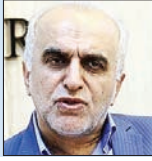




Iran will file complaint against sanctions backers **2**



Iran, China holding joint economic committee meeting **4**



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Congratulations on birthday of Imam Ali (AS) and father's Day



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Raisi calls for serious steps to counter racism, terrorism

Zarif meets grand ayatollahs in Qom

TEHRAN — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif visited Qom on Monday and held meetings with grand ayatollahs. According to the IRIB, Zarif's visit intended to elaborate on President Hassan Rouhani's visit to Iraq.

He met Lotfollah Safi Golpaygani, Hossein Vahid Khorasani, Hossein Noori Hamedani, Abdollah Javadi-Amoli, Naser Makarem Shirazi,

Mousa Shubairi Zanjani, Mohammad Alavi Gorgani and also Ayatollah Seyyed Javad Shahrestani, representative of the Iraqi religious leader Ayatollah Ali Sistani.

During the meeting with Zarif, Grand Ayatollah Golpaygani said that Iran can be a "messenger of peace and kindness". He also attached great importance to visits to regional countries. **→2**

War on terror will continue relentlessly: Military chief

TEHRAN — Major General Mohammad Baqeri, chief of the Iranian armed forces, said on Monday that fight against terrorism in the region will continue until the phenomenon is totally eradicated.

Baqeri, who had visited Damascus to participate in the Iran-Iraq-Syria security meeting to coordinate war on terrorism, said "The Islamic Republic of Iran will continue the path it started with the Iraqi

and Syrian brothers."

He noted that Syria's national sovereignty and territorial integrity should be maintained and all foreign forces which are in Syria without Damascus permission should leave the country.

The top general noted that Iran has advisory presence in Syria and Iraq upon requests by the two countries and that terrorists in Iraq and Syria have been a threat against Iran. **→2**

EU, Iran hold talks on Yemen and Syria

TEHRAN — Hossein Jaber Ansari, a senior advisor to the Iranian foreign minister for political affairs, met with Secretary General of European External Action Service Helga Schmid in Brussels on Monday.

The two sides discussed the crises in Yemen and Syria as well as the recent regional developments during the meeting, Mehr reported.

Jaber Ansari is also scheduled to participate at the fifth round of talks between Iran, the EU, and four European countries, including Germany, France, Britain, and Italy in Brussels.

The fourth round of talks between Iran and the EU and the four European countries was held in Brussels in December 2018.



EDITORIAL

Mohammad Ghaderi
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Win year for resistance

The year 1397 is over with all its ups and downs. Realization and consolidation of the victory of the resistance front in Syria, Lebanon's general election victory on March 8th, the crystallization of the political power of the Iraqi Popular Forces, the military and political victory of Ansarullah in Yemen and Zionist withdrawal in the war against Hamas, all raised the "Flag of Resistance" in the region and world.

In the beginning of 1397, US National Security Advisor John Bolton and U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, aiming to curb Iran and the axis of resistance, and even trying to destroy them, terribly failed in their continuous mission against the resistance forces that brought the White House defeat.

The 1397 was a year that not only revived the name of "resistance", but also transformed it into a comprehensive discourse on international order. The blatant action of the U.S. and Britain in boycotting groups such as the al-Nujaba Movement in Iraq and Lebanon's Hezbollah is also the result of Washington and its allies' intense anger against the axis of resistance.

The regional, military, and political victories of the resistance front will never be limited to 1397. Undoubtedly, in 1398 and in the years to come, we will continue to build solid ties that "Resistance" has created for the blessing of the blood of its martyrs.

The U.S., Israel, economic, political and military blitz will intensify against the resistance front next year. The West, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, will play the role of "foot soldiers" of the enemies. However, this years' experience has shown that as much as "action of resistance enemies" is more intense against this popular and spiritual front, the resistance response and subsequently the costs of defeat of the West and the Zionist regime will be heavier.

In 1397, the resistance front monitored the intelligence movements of the White House and its allies and failed to surrender as "redefining ISIS in the West Asia region" and "normalizing the relations between Arabs and the Zionist regime". In the New Year, the resistance front will continue this clever observation, and will show a strong response to any "tactic" and "American-Zionist" strategy. **→7**

Iran's Meteorological Organization projects normal water year, says director

By Maryam Qarehgozlou

TEHRAN — Iran's Meteorological Organization (IMO) predicted normal conditions for the next water year (starting on September 23) in the country.

In a press conference, the new director of IMO, Sahar Tajbakhsh, explained that since the beginning of the current water year (September 23, 2018) the precipitation rate has increased by 17.6 percent compared to long-term averages, so it is predicted that the current desirable con-

ditions will last in the spring as precipitations levels will hit normal and above normal levels.

Accordingly, precipitations for the next water year appear to be normal, Tajbakhsh highlighted.

However, IMO director highlighted that the increase in precipitation amounts in the current year and next year does not necessarily mean that drought spells are over in the country.

"There are different kinds of drought including meteorological, hydrological, and agricultural droughts," she said, adding that drought spells

do not solely depend on increased precipitation levels, as depletion of groundwater resources also plays a significant role in giving rise to droughts.

Meteorological drought is defined on the basis of the degree of dryness, in comparison to a normal or average amount, and the duration of the dry period.

Data sets required to assess meteorological drought are daily rainfall information, temperature, humidity, wind velocity and pressure, and evaporation. **→13**

Kashmir matters, and Kashmiris too

By A. G. Noorani

TEHRAN — Relations between India and Pakistan have nosedived since Narendra Modi became prime minister in 2014. If anyone thought that he would make up the loss by a conciliatory policy towards Kashmiris, they were mistaken. It was never part of his agenda. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) would have none of it. The game is to accuse dissent within Kashmir

as a movement that is Pakistani sponsored, and ruthlessly crush it.

At least a decade ago, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq had warned that alienation was on the rise and leaders of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference were fast losing influence over the insurgents. He has nothing to offer them except snubs.

Muslim-majority Kashmir was an eyesore. Modi aspired to plant an RSS-led government

there backed by a massive Jammu vote and a few seats from the Valley won by hirelings. Coalition was the first step. The goal is to fulfil the aim of repealing Article 370 of India's constitution, which guarantees Kashmir's autonomy, and its corollary Article 35-A. It guarantees its "permanent residents" special rights and privileges on acquisition of immoveable property on employment by the government, barring non-Kashmiris. **→6**

Washington making war against Venezuela unlikely: U.S. analyst

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — An American political analyst and radio host said the likelihood of a U.S.-led war against Venezuela "flies in the face of logic" and is "very low".

"...the actual probability of someone making war against Venezuela flies in the face of logic, you know, and in fact, I would say the probability is very low because of that. But the probability of success I would say is close to zero because this would be the one thing that could unify the Venezuelan people," Don

Debar, from New York, told Tasnim.

Following is the full text of the interview:

■ U.S. officials have threatened Venezuela with military action. They have said that they would take action against the Venezuelan government militarily. I would like to know your take on this and what do you think about the latest developments in Venezuela?

A: I remember when the first U.S. invasion of Iraq took place in late 1990, I think actually January of 1991 is when the actual incursion

began, and there was a political condition I guess at the time called "Vietnam Syndrome", which was sort of public exhaustion over the long war in Vietnam and sort of an antiwar sentiment that had come to reside in the American population. It was acknowledged by just about everyone. And there were efforts made by the military industrial complex, the government, you know, all of those over the course of even Jimmy Carter's presidency, but certainly Ronald Reagan's and then George Bush's to do away with this. **→7**



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Staff at Tehran Times celebrate New Year

Staff at the Tehran Times celebrated the New Year (well-known as Noruz) prior to the beginning of the two-week holidays.

The Tehran Times wishes all the Iranian people a happy, healthy and prosperous year.

We will be back on April 6.

Imam Ali (A.S): The great and most oppressed companion.

By Yusuf Abdullah

NIGERIA/ KANO — Peace and blessings of Allah be upon His chosen servant, our master Muhammad and his pure purified progeny.

Birth of Imam Ali Ibn Abi Talib on the first great night in the holy Kaaba was one of the most memorable historic events of the month. Being the head of the prophet's household, loving him and his family are the necessary reward for prophetic guidance "... no reward do I ask of you for this except the love of those near of kin..." Q42:23. His virtues are highlighted for believers to emulate.

In view of this, I will take a brief look at his blessed life in remembrance of the event. Allamah Ibn Hajar has narrated in Sawa'iq Chapter 9 that the prophet (S) has said: Behold, this is Ali: he is with the Qur'an and the Qur'an is with him.

They shall never part from each other until they come to me at the pool of Kauthar." It was narrated as recorded in Mustadrak and Kanzul Ummal, that the prophet has said, "Whoever wishes to live and die like me, and to abide in the Garden of Eden after death should acknowledge Ali as his patron and follow Ahlul-bait after me, for they are my Ahlul-bait and they have been created out of the same clay, and were blessed with knowledge and understanding as myself. "Woe unto those followers of mine who will deny their distinctions and who will disregard their relationship and affinity with me. May Allah never let them benefit from my intercession".

On the occasion of farewell pilgrimage, when the Imam was sent for deliverance and declaration on the great pilgrimage day, Abu-Bakr cried saying O messenger of Allah! Reveal something for me. The messenger answered "my lord ordered me that nobody can discharge my duty except myself or Ali" Al-Tabari has narrated as mentioned in Kanzul ummal, Volume: 6 page 153, when marrying out his daughter to Imam Ali, the prophet said, I gave you in marriage to the first one to adhere to Islam from my nation, he is also the most knowledgeable and most patient among them. **→7**

Dear readers,
The next issue of the Tehran Times will be published on Saturday, April 6.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Zarif's presence very important for administration: Vaezi

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Presidential chief of staff Mahmoud Vaezi said on Wednesday that the presence of Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif is very important for the Rouhani administration, Mehr reported. Speaking to reporters after a cabinet session, Vaezi also said very few people in Tehran and Damascus knew about President Bashar al Assad's visit to Iran beforehand.

He also denied his role in Zarif's resignation, which was attributed to not knowing about Assad's visit, saying he himself was not aware of the trip until President Assad showed up at the office of President Rouhani.



Iran not involved in Turkish operation against PKK: source

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — An informed source with the General Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces has said Iran is not involved in the Turkish military's operation against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

According to Mehr, the source made the comments after reports emerged that Iran is cooperating with Turkey in the operation.

Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soyly said Turkey and Iran carried out a joint operation against militants from the outlawed PKK on Monday.

"We started carrying out an operation with Iran against the PKK on our eastern border this morning," Soyly said.



Iran opens new port in Negin Island

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Transport Minister Mohammad Eslami has inaugurated a container dock with a capacity of 50,000-ton in Negin Island of the Persian Gulf.

Eslami cut the ribbon on Sunday to let the new port go to work in full swing after almost 4 years of construction, Fars reported.

With the new dock in operation, the container loading and unloading capacity for Bushehr Port will increase to 600,000 TEUs. This is twice its current capacity, making it the country's second biggest container port after Shahid Rajaee Port in Hormozgan Province.



Mogherini: EU resolute to implement Iran deal

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini on Monday underscored the EU's determination to ensure the continued implementation of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"We continue to work hand-in-hand together to ensure the continued implementation of the nuclear agreement with Iran that we together negotiated for long nights and days," Mogherini said at a press conference following the EU-China Strategic Dialogue.

She also said the European Union is committed to strengthening cooperation with China, pointing to the nuclear deal as one of the global issues on which "we clearly have cooperated and continue to cooperate."

Iraq criticizes policies of self-centered countries against Iran

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iraqi Foreign Ministry spokesman Ahmed al-Sahhaf has highlighted his country's national sovereignty, saying Iraq will never let other countries use its soil in order to harm neighbors or any other country around the world.

Al-Sahhaf made the remarks when asked by ILNA to comment on recent remarks by U.S. President Donald Trump who had said he was keeping American troops in Iraq to be able to "watch Iran".

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

"We regard the security of Iraq's neighboring countries, especially the Islamic Republic of Iran, as Iraq's own security," al-Sahhaf said, ILNA reported on Monday.

"The [Iraqi] Foreign Ministry has always criticized the policies of the self-centered countries and will not act accordingly," the spokesman remarked.

Because, he continued, "in our view, the policies of the self-centered countries have not built confidence and have not strengthened the logic of dialogue."

On President Hassan Rouhani's recent visit to Iraq, al-Sahhaf said the trip was a big and important development which will have positive impacts on the two friendly and brotherly countries.

Rouhani's visit will boost the two sides' security, sovereignty and independence and will prevent any foreign interference in their internal affairs, he asserted.

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.

Rouhani says Iran will file complaint against sanctions backers

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani announced on Monday that some members of his cabinet will file a lawsuit against those in the U.S. who are supporting and implementing economic sanctions on Iran.

Rouhani said the presidential aide for legal affairs, justice minister and foreign minister will do the job.

The president called sanctions against Iran "crimes against humanity" and said "the U.S. sanctions are not against Iran's system or nuclear technology, but against the people's lives and health."

Rouhani also said according to an order by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the president should take the commander in resisting the "psychological and economic war" that has been launched against Iran by the Trump administration.

Rouhani added he had asked Ayatollah Khamenei to take the lead in this struggle but the Leader said the president "should be the commander".

Elsewhere in his remarks, the president said the nation should feel assured that his administration will use all its energy to offset



sanctions. "Be aware that the government is using all its power and will continue to do so."

He also said in resisting sanctions "we are not disappointed about the future and we are completely hopeful."

Likewise the media outlets are "duty bound to strengthen unity and hope in the society."

He added, "There are problems but we can overcome them."

The president said the U.S. is putting pressure on Iran with the aim of bringing back Iran to its domain of influence but the Iranians will resist and Washington will fail to reach its objective.

Zarif meets grand ayatollahs in Qom

I → Grand Ayatollah Noori Hamedani attached great importance to unity as the most important principle in the Islamic system.

"Enemy will not be able to cause harm as long as the officials show unity and solidarity," he said.

Grand Ayatollah Shahrestani described Rouhani's visit to Iraq as a new chapter in bilateral relations.

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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.

■ 'We trust no one'

Speaking at the Qom administrative council, Zarif said there is no room for trust at the international arena and Iran does not trust anyone.

"We believe that we can negotiate with everyone due to the power we have. Negotiation is different from trust. We trust no one and do not advise our friends to trust, especially on those who have animosity towards Iran for more than 40 years and supported Saddam (the former Iraqi dictator)," he said.



Zarif (L) meets Ayatollah Lotfollah Safi Golpaygani

BBC Persian's misinformation about Soleimani exposed by Italian diplomat

A former Italian ambassador to Iraq has laid flat BBC Persian's "lie" about IRGC Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani, according to a review by the Young Journalists' Club.

The review refers to Marco Carnelos' March 15 commentary for the Middle East Eye titled "Qassem Soleimani is a master strategist, not a cartoon villain".

"The U.S. officials interviewed by the BBC portray their Iranian nemesis as having been keen to establish a relationship with them, while they systematically rebuffed him. From my modest experience on the ground in Iraq, it was just the opposite," Carnelos wrote.

"The storytelling mirrors some of the limits of U.S. and Western policy towards Iran and, more generally, the Middle East: oversimpli-



fication and unnecessary Manichaeism," the diplomat added.

"The documentary does not provide new information, and much of the backstory it tells was reported years ago. Its main problem is that it offers a panorama of events almost exclusively from a Western perspective. Not a

single member of the IRGC, or any Iranian official, is quoted."

Carnelos goes on to note that "this approach betrays the irrepressible Western necessity to have an enemy - an 'other' - a bearer of different, evil values to mobilize against."

The Western narrative on Iran and Soleimani is overwhelmingly produced by Israeli sources, without significant fact-checking, he adds.

"There is no doubt that Soleimani is a brilliant military commander. People who have dealt with him repeatedly, such as Mowaffak al-Rubaie, Maliki's former national security adviser, have summarized his three main characteristics: 'frighteningly intelligent, ideologically driven and, most of all, with the quite rare [possession of] both tactical and strategic capabilities'."

Carnelos adds that "Soleimani is not a fanatic. He has courage, humility, revolutionary commitment, and empathy towards his men. He is a strong motivator and a patient listener, facilitating dialogue with a huge network of interlocutors on the ground - qualities that his U.S., Israeli and Arab foes sometimes lack. The main source of his success is his unique ability to capitalize on the countless errors made by these same foes."

"The main enablers of Soleimani's heroic gestures," and the best propagandists of his now apparently widespread and growing popular following - which could also open a political future for him in Iran - are his supposed enemies, who quite frequently turn out to be his main, and unforgivably unaware, allies."

Raisi calls for serious steps to counter racism, terrorism

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Raisi has called for serious measures to counter racism, terrorism and extremism, saying condemning acts of terror after they occur is "not enough".

"We invite all judges, lawyers and true human rights advocates across the world to make efforts to reach a strong

consensus through exchanging of views and cooperation and to take serious steps in this regard through joining a rights movement to counter racism, terrorism and extremism," Raisi said, Fars reported on Monday.

The newly-come Judiciary chief's call was made in particular reference to a recent terrorist attack in New Zealand.

A gunman killed 50 people and wounded more than 40 during Friday prayers at two New Zealand mosques last week in the country's worst ever mass shooting.

The assailant broadcast livestream footage on Facebook of the attack on one mosque in the city of Christchurch, mirroring the carnage played out in video games, after publishing a "manifesto" in

which he denounced immigrants, calling them "invaders".

"The Judiciary of the Islamic Republic, as the country's highest judicial body which has been the main victim of terrorism and violence in the world, is ready to be the centerpiece of this movement and the coordinator of worldwide efforts in this area," Raisi added.

Another border guard lost in clash with armed groups

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — An Iranian border guard has been killed in clashes with armed bandits in the northwestern province of Kurdistan near the border with Iraq.

The clash took place as the border guards prevented the armed group from entering the country. The bandits were venturing into the Iranian territory with the intention of conducting acts of sabotage, the province's border

police chief announced.

The clash took place near the border village of Sardab on Sunday night, according to Brigadier General Kiumars Sheikh.

The commander did not give any further details or say whether they were connected to militant groups but said police had obtained new clues about them and launched a hunt.

Over the past years, Iranian security forces and border guards have engaged in several clashes with terror groups, many of whom tried to enter the country from Pakistan and Iraq to carry out attacks.

In February, a suicide bomber targeted a bus carrying border guards near the border with Pakistan, killing 27 IRGC servicemen injuring 13 others. The Jaish ul-Adl terrorist group took responsibility for the attack.

Official raps silence on New Zealand attack



has described as institutionalized secularism in the West.

He said it was the West that gave birth to the Daesh (ISIL) terrorist group, and now the notorious terrorists have emerged in the U.S. and Europe.

Ameli also denounced the international community's refusal to condemn the terrorist attack in New Zealand, saying the Western Islamophobia campaign has historical and economic roots.

"Islamophobia has its roots in the European and American economy, as they created Islamophobia for the sake of the arms trade market so that they could sell

arms to a country like Saudi Arabia," the cleric added.

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(Source: Tasnim)

War on terror will continue relentlessly: Iranian military chief

I → Elsewhere, he said that the global hegemony has created Daesh to weaken regional security.

■ 'Joint military exercises are essential'

Hanin Qadou, a representative of the al-Bina coalition in

the Iraqi parliament, has said it is essential that Iran, Iraq, and Syria hold joint military exercises.

"If drills are staged, Washington's way to impose its influence and support Daesh will be blocked," the Fars news

agency quoted him as saying.

Qadou underscored that the Iraqi security is directly tied to security in Syria and Iran and joint drills will bring stability and security to the entire region.

MBS approved ‘intervention’ against dissidents: NYT report

More than a year before the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, Saudi Arabia's powerful Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, also known as MBS, approved a secret campaign to silence dissenters, the New York Times has reported. The campaign included surveillance, kidnapping, detention and torture of Saudis, said the report published on Sunday citing the U.S. officials who have read classified intelligence reports about the effort.

American officials referred to it as the Saudi Rapid Intervention Group, the Times said.

One of the victims of this group was a university lecturer who reported on the situation of women and was tortured last year, prompting her to attempt suicide.

Saudi Arabia has a long history of pursuing dissidents, including those based outside the country, but this practice has seen a major upsurge following Prince Mohammed's promotion as the crown prince in 2017.

At least some of the clandestine missions were carried out by the members of the team that killed and dismembered Khashoggi in October at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, suggesting his murder was part of a wider campaign against dissidents, the report said, citing the U.S. officials and associates of some Saudi victims.

These members were involved in at least a dozen operations beginning in 2017, the officials said, including forcibly repatriating Saudis from other Arab countries.

Authorized by MBS
The murder of Khashoggi, a Washington Post contributing columnist, generated global outrage, leading to a call by some U.S. senators for President Donald Trump to designate



and punish those responsible. Trump did not comply.

The senators, briefed by the heads of U.S. intelligence agencies, said they were convinced that Prince Mohammed was responsible for the Khashoggi killing.

Saudi Arabia has stressed the prince was not involved.

The kingdom initially said it had no knowledge of Khashoggi's fate but later blamed its rogue agents for his gruesome murder.

Saudi Arabia's public prosecutor has charged 11 people over his murder.

The Rapid Intervention Group was au-

thorised by Prince Mohammed and overseen by Saud al-Qahtani, a royal court insider, American officials told the Times.

U.S. intelligence reports did not specify how involved Prince Mohammed was with the group's work, but said that the operatives saw al-Qahtani as a "conduit" to the prince, the report said.

Al-Qahtani has been sacked over Khashoggi's murder but Saudi authorities have not said if he was among those charged. Five of the accused face the death penalty.

Harassing rights activists
According to the New York-based newspa-

per, the Rapid Intervention Group has been involved in the harassment of arrested prominent human rights activists and women's rights defenders, including Loujain al-Hathloul, Aziza al-Yousef and Iman al-Najfan.

Alia al-Hathloul says that al-Qahtani attended several such sessions to torture her sister. He also threatened to kill Loujain and throw her body into the sewers, Alia says.

According to the newspaper, the women were beaten, subjected to electric shocks, waterboarding, and threatened with death and rape during the interrogations.

Loujain's sister says that at first the Saudi authorities did not send the arrested women to jail, but in a secret location in the Red Sea city of Jeddah.

According to U.S. intelligence assessment, the brutal interrogations prompted university professor al-Najfan to attempt suicide.

The women's trial began last Wednesday after nearly a year in detention, but the Saudi government did not announce the charges against them.

Saudi denial
The intervention team was so busy that in June its leader asked a top adviser to Prince Mohammed whether he would give them bonuses for Eid-ul-Fitr, a major festival at the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Saudi officials declined to confirm or deny that such a team existed, or answer questions from the Times about its work.

According to a spokesperson for the Saudi embassy in Washington, the kingdom "takes any allegations of ill-treatment of defendants awaiting trial or prisoners serving their sentences very seriously".

Putin, in Crimea for annexation anniversary, launches power stations

President Vladimir Putin inaugurated two new power stations in Crimea on Monday after flying into the Black Sea peninsula to celebrate the fifth anniversary of Russia's annexation of the region from Ukraine.

