



**Iran to spare no efforts to help Afghanistan** **2**



**Iran to unveil 112 new nuclear achievements in April** **2**



**Iran runners-up at UWW Freestyle World Cup** **15**



**Raheeno Tour & Travel Agency**  
Which incoming tour and travel agency do the biggest organisations work with? **See Page 9**

## South Pars phases 13, 22-24 inaugurated



**Nation will not give in to pressure: Rouhani** **2**

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## Steel products output rises 8% in 11 months on year

**TEHRAN** — Production of steel products in Iran rose eight percent during the eleven-month period from March 21, 2018 to February 19, 2019, IRNA reported on Sunday citing the data released by Iranian Steel Producers Association.

As reported, Iranian producers have produced 19,604 million tons of steel products during the mentioned period of time. Over 40% of crude steel produced in

Iran is exported to different markets worldwide, according to Khodadad Gharibpour, the head of Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO).

Of the 1.79-billion tons of the world's annual crude steel production, some 30 percent is exported by the producing countries, so Iran's 40-percent share of export is higher than the global figure, the official said. **→4**

## Iran sends warships to Bab-el-Mandeb Strait

**TEHRAN** — Iran's Navy has dispatched its 61st flotilla to Bab-el-Mandab Strait and the Gulf of Aden to secure maritime routes used by Iranian vessels, Chief of the Navy's Southern Fleet Afshin Tashak said on Sunday.

The flotilla, comprising the Navy's Sabalan destroyer and the Bandar Abbas logistical vessel, had set sail from the

southern port city of Bandar Abbas on Saturday, IRNA quoted Tashak as saying.

The Iranian Navy's 60th flotilla has just returned home after 52 days of a voyage in international waters. The flotilla's mission included visits to Sri Lanka and Sultan Qaboos port, the largest port in Muscat, Oman, for a four-day stay. **→2**

## Fresh U.S.-led airstrikes kill many civilians in Syria's Dayr al-Zawr

A large number of civilians, mostly women and children, have been killed after the U.S.-led coalition purportedly fighting the terrorist Takfiri Daesh group conducted fresh airstrikes in eastern Syria.

Syria's official news agency SANA, citing some local sources, reported that casualties were caused on Saturday when U.S.-led warplanes bombed Baghouz refugee camp in the eastern province of Dayr al-Zawr. The U.S.-led coalition has recently

stepped up its airstrikes in the besieged town of Baghouz, the final piece of land still held by Daesh. At least 50 people were killed and scores of others injured on Monday when U.S.-led jets targeted families fleeing the last vestiges of Daesh's territorial rule near the Iraqi border.

Earlier this month, U.S. warplanes also bombed the same troubled region with internationally-banned white phosphorus munitions, killing several people. **→13**

## Steps taken for technology and innovation improvement in 1397

By Setareh Behroozi

**TEHRAN** — Digital transformation, e-government, knowledge economy, and space-based business are amongst catch-phrases of technology in Iran during the Iranian calendar year 1397, ending on March 20.

Information technology and innovation ecosystem, as newly emerged approaches in Iran, promote efficiency and entrepreneurship, which seem attractive for both the young generation and the officials.

In mid-March, Information and Communication Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi announced that despite sanctions the ICT sector will flourish in the next Iranian calendar year 1398 (starting March 21).

Many entrepreneurs and officials eye in-

novation ecosystem and new technology as a method to transit Iran from the oil economy to a knowledge economy.

As the last issue of the newspaper in which technology page appears, here you can read some achievements and steps taken to improve technology and innovation ecosystems in Iran during the past year, 1397.

### Digital transformation keeping pace with changing world

Digital transformation was one of the keywords frequently used by the ICT minister Azari Jahromi during the past year. He believed that e-government is a crucial phase, which should be passed to reach digital transformation.

Digital transformation is the transformation of business by revamping the business strategy

or digital strategy, models, operations, products, marketing approach, objectives etc., by adopting digital technologies. This accelerates sales and growth of the business from end to end.

In March 2018, the ICT Ministry and University of Tehran announced that they are discussing the preparation of a comprehensive Digital Transformation (DT) document.

The document was planned to shed light to different aspects of DT including smart urban, administrative, executive and judicial management.

However, in December 2018, Azari Jahromi announced that 95 percent of the state-run organizations are not ready yet for the changes.

Besides technology development, the inter-relation between different organizations is important as well, he explained. **→10**

## One Israeli killed in stabbing, shooting attacks in West Bank

The Israeli military says one Israeli has been killed and two others have been wounded in shooting and stabbing attacks in the West Bank.

The attacks occurred near the Ariel junction southwest of Nablus, and the Israeli regime said they were believed to have been carried out by a Palestinian.

"One Israeli is dead," Israeli army spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Jonathan Conricus said, adding that the assailant "appears to be Palestinian."

Israeli media earlier reported that an assailant stabbed a regime soldier and managed to take his gun and drive to the Gitai Avishar junction, where he allegedly shot other people.

The alleged attacker fled the scene. Palestinian media reported that the Israeli military raided an area near the Palestinian vil-

lage of Burqin in their search for the assailant. Residents said the situation was very tense there.

Tensions have been running high in the West Bank and the blockaded Gaza Strip since December 2017, when U.S. President Donald Trump decided to recognize Jerusalem al-Quds as Israel's "capital" and moved Washington's embassy from Tel Aviv to the occupied Palestinian city.

While the Israeli regime had already been taking increasingly harsh measures against Palestinians, it has been emboldened by the Trump administration's move.

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

Human rights groups have repeatedly slammed the Tel Aviv regime for its shoot-to-kill policy

as a large number of the Palestinians killed at the scene of attacks did not pose any serious threat to Israelis.

### Israeli court orders closure of Aqsa's Rahma gate

An Israeli court has ordered the temporary closure of Bab al-Rahma (Gate of Mercy) prayer area at the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in the Old City of Jerusalem al-Quds amid recent tensions surrounding the highly sensitive holy site.

The Jerusalem al-Quds Magistrate's Court announced on Sunday that it had accepted a request by Israeli officials to close the gate while the case continues.

The Islamic Waqf (Endowment) Organization, which manages the compound's affairs, was also granted 60 days to appeal the decision. **→13**



## REPORT

Hanif Ghaffari  
Political analyst

## Anger of American citizens from the White House

Although U.S. President Donald Trump vetoed the congressional decision using his special powers, the U.S. president's move has led to anger and discontent among U.S. citizens. Currently, American citizens call the White House a symbol of the violation of democracy in the United States.

On Friday, President Trump vetoed a measure to block his national emergency declaration. The measure passed the House and Senate with bipartisan support. Numerous polls suggest Trump's decision was popular among his Republican base. But his decision to use executive authority to fund a wall along the southern border is opposed by a clear majority of the public.

During his recent actions, Trump showed that the opinion of American citizens is not important to him. Since the onset of tension between the White House and the Congress over the provision of wall-payment on the Mexican border, Trump was well aware of public discontent over this issue. Polls in the United States also confirm this.

As Washington Post reported: That is reflected in six polls taken from early January to early March. By roughly a 2-to-1 margin, Americans oppose Trump's decision to use emergency powers to build a border wall. That's a wider margin than the Senate resolution to overturn Trump's declaration of a national emergency, which passed 59 to 41.

The most recent poll on the issue comes from Monmouth University and was in the field between March 1 and 4. Monmouth found 65 percent of Americans disapproved of Trump "declaring a national emergency in order to use funding designated for the U.S. military to build a wall along the Mexican border."

As noted above, other surveys conducted in the United States also show this. In January, Monmouth asked a similar question but didn't include the part about "using designated military funds to pay for the wall." Opinion barely budged between then and now. Disapproval now is 65 percent vs. 33 percent approval; then it was 64 to 34. **→13**



## ARTICLE

Mohammad Homaeifar  
Tehran Times journalist

## Joyful over sanctions yet angry at defiance

Brian Hook, the U.S. State Department's special representative on Iran, has expressed delight over the sanctions which have made the life difficult for the Iranian people.

Speaking in an interview with Alhurra television on March 15, Hook said, "We know that our campaign of maximum economic pressure is having a significant effect on the Iranian regime. We are denying the regime billions and billions of dollars partly through our oil and financial sanctions."

Hook also said the Iranian people "have lost ground by every economic indicator" under President Hassan Rouhani.

It is shameful to take delight when a nation faces economic hardship under illegal sanctions. Of course, one should not expect better words from Hook because dinosaurs like John Bolton and Mike Pompeo have already expressed pleasure over pressuring Iranians economically.

In November 2018, Bolton said "it's our intention to squeeze" Iranians "very hard" until "the pips squeak." In the same month, Pompeo also told BBC Persian that Iranian officials must listen to Washington "if they want their people to eat."

However, Hook and his master Pompeo should feel assured that this situation cannot last for long because the U.S. is not the whole world. It cannot forever bully countries not to do business with Iran.

Such a bullying attitude by the Trump administration has made countries, even those in Western Europe, to realize the threat from the emergence of Trumpism and are revising their political and economic policies with the United States.

Also, though the sanctions are bitter they may produce positive results at the end. If today Iran is not economically in a good shape it is also partly due to structural problems and the culture of wastefulness left from money easily gained from oil exports which dates back to more than half a century.

Hook also showed his anger at Rouhani's visit to Iraq, claiming that Iran is not likely to stand by promises made during his visit to Iraq. He also claimed that Iran is seeking to undermine Iraq's sovereignty. **→2**



© Tehran Times/ Kosar Karimi

## Funeral held for martyrs in southwestern Iran

**TEHRAN** — A funeral ceremony was held for 115 fallen Iranian soldiers of Iraq's 1980-88 war against Iran on Saturday in the southwestern city of Ahvaz, Khuzestan province.

The bodies of the martyred war veterans were just recovered and returned home about 30 years after the end of the war.

After 3 decades still bodies of fallen Iranian soldiers are being recovered and brought back to the country.



MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



President says Iran-Iraq relations are firm

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — In a meeting of the Supreme Council of Economic Coordination on Saturday, President Hassan Rouhani said that relationship between Iran and Iraq are so strong that it cannot be damaged.

Rouhani described his visit to Iraq as a turning point in ties, Mehr reported. During Rouhani's visit to Iraq on March 11-13, five memorandums of understanding (MOUs), including an agreement on building a cross-border railway, and one on easing travel conditions, and 22 agreements in various areas of trade and industry cooperation were signed.

The visit was hailed for sending a strong message to the U.S. and its regional allies that Iran still enjoys support in Iraq in spite of the sanctions.



Zarif: Iranians, Kurds will never forget Halabja chemical attack

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said the Iranian nation and Kurdish brothers in Iraq will never forget the Halabja and Sardasht chemical attacks.

"First they denied it happened—then they blamed Iran. When it was clear it was their own ally, using their own chemical weapons, they were silent. The West may like to forget about horrors of Halabja & Sardasht—31 years ago today—but neither we, nor our Kurdish brethren, ever will," Zarif said in a tweet on Saturday night.



Iran to spare no efforts to help Afghanistan

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — The Iranian deputy foreign minister has welcomed the Afghan president's recent initiatives for peace process in Afghanistan, saying that Iran will spare no efforts to help the people and government of Afghanistan.

Abbas Araqchi made the comments in a meeting on Saturday with Mohammad Umer Daudzai, President Ashraf Ghani's Special Representative on Regional Affairs for Consensus on Peace, according to IIRB.

Araqchi also expressed doubt about the intention of the United States in Afghanistan, emphasizing the need for a regional approach to the peace process in the country.

Daudzai, for his part, presented a report on the latest developments in Afghanistan and thanked Iran for supporting Afghanistan.



Pakistan moving to free Iranian border guards

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — The Pakistani Army has launched an operation to release the remaining Iranian border guards abducted by terrorists at a military post on the common border back in October 2018, according to the commander of Iran's border police.

In comments on Sunday, Brigadier General Qassem Rezaei highlighted the Pakistani Army's military capabilities, saying the Islamabad government could wipe off terrorist and criminal groups from the region with a serious resolve, ISNA reported.

On October 15, 2018, the Jaish-ul-Adl terrorist group ventured into Iran from the Pakistani side of the border and took hostage 14 border guards, local Basij forces, and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps members.

Also on Sunday, the terrorist group claimed on social media that the five remaining abductees had spoken to their families over the telephone.



East Azarbaijan eying closer ties with Turkey

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — East Azarbaijan Province welcomes scientific and industrial ties with neighboring Turkey, the provincial governor said on Saturday.

Mohammad Reza Pourmohammadi made the remarks in a meeting with Turkish Scientific and Technological Researches Council chief Hassan Mandal.

Pourmohammadi pointed out that already a large number of Turkish companies have invested in Tabriz Foreign Investment Township.

Mandal, for his part, hoped that 2019 will be a good year in terms of promoting scientific and technological collaboration between Turkey and East Azarbaijan.



Rehabilitation center opens for unadmitted addicts

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Head of the counter narcotics headquarters says a new rehabilitation center has been opened for sick addicts who are not admitted to other centers.

Eskandar Momeni said drug addicts are human beings, who need to be sheltered and treated, Mehr reported.

He also said 10,000 tons of narcotics are annually smuggled from Afghanistan to other countries, adding that Iran seizes 800 tons of the drugs.

"Other countries don't do their share of the fight against narcotics," he said. "If such trend continues, the Islamic Republic of Iran will reconsider its approach and will instead focus on the domestic cases."

# Nation will not give in to pressure: Rouhani

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani said on Sunday that the Iranian people will resist economic pressure created by the United States' sanctions and will not "give in to enemies".

"The enemies set hope on deviating the people from path of revolution, system..., but these people accepted the difficulties and gave negative response to the enemies with a loud voice," he told a gathering of people in the coastal city of Bushehr, where he inaugurated phases 13 and 22 to 24 of the South Pars gas field.

Rouhani went on to say that the government will stand beside the people in these difficult days. He also said that Iran will continue implementing projects despite economic sanctions.

"It means that the nation will continue its path in spite of enemies' pressure."

The president also said despite efforts by the U.S., the Zionist regime and Saudi Arabia to demonize Iran, Tehran is determined to expand its relations with



its neighbors.

"The U.S., Zionists and other reactionary countries in the region are exerting pressure on the Iranian people, however, we will expand relations with

our neighbors," Rouhani remarked.

Rouhani made three-day tour of Iraq on March 11-13. His visit prompted an angry reaction by Brian Hook, the U.S. State Department special envoy on

## Foreign forces should leave Syria, military chief says

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Major General Mohammad Baqeri, chief of the Iranian armed forces, said on Sunday that foreign forces that are in Syria without a permission by the Damascus government should leave the country.

"As Iran has come to Syria upon official invitation of the Syrian government, other countries' forces should be in Syria with coordination and permission of the Syrian government," he said upon arrival in Damascus.

Baqeri is visiting Syria to attend the Iran-Iraq-Syria conference in order to study strategies in fighting terrorism.

"This issue (that foreign forces should leave Syria) will be discussed in the Iran-Iraq-Syria conference," Baqeri said.

He also condemned terrorist attacks on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, saying the "catastrophic crime" was aimed at weakening Islam and in line with the Islamophobia project.

The perpetrators behind the attacks on Muslim worshippers in New Zealand



have been influenced by the Islamophobia project led by the U.S. and Zionist regime of Israel, the top general noted.

Coordinated terrorist attacks on two mosques in Christchurch on Friday left 50 worshippers killed and many others wounded.

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

Brenton Harris Tarrant, who attacked the worshippers, has praised Trump as "a symbol of renewed white identity".

## Iran to unveil 112 new nuclear achievements in April

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iran is set to unveil 112 new nuclear achievements in April, according to the spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI).

Speaking at a press conference in Tehran on Saturday, Behrouz Kamalvandi described the achievements as "very important" that would cover various fields such as exploration, extraction, fuel cycle, power plants, science and technology as well as laser.

The achievements would be unveiled on April 9 which Iran celebrates as National Nuclear Technology Day.

"The unveiling of these achievements under the country's current circumstances will convey this message to enemies that the Iranian nation has resisted economic sanctions and has turned threats into opportunities," Kamalvandi said.

He said the U.S. has waged a "full economic war" against Iran and currently resorts to every ploy to pressure Tehran.

"In this war, America puts pressure on all of its allies and non-allies to stop their economic relations with Iran. However, the Iranian nation will strongly pass



this phase as well," Kamalvandi said optimistically.

He said Iran should make utmost use of its capabilities to counter the economic war.

U.S. President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew Washington in May last year from the landmark Iran nuclear agreement, known as the Joint Comprehensive

## The entire occupied lands within range of Hezbollah missiles: IRGC chief

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — The commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps has said that Lebanon's Hezbollah movement possesses missiles with a range that covers the entire Palestinian territories occupied by Israel.

Speaking to Fars in an interview published on Sunday, Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari said the Israeli expansionist dreams turned sour with the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

On the bullying rhetoric of Israel against Iran, he said, "While they once dreamed of their territorial expansion from the Nile River to the Euphrates River, and they have been trying to realize this wish over the past 50 years, today you can see that they have been unable to expand their land even for an inch."

"They have even lost some of the territories they had already occupied and are under full siege from all around their borders."

Jafari referred to the resistance staged by the people of Gaza, say-



ing, "The current status quo and the current capabilities of the resistance front of the Islamic Revolution are all the unique accomplishments of the Islamic Revolution which cannot be verbally described, but rather should be felt."

"To put it in a nutshell, we can say that the enemy has not been successful in the region and all its plots and operations have ended up with nothing but failure for them and success for the Islamic Revolution and the resistance front," he asserted.

Plan of Action (JCPOA), and reimposed sanctions against Tehran.

Under the deal reached between Iran and the P5+1 group of countries in 2015, Tehran undertook to put limits on its nuclear program in exchange for the removal of nuclear-related sanctions.

The sanctions, which the Trump administration has described as the "toughest" ever, have targeted Iran's banking sector and oil exports.

Despite Washington's withdrawal, Iran has not left the deal yet. However, Iran has stressed that the remaining signatories to the agreement have to work to offset the negative impacts of the U.S. pullout from the agreement if they want Tehran to remain in it.

This comes as earlier this month the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) once again affirmed Iran's compliance with its nuclear-related commitments under the JCPOA.

"Iran is implementing its nuclear-related commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action," Yukiya Amano said in his introductory statement to the IAEA's Board of Governors in Vienna on March 4.

## Joyful over sanctions yet angry at defiance

**1→** In fact, it is the U.S. which is questioning the independence and sovereignty of other countries including Iraq by threatening them not to do legal business with Iran.

It is an open interference in Iraq's affairs when Hook says "we do expect them (Iraqis) to comply with U.S. Sanctions".

He also claimed that "what Iran would ultimately like to see happen is Iraq turn into a province of Iran so that they can create a military highway across the northern Middle East that the Iran

Revolutionary Guard Corps can use to ferry missiles and weapons."

Hook's anger also has its roots in the widespread portrayal of President Rouhani's Iraq trip as a great victory.

The visit clearly showed the inability of the United States as well as Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf Arab states to undermine Tehran's ties with Iraq.

Iranian officials and media were quick to note the meaningful difference between Rouhani's reception in Iraq and U.S. President Donald Trump's unannounced

visit to Baghdad.

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

Trump's remarks provoked a backlash from Iraq, with President Barham Salih saying Iraq did not ask permission to station U.S. troops in Iraq to "watch Iran".

Salih said U.S. troops were in Iraq as part of an agreement between the

two countries with a specific mission of combating "terrorism" and that any action taken outside that framework was "unacceptable".

Furious over the developments and perhaps growing concerned about Washington's rapidly diminishing influence in Iraq, Hook warned Iraq to be mindful of U.S. sanctions.

"We do expect them to comply with U.S. Sanctions. We think it is very much in Iraq's interest," he claimed, while keeping a straight face.

## Iran sends warships to Bab-el-Mandeb Strait

**1→** In the Gulf of Aden, the 60th flotilla successfully thwarted a pirate attack on an Iranian oil tanker.

Pirates in 11 speedboats attacked the oil tanker with a cargo of more than 150,000 tons in Bab el-Mandeb Strait. However, commandos of the Navy's 60th flotilla of warships, which patrols the Gulf of Aden in an overseas mission, managed to repel the attack, according to Press TV.

Also on Wednesday, Defense Minister Amir Hatami warned that Iran will respond firmly to any action against its oil shipment.

His warning came as a response to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who at a graduation ceremony of Israeli navy cadets in Haifa on March



6, said the regime's navy could take action against Iranian oil shipments.

He claimed that Iran is trying to "covertly" ship fuel over maritime routes to "circumvent" the U.S. sanctions.

"To the extent that these attempts widen, the navy will have a more important role in blocking these Iranian actions," Netanyahu threatened.

Hatami said this action is considered "banditry" and a threat against international security and Iran will respond to it firmly.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran's armed forces are definitely capable of defending the country's shipping routes in case of any threat," he asserted.



# India, Pakistan threatened to unleash missiles at each other

The sparring between India and Pakistan last month threatened to spiral out of control and only interventions by U.S. officials, including National Security Advisor John Bolton, headed off a bigger conflict, five sources familiar with the events said.

At one stage, India threatened to fire at least six missiles at Pakistan, and Islamabad said it would respond with its own missile strikes "three times over", according to Western diplomats and government sources in New Delhi, Islamabad and Washington.

The way in which tensions suddenly worsened and threatened to trigger a war between the nuclear-armed nations shows how the Kashmir region, which both claim and is at the core of their enmity, remains one of the world's most dangerous flashpoints.

The exchanges did not get beyond threats, and there was no suggestion that the missiles involved were anything more than conventional weapons, but they created consternation in official circles in Washington, Beijing and London.

Reuters has pieced together the events that led to the most serious military crisis in South Asia since 2008, as well as the concerted diplomatic efforts to get both sides to back down.

The simmering dispute erupted into conflict late last month when Indian and Pakistani warplanes engaged in a dogfight over Kashmir on Feb 27, a day after a raid by Indian jet fighters on what it said was a militant camp in Pakistan. Islamabad denied any militant camp exists in the area and said the Indian bombs exploded on an empty hillside.

In their first such clash since the last war between the two nations in 1971, Pakistan downed an Indian plane and captured its pilot after he ejected in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir.

Hours later, videos of the bloodied Indian pilot, handcuffed and blindfolded, appeared on social media, identifying himself to Pakistani interrogators, deepening anger in New Delhi.

With Prime Minister Narendra Modi facing a general election in April-May, the government was under pressure to respond.

## ■ "No going back"

That evening, Indian National Security Adviser Ajit Doval spoke over a secure line to the head of Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), Asim Munir, to tell him India was not going to back off its new campaign of "counter terrorism" even after the pilot's capture, an Indian government source and



a Western diplomat with knowledge of the conversations told Reuters in New Delhi.

Doval told Munir that India's fight was with the militant groups that freely operated from Pakistani soil and it was prepared to escalate, said the government source.

