

## Japan's Halt Throws Iran Oil Sales To 2-Year Low

Japan will not lift any Iranian crude oil this month which will also see Iran's exports fall to the lowest level in two years, unconfirmed reports say.

Iran will sell 1.9 million barrels per day (bpd) of crude and condensate in March, down by one-third of exports in the previous month, Reuters reported on Friday. Asia accounts for 60% of Iran's crude and condensate exports. According to the report, shipments to main Asian customers are set to total 1.12 million bpd this month, down by one-third from February and the lowest since November 2015. An unnamed source, quoted by Reuters, suggested that uncertainty over sovereign insurance for tankers had prompted Japan to buy no Iranian crude in March. Japan is the fourth biggest buyer of Iranian oil in Asia, which lifted



218,757 bpd from the Middle Eastern country in December. There was no reaction to the report from Iran's Ministry of Petroleum on Saturday. The decline comes after reports that Iran had offered 100% discount on its freights to India. Iran's Minister of Petroleum Bijan Zangeneh

told reporters after a meeting with Indian Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan in New Delhi last month that India's state-owned companies were going to increase their level of Iranian oil purchase. Zangeneh said both state-owned and private

Indian refiners would buy about 500,000 barrels per day (bpd) of Iranian oil in 2018. Indian imports of Iranian oil through January to April in 2017 averaged 442,800 bpd, which were about 17 percent less than those in the corresponding period a year before. Iran has been working hard to retain its market share after Western sanctions over its nuclear program were lifted in January 2016 and establish its place as the third largest OPEC exporter. The country has raised its oil exports to 2.3 million barrels from around 1 million bpd before the lifting of the sanctions.

Last month, Deputy Petroleum Minister Amir Zamaninia said Iran aimed to raise its crude output capacity by 700,000 bpd to 4.7 million bpd within the next four years. (Press TV)

## Neighbor News

### Uzbek-Tajik Agreements to Stabilize Central Asia

DUSHANBE - The latest energy agreement between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan will help the countries solve both energy and water issues, Deputy Head of the CIS States Institute Vladimir Zharikhin said in an interview with Sputnik Uzbekistan. According to the expert, the water issue has always been very sensitive for the Central Asian states, because there was no compromise between the countries that have plenty of water resources and the states that have problems in water supply. "Considering the common challenges and threats, such agreements serve as a stabilizer for the region. Finally, the prob-

lems glooming over interstate relations in Central Asia have been solved," Zharikhin stressed. The main problem, according to the expert, is the inability of countries to achieve a compromise in the water use. "However, progress is clear. By the example of the Uzbek-Tajik agreement one can see that countries involved in such agreements get mutual benefits. Tajikistan is now able to raise its power production and sell the excess to neighboring countries, while Uzbekistan may now implement more advanced irrigation methods, such as the drip irrigation," the expert concluded. (Trend)

### Chairman Senate Should Be a Person Who Strengthens Democracy

ISLAMABAD - Minister of State for Finance Rana Muhammad Afzal has said the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government wanted such a person as Chairman of Senate, who will work for rule of law and further strengthening the democracy. PML-N has majority seats in the Senate and it would announce nominee for Senate Chairman soon, he said while talking to a private news channel. The minister said Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) had sold its 13 Senators to Co-Chair-

man Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Asif Ali Zardari. "I am astonished on those Senators who were sold to them second time," he added. He said PTI leadership was making fun with itself that Senate Chairman should be elected from Balochistan. He said Raza Rabbani was a competent person, who had worked for promotion of democracy. Replying to a question, he said former Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif had strengthened the democracy in the country. (Monitoring Desk)

### Iran Says Has No Commitment to US over Ex-FBI Agent

TEHRAN - Iran has dismissed a recent claim by the US Department of State about the Islamic Republic's commitment to find and bring retired FBI agent Robert Levinson back home, saying Tehran has no information about him. "Robert Levinson had traveled to Iran at a juncture and then left our country and the Islamic Republic of Iran has no information about his fate after that," Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Saturday. Levinson reportedly visited Iran's southern Kish Island on March 9, 2007. He later went missing and his whereabouts have remained unknown ever since. There are different reports about the aim of his trip, with some saying the man, who had become a private detective, was reportedly investigating cigarette counterfeiting in

the region. Others said he was on a business trip. Back in 2010, a video was sent to the Levinsons, reportedly showing the man demanding help for his release. Also in early 2011, some of his images were emailed to the family. On the 11th anniversary of Levinson's disappearance from Kish, the US Department of State on Friday claimed that Iran had "committed to cooperating with the United States to assist us in bringing Robert Levinson home" and called on Iran "to fulfill this commitment." Qassemi said Iran pursued a "humanitarian approach" to Levinson's case, adding, "The Islamic Republic of Iran has no commitment to the US government in this regard and Iran's assistance in the past had been based on humanitarian considerations." (Press TV)