The power stations, in the cities of Sevastopol and Simferopol, were partially launched last year, but Monday's inauguration marked the moment they began working at full capacity.

The same facilities were at the center of an international scandal after German engineering company Siemens said its power turbines had been installed at them without its knowledge and in violation of European Union sanctions. Russia denied that.

Putin, who has poured billions of Russian taxpayer dollars into Crimea since Moscow seized control of it in 2014, attended the launch of the Sevastopol power station. He oversaw the launch of the Simferopol facility by video conference.

Earlier on Monday, Dmitry Peskov, Putin's spokesman, said the ceremony would show that Crimea was able to meet all of its own energy needs for the first time. Before annexation, Ukraine supplied 80 percent of the peninsula's electricity needs.

Ukraine says it wants Crimea, which most countries still recognize as Ukrainian territory, back.

Russia says the matter is closed forever and that a 2014 referendum held after Russian forces secured the peninsula, showed Crimeans want to part of Russia.

Putin is due to speak at a celebratory music concert later on Monday and to hold talks with local people and businesses about what Russia has achieved in Crimea in the last five years and where it has fallen short.

Russia has spent heavily to try to integrate Crimea and reduce its dependence on Ukraine, including building a giant bridge to link the peninsula to southern Russia. But Western sanctions designed to punish Moscow for its annexation have helped isolate the peninsula, pushing up prices and slowing its development.

Putin's approval rating soared on the back of Russia's Crimean annexation, which stirred national pride in many Russians. But despite remaining high at over 60 percent, his rating has since declined due to public unease over falling wages, rising prices and unpopular pension reforms.

Russian enthusiasm for the annexation also appears to have cooled with an opinion poll from the FOM pollster this month showing that 39 percent of Russians believe it brought more good than harm, down from 67 percent in 2014.



Canada's PM changes cabinet for third time in 3 months amid crisis

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau Monday changed his cabinet for the third time in three months in response to a crisis caused by the resignation of a minister who later alleged inappropriate conduct by officials.

In a surprise move, Trudeau named backbench Liberal legislator Joyce Murray to the post of Treasury Board President, where she will be in overall charge of government spending.

It is the first federal cabinet post for Murray, 64, who had previously been a provincial government minister in

British Columbia.

Murray replaces Jane Philpott, who quit on March 4 in protest over how the government was handling a corruption case involving SNC-Lavalin Group Inc., a major construction company.

Philpott expressed unhappiness over allegations that government officials pressured former Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould last year to help Montreal-based SNC-Lavalin avoid a criminal trial.

Wilson-Raybould, who was demoted in January, resigned from Trudeau's cabinet the next month. Trudeau's closest personal aide quit shortly afterwards.

Polls show the crisis could derail the Trudeau government's chances of being reelected in October.

Earlier this month, Trudeau denied he or his officials had interfered in Canada's judicial system, and he offered no apology.

(Source: Daily Star)

Over 160 dead in Zimbabwe, Mozambique as cyclone destroys city

A cyclone that ripped across Mozambique and Zimbabwe has killed at least 162 people with scores more missing and caused "massive and horrifying" destruction in the Mozambican city of Beira, authorities and the Red Cross said Monday.

Cyclone Idai tore into the centre of Mozambique on Thursday night before barreling on to neighbouring Zimbabwe, bringing flash floods and ferocious winds, and washing away roads and houses.

"The scale of damage caused by cyclone Idai that hit the Mozambican city of Beira is massive and horrifying", the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) said in a statement.

It said 90 percent of the city of some 530,000 people and its surrounding area had been "damaged or destroyed"

"The situation is terrible. The scale of devastation is enormous," the IFRC's Jamie LeSueur was quoted as saying in the statement.

"Almost everything is destroyed. Communication lines have been completely cut and roads have been destroyed. Some affected communities are not accessible," he said.

A large dam burst on Sunday and cut off the last road to Beira, he said.

A toll compiled Monday by AFP from official sources puts the death toll in Mozambique at 73, including 55 in Beira alone, and 89 in Zimbabwe.

At least 150 more are missing in Zimbabwe, many of them believed to government workers whose housing complex was engulfed by floods.

Mozambique's environment minister, Celso Correia, warned that the death tally would rise.

"I think this is the biggest natural disaster Mozambique has ever faced. Everything is destroyed," he told AFP on Sunday night said at Beira international airport, which re-opened after being temporarily closed because of cyclone damage.

In Zimbabwe, Idai swept away homes and ripped bridges to pieces, leaving a trail of destruction that the acting defence minister, Perrance Shiri, said "resembles the aftermath of a full-scale war".

"There was a lot of destruction both on our facilities and

on people," said Shiri speaking on television from the affected eastern highlands region.

Roads have been swallowed by massive sinkholes, while bridges were ripped to pieces by flash floods, according to an AFP photographer.

"This is the worst infrastructural damage we have ever had," Zimbabwean Transport and Infrastructural Development Minister Joel Biggie Matiza said.

School hit -
Zimbabwe's eastern district of Chimanimani was the worst-hit part of the country, with houses and most of the bridges washed away by flash floods.

The most affected areas are not yet accessible, and high winds and dense clouds have hampered military rescue helicopter flights.

Two pupils and a worker at a secondary school in the area were among those killed after a landslide sent a boulder crashing into their dormitory.

Soldiers on Sunday helped rescue the surviving nearly 200 pupils, teachers and staff who had been trapped at the school in Chimanimani.

"The teachers and school authorities are making all efforts to ensure the children arrive and we take them home but it seems the situation is getting worse," one unnamed parent told the state broadcaster ZBC, as she raised concerns about the ongoing rains.

Joshua Sacco, lawmaker for Chimanimani, told AFP by phone, that between "150 to 200 people" are missing.

The majority of them are thought to be government workers, whose housing complex was completely engulfed by raging waters. Their fate is currently unknown because the area is still unreachable.

"We are very worried because all these houses were just suddenly submerged under water and literally washed away and that is where we have about 147 missing," he said.

Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa, who cut short a visit to Abu Dhabi, said on arrival on Monday, "we are deeply grieved as a nation".

(Source: AFP)

Yemeni forces kill Saudi, Sudanese troopers in Saudi Arabia

Yemeni forces have killed nearly 40 Saudi and Sudanese soldiers during two separate operations in Saudi Arabia's southwestern border region, in retaliation for the ongoing Saudi-led military campaign against Yemen.

Brigadier General Yahya Saree, the spokesman for Yemeni Armed Forces, said on Sunday that at least 11 Saudi soldiers and 26 Sudanese troops had been killed in Saudi Arabia's provinces of Jizan and Najran over the past hours, Yemen's Arabic-language al-Masirah reported.

The Yemeni forces targeted military

positions across the region following the gathering and analysis of intelligence, he added.

Saree also said Saudi-paid militiamen suffered heavy losses when Yemeni army soldiers and allied fighters from Popular Committees repelled their attacks in some parts of Hudaydah and al-Rabuah provinces.

Saudi Arabia and a number of its regional allies launched the war on Yemen in March 2015 with the goal of bringing a former regime that had been submissive to Riyadh back to power.

Sudan has contributed forces to the

invading coalition.

A number of Western countries — the U.S. and Britain in particular — supply that coalition with advanced weapons and military equipment as well as logistical and intelligence assistance.

Thousands of Yemeni civilians have been killed, while thousands more have been injured.

Much of the country's infrastructure has also been destroyed, and a Saudi-led blockade has deprived most of the Yemeni population of clean water, food, and proper healthcare.

(Source: Press TV)

Schools in Sistan and Baluchestan Province Equipped with Heating Systems

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STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	175804.1
IFX	2205.82

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,605 rials
GBP	55,811 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$67.27/b
WTI	\$58.43/b
OPEC Basket	\$67.29/b
Gold	\$1,304.25/oz
Silver	\$15.38/oz
Platinum	\$835.10 oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Iran, China holding joint economic committee meeting

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran and China are holding their 17th joint economic committee meeting in Beijing, exploring avenues to expand bilateral relations in a wide



range of areas. Iranian Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dejpasand, heading a delegation, arrived in Beijing on Monday for a two-day visit, IRNA reported. During the meeting, the two sides discuss ways to boost ties in the fields of investment, trade, finance, banking, telecommunication, energy, environment, agriculture, health and tourism within the framework of specialized committees.

Several documents of cooperation will be signed at the end of the meeting.

Sanctions on Iran have negative effects on energy markets: Novak

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak said the U.S. sanctions on Iran and Venezuela are having a negative impact on global energy markets.

The official noted that the sanctions volatility is hindering long-term planning in the market and confusing investment decisions, Reuters reported.

Novak said planning even a few months ahead is tough due to possible sanctions-related volatility, adding that the country imposing sanctions — an apparent reference to the United States — was doing so in order to promote its own goods. In November 2018, The Trump administration reimposed the sanctions which were lifted under the nuclear deal, reached under former President Obama.

The sanctions targeted Iran's oil sector, financial transactions and banks, as well as shipping and ship-building industries in order to cut off the country's revenue sources.

UAE plans to ease citizens' debt burden as economy slows

The United Arab Emirates started a program that aims to reduce the debt burden of its citizens as the oil-rich Persian Gulf country grapples with an economic slowdown.

The program, launched by the central bank, targets loans that cost individuals more than 50 percent of their monthly salary, according to the state-run WAM news agency. Payments would be consolidated over a maximum period of four years and capped at half the person's salary or 30 percent of their pension. The interest rate won't exceed the three-month interbank rate.

The Persian Gulf Arab monarchies have frequently bailed out citizens by writing off debt, part of an unwritten social pact that offers generous benefits in return for political loyalty. Critics say such moves encourage irresponsible borrowing. The vast majority of the UAE population is made up of expatriates.

The UAE's program comes as the non-oil economy struggles to cope with more than four years of lower crude prices, causing a drop in property values. A measure of business activity last month showed that companies in the second-biggest Arab economy are cutting jobs at the fastest pace in almost a decade.

Under the program, eligible debt includes personal loans, auto loans, overdraft facilities and credit card balances given before May 2011. It doesn't cover mortgages or loans for shares or deposits. Banks will start accepting applications in April.

Citizens have to pledge that they would not seek any loans or credit facilities from banks or financial institutions during the repayment period, WAM reported.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Producing 51GW of electricity during summer on agenda

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — Iranian power plants are set to produce at least 51 gigawatts (GW) of electricity during the peak hours of consumption in summer, IRNA reported on Sunday quoting deputy minister of energy for electricity affairs as saying.

According to Homayoun Haeri, in this regard the oil ministry plans to focus on consumption management and increasing the average efficiency of the country's power plants to 38.5 percent.

"The production record high of 47,000

megawatts (47GW) which was achieved in last summer should not only be maintained this year but we need to increase the number to at least 51,000 megawatts (51GW)," Haeri said.

In October 2018, the head of Iran's Thermal Power Plants Holding Company unveiled a plan for an increase in the efficiency of the country's power plants up to 40 percent.

According to Mohsen Tarzitalab, following a development initiative foreseen in the country's Sixth Five-Year National Development Plan (2016-2021) the aver-

Iran raises output from West Karun fields, Jask terminal to be ready by 2021

There has been a steady rise in crude production at Iran's West Karun fields, oil minister Bijan Zanganeh was quoted as saying Sunday by Shana news agency.

Zanganeh also said Iran's new crude export oil terminal at Jask on the Gulf of Oman will be operational by 2021.

Oil production from West Karun oil fields has quintupled over six years, Zanganeh added.

"The amount of oil production from West Karun fields in 2013 was 70,000 b/d. This amount has reached 355,000 b/d in the year 1397 (March 2018-19)," the minister said, referring to the current Iranian year that ends March 20.

In 2018, Iran said output from the main West Karun fields including Yadavaran, Yaran and Azadegan fields had hit 305,000 b/d, up from 120,000 b/d in 2017.

Despite U.S. sanctions that have capped Iran's oil sales by restricting its oil customers, Zanganeh has said the country has not stopped raising output.

Iran crude production has averaged



2.72 million b/d so far, according to S&P Global Platts estimates, the lowest in over six years.

Iran's plans to make the Jask terminal operational in two years are on track, Zanganeh added.

"We hope that this terminal [Jask] will become operational by end of the year 1399 (March 2020-21) and for the first time Iran's oil will be exported through Makran [Gulf of Oman]," he said.

This will give the sanctions-hit oil producer an alternative outlet for its exports. (Source: spglobal.com)

Japan's exports slump again on weak external demand, puts BOJ on notice

Japan's exports fell for a third month in February in a sign of growing strain on the trade-reliant economy, suggesting the central bank might be forced to offer more stimulus eventually to temper the effects of slowing external demand and trade frictions.

Slowing global growth, the Sino-U.S. trade war and complications over Britain's exit from the European Union have already forced many policymakers to shift to an easing stance over recent months.

Japan is in a similar situation to much of the rest of the world, where factories have slammed on the brakes and business confidence has plummeted in the wake of rising global economic uncertainty.

Ministry of Finance data showed on Monday exports fell 1.2 percent year-on-year in February, more than a 0.9 percent decrease expected by economists in a Reuters poll.

It followed a sharp 8.4 percent year-on-year drop in January, marking a third straight month of falls due to drops in shipments of cars, steel and semiconductor production equipment.

"Exports to advanced nations like the United States and Europe still held firm, but China- and Asia-bound shipments were clearly sluggish," said Takeshi Minami, chief economist at Norinchukin Research Institute.

"Exports will remain in a declining trend for the time being, which could curb capital spending and wages. Domestic economy will face a severe situation ahead of October's sales tax hike."

The trade data comes on top of a recent batch of weak indicators, such as factory output and a key gauge of capital spending, which have raised worries that Japan's record run of postwar growth may come to an end.

Some analysts say a recession cannot be ruled out.

The Bank of Japan last week cut its view on exports and output, while keeping policy unchanged. Yet, extended



weakness in exports could put it under pressure to deliver more easing, especially as inflation remains well off its 2 percent target and pressure on businesses and consumers continues to rise.

In the post-policy press conference last week, BOJ Governor Haruhiko Kuroda acknowledged the challenges the economy faced but gave no indication there would be any additional stimulus.

But Kuroda may have to change tack in the face of a run of weak economic indicators.

Many in the BOJ expect Japan's economy to emerge from the current soft patch in the second half of this year, assuming China's stimulus plans can revive demand there.

The biggest worry among BOJ policymakers is that weakening exports and output will hurt corporate sentiment, prompting firms to delay capital expenditure and wage hikes.

Fragile bounce

The trade war between the United States and China - Japan's largest export markets - has already curbed global trade.

Monday's trade data showed exports to China, Japan's biggest trading partner, rose 5.5 percent year-on-year on shipments of semiconductor production equipment and



age efficiency of the country's power plants would increase 2.1 percent from the current 37.9 percent.

According to the plan, new power plants in Iran should operate with an efficiency of at least 55 percent.

The Ministry of Energy has been trying to improve the efficiency of the country's existing power plants as part of efforts to limit harmful emissions and cut fuel consumption.

The country's current nominal power generation capacity stands at 79,325GW.

European nations eager to join INSTEX: Belgian official

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The Belgian embassy's commercial attaché to Tehran said European countries are willing to join the financial mechanism with Iran known as Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX), the portal of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) reported.

"There are still risks in trade with Iran, however alongside Britain, France and Germany as founders of INSTEX, other European countries are willing to join this financial mechanism," Christopher Smith said.

The official made the remarks in a meeting with ICCIMA deputy head for international affairs Mohammad-Reza Karbasi on Monday at the ICCIMA building in Tehran.

Smith noted that European small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are eagerly waiting for the implementation of the INSTEX and the determination of its operational framework.

The business adviser, stressed the interest of Belgian companies in maintaining trade ties with Iran, saying, "Currently, a part of

the Belgian trade with Iran is being carried out through third parties, but we are looking for the right solutions in the current situation for expansion and development of our bilateral economic relations."

Karbasi, for his part, criticized the delays in the implementation of INSTEX and called for clearance in the mechanism's details.

"In the current situation, it is necessary that EU determines the operational details and framework of INSTEX as soon as possible," Karbasi said.

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

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

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

cars, rebounding from a 17.4 percent drop in January.

However, overall trade to the Asian giant remained weak, as even after averaging effects of the Lunar New Year holiday, China-bound shipments declined 6.3 percent in the January-February period from a year earlier.

Seasonally-adjusted overall trade values rose 6.7 percent month-on-month in February, the strongest rise in two years. Export volumes fell 0.6 percent in the year to February after the previous month's 9.0 percent decline.

"Shifts in the timing of Chinese New Year partly explain the sharp swings in trade volumes at the start of the year so the recent strength in export volumes may unwind before long," said Marcel Thieliant, senior Japan economist at Capital Economics.

"We still think that net trade will remain a drag on GDP growth both in the first quarter and throughout 2019."

Japan's shipments to Asia, which account for more than half of overall exports, fell 1.8 percent, down for a fourth straight month.

U.S.-bound exports rose 2.0 percent, but imports from the United States grew 4.9 percent, resulting in Japan's trade surplus with the country declining 0.9 percent year-on-year to 624.9 billion yen (\$5.60 billion) in February.

Yet, Japan's still-large surplus with the United States raises concerns among Japanese policymakers and auto exporters that Washington may impose hefty duties on its imports.

Imports of Japanese cars make up about two-thirds of Japan's \$69 billion annual trade surplus with the United States, making Tokyo and Beijing targets of criticism by Trump.

In February, Japanese auto exports to the United States rose just 0.5 percent year-on-year to 152,198 units in February, with the value of shipments down 6.8 percent.

(Source: Reuters)

ECB attacks EU plans for boosting supervision of clearing houses

European Central Bank officials have strongly criticized EU plans for boosting supervision of clearing houses, saying they leave it without crucial powers to fend off crises in the €660tn market for euro-denominated derivatives and violate its independence.

The bank's concerns center on a deal reached at last week's talks between national capitals and the European Parliament on a planned law giving the bloc greater oversight over clearing houses handling euro-denominated trades, the officials say.

Under the deal, the European Securities and Markets Authority, a Paris-based agency, will get new powers to monitor clearing houses' risk management. Esma and central banks will also be given a role in judging whether non-EU institutions should be pressed to move to the bloc.

Regulators see clearing houses as critical financial infrastructure, since they act as central counterparties between sellers and buyers of shares and derivatives. A particular priority in the talks was to enhance supervision of the clearing of euro-denominated swaps contracts, a business

dominated by the City of London.

But ECB officials say negotiators only partially met their request for a change to the central bank's statutes that would have given it a clear right to set regulations governing "clearing systems for financial instruments".

Benoit Coeure, a member of the ECB's executive board, repeated the call last month, saying that "we should be able to adopt requirements to address critical central bank concerns".

The ECB argues that the functioning of clearing houses has a direct impact on banks' lending capacity and therefore potentially affects the effectiveness of its monetary policy decisions. It also says that if it is expected to provide emergency liquidity in a crisis, it should have powers to ensure the soundness of euro clearing.

The Financial Times is collaborating with 16 news organizations for an experiment called Europe Talks, where we connect thousands of Europeans for face-to-face conversations across borders. Would you like to be involved?

Powers sought by the bank included the ability to require clearing houses to hold central bank accounts and to set standards for managing liquidity risk.

A lack of ECB oversight for euro clearing has long troubled the bank, with officials concerned that the status quo presented a possible risk to the entire financial system and the Eurozone economy.

The reaction to last week's deal also underlines the often fraught relationship between the ECB and national supervisors. EU officials said that, in last week's negotiations between MEPs and national governments, the ECB fell foul of a general reluctance on the part of governments to shift oversight of clearing houses away from national regulators.

Under the deal that was reached, the ECB would get a change to its statutes, but its new powers would be mainly confined to clearing houses based outside the EU and be tightly limited, according to people involved in the talks.

ECB officials said that the planned wording in the new law could be even

worse than the existing situation, because a strictly limited list of what the ECB could and could not do would violate the central bank's independence and deny it the flexibility it needed to fulfil its role.

They added that the bank was considering its options, including simply scrapping its request for changes to its statutes and reverting to the status quo. Such a move would require unanimous support from the bloc's central bank governors, who are set to discuss the situation next week.

The ECB declined to comment.

Last week's deal will take effect after it has been formally signed off by governments and the European Parliament.

The bank's concerns about its jurisdiction over clearing houses date back to 2015, when it lost a landmark case at the European Court of Justice to the UK government.

Britain successfully argued that the central bank did not have the right to set limits to how much euro clearing could take place outside the euro area, prompting the ECB to start seeking ways to legally reinforce its remit.

(Source: Financial Times)

Iran, Venezuela sanctions impacts not dire enough to justify easing OPEC oil cuts: Falih

Crude production from Iran and Venezuela has remained resilient in the face of U.S. sanctions, Saudi energy minister Khalid al-Falih said Sunday, so for now, OPEC and its allies "need to stay the course, certainly until June," on their 1.2 million bpd oil cut agreement.

"The fact of the matter is that [Iran and Venezuela] have not declined precipitously to the point where we see there are still inventory builds," Falih said in Baku, Azerbaijan, a day ahead of a key OPEC/non-OPEC monitoring committee meeting.

He noted that Venezuela has redirected some of its crude flows to Asia and away from U.S. Gulf refiners, who are practically banned from importing Venezuelan oil due to U.S. sanctions.

"Therefore, the market overall remains supplied with Venezuelan barrels," Falih said. "The overall supply situation remains long and is forecasted to be long for the rest of the year, as far as I see it."

Saudi Arabia will keep its crude production around 9.8 million bpd for both March and April, he reiterated, with exports in both months remaining below 7 million bpd.

But he added that the alliance would continue to manage oil supplies with the objective of market stability, monitoring not only the U.S. sanctions but also uncertain demand from China, India and other growth economies.

"We remain ready to continue monitoring supply and demand and doing what we have to do in the second half of 2019 to keep the markets balanced," Falih said.

Venezuelan production fell to 1.10 million bpd in February, down from 1.16 million



bpd in January, according to the latest S&P Global Platts survey of OPEC output, though a recent massive power outage in the country is expected to significantly impact output levels.

Iran, meanwhile, held production steady at 2.72 million bpd in February, unchanged month on month, the survey found, as sanctions waivers the U.S. granted to eight countries to continue Iranian oil purchases help buoy output. The waivers expire in May, and U.S. officials have not said whether they plan to extend them.

Extension deliberations

OPEC and 10 non-OPEC allies led by Russia agreed in December to a 1.2 million bpd production cut accord that is scheduled to run through June.

Russian energy minister Alexander Novak said the oil market had seen a "significant

decline" in price volatility since the deal was agreed.

As for whether the deal should be extended, he said the OPEC/non-OPEC coalition would need to make a decision by May or June.

"We're looking at every change in fundamentals to assess what other actions need to be done," Novak said. "All the sides have confirmed once again that they are committed to the agreement of December, and we will see it all the way through."

Falih has said that his preference is to maintain the cuts beyond their June expiry.

OPEC's own analysis arm said Thursday in its monthly oil market report that oil inventories as of January stood at 2.88 billion barrels, about 19.1 million barrels above the five-year average that the coalition is targeting. The bloc's next full meetings are

April 17-18 and again June 25-26 in Vienna.