A Pakistani government minister and a Western diplomat in Islamabad separately confirmed a specific Indian threat to use six missiles on targets inside Pakistan. They did not specify who delivered the threat or who received it, but the minister said Indian and Pakistani intelligence agencies "were communicating with each other during the fight, and even now they are communicating with each other".

Pakistan said it would counter any Indian missile attacks with many more launches of its own, the minister told Reuters, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"We said if you will fire one missile, we will fire three. Whatever India will do, we will respond three times to that," the Pakistani minister said.

Doval's office did not respond to a request for comment. India was not aware of any missile threat issued to Pakistan, a government official said in reply to a Reuters request for comment.

Pakistan's military declined to comment and Munir could not be reached for comment. Pakistan's foreign ministry did not respond to a Reuters request for comment.

## ■ Trump-Kim talks

The crisis unfolded as U.S. President Donald Trump was trying to hammer out an agreement with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Hanoi over its nuclear

program.

U.S. security advisor Bolton was on the phone with Doval on the night of Feb 27 itself, and into the early hours of Feb 28, the second day of the Trump-Kim talks, in an attempt to defuse the situation, the Western diplomat in New Delhi and the Indian official said.

Later, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who was also in Hanoi, also called both sides to seek a way out of the crisis.

"Secretary Pompeo led diplomatic engagement directly, and that played an essential role in de-escalating the tensions between the two sides," State Department deputy spokesperson Robert Palladino said in a briefing in Washington on March 5.

A State Department official declined comment when asked if they knew of the threats to use missiles.

Pompeo spoke to Doval, the Indian and Pakistani Foreign Ministers Sushma Swaraj and Shah Mahmood Qureshi, respectively, Palladino said.

U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Admiral Phil Davidson told reporters in Singapore last week that he had separately been in touch with the Indian navy chief, Sunil Lanba, throughout the crisis. There was no immediate response from Lanba's office to a question on the nature of the conversations.

U.S. efforts were focused on securing the quick release of the Indian pilot by Pakistan and winning an assurance from India it would pull back from the threat to fire rockets, the Western diplomat in New Delhi and officials in Washington said.

"We made a lot of effort to get the inter-

national community involved in encouraging the two sides to de-escalate the situation because we fully realized how dangerous it was," said a senior Trump administration official.

The Pakistani minister said China and the United Arab Emirates also intervened. China's foreign ministry did not respond to requests for comment. The government of the UAE said Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan held talks with both Modi and Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan.

India has not given details, but has said it was in touch with major powers during the conflict.

On the morning of Feb 28, Trump told reporters in Hanoi that he expected the crisis to end soon.

"They have been going at it and we have been involved in trying to have them stop. Hopefully that is going to be coming to an end."

Later that afternoon, Khan announced in Pakistan's parliament that the Indian pilot would be released, and he was sent back the next day.

"I know last night there was a threat there could a missile attack on Pakistan, which got defused," Khan said. "I know, our army stood prepared for retaliation of that attack."

The two countries have gone to war three times since both gained independence in 1947, the last time in 1971. The two armies are trading fire along the line of control that separates them in Kashmir, but the tensions appear contained for now.

Diplomatic experts said that the latest crisis underlined the chances of misread signals and unpredictability in the ties between the nuclear-armed rivals, and the huge dangers. It still was not clear whether India had targeted a militant camp in Pakistan and whether there were any casualties, they said.

"Indian and Pakistani leaders have long evinced confidence that they can understand each other's deterrence signals and can de-escalate at will," said Joshua White, a former White House official who is now at Johns Hopkins.

"The fact that some of the most basic facts, intentions and attempted strategic signals of this crisis are still shrouded in mystery ... should be a sobering reminder that neither country is in a position to easily control a crisis once it begins."

(Source: Reuters)

## New Zealand gunman sent manifesto to PM minutes before attack

The accused shooter in the New Zealand mosque attacks sent Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern his 74-page diatribe against foreign "invaders" minutes before he launched the assault that killed at least 50 worshippers.

Ardern said her office and others were emailed the alleged gunman's so-called manifesto nine minutes before the attacks began, but there wasn't enough time to take action to stop the massacre.

"It did not include a location. It did not include specific details... If we could have [stopped it], we absolutely would have," she told reporters on Sunday.

"This was received by over 30 recipients nine minutes before guns were fired. Within two minutes of receipt it went to our parliamentary security," said Ardern. "But again, by the advice of police, by the time those emails were received they were already receiving 911 calls and responding, and someone was taken into custody within 36 minutes."

In emotional scenes, Ardern earlier met mourning members of the Muslim community in Wellington.



Friday's attack, which Ardern labelled as "terrorism", was the worst ever peacetime mass killing in New Zealand and the country raised its security threat level to the highest.

## ■ Another body found

The death toll in the New Zealand

mosque shootings rose to 50 after police said they found another body, as an overwhelmed hospital was forced to delay surgeries as it struggled to cope with the sheer number of wounded.

Police Commissioner Mike Bush said

the body of the 50th victim was found at the Al Noor mosque, where more than 40 people had died after the attacker entered and shot randomly at people with semiautomatic rifles with high-capacity magazines, before travelling to a second mosque to do the same.

"As of last night, we were able to take all of the victims from both of those scenes. In doing so we were able to locate a further victim," Bush said.

Thirty-four people were still in Christchurch Hospital, with 12 in critical condition and one child was moved to dedicated children's hospital in Auckland.

Greg Robertson, the chief of surgery at Christchurch Hospital, said the medical staff were having trouble dealing with the enormity of the situation.

"We struggling with it as much as everyone else. This is not something that we expected to see in our environment. We do see gunshot wounds but 50 people in one day is more than what we should see," Robertson said a news conference.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

## Kabul summons diplomat over remarks by Pakistan's Khan

Afghanistan summoned a senior Pakistani diplomat Saturday to account for remarks by Prime Minister Imran Khan speculating about a new government in Kabul following a possible peace settlement.

The summons by the Afghan foreign affairs ministry marked the second time in just over three weeks that Kabul has demanded an explanation from Pakistan, illustrating the longstanding tensions between the two neighbors at a sensitive time.

Khan, at a rally in Bajaur, in northwestern Pakistan Friday, predicted "mutual peace" in Afghanistan as an outcome of recurring talks between the United States and the Taliban to end the country's 17-year-old war.

"A good government will come in Afghanistan," Khan said. "I mean a government will come in which all will be represented. War will end and there will be peace."

The Afghan ministry summoned Pa-

kistan's counsellor to clarify the remarks, spokesperson Sibghatullah Ahmadi tweeted.

"Afghanistan expressed its grave objection on Pakistan's government and deemed such remarks a flagrant interference in its internal affairs," he said.

In February, the ministry summoned Pakistani ambassador Zahid Nasrullah Khan over his remarks that Afghan peace talks could be affected if India resorted to violence against Pakistan.

The summons to Pakistan comes a day after a top official in President Ashraf Ghani's government voiced frustration about what Kabul regards as Afghanistan being sidelined during talks between Taliban and U.S. negotiators, drawing a rebuke from Washington.

The latest round of peace talks ended Tuesday, with both U.S. and Taliban officials saying progress was made.

Tensions have been building between



Kabul and Washington over U.S. efforts to forge a peace pact with the Taliban that includes a U.S. troop withdrawal, some-

thing that Kabul fears could weaken its own negotiating position.

(Source: Reuters)

## Over 60,000 people, mostly civilians, have fled from last Daesh Syria enclave: SDF

The U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces said Sunday over 60,000 people, mostly civilians, had flooded out of Daesh's (ISIL) last enclave in eastern Syria since a final assault to capture it began over two months ago.

SDF spokesperson Kino Gabriel told journalists that 29,600 people, the majority of whom were families of fighters of the militant group, had surrendered since the U.S.-backed forces led by the Kurdish YPG laid siege to the town of Baghouz and its hinterland on the Euphrates River.

Among them were 5,000 militants, the SDF said.

Another 34,000 civilians were evacuated from Baghouz, the last shred of territory held by the militants who have been driven from roughly one third of Iraq and Syria over the past four years, Gabriel said.



Former residents from the region say many of the civilians who came out of the Baghouz area in recent weeks were Iraqi Sunnis with close tribal ties on the other side of the border in Deir al-Zor, a Sunni heartland.

Another SDF spokesperson Mustafa Bali told Reuters only around a hundred militants and their families had surrendered overnight in the remaining spot where hardline militants have been mounting a desperate last-stand defense.

"We had expected the surrender of a large number of terrorists and their families but only a small group came out," Bali said.

A Reuters witness spotted U.S.-led coalition jets flying overhead but there was no renewed bombing raids in a lull in fighting as the SDF expected more fighters and their families to surrender in the course of the day.

The group said that 1,306 "terrorists" had been killed alongside many who were injured in the military campaign that began on Jan. 9 while 82 SDF fighters had been killed and 61 injured.

The SDF said another 520 militants were captured during special operations conducted in the last militant bastion that comprises a group of villages surrounded by farmland where Daesh fighters and followers retreated as their "caliphate" was driven from once vast territories.

Former residents say hundreds of civilians have been killed in months of heavy aerial bombing by the coalition that have leveled to the ground many of the hamlets in the farmland area along the border with Iraq.

The SDF has mostly transferred the tens of thousands who have fled Daesh's shrinking territory in recent months to a camp at al-Hol in the northeast.

A senior International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) official said last Monday an estimated 20,000 Iraqi women and children in the camp were expected to be sent home within weeks or months.

The United Nations says the camp now holds around 67,000 people, 90 percent of them women and children – well beyond its capacity. Camp workers say they do not have enough tents, food or medicine. They have warned of diseases spreading.

(Source: Reuters)

## UK government warns it might not hold pivotal Brexit vote

British leader Theresa May's government warned Sunday it might not have a planned Brexit vote this week unless it feels it could secure a win that avoids a lengthy delay to the EU pullout.

Britain has been paralyzed by political inaction and chaos as it barrels toward the March 29 end of its 46-year involvement in the bloc without a plan.

Parliament has twice resoundingly rejected the separation terms May reached with the other 27 EU leaders last year.

She doggedly vowed to bring the lawmakers back by Wednesday for a third vote that – if it finally ended in success – would see her ask the EU for a "technical" Brexit delay until June.

But May warned on Sunday that another defeat would almost certainly require Britain to take part in European Parliament elections in May.

This would mean "we will not leave the EU for many months, if ever," May wrote in The Sunday Telegraph.

Two of her top ministers then warned that May might not even submit her deal for a third vote unless she feels she has sufficient support from her own party members who previously voted against.

"It would be difficult to justify having a vote if you knew you were going to lose it," International Trade Secretary Liam Fox told Sky News.

"We will only bring the deal back if we are confident that enough of our colleagues... are prepared to support it so that we can get it through Parliament," Finance Minister Philip Hammond added on the BBC.

"I mean we are not just going to keep presenting it if we haven't moved the dial," Hammond said.

Some EU leaders have suggested postponing Brexit until the end of 2020.

A delay that long could give Britain time to decide to either keep much closer EU ties or have Brexit reversed in a new national poll – two options welcomed by a range of European officials.

The 27 EU leaders will meet in Brussels on Thursday and Friday to discuss their Brexit options.

(Source: Daily Star)





STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	1397.79
IFX	2157.86

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

Steel products output rises 8% in 11 months on year

**→** A report released by the World Steel Organization (WSO) indicated that Iran became the world's tenth largest steel producer in 2018.



Iran which stood at the 13th place in 2017 could lag behind three major steel producers in the world, namely Italy, Taiwan, and Ukraine to stand at the 10th place in 2018, despite the re-imposition of sanctions by the U.S.

According to the WSO's report, Iran produced 25 million tons of crude steel in 2018 which indicates 17.7 percent growth from 21.2 million tons in 2017.

Chinese to invest in Iran's northeastern mines

Chines investors will make investment worth five million yuans (about \$744,775) in the mines of Iran's North Khorasan Province, deputy governor general of the province announced.

Making the remarks after a meeting with Chinese investors, Majid Pour-Isa said that the investments will be made in projects for marble mines of Garmeh County.

"Chinese operation in the province's mines will start as of the next Iranian year (March 21, 2019)," he said.

There are also plans to cede land to the Chinese in Bojnourd Special Economic Zone to set up factories, he said.

Some 21 types of minerals with reserves of 775 million tons have been discovered in North Khorasan Province, the most important of which are bauxite, marble, limestone and plaster.

(Source: IRNA)

Trump's trade war cost U.S. economy \$7.8b in 2018: study

President Donald Trump's trade battles cost the U.S. economy \$7.8 billion in lost gross domestic product in 2018, a study by a team of economists at leading American universities published this week showed.

Authors of the paper said they analyzed the short-run impact of Trump's actions and found that imports from targeted countries declined 31.5 percent while targeted U.S. exports fell by 11 percent. They also found that annual consumer and producer losses from higher costs of imports totaled \$68.8 billion.



"After accounting for higher tariff revenue and gains to domestic producers from higher prices, the aggregate welfare loss was \$7.8 billion," or 0.04 percent of GDP, the researchers said.

The study was authored by a team of economists at the University of California Berkeley, Columbia University, Yale University and University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) and published by the National Bureau of Economic research.

Having dubbed himself the "tariff man," Trump pledged on both the campaign trail and as president to reduce the trade deficit by shutting out unfairly traded imports and renegotiating free trade agreements.

Trump has pursued a protectionist trade agenda to shield U.S. manufacturing. Washington and Beijing have been locked in a tit-for-tat tariff battle for months as imposing unilateral tariffs to combat, and Trump has imposed tariffs that have roiled the European Union and other major trading partners.

The authors said while U.S. tariffs favored sectors located in "politically competitive" counties, the retaliatory tariffs imposed on U.S. goods have offset the benefits to these areas.

"We find that tradeable-sector workers in heavily Republican counties were the most negatively affected by the trade war," the researchers said.

(Source: Reuters)

South Pars phases 13, 22-24 inaugurated

**ENERGY DESK** **TEHRAN** — Phases 13, 22, 23 and 24 of developing Iran's South Pars gas field were officially inaugurated by President Hassan Rouhani on Sunday, Shana reported.

Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh also accompanied the president in the inauguration ceremony.

As reported, the total investment made in these megaprojects is estimated at about \$11 billion, which, given the country's gross domestic product (GDP) in the Iranian calendar year of 1396 (that was \$427 billion), the value of the projects exceeds two percent of the country's total GDP.

With the inauguration of these phases, for the first time Iran's gas production from the giant South Pars will exceeds that of Qatar with which the country shares the field in the Persian Gulf.

The mentioned phases are aimed at production of 56 million cubic meters (mcm) of gas, 75,000 barrels of gas condensate and 400 tons of sulfur per day in addition to one million tons of ethane and one million tons of propane and butane per annum.

During his visit to Bushehr Province in southwest of the country, the president also inaugurated the South Pars refineries gas metering systems and a mercaptan produc-



tion plant in the port city of Assaluyeh as well as the Assaluyeh-Kangan ethane pipeline through video conference.

South Pars is divided into 24 standard phases of development in the first stage. Most of the phases are fully operational at the moment.

Shares of 3 petchem companies to be offered at stock market

**ECONOMY DESK** **TEHRAN** — The shares of three petrochemical companies will be offered at the stock market in the next Iranian calendar year, which starts on March 21, 2019, IRNA reported on Sunday.

Two of the companies i.e. Bandar Imam and Bulai Sina are located in the port city of Mahshahr (in the southwestern province of Khuzestan) and one of them named Nouri is in the port city of Assaluyeh (in the southwestern province of Bushehr).

On January 1, Mohammadreza Pour-Ebrahimi, the chairman of the Parliament Economic Committee, told IRNA that the national budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year 1398 has envisaged transferring 50 trillion rials (about \$1.19 billion) worth of state-run shares to the private sector.

As previously reported, in its planned

budget for the current Iranian calendar year, the Iranian government expects to earn some 106 trillion rials (about \$2.5 billion) of income from divesting shares of state-run companies to the private sector.

The government envisioned a large privatization program in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year. Under the present interpretation of the Article 44, some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

The head of Iran Privatization Organization has said that this organization still lags behind its set target due to the number of state-run companies which have been decided to be privatized.

U.S. to blame for tensions in oil market: Zanganeh

**ENERGY DESK** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh has blamed U.S. for the tensions created in the oil market, Shana reported on Saturday.

Speaking in a news conference on Saturday ahead of the inauguration of four development phases of South Pars gas field the official noted that the U.S. has caused tensions in the oil market for over a year now and they are responsible for it

"If this trend continues, the market will be tenser." He added.

U.S. President Donald Trump has repeatedly tweeted about oil prices and the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

He has expressed concern about higher prices, including last month and ahead of OPEC's meeting in December.

The field is estimated to contain a significant amount of natural gas, accounting for about eight percent of the world's reserves, and approximately 18 billion barrels of condensate.

**■ Other projects inaugurated during president's trip**

On the sidelines of President Rouhani's visit to Bushehr Province, a cement production unit was inaugurated through video conference and the ground was also laid for three other industrial projects.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by a handful of officials including Deputy Minister of Industry, Mining and Trade Saeed Zarandi and Head of Bushehr Province's Industry, Mining and Trade Department Hossein Hosseini.

As reported, with \$3.8 trillion rials (about \$90.48 million) of investment, the Mond-Dashti Cement Production Unit has the annual capacity of producing 1.2 million tons of cement and creates over 170 job opportunities.

Other three projects included a paper production unit and two lead acid storages for producing batteries in which 1.9 trillion rials (\$45.57 million) has been invested.

President Rouhani also inaugurated six electricity projects worth 899 billion rials (about \$21.4 million) in Bushehr province.

According to the Iranian minister, the country has invested \$11 billion to complete the phases 13 and 22-24 of the giant field, which Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf.

As reported by Shana, the giant gas fields 27 phases are expected to go operational by next March.

France's Total suspended investment in phase 11 of South Pars last year after the United States threatened to impose sanctions on companies that do business in Iran and now talks with China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC) are underway to replace the French company.

"Negotiations are ongoing. A senior delegation from China is due to come to Iran for talks. They have promised to come to Iran soon," ISNA quoted Zanganeh as saying.

Is a new global economic storm brewing?

By Rong Qin

Speaking at the elite annual World Economic Forum meeting in January, IMF's Managing Director Christine Lagarde warned that global economic growth is on the decline. What's causing the IMF to cut its global growth forecast from 3.7 to 3.5 percent? Accelerating economic risks, says Lagarde, including the U.S.-China trade war, Brexit, and China's slowing economy.

Lagarde has always been acute and prospective, which can be reflected by her profile. As a lawyer specializing in anti-trust and labor in Paris, Lagarde chaired international legal powerhouse Baker & McKenzie in 1999. After serving several ministerial positions in French government, she became the first female Financial Minister of a G7 (then a G8) country and then the first chairwoman of the IMF in 2011. During the Euro crisis, she strongly supported austerity on Greece in exchange for a rescue package.

Knowing how Lagarde's economic views are shaped, it is less surprising that she started warning about threats to the global economy since 2017, when most of the world was experiencing a strong development phase—the strongest since the financial crisis in 2008. At the time, Lagarde had already identified high levels of debt, the rapid credit expansion in China, the excessive risks in financial market, and inequalities among countries as potential threats to the prosperous development of the global economy.

After President Trump threatened to impose additional tariff on \$267 billion in Chinese goods in 2018, Lagarde was alarmed that a global economic slowdown would be triggered by rising protectionism and the increasing levels of debt. And in January 2019, Lagarde launched a report about the world economic outlook in Davos, announcing that the IMF lowered its global economic growth forecast for 2019, reiterating the concerns at the World Government Summit in Dubai a month later.

In both the IMF report and an interview on CNBC, Lagarde warned that the following major rising risks would further undermine the global economy: trade tensions and barriers, the slowdown of China's economy, the spillover effect of Brexit, and overall financial tightening.

**■ Trade tensions and barriers**

The trade war between the United States and China will have a global impact.

First, rising tariffs will directly lower trade volumes and negatively affect multinational companies located in the United States and China. After the two world largest economies tariffs on each other, the trade between them and the world trade greatly declined. IMF estimates that the world trade volume will reduce to 4% in 2019, which is 0.1% lower from the estimation in October and 1.3% lower from the 2017 volume. Additionally, in a survey conducted by AmCham Shanghai last September, 60% of the 432 American respondents believed that the tariffs would hurt their companies in China. They ranked the "loss of profits" (50.8%), the "higher production costs" (47.1%), and the "decreased demand for products" (41.8) as the top three worries. Some companies, such as GoPro Inc., announced their intention to move its manufacturing factories out of China in December.

Second, people's estimation about trade risks has changed dramatically in the last six months, which poses a huge threat to



the global economy. People's confidence in economic liberalism has been shaken greatly. After one country embraces protectionism by building trade barriers, the security dilemma will seduce other countries to adopt "beggar-thy-neighbor" policies. The increasing uncertainty will reduce people's confidence in trade and thus decrease global investment. In the 22nd Annual Global CEO Survey conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers, nearly 30% of CEOs predicted a global economy decline, compared with a 5% last year.

**■ The slowdown of the Chinese economy**

What matters is not only the global impact of China's slowdown, but also what China will do to save its own economy.

To support its economic expansion in the last two decades, China has relied on high levels of credit to stimulate internal demand, on its large export market by subsidizing its state-owned enterprises, and on its cheap labor force to attract manufacturing factories. However, after the trade war eroded people's confidence in China's economy, these factors became less effective in stimulating China's economy.

China's internal spending will decrease as people lose confidence about their future income. The increasing production costs in China will force manufacturing industries to relocate their factories to other ASEAN countries, leading to a shortage of jobs for Chinese workers. Additionally, the already high levels of debts from both business and government, will make the lenders nervous about default risks. As a result, after China reported its lowest growth rate since 1990—6.6%, the IMF expected that China's growth rate would de-accelerate this year to 6.2%.

China's slowdown will greatly influence the global market. China has the world's largest market for automobiles and technology products, and it accounts for a quarter of the growth in global oil demand. A shrinking demand after the economic slowdown has already worried foreign companies for their lost revenues in China, such as Germany's auto industry.

China is a huge exporter and financial center; saving China's economy matters greatly to the rest of the world. A report from the Council on Foreign Relations points out that, although China has not considered to depreciate its currency to gain more advantage on exports yet, it can improve China's exports greatly and drive workers in other countries jobless if it does. On the other hand, if China continues to build up its debts to boost domestic spending, foreign lenders' confidence will be further eroded and a capital flight from Asia is expected.

**■ The spilled effects of Brexit**

Uncertainty rises as London no longer functions as the European financial center and globalization will be further weakened.

Brexit has created massive uncertainty, which will hurt the UK economy. Since global banks and institutions have used London to connect to the EU, after Brexit London stands to lose a huge amount of economic activity. According to Brussels-based economic think tank bruegel, London will lose 10,000 banking jobs and 20,000 roles in financial services, with \$2.1 trillion of assets potentially being moved out of the UK due to the Brexit. During an interview, Lagarde predicted that even the mildest scenario would add difficulties to the currency system, making transactions and transportation less smooth and inconvenient.

