



**U.S. to suffer heaviest defeat in history** **2**



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# Trump factor stands out in Christchurch massacre

Iran condemns ‘brutal’ terrorist attacks in New Zealand



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© AP/ Mark Baker

Ambulance staff take a man from outside a mosque in central Christchurch, New Zealand, Friday, March 15, 2019.

## Iran, Azerbaijan stress bolstering trade ties in business forum

**TEHRAN** — Attended by senior officials, entrepreneurs and businessmen from both sides, an Iran-Azerbaijan business and investment forum was held in Baku on Thursday.

According to a report by the portal of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA), Iranian Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dajpasand, Azerbaijan’s Minister of Economic

Development Shahin Mustafayev and the Head of Iran-Azerbaijan Joint Chamber of Commerce Hossein Pirmoazen were among the attendees of the forum.

Speaking in the event, Mustafayev mentioned the 12 meetings between the two countries’ presidents during the past five years and said “that is an indication of how good the relations between the two countries are.” ➔4

## Foreign Ministry: U.S. biggest violator of Iranian people’s rights

**TEHRAN** — The Foreign Ministry said on Thursday that the U.S. government is the “biggest violator” of the Iranian people’s rights through introducing “illegal” sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

“The U.S. government has been the biggest violator of the Iranian nation’s human rights. It [the U.S.

government] has spared no action in violating the Iranian citizens’ rights though illegal unilateral sanctions,” ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi stated.

His comments came as response to the U.S. annual reports on the human rights for 2018 in which Iran was accused of abusing the human rights. ➔2

## Israel launches Gaza air attacks after rockets fired at Tel Aviv

At least two rockets launched from the besieged Gaza Strip have landed in the Israeli capital Tel Aviv, bypassing the Iron Dome missile system to mark yet another embarrassing defeat for one of the world’s most expensive military forces.

The attack on Thursday night caused rocket alerts to blare throughout central Israel, Israeli media reported.

Several people told local media that

they could hear two loud blasts in the Gush Dan (the greater Tel Aviv area), while some also claimed to have seen Iron Dome missiles being launched.

Authorities in Tel Aviv and Rishon LeZion municipalities said they would open public shelters as a cautionary measure.

The Iron Dome missile system was activated but apparently failed to intercept any of the missiles. ➔13

## The Kashmir conflict and distorted education

By Hakim Mohammad Ilyas

**KASHMIR** — Education plays a positive role in peace promotion and heals the wounds of war, solve youth unemployment, deliver decentralization and democracy, build peace and promote economic/social development. Unfortunately since last 30 years of conflict in Kashmir, The education sector has been badly hit. Unrest and violence has affected young minds the most, the biggest casualty thus far has been academia, educational infrastructure and it has suffered sabotage in many ways.

Blasts, encounters, curfews, hartals (strikes) has disrupted life on an almost daily basis and it has declined the educational standards at large. The exposure to violence and armed conflict reduces the quantity of education and has pushed many students into depression. Due to the closure of schools/colleges, now and then, the academic session got badly hit to the extent that it caused irreversible loss of study and tuitions to the students. Usually not more than 50 percent of the total curriculum is covered.

Every year approximately 50 thousand students qualify 12th class examination in Kashmir valley and accordingly they used get admission in different universities/colleges in various courses. The present Educational infrastructure consists of 1 central and 4 state universities including one agriculture and 1 cluster university and around 150 associated colleges. Appox. 14% students opt for engineering /technology course and 12% students opt for para/medical professional courses. ➔7

## Sheikh Zakzaky and the Nigerians

**ZARIA** — History has recorded so many men and their great works, floating on the pages of books events has unfold some are ceremonious and some are brutal. The event of karbala to some people with shallow perceptions takes it as an historical illusion.

History had brought the event of karbala to our era in the event of Zaria massacre were over one thousands of Muslims were killed of no crime committed other than their love of Ahlulbait.

Were a man six son was killed before his present, shoot him and also detained him. This

man is Zakzaky the hero of which many ink and tongues are short of worlds to describe this unique personality;

Who is zakzaky? In the view John Husain. Sheikh Zakzaky is a man with good vision and mission to the Nigerians but they see him as a threat to their daily life routine. Different perception can be drag along different categories of life within the nation.

He is an idealistic person with mental magnitude but the so called elites see him as a common Islamic scholar. He is a man of tolerance and

understanding, the tribal warriors see him as sectarian bigot. He preaches truth, justice and fairness among all Nigerians, the southern part of the nation refer to him as Hausa man from north.

He has outstanding policy that will move the nation to progress but the politicians see him as a person who will end their monopoly. He got no room for corruption hence the corrupt consider him as an arch rival. He respect women all the macho men consider him feminist. He accomodates christians and the wahabists called him infidel. ➔7

## Bahraini court jails nearly 170 people in crackdown on dissent

A court in Bahrain has handed down prison sentences to 167 anti-regime protesters as the ruling Al Khalifah regime does not shy away from its heavy clampdown on political dissidents and pro-democracy activists in the tiny Persian Gulf kingdom.

The High Criminal Court sentenced 56 of the defendants to ten years in jail each after

finding them guilty of “attacks on police officers.” The remaining majority of defendants received one-year terms. The court acquitted four people in the case.

Court documents obtained by Reuters showed that the sentences had been handed to the defendants at a trial on February 27.

The defendants had been detained for

six months before being released on bail in late 2017.

“None of the defendants came to the court when the sentences were announced because they feared being arrested,” said one lawyer, who declined to be named.

Two lawyers involved in the case said they had filed an appeal. ➔13

**ARTICLE**

**Sarbaz Roohulla Rezvi**  
Peace and Justice activist  
@roohullarezvi

## The whole Islamic world is guilty

The horrible images massacre of Al-Noor mosque of Christchurch that shocked us all, were of course delightful for some. Right-wing movements from the divinator United states of America to the black heart of the green continent, from French white fascists to Anti-non-semitic Zionists, from RSS Hindus in Saffron dresses to extremist Buddhists of Rakhine, all have watched those images again and again ridiculing those frivolous Muslims drumming the beats of Arab-Ajam, Kurd-Turk, Shia-Sunni differences.

We Muslims were also guilty in the spread of Islamophobic rhetoric when the American discourse of “War Against Terrorism” was accepted by us all, overlooking that the discourse considers every and each Muslim, be an Arab or Ajam, Kurd or Turk, Shia or Sunni a potential terrorist. We started to blame each other as Terrorists naively, conceiving that this will obtain us respect in front of the so called modern world as non-terrorist Muslims. Here the intrinsic diversity among Muslims, was revealed more as repulsion, hatred and animosity.

Extremists with different ideological backgrounds have never been under attack with the discourse of Terrorism until 2001, while during second half of 20th century, most of the massacres that took place, victimized Muslims but non of the western countries, considered those criminals as Terrorists that whole world has to unite against them. The discourse of Terrorism all started when extremist Muslim groups tried to retaliate USA in the same way that they were attacking Muslim territories, no doubt both had to be denounced.

The new wave of Islamophobia is a result of hegemony of the discourse of war against terrorism that non of the Islamic countries was able to keep away itself from that. It was resonated and repeated by Muslims more, rather than others, resulting in widespread penetration of the discourse across the world as we Muslims were confessing it.

Lets hope that the blood of innocent prayers of Al-Noor mosque of Christchurch makes the Muslim countries to review their attitude and convince them not to be a part of the system that reproduces violence against the Muslims by bowing in front of the American discourse of war against Terrorism. This, of course does not mean that hardliners among Muslims should not be confronted by any means, but we have to find an alternative discourse to fight them.

**ARTICLE**

**By Yuram Abdullah Weiler**  
Analyst and journalist

## Normalizing the abnormal: U.S. Federal Reserve contemplating QE replay

**“That’s not decided yet, but it’s part of what we are discussing now.”**  
— San Francisco Federal Reserve Bank President Mary Daly.

The U.S. Federal Reserve (FED) engaged in quantitative easing (QE), a policy of purchasing longer-term securities to stimulate economic activity, following the financial crisis of 2008. From late 2008 until October 2014, the FED supported a near zero interest rate policy until a program of progressive interest rate hikes was begun in December 2015. By September 2017 the decision was made to gradually sell off the securities purchased under the QE program, a process which was termed “balance sheet normalization.” However, by January 2019, the FED has conceded that it is contemplating a revival of QE if needed to bolster the ailing U.S. economy.

According to the latest statement by the FED, “The Committee is prepared to adjust any of the details for completing balance sheet normalization in light of economic and financial developments.” In other words, they are prepared to call a halt to interest rate hikes and pump liquidity back in the economy by a return to QE, if economic conditions warrant. The statement, which was reiterated by San Francisco Federal Reserve Bank President Mary Daly in the epigraph, is tantamount to an admission that the U.S. economy has entered an abnormal phase where low unemployment no longer appears to imply high inflation. As a result, the FED may again be forced to resort to the abnormal tool of QE in hopes of stimulating the faltering U.S. economy and preventing a repeat of the 2008 crisis.

As the central bank of the U.S., the FED has a dual mandate. On the one hand, there is the goal of full employment, and on the other, there is the goal of price stability, that is, the control of inflation. These two contrary goals are related as described by the Phillips Curve, which illustrates the inverse relationship between the unemployment rate and the inflation rate. ➔7



© Tehran Times/ Faeezeh Kaboli

## “Noruz Khani” tradition in northern Iran

People of Balajadeh village in Kordkouy city, northern Golestan province, take part in the Noruz Khani ritual, on the last Wednesday of the year, March 13.

The tradition, in their opinion, heralds the coming of the new year (Noruz) and spring.

Noruz Khan (Noruz singer) goes from house to house, while singing lines of poetry in praise of spring, the new year and the nature. It is customary for householders to give him gifts or sweets in return.



MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



**Ayatollah Emami Kashani: Iran defeated U.S. in Iraq and Syria**

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Ayatollah Mohammad Emami Kashani, a Tehran Friday prayer leader, says the U.S. used all its energy against Iran but the Islamic Republic withstood Washington and defeated it in Iraq and Afghanistan.

He said the world is acknowledging this fact.

The ayatollah also said the Friday shootings at two mosques in New Zealand were an attack against the base of the movement of the Islamic Ummah, Mehr reported.

"We should pay attention to Friday prayers and know the enemy and know that the enemy is contemptible and that we should perform our duty," Emami Kashani told worshippers in Tehran.

Forty-nine people were killed and at least 20 others injured in shootings at two mosques in New Zealand city of Christchurch in the worst attack in the Pacific country's history.



**Tehran calls for peaceful resolution of Pakistan-India conflict**

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said on Friday that he has spoken with Pakistani's Foreign Secretary Tehmina Janjua over the phone, calling for "de-escalation and peaceful resolution of Pakistan-India conflict."

"Today I spoke with Tehmina Janjua, Foreign Secretary of Pakistan over phone. Iran & Pakistan are close neighbors and friends. We agreed to strengthen our cooperation in all fields inc. fighting terrorism," Araqchi tweeted.



**Tehran slams Pompeo's anti-Iran rhetoric**

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi on Thursday slammed U.S. officials for making "fabricated" and "unreal" claims and accusations to maintain the status quo in West Asia and keep it a tense region struggling with numerous crises. Qassemi's remarks came after U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo claimed that Iran uses its energy exports to "exert undue influence all across the Middle East, most particularly today on Iraq."

Qassemi said, "Relations between Iran and Iraq have been established with the [strong] will of two sides' leaders and at the request of Iranian and Iraqi nations and are totally based on mutual respect and trust and common interests."



**IRGC holds drone exercise over Persian Gulf**

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) on Thursday held a large-scale war game over the Persian Gulf, during which squadrons of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) were flown to practice an assault operation.

During the military exercise the IRGC Aerospace Force flew tens of military drones toward a target on a tiny island in the Persian Gulf, Tasnim reported.

The military drones and a number of other combat and assault pilotless planes raided a spot on Bani Farur Island in Iran's territorial waters in the Persian Gulf, and successfully bombed the target at the same time.



**'Netanyahu attacks Palestinians to win election'**

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — A senior foreign policy advisor to the parliament speaker said on Friday that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is not hesitant to commit any kind of crime against Palestinians in order to win the upcoming election, Mehr reported.

Hossein Amir Abdollahian denounced the "blind" and "brutal" attacks by the Zionist regime against the Palestinian people in Gaza, saying "time is not in favor of the Zionists".

Amir Abdollahian also called on the people of the world, organizations, Islamic assemblies and human rights institutions to firmly denounce the Zionist regime's arbitrary attacks and support the innocent Palestinian people.



**Iran bans flight of Boeing 737 MAX in its airspace**

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iran is banning Boeing 737 Max 8 jets from its airspace amid safety concerns that arose following a crash of an Ethiopian Airlines flight on March 10, the Transport Ministry announced on Friday.

The Ethiopian crash was the second in five months involving the 737 Max 8. A Lion Air flight went down in Indonesia in October. Both crashes came shortly after takeoff.

Reza Jafarzadeh, director of public relations at Iran's Civil Aviation Organization, said the ban followed after many airlines have decided not to fly the Boeing 737 Max 8.

# U.S. to suffer heaviest defeat in history: Ayatollah Khamenei

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said on Thursday that Washington has imposed the "strongest sanctions in history" on Iran, however, the U.S. will suffer "heaviest defeat in history".

"The U.S. has said several times that sanctions against Iran are the strongest sanctions in history. They are right. I said in response to what they said that the U.S. defeat in this respect will be the heaviest in history," the Leader said during a meeting with members of the Assembly of Experts.

Ayatollah Khamenei said it is "essential" to make every effort to offset sanctions. "Maximum mobilization against maximum pressure is essential."

"Today, the enemies' pressure is maximum which means that they are using all their resources and capabilities. First the U.S. and then the Zionists along with the Westerners and all the Europeans (on the sidelines)," the Leader stated.

He noted that the U.S. has removed ban on purchasing Iran's oil by certain European countries, yet they refrain to buy Iran's oil



and this is a "particular type of enmity". U.S. President Trump unilaterally pulled Washington out of the nuclear deal in May

2018 and ordered reimposition of sanctions against Iran. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo an-

## No power can drive a wedge between Iran and Iraq, Rouhani says

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani arrived in Tehran on Wednesday night from his three-day trip to Iraq, which was deemed a new chapter in Tehran-Baghdad relations.

The historic visit came a month after U.S. President Donald Trump said he intended to keep a U.S. military base in Iraq "because I want to be looking a little bit at Iran because Iran is a real problem."

Trump's remarks angered yet also unified Iran and Iraq.

Upon his arrival, Rouhani said, "No power and third country can divide the great Iranian and Iraqi nations and governments."

"In this visit, we had meetings with almost all senior officials of Iraq, including the prime minister, president, parliament Speaker and other high-ranking officials and discussed very important issues," the president said, according to the Foreign Ministry website.



He also said, "We stressed issues related to borders and the 1975 treaty, dredging Arvand Rud, and also free visas for the tourists and pilgrims to both countries."

Tourism is a very important issue with regard to economy, culture and even politics, and issuing free visas to both countries can be effective in developing tourism, Rouhani explained.

"We also agreed on different fields such as cooperation in energy, electricity, oil and gas."

He also mentioned regional security issues, saying during his visit the two sides reached good agreements and shared close views about the issues.

On the signing of five memoranda of understanding (MOU) between the two countries, the president said, "In our meetings with Iraqi officials, both sides stressed that the good bilateral relations should be expanded to trilateral and multilateral relations."

## U.S. tried to disrupt Tehran's power grid: report



Night lights from residential and commercial buildings reflected in water. Lake Chitgar, western Tehran. File photo.

The journalist further wrote that she discussed the matter with "a colleague with an engineering background" who explained that the code could have been used to hack or deactivate power grids "governed by electronic or computer systems."

"You don't have to physically be there if you can hack into it, but that's of course harder. If they (the Americans) needed to have someone physically there during the sabotage attempt, it probably means they didn't have remote access to the system," the engineer added.

Narwani said that she sought to publicize the revelations after news spread about similar suspected sabotage operations targeting Venezuela's power grid this month.

Last week, an overheating incident knocked out Venezuela's main hydro-

electric dam, causing a widespread and ongoing electrical blackout, affecting 23 of the country's 24 states.

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has accused the U.S. of masterminding a "demonic" plot to destroy his country and force him from power by waging an "electromagnetic attack".

The heightening tension comes as opposition leader Juan Guaido declared himself "interim president" of Venezuela in January, vowing to topple Maduro.

The U.S. has openly backed Guaido, imposing economic sanctions on Venezuela and confiscating the country's state oil assets based in the U.S. to channel them to Guaido.

Narwani, along with other Middle East pundits, have raised the prospect that the attacks on critical Venezuelan infrastructure may be related to an adoption

of an earlier plan developed under the administration of former U.S. president George W. Bush against Iran.

Known by its code-name "Nitro Zeus," the New York Times first published details about the plan in 2016, claiming that the program sought to target Iranian electrical, communication and defense systems.

The report also claimed that the Obama administration had "seriously" considered carrying out the plan if nuclear negotiations with Iran at the time had failed.

Narwani believes details revealed to her by the mentioned Iranian-American engineer may have been part of the alleged sabotage program.

Israel and the U.S. have been conducting numerous acts of sabotage targeting the Iranian people and the country's critical infrastructure over the past years.

In 2011, the U.S. and Israel conducted a cyber-attack against the Iranian nuclear energy program.

Reporting the incident a year later, the Washington Post said the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA), its spy service CIA, and Israel's military had worked together to launch a malware dubbed Stuxnet against Iran's nuclear facilities.

Iran also says the Israeli regime assassinated four of its nuclear scientists between 2010 and 2012.

The U.S., under President Donald Trump, along with its regional allies, has also sought to weaken Iran by imposing strict sanctions on the country to incite unrest in the country.

## Iran condemns 'brutal' terrorist attacks in New Zealand

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi on Friday condemned terrorist attacks on two mosques in New Zealand as "brutal" and "inhuman".

"Any terrorist action, at any place, by anybody and under any pretext and motivation must be condemned by all countries. The governments should not let racist and anti-Islamic ideologies and movements endanger the countries," he said.

He urged New Zealand to find perpetrators behind the attacks.

Coordinated attacks on two mosques in New Zealand on Friday left at least 49 people killed and many others wounded.

Prime Minister of New Zealand Jacinda Ardern described the incident as "an extraordinary and unprecedented act

of violence."

Officials said that one man in his late 20s, who is in police custody, had been charged with murder, and that two explosive devices were found attached to a vehicle that they had stopped.

■ **Zarif: 'Western hypocrisy of defending demonization of Muslims as freedom of expression must end'**

Following the attacks, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif also said the West must end its "hypocrisy" of demonizing Muslims under the pretext of defending freedom of expression.

"Western hypocrisy of defending demonization of Muslims as freedom of expression MUST end," Zarif wrote on his tweeter account.

Zarif also said, "Impunity in Western 'democracies' to

promote bigotry leads to this:

-Israeli thugs enter mosque in Palestine to insult Muslims;  
-Terrorists in NZ livestream their murder of 49 Muslims."

According to al Jazeera, the Australian-born attacker on worshippers in Christchurch has published a manifesto citing U.S. President Donald Trump and Anders Breivik, the Norwegian white supremacist who murdered 77 people in Norway in 2011.

The 74-page dossier by the shooter, which has been described by Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison as a "work of hate", praised Trump as "a symbol of renewed white identity and common purpose".

He also claimed that he had "brief contact" with Breivik and had received a "blessing" for his actions from the mass murderer's acquaintances.

## Foreign Ministry: U.S. biggest violator of Iranian people's rights

1 → Qassemi said, "The U.S. levels accusations against other countries' human rights situation while it has heavy records of violating the human rights inside and

outside of its lands and has always been criticized by many governments and the United Nations."

The Foreign Ministry official said the U.S.

report is politically motivated and biased, adding Washington is not qualified to issue reports on the situation of the human rights when is has a "black record" in this area.

He noted that the U.S. uses the issue of human rights as a tool to achieve its political objectives and put pressure on independent countries.



# North Korea may suspend nuclear talks with ‘gangster-like’ U.S.: diplomat

North Korea is considering suspending talks with the United States and may re-think a ban on missile and nuclear tests unless Washington makes concessions, news reports from the North's capital on Friday quoted a senior diplomat as saying.

Vice Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui blamed top U.S. officials for the breakdown of last month's summit in Hanoi between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, Russia's Tass news agency and the Associated Press said. "We have no intention to yield to the U.S. demands (at the Hanoi summit) in any form, nor are we willing to engage in negotiations of this kind," TASS quoted Choe as telling reporters in the North Korean capital.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and national security adviser John Bolton "created the atmosphere of hostility and mistrust and, therefore, obstructed the constructive effort for negotiations between the supreme leaders of North Korea and the United States", Tass quoted Choe as saying.

Kim is set to make an official announcement soon on his position on the denuclearisation talks with the United States and the North's further actions, it added, citing Choe.

Choe said Washington threw away a golden opportunity at the summit and warned that Kim might rethink a moratorium on missile launches and nuclear tests, the Associated Press news agency said.

"I want to make it clear that the gangster-like stand of the U.S. will eventually put the situation in danger," AP quoted her as saying. But she added: "Personal relations between the two supreme leaders are still good and the chemistry is mysteriously wonderful."

South Korea, which has an ambitious agenda of engagement with North Korea that



is dependent on Pyongyang and Washington resolving at least some of their differences, said it was too early to tell what Choe's comments might mean.

"We cannot judge the current situation based solely on Vice Minister Choe Son Hui's statements. We are watching the situation closely. In any situation, our government will endeavor for the restart of North Korea-U.S. negotiations," South Korea's presidential Blue House said in a statement.

Choe's comments echoed the North's usual rhetoric at tense points in its dealings with Washington. North Korea expert Joshua Pollack said North Korea may be delivering an ultimatum.

"They're putting down a marker, saying

which way things are headed if nothing changes," Pollack, of the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies in Monterey, California, said.

## ■ "No overnight solution"

The second Trump-Kim summit broke down over differences about U.S. demands for Pyongyang to denuclearise and North Korea's demand for dramatic relief from international sanctions imposed for its nuclear and missile tests, which it pursued for years in defiance of U.N. Security Council resolutions.

Choe had said after the Hanoi talks that Kim might lose his commitment to pursue a deal with the United States after seeing it reject a request to lift some sanctions in

return for the North destroying its main known nuclear complex.

In Washington this week, the U.S. special representative for North Korea, Stephen Biegun, said the United States expected to be able to continue its close engagement, though he offered no specifics on when new talks might be held.

"Diplomacy is still very much alive," Biegun said on Monday, but stopped short of saying if there had been any talks since the summit.

Bolton, who has argued for a tough approach to North Korea, said last week that Trump was open to more talks but also warned of tougher sanctions if the North did not denuclearise.

In Beijing, Premier Li Keqiang urged patience and further dialogue between North Korea and the United States.

"The peninsula problem can be said to be complicated and long-standing, and it cannot be solved overnight," Li told an annual news conference on Friday, although his remarks were not made in response to the TASS report.

Earlier on Friday, a spokeswoman for South Korea's Ministry of Unification told a press briefing that the weekly inter-Korean meeting scheduled at a liaison office in Kaesong, North Korea, had been canceled after the North Koreans said they would not be sending senior officials.

The spokeswoman said the ministry had not confirmed why the North Korean officials decided not to attend.

The South Korean won fell to its weakest intraday level in four months soon after the report, whereas the stock market's KOSPI was muted in its reaction.

South Korean and Japanese defense-related shares surged following the reports.

(Source: Reuters)

## Left out of peace talks, U.S. allies reassess Afghan support

At a dinner party in Kabul's high-security "green zone" in March, a senior European diplomat poured himself a glass of red wine and pulled up a photograph on his iPhone.

Released by Qatar's foreign ministry on Feb. 25, it showed seven Qatari officials alongside U.S. and Taliban negotiators as talks on ending the 17-year-old war in Afghanistan had restarted in the Gulf state the previous day.

"If Qatari officials can be at the negotiating table, then how did the U.S. forget to invite its key allies who have fought the Afghan war since 2001?" said the diplomat, whose nation has contributed hundreds of troops to NATO's mission in the country.

"We continue to pour millions of dollars as an act of solidarity, but when it comes to peace talks, the U.S. decided to go solo."

Reuters spoke with 10 diplomats from countries spanning three continents that are among the 39 that provide military personnel to the NATO training operation, known as Resolute Support, in Afghanistan, and those that provide development aid.

Many of those countries are significant, consistent donors. Most of the diplomats spoke on condition of anonymity, citing the sensitivity of the situation.

The diplomats interviewed said their governments were broadly rethinking their commitments to rebuilding the country. That process had been hastened by feeling excluded from peace talks, and also by a weariness for supporting the Afghan campaign among voters and lawmakers in their respective countries, they said.

Asked about those comments, a U.S. State Department spokesperson said regular reviews of foreign assistance was "good practice" and Afghanistan's development remained in the interest of the international community.

