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Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan (L) meets Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Tehran on Wednesday, February 27, 2019.

## Iran, Armenia should have solid, amicable ties despite U.S. opposition

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## Iranian banking delegation to embark for Japan soon

**TEHRAN** — An Iranian banking delegation will soon leave Tehran for Tokyo as accorded in a meeting between the Governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Abdolnaser Hemmati and Japan's Ambassador to Tehran Mitsugu Saito, the portal of CBI reported on Wednesday.

The visit seeks to accelerate finalization of clearing Japan's oil payments to Iran and trade of goods between the two sides, the report said.

Underlining that Japanese companies preserved their businesses with Iran over the past months despite the U.S. sanctions against Tehran, the Japanese ambassador said that his country will continue economic relations with Iran according to its own interests.

Cementing economic ties between the two countries is Japan's first priority regarding its relations with Iran, Mitsugu Saito said two weeks ago.

## Iran's first hemodiafiltration center for kidney diseases inaugurated

**TEHRAN** — The first specialized center using hemodiafiltration as a dialysis method for kidney diseases was inaugurated in Dr Lavasani Hospital in Tehran.

According to the hospital's president Seyyed Ali Jamalian, hemodiafiltration therapy will substantially improve the life of patients who need dialysis, IRIB reported on Tuesday.

In medicine, dialysis is the process of removing excess water, solutes, and

toxins from the blood in people whose kidneys can no longer perform these functions naturally. This is referred to as renal replacement therapy.

Hemodiafiltration is a type of dialysis that combines two other methods of dialysis; namely, hemodialysis and hemofiltration. It is thus used to purify the blood from toxins when the kidney is not working normally and also used to treat acute kidney injury (AKI). **→9**

## Imran Khan calls for talks, urges India to avoid 'miscalculation'

Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan has called for talks with India after both sides said they shot down each other's warplanes, something that has not happened since the nuclear-armed rivals went to war in 1971.

Pakistan shot down two Indian air force fighter jets and launched air strikes at six targets in Indian-administered Kashmir,

its military said, in a dramatic ratcheting up of tensions between the two nuclear-armed neighbors.

The Indian air force jets were shot down over Pakistani airspace in Pakistan-administered Kashmir on Wednesday, a day after Indian aircraft launched air raids on Pakistani territory, Pakistani military spokesperson Major General Asif Ghafoor said. **→13**



### PERSPECTIVE

**Mostafa Mousavi Sabet**  
Head of the Tehran Times  
Art & Culture Desk

## Joy key ingredient missing from Iranian festivals

Enjoyment is a vital part missing from Iranian cultural events, the most important of them are the Fajr festivals, which are organized every year to celebrate the anniversary of the 1979 Islamic revolution.

Those who intend to participate in the festivals get into disputes to convince the selection boards to pick their works and widespread criticism begins if their works fail to be entered in the events.

The artists whose works do gain entry to the festivals then start bargaining for a better time slot for their works on the festival's schedules.

After the selection boards announce their decision, there will be more hard bargaining among the owners of the entries for an even better place on the festival's schedules.

Afterward, they spend all the days of the festivals suffering anxiety attacks over whether their works will enjoy critical and public acclaim.

Festival organizers' calls to attend a press conference come as summonses on artists, filmmakers and their crews. The press conferences are replete with sickening quarrels between journalists and artists. During the press conferences, the journalists and critics regard the entries as nonsense and the artists view their questions and comments as superficial.

The closing ceremonies of the festival also have their own bizarre stories. Hosts and coordinators fail to have sufficient control over the programs they have arranged for the ceremonies. All participating officials and organizers are invited to the stage and annoy the audience with their long, boring speeches. And yet surprisingly, none of them reject those invitations.

Award presenters and jury members appear on stage to be unfashionable and outdated, using gestures more appropriate for people who are attending a memorial service, and then quickly become part of the stage props until the conclusion of the ceremonies. **→16**

## 'Events unfolding between India and Pakistan very frightening'

By Syed Zafar Mehdi

**TEHRAN** — The heightened tensions between India and Pakistan — the two warring neighbors — in the wake of recent terror attack in Indian-controlled Kashmir have brought them on the warpath again.

After two weeks of shrill war rhetoric, the two nuclear powers have started flexing the military muscle, conducting 'surgical strikes' in each other's territories.

Beena Sarwar is a Pakistan-based journalist, artist, documentary filmmaker and peace activist. She has been working as Editor Aman ki Asha, a peace initiative between two biggest media groups of India and Pakistan.

In an interview with Tehran Times, she talks about the latest escalation between India and Pakistan, the implications of war, and why the unfolding events are 'frightening'.

Following are the excerpts:

■ The recent attack in Indian controlled Kashmir, the deadliest in three decades of insurgency, has again brought India and Pakistan at loggerheads. Do you think the damage done this time is irreversible?

A. Nothing is irreversible but each such bout of violence sets us back immensely.

■ India accuses Pakistan of providing sanctuary to Jaish e Mohammad, a group that claimed responsibility for the Kashmir attack, and other terrorist groups. Pakistan rejects the allegations. Do you think the leadership in Pakistan has got control over these groups?

A. They may not have control over these groups but enforcing rule of law would help to obtain it. Treat criminal acts as criminal acts — charge, prosecute and punish according to law. Instead, Pakistan has allowed certain groups to get away

with certain crimes in the name of ideology or religion. Such impunity and exceptionalism doesn't work in the long run.

■ Following the attack, Indian PM Narendra Modi vowed 'befitting reply' and one of his ministers said India will 'diplomatically isolate Pakistan'. Pakistan, however, called it 'a dream'. Do you think India will be able to 'isolate' Pakistan?

A. Difficult in this increasingly inter-connected world where there are so many financial and power interests. They will have to learn to get along. The sooner the better.

■ War drums are beating loudly in India with radical Hindu groups calling for 'revenge'. Tensions have heightened in Kashmir where fighter jets are creating panic and anxiety among people. Both countries are claiming to have conducted surgical strikes. Do you see the likelihood of small-case war? **→6**

## Trump and Kim predict success in high-stakes nuclear summit

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and U.S. President Donald Trump met in Vietnam on Wednesday for a second summit that the United States hopes will persuade North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons in exchange for promises of peace and development.

Kim and Trump shook hands and smiled briefly in front of a row of their national flags at the Metropole hotel in the Vietnamese capital, Hanoi, before heading to dinner together.

Trump told reporters he thought the talks would be very successful, and asked if he was "walking back" on denuclearization, said "no".

At their historic first summit in Singapore last June, Trump and Kim pledged to work toward denuclearization and permanent peace on the Korean peninsula but little progress has been made.

Kim said they had overcome obstacles to hold their second summit and praised Trump for his "courageous decision" to begin a dialogue.

"Now that we're meeting here again like this, I'm confident that there will be an excellent outcome that everyone welcomes, and I'll do my best to make it happen," Kim said.

Trump and Kim held a 20-minute, one-on-one chat before sitting down to dinner with U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo Trump's acting

Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney, Kim's top envoy, Kim Yong Chol, and North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho.

On Thursday, the two leaders will hold a series of meetings, the White House said. The venue has not been announced.

"We're going to have a very busy day tomorrow," said a smiling, relaxed-looking Trump, seated beside Kim at a round table with the other four officials and two interpreters.

"Our relationship is a very special relationship." Experts said the pair were at pains to show their relationship had improved since their first meeting, with their body language closely mirroring each other. **→3**



## Jundi Shapur symbol of Iranian wisdom, intellect: official

**TEHRAN** — The secretary general of the Iranian National Commission for UNESCO has described the ancient Jundi Shapur University as a symbol of Iranian wisdom and intellect, IRNA reported.

"The freedom in science, along with the Iranian wisdom and intellect prevail over Jundi Shapur," Hojjatollah Ayoubi said on Tuesday, addressing an international congress on history, archaeology held in the southwestern university.

While in today's world, morality is a missing link which is a major issue in UNESCO, our academia in ancient Jundi Shapur had a moral charter, he said.



### ARTICLE

**Syed Zafar Mehdi**  
Journalist  
from New Delhi

## It's official: India, Pakistan are at war, again

After days of shrill war rhetoric and saber-rattling, India claimed to have conducted a surgical strike in Balakot, a small hamlet in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, early Tuesday morning.

Indian government termed it a "non-military, pre-emptive action" against a major terror sanctuary of Jaish e Mohammad (JeM), a terror group that claimed responsibility for an attack in Indian controlled Kashmir two weeks ago, which killed 44 members of India's paramilitary police force.

More than 200 militants were killed in the precision strike, Indian officials and military analysts claimed from run-of-the-mill television studios.

Pakistan debunked the claim and said Indian military planes had violated the Line of Control (LoC), intruding from Pakistan controlled Kashmir, after which "Pakistan Air Force immediately scrambled" and Indian military planes headed back.

Maj. Gen. Asif Ghafoor, spokesperson of Pakistan military, said it was time for India to wait for Pakistan's "befitting response", which he said will come "at a point and time of our choosing".

On Wednesday morning, Pakistan announced that it had carried out air raids in Indian controlled Kashmir and shot down two Indian fighter jets, one of them in central Kashmir's Budgam district. It also claimed to have arrested one of the Indian fighter jet pilots. India said three Pakistani combat jets had entered the airspace over Indian controlled Kashmir but made their way back to Pakistan after being intercepted by Indian planes.

At least four airports in northern India have been indefinitely shut down amid fears of a retaliatory attack from Pakistan. On Pakistani side too, preparations are afoot to repel any attack from India.

So, it's official: the two South Asian nuclear-armed neighbors are at war. The season of madness has begun, and this time India has jumped the bandwagon, seeking 'justice' for Pulwama attack.

Amidst this mindless cacophony of war, revenge and retaliation, sane voices on both sides of the border have been calling for restraint and calm. They have urged both warring parties to give peace a chance, while denouncing military adventurism. **→6**



## MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



### Leader-Assad meeting was a 'blissful' event: Jannati

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Assembly of Experts Chairman Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati on Wednesday described as "blissful" the recent meeting between Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Ayatollah Jannati said one should thank God that the Syrian president and nation were able to overcome different problems and prove their righteousness, Mehr reported.

President Assad visited Tehran on Monday to thank the Iranian government and nation for supporting his country since the beginning of the war in Syria in 2011. During his visit he met Ayatollah Khamenei and President Hassan Rouhani.



### Zarif asks India, Pakistan to exercise self-restraint

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Wednesday expressed regret over recent clashes between India and Pakistan, asking the two countries to exercise self-restraint.

Zarif made the remarks in a phone conversation with his Pakistani counterpart Shah Mehmood Qureshi, IRNA reported. Zarif was also expected to talk on the phone with his Indian counterpart on the issue.

Over the last two days, India and Pakistan have ordered air strikes against one another, the first time in history that two nuclear-armed powers have done so, while ground forces have exchanged fire in more than a dozen locations.



### Iranian, Syrian foreign ministers talk on phone

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and his Syrian counterpart, Walid al-Muallem, held talks on a range of issues, including the latest efforts to boost strategic relations between Tehran and Damascus.

In a telephone conversation on Wednesday, Zarif and Muallem also exchanged views about the outcomes of a recent historic visit by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to Tehran, Tasnim reported.

Assad paid an unannounced visit to Iran on Monday. He met with Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Rouhani.

Speaking at the meeting, the Leader praised the resistance of the Syrian government and people that led to the defeat of Washington and its regional mercenaries in the Syrian war.



### 'No link between Zarif's resignation and Assad's trip to Tehran'

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — A senior foreign policy advisor to the Iranian parliament speaker has ruled out any link between Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif's resignation and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's Monday visit to Tehran.

Hossein Amir Abdollahian said the rumors in this regard are merely media speculation which aim to diminish the impact of Assad's visit to Tehran, ISNA reported on Wednesday.

He also said the Syrian president's trip to Tehran carried a meaningful message in the current time.

Amir Abdollahian added the Islamic Republic supports the Syrian government and its legal government.



### Mostafa Mahami named Zahedan Friday prayer leader

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has appointed Sheikh Mostafa Mahami as interim Friday prayer leader of Zahedan and his representative in the border province of Sistan-Baluchestan, ISNA reported on Wednesday.

In his decree, Ayatollah Khamenei said advancing religious, cultural, social and political affairs of the people in the province is the most important job of Mahami.

The Leader added that respecting religious scholars and scientific and academic figures as well as paying attention to religious centers and coordinating related bodies are among his representative's duties.



### Bodies of 5 IRGC members discovered in Syria

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Public Relations of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) has announced that it had discovered the bodies of five missing members of the IRGC in Syria, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

"With round-the-clock efforts of the research team of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps' Quds Force, the bodies of five Iranian soldiers, who had been martyred during an advisory mission in Syria, were discovered and they were identified after DNA tests", the statement said.

It also named the martyrs as: Saeed Ansari and Meysam Nazari from Tehran Province, Hamid Mohammad Rezaee from Qazvin Province, Mohammad Qanbarian from Semnan Province and Seyyed Javad Asadi from Mazandaran Province.

# Leader: Iran, Armenia should have solid, amicable ties despite U.S. opposition

## Ayatollah Khamenei says the resolution of the Karabakh conflict is dependent on a constant dialogue between Armenian and Azeri officials

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Wednesday called Iran and Armenia as good neighbors who have been enjoying good relationship during the history and said in contrast to opposition by the United States both Iran and Armenia should make their relations "strong, durable and amicable".

Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks in a meeting with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan who visited Tehran at the head of senior delegation on Wednesday.

Ayatollah Khamenei also pointed to the good relationship between Iranians and their Armenian countrymen, saying the Armenian community in Iran made sacrifices during Iraq's war against Iran in the 1980s.

"I have visited the houses of these martyrs because the Armenian martyrs of the imposed war are like Muslims martyrs and we consider them as honors of Iran," the Leader noted during the meeting which President Rouhani was also present.

The Leader said promoting friendship and close cooperation is a duty which will meet the interests of Iran and Armenia.

However, Ayatollah Khamenei said Americans are quite untrustworthy and seek war and conflict everywhere in the world, adding are against the relationship between Iran and Armenia "but in response we are tasked to reinforce our cooperation and relations."

Referring to the amicable ties between Iran and Armenia in the course of history, the Leader said, "Iran and Armenia have never had problems with each other and according to Islamic principles were are duty bound to have good behavior with neighbors."

"However," Ayatollah Khamenei added, "American officials like John Bolton have no understanding of such a human relationship".

Ayatollah Khamenei also said the current level of economic ties between Iran and Armenia is less than the existing capacities of the two countries and suggested that the agreements made during his visit to be seriously followed and implemented.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Leader



President Rouhani welcomes Armenian PM Nikol Pashinyan at Saadabad Palace in Tehran

said the resolution of the Karabakh conflict is dependent on a constant dialogue between Armenian and Azeri officials.

Ayatollah Khamenei reiterated Iran's long-held position that the Islamic Republic is ready to help resolve the conflict between Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan.

For his part, Prime Minister Pashinyan described his visit to Tehran as constructive and promising and expressed hope that the agreements signed during his visit would be implemented with the determination of the two sides.

Pashinyan said the history of friendly ties has provided a good condition for improving ties.

He also said, "Armenia has never been and will never be involved in any anti-Iran moves and we consider promotion of relations with Iran to the interests of our people and country."

The prime minister also expressed happiness over the favorable life of the Armenian community in Iran and said he believed that in the light of the great experience of the Leader and the role of the Islamic Republic in the region cooperation between Armenia and Iran would expand

more than ever.

### Rouhani: Iran happy with Armenia's stance on illegal sanctions

At a joint press conference with Prime Minister Pashinyan, President Rouhani said Iran is satisfied with Armenia's stance on the irrational and illegal sanctions imposed against Iran by the United States.

He said the two neighboring countries are determined to push bilateral relations forward based on their national interests and without being affected by a third party, ISNA reported.

"There are good relations between the two countries in the fields of politics, culture, tourism, science and academia, and we want to expand these relations in all fields," he remarked.

According to Rouhani, good agreements and accords were reached during the visit of the Armenian prime minister and the delegation accompanying him.

The president further pointed to the good relations established between the two states since Armenia's independence, saying, "We hope to witness more agreements and accords with the new [Armenian] government."

Reiterating his administration's policy to boost ties with neighboring countries, Rouhani said there are good opportunities for closer ties between Tehran and Yerevan in different fields, particularly economy.

Hailing the pace of peaceful and democratic developments in Armenia, he said the visit will strengthen political, economic, cultural and political relations between the two nations.

"There are good opportunities and potentialities in Iran and Armenia to develop relations in various sectors of agriculture, including animal husbandry, cultivation of products and creation of agro-industrial companies," Rouhani explained.

Talking at a joint meeting of the two countries' senior teams, Rouhani said, "The Islamic Republic of Iran has always been seeking development of ties and cooperation with neighboring countries, especially Armenia, and follow this policy with seriousness."

Prime Minister Pashinyan, for his part, voiced Armenia's willingness to boost cooperation with the Islamic Republic in all areas, including agriculture, transport and tourism. He said the two sides' potentials should be tapped to bolster the friendly ties.

Pashinyan also said close ties between Eurasian countries and Iran and approval of preferential trade agreements by the parliaments of the member states will be a great step in the region.

He also thanked Iranian for hosting the Armenian nationals, saying it has strengthened solidarity between the two neighbors.

Heading a high-ranking delegation, the Armenian premier visited Tehran to hold talks with senior Iranian officials on ways to boost bilateral relations.

### Iran, Armenia sign two MOUs

Two memorandums of understanding (MOUs) were also signed between the two countries at the president of President Rouhani and Prime Minister Pashinyan.

Upon his arrival, Pashinyan was welcomed by Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, two days after the latter announced his resignation. Zarif's resignation was later rejected by President Rouhani who said it is contrary to national interests.

## Rouhani rejects Zarif's resignation

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani has refused to accept resignation by Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, saying it is contrary to the country's interests.

"Since according to the words of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution I consider you trustworthy, brave, courageous and faithful and in the forefront of resistance against widespread pressure by the United States, I believe your resignation is against the country's interests and don't agree with it," Rouhani wrote in a letter released on Wednesday.

He added, "I am well aware of pressure being exerted against the country's diplomatic apparatus, the government and even the president who have been elected by the people... I am sure that we will pass this difficult stage."

Rouhani said the successes of the Foreign Ministry just over the last few months are noticeable, citing Iran's legal victories against the United States in the International Court of Justice, the failure of the U.S.-organized conference in Warsaw which was intended to demonize Iran, and Zarif's reasonable and logical speech at the Munich Security Conference as examples.

Rouhani said the happiness of the "sworn enemies" of the Iranian people such as the Zionist regime of Israel are the "best evidence" of the success of Zarif.

Writing on his Twitter account, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday expressed joy over Zarif's resignation, saying, "Zarif is gone - good riddance."

The president said these things are the "best indications" that Zarif should stay in his job as chief diplomat. "You are trusted by me and the whole Islamic Republic system, especially by the Supreme Leader. Continue your work resolutely and bravely," Rouhani suggested to Zarif.

In remarks on Tuesday, Zarif said he was leaving his job so that the Foreign Ministry could find its "legal place" in foreign policy.

Rouhani said Zarif's concerns about the need to protect the status and credibility of the Foreign Ministry and also the position of the foreign minister as the highest responsible person in implementing foreign policy is "understandable" and "I confirm" them.

The president added the Foreign Ministry is responsible for foreign relations and "as I have repeatedly ordered all bodies... should be fully in coordination with the ministry".

Zarif announced his resignation in a post on his Instagram on Monday night.

"I am grateful for magnanimity of the dear and courageous people of Iran and the respectable authorities' over the past 67 months," Zarif said.

## General Soleimani: Zarif is in charge of Iran's foreign policy

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — General Qassem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC Quds Force, said on Wednesday that Iran's top officials support Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and he is in charge of the country's foreign policy.

The remarks by the general came after Zarif announced his resignation in a post on his Instagram late on Monday. His resignation came as a shock to the officials and the people.

General Soleimani said lack of coordination in the presidential office led to Zarif's absence in meeting between President Hassan Rouhani and visiting Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad on Monday.

However, Soleimani said this lack of coordination was not intentional. Soleimani pointed to happiness shown by anti-revolutionary groups and enemies after announcement of Zarif's resignation, saying their rush to celebrate the move, which was the result of a mistake by the Rouhani administration,

will not impact Iran's determination to take steps in line with national interests.

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On Wednesday, Zarif was present in Rouhani's meeting with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan who visited Tehran at the head of a delegation.



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# Trump and Kim predict success in high-stakes nuclear summit

## 1 → ■ Good relations

Trump said late last year he and Kim "fell in love", but whether the bonhomie can move them beyond summit pageantry to substantive progress on eliminating Pyongyang's nuclear arsenal that threatens the United States is the question that will dominate the talks.

Trump and Kim's Singapore summit, the first meeting between a sitting U.S. president and a North Korean leader, ended with great fanfare but little substance over how to dismantle North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles.

In the run-up to this summit, Trump has indicated a more flexible stance, saying he was in no rush to secure North Korea's denuclearization. He repeated that on Wednesday, saying while some people believed the talks should be moving more quickly, he was satisfied.

He has also said he would be happy as long as North Korea, which has not tested a nuclear weapon or intercontinental ballistic missile since 2017, maintained that freeze.

Some critics have said Trump appeared to be wavering on a long-standing U.S. demand for complete and irreversible denuclearization by North Korea, and risked squandering leverage if he gave away too much, too quickly.

Asked if he would declare a formal end to the Korean War, which North Korea has long called for, Trump said: "We'll see."

North and South Korea have been technically at war since their 1950-53 conflict, with the Americans backing the South, ended in a truce, not a treaty.

Evans Revere, a former U.S. negotiator with North Korea, said Trump was under



pressure, given the criticism and other domestic problems, and Kim might try to use that.

"Kim may be tempted to push Trump even harder for concessions, knowing how much the president wants and needs that testing pause," Revere said.

### ■ 'Awesome' potential

U.S. intelligence officials have said there is no sign North Korea will ever give up its entire arsenal of nuclear weapons, which it sees as its guarantee of national security. Analysts say it won't commit to significant

disarmament unless punishing U.S.-led economic sanctions are eased.

The two sides have discussed specific and verifiable denuclearization measures, such as allowing inspectors to observe the dismantlement of North Korea's Yongbyon nuclear reactor, U.S. and South Korean officials say.

U.S. concessions could include opening liaison offices or clearing the way for inter-Korean projects.

Despite little progress on his goal of rid-

ding North Korea of its weapons programs, Trump appeared to be betting on his personal relationship with Kim, and the economic incentive after 70 years of hostility between their countries.

"Vietnam is thriving like few places on earth. North Korea would be the same, and very quickly, if it would denuclearize," Trump said on Twitter ahead of the meeting.

"The potential is AWESOME, a great opportunity, like almost none other in history, for my friend Kim Jong Un. We will know fairly soon - Very Interesting!"

For Trump, a deal that eases the North Korean threat could hand him a big foreign-policy achievement in the midst of domestic troubles.

While he is in Hanoi, his former personal lawyer Michael Cohen is testifying before U.S. congressional committees, with the president's business practices the main focus.

Cohen, in wide-ranging testimony he is due to deliver on Wednesday, refers to a comment Trump made to him about avoiding the U.S. military draft for the Vietnam War on medical grounds: "You think I'm stupid, I wasn't going to Vietnam," Cohen cited Trump as saying.

"I find it ironic, President Trump, that you are in Vietnam right now," Cohen said in a draft statement seen by Reuters.

Trump, responding to the statement on Twitter, said Cohen was lying to reduce his prison time. He declined to respond when a reporter asked him about Cohen later.