Improving compliance

A technical committee of OPEC and non-OPEC delegates met Sunday in Baku to assess market conditions, and a six-country Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee co-chaired by Falih and Novak is scheduled to meet Monday to discuss the supply accord.

Novak, however, will not attend the meeting, as he has a scheduling conflict that requires him to return to Russia, though he arrived in Baku Sunday afternoon to hold bilateral talks with several members of the coalition.

The bloc achieved 86 percent conformity in February with their agreed 1.2 million bpd in output cuts, a delegate told S&P Global Platts.

That is a slight improvement on January's 83 percent compliance, and Falih, who has pressured members to adhere to their quotas, told reporters that he was confident that the group's performance "will catch up very soon."

Russia is one of the non-compliant members, reporting last week a February production level of 43.3 million mt, or about 11.34 million bpd, which was above its quota of 11.19 million bpd.

Novak said the country will be in full compliance by the end of March or beginning of April, and that full cuts were delayed by weather and technical factors.

Iraq, another country that has been slow to bring production down in line with its quota, will slash its crude exports in March by 200,000 to 250,000 bpd from February levels, oil minister Thamer Ghadhbani said at the press briefing. (Source: Platts)

Kazakhstan will comply with promised oil output cuts as giant Kashagan field shuts



Kazakhstan will shut production at its giant Kashagan oil field next month, bringing its production into compliance for the six months of the promised cuts under the OPEC/non-OPEC supply accord, energy minister Kanat Bozumbayev said Sunday.

The average production over the six months will meet the commitment, as Kazakhstan will reduce output more than promised in March, April and May, Bozumbayev told reporters in Baku, Azerbaijan, where he will attend Monday's OPEC/non-OPEC monitoring committee meeting. Output in March will average 1.82 million bpd, and fall to below 1.8 million bpd in April, he said.

The Central Asian country has to date exceeded its production quota of 1.86 million bpd under the deal, which covers the first six months of 2019, primarily due to rising output at Kashagan.

"Output there is currently between 300,000 and 350,000 bpd, so it will be a significant cut, almost 200,000 bpd," Bozumbayev said. "We expect that in April and May we will have a low output level, then in June it will pick up and so our average output for the six months

will be less than 1.8 million bpd."

Last week Kazakhstan's energy ministry reported daily liquids output of 1.893 million bpd in February and 1.885 million bpd in January.

Bozumbayev added that a decision on whether Kazakhstan will join the monitoring committee may be taken at the next full meeting of the OPEC/non-OPEC coalition April 17-18 in Vienna.

The six-country committee is currently co-chaired by ministers from Saudi Arabia and Russia, and also includes Kuwait, Algeria, Venezuela and Oman. It is tasked with monitoring market conditions and assessing compliance with the supply cuts, as well as making recommendations to the wider OPEC/non-OPEC coalition.

"They proposed this to us, but [confirming new committee members] would happen at the general meeting, which will take place only in April," Bozumbayev said, adding that it was not Kazakhstan's idea, but the country is open to joining the committee if other participants are amenable.

(Source: Platts)

Russia will be fully compliant with OPEC-led supply cuts by April: Novak



Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak said on Sunday that Moscow will be fully compliant with OPEC-led supply cuts over the coming weeks.

"As far as the meeting is concerned we, of course, discussed the situation with the execution of the agreement (and) we stressed once again that Russia is discharging its obligations in accordance with the agreement to smoothly achieve the target output," Novak told CNBC's Dan Murphy in Baku, Azerbaijan, according to a translation.

"As for the target output level that forms part of the signed agreement, we plan to reach those figures by the end of March (or) beginning of April. This is earlier than in the same period two years ago by about one month."

His comments come three months into a fresh round of production cuts from the so-called OPEC+ alliance. The producers meet in mid-April to review their oil supply cut agreement, which is scheduled to last through the first-half of 2019.

The Middle East-dominated group, alongside non-OPEC allies such as Russia, agreed

to reduce output by 1.2 million barrels per day (b/d) for six months.

OPEC's share is 800,000 b/d, to be delivered by 11 members — with Iran, Venezuela and Libya exempt from cuts.

When asked whether Russia would support an extension to the cuts, Novak replied: "It is a little premature to talk about this. The deal after all covers the first six months of the year so any extension will be discussed in May or June this year."

The compliance rates in the first two months of the year are less than levels seen in 2017 and 2018. But, Saudi Arabia's Energy Minister Khalid al-Falih told reporters on the sidelines of the joint ministerial monitoring committee meeting in Baku that he expected oil producers would "catch up very soon."

The 2019 pact was a dramatic turnaround for OPEC and its allies, after the producer group had agreed to boost supplies in mid-2018. OPEC+ changed course after Brent crude futures tumbled from \$86 a barrel in October, making them wary of a supply glut.

(Source: CNBC)

Oil pulled two ways by economic slowdown, OPEC-led supply cuts

Oil prices were mixed on Monday, weighed by concerns that an economic downturn may dent fuel consumption, but supported by supply cuts led by producer group OPEC and U.S. sanctions against Iran and Venezuela.

Brent crude oil futures were at \$67.24 per barrel at 0737 GMT, up 8 cents from their last close, and not far off the \$68.14 per barrel 2019-high reached last week.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) futures were at \$58.43 per barrel, down 9 cents from their last settlement, but also still close to last week's 2019-high of \$58.95.

"The market sits in limbo as it searches for direction," said Matt Stanley, a broker with Starfuels in Singapore.

Bernstein Energy said on Monday "the greatest downside risk to our oil price view is demand weakness on slower economic growth. Our base case is that global oil demand will increase by 1.3 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2019 ... (although a) global slowdown in growth could push global demand growth to below 1 million bpd."

U.S. manufacturing output fell for a second straight month in February, in a sign that the world's biggest economy has been slowing down in the first quarter.

In Asia, Japan's exports fell for a third straight month in February in a sign of growing strain from slowing global demand.

Despite this, oil prices have gained around a quarter since the start of the year amid U.S. sanctions against Iran and Venezuela, and as the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and non-affiliated allies like Russia - known as OPEC+ - have pledged to withhold 1.2 million bpd in supply to prop up prices.

OPEC's de-facto leader Saudi Arabia said on Sunday that balancing oil markets was far from done as inventories were still high. Russia also said production cuts would stay in place at least until June.

As a result, Bernstein forecast an inventory draw of 37 million barrels in the first quarter for the 36 member countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which comprises most industrialized nations.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) said on Friday it expected oil markets to be in a modest deficit from the second quarter of 2019. Key for the supply and demand balance will be the United States, where crude production has soared by around 2 million bpd over the past year, thanks largely to an onshore boom in shale formation drilling.

The number of rigs drilling for new oil production in the United States has been falling in 2019, and hit its lowest level since April 2018 last week, at 833 operating rigs.

However, U.S. crude oil production still increased at the start of 2019, hitting a record 12.1 million barrels per day (bpd) in February, data from the Energy Information Administration (EIA) showed.

Output has since dipped back to 12 million bpd, but that still makes America the world's biggest crude oil producer.

(Source: Reuters)

Oil bulls stick to their guns as Saudis say job isn't complete

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

Money managers increased wagers on rising West Texas Intermediate and Brent crude prices to the highest since October ahead of a key meeting of top exporters in Azerbaijan over the weekend. OPEC and its partners need to "stay the course" until June as the group's job is "nowhere near complete" in terms of restoring oil-market fundamentals, Saudi Energy Minister Khalid Al-Falih said late Sunday.

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

OPEC has signaled commitment to its deal to cut output, helping spur a rally of more than 30 percent for both benchmarks since late December. Plus, sanctions on Iran and Venezuela have helped to tighten global oil supply.

WTI ended the week more than 4 percent higher, at \$58.52 a barrel, just pennies below a four-month high. Brent had a weekly gain of 2 percent, to \$67.16.

Saudi Arabia is said to have pledged a bigger-than-required cut in crude shipments to its customers in April, and Russia has said it was speeding up its progressive reduction of production.

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

(Source: Bloomberg)

Oil refiners reveal hints about their boom expectations

Oil refiners are getting ready for a boom. The plants in Europe and the U.S. are scaling back planned maintenance later this year in anticipation of a surge in demand and fatter margins as the shipping industry gets ready for a historic fuel switch. Analysts say a similar picture is emerging in Asia, too.

Refiners in the Mediterranean and Northwest Europe so far arranged to take about 60 percent less capacity offline for routine work from September to November than they did a year earlier, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. There's been a similar plunge in planned U.S. work. Even though more maintenance will come to light, most industry observers are nonetheless expecting fewer shutdowns.

The rush to refine during what's normally a fallow period for the industry is a response to the introduction in January in 2020 of rules to cut sulfur emissions from the shipping industry. The switch is forecast to send prices soaring for fuels that allow owners to comply with the regulations, according to the International Energy Agency. The measures are widely expected to create a profit surge for some refiners.

Front loaded

"We are seeing, not just in Europe but also in other regions, that refinery maintenance is definitely being front-loaded towards

the spring rather than the autumn," said Jonathan Leitch, London-based research director for refining and oil product markets at Wood Mackenzie Ltd. "We think that refiners will be trying to maximize their production of middle distillates in the second half of the year."

Refineries typically plan maintenance in the spring and autumn in order to gear up for stronger fuel demand in the summer and winter months.

Europe's oil refiners are so far scheduled to halt an average of 520,000 barrels per day of crude-processing capacity from September to November, the data show. That's less than half the 1.3 million barrels per day they took offline in the same period last year -- including both planned and unplanned stoppages.

Second half

One such company is Saras SpA, which operates the 300,000-barrel-a-day Sarroch refinery in Sardinia, one of the biggest plants in the Mediterranean market. The Italian company is expecting higher average refining margins year-on-year, especially from the second half of 2019, when the new regulation "will start to have effect," it said in a March 4 earnings presentation.

The refiner concentrated its maintenance work in the first quarter of this year "in or-

der to be ready to capture better market opportunities arising from IMO," it said.

Widespread shift

Likewise, Spain's Repsol SA and Tupras Turkiye Petrol Rafinerileri AS are also conducting the bulk of their 2019 work in the first half of the year. Both are doing so with a view to capturing higher margins associated with IMO 2020, according to Bloomberg Intelligence analyst Salih Yilmaz.

While 2018's work was divided roughly equally between the 1.3 million barrels a day halted in Spring and 1.1 million barrels a day in Autumn, this year's schedule for Spring is currently double what's expected to take place in Autumn. It's important to note that refineries often try to keep plans about work private because the information can be commercially sensitive. Plants also stop unexpectedly. That means this Autumn's figure is sure to rise as the year progresses.

"This year's refinery work is particularly front-loaded, likely due to IMO 2020," researcher Energy Aspects Ltd. said in an emailed note on March 13.

The rule capping the amount of sulfur in fuel used to power the world's merchant ships is forecast to boost prices for distillate fuels like diesel and marine gasoil, which will be used to meet the regulations.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Optimizing the system for supplying and supporting Iranian-made goods

Hamid Nouri, the chairman of the board of directors of Oshanak Co. (Haft Chain Stores) has said that the current system for nationwide supply emerging from retail selling is not based on optimized use of the national resources. The retail selling structure in the country over the past 30 years has been affected by numerous factors so that the country is facing with the highest rate of growth in retailers so that there are more than two million retailers, meaning one retailer for every 40 persons in the country, he added.

Logistics costs, as one of the basic elements of consumer prices, are very high in this structure, Nouri said, adding that there are no exact figures about what percentage of the consumer prices go for logistics costs as Iran ranks third in the world in terms of the number of retailers. However, these costs are either hidden in the consumer prices somehow or resources in this field are being wasted, he explained.

He went on to say that providing the ground for standardizing the retailing system in the country is the way out of the existing situation in the field of consumer goods. Creating such standards and reducing the costs resulting from parallel working, focusing on logistics, and volume and amount of orders will not only lead to a more regulated and concentrated supply system, and distribution in particular, but will also reduce consumer prices to a great extent.

Basically, the reduction of consumer prices is in line with the goal of realizing social justice for families, while it will lead to creating capacities for increasing the volume of consumption through reducing consumer prices, boosting production, and finally job creation.



NEWS IN BRIEF

**'National award' for Pakistani victim of Christchurch**

INTERNATIONAL **TEHRAN** — Pakistani government has announced a national award for one of the victims of Christchurch mosque shootout last Friday, in which 49 people were killed, including nine Pakistani nationals.

Prime Minister Imran Khan announced that the award will be conferred posthumously on Naeem Rashid, a Pakistani man who lost his life while trying to prevent the attacker from shooting at other worshippers.

"Pakistan is proud of Mian Naeem Rashid who was martyred trying to tackle the white supremacist terrorist and his courage will be recognized with a national award," Khan tweeted.

Rashid, a resident of Abbottabad in Pakistan who was teaching at a college in New Zealand, has become a hero with his brave act. He also lost a 22-year old son in the attack.

Khan said his government was ready to extend all possible support to the families of Pakistani victims of the terrorist attack.

The attack was carried out by a white supremacist terrorist who claimed to be inspired by U.S. President Donald Trump and his far-right supporter Candance Owens.

A number of world leaders have condemned the terrorist attack and denounced far-right white supremacist terrorism and its supporters, including Trump.

**Dozens killed in clashes between Taliban and Afghan forces**

INTERNATIONAL **TEHRAN** — While the U.S. and Taliban called off their marathon talks in Doha, which lasted 16 days, the battle continued in different parts of the war-ravaged country, leading to dozens of casualties.

According to reports, heavy clashes are going on between Taliban fighters and Afghan security forces in different parts of Afghanistan, especially in southern and northern parts of the country.

The northwestern province of Bagdhis has witnessed pitched battles between the two sides over the past ten days after a group of Taliban fighters attacked government posts in Bala Murghab district, bordering Turkmenistan, according to reports.

Footage released by Afghanistan's ministry of defense shows Afghan Air Force targeting a Taliban hideout in Bala Murghab district on Friday night.

The Taliban launched the retaliation late on Saturday with attacks on checkpoints manned by police and pro-government forces, leading to fierce gun battle that continues till now.

While the violence continues across the country, U.S. officials have been engaged in 'negotiations' with the insurgents in Doha, raising questions about the motive of these meetings.

Many Afghan officials and experts have argued that the violence and talks should not go together as it allows the insurgent group to negotiate from the position of strength.

**Pentagon budget shows U.S. paranoia of China**

INTERNATIONAL **TEHRAN** — The U.S. paranoia about Chinese threat is evident in the defense budget released by Pentagon, which talks about Chinese bombers, Chinese hypersonic missiles. Chinese cyber-attacks, and Chinese anti-satellite weapons.

According to a report in Associated Press, the 2020 Pentagon budget proposal, to a large degree, is "shaped by national security threats that acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan has summarized in three words: China, China, China."

The report states that Shanahan seeks to shift the U.S. military's main focus to what he considers the "more pressing security problem of a rapidly growing Chinese military."

On Thursday Shanahan presented the Trump administration's proposed 2020 defense budget to the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Reacting to the report, a Chinese analyst said U.S. obsession with China has to do with its insecurity and paranoia as China is slowly replacing the U.S. as the global leader and superpower.

**Pakistan's bailout talks with IMF 'in final stages'**

INTERNATIONAL **TEHRAN** — Pakistan, which has been staring at an economic crisis, is likely to be bailed out by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), despite opposition from the U.S.

Pakistan's finance minister Asad Umar has hinted that talks regarding the bailout package with the IMF are in their final stages and the government will have further negotiations with the newly appointed IMF mission before reaching an agreement.

"Pakistan has come closer to reaching an agreement with the IMF as the differences between Pakistan and the IMF over a possible bailout package have decreased," Umar told media persons on Saturday.

He said the IMF had asked Pakistan to take strict measures but "we did not bow to their demands". He said the IMF understood Pakistan's position. And "now we are about to reach an agreement with the IMF," he added.

A day before the arrival of the IMF mission, a delegation of the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) Asia Pacific Group is likely to visit Islamabad.

Umar said the FATF delegation would be briefed about the steps the government has recently taken to tackle the issue of money laundering and terror financing.

India, Pakistan threatened to unleash missiles at each other

INTERNATIONAL **TEHRAN** — Tensions between India and Pakistan since India conducted a surgical strike inside the Pakistani territory followed by Pakistani air raids and capture of an Indian pilot.

The tensions were de-escalated after Pakistani premier Imran Khan announced the release of captured Indian pilot Abhinandan and extended an olive branch to New Delhi.

But, things are still not well between the two countries as skirmishes on the border continue in many regions, leading to civilian casualties.

According to a new revelation, the situation between the two warring neighbors had become very tense at one point with India threatening to fire at least six missiles at Pakistan.

A report in Reuters, quoting Pakistani and western officials, said after India threatened to fire missiles at Pakistan, Islamabad said it would respond with its own missile strikes "three times over".

The escalation between the two nuclear-armed countries, which began following a deadly terror attack in Indian-controlled Kashmir in February, almost brought them to the brink of war.

Kashmir, a disputed Himalayan region, remains the main bone of contention between the two countries with both sides holding



parts of it but claiming whole.

The report by Reuters said the exchanges between New Delhi and Islamabad did not go beyond threats, and there was no suggestion that the missiles involved were anything more than conventional weapons.

Following the surgical strikes, the report stated, Indian national security adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval had spoken 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".

"Doval told Munir that India's fight was with the militant groups that freely operated from Pakistani soil and it was prepared to escalate," a Pakistani government source is quoted as saying.

The report does not specify who delivered the threat or who received it, but it says 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 is quoted as saying 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 says.

Meanwhile, an Indian government official, a report in The Hindu said, said India was not aware of any missile threat issued to Pakistan.

This is not the first time the two estranged nuclear-armed neighbors and South Asian giants have had a military and diplomatic showdown. The two sides have fought three wars and engaged in intermittent clashes at the border.

Following the latest escalation, India threatened to isolate Pakistan diplomatically in the international community, and Pakistan vowed to counter any such moves.

Many world leaders have urged the leaders of the two countries to resolve the issues through dialogue, and some countries like Iran and Russia have even offered mediation.

India goes to polls next month and experts believe it is unlikely that New Delhi would like to explore the channel of talks until the election results are announced in New Delhi.

India to not cut any deal with China or others to blacklist JeM chief at UNSC

TEHRAN — India and China, the two regional economic and political heavyweights, have been locked in a wrangle over blacklisting the chief of Pakistan-based militant outfit Jaish e Mohammad (JeM).

While China has opposed the move to blacklist JeM chief Masood Azhar at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), India has been mulling at other options to build its case against Azhar.

JeM, which is allegedly based in Pakistan, has been responsible for many attacks in Indian-controlled Kashmir, including the one in February, which led to tensions between India and Pakistan.

Earlier this week, China again vetoed the move at United Nations to blacklist the JeM chief, urging India to have 'more' discussions on the issue.

The move evoked widespread anger and outrage in India, with people calling for boycott of Chinese goods and products on social media.

There has been speculation that India might announce strong measures as retaliation against China, the new all-weather ally of Pakistan and India's traditional rival.

However, according to reports, Indian government has chosen to act patiently and not cut any deal with China or any other country to list Azhar as a global terrorist by the UN Security Council.

New Delhi has instead decided to work on further strengthening its case against Azhar and his sponsors, according to reports in sections of Indian media.

A report in Economic Times, quoting a source, said "enough evidence" was available on Azhar and his terror



outfit in Pakistan which can be "independently verifiable".

"The government is ready for a long haul and will continue with its endeavours through UN and other international bodies to act against the Pakistan based terrorist," the report said, quoting sources.

The government, as part of this process, will step up engagement with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) ahead of its next meeting in mid-2019 to put Pakistan to task for failing to control terror funding, it added.

FATF, which has put Pakistan on its grey list, has accused Islamabad of not doing enough to curb the finances of terror groups like the JeM and Lashkar-e-Taiba.

The grey list makes it hard for the country to get international loans. The country has been given time until May 2019 to complete its action plan to control terror finances,

or face black listing.

India has also decided to step up pressure on Pakistan through the BRICS bloc where China is a member, according to reports. BRICS has included counter-terrorism a part of its broad agenda.

Another report in Live Mint newspaper said New Delhi was optimistic that it could work with Beijing on the matter, despite many roadblocks.

The report, quoting sources, said there are issues China has to resolve with Pakistan on this matter and India is cautiously confident that eventually Masood Azhar will get listed.

The proposal at the UN against Azhar was brought in the wake of 14 February terror attack in south Kashmir's Pulwama, which killed at least 44 members of India's paramilitary forces.

It was the deadliest attack on Indian forces stationed in Kashmir in three decades of insurgency, and briefly brought the two nuclear powers to the brink of full-fledged war.

While 14 members of the UN Security Council expressed support for the proposal banning Azhar, China vetoed it, making headway difficult. China is one of the permanent members of the UNSC.

This is not the first instance of China blocking the move to designate Azhar a terrorist at the UN, a move that will curtail his travel, freeze his assets and choke his finances.

A statement issued by the Indian government expressed "disappointment" over China's veto. When China had blocked a similar proposal brought by India in 2016, an Indian statement had then said that India had raised the matter with the Chinese at the "highest levels."

Kashmir matters, and Kashmiris too

I → Petitions are pending in the Indian supreme court to nullify Articles 370 and 35-A and thus bring Kashmir on a par with states by stripping it of its "special status".

On Feb 25, PDP leader and former chief minister Mehbooba Mufti said: "If anything like [tinkering with Article 35-A] happens, its consequences would be - I have said it earlier and my words were not taken well - that it would be difficult for those who raise the flag of [India] to even shoulder it. If [Article 35-A] is attacked, I don't know that which flag the people of Jammu and Kashmir would raise...." A joint strategy, across the political divide, to safeguard the special position of Jammu and Kashmir is necessary. Will the leaders rise to the occasion?

The National Investigation Agency has been targeting Kashmir's leaders on charges inter alia of money laundering and 'terror funding'. On Feb 26, it raided the homes of the Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, Mohammad Yasin Malik, Shabbir Ahmed Shah and a son of Syed Ali Shah Geelani who has been under house arrest for years. Geelani Shah has been in precariously poor health. With the decline of the Hurriyat, these three formed the Joint Resistance Leadership, which soon acquired a standing in popular esteem. On Feb 23, 150 separatists were detained by police in a midnight swoop.

Prime Minister Modi faced the same spectacle as his predecessors did whenever they went to Kashmir - a total boycott. That did not deter him from declaring in Srinagar, on Feb 3, that his government would "break the back" of militancy in Kashmir. History demonstrates that no fighting that has roots in the people's sentiments can be extinguished by brute force. That is what Modi seeks to do. He is certain to fail.



Harinder Baweja, who followed developments in Kashmir since the outbreak of militancy wrote on Feb 21, "If the number of locals joining militancy began to steeply rise, it was because they appeared fed up with Delhi's unwillingness to accept the very political nature of the Kashmir problem."

