



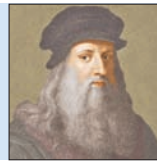
Majlis preparing to designate U.S. army as terrorist **2**



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Iran, Iraq agree to fend off common aerial challenges



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Iranian, Iraqi ministers confer about energy, economic co-op

TEHRAN — During the two-day stay of an Iraqi high-ranking delegation in Iran, the Iraqi ministers met their Iranian counterparts to discuss different areas of cooperation between the two neighbors.

Iraqi Prime Minister Abdul Mahdi arrived in Tehran on Saturday morning at the head of a high-ranking economic and political delegation. He was accompanied by ministers of oil, finance, foreign

affairs, planning, commerce, energy as well as national security advisor, army chief of staff, deputy interior minister, and a number of parliamentarians.

The visit came after Rouhani's landmark visit to Iraq in March which marked the signing of several memorandums of understanding for expansion of cooperation in key sectors and meeting with top political and religious figures. **→4**

Larijani says U.S. behavior endangering global peace

TEHRAN — Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani said on Sunday that the "imprudent" behavior demonstrated by the Trump administration is endangering the international peace and security.

Larijani cited U.S. plan to withdraw from the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) with Russia, its abrogation of the Iran nuclear deal, its pullout from the Paris climate agreement,

its economic war against China and the Europe, moving its embassy to Jerusalem in the occupied territories as some instances that are endangering international peace and security, Larijani told the Inter-Parliamentary Union summit in Doha.

He noted that such moves show that there is no trust on international agreements because of "unilateral behaviors" by the United States. **→2**

Jahangiri: Iran, Iraq quite firm to deepen ties

TEHRAN — Iranian Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri said on Sunday that despite the U.S. animosity, Iran and Iraq are seriously determined to expand cooperation.

"Good agreements in various areas have been signed between the two countries. Fortunately, Iran and Iraq have common view on expanding cooperation," he said during a meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi and his accompanying

team in Tehran.

Jahangiri added that Iran will stand beside the Iraqi people and government in reconstructing their country.

He also said, "We should not allow sanctions impede expansion of relations between the two countries. Sanctions cause restrictions, however, they create many opportunities to expand relations." **→2**

We will see another 'Arab Spring' in the next five or so years: Askari

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Professor Hossein Askari, an expert on Saudi Arabia who also teaches international business at the George Washington University, believes that "we will see another 'Arab Spring' in the next five or so years and Arab regimes will change and the new leaders will not be as close as they are today to Washington."

"Arab leaders —Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia,

UAE and others in the GCC—are spineless," Hossein Askari, who served as special advisor to Saudi finance minister, tells the Tehran Times.

He adds that "All these leaders rely on U.S. military and intelligence support."

Following is the text of the interview:

■ U.S. President Donald Trump formally recognized Israeli sovereignty over the Israel-occupied Golan Heights. What was the reason behind this decision?

A: To support Netanyahu in his election bid.

Netanyahu is indicted and needs much help. I think Trump did this also in support of his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, who has become close to Netanyahu and has been working with him to fabricate a meaningless Middle East peace plan. If Netanyahu is not elected, Kushner could have a less receptive prime minister in Israel.

■ Why President select this time for this recognition?

A: Again, it is to boost Netanyahu's election chances. **→7**

Palestinian official denounces Netanyahu's campaign pledge

By staff&agencies

Israel's leader will face a "real problem" if he follows through with his election campaign promise to annex Jewish settlements in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, the Palestinian foreign minister said Sunday.

Riyad al-Maliki told The Associated Press on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Jordan that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's pledge was likely aimed at rallying his nationalist

base in the final stretch of a tight race.

He added that Palestinians would "resist" such a policy if carried out.

"If Netanyahu wants to declare Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank, then you know he has to face a real problem, the presence of 4.5 million Palestinians, what to do with them," Maliki said.

He said Israel cannot expel the Palestinians. "We will stay there," he said. "Then you know the international community has to deal with us."

Maduro fights back as Guaido vows 'greatest escalation'

Tens of thousands have taken to the streets in the latest rival rallies held across Venezuela, which is facing a deepening crisis amid a U.S.-led push to topple President Nicolas Maduro.

A large crowd, dressed in bright red, gathered in the center of the capital Caracas on Saturday, before they marched toward the presidential palace to express support for Maduro.

"I'm going out to defend the future of my children and grandchildren," said a demonstrator. "No other nation can interfere in our affairs."

President Maduro denounced what he called US-backed cyber attacks on Venezuela's power grid which has led to rolling blackouts and crippled the country.

"They've resorted to cyber terrorism, to electromagnetic terrorism," Maduro told the crowd. "I ask for understanding ... we are in a true electrical emergency, a true national emergency."

Maduro also took to Twitter and called on Venezuelans to keep up their fight against foreign interference. **→13**

Iran, Iraq stress developing trade ties in business forum

By Ebrahim Fallahi

TEHRAN — Following the visit of a high-ranking Iraqi delegation to Tehran, Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) hosted an Iran-Iraq business forum on Sunday.

The event was attended by several senior officials from both sides including Iran's First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri, Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi as well as Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian, Iraqi Minister of Electricity Louay Al Khateeb, Iraqi Trade Minister Mohammad Hashim Abdul Majid Jasim, Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani, Head of Basra Chamber of Commerce Majed Mozan, and Gholam-Hossein Shafeie, the chairman of ICCIMA, along with representatives of private companies. **→4**



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ARTICLE

Afshin Majlesi
Tehran Times journalist

Travel in Iran grows over Persian New Year holidays

People in Iran made 74 million overnight stays in their domestic trips during the Persian New Year (Noruz) holidays, an increase of 20 percent year on year, Iran tourism chief announced on Sunday.

The statistics takes into account travels from March 18 to April 6, an extended span of time which covers official New Year holidays, starting March 21.

Some 132 million visits to tourist attractions have been registered during the mentioned period, which shows a 34 percent growth year on year, meaning each traveler visited seven tourist spots on average, Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization Director Ali-Asghar Mounesan said.

He made the remarks in a press conference, ISNA reported.

The provinces of Mazandaran, Gilan, Bushehr, Khorasan Razavi, Hormozgan, Khuzestan, and Fars attracted highest numbers of holidaymakers, the official said.

A phenomenon of this year's Noruz trips was Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari province, which as a lesser-known destination, registered 206 percent year-on-year increase in attracting travelers.

Mounesan, who doubles as vice president, referred to outbound travels, saying, this year, major parts of the outbound journeys were made overland, which is "important to us" because it led to a distribution of income within the country.

Outbound travels via land witnessed 27.5 percent increase in comparison to the same period last year while the figure for air travels shows 7.2 percent of growth, the official explained.

Earlier in March, Mounesan estimated that domestic trips would grow by 20 percent over the New Year holidays, saying "This year, there have been three million dropping out of foreign travels, and if this [figure] is to be added to domestic travels, we will have a 20 percent increase in [the number of domestic] travels during Noruz."

Iranians make hundreds of thousands of domestic trips during the New Year holidays, when most businesses and workplaces are closed, as are schools. The country hosts some of the world's oldest cultural monuments, including 22 UNESCO World Heritage Sites.



ARTICLE

Martin Love
Political analyst from North Carolina

The aggravation of Trump's lack of vision is the world's burden

Now that Americans have been informed that the Mueller report conclusions investigating alleged collusion between Trump and minions and the Russians was little more than conspiracy pornography concocted by Obama and Clinton and by those who were appalled that Trump won the election in 2016, the Republicans and Trump may breathe a sigh of relief for a short while, but no one else can.

To any extent that Trump and the Neocons are emboldened further by the alleged conclusions of the Mueller investigation, it's not just Americans who are at risk, but the entire world. A world which is groaning under the lash of a President doing all the wrong things to "make America great again". Trump is mostly making America despised.

As odd as the analogy may be, I had the distinct displeasure of having to spend an entire night last week at a newish terminal at Newark airport outside New York City, and felt that the actual fixed layout of the place served to describe the country today. By all appearances the terminal appeared nice enough, but every single chair for those in transit, including those at food kiosks, was firmly bolted to the floor, and not a single one induced relaxation or provided much comfort.

The entire terminal was all a matter of appearances that delivered little for weary travelers. So it is for people yearning for relief from the efforts of the Trump administration to attack with sanctions or threats of war just about every country on earth: with policies that seem bolted down, like the chairs at Newark airport, and averse to any qualitative change, designed to resist even the slightest challenge to U.S. imperialism and unilateralism.

Amid a welter of bad news, including the floods in Iran (but which may revitalize in some respects a very arid country overall) one must note in random order: Turkey is not bowing to U.S. pressure to cancel the \$400 deal with Russia, Europe is responding positively to China's Belt and Road initiative and showing some independence for the first time in decades from U.S. dominance, **→7**

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Jafari: Terrorist designation for IRGC would end calm for U.S. forces

POLITICS **TEHRAN** – The U.S. military will no longer have calm in West Asia if the United States designates the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization, IRGC Chief Mohammad Ali Jafari said on Sunday.

“If the Americans do this stupid thing, threatening our national security, according to the policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran we will put reciprocal measures on the agenda,” Mehr quoted Jafari as saying.

The Trump administration is expected to designate the IRGC as a foreign terrorist organization as early as next week, CNN on Sunday quoted a U.S. official as saying.



Zarif warns U.S. of consequences of IRGC terror designation

POLITICS **TEHRAN** – Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif warned the U.S. on Sunday of the consequences of designating the IRGC as a foreign terrorist organization, saying President Donald Trump “should know better than to be conned into another U.S. disaster.”

“#NetanyahuFirsters who have long agitated for FTO designation of the IRGC fully understand its consequences for US forces in the region. In fact, they seek to drag US into a quagmire on his behalf,” Zarif said in a tweet.

“@realDonaldTrump should know better than to be conned into another US disaster,” he added.



MPs donate part of their salary to flood-stricken people

POLITICS **TEHRAN** – Deputy Majlis Speaker Ali Motahari said on Sunday that part of lawmakers’ salary were donated to the people affected by the floods across the country.

“A majority of the representatives allocated a few days’ worth of their income to the flood-stricken people,” Motahari said, Mehr reported.

Following torrential rain in many regions across Iran since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year on March 21, catastrophic floods have hit 1,900 cities and villages in western, southwestern, northern and north-eastern Iran, leaving 67 dead and hundreds of thousands displaced.

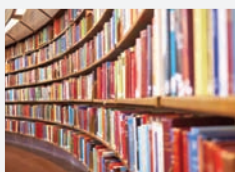


Imran Khan extends his support to Iran’s flood victims

POLITICS **TEHRAN** – Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan on Sunday extended his prayers and support to the Iranian public as continuous floods since last month have claimed around 70 lives.

The premier also offered to provide immediate support when required, according to The News.

“Our prayers go to the people of Iran as they deal with unprecedented flooding. We stand ready to provide any humanitarian assistance required,” Khan stated.