(Source: Reuters)

## Venezuelan vice president to fly into Moscow for talks on Friday

Venezuelan Vice President Delcy Rodriguez will hold talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Moscow on Friday, the RIA news agency reported, the latest in a flurry of visits by Venezuelan politicians to staunch ally Russia.

Moscow has backed socialist President Nicolas Maduro in the face of a challenge from opposition leader Juan Guaido who declared himself interim president in January, a move backed by most Western nations.

The prospect of Maduro being ousted is a geopolitical and economic headache for Moscow and Russia has accused the United States of trying to engineer an illegal coup to topple him.

Russia, alongside China, has become a creditor of last resort for Caracas, lending it billions of dollars as its economy implodes. Moscow has also helped its military and oil industry and provided wheat.

Venezuela's deputy foreign minister, Ivan Gil, and the country's industry minister, Tareck El Aissami, were in Moscow last week for talks with senior officials.

----Venezuelan FM urges UN Security Council to reject use of force

Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza has accused the United States of trying to intervene in the Latin American country militarily, urging the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to reject any use of force against the country.

Addressing a UNSC meeting on Tuesday, Arreaza said the U.S.-led campaign to oust President Nicolas Maduro had failed.

"That was the last chapter in the coup on Saturday," he said. "Read my lips - it failed. Now is the time for us to return to sanity."

In the same meeting, Russia's Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia accused Washington of seeking to topple President Maduro through military intervention, adding that the U.S.' policy toward Venezuela is tantamount to violating international law.

He supported Arreaza and questioned what other countries would have done if confronted with "an attempted illegal state border crossing for the delivery of unknown cargo."

Turning to the U.S., he pointedly noted, "One country even wants to build a huge wall on the border of another country to prevent an illegal border crossing."

Maduro on Tuesday said the U.S. President Donald Trump is surrounded by "bad" officials who are advising him during the ongoing political and humanitarian crisis in the country.

"I fear the people that are around him," Maduro told ABC News in an exclusive interview.

The comments come a day after the Trump administration ramped up sanctions to pressure Maduro to leave office and allow Juan Guaido, an opposition leader the U.S. and other world powers recognize as Venezuela's interim president, to take power.

Venezuela's opposition leader Juan Guaido, 35, who is also the head of Venezuela's defunct National Assembly, plunged the country into political chaos on January 23, when he proclaimed himself as the "interim president" of Vene-



zuela, a bizarre move that drew Trump's immediate support and prompted the White House to call on other countries to follow suit in recognizing Guaido as such.

The US-backed opposition figure has also planned to bring in foreign humanitarian aid, including those from the U.S. through the Colombian border, to allegedly alleviate the country's economic crisis.

Maduro has said the real incentive behind Guaido's "relief" effort is to undermine his government in a Washington-or-chedestrated bid to oust him, stressing that Caracas would not allow the entry of the so-called aid to Venezuela, which has the world's largest proven oil reserves.

(Source: agencies)

## Egypt rebukes Turkey in spat with EU after executions

Egypt rebuked Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday after he criticized European leaders for attending a summit hosted by Cairo days after nine men were executed.

Erdogan and his foreign minister accused European Union leaders of hypocrisy for telling Turkey reinstating the death penalty would end hopes of joining the bloc yet attending a summit hosted by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

"Turkish President Erdogan once again speaks to us about Egypt and its political leadership, clearly showing hatred and furthermore expressing his continued embrace

of the terrorist Brotherhood group," Egyptian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ahmed Hafez said in a statement.

Relations between Ankara and Cairo have been strained since the Egyptian military, then led by Sisi, ousted President Mohammad Morsi of the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood in 2013 after mass protests against his rule.

Hafez cited rights accusations against Turkey, including the existence of 70,000 political prisoners, jailing of 175 journalists and firing of 130,000 government employees.

"This narrative illustrates the lack of credibility of what the Turkish president is

promoting," he said.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu had on Tuesday chided EU leaders for being with Sisi days after "these young saplings were martyred" for killing Egypt's chief prosecutor in 2015.

Cairo blamed the Muslim Brotherhood and Gaza-based Hamas militants for the operation. Both groups denied that.

Sisi defended the death penalty on Monday at the Arab-EU summit in Egypt's Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, saying the two regions had "different cultures".

Turkey aspires to join the EU but its accession negotiations, launched in 2005, are

at a standstill amid concerns over human rights and the rule of law.

Egypt says the Brotherhood, the world's oldest Islamist movement, is a terrorist organization. Most of its senior members have been arrested, driven underground or into exile.

The movement has close ties with Turkey's ruling AK Party and many of its members have fled there since its activities were banned in Egypt. It says it is a peaceful organization.

Rights groups said the executions in Egypt were carried out after unfair trials.

(Source: The Daily Star)

## French President: no Brexit Article 50 extension without clear objective

French President Emmanuel Macron said on Wednesday that there could only be an agreement for an extension to the Brexit Article 50 negotiation period if justified by Britain and if there were clear objectives.

"We would support an extension request only if it was justified by a new choice of the British," Macron said at a joint news briefing held with German leader Angela Merkel.

"But we would in no way accept an extension without a clear objective," he added.

### ■ Head of Conservative eurosceptics softens on May's Brexit plan

The leader of a pro-Brexit faction in British Prime Minister Theresa May's Conservative Party on Wednesday scaled back his opposition to her deal for leaving the European Union ahead of a vote on the agreement next month. Jacob Rees-Mogg said he would no longer insist that the so-called Northern Irish backstop be removed as a condition for his support and other legal ways might ensure it was not permanent.

"I can live with the de facto removal of the backstop ... I mean that if there is a clear date that says the backstop ends, and that is in the text of the treaty or equivalent of the text of the treaty," Rees-Mogg told BBC radio.

With parliament divided on how to proceed on Brexit,

Rees-Mogg's European Research Group (ERG) of anti-EU members of parliament in the Conservative Party is key to the outcome of Brexit.

The ERG played a big part in the historic defeat suffered by May when she put her Brexit plan to parliament last month.

But the group must now decide whether to back a revised version of the plan or risk a delay to Brexit and the possibility of a second referendum after the main opposition Labour Party this week backed a public vote.

May on Tuesday paved the way for a delay to Brexit until June from its planned date of March 29 if she loses the latest vote on her divorce deal next month.

Rees-Mogg said the time limit he wants for the backstop should be "a short date, not a long date, then that would remove the backstop in the lifetime of parliament."

### ■ Irish border

The backstop is an insurance policy which aims to avoid the return of a hard border on the island of Ireland. It has become the main point of contention in exit talks, which have reached an impasse with just 30 days until Britain leaves the bloc.

London wants the backstop to be provisional rather than permanent, while the EU resists any suggestion it could expire.

Rees-Mogg told Sky News he thought an extension of the

formal two-year Brexit negotiation period was likely after May opened the possibility of a delay until June.

That move by May appeared to have averted a clash with Remainers in her party when amendments to her plan are due to be put to parliament later on Wednesday.

But EU countries would have to approve an extension to the former Article 50 process for a country leaving the bloc and ministers from France and Germany said they wanted to know what a delay would achieve.

"For us it is important that something substantially new would be put on the table to justify a delay. Then we would all have to vote on it," Germany's European Affairs Minister Michael Roth said.

"No one wants to punish the Britons, if we can achieve something with a delay, we would be the last ones to stand in the way," he said.

France's finance minister said he would not see the need to grant an extension if Britain cannot state clearly what it intends to do with the extra time.

"If there is no clarity on the purpose of that extension, I don't see the necessity of that extension, so it is up to the British government to explain to us if they are asking for an extension," Bruno Le Maire said.

(Source: Reuters)

## Russia: U.S. pressure on Europe not to do business with Iran is 'economic blackmail'

### By staff and agency

Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's permanent representative to the Vienna-based international organizations, said on Tuesday that the U.S. pressure on the European Union over doing business with Iran is an instance of "economic blackmail".

"This is economic blackmail and blatant arbitrariness. The Americans have no legal basis for preventing other countries from complying with the economic part of the nuclear deal that was approved by the UN Security Council," TASS quoted him as saying.

U.S. President Donald Trump unilaterally pulled Washington out of the JCPOA (the official name for the 2015 nuclear deal) in May 2018 and ordered reimposition of sanctions against Iran.

Speaking at the Munich Security Conference on Feb. 16, U.S. Vice President Mike Pence urged European powers Germany, France, and Britain to follow Washington in withdrawing from the deal and to "stop undermining U.S. sanctions."

On January 31, France, Germany and Britain announced the creation of INSTEX, a special purpose vehicle aimed at facilitating legitimate trade between European economic operators and Iran.

The European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt has said INSTEX will support legitimate European trade with Iran.

Russia and China have also remained publicly committed to the existing accord.

## Sheikh Isa Qassim meets Iranian ulema in Qom



**TEHRAN** — Leader of Bahraini Shias Ayatollah Sheikh Isa Qassim has met with a number of top Iranian religious scholars including Ayatollahs Nasser Makarem Shirazi, Lotfollah Safi-Golpayegani and Hossein Nouri-Hamedani in the shrine city of Qom.

During his meeting with Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi on Tuesday, the two religious personalities discussed the latest developments in the Islamic world, especially Bahrain.

"What makes you happy makes us happy too and what disturbs you also disturbs us," Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi said, IRNA reported.

He also honored the struggles of Bahraini Shias and their leader Sheikh Isa Qasim.

Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi also prayed for the top Bahraini cleric's health and release of all Muslims, particularly Bahraini Shias, from the evil of the oppressors.

Anti-regime protesters have held demonstrations in Bahrain regularly since February 2011. They are demanding that the Al Khalifah dynasty allow a just governing system representing all Bahrainis.

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

Scores of people have lost their lives or sentenced to death, and hundreds of others sustained injuries or got arrested as a result of the crackdown.

## U.S. general: No military threat on southern border

Under pointed questioning from senators, the top United States general for homeland defense said on Tuesday that he sees no military threat coming from the southern border with Mexico, but his focus is on "very real" threats from China and Russia.

Air Force Gen. Terrence O'Shaughnessy, commander, U.S. Northern Command and North American Aerospace Defense Command, told a Senate committee that proposed barriers along the U.S.-Mexico border could increase security against any potential military threats coming from the south. But he said Russia's advancements in training and capabilities, and its intent to hold the U.S. at risk, present an urgent threat to America.

President Donald Trump has declared a national emergency along the southern border to fund his proposed wall, and he plans to use Defense Department funds from military construction and counter-drug programs to pay for it. Members of Congress are challenging that.

Democratic senators on the Senate Armed Services Committee peppered O'Shaughnessy with questions about the need to divert the money from existing projects and questioned the validity of a national emergency declaration.

The meeting comes as the Democratic-controlled House was planning a vote Tuesday to revoke Trump's emergency declaration, and send legislation to the Republican-held Senate, where it would take only a handful of GOP defections to pass it.

O'Shaughnessy, who visited the southern border on Saturday with Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan, was careful to defer any assessment of the southern threat to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Customs and Border Protection. He said that those agencies believe that more fencing can impact the movement of drugs across the border.

The U.S. Coast Guard currently has one working Polar-class icebreaker ship, but there's funding in the Defense Department budget to begin building more. Sullivan said the poor condition of the U.S. ship is a disgrace, and the U.S. needs more ability to counter Russia and China in the arctic.

(Source: abc News)



STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	165294.7
IFX	2100.28

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,782 rials
GBP	55,625 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$66.33/b
WTI	\$56.82/b
OPEC Basket	\$65.36/b
Gold	\$1,327.95/oz
Silver	\$15.89/oz
Platinum	\$874.25 oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



Transport min. appoints new head of Airports Company

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Transport Minister Mohammad Eslami Appointed Siavash Amirmokri as the new head of Iran Airports Company. IRIB reported on Wednesday.

Amirmokri, who was the deputy head of Airports Company for resources management and development over the past years, replaces Rahmatollah Mahabadi, the company's previous head. Iran Airports Company is the holding and operating company for civilian airports in Iran. Its headquarters is located at Tehran Mehrabad International Airport but it has offices at all airports in Iran.

U.S.-China trade: tariff and non-tariff barriers

U.S. President Donald Trump said this week he may soon sign a deal with Chinese President Xi Jinping to end a trade war blamed for slowing global economic growth and disrupting markets.

Citing progress in talks between the two countries, Trump said he would delay a planned increase in tariffs to 25 percent from 10 percent on \$200 billion of Chinese imports.



China's trade surplus with the United States, which is at the center of their dispute, rose to \$323.32 billion last year, the biggest on record going back to 2006.

China's average import tariff of 3.5 percent is the highest among top industrial nations, data from the World Bank shows, although its tariff rates have fallen sharply over the past 20 years.

Trump and Xi called a 90-day truce last year to allow time for a deal to be negotiated. But the U.S. threat of tariff increases comes just as China is trying to support its cooling economy, so could offer Trump leverage in the talks.

Negotiators from both camps have been seeking to iron out differences over China's treatment of state-owned enterprises, subsidies, forced technology transfers and cyber theft.

The two sides are expected to sign memorandums of understanding (MOUs) for actions to be taken by China on issues ranging from structural reforms to trade and economic policies.

Reuters reported that both sides were drafting MOUs on cyber theft, intellectual property rights, services, agriculture and non-tariff barriers to trade, including subsidies.

(Source: Reuters)

Singapore central bank chief says policy ‘appropriate’ but monitoring data

Singapore's monetary policy stance remains appropriate, the city-state's central bank's chief said on Wednesday, in comments that follow a disappointing run of recent economic data.

“Our monetary policy remains appropriate,” Monetary Authority of Singapore's (MAS) managing director, Ravi Menon said at Citi's annual Asia Pacific conference on Wednesday.

This comes after Singapore reported its slowest on-year economic growth in the fourth quarter, its biggest fall in exports and the biggest fall in factory output in more than two years.

The MAS, which manages policy through changes to the exchange rate rather than interest rates, tightened monetary settings at both of its semi-annual meetings last year. Its policy announcement last April was its first monetary policy tightening in six years.

The MAS holds its next monetary policy decision in April. “Two months is a long time, so we will see how it looks like then,” Menon added. “We are also watching how the data pans out”.

Earlier this week, the MAS and the trade ministry also revised its 2019 headline inflation forecast downwards, from 1-2 percent to 0.5 to 1.5 percent. However, core inflation— a more closely watched indicator for monetary policy— rose within the MAS forecast range.

(Source: Reuters)

MOUs, deals signed with private sector on Chabahar development

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Eight memorandums of understandings and deals were signed with private sector on development of Iran's southeastern port of Chabahar, IRNA reported.

The Ports and Maritime Department of Sistan-Baluchestan Province inked the MOUs and deals with some Iranian private companies on Tuesday evening on the sidelines of the International Conference on Chabahar Development which was held at the international conference hall of Chabahar Free Zone.

Construction of two multipurpose warehouses, establishment of a passenger shipping line between Chabahar Port and Oman's Port of Muscat, and building a specialized container yard at the port were some of the projects that for their implementation the mentioned MOUs and deals were signed, according to Behrooz Aqaei, the director general of Ports and Maritime Department of Sistan-Baluchestan Province.



As reported, Mohammad Rastad, the head of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO), was also present in the signing ceremony.

The international conference of Chabahar, which was participated by a number of Iranian officials including Transport Minister Mohammad Eslami, PMO head, and Secretary of Iran's Free Zones High Council Morteza Bank, in addition to some participants from other countries, presented the investment opportunities and also potentials and facilities available in the southeastern port of Iran to the audience including Iranian investors.

Lying on the coast of the Gulf of Oman in Iran's southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan Province, Chabahar is the country's only oceanic port and given its strategic location in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) development of the port is of high significance for Iran.

Over \$20.4b of taxes collected in 11 months

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** —The Iranian National Tax Administration (INTA) has collected 860 trillion rials (about \$20.476 billion) of taxes since the beginning of current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2018), according to the acting head of INTA.

Making the remarks among the reporters on the sidelines of the 12th edition of the Conference of Tax and Fiscal Policies on Tuesday, Mohammad Qasem Panahi said the figure shows that the estimated tax income for this year is already achieved by 83.5 percent, IRIB reported.

Iran's tax income rose 14.1 percent during the last Iranian calendar year (March 2017-



March 2018) to reach 1.15 quadrillion rials (about \$26.6 billion), according to the data released by the Central Bank of Iran (CBI).

President Hassan Rouhani's economic strategy is to significantly reduce the government's dependency on oil and instead collect tax more systematically.

TPO granted awards to top Iranian brands

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) granted awards to the top Iranian trademarks in a ceremony held at Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds on Tuesday, IRIB reported.

This year's edition of the ceremony, which was the second one, was participated by Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani and TPO Acting Head Mohammadreza Modoudi.

Addressing the ceremony, TPO head underlined Iran's noticeable jump in promoting production and exports over the recent years in a way that the country's value of non-oil export stands at

\$50 billion, a figure that is going higher than that of the oil exports.

Also in a message to this ceremony, President Hassan Rouhani wrote: “Iran is the land of great historical, material and human assets, and appreciating this huge asset promises a more prosperous Iran”, the official website of Iranian Presidency published.

He added “at the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, the enemies of this land are targeting the trust, belief and hope of the people of Iran, not knowing that this is in clear conflict with the rich cultural and religious potentials of this land.”

Iran’s agricultural sector: 40 years of flourishing

By Ebrahim Fallahi

**TEHRAN** – In the past forty years, since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has witnessed a remarkable improvement in various sectors and the agriculture industry has been one of the areas in which the country has undergone huge development.

In this regard, and on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, a press conference was held at the agriculture ministry in Tehran on Wednesday in which the Supreme Leader's representative to the ministry presented some of the Islamic Revolution's achievements in the agricultural sector.

■ Agriculture

Starting his remarks, Seyed Reza Taqavi mentioned revolutionizing the agriculture industry through implementing billions of dollars' worth of development, research and educational projects across the country as one of the main reasons for the significant improvements in this sector during the past 40 years.

According to the official, the production at the country's agricultural sector has increased by six-fold over the past 40 years (since the Islamic Revolution).

“Our Agriculture is moving toward a systematic, knowledge-based and modern future on a very desirable pace and Iran will be an agricultural hub in the region and one of the biggest producers of agricultural products in the world in the next 15 years,” Taqavi said.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Supreme Leader's representative noted that currently over 9000 agriculture experts are supervising the process of producing agricultural products across the country to insure the highest quality and quantity.

Taqavi further mentioned the management of water resources in the country saying that, “By using new methods of irrigation and water management systems in the country's dry regions and also by cultivating products that have less water requirement in those regions we could help preserving



the country's water resources while maintaining or even improving our production levels.”

In this regard in December 2018 Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) and Agriculture Ministry signed an agreement to increase agricultural production by 2.2 kilograms per square meter of water used in cultivation by 2026.

Iran is situated in a dry plateau with limited water resources. Tehran has been trying in recent years to decrease water consumption in its agriculture sector by introducing new irrigation methods.

■ Foodstuff production

Mentioning the production of foodstuff, the official noted that in the poultry and fishery sectors the agriculture ministry has been promoting new methods of breeding and genetic engineering in order to increase the efficiency of production in this sectors.

“Iran is currently 82 percent self-sufficient in producing foodstuff while we were mainly an importer of agricultural and foodstuff products before the Islamic Revolution,” Taqavi said.

According to Deputy Agriculture Minister Abbas Keshavarz, the country's self-sufficiency rate in wheat production has

increased from 65 percent in the Iranian calendar year of 1392 (March 2013-March 2014) to 105 percent in the current year (which ends on March 20, 2019).

In addition to supplying the domestic needs, foodstuff account for a significant part of Iran's non-oil exports.

Dairy products, sweets, saffron, tomato paste, juices and concentrates, animal food, poultry and aquaculture, yeast, pasta, as well as wheat flour and potato products are some of the main items exported from Iran to the world markets.

■ Halal industry

Elsewhere in his remarks, Taqavi mentioned the Halal industry and Iran's position as one of the Islamic world's most significant countries in this newly flourishing industry.

According to the official, despite the country's great potentials and capacities, unfortunately the share of Iran in the global Halal trade is only 0.7 percent.

“This is very unfortunate and the ministry [agriculture ministry] has plans to improve our position to a more desirable place in this lucrative industry.” He underscored.

Taqavi further noted that lack of a comprehensive organization which could be in charge for handling the Halal business and industry is one of the main reasons that Iran's share of the Halal market is not what the country deserves.

■ Agricultural achievements exhibition

Finally, the official mentioned holding an exhibition on the achievements of the country's agricultural sector in the last 40 years.

The agricultural achievements exhibitions which is due to be held during March 4-5 at Tehran's Imam Khomeini Grand Prayer Grounds (Mosalla) will be a showcase for presenting Iranian agriculture sector's achievements since the Islamic Revolution.

Different subsidiaries of the agriculture ministry along with the private sector, startups as well as knowledge-based companies and institutions will be presenting their latest achievements and products in this exhibition.

European shares snap three-day winning streak

European shares fell in early deals on

Wednesday, snapping a three-day winning streak amid growing Indian-Pakistani tensions, and a warning from Beiersdorf hammered consumer staples stocks while Air France-KLM and Marks and Spencer sank.

The pan-European STOXX 600 index was down 0.6 percent at 1007 GMT after hitting its highest level since the beginning of October a day earlier. All continental bourses were in the red.

The export-heavy FTSE 100 lagged the broader market as sterling lingered near five-month highs against the dollar amid fresh hopes that a no-deal Brexit could be avoided.

Investors were still awaiting fresh news on China-U.S. trade talks, but sentiment overall was gloomy with a growing confrontation between India and Pakistan rattling confidence in assets considered risky.

Healthcare and miners were the only sectors in positive territory in early deals, with travel, leisure, chemicals and retail notching up the biggest losses.

“Geopolitical tensions between Pakistan and India have strongly impacted equities from Tokyo to London today, with investors fearing a further escalation,” said Pierre

Veyret, analyst at ActivTrades.

Among individual moves, shares in Air France KLM were on track for their worst day in more than a decade after the Dutch government said it would take a 14 percent stake in the airline. The move highlighted tensions between the Netherlands and its French partners in the company.

Investors also punished Beiersdorf, which plunged to two-year lows after the Nivea skin cream maker issued a shock warning about its 2019 operating margins, with the company's new CEO declaring the consumer goods industry was in “turmoil”.

Unilever, Henkel and Reckitt Benckiser were all dragged lower with Beiersdorf.

Alongside the results outlook, the company said it would invest to compete with niche brands disrupting the sector.

“Beiersdorf have joined Henkel, Colgate and Coke in ‘the reset club’ in a dramatic first act by new CEO Stefan de Loecker and CFO Desi Temperley,” said Jefferies analyst Martin Deboe.

He said the move would up the ante for Unilever, which competes with all three of the reseters in big categories like skincare, haircare, dentifrice and laundry.

“We therefore expect the credibility of

UK employers’ confidence in economy slides before Brexit

British employers' confidence in the economy has fallen sharply ahead of Brexit, hammering hiring and investment intentions, an industry survey showed on Wednesday.

The Recruitment and Employment Confederation's (REC) gauge of confidence in the economy slid to -20 in the three months to January, the lowest reading since the survey started in mid-2016 and down from -14 in the previous report.

The survey adds to a raft of business surveys showing that businesses have put the brakes on investment plans ahead of Britain's scheduled departure from the European Union on March 29.

Lawmakers in London have yet to approve a deal that would smooth Britain's divorce with the EU, leaving open the prospect of a disorderly departure - although on Tuesday Prime Minister Theresa May offered lawmakers the chance to vote next month in favour of a delay.

“With employers' confidence levels at a low point and hiring intentions for both permanent and temporary staff dropping in today's survey, there can no longer be any argument: uncertainty is damaging for job creation,” REC chief executive Neil Carberry said.



By contrast, consumer confidence has held up relatively well, although a separate survey showed households are being hit with higher prices in shops.