### Women Are Actively Participating in National Development

KARACHI - Sindh Governor Muhammad Zubair has said that Pakistani women are talented, intelligent and are actively participating shoulder to shoulder with men in the national development. He said this while addressing an awards ceremony organized by Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry Karachi at Governor House, said a statement issued here on Sunday. He said that women are playing an important role in every field of life, including development, welfare and economy.

that only 20 percent of women who got higher education are taking part in the national development after getting married, which is deplorable. He said women's participation in the national development is the need of hour. Muhammad Zubair said that Madar-e-Millat Fatima Jinnah is the beacon of light for women. The ceremony was attended by a large number of women including Executive members of Women chamber Ghazal Safi, Rukhsana Abbasi, Naheed Haroon, Fareeda Qureshi and Amna Faraz. The Governor Sindh distributed awards among the women including Florence, Villers, Sadia Naveed, Tasneem Ahmer Abbas, Munawer Shaker, Momina Dareed, Sofia Safi and Dr. (Monitoring Desk)

The Governor said that a recent survey revealed

### Mattis Says US-North Korea Diplomacy Is At Delicate Stage

U.S. DEFENSE SECRETARY - Jim Mattis said the diplomatic push to solve the North Korean nuclear weapons crisis was at such a delicate stage that he won't publicly discuss the talks or related issues such as U.S.-South Korean military exercises. Mattis was among advisers who were in the White House when President Donald Trump on Thursday decided to accept the offer by North Korean leader Jong Un Kim to meet by May. The offer was relayed to Trump by a South Korean government delegation that briefed the president on

their meeting with Kim last week in the North Korean capital. "I do not want to talk about Korea at all. It's that delicate," he said in an interview as he flew to the Mideast, landing in Oman on Sunday. "When you get in a position like this, the potential for misunderstanding remains very high," he said, explaining his unwillingness to talk about any aspect of the diplomatic efforts. The Pentagon chief said the White House and State Department were best suited to discuss the situation in advance of the May meeting. (AP)

## China's Parliament Puts Xi on Course to Rule for Life

BEIJING - China's Xi Jinping on Sunday secured a path to rule indefinitely as parliament abolished presidential term limits, handing him almost total authority to pursue a vision of transforming the nation into an economic and military superpower. The move reverses the era of "collective" leadership and orderly succession that was promoted by late paramount leader Deng Xiaoping to ensure

stability following the turbulent one-man rule of Communist China's founder Mao Zedong. The historic constitutional amendment cleared the rubber-stamp parliament with 2,958 in favour, two against, three abstentions and one invalid vote, despite an unusual bout of online criticism that censors have scrambled to extinguish. Xi stood up first at the imposing Great Hall of the People in Beijing



to cast his paper ballot in a red box, as delegates of the National People's Congress applauded after each

vote on the constitutional amendment to lift the two five-year term limit for the presidency. (AFP)

## French President Pokes at Trump for Leaving Paris Accord



NEW DELHI - French President Emmanuel Macron took a jibe at President Donald Trump on Sunday for his decision to withdraw the United States from

the Paris climate agreement. Macron did not name Trump while speaking at the first meeting of the International Solar Alliance in New Delhi.

But while hailing the "solar mamas," a group of women trained as solar engineers, he said the women had continued their mission to promote solar energy even after "some countries decided just to leave the floor and leave the Paris agreement." Trump announced last June that the U.S. was withdrawing from the Paris accord, which aims to slow the rise in global temperature by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. At a separate weekend

event in India, former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also regretted Trump's decision. "It is shameful that the U.S. is the only country in the world that is not in the Paris Agreement," Clinton said Saturday in Mumbai, India's financial capital, while speaking at a conference organized by the India Today media group. Heads and ministers of dozens of countries participated in Sunday's solar meeting, co-hosted by India and France. (AP)

### India, France to Work for Indian Ocean Freedom of Navigation

NEW DELHI - India and France pledged Saturday to work together to ensure freedom of navigation in the Indian Ocean and signed an agreement to expedite construction of a major nuclear power plant in India by a French company. After talks with French President Emmanuel Macron in New Delhi, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi also highlighted a solar alliance and cooperation between the two countries in defense, security, technology, space and counterterrorism. Macron, who arrived in

New Delhi on Friday for a four-day visit to India, said France and India should be key partners. "And I dream to have more and more Indian citizens coming to France - studying, becoming entrepreneurs, creating startups - and I want my country to be a best partner in Europe, an entry point," Macron said at a reception ceremony. "I want to double the number of Indian students coming to France," he said later on Twitter. Modi said it was critical for the two countries to cooperate in the Indian Ocean region. (AP)

