



Rouhani urges New Zealand to bring mosque attackers to justice **2**



No peace without eradicating terror ideology **2**



Iran learn rivals at FIBA World Cup 2019 **15**



Tajik poet Farzona receives lifetime achievement award in Iran **16**

Afghans should have final say on their country: Zarif

See page 2

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Iran's mechanism for INSTEX to be set up soon: CBI governor

TEHRAN— The Iranian mechanism which is in consistence with INSTEX (the special purpose vehicle to facilitate trade between the EU and Iran to get around U.S. sanctions) will be set up in Tehran soon, Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Governor Abdolnaser Hemmati said on Friday night.

The official also stressed that establishment of this mechanism

and related company does not at all mean that Iran will wait for Europe to implement INSTEX, saying, "We will continue our strategy of finance and trade through the special methods that we have already planned to conduct trade under the sanctions, especially with our neighbors and other trade partners." Tasnim news agency reported. **→4**

Dutch museum wins American art prize for Iran exhibition

TEHRAN — The Drents museum has won an audience prize in New York at the prestigious Global Fine Art Awards. The prize was granted on March 12 for its contribution to hosting "Iran – Cradle of Civilization", an enormous loan exhibit on the history of Persia.

Such awards are considered "as the Oscars within the museum world,"

said the Drents Museum, which is located in Assen, in the northeastern Netherlands.

The exhibition attracted 115,000 visitors and showed with two hundred unique finds from National Museum of Iran. It showcased an anecdote of one of the oldest and most extraordinary cultures in the world, the museum said. **→10**

Houthis warn they could target Riyadh, Abu Dhabi

Yemen's Houthis warned Saturday they could launch attacks against the capitals of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, who lead a military coalition against them.

"We have aerial photographs and coordinates of dozens of headquarters, facilities and military bases of the enemy," rebel military spokesman Yahya Sare'e said in comments carried by the Al-Masirah channel.

"The legitimate targets of our forces extend to the capital of Saudi Arabia and to the emirate of Abu Dhabi," capital of the UAE, he said.

"We have manufactured advanced generations of attack aircraft, and new systems will soon be functional."

Meanwhile, Yemen's army says the country's air defense has managed to shoot down 19 Saudi Apache helicopters since the outbreak of the war in 2015. **→13**



EDITORIAL

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What are the charges of French government?

The French government's violent crackdown on protesters has faced objections by many formal and informal institutions in Europe and the world. This is while the Emmanuel Macron government is trying to make it natural! Reports published recently in France have shown that Brussels has blamed the government for suppressing its opponents in the streets of Paris.

As the Financial Times has reported, the French government under Macron has been accused of "strengthening security and repression" not only to tackle terrorist threats but also to deal with anti-government gilets jaunes protesters and migrants. In his 2018 annual report released on Tuesday, Jacques Toubon, the official rights defender or national ombudsman, complained of an unprecedented number of preventive arrests that appeared to be an extension of the anti-terror state of emergency imposed in 2015 and supposedly ended in 2017.

A review of part of this report could disclose human rights violations in France during the protests of last weeks: "In France, along with the decline of public services, a policy of strengthened security and repression has taken root in the face of the terrorist threat, social troubles and fears about an immigration crisis."

The French authorities' rash response to this report shows that they do not have the quarreling responses to these allegations. Christophe Castaner, Macron's interior minister, immediately rejected the accusations. "For weeks, every Saturday, our security forces have been attacked," he said. "You have to ask a simple question: 'Do our security forces have the right to defend themselves in the face of the ultra-violence of some demonstrators?'"

But there is evidence that the French Minister of the Interior and other French authorities have no justification for them. The UN and the Council of Europe have condemned what they saw as the disproportionate use of force against demonstrators, in particular the firing of more than 13,000 rounds of rubber bullets, stun grenades and tear gas canisters. **→7**

Christchurch carnage must silence the breed of Islam-bashers

By Abid Hussain

TEHRAN — Daoud Nabi was the first victim of the Christchurch mosque shootings on Friday. He was standing at the door when the terrorist barged inside Masjid Al Noor mosque brandishing his semi-automatic weapon.

"Salam brother," Nabi greeted the attacker, which was overheard on the Facebook live stream of the shooting. Those were his last words. In a split second, the elderly man was lying in a pool of blood.

Nabi is being hailed as a hero on social media for conveying the real message of his religion — peace — to his assassin. In two words, he demolished the myth of Islam being the 'religion of terrorism'.

The horrific attacks at two mosques, which claimed the lives of 49 people, the worst ever mass shootings in the history of New Zealand, have busted many a myths.

The critics of Islam have often proclaimed that every Muslim is not a terrorist but every terror-

ist is a Muslim. The message they have sought to convey is that there is something inherently wrong with Islam which sanctions the macabre acts of terrorism and violence.

These mass shootings in Christchurch have completely smashed that irrational theory. Didn't the Christ ask you to put forth another cheek if someone slapped you? So if Christianity is a religion of peace why did a Christian man commit this heinous crime? The answer is simple. It has nothing to do with religion. **→6**

One belt-one road, a path to economic resilience

By Ebrahim Fallahi

TEHRAN — The history of Iran and China's economic and cultural relations goes back to the ancient times, when positioned at the heart of the Silk Road, Iran linked the Asian country to the nations in Europe.

Now, centuries later, the two countries have still maintained those strong ties and the economic relations between the two sides are seemingly on a new path to growth.

In December 2013 when Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed that China and Central Asian countries build an "economic belt along the Silk Road",

a new chapter was begun in the global economy and consequently in Iran and China's all-out ties.

In February 2016, with the arrival of a cargo train from China to Iran, a milestone was marked in the economic relations between the two sides and the ancient "Silk Road" was once again revived.

What follows is a brief look at the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative, its pros and cons and the impact it could have on Iran's economy.

■ The initiative

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known

as the One Belt One Road (OBOR) or the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road is a development strategy adopted by the Chinese government involving infrastructure development and investments in 152 countries and international organizations in Europe, Asia, Middle East, Latin America and Africa.

"Belt" refers to the overland routes for road and rail transportation, called "the Silk Road Economic Belt"; whereas "road" refers to the sea routes, or the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. **→4**

Fresh clashes as France's yellow vests seek new momentum

French police fired tear gas and arrested dozens on Saturday in clashes with protesters as the yellow vest movement sought to inject new impetus into its four-month old revolt against President Emmanuel Macron and his pro-business reforms.

Protesters threw cobblestones at riot police through clouds of tear gas in front of Paris' Arc

de Triumphant monument, which was ransacked at the peak of the protests in December. Bonfires were started in nearby streets, with at least one car in flames.

Police also used water cannons and had arrested more than 30 protesters by late morning as tensions flared at the top of Paris' upmarket Champs Elysees avenue, where the windows of

a high-end restaurant were smashed.

Interior Minister Christophe Castaner said thugs looking for trouble had infiltrated the demonstrations and gave the order to respond to "unacceptable attacks with the greatest firmness".

"Let there be no doubt: they are looking for violence and are there to sow chaos in Paris," Castaner said in a Tweet. **→13**



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New Year shopping heralds of Noruz

With the Iranian New Year (known as Noruz falling on March 21) approaching, bazaars, markets, and shopping malls are jammed with people across Iran.

Buying new clothes, fruits, nuts and Haft Seen items (an arrangement of seven symbolic items traditionally displayed during the Iranian New Year holidays starting with letter 'S' in Persian language) are among the deep rooted traditions observed in this time of the year by Iranians.



ARTICLE

Syed Zafar Mehdi
Journalist
from New Delhi

Christchurch shooting is 'white supremacist terrorism'

Islamophobia is not a cock and bull story or a figment of some fiction writer's imagination. It is a disturbing reality unfolding before our eyes, almost everywhere.

Attacks against Muslims have assumed alarming proportions in recent years, especially in the Western world, mostly carried out by far-right white supremacists filled with unexplainable hatred for Muslims.

On Friday, the normally quiet and peaceful Christchurch city of New Zealand witnessed ghastly attacks at Al Noor and Linwood mosques during congregational Friday prayers.

More than 40 people were killed after an attacker carrying automatic weapons barged inside the mosques and opened indiscriminate fire at the worshippers in what is being called an unprecedented mass shooting in the Pacific country's history.

Police immediately took some suspects in their custody and New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern termed it "one of New Zealand's darkest days."

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said one of the suspects was an Australian national, calling him an "extremist, right-wing, violent terrorist".

The dastardly attack was livestreamed on Facebook by the attacker who identified himself as Brenton Tarrant. The video was later taken down, but not before it was shared widely in Whatsapp groups.

The attacker also reportedly left behind racist literature at the scene, denouncing "invaders".

Muslims in New Zealand account for just one percent of the country's population, according to a 2013 census. Most of them are immigrants and refugees.

While the police authorities in New Zealand stopped short of calling it an act of 'terrorism', the Islamic Council of Queensland spokesman Ali Kadri said "this has to be called terrorism".

He said the incident has shaken a small minority of Muslims in the country but they will continue to go to mosques for prayers. He said if far-right extremism and radicalisation is not stopped then "these types of attacks will continue". **→6**

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Iran ranked 13th most powerful country

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran has been ranked 13th most powerful country in the world, according to an annual ranking.

The U.S. News and World Report rankings looked at a country's political and financial influences, as well as its international and alliances, its military strength and how it acts as an international leader.

According to U.S. News, Iran "has long been of interest to global powers because of its strategic location within the Middle East and its abundant supply of oil and other natural resources."

The report ranked the United States the most powerful country, followed by Russia and China respectively.



Expediency Council backs Guardian Council on budget bill

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Expediency Council on Saturday voted in favor of the Guardian Council's objection to a parliamentary decision on the budget bill for the next Iranian year (March 2019-March 2020), a member of the Expediency Council said.

According to Tasnim, Hossein Mozaffar also said the bill on returning money to the National Development Fund and also the Employment Fund to help those who have productive activities were accepted by the Expediency Council.



Ex-minister raps West's double standard on terrorism

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Former Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki on Saturday slammed the West's double standard with regard to terrorist attacks.

"The massacre of Muslims by American and European Daeshes and the recent crime in New Zealand revealed the West's double standard with regard to terrorism," Mottaki tweeted.

"America will pay the price of implementing the predictions of (Francis) Fukuyama and warmongering between the Islamic world and the West," he added.

At least 49 people were killed and 20 others seriously injured in shootings at two mosques in New Zealand city of Christchurch in the worst attack in the Pacific country's history.



1 million liters of smuggled diesel seized

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — IRGC Navy forces have seized over one million liters of diesel in the coasts of the southern port city of Bandar Abbas before being smuggled abroad.

The IRGC forces managed to confiscate two bunker ships and five towboats, following a week of intelligence operations. They also arrested 56 individuals.

According to an IRGC Navy official, the towboats were used for transferring diesel to the bunker ships and then the fuel was distributed to different ships and ports, Mehr reported.

The official added that the IRGC is investigating the case to find out the destination of the smuggled fuel.



Envoy decries BBC Persian's failure to label terror attack

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian ambassador to London Hamid Baedinejad has strongly criticized the Persian service of the BBC for refusing to call the New Zealand shootings "terrorist attacks".

In their view there is only one criterion for describing an attack as a "terrorist" one, and those are the ones carried out against the UK, Baedinejad tweeted on Friday.

"Hence, a knife attack in London is called a terrorist [attack], but the massacre in New Zealand is just an attack," he added.

In another tweet, the ambassador said, "Darkest day in modern New Zealand and a sad day for Muslims: scores of Muslims massacred as victims of extremism and Islamophobia in two mosques."



Moscow says Iran rigorously adhering to JCPOA

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Tehran is rigorously complying with the nuclear deal it signed with world powers in July 2015, Russia's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Friday.

Speaking during a press briefing in Moscow, Zakharova said, "Iran strictly complies with all relevant requirements (under the JCPOA) and this is regularly confirmed by the IAEA."

"Nuclear activities in this country are under the constant control of the agency and are an example of transparency," she added, Tasnim reported.

The spokeswoman also stated that the U.S. actions, which aimed to prevent the implementation of the JCPOA, were a source of concern for all parties to the deal.

Rouhani urges New Zealand to bring mosque attackers to justice

President Hassan Rouhani has condemned Friday's "terrorist, racist" attacks on Muslim worshippers in New Zealand, saying the perpetrators of the crime should be brought to justice.

Rouhani's message, published on his official website late Friday, reads as follows:

In the Name of God, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

The terrorist, racist attack on Muslim prayers in New Zealand was a brutal, tragic act that filled the hearts of all Muslims and free people around the world, including the Iranian nation, with deep grief.

This savage crime that led to the martyrdom and injury of a number of innocent, defenseless prayers is another sign for the importance of comprehensive fight against terrorism and spreading hatred towards ethnic and religious groups, and also the common Islamophobia in the West, which is unfortunately fanned by some western powers.

The unprofessional, inhumane news coverage of this terrorist crime by some boastful



western media is another proof of their racist views and double standards towards the lives of people. This ferocity and clear barbarism is not something that clear conscience that

respect human values can forget.

This crime proved that terrorism is still an important global scourge and requires integrated fight and identical approach of all

countries towards violence and extremism anywhere in the world, and the international communities, especially Muslim countries should show serious reaction to such anti-human crimes, exposing all their hidden and clear sponsors and supporters.

The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran is still determined to combat terrorism and racism and is confident that such blind, indiscriminate conspiracies of the enemies will not have any results for them except for more infamy under more unity and integrity among Muslims.

I hereby condemn this horrible catastrophe and express my sympathy to the families of the victims, offering condolences to the entire Muslim community in the world, and pray to the Almighty for the martyrs and wish swift recovery for the injured.

The foreign ministry of the Islamic Republic of Iran will seriously follow up the heinous act and call for the apprehension and bringing all its perpetrators and instructors to justice through international stages.

31 years since Saddam gassed Halabja

March 16 marks the 31st year after the Iraqi Baath regime's chemical attack against the Kurdish city of Halabja in northern Iraq that killed thousands of people during the closing days of the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s.

Halabja was the scene of one of the most notorious crimes against humanity.

On March 16, 1988 Iraq's dictator Saddam Hussein ordered his air force to attack Halabja with chemical bombs, using nerve agents such as VX and mustard gas.

Streets were strewn with dead bodies of women and children. Many perished by water streams as they tried to wash the deadly gas off their faces.

The attack killed between 3,200 and 5,000 people and injured 7,000 to 10,000 more, most of them civilians.

Preliminary results from surveys of the affected region showed an increased



rate of cancer incidence and birth defects in the years after the attack.

The Halabja attack was part of the Al-Anfal Campaign in northern Iraq. The attack has been recognized as a distinct event of genocide conducted against the Kurdish people by the Saddam regime. The Iraqi High Criminal Court recognized the Halabja massacre as an act of genocide on March 1, 2010.

(Source: Tasnim)

Zarif urges OIC to hold emergency meeting over New Zealand shooting

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has strongly condemned the deadly terrorist attacks on Muslim worshippers in New Zealand, calling on the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to hold an emergency session on the carnage.

In a Friday phone conversation with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, whose country is the rotating president of the OIC, Zarif called for appropriate reaction of Muslim states to the heinous crime.

The Iranian foreign minister pointed to the New Zealand terrorist attack as well as the Israeli soldiers' recent insult

to Muslims' mosque in the occupied Palestine, proposing that the OIC immediately hold an emergency meeting at the level of leaders or foreign ministers.

Forty-nine people were shot dead and 48 injured in attacks targeting Muslims at two mosques during Friday prayers in Christchurch, in the worst mass shooting in New Zealand's history.

In a tweet also on Friday night, Zarif said Iranians are saddened but not surprised by the terror attack. "Iranians are deeply shocked and saddened by Christchurch terror today. But we're not surprised. Banned from travel to

the US, and not allowed to abide by our faith if attending French schools, we Iranians know too well what bigotry and hatred of Islam augur. #EndIslamophobiaNow," read Zarif's tweet.

In an earlier Tweet on Friday, Zarif said, "Western hypocrisy of defending demonization of Muslims as freedom of expression MUST end."

The Australian-born shooter published a manifesto praising U.S. President Donald Trump and Anders Breivik, the Norwegian white supremacist who murdered 77 people in Norway in 2011.



A car laden with explosives hit a bus of soldiers on Zahedan-Khash road in the border province of Sistan-Balouchestan on Feb. 13, killing 27 and injuring the remaining 13.

Terrorists usually use Pakistan's soil as a safe haven to carry out attacks inside Iran.

Iran has always been complaining that Pakistan fails to fully guard its borders with Iran. Pakistan has also rejected repeated calls by Iran for joint operations against terrorists inside Pakistan's soil.

No peace without eradicating terror ideology, Larijani tells New Zealand counterpart

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — In a message to his New Zealand counterpart Trevor Mallard on Friday, Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani said peace will never be achieved as long as ideology of terrorists is not eradicated.

The message came after coordinated terrorist attacks on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, on Friday. At least 49 worshippers were killed and many others wounded in the attacks, which Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern condemned as terrorism.

A gunman broadcast livestream 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".

New Zealand was placed on its highest security threat level, Ardern said, adding that "this can now only be described as a terrorist attack".

Police said three people were in custody including one man in his late 20s who had been charged with murder.

Larijani said this crime shows that it is essential for all countries to be vigilant and cooperate in fighting terrorism.

He said Iran, as a victim of terrorism, is ready to cooperate with the international community to find a solution to scourge of terrorism.

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

■ **'Sources of violence, extremism should be eradicated'**

In a message issued on Saturday, Iran's First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri also said it is necessary to root out the sources of "hatred", "violence", "extremism" and "racism".

He said that the incident in Christchurch is a warning to the inter-

national community about the dangers of terrorism and racism.

An international determination is needed to dry up sources of terrorism and violence, the vice president insisted.

In an indirect reference to U.S. President Donald Trump, Jahangiri said leaders of certain countries who adopt racist policies and spread division between people should be aware that they play a part in such "inhuman actions".

Brenton Harris Tarrant, 28, who attacked worshippers in New Zealand has praised Trump as "a symbol of renewed white identity".

In a message on his tweeter account on Friday, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif 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.

In his tweet, Zarif added, "Western hypocrisy of defending demonization of Muslims as 'freedom of expression' MUST end."

■ **Amoli Larijani censures 'racist' attack in New Zealand**

Also, Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani, chairman of the Expediency Council, issued a statement calling the attacks in New Zealand "racist" and strongly condemned it.

The "terrorist and racist attack" on Muslim worshippers in New Zealand, which killed and injured a large number of Muslims from various nationalities, showed the hypocritical face of the West and hurt the feelings of Muslims around the world, including Iranian nation, Amoli Larijani said in a statement on Saturday, Tasnim reported.

He offered his condolences to the people and government of New Zealand, the bereaved families of the victims in particular.

New Zealand mosque attack suspect Brenton Tarrant grins in court

The Australian suspect accused of shooting dead dozens of Muslim worshippers in two mosques has appeared unrepentant in court in New Zealand, staring down media members with a smirk on his face.

Brenton Tarrant, 28, appeared in a Christchurch District Court on Saturday and was charged with murder after the worst ever mass shooting in New Zealand's history, which Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern condemned as "a terrorist attack".

He was remanded without a plea until his next appearance in the South Island city's High Court on April 5.

Handcuffed, shoeless, and wearing a white prison suit, Tarrant did not speak. His court-appointed lawyer made no application for bail or name suppression.

He flashed an upside-down "okay" signal, a symbol used by white power groups across the globe.

Al Jazeera's Andrew Thomas, reporting from Christchurch, said the suspect looked eyes intensely with journalists.

"He came into court, he didn't say anything at all. He stood there looking directly at the media in the courtroom and was smirking throughout his appearance," Thomas reported.

Judge Paul Kellar allowed photos to be taken but ordered that the face of the former fitness instructor be blurred to preserve fair-trial rights.

Two other suspects were taken into custody while police tried to determine what role, if any, they played in the cold-blooded attack that stunned New Zealand.

None of those arrested had a criminal history or was on any watchlist in New Zealand or Australia.

With 49 people killed in the mosque attacks, it was by far the deadliest shooting in modern New Zealand history. Funerals were planned on Saturday for some of the victims.

Medical staff said 39 wounded people were being treated in hospitals, 11 in critical condition including a four-year-old girl.

Victims were from across the Muslim world, including Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Jordan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Malaysia. The dead included women and children.

Egypt's emigration ministry said on Saturday that authorities in New Zealand confirmed the deaths of the four Egyptians, including two 68-year-olds. The ages of the other two victims were not given.

Jordan's foreign minister said that four Jordanians were also killed in the rampage.

Gun laws questioned

Calling the mosque shootings a well-planned "terrorist attack", Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said the main suspect was a licensed gun owner who used five weapons during his rampage, including two semi-automatic weapons and two shotguns.

The weapons had been modified to allow



the quicker discharge of rounds, she said.

"I can tell you one thing right now, our gun laws will change," Ardern told reporters, saying a ban on semiautomatic weapons would be considered.

She said the suspect intended to continue the rampage before he was caught by police.

"The offender was mobile, there were two other firearms in the vehicle that the offender was in, and it absolutely was his intention to continue with his attack," Ardern said.

"I'm not privileged to a full breakdown at this point but it is clear that young children have been caught up in this horrific attack," she added.

New Zealand, with a population of five million, has relatively loose gun laws and an estimated 1.5 million firearms, or roughly one for every three people. But it has one of the lowest gun homicide rates in the world. In 2015, it had just eight gun homicides.

Tarrant posted a jumbled, 74-page manifesto on social media in which he identified himself by name and said he was a white supremacist who was out to avenge attacks in Europe perpetrated by Muslims.

The gunman also livestreamed the attack at Al Noor mosque, where he sprayed worshippers with bullets, killing at least 41 people. Several more people were killed in an attack on a second mosque in the city a short time later. Police also defused explosive devices in a car.

Authorities did not say whether the same person was responsible for both shootings.

Tarrant's relatives in the Australian town of Grafton, in New South Wales, contacted police after learning of the shooting and were helping with the investigation, authorities said.

Tarrant has spent little time in Australia in the past four years and only had minor traffic infractions on his record.

Searching for relatives

On Saturday, outside one of the two mosques, 32-year-old Ash Mohammed pushed through police barricades in hopes of finding out what happened to his father and two brothers, whose mobile phones rang unanswered. An officer stopped him.

"We just want to know if they are dead or alive," Mohammed told the officer.

In the aftermath of Friday's bloodshed, the country's threat level was raised from low to high. Police warned Muslims against going to a mosque anywhere in New Zealand, and the national airline cancelled several flights in and out of Christchurch, a city of nearly 400,000.

New Zealand is generally considered to be welcoming to migrants and refugees. On Saturday, people across the country were reaching out to Muslims in their communities on social media to volunteer acts of kindness - offering rides to the grocery store or volunteering to walk with them if they felt unsafe.

Muslims account for just one percent of New Zealand's population, a 2013 census showed, most of whom were born overseas.

A website set up for victims had raised more than \$684,000 in less than a day, and social media was flooded with messages of shock, sympathy and solidarity.

One image shared widely was of a cartoon kiwi, the country's national bird, weeping. Another showed a pair of figures, one in a headscarf, embracing. "This is your home and you should have been safe here" the caption read.

A city mourns

The Al Noor mosque sits opposite a grand English-style park filled with towering oak trees. On Saturday morning, dozens of people stood silently, facing the building as police went about their work.

