

 <p>Ayatollah Khamenei calls Assad example of resistance 2</p>	 <p>Tehran calls UN human rights 'flawed' 2</p>	 <p>Fighting terror is Iran-EU common concern: Zarif 2</p>	 <p>Hassan Rouhani invited to 2018 World Cup 15</p>
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EXCLUSIVE
 See page 7

Professors sign Tehran Times and Mehr letter to Guterres: Use Norouz to promote peace



ARTICLE
 By Hanif Ghaffari
 Political analyst

Trump's popularity reducing among Republicans

The President of the United States is seriously worried about the country's 2020 presidential election. The drop in his popularity on the one hand, along with the possibility of a decrease in his votes in those states that led to his victory in the 2016 election, has concerned many of his companions about the upcoming presidential election.

Furthermore, recent polls in the United States show that, in addition to a number of Republican politicians, a relatively large number of the party's supporters are opposed to Trump's performance at the White House.

This is while Trump will need the backing of the vast majority of Republicans to win the presidency of the United States in 2020.

Another important point is about the results of previous polls which revealed that some Republicans have turned a blind eye to Trump and they're now ready to vote for Joe Biden, Bernie Sanders, or even Hillary Clinton as Trump's potential rivals in the upcoming elections.

However, Trump is still trying to believe that he would be the winner of the next presidential elections in the U.S. At any rate, he knows well that he can't win more popular votes than his rivals, thus trying to secure his victory by relying on the Electoral College.

Electoral College, is a body of 538 members who select the president based on the popular vote in each state, meaning the person who gets the most votes nationally doesn't necessarily win the election.

It should be noted that during the United States Presidential Elections in 2016, Hillary Clinton has won the popular vote by more than 2.86 million ballots, which was about 3 million more votes than Trump. The Democrat beat the President-elect by exactly 2,864,974.

Democrats gained more votes than the Republican Party. And Hillary Clinton won about 3 million more votes than his opponent. But since the outcome of the U.S. presidential election is determined by the Electoral College, Trump could eventually overcome Clinton by winning more electoral votes. **→7**

Europeans following Austria in doing green projects in Iran: envoy

By Maryam Oarehgozlou

Not a single day passes without hearing a worrying news coming in of lasting, and sometimes irreversible damages to the environment worldwide. Air pollution in megacities, plastic pollution in oceans, rapid loss of plant and animal species, climate change, and water scarcity are a few instances which inflict considerable and serious harms both on the planet and human lives.

Iran, a country situated in an arid and semi-arid area, is no exception. The country is dealing with some major environmental issues, some are sparked by climate change; however, many are the outcomes of decades of mismanagement and shortsighted decision making.

Meanwhile it is impossible to ignore the importance of boosting international cooperation to tackle some of the environmental issues by garnering technical and scientific support and utilizing them to curb some of the detriment effects.

In an exclusive interview with the Tehran Times, Austrian Ambassador to Iran Stefan Scholz named some of the green projects, including solar power stations, projects for decomposing organic substance as efficient and low-emission as possible, and environmentally friendly oil extraction and drilling techniques which are already being implemented in Iran or are near to contract signing.

The first part of the interview with Mr. Scholz was published on February 28 focusing on Iran's nuclear deal, officially known as JCPOA, and economic cooperation. Below is the text of the second part of the interview on environmental issues and collaborations.

■ Austrian Federal Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management André Rupprechter and the then chief of the department of environment Masoumeh Ebtekar signed an environmental MOU in Vienna in

September 2016 to expand cooperation in the exchange of information and technology related to the environment, climate change, and marine ecology. Did the MOU ever go into effect?

Yes, we managed to bridge the gap between signing the MOU and actually implementing it, which is quite remarkable, since there was also a change in office on both sides. We established a joint working group and we also agreed on a plan of action which identified the priorities for the bilateral cooperation.

Already in 2016 the focus was on mutual exchange of expertise in the management of national parks, which is very much connected to the environment, climate change and tourism, and also protected areas. Two delegations of national park rangers from various regions in Iran visited Austria. They met with Austrian experts and visited several national parks to learn how we, in Austria, manage national parks. **→12**

Saudi and UAE try to undermine Iran wherever and whenever possible: Kamrava

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
 By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Mehran Kamrava, a professor of the Middle East Studies in Georgetown University of Doha, tells the Tehran Times that Saudi Regime and the UAE try to undermine Iran (and Qatar) wherever and whenever possible.

Director of the Center for International and Regional Studies at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service in Qatar also adds "For Qatar, currently the most important friends to have are Iran and Turkey for purposes of com-

merce and transportation, and Kuwait and Oman for diplomacy and support within the PGCC."

Following is the text of the interview:

■ Saudi Regime and UAE have pledged to financially back a five-nation coalition force in the Sahel region of West Africa. What are the reasons behind such funding?

A: I think this is part of their broader effort to use "dollar diplomacy" to win favors with the European powers who are concerned about the Sahel region. All countries use the tools at their disposal to attract friends and allies, and in this case Saudi Arabia and the UAE are using

\$130 million to ingratiate themselves further to European powers such as France, Germany, Belgium, and Italy.

■ What is the strategic importance of the Sahel region for Saudi Regime and UAE?

A: There really is no direct or indirect strategic interest for the UAE and Saudi Arabia to be involved in the Sahel, except of course the general desire to counter religious extremism. They are involving themselves financially in order to pay for the military efforts of some of the world's poorest countries, such as Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali. **→13**

Dollar-based purchase orders prohibited in Iran since Feb. 28

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Purchase orders by merchants that are based on U.S. currency are no longer allowed to go through import procedures in Iran since Wednesday to address fluctuations in domestic market rates of the U.S. currency, IRNA reported.

"The policy is applied due to an official request by the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) and is implemented by the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade," CBI's Director of Foreign Exchange Rules and Policies Affairs Mehdi Kasraeipour told IRNA.

It's been for a long time that Iran's banking sector cannot use the dollar as a result of the sanctions, Kasraeipour said, therefore, the decision will not create major trouble for traders because the share of the greenback in Iran's trade activities is not high. **→4**

TMCA provides safe haven for Giacometti's "Walking Man" and "Standing Woman"

ART **TEHRAN** — The Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (TMCA) has transferred Swiss artist Alberto Giacometti's bronze statues, "Walking Man 1" and "Standing Woman 1", to inside the art center after undergoing minor restorations to repair the damage caused by acid rain and air pollution.

The statues were earlier located in the courtyard of the museum, and the relocation was done in consultation with Swiss art experts Oliver Wick and Hans Peter Marti.

"It was a difficult decision to transfer Giacometti's statues to inside the museum 40 years after setting them in the central courtyard," TMCA director Ali-Mohammad Zare' said on Wednesday after unveiling the restored artworks at the museum. **→16**

Putin unveils new nuclear weapons systems

Russian President Vladimir Putin has revealed new nuclear weapons he said could hit any target around the globe with little chance of interception.

Putin warned during his annual state of the nation speech on Thursday that an attack on Russia or any of its allies would elicit an immediate response from Moscow. Video footage of the new weapons was projected behind him at a conference hall in the Russian capital, where Putin spoke with legislators.

He said the updated arsenal included a new intercontinental ballistic missile, a small nuclear warhead that could be attached to cruise missiles, underwater nuclear drones, supersonic arms, and a laser weapon. **→13**

Military headquarters, French embassy attacked in Burkina Faso's capital

At least seven people have been killed and six attackers "neutralized" Friday in Burkina Faso after attacks on the national army headquarters and the French embassy, a government minister said.

It's not yet clear who was behind the violence in the West African nation's capital, Ouagadougou.

France's special envoy to Africa's Sahel region, Jean-Marc Châtaigner, urged people to avoid the city center in a tweet referring to a "terrorist attack."

Rémi Dandjinou, Burkina Faso's minister of communication, told CNN that an explosive device was used in the attack at the General Staff of the Armed Forces. At least five people were killed and two attackers "neutralized" there, he said.

Four attackers were also "neutralized" and two Burkina Faso security members killed at the French embassy, according to Dandjinou. He cautioned that the death toll might change.

A spokesman for the French Ministry of Defense told CNN the situation at the embassy was under control.

Freelance journalist Yacouba Ouédraogo, who is in Ouagadougou, told CNN the shooting had stopped and that the people who attacked the army headquarters wore Burkinabé army clothes.

A government statement urged people to keep calm and avoid areas where there might be gunfire. The French embassy earlier said on Facebook that attacks were underway there and at the French Institute, a cultural organization about a mile away.

France's ambassador to Burkina Faso, Xavier Lapdecab, urged people via Twitter to act with "absolute precaution" as the attack was ongoing.

Burkina Faso's national police warned people to move away from areas around the "vicinity of the Prime Ministry -- and the United Nations roundabout" in a post on its Facebook page. "The specialized units of the defense and security forces are in action," it said.

The Prime Minister's office later posted on Facebook that it was not affected by the attack.

The US embassy urged people to seek shelter.

"Attacks are reported to be ongoing in downtown Ouagadougou, in the Koulouba area. The affected area includes the Chief of Staff Headquarters. Avoid downtown Ouagadougou. Shelter in place. Monitor local media for updates," it said on Twitter. (Source: CNN)



Haji Firuz heralds Iranian New Year

The photo is depicting a little girl standing by a statue of Haji Firuz who appears on the streets this time of the year with his face covered in soot. Wearing red clothes Haji Firuz dances through the streets while singing and playing a tambourine.

The photo was taken on the sidelines of Amu Noruz national festival celebrated in the city of Qazvin on Wednesday, heralding the arrival of the Iranian New Year holidays, Noruz, starting March 21.

Amu Noruz (uncle Noruz) is a fictional figure in the Iranian folklore who appears at the beginning of spring, together with his companion Haji Firuz.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Cult rioters must be punished: cleric

POLITICS TEHRAN — Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami said at the Tehran Friday prayers that both the nation and government want the rioters affiliated to a cult group to receive “severest” punishments.

A few weeks ago, 3 policemen and 2 Basijis were violently run over and killed by members of the Gonabadi Dervishes in protests in Pasdaran Street in north of Tehran.

Ayatollah Khatami said the murderers of the five security forces must be punished for their heinous crime.

“Regrettably, the criminals directed martyred Basiji Hadadian among themselves and killed him in the most brutal form,” he said, calling the criminals “domestic Daesh”.



Zarif, Lavrov hold phone talks on regional developments

POLITICS TEHRAN — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov discussed bilateral relations and regional developments in a phone conversation on Thursday.

The two sides talked about bilateral ties and regional developments, issues pertaining to the Caspian Sea and Russia’s veto of an anti-Iran resolution at the UN, IRNA reported.

The British-drafted resolution, which was backed by the U.S., accused Iran of violating UN arms embargo on Yemen.

Washington in a recent series of attempts has targeted Iran’s missile capabilities, accusing Tehran of sending missiles to Yemeni Houthis. Iran has vehemently rejected the allegations and Russia has insisted there is no credible evidence to prove the claim.



‘Iran doesn’t recognize Israel to enter sports competition with’

POLITICS TEHRAN — Alaeddin Boroujerdi, chairman of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, said on Friday that the Islamic Republic does not have ties with the Israeli regime in sports and other areas.

On why Iranian athletes do not compete against Israelis, Boroujerdi said the reason is in line with the country’s policy not to recognize the occupying regime, IRNA reported.

On February 23, the United World Wrestling Disciplinary Chamber (WWDC) banned Iranian wrestler Alireza Karimi from competition for six months, and his coach Hamidreza Jamshidi for two years after the wrestler deliberately lost a bout to avoid facing an opponent from the Zionist regime.



Iran’s Interior Ministry recognizing unions’ right to protest

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Iranian Ministry of Interior says it is considering to recognize the right of unions to hold protest rallies.

Salman Samani, the ministry’s spokesman, on Friday said governors have been told to facilitate negotiations and gatherings for unions.

He said the directive comes as part of the ministry’s newly issued charter on political dialogue, which is hoped to enhance the opportunity for political groups to engage in expression of ideas and dialogue with each other.

Samani added that governors have been told to deliver quarterly reports to the ministry about how they worked to implement the charter.



Turkey concerned over Tehran-Riyadh rift: ambassador

POLITICS TEHRAN — Turkey’s ambassador to Tehran has voiced concerns over tension between Tehran and Riyadh, urging the two countries to resolve their differences through dialogue.

Riza Hakan Tekin also said the region is facing big problems, especially terrorism, which has destabilized Iraq and Syria, ISNA reported on Friday.

Turkey has been fighting terrorism for 40 years, the ambassador stressed, adding that his country cooperates with Iran and other countries in the fight against terrorism.

He also said the PKK is a threat to both Iran and Turkey.



Boeing ordered to reveal details of deal with Iran to Israeli family

POLITICS TEHRAN — A federal judge has ordered the Boeing corporation to turn over details of a \$16 billion contract with Iran Air to the family of an Israeli terror victim who are seeking to collect on a longstanding, \$67-million civil judgment against Iran.

Chief U.S. District Judge Ruben Castillo in Chicago also said that the Trump administration has notified the court that it is complying with the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, the Washington Post reported on Thursday.

Castillo’s ruling rejects Boeing’s contention that providing the contract details to the victims would not only undermine the mega-contract with Iran Air — but could jeopardize the nuclear deal itself.

Ayatollah Khamenei calls Assad example of resistance

POLITICS TEHRAN — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei said on Thursday that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad “appeared as a great example of resistance and a fighting image”.

“Bashar al-Assad appeared as a great example of resistance and a fighting image; he never hesitated and stood strong and this is very important for a nation,” the Leader said during a meeting with Syrian Minister of Religious Endowments (Awqaf) Mohammad Abdul-Sattar al-Sayyed and his accompanying delegation.

Ayatollah Khamenei added, “Today, Syria is on the frontline. So, we are duty bound to support Syria’s resistance.”

The Leader also said that enemies cannot do anything against a nation whose leaders dignify Islam and their identity.



“Enemy cannot do a damn thing if heads of the countries and the regional nations take firm decision to resist.”

He also said that all the major powers including the U.S., the Soviet Union, NATO and the regional reactionary states got united against the Islamic Republic of Iran after victory of the revolution.

“Survival of the Iranian nation’s revolution proved that the U.S., Europe and the atomic powers do not necessarily achieve their goals, and if all of us and elements of the resistance front in the region get united, the enemies cannot do a damn thing,” Ayatollah Khamenei asserted.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Leader noted that it is the Islamic community’s duty to resolutely counter division-seeking policies like the one being taken by Saudi Arabia.

Fighting terror is Iran-EU common concern: Zarif

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Iranian foreign minister has said that fighting terrorism is a “common concern” of Iran and the European Union.

Speaking in a meeting with Bakir Izetbegovic, a member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina on Thursday, Mohammad Javad Zarif said, “Fight against ideology of extremism should be prioritized.”

He added, “Fight against terrorism and extremism is a common concern for us, you and the European Union. Extremism has nothing to do with Islam and other religions. Ideological and cultural fight against ideology of extremism should be a priority. We can cooperate in this respect which is beneficial for the international peace and security.”

Zarif also met separately with Igor Crnadak, the foreign minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Zarif says extremists are not Muslim
During a meeting with Iranian residents in Sarajevo, Zarif said that extremists are not Muslim.

“We are facing threat of extremism in the region. Extremism has set fire to the region. There is no extremism in religion,” the chief diplomat noted.



On Thursday, Zarif also met in Zagreb with Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic, who said her country is ready to strengthen ties with Iran.

“We are ready to expand relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran especially in spheres of tourism, science and technology and petrochemistry,” the Croatian president remarked.

She called for expansion of cooperation between the Iranian and Croatian businessmen.

For his part, Zarif said that the two countries should expand economic and political relations.

Iran can be a “reliable resource” to provide Croatia with energy resources especially oil and gas, Zarif added.

Zarif, accompanying by an economic delegation, visited Croatia on Wednesday after concluding his trip to Bulgaria. He met separately with Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic on Thursday to discuss expansion of relations.

Plenkovic praised Iran’s “positive” and “constructive” role in the Middle East region.

Iran makes efforts in line with stabilizing the region, he added.

In a separate meeting with Gordan Jandrokovic, the speaker of the Croatian parliament, Zarif expressed hope that the two countries would expand relations after removing impediments.

Jandrokovic said that Zagreb attaches great importance to ties with Iran and is ready to expand relations with Tehran in various spheres.

The Iranian foreign minister also met separately with Croatian Foreign Minister Marija Pejcinovic Buric.

State Department OKs nuclear monitoring system for Iran

The Donald Trump administration is allowing high-tech U.S. exports to Iran that could boost international oversight of the 2015 nuclear deal, Al-Monitor reported.

U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan signed a waiver that allows a Maryland-based company to export broadband networks, satellite dishes and wireless equipment to Iran for stations that monitor nuclear explosions in real time. Under laws that came into force after the Iran-Iraq War, the United States restricts “dual-use” exports to Iran.

The State Department notified Congress of the move on Jan. 5, according to correspondence viewed by Al-Monitor. It is not the first time the United States has allowed exports of digital technology to Iran.

The monitoring equipment was requested by the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO), which oversees a global ban on nuclear test explosions. Though the United States and Iran are among eight nuclear or atomic-aspiring nations that haven’t ratified the 1997 treaty, organization officials have nevertheless set up three sites in Iran to transmit explosion data back to Vienna, giving U.S. and other policymakers a live, independent channel to watch the Islamic Republic’s nuclear activity.

“It’s like an earthquake detection system — it’s going to detect a very large detonation,” said Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association. “If we think that the Iranians have somehow, somehow detonated a nuclear device, we want to prove that using a data network that can show its work.”

Hughes Network Systems, the Maryland-based company contracted in October to put in place a communications backbone behind the verification sites, is tasked with transmitting explosion data between Iran and the United States. The CTBTO has certified a seismic station for use in Tehran and two more at Kerman and the western city of Shushtar, with three more sites on the way.

The waiver to provide the equipment comes as Trump faces a May 12 deadline to decide whether to stay in the 2015 nuclear agreement. In January, he extended a waiver on sanctions against Iran to keep the United States in the nuclear deal, but warned Congress and European allies that it would be the last postponement he would grant without Britain, France and Germany making “radical” changes to the pact.

Europeans engage with Iran on regional issues

By Reuters and staff

European powers and Iran have started talks over Tehran’s role in the Middle East and will meet again this month in Italy as part of efforts to prove to U.S. President Donald Trump that they are meeting his concerns over the 2015 nuclear deal, according to Reuters.

With Trump warning of a last chance for what he called “the worst deal ever negotiated”, Britain, France and Germany have been working with U.S. officials to draw up a strategy to improve the Iran nuclear deal in return for Trump keeping the pact alive by renewing U.S. sanctions relief on May 12.

Parallel to those efforts, the three European powers, joined by Italy and the European Union, have initiated discussions with Iran to address regional issues amid Western, Persian Gulf Arab and Israeli hype against Iran’s foreign policy vis-a-vis Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and Iraq.

This is while Tehran says the United States, Israel and Saudi Arabia are fomenting tensions in the Middle East.

Last month, senior officials held a first meeting on the sidelines of Munich Security Conference, focusing on Iran’s role in the Yemen conflict. They are due to meet again in Italy this month, two European diplomats and an Iranian official said. A third European confirmed the Munich meeting.

Iran has already proposed what will go beyond mere détente between the Persian Gulf littoral states. President Hassan Rouhani suggested on Wednesday that Iran and Arab states on the southern shores of the Persian Gulf can form “a big union” involving cooperation in business, tourism, industry and energy.

“In Munich we laid out what was expected from them in Yemen. They obviously said it wasn’t them, but we drew some conclusions to move forward together,” said a senior European diplomat.

“The Iranians are pretty co-operative, but having a positive meeting doesn’t mean we’ll see any sort of impact in the real world.”

“Most of the gaps can be narrowed with the West ... but it needs goodwill and loads of work,” said a senior Iranian official. “The West should gain our trust again ... the nuclear deal was not fully implemented, how can we trust them on other issues?”

The European powers, who meet American officials in Berlin on March 15, have stressed to the United States that while they will work on an Iran strategy, including tackling its ballistic missile program, in return Trump must not kill the accord.

“We want to keep the nuclear deal, but we’re telling the Iranians that we have other problems with them. We need to see progress on these issues. Otherwise, because of Trump it will lead to the collapse of the accord,” said a senior French diplomat.

Iran, Pakistan agree to boost security cooperation

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran and Pakistan on Thursday agreed to enhance security as well as political cooperation, a Foreign Office press release said.

Iran’s Air Force Commander Brigadier General Hassan Shahsafi, along with a delegation, called on Pakistani National Security Adviser retired General Nasser Khan Janjua, where the two sides discussed options for improving the bilateral relations and matters pertaining to regional security.

Janjua warmly welcomed the guests and shed light on the significance of Iran for Pakistan. “We believe that Pakistan and Iran share a common future and need to enhance their cooperation,” Dawn quoted him as saying.



He also highlighted the challenges being faced by both countries at regional and international levels, saying that the solution to all these issues lies in a cooperative framework.

The Iranian commander emphasized the importance of identifying and removing all the impediments affecting relations.

Talking about the situation in Afghanistan, both sides agreed that peace in Afghanistan is prerequisite for establishing peace in the region. They also insisted on the need for unity in the Muslim bloc of the world.

Both sides also agreed to increase engagements at all levels in multiple areas, including politics, defense, trade, and economics.

West, silent on Damascus shelling, threatens Ghouta action

France has joined the U.S. and Britain in threatening Damascus with possible airstrikes in the event of further chemical weapons use in Syria.

Their threats on Friday came as terrorist groups continued shelling a safe corridor declared by the Syrian government for civilians to leave Eastern Ghouta.

Takfiri terrorists have turned the enclave on the suburbs of Damascus to a launch pad for mortar attacks on the Syrian capital.

The Syrian army is currently in the midst of an operation to drive the terrorists out of Eastern Ghouta, but it is facing a hostile West threatening attacks on Syrian troops which it accuses of targeting civilians.

Western leaders were quick to point the finger at the Syrian government after reports of chlorine release in Eastern Ghouta last week.

For years, foreign-backed militants have appeared to release chemical substances in the areas close to the site of government airstrikes and capture the aftermath on videos.

French President Emmanuel Macron and his U.S. counterpart Donald Trump vowed there would be "no impunity" in the event of further chemical weapons use in Syria in a telephone call Friday.

Macron "stressed there will be a firm response in the case of proven use of chemical weapons leading to the death of civilians, in close coordination with our American allies," a statement from the French presidency said.

"France and the United States will not tolerate impunity," the statement said, adding the leaders also urged Russia to put "maximum pressure" on Damascus to commit to a UN ceasefire across Syria.

Syria and Russia have already declared a unilateral ceasefire across Syria, but that does not include areas held by Daesh, al-Qaeda and al-Nusra Front along with "individuals, groups, undertakings and entities" associated with the terrorist groups.