Brexit negative outcomes will spill over to the EU and the rest of the world. A Forbes report predicts that, as some global companies plan to relocate their bases from London to other EU countries to maintain their transactions with the EU, the future financial center in Europe will be more diffused. Compared to the business in a concentrated financial center such as London, the new dispersed economic activities in the EU will be less efficient, less productive, and less predictable. For example, UK companies have no idea how they would trade with Europe in the future. Such uncertainty will reduce the economic activity in the EU, and will hurt the global economy due to the interconnectedness. Additionally, Brexit is a strong signal in support of protectionism, which means people's confidence in globalization will be further weakened.

**■ Financial tightening**

Growing debts in both private and public sectors increase the financial instability.

The Federal Fund Rate has steadily increased from 0.1% in 2014 to 2.4% this January. Functioning not only as the borrowing rate between banks, the Fed fund rate also forms the basis for the banks to lend to the private sector. While an expansionary monetary policy will decrease the Fed fund rate to encourage more economic activity, the current rising interest rate indicates an opposite intention.

The piling-up of debt makes people more vulnerable under a rising interest rate. As the global debt ballooned from \$84 trillion in 2000, to \$173 trillion during the 2008 financial crisis, and to \$250 trillion in 2018, the rapidly increasing debt makes everyone nervous. To cool down the economy, the U.S. government chose the financial tightening—raising the interest rate, selling securities, reducing the monetary supply, and thus raising the value of dollars. However, it is more difficult for emerging economies to repay their debts, not only because they need to repay in the more expensive dollar but also because the rising interest rate increases the debt.

However, to be fair, all the risks above do not indicate an inevitable global recession but rather "the risk of a decline in global growth has certainly increased," as stated by Lagarde. Lagarde believes there is still policy room to prepare for future uncertainties, by making domestic economies more resilient and inclusive and by increasing international collaboration.

First, economies should strive to become more resilient. Since the market changes dramatically every day with increased volatility, future monetary policies should depend closely on data, and the exchange rate should respond quickly to shocks.

(Source: diplomaticourier.com)



# OPEC's Barkindo says rebound in oil investments "very minimal"

The investments needed to ensure stability in the global oil industry are returning after a downturn, but the pace is still slow, OPEC Secretary General Mohammed Barkindo said.

Barkindo was talking to Reuters and an Azeri TV station Real on the sidelines of an OPEC and non-OPEC monitoring committee, which is meeting this weekend in the Azeri capital of Baku.

He also said leading oil producing nations have made significant achievements in terms of cooperation and efforts to avoid imbalance between the supply and demand on the global oil market.

Barkindo added he would welcome greater engagement with the United States to tackle industry issues.

According to estimates from Saudi Aramco Chief Executive Officer Amin Nasser last year, the global oil and gas industry needs to invest more than \$20 trillion over the next 25 years to meet expected growth in demand and compensate for the natural decline in developed fields.

"A number of challenges are arising from the down cycle that we have seen,



and at the top of that list is an issue of investments. We have seen investments contract for couple of years and even at the

moment the rebound is very, very minimal," Barkindo said.

"For the long cycle projects, which

are the base for the global economy, the picture is still not encouraging. Therefore we welcome the United States to join us in this global energy dialogue to address this and other issues affecting this industry."

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and other large oil producers led by Russia have agreed on joint efforts to curb their oil production in order to restore the balance on the global oil market and support the price.

The first such deal was signed at the end of 2016 in Vienna.

"We remain on course and we have made significant progress in ensuring that we do not allow the market to return to an imbalance," Barkindo said, speaking in English. "All participating countries are committed to ensuring that supply and demand remain balanced through stock movement that would remain within the five-year industry average," Barkindo added.

"That remains our key metrics in assessing the state of the oil market and so far so good."

(Source: Reuters)

## 'Solar to be world's largest power source by 2050 as cost halves'

Solar energy will account for almost half of all power capacity installed globally by 2050 as the cost of the technology halves, according to new analysis by DNV GL.

The amount of solar power generated each year will be 65 times higher than in 2016, providing 40 percent of the world's electricity and making PV the planet's largest source of power.

"The sheer magnitude of the coming PV revolution is hard to comprehend," says the analysis.

In contrast to other observers, the Norway-based global risk-management company believes that two-thirds of the solar capacity will be utility-scale.

"The powerful economies of scale in PV are likely to see costs in 2050 at half of today's levels — enabling additional investments in grid expansion and integration technologies such as storage, connectivity, and demand-response that increase the value of solar assets," says the analysis, written by global solar segment leader Dana Olson and deputy director of its Energy Transition Program, Bent Erik Bakken.

"Although other commentators emphasize the role of



distributed generation over large centralized installations, we do not share that view. We foresee utility-scale PV dominating electricity generation because of its favorable economies of scale, outweighing the savings in transmission costs brought by decentralized microgrid installations."

Utility-scale PV will dominate all world regions by 2050, with the exception of sub-Saharan Africa, where off-grid PV will lead the way, says the report.

By 2050, the cost of PV systems will have shrunk by 43-54 percent compared to today, depending on the region and the type of PV installation. Installed utility-scale PV systems will halve in price by 2050 to \$0.42-0.58 per watt. In addition, 60 percent of global PV capacity in 2050 will be based in two countries — China and India.

The authors say they "foresee no significant spatial or resource-related limitations to this spectacular [global] growth", but add: "However, an important challenge to consider is the ability of the solar industry to attract the substantial financial capital required to support this acceleration and growth across diverse markets and categories around the globe."

"There may be a limit to the speed and volume at which financial capital will be available to support this acceleration of development and deployment."

(Source: rechargenews.com)

## Trade tensions overshadow U.S. oil, gas industry

The fast-growing U.S. oil and natural gas industry, which is seeking export markets around the globe, are overshadowed as sticky trade tensions have added uncertainty and costs to U.S. businesses.

Many U.S. oil and gas companies face higher costs or more difficulties resulting from nearly frozen Chinese purchasing of U.S. crude oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG), industry insiders, experts and officials said at the energy industry conference CERAWeek held from March 11-15 by the London-based information company IHS Markit.

Still, the economic complementarity between the two sides remains strong despite trade policies and tariffs announced in 2018.

### ■ U.S. companies under pressure

The downstream impacts of trade barriers are very real, said Susan Schwab, professor with the University of Maryland and former U.S. trade representative on Friday at a panel discussion.

"We see them in our economy today. Interconnectedness of economy is very real. There's a lot of evidence," Schwab added.

The trade tensions between China and the United States have impacted the trade flows of LNG, said Matthew Shruhan, senior analyst on global LNG with international consultancy firm IHS Markit.

But these long-term LNG projects last for 20 or 30 plus years. The real impact on date has been a kind of long-term contract in front, said Shruhan on Thursday at another panel discussion.

"We haven't seen really any Chinese buyers (who have) contacted the U.S. LNG project developers since the tensions hiked," Shruhan said.

"When you take a trade action, you are going to perhaps create leverage for yourself, but you're also likely to be having an impact on your own domestic economic interest," said Schwab.

The proposed Alaska LNG exporting project is one of the U.S. LNG projects impacted by the bilateral trade tensions, said an anonymous industry insider.

"A lot of projects are looking to sell into China like Alaska LNG project. Cheniere Energy has long-term contracts with Chinese customers and then a lot of the proposed projects also want to sell LNG to China," said the source.

In November 2017, the State of Alaska, the AGDC, Sinopec, the Bank of China and the China Investment Corporation signed a five-party agreement to advance Alaska's LNG export project with a total investment of 43 billion U.S. dollars.

The AGDC is having conversations with individuals and officials in China, other Asian countries as well as producers and potential investors, said Mike Dunleavy, Governor of Alaska.

China is the second largest oil refining market and the United States has the largest unconventional oil coming to the market. So, you would need to find a way for some of the U.S. crude oil to go to China, according to Roger Diwan, vice president of financial services and energy with IHS Markit.

"Because of the trade tensions, China has stopped buying U.S. crude oil. If U.S. crude oil output continues to add another 1 million to 1.5 million barrels and the Chinese market is closed, that would create more relocation of crude oil in physical market," said Diwan.

### ■ Cooperation needed

Schwab said, "Speaking as an economist, trade was bad and trade barriers are bad. You have a situation where trade barriers by definition hurt everyone and consumers, (but) may benefit a few."

"Trade policy has a limited role to play when it comes to trade deficits," Schwab added.

"If the trade negotiations are not resolved, it not only has a sentiment on demand, but also has a direct impact

on the physical flow of crude oil," Diwan said.

The U.S. energy industry has been going through revolutionary changes in the past decade, with increasing productions of both crude oil and natural gas, said Hou Qijun, vice president of the China National Petroleum Cooperation.

On the other hand, China has become the world's largest oil importer in 2017 and also one of the largest natural gas importers in 2018. "Naturally, a large energy producing country and a large energy consuming country are complementary," Hou said at the CERAWeek.

Hou noted that China's increasing imports of U.S. energy can improve the trade structures of both countries, reduce trade deficit and diversify the energy import source of China.

"There may be some challenges now, but economic facts are stubborn. I would expect that sooner or later U.S. LNG exporters and Chinese LNG importers will meet, which would be beneficial for both of the countries and for the global energy markets," Fatih Birol, executive director of the IEA Tuesday said in an interview with Xinhua on the sidelines of the CERAWeek conference.

The emerging of the United States as a major energy exporter would bring more options and diversifications for energy importers such as China, said Birol.

More LNG exports from the United States would make the hand of gas importers stronger and bring more flexibility to the market, Birol added.

"It is becoming more of a buyers' market and it would be a good time for LNG importers such as China," Birol said.

The United States would contribute 75 percent of incremental LNG supply in the world in the coming few years, said Birol.

(Source: Xinhua)

## Saudi's Falih says optimistic about commitment to OPEC+ cuts deal

Saudi Arabia's energy minister said on Sunday he was optimistic about continued commitment to the supply cut agreement between OPEC and non-OPEC members.

Saudi Arabia along with other oil producers such as Azerbaijan will continue to work together to manage oil market stability, Khalid al-Falih said on the sidelines of the joint ministerial monitoring committee meeting in Baku.

"We will not allow energy security to be challenged by any event, but at the same time we will not leave investors, and oil and gas companies to stay bewildered not knowing what tomorrow is going to bring in terms of stable environment where investments can flow to the sector," he told reporters.

(Source: Reuters)

## 'World can rely on OPEC supply cushion for urgent oil needs'

Production cutbacks by OPEC nations are building a supply cushion that could be called upon to mitigate a possible supply shock from an abrupt drop in crisis-hit Venezuela's output, the IEA said.

With a nationwide blackout that paralyzed the country for one week, demonstrating the unreliability of the country's electricity network, new questions are being raised about Venezuela's ability to continue to produce and export oil.

In its latest monthly report, the Paris-based International Energy Agency said that Venezuela's oil industry operations were seriously disrupted by the blackout and warned that "ongoing losses on a significant scale could present a challenge to the market."

Venezuela's oil output has long been on a downward spiral thanks to years of underinvestment and mismanagement, with stepped-up US sanctions further trimming exports.

However the IEA also noted that Venezuela's current oil production of about 1.2 million barrels per day (mbd) is the size of production cuts agreed by members of the OPEC oil cartel and a number of other nations led by Russia, a grouping often called OPEC+.

Overall, it said OPEC members have about 2.8 mbd of spare production capacity, with much of it being similar in quality to oil produced in Venezuela, which means it could be used without much, if any, adjustment by refineries.

"Therefore, in the event of a major loss of supply from Venezuela, the potential means of avoiding serious disruption to the oil market is theoretically at hand," said the IEA, adding that "production cuts have increased the spare capacity cushion."

The agency, which advises oil-consuming nations on energy issues, said that thanks to bigger-than-promised cuts by Saudi Arabia and its Persian Gulf allies, the OPEC+ effort to trim output was beginning to work.

Since 2016 the OPEC+ nations have agreed on a series of output limits in an effort to counteract the collapse of oil prices in 2014 caused by overproduction. After oil prices had a rollercoaster ride at the end of last year, OPEC+ agreed to cut production by 1.2 mbd in January to June.

The IEA said OPEC+ production was 0.24 mbd above the target of 44.3 mbd, with overall compliance with reduction targets at 80 percent.

"OPEC's compliance was a robust 94 percent, compared to 51 percent from non-OPEC," said the IEA, adding that major producer Russia was continuing to adjust its production gradually.

"If the producers deliver on their promises, the market could return to balance in the second quarter" of this year, said the IEA.

The IEA left unchanged its forecast for non-OPEC supply increasing to 64.4 mbd this year from a revised 62.7 mbd in 2018, a gain of 1.7 mbd.

It left unchanged its forecast for global oil demand growth of 1.4 mbd to an average of 100.6 mbd in 2019.

(Source: Arab News)

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## Justice is the key ingredient for sustainable peace in CAR



By Patryk I Labuda

On February 6, the government of the Central African Republic (CAR) and 14 armed groups signed a long-awaited peace agreement aiming to end the country's devastating civil war. While the deal was celebrated as an important step towards peace both in CAR and abroad, now many Central Africans are asking themselves: is this the peace they have been waiting for?

This is not CAR's first peace agreement. In fact, several deals have been signed and eventually collapsed in the last few years. While there are reasons to be optimistic that this time will be different, it is important to be clear-headed about the challenges that lie ahead. Much depends on how the agreement's many compromises are interpreted and implemented. One compromise in particular - justice for human rights abuses - will require creative thinking as the peace process moves forward.

Dealing with justice was a difficult component of the peace talks mediated by the African Union. A cloud of uncertainty hung over the outcome until the very last day. In fact, the text of the peace agreement only became known after it was leaked on February 8, two days after the President, Faustin-Archange Touadéra, formally endorsed the document. Many worried that the government was reluctant to admit that it had agreed to a broad-based amnesty for the country's armed groups, depriving Central African victims of the opportunity to seek justice in court.

These concerns proved misplaced. The peace agreement makes no direct mention of amnesties, and it reaffirms that impunity is a core cause of the crisis in CAR. This is in and of itself a significant achievement given that amnesty was reportedly a non-negotiable demand of various armed groups.

And yet there remains room for concern. Beyond token invocations of the "fight against impunity", the agreement says

**To build a lasting peace, the CAR government needs to ensure there is justice for past crimes and human rights abuses**

very little of substance about justice for serious crimes. Notably, it does not mention trials of perpetrators before the Special Criminal Court, a hybrid court that the CAR government helped bring into existence in 2015 and which finally launched investigations in October 2018. This is surprising, given that the government had, until very recently, emphasized that prosecutions of serious crimes were an essential component of the peace process.

The new peace agreement seems to place the emphasis elsewhere. Adopting the language of pardons and reconciliation, it requires a Truth, Justice, Reparations and Reconciliation Commission (TJRRC) to be established within 90 days of the agreement's adoption. The short timeframe will certainly ensure minds concentrate on getting the commission up and running, but it leaves very little time for public and expert consultations. There is clearly a risk that the new TJRRC will be unresponsive to the needs and expectations of ordinary Central Africans.

More worryingly, an Inclusive Commission will operate while details of the TJRRC are hashed out. Tasked with examining "tragic aspects of the CAR conflict", the Inclusive Commission has been empowered to recommend "action in matters of justice". Some fear that the peace agreement's vague language on justice foreshadows further compromises on human rights abuses. It is unclear whether the Inclusive Commission, which is composed of just eight government representatives and five armed group members, has enough legitimacy and public support to shape the public debate on justice in CAR.

These developments may signify a broader policy shift in the Central African government's handling of armed groups. Human rights groups worry that although the peace agreement makes no explicit mention of amnesty, pardons and reconciliation will be understood as an alternative to prosecutions. In fact, according to Human Rights Watch, some armed groups view the peace agreement as a de facto amnesty, and have warned that they will withdraw from the peace process if their members are arrested.

This is worrying. It suggests that there remain fundamental differences of opinion about the relationship between peace and justice in CAR. Much will depend on the resilience of civil society organizations, which have advocated on behalf of victims, as well as the international community. It is critical that the new truth and reconciliation commission finds creative ways of moving the discussion forward. How this will be done remains unclear at this stage, but the government and armed groups must find a way to share power and deal with past grievances without undermining Central Africans' aspirations for justice.

One thing is certain: if there is to be a sustainable peace, various controversial topics arising from the recent peace deal will have to be decided in the next few months. As noted last month by the outgoing United Nations Special Representative, Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, the peace agreement was a "necessary and decisive step" but "the most difficult part is still to come". Justice is just one component of the peace process, but how the government and the armed groups handle this issue is likely to determine the future of peace in CAR.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

# After the Senate vote, will Trump intervene to back his reckless ally in Saudi?

By Abdulaziz Kilani

The U.S. Senate took a remarkable step on Wednesday by voting to end American support for the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen for the second time. The result (54-46) had the support of seven Republicans who voted in favor of passing the resolution. "In an historic vote, the Senate sent an important message: we will no longer support Saudi Arabia in causing the worst humanitarian disaster on the planet. Congress will reassert its constitutional authority on issues of war and end U.S. support for the war in Yemen," Senator Bernie Sanders tweeted after the vote. This suggests that U.S. lawmakers are insisting that they are no longer willing to turn a blind eye to the crimes that the Saudi regime is committing in Yemen.

Yet this historic step is a rebuke for Trump's incomprehensible behavior towards Saudi Arabia and especially the kingdom's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman. It also indicates that the lobbying, which Saudis have been carry out in the United States, did not have an impact on preventing the lawmakers from condemning what Riyadh has been doing in Yemen for almost four years.

"The vote today in the U.S. Senate was really about Saudi Arabia. While the resolution called for ending U.S. support for the war in Yemen, the real target was the Saudi Crown Prince, Mohammad Bin Salman (MBS)," Professor Nader Hashemi, Director of the Centre for Middle East Studies at the University of Denver, told me.

This vote was a reflection of popular American anger toward the murder of Jamal Khashoggi [by MBS] and more generally a reflection of American opposition toward the current state of U.S.-Saudi relations.

Last week, Newsweek reported that "a new investigation found that hundreds of ci-



**Under Trump's reign, we are seeing, more than at any time before, the White House administration giving its full support to a crown prince who has not been doing anything except breaching human rights laws.**

vilians – including children – have been killed or maimed by U.S.-made weapons in unlawful airstrikes conducted as part of the ongoing war in Yemen." Yet, this is not the first time this has happens. This is because munitions experts told CNN that the bomb used by the Saudi-led coalition in a devastating attack on a school bus in Yemen was sold as part of a U.S. State Department-sanctioned arms deal with Saudi Arabia. This demonstrates the way in which Trump has forced his country to be complicit in the violations that the Saudi-led coalition is committing in Yemen.

Arguably, Trump's approach to Saudi

Arabia contradicts the U.S.' really morals. However, under his reign, we are seeing, more than at any time before, the White House administration giving its full support to a crown prince who has not been doing anything except breaching human rights laws. This makes the U.S., which has been viewed as a champion of human rights, look like a backer of a crown prince that has destroyed his country's reputation globally as a result of his human rights abuses.

Such an approach has forced U.S. lawmakers to take a stand and stop their country's slogan being changed from "leader of the

free world" to "backer of a brutal regime". Only action will stop this happening and the senators did just that.

"The Senate vote to end U.S. support for the war in Yemen is another expression of the bipartisan anger in Congress toward the relationship between the White House and the Saudi leadership in the aftermath of the killing of Jamal Khashoggi," Baker Institute fellow for the Middle East, Kristian Ulrichsen, told me. "This anger is very real and it is one of the rare instances of an issue that crosses the partisan divide and in which prominent Republicans and Democrats can work together. This presents a real problem for the Saudi leadership as the U.S.-Saudi partnership has lost the support of Congress and now rests with the occupants of the White House, who may not be there in two years' time."

Yet it is unlikely that Trump is going to listen to Congress and, as a result, he is likely to veto its decision, stopping it in its tracks. This will only deepen the disagreement that he created between his administration and the lawmakers regarding his "MBS First" policy.

MBS has been gaining strength from Trump, and we can argue that he may not have maneuvered in the way he has been of late if Trump wasn't in the White House. The president's silence has been taken as a green light for the kingdom's de facto ruler to do anything he wants.

Arab regimes who at first joined the Saudi coalition in Yemen have since realized that their country's reputation hung in the balance as a result and they withdrew their forces.

Trump has continuously acted as a businessman; everything has a price to him. History will not look keenly on such "leaders" who have deliberately been taking the wrong approach in favor of commercial considerations.

(Source: Middle East Monitor)

## Ankara fumes as European Parliament votes to suspend EU talks

By Ayla Jean Yackley

Turkey fired back at the European Parliament after it called for the suspension of membership negotiations over its human rights record, calling the resolution "worthless" and "discriminatory" and sounding an alarm about right-wing populism taking root in Europe.

On Wednesday, the Strasbourg-based assembly approved a report that said Ankara's failure to protect rights and the rule of law and its transition to an executive presidential system last year that concentrates power in one man's hands meant that the membership process should be frozen.

The vote is only advisory, and it is up to European governments to decide whether to shelve the talks. But it was still a sharp rebuke of Turkey, whose long-running bid to join the affluent bloc has been bogged down for years over its slow pace of reforms, a lack of a settlement on Cyprus and Europe's reluctance to admit a populous Muslim nation. Turkey began formally negotiating its entry into the EU in 2005.

"We are concerned for the EU's future and our common values now that extreme right and left-wing currents have begun to hold sway over the EP, turning the report into an exclusionary, discriminatory and populist text that does not reflect reality," the Turkish Foreign Ministry said in a statement. "This advisory decision is meaningless for us."

The measure was adopted with 370 votes in favor, 109 against and 143 abstentions. Conservative members failed to add language that went further and called for the termination of Turkey's membership process.

EU membership remains a strategic goal for Turkey, the Foreign Ministry said, calling on Europe to improve dialogue and relations with Turkey. It also questioned the timing of the vote, noting that it coincided with another election campaign in Turkey and the eve of a key meeting taking place in Brussels after a four-year hiatus.

Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu will meet Federica Mogherini, the EU's top diplomat, and Johannes Hahn, the commissioner for enlargement, in Brussels on Friday for a Turkey-EU Association Council Meeting, the two sides' top decision-making mechanism. They are expected to discuss changes to the customs union that governs trade between the EU and Turkey, as well as lifting visa restrictions on Turkish citizens. The council last met in May 2015.

Ankara and Brussels have sought to repair relations dam-



Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu (L) and European Union Foreign Policy Chief Federica Mogherini hold a news conference at the European Commission in Brussels, Belgium, July 25, 2017.

aged in the aftermath of a failed 2016 military coup in Turkey and an ensuing crackdown that has jailed tens of thousands of people. Europe is Turkey's biggest trading partner, and it needs foreign investment amid a sharp economic downturn. For its part, Europe relies on Turkey for security and help in

**The Strasbourg-based assembly approved a report that said Ankara's failure to protect rights and the rule of law and its transition to an executive presidential system last year that concentrates power in one man's hands meant that the membership process should be frozen.**

stemming irregular migration to the continent.