The British Retail Consortium said shop prices rose at an annual pace of 0.7 percent in February, the highest inflation rate since March 2013 and following a 0.4 percent increase in January.

“While price rises over the last six months have been relatively modest, a no deal Brexit would have a much more immediate and dramatic effect,” BRC chief executive Helen Dickinson said.

A Citi/YouGov survey earlier this week showed expectations for consumer price inflation among Britain's public hit a joint five-year high in February.

(Source: euronews)



# Oil advances as OPEC set to continue supply cuts despite U.S. pressure to ease

Oil prices rose on Wednesday after a report of declining U.S. crude inventories and as producer club OPEC seemed to stick to its supply cuts despite pressure from U.S. President Donald Trump.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude oil futures were at \$55.89 per barrel at 0755 GMT, up 39 cents, or 0.7 percent, from their last settlement.

International Brent crude futures were at \$65.48 per barrel, up 27 cents, or 0.4 percent from their last close.

U.S. crude oil inventories fell by 4.2 million barrels in the week to Feb. 22, to 444.3 million barrels, the American Petroleum Institute (API) estimated in a weekly report on Tuesday.

Official data will be released by the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) after 1800 GMT on Wednesday.

Oil markets have generally received support this year from supply curbs by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which together with some non-affiliated producers like Russia, known as OPEC+, agreed late last year to cut output by 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd) to prop



up prices.

And the group has indicated it will continue to withhold supply despite pressure

from Trump this week to stop artificially tightening markets.

"Crude oil futures bounced as OPEC mem-

bers remained firm on planned production cuts despite heightened political pressure from U.S. President Trump early this week," said Benjamin Lu of Singapore-based brokerage Phillip Futures.

Trump tweeted on Monday that oil prices were getting too high for the global economy, asking OPEC to relax its supply cuts.

Despite the OPEC-led curbs, oil remains in ample supply as U.S. crude production has risen by more than 2 million bpd over the past year, to a record 12 million bpd, and because demand growth is low due to a global economic slowdown and improving energy efficiency across industries.

"The OPEC+ production cuts have ... so far failed to create the tightness needed to support a continued rally," said Ole Hansen, head of commodity strategy at Denmark's Saxo Bank.

Financial markets on Wednesday also became cautious after Pakistan said it had shot down two Indian jets in its territory, sending investors out of riskier markets and into more conservative choices such as the yen.

(Source: Reuters)

## Russian energy minister says current oil prices 'acceptable': reports



Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak has credited last year's deal on oil output cuts with helping set a fair price.

"The market today looks relatively calm and stable, marked by decreasing volatility and more or less acceptable prices for both exporters and importers. We attribute this stability primarily to the deal," he said in an interview with Gazeta.ru.

The Brent benchmark traded at \$65 per barrel, while the WTI was lower at \$55 per barrel. Novak said prices bottomed out at \$50 in December 2018 when the OPEC and several major oil producers agreed to take an extra 1.2 million barrels a day off the market.

"If the glut had continued we would have seen them [prices] sink even deeper. Let me remind you that prices hit \$25-27 per barrel in January 2016. It is possible that we would have seen the market hit a new low," Novak added.

The new deal on production caps will last until this July. US President Donald Trump took to Twitter on Monday to urge OPEC to "relax and take it easy" after warning that oil prices were getting

too high.

Novak also said in an interview that Russia will reach a reduction in oil output under the OPEC-non-OPEC deal by the agreed volume of 228,000 barrels per day by April.

"By 1 February, we started to reduce production somewhere about 90,000-100,000 barrels per day on October 2018. And given that in December we had output rates higher than in October, by some 50,000 barrels, then against December, the reduction has now reached almost 140,000-150,000 barrels per day. These are quite large and high rates of reduction. And I think that we will reach the parameters that were agreed upon under the agreement during March, by the end of March — the start of April," Novak said.

Last Friday, oil prices fell just below \$67 per barrel after the United States hit another record in oil production by pumping 12 million barrels per day, undermining efforts of other major oil producers, including Saudi Arabia and Russia, at limiting their production to stabilize the market.

(Source: Sputnik)

## PDVSA restarts Petrocedeno heavy crude upgrader



Venezuelan state PDVSA has restarted its 202,000 bpd Petrocedeno extra heavy crude upgrader at 118,000 bpd, or 58.4 percent of capacity, despite the country's deficit of naphtha, a company technical report seen Tuesday showed Tuesday.

According to previous PDVSA technical reports, the production at the Petrocedeno joint venture (PDVSA 60 percent and Total/Equinor 40 percent) was stopped February 10, when inventories of naphtha ran out. Naphtha is used to lighten the extra heavy crudes produced in the Orinoco Belt region.

PDVSA operates four heavy crude upgraders: the 120,000 bpd Petro San Felix; the 120,000 bpd Petromonagas, a joint venture with Russia's Rosneft; 202,000 bpd; Petrocedeno, a joint venture of Total and Equinor and the 190,000 bpd Petropiar, a JV of PDVSA with Chevron, according to recent PDVSA figures.

All four upgraders are located in the southern part of Venezuela's Anzoategui state. The Sinovenosa mixing plant is located in Morichal, Monagas state.

The technical report said that the upgrader Petropiar is operating at 150,000

bpd, or 78.9 percent of its capacity.

The Petro San Felix upgrader has been shut since June, but PDVSA expects to restart it on March 15.

Updates on the Petromonagas upgrader and Sinovenosa were not available in the technical report.

Upgraded crude production by PDVSA and its international partners at five upgrader facilities has been declining from its maximum capacity of 762,000 bpd capacity because of the lack of extra heavy crude as naphtha and light crude. The naphtha deficit reaches 62,000 bpd to maintain the production of upgrader crude, according to the technical report.

The lack of diluent is threatening to push Venezuela's already declining crude production even lower. S&P Global Platts estimates Venezuela pumped 1.16 million bpd in January, down from 2.35 million bpd two years prior.

US sanctions on PDVSA amount to a de facto ban on US imports of Venezuelan crude, and a prohibition on US exports of roughly 120,000 bpd of diluent used to blend heavy Orinoco Belt crude for export.

(Source: Platts)

## Saudi energy minister responds to Trump's OPEC tweet: 'We are taking it easy'

Saudi Energy Minister Khalid al-Falih said OPEC is taking a measured approach to supply cuts, directly responding to comments from President Donald Trump earlier in the week telling the oil producing body to "relax."

"We're taking it easy," he told CNBC's Dan Murphy while at an OPEC symposium in Riyadh, when asked about the U.S. president's tweet.

"The 25 countries are taking a very slow and measured approach. Just as the second half last year proved, we are interested in market stability first and foremost."

On Monday, Trump lobbied the latest of a series of tweets aimed at OPEC's planned production cuts, agreed upon between the cartel's members and non-member allies in December of last year to counter a drop in oil prices and soaring inventories.

"Oil prices getting too high. OPEC, please relax and take it easy. World cannot take a price hike - fragile!" the president said.

"We listen to the honorable president, and hear his concern about consumers and assure everybody, whether it's him or developing country leaders, that we are as focused on the interests of the global economy and consumers around the world as we are focused on the interests of producers," al-Falih said. The U.S. became the world's largest oil producer in late 2018.

OPEC plus, which refers to OPEC and a collection of non-OPEC oil producers working in tandem with the organization,



agreed on output cuts totaling 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd) in order to stem a sinking market and support their own export-dependent economies. The move riled Trump, who wants to keep oil prices low.

The cuts failed to bring the price of global benchmark Brent crude back up to anywhere near its early October highs of more than \$84 a barrel, though it reclaimed losses from a low of just over \$50 a barrel at the end of December to a year high of \$67.18 last week. Brent fell by 28 cents as the minister spoke on Wednesday, from \$65.75 to \$65.47, and was trading at \$65.57 at 8:35 p.m. London time.

Trump's tweets sent prices sliding on Monday, before they steadied Tuesday

on signs that OPEC would continue its program of cuts. Saudi Arabia has so far borne the brunt of the cuts, with plans to slash its output to 500,000 bpd below its quota in March. Oil is up about 20 percent since the start of the year.

■ **'Leaning toward' a production cut extension**

Much speculation has surrounded whether OPEC plus will decide on deeper production cuts when OPEC members meet again in April. But December's production agreement is meant to last until June, by which time al-Falih said an extension of the deal is likely.

"We remain flexible, I am leaning toward the likelihood of an extension in

the second half (of 2019), but that's not automatic," he said. "If we find out the fundamentals are tightening, by June you can bet that I will be — just like we did last year — encouraging my colleagues within the OPEC plus to ease the voluntary limits we set on ourselves and to increase supplies to ensure that there is no unnecessary tightening in the market."

The jury is out on the trajectory for oil prices in 2019, with many market watchers forecasting the commodity will be pulled down by slowing global growth and demand. Uncertainty from Venezuela and sanctions on Iran are factors that could support prices, depending on the scope of sanctions and waivers from Washington on Tehran and Caracas and on political developments in Latin America.

Goldman Sachs in a recent report predicted a "wild ride" for oil this year, forecasting a rise to as high as \$70 to \$75 per barrel in the coming months but followed by a drop back to \$60 in the second half due to a surge in U.S. shale oil output and rising low-cost production from OPEC plus.

"The current levels are not God-given, this is just the best compromise we could reach back in December," al-Falih added, discussing the OPEC plus deal. "So if in June we find out we need to have a different limit, a different target from 1.2 million (barrels), certainly it is open. But the easiest way forward, assuming it is still an oversupply, would be to roll over."

(Source: CNBC)

## BP chief calls U.S. 'market without brain' for renewing record oil output

The United States is acting as "a market without a brain" as it responds to prices and increases its oil output to record highs, Bob Dudley, the chief executive officer of the UK multinational BP Group, said Tuesday.

"The United States is probably the only country in the world that completely responds to market signals. It's like a market without a brain. Nobody says this is what we will do, it just responds to price signals," Dudley said at the International Petroleum Week conference in London, when asked about U.S. beating its record in oil production yet again and complaining of high oil prices.

When asked about U.S. President Donald Trump's recent tweet complaining of oil prices being "too high" at around \$67 per barrel, Dudley argued that it could be a signal for extension of U.S. sanctions against Iran.

"It's amazing. I don't tweet but I saw that. It struck me as the sort of a signal to extend Iran sanctions, but I have no idea about the insight of this," he said.

However, given the nature of shale oil, the high rate of U.S. oil production may not continue for long, the BP chief said.

"The big question — longer-term for five, 10 years — is whether shale will continue going up, up, up or level up because of the nature of these fields that decline fast, it makes huge difference for the overall balance," he added.

UK oil and gas multinational BP forecasts oil prices to stand between \$50 and \$65 per barrel over the next 3-4 years, company CEO said.

"We plan BP's [activity based on] the price of \$50-\$65. That's the planning of the company, but it could go up and down. As long as we keep our discipline, that's how we see the future for the next 3-4 years," Dudley said at the International Petroleum Week conference in London.

For all global oil producers, prices between \$50 and \$70 per barrel are most convenient, according to Dudley.

"The world works well in the fairway of \$50-\$70 per barrel, the world can work with production in the state of balance," the group chief executive said.

On Friday, oil prices fell just below \$67 per barrel after the United States hit another record in oil production by pumping 12 million barrels per day, undermining efforts of other major oil producers, including Saudi Arabia and Russia, at limiting their production to stabilize the market.

Increased U.S. output comes just as the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) revised down its assessment of the oil demand growth in 2019. According to OPEC's February report, oil demand growth is expected to reach about 1.24 million barrels per day, due to adjusted economic forecasts.

### ■ Sanctions on Venezuela

Sanctions against Venezuela and Iran can spur quick oil price changes and cause supply deficit, Bob Dudley said.

"If we talk about supply gap, today Venezuela is declining rapidly due to the gravity [of the crisis]. Are there, are there not sanctions on Iran? These things are more likely to move the [oil] price quite quickly and cause supply gap," Dudley said at the International Petroleum Week conference in London.

Earlier in February, the International Energy Agency (IEA) remarked that U.S. sanctions against Venezuela were complicating exports for Caracas. Iranian oil production fell by 520,000 barrels daily in December, compared to October, amid renewed U.S. sanctions, the IEA said last month.

In February, the IEA increased its 2019 supply growth estimates for producers that are not part of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries. The organization cited higher U.S. production as the reason for revision.

(Source: Sputnik)

## Future oil supply still at risk from low investment: Saudi Aramco CEO

The global oil market remains at risk from a potential supply shortfall in the coming decades due to a lack of upstream spending in conventional projects, the head of Saudi Aramco Amin Nasser said Tuesday.

While U.S. shale production growth is widely expected to meet global oil demand in the short to medium term, question marks over the sustainability of shale output growth and concerns over climate change are hitting investment in conventional oil, Nasser said.

"Unless there is something that is going to happen with the level of investment that we see today, there will be an impact... Unfortunately, unless we see more conventional coming on...we'll see a supply gap and it will impact the global economy," Nasser told the IP week conference in London.

He said most of the current global upstream investment is "incremental and short term," leaving the supply outlook vulnerable when shale oil output starts to decline in the coming years and demand continues to grow.

Nasser said Saudi Aramco, the world's biggest oil exporter, continues to invest in maintaining Saudi Arabia's maximum sustained capacity of 12 million bpd. He noted, however, that it would take Aramco five to seven years to bring a new field on stream, risking as potential future supply shortage as "we cannot react that quickly" to a supply shortfall elsewhere in the industry or a demand uptick.

"With the Kingdom having 260 billion barrels of resources...we continue to have an exploration program of \$1.7 billion barrels a year to replace every barrels that we produce," he said.

Also speaking at the event, BP Chief Executive Bob Dudley said he is not concerned over any short-term supply gap as a result of the slump in upstream spending since the 2014 oil price collapse.

This report provides a thorough introduction to the IMO's sulfur cap on marine fuel, its impact on markets and what to expect from the new regulatory framework.

In the short term, upstream investment requirements have been tempered by the fact that upstream costs have fallen, while the supply threats from sanctions on Iran and Venezuela are the most immediate supply risks, he said.

In late 2016, the International Energy Agency forecast that sliding levels of investment in conventional oil fields was putting future flows from the sector on a knife edge, threatening to create a supply gap of some 16 million bpd by 2025.

Since then, oil majors Total and Eni have also expressed concern over a potential shortfall in oil supply in the coming years to massive spending cuts by the industry to ride out the price downturn.

The IEA has estimated crude output from conventional fields will fall by 23.7 million bpd over the decade to 2025, the equivalent of losing the entire oil output of Iraq every two years.

(Source: Platts)



## NEWS IN BRIEF



## India test-fires short-range QRSAM missile

**INTERNATIONAL d e s k** **TEHRAN** — As the situation escalates in the South Asian region, India on Tuesday successfully test-fired short-range Quick Reaction Surface to Air Missile (QRSAM) off southern coast.

According to reports in Indian media, the Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) test-fired two missiles from a test facility at Chandipur in Balasore district of Odisha province.

The missiles, which have a strike range of about 30 km, is capable of killing aerial targets, tanks and bunkers, were fired from a canister mounted on a rotatable truck-based launch unit, said reports.

The country's defense minister Nirmala Sitharaman conveyed her appreciation to the team on achieving the main objective, said reports.

It comes amidst escalation of tensions between India and Pakistan. Both warring countries have conducted multiple surgical strikes at each other over the past two days.

Many regional countries, including Iran, China and Russia, have urged the two nuclear-armed countries to exercise restraint and not allow the situation to escalate further.



## U.S. giving Daesh safe passage in east Syria under gold deal

Reports have emerged of a deal clinched between the United States and Daesh, under which Washington has received massive amounts of gold in exchange for providing safe passage to the terror group's members in Syria.

The deal gave the United States "tens of tons of gold that the terror organization had stolen," the official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) reported on Tuesday, citing local sources.

In return, U.S. forces would allow the terrorists and their ringleaders to escape their hideouts in the eastern province of Dayr al-Zawr, the agency added.

The gold has been carried away from the province's al-Baghouz area on board helicopters.

The report added that the terror outfit's last hideouts in Dayr al-Zawr also contain millions of dollars in funds plundered by the group from across Syria and neighboring Iraq.

Damascus objects to Washington's military presence on its soil and has repeatedly brought its stated goal into question.

An Iraqi lawmaker, meanwhile, has said that Daesh's ringleader Ibrahim al-Samarrai, aka Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, is being protected by U.S. forces in a western desert area located in the Iraqi Province of al-Anbar.

Iraqi lawmakers are planning to ratify the bill at the start of the upcoming season, Salem concluded.

(Source: Press TV)



## India, China, Russia vow to 'eradicate terrorism'

**INTERNATIONAL d e s k** **TEHRAN** — As a reaffirmation of their resolve to combat the menace of terrorism and extremism in the region, Russia and China on Wednesday agreed to 'closer policy coordination'.

The commitment came at the conclusion of the meeting of foreign ministers of Russia, India and China, who vowed to eradicate the "breeding grounds of terrorism".

"We agreed to jointly combat all forms terrorism through closer policy coordination and practical cooperation. Especially important is to eradicate the breeding grounds of terrorism and extremism," Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said at the end of meeting.

Chinese foreign minister, however, cautiously highlighted that Pakistan, which is an all-weather ally of Beijing, is also opposed to terrorism.

"As far as the joint strategy is concerned, you just heard foreign minister Wang Yi's speech. What he said during his concluding statement, he reiterated here and he said that we would cooperate on eradicating the breeding grounds of terrorism," she said.

In the joint statement, the ministers called on the international community to strengthen UN-led global counter-terrorism cooperation by fully implementing the relevant UN Security Council resolutions.



## 'India-Pakistan war will impact Afghan peace process'

**INTERNATIONAL d e s k** **TEHRAN** — With India and Pakistan on the warpath, Afghan Taliban has also jumped the bandwagon, warning that it could have a bearing on Afghanistan's peace process.

In a statement on Wednesday, the insurgent group said ongoing clashes between India and Pakistan would impact the Afghan peace process and told India to refrain from further military action.

The statement comes while a delegation of the group headed by top Taliban leader Mullah Baradar holds talks with U.S. officials led by Zalmay Khalilzad in Qatar.

The two sides have held a series of talks in recent months in Pakistan, Qatar and UAE without reaching any breakthrough. Many regional countries have also hosted talks with the insurgent group, including Iran, Russia and China.

Taliban, which has bases in Pakistan, is allegedly close to the military leadership in Pakistan and would take the side of Pakistan in case of war between India and Pakistan.

Meanwhile, India's envoy to Kabul Vinay Kumar in a meeting with Afghanistan's vice president Mohammad Sarwar Danesh on Tuesday expressed New Delhi's support for Afghan government's policies over peace process.

Kumar emphasized on an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process, reaffirming India's support to transparent elections in Afghanistan, said a report in Pajwok News Agency.

# Amidst 'war-like situation', India, Pakistan conduct surgical strikes

By Syed Zafar Mehdi

**TEHRAN** — From diplomatic offensive to military action, India has moved swiftly to take 'revenge' from arch-rival Pakistan for the recent terror attack in Indian-controlled Kashmir.

Early Tuesday morning, India reportedly conducted surgical strikes in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir and claimed to have killed nearly 200 militants belonging to Jaish e Mohammad (JeM), a militant group responsible for the Kashmir attack.

Pakistan dismissed the claim but vowed 'befitting reply'. "It is your turn now to wait and get ready for our surprise," Gen. Asif Ghafoor, spokesperson for Pakistani military, said on Tuesday night.

It took less than a day for Pakistani military to retaliate. Early Wednesday morning, Pakistan reportedly conducted surgical strikes in Indian-controlled Kashmir and claimed to have shot down two Indian jets and capturing one of the pilots.

Pakistan's foreign ministry said in a statement on Wednesday morning that it had struck a "non-military target" across the ceasefire line in Kashmir without entering Indian airspace to demonstrate its "right, will and capability for self-defense".

"We have no intention of escalation, but are fully prepared to do so if forced into that paradigm," said Mohammad Faisal, Pakistan's foreign ministry spokesman.

An Indian aircraft crashed in central Kashmir's Budgam district on Wednesday morning, killing the pilot, but it was not immediately clear whether it was brought down by Pakistan.



Pakistan's military spokesman, Major-General Asif Ghafoor claimed that two jets were shot down by Pakistan. "One of the aircraft fell inside AJ&K [Pakistan-controlled Kashmir] while other fell inside IOK [Indian-controlled Kashmir]. One Indian pilot arrested by troops on ground while two in the area," he announced on Twitter.

Indian news agency ANI said on Wednesday that a Pakistani F-16 fighter jet was also shot down.

A senior Indian official was quoted saying by the Guardian the Pakistani jets were likely to have struck three evacuated villages, Nadian, Lam and Jhangar, in the border district of Rajouri shortly after 10.30am. "The Indian air force responded strongly and they were pushed back," the official said.

The cross-border incursions are unprec-

edented, first time in nearly five decades, according to observers. It marks the most serious military escalation between the two South Asian nations since 1999 Kargil War.

To prepare for any eventuality, even full-blown war, the militaries of both the countries have been making all necessary arrangements. Airports in north India have been shut down and flights have been put on hold. Pakistan has also suspended flights in Lahore, Islamabad and other cities.

Earlier, India claimed that it had hit a militant training camp in Balakot, a small village in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, and killed "a very large number" of fighters from Jaish-e-Mohammed.

Pakistan rejected the claim, saying the Indian fighters were intercepted before they could reach Balakot and dropped bombs in

an open field as they went back.

On Wednesday morning, India's foreign minister Sushma Swaraj emphasized that Pakistan's military was not the target of India's surgical strikes.

"No military installations were targeted," Swaraj said. "The limited objective of the pre-emptive strike was to act decisively against the terrorist infrastructure of the JeM in order to pre-empt another terrorist attack in India."

"India does not wish see further escalation of the situation and India will continued to act with responsibility and restraint," she added.

On Wednesday afternoon, Pakistan held a joint session of parliament followed by a meeting of the National Command Authority, whose responsibilities include overseeing the country's nuclear arsenal.

Addressing the nation on Wednesday afternoon, Pakistan's premier Imran Khan offered dialogue with India and said it was not in Pakistan's interest to let the land be used for terrorism.

"It is important where we go from here. From here, it is imperative that we use our heads and act with wisdom," he said, addressing the government in India.

Meanwhile, troops from both sides have been shelling across the LoC in many areas, leading to civilian casualties on both sides, according to reports. People living along the border have been asked to evacuate.

It is pertinent to mention that both India and Pakistan claim the disputed territory of Kashmir, but control only parts of it. The nuclear powers have fought three wars since the partition of British India, two of them over Kashmir.

## 'Events unfolding between India and Pakistan very frightening'

**1 →** A. Fighting and tensions by any other name may as well be war even if it stops short of being a full-scale war. Kargil was called a war-like situation. We treat each other's prisoners like prisoners-of-war. We already limit contact between our people.

■ As an advocate of peace and dialogue between the two estranged neighbors, how frightening are these recent developments. Do you feel the gains have been squandered?

A. Very frightening. To an extent, yes. The media gives less space to peace and dialogue now because there's so much emphasis on ratings and clickbait. They give disproportionate space to sensationalism and war-mongering, and that drowns out voices for peace and sanity. I believe that peace-loving people are in a majority but most are too scared to speak out because they get bullied, trolled and termed as traitors and anti-nationals.

■ What needs to be done to settle the longstanding issue of Kashmir for once and prevent another war between the



Beena Sarwar

two nuclear powers?

A. Kashmir must be seen not as a territorial dispute between India and Pakistan but as a matter of the lives and aspirations of the Kashmiri people who must be included in

any dialogue and policy about their future. Both India and Pakistan need to step back and set aside their egos – that national honour they talk so much about – and allow the Kashmiris to breathe. Let people meet, give visas on arrival, develop a normal relationship, and stop allowing extremists to radicalize the youth, Muslim or Hindu.

