



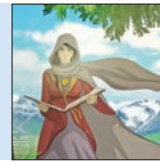
**Iran to unveil new nuclear accomplishments next year** **2**



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## Diplomats plant trees to highlight friendship and peace

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© Tehran Times/ Maryam Kamyab

## Iran, Bulgaria explore ways to expand trade ties

**TEHRAN** — Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) hosted a gathering of officials and businessmen from Iran and Bulgaria on Saturday which aimed for exploring ways of expanding economic ties.

As reported by the portal of TCCIMA, the event was attended by the Bulgarian Ambassador to Iran Christo Polendakov, TCCIMA's Secretary General Bahman Es-hqi and Deputy Director for International

Affairs Mohammadreza Bakhtiari as well as representatives of the ministry of foreign affairs and a handful of Iranian and Bulgarian businessmen.

During the meeting both sides emphasized their long history of trade and economic relations while expressing dissatisfaction with the current level of mutual trade and called for measures to be taken in order to boost the mutual trade to a desirable level. ➔4

## Zarif calls Iran and Iraq two pillars of regional security

**TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Sunday that President Rouhani's visit to Iraq is taking place at a very important juncture.

"We are glad that Dr. Rouhani's visit is taking place at a very important historic juncture after victory over Daesh as enemy against humanity," Zarif told

a joint meeting of the Iranian and Iraqi delegations in Baghdad attended by Mohammed Ali al-Hakim, the Iraqi foreign minister.

Rouhani plans to start his three-day visit to Iraq on Monday.

Zarif called relations between Iraq and Iran are "strategic", which cannot be weakened by any country. ➔2

## Knowledge-based company to establish advanced biotech factory

**TEHRAN** — An Iranian knowledge-based pharmaceutical company will establish a biotech factory which is said to be one of the most advanced biotech factories in the country, Mehr reported on Saturday.

The company has been producing recombinant proteins and biosimilar medicine since the Iranian calendar year 1395 (March 2016-March 2017).

Measuring 3500 hectares in area, the factory is composed of different sections including biotech product line, research, and development (R & D), vial adapter, quality control (QC) and quality assurance (QA), the company manager Shima Sardab said.

The company aims to transfer technological knowledge to Iran and produce homegrown medicines, she said. ➔10

## Erdogan says U.S. angered by Turkey's independence

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan says the United States is pressuring Turkey to cancel an arms agreement with Russia because Washington is angered by Ankara's independence.

"The issue is not about (the Russian defense system) S-400. It is because Turkey takes action of its own will regarding regional developments, particularly in Syria," President Erdogan said in the southeastern city of Diyarbakir on Saturday.

Turkey has been maintaining military presence in Syria to ward off Kurdish militants, whom it associates with anti-Ankara separatists. The U.S., which has also been present on Syrian soil, has been arming those Kurds under the pretext of helping them fight the Takfiri terror group of Daesh. Ankara has been at loggerheads with Washington over that support.

Russia and Turkey finalized an agreement on the delivery of Russian S-400 missile defense

systems in December 2017. Turkey is expected to take delivery of the systems between later this year and early next year. The U.S. has been selling its own Patriot missile systems to regional countries to push back against Russia's expanding influence among them.

A day before Erdogan made the comments, the U.S. Department of Defense warned Turkey of "grave consequences" if it took delivery of the Russian equipment. ➔13

## Massive water transfer projects not to ease acute shortages but cripple ecosystems

By Faranak Bakhtiari

**TEHRAN** — Water transfer schemes looking attractive to many of those residing in drought-stricken central Iran worried about drought, not only does not eliminate water scarcity, but inevitably involves polluting the environment along with damaging agriculture, people's fragile source of income.

Two water transfer projects have been proposed by the government to ensure water supplies for the provinces of Semnan and Sistan-Baluchestan suffering severe water shortages, which have been controversial over the past years.

One of the projects is the water transfer from the Caspian Sea to the central province of Semnan proposed in 2012, but not proceeded at the time due to concerns raised by the department of environment, while is now back on the table and at the planning stage.

The other looked to Oman seawater quenching the thirst of the southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan, Hormozgan and Khorasan Razavi provinces, which have been allocated a budget of \$400 million by the president in March 2016.

Although the projects are still under research,

now a question remains, is the transfer of desalinized water from one geographic region to another a sustainable way to secure drinking water and provide people's source of income?

Experts believe that these projects entailing economic and environmental burden are no solution to droughts, and demanded the water transfer projects to be dismissed due to the irreparable damages to the environment namely deforestation, wildlife habitat destruction, biodiversity degradation, improper land change use, and contaminated seawater. ➔12

## 'Taliban views Washington unreliable, welshing on agreements'

**TEHRAN (FNA)** — Faheem Dashti, Afghan Political Analyst, says Washington is pursuing its own policy of serving its national interests in the region, rather than being concerned with Afghanistan's security.

Speaking in an exclusive interview with FNA, Mr. Dashti shed light on the Pakistan-brokered peace talks between the U.S. and the Taliban,

saying "Pakistan is obtaining credit out of brokering the talks and getting the Taliban to the negotiations table" to cover its own domestic and international shortcomings.

Faheem Dashti is a Kabul-based veteran Afghan journalist and analyst. He is the Head of the National Journalists' Union in Afghanistan. He also published Kabul Weekly, the first privately

owned newspaper to be founded after the fall of the Taliban regime. He has denounced the rising use of violence against journalists, as himself is a victim of such terrorist attacks. Mr. Dashti was badly wounded in the terrorist attack in which Ahmad Shah Massoud, Commander of the Northern Alliance of minority groups in Afghanistan, was fatally wounded. ➔7



© Tehran Times/ Mehdi Bakshi

## Qom Seminary teachers honor Sheikh Isa Qassim

**TEHRAN** — The Society of Qom Seminary Teachers held a ceremony on Saturday to honor Ayatollah Sheikh Isa Qassim, a leading pro-democracy Bahraini cleric.

Sheikh Isa Qassim, 82, is considered an icon of democracy for defending the rights of the Bahraini people.

Manama revoked his citizenship in June 2016, prompting protests and sit-ins in his hometown of Diraz.

Bahraini authorities later dissolved the Islamic Enlightenment Institution, founded by him, in addition to the opposition al-Risala Islamic Association.



### PERSPECTIVE

Hanif Ghaffari  
Political analyst

## How to analyze the new poll in Iowa?

The Guardian, in one of its most recent articles, has been reviewing the latest polls in the Democratic Party of America. The Guardian writes in this regard:

"Biden, who has not announced whether he is running in the 2020 election, is the first choice for president of likely Iowa Democratic caucus-goers with 27% in the Des Moines Register/CNN/Mediacom Iowa Poll. Sanders, 77, got 25%."

Iowa is the first state in which the Democratic elections are traditionally held. The victory or the defeat of any of the candidates in this small state can affect the electoral environment of the Democratic Party and the results that it will subsequently gain in other states.

The report states that Nearly 65% of the voters said Biden, 76, who was also a U.S. senator first elected in 1972, has more experience than any other candidate and should enter the race, while 31% said his time as a candidate has passed. Sanders, a progressive populist who held a rally in Iowa as the poll was being conducted last week, gained six percentage points from 19% in the group's previous poll released in December. Biden fell five percentage points from 32% in the last poll.

The truth is, so far, in most polls, Biden has surpassed other Democrat candidates. Sanders (who failed in Hillary Clinton's in-party election in 2016) is ranked second. Meanwhile, Senator Kamala Harris, another candidate for the Democratic Party in third place, and people like Elizabeth Warren and are in the next ranks.

Recent polls can be viewed from a variety of dimensions. The fact is that now it is impossible to count on polls conducted among Democrat supporters. The experience of previous elections shows that in the weeks leading up to the election, general elections in various states are undergoing changes. However, Sanders' growth in recent polls reflects his success in adding popular votes to his basket of votes. The same thing can surprise Biden to a great extent. ➔7



### ARTICLE

Damir Nazarov  
Journalist  
from Russia

## Zionism is disturbed by the pro-Iranian Iraq

At the beginning of February 2019, military intelligence of the Zionist colony (Aman) stated that allegedly "the Islamic Republic of Iran is creating military bases in Iraq." At the same time, the local newspaper "Jerusalem Post" writes that "the desire to block Iran's ground route to Syria and Lebanon changes Iraq into the arena of a possible attack on the part of Israel."

Then, in early March, an Iranian resource published a couple of news about the activities of States and Zionists in espionage over Iraqi aviation and ground provocations against the People's Militia of Iraq. Such behavior of Zionism can be interpreted as a reaction based on political psychosis.

Zionism is not satisfied with the victory of Iraq over ISIS, where Baghdad's closest ally, Iran, played a special role. The States, Europe and their regional allies maximally helped Takfiris to destroy Syria and Iraq, so that the flame of war would go inside the Islamic Republic, but they could not achieve their goal, and the half-destroyed Arab republics of Sham and Mesopotamia survived and became only stronger.

As for Iraq, there Zionism faithfully manifests its emotions. After each conflict in Iraq, the relation with Iran acquires an increasing and qualitative significance for Baghdad. The war with the takfiris was not an exception. If after the American invasion, the Iranians created a number of organizations for partisan and political activities, and now Iraq has separate state level structures at its disposal, where each has its own special status and stable electorate.

Representatives of the Islamic Resistance of Iraq, who are partially members of the People's Militia, are making visits to Lebanon, where they are met by Hezbollah leaders or by the local office of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. The forces of Hashad al-Shaabi (the people's militia of Iraq) in the fight against the remnants of the ISIS militants have long ago pushed aside the useless army of Iraq and the federal police, both divisions were formed during the NATO occupation, so there is no point to expect clever actions from them. ➔7



MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Larijani calls for Azerbaijan visa waiver

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Parliament Speaker Ali Akbar Salehi on Saturday called on the Azeri government to lift visa requirements for Iranian citizens visiting Azerbaijan in a bid to boost ties between the two neighbors.

Speaking at a meeting with Azeri Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov, Larijani also hailed Tehran-Baku ties as cordial and said there is a positive view about Azerbaijan in the Iranian parliament, Tasnim reported.

“Now that we have lifted the visa (requirements) for the citizens of Azerbaijan, we want you to remove visa (requirements) for Iranians, like Turkey, to facilitate the travels,” he stated.



Iran to unveil new nuclear accomplishments next year

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Ali Akbar Salehi, director of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, announced on Sunday that Iran will unveil new nuclear achievements in the next Iranian year, which starts on March 21.

Speaking on a visit to Alborz province, Salehi hailed the achievements made after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, saying “it was the Revolution that laid the ground for self-sufficiency of the country and the nation's awakening,” Mehr reported.

The nuclear chief also praised the Revolution for the scientific and technological achievements, saying Iranian experts have made great achievements despite the pressures and bans.



Tehran condoles with Ethiopia over plane crash

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi on Sunday voiced Iran's condolences to Ethiopia after an Ethiopian airplane with 149 passengers and eight crew members on board crashed earlier in the day.

The Boeing 737 plane was on regular scheduled flight to Nairobi when it crashed on Sunday.

“The Office of the PM, on behalf of the Government and people of Ethiopia, would like to express its deepest condolences to the families of those that have lost their loved ones on Ethiopian Airlines Boeing 737 on regular scheduled flight to Nairobi, Kenya this morning,” the office of Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said.



UK meddling in Nazanin Zaghari case backfired: MP

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Chairman of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee says the case of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe could have been resolved if the British government had not interfered.

Heshmatollah Palahatpisheh said Zaghari-Ratcliffe could have been pardoned according to the principle of Islamic clemency if there were not such interferences, ISNA reported on Sunday.

Britain and some European countries turn cases which have legal and judicial aspects into political issues, he lamented.

Falahatpisheh added that politicizing such cases backfires when countries like Britain get themselves involved in them.

Zaghari-Ratcliffe, 38, has been imprisoned in Iran for 2 years on charges of trying to orchestrate a soft overthrow of the Islamic Republic.



New ambassador calls for closer Iran-Tajikistan relations

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iran's new ambassador to Tajikistan, Mohammad-Taqi Saberi, on Sunday called for closer ties with Dushanbe, saying he will use every opportunity to expand Iran's relations with Tajikistan.

Saberi made the remarks during a meeting with Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani, IRNA reported.

Larijani also said expanding ties with Tajikistan in different fields, including economy, is necessary.

“Tajikistan is a friendly country with which we share historical relations and common language,” Larijani stated.

The two countries have enjoyed close relations in different fields and such atmosphere should be used in order to resolve some misunderstandings, the parliament speaker added.



Non-UN sanctions are illegitimate: UN rapporteur

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Idriss Jazairy, the UN Human Rights Council's rapporteur on sanctions, has said Europe does not approve of unilateral sanctions against Iran.

Sanctions outside the UN framework are both illegitimate and illegal, said Jazairy, IRNA reported on Sunday.

The sanctions create an atmosphere of fear which drives companies away from the countries under the sanctions, he said.

He added that while a lot of companies are not willing to enter Iran's market due to U.S. sanctions, certain companies, which do not seek to work in the U.S. market, might be willing to work with Iran.

# Zarif hails Rouhani's Iraq visit as new start in Tehran-Baghdad ties

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has said that President Hassan Rouhani's visit to Iraq will be a new start in Iran-Iraq relations.

Zarif, who arrived in Iraq on Saturday evening, made the remarks in an interview with the Iraqi al-Forat satellite TV network aired on Saturday, according to Press TV.

Pointing to measures aimed at boosting cooperation during Rouhani's visit to Iraq, Zarif said such cooperation will be in the areas of transit, oil, joint industrial work, and the dredging of Arvand River.

Rouhani is scheduled to arrive in Baghdad on Monday for a three-day visit.

Zarif said Iran and Iraq shared not only a border but historical affinities and common interests.

“We plan to use those commonalities to advance the joint interests of both countries as well as those of the region,” he stated.

The foreign minister also said Tehran welcomes any initiative for dialogue and cooperation with regional countries, provided that they are not against any party.



“All countries in our region should be involved in such cooperation,” he asserted.

■ **‘The region does not concern you!’ Zarif quotes Saudis**

In spite of Iran's calls for inclusive dialogue, Riyadh had shown no such willingness,

Zarif said.

He added he had sent multiple messages to Saudi officials to voice Iran's readiness for bilateral and regional cooperation when he took office in 2013, to which they responded, “The region does not concern you!”

## Italy looking into INSTEX membership

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — An Italian Foreign Ministry official says his country is reviewing details about the newly developed financial mechanism with Iran known as Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX) and is considering joining it.

Manlio Di Stefano who met Gholamareza Ansari, Iran's deputy foreign minister for economic affairs in Rome on Thursday, said in the current circumstances INSTEX is the best possible way for supporting small and medium sized companies to operate in Iran, according to the Eghtesad Online.

Introduced by the European Union, INSTEX aims in the long term to be open to economic operators from third countries who wish to trade with Iran while Iran has been put under sanctions by the U.S.

Stefano noted that Rome supports the financial channel



between Iran and European Union.

Ansari, for his part, termed INSTEX a practical measure to enforce European obligations as enshrined in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), stressing the importance of respecting commitments made in the historic

## Pakistan promises ‘good news’ for Iran over border attack

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan has said he would soon have “good news” for Iran regarding measures against a terrorist group behind a deadly suicide attack in Iran's southeastern border areas.

The Pakistani prime minister made his promise during a phone call with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani late on Saturday, who called for “decisive” action by Pakistan over the incident and said inaction by Islamabad could jeopardize relations between the neighbors, according to IRNA.

A suicide bombing killed 27 members of Iran's Revolution Guards in mid-February in the southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan, where security forces are facing a rise in attacks by terror gangs venturing into Iran from inside the Pakistani territory.

The Jaish al Adl terrorist group claimed responsibility for the attack.

“We are awaiting your decisive operations against these terrorists,” the news agency quoted Rouhani as telling Khan.

“We should not allow decades of friendship and fraternity between the two coun-



tries to be undermined by the actions of small terrorist groups, the source of whose financing and arms is known to both of us,” Rouhani remarked.

Iran has blamed its regional rival Saudi Arabia and arch-enemy Israel for the attack and other cross-border raids.

“It is in Pakistan's own interest not to allow our territory to be used by terrorist groups, and the Pakistani army is prepared to confront the terrorists more decisively with the information provided by Iran,” Imran Khan said in response.

He said Pakistani forces have come close to the terrorists' hideout and there would soon be “good news” for Iran.

## Ex-White House official: No one can dictate others what technology they can have or not

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Frank Von Hippel, a former White House director assistant, has said that no country should dictate others what technologies they can or cannot have.

“Everything should be controlled within international agreements, not a country dictates to other countries what technologies they can or cannot have,” he told IRNA in an interview published on Sunday.

The U.S. has urged the UN Security Council to impose

sanctions on Iran for launching satellites.

Hippel also said the Trump administration's exit from the 2015 nuclear deal came as very “serious and damaging” blow to the U.S. image in the world.

President Trump unilaterally pulled Washington out of the nuclear deal in May 2018 and illegally ordered reimposition of sanctions against Iran.

On January 31, France, Germany and Britain announced the creation of INSTEX, a special purpose vehicle aimed at

## Rouhani visit to Iraq to deepen ties: Iraqi president

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iraqi President Barham Salih said on Sunday that President Hassan Rouhani's visit to Iraq will deepen relations between the two countries and people.

“President Rouhani's visit is very important. Before anything else, it will deepen relations between the two countries and nations,” he told reporters.

Rouhani is scheduled to start his three-day visit to Iraq on Monday.

Pointing to his visit to Tehran in November 2018, Salih said that Rouhani's trip is in line with the negotiations between the two neighboring countries.

Salih noted that economy will be the main agenda of the talks during the visit.

Salih added that Iraq will help the Iranian people counter the U.S. sanctions.

“Iraq will not be a part of the U.S. unilateral sanctions against Iran,” he noted.

Elsewhere, Salih praised Iran's supports for Iraq in the difficult times. He said that any threat against security of



Iran is “unacceptable”.

During a joint press conference with Rouhani in November, Salih said that his country will not forget Iran's support for the Iraqis in their struggle against the regime of Saddam Hussein and Daesh.

“Through its support for us, the Islamic Republic played a great role in defeating terrorists in Iraq,” Salih said.

During a meeting on Saturday with Abdul-Rahman Saad Jawad Qandeel, the new Baghdad's ambassador to Tehran, Rouhani said that Iran-Iraq ties are “exemplary” in the region.

He added that Iran will stand beside the Iraqi government and people.

## African Union seeks co-op with Iran in nanotechnology

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — An official from the African Union on Sunday called for more cooperation with Iran in nanotechnology as the bloc is making efforts to reach its so-called Agenda 2063, Africa's strategic framework for the socio-economic transformation of the continent over the next 50 years.

“The condition for Iranian universities' cooperation with African academic centers to implement the African Union's vision is

very good,” Sarah Anyang Agbor, the commissioner for human resources science and technology at the African Union Commission, told Hossein Salar Amoli, the deputy Iranian science minister for international scientific cooperation.

The African Union commissioner praised Iran's “considerable” scientific and technological achievements as well as women's presence in various scientific fields, according to a report by the Islamic Republic News Agency.

## Over two tons of narcotics seized in southeastern Iran

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Police have uncovered more than 2,300 kilograms of narcotics following two separate operations in southeast of Iran, a local police officer announced on Sunday.

Anti-narcotics forces managed to seize two big consignments of illegal drugs in the operations, said Ahmad Taheri, deputy police commander of Sistan-Baluchestan Province, ILNA reported.

The first operation took place in Saravan City, where two sedans stashed with 900 kg of opium, 327 kg of hashish and two Kalashnikov rifles were seized, he explained.

In another operation in Nikshahr City, the forces uncovered 1.32 tons of opium, 53.7 kg of heroin and three kg of illegal drugs of various types, Taheri said.

The officer also said that a number of drug smugglers were detained during the two operations.

## Zarif calls Iran and Iraq two pillars of regional security

➔ Pointing to parliamentary elections in Iraq, he called the elections “a great success”.

“This has been a great success for democracy and the people of Iraq and we congratulate the Iraqi government and people on this,” Zarif remarked.

The Iraqi parliamentary elections were held on May 12, 2018.

Elsewhere, Zarif said that he held talks with the Iraqi foreign minister to discuss regional and international issues.

He also expressed hope that talks between the Iranian and Iraqi officials would

yield to positive results in line with the interest of the two countries.

In a press conference with his Iraqi counterpart, Zarif also described Iran and Iraq as two pillars of security in the region which their cooperation can strengthen security.

Zarif also said the two countries' sand toward regional and international issues are “very similar” and this can help regional security.

The chief diplomat also thanked Iraqis for their opposition to “unjust and illegal” U.S. sanctions against Iran.



# Russia to defend its Venezuela oil assets in ‘toughest way possible’

Nicolas Maduro’s staunchest international ally—Russia—reaffirmed last week its full support to the Socialist leader’s regime and his efforts to prevent what Moscow sees as interference in Venezuela’s domestic affairs.

At the same time, Russia, which vowed to defend its oil assets in Venezuela as early as the political crisis began in January, sees risks to its investments in the Latin American country and pledges to react “in the toughest way” possible within international law if those investments are threatened, Russia’s Ambassador to Venezuela, Vladimir Zaemsky, told Russian government-run newspaper Rossiyskaya Gazeta in an interview published this week.

Russia is the staunchest supporter and ally of Maduro’s regime in the political power struggle in the Latin American country sitting on top of the world’s largest oil reserves, while the U.S. and many European nations have recognized Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó as the legitimate interim president. Russia has stood by Maduro for years and has poured billions of U.S. dollars in Venezuela in the form of loans and oil investments. Russia’s state-controlled oil giant Rosneft has extended US\$6 billion of loans to Venezuela’s state oil firm PDVSA. As of December 31, 2018, Venezuela still owed Rosneft US\$2.3 billion.