On Feb 3, a senior army official said that as many as 191 local youth joined various outfits in Jammu and Kashmir last year, 65 more than 2017 when 126 locals had joined these ranks. He said of the 191 recruits in 2018,

139 hailed from southern Kashmir areas - the highest, 59, were from Pulwama. In 2016, 88 Kashmiri youth had joined the fighters. Since 2016, there has been a constant rise in the number of youths becoming part of

the insurgency. The year 2013 marked the lowest point in recruitment. Significantly, it rose since 2014 when Modi became prime minister.

A former union home minister who dealt with Kashmir, P. Chidambaram, has a similar story to tell, "The number of infiltrators and number of local recruits have been on the rise since 2015. I am implacably opposed to the muscular, militaristic and maximalist position of the BJP-led central government that has also victimised the people." Recruits rose from 16 in 2013 to 164 in 2018, he said. Why? Few care to answer.

Violence and terror are condemnable. But repression is not the answer. The solution lies in addressing the roots of the problem. That was done by Harinder Baweja, who followed developments in Kashmir since the outbreak of militancy. She wrote on Feb 21, "If the number of locals joining militancy began to steeply rise, it was because they appeared fed up with Delhi's unwillingness to accept the very political nature of the Kashmir problem."

It is a measure of the BJP's abject defeat that the men who were driven to join the BJP hid their faces from the cameras. They know what the people think of such acts and decided to hide their faces. A photograph published on the front page of a leading daily revealed nearly 100 of them leaning on one another's back to avoid exposure. In Kashmir, more than the reportage in words, it is a reportage in photographs that reveals the whole truth - as well as the women who crowd at windows mourning at the funerals of those killed pass by.

Writer is a veteran Indian lawyer, author and commentator. This column was first published in Dawn.

Imam Ali (A.S): The great and most oppressed companion

➡ Ahmad bin Hanbal has said: “no one among the companions of the messenger of Allah had more virtues than Ali Ibn Abi Talib. When Imam al-Nisa’i wrote his prominent book -Khasa’isu Ameerul mu’mineen – the virtues of Imam Ali, on a visit to Damascus, he was asked to produce any such merits in respect of Mu’awiya out of envy. As he insisted on none, they killed him at the spot! The Sunnis chant – Karramallahu wajhahu – May Allah honour his face when referring to him, in contrast to other companions because he was the only one that never prostrated for any being beside Allah the Most High. On the 18th day of Zilhajj, 10 years after hijra, at the pool of Ghadeer, as pilgrims returned to their respective destinations, holding his hand, the prophet said; “Do you witness that I have a prior right to and superior authority over all the faithful?”

They replied yes o messenger of Allah. There upon he said, “Ali is the master of all those of whom I am master. O Allah! Love him who loves him and hate him who hates him, help him who helps him, forsake him who forsakes him, and turn justice with him wherever he turns.” To cut it short, Imam al-Shafi’i said, “I am surprised about a man whose virtues were kept secret by his enemies out of envy, and by his followers out of fear, but nevertheless, an enormous amount of them spread.”

For this unequalled position, he was envied and suffered lots of persecution along with his blessed family. Apparently, he was the greatest companion of the noble messenger (S). And no doubt, he could never be compared with any other in terms of leadership qualities at all. In the story of the children of Israel, they asked their prophet to appoint for them a king with whom to fight in the cause of Allah.

“Their prophet said to them; Allah hath appointed Talut as king over you. They said; how can he exercise authority over us when we are better fitted than he to exercise authority, and he is not even gifted, with wealth in abundance?”

He said Allah has chosen him above you, and has gifted him abundantly with knowledge and bodily prowess; Allah granteth His authority to whom He pleaseth; Allah is all-embracing, and He knoweth all things” Q2:247 Looking at the two criteria we may ask; did any of the prophet’s companions



compare with Imam Ali (AS) with regards to knowledge and bravery? Allah states “Say; are those who know and those who do not know alike? Q39:9.

In a well-known tradition, the prophet said “I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate”. Abu Bakr, the prominent companion has said, may Allah never put me in a predicament that Abul Hasan cannot solve” just as Umar repeatedly said’ if it was not for Ali, Umar would have perished. Ibn Abbas, on the other hand, has said “my knowledge and the knowledge of the companions of Muhammad (S) is but a drop in seven seas if compared with Ali’s knowledge”.

Thus, Imam Ali has said about himself “ask me before you lose me. By Allah, if you could ask me about anything that could happen up to the Day of Judgment, I will tell you about it. Ask me about the book of Allah, because by Allah there is no Qur’anic verse that I did not know whether it was revealed during the night or the day, or whether it was revealed on a plain or a mountain” Al-Isti’ab, volume, 3 page, 39.

“Is he then who guides to the truth more worthy to be followed or he who himself does not go aright unless he is guided? What then is the matter with you, how do you judge? Q10:35 looking at his bravery on the other side, the Imam’s role in defense of Islam and Muslims was generally acknowledged.

Statistically, he was believed to have killed more number of enemies than those killed by other companions put together.

Did any of the companions compare to him in Badr, Uhud, Hunain and Khandaq among others? After the non-tactical retreats of famous companions in Khaibar, the prophet said, “Tomorrow I will give my flag to a man who loves Allah and His messenger, ever going forward and never retreating. Allah had tested his heart with the faith”. On that very day, he handed over the flag to Imam in whose hands Allah gave the victory.

Virtually, the Imam categorically compared to none in knowledge, bravery, brevity, piety and other sterling qualities. But out of envy some fabricated a number of sayings linking same to the noble messenger and his purified progeny for promotions and demotions on selfish grounds. For example, why could not Imam Ali narrate more with his young age, exceptionally gifted talent and retentive memory?

Above all, he was the gate of the city of knowledge and wisdom as repeatedly pronounced by the noble messenger. This is the case with his wife, Fatima (AS), the great daughter of the prophet, who could not narrate but few of her father’s sayings? So also, her children described as leaders of youths in paradise by the messenger.

However, others transmitted thousands of the prophetic sayings including late con-

verts that accepted Islam few years to the demise of the messenger! It was from such fabrication that his parents were thrown to hell. Although they loved the prophet and gave him utmost protection for which the messenger described the year of Abu Talib’s death, which coincided with that of his wife Sayyida Khadija, as the year of sorrow!

His wife Fatima was martyred before his eyes at the age of 18 in Medina. After a very long persecution, the Imam was finally assassinated in Ramadan, 40years after hijra while leading the Morning Prayer. And his children were mercilessly martyred one after the other by the Umayyad! The Imam was greatly hated by many including companions for one reason or the other.

It was on the basis of that enmity some disallowed the prophetic will to reach his umma! In Bukhari, Ibn Abbas narrated that the prophet was in his last moment and many people had gathered in his house at that time when he said “I want write a will for you so that you will never go astray after me” Some people said “the prophet was affected by pain.

We have the Qur’an with us; the book of Allah is sufficient for us” people gathered in the house started opposing one another on this point. When the noise increased, the prophet ordered them to leave him alone. The questions we may ask include; why was the prophet not allowed to write his will?

And what would the prophet write if he were allowed? Could we relate the oft-related sayings of the prophet on his pure progeny as would be the will? In relation to this, Abdullahi Ibn Abbas described deterring the messenger of Allah from writing his will as the greatest calamity that has befallen the ummah.

And no doubt, the perpetrators must pay heavily being the cause for all that went astray and confusion witnessed today. While urging all to strive more to acquire the pleasure of Allah in this sacred month, I wish to redraw the attention of all justice seeking people regardless of all borders to play their role to secure freedom for Sheikh el-Zakzaky, his wife and other disciples. No doubt justice delayed is an obnoxious oppression, and injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. I pray to Allah to protect him, bring an end to the oppression and avenge all the innocent victims.

Washington making war against Venezuela unlikely: U.S. analyst



➡ We had the little Grenada invasion and some things that were intended to try to change the public’s mind or bring closure to the Vietnam Syndrome, etc.

And we were told that Iraq would be a very quick and easy victory that the reason Vietnam, you know, was so difficult was because it was a jungle and because Iraq was desert, we can see all the bad guys and pick them off right away and so it would be over very quickly.

Well, in fact, here we are 28 years, 29 years later, still involved in Iraq and now they are talking about going into Venezuela, which of course has what jungle all over the place. That’s the first part. The second part is the U.S. clearly has been trying to decapitate the regime by pulling the military.

They want a military coup in essence to ratify this you know the guy, everyone calls random dude, that’s the one who wants to be president. And they’ve had no success whatsoever. But you might want to go back to 2002 in April of 2002 when in fact there was a military coup. And what happened was that the people of Venezuela themselves undid it and the military swung around seeing that many of them were going to end up on the wrong end of a rope, you know, Nuremberg style. So I don’t think there’s going to be any success along those lines.

But again, the polling data from Venezuela right now is something like 85% of the people. In other words, even half of the opposition is strongly opposed to U.S. military intervention or direct intervention by any other party from outside the country. So the actual probability of someone making war against Venezuela flies in the face of logic, you know, and in fact, I would say the probability is very low because of that. But the probability of success I would say is close to zero because this would be the one thing that could unify the Venezuelan people. That would be repelling an outsider.

■ Russia has warned that the United States is using humanitarian aid to instigate a dangerous provocation in Venezuela by arming the country’s opposition. Now, another Russian official recently said that Moscow will do all it can to prevent any potential intervention in Venezuela by the US. What do you think about this? Do you believe that an all-out war would take place between these two superpowers?

A: Well, first of all, it’s important to note that this Venezuela policy from the US is being driven right now by Elliott Abrams and John Bolton, who were both around for the contra war that was started against Nicaragua. And in fact, they’ve already started threatening Nicaragua.

They tried something last year there. And one of the criminal convictions that Abrams had to be pardoned from, had to do with smuggling military weaponry under the guise of humanitarian aid and the crime was that he lied about it to Congress. But, in other words, these two both have a record of doing exactly what the Russians have said, you know, these guys might be trying to do with this humanitarian aid.

There is another dimension to that of course; they know if I starve your house for five months, your family and everyone, and then I send someone down there with steak for lunch today.

Well, you know, whoever that person is that shows up there is going to be the new hero of the household regardless of anything else because they’re solving this major crisis that the family faces and very few people will go to the trouble of analyzing how they got where they are and just try to solve their critical problem.

So there is the political aspect to US embargo that trashes the economy and then trying to appoint this guy, random dude as we call them, Guaido, as an agent of humanitarian relief.

But when Russia talks about doing everything that they can to protect from a U.S. military intervention, it’s worth noting that President Putin mentioned specifically the October 1962 crisis, that’s known here as the Cuban missile crisis, not that is a specific threat but he did point out that, that behavior leads to that kind of crisis and he also has made a couple of material demonstrations they sent, you know, very small, low key visit, but a specific visit from two Russian bombers a few weeks back. And there have been Russian humanitarian aid delivered at the very time that this big incident about the delivery of American aid was all over the media.

So I don’t think any sane world leader, and I don’t necessarily include anyone in the U.S. in that category, but you know, Xi, Putin, others will risk nuclear war. However, there were some things that are very important interests that have to be protected or you end up risking nuclear war down the road. And one of those is Russia’s right to be able to trade with and make alliances with anyone anywhere in the world. And the people of Venezuela and the government of Venezuela want to make an alliance with the Russian Federation.

You know, the Russian Federation has got to be able to stand up to what the United States says “get out of the way or we’re going to blow you up” and it seems that the Russian leadership has learned that lesson. This led to the announcement a couple of years back between China and Russia of a strategic partnership. They meant it for exactly these kinds of cases.

So, you know, I think there are no wild and crazy threats coming from Russia, but a clear statement of their interest in the outcome of this and also their more general interest in the rule of law among international relations. And so, you know, they have a military and they can project power when they need to.

ICC should investigate U.S. war crimes - everywhere

TEHRAN (FNA) — US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo might be doing a rational thing to impose visa restrictions on a number of officials of the International Criminal Court (ICC) or many state and military officials will end up in jail.

He knows full well that the US is still committing war crimes and crimes against humanity in Afghanistan and the ongoing inquiries by the ICC would once again put the the Land of the Free in negative light.

He also knows full well that the ICC has not formally launched an investigation, but has been soliciting information of possible crimes against humanity committed in Afghanistan. They have reported getting about 700 submissions from victims so far.

So it makes perfect sense for those who are making “America”’s war crimes “great again” in Afghanistan to stay away from the nosy ICC officials. Who wants to get into trouble anyway, especially when the hated war criminals have so few friends among the international civil society, even among the European Union member states - their hard-core allies in the fake war on terror.

The US government doesn’t favor the ICC in the best of times, anyhow, and Pompeo says the effort to look into US war crimes amounts to a threat to “national sovereignty.” He has further threatened economic sanctions if an investigation grows!

This is rubbish. This silly and familiar rhetoric of “threat to national sovereignty” or “threat to national security” we have all heard it before. It has even “frightened” German Chancellor Angela Merkel!

President Trump, who has made Eurozone economies a captive of his tariff war, can’t wait to sign “Section 232” report from the US Commerce Department. The report alleges that European exports of cars to the US are a national security threat.

This has already frightened European powers. Chancellor Merkel, in particular, has voiced dismay and described US moves to declare European car imports “a threat to national security” as “frightening”.

There is no mystery here, and this is not just about German cars. The ICC already has the damning evidence and

material witnesses to investigate crimes against humanity even if the US government is unwilling to do so. The US government would clearly be able to investigate such violations in Afghanistan, but whether or not they’ve proven willing to do so is hotly debated, based on how often such reports and allegations are just quietly dismissed in internal investigations - and swept under the rug.

Here, then, is the true thrill of it all: imagining what could possibly come next.

March 20 marks the anniversary of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Since then, the United States has been committing the greatest war crime of the twenty-first century: not just in Iraq, but in Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen as well.

There should be a significant consensus at the ICC, as well, that the Iraq invasion was the “worst foreign policy decision in American history”. Simply put: a war crime.

In fact, the Afghanistan invasion fell into the very category that led the list of crimes at the Nuremberg tribunal, where Nazi high officials were tried for their actions during World War II. During the negotiations establishing that tribunal and its rules, it was ironically the United States that insisted on including the crime of “waging a war of aggression” and on placing it at the head of the list.

Similarly, the ICC’s position should be that all the rest of America’s war crimes sprang from its first aggression against Afghanistan.

This should include the extraordinary renditions; the acts of torture at Guantánamo, Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan, and CIA black sites all over the world; the nightmare of abuse at Abu Ghraib, a US military prison in Iraq; the siege and firebombing (with white phosphorus) of the Iraqi city of Fallujah; the massacre of civilians in Haditha, another Iraqi city, plus the US-backed, Saudi-Israeli atrocities in Yemen and Syria and Gaza and Lebanon.

All of these war crimes and crimes committed against humanity arose from the Bush administration’s determination to unlawfully invade and occupy Afghanistan and then Iraq and then the rest of the sovereign nations of the Middle East - except Iran.

Obviously, by refusing to allow the ICC investigators to



enter the US, the Trump administration sees no reason to do anything to limit the impunity of US military war criminals, whoever they might be.

It just makes official what has been US policy since the illegal invasion of Afghanistan, which is that there will be no notice taken of war crimes because so many of them have been and are still being committed by allies and American forces, generals, commanders, military and intelligence officers, and elected officials at the White House, including Trump, and Pompeo and their hard-core generals at the Pentagon.

The war crimes of conspiring and waging aggressive war still exist, as torture, denial of fair trial rights, and indefinite detention are war crimes. It is so embarrassing, so ridiculous and so hypocritical for Trump and his neocon faction, mainly Pompeo, to issue report after report to voice their bogus “concerns” about alleged human rights violations in places like Iran, China, Russia, Syria and Venezuela. What a disgrace.

Horn of Africa: Millions suffering due to prolonged drought

Millions of people in the Horn of Africa are suffering from a prolonged drought that is coinciding with the United States’s proposal to slash funding for lifesaving food aid.

Earlier this month, the White House, in the 2020 fiscal year budget submitted to Congress, called for a 24-percent cut in US foreign assistance.

Recently released data from the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSN) predicts worsening drought, severe hunger and crop failures of up to 30 percent in parts of the region in the coming months.

“We’re very concerned by the deteriorating conditions in the region where we are

seeing families - whose lives rely on the land - unable to cope,” said Matt Davis, the East Africa regional director for Catholic Relief Services, which oversees a major US government-funded food assistance programme in the region.

“We are concerned the administration’s budget could abandon millions of families around the world just when they need help the most.”

Climate change is also dramatically impacting crop yields in some of the poorest areas of the world.

The number of extreme climate-related disasters including severe heat, droughts,

floods and storms has doubled since 1990, according to The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report released by the United Nations last year.

These disasters destroy crops, resulting in tragic consequences for people who live off the land. In the Horn of Africa, up to 80 percent of the population is subsistence farmers.

“We have not seen an improvement in the climate situation,” said Birhan, a mother of four from rural Hawzen district in Ethiopia’s Tigray region.

“The drought is becoming recurrent. But if there is rain, it is excessive and destroys

the crops.”

Birhan is one of around 1.5 million people who receive food through a USAID-funded programme that provides emergency assistance to people affected by the drought.

“Without this assistance, our only chance would be to migrate. I don’t even know where I would go,” she said.

To make matters worse, rainfall from October to December of last year was 55 percent less than normal in some parts of the Horn. As a result, widespread hunger is expected to increase in the coming months.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

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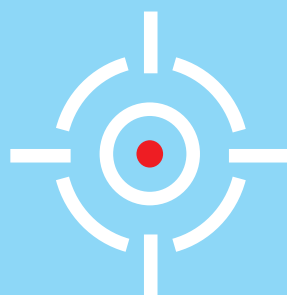
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Iranian researchers succeed in building thermal cyclers

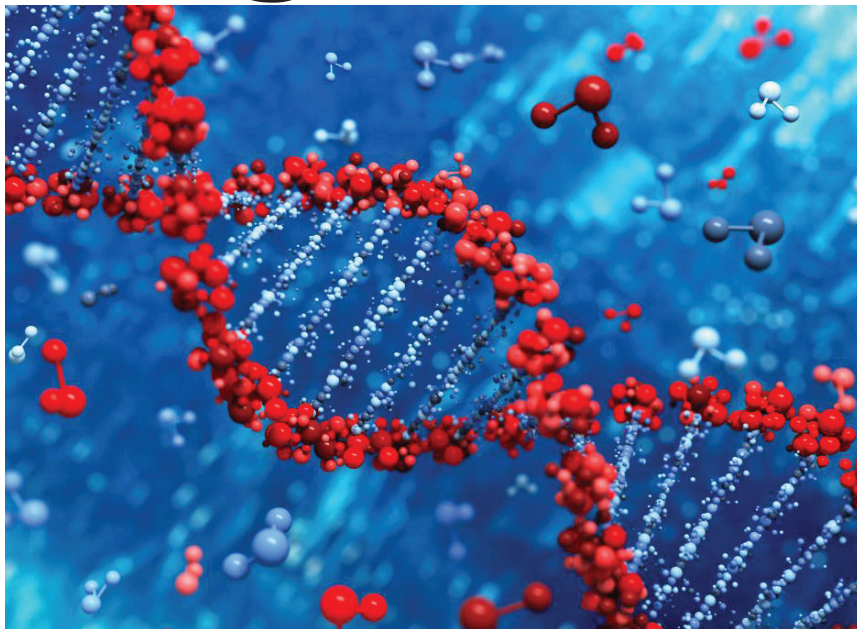
HEALTH **TEHRAN** — A group of Iranian researchers at Sharif University of Technology have successfully made a thermal cycler after three years of incessant efforts, IRNA news agency reported on Saturday.

The thermal cycler (also known as a thermocycler, PCR machine or DNA amplifier) is a laboratory apparatus most commonly used to amplify segments of DNA via the polymerase chain reaction (PCR). It is an important instrument which is needed in all the labs working in the field of gene cloning.

Amir Shamlou, (PhD) associate professor at Sharif University of Technology's school of mechanical engineering, explained that the thermal cycler is currently being used on a daily basis in laboratories, hospitals and clinics, however, so far the machine was manufactured in other countries.

The home-grown PCR machine is now available at one-tenth of its original price in the country, Shamlou highlighted.

PCR is a method widely used in molecular biology to make many copies of



a specific DNA segment. Using PCR, a single copy (or more) of a DNA sequence is exponentially amplified to generate thousands to millions of more copies of that particular DNA segment. PCR is now a common and often indispensable technique used in medical laboratory and clinical laboratory research for a broad variety of applications including biomedical research and criminal forensics.

PCR was developed in 1983 by Kary Mullis, who received a Nobel Prize in chemistry in 1993 for his invention. The polymerase chain reaction has been elaborated in many ways since its introduction and is now commonly used for a wide variety of applications including genotyping, cloning, mutation detection, sequencing, microarrays, forensics, and paternity testing.

PCR has a number of advantages. It is fairly simple to understand and to use, and produces results rapidly. The technique is highly sensitive with the potential to produce millions to billions of copies of a specific product for sequencing, cloning, and analysis.

Drug which makes human blood 'lethal' to mosquitoes can reduce malaria spread, study shows

A drug which poisons mosquitoes when they feed on it could provide a powerful new avenue for tackling malaria.

Trials showed it reduced cases among children in rural Burkina Faso by 20 per cent.

Treating adults and children with the drug ivermectin helped to control the spread of malaria without causing harmful side-effects, the research led by a team at the Colorado State University found.

They concluded that the new approach in combination with drugs to tackle the infections could slow down the creature's ability to resist the disease.

Currently, conventional insecticides and anti-malarials and hampering the eradication effort.

"Ivermectin reduces new cases of malaria by making a person's blood lethal to the mosquitoes who bite them, killing mosquitoes and therefore reducing the likelihood of infection of others," said Dr Brian Foy, author of the study published in *The Lancet*.

Malaria's life cycle is split between humans and its host mosquitos, the parasite is passed into the blood with a bite where it matures and multiplies and then waits to be transmitted on to the next mosquito to reproduce.



Ivermectin is already used to treat other parasites causing river blindness and scabies, but its effects on malaria transmission haven't been studied in a large trial.

For the 18-week study researchers recruited 2,700 people, including 590 children, across eight villages with half in the treatment group receiving a dose of ivermectin

every three weeks.

Regular visits from nurses were used to assess children for malaria symptoms and confirmed with a blood test and it found twice as many children in the treatment group had no malaria attacks.

In all there were an average of 2 malaria attacks per child in the treatment group compared to 2.49 in the control villages, without any additional harmful side effects.

If the findings are replicated in larger studies ivermectin's unique way of working could help reduce the burden of malaria and control mosquito populations.

Professor Chris Drakeley from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, who was not involved in the research, said that the looming resistance crisis means new approaches are "desperately needed".

He said the current study is "proof of principle" that ivermectin can reduce episodes of malaria and showed a significant reduction in episodes with no safety issues.

"This study is the first of its kind to demonstrate effect at community level, highlighting a potential new avenue for malaria control," he added.

(Source: *The Independent*)

WHO recommends best approaches on speed management to improve road safety in Iran

World Health Organization (WHO) with support of its national counterparts conducted a mission to Iran for providing a technical support that would untimely enhance speed management strategy for road traffic injury prevention in the country.

This mission was organized through collaboration between National Road Safety Commission, Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization, Ministry of Health and Medical Education and WHO on March 9-15, 2019.