France has repeatedly warned that evidence of further use of chemical weapons in Syria is a "red line" that would prompt French strikes.

Washington has asked the UN Security



Council to set up a new inquiry on chemical weapons attacks, for which the Syrian government has repeatedly denied responsibility.

The United Nations Human Rights Council on Friday was set to hold an emergency session on Eastern Ghouta at the request of Britain.

However, they are generally silent on daily mortar attacks on Damascus, which take the lives of civilians.

On Friday, Syria's official SANA news agency said the terrorists in the Damascus suburb targeted the humanitarian corridor out of Eastern Ghouta with three shells to

prevent the civilians from fleeing the militant-held area.

The latest attacks came shortly after a fourth humanitarian pause in the fighting took effect in Eastern Ghouta.

An activist group has recently posted video footage online, depicting how the country's capital has been "living a nightmare" for years at the hands of the terrorists targeting it from the city's suburb of Eastern Ghouta.

The video by The Truth about Syria purportedly features a compilation of recordings captured during the near-daily mortar barrages and their aftermaths, as well as

pictures of some of the children, who were killed during the raids.

Press TV cannot independently vouchsafe the veracity of the video.

The Eastern Ghouta-based groups launched 340 mortar shells on the capital, killing 19 civilians, including three children, and wounding 172 others, over seven days towards the end of February, the description reads.

After losing most of the Syrian territories in their control, militants are now largely concentrated in the Damascus countryside.

(Source: agencies)

China warns Taiwan playing with fire over U.S. bill

China warned Taiwan on Friday it would only get burnt if it sought to rely on foreigners, adding to warnings from state media the country could go to war over Taiwan if the United States passes into law a bill promoting closer U.S. ties.

The legislation, which only needs President Donald Trump's signature to become law, says it should be U.S. policy to allow officials at all levels to travel to Taiwan to meet their Taiwanese counterparts, permit high-level Taiwanese officials to enter the United States "under respectful conditions" and meet with U.S. officials.

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

China's Taiwan Affairs Office said the bill was a serious contravention of the "one China" principle.

"We also sternly warn Taiwan: do not rely on foreigners to build yourselves up, or it will only draw the fire upon you," it said in a short statement.

In a strongly-worded editorial, the official China Daily said if the bill becomes law it will only encourage Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen to further assert the island's sovereignty.

"Which, if she persisted, would lead to the inevitable consequence of triggering the Anti-Secession Law that allows Beijing to use force to prevent the island from seceding," the paper said, referring to a Chinese law passed in 2005.



"Since the U.S. is bound by domestic law to act on behalf of the island in that instance, it would only give substance to the observation that the descent into hell is easy."

China's hostility towards Taiwan has risen since the election to president of Tsai from the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party in 2016.

China suspects Tsai wants to push for formal independence, crossing a red line for Communist Party leaders in Beijing, though Taiwan's leader has said she wants to maintain the status quo and is committed to ensuring peace.

Taiwan has welcomed the U.S. legislation.

Speaking to reporters in Taipei on Friday, Premier William Lai said the United States was a "solid ally" of Taiwan's and expressed his deep thanks for the legislation.

"We wholeheartedly anticipate that this law can in the future further raise the substantive relationship between Taiwan and the United States," Lai said.

In a second editorial, the widely-read state-run Global Times tabloid said China could "make targeted measures against pro-independence forces in Taiwan".

"Militarily, the strength of the People's Liberation Army has fundamentally changed the military and political situation across the Straits," it said, talking about the narrow waterway that separates Taiwan from its giant neighbor.

"Thanks to its rapid growth, the Chinese mainland is now granted unparalleled strategic initiative across the Taiwan Straits."

China has dramatically upped its military presence around Taiwan. China's air force has carried out 16 rounds of exercises close to Taiwan in the last year or so, said Taiwan's defense ministry in late December, warning that China's military threat was growing by the day.

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

(Source: Reuters)

Sisi: Defaming security forces is 'high treason'

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi warned on Thursday he considers defaming of the country's armed forces and police an act of "high treason" that wouldn't be tolerated.

In televised comments during a visit to the Mediterranean coastal town of Alamein, he reminded viewers of the hundreds of soldiers and police officers killed by armed groups in recent years.

"If anyone defames them, he is defaming all Egyptians. It's no longer a question of freedom of speech," said Sisi, a former general who led the military overthrow of elected president Mohamed Morsi in 2013.

"No one defames the army and police while I am here."

Sisi's comments came a day after a call by Egypt's top prosecutor, Nabil Sadek, for legal action against news outlets that publish "false news, statements and rumors".

"[The decision comes] in light of recent attempts by the forces of evil to undermine the safety and security of the nation by broadcasting and spreading lies," Sadek said in a statement.

Fabricated sources?

Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry criticised the British broadcaster BBC on Tuesday for recent reporting on human rights in the country.

"It is ... regretful to notice lack of professionalism in the performance of some media outlets, which base their coverage on fabricated sources, for political purposes, or in search of scoops," he said.

"This was the case in BBC's last week report on Egypt, where the girl - who was alleged as forcibly disappeared and tortured - appeared on screens refuting such claims."

The State Information Service accused the BBC of spreading false information and

demanding an apology "refuting the professional errors and violations, as well as the allegations on the situation in Egypt".

BBC published a short documentary on February 23 purporting to show human rights violations in the North African country.

It gave detailed account of arrests, forced disappearances, torture, and sexual violence as recounted by victims and their families. Egyptian authorities called the reporting "flagrantly fraught with lies".

Hatem Azzam, a former member of Egypt's parliament and a human rights advocate, said in a tweet the BBC story exposed practices that have become all too common.

A BBC spokesperson said the organization stood by "the integrity" of its reporting teams.

The Egyptian government has increased its crackdown on media workers since Sisi seized power, including against Al Jazeera

Media Network staff.

Mahmoud Hussein, an Egyptian national who works for Al Jazeera Arabic in Qatar, has been jailed without charge since December 2016.

Hussein, 55, was accused of "incitement against state institutions and broadcasting false news with the aim of spreading chaos", allegations he, his lawyers, and Al Jazeera strongly deny. He has been held in the notorious Tora maximum-security prison and suffers from physical injuries and severe psychological duress.

Egypt ranks third in the world in terms of journalists arrested with 24 media workers held in detention. Since 2011, 10 journalists have been killed without proper investigations being conducted, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

(Source: agencies)

Russia denies violating arms control pacts

The Kremlin strongly rejects the allegations that Russia has been violating any arms control agreements, stressing that Moscow does not seek to be part of an arms race.

"We categorically reject any accusations that Russia is violating any provisions and articles of international law on disarmament and arms control," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on a conference call on Friday.

He emphasized that Russia has no plan to "get dragged into any arms race."

Delivering his annual state of the nation speech in Moscow on Thursday, Russian President Vladimir Putin warned that his country would regard any use of nuclear weapons against its allies as a "nuclear attack" on itself and give an "instant" response.

The new American policy allows the use of nuclear weapons "in response to a conventional attack or even a cyberthreat," the Russian president said, adding, "Russia reserves the right to use nuclear weapons only in response to a nuclear

attack or an attack with other weapons of mass destruction against her or her allies, or a conventional attack against us that threatens the very existence of the state."

The Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), which was released in February, came largely to counter Russia and China, effectively ending efforts by former U.S. President Barack Obama to reduce the size and scope of the U.S. arsenal and minimize the role of nuclear weapons in the country's military doctrine.

(Source: TASS)

United Nations 'an utter and abject failure' on Yemen: Rights group



A human rights group has described the United Nations as "an utter and abject failure" on the ongoing crisis in Yemen, stating that the Security Council is under the sway of some bullying powers.

"The UN is an utter and abject failure as far as Yemen and many other poor countries are concerned. It has become, more or less, dominated by the Security Council and the Security Council itself is dominated by three prominent members, who bully everybody else politically and diplomatically, and we all know that," Human Rights for Yemen Director Kim Sharif told English-language RT television news network on Thursday.

She added that the Saudi-led coalition, "aided and abetted by the U.S. and the UK," are committing "crimes against humanity and genocide" in Yemen.

Sharif also said that Saudi Arabia and its allies have been violating "every known international rule of law" over the past three years in the military aggression against Yemen.

Her remarks came a day after at least eight Yemeni civilians were killed and several others injured by separate Saudi airstrikes in the war-torn Arab country.

Saudi Arabia has been incessantly pounding Yemen since March 2015 in an attempt to crush the popular Houthi Ansarullah movement and reinstate former president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, who is a staunch ally of the Riyadh regime.

At least 13,600 people have been killed since the onset of Saudi Arabia's military campaign against Yemen. Much of the Arabian Peninsula country's infrastructure, including hospitals, schools and factories, has been reduced to rubble due to the war.

The United Nations says a record 22.2 million people are in need of food aid, including 8.4 million threatened by severe hunger.

A high-ranking UN aid official recently warned against the "catastrophic" living conditions in Yemen, stating that there is a growing risk of famine and cholera there.

"After three years of conflict, conditions in Yemen are catastrophic," John Ging, UN director of aid operations, told the UN Security Council on Tuesday. He added, "People's lives have continued unraveling. Conflict has escalated since November driving an estimated 100,000 people from their homes."

Ging further noted that cholera has infected 1.1 million people in Yemen since last April, and a new outbreak of diphtheria has occurred in the war-ravaged Arab country since 1982.

(Source: Press TV)

Myanmar troops to Rohingya: Leave the 'no man's land'

Myanmar on Friday defended deployment of its troops near Bangladesh border, where thousands of Rohingya refugees have taken shelter, calling it an "anti-terrorism operation".

The move has drawn criticism from Bangladesh, which summoned Myanmar's ambassador on Thursday, while the UN refugee agency raised their concerns at the military build-up.

Some 200 troops were deployed to the border on Thursday, close to a nearby strip of land between Myanmar and Bangladesh home to makeshift camps housing some 6,000 Rohingya refugees. The strip of land is officially designated as Myanmar's territory, but is widely referred to as "no man's land" because it lies beyond the country's border fence.

"We acted this way based on the information we got regarding terrorism, especially the Arakan Rohingya Solidarity Army (ARSA) movement," Zaw Htay, a spokesperson for the Myanmar government, told AFP news agency on Friday.

"It was not aimed at antagonizing Bangladesh," Htay said.

Bangladesh has called for an immediate pullback of Myanmar security forces - who have reportedly issued warnings using loudspeakers for Rohingya to leave the "no man's land" - from the area. Nearly 700,000 Rohingya have fled Myanmar since August following a government crackdown, which was launched in the wake of deadly attacks on military posts by the ARSA.

Rohingya, one of the most persecuted communities in the world, are not recognized as citizens and face widespread discrimination from the Myanmar authorities. Prior to the current exodus, tens of Rohingya have already been living as refugees in several neighboring countries.

It is the fastest growing refugee crisis in the world, according to the UN, with the majority of the displaced seeking refuge in neighboring Bangladesh.

The prospects for repatriation

Myanmar and Bangladesh announced a repatriation deal in January, but rights groups and Rohingya have raised concerns about the agreement, saying it does not guarantee full citizenship, or safety, for those who return.

Filippo Grandi, the UN high commissioner for refugees, said last month conditions in Myanmar are "not yet conducive" for the Rohingya to go back.

"The causes of their flight have not been addressed, and we have yet to see substantive progress on addressing the exclusion and denial of rights that has deepened over the last decades, rooted in their lack of citizenship," Grandi told the UN Security Council on February 13. Rights group Amnesty International said last month Myanmar's history of discrimination and segregation of the Rohingya were early "warning signs" of the ongoing crisis.

"This episode will stand in history as yet another testament to the world's catastrophic failure to address conditions that provide fertile ground for mass atrocity crimes," Secretary-General Salil Shetty said on February 22.

"The transformation of discrimination and demonization into mass violence is tragically familiar, and its ruinous consequences cannot be easily undone," he added.

The UN has said the crisis may amount to genocide.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	97961.8
IFX	1092.24

Sources: tse.ir, lfb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	44,690 rials
EUR	54,490 rials
GBP	68,000 rials
AED	13,400 rials

Source: mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

WTI	60.83/b
Brent	63.52/b
OPEC Basket	63.97/b
Gold	\$1,322.55/oz
Silver	\$16.54/oz
Platinum	\$967.75/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



Tehran to host banking, insurance expo in mid-April

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The 11th edition of Iran's International Exhibition of Exchange, Bank and Insurance (FINEX 2018) is due to be held on April 16-19 in Tehran, ILNA reported.

According to the organizers, so far, 359 companies have signed up for the event while knowledge based companies and startups have the largest share of participation.

Investment companies, portfolio investors, investment advisers, banks and financial and credit institutions, leasing companies, brokers, insurers, financial services providers, educational and research services, software services, startups as well as press and publications comprise the main participants of this year's event.



Intl. power generation, turbomachinery expo running in Tehran

ENERGY TEHRAN — Iran's first International Exhibition of Power Generation and Turbomachinery opened at Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds on Friday.

As reported by IRNA, 50 Iranian companies along with 5 foreign exhibitors from Britain, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands are showcasing their latest products and services in this four-day event.

Meanwhile, an international conference on power generators will also be held on the sidelines of the exhibition in which representatives from Britain, Italy, Nigeria and the Netherlands will attend.



Hand-woven carpet exports up 22% in 10 months yr/yr

ECONOMY TEHRAN — "Iran exported \$336 million of hand-woven carpets in the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2017- January 20, 2018), showing an increase of 22 percent compared to the same period of time in the past year," ISNA reported on Friday quoting Hamid Kargar, the head of Iran's National Carpet Center.

The country's exports of hand-woven carpets during the first half of the present calendar year (March 21- September 22, 2017) stood at \$153 million, indicating 13 percent rise from that of the same time span in the previous year, Kargar has previously announced.

Iran's exports of hand-woven carpets in the past Iranian calendar year 1395 (ending March 20, 2017) stood at \$359 million, he added.

Dollar-based purchase orders prohibited in Iran since Feb. 28

Under the current circumstance, the merchants are required to identify their terms of payment, i.e. via banking system or bureaux de change, at the time of making their purchase order, he added.



According to the official, Iranian merchants would need to inform their suppliers to change the base currency from the dollar to other currencies so that the related import documents could be processed at Iran's entry points.

Tehran has long sought to switch to non-dollar based trade. It has already signed agreements with several countries and is in talks with Russia on using national currencies in settlements.

Iran-Turkmenistan business forum held in Ashgabat

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Turkmenistan's Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Ashgabat hosted Iran-Turkmenistan business forum on Friday, IRNA reported.

As part of the 14th exclusive exhibition of Iranian products in Turkmenistan, the event was attended by several high-ranking officials from the two countries as well as representatives of the Iran and Turkmenistan's private sectors.

Over 60 Iranian companies participated in the 14th exclusive exhibition of Iranian goods and services which kicked off on Thursday in

Turkmenistan's capital Ashgabat and will wrap up on Saturday.

Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Mohammad Shariatmadari who visited Turkmenistan at the top of a high-ranking delegation to attend the exhibition opening ceremony, met with Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov on Thursday.

In the meeting, Berdimuhamedov expressed satisfaction with the holding of Iranian exclusive exhibition and the business forum, saying holding such events will facilitate and expand economic cooperation between the



two countries.

Shariatmadari for his part noted that his country is interested in long term economic cooperation with Turkmenistan.

"President Hassan Rouhani's future visit to Turkmenistan in April will open a new chapter in the relations of the two neighboring countries," he added.

Oman seeks expansion of trade ties with Iran

ENERGY TEHRAN — Oman is seeking expansion of its trade relationship with Iran, according to Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry Vice Chairman Rashid Amer Mohammed Al-Mesailhi.

Al-Mesailhi made the remarks in a meeting between a delegation of Iranian traders and businessmen from Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mine and Agriculture

(ICCIMA) with their Omani counterparts in Muscat on Thursday, ICCIMA portal reported.

The Omani official further appreciated the close cooperation of Iran-Oman Joint Chamber of Commerce with Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Hossein Selahvarzi, the vice chairman of ICCIMA, for his part referred to some fields for economic cooperation

between the two countries and stressed the necessity of more cooperation between Iran and Oman chambers of commerce.

He also expressed his delegations' readiness for more ties with Omani traders in the fields of agricultural products, foodstuffs, pharmaceutical products, and minerals.

Asia may face steel, aluminum glut with Trump's tariff plan

U.S. President Donald Trump's plan to slap hefty tariffs on steel and aluminum imports will likely make Southeast Asia the new hunting ground for global exporters seeking buyers, creating a glut that could depress prices and prompt some producers to close.

More of China's steel may find its way into developing countries such as the Philippines and Vietnam, but it could face competition from Russia, Ukraine and Turkey, industry officials and traders said.

Chinese aluminum exporters, which may take a similar tack, could clash with producers in South Korea and Thailand.

Trump said the duties, 25 percent on steel imports and 10 percent on aluminum, would be formally announced next week, and believes they will protect American jobs.

Fears of a global trade war dragged down Asian equities with shares of Asian steel producers supplying the U.S. market hit hard.

South Korea is the third-biggest steel supplier to the United States after Canada

and Brazil and would be the hardest hit by the tariffs. Other Asian suppliers are Japan, Taiwan and India.

China, the world's biggest steel producer, accounted for only about 2.9 percent of U.S. steel imports, data compiled by Wood Mackenzie showed. The world's top steel-buying nation, the United States imported a total 35.6 million tonnes last year.

Some of those Chinese products meant for the U.S. would go to Southeast Asia, said Roberto Cola, vice president of the ASEAN Iron and Steel Council.

"There will be excess supply in the region and prices will drop, which will be good for consumers," Cola said.

With some of the world's fastest-growing economies including the Philippines and Vietnam, Southeast Asian countries are among the world's major steel buyers with many of them having limited and costly domestic steelmaking capacity.

Southeast Asia accounted for about a quar-

ter of China's steel exports in 2017, Cola said.

As prices drop, China will face competition from other suppliers such as Russia, Ukraine, the Middle East and Turkey, said CRU analyst Richard Lu.

But strong domestic demand may help China absorb the excess steel, Lu said. Chinese steel shipments have dropped since hitting a record 112.4 million tonnes in 2015.

'They have to shut'

Japan and China are two of the biggest Asian exporters of aluminum to the U.S., accounting for 11 percent and 14 percent of those countries' total shipments.

As Chinese aluminum producers look for new export markets, they could offer competition to manufacturers in South Korea Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand, while tighter margins could accelerate their plans to set up units offshore.

"We believe the fabricators are able to divert their exports to other Asian countries if the U.S. situation plays out as they expect,"

said a source at a global trading house in Shanghai.

China Hongqiao Group, the world's biggest aluminum producer, is already looking into the possibility of moving recently shuttered illegal smelting capacity overseas, mainly to Indonesia.

But import duties on semi-manufactured aluminum products in some Asian countries could make it tougher for China to enter them, said a Singapore-based physical aluminum trader.

"China has no choice, they have to shut. But ultimately U.S. consumers will have to bear the brunt of the price increase because the industry needs it. It's more about politics than aluminum," the trader said.

"I expect retaliatory moves from other countries," said Cola from the ASEAN Iron and Steel Council.

"What Trump is doing is an unprecedented move, it's going back to the old days of protectionism." (Source: Reuters)

Germany says planned U.S. tariffs would distort world trade

U.S. President Donald Trump's planned tariffs on steel and aluminum would distort world trade, German Economy Minister Brigitte Zypries said on Friday, adding Europe would respond appropriately if Washington follows through with the plan.

The president of Germany's BDI industry group said separately that the planned

tariffs risked global trade wars.

"The U.S. policy of isolation is a mistake," BDI President Dieter Kempf said in a statement. "U.S. President Donald Trump risks global trade wars and a spiral of protectionism, which in the end would cost American jobs."

(Source: Reuters)

China could target U.S. soybeans in a trade dispute, but Beijing is holding off for now

Beijing could target soybeans to retaliate against any punitive trade action from the U.S., but it's unlikely to do that just to counter heavy U.S. tariffs on steel and aluminum, experts said.

U.S. is a major producer and exporter of soybeans globally, and China is the top buyer of these American oilseeds.

"Half of U.S. soybeans exports goes to China. If China hits back on soybeans, it's really going to hurt," said Haiyan Wang, a professor at INSEAD in Washington D.C.

The grain markets were on edge about a tit-for-tat between the world's two largest economies, sending prices of soy futures up on Friday. (Source: CNBC)

Global stocks tumble as Trump sparks global trade war fears

The specter of a global trade war sent world stocks tumbling on Friday and drove investors toward the traditional safe havens of government bonds and the Japanese yen.

Europe's STOXX 600 index fell over 1 percent early on, following both Wall Street and Asia down, after Donald Trump said the United States would impose hefty tariffs on imported steel and aluminum.

Trump said duties of 25 percent on steel and 10 percent on aluminum would be formally announced next week, sparking concerns of retaliatory moves from major trade partners such as China, Europe and neighboring Canada.

"It is a real worry because Europe is an open global economy so it isn't just about U.S. versus China," with Ian Ormiston, European equity fund manager at Old Mutual Global Investors. "And we will see retaliation there are no two ways about it."

Europe's early drop came amid caution anyway ahead of crunch few days of politics.



Britain's under-fire Prime Minister Theresa May will flesh out her Brexit plans later, while Germany will find out if it finally

BOJ's Kuroda joins queue of central banks looking toward exit

The end of the easy money era which spanned the global economy for the last decade came into even sharper focus on Friday as the Bank of Japan gave fresh insight into when it might slow its bond-buying program.

Governor Haruhiko Kuroda's remarks that the central bank will start thinking about how to complete its unprecedented monetary stimulus around the fiscal year starting April 2019 was the clearest signal yet that a conclusion might be in sight to emergency support for the Japanese economy.

While Kuroda's statement in response to questions from lawmakers was in some ways stating the obvious -- the BOJ forecasts inflation to reach its 2 percent target in fiscal 2019 -- the significance is that he's put down a marker in public that he can be held to.

"It's notable how over the past few weeks Kuroda has been forced into talking more specifically about the exit," said Izumi Devalier, head of Japan economics at Bank of America Merrill Lynch. "A year and a half ago he would have shut down the discussion altogether with the blanket 'it's too early to talk about it' statement."

That means the last of the big central banks is finally thinking out loud about policy normalization or how to begin the process of unwinding years of asset purchases and ultra-low interest rates that were used to



stoke growth after the 2008 financial crisis sparked the worst global recession in decades.

The Federal Reserve, Bank of Canada and Bank of England have already raised interest rates and may do so again soon, while the European Central Bank is debating how soon to end its own bond-buying. China's central bank is sticking to what it describes as neutral policy settings and is ratcheting up money market rates to cool the pace of borrowing. Bloomberg Economics

estimates net asset purchases by the main central banks will dwindle to around zero around the start of 2019.

