest, would not appear to present a danger to the public order, and could instead be dealt with during her pre-trial period with an order to be in her village and report to a neighboring police station on a regular basis. She has been incarcerated for almost two months for offenses that, in most countries which follow the rule of law, would have been handled with minimal, if any, imprisonment. As such, there appears to be no proportionality between the alleged offenses and the length of her incarceration.

I also note that, as a protected person

under the Fourth Geneva Convention, Ms. Tamimi is required to be detained within the occupied territory. She is instead imprisoned at Hasharon prison, within Israel, a violation of Article 76 of the 4GC.

■ Ahed Tamimi's trial is being held behind closed doors. What is your take on this based on international legal standards?

A: The rule of law demands that every court proceeding, particularly one involving criminal offenses, shall be open to the public. The exceptions to this rule are narrow, involving such issues as public security, personal reputation, or that the public interest demands a restriction or ban on an open court. I understand that Ms. Tamimi's lawyer expressly requested an open court, yet the military judge nevertheless ordered the court proceedings to be closed to protect her. I also note that there was a substantial

crowd wanting to witness the proceedings, which the Tamimi family welcomed. The public's confidence in the Israeli military court system to deliver justice, as required by international standards, is substantially diminished by such a ruling.

■ "Figures from Palestine show that Israel detains and prosecutes between 500 to 700 Palestinian children in military courts annually", you noted in a recent address. Would you elaborate?

A: The international NGO Defence of Children International - Palestine reports that Israel has the distinction of being the only country in the world that systematically prosecutes between 500 and 700 children each year in its military courts in the West Bank. These children lack fundamental rights regarding due process and fair trials. The DCIP, using statistics from the Israeli Prison Service, says that an average of 310 Palestinian children were in the Israeli prison system each month. Approximately 60 of these children were between 12 and 15 years old. Many of them have reported abuse, intimidation and some form of physical violence while they were in custody. Some have been kept in solitary confinement or have been subject to administrative detention (where there are imprisoned without charge or trial, often based on secret evidence). These conditions are in violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

■ Do you believe that Palestinian children are commonly mistreated while in Israel's detention and subjected to both physical and psychological abuse?

A: Reputable international organizations — such as UNICEF and Defence of Children International — Palestine have regularly reported that Palestinian children have been abused while in detention.

UN required to step in to end U.S., Israel escalation against Syria

TEHRAN (FNA) — Various terrorist groups, including ISIL, Al-Qaeda and their affiliates, continue to find themselves on America's and Israel's good sides and it's official.

Israel's mounting interest in the U.S.-led war on Syria, and in particular in picking fights with the Syrian government, Iran, and Hezbollah - after the defeat of ISIL by these allied forces - have included reports by analysts of a growing amount of Israeli arms and ammunition flowing across the border for Qaeda-allied terrorist groups on the Golan frontier.

To be clear, similar reports and evidence have put the United States on the side of all these terror proxy groups, like Al-Qaeda's Nusra Front, which have been active in the area for some time. After all, American officials, the Pentagon regime, and the CIA continue to be very public saying they prefer ISIL over the elected government in Syria.

No wonder the regime changers are pushing the UN Security Council members for the Syrian government and its allies to halt their ongoing offensive in the Idlib province. Their desperate attempts to stop the successful offensive are designed primarily to save the Nusra Front and other terror proxies. This way they can claim they need to stay in the country, support the so-called "moderates", and prolong their illegal occupation and war on the pretext of fighting terror.

The US has done the same to save the ISIL forces. In early February this year, U.S. forces intensified their heliborne operations to evacuate ISIL commanders trapped in Hasaka province. Local sources in Hasaka confirmed that the US helicopters conducted heliborne operations in the village of Tuwaimin, 50km Northeast of al-Shadadi, in Southern Hasaka. The sources said militants, including an ISIL security commander, were evacuated from the region. The area where the operation took place is still occupied by the terrorist group.

If still in doubt, consider this: U.S. Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii, a member of both the Armed Services and Foreign Affairs committees, has just proposed legislation that would prohibit U.S. assistance to terrorist organizations in Syria as well as to any organization working directly with them. Equally important, it would prohibit U.S. military sales and other forms of military cooperation with other countries, including Israel and Saudi Arabia, that provide arms or financing to those terrorists and their collaborators.

Gabbard's Stop Arming Terrorists Act' challenges for the first time in Congress a U.S. policy toward the conflict in the Syrian war that should have set off alarm bells long ago:

In 2012-13 the Obama administration helped its allies Turkey and Saudi Arabia provide arms to Syrian and non-Syrian armed groups to force President Bashar Assad out of power. And in 2013 the administration began to provide arms to what the CIA claimed to be "relatively moderate" groups. According to a declassified October 2012 Defense Intelligence Agency report, that policy which began in September 2011 helped build up Al-Qaeda's Syrian franchise Nusra Front as well as ISIL into the dominant threat to Syria, Iraq, the region, and the rest of humanity.

The closest Washington came to a public reprimand of its allies over the arming of terrorists in Syria was when Vice President Joe Biden criticized their role in October 2014. In remarks at Harvard University's Kennedy School, Biden complained that "our biggest problem is our allies." In his words, "The forces they had supplied with arms were Nusra and Al-Qaeda and the extremist elements of jihadis coming from other parts of the world."

The significance of all this is clear: In blatant violation of International Law and the UN Charter, which bars UN member states from supporting military action to overthrow other members' governments, the U.S. and its allies have been largely responsible for having extended the power of ISIL and Al-Qaeda across a significant part of Syrian territory.

The CIA, the Mossad and the Pentagon regime are still doing anything they can to regime change post-ISIL Syria. Unless the United Nations and the international civil society confront the warmongers explicitly, they will continue to be complicit in the consolidation of power by Al-Qaeda in Syria, even if ISIL has been defeated there.

Here is the conclusion: Much of the carnage that has ravaged Syria during the past seven years is due to the criminal actions and the calamitous policies of the United States and its allies in the Middle East, mainly Israel and Saudi Arabia. Their failed regime-change war is at risk of a new round of escalation. Now, faced with an alarming risk of a renewed escalation, it's time for the United Nations to step in to end the U.S. and Israeli threats and aggressions against Syrian sovereignty. It's not clear why the UN has never condemned Israel's continued attacks on Syria and the United States' unauthorized deployment in the country both in support of the terrorists in open alliance with Al-Qaeda.

Nabeel Rajab: The voice of the voiceless

➔ So far, Bahrain has repeatedly showed unwillingness to comply with international legal standards, despite its promise to the United Nation and to the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry. The recommendations of 2017-UPR has urged the Bahraini government to «re-evaluate its adherence to international human rights standards».

Dimitris Christopoulos, president of the Paris-based group, emphasized that Rajab is not only a human rights defender but also a man of intellectual value who should not be in jail. He added that he expects the Bahraini authorities to understand that violating the fundamental human rights of rights defenders is not the way to proceed. He warned that Rajab could face an even longer jail term for a separate case he faces.

Nabeel Rajab's arrest has received widespread international attention, and it should not go unnoticed and unchallenged. The UN High Commissioner on Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, warned Bahrain: «Repression will not eliminate people's grievances; it will increase them». Rajab has been prosecuted repeatedly since the 2011 Arab Spring, on charges based on his activism, posts on social media, and televised interviews, «organizing unauthorized protests, insulting the government, insulting the Central Jau Prison administration, insulting a statutory body, undermining the war in Yemen, spreading false news, offending a foreign country», and much more.

Human rights groups have roundly condemned Rajab's verdict, which illustrates the corruption of the Bahraini justice system. The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) urged the government to immediately release Rajab.

The silver lining of Germany's political chaos

By Mathieu von Rohr

Germany's Social Democratic Party these days is a pathetic shadow of its former self, and there is, of course, a tragic element to the public disintegration of a once proud party. The unsavory fight between Sigmar Gabriel and Martin Schulz over the position of foreign minister in the new government, the rebellion brewing in the grassroots - all of it is driving the SPD downward in the polls, to its alarming showing last week of 16 percent. The only thing now missing is the party's membership rejecting participation in a new coalition with Chancellor Angela Merkel. Should that happen, the party will be focused entirely on itself for quite some time to come. Or at least on what is left of it.

But it would be too simple to place all the blame for the spectacle on SPD leaders. We are, after all, actually witnessing a development that has long since become inevitable: The end of dominance

of former big-tent parties. Merkel's Christian Democrats likewise find themselves in a deep crisis, though it has thus far lacked the intensity of the one afflicting the SPD.

The era of traditional big-tent parties is coming to an end in Germany. Ever since the founding of postwar Germany, the SPD and the CDU have alternately held political power in the country, with their senior functionaries reliably mediating between voters and the state. But it looks as though this arrangement will soon be over. The way politics is done in Germany is undergoing a profound shift.

■ Governing coalition

Germany is being overtaken by a development that is much further along in other countries. In the Netherlands, four parties were necessary to assemble a governing coalition. Belgium went for 541 days without a government. In France, a young

savior stormed the presidency and swept away the old party system in the country. Few thought that something similar would be possible here in Germany. As we now know, however, that was a mistake. Were new elections to be held on Tuesday, a coalition between the conservatives and the SPD would have trouble achieving an absolute majority. Support for the SPD has fallen to a level generally seen among traditionally smaller parties like the Left Party, the Greens and the business-friendly Free Democrats. And it is neck and neck with the right-wing Populist Party Alternative for Germany (AfD).

Understandably, it is a situation that many people find unsettling. The system that has existed until now stood for a stability - and that stability is now likely a thing of the past. But it doesn't help to bemoan the political upheaval. It is, after all, a logical development that cannot be stopped. It is a

reflection of the societal trend toward fragmentation, toward more individualism, toward the disintegration of traditional milieus. It is a reflection of the logic inherent in social media. The big-tent parties, with their numerous wings representing different elements of society, no longer correspond to an era in which voters want to see their own unique desires represented directly. Career politicians who have spent decades moving from one political committee to the next on their way up the ladder have fallen into disrepute, as have 100 percent results in party convention votes. Voters are becoming emancipated from political parties -- they no longer trust the elite and they yearn for more participation. That can also be seen in the increasing calls for more direct democracy in the form of referendums.

■ Politics more volatile

Is this development exclusively negative? Politics

will certainly become more volatile, more populist and perhaps riskier as a result. Democracy might no longer resemble a well-oiled machine but a constant tightrope walk. The election of Donald Trump as U.S. president shows what can go wrong and how much is at stake.

That is also true of the success of the AfD in the general election last September. It's not just right-wing populists who benefit from the new rules of the game, though. So, too, do centrist politicians who know how to sell their views. People like Emmanuel Macron in France, Sebastian Kurz in Austria and Christian Lindner, head of the Free Democrats in Germany. Their parties, which they prefer to call "movements," may be held together by marketing just as much as they are by a political platform. But their success reveals a need. And Macron's success was able to revitalize France's decaying political system. →13

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Invite spring with colorful flowers to your home

L I F E For most people, the spring season is associated with flowers, green earth and blue sky. In Iran, the New Year Celebration, Noruz, is the exact astronomical beginning of the spring.

Haft Seen, an arrangement of seven symbolic items, which start with 'S' in Persian language, is a custom which is being observed by almost all Iranians worldwide.

Sabzeh, wheat, barley, mung bean or lentil sprouts growing in a dish, is one of the items of Haft Seen, which are prepared weeks ago by Iranian families.

Hyacinth flower as well as gold fish, colorful eggs, Holy Quran, candles, and mirror, are some additional items, which are put on Haft Seen. Here you can find about some flowers, which bring springs to your homes.

Hyacinth flower, reminder of Noruz

Many Iranians put hyacinth flower on their Haft Seen table in Noruz.

According to the flower expert website, hyacinths are spring-flowering bulbs with long, narrow leaves that are folded lengthwise. They are highly fragrant flowers that bloom in dense clusters. The plant flowers one to two weeks in spring. Many of us put it away after that period but after the plant has finished flowering, we can cut back flower stalks but allow the leaves to die back naturally, hiding the unsightly foliage with annual or perennial plantings.

It needs bright place. Keep the potting media lightly wet, but not soaked. Keep it cool during the growing season to prolong the bloom.



Spring season is associated with flowers, green earth and blue sky. The Iranian New Year, Noruz, is the exact astronomical beginning of the spring. You can invite Noruz to your home with beautiful flower pots.

Colorful tulips

Tulip is also a great choice for bringing spring to your home. This beautiful spring flower grows best in areas with cold winters and dry summers. However you can bring this beautiful sign of spring to your home in a pot and keep them after its flowering is finished. Be careful not to overwater the plant and keep it next to a sunny window.

If your bulbs have to sit in water, they are more likely to rot. Don't use bark to create extra drainage. Place the bark at the bottom of the container, which will allow air to flow under the soil and prevent rotting.

Geranium and Persian houses

For many Iranians, the flower is reminder of grandma's houses with a big yard and a pool in the middle decorated with geranium pots.

Its fragrance and color is reminder of childhood and old Iranian houses. Spring is a great chance to bring all those sweet reminding to your home. According to the spruce.com, geraniums need lots of direct suns to bloom well, so let them soak up those rays by placing them on the south side of walls, on tabletops or as an accent in sunny areas of the garden. If you notice that your plant has stopped blooming in summer, don't panic!

They have a tendency to stop blooming during hot weather, so try placing it where it will receive some afternoon shade if you live in a hot climate. To keep geraniums in bloom, remove spent flower stalks periodically. To keep plants bushy, full and packed with flowers, pinch out new growth occasionally by pruning the tips of each stem with sharp, clean pruners.

Get clear, healthy skin: Secrets your skin wishes you knew

Don't rub your eyes

I'm thinnest here. At only about 0.05 mm thick—half the thickness of computer paper—I get tiny tears in capillaries from all that manhandling, making me look discolored and older. These are the 17 skin-care tips dermatologists use themselves.