Foreign Ministry donates 50,000 books to National Library

POLITICS **TEHRAN** – Iran’s Foreign Ministry has donated 50,000 books to the National Library of Iran.

The Foreign Ministry started the process of donating the books to the National Library in October upon the efforts of experts in this field, IRNA reported on Sunday.

The books are worth 18,229,500,000 rials (nearly \$430,000) that include fiction and non-fiction.

Last year, the National Library named the Foreign Ministry library the top book donor of the year for its huge contributions.



Intl. community, UN representatives discuss Iran floods

POLITICS **TEHRAN** – Ugochi Daniels, UN resident coordinator and representative of UN secretary general in Iran, said on Sunday that members of the international community, including UN representatives, have held a meeting to discuss how to best support those affected by the floods in Iran.

“Members of the international community and my colleagues from the #UN came together to discuss how to best support those affected by #IranFloods,” Daniels tweeted.

She also tweeted earlier that “Members of #UN #Iran team are currently briefing members of the international community on our #IranFloods response in 5 sectors: Health. Shelter. WASH. Education. Recovery.”

Majlis preparing to designate U.S. army as terrorist if IRGC blacklisted

POLITICS **TEHRAN** – The Iranian parliament is working on a double-urgency bill to put the U.S. army on the terrorist list as it has put Daesh if the U.S. State Department designates the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as terrorist, a senior lawmaker announced on Sunday.

Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh, chairman of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, told reporters that all three major parliamentary factions back the bill.

In a tweet on Saturday, Falahatpisheh said, “If the Guards is put on America’s terror groups list, we will put American military personnel on the terrorist blacklist beside Daesh.”

The bill followed a report by the Wall Street Journal in which unnamed sources said the U.S. is expected to designate the IRGC as a terrorist organization, a move that would mark the first time Washington formally labels another country’s military a terrorist group.

The decision, which critics warn exposes U.S. military and intelligence officials to similar actions by unfriendly governments



abroad, is expected to be announced by the U.S. State Department as early as Monday, the officials told the Wall Street Journal.

In response to the report, IRGC chief Mohammad Ali Jafari threatened if the United

States makes such “stupidity the U.S. army and its security forces will not have that kind of security that they have today.”

On Sunday, 255 MPs signed a statement expressing their unequivocal support for

the IRGC.

Part of the statement said according to the Article 150 of the Constitution, the IRGC is one of the powerful armed forces along with the Army and it has done great services in defending the country during Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Iran in the 1980s, reconstructing the country and giving advisory help to regional countries in campaign against terrorism.

“We as the representatives of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, while announcing our comprehensive support for the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran especially the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, consider the national security of the Iranian nation and its armed forces as the red lines; and in case of any move by the U.S. president or any other entity against the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, we will do a retaliatory action so that the American ruling board, which itself is the creator and supporter of terrorist groups in the region, to become repentant of their improper and stupid move,” the statement stated.

Tehran calls G7 statement ‘untrue’ and ‘unrealistic’



G7 and EU representatives pose for photo during summit in Dinard, France, April 6

POLITICS **TEHRAN** – The Iranian Foreign Ministry has denounced the Group of Seven’s position on Tehran’s missile program and regional policies as “untrue” and “unrealistic”.

At the end of a two-day meeting on Saturday, the foreign ministers of the Group of Seven nations (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States), issued a final communique claiming that Iran’s missile program is a source of concern.

“We intend to continue our work to counter Iran’s regional proliferation of ballistic missiles and its unlawful arms transfers,” the communique said.

In a statement on Sunday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi underlined Iran’s “undeniable role” in consolidating stability and security and fighting terrorism in the Middle East, saying that the country’s missile program is of peaceful and defensive nature.

Qassemi said the Islamic Republic believes the content of this statement, which is based on groundless accusations and misapprehension of Iran’s peaceful nuclear program, its regional role and missile program, is unconstructive and completely unilateral.

Iran maintains that these accusations clearly violate the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and the commitments of the three European countries, he added.

The European trio, France, Germany, and the UK recently sent a letter to the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, calling on him to present his full report on Iran’s recent missile activities, including attempts to launch a satellite and displaying its ballistic missiles.

Lambasting the European trio for the letter, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on April 3 accused Britain, France, and Germany of trying to appease U.S. President Donald Trump.

Zarif tweeted that a year after the U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear agreement known as the JCPOA, “Europe can’t muster the will to defy US’ #EconomicTERRORISM.”

In his Sunday statement, Qassemi also said, “It is a source of regret that the members of this group are influenced by the illegal and bullying behavior of the United States, and are repeating false claims against Iran, using a rhetoric that they themselves admit does not belong to them.”

“They only want to satisfy Washington and meet the U.S. demands which is just one of the members of the Group of Seven.”

“Having complied with its international obligations, the Islamic Republic of Iran has shown its good faith in engaging, negotiating and maintaining contact with the international community,” he said.

Tehran believes that setting forth unrealistic issues and making unsuccessful attempts to portray Iran as a threat will not affect the determination of the Iranian people and the Islamic Republic’s approach to pursue its national interests in the region and the world, he added.

Qassemi also condemned the violations of the fundamental principles of the Iran nuclear deal by the three European countries, calling on them to provide a clear explanation. He emphasized that the Islamic Republic of Iran will pursue this issue using the mechanisms existing in the JCPOA.

Larijani says U.S. behavior endangering global peace



Iraqi Parliament Speaker Mohamed Al-Halbousi (L) and Iranian counterpart Ali Larijani meet in Doha, April 6

1 → Elsewhere in his speech, he described the U.S. illegal sanctions against Iran as “economic terrorism”.

■ Doha praises Iran’s stance toward the Qatar blockade

Larijani who had visited Doha for the Inter-Parliamentary Union summit also held talks with a number of foreign officials. He held talks with Qatari Prime Minister Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa Al Thani and his counterparts from Iraq, Lebanon and Russia.

The Qatari prime minister, in his talks with Larijani on Sunday, said that Iran adopted a “positive” stance on the blockade of Qatar.

In June of 2017, Saudi Arabia along with Bahrain, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) abruptly cut off diplomatic relations with Qatar and closed land, sea and air routes to the country. The severing of relations also included withdrawing ambassadors and imposing trade and travel bans on Doha.

The Islamic Republic opened its airspace to about 100 more Qatari flights a day during the blockade.

■ Larijani says Iraq can always count on friendship with Iran

During his meeting with Iraqi Parliament Speaker Mohamed Al-Halbousi on Saturday, Larijani said that Iran-Iraq relations and interaction are “constructive” and “important”.

“You, the Iraqi brothers, can always count on friendship with Iran,” Larijani said.

He also welcomed Halbousi’s invitation to visit Iraq.

Halbousi said that Iraq intends to hold a summit of neighboring countries’ parliament

speakers and attaches great importance to Iran’s participation.

Larijani also held a separate meeting with Nabih Berri, the Lebanese parliament speaker.

During the meeting with Berri, Larijani condemned the U.S. for blocking aid to flood victims in Iran.

Since March 19, large parts of Iran have been inundated with flash floods. So far, about 70 people have lost their lives and hundreds of thousands have been displaced. 24 provinces out of 31 have been affected by the flood.

The U.S. is practically preventing aid to the Iranian flood victims by other countries by blocking the accounts of Iran’s Red Crescent Society.

Larijani said before departing to Qatar on Saturday that the U.S. move clearly shows the depth of Washington’s animosity toward the Iranian people.

He held a separate meeting with Russian State Duma (lower house of parliament) Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin on Sunday.

Larijani called for implementing agreements between the two countries.

Volodin described the agreements as “important” and “strategic”.

He also invited an Iranian delegation to Moscow in order to participate in the International Forum on the Development of Parliamentarism.

“On July 1-2, the second International Forum on the Development of Parliamentarism will take place. We would be glad if you come or send a delegation,” Sputnik quoted him as saying.

Jahangiri: Iran, Iraq quite firm to deepen ties

1 → Jahangiri also said it is necessary to put banking cooperation on agenda.

Elsewhere in his talks, the vice president said Iranian technical engineering companies have good knowledge and experience in different fields and their presence in Iraqi tenders can help bring prices down by foreign contractors.

Speaking at a joint session of the two countries’ private sector and officials at Iran’s chamber of commerce on Sunday, the vice president also said Iran intends to increase its economic and trade ties with Iraq to 20 billion dollars by 2020.

Elsewhere, he noted that Iran and Iraq’s security and development are intertwined. “The Islamic Republic of Iran considers Iraq’s development and security as its own.”

The vice president also greeted Iraq for defeating the Takfiri terrorist groups including Daesh, saying, “This was not only a defeat for terrorist groups it also meant a defeat



for their supporters.”

For his part, Abdul Mahdi said that his visit to Tehran

shows Iraq’s determination in expanding relations.

He said, “Iraq does not want to be part of the sanctions regime against the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

The prime minister added Baghdad will not let any aggression against Iraq from the Iraqi soil.

“Iraq seeks to have best relations with its neighbors and makes efforts to bridge differences,” the prime minister remarked.

The Iraqi prime minister arrived in Tehran on Saturday. He met with Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif. Abdul Mahdi was accompanied by ministers of oil, finance, foreign affairs, planning, commerce, energy as well as national security advisor, army chief of staff, deputy interior minister, and a number of parliamentarians.

Iran, Iraq agree to fend off common aerial challenges

POLITICS **TEHRAN** – Major General Mohammad Baqeri, chief of the armed forces, has said Iran and its neighbor Iraq have agreed to cooperate in the area of air defense in order to fend off common aerial challenges.

He made the remarks following a meeting in Tehran with his visiting Iraqi counterpart, Lieutenant General Othman al-Ghanimi, Mehr reported on Sunday.

General Baqeri said the meeting fo-

cused on defense of the two countries’ skies, because “Iran might sense threats coming from its western borders.”

Accordingly, it was agreed that more coordination be made in the air defense sector, he said.

Baqeri said Iran and Iraq also agreed on potential training cooperation, transferring of Iran’s defense experiences to Iraq, and joint military exercises.

Agreements on these matters will be

finalized in the near future, he added.

“We have friendly relations with Iraq’s army... and we agree that the two countries enjoy deep ties,” General Baqeri said.

Iran’s relations with Iraq is different from other countries’ relations, because the two countries share common interests and face common threats, he remarked.

Baqeri also quoted the Iraqi commander as saying during the meeting that Baghdad would be exercising stricter control

on the United States’ military presence on its soil.

The American forces are only there to train Iraqi forces and their activities are under the Iraqi Army’s oversight, he stated.

Ghanimi arrived in Tehran as part of a delegation accompanying Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi. On Saturday, the delegation met with Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Hassan Rouhani.

