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South Pars annual gas output up 12%

TEHRAN — Production of gas in South Pars gas field (Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf) rose 12 percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1397 (ended on March 20, 2019) from its previous year, according to the managing director of South Pars Gas Company.

Hadi Hashemzadeh Farhang said it is while annual gas production in the field had experienced just seven percent rise in 1397 from its preceding year, IRNA reported.

The rise came as the result of putting new development phases of the giant gas field into operation which also let Iran to overtake Qatar in gas extraction from the joint field, the official further highlighted.

He said South Pars has 14 trillion cubic meters of natural gas and 19 billion barrels of gas condensate, which is equivalent to 50% of the country's overall reserves and 8% of the world's gas reserves. →4

EU trio seeking to appease Trump, Iran laments

TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Wednesday strongly criticized the European Union trio of Britain, France and Germany for failing to counter Washington's "economic terrorism" against Iran, saying the trio are instead turning the spotlight on the Islamic Republic's defensive missile program to appease the Trump administration.

"A year after US' unlawful abrogation

of JCPOA, Europe can't muster political will to defy US' #EconomicTERRORISM. Not even by setting up a single banking channel for humanitarian aid," Zarif tweeted.

In May last year President Donald Trump ordered U.S. withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and reimposed sanctions against Iran. →2

Iraqi PM to visit Iran on Saturday

TEHRAN — Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi will travel to Iran on Saturday, a member of his office said, Arab News reported on April 3.

Abdel Mahdi would spend two days in the Islamic republic.

He was expected to discuss "the issue of trade outside the framework of sanctions" on Iran in addition to "the rapprochement

and the convergence of views between Iran and Arab countries," the official said.

Iran is the second-largest supplier of imported goods to Iraq and also enjoys vast political influence in the country, particularly among Iraq's Shiite parties.

Iraqis credit Iran for helping their armed forces defeat Daesh in a fierce three-year battle that ravaged much of the country.

PERSPECTIVE
Hanif Ghaffari
Political analyst

Trump is still afraid of Mueller report

It is unclear whether the publication of the full and uncensored Inspector-General Mueller report would have consequences for Donald Trump, President of the United States and his entourage. Many officials in the Trump government are worried about the full publication of this report and its impact on the 2020 presidential election.

However, Trump in recent days, citing the words of his Minister of Justice! Believes that there is no ambiguity in this regard, and Mueller has acquitted him of the charge of collusion with the Russians in the presidential election of 2016.

A recent report from the New York Times clearly shows that the controversy over the report of the Mueller Inspector General in the United States has just begun!

New York Times recently reported that some of Robert S. Mueller III's investigators have told associates that Attorney General William P. Barr failed to adequately portray the findings of their inquiry and that they were more troubling for President Trump than Mr. Barr indicated, according to government officials and others familiar with their simmering frustrations.

At stake in the dispute — the first evidence of tension between Mr. Barr and the special counsel's office — is who shapes the public's initial understanding of one of the most consequential government investigations in American history.

Some members of Mr. Mueller's team are concerned that, because Mr. Barr created the first narrative of the special counsel's findings, Americans' views will have hardened before the investigation's conclusions become public.

It seems that according to the New York Times and other media sources in the United States, the Muller Inspector General's report and its impact on American electoral equations are still open.

However, there is a need for time to determine how this affair will affect the next U.S. election and its contribution to the victory or failure of any of its two traditional parties (Democrat and Republican).

The fact is that many analysts from the U.S. political and security issues believe that the Mueller Inspector's report will continue to be used as a leverage against Trump and its entourage. Undoubtedly, this will be the case in the Democratic Premier Election Campaign. →7

Will recent floods ease Iran's water bankruptcy?

By Maryam Qarehgozlou

TEHRAN — Since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year on March 21 some provinces across the country, in northern, northeastern, western and southwestern Iran were hit hard by devastating floods incurring a dramatic loss.

According to the latest statistics announced by Iran's Forensics Organization since the New Year, some 67 lost their lives in floods in provinces of Fars, Lorestan, North Khorasan, Golestan, Mazandaran, Hamedan, Khuzestan, Kerman-shah, Semnan, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad and Khorasan Razavi.

Province of Fars with 21 deaths and province of Lorestan with 15 deaths are among the areas with highest fatalities reported so far, Mehr news agency quoted Iran's Forensics Organization director Ahmad Shojaei as saying on Wednesday.

In addition to the casualties, the catastrophic floods have caused major damage to properties, destruction of crops, and loss of livestock in many provinces, especially in Mazandaran, Golestan, and Lorestan.

But despite the serious loss, many have already come to a burning question: will the tor-

rential rains quench water tension in arid and semi-arid Iran?

Precipitations set the records high

Director of National Drought Warning and Monitoring Center (NDWMC) Sadeq Ziaei told the Tehran Times on Friday that since the beginning of the current water year (starting on September 23, 2018) the whole country has received 256 millimeters of precipitation on average and this is while the average precipitation the country received over the last water year (September 2017-September 2018) amounts to 232 milliliters. →12

Zarif rejects Pompeo's flood remarks as 'demagogic'

TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Thursday that U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's remarks on devastating floods in Iran are "unprofessional, interventionist and demagogic".

Pompeo claimed on Tuesday that Tehran's response to the floods showed the level of "mismanagement in urban planning and in emergency preparedness".

"It seems that the U.S. secretary of state is unaware of the mismanagement of natural disasters in the U.S. over the past two years, and hence opines—in an unprofessional, interventionist and demagogic manner—on Iran's management of the horrific and unprecedented floods which simultaneously afflicted 24 provinces," Zarif tweeted.

"Apparently Mr. Pompeo has forgotten that the U.S. federal government itself has shown to be incapable of providing sufficient relief in many regions affected by natural disasters, which have claimed the lives of thousands of Americans, cut off electricity and other services in affected areas for days and even weeks, and forced hundreds of thousands to flee their homes," he added. →2

Saudi Wahhabism helping to spread Islamophobia: Australian prof.

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — A senior professor and political analyst based in Australia described Saudi Arabia as a "client state" for the U.S. and said Wahhabism, which is "a cult built around the Riyadh regime", is helping in spreading hatred against Muslim communities in the world.

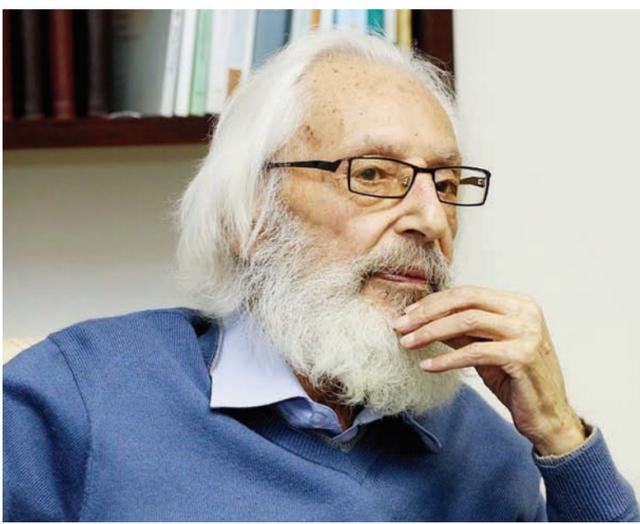
"Certainly, Wahhabism is a key tool at the root of divisions in the Middle East, helping to spread hatred against Muslim communities," Professor Tim Anderson said in an interview

with the Tasnim News Agency.

"In this respect, the Saud family, serving as a 'cat's paw' or client state for Washington, has done tremendous harm to the image of Islam in the world," he added.

Professor Tim Anderson is a distinguished author and Director of the Sydney-based Centre for Counter Hegemonic Studies. He has worked at Australian universities for more than 30 years, teaching, researching and publishing on development, human rights and

self-determination in the Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Middle East. In 2014, he was awarded Cuba's medal of friendship. He is Australia and Pacific representative for the Latin America based Network in Defence of Humanity. His most recent books are: Land and Livelihoods in Papua New Guinea (2015), The Dirty War on Syria (2016), now published in ten languages; and Countering War Propaganda of the Dirty War on Syria (2017). His next book Axis of Resistance is due out in 2019. →7



Veteran actor Jamshid Mashayekhi's funeral to start in Tehran today

TEHRAN — The funeral procession for veteran Iranian actor Jamshid Mashayekhi will begin at Tehran's Vahdat Hall today.

He will be buried in the Artists Section of Tehran's Behesht Zahra Cemetery.

Mashayekhi passed away at a Tehran hospital last Tuesday at the age of 85.

Mashayekhi, who was among the golden generation of actors of pre-revolutionary Iran, was once called by veteran actor Parviz Parastui one of the top five actors of Iranian cinema along with Mohammad-Ali Keshavarz, Ali Nasirian, Davud Rashidi and Ezzatollah Entezami.

He began his acting career in Luigi Pirandello's "The Doctor's Duty" in 1957. Gholam-Hossein Saedi hired him to act in his "Upper and Lower Case A" and he also played a role in "The Nest of Jackal and Viper" directed by Nasirian. →16

ARTICLE
Martin Love
Political analyst from North Carolina

Pity any nation that has veered from the moral messages of Islam or Christianity

Lawrence Ferlinghetti, 99, and apparently still alive, is an American poet and publisher of books who got his start as an undergraduate at the University of North Carolina, where he majored in journalism and went on to a notable career as both a writer and painter.

His heyday as a poet was in the 1960s and 70s during the Vietnam War, which he was radically opposed to as he was to so much about the developing state of American polity and mores. Some of his work was prophetic.

A part of one poem in particular from decades ago stands out, and is even more relevant today than it was when it was penned. It's worth quoting because while Ferlinghetti applied the words to the U.S., it could be well applied to most any nation that, to use an Arabic term that appears in the Holy Qu'ran, has veered off the "Siraat al-Mustaqim".

- "Pity the nation whose people are sheep
- And whose shepherds mislead them
- Pity the nation whose leaders are liars
- Whose sages are silenced
- And whose bigots haunt the airwaves
- Pity the nation that raises not its voice
- Except to praise conquerors
- And acclaim the bully as hero
- And aims to rule the world
- By force and by torture...
- Pity the nation oh pity the people
- Who allow their rights to erode
- And their freedoms to be washed away..."

These words encompass the mindset and actions of the Trump Administration, which has been in the process of attempting (unwittingly or not) to undermine not just the U.S., but the stability of the entire world and in particular, of late anyway, countries like Venezuela and Iran.

And it can be argued that Trump (and Pompeo, Bolton, Pence and Abrams) is as responsible as anyone for the recent slaughter of 50 Muslim worshippers at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. →7

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Cleric urges nation to help the flood-stricken

POLITICS TEHRAN — Mohammad-Hassan Aboutorabi Fard, the interim Friday prayer leader of Tehran, on Friday urged the nation to allocate part of their money to the flood-stricken people, Fars reported.

"The people [should] allocate some percent of their salary to resolve the problem of the flood-stricken so that a great national action takes place," Aboutorabi Fard said, addressing worshippers.

Since March 19, most of Iran has been affected by flash floods triggered by the heaviest downpours in the country in at least a decade. Over 60 people have been killed in the natural disaster, which has also forced tens of thousands to evacuate their homes.



Soleimani: Arbaeen mokebs to aid flood victims

POLITICS TEHRAN — Major General Qassem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC Quds Force, has said in a message that the mokebs (tents) which provide Arbaeen pilgrims with services are to be put up in flood-stricken areas in Khouzestan and Lorestan provinces for a month in order to help the people.

Citing the problems affecting the people after severe floods hit many parts of the country, General Soleimani said he and other military commanders feel responsible to share their experiences and provide services for those affected by the natural disaster, Mehr reported on Friday.

At least 60 people have died and hundreds more injured in severe floods that affected large parts of Iran, especially the west and southwestern provinces.



Zarif backs accession to FATF

POLITICS TEHRAN — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has backed accession to Palermo Convention and CFT as part of the FATF requirements, saying that not joining the FATF could harm Iran's national interests.

The administration believes that jointing the two conventions is beneficial for Iran's national interests, Zarif said, ILNA reported on Friday.

"From the perspective of the administration and security bodies, which have followed the details of these two conventions and other FATF requirements for two years, not only such measures won't harm national interests, but not joining them is troublesome," the chief diplomat added.



Amano reaffirms Iran's commitment to nuclear deal

POLITICS Yukiya Amano, chief of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), on Tuesday reaffirmed Iran's compliance to its commitments under the 2015 nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"In my regular reports to the board I have stated that Iran is implementing those commitments," Amano insisted, Press TV reported.

"Since January 2016, the agency [IAEA] has been verifying and monitoring Iran's implementation of its nuclear-related commitments under the JCPOA," the IAEA chief added.

Amano further noted that IAEA inspectors have full access to all locations required to verify the deal's implementation.



ICJ writes to U.S. on lifting unilateral sanctions

POLITICS TEHRAN — The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has written a letter to the United States on removal of unilateral sanctions against Iran, Tehran's legal representative to the ICJ Mohsen Mohebi said on March 29.

Speaking with IRNA, Mohebi said Washington is required to report to the court by May 15 about its measures to fulfill ICJ's orders on provisional measures addressed to the United States.

The U.S., in accordance with its obligations under the 1955 Treaty of Amity, shall remove any impediments arising from the measures announced on May 8, 2018 to the free exportation of medicine, foodstuffs and spare parts, equipment and associated services necessary for the safety of civil aviation to the territory of the Islamic Republic of Iran.



Luxembourg court rejects U.S. request to seize Iran assets over 9/11

POLITICS On March 27, a Luxembourg court rejected a U.S. request to compensate victims of the twin tower attacks by seizing assets from Iran, a country an American court has accused of involvement in the event that killed thousands.

The Luxembourg court said that the rule the U.S. court used to repeal the immunity of the defendants, namely the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Central Bank of Iran, is not compatible with international law.

U.S. request fails to meet international law criteria, the court said.

Leader calls for 'pick-up in production' in New Year

POLITICS TEHRAN — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has offered congratulations to the Iranian nation on the Persian New Year, calling on the government and the nation to boost production in the country.

In his televised message to the nation broadcast on the morning of March 21, the Leader hailed the nation's "fortitude and prudence" against the enemies' conspiracies.

Ayatollah Khamenei designated the new Iranian calendar year of 1398 as the year of "Pickup in Production."

Iran will continue to strengthen defense power

Addressing a large gathering of people in Mashhad on the first day of the New Year, the Leader reiterated that Iran will continue to strengthen its defense power regardless of the pressure by the West.

"We will continue to strengthen defense infrastructure and will not give in to pressure by others," he said.

Leader likens European financial mechanism to a 'bitter joke'

Ayatollah Khamenei also pointed to the European financial mechanism for trade



Ayatollah Khamenei addresses audience in Mashhad, March 21.

with Iran, likening it to a "bitter joke".

"Europe's financial channel introduced recently is more like a bitter joke," he remarked.

After months of delay on January 31,

France, Germany and Britain finally announced the creation of INSTEX, a special purpose vehicle aimed at facilitating legitimate trade between European economic operators and Iran. However, experts and

diplomats say the mechanism lack teeth.

The Leader said Europeans did not live up to their commitments under "different pretexts" since the Trump administration withdrew the United States from the 2015 nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"They (Europeans) had to resist in regard to the JCPOA but they, under different pretexts, did not do their duties and repeatedly insisted that Iran should not pull out of the JCPOA, but the performance of themselves was in fact exit from the JCPOA," he added.

Ayatollah Khamenei says does not know any country 'worse' than Saudi Arabia

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Leader called Saudi Arabia the worst country that he has ever known in the world.

"I do not know any country worse than the Saudi government," the Leader said. "The Saudi government is corrupt, despotic and also oppressive."

Saudi Arabia has been leading an atrocious war against Yemen since March 2015. The United Nations has announced that the war on Yemen has caused the greatest human disaster in the modern history.

Blocking foreign aid to Iranian flood victims is an 'unprecedented crime': Rouhani

POLITICS TEHRAN — In reaction to U.S. sanctions moves which have hampered foreigners to send humanitarian aid to flood victims in Iran, President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday that in such a situation in which large parts of Iran has been affected by flood preventing international aid to people is an "unprecedented crime".

"It is an unprecedented crime to prevent foreign aid to enter Iran and to make our Red Crescent unable to receive help from other countries," he said during a meeting with ministers, executive managers and members of the parliament.

He urged the Foreign Ministry and legal institutions to pursue the issue.

Elsewhere, he said that people, government, armed forces,

relief agencies and all organizations did a great job in helping to remedy the situation.

Unprecedented floods have wreaked havoc in large parts of Iran, killing more than 57 people and disrupting major transportation and communications. The most affected provinces are Golestan in the north and Lorestan, Kermanshah, Ilam and Khuzestan in the west and southwest.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Tuesday that U.S. sanctions have hampered relief support from foreign donors.

In October 2018, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ordered that the United States had to halt the unilateral sanctions it has re-imposed on "humanitarian" supplies.



Leader appoints Marvi as custodian of Astan Quds Razavi

POLITICS TEHRAN — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has appointed Hojjatoleslam Sheikh Ahmad Marvi as the new custodian for the Astan Quds Razavi, an organization that manages the holy shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad.

In a decree released on Thursday, Ayatollah Khamenei said Marvi would replace Hojjatoleslam Seyyed Ebrahim Raeisi.

Raeisi was appointed as the new head of

the Judiciary on March 7. The Leader offered the new custodian a list of guidelines for the post.

"Firstly, I see it fit to remind you of all the points mentioned in the decree appointing Mr. Raeisi, including seizing this opportunity to serve and use all that is in your power for this purpose to serve the pilgrims and the residents of the city, particularly the weak and the needy; exploit the cultural capacities of the Astan Quds; preserve and protect the unique

architectural, calligraphic, and decorative art collection in the entirety of the buildings and spaces; protect the abundant and rich donations; manage economic and service organizations; and finally benefit from the spirituality of this shining sun, with purity and hard work," the Leader said in the decree published by the khamenei.ir.

He added, "Secondly, I strongly recommend collaboration with the Hawzah (Seminary) and the clergy of the holy city

of Mashhad. Thirdly, cooperating with government officials and assisting them accordingly is also recommended. Finally, seeking devoted and revolutionary experts and employing them in different positions is another key recommendation that has always been insisted upon."

Marvi was in charge of a department at the Leader's Office responsible for contacts and communications with seminars before being appointed to the new post.

Ayatollah Khamenei praises flood response

POLITICS TEHRAN — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Wednesday praised the people's cooperation in helping one another as large parts of the country that has been affected by flash floods.

"Thanks be to God, people's efforts in this incident has been wonderful," the Leader told a gathering of people, officials and foreign envoys on the occasion of Mab'ath, which marks the appointment of Islam's Prophet Muhammad to his divine mission.

The Leader said it "is not the first time" that Iranian rush to each other's help in times of need.

"In all natural disasters, the Iranian nation entered the scene vigorously. This spirit of solidarity and mobilization of the people is extraordinary, which also motivates and helps the government."

However the Leader said "the main tasks are left to be done" when reconstruction of



houses and revitalization of farms will begin.

Unprecedented floods have caused great damages in Iran, killing more than 57 people and disrupting major transportation and communications. 24 provinces out of 31 have been affected by floods and landslides.

The Leader, as commander in chief, has ordered Armed Forces to join the national relief campaign. President Hassan Rouhani also called back his cabinet from New Year holidays to speed up the rescue operations.

Zarif rejects Pompeo's flood remarks as 'demagogic'

1 -> Since March 19, large parts of Iran have been affected by flash floods. At least 57 people have died and hundreds more injured in severe floods.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Wednesday praised national display of solidarity with the victims of the floods, assuring the nation that the flood damage will be entirely compensated once the rescue efforts are completed.

Zarif derides Pompeo's claims of flood assistance as 'fake news'

Also in a tweet on Tuesday, Zarif dismissed as "fake news" claims by Pompeo that Washington is seeking to contribute to relief operations in Iran, saying the "Iranian Red Crescent can't receive any funds due to illegal U.S. sanctions".

On Tuesday, Pompeo claimed that the United States "stands ready to assist and contribute to the International Federation

of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which would then direct the money through the Iranian Red Crescent for relief."

Earlier on Tuesday Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said U.S. sanctions have hampered relief support from foreign donors.

In October 2018, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ordered that the United States had to halt the unilateral sanctions it has re-imposed on "humanitarian" supplies.

On Monday, Zarif stressed that the economic restrictions, which Washington is deploying against Tehran under the banner of "maximum pressure", are violating the related UN and ICJ regulations.

Zarif has said the U.S. is waging "economic terrorism" against Iran by employing restrictive measures that are troubling the relief efforts targeting flood-stricken people across the country.

EU trio seeking to appease Trump, Iran laments

1 -> In a letter to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres on Tuesday, the European trio claimed that Iran's launch of a space vehicle and the unveiling of two new missiles in February were "inconsistent" with the Resolution 2231 endorsing the JCPOA. According to the Press TV, the three countries, which are signatories to the JCPOA along with the U.S., Russia and

China, asked Guterres to "report fully and thoroughly on Iranian ballistic missile activity" in his next report, which is expected in June.

In his tweet, Zarif added, "E3 are instead busy appeasing @realDonaldTrump by pressuring UN over our defensive capabilities."

Iran says neither its space program nor its missile

launches are banned under Resolution 2231.

The resolution, adopted in July 2015, terminated the provisions of previous UN Security Council resolutions against Iran, some of which had imposed restrictions on Iranian missile activities. The resolution merely calls on Iran "to refrain from any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons."

Analyst writes to U.S. on flood-hit Iranians

POLITICS TEHRAN — Yuram Abdullah Weiler, a U.S.-based international affairs analyst who occasionally writes for the Tehran Times, has written an open letter to U.S. officials urging them to open a way for relief aid for those hit by floods in Iran.

His letter reads as follows:
Dear Official:

Floods have inundated vast areas of Iran creating an environmental disaster, the scale

of which necessitates an international humanitarian response. As your constituent, I am asking you to press the Trump regime to take action to relieve U.S. sanctions so that humanitarian aid can reach the Iranian people.

Many Iranians are in desperate need of assistance now; flooding has killed dozens, displaced tens of thousands and cut off many areas of the country from relief efforts.

Due to unilateral U.S. sanctions, the Iranian Red Crescent - Iran's affiliate of the Red

Cross - has been cut off from global banking transactions, thus hindering their relief efforts. For the same reason, the United Nations has experienced complications that "affect the UN response and the accountability of UN to deliver the appropriate support."

Urgent relief to alleviate humanitarian catastrophes like the flooding currently afflicting Iran requires effort that should not be impeded by geopolitical self-interest. To show it is on the side of the Iranian people

as claimed, the current Washington regime must take clear steps to broaden humanitarian exemptions to U.S. sanctions. Please urge key administration officials to take immediate action to expedite humanitarian assistance to Iran.

Sincerely,
Yuram Abdullah Weiler
700 Sombbrero Court
Las Cruces, New Mexico 88007
303 377 8231

Syria warns Israel: All options on table for liberating Golan

Venezuelan FM meets top Syrian officials in Damascus

Damascus warns Tel Aviv not to go too far in its occupation of Syria's Golan Heights, saying all options remain on the table for liberating the strategic region, which has been under Israeli occupation for more than five decades.

The stern warning was delivered by Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallem on Thursday during a joint presser with his Venezuelan counterpart, Jorge Arreaza, in the capital, Damascus, the official SANA news agency reported.

Syria, Muallem said, is strongly determined to protect its sovereignty and liberate "every inch" of the country, which has been, since 2011, the scene of a crisis fueled by the U.S., Israel and their allies with the aim of toppling the Damascus government.

The top diplomat further blasted the U.S. for becoming the sole country in the world to recognize Syria's Golan Heights as "Israeli territory" last month, in a move that marked a break from decades of U.S. foreign policy on the occupied Syrian land and flew in the face of UN resolutions.

Muallem, however, downplayed the impact of Washington's dramatic policy shift on Golan and said it would only produce a "single effect," which is further "isolation" for the U.S.

He further emphasized the Syrian nation's right to its land and said "every inch of the occupied Syrian territories will be liberated."