With the street closed, the only sounds to be heard were crickets and the occasional

car engine in the distance. Occasionally, the sound of sobbing cut through.

A few hundred metres down the street where the alleged gunman drove after attacking the first mosque, bunches of flowers were slowly building in memoriam.

Many of those visiting this scene were migrants, newcomers to the city and a country that prides itself on its peace-loving nature.

Rizwan Khan, 32, originally from West Bengal in India, told Al Jazeera of his fortune when an appointment in town meant he was running late for his usual trip to the Al Noor mosque.

"Because I was running late I decided not to go," said Khan. "I feel very grateful to God. I can't imagine what would have happened. One of my friends called me, who I normally pray with in the mosque. And when I called him he just said he'd been shot in his shoulder.

"I was just saved by luck."

Other stories were just as remarkable - for the wrong reasons.

Two young grief-stricken Muslim men described how their friend's uncle came to visit him from India for a few weeks. He had gone to the Al Noor mosque the day before flying home, only to be shot in cold blood.

Rampage video

Facebook, Twitter and Google scrambled to take down the gunman's video, which was widely available on social media for hours after the mass shooting.

In the video, the killer spends more than two minutes inside the mosque targeting terrified worshippers with gunfire. He then walks outside where he shoots at people on the pavement.

Children's screams can be heard in the distance as he returns to his car to get another weapon. He walks back into the mosque, where there were at least two dozen people lying on the ground.

After going back outside and shooting a woman there, he got back in his car where a song can be heard blasting. The singer bellowed "I am the god of hellfire!" and the gunman drove off before police even arrived.

The second attack took place at the Linwood mosque about 5km away. Mark Nichols told the New Zealand Herald he heard about five gunshots and a worshipper returned fire with a rifle or shotgun.

The footage showed the killer was carrying a shotgun and two fully automatic military assault rifles, with an extra magazine taped to one of the weapons so that he could reload quickly. He also had more assault weapons in the boot of his car, along with explosives.

The gunman said he was not a member of any organization, acted alone, and chose New Zealand to show even the remotest parts of the world are not free of "mass immigration".

(Source: Al Jazeera)

U.S., Canada, EU hit Russia with fresh sanctions over Ukraine

Russia says it will respond to new sanctions



The United States, in coordination with Canada and the European Union, has slapped new sanctions on more than a dozen Russian officials and businesses, citing Moscow's "continued aggression in Ukraine".

Six Russian officials, six defense firms and two energy and construction firms were targeted, either over the seizure of Ukrainian vessels in the Kerch Strait, or for their activities in Russian-annexed Crimea or separatist eastern Ukraine, the U.S. Treasury said in a statement on Friday.

"The United States and our transatlantic partners will not allow Russia's continued aggression against Ukraine to go unchecked," said Steve Mnuchin, the U.S. treasury secretary.

"This joint initiative with our partners in the European Union and Canada reinforces our shared commitment to impose targeted and meaningful sanctions in response to the Kremlin's attempts to disregard international norms and undermine Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity," he added.

The U.S. sanctions freeze all property and interests in property belonging to the designated individuals and entities, and prohibits U.S. persons from transacting with them.

Four of the individuals are border guard or coastguard officials, singled out for their role in a November 25, 2018, naval confrontation, in which Russian ships fired on and seized three Ukrainian vessels in the narrow Kerch Strait linking the Black and Azov seas near Crimea. The Russian navy captured 24 Ukrainian sailors during the clash.

Canada imposed sanctions on 114 people and 15 entities in response to Russia's military action against the Ukrainian ships, while the EU sanctioned eight more Russians over the standoff.

The decision takes the number of people blacklisted by the bloc over the crisis in Ukraine to 170 persons and 44 entities.

The EU said its sanctions affected senior security service officials and military commanders accused of preventing Ukrainian ships from reaching port.

Attack on Ukrainian ships

The U.S., Canada and the EU on Friday again pressed for Moscow to release the detained Ukrainian crew.

"Canada and its allies are unwavering in our support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Russia's provocations in the Kerch Strait and its illegal invasion and ongoing occupation of Crimea will not go unchecked," said Chrystia Freeland, Canada's foreign minister.

Robert Palladino, a spokesman for the U.S. State Department, called on Russia to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. He added: "We call upon Russia to immediately return to Ukraine the seized vessels and arrested crew members, and keep the Kerch Strait and the Sea of Azov open to ships transiting to and from Ukrainian ports."

The U.S. also imposed sanctions on two Ukrainian separatists - Aleksey Naydenko and Vladimir Vysotsky - involved in organising November elections in the breakaway east, which Washington says were a "sham".

The six defence firms were targeted over their operations in Crimea, where the U.S. says several "misappropriated Ukrainian state assets to provide services to the Russian military".

Among them are Russian shipbuilding giant Zelenodolsk, the hydroacoustic equipment producer Okeanpribor, a diesel engine supplier to the Russian military, Zvezda, and an electronic parts supplier to the military, Fiolent.

'Political scheming'

Separately on Friday, Russian businessman Oleg Deripaska sued the U.S. alleging that it had overstepped its legal bounds in imposing sanctions on his companies.

The billionaire was slapped with sanctions in April last year, which targeted tycoons with close ties to the Kremlin.

In a legal filing, Deripaska asked the U.S. District Court in Washington to block the U.S. Treasury Department from using the "devastating power" of such economic sanctions. He claimed his net worth has dropped by \$7.5bn because of the measures.

"I have spent 30 years of my life building companies that are major players in the global economy, and will not let that hard work - along with millions of jobs and individual livelihoods - be destroyed by political scheming," he said in the statement sent by his spokeswoman.

Russia's response

Russia will respond to new European Union sanctions, its foreign ministry said Saturday, without saying what action it would take.

The EU Friday added eight more Russians to its sanctions list over a stand-off between Russia and Ukraine in the Azov Sea, including senior security service officials and military commanders that the EU accuses of preventing Ukrainian ships from reaching port.

The EU's announcement coincided with the fifth anniversary of Russia's annexation of the Crimean peninsula and was coordinated with the United States and Canada. The two countries also introduced new sanctions.

"The Russian side will not leave this unfriendly action by the European Union unanswered," the foreign ministry said in a statement.

The EU imposed travel bans and asset freezes on Russian officials in relation to an incident in the Azov Sea last November, when the Russian navy captured 24 Ukrainian sailors and their vessels in the Kerch Strait, near Crimea.

"The EU's claim that Russia 'broke international law' and used unjustified force does not correspond with reality at all," the ministry said. "The excuse for placing our fellow countrymen on the European Union's illegitimate sanctions lists amazes with its hypocrisy and cynicism," it added, saying the individuals targeted were simply doing their jobs.

The EU's decision takes the number of people blacklisted by the bloc over the crisis in Ukraine to 170, plus 44 entities.

(Source: agencies)

Turkey says 2 of its soldiers killed, 8 wounded in northern Iraq

Two Turkish soldiers were killed and eight others were wounded Saturday in a clash during operations into northern Iraq, Turkey's defense ministry said.

Six militants, including a woman, were "neutralized" during the operations, the ministry said in a statement. The Turkish army uses the term neutralize when it has killed, captured or wounded combatants

Turkey regularly carries out air strikes on PKK bases

in northern Iraq, as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan pursues his aim of ending the militant group's presence near Turkey's borders.

The PKK, considered a terrorist organization by the United States, the European Union and Turkey, has waged a three-decade insurgency in Turkey's largely Kurdish southeast that has killed about 40,000 people.

(Source: Dailey Star)



If you 'care' about Yemenis, back Saudi war: Pompeo to senators

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has rebuked senators for passing a resolution to end Washington's support for the Saudi war on Yemen, saying they should back Riyadh if they "truly care about Yemeni lives."

In comments to the media in Washington on Friday, Pompeo claimed the vote showed that American senators do not care about the Yemeni people.

"If you truly care about Yemeni lives, you'd support the Saudi-led effort to prevent Yemen from turning into a puppet state of ... Iran," he said.

On Wednesday, the Republican-led Senate approved the resolution to halt U.S. military assistance for the Saudi offensive against Yemen by a 54 to 46 tally.

The measure now heads to the Democrat-led House of Representatives, where it is expected to pass.

A similar resolution to end U.S. support for the Saudi war on Yemen passed the Senate in December, but it was not taken up under the then-Republican-controlled House. For the resolution to reach the president's desk, it will have to go back to the House for approval.

The U.S. provides intelligence sharing,



logistics support and other training to the Saudi-led coalition, which has been waging the war on Yemen since March 2015. It also previously helped with mid-air refueling for warplanes operated by Riyadh and its allies, but that assistance ended last November.

Senator Bernie Sanders, a co-sponsor of the resolution, said, "The bottom line is that the United States should not be supporting a catastrophic war led by a despotic regime with a dangerous and irresponsible foreign policy."

Pompeo, however, said the Trump administration believes that suspending the U.S. role would not end the Yemen conflict.

"We all want to improve the dire humanitarian situation. But the Trump administration fundamentally disagrees that curbing our assistance to the Saudi-led coalition is the way to achieve these goals," he said.

Pompeo also argued that the way to "alleviate the Yemeni people's suffering isn't to prolong the conflict by handicapping our partners in the fight," but by giving the Saudi-led coalition the support needed to defeat Houthi Ansarullah fighters.

Saudi Arabia and its partners launched the war in an attempt to reinstall Riyadh-allyed former regime and crush the Houthis, who have been running state affairs in the absence of an effective government.

The Western-backed aggression against Yemen, coupled with a naval blockade, has destroyed the country's infrastructure and led to famine as well as a cholera outbreak.

So far, the aggressors have been unable to penetrate the defenses of the Yemeni nation and Houthi fighters.

(Source: Press TV)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	171125.0
IFX	2114.84

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,570 rials
GBP	55,855 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$67.16/b
WTI	\$58.52/b
OPEC Basket	\$66.22/b
Gold	\$1,303.45/oz
Silver	\$15.36/oz
Platinum	\$835.00/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Bank of Japan has dimmer view of Japan's struggling economy

Japan's export-driven economy is feeling the pain resulting from the global economic slowdown and the disruption of international trade caused by president Donald Trump.

The Bank of Japan, the central bank, for the first time, expressed pessimism robust exports and factory output will underpin Japan's growth this year in a confirmation that trade and political tensions overseas threaten to derail its fragile economic recovery. And to protect that recovery, the BOJ kept monetary policy steady on Friday.

At a two-day rate review, the BOJ reaffirmed its promise to retain short-term interest rates at minus 0.1 percent and 10-year government bond yields around zero percent. The widely expected decision was made by a 7-2 vote.

"Exports have shown some weaknesses recently," said the BOJ in a statement on its policy decision. Its bleaker view today stands in stark contrast to January when it said exports were increasing as a trend.

The BOJ did, however, cut its assessment of the health of overseas economies, saying they're showing signs of a slowdown. It also downgraded its view on exports and output.

Japan's exports posted their biggest deceleration in more than two years in January as exports to China tumbled. Factory output also posted the biggest decline in a year in January, another sign slowing weakening global demand is taking its toll on the country's economic health.

The BOJ also defended its view Japan's economy is expanding moderately. There was a caveat to this optimism, however. The bank added a phrase that "exports and output have been affected by slowing overseas growth."

(Source: Business Times)

U.S. manufacturing sector slowing as economy loses steam

U.S. manufacturing output fell for a second straight month in February and factory activity in New York state hit nearly a two-year low this month, offering further evidence of a sharp slowdown in economic growth early in the first quarter.

The reports on Friday extended the streak of weak data and underscored the Federal Reserve's "patient" stance towards further interest rate increases this year. Fed officials are scheduled to meet next Tuesday and Wednesday to assess the economy and deliberate on the future course of monetary policy. The U.S. central bank raised rates four times last year.

"The economy is spinning its wheels and not gaining any traction yet in this soft patch produced by trade wars and stock market turbulence and the government shutdown," said Chris Rupkey, chief economist at MUFG in New York.

"Thank God Fed officials were smart enough to take their foot off the rate hikes accelerator."

The Fed said manufacturing production dropped 0.4 percent last month, held down by declines in the output of motor vehicles, machinery and furniture. Data for January was revised up to show output at factories falling 0.5 percent instead of slumping 0.9 percent as previously reported.

It was the first back-to-back decline since mid-2017.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast manufacturing output rising 0.3 percent in February. Production at factories increased 1.0 percent in February from a year ago. Manufacturing accounts for about 12 percent of the economy.

Motor vehicles and parts output slipped 0.1 percent last month after tumbling 7.6 percent in January. Excluding motor vehicles and parts, manufacturing output fell 0.4 percent last month, the largest decrease in nearly a year.

February's drop in manufacturing production added to soft reports ranging from retail sales to housing in suggesting the economy lost significant momentum early in the first quarter.

The Atlanta Fed is forecasting gross domestic product will rise at a 0.4 percent annualized rate in the first quarter. GDP grew at a 2.6 percent pace in the fourth quarter.

The economy is losing steam as the stimulus from last year's \$1.5 trillion tax cut package fades. Activity is also being crimped by a trade war between the United States and China as well as by last year's surge in the dollar and softening global economic growth, which are hurting exports.

These factors, together with a 35-day partial shutdown of the U.S. government that ended on Jan. 25, have spilled over to the manufacturing sector.

In a separate report on Friday, the New York Fed said its general business conditions index fell 5.1 points to a reading of 3.7 in February, the lowest since May 2017. It was the third consecutive monthly reading below 10, which the New York Fed said suggested "that growth has remained quite a bit slower so far this year than it was for most of 2018."

(Source: Reuters)

Monthly gas condensate export from Pars energy zone rises 15% on year

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — The value of Iran's gas condensate export during the eleventh Iranian calendar month of Bahman (ended on February 19) rose 15 percent compared to the same month of the past year, the director general of Pars Special Economic Energy Zone's Customs Department announced.

In an interview with IRNA on Saturday,

Ahmad Pour-Heidar stressed that this increase in exports has occurred despite the U.S. reimposition of sanctions against Iran and all related limitations.

The official said 1.431 million tons of gas condensate worth \$745 million has been exported from the zone during the mentioned month, with a nine-percent increase in terms of weight.

Iran's mechanism for INSTEX to be set up soon: CBI governor

1 → Hemmati went on to say, "My colleagues had some negotiations with the representatives of three European countries and also the director of INSTEX at the place of CBI last week and explained the Iranian mechanism completely for them; now we are expecting the practical approach to be adopted by the European side."

President Trump unilaterally pulled Washington out of the nuclear deal in May 2018 and ordered reimposition of sanctions against Iran. This happened despite the fact that the United Nations' International Atomic Energy Agency has repeatedly confirmed that Iran is fully abiding by the terms of the nuclear agreement. U.S. intelligence agen-

cies have also endorsed Iran's compliance to the deal.

On January 31, France, Germany and Britain announced the creation of INSTEX (Instrument for Supporting Trade Exchange-s), a special purpose vehicle aimed at facilitating legitimate trade between European economic operators and Iran.

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

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

One belt-one road, a path to economic resilience

1 → The Chinese government calls the initiative «a bid to enhance regional connectivity and embrace a brighter future». Some observers see it as a push for Chinese dominance in global affairs with a China-centered trading network.

■ OBOR: pros and cons

Although clearly the OBOR initiative entails great merits for the global economy, especially for the involving countries, there are some people who believe it could act as a double-edged sword.

They argue that with the Chinese large-scale investment and growing presence in the involved countries, there is the risk of A "China hegemony" replacing the notion of "U.S. and EU" dominated economy.

It is said that one of the most important aspects of the OBOR project is that it is aimed to reduce the domination of U.S. and Europe over international relations system which has been formed during the past 500 years, but isn't it going to start another form of yuan dominance?

In March 2018, a study by the Washington-based Center for Global Development (CGD) reported that China's ambitious Belt and Road infrastructure initiative could raise the sovereign debt risks in eight countries involved in the plan.

According to CGD, of the 68 countries identified as potential borrowers in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) 23 were found to be already at a "quite high" risk of debt distress.

"Those countries include Pakistan, Djibouti, the Maldives, Laos, Mongolia, Montenegro, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan." The study said.

Advocates of the plan, on the other hand, argue that aside from regional stability and security as a result of close cooperation between the involved countries, Industrial structure improvement, energy security and development of infrastructure for the countries in the way of the new Silk Road are just few of the great advantages that the huge project has to offer.

■ Iran and OBOR

As I mentioned before, Iran has been a major gateway to ancient Silk Road, and thanks to its strategic position



among the Arabian Peninsula, Central Asia and South Asia, the country is still a critical crossroad in the region.

In realization of its ambitious plan for implementing the OBOR initiative, China inevitably needs Iran's support in the process. Of course the project is executable even without Iran's participation but the costs won't be justifiable, both literally and figuratively. Considering the two countries' political and economic agendas and interests, the two sides need each other to move forward and that is a known fact.

On Iran side, the U.S. withdrawal from Iran's nuclear deal (known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or JCPOA) and re-imposition of sanctions on the country has made Iran more determined to pursue forming a resilient economy in which the dependence on U.S. dollar is minimized. In this regard, once again the significance of the economic ties with China comes to focus.

China could be Iran's biggest source of the capital it needs to finance infrastructure projects in the absence of global banks which are intimidated by the U.S. sanctions.

As Advisor to Iranian Transport Minister Asghar Fakhrieh Kashaan said, the Chinese initiative would do much more than just provide a channel for transporting goods. "Think infrastructure, city planning, cultural exchanges, commercial agreements, investments and tourism," he said. "You can pick any project, they are all under this umbrella."

As for China, since the country is heavily reliant on Iranian energy imports and more importantly one of the key



He also said that over 3 million tons of non-oil commodities, including gas condensate, worth \$1.298 billion has been exported from Pars Special Economic Energy Zone during the eleventh month of this year, indicating 13 percent growth in terms of weight compared to the same month of the previous year.

The director general mentioned United Arab Emirates, China, South Korea, India, Indonesia, Japan, Taiwan, Italy, France, Belgium, Germany, Russia, Poland and Norway as the major destinations for the products exported from the zone located in southwest Iran.

Over \$714m worth of commodities traded in IME in a week

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** —During weekdays ending up to March 14, approximately 624,721 million tons (MT) of commodities worth over \$714 million were traded at Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME).

According to the report from IME International Affairs and Public Relations Department, last week, on the domestic and export metal and mineral trading floor of IME, 247,990 MT of various products worth close to \$308 million were traded.

On this trading floor, 342,980 MT of steel, 3,040 MT of copper, 1,500 MT of aluminum, 210 MT of molybdenum concentrates, 260 MT of zinc ingot and

10 kg of gold bullion were traded by customers.

The report declares that on domestic and export oil and petrochemical trading floors of IME, 369,365 MT of different commodities with the total value of \$408 million were traded.

On this trading floor, 98,355 MT of VB feed stock, 141,177 MT of bitumen, 88,433 MT of polymer products, 32,136 MT of chemical products, 9,040 MT of sulfur as well as 1,196 MT of insulation were traded.

Furthermore, 7,366 MT of various commodities were traded on the side market of IME.

issues for China to implement the OBOR initiative in the Middle East is to maintain regional stability and build trust among the involved countries, Iran, as one of the major players in the region which has deep ties with countries like Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan can play a key role in realizing this goal.

■ Final thoughts

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) hopes to deliver trillions of dollars in infrastructure financing to Asia, Europe, and Africa.

With the project coming into force, more and more countries in the region are upgrading their infrastructure to get ready to fully benefit from the potentials of this huge economic opportunity.

Among Iran's neighbors, Russia, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Georgia and Turkey have already inked an agreement on customs cooperation to facilitate transit from Asia to Europe.

Russia has invested \$850 million on the railway projects in the Caspian region and Pakistan is benefiting from a \$46 billion investment from the Chinese in Gwadar port.

On the other hand, there are numerous uncompleted transportation projects in Iran which require funding and attention if the country is willing to advance with other rivals.

Iran is currently developing Chabahar port which is the biggest competition for Pakistan's Gwadar.

Based on Chabahar's project development plan, this port is going to be linked to the transit routes of Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Turkey and Azerbaijan via rail through a series of railway projects called North-South Corridor.

Now, considering China's strong support in development of Gwadar port, the future of Chabahar is completely dependent on its development speed.

Iran should place greater importance on its transportation infrastructure and allocate more funds in this area and not to rely heavily on the Chinese financial support, in order to be able to take full advantage of the platform that OBOR initiative is providing for boosting the country's economy.

Brexit's poison will last for years

data toward the end of last year. Growth was a poor 0.2 percent in the three months to January, according to the Office for National Statistics. The composite purchasing managers' index, a measure of economic activity, points to growth of 0.1 percent in the first quarter of 2019. The Office for Budget Responsibility, Britain's fiscal watchdog, predicts that the economy will expand by 1.2 percent this year, down from a 1.6 percent forecast five months ago.

One negative force is the decline in investment. Jonathan Haskel, the newest member of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee, said in a speech this week that post-referendum business investment had fallen relative to its historic trend and compared to the other G-7 economies. Had it grown at the same pace as the median G-7 country (excluding the UK), it would have risen 2.9 percent. Instead, it fell 0.4 percent. This suggests Brexit accounts for nearly 70 percent of the investment slowdown.

Anecdotal evidence backs this up, showing the impact on people's livelihoods. Nissan Motor Co Ltd. is shifting the production of some cars – the X-Trail sport utility vehicle and two Infiniti models – away from Sunderland in northern England. Honda Motor Co Ltd. is to close down its flagship UK plant in Swindon. While the companies insist these decisions aren't purely down to Brexit, it is ludicrous to think that Britain's attempt to leave not just the EU, but also the single market, isn't affecting foreign investors.

One hope is that this is temporary. Once Britain actually leaves, so the optimists' tale goes, business will know what to expect and will resume buying equipment and machinery. Indeed, the OBR has lifted its forecasts for economic growth in the next two years, assuming a deal is done. The economy is now expected to expand by 1.4 percent in 2020 and 1.6 percent the year after.

That optimism is misplaced. There are three scenarios for companies in the UK, and none looks pretty.

First is a catastrophic exit, whereby Britain leaves the EU without a withdrawal agreement. From pharmaceuticals to aviation, it's hard to think of a sector that would not suffer. Companies may need to spend to deal with the disruptions, but this will pale by comparison with the reduction in domestic and foreign demand. The Bank of England may relax monetary policy to deal with the slump, but a collapse in sterling and supply constraints could cause inflation to spike, which would require a monetary tightening. How do you square that circle?

The Bank has also asked lenders to triple their holdings of liquid assets, according to the Financial Times, but weaker banks would still be vulnerable. In a no-deal Brexit, a credit crunch would be a near certainty.

The second scenario is an orderly exit, with some form of withdrawal agreement. Yet this won't answer the fundamental question about the future EU relationship. With the dominant Conservative and Labour parties riven by in-

fighting, who knows what they want Brexit to be like? And, anyway, which party will be in power? How much will the EU concede? And what will Britain's trade deals with the rest of the world look like?

Even if Britain asks for more time to make up its mind, that won't clarify anything for British business. The same could be said for a second referendum – the third scenario – which might take a year to arrange and could end up with the same result or inflict even greater political division on the country.