Libya’s GNA forces announce ‘counteroffensive’ to defend Tripoli

U.S. pulls some troops out of Libya amid unrest

The army behind Libya’s UN-backed government has announced a counteroffensive to defend Tripoli, vowing to reclaim all areas seized by forces loyal to renegade General Khalifa Haftar, who have been marching on the outskirts of the capital.

Colonel Mohamed Gnounou told reporters in Tripoli on Sunday that the counteroffensive, dubbed “Volcano of Anger”, was aimed at “purging all Libyan cities of aggressor and illegitimate forces”.

The announcement came as Haftar’s forces said they conducted the first air raid on a Tripoli suburb as part of their aim oust the internationally-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) and control Tripoli.

The alleged strike came after GNA forces launched air raids on Haftar’s self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA) around 50km south of Tripoli on Saturday, reportedly killing one person.

Meanwhile, Tripoli residents, fearing that large-scale fighting could break out, have begun stocking up on food and fuel.

Libya has struggled since the 2011 overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi which left dozens of militia to fill the void and ally with either the GNA or the rival administration in the east backed by Haftar.

On Sunday, the US military said it had temporarily pulled some of its forces out of Libya amid the upsurge of fighting in the



North African country.

“Due to increased unrest in Libya, a contingent of US forces supporting US Africa Command temporarily relocated from the country in response to security conditions on the ground,” it said in a statement.

It did not detail how many military personnel had been withdrawn from Libya.

US Africa Command, headquartered in

Stuttgart, Germany, said its mission in Libya involves “military support to diplomatic missions, counterterrorism activities, enhancing partnerships and improving security across the region”.

It said it would “continue to monitor conditions on the ground in Libya and assess the feasibility for renewed US military presence as appropriate”.

“The security realities on the ground in Libya are growing increasingly complex and unpredictable,” said US Marine Corps General Thomas Waldhauser, commander of US Africa Command.

“Even with an adjustment of the force, we will continue to remain agile in support of existing US strategy.”

■ ‘Betrayal’

On Saturday, the head of the GNA accused Haftar of “betraying” him after the latter launched his military offensive on Tripoli.

In a televised speech, Fayeze al-Sarraj said Haftar’s forces would meet firm resistance from forces loyal to the GNA.

“We have extended our hands towards peace but after the aggression that has taken place on the part of forces belonging to Haftar and his declaration of war against our cities and our capital ... he will find nothing but strength and firmness,” al-Sarraj said. He also warned of “a war without winners”.

Al-Sarraj and Haftar held talks in Abu Dhabi in late February, their first confirmed meeting since November 2018, during which they agreed that national elections were necessary, according to the UN.

“They also agreed on ways to maintain stability in the country and unify its institutions,” the UN Libya mission said in a Twitter post after the Abu Dhabi meeting.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Russia slams Israel’s ‘inadmissible’ shelling of Syria



Russia’s foreign minister has slammed as “inadmissible” Israel’s airstrikes on Syria, underlining the need for respecting the sovereignty of the Arab country.

In an interview with Egypt’s al-Ahram newspaper on Saturday, Sergei Lavrov said Moscow’s stance on the inadmissibility of Israeli shelling of Syria’s territory has not changed.

“Our principled stance concerning shelling Syria’s territory has remained unchanged. We have always clearly expressed our attitude to that. We proceed from the need for strict respect for Syria’s sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity,” Lavrov said.

“We are opposed to turning the country’s territory into a scene of armed standoff between various regional players,” Lavrov said when asked to comment on remarks by some political analysts about softening Moscow’s stance on Israeli shelling of Syria.

The top Russian diplomat said, “During our contacts with all parties concerned, we highlight the importance of preventing an upsurge in tensions and the dangerous escalation of the situation in Syria, which are fraught with negative consequences for both neighboring countries and the Middle East region in general.”

He went on to say that Russia in cooperation with Iran and Turkey contributed to working to set up a de-escalation zone in Syria’s south and southwest.

“Now these areas are under the control of the Syrian government. Russian military police officers help maintain law and order there,” Lavrov said.

Israel began carrying out military strikes in Syria in 2013.

The Tel Aviv regime has recently increased its airstrikes in the Arab nation. Earlier in March, the Israeli regime launched the attacks on Shaykh Najjar industrial city located 10 km northeast of the city of Aleppo.

The Syrian government has on multiple occasions slammed the Israeli regime’s act of aggression and also warned about the “dangerous repercussions” of Israeli assaults on its territories. Israel is widely believed to have been providing weapons to anti-Damascus militants as well as medical treatment to Takfiri elements wounded in Syria inside the occupied Golan Heights.

Israel often claims that it conducts airstrikes targeting “Iranian assets” in Syria.

Damascus and Tehran have repeatedly rejected Israeli claims that Iran has military bases in Syria. Iran has been offering military advisory support to Syria at the request of the Damascus government, enabling its army to speed up its gains on various fronts against terror outfits.

Russia has also conducted aerial bombardment of terrorist positions.

In the past, the Syrian army has confiscated Israeli-made arms and military equipment from terrorists fighting the government forces. There are also reports that Tel Aviv has been treating the extremists wounded in Syria.

(Source: Press TV)

Pope blames U.S., Europe for deaths of people in war zones

Pope Francis says arms sales by the United States and Europe are to blame for the deaths of people, including children, in such places as Yemen, Syria, and Afghanistan.

“The rich Europe and America sell weapons... used to kill children and kill people,” said the pontiff, in unprecedented remarks made while addressing students and teachers at Milan’s San Carlo Institute on Saturday, the Associated Press reported.

He said violence-scarred countries like Yemen, Syria, and Afghanistan would not be witnessing wars if it was not for the arms.

“A country that produces and sells weapons has on its conscience the death of every child and the destruction of each family,” the Pope said. The U.S. and major European countries, such as Britain and France, have been selling loads of weapons to Saudi Arabia and its allies, which invaded Yemen in March 2015.

In March, the London-headquartered child rights advocacy group Save the Children reported that as many as 37 Yemeni children are being killed or injured by foreign bombs every month.

Violence engulfed Syria in 2011. The U.S. and its European and regional allies began funding and offering other kinds of support to various militant and terrorist outfits in the Arab country attempting unsuccessfully to topple the Syrian government. Last December, the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a UK-based monitor, said more than 21,000 children had died since the country plunged into conflict.

Under the banner of “war on terror,” the U.S. invaded Afghanistan in 2001. Thousands of civilians have been killed each year since then.

■ Slamming walls

The Pope also spoke about the need for countries to welcome migrants, rejecting any association between migrant integration and increase in crime rates.

Foreigners are not the source of most crimes, the Pope said, adding “we also have lots of them (asylum seekers)” in Italy.

“The Mafia has not been invented by Nigerians. Mafia is ours,” he said. “All of us have the possibility of being criminal. Migrants bring us wealth because Europe has been made by migrants.”

The remarks were clear jabs at U.S. President Donald Trump, who has banned travelers from several Muslim countries, blamed Mexican migrants for an alleged rise in crime in America, and been attempting to have incoming asylum seekers stopped at the U.S.’s southern border through the building of physical barriers.

“Builders of walls — be they made of razor wire or bricks — will end up becoming prisoners of the walls they build,” Pope Francis said last Sunday.

(Source: AP)

New NAFTA deal ‘in trouble’, bruised by elections, tariff rows

More than six months after the United States, Mexico and Canada agreed a new deal to govern more than \$1 trillion in regional trade, the chances of the countries ratifying the pact this year are receding.

The three countries struck the United States-Mexico-Canada agreement (USMCA) on Sept. 30, ending a year of difficult negotiations after U.S. President Donald Trump demanded the preceding trade pact be renegotiated or scrapped.

But the deal has not ended trade tensions in North America. If ratification is delayed much longer, it could become hostage to electoral politics.

The United States has its next presidential contest in 2020, and Canada holds a federal election in October.

The delay means businesses are still uncertain about the framework that will govern future investments in the region.

“The USMCA is in trouble,” said Andres Rozental, a former Mexican deputy foreign minister for North America.

Though he believed the deal would ultimately be approved, Rozental said opposition from U.S. Democrats and unions to labor provisions in the deal, as well as bickering over tariffs, made its passage in the next few months highly unlikely.

Canada’s Parliament must also ratify the treaty and officials say the timetable is very tight. Current legislators only have a few weeks work left before the start of the summer recess in June, and members of the new Parliament would have little chance to address ratification until 2020.

Trump, a Republican, has shown frustration with the Democratic-led U.S. House of Representatives for failing to sign off on the USMCA. He has threatened to pull out of the old pact, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), if Congress does not hurry up.

If Trump did dump NAFTA, the three nations would revert to trade rules in place before it came into effect in 1994.

■ Tariffs

Canada and Mexico are seeking exemption from U.S.

tariffs on global metal imports imposed last year.

The metals tariffs were not included in the USMCA and Mexico and Canada are impatient to resolve the issue. Mexico has repeatedly threatened to target new U.S. products by the end of April in retribution if tariffs are imposed.

Meanwhile, Trump on Thursday threatened to slap tariffs on Mexican auto exports unless Mexico does more to stop drug traffickers and illegal immigration.

Mexico’s government is in the final stages of completing a new list of potential U.S. imports to be targeted, said Luz Maria de la Mora, a Mexican deputy economy minister.

“There’s going to be a bit of everything,” she told Reuters, declining to give details of how the list - originally encompassing products such as bourbon, cheese, motor boats, pork legs, steel and apples - could be modified.

De la Mora would not be drawn on whether Mexico could refuse to ratify USMCA if steel tariffs are not withdrawn, saying only: “All options are on the table.”

In Ottawa, Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland said this week her government was “constantly” looking at its own retaliation list, noting that Trump’s tariffs left the country over C\$16 billion worth of space to strike back.

Freeland did not say when that list could change, and a government source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said it might not be necessary. Still, Freeland said Canada was coordinating with Mexico about its options.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who faces a tough re-election battle, on Thursday rejected accepting quotas on Canadian steel and aluminum in exchange for U.S. tariffs being dropped.

Trudeau was criticized during the USMCA negotiations for giving ground to Trump on access to Canada’s dairy sector.

■ Workers

U.S. Democrats have threatened to block the USMCA unless Mexico passes legislation to improve workers’ rights, a demand shared by the Canadian government.



A bill already in Mexico’s Congress to strengthen trade unions should be approved this month, the government says.

Trump blamed NAFTA for millions of job losses in the United States as companies moved south to employ cheaper Mexican labor. Trump is running for re-election in 2020, and his ‘America First’ policy will likely feature prominently in the campaign.

Forcing Mexico and Canada to rework NAFTA was one of Trump’s signature pledges during his shock win in 2016, and Democrats are pulling out the stops to avoid losing again.

“The closer the election gets, the harder it will be for Democrats to grant Trump a victory” by ratifying the USMCA, said Sergio Alcocer, a former deputy Mexican foreign minister. Some Democrats are pushing to change the deal - an idea that both Canadian and Mexican officials resist.