"Syria will liberate the occupied Golan by all means, and all choices are on the table," Muallem stressed. "Israel mustn't go [too] far... We have the will and determination."

Israel seized the Golan Heights from Syria in the closing stages of its 1967 Six-Day War with Arab countries, which also saw the regime occupy the Palestinian territories of the West Bank, East Jerusalem al-Quds and the Gaza Strip.

Tel Aviv unilaterally annexed the Golan Heights in 1981 in a move not recognized internationally.

Later that year, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution, declaring Israel's annexation of occupied Golan as "null and



void and without international legal effect." Resolution 497 also called on the regime to rescind its action.

Israel, however, refused to comply with that resolution and began dotting the resource-rich rocky plateau with settlements in defiance of global criticism.

Since 2011, when foreign-backed militancy broke out in Syria, the Tel Aviv regime has been using the occupied part of Golan to prop up the terrorists operating against the Assad government.

Washington's decision to recognize Israel's annexation of Syrian land came only months after the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution, urging Tel Aviv to withdraw from the entirety of the Syrian Golan Heights.

Muallem further criticized the Arab League from failing to adopt a firm stance on Washington's contentious U-turn on Golan at its recent summit in Tunisia.

"Is it possible that the Arab Summit issues a statement on the occupied Syrian Golan

which is weaker than Britain's stance?"

Elsewhere, Muallem said, despite the many gains the Syrian army -- backed by Iran and Russia -- has made on the battlefield against terrorists, "Our war on terrorism hasn't stopped and the conspiracy against us is continued through the military assault and the economic siege with the aim of prolonging the crisis in Syria in the interest of 'Israel'."

He further dismissed as mere lies President Donald Trump's claims that the U.S. would withdraw its military forces from Syria in the coming months.

"The U.S. administration lies with regard to pulling out its troops, which are illegitimately deployed in Syria, and it isn't our duty to teach them to be honest," Muallem said.

■ "Venezuela, Syria targeted by U.S. plots of similar nature"

Arreaza, in turn, hailed the Venezuelan and Syrian nations for standing firm in the face of "imperialism" and "U.S. conspiracies."

"I agree with Minister al-Muallem that the U.S. conspiracy targeting our countries

is one," said the top Venezuelan diplomat.

"Venezuela will benefit from Syria's experience in the war against terrorism [and] in facing the U.S. conspiracy," said Arreaza, adding that there are states at the Security Council that are in cahoots with the U.S. in its attempts to destabilize Venezuela.

He emphasized, however, that his country will successfully foil all the U.S.-backed plots of the country's right-wing opposition.

Venezuela is in the midst of a political crisis, which broke out in late January after opposition politician Juan Guaido abruptly declared himself "interim president" of Venezuela and urged elected President Nicolas Maduro to step down, in what Caracas has termed as a U.S.-backed coup attempt.

Guaido's bid was quickly recognized by the U.S. followed by dozens of its regional and European allies. Washington slapped sanctions on the Venezuelan oil sector in support of the opposition figure and went as far as threatening a military option to topple Maduro.

Later on Thursday, the Venezuelan foreign minister sat down with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus, where the two sides discussed bilateral ties and the developments unfolding in Venezuela.

President Assad said he was confident that the Venezuelan nation would successfully emerge from the political crisis.

The American policy of sanctions and interference is not restrained to Venezuela and has affected all the independent states of the world, he added.

Assad said "what is going on in Venezuela is similar to what happened in Syria and that [is aimed] at imposing hegemony on states and controlling their independent decision."

For his part, Arreaza thanked President Assad for standing by Venezuela in its efforts to restore stability to the country.

"The tools and steps used by the states, which are enemies of Venezuela, are similar to those used in Syria for igniting war in it," the Venezuelan minister stressed.

(Source: Press TV)

British PM asks EU to delay Brexit until June 30

Prime Minister Theresa May asked the European Union on Friday to delay Britain's departure from the bloc until June 30, with the extension ending earlier if Parliament approves her Brexit deal.

May also told EU Council president Donald Tusk in a formal letter that Britain would start preparing for its participation in European Parliament elections in case it is still a member of the bloc when they begin on May 23.

"The United Kingdom proposes that [the extension] should end on June 30 2019. If the parties are able to ratify before this date, the government proposes that the period should be terminated earlier," May's letter said.

Downing Street released May's request moments after a senior EU official told AFP that Tusk was proposing to postpone Brexit day by up to a year, also pending Parliament's approval of the EU-U.K. Withdrawal Agreement.

The current deadline is April 12, which has already been pushed back once from March 29 because of the U.K. Parliament's failure on three occasions to back the deal May signed with the other 27 EU leaders in December.

In her letter, May said she wanted to make sure that Britain left the bloc after 46 years in an orderly manner, with an agreement that could help unwind intricate political, security, diplomatic and economic ties.

"The government's policy has always been and remains to leave the European Union in an orderly way, and without undue delay," May wrote.

"The government agrees that leaving with a deal is the

best outcome," she said.

May is racing against the clock in a desperate bid to get her deal approved in time for an EU leaders' summit in Brussels on Wednesday, when a formal decision on any extension will be made.

EU nations must give unanimous backing to any new deadline.

Some, like French President Emmanuel Macron, have said they want to hear a clear reason from May as to why Brexit should be delayed yet again -- a move that would add to uncertainties weighing on business across the bloc.

May's team is currently holding negotiations with leaders from Britain's main opposition Labour Party in a bid to secure enough votes to push through her deal on a fourth attempt.

But the talks so far have failed to clinch a breakthrough. "I don't think we are quite at the point where the government can indicate where their concessionary strategy might apply," deputy Labour leader Tom Watson told BBC radio.

May's letter said that should she fail to find a compromise with Labour, the two sides "would instead look to establish a consensus on a small number of clear options on the future relationship to be put to [Parliament] for a series of votes to determine which course to pursue."

But she conceded that this process could take time and will probably force Britain to take part in European Parliament elections at the end of May, nearly three years after U.K. voters opted to leave the bloc.

If Britain "were still a member state of the European



Union on May 23 2019, it would be under a legal obligation to hold the elections," May wrote.

"The government is therefore undertaking the lawful and responsible preparations for this contingency."

(Source: AP)

Afghanistan: Taliban encircles government compound, kills dozens

Afghan officials say a massive Taliban siege of a government compound and army base in western Badghis province, now in its second day, has killed at least 12 more troops.

Friday's fatalities bring the overall casualty toll for the assault in the district of Bala Murghab to at least 32.

Many more have been wounded and the area is cut off.

Mohammad Nasir Nazari, a provincial council member, said that according to soldiers inside the base, roughly 2,000 Taliban fighters are involved in the attack.

He said there are about 600 Afghan troops and members of the security forces inside and they are running out of ammunition, water and food.

Abdul Waris Sherzad, a district chief, said the locals are disappointed that NATO forces and the Afghan government have not helped, an assertion the defence ministry disputes.

Sherzad said in a statement on Thursday the Taliban had killed 36 members of the government forces and captured several security checkpoints in attacks that began on Wednesday night.

More than 30 Taliban fighters were also killed, according to Jamshed Shahabi, spokesman for Badghis' provincial governor.

Taliban spokesman Qari Yousef Ahmadi



said the group attacked from four directions, capturing five checkpoints.

Afghanistan's defence ministry, in a series of tweets, said its forces chose to "tactically retreat" from the checkpoints to prevent civilian casualties.

The ministry said it called in multiple air attacks on Taliban positions and had airlifted reinforcements and supplies to Badghis.

On Friday the defence ministry said Af-

ghan forces had forced the Taliban to retreat from some checkpoints and that all key areas remained under its control.

■ Recurring hotspot

The district of Bala Murghab has been a recurring hotspot of fighting in the past two months, and officials have previously warned that it could fall to the Taliban without reinforcements.

The armed group controls or contests

nearly half of Afghanistan, the most since US-led forces removed it from power in 2001, according to the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction.

Fighting in Afghanistan has escalated before the usual spring season, as both sides seek to increase leverage in talks on a peace settlement.

Fighting between armed groups has also intensified. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said in a statement on Thursday that attacks on Taliban positions by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or ISIS) on March 23 resulted in 21,000 people being displaced in Kunar and Nangarhar provinces.

The latest round of peace talks between U.S. and Taliban officials wrapped up last month, with both sides citing progress.

But despite the talks, the Taliban stages near-daily attacks on Afghan forces, inflicting staggering casualties. The armed group refuses to talk directly with the government in Kabul, considering it a U.S. puppet.

The Taliban says it is fighting to expel foreign troops, topple the Western-backed Afghan government and restore its version of law.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

UN chief flies to eastern Libya to meet commander as fighters close in on capital

Libyan force allied to Tripoli takes 145 prisoners from Eastern forces

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was flying to eastern Libya Friday to meet commander Khalifa Haftar, whose forces are advancing on the capital Tripoli now held by an internationally recognized government.

Troops allied to the Tripoli government moved more vehicles from the western city of Misrata to Tripoli to defend the capital against Haftar's forces, who are allied to a parallel administration in the east, residents said.

The advances by the Benghazi-based eastern forces marked a dramatic escalation of a power struggle that has dragged on in Libya since the overthrow of Moammar Gadhafi in 2011.

They also surprised the United Nations, whose Secretary-General Antonio Guterres had been in Tripoli this week to help organize a reconciliation national conference later this month.

Guterres, who spent the night in the heavily fortified UN compound in a Tripoli suburb, will also go to Tobruk, another eastern city, to meet lawmakers of the House of Representatives, also allied to Haftar.

"My aim remains the same: avoid a military confrontation. I reiterate that there is no military solution for the Libyan crisis, only a political one," Guterres wrote on Twitter.

Later on Thursday, the assembly president, Aguila Saleh, issued a statement welcoming the offensive, a spokesperson said.

Since Gadhafi's downfall, the country has been divided between the UN-backed government in Tripoli and the parallel administration allied to Haftar.

Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) forces on Thursday took Gharyan, a city some 80 km south of Tripoli after brief skirmishes with forces allied to Tripoli-based Prime Minister Fayez al-Serraj.

But the LNA did not succeed in taking a checkpoint west of the capital in a bid to close the coastal road to Tunisia, Tripoli's main artery. An armed group allied to the LNA withdrew overnight from the so-called Gate 27, 27 km west of Tripoli, which was abandoned in the morning, a Reuters reporter said.

The renewed confrontation is a setback for the United Nations and Western countries which have been trying to mediate between Serraj and Haftar, who met in Abu Dhabi last month to discuss a power-sharing deal.

The conference the United Nations is helping to organize is aimed at forging agreement on a road map for elections to resolve the prolonged instability in Libya, an oil producer and a hub for refugees and migrants trekking across the Sahara in the hope of reaching Europe.

Haftar enjoys the backing of Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, which see him as bulwark against extremists and have supported him militarily, according to UN reports.

Haftar's biggest opponent is Misrata, a western city that is home to strong forces which also have aircraft, analysts say. It is known for resisting old regime figures, including in 2011 when forces loyal to Gadhafi besieged it for three months.

Meanwhile, the Kremlin said it was not helping Libyan military forces loyal to eastern commander Khalifa Haftar push westward and that it supported a negotiated political settlement to Libya's problems that ruled out any new bloodshed.

The Kremlin was commenting after UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he was flying to eastern Libya to meet Haftar, whose forces a day earlier began an offensive to take control of the capital currently held by an internationally recognized government.

"We are closely following the situation in Libya," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. "Of course we consider that the most important thing is that [military] operations there do not lead to bloodshed. The situation should be resolved peacefully."

Asked if Moscow was backing Haftar's new westwards push, Peskov said it wasn't and was not involved in current events.

(Source: Daily Star)

U.S. citizens among 7 arrested in new Saudi crackdown

At least seven writers and bloggers, including two U.S. citizens, have been arrested in Saudi Arabia, activists on said Friday, despite heightened international scrutiny of the kingdom's human rights record.

London-based human rights group ALQST identified the U.S.-Saudi dual nationals as writer and doctor Bader al-Ibrahim, and Salah al-Haidar, the son of Aziza al-Yousef -- a high-profile activist who was temporarily released last week but remains on trial along with other women's rights campaigners.

ALQST said all those arrested were "writers and social media bloggers previously engaged in public discourse on reforms."

There was no immediate comment from Saudi authorities. The kingdom already faces international criticism over the ongoing trial of 11 women, some of whom allegedly faced torture and sexual abuse during nearly a year in detention, on charges that include contact with foreign media, diplomats and human rights groups. Most of the women were detained last summer in a wide-ranging crackdown against campaigners just before the historic lifting of a decades-long ban on female motorists.

(Source: AFP)

Algerian intelligence chief sacked

Algeria's intelligence chief, Athmane Tartag, has been removed from his post, private Ennahar television station reported on Friday.

Tartag, a retired army general, was an ally of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who resigned on Tuesday in the face of mass protests. His reported departure from the job came after Algeria's military carefully managed Bouteflika's exit in an attempt to defuse mass protests calling for democratic reforms.

Algeria is now in the hands of a caretaker government -- which is unlikely to mollify anger on the streets -- until elections in three months and with no successor in sight.

(Source: Reuters)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	185281.1
IFX	2405.33

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,216 rials
GBP	55,324 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$69.26/b
WTI	\$62.16/b
OPEC Basket	\$69.12/b
Gold	\$1,290.05/oz
Silver	\$15.21/oz
Platinum	\$906.15/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Iran, Pakistan likely to sign FTA draft this month

A Pakistani English language news daily reported that Iran and Pakistan are likely to finalize the draft for Free Trade Agreement (FTA) during the two-day talks on April 22-23 to be held in Islamabad.



The report said the technical teams from the both sides are likely to approve the draft for FTA. According to a senior official at Indian Commerce Ministry, both sides have worked a lot on the draft for FTA and now they are inclined to give green signal to the free trade deal.

At present, the trade between the two neighboring countries is underway under Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) which was signed in 2006 and effective in 2007. (Source: IRNA)

'Norway ready to develop cage culture in Iran'

Head of Norwegian Veterinary Association expressed readiness for promoting fish farming, known as cage culture, in Iran.



The Norwegian official made the remarks in a meeting with his Iranian counterpart Alireza Rafi'pour held on the sidelines of 2019 OIE Global Conference on Aquatic Animal Health.

The event was held in Santiago, Chile on April 2-4. Rafi'pour appreciated Norwegian Veterinary Association for holding training courses on fish farming and diagnosing fish disease in Iran.

He also called for more cooperation between Iran and Norway in expanding fish farming up to 300,000 tons in Iran.

Meanwhile, the Norwegian official expressed his willingness for more cooperation with Iran in hygienic, diagnosis, monitoring, equipment and facilities fields. (Source: IRNA)

European markets open slightly higher on U.S.-China trade optimism

European stocks opened slightly higher Friday morning, amid progress in the latest round of U.S.-China trade talks.

The pan-European Stoxx 600 was up around 0.1 percent shortly after the opening bell, with most sectors and major bourses in positive territory.

Market players monitored the latest developments in trade discussions between Washington and Beijing. President Donald Trump said Thursday that the two countries were making swift progress in talks, adding "we'll know over the next four weeks" whether an agreement can be reached.

Chinese Vice Premier Liu He, meanwhile, said that new consensus had been reached by both parties on the text of a deal, official state news agency Xinhua reported.

Despite the positive news around trade, investors grew nervous amid worries over a potential economic slowdown in the euro zone.

Data released on Thursday showed that German factory orders fell at their sharpest rate in two years. Meanwhile, a Bloomberg report said the Italian government is set to cut its 2019 GDP (gross domestic product) forecast to just 0.1 percent — significantly lower than a 1 percent expansion forecast in December.

Elsewhere, traders will likely keep a close watch on upcoming U.S. non-farm payrolls due to be released in the afternoon. Other notable data releases for Friday include German industrial production and euro zone retail sales. (Source: CNBC)

South Pars annual gas output up 12%

On March 17, phases 13, 22, 23 and 24 of developing South Pars gas field were officially inaugurated by President Hassan Rouhani. Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh also accompanied the president in the inauguration ceremony.

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

With the inauguration of these phases, for

the first time Iran's gas production from the giant South Pars will exceed that of Qatar.

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

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

The huge field, which Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf, covers an area



of 9,700 square kilometers, 3,700 square kilometers of which, called South Pars, are in Iran's territorial waters. The remaining 6,000 square kilometers, called North Dome, are situated in Qatar's territorial waters.

Floods in Iran leave behind up to \$1.1b damage to agriculture sector

TEHRAN — Iranian Ministry of Agriculture estimates the damages caused by the recent floods to the country's agricultural sector at 46.6 trillion rials (near \$1.1 billion) based on the official exchange rate of 42,000 rials to a dollar, Mehr news agency reported on Thursday.

According to the director general of the Crisis Management and Reduction of Hazards Bureau with the Ministry of Agriculture, of the mentioned damages, Golestan Province in northern Iran took the heaviest hit by 34 percent followed by Khuzestan Province by 13 percent as well as Mazandaran, Lorestan, and Fars provinces with 12 percent, 11 percent and six percent respectively.

As the latest estimations by the ministry show, since occurrence up to April 2, over 15,000 livestock were also reported to be killed in the floods.

"49 percent of the damages caused by the recent floods has been to the farming sector, 22 percent to water, soil and infrastructure subsectors, 16 percent to the horticulture sector and 13 percent to livestock, poultry and aquatic sectors.

About 1,900 cities and villages have been affected by floods and exceptionally heavy rains since March 19.

Late March, IRNA quoted an official as saying that the agriculture sector in the northern province of Golestan suffered loss of 10.9 trillion rials (nearly \$260 million) due to the recent devastating flood in the region.

The flooding also hit 17 cities in province of Khuzestan and 9 cities in Lorestan.

The government has assured citizens, and especially flood-affected farmers, that all losses will be compensated.

Value of trades at IME rises 52% in a year

TEHRAN — The value of trades at Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) rose 52 percent in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20, 2019) from its previous year, Tasnim news agency reported.

As reported, the worth of trades at three markets of IME, i.e. physical market, derivatives market and financial market, hit 1.786 quadrillion rials (about \$42.5 billion) in the past year.

Over 24.84 million tons of commodities valued at 884.3 trillion rials (about \$21.05 billion) were traded at the physical market of IME, showing seven percent fall in the amount and 77 percent rise in the worth of trades year on year.

IME, a commodities exchange located

in Tehran, was founded in 2006. IME trades in agricultural, industrial and petrochemical products in the spot and futures markets. It is mainly a domestic or regional market with the aim to become more international in the future.

As of 2014, about one fourth of IME's commodities were exported. IME offers a variety of services, including providing access to the initial offering of commodities, pricing for Iran's Over-the-Counter (OTC), secondary markets and end users, providing a venue for government sales and procurement purchases, facilitating a trading platform and user interface, providing clearing and settlement services, risk management, technology services, and training of market participants.

India engaged with U.S. on Iranian oil imports

TEHRAN — India says the country is engaged with the Trump administration on the issue of extending the waiver on imports of oil from Iran as the waiver expires next month, ND TV reported on Thursday.

In November, the U.S. granted a six-month waiver to India, China, Greece, Italy, Taiwan, Japan, Turkey and South Korea to continue importing oil from Iran.

The temporary waiver ends on May 2.

"We are engaged with the U.S. The important thing is that we will continue our engagement with the U.S. on the issue," India's Ministry of External Affairs spokesman Raveesh Kumar said during a media briefing.

India had won the exemption from the U.S. sanctions after it agreed to cut oil imports from Iran.

In May last year, the U.S. brought back sanctions on Iran after withdrawing from the

Nuclear deal which was struck in 2015. The U.S. has told India and other countries to cut oil imports from the Persian Gulf nation to "zero" by November 4 or face sanctions. However, the U.S. granted a six-month waiver to India and seven other countries to buy oil from Iran.

India, which is the second biggest purchaser of Iranian oil after China, has since then restricted its monthly purchase to 1.25 million tons or 15 million tons in a year (300,000 barrels per day), down from 22.6 million tons (452,000 barrels per day) bought in 2017-18 financial year, sources said.

India, the world's third biggest oil consumer, meets more than 80 percent of its oil needs through imports.

Iran was India's seventh biggest oil supplier in January, as compared with its position as third-biggest a year ago before the reimposition of sanctions.

Tehran to host Iran-Iraq business forum

TEHRAN — An Iran-Iraq business forum is planned to be held in Tehran on the sidelines of Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi's two-day visit to Iran on Saturday and Sunday, IRNA reported.

As reported, the forum will be attended by some members of Iranian and Iraqi chambers of commerce.

Earlier on March 10, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani visited Iraq at the official invitation of that country's president and prime minister at the head of a high-ranking delegation.

In the first day of Rouhani's high profile visit to Iraq, an Iran-Iraq business forum was held in the capital city of Baghdad.

According to a report by the portal of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA),

the event was attended by several senior officials from both sides including President Rouhani, Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi as well as the two countries foreign ministers along with heads of the two countries chambers of commerce and representatives of private companies.

During the event, the two sides called for further expansion of the trade ties between the two countries and President Rouhani and Adil Abdul-Mahdi delivered speeches addressing various trade related issues.

The two sides also inked five MOUs aimed at the expansion of bilateral cooperation in various sectors.

The documents were signed by senior officials of the two countries in the presence of President Rouhani and Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi.

Global outlook takes more hits as central banks stay patient

The first week of the second quarter brought more bad news for the global economy and further evidence that central bankers are hitting pause — or even rewind — on their tightening plans. Still, amid the darkening outlook, progress in trade talks are providing a glimmer of hope.

Check back later on Friday for U.S. nonfarm payrolls data, which probably will show that employers added 177,000 workers last month after a dire 20,000 in February.

Here's our weekly wrap of what's going on in the world economy.

Clouds gather

The World Trade Organization became the latest body to slash its outlook, cutting its global trade growth projection to the lowest level in three years as it cited the impact of rising commercial tensions and tariffs. On a more local level, Italy is preparing to downgrade its forecasts, Germany's five leading research

institutes now see the nation's economy expanding by less than half the rate previously expected this year, while the Asian Development Bank cut its estimates for India and Southeast Asia and the World Bank slashed its forecast for Latin America. That's ahead of the IMF's new set of predictions next week, with Christine Lagarde already warning that global growth has lost momentum, leaving the economy in a "precarious" position.

More immediate data points also made for grim reading. A report in the UK showed the huge services sector shrank for the first time in more than 2 1/2 years, highlighting the damage Brexit turmoil is inflicting on the economy, while in the U.S. retail sales fell and the euro area's factory slump intensified, even as services came in stronger than anticipated at the end of the first quarter.

Central banks hit pause

As our comprehensive global wrap shows,

policy makers around the world are responding to the bleaker outlook by taking to the sidelines or even becoming dovish again. The Reserve Bank of India led the way this week, delivering its second successive interest rate cut and saying it stands ready to use all tools available to it to ensure liquidity in the banking system. The prospect of an extended period of low rates is worrying some European Central Bank officials, while Bank of England Governor Mark Carney has his own reasons for caution, saying that the risk of a no-deal Brexit is now "alarmingly high." Meanwhile in the U.S., there is some concern that the Federal Reserve risks stoking asset bubbles with its new-found eagerness to fan inflation.

Trade-talk progress

Amid the gloom, there is some optimism that one obstacle to growth may be lifted. China and the U.S. claimed progress in Washington talks to end their trade war, with President Xi

Jinping pushing for a rapid conclusion and President Donald Trump talking up prospects for a "monumental" agreement, though a final deal may still be some weeks away. Drafts of the agreement being crafted would give Beijing until 2025 to meet commitments on commodity purchases and allow American companies to wholly own enterprises in the Asian nation, according to people familiar with the talks.

In less positive news, European Union ambassadors put off giving the green light for trade talks with the U.S. as France continues to withhold its consent. Meanwhile, the Trump administration is examining options for shutting entry points to the U.S. from Mexico in case the president follows through with his threat to close the border, a risk that's this week pushed the price of one Mexican delicacy up by the most in a decade. (Source: Bloomberg)

Trump says U.S.-China trade deal may be reached in four weeks

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Thursday the United States and China were close to a trade deal that could be announced within four weeks, while warning Beijing that it would be difficult to allow trade to continue without a pact.