### 'Mr. Records' Keeps Kenya's Last Vinyl Music Shop Alive

NAIROBI, Kenya - Tucked into a busy market in Kenya's capital is arguably the country's last record store. "Real Vinyl Guru" has been open for 28 years and now enjoys the growing interest of music lovers who want to look beyond sleek digital offerings and return to the pleasure of browsing for a classic African vinyl find. Former disc jockey James "Jimmy" Rugami is at his shop every morning as early as 6, sorting through his latest discoveries. While many record shops closed in music's shift to digital and with the rise of piracy, he patiently held on and collected the stock of closing stores. (AP)

### Scientists Find New Type of Ice inside Diamonds

WASHINGTON - A rare form of ice has been found inside diamonds that were newly unearthed around the world, according to a study published in Thursday's Science journal. The type of ice, known as ice-VII, features a cubic shape and is about 1.5 times as dense as the regular ice - ice-I. Different from other solids, whose atoms squeeze together under higher forms of pressure, water-based ice rearrange themselves into new structures when subjected to increasing pressure.

For example, if you press down hard enough on ice-I, it will transform into ice-II, which has a rhombohedral structure. Increase the pressure once gain and the atoms will rearrange themselves into ice-III, then IV, V, VI and VII.

Once it reaches the phase of ice-VII, the structure remains fairly stable even as the pressure increases. The discovery has cheered the scientists, who previously believed that ice-VII only existed on other planets of the solar systems. (Xinhua)

### Hi-Tech Conservationists Fight Indonesia Wildlife Crime

JAKARTA - From cutting-edge DNA barcoding to smartphone apps that can identify illegal wildlife sales, conservationists are turning to hi-tech tools in their battle against Indonesia's animal traffickers. Spread across more than 17,000 islands, the Southeast Asian nation's dense tropical rainforests boast some of the highest levels of biodiversity in the world, from scaly pangolins to the endangered orangutan. But that enormous array of flora and fauna means Indonesia is also on the frontline of an illicit global trade estimated to be worth as much as \$23 billion a year - a shadowy operation bringing some species to the brink of extinction. To tackle the problem,



conservationists have begun using a slew of new gadgets to protect the archipelago's rare and threatened wildlife. "Without a doubt (technology) is probably one of the largest resources that will help the good guys get the bad guys," Matthew Pritchett, from anti-trafficking group Freeland Foundation,

told AFP. "The criminals that are behind the illegal wildlife trade are large organized syndicates that are extremely sophisticated." To keep pace with these vast trafficking groups, activists are now deploying the kind of technology once reserved for combating drug cartels and crime lords. (AFP)

### At Least 16 Dead As Lightning Strikes Rwanda Church

KIGALI - At least 16 people were killed and dozens more injured after lightning struck a Seventh-Day Adventist church in Rwanda, a local official said Sunday. Fourteen victims were killed on the spot as lightning hit the church in the Nyaruguru district in the Southern Province on Saturday, local mayor Habitegeko Francois told AFP over the phone. Two others died later from their injuries, he said.

He added that 140 people involved in the incident had been rushed to hospital and district health centres, but that many had already been discharged. "Doctors say that only three of them are in critical condition but they are getting better," he said. According to the mayor, a similar accident took place on Friday when lightning struck a group of 18 students, killing one of them. (AFP)

### U.S. Tops Medal Tally at Day 2 of Pyeongchang Paralympics, DPRK Officially Debuts

PYEONGCHANG - The United States continued Sunday to top the medal tally against a melting snowfield from sunny weather, grasping one gold, two silver and one bronze medals further on day two of the 2018 Paralympic Winter Games.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) officially debuted in the Winter Paralympics, with its two Nordic skiers completing course in the men's 15km cross-country sit ski event.

All of Sunday's medals came from skiing: alpine skiing super-G and cross-country skiing, on which six and two gold medals were up for grabs.

Races were tough for every skier as sunny weather and higher temperature melted snow, making conditions grueling.

"Everything is melting, everything is mush. For my class, it is very hard, especially the climbs," said Maksym Yarovyi of Ukraine who won his first-ever Paralympic gold medal in the men's cross-country 15km sit ski.

Two U.S. athletes made their podium with gold and bronze in the women's sitting 12.5 km cross-country event. The U.S. Nordic skier Kendall Gretsch won her second Paralympic gold in the space of two days, with teammate Oksana Masters taking bronze.

In the medal table, the United States kept top post with four gold, three silver and two bronze medals in total. France came next with three gold, two silver and one bronze medals, trailed by Slovakia having only one less silver medal than the runner-up. (Xinhua)