"Central banks worldwide are gradually normalizing monetary policy as growth and inflation risks return," said Chua Hak Bin, a senior economist at Maybank Kim Eng Research in Singapore. "The Bank of Japan is preparing the markets for an eventual exit from its accommodative monetary policy."

Traders leaped on Kuroda's remarks. The

yen surged while yields on Japanese sovereign debt climbed across the curve. The Nikkei 225 Index closed 2.5 percent lower and the Topix Index fell 1.8 percent.

Such moves suggest just how vigilant investors are to talk of a turn by policy makers. Stocks have fallen and bonds have risen recently amid concern that synchronized global growth, falling unemployment and signs of accelerating inflation would prompt central banks to become more hawkish.

Earlier this week, new Fed Chairman Jerome Powell indicated U.S. policy makers may raise rates this year by more than the three times they have been anticipating.

To be sure, Kuroda remains doggedly committed to powerful stimulus until inflation hits 2 percent and on Friday he, again, ruled out any consideration of an exit before then. Many in the market believe him.

"Hearing Governor Kuroda talk about the policy board debating exit is obviously bracing for markets and underlines the communication challenge the BOJ faces," said David Fernandez, chief Asia-Pacific economist at Barclays Plc. "However, he simply said that the exit debate would happen in fiscal 2019 because the policy board forecasts that they will have reached the 2 percent target by then."

(Source: Bloomberg)

OPEC oil production drops to 10-month low

Crude production from OPEC countries fell to a 10-month low in February, mainly due to maintenance at a field in the United Arab Emirates and continued output declines in Venezuela.

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies including Russia have defied the skeptics by going deeper than their pledged cuts and maintaining them for long enough to deplete bloated inventories and boost prices. While the group says it's committed to the deal for the remainder of the year, it's also contending with a record-breaking surge in U.S. output that could undermine its efforts.

Output from the 14 members of OPEC fell 80,000 barrels a day to 32.28 million a day in February, according to a Bloomberg News survey of analysts, oil companies and ship-tracking data. That's the lowest since 31.89 million in April.



Venezuela's output dropped by 30,000 barrels a day to 1.68 million barrels. The Latin American nation is a big part of the reason for OPEC's stellar implementation of promises to curb production. Its industry is suffering from a lack of investment and looming U.S. sanctions, sending output last year to the lowest since the 1980s.

Oil production in the UAE fell last month due to maintenance at fields that produce the Das Blend, according to a person with knowledge of the matter. The survey found the Persian Gulf country pumped 2.8 million barrels a day, a drop of 50,000 a day from January.

Production in Saudi Arabia, OPEC's largest producer, fell 80,000 barrels a day to 9.88 million barrels, the survey found. Libya's output rose 70,000 barrels a day to 1.05 million, the highest since 2013.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Oil major Total expands in Libya with Waha stake buy from Marathon

French energy company Total said on Friday it had acquired a 16.33 percent stake in Libya's Waha concessions from Marathon Oil in a \$450 million transaction.

Waha Oil Company is a subsidiary of Libya's state-owned National Oil Corp (NOC) and currently produces 300,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day (boe/d) and which is expected to rise to 400,000 boe/d by the end of the decade, Total said.

The deal would give Total access to reserves and resources in excess of 500 million boe, with immediate production of around 50,000 boe/d and "significant exploration potential" in concessions in the Sirte Basin, the company said in a statement.

"This acquisition is in line with Total's strategy to reinforce its portfolio with high quality and low-technical cost assets whilst bolstering our historic strength in the Middle East and North Africa region," said Total CEO Patrick Pouyanne.

Other Waha stakeholders include NOC with 59.18 percent, ConocoPhillips with 16.33 percent and Hess with 8.16 percent. Total is already present in Libya with a

production share of 31,500 boe/d in 2017 from concessions in the offshore Al Jurf field and the onshore Sharara field.

The oil industry in OPEC member Libya sector has staged a partial recovery after being hit by blockades and armed conflict following an uprising seven years ago.

National production dropped to lows of about 200,000 barrels per day (bpd), before rebounding to 1 million bpd last summer.

It is still well under the 1.6 million bpd Libya was producing before 2011, and the industry has suffered continuing stoppages including the current closure of the southwestern El Feel field due to a protest by guards.

Waha is one of Libya's main export grades. It is shipped from the eastern port of Es Sider, which was blockaded by an armed faction between 2014 and 2016.

Es Sider and other ports in Libya's Oil Crescent are now controlled by the eastern-based Libyan National Army (LNA), which allowed the NOC to reopen them in late 2016.

(Source: Reuters)

U.S. embargo would be the 'death knell' for Venezuela's oil industry

The red flags of an imminent U.S. embargo on Venezuelan crude are already apparent, according to an oil analyst, with ramifications of such a move likely to exacerbate an unprecedented economic meltdown.

"The imposition of U.S. oil sanctions is now edging closer to reality. Such a move would act as the death knell for Venezuela's oil industry," Stephen Brennock, oil analyst at PVM Oil Associates, said in a research note Wednesday.

Donald Trump is reportedly considering sanctioning Venezuela's crude industry in a bid to ratchet up pressure on Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, Reuters reported Thursday, citing an unnamed U.S. official.

This follows a stark warning from U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who said at the start of February that sanctioning Venezuela's oil or prohibiting the crude to be sold in the U.S. was something the White House was continuing to mull over.

A move to directly target Venezuela's oil industry would be a huge blow to Maduro's socialist administration, which is depending almost entirely on crude sales to try and de-

celerate a deepening economic crisis.

Last year, Venezuela was the fourth largest supplier of crude oil and products to the U.S., according to the Energy Information Administration (EIA).

Brennock said U.S. imposed sanctions on the oil-dependent state's crude industry would force Caracas to offer steep discounts in a desperate search for new buyers and also leave the country reeling with the prospect of supply restrictions of vital diluents. Such diluents are essential in helping to market and transport Venezuela's tar-like heavy crude, he added.

Meanwhile, Maduro is running for another six-year term in a general election next month. The current premier is asking supporters to stick with his brand of "21st century socialism" in order to keep the country on track to recover 70 percent of its lost oil production in the first six months of the year.

In 2017, Venezuela's crude sales to the U.S. slipped below 600,000 — the lowest level of sales to America in almost three decades, according to Reuters.

(Source: CNBC)

Oil prices give up gains; set for weekly drop

Global benchmark Brent was down 2 cents at \$63.81 at 0740 GMT on Friday after spending most of the session slightly higher. The contract settled down 1.4 percent on Thursday, a two-week low. Brent is set for a weekly fall of 5.2 percent.

U.S. oil prices also fell, taking declines to a fourth day as Asian share markets extended a sell-off on Wall Street after news of planned U.S. tariffs on steel and aluminum raised fears of a trade war.

President Donald Trump announced he would impose hefty tariffs on the two metals to protect U.S. producers, risking retaliation from major trade partners like China, Europe and neighboring Canada.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude was down 11 cents, or 0.2 percent, at \$60.88 after also touching a two-week low of \$60.18 a day earlier.

U.S. crude is on track for a 4.2 percent drop this week, its first weekly decline in three, having given up much of the gains in recent weeks when sentiment was boosted by a fall in inventories at the Cushing delivery point for WTI.

"The market is not showing any obvious signs of turning around the mood. We are being driven by the pick-up in U.S. inventories and in general terms the market went a bit too far too soon," said Ric Spooner, chief market analyst at CMC Markets in Sydney.

"Then we have the volatility in the U.S. dollar and the implications of the tariff news to factor in," he said.

U.S. crude stocks rose last week even as refineries hiked output, increasing by 3 million barrels, compared with expectations for an increase of 2.1 million barrels.

Still, stocks fell again at Cushing in Oklahoma, with inventories down by 1.2 million barrels, the 10th consecutive week of declines, the Energy Information Administration said this week.

"Although destocking in Cushing has continued, with stocks there falling below 30 million barrels for the first time since late 2014, the overall increase in U.S. oil stocks has overshadowed the good news," Fawad Razaqzada, market analyst at Forex.com, said in a note.

(Source: Reuters)

OPEC deal compliance reaches 149% in February

Overzealous crude production cuts from the United Arab Emirates caused OPEC's monthly output to fall to a 10-month low in February, according to a survey by Reuters.

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries produced 32.28 million barrels per day this month—netting a reduction of 70,000 barrels per day compared to the previous month. The February output figure amounts to the lowest since April 2017.

Compliance to the November 2016 agreement to cut output by 1.2 million barrels per day rose to 149 percent this month, jumping five points from January.

"We still feel that the job is not complete," Emirati Energy Minister Suhail al-Mazrouei told Reuters earlier this month. "The price is one thing, rebalancing the market is something else and we need to balance the market."

(Source: oilprice.com)

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Jean-Claude Juncker's dangerous defense strategy



By Ana Palacio

Former Spanish foreign minister

Post-mortems of this year's Munich Security Conference amounted to something of an indictment of the increasingly rudderless global order. The one big idea – European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker's call to shift authority over foreign and defense policymaking in the EU from the member states to the Commission – is a very bad one.

These days, there are just three events that bring together all of the main actors in international politics: the annual General Debate of the United Nations General Assembly, G20 summits, and the Munich Security Conference. That makes it all the more disappointing that the latest MSC, which took place in mid-February, brought only one big idea – and not a good one.



The MSC has long been a place not just to see and be seen, but also to hear and be heard. Yet, at this year's meeting, what was not said seemed to speak louder than what was. Post-mortems of the gathering amounted to something of an indictment of the increasingly rudderless global order. Observers largely focused on how little in the way of new ideas or innovative solutions there was, despite much handwringing about the state of the world.

This stands in stark contrast to years past. In 2015, the MSC helped to generate momentum for the subsequent deal on Iran's nuclear program. Last year, it was at the MSC that key members of U.S. President Donald Trump's administration first met their global counterparts. In 2007, Russian President Vladimir Putin famously used the MSC to present his stark worldview, in a speech that presaged Russia's interventions in Georgia and Ukraine.

At this year's conference, the one big idea was European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker's call to shift authority over foreign and defense policymaking in the European Union from the member states to the Commission. But, while Juncker is right to assert that the EU should take steps to ensure that it can act effectively in world politics, his approach is deeply flawed.

To assume a leading role in the world, the EU needs a culture and incentives that support genuine cohesion and cooperative action. Rather than take the time to achieve that, Juncker wants to take a short cut, arguing that, when it comes to foreign and defense policies, the EU cannot be required always to achieve unanimity.

And yet the EU is founded on an agreement that, in exchange for membership, states relinquish a certain degree of sovereignty in some areas. But foreign and defense policy are areas where states are supposed to retain authority. Flippantly attempting to change that bargain eschews political realities and threatens to set the European project on a dangerous course.

Juncker's proposal at the MSC echoes similar recommendations on the single market, which he floated in his 2017 State of the Union address. Both are part of a broader effort to shift power from the European Council to the Commission – an effort that Juncker buttressed by recently appointing his Svengali, Martin Selmayr, as the Commission's secretary-general, the body's top civil-service job.

Now, Selmayr – who, as Juncker's chief of staff, has been compared to figures like Machiavelli and Rasputin – will have far greater influence, including over the selection of a new Commission president next year. The way the appointment was carried out – shrouded in secrecy, in order to avoid the involvement of member states – should do more than raise eyebrows.

But such machinations are merely a symptom of a deeper problem with Juncker's approach. The problem is not that his approach may succeed – a functioning United States of Europe would achieve a lot – but rather that it cannot. Europeans are simply not prepared to cede more sovereignty to the EU.

Since the global financial crisis erupted a decade ago, Europe has been firmly in inter-governmental mode. The last thing it needs is another grand-sounding scheme that it is not in a position to carry out. Between the Economic and Monetary Union, the Banking Union, and the Energy Union – each of which was launched with great fanfare and is now adrift – the EU already has plenty of those.

Rather than politely applauding castles in the sky, EU officials and member governments need to work, with a frank and realistic mindset, to build consensus on foreign and security issues. This means not changing the rules at the top, but rather building cohesion from below.

To ensure that this effort does not end up being dragged out interminably, as so many EU discussions do, we should begin with concrete objectives. The Permanent Structured Cooperation in the field of defense – agreed by the European Council last December – is a good place to start, with countries increasing, for example, joint strategic planning at the European level. Inspired by German Chancellor Angela Merkel's recent proposal to tie EU funding to the acceptance of migrants, member states should also work to create stronger incentives for cooperation.

There is no question that it is difficult for 27 sovereign countries to act as one. But, as tempting as it may be, trying to paper over differences or avoid dissent – let alone destroying the compact at the core of the European project – will not make matters any easier. The only way to get where Europe needs to go is through a realistic and gradual effort to build unity. For Europe, it is this that should be the key lesson of the MSC.

(Source: The Project Syndicate)

Inside the dark web of the UAE's surveillance state

Since the Arab uprisings of 2011, UAE has utilized 'cyber-security governance' to quell the harbingers of revolt and suppress dissident voices

By Joe Odell

The nuts and bolts of the Emirati surveillance state moved into the spotlight on 1 February as the Abu Dhabi-based cybersecurity company DarkMatter allegedly stepped "out of the shadows" to speak to the international media.

Its CEO and founder, Faisal al-Bannai, gave a rare interview to the Associated Press at the company's headquarters in Abu Dhabi, in which he absolved his company of any direct responsibility for human rights violations in the UAE.

Established in the UAE in 2015, DarkMatter has always maintained itself to be a commercially driven company. Despite the Emirati government constituting 80 percent of DarkMatter's customer base and the company previously describing itself as "a strategic partner of the UAE government", its CEO was at pains to suggest that it was independent from the state.

According to its website, the company's stated aim is to "protect governments and enterprises from the ever-evolving threat of cyber attack" by offering a range of non-offensive cybersecurity services.

Seeking skilled hackers

Though DarkMatter defines its activities as defensive, an Italian security expert, who attended an interview with the company in 2016, likened its operations to "big brother on steroids" and suggested it was deeply rooted within the Emirati intelligence system.

Simone Margaritelli, also a former hacker, alleged that during the interview he was informed of the UAE's intention to develop a surveillance system that was "capable of intercepting, modifying, and diverting (as well as occasionally obscuring) traffic on IP, 2G, 3G, and 4G networks".

Although he was offered a lucrative monthly tax-free salary of \$15,000, he rejected the offer on ethical grounds.

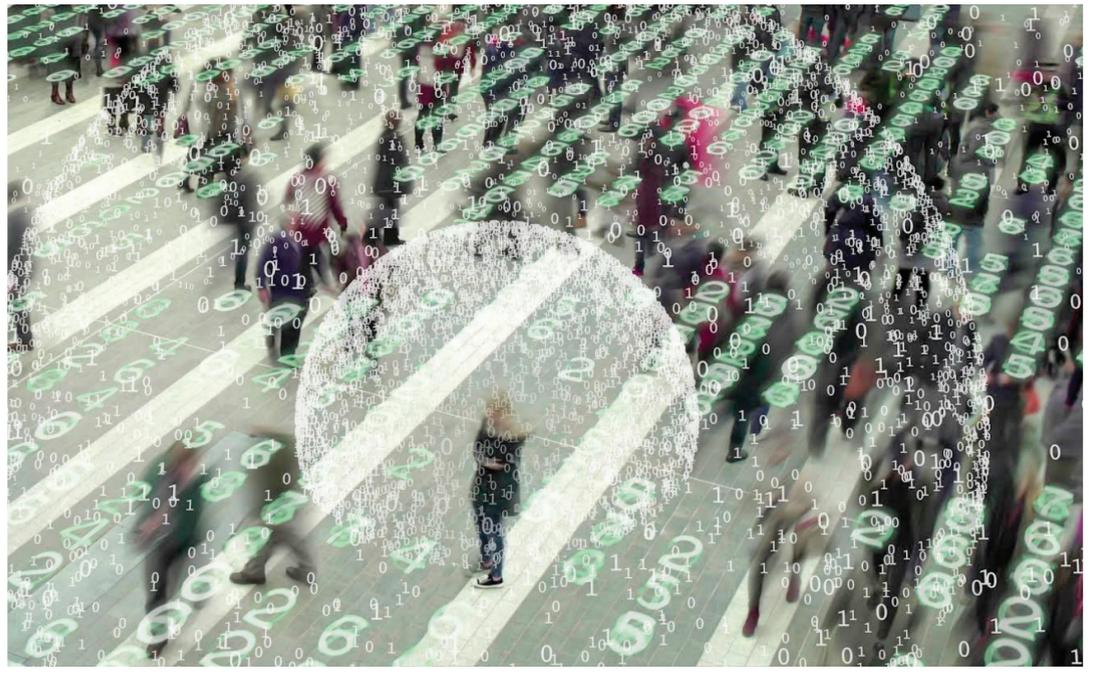
Furthermore, in an investigation carried out by The Intercept in 2016, sources with inside knowledge of the company said that DarkMatter was "aggressively" seeking skilled hackers to carry out offensive surveillance operations. This included plans to exploit hardware probes already installed across major cities in order to track, locate and hack any person at any time in the UAE.

As with other states, there is a need for cybersecurity in the UAE. As the threat of cyber attacks has increased worldwide, there have been numerous reports of attempted attacks from external actors on critical infrastructure in the country.

Since the Arab uprisings of 2011, however, internal "cyber-security governance", which has been utilized to quell the harbingers of revolt and suppress dissident voices, has become increasingly important to the Emirati government and other regimes across the region.

Authoritarian control

In the UAE, as with other PGCC states, this has found a legislative expression in the cybercrime law. Instituted in 2012, its vaguely worded provisions essentially



Scores of people who have criticized the UAE government on social media have been arbitrarily detained, forcefully disappeared and, in many cases, tortured.

provide a legal basis to detain anybody who criticizes the regime online.

This was to be followed shortly after by the formation of the UAE's own cybersecurity entity, the National Electronic Security Authority (NESA), which recently began working in parallel with the UAE Armed Forces' cyber command unit, established in 2014.

A network of Emirati government agencies and state-directed telecommunications industries have worked in loose coordination with international arms manufacturers and cybersecurity companies to transform communications technologies into central components of authoritarian control.

In 2016, an official from the Dubai police force announced that authorities were monitoring users across 42 social media platforms, while a spokesperson for the UAE's Telecommunication Regulatory Authority similarly boasted that all social media profiles and internet sites were being tracked by the relevant agencies.

As a result, scores of people who have criticized the UAE government on social media have been arbitrarily detained, forcefully disappeared and, in many cases, tortured.

Last year, Jordanian journalist Tayseer al-Najjar and prominent Emirati academic Nasser bin Ghaith received sentences of three and 10 years respectively for comments made on social media. Similarly, award-winning human rights activist Ahmed Mansoor has been arbitrarily detained for nearly a year due to

his online activities.

This has been a common theme across the region in the post-"Arab Spring" landscape. In line with this, a lucrative cybersecurity market opened up across the Middle East and North Africa, which, according to the U.S. tech research firm Gartner, was valued at \$1.3bn in 2016.

A modern-day surveillance state

In many respects, the UAE's surveillance infrastructure has been built by a network of international cybersecurity "dealers" who have willingly profited from supplying the Emirati regime with the tools needed for a modern-day surveillance state.

Moreover, it has been reported that DarkMatter has been hiring a range of top talent from across the U.S. national security and tech establishment, including from Google, Samsung and McAfee. Late last year, it was revealed that DarkMatter was managing an intelligence contract that had been recruiting former CIA agents and U.S. government officials to train Emirati security officials in a bid to bolster the UAE's intelligence body.

UK military companies also have a foothold in the Emirati surveillance state. Last year, it was revealed that BAE Systems had been using a Danish subsidiary, ETI Evident, to export surveillance technologies to the UAE government and other regimes across the region.

The million dollar dissident

Although there are officially no diplomatic relations between the two countries, in 2016, Abu Dhabi launched Falcon

Eye, an Israeli-installed civil surveillance system. This enables Emirati security officials to monitor every person "from the moment they leave their doorstep to the moment they return to it", a source close to Falcon Eye told Middle East Eye in 2015.

The source added that the system allows work, social and behavioral patterns to be recorded, analyzed and archived: "It sounds like sci-fi but it is happening in Abu Dhabi today."

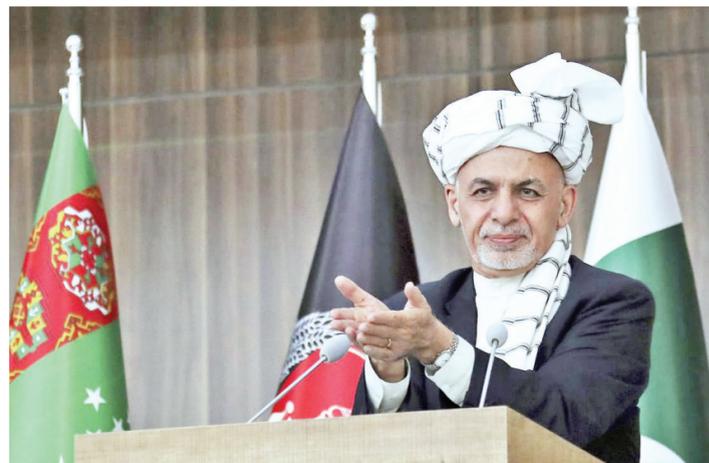
Moreover, in a story that made headlines in 2016, Ahmed Mansoor's iPhone was hacked by the UAE government with software provided by the Israeli-based security company NSO Group. Emirati authorities reportedly paid \$1m for the software, leading international media outlets to dub Mansoor "the million-dollar dissident."

Mansoor's case is illustrative of how Emirati authorities have conducted unethical practices in the past. In recent years, the UAE has bought tailored software products from international companies such as Hacking Team to engage in isolated, targeted attacks on human rights activists, such as Mansoor.

The operations of DarkMatter, as well as the installation of Falcon Eye, suggest, however, that rather than relying on individual products from abroad, Emirati authorities are now building a surveillance system of their own and bringing operations in-house by developing the infrastructure for a 21st-century police state.

(Source: The Middle East Eye)

War in Afghanistan: Give peace a chance



Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani

Kabul's government has made an offer of peace talks to the Taliban to end America's longest war. It should be taken up.

would be a good thing.

For America, the war in Afghanistan is now almost 17 years old and is officially the longest in its history. True,

the fighting in Vietnam went on longer, but since war was never declared it is classed as a conflict. Unlike Vietnam, the battle in Afghanistan has not come

to define America. Yet today there are U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan who were just out of their "diapers" when the war started. The Taliban, meanwhile, is gaining ground – and controls almost half the country's districts. There are at least 10,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan, and a few hundred British ones in a NATO force numbering a few thousand more. If America could not defeat the Taliban with 100,000 soldiers, how it could do so with barely a fifth of that number? The U.S. admission that the solution is ultimately political, not military, is welcome.

