

## Saudi Cleric Says Women Need Not Wear Abaya Robe in Public

SAUDI ARABIA - Saudi women should not have to wear the loose-fitting abaya robe to shroud their bodies in public, a senior cleric said, in the latest sign of a far-reaching liberalization drive.

"More than 90% of pious Muslim women in the Muslim world do not wear abayas," said Sheikh Abdullah al-Mutlaq, a member of the council of senior scholars - the kingdom's highest religious body.

"So we should not force people to wear abayas," he told a television programme broadcast on Friday. Saudi Arabia, which has some of the world's tightest restrictions on women, requires them to wear the garment by law.

The government has not said whether it will change the law,



but this is the first such comment from a senior religious figure.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has recently introduced a series of reforms in favour of women as the kingdom prepares for a post-oil era.

Saudi Arabia last month allowed women to enter a football stadium for the first time to watch a game.

The move came four months after the kingdom announced an end to a long-standing ban on women driving - a major change to the country's ultra-conservative social order.

But women still face a number of restrictions. (The Guardian)

### American Luger Emily Sweeney Crashes Out of Olympics

PYEONGCHANG, South Korea - American luger Emily Sweeney crashed out of the Pyeongchang Olympics on Tuesday, losing control of her sled midway through the final run of the competition.

There was no immediate word on the nature of Sweeney's injury. She was able to walk toward the finish about 10 minutes after the crash, albeit very gingerly and with some assistance from team and on-site medical personnel.

Sweeney lost control around Curve 9, the track's most treacherous

spot, and then began careening all over the track. She wound up sliding feet-first up one curve toward the track roof before getting thrown from her sled and eventually tumbling to a stop. Sweeney remained on the ice for several minutes, then was able to sit on the track wall while medical personnel tended to her. The crowd at the Alpensia Sliding Center - which had been raucous all night - immediately went silent while waiting for any sign that Sweeney was fine. These were the first Olympics for Sweeney. (AP)

## Countries Who Fought Islamic State Must Help Rebuild Iraq -Tillerson

KUWAIT - The United States urged members of the coalition fighting Islamic State on Tuesday to help rebuild Iraq or risk the reversal of the gains made against the group there.

The U.S. leads the coalition and hopes that after a three-year fight to defeat the militants it can count in large part on Gulf allies to shoulder the burden of rebuilding Iraq and on a Saudi-Iraqi rapprochement to weaken Iran's influence in the country, which is run by a Shi'ite led gov-



ernment. Islamic State took control of large parts of Iraq and Syria in 2014. Donors and investors

have gathered in Kuwait this week to discuss efforts to rebuild Iraq's economy and infrastructure as it emerges from a devastating conflict with the hardline militants who seized almost a third of the country. (Reuters)

## Erdogan Says U.S. Funding of Syrian YPG Militia to Impact Turkey's Decisions



ANKARA/ISTANBUL - A decision by the United States to continue to fund the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia will affect Turkey's future moves,

President Tayyip Erdogan said on Tuesday, ahead of a visit this week by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. U.S. officials have said

that Tillerson expects to have difficult conversations when he visits Turkey on Thursday and Friday, given that the NATO allies have starkly diverging interests in Syria.

Turkey has been enraged by U.S. support for the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia, which Ankara sees as a terrorist organization and an extension of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party

(PKK). Washington has backed the YPG in the fight against Islamic State in Syria. "Our ally's decision to give financial support to the YPG... will surely affect the decisions we will take," Erdogan said in a speech to members of his ruling AK Party in parliament. His comments followed the release of the U.S. Department of Defence's 2019 budget, which includes requests for funds to train and equip local forces in the fight against Islamic State in Syria. (Reuters)

### India Explores "Cheap Power" Sales to Neighbours

NEW DELHI - India is exploring selling "cheap power" to its South Asian neighbours and Myanmar on a long-term basis and wants state utility NTPC to expand overseas, its power minister said on Tuesday.

Indian companies such as Reliance Power Ltd and Adani Power Ltd have already signed agreements to supply power to Bangladesh, where New Delhi is fighting for influence with China. India also sells some electricity to Nepal and Myanmar, but power minister R.K. Singh said it could sell more. "Neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Nepal and Bangladesh are viable markets... where the per-unit cost of electricity is very high," Singh said in a statement released by the power ministry. "There is huge opportunity to export cheap power to neighbouring countries which will be beneficial for the entire region," he said. The ministry would look at sending teams to those countries to assess demand for power imports, he said. (Reuters)

### Geisenberger Defends Women's Olympic Luge Title

PYEONGCHANG, South Korea - Natalie Geisenberger has another Olympic women's luge gold medal. The German star is now the two-time Olympic champion, after finishing off the historic win at the Pyeongchang Games. Germany's Dajana Eitberger was second and Alex Gough earn bronze, giving Canada its first Olympic luge medal.