Omer Celik, Turkey's former chief negotiator with the EU and now spokesman for the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), said in a series of tweets that the resolution is

"null and void, worthless and disreputable."

"We return this report back to you. You may found a 'European Museum of Racism and Islamophobia' and hang this report of yours on its gate. So that you will remember how you surrendered Europe to racists step by step," Celik said.

But the body insisted its vote was a defense of its commitment to basic rights and freedoms. It said in a statement that "years of severe political and democratic backsliding" in Turkey were behind its decision and accused the government of restricting basic human rights, including the role of civil society and the press. Turkey is the world's biggest jailer of journalists and rated "not free" by Freedom House.

"If the EU takes its own values seriously, no other conclusion is possible than to formally suspend the talks on EU integration. Our repeated calls to respect fundamental rights have fallen on deaf ears in Ankara," Kati Piri, the European Parliament's rapporteur on Turkey who drafted the report, said in the statement.

"I realize that stopping the accession talks is not a step which will help Turkey's democrats. For that, the EU leaders must use all possible tools to exert more pressure on the Turkish government," she said, urging more EU funding be directed to civil society groups, journalists and human rights defenders.

Improvements Turkey has sought in the customs union, such as access to other markets with which the EU has free trade agreements and removing tariffs on Turkish agricultural products, should be conditional on Turkey improving its human rights record, Piri said.

One opposition politician in Turkey blamed the government for wrecking Turkey's EU membership aspirations but also accused Europe of "insincerity."

"Our relationship with Europe shouldn't be only economic, it should include rights and the law," said Sezai Temelli, who leads the leftist Peoples' Democratic Party, which has seen thousands of its activists, lawmakers and mayors jailed in Turkey since 2016 on terrorism-related offenses.

"Amid so many rights violations in Turkey, so much unlawfulness, [Europe] has been ... arm in arm with the government, turning a blind eye in its bargain over refugees," Temelli said. "This resolution should be corrected. Both Turkey and the EU need to rebuild relations based on justice and human rights."

(Source: Al Monitor)

## The rise of the far-right has been ignored for too long

Extremists today are tech-savvy and emboldened by populist leaders.

The terror attack on two New Zealand mosques, which killed at least 49 Muslims at prayers, was the work of a white supremacist conspiracy theorist. As in all such cases, the attack is above all an immense human tragedy. Live-streamed by the terrorist himself, it is also a stark reminder that the radical right is resurgent. Its adherents today are empowered by politicians in western democracies who have shifted the boundaries of acceptable political discourse. Supporters have pushed these same narratives on popular platforms including YouTube, where algorithms can lead viewers towards ever more extreme content. The radical right has, in parts, attempted to

rebrand itself by dropping the overt symbolism of the past while keeping its underlying ideology of hate intact.

It has been bolstered by the rise of populist politicians who have shifted norms. U.S. president Donald Trump said last year there were "fine people" among white supremacists who gathered at Charlottesville, one of whom murdered a counter-protester. In the wake of the Christchurch attack, Australian senator Fraser Anning termed it "violent vigilantism". The conspiracy theories underpinning the terrorist's worldview have become the stock language of too many politicians. The radical right has also been successful because it knows how to turn social and news media into a bully pulpit. Even in regular times,

moderators on sites such as YouTube face a gruelling uphill battle with a constant stream of content. In extreme scenarios such as the New Zealand attack, they struggle as new videos appear as quickly as others are taken down. This is compounded by the rise of "alt-tech" platforms which claim to be committed to uncensored free speech but are often patronized by extremists. These sites are often less likely to remove offensive content.

At least one provided a link to his manifesto. Shocking pictures and words may be part and parcel of the click-driven commercial internet, but this is exactly what the terrorist intended to happen. News organizations must balance the desire to illustrate and explain with the risks of linking to a manifesto that is specifically designed

to spread discord through misinformation. Halting the resurgence of the radical right will take action by multiple parties. Those politicians who trade in Islamophobia and bigotry, tacit or explicit, must move beyond merely proffering condolences and stop pandering to extremists. Big Tech should better support moderation and ensure algorithms do not aid the radical right. Alt-tech companies, which have all too often used free speech arguments as carte blanche to carry extremist content, may require regulation. Traditional media cannot allow the drive for clicks to outweigh the potential harm of giving terrorists the publicity they crave. The time has come to confront the mortal threat to the open society.

(Source: FT)



# ‘Saudi Arabia, Israel two peas in a pod’

**TEHRAN (Tasnim)** — A political analyst and Islamic scholar based in Leicester, the United Kingdom, described the Israeli-Saudi alliance as “not surprising” and said the two regimes, which are both satellites of the US, are in fact “two peas in a pod”.

“So, the alliance between the regime occupying Arabia and the regime occupying Palestine, which is what I think it’s better to refer to them as, is something not surprising,” Shabbir Hassanally said in an interview with the Tasnim News Agency.

Following is the full text of the interview:

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

A: In order to understand this question, in order to answer this question really about the relationship, supposedly covert relationship but in reality very overt relationship between so-called Israel and so-called Saudi Arabia, we have to understand that both of these entities are built on the perversion of a religion. They both profess to represent. Israel professes to represent Judaism but in reality, has nothing to do with Judaism. The same way so-called Saudi Arabia professes, claims to represent Islam but has nothing to do with Islam. It’s alien to Islam and everything about Saudi Arabia and its manner of conduct (is proof of this). The same with Israel goes against the teachings of Islam and for Israel that goes against the teachings of Judaism and this is not just one person saying it. This is evidenced by many senior Jewish rabbis and senior Muslim Ulama or scholars who have suggested this and said this and actually gone further to prove it. So, the alliance between the regime occupying Arabia and the regime occupying Palestine, which is what I think it’s better to refer to them as, is something not surprising.

What’s surprising is that they haven’t done it sooner but of course, it’s all about perception. It’s about how the world will view them. I mean for many years, Saudi Arabia was perceived by the Muslim world as the bastion of Islamic teachings and Islamic thought and it was thought of unfortunately by the Muslim world as a whole, as a flag bearer for Islam whereas the events in Syria with the sponsoring of Daesh and such groups, the sponsorship of al Qaeda and its various operations across the world, not to mention its genocide in Yemen and also in Bahrain, has sort of removed the mask from the Saudi regime.

Also, a lot of the corruption and the debauched behavior of the children from this family is now coming out into the open and because of this it’s a case of people like Mohammed bin Salman, who is the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, really doesn’t have any time for Islam. He doesn’t want these restrictions or as he thinks of them of course as restrictions and he wants to completely westernize his country with what he believes is his country but he’s actually occupied land. So, of course, it’s not very surprising at all. What I believe is one of these strategic problems that Saudi Arabia has is that there is now a power in the region called the Islamic Republic of Iran which does embody the principles of Islam. It speaks for Islam. It selflessly supports people that are oppressed. The Islamic Iran has supported the Palestinians from day one of the (1979) revolution and the victory of the revolution and it went in to support Iraq when Iraq had a problem with Daesh and al-Qaeda and it went in of course into Syria for the same reason and it doesn’t go into countries with the intention that America does, where America goes into a country and it was to pillage the country and you know, to take over its natural resources.

Of course, Iran doesn’t act in this way.



Iran goes in to support the country, to help the country, develop a degree of stability and remove its problems if we like, organize itself and remove its problems and then Iran will go back to Iran and continue supporting that country helping the country rebuild, reconstruct itself and develop the independence that the people of the Islamic Republic of Iran fought so hard to get. We must remember all of this is tied to the ideology that brought about the Islamic Revolution, the way the Islamic Revolution was brought about, why it was brought about. All of these need to be understood in order to understand Iran’s policy.

For Saudi Arabia this was, of course, a disaster because with Iran, which they point out and they call it as the Ajam or the Persian or the Shiite and they make this idea that Iran is somehow not talking about Islam and Saudis can say this but at the end of the day, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. So, when you look and compare Saudi Islam and the Islam coming out of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its practical aspects, its spiritual aspects, cultural aspects, everything, you can see that what so-called Saudi Arabia has is nothing as though has no connection to Islam whereas what Iran is doing is the embodiment of Islamic teachings within the Quran, where you’re supposed to help your fellow man when he or she is down, you’re supposed to go and support people who are being oppressed, you go and help those who are poor and such things. So this embarrasses Saudi Arabia and so they want Iran to be out of the equation. So does Israel of course for the same reason because Iran calls Israel an occupier, an illegal occupier which is what it is and so of course, Israel has a problem. These two are both satellites of the United States which has a very big problem with Iran because Iran is not subservient to the Empire and as a result, they will all come together. So, this is in my opinion, the understanding that I have of why there is extensive now more outside but previously behind-the-scenes diplomatic and intelligence and other cooperation between so-called Saudi Arabia and so-called Israel and with that I will move on to the next question.

■ 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: Now, this is an interesting question. It’s not so much a case of Saudi Arabia being infiltrated by Israel. It’s more a case of America which is the Great Satan. I mean, we should call it what it is, which has been controlling and utilizing both of these entities in order to further its agenda and like I’ve said, Saudi Arabia and Israel are two peas in a pod.

They are the same, one usurps and defames

and insults Islam; the other one defames, insults and usurps Judaism. They have nothing to do with the divine religions but they are motivated by greed and by power and essentially by their own survival in terms of the regimes and America provides this. So, America has now chosen to almost expose more publicly the idea that Saudi and Israel are working very closely. Mossad we know works very closely with the CIA and so ultimately, the so-called Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been infiltrated from the beginning.

When I say infiltrated, I mean it’s not been working for the betterment and for the benefit of its population. It’s been working for the betterment and benefit of its master which is of course the United States and as a result of this it is receptive to overtures by Zionists and neo-cons and people who have no care for the people of Saudi Arabia and the region but who care about the natural resources who care about maintaining a balance of terror in the region where American power is constantly thought of by or at least this is the illusion that America tries to create.

America wants to be in a position where the world needs it, where the region, the Middle East region, which is one of the most important strategic regions, needs it all the time and so it keeps trying to do that and one of the means that it uses is of course using Israel because Israel is obviously on the surface. It’s a lot closer to the American Empire and to work with Saudi Arabia to circumvent either local and indigenous resistance movements that have been resisting the illegal and inhumane policies of Saudi Arabia but not just that; it also of course tries to create a scenario of war with either Syria or with Iran or with Hezbollah or with any organization, any country that seeks to stand in the way of America and says we will not bend the knee to the empire anyone who does this is a threat to the Empire so the Empire will use every method available to it in order to achieve its goals.

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

A: Again, this is a very interesting question. The normalization of ties between so-called Saudi Arabia and so-called Israel, this is something that I believe as long as the Saudi regime occupies Arabia is something inevitable. I’m surprised that it actually took this long and I think the reason it’s taken this long is because they’ve had ties but the ties have been undercover. They haven’t been overt. Now, with what is perceived as the failure of the so-called Arab Spring and the failure of the Americans and the Zionists and the Saudis to defeat the resistance axis in Syria and Iraq, I think they’re being forced into a different position and they’re taking more direct action

and as a result, they’re showing their colors; they’re showing that they’re all together.

As for the countries that will follow suit, which countries will join in on this activity, I think those countries that are controlled and beholden to Saudi Arabia and America will go into this. They may make different noises initially; they may sort of pretend to resist if you like to somehow appease their population but ultimately, this will all become overt unless the people, the genuine people on the ground in these countries and I’ll come to who I think the countries are; until these countries have an independent government that actually cares about the people, nothing is going to change. It’s just going to get worse and worse and in terms of these countries, first of all, I’m talking about the countries of the Persian Gulf region.

Countries such as Bahrain, even Qatar unfortunately, Oman, Kuwait, of course so-called Saudi Arabia, and also we mustn’t forget countries like Jordan and Egypt and so on. All of these countries operate as satellites of the United States and as long as they are satellites of the United States, this policy coming out of Washington of normalization that the Saudis have been asked to promote if you like and be flag bearers on, of course this will continue.

So, once Saudi has fully normalized, then you’ll see Bahrain very quickly, UAE, the so-called Emirates, you know, as I like to call them the shopping mall with a flag, they will also fully normalize although arguably they have already fully normalized and you know further and further and further and further so until there is a viable resistance, until there is a real opposition from the population, I don’t think this is going to change. In terms of the cost, I think that these countries that I’ve mentioned, Bahrain and Oman and UAE and such, I think these people the cost to get them onto the side of the empires and for the regimes to come on the side of the Empire and to make open relations with Israel.

I think this is going to be quite cheap. These people (regimes) have very little honor. They don’t really care and they see making ties with Israel as a means to further their financial agendas and their financial aims. So in terms of having to bribe them, I don’t think this is going to be a problem for the Americans or for the Saudis. This is not what they need. In terms of the people, the cost, in terms of the local people in these countries, anyone who comes and resists and stands up and says no, this is a problem, they will pay a very heavy price and they will need to be a revolution and again, I think people need to look at the Islamic Revolution because if you look at Shah in the pre-Islamic Revolution victory times, Shah was completely in bed with Israel.

There’s documentary evidence that suggests that Savak was trained by Mossad and CIA and that Shah had no problem with the Israelis even though, you know, of course he knew that people didn’t like it but Shah never cared about the people. This is the same nature of these mini-Shahs that are floating around in so-called Saudi Arabi, Bahrain, UAE, etc. in Jordan and Egypt etc. These shahs need to be removed and can only be removed by a ground like a grass roots real revolution and I don’t believe a secular revolution can remedy this. I believe it needs to be in this region. It needs to be an Islamic Revolution, a revolution of light if you like the Islamic Revolution and I would encourage those revolutionaries on the ground in these countries to study the history of the Islamic Revolution from 1963 until 1979 to read Imam Khomeini’s writings to understand what was going on to understand what Shah had done and to understand how deep the Israeli and American influence was in Iran prior to the revolution and to see how it was possible for Imam Khomeini and the brave people of Iran to give many many sacrifices to literally take this cancer and throw him out.

## A U.S. military base, a British occupation and a UN judgment for the decolonisation of Mauritius



By Vijay Prashad

Give Chagos back to the Chagossians! That’s a slogan I first heard in 2000. It was a demonstration in London, outside a court house, a small group of people with handmade signs appealing to the British legal system to return their islands to them. Few people paid them any attention. The courts sniffed, sided with the islanders (whose case is unimpeachable), and then did nothing to enforce their verdict.

The Chagos Archipelago is a group of 60 islands in the Indian Ocean. These islands are claimed by Mauritius, a country that won its independence from the United Kingdom (UK) in 1968. Three years before the independence of Mauritius, the British separated the Chagos Archipelago, and converted it into the British Indian Ocean Territory. To cement its control over the islands, the British expelled over two thousand Chagossians. Some of these Chagossians stood in London, fighting for their lost islands.

At the end of February, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that the UK must give the islands back to Mauritius. In 2017, the UN General Assembly had heard the case of the islanders, and referred it to the ICJ. Now, the ICJ – with a 13 to 1 ruling (the US voting against) – has sided with the Chagossians. But this is not a binding ruling, and the British government has said it would ignore the International Court of Justice.

### ■ Diego Garcia

Why would the United Kingdom need these islands? By the 1960s, the United States had begun to take over many of the British imperial bases for its own massive military base system. There are now over 800 US military bases in more than 70 countries (for comparison, the Russians have about eight overseas military bases, most of them in the territory of the former USSR – such as in Moldova and in Belarus – with only the bases in Syria and Vietnam outside that zone). No country can match the US military footprint.

The biggest island on the Chagos Archipelago is Diego Garcia. The United States leases this island from the United Kingdom. The UK gave the US the lease in exchange for a discount on the sale of the Polaris nuclear submarine system. That lease ends in 2036. Diego Garcia has been one of the most important US overseas bases – used in the US war on Vietnam, the US war on Afghanistan and the US war on Iraq. It was used by the CIA as a black site in the War on Terror (150 Sri Lankan fishermen were held there in its prisons).

### ■ Zone of Peace

The United States has faced legal threats to its base for the past five decades. The bereft Chagossians have taken their case to British courts, hoping to exert pressure to return the islands to them. When the British broke off the islands from Mauritius in 1965, the UK violated UN Resolution 1514 (XV) on Decolonisation that argued against the break-up of colonies. Britain strong-armed the Mauritius independence movement, telling them that they could have their freedom without Chagos or have no freedom at all.

More difficult for the US military operations was the attempt by the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the United Nations to constitute the Indian Ocean as a ‘zone of peace.’ As early as 1964, at the Cairo (Egypt) Non-Aligned summit, the member states recommended that the oceans of the world be ‘denuclearised zones’ (the NAM was inspired by the 1959 Antarctic Treaty and the 1963 Treaty of Tlatelco – to keep Latin America free of nuclear weapons). In 1970, the Non-Aligned summit in Lusaka (Zambia) declared that the Indian Ocean must be a ‘zone of peace from which Great Power rivalries and competition, as well as bases’ must be excluded.

The United States attacked this idea. Admiral Elmo Zumwalt told the US Congress in 1974 that the USSR stood atop the ‘central part of the West’s energy jugular down to the Persian Gulf.’ For that reason, the Indian Ocean – and Diego Garcia – has ‘become a focal point of US foreign and economic policies and has a growing impact on our security.’

### ■ Marine Reserve

Every attempt was made to deny the people of Chagos their homeland. In April 2010, the British Foreign Office said that 640,000 square kilometres of the archipelago would now be a ‘marine reserve,’ which should remain uninhabited. The British government told the US government – in a secret cable – that the ‘former inhabitants would find it difficult, if not impossible, to pursue their claim for resettlement on the islands if the entire Chagos were a marine reserve.’ This was environmental conservation for military purposes. No statement was made to remove the US base from Diego Garcia, which would be at the heart of the marine reserve.

In 2015, Mauritius went to the court of arbitration at The Hague, where they won a ruling that the British declaration of the marine reserve was illegal. The UK had not consulted either Mauritius or the Chagossians. Britain eventually said that the Chagossians would not be able to exercise their right to return because of the objections of the US military. So be it.

After this ruling, a spokeswoman for the British foreign office said that the ICJ’s ruling ‘was an advisory opinion, not a judgment.’ It is unlikely that the UK – or the US – will honour the opinion. The US voted against it. The UK now says that the military base ‘helps to protect people here in Britain and around the world from terrorist threats, organised crime and piracy.’ The door closes once more on the hopes of the Chagossians.

## Human Rights: No game in progress at UNHRC

**TEHRAN (FNA)** — It is unfortunate to hear that European Union ambassadors have decided to leave sanctions imposed on a number of Iranian individuals for alleged human rights abuses in place for another year.

This is while the Iranian Judiciary’s High Council for Human Rights has also lambasted the United Nations’ special rapporteur for human rights in Iran for his latest report on the country. In his report submitted to the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Iran Javadi Rehman voiced concern over human rights violations in Iran.

That the new reports and sanctions are baseless and politicized are beyond dispute. What’s new is that they are based on numerous interviews with various anti-Iran media outlets in the West, including the BBC, the VOA, Radio Farda and so on, which are well known for their hostile reports against Iran. This is a blatant violation of the UN framework, within which special rapporteurs are chosen.

It is an open secret that violations, double standards and politicization of human rights agenda by certain members of UNHRC have now become a routine. This has made many member states like Iran to react. Not by naming and shaming certain hypocritical governments that have double standard and fail, but by promoting dialogue and exchange on the basis of mutual respect and equality.

It is very difficult to come up with any counterargument to dismiss such a progressive call for promotion of international dialogue and cooperation. On balance, nothing is wrong with playing a positive role in global politics, excuse yourself from the table of negativity at the UNHRC and lean forward in peace, and/or uphold the purposes and principles



of the Charter of United Nations, respect sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations, and work consistently with the international civil society in an impartial, objective, constructive, and non-selective manner.

Confrontation or raising baseless accusations about an important subject matter such as human rights in Iran will take the Council and its decisions nowhere. Baseless accusations and confrontations as such only embed an enduring showdown, harbor intense apprehension, and fuel distrust and enmity, ultimately bringing the UNHRC and officials unwittingly to their knees.

This should be avoided at all costs. Being loose domestically and strict abroad is contrasting principles for the European Union and/or the United States, which are always behind anti-Iran human rights reports. They need to walk the talk before criticizing others for alleged human rights violations when they themselves practice just that. A case

in point could be the ongoing violent protests by the Yellow Jackets in France, during which many protesters have been injured, blinded and even killed. How come, the UNHRC never bothers to issue a report to condemn such violations in the heart of the European continent?

Nevertheless, the time is now for Western nations to prove they also respect human rights. They should never defend their own national interests or wield human rights issues and sanctions as a political tool. In fact, all UNHRC member states should dispose of their human rights plaything, and live up to their standards and commitments.

History suggests that when human rights reports and discussions are embroiled in controversy, thrown aside, ignored or politicized in such sessions, there is no game in progress. Concern for human rights and international justice should never come only when some member states see it as crucial to their own national and geopolitical interests.

The same rule applies to UNHRC policymakers and rapporteurs, as they are the ones that pen the Council’s annual human rights reports. They should avoid hypocritical and misleading accounts, divorce themselves from one-size-fits-all approach, take into account national conditions, and employ similar language for everyone. It might turn out to be the only key to significant progress and credibility for the Council.

There can be no doubt that it will take realpolitik even more than morality or enlightenment for the Council to indulge in such policies and practices. In the absence of realpolitik, there is too little incentive for policymakers and rapporteurs to actually bring about the sort of changes and reforms that would make universal human rights violations and hypocrisies a thing of the past.



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# Steps taken for technology and innovation improvement in 1397

## Technology eases everyday life of people

The technology achievements become tangible in today world. They ease everyday life with more efficient methods.

During the past year, the ICT Ministry signed several agreements with other organizations and organizations in order to facilitate and improve the lives of citizens.

In July 2018, the ICT Ministry and the Ministry of Energy signed an agreement to boost job creation and improve efficiency in the field of water and electricity through technological advancement.

According to the agreement, the ICT Ministry plans to provide smart water and electricity metering, light switch, electrical substation and street light, and water consumption management.

According to an agreement between the ICT Ministry and agriculture ministry smart irrigation was planned in a bid to help deal with water shortage in the country.

A pilot study was conducted in Moghan plain, northwestern Iran, and Qazvin plain, central Iran, resulted in a 50 percent decrease in water usage through smart irrigation. The figure is 15 percent in Fars province.



According to the agreement, it is projected that at least 20 percent of the agricultural economy to be linked with the digital economy over the course of four years so that the private sector's contribution to smart agriculture would rise by 300 percent.

In January 2019, the Department of Environment and the ICT Ministry inked a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to contain natural disasters such as wildfires using modern technologies in Golestan National Park, northern Iran.