■ A day before the Kashmir attack, Iran's southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan province was also rocked by a terror attack, which killed at least 27 members of elite IRGC. Both attacks bore striking similarity and were carried out by groups based in Pakistan. With its relations with India and Afghanistan already fragile, Can Pakistan afford to antagonize another neighbor?

A. Whenever something happens in India, they blame Pakistan. And whenever something happens in Pakistan, they blame India. Each may well be engaged in making mischief against the other, but they need to also look inwards and see what they are doing wrong, why their youth are disgruntled and easy prey for extremist recruiters.

## It's official: India, Pakistan are at war, again

**1 →** Even Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday afternoon reiterated that he was bating for peace, because "it was not in Pakistan's interest to let our land be used for terrorism".

He said the "sole purpose" of Pakistan's retaliatory attack was to "convey that if you come into our country, we can do the same", he said while addressing the nation.

However, he added that it was important to "use our heads and act with wisdom". "All wars are miscalculated and no one knows where they lead to.

World War I was supposed to end in weeks, it took six years," the Pakistani premier said.

"I ask India: with the weapons you have and the weapons we have, can we really afford such a miscalculation," he said. "If this escalates, things will no longer be in my control of in Modi's."

Interestingly, the strike comes barely two months ahead of general elections in India, with Narendra Modi seeking another term as prime minister. War frenzy, experts say, gives him a clear advantage.

But, what Modi and his right-wing fan-boys, shamelessly cheerleading for war, don't understand are the catastrophic implications of a full-blown war between the two nuclear powers.

According to a 2007 study by researchers from Rutgers University, University of Colorado-Boulder and University of California, if India and Pakistan fought a war detonating 100 nuclear warheads, more than 21 million people will be killed, about half the world's protective ozone layer would be destroyed, and a 'nuclear winter' would devastate monsoons and agriculture worldwide.

This death toll would be 2,221 times the number of civilians and security forces killed in India over 9 years to 2015, according to an IndiaSpend analysis of South Asia Terrorism Portal data.

Also, two billion people worldwide would face risks of severe starvation due to climatic effects of the use of nuclear weapons in the subcontinent, according to 2013 study by International Physicians for Prevention of Nuclear War.

Taking that into account, since the news



## The two South Asian nuclear-armed neighbors are at war. The season of madness has begun, and this time India has jumped the bandwagon, seeking 'justice' for Pulwama attack.

about India's surgical strike broke out early on Tuesday, social media has been abuzz with people denouncing war and calling for restraint.

Prominent filmmaker and activist Anand Patwardan in a Facebook post said "war, violence and hate" are always in the interest of ruling class.

"Before elections there will be a terror attack. There will be retaliation. There will then probably be counter-retaliation and so on and on.

War, violence and hate is what rulers need to survive. But we in India and in Pakistan, must survive our rulers," he wrote.

Kashmiri journalist and writer Murtaza Shibli said it was 'frightening' to see calls for 'retaliation'.

"I am watching with utter fright that now

a large number of Pakistani commentators, including many of my friends, are calling for escalation through counter attacks on India. Are we sleepwalking into a disaster," he wrote. "I sincerely hope there is deep introspection and that Pakistan will chose diplomatic space than war as the only option."

Pakistan's former envoy to U.S. Hussain Haqqani took to Twitter to express his anxiety over heightened tensions between the two warring nations.

"War is never the solution. India and Pakistan must de-escalate, including on the propaganda front. Time also for serious Pakistani action against LeT and JeM terrorists," he wrote.

Noted Pakistani writer and commentator Raza Rumi reminded the two countries of the 'ramifications' of military escalation.

"The prospect of war between nuclear India and Pakistan is chilling for if it gets out of hand, it can have ramifications for the world. There is urgent need for dialogue and finding a common ground rather than threats and counter threats. Why can't the PMs and Army Chiefs call and talk," he wrote.

Indian writer and political analyst Sudheendra Kulkarni called for 'summoning shared civilizational wisdom' to avoid another war.

"The best 'war' is one in which no bullet, missile or bomb is used. The best 'war' is one in which both countries are winners, & no side is a loser," he tweeted.

"Can India & #Pakistan not fight such a war-less 'war' to eliminate terrorism by both summoning our shared civilisational wisdom."

Samarth Pathak, who works with a UN agency in New Delhi, said in the end, a soldier's family appreciates national calls for peace and restraint, more than war-thirst and jingoistic appeals for revenge.

"Which war in history has resulted in lasting peace and a complete end to violence? It is a question worth pondering on, in these times of instant TV/social media patriotic gratification," he wrote.

A Twitter user Sarmad Palijo said war can never be a solution. "Everyone is talking about revenge. I refuse.

I don't stand with war. War is devastating. War is immoral. War is unjust in almost all conditions. We can stand tall by refusing to retaliate. We can show the world how it's done. Stand down and stand with peace," he wrote.

Another user Nuzhat Siddiqi, taking a jibe at New Delhi and Islamabad, said two nations with issues of climate change, species depletion, food and water scarcity, population boom, malnutrition, infant mortality, various cancers and AIDS issues, natural resource exploitation and crippling poverty "need war urgently to fix everything".

The message is loud and clear: war has very few takers in the region. It may help politicians gain power, but it renders everyone else powerless and helpless in a state of misery and despondency.



# Saudis’ Yemeni headache won’t go away if and when the guns fall silent

By James M. Dorsey

**MODERN DIPLOMACY** — These are tough times for Saudi Arabia. The drama enveloping the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi and the brutal way in which it was carried out have captured public attention. In reality, however, Saudi Arabia’s real problems began earlier as a result of its conduct of the Yemen war.

Saudi interference in Yemen that culminated in military intervention predates the four-year-old war. Yemen has long been perceived by Saudi Arabia as a threat. That threat went far beyond current Iranian support for the Houthis. In fact, it was Saudi divide-and-rule tactics in Yemen, changing Saudi attitudes towards the Houthis and Saudi Arabia’s global campaign to promote anti-Shiite, anti-Iranian strands of ultra-conservative Sunni Muslim Islam that helped pave the way for the current Yemen crisis.

It is only half a century ago that the Houthis were part of a Saudi effort to confront Arab nationalism. As an aside, Saudis and Israelis cooperated already then with Israeli military aircraft dropping weapons for the Saudi-backed rebels that included the Houthis. The deterioration in Saudi-Houthi relations accelerated just after the turn to this century when the Saudis funded the opening of a Salafi centre on the outskirts of the Houthi capital of Saada.

The centre constituted not only a challenge to the Houthis but also to the power of the Houthi leadership. It successfully appealed to the socially disadvantaged as well as youth who were attracted by Salafism’s egalitarianism, resented the power of the older generation and saw puritan Islam as a vehicle to challenge the traditional hierarchy. Fear of the Wahhabi/Salafi encroachment fuelled the Houthi’s armed fight against the government of then President Ali Abdullah Saleh, his Saudi-backed successor Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, and ultimately the Saudis themselves, which led to the kingdom’s military intervention in Yemen in March 2015.

To initially counter the threat, the leadership of the Houthis, Zaidis who are Shiites with practices more akin to Sunni Muslim ritual, turned to Iran for support in religious education, a development that further angered the kingdom, and laid the groundwork for a war that has devastated a country that already ranked as one of the world’s poorest.

The Saudi intervention was, however, about more than just confronting an Iranian proxy on its doorstep. For one, if anything, it was the intervention that really drove the Houthis and Iranians closer to one another. Even so, the Houthis remain an opportunity in a far broader Saudi-Iranian rivalry rather than a strategic target for the Iranians.

The Salmans, the king and his son, have since coming to office and despite the emer-



gence of Donald Trump, taken to new heights a far more assertive foreign and military policy that was initially crafted by their predecessors in response to the popular Arab revolts in 2011. Make however no mistake, Saudi Arabia’s new assertiveness is not a declaration of independence from the United States even if the kingdom is expanding its international relations as is evident in Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s recent tour of Asia.

On the contrary, Prince Mohammed made that very clear in multiple interviews. His goal was to force the United States to reengage in the Middle East as the best guarantor for regional stability. The Saudis appear to be operating on the basis of Karl Marx’s Verelendungs theory: things have to get worse to get better. That is the part of the backdrop of the stalled military intervention in Yemen. Dangling Iran as the real threat emanating from Yemen serves the Saudis’ purpose.

In doing so Saudi Arabia, has proven to be driven. It is a drive that is fuelled by a perception that Iran poses an existential threat to Saudi Arabia. In fact, that may not be incorrect, certainly from the perception of the monarchy and its ruling family.

Saudi Arabia dazzles with the billions of dollars gained from oil exports that it is able to invest overseas and the investment opportunities it creates in the kingdom itself. But the truth of the matter is that long-term Saudi Arabia’s future is not that of a regional hegemon.

Saudi regional leadership, even if it has been tarnished in Yemen in military and reputational terms, amounts to exploitation of a window of opportunity rather than reliance on the assets and power needed to sustain it. Saudi Arabia’s interest is to

extend its window of opportunity for as long as possible. That window of opportunity exists as long as the obvious regional powers — Iran, Turkey and Egypt — are in various degrees of disrepair. For now, punitive economic sanctions and international isolation take care of Iran.

And that is what bites. Iran may not be Arab and maintains a sense of Persian superiority, but it has like Turkey and Egypt assets Saudi Arabia lacks: a large population base, an industrial base, a huge domestic market, a battle-hardened military, a deep-rooted culture, a history of empire and a geography that makes it a crossroads. Mecca and money will not be able to compete.

Add to all of this two factors. The Islamic regime came to power in a revolution that preceded the 2011 Arab revolts by 32 years. Moreover, the Iranian revolution toppled a monarch not a president and an icon of US power in the Middle East.

Perhaps, more importantly, if one disregards the sanctioning of Iran, it is Iran rather than Saudi Arabia that is likely to shape the future energy architecture of Eurasia. Oil, in terms of demand is a diminishing commodity.

If the long-term future is renewables, the medium term will be shaped by gas. Iran has gas, Saudi Arabia does not, at least not the kind of gas it can export. In fact, Iran, has the world’s second largest gas reserves. Again, disregarding the sanctions, Iran would have in the next five years 24.6 billion cubic metres available for annual piped exports beyond its current supply commitments.

If, indeed, Iran poses an existential threat to the rule of the Al Saud family that it cannot eliminate and at best contain

with the support of the United States, the question is what Saudi Arabia’s goal in Yemen is as well as in its broader rivalry with Iran. There are those who coherently argue that Saudi Arabia’s goal in Yemen may have initially been the roll-back of Houthi advances with their occupation of the Yemeni capital Sana’s and large parts of Yemen, destruction of Houthi power and forcing them into a situation in which they would have had to accept a Saudi-dictated end to the war.

Four years into the war, that is not a realistic goal. Short of that, the question is how sincere Saudi and for that matter UAE interest is in finding a way out of the war. It is conceivable that short of outright victory, Saudi Arabia would want to keep Yemen weak and the Houthis militarily on the defensive. That is at best only sustainable in the short term. Fact of the matter is that the reputational damage Saudi Arabia has suffered is starting to hurt witness measures taken by the US Congress and Germany’s decision to halt arms sales to the kingdom. Conflicts are only ended, if not resolved if the pain of continuing the conflict is greater than the pain of ending it. In Yemen, Saudi Arabia could well be nearing the inflection point.

The problem is that even if the United Nations mediated peace talks ultimately produce an end to the war, Yemen, if anything, will pose in the post-war era an even greater and more real threat. Yemen for much of post-World War Two history has been an after thought in the international community if it sparked a thought at all. Yet, what a post-war Yemen will represent is a devastated country that largely needs to be rebuilt from scratch, a country whose traumatized population has suffered one the world’s worst humanitarian disasters and will need all the after-care that goes with that.

Beyond the taking care of the most immediate humanitarian issues, there is little reason to believe that investors and governments with massive aid packages and offers of reconstruction will be knocking on Yemen’s doors. Like in Syria and Libya, the risk is of the emergence of a generation that has nothing to look forward to and nothing to lose. In Yemen, that generation is likely to deeply resent what it perceives Saudi Arabia has done to their country. If Saudi Arabia, long saw Yemen as the Gulf’s most populous nation with a battle-hardened military that needed to be managed, that new generation is likely to put flesh on the skeleton.

Its not a pretty picture to look forward to. And it is one in which the damage has already been done. Having said that, its never too late to try to limit the damage, if not reverse affairs. That however would take the kind of courage and vision that Prince Mohammed and others in power elsewhere in the Middle East have yet to demonstrate.

## EU states adhere to U.S. agenda even against their own intersts: analyst

**TEHRAN (Tasnim)** — An American political analyst said despite recent developments straining Washington’s relations with its EU allies, the Europeans tend to adhere to the U.S. agenda even when harming their interests, adding that Trump’s time in office will end and the ties will be repaired.

“Indeed there’s disagreement between Trump and EU countries over Iran, the Nord Stream pipeline, and other issues - but it’s not enough to change the longstanding relationship,” Chicago-based Stephen Lendman told Tasnim in an interview.

“They (EU countries) largely adhere to the U.S. agenda even when harming their own self-interest,” he said, adding, “Nine months after pledging to support and preserve the JCPOA, they’ve come up with nothing but weak proposals instead of breaking with Washington on this issue strongly and proving it with firm actions quickly.”

“Here’s the bottom line; Trump’s time in office will end. There will be a new U.S. president in 2021 or 2025, and the relationship can be repaired - how I believe EU nations are thinking, so they’re riding things out until that time.”

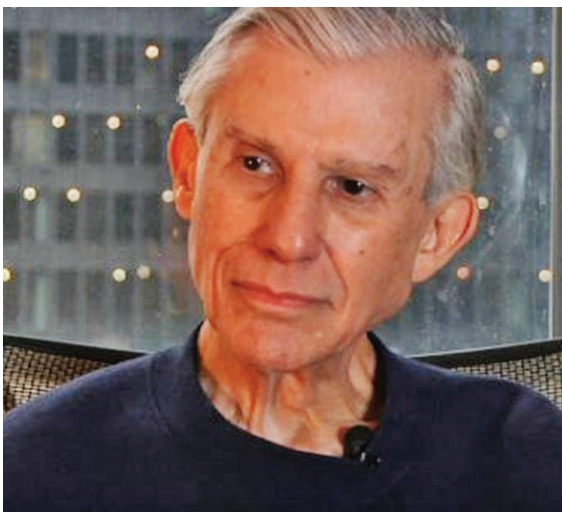
Stephen Lendman is a writer, syndicated columnist, activist, News TV personality, and radio show host. He currently writes for MoneyNewsNow.com and VeteransToday.com and hosts, since 2007, a progressive radio show at The Progressive Radio News Hour on The Progressive Radio Network.

The following is the full text of the interview:

**Q:** Tensions have grown in recent months between the U.S. and its closest allies in the EU over various issues, including Iran, which was underlined at a recent U.S.-backed conference on the Middle East in Poland that was largely sidestepped by many European governments. What do you think about U.S. President Donald Trump’s foreign policy that has strained the transatlantic relations?

**A:** Indeed there’s disagreement between Trump and EU countries over Iran, the Nord Stream pipeline, and other issues - but it’s not enough to change the longstanding relationship.

Post-WW II, the CIA created the EU so the U.S. could colonize its member states. They largely adhere to the U.S.



agenda even when harming their own self-interest.

Nine months after pledging to support and preserve the JCPOA, they’ve come up with nothing but weak proposals instead of breaking with Washington on this issue strongly and proving it with firm actions quickly.

Instead, Britain, France and Germany equivocated and delayed, telling me they lack resolve to back their rhetoric with tough pro-Iran policies, breaking with Trump firmly on this issue.

It’s true that EU nations are displeased with Trump on various issues. NATO and how much of their GDP should go for military spending is another one.

Here’s the bottom line. Trump’s time in office will end. There will be a new U.S. president in 2021 or 2025, and the relationship can be repaired - how I believe EU nations are thinking, so they’re riding things out until that time.

**Q:** The Trump administration’s foreign policies are also slammed by top U.S. officials. Recently, Speaker of the U.S.

House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi described the administration’s general approach toward Iran, including Washington’s withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal, as “completely wrong”. Do you believe other U.S. officials would cooperate with the Trump administration in implementing its policies?

**A:** I take what undemocratic Dems and Republicans say about each other with a grain of salt. On major issues mattering most, they’re in lockstep - mainly U.S. wars, its overall imperial agenda, and corporate empowerment.

Public rhetoric and disagreements over issues like the border wall are for political advantage. With Israel so militantly hostile toward Iran and virtually the entire Congress pro-Israel, rare exceptions proving the rule, Dems like Pelosi and others support Tel Aviv, not Tehran.

**Q:** The White House made a massive blunder after claiming European leaders applauded when Vice President Mike Pence dropped Trump’s name in a speech. Pence was speaking at the Munich Security Conference in Germany when he passed on Trump’s regards to the dignitaries gathered. The 59-year-old paused for several moments, waiting for a response, but the crowd remained silent. Do not you think that it is another sign of the strained transatlantic relations? How do you predict the European countries’ future reactions to the conflicting policies adopted by the Trump administration?

**A:** I wrote about Pence’s remarks in Munich, a deplorable display. I think the audience’s reactions by silence at times showed frustration about part of Trump’s agenda, including the demand that the EU and all other countries abide by illegal U.S. sanctions on Iran.

Look at what’s going on in Venezuela. Most EU countries support Trump’s coup attempt against a sovereign country and its democratically elected and reelected president.

Again, I think EU countries will largely support the U.S. agenda, but not across the board. Germany especially supports the Nord Stream pipeline, opposing Trump’s call to reject it.

What’s going on is very disturbing. The U.S. might escalate wars this year and next. Venezuela is mainly in the crosshairs and Iran is threatened by Trump regime’s belligerence.

## Dialogue: The only ‘Option’ for Venezuela

**TEHRAN (FNA)** — US-backed unrest and fears of military intervention in Venezuela bring back terrible memories for many of us who witnessed back in 2003 the disastrous decision by the Bush regime and company to invade Iraq and turn it into a failed state.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo wants a repeat of that right now: He continues to warn that “every option is on the table” yet again and that the Trump administration will galvanize a “global coalition to put force behind the voice” of those calling for the ouster of elected Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

Pompeo even tweeted that the “US will take action against those who oppose the peaceful restoration of democracy in #Venezuela,” an apparent reference to those millions of voters who do not back a regime change to opposition leader and self-declared acting president Juan Guaido. After all, Guaido seeks help from Washington to topple President Maduro and he has also said that “all options” are being considered, even asking the US to invade Venezuela.

Many US lawmakers and senators are also on board. Senator Marco Rubio, who has helped spearhead the US position on Venezuela, posted a tweet showing Panamanian President Manuel Noriega under arrest in the US in what is a not-so-subtle threat to take Maduro out militarily. He even continued the not-so-subtle threats with side by side photos of Muammar Gaddafi, with one showing the ousted Libyan leader bloodied as he was dragged through the streets.

Sadly, once again, the United Nations is looking the other way. Silly how in the middle of all this the US government wants to send so-called \$20 million of food and medicine aid to Venezuela, when the Trump regime has stolen \$30 billion from Venezuela in oil revenue, and takes \$30 million every day. It needs no comment — nor does the fact that the US-backed war on Yemen has pushed millions to the brink of famine, turned Syria into yet another failed state, and destabilized Libya forever.

Worse still, the US is waging illegal economic warfare against the people of Venezuela. From the sanctions to the freezing of assets to the blocking of Venezuela from the international financial system, this is what appears to be driving that country over the edge.

As is the case, there are no legal or moral grounds to sanction and intervene in the affairs of Venezuela and no international laws to support such a meddling. There is nothing in the UN Charter that sanctions meddling in the elections of a foreign country, and nothing in the Venezuelan constitution that legitimizes self-appointed presidents. Venezuela is not a threat. Venezuela is not firing missiles at the United States, attacking US allies or invading the US with troops.

To be clear, the Maduro government has failed to fix the economy. But that does in no way give justification to the US government to turn the situation from bad to worse. The US and its allies have no right whatsoever to interfere in Venezuela’s affairs. Not only is their regime change illegal and morally wrong, it has proved to be disastrous. Any doubters should ask the United Nations.

In the meantime, the so-called US aid is fake news. After all, this is the same trump administration that imposed Muslim travel ban, imprisoned immigrant mothers and their kids, and left Puerto Rico for dead after Hurricane Maria. It is mad to think even for a second that Trump now does actually care about the Venezuelan poor.

At any rate, Venezuela is in crisis and it should be resolved only through national dialogue and reconciliation. This very real and very daunting needs help from the international community — not foreign interference or military invasion. Without litigating who’s responsible for what, whether US-led sanctions and economic sabotage are more to blame or the economic policies of President Maduro, one simple fact is true: Venezuela needs help and only its people can determine their own fate. And guess what! They have already done so in the most democratic and transparent election in the world, according to the UN norms and standards.

The fact that the bulk of international aid community has either distanced itself from this crisis or outright ignored the plight of Venezuelan people is yet another dark chapter in the history of contemporary world. It is about time the International Committee of the Red Cross, United Nations agencies and other relief organizations came to the rescue of the nation and push the US illegal moves back. They should never collaborate with the US government and its allies in the Venezuelan opposition who have every intention to turn the South American country into yet another Iraq and Syria.

## Zarif resignation result of incoordination not internal disputes

By Mohammad Ali Haqshenas

**TEHRAN (MNA)** — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif announced his resignation yesterday which many believe that it was a result of incoordination not internal disputes as some foreign media claim.

Zarif unexpectedly resigned from his post as Iranian Foreign Minister on Monday night. Early speculations claimed that Zarif’s decision was because he was not invited or informed about meetings of Syrian President Bashar Assad in Tehran with Leader of Islamic Revolution and with the Iranian president.

Iranian media is flooded with interviews of different officials who all praise the performance of Zarif in his tenure and believe that he is the best choice for this post.

Majority of Parliament members signed a letter to Rouhani in support of Zarif today, as announced by Ali Najafi Khoshroudi, spokesperson for the Parliament’s National Security and Foreign Policy Committee. The letter demands that Zarif continue his tenure as the country’s foreign minister.

According to reports, First Vice President Es’hagh Jahangiri has held a phone conversation with Zarif on Tuesday to further discuss the resignation and persuade him to get back in the office.

Zarif holds a record for receiving praise from the Islamic Revolution Leader, tweeted Ezzatollah Zarghami, a member of Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, on Tuesday. “One understandable incoordination should not guide him to this point,” he notes, adding, “Zarif should return and not turn the sweetness of this historic meeting [Leader’s meeting with Bashar Assad] bitter.”



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The Tehran Times new pocket-sized glossary is now available on the market. The reader-friendly is a rich source of the most common journalistic terminology collected by the daily's retired staff.

It can benefit a wide range of tastes from students to professional journalists. Persian equivalents have been given for all entries, including idioms and expressions. The glossary also includes example sentences for entries the authors thought it would be a bit difficult to learn.

For more information contact:  
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# Iran's first hemodiafiltration center for kidney diseases inaugurated

**1 ->** Jamalian further remarked that the new method was never used in the country before and it would be free of charge, like former dialysis treatments in Iran.

Mehdi Shadnoosh, the director of Transplantation Department at the Ministry of Health also highlighted this event, saying there are around 8,600 people in Iran waiting to receive kidney transplant. Plus, 15 to 16 thousand patients receive dialysis every day.

It is estimated that, annually, the number of Iranians who receive dialysis grow by three to four thousands, and every round of dialysis costs around 4.5 million rials (around \$107) for the healthcare system, said Shadnoosh.

Kidney transplant and dialysis are free services in Iran, so there must be more focus on teaching people the proper preventive methods such as controlling their high blood pressure and diabetes, he added.