Haskel found that investment in intellectual property products has held up reasonably well since the vote, probably because they suffer less risk of holdups at the border. But a stricter immigration policy post-Brexit, as favored by May and Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, would probably force companies in these sectors overseas too. Similarly, many finance firms have set up shop in other EU countries now, and they may start competing with those still located in the UK. Divestment away from Britain may have only just started.

The Brexit referendum was meant to settle the issue of Britain's relationship with the EU for a generation. But for companies investing in the UK, all it has done is open up an era of uncertainty that contrasts vividly with Britain's hard-won reputation for boring predictability. The Great Smog of London killed thousands, but waned in less than a week. It will take years for the poison of Brexit to clear.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Oil bulls stick to their guns ahead of make-or-break OPEC summit

OPEC can make or break oil's bull run, and hedge funds are betting the cartel will keep fueling the rally.

Money managers increased wagers on rising West Texas Intermediate and Brent crude prices to the highest since October ahead of a key meeting of top exporters in Azerbaijan over the weekend.

"As long as we come out of the weekend with stasis, the hedge funds will consider that a positive sign and will continue to support the bull run," said Ashley Petersen, an oil analyst at Stratas Advisors LLC in New York.

As the producer group prepares for the gathering with allies including Russia, OPEC has signaled commitment to its deal to cut output. That's helped spur a rally of more than 30 percent for both benchmarks since late December. Plus, sanctions on Iran and Venezuela have helped to tighten global oil supply.

WTI ended the week more than 4 percent higher, at \$58.52 a barrel, just pennies below a four-month high. Brent had a weekly gain of 2 percent, to \$67.16. The weekend's agenda in Baku, Azerbaijan's capital, includes a meeting of Russia's Energy Minister Alexander Novak with his Saudi Arabian counterpart, Khalid Al-Falih. Their two countries, which together produce more than a fifth of the world's crude, are key to the accord's success.



Saudi Arabia is said to have pledged a bigger-than-required cut in crude shipments to its customers in April, and the kingdom is leaning toward extending the output curbs agreement into the second half of this year. Russia, in turn, has said it will speed up its progressive reduction of production. "The speculative community is starting to

get bullish," said Bill O'Grady, chief market strategist at Confluence Investment Management in St. Louis, Missouri. "The Saudis appear pretty committed to trying to keep supplies constrained and generally, if the Saudis are willing to put that out there, the rest of the cartel usually goes along."

Hedge funds' WTI net-long position -- the

difference between bets on higher prices and wagers on a drop -- climbed 4 percent to 157,648 futures and options in the week ended March 12, according to the U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission. Longs rose for a third straight week, while shorts dropped 7 percent during the period.

At the beginning of the year, there were fears that U.S. production growth "was going to explode, demand is going to crumble, and what are we going to do with an excess of oil?," Petersen said. "Now, we're actually getting data that shows the sky isn't falling and positions are reacting accordingly."

Another reason for hedge funds to become more optimistic on crude: technicals. WTI's 50-day moving average is poised to cross above its 100-day moving average-- a bullish signal that often invites buyers into the market. Brent's 50-day average crossed above its 100-day line on Friday.

But not everyone was optimistic. Investors have rushed to short one of the top oil exchange-traded funds as crude prices hover near four-month highs. Short interest in the \$1.86 billion SPDR S&P Oil & Gas Exploration & Production ETF made up close to 35 percent of the fund's outstanding shares, the most since 2014, according to Markit data.

(Source: Bloomberg)

IEA warns of looming oil market deficit



Production outages and Iran and Venezuela will tip the global oil market into a shortage during the second quarter, the International Energy Agency said in the new edition of its monthly Oil Market Report.

This will happen against the background of steadily rising demand despite a slowdown during the last quarter of 2018, the agency said, adding that it had kept its 2019 global demand forecast unchanged from the last OMR at 1.4 million bpd.

The IEA said Venezuela's oil production had stabilized around 1.2 million bpd before the massive power outage that hit the country earlier this week, noting this is the same amount as the one OPEC and its partners agreed to take off global markets in December in a bid to prop up prices.

While it did not say it expected Venezuelan's oil production to grind to a halt, further decline is more or less a certainty. However, any serious market disruption should be limited because OPEC members--excluding U.S. sanctioned Iran and Venezuela--are sitting on some

2.8 million bpd in spare capacity. This, with two-thirds of it in Saudi Arabia, could be quickly brought back online to cover any shortages, especially of heavy crude. OPEC has cut mostly its heavy crude oil output.

Whether the cartel would be willing to do this, however, remains an open question in light of recent comments by the Saudi Energy Minister, who suggested the cuts might have to be extended beyond the April deadline to boost prices enough for the Kingdom's comfort.

On the other hand, OPEC is likely to face the vocal opposition from the U.S. President as well as India and China if oil gets too expensive for importers' comfort.

Speaking of importers, the IEA noted the U.S. has started buying a lot more crude from Russia to replace lost Venezuelan barrels. "As exports to the US have slumped following the imposition of sanctions, Russia has taken the opportunity to increase its shipments to the US from relatively modest levels to around 150 kb/d."

(Source: oilprice.com)

Natural gas market eager for China's next move



China is the thread that keeps the gas wheel spinning. That's a key takeaway from this year's CERAWEEK by IHS Markit conference that wrapped up Friday in Houston.

The world's most populous nation is expected to surpass Japan within the next decade as the biggest importer of LNG. Developers of liquefaction terminals on the U.S. Gulf and West coasts are depending on that forecast as they scurry to sign offtake contracts and secure financing or equity partners for their projects.

There are risks, from price volatility to trade tensions to geopolitical concerns. There's also competition for the market, from other countries and other fuels. Producers, traders and investors have reason for optimism, but they were also told at the conference to not be hasty.

"China's impact is very significant and it's something that we watch closely," Hendrik Gordenker, executive chairman of Jera, a joint venture of Tokyo Electric Power and Chubu Electric Power and as such a major buyer of LNG, said during a leadership dialog.

Between the martinis and endless buffets of eggs and sausages and salmon and pasta,

along with the breakout sessions, panel discussions with global energy ministers and private meetings, talk of China kept coming up among the 5,300 participants, a new record for the conference.

How will clean air goals impact the demand expectations? What about coal? And, of course, tariffs. How long will the duties on imports of U.S. LNG last? Could they go higher?

There was no shortage of speculation, or head-scratching. Some projects have had difficulty signing long-term contracts with Chinese counterparties. Others continue to be in talks, with hope of firming up deals in the weeks and months ahead. Cheniere Energy, which owns two of the three major U.S. LNG export terminals currently in operation, is said to be in talks with China's state-run Sinopec about a long-term supply agreement, with the parties awaiting further instructions from government authorities about a trade resolution.

Despite all the focus on China, Tellurian's Charif Souki doesn't seem worried.

In the meantime, he said, "They come, they do their due diligence, they kick the tires."

(Source: Platts)

Oil demand is beating bearish forecasts and will push prices above \$70: Goldman Sachs

The world's appetite for oil and gasoline is growing faster than many forecasters expected, putting Brent crude on pace to top \$70 a barrel, Goldman Sachs says.

The investment bank says oil demand grew by 1.55 million barrels per day in January alone, a strong result despite a tough comparison with high consumption last year. For the first quarter, Goldman expects global oil demand to grow by nearly 2 million bpd, trouncing its earlier forecast for 1.1 million bpd and driven by consumption in emerging markets.

"We continue to believe that ongoing macro and oil demand concerns are overdone," Goldman analysts said in a research note on Thursday.

The strong demand will likely push Brent crude, the international benchmark for oil prices, above \$70 per barrel.

The rally has already outstripped Goldman's prior view that Brent would peak at \$67.50 in the second quarter. Brent hit a 2019 high above \$68 on Thursday.

It will also keep growth for the full year on pace for Goldman's target of 1.45 million bpd, making the bank more bullish than most forecasters.

In China, a key engine for oil demand, oil consumption grew by 340,000 bpd in January and February, according to Goldman. The Chinese also stocked away 360,000 bpd, a buildup that runs counter to seasonal trends, the bank says.

Gasoline demand in particular is surprisingly strong. Over the last three months, Goldman's subsample of consumers shows gasoline consumption growing by 510,000 bpd, the

highest reading since May 2016.

Goldman sees catalysts around the world, including the move away from diesel engines in Europe, a value-added tax cut in South Korea and a drop in gasoline prices relative to biofuel in Brazil.

The bank warns that strong demand does create one key risk to the oil price rally: Rising prices could prompt one of President Donald Trump's now infamous OPEC tweets.

"Any further meaningful rally in oil prices will likely lead to further US pressure to ease" output cuts by OPEC and its allies, Goldman said. "So far, however, the ongoing OPEC 'shock and awe' strategy has shown no signs of wavering after the latest US presidential oil tweet."

(Source: CNBC)

How the LNG market is reducing shipping pollution

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) is cracking down on pollution with strict regulations that aim to reduce sulfur emissions from shipping vessels into the atmosphere. The ban on ships using fuels that contain more than 0.5 percent of sulfur content, as opposed to the 3.5 percent that was previously allowed will take effect in the year 2020.

Failure to comply with the new rules will result in heavy fines for businesses and private owners in the shipping industry. At least 1.6 million tons of sulfur dioxide is emitted into the earth's atmosphere per year from international trade ships, tankers and other vessels operating on the sea in Europe alone. Sulfur emissions have been linked to CO2 which

is the gas responsible for acid rain, global warming, and smog which causes various respiratory illnesses in humans.

Many businesses and private owners are looking for an effective alternative, and the pressure to reduce gas emissions are steadily pushing shipowners in the shipping industry to explore liquefied natural gas, also referred to as LNG as a cleaner alternative and a replacement for conventional oil for commercial vessels.

Demands in the LNG market has risen significantly, as the number of ships using liquid natural gas increases due to the tough restrictions placed on the shipping industry by the United Nations International Maritime Organization. LNG emits 10-20

percent less CO2 compared to low sulfur fuel oil and conventional crude. Environmentalists estimate that using LNG instead of maritime oil will reduce nitrogen oxides and sulfur oxides emitted into the air by 90-95 percent, LNG also cost a lot less and generates more electricity than maritime oils and diesel. Investors are focused on building the necessary refueling facilities to help the shipping industry transition to what is considered "going green". Analysts forecast that the use of LNG bunkers will increase up to 20-30 million tons by the year 2030. The safe transfer of LNG between ships and shore based systems is paramount for the increased use of this technology. The LNG transfers website has the up to date information on

this technology and how it is developing to make this technology safe to use.

New ships built to operate using only liquefied natural gas are currently on the market for those who want to make the switch. There are more than 170 LNG powered ships in use around the world, and that number is predicted to rise immensely before 2030. Some shipowners have yet to decide what their approach to the new restrictions on sulfur will be; nonetheless, it's clear that liquefied natural gas (LNG) is the most effective way to reduce air pollution and the best option in regards to meeting the new regulations imposed on shipowners in the shipping industry.

(Source: thetribuneworld.com)

UK output to decline, loadings remain below 800k bpd

With continued uncertainty around Brexit, the IEA recently commented that a "disorderly Brexit" would affect global oil demand, as consumption is highly affected by global economic performance. Meanwhile, the Oil and Gas Authority (OGA) expects the country's crude oil production to decline to levels marginally below 950k bpd, from around 980k bpd that it was last year. Oil production, including natural gas liquids, increased 8.9% from 2017 to 1.09 million bpd. OGA also forecasts the downwards trend to last with output to reach 760k bpd by 2024, in parallel to the decline to be observed in capital expenditure during the same period (from USD 6.76 billion this year to USD 3.31 billion in 2024).

Focusing on the current year, performance so far might seem to be poor, with loadings on tankers deepening further in January and remaining below 800k bpd for a third consecutive month in February. In parallel to that, the Bank of England has been highlighting the consistent drop in investment in the UK since last year, with lower levels expected to follow. To an extent, this drop in investment has been driven by uncertainty around the UK's future trade deals, policy context and legal framework. Brexit has been included in the IEA's list of worrying market factors. The impact could be significant for oil demand, which has already been feeling the pressure of the US-China trade wars and the already declining productivity across Europe.

In terms of destination for UK crude oil, the Far East has absorbed significantly more last month, with the flows reaching 265k bpd from 139k bpd in January. NW Europe and the Mediterranean fell significantly, providing more space for China.

(Source: ihsmarkit.com)

Engie plans to take part in Dutch offshore wind-farm tender

Engie SA plans to take part in a tender for an offshore Dutch wind-power project, joining rivals in expressing an interest in the sites in the North Sea.

The French company becomes the fourth publicly known bidder, joining Vattenfall AB, Denmark's Orsted A/S and a group consisting of Royal Dutch Shell Plc, Eneco Groep NV and Van Oord NV. Engie's participation was confirmed by a company spokesman on Saturday after an earlier report by Dutch newspaper Het Financieele Dagblad.

Revenue from the Hollandse Kust Zuid 3 and 4 project in the North Sea will flow solely from the electricity generated by the wind farm on offer. Sweden's Vattenfall was the winner of a permit to build 700 megawatts at the Hollandse Kust Zuid 1 and 2 zone last September. Wind farms in the latest tender are expected to have a total installed capacity of about 760 megawatts, according to a statement earlier this month from the Shell consortium, with the group planning to start operation of the sites in 2023. The wind farms will be constructed 20 kilometers off the coast of The Hague.

(Source: Bloomberg)

U.S. oil explorers scale back drilling as shale weakness emerges

Oil explorers settled into the deepest drilling hibernation in more than a year as the U.S. shale patch struggles to maintain its explosive growth.

Working oil rigs fell by one this week to 833, according to data released Friday by oilfield-services provider Baker Hughes. The four-week decline is the longest since May 2016.

The U.S. government cut its oil production forecast for the first time in six months as drillers scale back in smaller shale plays and the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. While crude output is still expected to reach record levels, the Energy Information Administration trimmed its 2019 forecast to 12.3 million barrels a day -- 110,000 barrels-a-day lower than its previous forecast.

"This is just the beginning," said Phil Flynn, senior market analyst at Price Futures Group Inc. in Chicago. Many shale drillers "are not making money and are having a hard time keeping these production levels up." U.S. crude output fell for the first time this year when output dropped by 100,000 barrels a day last week to 12 million, according to the Energy Information Administration.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Canadian oil firms lament output cuts as rail volumes slip

Some Canadian oil executives blame higher crude prices from mandated production curbs for hurting their refining margins and depressing shipments of Alberta crude to U.S. customers.

The government of Alberta last year mandated output cuts of 325,000 barrels per day (bpd) to help alleviate a supply glut that had weighed on crude prices and earnings of Canadian producers. Many in the industry had praised the move as prices rose.

But other Canadian companies including Husky Energy Inc and Suncor Energy Inc that both produce and refine oil into fuel had benefited from cheap feedstock for their refineries.

Executives at an energy industry this week said falling rail shipments to the United States are one of the "unintended consequences" of the output cuts as rising Canadian prices make transporting by rail less attractive.

Canadian crude by rail shipments have fallen despite rising U.S. demand for Western Canadian crude. Mandated output cuts have lifted regional prices, making it less economic to ship by rail to the U.S. Gulf Coast, the executives said.

"The differentials need to be wide enough" to make it worthwhile to send the crude by rail, "and we've actually seen rail cut back this year," said Steve Reynish, executive vice president at Suncor Energy Inc, at IHS Markit's CERAWEEK conference. "The first step would be to phase out the curtailment and let the market react to the signals we're getting."

The spread between Canadian heavy crude and the U.S. futures benchmark has narrowed to less than \$10 a barrel from more than \$50 a barrel last year. Adding rail costs to the Gulf Coast makes the oil less attractive to U.S. buyers.

Alberta in December ordered Canadian producers to cut output by 325,000 barrels per day (bpd) after local prices tumbled because of a lack of pipeline space to export markets. The province in July plans to make 4,400 leased rail cars available to help clear the bottleneck.

(Source: Reuters)

NEWS IN BRIEF

**China wants
'discussions' on
blacklisting JeM
chief**

INTERNATIONAL **TEHRAN** — China and India, the two regional heavyweights, are again at loggerheads, this time over China blocking the move to blacklist a Pakistan-based chief of a terrorist outfit.

China prevented a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) committee on Wednesday from blacklisting Jaish e Mohammad (JeM) founder Masood Azhar, the group accused of carrying out attacks in Indian-controlled Kashmir, including the one in February. On Friday, China said it was willing to have more discussions with all parties concerned, including India, on blacklisting the JeM chief. China's foreign ministry said the "technical hold" on the blacklisting was to give more time for the committee to have further consultations and study on the issue.

India said it was disappointed with China blocking the move, which sparked calls for boycotts of Chinese products on social media. China, which has become an all-weather ally of Islamabad, had previously prevented the UNSC sanctions committee from sanctioning JeM chief in 2016 and 2017.

The attack on February 14 killed at least 40 paramilitary police personnel and was the deadliest in Kashmir's three-decade insurgency, escalating tension between the two nuclear powers. Blacklisting JeM chief at UNSC needs nine votes in favour and no vetoes by permanent members – Russia, China, U.S., Britain or France.

**India accuses
Pakistan of
violating
Kartarpur**

INTERNATIONAL **TEHRAN** — Tensions between India and Pakistan in the wake of recent surgical strikes continue to run high as the two neighbors are now locked in a box over Kartarpur corridor.

A day after the two countries discussed the draft agreement for the Kartarpur corridor at Attari, on the Pakistani side of the border, Indian officials said on Friday that despite promising visa-free access to the Sikh shrine, Pakistan wanted to introduce "special permits for pilgrims for a fee." Pakistan restricted the duration of the agreement to two years, an official was quoted saying by the prominent daily, adding that the hype created by the Pakistan government media on the Kartarpur corridor had turned out to be "farfetched and mere tokenism."

"There is a sea of difference between what Pakistan, including Prime Minister Imran Khan, had announced and what they offered at Attari," the official is quoted as saying.

The official further says that Pakistan suggested capping the number of pilgrims to the shrine at 700 a day instead of the 5,000 proposed by India.

The official said India and Pakistan had signed a pact in 1974 to facilitate the visit of their pilgrims to 15 shrines in Pakistan and seven in India which pilgrims from both sides can visit.

**Peace in
Afghanistan
"around the
corner": Khan**

INTERNATIONAL **TEHRAN** — In Afghanistan's peace process, Pakistan has always had an important role to play and since the new government took over in Islamabad last year, the cooperation has markedly increased.

Speaking at an event in northwestern tribal region of Pakistan on Friday, close to the Afghan border, Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan said that peace in Afghanistan was "around the corner".

Taliban and U.S. officials have been engaged in negotiations over the past many months, reportedly facilitated by the Imran Khan government.

He the peace process would result in stability, trade and economic prosperity for the region, and particularly for Afghanistan to enable the war-shattered country stand on its own feet. Pakistan has long been accused of secretly backing and sheltering leaders of the Taliban insurgency to contain growing influence of arch rival India there, according to analysts.

During the previous government in Islamabad, the regions between the two countries had ebbed. But under Khan, the ties have improved and the peace process has been resurrected.

**Rohingya
oppose
relocation to
an island**

INTERNATIONAL **TEHRAN** — The issue over the repatriation of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh has become more complicated with Rohingya protesting the Bangladeshi government's move to relocate them to a remote island.

Bangladeshi authorities said they are set to relocate some 100,000 Rohingya refugees to temporary houses on a remote island in the Bay of Bengal known as Bhashan Char.

At least 150 Rohingya Muslims were meant to be repatriated to Myanmar on Thursday, but protests put a stop to the operation. Hundreds of people chanted "we will not go" at a demonstration near the Myanmar border, according to reports. Although construction is completed, the UN has said the island "may not be habitable."

Bhashan Char is a small island vulnerable to flooding and cyclones. In early 2018, Bangladesh began constructing roads, shelters and floodwalls on the island, and it has spent an estimated \$280 million on the project.

Bangladesh plans to shelter around 100,000 Rohingya in 1,440 buildings it has built on the island.

The exodus of persecuted Rohingya from Myanmar's Rakhine state started in October 2016, and over the years around 100,000 people have fled Myanmar to escape persecution, murder, arson and rape.

U.S. prevents ICC team from investigating its 'war crimes' in Afghanistan



TEHRAN — It is common knowledge that the U.S. industrial military complex has been involved in horrendous war crimes in war-ravaged Afghanistan since invading the country in 2001.

Despite the attempts to cover-up, the U.S. war crimes have been widely documented by many international rights groups over the years. Now, in another blatant move to prevent the expose of its war crimes in Afghanistan, the U.S. government has banned the International Criminal Court (ICC) team from visiting the country.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Friday said his government will revoke or deny visas to ICC officials seeking to investigate war crimes by U.S. forces or its allies in Afghanistan.

"The ICC is attacking America's rule of law," Pompeo told a news conference. "I'm announcing a policy of U.S. visa restrictions on those individuals directly responsible for any ICC investigation of U.S. personnel."

"We are determined to protect the American and allied military and civilian personnel from living in fear of unjust prosecution for actions taken to defend our great nation," he further added.

Pompeo said the move is to "prevent the international tribunal from infringing on U.S. sovereignty", without elaborating on how an internationally recognized group can be prevented from doing its job.

"These visa restrictions may also be used to deter ICC efforts to pursue allied personnel, including Israelis, without allies' consent," he added, adding that the U.S. government may look at the option of "economic sanc-

tions" if ICC does not "change its course".

However, in a direct rebuff to U.S. threats, the Hague-based court, the first global tribunal for war crimes, said in a statement that it would continue to operate "undeterred" by the U.S. action.

"The court is an independent and impartial judicial institution crucial for ensuring accountability for the gravest crimes under international law," said the statement.

"The ICC, as a court of law, will continue to do its independent work, undeterred, in accordance with its mandate and the overarching principle of the rule of law," it added, in response to Pompeo's threats.

ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda had asked judges in November 2017 to initiate

an investigation into alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Afghan national security forces, Taliban, as well as U.S. forces and intelligence officials in Afghanistan since May 2003.

Bensouda said there is information that members of the U.S. military and intelligence agencies "committed acts of torture, cruel treatment, outrages upon personal dignity, rape and sexual violence against conflict-related detainees in Afghanistan and other locations, principally in 2003-2004 period."

According to reports, ICC judges are reviewing all material submitted by the prosecutor, and will accordingly decide whether to initiate an investigation.

The Palestinians have also asked the court

to bring cases against Israel, which is also likely to face opposition from the U.S., as is evident from Pompeo's statement.

Meanwhile, global watchdog bodies, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, slammed Pompeo's announcement.

Human Rights Watch called it "a thuggish attempt to penalise investigators" at the ICC.

"The Trump administration is trying an end run around accountability," it said. "Taking action against those who work for the ICC sends a clear message to torturers and murderers alike: Their crimes may continue unchecked."

Amnesty International described the move as "the latest attack on international justice and international institutions by an administration hellbent on rolling back human rights protections."

The American Civil Liberties Union, which represents three people before the ICC who were tortured in Afghanistan, called the decision "misguided and dangerous" and "an unprecedented attempt to skirt international accountability for well-documented war crimes that haunt our clients to this day."

James Goldston, Open Society Justice Initiative executive director, said Pompeo's remarks reflect the administration's view that international law matters "only when it is aligned with U.S. national interests."

ICC, which presently has 123 member states, including the European Union, was formed in 2002 to prosecute war crimes, genocide or crimes against humanity when a country is unable or unwilling to prosecute perpetrators.