Dealing with a murderous outfit such as the Taliban is morally unappealing, but unavoidable. They are also unreliable partners, arguing that all other Afghans should be shut out of talks they would have with the U.S. This would match the error the U.S. previously made in excluding the Taliban, who can legitimately claim some popular support. Mr Ghani's elected government is recognized by every nation in the world. Snubbing him would reveal the Taliban as more interested in prestige than peace. On average, 66 civilians die each week in this conflict. While the great powers might be prepared to fight in a war without end, surely the nation's self-styled patriots – who want better lives for all Afghans – are not.

(Source: The Guardian)

Professors sign Tehran Times and Mehr letter to Guterres: Use Norouz to promote peace

A group of distinguished professors and intellectuals have written a letter to United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres calling on him to use Norouz, the Persian New Year, as an opportunity to remove "structural violence" in international system in order to achieve true peace (Positive Peace).

Following is the text of the letter sent by the Mehr news agency and Tehran Times:

Dear Secretary-General Guterres,
Persian New Year, better known as Norouz, is right around the corner. Celebrated by a few countries around the world, Norouz is the renewal of nature and transition from cold and darkness into light and hope. In other words, the arrival of spring promises rebirth and even whispers of peace.

Now that the nature's good tiding is peace, why can't humans get along and live in peace? What brought humankind to be enemies of others, to lose their true identity and subject them to war. Aggression and violence have brought nothing but shame to humanity and the international community is responsible for the chaos and carnage. It people choose to wage war, peace will remain a distant goal in the international arena.

A main challenge in international relations is prevention of war. To that end, much has been declared and written, and many organizations, institutes and NGOs have been established by governments to help resolve conflicts in a peaceful manner, but to no avail.

Geographical borders as well as personal, religious, ideological, racial and ethnic boundaries have all been lame excuses for violence. No man, ethnic group or culture is better than another.

We have been witnessing a kind of "structural violence" in international society, for instance, the views and definitions of human rights among countries.

World peace is only realized when structural violence is eliminated. It is achievable not just through ceasefires in wars (negative peace), but rather in the presence of justice for all (positive peace). And even while there may be no firm peace in place, the absence of violence is still an achievement.

The likelihood of civil war and war between states can be minimized or even eliminated when people respect law, human rights and fundamental human freedom.

World peace not only does protect man from the shadow of war and its irreparable and heartbreaking aftermath, but



allows him to recognize his rights. It is in peacetime that man achieves human dignity which has been frequently addressed in moral, religious and philosophical teachings.

In a resolution dubbed as the culture of peace in 2010, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed March 21 as the International Norouz Day that is observed by a few countries across the world including Afghanistan, Albania, Azerbaijan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey and Turkmenistan.

Signatories:

1- Nicholas Onuf, Professor Emeritus of International Relations at Florida International University, editorial boards of International Political Sociology, Cooperation and Conflict, and Context to International, primary figures among constructivists in international relations

2- Peter S. Onuf, American history professor, Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation Professor of the University of Virginia

3- Prof. Mahmood Monshpouri, University of California, Berkeley, and San Francisco State University

4- Charles Taliaferro, American philosopher, Professor and Chair of Philosophy at St. Olaf College

5- Mehran Kamrava, Professor and Director of the Center for International and Regional Studies at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service in Qatar

6- Charles Butterworth, emeritus professor of political philosophy at the University of Maryland, College Park

7- Clayton Crockett, University of Central Arkansas, Con-

way, AR USA

8- Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, Professor in Global Thought and Comparative Philosophies and Chair of the Centre for Iranian Studies at the London Middle East Institute, SOAS, University of London

9- Matthew H. Kramer, Professor of Legal and Political Philosophy at the University of Cambridge, Fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge

10- Nader Entessar, Professor Emeritus of Political Science and Criminal Justice, University of South Alabama

11- Hossein Askari, Professor of George Washington University, former executive Board of the International Monetary Fund, former special advisor to the Minister of Finance of Saudi Arabia

12- Dr. Afshin Shahi, Senior Lecturer in Middle East Politics, Division of Peace Studies & International Development, University of Bradford, Associate editor of British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies

13- Stephen Lendman, anti-racist, humanitarian Jewish American analyst, writer and a Research Associate of the Centre for Research on Globalization

14- Yuram Abdullah Weiler, freelance writer and political critic

15- Prof. Kevin Richards, the Chair of Liberal Arts, and the Low-Residency MFA Program Head, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

16- Stuart Sim, Professor of English Literature at Northumbria University (School of Arts & Social Sciences)

17- Scott Davison, Professor of Philosophy, Morehead State University

18- Dr. Dimitris Giannakopoulos, Editor-in-Chief of Modern Diplomacy

19- Douglas Casson, Associate Professor of Political Science, Director of the Great Conversation Program, St Olaf College

20- Lucia Margaret Wagner, student at St. Olaf College

21- Simon Vincent Patmore-Zarcone, student at St. Olaf College

22- Chad Meister, Professor of Philosophy, Bethel College

23- Mohammad Ghaderi, editor-in-chief of the Tehran Times

24- Jalal Heirannia, freelance journalist

25- Javad Heirannia (author of the letter), Expert on Middle East Issues, Head of international desk of the Mehr news agency

Trump's popularity reducing among Republicans

➔ After 304 electors voted for Donald Trump, he cleared the 270-vote hurdle and thus became the President of the United States. Trump is now trying to increase his popularity with those who voted for him in the previous presidential election. But he seems to have failed in this regard.

The President of the United States now faces polls that indicate a strong opposition against him within the Republican Party. The polls results has deeply worried the President of the United States. An overview of a recent poll suggest that Trump's and his administration's concerns over his decreasing popularity among the Republicans' supporters is not without a reason.

The results of the recent NBC polls and the Wall Street Journal, which have been published before the federal government's shutdown, shows that

57% of the participants did not acknowledge the president's performance, including 51% who said that they're « Strongly opposed » to his performance.

In this poll, 78 percent of the Republicans said they approved Trump's performance. However, it seems that even among these 78 percent, there are some people who, while agreeing with his general approach, they refuse to accept him again as the President of the United States. Moreover, even based on this survey, we can conclude that about a quarter of Republican voters have crossed Trump. This alone can turn into the Achilles heel of the U.S. controversial President in the next elections in 2020.

Here it is necessary to emphasize once again that during the U.S. 2016 presidential elections, Trump lost against Democrats according to the popular vote, with a difference of about

3 million. But he was able to reach the top of power by referring to the Electrical College.

Hence, Trump is well aware of his high vulnerability in the next presidential election. Right now there is kind of intense rivalry within the Democratic Party over the next presidential election. Because of the continuing trend in the White House, the possibility of Trump's defeat in the coming election is very high.

Of course, this is if he would be able to finish his first term in office by 2020! Some analysts of the U.S. affairs believe that Trump's government may face some crises that he doesn't have the power to manage, including topics such as the relationship between the President's election Campaign and Russia.

However, polls in the United States show that Trump is severely vulnerable to future presidential elections. Undoubtedly, factors such

as the shutdown of the federal government (which has just occurred) will lead to a further decline in the popularity of the U.S. President.

On the other hand, the Republicans' possible defeat in Congressional elections will also aggravate the activities of the Democrats in the Senate and the House of Representatives between 2018 and 2020, and their activities will be against U.S. government bills.

Under such circumstances, the power of the U.S. President will be limited to Washington. What is certain is that the polls results has uncovered the difficult situation that Trump will face in the next three years.

A situation that he seems to be unable to manage. It's not without a reason that some of Trump's companions during the last year presidential competitions are now disappointed at him as the next American president.

From defense perspective Sahel is not very important for Saudi: Hunter

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Shireen Tahmaasb Hunter, a professor of political science at Georgetown University, tells the Tehran Times that "From a defense perspective the Sahel is not very important for Saudi Regime or the UAE."

Professor Hunter also says that "However, in terms of Saudi claim to the leadership of the Islamic world their cooperation is useful." She also adds that "I don't think competition with Iran is the main objective of Saudi Arabia in trying to endear itself to the Sahel countries."

Following is the text of the interview:
■ Saudi Regime and UAE have pledged to financially back a five-nation coalition force in the Sahel region of West Africa. What are the reasons behind such funding?

A: The financial contribution made by Saudi Arabia and the UAE was mostly to please the French who organized the Summit. Another goal could be to gain the good will of these countries most of which are Muslim. Also Saudi Arabia and the UAE use some of these countries in various coalition they form. The participation of these countries gives the impression Saudi operations such as the one in Yemen have broad support;

■ What is the strategic importance of the Sahel region for Saudi Regime and UAE?

A: From a defense perspective the Sahel is not very important for Saudi Arabia or the UAE. However, in terms of Saudi claim to the leadership of the Islamic world their cooperation is useful.

■ One of the reasons as to why Saudi Regime and UAE joined the initiative is to contain the influence of Iran and Qatar in the Sahel region. Basically what are these countries competing for in the Sahel region?

A: I don't think competition with Iran is the main objective of Saudi Arabia in trying to endear itself to the Sahel countries.

■ Right after that Saudi Regime and UAE joined G5 Sahel force summit in Paris and pledged their support, Qatar's emir visited the region to sign trade and economic deals. How much potential do have the Sahel region to help Qatar get rid of the hardship caused by Saudi Regime and its allies?

A: Most of Sahel countries are very poor and underdeveloped and lack viable armies. Therefore, they cannot be much help to Qatar in its standoff with Saudi Arabia. The visit of emir of Qatar has more symbolic value and is intended to show that Saudi intimidation has not stopped Qatar to pursue its activist foreign policy.

First Announcement

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After Hitler, Saudis next in history to have used hunger as weapon of war: analyst

TEHRAN (FNA) - Political analyst Catherine Shakdam says Saudi Arabia's use of hunger as a weapon of war and unprecedented targeting of civilians are indications to the very nature of Saudi Arabia's intentions in Yemen.

Below you will find the full text of the interview:

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

A: The premise of Saudi Arabia's war on Yemen is based on destruction and chaos. And if Riyadh has tried to rationalize its military aggression by claiming it wants to restore Yemen's legitimate government, the many deaths and unprecedented targeting of civilians clearly prove otherwise.

Saudi Arabia is out to destroy the very idea of Yemen as a sovereign nation so that only its rule would prevail in the region. Just as Al Saud gave its name to the Hijaz, now known as Saudi Arabia, Al Saud wants to claim Yemen to its crown.

It is a pity the international community has stood by Riyadh's war crimes and crimes against humanity. We ought to realize that it was Hitler who last used hunger as a weapon of war. This fact alone should make us pause as to the nature of Saudi Arabia's intentions in Yemen. To think that such actions could be sanctioned by the international community in the name of political pragmatism and religious bigotry is outrageous.

Yemen has committed no crimes that could ever warrant such cruelty. But then again western capitals are not exactly known for abiding to those principles they claim to front: democratic empowerment, human rights and territorial integrity.

What has been done to Yemen is nothing short than a genocide. One wonders how far humanity has fallen when superpowers can justify murdering the innocent in the name of power.

Yemen's war is the very definition of neo-imperialism and neo-conservatism.

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

A: Saudi Arabia may have billions of dollars to throw at the world to buy fancy military technology and mercenaries to its cause, but it does not know how to fight a war. I would go as far as say that Saudi Arabia is not a nation in the sense that we understand it. Saudi Arabia is a land owned and governed by a tribal line whose cruelty has silenced all opposition.

Saudi Arabia was born in the desert of Nejd and has since imposed its violence to the region on the back of religious radicalism.

Saudi Arabia exists in the belief that it is indestructible. It thinks itself mightiest over nation. It is full of its own self-importance and so it believed that Yemen would be an easy prey to its hegemonic hunger. Saudi Arabia never once considered that Yemen was more than the poverty it was suffering under, and that behind such poverty lay a proud and brave people willing to defend their homeland and right to religious freedom with their lives.

Yemen is old. Yemen has a history and a civilization that stretches centuries and millennia. Yemen, Saudi Arabia should have learnt, was never once invaded and conquered by foreign hands. Yemenis never ever once tolerated for their future to be dictated by foreign powers. Yemen was dismissed on account of its poverty. Yemenis were dismissed on account world powers believed them to be ignorant. Yemen proved to be resilient beyond all resilience and Yemenis proved bravest and most patient in the face of adversity. Those are the qualities of a people that cannot be defeated.

Saudi Arabia will never win this war against Yemen. Yemenis have a bravery Saudis cannot fathom, let alone yield. The time of empires is truly over! Arrogance and ignorance led to Al Saud's defeat in Yemen. I believe that Yemen will spell the end of Saudi Arabia as a regional power.

■ Why do the U.S. and the UK continue to supply Saudi Arabia with arms despite international criticism with regard to civilian casualties?

A: Unfettered capitalism. All the U.S. and the UK see in Saudi Arabia is money, a mean to an end.

Both London and Washington could not care less about the millions of children and innocent civilians who stand to die under Riyadh's fire. All those governments comprehend is profit.

Make no mistake the UK and the U.S. are well aware of the heinous crimes being committed against the Yemeni people. Ignorance here is not the issue. It's not like they don't know but really that they don't care. Yemenis do not matter in the face of the billions the U.S. and the UK stand to make from arms sales. Let's not be fooled by those lies state officials love to repeat to the public so they could pretend to have moral and ethic.

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

A: The better question would be "why do we continue to expect the UN to do anything when the UN is clearly under the thumb of war criminals and neocons?" The United Nations is an empty shell of an institution whose purpose today is to serve its wealthy masters - ie: Saudi Arabia.

It is folly to expect the UN to behave against the nature of its leadership. The UN is morally bankrupt. It has been for a long time since it refuses to act on principle to favor political elitism and selectivism.

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

A: Riyadh wants to kill all opposition to its rule and if that means murdering 26 million people then that's what it will do. There is no limits to the atrocities Al Saud are willing to commit, no lines they would not cross, no crimes they will not claim as righteous. Al Saud monarchy will be remembered as one of the most tyrannical and murderous in history. The ferocity of their hatred and violence is beyond human comprehension.

■ Why does Riyadh continue to attack Yemen despite its failures and cash-strapped economy? What do you think about the future of the war?

A: The kingdom wants to win no matter what. Mohammed bin Salman is not exactly a model of rationality. His behavior is erratic at best. Saudi Arabia is being run to the ground by a decrepit elite of princes who are demonstrating clear signs of mental instability. When a mad man is at the wheel why look for logic in his actions?

As far as the war is concerned Yemen has already won. Saudi Arabia will soon face to its crimes and I doubt Yemenis will be kind in their calls for justice.

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Ways your clothes could be killing you

By Anna De Souza

Did you ever suspect that the sweater you're about to pull over your head could give you a cold, a rash, or worse? Here's how to avoid becoming the ultimate fashion victim.

Man-made fabrics like polyester, nylon, rayon, and acrylic are dripping with dyes and chemicals. "These textiles are made with potentially toxic fibers, particularly those designed with fashion or convenience in mind," explains Gabriella Farkas, MD. "Beware of stain resistant, insect-repelling, flame-retardant, water-repellent, waterproof, perspiration-proof, anti-static, anti-cling, and anti-shrink fabrics." Just to name a few.

The more benefits from said apparel, the more you might be putting yourself to toxic chemicals. "Those chemicals may separate from the clothes, set up shop on your skin, and eventually enter your bloodstream," adds Caleb Backe, health and wellness expert for Maple Holistics. This may spur a rash, but it's even more concerning that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has found that some chemicals in workout clothing like Dimethylformamide may be linked to liver damage. Opt for natural fibers, ideally organic, such as cotton, wool, silk, flax, and hemp.

High heels

Pumps and t-strap heels are causing you a lot more than just foot pain and blisters—wearing high heels days can actually lead to a shortened calf. When you slide on high heels day-in and day-out, anatomically the ankle becomes raised and the calf muscles contract. As these muscle fibers stiffen and become thicker, it can lead to discomfort when you've opted for flats. Ultimately, shortened calves may force you to walk on your tippy toes when you're barefoot to avoid pain. Beware of the other horrible things high heels may do to your body, too.

You don't need a Renaissance-style lace corset to trigger poor circulation, swollen legs, and blood clots—all you need are skinny jeans. A woman was cut out of her skinnies and hospitalized for four days after suffering numbness in her feet after squatting as she



Compression garments can crush your organs and prevent your digestive system from working properly. They can even cause blood clots and varicose veins.

helped a relative move. And a study published in the Journal of Neurology Neurosurgery & Psychiatry found that skinny jeans can damage muscle and nerve fibers in the legs. Find out how skinny jeans affect men.

Laundry detergent

Suffering from inexplicable bumps, redness, and rashes? Your laundry routine could be to blame. "Dyes and fragrances in detergent and laundry soaps contain chemicals that clean, deodorize, and disinfect," explains Jeffrey Fromowitz, MD, a board-certified dermatologist. "For people with eczema or extremely sensitive skin, even the slightest contact can trigger a reaction." He recommends avoiding dyes, fragrances, and harsh detergents and opting for liquid products, as they tend to leave fewer residues than powders. Use the "extra rinse" setting on your washing machine and keep your washing machine clean (i.e. lint-, dust-, and mold-free).

What you're not washing

Winter coats, scarves, and gloves that are washed only once per season are teeming with viruses and bacteria that can make you sick. Turns out, you should be washing hats and scarves weekly. Pajamas should be washed daily and neckties that have grazed lunch tables and more should take a tumble every couple of wears, too.

Bulky handbags

When walking with a big, bulky bag, we tend to raise our opposite shoulder to compensate for the weight. According to the Express Tribune, this may throw your sway off-kilter and lead to a collapsed foot arch corresponding to your weighted shoulder and a curved spine. This can ultimately lead to shoulder and neck pain, a trapped nerve, radiating pain into the arms, and carpal tunnel syndrome. Cue in back pain and arthritis as well. Consider switching to a backpack or distributing the weight between both shoulders

evenly. Find out how to downsize your heavy handbag.

Flip flops

Flip flops are the official mascot of summer, but according to Katy Bowman, a biomechanist and author of Simple Steps to Foot Pain Relief, they fall short in a big way. "You have to clench the muscles in your feet the entire time you're wearing them so they don't fall off." This can lead to shortened toe muscles, called hammer toes, and gait and balance changes, and it can affect how your whole body moves. "The 'grip' to keep footwear on makes some toe bones curl up and some down," she adds. "It drives the end of some bones into the ground, creating higher-than-normal pressure which can lead to toe injury over time." That friction can also lead to corns and calluses over time if there's something for the toes to rub on overtop.

Compression garments

Compression around the midsection can be dangerous, too. Enter: Spanx and other smoothing garments. It can cause heartburn, bloating, gas, and nerve compression. What's more, it can crush your organs and prevent your digestive system from working properly. According to a report by HuffPost, it can even cause blood clots and varicose veins. And that's not all: Tight clothing of any sort can also trap moisture on the skin and cause infections and rashes, too.

Wrinkle-free clothing

Need a solid reason to toss that new top in the washer before wearing it to date night? Wrinkle-free clothing may be finished with a layer of formaldehyde, a known carcinogen that is not regulated in the United States. Check out more reasons why you should always wash brand-new clothing before wearing it.

Vintage clothing

What about used clothes whose source is unknown? "Bacteria, parasites, and fungi from a variety of diseases can survive on clothing for extended periods of time," says Dr. Farkas. Substantial heat is typically required to kill off any organisms, and experts recommend tumbling clothing with suspected ticks and other bugs in the dryer for 45 minutes before tossing them into the washer.

(Source: rd.com)

Senior wellness: the best tips for health in spring

After a long and sometimes dark winter, you might feel inspired to make changes to enhance your health. If that is the case, read on to find out how you can rejuvenate your life this spring. Whether you're living in a senior community already, living independently, living with a family member, or caring for one, these spring health tips are worth taking into account.

Take yourself in for a tune up

To keep your body running at peak performance, it needs regular maintenance: a spring tune-up, so to speak. Get your weight, blood pressure, and glucose and cholesterol levels checked out by your primary-care physician, who can also book you for other relevant tests.

In addition, if it's been a year since your eyes were tested, schedule an appointment with your optometrist, and see your dentist if you haven't been examined for at least six to nine months.

Finally, if you are finding it difficult to catch what people are saying, especially in a crowd of people, it's probably time to get your hearing tested.

Put on your walking shoes

If you're no fan of ice and snow, your whole world may expand once the spring sun settles in and thaws out the land. And there's no better way to explore the season than by walking. Health-wise, it's one of the best physical activities for seniors — its considerable benefits include controlling blood sugar, supporting bone and heart health and improving sleep.

Not only that, walking in a park or forest is a great way to connect with nature, and, if you join a walking club or hiking group, it can be an easy way to meet new friends.

Remember to make sure that you choose terrain that is suitable for your current level of activity and balance, and that you wear supportive and comfortable shoes, as these can help reduce the risk of falls.

Take an exercise class

In addition to walking, get your endorphins flowing by signing up for a low-impact aerobics or other type of exercise class. Consider Yoga, Pilates or Tai Chi, all of which can improve balance and flexibility and decrease your chances of falling. Aquafit is another fun and social way to increase physical fitness, one that can be especially suitable if you have arthritis or chronic pain.

Get outside and garden

In springtime, a highlight of many seniors' lives is gardening, which brings a multitude of health benefits. For starters, tending to a garden can boost your level of Vitamin D, which can, in turn, help reduce the risk of bone problems and fractures.

On an emotional level, getting outside and breathing fresh air, listening to birds chirp, and watching worms crawl through the dirt can be as calming and relaxing as an hour



of meditation. On a physical level, digging, planting and weeding can improve strength, flexibility and agility.

Lighten up your diet

Many healthy fruits and veggies, like asparagus, peas, lettuce, and strawberries come into season in the spring, making it the perfect time to replace heavier winter meals with salads, light soups or other lightly cooked fare. In fact, cut down your chances of developing conditions, such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and arthritis, by making a complete dietary overhaul.

Consider cutting down on red meat and processed foods, replacing white flour with whole grain flour, and increasing your intake of produce as well as healthy fats such as olive oil and avocados.

Remember that you should never undertake a new diet or exercise plan without consulting your doctor about what will be safe for your current level of health.

Drink lots of water

As you age, your ability to notice thirst may decrease, so it's important to keep an eye on water intake, especially when you've been exercising outdoors in the sun. Dehydration can adversely affect memory and concentration and increase fatigue; it can also lead to serious complications such as increased risk of falls.

As a rule of thumb, aim for at least eight cups of water per day, and be conscious about the type of fluid that you ingest, choosing water, herbal tea and fresh vegetable juices over coffee, fruit juices or sugary sweet soft drinks.

Dress for the weather

Spring is one of those in-between seasons -- some days are weather-perfect, while others are a little too hot or a little too brisk. When the sun is shining brightly, always wear sunglasses or a wide-brimmed hat to protect yourself from ultraviolet rays that can adversely affect your skin and eyes, while on cooler or windier days, insulate yourself from the cold by topping off your outfit with a sweater or jacket and a scarf.