“People need to be very careful around opening up what could really be a Pandora’s box,” Freeland said on Thursday. Canadian officials say they fear that if one part of the treaty were reopened, it could spark clamor for other sections to be renegotiated as well.

(Source: Reuters)

India may attack Pakistan in mid-April, Islamabad says citing ‘reliable intelligence’

The Indian military may attack Pakistan sometime in less than two weeks, Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi claimed citing “reliable intelligence.” The two nuclear powers had a major flare up of tensions in February.

“We have reliable intelligence that India is planning a new attack on Pakistan. As per our information this could take place between April 16 and 20,” Qureshi announced.

The minister, who was visiting his hometown of Multan on Sunday, told journalists that Pakistan shared its concerns with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. The official would not elaborate on what evidence Islamabad has to back his claim, but indicated he was speaking on the instruction of Prime Minister Imran Khan.

India would not immediately respond to the allegations.

Tensions between the nuclear-armed rival neighbors escalated this year after a suicide bombing attack killed dozens of Indian police



troops in the disputed region of Kashmir in mid-February. Two weeks later, Indian

warplanes conducted an air raid on Pakistani territory, targeting what India said was a

training camp of the militant group which claimed credit for the attack.

An outraged Pakistan retaliated on the following day with its own bombing raid in the Indian-controlled part of Kashmir, which escalated into a clash between two nations’ air forces. India lost one fighter jet and claims to have shot down one of Pakistan’s F-16 aircraft, which Islamabad denies.

The situation was deflated within days, with Islamabad quickly releasing a captured Indian pilot from the plane it shot down. The stand-off led to surge of nationalist feelings on both sides.

Each nation has accused the other of being the source of the flare-up. India said Pakistan was covering up for Jaish-e-Mohammed, the militant group behind the bombing, instead of helping to stop their terrorist activities. Pakistan accused India’s ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of fueling “war hysteria” ahead of crucial elections in the country.

(Source: RT)

Turkey’s AK Party to seek recount of all Istanbul votes

President Tayyip Erdogan’s AK Party will ask Turkey’s top electoral board for a recount of all votes cast in local elections in Istanbul, a senior party official said on Sunday.

Initial results from the March 31 election gave a narrow victory to the opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) mayoral candidate in Istanbul. The AKP had already appealed the results, leading to partial recounts in some districts and full recounts in others.

“We chose the path to eliminate numerical mistakes. But it’s not over,” AK Party deputy chairman Ail Ihsan Yavuz told reporters in televised comments.

The party has appealed for a full recount in the Istanbul district of Beyoglu, one of 39 voting districts across Turkey’s largest city, he said, and will ask the High Electoral Board (YSK) to do the same in the others.

“We will apply to the YSK for the recount of all votes in

38 (other) districts,” Yavuz said.

Erdogan’s AKP, hurt by a slowing economy, is reeling from its apparent loss of Istanbul, Turkey’s commercial hub, and the capital Ankara, in the local elections.

The AKP has been in power nationally since 2002, but it and its predecessors have dominated Turkey’s two biggest cities for a quarter of a century.

(Source: Reuters)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	188075.2
IFX	2410.54

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,131 rials
GBP	54,761 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$70.34/b
WTI	\$63.08/b
OPEC Basket	\$68.76/b
Gold	\$1,292.80/oz
Silver	\$15.19/oz
Platinumium	\$904.60/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Green shoots pop-up in global economy as China keeps pumping

Spring has sprung in the Northern Hemisphere and green shoots are appearing everywhere, even in seemingly dormant economies. In a matter of weeks, activity across a broad range of industries has picked up and talk of recession has been more muted. On top that, some global anxieties seem to be easing. "Known unknowns" — such as the U.S.-China trade war and Brexit — look like being shifted into the "known knowns" basket. The big investment bank, JP Morgan's keenly watched global "all-industry output PMI" increased for the second successive month in March, as did its "new orders index". The PMIs — or Purchasing Managers' Indexes (ISMs in the U.S.) — survey businesses on a monthly basis, collating data on such things as new orders, output, exports and employment intentions.

A result above 50 represents expansion, the higher the number the greater the activity. A PMI below 50 shows things are going backwards. Right now global PMIs are not only showing expansion, the rate of expansion is accelerating. Not surprisingly global GDP is picking up too. Just as one swallow doesn't make a summer, two solid months of global PMIs don't necessarily usher in a growth spurt or ward of a slowdown — but it is at least promising, according to JP Morgan's economics team. It should be pointed out the global PMI gain has largely been supported by two factors: strong performances by the services sector, rather than manufacturing, and a rebound in activity in China. Australia has so far broadly missed the global PMI bounce. PMIs, while still positive are near six-year lows and forward-looking new orders are getting weaker. The construction sector variant, the PCI, is contracting.

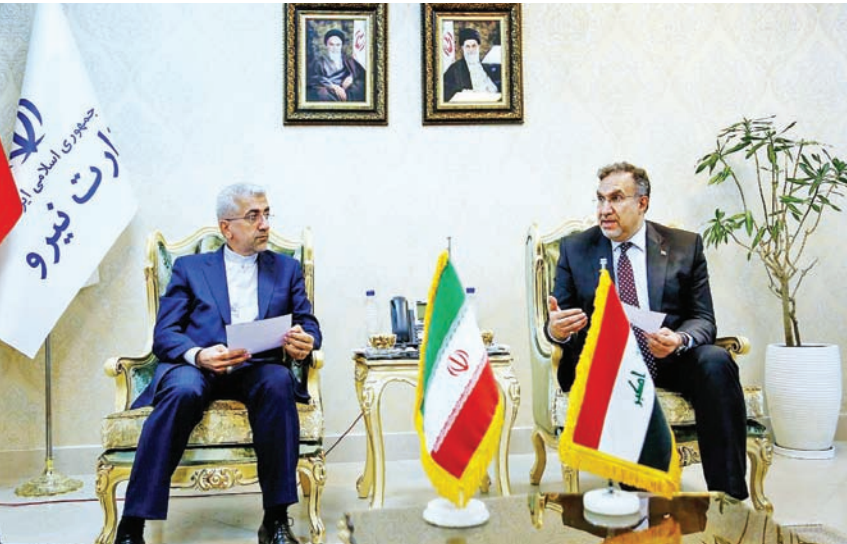


Still, there were heartening signs last week in the retail sector, while the monthly trade balance ballooned to almost \$5 billion in February on the back of some furious shoveling and pumping in the resources sector. The composition of the global recovery may be somewhat unusual, according to JP Morgan, but it makes sense in the context of China being more aggressive than other countries in stimulating its economy. Leaving aside Europe's ongoing struggles, UBS resources analyst Glyn Lawcock says PMI and industrial production data from the other big economies such as the U.S., China and UK point to robust growth and demand for commodities in the months ahead. "The latest demand indicators cite revitalizing growth, owing to easing trade tensions, and waiting for the Chinese infrastructure stimulus to take effect through the second half of 2019," Dr. Lawcock said. China's rebound back to expansion should be particularly heartening for Australia's commodity exporters. "The latest reading was the first sign of growth in four months reflecting recovering domestic growth amidst easing trade disputes ... we expect [economic] growth to pick up sequentially [in the second quarter]," Dr. Lawcock noted. However, drilling into the PMI surveys, the more downbeat outcomes were ongoing falls in manufacturing expectations. Those assumptions don't auger well for global business investment, although a successful conclusion of a U.S.-China trade deal might turn things around on that front. "The relative resilience of the global services PMI in the face of the sharp down-trend in the manufacturing index over the past year has been impressive," JP Morgan's David Hensley said. The global manufacturing sector may have stabilized, but it still hasn't turned the corner going into the second quarter. "While the all-industry PMI is moving in a constructive fashion, with both output and orders rising, we would feel more confident about a sustained improvement in both the PMI and economic growth if some rebalancing were to occur between the services and manufacturing sectors," Mr. Hensley said. (Source: abc.net.au)

Iranian, Iraqi ministers confer about energy, economic co-op

Iran to export 1500MW of electricity to Iraq

After his meeting with Iraqi Minister of Electricity Louay Al Khateeb on Saturday, Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian announced that Iran will export 1500 megawatts (MW) of electricity to Iraq, IRNA reported. Iran's electricity is now exporting to Iraq and relative down payments have been made in due course, he said. Al-Khateeb, for his part, described prospects of Iran-Iraq cooperation in the field of electricity as positive. "We are optimistic about developing electricity industry in cooperation with Islamic Republic of Iran," he noted. About the export of gas and electricity from Iran to his country, the Iraqi official said, "We will continue imports from Iran until Iraq' gas sector and power plants achieve self-sufficiency." Energy imports from Iran are temporary and will last almost two or three years, he pointed out. **Iran, Iraq agreed on joint development of 2 oil fields** During a meeting between Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh and his Iraqi counterpart Thamer Ghadhbhan on Sunday, the two sides agreed on the joint development of Naft Shahr and Khorramshahr joint oilfields, Shana reported. Speaking in the meeting which was held during a visit to Energy Industries Engineering and Design Company (EIED), an affiliate to Oil Industries' Engineering and Construction Company (OIEC), the Iranian minister said that there are massive potentialities for expanding Iran-Iraq cooperation in oil, gas, refining and petrochemicals areas, and Iran is ready to offer its capabilities to the Iraqi oil industry. He added that Thamer al-Ghadhbhan, during the visit to EIED, learned about the capacities of the company, and it was decided that a joint partnership be established be-



Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian (L) and Iraqi Minister of Electricity Louay Al Khateeb met in Tehran on Saturday

tween OIEC and a similar company in Iraq in order to develop joint capacity utilization. The official further said that Iran had a lot of potentialities in the oil, gas, refining and petrochemicals sectors, adding: "Given the lack of development in the petrochemicals and gas industries in Iraq, there is a bright perspective for cooperation between the two countries." He also said that Iran's gas dues from Iraq stood at \$1 billion already. **Incentives for doing business in Iraq** Iran's Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance Farhad Dejpasand said Iranian traders will be provided with plenty of incentives to expand their presence in the Iraqi market, Mehr News agency reported. Dejpasand made the remark after a joint meeting with Iraqi ministers of planning and finance in Tehran on Saturday. "During the meeting with the two Iraqi

ministers, we conferred on customs issues, facilitating business activities, the need for insurance, and joint ventures between the two countries," he added. Iraq is Iran's second largest trade partner, said Dejpasand, adding however that the volume of trade and economic transactions between the two countries is not desirable given the countries' backgrounds, histories and cultures. The Iraqi minister of planning, for his part, said the presence of nine ministers and a large number of Iraqi businessmen who have accompanied the Iraqi prime minister on this trip to Tehran reflects the interest of Baghdad in increasing the level of trade and economic exchanges with the neighboring country. The Iraqi minister of finance also said that he would discuss with Iranian authorities the barriers and problems that exist for the

development of trade transactions between the two sides. **Joint committee to be set up for industrial co-op** On the sidelines of his meeting with Iraqi Trade Minister Mohammad Hashim Abdul Majid Jasim, Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani said a joint committee is to be set up between the two countries for following up the issues of co-operation, IRIB reported. The Iraqi minister for his part said that his country welcomes Iranian investors in implementation of different projects in his country. **Banking relations to be facilitated** Governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) announced on Sunday that Iran-Iraq banking relations will be eased to lubricate transactions between the two countries' businessmen. Making the remarks on the sidelines of his meeting with the Iraqi Finance Minister Fuad Mohammed Hussein in Tehran, Abdolnaser Hemmati said that regarding the ever increasing trade transactions between the two sides and Iran's exports of gas and oil to Iraq besides Iranian private sector's exports to the country, the exports volume from Iran to Iraq has increased recently up to \$12 billion per year. There are some banking difficulties about which negotiations were made with the Iraqi minister today and as accorded, to ease Iranian tradesmen's activities in Iraq the impediments will be removed soon, CBI governor said. Meanwhile, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi agreed on the future visit of Hemmati to Iraq. The trip is aimed at finalizing and implementing financial and banking agreements between Iran and Iraq. Hemmati had visited Iraq last year to talk on using local currencies between the two countries. (Source: staff & agencies)