Try not to scratch!

During cooler months, the dry air sucks moisture out through my top layer, which makes me irritated. Literally. Dryness triggers an inflammatory response: Immune cells as well as pro-inflammatory proteins and other enzymes go wild, activating itch receptors that send signals to your brain.

Take shorter showers

Especially in winter. Long, hot showers strip away my natural oils, as do soapy cleansers.

Don't wash your face in the morning

If I could make a PSA for this, I would: Ladies, you don't need to wash your face twice a day (especially if you have dry skin). One cleansing at night gets rid of the debris that can clog my pores and contribute to acne.

Make sure your moisturizer has ceramides

These lipids occur naturally in my top layer, but this time of year, I welcome an extra dose. They trap water molecules to help me stay smooth and dewy.

I'm a huge part of your immune system

Did you know I'm your first line of defense against germs? All three of my layers—my outer epidermis, thickest middle dermis, and bottom fatty layer—protect against invading bacteria, fungi, and other undesirables.

Wear SPF. All year round. Please.

Even applying a face powder with SPF would be better than nothing. Maybe you don't realize that as long as it's daylight, those ultraviolet rays are around, regardless of the weather. In winter, there can be up to twice as many UVA rays as UVB.

Salmon makes me smile

The fish is packed with omega-3s, which can help replenish my natural oils as well as fight inflammation. Even better? Add broccoli. It has loads of vitamin C, which my cells require to make collagen, a protein that makes me firm and supple.

Sugar doesn't

You know it's not good for your waist or teeth, but it also takes a toll on my complexion. Sugar molecules bind to my proteins, which compromises the fibers that keep me taut. (Translation: wrinkles.) These are the skincare rules to live by in every stage of your life.

Get your beauty sleep

That's when I do all my repair work. All day long, I've been making fresh new cells and pushing up dead ones to the top to be sloughed off. This renewal process speeds up during deep sleep. In roughly a month, my top layer will be fully regenerated.

People who get uninterrupted, high-quality sleep show half as many signs of aging as poor sleepers. Good sleepers have fewer fine lines, better elasticity, and more even tone. I'll also recover more efficiently from stressors, and let's face it: I'll look more attractive.

This is why drinking water probably won't help your skin, according to dermatologists.

(Source: Reader's Digest)

28 simple and natural ways to detox your body



#10. Get in more sleep each night:

You may look at sleep as a luxury, but it's an important part of a healthy lifestyle. Without proper sleep you can gain weight, you may have a compromised immune system, and of course you lack natural energy. Sleep deprivation is unfortunately all too common as we put this off in the interest of getting other things done.

The problem is that lack of sleep can catch up on you after awhile. The body wears down and this shows through in a compromised immune system that means you get sick more easily.

You also have a lack of willpower and lack of energy to make healthy choices

for yourself when you feel exhausted. You are ultimately not taking care of yourself in the proper way—and that's not good for your health or your ability to naturally cleanse.

When you try to get 7-8 hours of sleep each night you give your body a chance to rest and recuperate. This is not a luxury but an important way that your body rebuilds and prepares for the activities that you have ahead the next day.

It's imperative to rest and take care of yourself in this manner not only to function properly, but to keep the bad and harmful substances out as well.

(Source: bembu.com)

Tips and techniques for how to manage your money better?



Think before you spend

When you're faced with a spending decision, especially a large purchase decision, don't just assume you can afford something. Confirm that you can actually afford it and that you haven't already committed those funds to another expense.

Have a budget

Many people don't budget because they don't want to go through what they think will be a boring process of listing out expenses, adding up numbers, and making sure everything lines up.

Track your spending

Small purchases here and there add up quickly and before you know it, you've overspent your budget. Start tracking your

spending to discover places where you may be unknowingly overspending.

pay the best prices

You can make the most of your money comparison shopping, ensuring that you're paying the lowest prices for products and services. Look for discounts, coupons, and cheaper alternatives whenever you can.

Save up for big purchases

When you put off large purchases, rather than sacrificing more important essentials or putting the purchase on a credit card, you give yourself time to evaluate whether the purchase is necessary and even more time to compare prices.

(Source: thebalance.com)



101 ITEMS FOR YOUR BUCKET LIST!

38. Throw a mega party

Get to know your friends' friends and introduce your friends to others by throwing a mega party! Throwing a mega party should be about having the right company—people whom you enjoy hanging around and who are great to converse with. Plan ahead, identify a venue (someone's home will suffice; or you can always rent a space), set aside a little budget (having a party doesn't have to cost a bomb!), and start sending out the invites! Who knows, you may well meet your future friends here!

Here we share 101 items to consider for your bucket list. Look through the list—any item that resonates with you? Take the items that resonate with you and use them for your own list!

(Source: personalexcellence.co)



#IRANIANLIFESTYLE

A couple sits in the yard of an eco-lodge in Shiraz in an undated photo (Instagram/@persian.discovery)



Tips and ideas for elder-friendly interior design



By Maliheh Ahmadbeigi

Designer and medical decoration innovator

If you are in the prime of your youth or middle age, I should remind you of a truth: You will be the elderlies of the future, so treat well today's elderlies like you expect to be treated as future elderlies.

It's true that they have made so many precious experiences in the book of their lives because of their right lifestyles and that they have a great perception and comprehension; however, it doesn't mean you can expect too much of them to the extent that you think they must grin and bear any negligence. Never think they are happy and satisfied to be dependent on you or they enjoy it. Far from it! Because the first grief and sorrow of senility is the loss of independence in daily activities.

The only key to bringing them back to a relatively suitable physical condition, to be able to manage at least their personal activities on their own, is as follows:

- Keep hope of life and motivation alive in their hearts.
- Assign them some easy responsibilities.

c. If they have an artistic skill, provide them with the necessities so that can both get involved in a task and make a small living, or else you can introduce to them different handicrafts so they can discover their favorite art. Then prepare the ground for their learning that art.

- Create a secure place in the interior of your house:

Small but important points:

1. Having a private room for the elderlies is very important because they also need some privacy as you do to rest in their own room far from the maddening crowd or to study and think in repose.

2. To avoid worrying while the elderlies are left alone in their rooms, install an accessible alarm to their beds especially when they are sleeping. Remember your health matters as well! Therefore, avoid an alarm with an ear-piercing sound. Explain to them gently and respectfully that this alarm should be used just at the time of emergency for instance when they find it difficult to get up.

3. Bed sheets, counterpanes, pillowcases and blankets should be made of natural fibers without static electric shock.

4. Bed mattresses should be soft and flexible because the elderlies' skins, due to fragility, might get bedsores when they lie or sleep longer in bed because of fatigue and illness. If buying a standard mattress is not possible for you, you can use wavy mattresses with automatic air pump.

5. When designing and painting the elderlies' rooms forget about dark and depressing colors. If possible, provide a color catalogue and ask their opinions about the color of their rooms and reassure them that they won't be mocked for the colors they choose and that no one will say the color doesn't fit their age.

Before making decisions explain these points, then you could make a great revolution by benefiting from the elderlies' helps.

Background color is the most kind of color on the walls and ceilings, you could use one of these colors as background, white, light yellow or bone color.

you also can paint one of width walls that has the least measure in your interior space to these some rejoicing and exhilarating colors like green, blue, medium violet red, mild violet, lilac, turquoise, aquamarine, cadet blue, chartreuse and dodger blue, notice that do not use repulsive and galvanic colors like orange, red, yellow in a large mount, if you are interested in using those, you could perform such colors in curtains, pillowcases, counterpane and or some pieces of furniture.

6. Exert all of your art and initiative to increase their excitement and hope of life, consider and find out what kind of art or profession they interested in, if it doesn't have any harm, help them to occupy some hours a day. Believe me, they are very talented and creative because there are a lot of experiences of life in their mind and heart.

plants are one of the inexpensive cases you can provide a pleasant and easy responsibility for them, making sense of being able to take care of something that is growing up day to day will raise another enthusiasm in their heart.

Provide a small moveable vegetable garden by boxes and plastic vases beside that elderlies and all family members can benefit from this small miniature garden's products such as green pepper, pennyroyal, cress and etc...

It's better to consult with an expert to learn how grow up good agricultural products.

7. all of the valve equipments in your home should be easy to open, you may choose lever or optical kinds to open and close automatically.

8. the best bedroom's floor cover is moquette and carpet because parquets because of its slippery surface may increase danger of falling during walking.

W.C is one of the other dangerous places that there are risk of slip and collapse of elderlies.

I know you have to use tiles and earthenware in W.C because of its special space for walls and floors, so I recommend you to use patterned high relief tiles to dissolve risk of falling. Do not attempt to solve this problem with jagged slippers because that is one of the falling factors so you may think about changing tiles to relief ones.

9. most of the elderlies cannot sleep well over the nights and they wake up soon in compare of the other members, so they compensate this sleeping shortage by a brief nap in before or after noon. a well-built standard rocking chair could be a lovely friend not only for them but also for you with a thick cover in the back part and a comfort cushion at the dwelling place can provide a convenience seat on rocking chair.

10. for some reasons, elderlies may get frighten, anxious and stressful in absolute dark places. It's better to design a soft lighting for bedroom at nights such as switching bedside lamps to be able to raise and down the light, not to stop secretion of melatonin hormones.

Private sector to revive, operate more historical monuments in Iran

HERITAGE TEHRAN — A total of 269 historical places and monuments across Iran are to be ceded to the private sector with the aim of receiving better conservation through repurposing them into thriving eco-lodges or other profitable niches.



An interior view of Malek al-Tojjar boutique hotel, which has been repurposed from a historic mansion in Yazd.

To date, 64 historical monuments have been handed over to the private investor to make the best use of them under contracts for restoration, maintenance and operation, IRIB quoted a deputy at the Revitalization and Utilization Fund for Historical Places as saying on Monday.

"Up to now, a sum of 780 billion rials (nearly \$170 million) has been spent on restoring the 64 sites and 700 billion rials (some \$152 million) on refurbishing them," Ali Kazemi added.

Through restoring historic sites the [traditional] culture of the country will be preserved. Moreover, a tourism-based economy will grow, leading to creation of jobs and improvement of living standards, the official explained.

"This sort of investment seems attractive for the private sector, because accommodation in [well-preserved] monuments is attractive for both domestic and foreign tourists, in addition these steps are carried out without the need for [excessive] administrative bureaucracy."

Upon an initiative scheme, the Revitalization and Utilization Fund for Historical Places (known by its Persian acronym Saabta) provides opportunity for privately-owned businesses to run certain old structures in order to be maintained and repurposed into hotels, traditional restaurants or lodging places.

Iran is home to abundant historical mansions, caravanserais, bathhouses, madrasas, and other massive monuments, which can buttress its budding tourism and hospitality sectors if managed appropriately and refurbished properly.

Tourist arrivals to Philippines up 11% in 2017

MANILA (Xinhua) — Tourism is booming in the Philippines with 6.62 million tourists visited the Philippines in 2017, an 11 percent growth from last year, Philippine presidential spokesman Harry Roque said on Tuesday.

"Indeed, it's more fun in the Philippines," Roque told a news conference at the Malacanang presidential palace, citing the slogan that can be seen now and then in scenic spots of Manila.

Roque reported that the number of international tourist arrivals for 2017 has reached an all-time high at 6,620,908, up from 2016's arrival of 5,967,005.

"The 6.6 million tourism milestone is a parlayed growth in the country's tourism industry," Roque said.



ROUND THE GLOBE

Gyeongju Historic Areas

The Gyeongju Historic Areas contain a remarkable concentration of outstanding examples of Korean Buddhist art, in the form of sculptures, reliefs, pagodas, and the remains of temples and palaces from the flowering culture of Silla dynasty, in particular between the 7th and 10th century.

The Korean peninsula was ruled for almost 1,000 years (57 BC – 935 CE) by the Silla dynasty, and the sites and monuments in and around Gyeongju bear outstanding testimony to its cultural achievements.



A reconstructed pavilion at Anapji, a pleasure garden built after Silla unified most of the Korean Peninsula.

These monuments are of exceptional significance in the development of Buddhist and secular architecture in Korea. The property comprises five distinct areas situated in the center of Gyeongju and in its suburbs.

The Mount Namsan Belt lies to the north of the city and covers 2,650 ha. The Buddhist monuments that have been excavated at the time of inscription include the ruins of 122 temples, 53 stone statues, 64 pagodas and 16 stone lanterns. Excavations have also revealed the remains of the pre-Buddhist natural and animistic cults of the region.

36 individual monuments, including rock-cut reliefs or engravings, stone images and heads, pagodas, royal tombs and tomb groups, wells, a group of stone banner poles, the Namsan Mountain Fortress, the Poseokjeong Pavilion site and the Seochulji Pond, exist within this area.

The Wolseong Belt includes the ruined palace site of Wolseong, the Gyerim woodland which legend identifies as the birthplace of the founder of the Gyeongju Kim clan, Anapji Pond, on the site of the ruined Imhaejeon Palace, and the Cheomseongdae Observatory. (Source: UNESCO)

Visit Nader Shah's mausoleum in Mashhad

TOURISM TEHRAN — The modest mausoleum of Nader Shah in downtown Mashhad is well worth a visit while traveling to the northeastern Iranian metropolis.

The grey-granite mausoleum, which is encircled by a small manicured garden, is where Nader Shah (1688 -1747), the founder of the Afsharid dynasty, is laid to rest.

Born Nader Qoli Beg, Nader created an Iranian empire that stretched from the Indus River to the Caucasus Mountains.

The mausoleum is surmounted by an impressive equestrian statue depicting the monarch holding an axe, the work of renowned Iranian sculptor Abolhassan Sadiqi.