"We see no signs that interest and investment are wavering," said the spokesperson, adding that U.S. Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad has briefed NATO allies and other partners three times since December, and effective coordination remained a priority.

Nick Kay, NATO's newly appointed senior civilian representative in Afghanistan, said NATO allies "fully support" Khalilzad's efforts to negotiate a settlement.

But even the Afghan government has complained of being left out. President Ashraf Ghani's national security adviser on Thursday accused Khalilzad of "delegitimizing" the Kabul government by excluding it from deliberations.

Qatari officials did not respond to a request for comment.

In 2017, U.S. development aid for Afghanistan totaled about \$1.2 billion, well ahead of the next biggest donors Germany, European Union institutions, Britain and Japan, according to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data. But the United States' junior aid partners collectively contributed nearly two-thirds of all development assistance, highlighting their critical if less visible importance to the country's future.

## ■ Changing priorities

U.S. and Taliban negotiators wrapped up their longest round of peace talks on Tuesday with progress made but no agreement on when foreign troops might withdraw.

Whether funding countries keep investing in Afghanistan could prove pivotal to sustaining any peace. Diplomats say that, after troops leave, it may be the only leverage they have to retain influence over future Afghan governments.

Since the 2001 U.S.-led invasion, Afghanistan has been among the top recipients of foreign government aid to promote economic and social development. In 2016, international donors pledged \$15.2 billion in aid

for Afghanistan until 2020.

With those pledges due to expire, many countries are re-evaluating their military and funding commitments.

"Priorities have changed for every EU nation," a European diplomat said, adding that countries besides Afghanistan needed support.

"The donor fatigue is intense and no one is in the mood to overlook it after 2020," another diplomat said.

A third diplomat said their country was re-evaluating its future aid with different scenarios in mind, including whether to continue development if the Taliban joins Afghanistan's government, and what to do if peace talks fail.

Any drop-off in international aid would be disastrous for Afghanistan, since much of it funds basic health and education services, said Adele Khodr, country representative for Unicef.

"It is definitely something we are concerned about. Imagine what would happen - (Afghanistan) would be Yemen," Khodr said. "(By) pulling out, the international community will pay a much higher price in insecurity across the world."

Ninety percent of the money spent on the health sector in Afghanistan comes from the international community, said Toby Lanzer, deputy special representative in Afghanistan for the UN.

An official in Ghani's office in Kabul declined to comment on potential risks to future aid.

He said the government was making every effort to hold peace talks with the Taliban. The militant group said on Tuesday that such talks would have to wait until after a troop withdrawal plan is set.

## ■ 'Crucial to stick together'

Some diplomats caution against a quick retreat.

"If we leave the country hastily, all these (advances) will go down the drain," Ambassador Markus Potzel, Germany's special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan and one of the 10 diplomats interviewed, told Reuters in Kabul.

Potzel was referring to gains such as Afghan girls' attendance in school and new employment opportunities.

Maintaining aid was also critical to holding influence in Afghanistan, he said.

"That's our leverage. We can attach strings," Potzel said. "It is crucial to stick together."

A spokesperson at the British Embassy in Kabul said any changes to Britain's troop contribution would be made in consultation with coalition partners.

As of March 2019, 39 countries contributed 17,034 foreign forces in Afghanistan for Resolute Support, of which the U.S. provided 50 percent, according to NATO. U.S. troops are also deployed in a separate mission directed against groups such as al Qaeda and ISIL.

U.S. President Donald Trump's questioning of NATO's value to Washington, along with the absence of allies at the negotiating table, has deepened the unease within the military alliance created in 1949 by the United States, Canada, and Western European nations.

"The concern is that we need to be appraised of the progress of the discussions and to be involved. We have invested a lot," said a European diplomat. "This commitment should be reflected in influence or at least information on the peace talks."

The diplomat said it was understandable that access to the negotiating table was narrow right now, but "what I would find abnormal is that we would be served a deal in which we had nothing to say and then be asked to foot



the bill".

## ■ Shrinking footprint?

The senior diplomats interviewed by Reuters, who are based in Kabul and Islamabad, said their governments were finding it harder to justify the continuing presence of their troops and the steady drain of aid funding to Afghanistan.

"It is increasingly difficult to tell our people why we are still here especially when they read reports about more than half of country being under the Taliban control," said a Western diplomat. "Almost all NATO countries are now struggling to justify their presence in Afghanistan to voters back home."

The war's long duration has also weakened commitment. "If we had known that the war could go on as it has been for 18 years, we would have had a rethink in 2001," the Western diplomat said.

The withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan has always been the Taliban's main demand, and Trump's interest in drawing down U.S. troops has stimulated efforts to end the war.

"The prime concern is that we may wake up one day to a tweet by Trump about a unilateral withdrawal of U.S. troops before a peace agreement has been negotiated," said a diplomat whose country supports Afghan health-care projects.

Neighboring Pakistan sees a similar danger, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said.

"An immediate vacuum can also be detrimental for peace and security and an indefinite presence is also not acceptable, so this is the detail that has to be worked out," he said.

NATO members and partners said they also expect regional powers to share costs and step up their roles in Afghanistan to prevent civil war after foreign forces depart. "China has been sitting on the bleachers for a long time now," a diplomat said.

The Chinese embassy in Kabul did not respond to requests for comment.

Michael Kugelman, a South Asia expert at the Washington-based Woodrow Wilson Center, said the U.S. continues to count on friends to share the burden in Afghanistan.

"But so long as the war continues with no peace deal, that supply of states willing to assist will shrink," said Kugelman.

## All American diplomats have left Venezuela: Pompeo

The United States has withdrawn all remaining diplomatic personnel from its embassy in Caracas as the crisis in Venezuela deepens, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Thursday. "They are fully dedicated to our mission of supporting the Venezuelan people's aspirations to live in a democracy and build a better future for their families," Pompeo said in a statement.

Venezuela is gripped by an acute economic crisis that has fueled the rise of opposition leader Juan Guaido, the National Assembly speaker who in late January declared himself as interim leader.

The embassy closure is set to worsen already tattered relations with U.S. President Donald Trump, who has not ruled out military intervention to oust President Nicolas Maduro as Washington monitors rapidly unfolding events in the oil-rich but crippled South American nation.

The U.S. has already imposed sanctions designed to choke off Venezuelan oil sales, the lifeblood of the leftist government in Caracas.

Pompeo said the diplomatic staff would continue from outside Venezuela to work for its future, help manage the flow of humanitarian assistance and support those "bravely resisting tyranny."

The country began returning to normal Thursday, with Venezuelans resuming work after a weeklong hiatus forced by an unprecedented nationwide blackout that the government has blamed on what it calls sabotage encouraged by the U.S.

Three storage tanks at the Petro San Felix heavy oil processing plant in eastern Venezuela caught fire late Wednesday, Oil Minister Manuel Quevedo told state television.

Quevedo blamed Guaido, accusing him of collusion with the U.S. "There was a terrorist act that we denounce at an international level," Quevedo told the VTV network.

On Twitter, the minister said Guaido and the opposition were "intensifying terrorist incursions" against the state-owned oil company PDVSA to impact Venezuela's vital crude exports. "Traitors!" he wrote, adding "the U.S. has decided to rob Venezuela of its oil resources ... [and] wants blood to flow."

Meanwhile in Caracas and other cities, Venezuelans who had been prevented working for a week because of the blackout returned to their activities as best they could after power was restored.

The government called all public sector employees back to their offices, but state schools remained closed for another day.

Long lines formed in the capital for the few buses running and in front of banks. The city's subway, which usually transports 2 million people daily, was partly operating and extremely crowded.

The resumption marked a degree of relief after the lack of electricity, which deepened Venezuela's long economic crisis. But things remained far from normal, with many shops remaining shuttered.

The national industry federation Conindustria said it would take several days for some activities to come back. According to an economic analysis firm, Ecoanalitica, the blackout cost Venezuela \$875 million and paralyzed industry, including the all-important oil sector.

(Source: AFP)

## UAE blocks diplomatic efforts to free 11 Lebanese detainees: Report



The United Arab Emirates has denied Lebanon's embassy officials the right to meet with 11 Lebanese citizens arrested in the Persian Gulf state over ties to the resistance movement Hezbollah, a media report says.

According to a report by Al-Akhbar, the UAE is blocking diplomatic efforts to secure the release of these Lebanese nationals, who are in prison for two separate cases.

In the first case, three Lebanese citizens Ali Hassan al-Mubdar, Abdullah Hani Abdullah, and Ahmad al-Makkawi have been jailed since 2015 on charge of disclosing the UAE government's "secrets" to Hezbollah.

In a video message in October 2018, al-Makkawi said he had been severely tortured by UAE officials, and called for an international probe into the issue.

However, the Lebanese embassy's request to meet the detainees in Abu Dhabi's Al Wathba Prison was rejected by authorities, who said such a meeting needed the prosecutor's permission.

The prosecutor in January rejected the Lebanese embassy's second request for a meeting, citing "national security" concerns.

In the second case, the UAE claims the eight Lebanese citizens have engaged in establishment of a Hezbollah "cell" in the Persian Gulf country.

The eight detainees have been imprisoned since February 2018, and the Lebanese government has failed to receive any information about their conditions.

During the past few years, Emirati officials have in numerous cases arrested, tried, and imprisoned individuals from Lebanon and other Arab states on charge of being linked to the Hezbollah resistance group, a key part of Lebanon's politics.

The UAE is criticized by human rights organizations for not having any democratically-elected institutions, disappearances of foreign nationals and Emirati citizens, numerous instances of torture in incarceration, and denying prisoners' right to a speedy trial and access to counsel.

(Source: Press TV)



STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	169115.5
IFX	2095.65

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,537 rials
GBP	55,618 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$67.08/b
WTI	\$58.60/b
OPEC Basket	\$66.60/b
Gold	\$1,303.10/oz
Silver	\$15.40/oz
Platinum	\$837.00/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Tehran to host 15th meeting of Iran-Belarus Joint Economic Committee

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Mohammadreza Modoudi, **d e s k** he acting head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), and Belarusian Ambassador to Tehran Yury Lazarchik discussed holding the 15th meeting of Iran-Belarus Joint Economic Committee in Tehran in the first half of the next Iranian calendar year (March 21-September 21, 2019), TPO website published.

Modoudi said: "Belarus is one of the countries with noticeable effect on Iran-EEU negotiations and as the talks are close to their conclusion, we expect a stronger part to be played by Belarus."

In late November 2018, Russia's President Vladimir Putin has endorsed a much-awaited agreement for the establishment of a free trade zone between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) thus facilitating the process for the Islamic Republic to join the Moscow-led regional economic bloc.

According to a Kremlin announcement, the agreement became a federal law after Putin's endorsement and was accordingly forwarded to the relevant institutions to be implemented.

Apart from authorizing the creation of a free trade zone between Iran and the EU, the document would be meant to support their cooperation over a wide range of economic and commercial areas.

The EEU is comprised of Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. It is an international organization created with the aim of encouraging regional economic integration through the free movement of goods, services and people within the union.

Eurozone industrial output shows spark but Germany lags behind

Industrial production in the Eurozone showed signs of stabilization in January across sectors and in most countries, despite a contraction in Germany, the bloc's biggest economy.

Output in the region rose 1.4 percent from the previous month, rebounding from a decline of 0.9 percent in December, better than a forecast from analysts in a Reuters poll of 1.0 percent expansion, Eurostat figures revealed on Wednesday.

"Expectations of a structural rebound in industrial output remain alive, as the downward drag from temporary factors should fade out over the coming months," said Bert Colijn, economist at ING.



Energy production had the biggest monthly increase, with 2.4 percent, overturning a 0.6 percent decline in the previous month.

On a less volatile year-on-year change, industrial production shrank 1.1 per cent, but this is milder than the 4.2 percent decline in December. Analysts in a Reuters poll predicted a 2.1 per cent fall.

In Spain, France and the Netherlands monthly output rose, compared with a contraction in December. Italy remains marginally in negative territory, up from an annual contraction of 5.5 percent in the final month of 2018.

In contrast, production declined in the biggest Eurozone economy by 3.4 percent year-on-year, a faster contraction than 3.2 percent in December. Germany accounts for the largest share of the Eurozone industrial production.

The spark of stabilization comes after the European Central Bank slashed its growth forecast for the region to 1.1 percent for this year, down from a forecast of 1.7 percent three months ago.

"Overall, today's data release offers some reassurance that the industrial recession is not deepening. But with the business surveys suggesting that output continued to fall in February, it is too soon to sound the all clear" said Andrew Kenningham, economist at Capital Economics.

(Source: Financial Times)

Iranian companies are top priority in Syria's reconstruction projects: envoy

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Syrian **d e s k** Ambassador to Tehran Adnan Mahmoud said Iranian companies are the top priority in awarding the country's reconstruction projects, Shata reported on Thursday.

Speaking in a meeting between the representatives of Syrian private sector with the Iranian Minister of Industry, Mines and Trade Reza Rahmani along with officials of the Iranian cooperatives chamber, Mahmoud noted that the Iranian private sector is a key partner in reconstruction of Syria's infrastructure.

The ambassador stressed the need for providing facilities in order to further expand the economic cooperation between the two countries.

He called for the implementation of a free trade agreement between the two countries so that the two sides can have a comprehensive economic partnership with each other.

A trade delegation from Syria visited Iran on March 11 to attend a business forum which was held at Iran Chamber of Cooperatives in Tehran and also to hold talks with Iranian



Syrian Ambassador to Tehran Adnan Mahmoud (3rd R) met Iranian Industry, Mines and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani (C) on Thursday

private sector in order to encourage them to cooperate in the war-stricken country's reconstruction.

Iran and Syria have been exchanging numerous trade delegations in the past few

months and Iranian private companies are already investing in different areas like providing construction materials especially cement and working on several reconstruction projects in Syria.

Iran, Azerbaijan stress bolstering trade ties in business forum

**1 →** "In 2018, trade between the two countries increased by 74 percent. Azerbaijan hasn't had such a boost in trade with any other country." The official said.

The Azeri minister referred to energy, transportation, industry and tourism as good areas for developing bilateral relations with Iran, and called for Tehran to strengthen relations in these areas.

He further mentioned the friendly relations between his country, Iran and Russia and called for the strengthening of trilateral relationship between Tehran, Baku and Moscow.

■ Importance of private sectors

Iranian finance minister for his part Referred to the satisfactory volume of trade between the two countries, stressing the important role of Iran's private sector in developing economic relations with the northern neighbor.

Dejpasand further added that for development of bi-lateral ties, the interaction between the two sides' private sectors should be strengthened and joint ventures must be formed.

Iran's economy minister called for win-win economic relations between the two sides in a variety of areas including investment, tourism, services and trade, and announced Iran's readiness for cooperation in these areas.

He described Iran as Azerbaijan's gateway into the southern waters and called on Baku to use the opportunities that the North-South corridor is providing.

Elsewhere in the meeting, Hossein Pirmouzan, the chairman of Iran-Azerbaijan Joint Chamber of Commerce, pointed to the exchange of more than 100 trade delegations between the two countries in recent years and addressed the relations between the two sides to be very positive and on the path to growth.

He called for the establishment of a preferential trade agreement between the two countries aimed at increasing the volume of trade exchanges.

■ 13th Joint Economic Committee meeting

Previous to the business forum, the 13th Iran-Azerbaijan Joint Economic Committee meeting was also held in Baku

on Wednesday.

In the meeting, Head of the Organization for Investment and Technology and Assistance of Iran Ahmad Jamali stressed Azerbaijan's strategic geographical position and its importance for Iran.

Jamali noted that "using the capacity of the joint economic committee, we can see a further boom in the volume of trade between the two sides."

The official pointed to the Qazvin-Rasht railway project, which is a part of North-South corridor, as a turning point in the development of relations between the two countries and said that this railway is going to further facilitate the trade between Iran and Azerbaijan.

The talks between the representatives of the two countries were held in the form of eight committees, including trade, industry, investment along with financial and banking, customs and borders as well as transportation and transit, energy and environment, agriculture and health, cultural, social and humanitarian and finally tourism.

Renault to return to Iran: deputy minister

Iranian Deputy Minister of Industry, Mining and Trade Farshad Moqimi said Renault has made an investment of \$1 billion in Iran.

"Following the negotiations and consultations that have been made and considering the amount of investment that Renault has made in the country (Iran), we would announce that the company will again return to Iran," he added.

The deputy minister also noted that a mechanism has been devised to allow for the resumption of production of Renault cars in Iran.

In July 2018, Renault put its Iran operations on hold to comply with the U.S. sanctions against Tehran.

Since the anti-Iran sanctions were eased in 2016 under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran emerged as a hot spot for growth, and trade with European countries surged to more than \$10 billion. But when the U.S. withdrew from the nuclear deal and re-imposed trade curbs in



2018, many Western companies backed out and halted cooperation with Iran.

In 2017, Renault signed an agreement with Iran's Industrial Development and Renovation Organization (IDRO) and local dealer Parto Negin Naseh Co. to boost its local production by 75 percent. The company said it had not yet started manufacturing vehicles or making investments under the deal, but has been producing cars there since 2003 with two other partners.

(source: Tasnim News Agency)

Iran ready to export Mercaptan: NIGC managing director

The managing director of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) said it was possible for Iran to export some of its mercaptan output.

Hassan Montazer Tarbati stated that the item's production capacity would reach 800 tons per year by the early months of the next calendar year, beginning on March 21.

"90 barrels of 150 barrels in the first stage of the mercaptan production were sent to three gas companies in Khorasan Razavi, Bushehr and Khuzestan provinces this week. According to the plans, by early next year, the production capacity of this vital item will reach 800 tons annually," the official said.

Mercaptan is also known as methanethiol is a harmless but pungent-smelling gas which has been described as having the stench of rotting cabbages or smelly socks.

It is often added to natural gas, which is colorless and odorless, to make it easier to detect.



He added: "In recent years, the National Iranian Gas Company has taken major steps towards domestic production of this essential substance, due to the limitations facing foreign suppliers of the item."

Iran Gas Engineering and Development Company has invested 1.5 trillion rials (about \$37.5 million) for developing a mercaptan production unit with 800 tons per annum of production capacity.

Iran, along with France, Russia, and the United States, is now a producer of the item.

(Source: Shana News Agency)

China premier says can use interest rates, other policy steps to help economy

China can use reserve requirements and interest rates to support economic growth, Premier Li Keqiang said on Friday, promising broad policy steps to prevent a sharper slowdown for the world's second-biggest economy.

Li's comments suggest Beijing is ready to roll out more forceful stimulus measures to ease strains on businesses and consumers.

China has so far promised billions of dollars in tax cuts and infrastructure spending, as economic momentum is expected to cool further due to softer domestic demand and the trade war with the United States.

Shares in China climbed on Friday after the government reiterated its commitment to boosting growth.

China is targeting economic growth of 6.0-6.5 percent this year, down from 6.6 percent in 2018 - the slowest pace in 28 years.

"Of course, we are faced with many uncertain factors this year. We have to prepare more and we have reserved policy room (to address uncertainties)," Li told a news conference after the annual parliament meeting ended.

"Moreover, we can deploy quantity-based or price-based policy tools such as reserve requirements and interest rates. This is not monetary easing but to more effectively support the real economy."

Li's comments "reconfirm a consistent pro-growth stance, with clarity on fiscal easing and an earlier-than-expected effective date for tax cuts," Morgan Stanley said in a note, adding that it expects improved growth from the second quarter.

The support measures rolled out so far are taking time to kick in and most analysts believe activity may not convincingly stabilize until the middle of the year.

The central bank has cut banks' reserve requirement ratios (RRR) five times over the past year, with a two-stage RRR cut in January releasing a total of 1.5 trillion yuan (\$223.23 billion) into the financial system.

Further cuts in RRR had been widely expected this year,



after fresh data pointed to persistently soft demand in the Asian economic giant, raising fears of a sharper slowdown.

Sources told Reuters in February that the central bank is not yet ready to cut benchmark interest rates to spur the slowing economy, but is likely to cut market-based rates.

An across-the-board cut in borrowing costs could also risk another flare-up in debt and speculative activity like that in the wake of the 2008-9 global financial crisis.

■ Tax and fee cuts

Promised cuts in value-added tax (VAT) for manufacturing and other sectors will take effect from April 1, while social security fees will be reduced from May 1, Li said.

The premier announced on March 5 that the VAT for the manufacturing sector would be cut to 13 percent from 16 percent. VAT for the transport and construction sectors will be reduced to 9 percent from 10 percent.

Li on Friday sought to soothe concerns that the tax cuts will weigh on local finances, promising the central government will offer support to provinces in central and western China via payment transfers.

The premier said the government would take multiple measures to lower funding costs for small and micro firms by 1 percentage point this year.

Beijing's tax cut efforts have focused on the manufacturing

sector and small businesses that are vital for economic growth and employment. Li said the government hopes to create 13 million jobs this year, the same as last year.

"Not allowing the economy to slip out of a reasonable range, that is to say we will not allow waves of layoffs," said Li, adding the government will provide support to firms creating the most jobs.

Data on Thursday showed that China's survey-based jobless rate rose to 5.3 percent in February, from 4.9 percent in December, partly due to job shedding by export-oriented companies.

■ Trade war

China is still negotiating with the United States to resolve their trade frictions, Li said, adding both sides have far more shared interests than conflicts, and it would be "unrealistic" to decouple the world's two largest economies.

"We hope that the consultations will be fruitful and will achieve mutual benefit and win-win. I believe that this is also the expectation of the world," Li said.

A summit to seal a trade deal between U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping will not happen at the end of March as previously discussed, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said on Thursday.

Washington and Beijing have been locked in a tit-for-tat tariff battle as U.S. presses China for an end to practices and policies it argues have given Chinese firms unfair advantages, including subsidizing of industry, limits on access for foreign companies and alleged theft of intellectual property.

On Friday, China's parliament approved a new foreign investment law that promises to create a transparent environment for foreign firms, though there is skepticism about its enforceability.

The law, designed to ease concerns among foreign companies about the difficulties they face in China, will ban forced technology transfer and illegal government "interference" in foreign business practices.

(Source: Reuters)



# U.S. oil hits highest so far this year, but concerns over demand growth drag

Oil prices edged up on Friday, with U.S. crude climbing to its highest so far this year as production cuts led by OPEC and U.S. sanctions against Venezuela and Iran likely created a slight deficit in global supply in the first quarter.

Yet prices have been prevented from rising further by concerns that an economic slowdown will soon start denting growth in fuel demand.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude oil futures were up 15 cents at \$58.76 per barrel at 0745 GMT, their strongest so far in 2019.

Brent crude oil futures were at \$67.43 per barrel, up 20 cents, or 0.3 percent, from their last settlement, and within a dollar of their \$68.14 2019-high reached the previous day.

Oil has rallied around a quarter since the start of the year.

"Oil continues to grind higher ... in response to ongoing production cuts from the OPEC+ group of producers as well as another (output) slump from a blacked-out Venezuela," said Ole Hansen, head of commodity strategy at Denmark's Saxo Bank.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and non-affiliated



allies like Russia - known as the OPEC+ alliance - have been withholding around 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd) in crude supply from the start of the year to tighten markets and prop up prices.

OPEC+ ministers will meet at the group's

headquarters in Vienna, Austria, on April 17-18 to decide output policy.

"If OPEC+ decide to extend (cuts) ... we expect that inventories will continue to draw through at least Q3," U.S. investment bank Jefferies said on Friday.

With OPEC withholding supply and U.S. sanctions preventing Iranian and Venezuelan oil from entering markets, global crude flow data in Refinitiv showed a slight supply deficit likely appeared in the first quarter.

Preventing oil from rising further have been concerns that a economic slowdown that has gripped large parts of Asia and Europe, and which is showing signs of spilling into North America, will soon dent fuel demand growth.

But oil demand has held up well so far.

Crude oil use in China, the world's biggest importer, in the first two months of 2019 rose 6.1 percent from a year earlier to a record 12.68 million bpd, official data showed this week.

"Oil demand concerns are overdone," Goldman Sachs said in a note on Friday.

The U.S. bank said January global crude oil demand growth was "nearly 2.0 million barrels per day, with strength visible in both emerging markets and developed economies".

Goldman said "current fundamentals will tighten physical markets further", driving up spot Brent crude futures above \$70 per barrel "as supply losses continue (and) demand growth beats low consensus expectations".

(Source: Reuters)

## Asian LNG prices dip to 3-year seasonal low



Asian spot prices for liquefied natural gas (LNG) this week fell to their lowest for this time of the year since 2016 as more supply entered the market from Egypt and Australia, with the lower prices attracting Indian demand, trade sources said.

Spot prices for April delivery to Northeast Asia LNG-AS dropped to \$5.45 per million British thermal units (mmBtu) this week, down 25 cents from the previous week. That was the lowest for mid-March since 2016.

Prices for cargoes delivered in May are estimated to be around \$5.50 per mmBtu, indicating some price recovery could be coming, trade sources said.

The continued drop in prices has been attracting buying interest from India, they added.