Industrial, mineral exports rise 8% in 11 months on year

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The value of Iran's industrial and mineral exports during the eleven-month period from March 21, 2018 to February 19, 2019 rose eight percent compared to the figure of the same time span in the previous year, according to an official at Trade Promotion Organization (TPO). Masoud Kamali Ardakani, the director general of Industrial and Mineral Exports Development Office at TPO, put the value of exports from these sectors at \$28.2 billion during the mentioned time span and highlighted that it is while the country's non-oil exports have experienced six percent growth in that time, TPO official website published on Sunday.



Neighboring countries mainly Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Turkey are the major export destinations of Iranian industrial and mineral products, followed by India, China, Indonesia, Syria and Uzbekistan. Iran's non-oil trade with other countries registered a \$1.5-billion positive balance in the eleven-month period, Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dejpasand has previously announced. The minister put the value of non-oil exports at \$40 billion and that of the imports at \$38.5 billion in the mentioned period of time, IRNA reported. Dejpasand mentioned the positive balance a very satisfactory result given all limitations the country is already facing.

Tehran, Baghdad stress developing trade ties in business forum

1 → During the event, the two sides called for further expansion of the trade ties between the two countries and the officials delivered speeches addressing various trade related issues. In his speech, the Iranian vice president mentioned Iranian President Hassan Rouhani's visit to Iraq in early March, saying that the visit of Iraqi delegation less than a month after President Rouhani's visit to their country is an indication of the two sides' determination for expanding economic ties.

He also pointed to the desirable talks and agreements which have been reached during the Iraqi delegation visit to Iran and noted that "following the agreements reached during president Rouhani's visit to Iraq these new agreements can provide a reliable basis for future cooperation between the two countries' private sectors." Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi, for his part expressed his country's eager determination for expansion of relations with Iran in all areas and noted that the two

countries should join hands in order to reach a level of development which they deserve. The official further called on Iranian private sector to cooperate with their Iraqi counterparts in reconstruction of Iraq's infrastructure. He mentioned some of the memorandums of understanding (MOUs) which were signed between the two sides, including an agreement on building a cross-border railway, easing travel conditions and exports of electricity and gas from Iran to Iraq and called for the

two sides' all-out efforts for their realization. During the event, Reza Ardakanian, Gholam-Hossein Shafeie and Majid Mozan also delivered speeches, stressing the two countries' willingness for expansion of economic relations. Heading a high-ranking economic and political delegation, Iraqi Prime Minister Abdul Mahdi arrived in Tehran for a two-day visit on Saturday. The visit came after Rouhani's landmark visit to Iraq in March.

Europe isn't Japan in the 1990s. You should still be worried

Europe's sclerotic growth and political dysfunction inspire frequent comparisons with Japan's lost decade from the mid-1990s. We're not there yet. The region's bout of misery this year -- Germany's industrial slump and the struggle to fix its banks, Italy's inability to reform, the apparent defeat of central bankers seeking to wean the euro area off stimulus -- may seem to make perpetual malaise look inevitable. German bond yields have been on a steady decline for months. The euro region's economy is similar in important ways to its Asian counterpart two decades ago: Interest rates at or below zero, the mountains of debt and non-performing loans, populations transitioning from an aging society to an aged one. Economists insist there are limits to the comparison, though, while acknowledging that a prolonged period of European stasis, deflation and central bank impotence remains a threat. "I'm very worried about it," said Adam Posen, president of the Peterson Institute for International Economics, whose areas of expertise include both Japan and Germany. "Europe's Japanification is a real risk." Japan's so-called lost decade, triggered by the bursting of a bubble in stocks and real estate, pushed the economy into anemic growth or none at all, with rising unemployment and falling interest rates. Here are some of the ways Europe is heading in that direction -- and some of the ways it isn't. **Dwindling workforce** The euro area's working-age population has decreased as people live longer and have fewer children. Overall population growth is set to peak in 2045, according to Eurostat, so the



region is well on track to match Japan. There, the population has fallen for the last seven years; one in three people is now age 60 or older. Aging populations are often thought to weaken inflation pressures, as people save for retirement and spend less per capita. Japan's demographic squeeze has brought more women and old people into work and pushed the overall unemployment rate to 2.3 percent, near the lowest level in more than two decades. Yet wage growth is tepid, insufficient to spur inflation. In the euro area, on the other hand, unemployment is still above its pre-crisis low, yet workers' pay has started to improve, a signal ECB officials frequently cite as evidence that price growth will pick up. **Monetary policy** The Bank of Japan has battled deflation for much of the last two decades. The ECB got a taste of that struggle in 2009 amid a recession and in the aftermath of the euro area's sovereign debt crisis. While Japan's woes began abruptly at the start of the 1990s, the euro area slid more gently into weak inflation and growth. The BOJ was the first major central bank to embrace radical monetary policy, yet it's still locked into negative

interest rates and asset purchases, and weighing more easing. The ECB is a long way from raising rates. While it may be unable to adopt more BOJ-like measures if the slowdown worsens, the bank could be locked into its current stance for a while. "By refusing to ease policy appropriately, the Bank of Japan created a situation where the country had to stay with near-zero interest rates for 20 years," said Athanasios Orphanides, a former ECB policy maker. "If you look at it like that, 2020 or 2021 might become completely impossible for the ECB to hike." **Inflation expectations** While inflation in the euro area has picked up, it's still below the ECB's goal of just under 2 percent, and the core rate is stuck around 1 percent. The euro area's core inflation rate appears to be stuck in a rut. The ECB says the risk that markets anticipate even slower inflation is "very low." Investors are less sanguine: A gauge based on derivatives prices has plunged to 1.3 percent, the lowest level since 2016 -- when the ECB was buying bonds at a rate of 80 billion euros (\$90 billion) a month. Euro 5y/5y inflation swaps have gone down sharply. **Debt and yields** Japan's debt-to-GDP ratio is now above 230 percent, and rising as deficits pile up. European Union rules impose fiscal limits that will limit such a buildup. The euro area's ratio is 89 percent and is forecast to decline slowly, though a weaker economy and the need for fiscal stimulus could hamper progress. Still, bond yields tell a worrying story: German borrowing costs are converging with those of Japan. (Source: Bloomberg)

OPEC will probably extend its output cut in H2

The oil market has forgotten last year's crash, returning a whopping 39 percent for the year till date. Crude made a steady comeback this year and sentiment has climbed as OPEC's firmness to control output to support prices worked in the favor of oil producers.

The OPEC deal to curb oil production probably will be extended hopefully for another six months beyond the end of June.

Since crude oil prices have ended with gains, WTI crude oil experienced the longest weekly winning streak since November 2017 as crises from Venezuela to Libya threatened supplies, while optimism about the U.S.-China trade talks buoyed the outlook for demand. In March, OPEC cut production for a fourth month, while supply risks are mounting in member nations exempt from the strategy.

Power failures that plagued Venezuela last month were said to have briefly slashed crude output by half. And in Libya, tensions are rising as military leader Khalifa Haftar ordered his forces to advance on the capital. Escalating tensions in Libya, the economic



unravelling of Venezuela and the possibility that the White House won't extend waivers to buyers of Iranian oil threaten to tighten

supply further.

Crude production in Venezuela was 890,000 barrels a day in March, com-

pared with 1.23 million a day in January, as blackouts across much of the country that began March 7 paralyzed oil wells and rigs. The crisis is worsening and the risk of further output declines is increasing.

US sanctions on Venezuelan and Iranian oil, as well as output cuts by the Saudi Arabia-led OPEC, are creating a shortage of crude oil. Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, increased May pricing for most crude oil grades to all of its markets as the kingdom continues to restrain production and shipments.

After Brent crude briefly topped \$70 a barrel last week, there'll be a series of reports in coming days that'll help shape the outlook. Traders will receive updates on global supply and demand when OPEC issues its monthly report on April 10 and the International Energy Agency publishes its own take the following day. Both will give data showing how far OPEC has implemented its latest round of supply cuts. Hence, we expect the trend for oil to be bullish going into the next week.

(Source: moneycontrol.com)

Aramco's true breakeven price

Saudi Aramco, the national oil company of Saudi Arabia, is by far the largest oil company in the world. The company produces around 13 percent of the world's oil, but its business operations have been notoriously opaque for decades. It has often been stated that the company has plenty of low-cost legacy wells that drop its overall production costs to \$10 per barrel, or even lower.

Because there was no way to audit this information, the world was left to guess at the actual breakeven costs for the world's largest oil company. This week Saudi Aramco lifted the veil on its financial condition in a bond offering for the company.

There are many important financial details in the filing. The company is indeed the world's most profitable, earning \$111 billion on \$356 billion in revenue in 2018. This is nearly double the \$59.4 billion made by Apple, the world's second-most profitable company, in 2018. It's also over five times the \$20.8 billion made by ExxonMobil last year.

Bloomberg points out that Aramco's "funds flow from operations" was \$26 per barrel last year, which they note was worse than Shell or Total which reported \$38 and \$31, respectively.

However, I found the most significant item in the prospectus to be that Saudi Aramco struggled to break even in 2016 when Brent crude averaged about \$45 per barrel. Net income in 2016 was only \$13 billion, and free cash flow a mere \$2 billion. Contrast that with the \$111 billion in income and \$86 billion in free cash flow the company made in 2018 (when Brent crude averaged \$71.34/bbl),



and it looks like Aramco's breakeven price is just about \$40/bbl.

No wonder OPEC threw in the towel in 2016 and decided to abandon its price war with U.S. shale. OPEC's largest member saw its income dry up and was on the verge of posting a loss if oil prices didn't turn around. I once characterized OPEC's decision to declare war on U.S. shale oil producers as a trillion dollar miscalculation, and at least now we can see that it likely cost Saudi Aramco alone several hundred billion dollars.