Rosneft is also said to be helping Venezuela to get the oil products it needs to dilute its heavy crude after the U.S. sanctions choked off American naphtha exports to Venezuela.

There certainly are risks to Russia’s investments in Venezuela, but those risks are associated with Washington’s behavior, rather than with Venezuela’s government, as the case with PDVSA’s U.S.-based refining subsidiary



Citgo has shown, ambassador Zaemsky told Rossiyskaya Gazeta (in the interview with a headline ‘Russia is not abandoning its friends’).

All Russian investment projects have been approved by the relevant Venezuelan and international law and therefore, are under their protection, Zaemsky said, and added: “If attempts are made to deprive Russian companies of their investments in Venezuela’s economy, Russia will react to this in the toughest way, employing all available means under international law.”

Referring to Citgo, Zaemsky said that Russia sees in this a U.S. policy of unfair competition, citing another example—“unprecedented U.S. pressure on Europe” over the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project in an attempt to squeeze Russia out of the EU gas market.

Similarly, Washington basically appro-

priated assets of a large oil refining business, without paying a cent for it and hiding behind tales of its transfer to “the legitimate president Juan Guaidó” [sic], Rossiyskaya Gazeta quoted Zaemsky as saying.

The Russian ambassador to Venezuela also reaffirmed Moscow’s stance that Russian-Venezuelan relations are strategic and the countries continue to strengthen them.

This position was also expressed last week by Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who said on Friday, after talks with visiting Venezuelan Vice President Delcy Rodríguez, that Moscow supports Maduro and the “measures taken by Nicolas Maduro’s government to prevent further destabilisation.”

Executive Vice President Delcy Rodriguez confirmed what President Nicolas Maduro has said repeatedly: that the Venezuelan

leadership is ready for such a dialogue. Of course, it is unfortunate that the opposition has consistently rejected dialogue – upon direct instructions from Washington, as we all know very well,” Lavrov said, as carried by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

On Saturday, in a telephone conversation with U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo regarding Venezuela, Lavrov “condemned the threats the U.S. has made toward the country’s lawful leadership, which is an overt interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state and a severe violation of the international law,” the Russian foreign ministry said.

While the global superpowers spat over the handling of the crisis in Venezuela, the Latin American country’s oil industry has been hit hard by the U.S. sanctions against it and its state oil firm PDVSA. Venezuela struggles to find buyers for its oil, after the sanctions essentially ban exports to what was its largest market until recently, the U.S., as well as imports from the U.S. of naphtha, which the country uses to dilute its thick heavy oil to make it flow.

Russia’s Rosneft is reportedly coming to the rescue with shipments of naphtha to Venezuela to help it make its heavy oil suitable for processing and exports. Two Rosneft tankers will be sending 1 million barrels of heavy naphtha to Venezuela in the next few weeks, Bloomberg reported on Tuesday, citing shipping reports and a source with knowledge of the plans. These naphtha shipments could bring some immediate relief, but they would be lower than Venezuela’s typical monthly heavy naphtha imports of 2-3 million barrels, according to Bloomberg.

(Source: RT)

## India to go to polls from April 11; tension with Pakistan seen boosting Modi

India will hold a general election in seven stages starting on April 11, the election commission said on Sunday, in what will be the world’s biggest democratic exercise with Prime Minister Narendra Modi likely to benefit from tension with Pakistan.

Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora told reporters that about 900 million voters would be eligible for the polls, about 15 million between the ages of 18 and 19 years.

Until a few weeks ago, a shortage of jobs and weak farm prices were seen as denting Modi’s popularity.

But pollsters say his ruling Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has a clear advantage over opposition parties after India’s armed forces clashed with those of arch rival Pakistan last month, triggering a wave of patriotic fervor across the country of 1.3 billion.

“For the first time I will vote for Narendra Modi, because I like what he has done against Pakistan,” said Anjali Tivari as she was picking up her son from school in Mumbai.

“I’m impressed. He gave the right answer to Pakistan.”

Modi touted his government’s achievements in a series of tweets after the announcement.

“I hope this election witnesses a historic turnout. I particularly call upon first time voters to vote in record numbers,” Modi tweeted.

India says its warplanes killed “a very large number of

terrorists, trainers, senior commanders, and groups” of militants in a camp run by Islamist group Jaish-e-Mohammad in northeastern Pakistan on Feb. 26.

The militant group claimed a suicide bomb attack that killed 40 Indian paramilitary police in the disputed region of Kashmir on Feb. 14, and India accused Pakistan of complicity.

Pakistan rejected the suggestion it was linked to the attack and said no one was killed in the Indian air strike.

The Indian attack and retaliatory aerial action by Pakistan brought the nuclear-armed rivals to the brink of another war.

India is battling multiple insurgencies in the state of Jammu & Kashmir and elections there are usually marred by violence.

Speaking at a news conference on Sunday, Arora said an election commission team had visited the state to speak to stakeholders and has decided to appoint three special observers to the region to monitor the polling. He said assembly elections that are due to be held in the state, where the assembly was dissolved last year, won’t take place simultaneously with the general election.

Although questions were raised about how effective the Indian military action actually was, Modi’s approval rating has soared.

HSBC Securities and Capital Markets said in a note that



national security and nationalism could trump economic issues in determining voters preferences.

India’s unemployment rate in February rose to the highest since September 2016, data from private think-tank Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy showed, even as the economy grew at its slowest pace in five quarters in the last three months of last year.

Votes will be counted on May 23, he said.

(Source: Reuters)

## Responding to Macron, Merkel protege warns against centralized EU

The leader of Germany’s ruling Christian Democrats (CDU) has responded to French President Emmanuel Macron’s ideas for a “European renaissance” by offering some overlap with his vision, while also warning against too much centralization.

Under the title “Doing Europe Right”, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer echoed Macron by calling for a reform of the European Union’s migration policy, but rejected his idea for a European minimum wage and cautioned against collective debts.

Kramp-Karrenbauer’s response to Macron fills a void left by Chancellor Angela Merkel, who is under pressure from her party to engage with him more fully after leaving her spokesman to simply say Germany supports discussions about the EU’s future.

“Our Europe needs to become stronger,” Kramp-Karrenbauer, who succeeded Merkel as CDU leader in December, wrote in an opinion piece for the Welt am Sonntag weekly newspaper.

But she added: “European centralism, European statism, the collectivization of



debts, a Europeanization of social systems and the minimum wage would be the wrong way.”

That appeared to counter Macron’s call for a European minimum wage, adapted to each country, and also highlighted the entrenched resistance in Berlin to any moves that could make Germany liable for other

countries’ debts.

Macron’s proposals, unveiled in an open letter to citizens of Europe that was published this week in newspapers across the EU, aim to protect and defend Europe’s citizens while giving the 28-nation bloc new impetus in the face of global competition.

Since winning election as French presi-

dent in 2017, Macron has championed EU reform, but wariness in Berlin of increased burdens on German taxpayers has left him short of big-bang measures.

Presenting her ideas, Kramp-Karrenbauer, who is Merkel’s protege and in pole position to succeed her as chancellor, called for an internal European banking market to ensure that Europe’s businesses can secure financing in the EU.

She also said a joint EU innovation budget should fund new technologies, tax loopholes should be closed in the bloc and a digital tax introduced based on an Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) model.

Kramp-Karrenbauer, like Macron, called for a reform of migration policy, but stressed that tackling migration at its source, protecting Europe’s external borders and absorbing asylum seekers were roles that should be shared fairly.

She added: “In future, the EU should be represented with a common permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council.”

(Source: Reuters)

## Germany tightens travel advice on Turkey

Germany changed its travel advice for visitors to Turkey on Saturday, warning its citizens that they risked arrest for expressing opinions that would be tolerated at home but may not be by Turkish authorities.

“It cannot be ruled out ... that the Turkish government will take further action against representatives of German media and civil society organizations,” an updated Foreign Ministry travel advisory read.

“Statements, which are covered by the German legal un-

derstanding of the freedom of expression, can lead in Turkey to occupational restrictions and criminal proceedings.”

The advice, which a ministry spokeswoman confirmed was updated on Saturday, noted that several European, including German, journalists had been denied accreditation in Turkey without explanation. In the last two years German nationals have also been increasingly arbitrarily detained, it said.

Turkish authorities are suspicious about any connec-

tions to the network of U.S.-based Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen, who Ankara says orchestrated a 2016 attempted coup, the ministry said.

But it added that any holidaymakers who had taken part in meetings abroad of organizations banned in Turkey risked being detained, as did Germans who made, or endorsed, statements on social media critical of the Turkish government.

(Source: TRT)

## Erdogan slams women’s day rally over ‘rude’ behavior

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan Sunday lambasted participants of the International Women’s Day march in Istanbul over what he described as “disrespect” during the Islamic call to prayer.

Police fired tear gas on Friday at thousands after authorities issued a statement banning any demonstration on the famous Istiklal avenue before the march, although the event has previously taken place peacefully.

In an unverified video that has since gone viral, women and men marching on Friday along the avenue continued chanting during the call to prayer.

“A group which came together in Taksim led by the [main opposition Republican People’s Party] CHP and [pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party] HDP supposedly for women’s day behaved rudely with whistling and chanting during the call to prayer,” Erdogan said.

The avenue is close to Taksim square, a traditional rallying point.

Erdogan played a short clip of the video as well as footage of an opposition rally from 2011 where it was claimed the Turkish flag could not be seen.

“[The opposition is] attacking our liberty and our future with this disrespect to our flag and our call to prayer,” he said during a rally in the southern city of Adana.

The president has been holding daily rallies across the country and often slamming the opposition ahead of local elections on March 31. He has accused the CHP of being in an alliance with the HDP, which Erdogan says is a political front for Kurdish insurgents.

Although polls suggest Erdogan’s ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) remains the biggest, there are fears the opposition may make larger gains as the economic slowdown and the weaker Turkish lira impacts households.

Erdogan often says that his Islamic-rooted party has given greater freedom to Muslims in Turkey where until a few years ago, women were banned from wearing the Islamic headscarf, known as the hijab, in state institutions and universities.

But he has been accused by critics of eroding the secular pillars of modern Turkey.

The call to prayer has been at the center of controversy in the history of the Turkish republic since its foundation in 1923.

Most recently in 2018, there was a row after CHP MP Ozturk Yilmaz called for it to be in Turkish rather than Arabic.

From 1932 to 1950, the call to prayer was banned in Arabic in Turkey.

(Source: AFP)

## Ethiopian Airlines flight to Nairobi crashes, killing 157



An Ethiopian Airlines Boeing 737 passenger jet to Nairobi crashed early on Sunday with 149 passengers and eight crew members aboard, the airline said, and there were no survivors, according to the state broadcaster.

The flight left Bole airport in Addis Ababa at 8.38 am local time, before losing contact with the control tower just a few minutes later at 8.44 am.

“There are no survivors onboard the flight, which carried passengers from 33 countries,” said state-run Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation, quoting an unidentified source at the airline.

Flight ET 302 crashed near the town of Bishoftu, 62 kilometres southeast of the capital Addis Ababa, the airline said, adding that the plane was a Boeing 737-800 MAX, registration number ET-AVJ.

That model number does not exist however and multiple aviation websites later identified the plane as a new 737 MAX 8, the same plane that crashed in Indonesia in October, killing 189.

“Search and rescue operations are in progress and we have no confirmed information about survivors or any possible casualties,” the airline said in a statement.

The flight had unstable vertical speed after take off, said flight tracking website Flightradar24 on its Twitter feed.

At Nairobi airport, many relatives of passengers were waiting at the gate, with no information from airport authorities.

“We’re just waiting for my mum. We’re just hoping she took a different flight or was delayed. She’s not picking up her phone,” said Wendy Otieno, clutching her phone and weeping.

Robert Mutanda, 46, was waiting for his brother-in-law coming from Canada.

“No, we haven’t seen anyone from the airline or the airport,” he told Reuters at 1pm, more than three hours after the flight was lost. “Nobody has told us anything, we are just standing here hoping for the best.”

The Ethiopian prime minister’s office sent condolences via Twitter to the families of those lost in the crash.

On Oct. 29, a Lion Air Boeing 737 MAX 8 crashed into the Java Sea shortly after take-off from Jakarta, killing all 189 people on board.

The plane is the latest version of the 737 family, the world’s best selling modern passenger aircraft and one of the industry’s most reliable.

State-owned Ethiopian is one of the biggest carriers on the continent by fleet size. It said previously that it expected to carry 10.6 million passengers last year.

Its last major crash was in January 2010, when a flight from Beirut went down shortly after take-off.

(Source: Reuters)



STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	164470.6
IFX	2070.37

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,192 rials
GBP	54,667 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$65.74/b
WTI	\$56.07/b
OPEC Basket	\$65.57/b
Gold	\$1,299.55/oz
Silver	\$15.40/oz
Platinum	\$821.80/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Iran, Turkey to set up joint industrial area

Chief Executive of Iran’s Maku Free Zone Organization (MFZO) Gholamreza Soleimani said on Saturday that Iran and Turkey will launch a joint industrial area.

An area as vast as 700 ha has been considered for setting up this joint industrial area, he said, adding, “talks are underway for launching this industrial area between concerned officials of the two countries.”

Presently, Iranian engineers are conducting feasibility studies for the construction of this industrial area, he added.

He pointed to the launch of clothing and garment hub in cooperation with Turkey as one of the main objectives behind construction of this industrial area.

Efforts are underway for the attraction of more cooperation and interaction with the Autonomous Republic of Nakhichevan, he said, adding “economic and tourism cooperation will be promoted with this country through Maku Free Zone.”

(Source: Mehr News Agency)

Pakistan keen on boosting railway co-op with Iran

Pakistan’s Railways Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmad says his country welcomes Iran’s readiness for reconstruction of Pakistan railways.

He made the remarks in Islamabad after returning from a three-day visit to Iran. He said that cooperation with Tehran will be the golden era of Pakistan’s railways.

“The issues of cooperation with Iran and Turkey to expand internal railways, reconstructing and connecting to various countries, including Central Asia, have been discussed with Prime Minister Imran Khan,” he mentioned.

He added that joint railroad projects with Iran will start after the Pakistani prime minister’s approval.

Referring to the need to strengthening the railway connectivity between Iran and Pakistan, Iran’s Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mohammad Eslami said, “Pakistani tenders will definitely help our plans to establish rail connections and trade exchanges.”

The Iranian official said that Iran is prepared to provide passenger trains for Pakistani pilgrims to the holy city of Mashhad in northeastern Iran, and also to Karbala up to Kermanshah under the existing conditions.

(Source: Mehr News Agency)

U.S., China have reached consensus on many vital issues, Yi says

China and the U.S. have reached consensus on many “crucial” issues and have discussed the need to observe the “autonomy” of each other’s monetary policy, People’s Bank of China Governor Yi Gang said.

“The two sides discussed issues surrounding the yuan including the need to abide by previous commitments made by Group of 20 nations not to engage in competitive depreciation and to communicate closely on currency issues,” Yi said during a press conference in Beijing Sunday during the annual National People’s Congress. He didn’t say on which issues they had reached consensus.

The negotiators also discussed the importance of a market-orientated foreign exchange mechanism and the need to disclose information to International Monetary Fund standards, Yi said. He has been part of the Chinese team at the trade talks.

The issue of currency manipulation has become part of the ongoing talks to solve their trade confrontation, with the U.S. pushing for a pledge by China to not devalue its currency as a way to gain competitiveness or offset the effect of tariffs. China has said that any deal to end the trade spat should be “two way, fair and equal.”

The PBOC has “basically exited” daily intervention in the foreign exchange market, Yi said, reiterating the existing intention to keep the yuan “basically stable” at “reasonable equilibrium.” China will “never” use the exchange rate for competitive purposes, to increase exports or to solve trade disputes, he said.

The talks on foreign exchange have been “very meaningful,” and the yuan exchange rate formation mechanism is in line with G-20 standards and is decided by the market, Yi said, adding that he expects to reach more consensus in discussions with the U.S. on this. He didn’t say what he meant by that.

Looking at the comments as a whole, including Yi’s reference to continuing to use counter-cyclical measures, “it seems to me that there will not be obvious change on the yuan mechanism,” said Iris Pang, a Hong Kong-based economist with ING Bank NV.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Yaran Oilfield development project studied by NIOC

**E N E R G Y** **TEHRAN** —The project for development of Yaran Oilfield was studied by National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) on Saturday, ILNA reported.

The plan which was submitted previously was investigated in the 62nd meeting of NIOC’s oil and gas reserves management consultants.

Yaran is one of the five oilfields known as West Karoun oilfields which Iran shares with Iraq at the western part of Iran’s southwestern region of Karoun.

Yaran Field, which is divided into two parts namely North Yaran and South Yaran,

lies 120 kilometers west of Ahwaz, the capital city of southwestern province of Khuzestan, on the border line with Iraq.

The field is adjacent to Azadegan Field in east and to Iraq’s Majnoon Field in west.

West Karoun region which includes five major fields namely North Azadegan, South Azadegan, North Yaran, South Yaran and Yadavaran prioritized among the country’s top development projects.

Providing the condition for the presence of private sector in development projects is now an agenda for the NIOC.

The budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year 1398, which starts on March

Non-oil exports from Arvand Free Zone at \$1.2b in 11 months

**E C O N O M Y** **TEHRAN** — Over \$1.2 billion worth of non-oil commodities was exported from Arvand Free Trade Zone during the first eleven months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2018 – February 19, 2019), a deputy at Arvand Free Zone Organization announced.

In an interview with IRNA on Sunday, Syed Ali Mousavi, the deputy director of Arvand Free Zone Organization for investment affairs, said the figure shows 23 percent rise compared to the same period of time in the previous year.

Iran’s non-oil trade with other countries registered a \$1.5-billion positive balance in the first eleven months of the current Iranian calendar year, Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dejjasand has recently announced.

The minister put the value of non-oil exports at \$40 billion and that of the imports at \$38.5 billion in the mentioned period of time.

Dejjasand mentioned the positive bal-



ance a very satisfactory result given all limitations the country is already facing.

Arvand Free Trade Zone in the southwestern province of Khuzestan is one of the seven major free trade zones of Iran.

This Zone has long been one of the border and oil rich zones of the country due to the existence of freshwater Rivers of Karun and Arvand and also transportation facilities including road, rail, sea and air.

Lands of this Zone have been allocated to industrial activities, and other sectors, such as trade, tourism and office, to ports, warehousing and transit, and investors can invest in any of the economic activities.

Tehran, Baghdad to ink several MOUs to increase trade ties

Iran is expected to sign several memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with Iraq on rail projects, easier visa processes as well as medical cooperation as the two neighboring countries eye 20-billion-dollar annual trade volume.

“These MOUs will be about establishing railway between the border cities of Khorramshahr and Basra, building and developing joint industrial parks, travel visas, customs issues and health and medical cooperation,” said Iranian Ambassador to Iraq Iraq Masjedi.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani is scheduled to visit Iraq on Monday. He is the first president of a foreign country that will officially visit Iraq at the request of Iraqi President Barham Salih and Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi since the new government’s formation.

The Iranian border city of Khorramshahr lies some 40 kilometers away from the Iraqi Basra. The Iranian and Iraqi

officials are eager to connect their countries through railway in a bid to boost export and import.

Tehran and Baghdad are seeking to raise their annual trade volume up to \$20 billion in the next few years. Iranian current exports to Iraq stand at \$13 billion, more than seven billion of which are non-oil exports.

Iraq is also among the first top destinations for export of Iranian goods. The Iranian envoy to Iraq noted that his country is planning to organize more than 40 Iranian goods trade fairs in Iraq up to March 2020.

Their bilateral trade has been seeing a \$2.5 billion annual increase with oil and gas exports making the most part of it, according to Masjedi.

He also added that a draft document of easing visa issuance for traders and businessmen from both countries is ready.

(Source: IRNA)



The world economy risks remaining weak for a while longer

On Friday alone, reports showed the slowest U.S. hiring in more than a year, a slump in Chinese exports and an unexpected decline in German factory orders.

With economies already undershooting expectations by the most since 2013 and the OECD slashing its forecasts, worries are mounting that the recent slowdown will last for longer, although recession fears for now remain limited.

The soft patch puts the U.S. and China under pressure to settle their trade war, which has bludgeoned sentiment, and leaves central banks needing to keep monetary policy looser than they were planning into this year. Chairman Jerome Powell said late Friday that the Federal Reserve could be patient after pausing its interest rate hikes.

Such forces may still prove enough to drive a pickup and next week witnesses further health checks ranging from retail sales data in the U.S. to industrial statistics from China and the euro-region.

“The trends in the global economy have certainly concerned markets,” said Philip Shaw, chief economist at Investec in London. “It’s material enough to make a difference to the policy outlook.”

The week ended with news that U.S. pay-

rolls grew just 20,000 in February, way below the 180,000 median forecast in a Bloomberg survey of economists.

Deutsche Bank is already warning the U.S. economy could grow less than 1 percent this quarter and the bout of labor market weakness will sew worries about the spending power of consumers. On Monday in Washington, the government will release retail sales data for January, after December witnessed the worst slump in nine years.

Elsewhere, exports from China tumbled almost 21 percent in February, the most in three years, while German factory orders unexpectedly dropped 2.6 percent in January, the most since June.

That was just one day. Manufacturing purchasing manager indexes are in contraction territory in China, Japan and the euro area, where there’s mounting concern that the bloc’s economy and markets risk repeating Japan’s lost decades of growth.

There are caveats. U.S. wage gains were the fastest of the expansion in February, and JPMorgan Chase & Co. predicts salaries in rich nations will start advancing by more than 3 percent this year. Financial conditions have also turned more relaxed after tightening into the end of last year, with the MSCI World Index



Eurozone banks hold too great a share of state loans on their balance sheets, such as the situation which preceded the 2014 debt crisis.

Eurozone banks buy govt. bonds amid crisis ‘dead loop’ concerns: report

Banks across the Eurozone have started to purchase their own governments’ bonds for the first time since the single-currency bloc’s debt crisis broke out in 2014, The Financial Times reports.