Adjoining the mausoleum stands a small museum which displays a variety of the time's military assets, documents and artifacts such as guns, a rhino-hide shield and a carpet depicting a portrait of Nader on horseback.

Nader Shah is widely considered as one of the most powerful rulers in history of the nation. He assumed power when a period of chaos overwhelmed Iran.

Nader endeavored to reunite the Persian realm while repelled invaders. He is sometimes referred to as the Napoleon of Persia or the Second Alexander.

According to Encyclopædia Britannica, Nader Qoli Beg had an obscure beginning in the Turkish Afshar tribe, which was loyal to the ?afavid shahs of Iran. After serving under a local chieftain, Nader formed and led a band of robbers, showing marked powers of leadership.

Nader reformed Iran's military forces and utterly defeated the Ghilzay Afghans in a series of brilliant victories, after which he restored ?ahmasp to the Iranian throne.

Nader Shah's only interests were war and conquest. Once, when informed that there was no warfare in paradise,



An impressive equestrian statue embellishes Nader Shah's mausoleum in Mashhad, northeastern Iran.

he remarked: "How then can be any delights there?" Every single day, Mashhad plays host to thousands of travelers and pilgrims who come from various Iranian cities, neighboring countries and even across the globe to visit the beautiful, massive holy shrine complex of Imam Reza (AS), the eighth Imam of the Shia Muslims.

Nader Shah is widely considered as one of the most powerful rulers in history of the nation. He assumed power when a period of chaos overwhelmed Iran.

A new Dublin hotel is fully powered by an underground rive

Dublin's newest accommodation offering, Iveagh Garden Hotel, will source its energy from an underground river that runs 50 metres below the hotel. This makes it the first hotel in Europe to develop a unique low energy system that creates the lowest carbon footprint possible. The four-star hotel in the Irish capital opened this week on Harcourt Street, a renowned Georgian street.

The sustainable hotel utilises natural energy that is harvested by turbines onsite, with the underground river Swan acting as an energy reserve for cooling and heating the hotel without burning fuel. The hotel has been built into existing four-storey buildings, comprising 56,000 square feet. These were renovated and two new storeys were added. Their Georgian facade was carefully restored, and the new hotel's interior features a blend of modern styling with original features, including the original tall Georgian windows facing onto Harcourt Street.



The new Iveagh Garden Hotel in Dublin will be powered by an underwater stream. (Image: Iveagh Garden Hotel)

The hotel has 152 bedrooms ranging from deluxe to premium, and it has suites with balconies that overlook the historic Iveagh Gardens. The gardens were known in 1756 as Leeson's Fields, after Joseph Leeson, the first Earl of Milltown, and they had several owners after that. On 4 May 1939, their owner, Lord Iveagh, wrote to the Irish prime minister, Éamon de Valera, offering the Iveagh complex as a gift to the nation.

The Iveagh Garden Hotel is the latest addition to seasoned hoteliers, Brian and Sally McGill's portfolio, which includes the neighboring Harcourt Hotel and Harrington Hall. It has a spacious ground floor bar and bistro called Elle's, and inside the foyer, you'll find coffered ceilings featuring modern chandeliers and large patterned glossy porcelain tiles. The reception area contains black marble highlighted with brass framing, and guests can relax on luxurious velvet sofas and couches inspired by mid-century style. (Source: Lonely Planet)

How to get by in a country where you don't know the language

Not knowing the local language is no reason not to travel. Here are some tips to get by from someone who does it all the time.

Traveling to a foreign country can be daunting if you don't know the local language, and while François Thibault, the cellar master and co-founder of Grey Goose, speaks only French, his job requires constant travel around the world. "Over the years, I've learned how to navigate foreign countries with limited verbal communication," he said.

Mr. Thibault has a number of tips to help travelers manage in a destination when they don't speak the native tongue, based on his own experience. Here are a few of them.

Traveling in foreign countries has become much easier in the past few years thanks to the many foreign language apps which translate words on the spot. Mr. Thibault tends to rely on Google Translate and suggests that travelers find an app that works for them. Ideally, find one that specializes in the language you need to translate especially if the language uses a character set you're not familiar with, or have difficulty pronouncing.

But take note: in Mr. Thibault's experience, these apps work best when you're trying to decipher something in writing, like a restaurant menu or a street sign, rather than in the midst of a conversation.

Speak with your hands and head

Pointing with your hands and nodding or shaking your head, Mr. Thibault said, are an easy way to communicate with locals in the country you're in. "Gestures are almost all universally understood," he said.

There are exceptions however. In many of the countries in the Balkans, for example, nodding means "no," and shaking your head means "yes." Also, although a smile usually conveys friendliness, in some countries such as Russia, locals don't smile at people they don't know. A quick web search for the country you're visiting and "gestures" or "body language" will turn up anything you need to be aware of before you go.

Learn a few key words

Knowing basic words and phrases like "hello," "thank you" and "I'm sorry, I don't speak [insert the language of the country you're visiting], do you speak English?" are a must, Mr. Thibault said. Showing that you care enough to learn some of the language before you went, and at least enough to acknowledge that you don't know more, is a form of respect and will go a long way to endear you to locals.

He suggested going on YouTube to find a tutorial on how to spell and say basic words and phrases, ideally from native speakers eager to teach would-be visitors. "It'll take five minutes of your time and is well worth it," he said.

Work with a local travel agent

If you feel particularly uncomfortable in the country you're headed to, and you have to go anyway, relying on a local travel agent who knows both your and your destination's language can be incredibly useful.

He or she can step in to help translate over the phone should any major issues arise, especially with things like flights, lodging, or other travel-related issues. Many



agents also offer services 24 hours a day, so help is just a quick call away no matter what the problem may be.

Hire a local tour guide

A tour guide can help you get a better grasp of the local language and is a good person to practice words and phrases with. Whenever Mr. Thibault visits a new country, he books a sightseeing tour with a guide on the first day of his trip. "I use this day to learn about my destination and get familiar with the language," he said.

You can always search the web for local tour guides and fixers before you go, or alternatively find a guide through your hotel's concierge a travel agent or by calling the local tourist office. (Source: The New York Times)

Traveling to a foreign country can be daunting if you don't know the local language, but it has become much easier in the past few years thanks to the many foreign language apps which translate words on the spot.

Google's researchers hope AI can predict heart disease by looking at retinas

It may sound like a sappy sentiment from a Hallmark card. Essentially though, that's what researchers at Google did in applying artificial intelligence (AI) to predict something deadly serious: the likelihood that a patient will suffer a heart attack or stroke. The researchers made these determinations by examining images of the patient's retina.

Google, which is presenting its findings Monday in Nature Biomedical Engineering, an online medical journal, says that such a method is as accurate as predicting cardiovascular disease through more invasive measures that involve sticking a needle in a patient's arm.

According to the company, medical researchers have previously shown some correlation between retinal vessels and the risk of a major cardiovascular episode. Using the retinal image, Google says it was able to quantify this association and 70% of the time accurately predict which patient within five years would experience a heart attack or other major cardiovascular event, and which patient would not. Those results were in line with testing methods that require blood be drawn to measure a patient's cholesterol.

Small data set

The "caveat to this is that it's early, (and) we trained this on a small data set," says Google's Lily Peng, a doctor and lead researcher on the project. "We think that the accuracy of this prediction will go up a little bit



Google's technique generated a "heatmap," or graphical representation of data that revealed which pixels in an image were the most important for predicting a specific risk factor.

more as we kind of get more comprehensive data. Discovering that we could do this is a good first step. But we need to validate."

Peng says Google was a bit surprised by the results. Her team had been working on predicting eye disease, then expanded

the exercise by asking the model to predict from the image whether the person was a smoker or what their blood pressure was.

Google's technique generated a "heatmap," or graphical representation of data that revealed which pixels in an image were the most important for predicting a specific risk factor. For example, Google's algorithm paid more attention to blood vessels for making predictions about blood pressure.

Proof of concept

"Pattern recognition and making use of images is one of the best areas for AI right now," says Harlan M. Krumholz, a professor of medicine (cardiology) and director of Yale's Center for Outcomes Research and Evaluation, who considers the research a proof of concept.

It will "help us understand these processes and diagnoses in ways that we haven't been able to do before," he says. "And this is going to come from photographs and sensors and a whole range of devices that will help us essentially improve the physical examination and I think more precisely hone our understanding of disease and individuals and pair it with treatments."

Should further research pan out over time, physicians, as part of routine health check-ups, might study such retinal images to help assess and manage patients' health risks.

(Source: USA Today)

Infrasound microphones could predict volcano eruptions: new study

Sound-recording equipment is getting better all the time. Researchers from Boise State University, Stanford University, and Chile's University of Concepcion have just found a new, very specific application for low-frequency microphones, however, potentially helping to predict the eruption of certain volcanoes around the world.

Their technology involves monitoring inaudible low frequencies, called infrasound, which are produced by a type of active volcano such as the Villarrica volcano in southern Chile.

"Many volcanoes produce energetic infrasound — not ultrasound — which is low-frequency sound that travels long distances through the atmosphere and can be recorded with specialized microphones," Jeffrey Johnson, an associate professor of geophysics at Boise State, told Digital Trends. "Although humans can't perceive infrasound, it can be incredibly energetic."

Acoustic power

In the lead-up to Villarrica's March 3, 2015 eruption, which caused the evacuation of around 4,000 people from their homes, Johnson notes that the volcano was kicking out as much as 100,000 watts of acoustic power 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

This infrasound was produced by the lava lake at the bottom of the crater, but

its sound tone and quality were influenced by the shape of the crater, which acted like a giant musical horn. As the lava lake began to rise within the crater, the shape of this horn changed and, as a result, the character of the sound it produced.

Tracking this infrasound in real-time, using microphones similar to the ones custom-built and calibrated by the team at Boise State's infrasound laboratory could help serve as a valuable early warning tool for potentially deadly eruptions.

Machine-learning algorithms

This monitoring might be carried out using tools such as machine-learning algorithms. It could be added to the existing volcano forecasting models, which analyze readings from seismometers, satellite remote sensing, and gas sensors. Similar volcanoes to Villarrica are located in Hawaii, South Pacific, Italy, Africa, and Central America.

"Our goal is to promote improved eruption forecasting, but not for commercial ends," Johnson said. "This type of science is not driven for monetary profit, but for the goal of seeing science applied to issue timely warnings and — hopefully — mitigate the human impacts of eruptions."

(Source: Digital Trends)

Earth's first land plants may have sprouted 80m years earlier than we thought

For hundreds of millions of years, life on Earth was a purely aquatic phenomenon. The jump from the oceans to the continents was a monumental event, one that would irrevocably change the face of our planet. A new study suggests the first plants to make this evolutionary leap appeared much earlier than we thought.

Our planet's first terrestrial plants appeared 500 million years ago, according to new research published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. That's a surprising figure, considering the oldest known plant fossils date back approximately 420 million years. The University of Bristol scientists who conducted the study analyzed the genes of living organisms, and then combined that with what we know about the fossil record, to come up with the revised date.

It's called the "molecular clock" technique, and it's typically utilized in cases where the fossil record is sparse (which is the case here).

Clock hypothesis

The molecular clock hypothesis states that DNA and protein sequences evolve at a rate that is relatively constant over time and among different organisms. A direct consequence of this constancy is

that the genetic difference between any two species is proportional to the time since these species last shared a common ancestor.

Therefore, if the molecular clock hypothesis holds true, this hypothesis serves as an extremely useful method for estimating evolutionary timescales.

Or in this case, the planet's first terrestrial plants, which looked like moss or algae. Once on land, these plants would eventually diversify into more complex forms, such as flowering plants, trees, and grass. Land plants changed our planet forever, contributing to the chemical weathering of rocks — an important element of the carbon cycle involved in regulating Earth's atmosphere across long timescales.

Global spread of plants

The "global spread of plants and their adaptations to life on land, led to an increase in continental weathering rates that ultimately resulted in a dramatic decrease in the levels of the 'greenhouse gas' carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and global cooling," Jennifer Morris, the co-lead author of the new study, said in a statement.

(Source: Gizmodo)

Arya Sasol Polymer Co. Wins Golden Status as Top Green Industry

As one of country's top four green industries in the country, Arya Sasol Polymer Company won the golden status, the Public Relations Dept. of the company reported.

After its salient achievement in the past year and winning silver status at 18th edition of National Seminar of Green Services and Industrial Units, Arya Sasol Polymer Company managed to win golden statue of green services and industrial units at this year's edition of 19th Nationwide Green Services and Industrial Units.

The 19th edition of Green Nationwide Services and Industrial Units was held a couple of days ago in International Conferences Hall of Department of Environment in the presence of Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Mohammad Shariatmadari, Isa Kalantari vice President and Head of Department of Environment



(DoE), and also resident representative of UN Industrial Development Organization.

Accordingly, four exemplary industrial units of country (including Arya Sasol Polymer Company, KAVAN Cement Production Company in Bukan, West Azarbaijan Province, Dairies Industries Company of Fars (PEGAH), and Fanavarvan Khuzestan Petrochemical Company) were introduced as green services and industrial companies, the report added.

Nationwide Green Services and Industrial Units Seminar is held every year at the initiation of Department of Environment, UNIDO (United Nations Industrial Development Organization) and German International Cooperation Organization in line with protecting environment and for encouraging services and industrial units.

CEO of Bank Pasargad hailed in 8th Iran National Financial Management Award

Chief Executive of Bank Pasargad Dr. Ghaseimi was appreciated in 8th National Financial Management Award for his long years of fruitful experiences in the field of financial sciences of the country, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

According to the evaluation made by the Arbitration Committee held in OIC Summit, the senior official of the bank was honored in the presence of Morteza Bank President's senior advisor and secretary of Supreme Council of Free Trade and Industrial Zones, Mehdi Rasekh Deputy Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (ICT) for Logistics,

Coordinating and Management Development Affairs, Seyed Ali Sadr-Alsadat Deputy Ministry of Health and Medical Education for Resources and Management Development Affairs and a number of senior state officials.