The implications of this news are that we will likely never again see an extended period of time with world oil prices below \$45, because OPEC will have to take action at that point to prop up prices as the cartel did in 2016. Otherwise, they will quickly find themselves in deep financial trouble, unable to balance government budgets.

So, if you do see oil prices dip back down to that level, it's definitely time to buy. Unless, of course, demand for oil has peaked and is on the decline. But that's an argument for a different column.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Trump declares war on OPEC, Saudis laugh as oil price surges

Donald Trump is ramping up his attack on oil prices as U.S. crude hit a 5-month high. While up to now the U.S. president has been focused on denouncing high energy costs via Twitter, it appears he now is looking to do more than merely bash OPEC online. As CNBC reported, the U.S. wants to ensure "dominance" in this sector through a blockbuster executive order designed to boost pipeline infrastructure. In reality, Trump walks a dangerous tightrope when it comes to crude.

The main obstacle that Donald Trump faces in maximizing his popularity through energy policy is that two sides of his base want different things. First, there are the Rust Belt farmers and factory workers who love seeing the cost of living reduced. Farmers, in particular, use a lot of fuel, and any reduction in energy costs is a great benefit to their business. In this regard, Trump can help offset some of the damage his trade war has done to certain crop prices.

The other side of this coin is that other red states like Texas and Oklahoma love high energy prices. Historically, Democrats have been raked across the coals in these areas for trying to depress the value of crude. Trump is banking on tribalism to keep these states on board, and if polls are any indicator, they very much still are.

Moreover, it is rather strange to see Trump bashing OPEC about high oil prices and wanting to restore U.S. "dominance" when it is already the largest oil producer in the World. Obama doesn't deserve credit for this as he previously claimed, but neither does Trump. Good old technical ingenuity helped the U.S. access exploit unusable deposits.

However, there is another reason that



Trump wants to subdue oil prices, and it is the same reason that he attacks the Federal Reserve over cheap money. Everything that Trump does is to try and stimulate the economy. He needs it in overdrive to make his GDP claims come to fruition. If energy prices are too high consumers, get defensive. It also erodes wage gains as inflation eats into paychecks.

Janet Yellen once called cheap energy "a tax cut" for the American people, and that is probably true. OPEC is far less diversified in general than the United States, so overall cheap oil is a significant negative as opposed to the U.S. where it is a net benefit for the service based economy.

If the U.S. president succeeds in crushing energy prices, there could be an interesting twist in 2020. Texas has been shifting blue for a while, and Beto O'Rourke nearly upended Ted Cruz in the most recent election.

If oil workers are sufficiently irritated, then conceivably they might rebel in 2020. The flip-side of this is that Trump could increase his manufacturing base in the "blue wall" of Michigan and Wisconsin as the economy keeps humming.

(Source: CCN)

Why oil prices rallied 30% this year



Oil prices gained around 30 percent in the first quarter this year, with both WTI and Brent posting their best quarterly performance in a decade—since the second quarter of 2009.

At the start of the second quarter of 2019, WTI Crude had already topped \$60 last week and has been trading above that level in the first week of April, while Brent Crude has been flirting with the \$70 mark for days.

At the end of last year, the analysts predicting such a fast rise in oil prices in 2019 were in the minority, after market participants panicked over gloomy forecasts about slowing oil demand growth this year that sent oil tumbling nearly 40 percent in Q4 2018.

A quarter into this year, signs have started to appear that concerns over faltering demand growth may have been overblown.

Demand has been resilient—actually it has been holding more resilient than many pundits had expected at the end of last year. Coupled with a tightening market due to OPEC and allies' cuts and U.S. sanctions crippling Venezuelan and Iranian oil sales, oil prices may have surprised to the upside many forecasters.

Higher oil prices have naturally led to higher gasoline prices, and forecasts suggest that U.S. drivers should brace for further increases in gas prices as spring comes and motorists drive more. Refinery maintenance season in the U.S. is also weighing on gasoline stocks and prices, AAA said in an update on April 4.

"Until refineries return to normal operations, which will take a few weeks, American motorists should expect pump

prices to continue increasing as gasoline demand gains steam," according to AAA.

Patrick DeHaan, head of petroleum analysis for GasBuddy, said on April 1:

"There's no fooling motorists, gas prices have continued to surge. For the seventh straight week the national average has continued to rise, unabated, due to seasonal impacts. The run-up this spring has felt worse than prior years, and thus far, the national average is up nearly 50 cents per gallon from our 2019 low."

"Unfortunately, this a rut we'll be stuck in yet for at least a few more weeks," DeHaan noted.

One of the drivers of higher oil prices so far this year has been "very resilient demand," Michele Della Vigna, head of EMEA natural resources research at Goldman Sachs, told CNBC this week.

"Everybody came into the year with a very negative view and actually demand has been resilient," della Vigna said.

"Demand remains robust particularly in the emerging markets, which continue to buy a lot of crude," Goldman's expert noted.

The current price level works for everybody on the producer front—it helps to manage deficits in some OPEC members to sustainable levels, it is actually very profitable for the industry, and it's enough for U.S. shale to keep growing, della Vigna told CNBC.

Goldman Sachs doesn't see Brent Crude prices breaking significantly above \$70 or below \$60 a barrel in the coming weeks.

But there are events expected in coming weeks and a couple of months that could impact global oil supply and determine the trend in oil (and gasoline) prices into

the summer.

Assuming that demand growth holds, as Goldman says it has so far this year, supply is expected to further tighten with the U.S. sanctions on Venezuela and the upcoming review of the U.S. waivers for Iranian oil customers. The Trump Administration is not expected to cut off all Iranian buyers in early May, considering President Trump's aversion to high gasoline prices and the current Brent price a hair's breadth away from \$70 a barrel.

OPEC and its Russia-led non-OPEC allies will review their production cut pact in late June, but at that meeting they will have a clearer picture of where supply might be going, because the U.S. will have already decided whether to extend and to whom to extend waivers for Iranian oil purchases.

OPEC leader Saudi Arabia has made it crystal clear that it would do whatever it takes to rebalance the market, with cuts potentially going through the end of 2019, while non-OPEC leader Russia is, as usual, signaling its reluctance over continued cuts.

On the demand side, there is always weakening global economic growth and the U.S.-China trade war lurking in the shadows to spook the oil market again.

The first quarter this year saw a combination of resilient demand and tightening supply pushing oil prices higher. U.S. sanctions policies toward Iran and Venezuela, the state of the global economy, emerging markets growth, trade disputes, OPEC members' fiscal needs, or a sudden supply disruption, in Libya for example, will all determine—to various degrees—where oil prices will be in coming quarters.

(Source: oilprice.com)

The biggest Saudi oil field is fading faster than anyone guessed

It was a state secret and the source of a kingdom's riches. It was so important that U.S. military planners once debated how to seize it by force. For oil traders, it was a source of endless speculation.

Now the market finally knows: Ghawar in Saudi Arabia, the world's largest conventional oil field, can produce a lot less than almost anyone believed.

When Saudi Aramco on Monday published its first ever profit figures since its nationalization nearly 40 years ago, it also lifted the veil of secrecy around its mega oil fields. The company's bond prospectus revealed that Ghawar is able to pump a maximum of 3.8 million barrels a day -- well below the more than 5 million that had become conventional wisdom in the market.

"As Saudi's largest field, a surprisingly low production capacity figure from Ghawar is the stand-out of the report," said Virendra Chauhan, head of upstream at consultant Energy Aspects Ltd. in Singapore.

King of oil

The Energy Information Administration, a U.S. government body that provides statistical information and often is used as a benchmark by the oil market, listed Ghawar's production capacity at 5.8 million barrels a day in 2017. Aramco, in a presentation in Washington in 2004 when it tried to debunk the "peak oil" supply theories of the late U.S. oil banker Matt Simmons, also said the field was pumping more than 5 million barrels a day, and had been doing so since at least the previous decade.

In his book "Twilight in the Desert," Simmons argued that Saudi Arabia would struggle to boost production due to the imminent depletion of Ghawar, among other factors. "Field-by-field production reports disappeared behind a wall of secrecy over two decades ago," he wrote in his book in reference to Aramco's nationalization.

The new details about Ghawar prove one of Simmons's points but he missed other changes in technology that allowed Saudi Arabia -- and, more importantly, U.S. shale producers -- to boost output significantly, with global oil production yet to peak.

The prospectus offered no information about why Ghawar can produce today a quarter less than 15 years ago -- a significant reduction for any oil field. The report also didn't say whether capacity would continue to decline at a similar rate in the future.

In response to a request for comment, Aramco referred back to the bond prospectus without elaborating.

Lost crown

The new maximum production rate for Ghawar means that the Permian in the U.S., which pumped 4.1 million barrels a day last month according to government data, is already the largest oil production basin. The comparison isn't exact -- the Saudi field is a conventional reservoir, while the Permian is an unconventional shale formation -- yet it shows the shifting balance of power in the market.

Ghawar, which is about 174 miles long -- or about the distance from New York to Baltimore -- is so important for Saudi Arabia because the field has "accounted for more than half of the total cumulative crude oil production in the kingdom," according to the bond prospectus. The country has been pumping since the discovery of the Dammam No. 7 well in 1938.

On top of Ghawar, which was found in 1948 by an American geologist, Saudi Arabia relies heavily on two other mega-fields: Khurais, which was discovered in 1957, and can pump 1.45 million barrels a day, and Safaniyah, found in 1951 and still today the world's largest offshore oil field with capacity of 1.3 million barrels a day. In total, Aramco operates 101 oil fields.

The 470-page bond prospectus confirms that Saudi Aramco is able to pump a maximum of 12 million barrels a day -- as Riyadh has said for several years. The kingdom has access to another 500,000 barrels a day of output capacity in the so-called neutral zone shared with Kuwait. That area isn't producing anything now due a political dispute with its neighbor.

While the prospectus confirmed the overall maximum production capacity, the split among fields is different to what the market had assumed. As a policy, Saudi Arabia keeps about 1 million to 2 million barrels a day of its capacity in reserve, using it only during wars, disruptions elsewhere or unusually strong demand. Saudi Arabia briefly pumped a record of more than 11 million barrels a day in late 2018.

"The company also uses this spare capacity as an alternative supply option in case of unplanned production outages at any field and to maintain its production levels during routine field maintenance," Aramco said in its prospectus.

Costly strategy

For Aramco, that's a significant cost, as it has invested billions of dollars into facilities that aren't regularly used. However, the company said the ability to tap its spare capacity also allows it to profit handsomely at times of market tightness, providing an extra \$35.5 billion in revenue from 2013 to 2018. Last year, Saudi Energy Minister Khalid Al-Falih said maintaining this supply buffer costs about \$2 billion a year.