According to World Health Organization, a 2015 study revealed that, in 2015, 1.2 million people died from kidney failure, an increase of 32% since 2005.

In 2010, an estimated 2.3-7.1 million people with end-stage kidney disease died without access to chronic dialysis. Additionally, each year, around 1.7 million people are thought to die from acute kidney injury. Overall, therefore, an estimated 5-10 million people die annually from kidney disease.



**It is estimated that, annually, the number of Iranians who receive dialysis grow by three to four thousands, and every round of dialysis costs around 4.5 million rials (around \$107) for the healthcare system.**

## Very first linear particle accelerator made in Iran

**HEALTH DESK** **TEHRAN** — Iran's very first linear particle accelerator, a device mainly used for treatment of cancer patients, was produced by Behyaar Sanaat Sepahan, a knowledge-based company based in Isfahan, announced the company's managing director.

According to Navid Nejatbakhsh, the device is now completely ready to use and awaits proper licenses, IRNA reported on Tuesday.

A linear accelerator (LINAC) is the device most commonly used for external beam radiation treatments for patients with cancer. The linear accelerator is used to treat all parts/organs of the body. It delivers high-energy x-rays or electrons to the region of the patient's tumor.

Nejatbakhsh further remarked that the new technology has a variety of applications in food



and metal industries, water treatment and sterilization as well as studies in physics and fundamental sciences.

He went on to say that the local version of the device is around 30% cheaper than its foreign equivalents that cost around three to four million dollars; furthermore, almost 90% of the device's components are homegrown as well.

"In every country, there should be three to four linear accelerators per a million people, so there need to be around 240 to 320 of such devices in our country, but there are currently around 70 devices in use," he further noted.

However, he added, Iran's neighboring countries are facing a much greater shortage of linear accelerators, so it's better to start its mass production as soon as the proper licenses are issued.

## TTAC system for food products, medicine starts pilot phase

**HEALTH DESK** **TEHRAN** — The electronic system for Tracking, Tracking and Authentication Control (TTAC) of food and medicine started its pilot phase on Tuesday, an official with Iran's Food and Drug Administration (IFDA) announced.

The pilot program is first running in three medical science universities of Tehran, explained Vahid Mofid who presides over the Food and Beverages Department at IFDA.

According to Mofid, the pilot program will expand to include more food and beverages by the end of current Iranian calendar year (March 20), and it would hopefully include all such products in the beginning of the next year, YJC reported.

By running the TTAC, all food and beverages will get an authentication code and it can be used to realize if such goods are counterfeit or smuggled ones, said Mofid.

"The IFDA had long intended to have a comprehensive electronic system to manage food products. The system will issue license for producing such goods and it will not issue the permit if they don't meet a set of standards," Mofid further remarked.

"By using the TTAC, we can also keep track of the products online and know the quantity of returned products," he added.

## Young female blood donors at higher risk of iron deficiency

Adolescent female blood donors are more likely to develop an iron deficiency compared to older donors and non-donors, new research has found.

This means they might be at a higher risk of fainting and feeling unwell after donating blood, but the researchers stress this shouldn't dissuade people from becoming donors, rather encourage them to take the necessary precautions, such as iron supplements.

The study was carried out by the John Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore, Maryland, and also suggests that such deficiencies could have an adverse effect on brain development in these women.

In the US, an estimated 6.8 million people donate blood each year and a large proportion of them are adolescents, according to the American Red Cross.

For this study, researchers looked at 9,647 female participants between the ages of 16 and 49, all of whom provided blood samples and a history of their blood donations. Out of this group, 2,419 were teenagers.

The authors explain that donating blood, which typically sees the removal of 200-250 milligrams of iron from the donor, could pose a threat to young women's health specifically because adolescents have lower blood volume, but higher iron levels, which means that when they have blood drawn they lose more iron for the same volume of blood than older adults.

(Source: the independent)

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## “Youngest” Iranian woodturner honored

**HERITAGE d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Parsa Qazi, an eight-year-old crafter, has been honored as the “youngest” Iranian woodturner during a ceremony in Tehran, CHTN reported on Wednesday.



The ceremony was attended by Iran’s Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization Deputy Director Pouya Mahmoudian and Ghada Hijavi, the head of World Crafts Council-Asia Pacific Region, who traveled to Iran for several visits to Iranian cities.

Qazi started practicing woodturning at the age of four. He also held craft workshops during the 30th National Crafts Exhibition, which ran at the Tehran Permanent International Fairground in August 2018, the report said.

Over the past couple of years, dozens of high-quality Iranian handicrafts have been honored with UNESCO seals of excellence.

## Asia’s travel boom is in trouble as pilot shortage worsens

An unprecedented travel boom in Asia has spawned new budget carriers and millions of first-time fliers, but a shortage of pilots is threatening to choke demand.

Vietnam’s Bamboo Airways Co., which launched this year, was the region’s latest low-cost carrier to start services and more are expected to join the race. In Southeast Asia alone, LCCs have about 1,400 aircraft on order, compared with fewer than 400 for full-service carriers, according to CAPA Centre for Aviation. With the supply of pilots lagging behind, the airlines will struggle to find skilled cockpit crew.

“There’s a real crunch coming,” Peter Harbison, executive chairman of Sydney-based CAPA said in Singapore. “For new airlines, it’s much, much harder and it’s going to be a real struggle.”

Global traffic is set to double in the next two decades with the biggest increase expected in the Asia-Pacific region, where almost 4 billion passenger journeys are expected, according to the International Air Transport Association.

(Source: The Japan Times)



## ROUND THE GLOBE

### Historic center of Riga

The historic center of Riga, the capital and the largest city of Latvia, is a living illustration of European history.

Through centuries, Riga has been the center of many historic events and a meeting point for European nations, and it has managed to preserve evidence of European influence on its historical development, borders between the West and the East, and intersection of trading and cultural routes.



A view of the historic center of Riga, Latvia

Riga has always been a modern city keeping up with the current trends in architecture and urban planning, and at the same time, preserving the city’s integrity in the course of development.

A World Heritage site, the historic center of Riga is comprised of three different urban landscapes — the relatively well-preserved medieval core, the 19th century semi-circle of boulevards with a green belt on both sides of the City Canal, and the former suburban quarters surrounding the boulevards with dense built-up areas with a rectangular network of streets and wooden architecture of the 18th and 19th centuries.

Riga, which was founded as a port town in 1201, was one of the key centers of the Hanseatic League in Eastern Europe from the 13th to the 15th century. The urban fabric of its medieval core reflects the prosperity of those times, though most of the earliest buildings were rebuilt for actual needs or lost by fire or war.

In the 17th century, Riga became the largest provincial town of Sweden. In the 19th century, it experienced rapid industrial development. It is in this period that the suburbs surrounding the medieval town were laid out, first, with imposing wooden buildings in neoclassical style, and later, when permanent stone buildings were allowed instead, in the Art Nouveau style.

In the early 1900’s Riga became the European city with the highest concentration of Art Nouveau architecture with around 50 Art Nouveau buildings of high architectural value in the medieval part and more than 300 in the rest of the historic center.

The site reflects various architectural styles, which provide valuable insight into the stages of development of Riga as a city.

(Source: UNESCO)

# Isfahan: Why it’s great to wandering about

**TOURISM d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Soaked in a rich history, Isfahan was once a crossroad of international trade and diplomacy in Iran and now it is one of Iran’s top tourist destinations for good reasons.

It is filled with many architectural wonders such as unmatched Islamic buildings, bazaars, museums, Persian gardens and tree-lined boulevards. It’s a city for walking, getting lost in its mazing bazaars, dozing in beautiful gardens, and meeting people.

Isfahan is renowned not only for the abundance of great historical bridges, but also for its ‘life-giving river’, the Zayandeh-Rood, which has long bestowed the city an original beauty and a fertility.

Isfahan has long been nicknamed as Nesf-e-Jahan which is translated into “half the world”; meaning seeing it is relevant to seeing the whole world. In its heyday it was also one of the largest cities in the region with a population of nearly one million.

The cool blue tiles of Isfahan’s Islamic buildings, and the city’s majestic bridges, contrast perfectly with the encircling hot, dry Iranian countryside.

The huge Imam Square, best known as Naghsh-e Jahan Sq. (literary meaning “Image of the World”), is one of the larg-

est in the world (500m by 160m), and a majestic example of town planning. Built in early 17th century, the UNECO-registered square is punctuated with the most interesting sights in Isfahan.

It was laid out under the reign of the Safavid ruler, Shah Abbas the Great, to signal the importance of Isfahan as a capital of his powerful empire.

It is hemmed on four sides by magnificent buildings: to the east, the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque; to the west, the palace of Ali Qapu; to the north, the portico of Qeysarieh; and to the south, the eminent Imam Mosque.

“The square was at the heart of the Safavid capital’s culture, economy, religion, social power, government, and politics. Its vast sandy esplanade was used for celebrations, promenades, and public executions, for playing polo and for assembling troops,” according to the UNESCO website.

Right at the northern limit of the Imam Square, one will find “Qeysarieh Gate”, which leads to the unique and unforgettable “Grand Bazaar of Isfahan”. This historical market is one of the largest and most labyrinthine bazaars of the country. Shops offering handicrafts, souvenirs, jewelry, silverware, traditional ceramics and authentic Persian carpets.

Modern Isfahan is now home to some



A view of the UNESCO-registered Imam Square

**Isfahan has long been nicknamed as Nesf-e-Jahan which is translated into “half the world”; meaning seeing it is relevant to seeing the whole world.**

heavy industry, including steel factories and a nuclear facility on its outskirts, however its inner core wants to be preserved as a priceless gem.

## Achaemenid-era objects discovered in southern Iran



**HERITAGE d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iranian authorities have confiscated seven prehistoric objects, which are estimated to date back to Achaemenid times, from smugglers in Rudan county, Hormozgan province, southern Iran.

After [days of] intelligence operations, seven sculptures were seized from two individuals who were arrested following a vehicle pursuit, ISNA quoted Abbasali

Behdanifard, a provincial police commander, as saying.

Cultural heritage experts are assessing that the objects worth some seven billion rials (around \$165,000), he explained.

The Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BC) was the largest and most durable empire of its time, stretching from Ethiopia, through Egypt, to Greece, to Anatolia (modern Turkey), Central Asia and to India.

## Iran to host intl. conference on health tourism



**TOURISM d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iran will play host to the 4th Conference on Health Tourism in Islamic Countries on November 26 and 27, ILNA reported.

On Tuesday, representatives from several countries attended a press conference for the event, which was held in Tehran’s Homa Hotel.

Medical tourism made an economic contribution of around \$1.2 billion to the country in the last Iranian calendar year 1396 (March 2017-March 2018), attracting around 300,000 medical tourists.

The country has set its goals to exceed its yearly medical travelers to around two million in [calendar year] 1404.

## After an avalanche, questions about safety

By Biddle Duke

Snow slides happen both in the backcountry and inbounds, despite the efforts of ski patrols, but there are precautions skiers can take.

### ■ How common are ski area avalanches?

In the U.S., the vast majority of avalanche deaths occur in the backcountry, with more snowmobilers, hikers and climbers killed than skiers and snowboarders. In the 10 seasons ending last year, 259 avalanche fatalities were recorded; 103 of them were backcountry snowboarders or skiers.

But inbounds avalanches happen every season. Eight ski-area guests have perished in avalanches on open terrain within resorts in the U.S. in the last 11 years, according to statistics from the National Ski Areas Association and the Colorado Avalanche Information Center. Another two guests died on closed inbounds terrain in the same time period.

Recently, in addition to the deadly slide at Taos, a 150-foot-wide avalanche at the southern end of Jackson Hole’s Expert Chutes on Dec. 1 buried five guests. All were rescued without serious injury. Last March at Squaw Valley, five people were caught in a big slide near the Olympic Lady chairlift. Two of the victims were hospitalized for their injuries. The others were unharmed.

### ■ Hasn’t open terrain been cleared by the ski patrol?

When terrain is “open” by a ski area the assumption by the lift-riding public is that it is safe to ski or ride. But that’s not necessarily the case.

“‘Safety’ means there’s freedom from harm or danger,” said Dale Atkins, who advises resorts on avalanche protocols, “and we can’t guarantee that, not in that type of steep terrain.”

Avalanche risk is a complicated issue for resorts with slide-prone terrain. The powdery steeps are the goal for many skiers and riders, and resorts face immense pressure to open them, especially in the wake of big storms. Before deciding to open a slope, resort ski patrols use explosives to release loose snow and test the snowpack. They will frequently venture



into hazardous zones to “cut” slopes on their skis, testing a slope’s stability, sometimes triggering slides. To determine the likelihood of an avalanche, patrols will study the snowpack’s layers by digging snow pits. And they will often rely on historical knowledge: when has a slope slid and under what types of snow and weather conditions?

The work is dangerous — five patrollers and snow scientists have died in inbounds avalanches in the past decade — and it is inexact.

In a telling shift, resorts some years ago began moving away from talking about “avalanche control,” which implied that resorts had the power to stop avalanches from happening, which they don’t. These days the commonly used term is “avalanche mitigation.”

At Taos, the chief executive, David Norden, said the Taos Ski Patrol followed its customary snow-safety protocols, including the use of explosives, before opening the K3 Chute where Matthew Zonghetti, 26, and Corey Borg-Massanari, 22, were buried.

### ■ Who is responsible when an avalanche occurs?

The question of who is legally responsible has only rarely been tested in the courts. A lawsuit over a 2007 avalanche death at The Canyons in Utah

resulted in a jury deciding that the resort had taken “reasonable” steps to mitigate avalanche danger. A lawsuit brought against Jackson Hole over a 2008 avalanche fatality ended in an out-of-court settlement. Both lawsuits argued that inbounds avalanches are not automatically part of the inherent-risk legislation that protects resorts, and that the resort operators needed to prove they had taken thorough avalanche-mitigation precautions before opening the slopes.

In a ruling that was the first of its kind in the nation, the Colorado high court in 2016 declared that avalanches are an inherent risk of the sport. In 2012, 28-year-old Christopher Norris died in an inbounds slide at Winter Park. His family’s wrongful death suit went all the way to the Colorado Supreme Court, which ruled that “the definition of inherent dangers and risks of skiing ... include an avalanche.”

### ■ What can skiers do to protect themselves?

Resorts are constantly reviewing and updating safety protocols, and they differ across the industry. Rules, for example, about venturing into steeper, avalanche-prone terrain vary from resort to resort. The two men at Taos were not wearing avalanche beacons; Taos does not require them. Some resorts with similar terrain do, however. At Bridger Bowl, in Montana, for example, you must be wearing a beacon to ride the Schlasman’s Lift which accesses Bridger’s inbounds ridge terrain.

Mr. Atkins and other experts recommend that people venturing into such steep territory should always be with at least one other person, understand possible dangers and know how to minimize them through education (avalanche courses) and conversations with the ski patrol; always ski steep powdery slopes one at a time; wear an avalanche beacon for quick detection if they are buried; and consider using an avalanche airbag pack that inflates in the event of a slide to keep victims on the surface to avoid being crushed or suffocated by the snow and for faster detection.

(Source: The New York Times)



# Scientists have found an efficient way to turn carbon dioxide back into coal

As far as environmental supervillains go, atmospheric carbon is the kingpin of crime. And just like in the comic books, every time we think we have a way to lock it up for good, it gets away from us.

What we need is something cheap. Scalable. Something that can have a hope of ripping enough carbon from the atmosphere to actually make a difference. Well, a new technique from scientists in Australia could be what we've been looking for.

Researchers from RMIT University in Melbourne have developed technology that can convert carbon dioxide gas into particles of what is essentially pure soot.

Rewinding the carbon cycle on greenhouse gases and finding a way to return them to the ground has been a dream of scientists ever since we discovered the threat of global warming.

We've come up with a long list of ways we can sequester carbon, from growing and burying biomass to pumping the gas into reservoirs underground to speeding up the chemical reactions that can turn CO<sub>2</sub> into a less volatile material.

## Big polluters

Some are cheap, but relatively slow. Others just don't offer enough of an incentive for big polluters to pay attention, or risk releasing the carbon again far too easily.

The end result is we really shouldn't pin our hopes on negative emissions solving our carbon crisis.

Still, headway has been made in recent



years, making us optimistic we could be getting closer to an environmental solution.

The new technique developed in Australia isn't just relatively quick, it also doesn't require huge amounts of pressure (or complicated chemical reactions) to turn carbon dioxide into a solid form that can be locked away again.

Suspending the nanoparticles in the form of a liquid metal alloy prevents a build-up of the solidified carbon over the cerium, enhancing the efficiency of the process.

Better still, using the metal gallium as a solvent means the whole process can take place at room temperature, given the element's remarkably low melting point.

**Rewinding the carbon cycle on greenhouse gases and finding a way to return them to the ground has been a dream of scientists ever since we discovered the threat of global warming.**

## Earth could warm by 14°C as growing emissions destroy crucial clouds, say scientists

If we keep burning fossil fuels with reckless abandon, we could trigger a cloud feedback effect that will add 8°C on top of all the warming up to that point. That means the world could warm by more than 14°C above the pre-industrial level.

Needless to say, this would be cataclysmic. For instance, large parts of the tropics would become too hot for warm-blooded animals, including us, to survive.

The good news is that if countries step up their efforts to cut emissions we should avoid finding out if this idea is correct. "I don't think we will get anywhere close to it," says Tapio Schneider at the California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, who led the research.

Schneider's team modelled stratocumulus clouds over subtropical oceans, which cover around 7 percent of Earth's surface and cool the planet by reflecting the sun's heat back into space. They found there was a sudden transition when CO<sub>2</sub> levels reached around 1200 parts per million (ppm) — the stratocumulus clouds broke up and disappeared.

## Subtropical stratocumulus

The reason why this finding applies only to subtropical stratocumulus is that these clouds are unusual. The cloud layer is maintained by the cloudtops cooling as they emit infrared radiation — and very high CO<sub>2</sub> levels block this process.

The loss of these bright white clouds would have a dramatic warming effect, adding 8°C to the global temperature, Schneider calculates. Since the world would warm around 6°C or more if CO<sub>2</sub> levels passed 1200 ppm, this means the average global temperature could exceed 14°C or more.

CO<sub>2</sub> levels will pass 410 ppm this year, up from 280 ppm in preindustrial times. If we burned all available fossil fuels, atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> levels could rise as high as 4000 ppm.

However, even in the standard worst case scenario used by climate scientists, which assumes nothing is done to curb emissions, CO<sub>2</sub> levels would only pass 1200 ppm decades after 2100.



Other climate scientists say this cloud feedback is plausible. "Conceptually I think it's sound," says Helene Muri at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. But there are some uncertainties about the numbers, so it will be important to try to narrow them down, she says.

The result might hold up, but we already have more than enough reasons to avoid reaching this point, says Kate Marvel at the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies.

## Worst-case scenario

Emissions are currently growing in line with the worst-case scenario, but the expectation is that countries will eventually do more. "This result isn't cause for panic," says Marvel.

The finding could also help solve a longstanding mystery — how the planet got so hot around 50 million years ago that crocodiles thrived in the Arctic. We know that CO<sub>2</sub> levels were generally much higher at the time, but they were not high enough to explain the extreme warmth during this period.

The reason why the cloud feedback effect had not been discovered before is that general climate models of the planet have to greatly simplify cloud physics to make the computations manageable.

Schneider's team instead modelled only a small part of the subtropical atmosphere in great detail.

And if the models are missing major effects like this, there could be more nasty surprises in store as the world warms.

(Source: newscientist.com)

## Plastic found in deepest ocean animals, new research finds

Animals living in the deepest ocean trenches have been found with plastic fragments in their gut, according to new research published Wednesday showing how manmade pollution reaches into the bowels of the planet.

More than 300 million tons of plastics are produced annually, and there are at least five trillion plastic pieces floating in our oceans.

Because deep-sea exploration is expensive and time-consuming, most studies on plastic pollution up until now had been close to the surface, showing a widespread level of plastic contamination in fish, turtles, whales and sea birds.

Now a British team of researchers say they have discovered cases of plastic ingestion among tiny shrimp in six of the world's deepest ocean trenches.

In the Mariana Trench east of the Philippines, the deepest depression on Earth, 100 percent of the animals studied had plastic fibers in their digestive tracts.

"Half of me was expecting to find something but that is huge," said Alan Jamieson, from Newcastle University's School of Natural and Environmental Sciences.

## In the depths of ocean

Jamieson and his team normally spend their time looking for new species in the depths of the ocean.

But they realized that during the course of expeditions dating back a decade they had accumulated dozens of specimens of a species of tiny shrimp that lives between 6000-11,000 meters (19,500-36,000 feet) beneath the surface.

"We are sitting on the deepest dataset in the world, so if we find (plastics) in these, we are done," Jamieson told AFP.

The team was astonished by just how widespread the plastic contamination at extreme depths proved to be.

For instance, the Peru-Chile Trench in the southeast Pacific is around 15,000 kilometers (9,300 miles) from the Japan Trench. Yet plastic was found in both.

Map showing ocean trenches up to 10 km deep where scientists found tiny shrimps which had ingested microplastics.

"It's off Japan, off New Zealand, off Peru, and each trench is phenomenally deep,"

To "date, CO<sub>2</sub> has only been converted into a solid at extremely high temperatures, making it industrially unviable," says RMIT physical chemist Torben Daeneke.

"By using liquid metals as a catalyst, we've shown it's possible to turn the gas back into carbon at room temperature, in a process that's efficient and scalable."

It's that scalability that just might see it make a dent in emissions. But there's another outcome that could also give this process an edge over other similar methods: its product isn't necessarily destined for the ground.

## Carbon can hold electrical charge

A "side benefit of the process is that the carbon can hold electrical charge, becoming a supercapacitor, so it could potentially be used as a component in future vehicles," says lead author and engineer Dorna Esrafilzadeh.

The "process also produces synthetic fuel as a by-product, which could also have industrial applications."

Carbon-based products such as graphene have the potential to revolutionize the future of electronics, not only as a supercapacitor but as a superconductor.

Even if only a fraction of the hype is realized, a materials industry based on carbon could be worth big dollars in the future.

It's quickly becoming clear that economic incentives pose as much of a problem in fixing our environmental concerns as any technological challenge.

(Source: sciencealert.com)



Jamieson said.

The "salient point is that they are consistently found in animals all around the Pacific at extraordinary depths so let's not waste time. It's everywhere."

But when the team analyzed the fibers — most of which appeared to be clothes fabrics such as nylon — they found that the plastics' atomic bonds had shifted compared to brand new material, suggesting they were several years old.

## Microplastic particles

Microplastic particles are either dumped directly into the seas via sewers and rivers or form when larger chunks of plastic break down over time.

Once they start gathering bacteria, they get heavier and eventually sink.

"So even if not a single fiber were to enter the sea from this point forward, everything that's in the sea now is going to eventually sink, and once it's in the deep sea where is the mechanism to get it back?" asked Jamieson.

"We are piling all our crap into the place we know least about."

Because plastic contamination is now so widespread, even at extreme depths, the team cautioned that it was nearly impossible to know what effect plastic ingestion was having on bottom-dwelling species.

"These particles could just pass straight through the animal, but in the animals we looked at they must be blocking them. The equivalent would be for you to swallow a 2-meter polypropylene rope and expect that not to have an adverse effect on your health," said Jamieson.

(Source: phys.org)

## The moon flies through the Earth's atmosphere, SOHO researchers reveal

A 20-year-old data from the space-based Solar and Heliospheric Observatory (SOHO) have revealed that the outermost part of the Earth's atmosphere known as geocorona is far bigger than previously thought.

Researchers said the geocorona, a cloud of hydrogen atoms that glows in far-ultraviolet light, does not just wrap around our planet. It actually reaches nearly twice as far as the moon and is 50 times the Earth's diameter.