Christchurch shooting is 'white supremacist terrorism'

1 → Kadri said people are getting radicalized by the extreme right through an underground movement.

"They talk about Muslims being cockroaches, they talk about Muslims breeding like anything, taking over Australia and European land and the need to fight back – that's where these people get radicalized," he was quoted saying by Courier.

Dr. Rabeah Junaid, who heads Muslims Australia – the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils –, said the massacre at Christchurch mosques is the "consequence of Islamophobia and marginalisation of Muslims".

A manifesto attributed to Tarrant was posted on 8Chan, an unregulated website known for hate speech and Islamophobia. It credited U.S. President Donald Trump and his ultra-conservative supporter Candace Owens as 'inspirations' for the mosque attacks.

"Well, it's time to stop shitposting and time to make a real life effort post. I will carry out an attack against the invaders, and even live stream the attack via Facebook link," Tarrant wrote on 8Chan on Thursday, which carried links to his "writings" and his far-right extremist views.

How the counter-terrorism and law-enforcement authorities in New Zealand missed the warning is incredibly astonishing.

A day earlier, he had posted a picture of his automatic weapon on Twitter, with the words "Here's your migration compact" written on the rifle.

In one of his posts on Facebook, he singles out Candice Owens to be the "particular person" who radicalized him the "most".

"Each time she spoke I was stunned by her insights and her own views helped push me further and further into the belief of violence over meekness," he wrote.

Trump and Owens have played a key role in fueling hate crimes against Muslims in the Western world through flagrant hate speech, anti-immigration policy and travel ban on Muslims.



Trump famously told Anderson Cooper in 2016 that "Islam hates us". This imprudent declaration has over the past few years manifested itself in blatant Islamophobia in America and elsewhere.

Anyone standing up to this powerful lobby comes under fire. The latest example is that of U.S. Congress member Ilhan Omar, who has been attacked for speaking about the influence of the Zionist lobby in U.S. politics and policy.

The American-Somalian congresswoman has been ridiculed, denigrated and threatened in recent weeks with assassination simply because she has the audacity to call spade a spade.

This vilification of Omar and many others like her is the direct result of the bogey of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim rhetoric that has been normalized in the Western societies.

Studies show that over the past few years, hate crimes and attacks against Muslims in the U.S. have skyrocketed. According to Pew Research analysis, attacks on Muslims have "easily surpassed" post 9-11 levels, and one of the factors is the rise of Trump.

However, author and commentator Khaled Beydoun says Islamophobia has "deep roots" in American history, but now it has been given a "new face", intensified by the rhetoric of

characters like Trump.

In UK, which is considered the hub of Islamophobia in Europe, a record number of anti-Muslim attacks were reported last year, according to the monitoring group Tell Mama.

In its report, the group noted a surge in Islamophobic attacks, with 1,201 cases reported in 2017, the highest number since it began recording incidents.

According to Hope Not Hate, an anti-racism charity, Islamophobia has become the driving force behind the rise of far-right movements in the UK. It says "anti-Muslim prejudice" has replaced immigration as the "key driver" of far-right groups.

A report published by the charity said 35 percent people in UK thought Islam was "generally a threat to the British way of life".

In Canada, hate crimes against Muslims have grown sharply in last few years, with 349 documented cases in 2017 – nearly one every day. Anti-Muslim hate crimes account for 17 per cent of all crimes in Canada, according to reports.

In Netherlands, just last week a mosque was attacked by members of the far-right German group Pegida, who defaced the building with racist banners, a mosque official was quoted as saying.

But, unfortunately, Islamophobic bigotry in the West does not get the kind of media coverage as attacks carried out by 'Muslim' groups do. When the perpetrator is a Muslim, it is termed an "act of terrorism", but when it's a white supremacist, it's smartly downplayed as an "act of extremism".

This 'extremism' is the classical euphemism for white supremacist terrorism and not only talked down but even defended by deranged politicians like Fraser Anning.

This is the kind of Islamophobia peddled by the likes of Donald Trump and Candace Owens, who 'inspired' the Christchurch attacker, with their blatant hate speech targeting Muslim and immigrants.

Christchurch carnage must silence the breed of Islam-bashers

1 → But it has everything to do with white supremacist terrorism, which is no different from ISIS or Taliban or those hate-mongering Hindutva groups in India.

The enemies of Islam have been unfairly accusing and maligning the religion of Islam. Islam does not have a copyright on terrorism as you wanted the world to believe. No religion promotes or propagates terrorism but unfortunately there are terrorists and extremists found in every religion, in every school of thought.

Be it the Hindutva terrorists in India, the Buddhist terrorists in Myanmar, the Christian terrorists in West or the Muslim terrorists in the Middle East.

This horrific event should silence all those who have been desperately trying to project Islam as a religion of violence and labeling all Muslims as terrorists.

It is time to stop ascribing religion as a motivation for such mindless acts of terrorism. Terrorist is simply a terrorist. Terms like Islamist terrorist, Christian terrorist, Hindu terrorist are oxymorons. It is never wise to give religious legitimacy to terrorists by prefixing their religious affiliation. Terrorism has no religion even if the terrorist invokes religious justification for his unjustifiable actions.

Just like this event should stop Islam-bashers from equating Islam with terrorism, it should also put an end to myriad hypocrisies.

Whenever a person affiliated to Islam would carry out such an act he would immediately be dubbed an 'Islamist'. But if it was



carried out by, say a white supremacist, who also happened to be a Christian, they would at once invoke the mental illness theory. It has happened many times in the past.

This blatant hypocrisy should end. The person who carried out this heinous crime was in no way mentally sick. He was fully aware of what he was doing. He had meticulously planned it, and he had chosen his targets carefully and was aware of the consequences of his actions.

Another important point is about the capital punishment for such horrendous crimes.

New Zealand government abolished the capital punishment in 1960s. Now this person who is responsible for killing 50 innocent people and destroying 50 families with a meticulously planned act of terrorism and with full knowledge of its consequences at the most will spend rest of his life peacefully in a jail with best possible facilities at his disposal.

Question is not whether capital punishment would have prevented him from doing it. It might not have acted as a deterrent and in many cases it does not but it is not primarily a matter of deterrence, it is a matter of justice.

The old father whose young son was killed by this terrorist will now have to mourn all his life while the perpetrator will be enjoying lavish facilities behind the bars. He does not have to work now and gets everything on platter. He is now a lifetime VIP. That's precisely why it is a mockery of justice.

It is true that there is a possibility of the misuse of capital punishment and there is a problem of uncertainty and the fact that once implemented it can't be reversed but that in no way justifies an absolute abolition of capital punishment.

In cases like these, capital punishment is fully justified and should be applied to serve justice. If you have killed someone deliberately then you don't deserve to live either. As the Holy Quran has beautifully mentioned: "In Qisas, there is life for you".

My heart bleeds for the victims of this massacre. They were ordinary people like us who just wanted to live peacefully. They had simply gone to a mosque to pray, to connect with their Creator, to ask simple things from Him. In the end they ended up losing their lives because of one white supremacist terrorist and his warped worldview inspired from the likes of Donald Trump and Candace Owens.

They say if you are killed unjustly you die a martyr and all these victims are indeed martyrs. They have got an exalted place in heaven. But they need justice too. And we need to be their voice now.

Writer is a medical practitioner and commentator based in Indian-controlled Kashmir.

Rouhani’s visit to Iraq: Huge economic cooperation at eastern gate of Arab World

TEHRAN (FNA) — The agreements sealed during the visit of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani to Iraq mark the start of the largest economic cooperation project between the two neighboring states in the region.

In the 1990s, when the U.S. decided after Operation Desert Storm and annihilation of 70 percent of Iraq’s Army to re-instate Saddam Hussain rather than conquering Baghdad, there was only one thing revolving in the mind of Washington’s politicians: to prevent the Shiite revolutionary movement, which was gaining momentum after the Intifada (uprisings) in Southern Iraq and becoming an independent powerhouse, from getting strengthened.

Despite the fact that in 1991 the Iraqi army had lost control of all Shiite regions, the scale was tipped in favor of Saddam’s regime when the U.S.-led coalition allowed the dictator to fly his Mil Mi-24 helicopters which led to the largest massacre of the Shiite population in Iraq.

Interestingly, in 2014, when the ISIL terrorists conquered Mosul, one of the biggest cities in Iraq, a parallel course of event was to happen. While the terrorists were approaching the gates of Baghdad and the repetitive calls of the Iraqi government for winning the air support of the U.S.-led coalition had failed, Iran’s strong entry into war to help its Western neighbor turned the whole tide. Now after 5 years, not only nothing has been left of the ISIL in Iraq, but also the position of Shiite-led central government in the Arab country has been cemented more than ever.

■ From the fall of the eastern gate to the resistance front

Iraq was the Eastern Gate of the Arab World, in the mindset of Saddam Hussain, to resist against Iran’s infiltration. Wafiq al-Samarrai, Director of Iran desk in Iraqi Army’s Intelligence Organization during the 8-year war of the Baathist regime against Iran has thoroughly evaluated and discussed this concept in his book of memoirs, ‘The Ruins of the Eastern Gate’.

Now after the falloff of the ISIL in a few-year-old war, Iraq has become part of an alliance which is called the Resistance Front. A front which is based on not religious motives as claimed in the West’s Shiite Crescent theory, but on a pro-independence essence opposing the Westerners’ interference in the fate of Muslim countries.

■ Heading toward \$20 billion trade President Rouhani’s visit to Iraq is exactly highlighting the same strategic cooperation. Although the Tehran-Baghdad strong ties in security areas have fruited great successes in the past couple of years, it seems that the ties are expected to develop at a serious level to other areas.

Economy is one of the main areas which was placed under the spotlight by the officials of the two countries during the recent visit of President Rouhani to Iraq. Undoubtedly, Iran enjoys a unique status for develop economic cooperation with Iraq.

The two countries share more than 1000 kilometers of borderline fittingly tied with identical ethnic patterns across the borders. For instance, Iran’s Kurdish provinces share



borders with the Iraqi region of Kurdistan and accordingly can serve as an economic hub in the region because of the ethnic and lingual commonalities.

Also most of Iran’s Southwestern provinces which share border with Iraq are resided by Arab and Shiite Iranians which again positively contribute to cross-border interactions.

Besides, despite the fact that Iraq’s Western and Northern governorates like al-Anbar and Nineveh are home to bloody battles with the ISIL terrorists, security has been preserved so far in Eastern governorates which share border with Iran.

All these realities as well as the nearly 2 million Iranians who travel to the Iraqi cities of Karbala and Najaf in Arbaeen pilgrimage season have ushered in good trade between Iran and Iraq.

However, a study of economic figures shows that Iran’s share of Iraq’s market, particularly its growth in the past couple of years, still fails to match the two sides’ potentials.

This is exactly one of the very issues which drew much of the attention in the recent visit of President Rouhani to Iraq. Iranian and Iraqi officials held countless meetings and seminars before the Rouhani visit to discuss proper and wide avenues for expanding relations.

The truth is that Iran is competing with serious regional and international rivals in Iraq’s market. Turkey is one of the countries which are seriously marketing and expanding their share of the market in the food products section in Iraq.

Nevertheless it has to be born in mind that Turkey’s presence in Iraq’s market is nothing anew and an outcome of the last years. Rather, Turkey was one of the big suppliers of Iraq’s market during the reign of Saddam Hussain. Yet, the facts stated earlier display that Iran enjoys better capabilities for exporting goods to Iraq.

China and the UAE are among the other competitors in Iraq’s market, specially in the field of consumer durable goods.

Considering the situation, Iranian and Iraqi merchants held numerous meetings on the ways to expand trade between the two

countries during President Rouhani’s visit.

Iran’s Ambassador to Baghdad Iraj Masjedi had already said at an economic seminar in Baghdad that the two countries have set a \$20 billion objective for the volume of their trade.

This figure may seem a bit out of reach at the first sight, but it is assuredly accessible considering that Iraq is now entering a phase of reconstruction after the war against terrorism and peace has been restored in its cities.

The decision to issue visas for the nationals of the two countries free of charge was another important accomplishment of President Rouhani’s visit to Iraq which can act as a catalyst further facilitating cross-border travels for the nationals of the two sides.

■ U.S. worried about sanctions-busting One of the motives behind President Rouhani’s visit to Iraq was the capacities of this Arab country in helping Iran to bypass the U.S.’ unilateral sanctions.

Tehran is going to use Iraq’s help for finding a way around new sanctions to meet its financial needs, as it did in the last round of bans with the help of Turkey.

The fact is that thanks to broad suitcase trade between Iran and Iraq in areas of trade of commodities and foreign currencies exchange, the typical sanctions imposed by the U.S. Treasury Department are unable to cause a sensible disruption in the bilateral channels between the two sides.

The reiterations of U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo warning Iraqi officials about the suitcase trade of hard currency across the border of Iran and Iraq is reflecting the same very concern.

Iran is capable of importing many of its needed goods, which are not easily accessible because of financial and insurance limitations caused by sanctions, immediately through re-exporting them from Iraqi market. Accordingly, Iraq would be playing the same role once played by the UAE.

Many hold that oil rich port of Basra in Southern Iraq which is also the richest city of the country is enjoying the potential to become the second Dubai in the region. Iran can play the same role it played for flourishing Dubai

in the 1980s.

The recent visit of the Governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Abdolnasser Hemmati and the serious memorandum of understanding signed on banking relations between Tehran and Baghdad underlines the importance of Iraq’s banking system for Iran. Besides, Iraq has a broad network of currency relations with the world, through a system of exchange centers, particularly with East European countries, which is of high value for Iran.

One of the objectives of President Rouhani’s visit to Iraq which was not announced publicly was to expand these very kind of relations, and assuredly the officials of the two countries have discussed this issue in their meetings, and certainly the Americans are after stopping these relations at any level.

■ Iran and Iraq as pillars of future energy exchange hub in region

Expanding cooperation on energy was also among the issues discussed for broadening bilateral cooperation between the two countries in the meetings of President Rouhani in Iraq.

This was the very same demand that made U.S. President Donald Trump to agree with granting exemptions to Iraq to import energy from Iran during the first batch of sanctions against Tehran. However, some U.S.-backed regional countries are after undermining Iran’s position in Iraq.

For example Saudi Arabia is after weakening Iran’s role in this area with exporting electricity to Iraq. The main point is that Rouhani’s visit to Iraq can mark a starting point for broader energy cooperation of the two countries in the region’s energy market.

Iraq has three gas fields and the country will start producing gas by the next five years. Although the early production of gas by Iraq may make the country needless of importing the energy carrier, the growing demand for electricity in the Arab country means Baghdad will continue importing energy from Iran.

In addition, Iraq is bordering Kuwait and Jordan which both are electricity thirsty and Iraq can act as an energy hub in the region to export Iran’s gas to the two countries besides meeting its own needs.

The same scenario is applicable to electricity to let Iraq play a stabilizing role in the region. The path may seem very long but Prescient Rouhani’s visit to Iraq marked a golden start for this long march.

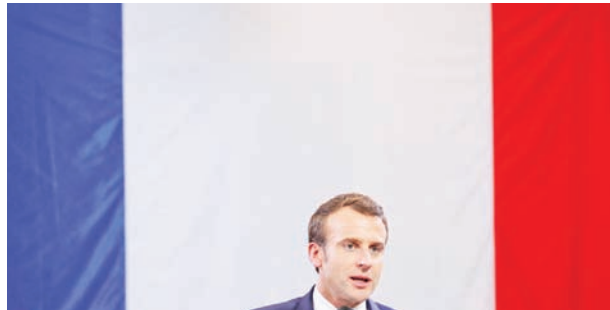
■ Start of huge economic cooperation in region

Eleven years ago, when Iran’s ex-President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad traveled to Iraq, the country was still under the U.S. occupation.

And now in era of Rouhani, these are the Iraqi security forces who are providing security in Baghdad with the help of their Iranian partners.

Moving along the same line, we may rightfully expect inauguration of mega projects during the visit of the next Iranian president to Baghdad. This path, despite being long, is the future within the reach of the hands of the two nations.

What are the charges of French government?



1 → Even some of the president’s own party members in the National Assembly abstained from a vote on “anti-wreckers” legislation that is set to become law shortly. It would allow officials to ban individuals from demonstrating and forbid protesters from obscuring their faces to avoid identification.

Finally, the French authorities and the president should accept their accusations of repression of the French protesters. Without a doubt, under such circumstances, French authorities can no longer lie to their country as a guardian of democracy and freedom!

New Zealand attack meant to deflect global attention from Gaza, Yemen: U.S. analyst

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — A former U.S. army psychological warfare officer and counter-terrorism analyst described Friday’s massacre in New Zealand as a ‘Zionist operation’ aimed at drawing the global attention away from other ongoing massacres in the world, including those in the Gaza Strip and Yemen.

One gunman killed 49 people and wounded more than 20 during Friday prayers at two New Zealand mosques in the country’s worst ever mass shooting, which Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern condemned as terrorism.

“This attack seems to be trying to enrage Muslims around the world and motivate them to take revenge acts for this shooting,” Scott Bennett, the American counter-terrorism analyst, told Tasnim on Saturday.

“This of course would play into the Zionist-Mossad intelligence services which benefits from a war between Muslims and the West, and can use this renewed conflict to set the stage for a conflict against Iran, the conquest of the Golan Heights by Israel, and the Netanyahu military strikes against Gaza and Syria; as well as the Saudi Arabian attacks on Yemen”.

The analyst stressed, “Conveniently, this shooting event in New Zealand seems to be drawing the eyes of the world away from the other events in the world as well”.

He further said that the Israeli-Zionist intelligence agencies and military-industrial-police state in America and the West would seem to benefit the most from such an event.

“I believe this entire event is a false flag event... so this seems to be a psychological operation designed to manipulate the public for a political agenda—which appears to be a Zionist operation,” Bennett went on to say.

The Australian gunman behind the massacre, 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 U.S. President Donald Trump as “symbol of renewed white identity and common purpose.”

Muslim worshipper assaulted at East London mosque after NZ attack

A man has been attacked with a “hammer” and a “batten” outside an East London mosque, British media reported hours after at least 49 people were killed in an attack on two mosques in New Zealand.

A group of men shouted Islam phobic abuses as they drove past the mosque and called the attendees at the Friday prayers “terrorists”, witnesses told the Independent newspaper.

One of the three men then climbed out of the vehicle and allegedly attacked one of the worshippers. The 27-year-old victim sustained injuries to his head.

In a video filmed by a witness, one of the attackers was seen climbing onto the front of the car in an attempt to get away from the scene.

“The suspects returned to their car and left the scene before police arrived,” a spokesperson for London’s Metropolitan Police told the Independent, adding that the suspects were all described as white men, believed to be in their 20s.

No arrests have been made yet.

■ London stands with Christchurch

Following the attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, the United Kingdom police officers stepped up security around mosques on Friday.

“Whilst there is no intelligence linking these appalling events in Christchurch to the UK, additional uniform patrols will continue in London and nationally over the coming days, focusing on places of worship and specific communities,” Neil Basu, the national policing lead for counterterrorism, told the Independent.

“We are paying specific attention to mosques, particularly Friday prayers.

“Many communities will be understandably concerned and local officers will be out and about providing reassurance and protective security advice to communities, places of worship and businesses.”

In a statement issued after the attack, London Mayor Sadiq Khan said the city “stands with the people of Christchurch in the face of this horrific terrorist attack”.

“London will always celebrate the diversity that some seek to destroy ... I want to reassure the Muslim communities in London,” he said.

“I have been in touch with the Met Police. There will be highly visible policing around mosques today, as well as armed response officers, as Londoners go to pray.”

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Saudi targeting Iran by alliance with Israel: UK-based analyst

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — A senior political commentator based in London highlighted reasons behind recent covert acts by Saudi Arabia to pursue a closer relationship with Israel, saying Riyadh is seeking “not only to deter Iran but also to bring the Shiites to their knees”.

Dr. Riaz Karim holds a Ph.D. from Harvard University. He is also the Director of Veritas Centre for Strategic Studies in London. He is also an analyst and commentator for a number of media outlets around the world.

Following is the full text of the interview:

■ As you know, the Israeli and Saudi regimes do not have any official diplomatic relations but media reports have surfaced indicating extensive behind-the-scenes diplomatic and intelligence cooperation between the two. In your opinion, what goals is Riyadh pursuing by getting closer to Tel Aviv?

A: As the saying goes “Birds of a feather, flock together” so is the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Israel. Until now, there were denials rubbishing the idea that this relationship was not possible without first having peace in Palestine but Saudi Arabia and other oil rich nations of the region have decided to throw Palestine under the bus in order to further their agendas and geopolitical aspirations.

This “sleeping with the enemy” game has been going on for a long time and it’s nothing new, the main Stream media just happens to wake up to this love affair now. Israel has been in the thick of things with the Saudi manufactured war on Yemen and intelligence cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Israel has been in the making for a long time.

However, there is a little sticking point which according to Mohammed bin Salman is nothing to scream about and that is the king has reiterated time and again that there can’t be solid ties between the two countries without peace in Palestine and since the King is old and suffers from various ailments that disable him from making sound judgments and decisions, the Prince has already been sold on the idea that Palestine is the least of their problems and has taken upon himself to give the Palestinians an ultimatum of either accept America’s “Deal of the century” or face the consequences.

These countries are coming together under the banner of “fighting terrorism” which is a cover. In reality, this coalition of Israel, Saudi Arabia and others is coming together not only to deter Iran, but also to bring the Shiites to their knees and this is very transparent in the way Saudi Arabia and Bahrain treat their Shiite population. However, Israel



has much bigger aspirations of Eretz Israel or Greater Israel since land grabbing is their national time pass.

It is also very important to make a distinction between Jews and Zionists because Orthodox Jews and people of other denominations are persecuted in Israel and treated as third class citizens just as Saudi Arabia treats their non-Sunni population.

There is currently frantic movement between the two countries who both use America as the go between in order to normalize the ties which bind them together. The kingdom looks to buy Israel’s Iron Dome system and advanced technology in order to stop missiles raining from Yemen while Israel looks to boost trade with rich Arab countries and further their agenda of Eret Israel (greater Israel) but the one common factor that makes these Rich Arab Oil Nations want to sleep with their enemy is the expanding power of Iran in the region and having a predominantly Shiite Nation come out on top cannot be stomachached by either of them.

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

A: The story of Adel Al Jubeir being connected to Mossad first appeared in an American Website Odyssey which is an

open creator platform for real people to share authentic ideas – They have deemed the story by British Journalist Jemma Buckley who first broke the story and cited Former CIA agent Philip Gerald as her main source, as deceptive content, her story was found to be in violation of the website’s rules and her account has been suspended since.

Also upon contact by the Editor in Chief of Veterans Today, in order to substantiate the story, the former CIA agent Philip Giral di categorically stated that “I have never heard anything about the story, or talked to the investigator who is citing me as her key source, or even ever heard of her”.

This story was first published on February 18, 2019, and was picked up by a few media outlets in the Middle East and is yet to be substantiated.

However, to answer the question, Israel does not need to infiltrate into Saudi Arabia. They do have a relationship that spans decades. Upon being confronted by The Washington Post, about his family’s Jewish Ancestry, King Faisal Al-Saud Bin Abdul-Aziz gave a statement which rings true today.