CEO of the bank was awarded with a Plaque of Honor and a Golden Statue for its salient measures taken in the fields of financial management, financial and economic transparency, etc.

CEO of the bank was the first speaker who commemorated the name and memory of designers of this national award named Dr. Gholam-Reza Eslami Bidgoli



and Dr. Ali Madad and said: "Promoting financial management capability level of economic enterprises of the country is the main objective behind organizing this

prestigious ceremony."

Turning to the significance of innovation in the economic management of the country, he said: "elimination of boundaries of various economic activities in the contemporary world of today has been taken into consideration as the main topic in this award-granting ceremony."

In conclusion, CEO of the bank pointed to the results of recent research activities made in this regard and said: "technical and financing economic enterprises have created new and specialized products, turning processes with high margin of profit into the electronic goods automatically, etc."

Ayandeh Bank Awarded with Iran 8th National Financial Management Award

For the fifth consecutive year, Ayandeh Bank was awarded with the National Financial Management Award, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

According to the financial parameters predefined, the bank succeeded in receiving a golden trophy in 8th National Financial Management Award in a ceremony held a couple of days ago in OIC Summit in the presence of senior governmental officials, elites and leaders in the field of financial management.

It should be noted that winning Iran National Financial Management Award in higher levels is considered as a honorary doc-

ument awarded to a prestigious organization, the report added. This award has provided a suitable opportunity for prestigious organizations and institutions to improve and promote level of their financial and economic management.

This prize is awarded to the shortlisted and qualified companies with the aim of supporting professional financial management in the course of attaining their actual status, encouraging companies to assess themselves and recognize their strengths and weak points, etc., the Public Relations Dept. of the bank concluded.



Successful SpaceX Falcon heavy launch opens up more asteroid mining opportunities

The successful launch of the SpaceX Falcon Heavy rocket may have opened up more asteroid mining opportunities, according to an astrophysics researcher. Will the venture soon prove to be possible, or will it remain a concept for many more years?

The success of the Falcon Heavy has pushed SpaceX to set its sights on even bigger goals, with the Big Falcon Rocket now in the works.



The BFR, which will be designed to allow humans to enter other planets such as Mars, may be ready for experimental launches by next year.

However, Martin Elvis, a researcher from the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, is looking not at planets but at asteroids. He believes that, with the successful Falcon Heavy launch by SpaceX, many more asteroids have been made available as potential mining sites.

"Instead of a few hundred, we may have thousands of ore bearing asteroids available," said Elvis to an audience at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science held in Austin, Texas.

One of the challenges in asteroid mining is landing on the asteroids, and Elvis thinks that the Falcon Heavy will help in this regard.

The calculation on how accessible an asteroid is for mining operations is based on delta-v, which measures the thrust needed to have a spacecraft switch between orbiting Earth and orbiting the asteroid.

According to Elvis, the Falcon Heavy will increase the maximum delta-v for asteroid that can be mined, expanding the percentage of economically valuable asteroids for mining from 3 percent to 45 percent.

In space, the water that can be mined in asteroids may be more valuable than gold on Earth due to the exorbitant cost of launching supplies from Earth to space.

(Source: Tech Times)

Gluten intolerance in women could be symptom of ovarian cancer

Women are more likely to cut out foods than go to their GP if they experience persistent bloating.

Women in the UK are more likely to consider changing their diet than visiting their GP when confronted with bloating, a major symptom of ovarian cancer.

New research from Target Ovarian Cancer shows that, when faced with the prospect of persistent bloating, women may unknowingly put themselves at risk by opting to do things like eat more probiotic yoghurts or cut out gluten, rather than visiting their GP.

Half (50 percent) of UK women said they would do something with their diet, whereas one in three (34 percent) said they would see a doctor if they were concerned about bloating. Previous research by Target Ovarian Cancer has shown that just 1 in 5 women can name persistent bloating as a symptom of ovarian cancer — an alarmingly low rate of awareness.

Target Ovarian Cancer's research also showed that women over 55 — who are most likely to develop ovarian cancer — are least likely to google their symptoms, leaving them at risk of a delayed diagnosis. Just one in three women over 55 (34 percent) would do this, compared to almost two thirds of 18-24 year olds (64 percent).

Raising awareness is the first critical step, ensuring women know the potential significance of continued bloating and seek medical advice. This awareness gap means that women are not visiting their GP promptly, not being sent for the correct ovarian cancer tests quickly, and risk missing out on a crucial early diagnosis.

(Source: Target Ovarian Cancer)

After two decades and 6,000 studies, scientists find GMO corn is actually good

From monikers like "Frankenfoods" to general skepticism, there has been a variety of biased reactions to these organisms, even though we as a species have been genetically modifying our foods in one way or another for approximately 10,000 years.

Perhaps some of this distrust will be put to rest with the emergence of a new meta-analysis that shows GM corn increases crop yields and provides significant health benefits.

The analysis, which was not limited to studies conducted in the U.S. and Canada, showed that GMO corn varieties have increased crop yields worldwide 5.6 to 24.5 percent when compared to non-GMO varieties.

They also found that GM corn crops had significantly fewer (up to 36.5 percent less, depending on the species) mycotoxins — toxic chemical byproducts of crop colonization.

Some have argued that GMOs in the U.S. and Canada haven't increased crop yields and could threaten human health; this sweeping analysis proved just the opposite.

For this study, published in the journal Scientific Reports, a group of Italian researchers took over 6,000 peer-reviewed studies from the past 21 years and performed what is known as a "meta-analysis", a cumulative analysis that draws from hundreds or thousands of credible studies.

This type of study allows researchers to draw conclusions that are more expansive and more robust than what could be taken from a single study.

There have been, for a variety of largely unscientific reasons, serious concerns surrounding the effects of GMOs on human health.

This analysis confirms that not only do GMOs pose no risk to human health, but also that they actually could have a substantive positive impact on it.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

No hikes in drug price: health minister

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Drug prices have not spiked over the past few months, IRNA quoted Health Minister Hassan Qazizadeh-Hashemi as saying on Wednesday. “We haven’t had any price increase [for drugs] but insurance companies operate on a different basis and may introduce some [price] changes,” he added.

Foreign currency fluctuations over the past few weeks will definitely affect some of the prices as part of raw materials and equipment for producing pharmaceuticals as well as some drugs are imported to the country, said the minister.

However, the committee which is responsible for drug pricing should introduce a “rational” increase in prices in a way that it won’t impose extra pressure on the public nor lead to drug shortage in the market, he added.

Insurance coverage for infertility treatment
Saeed Namaki, deputy director of Budget and Planning

Organization, also said that “We hope that infertility treatment expenses will be covered by insurances in the next [Iranian calendar] year 1397 (March 2018 – March 2019).”

He also touched on the fact that in the budget bill for next fiscal year, a special budget line has been allocated to treatment of infertile couples.

Considerable cost of treatment is one of the main concerns and barriers for infertile couples, and surely, their full insurance coverage can be a huge hope both for them and the country’s population.

In 2016, the administration pledged to cover 85 percent of the infertility treatment expenses for some two million couples who had difficulty for conceiving.

EU should raise fossil fuel taxes to plug Brexit budget gap: former officials

The European Union should raise taxes on fossil fuels to help meet goals on climate change and plug a budget gap after Britain leaves the bloc, former senior EU officials said in a letter to EU leaders.

European leaders will discuss options for the bloc’s next long term budget from 2021 to 2027 at a summit on Friday and the taxes were not among those laid out by the EU executive ahead of the talks.

Instead, the European Commission proposed that a share of the revenue from national auctions of carbon permits under the bloc’s cap-and-trade Emission Trading System be used.

“We call on the EU to create a contribution of the oil, gas and coal sector to the EU budget,” 19 economists wrote in the letter seen by Reuters on Wednesday and dated Feb. 20.

Italian Prime Minister Enrico Letta, former WTO director Pascal Lamy, former German finance minister Hans Eichel and Belgian economist Paul de Grauwe were among the signatories.

A “modest” price level of five euros per ton of carbon dioxide on coal, oil and gas burned in Europe would generate revenues of around 17 billion euros per year, they wrote.

The letter also proposed raising the EU’s minimum diesel tax, introducing a kerosene tax to tackle aviation emissions or applying a minimum value added tax to airplane tickets.

The Brussels-based climate campaign group Transport & Environment said the letter added clout to policy debates over using taxes to tackle air pollution from transport, Europe’s largest source of emissions.

(Source: Reuters)

LEARN ENGLISH

Asking for Time Off

A: Mr. McKenna, do you **have a second**? I need to talk to you about something.

B: Sure, Liv, what can I do for you?

A: Well, I was just wondering... you see, I know I’ve **used up** all my vacation days this year, but my sister is getting married, and the wedding is **overseas**, and, well...

B: You wanna **take some time off**, is that right?

A: Well, sir, I was just hoping that I might be able to take some **unpaid leave** this year.

B: What dates are you planning on **taking off**? I’ll need at least two months’ **notice**, so that I can plan for your absence.

A: I was thinking of taking off from September first until the thirtieth. Would you be **okay with that**?

B: Well, I guess so.

Key vocabulary

have a second: have some time, not busy

use up: take all of something

overseas: in an other country, across the ocean

take some time off: stop working for a short time

unpaid leave: time away from work that is not paid

take off: leave

notice: information that tells you about something or warns about something

be okay with that: agree

Supplementary vocabulary

take a leave of absence: stay away from work for a long period of time, without getting paid

sick leave: time away from work when sick

personal leave: time away from work for personal reasons (i.e. doctor’s appointment, etc.)

maternity leave: time away from work for a mother to care for a new baby

bank holiday: public holiday recognized by law (BrE)

(Source: irlanguage.com)



Be kind to me!

Polish investors invited to smart city projects in Tehran

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Tehran Mayor Mohammad Ali Najafi has asked Polish investors and companies to take part in smart city projects in the Iranian capital, Fars reported on Wednesday.

Najafi made the remarks in a joint economic forum held during his four-day trip to the Polish capital with Warsaw Mayor Hanna Beata Gronkiewicz-Waltz.

The Tehran mayor encouraged the Polish private sector to become active in Iran maintaining it as a priority for the municipality.

He further deemed projects pertaining to developing smart cities as the major projects for the municipality saying “developing smart city projects has been recently proposed for the first time as one of our principal urban management programs and we are seriously following up with it.”

“Such projects will open up ample opportunities for Polish investors active in private sector,” he restated.

He further explained that traffic congestion, noise pollution, and air pollution mostly exacerbated by motorcycles is one of the main issues Tehran municipality is struggling with noting that some 3 million [carbureted] motorcycles are plying the city and that municipality is planning to replace such high-emission vehicles with electric ones.

“This is one of the major projects that Polish investors as well as other foreign investors can participate,” he highlighted.

Najafi went on to say that projects concerning public transit, waste segregation, waste recycling and producing biofuel and electricity from waste, developing tourism infrastructure such as hotels, multi-level automated parking, as well as manufacturing firefighting equipment are also the projects that can provide common grounds to start joint cooperation.

He finally commented on lack of banking channels as the main obstacle in extending ties with Polish investors and companies.

Smart cities characteristics

According to the Internet of the Things Agenda website a smart city is a municipality that uses information and communication



Tehran municipality, as a front organization for urban management, is failing to keep its promises to increase the city livability index and for many of us the capital is synonymous with constant air and noise pollution and torturous traffic.

technologies to increase operational efficiency, share information with the public and improve both the quality of government services and citizens welfare.

Emerging trends such as automation, machine learning and the internet of things (IoT) are driving smart city adoption.

In the transportation arena, smart traffic management is used to keep track of and analyze traffic flows to optimize streetlights to prevent roadways from becoming too congested based on time of day or rush-hour schedules.

Smart public transit is another feature of smart cities, used to ensure public transportation meets user demand. Smart transit companies can coordinate services and fulfill

riders’ needs in real time, improving efficiency and rider satisfaction. Ride-sharing and bike-sharing are also some of the common services in a smart city.

Smart city initiatives also focus on monitoring and addressing environmental concerns such as climate change and air pollution. Sanitation can also be improved with smart technology, for example by using internet-connected trash cans and IoT-enabled fleet management systems for waste collection and removal, or using sensors to measure water parameters and guarantee the quality of drinking water with proper wastewater removal and drainage at the back end.

Tehran, a city struggling to survive
With that being said the mayor of Tehran

‘Iran-Switzerland Science Day’ proposed

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Seeking to promote scientific cooperation between the two countries, Iranian Science Minister Mansur Gholami expressed readiness for organizing ‘Iran-Switzerland Science Day’ event.

In a meeting in Tehran on Tuesday with Swiss Ambassador to Iran Markus Leitner, Gholami said holding such events paves the way for introducing scientific capabilities of the two nations to each other and can shape a bright future in scientific cooperation, Nasimonline reported.

Gholami also referred to the upcoming tour of Swiss deputy science minister to Iran in May and considered it as a “major step towards boosting scientific, educational and technological cooperation.”

Touching on the roadmap for the development of relations signed by the presidents of the two nations in February 2016, he declared Iran is “fully ready” to take the agreements into action.

Leitner, for his part, emphasized on the willingness and determination of his country’s administration to extend cooperation with Iran in many fields including science and technology.

He called for determining the specific topics of future collaboration prior to the visit of Swiss scientific delegation to Iran in order to facilitate the development of related ties.

The ambassador also referred to considerable number of Iranian researchers and



professors living in Switzerland and regarded them as invaluable channels for boosting the scientific collaborations.