Aramco also disclosed reserves at its top-five fields, revealing that some of them have shorter lifespans than previously thought. Ghawar, for example, has 48.2 billion barrels of oil left, which would last another 34 years at the maximum rate of production. Nonetheless, companies are often able to boost the reserves over time by deploying new techniques or technology.

In total, the kingdom has 226 billion barrels of reserves, enough for another 52 years of production at the maximum capacity of 12 million barrels a day.

The Saudis also told the world that their fields are aging better than expected, with "low depletion rates of 1 percent to 2 percent per year," slower than the 5 percent decline some analysts suspected.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Petrobras plans to sell gas pipeline to Engie for \$8.6bn

Brazil's national oil company Petrobras plans to sell a natural gas pipeline unit to a consortium led by French energy group Engie for \$8.6bn.

Petrobras said on Friday that Engie, alongside Canada's Caisse de Dépôt et Placement du Québec, presented the largest bid to acquire 90 percent of Transportadora Associada de Gás, or TAG. This marks one of the largest divestments in Petrobras' quest to accelerate asset sales.

The process for the sale of TAG, which operates some 4,500km of gas pipelines in Brazil, began in 2017 but was halted by a Supreme Court injunction. If the deal -- which is currently pending approval from Petrobras' governance entities -- proceeds, it would be a big fillip for the company's new chief executive, Roberto Castello Branco, who took the reins in January.

The deal would provide capital to cut down on Petrobras' debt pile, which stood at \$69.3bn at the end of 2018.

Last December, the Rio de Janeiro-based company said it was looking to raise some \$26.9bn through asset sales.

(Source: Financial Times)

Ashraf Ghani's grand plan for sustainable peace in Afghanistan

By Samim Arif

Peace, once seen as an impossible prospect, has now become part of the national discourse in Afghanistan. Last month, for example, around 3,500 women from all ethnic and linguistic groups in the country issued a joint communique calling for a peace in which Afghan women would not be subjected to the horrors of the Taliban era once again.

The Afghan government is also committed to peace, but just like the women of Afghanistan, it is not ready to settle for any "peace deal". It wants a peace that would reinforce the values of the republic and the fundamental rights and liberties of the Afghan people, not one that would inevitably lead to the collapse of the state and reversal of the gains of the past 18 years.

Today, as a result of increased U.S. pressure on Pakistan and the Taliban, as well as the Afghan government's relentless efforts to solve the country's deep-rooted problems, there is renewed hope for a peaceful, sustainable settlement to Afghanistan's decades-old conflict. Undoubtedly, this moment has not come without a cost. Thousands of Afghans (and their international partners) sacrificed their lives and resources to get us here. But even these immense sacrifices have not been enough to bring sustainable peace to a country that has been torn apart by conflict for over four decades.

Afghanistan now needs a well-rounded strategy and pragmatic leadership to tackle the last few hurdles on its long and treacherous path to peace.

Thankfully, Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani devised a comprehensive and practical four-phase strategy to achieve sustainable peace in the country:

First, the president insists, Pakistan should be convinced to end hostilities towards Afghanistan. The Taliban and their affiliates who engage in violence in Afghanistan have been doing so with the blessing and encouragement of Islamabad. A peace settlement can only be agreed on if and when Pakistan learns to respect the sovereignty of Afghanistan and gives up its ambition to forcefully bring its neighbor under its sphere of influence.

Pakistan most recently made its opposition to a sovereign, united and fully independent Afghanistan apparent when Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan called the Kabul government a "hurdle to peace talks" and suggested setting up an interim government in the country.

■ Scrapping the constitution

An interim government means going back to square one, scrapping the constitution and reversing the gains of the past 18 years. The people of Afghanistan, who fought long and hard for their independence, have no intention of agreeing to any peace process that would deprive the country of its sovereignty.

Ghani is aware of this and believes the peace process can only move forward after consensus is reached between the neighbors.

Second, Ghani asserts, Afghanistan should work towards gaining the trust of the international community and demonstrating that it is ready to tackle the challenges of the post-conflict era independently.

The president believes sustainable peace can only be achieved by ending Afghanistan's reliance on foreign aid. Alongside his efforts to achieve economic self-sufficiency, Ghani is also embarking on diplomatic engagements to restore the international community's trust in the Afghan government. So far, his engagement with the U.S. resulted in the Trump administration's Afghanistan-focused South Asia strategy and put increased pressure on Pakistan to end its support for the Taliban.

Meanwhile, his engagement with Islamic nations resulted in the endorsement of his peace efforts by Saudi Arabia and the Indonesian Ulema Council. Moreover, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation officially described the Afghan war as a conflict "contrary to the principles and formal teachings of Islam". This statement stripped the war of its religious justifications, bringing Afghanistan one step closer to peace.

Third, the president believes a successful peace process should involve all segments of Afghan society. Past experiences in 1992 and 2001 clearly demonstrate that peace efforts which focus on reconciliation with one group while undermining others result in renewed conflicts.

President Ghani is aware of this, and he has already met and engaged in intensive discussions with thousands of citizens including women's rights activists, civil society representatives and a diverse selection of political leaders and religious scholars. He has given every stratum a stake at peacemaking. To make the process even more inclusive, the government is convening a Consultative Loya Jirga on April 28 where the representatives of all demographics will come together to define the government's direction on peace. Ghani believes what Afghanistan needs is a people-centered peace, not an elite-led one, and he is working hard to deliver this.

Fourth, Ghani believes the peace process should be owned and led by the people and government of Afghanistan. In 1989, the United Nations brokered a peace deal between the Pakistan-based Afghan mujahideen and the government of Mohammad Najibullah. However, this peace deal failed, leading to renewed conflict and more bloodshed. The failure of the deal was mainly caused by the exclusion of Afghans from the process and the lack of mechanisms for accountability. Today, Ghani insists on an Afghan-led peace process because he does not want to repeat past mistakes or agree to a process that could leave the country in the middle of yet another bloody conflict in the near future.

■ For an interim government

As the peace process intensifies and some elements both within and outside Afghanistan advocate for an interim government, hundreds of civil society activists gathered in Kabul and issued a communique on the kind of peace they want. One of their main demands was for the Afghan constitution and the core values of the republic to be upheld. The Afghan Constitution assigns the power to declare war and peace to the president.

In short, Ghani's vision for sustainable peace is based on the elimination of hostile outside influences, long-term economic planning, diplomatic engagements and, most importantly, inclusivity. He is guarding our constitutional values to ensure succession of power continues through elections - one of the main tenets of Afghan constitution. He has a plan that will lead the country not to a "negative peace" in which merely violence is absent, but to a positive one, which would guarantee the presence of justice, equality and development in addition to absence of violence.

Ghani's efforts played an important role in making peace in Afghanistan a real prospect. Now that we are at the point where direct talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban could begin any moment, the president's vision for peace and well-thought-out plans for the post-conflict era is guaranteed to lead Afghanistan to a prosperous future.

(Source: aljazeera.com)

By Walter Mayr

These days, his statesman's uniform fits the former rebel commander perfectly: bespoke shoes, dark suit, golden cuff links. Flanked by reverent-looking toadies, Ramush Haradinaj recently sat down for an interview in Pristina, at the seat of the Kosovo government.

If it weren't for Haradinaj and his comrades, Europe's youngest republic might not exist. In the nineties, at the fiercest phase of the ethnic Albanian revolt against the Serbian occupiers in Kosovo, he commanded part of the Kosovo Liberation Army, a paramilitary organization known by its Albanian initials UCK. Haradinaj's nom de guerre was "Smajl." Today he is the head of government in a country searching for its place in Europe.

Twenty years after the NATO bombings that, starting on March 24, 1999, forced the withdrawal of the Serb-dominated Yugoslav army, Kosovo remains the problem child of the Balkans. This tiny country, with barely 2 million inhabitants, 90 percent of whom are Albanian, is currently not recognized by more than 80 countries around the world, including five EU members. That insecurity is impeding the country's progress. Its citizens are the only Europeans west of Belarus who still require a visa to travel to the Schengen area. Every third employable resident is jobless.

Potentially even more alarming, discussions about the country's borders have recently cropped up -- the kind of talk that many people thought had faded into the past. Leading ethnic-Albanian politicians in Kosovo argue about whether the Serb-dominated north of the republic should be left to Belgrade as part of an exchange of territory. The presidents of Serbia and Kosovo discussed this question under the oversight of Federica Mogherini, the EU's chief diplomat, but Prime Minister Haradinaj rejects any such proposals, claiming they are dangerous nonsense. The "tragedies in the Balkans always had to do with borders," he says. "Whoever raises these questions again now invokes new tragedies."

Over 13,000 people died between February 1998 and June 1999. Haradinaj knows the horrors of the Kosovo War. The former commander has stood before the International Criminal Court in The Hague twice for crimes against humanity, including murder and rape. He was ultimately acquitted both times. "I did what was necessary," he says, looking back. Though he makes it sound like he didn't even participate. He claims that during the war, and afterward, it was about "surviving in a lawless society." Even today, in his statesman's uniform, Haradinaj is a fighter. With customs duties of 100 percent on imports from Serbia, he is trying to force the government in Belgrade to recognize Kosovo -- and, in the process, is riling up the United States, the country's protector.

Ever since the autonomous province of Kosovo was allowed to cut itself free from Serbia in 2008 with the explicit permission of Madeleine Albright, Washington's ambassadors have been the secret rulers of this country. But these days, U.S. President Donald Trump's man in Pristina is facing resistance. Haradinaj coolly explains that the custom duties were a "sovereign decision of the Kosovar government." In other words, it means Pristina is no colony of Washington's and reserves the right to take revenge for things like Serbia's most recent veto against Kosovo joining Interpol.



Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj

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Was this a first step out of the shadow of the American superpower? Haradinaj says Kosovo needs to learn to defend itself: "We had no choice. Serbia has been acting more and more aggressively lately. Our openness and generosity have been misread as weakness."

■ A historical agreement

Although Trump expressed in letters to the heads of state in Belgrade and Pristina that he hoped to be able to sign a "historical agreement" at the White House as soon as possible, a long-term peaceful solution is not in sight. For a long time, a partition of Kosovo was out of the question for Washington. Now it sounds like things have changed. "We no longer have any red lines; if the two countries suggest a deal that involves a change in the borders and that is accepted by the citizens, then that is fine with us," said one high-ranking U.S. official in Pristina, who added that when it comes to the "struggle between the superpowers," Washington is mostly concerned about "maneuvering Kosovo to the West."

That means, into the EU and NATO, which is to say, away from the Russian sphere of influence. The latter begins in the city of Mitrovica, the primarily Serbian part of Kosovo north of the Ibar River, and stretches anywhere in the Balkan region where questions of alliance are still unresolved. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, for instance, Moscow is using logistical and military support to keep the threat of the country's division alive.