For instance, India's Reliance Industries issued a tender earlier this month seeking 12 cargoes for April 2019 to March 2020, while Emirates National Oil Company had sought four cargoes for delivery into India over April to July, they said.

ENOC likely bought the cargoes at \$5.50 to \$5.60 per mmBtu, they said, though details of sellers were not immediately known.

India's GSPC and Torrent Power had also

purchased spot cargoes earlier this month.

Companies do not typically comment on such deals.

Still, supply was ample with Egyptian state-owned company EGAS offering at least four LNG cargoes for loading in April, one of the traders said.

Australia's Ichthys project may also have offered a cargo for late March to early April loading, a second trader said.

Demand from China remained muted as hopes dimmed that Washington and Beijing could reach a deal soon to resolve their long-standing trade dispute.

A summit to seal a trade deal between U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping will not happen at the end of March as previously discussed because more work is needed in U.S.-China negotiations, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said on Thursday.

Buying interest was also low in Europe, industry sources said.

"Europe is quite calm ... more offers than bids, I would say," said an LNG trader.

The tradable price level in Europe is at a discount of around 20 cents per mmBtu to the Dutch price.

(Source: Reuters)

## Norway plans to expand arctic oil exploration areas



Norway's government is proposing to expand the area that will be offered for oil and gas exploration in the 2019 licensing round of acreage in mature areas, Petroleum and Energy Minister Kjell-Borge Freiberg said on Thursday.

Norway plans to include a total of 90 new blocks in the so-called APA annual licensing round this year, including 48 blocks in the Barents Sea, 37 blocks in the Norwegian Sea, and five blocks in the North Sea, Freiberg said.

"It's important to maintain the positive development in exploration activity in the Barents Sea. I hope this will lead to robust field development solutions and increased value creation in the north," Reuters quoted Freiberg as saying in a statement.

There has been opposition to the extension of the acreage under the APA licensing round from politicians of the opposition and from environmentalists, who have argued that those licensing rounds with additional blocks are being used to expand exploration to beyond the scope of those rounds—that is mature and well-explored areas.

In the 2018 APA licensing round, Norway awarded 83 production licenses—a record number of awards for such rounds.

"53 years after the first licensing round, this new record confirms the industry's belief in continued value creation and activity in Norway," Freiberg said in January this year, when he announced the new licenses and the 33 different companies that were awarded ownership interests.

Norway's oil production is expected to drop this year to its lowest level since 1988, but to recover afterwards thanks to two large developments.

Production is expected to jump in 2020 through 2023, thanks to the start up in late 2019 of Johan Sverdrup—the North Sea giant, as operator Equinor calls it.

But after Johan Sverdrup and after Johan Castberg in the Barents Sea scheduled for first oil in 2022, Norway doesn't have major oil discoveries and projects to sustain its oil production after the middle of the 2020s.

The Norwegian Petroleum Directorate (NPD) started warning last year that from the mid-2020s onward, production offshore Norway will start to decline "so making new and large discoveries quickly is necessary for maintaining production at the same level from the mid-2020s."

(Source: oilprice.com)

## U.S.-China trade deal driven by energy exports

Amid signals that the U.S. and China have made some progress in trade negotiations in recent weeks, China has tentatively resumed buying U.S. commodities — something it had stopped doing during the peak of the trade dispute in the summer and fall of 2018.

China is now once again importing U.S. crude oil and soybeans, but despite increased inquiries, the Chinese market response to U.S. liquefied natural gas (LNG) is still tepid, S&P Global Platts' Eric Yep writes in an analysis, citing traders.

"China will agree to purchase a not yet agreed upon, but very substantial, amount of agricultural, energy, industrial, and other product from the United States to reduce the trade imbalance between our two countries," the White House said after the meeting between U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping at the G-20 summit in early December.

While a new summit between the two leaders is yet to be scheduled, the oil market has been recently buoyed by prospects of a trade deal between the world's two largest economies. And the slow return of Chinese purchases of U.S. crude oil could be a positive sign in the trade talks.

The latest available EIA data shows that at the peak of the trade war in the summer, China totally cut off U.S. crude oil purchases in the months of August, September, and October. November saw a trickle of 8,000 bpd U.S. crude oil exports to China, while in December, Chinese imports averaged 97,000 bpd—up from November's very small amount but much lower than the 510,000 bpd record imports in June 2018.

U.S. energy exports are "part of the mix, it may not be the driver, but it's always hanging out there as part of the matrix," U.S. Secretary of Energy Rick Perry said in an interview with CNBC at CERAWEEK this week, referring to the energy exports as part of the trade talks.

"America now has the ability to use that in a very pos-



itive way when it comes to trade negotiations," Secretary Rick added.

Some of the latest signals from ship-tracking data suggest that U.S. crude oil appears to be heading to China after many months of China abstaining from buying American oil despite the fact that it's not on Beijing's tariff list.

Still, a sustained return of U.S. crude oil exports to China will depend on two key factors—how the trade dispute plays out in coming weeks and months and how wide the Brent Crude premium over WTI Crude will be. The wider the spread, the more economical U.S. oil is for Asian refiners compared to Brent-linked grades. In recent weeks, U.S. crude for Asian refiners has also been more advantageous than Middle Eastern grades because the Dubai/Oman prices, off which the Middle East's oil producers price their oil to Asia, are nearly \$10 a barrel higher than WTI.

Total U.S. crude exports set a weekly record of 3.607 million bpd in one of the weeks in February and are expected to continue to grow.

Ben Luckock, Co-Head of Oil Trading at one of the world's biggest trading houses, Trafigura, said at the CERAWEEK conference this week that the U.S. would need China as a buyer in order to absorb the growth in exports over the coming years, so the trade dispute must end for the U.S. to

find buyers of its soaring crude oil exports.

On the LNG trade front between the U.S. and China, things are a bit more complicated as China—the world's fastest-growing LNG demand market—slapped a 10-percent tariff on U.S. LNG imports amid the heated trade tariff tit-for-tat last summer.

Between the start of the first U.S. LNG exports to the world in February 2016 and end-December 2018, China was the third-largest buyer of American LNG behind South Korea and Mexico, with a total of 62 cargoes accounting for 10.7 percent of all U.S. LNG exports, U.S. Department of Energy data shows.

The Chinese import tariff in September 2018, however, stalled American LNG flows to China in the second half of last year, according to data from Thomson Reuters ship tracking and the U.S. Department of Energy. So far this year, only one LNG cargo that left U.S. shores traveled to China, Reuters data showed earlier this week.

If the recent thaw in the trade dispute translates into a trade deal, it could create a win-win situation for both the United States and China. The U.S. will have a large export outlet for its increased LNG shipments which are expected to surge with more liquefaction and export projects coming online. And that export outlet will be the fastest-growing LNG market in the world, as China is betting on natural gas to switch away from coal-fired use in its efforts to curb pollution.

Last week, reports emerged that China's biggest refiner Sinopec was preparing to sign a 20-year LNG supply deal with Cheniere Energy if the U.S.-China trade conflict gets resolved. Sinopec is also getting ready to buy U.S. LNG as soon as the Chinese government directs it to do so, Sinopec's President Ma Yongsheng told Reuters last week.

(Source: oilprice.com)

## Dueling U.S. oil sanctions give India unexpected leverage

By asking India this week to cut its Venezuelan crude oil imports, the U.S. may be showing its willingness to ease Iran sanctions enforcement for the world's No. 3 oil consumer.

India needs both Iranian and Venezuelan oil to run its refineries, but Iranian crude has the advantage of being closer, less expensive and potentially more reliable as Venezuela's infrastructure collapses.

The U.S. is using sanctions against Tehran and Caracas to clamp down on both countries' oil exports to exert economic pressure. For major importer India, the two U.S. policies have collided, likely making it impossible for diplomats to talk about one without addressing the other.

India may point to a sharp drop in its Iranian imports, its potential room to cut Venezuelan imports and its increasing reliance on U.S. crude in negotiating for further Iran sanctions relief in May, analysts said.

Iranian shipments to India have dropped to around 270,000 bpd so far in 2019, from a 2018 average of 517,823 bpd, according to data from Platts trade flow software cFlow. The 2018 imports rose from 461,977 bpd in 2017 as the Trump administration geared up to reinstate sanctions along with Iran providing freight discounts to Indian refiners.

Venezuelan shipments to India, however, have remained relatively steady despite the exporter's escalating crisis. India imported 296,356 bpd year to date, compared with 285,255 bpd in 2018 and 334,997 bpd in 2017, according to cFlow data.

### Prices favor Iran imports

Increasingly steep Iran Heavy discounts are likely designed to keep Indian refiners interested, and at the possible expense of similar grades. On a delivered basis into West Coast India, Iran Heavy has held a \$6.20/b discount to Venezuelan Mesa and a near-\$7/b discount to the U.S. medium sour benchmark Mars so far in March, according to S&P Global Platts calculations. This is a far cry from the near-parity sellers of Mars and Mesa enjoyed as recently as June and July.

Venezuelan Mesa is similar in quality to Iran Heavy and Mars, albeit slightly less sour, and offers similar refining economics, in particular for coking on the U.S. Gulf Coast, according to calculations based on Platts prices and Turner, Mason & Co. yield formulas.

India's state-owned refiners are heavily reliant on Iranian oil, while the country's two private refiners, Reliance Industries and Nayara Energy, are significant buyers of Venezuelan crude.

Reliance, which operates two mega refineries at the Jamnagar complex on the west coast of India, has said it will trim crude imports from Venezuela in compliance with U.S. sanctions. The refiner has also halted sales of diluents like naphtha to Venezuela in the past month. State-owned PDVSA uses naphtha to dilute its heavy crude grades to sell overseas.

The situation could be a bit trickier for Nayara, as Russia's Rosneft is its largest owner. Rosneft has continued its operations in Venezuela, including increasing oil product supplies to the Maduro regime. This week, Rosneft rejected U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's assertion that the company was defying US sanctions by continuing to buy crude from PDVSA.

Another layer of complexity is that private companies often have lower risk tolerance than state-owned companies when weighing sanctions and their threat of getting blocked from the U.S. financial system, said Kevin Book, managing director of ClearView Energy Partners.

"The discussions are probably pretty complicated," he said. "All these things are part of the innate challenge of trying to use economic measures to achieve geostrategic goals. You have to ask businesses to do less well and you have to get them to agree."

### U.S. oil diplomacy

India's imports of U.S. crude have marched steadily higher as Gulf Coast export capacity increases, starting 2019 at a year-to-date average of 133,878 bpd, according to cFlow data, compared with 132,134 bpd in 2018 and 26,342 bpd in 2017, according to the Energy Information Administration. While the U.S. government cannot dictate where private drillers send their crude supplies, the flows have become central to recent diplomatic talks on trade, sanctions and security issues.

Last month, state-owned Indian Oil Corp. struck a deal to buy up to 3 million mt of various U.S. crude grades for delivery over the next fiscal year starting in April. Analysts have said the decision was part of a strategy to broaden its import base, given the uncertainty over Iran sanctions.

India is still buying Iranian crude after U.S. sanctions snapped back in November thanks to a "significant reduction exemption" from the State Department. Terms of the agreement are not public, but the waivers are intended to allow trades to continue as long as the importer reduces volumes every six months.

India's current waiver expires May 4, meaning negotiations over another waiver are at a critical stage as refiners decide whether to continue booking loadings.

Bob McNally, president of Rapidan Energy Group and adviser to former President George W. Bush, does not expect the State Department to make final decisions on the Iran waivers until late April.

"Venezuela is obviously a complication and also argues for holding off until that picture is clearer," he said. "So it's really hard to say with confidence what they'll do. That said, I assume if waiver extensions are granted (perhaps at lower volumes), India will get one."

While India needs no waiver to continue importing Venezuelan oil, the U.S. has threatened additional sanctions that could make it harder for foreign companies to do business with PDVSA. And Pompeo signaled this week that a U.S. request for India to curb its oil business with Venezuela was likely part of the oil sanctions negotiations.

(Source: Platts)

## IEA sees oil market flipping into deficit in second quarter

The oil market will flip into a modest deficit from the second quarter of this year, with OPEC possessing a hefty supply cushion to prevent any price rally in case of possible supply disruptions, the International Energy Agency said on Friday.

The IEA, which coordinates the energy policies of industrialized nations, kept its 2019 oil demand growth forecast unchanged at 1.4 percent, or 1.4 million barrels per day.

Solid non-OPEC oil output growth led by the United States should ensure demand is met, the IEA said.

The IEA said the market could show a modest surplus in the first quarter of 2019 before flipping into a deficit in the second quarter by about 0.5 million bpd.

"At the same time, (OPEC) production cuts have increased the spare capacity cushion. This is especially important now as economic sentiment is becoming more pessimistic and the global economy could be entering a vulnerable period," the IEA added.

The agency said it was particularly concerned about a possible further decline in production in Venezuela, where output has stabilized at 1.2 million bpd in recent months.

It said the degradation of Venezuelan power system, vital for oil output, was such that it could not be sure if the fixes were durable.

(Source: Reuters)



## Senate takes first step to end Yemen war, reorient foreign policy

By Ben Armbruster

The Senate on Wednesday passed a measure mandating the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the Saudi/UAE-led war against Houthi fighters in Yemen. The vote marks the first time since the War Powers Act of 1973 became law that both chambers of Congress have directed the president to withdraw American forces from a conflict. This is a big deal.

The U.S. role in this needlessly destructive war is unlikely to end any time soon. Donald Trump, who appears to have a special fealty to the Saudi leadership and its criminal activity, has said that he will veto the resolution. But U.S. withdrawal is only a matter of time — that is, a matter of Trump's time in office.

Indeed, one important feature of this vote is that Congress — with the help and prodding of grassroots activists — has officially normalized a policy of withdrawal from the Yemen war on a bipartisan basis.

At the same time, the vote also has wider implications for U.S. foreign policy outside of ending the war in Yemen. It has put a serious crack in the structure of U.S. foreign policy making. Since at least 9/11, U.S. foreign policy has been dominated by an executive branch run by leaders of both parties seemingly bent on expanding where and when the United States is involved in war, a status quo that allowed the Yemen war to continue without congressional authorization.

By cancelling the blank check in Yemen, Congress now has momentum to finally repeal the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF), which authorized the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan but has been used since to justify subsequent and unrelated wars. That process gained energy two years ago after a bipartisan majority in a House subcommittee passed a measure, sponsored by Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA), that would have repealed the 2001 AUMF, only for the House GOP leadership to later strip the measure.

Lee has reintroduced a similar measure in this Congress, and a bipartisan repeal effort is now underway in the House. Meanwhile, eight lawmakers—including rising stars Reps. Ilhan Omar (D-MN) and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) and two Democratic presidential candidates Sens. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Bernie Sanders (I-VT)—recently signed a separate pledge to “end the forever war.”

Last week's Senate vote on Yemen has also dented another staple of U.S. foreign policy: unwavering American support for the Saudi monarchy. Change in the U.S.-Saudi relationship is obviously due in large part to the murder of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi, which the CIA concluded with high confidence was ordered by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Ten years ago, it would have been unheard of for the Senate to issue such a sharp rebuke to Saudi Arabia. Less than two years ago, Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) delivered an impassioned speech defending an arms deal with the Saudis. But now, his feelings have completely reversed. “The relationship with the crown prince is so toxic, so tainted, so flawed that I can't ever see myself doing business with Saudi Arabia in the future unless there is change there,” he said in December.

But Khashoggi's murder doesn't account for all Republican defections. Both House and Senate measures garnered significant bipartisan support before it. Indeed, a lead sponsor of Wednesday's Senate bill was Sen. Mike Lee (R-UT), and 18 Republicans in the House voted on a similar resolution last month. Referring to the fact that the Saudis and Emiratis are deliberately starving Yemenis, Sen. Todd Young (R-IN) said: “It offends my sensibilities — and I know it offends the sensibilities of all Americans—that there are countries in this day and age that are using food as a weapon of war.”

Largely overlooked throughout this whole process is that these votes show how U.S. foreign policy, so often a byproduct of Washington lobbyists and other powerful special interests, can be democratized. Saudi Arabia's lobbyists did indeed mobilize to try to quash these votes, but their efforts fell far short, in large part because of a mass grassroots activist mobilization over the last few years pushing Congress to act. Rep. Ro Khanna (D-CA), the lead sponsor of the House measure to end support for the Yemen war, acknowledged the grassroots power on Yemen.

Win Without War, the Yemen Peace Project, the Friends Committee on National Legislation. They have all been instrumental. We would not have been able to do any of this without them. They've been instrumental in the drafting of the legislation. They've been instrumental in making sure members were aware of the legislation and convincing members to support the legislation.

Action on Yemen now shifts to the House, which already passed a resolution mandating U.S. withdrawal from the Saudi/UAE Yemen war. But due to procedural matters, the House must now vote again on either the Senate version that passed last week, or a reconciled version of the House and Senate bills.

Either way, U.S. support for the Saudi/UAE war in Yemen will end, and changes are coming to the way in which U.S. foreign policy is debated, enacted, and conducted.

(Source: Lobe Log)

# Kuwait's steady hand in Persian Gulf affairs

By Kristion Coates Ulrichsen

When Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov arrived in Kuwait March 5 for talks on the Persian Gulf and the region, it was not just a courtesy stop on a tour that also featured consultations in Riyadh, Abu Dhabi and Doha.

Over the past two years, Kuwait has emerged as a critical and essential broker — and bridge — among an otherwise fractious Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) split by the blockage of Qatar by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain as well as Egypt.

Kuwait, which served as PGCC chair last year, as well as Oman, which holds the chair now, have pursued policies that have sought to de-escalate multiple flashpoints, including preventing the blockade of Qatar from escalating into outright conflict, seeking a mediated solution, all the while holding together what remains of the PGCC security structure.

From the start, Kuwait's emir, Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah, has emerged as a steady statesman and go-to leader during the Qatar crisis. He embarked on a frenetic round of shuttle diplomacy in the opening days of the crisis and, at a press conference with U.S. President Donald Trump at the White House in September 2017, suggested that his efforts had successfully prevented military action. Sabah and senior members of the Kuwaiti government have continued to relay messages between the two sides to keep open an indirect channel of communication between the parties as the “hot” crisis in its opening days has settled into a prolonged face-off that has so far defied easy resolution.

This is not the first time that Kuwait has attempted to mediate in intra-PGCC disputes involving Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In 2004, Sabah, then-prime minister of Kuwait, participated in negotiations in France that sought to find common ground between the Saudi and Qatari leadership after Saudi Arabia had withdrawn its ambassador from Doha in 2002, partly in displeasure at Al



## Kuwait's ability to bridge regional and international approaches to diplomacy remains vital.

Jazeera's coverage of regional events. On that occasion, Sabah was unsuccessful, as the Saudi ambassador only returned to Qatar in 2007. But in 2014, Sabah, who was now the emir, embarked on months of patient diplomacy that resolved a first iteration of the standoff between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE.

Several reasons underlie Kuwait's commitment to regional diplomacy, although they have evolved over time. Aside from Saudi Arabia, which never fell under foreign domination, Kuwait became the first of the British-protected sheikhdoms in the Persian Gulf to gain independence in 1961, 10 years before Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE. British forces returned to Kuwait within a week of leaving, however, after Iraq's military ruler moved forces toward the southern border and appeared ready to move into Kuwait. Although British troops were later replaced

by an Arab League force, and Iraq dropped its territorial claim to Kuwait and recognized its independence in 1963, the incident provided a sobering lesson to Kuwaiti leaders of the vulnerability of small states to powerful and expansionary neighbors. As a small state, Kuwait has also appreciated the value of cooperative regional partnerships and balance in international affairs that eschews taking sides or viewing policies through a zero-sum mentality.

Prior to becoming prime minister in 2003 and emir in January 2006, Sabah served for nearly 40 years as Kuwait's foreign minister between 1963 and 2003, with a short break in the early-1990s. This record of more than five decades' service has given Sabah unrivaled experience in regional and foreign affairs and, as he approaches his 90th birthday in June, a reputation as a respected elder statesman. Having experienced, at first

hand in 1990, the invasion and occupation of his country by Iraqi forces, it was hardly a surprise that Sabah responded so energetically to the launch of the blockade of Qatar in June 2017, which represented the most serious rupture in Persian GCC politics since the 1990-91 Persian Gulf War.

Moreover, the damage done to the PGCC as an institution is deeply felt in a country that was one of the architects of its creation in 1981, and whose leaders have devoted much of the past four decades to building and strengthening collective policy responses to shared regionwide concerns in the Persian Gulf.

In May 2015, Sabah was one of only two PGCC heads of state to attend in person the U.S.-PGCC summit with President Barack Obama at Camp David. (Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani of Qatar was the other head of state.) If there is a window for “saving” or reviving the PGCC, it probably lies within the remaining lifespan of Sabah, as well as Sultan Qaboos of Oman, the other wise elder statesman of the PGulf.

Kuwait's ability to bridge regional and international approaches to diplomacy remains vital. Currently in the second year of a two-year term as one of the 10 rotating members of the United Nations Security Council, Kuwait has supported diplomatic, humanitarian and reconstruction initiatives in Yemen, Syria and Iraq, in partnership with international organizations and other Security Council members. At a time when U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf is characterized by a sense of drift that appears to be impacting efforts to secure regional support for Trump administration objectives vis-a-vis Iran, Syria or the peace process, this record of pragmatic engagement and quiet leadership continues to set Kuwait apart from the geopolitical straitjacket approach in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi to regional issues that has deepened polarization within the PGCC and with Iran, and manifested itself in the continuing war and humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen.

(Source: Al Monitor)

# America's polarization is a foreign policy problem, too

The fact that Democrats and Republicans hate each other is making the United States weaker

By Stephen M. Walt

Partisan politics, one sometimes still hears, are supposed to “stop at the water's edge.” Domestic political quarrels might be intense and occasionally personal, but Americans are supposed to temper their disagreements and link arms when dealing with the outside world.

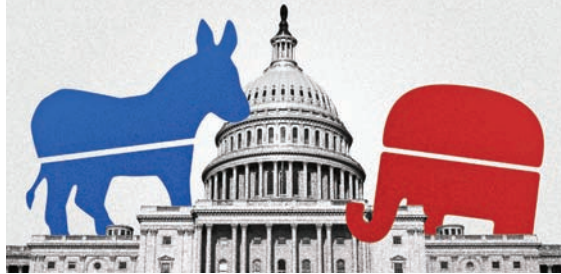
This notion was always a bit of an exaggeration — if not an outright myth — even in the heyday of the fabled “Cold War consensus.” The supposed need to suppress partisan differences didn't prevent nasty accusations about “who lost China?” in the 1940s and early 1950s, along with angry debates over the war in Korea, the broader phenomenon of McCarthyism, the supposed “missile gap” of the late 1950s, or the deep divisions that emerged during the Vietnam War. Nor do I recall a lot of bipartisan restraint in the late 1970s or the 1980s, when Democrats accused former President Ronald Reagan's administration of a cavalier approach toward nuclear war and giving illegal support to right-wing death squads in Central America. Moreover, too much consensus can be as harmful as deep disagreement. If the foreign-policy elite becomes wedded to a bunch of bad ideas and to a flawed grand strategy, the result is likely to be a protracted series of failures. You know: like the past 25 years.

That said, there's no question that the United States is at a level of political polarization unseen for many decades. Most of the attention to this phenomenon has focused on its effects on America's internal politics, and some observers are clearly worried that the core institutions of the country might be at risk—understandable, given President Donald Trump's open hostility towards some of these institutions, his apparent fondness for authoritarians, and the emergence of something resembling “state media” (i.e., Fox News). Less attention has been paid, however, to the impact that hyperpolarization could have on U.S. foreign policy. Apart from an excellent essay by Ken Schultz of Stanford University, this topic just hasn't received a lot of attention. But it should.

How might excessive polarization — where members of a society increasingly cluster into separate “tribes” sharing political beliefs with each other, but not with members of the opposing group — undermine foreign policy? Granting that a degree of disagreement is both unavoidable and often desirable, how might such divisions get out of hand and begin to damage America's ability to interact with the outside world sensibly and successfully?

We should begin by recognizing that today's level of polarization may be partly a reflection of America's privileged international position. Once the Soviet Union collapsed and left the United States at the pinnacle of power, the need for national unity declined and ambitious politicians had less need to show restraint in attacking their political rivals. As Michael Desch argued in a seminal article, states facing serious national-security challenges tend to be stronger and more unified, whereas those in a benign international environment are prone to grow more fractious. America's trajectory since 1992 fits Desch's argument quite well, notwithstanding the brief surge of patriotic feeling that followed the 9/11 terrorist attacks. To put it bluntly: Because the United States was now so safe and secure, politicians felt they could sow division at home without worrying too much about weakening the country abroad.

Unfortunately, one negative impact of excessive polarization is a decreased ability to do the things that can keep the country on top for a long time. If polarization prevents the federal government from taking effective action on climate change, decaying infrastructure, the opioid epidemic, primary education, financial regulation, the deficit, or any number of other problems, America's long-term position of power



could erode and leave the country less able to handle future foreign-policy challenges.