The two countries are engaged in intense negotiations to end a months-long trade war that has rattled global markets, but hopes of a resolution soared after both sides expressed optimism following talks in Beijing last week.

Speaking to reporters at the White House at the start of a meeting with Chinese Vice Premier Liu He, Trump said some of the tougher points of a deal had been agreed but there were still differences to be bridged.

"We're getting very close to making a deal. That doesn't mean a deal is made, because it's not, but we're certainly getting a lot closer," Trump said in the Oval Office.

"And I would think with, oh, within the next four weeks or maybe less, maybe more, whatever it takes, something very monumental could be announced."

Trump said he would hold a summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping if there were a deal.



Xi assured Trump that text of the China-U.S. trade deal could be finalized soon, in a message conveyed by Liu He.

According to state-run news agency Xinhua, Liu He told Trump that Xi believed under his and Trump's leadership, China-U.S. relations will make new and greater progress.

Xi said that in the past month or more, the two sides' trade teams had maintained close contact and "achieved new and

substantive progress on issues in the text of two countries' trade agreement".

"I hope the two sides' trade teams can continue working in the spirit of mutual respect, equality, and mutual benefit to resolve each other's concerns, and finish negotiations on the text of the China-U.S. trade agreement soon," Xi said to Trump through Liu.

Keeping leverage

Trump declined to say what would happen to U.S. tariffs on \$250 billion worth of goods as part of a deal. China wants the tariffs lifted, while U.S. officials are wary of giving up that leverage, at least for now.

Asked about the benefits of an agreement for China, Trump said: "It's going to be great for China, in that China will continue to trade with the United States. I mean, otherwise, it would be very tough for us to allow that to happen."

Goods trade between the United States and China, the world's two largest economies, totaled \$660 billion last year, according to U.S. Census Bureau data, consisting of imports of \$540 billion from China and \$120 billion in exports to China. (Source: Reuters)

Oil prices dip amid economic concerns, but on track for weekly gain

Oil prices fell on Friday, with Brent slipping away from the \$70 mark reached the previous day, pulled down by worries about progress in the U.S.-China trade talks.

International benchmark Brent futures dropped 15 cents, or 0.2 percent, to \$69.25 a barrel by 0455 GMT, having touched \$70.03 in the previous session, the highest since Nov. 12.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude was down 1 cent at \$62.09. The contract fell 36 cents in the previous session, having hit \$62.99 on Wednesday, its highest since Nov. 7.

Weighing on prices are concerns that an economic slowdown could dent fuel consumption, traders said.

The United States and China, the world's two biggest oil consumers, could be close to a deal to end their trade dispute though some hurdles remain.

U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday said the two sides were "very close to making a deal," though the United States remains hesitant to lift \$250 billion in tariffs that China is seeking to have removed.

Prices for thermal coal and natural gas, the main power generation fuels, have already fallen sharply amid a marked slowdown in



consumption.

Still, Brent is heading for a second week of gains, while WTI is on track for a fifth consecutive weekly rise.

Brent has gained nearly 30 percent this

year, while WTI has risen nearly 40 percent, underpinned by production cuts and U.S. sanctions against Iran and Venezuela.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and producer allies

such as Russia, together known as OPEC+, agreed to cut output by 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd) this year to prop up prices.

Consultancy Rystad Energy said ongoing OPEC-led supply cuts would support oil prices towards the second half of this year and into 2020.

"We retain our bullish stance for the second half of 2019 and first half of 2020 as we anticipate OPEC+ to extend production cuts through 2019, while we also expect bullish oil market effects due to the introduction of IMO 2020 regulations on sulfur content in marine fuels," said Bjornar Tonhaugen, head of oil market research at Rystad.

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) will mandate all shippers use fuel with a reduced sulfur content, resulting in a sharp increase in diesel consumption and the use of low-sulfur fuel oil.

Somewhat undermining the OPEC-led efforts to prop up the market is surging U.S. oil production, which according to official data rose to a record 12.2 million bpd last week.

As a result, U.S. crude oil stockpiles soared last week, the Energy Information Administration said on Wednesday.

(Source: Reuters)

Key OPEC oil producer Libya is on the brink of war as general orders forces into Tripoli

Libya's eastern military leader has ordered his forces to march on Tripoli, sparking concerns that open war could soon break out between the main political factions in a key oil-producing nation.

The OPEC member state has been riven by conflict since the fall of dictator Muammar Qaddafi in 2011. For much of that time, General Khalifa Haftar has held the country's east, drawing support from Egypt and the United Arab Emirates and serving as a foil to the United Nations-recognized government in the capital of Tripoli.

The two sides have been engaged in UN-sponsored power-sharing talks. But on Wednesday, Haftar's Libyan National Army unexpectedly advanced towards Tripoli. Skirmishes between the LNA and forces loyal to Prime Minister Fayez al-Seraj have since been reported, including in the city of Gharyan south of Tripoli. Earlier, it remained unclear whether Haftar intended to bring the west under his grip or merely increase his leverage ahead of a national conference later this month. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who is in Libya to meet with leaders, called for calm and restraint.

But the order to enter Tripoli came in the early evening in Libya in a voice recording from Haftar posted online, the Associated Press reported. The general told his troops only to raise their weapons "in the face of those who seek injustice



and prefer confrontation and fighting," according to AP.

"Those who lay down their weapons are safe, and those who raise the white banner are safe," he said.

This year, Haftar's LNA forces have already sought to bring order to the restive southern oil-producing region. But a campaign to take Tripoli could be even more grueling, says Hamish Kinnear, senior analyst for the Middle East and North Africa at Verisk Maplecroft.

"Our base case is that the LNA will soon find itself bogged down in heavy fighting near Tripoli," Kinnear said in an email briefing. "Unlike its recent advance in the south, the LNA will face more determined resistance from larger and better organized militias in the western region."

(Source: CNBC)

U.S. oil and gas M&A deal values crash in q1 2019

Drillinginfo, the leading energy SaaS and data analytics company, reported today that U.S. oil and gas M&A deal values have plunged to a record 10-year low in the first quarter of 2019. A slump that began in late 2018 has carried over into the New Year and the \$1.6 billion in Q1 deals is down 91 percent from Q4 2018, and down 93 percent compared to Q1 2018. The slump follows the \$82 billion in deals in 2018 that set a four-year record high.

"The market for upstream deals came to a halt in late 2018 with the combined pullback in oil prices and equities," said Drillinginfo M&A Analyst Andrew Dittmar. "Since then, oil has rebounded by 20 percent and E&P stocks are up 15 percent, albeit with nearly all those stock price gains taking place in early January. However, deals haven't returned in a meaningful way and we believe that is being largely driven by Wall Street," said Dittmar.

Remaining consistent with Drillinginfo analysts predictions at the start of the year, a confluence of factors drove deal values down, including the rapid 40 percent drop in oil prices in late 2018. The primary contributing factor appears to be Wall Street's pressure to deliver on free cash flow and weak equity and debt markets available to fund deals. Meanwhile, private equity - which has in recent cycles stepped in as an opportunistic buyer to take advantage of pullbacks by public E&Ps - has largely sat on the sidelines.



The Drillinginfo analysts continued by highlighting that the lack of buying enthusiasm appears to be changing the game plan for would-be sellers. While there are significant assets for sale, perhaps most notably BP's major push to sell non-core U.S. properties, some companies are using "soft" marketing processes that only reach out to a few, select potential buyers. This is particularly true for private equity-backed E&Ps, which have historically been selective in choosing their entry and exit points. While some smaller positions may be sold or merged into larger portfolio companies, these firms have no intention to give away their prime positions in major plays during a down market. The inflection point, when positive, sustainable free cash flow is reached, remains the key for the U.S. shale business.

(Source: globenewswire.com)

Venezuela blackouts cut oil output by half during March

Power failures that plunged Venezuela into darkness for much of March also briefly slashed the country's crude production by half, according to people familiar with the situation.

Rolling blackouts across much of the country that started on March 7 paralyzed most of the country's oil wells and rigs, which have slowly come back online. Oil output averaged less than 600,000 barrels a day during the blackouts, the people said, who asked not to be identified because the information isn't public. For the full month, daily production was 890,000 barrels, according to a Bloomberg survey of officials, analysts and ship-tracking data.

The loss of production due to the blackouts deals another blow to Venezuela's oil industry,

already reeling from years of mismanagement and U.S. sanctions that removed its biggest customer. The nation's crude output, one of the few sources of cash for Nicolas Maduro's regime, has tumbled by two-thirds since before PDVSA workers went on strike in December 2002.

Near the Orinoco basin in the East, where four out of every five barrels is pumped, heavy tar-like oil has begun to clog pipelines and tanks after the heating system lost power, according to Wills Rangel, a former PDVSA board director and president of the United Workers Federation of Oil, Gas and Related Derivatives of Venezuela. Cleaning or removing the pipes could take months, he said.

"Damage caused by the blackouts at the Orinoco Belt oil fields is substantial," Rangel

said in an interview.

Because of the blow to Orinoco Belt production, a huge drop will be reflected in the March numbers Venezuela will report to OPEC, Rangel said. During the blackouts, production was down to a level similar to Venezuela's January 2003 reported production to OPEC, which plunged after the PDVSA strike against then-president Hugo Chavez.

The Orinoco Belt area hasn't recovered fully from the electricity blow and is currently producing about 300,000 barrels a day, he said.

While pumping oil from fields in the Orinoco Belt requires some electricity, the bigger power demand comes from the upgraders -- facilities that convert the extra-heavy oil to more commercial blends -- located some

300 kilometers away in the north near the coast. The country's four upgraders are still working to restart.

"If PDVSA restores power at full to all its four upgraders, jointly owned by Chevron, Total, Equinor and Rosneft, it can have an impact on the national grid," Rangel said.

Upgraders will only have total power once the state run utility allows it, Rangel said. The flow of electricity from the national grid needs to be stabilized before it can bring power back to other high-demand services such Caracas's subway and water pumping systems. In the fields, oil wells and pumps are expected to be connected under a government-ordered power rationing plan that's in effect.

(Source: Bloomberg)

One-third of world's power plant capacity is now renewable

One-third of the world's installed electricity generation capacity is from renewable sources, according to the latest industry statistics.

The data compiled by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) shows that two-thirds of the power capacity added around the world in 2018 was from renewables. Wind and solar accounted for 84 percent of that total.

2018 was characterized by a spate of solar and wind pricing breakthroughs. Falling interest rates for investors, ongoing technology improvements and regulatory frameworks that encourage competition among would-be developers have all played a part. Fossil fuels have been frequently undercut by renewables. Pipelines of subsidy-free projects are building up in the UK, Spain, throughout the Middle East with China dipping its toe in as well. The direction of travel is clearly set.

The geographical distribution of the new plants includes developing and developed economies but it is the former leading the way. The three fastest growing regions were Oceania, Asia and Africa. Asia also became the first terrawatt region, just, with IRENA's figures putting installed



renewable capacity at 1,024GW. More than two-thirds of that is in China.

"Through its compelling business case, renewable energy has established itself as the technology of choice for new power generation capacity," said IRENA Director-General Adnan Z. Amin. "The strong growth in 2018 continues the remarkable trend of the last five years, which reflects

an ongoing shift towards renewable power as the driver of global energy transformation.

"Renewable energy deployment needs to grow even faster, however, to ensure that we can achieve the global climate objectives and Sustainable Development Goals," said Amin. "Countries taking full advantage of their renewables potential will benefit from a host of socioeconomic benefits in addition to decarbonizing their economies."

Offshore wind capacity has doubled since 2015 but only represented around 4.4GW of the 171GW of renewable power plant deployed in 2018. The concentration of offshore wind remains firmly in Europe (~80 percent).

Solar was the runaway leader of the pack adding 94GW in 2018 to 49GW of wind, on- and offshore.

Half of the world's total installed capacity is currently hydropower but China was the only nation to make substantial hydro additions last year. Bioenergy the 'best of the rest' adding 6GW.

Amin's comments on the report were among his final duties at IRENA before handing over the reins to the Italian diplomat Francesco La Camera.

(Source: Forbes)

Saudi Arabia threatens to ditch dollar oil trades to stop 'NOPEC': sources

Saudi Arabia is threatening to sell its oil in currencies other than the dollar if Washington passes a bill exposing OPEC members to U.S. antitrust lawsuits, three sources familiar with Saudi energy policy said.

They said the option had been discussed internally by senior Saudi energy officials in recent months. Two of the sources said the plan had been discussed with OPEC members and one source briefed on Saudi oil policy said Riyadh had also communicated the threat to senior U.S. energy officials.

The chances of the U.S. bill known as NOPEC coming into force are slim and Saudi Arabia would be unlikely to follow through, but the fact Riyadh is considering such a drastic step is a sign of the kingdom's annoyance about potential U.S. legal challenges to OPEC.

In the unlikely event Riyadh were to ditch the dollar, it would undermine its status as the world's main reserve currency, reduce Washington's clout in global trade and weaken its ability to enforce sanctions on nation states.

"The Saudis know they have the dollar as the nuclear option," one of the sources familiar with the matter said.

"The Saudis say: let the Americans pass NOPEC and it would be the U.S. economy that would fall apart," another source said. Saudi Arabia's energy ministry did not respond to a request for comment.

A U.S. state department official said: "as a general matter, we don't comment on pending legislation."

The U.S. Energy Department did not respond to a request for comment. Energy Secretary Rick Perry has said that NOPEC could lead to unintended consequences.

■ Dollar hegemony

NOPEC, or the No Oil Producing and Exporting Cartels Act, was first introduced in 2000 and aims to remove sovereign immunity from U.S. antitrust law, paving the way for OPEC states to be sued for curbing output in a bid to raise oil prices.

While the bill has never made it into law despite numerous attempts, the legislation has gained momentum since U.S. President Donald Trump came to office. Trump said he backed NOPEC in a book published in 2011 before he was elected, though he not has not voiced support for NOPEC as president.

Trump has instead stressed the importance of U.S.-Saudi relations, including sales of U.S. military equipment, even after the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi last year.

A move by Saudi Arabia to ditch the dollar would resonate well with big non-OPEC oil producers such as Russia as well as major consumers China and the European Union, which have been calling for moves to diversify global trade away from the dollar to dilute U.S. influence over the world economy.

Russia, which is subject to U.S. sanctions, has tried to sell oil in euros and China's yuan but the proportion of its sales in those currencies is not significant.

Venezuela and Iran, which are also under U.S. sanctions, sell most of their oil in other currencies but they have done little to challenge the dollar's hegemony in the oil market.

However, if a long-standing U.S. ally such as Saudi Arabia joined the club of non-dollar oil sellers it would be a far more significant move likely to gain traction within the industry.

(Source: Reuters)

Australian oil exports to China set to rebound as Fuhaihuang seeks condensate

The sharp downturn in Australia's crude oil exports to China will likely reverse over the coming quarters, as a new petrochemical complex in Fujian province has expressed strong interest in various low sulfur ultra-light crude grades produced in Australia.

Australia's exports of crude and other refinery feedstocks to China totaled 7.32 million barrels in 2018, down 31 percent from 10.62 million barrels the previous year and down 59 percent from 17.97 million barrels in 2016, Department of the Environment and Energy data showed.

This year got off to a dismal start, with the Oceania producer exporting around 347,000 barrels to Asia's biggest oil consumer in January, down 48 percent month on month and down 71 percent from the same period a year earlier, latest data from the department showed.

Australia's faltering heavy sweet crude production and Chinese independent refiners' growing preference for Brazilian heavy crude supplies in recent years have significantly reduced Australian oil flows to the giant Asian importer over the past several years, industry sources said.

However, China's renewed interest in Australia's ultra-light crude could help revive the trade flows going forward, with Fuhaihuang Petroleum and Petrochemical showing an affinity for Oceania condensate grades in recent trading cycles.

S&P Global Platts previously reported that Fuhaihuang bought a combined total of at least 2.5 million barrels of various Australian condensate grades including Wheatstone, North West Shelf and Pluto for loading in February and March.

Some of the condensate cargoes have already been delivered to the Chinese end-user. Platts vessel tracking software cFlow showed that a Portuguese-flagged Aframax vessel Nordmarlin arrived at Gulei port in southern Fujian March 1, after loading from the port of Ashburton in Western Australia over February 16-17.

State-run PetroChina had chartered the vessel that carried around 75,000 mt of Wheatstone condensate, Beijing-based trade sources with knowledge of the matter told Platts.

Reflecting the recent string of Australian spot cargo trades and shipping fixture reports, the export volumes to China may show signs of recovery from late Q1 data onwards, Singapore-based light crude and condensate traders said.

The Department of the Environment and Energy is expected to release February Australian oil and gas trade statistics later this month.

■ African competitors

Australia may need to fend off competition from African condensate suppliers in its quest to expand the Chinese market share, as Fuhaihuang has also been showing strong interest in cargoes from Equatorial Guinea and Nigeria.

The Chinese buyer recently issued a spot tender seeking a cargo of either Asia Pacific or African condensate for delivery to Gulei port in May.

The company was heard to have bought in its previous tenders two cargoes of Equatorial Guinea's Alba condensate and 600,000 barrels of Nigerian Escravos condensate for delivery in March-April, Platts reported earlier.

(Source: Platts)

Assessing the election in Ukraine



Zelenskiy

Poroshenko

By Reuben F. Johnson

Results in Ukraine's first round of presidential balloting yielded no surprise with TV actor and comedian Viktor Zelenskiy placing first with 30 percent of the vote. Instead, the surprise was his margin over the sitting president, Petro Poroshenko, who received about 16 percent. Ukraine's constitution requires a winner receive more than 50 percent of all ballots cast, so these two candidates will be the only contenders in a final vote on April 21. Mr. Zelenskiy is favored to win election to the five-year term.

At 41, Mr. Zelenskiy is 12 years younger than Mr. Poroshenko and has no political experience. What he does have is what every politician wants: extensive name recognition. His popularity as a national TV personality, which is still where many Ukrainians get both their news and entertainment, has given him a significant margin — particularly among the youngest segment of the electorate.

In the category of "you cannot make this up," Mr. Zelenskiy's most recent TV role has been in a sitcom titled "Servant of the People," where he plays the part of a man who accidentally becomes the president of Ukraine. It is part of the appeal that had almost one-third of the country's voters selecting him out of a field of 39 candidates.

Mr. Poroshenko came to office in a snap election in March 2014, after the previous president, Viktor Yanukovich, fled the country during the Maidan Revolution.

There were initially hopeful expectations. He was a successful businessman, he had served in more than one of the previous Ukrainian governments — including stints as foreign minister, minister for trade and economic development, and head of the National Security and Defense Council — and was a known entity to EU and U.S. politicians.

But, with the 2014 invasion and occupation of Crimea by Russia and the subsequent onset of a Moscow-backed separatist war in the eastern Donbass region, the public began to question why Mr. Poroshenko would not divest himself of his business interests in Russia. He has made several unspecified promises of an imminent dramatic announcement of these assets being sold off, but neither the announcement nor these steps toward divesting himself of these enterprises have ever materialized.

Last September, the president said, "I had business in Russia before the war. But the war changed everything. And now I want everyone to hear that Poroshenko has no business in Russia, it is out of question."

However, his critics claim that he continues to maintain numerous business ties to Russia through a spider-web type conglomerate of various interconnected companies and off-shore arrangements.

Zelenskiy as comedy star

One of the outlets for some of the president's strongest critics, and the same channel in which Mr. Zelenskiy appears as a comedy star, has been the 1+1 TV channel.

The station is majority-owned by companies connected to Igor Kolomoyskiy, a powerful oligarch who has been de facto exiled to Israel by Mr. Poroshenko. The businessman and president are bitter rivals, which has caused this election to be characterized as the "battle of two oligarchs" — Mr. Poroshenko, and Mr. Kolomoyskiy using Mr. Zelenskiy as his proxy.

The three-week period of campaigning leading up to the runoff has already begun in such a manner that almost excludes the possibility of the contest being in any way gentlemanly or judicious.

Mikhail Fyodorov, who is the head of Mr. Zelenskiy's digital strategy, told the press, "I am going to destroy him (Poroshenko). He's a marauder." Much of Mr. Zelenskiy's support among youth can be credited to his campaign's use of Internet-based channels and clever image-making. Mr. Poroshenko shot back, declaring that "fate has pitted me against Kolomoyskiy's puppet."

Mr. Poroshenko had promised that if re-elected, he would secure Ukraine's membership in NATO that the country would take back the occupied regions of Crimea and the Donbass, and that corruption would be eliminated. His supporters warn that an inexperienced personality like Mr. Zelenskiy becoming president jeopardizes the credibility of Ukraine's political institutions and could eliminate the possibilities for membership in NATO. Conducting a war against Russia is another task that they question the TV comic's capability to carry out.

But Mr. Poroshenko's critics state that the corrupt administration over which he has presided make these objectives problematic at best.

A wholesale house-cleaning

Eliminating the corruption which still plagues the country five years after a revolution to end corruption, they continue, requires a wholesale house-cleaning of the main governmental and presidential administrative apparatus.

Charges of corrupt arrangements against Mr. Poroshenko's allies involving pocketing of large chunks of the defense budget have been partially responsible for Mr. Zelenskiy receiving the strongest support in those Eastern regions of the country that have been invaded. Moscow-backed proxy forces are being aided by Russian "contract soldier" Special Forces troops — and the public at large in general and the population in those regions in particular are tiring of the conflict. They are also resentful of what they see as an on-going five-year war that seems to be more about profiteering from the conflict than bringing it to an end.

Mr. Zelenskiy will have to mobilize enough supporters in all regions of the country in order to be able to overcome a far-more entrenched network nationwide that supports the incumbent.

If elected, the next hurdle will be forming a government that does not just end up with the usual suspects to the posts of prime minister and other senior posts. It is Mr. Zelenskiy's unknown quality and simply the fact that he is different that has made him popular.

"Every Ukrainian has his own idea of who Zelenskiy is," said one Ukrainian political commentator. That very asset that has propelled him to a spot where he is one step away from being the next president could disappear quickly if he ends up being defined as the same type of politician that Ukrainians are so unsatisfied with — and for now are hoping he is not.

(Source: washingtontimes.com)

The U.S. and President Trump 'are 100 percent behind' us

By Peter Müller, Christoph Schult

In an interview, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg discusses recent tensions between the Trump administration and its European partners in the alliance, Germany's military spending and what China's growing military power means for the trans-Atlantic community.

■ Mr. Stoltenberg, one of your predecessors, the first NATO Secretary General Lord Ismay, said that NATO was there to "keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in and the Germans down."

A: My main message is this: NATO is good for Europe and North America. That's why we have to stand together. And: NATO is the strongest alliance in history because we change when the world changes.

■ We're not quite as optimistic about the state of the alliance. U.S. President Donald Trump is raising doubts about his solidarity with the alliance, Russia is stationing new medium-range weapons and with China a new military power is emerging beyond the scope of the trans-Atlantic alliance. Is the world a more dangerous place today than it was when NATO was founded?

A: The world is less predictable today. During the Cold War, we had hundreds of thousands of soldiers ready for action in the East and the West and tens of thousands of nuclear warheads. This confrontation between NATO and the Warsaw Pact was very dangerous, but at the same time also very predictable. Today we have fewer soldiers, fewer nuclear weapons and the Warsaw Pact is history. But we are experiencing a new uncertainty.

■ NATO proved incapable of foreseeing the rise of the terrorist organization Islamic State ...

A: ... or the annexation of Crimea by Russia. That's exactly what I'm talking about. We need to prepare ourselves for the unexpected. NATO helps us to prepare for surprises.

■ The only problem is that the behavior of some allies has also become unpredictable — first and foremost that of Donald Trump. How often do you check Twitter each day for White House news?

A: I use Twitter, but I don't only follow Mr. Trump. I do not deny that there are disagreements between the NATO member states. Take trade and climate policy, the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project and the nuclear agreement with Iran. At the same time, we can see that North America and Europe are working more closely together in NATO than they were a few years ago. Despite all the differences, there are new multinational NATO battlegroups in the eastern part of the alliance, and the U.S. is strengthening its presence in Europe.