Special consortium to facilitate co-op
A consortium comprising top universities of Iran has been established to develop a special roadmap for boosting Iran-Switzerland scientific cooperation, said Hossein Salar Amoli, deputy science minister for international affairs.

Current level of scientific cooperation between the two nations is far from their true potential, he said, adding that stronger determination and more definite plans are needed in this regard.

Exchanging of professors and students to provide research opportunities and holding short-term training courses, carrying out joint research projects and establishing joint field of study, faculties and universities were among topics that Amoli expressed interest for cooperation.

China will plant 32,400 square miles of trees to combat air pollution

China has an air pollution problem. But recently the country has worked to improve its air quality and reduce emissions. In 2017, China elected to shut down 40 percent of its factories, and announced plans to ban diesel-powered cars. In 2018, it became home to the world’s largest smog tower that is capable of reducing nearby air pollution by 15 percent.

Now, China is proceeding with a new plan: planting trees — 84,000 square kilometers (32,400 square miles) of them, to be exact.

Currently, China has roughly 208 million hectares of forested area. Throughout 2018, the country hopes increase its total forest coverage from 21 percent to 23 percent, and tasked roughly 60,000 soldiers to handle the job, according to Asia Times. A regiment of the People’s Liberation Army, as well as the nation’s armed police force, have been pulled from their posts on the northern border for the project. The Independent reports that Zhang Jianlong, head of China’s State Forestry Administration, said the country’s total forest coverage could reach as high as 26 percent in less than two decades.

Most of the troops are being dispatched to the heavily-polluted Hebei province near Beijing — one of the biggest contrib-



utors to the country’s smog problem. The province pledged to increase its forest coverage to 35 percent by 2020.

While it’s reassuring to see China take its air pollution issues so seriously, it’s unlikely that additional trees will solve the problem. China’s forest coverage is already at 21 percent, and the country still has a significant amount of smog.

While an additional two percent of forest will certainly help, it probably won’t change China’s air quality all that much. Not on its own, anyway; but that’s where other endeavors like the aforementioned diesel car ban and push for renewable energy come into play.

Air pollution has major impacts on human health, and countries like China would do well to reduce national levels sooner than later.

(Source: futurism.com)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

Transport budget for special students jumps fivefold to \$5m

Iran’s government has allocated some 180 billion rials (nearly \$5 million) to provide special students with school transport at no cost, the director for special students department of the Education Ministry has said. There has been a fivefold increase in the budget allocated to the special students school transport as the budget was some 35 billion rials (nearly \$1 million) in 2013, Majid Qadami told Fars news agency. “Following through on the pledge we made, last year we provided special students living in underprivileged areas with free school transport and paid for 80 percent of the costs of the transport in other areas,” Qadami explained.

اختصاص اعتبار پنج برابری ۱۸۰ میلیارد ریالی برای دانش آموزان استثنایی

رئیس سازمان آموزش و پرورش کودکان استثنایی وزارت آموزش و پرورش گفت: دولت اعتباری معادل ۱۸۰ میلیارد ریال برای رایگان شدن سرویس دانش آموزان استثنایی اختصاص داده است. به گزارش خبرگزاری فارس مجید قدیمی گفت: رایگان شدن سرویس مدارس دانش آموزان استثنایی نسبت به سال ۱۳۹۲، پنج برابر شده است؛ یعنی حدود ۳۵ میلیارد اعتبار این کار به حدود ۱۸۰ میلیارد ریال رسیده است. قدیمی همچنین توضیح داد: مطابق قولی که داده بودیم سال گذشته هزینه سرویس مدارس در مناطق محروم پرداخت شد و در سایر مناطق را تا ۸۰ درصد هزینه های سرویس مدارس را در سایر مناطق پرداخت کردیم.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-ess”

Meaning: a word ending that indicates woman or girl
For example: She won the best supporting **actress** award.

PHRASAL VERB

Farm somebody/something out

Meaning: to send work to other people instead of doing it yourself
For example: The processing will be farmed out to people in local villages.

IDIOM

Above board

Explanation: if a situation or business is described as above board, it is open, honest and legal
For example: There are not secret negotiations. Our dealings have always been above board.

Pro-government fighters move into Syria's Afrin

Turkey: Whoever helps Kurd militia in Syria is 'legitimate target'

➔ Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Britain-based war monitor the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), confirmed "hundreds of fighters entered the Afrin region on Tuesday afternoon".

Turkish forces fired "warning shots" at the Damascus-backed fighters as they entered the region towards Afrin city on Tuesday.

"Pro-regime terrorist groups that are trying to advance towards Afrin retreated to about 10 kilometers [six miles] from the town because of the warning shots," Turkish state news agency Anadolu said.

Syrian news agency SANA confirmed Turkish artillery fire but made no mention of any retreat.

"Turkish regime forces targeted the locations of popular forces with artillery fire as they arrived to the Afrin region," SANA reported.

The shelling marks a serious escalation in the month-old assault Turkey and allied rebels are waging on Afrin.

Mevlut Cavusoglu, Turkey's foreign minister, said on Monday his military would hit back if pro-Syrian forces intervened in Afrin to help the YPG.

Ankara sent its military into northern Syria last month saying it needed to defeat the YPG to protect its border.

YPG, part of the United States-backed Syrian Democratic Forces umbrella organization, gained control of large swaths of territory in northern Syria during an offensive against Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist outfit.

The U.S. support for the YPG has infuriated Turkey as it considers the group a "terrorist" organization.

Ankara sees YPG as part of the banned Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK/Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê), which has waged a decades-long bloody rebellion against the Turkish state in southeastern parts of the country.

➔ **Turkey: Whoever helps Kurd militia in Syria is 'legitimate target'**

Moreover, Turkey on Wednesday said it would consider a "legitimate target" any group that comes to the aid of Kurdish militia in Afrin in northern Syria.

The threat from presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin came a day after Syrian pro-regime forces entered Afrin, only to come under fire from Turkish forces.

Last month Ankara launched a cross-border air and ground offensive backing Syrian rebels against the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) in Afrin.

"Today, tomorrow could they attempt this again? It's possible. But the relevant measures have been taken," Kalin said, after Turkey said it fired "warning shots" at Syrian pro-regime forces in Afrin.

"Every step taken in support for the YPG terror organization would mean [any forces intervening on the Kurdish militants' side] are on the same level as terror organizations. And for us, that would make them legitimate targets," Kalin told reporters in Ankara.

"It doesn't matter who makes such an attempt, there will be serious consequences."

The YPG has controlled Afrin since Syrian government forces withdrew from Kurdish-majority areas in the country's north in 2012.

Kalin said Ankara does not have any



official contact with Damascus, but that if necessary, Turkish and Syrian intelligence could enter into "direct or indirect" contact.

➔ **Syria: Western officials complicit in terrorist crimes against civilians**

Meantime, in a letter of complaint to the United Nations, Syria has drawn attention to a sharp rise in deadly terrorist attacks against civilians in Damascus and its suburbs, calling on the world body to take proper measures against countries that support and fund the armed groups.

The Syrian Foreign and Expatriates Ministry sent the letter to the UN chief and the Security Council chairman on Tuesday, hours after militant groups stationed in the Eastern Ghouta region targeted the capital and its countryside with lethal shells, killing and injuring dozens of people, the official SANA news agency reported.

The letter condemned the attack as "a continuation of the crimes committed on daily basis by these terrorists against the citizens in Damascus," saying they have fired more than 1,500 shells in the past seven weeks and left hundreds dead and wounded.

The ministry further accused some Western officials of directly supporting the terrorists and encouraging them to carry out attacks without fear of being held accountable.

"These officials are complicit in the terrorists' crimes against innocent civilians in Damascus and its countryside, as they are denying the Syrian state's right to defend its citizens, fight terrorism, and confront those who fund and arm terrorists."

The terrorists have been slaughtering civilians over the past seven years "upon instructions from their masters" in the capitals of Western and Persian Gulf states, the letter read.

The Syrian capital has seen a spike in attacks in recent weeks from nearby regions held by militant groups.

Meanwhile, government forces have intensified their counterterrorism campaign to liberate those areas.

Elsewhere in its letter, the Foreign Ministry gave assurances that the attacks would not dissuade the government from fighting the terrorists and working to restore security to the country.

It also demanded "an immediate and

stern condemnation" of the attacks by the UN, urging the Security Council to shoulder its responsibility and take action against the regimes that support and fund terrorism.

Terrorists and their supporters keep up using citizens in Eastern Ghouta and other regions as human shields, it added.

➔ **UN's Guterres voices alarm at situation in E. Ghouta**

Separately, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres voiced alarm at the situation in Eastern Ghouta and called on all sides to the conflict to uphold the basic principles of humanitarian law.

"The secretary-general is deeply alarmed by the escalating situation in Eastern Ghouta and its devastating impact on civilians," said UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric.

Also the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has claimed that some 250 people have been killed in Eastern Ghouta in two days of the Syrian government's Russian-backed aerial operations against the terrorists.

➔ **Al-Nusra using civilians as 'human shields'**

Elsewhere, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov had on Monday blamed "armed provocations" by Takfiri al-Nusra Front (Jabhat al-Nusra) militants for conditions in Eastern Ghouta.

The al-Nusra Front terrorists, he said, are hampering the evacuation of civilians from Eastern Ghouta, where they use them as "human shields" while keeping up attacks on Damascus' civil facilities.

"It took enormous effort to reach agreements on medical evacuation, first of all, of children and people needing emergency medical assistance. But subsequent efforts to organize large-scale evacuation of civilians from that area encountered Jabhat al-Nusra's refusal as it seeks to keep these people as a human shield," Lavrov said.

The top Russian diplomat also called on Western powers, which "have influence" on al-Nusra Front, to "discipline" the terror outfit because otherwise it would be "exterminated."

➔ **Over Dozen civilians killed in new U.S.-led strikes Dayr al-Zawr**

The developments follow as more than a dozen civilians have lost their lives when the U.S.-led coalition purportedly fighting the ISIL 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 the 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 SOHR reported on November 23 last year that 2,759 civilians, including 644 minors and 470 women, had been killed in the 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 targets inside Syria since September 2014 without any authorization from Damascus 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 ISIL.

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 ISIL terrorists with cover.

It noted that ISIL 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 afternoon 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.

Bahrain: Appeals court upholds death sentences handed to six Bahrainis, strips two others of citizenship

Bahraini court: Five years in jail for Nabeel Rajab's tweets

➔ Elsewhere, the Bahrain Center for Human Rights and the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD), two leading rights groups, confirmed the sentence handed down to Rajab.

The campaigner's Twitter account posted a photo showing him smiling and flashing the victory sign after the verdict was announced.

Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei, an activist with BIRD, accused courts of "curtailing freedom of expression by deterring Bahraini citizens from criticizing its authorities."

"Instead of rewarding Nabeel Rajab for his brave and commendable exposure of human rights abuses and advocacy for peace, the authorities have chosen to punish the messenger," he added.

Brian Dooley, a senior adviser at the United States-based group Human Rights First, called on the U.S. administration to show "some spine in standing up to the dictatorship in Bahrain."

"It should take punitive action over this verdict and send the American ambassador to visit Rajab in prison to tell him that the U.S. is on his side and against this reckless repression," he said.

Rajab was already serving a two-year sentence over a January 2015 news interview in which he said that the Bahraini regime was torturing political prisoners.

➔ **Appeals court upholds death sentences handed to six Bahrainis**

Separately on Wednesday, an appeals court upheld the death sentences handed to six Bahrainis and stripped two others of their citizenship.

Since February 14, 2011, Bahraini people have been holding peaceful protest rallies on an almost daily basis, demanding that the House of Khalifah relinquish power and let a just system representing all people be established.

They have also been complaining about widespread dis-



crimination against the Shia majority in the tiny Persian Gulf state.

Manama has responded to the protests with lethal force, drawing international criticism.

Manama has gone to great lengths to clamp down on any sign of dissent. On March 14, 2011, troops from the House of Saud regime and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) were deployed to assist Bahrain in its crackdown.

Scores of people have lost their lives and hundreds of others sustained injuries or got arrested as a result of the House of Khalifah regime's crackdown.

On March 5, 2017, Bahrain's parliament approved the trial of civilians at military tribunals in a measure blasted by human rights campaigners as being tantamount to imposition of an undeclared martial law countryside.

Bahraini monarch King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifah ratified the constitutional amendment on April 3 last year.

Bahraini authorities have also detained human rights campaigners, broken up major opposition political parties and revoked the nationality of several activists.

➔ **Bahrain bars opposition lawmakers from contesting in elections**

The developments follow as Bahrain's Council of Representatives has approved a new legislation, preventing members of dissolved political parties from taking part in the country's parliamentary and municipal elections later this year.

The lower house of the Bahraini National Assembly took the decision during a session on Tuesday. It will effectively affect over 70,000 Bahrainis from contesting in the polls, Arabic-language Lualua television network reported.

Bahraini officials have dissolved opposition parties al-Wefaq National Islamic Society, leftist National Democratic Action Society (Wa'ad) and the Islamic Action Society, commonly referred to as Amal Party, over allegations of "supporting terrorism".

➔ **Hundreds of Bahrainis stage anti-regime protests**

Elsewhere, hundreds of Bahrainis have staged anti-regime protests across the tiny Persian Gulf state against the House of Khalifah regime's crackdown on dissent.

Protesters held placards and chanted slogans against the House of Khalifah regime and called for immediate release of political prisoners.

The regime forces, however, used tear gas to disperse the crowd in the village of Ma'ameer.

The protesters also expressed solidarity with prominent opposition figures, including Shia cleric Sheikh Isa Qassim and Sheikh Ali Salman.

Sheikh Isa Qassim is now living under house arrest since Manama revoked his citizenship in June 2016, prompting protests and sit-ins in his home-town of Diraz.