Moreover, as Schultz notes, polarization leaves the country more vulnerable to outside interference. And this sort of thing can rapidly become self-reinforcing, as opposing sides leap to accuse each other not just of bad judgment but of being actively disloyal. This sort of thing is not unprecedented in U.S. political history: In the early days of the republic, Hamiltonians accused Thomas Jefferson of being overly sympathetic to revolutionary France, while Jeffersonians believed Hamilton to be a closet monarchist with a poorly disguised sympathy for Great Britain. It did not take much for either group to see the other as more than misguided.

Schultz also points out that polarization threatens a nation's ability to reach agreements with other countries. It is no accident that presidents have come to rely more and more on executive agreements rather than formal, ratified treaties: It has become increasingly difficult to get the latter through a divided Congress. Of equal concern is the possibility that other states will be wary of making mutually beneficial agreements with the United States, simply because they have no way to be sure whether an agreement reached this year will survive the next election. People who think U.S. interests are best served by avoiding international agreements and maximizing the country's freedom of action (e.g., John Bolton) might welcome such a situation, but this view is dangerously shortsighted. The United States has benefited greatly from a host of past agreements of various types, and it makes no sense to encourage other states to have less and less confidence in the value of U.S. pledges. Nobody expects the United States to act contrary to its interests, but how can it expect other countries to do something it wants in exchange for something they want, if they have no way of knowing whether it will deliver?

Indeed, the problem of inconstancy may be even worse than Schultz suggests. Once foreign policy begins to oscillate between two increasingly divided factions, each of the groups has an incentive to pursue its most ambitious, controversial, or extreme projects whenever it happens to be in a position of power. Not only does the pendulum oscillate with greater frequency, the swings themselves become more extreme.

Another cost of polarization is the erosion of America's broader image for competence and good sense. The more bitter, divided, gridlocked, venal, and downright stupid American politics become, the less appealing the American system of government is to outside observers. When that happens, the country's moral voice — already compromised by foreign-policy excesses — gets reduced to a whisper. I mean, seriously: What sensible foreign country would listen to an American telling it how to organize a government, write a constitution, root out political corruption, or hold officials accountable, when the U.S. system itself seems increasingly broken and the political ecosystem is populated by unprincipled popinjays, corrupt con men, habitual liars, and senior officials whose chief skill is failing upward? When a nation's politics are sufficiently

polarized, the worst people can still find safe sinecures within their tribe. Yeats got it exactly right: “The best lack all conviction, / While the worst are full of passionate intensity.”

Polarization also threatens to defeat the growing effort by Congress to wrest back some of the powers over foreign policy enshrined in the Constitution (such as the capacity to declare war), powers that presidents have gradually usurped over many decades. On balance, U.S. foreign policy would be better served if Congress provided a forum for genuine debate—in part to better inform the public—and if it performed effective oversight over many aspects of the country's foreign policy. But a Congress divided into warring factions, that uses its powers not to debate, oversee, and refine U.S. policy, but rather to grandstand, distract, and advance a purely partisan agenda, is hardly an institution that is likely to have a positive impact on U.S. foreign policy.

Lastly, as I noted in my recent book, deep polarization also makes it harder for the country to learn the right lessons from the past. Learning from past mistakes is essential but also difficult, because any historical episode yields many lessons and reasonable people can disagree about which lessons to draw. But when politics becomes tribal and there is little overlap between rival camps, each will simply believe its own self-serving narrative and will draw very different lessons from the past. One sees this already in the case of the Iraq War, which about as clear an example of a foreign-policy debacle as one could name. But where Democrats blame the administration of former President George W. Bush for leading the country to war under false pretenses and then bungling the occupation, Republicans now insist the United States was on the path to victory after the 2007 “surge” and blame former President Barack Obama for pulling the country out too early. Once politics becomes sufficiently polarized, we won't agree on lessons or even on basic facts.

What's to be done about this situation? If I had a quick and easy solution to this problem, I wouldn't need to work for a living. One “solution” would be the emergence of a “clear and present danger” that would impart some discipline and restraint to American foreign policy, but that's an awfully big price to pay for greater harmony at home. Would the United States really be better off facing a more dangerous world, even if it did encourage politicians and pundits to be more careful and judicious in their public discourse? And there's no guarantee that a more dangerous world would instantly cause the political class to return to earlier levels of bipartisan amity. It's equally tempting to pontificate about reining in social media and the other accelerants of division, but interfering with free expression is a slippery slope and would almost certainly make this situation worse.

There are other remedies that have been proposed — electoral reforms that would encourage centrist candidates, more systematic efforts to “ghost” known trolls, and government and private sector initiatives to halt foreign efforts to exacerbate the existing divisions. And we can hope that the current period of hyperpartisanship is merely a phase, and that the fever will eventually break and restore the United States to a more healthy political condition.

I don't know if any of these remedies would work, or if any of these reasons for optimism are valid. But I do know this: Polarization doesn't just make it harder to address America's domestic challenges; it's a deep drag on the country's ability to advance its interests overseas. Good thing the United States is already pretty darn safe and secure. If we had to be competent, farsighted, disciplined, and smart these days, we'd be in real trouble.

(Source: Foreign Policy)



# The Kashmir conflict and distorted Education

**1 →** Reference; AISHE-2017 MHRD (All India Survey on Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development). It is pertinent to mention here, there is only one private engineering college with 180 seating capacity and 2 Government medical colleges with 150, 100 seating capacity each. Since 2003, Kashmir is without a government engineering college after Regional Engineering College was converted into National Institute of Technology (NIT) whose seats get filled at all India level.

Besides there are many professional colleges indicated in AISHE (All India Survey on Higher Education 2017) mostly operating in rented buildings or does not have required infrastructure/ machinery equipment. In order to overcome the dearth of educational infrastructure, State government needs to pay special attention towards its development.

They should encourage the emergence of private colleges and universities of excellence thereby augmenting the educational eco-system. Reportedly there are 100s of files pending since years for the establishment of new private colleges for want of government clearance. Nevertheless lack of educational infrastructure, the candidates who opt for engineering/technology, medical and allied courses etc have no other option to move out of valley. Approximately 13 thousand students move every year in different states of India in order to get admission in various professional courses.

This scenario changed after 14 February 2019, when a convoy of vehicles carrying security personnel on the Jammu Srinagar National Highway was attacked by a vehicle-borne suicide bomber in the Pulwama district of Kashmir. The attack resulted in



the deaths of 44 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). In the back drop of this attack, Majority of students studying outside state, including girls, have been humiliated, intimidated and threatened.

There were cases of beatings and physical harm too. At places, colleges have been forced to expel the Kashmiri students and police has been pressurised to register cases against them on fictitious charges. Students were also given ultimatum to leave the colleges/ universities by the angry mobsters who are taking law in their hands.

Despite Prime Minister and Chief Justice of India directed all the states to ensure secu-

rity of Kashmiris students, the members of (VHP) Vishiv Hindu Pereshad and Bajrang Dal succeeded to extrude most of students thus becoming self-styled lawmakers and prosecutioners. A sizeable number of students have cancelled their admissions or are not agreeing to go back for studies.

It has been observed most of the students belonging from average middle class families and have taken education loans which is of no avail now. The move has pressurised them to leave studies mid-way as safeguarding the life takes precedence over education.

The forced expulsion of thousands of Kashmiri students from outside colleges will

be the biggest challenge before the society. Also challenge for upcoming aspirants to which there seems to be no way forward as alternative. In such sensitive scenario there is every likelihood that kashmiri students can once again become hostage. All sections of society must sit together and should try to find solutions. Religious and community leaders across country have a role to play wherein they can counsel the majority to respect for human rights and the acceptance of responsibility. Kashmiri students also need to learn skills of negotiation, avoid discussions, critical thinking that will enable them to complete education without indulging in violence.

Although United Nations organization (UNO) and World community has failed to resolve century old Kashmir conflict. But a small favour can be expected from them on humanitarian grounds by reserving professional education seats in medicine, engineering and other courses in their colleges and universities on scholarship for distressed Kashmiri students. This will not only boost the morale of helpless students in particular but will be a contribution to humanity in general.

At this crucial juncture, there is a pivotal role of OIC (Organisation of the Islamic conference) and its associated nations to take a strong note of the matter. They should also come forward unanimously by paying way to support the students of the conflict. Unless affected students, are not protected and educated, their future is seriously imperilled. Yet the world would be a better place for all of us if every child has an education and every child had a fair chance in life.

## Sheikh Zakzaky and the Nigerians

**1 →** He didn't believe in Boko Haram (says its government made to serve a perpose) the security wants to name him a terrorist. He always help the needy, the poor, the tycoons says he is a foreigen agent.

He passed his university papers with first class some academicians says he is a drop out. He enjoys millions of followers and the government says he wants to change the government, the system and way of leadership, he wants to revolutionalise the nation. Funny isn't it.

Who is this man please, why are many against him, doesn't he have the answers to our countless problems? It is time to

know the ideology of this man, Sheikh Zakzaky."

Sheikh zakzaky is a man of foresight and a man of eloquent speech; His view on the world political system in general and in Nigeria in particular:

"We must realize that this will not take us out of the woods. Even if all the people were to call for the resignation of Babangida, a worse tyrant will take up the mantle. That is the fact. When Shagari was the president, people wanted him out. The moment he was toppled, Buhari took over. Then people felt that things were much better with Shagari than with Buhari. Now after removal of Buhari, people are

again saying Buhari is even better. Now, if Babangida is to step aside, people will agitate why will he not come back?

It is like a spoilt car. You keep changing drivers because of your erroneous belief that the problem is with the drivers. As long as the car is not repaired, the journey will never be smooth. The problem is not about drivers.

For the avoidance of doubts, only a just system will produce just leaders. Thus, our efforts must be geared towards ensuring a just system. A just system will necessarily have to precede just leaders. 1992, at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Zaria.

## Maduro failure to Nab Guaido will sap Venezuela army's morale: ex-U.S. official

**TEHRAN (Tasnim)** — Dr. Paul Craig Roberts, former U.S. assistant secretary of the Treasury for Economic Policy, said the failure of Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro to arrest opposition leader Juan Guaido would damage the military's morale and pave the way for his government's collapse.

Following is the full text of the interview: **■** Recently, U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton said Washington is working to build a coalition seeking to replace Venezuela's president Nicolas Maduro and his government. The U.S. has also threatened Venezuela with military action. What is your take on this?

A: The United States government is unable to tolerate any country that has an independent policy. This is the reason the United States government tried to overthrow (Bashar) Assad in Syria and the reason it wants to overthrow the Iranian government. Those governments that do not follow Washington's rule are unacceptable and so in the case of Venezuela and in many other examples, the situation is magnified by the fact that Venezuela has the largest oil reserves in the world (and) that these oil reserves, prior to the Chavez government to the revolution as they call it there, were exploited by American and western firms and the money was taken out of the country and was not there to help with the development of Venezuela or the improvement of the situation of the Venezuelan people. So the nationalization of the oil by Chavez exactly as happened in Iran in the early 1950s when your first-elected democratic government nationalized the oil and was overthrown by the CIA, that is now in process in Venezuela. So it is really two things behind it: one is Washington will not tolerate countries, especially in Latin America because of the so-called "Monroe Doctrine" which means that the United States regards entirety of Latin America as American vassals. This was challenged by Chavez and by Maduro, so then Maduro has to go. Second: the oil needs to be put back into the hands of American oil companies. So that is what is going on down there and the whole thing is set-up, is an egregious obvious violation of international law and United States law. And yet it has the support of much of Latin America and primarily all of Europe. So it shows the extent of the American empire.

**■** Russia has warned that the U.S. is using humanitarian aid to instigate a dan-

gerous provocation in Venezuela by arming the country's opposition while moving its own forces closer to the borders of the Latin American country for a military invasion. Again, recently a Russian official said Moscow will do all it can to prevent any potential intervention against Venezuela by the U.S. I would like to know your take on this as well.

A: What the Russian government means by doing all that it can means diplomatically. It does not mean a military intervention; it means that the Russian government will speak out against the American coup, will expose it and will try to organize diplomatic opposition against it. Of course, whatever the Russians say is unlikely to be reported in the American media. The Americans do not have a media, they have a ministry of propaganda. There is no such thing as a free press in the United States except the alternative media that still exist on the internet. So Russia is not really doing all it can. They could send a regimen of crack troops; this would increase the confidence of the Venezuelan military. The Chinese could do the same. Both China and Russia have large investments in Venezuela and of course, all of these could be lost if the American coup succeeds. So yes they could do that but this would be regarded by the Russian government as too much of provocation I think. So they are speaking mainly of diplomatic efforts, of their efforts in the United Nations Security Council; they will speak in defense of the Venezuelan government; they expose the American plot.

**■** Venezuela's self-declared leader Juan Guaido said recently that he was working to restore ties with Israel that Caracas cut off a decade ago in solidarity with the Palestinians. What do you think about his comments?

A: Well, I would imagine that they are inspired by John Bolton and the American neo-conservatives and Zionists who are allied with Israel and the American neo-conservative policy of U.S. hegemony works to Israel's benefit in the Middle East and so probably it is just Bolton trying to expand his network and no doubt if the American coup succeeds, Venezuela will be made a member of NATO. So it is just the neo-conservatives or Zionists allied with Israel. Some of them are dual citizens, U.S.-Israeli citizens; they are just expanding their network and also opening up for Israel the chance to participate alongside the Americans with the plundering, looting



of Venezuela because that is what the coup is aimed at, namely to restore the ability of Washington and its friends to loot Venezuela because it has important resources. The world needs to understand much of the American wealth comes from looting of countries. That's what it is about. If Israel then takes this interest, Israel's lobby becomes just another lobbying force in Washington preaching Trump actually to do more and use the military. So I would imagine it is just all part of John Bolton's view of maximizing the pressure Washington can put to overthrow Venezuela. This so-called opposition leader ... first of all the only opposition are the Venezuelans who formally participated with the Americans in plundering the country and they want to recover this opportunity to plunder their own country. They are tiny number of people; they are obstacle elite elements and their candidate, of course, was picked by Washington because he is a puppet; he is servant of Washington; he does not represent Venezuelan people and he has never run for president; he has never been a candidate and it is really so absurd and it is so audacious; it makes you wonder why the United States would expose itself to this type of ridicules; it is too open. It is showing too much of an open illegality and obvious coup. Usually, Washington tries to hide the coup. This one is just too blatant. So it shows some people are running amok.

What the United States in banking on in Venezuela is that stress and strain will break the Venezuelan military. So far it has stood with the elected government in Venezuela and I think most likely members of

the Venezuelan military understand that if the American coup succeeds, then the whole country will be back into poverty and will be plundered again as it has been in the past. So they have an incentive to stand with the elected government. Whatever Maduro's failures, they are very small compared to what will happen to Venezuela once it is back in America's clutches. But the stress and strain of the constant threats and bribes...you know the United States is offering his Venezuelan officers huge sums of money to commit treason and if you get worn down by stress and strain; the Americans have convinced you; they are coming with an invasion force and they are going to bomb Caracas and the alternative is you take millions of dollars and change sides; this is a serious threat to the legitimate government and so the longer these stress and strains go on, the bigger chance the Americans have that it will break the courage of the Venezuela military. Then they will desert their own government. That is what Washington is trying to do. I doubt that Washington would actually invade and particularly if the Venezuelans are going to resist because American invasions do not always succeed very well. You can look at Afghanistan where after 18 years they are unable to defeat a few thousand lightly armed Taliban. But I think the Americans will put heavy, heavy pressures on the Venezuelan military with threats and bribes and try to crack the resistance and I think in this sense Maduro is making a serious mistake not arresting the American puppet. The man has clearly committed sedition and treason. He is clearly in violation of the laws recognized all over the world and Maduro's failure to arrest this man and all of his supporters and put them on trial will contribute to the military losing confidence in Maduro's government. So Maduro will not deal with the American puppet who says he is the real president, a person no one has ever voted for, and at the same time the Americans are pressuring, threatening and bribing the military... so that's a very bad decision on the part of Maduro; I do not know who is advising him; maybe he is scared, maybe he thinks if he does arrest this man, America will invade. No. I think his government will collapse if he does not take action against this obvious treason and so I would say that the chance of John Bolton not succeeding (is low), at least it is 50-50 chance to overthrow the Venezuelan government.

## Normalizing the abnormal: U.S. Federal Reserve contemplating QE replay



**1 →** In other words, when inflation is low, unemployment should be high and vice versa, and during the 1960s, the two rates seemed to follow closely the predictions published by New Zealand economist A. H. William Phillips in 1958. In fact, the curve fit the data so closely, that government policymakers began to use it cavalierly in the 1970s as a tool to predict the tradeoff between inflation and unemployment.

In 1973 U.S. president Richard Nixon took the dollar off the gold standard and inflation began to increase, along with unemployment, in contradistinction to the Phillips Curve, thus confounding economists. The FED raised interest rates to a high of 13 percent to curtail the inflation rate, which by 1974 had risen to over 12 percent, concurrently with the Arab oil embargo. Predictably, the result of this economic double-shock was a recession, so the FED began to lower interest rates in hope of moderating the unemployment rate, which stubbornly continued to climb, reaching a high of 10.8 percent in 1982. High inflation continued along with high unemployment into the 1980s, until inflation finally dropped below 4 percent by December 1982, but the unemployment did not fall below 6 percent until 1987.

Throughout this period of what was then termed "stagflation" the FED raised and lowered interest rates, which at times were as high as 20 percent in 1979 and 1980, in reaction to the double-digit inflation rate. FED chairman Paul Volker put a halt to the so-called stop-go monetary policy of frequent and unpredictable interest rate changes, and instead fought inflation with consistent, relatively high interest rates. The result was that the U.S. economy continued to have its ups and downs, but inflation has stayed well below the double-digit range.

Also, it was becoming clear that the FED was leaning in favor of its mandate to control inflation at the expense of full employment, which the FED interprets as an unemployment rate of between 4 and 5 percent. Presently, the FED feels that 2 percent "is most consistent over the longer run with its mandate for price stability and maximum employment." But maintaining such a tight leash on inflation has a high social cost. "There is very little basis in economic research for maintaining that a stable 3.0 inflation rate is more costly to the country than having 1 million people being needlessly unemployed," wrote economist Dean Baker in 2015. At that time, the actual unemployment rate, U6 in U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics parlance, was at 10 percent, and the latest figures from February 2019 peg it at 7.3 percent. During a recent meeting, the FED conceded that "it would not be appropriate to specify a fixed goal for employment," but participants in the Federal Open Market Committee meeting estimated "the longer-run normal rate of unemployment was 4.4 percent."

Of course inflation eats into the profits of bankers and financiers, and since the FED is composed of people who are either from the banking and financial services sector, or intend to have future careers in it, the policies adopted by the FED tend to be congruent with the interests of the banks and investment firms. These are the types of people who are invited to the FED's annual gathering in late August in Jackson Hole, Wyoming of bankers, policymakers, economists, academics and other influential people from around the world. Last year's symposium included such notables as Claudia M. Buch, Vice President, Deutsche Bundesbank; Andrew G. Haldane, Chief Economist, Bank of England; Agustín Carstens, General Manager, Bank for International Settlements; Stephen S. Poloz, Governor, Bank of Canada; Sylvie Goulard, Deputy Governor, Banque de France; Ilan Goldfajn, Governor, Bank of Brazil; Jing Liu, Deputy Representative, U.S. Office of The People's Bank of China; and, Karnit Flug, Governor, Bank of Israel. The absence of labor leaders or, for that matter, any representative of the common people leaves one gasping for breath.

In 2007, the first tremors of what was to be the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s were felt. Homeowners who had taken adjustable rate mortgages (ARMs) began to default on their loans after the FED had raised interest rates, causing monthly mortgage payments to rise. The financial sector had created sophisticated financial instruments, mortgage-backed securities otherwise known as derivatives, from these mortgages to create investments. The defaults on the mortgages rippled through to the derivatives causing their value to fall. Likewise, as homeowners defaulted on mortgages, banks began foreclosing on homes, driving housing prices down.

As the housing market crumbled, the FED began to cut interest rates in January 2008, and continued to do so feverishly until by December the target rate for federal funds was between zero and one-quarter percent. In the meantime, the FED began to buy so-called toxic securities, primarily mortgage-backed securities that financial firms had purchased and could not resell due to the collapse of the housing market. When the Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae) and the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation (Freddie Mac), both quasi-governmental corporations created to expand mortgage accessibility, began to flounder under the avalanche of foreclosures, they were nationalized, giving them access to money from the U.S. Treasury general fund.

Over the decade from 2008 to 2018, the FED pumped some \$4 trillion into the U.S. economy, which remains in an abnormal state, with historically low unemployment rates but uncharacteristically low inflation. This \$4 trillion appears on the FED balance sheet as assets, which, under the normalization program, were slowly being disposed of. But due to economic concerns, such as the recent partial federal government shutdown, continued weakness in the housing sector and slowing global economic growth, particularly in China and Europe, the FED appears ready to normalize the abnormal: drop interest rates to zero and revive QE to resuscitate an ailing U.S. economy.

So it appears U.S. taxpayers will continue to be stuck with the bill for bailing out the "too big to fail" financial giants when their risky financial ventures go awry. As economist Edward Kane noted, assurance of governmental rescue "permits aggressive managements to back risky positions" knowing there is a safety net of "equity capital extracted from hapless national or foreign taxpayers." Furthermore he stated, "Corruption deepens as the stakes rise and when incentive conflict tempts other players to join in a coalition to exploit taxpayers."



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# In need of organ transplant: 25,000 lives hanging in the balance

**HEALTH** **TEHRAN** — Currently some 25,000 individuals are in need of organ transplantation in the country, Mehdi Shadnough, head of the Health Ministry's management center for transplantation and special diseases, has said.

The ministry is striving to promote the culture of organ transplant among the public, Mehr Quoted Shadnough as saying on Friday.

Of the 25,000 who need organ transplant, 8,600 are suffering kidney diseases and in some cases their survival highly depend on receiving an organ, he added.

While last year (March 2017-March 2018) the rate of organ transplant was at its highest in the country only 926 individuals donated their organs while some 4,000 dies of brain death which means only 25 percent of them donated their organ, he lamented.

However, if each brain dead patient on average donate three organs no one will remain on the waiting lists for organ transplant, he suggested.

He went on to highlight that people should become aware of the fact that brain dead



patients will never survive and they have only short amount of time to decide whether they want to donate their organs or not.

Transplantation is the optimal treatment for many patients with end-stage organ failure. However, the demand for transplantable

organs is not met by the supply of those from live or deceased donors.

According to the figures revealed by International Registry in Organ Donation and Transplantation (IRODaT) Spain leads the world in organ donation.

Based on the data published on IRODaT by the end of 2017 Iran's per million population of actual deceased organ donors was 11.43. In 1996 Iran's per million population of actual deceased organ donors was 0.1, which compared to the current per million people in the population (pmp) shows a great increase.

Understanding the meaning of neurological death is also another factor helping families to consent for organ donation.

Neurological death is defined as 'irreversible loss of capacity for consciousness combined with the irreversible loss of the capacity to breath'. It is a pre-requisite for donation, although to families the body still appears to have life.

Making families of the deceased aware of the fact that they can find a sense of meaning and creating a positive outcome of their tragic loss by organ donation is a must to promote the culture. Families should have a desire to help others and apprehend that the deceased's legacy will continue to exist through donation.

## Breast cancer test could predict chances of disease's return 20 years later

A new test could identify breast cancers that are likely to return more than 20 years later – a development that might herald an era of personalized medicine.

The way a patient's cancer will progress can be determined by categorizing molecular and genetic markers of breast tumors into 11 subtypes, University of Cambridge researchers found.

Following around 2,000 women over 20 years, the team funded by the Cancer Research charity found some women with initially aggressive cancers had a low chance of tumors returning after five years.

However, other tumors that might initially respond to treatment were found to be more likely to reappear up to 20 years later, potentially in an incurable form.

"We've shown that the molecular nature of a woman's breast cancer determines how their disease could progress, not just for the first five years, but also later," said Dr Oscar Rueda, lead author of the paper published in the journal Nature. "We hope that our research tool can be turned into a test doctors can easily use to guide treatment recommendations."

Using molecular markers is a booming field for cancer research. Previously, tumors have been classified by the

area in which they originate, and other features such as size.

The researchers said around 12,300 women in the UK could belong to one of these "late recurring" subgroups, which are currently clumped together within cancers classed as oestrogen receptor positive tumors.

If doctors are able to test for molecular features, these patients could benefit from longer courses of chemotherapy, or more frequent follow-up screening checks.

The new model also helps predict where cancers are likely to spread and how aggressive – or treatment-resistant – they are likely to be when they return. The tests would have the added benefit of giving women reassurance about their personal risks.

"It's quite scary and definitely a worry," said Catherine Scott, 51, from Cambridge. She joined the study after being diagnosed with triple negative breast cancer – a form with the fewest treatment options – in 2016.