■ But deterrence isn't based exclusively on soldiers and military equipment — it also has to do with the opponent believing the alliance will stick together at the decisive moment. And every new Trump tweet raises fresh doubts.

A: No. The U.S. government and President Trump have not been lacking in clarity: They are 100 percent behind NATO, and they show it with their deeds. Since Donald Trump became president, NATO military spending for Europe has risen by 40 percent. The last American tank left Europe in 2013, but now the U.S. is back with an armored brigade — because the security situation has worsened following Russia's annexation of Crimea. At the same time, the U.S. insists that the burden



be shared more equitably. Although the economic strength is roughly the same, the U.S. spends more than twice as much on defense as the Europeans.

■ Trump's criticism is mainly directed at Germany. Has the federal government officially informed you yet that Germany will not be keeping its promise to spend 1.5 percent of economic output on defense in 2024?

A: First of all, I welcome that Germany is increasing its defense budget: from around 35 to 42 billion euros between 2014 and the present. That's an important step. Moreover, in their national plan for NATO, the German government has pledged to increase military spending by more than 80 percent within a decade. Germany's economy is big, so every tenth of a percent more for defense is a big step.

■ So, let's be clear: As long as the German government doesn't inform you otherwise, you expect Berlin will stick to the pledged 1.5 percent?

A: Of course. I assume Germany will keep its promises, and I see that defense spending is to be further increased in the current draft budget. I understand that it is harder for a government to spend money on defense than on roads, schools and hospitals. But we are not increasing our defense spending to please President Trump — it's out of our own European interest. We see a stronger Russia, we see terrorists at our borders and we have to fear there will be cyberattacks.

■ Long-time NATO observers say the alliance has two problems: an American one and a German one.

A: No, that's not how I see it at all. I see that Europe and the United States are cooperating more on security issues. Germany leads NATO troops in Lithuania, participates in monitoring the airspace in the Baltic states, is deployed in Afghanistan and trains soldiers in Iraq. NATO's strength is that it works well together despite all its differences.

■ One answer to the lack of preparedness to spend a lot of money on the military is that Europeans are working together more closely on defense. French President Emmanuel Macron is calling for a European army and says that Europeans need to be able to defend themselves even without the U.S.

A: I support the Europeans when it comes to their joint defense. I welcome, for example, the close cooperation between Germany and the Netherlands with the joint brigade, which

is happening under the auspices of NATO. But we must avoid a situation in which European efforts merely copy NATO's efforts or are even seen as an alternative to NATO. European unity cannot replace trans-Atlantic unity, especially after Brexit, at which point 80 percent of NATO's defense spending will come from countries that are not members of the EU.

■ Because Trump continues to sow doubts about his solidarity to the alliance, the idea has been circulating to extend the umbrella of the French nuclear arsenal to Germany and Europe. How do you feel about that idea?

A: The French have a clear view that these weapons are French weapons. Anything else would be speculation.

■ Do you understand why Germany's center-left Social Democratic Party has a tough time spending more money on the military? As a politician in the youth organization of Norway's Social Democrats, you were also involved in anti-NATO politics ...

A: ... on the contrary! As a young Social Democrat, I defended the alliance like no other. When I became head of the Norwegian youth wing of the Social Democrats in the 1980s, they were opposed to NATO. When I left, they were for it. My role models were Willy Brandt and his Ostpolitik ...

■ ... meaning change through rapprochement.

A: Exactly. Like Brandt, I did everything I could later as Norwegian prime minister not to isolate Russia. As prime minister, I reached agreements with Russia to extract oil and gas in the Barents Sea. This was not directed against NATO, rather, it succeeded because of NATO. The alliance provided a platform for the dialogue with the Russians.

■ But it looks less and less like that today. NATO has sharply criticized Russia repeatedly for violating the INF treaty banning medium-range nuclear weapons in Europe. But the Russians don't care. How great is the danger?

A: The INF treaty between Russia and the USA is of existential concern to the security of Europe, because medium-range missiles are built to strike Europe, not the U.S. We've been trying for six years now to get the Russians to comply with the treaty again. Unfortunately, the result is clear: There are no new American missiles in Europe, but there are new Russian missiles. These weapons are dangerous. They are mobile, difficult to discover and they can reach European cities without significant

warning time. This lowers the threshold for the possible use of nuclear weapons in a conflict. We continue to call on Russia to come back into compliance, but we are also preparing for a world without an INF treaty. In that case, NATO's response to the new Russian missiles will be measured and defensive. Let me be clear: We have no intention of stationing new land-based nuclear missiles in Europe.

■ NATO members like Lithuania have warned that Russia could interfere in the European election campaign. How great do you consider this danger to be?

A: Free and fair elections are the basis of every democracy. It is therefore extremely important that we protect democratic institutions. Any attempt to influence the European elections through hacker attacks, propaganda or other forms of interference is unacceptable. We have to be vigilant.

■ Is NATO sufficiently armed against Russian cyberattacks?

A: NATO has invested a lot in defense against cyberattacks. For example, we exchange real-time information on cyberattacks with NATO members and the EU. But the best weapon against disinformation is our free society. We respond to propaganda with facts, not propaganda. One of the best instruments for protecting our democratic institutions is a free and independent press. Your work prevents governments from undermining confidence in our democratic institutions.

■ The Soviet Union, even at the peak of its power, was never an adversary playing at eye level with the U.S. economically. That's different with China today. How is China changing NATO and its tasks?

A: We have to assess the consequences of China's rising power. There is no doubt about that. China is a growing economic power, but also a military one. With the exception of the U.S., no country in the world spends more on arms than China. The Chinese are developing capabilities that they can use worldwide — new weapons systems, new missiles, and they are not bound by the INF treaty. It's not a question of NATO expanding in the direction of the South China Sea, to the contrary: The Chinese are getting closer to us. They perform naval maneuvers in the Mediterranean Sea, the Baltic Sea and the far north.

■ China could leave the West trailing behind on future-oriented issues like artificial intelligence. Chinese companies want to get involved in the construction of new 5G mobile networks. Is the U.S. right to see this as a threat to its security?

A: It is up to the member states to decide on which firms they award investment contracts and with which countries they conduct trade. We respect national decisions, but also point out that these decisions could have consequences for our security. That's why we have agreed on standards in NATO to ensure a secure telecommunications and energy infrastructure, and we are also discussing this with the EU.

■ Can NATO operate with mobile networks that are being set up by the Chinese company Huawei, which has close ties to the state?

A: Some NATO member states, including the U.S., are very concerned about Huawei setting up the networks of NATO members, and have expressed their views accordingly within NATO. We take these concerns very seriously.

(Source: Spiegel)

Donald Trump is trying to kill you

By Paul Krugman

There's a lot we don't know about the legacy Donald Trump will leave behind. And it is, of course, hugely important what happens in the 2020 election. But one thing seems sure: Even if he's a one-term president, Trump will have caused, directly or indirectly, the premature deaths of a large number of Americans.

Some of those deaths will come at the hands of right-wing, white nationalist extremists, who are a rapidly growing threat, partly because they feel empowered by a president who calls them "very fine people."

Some will come from failures of governance, like the inadequate response to Hurricane Maria, which surely contributed to the high death toll in Puerto Rico.

Some will come from the administration's continuing efforts to sabotage Obamacare, which have failed to kill health reform but have stalled the decline in the number of uninsured, meaning that many people still aren't getting the health care they need. Of course, if Trump gets his way and eliminates Obamacare altogether, things on this front will get much, much worse.

But the biggest death toll is likely to come from Trump's agenda of deregulation — or maybe we should call it "deregulation," because his administration is curiously selective about which industries it wants to leave alone.

Consider two recent events that help capture the deadly strangeness of what's going on.

Safety problems

One is the administration's plan for hog plants to take over much of the federal responsibility for food safety inspections. And why not? It's not as if we've seen safety problems arise from self-regulation in, say, the aircraft industry, have we?

Or as if we ever experience major outbreaks of food-borne illness? Or as if there was a reason the U.S. government stepped in to regulate meatpacking in the first place?

Now, you could see the Trump administration's willingness to trust the meat industry to keep our meat safe as part of an overall attack on government regulation, a willingness to trust profit-making businesses to do the right thing and let the market rule.

And there's something to that, but it's not the whole story, as illustrated by another event: Trump's declaration the other day that wind turbines cause cancer.

Now, you could put this down to personal derangement: Trump has had an irrational hatred for wind power ever since he failed to prevent construction of a wind farm near his Scottish golf course. And Trump seems deranged and irrational on so many issues that one more bizarre claim hardly seems to matter.

But there's more to this than just another Trumpism. After all, we normally think of Republicans in general, and Trump in particular, as people who minimize or deny the "negative externalities" imposed by some business activities — the uncompensated costs they impose on other people or businesses.

For example, the Trump administration wants to roll back rules that limit emissions of mercury from power plants.

And in pursuit of that goal, it wants to prevent the Environmental Protection Agency from taking account of many of the benefits from reduced mercury emissions, such as an associated reduction in nitrogen oxide.

But when it comes to renewable energy, Trump and company are suddenly very worried about supposed negative side effects, which generally exist only in their imagination.

Last year the administration floated a proposal that would have forced the operators of electricity grids to subsidize

coal and nuclear energy.

The supposed rationale

The supposed rationale was that new sources were threatening to destabilize those grids — but the grid operators themselves denied that this was the case.

So it's deregulation for some, but dire warnings about imaginary threats for others. What's going on?

Part of the answer is, follow the money. Political contributions from the meat-processing industry overwhelmingly favor Republicans.

Coal mining supports the G.O.P. almost exclusively. Alternative energy, on the other hand, generally favors Democrats.

There are probably other things, too. If you're a party that wishes we could go back to the 1950s (but without the 91 percent top tax rate), you're going to have a hard time accepting the reality that hippie-dippy, unmanly things like wind and solar power are becoming ever more cost-competitive.

Whatever the drivers of Trump policy, the fact, as I said, is that it will kill people. Wind turbines don't cause cancer, but coal-burning power plants do — along with many other ailments.

The Trump administration's own estimates indicate that its relaxation of coal pollution rules will kill more than 1,000 Americans every year.

If the administration gets to implement its full agenda — not just deregulation of many industries, but discrimination against industries it doesn't like, such as renewable energy — the toll will be much higher.

So if you eat meat — or, for that matter, drink water or breathe air — there's a real sense in which Donald Trump is trying to kill you. And even if he's turned out of office next year, for many Americans it will be too late.

(Source: NYT)

Mab'ath: The undisputed base of European renaissance

By Yusuf Abdullah

NIGERIA/ KANO — In the name of Allah who states "Read! In the name of your Lord who has created (all that exists). He has created man from a clot (a piece of thick coagulated blood). Read! And your Lord is the most generous. Who has taught (the writing) by the pen. He has taught man that which he knew not," Q96:1-5

Peace and blessings of Allah be upon His noble servant, our master Muhammad and his purified progeny. Recently, the Muslim-Ummah observed Yaumul Mab'ath, which historically denotes the very day the noble Messenger Muhammad (S) received the first revelation in the cave of Hira. No doubt, the mission is the source of light and development of human race in its entirety. I am not going to be graphical on this as I had an intensive article on educational dynamism as undisputed pride of Islamic civilisation.

The idea is to appraise some missing links with regard to the World Literacy Day, marked across the world. The rationale was to all towards basic literacy and its promotion. It is imperative to ask what literacy is. Are there types referred to by the UN declaration? And to what extent are other forms of literacy considered and strengthened? Literacy is simply the ability to read and write.

Thus, we have different types such as the Roman, Arabic, Chinese and Indian. The predominant Ajami, using Arabic letters, was widely used in Hausa land, long before the advent of colonialists to what later became Northern Nigeria. But on a clear discrimination, the Roman literacy receives greater attention.

Then, we may appraise the links between literacy, education and knowledge? Education is a process of imparting knowledge, information and skills so that the recipient becomes a useful member of his/her society. While literacy was defined, knowledge refers to facts, information, understanding and skills one acquires through education and experience. Therefore, education is a process through which knowledge is achieved by means of literacy as a common medium.

So, in the cause of this piece, education is viewed from this context. Educational dynamism is evidently complementary to the vicissitudes of human life from gathering and hunting to agricultural and industrial revolutions respectively. The contemporary achievements in science and technology owe their origin to this educational trend from positive and negative aspects such as the advancement in medicine and pharmacy and technology of destruction in the nuclear arms.

However, the scientific and technological advancement touching the world in agricultural mechanisation – boosting food production, improved medical care delivery, in addition to other fields that provide diverse employment opportunities to support the ever increasing world population, is what many, wrongly or abusively, refer to as Western education. In contrast to geography and temporality,



Sarwa (1994) defined education as a system which transmits the revealed and acquired knowledge to the younger generation of Muslims in order to prepare them for life and enable them to discharge their duties as vicegerents of Allah on earth, with the sole aim of achieving success here and in the hereafter.

So, it is an undisputed fact that Europe's Renaissance after Dark Ages was achieved in the light of the last revelation. What a beautiful pride to Islamic civilisation! Islam, as a religion, started in Arabia and steadily spread to Africa, Persia and Asia to become the universal religion covering the Byzantines, the inheritors of Greek Roman civilisations in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The Egyptians, Persians and other Asian groups have developed from Chinese and Indian civilisations. Such converts brought their intellectual legacies to the Islamic community. Thus, Muslim scholar's uncovered literary and scientific legacy of ancient civilisation, which they critically assessed, translated, commented and documented. The attempt to learn from earlier civilisation, was remarkably fostered during the Abbasid when the Baitul hikma -house of wisdom and Baitul tarjama – house of translation, were established.

The generous patronage accorded scholars and scholarship were very instrumental in furthering the scholarly activities. With such efforts, Muslim preserved and revived the learning of the ancient world. It was a great service to humanity, especially in Greek learning as scientific studies had been neglected to decay for centuries in Europe.

If not for the effort of Muslim in translation and development on the works of ancient scholars, most would have been lost or destroyed before Europe's emergence from dark ages. Although knowledge is relative and multifaceted in nature, the positive aspects, no doubt, originated from the light of heavenly revelation, most importantly the Last Messenger's, not inclusive of the Arab age of ignorance as referred to by some West-

ern philosophers. At this point, two historic testimonies are relevant:

President Obama's "New beginning" at Cairo University, Egypt on 4th June, 2009 by 1:10-2:05 am (local time) as released by his press secretary. "Thank you very much. Good afternoon. I am honoured to be in the timeless city of Cairo, and to be hosted by two remarkable institutions.

For over a thousand years, Al – Azhar has stood as a beacon of Islamic learning; and for over a century, Cairo University has been a source of Egypt's advancement. And together, you represent the harmony between tradition and progress. I'm grateful for your hospitality, and the hospitality of the people of Egypt. And I'm also proud to carry with me, the goodwill of the American people, and a greeting of peace from Muslim communities in my country: Assalaamu alyakum. (Applause)... As a student of history, I also know civilisations debt to Islam. It was Islam – at places like Al-Azhar – that carried the light of learning through so many centuries, paving the way for Europe's Renaissance and Enlightenment.

It was innovation in Muslim communities – (applause – that developed the order of algebra; our magnetic compass and tools of navigation; our mastery of pens and printing; our understanding of how disease spreads and how it can be healed. Islamic culture has given us majestic arches and soaring spires; timeless poetry and cherished music; elegant calligraphy and places of peaceful contemplation. And throughout history, Islam has demonstrated, through words and deeds, the possibilities of religious tolerance and racial equality. (Applause).

I also know that Islam has always been a part of America's story. The first nation to recognise my country was Morocco. In signing the Treaty of Tripoli in 1796, our second President, John Adams, wrote, "The United States has, in itself, no character of enmity against the laws, religion or tranquility of Muslims." And since, our founding, American Muslims have enriched the United States.

They have fought in our wars, they have served in our government, they have stood for civil rights, they have started businesses, they have taught at our universities, they've excelled in our sports arenas and they've won Nobel Prizes, built our tallest building, and lit the Olympic Torch. And when the first Muslim American was recently elected to Congress, he took the oath to defend our Constitution using the same Holy Koran that one of our Founding Fathers -Thomas Jefferson- kept in his personal library. (Applause).

So, I have known Islam on three continents before coming to the region where it was first revealed. That experience guides my conviction that partnership between America and Islam must be based on what Islam is, not what it isn't. And I consider it part of my responsibility as President of the United States, to fight against negative stereotypes of Islam wherever they appear. (Applause)Thank you. And may God's peace be upon you. Thank you very much. (Applause)" In addition to the recent Obama's testimony and Encyclopedia Britannica's under civilisation, a great future spelling on the Islamic religious concept of Sir George Bernard Shaw in The Genuine Islam, Vol. 1, No. 8, 1936, already saw the light: "If any religion had the chance of ruling over England, nay Europe within the next hundred years, it could be Islam.

I have always held the religion of Muhammad in high estimation of its wonderful vitality. It is the only religion which appears to me to possess that assimilating capability to the changing phases of existence which can make itself appeal to everyone. I have prophesied about the faith of Muhammad that it would be acceptable to the Europe of today. The medieval ecclesiastics, either through ignorance or bigotry, painted Islam in the darkest colours.

They were, in fact, trained to hate the man, Muhammad and his religion. To them, Muhammad was anti – Christ. I have studied him – the wonderful man, and in my opinion, far from being an anti-Christ, he must be called the savior of humanity. I believe that if a man like him were to assume dictatorship of the modern world, he would succeed in solving its problems in a way that would bring the much needed peace and happiness. But to proceed, it was in the 19th century that honest thinkers like Carlyle, Gibbon and Goethe, perceived intrinsic worth in the religion of Muhammad – already, even, at the present time many of our people have gone to his faith, and Islamisation of Europe may be said to have begun".

On the light of the above verses stressing the significance of broad based knowledge acquisition, the prophet (s) has said "seeking of knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim male and female" While commending all efforts towards justice without borders on the Zaria massacre and its aftermath, I use the medium to reiterate the urgent need for the unconditional release of Shaikh Ibraheem el-Zakzaky and his disciples.

(Source: leadership)

Trump is still afraid of Mueller report



➔ Many Democrat candidates believe that it would be possible to put pressure on Trump, through the insistence on full and uncensored report of the Mueller Inspector.

It is not unreasonable that the President of the United States intends to prevent the publication of this report by any means possible. However, this case will remain open until the presidential elections of 2020 and then thereafter. During the 2016 presidential election campaign, Trump tried to put Hillary Clinton under pressure for her security mistakes. It seems that the equation is reversed this time!

This time, the Democrats and rivals of Trump, who take the charges against Trump, have the most benefit against him and the Republicans. It is not unreasonable that Republicans are afraid of publishing the entire report of Mueller's Inspector General. A fear that will continue until at least 2020.

Saudi Wahhabism helping to spread Islamophobia: Australian prof.

➔ The following is the full text of the interview:

Turkey's Istanbul recently hosted an emergency meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) about "increasing violence based on Islamophobia" a week after the New Zealand mosque attack killed at least 50 Muslims, including children. What do you think about the importance of the emergency meeting and the concerns of the participants?

A: It is important that the Organization of Islamic Cooperation made that statement, and that there is wider coordinated action against the vilification of Muslims and of Islam. However, such a statement is undermined when it comes from Mr. Erdogan, who is well known to have supported DAESH in Syria and Iraq, in pursuit of his own ambitions. Those who backed Wahhabism and DAESH have done greater damage to the image of Islam in the world than any individual terrorist. Most well educated people in the region have already recognized this.

Brenton Tarrant, the Australian terrorist who carried out the pre-planned attack on two mosques in New Zealand's Christchurch, penned a 74-page manifesto that he published around the time of the shootings. Revealing his admiration for Anders Behring Breivik, who killed 77 people in Norway back in 2011, Tarrant also praised US President Donald Trump as "a symbol of renewed white identity and common purpose." Breivik's attacks in Norway were described as "lone wolf" domestic terrorist attacks. Some claim that the terror attack in Christchurch was also the same. Can we describe the attack "lone wolf" or you think that an anti-Islam current is behind it?

A: The terrorist in Christchurch, New Zealand, cannot have acted alone. There is a great deal of speculation about those from whom he got support. I do not want to add speculative comments. The official inquiry announced by the government of New Zealand may help shed more light on this. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that the gunman and his associates drew on a wider anti-Muslim and anti-Arab current in Western culture, a current encouraged by many Western governments during the multiple wars they launched against the independent states and peoples of the Middle East region. For example, in just five newspapers of the Australia-based News Corp (Murdoch) group, a survey found, in one year, "almost 3000 articles that referred to Islam or Muslims alongside words like violence, extremism, terrorism or radical" (<https://www.onepathnetwork.com/islam-in-the-media-2017>).

That constant anti-Muslim agitation must infect many feeble minds with racial or religious hatred. It serves as the background for such horrific crimes. Yet it seems to be thought necessary, by western elites, to attract popular support for the recent series of Washington-led wars.

In your opinion, how can Muslims prevent the spread of Islamophobia? Wahhabism is Saudi Arabia's dominant faith and blamed for the rise of Islamophobia in the world. The ideology is closely linked to extremist ideas that have nothing to do with true Islam. Do not you think that one of the ways to prevent the spread of Islamophobia is to prevent the spread of Wahhabism?

A: Certainly, Wahhabism is a key tool at the root of divisions in the Middle East, helping to spread hatred against Muslim communities. In this respect, the Saud family, serving as a 'cat's paw' or client state for Washington, has done tremendous harm to the image of Islam in the world. I would not say that Wahhabism is a 'faith'; it may draw on certain conservative doctrines, including Salafism, but Wahhabism is really a cult built around the Riyadh regime. That Wahhabi cult works alongside the 'Second Temple' cult of Israel, using finance and propaganda to generate divisions amongst the people of the region. The result is a weak and divided region, open to subjugation by the imperial and former colonial powers. Yet the only hope of definitively defeating this recent neo-colonial project (called a 'New Middle East') is the close coordination and unity of resistance forces. We have to conclude that Saudi Wahhabism – build from its beginnings through collusion with the colonial powers – is a key enemy of the peoples of the region.

Pity any nation that has veered from the moral messages of Islam or Christianity

➔ Indeed, the anti-Islam policies of Trump and his largely Zionist-oriented minions arguably helped at the margin to set off the attacks in New Zealand by an Australian "white power" advocate. The language used by the killer in New Zealand actually mirrored some of the language Trump himself has used in the past, calling, for example, "white power" advocates such as were witnessed in a protest in Charlottesville, Virginia, not long ago "fine people".

They and the killer in New Zealand are anything but "fine people". They are bigots but it should be noted that even while such people constitute a significant part of Trump's electoral "base" along with the faux "Christian" evangelical crowd, they are NOT by any measure representative of the American people as a whole.

And it should be further noted that Trump himself has no particular intellect or ideology and is not even a "Christian" by any fair definition of the tenets of the faith: he knows no belief whatsoever but a desire to amass power and stay in office, and will grab what power he has from ANY willing group of people capable of giving him what he wants to maintain. Simply look at his decree that the Syrian Golan is Israel's. No other country in the world recognizes that.

Trump's strategic agenda is NOT a winning strategy in the very longer term, and opposition to the Trump gangsters is mounting in the U.S. at the same time that his "regime change" efforts with regard to Venezuela and Iran (and other nations) seems not to be gaining traction. However, the Democrats and mainstream media in the U.S. for three years have been peddling a lie about Russian involvement and influence in U.S. politics.

The Mueller report turned up nothing, and no indictments. Thus, Trump has been given a huge boost by the moronic Democrats, one that may make a second term for Trump relatively easy to win...unless the economy craters in the next year.

Trump has also been isolating the U.S. while Eurasian countries, including Iran, bind themselves tighter together economically under China's and Russia's leadership. In addition, Iran seems to be carefully improving its relations with Iraq and Pakistan, as it has already accomplished with Syria and Turkey, creating a huge arc of mutually sympa-



thetic countries across west Asia and beyond. And some European U.S. "allies" are beginning slowly to drift away from obedience to U.S. diktat and even NATO.