The newspaper cited European Central Bank (ECB) sources as saying that in a bid to increase their sovereign debt holdings, the Eurozone banks “bought a net €1bn of their domestic government’s debt in the 12 months to January”.

The sources warned that the tendency may finally lead to a so-called “doom loop”, in which



21, 2019, indicates that the budget allocated to the development projects is not expected to see a noticeable rise in the next year, and it is while there are over 80,000 semi-finished development projects in the country; so the government has invited the private sector to contribute to finishing them.

In this due, oil and gas sector as the main

Iran, Bulgaria explore ways of expanding trade ties

**1 →** Addressing the meeting, Mohammadreza Bakhtiari said “The level of trade between the two countries should increase in line with provided facilities. When IN-STEX is launched, small and medium-sized Iranian companies can partner with their counterparts in Bulgaria, and this will obviously increase the level of trade.”

TCCIMA’s secretary general also stressed the two countries’ 120 years of mutual trade and noted that Bulgaria could be the Europe’s trade gate for Iran.

Bahman Eshqi further mentioned the two sides’ trade turnover in 2017 to be \$121 million adding, “Bulgaria imported \$3.2 billion worth of goods from the Middle East region while the imports from Iran stood only at \$62 million.”

Polendakov for his part, referred to the imminent holding of a joint economic committee meeting between Iran and Bulgaria, saying “the sides’ private sectors should take advantage of this opportunity and promote bilateral trade between the two countries.”

He further expressed hope that the two

source of income for the country welcomes private sector’s presence in its projects, both in exploration and in development.

In development sector, as there are many exploration blocks waiting for implementation of projects, NIOC is seriously following up the plans to lay the ground for the private sector’s contribution.



sides could find ways to develop trade relations.

The Iran-Bulgaria Joint Economic Committee meeting chaired by Iranian Transport Minister Mohammad Eslami is slated to be held in Sofia from April 15 to 18.

Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) is going to dispatch a trade delegation to Bulgarian capital city of Sofia concurrent with the event.

The delegates to be led by ICCIMA Vice Chairman Hossein Selahvarzi are active in the fields of road building and urban projects as well as technical-engineering services.

(Source: Bloomberg)

lenders to grant better credit conditions to customers, which is in turn expected to stimulate the real economy.

ECB President Mario Draghi, for his part, also singled out a series of external risks as the reason for the new stimulus package.

“The persistence of uncertainties related to geopolitical factors, the threat of protectionism and vulnerabilities in emerging markets appears to be leaving marks on economic sentiment,” Draghi pointed out.

(Source: Sputnik)



# Saudi's Falih: U.S., China driving oil demand; no April OPEC policy change

Saudi oil minister Khalid al-Falih said on Sunday that China and the U.S. would lead healthy global demand for oil this year but that it would be too early to change OPEC+ output policy at the group's next meeting in April.

He said total global oil demand is set to grow by around 1.5 million barrels per day (bpd).

"If you look at Venezuela alone you would panic, if you look at the U.S. you would say the world is awash with oil. You have to look at the market as a whole. We think 2019 demand is actually quite healthy," Falih told Reuters.

In Venezuela, suffering from a political and economic crisis, oil exports have plunged by 40 percent to around 920,000 bpd since Washington slapped sanctions on its petroleum industry on Jan. 28.

On the other hand, production in U.S. hit a record of more than 12 million bpd in February.

The International Energy Agency in a report last month left its demand growth forecast for 2019 unchanged from January at 1.4 million barrels per day.

Falih said Chinese demand was breaking records month after month and estimated



the country would breach 11 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2019.

For Saudi Arabia, he said oil output in April was expected to remain at this month's level of 9.8 million bpd.

"Aramco is finalizing their April

allocations today or tomorrow so we will know more on Monday. But my expectation is that April is going to be pretty much like March".

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies such as

Russia — known as the OPEC+ alliance — will meet in Vienna on April 17-18 and another gathering is scheduled for June 25-26.

Falih said the group was unlikely to change its output policy in April and if required will make adjustments in June.

"We will see what happens by April if there is any unforeseen disruption somewhere else but barring this I think we will just be kicking the can forward," Falih said.

"We will see where the market is by June and adjust appropriately," Falih said.

On Jan. 1, OPEC+ began new production cuts to avoid a supply glut that threatened to soften prices. The group agreed to reduce supply by 1.2 million barrels per day for six months.

Sources recently said the OPEC+ production policy is expected to be agreed on in June with an extension of the current pact the likely scenario so far, but much depends on the extent of U.S. sanctions on both OPEC members Iran and Venezuela.

OPEC's share is 800,000 bpd, to be delivered by 11 members — all except Iran, Libya and Venezuela, which are exempt from cuts. The baseline for the reduction was in most cases their output in October 2018.

(Source: CNBC)

## Bahrain's Bapco sees oil trading opportunities as it expands refinery

Bahrain plans to commission its expanded oil refinery by early 2023, allowing it to sell and trade more petroleum products in the Persian Gulf region and Asia, the chief executive of state-owned oil company Bapco said.

The expansion will boost the capacity of its Sitra oil refinery to 360,000 barrels per day (bpd) from the current 267,000 bpd, Bapco CEO Pete Bartlett told Reuters.

Bapco currently receives 220,000-230,000 bpd of crude from state oil company Saudi Aramco and will import the same volume during the refinery's expansion, with commissioning scheduled for late 2022 or early 2023, Bartlett said.

In October 2018 Aramco and Bapco announced the commissioning of the AB-4, a new phase of the Saudi-Bahrain crude oil pipeline, capable of transporting up to 350,000 bpd, which would serve Bahrain's planned refinery expansion.

"We are on track," Bartlett said of the expansion.

The small non-OPEC Persian Gulf oil producer, with around 124.6 million barrels of proven reserves, gets its oil revenue from two fields: the onshore Bahrain field, and the offshore Abu Safah field, which is shared with Saudi Arabia. The Bahrain field produces around 50,000 bpd.

Bahrain and top oil exporter Saudi Arabia split revenues from the 300,000-bpd Abu



Safah field, where production is overseen by Aramco.

The refinery expansion and resulting production increase may prompt Bapco to focus more on spot trading, but the company is unlikely to establish its own trading joint venture like other national oil companies in the Middle East, Bartlett said.

Around 88 percent of the crude that Bapco refines comes from neighbouring Saudi Arabia, and the rest from Bahrain's field.

The refinery's expansion project financing — which is over \$4 billion in size — will be finalised in March, Bartlett said.

Bapco had awarded contracts for the project to a consortium comprising Technip-FMC, Samsung Engineering and Tecnicas Reunidas.

(Source: Reuters)

## UAE in compliance with OPEC and non-OPEC output curbs, says energy minister

The UAE has met, if not "exceeded", its compliance with the OPEC and non-Opec production cuts for February, as it continued to make voluntary output adjustments, Energy Minister tweeted on Sunday.

"We will continue to deliver on the OPEC & non-Opec commitment for voluntary production adjustments, until the global market is re-balanced," said Suhail Al Mazrouei.

We will continue to deliver on the OPEC & Non-OPEC commitment for voluntary production adjustments, until the global market is re-balanced.

The UAE's output at the end of January, according to secondary sources cited by OPEC, was 3.078 million barrels per day. Opec producers led by Saudi Arabia, the kingpin of the group, and members outside the alliance led by Russia, agreed in December to restrict production by 1.2 million bpd for six months starting January. The curbs were a response to the dramatic fall in oil prices, which had surged to a three-year high of \$86.29 per barrel, only to plunge by 40 per cent in December.

Rising US production and more supply in the markets due to the earlier efforts by OPEC to boost production, pushed the prices lower. Brent crude reached



\$65.74 per barrel at the end of last week.

Saudi Oil Minister, Khaled Al Falih, said separately to Reuters on Sunday, the US and China would continue to lead oil demand globally. It was also "too early" for the producers undertaking output cuts to reverse policy at OPEC's meeting in April, he said.

Global demand would grow by around 1.5 million bpd, said Al Falih.

Allocations by Saudi Aramco, the kingdom's state oil producer would remain at 9.8 million bpd.

"Aramco is finalizing their April allocations today or tomorrow, so we will know more on Monday. But my expectation is that April is going to be pretty much like March," Al Falih told Reuters.

(Source: The Tribune)

## Shale boom drives U.S. to take least OPEC crude in three decades

OPEC crude oil shipments to the world's largest economy sank to a thirty-year low as part of an effort by the cartel and its allies to balance supplies and counteract America's shale boom.

OPEC supply cuts that started in 2017 were extended in 2018. The end result was Saudi Arabia cutting exports to the U.S. by 9 percent to about 870,000 barrels

a day in 2018. OPEC as a whole sent 17 percent less than the year before, and the least since 1987, according to the latest U.S. government data.

Rapid production growth in the prolific Permian oil patch also sapped interest among American refiners for OPEC's deliveries. With the help of light oil, U.S. crude production hit a record 12 million

barrels a day and is expected to grow more into 2020, based on data from the Energy Information Administration.

An abundance of supply from shale wasn't only to blame for OPEC's withering exports to the U.S. Venezuela, the country with the world's largest crude oil reserves, has been struggling to maintain its production which has reached

the lowest levels since 1940s due in a large part to chronic mismanagement of its oil industry.

More recently political unrest and U.S.-led sanctions resulted in the Latin American producer sending just sent just half a million barrels a day to U.S. last year, the smallest volume since 1989.

(Source: Bloomberg)

## Why oil markets can't find a solid footing

There is a myriad of factors influencing current global oil prices. On the supply side there is what can be called a back and forth tension between the OPEC+ oil production cuts, led by Saudi Arabia who is exceeding its pledge as part of the deal reached in January to remove 1.2 million bpd of oil supply from the market, against the continued ramp up in U.S. oil production, led by unconventional oil production, predominantly from the Permian Basin.

The U.S. has now reached the 12.1 million bpd oil production point, and will likely see production above that level for the rest of 2019 as supply restraints in the Permian ease. U.S. oil output has increased a staggering 2 million bpd in just one year - making the U.S. the world's largest oil producer, ahead of both oil production heavyweights Russia and Saudi Arabia. Other supply-side factors include U.S. sanctions against both Iran and Venezuela that have removed barrels from would oil supply, as well as Libya, whose largest oil field recently started producing again, which could cause problems for the OPEC+ group of producers efforts to keep a check on oil supply.

### ■ Demand-side dynamics

The demand side of the current oil equation is also multifaceted. First, global economic growth is stagnating, not only in China due to the ongoing trade war with the U.S., but in numerous other regions as well. Yesterday, the OECD cut forecasts again for the global economy in 2019 and 2020, following on from previous downgrades in November, as it warned that trade disputes and uncertainty over Brexit would hit world commerce and businesses. The OECD forecast in its interim outlook report that the world economy would grow 3.3 percent in 2019 and 3.4 percent in 2020. Those forecasts show cuts of 0.2 percentage points for this year and 0.1 percentage points for 2020, compared to the OECD's last set of forecasts in November.



"High policy uncertainty, ongoing trade tensions, and further erosion of business and consumer confidence are all contributing to the slowdown," the OECD said in its report. "Substantial policy uncertainty remains in Europe, including over Brexit. A disorderly exit would raise the costs for European economies substantially," the report added.

### ■ OECD report

In addition to the OECD report, news broke on Friday that also weighed on concerns over oil demand growth going forward. Reuters reported that China's exports dropped the most in three years in February while imports fell for a third straight month, pointing to a further slowdown in the economy and stirring talk of a trade recession, despite a spate of support measures by Beijing. Chinese shares dropped by more than 4 percent on the news. The disclosure came just one day after the European Central Bank slashed growth

forecasts for the region.

In the U.S., job growth likely slowed to a five-month low in February, reports indicated on Friday, as tougher financial conditions set in. All of this disconcerting news will likely continue to confuse oil markets, which sometimes reacts to supply-side dynamics while sometimes responding to economic growth worries and oil demand concerns. The news also comes as Washington and Beijing continue to hammer out what looks like a reasonable shot at a trade deal. For Trump, besieged at home on nearly every front and coming just over a week after a disappointing summit with North Korea, a successful trade deal with China would, or at least should, draw some attention away from the current poisoned political discourse in Washington.

### ■ Trade war dangers

The danger for the U.S. side is that Trump, now eager for a trade deal win, could concede too quickly. However, even if a trade deal is reached, it will take considerable time for the removal of the current tit for tat tariffs to trickle down to the global economy. Moreover, no trade deal, with the prospect of tariffs remaining in place and even more tariffs enacted, would take both the world economy and global oil markets into uncharted territory. The dynamic of interconnected global markets, unprecedented in its scale, is one that will continue to expand - something that both the U.S. and China should consider going forward.

In lockstep with this worsening global economic picture, global oil prices dropped nearly 2 percent on Friday. London-trade Brent crude futures, the global benchmark, tanked by \$1.22, 1.9 percent, to \$65.08/barrel AT 1040 GMT. NYMEX-traded, U.S. oil benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) futures also dropped, down 96 cents (1.7 percent) from the previous day, at \$55.71.

(Source: oilprice.com)

## Pradhan red flags higher crude oil prices to Saudi Arabia

India has raised concerns about the rising price of crude oil during a meeting with Minister of Energy, Industry and Mineral Resources of Saudi Arabia and Chairman of Saudi Aramco, Khalid A Al-Falih.

An official statement said, Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Dharmendra Pradhan raised concerns about increasing trend in global crude oil prices during a meeting with Falih. Pradhan also pointed to the need for uninterrupted supplies of crude oil and LPG (cooking gas) to India in view of the OPEC+ cuts.

Both Ministers also discussed about possible adverse impact of recent geopolitical developments on global oil market, the statement added.

Falih and Pradhan also reviewed various Saudi investment proposals in the Indian oil and gas sector, including the urgent steps to be taken to expedite the implementation of the first Joint Venture West Coast Refinery and Petrochemical Project in Maharashtra. The refinery cum petrochemical project is estimated to cost \$ 44 billion, which will be the largest greenfield refinery in the world. Saudi Arabia's participation in Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) Program was also discussed.

The meeting was a follow-up to the first State visit of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in February this year.

Saudi Arabia is the second largest supplier of crude and LPG to India. In 2017-2018, India's crude oil imports from Saudi Arabia were 36.8 million ton, accounting for 16.7 per cent of total imports.

(Source: thehindubusinessline.com)

## China's State Grid promises further power price reductions

China's state-owned State Grid Corp promised further power price reductions for industrial and business users to support the economy, the company said on Friday.

The state-backed company said in a statement on its website that it plans to offer a 10 percent price reduction in the average electricity price.

State Grid will start the price cut in 2019, state news agency Xinhua reported on Friday.

Factory activity in China contracted to a three-year low in February as export orders fell at the fastest pace since the global financial crisis, highlighting deepening cracks in an economy facing weak demand at home and abroad.

China sought to shore up its slowing economy through billions of dollars in planned tax cuts and infrastructure spending, with economic growth at its weakest in almost 30 years due to softer domestic demand and a trade war with the United States.

(Source: Reuters)

## Venezuela hit by third day of blackouts

There were further blackouts across Venezuela on Saturday, plunging much of the strife-torn country in to darkness for a third day.

Netblocks, a U.S.-based civil society group that champions internet freedom, confirmed "a second, major national power outage affecting critical infrastructure" across Venezuela, knocking out 96 percent of the country's telecommunications network.

President Nicolás Maduro blamed saboteurs for what he described as "the most serious electrical attack that any Latin American country has been subjected to in its history".

Speaking to a crowd of supporters in Caracas, Maduro said the government had managed to restore power to 70 percent of the country following Thursday's massive blackout only to be hit by another outage just before midday on Saturday.

By Saturday night, according to numerous reports on social media, many areas of the country were still in darkness and some had been without power for well over 48 hours.

While Maduro has blamed "saboteurs", analysts said the outage showed the country was running out of gasoline and diesel supplies, as no back-up thermoelectric plants came on stream as they usually do when there are failures at the problem-plagued Guri hydroelectric dam, which supplies most of Venezuela's electricity.

The outages are the culmination of an economic unravelling that follows years of hyperinflation and collapsing oil output, capped by tough U.S. energy sanctions.

The January 28 measures ordered that around \$11bn of annual Venezuelan oil sales to the U.S. could only take place if the proceeds were diverted to Venezuela's parallel government, led by opposition leader Juan Guaidó.

Six weeks after the U.S. imposed the ban in a bid to starve Maduro's government of oil revenues, Caracas has had limited success in skirting the measure by turning to countries such as India and Russia to buy its oil and sell the crucial chemicals needed to keep its energy production going — as the blackout revealed.

Venezuela, which sits on the world's largest energy reserves, suffered major blackouts in 2008 and 2013, but both were resolved in less than six hours.

Venezuelan oil output has fallen by two-thirds since 2001 to around 1m barrels a day currently, a decline that long pre-dates the U.S. sanctions.

"The electricity war announced and led by U.S. imperialists against our country will be beaten. Nothing and nobody will conquer the people of [Simon] Bolívar and [Hugo] Chávez," Maduro said on Friday on Twitter at the height of the blackout, which left hospitals in darkness, and forced businesses and government offices to close. "Maximum patriotic unity!"

Yet despite such exhortations, shipping data shows that Caracas has had only partial success in sourcing new energy markets and suppliers of naphtha, a vital diluent needed to thin its sludge-like heavy crude so it can be piped from fields and upgraded into refinery-ready oil to make gasoline.

According to shipping data from Kpler, while U.S. imports of Venezuelan oil have dropped to 75,000 b/d in February from 300,000 b/d in January, Indian imports have jumped by 100,000 b/d to 400,000 b/d — a large rise but only a partial substitution.

"India is definitely playing a key role in mitigating the impact of the sanctions," said Patricia Ventura, director of IPD Latin America, an energy consultancy. "Most of the Venezuelan exports that would have gone to the U.S. are now going to India."

The lion share of those exports have gone to Reliance Industries, which operates a massive Indian refinery, Ventura said, while some are going to Nayara Energy, owned by the Russian state oil company Rosneft, which operates India's second-largest refiner.

(Source: Financial Times)



## Erdogan snubs the West but stops Turkish progress



By David Ignatius

For a scary snapshot of what a “post-American” world looks like, consider the rupture that has been developing through three administrations in the U.S.-Turkey relationship. Turkey has come to think it can call the shots, regardless of U.S. interests.

The prime mover has been President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Over the past decade, he has altered Turkey’s political geography - undoing the western-facing secular republic created by Kemal Ataturk and creating a neo-Ottoman Turkey that’s more aligned with its eastern neighbors, including Russia.

“Ever since the end of the Cold War, this relationship has been in trouble, because the common threat of the Soviet Union has disappeared,” argues Bulent Aliriza, who heads the Turkey Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

American presidents have tried to coerce and cajole Erdogan, but to little effect.

The two countries are now heading toward the most serious confrontation yet.

The Pentagon warned Monday that Turkey would face “grave consequences” if it went ahead with its planned purchase of a Russian S-400 air-defense system rather than the Patriot missiles the U.S. has offered.

NATO commander Gen. Curtis Scaparrotti Tuesday implored Ankara to “reconsider.”

Erdogan responded, in effect, by flipping the bird. “It’s done,” Erdogan said Wednesday of the S-400 purchase. “There can never be a turning back. This would not be ethical, it would be immoral. Nobody should ask us to lick up what we spat.”

Erdogan’s defiant decision comes despite U.S. warnings that Turkey was jeopardizing its role as a partner in building the F-35 fighter - the very weapon the S-400 is designed to shoot down. Having the rival weapons systems in the same country could compromise the security of the F-35, U.S. officials believe. They are now scrambling with Lockheed Martin, the lead contractor, to find alternative sources for fuselage parts and hundreds of other F-35 components that were to be made in Turkey.

“We have to take them [the Turkish government] at their word,” a senior official in U.S. President Donald Trump’s administration said.

“We have a responsibility on our side to take the steps that are necessary.”

“Turkey is a totally unreliable ally,” argues Eric Edelman, who served as U.S. ambassador to Ankara from 2003 to 2005. Edelman was warning about Erdogan’s “authoritarian loner streak” back then, in a January 2004 cable revealed by WikiLeaks: “Erdogan has traits which render him seriously vulnerable to miscalculating the political dynamic, especially in foreign affairs.”

The Turkish pendulum has been swinging away from the West, despite attempts by the last three U.S. presidents to reassure the Turkish leader.

President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama both pushed Europe to admit Turkey into the European Union; Obama treated Erdogan as a model Muslim leader during the Arab Spring, courting the Turkish leader in more than 20 personal phone calls.

Trump embraced Erdogan as a kindred spirit and offered in December to withdraw U.S. troops from northeast Syria and let Turkish forces take over there, a position he has since reversed.

America and the NATO alliance are strong enough to survive Erdogan’s mischief.

The tragedy is that the Turkish leader has been sabotaging his own country’s progress, which had been one of the world’s great success stories. Erdogan crushed a thriving free press, enfeebled a once-strong military, jailed thousands of dissidents, and undermined the Turkish economy, once the jewel of the emerging markets.

Erdogan’s version of populist nationalism features strident attacks on the Kurdish Workers Party, or PKK, that approaches Kurdophobia.

A decade ago he was exploring a possible truce with PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan; now he blasts the group and its Syrian Kurdish affiliate, the YPG, as terrorist organizations - even though the YPG has been America’s best ally against the Daesh (ISIS).

There has been a string of anti-American moves by Erdogan in recent years: undermining U.S. sanctions against Iran; jailing pastor Andrew Brunson; blaming America for the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey; allowing his bodyguards to attack demonstrators in Washington in 2017; according to a tweet by Erdogan’s spokesman, Ibrahim Kalin.

In today’s messy world, America seems to be everyone’s target, and authoritarian leaders take potshots at will. And for now, sadly, Erdogan is a wrecking ball for Turkish efforts to build a modern, Western-style democracy. But eventually, the political pendulum swings back.