As per the MOU, such projects aiming at achieving environmental goals and sustainable development along with early detection and warning of natural disasters using modern technology will be implemented nationwide.

## 5G internet is on the way!

In February 2019, the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Ministry aims to develop the 5th Generation (5G) -- the latest generation of cellular mobile communications -- and Internet of things (IoT) in the next Iranian calendar year 1398 (starting on March 21).

In August 2018, Azari Jahromi announced that up to now 55 percent of Iranian villages have internet coverage "Heading towards 5G! It is an aim we pursue besides development of IoT in 1398. Now, all the Iranian cities and over 66 percent of villages have 3G/4G coverage. We do our best for the development of public access in next year despite sanctions. The new generation of telecommunication is waiting for us!" Azari Jahromi announced.

## E-government is not a claim!

During 1397, the ICT Ministry is providing infrastructures for e-government and make it applicable in some areas.

In July 2018, Iran moved 20 notches up to rank 86 among 193 countries in the United Nations E-Government Development Index (EGDI 2018) in comparison with EGDI 2017, UN website reported.

Issued by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, EGDI evaluates the scope and quality of online services, the status of telecommunication infrastructure and existing human capacity.

Iran was amongst 17 countries that transitioned from Middle- to High-EGDI level group.

The first phase of e-government services project in Iran officially came on stream under the title of 'Mobile Government' in mid-May 2018.

The project aims to facilitate some government services, reduce unnecessary expenses and ease traffic jam, which is the main cause of air pollution in big cities.

It is based on the National Information Network, an ongoing project to develop a secure and stable infrastructure network in the country.

The National Information Network (NIN) is the definition of cyberspace development by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Iran started issuing smart cards for purchasing gasoline on December 3 through "Mobile Government" - the first phase of e-government services project which came on stream in May.

Through the project, the gasoline smart cards, which were used for rationing fuel in past years, is now connected to the bank cards for easy payment.

The government saves 3.3 trillion rials (some \$78.5m) through issuing the smart card by the Mobile Government.

The Mobile Government aims to facilitate some government services, reduce unnecessary expenses and ease traffic jam, which is the main cause of air pollution in big cities.

**There are 257 companies active in this field, 33 percent of which working on nano-materials. These companies have manufactured 376 different products using the nontechnology, showing that this is a field with huge economic and practical advantage.**

## Some statistics about internet users in Iran

Some organizations and ICT Ministry released statistics about internet and internet users in the country during the past year.

In January 2019, the Information Technology Organization of Iran announced that Iranians spend one hour and four minutes daily on social networks.

The figures are stated according to a survey conducted by the Statistical Center of Iran in the past Iranian calendar year 1396 (ended on March 20, 2018).

The time Iranian spend on social media is 30 times more than the time they read newspapers and nine times more than the time they read books, he said.

Iranians spend four hours and 34 minutes per month on book reading, which includes non-curriculum books, and the figure is one hour and 27 minutes for the reading the newspaper.

According to a report released by the Measuring Information Society of Iran at the Information Technology Organization in early 2019, 64 percent of Iranians above six years are internet users.

A survey was conducted at urban and rural areas during the winter season of the Iranian calendar year 1396 (ended March 20, 2018) by the Statistical Center of Iran.

According to the survey, the internet user is defined as someone who has used the internet during the past three months and by this definition, 46,315,545 people are internet users in Iran.

According to the report, 72.8 percent of Iranian families have access to the internet, which means that 17,936,000 families benefit from internet nationwide.

A total of 17,216,000 families have access to a computer, which is 69.7 percent of the population.

Another survey, which was conducted two years ago, reported that 61.39 percent of Iranian families have access to the internet until the yearend of Iranian calendar year 1395 (ended on March 21, 2017).



Hence, there is a 10 percent development during a year, according to the report.

The survey is done according to 19 indicators and factors provided by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

## Cybersecurity for children atop agenda

In mid-November, the ICT Ministry announced that it plans to introduce parental control applications.

According to a survey conducted by the ICT Ministry, only eight percent of Iranian parents monitor their children's online activity.

The survey revealed that Iran is not very successful in content creation for children and to control children's online activity.

The ministry held a festival named Koodakonline in March 2019 during which, it introduces apps for kids.

The festival acted as an incubator in the field of creating appropriate content for children and young adults

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

The ICT Ministry also plans to hold a festival on web series and online short films for children in spring 2019, he announced.

According to a report announced by the deputy education minister for training Alireza Kazemi in early December, about 20 million internet users out of 56 million users are below 18.

## Space technology is not untapped anymore!

Iran, as a country which has made several achievements in space technology in recent decades, is not an exception. Now, the Iranian Space Agency (ISA) promotes space-based businesses as one of the main factors for the development of the country.

In June 2018, Indonesian National Institute of Aeronautics and Space (LAPAN) and Iranian Space Agency (ISA) discussed the expansion of relationship during a meeting on the sidelines of 61st Committee of the United Nations on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS).

In October 2018, the ISA Director Morteza Barari announced that Iran possesses 30 geostationary orbital slots and the country plans to provide infrastructure for filling the slots in the near future.

In March 2019, the head of the Iranian Space Research Center Hossein Samimi announced that the center is working on five key projects, which are considered as the main achievements of Iran's space technology.

According to a recent agreement signed between the Iranian Space Research Center and the Ministry of Agriculture, in February 2019 the remote sensing satellites are planned to be used in different sections of the agricultural industry.

The center already provided a map of the cultivated area, which provides more than 95 percent of the national rice market in five provinces.

During Arbæen pilgrimages, which fell on October 3 this year, the balloons brought internet access at the borders of Mehran and Khosravi, which offered free WiFi services to pilgrims.

In February 2019, The Iranian Space Research Center provided details of a successful test of its internet balloon system that took place over the city of Karaj, Alborz province, Mehr reported on Tuesday.

Named "Baam 300", it is equipped with night-vision

cameras, the high altitude balloon went 350 kilometers above the Earth's surface with the capacity to transfer 300 kg of telecommunication packages.

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

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

## Satellites

In a speech in January 2019, ICT Minister announced that the satellites improve the standard of living, food and water resources security, which are the most important aims for the government.

Azari Jahromi said that Iran will not hold off development in the field of space technology and cannot wait for other countries to meet its needs.

In January 2019, Iran launched homegrown Payam satellite, however, the satellite's carrier rocket could not reach the "necessary speed" and so neither reach the orbit, the information and communication technology (ICT) minister told the state TV.

Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi said that the satellite successfully passed the first and second stages of the launch, but could not reach the "necessary speed" in the third stage.

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

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

Later Azari Jahromi announced that Iran has spent 1.2 million euros for manufacturing Payam satellite over a period of ten years saying that the budget is not an expenditure but an investment, just like e-government, the remote sensing satellite will improve usage of water resources and methods of agriculture.

## Nanotechnology achievements on the rise year on year

Recognizing the great importance of nanotechnology, Iranians have had boosted researches in the field year on year.

There are 257 companies active in this field, 33 percent of which working on nano-materials.

These companies have manufactured 376 different products using the nontechnology, showing that this is a field with huge economic and practical advantage.

According to a report released by the StatNano, a comprehensive statistical database portal, in January 2019, Iran ranks first in 2018 in terms of local share of nano-articles, which is the ratio of the nano-articles carried in a country to the total articles of that country.

In February 2019, Iran Nanotechnology Initiative Council announced that the Iranian knowledge-based companies



manufacture 12 to 15 new nano products per month.

In November 2018, Iran Nanotechnology Innovation Council announced that it is predicted that 30 billion rials (about \$175 million) of nanotechnology products will be sold by the end of the current Iranian calendar year 1397 (March 20, 2019).

There are 194 companies active in the field of nanotechnology in 2018 out of which, 60 percent were initiated as nanotechnology companies and the rest changed or developed as such companies.

With 9,662 articles and 5.81 percent of its share, Iran ranks 4th amongst the top 20 countries based on the share of nano-articles carried in 2018.

Approximately 166,000 nano-articles were indexed in the Web of Science (WoS) in 2018, comprising around 10% of the total. Among the different branches of science, chemistry, materials, and physics had respectively the largest shares of the indexed nano-articles.

In June 2018, the council announced that in Iran, about 170 nanotechnology companies produce over 420 nano products in the different fields including healthcare, textile, home appliances, energy and laboratory equipment.

Meanwhile, the Iran Nanotechnology Initiative Council announced that the Nanomedicines, advanced nanomaterials and nanomedical devices are on the top list for export and nanotechnology products were exported to 50 countries over the Iranian calendar years 1394 to 1396 (2015-2017).

Russia, India, Brazil, and Mexico are the target markets for nano product since they have a great market for nanotechnology products.

## Iran's successes in biotechnology

In February 2019, the biotech development center (BioDC) announced that there are 146 biopharmaceuticals in the global market, out of which, 22 items are available in Iran which are monoclonal antibodies and recombinant proteins.

The Development of biotechnology can save \$200-300 million annually in coming years.

Previously in October 2018, the BioDC released a report that medicine is on top of the list of exports of biotechnology products in Iran.

In July 2018, the vice president for science and technology Sourena Sattari announced that Iranian startups meet 98 percent of the domestic market's need to biotechnology medicine.

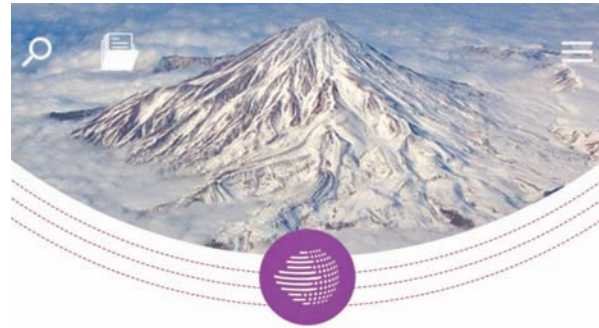
## Knowledge economy is a necessity

Knowledge economy and innovation ecosystem were catchphrases of the vice president for science and technology

Sourena Sattari during the past year.

In his speeches on different occasions, he always stressed the importance of the replacement of the oil economy with knowledge economy for improvement of the country.

In May 2018, the Health Ministry announced that Iranian knowledge-based companies operating in the field of health have supplied over 2,500 products to the domestic market and about 450 knowledge enterprises are now active in the field of healthcare products in the country.



خدمات دولت همراه



It was announced that out of this number, 52 companies export their products with value more than 70 million dollars.

In September 2018, the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology announced that selling knowledge-based products has so far brought in 34 trillion rials (about \$8 million) revenue in the current Iranian calendar year, starting March 21.

The number of incubator centers has increased to 193 in the previous Iranian calendar year 1396 compared to 174 centers in the year earlier. As many as 41 science and technology parks were operational as the main centers for the development of knowledge-based companies until the end of the previous Iranian calendar year.

In September 2018, the vice presidency for science and technology announced that Iran has exported \$400 million worth of knowledge-based products during the past Iranian calendar year 1396 (March 2017-March 2018).

In April 2018, Iranian knowledge enterprises exported products valued at 450 million dollars during the past Iranian calendar year which ended on March 20, the vice president for science and technology announced on Saturday.

Startups also took the lead through the past Iranian calendar year.

In September 2018, the vice presidency for science and technology announced that there are about 4,000 startups operating in Iran which provide IT-based services to the public.

The ICT Ministry announced in September 2018 that over 93,700 job opportunities were created in the field of the smart transportation system, e-commerce and mobile applications in Iran during the previous Iranian calendar year 1396 (March 2017- March 2018).



The vice presidency for science and technology announced in September 2018 that there were about 4,000 startups operating in Iran which provide IT-based services to the public.

## Bottom line

The technology and its application in everyday life bring transparency, comfort and time to us. However, this is all upon us how to use it and be aware of non-use of technology.

Iran is on the track to promote technology and innovation for a more easy life, creating jobs and opportunities for citizens and, of course, all of us can have own share in such a development. However, maybe we should write it on our resolution list for the New Year, to create and use technology tools and solutions and not let them use us. Happy Noruz!

**According to a recent agreement signed between the Iranian Space Research Center and the Ministry of Agriculture, in February 2019 the remote sensing satellites are planned to be used in different sections of the agricultural industry.**



# Which habitable zones are the best to actually search for life?

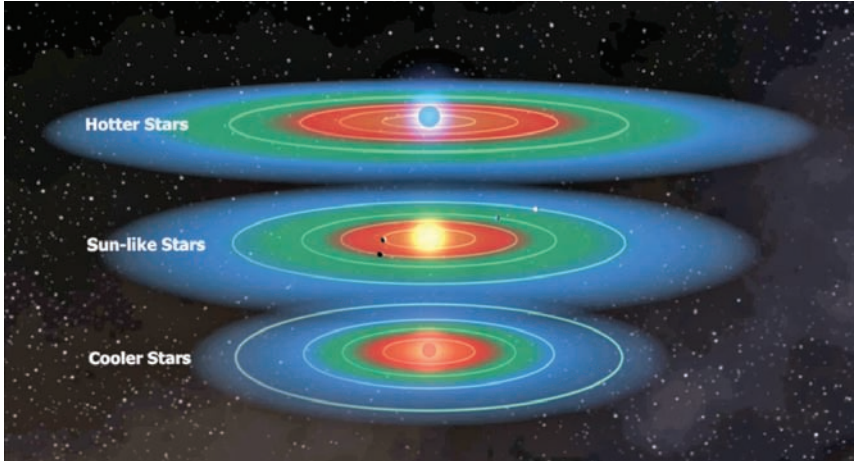
Looking to the future, NASA and other space agencies have high hopes for the field of extra-solar planet research. In the past decade, the number of known exoplanets has reached just shy of 4000, and many more are expected to be found once next-generations telescopes are put into service. And with so many exoplanets to study, research goals have slowly shifted away from the process of discovery and towards characterization.

Unfortunately, scientists are still plagued by the fact that what we consider to be a “habitable zone” is subject to a lot of assumptions. Addressing this, an international team of researchers recently published a paper in which they indicated how future exoplanet surveys could look beyond Earth-analog examples as indications of habitability and adopt a more comprehensive approach.

The paper, titled “Habitable Zone predictions and how to test them”, recently appeared online and was submitted as a white paper to the Astro 2020 Decadal Survey on Astronomy and Astrophysics. The team behind it was led by Ramses M. Ramirez, a researcher with the Earth-Life Science Institute (ELSI) and the Space Science Institute (SSI), who was joined by co-authors and co-signers from 23 universities and institutions.

## Progress in various fields

The purpose of the decadal survey is to consider previously-made progress in various fields of research and to set priorities for the coming decade. As such, the survey provides crucial guidance to NASA, the National Space Foundation (NSF), and the Department of Energy as they plan their astronomy and



astrophysics research goals for the future.

At present, many of these goals focus on the study of exoplanets, which will benefit in the coming years from the deployment of next-generation telescopes like the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) and the Wide-Field Infrared Space Telescope (WFIRST), as well as ground-based observatories like the Extremely Large Telescope (ELT), the Thirty Meter Telescope, and the Giant Magellan Telescope (GMT).

One of the overriding priorities of exoplanet research is looking for planets where extra-terrestrial life could exist. In this respect, scientists designate planets as being “potentially-habitable” (and therefore worthy of follow-up observations) based on whether or not they orbit within their stars’ habitable zones (HZ). For this reason, it is prudent to take a look at what goes in to defining a HZ.

As Ramirez and his colleagues indicated in their paper, one of the major issues with

exoplanet habitability is the level of assumptions that are made.

## With tectonic activity

To break it down, most definitions of HZs assume the presence of water on the surface since this is the only solvent currently known to host life. These same definitions assume that life requires a rocky planet with tectonic activity orbiting a suitably bright and warm star.

However, recent research has cast doubt on many of these assumptions. This includes studies that indicate how atmospheric oxygen does not automatically mean the presence of life – especially if that oxygen is the result of chemical dissociation and not photosynthesis. Other research has shown how the presence of oxygen gas during the early periods of a planet’s evolution could prevent the rise of basic life forms.

Also, there have been recent studies that have shown how plate tectonics may not be necessary for life to emerge, and that so-called “water worlds” may not be able to support life (but still could). On top of all that, you have theoretical work that suggests that life could evolve in seas of methane or ammonia on other celestial bodies.

The key example here is Saturn’s moon Titan, which boasts an environment that is rich in prebiotic conditions and organic chemistry – which some scientists think could support exotic lifeforms. In the end, scientists search for known biomarkers like water and carbon dioxide because they are associated with life on Earth, the only known example of a life-bearing planet.

(Source: universetoday.com)

**Researchers have published a paper in which they indicated how future exoplanet surveys could look beyond Earth-analog examples as indications of habitability and adopt a more comprehensive approach.**

## Team of scientists investigates sea otter tools

The tools and trash that ancient humans left behind provide a window to the past, revealing how they lived thousands of years ago.

Now, scientists want to do the same to study another species – the sea otters. The marine mammals, known for their ability to use tools to open food they cannot crack with their little paws, are the subject of a new study.

An international team of researchers observed and analyzed how sea otters at the Bennett Slough Culvert site in California use shoreline stones to crack open mollusks, particularly mussels. The study, published in the journal Scientific Reports, was conducted over 10 years from 2007 to 2017.

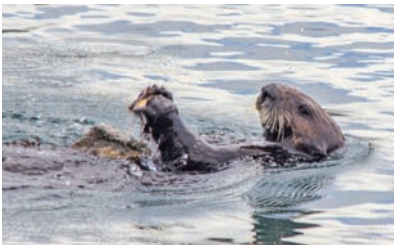
They found that mussels were the primary prey of sea otters in the area. They also found that the mussels were the only prey that the marine mammals crack open using shoreline stones. The researchers estimate that sea otters use shoreline stones in about 20 percent of the mussels they consume.

Through careful observation and analysis, the researchers also noticed that the sea otters tend to pound in the points and ridges of the shoreline rock facing the water, leaving them smoother and lighter in color.

## Shards of shells

In addition, the team collected the shards of shells left behind by the sea otters and found a consistent damage pattern. The right shell is always cracked, but the left never is.

Combined with videos of sea otters



cracking mussel shells with shoreline stones, the study suggested that, like humans, the marine mammals also exhibit “handedness.” While they use both paws to hold the shells, they always strike it on the stone with the right paw slightly on top.

The researchers believe that their findings could aid archaeologists who study coastal populations. Their research found patterns that can determine whether humans or sea otters used the stone tool and left behind the shards of mussel shells.

Additionally, the team hopes that their research would lead to more studies that would investigate if the same behavior is exhibited by sea otters in other parts of the world and when they started doing it.

“More broadly, the recovery of past animal behavioral traces helps us to understand the evolution of behaviors like stone anvil use, which is rare in the animal kingdom and is extremely rare in marine animals,” stated Jessica Fujii of the Monterey Bay Aquarium. “We hope that this study establishes a new path for the growing field of animal archaeology.”

(Source: techtimes.com)

## New fuel cell material can run efficiently in reverse, storing energy

Lithium batteries can readily smooth out short-term hiccups in the supply of intermittent renewable energy.

But they’re not ideal for long-term storage, since they’ll slowly discharge. They also aren’t great for large quantities of energy – to store more, you keep having to buy more battery.

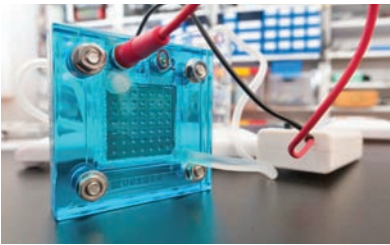
Because of these issues, there has been research into a number of technologies that scale better, like flow batteries and renewable fuel production. But these pose their own challenges, both chemical and economic.

But researchers are now reporting a possible solution to some of these problems: a fuel cell that can be run efficiently in both directions, either using hydrogen or methane to produce electricity or using electricity to produce these fuels. Their measurements suggest that, after doing a complete cycle, they get out 75 percent of the electricity they put in to start with.

Batteries, as we mentioned above, don’t work for longer-term storage, as they will typically lose charge slowly. They’re also expensive, as adding capacity means adding more batteries. Flow batteries solve some of these problems by storing the charged and discharged forms of a chemical in different tanks; larger or additional tanks are cheap, making expanded capacity relatively simple and inexpensive.

## Long-term storage

An alternative for longer-term storage is to convert any excess electricity to fuel. But these reactions often have efficiency problems of their own, meaning some of the energy is lost in the process. And the costs can be quite large, since you typically need hardware for both fuel production and electricity generation, as well as very pure sources of water



and expensive catalysts.

Fuel cells simply separate different parts of a chemical reaction so that the electrons that are transferred during the reaction can be used as a source of electricity.

Operating in the forward direction, fuel cells will take hydrogen or methane as fuel and produce electricity by combining it with oxygen from the air. Operating in reverse, they’ll use electricity to drive the production of hydrogen starting with water, or methane if given water and CO<sub>2</sub>.

## Valuable chemical stocks

This allows for a completely reversible cycle by which electricity is essentially stored in the form of hydrogen or methane, without the need for separate hardware for storage and use. In essence, it acts like a big battery. Alternately, hydrogen and methane are valuable chemical stocks or can be used to power various forms of transport. Clearly, a reversible fuel cell is extremely flexible. So why aren’t we using them?

A number of types have been built, but they all have issues. Some forms require high temperatures to function. All of them produce a mixture of hydrogen and water that’s less valuable than pure, dry hydrogen.

(Source: arstechnica.com)

## Scientists see a path to the future, paved with ceramics

When you hear the word “ceramics,” you may think of the mug you made in pottery class or the vases collecting dust on your grandmother’s shelf. While these objects are made up of ceramics, they’re only one small part of the bigger picture.

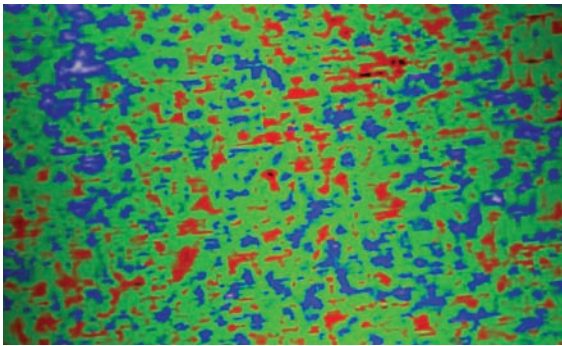
Ceramics are being used in armor, lasers, electronics, teeth replacement, and more. They ensure that your computer’s motherboard runs smoothly. They protect space shuttles when most other materials would burn up in the atmosphere.

They also come with a price. Processing of many ceramics requires heating them up to temperatures over 2,000 degrees centigrade for several hours. That’s a significant spending in energy. At Carnegie Mellon University, B. Rejea Jayan is working to solve this problem with her unconventional source of power.

Jayan is an assistant professor in mechanical engineering and directs CMU’s Far-from-Equilibrium Materials Laboratory. She is investigating the use of electromagnetic fields in ceramics fabrication, specifically with regards to sintering and synthesis. Sintering is the process in which a porous material, such as clay, densifies under pressure or with heat. She detailed the new developments in this field of research in the January 2019 cover article of the Journal of the American Ceramic Society.