The rallies came two days after Bahraini people marked the seventh anniversary of their popular uprising with massive protests across the country. Police used tear gas against the demonstrators in several areas, injuring several of them in the ensuing clashes.

(Source: agencies)

Gaza youth dies of injuries inflicted by Israeli troops

A Palestinian youth has succumbed to injuries sustained during clashes with Israeli forces which broke out during the "Friday of Rage" protests near the Gaza Strip's border.

The Palestinian Health Ministry announced the death of Ahmad Muhammad Abd Rabbuh Abu Holu on Wednesday.

The 19-year-old was wounded as Israeli forces started confronting Palestinian protesters in the city of al-Breej in the coastal enclave last Friday, the ministry added.

Separately, it was reported that a Palestinian youth had been wounded during fresh clashes with Israeli forces at the entrance to the village of Baita near the West Bank city of Nablus.

Israeli forces also raided Palestinian homes in the West Bank, making 20 arrests.

Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank have been holding weekly protests on Fridays since early December 2017, when the United States President Donald Trump said Washington was recognizing al-Quds (Jerusalem) as Israel's "capital."

Israel has in recent weeks intensified its air raids against the Gaza Strip.

Tel Aviv pulled its forces out of Gaza in 2005, but has been incessantly attacking the sliver, which has been under a crippling siege for over a decade.

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

(Source: Press TV)

France to unveil controversial migrant law

The French government is set to unveil a tough new immigration bill that is proving one of the most divisive of Emmanuel Macron's young presidency.

The legislation, which criminalizes illegal border crossings and aims for quicker deportation of those deemed economic migrants, has sparked widespread anger from NGOs (non-governmental organization) who have branded it repressive.

The government says the law balances "efficiency" with "humanity", offering faster asylum to refugees found to have fled conflict or repression.

But it has opened divisions in the left-right coalition that newcomer Macron set up when he came to power in May, with even some members of his Republic On The Move (LREM/La République En Marche) party breaking ranks to criticize it.

"The most vulnerable will be punished," Jean-Michel Clement said, a lawmaker who joined the centrist LREM after switching from the Socialists.

"It's not forbidden to put a little humanity into a draft law."

Some workers at France's refugee protection office Ofpra were going on strike to protest the bill on Wednesday, branding it "an unequivocal departure from France's tradition of asylum".

They join staff at the asylum court who have been on strike for nine days over their working conditions, with immigration lawyers also raising concerns over aspects of the draft law.

The bill will be presented to the cabinet on Wednesday before being tabled in parliament in April.

While left-wingers see it as too punitive the right have labeled it too lax.

Macron has come under pressure to toughen his stance after winning power in an election in which far-right leader Marine Le Pen won 34 percent of the vote, capitalizing on concerns over immigration.

The infamous "Jungle" migrant camp in Calais was razed in 2016 but young Africans and South Asians continue to head to the coast hoping to stow away on trucks crossing to Britain, while others are camped out on the streets of Paris.

France received a record 100,000 asylum applications last year.

Liberation newspaper noted that while polls showed voters backing tougher laws the relocation of thousands of migrants to towns and villages nationwide in 2016 went off largely without hitch.

NGOs have lashed out in particular at plans to double the time asylum seekers can be held in detention to 90 days and halve the amount of the time they have to appeal if turned down for refugee status.

"We're asking for it to be withdrawn," the Cimade migrants' charity said of the bill.

The government has defended the bill as "balanced" and said it is considering proposals on how to better integrate newcomers, including doubling the number of hours of French lessons they get and allowing asylum seekers to work.

The bill also aims to cut the average waiting time on asylum applications from 11 months to six, although staff at the asylum court have raised concerns that the tighter turnaround on cases will make it more difficult to appeal.

A heated parliamentary debate last week on a separate law on taking in "Dublin" migrants - those whose asylum claims are registered in other EU countries - provided a taste of how the issue has split Macron backers.

The government has already had to abandon a controversial proposal to deport failed asylum-seekers to a third country deemed "safe".

Plans by Interior Minister Gerard Collomb to carry out immigration checks in homeless shelters have also come under fire in recent weeks.

(Source: AFP)

The silver lining of Germany's political chaos

➔ The lesson is: The changes we are witnessing are neither completely bad nor completely good. The question is what politicians and voters make of them.

The deep crisis facing Germany's once dominant big-tent parties represents a challenge. It could weaken the country. Already, Germany has gone months without a government and without a voice in the world. But that doesn't mean a return to the Weimar Republic, and democracy is not yet in danger. We cannot now, though, focus our attention on defending obsolete structures. We have to stand up for our values: for liberal democracy, the constitution and our state institutions. There are good reasons for why many voters are yearning for a renewal. If that results in new parties and forms of political participation, it will breathe life into the political system and, in the best case, make it more resistant.

It is always wrong to be afraid of voters. Wanting to persuade them of your own political convictions is always right.

(Source: Source: Spiegel)

Escape Messi's shadow? Change sport! - Henry's advice to Neymar

Neymar would have to change sport if he is serious about stepping out from Lionel Messi's shadow, according to Thierry Henry.

The Brazilian stunned the footballing world in August by completing a record €222million switch from Barcelona to Paris Saint-Germain, amid speculation he sought individual acclaim away from the Camp Nou's regular headline act.

And Neymar has made a fine start to life at PSG, scoring 28 goals in 29 appearances across all competitions with Unai Emery's men seemingly set for a return to domestic dominance after seeing Monaco storm their way to Ligue 1 glory last season.

Neymar was a Champions League winner alongside Messi and Luis Suarez with Barca in 2015, but hopes of European success this time around hang in the balance after PSG's 3-1 defeat at Real Madrid in the opening leg of their last-16 tie.

And Messi's former team-mate Henry believes Neymar would have to take drastic action to achieve his goal of usurping the Argentine atop the superstar hierarchy.

"I don't know if Neymar left Barcelona to get out of Messi's shadow," the Frenchman told Marca.

"What is true is that all players are in Messi's shadow, and if Neymar doesn't want to be, he should change sport."

(Source: Goal)

State of Bremen wins court case over policing costs

A German court has ordered the DFL, which operates the Bundesliga, to pay police costs for "high risk" football matches. This is the latest twist in a legal battle between the league and the city-state of Bremen.

The upper regional court in Bremen ruled on Wednesday that the German football league (DFL) must pay additional police costs incurred as a result of "high-risk" Bundesliga matches hosted by local side Werder Bremen. High risk matches are those in which the likelihood of fan violence is regarded as being significantly higher than it would be at other games.

The court overturned a May 2017 decision, when the lower regional court ruled that it was not lawful for Bremen to pass on the additional costs from high-risk matches to the DFL.

The case started when Bremen first sent the DFL a bill of €425,000 (\$523,000) for increased police costs linked to the high-risk match between Werder Bremen and Hamburg on April 19, 2015. Bremen has attempted to bill the DFL for other matches since then, bringing the total to around €2 million.

Wednesday's ruling doesn't necessarily mean that the case is closed, as the DFL now has the option of filing an appeal with a federal court.

(Source: DW)

Serena Williams: I almost died after giving birth

Serena Williams "almost died" after giving birth to her daughter last September, the former women's world number one tennis player wrote in a column for CNN that was published on Tuesday.

Williams had previously revealed some of the complications she had after giving birth but offered more details about an experience that has since inspired her to speak out about the importance of affordable child care. "I almost died after giving birth to my daughter, Olympia," Williams, 36, wrote in the opening line of her article. Williams was bedridden for six weeks from a series of complications, including a pulmonary embolism that led to multiple surgeries, after her daughter was delivered by emergency caesarean section. "I am so grateful I had access to such an incredible medical team of doctors and nurses at a hospital with state-of-the-art equipment," said Williams.

"They knew exactly how to handle this complicated turn of events. If it weren't for their professional care, I wouldn't be here today."

Williams said her C-section wound popped open due to intense coughing endured as a result of the embolism.

She had surgery, where doctors found a large hematoma in her abdomen and returned to the operating room for a procedure that prevents clots from travelling to her lungs.

(Source: Eurosport)

No medals but plenty of cheers for North Korea

North Korea will not be the only nation leaving the Pyeongchang Olympics without a medal, but they are one of the few minnows of winter sports to have earned rousing cheers wherever they go.

When 25-year-old alpine skier Kim Ryon Hyang glided down the mountain in the women's slalom to take last place, North Korean cheerleaders led the crowd in a warm ovation.

The diminutive Kim beamed after the race, taking photos with fans and waving excitedly to the crowd.

The cheerleaders, outnumbering the nation's athletic team by 10 to one, have been a fixture wherever North Korea's 22 athletes have competed.

They were particularly vocal when North Korean players joined South Koreans in a unified women's ice hockey team, the first joint North-South team to compete at any Olympics.

The team's head coach, Canadian Sarah Murray, played six of the 12 North Korean players in all five games. Only one, Kim Un Hyang, played in every one.

Figure skating pair Ryoum Tae Ok and Kim Ju Sik, the only North Koreans to qualify for the Games, were the nation's best hope. The others were given wildcard entries, part of South Korea's diplomatic efforts to re-engage with the North.

The pair ranked 13th out of 16 teams, outperforming South Korean pair Kim Kyu-eun and Kam Alex Kang-chan.

"There remains lots of things to do... It seems that we still lack experience and guts. We will do better," Kim Ju Sik told reporters.

North Korea came into the Games with another big handicap: some of the world's toughest international sanctions.

(Source: Reuters)

Could joint Korean team return for an encore?

Politics crept into the Olympics when it was announced that there would be a joint Korean women's ice hockey team competing in Pyeongchang. The move was criticized by some, but the spectacle on the ice warmed hearts.

When any sporting side receives a 6-1 thrashing, not to mention a fifth straight loss, a standing ovation is the last scene one expects to take in.

Yet following the conclusion of their five-goal loss to Sweden on Tuesday, Korea's joint women's ice hockey team were given a rousing reception by their adoring fans as they skated around the rink to acknowledge the home fans.

The team has been poor, there's no other way around it. Five games and five losses for a total of 28 goals conceded and just two scored is a pretty devastating record. Failure on the ice, however, has failed to dampen the feel-good story, even if there seems to be a political PR stunt not so far beneath the surface. South Korea's squad of 23 players had been all set to represent their country at the Olympic ice hockey tournament - a first for the country's women. But just weeks prior to the start of the Pyeongchang Games, government officials decided the two Koreas would combine forces. Twelve North Koreans joined the squad.

The team was to meant symbolize what South Korean President Moon Jae-in was eager to brand as the "peace Olympics", with the two countries also marching under one flag during the opening ceremony.

For South Korea's American-born coach, Sarah Murray (pictured above, left), who has been in charge for four years, it made already challenging preparations that much tougher. But Murray, who through her father, former NHL coach Andy Murray, also holds Canadian citizenship, decried the team's attitude and



commitment as "incredible" after bursting into tears after the final buzzer sounded.

"The politicians made the decision... but our players and our staff are the ones that made it work," Murray told reporters.

"When I was standing there I was just so proud of them just watching them skate around saluting the fans there. With everything that happened to them, prior to the Olympics, for them to come together like this and to compete like this in the Olympics, it's remarkable."

It's a historic moment, no doubt, but the political nature of the unified team didn't sit well with a lot of South Koreans. There were raillies before the one of the team's pretournament exhibition match, also against

Sweden, with protesters chanting "Pyeongyang Olympics".

They suggested the North had been allowed to hijack the Pyeongchang Games, while many were outraged that the decision deprived a number of South Koreans of the opportunity to represent their nation after years of hard work.

Despite the opposition, however, the love was strong whenever Korea took to the ice. The women became crowd favorites even as their results failed to improve. Bumper crowds attended every match, with an average of almost 4,000 spectators per contest. The total crowd of almost 20,000 was the third-highest among the eight women's teams

in Pyeongchang.

The North Korean cheerleading squad even rocked up to the South Korean men's ice hockey game to lend their support.

One International Olympic Committee (IOC) official, Angela Ruggiero, has even suggested the unified Korea team be nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize.

And when Han Soo-jin scored Korea's first goal, in a 4-1 loss to Japan, the puck was sent directly to the International Ice Hockey Federation's (IIHF) hall of fame. The federation's president, Rene Fasel, would like to see the unified team to stick around for the 2022 Beijing Games.

(Source: Deutsche Welle)

Antonio Conte says Blues can do 'something incredible'



Chelsea will "try to do something incredible" by knocking Barcelona out of the Champions League, said manager Antonio Conte after a drawn first leg.

Willian put the Blues ahead at Stamford Bridge, but Lionel Messi capitalised on an error to ensure the match finished 1-1 by netting 15 minutes from time.

Barcelona, who are seven points clear in La Liga, had barely threatened the hosts before their equalizer. "We were close to playing the perfect performance," said Conte. "We made one mistake. It is a pity and we are disappointed with the final result."

Chelsea twice hit the post with strikes from outside the area from Willian, before the Brazilian scored at the third attempt with another 20-yard effort.

However, 13 minutes later, Andreas Christensen played a loose pass and Andres Iniesta linked up with Messi, who scored his first Champions League goal against the London club.

Christensen, 21, had made only three appearances for Chelsea before this season, but has played 31 times for the club this campaign.

After selecting him ahead of England center-back Gary Cahill, Conte defended the Danish international.

"It was an incredible performance," said the Italian. "We are talking about a very young player. It is great that he is

able to play this game with maturity and personality. He was one of the best players.

"It is very difficult to mention one player but I think Christensen played a top game and I was very pleased with his performance.

"We made one mistake but we know against these opponents and players like Messi, Iniesta and [Luis] Suarez, if you make a mistake you pay."

The return leg takes place at the Nou Camp on Wednesday, 14 March.