Watch for allergies

Springtime can mean the beginning of allergies for people who react badly to grass and pollen. Keep an eye on the weather. Many weather reporters and websites now offer allergy predictions as well. Untreated allergies aren't just uncomfortable—they can lead to breathing problems, sinus infections, and colds.

A doctor can recommend or prescribe a good allergy treatment. Taking it regularly can help prevent more serious respiratory problems.

(Source: arborcompany.com)

4 ways exercise helps arthritis

Even the healthiest people can find it hard to stick with an exercise regimen — and if you suffer from the joint pain of arthritis, moving your body may be the last thing you want to think about. But regular exercise not only helps maintain joint function, it also relieves stiffness and reduces pain and fatigue.

If you have arthritis, you want to be sure your exercise routine has these goals in mind:

- A better range of motion (improved joint mobility and flexibility). To increase

your range of motion, move a joint as far as it can go and then try to push a little farther. These exercises can be done any time, even when your joints are painful or swollen, as long as you do them gently.

- Stronger muscles (through resistance training). Fancy equipment isn't needed. You can use your own body weight as resistance to build muscle. For example, this simple exercise can help ease the strain on your knees by strengthening your thigh muscles: Sit in a chair. Now lean forward and

stand up by using only your thigh muscles (use your arms for balance only). Stand a moment, then sit back down, using only your thigh muscles.

- Better endurance. Aerobic exercise — such as walking, swimming, and bicycling — strengthens your heart and lungs and thereby increases endurance and overall health. Stick to activities that don't jar your joints, and avoid high-impact activities such as jogging. If you're having a flare-up of symptoms, wait until it subsides before

doing endurance exercises.

- Better balance. There are simple ways to work on balance. For example, stand with your weight on both feet. Then try lifting one foot while you balance on the other foot for 5 seconds. Repeat on the other side. Over time, work your way up to 30 seconds on each foot. Yoga and tai chi are also good for balance.

Arthritis doesn't have to keep you from enjoying life.

(Source: health.harvard.edu)

Simple ways to spring clean your health



By Linda Melone

Ah, spring. There's something simply magical about the season. Even perpetually peppy birds seem to have a little more cheer in their chirps, and heck, what's not to like about going outside and not being slapped by a wind so cold it makes you wonder what you ever did to make Mother Nature hate you?

But there's nothing that can kill your warm weather-induced buzz faster than the idea of "spring cleaning."

Not to worry, we're not going to tell you to set aside several days for massive home cleaning (good grief, can you imagine?). Instead, we've got a few essentials to help you kick your healthy habits up a notch—from tossing old makeup to deciding to eat local—with nary a cleaning binge in sight.

1. Choose in-season, local produce

Seasonal produce offers more flavor as well as price savings, says Keri Gans, RD, a New York-based nutritionist and author of The Small Change Diet. Local produce supports farmers and also spares the environment by eliminating long-distance delivery systems. And spring is the perfect time to take advantage of your neighborhood's bounty.

2. Schedule screenings and doctor appointments

Plan ahead to keep track of wellness appointments during the year. "There is no test that a woman needs annually if they are of average risk for any of the diseases usually screened," says

In general, plan on a colonoscopy around age 50, a bone mineral density screening after menopause, a PAP test every three years, mammograms every two years, and dental exams every year.

Robert Blackman, MD, an internist with Healthcare Partners Medical Group in Los Angeles. Talk with your doctor for a plan that suits your needs. In general, plan on a colonoscopy around age 50, a bone mineral density screening after menopause, a PAP test every three years, mammograms every two years, and dental exams every year.

3. Venture outside

Walking for exercise benefits your cardiovascular system and burns calories. Take a walk in the woods and you'll also reap the benefits of anti-cancer proteins, according to a study published in the International Journal of Immunopathology Pharmacology. Called "forest bathing," researchers found that walking in the forest lowers blood pressure and stress and boosts the immune system.

4. De-clutter your medicine cabinet

First off, medicine should be stored in a cool, dry cabinet, not in the bathroom, says David Small, RPH, pharmacy manager for Nantucket Cottage Hospital in Massachusetts. The expiration date is your best guidance for the potency of a medicine, but if you're unsure, toss it if it smells bad or looks off-color. "Aspirin smells like vinegar when it gets old," says Small.

5. Go wheat free for a month

If you can't seem to shake those last few winter pounds, try eliminating wheat from your diet. "Cutting wheat helps you avoid the appetite-stimulating property of the wheat's gliadin protein," says William Davis, MD, a preventive cardiologist and author of Wheat Belly. "Plus, you avoid agglutinin that disrupts intestinal health, as well as amylopectin A that's responsible for raising blood sugar." Swap wheat-based products for rice, quinoa, legumes, buckwheat, tapioca, and potatoes.

6. Learn how to de-stress instantly

Resolve to finally learn how to handle your stress this spring. If you can't spare a block of time every day to meditate, squeeze in a few minutes each hour to experience the same benefits, says Heidi Hanna, PhD, author of The Sharp Solution: A Brain-Based Approach for Optimal Performance. Sit in a comfortable position and close your eyes. Focus on pulling the air down into your belly. Breathe in for a count of five, hold the breath for a moment, and then slowly release. Continue for three to five minutes.

7. Allergy-proof your house

Okay, so this one is cleaning-related—but it's definitely worth it. You can help put the kibosh on spring allergies by washing all linens and blankets. Why? The greatest number of dust mites live in the bedroom, according to the American College of Allergy Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI). "All smooth surfaces, including ceiling fan blades and window coverings should be wiped with a cloth," says James Sublett, MD, president-elect of the ACAAI. If you have forced air heating and air conditioning (HVAC), also replace your furnace filters.

9. Replace old workout shoes

Your comfy, worn-out running shoes may do more harm than good. "The general rule of running shoe replacement is every 600 miles of running, i.e., someone running 50 to 60 miles a week should replace their shoes every three months," says Andrew P. Gerken, MD, orthopedic surgeon with Newport Orthopedic Institute in Newport Beach, California. The material, particularly in the heel, wears out with use, and loses its cushioning effect.

10. Organize your in-box

Chances are, the giant stack of junk mail and flyers on your kitchen counter isn't the only mail source gathering dust. If you email in-box looks a bit like an avalanche, here's how to dig out, courtesy of Dmitri Leonov from Sanebox.com, a service that automatically prioritizes and sorts your emails based on importance.

Each morning, flag emails that must be dealt with today, focusing on your top priorities. Dedicate 30-minute blocks every two hours to staying on top of email. During those blocks, make decisions about each message immediately: Respond if it takes less than two minutes, delete, archive, or defer to respond later.

(Source: prevention.com)

Endangered felids in the limelight for World Wildlife Day



The animals and plants that live in the wild have an intrinsic value and contribute to the ecological, genetic, social, economic, scientific, educational, cultural, recreational and aesthetic aspects of human well-being as well as sustainable development.

World Wildlife Day is celebrated in 2018 under the theme “Big cats: predators under threat”.

“On World Wildlife Day, I call on people around the world to help raise awareness and to take personal action to help ensure the survival of the world’s big cats and all its precious and fragile biological diversity,” UN Secretary-General António Guterres has said.

Big cats are among the most widely recognized and admired animals across the globe. However, today these charismatic predators are facing many and varied threats, which are mostly caused by human activities. Overall, their populations are declining at a disturbing rate due to loss of habitat and prey, conflicts with people, poaching and illegal trade. For example, tiger populations plummeted by 95% over the past 100 years and African lion populations dropped by 40% in just 20 years. But a range of measures are underway to arrest this decline.

In an effort to reach as wide an audience as possible, the expanded definition of big cats is being used, which includes not only lion, tiger, leopard and jaguar – the 4 largest wild cats that can roar – but also cheetah, snow leopard, puma, clouded leopard, etc. Big cat species are found in Africa, Asia, and North, Central and South America, representing a virtually global distribution.

Over the past century we have been losing big cats, the planet’s most majestic predators, at an alarming rate. World Wildlife Day 2018 gives us the opportunity to raise awareness about their plight and to galvanize support for the many global and national actions that are underway to save these iconic species.

■ Background

On 20 December 2013, at its 68th session, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) proclaimed 3 March, the day of signature of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), as UN World Wildlife Day to celebrate and raise awareness of the world’s wild animals and plants. The UNGA resolution also designated the CITES Secretariat as the facilitator for the global observance of this special day for wildlife on the UN calendar. World Wildlife Day has now become the most important global annual event dedicated to wildlife.

World Wildlife Day is an opportunity to celebrate the many beautiful and varied forms of wild fauna and flora and to raise awareness of the multitude of benefits that conservation provides to people. At the same time, the Day reminds us of the urgent need to step up the fight against wildlife crime and human induced reduction of species, which have wide-ranging economic, environmental and social impacts. Given these various negative effects, Sustainable Development Goal #15 focuses on halting biodiversity loss.

■ Cheetah



According to National Geographic fastest mammal on land, the cheetah can reach speeds of 60 or perhaps even 70 miles (97 or 113 kilometers) an hour over short distances. It usually chases its prey at only about half that speed, however. After a chase, a cheetah needs half an hour to catch its breath before it can eat.

The cheetah’s excellent eyesight helps it find prey during the day. The cheetah is hard to see because its spotted coat blends with the tall, dry grass of the plains. Suddenly, the cheetah makes a lightning dash. It knocks its prey to the ground and then bites its throat. Once found throughout Asia and Africa, cheetahs today are racing toward extinction. Loss of habitat and declining numbers of their prey combine to threaten the future of these cats. Cheetahs live and hunt mainly in open grasslands and bushy areas in parts of Africa and the Middle East.

■ Tiger



Easily recognized by its coat of reddish-orange with dark stripes, the tiger is the largest wild cat in the world. The big cat’s tail is three feet long. On average the big cat weighs 450 pounds, about the same as eight ten-year-old kids. It stands three feet tall with teeth four inches long and claws as long as house keys.

A female tiger gives birth to a litter of three or four cubs, who she will care for until they are a year-and-a-half old. These cubs quadruple in size during their first month!

The powerful predator generally hunts alone, able to bring down prey such as deer and antelope. Tigers wait until dark to hunt. The tiger sprints to an unsuspecting animal, usually pulling it off its feet with its teeth and claws. If the prey animal is large, the tiger bites its throat to kill it; smaller prey is usually killed when the tiger breaks its neck. Tigers have been known to eat up to 60 pounds of meat in one night, but more often they consume about 12 pounds during a meal. It may take days for a tiger to finish eating its kill. The cat eats until it’s full, and then covers the carcass with leaves and dirt. The tiger comes back to feed some more.

Tigers live far apart from each other. A tiger knows if it is in another tiger’s territory based on the trees around him. Each tiger marks the trees in its area with urine and special scratches.

Unlike most members of the cat family, tigers seem to enjoy water and swim well.

Some tigers live where it gets very cold—in India and parts of southeast Asia. The whole species is endangered throughout its range.

Tigers have been overhunted for their fur as well as for other body parts that many people use in traditional medicines. Tigers’ habitat has also dwindled seriously as humans have developed land for uses such as farming and logging. However, in the Siberian region of Russia, there’s hope that these big cats are making a comeback.

■ Lion



For all of their roaring, growling, and ferociousness, lions are family animals and truly social in their own communities. They usually live in groups of 15 or more animals called prides. Prides can be as small as 3 or as big as 40 animals. In a pride, lions hunt prey, raise cubs, and defend their territory together. In prides the females do most of the hunting and cub rearing. Usually all the lionesses in the pride are related—mothers, daughters, grandmothers, and sisters. Many of the females in the pride give birth at about the same time. A cub may nurse from other females as well as its mother. Each pride generally will have no more than two adult males.

While the females usually live with the pride for life, the males often stay for only two to four years. After that they go off on their own or are evicted by other males who take over the pride. When a new male becomes part of the pride it is not unusual for him to kill all the cubs, ensuring that all future cubs will have his genes. The main job of males in the pride is defending the pride’s territory. A male’s loud roar, usually heard after sunset, can carry for as far as five miles (eight kilometers). The roar warns off intruders and helps round up stray members of the pride.

Hunting generally is done in the dark by the lionesses. They often hunt in groups of two or three, using teamwork to stalk, surround, and kill their prey. Lionesses aren’t the most successful of hunters, because they usually score only one kill out of several tries. After the kill the males usually eat first, lionesses next—and the cubs get what’s left. Males and females fiercely defend against any outside lions that attempt to join their pride.

■ Leopard



This is one cat that doesn’t need any help getting down from a tree. The leopard is so comfortable up there that it often stalks prey and even hauls its kills up into the branches.

Leopards are powerful big cats closely related to lions, tigers, and jaguars. They live in sub-Saharan Africa, northeast Africa, Central Asia, India, and China. However, many of their populations are endangered, especially outside of Africa.

You can identify most leopards by their light color and distinctive dark spots. Those spots are called rosettes, because they resemble the shape of a rose. These patterns camouflage their bodies as they move through the grass and trees. Black leopards, which appear to be almost solid in color because their spots are hard to distinguish, are commonly called black panthers.

Unlike lions, leopards are solitary creatures. Males are almost entirely solitary and females only break their solitude when they are raising cubs. But, like lions, leopards roar. Male leopards defend their territory by roaring and scent marking, while females use their roar to attract mates and call their cubs. A leopard roar is a rough rasp, like a handsaw cutting wood.

Leopard cubs are born with barely visible spots. The mother hides her cubs and moves them from one safe location to the next until they are old enough to begin playing and learning to hunt. When the cubs are about two years old, they live on their own. But the maternal bonds are strong, and offspring sometimes have reunions with their mothers.

■ Jaguar



Jaguars are the largest of South America’s big cats and the third largest cats in the world. Their fur is usually tan or orange with black spots, called “rosettes” because they are shaped like roses. Some jaguars are so dark they don’t seem to have spots. Unlike many other cats, jaguars do not avoid water; in fact, they are quite good swimmers. Rivers provide prey in the form of fish, turtles, or caimans—small, alligator-like animals. Jaguars also eat larger animals such as deer, peccaries, capybaras, and tapirs. They sometimes climb trees to prepare an ambush, killing their prey with one powerful bite.

■ Mountain lion



The mountain lion goes by many names, including cougar, catamount, panther, red tiger, deer tiger, and puma. This cat can be found throughout much of South and North America.

The mountain lion used to be found all over the United States, but now is primarily seen in the western U.S. An endangered subspecies of mountain lion also remains in Florida. These felines are comfortable in many different habitats and, aside from humans, have the widest geographic range of any land mammal in the Western Hemisphere.

In North America, mountain lions eat mainly deer, but they also eat smaller animals, such as mice and rabbits. These cats have a poor sense of smell, but have excellent vision and hearing that help them hunt in the early morning and evening hours. Their powerful hind legs enable them to jump as far as 40 to 45 feet (12 to 13 meters).

This carnivore stalks its prey until an opportunity arises to pounce. Mountain lions “cache” their prey, or hide it under leaves and soil, where they can come back and feed on it over the course of several days.

Mountain lions don’t roar, but females have a loud scream, which is believed to attract males.

Females have an average of two to four cubs per litter and give birth in a den. The cubs are born with spots, which usually disappear by the time they are roughly nine months old. Their eyes also change from blue to yellow by the time they reach 16 months old. By 18 months, the young cats leave their mom to go fend for themselves.

■ Snow leopard



Snow leopards have evolved to live in some of the harshest conditions on Earth. Their white-gray coat spotted with large black rosettes blends in perfectly with the steep and rocky mountains of Central Asia.

The snow leopard’s powerful build allows it to scale great steep slopes with ease. Its hind legs give the snow leopard the ability to leap six times the length of its body. A long tail provides balance and agility and also wraps around the resting snow leopard as protection from the cold.

For millennia, this magnificent cat was the king of the mountains. The mountains were rich with their prey such as blue sheep, Argali wild sheep, ibex, marmots, pikas and hares. Snow leopards are found in 12 countries—including China, Bhutan, Nepal, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Russia, and Mongolia—but their population is dropping.

(Sources: UN, National Geographic, World Wide Fund for Nature)

Scientists converting CO₂ into usable energy

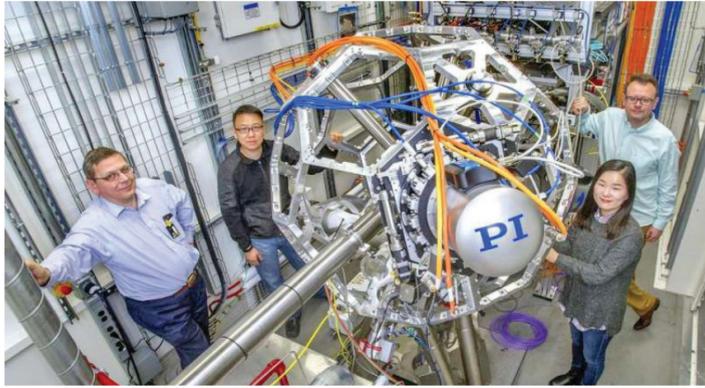
Imagine if carbon dioxide (CO₂) could easily be converted into usable energy. Every time you breathe or drive a motor vehicle, you would produce a key ingredient for generating fuels. Like photosynthesis in plants, we could turn CO₂ into molecules that are essential for day-to-day life. Now, scientists are one step closer.

Researchers at the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Brookhaven National Laboratory are part of a scientific collaboration that has identified a new electrocatalyst that efficiently converts CO₂ to carbon monoxide (CO), a highly energetic molecule. Their findings were published on Feb. 1 in *Energy & Environmental Science*.

"There are many ways to use CO," said Eli Stavitski, a scientist at Brookhaven and an author on the paper. "You can react it with water to produce energy-rich hydrogen gas, or with hydrogen to produce useful chemicals, such as hydrocarbons or alcohols. If there were a sustainable, cost-efficient route to transform CO₂ to CO, it would benefit society greatly."

Energy-rich hydrogen gas

Scientists have long sought a way to convert CO₂ to CO, but traditional electrocatalysts cannot effectively initiate the reaction. That's because a competing reaction, called the hydrogen evolution reaction (HER) or



"water splitting," takes precedence over the CO₂ conversion reaction.

A few noble metals, such as gold and platinum, can avoid HER and convert CO₂ to CO; however, these metals are relatively

rare and too expensive to serve as cost-efficient catalysts. So, to convert CO₂ to CO in a cost-effective way, scientists used an entirely new form of catalyst. Instead of noble metal nanoparticles, they used single atoms of nickel.

Scientists have long sought a way to convert CO₂ to CO, but traditional electrocatalysts cannot effectively initiate the reaction.

"Nickel metal, in bulk, has rarely been selected as a promising candidate for converting CO₂ to CO," said Haotian Wang, a Rowland Fellow at Harvard University and the corresponding author on the paper. "One reason is that it performs HER very well, and brings down the CO₂ reduction selectivity dramatically. Another reason is because its surface can be easily poisoned by CO molecules if any are produced."

Single atoms of nickel, however, produce a different result.

Single atoms

"Single atoms prefer to produce CO, rather than performing the competing HER, because the surface of a bulk metal is very different from individual atoms," Stavitski said.

Klaus Attenkofer, also a Brookhaven scientist and a co-author on the paper, added, "the surface of a metal has one energy potential -- it is uniform. Whereas on a single atom, every place on the surface has a different kind of energy."

In addition to the unique energetic properties of single atoms, the CO₂ conversion reaction was facilitated by the interaction of the nickel atoms with a surrounding sheet of graphene. Anchoring the atoms to graphene enabled the scientists to tune the catalyst and suppress HER.

(Source: eurekaalert.org)

LEGO ditches oil-based plastics for some of its toys, will use plants instead

LEGO's plastic superheroes, astronauts, knights, and ninjas are, like most such materials, primarily made from oil. Legos have been made this way for nearly 70 years. But the toy company now wants to wean itself from petroleum and produce its famous toys with plants instead — specifically tropically-grown sugarcane.

On Thursday, the company announced it will begin producing its softer LEGOs — like its little trees and bushes — from sugarcane-sourced plastics.

"It sounds high-falutin, but it's our belief that we owe it to children not to damage their planet by making their favorite toy," said Tim Brooks, LEGO's vice president of environmental responsibility and sustainable materials Center, in an interview.

LEGO has started purchasing sugarcane from Brazil — but Brooks said the company ensured it's being grown on

agricultural land, "so we're not chopping down rainforest to grow the crop." The sugarcane sourcing also got a thumbs up from the Bioplastic Feedstock Alliance, which provides guidance on sustainably grown sugarcane.

LEGO is using sugarcane to produce a specific, softer type of plastic, called polyethylene, for its plants and bushes. By the end of 2018, Brooks said that any LEGO box you buy will have sugarcane-sourced LEGO "botanicals."

Oil-based ABS plastics

Brooks recognizes that this is just a start, as polyethylene is only used in one to two percent of LEGO's total products. Most LEGOs — the famous blocks — use ABS plastics, which are hard, durable, and oil-based.

But LEGO hopes to make most of its "core products" from more sustainable sources, like plants, by 2030.

Stephen Mayfield, a molecular biologist at UC San Diego

and director of the California Center for Algae Biotechnology, said the company's move is a step in the right direction. "You'll find haters, but it's way better than petroleum — so these people should be applauded for doing this," Mayfield said of sugarcane-based plastics. He has no affiliation with LEGO.

Switching from oil-based to plant-based plastics dramatically cuts the carbon footprint of a product by around 70 percent, Mayfield said.

The "more we can go to biological sources, the better it is," he said.

Additionally, Brazilian sugarcane is often boiled and processed using leftover plant matter — as opposed to using fossil fuels (like in the United States) to separate the plastic materials — said Mayfield.

The "carbon footprint on that is pretty dang good," he said.

(Source: Mashable)

Survey suggests group of Milky Way stars are homegrown, not alien invaders

New analysis suggests a group of Milky Way stars among the galaxy's halo actually began life within the central disk.

Like our sun, the majority of the Milky Way's stars are located within the galaxy's central disk. A comparatively smaller portion of stars can be found distributed throughout the galaxy's outer halo.

The star aren't scattered randomly, however. Many of them can be organized into large-scale structures — structures astronomers believe hold clues to the Milky Way's violent past. Scientists believe at least some of these stellar structures are the remnants of smaller galaxies that have collided with and were absorbed by the Milky Way.

Chemical composition

By surveying the chemical composition of the stars found in the Milky Way's halo, astronomers can gain a better understanding of their past.

As part of the latest study, astronomers analyzed the properties of 14 stars located within two stellar structures, Triangulum-Andromeda and the A13 stellar overdensities. Though the two structures are positioned on opposite sides of the galactic plane, previous studies suggest they're kinematically linked and may be related to the Monoceros Ring, a halo structure encircling the entire Milky Way.

Astronomers analyzed the chemical

makeup of the two stellar structures using the spectral instruments of the Keck and VLT telescopes.