Throughout the mission a team of international consultants from Australia worked closely with their national counterparts on recommending solutions to enhance speed management as well as best approaches in defining speed limits and traffic calming mechanisms for different road types, and also running different technical workshop with participation of the key stakeholders in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

"Every year almost sixteen thousand people in the country are losing their lives in traffic accidents, which was higher than a few years ago. Iranian authorities have done very well to get that level down but if good practices are implemented, that figure would fall to about two or three thousand, and then ultimately, hopefully, to zero deaths", Said Dr Eric Howard the international consultant working with WHO.

Road traffic injuries are a major public health problem and a leading cause of death and injury around the world. More than 1.25 million people lost their lives on the world's roads in 2018, along with tens of millions who were severely injured and left their families and loved ones shocked and stressed.

Dr Mansour Ranjbar, National Professional Officer at WHO Country Office in Iran on the objectives of the mission underscored that the project aims to propose tailor-made solutions for enhancing speed management strategy in the country by using global experience and considering local situation and context.

To reduce road traffic fatalities and injuries, the United Nations member states endorsed resolutions and their defined targets for improving global road safety.

The target 3.6 of the Sustainable Development Goal 3 (ensure health for all) calls for reducing the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic by 50% until 2020. In Iran statistic shows an increasing trend of 1.7% since 2017.

Iran has developed its national Road Safety Strategic Plan (2011-2020) in line with the five pillars including building road safety management capacity; improving the safety of road infrastructure; further developing the safety of vehicles; enhancing the behavior of road users; and improving post-crash response.

The plan has 14 strategic objectives mainly on speed management, motorists' and pedestrians' safety, development of a comprehensive crash data bank, road infrastructure safety, vehicle safety, and post-crash management.

(Source: WHO)

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Ancient migration transformed Spain’s DNA

A migration from Central Europe transformed the genetic make-up of people in Spain during the Bronze Age, a study reveals. DNA evidence shows the migrants streamed over the Pyrenees, replacing existing male lineages across the region within a space of 400 years. It remains unclear whether violence played a role or whether a male-centric social structure was more important.



Bronze Age Bell Beaker pottery from Camino de las Yeseras near Madrid

The result comes from the most extensive study of its kind. Researchers reconstructed the population history of Iberia (modern Spain, Portugal, Gibraltar and Andorra) over 8,000 years - the biggest slice of time tackled by a single ancient DNA study. The region has been a crossroads for different cultures over time. They extracted and analyzed DNA from 403 Iberians who lived between 6,000 BC and AD 1,600. The Bronze Age migrants traced some of their ancestry to Neolithic (Stone Age) farmers found throughout Europe - including Spain - while the rest of their genetic make-up was like that of people living at the time on the Russian steppe. This steppe ancestry was introduced to Europe by nomadic herders who migrated west from Asia and the eastern fringes of Europe. One of the triggers may have been a crisis that caused population numbers to plunge in Europe towards the end of the Neolithic period (which preceded the Bronze Age). Recent studies suggest plague might have played a role.

As the steppe people moved west, they picked up elements of culture from people they mixed with along the way. In Central Europe, one such mixed culture known as the Bell Beaker tradition formed. The Beakers and their descendants may have established highly stratified (unequal) societies in Europe, including Iberia - where they start turning up from 2,500BC. The researchers looked at the Y chromosome - a package of DNA passed down more or less unchanged from father to son. It can be used to track male-line inheritance. By about 2,000 BC, local Y chromosome lineages had been eliminated from the Iberian gene pool, in favor of those carried by the newcomers. When the team analyzed DNA from across the genome - the full complement of genetic material found in the nuclei of cells - they found that later Iberians traced 40% of their ancestry to the new population. The newcomers - of Bell Beaker origin - brought innovations such as bronze-working (including the manufacture of bronze weapons) and were probably riding horses. These may have given them a military advantage over Stone Age farming societies, but also probably conferred higher social status on males carrying these traditions. Co-author Inigo Olalde, from Harvard Medical School, U.S., said: “It would be a mistake to jump to the conclusion that Iberian men were killed or forcibly displaced.” He added: “The archaeological record gives no clear evidence of a burst of violence in this period.”

(Source: BBC)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Poblet Monastery

Poblet Monastery is located in the south of Catalonia, in the northeast of the Iberian Peninsula, Spain, in the municipality of Vimbodi. It is one of the largest and most complete Cistercian abbeys in the world. It was built in the 12th to 15th centuries around a church that dates to the 13th century. It is impressive for the majesty of its architecture and includes a fortified royal residence as well as the pantheon of the kings and queens of Catalonia and Aragon.



The Monastery is structured as three enclosures, surrounded by a defensive wall. The first outer enclosure contains buildings from the 16th century, such as storehouses, workshops, housing for lay workers and other premises connected with the financial life of the community. This enclosure also contains the Gothic chapel of Sant Jordi, built in 1452. The fortified Golden Door gives access to the second enclosure, made up of the Placa Major, or Main Square, around which stand the remains of the hospital for the poor, the Romanesque chapel of Santa Caterina and the treasury. Poblet Monastery is extraordinarily important in terms of art, culture, history and spirituality and for its key role in the repopulation and agricultural exploitation of New Catalonia under the Crown of Aragon. Its library and scriptorium were well known from the 13th century onwards for their works on law and history, and the monastery served as a custodian of the history of the dynasty as well as the Royal remains.

(Source: UNESCO)

Solid growth: A review of Iran’s tourism in 1397

By Afshin Majlesi

TEHRAN — How Iran’s tourism industry has performed over the current Iranian calendar year 1397 (ending on March 20)? Well, according to data compiled by the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization, it has experienced a solid growth. Based on CHHTO statistics, the Islamic Republic hosted over five million foreign nationals during the first eight months of the year, up 57 percent year on year. Latest data shows more than seven million holidaymakers toured Iran during the first eleven months of the year, which is seen as a remarkable rise from the same period last year. The country is also a growing destination for health and medical tourists from Iraq, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, the U.S., European countries and the Persian Gulf littoral states. According to official statistics, the country hosted some 400,000 medical tourists during the past Iranian year 1396 (ended March 20). Official data shows medical tourist arrivals nearly doubled in the first three months of the year, corresponding to spring 2018, from a year earlier. Experts say that U.S.-led sanctions together with its anti-Iran propaganda campaign has lessened Western travelers to the Islamic Republic but the country is doing its best to attract more visitors from neighbors. For instance, more than 2.2 million Iraqis visited Iran during the first nine months

of the current Iranian year, which shows 113 percent year-on-year increase, turning the neighboring country into Iran’s largest source of tourists. Contrary to Americans, European arrivals in Iran has decreased. Some 1,980 U.S. citizens visited Iran during the nine-month period, which demonstrates 82 percent year-on-year growth, based on data compiled by the CHHTO. However, the situation is totally different when it comes to outbound travels. Iran’s outbound tourism fell by 30 percent in the current Iranian year as, according to official data, it fell by 30 percent during the nine-month period (started March 21, 2018) from a year earlier. A total of 5,900,381 Iranians traveled overseas during the aforementioned period, as the figure stood at 8,483,317 a year earlier. The main reason behind the decline is deemed to be the sharp rise in the value of foreign currencies against rial that has pushed up the costs of traveling abroad. The 2019 Travel Risk Map, which shows the risk level around the world, puts Iran among countries with “insignificant risk”, a category where the UK, Denmark, Switzerland, Norway, and Finland are placed in. Iran embraces hundreds of historical sites such as bazaars, museums, mosques, bridges, bathhouses, madrasas, mausoleums, churches, towers, and mansions, of which 22 being inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list.



People visit Jameh Mosque of Isfahan in central Iran

Thrilled to see National Museum of Iran, director of Drents Museum says

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — Director of the Drents Museum on Sunday said that he was thrilled to visit the National Museum of Iran. Harry Tupan also called for strengthening cultural cooperation between Iran and the Netherlands. “I am very happy that I was able to visit this museum today and am excited to see these amazing historic works,” CHTN quoted Tupan as saying. Fortunately, Iran and the Netherlands have commenced a new chapter of collaboration in cultural arenas, including museum cooperation, and Tehran-Assen cultural relations are being fostered by the “Dutch Archaeology and Art Highlights from the Drents Museum”, he explained. Loaned by Drents Museum, the event, which will be



running through April 6, showcases 331 objects including stone tools, jewelry, and natural human mummies in three sections of archeology, pottery, and paintings, the latter is dedicated to artworks of the 18th to the 20th centuries. Last week, the Dutch museum won an audience prize in New York at the prestigious Global Fine Art Awards. The prize was granted on March 12 for its contribution to hosting “Iran – Cradle of Civilization”, an enormous loan exhibit on the history of Persia. Loaned by the National Museum of Iran, the exhibit featured earliest developments of agriculture and livestock farming from the very beginning to cuneiform clay tablets, gold beakers and ornaments, bronze weapons and beautifully painted ceramics associated with successive Iranian kingdoms.

Chaharshanbeh-Suri: A reddish salute to new Iranian year



HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — As every last Tuesday of the Iranian calendar year comes, millions of Iranians make bonfires at sunset to jump over the fire till midnight to observe Chaharshanbe-Suri, just days before Noruz, the New Year holidays. The festival is held on the night before the last Wednesday of the year when families and friends gather by bunches of open fires and keep them lit till dawn. Narratives say that ancient Iranians originally observed such time-honored fire festivity in a bid to ward off all the misfortunes and bad omens with hopes that their wishes would come true. Attendees chant “Give me your fiery red color and take back my wintry sallowness,” while they are jumping over open fires. In short, the festivity may symbolize a euphoria of nature on the eve of spring. In ancient Persia, the fire was considered as a sacred element, a belief that modern Zoroastrians still adhere to.

The fire has been supposed to give people its warmth and energy and take away their paleness, sickness, and problems in return. However, the ancient tradition has changed over the course of time. Many people say that it is turned into a nightmare! Earsplitting bangs dominate everywhere, caused by the loud explosion of fireworks from locally-made firecrackers to imported ones. The city feels like being under siege; fireworks go off every second, shaking windows. Each year, hundreds of people, particularly the youth, are burned or injured so that to be on the safe side many prefer to stay at home before nightfall. The Iranian New Year holidays, or Noruz, is the longest, oldest and most cherished festival on the nation’s calendar. Perhaps the most enduring image of the event is mostly about socializing, deepening family bonds and meeting up with old friends mostly in their homes.

How meditation can improve your travels

By Justin Sablich

Meditation has been proven to reduce stress and anxiety, making it a useful tool for those who find traveling taxing. Here are a few ways it can make your trips more enjoyable. When it comes to mindfulness and meditation, you may think it takes years of training — or a spiritual journey — to derive any benefits. But the essence of the practice is actually quite simple, and its techniques can bring a little relief to many stressful situations, including travel. “We’re talking about a sort of a slightly more sophisticated version of the advice that your mom gave you, when you were a kid, of ‘take a deep breath,’” said Dan Harris, the co-anchor of ABC’s “Nightline” and the weekend edition of “Good Morning America” who has authored two books about mindfulness and meditation. “You don’t have to believe in anything. It’s a really simple, secular exercise for your brain,” continued Mr. Harris, whose “10% Happier” smartphone app and podcast feature guided meditations. According to the most recent National Health Interview Survey, more American adults are meditating than ever, with more than 14 percent saying they have practiced in the past year, up from 4.1 percent in 2012. Given that one known effect of practicing

mindfulness is the reduction of stress and anxiety, travelers could stand to benefit. “There is strong research that shows that meditation can improve mental health,” said Dr. Megan Jones Bell, the chief science officer for the meditation app Headspace. “Meditation can help us learn to be more present, see ourselves and others from a new perspective, and approach life in a more engaged and peaceful way. This can all be really helpful during any part of our lives and especially during travel.” Here are a few ways that practicing mindfulness can make your travels less stressful and more enjoyable. ■ **What to do when stress and anxiety strike** Whether it’s the fear of flying or worrying about missing your next connection, many people feel anxiety when traveling. “We can’t control if the plane is delayed, or if our luggage gets lost, or the traffic on the road, and meditation and mindfulness allows us to learn to accept the unknowns, and even embrace them,” said Dr. Bell. First, focusing on your breathing can go a long way. If flying is a particularly stressful experience for you, Mr. Harris suggests putting aside a few minutes for this before takeoff, whether you’re waiting to board or buckled in your seat. “Just tuning into your breathing or even taking a few deep breaths has phys-

iological benefits, sending messages to your parasympathetic nervous system like, ‘O.K., relax, everything’s O.K.,” he said. The idea is to consider your nervous thinking from a different perspective. “You realize that, ‘oh yeah, this is just the mental state of worry, and I can unhook from it, even if it’s just for a second, so that it doesn’t own me completely,’” Mr. Harris said. ■ **Consider meditating regularly, even for a few minutes** To gain a better understanding of how mindful breathing and other meditative techniques can help, it’s best to practice them before your trip. If you can manage to develop something resembling a daily or regular habit, the effects tend to be greater. “Any type of mindfulness exercise, whether one minute or 10 minutes, can help your mind and body,” said Dr. Bell, who recommends starting with a short exercise and then building from there. For those who already meditate regularly, try not to judge yourself too harshly if you’re not able to maintain your usual schedule while traveling. “You’re on vacation, do what you can,” Mr. Harris said. “Sneak it in here and there, but not in a way that’s going to make you or your partner or children miserable or uptight, because that’s just counterproductive.”

■ **Reduce distractions and enjoy the moment** Mindfulness and meditation can also help you appreciate the destinations you’re exploring. “Traveling is this discovery and exploration process, and meditation helps you tune out or resist the siren call of projection into the future or rumination about the past, all of which pulls you away from what is happening right now, which you paid all this money to experience,” Mr. Harris said. The distractions that come from your smartphone, like social media feeds and the temptation to photograph every moment, can also take away from genuinely enjoying the moment, Mr. Harris explained. “I’m not saying that it’s wrong to take a selfie or to tell your friends about it. What I’m saying is you probably want to up the enjoyment in the moment quotient and reduce the social status quotient,” he said. If you’re struggling to be in the moment, Mr. Harris has a simple suggestion. Asking yourself “is this useful?” can help unhook you from all of that,” he said. “It’s not so much fighting this urge to do this stuff. It’s about seeing the urge and just letting it go and then that allows you to kind of seamlessly merge back into the moment you’re trying to enjoy.” (Source: The New York Times)

Researchers discover 500 million years of climate history pinned on plate tectonics

Generally speaking, it's easy enough to make sense of the last few million years of climate patterns — the world looked much as it does today, so changes in greenhouse gas concentrations or ocean circulation can be related to what we see now. But as you go back farther in time, you can find very different climates and a rearranged map of continents, and those require more creative thinking.

For example, the ice age periods in the recent past are not unique. But most of the last 500 million years have been much warmer — what has caused the climate to slowly drift toward warmer or cooler temperatures over millions of years?

In the grand sweep of Earth history, its climate has remained within a habitable temperature range — thanks in part to the moderating influence of feedback loops within the system. The weathering of silicate minerals in bedrock pulls CO₂ out of the atmosphere, for example. In a warming climate, weathering can speed up, removing more greenhouse gas and stabilizing temperatures. Cool the planet and weathering slows, giving greenhouse gases more chance to accumulate.

But the Earth has been like a house full of passive-aggressive roommates, with the set point on the thermostat seeming to change periodically.

Large-scale changes

Invoking geology to explain these large-scale changes more or less comes down to two options: either the release of CO₂ by volcanic activity changes, or something strengthens the processes sucking CO₂ out of the atmosphere. In recent years, researchers have been comparing these things to the pattern of



climate changes to see how they correlate.

A new study by Francis Macdonald at the University of California, Santa Barbara, makes a strong case for plate tectonics fiddling with the thermostat through collisions between lines of volcanic islands and larger continents—especially in the tropics.

The idea isn't new. Events like these are good candidates for climate movers-and-shakers. When one of these "volcanic arcs" collides with a continent, the volcanoes die and cease their release of CO₂. But more importantly,

some of their igneous rock gets smashed up onto the continent. The researchers say that this exposed igneous rock is extremely effective at removing CO₂ when it weathers. The tectonic squeezing continues pushing up the rock, too, preventing it from being buried and keeping it exposed to weathering.

In the tropics, the warmer temperatures and plentiful rainwater are ideal for maximizing the weathering process — even during glacial periods when vast ice sheets are found closer to the poles. The number of these

collisions at any point in time — and their location — is pretty much a bumper-cars accident of plate tectonics. So if a couple large collisions take place in the tropics for a few million years, the effect on the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere could be considerable.

To test the idea across a good sample of Earth's history, the researchers put together a map of reconstructed plate tectonic collisions (sometimes called "sutures," because the colliding rocks will stick together) going back to the Cambrian period 540 million years ago.

Evidence of ice sheets

They compared this to the recorded evidence of ice sheets, noting how close to the equator ice coverage extended.

Their hypothesis came out looking good. The correlation between volcanic-arc-and-continent collisions in the tropics and ice coverage is very good. The biggest glacial periods line up with times when these collisions stretched over 10,000 to 14,000 kilometers, exposing quite a lot of weatherable rock. At other, warmer times, the length of these tropical collisions dropped to 4,000 kilometers or less.

If you include collisions outside the tropics, the correlation is a little weaker. That's not surprising, as rocks exposed by high-latitude collisions wouldn't weather as rapidly.

The researchers argue that the overall picture supports the idea that removing CO₂ through weathering is more important than changing the release of CO₂ from volcanoes. If the volcanic release was the key, the global correlation would be at least as good as the correlation in the tropics, because it doesn't matter where CO₂ gets released.

(Source: arstechnica.com)

Scientists name new spiders after the Stormtroopers in Star Wars

Despite being widely distributed across north and central South America, bald-legged spiders had never been confirmed in Colombia until the recent study by the team of researchers Carlos Perafan and Fernando Perez-Miles (Universidad de la Republica, Uruguay) and William Galvis (Universidad Nacional de Colombia). Published in the open-access journal ZooKeys, their research paper describes a total of six previously unknown species inhabiting the country.

Four of the novel spiders were unable to fit into any already existing genus, so the scientists had to create a brand new one for them, which they called Stormtropis in reference to the Star Wars' clone trooper army known as Stormtroopers.

Considered to be amongst the most enigmatic in the group of mygalomorphs, the bald-legged spiders are a family of only 11 very similarly looking, small-to medium-sized species, whose placement in the Tree of Life has long been a matter of debate.

In fact, it is due to their almost identical appearance and ability for camouflage that became the reason for the new bald-legged spider genus to be compared to the fictional clone troopers.

One of the most striking qualities of the bald-legged spiders (family Paratropididae) is their ability to adhere soil particles to their cuticle, which allows them to be camouflaged by the environment.

The "stormtroopers are the soldiers of the main ground force of the Galactic Empire. These soldiers are very similar to each other, with some capacity for camouflage, but with unskillful movements, like this new group of spiders," explain the researchers.

"We wanted to make a play on words with the name of the known genus, Paratropis, and of course, we also wanted to



pay tribute to one of the greatest sagas of all time", they add.

One of the new 'stormtrooper' species (Stormtropis muisca) is also the highest altitudinal record for the family. It was recorded from an elevation of at least 3,400 m in the central Andes. However, the authors note that they have evidence of species living above 4,000 m. These results are to be published in future papers.

In the course of their fieldwork, the researchers also confirmed previous assumptions that the bald-legged spiders are well adapted to running across the ground's surface.

The spiders were seen to stick soil particles to their scaly backs as a means of camouflage against predators.

More interestingly, however, the team records several cases of various bald-legged species burrowing into ravine walls or soil - a type of behavior that had not been reported until then.

Their suggestion is that it might be a secondary adaptation, so that the spiders could exploit additional habitats.

In conclusion, not only did the bald-legged spiders turn out to be present in Colombia, but they also seem to be pretty abundant there. Following the present study, three genera are currently known from the country (Anisaspis, Paratropis and Stormtropis).

(Source: eurekalert.org)

What is the toothiest animal on Earth?

Peek inside a few animal mouths and you'll see evidence of evolution's finest work. Take snakes, whose teeth are needle-thin and spiked with venom — excruciatingly efficient instruments for killing prey. Or walruses, which use their massive teeth like ice picks to haul their heavy bodies along the ground. In hagfish, hook-like teeth that line the gullet are ideal for macerating the flesh into which they burrow, headfirst.

As it turns out, there's some stiff competition for the title of toothiest creature, depending on where you look — and what you define as a "tooth." Here are some of the best contenders.

Deep in South America's rainforests, the giant armadillo (Priodontes maximus) tops the land mammal tooth count, at 74 teeth. That number may not seem wildly impressive, but it's high for mammals, who are actually some of the least toothy creatures on Earth.

Egg-laying mammals like platypuses have no teeth, marsupials like opossums have around 50, while humans have a measly 32, said Robert Voss, curator in the Department of Mammalogy at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. In this context, the "giant armadillo is definitely an anomaly," he told Live Science.

Teeth have complex shape

There's an interesting reason behind this. Most mammals are 'heterodonts,' meaning their teeth have more than one shape and are complex, enabling precise interactions between the upper and lower jaw. This equips mammals to really mash up their food, which increases the food's surface area and enables them to absorb more energy and nutrients.

"Fewer teeth mean(s) they can focus on very precise types of contacts, and interactions, between opposing teeth" and thus maximize on energy consumption, said Peter Ungar, a paleoanthropologist at the University of Arkansas who studies



how mammal teeth evolved.

But, unlike other mammals, giant armadillos are homodonts, meaning their teeth are less complex: "At the front, their teeth look sort of like sharp chisels. Towards the back they look like pegs," Voss said. These simpler gnashers suit a diet of soft-bodied vertebrates, which require only a little crushing to release energy. "Think of it like bubble tea: You don't really need to chew those knobs up," Voss said. Evolutionarily speaking, having simpler teeth means more can fit in the mouth. Add to that the giant armadillo's long jaw, and the combination explains why these mammals are able to pack in more teeth than most.

Giant armadillos

Giant armadillos, however, "can't hold a candle to some fish, which can have hundreds, even thousands of teeth in the mouth at once," Ungar told Live Science. That revelation takes us plunging into the ocean — and into the jaws of requiem sharks, which are most likely the toothiest of all vertebrate animals, according to Gavin Naylor, director of the Florida Program for Shark Research.

This comes down to their rotational teething system — a smart biological hack that all shark species have. Instead of just one line of teeth rooted in the jaw, sharks grow multiple rows inside their mouths. These are tethered only to the skin covering the jaw, allowing them to move forward to replace lost teeth.

(Source: scientificamerican.com)

Largest carbon dioxide sinks located in renewable forests, new study suggests

Forests are the filters of our Earth: They clean the air, remove dust particles, and produce oxygen. So far, the rain forest in particular has been considered the "green lung" of our planet.

Yet, an international team, including researchers of Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT), recently found that the world's largest carbon sinks are located in young, regrowing forests.

Forests are considered major carbon sinks. These are ecosystems binding large amounts of carbon, thus retarding CO₂ accumulation in the atmosphere and, hence, climate change. These sinks are dynamic, their capacity can grow or shrink regionally.