For example, Italy has expressed its interest in being a link in the Chinese "Belt and Road" economic initiative, much to the horror of the Trumpists, while the Nordstream 2 pipeline binding Germany ever closer to Russia and its ample and relatively cheap supplies of energy is essentially a done deal and no amount of further "official" U.S. anger is going to scuttle the project, already over 70 percent completed.

What is remarkable in the U.S. is that two Muslim females, Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib, elected to the U.S. House of Representatives last November, are quietly leading the push for real, potential change in the U.S. simply by telling the truth about the dangers and faults of U.S. policies, particularly in the Middle East, as advocated by various powerful lobbies such as AIPAC. This despite continued attacks on both the women, led by the corrupting Zionist lobbies.

The leadership in Congress of both parties are apologetic

about the mere conversations these Muslim women have opened up about malign influences and perceptions, and the prime question has to be WHEN pressure on these so-called "leaders" by average, voting Americans will impact their chances for reelection in 2020. That day is coming eventually.

There remains, however, many, far too many relatively well off and prosperous upper middle-class Americans, whether they consider themselves "liberals" or "conservatives", who still refuse to believe or act upon the belief that the U.S. is and has been for decades on the wrong track with its foreign policies especially and with its handling of the economy.

Perhaps they are threatened too much by the mere idea of disruptive change. Perhaps they fear losing the advantages and comforts they have enjoyed and amassed. But the next time the financial markets implode and the U.S. economy dives into a deep recession... well, that could be the tipping point when the entrenched oligarchy at the top of the food chain and their entrenched followers finally are discredited and real "democracy" at last returns to the U.S.

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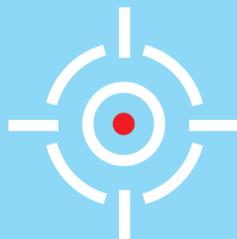
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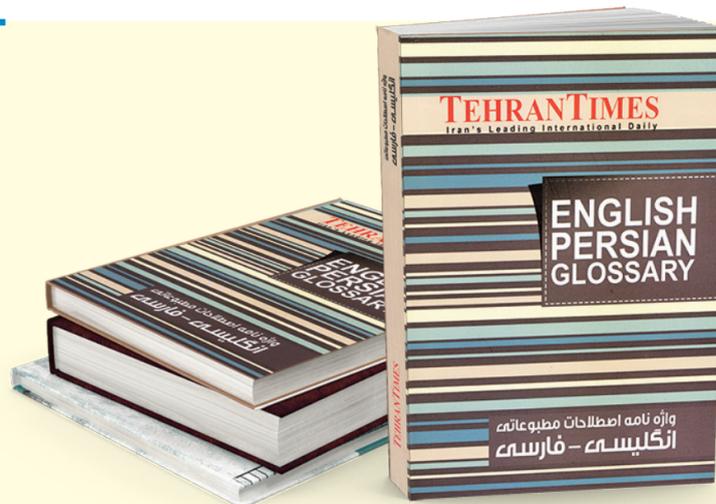
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The diets cutting one in five lives short every year

The food we eat is putting 11 million of us into an early grave each year, an influential study shows.

The analysis, in the Lancet, found that our daily diet is a bigger killer than smoking and is now involved in one in five deaths around the world.

Salt - whether in bread, soy sauce or processed meals - shortened the highest number of lives.

Researchers say this study is not about obesity, but "poor quality" diets damaging hearts and causing cancer.

So which diets have got it in for me?

The Global Burden of Disease Study is the most authoritative assessment of how people are dying in every country in the world.

The latest analysis used estimates of countries' eating habits to pin down how often diet was shortening lives.

The dangerous diets were those containing:
Too much salt - three million deaths
Too few whole grains - three million deaths
Too little fruit - two million deaths

Low levels of nuts, seeds, vegetables, omega-3 from seafood and fiber were the other major killers.

"We find that diet is one of the dominant drivers of health around the world, it's really quite profound," Prof Christopher Murray, the director of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington told the BBC.

How is this killing people?

About 10 million out of the 11 million diet-related deaths were because of cardiovascular disease and that explains why salt is such a problem.

Too much salt raises blood pressure and that in turn raises the risk of heart attacks and strokes.

Salt can also have a direct effect on the heart and blood vessels, leading to heart failure when the organ does not work effectively.

Whole grains, fruit and vegetables have the opposite effect - they are "cardioprotective" and lower the risk of heart problems.

Cancers and type 2 diabetes made up the rest of the diet-related deaths.

How far is the world off a perfect diet?
No country is perfect and each favors some



The healthy foods missing from the most diets around the world were nuts and seeds. The perception is they are little packs of energy that will make you fat, whereas they are packed full of good fats.

part of a healthy diet more than others, but this is how far the world is from an optimal diet.

■ Nuts and seeds again?

The healthy foods missing from the most diets around the world were nuts and seeds, according to the study.

Eager readers will have noticed they featured heavily in the planetary health diet, unveiled in January, to save lives, save the planet and feed 10 billion people.

So why don't we munch them?

Prof Nita Forouhi, from the University of Cambridge, said: "The perception is they are little packs of energy that will make you fat, whereas they are packed full of good fats."

"And most people don't see them as mainstream food; and the other issue is cost."

■ I thought meat and sugar were the bad guys?

The huge fat versus sugar debate and the link between red and processed meats with cancer have attracted huge headlines in recent years.

"These can be harmful as we show, but they are much smaller issues than low whole grains, fruit, nuts, seeds and vegetable intake," said Prof Murray.

Although, the study did show too many fizzy drinks were being drunk in every corner of the world. The researchers say it is time for health campaigns to switch from talking about nutrients like fat and sugar and instead promote healthy foods.

■ But is a tasty unhealthy diet worth it? Bad diets are knocking a couple of years off life expectancies around the world, according to the researchers.

But Prof Murray warns this is just the average and says the real question we should be asking is: "Am I going to die in my 50s from a heart attack? Or am I going to have some of the diet-related cancers in my 40s?"

■ Are any countries doing well? Mediterranean countries, have some of the lowest numbers of diet-related deaths in the world.

Countries in South East, Southern and Central Asia are at the opposite end of the spectrum. Uzbekistan has the highest diet-related deaths - 892 per 100,000 people a year.

Japan and China have curiously contrasting fortunes that reflect their changing relationship with salt.

China consumes enormous amounts of salt with soy and other salty sauces being a key part of the country's cuisine.

But the rising popularity of processed foods is introducing yet more salt to their diet. It has the highest death rate because of salt of any country.

Prof Murray said: "Japan is very interesting because if you go back 30 to 40 years, they like China today had enormous salt intake."

"Salt is still their number one problem, but it has come down dramatically."

"And they have a diet that is higher in many of the things we think are protective for heart disease such as vegetables and fruit." The UK is behind countries like France, Denmark and Belgium.

The biggest problems are a lack of whole grains, fruit, vegetables and nuts and seeds.

The study estimates 14% of UK deaths are related to diet, with 127 diet-related deaths per 100,000 people a year.

■ Any advice? Prof Murray said: "Diet quality matters no matter what weight you are."

"The really big story for people to act on is increase your whole grains, fruit, nuts, seeds and vegetable intake and reduce salt if you can."

But money is an issue. It is estimated that having your five fruit and veg a day would take up 52% of household income in poorer countries.

But Prof Forouhi warns: "The public can make healthier choices if informed and have the resources, but if what is on the shelves as buy-one-get-one-free is always unhealthy, then that message will fall down."

"Cheaper options that are healthy are badly needed."

Both agreed there needed to be a shift from focusing on nutrients (fat/sugar/salt) and on to which actual foods people should eat. (Source: BBC)

Obesity treatment helps patients safely lose weight by reducing blood flow to the stomach, trials show

A procedure which helps obese people to lose weight by reducing blood flow to the stomach could become a cheaper and less risky alternative to other surgeries, a clinical trial suggests.

Researchers leading tests of the recently developed technique, known as bariatric embolisation, showed that over a year severely obese patients shed around 10 per cent of their body weight.

They also reported having a reduced appetite, feeling full more quickly, and showed promising early signs that their cholesterol was going down.

"This is a great step forward for this procedure establishing early feasibility, safety and early efficacy," said Dr Clifford Weiss, lead author of the study from the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

The pioneering procedure works by using a tubular catheter to access the blood vessels and place microscopic beads which block off some of the arteries leading to the stomach.

This reduces the blood flow enough to prevent the stomach releasing hunger-triggering hormones, but not enough to cause damage.

Obesity is a growing public health crisis in developed countries like the U.S. and UK. Britain is already the fattest nation in western Europe and this is driving rates of type 2 diabetes, heart disease and cancers.

This places a significant burden on health systems, and while weight-loss surgeries are shown to be effective in reducing obesity, financial constraints mean the NHS has been reduced to rationing these as well.

Embolisation is already used to shut off blood flow to a weak or damaged blood vessel - aneurysm repair - and a way to starve cancerous tumors of oxygen.

While it is still in early stages in weight loss, bariatric embolisation instead of gastric bypass, where the small intestine is attached to a pouch at the top of the stomach, or gastric bands which pinch the stomach to make a person feel full quicker, with less risk of infection and complications.

The 20 patients in the trial, which is published in the journal Radiology on Tuesday, lost 8.2 per cent of their excess weight in the first three months and had lost 11.5 per cent of their weight by the end of the trial.

Crucially the participants all reported that their quality of life had improved as well.

Larger trials with more patients will be needed to rule out the possibility that the weight loss is just a temporary placebo effect, but it looks at present like a future option to help combat obesity.

"It is fulfilling to all of us to see something that started as an idea develop through about a decade of research and then go all the way to an initial clinical trial," Dr Weiss said.

"The reality is that obesity itself is an individualized disease that requires individualized treatments." (Source: The Independent)

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nice cases ready to move in.

'5G telecom network in Iran high on agenda'

TECHNOLOGY TEHRAN — The 5G telecom network is high on agenda during the current Iranian calendar year, which began on March 21, the director of Communication Regulatory Authority of Iran announced.

Hossein Fallah Joshagani said that Iran is now providing infrastructures for 5G telecom network, Mehr reported.



Some preliminary actions like providing bandwidth and regulation are underway, he said.

5G will use spectrum in the existing LTE frequency range (600 MHz to 6 GHz) and also in millimeter wave (mmWave) bands (24–86 GHz).

According to the UN report released in June 2018, Iran moved 20 notches up to rank 86 among 193 countries in the United Nations E-Government Development Index (EGDI 2018) in comparison with EGDI 2017.

Iran's EGDI value was 0.6083 this year. Regarding the sub-items, the country got 0.6319 scores in the online service index (OSI), 0.4566 in the telecommunication infrastructure index (TII), and 0.7364 in the human capital index (HCI) this year.

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

Introducing the World's First Gene-Edited Lizard

Scientists have been altering the genes of mice, pigs, goats, chickens and butterflies for quite some time. But even as Crispr, a transformative gene-editing tool, made seemingly impossible genetic alterations possible, reptiles had remained untouched.

That changed with the birth of a nearly transparent Anolis lizard, the first gene-edited reptile, according to the draft of a study made public this week.

Ashley Rasys, a graduate student at the University of Georgia who was involved in the lizard's creation, arrived shortly after he broke through his thick M&M-size shell.

"I was floored," she said. "We weren't really expecting to generate an albino lizard at first," she added.



The steps involved in creating him are outlined in the paper, which was first reported by Science magazine. Scientists now have another model to utilize in genetic research.

"When we want to understand human biology we go to one of these model systems," said Douglas Menke, the director of the genetics department at the University of Georgia and another author of the study. Until now, all 10,000 species of reptiles have been off-limits. "People thought they were just too hard to work with," he said.

The challenge was figuring out how to access lizards' reproductive systems in the right way at the right time. What his team has proved, he said, is that it is possible.

"We can now create two to four mutant lizards from just a day's work," he said.

It took the scientists about two years to figure out how to access the reproductive system of the lizards in the desired way. Then they had to use their genetic scalpel to target the lizard mom's eggs, while they were still growing inside her.

The scientists could have altered a variety of genes, but they focused on the mutation that codes for albinism in large part because that tweak is visual. Producing an albino lizard would show their gene editing was successful.

They thought it would take at least two generations to get there, however.

Having an albino mother does not mean a person — or a lizard — will be albino. Both the mother and father must carry the mutation.

Because researchers were targeting the lizards' eggs before they were fertilized by the father, they thought that getting the albino mutation into the paternal DNA would take additional breeding.

And yet their very first gene-edited lizard emerged without any pigment. Three of the other 146 edited eggs did as well. Somehow they had altered both maternal and paternal DNA in one fell swoop. The researchers have a hypothesis about why that will require additional study.

George Church, a geneticist affiliated with Harvard and M.I.T., called the application of Crispr to lizards "significant." Dr. Church uses genome modification techniques to try to reverse aging in dogs, to make pigs more compatible for organ transplants in humans, and to protect elephants from herpesvirus.

There is a movement to use gene editing to combat pathogens and environmental threats. Many reptiles are endangered. "Editing could help," he said.

Jonathan Losos, an evolutionary biologist from Washington University in St. Louis, was also enthusiastic. "This study opens the door to studying the genetics of lizard evolution," he said.

(Source: The New York Times)

ICT ministry restores connectivity in Lorestan after devastating flood

TECHNOLOGY TEHRAN — The 4G internet coverage which had been lost due to the recent devastating flood in the city of Poldokhtar, Lorestan province, is now reconnected, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi announced on his Twitter account, IRNA reported.

The tweet, which is written in Lori language, reads "Here is Poldokhtar, it is 7:21 a.m., the 4G is connected, now it is time to share your problems and deficiencies with others."

Azari Jahromi traveled to Lorestan province on Wednesday, two days after severe flooding wreaked havoc on the region.

All communication and road connectivity with Poldokhtar was lost Monday afternoon due to a devastating flood.

He also expressed gratitude to his colleagues and ICT experts who did their best



during the past 48 hours.

All rivers in Lorestan have breached their banks and have turned into channels for unprecedented floods. The Marook dam in the area has been swamped by excess water, which has surpassed the top.

It was reported on Monday that water levels in Khorramabad, the capital of Lorestan had reached 3 meters.

Devastating floods have hit 400 villages and cities in 15 provinces across the country, Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli has said.

So far 78 roads linking cities and 2,199 roads connecting villages are blocked by the floods, the minister said, adding that some 84 bridges are destroyed in the flood-stricken areas.

He went on to say that 141 rivers have burst their banks and that some 409 landslides have been reported in the country.

National optical fiber project to be completed in September: official

TECHNOLOGY TEHRAN — The national optical fiber network project entitled "Noor 2" will be completed by September 22, the deputy director of Telecommunication Infrastructure Company announced, Mehr reported on Friday.

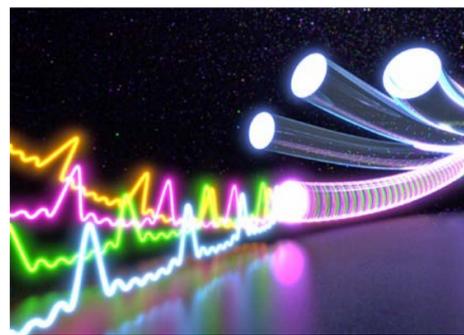
Esmaeil Radkani said that the project aims to add more than 13,000 kilometers of optical fiber nationwide.

The project will expand the national optical fiber network to 84,000 kilometers.

The project aims to increase the capacity of infrastructures for ISPs and their quality, he added.

In mid-February, the company's managing director Sadeq Abbasi Shakhkouh announced that with utilizing the capacities of IP networks, there is not a deficiency in infrastructure facilities.

In December 2018, ICT Minister Mohammad Javad Azari



Jahromi announced that Iran has already invested over five billion dollars to develop ICT infrastructures.

The 80 percent of the project has already been completed and will be probably unveiled in early September, he said.

The fiber network completely covers the Tehran-Mashhad route, which is already operational, he explained.

Iran has already over 70,000 kilometers of optical fiber network, which covers 350 cities and thousands of villages, he said.

The project which is done by the company affiliated to the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Ministry aims to expand national communication network for Internet service providers (ISPs), he noted.

Besides the increase in capacities of optical fiber network, the network of transmission bandwidth and the national Internet Protocol (IP) are increased, he explained.

Japan just shot a copper cannonball at an asteroid



JAXA's Hayabusa2 spacecraft has a tumultuous relationship with the asteroid Ryugu that's become even more dramatic.

Japan's Hayabusa2 spacecraft has already fired a bullet at the asteroid Ryugu from close range to suck up a sample of the space rock. Now the mission has gone a step further by attempting to blast a new crater onto the surface of the object it's been orbiting for months.

The Japanese Space Agency (JAXA) announced just before 8 p.m. PT Thursday that it fired its "small carry-on impactor" (SCI) at Ryugu. The SCI is a 2 kilogram (4.4 pound) lump of copper attached to Hayabusa2 that was shot toward Ryugu at a speed of 2 kilometers per second (4,474 miles per hour).

JAXA announced the successful firing of the SCI and retreat of Hayabusa2 via

live webcast from mission control. English translators on the feed added that it may take up to several hours for imagery to be received from the spacecraft confirming that the SCI explosion successfully created a new crater on the asteroid.

The hope is that the impact will expose some of the underlying structure of the asteroid for observation. Hayabusa2 will also descend and sample some of the materials dislodged from below the surface for comparison with the surface crumbs collected earlier in the mission.

About three weeks after smacking Ryugu with what's basically a copper cannonball, Hayabusa2 will begin a search for the artificial crater from a higher vantage point and plan for a touchdown at its custom landing spot as early as May.

(Source: cnet.com)

Newfound tiny planet may be a glimpse of Earth's ultimate fate



In 1995, a cosmic question was answered when a ground-based telescope picked up on a faint, wobbly signal coming from hundreds of light-years away. The telescope had detected the first exoplanet orbiting a sun-like star, a breakthrough discovery proving that, yes, there are planets beyond our solar system—and hinting at the potential for many more.

Astrophysicists have since confirmed nearly 4,000 exoplanets orbiting stars across the Milky Way galaxy. Like our sun, these stars are typically in the so-called main sequence phase of their lives, a period that lasts billions of years and during which the stars burn healthy, hot, and bright.

But now, a group of researchers has zeroed in on a planetary body closely orbiting a white dwarf—a burned-out star

that is on death's door. Described this week in the journal Science, the findings are among the first of their kind, and they offer a glimpse at what Earth's fate could be when our sun begins to die.

Led by University of Warwick astrophysicist Christopher Manser, the team discovered the rocky object using a method called spectroscopy, which involves collecting and analyzing the different wavelengths of light coming from the gas disk surrounding the white dwarf. This is the first time this method has been used to identify a planetary body orbiting a white dwarf.

Using the Gran Telescopio Canarias in La Palma, Spain, the team observed the "color of light emitted by calcium in the disc, and we collected a spectrum every two to three minutes," Manser says in an email. (Source: msn.com)

Why beating your phone addiction may come at a cost

At 9.30am on a Wednesday morning, I received a notification telling me I'd already picked up my phone 30 times that day. "11 left until you go over your goal of 41 pickups," my screen read. "Put your phone down until 9.52am! Enjoy your time living in the moment."

These updates were sent via Moment, an app that tracks my screen time.

Moment was created by Kevin Holesh in 2014 to combat his own device addiction. He was working as an independent app developer, spending hours each day staring at screens. After work, Holesh found that he was scrolling mindlessly through Twitter instead of talking to his wife or taking his dogs for a walk.

"I wanted a way of seeing how much time I was sinking into my phone," he told me. "So I hacked something together that could monitor my screen time."

Holesh found that he was spending 75 minutes on his phone a day. He added a feature to the app that notified him whenever his screen time exceeded 40 minutes. "My phone would buzz, and I'd go and do something else," he said. "It was like a little angel on my shoulder nudging me in the right direction."

Holesh figured that if the system worked for him, it would work for others, and later that year he released Moment as a free app. To date, it has been downloaded 8m times.

As well as tracking device use, Moment now has a "coach" function, which offers guided programs to help users focus and be more productive, for \$7.99 a month.

I signed up for a week-long course called Bored and Brilliant that was supposed to help me regain creativity, but after five days I had made little progress. By 10.30am on Wednesday morning I received another notification informing me I had gone over my 41 allotted pickups.

Yet, Moment is popular, and many online reviews are positive. "I am so much happier, I sleep better, I read more,



I take better care of myself, and most of all I am present in my day-to-day life," one reviewer wrote, only heightening my sense of personal failure.

Moment's popularity reflects a growing consciousness around "digital wellness", the name given to lifestyle practices that encourage healthy device use. Wellness trends reflect the anxieties of the era in which they arise; this one is about time being stolen from us. If being on the phone 24/7, or having tech-savvy kids, was once a signifier of productivity and affluence, now device addiction signifies a loss of control.

Many digital wellness books, programs and apps encourage commonsense behavioral changes — say, leaving your phone outside your room when you go to sleep — aimed to help people regain control of their time in a digital economy designed to drip-feed information and dopamine in return for our data and attention.

But as this burgeoning movement becomes an industry, some worry that the "wellness" approach and its emphasis on personal responsibility is whitewashing deeper structural issues within the tech industry.

Academics have been concerned about the addictive potential of computers for decades. As early as the 1970s, pioneering computer scientist and technology critic Joseph Weizenbaum warned that people had become "addicted" to modern technology and that there was a need for "withdrawal therapies".

While these critiques were often overshadowed by prevailing techno-optimism — a belief that a more connected world was a better world — the narrative began to shift at the turn of the last decade with the rise of smartphones. As we became increasingly tethered to our screens, a growing number of experts and social commentators, like Sherry Turkle and Nicholas Carr, published grave warnings that we were spending too much time on them.

As trust in the tech industry has atrophied over the past few years, this critical perspective has become commonplace. Countless articles, studies and books now tell us how our screen addiction is making us more anxious and depressed, incapable of thinking deeply and too distracted to engage in meaningful relationships or self-reflection. Concerns are particularly acute in relation to young people and how it may affect their development.

Born out of this cultural anxiety is the digital wellness movement. Unlike earlier tech criticism, which sought to diagnose and raise awareness around tech addiction, digital wellness aims to provide solutions, often in the form of step-by-step programs.

Science journalist Catherine Price's bestselling book of last year, How to Break Up With Your Phone: The 30-Day Plan to Take Your Life Back, draws on cognitive science and philosophy to show how phones and social media platforms are designed like slot machines to lure us in. She then offers an action plan involving mindfulness strategies, like putting a rubber band around the device as a reminder to take pause before plugging back in. (Source: theguardian.com)

Do cats know their names? Scientists went to a cat cafe to find out

Scientists believe cats can differentiate their names from others sounds.

Cats know their own names, according to the authors of a study that could raise questions for pet owners, who wonder whether their furry friends purposefully ignore them.

Scientists in Japan observed a total of 78 domesticated cats, some in the households and others in a cat cafe where they lived.

In four separate experiments, the pet owners and researchers said the animals' names, as well as nouns with a similar length and rhythm, and the names of other cats.

If a cat meowed or moved its ears or head, the researchers noted this down as the cat recognizing its name. To make sure the cat wasn't just reacting to any utterances, the team repeatedly said words until the cats stopped responding, and then said their names and watched for a reaction.

Content of human utterances
"We conclude that cats can discriminate the content of human utterances based on phonemic differences," the authors wrote in their study published in the journal *Scientific Reports*.

However, cat cafe cats were unable to differentiate between their own names and those of their feline counterparts.

The authors argued cats can likely pick up on their names because doing so could lead them to rewards like food or playtime. But cat cafe cats probably



If a cat meowed or moved its ears or head, the researchers noted this down as the cat recognizing its name. To make sure the cat wasn't just reacting to any utterances, the team repeatedly said words until the cats stopped responding, and then said their names and watched for a reaction.

get the connection between their name and rewards confused as many different humans with different voices give them rewards, and they often hear the names of other animals.

Scientists believe cats can differentiate their names from others sounds.