The "moon flies through Earth's atmosphere," said Igor Baliukin, from Russia's Space Research Institute who is one of the authors of the paper that presented the findings.

Baliukin added they were not aware how big the geocorona is until they looked at observations made by the SOHO spacecraft more than two decades ago.

SWAN, one of the instruments aboard SOHO, used its sensitive sensors to trace the hydrogen signature of the geocorona and precisely detect how far this extended. Such observations, could only be done at certain times of the year when the Earth and the geocorona can be viewed from SWAN.

SWAN's hydrogen absorption cell could selectively measure Lyman-alpha, a wavelength of ultraviolet light that hydrogen atoms can both absorb and emit. Because Lyman-alpha is absorbed by Earth's atmosphere, this type of light can only be observed from space.

The "use of a hydrogen absorption cell allowed to disentangle the interplanetary emission from the geocoronal one and to assign the absorbed signal almost entirely to the geocorona," researchers wrote in their study, which was published in the Journal of Geophysical Research.

The findings about the extent of the Earth's atmosphere's reach have implications in future astronomical observations conducted in the vicinity of the moon. The geocorona may interfere with the observations.

(Source: Newsweek)

## Migrating blue whales rely on memory more than environmental cues to find prey

Blue whales reach their massive size by relying on their exceptional memories to find historically productive feeding sites rather than responding in real time to emerging prey patches, a new study concludes.

Researchers examining records of both whale migration and oceanic conditions in the California Current Ecosystem found that blue whales almost perfectly match the timing of their migration to the historical average timing of krill production, rather than matching the waves of krill availability in any given year.

The findings suggest that blue whales locate prey by relying on memory to return to stable, high-quality foraging sites, which historically have served them well but could make it difficult for the whales to adapt if novel ecosystem changes emerge as a result of climate change.

The concept of tracking the timing of food availability along migration routes is not unusual for land animals, but it has been more difficult to identify in marine creatures, according to Briana Abrahms, a research ecologist with the NOAA Southwest Fisheries Science Center in Monterey, Calif., and lead author on the study.

"We know that many species that migrate on land, from caribou in the Arctic to wildebeests in the Serengeti, enhance their survival by carefully adjusting the pace and timing of their migrations to find food as it becomes seasonally available along the way, rather than just migrating to get from point A to point B," Abrahms said.

Blue whales seem to embrace that same strategy, which is enhanced by their memory, she noted. "These long-lived, highly intelligent animals are making movement decisions based on their expectations of where and when food will be available during their migrations."

"This novel study is particularly noteworthy in that it focuses on the phenology, or timing of migration in a large marine predator," said Sue Moore, an affiliate professor at the University of Washington Center for Ecosystem Sentinels, who was not involved in the study.

(Source: eurekalert.org)



## Scientists create artificial ocean hydrothermal vents to study primordial origins of life

A team of scientists investigated the conditions of the primordial ocean to understand how life began on Earth. They believe that this could help narrow down the search for extraterrestrial life in the universe.

Astrobiologists at NASA have successfully recreated the conditions of the primordial ocean where life on Earth began some 4 billion years ago.

The team from the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California recreated hydrothermal vents, openings in the ocean floor where heated water and material from within the crust spew, to understand the building blocks of life.

The study was done to understand how life formed in the early years of planet Earth. This will allow scientists to one day identify areas in the cosmos where extraterrestrial organisms might also blossom and thrive.

The researchers recreated the conditions of the primordial ocean by filling a laboratory beaker with the same materials that were present when life began on Earth billions of years ago. They mixed water, minerals, as well as pyruvate and ammonia — molecules usually found near hydrothermal vents and are precursors for the formation of the building blocks of life.

They also heated the beakers to 158 degrees Fahrenheit, adjusted the pH to mimic alkaline environments, decreased oxygen, and used a mineral called iron hydroxide, or green rust, which was abundant in the early years of Earth.

During the experiment, the researchers discovered that when a small amount of oxygen was introduced to green rust, it caused a reaction that led to the formation of the amino acid alanine and alpha hydroxy acid lactate. While the team did not produce life, they believe that the molecules produced from the artificial ocean might recombine and eventually allow life to flourish.

(Source: techtimes.com)

## Old stars live longer than we thought, new observations suggest

The type of stars we refer to, which cannot be seen by the naked eye, officially up to now the objects which have suffered the greatest loss of mass. But the spiral structures detected by an international team show that this is not the case.

Thanks to new observations from the ALMA telescope in Chile, it became clear that the stellar wind of this red giant forms a spiral. This is an indirect indication that the star is not alone, but part of a binary star.

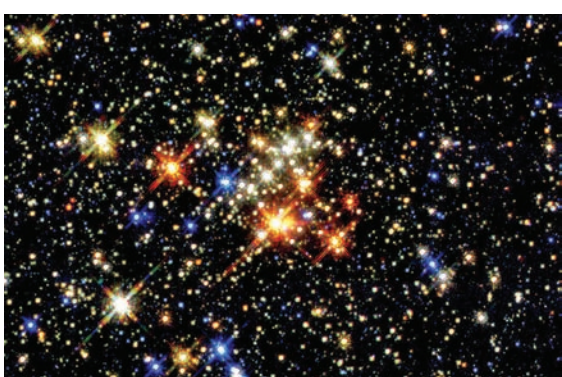
Towards the end of their lives some 95% of stars evolve into red giants which lose their mass via a "stellar wind." Eventually they end up as planetary nebulae, ionized gas with a central hot star, a white dwarf.

Researchers from 14 European scientific institutions, among them the IAC, have detected the existence of a binary interaction which had not been noticed by the scientific community.

## Giant stars

This new research offers an alternative explanation to the high rates of mass loss which it was thought were present towards the end of the lives of the most massive giant stars.

The study shows that these stars lose mass at a much slower rate than previously thought. The stellar wind is not stronger than usual, but it is affected by a companion star which had not been noticed until now, a second star orbiting



around the red giant.

The fact that this process is slower than expected has a major impact on our understanding of how stars end their lives. As a consequence of this discovery we find that the most massive giant star need a longer time to expel their chemically rich interiors into their environment, which affects the enrichment of the interstellar medium, and therefore the chemical evolution of galaxies.

## Spiral structure

The data show a spiral structure which show that these stars are not individual have a binary companion" explains Anibal García Hernández, a researcher at the IAC and at the ULL, a co-author of the article.

He adds the "interaction with its companion gives rise to a rather complex morphology, in the form of an incomplete spiral. Previous data lacked the spatial resolution and the sensitivity given by ALMA and did not allow astronomers to find the characteristics associated with a binary star."

The interpretation of the ALMA observations has shown in a convincing way that the last evolutionary phase of these old stars is not characterized by a short-lived "extreme superwind" but rather by a "normal wind" which lasts much longer. In other words "old stars take longer to die" or as a slogan "old stars live longer."

Now the scientific community will see if the existence of a binary companion could explain the behavior of other particular red giants. "We thought that many stars lived alone, but we will probably have to change our ideas" explains Leen Decin, the first author on the article, who is a Professor at the Catholic University of Louvain.

(Source: sciencedaily.com)



## Welfare Organization to build 113,000 housing units for the underprivileged

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — Iran’s Welfare Organization will construct some 113,000 housing units for the underprivileged under the coverage of the organization within the next three years, the organization’s director has said.

Currently, some 53,000 houses are under construction both in rural and urban areas, Farid Qobadi-Dana explained, adding that, the organization is planning on constructing 113,000 more housing units in three years.



Moreover, since the year 1394 (March 2015-March 2016) some 1,000 families with two or more members with disabilities have been provided with housing and some 6,800 more houses are under construction, Tasnim news agency quoted Qobadi-Dana as saying on Wednesday.

## IRCS plans rescue and relief scheme for New Year holidays

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) rescue and relief will launch a scheme on March 16 aiming to increase safety on roads during the New Year holidays, head of Rescue and Relief Organization, Morteza Salimi, has said.



Every year, people in Iran make hundreds of thousands of domestic trips during the Iranian New Year holidays (starting on March 21), when most businesses and workplaces are closed, as are schools.

The scheme will end on March 6, Salimi said, ISNA news agency reported.

During the aforesaid period some 5,800 search and rescue forces will be on duty in IRCS stations nationwide, Salimi explained.

Resources for implementation of the scheme has increased by three percent compared to the same period last year, he concluded.

## LEARN ENGLISH

### Complaining at a Restaurant

A: Excuse me, waiter? Waiter!  
B: Yes, sir? What can I do for you?  
A: I’ve been sitting here for the past twenty minutes and no one has offered me a glass of water, brought any bread to the table and our appetizers haven’t been served yet! You know, in this kind of establishment, I’d expect much better service.  
B: I am sorry, sir. I’ll check on your order right away.  
C: Relax honey, the place is busy tonight, but I’ve heard the food is amazing. Anyway...  
B: Here you are, sir. The steak for the lady, and a mushroom soup for you.  
A: Waiter, I ordered a cream of mushroom soup with asparagus. This soup is obviously too **runny**, and it’s **over-seasoned**. It’s completely **inedible**!  
B: Okay, I do apologize for that. Can I bring you another soup, or would you like to order something else?  
A: Take this steak back as well, it’s **rubbery** and completely **overcooked**. And look at the **portion size**! How can you charge twenty-five dollars for a **sliver** of steak?  
B: Right away... sir.  
C: Honey come on! The steak was fine, why are you **making such a big deal**? Are you trying to get our meal **comped** again?  
A: What do you mean? We are paying for this. If I’m **shelling out** my **hard earned** bucks, I expect value for money!  
B: Here you are, sir. I hope it is alright now. The chef has prepared it especially for you.  
A: Yes, fine.

■ **Key vocabulary**  
**runny**: more liquid than expected  
**over seasoned**: too salty  
**inedible**: cannot be eaten  
**rubbery**: difficult to chew  
**overcooked**: be cooked overtime  
**portion size**: the amount of food that is served to a person  
**sliver**: a small, thin piece  
**make a big deal**: get very upset about something small  
**comp**: be given to customers for free  
**shell out**: to spend money  
**hard earned**: money you work hard for  
■ **Supplementary vocabulary**  
**a bad aftertaste**: a bad second taste  
**rank**: a strong, unpleasant smell  
**rancid**: a rotten taste or smell  
**unappealing**: not appealing; not attractive or tasty  
(Source: irlanguage.com)

# Code Pink visits fair featuring Iran’s attempt to empower the deprived

By Maryam Qarehgozlou

**TEHRAN** — Code Pink, an internationally active NGO working to end U.S.-funded wars and occupations, paid a visit to a permanent fair highlighting social achievements of the Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam to empower the deprived and eliminate deprivation on Tuesday.

Code Pink is a women-led grassroots organization working to end U.S. wars and militarism, support peace and human rights initiatives and aiming to redirect resources into health care, education, green jobs and other life-affirming activities.

The organization was founded in fall 2002 as a grassroots effort to prevent the U.S. war on Iraq, and to continue to organize for justice for Iraqis and to hold war criminals accountable. The group actively oppose the continuing U.S. war in Afghanistan, torture, the detention center at Guantanamo, spy drones, and U.S. support for the Israeli occupation of Palestine and repressive regimes.

The group’s visit to Iran, from February 23-March 3, is organized as a reaction to the U.S. administration’s uncompromising attitudes towards Iran. A coalition of peace groups has put together a peace delegation to Iran in an attempt to have a significant impact in helping move the two nations from a place of hostility and military threats to a place of mutual respect and peace with one another.

The group paid a short visit to the fair and were briefed on the achievements of the Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam, especially efforts exerted on empowering breadwinner women and creating jobs for them.



Over their short stay they have also met with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif. The group has also paid a visit to the Iranian Parliament (Majlis).

Code Pink has also visited Tajrish Bazaar, a market in northern Tehran.

“Great day today visiting Tajrish Bazaar on our peace delegation. We made new friends and heard stories about sanctions,” co-founder of Code Pink Medea Benjamin tweeted on Tuesday.

■ **Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam**

Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam, also known as Setad-e Ejraiye Farman-e Hazrat-e Emam, was founded

in 1989. In the Iranian calendar year 1386 (March 2017-March 2018) Barekat charity foundation- the social arm of the organization- with the aim of promoting social justice was established.

Socio-economic empowerment of the communities by encouraging entrepreneurship prioritizing breadwinner women, developing infrastructure such as water supply schemes, power grid, and road building, constructing schools and increasing educational spaces, promoting health for all, granting non-repayable loans and insurance especially in less developed areas and regions most affected by 1980s war and natural disasters are of the priorities of the

charity foundation.

■ **Barekat-tel: telemedicine**

Using a domestically produced testing device in three pilot villages in Iran the patients’ cholesterol level, blood sugar, blood pressure, etc. will be measured and the test results will be remotely viewed to a doctor.

Telemedicine is the use of telecommunication and information technology to provide clinical health care from a distance.

The scheme is now being piloted in three villages in Kermanshah, western Iran; East Azarbaijan, northwestern Iran; and Sistan-Baluchestan, southeastern Iran.

Creating a health profiles for the residents and following up on patients’ condition including those suffering diabetes or pregnant women will promote social justice for health.

The programs are supervised universities of medical sciences in the aforesaid provinces.

■ **Improving healthcare**

Barekat charity foundation also have invested in pharmaceutical industry producing cancer medications, raw material for anti-biotic, medications for heart diseases, herbal medicine to cure diabetes (which is in clinical trial phase), as well as cell therapy and regenerative medicine.

■ **Social empowerment**

Moreover, providing non-repayable loans to the people suffering refractory diseases such as cancer, orphaned children and newlywed couples are of the other achievements of the charity foundation.

Offering cochlear implants for the deprived hearing impaired children, and infertility treatment for infertile couples are also underway in the foundation.

## National document on disaster management training prepared

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — A national document on disaster management training has been prepared for 27 provinces, deputy director of National Disaster Management Organization has said.

Some natural disasters like earthquake cannot be predicted and everybody should be prepared for them twenty-four seven, Behnam Sa’edi said, IRNA news agency reported on Wednesday.

Sa’edi further highlighted that releasing coherent and reliable statistics is also an important factor in addressing disasters.

Moreover, notifying the public about different aspects of a disaster is a must so that the public could stay calm once it happens, he concluded.

Public training programs for disaster preparedness is inseparable from disaster management and that’s why the



government cannot solely manage disaster and public participation is a must.

According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies the aim of disaster management training is to build the capacity of National Societies’ staff and volunteers, and that of International Federation delegates, to improve preparedness and response at all levels before during and after disasters and to give all components of the movement the means to work together in a coordinated manner.

The focus of disaster management training is generally on improving the technical skills of the participants, but also on personnel and team management. It aims to encourage an exchange of experience and knowledge and the creation of networks amongst the disaster managers. It also aims to improve coordination of disaster response and the quality and availability of disaster management tools.

## Only one-in-a-million chance global warming is not manmade, scientists say

Evidence for man-made global warming has reached a “gold standard” level of certainty, adding pressure for cuts in greenhouse gases to limit rising temperatures, scientists said.

“Humanity cannot afford to ignore such clear signals,” the U.S.-led team wrote in the journal Nature Climate Change of satellite measurements of rising temperatures over the past 40 years.

They said that confidence human activities were raising the heat at the Earth’s surface had reached a “five-sigma” level.

This statistical measure meaning there is only a one-in-a-million chance that the signal would appear if there was no warming.

Such a “gold standard” was applied in

2012, for instance, to confirm the discovery of the Higgs boson subatomic particle, a basic building block of the universe.

Benjamin Santer, lead author of the study at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California, said he hoped the findings would win over sceptics and spur action.

“The narrative out there that scientists don’t know the cause of climate change is wrong,” he said. “We do.”

Mainstream scientists say the burning of fossil fuels is causing more floods, droughts, heat waves and rising sea levels.

Donald Trump has often cast doubt on global warming and plans to pull out of the 197-nation Paris climate agreement which seeks to end the fossil fuel era this century by shifting to cleaner

energies such as wind and solar power.

Sixty-two per cent of Americans polled in 2018 believed that climate change has a human cause, up from 47 per cent in 2013, according to the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication.

The findings, by researchers in the U.S., Canada and Scotland, said evidence for global warming reached the five sigma level by 2005 in two of three sets of satellite data widely used by researchers, and in 2016 in the third.

Professor John Christy, of the University of Alabama in Huntsville which runs the third set of data, said there were still many gaps in understanding climate change. His data show a slower pace of warming than the other two sets.

“You may see a certain fingerprint that indicates human influence, but that the actual intensity of the influence is minor (as our satellite data indicate),” he said.

Separately in 2013, the United Nations’ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concluded that it is “extremely likely”, or at least 95 per cent probable, that human activities have been the main cause of climate change since the 1950s.

Peter Stott of the British Met Office, who was among the scientists drawing that conclusion and was not involved in Monday’s study, said he would favor raising the probability one notch to “virtually certain”, or 99-100 per cent.

(Source: The Independent)

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → €

### ‘Diesel particulate filter best option to cut PM 2.5’

Installation of diesel particulate filter on vehicles is one of the best and cost-efficient measures to reduce small particulate matter of 2.5 microns or less in diameter (PM2.5) in metropolises, Masoud Zandi, head of the national center for air quality and climate change, has said.

Based on a statute passed by the cabinet has made diesel particulate filter mandatory so that all in-use vehicles in 8 metropolises of Iran must be equipped with the filters and new models should already have the filter, YJC quoted Zandi as saying on Saturday. The diesel particulate filters used to cost some 250 to 300 million rials (nearly between \$6,000 and \$7,000) but now the prices have climbed to 800 million rials (nearly \$19,000), he regretted.

## PREFIX/SUFFIX

### “cranio-, crani-”

■ **Meaning**: skull  
■ **For example**: I am being referred to a **craniologist** - someone who manipulates your spinal fluid based on very gentle manipulation.

## PHRASAL VERB

### Wash over somebody

■ **Meaning**: if a feeling washes over you, you suddenly feel it very strongly  
■ **For example**: A feeling of relief washed over her.

## IDIOM

### A couch potato

■ **Explanation**: someone who often engages in sedentary activities, usually understood as frequently watching television  
■ **For example**: Lisa wants to marry a man who loves to travel and explore, not a couch potato who watches television all the time.

## نصب فیلتر دوده تنها راه حل کاهش ذرات معلق کمتر از ۲٫۵ میکرون

مسعود زندی رئیس مرکز ملی هوا و تغییر اقلیم سازمان حفاظت محیط زیست گفت: نصب فیلتر دوده بهترین و کم هزینه‌ترین راه برای کاهش ذرات معلق کمتر از ۲٫۵ میکرون است.

به گزارش باشگاه خبرنگاران جوان زندی افزود: موضوع حذف فیلتر دوده در شهر تهران و ۸ کلانشهر کشور به تصویب هیئت وزیران رسیده است که براساس این مصوبه شهرداری مکلف به اجرای آن است. زندی گفت: در گذشته هزینه نصب فیلتر حدود ۲۵ تا ۳۰ میلیون تومان بود که هم اکنون این رقم به ۸۰ میلیون تومان افزایش یافته است.



# Imran Khan calls for talks, urges India to avoid ‘miscalculation’

**1→** Two Indian air force pilots were taken into custody, Ghafoor said, with one of them being treated for wounds at a military hospital.

India’s foreign ministry spokesperson has confirmed that one of their pilots is missing and that they are “ascertaining the facts”.

“In this engagement, we have unfortunately lost one Mig-21. The pilot is missing in action. Pakistan has claimed that he is in their custody,” Raveesh Kumar told a briefing.

Kumar also announced that a Pakistan jet was hit as it took part in an operation “to target military installations on the Indian side”. “The Pakistani aircraft was seen by ground forces falling from the sky on Pakistan.”

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan called on Wednesday for talks with India and hoped “better sense” would prevail so that both sides could de-escalate.

“History tells us that wars are full of miscalculation. My question is that given the weapons we have can we afford miscalculation,” Khan said during a brief televised broadcast to the nation. “We should sit down and talk.”

Separately, Ghafoor said that Pakistani aircraft had fired on six targets in Indian-administered Kashmir, hitting “open spaces” as a demonstration of Pakistan’s capability to hit Indian targets. The intention, the military spokesperson said, was not to cause any civilian or military casualties.

“[The] sole purpose was to demonstrate our right, will and capability for self-defense,” read a Pakistani foreign office statement released shortly after the attacks. “We have no intention of escalation but are fully prepared to do so if forced into that paradigm.”

Speaking to reporters at military headquarters in Rawalpindi, Ghafoor said Pakistan did not wish to escalate hostilities and urged India to engage in dialogue.

“This was not a retaliation in a true sense,



but to tell Pakistan has capability; we can do it, but we want to be responsible, we don’t want an escalation, we don’t want a war,” he told a news conference.

Police officials in Indian-administered Kashmir said that two pilots and a civilian had died after an Indian air force plane crashed in Kashmir, but did not confirm if the plane had been shot down by Pakistani forces.

Also on Wednesday, Pakistan closed its airspace for all commercial flights, the Civil Aviation Authority said in a notice.

Several airports in northern India were also closed, forcing airlines to cancel service to at least six cities.

Tensions have been high between the two nuclear powers since a February 14 suicide attack killed at least 42 Indian security forces personnel in the Indian-administered Kashmir town of Pulwama.

India blamed Pakistan for “controlling” that attack, and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi vowed to take military action to

retaliate. The attack was claimed by armed group Jaish-e-Muhammad (The Army of Muhammad/JeM), which has had a presence in Pakistan. The Pakistani government and military deny any involvement in the attack.

On Tuesday, Indian aircraft entered Pakistani airspace in Pakistan-administered Kashmir to fire four bombs that landed in the village of Jaba, about 10km outside of Kashmir in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

In a foreign ministry statement, India claimed it had destroyed a “Jaish-e-Muhammad camp” in Jaba, but Pakistan’s military and witnesses at the scene said the bombs struck a mostly uninhabited forest. One man was wounded in the attacks, with local hospital officials reporting no other casualties.

It was the first time Indian jets had entered and fired while within Pakistani airspace since a war between the two countries in 1971.

India and Pakistan have fought two of their three wars over the disputed territory of Kashmir, which both claim in full but

administer separate portions of, divided by the Line of Control (LoC).

**■ India shelling ‘kills civilians’ in Pakistan-administered Kashmir**

Elsewhere, four people, including two children, have been killed and seven others wounded in an exchange of fire between Indian and Pakistani troops in Pakistan-administered Kashmir’s district of Kotli, officials said.

“So far, four people have been killed in the shelling,” Nasrullah Khan, a senior hospital official told Al Jazeera by telephone on Tuesday night.

Khan said the dead included a woman and her two children in Nakyal along the Line of Control (LoC), the heavily militarized de facto border between India and Pakistan.

“An Indian mortar shell hit a house in Nakyal sector along the Line of Control that killed a mother, daughter and son,” local disaster management authority official Shariq Tariq told AFP news agency.

Another death was reported from Khuriratta town in the semi-autonomous region, Khan said.

Meanwhile, Indian media reports said at least five of India’s soldiers were also wounded in cross-border firing along the LoC.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Pakistan counterpart Imran Khan both summoned emergency meetings of top ministers after the attack.

Khan also convened a meeting for Wednesday of the National Command Authority, which oversees command and control of the country’s nuclear arsenal, the military said.

Modi had threatened a “jaw-breaking” response to the February 14 attack.

The escalation between India and Pakistan has triggered international alarm, with China and the European Union calling for both sides to show restraint.

*(Source: agencies)*

## Russia, Syria urge U.S. to withdraw its troops

Russia and Syria have called on the United States to leave Syria and to allow people inside a refugee camp in the southeast of the country to be evacuated by Russian and Syrian forces.