When her treatment ended, she asked her doctor about her chances of it returning because her next checkup was not for a year. The doctor could only predict the chances based on old cases.

"If they were able to make it more personalized that would

be more reassuring," Ms Scott said. "It would definitely be better than feeling you have to cross your fingers."

The research comes after another Cambridge University group released an online calculator for men with prostate cancer. The tool helps them understand their cancer risks and the side-effects of treatments.

The findings also follow the launch of schemes such as the NHS Genomic Medicine Service, which offers free testing to patients with rare disease or cancers. Such developments bring the prospect of an affordable personalized cancer test in hospitals closer.

"We hope these 11 molecular subtypes could in future help us better predict long-term outcomes and lead to more personalized treatment plans for patients based on the properties of their tumor," said Dr Simon Vincent, director of research of the charity Breast Cancer Now.

"Crucially, this major study could help us tease apart the diverse set of hard-to-treat breast cancers currently grouped together as 'triple negative', and identify certain patients that are unlikely to experience a recurrence more than five years after their treatment."

(Source: The Independent)

## Quarter of all deaths worldwide linked to environmental damage and pollution, UN says

One in four deaths worldwide can be linked to pollution and other environmental damage caused by humans, the United Nations has warned.

Polluted drinking water, filthy air and land destroyed by "mega-farms" are among the threats that must be urgently addressed, according to a new report compiled by hundreds of scientists.

Based on data from 2015, they estimated 9 million deaths each year can be attributed just to pollution – with outdoor and indoor fumes posing the biggest danger.

The report's authors warned humanity faces a "bleak future", as parts of Asia and Africa, in particular, could see millions more premature deaths in the coming decades.

The gap between rich and poor countries is expected to grow as overconsumption and food waste in the developed world are matched by hunger and the spread of preventable diseases elsewhere.

Pollutants entering freshwater systems could lead to anti-microbial resistance becoming the number one cause of death by the middle of the century as infections become harder to control.

The UN released its Global Environment Outlook, a project six years in the making, at a major meeting in Nairobi on Wednesday.

It draws on hundreds of data sources to establish various factors driving the prevalence of more than 100 diseases.

The report concluded preventable environmental problems will "cause approximately 25 per cent of global disease and mortality".

"The science is clear. The health and prosperity of humanity is directly tied with the state of our environment," said Joyce Msuya, acting executive director of UN Environment.

"We are at a crossroads. Do we continue on our current path, which will lead to a bleak future for humankind, or do we pivot to a more sustainable development pathway? That is the choice our political leaders must make, now."

The Paris climate agreement was established in 2015 as a strategy to address climate change, with nations committing to cut their carbon emissions and hold back soaring global temperatures.

But while awareness of climate change's catastrophic impacts grows, there is no equivalent agreement by nations to deal with the other environmental challenges facing the planet.

Negotiations taking place at the current UN environment assembly are expected to focus on critical issues including tackling food waste and plastic pollution in the oceans.

However, the team behind the new report said that most of the policies and technologies that can help avoid the worst already exist.

According to their analysis, investing 2 per cent of each nation's GDP would ensure economic growth continues while avoiding much of the impact of climate change, water loss and habitat destruction. The UN team called for nations to take responsibility for the harm they are causing and implement such policies as soon as possible.

(Source: The Independent)

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facilities,\$15000

Darous  
Duplex villa,600 sq.m built  
up,1000 sq.m land ,all  
facilities,\$8000

Other areas:  
Farmaniyeh  
Aghdasiyeh  
Shahrak Gharb  
Shariati-Pasdaran  
Valiasre  
Tajrish  
Jordan  
Vanak  
Arjantin  
Zafar...  
nice cases ready to move in.



## Identity in cyberspace atop agenda of Supreme Cyberspace Council

**TECHNOLOGY** **TEHRAN** — The identity system document for cyberspace is amongst the high priorities of the Supreme Cyberspace Council, the secretary Abolhassan Firuzabadi announced, Mehr reported on Friday.

“We aim to develop an infrastructure for clean and dynamic interaction regarding personal and social rights in cyberspace by defining the identification system document,” he said.

In this way, the social, economic, political and technological relations between internet users are developed, which leads into boosting of digital marketing, digital media, and online administrative affairs, he added.

In the document, the digital identity should be verified according to the user’s interaction in cyberspace regarding personal privacy.

“We only aim to provide a system in which, there would be no need to render documents for several times for administrative procedures and the state-run as well as private sector have access to them,” he said.

The identification system is one of the main principles of cyberspace governance, which is important to digital development, he said.

Providing digital ID in cyberspace, the safety for personal information, the interaction between digital and physical data are amongst the issues discussed in the document, he concluded.

## Tehran to host ELECOMP 2019 in July

**TECHNOLOGY** **TEHRAN** — The 25th edition of Iran International Exhibition of Electronics, Computer & E-commerce (ELECOMP 2019) will be held from July 18 to 21.

The Elecomp will be held with the motto of ‘better future’ this year, the head of Iranian Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Guild Organization Mohammad Baqer Asna-Ashari said on Wednesday, Mehr reported.



ELECOMP Jobs is a new section, which will be added to the exhibition in order to boost entrepreneurship for ICT graduates, he said.

Unfortunately, there is no connection between alumni and the companies, which may be facilitated by the ELECOMP Jobs section, he said.

He named ELECOMP Trends as another important section in which, hi-techs like big data and blockchain are discussed.

A total of six halls are allocated to startups, while the halls for startups are limited to four in past editions, he said.

The ICT Ministry is negotiating with some foreign countries to take part in the ELECOMP 2019, he announced.

ELECOMP is the biggest event in the Iranian electronics and computer market. Since its first edition in 1995, the event has been providing a unique opportunity for businesses to increase their share of this huge and ever-growing market.

## Olympics: Tokyo 2020 unveils robots to help wheelchair users, workers

Tokyo 2020 Olympics and Paralympics organizers launched their ambitious Robot Project on Friday, unveiling two of the robots designed to assist supporters, workers and athletes at the Games.

Toyota’s Human Support Robot (HSR) delivers a basket to a woman in a wheelchair at a demonstration of Tokyo 2020 Robot Project for Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo, Japan, March 15, 2019. REUTERS/Kim Kyung-hoon

The two products, Toyota’s Human Support Robot (HSR) and the Power Assist Suit from Panasonic, were demonstrated to the public for the first time in Tokyo.

The HSR, a small white robot with built-in facial features, will assist wheelchair users at the Olympics, which begin in July 2020.

The robots can carry food and other goods, guide viewers to their seats and provide event information.

“We will support people at the Olympics and at the stadium in wheelchair accessible areas,” said Minoru Yamauchi, who is in charge of Toyota’s 2020 robots program.

“In terms of service, we will be offering stress-free entry and viewing and the robot can also carry bags and other luggage items for the customers.”

There will be 16 HSR robots at Tokyo 2020 venues and Toyota hope to have similar products available for general sale by the early 2030s.

Panasonic also presented their offering, a battery-powered exoskeleton that assists with picking up heavy objects.

People are strapped into the Power Assist Suits, which enable users to repetitively lift and carry objects without putting a strain on their back.

They will be used by workers at Olympic and Paralympic venues, as well as the athletes’ village.

Tokyo 2020 organizers have long maintained next year’s summer showpiece will be the most innovative ever and more robots are expected to be announced later.

“At Pyeongchang there are examples of robots being used at the Games but I don’t think it was to this sort of practical level,” said Tokyo 2020 Vice Director General Maasaki Komiya.

“So, let me reiterate, we want to give the impression that robots are actually usable and they can become part of our daily lives.”

“At past Games I do not believe that we really saw robots as part of the Games.”

The Olympics begin on July 24, 2020 with the Paralympics commencing a month later.

(Source: reuters.com)

# Iran working on key space technology projects

**TECHNOLOGY** **TEHRAN** — The head of the Iranian Space Research Center Hossein Samimi announced that the center is working on five key projects, which are considered as the main achievements of Iran’s space technology, Mehr reported on Thursday.

The Nahid 1 telecommunication satellite will launch into orbit and Nahid 2 satellite will be completed during the next Iranian calendar year 1398 (starting on March 21), he said.

The satellite engineering model for Pars 1 remote sensing satellite has already been completed and its satellite flight model will be prepared during the next year, he explained.

The upper-stage system, known as SAMAN, is one of the other key projects the center aims to complete during next year, he added.

The internet balloon is another one, which become operational in the first half of 1398, he said.

He said that center aims to develop its cooperation with other organizations



including Management and Planning Organization of Iran, ministry of culture and Iran Meteorological Organization during the next year.

In late February, Electromagnetic Compatibility (EMC) testing lab was inaugurated at the venue of the Iranian Space Research Center.

Iran launched homegrown Payam satellite on January 15, however, the satellite’s carrier rocket could not reach the “necessary speed” and so did not reach the orbit.

Payam, a 90kg non-military satellite, was planned to be sent into a 500km orbit using domestically-made Simorgh satellite-carrier rocket.

Manufactured by Amirkabir University of Technology, the image resolution of the Payam satellite was 45 meters and could stay in orbit for three years.

During a speech in February, Information and Communication Technology Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi announced that despite the sanctions that have slowed down the country’s space technology development, there are no specific problems and the national space program is well progressing.

The U.S. tries definitely to impede Iran’s space technology and the European countries do not have any cooperation with Iran and our absolute message is that space technology improves lives of Iranians and people worldwide, he said.

## INOTEX 2019 to gather ‘Innovation Ecosystem under One Roof’



**TECHNOLOGY** **TEHRAN** — The 8th International Innovation and Technology Exhibition (INOTEX 2019) will be held from June 9 to 12 at the Tehran international permanent fair-ground, IRNA reported on Thursday.

With the motto of “Innovation Ecosystem under One Roof”, the exhibition aims to connect entrepreneurs and investors, Akbar Qanbarpur, an official with the Pardis Technology Park announced.

The festival also paves the way to develop cooperation between companies and startups and solve the challenges in the innovation ecosystem, he said.

Over 400 startups, startup accelerators, technology parks, innovators, incubator centers, venture capitals, and mentors will attend the event, he said.

A congress for pioneers of knowledge economy will be held on the sideline of the event, he announced.

The INOTEX, one of the leading events for professional engaged in technology and innovation, hosted over 1000 participants from 25 countries during the past seven editions.

The event is held by the vice presidency for science and technology and is supported by the innovation and prosperity fund.

## Iran’s IT sector to flourish next year: minister



**TECHNOLOGY** **TEHRAN** — Despite sanctions, Iran’s information and communication technology (ICT) sector will flourish in the next Iranian calendar year (starting March 21), the ICT minister has said, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

The IT is crucial in boosting efficiency in different fields, he said.

The IT has a great role in transformation in different fields of culture, economy and policy making, he said.

It is not rational to cope with technology but we should know more about the potentialities provided by ICT, he added.

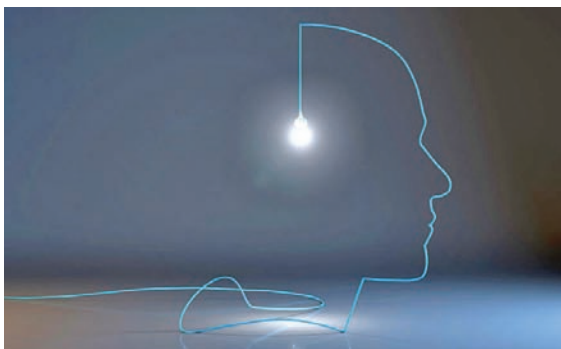
In economic war, we should fight with our economic power, which is the digital economy, he said.

Technology leads to counterparts in different fields of politics and economics, however the technology transformation is multidimensional and different parts should grow with each other, he said.

The governments should act as facilitators and let the creation develop in businesses, he said.

“We have no time to meet the demands in digital transformation since if we cannot provide it for people, they attract to other markets,” he said.

## Digital transformation is not about technology



A recent survey of directors, CEOs, and senior executives found that digital transformation (DT) risk is their #1 concern in 2019. Yet 70% of all DT initiatives do not reach their goals. Of the \$1.3 trillion that was spent on DT last year, it was estimated that \$900 billion went to waste. Why do some DT efforts succeed and others fail?

Fundamentally, it’s because most digital technologies provide possibilities for efficiency gains and customer intimacy. But if people lack the right mindset to change and the current organizational practices are flawed, DT will simply magnify those flaws. Five key lessons have helped us lead our organizations through digital transformations that succeeded.

● Lesson 1: Figure out your business strategy before you invest in anything. Leaders who aim to enhance organizational performance through the use of digital technologies often have a specific tool in mind. “Our organization needs a machine learning strategy,” perhaps. But digital transformation should be guided by the broader business strategy.

At Li & Fung (where one of us works) leaders developed a three-year strategy for serving a marketplace in which mobile apps were just as important as bricks-and-mortar stores. They chose to focus their attention in three areas: speed, innovation, and digitalization. Specifically, Li & Fung sought to reduce production lead times, increase speed-to-market, and improve the use of data in its global supply chain. After concrete goals were established, the company decided on which digital tools it would adopt.

There is no single technology that will deliver “speed” or “innovation” as such. The best combination of tools for a given organization will vary from one vision to another.

● Lesson 2: Leverage insiders. Organizations that seek transformations (digital and otherwise) frequently bring in an army of outside consultants who tend to apply one-size-fits-all solutions in the name of “best practices.” Our approach to transforming our respective organizations is to rely instead on insiders — staff who have intimate knowledge about what works and what doesn’t in their daily operations.

Santa Clara County in California (where one of us works) provides an example. The Department of Planning and Development was re-engineering work flows with the goal of improved efficiency and customer experience. Initially, external consultants made recommendations for the permit-approval process based on work they themselves had done for other jurisdictions, which tended to take a decentralized approach.

● Lesson 3: Design customer experience from the outside in. If the goal of DT is to improve customer

satisfaction and intimacy, then any effort must be preceded by a diagnostic phase with in-depth input from customers. The staff of Santa Clara County’s Department of Planning and Development conducted more than ninety individual interviews with customers in which they asked each customer to describe the department’s strengths and weaknesses. In addition, the department held focus groups during which they asked various stakeholders — including agents, developers, builders, agriculturalists and crucial local institutions like Stanford University — to identify their needs, establish their priorities, and grade the department’s performance. The department then built the input into their transformation. To respond to customer requests for greater transparency about the permit approval process, the department broke down the process into phases and altered the customer portal; customers can now track the progress of their applications as they move from one phase to the next. To shorten processing time, the department configured staff software so that it would automatically identify stalled applications. To enable personalized help, the department gave Permit Center staff dashboard control of the permit workflow. Leaders often expect that the implementation of one single tool or app will enhance customer satisfaction on its own. However, the department’s experience shows that the best way to maximize customer satisfaction is often to make smaller-scale changes to different tools at different points of the service cycle. The only way to know where to alter and how to alter is through obtaining extensive and in-depth input from the customers.

● Lesson 4: Recognize employees’ fear of being replaced. When employees perceive that digital transformation could threaten their jobs, they may consciously or unconsciously resist the changes. If the digital transformation then turns out to be ineffective, management will eventually abandon the effort and

their jobs will be saved (or so the thinking goes). It is critical for leaders to recognize those fears and to emphasize that the digital transformation process is an opportunity for employees to upgrade their expertise to suit the marketplace of the future.

At CenturyLink, where one of us works, the sales team had been considering adopting artificial intelligence to increase their productivity. Yet, how AI should be deployed remained an open question. Ultimately, the team customized an AI tool to optimize each salesperson’s effort by suggesting which customers to call, when to call them and what to say during the call in any given week. The tool also contained a gamification component, which made the selling process more interesting. Vernon Irvin, who watched this process from the inside, observed that it made selling more fun, which translated into an increase in customer satisfaction — and a 10% increase in sales.

● Lesson 5: Bring Silicon Valley start-up culture inside. Silicon Valley start-ups are known for their agile decision making, rapid prototyping and flat structures. The process of digital transformation is inherently uncertain: changes need to be made provisionally and then adjusted; decisions need to be made quickly; and groups from all over the organization need to get involved. As a result, traditional hierarchies get in the way. It’s best to adopt a flat organizational structure that’s kept somewhat separate from the rest of the organization.

This need for agility and prototyping is even more pronounced than it might be in other change-management initiatives because so many digital technologies can be customized. Leaders have to decide on what apps from which vendors to use, which area of business best benefit from switching to that new technology, whether the transition should be rolled out in stages, and so on. Often, picking the best solution requires extensive experimentation on interdependent parts. If each decision has to go through multiple layers of management to move forward, mistakes cannot be detected and corrected quickly. Furthermore, for certain digital technologies, the payoff only occurs after a substantial portion of the business has switched to the new system. For example, a cloud computing system designed to aggregate global customer demand can only generate useful analytics when stores in different countries all collect the same type of data regularly. This requires ironing out differences in existing organizational processes across different regions. If the details of how a new technology will be used are chiefly developed by employees from one country, they might not be aware of the potential incompatibilities.

(Source: Harvard Business Review)



# There's nothing we can do now to stop Arctic temperature rise, new research shows

A new paper from the UN reveals that even if we pull the plug on all carbon emissions tomorrow, our hands are ultimately tied; the Arctic region is still going to warm by up to 5 degrees Celsius come the end of the century.

Even under the terms of the Paris Agreement, the research shows that winter temperatures in the Arctic are set to rise by at least 3°C by 2050 and 5 to 9°C by 2080 compared to pre-industrial levels.

The Arctic region is the virtual bull's eye of climate change, but that doesn't mean the rest of the world gets off scot-free. As the top of our planet begins to melt, the consequences are certain to trickle down like a dripping ice-cream cone.

There is plenty of research to suggest that climate changes in the Arctic region will unleash dangerous sea level rises around the world, causing coastal flooding, erosion, and damage to buildings and infrastructure. It will also flip ecosystems on their head, contaminate drinking water, and drive mass human migration.

"What happens in the Arctic does not stay in the Arctic," says Joyce Msuya, the acting executive director at UN Environment.

"We have the science; now more urgent climate action is needed to steer away from tipping points that could be even worse for our planet than we first thought."

## Changes devastating regions

A major part of the problem is that the changes are going to devastate an already devastated region. Since 1979, research shows that the Arctic has lost roughly 40 percent of its sea ice, and the ice that still remains is thinner and more vulnerable than ever before.



Some climate models even predict that the Arctic's ice cap could disappear completely come summertime in the 2030s. As the melting reaches deeper and deeper it could awake a "sleeping giant" - a tipping point that could derail all our climate goals.

Even if the Paris Agreement is met, Arctic permafrost is expected to shrink 45 percent more, releasing billions of metric tons of carbon and methane into the atmosphere.

This will ultimately lead to even warmer

temperatures, thawing even more ice in a vicious cycle called a 'positive feedback' loop. The consequences could include more frequent wildfires, habitat loss, and infrastructure damage.

One recent study found that by 2050, four million people and around 70 percent of today's Arctic infrastructure could be threatened by thawing permafrost.

Just as one domino knocks over the next, scientists think this tipping point will also

set off another.

"When permafrost thaws, it contributes substantially to the organic matter load of surface fresh water delivered to the ocean, which in turn contributes to acidification through decomposition," the report explains.

The "release of methane by thawing subsea permafrost also contributes substantially to acidification."

## The climate change

Similar to climate change, the Arctic is disproportionately affected ocean acidification. This region's marine species are especially vulnerable because the cold water they live in can hold more dissolved CO2, leading to greater acidity.

Today, surface waters are 30 percent more acidic than they were before the Industrial era, disrupting the food chain by causing corals, molluscs, sea urchins, and plankton to use more and more energy to build their shells and skeletons.

What's happening in the Arctic right now is a warning sign to prevent further warming. If we don't act soon, the paper suggests we may soon face a dead end, with no way to escape.

The "urgency to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement is clearly manifested in the Arctic, because it is one of the most vulnerable and rapidly changing regions in the world," says the Finnish Minister of the Environment, Energy and Housing, Kimmo Tiilikainen.

"We need to make substantial near-term cuts in greenhouse gas emissions, black carbon and other so-called short-lived climate pollutants all over the world."

(Source: sciencealert.com)

One recent study found that by 2050, four million people and around 70 percent of today's Arctic infrastructure could be threatened by thawing permafrost.

## Solar-powered moisture harvester collects and cleans water from air, scientists find

Access to clean water remains one of the biggest challenges facing humankind. A breakthrough by engineers at The University of Texas at Austin may offer a new solution through solar-powered technology that absorbs moisture from the air and returns it as clean, usable water.

The breakthrough, described in a recent issue of the journal *Advanced Materials*, could be used in disaster situations, water crises or poverty-stricken areas and developing countries. The technology relies on hydrogels, gel-polymer hybrid materials designed to be "super sponges" that can retain large amounts of water.

A research team led by Guihua Yu in UT Austin's Cockrell School of Engineering combined hydrogels that are both highly water absorbent and can release water upon heating.

This unique combination has been successfully proved to work in humid and dry weather conditions and is crucial to enabling the production of clean, safe drinking water from the air.

## The filtration system

With an estimated 50,000 cubic kilometers of water contained in the atmosphere, this new system could tap into those reserves and potentially lead to small, inexpensive and portable filtration systems.

"We have developed a completely passive system where all you need to do is leave the hydrogel outside and it will collect water," said Fei Zhao, a postdoctoral researcher on Yu's team and co-author of the study.

The "collected water will remain stored in the hydrogel until you expose it to sunlight. After about five minutes under natural sunlight, the water releases."

This technology builds upon a 2018 breakthrough made by Yu and Zhao in which they developed a solar-powered water purification innovation using hydrogels that cleans water from any source using only solar energy.



The team's new innovation takes that work a step further by using the water that already exists in the atmosphere. For both hydrogel-based technologies, Yu and his research team developed a way to combine materials that possess both hygroscopic (water-absorbing) qualities and thermal-responsive hydrophilicity (the ability to release water upon simple heating).

## Producing clean water

The "new material is designed to both harvest moisture from the air and produce clean water under sunlight, avoiding intensive energy consumption," said Yu, an associate professor of materials science and mechanical engineering.

Harvesting water from moisture is not exactly a new concept. Most refrigerators keep things cool through a vapor condensation process. However, the common fridge requires lots of energy to perform that action.

The UT team's technology requires only solar power, is compact and can still produce enough water to meet the daily needs of an average household. Prototype tests showed daily water production of up to 50 liters per kilogram of hydrogel.

Representing a novel strategy to improve upon atmospheric water harvesting techniques being used today, the technology could also replace core components in existing solar-powered water purification systems or other moisture-absorbing technologies.

(Source: phys.org)

## Early animal life exploded on Earth even earlier than once thought: new analysis

Beginning about 541 million years ago, life on Earth exploded. Over a 53-million-year period, gigantic sea creatures, armored worms and bizarre-looking filter feeders filled the primordial seas. Nearly all the animal body plans that exist today first appeared in primitive form during that time.

In fact, a new analysis suggests that the Cambrian explosion may not have been a true explosion at all, but rather a series of waves — and those waves began millions of years earlier than previously believed.

Since the days of Charles Darwin, scientists have found Cambrian-era rocks that were chock-full of fossils. Those fossils seemingly appear in the geologic record "in an abrupt way and with great diversity," said lead study author Rachel Wood, a professor of carbonate geoscience at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland.

"There's no doubt that in the Cambrian there was an explosion of bilaterian forms (bodies with two symmetrical sides) — that's all the animals except the sponges, corals, jellyfish and so on," Wood told Live Science.

## Fossil discoveries

But recent fossil discoveries dating to the Ediacaran period (635 million to 542 million years ago) suggest that many new soft-bodied species first arose long before creatures with skeletons showed up during the Cambrian, Wood told Live Science.

For the study, the researchers conducted a sweeping evaluation of existing research in fields such as geochemistry, stratigraphy and paleontology, Wood said. They also analyzed fossil finds from both the Ediacaran and the Cambrian, creating the first integrated picture of what happened before, during and after the Cambrian explosion.

They discovered that some physical features found in Cambrian creatures were also present in organisms from older rocks. These collections of creatures form a transitional bridge "between what was



thought to be typically Ediacaran and what is typically Cambrian," Wood said.

The scientists also noted that changes swept through early animal life in waves, beginning as early as 571 million years ago and producing multiple surges in animal diversity during the Cambrian.

"It begs the question: Is it sensible to isolate the Cambrian explosion as one event, or should it simply be seen as one event amongst many?" Wood said.

## The Cambrian explosion

Their conclusions, while "not shocking news," were absent from prior studies because most researchers tended to focus on the "abruptness, explosiveness, and uniqueness of the Cambrian explosion," Shuhai Xiao, a professor of geobiology in the Department of Geosciences at Virginia Tech, told Live Science in an email.

Xiao, who was not involved in the study, said that paleontologists will now need to untangle the evolutionary relationships between Ediacaran and Cambrian fossils to determine how big the extinctions were before the Cambrian explosion.

The new study will help scientists to study early animal diversity as a continuous process, "rather than just thinking it all happened in a very short period of time in the Cambrian," Wood said.