(Source: The Daily Star)

# The West’s rebuke of Saudi Arabia won’t change its course

By Ishaan Tharoor

The rhetorical attacks keep coming at Saudi Arabia from the West. On Thursday, the European Union signed on to a rare rebuke of the kingdom. At a session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, 36 countries, including all 28 member states of the continental bloc, called on the Saudis to release 10 imprisoned activists and cooperate with a UN inquiry into last year’s killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul. The statement was the first collective reprimand of Riyadh issued at the council since it was founded in 2006.

“We call on Saudi Arabia to take many full steps to ensure that all matters of the public including human rights defenders and journalists can freely and fully exercise their rights to freedom of expression, opinion, and association including online and without fear of reprisals,” read the text of the joint statement. It also urged Saudi Arabia “to disclose all information available” from its investigation into the death of Khashoggi, a prominent Saudi dissident voice who U.S. intelligence believes was abducted, tortured and killed on the orders of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Both the Trump administration and Saudi officials have sought to shield Mohammed from scrutiny, but that hasn’t dimmed the outrage of a host of Western governments and lawmakers. In Washington, Congress is still battling the White House over the latter’s flouting of a legal requirement to report to the Senate on the crown prince’s role in Khashoggi’s death. Though U.S. politicians remain bitterly divided on most issues, they have found an unusual consensus in their antipathy toward Riyadh.

On top of what happened to Khashoggi, there’s growing concern over the status of Walid Fitaichi, a Harvard-trained physician and a dual U.S.-Saudi national who has been detained by the Saudis since November 2017 and allegedly beaten and tortured on repeated occasions. According to the New York Times, friends close to Fitaichi believe his detention has to do with the palace intrigues surrounding the crown prince’s ruthless consolidation of power. And they have expressed their disquiet with President Trump’s silence over his incarceration.

“He’s gone full gangster,” said Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) at a hearing on Wednesday in reference to Mohammed. “and it’s difficult to work with a guy like that.” Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.) added that the Saudis’ “list of human rights violations is so long, it’s hard to comprehend what’s going on there.”

Several pieces of legislation are pending in



**Several pieces of legislation are pending in the Senate and House, including a bill calling for the end of U.S. support of the Saudi-led war in Yemen and a bipartisan-sponsored measure that would effectively mandate sanctions on the crown prince.**

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“Now the question is whether the Senate will act to uphold its authority under the law and prevent the Saudi ruler from escaping accountability for the gruesome murder and dismemberment of a journalist who was a Virginia resident and a contributor to The Post,” noted an editorial in The Post. “Not only the question of justice for Khashoggi is at issue: The crime is part of a pattern of reckless and destructive behavior by Mohammed bin Salman that ranges from the bombing of civilians in Yemen to the imprisonment and torture of a number of Saudi female activists, as well as a U.S. citizen.”

But the Saudis’ response has so far been categorical and unrepentant. “Interference in domestic affairs under the guise of defending human rights is in fact an attack on our sovereignty,” said Abdul Aziz Alwasil, the kingdom’s permanent representative in Geneva, in reaction to the European Union’s statement. Similar bullish statements came from the Saudi Foreign Ministry this year as members of Congress weighed the passage of a punitive bill.

That Riyadh has endured only the slightest course corrections amid months of controversy speaks, firstly, to the durability of the monarchy’s economic ties with a host of major powers. International political and business elites have shown themselves all too willing to overlook a regime’s record when it suits their interests. But it also speaks to the fact that despite their concerns over Khashoggi’s death, insiders in Washington cheer the Saudi push toward a more “normal” and secular modernity encouraged by Mohammed’s ambitious economic and social reform agenda. Movie theaters have sprung up, and women can now learn to drive — no matter that key female activists who clamored for these rights are still in prison.

Mohammed has championed these reforms by inculcating a new spirit of nationalism. “Saudi Arabia’s undergoing an aggressive nationalist rebranding, downplaying an austere religious doctrine associated abroad with terrorism, and promoting veneration of de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman as he pursues an economic overhaul,” noted Bloomberg News this week, exploring the extent to which overt nationalism is supplanting the kingdom’s traditional religious orthodoxy. “Amid efforts to maintain domestic support while redesigning the contract be-

tween state and citizen, traitors, not infidels, are the enemy.”

The lecturing from Western capitals, too, plays into this dynamic, deepening national feeling among many patriotic Saudis who have rallied around their prince in the face of “unbalanced” criticism from abroad, said Ali Shihabi, founder of the Arabia Foundation, a Washington think tank with close ties to Riyadh. He added that “inspiring nationalism is an objective” of Mohammed’s reform agenda.

Critics of the crown prince view him as a fundamentally destabilizing leader. Other experts argue that he’s here to stay. “It’s impossible to not see how much the country has changed” under Mohammed’s watch, said former U.S. diplomat Dennis Ross at a panel hosted by the Arabia Foundation last week, saying that though the crown prince may be “reckless,” the United States has much to gain from a “successful transformation” from Wahhabism to nationalism in Saudi Arabia.

In an op-ed written last year, Ross had even suggested the crown prince could turn into the Ataturk of the Persian Gulf, a reference to the pioneering, secularizing founder of the Turkish republic.

(Source: The Washington Post)

## Donald Trump is watching Sebastian Kurz

By Peter Rough

Some 10 years ago, a bright student from the University of Vienna visited the United States, by one account dropping by Trump Tower for kicks during his stay in New York City. Last month, at the age of 32, Sebastian Kurz returned to the United States as the youngest head of government in the world, this time to meet with President Donald Trump in the Oval Office.

It has been a meteoric rise for Kurz, who went from law student to chancellor of Austria in less than a decade. It is no accident that his success has coincided with an era of political transition across the West. Kurz is ideologically nimble: As one seasoned Austrian journalist put it to me, “He has only two political identities: anti-left and pro-Israel.” This has freed him to pursue policies, especially in the area of immigration, that are less dogmatic than those of the Austrian establishment, which has long advocated openness and globalization. The upshot has been one victory after another for the young chancellor. Since taking power in December 2017, his People’s Party has gained in popularity, winning or surpassing expectations in every regional election.

Perfectly at ease in the age of social media, Kurz is the most talented communicator in recent Austrian political history, rivaled only by the late right-wing populist Jörg Haider. Kurz exudes the same youthful confidence as Haider, whose populist rebellion transfixed Europe for decades. His politics are decidedly different, however. Kurz is the protégé of Wolfgang Schüssel, the conservative chancellor who cut Haider’s Freedom Party down to size in the early 2000s. Like Schüssel, Kurz has entered into a coalition with the Freedom Party with the same goal in mind. Aside from a few populist reforms, he has focused mostly on implementing economic orthodoxy in the all-important finance ministry, which his pro-business party has controlled since Schüssel’s day. Indeed, Kurz is more mainstream than populist. In September 2018, when Austria held the European Union presidency, he even publicly supported EU sanctions against Hungary’s President Viktor Orban. As one prominent German analyst said to me of Kurz, “He’s trying to save the system rather than destroy it.”

The Trump administration has taken note of Kurz’s success. In the larger session following the Oval Office meeting in February, the Americans surprised Kurz, whose delegation did not include a single cabinet minister, by assembling virtually the entire national leadership, from the vice president and secretary of state to the national security advisor and the secretary of energy. The signal was clear: Kurz, in the White House’s view, has distinguished himself sufficiently to merit special attention and represents the future of Eu-



**Austria’s young chancellor has become a major player in Europe. The White House has taken notice.**

ropean politics.

As the Austrian foreign minister, Kurz was a major player in crafting the European response to the refugee crisis of 2015. During his campaign for chancellor, he rarely missed an opportunity to discuss his greatest accomplishment: the closing of the so-called Balkan refugee route. On account of its history, Vienna maintains strong links into the Balkans and across the Visegrad states of Central Europe. During his talks with Trump, for example, Kurz urged the United States to utilize its influence in Pristina to overcome ongoing problems between Kosovo and Serbia.

Austria is a small country, however. It cannot compete with Germany or even France on the world stage. From the start, therefore, Kurz has sought to turn this weakness into an opportunity. Apparently calculating that political equivocation by a small EU member state already outside of NATO will not materially weaken the West, Kurz has hedged between Russia and the United States in a way almost impossible for Berlin or Paris. In the past year alone, he has met with Russian President Vladimir Putin four times. Time and again, he has spoken of Austria as a bridge between east and west and denounced the formation of geopolitical blocs.

At home, it protects Kurz’s populist flank from his coalition partner, which has long advocated closer ties to Moscow. Sympathy for Russia runs wide and deep in Austria. In De-

cember 2016, the Freedom Party even signed a cooperation agreement with Putin’s United Russia party. Abroad, Kurz’s hedge has elevated Austria as a neutral arbiter and diplomatic hub. The government is proud that the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, known in German as the “Vienna accord,” was negotiated in Austria, already the headquarters of the International Atomic Energy Agency and OPEC. And it’s an open secret that Vienna also sought to host the first bilateral meeting between Presidents Trump and Putin, eventually losing out to Helsinki. At the White House last month, the Austrians reiterated their offer to host future such diplomatic gatherings. For a small country, even hosting events that shape global affairs is considered a major success.

So how to explain the entire U.S. national leadership gathering in the Cabinet Room for Kurz’s visit? After all, immigration aside, Trump and Kurz are on opposite sides of virtually every trans-Atlantic issue. When it comes to the Iran deal, the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, the Paris climate accords, and trans-Atlantic trade, Kurz has adopted the German position. On military spending and nuclear weapons, he has gone even further, openly advocating for less of both.

For Trump, it may be that Kurz’s support for talks with Russia fortifies his attempts at engagement with Putin. But neither the Austrians nor the Americans emphasized Russia in their descriptions of the White House meeting. Instead, Kurz offered another answer in interviews with Austrian television after leaving the White House. The message he would take back to Brussels, he emphasized, was that Europe needs to pick up its pace in the trade talks with the United States. A strategy of delay would merely lead to the imposition of further tariffs, which would only hurt Austrian workers. Instead of blind hostility toward Trump or dilatory tactics on trade, then, Kurz has offered himself as a partner willing to work things through with the United States. In today’s trans-Atlantic environment, that is no small thing.

That flexible attitude extends to Europe, where Kurz represents a new kind of thinking. Whereas other leaders march to the beat of an ever-closer union, Kurz has adapted to the times, supporting what outgoing European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker describes as “Doing less more efficiently.” In particular, Kurz champions the principle of subsidiarity, which pushes decision-making to the national or subnational level whenever possible. As he put it while still foreign minister, “What we don’t need is a union that lays down detailed rules governing the color of chips. What we do need, however, is a union that is able to guarantee security for its citizens.” This is music to the ears of the Trump administration.

(Source: Foreign Policy)



# Taliban views Washington unreliable, welshing on agreements

1 →

Below is the full text of the interview:  
■ Unlike Tehran, Washington held talks brokered by Islamabad directly with the Taliban and in absence of Kabul. How do you see the negotiations?

A: As a matter of fact, it is impossible that any peace talks lead to the positive result, while the Taliban rejects holding face to face talks with representatives from Kabul. It seems the move by the Taliban is a sort of bargain to have the higher hand in the possible future talks with the Afghan government. One may think that the U.S.-Taliban talks without any representatives from Afghanistan can be a negotiation's policy to pave the road to hold Taliban-Kabul direct talks in the future. Especially, the U.S. has also started negotiations with other regional powers namely India, Russia and Pakistan, and it may also negotiate the issue with China and Iran, too; not to mention, not all of the negotiations are done through diplomatic means. However, it seems Washington is pursuing its own policy of serving its national interests in the region, rather than being concerned with Afghanistan's security.

■ There is a history of unproductive talks between the Taliban and the U.S. Why did Pakistan broker another U.S.-Taliban peace talks, this time in the UAE?

A: The Taliban has always viewed the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan as of its



supporters. Contribution of these countries to such negotiations reassures the Taliban that the U.S. will stick to its words, as the Taliban knows Washington has a history of welshing on its agreements and cannot be trusted alone. This is why the Taliban allows Pakistan to get involved. On the other hand, Islamabad's move to broker the UAE talks is to take advantages of the current unrest in Afghanistan. Pakistan is obtaining credit out of brokering the talks and getting the

Taliban to the negotiations table, to cover up its economic problems within its borders, as well as its international isolations. Pakistan knows it very well that in the long term, the interests of the U.S., China and even India lie in maintaining the security in Afghanistan. Pakistan is the historic backer of the Taliban, and now it is playing the role of peace negotiator.

■ The Taliban has rejected Afghanistan's role in the peace talks. Why does the

Taliban discuss the truce with Washington, instead of Kabul?

A: The Taliban understands there is no way out but to participate in the peace negotiations. It also clearly knows peace talks will be inconclusive unless Afghanistan's government participates in the talks. Meanwhile, the Taliban leadership has made this impression among its members that the Afghan government is the puppet of other countries. The leadership of the Taliban tries to preserve its dignity among its members, by rejecting direct talks with Afghanistan's government for now. This is the cause that has led to the recent talks with the U.S. Despite the shortcomings, the current administration is Afghanistan's legitimate government whose representatives are needed to participate in the talks.

■ How do you assess the decision of Ashraf Ghani, the Afghan President, to replace top security chiefs and assign anti-Taliban officials amid the UAE talks?

A: The Taliban's move to reject attendance of Kabul's representatives in the current talks is to evince that Kabul is non-significant in the future peace talks. Kabul, on the other hand, made the counter move in a bid to have the higher hand in the possible future direct talks with the Taliban. Assigning anti-Taliban figures to such important positions means Kabul has plenty of options on the table.

## The mission of Man on Earth

By Abdullahi yusuf

**ABUJA** — In the name of Allah who states, "He who created death and life, that He may try which of you is best in deed; He is the exalted in might, Oft forgiving" Q14: 42 Peace and blessings of Allah be upon His noble servant, our master Muhammad and his oppressed progeny.

Before I proceed on the topic above, let me congratulate us on the advent of the sacred month. Rajab is the seventh month of Islamic calendar from the four sanctified. Muslims were generally encouraged to put in more effort to acquire the pleasure of Allah through prayers, Qur'anic recitation and charity among others. Of the most memorable historic events of the month was the birth of Imam Ali in the first of its great nights in the holy Kaaba.

Being the head of the prophet's household, the Ummah was enjoined to love him and his family as necessary reward for prophetic guidance "... no reward do I ask of you for this except the love of those near of kin..." Q42: 23. The youth forum of the Islamic Movement colorfully marks the event annually where the Imam's sterling virtues are highlighted for believers to emulate. I hope to take a look at his blessed life in remembrance of the historic event later. The Mission of Man on Earth The piece I want to discuss this week is the mission behind the creation of man. It is very unfortunate that most people are either ignorant or careless about this mission for which they were created and placed on earth. The philosophy behind life is very clear in Islam. Allah says "Behold, thy Lord said to the angels I will create a vicegerent on earth, they said Wilt thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? Whilst we do celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy (name) He said I know what ye know not" Q2: 30 we can clearly understand from the verse above that Allah has created man to live as His vicegerent on earth. This means that he should run his life strictly in accordance with the directives of Allah as contained in the noble Qur'an. So, it is part of this exercise to teach the children the essence of life, which is to worship Allah alone and not associate anything with him.

Allah states, "O you people! Worship your Guardian Lord, who created you and those who came before you; that you may become righteous. Who has made the earth your couch, and the heavens your canopy; and sent down rain from the heavens and brought forth therewith fruits for your sustenance; then set not up rivals unto Allah when ye know (the truth). Q2:21-22 Based on this, life has three stages; our living on earth, the interim stay in the grave, otherwise referred to as the life in the unseen and the life hereafter. All these three stages are important but most important of all is the life here as is the fieldwork of the two lives to come. Therefore, we must work harder to live as vicegerents of Allah so that we may acquire His pleasure and attain the greatest abode of His righteous servants in the hereafter. Therefore, in the cause of his life, man must

make sure that he properly understands and gives more attention to spiritual aspect of his being, which has greater impact and determines his hereafter. Here and hereafter are two accustomed expressions that simply refer to this life and the life after. Which of the two is more important? The earthly life of course, this is because, it is the seed for the life that comes after it. No doubt, all messengers of Allah were sent on this motive and no nation was left. In fact, Allah has told us the answer of the rebellious in a response to angels on the coming of the messengers "They will say, yes indeed a Warner did come to us, but we rejected him and said Allah never sent down any (message); ye are in nothing but a grave error! Q67:9 Running a Pleased Life Prosperous is he who purifies the soul and failed has he who soils it with sin and impurity. Q91: 9-10.

In a hadeeth, the prophet (S), every child is born on a pure nature, it is his parent that brings him up as a Christian or a Jew. Allah states, "we will give a pure and wholesome life to every one man or woman who acts righteously and has faith and we will reward them in accordance with the best of what they used to do" Q16: 97 On whatever capacity one lives in this world, he/she shall be judged based on his/her action. So, the trial of life covers the rich and the poor, scholar and ignorant, civil servant and the farmer just as it affects all and sundry. So, we must be very careful in our duty to Allah the Most High! And from the wisdom of Allah, the linking bridge is death that all souls must taste. We may ask what is death? Simply, death could be defined as an end to living. Life's end or stoppage from being alive. I could recall a little article I wrote during our university days on a similar appellation on which many commented including medical students.

Although we know about death, but we hardly think over it especially with regard to what comes after. When the Western scientists enumerate characteristics of living things, they simply say death is the final but unimportant end! One must ask himself some related questions, however. Is the death an end or a beginning? What is the wisdom behind death? Where do we go after death? What is the relation between the physical and spiritual aspects of a human being? And what are the lessons to learn from the death of others we witness? Regrettably, many people do not mind the religious teachings about death and therefore live unconscious of the related highlights. Most important thing I want to draw our attention to is the spiritual aspect, which is beyond the comprehension of a qualified medical doctor.

A doctor pronounces a man dead when the various systems of his body, such as circulatory and respiratory among others cease to function. The organs are there but no longer function and the doctor can neither restart nor give a kick. Allah says, "They will further say Had we but listened or used our intelligence we should not (now) be among the companions of the blazing fire. They will then confess their sins; but far from Allah's mercy are the companions of the blazing fire! Q67: 10-11 In the light of the above verses, we



can understand that Listening and Intelligence are very important criteria for good comprehension of the essence behind this life. As such, those that missed the guidance were perished in hell. May Allah protect us! The sermon of Luqman el- Hakeem to his son is very relevant where he admonished him to associate no partner with Allah, to be obedient to his parents, to be steadfast in prayers, bid people unto virtue and forbid vice, bear patience with whatever may befall him in the path of Allah, turn not his face in scorn and pride and not be indifferent towards people. Q31:19.

The psychological contribution of Dr Alexis Carrel, a French scholar, in his book, Reflections sur le conduite de la vie, Persian translation, Pages 99-100 is very relevant here and could traced from its sources. Rewards according To Deeds So, the righteous and the wicked are rewarded accordingly. "But give glad tidings to those who believe and work righteousness, that their portion is Garden, beneath which rivers flow. Every time they are fed with fruits there from, they say why, this is what we were fed with before, for they are given things in similitude and they have therein spouses purified; and they abide therein (forever)" Q2: 25 Imam Ali has said at times one's enemy is more helpful than one's friend because the latter makes one aware of his shortcomings leading him to overcome them. Therefore, the success behind this life is undoubtedly to live in accordance with the teachings of the creator and to attain His pleasure. The losers are those that wasted their lives by missing the guidance of Allah, running their lives in accordance with their wishes. Most people will not perceive this until they die. These are the ignorant, the careless that think they are in control but the real and actual controller is Allah, the Omnipotent and disposer of all affairs. I hope we will make the best use of our time to acquire the pleasure of our creator in this trial so that Allah might be pleased with us. While urging us to put in more efforts to achieve the pleasure of Allah, the Most High, the unconditional need for our goals, esteemed readers on the need to refer to Shi'a scholars, books and sites for more information and guidance, the need for the unconditional release of Sheikh el-Zakzaky and all his disciples cannot be over emphasised.

## Saudi seeking to hit Iran by pursuing closer ties with Israel: ex-U.S. diplomat

**TEHRAN (Tasnim)** — An American author and former diplomat deplored the Israeli regime as "the Apartheid Entity" and said Riyadh is seeking to change the government in Iran by pursuing closer ties with Tel Aviv.

"Saudi Middle East policies appear built on regime change in Iran and the Kingdom's overestimation of its self-importance," Michael Springmann, the former head of the American visa bureau in Saudi Arabia, said in an interview with the Tasnim News Agency.

"In my view, Saudi Arabia has one and only one goal in pursuing closer ties with Israel, the Apartheid Entity: the destruction of Iran," he said.

J. Michael Springmann served in the US government as a diplomat with the State Department's Foreign Service, with postings in Germany, India, and

Saudi Arabia. He left federal service and currently practices law in the Washington, DC, area. Springmann's works and interviews have been published in numerous foreign policy publications, including Covert Action Quarterly, Unclassified, Global Outlook, the Public Record, OpEdNews, Global Research and Foreign Policy Journal. He has written Visas for Al Qaeda: CIA Handouts That Rocked The World and a second book Goodbye, Europe? Hello, Chaos? Merkel's Migrant Bomb. Both are available on Amazon. The books' website is: www.michaelspringmann.com

The following is the full text of the interview:

■ As you know, the Israeli and Saudi regimes do not have any official diplomatic relations but media reports have surfaced indicating extensive behind-the-scenes

diplomatic and intelligence cooperation between the two. In your opinion, what goals is Riyadh pursuing by getting closer to Tel Aviv?

A: In my view, Saudi Arabia has one and only one goal in pursuing closer ties with Israel, the Apartheid Entity: the destruction of Iran. The Saudis have an inflated view of their own worth and their own power. Some of it is cultural and some of it is political. And they want to use this perceived dominance to topple the Islamic Republic.