“We, the Saudi Family, are cousins of the Jews: we entirely disagree with any Arab or Muslim Authority which shows any antagonism to the Jews, but we must live together with them in peace. Our country (Arabia) is the fountain head from where the first Jew sprang, and his descendants spread out all over the world.” King Faisal Al-Saud said in 1969.

As the “keeper of Islam’s two holiest places” and the world’s leading oil exporter Saudi Arabia becomes the de-facto leader to the Sunni bloc of nations and taking the lead in establishing ties with Israel translates to Israeli investment and technical expertise thus bringing Israel substantial economic benefits. This would also mean that Israel would have access to the vast territory between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea. All these benefits and without giving in to Palestinian demands nor surrendering any land makes it a win-win for Israel any way one slices or dices it.

As such the love affair between The State of Israel and The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has now been solidified with common aspirations. However, the Zionist State of Israel stands to gain much more than the Saudis do and when you throw the rich Sunni Arab countries into the mix, their pandering of the United States comes to fruition without having to follow complex pathways since both Israel and Saudi Arabia are allies of the United States and all three have one common enemy... Iran.

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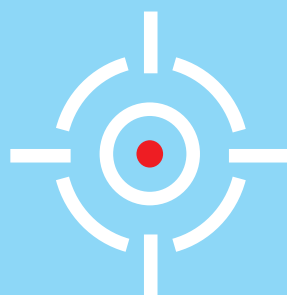
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‘Childhood obesity rate worryingly soars in Iran’

HEALTH **TEHRAN** — Childhood obesity is on the rise in the country alarmingly and it can be prevented by healthy diet and increased physical activity among children, director of the Health Ministry’s nutrition office, Zahra Abdollahi, has said.

The main solution to prevent childhood obesity is changing families’ diet as consumption of fast foods and carbonated drinks are causing serious health problems among the children, IRNA news agency quoted Abdollahi as saying on Saturday.

Children’s diet is highly depending on parents’ choices so that they can play an important role in their children’s healthy diet as well, she suggested, warning that, in case a child has a craving for sugary food and get used to consuming them in large portions they will be at risk for developing various diseases in adulthood.

Consuming too much fatty and sugary foods and physical inactivity in the modern life has worsen the conditions, she said, stating that children should at least be physically active 60 minutes per day.

Children are not sufficiently active and do not consume enough vegetables and fruits, she regretted.

In September 2018, Abdollahi explained that obesity has affected 20 percent of the students in the country.

Childhood obesity is one of the most serious public health challenges of the 21st century.



According to World Health Organization (WHO) data globally, in 2016 the number of overweight children under the age of five, is estimated to be over 41 million.

According to World Health Organization (WHO) data globally, in 2016 the number

of overweight children under the age of five, is estimated to be over 41 million.

The problem is global and is steadily affecting many low- and middle-income countries, particularly in urban settings. The prevalence has increased at an alarming rate. Almost half of all overweight children under 5 lived in Asia and one quarter lived in Africa.

If current trends continue the number of overweight or obese infants and young children globally will increase to 70 million by 2025.

Obese children are more likely to develop a variety of health problems as adults. These include: cardiovascular disease, insulin resistance (often an early sign of impending diabetes), musculoskeletal disorders (especially osteoarthritis - a highly disabling degenerative disease of the joints), some cancers (endometrial, breast and colon), and disability.

WHO highlights that early initiation of breastfeeding within one hour of birth; exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life; and the introduction of nutritionally-adequate and safe complementary (solid) foods at 6 months together with continued breastfeeding up to two years of age or beyond would help in preventing childhood obesity.

Moreover school-aged children and adolescents should: limit energy intake from total fats and sugars; increase consumption of fruit and vegetables, as well as legumes, whole grains and nuts; engage in regular physical activity (60 minutes a day).

Cholesterol from daily egg consumption may increase risk of heart attack death, study says

Eating more than three or four eggs a week increases the chances of dying from a heart attack or stroke, according to a large U.S. study which underlines the risk of cholesterol in everyday diets.

The study involving nearly 30,000 people found those averaging two eggs a day had their risk of heart attack and other cardiovascular episodes rise by 27 percent, and of dying from any cause rise by 34 percent.

Average U.S. consumption – roughly an egg every other day – was associated with a smaller, but still significant increase in cardiovascular disease (6 percent) and an 8 percent higher risk of dying prematurely.

The authors of the study, from Northwestern University, said there had been conflicting information from recent studies, and U.S. health guidelines recommend people eat eggs regularly.

“We want to remind people there is cholesterol in eggs, specifically yolks, and this has a harmful effect,” said Dr Norrina Allen, one of the authors and an associate professor of preventative medicine.

“As part of a healthy diet, people need to consume lower amounts of cholesterol. People who consume less cholesterol have a lower risk of heart disease.”

Cholesterol is a type of fat used to fuel the body’s cells and is contained in foods like meat and particularly egg yolk, but is also produced in the liver from breaking down other fats.

The latest U.S. guidelines dropped an upper limit for dietary cholesterol as well as promoting weekly egg consumption, which Dr Allen and colleagues said could be harmful.

In their study, published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, participants were followed over 17 years and there were 5,400 heart attacks or strokes, and 6,132 deaths from all causes.

On average, adults in the study ate just one egg every three days; around 11 percent had a heart attack or incident during the study and 12 percent died.

While people eating two eggs or more per day had the biggest risks of heart disease and early death they only accounted for 2 percent of the 29,615 participants studied.

However, the authors warn egg consumption could rise more in the future due to lack of awareness of the risks of cholesterol among the public, which they said could be “harmful for prevention of CVD [cardiovascular disease] and premature death”.

Dr Robert Eckel, a researcher from the University of Colorado who was not involved in this research, said the findings were “important” in the context of previous conflicting studies.

“The association of egg consumption and dietary cholesterol with cardiovascular disease and death, although debated for decades, has more recently been thought to be less important,” he said.

But, he added, the latest study is “far more comprehensive, with enough data to make a strong statement that eggs and overall dietary cholesterol intake remain important in affecting the risk”.

(Source: The Independent)

Mushrooms may ‘reduce the risk of mild brain decline’

Eating mushrooms more than twice a week could prevent memory and language problems occurring in the over-60s, research from Singapore suggests.

A unique antioxidant present in mushrooms could have a protective effect on the brain, the study found.

The more mushrooms people ate, the better they performed in tests of thinking and processing.

But researchers said it was not possible to prove a direct link between the fungi and brain function.

The National University of Singapore study’s findings were based on 663 Chinese adults, aged over 60, whose diet and lifestyle were tracked from 2011 to 2017.

Over the six-year study, the researchers found that eating mushrooms lowered the chances of mild cognitive impairment, so that roughly nine out of 100 people who ate more than two portions a week were diagnosed, compared with 19 out of 100 among those who ate fewer than one portion.

‘Encouraging’

Mild cognitive impairment (MCI) can make people forgetful, affect their memory and cause problems with language, attention and locating objects in spaces - but the changes can be subtle.

It is not serious enough to be defined as dementia.

The participants in the study were asked how often they

ate six different types of mushrooms: oyster, shiitake, white button, dried, golden and tinned.

Mushroom eaters performed better in brain tests and were found to have faster processing speed - and this was particularly noticeable in those who ate more than two portions a week, or more than 300g (10.5oz).

“This correlation is surprising and encouraging,” said assistant professor Lei Feng, the lead study author, from the university’s department of psychological medicine.

“It seems that a commonly available single ingredient could have a dramatic effect on cognitive decline.

(Source: BBC)

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Dutch museum wins American art prize for Iran exhibition

1 → It featured earliest developments of agriculture and livestock farming from the very beginning to cuneiform clay tablets, gold beakers and ornaments, bronze weapons and beautifully painted ceramics associated with successive Iranian kingdoms. Last year the Fries Museum in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands, won the prize for the exhibition Alma-Tadema classical seduction.



“Iran – Cradle of Civilization” was opened to the public on June 17, 2018 with the attendance of researchers, experts, academia, and cultural heritage aficionados some of whom delivered speeches on the event. Tehran’s Ambassador to The Hague, Alireza Jahangiri, called the show “an important initiative and a great cultural motion” that would take its visitors to a journey of one of the oldest and most interesting cultures in the world. The Drents Museum, in return, put on show some 300 objects including stone tools, jewelry, and natural human mummies in three sections of archeology, pottery and paintings, at an exhibit hosd by the National Museum of Iran. The exhibit kicked off in October 2018 and well received by museumgoers in the Islamic Republic.

Paris-Isfahan-Samarkand tourist route proposed

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – Head of Uzbekistan Center of Islamic Civilizations has proposed establishing a touristic itinerary, which connects Paris to Isfahan and Samarkand, IRNA reported. Sha Azim Monavvarov made the remarks in a meeting with Isfahan Governor General Abbas Rezaei late on Wednesday, adding that Isfahan has numerous historic and ancient attractions and can have close interaction with Uzbekistan cities, including Samarkand and Bokhara. Noting that over 500,000 tourists visit Isfahan each year, he said, “We can create tourism path of Paris-Isfahan-Samarkand and promote tourism industry among the cities.”



Monavvarov also said that there are great capacities for having a sisterhood agreement between Isfahan and cities of Uzbekistan, including Samarkand. Isfahan governor general also welcomed the sisterhood proposal, saying that Isfahan has many interesting attractions for the tourists. “Dialogues between the officials are essential for enhancing relations”, he said, adding that Isfahan hails deepening cultural and tourism relations with Uzbekistan.

ROUND THE GLOBE

Amphitheatre of El Jem

The impressive ruins of the largest colosseum in North Africa, a huge amphitheater which could hold up to 35,000 spectators, are found in the small village of El Jem. This 3rd-century monument illustrates the grandeur and extent of Imperial Rome.



The Amphitheatre of El Jem bears outstanding witness to Roman architecture, notably monuments built for spectator events, in Africa. Located in a plain in the center of Tunisia, this amphitheater is built entirely of stone blocks, with no foundations and free-standing. In this respect it is modelled on the Coliseum of Rome without being an exact copy of the Flavian construction. Its size (big axis of 148 metres and small axis 122 metres) and its capacity (judged to be 35,000 spectators) make it without a doubt among the largest amphitheatres in the world. Its facade comprises three levels of arcades of Corinthian or composite style. Inside, the monument has conserved most of the supporting infrastructure for the tiered seating. The wall of the podium, the arena and the underground passages are practically intact. This architectural and artistic creation built around 238 AD, constitutes an important milestone in the comprehension of the history of Roman Africa. The Amphitheatre of El Jem also bears witness to the prosperity of the small city of Thysdrus (current El Jem) at the time of the Roman Empire. (Source: UNESCO)

Lipar, a small lake in pink

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – Lipar, a small lake which usually turns pink, is an off-the-radar tourist destination in Iran, which has never been introduced completely! When people look at the lake, they think it is filled with strawberry syrup. Due to the special type of the soil surrounding the lake, its water surface seems shining with pink color during some five months of the year and it reportedly covers an area of 10 hectares. The lake and a nearby lagoon of the same name boast beautiful and unique landscapes, a potential attraction for domestic tourists and foreign travelers. They are situated some 20 kilometers east of Chabahar in Sistan-Baluchestan province. Chabahar is a humid port city commonly considered as one of the warmest places in Iran. Water levels of the seasonal lake routinely depend on the amount of rainfall. Gaz shrubs, whim, and straw are amongst its topmost vegetation. It is also home to flamingos, pelicans, white and gray hawks amongst other birds. Some environmental experts believe the

pink color of the lake is due to planktonic activities. The presence of large plant planktons in the region, and the abundance of organic and materials, in some seasons, leads to a significant increase in biological production. Such aspects, along with the impact of monsoon storms, which are unique features of the oceanic region of Oman Sea, cause an increase in the number of plant planktons and pure pink color of the lake in December. The monsoon winds, which flow from the Indian subcontinent in summer, make Chabahar the coolest southern port in the summer and the warmest part of Iran in the winter. That is why Chabahar is called “four springs” in Persian which indicated the fact that the climate is all year long similar to spring. Chabahar is a beautiful unknown destination, even to most of Iranians. There are good reasons for visiting the region; hospitable people, their unique culture, lifestyle, rituals, historical sights, the scenic Oman Sea, its stunning rare nature surround, and the Chabahar Free Trade-Industrial Zone. In addition, travelers to the region are



amazed at multi-colored mountain ranges, which are famous as the Mars Mountains, located on the route that connects Chabahar to the Hara Forest and Pakistan. In March 2017, provincial tourism authorities announced putting a new face to Sistan-Baluchestan was on their agenda in a bid to turn it into a tourist destination.

“Iran, Cradle of Civilizations” on show in Spain

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** – “Iran, the Cradle of Civilizations”, an exhibition of nearly two hundred magnificent pieces of ancient relics, has opened its doors to the public at the Archeological Museum of Alicante (MARQ) in south eastern Spain. Tehran’s Ambassador to Spain Hassan Qashqavi and the director of National Museum of Iran Jibrail Nokandeh, as well as several local Spanish authorities took part in the inaugural ceremony on March 14, IRNA reported. Addressing attendees at the start of the six-month event, the Iranian envoy called the exhibit the most important cultural event that has been held during the past 400 years of bilateral relations. “196 valuable historical pieces of a large span of Iranian history, starting from pre-historical era to the Islamic period, are being demonstrated as part of this exhibition,”



Nokandeh explained. “Pieces as old as seven to 10,000 years old, a letter by King Abbas of the Safavid Empire to Spanish King Filip the third about

the first Iranian ambassador to Spain as well as a 400-year-old Quran are included in the exhibition,” he added. “We intend to showcase Iranian history and civilization to the Spanish people by organizing an exhibition entitled ‘Iran, Cradle of Civilization’,” Iran tourism chief Ali-Asghar Mounesan said earlier in January. “Iran, Cradle of Civilization” will be running from March 14 to Sept. 1. It turns the spotlight on the earliest developments of agriculture and livestock farming from the very beginning to cuneiform clay tablets, gold beakers and ornaments, bronze weapons and beautifully painted ceramics associated with successive Iranian kingdoms. Organized by the National Museum of Iran, “Iran, Cradle of Civilization” was previously on show at Drents Museum, Assen, the Netherlands, where it was well received by museumgoers from June to November 2018.

Tourism in Osaka, often overshadowed by Tokyo, is catching up

Osaka, long Japan’s “second city,” is winning the race against Tokyo to draw foreign tourists, but after a boom, its retailers and property developers are adapting to shifting tourism spending patterns. Inbound tourism to Osaka surged five-fold between 2012 and 2017, faster than visits to Tokyo, as the city lured low-cost carriers and promoted itself as a base to visit the 25 World Heritage sites in nearby Kyoto and Nara. Initially, developers and retailers scrambled to build new hotels, expand floor space, and install cashless payment systems like AliPay and WeChat to keep up with the sudden influx of big-spending tourists, mostly from China. But tourism is entering a new phase now, where instead of loading up on luxury brands, visitors want to spend more on services like makeup consulting, maternity goods, and other cheaper items. Businesses expect that to become the norm - and to provide a permanent boost to the economy of the Kansai region around

Osaka as the city prepares to build a large casino resort. “Osaka was running at full speed on tourism, but now we’re moving to a more sustainable pace of growth,” said Takeshi Yamaguchi, associate director of research at real estate consulting firm CBRE in Osaka. “Compared to Tokyo, Osaka is positioned for longer and more sustainable growth in development and tourism because of things like the integrated resort,” Yamaguchi added. **■ Tourist boom** The success of Osaka, long overshadowed by Tokyo and dismissed as gritty and chaotic, has caught analysts by surprise. The city’s compact layout and food culture have proven a hit with Asian tourists, and that has created new opportunities for start-ups, social media marketing consultants and foreign property developers. Osaka and its surrounding cities may become the most visible example of how Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s economic policies have changed Japan.

Since Abe took office in late 2012, the government has relaxed visa requirements for China and other Southeast Asian countries. Foreign visitors to Osaka hit 11.1 million in 2017, a five-fold increase from 2012, making it Japan’s fastest-growing inbound tourist destination, government data show. By contrast, visits to Tokyo roughly tripled in the same period. Foreign visitors to Osaka could reach 26 million per year by 2030, CBRE’s Yamaguchi says. “I’ve been to Osaka three times, and I like it better than Tokyo,” Zhang Xin Jie, 30, a software engineer from Shenzhen, China, said at a shopping arcade in Osaka’s bustling Shinsaibashi district. “I like the vibe, the history, and the shopping.” Tourism spending in the Kansai area, which includes Osaka, Kyoto and Nara, more than tripled to 1.3 trillion yen (8.86 billion pounds) in fiscal year 2017 from fiscal 2013, adding an average 0.2 percentage point to the Kansai area’s economy for the past three fiscal years, according to a central bank report. (Source: euronews.com)

This is the world’s busiest airport



Southwest Airlines also flies out of Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. protectionist policies around the world. “Aviation is strongly linked to the global economy and to local development, however, and the protectionist rhetoric that has swept several Western countries will continue to restrain growth in the efficient flow of people, goods and services,” she said. “The ongoing trade war between the United States and several of its closest trade partners was a shock for the industry and global supply chains.” **■ Major connecting hub** Atlanta continues to dominate the passenger market because of its location as a major connecting hub and port of entry into North America. It’s within a two-hour flight of 80% of the United States population of more than 300 million people. The airport could be facing some bumps in the road, however, as the Georgia State senate recently voted to take over control of the airport from the city of Atlanta. It’s not clear that the Georgia House of Representatives will follow suit. The CEO of Delta Air Lines, the dominant tenant at the Atlanta airport, which is its hub, has expressed opposition to a state takeover. There was no change in the rankings of the top three passenger airports. Coming in second place, Beijing Capital

International Airport passed the 100 million passengers mark in 2018, hitting nearly 101 million passengers and growing by 5.4%. Third place Dubai Airport handled 89 million passengers, increasing by only 1%. (Dubai was also the top-ranked airport for international passenger traffic, followed by London’s Heathrow Airport and Hong Kong International Airport.) Chicago’s O’Hare International Airport knocked Atlanta out of the No. 1 spot for most aircraft movements, which is airport language for takeoffs and landings. O’Hare handled nearly 904,000 movements in 2018. Atlanta handled more than 895,000 movements, and Los Angeles International Airport handled nearly 708,000 movements. The top 20 airports for aircraft movements grew by 2.4% in 2018. Hong Kong remains the largest air cargo airport, handling more than 5.1 million metric tonnes of cargo in 2018, a 1.4% increase over the previous year, followed by the Memphis International Airport (Tennessee, U.S.) and China’s Shanghai Pudong International Airport. India overtook Japan to become the world’s third-largest aviation market in terms of passenger throughput, behind the United States and China, according to a new ACI analysis. Indra Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi is evidence of that trend, leaping from 16th place to 12th place in the latest rankings, with 69.9 million passengers. (Source: CNN)

Nitrogen pollution's path to streams weaves through more forests and faster

New research by scientists shows that more nitrogen from rain and snow is making it to more streams than previously believed and flowing downstream in forests of the United States and Canada.

Scientists found that some nitrate, which is a form of nitrogen that plants and microbes can use, occasionally moves too fast for biological uptake, resulting in "unprocessed" nitrate bypassing the otherwise effective filter of forest biology.

The study links pollutant emissions from various and sometimes distant sources including industry, energy production, the transportation sector and agriculture to forest health and stream water quality.

"Nitrogen is critical to the biological productivity of the planet, but it becomes an ecological and aquatic pollutant when too much is present," said Stephen Sebestyen, a research hydrologist with the USDA Forest Service's Northern Research Station based in Grand Rapids, Minn., and the study's lead author.

Forest health and water quality

"From public land managers to woodlot owners, there is a great deal of interest in forest health and water quality. Our research identifies widespread pollutant effects, which undermines efforts to manage nitrogen pollution."

Sebestyen and 29 co-authors completed one of the largest and longest examinations to trace unprocessed nitrate movement in



forests.

Scientists from several federal agencies and 12 academic institutions in the United

States, Canada, and Japan collected water samples in 13 states and the province of Ontario, ultimately compiling more than 1,800

Too much nitrogen contributes to forest decline and growth of nuisance vegetation in lakes and ponds. Tree species have varying levels of tolerance for nitrogen.

individual nitrate isotope analyses over the course of 21 years.

"We generally assumed that nitrate pollution would not travel a great distance through a forest because the landscape would serve as an effective filter," Sebestyen said. "This study demonstrates that while we have not been wrong about that, we needed more information to be better informed."

Unprocessed nitrate flows

Forests overall use most nitrate, unless rainfall and snowmelt runoff during higher flow events lead to brief, but important windows when unprocessed nitrate flows to streams; sometimes at levels that are unexpectedly high.

Too much nitrogen contributes to forest decline and growth of nuisance vegetation in lakes and ponds. Tree species have varying levels of tolerance for nitrogen.

Too much nitrogen can change forest composition and provide a foothold for non-native plants. "I'm concerned with how air pollution affects forests and watersheds," said Trent Wickman, an Air Resource Specialist with the USDA Forest Service's Eastern Region and a co-author of the study.

"There are a number of federal and state programs that aim to reduce nitrogen air pollution from vehicles and industrial sources. Understanding the fate of nitrogen that originates in the air, but ends up on land, is important to gauge the effectiveness of those pollution reduction programs."

(Source: phys.org)

Europe space scientists to continue working on the air-breathing hypersonic engine

When it comes to the future of space exploration, the name of the game is "save money." To do this, space agencies and aerospace companies around the world are investing in things like reusable rockets, single-stage-to-orbit (SSTO) rockets, and reusable space planes. This last concept builds on the tradition established by the Space Shuttle and Buran spacecraft, two reusable vehicles designed to make space launches more affordable.

The one drawback of these spacecraft was the fact that it still took two rocket boosters and a huge external fuel tank to put them into orbit. This is where the Synergetic Air Breathing Rocket Engine (SABRE) comes into play. With the help of the European Space Agency (ESA) and the UK Space Agency (UKSA), this revolutionary hypersonic engine recently took a big step towards fruition.

The idea behind the SABRE engine is both elegant and straightforward. During take-off and ascent, the engine scoops up atmosphere and uses it to generate thrust (reaching speeds up to Mach 5.4). After reaching an altitude of about 25 km (15.5 mi), it switches to rocket mode and accelerates to Mach 25 to achieve orbit and flight in space.

Brainchild of UK Reaction Engines

The engine is the brainchild of UK-based aerospace manufacturer Reaction Engines, who originally proposed it as part of their Skylon space plane concept. The company was founded in 1989 with the purpose of developing the technologies necessary to create a hypersonic engine that could combined the fuel efficiency of a jet with the power and high-speed capability of a rocket.

Together with the UKSA, the ESA recently reviewed the preliminary design of the engine demonstrator's core, thus bringing the full-scale engine one step closer to realization.

The "positive conclusion of our preliminary design review marks a major milestone in Synergetic Air-Breathing Rocket Engine (SABRE) development. It confirms the test version of this revolutionary new class of engine is ready for implementation."

This represents the latest step in the joint effort by the ESA and Reaction Engines to



develop the SABRE engine. Back in 2010, the ESA became officially involved after conducting an independent review of the engine's viability, which opened the door for the British government to invest on behalf of the UKSA.

Testing the precooler design for the SABRE engine at the Reaction Engines' site in Oxfordshire (overseen by the ESA) in November of 2012.