"We'll start to be able to really understand the pace and the dynamics of evolution, and the origin of animal complexity," she added.

(Source: livescience.com)

## A NASA journey to the moon may need to find another rocket or two, team says

Struggling to get its new giant rocket ready in time for a scheduled launch next year, NASA might just leave it on the ground and turn to commercial alternatives.

"NASA has a history of not meeting launch dates," said Jim Bridenstine, NASA's administrator, at a Senate committee hearing on Wednesday, "and I'm trying to change that."

NASA plans to send its Orion capsule, designed to carry astronauts on deep space missions, on a crewless test trip around the moon next year.

But the schedule for completing the rocket that is to carry Orion — known as the Space Launch System — has slipped repeatedly despite NASA's spending more than \$10 billion on the program so far.

Last year, in announcing the latest delay, NASA said that the mission was penciled in for the end of 2019 but even then conceded that June 2020 was a more realistic target date.

"Cost increases and schedule delays of core stage development can be traced largely to management, technical, and infrastructure issues driven by Boeing's poor performance," the report said. "For example, Boeing officials have consistently underestimated the scope of the work to be performed and thus the size and skills of the work force required."

On Wednesday, Mr. Bridenstine said that last week it had become clear that the rocket would probably not be ready even by June 2020. He said he had directed managers to explore whether there would be another way to launch.

The two pieces would then rendezvous and dock in orbit before heading to the moon. Mr. Bridenstine noted that Orion currently lacks the ability to dock with another spacecraft in orbit.

"Between now and June of 2020, we would have to make that a reality," Mr. Bridenstine said.

Senator Roger Wicker, Republican of Mississippi and chairman of the Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, noted: "This is 2019."

A commercially launched mission would allow extended testing of Orion and the service module, one of the main goals, but it would push the first flight of the Space Launch System further into the future.

(Source: NYT)



## Scientists track patterns of island growth in crystals

Understanding how crystals grow impacts broad areas of materials science, from developing better microelectronics to discovering new materials. At the atomic level, crystals can grow in several different ways, and scientists have recently discovered an intriguing behavior associated with a common way that crystals grow.

In this mode of crystal growth, called "layer-by-layer," the surface of the crystal starts out very smooth at the atomic level. New atoms that arrive on the surface tend to skate around until they find each other. When this happens, they begin to form a new one-atom-thick layer by joining, creating a flat region known as an island. As more atoms arrive, additional islands form at other places on the surface. Eventually the growing islands cover the whole surface, coalescing to form a new atomic layer.

"If we understand how crystals grow in this mode, we might be able to better understand some of the mechanisms behind defect formation, as well as develop techniques to synthesize new types of crystals."

In a new study scientists have found that the seemingly random arrangement of islands that form to begin new layers can actually be very similar from layer to layer.

Using coherent X-ray scattering techniques to observe the crystal surface at the atomic scale during crystal growth, the researchers were able to characterize the exact arrangements of the islands as they form, or "nucleate," in each layer of the crystal.

"You can think of what we're doing as something like making pancakes in a pan," said Argonne Distinguished Fellow and study author Brian Stephenson. "As we randomly add more atomic 'batter,' our pancake islands start to run together and coalesce. The interesting thing is that every time we grow a new layer, the pattern of pancakes repeats the pattern of the original layer."

(Source: newswise.com)

## There may be 50 billion rogue planets in our galaxy, new study claims

People used to argue about whether or not planets like the eight (or more) in our Solar System were rare. Starting in the 1990s with the discovery of the first exoplanets, it became clear planets are common around other stars. What about planets without stars? Astronomers have identified a handful of such planets, but a new simulation developed at the University of Leiden suggests there could be as many as 50 billion rogue planets in the Milky Way.

In the immortal words of Douglas Adams: "Space is big. You just won't believe how vastly, hugely, mind-bogglingly big it is." Rogue planets, even the largest among them, are but tiny specs floating in the infinite cosmic void without a star to point the way. That we've spotted any of them is a minor miracle, but the technology doesn't exist to conduct an accurate survey of rogue planets. Thus, the importance of the new simulation.

The team built a simulation of 1,500 stars in a region of space called Orion Trapezium. Of course, we don't know how many planets really exist around these stars, but the model included between four and six planets in orbit around about 500 of those planets. That's a total of 2,522 planets in the model.

Over the course of millions of simulated years, gravitational interactions between the stars kicked more than 350 of those planets out of their solar systems. That works out to approximately 14 percent of all the planets in the model becoming rogue planets.

We don't know how many planets exist in the galaxy, but there are about 200 billion stars. Most of them are in clusters not unlike Orion Trapezium. Estimating even a modest number of planets on average that could mean billions of rogue planets in the Milky Way. The team used a number of guesstimates to arrive at 50 billion. Some of those might even have come from our own solar system.

Most of the confirmed or suspected rogue planets we've spotted are under 100 light years away, and several of those are too faint to characterize beyond the most basic details.

(Source: extremetech.com)

## Researchers use quantum computer to 'reverse' time

Scientists have reported that they were able to turn back time, albeit only for a fraction of a second, with a quantum computer.

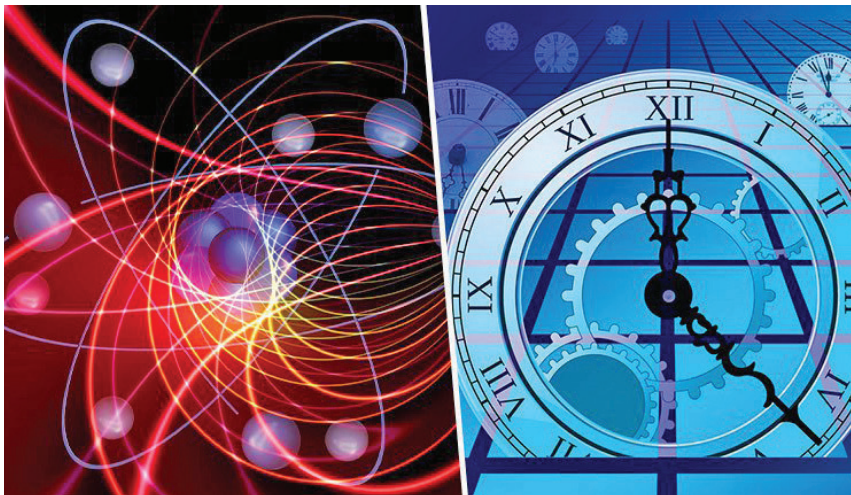
In a study, a team of researchers from the Moscow Institute of Physics and their colleagues from the United States and Switzerland successfully returned the state of an IBM quantum computer into the past.

The feat challenges the basic laws of physics and the current understanding of the mechanics that govern the entire universe.

The second law of thermodynamics which states that, as energy is transferred and transformed, the more it is wasted. It also states that any isolated system will descend into a more disorder state naturally.

The second law of thermodynamics is also closely associated with the "arrow of time," a concept that posits time only has one direction and it goes forward.

However, experiments like the one that was published in the journal *Scientific Reports* on Tuesday, March 11, shows that these laws can be violated.



## Using an evolution program

In the study, the researchers used an evolution program that will affect qubits, a basic unit of quantum information described by a "one," "zero," or a mixture of both called

"superposition."

The evolution program was launched, causing the qubits to form into increasingly complex changing patterns of ones and zeroes.

During the process, the order was lost.

However, another program altered the computer's state, allowing it to return to its original form, restoring order from the chaos.

According to the researchers, the two-qubit quantum computers returned to their orderly original state in 85 percent of the cases. In three-qubit quantum computers, the success rate went down to 50 percent.

Unfortunately, the discovery does not mean that the researchers have just invented time travel. The experiment can be compared to watching a video and pressing the rewind button.

It is not exactly a TARDIS or Dr. Brown's DeLorean. However, researchers believe that their study could be useful for testing quantum programs and aiding in the development of more precise quantum computers in the future.

"Our algorithm could be updated and used to test programs written for quantum computers and eliminate noise and errors," stated Gordy Lesovik, the lead author of the study.

(Source: techtimes.com)



## ‘Almost certain extinction’: 1,200 species under severe threat across world

More than 1,200 species globally face threats to their survival in more than 90% of their habitat and “will almost certainly face extinction” without conservation intervention, according to new research.

Scientists working with Australia’s University of Queensland and the Wildlife Conservation Society have mapped threats faced by 5,457 species of birds, mammals and amphibians to determine which parts of a species’ habitat range are most affected by known drivers of biodiversity loss.

The project is from the same team of researchers that found just five countries are responsible for 70% of the world’s remaining wilderness.

The new research, published in PLOS Biology, maps “hot-spots” where species are most affected by threats such as agriculture, urbanization, night lighting, roads, rail, waterways and population density, and “coolspots” that provide refuge from these threats.

The team looked only at threats that were known to affect a species within its habitat range and found that for the majority of wildlife studied, intrusions were “extensive” across most habitat, “severely limiting the area within which species can survive”.

They said most concerning was their finding that 1,237 species – nearly a quarter of the animals assessed – were affected by threats across more than 90% of their distribution.

The situation was worse for 395 species, or 7%, which were found to be affected by at least one relevant threat across their entire habitat range.

“These results are very alarming and that’s because the threats we’ve mapped are specific to the species,” said James Allan, a University of Queensland post-doctoral researcher and the study’s lead author.

“They’re the primary causes of the species’ decline and the reason they are threatened with extinction. Where a threat overlaps with a species, we know that species will continue to decline.”

Mammals were identified as the most affected group studied, with on average 52% of a species’ distribution degraded by threats.

One in three of the species studied were found to have no exposure to threats across their habitat range, but the researchers cautioned that this result “should be interpreted within the context of threats we consider”.

Two major threats they had not mapped were diseases affecting amphibians and climate change, which threatens all species.

Human impacts were found on species across 84% of the earth’s terrestrial surface.

The top five countries most affected by threats were all in south-east Asia. Malaysia was the most affected, followed by Brunei and Singapore.

The most affected biomes included mangroves, tropical and sub-tropical moist broadleaf forests in southern Brazil, Malaysia and Indonesia, and tropical and subtropical dry broadleaf forests of India, Myanmar and Thailand.

The countries with the greatest areas of “coolspots” or refuges from threats were also in south-east Asia, as well as the Amazon rainforest, parts of the Andes and Liberia in West Africa.

Allan said that in some cases, hotspots and coolspots were found side by side, which he attributed to the fact there was such a high diversity of species there.

“The obvious thing we need to do is protect the coolspots, the unimpacted areas of species ranges,” he said. “We need to stop threats getting into those areas.

“There’s room for optimism. Every threat that we mapped can be stopped through conservation effort.”

(Source: The Guardian)

## LEARN ENGLISH

### This Is Your Captain Speaking

A: And the next thing you know; we’re running towards the... Oh...did you feel that?

B: Yeah, don’t worry about it; we’re just going through a bit of turbulence.

C: Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. It looks like we’ve hit a **patch of rough** air, so we’re going to have a bit of a **bumpy** ride for the next several minutes, and...

A: This why I hate flying... Oh!

C: At this time, I’d like to remind all of our passengers to **fasten** their seat belts and remain seated until the fasten seat belt sign is turned off. Please ensure that all **cabin baggage** is carefully **stowed** under the seat in front of you. I’ll be back to update you in a minute.

A: Did you hear that? Oh my God! Brent!

B: Don’t worry about it. This is totally normal. It happens all the time.

C: Ah, ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain again. We’ve got quite a large patch of rough air ahead of us, so for your safety, we will be **suspending** in-flight service. I would ask all in-flight crew to return to their seats at this time. I would also like to ask that all our passengers **refrain** from using the **lavatory** until the seat belt sign has been switched off We can expect...

#### ■ Key vocabulary

**turbulence:** sudden, strong movement of air especially that causes a plane to move up and down

**patch:** small area

**rough:** having or causing sudden violent movements

**bumpy:** having sudden up and down movements

**fasten:** do up; connect one part with another

**cabin baggage:** suitcases and luggage that travels inside the plane with the passengers

**stow:** put something in a place where it is safe, but can be accessed easily

**suspend:** stop something for a short time

**refrain:** avoid doing

**lavatory:** room with a sink and toilet, chiefly on an airplane or train

#### ■ Supplementary vocabulary

**overhead bin:** place above the seat in an airplane where you can store luggage

**carry-on:** cabin baggage

**table tray:** a table that folds down from the seat in front of you on an airplane

**life jacket:** piece of clothing that you wear to stay floating in water

**oxygen mask:** a mask worn over your mouth and nose so you can breathe

(Source: irlanguage.com)

# Police on bikes in central Tehran to promote bike-riding

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — In an attempt to encourage bicycling among citizens of Tehran Traffic police has started using bikes instead of motorbikes, Mehr news agency reported on Friday.

In the current year (started on March 21, 3018) Tehran Traffic Police, aiming to promote best traffic practices, especially in crowded neighborhoods, have started a pilot plan letting traffic police to use bikes instead of other vehicles in districts 6 and 12 of Tehran, the director of public education at social directorate of Tehran Traffic Police said.

The plan was organized in collaboration with Tehran Municipality directorate for transport and traffic affairs, Seyyed Moslem Mousavi explained.

The scheme is planned to be implemented in two more districts in the next year (starting on March 21), Mousavi added.

The scheme can play a role in tackling air pollution and encouraging the public to use bicycles especially in central parts of the city, he suggested.

Moreover, Mousavi added, implementing the scheme would help traffic officers to attend at the scenes sooner and make police officers more easily approachable, most importantly in areas which are highly congested.

Also using bicycles would not entail the traffic officers to follow traffic laws, for instance they can take one way streets provided that



**Police-on-bikes visibly advertise bicycles as ideal urban vehicles. If bicycles can function as instruments of the law, then surely they can handle trips to the store and elsewhere.**

## Northwestern Kani Barazan Wetland play host to 30,000 migratory birds



**ENVIRONMENT** **TEHRAN** — Some 30,000 migratory birds have winged their ways to Kani Barazan Wetland, located in northwestern province of West Azarbaijan, Mahabad chief of department of environment has said.

Birds including grey-lag geese, pelicans, white-headed duck, marbled duck and some other endangered bird species have flown to this area and made the habitat much more attractive than ever, IRNA quoted Farouq Sokhanvar as saying on Thursday.

Agreeable environmental conditions as well as enough water resources has turned Kani Barazan Wetland into a suitable habitat for bird species in northwestern Iran, Sokhanvar explained.

The birds will spend some time in the wetland and continue their journey to the northern regions, he added.

He also called on locals to report poachers, had they spotted any, to the department of environment.

Kani Barazan Wetland is located south of great Urmia Lake and 30 kilometers north of Mahabad. Being part of southern ecology

of Urmia Lake, this wetland covers an area of 907 hectares.

According to the persiaport.com the wetland hosts a range of native and migrating birds. Kani Barazan Wetland is one of the main wildlife habitats in northwestern Iran being supplied by Mahabad dam and its downstream river.

Birdwatchers call it Iran birds’ paradise being the first bird-watching site of Iran. The best time for bird-watching in the region is from mid-January to mid-February.

Interestingly, the local residents voluntarily assume the responsibility of protecting this wetland and its wild life from poaching.

Due to its topography and mass canals, the wetland is mainly frequented by water birds including white-headed duck, pelican, flamingo, marbled duck, heron, spotted eagle, goose, ruddy shelduck, tern, coot, black winged stilt, great crested grebe.

According to the estimates, there are 75 kinds of aquatic species identified in the wetland, belonging to 11 broader categories of birds.

## Precipitations to hit normal, above-normal levels in spring



**ENVIRONMENT** **TEHRAN** — Iran’s Climatological research Institute announced that the country will receive normal and above-normal levels of precipitations in the first two months of spring.

Based on the weather maps the condition for receiving normal and above normal precipitations, particularly in northern and eastern parts of the country, is fairly good, the report highlighted.

Temperatures will be normal in the same period as well.

As per the data released on Friday by the National Drought Warning and Monitoring Center affiliated to the Meteorological Organization the whole country received 186.7 millimeters of precipitations since the beginning of the current water year (starting on September 23) which indicates an 18-percent rise compared to the long-term averages.

Moreover, the amount also shows a 125.4-percent increase compared to last year’s precipitations in the corresponding period.

This is while last year’s precipitation in

the same period displays a sharp drop of 47.7 percent compared to the long-term means.

Fluctuation in precipitations amounts received in provinces of Sistan-Baluchestan, Fars, South Khorasan, Yazd and Hormozgan in mid-winter is one of the main sings of future climate of the country which not only result in an increase in water resources but it would lead to recurrent destructive floods in the regions.

Furthermore, Iran’s Climatological research Institute report highlights that despite the increase in precipitation levels most provinces located in southern and southeastern Iran have experienced a 10 to 30 percent decrease compared to long-term averages which are a sign of climate disruption.

Climate disruption or global climate disruption, is the new term scientists are using to explain the extreme fluctuations that can and will occur to our weather systems as anthropogenic-caused carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases increase in our atmosphere, the oceans get warmer, and weather events go wild.

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

## 12,000 traffic-related deaths occurred in 8 months

The number of traffic-related deaths occurred in the country in the first 8 months of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2018) amounted to 12,261, a 0.9 percent rise year on year.

According to Iran’s forensics organization, of the total number 9,587 were men and the rest were women, IRNA news agency reported on Saturday.

Provinces of Fars, Tehran and Isfahan with 992, 916 and 848 deaths respectively are the regions with the highest number of deaths recorded while provinces of Ilam, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer Ahmad and Ardebil with 110, 141, and 161 deaths reported the lowest number of deaths respectively.

## PREFIX/SUFFIX

### “-age”

■ **Meaning:** a word ending used to form nouns that show condition, function, relation, or action

■ **For example:** They moved to a house with lots of **storage** space.

## PHRASAL VERB

### Turn around

■ **Meaning:** if a business, department etc. that is not successful turns around, or if someone turns it around, it starts to be successful

■ **For example:** The company turned around from losses of £1.4 million last year to profits of £26,800.

## IDIOM

### Face the music

■ **Explanation:** to accept criticism or punishment for something you have done

■ **For example:** If we do nothing to curb this pollution, I guarantee we will face the music in the future.

## از ابتدای فروردین تا پایان آبان ماه ۱۲ هزار نفر بر اثر حوادث رانندگی جان باختند

سازمان پزشکی قانونی کشور اعلام کرد: از ابتدای فروردین تا پایان آبان ماه امسال ۱۲ هزار و ۲۶۱ نفر بر اثر صدمات ناشی از حوادث رانندگی در کشور جان خود را از دست دادند که این آمار نسبت به سال گذشته ۰.۹ درصد افزایش را نشان می دهد.

به گزارش روز شنبه ایرنا، از مجموع ۱۲ هزار و ۲۶۱ نفری که در تصادفات هشت ماهه امسال جان باخته اند، ۹ هزار و ۵۸۷ نفر مرد و بقیه زن بودند. در این گزارش تاکید شده است: استان فارس با ۹۹۲، تهران با ۹۱۶ و اصفهان با ۸۴۸ نفر استان های دارای بیشترین فوتی ها ناشی از حوادث رانندگی و استان های ایلام با ۱۱۰، کهگیلویه و بویراحمد با ۱۴۱ و اردبیل با ۱۶۱ نفر، دارای کمترین آمار تلفات حوادث رانندگی در این مدت بودند.



# Trump factor stands out in Christchurch massacre

Forty-nine people have been killed and at least 20 others grievously injured when gunmen entered two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, and opened indiscriminate fire at worshippers, including women and children, who had gathered for Friday prayers.

This is the worst attack in the Pacific country's history.

New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern told a news conference that the mosque shootings appeared to be a well-planned "terrorist attack".

"This is, and will be, one of New Zealand's darkest days," an ashen-faced Ardern said.

The prime minister also said two explosive devices attached to suspect vehicles were found and were disarmed.

The mosques on target were the Masjid Al Noor in central Christchurch and another one in suburban Linwood.

## Trump factor

The Australian gunman, identified as Brenton Tarrant, broadcast live footage on Facebook of the attack on one mosque in the city of Christchurch, mirroring the carnage played out in video games, after publishing a "manifesto" in which he denounced immigrants, calling them "invaders".

In his manifesto, Tarrant said he saw Trump as "symbol of renewed white identity and common purpose."

The 28-year-old terrorist said he chose to use a gun over other weapons because it would spark a debate around the second amendment.

"With enough pressure the left wing within the United States will seek to abolish the second amendment, and the right wing within the US will see this as an attack on their very freedom and liberty," Tarrant said.

"This attempted abolishment of rights by the left will result in a dramatic polarization of the people in the United States and eventually a fracturing of the US along cultural and racial lines.

"Eventually, when the white population of the USA realizes the truth of the situation, war will erupt," he added.

## Dressed in black

Len Penaha, a witness, said he saw a man dressed in black enter the Masjid Al Noor mosque and then heard dozens of shots, followed by people running from the mosque in terror.

He said he also saw the gunman flee before emergency services arrived.

Penaha, who lives next to the mosque, said he went into the building to try and help. "I saw dead people everywhere."

## Anger towards Muslims through media

Media portrayal of Muslims is fueling anger against the community according to a 2017 academic research in which 16,000 New Zealanders were surveyed.

Speaking to Al Jazeera from Dunedin, the lead researcher, Dr John Shaver of the University of Otago, said, "Highly educated and leftist-oriented people normally tended to have a positive attitude toward not just Muslims but migrant populations in general."

"Our study found that highly educated people, even those on the left, developed anger towards Muslims through the media. The more they watched the news, the more



prejudiced they became."

He was, however, careful to add that New Zealand is a multi-cultural society which is accepting of all groups. "There have been only a handful of incidents in which Muslims were harassed or their properties vandalized.

"Things here are not like they are in Australia, the US or the West," he said.

Overwhelmingly, Dr Shaver said New Zealand media tends to absorb content generated by US and European news outlets without providing context.

"In the western media, the focus is only on the conflicts in the Middle East," he said.

He went on to say that there is very little coverage in the New Zealand media of the Muslim population in country which is very diverse and has a history of more than 100 years.

"Instead of focusing on the domestic Muslim population, the media focuses on violence and looks at the community from a western media lens," he said.

## Close shave for Bangladesh cricketers

ESPN Cricinfo reporter Mohammed Isam said the members of the Bangladesh cricket team, who were to play a Test match in Christchurch scheduled from Saturday, escaped unhurt from the mosque.

Mario Villavarayen, the strength and conditioning coach of the Bangladesh cricket team, was quoted by the New Zealand Herald as saying the team was close to where the shooting occurred, but was safe.

"The players are shaken up but fine," Villavarayen was quoted as saying.

## The world reacts to mosque attacks

Political and religious leaders from across the world have expressed their condemnation at the deadly shooting at two mosques in the New Zealand city of Christchurch.

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan condemned the deadly attack on the mosques, describing them as "the latest example of rising racism and Islamophobia."

"With this attack, hostility towards Islam, that the world has been idly watching and even encouraging for some time, has gone beyond individual harassment to reach the level of mass killing," Erdogan said at the funeral of a former Turkish minister.

"It is clear that the understanding represented by the killer that also targets our country, our people and myself, has started to take over Western societies like a cancer."

Erdogan's spokesman separately condemned what he called a "racist and fascist" attack.

"This attack shows the point which hostility to Islam and enmity to Muslims has reached," Ibrahim Kalin wrote on Twitter.

"We have seen many times Islamophobic discourse against Islam and Muslims turning into a perverse and murderous ideology. The world must raise its voice against such discourse and must say stop to Islamophobic fascist terrorism," he said.

US President Trump sent out a 270 character Tweet but failed to mention the word Muslims when condemning the deadly shootings.

Instead, he sent his "warmest sympathy and best wishes" to the people of the country.

"49 innocent people have so senselessly died, with so many more seriously injured. The US stands by New Zealand for anything we can do," Trump wrote in a post on Twitter.

Earlier, White House press secretary Sarah Sanders said in a statement that the US strongly condemned the attack.

"The United States strongly condemns the attack in Christchurch. Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their families. We stand in solidarity with the people of New Zealand and their government against this vicious act of hate," Sanders said.

According to the Jordanian Foreign Ministry, a Jordanian man was among those killed and five other Jordanian nationals have been injured in the attack.

"This heinous massacre is an appalling terrorist crime. It unites us against extremism, hatred and terrorism, which knows no religion," Jordan's King Abdullah said.

Lebanon's Foreign Minister Jubran Bassil warned against the rise of extremism in the West, saying it puts "communities at great risk and in direct confrontation that will only lead to the scourge of war."

Egypt said it stands by New Zealand and the families of the victims, and condemned "the despicable act of terrorism that goes against all principles of humanity and serves as a new reminder of the need to continue

and intensify international efforts to fight terrorism, violence and extremism."

Qatar said it condemned in the strongest terms the "terrorist and brutal attack" in New Zealand.

In a statement on Friday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Qatar reiterated its firm stance on rejecting violence and terrorism, regardless of motives and reasons.