As a whole, the Saudis and their government want to be the dominant force in the region. The largest country there, the birthplace of Islam, yet dominated by Wahhabi fanatics, the Kingdom apparently believes it has the right to dictate international policy. To do so, it needs allies.

Riyadh has America's backing, but even in the United States, long an enemy of Iran, Saudi excesses are beginning to alienate some influential politicians and parts of the news media. Therefore, the Kingdom is seeking extremist collaborators closer to hand. Israel, with its irrational hatred of Iran, fills the bill. Backing Riyadh with its hidden nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, Israel can help wreck the Islamic Republic—so long as someone else fights and dies in the process.

■ Recently, some media reports revealed secret links between top Saudi officials, including Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel al-Jubeir, and the Israeli spy agency, Mossad. Can we say that Israel has managed to infiltrate into Saudi Arabia and is dictating its policies to Riyadh? How do you see the future of relations between the two? →13

## How to analyze the new poll in Iowa?

1 → Although Biden has not yet officially announced his presence in the U.S. presidential election of 2020, some of his closers report high probability of his presence in the competition. However, Iowa's in-party election results can be a wave of overthrow or create a widespread affair for the winning candidate. Sanders and other Democratic candidates therefore have a strong focus on winning the election.

There is no doubt that in the near future there are other polls in Iowa and other U.S. states that could conflict with the recent poll! An issue that should not lead to surprise audiences.

## Zionism is disturbed by the pro-Iranian Iraq

1 → In the Iraqi Parliament there are politicians related to various factions, organizations and resistance groups, who back in the day defended their Homeland through destroying the western invaders. In all of these specified political actions, the main merit lies on the figures of the IRGC, which is step by step building a "new Iraq". But the most important thing is that Washington is aware of all these facts, and therefore Zionism too. But these two cannot do anything about the changes taking place in Iraq.



The worry and idle threats of Zionism are justified. Another country has now officially joined the ranks of the regional alliance built-up by Tehran under the name "Axis of Resistance". Zionism ad libit can build relations with the Gulf States, the Turks and neighboring dictatorships such as Jordan and Egypt, in the hope of creation of a "fruitful anti-Iranian union," but the reality is that the number of allies of IRI will eventually only be growing, simply because of the fact that every pro-Western dictatorship will sooner or later will come to the end, and therefore Zionism will come nearer the end.

## U.S. U-Turn: Afghans' Suffering Now Has No End

**TEHRAN (FNA)** — There is no end in sight for the suffering of people in Afghanistan because the Pentagon regime plans to keep its occupying troops in the war-torn country for five more years.

Under the new plan, ongoing U.S.-Taliban peace negotiations, designed to end the 18-year war, has a new proposal, with the Pentagon regime having finally offered a formal plan for withdrawing U.S. forces from Afghanistan. The plan would have half of the 14,000 U.S. troops leave Afghanistan within a matter of months, but then the rest would stay for as long as five years — and maybe longer.

It is wrong to assume that the end of the five years would see not only all U.S. troops out of Afghanistan, but also NATO troops. The U.S. has in the past made similar plans to withdraw all its troops but to no avail. There is no reason to think this time it will be otherwise.

And it's not clear what the Taliban's position is. That might be a tough sell for the Taliban. After resisting a U.S. occupation for 18 years, the Taliban's demand is to get the U.S. out of the country, and while the logistics of that might take awhile, five years is a very long time.

If anything, such a long time is likely to raise fears that the Pentagon regime is intentionally dragging its feet specifically to give U.S. officials time to change their minds and dishonor the deal, and keeping thousands of troops inside Afghanistan means President Trump, or his successor, could end up continuing the endless war.

Based on the U-turn in Trump's policy toward Afghanistan, therefore, it is time to recognize the importance and contribution of the United Nations and the international civil society to end America's endless war on Afghanistan. The new U.S. approach is ominous for the Afghan people, and will inevitably lead to further increases in civilian casualties. According to a report by the UN assistance mission in Afghanistan, deaths of Afghan women and children in the conflict reached a new high for the first six months of 2018.

Every day that the U.S. military stays in Afghanistan is indeed a victory for the Taliban and terrorist groups like ISIL and Al-Qaeda. The calculation couldn't be simpler. More people will be killed. And the war, President Trump says has cost American taxpayers, minimally, \$7 trillion dollars, with no end in sight will create greater costs in the next five years.

Indeed, every day the Afghan war and the others that have followed from it continue is but another triumphant day for the War Party in Washington and the Military-Industrial Complex. The wrongs the warmongers have committed, and continue to commit, in Afghanistan will not be righted until Americans begin to reject the madness of their government's rampant militarism, bloated military, and endless war.

As the Trump administration adjusts its five-year strategy toward Afghanistan, the critical issue that will determine its success or failure is how Afghans - from ordinary villagers to leaders - perceive U.S. intentions and deeds. Earning the Afghans' acceptance and support requires that the policy itself resonate with them.

That policy should therefore be geared toward fostering peace and reconciliation, reinstating farming, and rebuilding businesses, infrastructure, and commerce. Above all, a greater effort must be made to inform and consult Afghans at all levels and at every stage of the policy process. Last but not the least, all this should lead to a full U.S. troop withdrawal.

Far from it, the recent U.S. strategic shift is designed with a significant new focus to prolong the Afghan war and make it possible for American and NATO soldiers to occupy Afghanistan forever. Afghan leaders and people should reject this plan outright. It is in no way designed to end America's 18-year war.



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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.

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# E-prescribing system becomes operational in Iran

**HEALTH** **TEHRAN** — Electronic prescribing system - a technology framework that allows physicians to write and send prescriptions to a participating pharmacy electronically - has become operational in Iran.

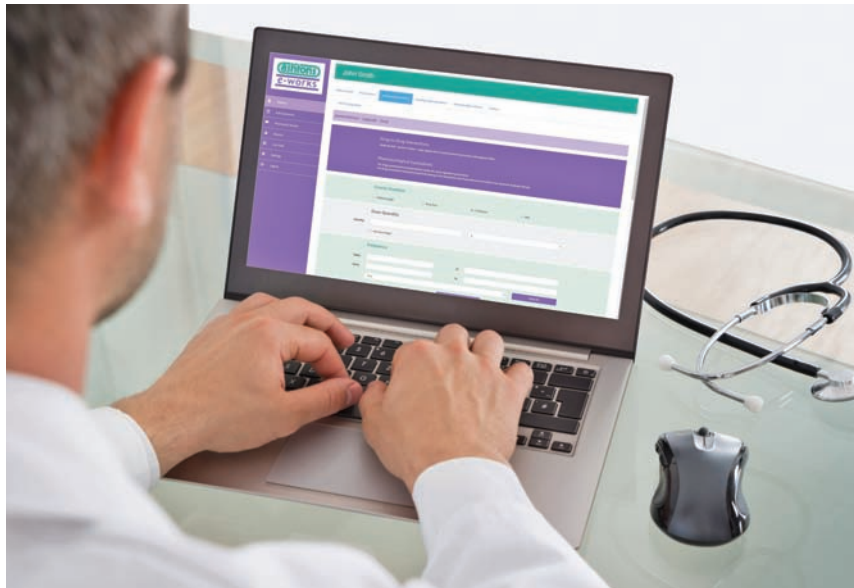
The project was first piloted in the south-eastern province of Kerman and it is now operational in 31 provinces nationwide, CEO of Salamat insurance company said, ISNA news agency reported on Sunday.

Taher Mouhebati further highlighted that complete implementation of the projects is time-consuming and entails cooperation among doctors and pharmacologists.

Health Minister Saeed Namaki also highlighted that the project will go into effect in one city in each province nationwide and electronic health record (EHR) will be also operational in the spring.

EHR is the systematized collection of patient and population electronically-stored health information in a digital format.

E-prescribing has been overlooked in the past and it is a part of developing electronic health record which would be also cost effective, the minister added.



Implementing e-governance, electronic health record, and electronic prescribing system can lead to transparency in the gov-

ernment and medical society, he concluded.

## ■ Benefits of e-prescribing

According to the carecloud.com, e-pre-

scribing offers many benefits for all involved from the prescriber in the patient room to the pharmacy employee who hands the patient the prescription.

E-Prescribing gives prescribers full insight into a patient's previous prescription history at the click of a button.

It would prevent prescription drug errors. By utilizing e-prescribing, both the prescriber and those who handle the prescription along the way can feel assured they have given the patient the correct medication.

With e-prescribing, prescribers can track if patients fill prescriptions, giving physicians the ability to counsel patients on medication management if needed.

Prescribers can also follow how often prescriptions of controlled substances are filled to monitor potential drug abuse.

Additionally many e-prescribing software programs make it easy for the prescriber to choose generic medicines which are more likely to be covered by the patient's insurance. When the patient incurs fewer costs, there is a better chance they will be compliant with the needed drug therapy.

## A third person may have become HIV-free after a bone marrow transplant



Following news of a man in the UK who has been free of HIV since his cancer treatment, a similar case has been reported by researchers who treated a patient in Germany. Together, they add to evidence that it may be possible to cure HIV.

The virus infects cells of the immune system, which are made in the bone marrow. A man known as the "Berlin patient" was the first person to become HIV-free after cancer treatment, back in 2007. To treat his leukaemia – a cancer of the immune system – he was given a treatment that involved killing nearly all his immune cells with radiotherapy or drugs, and then replacing them with cells from a donor. This donor was naturally resistant to HIV, thanks to a rare but natural mutation in a gene called CCR5.

Since then, no one else had HIV eliminated from their body in the same way, until a second case was announced last week. This person, known as the London patient, was given bone marrow from a donor with the CCR5 mutation as a treatment for Hodgkin's lymphoma, another immune cell cancer. He was advised to stop taking the antiviral drugs that keep the virus in check about a year afterwards. Eighteen months later, the virus hasn't returned.

A possible third case was then announced today, at the Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections in Seattle. Biopsies from the gut and lymph nodes of this "Düsseldorf patient" show no infectious HIV after three months off antiviral drugs, says Annemarie Wensing of University Medical Center Utrecht in the Netherlands, who worked on this case.

Researchers are tracking the few other people who have HIV and have then had a bone marrow transplant from someone with the CCR5 mutation in a collaboration called IciStem. As well as the three reported so far, there are two others who haven't yet stopped taking antiviral medications, says Javier Martinez-Picado of the IrsiCaixa AIDS Research Institute in Barcelona.

Bone marrow transplants can't be used for people with HIV who don't have cancer, because they carry considerable risks and are only used as a last resort. But the fact that the approach seems to work could point the way to other strategies for a cure. One possible method might be to use gene editing to mutate the CCR5 gene in a person's own immune cells.

(Source: newscientist.com)

## MMR vaccine does not cause autism, study of over 650,000 children finds

A huge new study has become the latest research to confirm the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine does not cause autism, despite continued warnings by anti-vaccination advocates.

Data from more than 650,000 children showed there was no link between the MMR jab and the developmental problem, which affects how people communicate and interact.

The findings by a Danish team were intended to reassure the growing number of people making the unfounded link between vaccines and conditions including autism.

They come after a 30 per cent rise in the number of measles cases being reported, which the World Health Organization has attributed in part to parents shunning vaccines.

Alongside pandemics, climate change and HIV, WHO listed so-called "anti-vax" ideas as one of the biggest threats to global health in 2019.

While vaccines themselves come with minimal risk, measles is a highly infectious disease that can sometimes cause seizures, brain inflammation and even death.

MMR vaccines are distributed free to all children on the

NHS, and yet the number of children receiving them in the UK each year has been falling.

Doubts about the vaccine were initially sparked by the discredited former physician Andrew Wakefield, who published a since retracted paper suggesting a link between MMR and autism in 1998.

Despite being thoroughly disproved, this theory has helped fuel a rise in measles outbreaks from the U.S. to Europe in recent years as anti-vaxer parents refuse to vaccinate their children. "Parents should not skip the vaccine out of fear for autism," lead study author Dr Anders Hviid of the Statens Serum Institut told Reuters.

"The dangers of not vaccinating includes a resurgence in measles which we are seeing signs of today in the form of outbreaks."

In their study, the team – which had previously undertaken one of the first studies to discredit Mr Wakefield's ideas – followed up their cohort of children until some of them were 14.

Around 1 per cent of the children developed autism, but there was no significant different in rates of autism between those who had the jab and those that did not.

This was even the case among children at higher risk of autism due to having a sibling that already had the condition. They published their findings in the Annals of Internal Medicine.

In a piece written to accompany the study, Dr Saad Omer and Dr Inci Yildirim from Emory University said it was worth carrying out such extensive research to hammer home the truth about vaccines and autism.

They lamented the current situation, where conspiracy theories spreading online had led to a "fact-resistant world". "In an ideal world, vaccine safety research would be conducted only to evaluate scientifically grounded hypotheses, not in response to the conspiracy du jour," they wrote.

"In reality, hypotheses propagated by vaccine sceptics can affect public confidence in vaccines."

(Source: The Independent)

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## Knowledge-based company to establish advanced biotech factory



➔ The factory's main focus would be on monoclonal antibodies in immunotherapy, which is a crucial treatment in the body's immunity system, she added.

Monoclonal antibodies (mAb or moAb) are antibodies that are made by identical immune cells that are all clones of a unique parent cell. Monoclonal antibodies can have a monovalent affinity, in that they bind to the same epitope (the part of an antigen that is recognized by the antibody).

The blood pressure medication would be the first product of the factory, which will be available at the national market, she said.

The innovation and prosperity fund supports the factory's products to be available in the Iranian market and it can be exported to other countries in the near future, she said.

In February 2019, secretary of biotech development center (BioDC) at science and technology vice-presidency Mostafa Qanei said that there are 146 biopharmaceuticals in the global market, out of which, 22 items are available in Iran which are monoclonal antibodies and recombinant proteins.

He said that the domestically manufacturing of biotechnology products has so far saved one billion dollars for the country.

Previously in October 2018, the biotech development center (BioDC) announced that medicine is on top of the list of exports of biotechnology products in Iran.

### ■ Biotechnology in medicine

According to economywatch.com, the benefits of biotechnology in medicine are without doubt staggering. Although many exciting developments have taken place in the past few years, with continuing research, it is expected that more and more revolutionary procedures, substances, and devices will be developed to improve and enhance human life. When it comes to biotechnology in medicine, there are many different things that have already been discovered and even more on the near horizon.

For instance, today's biotechnology is now being used to develop much-needed vaccines, new drugs to combat tough illnesses, creating xenotransplant organs, developing a variety of nanomedical diagnostic techniques, and even determining origins of disease.

## Supreme council supports cyberspace development: official



TECHNOLOGY DESK TEHRAN — The Supreme Cyberspace Council is against cyberspace blocking and supports the development of cyberspace in the country, secretary of the council Abolhassan Firouzabadi said on Saturday.

However it does not mean that Iran obeys foreign technological companies, he added, Mehr reported.

“Just like the system and platform imported from Western countries, our mindset about cyberspace is described by the West as well,” he said.

The issue makes some problems for Iran's cyberspace government since the government cannot guarantee the jobs created based on these platforms, he lamented.

He pointed to the blocking of Iranian application on iOS systems last week, which makes a problem for digital marketing in the country. Iranian users of iOS systems do not have access to some of their applications which they have installed from other sources than App Store from February 27. Apple Inc. has blocked enterprise programs due to its rule for app distribution policy and the Apple users have access to apps through App Store, which is not applicable for Iranian developer during past years due to U.S. sanctions.

He said that the digital economy is formed beyond governments and it may lead to some problems for marketing based on that.

The clean cyberspace does not limit to content but Linked Data Platform (LDP) and architecture of cyberspace, he said, adding that the cyberspace provides an opportunity to create contents promoting values and norms at the national level.

“The cyberspace is a chance for different social and religious groups to meet and know more about each other.”

The public produces content for the cyberspace but what is the role of government, he asked.

“We should have players in cyberspace. National players are aware of foreign platforms,” he said.

The council aims to create national systems for cyberspace like Iran's National Information Network and video games as well as Iranian messaging apps, he concluded.

In April 2018, the National Center for Cyberspace, an organization established by the Supreme Cyberspace Council, introduced five messaging applications have been approved by Soroush, Gap, iGap, BisPhone Plus, and Wispi as alternatives for Telegram.

Telegram, with 40 million subscribers in Iran, was on the top list of messaging applications in the country. Hundreds of people and companies in Iran used the app for their marketing and sales.

Domestic messaging applications eye officials for further support to help them to convince subscribers to move to another application.

# Koodakonline awards selected apps for kids

TECHNOLOGY DESK TEHRAN — Four apps for kids, developed by Iranian companies, were selected on Sunday as the best at the closing ceremony of Koodakonline, a festival on creating appropriate content for children and young adults.

The kids' launcher Nabat, children messaging app Medad, story and song application Touchstan and the application for children animation Aio Tune were named winners of the festival.

During the event, 20 ideas were also selected, which are supported by the Information and Telecommunication Technology (ICT) Ministry.

We have already 13 million children and young adults who are born in cyberspace era, ICT Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi said during the event.

The new generation lives with cyberspace before they start their education and this makes them one of the most vulnerable ones in cyberspace, he said.

“Hence, without considering their cultural and social situation, we actually miss the future generation,” he said.

Azari Jahromi said that the new gener-



**‘The new generation lives with cyberspace before they start their education and this makes them one of the most vulnerable ones in cyberspace’**

ation knows about anti filter apps and the blocking of internet websites and apps is not

the solution for them.

The ICT Ministry teaches 50 NGO teams

## Knowledge-based ecosystem needs new ideas for investment: VP



TECHNOLOGY DESK TEHRAN — Knowledge-based ecosystem needs new ideas for investment, the vice president for science and technology Sourena Sattari announced, IRNA reported on Sunday.

The research and innovation funds pave the way for modern investment while in the traditional system the financial issues are solved by banks and investment funds, he said, adding that research and innovation funds play an important role in granting facilities and promote investment.

He made the remarks during a meeting on cooperation between the innovation and prosperity fund affiliated to the vice presidency for science and technology and research and technology funds of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology.

“With the expansion of venture capitals to exchange and insurance fields, we can provide a serious change in the innovation ecosystem and this is one of the duties of innovation and prosperity fund.”

Such cooperation provides financial infrastructure for innovation and prosperity fund, he said.

The research and innovation funds' branches in different provinces have a great role in the distribution of financial facilities for companies, he added.

During the ceremony, the science minister Mansour Gholami said that cooperation can be a turning point in support of technological ideas.

The knowledge-based companies and startups need venture capitals, which is possible through research and technology funds, he said.

## Vice presidency, SSIC to boost innovation ecosystem



The vice president for science and technology Sourena Sattari (r) and the SSIC director Mohammad Rezvanifar

TECHNOLOGY DESK TEHRAN — The vice presidency for science and technology and the Social Security Investment Company (SSIC, also known by its Persian acronym SHASTA) signed an agreement to boost innovation ecosystem.

The agreement was signed by VP Sourena Sattari and SSIC Director Mohammad Rezvanifar during a meeting on Saturday, IRNA reported. According to the agreement, the potentialities of SSIC and affiliated companies would be used for the development of the knowledge economy and promoting of science and technology.

The development of the market for startups provided services and products related to SSIC, providing systematic support for

commercialization of startups and knowledge-based companies are amongst the issues discussed in the agreement.

The vice presidency is responsible for providing models for financial service and facilities to knowledge-based companies affiliated to SSIC.

SSIC is active in different fields of medicine, industries, oil and petrochemicals and mining, which provides a variety of opportunities for startups and knowledge-based companies' activities, Rezvanifar said.

SSIC has a great capacity for development of an innovation ecosystem, Sattari said.

Medicine is one of the main fields in which, the pharmaceutical companies can cooperate with SSIC, he added.

## Technology and learning in the classroom: six tips to get the balance right



fantastic way to ensure educational benefit when using technology.

Nearly half (44%) of current jobs are at high risk of being digitally disrupted in the next 20 years. The fastest-growing jobs now require multimodal design and digital communication skills, for example engineering or architecture.

### ■ Channel creativity

Look for opportunities for students to produce rather than consume, and to be interactive and creative. Don't just play educational games - make them. Students shouldn't be sitting passively watching a screen, or sitting through lecture-style content while watching the teacher flip through slides.

Avoid educational software that simply requires students to engage in closed answer, “fill-in-the-blank” responses. While sometimes useful for memorizing information, such as spelling words, using platforms that encourage creativity and support children to think for themselves is better for learning.

Try to choose technologies that support interactivity, critical thinking, and problem solving. Examples include educational games that allow exploration, or websites that encourage the learner to solve problems, write basic code, express their creativity or build something.

### ■ Choose collaboration

Give students opportunities to work together in learning and engaging with digital media. Collaborative digital activities can be used to engage students in higher order thinking skills and explore content in depth with the support of classmates.

This includes devices and software that allow multi-user learning and encourage students to interact with each other. This includes interactive discussion boards, or applications such as “minecraft for education” where students can experience a digital learning environment together.

Incorporate “distributed expertise”, where classmates help each other out in areas of digital strength, rather than seeing the teacher as the only expert. This has been shown to have great benefits in developing students' soft-skills (such as creative thinking, communication and teamwork).

### ■ Movement is key

Many digital technologies involve more sensory involvement than in the past. Using virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR) or mixed reality (also called hybrid reality - where digital and physical objects co-exist), can encourage children to be active physically while using their brains.

A student uses a tablet during a science lesson to play a game that assesses their understanding of the content covered. Christian Moro/Author Provided

Research shows moving can help keep the brain active. Cognition is deeply connected to the child's bodily interactions with the world, so technology use and learning doesn't need to be motionless!

This can include placing QR-codes (markers) around the room for them to scan, or the student using augmented reality apps where their smartphone or tablet is used to render 3D objects, text or animations on the screen when the camera is pointed towards a marker. An example of software capable of performing this includes Augment, which also offers specific instructions and accounts for educators.