The "analysis of chemical abundances is a very powerful test, which allows, in a way similar to the DNA matching, to identify the parent population of the star," Maria Bergemann, researcher at the Max Planck Institute for Astronomy in Heidelberg, Germany, said in a news release. "Different parent populations, such as the Milky Way disk or halo, dwarf satellite galaxies or globular clusters, are known to have radically different chemical compositions. So once we know what the stars are made of, we can immediately link them to their parent populations."

Milky Way's inner disk

The results — published in the journal *Nature* — showed the stars from Tri-And and A13 are related to parent populations from the Milky Way's thin inner disk.

"We showed that it may be fairly common for groups of stars in the disk to be relocated to more distant realms within the Milky Way — having been 'kicked out' by an invading satellite galaxy. Similar chemical patterns may also be found in other galaxies — indicating a potential galactic universality of this dynamic process," said study co-author Allyson Sheffield, an associate professor of physics at LaGuardia Community College.

(Source: inforsurhoy.com)

Scientists trying to save our oceans

Every other breath we take comes from our oceans and our oceans are dying. Climate change is warming their waters, leading to a disruption in migration patterns and increasing acidification.

Overfishing is irreversibly altering marine ecosystems, with an estimated 60 to 90 percent of oceanic predators like tuna and swordfish already gone. Forecasts predict we may lose 90 percent of our glorious coral reefs by 2050, along with the vital nursery grounds and coastal protections they provide.

And 8 million tons of plastic enter our seas every single year, allowing harmful chemicals into our food chains.

Like many other environmentalists, I believe it's possible to prevent further damage to the world's oceans, which we must do to protect our future.

Unfolding catastrophe

But it is no longer enough to simply shout from the rooftops about this unfolding catastrophe; after almost 20 years of ocean advocacy work, my voice is sore. As governments convene throughout 2018 and beyond to discuss new and necessary ocean laws, we must give equal consideration to the perspectives of women.

Our oceans cover more than 70 percent of



the Earth's surface, yet throughout human history, legislation has focused almost entirely on the other 30 percent. For centuries, governments have drawn borders, written rules of conduct, signed treaties, enforced regulations and set laws for the land that covers less than one-third of the planet.

Fraction of the ocean

Eventually, rules were also written for sovereign waters areas we now call "exclusive economic zones," but these apply to only a fraction of the ocean. Most of the ocean 64 percent is what is known as the "high seas." This vast area does not belong to any one

nation, and rules and regulations that aim to protect and sustain life (whether human or marine) are scant in this oceanic version of the Wild West. And the treaties and regulatory bodies that do exist for the high seas, such as the International Seabed Authority and Regional Fisheries Management Organizations, don't provide comprehensive oversight or protection.

Generally speaking, ocean law was a latecomer to the international scene; the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) only came into effect in 1994. UNCLOS technically covers both sovereign waters and the high seas, but until now, little attention has been given to the latter. It's incredible to me that, after centuries of seafaring, trade, fishing and exploring, these laws came into effect just as I was dreaming of one day becoming an ocean explorer myself.

The push to achieve gender equality has accelerated only in recent years, so it is not surprising the original UNCLOS negotiations and related legal instruments did not include a conscious effort to incorporate women's perspectives or take into account the practical needs of women working in the maritime domain.

(Source: HuffPost)

Iran's BMI and Spain's Ares Bank to Develop and Expand Banking Ties

Chief Executive and Chairman of the Board of Directors of Bank Melli Iran GholamReza Panahi met and held talks with Luis Casado, Managing Director of Ares Bank of Spain for expanding and developing banking cooperation, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

The managing director of Ares Bank of Spain announced on Tuesday the readiness of this bank for issuing a credit line of short-term finance between Iran and Spain.

Luis Casado, Managing Director of Ares Bank of Spain announced the readiness of this bank for issuing a credit line of short-term finance with the value of 100 million

euros to Iran.

In this bilateral meeting, Panahi pointed to the high capability and potential of Bank Melli Iran in offering quality services to both Iranian and Spanish merchants and said, "suitable grounds have been paved for broadening and enhancing bilateral cooperation between the two countries in the relevant field."

He placed special emphasis on receiving short and long-term loans, transaction of currency and also exchange guarantee letters.

For his part, the Spanish CEO of Ares Bank appreciated

the brokerage ties between the two banks and termed the volume of transaction activity between Bank Melli Iran and Ares Bank of Spain "positive and constructive".

The Spanish banker made the remarks on Tuesday during a meeting with Ali Salehabadi, the CEO of the Export Development Bank of Iran, to create an atmosphere of cooperation and expansion of business interactions with Iran's Export Development Bank.

He has traveled to Iran with the commercial director of Aras Bank of Spain to develop banking relationships between Spaniard and Iranian banks.

Massive solar flares diminish chance of finding life on Proxima Centauri

The discovery of an Earth-like planet orbiting Proxima Centauri back in August 2016 was an exciting moment for astronomers and space exploration enthusiasts alike. Not only was the planet nearly the same size as Earth (1.3x larger), it also existed within the narrow habitable range of its host star. Unfortunately, a recently detected massive X-ray flare suggests Proxima Centauri b is almost certainly devoid of any life.

Proxima Centauri is a red dwarf star, compared with Alpha Centauri A (classified as G2V, the same as our own sun) and Alpha Centauri B (classified as K1V, a cooler, smaller star). This system, visible below as a single star, is referred to as Centauri AB.

Red dwarfs are some of the oldest and most stable stars; Proxima Centauri is expected to remain a main sequence star for the next 4 trillion years. The three stars form a trinary star system, with Proxima Centauri far removed from its distant cousins.

Unlike Alpha Centauri A or B, Proxima Centauri is known to be a flare star, a type of star that can undergo a tremendous shift in luminosity driven by magnetic activity. When this happens, the X-ray output of Proxima Centauri can match that of the sun. That matters for Proxima Centauri b (the aforementioned planet), because it orbits its host star at just 0.05 AU and has a year just 11.2 days long.

A new astronomical survey of data collected on Proxima Centauri from January 21 through April 25 showed that the star flared on March 24 for a full minute, reaching a brightness 1000x higher than is typical.

(Source: extremetech.com)

Dolphins plan their hunting dives ahead of time, new study finds

Recordings of the sound that dolphins make when hunting for their prey revealed that the cetaceans learn from past dives and plan their next dives. Other air-breathing marine animals may also have a similar ability.



One of the challenges that dolphins face when hunting for food is that they need oxygen from the air. This means that they can drown if they dive too deep when hunting for their prey.

Findings of a new study have revealed that these intelligent marine animals, known for their excellent memory and have recently been found to give sponge gifts to their potential mates, use oxygen wisely to survive. One way they do this is by carefully planning their hunting dives.

In the study Patricia Arranz of the University of La Laguna in Spain and colleagues revealed that the cetaceans use information from previous dives to predict where they can get their food.

The researchers recorded the locations and vocalizations of 37 Risso's dolphins as the creatures swam and hunted for food.

Small recorders attached to the animals recorded the sound that the dolphins make when they are hunting. Researchers call these buzzes. Arranz explained that these sounds are faster, lower-intensity click sequences that the cetaceans make while attempting to capture a prey.

To find out if the dolphins were planning their dives, the researchers analyzed recordings from 37 dolphin dives while tracking the location of the squid prey.

The researchers also discovered that after the dolphins found success hunting at a particular depth as indicated by their buzzing sounds, the marine animals adjusted the frequency and the echolocation of their clicks to focus on that particular depth during future dives.

(Source: Tech Times)

Termites are now considered cockroaches, researchers say

The Entomological Society of America recently updated its list of insect names and reclassified termites as Blattodea, or cockroaches, in everyday terms.

"It's official that termites no longer have their own order," Entomologist Mike Merchant who serves on the organization's naming committee told Science News. Every species of termite has been recategorized.

Entomologist Gil Bloom, president of Standard Pest Management in New York, likened it to another reclassification that everyone is familiar with.

"It's like Pluto, you know. The planet that was," he told Newsweek. Although this change might surprise the average person, it likely won't cause shock or uproar among experts in the bug community who have been expecting this. In 2007, a paper published in the journal *Biology Letters* used genetic evidence to assert that termites were simply social cockroaches and weren't deserving of their own order.

Bloom explains the bugs have many differences when it comes to roach and termite species.

"If you're looking at it taxonomically they're similar," he said of the classification.

But Bloom clarifies that termites are highly developed social insects and roaches prefer the pleasure of their own company. The latter might mingle by sharing harborage sites; after all, they want to be near food, shelter and water. But typically they fly solo. The methods used to treat infestations for both types of bugs also vary.

Despite any differences these pests from another mother share, they do have one very strong commonality: No one wants to see either in their homes.

(Source: Newsweek)

'Cleanest in history' diesel cars still pollute above current legal limits

Over half of diesel cars recently approved for sale in Europe are emitting pollutants far above current legal air pollution limits, despite being marketed as the "cleanest in history".

Analysis of emissions data from nearly 100 car models revealed many vehicles from the new "Euro 6" generation would not be allowed on the market if they were tested today.

An investigation by Greenpeace found dozens of these high-polluting vehicles were approved for sale during a "monitoring period" in which there was no limit set on the amount of nitrogen oxide (NOx) they could emit on roads.



Many of these vehicles have only gone on sale across Europe in the recent months.

The news comes after a German court ruled cities can impose driving bans on certain diesel cars in an effort to deal with the country's air pollution.

Such restrictions on diesel cars – including the clean air zones found in London and other UK cities – tend to focus on older, dirtier car models.

However, Greenpeace campaigners emphasized that while newer Euro 6 models are described as "light years away from their older counterparts" many of them still have the capacity to emit high levels of pollutants.

Following the so-called "dieselgate" scandal in 2015, which found Volkswagen had installed "cheat software" in its vehicles to fool lab emissions tests, there was a widespread push for tough new regulations.

In the aftermath of the scandal, testing revealed diesel cars that met the latest "Euro 6" limits for NOx emissions in lab tests were massively exceeding those limits when driving on the road.

As a result, the EU brought in the real driving emissions (RDE) test to assess how cars performed in real traffic conditions.

Despite the introduction of these tests in April 2016, no NOx limit was put in place for them until September 2017.

This meant that, for over a year, new car models being approved for the market did not have to meet any not-to-exceed limits for NOx emissions when driving on the road.

During this period, major car manufacturers had dozens of new models approved for sale in the EU.

Though these new models were subjected to the new RDE testing, the results of their tests were not taken into consideration. Instead, cars were approved for sale on the basis of the lab tests that had been discredited following the emissions scandal.

Greenpeace's investigative platform Unearthed gained access to the data from the RDE tests of 94 of these new models, covering cars produced by Europe's 20 most popular brands.

They found more than half the vehicles tested exceeded the RDE emissions limit that came into force in September 2017, meaning if they were tested today they would not be allowed on the market.

"Carmakers, backed by the industry lobby, are yet again knowingly misleading their customers and the public at large by marketing new Euro 6 diesels as the 'cleanest in history'," said Greenpeace clean air campaigner Paul Morozzo.

(Source: Independent)

LEARN ENGLISH

Sports-Related Injuries

Grace: What happened to you?!

Paul: I had a little accident at the game today.

Grace: Little accident?! You're **limping** and obviously in pain!

Paul: I just **pulled a muscle** in my back and **aggravated** my **runner's knee**, that's all. It's nothing to worry about.

Grace: And you're still recovering from the **sprained** ankle, **concussion**, and neck **strain** from three weeks ago. Don't you think you should sit out of the game for the next few weeks?

Paul: I might have to, but these aren't serious injuries. They're just part of playing sports.

Grace: I hate to bring this up again, but you're not a 20-year-old anymore. Maybe your **ligaments**, **tendons**, and **joints** aren't what they used to be.

Paul: Don't start with me. I'm **in the prime of my life** and in perfect physical condition. Don't try to tell me I'm over the hill just because I get an injury or two now and then.

Grace: I'm not saying you're **over the hill**. I just worry that you can't sit, stand, or lie down comfortably.

Paul: Who says I can't...ow!

Key vocabulary

limp: to walk slowly and with difficulty because one leg is hurt or injured

pull a muscle: injure a muscle

aggravate: to make a bad situation, an illness, or an injury worse

runner's knee: a term doctors use for a number of specific conditions affecting the knee

sprain: to damage a joint in your body by suddenly twisting it

concussion: a small amount of damage to the brain that makes you lose consciousness or feel sick for a short time, usually caused by something hitting your head

strain: an injury to a muscle or part of your body that is caused by using it too much

ligament: a band of strong material in your body, similar to muscle, that joins bones or holds an organ in its place

tendon: a thick strong string-like part of your body that connects a muscle to a bone

joint: a part of your body that can bend because two bones meet there

in the prime of life: the time in your life when you are strongest and most active

over the hill: no longer young, and therefore no longer attractive or good at doing things

(Source: eslpod.com)

Europeans following Austria in doing green projects in Iran: envoy

And highly respected Vice President of Iran for Women and Family Affairs, Ms. Masoumeh Ebtekar in her previous capacity as head of the Department of Environment paid a bilateral visit to Austria in September 2016 which was very successful and also widely reported in Austrian media.

Given this successful start we would like to expand the focus of our cooperation and include air pollution, climate change and environmental technologies.

And as Iran and Austria this year are celebrating 160 years of full diplomatic relations, we have planned a key event together with Vice President for Tourism Mohammad Moheb-Khodaie commemorating the first documented Austrian ascent of Mount Damavand. We are expecting mountaineers from Austria and a few other European countries. The vice president himself offered to our delight to act as team leader for our expeditionary ascent. The 10-day program will start on July 22 and help promote Iran's strategy of using sustainable tourism as a tool for local socio-economic development.

Are there any ongoing joint environmental projects, not just the ones written on the paper, between Iran and Austria especially in the field of clean energy?

Since you very rightly pointed out, many MOUs have been signed. One ambassador recently said that Europeans have inked a mountain of MOUs but only signed a handful of concrete contracts and we were able to implement a few lighthouse projects using innovative financing approaches.

Austria's KPV Solar GmbH last year connected its first Iranian solar power station to the network. The 1.2 MW plant in Rafsanjan, Kerman province, was planned and installed within six months, and announced plans to build further 6 solar parks with 10 MW each in the industrial zone within the next 12 months and finally upgrade them to 100MW.

KPV Solar has created a joint venture with their Iranian company daughter with Kerman-based EPC. This model has already been replicated by companies from two other European countries. And I would like to underline that the investment was completely equity financed, so there is a business case.

KPV Solar expects a return on invest within four to five years. This early return on investment is outstanding for international standards, signifying that this is really money not only well-spent but also well-invested.

The second example is the Austrian Composting specialist Comtech. They signed an MOU which is near to contract signing. The purpose of composting is to decompose organic substances as efficiently as possible and to convert them into a stable, plant-friendly, high-quality humus product in a controlled rotting process that is as efficient, short and low-emission as possible. This is something that Iran urgently needs for its parks and also for regenerating the environment.

The governor general of Khorasan Razavi mentioned this project as a possible flagship project for his province. We agreed to lead a specialized trade mission later this year to Khorasan on water security.

A third project I would like to briefly mention is in the petrochemical sector. There are ongoing talks in the area of gas storage and with the Austrian oil company OMV which has one of the highest recovery rates in the world achieving up to 95 percent and at the same time using extremely environmentally friendly extraction and drilling techniques, developed in Austria. In Iran there is an undisputed demand for improving the efficiency of oil extraction and to redevelop already used oil fields and to revive and restore the environment around plugged oil wells.

And finally, 128 new dams will be completed during the second administration of President Rouhani, many of the existing dams are using turbines from Austria. Austria's electricity set up in 2017 showed that 91.8 percent of the electricity is generated by renewables and out of these 56 percent are produced by hydroelectric power plants. These are the four areas we are involved in and we hope that many more will follow.

Mr. Ruppachter delivered a speech in the opening session of the 15th International Environment Exhibition in 2016 and some Austrian companies attended the event as well. Are Austrian companies planning to attend Iran's 17th International Environment Exhibition in February?

Excellent research, yes Minister Ruppachter addressed the IEE on 29.2.2016.

This year unfortunately we will not have an Austrian participation – but the Commercial Section of the embassy is planning a thematic focus on water security for autumn 2018. The idea is to merge the participation in the Water Exhibition Tehran by showcasing Austrian water management



Often, not excluding my own country, ministries have reverted to silo thinking and we believe that this approach needs to be overcome as it is the source of many problems that we are facing today. Policy planning has to go hand in hand with the use of technology that has been tested and is available.

expertise and taking this road show also to Mashhad.

The Energy Globe Award, founded by the Austrian energy pioneer Wolfgang Neumann and is one of today's most prestigious environmental awards. Less than a month ago Iran won Energy Globe World Awards 2017 in the category of water. Also some Iranian organizations won awards due to adoption of sustainability approaches in their projects and organizations. How does winning such awards help other countries, especially developing countries, to move towards sustainability?

Environmental awards in general are good incentives. Frontrunners get higher attention and are awarded for their activities, projects, products, etc. This can contribute to competition as others might want to become frontrunners as well. It also helps to communicate that environmental protection goes hand in hand with innovation and

with advantages for the economy.

The Energy Globe brings recognition and it demonstrate the companies that are on the right track. We saw the joy in the faces of the prize winners and the publicity for their companies. Finally, there is the aspect of networking amongst early movers and piers and the possibility to exchange information and knowhow.

Iran is facing serious water shortage due to repeated droughts. However, part of the problem is related to the old irrigation system and mismanagement. In view of these facts, what steps have been taken by the European Union in general and Austria in particular to help Iran cope with the problem?

At this stage I can only speak for Austria. Austria is one of the three countries in Europe with water surplus. Water is a thematic focus for Austrian development cooperation in Africa. We have previously

managed to hook up one million people in Uganda to tap water. This is a technology that is available and not rocket science but it requires a thorough understanding of integrated water management systems.

What provider countries had to learn the hard way is that we cannot force countries to adopt water saving policies. The first step lies with Iranians themselves to collectively acknowledge the looming problem. The Government already is a step further and has started implementing the nexus approach in its planning and programming.

The nexus is a very new concept in international environmental policies that all actions in the area of water, energy and land, have impact on one or the two areas.

Often, not excluding my own country, ministries have reverted to silo thinking and we believe that this approach needs to be overcome as it is the source of many problems that we are facing today. Policy planning has to go hand in hand with the use of technology that has been tested and is available. Austria has many examples that demonstrate that damaged environment can be ecologically resorted if the conditions are right. It is possible today, this is the good part of the answer.

The next step in Iran would be to separate process water from drinking water and to recover used water from industry. It is up to Iranians to improve the situation; we will support them with best practices and technology and stand ready to help Iran to resolve problem.

The Iranian ministries in charge have convinced me that on the planning side the necessary measures have been put in place, but we jointly now have to bridge the gap between good ideas, rules and regulations and their actual implementation.

During the EXPO Milano three years ago every country was given a small block of land to build their national pavilion. So what did Austria do? The central element was a dense Austrian forest that was brought together with technical elements in order to create a breathing microclimate. With this oxygen- and carbon-producing core, the pavilion became an "air generating station" – and the only building on the entire EXPO site to withstand the hot Milanese summer without conventional air conditioning. For the project designers, such combinations of natural and technological systems initiated a clear paradigm shift in the future.

It gave hope. I used the opportunity to organize a meeting with planning ministers from 15 West African countries and they were excited that Austria used the EXPO to demonstrate tested and proven technologies to reverse land degradation, provided that the political will is there.



N.I.O.C
1396.5633



National Iranian
Drilling Company

Public Call Of Tender

One-Stage

TENDER GUARANTEE		ESTIMATED VALUE (Rial)	Subject of Tender	Tenders Portal Reg. No.	TENDER NO. / INDENT NO	No
Euro	Rial					
2,604	120,000,000	2,229,945,600	P/F "MALBRANQUE" SAFETY GATE VALVE	3,154,087	Tender No.:FP/20-96/039 Indent No.: 08-22-9645019	1

Brief description of subject:
National Iranian Drilling Company(NIDC) address pasdaran Blev., Airport Saqare, Ahwaz, Iran hereby intends to purchase its requirements from qualified and interested tenderers through one-stage public tender upon following **terms and conditions**:

A) Competence of tenderers:
The tenderers should not have legal restrictive to participation governmental to tenderers , also they should provide statute or business license related to subject of the tender.

B) Preparation of tender documents:
Purchasing of documents:
In order to receive the tender documents, **510,000 Rials** should be paid to SIBA account number 2174652205004 of NIDC in Bank Meli Iran and providing the original deposit receipt.

Receiving of documents:
Tenderers must obtain the tender documents maximum ten days after the date of second publication till 17-April-2018, in person at the following address: Hall No.:113, 1thfloor, Foreign Procurement Dept., National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN
Notice: Only the real or legal persons who apply to purchase and receive tender documents from foreign procurement department in due date and participates in tenderwill be known as tenderer from tender committee.

C) Delivery of bids envelopes:
Tenderers shall submit simultaneously envelopes of bids including (A) Tender bank guarantee, (B) stamped and signed of tender documents, (C) The priced signed and stamped of the same Technical-Commercial sheets maximum till 14March2018 to the following address: Hall No.:107, 1thfloor ,Tender Committee, Building operations, National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN.

Notice: The deadline for the refusal of bidders participation in the the tender is the last day of determined for submission of bids.

D) The envelopes will be opened at 9:00 On 18-April-2018

E) Tender Guarantee:
Type of guarantee:
A)Bank guarantees or guarantees issued by non-bank institutions that have activities licensed by the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
B) The original cash deposit receipt paid to National Iranain Drilling Company.

Duration of credit guarantee & quotation:
This duration should be valid for 90 days and extendable maximum For one time in initial credit amount.

More on this & other tenders is accessible by click on. WWW.NIDC.IR

Foreign Procurement Dept
National Iranian Drilling Company

تهران تایمز : نوبت اول ۹۶/۱۲/۱۲ نوبت دوم ۹۶/۱۲/۱۳

Putin unveils new nuclear weapons systems

Russia postpones strategic talks with U.S. in act of protest

➔ Russia and the West are at odds in several conflicts - including Syria, where Russia supports President Bashar al-Assad - and Ukraine.

Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 following an invasion that resulted from the popular overthrow of the pro-Kremlin government in Kiev.

Russia-backed rebels continue fighting Ukrainian forces in the country's east. The United States and its allies have responded with punishing sanctions.

"They have not succeeded in holding Russia back," Putin said, referring to the West. "Now they need to take account of a new reality and understand that everything I have said today is not a bluff."

The remarks came shortly before a national election on March 18, which Putin is expected to win.

U.S. toughens nuclear posture

The U.S. has also taken a more aggressive stance on nuclear weapons under President Donald Trump. The Trump administration has called for increased spending to modernize its nuclear arsenal.