Geisenberger becomes the third woman to win consecutive Olympic golds, joining fellow German stars Steffi Martin Walter and Sylke Otto. She also becomes the first woman to win three Olympic luge golds, the two singles races added to the team relay victory at Sochi in 2014.

Johannes HoesflotKlaebo of Norway has won the gold medal in the classic sprint at the Pyeongchang Olympics. Frederico Pellegrino of Italy edged out Alexander Bolshunov, an Olympic athlete from Russia, in a photo finish to win silver. Bolshunov got the bronze. (AP)

### Germany's Social Democrats Debate Future Leadership

BERLIN - Germany's center-left Social Democrats are debating the party's future leadership following a week of vicious infighting that has overshadowed a coalition deal reached with Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservative Union bloc.

Since agreeing last week to join a government with Merkel, senior Social Democrats have fallen out over the distribution of ministerial posts.

Chairman Martin Schulz is expected to step down Tuesday and make way for parliamentary caucus leader Andrea Nahles, a move strongly opposed by some in the party.

The internal dispute within the party has increased concerns that its leadership could fail to rally members behind a grassroots vote on whether to enter into a "grand coalition" with Merkel.

If members reject the coalition, Merkel's only realistic options would be to form a minority government or seek fresh elections. (AP)

## US Teen Star Kim Melts Hearts with Tearful Snowboarding Gold

PYEONGCHANG (South Korea) - American teenage sensation Chloe Kim romped to Olympic snowboarding gold in the women's halfpipe Tuesday before bursting into tears as the enormity of her achievement sunk in.

The 17-year-old, who has melted the hearts of home fans in Pyeongchang thanks to her ever-ready smile and Korean heritage, justified her status as the hot favourite with an eye-popping top score of 98.25.

Kim had been assured of gold before her pulsating final run after China's Liu Jiayu crashed



on her last descent. Pumping her fists after finishing with back-to-back 1080 spins, Kim was serenaded by a pumped-up crowd chanting: "Chloe Kim, Chloe Kim!"

But after wrapping herself in the American flag, Kim was suddenly overcome with emotion and the tears flowed as she celebrated with her Ko-

rean parents. "I'm a little overwhelmed," she said after composing herself. "I don't really know what's happening and I'm actually feeling a little anxious right now. "There was a lot of pressure," added Kim, who was so good at 13 she might have won gold in Sochi - but she was too young to compete. (AFP)

## US Warns EU against Defense Market Protectionism

BRUSSELS - The United States is warning the European Union not to use its deepened military cooperation as an excuse to protect Europe's defense industry, saying such practices could undermine NATO. The U.S. ambassador to NATO, Kay Bailey Hutchison, said Tuesday that "we do not want this (cooperation) to be a protectionist vehicle for EU." She said Washington is "going to watch carefully, because if that becomes the case then it could splinter the strong security alliance that we have." EU leaders - 22 of whose nations are

also members of the U.S.-led NATO alliance - agreed last year to jointly develop or purchase military equipment like drones. Washington is concerned now that the bidding process might exclude U.S. firms. EU countries also drew up a list of criteria and binding commitments to set their cooperation in stone, rather than rely on the vaguer promises of the past. On top of that, they agreed to use EU funds to finance Europe's battle-groups - small, expeditionary forces that can rapidly be deployed to crisis hotspots. (AP)

## Nothing's In a Name: Russians Resemble Russian National Team

GANGNEUNG, South Korea - They trudged from their locker room to the practice rink with expressions as blank as their jerseys.

The Russians enter the Olympic men's hockey tournament with their usual businesslike fashion, insisting they are not bothered by the nondescript uniforms and missing coat of arms on their chests. They are officially "Olympic Athletes from Russia" as declared by the International Olympic Committee in the doping scandal fallout, but this is still the same stoic, sometimes prickly group determined to win the gold medal.

"We're still Team Russia," forward Mikhail Grigorenko said Tuesday. "Everybody knows where we're coming from and they can't take away who we are just from the jerseys and all that. I think we still have a pretty good team. We have one goal here: to win. So we'll go out there and try to do everything we can to do that." From the straightforward, no-nonsense approach to the intense, full-speed practices, this is the Russian national team. The style of play has changed from the Cold War era, though this might as well be the Red Army team.