### ■ Media-free moments

While research supports the many benefits of using modern technologies for learning, there are guidelines for managing time with technology. Teachers and parents should establish media-free zones, and set content and time limits appropriate to age and the curriculum.

Removing smartphones, turning off computers and keeping an area completely technology-free at regular times during the day is important to establish healthy habits with technology.

### ■ Support cyber citizenship

Teach students digital etiquette, how to present and protect themselves online, and how to be critically literate. Model good digital citizenship and behaviour, and always be ready to learn. Adults can't assume children know how to interact safely and responsibly online. Research shows critical skills are often lacking among primary students. Teachers and parents have an important responsibility to show students how to critically evaluate how reliable online sources and other media are.

(Source: theconversation.com)



# Rain may be causing a worrying amount of ice to melt in Greenland, says researcher

Rain is becoming more common across Greenland's ice sheet and it may be playing an important role in rising sea levels.

Greenland's 1.7 million-square-kilometer ice sheet contains enough fresh water to flood coastal cities around the world. Warm air over the sheet is causing it to melt, but new work reveals that rainfall is also causing more melting than previously thought.

An analysis of satellite and weather station records suggests that around 300 melt events in Greenland between 1979 and 2012 were linked to rainfall. Over this time, rain-associated melting became twice as frequent in summer, and three times as frequent in winter. Rain now seems to account for 28 per cent of the ice sheet's melt.

The analysis highlights an under-monitored area, says Robin Smith at the University of Reading, UK, who was not involved in the study. "It tells us that we need to pay more attention to all the processes, and all the weather, all-year round, not just what's obvious," he said.

## Total amount of meltwater

Nicholas Barrand at the University of Birmingham, UK, says rainfall could have "profound effects" on the density of Greenland's snowpack, where meltwater goes and the total amount of meltwater that runs off the sheet into the sea. "Each of these make up the Greenland ice sheet's contribution to global sea level rise, and will require close monitoring in the coming years," he says.

When rain falls, its warmth can melt snow or ice. It is becoming more common



in Greenland due to higher temperatures, and is increasingly falling further north, even during the winter in some areas.

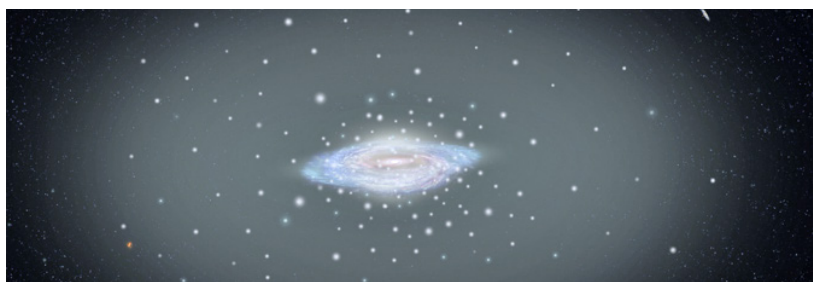
As more rain falls, more of Greenland's ice sheet becomes covered in ice instead of

snow. Come the summer, this ice reflects less of the sun's energy, exacerbating summer melting.

Historically, Greenland's melt season has run between May and August, but rainfall

**An analysis of satellite and weather station records suggests that around 300 melt events in Greenland between 1979 and 2012 were linked to rainfall.**

## Weight of Milky Way by using data from Hubble and Gaia space telescopes



The Milky Way is our galactic neighborhood, but there are still plenty of mysteries in its depths. Now, scientists have solved one of the riddle of the Milky Way's weight by combining fresh data from the Gaia mission and the Hubble Space Telescope.

The team's efforts resulted in the most accurate approximation of the galaxy's weight.

The galaxy weighs in at about 1.5 trillion solar masses within a radius of 129,000 light-years from the center, according to a release from the European Southern Observatory.

For a long time, scientists were divided about the actual weight of the galaxy, due to the varying efforts used to measure the distribution of dark matter.

Dark matter makes up 90 percent of the galaxy's mass, but European Southern Observatory's Laura Watkins reveals that it is not possible to see and observe dark matter directly, which made it difficult to get an accurate figure for the scientists.

## The star clusters

In these latest calculations, the team measured the velocities of the star clusters orbiting the galaxy instead.

The "more massive a galaxy, the faster its clusters move under the pull of its gravity" N. Wyn Evans of the University of Cambridge in United Kingdom explains. "Most previous measurements have found the speed at which a cluster is approaching or receding from Earth that is the velocity along our line of sight. However, we were

able to also measure the sideways motion of the clusters, from which the total velocity, and consequently the galactic mass, can be calculated."

The NASA/ESA Hubble Space Telescope and the ESA Gaia mission joined forces to provide the recent and most accurate estimate of the Milky Way's mass.

In the statement from ESA, the organization called it "a striking example of multi-mission astronomy."

## Hubble Telescope data

Data from the Gaia mission is key with measurements of these globular clusters extending up to 65,000 light-years away from Earth, while the observations from Hubble added data from globular clusters as far as 130,000 light-years from the planet.

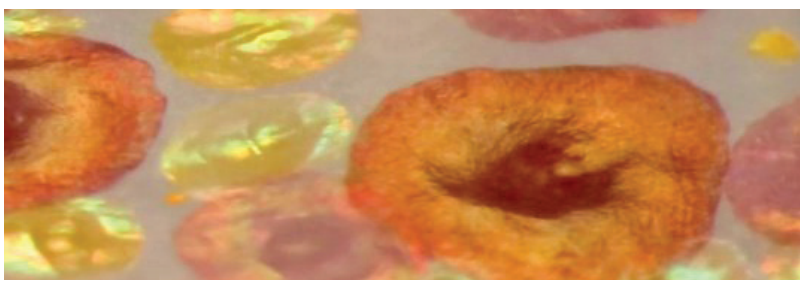
Roeland P. van der Marel of the Space Telescope Science Institute calls the team lucky for having access to informative data from two different sources. He adds that it would have been impossible to accomplish without these two telescopes.

Now, the results of the research on Milky Way's mass can open up to new answers to many astrophysical questions.

"One reason it's important to measure the Milky Way is that we live here, it's the closest galaxy we have," Watkins says in a report from The Guardian. "A lot of the time, we try to understand the universe by putting it in context of the Milky Way."

(Source: techtimes.com)

## Elegant interplay of coloration strategies is discovered in squid's smart skin



In the blink of an eye, the squid's "smart skin" switches color and pattern for the purpose of camouflage or sexual signaling, a virtuosic display that has long fascinated scientists.

Now, collaborators from Northeastern University and the Marine Biological Laboratory (MBL) report a paradigm-shifting discovery in how specialized organs in squid skin, called chromatophores, contribute to the feat via an elegant interplay of pigmentary action and structural coloration. Their study, which brings bio-inspired engineers ever closer to building smart skin, is published in Nature Communications.

"People have been trying to build devices that can mimic cephalopod color change for a long time by using off-the-shelf components," says Leila Deravi, an assistant professor of chemistry and chemical biology at Northeastern, whose lab led the study. "Nobody has come anywhere near the speed and sophistication of how they actually work."

Deravi and MBL Senior Scientist Roger Hanlon, a leading expert on camouflage in cephalopods (squid, octopuses, and cuttlefish), led an interdisciplinary team of researchers to investigate squid dynamic coloration on a molecular level.

## Two types of structures

Squid skin contains two types of structures that manipulate light to produce various colors. The chromatophores contain elastic sacs of pigment that stretch rapidly

means melting is now happening in winter too. The "rain events are extremely important because they are one of the only triggers for melting in winter," says Marco Tedesco of Columbia University in New York, who was involved in the analysis.

## Global warming

However, the team acknowledge that the period they studied was particularly warm. Natural variability means the decades between 1979 and 2012 were hotter than average, on top of the long-term trend of global warming, so are not necessarily a good guide to future melting.

Jason Box at the Geological Survey of Denmark and Greenland says that if the period had extended to 2017, the trend wouldn't have been so strong. That's because 2012, which saw intense melting in Greenland, was the end of a string of years with increasing temperatures.

Rainfall's role in Greenland's melting ice sheet has ramifications not just for sea level rises, which still need to be quantified, but for undertaking vital climate science too.

Liz Thomas of the British Antarctic Survey in Cambridge, UK, is heading to Greenland this summer to drill ice cores to study signs of previous climate change. "From my perspective, new evidence of rain in the winter and increased melting is alarming. Surface melt water will percolate through the ice and potentially wash away the valuable climate proxies contained in ice cores," she says.

(Source: newscientist.com)

## In a breakthrough research scientists store energy with egg shells

For the first time, a research group successfully uses egg shells as an electrode for energy storage.

Chicken eggs are used worldwide in large quantities in the food, pharmaceutical, and manufacturing industries, and for household purposes. However, after the egg is used, the shells are discarded and disposed of as bio-waste in landfills. The shell consists of a composite of calcium carbonate (CaCO<sub>3</sub>) and a protein-rich fiber membrane.

"Surprisingly, there are always new examples in which natural substances have good to very good prerequisites for producing materials for electrochemical storage," explains Professor Maximilian Fichtner from the Helmholtz Institute Ulm.

Together with his Australian colleagues, Fichtner discovered the



promising electrochemical properties of chicken egg shells, which are able to store lithium well due to their high CaCO<sub>3</sub> rate. The ?ne eggshell powders are used as an electrode against a metallic lithium anode in a non-aqueous electrolyte.

Theoreon, the cell maintained an excellent capacitance retention of 92% over 1000 cycles. Both the calcified shell and the shell membranes, including the inner and outer membranes, were used from the egg shells. The researchers washed, oven dried and crushed the shells to a powder and obtained a conductive material.

Egg shell waste has been used in a number of applications, including bioceramics, cosmetics and the dye industry. At the same time, the protein-rich, fibrous egg shell membrane has functioned as a separator in supercapacitors.

Biowaste has now been used as an electrode for the first time worldwide. Further research and a detailed understanding of the electrochemical and physical behavior of the material is needed in order to improve its performance and to enable its widespread use.

(Source: Advanced Science News)

## If we blow up an asteroid, it might put itself back together: new study

Faced with the prospect of a sizable asteroid heading toward Earth and causing doomsday, humanity has come up with various responses.

Hollywood may reckon that the best way to destroy an errant space rock is with nuclear weapons. This is rarely the preferred option of experts, but using some sort of spacecraft system to smash an asteroid into small, harmless pieces is seen as a real-world possibility. A new study, looking at a gigantic space rock-on-space rock clash, hints at how utterly ineffective this type of asteroid assassination attempt may be.

Using computer models, scientists simulated a 4,000-foot asteroid smashing into a 15.5-mile asteroid at 11,200 miles per hour. Immediately after colliding, the large asteroid cracked considerably, with debris flowing outward like a cascade of Ping-Pong balls. Despite some deep fractures, the heart of the asteroid was not comprehensively damaged.

As time went on, the gravitational pull of the asteroid's resilient core was able to pull back ejected shards. It seems that asteroids don't just absorb mind-boggling amounts of damage, but, as previous work has hinted, they also are able to rebuild themselves.

Asteroid collisions and demolitions have been simulated many times in recent decades. Earlier studies suggested that large asteroids are full of internal scars because of their violent history, and that a fast enough impact would completely shatter them.

This hybrid model allowed them to more realistically see how an asteroid responds to being hit by a powerful projectile. It captured previously missing but vital small-scale details, including where fractures would appear and precisely how they would spread.

The study doesn't rule out using projectiles to destroy an incoming asteroid, Dr. El Mir said. But, he added, shattering a large asteroid may end up causing more problems than it solves. Turning a cannonball into shotgun-shell fragments could still result in Armageddon if the shards strike Earth.

NASA's Planetary Defense Coordination Office, which keeps an eye on asteroids and comets that will one day pass close to Earth, instead suggests changing a space rock's trajectory by giving it a small nudge well in advance of reaching our world.

(Source: NYT)

## Scientists just found a way to extract rare-Earth elements from a plentiful resource

Researchers have discovered a new way to get some of these elements out of phosphate rock waste (or phosphogypsum) in what could be a huge boost for clean energy development.

The trick is using organic acids produced by bacteria to do the hard work of extracting rare earth elements (REEs) from phosphogypsum. The researchers tried a number of bio-acid mixtures of mineral and organic acids to extract six REEs — yttrium, cerium, neodymium, samarium, europium and ytterbium.

The phosphate rock waste they were working with is watery at first, and forms a crust as it dries. In these experiments the researchers were primarily using gluconic acid, found naturally in fruits and honey, to tease out the rare earth elements trapped in the waste.

The team hopes the method could be scaled up, which could mean less of a reliance on REE mining, and on the harsh, toxic chemicals usually deployed to extract the elements from metal ores.

This new study only looked at synthetic phosphogypsum produced in the lab, so the next challenge is to see if it works on waste actually produced by the industry, generated in the production of phosphoric acid for fertilizers.

The good news is there's a lot of it — about 100,000 tons of these REEs end up in phosphate rock waste every year. Even though the elements only make up about 0.1 percent of phosphate rock, the amount of waste produced means the annual production of rare earth oxides could be almost doubled, in theory.

REEs are actually quite plentiful in Earth's crust, despite the "rare" in the name — but they're widely dispersed and difficult to get out, both practically and economically. China is currently in charge of 90 percent of REE production, but other countries are looking to pick up the slack.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

## Biologists have studied enzymes that help wheat to fight fungi

Scientists from I.M. Sechenov First Moscow State Medical University together with their Russian colleagues studied reaction of wheat plants to damage caused by pathogenic fungi. They examined activation of enzymes involved in cell death induced in response to infection. The research results and enzyme classification were published in the International Journal of Molecular Sciences.

Plant resistance to harmful microorganisms (pathogens) is largely determined by a set of enzymes encoded in DNA, which are involved in death of infected cells and prevent infection spreading. Such enzymes that provide protein breakdown are called proteases.

Despite the importance of wheat in agriculture and science, including biotechnology, reaction of these plants to pathogens is described only in general (for example, in these two papers), without focusing on specific proteins. The complexity of study refers to the fact that wheat, like most other plants, is polyploid. It means that each cell has several sets of chromosomes.

## Reaction of plants

In the case of wheat, it is attributed to the fact that Triticum aestivum (wheat species used in agriculture) were cultivated by crossbreeding of Triticum Urartu, Aegilops

tauschii and related species. As a result, wheat genome is complex and contains 107 thousand genes that is almost five times more than a human genome.

Wheat is exposed to various pathogens (bacteria, viruses, fungi), nematodes (roundworms) and insects. Some of them parasitize on living plant cells, slowing their growth (biotrophic pathogens), others feed on cell content that leads to its death (necrotrophic pathogens).

The scientists used two pathogens: biotrophic pathogen (Puccinia recondita), that causes wheat leaf rust, and necrotrophic pathogen (Stagonospora nodorum) that damages leaves, heads and grains.

The biologists studied 'Khakasskaya' and 'Daria' wheat cultivars to find out the impact of fungi infection on plants.

They used specific method that combines liquid chromatography and mass spectroscopy.

Liquid chromatography is a technique used to identify mixture of substances passing in a liquid flow through a tube filled with sorbent. Due to the fact that substances are absorbed in varying degrees, the mixture is divided into components.

Mass spectroscopy is a technique that ionizes neutral atoms and mole-



cules into charged ions based on their mass-to-charge ratio. It makes possible to accurately determine even complex organic compounds.

## Enzymes substitute each other

In total, the scientists discovered 1,544

enzymes that belong to five catalytic types of proteases: serine, cysteine, aspartic, threonine and metalloproteases. They determined that protease proportion common in different plant cultivars is lower than expected (about 60% vs. 79.3%). However, the differences (about 40%) are divided almost equally between several types of proteases, indicating that these enzymes are likely to substitute each other.

The study of proteases helped to predict specific sites in their structures. The process of hydrolysis in such regions may be activated in the course of proteolytic cascades. This chain reaction allows an organism to activate many enzymes quickly that help it to fight infection.

The detailed study of enzymes allowed to clarify their classification. The scientists have described homologs (the most similar proteins) for enzymes of several groups, and clarified position of these enzymes in a phylogenetic tree (it shows evolutionary distances between proteins). For example, scientists have determined that aspartate proteases that belong to different types differ to such an extent that they may not be related, but have acquired similar functions independently.

(Source: eurekaalert.org)







# 85% of Kuwaitis reject normalization with Israeli regime: survey

A recent opinion poll has found a large proportion of Kuwaitis oppose normalization of diplomatic relations with Israel, despite the fact that a number of countries in the Persian Gulf region are warming ties with Tel Aviv following years of clandestine contacts.

The survey, conducted by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, revealed that 85 percent of the respondents disagree with Kuwait's relations with Israel. Accordingly, 39 percent of that figure "disagree somewhat."

Moreover, 52 percent said they support the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas, which is in control of the besieged Gaza Strip, while 63 percent accept a proposal by the United States for Arab states to be involved in the so-called Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, Arabic-language New al-Khalij news website reported.

Support for the U.S. President Donald Trump among the 1.5 million Kuwaitis surveyed did not exceed five percent, the poll found, noting that 64 percent support Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Chinese President Xi Jinping comes out almost as well, with a 49-percent approval.

Additionally, 25 percent of those who participated in the poll said they feel positive about the Ansarullah (Houthi) movement in Yemen.

About the relationship with regional power house Iran, 52 percent said Kuwait City should maintain good ties with Tehran.

The poll noted that the overwhelming majority of the Kuwaitis believe their government has not been successful in the fight against corruption, while between 30 to 40 percent believe their government is working



well regarding women's rights, privacy and dealing with tax issues.

About 36 percent of the Kuwaitis think that it is important to listen to those who try to explain Islam in a more moderate and modern way.

The poll also revealed that 60 percent believe that internal political and economic reform is more important than any issue of external interests.

Kuwaitis' strong opposition to normalization with Israel comes as delegates from the House of Saud regime, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Egypt at a recent meeting of Arab states reportedly opposed bids condemning the normalization.

Russia's RT Arabic television news network reported on March 4 that Abdullah ibn Muhammad Al ash-Sheikh, the speaker of the Saudi regime's Consultative Assembly, together with his Emirati and Egyptian counterparts opposed a paragraph in the final communiqué of the 29th Conference of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union in the Jordanian capital city of Amman, which demands an end to efforts aimed at normalizing ties with Israel and condemns all forms of rapprochement with the occupying regime.

The paragraph states that "one of the most important steps to support Palestinian brethren requires the cessation of all forms of rapprochement and normalization with

the Israeli occupiers. Therefore, we call for resilience and steadfastness by blocking all the doors of normalization with Israel."

The paragraph remained intact in the final communiqué of the conference, rejecting any normalization of ties with the Israeli regime.

On February 17, a report published by Israeli Channel 13 television network said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had held a "secret meeting" with Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita last September.

Additionally, the Warsaw conference, a U.S.-sponsored gathering that was held in the Polish capital on February 13-14, brought together Netanyahu and representatives from a number of Arab states, including Oman, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Jordan and Egypt.

The Israeli regime also recently re-launched a "virtual embassy" in a bid to "promote dialogue" with the Persian Gulf Arab states.

In the most high-profile visit by an Israeli official to Persian Gulf kingdoms, Netanyahu in late November last year visited Oman, where he met Sultan Qaboos at the Bait al-Barakah Royal Palace in the coastal city of Seeb near the capital Muscat.

Israel's English-language daily newspaper The Jerusalem Post reported that the two sides discussed ways to advance the so-called Middle East peace process as well as a number of issues of mutual interest with regard to the region's stability.

Jordan and Egypt are the only two Arab states that have diplomatic ties with Israel. (Source: Press TV)

## Saudi seeking to hit Iran by pursuing closer ties with Israel: ex-U.S. diplomat

**7→** A: Asserting that the Israelis have infiltrated the Saudi government and are now dictating future policy in the Kingdom doesn't quite fit the facts. While the Saudi-sponsored Arab Peace Initiative - a peace plan dating back some 16 years - may have marked a change in the Saudi outlook towards Israel, nothing of substance occurred subsequently. The reason is simple: it offered a full peace to Israel in return for things the Zionists would never accept--return to pre-1967 ceasefire lines; a just resolution of the Palestinian refugee problem; and a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem.



The real change occurred when the overly-ambitious Mohammed bin Salman began moving up in the Saudi government: head of the Crown Prince's Court, with the rank of minister (2013); Minister of Defense (2015); and Crown Prince (2017). Bin Salman's irrational hatred of Iran matched that of Apartheid Israel's Prime Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu. They both opposed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. They hated Iran's assistance to Syria, enabling Al-Assad's legitimate government to survive their attacks. Together, they began fulminating against the Islamic Republic and apparently started planning ways to bring it down.

Without the aid of a crystal ball or a gypsy fortune teller, the future of Saudi-Israel relations is not entirely clear. Certainly, Netanyahu is the hardest of the hardline Israeli officials. And he may leave office should he be indicted for corruption. However, given the increasingly radicalized Israeli voter and the choice of extremists that could succeed Netanyahu, there will likely be no drastic shift in policy towards Iran.

The real question is how long Mohammed bin Salman will remain as Crown Prince and work with the United States and the Kingdom against Iran. If he's removed for his extremist behavior in Yemen and against Qatar and Iran, the Saudis may become more moderate in their foreign policy. If he stays, we will see more of his militant behavior and increasingly closer ties to the Zionist Entity.

■ Generally speaking, how do you think about Saudi policies in the Middle East, including normalization of ties with Israel, and do you believe that regional countries would follow suit? If they would do so, how much are they ready to pay?

A: Saudi Middle East policies appear built on regime change in Iran and the Kingdom's overestimation of its self-importance. By and large, given Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's ambitions and radical behavior, Riyadh seems bent on throwing its weight around. Without oil and the funds derived from it, the Saudis would be bereft of influence, unable to buy governments or weapons to use against them. Improved ties with Israel are part and parcel of this. The Kingdom (especially its crown prince) apparently sees the Zionist Entity as a helper in asserting their regional policy, especially in their efforts to impose their control on other countries in the neighborhood.