The National Nuclear Security Administration, which oversees the U.S. nuclear weapons program, recently announced plans to resume production of plutonium pits, a necessary component of nuclear weapons.

The U.S. also began work on smaller nuclear weapons under former President Barack Obama. Critics of these smaller nukes say their smaller payloads might make them more tempting to use.

Putin expressed concern over the U.S.



new posture towards nuclear arms, saying the Russian nuclear program was only for defensive purposes.

"We will view any use of nuclear weapons against Russia or its allies - be it of small, medium or any force - as a nuclear attack on our country," Putin said.

Meanwhile, Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu suggested elements of NATO's anti-missile system deployed in Poland, Romania, and Alaska were penetrable.

"It turns out that the anti-missile umbrella has holes in it," Interfax news agency quoted Shoigu as saying on Thursday.

Shoigu also said NATO countries were trying to drag Russia into a new arms race, but its new nuclear weapons would help to avoid this scenario.

The Pentagon downplayed Russia's announcements, saying Moscow's weaponry was long under development and had already been factored into U.S. assessments.

"We're not surprised by the statements and the American people should rest assured that we are fully prepared," said Pentagon spokeswoman Dana White.

Strategic talks

Meanwhile, Moscow has postponed

planned talks with Washington on strategic stability originally set for later this month, after a U.S. delegation refused to attend a Geneva meeting on cybersecurity earlier in the week, Russian envoy to Washington has announced.

Ambassador Anatoly Antonov told Russian TASS news agency on Thursday that the last-minute pullout from talks in Geneva by the U.S. delegation on February 27 reflected an "unfriendly step... that gave the impression of having been pre-planned and leading to the further degradation of bilateral relations."

"We have expressed indignation to the Department of State that the American side has wrecked Russian-American expert consultations on global information security," Antonov said, noting that Moscow and Washington had agreed to hold the talks in Geneva on February 27-28.

However, he insisted, "The Americans refused to participate in the event just on its first day under the pretext of absolutely ungrounded accusations against Russia."

"As a result of those U.S. actions, the Russian side has found it impossible to hold Russian-American consultations on bilateral issues and strategic stability topics planned for March 6-7 in Vienna, which is why we have postponed them," Antonov said.

The development came after the U.S. accused long-time rival Russia of openly breaching Cold War-era treaties by developing what President Vladimir Putin referred to on Thursday as a new generation of "invincible" hypersonic weapons and submarines.

(Source: agencies)

Police question Netanyahu over third corruption case



Israeli police questioned Benjamin Netanyahu and his wife on Friday as part of a corruption investigation involving the country's largest telecom firm, local media reported, the third such scandal to engulf the prime minister.

Known as Case 4000, the investigation centres around allegations that the owners of Bezeq Israel Telecom provided positive coverage of the Netanyahus on a news website in return for regulatory changes worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

Bezeq has denied wrongdoing, and Netanyahu has not been named as suspect in the case. Police confirmed the Netanyahus had been questioned for several hours as part of an investigation, but did not specify which one.

Channel 10 TV showed footage on Friday of police entering Netanyahu's residence in Jerusalem. His wife, Sara, was being questioned at the same time in Tel Aviv, according to her lawyer.

The reports throw a cloud above Netanyahu's planned visit to Washington next week, where he will meet Donald Trump and give a speech to the pro-Israel lobby Aipac.

Pressure has been piling on the 68-year-old leader, whose rightwing politics have dominated Israel for a generation. Last month, police recommended Israel's attorney general indict him in two separate bribery investigations, one of which also relates to gifts in exchange for favorable media reports.

That development, along with the arrest of high-level members of his inner circle, poses a serious threat to the country's second-longest serving prime minister, who has held office for four terms.

Netanyahu, who also headed the communications portfolio until last year, has vehemently denied allegations of corruption and accuses the media of leading a witch-hunt against him.

Case 1000, also known as the "gifts affair", involves claims that he and his family received about £200,000 worth of gifts from international billionaires, including expensive cigars, pink champagne and jewellery for his wife. Alleged wealthy benefactors include the Hollywood producer and media magnate Arnon Milchan and the Australian businessman James Packer.

(Source: The Guardian)

Pentagon deploys hundreds of U.S. troops in southeastern Syria



The Pentagon has reportedly deployed hundreds of American troopers in southeastern Syria on the border with Iraq as the United States is virtually occupying tens of kilometers there without the consent of the Syrian government.

Turkish-language daily Yeni Akit reported that 600 troops, including special forces soldiers, have arrived at al-Tanf garrison, which was established two years ago.

The Arabic-language Palmyra Monitor news website, which is sympathetic to foreign-sponsored Takfiri militant groups, also wrote that units of U.S. soldiers have reached the base with armored vehicles over the past few days.

The reports come as an official from Russia's Security Council told Ria Novosti news agency that the United States has set up around 20 military bases in areas controlled by Kurdish militants it supports in northern Syria.

"The return of peace and stability to Syria is hampered by continued external interference in the Syrian crisis. For example, in the territory controlled by the people's self-defense units of Kurdistan, some 20 U.S. military bases have been created," Alexander Venediktov said.

(Source: al Alam)

The official also said Washington is supplying the Kurds with the most advanced weapons.

Venediktov further noted that the United States is occupying a 55-kilometer (34-mile) zone surrounding the al-Tanf garrison without the Damascus government's consent.

"This zone includes the infamous Rukban refugee camp, where militants from illegal armed groups are freely moving near the U.S. Armed Forces," he pointed out.

Meanwhile, Russia's Ambassador to Jordan, Boris Bolotin, told Sputnik news agency he has information that Takfiri terrorists are being trained in the al-Tanf region.

"I do not rule out that they could be militants who fled Raqqa," Bolotin said.

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

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

(Source: al Alam)

Afrin offensive: Eight Turkish soldiers killed in Syria clashes

Turkish attacks on Syria's Afrin leave nearly two dozen civilians dead

Eight Turkish soldiers have been killed in fighting in the north Syrian region of Afrin, the military says.

Another 13 were injured in the clashes on Thursday, with several said to be in a critical condition.

It is one of the bloodiest days for Turkish troops since they began a major offensive against Kurdish fighters in Afrin in January.

Meanwhile, the UN Human Rights Council is due to debate the situation in Syria's besieged Eastern Ghouta area.

More than 580 people have reportedly been killed in the rebel-held enclave near Damascus since the government and its allies intensified a bombardment on 18 February.

Civilian casualty

Nearly two dozen people have lost their lives when Turkish military forces launched a series of attacks against the purported positions of U.S.-backed militants from the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) in Syria's northwestern region of Afrin.

Syria's official news agency, SANA, reported on Thursday night that Turkish forces shelled the villages of Sharran, Maidanaki and Haj Khalil in the western sector of Afrin, killing 20 civilians, including a woman, and injuring and dozens more.

A number of civilian buildings were badly damaged in



the attacks as well.

Meanwhile, the Turkish military said on Thursday that at least 2,222 terrorists have been killed since the launch of Operation Olive Branch.

Ankara views the YPG as the Syrian branch of the militant Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) that has been fighting for an autonomous region inside Turkey since 1984.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has repeat-

edly said that Afrin should be cleared of "terrorists," and demanded the deployment of Turkish troops there during a speech back in November 2016.

This is while U.S. officials regard the YPG as the most effective fighting force against the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group in northern Syria, and have substantially increased their weaponry and technology support to the terrorist group.

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

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

Damascus "strongly condemns the brutal Turkish aggression on Afrin, which is an inseparable part of Syrian territory," SANA cited a Syrian Foreign Ministry source as saying on January 20.

"Syria completely denies claims by the Turkish regime that it was informed of this military operation," the source added.

(Source: agencies)

Trump blasted at home and abroad for tariff plan

U.S. President Donald Trump has announced that his country would impose steep tariffs on imported steel and aluminum to protect American producers, but critics say it would fail to boost jobs and risks starting a trade war with China.

The U.S. oil and gas industry on Thursday pounced on Trump's plan to slap tariffs of 25 percent on imported steel and 10 percent on imported aluminum, saying the controversial move would kill energy jobs by raising costs for big infrastructure projects.

Trump believes the tariffs will safeguard U.S. jobs but many economists say they will destroy more jobs than they create.

"It'll be 25 percent for steel and it'll be 10 percent for aluminum... and it'll be for a long time," Trump said. "We're going to build our steel industry back and our aluminum industry back."

America's top energy industry trade groups, which rely on imported steel for drilling equipment, pipelines, liquefied natural gas terminals and refineries, issued statements calling on Trump to scrap the plan.

The tariff plan is "inconsistent with the administration's goal of continuing the energy renaissance and building world class infrastructure," said Jack Gerard, president of the American Petroleum Institute.

Major stock indexes plunged on Thursday afternoon following Trump's announcement. Investor concern about the news rattled the Dow Jones industrial average, which closed down more than 400 points.

Trump has accused China of unfair trade practices. "What they do is they dump massive amounts of product in our country and it just kills -- it destroys our companies and our jobs," he said.

Republicans slammed Trump's plan, warning that it will lead to a trade war with China and leave American consumers paying the price.

"New, huge tariffs on all kinds of imported steel is a big mistake that will increase costs on American consumers, cost our country jobs, and invite retaliation from other countries," said Senator Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania.

Senator Mike Lee of Utah meanwhile said the president's tariffs offer a "huge job-killing tax hike" on consumers.

"While I am sympathetic to the issues facing domestic steel manufacturers, there must be a better way to address the steel industries concerns, and I hope Congress and the executive branch can identify an alternative solution before these tariffs are finalized next week," Lee said in a statement.

Senator Pat Roberts, who chairs the chamber's agriculture committee, said, "Every time you do this, you get a retaliation. Agriculture is the number one target. I think this is terribly counterproductive for the agriculture economy."

International reaction

China has already threatened to limit imports of American soybeans, while the European Union said it will consider action as well.

European Commission Chief Jean-Claude Juncker said the European Union will react firmly and commensurately to defend its interests.

Juncker called Trump's plan "a blatant intervention to protect U.S. domestic industry" under the guise of national security. He said the Commission will put forth a proposal for countermeasures in the coming days.

"We will not sit idly while our industry is hit with unfair measures that put thousands of European jobs at risk," Juncker said. "The EU will react firmly and commensurately to defend our interests."

Data shows that Canada supplies 16 percent of American demand of steel versus China's 2 percent.

Canada, which is the largest steel exporter to the U.S. followed by Brazil and South Korea, said on Thursday that it will retaliate against any U.S. tariffs on steel and aluminum product.

"Should restrictions be imposed on Canadian steel and aluminum products, Canada will take responsive measures to defend its trade interests and workers," Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland said in a statement, adding that any restrictions against Canadian steel imports would be "absolutely unacceptable."

Brazil's industry ministry said the country would consider taking action on its own over Trump's decision or in collaboration with other countries.

The German Steel Association meanwhile said the U.S. plan of imposing tariffs violates the rules of the World Trade Organization.

(Source: Agencies)

Saudi and UAE try to undermine Iran wherever and whenever possible: Kamrava

➔ One of the reasons as to why Saudi Regime and UAE joined the initiative is to contain the influence of Iran and Qatar in the Sahel region. Basically what are these countries competing for in the Sahel region?



A: I really don't know the answer to this question. In general, KSA and the UAE try to undermine Iran (and Qatar) wherever and whenever possible.

Right after that Saudi Regime and UAE joined G5 Sahel force summit in Paris and pledged their support, Qatar's emir visited the region to sign trade and economic deals. How much potential do have the Sahel region to help Qatar get rid of the hardship caused by Saudi Regime and its allies?

A: The potential is not much. For Qatar, currently the most important friends to have are Iran and Turkey for purposes of commerce and transportation, and Kuwait and Oman for diplomacy and support within the PGCC. Of course, the U.S. and the EU are important as military and political allies. Anything else is general diplomacy and a positive image around the world.

Wawrinka withdraws from Indian Wells and Miami Open

Former world number three Stan Wawrinka has withdrawn from the Miami Open and Indian Wells tournaments this month to continue his recovery from a persistent knee injury, the Swiss right-hander said on Thursday.

The 32-year-old curtailed his season in August last year after battling injury through the grasscourt campaign, which ended with opening round exits at Queen's Club and Wimbledon.

The three-times grand slam winner returned to competition at the Australian Open in January but hobbled to a second round exit. "They are both amazing events, but coming back from a big surgery after having played a few tournaments, I have discussed with my team that it is best for me to build on the progress and go back to practice," Wawrinka said in a statement.

"I've enjoyed being back on tour playing matches and this gives me even more motivation to go back on the practice court. My goal is to find my highest level again and in order to do that, I will keep working hard every single day."

Following his defeat at Melbourne Park, Wawrinka reached the semi-finals of the Sofia Open but followed that with early exits at Rotterdam and Marseille, the second through an injury retirement. French duo Richard Gasquet and Jo-Wilfried Tsonga have also been ruled out of Indian Wells due to knee injuries with Jeremy Chardy, Laslo Djere, and Lukas Lacko replacing the trio in the main draw.

(Source: Reuters)

Watford boss Gracia backs VAR to help referees

The Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system is a good idea if it helps English referees make fewer mistakes, Watford manager Javi Gracia has said ahead of Saturday's Premier League clash against West Bromwich Albion.

The technology has had a mixed reception in England with many calling for the system to be scrapped after errors in multiple cup matches, the latest controversies coming in Tottenham Hotspur's 6-1 FA Cup win over Rochdale on Wednesday.

Match referee Paul Tierney was heavily reliant on VAR throughout the match at Wembley, with five of the seven goals scored in the game checked by VAR before being awarded.

"England have good referees. If we review the mistakes, we have less mistakes," Gracia said.

"If they can do their job better with the help of technology, we must try to help the referees. So, for me, it's important we help the referees." Watford sit 10th in the table with 10 games remaining in the league campaign as they prepare to host bottom-side West Brom but Gracia is expecting a tough encounter against the Baggies, who are fighting to avoid relegation.

"It will be an opportunity to get three points. But I don't think it will be easier to play against West Brom, than to play against Arsenal in the next game after that," Gracia added.

"I'm certain West Brom will play the next game as though it's the last one."

(Source: Mirror)

Barca are outraged by Lahoz

Mateu Lahoz's decision making during the Las Palmas-Barcelona game has left the Catalans raging at his performance.

Their ire chiefly relates to a penalty given to the hosts and the decision not to send off Las Palmas' keeper, Chichizola, for a handball outside of his area. "It was an invisible penalty," Ernesto Valverde said after the match, clearly agitated, whilst Gerard Pique had to be held back at the final whistle, his anger boiling over.

Juan Andujar Oliver, Radio MARCA's refereeing expert, explained that the official was wrong in both decisions.

"Chichizola must be sent off," he said.

"The ball clearly hits his hand and ensures that Suarez can't score into an open goal." As for the penalty, it appears that Lahoz believe Lucas Digne intentionally touched it with his hand.

"Digne barely touches the ball and there is no intention on the part of the player," Oliver continued.

There were also two other important plays in which there should have been a different outcome.

One is Andres Iniesta's handball in the first half, inside the area.

"The Barcelona player's elbow blocked the trajectory of the ball and Mateu had to point to the penalty spot," Oliver noted.

Galvez escaped a red card with a nasty, deliberate foul on Lionel Messi. "He should have seen the red for a kick on Messi without any intention of playing the ball," explained Oliver, picking apart Lahoz's under-par showing.

■ **Barcelona's indignation**

After the match, Ernesto Valverde was clear.

"The penalty hurt us, it was an invisible offence," he opined.

"I still don't know what it was given for."

"And at the last moment before half-time, their goalkeeper, with a clear action, touches the ball with his hand outside of the penalty area."

(Source: Marca)

Dembele defends Dortmund strike

Ousmane Dembele has defended his decision to go on strike in a bid to force through a mega-money move from Borussia Dortmund to Barcelona.

France winger Dembele completed a €105million switch to Barca after refusing to train during his final days with the Bundesliga club.

The 20-year-old's actions drew widespread criticism but, back in Ernesto Valverde's first-team plans and attempting to salvage an injury-plagued debut season at Camp Nou, Dembele asked critics to put themselves in his shoes.

"What else should I have done? If Barcelona cancelled [their interest] for a second time that would have been impossible for me," he told Onze Mondial, referencing Barcelona's initial interest during his breakthrough campaign at Rennes.

"I'd like to know how the people who criticize me would have behaved if they had been in my position."

"I had the impression that I would miss the fulfilment of my dream, which is why I behaved like that. That's what I stand for."

(Source: Goal)

'Weakness in the face of evil': IOC condemned over Russia

The International Olympic Committee's decision to reinstate Russia was strongly condemned Thursday, with the lawyer for doping whistleblower Grigory Rodchenkov labeling it "weakness in the face of evil."

The reaction came after the IOC lifted the Russian Olympic Committee's suspension over widespread state-sponsored doping on Wednesday.

Rodchenkov's US lawyer Jim Walden told CNN that the IOC and its president, Thomas Bach, "treat Russia and its glaring acts of aggression with cowardice and appeasement."

"Weakness in the face of evil results in no good outcomes," he added. "What Russia did at Sochi was evil directed at the Olympics and clean athletes. Its reaction since -- lies, blame, threats and retaliation -- is a broader form of evil."

Rodchenkov, the former head of Moscow's anti-doping laboratory, fled Russia in 2015 and is currently enrolled in the witness protection program in the US.

■ **No evidence of systematic doping**

The IOC reinstated Russia even though two of its athletes failed drug tests during the Games, which ended on Sunday.

IOC president Thomas Bach said the two failed tests, from curler Alexander Krushelnitsky and bobsledder Nadezhda Sergeeva, were "very disappointing."

However, Bach stressed there was no evidence of systemic doping and no evidence of the involvement of the Russian Olympic Committee "in either case."

"I have never either violated the rules of sports or used doping," Krushelnitsky said in a statement published by TASS after handing back a bronze medal he had won alongside his



wife Anastasia. Meanwhile Stanislav Pozdnyakov, head of the team of Russian athletes who competed at the Games, assured the IOC the positive tests were "more to do with negligence than malicious intent."

Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) president Alexander Zhukov spoke of the effort it had taken to get Russia reinstated and called the decision "very important."

"You know that the past three months have been among the most challenging ones in Russian sport's history," Zhukov

said Wednesday, in comments carried by Russian state news agency TASS. "We had to meet many demands before and during the Games."

"I would like to thank our athletes who were able to perform well even despite the provocations," Zhukov added. "I thank the fans who did not cross the line and what could result in sanctions."

"Today's IOC's decision is very important for us. The ROC is an absolutely full-fledged member of the Olympic family."

Russia was banned from PyeongChang 2018 following state-sponsored doping, leading up to and including the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics. However, a team of 168 athletes who proved they were clean competed under the Olympic flag as Olympic athletes from Russia (OAR).

The OAR team finished 13th in the medal tables at the winter games -- winning two golds, nine less than Russia captured in 2014 in Sochi.

(Source: CNN)

DR Congo's Bakambu joins Beijing Guoan for reported \$90m



Democratic Republic of Congo striker Cedric Bakambu has signed for China's Beijing Guoan in what is understood to be an African transfer record.

The Chinese Super League side has not released the sum paid for the 26-year-old, but sources close to the player say it amounts to \$90m (£65m).

This beats the \$77m that Premier League side Arsenal paid for Gabon's Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang last month.

Bakambu has signed for four years, the same sources say.

Beijing Guoan, who finished ninth in the 16-team Chinese Super League last season, had hoped to pay considerably less for the player, who left Spain's Villarreal in January after his release clause worth \$50m was triggered.

The Chinese club tried to convince local authorities there was no need to pay double that amount, as required by Chinese taxation rules, given the player was a free agent.

Although Beijing Guoan failed with this, they did succeed in reducing the required tax from \$50m to \$40m - so saving \$10m.

Last year, the Chinese FA ruled that clubs must pay 100% tax on signings in

a bid to curb extravagant spending, with the extra funds going to the development of the local game.

Despite the lack of any formal transfer, Bakambu started training with his new team-mates in Portugal in January - with the club releasing pictures of the forward in training.

The only African ever to receive La Liga's Player of the Month award, Bakambu was one of the top scorers in La Liga, with nine goals, when he quit Villarreal.

He joined the Spanish club in 2015 from Turkish side Bursaspor, where he had scored 21 goals in his sole season with the club.

Born in France, the former France youth international - who switched allegiance to DR Congo in 2015 - won the Under-19 European Championship in 2010 and helped his side finish fourth at the following year's Fifa Under-20 World Cup.

He started his career at French side Sochaux, where he progressed from the youth ranks prior to being promoted to the first team in 2010.

At international level, he has scored seven goals for DR Congo.

(Source: BBC)

Neymar surgery positive news, says Brazil's fitness trainer



Neymar's surgery on a broken foot will be good news for Brazil's World Cup campaign, according to the national team's fitness trainer. Paris Saint-Germain confirmed on Wednesday the world's most expensive player would go under the knife after fracturing the fifth metatarsal in his right foot during the 3-0 weekend win over Marseille in Ligue 1.

The surgery could keep the 26-year-old forward on the sidelines for three months, meaning the prospects of him being at peak fitness by the time Brazil play their first match at Russia 2018 are in doubt.

But Fabio Mahseredjian, a member of Tite's Selecao backroom staff, believes Neymar's prospects of playing a full part against Switzerland at the Rostov Arena on June 17 are good.

"I'm sure he'll play in the first match, first because he's an athlete who takes care of himself, and he has a physiotherapist and a physical trainer who take care of him every day," Mahseredjian told Globo Esporte. "Secondly, he has no problems that make him fat because he does not acquire weight easily."

"Third, he's very young and has a huge

will, which makes his preparation for the World Cup much easier. I'm sure he has plenty of time to get to the first game."

While Mahseredjian acknowledged a lack of match sharpness could be an issue, he welcomed the prospect of Neymar uniting with his Brazil team-mates without enduring the wear and tear that comes with a domestic season finale at club level.

"Neymar will come with a very low workload, both of games and of training, basically as if it were a pre-season," he explained.

"The surgery will subtract from his physical condition, making him lose the physical effects he won during PSG's season."

"I say without any problem that it is good for us, since he will not be arriving with a high load of games."

"He will probably come to us well physically and, we believe, psychologically as well."

Neymar has 28 goals in 30 appearances since joining PSG from Barcelona for €22million last August but is unlikely to feature for Unai Emery's men again this season, with surgery scheduled for Saturday.

(Source: Daily Star)

Sparkling City close in on title by thrashing Arsenal again

Manchester City tore Arsenal apart for the second time in five days on Thursday, beating them 3-0 on a freeing night at The Emirates to restore their 16-point lead as they close in on the Premier League title.

Arsenal hoped for redemption after City thrashed them by the same scoreline in the League Cup final at Wembley on Sunday but first-half goals by Bernardo Silva, David Silva and Leroy Sane handed the Gunners their second home league loss this season.