This was followed in 2012 by the ESA and Reaction Engines collaborating on the testing of the engine precooler. This element, which is essential to the SABRE, ensures that the hot airstream entering at hypersonic speeds is kept at a consistent temperatures. These tests fully-validated the precooler, showing that it performed well at ambient air temperatures.

Operational conditions

"One of the great advantages of the SABRE propulsion concept is that it is totally modular from both design and operational perspectives. Therefore it is possible to subject each of the key components of the engine to rigorous ground testing, which fully mimic the operational conditions the engine will face up to Mach 5 flight at 25km altitude."

Development of the engine core began in October of 2016 when the company decided to create the central element of the SABRE. When tested, Reaction Engines and the ESA will be seeking to validate the engine's heat exchanges, turbomachinery modules, and ability to mix air and liquid hydrogen to generate combustion.

The testing of the core demonstrator will take place at the company's dedicated test facility in Westcott Venture Park, Buckinghamshire (which is currently being built).

(Source: universetoday.com)

Scientists crack genome of superfood seaweed, ito-mozuku

For the first time, researchers unveiled the genome of ito-mozuku (*Nemacystus decipiens*), the popular Japanese brown seaweed, providing data that could help farmers better grow the health food.

Unfortunately, scientists predict that pollution and rising ocean temperatures will blunt this impressive yield, forcing farmers to adopt new cultivation techniques. Recently, scientists at the Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology Graduate University (OIST) decoded the genome of the popular brown seaweed ito-mozuku (*Nemacystus decipiens*), providing data that could someday be critical to local farmers.

The study, published March 14, 2019 in Scientific Reports, presents the world's first draft genome of ito-mozuku. Just three years ago, the unit released the first draft genome of another local species of edible seaweed, *Cladosiphon okamuranus*, called Okinawa mozuku.

Both seaweed species contain exceptionally high concentrations of fucoidan, a slimy substance thought to stymie the formation of blood clots and cancerous tumors, among other health benefits. The researchers have spotted which genes drive up this fucoidan concentration, a discovery that could have applications in the health food industry.

Revealing genes

Besides revealing genes that imbue mozuku with health benefits, the research could be useful for farming.

"My future plan is to establish new methods for cultivation of this species," said Dr. Koki Nishitsuji, first author of the study and a staff scientist in the OIST Marine Genomics Unit, led by Prof. Noriyuki Satoh. Nishitsuji is now working to develop genetic markers to distinguish ito-mozuku from its close cousin.

"Using those markers, we can do cross-breeding," he said. "This is a popular method for making new varieties of land plants, especially wheat and potatoes, but in the case of seaweed, no one has succeeded in cross-breeding."

The Marine Genomics Unit conducted their study with the help of the Onna Fish-



eries Cooperative, an organization based just around the corner from OIST campus. The group established the "Onna-1" strain of ito-mozuku in 2006 and provided samples for the genome study. The Unit plans to continue sequencing samples from the Cooperative, but someday, they hope to extend their research even further.

Seaweed project

"So far, we plan to continue our 'seaweed project' in Okinawa," said Nishitsuji. "If possible, we would like to expand it to cover all of Japan."

Compared to other brown seaweeds, such as kombu (*Saccharina japonica*) or wakame (*Undaria pinnatifida*), both ito-mozuku and Okinawa mozuku are incredibly rich sources of fucoidan. The reason why might be coded in their genes.

The researchers found that both mozuku species contain a fused gene that drives their fucoidan production. On their own, the two genes code for two separate enzymes -- proteins that facilitate chemical reactions and ultimately help produce fucoidan. Once fused, the genes can be expressed simultaneously and produce a single enzyme equipped with two functions.

The researchers uncovered an additional pair of fused genes in ito-mozuku that they didn't find in Okinawa mozuku. They predict that, when expressed, these genes may boost the number of sulfate groups transferred to fucoidan, a chemical reaction that may be key to the substance's health benefits. The unit plans to put this theory to the test in future studies, as they continue to collect genomic data from brown seaweeds across Okinawa and greater Japan.

(Source: eurekalert.org)

Hypervelocity star flung out of Milky Way may have unusual origin: study

Stars are heavy. Heavy things require more energy to move. Therefore, accelerating solar masses to roughly 568km/s (or 353 miles/s) requires a staggering amount of it. Scientists have typically believed that the handful of hypervelocity stars we've found — the term refers to stars moving significantly faster than the typical 'background' rate for stars in the Milky Way galaxy — were flung out towards the void between the galaxies by Sagittarius A*, the supermassive black hole at the center of our galaxy.

But in at least one star's case, Sagittarius A* doesn't appear to be the culprit. LAMOST-HVS-1, a star with 8.3 solar masses, was flung out of the inner disk of the Milky Way some 33 million years ago, with a velocity between 551-587km/s. That's far faster than most stars — the Sun, for example, moves at a velocity of ~220km/s, or less than half that of LAMOST-HVS-1. There are two ways a star is thought to gain this kind of velocity: Either it was part of a binary pair and survived the supernova of its partner, or it takes part in complex gravitational interactions between multiple bodies as part of a star cluster.

Supernova ejection is simpler — at least, to the extent that anything involving the exploding mass of a star can be described as simple. The gravitational ejection model allows for the presence of multiple stars or various configurations of stars and black holes. What's interesting about LAMOST-HVS-1 is that while we thought this star had been flung from Sagittarius A*, it actually appears to come from the Norma spiral arm of the Milky Way.

And the story gets stranger. LAMOST-HVS-1 isn't just a hypervelocity star, it's a huge hypervelocity star that's no longer bound to the Milky Way at all. With an estimated mass roughly eight times higher than the Sun, it would've taken an incredible amount of energy to throw the star from the Norma spiral arm (it appears to have originated from an area near the galactic center, though still distinct from it).

(Source: extremetech.com)

MIT scientists think the last 3 ice ages were triggered by tectonic collisions

The last three ice ages might have been triggered by tectonic collisions between Earth's continents, according to new research, and it could give us clues as to how the planet's climate might suddenly shift again in the future.

What's likely to have happened, the new study says, is these massive collisions pushed oceanic rocks up above the surface, into hot and humid tropical environments where they began to pull carbon dioxide out of the air. Given enough time, these chemical reactions could cool global temperatures and start an ice age.

The findings are based initially on an analysis of two sutures in the Himalayas — major fault zones where oceanic and continental plates have collided. Both sutures were originally formed near the equator, 50 million and 80 million years ago respectively, and happened just before major global cooling events.

"We think that arc-continent collisions at low latitudes are the trigger for global cooling," says one of the team, Oliver Jagoutz from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

"This could occur over 1.5 million square kilometers (0.4-1.9 square miles), which sounds like a lot. But in reality, it's a very thin strip of Earth, sitting in the right location that can change the global climate."

You could think of it as the opposite of the process that's often associated with major extinction events — where huge amounts of carbon dioxide get released into the atmosphere from underground stores buried in rock.

Specifically in this case, it's the calcium and magnesium in the newly exposed rock that reacts with the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and pulls it out of the air.

Adding the new research to previous work, the researchers were able to model the eruption and movement of more sutures even further back through time.

They found three major periods of suture formation that coincided with ice ages — in the Late Ordovician period (455-440 million years ago), the Permo-Carboniferous period (335-280 million years ago), and the Cenozoic period (35 million years ago to the present day). No sutures meant no ice ages.

(Source: sciencealert.com)



Pests and the plant defenses against them drive diversity in tropical rainforests

Researchers have been baffled by tropical rainforest diversity for over a century; 650 different tree species can exist in an area covering two football fields, yet similar species never grow next to each other. It seems like it's good to be different than your neighbors, but why?

A group of caterpillars congregate on a leaf on an Inga tree species. Caterpillars can do extraordinary damage to tree leaves.

Different species of Inga trees have various defenses against herbivore species. Some herbivores have adapted ways to overcome tree defenses.

To grow in a tropical rainforest is to engage in constant warfare. Plants battle for resources, such as sunlight, water and minerals. Similar tree species compete for resources in the same ways, so they may inhibit each other's growth.

Plants also battle against herbivore pests. Related trees share the same pests and diseases — if one gets it, the infestation can spread. Scientists have asked, "What is the primary driver in tropical forest diversity-competition for resources, or herbivore pests?"

The team analyzed how neighboring trees influence the growth and survival of nine coexisting species of the tree genus Inga in the Panama rainforest. They compared tree traits for resource acquisition, anti-herbivore defenses and the herbivores that live on the plants. They found that neighboring trees were basically the same in terms of acquiring resources, but had very different defenses and herbivores.

Indeed, the defensive traits and shared pests impacted growth and survival, while resource acquisition traits had no effect on the plants' success. These findings indicate that anything impacting pest populations, such as climate change or habitat fragmentation, will have an impact on the health of the rainforest.

(Source: sciencedaily.com)

How gravity could change how we make decisions, new study finds

Mankind is preparing for a new space age: manned missions to Mars are no longer a distant dream and commercial ventures may open up the prospect for nonastronauts to visit other planets. Understanding how gravity impacts the way in which we make decisions has never been more pressing.

All living organisms on Earth have evolved under a constant gravitational field. That's because gravity is always there and it is part of the background of our perceptual world: We cannot see it, smell it or touch it. Nevertheless, gravity plays a fundamental role in human behavior and cognition.

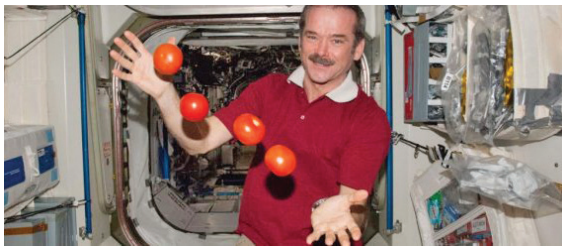
The central nervous system does not have "specialized" sensors for gravity. Rather, gravity is inferred through the integration of several sensory signals in a process termed graviception. This involves vision, our balance system and information from the joints and muscles.

Sophisticated organs inside the inner ear are particularly important in this process. Under terrestrial gravity, when our head is upright, small stones — the vestibular otoliths — are perfectly balanced on a viscous fluid. When we move the head, for instance looking up, gravity makes the fluid move and this triggers a signal which informs the brain that our head is no longer upright.

Exposure to zero gravity

Long-duration exposure to zero gravity, such as during space missions, leads to several structural and functional changes in the human body.

While the influence of zero gravity on our physical functions



has been investigated, its effects on decision-making are not yet fully understood.

Given the technical limitations and the expected gap of a few minutes in communication with Earth if we go to Mars, knowing the impact of altered gravity on how people make decisions is essential.

In a nutshell, human behavior is a constant trade-off between the exploitation of familiar but possibly suboptimal choices and the exploration of new and potentially more profitable alternatives. For example, in a restaurant you can exploit by choosing your usual chocolate cake, or you can explore by trying that tiramisu that you've not had before. Thus, exploitation involves routine behavior, while exploration involves varying choices.

Successful adaptive behavior

Every time they heard a beep sound, they needed to name a number between one and nine. Importantly, there was no time

to think or to count, just name a number. Critically, this task requires our brain to suppress routine responses and generate novel responses, and it can be considered a proxy for successful adaptive behavior.

But how does this change under the influence of gravity? We manipulated how the otoliths sense gravity by changing the orientation of participants' bodies with respect to the direction of terrestrial gravity by asking them to lie down. When we are upright, our body and otoliths are congruent with the direction of gravity, while when we are lying down they are orthogonal (at right angles).

This is a very efficient laboratory manipulation, which allows us to mimic alterations of gravitational signals reaching the brain. It is actually a better way to study the effects of gravity than sending someone to space. That's because when we are in space we are also affected by weightlessness, radiation and isolation — and it can be hard to separate what effect the lack of gravity alone has.

Our results indicate that lying down does seem to influence how people make decisions, with participants struggling with random number generation. This indicates that people are therefore less prone to generating novel behaviors in the absence of gravity.

This may be of importance to the planning of actual space missions. Astronauts are in an extremely challenging environment in which decisions must be made quickly and efficiently.

(Source: newsweek.com)

Heavy snow, blizzard hitting 8 provinces

ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** — Severe snowfall along with snowstorms have haunted 8 provinces of the country over the past 24 hours, Rescue and Relief Organization head Morteza Salimi said on Saturday.



Massive snowstorm barreled across 8 provinces namely Hamedan, Markazi, Lorestan, Golestan, Qazvin, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, Ilam and West Azarbaijan, Salimi noted, Fars news agency reported.

Meanwhile, relief services were provided to some 1,000 who were stranded in the snowstorm, and over a hundred of cars stuck in snow have been dug out, he stated.

Fresh iceberg ruptures in Patagonia raise alarm about global warming

Two new icebergs are seen after breaking off from the Gray glacier in Aysen, Chile's Patagonia, March 9, 2019. Picture taken 9 March 2019.

Two new icebergs have broken off from the Grey Glacier in Chile's Patagonia in recent weeks, amid fears such ruptures are becoming more frequent.

Scientists said the breaks occurred on 20 February and 7 March. They came after a larger block of ice the size of three football fields separated from the glacier, which sits in a glacial lake in Torres del Paine National Park in southern Chile, in November 2017.

The most significant rupture to the glacier before that was recorded in the early 1990s.

Scientists have linked the increased frequency of ice breaks to rising temperatures.

"There is a greater frequency in the occurrence of break-off in this east side of the glacier and more data is required to assess its stability," said Ricardo Jana, researcher and member of the climate change area of the Chilean Antarctic Institute (INACH).

In recent days, "temperature rises above the normal average and intense rainfall were registered together with an increase in water level in the lake, factors that could explain the separation", he added.

Researchers from universities in Germany and Brazil, together with experts from INACH and other local entities, have been studying the Grey Glacier since 2015 under an international cooperation program.

In December of this year, Chile will host the United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP 25.

(Source: The Independent)

LEARN ENGLISH

Job Interview

A: Okay, so let's go over everything one more time. I really want you to get this job!

B: I know! It's an amazing growth opportunity! They're true industry leaders, and it would be so interesting to be part of an organization that is the **undisputed** leader in business process platform development.

A: So, let's see, you did your research on the company, right?

B: Well, I visited their website and **read up** on what they do. They're an IT service company that offers comprehensive business solutions for large corporations. They provide services such as **CRM** development, and they also offer **custom** designed applications.

A: So what would your role in the company?

B: Well, the position is for an account manager. That basically means that I would be the link between our customers and our development team.

A: Sounds good, and so, why do you want to work with them?

B: Well, as I said they're the **industry leaders**, they have a really great **growth strategy**, amazing development opportunities for employees, and it seems like they have strong corporate governance. They're all about helping companies grow and **unleashing** potential. I guess their **core values** and mission really **resonated** with me. Oh, and they offer six weeks' vacation, stock options and bonuses... I'm totally going to cash in on that.

A: You, idiot! Don't say that! Do you want this job, or not?

■ Key vocabulary

undisputed: definitely true, not doubted

read up: read to gain the most recent information on a subject

CRM: processes, services, technology, and people used to attract and keep customers

custom: specially made to fit the needs of a person or organization

industry leader: being the best in that particular field or industry

growth strategy: chance to gain new skills

unleash: release; allow something to happen

core values: most important beliefs

resonate: have a special meaning or importance for someone

■ Supplementary vocabulary

integrated solutions: combine things to find a plan or a way to deal with a problem (esp. in business)

competitive advantage: something that places a company above the competition

optimize: make something as effective as possible

align: join a group in supporting something

platform: a program that tells a computer how to work



Tehran subway line 7 partially inaugurated

SOCIETY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Tehran subway line 7, connecting southeastern Tehran to northwestern parts of the city, was partially inaugurated on Saturday morning, Tasnim news agency reported.

Three stations of the subway line located on its northern half, stretching over 7.5 kilometers, were opened during a ceremony attended by Tehran mayor Pirouz Hanachi, Tehran city council chairman Mohsen Hashemi, and Saeed Mohammad, commander of Khatam al-Anbia Construction unit, a conglomerate belonging to the IRGC.

Subway line 7 is 27 kilometers long with 22 stations. The subway line was first partially opened in June 2017 but was closed due to safety issues in November 2017. Tehran subway line 7 was partially reopened in mid-July with 5 stations stretching over 6 kilometers.

Line 7 has deepest subway stations in Tehran and numerous stations facilitating cross-platform transfers with other subway lines, commander of Khatam al-Anbia Con-



struction unit Mohammad said, Mehr news agency reported on Friday.

In order to complete the project so far a budget of 25 trillion rials (nearly \$600 million) has been allotted, Mohammad said, adding that, nearly 8,000 jobs were created for the construction project of the subway line.

Should the necessary budget is allocated, the project will be finished by the end of the next Iranian calendar year (March 2020), he added.

Regarding its numerous stations facilitating cross-platform transfers with other subway lines, line 7 can play a significant role in easing traffic jam as well as air pollution, he concluded.

Tehran subway system consists of five operational lines, stretching to 170 kilometers, and the lines 6 and 7 are under construction. The lines link south to north, east to west and are gradually covering more neighborhoods. By completing the two aforementioned lines 70 kilometers will be added to the current railways.

Flood responsible for 61% of natural disasters



ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** — Flood is the leading natural disaster being responsible for 61 percent of the total natural disasters happened in the country, according to studies conducted over the past four decades in Iran.

Natural disasters in the country affect about 40 million people accounting for half of the country's population, Mohammad Esmail Motlaq, director general for risk management at the Ministry of Health has said.

After flood, 28 percent of the hazards in the country are related

to earthquakes, 3 percent to storm, and landslides and forest wildfires constitute 3 percent of the disaster, he added, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

He went on to say that this year, 15,279 natural disasters occurred in the country. In other words, four hazards happened in Iran on a daily basis.

Referring to unnatural hazards, he regretted that 19,799 people were injured in the current year (started on March 21, 2018) due to unnatural disasters, which were mostly related to gas leak, road crashes, alcohol and food poisoning.

Volunteer groups dispatched to deprived areas on cultural missions



SOCIETY d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) has dispatched volunteer teams to provide cultural services to the children residing in the underprivileged villages of the southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan.

The scheme is called Peyk-e-Omid (literally meaning messenger of hope), aiming to encourage cultural activities among children who cannot afford to pay for extracurricular cultural and recreational activities, Fars reported on Friday.

Volunteer groups are sent to the villages to promote cultural activities

among children and adolescents such as reading books, storytelling, as well as holding art workshops such as crafts, pottery, origami, playing group games, and screening film and animation.

Through the first phase of the scheme, some 9 villages in Sistan-Baluchestan province have been chosen to be provided with free cultural services, Mohammad Reza Zomorodian, deputy cultural director for IIDCYA said.

The teams managed to set up some small libraries in the villages for the financially struggling students, in addition to granting them stationary packages, toys and books, he added.

Injured Caracal survived death in southern Iran

ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** — A Caracal, a wild cat, found wounded in Jahrom city, the southern province of Fars, survived after receiving immediate medical treatment, IRNA reported on Friday.

The Caracal has been spotted for the first time in Jahrom region, which ended up injured.

An environmentally conscious local found the precious species suffering in pain, who immediately called the department of environment to save the animal.

The animal has been sent to the city of Shiraz for treatment, who fortunately escaped death.

Caracal means 'black ears' in Turkish. Caracal or Desert Lynx a native species in Iran and some other countries.

In Africa, the caracal is widely distributed south of the Sahara, but considered rare in North Africa. In Asia, it

occurs from the Arabian Peninsula, Middle East, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan to western India. It inhabits forests, savannas, marshy lowlands, semi-deserts, and scrub forests, but prefers dry areas with low rainfall and availability of cover.

It is characterized by a robust build, long legs, a short face, long tufted ears, and long canine teeth. Its coat is uniformly reddish tan or sandy, while the ventral parts are lighter with small reddish markings. It reaches 40–50 cm at the shoulder and weighs 8–18 kg.

Caracals provisionally are present across most regions of eastern and central Iran, including Fars and northern Khuzestan but there are also some concerns over the status of populations not just in Iran but also in the Central Asian Republics and also in Pakistan.

Dry steppes and semi deserts of Kavir National Park,

Tooran National Park, Bahram-e Goor Protected Area, Saghand Yazd, Abbasabad, Naeen, Naybandan Wildlife Refuge, Sistan-Baluchestan, Khorasan, Masjedsoleyman and Kermanshah are all listed as Caracal habitats in the country.

The caracal is categorized as least concern by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources; African populations are listed under CITES Appendix II, while Asian populations come under CITES Appendix I. In central, west, north, and northeast Africa and Asia, the major threat to the survival of the caracal is habitat loss due to agricultural expansion and desertification. Caracal are often killed in retaliation for preying on small livestock.

In October 2018, a Caracal lost life in a car accident on Shiraz-Kazeroon road, Fars province.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

Over 8,000 lesser white-fronted geese wintering in northwest Iran

About 8,000 endangered populations of lesser white-fronted geese were being wintering in West Azarbaijan province, northwestern part of the country, head of wildlife monitoring affairs at the provincial department of environment has said. "The global population of the winter migrant species is estimated at about 20,000 individuals, 8,000 of which are currently wintering in the country," IRNA quoted Omid Yousefi as saying on Wednesday.

۸,۰۰۰ قطعه غاز پیشانی سفید در آذربایجان غربی مشاهد شد

رئیس اداره نظارت بر حیات وحش حفاظت محیط زیست آذربایجان غربی گفت: هشت هزار قطعه غاز پیشانی سفید کوچک از گونه های در حال انقراض در زیستگاه های استان شمارش شد. امید یوسفی روز سه شنبه در گفت و گو با خبرنگار ایرنا اظهار داشت: جمعیت جهانی این پرنده در حال انقراض، ۲۰ هزار قطعه تخمین زده می شود که هم اکنون هشت هزار قطعه آن در زیستگاه های آذربایجان غربی زیست می کنند.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“ex-”

■ **Meaning:** former

■ **For example:** Student wins scholarship honoring ex-president..

PHRASAL VERB

Nag at

■ **Meaning:** to make someone feel continuously worried or uncomfortable

■ **For example:** Jane's boss nags at her all the time.

IDIOM

Crank into gear

■ **Explanation:** start to work or become effective

■ **For example:** Immediately after the announcement, a group of protesters cranked into gear.

Houthis warn they could target Riyadh, Abu Dhabi

Yemenis downed 19 Saudi Apache copters during war

→ Speaking at a press conference in Sana'a on Saturday, army spokesman Brigadier Yahya Sare'e provided the figures regarding the four-year-long war on the impoverished Arab country.

He said that Saudi Arabia and its allies have carried out over 250,000 airstrikes and dropped more than 500,000 bombs and missiles on Yemen, al-Masirah TV reported.

The aggressors' warplanes fired at least 5914 cluster and phosphorus bombs at several Yemeni provinces, he added.

Sare'e also noted that a total of 22 countries have directly and indirectly been involved in the Saudi war, adding that Yemen is in possession of evidence suggesting Israel's role in the Western-backed offensive.

The spokesman further said that the Yemeni army has boosted its capability to manufacture weapons and stored ballistic missiles at its depots.



The Yemeni military, he stressed, has managed to destroy over 7,000 armored vehicles, trucks, tanks and bulldozers belonging to the Saudi-led coalition.

Saudi Arabia and its regional allies, including the UAE, launched the devastating military campaign against Yemen in order to bring the Riyadh-backed former government back to power.

The invaders have, however, failed to achieve their objective in the face of Yemenis' resistance.