The other Arab states may not necessarily follow the Saudi line. They have their own internal difficulties, such as Algerian resistance to President Bouteflika's attempt to extend his time in office. Also, the Kingdom is not well-liked by its neighbors, except for the autocratic members of the (Persian) Gulf Cooperation Council.

For the Saudis to bring along a significant portion of the Arab world, a lot of money and aid would be necessary. Getting other Arabs to die for Riyadh's foreign policy could well be another matter. Any kind of cooperation could prove difficult. As one Palestinian-American always says, 300 million Arabs cannot recognize their own interests. Moreover, they are either unable or unwilling to promote and protect them if they could realize what they were.

## Erdogan says U.S. angered by Turkey's independence

**7→** "They (the Turks) would not have access to Patriot and the F-35," acting Pentagon spokesman Charlie Summers said, also referring to an advanced American fighter jet that the Turks plan to purchase.

The U.S. was about to sell the Patriots to Turkey before Ankara chose to purchase the Russian systems. It is also contracted to deliver 100 F-35 stealth warplanes to Turkey. Washington claims that members of the Western military alliance of NATO,



including Turkey, should be using certain weapons to ensure "interoperability."

Erdogan, however, said, "Everyone knows that this issue has nothing to do with either NATO and the F-35 project nor the security of the U.S."

Turkish-U.S. tensions are at a peak mainly due to Washington's support for the Kurds and Turkey's subsequent imprisonment of an American pastor.

Last year, Ankara also imposed tariffs on U.S. goods in response to American tariffs on Turkish-supplied steel and aluminum.

The two sides are separately at odds over Washington's refusal to extradite Fetullah Gulen, a Pennsylvania-based Turkish cleric accused of masterminding an abortive 2016 coup against the Turkish government.

The situation was not defused despite Turkey's release of the pastor, whom it had detained over alleged links to anti-Ankara outfits. (Source: agencies)

## U.S. warns Italy against joining China's new Silk Road project

The United States has warned Italy against supporting China's global economic effort, called the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), denouncing the infrastructure plan as a "vanity project."

In a thinly veiled rebuke of the initiative, which aims to unite European and Asian markets, a spokesman for the White House's group of national security advisers said on Saturday that Italy's participation in the BRI would add "legitimacy" to Beijing's infrastructure project.

"Italy is a major global economy and great investment destination. No need for Italian government to lend legitimacy to China's infrastructure vanity project," spokesman Garrett Marquis said on Twitter.

Italy is a major global economy and great investment destination. No need for Italian government to lend legitimacy to China's infrastructure vanity project.

Italy's intention to pull itself out of an economic recession that has gripped countries in southern Europe signals an upset for the United States and the administration in Washington, which has been actively seeking to curb China's global influence.

Marquis had previously claimed that the project was unlikely to "bring any sustained economic benefits to the Italian people," and that it "may end up harming Italy's global reputation in the long run."

The White House official had called on "all allies and partners, including Italy, to exert pressure on China to

bring its global investment efforts in line with accepted international standards and advanced practices."

The Saturday tweet came after Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte said he might sign an accord with Chinese President Xi Jinping later this month, despite reports that Washington was concerned at the prospect of Italy joining the venture.

"With all the necessary precautions, Italy's accession to a new silk route represents an opportunity for our country," Conte said on Friday, noting that participation in China's trade master plan would be up for discussion during Xi's upcoming visit to Italy.

The Chinese president is due to travel to Italy from March 22 to 24. Conte has pointed out that Rome and Beijing will seek a framework deal during the state visit.

The Italian premier has also announced his plans to attend a BRI summit in China in April.

The BRI plan, also known as the One Belt One Road project and championed by Xi, aims to link China by sea and land with southeast and central Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Africa, through an infrastructure network on the lines of the ancient Silk Road.

The U.S., which is currently engaged in a massive trade dispute with China, views the vast Asian country as a direct threat to its economic dominance and has expressed pessimism about Xi's infrastructure plan.

The administration of the U.S. President Donald Trump



has imposed steep tariffs on billions of dollars worth of Chinese products.

Since taking office, Trump has claimed that China's rise as an exporting powerhouse has hurt the U.S. workers and manufacturing.

Trump has imposed tariffs on \$250 billion in Chinese goods and threatened to target all Chinese exports to the U.S. Beijing has responded by imposing tariffs on \$110 billion in US products.

Other trade partners of the U.S., including the European Union, Canada and Mexico, have also retaliated with tit-for-tat tariffs against American products.

(Source: Press TV)

## Israeli forces shoot dead Palestinian youth in West Bank

Israeli forces have fatally shot a Palestinian youth at a makeshift checkpoint in the West Bank.

The incident took place just north of the city of Jericho (Ariha) early on Sunday.

The Palestinian Health Ministry identified the victim as Salameh Salah Kaabneh, 22. Palestinian Wafa news agency reported that Kaabneh was killed "in mysterious circumstances."

Israeli police, however, claimed in a statement the "masked" Palestinian, who was driving a car, had attempted to run through the checkpoint and not heeded an officer's order to stop.

"As a result of the gunfire, the car stopped and its Palestinian motorist, a resident of one of the villages nearby, was hit and pronounced dead," the statement added.

The Israeli military regularly opens fatal fire on Palestinians, accusing them of seeking to attack its personnel.

Human rights groups have repeatedly slammed Tel Aviv for its shoot-to-kill policy as a large number of the Palestinians killed did not pose any serious threat to Israelis.

Israeli troops have on numerous occasions been caught on camera brutally killing Palestinians, with the videos going viral online and sparking condemnations of the regime's militarism.

■ **Israel launches fresh airstrikes on Gaza Strip**

Meantime, the Israeli regime has launched a series of new airstrikes on the Gaza Strip a night after it targeted civilian infrastructure in the besieged enclave.

The attacks late on Saturday targeted

several locations north of Gaza, including two naval facilities.

Israeli regime sources said fighter jets had dropped bombs on locations in Sudaniya, Khan Yunis, Zeytoun and Tuffah.

There were no immediate report of casualties from the attacks which Israeli military sources claimed had targeted positions held by the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas.

However, most of such attacks over the past days, including those coming late on Friday, have mostly targeted civilian infrastructure in an enclave which is under a crippling Israeli siege and is in desperate need of humanitarian aid.

The Israeli military said in a statement that Saturday attacks had come in response to rocket launches by Hamas on areas north-west of the occupied Palestinian territories.

## May faces heavy Brexit defeat in Parliament, euro skeptics warn

British Prime Minister Theresa May's Brexit deal faces a heavy defeat in Parliament Tuesday because she has so far secured no major changes from the European Union, the leaders of two major euro skeptic factions in Parliament said Sunday.

Just 19 days before the United Kingdom is due to leave the EU on March 29, May's is scrambling -- so far unsuccessfully -- to secure last-minute changes to an EU exit agreement before a vote on Tuesday on whether to approve the deal.

If she fails, lawmakers are expected to force May to seek a delay to Brexit that some fear could see the 2016 decision to leave the bloc reversed. Others argue that without a delay Britain faces chaos if it leaves without a deal on March 29.

Nigel Dodds, the deputy leader of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) which props up May's minority government, and Steve Baker, a leading figure in the large euro skeptic faction of her Conservative party, warned "the political situation is grim."

"An unchanged withdrawal agreement will be defeated firmly by a sizeable proportion of Conservatives and the DUP if it is again presented to the Commons," they wrote

in the Sunday Telegraph.

The Sunday Times said May was battling to save her job as aides were considering persuading her to offer to resign in a bid to get the deal approved. The newspaper also said cabinet ministers have spoken about whether to insist she goes as early as this week.

Parliament rejected May's deal by a record margin in January, prompting the British leader to return to Brussels in search of changes to address the so-called Irish backstop -- an insurance policy designed to prevent the return of a hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Many British lawmakers object to the policy on the grounds that it could leave Britain subject to EU rules indefinitely and cleave Northern Ireland away from the rest of the country.

But, May's attempts to get the clause rewritten have so far failed to yield any result, with EU negotiators unwilling to meet her demands, and Britain rejecting a compromise offer.

Britain's opposition Labour Party should support staying in the EU if there is a second referendum, the party's Brexit spokesperson, Keir Starmer, said on Sunday.

"If there's a public vote that would operate as a lock, if



you like, on any deal that Theresa May get through. If that is the position, then in my view, the default ought to be 'remain'." Starmer told Sky News.

However, Starmer said the party would not be seeking to secure support in Parliament for a second referendum on Tuesday.

(Source: Daily Star)



## VAR will help Premier League referees next season, says Guardiola

Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola said he expected the video assistant referee (VAR) system to rid the Premier League of controversial refereeing decisions after his side scored a goal against Watford that was initially flagged offside on Saturday.

City's opening goal by Raheem Sterling in their 3-1 win sparked controversy after referee Paul Tierney changed his mind about the offside call following a discussion with his assistant.

"There should be an easy solution and next season there will be. With VAR, that will not be a problem, it will be fairer," Guardiola told reporters.

"The game is so fast and so quick, even the people sat here don't know if it is offside or onside. If we have doubts here, imagine how it is for the referee who has to make a decision in a split second.

"I am so sorry and I apologise to Javi (Gracia) and to Watford if the first goal is offside."

Other Premier League managers have backed the introduction of VAR, including Arsenal's Unai Emery who suggested that the system might prevent game-changing decisions going the wrong way. Guardiola said the Premier League was lagging behind other European countries which had already implemented VAR in their top-flight leagues.

"Hopefully next season, like in Europe, they can accept that we install VAR in this situation and it will be fair," Guardiola added.

"Manchester City voted to install VAR this season. Some other clubs did not accept it."

The Champions League has also implemented VAR in the knockout stages this season and UEFA has released statements on its website to explain its use of the system and justify decisions made by the referees in the last-16 matches so far.

(Source: Reuters)

## Boca player booked after 'rabona'

Boca Juniors right back Julio Buffarini was booked after performing a 'rabona' late in his team's Argentine championship win over San Lorenzo.

Boca were 3-0 ahead with only a few minutes to play when the 30-year-old infuriated the opposition by using the 'rabona', where the kicking foot is wrapped behind the standing leg, to cross the ball into the San Lorenzo area.

Seconds later Buffarini was pushed to the ground and surrounded by irate San Lorenzo players. Buffarini's team mates came to his defence, leading to a scuffle on the goal line.

The protests continued as Buffarini got to his feet and he was then shown a yellow card.

Buffarini, who spent four seasons at San Lorenzo, later apologised. "I got overconfident, I apologise one thousand times to the players of San Lorenzo and their fans," he said. "It wasn't the moment for a 'rabona', I realised that afterwards."

Boca won 3-0, a result which extended San Lorenzo's winless run to 15 matches in all competitions.

(Source: Eurosport)

## Bowe beats Japanese speedskaters to set 1,000m world record

American speedskater Brittany Bowe set a women's 1,00-meter world record of 1min 11.610secs on Saturday at a World Cup race in Salt Lake City. When the day began, the world record was 1:12.09 and belonged to Japan's Nao Kodaira from a 2017 effort at the same Utah Olympic Oval.

Japan's Miho Takagi broke the world record with a time of 1:11.713 to take the lead in the competition.

But the mark was short-lived as Bowe followed with her record skate on home ice, shattering her prior personal best of 1:12.180 from 2015 on the same 2002 Olympic Oval.

Kodaira finished third, completing the podium in 1:11.776.

Bowe is completing her first full season at the top level since suffering a concussion in a 2016 training accident.

Other world records fell Saturday as well.

Dutchman Kjeld Nuis won the men's 1,000m title in 1:06.183, breaking the decade-old world record of 1:06.42 set by American Shani Davis on the same oval.

Czech Martina Sablikova broke her own world record by winning the 3,000 in 3:52.027, eclipsing her prior mark of 3:53.31 from last week in Calgary.

Russia's Pavel Kulizhnikov set the men's 500m world record of 33.61 seconds, eclipsing his old mark of 33.98 on the same oval in 2015.

(Source: AFP)

## NBA fines Thunder's George \$25K for ripping referees

Oklahoma City Thunder forward Paul George was fined \$25,000 by the NBA on Saturday for criticism of officiating, the league announced. George made his comments after the Thunder's 118-110 road loss to the Los Angeles Clippers on Friday.

George fouled out with 3:49 remaining in the fourth quarter while star guard Russell Westbrook fouled out in the final minute.

Steven Adams also fouled out in the fourth quarter, making it only the second time in 10 NBA seasons that three starters fouled out of an NBA game in regulation time, according to an ESPN report. "It's just bad officiating," George said. "We don't get a fair whistle. We haven't gotten a fair whistle all year. Somebody has got to look into this. It's getting out of hand."

"We're getting grabbed. We're getting scratched, clawed, held, shoved. And there's nothing for it. The officials just get to walk out and there's nothing that penalizes them for not officiating the game the right way."

In all, the Thunder were whistled for 34 fouls, eight fewer than the Clippers. George knew a fine was coming even as he unleashed his refereeing rebuke.

"I'm going to lose money on this," George said. "We speak up, we lose money. There's nothing I can do to change that."

(Source: Fox Sports)

# Birmingham vs. Villa marred by disgraceful scenes as fan punches Jack Grealish

Birmingham's Championship match at home to rivals Aston Villa (live on ESPN+) was marred by disgraceful scenes early in the first half as a supporter ran onto the pitch and threw a punch at the back of Jack Grealish's head.

The match at St. Andrews was barely 10 minutes old when a fan came onto the field of play and approached Grealish, the Villa midfielder.

The fan then swung a punch from behind and caught Grealish, who fell to the ground. A steward then managed to restrain the supporter and marched him off the pitch. West Midlands police later confirmed the supporter had been arrested. Grealish later scored to make it 1-0 to Villa on 66 minutes.

An EFL spokesman said: "The EFL condemns the mindless actions of the individual who encroached on to the pitch at St. Andrews on Sunday afternoon. It's a situation no player should ever be faced with.

"In all circumstances the playing surface is



for players, not supporters and those playing in the game must be able to do so safe in the

knowledge they will not be subjected to this type of behaviour.

## U.S. women's head coach Ellis supports players' lawsuit



U.S. women's national soccer team coach Jill Ellis threw her support behind her players on Saturday after all 28 members of the reigning World Cup champions' squad filed a suit against U.S. Soccer for gender discrimination.

The lawsuit alleges that the women players were paid less than their male counterparts despite performing better, and were provided with inferior playing and training conditions.

"I'm definitely in support," Ellis told reporters, adding that the players called her before announcing the lawsuit but did not discuss it with her ahead of filing it.

Ellis, who as head coach is employed by the U.S. soccer federation, is in a unique position as both a representative of the players and the athletic body targeted in the lawsuit. "(I) recognise moments where we have to continue to push the envelope," Ellis said. "It's not hard to navigate because I'm in that world and my players know I support them."

The lawsuit rekindled the debate around gender pay equality and garnered the support of sports' biggest stars, including 23-times tennis grand slam champion Serena Williams.

"The pay gap has been there for a very long time. And this is across all industries. And soccer was no different," said two-times gold medalist Aly Wagner, who was part of the 2008 Olympic team with plaintiffs Tobin Heath and Carli Lloyd.

"I know what we went through when I was playing," Wagner said. "Things weren't always equitable."

The U.S. women's national soccer team, a stalwart of American athletics with three World Cup titles and four Olympic gold medals to their name, will enter this year's women's World Cup in June among the favourites to win the tournament.

Leslie Osborne, who played for the U.S. women's team in the 2007 World Cup, said the suit was overdue.

"(The players) know that they have leverage going into this next women's World Cup," Osborne said.

"I think the fact that they are doing this – and every single player is doing it together – is so strong and their voice is going to be heard regardless," she added.

"And people from all over the world are watching this team go through this."

(Source: Reuters)

## Farah defends Big Half title in London



Britain's Mo Farah has defended his title in the Big Half race, finishing in one hour one minute 14 seconds in London on Sunday.

The four-time Olympic champion won the half marathon in a sprint finish to beat his time of 1:01:40 in the inaugural event last year.

The 13.1-mile race is the 35-year-old's final one before he goes for a first London Marathon win on 28 April.

In the women's race, Britain's in-form Charlotte Purdue retained her title.

The 27-year-old finished in a time of 1:10:38, with fellow Englishwoman Steph Twell claiming second place ahead of Wales' Charlotte Arter.

"Conditions were a bit tougher than last year here - very windy, rainy - but it was nice. I got the job done, came first and now I'm preparing for the London Marathon and it's a nice stepping stone," Farah told the BBC.

"When I'm in London, the crowds always deliver. It's a great atmosphere and I enjoy racing at home.

"Training has gone well [for the London Marathon]. Obviously I'll have to have a

chat with my coach and see how I feel.

"I'm excited. I feel like I have more experience than last year. I've got to go out and do the best I can - but I know I can mix in with the guys."

Farah again hinted at a surprise return to the track to run the 10,000m at October's World Championships in Doha.

"It's possible. After the marathon, I'll make a decision about what I want to do," he added.

"Deep down, I miss the track. I look at my fellow athletes and I think 'woah' and I just get excited."

Farah, who finished third at last year's London Marathon, failed to reclaim the title of Europe's fastest half marathon runner - a record he achieved by finishing the 2015 Great North Run in a personal best time of 59:22.

Switzerland's Julien Wanders beat that record by finishing in 59:13 at the Ras Al Khaimah Half Marathon in February.

Elsewhere, David Weir won by a margin of over three minutes in the elite men's wheelchair race, with a time of 51:11.

(Source: BBC)

# Liverpool's title bid back on track

Liverpool have been eagerly anticipating the return of their England midfielder to give their title challenge a final push.

While all the attention has been on Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain's rehabilitation, little has been granted Adam Lallana.

Lallana's inclusion and excellence in the 4-2 victory over Burnley was not only reflective of Jurgen Klopp's enduring belief the midfielder can put fitness issues to one side, but also Naby Keita and Xherdan Shaqiri's failure to present a compelling case to start during midweek training sessions.

Klopp's faith in Lallana was validated as he inspired two first half goals after Liverpool had fallen behind in freakish circumstances. By the time he departed to a 77th-minute standing ovation, Liverpool were on their way to cutting the gap to Manchester City back to one point, although it was not without the occasional scare – Sadio Mane's second in injury time restoring a two goal lead to end a brief period of panic in an otherwise predictably sedate Anfield for a noon kick-off.

It was Lallana's long diagonal pass to Mohamed Salah which took out Burnley's midfield in the build-up to a 20th-minute equaliser, Roberto Firmino tapping in after Tom Heaton



failed to deal with the Egyptian's cross.

More satisfying was the counter-press on Phil Bardsley, Lallana fist-pumping when his challenge fell directly to Salah, before Mane swerved in to ensure he scored in six consecutive home games – a strike putting him in esteemed Anfield company.

Burnley were ahead in controversial circumstances,

Liverpool keeper Alisson enraged James Tarkowski was not penalised for pulling him to the ground when Ashley Westwood delivered a whipping left wing corner straight into the Kop goal.

The Brazilian was booked for the protests. Liverpool's frustration could as easily have been directed to Joel Matip for inexplicably gifting the sixth minute corner.

After being mocked for his weather report last weekend, Klopp would have been reluctant to reference the wind on this occasion. It was a factor for both sides and impacted on Liverpool's third on 67 minutes.

Heaton's goal kick was direct to Salah and as the winger rushed towards goal, Charlie Taylor's tackle fell into the gleeful path of Firmino for his second.

Liverpool should have had more – Mane hit the bar from three yards and Andy Robertson's goalward striker was blocked by Ben Mee – before Burnley briefly threatened a comeback in injury time.

Ultimately, Johann Berg Gudmundsson's close range effort impacted only on Liverpool's goal difference, Mane dribbling past Heaton to restore the two goal deficit.

(Source: Telegraph)

## PL join FIFA, UEFA, FA in investigating Man City

Manchester City are the subject of a fourth investigation into alleged financial wrongdoing, with the Premier League joining FIFA, UEFA and the Football Association in probing their transfer dealings.

The Premier League's investigation relates to the signing of academy players and third party ownership.

"The Premier League has previously contacted Manchester City to request information regarding recent allegations and is in ongoing dialogue with the club," a statement read.

"The league has detailed financial regulations and strong rules in the areas of Academy

player recruitment and third-party ownership.

"We are currently investigating these matters and will allow Manchester City every opportunity to explain the context and detail surrounding them."

Reports of City breaching FFP rules emerged following allegations made by German publication Der Spiegel, with leaked documents purportedly obtained by Football Leaks.

A UEFA statement published on Thursday had confirmed European football's governing body was launching an investigation into the Premier League champions for an alleged

breach of FFP rules, as City stand accused of manipulating money earned from a sponsorship deal with Etihad Airways.

City said they "welcome the opportunity to the opening of a formal UEFA investigation as an opportunity to bring to an end the speculation," following the announcement.

Meanwhile, manager Pep Guardiola, who won the Premier League last season and defended his Carabao Cup title in February, said he has no concerns his achievements at City would be tainted by the allegations

"No, absolutely not," he said.

If found guilty, City could face a possible Champions League ban.

City were found guilty of breaching FFP rules in 2014, and received a £49 million fine from UEFA as well as seeing their Champions League squad reduced for the following campaign.

The FA are investigating a payment allegedly made to former player Jadon Sancho, when he was signed from Watford in 2015.

FIFA's investigation centres around the signing of eight players under the age of 18 from outside Britain.

(Source: Soccernet)



# Sohrab Moradi to undergo surgery in Germany

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** – Iran's Olympic gold medalist Sohrab Moradi will undergo spinal surgery in Germany, Gholamreza Norouzi, Iran's Sports Medicine Federation, said on Sunday.

According to Norouzi, Moradi will be sidelined for between six to nine months.