Chelsea last played there in 2011-12 and, despite having John Terry sent off in the first half, drew 2-2 to gain a 3-2 aggregate win in the Champions League semi-final.

They then beat Bayern Munich on penalties in the final. "It won't be easy," added Conte. "We must be realistic because we are talking about Barcelona and they showed they are a really strong and fantastic team."

"But we also showed we are ready to work really hard in defense and have the right feeling when we get the ball to create the chances to score.

"We have to respect the opponent and when you play against Barcelona you know very well that if you go box to box that is crazy. The game could not only be 1-0 but 2-0, or 4-0, 5-0, 6-0.

"We can try to do something incredible in the Nou Camp and we must play an intelligent game - we are not stupid."

(Source: BBC)

Jessica Diggins delivers long-awaited U.S. gold



Kikkan Randall and Jessica Diggins delivered the first Olympic cross-country medal for the United States since 1976 with a stunning victory in a thrilling finish to the women's team sprint relay on Wednesday.

Diggins held off the challenge of Sweden's Stina Nilsson in a furious sprint for the line to win gold and Norway's Marit Bjoergen became the most successful winter Olympian of all time with 14 medals after taking bronze with Maiken Caspersen Falla.

"It feels unreal, I can't believe it just happened," Diggins told reporters.

"In the final stretch I was just thinking, 'Go, go, go, I'm giving it everything I had and I've got someone who I really love and care about waiting for me at the finishing line and I just want to make her proud,'" she said of Randall.

The Americans had not celebrated a medal in cross-country since Bill Koch took silver in the 30km race in Innsbruck more than 40 years ago.

"I had so much adrenaline as she was coming down, but if there's anybody I'd have 100 percent faith in coming down that finishing stretch as fast as possible, it's Jessie," said the 35-year-old Randall who is competing in her fifth Olympics.

"So that was just a wonderful feeling to take it all in and watch it happen."

Sweden and Norway were hot favorites

for yet another gold medal in women's cross-country skiing and the Nordic nations were at the head of the pack for almost the entire race.

With the racers taking turns to speed around the 1,176-meter long track, Randall and Diggins fought to stay in touch with the leaders as the rest of the pack fell away after the halfway point.

Randall kept the Americans in the hunt on her final leg, handing over to Diggins for the sixth and final lap which was raced at a furious pace as the lead changed hands several times.

Well set up by team mate Charlotte Kalla, Sweden's Nilsson and Norway's Falla clashed as they approached the stadium for the final time, and skis touched again as Diggins sought a lane from which to make her push for glory.

She passed Falla and set her sights on leader Nilsson, who won gold in the individual sprint, as they rounded the final bend to set up an electrifying finish.

Diggins surged past and thrust her ski across the line 0.19 seconds ahead of Nilsson.

"I am very proud of our performance, I was really digging deep today to get the power over the last 100 meters, but today USA was too strong and I really think they deserve the gold medal," Nilsson said.

(Source: Euro News)

FIFA accused of double standards over 2026 World Cup bids

FIFA have been accused of double standards after different rules were seemingly applied to countries presenting their bids for hosting the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

The Morocco 2026 bid team were set to demonstrate their credentials as a host nation in a presentation at the Confederation of African Football (CAF) Congress in Casablanca, but FIFA banned them from doing so.

This was due to rules that stipulate that "all officials shall refrain from publicly making any written or oral statements of any kind, whether adverse or otherwise, about the bidders in relation to their bids".

At the Congress, which was attended by FIFA President Gianni Infantino, CAF President Ahmad simply announced that Morocco had submitted a bid instead of promoting the campaign. Later, however, according to the BBC, Ahmad refused to toe the line and said: "I am for Morocco as you know as I have already said it."

"I won't be neutral, I can tell you what I want - when others are asked I will let them reply as they wish.



"I will act within the regulations and with the advice of my legal counsellor.

"I can't tell you today how or when I will act, but the fact that I'm speaking openly about it is a backing, isn't it?"

CAF were further angered when officials from the three-nation 2026 bid of United States, Mexico and Canada

were seemingly given permission to address the Council of Southern Africa Football Associations in Johannesburg, leading to accusations of double standards.

Infantino, however, was at pains to downplay the situation with his organization keen to avoid the chaos and corruption allegations that surrounded the 2018 and 2022 World Cup bids. "It is for this reason that, for the World Cup 2026, it was decided to establish very strict and very clear regulations," he said according to Inside World Football.

"The rules are clear and must ensure that all candidates are treated the same.

"They say, for example, that candidates are not entitled to submit their candidacy to Confederations unless they make a specific request to FIFA detailing their entire presentation."

The host of the 2026 FIFA World Cup will be decided on June 13 in Moscow, with all 211 FIFA member associations casting a vote. The 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia will start the following day.

(Source: Inside the Games)

Bahrani and Haddadi reunite to boost Iran's chances in second window

Returning Iranian icons Samad Nikkhab Bahrami and Hamed Haddadi have been called up to help Team Melli sweep their second window fixtures.

Iran absorbed an unexpected defeat to upstarts Iraq in the first window of the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2019 Asian Qualifiers, 74-66, and that certainly rocked the Iran Basketball Federation, prompting them to bring back both Bahrami and Haddadi to the fold.

Bahrani last played for Iran in the FIBA Asia Cup 2015 helping Team Melli finish on the podium as he and Haddadi were both named to the All-Star Five. Haddadi was with the national team at the FIBA Asia Cup 2017, averaging around 16 points, 11 rebounds, 7 assists and 2 blocks per contest, leading Iran to second place. Joining Bahrami and Haddadi in the second window are holdovers from the first window: Meisam Mirzaei, Sajjad Mashayekhi, Navide Niktash, Oshin Sahakian, Mohammad Jamshidi, Arsalan Kazemi and Navid Rezaeifar. Not returning are Vahid Dalirzahan, Rouzbeh Arghavan and Keyvan Riaei.

A trio of other veteran players have also been recalled to the national side: Saeid Davarpanah, Aren Davoudi and Mohammad Hassanzadeh. Iraq were successful in forcing a lot of turnovers from Iran in the first window, and the Iranians had trouble stopping naturalized Iraqi wingman DeMario Mayfield from scoring. The addition of Bahrami, Haddadi and the other veterans seems meant to address these issues. For Iran, the message is clear - stability and experience are crucial to achieve higher results not just in the second window but in other future matches.

Iran are also going to encounter an unbeaten Kazakhstan quintet on the road in Astana, and they would do well not to look past the resurgent Kazakhs, who are looking to strengthen their hold at the top spot of Group D. Three days after, Iran will finally have their rematch against first window tormentors Iraq at the Azady Gym in Tehran.

(Source: FIBA)



Al Hilal part ways with Diaz following defeat to Esteghlal

Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal announced they have parted ways with coach Ramon Diaz on Wednesday, following the side's 1-0 defeat to Islamic Republic of Iran's Esteghlal on Matchday Two of the 2018 AFC Champions League.

A statement published on the club's official Twitter account thanked the Argentine for his efforts which brought the Riyadh-based club a domestic league and cup double in addition to a spot in the 2017 AFC Champions League final which they lost to Japan's Urawa Red Diamonds.

Al Hilal find themselves bottom of Group D in the continental competition after two matchdays, with a goalless home draw against Al Ain followed by the 1-0 reversal against Esteghlal on Tuesday leaving them



with one point.

The Argentine had been appointed as Al Hilal boss in October 2016, four months after resigning from his post as Paraguay national team coach.

In his only full AFC Champions League campaign, he led the side to a 13-match unbeaten run which was brought to an end by Urawa in the second leg of the competition's final.

Juan Ignacio Brown steps up from his current post as Al Hilal Under-21 coach to replace fellow Argentinian Diaz on an interim basis. His first test on the continental stage will be a home encounter with Qatar's Al Rayyan on Matchday Three on March 6.

(Source: the-afc)

Al Hilal footballers ignore minute's silence for victims of Iranian plane crash



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Al Hilal's players did not observe the moment of silence in honor of victims of Iranian plane crash on Tuesday.

The silence was planned ahead of the Group D match of the 2018 AFC Champions League between Esteghlal and Al Hilal in Muscat, Oman.

On Sunday, An Iranian commercial plane crashed in a foggy and mountain-

ous southwestern region of the country, killing all 66 people on board.

The Iranian players lined up on the center circle ahead of the match to pay their respects.

But their counterparts from Saudi Arabian team instead walked back to their positions to line up ahead of the game.

Esteghlal defeated Al Hilal 1-0 at the end of the match to remain at top of the group.

It's my dream to play in Bundesliga: Alireza Jahanbakhsh



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iranian international midfielder Alireza Jahanbakhsh says he is dreaming to play in the Bundesliga.

Jahanbakhsh has made a big impression this season at AZ, scoring 12 goals and 12 assists in 27 games.

The Iranian's contract in Alkmaar will run until mid-2020, but there is a chance for him to join a better league after the 2018 World Cup in Russia.

"Iranian players like Ali Daei, Vahid Hashemian and Ali Karimi who have played at Bayern Munich, are my role model. The Bundesliga is my dream competition", says Jahanbakhsh

Next summer he will be active with Iran at the World Cup and in the group stage he will compete against Spain, Portugal and Morocco. Jahanbakhsh wants to think about that tournament later, sportsoftheday.com reported.

Bobsleigh: Jamanka steers Germany to gold

PYEONGCHANG, South Korea (Reuters) — Germany won the women's Olympic bobsleigh gold medal on Wednesday after a steering masterclass by Mariama Jamanka earned her and partner Lisa Buckwitz their country's first success in the event since 2006.

American Elana Meyers Taylor, who won silver four years ago and bronze in 2010, and partner Lauren Gibbs piled on the pressure with a succession of fast starts but their early advantage was whittled away each time and they took silver, seven hundredths of a second behind.

Canada's Kaillie Humphries, who won gold in the last two Games, added a bronze to her collection with new partner Phylicia George, 0.44 seconds off the pace.

After winning gold in 2006 Germany missed out on the podium in the next two Games but it was Stephanie Schneider who was expected to lead their challenge in Pyeongchang.

She managed only fourth place, however, as 27-year-old former hammer thrower Jamanka stepped up to the plate.

Leading by seven hundredths from the first two rounds she laid down the gauntlet with a course record 50.49 seconds, only for Meyers Taylor to improve it with 50.46 to close the gap to four hundredths going



into the final run.

Double world champion Meyers Taylor again delivered a smooth ride to pile the pressure on, but the Germans recovered from an early deficit to edge into a lead they maintained for the final few turns.

Both burst into tears when they saw their time, hugging each other before disappearing beneath a huddle of coaches and team officials.

Further down the field crowd-funded duo Mica McNeill and Mica Moore finished eighth, the best finish by a British women's team and all the more

impressive for their limited preparations.

The much-heralded Jamaican team, the country's first to appear in the event, were unable to show any improvement from their 18th place overnight, finishing second-last in 19th.

"We said we came here to do a job and that's what we were going to focus on and be athletes and that's what we did," pilot Jazmine Fenlator-Victorian said.

After a terrible debut on Tuesday when they limped in more than three seconds off the pace, Nigeria brought in Ngozi Onwumere to partner Seun Adigun but it made little difference as the first African country to compete in bobsleigh at the Games finished 20th and last, seven seconds off the pace.

"I think this was just one of those days that you can't really describe, full of all kinds of emotions," Adigun said.

"Full of relief, full of history. We are just beyond happy with the opportunity to be blessed with that type of title. We just pray all of our resilience does foster some future athletes."

"Full of relief, full of history. We are just beyond happy with the opportunity to be blessed with that type of title. We just pray all of our resilience does foster some future athletes."

Iran come first at West Asian Women's Handball Championship

S P O R T S Iran finished in first place at the 2018 West Asian Women's Handball Championship on Wednesday.

'Shahid Chamran of Larestan' team, who represent Iran in the six-day competition, defeated Syria 23-8 at the Princess Sumaya Hall in Amman, Jordan and won the title.



It is first medal of an Iranian women team in the Asian competition.

Iran started the campaign with a 43-8 victory over Iraq and then defeated Lebanon (29-19), Qatar (38-16) and Jordan (28-15) in the following matches.

The competition began in Jordan's Amman on Feb. 15 and finished on Feb. 21.

The 2017 West Asian Women's Handball Championship was the second edition of the championship held under the aegis of the Asian Handball Federation.

Ali Daei invited to participate in star-studded 'Mexico Peace Match'

MNA — Iranian veteran soccer player and a world record holder Ali Daei has been chosen to play in the 'Mexico peace match', along with luminaries like Brazilian Ronaldo and Spanish Carles Puyol.

Ali Daei has been invited to participate in the friendly game in aid of striving for world peace in Mexico and Colombia in March 2018.

Honored as the world player with the greatest number of goals, Ali Daei will be joined by Ronaldo, Carlos Puyol, Clarence Seedorf, and a host of other former football stars.

Iran's three-man team to participate at Dusseldorf Grand Slam

TASNIM — Iran to participate at the Dusseldorf Grand Slam 2018 with three judokas.

The competition will be held in Dusseldorf, Germany from February 23 to 25.

Mohammad Mohammadi Barimanlou in -73kg, Saeid Mollaei in -81kg and Javad Mahjoub in +100kg will represent Iran in the event.

Barimanlou and Mollaei will open their campaign on Saturday and Mahjoub will go on the tatami on Sunday.

The prestigious competition will bring 500 judoka from 71 countries together.

Kremlin says hopes investigation into doping case will clear athlete

MOSCOW (Reuters) — The Kremlin said on Wednesday it hopes an investigation into the case of a Russian curler who tested positive for doping at the ongoing Winter Olympics would clear the athlete's name.