In fact, eight players come from CSKA Moscow, which draws its roots to those storied Soviet teams, plus 15 more from SKA Saint Petersburg, which is far and away the best team in the Kontinental Hockey League. Having 21 of 22 skaters from the same two teams also gives the Russians the kind of chemistry that marked those dominant teams of the past - a chemistry most other teams in the Olympics don't have. "You play with a lot of the guys on the same team so you move better with them on the ice," forward Sergei Shirokov said. (AP)

## Neighbor News

### Peaceful Afghanistan in Favour of Pakistan, Entire Region: Aya Sadiq

ISLAMABAD - Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq said Tuesday that Afghanistan was our neighboring country and a peaceful Afghanistan was in the favour of Pakistan and the entire region. He said that Pakistan would like to have good relations with the United States as well as with all its neighbors based on mutual respect and equality. He said this while talking to Ambassador of Germany Martin Kobler and the participants of the 2018 Course for Senior Officials of the Federal Academy of Security Policy of Germany in the meetings separately in Parliament House on Tuesday, said a press release here. He said that Pakistan and Germany enjoyed cordial and cooperative relations which needed to be further strengthened through substantive and long term parliamentary

and economic cooperation. He emphasized the need for a regular interaction between political leadership, parliamentarians and people of both the countries that would take the existing relations to the new heights.

Underlining the need for exploring possibilities, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq added that Pakistan was potential country for investment with emphasis on trade and development for enhancing co-operation between the two countries. This will strengthen impetus of bilateral economic relations among the two countries, he added.

Exchanging views on global and regional issues, he remarked that Pakistan had a keen interest in promoting regional stability and was making consistent efforts for regional peace and economic stability. (Monitoring Desk)

### Peugeot Has to Procure 30% of Parts For Algeria from Iran

TEHRAN - French car-maker PSA Group has to procure 30% of auto parts at its Algeria site from Iran under its agreement with the country's leading automaker Iran Khodro (IKCO), a car parts maker says.

"According to the signed contract, 30% of the parts necessary for production should be sourced from Iran," said Mohammad Reza Najafi-Manesh, a member of the presiding board of Iranian Auto Parts Manufacturers Association.

He said Iranian auto parts manufacturers will attend Equip Auto Algeria In-

ternational Trade Fair for spare parts, equipment, services and maintenance for automotive and industrial vehicles which begins on Feb. 28.

Last month, PSA executive vice-president for purchasing, Yannick Bézard, invited Iran Khodro to set up shop in Algeria where Peugeot is launching a manufacturing unit.

Peugeot signed a joint venture worth around 100 million euros last November to produce cars for the Algerian market, with the production line due to become fully operational in 2019. (PressTV)

### Uzbekistan, South Korea See Growth in Trade Turnover

TASHKENT - The volume of bilateral trade between Uzbekistan and South Korea reached \$ 1.2 billion a year, Deputy Prime Minister of Uzbekistan Sukhrob Kholmurodov said at the Uzbek-Korean business dialogue in Tashkent.

During the dialogue, the sides thoroughly discussed the prospects for expanding mutually beneficial trade and economic cooperation between the two countries.

"We have achieved turnover of \$1.2 billion a year, but we can confidently say that we have all the opportunities for a significant increase of these figures," Kholmurodov said.

He stressed that South Korea is rightly considered one of the key partners of Uzbekistan, as well as a friend, an investor and participant in large-scale programs implemented in the republic aimed at structural transformation, modernization of the economy, expansion and production of competitive products, and an increase in exports.

Kholmurodov noted that today more than 70 representative offices of Korean companies operate in Uzbekistan, 440 enterprises with Korean investments operate in almost all sectors of the economy, whose trade volumes exceeded \$5 billion. (Trend)

### EBRD to Assist Uzbekistan in Tourism Development

TASHKENT - Central Asia's Uzbekistan and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the field of tourism and cultural heritage, Uzbek media reported. The memorandum was inked between the Culture Ministry, the State Committee of Uzbekistan for Tourism Development and the EBRD in London.

EBRD First Vice President Philip Bennett noted that he was sincerely glad that Uzbekistan was chosen as the first pilot country for implementation of this project.

He stressed that Uzbekistan has a unique cultural and historical heritage that can be effectively used to enhance competitive advantages in the global tourism market.

The document envisages financing of projects related to cultural heritage sites, including those that contribute to the development of infrastructure, the preservation, sustainable management and exploitation of historical heritage, promotion of cultural tourism, and assistance in strengthening various instruments for the creation of an effective chain of sustainable development.

The signing of the memorandum was held within the framework of the round table on "Inclusive sustainable tourism and commercialization of cultural heritage: challenges and opportunities" dedicated to launch the new initiative "Cultural Heritage" of the EBRD. The bank plans to direct €150 million to this initiative. (Trend)