Moradi missed the Fajr Weightlifting Cup in Tehran and will also miss 2019 Asian Weightlifting Championships in Ningbo, China. Both competitions serve as the 2020 Summer Olympics qualifiers.

Moradi will likely miss the 2019 World Weightlifting Championships in Pattaya, Thailand in September.

Moradi, who won Olympic gold at Rio 2016, is also likely to miss the 2019 World Championships in September, said the Sports Medicine Federation.

Only on Monday (February 11), Moradi was named runner-up behind Lasha Talakhadze

in the International Weightlifting Federation Weightlifter of the Year awards.

The 30-year-old won gold in the new Olympic weight category of 96 kilograms at the 2018 World Championships in Turkmenistan last November, a few months after winning Asian Games gold at his previous weight of 94kg.

In that Asian Games win, Moradi snatched 189kg to break a world record that had stood since 1999, set by triple Olympic champion Kakhi Kakhiashvili.

Another big name in Iranian weightlifting, Kianoush Rostami, returned from a long injury lay-off last week to win the 96kg class at the EGAT's Cup in Thailand - also an Olympic qualifier.

Rostami, the 2016 Olympic champion at 85kg, totalled 371kg, which is 45kg less than Moradi's winning total at the World Championships.



## AFC Beach Soccer Championship: Oman beat Iraq

Oman made a strong start to their AFC Beach Soccer Championship Thailand 2019 campaign, and immediately sealed their place in the quarter finals with a 6-3 win over Iraq on Sunday.

Two goals from Abdullah Salim contributed to a terrific team effort from Talib Hilal's side, who underlined their status as one Asia's beach soccer powers.

The win sends Oman to the top of Group D - and sets up a group-deciding clash with holders Islamic Republic of Iran on Tuesday - while Iraq's Thailand 2019 schedule ends after two losses.

Oman were the last team to get their campaign underway, but they certainly made up for lost time in the early stages, starting in stunning fashion to take the lead when Abdullah Salim poked the ball high into the net in the second minute.

Two minutes later they were two goals ahead, with Jalal Al Sinani's intelligent pass leaving Musaab Al Breiki with the simple task of tapping the ball into a gaping net.

Salah Hasan pulled a goal back for Iraq when he followed up to scramble Ali Jabbar's acrobatic initial effort over the line in the fifth minute, before Mohammed Sami produced a superb penalty save to prevent Al Breiki from scoring his second.

It looked as though the status quo would remain until the break, but a perfectly struck free-kick from Khalid Al



Oraimi gave Oman a 3-1 lead, and breathing space, at the end of the opening period.

Salim then turned the breathing space into a chasm when his lovely cushioned finish across the goalkeeper made it four in the 15th minute, and Sami Al Bulushi extended it even further when he delicately scored another one three minutes later.

A stunning Nooh Al Zadjali half volley forced Mohammed Saad into an equally excellent save in the 27th minute, but Saad spilled a long-range free-kick from goalkeeper Amjad

Al Hamdani a minute later, allowing Ishaq Al Qasmi to follow up and make it 6-1.

Murtadha Qasim swept home a late consolation goal for the Iraqis, and Ali Ahmed turned in another one off the post in the final minute, but there was little they could do to salvage their side's knockout stage hopes, as Oman sealed a solid start to their campaign.

### ■ Talib Hilal, Oman head coach

"First of all, I want to say thanks to my players, they did a good job. The match was not easy. We were well prepared because we knew we were going to play with a strong team and my players did a good job and played as we planned. Now our concentration goes to the game against Iran.

### ■ Karim Moghaddam, Iraq head coach

"Before the match we knew, we were playing against a really good team. Oman has good experience. From 2008 until now, they didn't change their coach. Talib Hilal stayed all the time. He's a perfect coach and he's changed just a few players from 2010 until now. They played in the World Cup, but my players don't have this experience. Today we lost as we are a young team with maybe 25-30 days of training. I think it's a good result. We only have top level teams in this group. I think after two months of experience this result is okay."

(Source: the-afc)

## Saudi Arabia's female athletes dream big

unique feeling of anxiety and pride had gripped Saudi Arabia's Zahra Al Tala as she prepared to take her first attempt in the women's discus F52-54 final at the Dubai 2019 World Para Athletics Grand Prix last month.

History was made on 24 February when Zahra along with two others, Amal Alahmari and Sarah Aljumaah, became the first Saudi Arabian women to compete in an international Para athletics meet. So, jitters were quite normal.

Covered from head to toe, with her face concealed, Zahra ended without a medal, but she grew in confidence with each throw.

"Earlier I was a bit apprehensive about how it would be like to compete in such a big event. But it's an amazing experience. I feel confident and lucky to be here today and participate on behalf of all the women of Saudi Arabia," Zahra said after her round, where she finished fifth.

"I am also happy that I could overcome my own fears that if I will not be able to compete in front of so many people.

"I hope I can take part in more events in future. Here, I have made many friends from the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait and Turkey etc. I want to meet them again," she added.

What was fascinating about Zahra was not just her indomitable spirit but her appetite to learn and excel. On the last day of the



competitions, she hurled the javelin with just an hour of training. "And she did quite well," said their coach Abdullah Mashrawi. Zahra ended fourth with a throw of 4.24 meters.

A high-school graduate, the 33-year-old Zahra also has a diploma in computers. She aspires to take up a full-time job someday but for now, she is focused to improve her skills

and technique in her new interest—javelin and discus events.

"I hope to work someday. But that's okay as I have a lot of work to do now. I have to work on my power and to get distance in my events. I hope to win a medal for Saudi Arabia one day," she added.

Like Zahra, Amal also aspires to bring

home glory. The 42-year-old, as the oldest among the three women athletes in the team, was like an elder sister for both Zahra and Sarah. She hopes they can leave a legacy for women in their country.

Amal competed in the shot put F35-37. Amal used to take up part-time projects of interior decoration before she became an athlete.

When asked about their plans for the future, Zahra added: "It's all about athletics now. I want to become a role model for the People of Determination and inspire more girls in my country to take up sports. Like me, they can also feel proud about themselves."

Coach Mashawi admitted that the exposure at the Dubai Grand Prix will do the athletes a lot of good.

"Zahra, Amal and Sarah are among the 10 women who have been training for the past three months in Riyadh under my supervision. They are improving but they have to improve a lot of to compete in international events," the coach said.

With Saudi Arabia easing the restrictions on women in sports recently, the interest in Para athletics is also growing.

"We are organizing camps for female athletes and many youngsters are showing interest, which is very good. Next year, I hope we have more women athletes in our team."

(Source: Paralympic.org)

## Ansarifard scores for Nottingham as win against Hull boosts playoff hopes



Persian Football - Team Melli forward Karim Ansarifard scored his first goal in the English SkyBet Championship helping his team to a 3-0 win over Hull City.

With the match tied at 0-0, Martin O'Neill brought in Karim Ansarifard on the 59th minute.

On the 72nd minute, Nottingham Forest scored the opener. An assist from Karim Ansarifard saw Carvalho teed up perfectly, who responded by smashing in a thundering drive, giving the home side the lead.

Former Olympiakos striker, Ansarifard, added Forest's second goal of the match in the 76th minute. He was well positioned in the box and finished from close range after a brilliant attempt from Lolley was denied by the post.

A penalty kick awarded to Forest in the 82nd minute concluded the 3-0 victory for O'Neill's men. Lolley converted from the spot reigniting Nottingham's playoff hopes.

Forest boss O'Neill said: "It was a tough old first half. The substitutes had a very, very important part to play for us.

"But I also thought there were some excellent performances from us.

"I'm delighted with the victory and delighted with the players."

Karim Ansarifard joined the SkyBet Championship team on an 18-month contract from Greek Super League giants, Olympiakos.

## Kim Dong Jin to officiate ACL Match between Al Sadd vs Persepolis

**Tasnim**– South Korean international referee Kim Dong Jin has been chosen to officiate Al Sadd of Qatar and Persepolis of Iran match in the 2019 AFC Champions League Matchday Two.

The match will be held in Doha's Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium on Tuesday in the competition's Group D.

Kim Dong Jin will be assisted by his countrymen.

The South Korean football official has been listed in FIFA's international referee from 2005.

Kim has served as a referee for competitions including the 2011 FIFA U-20 World Cup, qualifying for the 2010 and 2014 World Cups.

## Saman Ghoddos not happy with his performance at Amiens

**PLDC** – Iranian international midfielder Saman Ghoddos is not satisfied with his performance in Amiens SC.

Ghoddos is so eager to improve his technical potential with Amiens SC. The Iranian international penned a contract with the French top-flight football club cost four million euros from Swedish club Ostersund in the summer.

He had been also linked with Spanish club Huesca and Rennes.

Ghoddos has played 20 matches for Amiens so far and has been in starting XI 16 times. He scored three goals and assisted three as well.

"I've scored and made assists but I have not been very good since my arrival. I haven't taken a vacation in more than two years because I was playing in Swedish league, participating at the 2018 World Cup, transferring to Amiens SC and taking part in the 2019 AFC Asian Cup," Ghoddos said in an interview with L'Equipe.

"I feel that I recovered well and I feel fresh, but I think I have not been good since my arrival," he added.

## ACL Matchday Two: Saudi Arabia's Al Nassr to host Iran's Zob Ahan

Dubai: Saudi Arabia's Al Nassr will look to bounce back from their opening-day defeat to Al Wasl when they face the Islamic Republic of Iran's Zob Ahan in Group A of the 2019 AFC Champions League at Al Maktoum Stadium on Monday.

In their first game in the competition since 2016, Al Nassr went down 1-0 in to Al Wasl, also in Dubai, and the Riyadh side have now gone four games on the continent without registering a goal.

Al Nassr have, however, been on a superb run domestically and scored deep into stoppage time to secure a 3-2 win against Ettifaq on Friday and move within four points of Saudi Pro League leaders Al Hilal.

Zob Ahan dominated large spells of their opening match against Iraq's Al Zawraa last week but were unable to break the deadlock as the sides shared a goalless draw.

The Isfahan team have since won their first Iranian Pro League game since August when they defeated Padideh Khorasan 1-0 on Thursday to edge away from the relegation zone.

Al Nassr and Zob Ahan also met twice in the 2016 group stage with the Iranian side posting back-to-back 3-0 victories as they advanced to the knockout rounds and the Saudi side were eliminated.

(Source: the-afc)

## Mortara wins Formula E's 50th race after Bird demoted

**HONG KONG (Reuters)** — Edoardo Mortara won Formula E's 50th ePrix in Hong Kong on Sunday after Sam Bird collected a post-race penalty that stripped the Briton of victory hours after the podium ceremonies.

Bird was first across the line but the celebrations were muted, with the Virgin Racing driver aware that stewards were investigating a penultimate-lap collision with DS Techeetah's Andre Lotterer.

The impact at Turn Two punctured the German's right rear tyre and dumped the leader, a three-times Le Mans 24 Hours winner, out of the race.

The stewards imposed a five-second penalty on Bird, pending appeal, for causing a collision — a sanction that promoted Venturi's Swiss driver Mortara into the top spot as the fifth different winner in five races this season.

Brazilian Lucas Di Grassi moved up to second place for Audi Abt, with Bird's Dutch team mate Robin Frijns third.

Bird dropped to sixth but still regained the championship lead, one point clear of previous series leader Jerome d'Ambrosio who failed to finish for Mahindra.

The outcome was little consolation for Lotterer, who



accused Bird of a "disgusting move".

"I lost it thanks to him. Even if you give him a penalty my race is done — it's just sad," he said.

Lotterer had led from the eighth lap with Bird close behind but unable to get past on a narrow track in slippery conditions after earlier showers, with the race stopped early on and featuring three safety car periods.

"It's a shame," Bird said of the incident. "I tried to go down the inside and Andre late-defended. It's very slippery down the inside, I braked, locked up and hit him a little bit like what he did with JEV (Jean-Eric Vergne) in Santiago last year.

"My heart goes out to him; he drove a great race. It's a shame it ended up that way."

D'Ambrosio and German team mate Pascal Wehrlein failed to finish after both ran into Brazilian Felipe Nasr's crashed Geox Dragon car.

That brought out the safety car for the first time and then red flags.

When the race resumed, Britain's Oliver Rowland — who had seized the lead at the start - slowed and Bird took the lead until he made a mistake that allowed Lotterer to go past.

The safety car was again deployed when Belgian Stoffel Vandoorne, who had been on pole position, stopped on track with a technical problem.

It came out for a third time with five minutes to go when Rowland hit the wall and damaged his rear axle, the action picking up again with two minutes to go.

Reigning champion Vergne finished 13th.



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**GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING**

Silence in the time of speaking and speaking in the time of silence and pretending in spite of knowledge are wrong and unwise.

Imam Ali (AS)

## Tehran theater to host Woody Allen “Old Saybrook”

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — A group of Iranian actors will perform a reading of Woody Allen’s “Old Saybrook” at Shahrzad Theater in Tehran on March 15.

Sajjad Qatei is the director of the reading performance in which he will also play a role, and Mahmud Rashidi is the producer of the production.



A poster for a reading performance of Woody Allen’s “Old Saybrook” scheduled to go on stage at Shahrzad Theater in Tehran.

Bahman Vakhshur, Tima Pur-Rahmani, Ashkan Delavari, Hoda Fallah, Ramtin Meqdadi and Dorsa Hakimelahi are the other members of the cast.

The absurdist play is about Max, a writer who has left his play unfinished. Characters in the play finally get bored and a fight breaks out between the characters and the writer.

“In ‘Old Saybrook’, Mr. Allen indulges that side of himself that occasionally gets out of Manhattan like a Manhattanite with a summer rental,” the New York Times wrote in a review published in 2003.

“Set in the opulent living room of a Connecticut beach house, the play begins with... the kind of literary, self-deprecating and neurotically screwy jokery that is pure Woody Allen. The clear reference is to Chekhov, whose bored, affluent characters, in Mr. Allen’s contemporary translation, are less pretentious than proudly shallow.”

## Children come to “Meet at the Ark at Eight” in Tehran

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The Mostaqel Theater Troupe by Iranian director Maryam Kazemi will stage the play “Meet at the Ark at Eight” in Tehran’s Honar Hall this week.



A poster for “Meet at the Ark at Eight” by director Maryam Kazemi.

The play is based on the debut novel of German writer Ulrich Hub, who has written several plays for children and adults.

“Meet at the Ark at Eight” has won prizes in Germany, France, Italy and the Netherlands.

The novel has been translated into Persian by Hossein Fadai from the English version translated by Heinar Piller, the founding artistic director of the Grand Theatre Company in London.

The story centers on a pair of penguins who hear that a great flood is coming to destroy the earth, and they are the only two penguins who have been chosen to board Noah’s Ark. They decide, however, to smuggle their friend aboard in a suitcase, and a wild forty-day journey ensues.

Hossein Moheb Ahari, the prolific stage and screen actor who passed away in January after a lengthy battle with lymphoma, had previously been selected to play a role in the play. Asghar Hemmat will fill in for him in the production.

Actors Ali Forutan, Hamid Goli, Mehrad Zamani and Hassan Hemmati are other members of the cast.

The play will also be onstage during spring.

## Italian musicians to perform in Tehran

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Three Italian musicians from the Bruno Maderna Conservatory of Cesena will be giving a concert at Tehran’s Azadi Tower on Tuesday, the organizers have announced.

Violinists Paolo Chiavacci and Eleonora Poletti, as well as cellist Vincenzo Taroni are the musicians who will be performing a repertoire of classical and romantic pieces.

In addition, the trio is currently holding master classes at the Sazineh Music Education Academy in Tehran.

Chiavacci is the chamber music instructor and conductor at the Bruno Maderna Conservatory of Cesena. Poletti holds the principal violin chair, and Taroni holds the cello chair at the conservatory.

# Iranian films shine at Sharm el-Sheikh Asian Film Festival

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Four Iranian films have been honored with several awards at the third edition of the Sharm el-Sheikh Asian Film Festival in Egypt.

“The Last Fiction” by Ashkan Rahgozar, which is based on the classic Iranian tale from Persian poet Ferdowsi’s masterpiece Shahnameh, won the award for best motion picture, the Egyptian daily newspaper Al-Ahram reported on Sunday.

The film follows Zahak’s treacherous rise to the throne in Jamshid in Persia. The young and naive hero Afaridoun will have to save the kingdom and its people from darkness. But he must first conquer his own demons in this portrayal of Persian mythology that reveals human nature.

“Oblivion” by Fatemeh Mohammadi won the award for best short film at the festival, which was held in the Egyptian town from March 2 to 8.

The movie is about Mehrbanu who tries everything to make the life of her husband, who is suffering from Alzheimer’s, worth living. Rental issues and the absence of their children and grandchildren take their toll in this sensitive portrayal.

Abbas Kiarostami’s close friend Seifollah Samadian’s montage film “76 Minutes and 15 Seconds with Abbas Kiarostami” also received a special mention.

In addition, “Rona, Azim’s Mother”,



A poster for Ashkan Rahgozar’s movie “The Last Fiction”. (Hoorakhsh)

a co-production between Afghanistan and Iran, was picked as best film. The Tehran-based Afghan brothers Jamshid and Navid Mahmudi are the director and producer of the film, whose story

is set in Tehran.

Starring Iranian actors Mohsen Tanabandeh and Mojtaba Pirzadeh, the film is about Azim, an Afghan refugee who works as a janitor in Tehran. While

helping his mother and his brother’s family plan to smuggle themselves into Germany, he feels betrayed by his brother when he abandons their mother.

## German production designer Silke Buhr to hold workshop at Fajr festival



German production designer Silke Buhr in an undated photo.

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Prominent German production designer Silke Buhr will hold a workshop on the sidelines of the 37th Fajr International Film Festival, the organizers announced on Sunday.

Buhr has collaborated with celebrated German director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck on his 2006 Oscar-winning

movie “The Lives of Others” and 2018 Oscar-nominated film “Never Look Away”.

She has received awards at several events, including the German Film Awards and Bavarian Film Awards.

Italian cinematographer Luca Bigazzi will also hold workshops during the Fajr festival.

The 37th Fajr International Film Festival will be held in Tehran from April 18 to 26.

## Iranian children’s books on show at Tokyo library



Children’s books by Iranian writers are on display in an exhibition at Japan’s National Diet Library in Tokyo.

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — A selection of 200 Iranian children’s books are on display in an exhibition entitled “The Land of Poetry and Legends” at Japan’s National Diet Library in Tokyo.

The exhibition also includes the two side sections “Children’s Books in Iran” and “Authors and Illustrators”. Some of the

books have been translated into Japanese. The showcase, which will continue until July 21, has been organized to celebrate 90 years of diplomatic relations between Iran and Japan.

The occasion was also marked earlier in February in Tehran by organizing a festival of Japanese films.

## Asghar Farhadi to hold master class in Hong Kong festival

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Two-time Oscar-winning director Asghar Farhadi will hold a master class during the Hong Kong International Film Festival.

His latest movie “Everybody Knows” will also go on screen at the Masters and Auteurs section of the festival, which will be held from March 18 to April 1.

Farhadi won his first Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film with “A Separation” in 2012. In 2017, his film “The Salesman” received the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film.

In addition, Iranian director Arash Lahuti’s “Orange Days” will compete in the official section of the festival, while UK-based Iranian filmmaker Ebrahim Golestan’s

1964 film “The Brick and the Mirror” will go on screen in the Kaleidoscope section.

“Orange Days” tells the story of Aban, the only female contractor in the cutthroat and male-dominated orange harvesting industry, who enters a competition to win a large contract.

“The Brick and the Mirror” is about Hashem, a cab driver who finds an infant child in the back seat of his cab one night after he gives a ride to a young woman. He and his girlfriend, Taji, try to cope with this unwanted child. Hashem insists on getting rid of the child, Taji on keeping him. In the end, Hashem gets rid of them both.



Iranian director Asghar Farhadi in an undated photo.

## Wealthy millennials boosting the art market

**ZURICH (Reuters)** — The global art market experienced another uptick in 2018, helped by an increase in the spending power of millennials, a report published by UBS and Art Basel said on Friday.

A survey of wealthy individuals conducted by UBS and art economist Clare McAndrew for the report found millennials were buying art more actively and frequently taking to the internet to do so. It found that more of them were willing to shell out big money on art than their older peers.

They also provided a boost for female artists.

“For a generation that might never own a car, their appetite for buying art is encouraging,” UBS Group Chief Marketing Officer Johan Jervøe told Reuters.

“It may be a reflection of the unique and often experiential qualities of art and collectibles as long-term assets.”

Overall sales in the art market grew 7 percent to \$67.4 billion in 2018, according to UBS and Art Basel’s third annual art market report.

People between 22 and 37 years of age made up nearly half of the wealthy art buyers who regularly spent \$1



The logo of Sotheby’s auction house is seen at a branch office in Zurich, Switzerland October 25, 2016. (Reuters/Arnd Wiegmann)

million or more on an artwork over the past two years, the survey found, despite representing just over a third of the high-net-worth individuals surveyed.

The results of the survey, which was conducted in Britain, Germany, Japan, Singapore and Hong Kong, offered a silver lining for the art world as geopolitical and economic worries have weighed on overall sentiment.

As millennials grow into greater wealth, and benefit from a generational shift in wealth inherited from aging parents, their wealth could reach \$24 trillion by 2020, according to Deloitte.

Millennials’ spending habits could provide significant potential for both online sales and art’s squeezed middle, Jervøe said, benefiting the industry’s overall health.

This younger generation of collectors with over \$1 million in household assets to spend or invest helped buoy the digital art marketplace to \$6 billion sales last year.

And a majority of them also took to photo-sharing social media platform Instagram to source and buy art.

Between 2016 and 2018, 93 percent of the millennials made purchases online, spending \$106,930 on average, while the slightly older Generation X - between 38 and 52 years of age - spent around half a million dollars on an average web purchase, but did so with less frequency.