Indonesia, the world's biggest Muslim-majority country, strongly condemned the shooting as authorities were checking on whether any of its citizens were victims.

"The government and the people of Indonesia convey deep condolences to the victims and their families," Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said in a statement.

In Muslim-majority Malaysia, Anwar Ibrahim, the leader of the biggest party in its ruling coalition, said one Malaysian had been wounded in the attack he described as a "black tragedy facing humanity and universal peace".

"I am deeply saddened by this uncivilised act, which goes against humanistic values and took the lives of civilians," he said in a statement.

"We extend our deepest sympathies and condolences to the families of the victims and the people of New Zealand."

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan blamed the New Zealand attacks on rising Islamophobia after 2001's September 11 attacks.

"Shocked and strongly condemn the Christchurch, New Zealand, terrorist attack on mosques. This reaffirms what we have always maintained: that terrorism does not have a religion. Prayers go to the victims and their families," he tweeted.

"I blame these increasing terror attacks on the current Islamophobia post-9/11 where Islam & 1.3 bn Muslims have collectively been blamed for any act of terror by a Muslim. This has been done deliberately to also demonize legitimate Muslim political struggles," he added.

Afghanistan's ambassador to Australia, New Zealand and Fiji, Wahidullah Waissi, said on Twitter three Afghans had been wounded.

"My thoughts are with the family of Afghan origin who've been shot and killed at this heinous incident."

## Organization of Islamic Cooperation

The Jeddah-based Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) said the attack "served as a further warning on the obvious dangers of hate, intolerance, and Islamophobia."

OIC's Secretary General, Youssef al-Othaimen, urged the New Zealand government to provide more protection to Muslim communities living in the country.

## Al-Azhar

Al-Azhar, the world's foremost Sunni Islamic institution and university, said the attacks reflects an "escalation of the discourse of hate, xenophobia and Islamophobia" in Western countries.

Ahmed al-Tayyeb, the Grand Imam of the Cairo-based institution, condemned "the atrocious terrorist attack," and conveyed his condolences to the families of those killed.

(Source: agencies)

## U.S. report intends to whitewash Israel's human rights violations: PLO official

A high-ranking member of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) says a U.S. decision to drop Israeli-occupied designation from the Golan Heights and Palestinian territories in its latest annual human rights report is meant to whitewash the Israeli occupation and human rights violations against the Palestinian nation.

"After the release of the so-called human rights report by the U.S. State Department, it is now abundantly clear that [U.S. President Donald] Trump's administration is gearing all branches of the government to whitewash the Israeli occupation and its pervasive violations of human rights," Hanan Ashrawi, a member of the Executive Committee of the PLO, said in a statement released on Thursday.



She added, "The report also de-contextualizes the reality by omitting the inescapable fact of Israeli occupation of Palestine, reflecting this administration's infatuation with an alternative yet fallacious version of reality and legality."

The senior Palestinian official further denounced the report for describing Palestinians as mere "residents," saying the account negates Palestinian people's national identity and deep roots in their homeland. "This is both morally and politically reprehensible," Ashrawi said.

"The intention of this publication is clear. It is to exonerate Israel from its indisputable human rights violations, while deliberately attempting to depict the racist policies and attitudes of the Israeli regime as benign despite the fact that they deny the Palestinian people's humanity, nationality, and narrative," she said.

Ashrawi noted: "In its zealous pursuit to justify and mainstream the right-wing agenda in Israel, the Trump administration has made a mockery of the human rights report and reaffirmed its complicity in the promotion and support of human rights violations against Palestinian people. The legal and political standing of Palestine and the Syrian Golan Heights as territory under Israeli occupation is indisputable under international law. Under the Trump administration, these facts have been discarded and denied in these reports. However, denial of facts cannot alter reality nor change the legal and standing moral obligations of states under international law to respect and ensure respect of human rights."

"The Trump administration has spared no effort to reassert its destabilizing role and hostile agenda in the region in collusion with Israel. It is futile to engage with such disruptive actors, especially given their aversion to facts and their demonstrable hostility to the Palestinian people's national and human rights. However, the Palestinian leadership and people will continue to engage with partners who share our values and commitment to international law and peace based on respect, dignity, and justice," she concluded.

In its so-called Country Human Rights Practices for 2018 published on Wednesday, the U.S. State Department dropped references to the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Israel seized the Golan Heights from Syria after the 1967 Six-Day War and later occupied it in a move that has never been recognized by the international community. The regime has built dozens of settlements in the area ever since and has used the region to carry out a number of military operations against the Syrian government.

Any change in U.S. language and terminology in regard to the West Bank and Gaza Strip is a cause of concern for Muslims as it reflects Washington's intentions about supporting the establishment of a Palestinian state envisaged by interim peace agreements in the 1990s.

Analysts believe the Trump administration is turning its back on Palestinians and its international obligations towards the establishment of a Palestinian state to further serve and defend Israel's interests.

In an interview with Press TV last November, American political analyst Mark Glenn said the neoconservatives in the Trump administration want a greater Israel and pursue furtherance of the Israeli empire.

Former U.S. Congressman and presidential candidate Ron Paul also said in an interview that neoconservatives had taken over U.S. foreign policy.

(Source: agencies)

## U.S. in first sanctions against ICC

The United States announced its first sanctions against the International Criminal Court Friday, threatening visa restrictions for anyone involved in a potential probe of American soldiers' actions in Afghanistan.

"If you're responsible for the proposed ICC investigation of U.S. personnel in connection with the situation in Afghanistan you should not assume that you still have, or will get, a visa or that you will be permitted to enter in the U.S.," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told reporters.

Pompeo told a news conference in Washington the first visa denials had already been issued under the new regime but gave no idea of how many people might be targeted in total.

In November 2017, ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda announced that she would ask judges for permission to open an investigation into alleged war crimes committed in the Afghan conflict, including by the U.S. military.

In an unprecedented attack on the global body, charged with judging war crimes and crimes against humanity, the White House threatened its judges or prosecutors in September last year with sanctions if they target Americans or Israel.

Pompeo said the new visa restrictions would include "persons who take or have taken action to request or further such an investigation."

"These visa restrictions may also be used to deter ICC efforts to pursue allies' personnel, including Israelis," the secretary of state added.

(Source: Daily Star)

## Israel launches Gaza air attacks after rockets fired at Tel Aviv

**1→** The Israeli military confirmed the news but tried to pass off the interception failure as a result of the missile system's self-destruction mechanism which kicked in once it realized the missiles were going to land in open areas.

Initial reports suggested that the rockets caused no damages or injuries. However, several people had to be treated for shock as this was the first time since Israeli's last war with Gaza in 2014 that missile sirens were being activated in Tel Aviv.

Military spokesman Ronen Manelis said nobody in Tel Aviv expected Palestinian rockets to travel this far.

"We did not have advance knowledge of this fire today, and in fact it surprised us," Manelis said.

## Israel launches attacks on Gaza

Shortly after the attack, the Israeli military said it was "attacking terror targets in Gaza" but did not provide any details. Palestinian sources reported Israeli attacks near the Khan Yunis port, in southern Gaza.

Eyewitnesses in Gaza said Israeli warplanes were carrying out airstrikes across the enclave.

Press TV's correspondent said there had been no reports of casualties from the Israeli attacks, but people living in Gaza feared a major escalation from the Israeli military.

## Netanyahu calls emergency meeting

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who also acts as the regime's minister for military affairs, called an emergency meeting at army headquarters after the rocket attack.

According to reports, Israelis had asked an Egyptian security delegation in Gaza to leave the area. Media outlets in Gaza reported that the Hamas resistance movement had evacuated military posts in anticipation of Israeli attacks.

The delegation has been mediating indirect talks between Hamas and Israel since late February reportedly in hopes of striking a truce deal that could lead to a long-term agreement lasting between five to 10 years.

A Palestinian source in Gaza told Haaretz that the rockets were fired from the northern part of the enclave. No Palestinian groups claimed responsibility for the attack. Palestinian resistance movements Hamas and Islamic Jihad denied any role in the attack.

## Iron Dome's failure

The missile attack further hurts Iron Dome's reputation as a missile shield system that was supposed to once and for all end concerns about rocket attacks from Gaza.

The multi-billion dollar system experienced a humiliat-

ing defeat during the latest military flare-up between Gaza and Tel Aviv in November, when Hamas fired more than 460 rockets at the occupied lands in less than 24 hours in response to Israeli aggression.

The clashes ended after an Egypt-brokered ceasefire took effect in Gaza.

The truce was criticized by some Israeli officials and led Avigdor Lieberman to step down as the minister of military affairs. The resignation, which could bring about early elections in the occupied lands, was hailed by Hamas as "an admission of defeat" and a "political victory" for the Palestinian resistance.

Back then, Hamas leader in Gaza Yahya Sinwar warned Israel not to test the resistance group again or it will target Tel Aviv.

Sinwar noted that he had spoken to Muhammad Deif, the leader of Hamas's military wing the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades about the possible response to next aggression by Israel.

"Deif asked me to say that Tel Aviv and Gush Dan are next. The first barrage to hit Tel Aviv will surprise Israel," he said.

(source: agencies)

## Bahraini court jails nearly 170 people in crackdown on dissent

**1→** The defendants had been arrested at a 2017 sit-in in support of distinguished Shia cleric Sheikh Isa Qassim, who had been stripped of his citizenship by the Manama regime, outside his home in the northwestern village of Diraz, situated some 12 kilometers west of the capital.

Bahraini regime forces killed five protesters and arrested hundreds more in a raid on the sit-in.

London-based rights group Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD) said the majority of those arrested have been subjected to "the most atrocious torture."

"This is a massively unfair trial which has passed completely unnoticed ... this trial is a textbook example of the culture of impunity that prevails in Bahrain," Director of Advocacy at BIRD, Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei, said.

The US State Department, in its latest annual human rights report published on Wednesday, said that authorities were still investigating the "circumstances surrounding the death of five protesters during a May 2017 security operation to clear protesters outside the house of Shia cleric Isa Qassim."

Thousands of anti-regime protesters have held demonstrations in Bahrain on an almost daily basis ever since a popular uprising began in the country in mid-February 2011.

They are demanding that the Al Khalifah regime relinquish power and allow a just system representing all Bahrainis to be established.

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

Scores of people have lost their lives and hundreds of others sustained injuries or got arrested as a result of the Al Khalifah regime's crackdown.

On March 5, 2017, Bahrain's parliament approved the trial of civilians at military tribunals in a measure blasted by human rights campaigners as being tantamount to imposition of an undeclared martial law countrywide.

Bahraini monarch King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifah ratified the constitutional amendment on April 3, 2017.

(Source: Press TV)



## Napoli face Arsenal, outsiders Slavia meet Chelsea

Napoli, chasing their first European title since Diego Maradona's team won the old UEFA Cup in 1989, were drawn against Arsenal in the quarter-finals of the Europa League on Friday.

Rank outsiders Slavia Prague, who ousted Sevilla in thrilling style on Thursday, were rewarded with a tie against Chelsea, the other English Premier League team in the last eight.

Villarreal and Valencia were drawn together in an all-Spanish tie and Benfica will meet Eintracht Frankfurt, who eliminated Inter Milan with a 1-0 win at San Siro.

Arsenal were initially drawn at home in the second leg against Napoli but the order was reversed by UEFA to avoid a clash with Chelsea, who host Slavia in the return of their tie in London.

Arsenal or Napoli will meet Villarreal or Valencia in the semi-finals while Benfica or Eintracht play Slavia or Chelsea.

(Source: Reuters)

## Japan swim king Hagino loses mojo, sparking Olympic fears

Olympic swim champion Kosuke Hagino said Friday he has pulled out of next month's Japanese championships, blaming a lack of hunger and triggering concerns about his appetite for Tokyo 2020.

The 24-year-old was Japan's best hope for a swimming gold medal next year alongside Olympic poster girl Rikako Ikee, who was diagnosed with leukaemia last month.

"I've been unable to achieve the results I had hoped for since the 2017 season," Hagino said in a statement.

"As the gap between my targets and reality has widened, it has become harder for me to maintain my motivation."

The former Asian champion has struggled with form since capturing gold in the men's 400 metres individual medley at the 2016 Rio Olympics.

Japan coach Norimasa Hirai admitted that Hagino was in no shape to contest the nationals in Tokyo after skipping another local meet last month. "In his current condition it would be really hard," Hirai told Japanese media.

"He's not in very good spirits. He needs to rest and when he decides to comes back, he needs to start swimming for himself."

Hagino shot to fame by scooping four gold medals at the 2014 Asian Games, including a stunning upset over Chinese giant Sun Yang in the 200m freestyle.

He stormed to victory in his pet 400m individual medley in Rio and added a silver behind Michael Phelps in the 200m.

But Hagino has lost his mojo since, his alarming slump in form coinciding with American Chase Kalisz's emergence as the world's premier medley swimmer and the hot favourite for gold at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. "The ball is in his court," shrugged Hirai, asked when he thought Hagino would return.

(Source: AFP)

## Proposed 2021 F1 rules to be presented to teams this month

Formula One and the governing FIA will present teams with a 'global package' of proposed rules for the 2021 season at a meeting in London on March 26, FIA president Jean Todt said on Friday.

The sport is set for major change when the current commercial agreements expire at the end of 2020 as rights holders Liberty Medias seek to create a more level playing field and more competitive racing. Todt told reporters ahead of Sunday's season-opening Australian Grand Prix that the various proposals would be presented at a meeting of the F1 Strategy Group before the Bahrain Grand Prix.

The Group includes six teams as voting members — Mercedes, Ferrari, Red Bull, McLaren, Williams and Renault — with the remaining four able to attend as observers.

The package will include the commercial side relating to distribution of revenues and a planned cost cap, along with proposed regulations on engines and chassis and on future governance.

Todt said the engine regulations had already been sent to teams while the cost control initiative was "quite well advanced".

"These are all the different chapters that we are working on and we should be in a position to have a finalised package to discuss with the teams on March 26," said Todt.

If approved by the Strategy Group, the rules will be voted on by the FIA's Formula One commission, which includes all the teams.

Formula One chairman Chase Carey, appearing with Todt at a joint news conference, said "good headway" had been made but expected plenty of debate. The top three teams, who have the biggest budgets, have expressed concerns about the cost cap while Ferrari, who have special historical privileges, are reluctant to see their share of the revenue pot reduced.

(Source: Mirror)

## Zidane: I would love to coach Mbappe

Zinedine Zidane has said he would love to coach Paris Saint-Germain star Kylian Mbappe one day.

Zidane, returning to the Bernabeu for a second spell in charge of the team, stressed that his job was to finish the season well before moving on to transfer plans.

Asked whether he would like to coach France international Mbappe at some point, Zidane said: "Like with all good players, I would love to."

However, he said he had not asked Madrid president Florentino Perez to sign Mbappe, adding: "No, not at all. It's not the moment to talk about this."

Zidane's return to the Bernabeu was confirmed on Monday, when Perez suggested that Mbappe being a compatriot of the coach might convince him to come to the Bernabeu, and also indicated that he would like to sign PSG's Neymar.

But the coach said he would not be drawn on potential plans, adding: "I am not going to talk about this as the season is still ongoing."

"We know the quality of the two players, but I am just interested in tomorrow's game [at home to Celta Vigo] -- nothing else."

(Source: ESPN)

# Man Utd to face Messi again in Champions League quarter-finals

Barcelona will meet Manchester United in the Champions League last eight in a repeat of the 2009 and 2011 finals which were both won by the Catalans, with the help of goals from Lionel Messi.

Manchester City face Tottenham Hotspur in an all-Premier League clash, their first-ever European meeting, while Cristiano Ronaldo's Juventus meet Ajax Amsterdam, who are back in the last eight after a 16-year absence.

Liverpool, the fourth English representative, will face Porto in a repeat of last year's last 16 tie which they won 5-0 on aggregate.

The semi-final pairings were also made with Tottenham or City to face Ajax or Juventus and Manchester United or Barcelona to meet either Liverpool or Porto.

The draw had an unusual feel with neither Bayern Munich nor Real Madrid in the hat, the first time both European giants have failed to reach the last eight since 2005-06.

Barcelona, who are in the last eight for the 12th successive season, will be away in the first leg after UEFA switched the order to avoid United's home match clashing with Manchester City, who host Spurs in their second leg.

Ajax, once a major European power who struggle to compete financially with clubs from bigger leagues, ousted Real Madrid in the last 16 and their tie against Juventus will be a repeat of the 1996 final, which the Serie A club won on penalties.

They also met in the final of the old European Cup in 1973 with the Dutch side winning 1-0. "I'm neither happy nor sad. Ajax eliminated Madrid so they are no joke," said Juventus director Pavel Nedved. "I liked them a lot against Madrid so we will have to be very careful. We will have to face Ajax with great commitment: I expect two great games."

Remarkably, Juventus are unbeaten in their last ten meetings with Ajax, winning five of the last six.

■ **Solskjaer goes back to Camp Nou**

Manchester United will face Barcelona in the Champions League quarter-finals while Manchester City and Tottenham Hotspur clash in an all-Premier League tie following Friday's draw.

Liverpool were drawn to play FC Porto in the knockout rounds for the second year in



succession, as Ajax's reward for eliminating the holders Real Madrid is a two-legged tie against Cristiano Ronaldo and Juventus.

English hopes are high that this could be their year in Europe's elite club competition after all four of their representatives made it through to the last eight.

However, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's United will have their work cut out if they are to go any further as they take on the Barcelona of Lionel Messi in the headline tie.

With City and United not allowed to play their home leg in the same week, United will entertain the leaders of La Liga at Old Trafford on April 9 or 10, with the return a week later.

■ **Repeat of '96 final**

UEFA also drew the semi-finals on Friday, meaning the winners of the Barcelona v United will face either Liverpool or Porto in the last four. Jurgen Klopp's side, fresh from knocking out Bayern Munich in the last 16, will be confident of beating the Portuguese champions after defeating them 5-0 on aggregate in the last 16 on their way to the final last season.

Liverpool will host two-time European Cup winners Porto at Anfield in the first leg before heading to the Estadio do Dragao in the return on April 16 or 17.

There is guaranteed to be one English team in the semi-finals after Tottenham and City were paired together, with the first leg to be played in London.

With Pep Guardiola's team top of the Premier League, 13 points ahead of Spurs in third, City will be the favourites to advance to their first semi-final since 2016. City have also won their last three meetings with Mauricio Pochettino's team.

The draw means there will be three clashes between the sides in 10 days -- they are also due to meet in the Premier League at the Etihad Stadium on April 20.

The winner of that tie will host either Ajax or Juventus in the first leg of the semi-finals.

(Staff & Agency)

## Man City face FIFA transfer ban: report



Manchester City will be banned by FIFA from making signings in the next two transfer windows after they broke rules related to the protection of youth players and third-party ownership, according to a report in the Sun newspaper.

The club are already being investigated by the Football Association and Premier League over allegations related to youth transfers and financial fair play rules.

European football's governing body UEFA is also looking into potential breaches of financial fair play, an investigation that could result in City being banned from the Champions League.

A transfer ban for the Premier League champions would come less than a month after Chelsea were hit with the same sanction for 29 breaches of article 19 of FIFA's regulations on the transfer and status of players.

The west London club have already lodged an appeal against that punishment but were told by world governing body FIFA last week that the sanction would not be frozen while the case is being reviewed, as Chelsea had hoped.

FIFA has been investigating City's international transfers for several years, although the club were cleared of breaking the rules when they signed Benjamin Garre from Velez Sarsfield in 2016 just after the Argentine midfielder's 16th birthday.

According to the Sun report, FIFA believes City have crossed the line, though, in regards to their relationship with FC

Nordsjaelland and the Right To Dream football academy in Ghana that is also owned by the Danish side's president, Tom Vernon.

Last year, two players from the academy, Sierra Leone's George Davies and Ghanaian Dominic Oduro, told Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten that they signed for City and played in youth matches before they turned 18.

Both have since left City -- Davies now plays in Latvia and Oduro in the United States -- but FIFA has been investigating their time with the English club.

And that investigation was broadened later in 2018 when a second Danish newspaper, Politiken, published a story that said City had a secret deal with Vernon to have first refusal on the best prospects from Right to Dream.

If true, that would be a breach of the rules preventing the third-party ownership of players, as City could be argued to have undue influence over another club's players.

Neither FIFA nor City were available for comment on Thursday.

City have welcomed the UEFA investigation into allegations that the club tried to circumvent financial fair play regulations, and Blues boss Pep Guardiola said on the issue last week: "I said last season I trust a lot what the club has done because I know them. Hopefully they can solve it as soon as possible."

(Source: AFP)

## Three newcomers in Germany squad as overhaul continues



Germany coach Joachim Loew on Friday called up three newcomers to his squad for this month's internationals, saying his team overhaul was ongoing after a disappointing 2018.

Lukas Klostermann, Niklas Stark and Maximilian Eggstein were included in a 23-man squad for a friendly international against Serbia on March 20 and the Euro 2020 qualifier against Netherlands in Amsterdam four days later.

"We have young players to give responsibility and see how they handle it," Loew told a news conference. "We have the players who can grow into these roles."

Loew last week announced he would no longer call up 2014 world champions Jerome Boateng, Mats Hummels and Thomas Mueller, after Germany's shock 2018 World Cup first-round exit and their Nations League relegation late last year.

He said the decision was a necessary one as Germany, World Cup winners in 2014, looked to change their playing style.

Only captain Manuel Neuer, Toni Kroos and Matthias Ginter were also part of the 2014 World Cup squad.

"A new cycle is starting with the Euro 2020 qualifiers and given last year's results changes are necessary," Loew said.

"After the end of the Nations League we thought about how the team should play in the next qualifiers, how it should look in 2020."

The Bayern trio were irritated by their

unexpected and forced international retirement, with Mueller and Hummels saying they would continue fighting for places in the team. "These are not decisions taken from one day to the next," Loew said. "It was a process where changes would happen. I told them I am not planning with them for the Euro qualifiers and Euro 2020."

"For me personally the most important thing was that I inform the players personally."

He said his young German team would now look to recover their dominance during matches while also increasing speed and efficiency in the last third of the pitch.

"Possession, dominance will continue. Possession football is certainly not dead, look at Manchester City or Barcelona," Loew said. "We need to be more focussed and efficiency... and faster in attack."

Loew also gave Neuer his backing, saying the keeper, who has been far from convincing this season and was to blame for Liverpool's first goal in their 3-1 win at Bayern in the Champions League on Wednesday, would remain his number one choice ahead of Barcelona's Marc-Andre ter Stegen.

"Neuer is currently our number one. This year we have almost exclusively qualifiers. Ter Stegen will get his chances and then we will see what happens," Loew said.

"Neuer knows he has to deliver performances. But for the moment he is our number one."

(Source: Reuters)

## European clubs say will boycott FIFA's Club World Cup

Europe's top clubs say they will boycott FIFA's proposed new Club World Cup, leaving FIFA president Gianni Infantino's latest plans in serious doubt and risking a major split in the world game.

Infantino had hoped to get backing this week for creating two new, potentially money-spinning, tournaments -- a new worldwide Nations League for national teams and a fresh 24-team Club World Cup to start with a 'pilot' edition in 2021.

However, even before Friday's meeting of the ruling FIFA Council, Infantino was forced to drop the Nations League plan after his own task force found there was no consensus for such a tournament and a lack of space in the international calendar.

Infantino still wants to move ahead with his plans for a 'pilot edition' of a 24-team Club World Cup, with the council expected to allow the idea to move forward ahead of June's FIFA Congress which would be asked to endorse the plan.

But a letter to UEFA and Infantino from the European Club Association (ECA) head Andrea Agnelli, chairman of Italian side Juventus, and signed by 15 members of the or-

ganisation's board, including officials of Manchester United, Barcelona and Ajax Amsterdam, made clear the opposition.

The letter, sections of which were published in the German newspaper Sueddeutsche Zeitung says they are "firmly against any approval of a revised Club World Cup at this point in time and confirm that no ECA clubs would take part to such a competition".

The ECA represents 232 European clubs, including all the leading teams who would be expected to feature in a Club World Cup.

The ECA says a decision on potential new competitions can only be made as part of an agreed framework for the international match calendar post-2024.

A spokesperson for the ECA declined to comment on the content of the letter but told Reuters that they would be meeting later this month to discuss the situation.

"We are following developments around the FIFA Council closely. Any decision impacting our members will be discussed and assessed in detail at our upcoming board meeting to be held on 26th March," they said.

■ **'CONTRACTUAL COMMITMENTS'**

The letter also referenced a 2015 agreement between FIFA and the ECA and said that any decision which was against their wishes would "not be in accordance" with it.

The agreement stated that "any changes to the International Match Calendar... will require explicit consent from ECA."

The letter said: "We are therefore certain that FIFA will honour its contractual commitments and we reserve all rights in this regard."

FIFA did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Infantino is expected to hold a news conference following the council meeting on Friday.

The Club World Cup is currently an annual seven-team tournament which attracts minimal interest in Europe -- the centre of the football business.