## The electromagnetic effects

The paper traces its origins back to a two-day workshop held at Carnegie Mellon in June 2017, titled Electromagnetic Effects in Materials Synthesis. The workshop gathered scientists working in three different areas of field-assisted material synthesis. “This workshop was a good opportunity to learn from each other,” her postdoctoral researcher, Shikhar Jha, comments. “These methods – microwave, laser, and electric field – are very different from each other,



but we hope to figure out a common theme to relate them to a single mechanism.”

At the workshop, the scientists grappled with the question of why electromagnetic fields speed up sintering. “We want to see if these field-driven processes for sintering and synthesis are all thermally driven, or if the field itself is inducing additional driving force,” Jayan says. In other words, is the field just providing extra heat, or is it doing something else entirely?

This question presents unique research opportunities. In addition to making the process more efficient, researchers can also process new materials with new properties. “We’re not expecting the behavior and the properties of materials to be identical to what they were,” Jayan says. “We have found them to be different, but we don’t know how, and therein lies opportunities.”

## The available tools

However, there are several obstacles preventing their

full understanding of the process, including the available tools of characterization. “You cannot use a thermocouple to measure it,” Jayan says, “because the field will also interact with the thermocouple and give you unreliable data.”

Another issue is the dynamic nature of the process. “If you only measure the material properties and microstructure afterward, you don’t know what happened in the intermediate phase,” Jayan says. Due to this, studies that measure processes as they are happening, called in situ studies, have become invaluable. Jayan’s group is working with National Laboratories to use a synchrotron source, a type of electron accelerator, to shed light on the intermediate steps of structural changes during such processes.

The final issue is one of scale. When studying sintering, “you need to be able to connect and stitch together all the length scales,” Jayan says, “from atoms all the way up to large parts you can hold in your hands.”

In order for scientists to understand the underlying mechanisms, they need to develop characterization and modeling techniques that can determine the evolution of structures over time at different scales.

While the challenges may seem daunting, the result would be worth the effort. If scientists understood the role of external fields in the sintering process, they could accelerate technological development in a wide array of fields, including manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, electronics, and clean energy. Already, their efforts are yielding results. The 20-hour time frame “is coming down to seconds,” Jayan says, “and the temperature is coming down to a few hundred degrees. This is a significant saving in energy.”

(Source: phys.org)

## Bacteria may help frogs attract mates, team suggests

Brazilian scientists have discovered that the strong odor released by some amphibian species is produced by bacteria and that attracting a mate is one of its purposes. The bacteria in question are a noteworthy example of symbiosis as they assist in the animal’s mating process. A paper recounting the discovery of this role of microorganisms isolated from the skin of frogs has been published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS).

“Frogs emit a pungent odor. Sometimes a particular species can be recognized by its scent, but until now, the function of this odor was unknown. It was typically assumed to be an aposematic smell, meaning a chemical warning sign that served to repel predators, as in the case of skunks (Mephitis mephitis) among mammals, for example,” said Célio Haddad, a professor at São Paulo State University’s Rio Claro Bioscience Institute (IBRC-UNESP) in Brazil and a coauthor of the article.

According to Haddad, who is also affiliated with the university’s Aquaculture Center (CAUNESP) in Jaboticabal, this hypothesis was considered plausible because many amphibian species, especially when poisonous, are brightly colored, and this serves as a visual alert to frighten predators.

The new study resulted from the postdoctoral research of Argentinean biologist Andrés Eduardo Brunetti, supervised by Professor Norberto Pepporine Lopes. Conducted at the University of São Paulo’s Ribeirão Preto School of Pharmaceutical Sciences (FCFRP-USP), the research was supported by FAPESP.

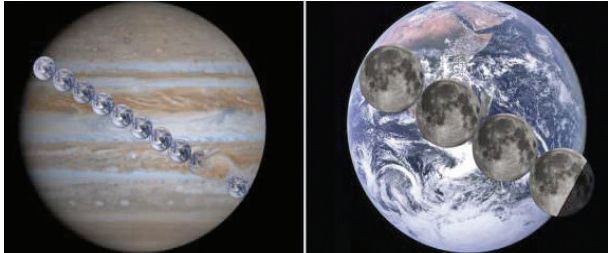
The “importance and originality of Brunetti’s research is that for the first time it shows a pronounced difference in the odors emitted by frogs of opposite sexes,” Haddad said. “No other studies of anurans have ever described this type of behavior. The results suggest that the odor serves to permit mutual recognition between males and females of the same species for mating purposes.”

(Source: sciencedaily.com)

## There are eerie similarities between Earth and Jupiter: study

Jupiter is a massive, lifeless gas giant out there on the other side of the asteroid belt. It’s a behemoth, containing 2.5 times as much mass as all the other planets combined. To top it off, it’s named after the Roman king of gods.

Earth is a tiny rocky world, almost too close to the Sun, where life rises and falls, punctuated repeatedly by extinctions. Compared to Jupiter, it’s a gum-drop world. Jupiter is 317.8 times the mass of Earth. And Earth is named after a goddess in German paganism, or so we think.



Whether on Jupiter or on Earth, the motions of fluids are governed the same. The photo from Jupiter is of the swirling clouds that define that planet. The Earthly photo is of a phytoplankton bloom in the Baltic Sea.

“This is all about fluids moving around on a rotating body,” said Norman Kuring of NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center. In a press release, Kuring described the similar flow patterns as a combination of laminar (following a smooth path) and turbulent (uneven and chaotic).

Scientists are pretty sure that the planet has three distinct cloud layers, and it’s the interaction between these layers, and the planet’s rotation, that helps create the planet’s stunning atmosphere.

NASA has invited any interested people to use the JunoCam images and process them into works of art. They can then upload them to the JunoCam gallery for people to see.

The ocean currents created the swirling flow patterns in the image. The image was captured by the Operational Land Imager on Landsat-8.

Scientists are very interested in how ocean currents move nutrients, carbon, and heat around the oceans, and these phytoplankton blooms are an opportunity to understand it all better. They’re like a window into it all.

It’s the same with Jupiter. The swirling currents at Jupiter tell scientists something about what’s happening deeper inside the gas giant’s atmosphere.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

## What makes a waterfall? Maybe it forms itself, claim researchers

Waterfalls are furious cascades of water, sometimes scoring the landscapes in which they flow as they obey gravity’s demands. From Iceland’s shimmering Skógafoss to the family of falls in New Zealand’s Milford Sound, they are zealous, aquatic showstoppers of the natural world.

Powerful though waterfalls may appear, there is a longstanding assumption that they can only form when permitted by other natural forces. Tectonic movement shifting rock around, alterations in sea level, a change from a resilient rock to a more easily erodible one are all ways in which external forces are believed to influence where waterfalls form.

But this paradigm may be about to change. By building a scaled-down river in their laboratory, a team of researchers demonstrated that waterfalls can sometimes bring themselves into existence without any outside help.

Scientists “often use the presence of waterfalls to try and reconstruct the history of a landscape,” said Edwin Baynes, a quantitative geomorphologist at the University of Auckland in New Zealand, and who was not involved in the study. By better understanding how waterfalls can form, the new study may prompt scientists to reconsider how our planet shaped itself, and help them peer back through deep geological time with greater precision.

Although there had been suggestions in the scientific literature that waterfalls could self-form, it wasn’t clear how that could occur. This new experimental evidence, said Dr. Baynes, provides a “very convincing” explanation.

To investigate how waterfalls form, researchers built a 26-foot long, 12-inch wide, 3.3-foot deep channel in a lab at the California Institute of Technology. They filled it with a foamy bedrock, tilted it at a 20 percent slope and let sediment-rich water flow down its surface. By using a riverbed made of foam rather than real rock, the team were able to watch millenniums of erosion play out under very short time scales.

(Source: NYT)



## UN resolution pledges to plastic reduction by 2030

One hundred and seventy countries have pledged to “significantly reduce” the use of plastics by 2030.

After five days of talks at the UN Environment Assembly in Nairobi, a non-binding resolution was made over throwaway items like plastic bags.



An initial proposal to phase out single-use plastic by 2025 was opposed by several nations including the United States.

Over eight million tons of plastic enter the world’s oceans each year.

“It’s hard to find one solution for all member states,” Siim Kiisler, the UN assembly president, told journalists before the vote.

“The environment is at a turning point. We don’t need verbose documents, we need concrete commitments.”

More than 4,700 delegates - including environment ministers, scientists and business figures - took part in the meeting.

A series of other commitments were also signed, including ones to reduce food wastage and to consult with indigenous populations over the development of new regulations.

The assembly is the world’s top international environment body, and this week’s pledge will set the tone for the UN’s Climate Action Summit in September.

The final ministerial statement only made only two references to man-made global warming, however, and none to the damage caused by fossil fuels that drive it.

However some campaigners have expressed concern that the final ministerial statement made only two references to man-made global warming.

Others have criticised countries like the United States, Cuba and Saudi Arabia for blocking attempts to pledge an earlier date for cutting their use of plastics.

“The vast majority of countries came together to develop a vision for the future of global plastic governance,” said David Azoulay from the Center for International Environmental Law, in an interview with Reuters.

“Seeing the U.S., guided by the interests of the fracking and petrochemical industry, leading efforts to sabotage that vision is disheartening”.

(Source: BBC)

## LEARN ENGLISH

### Chinese Medicine

A: What’s wrong?

B: I have a headache. These past few days I’ve been living off **painkillers**. Man, I feel like my head is going to explode.

A: You should get **acupuncture treatment**. My mom was always having headache issues and it was acupuncture that cured her. B: The results are too slow. On top of that, just the thought of smoking **needles poking** into my **flesh** frightens me.

A: They don’t just randomly stick you, they find your **pressure points**. The heat allows the body to immediately respond to the treatment, restoring the body’s “chi”.

B: But I get scared the moment I see a needle. How could I stand having needles in my body for hours on end?

A: The needles are very thin, and as long as the doctor’s technique is good, and the patient himself is relaxed, it won’t hurt – on the contrary it will actually **alleviate** pain. Now there are high-tech needles that are micro thin; they don’t hurt at all. However, if you are really scared of acupuncture, **scraping** or **cupping** are also options.

B: Scraping is too terrifying. When they finish scrapping, your body is all red, as if you were just tortured. Cupping is the same, your body ends up with red circles all over it – looks like someone beat you up.

A: This only signifies that the toxins have left the body. Actually, there is only discomfort during the treatment process. Once it’s over you feel very comfortable.

B: Chinese medicine is strange. The patients are already ill, and then the doctor makes them suffer more.

A: This is the only way to get at the problem. Anyway, if you want to relieve the pain, you are just going to have to be tough and do it. B: Forget it. I don’t want to **inflict** any more pain on myself. In a little while I’ll go and buy some more painkillers and take a nap.

#### ■ Key vocabulary

**painkiller:** a drug, treatment, or anything else that relieves pain  
**acupuncture:** Chinese Medical practice or procedure that treats illness or provides local anesthesia by the insertion of needles at specified sites of the body

**treatment:** an act or manner of treating

**needle:** a small, slender, rod-like instrument, usually of polished steel, with a sharp point at one end

**poke:** to quickly push your finger or some other pointed object into something or someone

**flesh:** the soft substance of a human or other animal body, consisting of muscle and fat

**pressure point:** a point on the skin that is extremely sensitive to pressure be- cause of the presence of pressure-sensing organs

**alleviate:** to make something less painful or difficult to deal with

**scraping:** it is s done when a tool is used to “scrape” over a muscle or sore spot to help move toxins out, break up scar tissue or get rid of tendonitis

**cupping:** the process of drawing blood from the body and the application of a cupping glass

**inflict:** to make someone suffer something unpleasant

#### ■ Supplementary vocabulary

**meditation:** devout religious contemplation or spiritual introspection

**tai chi:** a meditative exercise, characterized by slow circular and stretching movements and positions of bodily balance

**herb:** a plant when valued for its medicinal properties

**incense:** the perfume or smoke arising from a substance when burned

(Source: irlanguage.com)

# Technical inspection unreliable criteria making LEZ inefficient

By Mina Izadi

Poor air quality has turned into a serious threat to the health condition of the citizens in metropolises like Tehran. Over 12,000 pollution-caused deaths are annually reported in Iran, a big share of which is in big cities.

The good news is, things have been getting better recently, at least in Tehran, as people have passed fewer polluted days during the current Iranian year. However, the satisfying condition can hardly be attributed to the measure implemented by the municipal bodies like the Low Emission Zone scheme which is underway in the metropolis.

In line with this viewpoint, Mohamad Kazemi, an environmentalist and researcher in the field, says the ongoing scheme, which requires all vehicles to go through technical inspection tests to enter the borders of the capital city, can only reduce 1.75 percent of the emissions released in the air.

“In case the LEZ or ‘Reduction’ scheme is implemented at best, it would reduce only 1.75 percent of the pollutants flowing in the air,” Kazemi said.

Therefore, the improving air quality in the metropolis which is conceivable from the detailed charts provided by Tehran Air Quality Control Company, cannot be attributed to the implementation of the schemes like LEZ, he added.

#### ■ What is LEZ?

Passed in August 2015 by the High Council for Coordination of Urban Traffic, the LEZ scheme is aimed at banning highly polluting cars from entering Tehran in three phases.

The initial step, which took effect in October 2016 underway until November 24, 2018, merely involved checking the vehicles’ technical inspections in the restricted areas. Those breaking the regulations used to be fined 500,000 rials per day, ISNA reported.

The restricted zone is an 80-square-kilometer area in central parts of the capital in which only public transportation vehicles and some other cars with special allowances are authorized to enter during working hours. The second stage, which took effect on Nov. 24, expanded the restricted zone to cover the entire city.



## The improving air quality in the metropolis which is conceivable from the detailed charts provided by Tehran Air Quality Control Company, cannot be attributed to the implementation of the schemes like LEZ.

LEZ obliges drivers of highly polluting cars to take an alternative method of transport or choose to repair or dump their cars.

Seemingly, the early phase was only meant to motivate car owners to refer to the inspection centers to form the ground for the second raid against air-polluters.

According to Mohsen Pour Seyed Aqaei, CEO of Transportation and Traffic Organization of Tehran Municipality, the new step covers a much broader area and restrict cars, buses, and heavy vehicles lacking technical inspection stickers from entering the overcrowded city.

The plan targets carbureted motorcycles, diesel cars without filters and other clunkers -- the three main sources of particulate matters smaller than 2.5 micrometers.

All taken into account, it can be concluded that the ignorable effect of the scheme on improving air quality in the metropolis might be blamed on non-updated and

poor standards of technical inspection tests, on which the LEZ is based.

Numerous reports on fraudulent actions by inspection testers, installing low quality or fake catalyst converters (which are supposed to purify the emissions released from the vehicles’ exhaust into the air), and finally, the non-standard vehicles produced by local car makers are adding to the inefficient and substandard criteria of technical inspection tests.

Altogether, the factors are the reasons why an air pollution scheme like LEZ doesn’t work well, Mohammad Kazemi the environmentalist said.

“Serious measures should be taken to curb the factors hampering the air pollution reduction schemes to yield good results,” he added.

Changing the way of assessing vehicles in test centers or setting more stringent tests like premium certificates, can do a lot in favor of the ultimate goal.

## Over 7,000 talented students qualified for pre-international Olympiads

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — Taking part in 9 national examinations, 7,646 students managed to get admission for pre-international Olympiads exams, deputy director of the National Organization for Development of Exceptional Talents has said.

Out of nearly 1.9 million high school students qualified to take part in the examinations, 83,694 took part in 9 national exams including Persian literature, geography, mathematics, biology, stem cell and regenerative medicine, chemistry, informatics, physics and, astronomy and astrophysics held on January 21-25, Enayat Salarian explained.

The pre-international Olympiads exams will be held on April 23-26, IRNA news agency quoted Salarian as saying on Sunday.

Some 47 percent of the participants were girl students and the rest were boys and in general nearly 9.3 percent of the students were able to achieve the high



score to take part in the pre-international Olympiads exams, he added.

Salarian went on to say that 56 percent of the students

partook in experimental sciences exams, 30 percent took part in mathematical sciences exams, while 14 percent sat for human sciences exams.

He further highlighted that biology Olympiad is the most popular Olympiad among the students with 21,497 students taking the exam while astrophysics was the least popular with only 3,481 participating in the examination.

Once the pre-international Olympiads exams will be held some 360 students obtaining top scores in their respective groups will be chosen to attend classes with rigorous curriculum for 30 to 45 days and finally only 80 of them can attend 6-month courses and half of them will be eventually qualified to take part in international Olympiads in various fields, he concluded.

It should be noted that Persian literature, and stem cell and regenerative medicine Olympiads are only being held on national level for now.

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

## Clunker vehicles scrappage drops by 65% in Iran

The scrappage of clunker vehicles has decreased by 65 percent in the current Iranian calendar year (starting on March 21, 2018) compared to a year earlier, an official with traffic police has said.

While last year some 140,000 vehicles were scrapped this year only 50,000 old vehicles were discarded, Mehr news agency quoted Ali Mohammadi as saying on Tuesday.

The drop in vehicle importation to the country as well as increased prices of vehicles in the country are the main contributors to the decrease in the number of old vehicles removed from service, Mohammadi suggested.

## PREFIX/SUFFIX

### “-cline, -clinal”

■ **Meaning:** a specified form of slope or gradation

■ **For example:** The telescope is ***inclined*** at an angle of 43 degrees.

## PHRASAL VERB

### Try for something

■ **Meaning:** to try and get something you really want, such as a job, a prize, or a chance to study somewhere

■ **For example:** I decided I must try for some paid work.

## IDIOM

### Twist (one’s) arm

■ **Explanation:** to pressure or force one into doing something

■ **For example:** They had to twist my arm to convince me to start volunteering, but when I finally did, I realized how much I loved it.

## کاهش ۶۵ درصدی اسقاط خودروهای فرسوده

رئیس مرکز شماره‌گذاری و تعویض پلاک پلیس راهور ناجا از کاهش ۶۵ درصدی اسقاط خودروهای فرسوده در سال جاری نسبت به سال گذشته خبر داد.

به گزارش روز سه شنبه خبرگزاری مهر، علی محمدی گفت: از ابتدای سال جاری تا کنون ۵۰ هزار دستگاه خودرو فرسوده از رده خارج شده است این در حالیست که این رقم طی سال گذشته در این مدت بالغ بر ۱۴۰ هزار دستگاه بوده است.

وی گفت: کاهش ورود خودروهای خارجی به کشور و افزایش قیمت خودرو مهمترین عوامل کاهش از رده خارج شدن خودروهای فرسوده در کشور بوده است.



# Fresh U.S.-led airstrikes kill many civilians in Syria's Dayr al-Zawr

**1→** The Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates said in January that continued airstrikes by the U.S.-led coalition against ordinary people and civilian targets showed the alliance's reckless disregard for the UN Charter as well as international law.

The U.S.-led coalition has been conducting airstrikes and operations against what are said to be Daesh targets inside Syria since September 2014 without any authorization from the Damascus government or a UN mandate.

The military alliance has repeatedly been accused of targeting and killing civilians. It has also been largely incapable of achieving its declared goal of destroying Daesh.

## ■ SDF locked in battle with Daesh in Baghouz

Meanwhile, a spokesman for the U.S.-backed Kurdish militants in Syria said on Saturday that clashes were ongoing with Daesh terrorists who are now holed up in the village.

"Clashes broke out again last night and have continued since," Adnan Afrin, a spokesman for the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), said, adding, "There have so far been no surrenders (today) and there's no sign they are giving up."

An SDF statement said that the latest fighting broke out after the Kurdish-led force attacked Daesh positions inside Baghouz. Around 32 Daesh terrorists, including at least four senior figures, were killed in the battle.

On Friday, Daesh launched three attacks outside Baghouz, killing six people among those fleeing the village.

The U.S.-led coalition said on Twitter late Friday that the SDF had made no fresh advance.



"Daesh has proven to demonstrate a reckless disregard for human life and continues to be a global threat," the coalition said, adding, "We stand by our SDF partners as they fight to liberate that last Daesh-held territory."

Daesh has unleashed a wave of bombings over the past week to impede the SDF advance. It remains unclear how many Daesh militants and civilians remain inside Baghouz.

According to the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, more than 61,000 people have streamed out of the militant-held territory since December.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) said Saturday that around 3,000 people had arrived at al-Hol camp in northeastern al-Hasakah from Baghouz over the past two

days, pushing the camp's population to over 69,000.

The UN said most of the new arrivals "show clear signs of distress, fatigue, malnutrition and require some form of medical care or attention."

The IRC and the UN say around 122 people, mainly children, have died en route to the camp or shortly after arriving since December.

"There is an urgent requirement for funding to continue health and nutrition interventions in the camp," the UN said.

The U.S. has long been providing the SDF -- a predominantly Kurdish alliance of militants -- with arms, calling it a key partner in the purported fight against Daesh. Such support has angered Washington's

NATO ally, Turkey, which views militants of the People's Protection Units (YPG), the backbone of the SDF, as a terrorist organization tied to the homegrown Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militant group.

## ■ Syrian Army foils infiltration attempts in Hama

Syrian government forces, backed by allied fighters from popular defense groups, on Saturday confronted breaches of the de-escalation zones by foreign-backed terrorists who were seeking to infiltrate many military points in the country's west-central province of Hama.

According to SANA, army units foiled an infiltration attempt by terrorist groups in Hama northern countryside and killed many terrorists.

Syrian government forces also destroyed mortar cannons and rocket launch-pads for terrorist groups in the region.

The agreement on creating four de-escalation zones in four areas in northern, central and southern Syria, where the most intense fighting was underway between the Syrian government and different militant groups, took effect in 2017.

In recent months, Syrian government forces, backed by allied fighters from popular defense groups, have made unprecedented territorial gains against foreign-sponsored Takfiri terrorists across the conflict-plagued Arab country.

Syria has been gripped by militancy since March 2011. The Syrian government says the Israeli regime and its Western and regional allies are aiding terrorist groups that are wreaking havoc in the Arab country.

(Source: agencies)

## One Israeli killed in stabbing, shooting attacks in West Bank

**1→** Hatem Abdel Qader, a member of the Waqf Council, said the council does not recognize the Israeli court's decision regarding Bab al-Rahma, and that it is an integral part of the al-Aqsa Mosque compound.

The Waqf said in a statement on Saturday that it wants to carry out renovations at the building, but will keep it open during that time for Palestinians who wish to pray there.

It further noted that far-right Israeli settlers were seeking to take over Bab al-Rahma.

Prayer area of the al-Rahma Gate was closed on February 25 upon an order by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and reopened the following day.

Israel had closed the gate that leads to the prayer space in al-Aqsa Mosque since 2003 in the face of the Second Intifada (uprising) against the regime's occupation.