A joint statement released on Wednesday by Russia’s Ministry of Defense said Russian and Syrian forces had prepared buses to relocate refugees at the camp in the Rukban area and would guarantee them safe passage so they could start new lives.

Tens of thousands of Syrian refugees are facing harsh living conditions at the Rukban camp near the Syria-Jordan border, despite Russian attempts to set up “humanitarian corridors” through the region last week.

“We also call on the United States, whose military units are on Syrian territory illegally, to leave the country,” the joint statement issued on Wednesday read.

The U.S. had said earlier this month it would leave about 400 U.S. troops split between two different regions of Syria, a reversal by the U.S. President Donald Trump that could pave the way for the U.S. allies to keep troops in Syria.

The move to keep a small fraction of the more than 2,000 U.S. forces allegedly currently fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group in northeastern Syria came amid fierce criticism of Trump’s decision to withdraw all the U.S. soldiers from the war-torn country.

Damascus objects to Washington’s military presence on its soil and has repeatedly brought its stated goal into question, amid recurrent reports of the U.S.-led coalition’s attempts to help relocate terrorists around and out of Syria.

Critics have warned of a number of possible outcomes from a sudden withdrawal, including a Turkish attack on Kurdish-led so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), Washington’s main ally in the fight against ISIL, as well as a resurgence of the armed group.

ISIL’s presence has been confined to the village of Baghouz in Dayr al-Zawr. Its terrorists are on the brink of defeat, but a future resurgence of the group has become a concern among European states, who refuse to take back ISIL foreign fighters.

Trump announced the decision to keep troops in Syria after he spoke by phone to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who wants to set up a safe zone along the Turkey-Syria border.

Erdogan says the zone should be cleared of the U.S.-backed Kurdish People’s Protection Units (People’s Defense Units/Yekîneyên Parastina/YPG) militia, which Ankara considers a “terrorist” group tied to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK/Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê) inside its own borders.

**■ U.S. giving ISIL safe passage in east Syria under gold deal**

Meantime, reports have emerged of a deal clinched between the United States and ISIL, under which Washington has received massive amounts of gold in exchange for providing safe passage to the terrorist group’s members in Syria.

The deal gave the United States “tens of tons of gold that the terrorist organization had stolen,” the official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) reported on Tuesday, citing local sources.

In return, the U.S. forces would allow the terrorists and their ringleaders to escape their hideouts in the eastern province of Dayr al-Zawr, the agency added.

The gold has been carried away from the province’s al-Baghouz area on board helicopters.

The helicopters, according to eyewitnesses, transported large box loads of ISIL “spoils” from the al-Dashisha area in the countryside of Hasaka in northeastern Syria.

American forces have already appropriated and shipped out huge quantities of gold they had seized in ISIL’s strongholds, bringing the total amount of gold acquired and transferred to the U.S. to around 50 tons, SANA said.

The report added that the terrorist outfit’s last hideouts in Dayr al-Zawr also contain millions of dollars in funds plundered by the group from across Syria and neighboring Iraq.

The latest report comes around a week after the U.S.-led coalition transferred ISIL terrorists and their family members in 50 trucks out of Baghouz village, where the remaining ISIL elements are holed up, according to the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR).

The terrorist outfit launched a campaign of bloodshed and destruction in Syria and Iraq in 2014. Later that year, the U.S. led scores of its allies in an invasion of the two countries under the pretext of dislodging the terrorists.

Damascus objects to Washington’s military presence on its soil and has repeatedly brought its stated goal into question.

**■ U.S. protecting ISIL ringleader**

Elsewhere, an Iraqi lawmaker, has said that ISIL’s ringleader Ibrahim al-Samarrai, aka Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, is being protected by the US forces in a western desert area located in the Iraqi Province of al-Anbar.

Hassan Salem from the Parliament’s Al-Sadiqoun Bloc, which is associated with the Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq (League of the Righteous) paramilitary group, made the remarks to Lebanon’s Elnashra news website.

American forces based at Ayn al-Asad Airbase in the province, which is being used by the U.S. military, provide all the means required for al-Baghdadi’s movement between Iraq and Syria, he added.

“He is traveling between Iraq and Syria under U.S. forces’ protection,” Salem said.

Washington, he added, was supporting al-Baghdadi’s movement around, out of concern about a draft legislature prepared at the parliament, which obliges American forces to leave the Iraqi soil.

Iraqi lawmakers are planning to ratify the bill at the start of the upcoming season, Salem concluded.

**■ Some UNSC members waging economic terrorism against Damascus**

Elsewhere, Syria’s Ambassador to the United Nations Bashar al-Ja’afari says a number of countries, some of them



UN Security member states, are conducting a campaign of economic terrorism against his country, stating that active humanitarian support to Syrians could only be provided in case the process is not politicized.

Addressing a Security Council meeting in New York, U.S. on Tuesday, Ja’afari argued that while a number of world countries, some of which are permanent members of the Council, claim to be working to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria, they simultaneously support terrorism, illegitimately deploy their troops to the country and launch acts of aggression on it.

He added French Colonel Francois-Regis Legrier has acknowledged that the U.S.-led coalition, purportedly fighting the ISIL Takfiri terrorist group, has largely destroyed infrastructure in Syria, leaving thousands of civilians dead and injured.

“The goal of this illegal coalition was not combating terrorism, but rather targeting the capabilities of the Syrian state and prolonging the crisis that has beleaguered it,” Ja’afari commented.

“Some countries are broadening their political terrorism against Syria to economic terrorism through imposition of unilateral and coercive measures on the country,” he said.

Ja’afari highlighted that a number of states still obstruct the return of Syrian refugees to their homeland, and seek to politicize humanitarian assistance.

“Syria calls for genuine humanitarian cooperation in compliance with the General Assembly Resolution 46/182 and fully committed to its sovereignty,” the Syrian diplomat underlined.

Ja’afari highlighted that Damascus has opened two humanitarian corridors to provide a safe exit for displaced people stranded at Rukban camp in southern Syria.

“Syria aspires for an end to the sufferings of people at Rukban camp, where most of the residents want to return to state-controlled areas, and demands an end to the illegitimate presence of U.S. troops and terrorist gangs there,” the senior Syrian official commented.

He concluded that the UN Security Council should prevent exploitation of humanitarian issues as a means to destabilize states and interfere in their domestic affairs – a matter currently taking place in Venezuela.

*(Source: agencies)*

## Zarif resignation result of incoordination not internal disputes

**7→** Chief of Staff of the Iranian president Mahmoud Vaezi ‘vehemently’ denied reports that Rouhani has accepted the resignation in an early Tuesday tweet.

In another post, he wrote that President Rouhani’s appreciation for his foreign minister is a ‘clear evidence’ of his satisfaction with Zarif’s efforts and that “it was a firm response to false biased analyses.”

“Dr Rouhani is of the opinion that the Islamic Republic of Iran has just one foreign policy and one foreign minister,” he also added.

Rouhani, on Tuesday, appreciated the efforts of Zarif along with heads of CBI and Oil Ministry, saying that these figures are at the forefront of the fight against the United States.

Chairman of National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of Iranian Parliament, Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh, highlighted Tuesday that Zarif is the best choice to guide Iran’s foreign policy and hoped that he would remain in office.

Cultural adviser to the Iranian president, Hesam al-Din Ashna, also mentioned to ‘incoordination’ in an early response to the resignation.

Mohammad Javad Zarif has put his all for the dignity Iran and he has not ever disappointed the Iranian nation, noted Ashna in another tweet, also comparing Zarif to Arash, a heroic archer in Iranian mythology.

Some analysts are eager to imply that Zarif’s decision is a sign of internal disputes, however, Zarif has long proved his belief and loyalty to the Islamic Revolution and Resistance Axis and is famous for defending the Iranian nation in the world communities in past years. This resignation seems most like a resolvable misunderstanding which has resulted from a lack of coordination between some Iranian bodies in one particular case.

## Dozens feared buried after landslide at Indonesia gold mine

Rescuers in Indonesia are searching for survivors as dozens of people are feared buried by the collapse of an unlicensed gold mine on the island of Sulawesi.

The country’s disaster agency said in a statement that at least one person had been found dead and 13 people rescued by 8am on Wednesday (01:00 GMT) after a collapse the previous evening at the site in the Bolaang Mongondow area of North Sulawesi. Local media reports put the death toll at three.

Rescuers said they could hear the voices of some of those trapped in makeshift mining shafts in a muddy hillside in the Bolaang Mongondow area of North Sulawesi province and believed many were still alive.

“We are able to detect that many of them are still alive because we can hear their voices, as there are some places where air is getting in and out and there are gaps in the mud,” Abdul Muin Paputungan of Indonesia’s disaster agency said.

Search-and-rescue teams and military officers were working together but using simple tools such as spades and ropes because conditions remained dangerous, with the land still prone to shifting and sliding.

“We can’t use heavy machinery because the location is very steep ... it could endanger the victims,” Paputungan said.

Sutopo Purwo Nugroho, spokesman for the disaster agency, said dozens of people had been mining for gold when beams and support boards broke suddenly.

“Evacuation efforts continued through the night because of the number of people estimated to be buried,” he said.

Images released by the agency showed rescue workers and local residents on a muddy hillside at night, scrambling to pull out survivors and carry them away on stretchers. Informal mining operations are commonplace in Indonesia, providing a tenuous livelihood to thousands who labor in conditions with a high risk of serious injury or death.

Miners often burrow straight into hillsides with scant supports and children often are sent into the tunnels to dig and carry out ore hacked from rock faces.

The central government in Jakarta has banned such small-scale gold mining, although regional authorities often turn a blind eye to the practice in more remote areas.

*(Source: agencies)*

## Dozens killed in crash and fire at Cairo train station

At least 25 people have been killed and 50 injured after a train smashed into a barrier at Cairo’s main train station, state television and witnesses have said.

Photographs on social media showed clouds of black smoke billowing from the building in central Cairo.

Footage also showed fire engulfing the train and a nearby platform and people rushing to help the injured.

Ambulances and rescue teams have been dispatched to the site, medical sources said.

Egypt’s National Railway Authority confirmed the accident, saying several people were killed and injured.

In a statement, the authority said the fire broke out after a train derailed and collided with a concrete barrier at the station, without giving further details. Security sources told Reuters news agency that there was no indication the crash was deliberate.

A witness said there was an explosion when the train rammed into a steel barrier.

“I was standing on the platform and I saw the train speed into the barrier,” witness Mina Ghaly told Reuters news agency.

“Everyone started running but a lot of people died after the locomotive exploded. I saw at least nine corpses lying on the ground, charred.”

Eyewitness Ibrahim Hussein said: “I saw a man pointing from the locomotive as it entered the platform, and screaming ‘There are no brakes, there are no brakes’ before he jumped out of the locomotive. And I don’t know what happened to him.”

Several witnesses said they had seen fire coming out of the train’s engine before it crashed, causing an explosion and fires inside the station.

“Any person found to be negligent will be held accountable and it will be severe,” Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouli said as he arrived at the site.

Egypt has one of the oldest and largest rail networks in the region and accidents causing casualties have been common.

*(Source: agencies)*

## Nepal Tourism Minister Adhikari among 7 dead in helicopter crash

Nepalese Tourism Minister Rabindra Adhikari and six other people have been confirmed dead in a helicopter crash in the east of the country, according to a home ministry spokesman.

Adhikari was among seven people on board the private helicopter, travelling from the eastern district of Taplejung to Terathum, when it went down in a forest on Wednesday afternoon, officials said.

“The dead bodies of Tourism Minister

Rabindra Adhikari and six others have been identified at the crash site,” said Ram Krishna Subedi, spokesman for the home ministry.

Uttam Raj Subedi, a police spokesman, had earlier confirmed that five bodies had been found at the site of the crash.

“The helicopter was returning after a trip to Pathivara [a religious site in Taplejung district],” Home Secretary Prem Kumar told reporters.

Local media reported that Adhikari had travelled to the area to inspect the construction of an airport.

Residents informed the police about a huge flame at the crash site, moments after the helicopter was reported missing, Kathmandu Post said.

The crash site is about 240 kilometers northeast of the capital Kathmandu.

Air Dynasty is a private helicopter operator that caters for tourists and locals in

the country’s remote areas.

It is just the latest aviation accident to plague Nepal, an impoverished Himalayan nation with a poor air safety record.

In September 2018, six people were killed when a helicopter crashed in a dense forest area of central Nepal.

In April last year, a Malaysian jet with 139 people on board aborted its takeoff and skidded off a runway.

*(Source: agencies)*



## FIFA investigates Sala transfer payment

FIFA is investigating the transfer payment for Emiliano Sala after Nantes made a claim against Cardiff City.

Premier League side Cardiff were due to pay the first of three instalments for the £15m striker on Wednesday.

Argentine Sala, the Bluebirds' record signing, died aged 28 in a plane crash in the English Channel on 21 January.

"We can confirm we have received a claim. We are looking into the matter," said a spokesman for world football's governing body.

Cardiff were due to make the first instalments on 20 February, but they agreed with French Ligue 1 side Nantes to extend the deadline by a week. French side Nantes wrote to Cardiff on 5 February requesting for the first instalment.

But Cardiff said they were withholding payment until crash investigations were complete and that they were satisfied on "anomalies" around the deal.

Chairman Mehmet Dalman said Cardiff will be "honourable" with Nantes if they are contractually obliged to pay.

French side Bordeaux are due 50% of his fee because of a sell-on clause when they sold Sala to Nantes in 2015.

His body was recovered from the plane wreckage but pilot David Ibbotson remains missing.

(Source: BBC)

## Ex-Celtic striker Dembele slams Brendan Rodgers on Twitter

With Brendan Rodgers leaving Celtic and now confirmed as the new manager at Leicester, many Hoops supporters wished the manager well and thanked him for his time and the seven trophies he won while at the club.

Former Celtic and current Lyon striker Moussa Dembele was not among them, the French striker posting a series of tweets -- accompanied by gifs -- about his thoughts on Rodgers' decision to trade Celtic Park for the King Power in the middle of the season.

Why the animosity towards Rodgers you ask? Well the ex-Liverpool manager was quite critical of Dembele's push for a transfer in the summer, saying "the whole episode was disappointing," and that "there was a line overstepped [by Dembele] from a behavior perspective." After feeling his character was attacked, Dembele tweeted the following in August criticizing Rodgers.

After a long, drawn out saga, Dembele eventually got his wish and a move to Lyon but apparently has not been quick to forget the harsh words of his ex-manager. Rodger's words about loyalty and behaviour do seem a bit hollow and hypocritical now and to an extent, Dembele does seem to have a bit of a point.

(Source: Soccernet)

## Federer: I often pinch myself to believe at my Grand Slam wins

Roger Federer is an amazingly talented player but he never took success in tennis for granted. Unlike Rafael Nadal, Federer did not win a Grand Slam title at 18 years of age. In 2000, when Federer was 19, Queen's Tennis Club declined to give him a wild card, Federer received a wild card from the Gerry Weber Open in Halle and the rest, as they say, is now history.

"The road was long and rocky, but to win all the grand slams that I did ... I often have to pinch myself to believe it but it's been an amazing journey — it has made me tougher as a person and taught me to handle situations," Federer admitted in an interview with Gulf News. "Life has been good for me and I wish all players go through this phase."

Federer once revealed he left his home in Basel at the age of 14 in order to train at the Swiss National Tennis Center in Ecublens, and in the train ride to the tennis center, he used to cry a lot because he used to miss his parents.

"I have had also to take tough decisions along the road, but in a nice way. You also have to remember why you are in such a privileged position, I can't thank enough my fans, my team, the tournament officials — so many of them have touched my life along the way."

Federer won his first-round match at the Dubai Open on Monday against Philipp Kohlschreiber. He will play his second-round match on Wednesday.

(Source: Tennis World)

## Report: Lukaku seeks Juve switch

Romelu Lukaku will reportedly pursue a move to Juventus if he is forced to leave Manchester United this summer.

Lukaku has lost his place in United's attack to Marcus Rashford under Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, going on to score just nine goals in all competitions this season.

The Belgian has made no secret of his admiration for Juve in the past, and The Sun claims he is targeting a summer switch to the Serie A champions.

"He is an absolutely massive fan of Ronaldo," an unnamed source told the newspaper.

"He has lost his regular spot but not rocked the boat at all so far. The feelers are already out in both camps.

"We'll have to wait and see but it's going to be a busy summer."

Lukaku is already Belgium's all-time top goalscorer, despite being only 25 years of age, and is represented by Mino Raiola.

(Source: Football Italia)



# LeBron's Lakers finale veers off script

As movie pitches go, LeBron James' move to the Los Angeles Lakers had all the makings of a Hollywood blockbuster.

An ageing NBA superstar joins a storied-but-struggling franchise and leads a dramatic revival which transforms the team into title contenders.

But five months after James began training with the Lakers, the perfectly scripted finale has been stuck in what entertainment industry executives call "development hell".

After a promising start to their new era, the Lakers have tailed off dramatically since an injured James limped out of a Christmas Day upset of the mighty Golden State Warriors.

At that point, the Lakers were still firmly in the Western Conference playoff hunt with a respectable 20-14 record.

Since then, however, the Lakers have won nine games and lost 17, a slump which has seen them fall out of the playoff rankings into 11th spot in the West, three places adrift of the eighth postseason slot.

Much of that slide can be attributed to James' prolonged absence due to a groin injury, with the 34-year-old missing all of January before returning for a 123-120 win over the Los Angeles Clippers on February 1.

However, the Lakers have continued to struggle even with James back in the line-up.

A chastening sequence of results has included the heaviest defeat of James' career, a 136-94 pounding by the Indiana Pacers, as well as losses to lower-ranked opponents who have little to play for.

The most recent of those came on Monday against the Memphis Grizzlies, who are



one place off the bottom of the West with a 24-38 record.

James later appeared to question his teammates' focus after Monday's 110-105 reverse in Memphis, suggesting that any player unable to cope with the pressure of chasing a playoff berth should find another club.

■ **Locker room turmoil?**

"At this point if you are still allowing distractions to affect how the way you play, then this is the wrong franchise to be a part of and you should just come and be like, 'Listen, I don't think this is for me'," James told reporters.

Those kind of comments are unlikely

to endear him to a locker room which has reportedly been in turmoil since the team's pursuit of New Orleans Pelicans star Anthony Davis ended in failure in early February.

The Lakers were reported to have offered several prominent members of their roster in exchange for Davis, including Lonzo Ball, Kyle Kuzma, Brandon Ingram, Josh Hart, Ivica Zubac and Kentavious Caldwell-Pope.

James meanwhile had earlier spoken favourably of a possible link-up with Davis, saying playing alongside the Pelicans would be "amazing".

The perception that the Lakers' pursuit of Davis was going ahead with James' blessing

was pounced upon by rival fans.

Ingram was subjected to taunts of "LeBron's gonna trade you" during the loss to Indiana on February 5.

One unnamed NBA executive believes James bears some of the responsibility for the Lakers' problems by making no secret of his admiration for Davis.

"He killed the Lakers' chemistry," the executive told Bleacher Report. "He shouldn't have been so public about it."

Other pundits, however, believe the Lakers' problems are linked directly to James' fitness and his lengthy injury layoff.

"The biggest problem with the Los Angeles Lakers is LeBron James," Stephen A. Smith told ESPN's First Take show.

"Age, attrition or injury. Something is not right. He doesn't look like himself."

James meanwhile has always cautioned that rebuilding the Lakers would be a long-term project, stating in September that he anticipated "bumps and bruises" as the team attempted to rebuild after missing the playoffs for five straight seasons prior to his arrival.

But James must now conjure something remarkable over the final weeks of the regular season if he is to avoid missing the playoffs for the first time in his career since 2005.

The Lakers face a brutal run-in which includes games against Boston, Denver, Toronto and Milwaukee.

A daunting final six-game stretch sees them play New Orleans, Golden State, Oklahoma City, the Clippers, Utah and Portland.

(Source: AFP)

## US invites South America teams to new 2020 event



The United States Soccer Federation wants to launch a new international tournament next year featuring 10 sides from South America and the strongest teams from the CONCACAF region.

The New York Times said in a report later confirmed by CONCACAF on Tuesday that USSF president Carlos Cordeiro had sent a letter to the 10 federations that make up CONMEBOL offering to stage the new tournament.

The event, which strongly resembles the successful 2016 Copa America Centenario held throughout the United States, would be held at the same time as the 2020 European Championship.

The proposed event would guarantee nearly \$200 million to be shared amongst the invited teams and their ruling bodies, according to the Times.

It follows discussions held over the past year between officials from CONMEBOL and CONCACAF about a possible new tournament.

The winners of the tournament would earn more than \$11 million.

CONCACAF, the governing body responsible for football in North America, Central America and the Caribbean, welcomed the US proposal, saying the event would com-

plement its own regional championship, the Gold Cup. "We view this opportunity positively as it is not intended to replace or substitute any future editions of the CONCACAF Gold Cup and it complements our vision to continue providing opportunities for our Member Associations to play competitive football at the highest level," the body said in a statement.

The US proposal will be discussed next week in Miami, ahead of a meeting of FIFA's Council on March 15.

The 2016 Copa America Centenario was staged at venues across the United States to mark the 100th anniversary of the South American footballing showpiece.

The event featured 10 members of South America and six teams from the CONCACAF region. The success of that tournament, which saw Chile beat Argentina in the final on penalties, served as a precursor to the successful North American bid for the 2026 World Cup.

The proposed 2020 tournament would feature a group stage and a knockout round to decide a winner.

The Times report noted, however, that it remained to be seen how the US-backed proposal would be greeted by CONMEBOL.

(Source: AFP)

## FA investigates claims Man City paid Sancho agent



The Football Association is investigating claims that Manchester City made a banned payment of £200,000 to Jadon Sancho's agent when the England winger was 14 years old.

The allegations were made in documents published by Der Spiegel.

It is alleged City paid Emeka Obasi when they signed Sancho, now at Borussia Dortmund, from Watford in March 2015.

Young players cannot be represented by an agent until the year they turn 16.

A City statement read: "The attempt to damage the club's reputation is organised and clear.

"We will not be providing any comment on out of context materials purported to have been hacked or stolen from City Football Group and Manchester City personnel and associated people."

London-born Sancho, 18, joined City as a 14-year-old, when the Premier League champions paid £66,000 in compensation to Watford.

FA rules state that clubs are not permitted to offer financial inducements to a player under 16.

Der Spiegel - which has published a series of revelations in recent months, including allegations City deceived Uefa over

financial fair play (FFP) rules - claims the club wrote a letter to Sancho's father which outlined how much they were willing to pay the player once he turned professional.

The German magazine also says a City lawyer was "alarmed" that the letter could be deemed as a financial offer and therefore breaking the rules about offering inducements.

Der Spiegel alleges City paid £200,000 to Obasi as part of a scouting contract to find players in central and South America. It claims the payment was in fact in relation to Sancho's transfer from Watford.

Sancho never made a first-team appearance for City before moving to German side Dortmund for £8m in August 2017.

He has been one of the star players for the Bundesliga leaders this season, with the club describing him as "one of the most exciting players in Europe" when they announced he had signed a new long-term contract in October.

In April 2017, Liverpool were fined £100,000 by the Premier League and handed a two-year ban on signing academy players from other clubs for offering inducements to a 12-year-old academy player at Stoke City.

(Source: BBC)

## Alonso becomes McLaren ambassador, will test car & advise team

Two-time champion Fernando Alonso has become an ambassador for McLaren, a role that will include him testing their Formula 1 car this year.

The team said Alonso would "help advise the team's drivers and engineers and drive at selected tests to support the development" of the 2019 and 2020 cars.

The Spaniard, 37, left F1 last year and is competing at the Indianapolis 500 this season for a McLaren team.

Alonso said the role was "a true honour" and "just the beginning".

He added: "McLaren is a special team, and despite the challenges we have endured recently, it remains so.