Dr. Atsuko Saito, co-author of the study at the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Human Sciences at Sophia University in Japan told *Newsweek*: "Many cat owners know that cats understand their own names."

Scientific evidence
However, there are no scientific evidence about that ability.

"There are so many studies about dog ability to communicate with humans. We think it is important to show the abilities of cats."

However, Saito acknowledged the researchers could have gone further by using animals from more than one cat cafe.

"Results from the cat cafe may be difficult to generalize to other cats from other cat cafes," she said, pointing out a limitation of the study.

Cats and humans have been living together for around 9,500 years, but scientists only recently started investigating the communication skills of cats, the authors pointed out. But the evidence suggests the creatures are able to pick up on cues given by humans.

(Source: *newsweek.com*)

Recovery of Great Barrier Reef slows down with lower number of baby corals

The back-to-back bleaching events in 2016 and 2017 crashed the Great Barrier Reef's new coral recruitment. According to scientists, it would take 10 years for the world's largest coral reef system to recover. The Great Barrier Reef in Australia is not healing after it experienced a series of severe coral bleaching induced by global warming.

According to a new study, the back-to-back bleaching events that devastated the UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2016 and 2017 has affected its ability to recruit new corals. The findings suggest that the largest collection of coral reefs in the world unlikely to fully recover anytime soon.

Scientists at the ARC Center of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies monitored the death and birth of corals in the Great Barrier Reef after the 2016 and 2017 bleaching events. The team revealed in the study published in the journal *Nature* that new coral recruitment in 2018, a year after the second bleaching event, was 89 percent lower than historical levels.

Affecting the recruitment
"We never thought we would see disturbance on a scale to affect recruitment to this extent," stated Andrew Baird, co-author of the study.

The Great Barrier Reef located off the north-east coast of Australia is dubbed as the biggest living structure on Earth. It covers 344,400 square kilometers and is home to a wide variety of marine plants and animals, some of which cannot be found anywhere else in the world.

The site has only experienced four mass bleaching events recorded in history and all of them happened in the past two decades. The back-to-back disasters in 2016 and 2017 caused many adult corals to die.

While coral reefs can survive bleaching events, it would take years for them to recover. Scientists estimate that the production of baby corals to return to normal



in about five to 10 years, but only if there will not be another bleaching event in the next decade.

The fate of the Great Barrier Reef is looking grim. The UNESCO's climate models predict that bleaching events will become more frequent if the high emission of excess greenhouse gases continues. They warn that bleaching events will occur at least twice in every decade beginning in 2035.

More resilient to climate change
The scientists also shared some good news. Evidence suggests that some species of coral are growing more resilient to the impacts of climate change. The team reported that it took much greater heat exposure for the coral reefs to show the same level of damage during the second bleaching event between 2016 and 2017.

"So the reef is now moving rapidly to a new configuration, with a greater proportion of the species that are resistant to bleaching, or that are capable of bouncing back the fastest," added Terry Hughes, director of the ARC Center for Excellence for Coral Reef Studies.

The diversity, however, would be lost. A number of species will be gone if the trend continues.

The study already found that the population of *Acropora* declined 93 percent in 2018. The branching coral provides most of the reef habitat in the Great Barrier Reef, supporting thousands of other species like clownfish and triggerfish.

(Source: *techtimes.com*)

Apocalypse next? Astronomers find a chunk of planet around a distant, dead star

In a shard of galactic archaeology that offers a less-than-inviting hint at our own future, astronomers have discovered a chunk of a former planet orbiting the remains of its former star, now a smoldering cinder known as a white dwarf.

The fragment, made mostly of iron, nickel and other metals, lies 410 light-years from Earth in the constellation Virgo. It could be a mile, or hundreds of miles, in diameter, but to be dense enough to have survived the explosive demise and subsequent evolution of its host star, it likely was part of a large planet with a wider more distant orbit.

Now it circles the white dwarf so closely that it completes an orbit every 123 minutes.

The "fact that we have discovered a body orbiting on a two-hour period is clear evidence that a planetary body can survive this destructive process," said Christopher Manser, a physicist at the University of Warwick in England, and the leader of an international team that reported their results in *Science* on Thursday.

A white dwarf
A white dwarf is the end product left behind when a star as large as the sun or slightly bigger runs out of fuel, expires and eventually shrinks into a dense ember about the size of Earth. The universe is littered with these dense, cooling tombstones.

In the process of dying, however, these stars first puff up into so-called red giants, enveloping and destroying their inner planets.

When our sun goes through this process in 5 or 6 billion years, it will incinerate everything inside the orbit of Mars and probably disrupt the orbits of planets further out.

There is no chance of life on this planet surviving the event, and it's a toss-up whether the physical object now known as Earth will persevere or be dragged to



its doom in the sun.

The newly discovered planetary fragment is only about 320,000 miles from the white dwarf. That is well inside the presumed radius of the original star, and far closer than astronomers would expect to find anything solid. "So if the sun was positioned where the white dwarf is, the planetesimal would be orbiting within the sun," said Dr. Manser.

A solid object
Within the orbiting debris, the researchers noticed a solid object spraying a cometlike trail of gas. The object, a dense chunk of metal, was probably a remnant of the core of a planet, Dr. Gänsicke said. "If correct, the original body was at least hundreds of kilometers in diameter."

It is only the second solid remnant of a planet to have been discovered orbiting a white dwarf. And it marks the first time such an object has been identified spectroscopically, by analysis of the light emitted by the gas in its "tail."

It came as a surprise, Dr. Manser said. Such debris disks were typically understood to be the remains of a small body, such as an asteroid or comet, that had come near the white dwarf and been torn apart by tidal forces.

The newly found fragment would have to be solid metal, perhaps iron, to have withstood the tidal stretching, Dr. Manser said. But it now orbits too close to the white dwarf for life as we know it to exist on it. (Source: *NYT*)

Scientists may have pinpointed the source of Mars' methane

Back in 2013, NASA's Mars probe Curiosity reported detecting methane on Mars. This was a significant finding — methane has been periodically detected on Mars at various points, but the gas has always vanished thereafter. Long periods of time have passed without any methane being detected in the atmosphere at all.

In a new report, researchers claim to have found data substantiating Curiosity's initial methane detection. By scouring records from the ESO's Mars Express satellite, the team found evidence that its probe had picked up the methane burst as well, confirming that Curiosity detected what we thought it had.

Comparing the data from Curiosity with the data from Mars Express, the team was able to determine that the methane in question probably came from a ground release some distance from Curiosity's location at Gale Crater.

The most likely outcome, according to the team, is that 39-54 tons of methane were released into the Martian atmosphere from a subterranean source. After considering when the release began and the likely size, the scientists were able to create a likely grid for the emissions.

Their model suggests the release may have come from Aeolis Mensae, a geological feature some 300 miles east of Gale Crater. Current thinking is that a break in the Martian permafrost allowed for a significant release of methane gas.

The features at Aeolis Mensae are thought to be favorable for this kind of permafrost formation, increasing the chance that periodic breaks or fault lines could allow for a release. Gas accumulation could have caused a breach, or the permafrost might have been broken by a meteorite impact. The most likely origin block we've identified on the surface contains numerous geological faults that could account for the release.

This investigation highlights one of the gaps in our knowledge of Mars. While we're familiar with the planet's surface at this point, knowledge of its interior is lacking. Missions like InSight are intended to increase our knowledge of Mars' subsurface geology for precisely this reason.

(Source: *extremetech.com*)

Transparent wood now also stores and releases heat: new study

Three years ago, we heard how scientists from Sweden's KTH Royal Institute of Technology had created transparent wood — it could serve as a cheaper alternative to the silica-based glass currently used in windows and solar cells. Now, the material is additionally able to store heat and later release it.

In order to produce the initial version of the transparent wood, a KTH team led by Prof. Lars Berglund started by chemically removing light-absorbing lignin from natural balsa wood fibers — lignin is one component of wood cell walls.

The white-colored fibers were then combined with prepolymerized methyl methacrylate (PMMA), more commonly known as plexiglass. This altered the refractive index of the fibers, turning them transparent. The resulting material was stronger and tougher than regular clear plexiglass panels.

More recently, Berglund and PhD student Céline Montanari added a "phase-change" polymer called polyethylene glycol (PEG) to the treated wood fibers and PMMA.

Ordinarily taking the form of a solid, PEG has a high affinity for wood, plus it's also able to contain and disperse heat. It does so by melting when it reaches a temperature of 80 °F (27 °C), storing energy in the process. When it later cools back down, it reverts to a translucent solid, releasing that stored energy.

"During a sunny day, the material will absorb heat before it reaches the indoor space, and the indoors will be cooler than outside," says Montanari. "And at night, the reverse occurs — the PEG becomes solid and releases heat indoors, so that you can maintain a constant temperature in the house."

As an added bonus, the wood fibers and PEG are both biodegradable. Although the PMMA is not, it could likely be replaced with a more eco-friendly polymer, allowing the material to completely biodegrade when discarded.

(Source: *newatlas.com*)



Gene-hacked bacteria making spider silk so strong it could build space suits

Scientists have figured out how to genetically alter bacteria to churn out super-strong spider silk.

Pound for pound, spider silk is much stronger than steel, but farming spiders is incredibly inefficient, according to a press release — so finding a way to mass-produce the material could lead to super-strong fabrics and perhaps even next-generation space suits.

Put enough spiders as you'd need to farm silk together, and they tend to eat each other. Edit the gene for spider silk production into bacteria as is — now a common manufacturing process — and it gets rejected.

"In nature, there are a lot of protein-based materials that have amazing mechanical properties, but the supply of these materials is very often limited," lead researcher Fuzhong Zhang from Washington University in St. Louis said in the press release.

"My lab is interested in engineering microbes so that we can not only produce these materials, but make them even better." To get around those limitations, the scientists chopped up the spider silk genes into smaller pieces that re-assembled once they had been integrated into the bacterial genome.

With their new methodology, the scientists managed to manufacture two grams of spider silk — just as strong as silk that actually came from a spider — for each liter of gene-spliced bacteria.

That's not all that much silk for an unsettling amount of bacteria, but the press release reports that it's a vast improvement over other attempts to mass-produce silk.

If this research scales up, though, NASA may want to bring the bacteria along on future missions to space, giving crew members a new supply of materials for repairs.

(Source: *sciencealert.com*)

Scientists invent threads to detect gases when woven into clothing

Scientists have developed a novel fabrication method to create dyed threads that change color when they detect a variety of gases. Woven into clothing, smart, gas-detecting threads could provide a reusable, washable, and affordable safety asset in medical, workplace, military and rescue environments.

The study describes the fabrication method and its ability to extend to a wide range of dyes and detection of complex gas mixtures.

The researchers demonstrated that the threads can be read visually, or even more precisely by use of a smartphone camera, to detect changes of color due to analytes as low as 50 parts per million.

Woven into clothing, smart, gas-detecting threads could provide a reusable, washable, and affordable safety asset in medical, workplace, military and rescue environments, they say.

The complex gas mixtures
The study, published in the journal *Scientific Reports*, describes the fabrication method and its ability to extend to a wide range of dyes and detection of complex gas mixtures.

While not replacing the precision of electronic devices commonly used to detect volatile gases, incorporation of gas detection into textiles enables an equipment-free readout, without the need for specialized training, the researchers say.

Such an approach could make the technology accessible to a general workforce, or to low resource communities that can benefit from the information the textiles provide.

The study used a manganese-based dye, MnTPP, methyl red, and bromothymol blue to prove the concept. MnTPP and bromothymol blue can detect ammonia while methyl red



can detect hydrogen chloride — gases commonly released from cleaning supplies, fertilizer and chemical and materials production.

A three-step process "traps" the dye in the thread. The thread is first dipped in the dye, then treated with acetic acid, which makes the surface coarser and swells the fiber, possibly allowing more binding interactions between the dye and thread.

Finally, the thread is treated with polydimethylsiloxane (PDMS), which creates a flexible, physical seal around the thread and dye, which also repels water and prevents dye from leaching during washing.

Importantly, the PDMS is also gas permeable, allowing the analytes to reach the optical dyes.

"The dyes we used work in different ways, so we can detect gases with different chemistries," said Sameer Sonkusale, professor of electrical and computer engineering at Tufts

University's School of Engineering who heads the Nano Lab at Tufts and is corresponding author of the study.

Sonkusale's team used simple dyes that detect gases with acid or base properties. "But since we are using a method that effectively traps the dye to the thread, rather than relying so much on binding chemistry, we have more flexibility to use dyes with a wide range of functional chemistries to detect different types of gases," he said.

Using spectroscopic methods
The tested dyes changed color in a way that is dependent and proportional to the concentration of the gas as measured using spectroscopic methods.

In between the precision of a spectrometer and the human eye is the possibility of using smart phones to read out and quantify the color changes or interpret color signatures using multiple threads and dyes. "That would allow us to scale up the detection to measure many analytes at once, or to distinguish analytes with unique colorimetric signatures," said Sonkusale.

The threads even worked under water, detecting the existence of dissolved ammonia. "While the PDMS sealant is hydrophobic and keeps water off the thread, the dissolved gases can still reach the dye to be quantified," said Rachel Oweung, lead author and graduate student in the Tufts Department of Chemical and Biological Engineering.

"As dissolved gas sensors, we imagine smart fabrics detecting carbon dioxide or other volatile organic compounds during oil and gas exploration as one possible application." (Source: *sciencedaily.com*)

Volunteers join forces to help flood victims

SOCIETY TEHRAN — While many cities and villages across the country from north to south and east to west have been hit by devastating flood military and relief forces as well as volunteer groups have collaborated in aiding flood-stricken people.

Following heavy rainfalls in the country particularly in provinces of Golestan, Mazandaran, Lorestan, and Khuzestan as well as other provinces in western, southwestern, and northeastern Iran severe flood struck many cities and villages.



Shahin Fat'hi, deputy director at Rescue and Relief Organization, said on Friday that 1900 cities and villages are affected by flood over the past two weeks.

According to the statistics by Iran's Forensics Organization since the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21), some 67 have lost their lives in floods in provinces of Fars, Lorestan, North Khorasan, Golestan, Mazandaran, Hamedan, Khuzestan, Kermanshah, Semnan, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad and Khorasan Razavi.

Moreover, Mojtaba Khaledi, Emergency Medical Services spokesman, also said that some 768 were injured due to flood and heavy rainfalls since the beginning of the holidays.

In addition to the casualties, the catastrophic floods have caused major damage to buildings and other structures, including bridges, sewerage systems, roadways, and canal as well as crops and livestock in many provinces, especially in Mazandaran, Golestan, and Lorestan.

Forces at Iran's Red Crescent Society, Islamic Republic of Iran Army, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, as well as volunteer groups and charities are collectively attempting to help victims to stand on their feet once again.

The government and various charity organizations have pledged to provide the victims with non-repayable loans to compensate for the losses the floods have incurred.

According to Welfare Minister Mohammad Shariatmadari those provided with Iran's Welfare Organization coverage will receive non-repayable loans amounting to 100 million rials (nearly \$2,400) to reconstruct their houses.

Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam also known as Setad-e Ejrai-e Farman-e Hazrat-e Emam will grant 350 million rials (nearly \$8,300) insurance payouts to flood victims in villages of the southwestern province of Khuzestan to rebuild their houses.

German Ambassador to Tehran Michael Klor-Berchold also tweeted yesterday that a charter plane with German humanitarian assistance for flood victims has landed in Iran.

Will recent floods ease Iran's water bankruptcy?

1 → "There remain more than 5 months for the current water year to end, however, the amount of precipitations have already surpassed that of last year's," Ziaei highlighted.

NDWMC director went on to say that the amounts indicate a 39-percent increase compared to long-term averages and a 184-percent rise compared to the same period last year.

Considering last water year's deficiencies this year's precipitations have remedied deficiencies in almost all provinces except for provinces of Sistan-Baluchestan, Kerman, and Yazd, he added.

Moreover, he explained, provinces of Ilam and Lorestan have received considerable amounts of precipitations since the start of the current water year each with 136 and 112 percent increase compared to the corresponding period last year.

Ziaei also noted that 11 provinces including Ilam, West Azarbaijan, North Khorasan, Qom, Kordestan, Kermanshah, Golestan, Lorestan, Mazandaran, Markazi, and Hamedan, set the records for receiving most precipitation in long-term.

While the recent rainfalls have inflicted extensive damage they have played an important role in increasing the volume of water resources in the country, he stated.

■ **Will the wetlands be fully restored?**

Commenting on the restoration of wetlands in provinces receiving high precipitations NDWMC director said that full restoration of the wetlands depends on other factors other than increased rainfalls.

"Temperature rise and hence high evaporation rate especially in summer in Iran which is an arid and semi-arid country can result in dryness of the restored wetlands.

"So if the precipitations will not last for the coming months and temperature would



Karun River, in southwestern city of Ahwaz, is filled following recent rainfalls in the region

Different regions have different climates and with regard to the fact that substantial amounts of water is restored behind the dams in some areas should the water right of the wetlands is provided persistently they will remain full for a fairly long time.

rise the wetlands might get dry once again, as floodwaters can fill wetlands temporarily."

Nonetheless, Ziaei said, based on the projections for the second month of the spring temperatures will remain normal or below normal for the coming month.

"But different regions have different climates and with regard to the fact that substantial amounts of water is restored behind the dams in some areas should the

water right of the wetlands is provided persistently they will remain full for a fairly long time," he concluded.

■ **Addressing water bankruptcy**
It is generally believed the country is suffering water-bankruptcy, a term indicating that we are delivering much more water than nature provides annually.

Water bankruptcy will result in depletion of groundwater resources and dryness of

wetlands and rivers.

And now, with recent floods and rainfalls the controversial question is brought up once again: will the floods tackle water bankruptcy in the country?

What is evident is that recent floods have clearly increased the water level in rivers and wetlands, so that it has partially and most importantly temporarily addressed water shortages, but is it the same for the groundwater resources?

According to the Science Direct, groundwater recharge depends on several factors such as infiltration capacity, stochastic characteristics of rainfall, and climate factors. The spatial and temporal distribution of the rainfall mainly controls the natural groundwater recharge. Less groundwater recharge leads to a drop in the groundwater table, which can have a negative impact on vegetation.

In arid regions, recharge occurs through the ephemeral streams, which flow through the wadi course but most of the water is absorbed in the unsaturated zone before reaching the aquifer.

In semiarid regions, the recharge is irregular and occurs only in the periods of heavy rainfall. In humid regions, recharge is mainly in the winter period. In the summer period, most of the rainfall becomes soil moisture and evaporates. In cold areas, the melting of ice suddenly recharges the groundwater.

While groundwater recharge is a complex process and depends on various factors, effective watershed and aquifer management planning are required to feed valuable resources.

Managing water consumption as well as respecting nature by allocating the water right of rivers and wetlands can also play a significant role in achieving sustainability in the future.

Last time CO2 levels were this high, there were trees at the South Pole

Trees growing near the South Pole, sea levels 20 meters higher than now, and global temperatures 3C-4C warmer. That is the world scientists are uncovering as they look back in time to when the planet last had as much carbon dioxide in the atmosphere as it does today.

Using sedimentary records and plant fossils, researchers have found that temperatures near the South Pole were about 20C higher than now in the Pliocene epoch, from 5.3m to 2.6m years ago.

Many scientists use sophisticated computer models to predict the impacts of human-caused climate change, but looking back in time for real-world examples can give new insights.

The Pliocene was a "proper analogy" and offered important lessons about the road ahead, said Martin Siegert, a geophysicist and climate-change scientist at Imperial College London. "The headline news is the temperatures are 3-4C higher and sea levels are 15-20 meters higher than they are today. The indication is that there is no Greenland ice sheet any more, no West Antarctic ice sheet and big chunks of East Antarctic [ice sheet] taken," he said.

Fossil fuel burning was pumping CO2 into the atmosphere extremely rapidly, he said, though it took time for the atmosphere and oceans to respond fully. "If you put your oven on at home and set it to 200C the temperature does not get to that immediately, it takes a bit of time, and it is the same with climate," Siegert said, at a Royal Meteorological Society meeting on the climate of the Pliocene.

He added that global temperature had already risen by 1C since the industrial revolution, when CO2 levels were



Leaves of the extinct southern beech (*Nothofagus beardmorensi*) found at Oliver Bluffs, in the Transantarctic mountains, Antarctica.

280 parts per million (ppm). CO2 was now at 412ppm and rising, suggesting the planet would be locked into rises of 3C-4C in the next few centuries. Ice melting, he said, took even longer and the huge sea level rises indicated by the Pliocene evidence would probably take a few millennia to come about.

In the Pliocene a variety of beech and possibly conifer trees grew at Oliver Bluffs, 300 miles from the South Pole. The tree remains had been unearthed as fossils, along with cushion plants and mosses.

Jane Francis, director of the British Antarctic Survey, said: "This is an amazing discovery. They found fossil leaves of southern beech. I call them the last forests of Antarctica. They were growing at 400ppm CO2, so this may be where we are going back to, with ice sheets melt-

ing at times, which may allow plants to colonise again."

The evidence showed summertime temperatures in the Pliocene were a tundra-like 5C near the Pole, compared with -15C to -20C today.

The presence of plants showed the Antarctic ice cap was much smaller in the Pliocene and the sea level much higher. "Twenty meters of sea level rise would have a major impact on our all our coastal cities and all our coastal areas where people live," Francis said.

Polar regions were especially important in understanding global climate, she said: "We know that is where the change happens first and where it is most dramatic."

About 100m years ago an even more extreme climate occurred. In the Cretaceous period CO2 levels were 1,000ppm. Antarctica still sat over the South Pole, but the region was warm and covered in great forests, the stumps and soil of which have been preserved as fossils in places like Alexander Island.

"If we keep carbon emissions going at the current rate, by the end of the century we will have 1,000ppm," said Siegert. The low 280ppm level of CO2 in the run-up to the industrial revolution was rooted in carbon being removed from the air by plants and animals and then buried. "It formed coal seams, gas and oil fields. And what we have been doing for the last 150 years is digging it all up and putting it back into the atmosphere, it's crazy."

One climate peril these emissions ruled out, said Siegert, was a return to an ice age, which had happened several times in the last million years: CO2 was now at too high a level for there to be any chance of a big freeze, said Siegert. "We've killed it"

(Source: The Guardian)

LEARN ENGLISH

Talking About Skincare

A: You want to go get a **facial** with me today?
B: Dude, what are you talking about? Only girls do that.
A: Not at all, guys also get facials, **manicures** and **pedicures**. There is nothing wrong with looking after your skin and looking good.
B: True. So what do they do to you at your beauty **spa**?
A: Well, first they **exfoliate** my face, getting rid of all the dead skin. Then I get a face mask with nutrients that keep my skin healthy and young. Afterwards, they apply some moisturizer and you leave feeling like a million bucks.
B: That doesn't really sound like something I would be interested in. In any case, I just wash my face every night and use **sunscreen** during the day.
A: Well you should come with me one day, I'm sure you'll love it.
B: Uh... no.

Key vocabulary

facial: a treatment to beautify the face.
manicure: a cosmetic treatment of the hands and fingernails, including trimming and polishing of the nails
pedicure: professional care and treatment of the feet
spa: a luxurious resort or resort hotel.
exfoliate: to remove the surface of...such as skin and dirt
sunscreen: a substance formulated to prevent sunburn, skin cancers, and other conditions caused by excessive exposure to the sun

Supplementary vocabulary

massage: the act or art of treating the body by rubbing, kneading, patting
tranquil: free from commotion or tumult; peaceful; quiet
sunburn: inflammation of the skin caused by overexposure to the sun or a sunlamp.
tan: A brown color on the skin caused by the rays of the sun

(Source: irlanguage.com)



Without water, everything withers

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

DOE not convinced to transfer water from Caspian Sea

Studies carried out so far has not yet convinced the Department of Environment (DOE) to transfer water from the Caspian Sea to central Iran, Parvin Farshchi, deputy director of the DOE for marine affairs has said.