The war has so far taken a heavy toll on the Yemen's infrastructure, hospitals, schools, and factories.

According to a report by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), a nonprofit conflict-research organization, the Saudi war has claimed the lives of around 56,000 Yemenis.

Some 10 million Yemenis face mass starvation, according to the UN.

On Wednesday the UN Security Council met to discuss the stalled truce deal that had been agreed in Sweden in December between the Yemeni government and the Houthis.

(Source: agencies)

Fresh clashes as France's yellow vests seek new momentum

→ Protesters have promised to draw bigger numbers to mark the fourth month since the movement erupted in mid November, over since-scrapped fuel tax hikes and the high cost of living.

Named after the high visibility vests French drivers have to keep in their cars and worn by protesters, the revolt quickly swelled into a broader movement against Macron and his reforms.

However, the weekly demonstrations, held every Saturday in Paris and other cities, have been generally getting smaller since December, when Paris saw some of the worst vandalism and looting in decades.

After the spike in violence, Macron offered a package of concessions worth more than 10 billion euros (\$11 billion) aimed at boosting the incomes of the poorest workers and most pensioners.

His government ordered police to crack down on the protests in January, leading to complaints of police brutality after a series of injuries.

The 41-year-old former investment banker also launched a series of national debates which are aimed at determining what policies people want the government to focus on.

Saturday's protests coincide with the end of the debates.

(Source: Reuters)



Erdogan hits back at Netanyahu's son over 'occupation' claims

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has hit back at the son of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Yair, for claiming that the city of Istanbul is under "Turkish occupation."

In a Twitter post earlier this week, Yair Netanyahu said, "Istanbul is actually a city called Constantinople! The capital of the Byzantine empire and center of orthodox Christianity for more than a thousand years before Turkish occupation!"

Speaking at an election rally on Friday, Erdogan fired back at Netanyahu's son, saying it is actually the Tel Aviv regime which has occupied the entire Palestinian land.

"You occupied the whole of Palestine!" he said. "If the world is looking for a country that oppresses, it's Israel. If they are searching for a terror state that too is Israel."

The Turkish president further described Netanyahu's son as "immoral."

A war of words began between Turkey and Israel recently, when the rightist Israeli prime minister said the occupied territories only belong to the Jewish people and not all citizens.

"Israel is not a state of all its citizens," he wrote in an Instagram post. "According to the basic national law we passed, Israel is the nation state of the Jewish people –

and only it."

Critics accused Netanyahu of demonizing the Arabs, who make up some 17.5 percent of Israel's population, in a bid to boost right-wing turnout for the April legislative elections.

Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin strongly condemned Netanyahu's "blatant racism and discrimination."

In response, the Israeli premier called Erdogan a "dictator" who jails journalists and judges.

Erdogan, however, called Netanyahu a "thief" and a "tyrant who massacred seven-year-old Palestinian children."

He also criticized Israel for jailing

10,000 Palestinian women and children and disrespecting holy sites in Jerusalem al-Quds.

Ties between Ankara and Tel Aviv soured in 2010 after an Israeli raid on a Gaza-bound Turkish aid flotilla killed 10 Turkish activists in high seas.

Six years later, they reached an agreement to normalize their ties.

Their relations, however, sank to a fresh low in May 2018 after they expelled their envoys amid growing tensions over the Israeli killing of dozens of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

(Source: TRT)

Macron's concern over China's presence in Africa is about keeping riches in the West

When I see Western leaders smiling, shaking hands and offering sage and heartfelt advice on tours of Africa, I just can't help settling in for the show because you know some top level hypocrisy is just around the corner.

By far, my favorite part of politics is watching its highest level practitioners ignore whatever inconvenient facts from the past are getting in the way of the blatant self-interest of the present. The French leader visiting Africa? Well you know this is going to be a good one.

Africa is full of elephants, and many of them are political, sitting in the corners of rooms and trumpeting away merrily at the likes of Emmanuel Macron. His ability to ignore the weight of history has proved commendable.

Macron's been on a tour of East Africa, specifically Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya. He's not there to make the world a better place, but because economies in Africa are growing fast, in fact six of the top ten fastest growing economies in the world are there.

One of the agreements Macron made on his trip was to build a trainline in Nairobi. If you had any doubt that colonial instincts run deep, then that blast from the past should get rid of it.

Nothing stirs Europe's colonial powers like the thought of riches up for grabs in Africa, well apart from the thought that someone else might grab them first.

It was much easier to get away with smash and grab forays into Africa when there were no competitors, but there's a new power in town that goes by the name of China. France doesn't like the idea of China getting involved in a part of the world where it has had a free run for, well centuries really, and Macron travelled with dire warnings about letting Beijing in the front door.

Problem is, France already kicked the front door off



its hinges, stole the sofa and made the people living in the house cook dinner. Historically speaking of course.

Macron warned of China's growing presence in Africa saying: "I wouldn't want a new generation of international investments to encroach on our historical partners' sovereignty or weaken their economies."

"What can look good in the short term ... can often end up being bad over the medium to long term," he said.

Just to put that little gem into context, Macron also spent some time visiting French troops in Djibouti, because French troops have been stationed there since it became independent from French rule in 1977. I personally would call that long term.

France doesn't like the fact that China built its own military base there in 2017. But then again, the US built a military base there in 2002. Herein lies the dilemma,

because any Western warnings about China's presence in Africa is going to be hard to take for anyone with the faintest notion of history, or eyes in their head.

For some more of that top level hypocrisy I was talking about, just keep an eye out for how Macron's tune will change when China's President Xi is in Paris in a couple of weeks. I bet he's open for some long term Chinese investment back home.

So are the old colonialists offering anything better than the new ones from the East? China is spending big on infrastructure, literally billions and billions of dollars on ports and power stations, roads bridges and factories across Africa. Neither France nor anyone else can match that. Let's be frank, whether they're from the East or West, they're still rapacious capitalists so you might as well choose the one with the deepest pockets. It's not just China that's sniffing about, Russia, Turkey and India are too. In fact India is Africa's fourth biggest trading partner now.

So what can the West offer? Well the war on terror and airstrikes are still a growth business. Libya remains locked in chaos after being forced to import an excess of Western airstrikes back in 2011, and over in Somalia, hundreds of thousands of people have been forced from their homes, thanks in no small part to a surge in America's drone led war on terror that is flying under the radar. You'll be hard pushed to remember the last time China launched airstrikes in Africa.

In the current world of realpolitik where the facade of moral authority has long cracked for the old colonialists, African nations might as well just take the cash, because the problem with the devil you know, is that you know him.

(Source: RT)

Iraq begins exhuming mass grave in Sinjar region

The Iraqi government has started exhuming a mass grave left behind by Daesh (ISIL) terrorists in the northwestern Sinjar region in the presence of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Nadia Murad, whose slain relatives are believed to have been buried in the area.

The exhumation, which is being carried out with UN support, began Friday in the village of Kocho. Murad's official website said it marks the first exhumation of a mass grave containing the remains of Yazidis, a religious minority targeted for extermination by the extremists.

Daesh militants rampaged across Sinjar in 2014, killing Yazidi men and abducting thousands of women and children. Many followers

of the minority faith are still missing, after women were forced into sexual slavery and boys were indoctrinated in extremist ideology.

"I pay my condolence to the Yazidis and the whole humanity. There is not a single Yazidi family that didn't taste the bitterness of this extermination," said Murad. "They all lost their loved ones, their properties and their dreams, and especially in this village," she said.

Murad was one of an estimated 3,000 Yazidi women and girls who were kidnapped and sold into sexual slavery. She was raped, beaten and tortured before she managed to escape after three months in captivity.

Over 70 mass graves have been discovered in Sinjar since it was liberated from Daesh

in November 2015.

In November, UN investigators said they have verified the location of more than 200 mass grave sites from the time of Daesh's rule in northern Iraq, containing the bodies of between 6,000 and 12,000 victims.

Nada Selo, an activist from Kocho, lamented the slow pace of efforts to identify and recover victims.

"Negligence has been going on for four years and until now. The people were hoping during all this time to see their relatives alive. So honestly, this is a huge disappointment for us as Yazidis, and it is a real tragedy," she said.

A statement issued earlier this week by Murad, global Yazidi NGO Yazda and their

joint legal counsel Amal Clooney welcomed the process in Kocho. They expressed hope it would be part of a "comprehensive effort which will result in the exhumation of all ISIS mass graves in Sinjar and beyond, the return of victims' remains to their families and the investigation of the relevant crimes, leading to the prosecution of the responsible ISIS militants."

The group is on the verge of losing the last area it controls in Syria as U.S.-backed fighters squeeze the extremists in the village of Baghouz near the Iraqi border. Over the past months a number of Yazidi women and children have been freed in eastern Syria.

(Source: AP)

Arab League must re-evaluate Syria membership suspension: Ambassador

Syrian Ambassador to Lebanon Ali Abdel Karim Ali says his country must return to the Arab League, calling on the 22-member regional organization to reconsider "its wrong decision to suspend Syria's membership."

"The Arab League needs Syria because it cannot function well without it. The organization has violated its charter by suspending Syria's membership in the organization," Arabic-language online newspaper Elnashra quoted Ali as saying on Friday.

He added that the Arab League made this decision under pressure from the United States and Europe.

"It has become clear that many Arab countries noticed that they have an interest to resume their diplomatic ties with Syria and to return the country to the organization," Ali said.

Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad said on February 3 that his country will eventually return to the Arab League, stressing that the Damascus government will never surrender to blackmail or accept conditions for the restoration of its membership to the regional organization.

"Those who are trying to ignore Syria or to impose conditions for its return to the Arab League will not succeed, since Syria will not surrender to blackmail and is not primarily concerned with anything other than its domestic problems," Mekdad said.

He added that certain anti-Syria decisions are being made by some Arab states on the instructions of extra-regional powers.

The Arab League suspended Syria's membership in November 2011, citing alleged crackdown by Damascus on opposition protests. Syria denounced the move as "illegal and a violation of the organization's charter."

The issue of possible restoration of Syria's membership in the Arab League comes especially after a recent move by some Arab countries to re-open their embassies in Damascus.

Bahrain's Foreign Ministry announced in a statement on December 28, 2018 that work at the kingdom's embassy in the Syrian Arab Republic was going on while the embassy of the Syrian Arab Republic to Bahrain was carrying out its duties and flights connecting the two countries were operational without interruption.

The United Arab Emirates had earlier officially reopened its embassy in Damascus.

The Emirati Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation said the reopening of its embassy "reaffirms the keenness of the United Arab Emirates to restore relations between the two friendly countries to their normal course."

The move "will strengthen and activate the Arab role in supporting the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic and to prevent the dangers of regional interference in Syrian Arab affairs," the ministry said.

(Souce: agencies)

Group seeking to overthrow Kim behind North Korea embassy raid in Spain: Washington Post

A dissident organization committed to overthrowing North Korean leader Kim Jong Un was behind a raid on the North Korean embassy in Spain last month, The Washington Post reported, quoting people familiar with the planning and execution of the mission.

The newspaper, which did not further identify its sources, identified the group as Cheollima Civil Defense, which also goes by the name Free Joseon. It said the group came to prominence in 2017 after evacuating a nephew of Kim from Macau when potential threats to his life surfaced.

The Post's sources said the group did not act in coordination with any governments and U.S. intelligence agencies would have been especially reluctant to be involved given the sensitive timing of the mission ahead of a second summit between Kim and U.S. President Donald Trump in Hanoi from Feb. 27-28.

According to Spanish media accounts, broadly confirmed by a Spanish Foreign Ministry source, a group of unidentified men entered North Korea's embassy in Madrid on Feb. 22, bound and gagged staff, and drove off four hours later with computers.

There has been no claim of responsibility.

The dissident group identified by the Washington Post could not be reached for comment and its purported website has made no mention of any involvement in the raid.

On Feb. 25 the website posted a statement saying the group had "received a request for help from comrades in a certain Western country" and that "it was a highly dangerous situation but (we) responded." The group said an important announcement would be coming that week, but no details of any operation have been released.

The Madrid embassy is where North Korea's chief working-level negotiator in talks with the United States, Kim Hyok Chol, was ambassador until 2017.

Pakistan women's march organizers highlight online death threats

Organizers of an International Women's Day march in Pakistan say they have had death and rape threats on social media over the event, which prompted complaints from some conservative groups.

Nighat Daad told Reuters that the march organizers are looking into filing a complaint with Pakistan's Federal Investigation Authority about the online harassment.

"It has gone too far in terms of death and rape threats to the organizers and also to the marchers," Daad said, adding that one of the threatening accounts had been suspended by Twitter.

The event, which attracted tens of thousands of women on March 8, was only the second of its kind in Pakistan, which a Thomson Reuters Foundation poll found to be the sixth most dangerous country for women in 2018.

A Human Rights Watch report last year estimated that 1,000 "honor killings" - the practice of relatives murdering girls or women because they think the victim has brought shame or dishonour on the family - take place in Pakistan each year.

Another march organizer, who asked not to be identified, said the backlash "shows that this collective organization of women has threatened the patriarchal forces."

Pakistan has experienced a surge in social media usage with more than 40 million Facebook users. The rapid growth has sparked an online debate about misogyny, with some women highlighting daily hate and pornographic messaging.

(Source: Reuters)

Sarri seeks cutting edge from Chelsea in home stretch

Chelsea have found defensive stability in recent weeks and must focus on sharpening their attacking edge in the home stretch of the Premier League season as they chase a top-four finish, manager Maurizio Sarri has said.

Sarri's side have conceded 12 goals in their three league defeats this year but have tightened up at the back since, letting in only two goals in their last seven matches in all competitions.

"We're looking consistent in terms of defensive solidity. We're conceding less... in this moment the most important thing for us is to be solid," Sarri told the club's website ahead of Sunday's league trip to 11th-placed Everton.

"We're more consistent with results, but not at the moment with performances, especially in the offensive phase. Sometimes we've played with good quality, sometimes not. We need to start in the offensive phase playing every match with same ideas."

The sixth-placed London club have scored league 50 goals so far, the fewest among teams in the top six and Sarri is well aware of the need to regain their cutting edge.

"At the moment we are not able to do this, because sometimes we are without movement without the ball, sometimes we didn't attack balls in the box very well," the Italian added.

"Sometimes we didn't attack spaces behind the line of the opponent well. We need to have consistency in this."

(Source: Reuters)

Joachim Low hits back at criticism for ousting Bayern Munich trio

Joachim Low defended his decision to omit Jerome Boateng, Mats Hummels and Thomas Müller from Germany's squad. The national coach has received a lot of backlash for the way he informed the trio.

In his first comments since ousting World Cup winners Jerome Boateng, Mats Hummels and Thomas Müller from the German national team, Joachim L'w hit back at critics who questioned the way he delivered them the news.

His decision to no longer include the Bayern Munich trio in his squad drew a backlash last week. Many, including Bayern and Germany defender Joshua Kimmich, openly questioned the course of action.

On Wednesday, Sport Bild also reported that L'w, who flew to Munich 10 days ago to inform the three players in person of his decision, only spent a handful of minutes with each player.

"I find it strange when people make judgments about respect and values even though they did not take part in the discussions. Time is also no indicator for the quality of a conversation," L'w said at a press conference in Frankfurt.

L'w also said he didn't understand the argument that he declared the international careers of Boateng, Hummels and Müller, who have spent a decade with the national team together, effectively over.

"I would have been walking on eggshells if I said to players with 80, 90 or 100 caps, 'We'll see how the young players develop.' I want to be more straightforward with such players."

The Germany coach also said meeting Müller, Boateng and Hummels in person was of "most importance."

"It was extremely difficult for me emotionally because we have so much to thank those players for," L'w said, adding they were "utterly disappointed" by his decision to drop them.

All three players voiced their displeasure with L'w's decision last week. Müller posted a two-minute video where he said he "cannot understand the decision," while the others shared their dismay with long messages on Twitter.

Müller has made 100 appearances for Germany in his career, the 11th player in history to eclipse the century mark. Boateng has 76 career appearances, while Mats Hummels has made 70.

(Source: DW)

Bucks, down 20 at half, rout Heat in historic rally

There was no yelling and screaming in the Milwaukee locker room at halftime.

A little bit of film got reviewed, a couple of adjustments got discussed and the Bucks believed a 20-point deficit could be overcome.

They were right.

Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 33 points and finished an assist shy of a triple-double, and the Bucks tied a franchise record for second-half comebacks on the way to beating the Miami Heat 113-98 on Friday night.

"It doesn't matter if you're down 20, 15, 10," said Antetokounmpo, who also had 16 rebounds and 9 assists. "We're going to keep playing hard. It's a process. You've got to win games like this. You've got to face adversity when you're playing on the road. In the playoffs, it's not going to be easy. We want to be a great team, and that's why we keep playing hard."

The Bucks were 1-100 all time -- 0-77 on the road -- when trailing by 20 or more at the half. They trailed 72-52 at the half against the New York Knicks on Feb. 18, 1977, and won 124-123.

On Friday, it was Heat 62, Bucks 42 at the half.

From there, Bucks 71, Heat 36. Milwaukee also became the first team in NBA history to trail by at least 20 at the break and wind up winning by at least 15 points.

"We lost our energy in the second half," said Justise Winslow, who led Miami with 20 points -- all before intermission.

The Heat's lead over Orlando and Charlotte for the No. 8 spot in the Eastern Conference was trimmed to just one game.

Hassan Whiteside had 14 points and 11 rebounds for the Heat, Josh Richardson scored 11 points and Dwyane Wade was one of four players with 10 for Miami. Wade bruised his right hip on a hard fall late in the third quarter.

Khris Middleton scored 21 and Eric Bledsoe had 17 for the NBA-best Bucks, who improved to 52-17.

Antetokounmpo was in total control of the second half, grabbing an offensive rebound with 2:40 left and throwing a no-look.

(Source: ESPN)

Manchester City success judged on winning Champions League - Guardiola



group a success.

"I don't think I'm Pep so I have to win everything, it's only if we don't put everything in to try it. When we are in these positions, there are not many complaints. When I speak with my chairman and CEO there is credit

for what we've done.

"After that everyone can judge, people can say it's a failure but what can I do. Accept it and move on."

City face a hectic schedule following next week's international break, including three

games against Tottenham in the space of just 11 days.

Guardiola is without Kevin De Bruyne, John Stones, Fernandinho, Vincent Kompany and Benjamin Mendy for the sixth-round clash at Swansea. But he is hoping they will benefit from extra time off and could be ready for City's return to action in the Premier League on March 30.

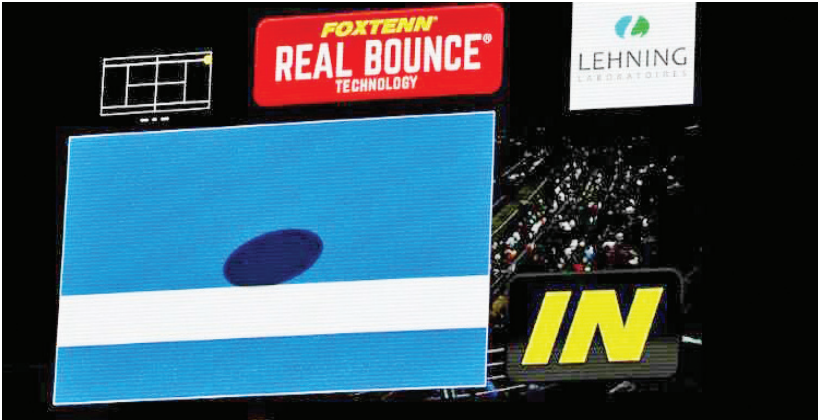
"I want them to come back as quickly as possible, to get back to the routine," he said. "Always the first game back is always dangerous, especially away, when you play at home, it's a little bit easier, but Fulham away will be difficult.

"People can be distracted by the situation, when we come back, with the semifinals maybe of the FA Cup -- if we go through -- hypothetical semifinals of the cup, that's why we will try.

"It's not the first time, we change the competitions, we change the dynamic, and we will have three or four training sessions before the Fulham game and we will try to come back to our principles and what we have to do. We did it in the past, we did it quite well and we will continue with that."

(Source: ESPN)

Moment of truth: tech firms in tennis line-call battle



A behind-the-scenes battle at the world's top tennis tournaments pits an upstart newcomer and an established star.

Hawk-Eye, the British firm that innovated ball-tracking technology, has been ruling the sector for more than a decade.

Its famous video simulations of contested line calls at Grand Slam tournaments are known to tennis lovers around the world.

They are produced by computer-linked tracking cameras that calculate a flight path and project the ball's landing point.

But start-up FoxTenn from Spain believes it can do better by eliminating doubt from the line-call business.

Hawk-Eye, which operates a dozen or so cameras placed around the tennis court, officially acknowledges a three-millimetre or so margin of error in its simulations of where the tennis ball would bounce.

For FoxTenn that tiny margin is too wide and it says it can offer real-time technology that eliminates any room for debate.

"What we are offering is the technology of truth and transparency, with the actual impact of the ball on the court," FoxTenn president Javier Simon told AFP.

In fact, FoxTenn's 40 or so cameras around the court, backed up by scanners and lasers, effectively capture the moment of impact of the ball, without need for any simulation.

Simon says the technology has been given a zero-error rating in a study approved by the main tennis federations, the ATP, ITF and the WTA.

Simon says that so far around 30 men's

and women's tennis tournaments have adopted the FoxTenn system, or about 20 percent of the professional circuit.

"Our goal is to equip all the tournaments," he said, particularly the top-tier Masters 1000 events and the four Grand Slams.

Within a few months the line-call contracts will be coming to an end at the nine Masters events, and FoxTenn is lobbying hard for a chance to prove its worth.

One tournament which already uses FoxTenn, Marseille Open, found that initial difficulties were overcome after two seasons.

"At the start, I liked the idea of a challenger for Hawk-Eye, which had a bit of a monopoly," said tournament director Jean-Francois Caujolle.

"FoxTenn seemed lighter to install, a bit cheaper and had real-time images, which is good.

"At the start it wasn't fast enough, but they have made progress, and it's very good. Maybe it will make Hawk-Eye renovate."

Players have other things to focus on and are rarely directly concerned by behind-the-scenes technology.

Roger Federer said he has no idea whether he has been exposed to FoxTenn.

"I doubt it. Yeah, I don't even know about it," he told AFP.

"You know the tournaments I've played. I guess there they haven't used it. Hasn't it been Hawk-Eye all the way?"

French world number 19 Gael Monfils says he is used to Hawk-Eye but thinks FoxTenn may hold a potential edge.

(Source: AFP)

U.S. federation defends support for women's team after lawsuit



The U.S. Soccer Federation defended on Friday its treatment of the World Cup-winning national women's team and said it was surprised at a recent lawsuit (USWNT) alleging gender discrimination.

All 28 members of the U.S. women's squad were named as plaintiffs in the lawsuit that was filed in federal court in Los Angeles on International Women's Day last week.

It includes complaints about wages and nearly every other aspect of the team's working conditions.

Federation president Carlos Cordeiro said in an open letter that the body had made a sincere effort to provide the very best resources possible to the women's team.

"U.S. Soccer believes that all female athletes deserve fair and equitable pay, and we strive to meet this core value at all times," he added.

The lawsuit comes just three months before the U.S. women open their World Cup title defense in France.

The players said they have been consistently paid less money than their male counterparts even though their performance has been superior to the men's team.