"I said before I stopped racing in Formula 1 last year that I see myself with McLaren for a long time to come, so I am delighted at this new role and the ability to stay closely involved with the team I feel is my spiritual home.

"We have the Indianapolis 500 in May of course, which I am looking forward to immensely, but this is just the beginning of many things we can do together.

"I am particularly passionate about nurturing young talent, whether that's with my own team or helping the new generation of Formula 1 drivers at McLaren unlock their true potential.

"This is important to both the team and myself, so will be an especially rewarding part of my role."

Alonso, who has set up his own karting circuit and school



in his home town of Oviedo in Spain, hopes to win the Indy 500 this year and become only the second driver in history to win motorsport's unofficial 'triple crown' of Monaco Grand Prix, Le Mans 24 Hours and Indy. Some regard the F1 part of the achievement as the world title.

McLaren chief executive Zak Brown said: "Fernando is part of the McLaren family. He has set his place in the team's history and continues to write his chapter of the McLaren story, so it is entirely appropriate that we formalise his status as a McLaren ambassador, joining another double

champion, Mika Hakkinen.

"For any race team, having someone of Fernando's class on hand to provide support through his experience is of huge value.

"His insights and perspective will be welcomed by both our drivers and engineers alike, while his stature and character remain highly appealing to our partners and fans."

■ **Could Alonso return to F1?**

In a news conference at pre-season testing in Spain, Alonso also hinted that he had not shut the door on a potential F1 return at some stage.

"I feel at the peak of my career so probably being at home is a waste of time and possibilities for everyone," he said.

"I am doing different iconic races now. I feel at the best moment of my career and I hope to win as many races as I can and I keep involved in the F1 life in case.

"I am probably stronger than ever now at 37, physically, mentally and knowledge of different driving styles.

"I feel very competitive in any series I jump in, so I will keep going the next couple of years and see what races will make an impact and race those.

"If one day F1 arrives the moment I can be competitive and be winning, I cannot be relaxed at home.

"I need to keep updated and the way to keep me updated in the moment is to be involved somehow."

(Source: BBC)



# Kuban Spring good warm-up for Iran’s woman U19 team: coach

**S P O R T S   T E H R A N** —Katayoun Khosrowyar, head coach of Iran's U19 women's football team, says that the 2019 Kuban Spring Women U19 Tournament is a good warm-up tournament for his team.

Defending champions Russia, Iran, Azerbaijan and Belarus will participate in the competition which will be held in Sochi, Russia from March 1-5.

Iran prepare for the AFC U19 Women's Championship Thailand 2019 Qualifiers Round 2, where they have been drawn in Group B along with hosts Vietnam, two-time champions Korea Republic and Lebanon.

The Round 2 Qualifiers will be played over three matchdays from April 26 to 30.

"I think these kinds of tournaments are very helpful. Our players need to play warm-up matches to prepare well for the Continent's competitions," Khosrowyar said.

"We don't care about the result in Sochi because we are here to realize our

strengths and weaknesses," she added.

"Three Iranian-American players will represent our team for the first time at Kuban Spring tournament. They currently play for American clubs and are very talented players. And they will fit in perfectly with the U19 team we are creating," Khosrowyar stated.

The format for the tournament will be a single group of four teams, where each participant will play all opponents.

Based on the results of three rounds, the champion and prize-winners of the "Kuban Spring-2019" will be determined.

Iran will kick off the campaign on March 1 with a match against Belarus, while Russia meet Azerbaijan on the same day.

The Persians will face Russia and Azerbaijan on March 3 and 5, respectively.

In 2008, the "Kuban Spring" began a new countdown. The tournament was transformed into the international festival of women's youth teams, having received support from FIFA.



## Team Melli ready to defend title at AFC Beach Soccer Championship: captain



**S P O R T S   T E H R A N** — Iran national beach soccer team captain Mohammad Ahmadzadeh says they want to defend their title at the 2019 AFC Beach Soccer Championship Thailand.

Team Melli have been drawn in Group D along with Oman and Iraq in competition.

The AFC Beach Soccer Championship Thailand 2019 will be played in Pattaya from March 9-17, 2019.

The second edition of the premier beach soccer championship in Asia will be an important competition as the top

three teams will represent the Continent in the 2019 FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup in Paraguay.

"We are in good condition at the moment and want to win the title for the third time and second time in a row," Ahmadzadeh said.

"Iran have performed well in the FIFA Beach Soccer World Cups and we finished in third place in the previous edition. Now, we are ready to win a berth in the Asian championship and also make a splash in the 2019 FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup in Paraguay," he added.

## Vincenzo Montella turns down Iran’s job offer



**S P O R T S   T E H R A N** — Italian coach Vincenzo Montella, who had been linked with a move to Iran, has reportedly turned down the job offer.

Tuttomercatoweb has claimed that the Italian tactician has rejected the proposal of a three-year contract worth €1.3m net per season.

Montella is seemingly not convinced that he wants to take on this particular role.

The AS Roma legend was appointed as interim coach of Roma in 2011, taking over the role from resigning coach Claudio Ranieri.

He has also coached Italian football clubs Catania, Fiorentina, Sampdoria and Milan.

Montella, 45, took charge of Spanish team Sevilla in 2017 and led the team to first-ever UEFA Champions League quarterfinals.

Under guidance of the Italian coach, Sevilla defeated Manchester United 2-1 on aggregate in the round of 16 but were beaten by Bayern Munich in the quarterfinals 2-1 on aggregate.

Iran football federation didn't renew Carlos Queiroz's contract at the end of the 2019 AFC Asian Cup.

Under tutelage of the Portuguese coach, Team Melli qualified for the FIFA World Cup in 2014 and 2018 but failed to meet expectations in the AFC Asian Cups in 2015 and 2019.

## New athlete voices for sitting volleyball

World ParaVolley is entering a new era of athlete engagement after world-wide elections to choose the members of the Athletes' Commission took place in early 2019.

Four regional elections across Europe, Asia/Oceania, Africa and the Americas were followed by one global election to elect the fifth Commission member.

There was high-athlete engagement, resulting in 25 candidates and 317 eligible voters.

World ParaVolley General Manager Phil Allen said: "With international electronic voting it is really impossible to know what participation levels might be, as there are so many factors at play, including potential language barriers, access to internet services, time zones, etc. But overall we are very happy with the participation levels."

After all votes were tallied, the elected members of the Athletes' Commission are:

- Jose Rebelo (CAN) – representing ParaVolley Pan America
- Masoumeh Barouti (IRI) – representing ParaVolley Asia/Oceania



- Emile Vunigabo (RWA) – representing ParaVolley Africa
- Ivan Cosic (CRO) – representing ParaVolley Europe
- Nicole Nieves (USA) – general member
- Tatiana Ivanova (RUS)\* – sitting volleyball representative

It is noticeable that six different countries are represented with an equal number of male and female athletes. The seventh member to be appointed by the Commission in the near future will be the Beach ParaVolley representative.

Rebelo was elected as Chair. As a result, he will automatically serve on the World ParaVolley Board of Directors. The Vice-Chair and the other representative of the Board (who must be a female), will be elected soon.

"It is with great honour that I receive this announcement. I want to thank all the candidates for your desire to develop ParaVolley in all its forms – it is really heartening," said Rebelo.

World ParaVolley President Barry Couzner added: "I'm very pleased that the World ParaVolley athletes have demonstrated a high level of engagement in the election process and that the newly elected members of the Commission will be actively involved in providing information and feedback to the Board and Commissions of World ParaVolley on a variety of matters from the perspective of an athlete."

(Source: Paralympic.org)

## UK’s Prince William and Kate show off soccer skills on surprise Northern Ireland trip

**BELFAST (Reuters)** — Britain's Prince William and wife Kate showed off their soccer skills when the royal couple paid a surprise visit to Northern Ireland on Wednesday.

The couple, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, are on a two-day trip to the British province, with the focus on

Wednesday on the benefits of sport and outdoor life on childhood development.

They showcased their own skills during a kickabout at Belfast's Windsor Park stadium, home of the Irish Football Association which runs programs to encourage young girls to play the sport and to support clubs dealing with mental health issues.

The royals, who were without their three children, were also due to visit Fermanagh to see the Roscor Youth Village, a residential center for children referred by social workers, before returning to Belfast to attend a party celebrating inspirational young people at the city's Empire Music Hall.



## Mehdi Torabi one of most exciting talents in Iran: AFC

Asian Football Confederation (AFC) website says Persepolis midfielder Mehdi Torabi is one of the most exciting talents in Iran football.

Last year's finalist Persepolis resumed its transfer activity this winter after serving a two-window ban. Having lost the likes of Vahid Amiri and Farshad Ahmadzadeh in that period, the Tehran club boosted its attacking midfield options with the signing of Mehdi Torabi from Saipa.

The 24-year-old is one of the most exciting talents in Iranian football. His bursts of pace from midfield will offer Persepolis a new dimension, and his combination of vision and shooting ability allows him to carve out scoring opportunities for himself and his teammates.

Torabi spent his entire career at Saipa prior to joining Persepolis. He made his debut in 2012 and after impressing in the Iranian Professional League, he received his first Team Melli call-up in 2015, scoring on his international debut against Uzbekistan.

The versatile winger has since racked up 25 caps and was part of the Iran squad in the 2018 FIFA World Cup, although he did not get an opportunity to play in Russia.

(Source: the-afc)

## Host of Women’s Olympic Football Qualifiers changed

**TASNIM** — Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has agreed to change the host of the Women's Olympic Football Tournament 2020 Asian Qualifiers Round 2.

The competition has been originally scheduled to be played in Palestine from April 1-9 but Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran requested AFC to change the host of the competition since the Iranian citizens are banned from entering Palestine territories.

Iran have been drawn along with Chinese Taipei, Palestine, and the Philippines in Group C.

According to the International Relations Department of Football Federation, AFC has agreed to change the host and the competition will be held in Doha, Qatar instead of Palestine.

## Karim Boostani quits as coach of Esteghlal Khuzestan

**IRNA** — Karim Boostani resigned as the coach of struggling team Esteghlal Khuzestan football team on Tuesday.

Boostani, who had replaced Daryush Yazdani in the Ahvaz-based team, has stepped down from his role by mutual consent.

His assistant, Karim Ghanbari, has been named as Esteghlal Khuzestan interim coach.

Esteghlal Khuzestan remain bottom of the Iran Professional League (IPL) table with seven points from 19 matches.

The team will play coach-less Sepidrood in Rasht on Friday.

## Vettel crashes Ferrari in pre-season testing

It has all been going so well for Ferrari. That is until Sebastian Vettel skated off the track at Turn 3 and straight into the barriers at the Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya on Wednesday morning...

The four-time champion escaped unhurt, but his Ferrari team will have plenty of work to do to get the car back in shape to hit the track again today.



Vettel had enjoyed a reasonably encouraging morning, clocking up 40 laps and the then second-fastest time of the day before his off-circuit excursion.

Ferrari said a "mechanical problem" caused the accident, but have yet to reveal any more details. The session was briefly red-flagged before restarting.

The German was taken to the track's on-site medical Centre as a precaution before heading back to the garage to discuss the incident with his engineers.

His team mate Charles Leclerc is penciled in to drive this afternoon, but it remains unclear when Ferrari will be able to get the car ready to run again.

(Source: Sky Sports)

## UEFA charges Real Madrid captain Sergio Ramos for deliberate yellow card

**NYON, Switzerland** — UEFA has formally charged Real Madrid captain Sergio Ramos with deliberately getting a yellow card to control the timing of a Champions League ban.

UEFA said its disciplinary panel will judge the case on Thursday.

Ramos risks an additional suspension from the first leg of the quarterfinals if Madrid advances from the round of 16 against Ajax.

He provoked a 90th-minute yellow card -- his third of the competition -- after Madrid took a 2-1 lead in the first leg in Amsterdam two weeks ago.

That foul triggered a one-game ban to be served in the second leg at home, when Madrid is heavily favored.

Ramos reportedly acknowledged his intentions in a post-game interview, then retracted it on Twitter.

UEFA can add extra bans on players seeking to miss a less important game. In a similar case last week, UEFA imposed a two-game Europa League ban on Sevilla midfielder Geoffrey Kondogbia.

(Source: Soccernet)



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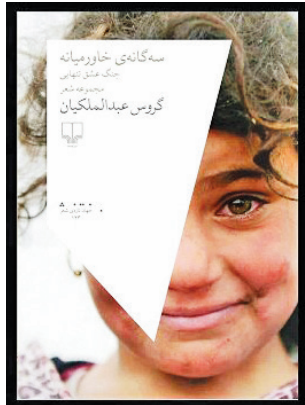
When capability in something increases, greed for it diminishes.

Imam Ali (AS)

## War, love, loneliness in Middle East inspire new Persian poem collection

**CULTURE** TEHRAN — War, love and loneliness has inspired a new collection by young Iranian poet Garus Abdolmalekian.

Poems in “The Middle East Trilogy: War, Love, Loneliness” have been composed between 2014 to 2018, publisher Cheshmeh announced in a press release on Wednesday.



Front cover of the Persian poetry collection “The Middle East Trilogy: War, Love, Loneliness” by Garus Abdolmalekian.

The front cover of the book bears a picture by Iraqi photographer Ali Fahdawi, depicting a girl from Mosul who was fleeing along with her family from ISIS forces. The publishing house has bought the copyright to the picture, which was later titled “Mona Lisa of Mosul”.

“Poems in the collection are both independent and connected,” the 38-year-old Abdolmalekian wrote in a preface to his book.

“Readers can start reading the book from the middle and if they start from the beginning they will find a hidden story, which gives a different atmosphere to the collection,” he added.

Cheshmeh has previously published Abdolmalekian’s collections “The Holes” and “Nothing Is as New as Death”; the latter also contains pictures by renowned Iranian photographers, including Abbas Kiarostami, Seifollah Samadi and Bahman Jalali.

## NEWS IN BRIEF



### National Orchestra to perform in Tehran next week

**A R T** TEHRAN — Iran’s National Orchestra is scheduled to give a concert at Tehran’s Vahdat Hall on March 7.

Guest vocalists Jamaledin Menbari and Purya Akhavas will accompany the orchestra during the performance, which will be conducted by Fereidun Shahbazian.

The orchestra is due to perform a repertoire of popular pieces by famous composers, including Homayun Khorram, Mohammad Sarir, Homayun Rahimian and Jamaledin Menbari.



### Culture minister appoints new assistant in press affairs

**CULTURE** TEHRAN — Mohammad-Mehdi Ahmadi was selected by Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi on Wednesday as deputy culture minister for press affairs.

Ahmadi, who is also an advisor to the minister, replaced Mohammad Soltanifar who resigned from the position in January.

## Joy key ingredient missing from Iranian festivals

**1 →** Artists spare no effort to achieve honors at the events, and naturally each one has a different way of expressing their excitement when upon receiving their awards. Oddly enough, Iranian artists generally do not celebrate their wins onstage and they shrink from showing any emotion or joyful reaction after receiving their awards. Judging by the way they hold their awards onstage one would think they do not feel any pride in their wins. This attitude raises a question to the winners: if the award doesn’t make you happy, then why did you put all that enormous effort into taking part in the festival?

Accordingly, where is the joyfulness of the festivals? It seems that both the organizers and participants should make a drastic revision in their attitudes and arrangements for the festivals.

# Film festival celebrates 90 years of relations between Iran, Japan

**A R T** TEHRAN — The Embassy of Japan and Iran’s Farabi Cinema Foundation is organizing a festival of Japanese movies in Tehran to celebrate 90 years of diplomatic ties between Iran and Japan.

The festival also aims to raise Iranian people’s knowledge of Japanese culture and life. Japanese Charge d’Affaires Toru Morikawa said during the opening ceremony of the festival at Farabi on Tuesday.

“Watching the Japanese films and animations can help the spectators become more familiar with Japanese life, culture and feelings,” he added.

He also said that animation has a lot of fans in Japan and the animations selected for the program portray special images of Tokyo.

“Oshin” directed by Shin Togashi is a highlight of the



Japanese Charge d’Affaires Toru Morikawa (L) and Farabi Cinema Foundation director Alireza Tabesh attend the opening ceremony of a Japanese film festival in Tehran on February 26, 2019. (Farabi Foundation)

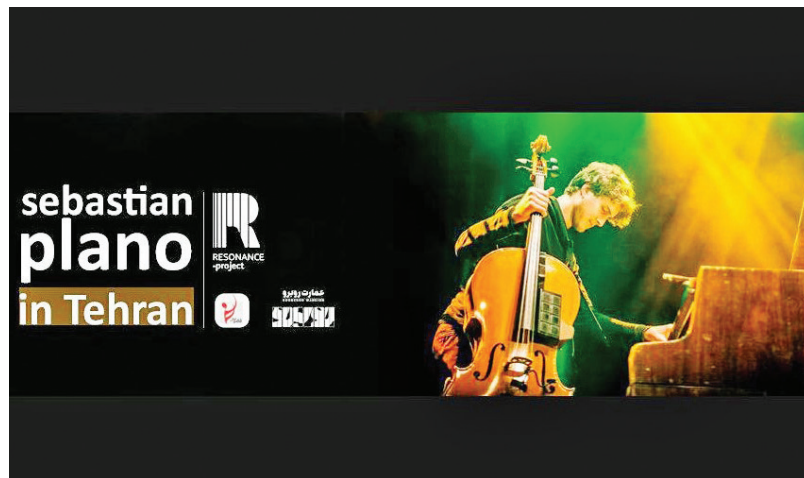
festival, which was screened on Wednesday.

“Rudolf the Black Cat” co-directed by Kunihiro Yuyama and Motonori Sakakibara, and “Samurai Cat” co-directed by Yoshitaka Yamaguchi and Takeshi Watanabe will be

screened in Farabi today (Thursday).

Also on Friday, “Pop in Q” by Naoki Miyahara and “Your Name” by Makoto Shinkai will go on screen at the Embassy of Japan.

## Sebastian Plano to perform in Tehran



A poster for Sebastian Plano’s concert in Tehran’s Andisheh Hall on March 7 and 8.

**A R T** TEHRAN — The German-based Argentinian classical composer and cellist Sebastian Plano is scheduled to give concerts at Tehran’s Andisheh Hall on March 7 and 8.

Entitled “In Between the Worlds”, the concerts have been organized by Rooberoo Mansion as a part of its Resonance Project, which plans to hold concerts in Neo-Classical genres

and to work with well-known music artists from across the world, the center announced on Wednesday.

With the release of his debut album “Arrhythmical Part of Hearts” in 2013, Plano gained international acclaim, being placed as one of the pioneering artists to combine classical and electronic elements.

His new album “Verve” is going to be released next week.

## Audio version of “Extraordinary Journey of Fakir” released in Persian

**CULTURE** TEHRAN — An audio version of the Persian translation of French author Romain Puertolas’s novel “The Extraordinary Journey of the Fakir Who Got Trapped in an Ikea Wardrobe” has recently been released.

Published by Novin Ketab Gooya Publications, the audiobook has been narrated by actor Mir Taher Mazlumi.

The book was translated into Persian by Abolfazl Allahdadi and published by Qoqus Publications last year.

“When the fakir, a professional con artist, arrives in Paris, he has just one goal: to get to Ikea. Armed with only a counterfeit hundred-euro note in the pocket of his silk trousers, he is confident that he has all he needs to thrive. But his plan goes horribly awry when he hides inside a wardrobe at the iconic Swedish retailer, the first in a series of accidents that will send him on a whirlwind tour



Front cover of the Persian version of “The Extraordinary Journey of the Fakir Who Got Trapped in an Ikea Wardrobe”

across Europe,” Amazon has quoted on its website about the book.

## Tehran animation festival announces CIFEJ, intl. juries



This combination photo shows members of the juries for CIFEJ and the international competition of the 11th Tehran International Animation Festival.

**A R T** TEHRAN — The organizers of the 11th Tehran International Animation Festival announced the juries for CIFEJ and the international competition on Wednesday.

The jury for the international section includes Dutch-British animator Michael Dudok de Wit, French film producer Sylvie Bringas and Iranian director Mahin Javaherian.

Hungarian animator Ferenc Mikulás, who

is the director of the Kecskemét Animation Film Festival, is the other member of the jury.

Iranian graphic designer and writer Azadeh Shakuri-raad and the program adviser of Germany’s International Film Festival SCHLINGEL, Volker Petzold, are on the CIFEJ jury panel.

A lineup of top animations from across the world will be competing in the 11th Tehran International Animation Festival running from March 3 to 7.

## Fiennes cousins, actor and explorer, adventure on the Nile for TV

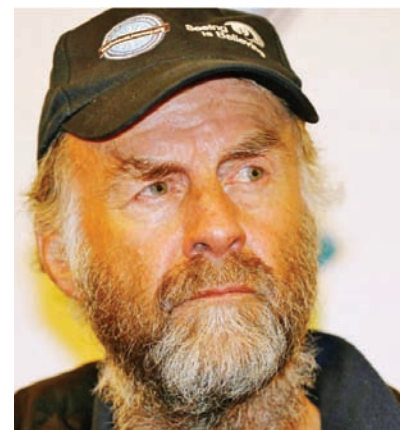
**LONDON (Reuters)** — Squeezing through tiny tunnels into a mummy’s tomb is not something to rattle veteran British explorer Ranulph Fiennes.

Yet for his younger cousin, who brought him to Egypt to film a TV show, the experience was stirring.

“I constantly felt I was in an Indiana Jones set. I keep (saying): ‘Oh no, not snakes!’” actor Joseph Fiennes told Reuters of the scene in “Fiennes Return to the Nile”, a three-part documentary airing on the National Geographic channel this month.

The program marks the 50th anniversary of an expedition that Ranulph, now 74, made up the River Nile and explores whether his actor cousin is cut from the same cloth as the man sometimes known as the greatest living explorer.

The show is at times like an upper-crust version of car show “Top Gear”, with the two Englishmen charg-



Actor and explorer Fiennes cousins

ing over desert sand dunes in a four-wheel-drive, trading banter in a Cairo traffic jam or learning how to charm deadly snakes.

## Mexico’s Inarritu to head Cannes Film Festival jury

**PARIS (Reuters)** — “Birdman” and “21 Grams” director Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu will head the jury at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival in May, becoming the first Mexican to do so, organizers said on Wednesday.

Inarritu, 55, won the best director award in Cannes in 2006 for “Babel”, a film with a web of narratives spanning three continents and exploring cultural prejudices.

He also won back-to-back best director Oscars in 2014 and 2015, for “Birdman”, a black comedy about a washed-up actor starring Michael Keaton, and “The Revenant”, which featured Leonardo DiCaprio as a bear trapper battling the elements in the American wilderness.

“Cannes embraces all types of cinema, and through the presence of... Babel’s director, it is Mexican cinema that the Festival will be celebrating,” organizers including Pierre Lescure, President of the Festival de



Director Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu poses at a photocall for the installation of “Carne y Arena” (virtually present, physically invisible) presented as part of virtual reality event at the 70th Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, France. May 22, 2017. (Reuters/Stephane Mahe)

Cannes, said in a statement.

They cited “Carne y Arena” (Flesh and Sand) - a virtual reality project showing life as an immigrant and presented by Inarritu at Cannes in 2017 - as a recent highlight of work he has launched in France.

Other jury members for the 72nd edition of the festival, which runs from May 14 to 25, will be announced at a later date.

Inarritu succeeds Australian actress Cate Blanchett as jury head. Last year the top “Palme d’Or” award went to “Shoplifters”, by Japanese director Kore-eda Hirokazu.

Inarritu is among a trio of Mexican film directors who have risen to global prominence in recent years, alongside Alonso Cuaron, who won this year’s best director Oscar for “Roma”, and Guillermo del Toro, whose feature “The Shape of Water” won the best picture Oscar in 2018.