A hearing in the case of Alexander Krushelnitsky, who tested positive for the banned substance meldonium, has yet to be scheduled at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).

"Let's keep up hope that this investigation will help rehabilitate him. For now, a fact is a fact," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on a call with reporters.

Arsene Wenger lauds Ostersund striker Ghoddos

Arsenal coach Arsene Wenger has praised Iranian striker Saman Ghoddos ahead of their match with Ostersunds FK in the Europa League.

Arsenal have one foot in the Europa League last 16 - and will look to finish the job on Thursday night.

The Gunners hold a 3-0 lead over Swedish minnows Ostersunds FK heading into the second leg of the tie at the Emirates. Nacho Monreal and Mesut Ozil struck in between a own goal to seal the victory on the road, meaning the second leg looks set to be a formality.

Arsene Wenger will be previewing the fixture alongside a player this lunchtime.

We will expect to hear team news, as well as a bit of easy build-up to the Carabao Cup final against Manchester City, which takes place on Sunday afternoon.

The boss is scheduled to be with us at 12:30pm and you can follow everything he says here.

Wenger has revealed which Ostersund player stood out for him during the first leg.

"The best [Ostersunds FK] player in first leg was [Saman] Ghoddos. Technically and tactically I was impressed by him."

(Source: Daily Star)

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■ Managing Director: Ali Asgari
■ Editor-in-Chief: Mohammad Ghaderi

» Editorial Dept.: Fax: (+98 21) 88808214 — 88808895
editor@tehrantimes.com
» Switchboard Operator: Tel: (+98 21) 43051000
» Advertisements Dept.: Telefax: (+98 21) 43051450
» Public Relations Office: Tel: (+98 21) 88805807
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Zip Code: 1599814713



“30,000 Years of Art” published in Persian

A R T TEHRAN — The Phaidon Press’ great book “30,000 Years of Art: The Story of Human Creativity across Time and Space” has been published in Persian in Tehran.



A Persian copy of “30,000 Years of Art”

The Sepas Film and Graphic Art Workshop is the publisher of the book, which presents 1000 great works of art from all periods and regions around the world.

The book is scheduled to be unveiled and reviewed in a session, which will be held at Hamishev Bookstore in the Shahra-ke Gharb neighborhood on Sunday.

Translators Golnar Saleh-Karimi and Monireh Panjtani and philosopher Mohammad Zeimaran will also attend the session.

The artworks have been arranged in chronological order for a general readership, said Phaidon Press, which published the original book in October 2007.

“Each work is accompanied by key caption information and a short text providing more information and explaining the art historical context,” the publisher added.

U.S. university hosting Iranian filmfest

A R T TEHRAN — The second edition of the Wisconsin Iranian Film Festival (WIFF) is currently underway at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (WUD) in the United States.



A poster for “Asphyxia” by Fereidun Jeirani.

Seven feature films, including “Being Born” by Mohsen Abdolvahab, “White Chairs” by Reza Dormishian, “Bitter Dream” by Mohsen Amirusefi and “Asphyxia” by Fereidun Jeirani, will be screened at the event, the organizers have announced.

In addition, “The Servant” by Farnush Abedi, “Gaze” by Farnush Samadi, “Kitchen Dreams” by Arvin Medqalchi and “Animal” by Bahram and Bahman Ark are among seven short films selected for the festival.

The Wisconsin Iranian Film Festival (WIFF) brings Iranian films to the campus to contribute to the cultural diversity and to promote dialogue between cultures through works of art.

Organized by WUD Film Committee, the festival opened in the U.S state on February 17 and will be running until February 25.

NEWS IN BRIEF



Art auction to raise funds for poor pediatric patients

A R T TEHRAN — A number of galleries and collectors plan to organize an art auction at Tehran’s Homa Hotel on Friday to raise funds for poor pediatric patients.

The auction will be organized in collaboration with the Zanjireh Omid Charity Institute, which provides medical and therapeutic services to underprivileged children suffering from cardiac, orthopedic and reconstructive diseases.

The artworks selected for the auction are on display in an exhibit that opened on Wednesday.



Exhibition industry poster showcase opens in Tehran

A R T TEHRAN — Posters on the exhibition industry are on display in an exhibit that opened at the Tehran International Permanent Fairground on Wednesday.

The showcase has been organized on the sidelines of the 1st International Exhibition and Conference for the Exhibition Industry, the organizers announced.

About 40 posters created over the past two years have been selected for the exhibition, which will run until February 24.

Akbar Radi’s play on Literacy Corps on stage in Tehran

A R T TEHRAN — “Sing in the Mist”, a play by foremost Iranian writer Akbar Radi about a number of uncultured teachers from the Literacy Corps in Iran, is currently on stage at Tehran’s Sangelaj Theater.

Masud Tayyebi is the director of the play that tells the story of several soldiers who are assigned to work in the Literacy Corps program, which was implemented in remote Iranian villages from 1962 to 1979. However, the soldiers begin to exploit the villagers.

“The play reviews the problems deeply rooted in our educational system and reveals the reasons behind the



Thespians perform “Sing in the Mist” at Tehran’s Sangelaj Theater. (Mehr/Mahsa Jamali)

lack of cultural growth,” Tayyebi told the Persian service of Honaronline on Wednesday.

Reza Bahrami, Behruz Panahandeh, Khabod Taraj, Soheil

Saei and Mair Adlparvar are among the main members of the cast.

The play will be on stage until March 16.

Sculptor Parviz Tanavoli’s students to showcase works at Tehran gallery

A R T TEHRAN — A number of students of the prominent sculptor Parviz Tanavoli will display their works in an exhibition, which will open at Tehran’s Jaleh Gallery on Friday.

The exhibit entitled “Metal Condition” will showcase a collection of sculptures and jewelry designs created by the students, the gallery announced on Wednesday.

“In 2001, when Tanavoli returned back

home [from Canada] after many years, he established his training atelier to pass his enormous technical and conceptual knowledge on to other students,” the gallery said in a statement.

“Metal Condition” is the experimental outcome of the students with different backgrounds in painting, architecture, filmmaking and industrial design,” it added.

The works also reflect issues such as

the economic crisis, urban living and the media influence, as well as Persian traditional art.

Maryam Ebtekar, Elham Jafari, Ladan Johari, Yekta Darvish, Mohammadreza Rastgu and Behnaz Fazeli are some of the participating artists.

The exhibit will run until March 9 in the gallery located at No.3, Noshahr Alley, Inranshahr St.



A poster for the exhibition “Metal Condition”.

Ursula K. Le Guin wins posthumous prize for essay writing

NEW YORK (AP) — The late Ursula K. Le Guin was among the recipients of literary honors presented Tuesday night by PEN America.

The science fiction/fantasy author’s “No Time to Spare” won a \$10,000 prize for best essay writing. Le Guin died last month at age 88 and her award was announced during a New York ceremony hosted by PEN, the literary and human rights organization.

Poet Layli Long Soldier’s debut collection “Whereas” won a \$75,000 award for the year’s best book. Jenny Zhang’s story collection “Sour Heart” received a \$25,000 prize for best debut fiction and Alexis Okeowo’s “A Moonless, Starless Sky: Ordinary Women and Men Fighting Extremism in Africa” won a \$5,000 award given to outstanding works by “authors of color.”



Ursula K. Le Guin in an undated photo

“This year’s awardees represent the near and far corners of the literary landscape, including writers who have shattered barriers of race, class, ethnicity, geography, gender and sexual orientation to bring stories to new audiences, unlock empathy and take places of distinction within our collective canon,” PEN America Executive Director Suzanne Nossel said in a statement. “In times of challenge great literature offers a desperately needed window onto other possibilities.”

Lifetime achievement awards had been previously announced and were given to Edmund White, who won the PEN/Saul Bellow Award for American fiction, and Edna O’Brien, winner of the PEN/Nabokov Award for international literature.

Film at Berlin festival shows 2011 massacre on Norwegian island



Director and executive producer Erik Poppe attends a news conference to promote the movie Utoya 22.juli (U - July 22) at the 68th Berlinale International Film Festival in Berlin, Germany, February 19, 2018. (Reuters/Axel Schmidt)

BERLIN (Reuters) — Director Erik Poppe says his latest film is part of the healing process in the aftermath of one of Norway’s most horrifying events - the massacre of 69 people, many of them teenagers, at a youth camp on the island of Utoya.

Poppe’s “U-July 22”, premiering at the Berlin film festival, is a retelling of the shootings by a far-right gunman on July 22, 2011. Filmed on another island close to Utoya in one take, it follows “Kaja” - a fictional teenager - as she runs for her life through woods, along beaches and in the sea.

The audience sees her desperately searching for her younger sister, comforting a dying teenager and singing to herself as she cowers in fear against a cliff. Shots ring out, but the gunman is only fleetingly visible, from a distance.

Poppe said some had criticized his movie as coming too soon, but young survivors of the attack had told him he should not wait.

“I would say that if it doesn’t hurt to watch this movie then it’s too late, so I

would say for sure it’s hard but it’s also a part of the healing process,” Poppe said at a news conference.

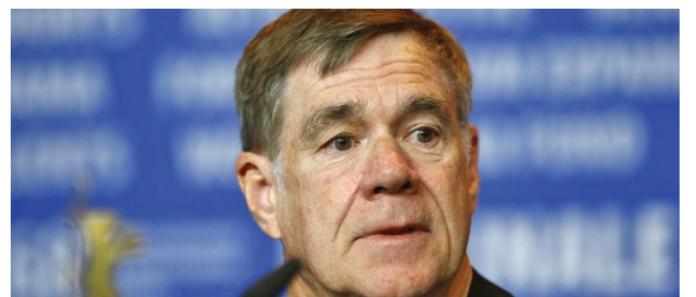
“We decided to make fiction for ethical reasons so the parents, sisters and brothers don’t need to see and think: Is that my sister or my brother? Is that my daughter?” he said, adding that psychologists had been on location to help actors and residents of the island where it was filmed.

“Looking around Europe today, realizing neo-fascism is growing day by day, we need to remember what took place out on that island, what right-wing extremism can look like.”

Survivor Ingrid Marie Vaag Endrerud said at the news conference the film’s story was one many Norwegians found impossible to tell.

“When I try to explain what I experienced, I am only able to tell it from a distance and that’s where film and the art of film can tell a story another way that writing or speaking cannot,” she said.

Disabled by alcohol - Van Sant brings cartoonist biopic to Berlin



Director, screenwriter and editor Gus Van Sant attends a news conference to promote the movie “Don’t Worry, He Won’t Get Far on Foot” at the 68th Berlinale International Film Festival in Berlin, Germany, February 20, 2018. (Reuters/Fabrizio Bensch)

BERLIN (Reuters) — It was a role Robin Williams wanted to play in honor of his friend “Superman” actor Christopher Reeve - the true story of a quadriplegic who despite his disability makes his name as a talented cartoonist.

But while Williams, who committed suicide in 2014, never got the chance to play the part, his interest in cartoonist John Callahan helped bring the story to the screen, in a biopic competing for the top prize at the Berlin festival.

“Don’t Worry, He Won’t Get Far on Foot”, based on Callahan’s 1989 memoir, shows the young man partying while in thrall to alcoholism before a car accident on a drunken night out leaves him quadriplegic at age 21.

It follows his career as the creator of biting cartoons that often addressed the darker side of human nature, while battling alcoholism.

Director Gus Van Sant said Williams

had asked him to work on adapting the memoir into a screenplay.

“He liked John Callahan’s work - he saw it in his local newspaper in San Francisco - and Christopher Reeve was a friend of his who had had an accident and he very much wanted to play a quadriplegic, partly in honor of his friend, who was a quadriplegic,” Van Sant said.

The film shows Callahan at Alcoholics Anonymous, revealing how being abandoned by his mother as a child drove him to drink.

Joaquin Phoenix, who plays Callahan - who died in 2010 - said the biggest challenge of the cartoonist’s life was not his paralysis.

“I think drinking was his disability really,” he told reporters in Berlin.

“Don’t Worry, He Won’t Get Far on Foot” is one of 19 films competing for the Berlin International Film Festival’s Golden Bear, to be awarded on Feb. 24.

Judge says IMDb can show Hollywood actors’ ages under First Amendment

NEW YORK (Reuters) — A federal judge on Tuesday declared unconstitutional a California law requiring IMDb, the movie and television information website, to remove actors’ ages at their request.

U.S. District Judge Vince Chhabria said the law violated the First Amendment rights of IMDb, a unit of Amazon.com Inc that challenged the law, by singling out age data for special treatment, despite being intended to serve the compelling interest of curbing age discrimination in Hollywood.

“Regulation of speech must be a last resort,” the San Francisco-based judge wrote. “California has not shown that it adopted a measure ‘actually necessary’ to combating age discrimination.”

The law was passed in 2016. It drew support from SAG-AFTRA, a union representing some 160,000 actors, broadcast journalists and other media professionals, which plans to appeal.

“SAG-AFTRA is extremely disappointed with today’s ruling,” General Counsel Duncan Crabtree-Ireland said in a statement. “The court unfortunately fails to understand or recognize the massive impact gender and age discrimination has on all working performers.”

The office of California Attorney General Xavier Becerra, which defended the law, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

While actors in Hollywood have long complained they are passed over for roles as they age, Chhabria said the

California law’s advocates “seem to misunderstand” that the real problem might be gender discrimination.

He cited the willingness of many movie producers to team older actors with much younger female actresses in leading roles, and TV networks to pair older male anchors with younger female anchors, rather than hire men and women of similar ages.

“The defendants barely acknowledge this, much less explain how a law preventing one company from posting age-related information on one website could discourage the entertainment industry from continuing to objectify and devalue women,” he wrote. “If the government is going to attempt to restrict speech, it should at least develop a clearer understanding of the problem it’s trying to solve.”