So far, it has been assumed that this is driven mainly by increased photosynthesis due to an increase in the carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere. Dense tropical forests near the equator, for instance, take up large amounts of CO₂.

Combination of data

Together with an international team of researchers, Professor Almut Arneth of the Atmospheric Environmental Research Division of the Institute of Meteorology and Climate



Research (IMK-IFU), KIT's Campus Alpine, reanalyzed global forests with a combination of data and computer models.

Based on datasets of the age of forests, the scientists calculated how much CO₂ was taken up by established, at least 140 year-old forest areas between 2001 and 2010. These values were then compared with those of younger

forests regrown on former agricultural or deforested areas.

They found that these areas take up large amounts of CO₂ from the atmosphere not only because of their increased photosynthesis, but mainly because of their young age.

The forests' CO2 uptake

This age effect accounts for about 25% of

the forests' CO₂ uptake. This mainly holds for forests at middle and high latitudes, such as areas in the east of the United States, which were used as farmland by the settlers until the late 19th century, or forests in Canada, Russia, and Europe that were destroyed by forest fires. But also big reforestation programs in China largely contribute to this carbon sink.

"These sinks that depend on forest growth are limited in principle. When the forests reach a certain age, their CO₂ uptake decreases and the important carbon sinks disappear unless reforestation occurs," Arneth says.

The "results of our study are needed to better understand the climate system and help us make substantiated decisions in forestry, as they reveal how much CO₂ will be bound by regrown forests in future.

However, the amount of carbon dioxide removed from the atmosphere by forests is limited. That is why it is crucial to reduce our emissions due to fossil fuels," the professor says.

(Source: natureworldnews.com)

An Antarctic ice shelf being shaken by thousands of 'ice quakes', but only at night

As the frozen Antarctic landscape at the bottom of the world adjusts to an ever hotter planet, we keep finding more mysterious phenomena beneath and within the ice. Now, there are "ice quakes" to add to that list.

It wasn't all so long ago that earthquakes were thought to not exist on this unforgiving continent. Scientists know better now, and have just reported another tremulous anomaly: ice quakes that shake the frozen landscape ... but only ever at night.

When darkness falls, for a 6-12 hour period during the evening, scientists investigating the behavior of ice on the McMurdo Ice Shelf picked up these mysterious ice quake vibrations, thanks to seismometers planted across the shelf landscape.

"In these areas we would record tens, hundreds, up to thousands of these per night," says glaciologist Douglas MacAyeal from the University of Chicago.

It's MacAyeal's business to study how meltwater and melting processes are affecting the Antarctic region; while it might sound surprising, it's actually melting that's responsible for setting off this nightly cavalcade of quakes.

During the Austral summer melt season (November 2016 to January 2017), the researchers set up seismometers in two different locations 20 kilometers apart (just over 12 miles apart) on the McMurdo Ice Shelf.

They called the sites the 'dry station' and the 'wet station', in reference to how much melting behavior the areas exhibited.

At the wet station, the slushy ice produced pools of water on the ground during the day, whereas the dry station was notably less prone to meltwater despite the heat of sunlight.

Each night, the wet station came alive with hundreds or thousands of fleeting ice quakes generated by natural activity and lasting less than a second each time. (Source: sciencealert.com)

Spaceflight can reactivate dormant viruses in astronauts, NASA study reveals

Urine, blood, and saliva samples taken from astronauts show immune cells that eliminate and suppress viruses are less effective during spaceflight and even 60 days after that.

New NASA research has revealed that dormant viruses may reactivate during spaceflight. Scientists reported that herpes viruses have reactivated in some crews involved in the Space Shuttle and the International Space Station missions.

Johnson Space Center, and colleagues analyzed the saliva, urine, and blood samples collected from astronauts before, during, and after spaceflight.

They found that during spaceflight, secretion of stress hormones increases. Stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol are known to suppress the immune system.



Mehta and colleagues also found that the astronauts' immune cells, particularly those that normally eliminate and suppress viruses, tend to be less effective during spaceflight and even up to 60 days after that.

The researchers said that 47 out of 89 astronauts on short space shuttle flights and 14 out of 23 astronauts on longer missions at the ISS shed herpes viruses in their saliva or urine samples.

"These frequencies - as well as the quantity - of viral shedding are markedly higher than in samples from before or after flight, or from matched healthy controls," Mehta said.

Not everyone developed symptoms. Only six astronauts have so far found to have developed symptoms because of reactivation and all were minor, but researchers said continued virus shedding after the flight has potential implications. It may pose threat to immunocompromised or uninfected individuals on Earth, such as newborns. (Source: techtimes.com)

Scientists shed light on semiconductor degradation mechanism

Scientists at Nagoya Institute of Technology (NITech) and collaborating universities in Japan have gained new insight into the mechanisms behind degradation of a semiconductor material that is used in electronic devices. By highlighting the specific science behind how the material degrades, they are making way for potential discoveries that may prevent the performance degradation of the material. The study was published in the Journal of Applied Physics in September of 2018. The scientists used Silicon Carbide (SiC) material for the experiment.

The study is based on a specific type of SiC material that is characteristic for its structure, or 4H-SiC. This material was exposed to both photoluminescence as well as various temperatures as a means to create specific kinds of deformations that lead to the degradation of SiC-based devices.

"We quantified the speed at which electric charge particles move in regions of 4H-SiC material where the atomic structure has been defected. This will usher discoveries of ways to suppress degradation of SiC-based devices such as power electronic systems," states Dr. Masashi Kato, an associate professor at the Frontier Research Institute for Materials Science in NITech.

In order to better understand the actual mechanism behind atomic deformation that lead to degradations, the researchers used photoluminescence to induce movement of electric charge particles and measured the speeds at which that took place. They also tested the effects of increasing temperature, specifically looking to see if higher temperatures will increase or decrease rate of deformation.

According to Dr. Kato, the presence of a particular kind of atomic deformation that causes the material degrade is particularly problematic for SiC-based power devices. "While a particular SiC-based device is in operation, the atoms of the material deform, which leads to degradation. The process by which these atoms deform is not clear yet. What is known, however, is that movement of electric charge within the material as well as areas where the material has become defect already contribute to the aforementioned atomic deformation," he states. (Source: phys.org)

MRT Jakarta to designate women-only cars during peak hours

Jakartans enjoy a trial run of the first phase of the Jakarta MRT, which connects Lebak Bulus in South Jakarta to the Hotel Indonesia traffic circle in Central Jakarta. (The Jakarta Post/Wendra Ajistyatama)

PT MRT Jakarta has decided to designate women-only passenger cars during peak hours.

The move aims to prevent sexual assault. MRT Jakarta corporate secretary M. Kamaluddin said on Tuesday that the women-only passenger cars would be in the first sequence of train cars.

“There will be one train car dedicated to women. We will place a sticker to designate the women-only cars,” he said, wartakota.tribunews.com reported.

The women-only cars would, however, only be designated during peak hours, from 7 a.m. until 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. until 7 p.m., as the MRT was not expected to be as crowded as the commuter line, he said.

MRT Jakarta, which operates from South Jakarta’s Lebak Bulus Station to Central Jakarta’s Hotel Indonesia (HI) traffic circle, is projected to serve around 65,000 passengers a day at 13 train stations, while the Greater Jakarta commuter line recorded 1 million passengers a day at 79 train stations.

The commuter line provides two women-only passenger cars per train in Greater Jakarta.

“No need to be exclusive because the MRT car is spacious inside, unlike that of the commuter line,” he said.

The move to designate women-only passenger cars follows a survey in which 58 percent of respondents said such a dedicated train car was necessary.

“We’ve also learned from [MRT] Tokyo in Japan, which designated [women-only passenger cars] during peak hours,” he added. (Source: Jakarta Post)

RECIPE OF THE WEEK

Persian walnut cookies

“These delicately-spiced, rose-scented cookies are the perfect treat for Passover since they contain no flour. They are nutty and rich, slightly chewy with a crunchy exterior. Pistachios or almonds can be substituted for the walnuts.”

Ingredients:



- 1 1/2 cups finely ground walnuts
- 3 egg yolks
- 3/4 cup white sugar
- 1 tablespoon ground cardamom
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 tablespoon rose water
- 1 egg yolk1 teaspoon water
- 1/2 cup walnut pieces for decoration

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). In a medium bowl, mix together the ground walnuts, 3 egg yolks, sugar, cardamom, baking soda and rose water until well blended. Roll teaspoon sized pieces of dough into balls and place onto parchment-lined baking sheets. Cookies should be spaced 2 inches apart. Whisk together the remaining egg yolk and water using a fork. Press a walnut piece into each cookie, then brush with the egg yolk glaze. Bake for 20 minutes in the preheated oven, or until golden. The cookies will appear soft and undercooked but take heart, they will harden considerably when cooled. Allow them to cool on the baking sheets for at least 10 minutes before transferring to a wire rack to cool completely.

LEARN ENGLISH

Guns

A: Hey Nick, what are you up to?
B: Not much, just heading over to the **shooting range**. You want to come?

A: Seriously? You mean to fire a real weapon? I don’t know man.
B: Yeah it will be fun! I have a 9mm pistol that is really easy to shoot. I also have a **revolver** that’s really fun too! They have big **targets** at the range that we could use to practice and improve your aim.

A: Yeah that would be cool! Maybe I can also have a try at other weapons like a machine gun or a shotgun! Maybe even a rocket launcher or an anti-tank missile! Or what about a flame thrower!
B: Whoa, take it easy there Rambo. Don’t get carried away. These weapons are not toys, and you must first learn how to handle them properly. There are basic rules that you must abide by in order to be safe. For example, never handle a weapon that you haven’t **inspected** yourself. Always make sure there isn’t anything in the chamber, and never put your finger on the trigger unless you are ready to shoot!

A: Wow, I didn’t know! It always looks so cool and easy in the movies!
B: The reality is different you know, running and firing a weapon is a lot harder than in the movies! So are you ready?
A: Let’s do it!

Key vocabulary

shooting range: a specified place to practice shooting
revolver: a small gun with a container for bullets
target: object to be aimed at in shooting practice
inspect: to look at (something) carefully
Supplementary vocabulary
rifle: a shoulder firearm with spiral grooves cut in the inner surface of the gun barrel
scope: instrument on a gun for viewing and aiming at the target
magazine: a metal receptacle for a number of cartridges, inserted into certain types of automatic weapons
round: ammunition for a single shot
barrel: the metal, cylindrical part of a firearm through which the bullet travels

(Source: irlanguage.com)

Mothers, the most flourishing blossoms of spring

By Naghmeh Mizanian

The yard is full of spring flowers. The radio plays spring music. The home is all clean. People are rushing to do their last shopping. The smell of homemade cookies is felt from the neighboring house. I feel the steps of Amoo Nowruz by all my heart!

I am not a baby girl anymore; nor a young girl, neither a mere wife.

Spring blossoms are blooming in me. I’m going to become spring myself! I am now a mature tree with buds and in few months my fruit is to be born.

This year, the fragrant smell of spring

has a different meaning to me.

From now on, I feel I am the one who should bring happiness to home. Bringing a cup of pleasant tea after a tough day of spring cleaning is not my mom’s duty any more, but me.

I am the person who should make the voice of tired and exhausted father calm and happy and I am the one who should make tasty Nowruz cuisines to make my child acquainted with her culture and roots.

I am the one who should grow sprouts at home to make my child happy seeing the growth of seeds at her home.

I am the one who should help my child

Women face greater threat from job automation than men

Women across the economic spectrum are more vulnerable than men to losing their jobs to technology, according to a study released on Wednesday by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research.

Among the positions with more than a 90 percent chance of becoming automated were administrative assistant, office clerk, bookkeeper and cashier, all fields dominated by women.

“We’re already seeing some of that with tasks being replaced by computers,” said Chandra Childers, the study director and a senior researcher at the IWPR.

Drawing on data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and research examining the possibility of automation based on current technology, the authors found that 58 percent of at-risk workers were women.

For every seven men in occupations with a 90 percent likelihood of automation, there are 10 women.

Researchers noted that while women work in the positions most likely to be automated, they also dominate those at lowest risk for automation, such a child-care and nursing.

These care positions tend to pay \$20,000 to \$25,000, an annual salary below the poverty line for a family of four and far less than the salaries of male-dominated positions that are not at risk of automation, including executives and legislators.

“We need a push to improve the quality of those jobs,” said Childers of care work.



The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts a jobs increase of 7 percent between 2016 and 2026, and new jobs may be created for the displaced women, Childers said.

Another potential solution for women in at-risk positions would be training for higher-wage positions.

But for women already years or decades into their careers, skill building can be a challenge.

Taking care of children or aging parents, jobs that disproportionately fall on the shoulders of women, leave little time for training, said Childers.

The research does not predict how quickly office automation will take hold, but looks to the jobs where current technology makes automation possible.

Childers said the timeline will largely depend on customers and clients who interact with workers in these positions.

“If people get used to technology, the speed will increase,” she said, noting that customers were initially wary of self-checkout machines but now use them regularly.

(Source: Thomson Reuters Foundation)

Iranian MP praises women’s growth in economic, social and cultural fields

W O M E N **TEHRAN** —Over the past years in Iran, women and girls have enjoyed the rights to get engaged in economic, social and cultural fields, said Farideh Owlad-Qobad speaking at the 63rd session of Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) on Thursday.

The trend prevailed in all social pillars as well as high profile positions, IRNA quoted Iran’s representative addressing the meeting held in UN seat in New York.

Rate of literacy among the women as well as their share in high education and life expectance have registered remarkable growth over the past 40 years, she added.

Islamic Republic of Iran has always abided by its commitments to guarantee a worthy future for Iranian women and girls and family as the main foundation of the society, she said.

Commission on the Status of Women holds a 10-day

session each year in the maid seat of the UN in New York to discuss gender equality, challenges facing women, set global standards and formulate policies for promoting gender equality and women’s progress in the world.

Owlad-Qobad further criticized France’s irresponsible use of its position in the United Nations Security Council to interfere in other countries’ affairs, saying that’s better for France to deal with profound discontent within its country.

The Iranian nation has paved a long way for embracing freedom based on independence, democracy, rule of law and human rights, she stated.

Owlad-Qobad further voiced deep concern over irresponsible behaviors undermining multilateralism and adversely affecting women’s situation across the world.

Iran’s envoy in the CSW noted that unilateral actions



make colorful eggs to make her to have a share in practicing Nowruz traditions.

And I am the one who should bring the smell of love among the smell of spring buds despite all difficulties of life.

The spring rain brings a high responsibility in my farm. I am taking the responsibility of transferring traditions and culture to my

children as my mom did to me.

I am now deeply grateful to my mom for making Nowruz traditions a beautiful and yet perpetual experience in my heart and mind.

May the best ever spring, Nowruz and happy New Year, 1398, be for all Iranian mothers!

Islamic women’s council: we’ve long feared an attack

A local Muslim woman says there have always been concerns that there could be an attack in New Zealand against this community.

50 people are confirmed dead after Friday’s terror attack at two mosques in Christchurch.

While the mosque shooter didn’t appear on any watchlist by intelligence services here or in Australia, the Islamic community says they have long been warning that discrimination and the alt-right were on the rise in New Zealand.

The Islamic Women’s Council of New Zealand met with GCSB, SIS and government officials numerous times over the past five years, but feel like their concerns have never been heard.

Spokeswoman Anjum Rahman told Larry Williams that they have been warning about a rise of vitriol, particularly online and in the media, and their concerns that overseas events would influence New Zealanders.

She says they have met with ministers and senior public servants over the years “We conveyed various issues to the police, for example when we gave them details of a Facebook page with severe hate messages, they did investigate that for us. Whenever we have found things that are troubling, we raised them with police.”

However, Rahman says that there was not the urgency or investment that there could have been.

“We, at various meetings, have said that we would expect they would put as much effort into monitoring these groups as they



would into surveillance into the Muslim community, and these groups would be a threat to our safety.

“I don’t feel like we got any kind of detailed response into what was happening into that area.”

She says that while the scale and the method of the Christchurch attack were shocking, they still expected something to happen.

“Given what has happened in Canada and the U.S. and Europe, we were always fearful that something like that could happen here.”

Rahman says that she commends the support the community has received from New Zealand authorities, particularly Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern.

“Once the immediate support needs for Christchurch are over, then there will need to be a period of reviewing how we can make changes in this country that will make it a safer place for all of us here. A lot of work needs to be done in that area.”

And that is something all New Zealanders will have to work on, Rahman says. (Source: Newstalk ZB)

ENGLISH IN USE

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A ← → ع

23,000 housing units completed in quake-stricken Kermanshah

Some 23,000 housing units were completed in quake-stricken regions of the western province of Kermanshah, deputy director at the Islamic Revolution Housing Foundation has said.

Retrofitting and reconstruction of the houses in the quake-hit villages is 90 percent completed, IRIB quoted Azizollah Mahdian as saying on Thursday.

By the end of the current [Iranian calendar] year some 26,000 housing units will be completed in villages affected by the earthquake, Mahdian added.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“arch-”

- **Meaning:** chief, beginning
- **For example:** The country went to war with its **archenemy**.

PHRASAL VERB

Try out for something

- **Meaning:** to try to be chosen as a member of a team, for a part in a play etc.; audition for
- **For example:** In high school, I tried out for all the female leads.

IDIOM

Lose touch

- **Explanation:** to no longer be skilled in doing something. In this usage
- **For example:** He used to be one of the league’s elite shooters, but it seems like he’s lost his touch.

واگذاری ۲۳ هزار واحد در مناطق زلزله زده کرمانشاه

معاون بنیاد مسکن انقلاب اسلامی گفت: ۲۳ هزار واحد روستایی به زلزله زدگان کرمانشاه واگذار شده است.

به گزارش روز پنجشنبه خبرگزاری صداوسیما، عزیزالله خاطرنشان کرد: کار بازسازی در مناطق زلزله زده روستایی ۹۰ درصد پیشرفت فیزیکی داشته است.

مهدیان افزود: سرجمع تا پایان سال ۲۶ هزار مسکن روستایی به مردم واگذار می شود.

Israeli forces may have committed war crimes: UN report

Israel depriving Palestinians of clean water

Israeli forces committed violations against Palestinian protesters in Gaza last year that may amount to war crimes, a United Nations report said on Monday.

A UN Independent Commission of Inquiry found that Israeli soldiers used live ammunition against unarmed protesters, killing at least 189 Palestinians during protests near the separation fence between Israel and Gaza last year.

Over 6,000 Palestinians were also injured in Israeli live fire in the period between March 30, 2018, and December 31, 2018.

"The Israeli Security Forces committed violations of international human rights and humanitarian law," said UN Commissioner Kaari Betty Murungi. "Some of those violations may constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity, and must be immediately investigated by Israel."

The 252-page report scrutinizes the Israel Defense Forces' directives for snipers' use of lethal force against Palestinian protesters, who have been regularly demonstrating along the separation fence.

"The Commission found there was no justification for Israel's security forces killing and injuring persons who pose no imminent threat of death or serious injury to those around them, including journalists, health workers and children," said Santiago Canton, the chair of the commission.

Canton said the commission, which presented the report to the Human Rights Council in Geneva, had reasonable grounds to believe that during the protests, labelled the Great March of Return, Israeli soldiers killed and gravely injured civilians who were neither participating directly in hostilities nor posing an imminent threat to the Israeli Security Forces, or to the civilian population in Israel.

"When examining the Israel Defense



Forces' use of live fire against the Palestinian protesters, the Commission, however, found that application of lethal force was in the majority of cases authorized unlawfully. This inevitably led to arbitrary deprivation of life," said Canton. The Commissioner Canton called upon Israel to immediately ensure that the rules of engagement of their security forces are revised to comply with international legal standards, especially in view of the one-year anniversary of the protests.

"We hear that crowds are going to be large at the official protest sites. The excessive use of force that took place on 30 March, 14 May and 12 October 2018 must not be repeated," Canton said.

Israeli security forces shot and wounded 6,016 protesters with live ammunition in the period investigated, while 189 people died at the protest sites, 183 of these from live fire. A significant number of persons also died in the days and weeks after they

were injured. A total of 73 Palestinian protesters died of gunshot injuries sustained on May 14, 2018.

"We strongly disagree with the suggestion that the targeting of these demonstrators meets the high human rights standards for using lethal force. Under these rules of engagement, 4,903 unarmed persons were shot in the lower limbs, many while standing hundreds of metres from the snipers," said Canton.

■ Velocity bullets and rifles

The investigation found that Israeli snipers used high velocity bullets and long-range sniper rifles equipped with sophisticated optical aiming devices. "They saw the target magnified in their sight and they knew the consequences of shooting, but still pulled the trigger, not once or twice but more than 6,000 times," said Commissioner Sara Hossain.

"The snipers killed 32 children, three clearly marked paramedics, and two clearly

marked journalists. They shot at unarmed protesters, children and disabled persons, and at health workers and journalists performing their duties, knowing who they were," she said.

Israel said it is now carrying out criminal investigations into the killing of 11 Palestinians but the commissioners called for an investigation of all the incidents where Palestinians were either killed or permanently disabled.

Israel claims that the protests by the separation fence masked "terror activities" by Palestinian armed groups. However, the commission found that the demonstrations were almost entirely civilian in nature, with clearly stated political aims and did not constitute combat or military campaigns.

While the demonstrations were at times violent, with many protesters hurling stones, cutting through the separation fence at points, and launching kites and balloons with burning coals and rags attached to them, the commission found that the use of lethal force against the protester was neither necessary nor proportionate. Only in two incidents the use of lethal force by the Israeli security forces may not have been unlawful.

■ Clean water

Israel is depriving millions of Palestinians of access to a regular supply of clean water while stripping their land of minerals "in an apparent act of pillage", a United Nations human rights investigator said on Monday.

Michael Lynk, UN special rapporteur on human rights in the Palestinian territories, said that Israel "continues full-steam with settlement expansion" in the West Bank, which the United Nations and many countries deem illegal. There are some 20-25,000 new settlers a year, he said.

(Source: agencies)

Bolton blasts Turkey for maintaining 'very bad' relations with Israel

US National Security Adviser John Bolton has not ruled out that Turkey is a "foe" of the United States, blasting Ankara for maintaining a "very bad" relationship with Washington's close ally Israel.

When asked by AM 970 radio host John Catsimatidis on Sunday whether Turkey was a "friend or foe" to the US, Bolton refused to give a straight answer and instead cited several major stumbling blocks in ties.

"Well you know they're still a NATO ally; we're trying to work with them, but they've got a very bad relationship with our close friends in Israel. That's something we need to look out on," Bolton said.

A war of words between Turkey and Israel recently, when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the occupied territories only belong to the Jewish people and not all citizens.

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

In response, the Israeli premier called Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan a "dictator" who jails journalists and judges.

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

The war of words continued Friday when the Turkish president rebuked Netanyahu's son for suggesting the city of Istanbul was under "Turkish occupation".

"You occupied the whole of Palestine!" Erdogan fired back at Netanyahu's son, saying it is actually the Tel Aviv

regime which has occupied the entire Palestinian land.

Elsewhere in his Sunday comments Bolton said that disagreements "with respect to the conflict in Syria" were another issue affecting bilateral ties between the US and Turkey.