UEFA, European football's governing body, is unlikely to fight Infantino's plans at Friday's council, with the proposal expected to be passed on to a further meeting ahead of June's congress.

(Source: Eurosport)



# Tractor Sazi move top of Iran football league

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — A 1-0 win over Padideh in Tabriz's Yadegar-e Emam Stadium, sent Tractor Sazi top of Iran Professional League (IPL) table. On Thursday, Tractor Sazi edged past favorites Padideh thanks to the Anthony Stokes's first half header. Georges Leekens's team now sit top of the table for the first time in the current season with 43 points. Sepahan could leapfrog Tractor Sazi on Friday but the team were held by Foolad in Ahvaz at the Foolad Arena. Brazilian forward Kiros Stanley found

the back of the Foolad's net from the penalty spot in the 69th minute but Hassan Beyt Saed's shot into the area leveled the score in the 81st minute. "Football punished us today because we missed so many chances. Of course, Foolad had also opportunities to score. We are a team that the Foolad's fans are happy with a draw against us at their home and it's satisfying," Sepahan coach Amir Ghalenoei said in the post-match news conference. He also criticized the Iranian referees, saying their decisions have gone against



his team so far. "I will not forgive four referees including Alireza Faghani. We could have been top of the table if the decisions had not gone against us," Faghani said. On Saturday, Persepolis will meet struggling Sepidrood in Rasht, while Esteghlal host Nassaji in Tehran's Azadi Stadium.

## Iranian duo win two bronzes at 2019 Asian Youth Athletics Championships



**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Fatemeh Sima Shadkam and Sahan Nouri both won bronze medals for Iran at the 2019 Asian Youth Athletics Championships. Shadkam stood third at the 2000 meters steeplechase with a time of 7:32.53. Japanese Yuzuki Murakami won the gold medal with 7:06.53 and the silver medal went to Kazakhstan's Vassilissa Fakhrutdinova who clocked 7:22.88. Nouri also seized a bronze medal at

the hammer throw event with a throw of 65.85 m. Indian Vipin Kumar claimed the gold medal with 69.63 m and Fan Yanfeng from China stood second with 66.64 m. The 2019 Asian Youth Athletics Championships are the third edition of the biennial, continental athletics competition for Asian athletes aged 15 to 17. The competitions are being held at the Tseung Kwan O Sports Ground in Hong Kong from 15 to 17 March.

## Herve Renard candidate for next coach of Iran: Report



**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Moroccan current coach Herve Renard has reportedly reached an agreement with Iran football federation to take charge of Team Melli. The sources close to Iran football federation president Mehdi Taj say the 50-year-old French coach will be introduced as new head coach of Team Melli. Renard has recently announced the list of Morocco national football team for the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations, scheduled to

be played in Egypt from June 21 to July 19. Team Melli are without a coach since parting company with Carlos Queiroz in late January. Iran didn't extend the Portuguese coach's contract after he failed to bring an end to Team Melli's 43-year title drought in the AFC Asian Cup. Renard attended the 2019 AFC Asian Cup in the UAE in January, fueling speculation that he will continue his work in an Asian football team.

# Alireza Jahanbakhsh loved the derby. Now bring on the FA Cup

Alireza Jahanbakhsh, the man who — via our back page — called for cool heads at Selhurst Park, has lived through and triumphed in a highly-charged derby with Albion. And he reckons a case of "same again" can get the Seagulls through their next test of temperament, at Millwall on Sunday. Albion go into the Lions' den for an FA Cup quarter-final buoyed by 2-1 success at Crystal Palace which completed a derby double. As a star player for Iran, Jahanbakhsh knows all about carrying the hopes of a nation. Not least when his country take on Iraq, as happened recently in the Asian Cup. There is a huge responsibility involved and the hope is to make as many people around you as happy as possible. Which means Jahanbakhsh has been well prepared for the last couple of weeks, in the run-up to a derby at Crystal Palace and now only the fourth FA Cup quarter-final of the club's history. He sensed a different feel ahead of the trip to Selhurst Park, which resulted in a 2-1 win. That left him braced for growing excitement this week as the Millwall trip looms. Jahanbakhsh, back as first choice out wide in Albion's league XI, told The Argus: "It was amazing (at Palace). We needed the points to get higher and higher. "Even the couple of days before the game, there was a lot of talk about just how important that game was and if we could win for the second time this season it would be great. "Away from home every game is tough, especially at such a stadium — really compact, Palace fans really loud. But everyone did a great job. When you are out in the street, on social media, everywhere, people showed us how important this game is. "Everyone worked hard — the players who played, who

didn't play, who came in all, the staff, everyone worked hard to get three points." Asked whether the Palace game and a highly-charged quarter-final can be compared to something like Iran v Iraq, Jahanbakhsh referred to the responsibility players feel towards those cheering them on. He added: "It is kind of the same game because it is important for the people. You know if you win the game you give a really good feeling to the people. It is incredible to win such a game. "I have played in many games like this before and I know how it feels afterwards between the fans." Palace fans were loud at times on Saturday. But they were not at their best by any means and that had a lot to do with what was going on in front of them. Some of that was their own failings. The time when Palace really could have got on a roll came after their penalty equalizer but a lot of passes went astray at key times, which killed their momentum. But Albion also took a lot of the credit for the way they were organized and disciplined, offering no real chances once the hosts had drawn level. Selhurst Park went unusually quiet once Anthony Knockaert had restored Albion's lead, right up until added time. Still, it was pretty lively to start with, especially for a 12.30pm kick-off. The talk afterwards was of how Millwall could be something similar. Jahanbakhsh said: "Everyone has been saying it will be quite the same. "This felt a little bit nicer because it is three league points, winning, this gives you a better feeling which is hard to explain. "We know how important it was for the players, for the fans and for the club.

"It was a double feeling. On the one side, we needed three points, on one side winning against Palace gives you a really good feeling. Both league and cup are really important to us. We know it is going to be another difficult game away from home. "But the most important thing is we just continue the same performance level, winning the games, get back to a good shape, get back to basics, which we always try to do. Playing in a semi-final and going further would be great." Jahanbakhsh has had some testing times but is back on a high with four starts in the last six games, including both of the last two. His many fans in Iran and those who supported him at last season at AZ Alkmaar follow his fortunes closely and are just waiting for him to explode as a Premier League star. They will love the fact Albion have won seven of the eight games he has started in league and cup, the exception coming at Everton. A first goal would be rapturously welcomed. He dipped a shot inches over at Palace and went even closer the previous week when he hit the bar with Huddersfield goalkeeper Jonas Lössl well beaten. How timely would a goal against the Terriers have been? Jahanbakhsh was back at Alkmaar the following afternoon as VIP guest for the 4-2 win at home to Fortuna Sittard. It was his official farewell to the club for whom he scored 21 league goals last term. He said: "They always welcome me and it was a good feeling to see my old team-mates, coaches, everyone there. I always had a good feeling, being there with my team-mates. "That is the feeling I get right now at Brighton and it is just getting better and better every single game. Hopefully I can just perform better for the club. They are following what I am doing and how the team is doing. (Source: The Argus)

# Iran knocked out of AFC Beach Soccer Championship

Japan came from two goals down to secure a place in the AFC Beach Soccer Championship Thailand 2019 semi-finals, after earning a stunning 3-2 extra time win against defending champions Islamic Republic of Iran on Thursday. A 38th minute free-kick from Takuya Akaguma decided what was a sensational, see-sawing match, after the Continental heavyweights were locked at 2-2 at the end of regulation time. The loss comes as a crushing blow to Iran, who will miss the FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup after having qualified for seven of the last eight editions, and finishing third in 2017. Fans had been anticipating a match to remember between the two Asian giants, and it was Masanori Okuyama stealing the ball from Iranian goalkeeper Hamid Behzadpour in the first passage of play of the game, only to miss the empty net that awaited. It was a missed opportunity that Japan would come to rue, particularly when Mahdi Shirmohammadi blasted in the opening goal

from a free-kick after being fouled by Naoya Matsuo in the ninth minute. Iran extended their lead in the very next minute, with a wild bounce off the sand rendering goalkeeper Shingo Terukina helpless, and allowing Mohammad Moradi to make it 2-0, with only the upright stopping Moradi from adding a third goal before the first break. But just when Ruy Ramos' Japan looked to be heading for a second successive scoreless period, Shusei Yamauchi popped up to force home his seventh goal of the tournament, and have the East Asians back to a one-goal deficit in the 21st minute. Okuyama was unlucky not to square the ledger in the final minute of the period, but his acrobatic bicycle kick crashed into the upright instead of the net to leave the make-or-break tie tantalizingly poised at 2-1 with 12 minutes to play. Japan had one period to keep their World Cup qualification streak alive, and they took just two final period minutes to draw level, this time through Akaguma, who found space at the back post to score with a header despite a solid touch from Behzadpour.

Iran head coach Marco Octavio introduced shot-stopper Peyman Hosseini into the action for the first time, and he made a superb save to deny Ozu Moreira's free-kick just after Mirshekari thundered a sensational bicycle kick into the crossbar with just six minutes to go. It was frenetic, dramatic and superbly entertaining action, as both sides fought to stay in the competition, with Japan producing the vast majority of late attacks as the match went into extra-time. The late Japanese dominance continued into extra time, and it paid dividends when Akaguma steered home a free-kick in the 38th minute to give them the lead for the first time in the match, sealing a priceless and unforgettable win for the East Asians. ---Ruy Ramos, Japan head coach "We knew it was going to be a difficult game. As we analyzed their team, we knew they had a suspended player and some injuries, and for both of us, it wasn't ever going to be an easy game. We made it difficult for ourselves at the start. We made many mistakes



and we weren't calm. After Iran's first goal, the players started to rush, which made it more difficult. We thought we'd play Iran after we'd booked our ticket to the World Cup, and the players were nervous against such a tough opponent." ■ Marco Octavio, IR Iran head coach "This is a match that could have been the match for the final. These are technically the best teams of Asia. I have to say congratulations to the Japanese team, and I want to say thank you very much to my brave players." (Source: the-afc)

## Hassan Tabatabaei elected as Iran's Karate Federation new president

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Hassan Tabatabaei has been elected as new president of Iran's Karate Federation on Thursday. He has been elected for a four-year term till 2023 by receiving 36 votes out of 41 votes in the presidential elections held at the Iran's Academy Olympic. Tabatabaei replaced Sadeqh Faraji who left his post due to a law barring the employment of retirees in government, state or public institutions which use state funds or facilities. Karate will be included for the first time in the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games as an additional discipline. The Iranian athletes have a great potential of winning medal in this sport.

## Chemidor win FIBA Asia Champions Cup WABA Qualifiers

**TASNIM** — Chemidor of Iran claimed the title of the FIBA Asia Champions Cup WABA Qualifiers 2019 on Thursday. The Iranian representative defeated Naft Baghdad 66-58 in its last match and claimed the title. Another Iranian team Petrochimi, who had won the previous edition, became runners-up. Naft Baghdad finished in third place and Syria's Al Jaych and Qalandia from Palestine came fourth and fifth respectively. This was a monumental tournament for the Iraq capital, because the city hosted its first major basketball event since 1988.

## Iran futsal remain third in world ranking

**IRNA** — Iran national futsal team remained third in the latest ranking released by Futsal World Ranking on Thursday. The Iranian team sit third with 1663 points. Brazil and Spain are first and second with 1901 and 1781 points, respectively. Iran national futsal team prepare for the 2020 AFC Futsal Championship Qualifiers and also 2020 FIFA Futsal World Cup. Iran finished third at the FIFA Futsal World Cup Colombia 2016 after a 4-3 penalty shootout win over Portugal following a 2-2 draw.

## Azmoun is showing why he should've been Celtic's record signing

Celtic tried and failed to lure Sardar Azmoun to the Scottish Premiership and now he's playing in Russia for Zenit St Petersburg. It is almost a year now since Sardar Azmoun was tipped to become Celtic's new record signing. According to The Sunday People, the Scottish Premiership champions were hoping to lure the so-called 'Iranian Messi' to Glasgow despite interest from the likes of Everton, Wolves and Fulham. With a £10 million price tag, Azmoun would have been the most expensive player in Celtic's history. And on current form, it looks like he would have been worth every penny. Despite continued links with a move to British shores, Azmoun swapped one Russian club for another in January. He left Rubin Kazan to join the giants of Zenit St Petersburg for a fee of £10.5 million, according to L'Equipe. And now he is in the form of his life. Azmoun has scored five times in his last four games for Zenit, including a clinical double in a Europa League victory against Fenerbahce. Blessed with a ruthless finish and a terrific leap, Azmoun looks more like a young Cristiano Ronaldo than Lionel Messi right now. And with Celtic's strikers enduring rather mixed seasons, Odsonne Edouard struggling to convince while Leigh Griffiths remains absent, it is tempting to wonder whether Azmoun would have been worthy of becoming the club's first ever eight-figure signing. (Source: HITC)



## Sousa takes charge of Bahrain

Portuguese Helio Sousa will replace Miroslav Soukup as the new head coach, the Bahrain Football Association (BFA) announced on Thursday. The appointment was confirmed by BFA on social media, stating its President H.E. Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa Al Khalifa's approval of Sousa to take over the national team. "The Chairman of the Bahrain Football Federation (BFA), Chairman of the National Teams Committee, Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, met with Portuguese coach Helio Sousa. It was agreed that Helio Sousa will be coach of the national football team for the coming period," the BFA said. Soukup, who led Bahrain to the Round of 16 at the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019, was out of contract following the Czech's role after the Continental tournament concluded last month. The 50-year-old Sousa coached the Portugal U-19 national team, and helped them win the UEFA European U-19 Championship in 2018. He also steered Portugal to the UEFA European U-17 Championship title in 2016. Sousa's first assignment will be the upcoming FIFA World Cup 2022 qualifying stage. (Source: AFP)



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He who opposes right, fails.

Imam Ali (AS)

## WHAT'S IN ART GALLERIES



### Painting

■ An exhibition of paintings by Farid Jahangir is underway at Iranshahr Gallery.

The exhibition will be running until April 9 at the gallery located at 69 Sepand St., off Karim Khan Ave.

■ Paintings by a large number of Iranian artists, including Farideh Lashai, Jalal Shabahangi, Hossein Mahjubi, Manuchehr Niazi and Behjat Sadr, are on view in an exhibition at the Iranian Art Museum Garden.

The exhibit entitled "From the Nature 2" will run until April 4 at the museum located at Dr. Hesabi St., Fayyazi St., Vali-e Asr Ave.



### Sculpture

■ An exhibition of sculptures by Tara Ravasi and Mahmud Shahruz is underway at Ordibehesht Gallery.

The exhibit titled "Pottery" will continue until April 1 at the gallery located at No. 7, 2nd Alley, Seif St. in the Shahrak-e Gharb neighborhood.



### Illustration

■ An exhibition of illustrations by a large group of artists, including Kambiz Derambakhsh, Qobad Shiva, Majid Baluch, Alireza Vakili and Ki-arash Zandi, is currently underway at Dena Gallery.

The exhibit named "Postal" will be running until March 20 at the gallery, which can be found at 4 Sussan Alley off Qarani St.



### Multimedia

■ Paintings, photos and sculptures by Nastaran Safai, Ailar Shahbazi and Dadbeh Basir are on display in an exhibition at Aran Gallery.

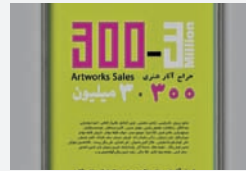
The exhibit named "Urban Chaos" runs until April 8 at the gallery that can be found at 5 Lolagar St., Neauphle-le-Château St.

■ Works by a large number of artists in various media are on display in an exhibition at Ace Gallery.

The exhibition will run until April 5 at the gallery located at 1831 Shariati Ave. near the Qeitarieh neighborhood.

■ Artworks in various media by a large number of renowned artists, including Works by Ardeshtir Moshass, Aidin Aghdashlu, Kambiz Derambakhsh, Hanibal Alkhas, Manuchehr Niazi, Sahar Alizadeh, are on display in an exhibition at Negar Gallery.

The exhibition will run until March 19 at the gallery located at 33 Delaram Alley, Roshanai St. in the Qeitarieh neighborhood.



## Book on Iran's post-revolution cinema published in Istanbul

**CULTURE** d e s k **TEHRAN** — "Iranian Cinema", a study about Iran's post-revolution cinema, has recently been published by Seyyah Publications in Istanbul, Turkey.

Written by Turkish cinema expert and researcher Riza Oylum, the book has shed light on the impacts of the Islamic revolution on Iranian films, filmmakers and film festivals, the publisher has announced.

The book will be unveiled during a book signing ceremony, which will be held tomorrow at the Yapi Kredi Culture and Arts Complex in Istanbul's Beyoglu district.



Front cover of "Iranian Cinema" by Turkish cinema expert Riza Oylum.

# Actor Mohammad-Ali Keshavarz writes statement for National Dramatic Arts Day

**A R T** d e s k **TEHRAN** — Mohammad-Ali Keshavarz, an actor from Iran's early golden generation of such stage and screen artists as Ezzatollah Entezami, Ali Nasirian, Jamshid Mashayekhi and Davud Rashidi has issued the statement for this year's National Dramatic Arts Day.

The director of Iran's Dramatic Arts Center, Shahram Karami, and the director of the Iranian Association of Dramatic Arts, Hamid Nili, met Keshavarz at his home in Tehran last Wednesday to receive the statement, the Dramatic Arts Center announced on Thursday.

"As quickly as the time is passing, we have realized how much we need your presence, energy, smiles and advice," Karami told Keshavarz at the meeting.

"Your generation has enriched our dramatic arts so much and given them an identity, and this structure stands based on the strong foundation that you laid," he added.

"It's a great honor that you have written the statement for this year's National Dramatic Arts Day," Karami noted.

Iran will celebrate the National Dramatic Arts Day simultaneously with World Theater Day on March 27. The Dramatic Arts Center asks a veteran stage artist every year to issue the statement of the National Dramatic Arts Day.

"We should regard this occasion as an omen of good fortune since it helps people get closer to theater," 88-year-old Keshavarz said.

He has played roles in numerous memorable movies including "Mother", "Kamalolmolk" and "Delshodegan" by Ali Hatami, as well as "Through the Olive Trees" by Abbas Kiarostami and "Once Upon a Time, Cinema" by Mohsen Makhmalbaf.

He has also acted in several popular TV



Actor Mohammad-Ali Keshavarz (C) signs a poster for the National Dramatic Arts Day at his home in Tehran during a meeting with Dramatic Arts Center, director Shahram Karami (L) and Iranian Association of Dramatic Arts director Hamid Nili on March 13, 2019.

series such as "Sarbedaran" and "Hezar-Dastan".

"Having dignity is my first advice to the younger people who join the theatrical

community," Keshavarz said.

He also asked the younger generation of stage artists to read as well, so as to raise their knowledge of Persian literature and

culture.

Keshavarz also autographed a poster for the National Dramatic Arts Day at the end of the meeting.

## Leila Hosseini selected for jury of Belgian doc festival

**A R T** d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian film scholar Leila Hosseini has been selected for the international competition jury of the Millenium International Documentary Film Festival, which will be held in Brussels, Belgium from March 22 to 30.

She has been working for the international section of Iran's Documentary and Experimental Film Center (DEFC) since 2001 and is a translator of several film scripts.

She is a festival programmer for DEFC's Cinéma Vérité international documentary film festival.

The jury is also composed of Balkan Documentary Center director Martichka Bozhilova and Millenium festival senior advisor Antonio Vigilante.



Iranian film scholar Leila Hosseini.

## "Triumph", "Water Lilies of Monet" picked for Fajr Docs in Focus

**A R T** d e s k **TEHRAN** — "Triumph" and "Water Lilies of Monet - the Magic of Water and Light" will go on screen in Docs in Focus, a section dedicated to documentary cinema, at the 37th Fajr International Film Festival, the organizers announced on Friday.

Co-directed by Kreshnik Jonuzi, Luftar Von Rama and Charlie Askew, "Triumph" centers on the football match between the Albanian and Serbian national teams during the EURO cup in 2014, which ended abruptly when Serbian fans attacked Albanian players in the middle of the match.

Produced in 2017, the documentary shows the history of political tensions, war and genocide following the Albanian National Team to their first EURO cup appearance.

"Water Lilies of Monet" directed by Giovanni Troilo from Italy provides a deep insight into the works and personal obsessions of the genius of Impressionism, Claude Monet.

The 2018 film focuses on Monet's "Water Lilies", a series of approximately 250 oil paintings.

The 37th Fajr International Film Festival will be held in Tehran from April 18 to 26.



This combination photo shows posters for "Triumph" (L) and "Water Lilies of Monet - the Magic of Water and Light".

## Zadie Smith, Anna Burns among winners of critics prizes

**NEW YORK (AP)** — Anna Burns' "Milkman," her Booker Prize-winning novel about an 18-year-old girl during "The Troubles" in Northern Ireland, has been awarded the National Book Critics Circle prize for fiction. Zadie Smith, best known for such novels as "White Teeth" and "On Beauty," received the criticism award for her essay collection "Feel Free."

Steve Coll was the nonfiction winner for "Directorate S: The C.I.A. and America's secret wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan," his sequel to the Pulitzer Prize-winning "Ghost Wars." Nora Krug's "Belonging: A German Reckons With History and Home" received the award for autobiography. Others winners Thursday night included Ada Limón's "The Carrying" for poetry and "Christopher Bonanos" "Flash," about the photographer Weegee, for biography.

All the winners but Burns, a resident of the United Kingdom, were in attendance Thursday night at the New School in Manhattan. The acceptance speeches were expressions of gratitude for everyone from agents and editors to literary heroes and mentors, and the general theme was one of contrasting the perceived solitude of writing with the sense of community the winners felt. As Limón told the hundreds gathered, she "never wrote a poem alone." Krug, meanwhile, recalled having a dream in which she had fallen asleep at the ceremony, and woke up in time to see a "more deserving" nominee get the award.

"I'm glad to say my dreams have not come true," she said.



In this Oct. 16, 2018 file photo, author Anna Burns smiles after being presented with the Man Booker Prize for Fiction 2018 for "Milkman," during the prize's 50th year at the Guildhall in London. Burns' "Milkman" has been awarded the National Book Critics Circle prize for fiction. (AP Photo/Frank Augstein, File)

Honorary prizes were presented to NPR critic Maureen Corrigan and the Latino publisher Arte Publico, which helped launch the career of Sandra Cisneros and numerous other writers. Tommy Orange's novel "There There" was named winner of best debut book. Orange is a member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma, and has been widely praised as a gifted new voice.

"It's a good moment (for Native American writers) that I hope doesn't come and go as it has in the past," he said.

The critics circle was founded in 1974 and includes around 800 reviewers, authors, bloggers and others in the books community.

## Filmmaker Almodovar walks Cruz, Banderas down memory lane in "Pain and Glory"

**MADRID (Reuters)** — Oscar-winning Spanish filmmaker Pedro Almodovar premiered his retrospective drama "Pain and Glory" in Madrid on Wednesday, reuniting actors Penelope Cruz and Antonio Banderas, who had risen to Hollywood stardom after starting in his movies.

The autobiographical narrative, where Banderas plays Almodovar's present-day tormented alter ego, and Cruz his mother at the time of his youth, wraps up a trilogy which includes the 1987 "Law of Desire" and 2004 "Bad Education".

The 69-year-old screenwriter and director, whose films often use nonlinear plots and feature gay and transsexual characters, returns to the big screen circuit after a three-year hiatus on March 22, when his 21st movie will be released in Spain.

European and U.S. release dates are yet to be confirmed, Almodovar's El Deseo production company told Reuters.

"It was a relief, but it is a dangerous thing to play with your own life and turn it into fiction," Almodovar said of making the film while standing on the red carpet before the screening.

Banderas, 58, and Cruz, 44, were previously billed together in Almodovar's 2013 eccentric comedy "I'm So Excited", which received mixed or average reviews.

The elegiac "Pain and Glory" focuses on various stages in the life of a film director, the relationship with his mother, romances, and the emotional distress of not knowing whether he will be able to keep directing films.

"All the actresses I meet in Hollywood



Director Pedro Almodovar and actor Antonio Banderas pose during the premiere of their latest film "Pain and Glory" in Madrid, Spain, March 13, 2019. (Reuters/Sergio Perez)

ask me what it's like to collaborate with Pedro and what they have to do to work with him, and I always tell them the same thing: learn Spanish," said Cruz, who in 2006 became the first Spanish actress to be nominated for an Oscar in the Best Actress category for her role in Almodovar's 2006 drama "Volver".

Three years later she won the Best Supporting Actress Oscar for her performance in the 2008 film Vicky Cristina Barcelona.

In the new film, Cruz also sings a Lola Flores piece along with Spanish Grammy award winner Rosalia, known for mixing traditional flamenco with urban music.

"I can tell you that it has been very emotional, it's been almost 40 years that we've been doing movies together," said Banderas, for whom "Pain and Glory" is his 8th collaboration with the filmmaker.