On February 22, however, the Waqf council decided to re-open the prayer space at the Bab al-Rahma Gate in defiance of Israel's 16-year-old ban. Hundreds of worshippers, led by the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem al-Quds Sheikh Mohammad Hussein, entered the area for the first time since 2003 for Friday prayers.

Angered by the move, the Tel Aviv regime launched an arrest campaign against Palestinians.

The arrests drew criticisms from Palestinians and Jordan, which is the custodian of the holy sites in occupied Jerusalem al-Quds.

The Islamic Waqf organizations and Palestinian institutions have insisted on keeping the Bab al-Rahma prayer area open for Muslim worship.

Palestinians have repeatedly warned of Israeli attempts



to change the status quo of the al-Aqsa compound, the third holiest site in Islam.

(Source: Press TV)

## Flash floods kill at least 58 in Indonesia's Papua

Flash floods in Indonesia's eastern Papua province have killed at least 58 people, an official said Sunday, as rescuers battled mud, rocks and fallen trees in the hunt for survivors.

The death toll was expected to rise as emergency services struggled to reach people in hard-hit areas, with more than 70 people injured and 4,150 evacuated.

The floods -- triggered by torrential rain and landslides on Saturday -- damaged numerous homes in the northeastern town of Sentani, said national disaster agency spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho.

"The number of casualties and impact of the disaster will likely increase as search and rescue teams are still trying to reach other affected areas," he said.

The waters had receded but officials were still trying to evacuate people from areas obstructed by "fallen trees, rocks, mud and other material," Nugroho added.

In Doyo, one of the most affected areas, a housing complex was littered with huge rocks believed to have rolled down from a nearby mountain, an AFP reporter at the scene said.

Sediment and waste swept by the floods piled up on the pavement.

The non-stop wail of ambulance sirens



could be heard, as heavy equipment was used to clear the roads.

The government has announced a 14-day state of emergency, said Jayapura police chief Victor Dean Mackbon.

Video footage showed rescuers administering oxygen to a victim who appeared to be trapped beneath a fallen tree.

Officers rescued a five-month-old

baby who was trapped for hours under the rubble, Papua military spokesman Muhammad Aidi said. The whereabouts of the parents are unknown.

A propeller plane lay partly crushed on a runway at the airport of nearby provincial capital Jayapura.

"The rain started last night and went on until around 1:00 am this morning," said

Lilis Puji Hastuti, a 29-year-old mother of two young children in Sentani.

"Our house was flooded with thick mud ... we immediately grabbed our valuables and ran to a neighbor's [two-story] house to seek refuge.

"It's hard to get out of the area because many roads are blocked... I'm worried, sad and scared all at once," she told AFP. In Sentani, tents have been set up to take in flood victims and treat the wounded.

Papua shares a border with independent Papua New Guinea on an island just north of Australia.

Flooding is common in Indonesia, especially during the rainy season which runs from October to April.

In January, floods and landslides killed at least 70 people on Sulawesi island, while earlier this month hundreds in West Java province were forced to evacuate when torrential rains triggered severe flooding.

The Southeast Asian archipelago of some 17,000 islands is one of the most disaster-prone nations on Earth, straddling the Pacific Ring of Fire, where tectonic plates collide. Earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are common.

(Source: agencies)

## Mass rally in Madrid against trial of Catalan separatist leaders

A huge crowd of demonstrators has rallied in Spain's capital Madrid in a major show of support for 12 Catalan politicians and activists standing trial for their role in organizing a failed independence bid in 2017.

Amid heavy police presence, nearly 400 buses on Saturday carried people from across the northeastern region of Catalonia to attend the gathering, the first major separatist march held in Madrid.

In unusual scenes for the capital, the central Paseo del Prado boulevard was steeped in red, yellow and blue, the colors of the Estelada flag of the Catalan independence movement.

"I think it's a fair judgment to say you've never heard the voice of Catalan independence spoken so loudly and with so many numbers here in Madrid," Al Jazeera's David Chater, reporting from the demonstration, said.

"There are two phrases that have been prominent here: that democracy is about taking decision and that self-determination is a right, not a crime."

Protest organizers put the turnout at 120,000, while police



gave a figure of 18,000, according to Reuters news agency.

-----Rebellion charges

The defendants face decades in prison on rebellion and

other charges for staging a banned referendum in October 2017 and declaring Catalan independence, although they took no action to implement that.

They went on trial at Spain's Supreme Court in mid-February. Many of their supporters believe the defendants are "political prisoners".

According to court filings, the defendants' lawyers intend to claim that the Catalan separatists are being prosecuted for their Catalan nationalist political beliefs and the act of voting.

Most of the politicians standing trial come from two political parties: the Catalan Republican Left (ERC) and the centrist Catalan European Democratic Party (PDeCAT).

Leaders of the Catalan National Assembly (ANC) and Omnium Cultural (OC) - two pro-independence civil society organizations - also stand trial.

The 2017 vote registered a majority of Catalans voting in favor of independence but many people had boycotted the plebiscite, which Spain's Supreme Court had labelled illegal.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

## Anger of American citizens from the White House

**1→** Across the months, questions with slightly different wording generated nearly identical results. Near the end of February, an NBC News-Wall Street Journal poll found 60 percent of registered voters disapproved of "Trump's decision to declare a national emergency" "to build a wall of over 200 miles along the U.S.-Mexico border."

Shortly before that, NPR-PBS NewHour-Marist found 61 percent who disapproved of "Trump declaring a national emergency to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border."

Looking to the beginning of February, CNN found 66 percent of respondents agreed Trump "should not declare a national emergency in order to build a wall along the border with Mexico." And a Washington Post-ABC News poll from early January found an identical 66 percent who opposed "Trump using emergency powers to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border."

The Post-ABC poll question included language saying, "Presidents can declare a state of national emergency, giving them special powers to take action without approval from Congress."

The emergency declaration is quite unpopular among Democrats and most independents, though it is favored by a majority of Republicans. In the most recent Monmouth poll, 93 percent of Democrats and 71 percent of independents disapproved of Trump declaring a national emergency, while 73 percent of Republicans approved.

Those opinions were largely consistent with January's Monmouth poll, in which 93 percent of Democrats and 66 percent of independents disapproved while 71 percent of Republicans approved. Finally, the latest action by Donald Trump showed how false democracy is in USA. Trump's disregard for the wishes of the majority of Americans shows this clearly.

## Afghan troops go missing after fleeing battle with Taliban

Around 100 Afghan soldiers fled their posts and tried to cross into neighboring Turkmenistan during a weeklong battle with the Taliban, officials said Sunday, in the latest setback for the country's battered security forces.

Mohammad Naser Nazari, a provincial council member in the western Badghis province, said the soldiers were not allowed to cross the border and their fate remains unknown. The Taliban have posted pictures of captured soldiers on social media.

Jamshid Shahabi, the provincial governor's spokesperson, said 16 soldiers have been killed and 20 wounded during the ongoing battle in the Bala Murghab district, in which the military carried out airstrikes and dispatched reinforcements. He said a number of soldiers tried to flee, without providing an exact figure.

Shahabi said more than 40 militants were killed in the fighting. He said the provincial police chief and army commander are in the district and instructing the forces to root out militants and rescue soldiers. Officials said the fighting had largely subsided by Sunday, with sporadic clashes breaking out in remote areas.

Nazari provided a higher toll, saying 50 soldiers were killed and around 100 others were missing. He said hundreds of local residents have gathered in front of the governor's office to express their concerns about security in the province.

He said Bala Murghab is almost completely controlled by the Taliban, with Afghan forces confined to the district headquarters.

The Taliban effectively control half the country and carry out daily attacks on Afghan security forces, causing staggering casualties. The attacks have continued even as the Taliban have been holding direct negotiations with the United States aimed at ending the 17-year war. In a separate development on Sunday, a Daesh (ISIL) affiliate claimed the killing of a local TV journalist in the eastern Khost province. The group did not say why it targeted Sultan Mahmoud Khirkhawa, a reporter with the local Zhman TV and radio, who was killed Friday when two men on a motorcycle opened fire on his vehicle. Another Afghan reporter was wounded in a targeted bombing last week in the southern Helmand province.

Afghanistan is among the most dangerous countries in the world for reporters. The Afghan Journalist Safety Committee reported 121 cases of violence against journalists and media workers in 2018, with 17 killed.

(Source: AP)

## Philippines due to leave ICC over drug war inquiry

The Philippines was poised to officially quit the International Criminal Court Sunday, though the beleaguered tribunal has pledged to pursue its examination of possible crimes in the government's deadly drug war.

Manila's withdrawal is to become final a year after it told the United Nations that it was quitting the world's only permanent war crimes tribunal, the second nation to do so.

"The Secretary-General... informed all concerned states that the withdrawal will take effect for the Philippines on 17 March," UN spokesperson Eri Kaneko told AFP on Friday.

The Philippine government and the ICC on Sunday had yet to comment on the withdrawal's affectivity.

The departure of the Philippines follows the court being hit in recent years by high-profile acquittals and moves by several nations to drop out. Manila moved to quit after the body launched a preliminary examination in 2018 into President Rodrigo Duterte's drug crackdown that has killed thousands and drawn international censure.

Duterte's drug war is his signature policy initiative and he defends it fiercely, especially from international critics like Western leaders and institutions which he says do not care about his country.

However, court officials have said the preliminary probe launched by ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda in February 2018 into possible crimes against humanity in the drug war would continue. Under the court's rules, any matter under consideration before a nation leaves the court is still under its jurisdiction.

Duterte has made it clear his government will not cooperate with the ICC in any way.

"The court 'can never acquire jurisdiction over my person, not in a million years,' he said in a speech on Wednesday.

Rights group Amnesty International said on Sunday the withdrawal should prompt the UN Human Rights Council to probe the killings.

"Filipinos bravely challenging the 'war on drugs' or seeking justice for their loved ones need international support to help them end this climate of fear, violence and impunity," said Amnesty International regional director Nicholas Bequelin.

(Source: AFP)



## American Shiffrin makes World Cup history

American Mikaela Shiffrin has become the first skier to clinch World Cup victories in overall, slalom, giant slalom and super-G in the same season. She completed the sweep by winning the giant slalom in Andorra on Sunday, taking her career tally to 60.

The 24-year-old finished in two minutes and 23.17 seconds in Soldeu having earlier won the super-G.

“Each globe is different but I wanted to come out here today and really earn it,” Colorado-born Shiffrin said.

Shiffrin beat New Zealand’s 17-year-old Alice Robinson by three-tenths of a second to finish first. “I wanted to really, really earn it and deserve it. I’m really happy with my skiing and the whole day,” she added. “I had energy for today. I was able to compete with focus. It’s amazing.”

Asked what first thing she planned to do in the off-season was, Shiffrin, who turned 24 on Wednesday, said, “I’m going shopping in Barcelona either tomorrow or the next day.”

Lindsey Vonn and Tina Maze are the only other female skiers to win four different disciplines in one season; no skier - male or female - has won titles in Shiffrin’s particular combination of disciplines in the same season before.

The world number one led the giant slalom after the first race and only needed to finish in the first 15 places in the second race to win. Shiffrin has now edged closer to compatriot Vonn, 34, who retired last month, who holds the women’s record with 82 World Cup wins, and has a record 17 wins this season.

(Source: BBC)

## Spence overpowers Garcia to retain IBF welterweight title

Errol Spence Jr. solidified his status as one of the best pound-for-pound fighters in the world with 12-round masterclass performance over challenger Mikey Garcia on Saturday.

The 29-year-old Spence easily beat Garcia by a unanimous decision to retain his International Boxing Federation title in a welterweight homecoming bout in front of 47,500 fans.

Spence dominated Garcia throughout with a stinging jab and a barrage of combinations and his hometown crowd at the AT&T Stadium in Dallas, Texas cheered wildly as he used his size and reach advantage to put on a boxing clinic.

“My motivation was fighting in front of my hometown crowd,” Spence said. “This is where I started it from a pup. From the amateurs all the way up.

“This is my core fan base. I felt good and I wanted to put on a great performance.”

The fight was hyped as a showdown of two unbeaten boxers but it didn’t turn out that way with one judge scoring it 120-107 for Spence. The other two had it 120-108 and 120-108.

Garcia never landed more than 10 punches in a single round. Spence landed 375 total punches to just 75 for Garcia, who was fighting for the first time as a welterweight after moving up two divisions.

Spence has been avoided by most of the top fighters in the division but this victory appears to have set up a future showdown with Filipino Manny Pacquiao.

Pacquiao appeared in the ring after the final bell and said he was willing to face the much younger Spence.

“I am looking at the winner of this fight. Spence wants to fight me,” said Pacquiao. “I am hoping to be back here, soon.”

(Source: AFP)

## Sources: Griezmann wants Atletico exit

Antoine Griezmann has offered himself to a number of Europe’s biggest clubs, including Barcelona, but the Catalan club are not contemplating a move for the Atletico Madrid forward, sources have told ESPN FC.

Griezmann, 28, turned down the chance to join Barca last summer but has grown increasingly frustrated at Atletico this season. Sources close to the France forward have said he is prepared to take a salary reduction and revealed he was even looking for an exit prior to last week’s Champions League elimination against Juventus.

But various sources close to Barcelona have confirmed to ESPN FC that Griezmann is not the type of attacker the club are looking for as they seek a long-term replacement for the 32-year-old Luis Suarez. They favour a younger option. Eintracht Frankfurt’s Luka Jovic and Celta Vigo’s Maxi Gomez have both been watched.

There would also be concerns about Griezmann’s wages, even though he’s prepared to take a cut. He earns €24 million at Atletico, an amount which Barca would not be prepared to match. Even if they were, it would require shifting several big earners off the wage bill.

Griezmann signed a new deal with Atletico last year, extending his stay at the club until 2023. The terms included an initial €200m release clause but that figure will drop to €120m this summer.

(Source: Soccernet)

## Fighters brawl backstage after UFC main event

A postfight melee broke out backstage between UFC welterweights Jorge Masvidal and Leon Edwards on Saturday shortly after Masvidal’s stunning victory over Darren Till in the main event of UFC Fight Night at O2 Arena.

Masvidal (33-13) knocked out Till in the second round of their fight. Minutes later, while Masvidal was doing a live interview with ESPN backstage, Edwards walked by and directed some words toward him. Masvidal left the interview to confront Edwards and was then caught on camera throwing and landing a few punches to Edwards’ face. The two were quickly separated, and the incident did not escalate further.

Edwards suffered a cut under his left eye and was treated before leaving the arena. Sources told ESPN’s Ariel Helwani that local police went to the fighters’ hotel in London to investigate.

(Source: ESPN)

# Hamilton frustrated with another Melbourne runnerup finish

Lewis Hamilton experienced frustration for a third successive year at the season-opening Australian Grand Prix on Sunday, as a poor start and an early pitstop condemned the Formula One champion to another runnerup finish.

Briton Hamilton claimed a record-extending eighth pole position at Albert Park on Saturday but ended up a distant second to his resurgent team mate Valtteri Bottas, who got the jump on him at the start and burned away.

Hamilton was called in to pit early and change to medium compound tyres, straight after Ferrari’s Sebastian Vettel did the same.

Bottas, meanwhile, stayed out on his soft tyres and extended his lead.

With Red Bull’s third-placed Max Verstappen a menacing presence behind him, Hamilton complained on the team radio that he was worried his tyres would not last and battled handling issues late on.

He later found out there was a piece of his floor missing which would have exacerbated his car’s balance problems and so did well to hold on to second to the finish.

Maximum points for Mercedes was a great



team result, but Hamilton was condemned to finishing runnerup for a third year in a row in Melbourne, after losing to Vettel in the last two editions.

Overall, Hamilton has converted only two

of his eight poles into wins at Albert Park, in 2008 and 2015, a record which would frustrate the most tranquil of drivers.

“Obviously the strategy was not ideal in the scenario that I had,” he told reporters

## Brazil’s Pato announces Tianjin departure



Brazil international striker Alexandre Pato shas left Chinese Super League side Tianjin Tianhai, the former AC Milan forward announced on social media.

Pato, who joined the club two years ago from Villarreal, released a statement on Instagram declaring his stint in China was over.

“I’d like to inform you that my adventure in China has come to an end,” the 29-year-old said.

“These two years in China were full of happy moments and new experiences. I am quite sure that China made me grow up as a man, I learnt (a) different culture and habits of this great country.

“I’m proud for sharing my love for football, for giving my contribution to Chinese football and for helping the team with my goals to reach the Asian Champions League for the first time ... and to win against many strong opponents.

“I would like to thank my club, my team mates, coaches, all the working people in the club, my fans who always supported me with love and all the nice Chinese people I met during these two years in China.”

The cancellation of his contract with Tianjin means Pato is now a free agent and expected to return to his native Brazil after a successful two-year spell in the CSL.

Pato joined Tianjin Quanjian following

the club’s promotion to the top flight of Chinese football at the end of the 2016 season and his 15 goals in his debut campaign were vital to the club securing a top three finish at the end of their first year.

That got Tianjin into the Asian Champions League for the first time in the club’s history, where they reached the quarter-finals before losing to eventual champions Kashima Antlers from Japan.

Despite their run to the last eight in the continental championship, however, Tianjin’s form faltered in the league in his second season and, having flirted with relegation, they finished the domestic campaign in ninth.

Worse was to follow in December when owner Shu Yuhui was arrested due to alleged irregularities within his Quanjian Group, forcing him to relinquish ownership of the club.

Without Shu’s backing the club struggled and the Tianjin Football Association was forced to step in and take over, changing the name to Tianjin Tianhai and imposing significant budgetary restrictions.

As a result, speculation had been rife that Pato would leave the club and he did not feature in either of the team’s opening games of the 2019 Chinese Super League season.

(Source: Eurosport)

## Wolves loss is ‘step backwards’ for United, says Solskjaer



Manchester United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer described his side’s 2-1 FA Cup quarter-final loss to Wolverhampton Wanderers on Saturday as the worst performance of his four months in charge.

Wolves produced a hugely impressive display in both halves at a rocking Molineux, reaching the last four of the FA Cup for the first time since 1998 with second-half strikes from Raul Jimenez and Diogo Jota.

Marcus Rashford pulled a goal back deep in added time but there was barely a minute left for United to find an equaliser and they fell to a second consecutive defeat after losing 2-0 at Arsenal in the Premier League.

“Quite a lot was missing today, it was the poorest performance we’ve had, it was a big step backwards” Solskjaer told a news conference. “We never had the urgency and quality on the ball even though without the ball in the first half we did ok.

“We felt too comfy in possession, we never managed to put their keeper or defenders under pressure. We had a couple of balls in behind for Rashford but not enough quality.”

There was little sign of the fighting spirit United had shown in their miraculous 3-1 win over Paris St Germain in the Champions League or the attacking flair of most of their performances since the former striker

of the early tyre change.

“So working with what I was given, I think I did a relatively decent job.

“Just obviously the start, I lost out quite a lot.”

Mercedes boss Toto Wolff said it was the right decision to have Hamilton pit early.

“No, I don’t think it was a mistake because we could have ended up behind Vettel, not doing that,” he said.

“I don’t know why they pitted (Vettel) so early. That put us under pressure, we needed to cover that undercut.”

While Hamilton’s day was tinged with disappointment, Mercedes were thrilled their raw pace was more than enough to put Ferrari and their rivals out of the equation.

Both Vettel and his new team mate Charles Leclerc finished nearly a minute behind Bottas, a performance that surprised the Silver Arrows.

“I think we were surprised that we had such a good pace and we were surprised that they didn’t have any pace at all,” Wolff said.

“And maybe the truth is somewhere in the middle.”

(Source: Reuters)

## Africa Cup of Nations host Egypt bogged down in domestic football crisis

Little more than three months before it hosts the Africa Cup of Nations, Egyptian football has been plunged into its latest crisis with major clubs squabbling, games regularly called off and security services intervening amid ongoing safety concerns.

“This is the hardest season in the history of Egyptian football,” Amer Hussein, chairman of the domestic league’s competition committee which schedules matches, told AFP.

With leading top-flight clubs also involved in African and pan-Arab competitions, the knock-on effect on the domestic calendar has this year thrown the Egyptian league into disarray.

It does not augur well for June and July, when Egypt will host the Cup of Nations for the fifth time, with 24 teams participating for the first time in an expanded format.

Egypt was chosen ahead of South Africa after Cameroon was stripped of its hosting duties by the Confederation of African Football. The tournament is due to take place during the searing Egyptian summer, from June 21 to July 19.

The domestic league is set to run on well beyond the end of the Cup of Nations, with the possibility of extended runs in international competitions for Cairo giants Al Ahly and Zamalek potentially making things even more complicated.

The hasty preparations for the Cup of Nations have compounded the league’s woes at a time when Ahly and Zamalek have been hitting out at organisers along with their new, Saudi-funded rival Pyramids FC.

### ■ “Tensions running high”

In February, Pyramids FC publicly accused the federation of favouring their rivals. The club called the scheduling of fixtures an “injustice” to them and threatened to complain to FIFA.

Turki Al Sheikh, an influential Saudi businessman and a close political advisor to Saudi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman, has bankrolled the club after buying it last summer.

He has completely rebranded it with an aggressive marketing campaign and gone on a signing spree, bringing in foreign players from the likes of Brazil and Syria.

Al-Ahly, Egypt’s and Africa’s most successful club, have even refused to comply with the packed domestic schedule. They implicitly hit out at Pyramids FC, saying they would not bow to “pressure from a certain party”.

“Tensions are running high and that frightens football officials in Egypt with the Africa Cup of Nations around the corner,” said Amir Abdel Halim of popular Egyptian football website Fil Goal.

He said football authorities were trying to contain the “anger of Ahly supporters”, while also encouraging new “investments in Egyptian football embodied in Pyramids FC”.

### ■ “No football without security”

In the face of this wave of postponements and growing fan impatience, Egypt’s powerful security services have stepped in, in a country where football and politics have made for a lethal mix.

The country is still scarred by the deadly clashes which

caused nearly 100 deaths on the sidelines of matches involving Ahly and Zamalek in 2012 and 2015 respectively.

“Ninety-five percent of postponements are because of the security services” Hussein explained. “There is no football without security.”

In the politically turbulent period after the 2011 uprising that toppled long-time ruler Hosni Mubarak, some fan groups attached to the two powerhouse clubs were instrumental in mobilising demonstrations and rallying supporters to political causes.

Last month, after weeks of media mudslinging between Ahly and Pyramids, the EFA announced that the match between both teams would be postponed “on orders from security services”.

“The EFA should have stuck to its original schedule” instead of “wanting to please everyone,” said Marwan Ahmed from influential website King Fut.

“The president of each club wants to show that he is the strongest,” he told AFP.

The match is scheduled to be played next month, but behind closed doors.

“What matters most to football fans is watching their team, not fights outside grounds,” he added.

Egyptian football fans were allowed to attend domestic games regularly for the first time in three years only last year, but they must provide their details to security services in order to gain entry.