Arsenal's club record signing Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang added to the home side's woes when his penalty was saved by Ederson early in the second half after fellow new arrival Henrikh Mkhitaryan was brought down just inside the area.

The win leaves Pep Guardiola's scintillating City side on 75 points from 28 games ahead of second-placed Manchester United and they only have to win five of their last 10 matches to be crowned champions for the third time in seven seasons.

"We are close. It's in our hands, we can't deny it," Guardiola said, while stressing his team must focus on the next game at home to last season's champions Chelsea on Sunday.

He expressed some sympathy for Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger, who has faced renewed speculation over his future at the London club as the Gunners slide out of contention for Champions League football next season for the second year in a row.



"He knows my admiration for him... I know all the managers can be in that situation. I'm sure he's going to take the right decision for him and for the club," Guardiola told a post-match news conference without elaborating.

■ **Low confidence**

The result leaves Arsenal sixth, 10 points outside the top four places that guarantee Champions League football next term.

They can still qualify for Europe's elite club competition, but to do so they will almost certainly have to win the Europa League in which they meet AC Milan in the last 16.

"We played with low confidence, you could see that at the

start of the game and we paid for it," said Wenger.

"We needed the penalty to go in, but that was another negative. We lost to a team that is the best in the country at the moment... The difference in the league is no coincidence."

On a snowy night at The Emirates, City's Portuguese forward Bernardo Silva opened the scoring in the 14th minute, collecting a pass after a long weaving run from Leroy Sane and delightfully curling his shot into the far corner past goalkeeper Petr Cech.

City sliced open Arsenal's defence again just before the half-hour, moving the ball swiftly upfield to Aguerro who laid it into the path of David Silva racing up on the left, and the Spaniard drove a low shot into the corner to double the lead.

Sane made it 3-0 five minutes later, walking the ball into the goal after another quick-fire City move had bamboozled Arsenal's ramshackle defence who were left chasing shadows.

The young German's goal drew the first of many boos from the home fans in the less than full stadium as their team headed for home and away defeats by City for the first time in 42 years.

Arsenal had a chance to get back into the game when they won a penalty early in the second half but their Gabon striker Aubameyang saw his spot kick saved by Ederson to complete a miserable night that piles more pressure on Wenger's team.

(Source: Eurosport)

Hassan Rouhani invited to 2018 World Cup

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iran President Hassan Rouhani has been invited to attend the opening ceremony of the 2018 FIFA World Cup by FIFA President Gianni Infantino.

Infantino traveled to Tehran Wednesday night to attend a ceremony to celebrate 100-year anniversary of Iran football federation.

The Swiss-Italian also shared the pitch with ex-Iranian stars in a futsal match before attending Tehran derby between Persepolis and Esteghlal, where Esteghlal won the match 1-0 in Tehran's Azadi Stadium.

Infantino participated at a joint news conference with Iranian sport minister Masoud Soltanifar, saying the diplomatic rift between Saudi Arabia and Iran should not be allowed to get in the way of football.

"There are of course political issues between countries all over the world but this should not have an impact on the football tournament. The solution is always just to play home and away like in every competition in every country," he said.

"The people of Iran, like any other nation, have the right to cheer their teams at their stadiums, and we, as the international federation of football, will try to defend this right," Infantino added.

Infantino also held a meeting with Rouhani later on Thursday.

"With regard to the appeal of football for nations and especially young people, the FIFA can play a significant role in bringing nations closer together. Fortunately, today the Iranian people, especially the younger generation, are very interested in sports and especially football, and sport events are followed by a lot of excitement, which you will see in the competition between the two most popular football clubs in the capital today," Rouhani said.

Stressing that the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has always tried to provide more and more access to sport,



he said: "Public and professional sport activities are increasing in our country today, and national teams of Iran take part in various fields of sport at global levels, including the presence of Iranian national football teams at all levels in regional and global competitions".

The president also referred to the passionate presence of women in various fields of sport, especially football, and said: "Today, Iranian women are present livelier

in sport fields, including 23,000 women athletes in football".

"Iran is a safe country and is ready to host regional and international sports and groups," said Rouhani, pointing out that regional federations should seek to bring nations closer together and increase friendships.

The president also emphasized the need for FIFA to promote the rights of nations to watch their favorite teams in

their stadiums and country".

Gianni Infantino expressed satisfaction over meeting with the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran and said: "Football has an important social role worldwide, and the Iranian people are truly among the most passionate fans of football in the world".

"FIFA is always looking to improve the world through sports and will not hesitate to help improve the level of football in Iran".

Tehran derby: Persepolis lose to Esteghlal

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iran Professional League (IPL) pacesetters Persepolis lost to Esteghlal 1-0 here in a lackluster match in Tehran derby on Thursday.

In the match attended by FIFA President Gianni Infantino at the Azadi Stadium, Esteghlal edged past their arch rivals thank to a goal from Vouria Ghaffouri just before the interval.

Ghaffouri, who was named as the Man of the match at the end of the match, took full advantage of mistakes made by Persepolis's defenders and found the back of the net.

Esteghlal held their shape in the second half and



defended well.

"First of all, I congratulate my team because they deserved to win the match. Also, I think the better team won the match," Esteghlal coach Winfried Schäfer said in the post-match news conference.

"The match with Persepolis is finished and from now on we concentrate on the match against the UAE's Al Ain in the AFC Champions League," the German coach added.

With five weeks remaining, Persepolis sit at top of table with 57 points, while Zob Ahan and Esteghlal are second and third respectively with 42 and 41 points.

Iran basketball drop one place in FIBA rankings



S P O R T S Iran national basketball team dropped one place in the latest FIBA rankings released on Thursday.

Iran slid down one spot at 24th and China - the hosts of next year's World Cup - dropped four spots at 28th.

Powerhouse Australia maintained their number 10 position in the world rankings and remain as the best team

in Asian zone.

The Philippines sit fourth in Asian zone.

Iran lead Group D of the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2019 Asian Qualifiers which includes Iraq, Qatar, Kazakhstan and.

The U.S. and Spain continue to reign supreme in the world of basketball, with France, Serbia and Argentina rounding out the top five.

German rowing coaches start work with Iranian rowers



S P O R T S Two German rowing coaches Wolfgang Lothar Schäfer and Ralf Herbert Zeidler start their works with Iranian teams.

They've already worked with the Iranian teams and returned to the country once again to lead the rowers.

Iranian rowing teams prepare for the 2018 Asian Games to be held in Jakarta, Indonesia. Rowing has been contested at every

Asian Games since its introduction to the program at the 1982 Asian Games.

The 18th Asian Games will be organized in Jakarta and Palembang from August 18 to September 2, 2018.

China are the most decorated Asian country winning 83 gold medals in the sports.

Iran have won just two gold medals but it seems there is a bright future ahead of the Iranian rowers.

Excited Arzani still undecided on international allegiance

Melbourne City young gun Daniel Arzani says he has not yet decided which nation he would like to represent at international level, if called up.

Born in Iran, Arzani, 19, is eligible to represent that country as well as the Socceroos.

In stunning form in the A-League, Arzani has shot to national football prominence thanks to a series of eye-catching performances.

Arzani made his breakthrough in the A-League just after the turn of the year, when he assisted Ross McCormack twice off the bench in a 2-1 City win over Wellington Phoenix at AAMI Park. Since then, he has opened his own goals account with one penalty and an incisive, skilful goal against Perth Glory at the weekend.

His consistent ability to wow fans has seen Arzani touted as a possible inclusion into Bert van Marwijk's plans for the World Cup, with friendlies upcoming this month against Norway and Colombia.

Iran, like Australia, qualified for world sport's biggest



stage in Russia.

But at the beginning of February, Arzani told reporters he was not sure where his loyalties lied on the national stage, and required parental consultation.

Speaking on Wednesday's Daily Football Show, Arzani said that topic had still not been discussed at home.

"It hasn't really been a conversation that's come up yet," he said. "But I think the most important thing for me right now is just to be playing the games."

"If I don't do well, then none of that would be a possibility anyway."

Just the thought of international football, however, was exciting the youngster.

"It's really exciting, even thinking about it," he added. "I'm happy that people are talking about it and that it's even considered a possibility."

"But it's just important that I focus on playing the games, focusing week in, week out on performing."

And if the chance came up with Australia, Arzani admitted to a media conference that he would be delighted.

"I'd be very happy to get called up," Arzani said. "I feel like I'm as ready as I'll ever be."

"I can be a bit better physically at the moment, but my mindset is as good as it's going to get."

(Source: Daily Football Show)

Elaheh Gholi-Fallah named Iran's flagbearer at 2018 Winter Paralympics

Paralympic.ir - Iranian Nordic skier Elaheh Gholi-Fallah has been named as the country's flagbearer for the Winter Paralympics opening ceremony.

Iran National Paralympic Committee has chosen the blind girl to carry the flag.

The country will be represented by five athletes in the prestigious event.

Elaheh Gholi-Fallah and Abolfazl Khatibi are Nordic skiers and Sedigheh Rouzbah, Hossein Soleghani and Pouria Khalil Tash will represent Iran in snowboard.

The Iranian team will be headed by former para skier Sadeq Kalhor and Isa Saveh Shemshaki is Team Iran's Chef de Mission.

The Paralympics will take place from March 9 to 18 in Pyeongchang, South Korea.

A total of 650 athletes from 45 countries are expected to participate in the event.

FIFA President underlines development of women football

IRNA - FIFA President Gianni Infantino underlined the efforts by FIFA to develop women football, and said that investment in this field is among FIFA's priorities.

On the occasion of World Women Football Day, Infantino attended a gathering of Iranian women footballers on Thursday, and said when 'I took office FIFA it did not have a suitable situation and I was confident that one of the fields to be strengthened is women football'.

He added that FIFA strengthened women football and elected a woman as secretary general of the FIFA and decided to invest in this issue and started world cup for under 15 and 17 years old and now FIFA is paving the way to increase women world cup teams from 16 to 24 teams.

Deputy Head of Women Football Federation Leila Sofizadeh welcomed Gianni Infantino and said that development of women football is in order to create a healthy and happy society.

She said that football is so attractive in Iran and asked Infantino to have more support for women's football in the Islamic states.

Buffon 'could play on for another two years' - agent

Gianluigi Buffon could play on at the highest level for another two years, according to the Juventus goalkeeper's agent Silvano Martina.

Buffon, 40, was expected to bring an end to his career at the end of the current season, but after being offered another call-up to the Italy squad this month, he is currently considering playing on.

Martina says he just needs to feel he can still make an important contribution, but he says there is no rush for him to make up his mind.

"It's still soon," Martina told RMC Sport. "Time will tell how he feels. If he carries on, he wants to be a protagonist and not in the shadows. I also think he's still looking good and he could play on for another two years, but he needs to have that fire burning inside him which spurs you on."

"It's up to him to decide by himself if he wants to continue or not."

Buffon's announced return to the Italy squad for friendlies against Argentina and England has drawn mixed reactions, with Fabio Cannavaro -- who won the World Cup with Buffon in 2006 -- saying it is not the right sign for Italy to call up veteran players as they look to rebuild after failing to qualify for the World Cup.

Martina feels that Buffon, who was named the Best FIFA Goalkeeper for 2017, is still at the top of his game, but that any mistake he does commit now is taken unnecessarily out of context.

"Nowadays you get the feeling that people no longer have any sympathy for footballers," he said. "Nowadays, footballers get judged by mistakes and not how they play. Against Tottenham, even a youngster could have committed that mistake and everybody is immediately sentencing him, particularly on social media."

(Source: ESPN)

Balotelli in negotiations over Premier League, Serie A return

Mino Raiola has said he is working on bringing Mario Balotelli back to Serie A or the Premier League.

Nice forward Balotelli is out of contract in the summer and, according to his agent Raiola, he will be a "bargain" for anybody looking to strengthen their attack.

The 27-year-old had successful spells at Inter Milan and AC Milan and Raiola believes he can deliver the goods once again in Serie A after proving he is back to his best in Ligue 1, while he says clubs from the Premier League are also taking an interest.

"Mario is ready to return," Raiola said. "He's matured and he's one of the top ten forwards in the world, and he's the No. 1 in Italy. He's worth €100 million, but he's available on a free, so he's a bargain."

"I'm already negotiating with many clubs in England and Italy. I've spoken with Juve, Roma, Napoli and Inter, but not Milan since they have [sporting director Massimiliano] Mirabelli and I'm not on his same level."

Balotelli has scored 13 goals in 19 Ligue 1 outings this season, after finding the back of the net 15 times in 23 games last term.

It is the first time he has gone into double figures in consecutive seasons since netting 12 and 14 for Milan in the 2012-13 and 2013-14 campaigns.

(Source: Soccerbet)

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Film students from 50 countries apply for Fajr Dar-ul-Fonun

A R T TEHRAN — Students from international film schools in 50 countries have applied to attend the Dar-ul-Fonun educational course during the 36th Fajr International Film Festival, the organizers announced on Friday.

Dar-ul-Fonun, which acquired its name from the Iranian polytechnic institute established in 1851, was initiated by the festival secretary, Reza Mirkarimi, in the 34th edition of the festival to discover emerging talents among film students in Iran and other countries.

Dar-ul-Fonun has been warmly received by foreign students, and a team of Iranian experts are examining applications to select 55 students from overseas film schools for the discovery camp, Dar-ul-Fonun director Maziar Miri said in a press release.

Fifty-five other students will also be selected from Iranian film educational centers, he added.

The festival will be held in Tehran from April 19 to 27.



WHAT'S IN ART GALLERIES

Photo



An exhibition of photos by Raheleh Balar is currently underway at Yasamin Gallery. The exhibit titled "Paris between the Sky and Earth" will run until March 7 at the gallery located at 70 Southern Kheradman St. off Karim Khan St.

E1 Gallery is displaying a selection photos by Yasmin Ashkbus in a charity exhibition named "Something Like a Dream".

The exhibit will raise funds for the children impacted by the devastating earthquake that hit the Kermanshah region in western Iran in November 2017.

The exhibit will be running for two weeks at the gallery located at 1 Hamid Dead End, off Lesani Alley, Jebbeh St., off Mahdiah St. in the Elahieh neighborhood.

Painting



Ariana Gallery is playing host to an exhibition of paintings by Sahar Khalkhalian.

The exhibit named "War and Peace" runs until Monday in the gallery located at 9 Fereshteh St., off East Maryam St., in the Elahieh neighborhood.

A showing of paintings by Zaha Bayat is currently underway in an exhibit at Saye Gallery.

The exhibition entitled "Meet and Punishment" will run until March 7 at the gallery located at the gallery located at 3 Aqakhani Alley, Omidvar St. in the Niavaran neighborhood.

Cartoon



Seyhun Gallery is hosting an exhibition of cartoons by Bozorgmehr Hosseinpour to raise funds for people suffering from cancer at the Behnam Daheshpur Charity Organization.

The exhibition will run until Wednesday at the gallery located at No. 11, 4th St., Vozara Ave.

Jewelry



Golestan Gallery is displaying a collection of handmade jewelry by Toktam Fazel and Bahram Dashtinejad.

The exhibit will be underway until Wednesday at the gallery located at 34 Kamasai St. in the Darus neighborhood.

TMCA provides safe haven for Giacometti's "Walking Man" and "Standing Woman"

Wick, Marti, Swiss Ambassador Markus Leitner and a number of artists also attended the unveiling ceremony.

Wick and Marti expressed their happiness over the relocation of the statues and said that there is no longer concern about the artworks.

Leitner said that he attended the ceremony to show how much importance the statues hold for them.

He also showed a Swiss ten-franc note bearing an image of "Walking Man 1" to the audience to illustrate the importance of Giacometti's place in Switzerland.

He said that the TMCA is one of the few art centers having Giacometti's artworks and added that the museum is one of the few places he visited after his arrival in Tehran a year ago.

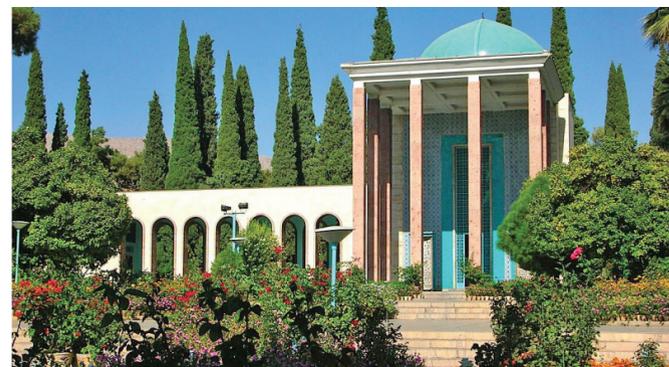
Examples of the statues are also on display at several major museums and galleries in the world.

The TMCA is also home to works by many other august artists of the West, including Claude Monet, Francis Bacon, Pablo Picasso, Max Ernst, Georges Braque, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Donald Judd, Andy Warhol, René Magritte, Duane Hanson and Chuck Close.



Swiss Ambassador Markus Leitner (L) speaks during the unveiling ceremony of Alberto Giacometti's statues, "Walking Man 1" and "Standing Woman", at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art on February 28, 2018. (Mehr/Maryam Kamyab)

IRIB to produce series on Persian luminaires



Mausoleum of Sadi in Shiraz.

A R T TEHRAN — Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) launched a project on Thursday to produce a TV series on the renowned figures of Persian classical literature Sadi, Hafez and Khajou Kermani.

"The Iranian Luminaries Project aims to introduce rich Persian literature and civilization, which only promotes peace and friendship in the world," IRIB deputy director Ali Darabi said.

A large group of artists from Fars Province will take part in the production

of the project, which is estimated to be completed in five to seven years.

The celebrated Persian poet Hafez is known for his divan, which is regarded as one of the pinnacles of Persian classical literature.

Sadi is one of the greatest figures of classical Persian literature, famous worldwide for his Bustan (The Orchard) and Gulistan (The Rose Garden).

Poet and mystic Khajou lived during the 13th and 14th centuries and his tomb is located at the Quran Gate near the Allaho-Akbar Pass in Shiraz.

Harvey Weinstein 'Casting Couch' statue unveiled ahead of Oscars

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Harvey Weinstein won't be going to Sunday's Oscar ceremony, but the film producer's presence is still being felt in Hollywood.

Los Angeles-based street artist Plastic Jesus on Thursday unveiled a statue called "Casting Couch", depicting a life-size Weinstein, clothed in a bathrobe, sitting on a golden colored couch and holding an Oscar. It was installed near the Hollywood venue where the Academy Awards ceremony will be held.

More than 70 women have accused Weinstein of sexual misconduct, including rape. Weinstein has denied having nonconsensual sex with anyone.

His representatives did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the installation.

The accusations against Weinstein triggered a flood of allegations of impropriety by other celebrities that have rocked Hollywood and dominated this year's movie awards season. "Whilst many thought the 'casting couch' was a thing of the past it was clearly still a part of the Hollywood culture," Plastic Jesus said in a statement on his Facebook page.

"Hopefully now in the light of recent allegations against



A statue of Harvey Weinstein on a casting couch made by artist Plastic Jesus is seen on Hollywood Boulevard near the Dolby Theatre during preparations for the Oscars in Hollywood, Los Angeles, California, U.S. March 1, 2018. (Reuters/Lucy Nicholson)

many leading figures in Hollywood the industry will clean up its (sic) act," he said.

Weinstein was one of the movie industry's most influential men, powering independent movies such as "The King's Speech" and "Shakespeare in Love" to Oscar best picture wins.

He was expelled from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences last year and fired from his company, the Weinstein Company. The company said on Sunday it planned to file for bankruptcy.

The 'Casting Couch' statue followed the appearance in Los Angeles on Wednesday of billboards designed by street artist Sabo that accused the entertainment industry of staying silent.

Plastic Jesus said the Weinstein statue was a collaboration with the artist Joshua "Ginger" Monroe and took two months to produce. It was paid for by donations through their websites.

Plastic Jesus and Ginger were also responsible for producing statues of Donald Trump that appeared in various U.S. cities in 2016, before he was elected U.S. president.

Long-lost Nigerian masterpiece found in London sold for \$1.4 million

LAGOS (Reuters) — A portrait of a Nigerian princess that was lost for more than 40 years and found in a London flat was sold at an auction for 1 million pounds (\$1.4 million) on Wednesday.

"Tutu", an art work by Nigeria's best-known modern artist Ben Enwonwu, was painted in 1974 and appeared at an art show in Lagos the following year but its whereabouts after that were unknown until it re-surfaced in north London.

The sale was a world record for the artist. The work had been expected to be sold for between 200,000 and 300,000 pounds (\$277,600-\$416,400).

The auction was held at Bonhams in London and shown live at the Wheatbaker, a hotel popular with artists in Lagos where the sale, made to a telephone bidder, was greeted with applause by about 70 people watching on a big screen.

"We are very happy that modern Nigerian art has begun to get its actual value," said Oliver Enwonwu, the artist's son, who is president of the Society of Nigerian Artists.

Tokini Peterside, who organizes an annual art fair in Lagos, said it was a "very exciting moment for Nigerian art" since Enwonwu was a "national treasure" who is regarded as a modern art pioneer in Nigeria.

"To have that artist's work validated in the global marketplace is almost...a coming of age for Nigerian modern art," she said.

The portrait of Adetutu Ademiluyi, who was a grand-daughter of a revered traditional ruler from the Yoruba ethnic group, holds special significance in Nigeria as a symbol of national reconciliation after the 1967-1970 Biafran War.

DiCaprio and Pitt team up for new Quentin Tarantino movie

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Leonardo DiCaprio and Brad Pitt — two of Hollywood's biggest stars — are teaming up for Quentin Tarantino's next project, a movie set in the 1969 Hollywood hippy era around the Charles Manson murders.

Movie studio Sony Pictures said on Wednesday that the film was called "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood" and will feature DiCaprio as the former star of a Western TV series, and Pitt as his longtime stunt double.

It's the first time the two actors have starred in a feature film together.

"Both are struggling to make it in a Hollywood they don't recognize anymore. But Rick (DiCaprio) has a very famous next-door neighbor ... Sharon Tate," Sony Pictures said in a statement.

Tate, the pregnant actress wife of director Roman Polanski, was murdered

in 1969 by followers of Manson, one of America's most notorious criminals. Manson died in November 2017 at the age of 83 while serving a life sentence.

The movie is to be released on Aug. 9, 2019, exactly 50 years after Tate and four friends were stabbed or shot dead.

Tarantino said he had been working on the script for five years and had lived in the Los Angeles area for most of his life, "including in 1969, when I was seven years old."

"I'm very excited to tell this story of an LA and a Hollywood that don't exist anymore. And I couldn't be happier about the dynamic teaming of DiCaprio and Pitt," he said in a statement.

DiCaprio won an Oscar in 2016 for his role in "The Revenant" while Pitt was Oscar-nominated for performances in "Moneyball" and "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button."