Over the past few years Iran has faced recurrent drought spells and low precipitation and the value of water has become more tangible, Khabaronline quoted Farshchi as saying on Saturday. She further explained that water transfer from the Caspian Sea to central Iran has been a matter of interest for some years now and in the [Iranian calendar year of] 1389 (March 2010-March 2011) various research and studies on the issue were conducted.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

"extra-, extro-"

■ **Meaning:** outside or beyond
■ **For example:** Chris's behavior that morning was quite **extraordinary**.

PHRASAL VERB

Think back

■ **Meaning:** to think about things that happened in the past
■ **For example:** Thinking back, it amazes me how we survived on so little sleep.

IDIOM

Cool as a cucumber

■ **Explanation:** calm and composed, especially in times of stress
■ **For example:** Practicing meditation has helped me to be as cool as a cucumber in times of trouble.

U.S. House approves resolution to end U.S. role in Yemen war

The U.S. House of Representatives on Thursday approved a bill to end U.S. support for the Saudi-UAE war in Yemen, sending U.S. President Donald Trump another rebuke over his support for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The measure, passed in a 247-175 vote, now goes to Trump, but the White House has signaled that the president is likely to veto the bill.

Passage of the resolution, approved previously by the U.S. Senate, marks the first time the United States Congress has acted under the War Powers Act of 1973, a Vietnam War-era law introduced to curtail a U.S. president's deployment of U.S. military forces without congressional approval.

Since 2015, the U.S. has provided aerial refueling of jets, reconnaissance, targeting and intelligence information to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), in their campaign against the Houthis who unseated the Saudi-backed government in Yemen. Saudi Arabia and a coalition of Arab governments have launched more than 19,000 air raids across Yemen.

Air raids by the Saudi-UAE coalition have hit civilians, hospitals and water treatment facilities. Aid groups estimate as many as 60,000 civilians have been killed in the war and as many as 85,000 children starved to death, with millions more "one step away from famine".

Recruitment of children

The Saudi-UAE military authorities are recruiting Yemeni children, many of them desperately poor, to fight along the Saudi border against the Houthis.

"I became convinced long ago that we cannot tie ourselves to the Saudis and the Emiratis given the way in which they have conducted this war," Democratic Senator Chris Murphy told Al Jazeera.

"If they are recruiting child soldiers, it just adds to the list of reasons why we need to be out of this coalition as soon as possible," he added.

"We have plenty of other avenues we can pursue. We can continue to push sanctions legislation in the committee. We can look at future arms sales votes. There is only so much we can do if the president refuses to change direction," Murphy said.



Ending U.S. involvement in Yemen war

The Democrat-controlled House had previously approved Thursday's measure on a 248-177 vote on February 13, but was required to redo the vote to overcome a parliamentary hurdle raised by Republicans.

"There are 22 million souls at risk of dying, of being killed. Maybe not of being shot, but being starved to death or dying from medical problems for which they can receive no medicines," House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer previously told reporters.

"It is a humanitarian crisis. I would refer to it in even more draconian terms because I think it's such a conscious effort by both sides to put these people at risk," he added. "It is necessary for us to act."

The resolution excludes U.S. drone attacks and special forces operations against al-Qaeda in Yemen from the terms of its prohibition. U.S. forces conducted six air attacks in March against what the U.S. military says were al-Qaeda targets located in the Al Bayda Governorate in Yemen, according to an April 1 statement by the U.S. Central Command.

A previous U.S. drone attack in Yemen on January 1 targeted and killed Jamal al-Badawi, who the U.S. says was one of the planners of the 2000 al-Qaeda bombing of the USS Cole naval ship in Aden Harbor that killed 17 American sailors.

U.S.-Saudi arms deals 'dramatically understated'

An American think tank says it has found

new data showing U.S. arms deals with Saudi Arabia and the UAE are "dramatically understated" and billions more than previously reported.

The data collected by arms trade watchdog Security Assistance Monitor (SAM) shows the U.S. has struck at least \$68.2 billion worth of deals with the two countries since they started their war in Yemen.

The colossal sum includes, for the first time, both commercial and governmental arms deals and indicates that U.S. involvement in the disastrous war may be greater than suspected, said London-based Middle East Eye which cited the data.

"In fact, the weapons expenditure could have funded the United Nations' 2019 humanitarian appeal for Yemen—which totaled \$4 billion—17 times over," the online news outlet said.

Government sales tend to be for major systems, like combat aircraft, tanks, bombs, and ships, while commercial sales include smaller weapons like firearms and bombs disproportionately used in Yemen.

According to William Hartung, the director of the arms and security project at the Center for International Policy, the commercial data shows the U.S. role in Yemen is "dramatically understated."

That is because commercial sales are "so rarely discussed, compared to big glitzy deals like the fighter planes," said Hartung whose progressive think tank in Washington houses SAM.

Middle East Eye quoted a U.S. State Department official who confirmed the overall

value of American weapons deals with Saudi Arabia and the UAE in their war on Yemen totaling about \$67.4 billion.

New details about the arms deals come amid a continued push in U.S. Congress to end Washington's involvement in the war in Yemen, which has displaced millions and led to widespread disease and malnutrition.

The new data reportedly shows the U.S. approved arms deals with Saudi Arabia and the UAE just days after they used U.S. bombs to kill civilians in Yemen and also after the brutal killing leading journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Deals made soon after Saudi attacks using U.S. weapons included a bomb on August 9, 2018 which hit a school bus in northern Yemen carrying boys on a field trip, killing 54 people, Middle East Eye reported.

Another Saudi bombing of a wedding northwest of the Yemeni capital Sana'a on April 22, 2018 reportedly killed 33 people, including the bride. Days later, it was proved that U.S. firm Raytheon had made part of a bomb found at the scene of the attack.

"It's hard to imagine a more dramatic example of the negative consequences of U.S. arms sales," Hartung said.

"They're supporting regimes that are murdering civilians and causing a humanitarian catastrophe... This is a stain on the United States."

According to Hartung, a withdrawal of all channels of military support to Saudi Arabia and the UAE would cripple their ability to wage war in Yemen and particularly the indiscriminate air war.

However, the Trump administration is "putting a stamp of approval on what these countries are doing" in Yemen so much so that over two-thirds of the entire Saudi combat-ready fleet comes from the U.S.

The Saudi war has so far claimed the lives of about 56,000 Yemenis, says the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), a nonprofit conflict-research organization.

The war has also taken a heavy toll on Yemen's infrastructure, destroying hospitals, schools, and factories.

The UN has warned that a record 22.2 million Yemenis are in dire need of food, including 8.4 million threatened by severe hunger.

(Source: agencies)

Mosque massacre suspect to face 89 charges

The man accused of carrying out the Christchurch mosque attacks will face 50 murder charges and 39 attempted murder charges when he makes his second court appearance, New Zealand police said Thursday. Police had earlier filed a single, representative murder charge against 28-year-old Australian Brenton Harrison Tarrant. He is due to appear via video link during a brief hearing Friday, and won't be required to enter a plea. Fifty people died in the March 15 attacks on two mosques and another 50 were wounded.

Police said in a brief statement that they were considering filing more charges against Tarrant but couldn't comment further as the case was before the court.

Tarrant's first appearance was on the day after the attacks in the Christchurch District Court. His case has now been moved to the High Court due to the seriousness of the charges. Tarrant has reportedly been moved to a high-security prison in Auckland, which is why he'll appear via video link.

During the scheduled court hearing, media photographs won't be allowed and reporting on the proceedings will be severely restricted under New Zealand law. The intent of the law is to avoid the possibility of the reporting and images would taint the views of potential jurors before they hear evidence in court.

Judge Cameron Mander said in a note that the brief hearing would mainly be about the accused gunman's legal representation.

Tarrant earlier dismissed lawyer Richard Peters, who was assigned to represent him during his district court appearance. Peters said Tarrant told him that he wanted to represent himself. Many worry that Tarrant will try to use his trial as a soapbox to push his white supremacist views.

The judge said he had received applications from 25 media organizations to take film, photographs or audio recordings of Friday's hearing but had denied all of them. He said reporters could remain throughout and take notes, although would be restricted in what they could report.

In other developments, Australia's Parliament passed legislation Thursday that could imprison social media executives if their platforms stream real violence such as the New Zealand mosque shootings. Tarrant used a helmet-mounted camera to broadcast live on Facebook as he shot the worshippers.

The law has made it a crime for social media platforms not to remove "abhorrent violent material" quickly. The crime would be punishable by three years in prison and a fine of 10.5 million Australian dollars (\$7.5 million), or 10 percent of the platform's annual turnover, whichever is larger.

Abhorrent violent material is defined as acts of terrorism, murder, attempted murder, torture, rape and kidnapping. The material must be recorded by the perpetrator or an accomplice for the law to apply. Platforms anywhere in the world would face fines of up to AU\$840,000 if they fail to notify Federal Police if they are aware their service was streaming "abhorrent violent conduct" occurring in Australia.

(Source: AP)

G7 ministers still divided on how to handle militants in Syria, Iraq

France hosts wary G7 in shadow of Trump snub, Brexit and yellow vests

Interior ministers from the Group of Seven industrialized nations still have different views over how to handle militants and their families in Syria and Iraq, the French Interior Minister Christophe Castaner said Friday.

The U.S. representative, under-secretary Claire Grady, reiterated at the meeting of G7 interior ministers in Paris the U.S. position that these foreign fighters should be returned to their countries of origin.

France and other countries say they should face trial in Iraq.

Meanwhile, France offered a wary welcome to foreign ministers from the Group of Seven on Friday for a meeting overshadowed by a snub from Donald Trump's U.S. administration, a meltdown in Britain over Brexit and months of anti-government protests at home.

Protesters spray-painted slogans attacking President Emmanuel Macron in the sleepy coastal resort of Dinard where the ministers were due to gather to set the agenda for their leaders at the annual big power summit in August.

Workers at dawn scrubbed furiously at walls daubed with "Thieving banks", "Revolution" and "No to the G7", slogans which mirrored the anger vented across France in more than five months of anti-government "yellow vest" protests.

French diplomats say they have scaled back their ambi-

tions for their presidency of the club of big rich countries, after Trump backed out of a joint communique at last year's summit in Canada and criticized Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will not attend and is sending a deputy. One seasoned diplomat in Paris said Pompeo had sent a message that he had "better things to do".

Still, the agenda includes important issues from cyber security and foreign interference in democracies, to countering trafficking in the Sahel and inequality.

British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said he would call on his European counterparts to support his government's request for a further delay to Britain's exit from the EU, scheduled to take place in a week unless EU countries agree an extension.

Prime Minister Theresa May has been unable to pass her withdrawal agreement in parliament. Hunt said the G7 was proof Britain was not pulling back from a leading international role.

"The UK's involvement in the G7 is vital for our collective security and prosperity as we seek to protect the rules-based international system," he said. "Be in no doubt that once Brexit has happened, the UK will remain a global power."

Along with the United States, France and Britain, the



group includes Japan, Germany, Italy, Canada and the European Union. The ministerial meeting is meant to ensure that when the leaders convene in Biarritz in August, they are largely in agreement.

But tensions between the United States and its European allies, particularly over trade, climate change and the nuclear deal with Iran, have meant that where they were once largely in accord, they now seek the lowest common denominator.

(Source: Reuters)

More Russian troops may arrive in Venezuela

Venezuela's Deputy Foreign Minister Ivan Gil says he does not rule out the possibility of more Russian military personnel arriving in his country based on agreements already reached between Caracas and Moscow.

The senior diplomat made the comments on Thursday, days after Caracas confirmed the deployment of two Russian planes with troops and equipment to the Venezuelan capital under a defense deal signed in 2001.

Gil also said that Russian forces would stay in Venezuela as long as needed, and that there was no set period for their stay.

"The group of military specialists is (in Venezuela) in the context of our agreements and contracts for military-technical cooperation," Interfax news agency quoted Vene-

zuela's deputy minister as saying.

On March 28, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Russian military specialists were in the South American country to service pre-existing contracts for the supply of Russian arms, stressing that Moscow was not interfering in Venezuela's domestic affairs.

Venezuela has been in an unprecedented political chaos since U.S.-backed opposition figure Juan Guaido declared himself the "interim president" in a bizarre move in January.

The administration of U.S. President Donald Trump, which immediately recognized the 35-year-old opposition leader as the acting president of Venezuela and called other countries to follow suit, has repeatedly threatened to use

military force to topple incumbent President Nicolas Maduro's government.

Furthermore, Washington has been using everything in its power, including economic pressure, to topple Maduro. The U.S. has also confiscated Venezuela's oil assets based in the U.S. to channel them to Guaido.

Late last month, Russia's sole state arms exporter Rosoboroneexport announced that it had opened a training center for military helicopters in Venezuela.

Russia and China, among many other countries, back the legitimate government of Maduro, who has called Guaido a "puppet" of Washington.

Russia also vocally opposes U.S. measures against Venezuela and accuses Washington

of attempting to organize a coup there in violation of the United Nations Charter.

On Wednesday, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that Washington would resort to all means in an attempt to force Russia out of Venezuela.

"President Trump's made clear that we're prepared to do what it takes to get the Russians to leave. I think he said it precisely that way," he said.

A week earlier, the U.S. special representative for Venezuela said Pompeo has a list of options, including sanctions, that the White House could use to respond to the presence of Russian troops in the Latin American nation.

(Source: agencies)

Persian Gulf Arab states, Egypt say will boycott parliament meet in Doha

Three Persian Gulf Arab states and Egypt said they will not attend a global meeting of parliamentarians due to be held in Doha on Saturday because Qatar has not changed the kind of behaviour which made them sever ties two years ago.

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and non-Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) member Egypt cut diplomatic, transport and trade ties with Qatar in 2017, accusing it of supporting terrorism and their regional foe Iran - something Doha denies.

The quartet plans to boycott an Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) annual meeting in Doha April from 6-10, they said in a statement carried on UAE state news agency WAM late on Thursday. The IPU is a global organisation of national parliaments that promotes democracy.

They will not attend because Qatar "has not responded to the just demands of the four countries and has continued its supportive policy for extremism, terrorism and interference in the affairs of the countries of the region," it said.

Gas-rich Qatar says the boycott is aimed at undermining its sovereignty. It has started charting a course away from its Gulf neighbors, including forging new trade partnerships, strengthening ties with Turkey and quitting OPEC.

Those moves have deepened expectations that the dispute will not be resolved quickly, unnerving the United States, the main Western ally of the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council which sees the rift as a threat to efforts to contain Iran.

(Source: Daily Star)

Ukraine presidential rivals undergo televised drug tests

The two remaining candidates in Ukraine's presidential race underwent televised drug and alcohol tests on Friday, capping a week in which they traded jibes in tit-for-tat social media videos and goaded each other to agree to a live policy debate.



President Petro Poroshenko is facing Volodymyr Zelenskyy, a comedian with no political experience who plays a fictional president in a TV series, in a run-off on April 21 after neither obtained a majority of votes in the first round last Sunday.

Zelenskyy won nearly twice as many votes as Poroshenko, but the incumbent is fighting back by painting his rival as a lightweight who would put Ukraine's security at risk.

The comedian had demanded they both be tested for drugs after he accepted Poroshenko's challenge for a policy debate in an apparent attempt to up the ante in their rivalry.

Early on Friday, Zelenskyy, 41, was shown in a livestream on his Facebook page undergoing a blood test at a private laboratory. "I took a blood test. They pumped all sorts of blood out of me. But thank God, I have enough of it. Young blood," he told reporters afterwards.

An hour later, several television channels broadcast live footage of Poroshenko, 53, having his blood drawn by a medic in red scrubs in a room inside Kiev's main football stadium.

Poroshenko, 53, submitted blood, hair and urine samples to four different laboratories, said Volodymyr Yary, the chief doctor at a Kiev state hospital. He announced that the preliminary results from Poroshenko's test showed that "no psychoactive substance was found."

Poroshenko goaded Zelenskyy for not accepting his invitation to have the tests done at the stadium alongside him.

"I'm at the stadium today," Poroshenko told reporters. "Volodymyr Oleksandrovych, as I understand it, was not. I came, but you didn't. No matter, I am sure that he will pick up the courage and come here and the debate will happen."

On Wednesday, Zelenskyy accepted Poroshenko's challenge to take part in a policy debate but set his own conditions, including that it be held at the football stadium.

Poroshenko released another video overnight accusing Zelenskyy of setting many preconditions as a way of avoiding the debate altogether.

Asked after Friday's drugs tests why he had not accepted Poroshenko's request to take the test at the stadium, Zelenskyy said: "There is no laboratory there. It was a very strange invitation."

(Source: Reuters)

Briton Kennaugh takes break due to mental health issues

Former Olympic gold medallist Peter Kennaugh is taking a break from professional cycling as a result of mental health issues, the rider and his Bora-Hansgrohe team said on Friday.

"Peter will be taking an indefinite break from professional cycling due to ongoing mental health issues," Bora-Hansgrohe said in a statement.

"The Team supports Peter in his decision and have agreed that this is the best course of action to ensure he can return to full health in the near future."

The 2014 and 2015 British road racing champion was a member of the Team Sky who helped Chris Froome win two of his four Tour de France titles in 2013 and 2015.

The 29-year-old, who won the team pursuit gold medal at the London Olympics with Edward Clancy, Geraint Thomas and Steven Burke, left the British outfit for Bora-Hansgrohe last year.

"I would like to thank everyone at Bora-Hansgrohe for their support and understanding to allow me to recover away from the sport. I wish the team the best of luck for the rest of the season," Kennaugh said.

(Source: Reuters)

Palace keeper Hennessey cleared of making Nazi salute

Crystal Palace goalkeeper Wayne Hennessey was cleared of making a Nazi salute by the English Football Association (FA) on Friday.

The Wales international was charged with an 'aggravated breach' of the rules governing player conduct in January after being pictured with his right arm in the air in a photo posted on Instagram by Palace team mate Max Meyer.

Hennessey denied the charge, taking to Twitter to explain that he had been calling out and waving to attract the attention of the person behind the camera when the picture was taken.

"I'm delighted that the FA have found me not guilty of this charge," Hennessey said in a statement on Palace's website.

The photograph prompted an outcry on social media and the FA charged the 32-year-old with a breach of its rules relating to abusive, insulting or improper conduct and bringing the game into disrepute.

"This was a genuinely innocent moment, which appeared to be something completely different when captured on camera," Hennessey added.

"I want to state for the record that I abhor all forms of racism, fascism, anti-Semitism or discrimination of any kind."

(Source: Eurosport)

Milwaukee Bucks seal first conference win since 1974

Milwaukee Bucks ensured they would finish as Eastern Conference top seeds for the first time since 1974 with a 128-122 win over Philadelphia 76ers.

Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 45 points as the Bucks ensured they would have home court advantage in the play-offs.

"It's been a really special year," Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said. "I'm very proud of the team."

Golden State Warriors boosted hope of finishing top in the Western Conference by beating Los Angeles Lakers 108-90.

Golden State improved to 54 wins and 24 losses with four regular season games left and boast a two-game lead over Denver Nuggets. All eight Western Conference spots are filled, leaving just the finishing order to be determined.

In the Eastern conference meanwhile, the Bucks have 59 wins and now have three matches to get to 60 regular season wins for just the fifth time in franchise history.

Their latest success saw them take the final quarter 46-36 to overcome Philadelphia, with Antetokounmpo strengthening his claim to win the NBA's Most Valuable Player Award.

His haul of 45 points and 13 rebounds means he has 25 points or more and 10 rebounds or more in a game 42 times this season.

Budenholzer added: "It's a special performance from him. It felt like a statement. He's an MVP in our eyes."

"We didn't play our best but had a couple of guys catch fire. Any time you can have home court in the play-offs it's a great thing."

(Source: BBC)

UK's richest man Ratcliffe wants to buy French club Nice

Britain's richest man, Jim Ratcliffe, wants to further expand his sport network by buying French Ligue 1 club Nice after snapping up cycling's Team Sky last month, his brother revealed to French media on Friday.

Robert Ratcliffe confirmed to the newspaper Nice-Matin that his sibling, the boss of petrochemical giant Ineos, wants to purchase the club following reports of negotiations on Thursday.

"We do not want to buy a club where we have to rebuild everything. There is a magnificent stadium and a brand new training centre," said Robert Ratcliffe.

He insisted that his brother, a Manchester United fan, "wants to invest in football" and "Ligue 1 has great players like Mbappe and Neymar, some of the best in the world."

However he said that after initially showing interest in the sale, Nice's Chinese-American owner Chien Lee pulled away from the offer, reportedly in the region of 100 million euros (\$112.3 million). "He told me he was open to selling ... but 24 hours later, we were informed that he did not want to receive any more offers," Robert Ratcliffe continued.

Brexit-backing billionaire Ratcliffe, 66, has assets worth an estimated £21 billion (\$27.8 billion, 24.5 billion euros), placing him top of the 2018 Sunday Times rich list.

He founded Ineos in 1998 and the company went on to become an industrial juggernaut in a country increasingly dominated by the service sector.

The group now has annual sales of \$60 billion and employs over 18,000 people in 24 countries.

(Source: AFP)

Bayern v Dortmund 'the biggest game in Europe this season'



German champions Bayern Munich host Borussia Dortmund on Saturday (kick-off 17:30 BST with live text coverage on BBC Sport) - a match described as the "biggest game of the season in Europe".

And for once, Bayern, managed by Niko Kovac, are the ones chasing Lucien Favre's Dortmund, who lead the way by just two points with seven games remaining.

Speaking on BBC Radio 5 Live, European football expert Guillem Balague and New York Times chief football writer Rory Smith discussed how the match known as Der Klassiker will pan out.

'A proper title decider'

At the start of December, the title race looked to be over with Dortmund nine points clear at the top, but Bayern took advantage of the stuttering form of their rivals to claw back the deficit.

However, Bayern slipped up last week by drawing against Freiburg and the yellow and blacks beat Wolfsburg with two late Paco Alcacer goals to regain the initiative.

Both teams were knocked out at the last-16 stage of the Champions League by English clubs, Bayern losing against Liverpool and Dortmund suffering defeat at the hands of Tottenham.

Balague said: "Kovac has found a way of playing now that makes them solid. When they start scoring, they don't stop scoring. Plus, they have the momentum with them."

"In terms of this weekend, Dortmund don't usually get anything when they go to the Allianz. It all seems stacked in Bayern's favor."

Smith said: "Dortmund raced into this lead and had this incredible start to the season."

Jadon Sancho was setting up goals, Alcacer was coming on with 15 minutes to go and scoring hat-tricks, Marco Reus was back and looking brilliant and then, around March, the time when they played Spurs, they just stopped.

"They ran out of energy, they ran out of ideas. It seemed like they choked, for want of a better word. Suddenly you had this big red machine, trundling up behind them."

"Niko Kovac found a style that worked for him and you thought 'relentlessly, remorselessly, Bayern will catch Dortmund'. But Dortmund have suddenly found a way back.

"It is probably the biggest game of the season, in Europe, in terms of what rests on it in any of the major five leagues. The timing of it, the gap between them, it is a proper title decider."

"Dortmund have this big game at the Allianz, where they don't need to win, they just need to draw to keep their two-point lead."

Beware the fox in the box

Bayern striker Robert Lewandowski leads the scoring chart this season and is just one strike away from registering 200 goals in the top flight but Dortmund's Spanish striker Alcacer is just three adrift for this term and

has scored at a quicker rate.

Balague said: "Alcacer is not a very good player, but he is a great striker. He finishes moves."

"He is not the fastest for the kind of counter-attacking moves they practise; physically you can't ask him to do 90 minutes of pressing football, but he has the knack of scoring goals at the right time, even from the bench."

"But his all-round game is not one you can trust. He loses the ball and doesn't get involved outside the box, but in it he is great." (Source: BBC)

England's Rose can't wait to see back of football after abuse



England defender Danny Rose has had enough of racism in the game and said he cannot wait to get out of football amid frustration over the response of the authorities to the abuse.

Tottenham Hotspur full back Rose was among the players who were victims of offensive chanting when they played for England in Montenegro last month in a Euro 2020 qualifier.

"I've had enough," Rose, 28, was quoted as saying by The Guardian on Thursday.

"At the minute, how I programme myself is that I just think: 'I've got five or six more years left in football and I just can't wait to see the back of it'."