According to the lawsuit, filed three years after several players made a similar complaint with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, U.S. soccer has "utterly failed to promote gender equality."

Cordeiro, however, said the soccer federation continues to be a champion for the women's game in the United States and on the global stage.

"From our proactive efforts to grow and invest in women's soccer at every level in

the U.S., to advocating for the improvement and increased support of the women's game worldwide, U.S. Soccer is active, committed and passionate in its support today and will be into the long-term future."

Cordeiro added that the federation had in recent years increased its investment in the USWNT program and worked in close partnership with the players to ensure they have everything they need.

"We have added additional technical and high-performance staff focused only on the USWNT, provided additional charter flights to improve travel, and created two elite women's international tournaments to provide high-level competition in the United States, among other efforts to support the team," he said.

"We also continue to expand our investment in female player development programs, including our eight Youth National Team programs and the Girl's Development Academy."

Cordeiro also pointed to a 2017 agreement with the women's team.

"In April of 2017, we agreed to a fair and equitable collective bargaining agreement with the Women's National Team, which included a contract structure that the players specifically requested to provide them with a guaranteed salary and benefits.

"At no point since that time have players raised concerns about the CBA itself, and we continue to work with them in good faith."

Cordeiro said he had spoken on Wednesday with some of the veteran players to better understand their thoughts and concerns.

(Source: Eurosport)

FIFA votes for new Club World Cup, Euro clubs confirm boycott

FIFA will go ahead with a new 24-team Club World Cup starting in 2021, its President Gianni Infantino said on Friday, setting the world soccer governing body in conflict with Europe's top clubs.

Infantino, speaking at a news conference, said FIFA had made the decision at its council meeting on Friday.

The competition, however, immediately faced a boycott from Europe's leading clubs, which include the likes of Real Madrid and Manchester United.

The European Club Association (ECA), which represents 232 European clubs, including all the major teams, wrote a letter asking Infantino not to make a decision now and saying they would not take part in the 2021 tournament.

Following Infantino's announcement, a spokesperson for the ECA said: "ECA clubs will not participate in 2021 CWC and will assess participation in editions of the competition post-2024."

UEFA, European soccer's governing body, later said it had a duty to protect the health of players and that its members of the FIFA Council had unanimously voted against the proposal.

"UEFA shares ECA's view that the International Match Calendar in 2021 does not provide any realistic option to stage a 24-team Club World Cup and that it should further-



more not be played at a time when players should have a well-deserved rest period," it said in a statement.

The tournament would be held instead of the Confeder-

ations Cup in June 2021. No host nation has been decided yet, Infantino said.

"We went through a consultation process, spoke with everyone, some agree, others disagree, you have different views and positions," said Infantino.

"I am feeling very positive from the discussions and I am sure that at the end we will be very happy," he said.

"I understand the situation in Europe with stakeholders, the leagues, the clubs, small clubs, big clubs, the players' union -- it's more complex than other countries in the world.

"In football we are not waging war against each other -- I am confident we can have a good and fruitful cooperation," he added.

Infantino said he believed a 48-team World Cup in 2022 in Qatar is "feasible", adding that FIFA would continue to study the options.

"If it happens -- fantastic. If it doesn't happen -- fantastic also," he said.

No decision will be made on expanding that tournament, with possible additional host nations, until June, Infantino said.

The FIFA Council also decided to use VAR video review technology at June's Women's World Cup in France.

(Source: Reuters)

Iran learn rivals at FIBA World Cup 2019

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran have learned their opponents at the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2019 Draw, took place in front of 8,000 spectators at Shenzhen Bay Arena on Saturday.

Team Melli have been drawn along with world's second-ranked Spain, Puerto Rico and Tunisia in Group C.

Ivory Coast, Poland, Venezuela and hosts China are in Group A.

Group B consists of Russia, Argentina, South Korea and Nigeria.

Serbia have been drawn along with the Philippines, Italy and Angola.

The U.S., world's No. 1-ranked team by FIBA, are pitted against Turkey, Czech Re-

public and Japan.

Greece are in Group F along with New Zealand, Brazil and Montenegro.

France, Germany, Jordan and Dominican Republic are in Group G and Canada have been drawn in Group H along with Senegal, Lithuania and Australia.

The competition will be held in China from 31 Aug. to 15 Sept.

The 2019 FIBA Basketball World Cup will be the 18th tournament of the FIBA Basketball World Cup for men's national basketball teams.

Rescheduled from 2018 to 2019, this edition will be the first FIBA Basketball World Cup since 1967 that will not occur in



the same year as the FIFA World Cup, but a year following the latter.

Also, the group stage will expand from 24 to 32 teams. The top 8 teams, including Japan as the hosts of the 2020 Summer Olympics (and the top 2 teams from each of the Americas and Europe; and the top

team from each of Africa, Asia and Oceania) in this competition will qualify for the men's basketball event in the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo.

Both the Czech Republic and Montenegro will make their first appearances in the FIBA World Cup as debutants.

Arash Miresmaeili elected as Iran's Judo Federation chief



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Dual world featherweight judo champion Arash Miresmaeili has been elected as new president of Iran's Judo Federation on Saturday.

Miresmaeili has been elected for a four-year term till 2023 by receiving 32 votes out of 43 votes in the presidential elections held at the Iran's Academy Olympic in Tehran.

He replaced Mohammad Dera-khshan 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.

At the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, Miresmaeili was disqualified for weighing in at nearly two kilograms above the limit for his weight class of his under-66 kg match against an Israeli opponent Ehud Vaks in the first round.

He also was Iranian delegation's flag-bearer in Athens.

Persepolis back in Iran Professional League top



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Persepolis football team defeated Sepidrood 3-1 and moved top of the Iran Professional League (IPL) table on Saturday.

Ali Alipour opened the scoring for the visiting team just 10 minutes into the match in Rasht's Sardar-e Jangal Stadium.

Ahmad Nourollahi made it 2-0 in the 31st minute and Siamak Nemati scored Persepolis's third goal in the 40th minute.

Mehrdad Bayrami pulled a goal back in the 67th minute and also missed a penalty

one minute later.

"First, I would like to congratulate the Iranian for Norouz. I am satisfied with our performance. We created several opportunities in this match but failed to score in the second half. I think it's important we finish the year with leadership," Persepolis coach Branko Ivankovic said.

Persepolis moved up top of the table with 45 points, followed by Tractor Sazi with 43 points.

Sepahan sit third with 42 points.

Asian glory awaits in final showdown

United Arab Emirates head coach Mohamed Almaazmi has called for his side to complete their AFC Beach Soccer Championship Thailand 2019 campaign with a perfect record, ahead of their highly anticipated tournament decider against Japan on Sunday.

The UAE boss has steered his side to five straight wins to reach the final for the second successive edition of the tournament, and seal their place at this year's FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup in Paraguay at the first time of asking.

The results keep alive Almaazmi's stated pre-tournament ambition of winning every game in Thailand, and he remains fully focused on delivering in the biggest match Asian beach soccer has to offer.

"I don't have easy goals and hard goals. With me, it's the same," he said.

"I reached the goal to go to Paraguay, and now I am preparing to reach the big goal of winning this important championship. This is me."

Although UAE suffered a 7-2 defeat against Islamic Republic of Iran in the final of the previous edition in Malaysia, Almaazmi said they achieved their objectives in that campaign.

This time, however, only an Asian title will do, and the Emiratis are 36 minutes of play away from achieving that dream.

"In 2017 my goal, at that time, was to reach the (FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup in the) Bahamas. Not to be champions," Almaazmi explained.

"Now, I want to get the trophy of these tournament."

The 2017 edition of the tournament was the first Asian Beach Soccer Championship to be organized by the AFC, but teams have been competing for the



Asian title since 2006.

UAE won the title twice in the pre-AFC era, and UAE star Waleed Beshr - who scored his side's winner in the 3-2 semi-final win over Oman - said becoming the first three-time Asian champions provides significant motivation.

"The first goal of UAE team to reach the World Cup has been reached. The second goal is to take this trophy," said Beshr, one of the shining lights of the UAE campaign.

"We want to be champions, especially because if we get the trophy tomorrow it means we will have three Asian titles (including the pre-AFC era).

"We want to be the first team to have three trophies in Asia."

Standing between UAE and that objective are Japan, who have also won five games out of five, including a no-nonsense 6-0 win over Palestine in Friday's semi-final.

With Ozu Moreira producing another standout display, Palestine were no match for the East Asians, but

Japan head coach Ruy Ramos was left disappointed by his side's performance, which came just 24 hours after an epic 3-2 extra-time win over defending champions Islamic Republic of Iran.

Ramos acknowledges his side is working hard, and getting results, but believes they are capable of more than they have shown so far in Thailand.

"The players played 120 percent against Iran, and also against Palestine they gave 120 percent effort," he said.

"The score doesn't matter; I'm focused on a better performance. Beach soccer isn't about winning 10-0 or making a big score, the players should be focused on performing better."

Ramos believes a day off to recharge the batteries may be crucial for his side, as they look to claim the title after finishing third in 2017.

"I'm expecting to have any interesting game tomorrow, of course. After our win against (Islamic Republic of) Iran, we had a lot of tension, and after that it seems like we have been keeping a lot of tension," he said.

"I think we can do better than yesterday's match. I'm expecting us to have a fresh mindset, and I'm hoping we can challenge more and play like we are supposed to play."

"Of course, it's a final, so it will be a difficult game for both us, but we will do our best."

With no disciplinary issues affecting either side, both UAE and Japan will be at full strength for Sunday's decider, with the winners to leave the picturesque backdrop of Pattaya's Bali Hai Pier with the title of Asia's beach soccer kings.

(Source: the-afc)

Ansarifard feeling the 'pressure' to score goals for Nottingham Forest

Striker Karim Ansarifard admits the pressure is on to find the back of the net for Nottingham Forest.

The Iran international opened his account for the Reds last weekend, when he came off the bench to play his part in a 3-0 win over Hull City.

It was Ansarifard's first Forest goal, in his seventh appearance for the club, as he reacted quickest when Joe Lolley's effort crashed back off the post.

Martin O'Neill's men couldn't keep their winning run at home going, however, as they then fell to Aston Villa on Wednesday night - a match which saw Ansarifard make his full debut.

But the 28-year-old is still pleased to have got off the mark on the goalscoring front.

"It was a great feeling," he told the club's

matchday program, before the midweek fixture.

"It was a difficult game for us because we know how important the game was and the three points were for the team."

"Everyone was trying their best to get the three points and we did a good job."

"Of course, it was my first goal for the club and I was so happy."

"It has taken a while, waiting for my debut and being away on international duty, so I was waiting for that moment to score."

"It is my job to score, I love scoring goals and it is my role in the team."

"I am always trying my best to give everything for the team, so Saturday was good for me to get one assist and one goal, and also the team performance was perfect."

Ansarifard made the move to the City

Ground in November as a free agent, having been released by Olympiacos.

However, he was unavailable for a spell around the turn of the year as he was called up for his country for the 2019 AFC Asian Cup.

He remains determined though, to give Reds supporters something to cheer.

"I wouldn't say it was relief but there is pressure to score in every game," he said of breaking his duck.

"The fans expect a lot from us and they want us to win every single game, to get the result to make them happy."

"That is the most important thing, to make the fans happy."

"In football it is like this as you play for your team-mates and for the fans to give them happiness."



"All of the time, you have that pressure on your shoulders and it is a good pressure, but you have to manage it, control your emotions and make sure you are always getting better with every training session."

(Source: Nottinghampost)

Vouria Ghafouri claims he was 'wrongly' excluded from World Cup squad

TASNIM — Iran international winger Vouria Ghafouri claims he was 'wrongly' excluded from the 2018 FIFA World Cup squad.

Ghafouri was left off Iran's 24-man squad for the World Cup. Team Melli coach Carlos Queiroz did not say why Ghafouri, a Esteghlal FC right-back, was not included.

"I think Queiroz made mistake for not inviting me to the national team. It's the worst memory I have ever had in my life. I don't know why I was left out the team because I was well-prepared for the competition," Ghafouri said.

"I cannot say anything more. Queiroz decided not to take me to the World Cup, but I think I could help Team Melli in Russia. I think Queiroz made mistake," he added.

Ghafouri was invited to Iran national football team in the 2019 AFC Asian Cup, where Team Melli failed to advance to the final match.

Cannavaro named new head coach of China

Italian FIFA World Cup-winning captain Fabio Cannavaro was named head coach of China PR on Friday.

The 45-year-old former defender will combine the job with being head coach of Chinese Super League (CSL) giants Guangzhou Evergrande.



He takes the post vacated in January by his mentor and compatriot Marcello Lippi, under whom Cannavaro lifted the FIFA World Cup in 2006.

The 70-year-old Lippi will be a consultant under the new coaching set-up named for next week's China Cup, the Chinese Football Association (CFA) said.

"The association has carefully made this decision based on comprehensive research of his experience and technical and tactical style, familiarity with Chinese players and other factors," the CFA said.

Cannavaro's first match in charge of the national side will be on Thursday, when the hosts play Thailand in the China Cup, which also involves Uruguay and Uzbekistan.

Cannavaro knows Chinese football well, having coached Tianjin Quanjian in 2016-2017, before taking the Evergrande job in November 2017.

(Source: AP)

India to host 2020 Finals

Kuala Lumpur: India will host the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup 2020, FIFA announced on Friday.

"We are delighted to announce that India has been confirmed as the host of the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup in 2020," President Gianni Infantino said after the FIFA Council meeting in Miami, USA on Friday.

This will be the second FIFA tournament India will be hosting, after the U-17 Men's World Cup in 2017.

All India Football Federation General Secretary Kushal Das told Indian media: "We are thankful to FIFA for giving the right to host the U-17 Women's World Cup. This will raise the profile of women's football in the country."

"We have been giving a lot of emphasis on the development of women's football in the country. So we bid for the U-17 Women's World Cup and now we have got it."

As host country, India automatically qualify for the 16-team showpiece event.

The U-17 women's tournament began in 2008, when New Zealand hosted it. Spain are the current champions and they had beaten Mexico 2-1 in the final in Uruguay last year. The tournament in India will be the seventh edition.

Asian teams are the most successful teams in the tournament, with DPR Korea (2008 and 2016) having won it twice and Japan (2014) and Korea Republic (2010) having also emerged champions.

September's 2019 AFC U-16 Women's Championship in Thailand will serve as the Qualifiers for Asia with the top three teams qualifying.

(Source: the-afc)

AFC expresses condolences on passing of former Uzbekistan FA President

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) President Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa has expressed his condolences on the passing of Mirabror Usmanov, the former President of the Uzbekistan Football Association.

Shaikh Salman paid tribute to the immense contributions of Mr Usmanov, who was the Uzbekistan Football Association President from 2006-17 and the President of the National Olympic Committee of Uzbekistan (2013-17).

"Mr Usmanov will always be remembered for his services and commitment for Uzbekistan and Asian football, for which he was honored with the FIFA Order of Merit in 2014," said the AFC President.

Shaikh Salman expressed his condolences to the Uzbekistan Football Association and to Mr Usmanov's family and friends.

(Source: the-afc)

INTERNATIONAL DAILY
www.tehrantimes.com

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» www.eshterak.ir Distributor: Padideh Novin Co.
Tel: 88911433
» Webmaster: webmaster@tehrantimes.com
» Printed at: Hamshahri No. 3 - ISSN: 1017-94

Tehrantimes79

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No. 18, Bimeh Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran
P.O. Box: 14155-4843
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Keep your faith secure by charity, and guard your wealth in a strong fortress through alms, and keep the waves of distress and disaster away by benediction.

Imam Ali (AS)

Image of the Year Celebration announces winners

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – The 16th edition of the Image of the Year Celebration announced the winners during a special ceremony held at the Iranian Artists Forum in Tehran on Friday.

The Best Image of the Year Award was presented to the film “I’m Not Depressed” by Mohammad Arsalan, and Mehdi Pedramkhu was named the Best Photographer of the Year.



Winners pose after accepting their awards during the closing ceremony of the 16th Image of the Year Celebration at the Iranian Artists Forum in Tehran on March 15, 2019 (Honaronline/Ramona Mirian)

In the photo section, Seyyed Mohammad-Saeid Sajjadi won the best award best photojournalist, while Shadi Kameli received the award in social documentary photography.

Masud Shahrestani was honored for his photos in art events and Parisa Hajjari won the award in sports photography.

Sepideh Seifi won the best award in the cartoon section and the award in the poster section went to Faezeh Shamimi.

The 16th Image of the Year Celebration opened in the Iranian Artists Forum on February 22 with the display of a selection of photos and the screening of a number of films.

Iran’s “Doch” to compete in Zlin Film Festival

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – “Doch” by Iranian director Amir Mashhadiabbas will go on screen at the 59th Zlin Film Festival in Czech, Iran’s Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) that is the producer of the film announced on Saturday.



A scene from “Doch” by Iranian director Amir Mashhadi Abbas.

“Doch” is about Gholamreza, a teenage boy who wants to have a new bicycle but he cannot afford to buy it. Therefore, he attends a contest organized by the Literacy Movement Organization to teach the last illiterate person in a village to raise the funds for the bicycle. But the last illiterate is 90-year-old woman with bad hearing and poor eyesight.

The Zlin Film Festival will be held in the Czech city from May 24 to June 1.

Iranshahr to provide theatergoers with “An Hour of Tranquility”

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – Iranian director Seyyed Javad Roshan plans to stage French playwright Florian Zeller’s “An Hour of Tranquility” (Une Heure de Tranquillité) at Tehran’s Iranshahr Hall on April 8.

The play is about Michel, a middle-aged man who is passionate about jazz. When he finds a rare music album, all he needs is one quiet hour to listen to it. But it seems his wife and son, his neighbors, plumber and the whole world have other plans.

Amir-Mehdi Juleh, Arastu Khoshrazm, Vahid Nafar, Masumeh Karimi and Elaheh Shahparast are the main members of the cast for the play, which will be on stage for a month.

Tajik poet Farzona receives lifetime achievement award in Iran

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – Tajik poet Inoyat Hojiev, mostly known as Farzona, was honored with a lifetime achievement award at the 13th edition of the Journalists Poetry Book of the Year Award in Tehran on Friday.

Farzona was unable to attend the awards ceremony held at the Book City Institute, so former Iranian cultural attaché in Tajikistan Ebrahim Khodayar received the award on behalf of the poet. “Persian-speaking nations’ return to the joint cultural home is the sweetest fruit of Farzona’s poetry garden,” Khodayar said in a short speech he made at the ceremony.

He praised the Iranian journalists for organizing the awards and noted, “Today, the role of cultural and literary centers is as significant as political and military centers, and perhaps the cultural centers are even more effective.”

The ceremony went on with the screening of a video message from Farzona, in which she congratulated the organizers in advance on Noruz, the Iranian New Year.

Farzona, 59, is influenced by Persian poets Ferdowsi and Rumi. Her works have been compared with poems by contemporary Iranian poet Forugh Farrokhzad, therefore she is occasionally referred to as the “Forugh of Tajikistan”.

This year’s Journalists Poetry Book of the Year Award went to “Rain with Its Thin and Sad Fingers” by Mehdi Mozaffari Savoji.



A video shows Tajik poet Farzona talking to the audience after being honored for her lifetime achievements during the Journalists Poetry Book of the Year Award at the Book City Institute in Tehran on March 14, 2019.

Parisian gallery displays works by Iranian artist Nima Zaare Nahandi



An artwork by Nima Zaare Nahandi from his “Le Premier” on view at the Galerie Nathalie Obadia in Paris.

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – The Galerie Nathalie Obadia in Paris is displaying a collection of artworks by Iranian artist Nima Zaare Nahandi in the exhibit entitled “Le Premier”.

A graduate of mathematics from the University of Tehran, Nima continued his studies in Paris and graduated from the Ecole Nationale des Beaux Arts de Paris in 2010.

During his residency at Casa de Velasquez in Madrid (2010-2012), Nima developed a precise technique, oriented on the finesse of details where his subjects evolve with time, and the final rendering is visible only after several months.

“This series articulates the essential moments in the evolution of human cognitive capacities or his fundamental aptitudes such

as abstraction, language and the creation of culture,” the gallery has written in a statement.

“The visual elements in his works refer to essential notions that arise over the course of this narrative. The first image of the series depicts the moment when a human being enters a territory and appropriates it,” the statement adds.

One of his artworks depicts a tree trunk. “The tree trunk has been photographed at different times of year from the same vantage point. Slight fluctuations of light are visible in each image. This choice reflects the relative immobility of plants compared to human and animal mobility,” the statement concludes.

The exhibit opened on March 14 and will be running until May 4.

Persian studies center opens at University of Belgrade



The head of the Faculty of Philology at the University of Belgrade, Ljiljana Markovic (R), and Iranian Ambassador Hossein Molla-Abdollahi pose after the opening ceremony of a Persian studies center at the university on March 15, 2019. (IRNA)

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — A Persian studies center has opened at the University of Belgrade in the Serbian capital, the Persian service of IRNA reported on Saturday.

The head of the Faculty of Philology at the University of Belgrade, Ljiljana Markovic, and Iranian Ambassador Hossein Molla-Abdollahi attended the opening ceremony.

Molla-Abdollahi expressed his thanks to Markovic for her cooperation in establishing the center and praised the officials of the university for their interest in Persian culture and literature.

He also said that the center will

function as a favorite haunt of students, professors and Persian language aficionados, as well as a place for periodic cultural and academic meetings.

Markovic on her part said that the center will play a key role in disseminating rich Persian literature in Serbia.

Markovic visited the Sadi Foundation, a Tehran-based organization that promotes the Persian language abroad, in April 2017.

The establishment of the center is an outcome of a memorandum of understanding signed between Markovic and officials of the foundation.

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Lori Loughlin dropped from Hallmark channel roles after cheating scandal

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Crown Media Family Networks, the company that owns the Hallmark cable channel, stopped working with its “Garage Sale Mysteries” star, Lori Loughlin, after she was charged in a college admissions scandal, it said on Thursday.

“We are no longer working with Lori Loughlin and have stopped development of all productions that air on the Crown Media Family Network channels” involving the actress, the company said in a statement.

Hallmark’s announcement follows an earlier one from LVMH’s Sephora beauty chain, which said it was ending its partnership



Actress Lori Loughlin arrives at the People’s Choice Awards 2017 in Los Angeles, California, U.S., January 18, 2017. (Reuters/Danny Moloshok/File Photo)

with Loughlin’s daughter, Olivia.

Olivia Giannulli, the 19-year-old daughter of “Full House” actress Loughlin and designer Mossimo Giannulli, is a social media “influencer” who goes by the name Olivia Jade online.

Products from her makeup collaboration had been removed from Sephora’s website by Thursday afternoon. It was not immediately clear whether her products were available in stores.

“After careful review of recent developments, we have made the decision to end the Sephora Collection partnership with Olivia

Jade, effective immediately,” a Sephora representative wrote in an email on Thursday.

A representative for Olivia Giannulli could not immediately be reached for comment.

Loughlin and Mossimo Giannulli were accused on Tuesday of paying bribes of \$500,000 in a scheme that involved cheating on college entrance exams to help their daughter and another daughter, Isabella Giannulli, get into the University of Southern California, according to court documents.

Loughlin and her husband were taken into federal custody and later released on separate \$1 million bonds on Wednesday.