(Source: AFP)



# Japan clinch coveted AFC Beach Soccer Championship title

Japan emerged as the beach soccer kings of Asia, beating UAE 3-1 on penalties after a 2-2 draw in the AFC Beach Soccer Championship Thailand 2019 final on Sunday.

Takaaki Oba was the man who slammed home the winning penalty, after Masuyaki Komaki and Ozu Moreira scored Japan's goals during a gripping and high-quality decider.

UAE valiantly fought back from 2-0 down thanks to two goals in two minutes from Ali Mohammad, but the West Asians couldn't find a third, meaning the match was decided by spot-kicks.

Both sides will represent Asia at the FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup in Paraguay, along with Oman, who won the third place play-off earlier in the day.

Japan came into the final 48 hours after a commanding 6-0 semi-final win over Palestine, and they looked to pick up where they left off, with Ozu forcing Mohamed Al Bahri into a save after just 13 seconds.

The Emiratis responded - with Ahmed Beshr coming close with a bicycle kick, and Haitham Mohamed forcing a free-kick save by Shingo Terukina - but it was Japan who went to break in front, with 36-year-old Komaki firing into the net after being cleverly supplied by Shusei Yamauchi.

Japan doubled their lead in the 16th minute, when the excellent Ozu made something out of nothing to score with a long-range volley that bounced beyond the reach of goalkeeper Humaid Jamal for his ninth goal, the most of any player, in the tournament.

With three minutes until the break, Ruy Ramos' side looked like taking a two-goal advantage into the final period, but UAE pulled one back in the 22nd minute when a wonderful driven assist from Waleed Beshr gave Ali Mohammad a chance he could barely miss.

The UAE's two-minute turnaround was complete when Mohammad scored again in the final



minute of the period, this time forcing the ball over the line after a goalmouth scramble that followed Humaid's crossbar-rattling effort from the other end of the pitch.

The West Asians started the deciding period the stronger, with Huamid forcing Terukina into a diving save with another long-range shot, and Ahmed Beshr saw two efforts blocked in the following moments, before his desperate lunge turned the ball onto the upright with seven minutes remaining.

Humaid saved an Okuyama header, and Haitham Mohamed sent a difficult volley tantalisingly wide, but neither side produced the desired late heroics as the

match, locked at 2-2, went to extra-time.

Neither side gave up on a winner, but despite the best efforts of Humaid - who hit the crossbar once more, then drew another Terukina save in the final seconds - the additional three minutes failed to provide a winner.

In a tense shootout, it was Ruy Ramos's side who prevailed, with Takaaki Oba slamming home the winning penalty just moments after UAE captain Walid Mohammad's costly miss to give Japan their third Asian title, and their first since the tournament came under the AFC umbrella in 2017.

(Source: the-afc)

## Iranian athletes win two gold at Asian Youth Championships



**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Arsalan d e s k Ghashghaei and Mohammad Reza Rahmanifar won two gold medals at the Asian Youth Athletics Championships in Hong Kong on Sunday.

Ghashghaei took a gold in shot put event with a throw of 19.36m. Amandeep Singh Dhaliwal from India and China's Peng Yingtei won silver and bronze medal with 19.08m and 18.59m, respectively.

Discus thrower Rahmanifar also seized a gold medal with a throw of 60.24m. The

silver medal went to his countryman Sadeh Samimi who threw 59.85m. Huang Nuo-ya from Chinese Taipei claimed a bronze medal with 54.93m.

Iran had earlier won two bronze medals in the competition.

Fatemeh Sima Shadkam and Sahand Nouri both won bronze medals at the 2000 meters steeplechase and hammer throw, respectively.

The competitions were held at the Tseung Kwan O Sports Ground in Hong Kong from 15 to 17 March.

## Iran runners-up at UWW Freestyle World Cup



**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Iran fell short in the final match of the 2019 United World Wrestling (UWW) Freestyle World Cup, losing to hosts Russia 9-1 at the Yakutsk's Triumph Sports Training Center.

The Russian Federation claimed their seventh overall Freestyle World Cup title and first gold since their title-winning performance at the 2011 Makhachkala World Cup.

The goal for the Russian Federation coming into the 2019 Freestyle World Cup

was simple and well stated, "Win the Freestyle World Cup on home soil."

The host nation wrapped up the World Cup on Sunday by easily halting Iran from winning their seventh World Cup title in the last eight years, unitedworldwrestling.org reported.

Meanwhile, in the third-place bout, the defending champion the United States edged Japan, 6-4.

Cuba finished fifth place after they defeated Mongolia, 6-4, and Georgia claimed seventh place after beating Turkey, 8-2.

## Klopp plays down Bayern Munich talk

Jurgen Klopp says he loves working at Liverpool but has to keep proving himself after Franz Beckenbauer backed him for the Bayern Munich manager's job.

Before Liverpool's 3-1 over Bayern Munich on Wednesday, which took the Reds to the Champions League quarter-finals, Beckenbauer said that the former Borussia Dortmund coach would be an ideal appointment at Bayern Munich.

"Jurgen Klopp at FC Bayern. That would be the highlight. Jurgen was the one who taught the Germans how to play football quickly," he said.

However, Klopp insists he is focused on winning trophies with Liverpool, although he admitted such praise from

Beckenbauer was akin to being awarded a knighthood.

"There is no bigger legend in Germany than Franz Beckenbauer," said Klopp. "It feels great he speaks positively about me. It is just like the king with his sword calling a man 'sir'.

"If he thinks that, it is a compliment to Liverpool. Bayern have done everything right in the last 10 or 15 years without making many mistakes but I feel I am a good fit where I am.

"I love it here, there are lots of opportunities to develop an already really good team. I have enough confidence to say I am the right manager for Liverpool at the moment, though in football we all constantly have to prove ourselves."

Liverpool will return to the top of the Premier League if they beat Fulham at Craven Cottage and, with eight games to go, Klopp believes the future is rosy at Anfield.

"So far, it has worked out, and hopefully it will last a lot longer. That would be cool.

"We are very happy about the situation and very positive about the future. We are fine with what we've done so far, but now we have to finish the season the best way possible.

"It is a big opportunity. We have improved a lot, but people judge it only on winning titles. We know that, but we can change it in the future."

(Source: Sky Sports)

## Japan's Olympics head voiced intention to resign amid bribery probe

The president of the Japanese Olympic Committee has expressed his intention to resign to a person close to him, sources with knowledge of the situation said Saturday, at a time when French authorities are looking into bribery allegations related to Tokyo's successful bid to host the 2020 Summer Games.

JOC President Tsunekazu Takeda, who has denied any wrongdoing, could announce his resignation on Tuesday when the Olympic committee holds a board meeting.

One of the sources quoted Takeda as saying he "wants to quit."

His retirement without serving another term, coming with less than 500 days to go until the opening, may deal a blow to organizers.

The 71-year old has been under formal investigation by French prosecutors for suspected corruption in connection with the awarding of the Olympics.

He has served as JOC president since 2001 and is now in his 10th term. Takeda

had been expected to be reappointed when the JOC holds elections for its executives in June and July.

But since the start of the French probe surfaced in January and amid growing concern at home and abroad over the negative potential impact on the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, Takeda's departure has become increasingly "unavoidable," according to the sources.

On Saturday afternoon, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at his private residence held a meeting with Yoshiro Mori, president of the Tokyo 2020 organizing committee.

During the meeting that lasted about an hour, Abe and Mori, a former prime minister, might have discussed the fate of Takeda.

Behind closed doors, the International Olympic Committee has been calling on the JOC to resolve the situation by the end of March, according to the sources.

The IOC has been concerned about the risk of tarnishing the image of the Olympics, they said.

"In ordinary circumstances, in light of the impact on the public, (the JOC) will try to settle the issue beforehand," an official said, referring to a series of important events in Japan ahead of the enthronement of the new emperor on May 1.

But some officials around him have suggested that Takeda continue until his current term expires in June. A senior JOC official said, "Quitting now, (before his term ends,) would look as if he has admitted to the allegations."

French investigators suspect that part of 2.8 million Singapore dollars (\$2 million) paid by the Tokyo Games' bid committee to Singaporean consultancy firm Black Tidings in 2013 went to Papa Massata Diack, a Senegalese man whose father was a powerful member of the IOC at the time.

Takeda, also an IOC member, has said the payment to the Singaporean firm was legitimate compensation based on a consultancy agreement and he will continue to cooperate with French prosecutors to clear himself.



In an interview with Kyodo News in January, Diack, who is wanted by French law enforcement authorities, denied there was any wrongdoing.

The son of former head of the International Association of Athletics Federations Lamine Diack said Tokyo's "victory was very clear" over Istanbul when the final round of secret voting by the IOC was held in 2013 in Buenos Aires and it is nonsense to think that Japan had to pay money to secure votes.

(Source: Japan Times)

## Aliakbari beats American Shelton Graves at ACA 93 - St. Petersburg

**TASNIM** — Former Greco-Roman wrestler Amir Aliakbari from Iran defeated Shelton Graves from USA at the ACA 93 - St. Petersburg on Saturday.

Aliakbari is a very accomplished Greco-Roman Olympic wrestler, and he's transitioned well to MMA.

He can use his strength to suplex his opponents repeatedly, and he has good pressure on top with solid ground-and-pound.

Sometimes he does so much with his wrestling that he runs out of energy by the end of the fight, but if he learns to be more conservative or ups his cardio, he will be a huge threat.

"My future plans in this sport is to be the next ACA Heavyweight champ and be the best Heavyweight Fighter in the world holding the No. 1 rank. I want to be the Fighter that no one wants to fight with and when they hear my name I bring the fear in everyone's heart," Aliakbari said.

## Monchi returns to Sevilla as sporting director after Arsenal links

Monchi has returned to Sevilla for a second spell as the club's general sporting director, despite reports linking him with a role at Arsenal.

Monchi left his role as Roma's technical director this month following the sacking of Eusebio Di Francesco and his backroom staff.

Newspaper reports had claimed he was a contender to replace Sven Mslintat as Arsenal's head of recruitment due to his existing relationship with Gunners manager Unai Emery, but the Spaniard has chosen to return to La Liga after his two years in Italy.

The dismissal of Sevilla's head coach Pablo Machin, after the Europa League exit in midweek, has seen director of football Joaquin Caparros take charge of the first team, and Sevilla president Jose Castro confirmed on Friday that the club had spoken with Monchi about the vacant position.

Monchi left Sevilla for Roma in April 2017, bringing an end to a 17-year period where the La Liga side won 11 trophies, including three Europa League titles.

The Spaniard has a strong reputation in the transfer market and is credited with organizing a number of lucrative purchases and sales of players including Dani Alves, Sergio Ramos and Ivan Rakitic.

The 50-year-old tweeted a picture on social media on Saturday, which read: "The heart never forgets the place where it left its best beats."

(Source: Sky Sports)

## Atletico-Barca women set world crowd record

Atletico Madrid set a new world record attendance for a women's match between two clubs sides as 60,739 people were at Sunday's league game against title rivals Barcelona.

Atletico usually play their home games at the club's training ground but the demand for tickets forced them to move the fixture to the 68,000-capacity Wanda Metropolitan on the outskirts of Madrid.

The crowd saw Atletico fall to a 2-0 defeat, as goals from Asisat Oshoala and Toni Duggan re-opened the title race. The result means second-place Barca close the gap on leaders Atletico to just three points with six matches remaining.

The record attendance in Madrid continues an increasing rise in the popularity of the women's game in Spain.

Athletic Bilbao had only set a new record attendance for a women's game in the country last month when 48,121 supporters attended their Copa de la Reina game against Atletico at San Mames.

Tickets for Atletico's match against Barca were available for free to club members and for as little as €5 for the general public.

An Atletico spokesman told ESPN FC that over 40 percent of the tickets on Sunday were paid for.

The final attendance was still some way short of the world record crowd for a women's international match, with 90,185 people in attendance for the 1999 World Cup final between the United States and China at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena.

(Source: ESPN)

## New Zealand futsal star mourned after being revealed among Christchurch terror victims

New Zealand Football (NZF) have confirmed the country's futsal national team player Atta Elayyan was among the victims of the terrorist attack in Christchurch on Friday.

Elayyan, 33, had made 19 A International appearances as a goalkeeper for the Futsal Whites and turned out for Mainland Futsal at domestic level.

The Kuwait-born goalkeeper was praying at Masjid Al Noor Mosque, next to Hagley Park, where he was among 50 victims of the shooting.

"It is still hard to comprehend what happened in Christchurch on Friday afternoon," NZF chief executive Andrew Pragnell said in a statement.

"On behalf of everyone at New Zealand Football our thoughts and prayers go out to anyone who has been affected by these heinous acts of violence.

"My heart goes out to the futsal community. They are a very tight-knit group and this news of Atta's death will be devastating for all involved in the game. We feel their pain and their grief."

Elayyan's Futsal White teammate Josh Margetts offered support to the deceased player's family, while remembering a 'great man' who will be 'sorely missed'.

"Atta was a great man and well-liked by everyone in the Futsal Whites squad and the futsal community," Margetts said, who is also a Futsal Development Manager at Football New Zealand.

"There are no words to sum up how we are all feeling. There is huge hole in our hearts as we come to terms with the loss of a great person and a good mate. He will be sorely missed.

"To Atta's family, we are deeply sorry for your loss. We can't imagine what you are going through, but please know we love you and we are here for you during this incredibly difficult time."

(Source: Goal)



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**GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING**

Contentment is eternal wealth.

Imam Ali (AS)

## Spanish producer Rosa Bosch to hold workshop at Fajr festival

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Spanish film producer Rosa Bosch will hold a workshop during the 37th Fajr International Film Festival, the organizers announced on Sunday. She has produced a wide variety of films in Latin American cinema and other countries. She is the producer of “Buena Vista Social Club” by German filmmaker Wim Wenders.



Spanish producer Rosa Bosch in an undated photo.

The Fajr organizers announced earlier that cinematographer Luca Bigazzi and director Andrea Pallaoro, both from Italy, and German production designer Silke Buhr are also scheduled to hold workshops at the festival. The 37th Fajr International Film Festival will be held in Tehran from April 18 to 26.

## “Tehran: City of Love” wins award at Sofia film festival

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Ali Jaberansari’s film “Tehran: City of Love” received the Young Jury Award at the Sofia International Film Festival, which is currently underway in the Bulgarian capital.



A scene from “Tehran: City of Love” by Iranian director Ali Jaberansari.

The film follows the stories of Mina, who is unhappy about her weight, Hessam, a retired bodybuilder who trains older men and Vahid, who sings at funerals and weddings. The festival will run until March 28.

## “Cold Sweat” to compete in Panama festival

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Soheil Beiraghi’s drama “Cold Sweat” will be competing in the International Film Festival of Panama, the organizers have announced. The film will be competing in the International Portal section of the event, which will take place in the Central American country from April 4 to 10. Movies from different countries, including Sudan, Lebanon, Hungary, Russia and America, will be screened in the category. “Cold Sweat” tells the story of Iran’s national women’s futsal team that makes the Asian Games final in Malaysia. But at the airport on departure day, the team captain discovers that her husband hasn’t signed the document to permit her to exit from the country.

# Museum opens for traditional Iranian puppet show kheimeh shab-bazi

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — A museum opened in downtown Tehran on Saturday for the traditional Iranian puppet show, kheimeh shab-bazi. Kheimeh shab-bazi is performed in a small chamber by a musical performer and a person called a morshed (mentor). The dialogue takes place between the morshed and the puppets, specifically the traditional Iranian puppet Mobarak. Actress Setareh Eskandari who is the manager of the museum said, “The door of the museum is open to all the masters and researchers. We aim to preserve documents to help the researchers and familiarize people and students with this type of Iranian puppet show.” Veteran kheimeh shab-bazi expert Davud Fat’halibeigi praised those who have exerted great efforts in establishing the museum. He said that he is sure the movement made by cultural figures would not let Persian cultural heritage sink into oblivion. Mohammadreza Kargar, the director of Iran’s Museums and Historical Properties Office, lauded Eskandari who spent her time and energy to revive part of Iran’s cultural heritage. The opening ceremony of the museum went on with honoring kheimeh shab-bazi master Morteza Khamsei for his lifetime achievements in this art after which Siavash Sattari performed a kheimeh shab-bazi performance.



Siavash Sattari performs a kheimeh shab-bazi during the inauguration ceremony of the Kheimeh Shab-bazi Museum of Iran on March 17, 2019. (Honaronline/Mehdi Azadbakht)

Ehteram Borumand, Azadeh Purmokhtar, Hormoz Hedayat, Afsaneh Mahian and Homa Jeddikar were among the participating artists. The Kheimeh Shab-bazi Museum of Iran is located at the Mana Art and Culture House on Vesal St., off Keshavarz Blvd.

## Iran to mull over rise in cinema ticket prices

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The Screening Council of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance will hold a meeting today to consider an increase in ticket prices of Iranian movie theaters. “A slight increase is predicted, but the ultimate result will be announced after the Monday meeting,” Screening Council spokesman Ali Sartipi told the Persian service of MNA on Saturday. The country observed a 50-percent rise in ticket prices at the beginning of the Iranian year on March 21, 2018. Film ticket in first-class theaters costs 150,000 rials (about \$1.5). Economic analysts have said that due to the adverse economic conditions facing the country, any new increase in cinema ticket price will force low-income families to drop cinema from their shopping basket. Seyyed Mahmud Razavi, the producer of acclaimed movies



Screening Council spokesman Ali Sartipi. (Mehr/Majid Asgaripur)

such as “Blood Trap” and “Standing in the Dust”, has asked his colleagues and the relevant officials not to increase the price of cinema tickets. In a statement published by ILNA on Saturday, Razavi said, “Despite the high cost of production, distribution and screening, I asked all my colleagues, distributors, and theater owners to give a Noruz gift to our people by not increasing the ticket price and to let the cinema be an inexpensive recreation of the New Year for all.” Mohsen Amiryusefi, the director of “Fire Keeper” and “Lovely Trash”, has also said that any rise in ticket prices will result in a decline in the number of filmgoers. In an interview published by ISNA on Saturday, he said, “There is evidence that a hard economic year is waiting for Iran and we should try to maintain cinema’s position as the most inexpensive collective entertainment for our people.”

## Iranian artists, literati who left the stage in 1397

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Many cineastes and cultural figures passed away during the Iranian calendar year 1397 (March 21, 2018-2019) and left us amidst tears and sorrow. We retain only the happy memories of those individuals who are no longer with us.



■ **Ezzatollah Entezami, actor**  
Ezzatollah Entezami, the veteran actor of stage and screen who was named “master actor” in his memoirs written by Hushang Golmakani, died on March 22. He was 94. He was one of Iran’s golden generation of actors, such as Mohammad-Ali Keshavarz, Ali Nasirian and Jamshid Mashykhhi, who began his career in acting with traditional Iranian performances.



■ **Nasser Malakmotiei, actor**  
Nasser Malakmotiei who appeared in over 100 movies and TV series, in most of which he played the roles of virile characters, died on May 26. He was 88. He was suffering from a kidney disorder. Born in Tehran in 1930, he studied physical education at the Tehran Higher Education Center and pursued a teaching career as a sports teacher at several of Tehran’s primary schools. He later switched to cinema and made his debut in 1949 with “Spring Variety, an episodic film directed by Parviz Khatibi.

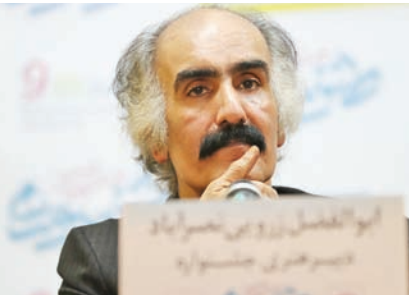


■ **Mohsen Vaziri-Moqaddam, artist**  
Mohsen Vaziri-Moqaddam, one of the most celebrated figures from the first generation of the Iranian modern art movement, died at his home in Rome, Italy on September 7. He was 94. The Italy-based artist was commended for his works by the Rome Municipality and was presented with the European Artist of the Year 2005 award in Rome on December 14, 2005. He created most of his abstract forms and designs using the media of sand, metal, plastic and wood.



■ **Hossein Erfani, dubber**  
Dubber Hossein Erfani who lent his voice to many leading actors of the world cinema such as Humphrey Bogart, Morgan Freeman, Samuel L. Jackson, Tommy Lee Jones, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone died of lung cancer on September 12. He was 76. Erfani began his career at the Moulin Rouge Studio in Tehran at 19, dubbing minor characters in foreign films. He also voiced characters played by Iranian actors such as Jamshid Hashempur, Akbar Abdi, Mohammad Moti and Kazem Afrandnia when all Iranian films used to be dubbed. ■ **Abolfazl Zarui Nasrabad, satirist**  
Abolfazl Zarui Nasrabad, a satirist who became known as the modern Obayd Zakani

due to the close similarity of his satires to those created by the renowned 14th-century



poet, died on December 2. He was 49. Zarui underwent heart surgery two years ago and was suffering from diabetes. He wrote under pseudonyms such as Molla Nasreddin, Choghondar Mirza and Naneh Qamar for over ten newspapers and magazines, including Hamshahri, Jam-e Jam, Entekhab, Zan and Banu.



■ **Hossein Moheb Ahari, actor**  
The prolific stage and screen actor Hossein Moheb Ahari who starred in numerous memorable TV series, movies and plays such as “T for Tickle” and “Off Limits” and “Health Alley”, passed away on January 16, 2019 after a lengthy battle with lymphoma. He was 67. The illness was diagnosed eight years ago. However, he never stopped his professional activities over these years. Earlier last December, he played his last film role in director Afshin Hashemi’s drama “Bye, Shirazi Girl”. ■ **Khashayar Alvand, screenwriter**  
Screenwriter Khashayar Alvand, whose writings made the happiest moments for Iranian viewers for over 15 years with popular comedy series such as “Noqtechin”, “Barareh Nights” and “Paytakht”, died of a heart attack at his home on March 1. He was 51. “The Intruder”, written in 2001 and di-



rected by his brother Sirus Alvand, was one of the few dramas Alvand wrote. “Comedy is not my main concern,” he once said in an interview. “Several of my early scripts were not comedies.” His career in comedy began with his collaboration on director Mehran Modiri’s TV blockbuster “Noqtechin” in 2003. The cooperation with comedy king Modiri went on with the TV series “Barareh Nights” and “A Man with a Thousand Faces”. He also wrote “Bitter Coffee”, a series Modiri directed for the home video network.



■ **Lilitte Therian, sculptor**  
Iranian-Armenian sculptor Lilitte Therian, who is considered as the mother of modern Iranian sculpture, died on March 8 at the age of 88. She studied painting at the Faculty of Fine Art at the University of Tehran and then left the country to continue her education in France. In 1961, Therian returned home and began a career in teaching at the Faculty of Decorative Arts. She introduced modern sculpture to the academic centers in Iran and then established the Sculpture Department at the faculty. She spent about 30 years teaching sculpture in various academic centers in Iran, and many renowned Iranian sculptors learned the art at the centers.