"Seeing how things are done in the game at the minute, I just want to get out of it."

Rose feels not enough action is being taken and the disparity in the punishment highlights its ineffectiveness.

"Obviously, it is a bit sad (to feel like this) but when countries only get fined what I'd probably spend on a night out in London, what do you expect?" he added.

"You see my manager get banned for two games for just being confrontational against Mike Dean," he said of Spurs manager Mauricio Pochettino's two-match touchline ban for confronting the referee

at the end of a 2-1 defeat at Burnley in February. "But yet a country can only get fined a little bit of money for being racist. It's just a bit of a farce at the minute. So that's where we are at in football and until there's a harsh punishment, there's not much else we can expect."

Rose said he had expected the racist abuse dished out to him and his England team mates Raheem Sterling and Callum Hudson-Odoi during the match against Montenegro in Podgorica.

"I played in Serbia about eight years ago and it happened there. So I sort of thought it would be a possibility that it might happen again and it did."

"I looked up straight away in the first half and I know the exact time it happened in the first half. "But it didn't affect my game. I'm a big boy now and I know that three points are obviously not the most important thing when you're going through something like that, but I just wanted the team to get three points so that we could move on and get out of Montenegro as quickly as possible," Rose said.

England are top of 2020 European Championship qualifying Group A with a maximum six points.

(Source: Reuters)

Racist abuse of Kean intolerable – Italy boss Mancini



The racist abuse of Juventus forward Moise Kean was "intolerable", says Italy manager Roberto Mancini.

Kean scored in Juve's win at Cagliari on Tuesday and celebrated by holding his arms outstretched, seemingly in response to racist chants.

Mancini gave the 19-year-old his international debut in November and Kean scored in both of his country's Euro 2020 qualifying wins in March.

"It can't go on. It needs action and it needs to be tough," Mancini said.

"Even in England, where they are far ahead of us in the fight against racism, these things still happen - but we must do a lot more to eliminate them altogether."

After Tuesday's match, Juventus captain Leonardo Bonucci suggested Kean was partly culpable for the chants because of his celebration. Bonucci said his team-mate "could have done it differently" and "the blame is 50-50", although the defender later said his comments had been misunderstood.

On the celebrations, former Manchester City boss Mancini said: "Kean's a golden lad. Maybe next time he won't do it. I think he was distressed."

Abuse disgusting and sad - Neville

Manchester City forward Raheem Sterling, who made a similar stand against racist chanting last month, called Bonucci's comments laughable.

Racist chanting was directed at several England players during their 5-1 Euro 2020 qualifying win over Montenegro in Podgorica in March. Sterling gestured to the crowd by putting his hands to his ears after scoring, and later called on football's authorities to take "a proper stance" against racist abuse.

Some have suggested England's players should have walked off the field, but manager Gareth Southgate said he was "not 100% certain that that would be what the players would want".

England women manager Phil Neville said the abuse was "disgusting" and added he "hopes he'd have the courage" to bring a team off to make a real stance.

"We've got to a point where we can no longer keep sweeping things under the carpet with a £10,000 or £20,000 fine, or close half a stadium, because I'm not so sure we are getting to the bottom of the real issue," he said.

"It'll only take one manager to do that, to make a real stance - because it's disgusting and sad and it's still happening."

(Source: BBC)

Sterling stands for a 'better society', says Man City boss Guardiola

Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola has hailed Raheem Sterling's decision to buy 550 tickets for his side's FA Cup semi-final against Brighton for pupils of his former school as an "incredible gesture."

Sterling grew up in the shadow of the old Wembley, having moved to England from Jamaica at the age of five.

"I grew up right next door to the stadium and would dream of one day playing in a cup final or even representing my country there," said Sterling.

"To now be able to play there myself is an honour and this is a great opportunity to give back to the community that helped me get to where I am."

The England international has become a key figure not only on the field for club and country, but an increasingly prominent campaigner against racism.

Sterling was allegedly targeted by racist abuse earlier in the season at Chelsea and also spoke out as England players suffered more disturbing scenes in Montenegro last month.

"It is an incredible gesture," Guardiola told reporters on Friday. "This kind of gesture makes a better society for



everyone.

"Football players are human beings, we live all together and these kind of gestures dignify who he is."

Sterling's England teammate Danny Rose admitted this

week he cannot wait to retire given the lack of leadership from the football authorities in the drive to weed out racist abuse.

However, Guardiola, whose side face Rose's Tottenham in the first leg of their Champions League quarter-final tie next week, encouraged the left-back to stand up and continue the fight against discrimination.

"Danny Rose has not to do that (retire)," said Guardiola. "Next Tuesday, if I see him, I will tell him the best way to fight, (to) combat this kind of terrible situation is fighting, being here every day."

"And of course because he is an extraordinary football player."

City will stay in London between the FA Cup semi-final and the trip to Tottenham's new stadium in midweek, with Guardiola keen to avoid unnecessary travelling time.

Sergio Aguero will travel south with his teammates on Friday but Guardiola is unsure whether he will be fit to face Brighton.

"He is almost fit," added the Catalan coach.

(Source: AFP)

Philippines beat Iran at 2020 Olympic Qualifiers Round 2

East Asian side the Philippines registered win over Iran on the opening day of Group C action in Round 2 of the AFC Women's Olympic Football Tournament Qualifiers on Wednesday.

Two excellent goals in five second-half minutes proved decisive for the Philippines, who kick-started their week in Qatar with an impressive 2-0 win over Iran at Grand Hamad Stadium in Doha, Qatar.

A stunning opener from Joyce Semacio was quickly followed by Alisha Del Campo's precise second, as Let Dimzon's side passed their opening test, and set up a top of the table clash with Chinese Taipei on Saturday.

In a fast-paced opening 45 minutes, both sides took regular turns at trying to get in behind the opposing defense, but while the match was high on energy, clear cut chances were rare, and it remained scoreless at the interval, the-afc.com reported.

The game burst into life in the second minute of the second period, as Philippines striker Semacio produced a magnificent volley on the turn to fire the Southeast Asians into the lead.

Before Iran could recover, that lead was extended as Del Campo breached the Iranian defense before picking out the bottom corner to beat goalkeeper Zahra Kahjavi and make it 2-0 in the 52nd minute.

Maryam Azmoun's side refused to give up, launching a wave of attacks and pushing several extra bodies forward, but their efforts went without reward as the Philippines celebrated what may prove to be a priceless three points.

Earlier on the day, Chinese Taipei defeated Palestine 3-0.



Thomas Haessler sympathizes with Iranians over deadly flood



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Former German midfielder Thomas Haessler has sympathized with Iranian people over deadly flood in Iran's southern Fars province.

The death toll from two weeks of flooding in Iran has risen to 62.

Some 26 provinces out of 31 now have flood warnings due to torrential rain in a country more accustomed to drought.

Authorities have warned about possibility of floods in the capital Tehran as well as in the oil-rich southern province of Khuzestan in the next 48 hours.

"My dear friends from Iran, I've already heard a terrible news about the flood in your country. I can only imagine what you're going through. I've worked as a football coach in Iran some years ago. I got to know a lot of kind people, and I respect and love your folk and your culture. I wish and I hope, it will be better soon. My heart goes out to you. God bless Iran," Haessler posted on his Instagram account.

Haessler, who won the 1990 FIFA World Cup, has worked in Iranian top-flight football club Padideh in 2014 as assistant coach.

Iran move up one place in FIFA rankings



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iran national football team moved up one place to 21st in the latest FIFA rankings.

Iran leads Asian teams and champions Qatar, the 2022 World Cup hosts, stay at No. 55.

While there were 150 games played across the globe during the international period, things remain tight at the top of the FIFA World Ranking as the top three remained unchanged.

This sees Belgium (1st, unchanged) maintain a slender lead — growing it marginally to three points — over 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia winners France (2nd,

unchanged). Brazil (3rd, unchanged), however, are looking over their shoulders somewhat as England (4th, up 1) leapfrogged World Cup finalists Croatia (5th, down 1).

Germany, rebuilding following their humiliating exit from the 2018 World Cup after the group phase, are also moving up.

They rise three places to 13th on the back of their victory over the Netherlands in the Euro qualifiers last month.

Austria slid 11 places, the biggest drop in the rankings, after Euro qualifier defeats in March.

The next FIFA world rankings will be published on June 14, 2019.

Iran basketball can make it: Mohammad Jamshidi

Iran are the only Asian team to have seen action in the last 2 FIBA Basketball World Cups, and that has cemented their place as the most consistently outstanding Asian squad in the past decade.

That was tested in the recent Asian Qualifiers, when Iran were pushed to their limits, needing to win their final game against Australia to formally book their tickets to the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2019. That they did, and last weekend the Iranians found out where they'll play and against whom. Team Melli were drawn into Group C alongside African team Tunisia, Puerto Rico of the FIBA Americas and World Cup 2006 champions Spain.

To say that it'll be a challenging group is a huge understatement, but veteran wingman Mohammad Jamshidi remains unfazed. He is confident that if his team will train well and will be at full strength, they can advance.

"We just need to work hard to get ready for these games," he said. "We are in a tough group, but we can make it,"



Jamshidi told fiba.basketball.

The 27-year-old basketballer was among Iran's best players in the Asian Qualifiers, averaging 12.0 points, 3.2 assists, 2.4 rebounds and 1.6 three-pointers per game, and he should play a vital role for the team in the World Cup.

For them to make a lot of noise in China, however Iran must ensure that all their most potent weapons are brought to fore. That means seasoned campaigners Arsalan Kazemi and Samad Nikkhab Bahrami must make themselves available, and the same goes for former NBA big man Hamed Haddadi.

Regardless of who ends up making Iran's final World Cup roster, though, Jamshidi is certainly excited to once again match wits with some of the best hoopsters from around the globe.

"This is a great opportunity for us to play against great players all around the world," he explained. "And this will be a very good chance for our team get valuable experience."

Iran will see action first in the city Guangzhou, opening their tournament against Puerto Rico on 31 August. That will be followed by a match against Tunisia on 2 September, and they will finish their group contests against Spain on 4 September.

(Source: FIBA)

Tokyo 2020 unveils Olympic and Paralympic mascot images

Tokyo 2020 has unveiled images of the Olympic mascot Miraitowa and Paralympic mascot Someity in a variety of poses, each representing one of the 33 Olympic and 22 Paralympic sports.

The images will be used in various areas, including on licensed merchandise and other materials approved by Tokyo 2020, by authorities in Tokyo and other cities hosting Tokyo 2020 events, and by marketing partners.

The images are designed to improve fans' awareness of the sports involved and therefore allow them to enjoy a more engaging experience, as well as raising the overall profile of the Tokyo 2020 Games.

There are 49 types of Miraitowa and 23 types of Someity.

Tokyo 2020 unveiled its official mascots for the Olympic and Paralympic Games in February 2018.

The choice of the mascots came following a vote where pupils from 16,769



schools were allowed to choose one of three mascot pairings.

These were taken from 2,042 mascot entries from the public, with "choice A" coming out on top.

The winning mascots, which were named Miraitowa and Someity in July 2018, were designed by Ryo Taniguchi, a character designer and illustrator whose work has been featured at various exhibitions in Japan. (Source: Insidethegames)

Iran will work harder in the future: Marco Octavio

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iran national beach soccer team head coach Marco Octavio says they will work harder and harder to get ready for the three upcoming competitions.

Team Melli failed to book a place at the FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup Paraguay 2019 after losing to Japan 3-2 in the 2019 AFC Beach Soccer Championship quarterfinals.

"First, I would like to congratulate the Iranian people on the arrival of Nowruz. I wish all the best feelings for all Iranian people in this Persian New Year and I have to say I see a beautiful future for us," the Brazilian coach told Tehran Times.

"I think our team deserved to be in the next FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup, but we respect the soul of football. We were the better team against Japan but referee's decision went



against us and he awarded a wrong penalty to Japan. This is football," Octavio added.

"We have three important competitions in July, October and November. Iran still are the world's No.2 in the ranking. We respect for all and will be working harder and harder for the upcoming events. After Nowruz we will start our preparation," Octavio concluded.

IPL: Tractor Sazi edge Sanat Naft

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Tractor Sazi football team edged past Sanat Naft 1-0 in Iran Professional League (IPL) on Friday.

Sasan Ansari scored the only goal of the match in the 42nd minute in Tabriz's Yadegar-e Emam Stadium.

Also, Padideh were held to a 1-1 draw by Foolad in Ahvaz.

Luciano Pereira gave Foolad the lead in the 30th minute and Amin Ghaseminejad equalized the match from the penalty spot two minutes later.

Struggling Esteghlal Khuzestan lost to Pars Jonoubi 2-1. And Sepahan were held to a goalless draw by Nassaji in Ghaemshahr.

Iran advance to 2020 AFC U23 Championship

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iran and Iraq football teams ended the 2020 AFC U23 Championship qualification with a goalless draw.

Iraq advanced to the 2020 AFC U23 Championship as Group C winners and Iran booked a place at the competition as one of four best runners-up.

The 11 group winners and four best runners-up joined hosts Thailand in the 2020 finals in January.

The 2020 AFC U23 Championship will be the fourth edition of the AFC U23 Championship, the biennial international age-restricted football championship organized by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) for the men's under-23 national teams of Asia.

The tournament will be held from Jan. 8 to 26, 2020 in Thailand.

This AFC U23 Championship will act as the AFC qualifiers for the Olympic football tournament.

The top three teams of the tournament will qualify for the 2020 Summer Olympics men's football tournament in Japan as the AFC representatives.

Nourollahi's jersey in auction to raise funds for Iran's flood-hit people

S P O R T S TEHRAN — The jersey of Tehran derby scorer Ahmad Nourollahi will be auctioned to raise money for Iran's flood-hit.

Ahmad Nourollahi scored Persepolis's winning goal against arch rivals Esteghlal in Iran Professional League in Tehran's Azadi Stadium.

The player's jersey will be sold by Iranian Red Crescent Society in a ceremony to raise money for the flood-hit people.

Iran has been hit with three major floods over the past two weeks, with a combined reported death toll of 45 people.

Floods have affected at least 23 out of Iran's 31 provinces and they also may face serious troubles.

Women weightlifters to participate at Asian championships

S P O R T S TEHRAN — A total of seven women weightlifters will represent Iran in the 2019 Asian Weightlifting Championships in China.

Elham Hosseini, Arisham Arjmandkhab, Parisa Jahanfekrian, Pupak Basami, Maryam Zarei, Marzieh Ghanbari and Elnaz Bajelani will take part in the event. However, the list can be reduced regarding the weightlifters' records.

The 2019 Asian Weightlifting Championships will be held from 18th to 28th April 2019 at Ningbo, Zhejiang Province, China.

This competition is IWF Gold Qualification Event for 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games.

Iranian renowned sports journalist Parviz Zahedi dies

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iranian long-serving sports journalist Parviz Zahedi died at the age of 85.

With over fifty years of experience, he passed away after a long battle with the disease.

Zahedi worked in Iranian sports weekly Keyhan-e Varzeshi and Donyaye Varzesh and sports newspaper Iran-e Varzeshi.

Zahedi was laid to rest on Tuesday at the Behesht-e Zahra cemetery in Tehran, capital of Iran.

Iranian sports family express condolences over the death of the veteran journalist.

Ayanda Patosi plays down Esteghlal departure

S P O R T S TEHRAN — South African international midfielder Ayanda Patosi has played down speculation that he is about to leave Esteghlal after dressing room bust-up.

Esteghlal lost to Iran Professional League leaders Persepolis 1-0 which left them in fourth place.

The Iranian media reports suggest that the 26-year-old player had a bust-up with Farshid Bagheri and Farshid Esmaili in the dressing room.

Esmaili missed a penalty in the late minutes of the first half, while Patosi is the first-choice penalty taker.

The local media reported that Patosi has asked his agent to terminate his contract with Esteghlal at the end of the season, but the Bafana Bafana playmaker has said he will stay with Esteghlal.

"Don't fall for the trap of our enemies. My stay with Esteghlal FC has been so amazing and I'm loving it here. Receiving so much love from the Esteghlal family has made my stay so much better. I'm happy I was welcomed into this beautiful family," Patosi posted on his Instagram account.

INTERNATIONAL DAILY
www.tehrantimes.com

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» www.eshterak.ir Distributor: Padideh Novin Co.
Tel: 88911433
» Webmaster: webmaster@tehrantimes.com
» Printed at: Hamsahri No. 3 - ISSN: 1017-94

Tehrantimes79 Tehrantimesdaily

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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Chastity is the adornment indigence, and gratitude is the ornament of wealthiness.

Imam Ali (AS)

Veteran actor Jamshid Mashayekhi's funeral to start in Tehran today

He also collaborated with director Hamid Samandarian in staging Jean-Paul Sartre's "Morts sans sepulture". He made his acting debut in cinema in 1964 with Ebrahim Golestan's "The Brick and the Mirror", which was reviewed in Venezia Classici at the 75th edition of the Venice International Film Festival in 2018.

His role as Khan Dai in Masud Kimiai's 1969 cult film "Qeisar" won him fame. Mashayekhi had an exemplary career, acting in about 100 movies and over 50 TV series. In his youth, he played the roles of powerful, middle-aged men, and in his middle age, he was selected to star as mature men. He also used to play the roles of charismatic figures in his senior years.

Collaboration with Iran's new wave filmmakers such as Dariush Mehrjui, Nasser Taqvai and Bahman Farmanara also enriched Mashayekhi's career in pre-revolutionary Iran. However, he remained in eclipse in that cinema, which preferred protagonists played by such actors as Behruz Vosuqi, Mohammad-Ali Fardin and Nasser Malakmotiei.

Mashayekhi and his contemporaries, including Keshavarz, Nasirian, Rashidi and Entezami, were highly regarded in Iran's post-revolution films.

He starred in the title role in Ali Hatami's "Kamalolmolk", which won him the Crystal Simorgh for best actor in 1984 at the Fajr Film Festival, which was established to celebrate the Islamic revolution.

In 1985, director Rasul Sadr-Ameli's drama "Chrysanthemum" brought him one more Crystal Simorgh at the festival.

In 2007, he was honored as an eternal figure of Iranian cinema during the Sixth Eternal Figures Gathering.

Many Iranian officials, including President Hassan Rouhani, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and Culture Minister Seyyed Abbas Salehi, sent messages of condolence to Mashayekhi's family.

"By his fine performances in films and society, this stylist artist of stage and screen left a good name of himself and a brilliant career," Rouhani wrote in his message.

Mashayekhi is survived by his wife, his daughter, Naghmeh, and his sons, Sam and Nader, who is a world-renowned musician.

WHAT'S IN ART GALLERIES

Painting



■ Mohsen Ahmadvand, Asareh Akasheh, Hoda Kashiha, Farshid Maleki, Omid Masumi, Neda Zare and 15 other artists are displaying their latest paintings in an exhibition at Etemad Gallery 2.

The exhibition will be running until April 23 at the gallery located at 25 Shirudi Alley, Mofatteh St., near Haft-e Tir Square.



■ Paintings by Sanahin Babajani are currently on display in an exhibition at Farmanfarma Gallery.

The exhibit titled "Parallel or Confluence" runs until April 19 at the gallery that can be found at 2nd Araabi St., North Kheradmand St. in the Karim Khan neighborhood.



■ A large number of artists, including Aidin Aghdashlu, Parvaneh Etemadi, Bahman Jalali, Rana Javadi, Ali Golestaneh and Farhad Fozuni, is showcasing their paintings in an exhibition at Inja Gallery.

The exhibit named "Flower, the Pure Paradox" will run until April 19 at the gallery located at 4 Pedram Alley, Neauphle-le-Château St.

Sculpture



■ An exhibition of sculptures by Kurosh Arish is underway at Etemad Negarestan Gallery.

The exhibit will continue until April 9 at the gallery located at Negarestan Garden near Baharestan Square.

Fajr picks five films from world cinema for Festival of Festivals

TEHRAN — Five films from world cinema, which have been screened at international events, will be reviewed in the Festival of Festivals sections at the 37th Fajr International Film Festival, the organizers have announced.

Among the films is Estonian filmmaker Moonika Siimets' debut movie "The Little Comrade".

The story of the film is set in the Soviet Union. In the midst of Stalinist tyranny, six-year-old Leelo's mother is sent to a prison camp. Haunted by her mother's last words telling her to be a good kid, Leelo vows to be on her best behavior in the confusing grown-up world in the hope that it will bring her mother back.

Argentinian director Armando Bo's drama "Animal" is in the lineup of the Festival of Festivals. The film tells the story of Antonio Decoud, a conservative family man who is forced by destiny to face an unexpected situation that shakes him to the core, scrambling up his life and his priorities, pushing him to forget his beliefs and his way of understanding life and follow the most basic instinct.

Norwegian filmmaker Magnus Meyer Arnesen's debut movie "As I Fall", which is his own life story, will also be screened.

The film portrays 25-year-old Joachim whose charming smile veils the daily battle he fights within himself as he struggles to manage a heroin addiction.

The Festival of Festivals also includes "One Last Deal" by Finnish director Klaus Härö. The film tells the story of Olavi, an elderly art dealer who is about to retire. A man who has always put business and art before everything - even his family - cannot imagine life without work. He decides to



"The Little Comrade" by Estonian filmmaker Moonika Siimets.

make one last deal in order to earn some proper pension money.

Lithuanian director Marija Kavtaradze will also take part in this section with her

"Summer Survivors".

The film is about Indre, a psychology post graduate, who has difficulties communicating with people herself, is ordered to take two

young patients, Paulius and Juste, to a psychiatric hospital in a seaside town.

The Fajr festival will take place in Tehran from April 18 to 26.



A combination photo shows posters for the Chinese films selected for the Retrospective of Chinese Cinema at the 37th Fajr International Film Festival. (FIF).

"My Second Year in College" to compete in Moscow filmfest

TEHRAN — Iranian director Rasul Sadr-Ameli's drama "My Second Year in College" will be screened in the official competition of the Moscow International Film Festival, the organizers have announced



"My Second Year in College" by Rasul Sadr-Ameli.

The film is about two close friends who go on an excursion to Isfahan. When one of them falls into a coma, the other one finds that any confrontation turns out to be a new challenge.

Twelve more films, including "The Mover" by Davis Simanis from Latvia, "My Polish Honeymoon" by Elise Otzenberger from France, "In Search of Echo" by Zhang Chi from China and "Laughing" by Valerio Mastandrea from Italy, will be competing at the festival, which will be held in the Russian capital from April 18 to 25.

Korean director Kim Ki-duk will preside over the jury, which is composed of Russia actress Irina Apeximova, Turkish director Semih Kaplanoglu and Italian writer Valia Santella.

Study on Iranian, Malaysian cultural heritage wins Kuala Lumpur book award

TEHRAN — "The Civilizational and Cultural Heritage of Iran and the Malay World, A Cultural Discourse", a book written by Malaysian scholar Syed Farid Alatas and edited by Iranian expert Abdolreza Alami, has won Malaysia's National Book Award 2019, the Persian service of IRNA reported on Friday.

Organized by the Yayasan Pembangunan Buku Negara in collaboration with the Kuala Lumpur International Book Fair, the award ceremony was held in Kuala Lumpur on April 1.

The book has been published by Gerakbudaya Publications in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia.

It also discusses the diversity of cultures, languages, ethnicities and religious sects in the Muslim world, which cannot be looked upon except through the lens of unity, a principle that lies at the heart of the Islamic religion.

Fajr film festival to spotlight Chinese cinema

TEHRAN — A lineup of six movies by Chinese filmmakers will be reviewed in the Retrospective of Chinese Cinema at the 37th Fajr International Film Festival, the organizers have announced. "Red Flowers and Green Leaves" by Miaomiao Liu, "The Enigma of Arrival" by Song Wen and "The Photographer"

by Zhang Wei are among the films.

The lineup also includes "A First Farewell" by Lina Wang, "My Dear Friend" by Yang Pingdao and "Ala Changso" by Sonthar Gyal.

The 37th Fajr International Film Festival will take place in Tehran from April 18 to 26.



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