He said US President Donald Trump "would like to have a good relationship with Turkey; he'd like to see US trade with Turkey increase, but we need them to help us out in some of these other problems in Syria and elsewhere in the region."

US support for YPG militants, whom Ankara views as terrorists and their group an extension of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), has angered Turkey.

The US has been arming and training Kurdish militants under the banner of helping them fight Daesh, but Syria and several other countries see ulterior motives behind the deployment.

President Trump's decision last year to leave Syria has exposed the Kurdish group to possible Turkish attacks.

Fears of a Turkish assault have led the Kurds to strike an agreement with the Syrian government to leave Manbij in exchange for military support in case they come under attack from Turkey.

Turkey, a key U.S. ally in the region, has repeatedly questioned Washington's deployment of heavy weapons in Syria despite the defeat of Daesh in much of the Arab country.

■ Bolton slams Turkey over S-400 deal

In his talks to AM 970 radio, Bolton further blasted Turkey for refusing to abandon a deal to purchase S-400



air defense missile systems from Russia, a major obstacle to US-Turkish relations.

"We're concerned about their purchase of the Russian air defense system called the S-400 - that's a big problem," Bolton said.

Moscow and Ankara finalized an agreement on the delivery of the S-400 missile systems in December 2017.

Last April, Erdogan and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin said in Ankara that they had agreed to expedite the delivery which could be made between late 2019 and early 2020.

Washington has reportedly proposed to deliver one US-made Patriot missile battery by the end of 2019, on the condition that Ankara abandons the deal with Moscow.

(Source: Press TV)

Italy's Salvini urges La Scala to snub Saudi cash

Italy's deputy prime minister, Matteo Salvini, urged Milan's La Scala opera house on Monday to reject an offer from Saudi Arabia to pump funds into the theater.

The Saudi culture ministry has offered a five-year partnership deal with La Scala worth 15 million euros (\$17 million).

The proposal has set off a furious row,

with human rights groups and some politicians arguing that one of Italy's most prestigious cultural institutions should shun money from Saudi Arabia, a deeply conservative Muslim kingdom accused of repeated rights abuses.

Salvini told reporters he did not want the partnership to go ahead.

"I would prefer for some people not to be there and for La Scala to be free, independent and autonomous," he said. "If the Swiss want to invest in La Scala, we would not have a problem."

It is the second time this year that Salvini, who heads the far-right League party, has taken aim at Saudi Arabia.

In January he condemned as "disgusting" restrictions imposed on women hoping to see the final of the Italian Supercoppa, which was staged at the start of the year in Saudi.

The La Scala board is due to discuss the Saudi proposal at a meeting on March 18.

(Source: Reuters)

Attackers targeting Turkey will go home 'in caskets': Erdogan

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan Monday described a mass shooting which killed 50 people at two New Zealand mosques as part of a wider attack on Turkey and threatened to send back "in caskets" anyone who tried to take the battle to Istanbul.

Erdogan, who is seeking to rally support for his AK Party in March 31 local elections, has invoked the New Zealand attack as evidence of global anti-Muslim sentiment.

"They are testing us from 16,500 km away, from New Zealand, with the messages they are giving from there. This isn't an individual act, this is organized," he said, without elaborating.

Australian Brenton Tarrant, 28, a suspected white supremacist, was charged with murder on Saturday after a lone gunman killed 50 people at mosques in the city of Christchurch.

At weekend election rallies Erdogan showed video footage of the shootings, which the gunman had broadcast on Facebook, earning a rebuke from New Zealand's foreign minister who said it could endanger New Zealanders abroad.

Erdogan also displayed extracts from a "manifesto" posted online by the attacker and later taken down.

He has said the gunman issued threats against Turkey and the president himself, and wanted to drive Turks from Turkey's northwestern, European region. Majority Muslim Turkey's largest city, Istanbul, is split between an Asian part east of the Bosphorus, and a European half to the west.

"We have been here for 1,000 years and will be here



until the apocalypse, God willing," Erdogan told a rally on Monday commemorating the 1915 Gallipoli campaign, when Ottoman soldiers defeated British-led forces including Australian and New Zealand troops trying to seize the peninsula, a gateway to Istanbul.

"You will not turn Istanbul into Constantinople," he added, referring to the city's name under its Christian Byzantine rulers before it was conquered by Muslim Ottomans in 1453.

"Your grandparents came here... and they returned in caskets," he said. "Have no doubt we will send you back like your grandfathers."

Erdogan was re-elected last year with new powers but

his AK Party, which has ruled Turkey since 2002, is battling for votes as the economy tips into recession after years of strong growth. He has cast the local elections as a "matter of survival" in the face of threats including Kurdish militants and attacks on Muslims such as the New Zealand shootings.

Speaking after a meeting of New Zealand's cabinet, Foreign Minister Winston Peters said he told his Turkish counterpart that Erdogan's use of the footage in an election campaign was wrong.

"Anything of that nature that misrepresents this country, given that this was a non-New Zealand citizen, imperils the future and safety of the New Zealand people and our people abroad, and that is totally unfair," Peters said.

Turkish relations with New Zealand have generally been good, strengthened by Gallipoli commemorations which emphasize shared sacrifices in battle as much as the confrontation itself.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, who was in Christchurch and visited Turkish citizens wounded in the attack, said Muslims around the world were worried about Islamophobia and racism.

A senior Turkish security source said Tarrant had entered Turkey twice in 2016 - for a week in March and for more than a month in September. Turkish authorities have begun investigating everything from hotel records to camera footage to try to ascertain the reason for his visits, the source said.

(Source: Reuters)

Win year for resistance

➔ In contrast, the U.S. has no longer been able to pay progressive deficits in the West Asia region. Damascus, Sanaa, Baghdad and Beirut have become a clear indicator of the failure of regional macroeconomic policies.

In such a situation, Trump and his allies are only seeking to reduce the cost of their failure in the region. The bloody and dangerous game that the Democrats and Republicans in the U.S. shared jointly in the region have now become the Achilles heel of the U.S. foreign policy. It is not unreasonable that even Western media outlets report the failure of the West and Arab leaders in Syria. American puppets the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman are very worried about such issues. The nightmare of Washington, Tel Aviv, and their mercenaries in the region are still on the way.

Iran's Meteorological Organization projects normal water year, says director

➔ Agricultural drought accounts for the susceptibility of crops during different stages of crop development. Deficient topsoil moisture at planting may hinder germination, leading to low plant populations per hectare and a reduction of yield.

Data sets required to assess agricultural drought are soil texture, fertility and soil moisture, crop type and area, crop water requirements, pests, and climate.

Hydrological drought refers to a persistently low discharge and/or volume of water in streams and reservoirs, lasting months or years. Hydrological drought is a natural phenomenon, but it may be exacerbated by human activities. Hydrological droughts are usually related to meteorological droughts, and their recurrence interval varies accordingly. Changes in land use and land degradation can affect the magnitude and frequency of hydrological droughts.

Data sets required to assess hydrological drought are surface-water area and volume, surface runoff, stream flow measurements, infiltration, water-table fluctuations, and aquifer parameters.

Tajbakhsh went on to say that regarding meteorological and agricultural droughts, taking recent rise in rainfall levels into consideration, the conditions have improved, nevertheless in respect of hydrological drought the situation have not ameliorated yet.

Elsewhere in her remarks, IMO director explained that during the Persian New Year holidays (starting on March 21) the weather conditions may not suit travelers as "we get rainfalls and snowfalls sporadically during the two-week holiday."

Owing to low temperatures and increased precipitation during spring, snowpack won't start melting anytime now which is good news as the supply of water coming from melting snow will not be exhausted, she noted.

As per the data released on Monday by the National Drought Warning and Monitoring Center affiliated to IMO the whole country received 199.8 millimeters of precipitations since the beginning of the current water year (starting on September 23) which indicates a 22.9-percent rise compared to the long-term averages.

Moreover, the amount also shows a 132.8-percent increase compared to last year's precipitations in the corresponding period.

This is while last year's precipitation in the same period displays a sharp drop of 47.2 percent compared to the long-term means.

Provinces of Ilam, Lorestan, and Golestan have experienced the highest rise in precipitation amounts in the same period compared to long-term averages while provinces of Kerman, Sistan-Baluchestan, and Yazd on average have suffered 19 percent drop in precipitations.

It is generally hoped that precipitation deficiencies will be overcome by the rainfalls the country receive in the spring.

Clashes after Kurdish prisoner suicide in Turkish jail

The death of a Kurdish activist on hunger strike in a Turkish prison sparked clashes between supporters and police near his grave on Monday, as his lawyers and Kurdish party officials said he had committed suicide.

Zulkuf Gezen, who died late Sunday, was one of scores of detainees on hunger strike in support of a Kurdish lawmaker in Diyarbakir, a sensitive region where Turkish forces have battled Kurdish fighters.

Clashes erupted on Monday when police firing water cannon to break up supporters of the main pro-Kurdish opposition party HDP who had gathered at his grave, an AFP reporter at the scene said.

"A prisoner lost his life yesterday. If the justice ministry had fulfilled its responsibility, our friend who lost his life would still be alive," HDP co-leader Sezai Temelli told reporters.

Gezen's lawyers said he had hanged himself. He had been in prison for 12 years on charges of membership of the PKK Kurdish group.

In a statement, the public prosecutor's office said Gezen had committed suicide in a bathroom, but rejected claims he killed himself as part of his protest.

A lawmaker from HDP or People's Democratic Party (HDP) Leyla Guven, launched a hunger strike on Nov. 8 while in prison to protest the prison conditions for Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan. She has been released but other detainees followed her lead.

Ocalan is one of the founders of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) which has waged a bloody rebellion against the Turkish state since 1984. It is blacklisted as a terror group by Ankara and its Western allies.

Ocalan has been serving a life sentence for treason in an island prison near Istanbul since his capture in 1999.

The HDP remains under the scrutiny of Turkish authorities, which accuse the party of links to the PKK. Several of its MPs are behind bars, including former party leader Selahattin Demirtas.

At least 171 prisoners are on hunger strike, according to the party, which has urged the international community to take action.

The PKK has waged a three-and-a-half decade insurgency against the Turkish state, initially seeking independence and more recently autonomy for Turkey's Kurdish minority. Fighting has left tens of thousands dead.

(Source: AFP)

We don't have to apologise for United fiasco, says Tuchel

Paris St Germain coach Thomas Tuchel said the team did not have to apologise to fans for their Champions League elimination by Manchester United.

"We don't have to apologise, we are the most disappointed ones," the German was quoted as saying on Monday.

"It was an accident. I know my team. If you lose a big game, and we lost one, you have to accept that everybody talks."

The club's hardcore 'ultra' group of fans did not support the team during the first 15 minutes of their Ligue 1 game against rivals Olympique de Marseille, their first home match since they were knocked out of the Champions League last 16.

Banners reading 'We do not forget' or 'Respect the institution' were unfolded before kickoff at Parc des Princes.

PSG beat OM 3-1, with fans then cracking fireworks and lighting flares to celebrate Angel Di Maria's double and Kylian Mbappe's first-half opener.

The capital side have already wrapped up the Ligue 1 title as they lead second-placed Lille, who have played one more game, by 20 points.

(Source: Reuters)

Ronaldo faces disciplinary hearing over goal celebration

Juventus forward Cristiano Ronaldo is facing disciplinary action for his celebration after one of the three goals he scored in last week's 3-0 win over Atletico Madrid in the Champions League.

UEFA said the Portuguese would face a hearing on Thursday for "improper conduct" during the last-16 second leg match, where Juventus completed a 3-2 aggregate win.

Ronaldo made a similar gesture to Atletico coach Diego Simeone, who celebrated his team's opening goal in the first leg by turning to the crowd and putting his hands on his trousers.

Simeone was fined 20,000 euros (17,124 pounds) for the incident but escaped a touchline ban for the return match. Juventus face Ajax Amsterdam in their quarter-final.

(Source: Eurosport)

Del Potro to miss Miami Open, may need surgery on knee



Argentine Juan Martin Del Potro will miss the upcoming Miami Open because of a knee injury, with a source close to the player telling Reuters he may have to undergo surgery.

Del Potro, ranked fifth in the world, was unable to defend his BNP Paribas Open title in Indian Wells this week as he underwent treatment on the injured right knee.

It has not recovered sufficiently to allow him to play in Miami, which begins next week.

"Unfortunately I won't be able to play in Miami this year," Del Potro said on Twitter. "Looking forward to coming back in 2020!"

A source, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Reuters the 30-year-old might have to have surgery on the fractured kneecap that has kept his appearances to a bare minimum since October when he withdrew from the Shanghai Masters.

The injury came at the tail-end of Del Potro's best season in years. He won titles in Indian Wells and Acapulco and reached the final of the U.S. Open to climb to a career high No. 3 in the world.

(Source: Mirror)

Team Sky set to become Team Ineos

Team Sky are set to announce a new sponsor - owned by Britain's richest man Sir Jim Ratcliffe.

The broadcaster said in December that it would end its decade-long commitment at the end of 2019, during which time Team Sky have won eight Grand Tours.

The team will be renamed Team Ineos - after the chemicals giant that billionaire Ratcliffe owns.

Ratcliffe is worth £21bn and has been in talks with Team Sky principal Dave Brailsford for several weeks.

Team Sky was launched in January 2010 and has since amassed 327 victories, including those eight Grand Tour triumphs.

Current riders Chris Froome and Geraint Thomas have won five Tours de France between them, and Welshman Thomas signed a new three-year deal in September after winning his first Tour last July.

Ineos is Britain's largest privately owned company and in 2018 posted annual pre-tax profits of £2bn.

Ratcliffe has already invested £110m in Ben Ainslie's Americas Cup team.

Former Team Sky rider Bradley Wiggins, who won the 2012 Tour de France, said the partnership between Brailsford and Ratcliffe could be "ideal".

(Source: BBC)

Merkel aide 'sad' about Ozil's wedding invite to Erdogan

Angela Merkel's chief of staff on Monday joined the growing chorus of criticism of Arsenal's German midfielder Mesut Ozil for reportedly inviting Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to his wedding this summer as his witness.

The 30-year-old Ozil, who has Turkish family roots, sparked controversy last May when he was photographed with Erdogan, raising questions about the footballer's loyalty to Germany on the eve of their disastrous World Cup campaign.

After 92 appearances for Germany, including a key role in the 2014 World Cup victory, Ozil suddenly quit the national squad last July, accusing German football officials of racism. On Sunday, Germany's top-selling tabloid Bild reported that Ozil, 30, and his model fiancée Amine Gulse, 25, a former Miss Turkey, personally presented Erdogan in Istanbul with an invitation to their wedding this summer, asking the Turkish leader to appear as the footballer's witness.

The invite immediately drew sharp criticism in Germany, whose government has been sharply at odds with Ankara over a range of human rights questions in recent years.

Helge Braun, a CDU politician and chief of staff to German Chancellor Merkel, told Bild it "makes one sad" that Ozil would make a such a move despite having already been sharply criticised by the German public over



his first meeting with Erdogan.

"The fact that this has continued will have disappointed a lot of football fans - me too!" said Braun.

The politician accepted Ozil's was "a private decision" which one must respect, but appealed to the footballer as a role model,

especially for young Turks in Germany.

"Footballers are symbolic figures in our society, with whom people identify with much more than ministers," added Braun.

"And so the question is raised: how much does someone wearing the German national jersey stand for Germany?"

European clubs, UEFA to begin discussions over post-2024 competitions



UEFA will meet representatives from European clubs on Tuesday to begin discussions over the future of the Champions League and other continental competitions from 2024 onwards, European soccer's governing body said Monday.

Both sides have hinted at extensive changes to European club competitions when a new international calendar comes into force in 2024.

UEFA said that Tuesday's meeting would be a brainstorming session between itself and the European Club Association (ECA), which represents 232 clubs from across the continent. "There is a meeting tomorrow," UEFA said in a statement to Reuters. "There is nothing secret about this brainstorming session."

UEFA said it would then meet other stakeholders, such as the players and the leagues, in the following months to "exchange ideas before concrete proposals are developed and decisions are made."

After being re-elected in February, UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin said the European body would work with the ECA to devise new tournaments which would bring a "new dimension" to European football. Ceferin promised "club competitions that are in keeping with the times, full of

excitement and intensity and open."

He said there would be no threat of a breakaway Super League as long as he was UEFA president and Andrea Agnelli — the president of Juventus — was chairman of the ECA. A report in the Wall Street Journal on Sunday said that suggestions which could be discussed including staging Champions League matches at weekends and a more closed qualifying system.

Agnelli has previously suggested replacing the current eight groups of four with four groups of eight, which would mean far more games.

European club competitions run in three-year cycles with the current one ending in 2021.

The Champions League, meanwhile, will maintain the same format introduced in 2018 which controversially saw a reduction in the number of places open to teams from Europe's smaller leagues.

The competition is dominated by a handful of elite clubs and the group stage has been marked by increasingly one-sided matches in the last few years. Last week, English champions Manchester City thumped Bundesliga side Schalke 7-0 in a last 16 second leg to win 10-2 on aggregate.

(Source: Reuters)

Teenager Andreescu stuns Kerber to win Indian Wells title



Canadian teenager Bianca Andreescu stunned three-times Grand Slam champion Angelique Kerber 6-4 3-6 6-4 to win the BNP Paribas Open and capture her first career title in Indian Wells on Sunday.

Andreescu used creative and aggressive shot-making to defeat the German despite suffering with a troublesome right shoulder and leg cramps on a hot and sunny day in the Southern California desert.

The 18-year-old dropped her racket and fell on her back when Kerber hit a backhand into the net on match point to deliver the tournament wildcard the victory.

"It wasn't an easy match. It was one of the toughest matches I've ever played," she said in an on-court interview. "It's so incredible."

Andreescu would love to follow in the footsteps of world number one Naomi Osaka of Japan, who won the tournament last year before claiming the U.S. and Australian Open titles.

"The next is a Grand Slam. Let's see where this can take me," said the unseeded teenager who is ranked 60th in the world but will rise to 24th on Monday.

"Naomi did this last year. Now to have my name in front of so many champions it means the world to me."

■ 'It's a pity'

Braun's comments come after German politician Cem Ozdemir, whose parents are Turkish, said on Sunday that he found it "inappropriate" for Ozil to invite the Turkish leader.

Ozil -- one of the world's most popular footballers on social media with 31 million followers on his official Facebook account, 19.1 million on Instagram account and 23.9 million on Twitter -- has an obligation as a role model, added Ozdemir.

Another lawmaker, Alexander Graf Lambsdorff, was equally unimpressed by his invitation to Erdogan.

"The wedding is the private matter of Mesut Ozil, but he is a world star, who people look up to, so of course it's a pity from a political point of view," Lambsdorff told newspaper Welt. Ozil has dated Gulse since 2017 and the couple announced their engagement in June 2018. The Arsenal midfielder, a third-generation German, whipped up a political storm when he was pictured alongside Erdogan last May.

Criticism intensified after the red-faced defending champions crashed out of the first round of the World Cup in Russia.

In the wake of the World Cup fiasco, Ozil announced his resignation from the national squad, saying: "I am German when we win, an immigrant when we lose".

(Source: AFP)

Sarri's stubbornness threatens Chelsea's top-four hopes

Chelsea's latest Premier League away-day collapse at Everton leaves Maurizio Sarri's side facing an uphill task to finish in the top four and secure much-needed Champions League qualification.

Languishing in sixth, the Blues trail fourth-placed Arsenal by just three points but face a much tougher run-in than the Gunners in the remaining eight games of the Premier League season.

A run of four defeats in their past five league games away from Stamford Bridge also gives little reason for hope ahead of upcoming visits to title-chasing Liverpool and Manchester United, who also lead Chelsea by a point in fifth.

A kind Europa League draw, with Slavia Prague to come in the quarter-finals before a potential last-four clash with Eintracht Frankfurt or Benfica, may now provide the easiest route to next season's Champions League, with a place in the group stage on offer for the winners of that competition.

But to emerge victorious in Baku on May 29 or stand a chance of a top-four revival, Sarri must iron out a number of repeated failings from his first season in charge.

Sarri was given the striker he desired in January with the arrival of Gonzalo Higuain.

However, the Argentine has scored just three times in 10 appearances, against lowly opposition in Huddersfield and

Fulham, with even Sarri admitting Higuain has to do more.

"He needs to improve his physical condition and mental condition," said Sarri after defeat at Goodison Park.

But the pressure is on for him to finally relent and hand Olivier Giroud league starts.

The French World Cup winner is the Europa League's top scorer with nine goals, but has made just six Premier League starts all season with Eden Hazard, the departed Alvaro Morata and Higuain all handed more time as the focal point to Chelsea's attack.

■ Lack of midfield punch

Chelsea's striker struggles have been exacerbated by a lack of goals and creativity from midfield.

Sarri's side have now failed to score in eight of 30 Premier League games.

One of Sarri's most analysed moves has been to deploy N'Golo Kante in a more advanced role to make room for Jorginho -- who followed Sarri from Napoli to west London last summer -- at the base of the midfield.

No player in the Premier League has made more passes than the Italian international's 2,554 this season, yet not a single one has provided an assist.

Kante has three league goals but often fails to provide the finish in his unfamiliar role despite getting into good positions and on-loan Real Madrid midfielder Mateo Kovacic

has yet to score for the club.

Even Ross Barkley, who started the season brightly, has not scored a league goal since October.

■ Youngsters not trusted

Given that lack of goals, one of the growing frustrations for the Chelsea faithful is Sarri's resistance to handing the home-grown talent of Ruben Loftus-Cheek and Callum Hudson-Odoi more Premier League minutes.

A loan spell at Crystal Palace last season gave Loftus-Cheek the playing time he needed to break into England's World Cup squad but he has started just once in the league all season despite being Chelsea's top-scoring central midfielder with six goals in all competitions.

The same goes for 18-year-old Callum Hudson-Odoi, for whom Chelsea rejected a reported £35 million (\$46 million) bid from Bayern Munich in January.

Hudson-Odoi has scored four times in eight Europa League appearances but has yet to start a Premier League game, with the more experienced Pedro Rodriguez and Willian trusted by Sarri.

A lack of game time is one of the reasons Hudson-Odoi was keen to leave in January and has so far refused to extend his contract beyond 2020. Sarri's current stance has done little to change his mind.

(Source: AFP)

Iran to drop tattooed players from Team Melli

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — The Iranian tattooed players have reportedly no place in Iran national football team from now on.

According to the reports, the Iranian football federation has been told it must prevent to invite the tattooed players to the national team.

The Ethics Committee of Iran's Football Federation had previously issued repeated warnings to players, describing having a tattoo as unprofessional.

Iranian authorities' sensitivity is heightened for footballers, because football is one of the most popular sports on Iranian TV — with a particularly high following among families.

The Iranian players, who have tattoos on their arms, always enter the playing field with long-sleeved tops, wear a short-sleeved shirt in their team's games.

Ashkan Dejagah and Sardar Azmoun had been summoned by the Ethics Committee of the Iranian Football Federation for revealing tattoos on their arms during Team Melli's games.

Iran considers athletes to be role models responsible for promoting "Islamic values" to the younger generation.

Iranian state media often refers to tattoos as a symbol of "Westernization" or part of a Western "cultural invasion" of Islamic society.

"Tattoos on the bodies of players is against Iranian culture and is detrimental to our society," a top official had already said.



Branko Ivankovic proud of Persepolis

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Persepolis coach Branko Ivankovic says he is proud of his team for what they have done in the last four years.

The Croatian coach took charge of the Iranian giants in April 2015 and has won two Iran Professional League (IPL) titles as well as two super cups. Ivankovic also led Persepolis to their first ever AFC Champions League final, where the Reds lost to Kashima Antlers 2-0 on aggregate.

"I think we have to be proud of what we have accomplished in the last years. We lost to Kashima Antlers but it was a great performance for Persepolis and Iran's football," the former Iran coach said in an interview

with Mehr news agency.

"Gianni Infantino attended the final match and told me 'you have to be proud of what you have done in the final match.' I think we have to take pride in showing such a great football," Brankovic added.

Ivankovic also played down reports that he has had problems with former Team Melli coach Carlos Queiroz.

The Portuguese coach parted company with Team Melli after Iran failed to qualify for the final match of the 2019 AFC Asian Cup.

"No, I don't think so. But I think Iran could have advanced to the final," he said.

Superfan Yamada dies with unfulfilled Tokyo 2020 dream

TOKYO (Reuters) — Superfan Naotoshi Yamada, famous in Japan for having been to every Summer Games since 1964, has died aged 92 with an unfulfilled dream of watching the Olympics when it returns to Tokyo next year.

Japanese broadcaster NHK reported on Monday that he died last week following heart failure.



Yamada, known to his Japanese compatriots as "Olympic Ojisan", or "Olympics Grandad", first experienced the Games when Tokyo last hosted the gathering in 1964.

He had been a colorful presence at every Summer Games since, in his distinctive gold top hat and red jacket to pair with his beaming smile.

In an interview with Reuters in October,

Yamada had expressed his desire to live long enough to see the Tokyo 2020 Games.

"It will be the culmination of all my years cheering the Olympics," Yamada had said.

Yamada's haul of flags, stamps, photographs and other items collected on his Olympic travels are on display at a gallery in his hometown of Nanto City, Toyama Prefecture.

Monchi rejected Arsenal offer in order to make Sevilla return

Monchi turned down an offer from Arsenal in order to return to Sevilla, he said on Monday, adding that he had not been approached by Real Madrid.

After leaving Roma earlier this month, Monchi had been linked with a move to the Gunners as a replacement for departed head of recruitment Sven Mislintat.

But Sevilla announced his return as their sporting director at the weekend and, speaking at a news conference on Monday, he said: "I thank Arsenal for their interest."

"It has been the club that has shown the most interest in me but, in the end, I evaluated all of the offers I had on the table and I chose the one that convinced me most."

"I had other options, and very important ones that were flashier, but I've chosen Sevilla because its sporting project convinced me."

"I want to thank everyone that contributed to my return to what I consider to be my home."

Monchi, 50, worked with Arsenal coach Unai Emery at Sevilla, with the club winning three consecutive Europa Leagues, and said he wanted to help the La Liga club grow in his second spell.

"Many people outside of Seville have told me that I've made the wrong choice, that sequels are never good," he said.

"I've evaluated all of this. I'm here not because I'm a Sevilla fan, not to save someone's skin, but because in the conversations I've had with the club president and other club executives, they have transmitted to me an idea of what Sevilla's future could be that coincides with what I believe Sevilla's future should be."

"My idea is to help Sevilla grow. I want to build a Sevilla team that can fight among the best."

Sevilla president Jose Castro said: "Monchi is a special person. He has a contract like everyone else at the club, but it's an indefinite one."

Monchi left Roma shortly after the club sacked coach Eusebio Di Francesco following their Champions League exit to FC Porto.

"I wouldn't change the two years I spent at Roma," he said. "I made a rookie mistake which was not to have got to know the club before I signed for them, and I was surprised with what I found."

"I left Roma for a simple reason -- at a certain point, the club wanted to follow a different path to the one I considered we should take and, in the end, we believed it was best to go our separate ways."

(Source: Soccer.net)

FIVB launches campaign to recycle discarded fishing nets

The World Volleyball Federation (FIVB) and marine conservation group Ghost Fishing Foundation have teamed up to collect discarded fishing nets from the oceans and recycle them into volleyball nets for local communities, the sport's governing body said.

The project, named Good Net, was launched over the weekend at Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro, where the 2016 Olympic Games beach volleyball tournament was held.

"It was really hard to learn that, in the oceans, there are so many nets that are doing so much harm out of sight," Giba, a



three-times Olympic medalist with Brazil's volleyball team, said in a statement.

"As volleyball players, nets are at the center of our game and of our joy."

About 640,000 tonnes of fishing equipment, which can trap marine wildlife, is found in the ocean every year.

Ghost Fishing, based in the Netherlands, has teams of divers working with the United Nations' Clean Seas campaign to combat marine plastic pollution.

"As divers, we care deeply about the oceans," Ghost Fishing CEO Pascal van Erp said.

"We understand just how ghost nets do a huge amount of harm to marine wildlife in places where only a tiny few can see that damage is being done."

(Source: Reuters)

AFC President congratulates Japan for claiming AFC Beach Soccer title

Asian Football Confederation (AFC) President Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa has praised Japan for their achievement after the East Asians defeated the United Arab Emirates 3-1 on penalties following a closely contested 2-2 draw in Sunday's final to clinch the AFC Beach Soccer Championship 2019 in Pattaya, Thailand.

Along with Japan and UAE, Oman sealed their spot as Asia's three representatives in the 2019 FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup which will take place in Paraguay in November this year. Oman, who will feature on the world stage for the third occasion, defeated Palestine 2-1 on penalties following a 2-2 draw in the third-place play-off just hours before Sunday's final.

The AFC President said: "On behalf of the Asian football family, I would like to congratulate Japan for their performance and consistency in Thailand. We must also praise UAE who displayed great skill in what was a thrilling final."

"Asia has a proud history on the world stage in beach soccer with Islamic Republic of Iran claiming third place in the last edition of the FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup in the Bahamas and I am confident Japan, UAE and Oman

will continue our remarkable legacy in Paraguay and build on the undeniable rise of the sport."

The AFC President also praised the efforts of hosts Pattaya, the Local Organizing Committee and the Football Association of Thailand as well as the competing AFC Member Associations for their role in growing the sport across the Continent.

Shaikh Salman added: "We had 15 teams in the 2019 competition, a notable increase from the 12 competitors from the previous edition, which further underlines the success of our Vision and Mission to provide more opportunities for Asia's teams and players to compete in top level competitions."

"I must express the appreciation to the LOC in Pattaya of the entire Asian football family, the FA Thailand and the Local Government for staging an exceptional tournament and also to our Member Associations for their unity in expanding the reach of beach soccer."

"The commendable performances from emerging teams such as Palestine, Malaysia and Afghanistan are testimony to the increasingly competitive nature and continued pro-



gress of the sport in Asia."

In the individual awards, Japan team captain Ozu Moreira (pictured above) was rewarded for a stunning campaign, winning both of the competition's major individual awards. The 33-year-old was voted the tournament's Most Valuable Player, while his nine goal-haul in Japan's six matches also saw the towering star claim the Top Goal Scorer Award, one ahead of teammate Shusei Yamauchi.

(Source: the-afc)

Iran U-23 football team beaten by Syria

TASNIM — Iran lost to Syria 2-1 as part of preparation for the 2020 AFC U-23 Championship qualification.

In the match, held behind closed doors in Tehran, Zlatko Kranjcar's side lost to Syria 2-1.

Omid Noorafkan scored Iran's only goal in the match.

Iran will start the competition with a match against Turkmenistan on March 22 in Group C in Tehran's Azadi Stadium.

Iran will meet Yemen and Iraq on March 24 and 26, respectively.

The 2020 AFC U-23 Championship qualification is an international men's under-23 football competition which decide the participating teams of the 2020 AFC U-23 Championship.

World No. 1s claim Georgia Open titles

The top-ranked players in wheelchair tennis took home the silverware at the Georgia Open on Sunday. Japan's Shingo Kunieda added the men's singles Georgia Open trophy to his list of successes while Diede de Groot retained the women's singles title.

Kunieda defeated world No. 4 Alfie Hewett of Great Britain 6-3, 6-3 in the final. In the previous rounds he also beat two other top ten players: Belgium's Joachim Gerard in the quarter finals and France's Stephane Houdet in the semi-finals.

It was Kunieda's second title of the year after winning the Melbourne Open in January.

In the women's final, Dutchwoman De Groot hold on to beat compatriot and world No. 3 Aniek van Koot 6-3, 7-5 to lift the second trophy of the year without losing any set after emerging triumphant at the Australian Open.

On her way to the final, the world No. 1 beat France's Charlotte Famin 6-2, 7-5; Germany's world Katharina Kruger 6-3, 6-0 and another Dutch player, Marjolein Buis 6-1, 6-3.

Quad singles world No. 2 David Wagner improved on his second place-finish at last year's inaugural Georgia Open to claim the title. The US player defeated South Africa's Lucas Sithole 6-2, 6-4 for his second title of the year following his Melbourne Open victory.

Kunieda, Groot and Wagner are hoping to extend their winning sequences at the Cajun Classic, the second Super Series tournament of the year, which begins on Tuesday in Baton Rouge, USA.

Full results of the Georgia Open are available on the ITF website. (Source: Paralympic.org)



Man United have no plans to move for Bale

Manchester United have no plans to move for Gareth Bale if he is made available by Real Madrid in the summer, sources have told ESPN FC.

Bale, 29, is facing an uncertain future at the Bernabeu in the wake of criticism from supporters and the return of Zinedine Zidane as coach.

Last week, Bale's agent Jonathan Barnett told ESPN FC that the winger planned to "wait and see" how things go with Zidane's return before deciding on his long-term future.

And earlier this month Barnett said Madrid fans who whistled Bale when he was substituted in the home Clasico defeat to Barcelona were "a disgrace."

Despite being under contract until the end of the 2021-22 season, Wales international Bale has been reported to be a contender to be sold as part of Madrid's efforts to raise funds for a squad rebuild.

The 29-year-old is in Manchester, training with Wales at United's Carrington base ahead of Wednesday's international friendly against Trinidad and Tobago.

But sources said United would not be registering an interest with Real due to the prohibitive cost of signing the player and his age, with their recruitment plans instead set to be focused on young and emerging talent.

United have been long-term admirers of Bale, with former manager Sir Alex Ferguson having attempted to sign him from Southampton in 2007.

David Moyes tried and failed to persuade Bale to join when he left Tottenham for Real in 2013, while the club also attempted to sign him during the reigns of both Louis van Gaal and Jose Mourinho.

(Source: ESPN)

Barcelona's Suarez out for two weeks with ankle sprain

Barcelona have said Luis Suarez will be sidelined for around two weeks after spraining an ankle in Sunday's win at Real Betis.

Suarez scored as Barca triumphed 4-1 in Seville to move 10 points clear at the top but was unable to finish the match after taking a knock to his ankle in the closing stages.

After undergoing tests at the training ground on Monday, he has pulled out of the Uruguay squad for this week's China Cup.

Uruguay face Uzbekistan in the semifinal in Nanning on Friday and then play either the final or a third place playoff against China or Thailand next Monday.

But Suarez could be back for Barca's next fixture, the Catalan derby against Espanyol at Camp Nou on March 30.

His stunning individual goal against Betis on Sunday was his 21st of the season, while he also set up the second goal of Lionel Messi's hat trick with a brilliant backheel.

The striker was one of a handful of players at the training ground on Monday as the majority of the squad departed for international duty.

Coach Ernesto Valverde has given the non-internationals the week off but is holding voluntary training sessions on Monday and Tuesday.

(Source: ESPN)

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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Get into partnership with someone who has an abundant livelihood, for he has more capital for getting rich and is more worthy for bringing good luck.
Imam Ali (AS)

Iranian troupe Titowak to perform “Divine Comedy” in Hungary

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Titowak Theater Group from Iran will perform “Divine Comedy-Inferno” at the FÉM Arts and Café in Budapest, Hungary on March 21 and 22.



A scene from “Divine Comedy-Inferno” by Iranian director Seyedahmadi are the Ebrahim Poshtkuhi. went on stage at Tehran’s Iranshahr Hall during January.

Ebrahim Poshtkuhi will direct the play, which is a loose adaptation of Dante’s “Divine Comedy”. It tells the story of a woman who is abused by her husband and brother. Maral Farjad, Majid Keshavarz, Mona Farjad and Hungarian actress Zsuzsanna Nagy are the main members of the cast for the play. EUandMore Company in Budapest and Amir Seyedahmadi are the producers of the play, which

Novels from Western literature published in Persian

C U L T U R E d e s k **TEHRAN** — American author John Steinbeck’s “The Wayward Bus” and Swedish journalist Jonas Jonasson’s novel “The Accidental Further Adventures of the Hundred-Year-Old Man” have recently been published in Persian.

Translated by Saeid Imani, “The Wayward Bus” is about a few people stuck at a bus station for a night due to some mechanical trouble with their bus, in post-World War II America.

The Persian version of the 1947 book has been published by Negah Publications in Tehran.

Jonasson’s 2018 comic novel is a sequel to his 2009 novel “The Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed out the Window and Disappeared”.

The book follows the story of Allan Karlsson and his friend Julius Johnsson, who are spending a luxurious life at a hotel in Bali, Indonesia, using the money they got from the previous book.

Translated by Zahra Bakhtiari, the book has been published by Chatrang Publications in Iran.

Photo: Front covers of the Persian versions of John Steinbeck’s “The Wayward Bus” (L) and journalist Jonas Jonasson’s “The Accidental Further Adventures of the Hundred-Year-Old Man”.

Nominees for Islamic Revolution Artist of the Year announced

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Art Bureau of the Islamic Ideology Dissemination Organization announced on Monday the nominees for the Islamic Revolution Artist of the Year.



This combination photo shows the nominees for the Islamic Revolution Artist of the Year.

Writers Mohsen Kazemi, Reza Amirkhani, Hedayatollah Behbudi, Nilufar Shadmehri and Mahnaz Fattahi, and filmmakers Mehdi Naqavian, Mohammad-Ali Bashe Ahangar, Ebrahim Hatamikia and Kurosh Zarei are among 14 cultural figures nominated for the title.

Also included are poets Mohammad-Mehdi Sayyar and Fazel Nazari, presenters Payam Fazlinejad and Vahid Yaminpur, and graphic designer and calligrapher Masud Nejabati.

Five cultural figures will be selected out of the nominees. The final winner will be announced on the last day of the Islamic Revolution Art Week, which will be held in Tehran from April 9 to 16.

Core of Iran Noruz in family: Afghan filmmaker Sahraa Karimi

By Manijeh Rezapoor

TEHRAN — Sahraa Karimi, a filmmaker, writer and photographer originally from Afghanistan, but born and raised in Tehran, says that family is the core of the Noruz celebration.

“When I was a child in Iran we celebrated Noruz like Iranians, totally like Iranians, we had Haft Seen. My father was the head of the family, so our house was full the first day of Noruz,” Sahraa told the Tehran Times in an interview in early March.

“We did not have any plans to go anywhere, we knew relatives would come to visit us. We had fruits and sweets and candies just like Iranians,” she said.

“I like the customs of the new year,” she conceded. “Whatever we wanted we had. My father always said if you are good children, then you deserve to have all these.”

“My childhood was full of paintings and decorating eggs. I was the person who had an idea to paint different eggs and my sister used to take care of sabzeh (green sprouts),” she said.

She also spoke of her excitement when she got new banknotes from relatives bearing stamps of congratulations, “I still have some of them,” she said.

“When we are children, we just think about enjoying the time,” she said, regretting that as a grown up, we are dealing with many issues and Noruz just becomes a part of those many issues.

“So Noruz must be the best one for us as a child,” she asserted.

“I have my connection with Noruz now. I don’t celebrate it the way we did in our childhood. I believe the core of the celebration of Noruz is family. My family is not here anymore. My father is dead, my mom and sister are in Canada, my brother in Afghanistan, and I am here. After leaving Tehran I only took the memories with me,” she said.

She also shared her feelings about Noruz. “It gives this feeling that when the new year starts everything will become new; it spiritually helps you become a new person and you try to recapitulate your last year and think of what you would like to be in the coming year,” she explained.

“For me, Noruz is always a new opportunity to be a better human beings,” Sahraa said.

“Noruz for me is still like what Noruz is in Iran. Of course, I respect the ceremonies in Afghanistan but the habits and traditions are different. In Iran, we have Haft Seen but in Afghanistan, we have Haft Mewa,” she added.

Haft-Seen includes seven items that begin with the Persian letter “seen”, which is pronounced in the same way as “s” in English.



Afghan filmmaker Sahraa Karimi.

Haft Mewa, which is literally translated to “seven fruits”, is a delicious, sweet, crunchy and syrupy mixture of dried fruits and nuts.

She continued that Iran is a Persian country and Noruz is its most famous cultural event, but in Afghanistan, it is only part of a large celebration, and that the largest one is Eid al-Fitr, marking the end of the holy month of Ramadan.

Sahraa moved to Slovakia at the age of 17 where she obtained her Ph.D. degree from the Film and Television Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava.

“When I moved to Slovakia I suddenly cut with everything, with the culture and those habits. But then again Noruz for me was Noruz. I have always been connected with the old culture. Wherever one goes or moves outside homeland, she/he takes part of that culture with her/him. For example, I have my book of Hafez with me everywhere, it is a kind of piece of my culture that goes with me everywhere,” she explained.

“But during those years I studied in Slovakia, maybe I did not celebrate Noruz properly, but for me the first day of spring was Noruz. I took that day off even if I had something important to do. I always told my professors and friends that today is Noruz, it is a new year for us and I want

to celebrate it,” she said.

She added that when she went to Afghanistan, she saw different sides of the celebration. In Afghanistan, they celebrate for three days.

However, she said that she is happy this year since during Noruz she is in Iran, and after all those years it is a kind of celebration again. “Maybe I will go to my friends and repeat the old things,” she added.

Sahraa is in Tehran and busy these days working on her film “Hava, Maryam, Ayesha”, a film that tells the story of three women inside Afghanistan.

“They are normal people with ordinary lives and ordinary issues. I want to be the storyteller of those stories. It is a movie I made inside Afghanistan,” she said, adding that the film is in the post-production stage in Tehran.

Sahraa is determined to submit the film to the Cannes Film Festival this year.

“When I finished university in 2013, I decided to go back to Afghanistan. I did not know why I wanted to return to Afghanistan. I did not have experience of living in Afghanistan. Of course, I am from Afghanistan. I am more familiar with Iran and its language, but I went back to Afghanistan and decided just to observe.

“I did not want to immediately make a movie and desired to know more about my culture: the language, the habits social issues, economy, culture and actually everything,” she explained of her experience in her homeland.

“I did not want to gather bits of information and from the collection of these bits of information create a story. So, for almost 4 years, I just observed and took notes. During those years, I worked with UNICEF for two years. I wanted to travel and gain experience inside Afghanistan, and the only way was to work for an international organization, otherwise, as an individual it was dangerous, especially for a woman,” she explained.

“And from those experiences, I wrote a story,” she noted.

Her feature-length debut “Afghan Women behind the Wheel” collected about 25 awards at major film festivals around the world.

Sahraa was a jury member for Eastern Vista, a section dedicated to movies from Asian and Islamic countries, at the 34th Fajr International Film Festival in 2016.

She displayed a few photos at the “Nimrouz” exhibit in Tehran along with a group of Afghan artists from all corners of the world at the Niavaran Cultural Center in November 2017.

Swedish festival to screen “Hendi and Hormoz”, “Beyond the Fence” from Iran



Zohreh Eslami acts in a scene from Iranian director Abbas Amini’s “Hendi and Hormoz”.

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — “Hendi and Hormoz” and “Beyond the Fence” from Iran will be competing in the 36th BUFF Malmö Film Festival, which will be held in the Swedish city from March 23 to 29, the organizers have announced.

“Hendi and Hormoz” directed by Abbas Amini is about an arranged marriage. The story of the film is set on the hematite-rich island of Hormoz where Hendi, a 13-year-old girl, is married off to Hormoz, a 16-year-old who is jobless and lives in poverty like

most of the rest of the island’s inhabitants. When Hendi becomes pregnant, Hormoz turns to a drug smuggler in an effort to ensure his family’s livelihood.

“Beyond the Fence” by Arman Qolipour is about Behnaz who is a really talented football player. Her dream is to play for the Iranian football team and play in the best European leagues. She trains hard and is determined but being a girl and living in a small town in Iran presents difficulties.

121 films from 40 different countries will be competing in the festival this year.

“Am I a Wolf?”, “Son of the Sea” to compete in Annecy animated film festival



“Am I a Wolf?” by director Amir-Hushang Moein.

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — “Am I a Wolf?” and “Son of the Sea” will compete in the Annecy International Animated Film Festival and Market in France, the organizers have announced.

Directed by Amir-Hushang Moein, “Am I a Wolf?” is about children who perform the familiar story of the wolf and the yearlings in school as a puppet show. The nanny goat grieving its yearlings and the angry wolf in its solitude face each other.

“Son of the Sea” directed by Abbas Jalali-

Yekta tells the story of a man lives in a house with his wife and the illusion of their son on the wall! This hallucination gradually creates complications in their lives.

The films will be screened in the Perspectives Short Films in Competition. Amelia Chiew, Zosie Golding and Fahim Arif Motahar are the members of the jury for the category.

Over 200 films have been shortlisted to screen in the official selection of the festival, which will take place in the southeastern French town of Annecy from June 10 to 15.

Netflix will cut “Bird Box” footage months after outcry

NEW YORK (AP) — Netflix will remove footage of a real fiery train disaster from its hit post-apocalyptic survival film “Bird Box” months after the streaming giant was criticized for exploiting a tragedy.

The stock footage was taken from a 2013 crash in the Quebec town of Lac-Mégantic when a train carrying crude oil came off the tracks and exploded into a massive ball of fire, killing 47 people.

Netflix licensed the footage from the stock image vendor Pond 5 and used it in “Bird Box” in an early TV news montage. The Sandra Bullock-led thriller is about monstrous entities that compel any human who sees them to quickly try to kill themselves.

Pond 5 in January said the footage “was taken out of context” and apologized. But Netflix said at the time it wasn’t



planning to cut the clip, although said it was looking at ways to do things differently moving forward.

Nexflix changed its mind and said Friday it will replace the footage with an outtake from a former TV series in the U.S. The company said it is “sorry for any pain caused to the Lac-Mégantic community.”

The mayor of Lac-Mégantic, Julie Morin, had criticized the use of the footage, calling it “a lack of respect.” She and Quebec’s culture and communications minister, Nathalie Roy, applauded Netflix’s latest move. “This result shows that by being united and pooling our efforts, everything is possible,” Roy tweeted.

Photo: This image released by Netflix shows Sandra Bullock in a scene from the film, “Bird Box.” (Saeed Adyani/Netflix via AP)