In a region in which ethnic Albanians live in several countries and the smallest border movement threatens to upset the balance, Kosovo's unresolved future is dynamite. And then there are the mass protests against the governments in the neighboring countries of Albania, Montenegro and, especially, Serbia, showing the impatience of inhabitants who

have been spent years waiting to join the EU.

Anyone who plays with fire in Kosovo -- on the historic fields dotted with medieval monasteries that, according to Serbian myth, are the cradle of the nation -- risks setting off a firestorm. And yet, Mogherini, John Bolton, Trump's national security adviser, and Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic are all considering giving the north of Kosovo to Serbia, and offering the mostly ethnic-Albanian Presevo Valley to Kosovo. Kosovar President Hashim Thaci is also in favor of this, but is largely alone in his own country in having that stance.

The unwritten, but internationally respected agreement not to change any of the old internal Yugoslav borders is now being questioned. It is a dangerous precedent. Who then could deny the Bosnian Serbs an alliance with Serbia, or the ethnic-Albanian North Macedonians one with Albania?

Anyone who visits Mitrovica in northern Kosovo sees posters behind the Ibar Bridge depicting the presidents of Russia and Serbia, Vladimir Putin and Aleksandar Vucic, peacefully assembled under the Cyrillic headline "We are brothers -- god stands with us." Oaths of loyalty between Russians and Serbians are not only a part of folklore here. They are also a geopolitical calculation.

The tone in Kosovo has gotten sharper. Its own protection force could gradually be turned into a regular 5,000-strong army. To date, NATO has guaranteed security in the country. Its secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, has warned against serious repercussions in the relationship with the alliance.

And because Albania's head of government, Prime Minister Edi Rama, is angry about what he sees as a stalling tactic by the EU, he is now threatening to bring the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo back to the motherland.

He considers a joint head of state and foreign policy a serious alternative to EU membership.

The border between the two states is already fluid and those traveling from Kosovo to Albania encounter only superficial inspections. In Pristina government circles, the creation of a "mini Schengen" in the western Balkans is already under discussion -- an option that would unite Albanians who live on either side of the border. A shared experience of injustice and the blood splattered through the mountain landscape have brought together the people on both sides of the border.

■ Potential Albanian war crimes

As of recently, potential Albanian war crimes are once again being addressed in The Hague. Under examination is the degree to which the Kosovar guerrilla army, UCK, may have incriminated itself. Many of the country's leading politicians were once members of the group. Since January, an international court subject to Kosovar law has been taking part in negotiations. Old wartime comrades of Prime Minister Haradinaj have already been invited, and it has intentionally been left unclear whether they are to appear as accused or as witnesses.

In the godforsaken Tropeja, on the Albanian side, two men in a cemetery are pointing, without hesitation, at the grave of a UCK fighter who died on this side of the border -- and where one of his brothers later placed the severed heads of two Serbian soldiers. There are photos proving the gruesome ritual murder occurred.

The government in Pristina is arguing that possible war crimes carried out by the Albanian side can of course be investigated. But patience among the ethnic-Albanian population is running thin. Investigations took place under UN supervision until 2008, then came the International Criminal Court in The Hague, and the EU's EULEX mission. If a special court were to investigate the UCK once again, it would likely not be well-received.

The West's grotesquely inconsistent approach is exemplified by the fact that ex-commander Hashim Thaci, now president of Kosovo, and Fatmir Limaj, the deputy prime minister, may currently negotiate with head EU diplomat Mogherini through different channels despite the fact that both of them were heavily involved in wartime activities of the UCK.

"There are, of course, some people on both the Albanian and Serbian sides who say, 'I won't negotiate with that bastard over there,'" admits a leading U.S. official in Pristina. But the Trump administration, he says, wants to achieve a historical solution similar to a Korea deal: "We need to make progress. The status quo in Kosovo is critical -- either the relationship between the two countries will improve, or it will go completely down the drain."

As long as the EU doesn't manage to show Kosovo the path forward, and do so as a unified body, the country's course will be set in Washington. Kosovo's prime minister complains that the goals of the Europeans are hard to determine, unlike those of the U.S.: "When our people recently flew to Brussels for discussions with Mogherini, they had a 30-page proposal in their luggage." And what did they get from the EU negotiators? "Nothing," says Haradinaj, "except coffee and water, though free of charge."

(Source: Spiegel)

Can the U.S. Marine Corps use F-35s to wage electronic warfare?

By David Axe

The U.S. Marine Corps is trying to figure out how to wage electronic warfare now that the service has retired the last of its EA-6B Prowler radar-jamming planes.

The Prowler, a four-seat version of the long-retired, two-seat A-6 attack plane, finally bowed out of service in March 2019.

The Prowler carried AN/ALQ-99 jamming pods under its wings and also could fire High-Speed Anti-Radiation Missiles, or HARMs. Navy and Marine Corps EA-6Bs suppressed and destroyed enemy air defenses in every major American conflict after 1970.

But by 2019 the Prowlers were old and only a few remained in service. The Navy retired its Prowlers in 2015. The last six Marine EA-6Bs spent their final months flying combat missions over the Middle East.

The Navy replaced its EA-6Bs with new EA-18G Growlers, but the Marines opted not to purchase this radar-jamming variant of the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet. Instead, the Corps is trying something new, and spreading the electronic-warfare mission across a wide array of aircraft including stealth fighters and drones.

■ Aviation platforms

The "Marine aviation approach to electromagnetic-spectrum operations is a distributed, platform agnostic strategy," the Corps explained in its 2018 aviation plan. "Marine aviation is integrating E.W. systems and Intrepid Tiger II payloads across aviation platforms to provide commanders with an organic and persistent airborne E.W. capability."

For starters, the Marines are counting on the F-35 stealth fighter with its powerful AN/ASQ-239 electronic-warfare suite, datalink and new weapons partially to replace the EA-6B's own jamming capability. The Marine Corps plans to buy 420 F-35s to replace, by 2030, all of its older fixed-wing jets.



The "F-35 brings a powerful combination of (electronic warfare), weapons, sensors and reduced signature to the (Marine Air-Ground Task Force)," the Corps explains in its 2019 aviation plan. "F-35 E.W. capabilities include emitter geolocation, identification and parametric data sharing via Link 16 (data-link)."

In addition, future versions of the F-35 should be compatible with the Advanced Anti-Radiation Guided Missile, a new version of the HARM with a better seeker and software. The Marines also believe that the F-35's electronically-scanned-array radar could, with modification, double as a radar-jammer.

But it's the AN/ASQ-239 that gives the F-35 its near-term electronic-warfare capabilities. The AN/ASQ-239 "provides the pilot with maximum situational awareness, helping to identify, monitor, analyze and respond to potential threats," according to manufacturer BAE Systems. "Advanced avionics and sensors provide a real-time, 360-degree view of the battlespace, helping to maximize detection ranges and provide the pilot with options to evade, engage, counter or jam threats."

■ Enemy air defenses

But the Marines aren't assuming the F-35 all by itself will be able to suppress all enemy air defenses. The Corps also is developing the Intrepid Tiger II, a radio- and radar-jamming pod that's compatible with almost any rotorcraft or fixed-wing plane. The Corps is integrating I.T. II on its AV-8B jump jets, UH-1Y transport helicopters, KC-130J aerial tankers and MV-22B tiltrotors.

"I.T. II is an E.W. payload providing communications electronic-warfare support and electronic-attack capabilities," the 2019 aviation plan states. "I.T. II deploys with each AV-8B ... detachment and has also completed eight ... deployments with UH-1Y detachments."

"I.T. II integration with KC-130J ... will be completed and fielded in (fiscal year) '19. Development of an I.T. II counter-radar capability for the MV-22B began in F.Y. '16, (research and development) is ongoing through F.Y. '21. Throughout F.Y.18 I.T. II was deployed in support of the 15th, 31st, 26th and 13th (Marine Expeditionary Units)."

As of 2018, the Marines also planned to add Intrepid Tiger II to the current RQ-21 drone and the future Marine Unmanned Expeditionary drone, or MUX. The "initial research and design for an I.T. II E.W. payload on the RQ21 began in F.Y. '18," the 2018 aviation plan explained. "Payload production is planned for F.Y. '21-'23. ... integrating I.T. II on the RQ21 will lay the foundation for further E.W. expansion."

"Future Marine aviation E.W. capabilities will also be provided by MUX," the 2018 plan continued. "In addition to providing persistent reconnaissance surveillance and communications, MUX will also provide a long-range, persistent, penetrating, responsive, airborne (electronic-warfare) capability."

(Source: nationalinterest.org)

‘Trump’s policies creating growing gap in income, wealth, opportunity in America’

TEHRAN (FNA) — Jack Rasmus, Professor of Economics, says whereas the tax paid by wealthy U.S. businesses is cut by trillions of dollars, average workers at best stagnated, with most experiencing a decline in real wages, while the rate of inflation is rising for rents, medical, education.

Dr. Rasmus believes the U.S. president bragged about wage gains of the average and low-paid U.S. workers, as more than half of them have reportedly received no wage gains in 2018.

Jack Rasmus, Ph.D Political Economy, is an author, journalist and radio host. He was an economist and market analyst for several international companies and U.S. unions.

Below is the full text of the interview conducted by FNA:

■ The U.S. has been experiencing higher GDP under President Trump in the last 2 years. Is this economic growth shared with average or low-paid Americans?

A: The Trump tax cuts passed in early 2018 amounted to more than \$4.5 trillion over the decade to wealthy households, businesses, investors and corporations, which have been ‘front-loaded’ in 2018. Offsetting this are \$1.5 trillion in tax hikes for wage earners, that begins to hit this year and accelerates after 2022. Assumptions about 3% GDP growth for another decade, with no recession, produces a further offsetting of \$1 or more. The result is the \$1.5 trillion reported by the press. The \$4.5 trillion cuts for business and investors have not gone into real investment and generated the Trump 2017-18 GDP growth rates.

Real investment in structures and equipment declined steadily over 2018 as the Trump tax cuts took effect: measured in percent terms compared to the preceding quarter, residential construction was negative every quarter in 2018. Commercial construction, with a lag, turned negative in the second half of 2018. And equipment spending fell from 8.5% in the first quarter to 3.4% by October 2018.

So if the Trump tax cuts did not go into real investment, creating real employment or real GDP, where did it go? It went into stock buybacks, dividend payouts, and M&A activity. Several U.S. banks’ research departments estimate buybacks plus dividends for



just the Fortune 500 largest companies in the U.S. will reach a record \$1.3 trillion in 2018. Add the largest 2000 or 5000 companies and its close to \$2 trillion. Hundreds of billions more for M&A. This diversion of the Trump tax cuts to financial markets is the main determinant driving stock markets (even after corrections) and other financial asset markets.

The government grossly over-reports wage gains for the average and low paid workers in the U.S. An independent source reports show that more than half of U.S. workers received no wage gain at all in 2018. The official reported wage gains of 3% are skewed to the top 10% of the labor force and, moreover, the data is for full time employed only. So average workers at best stagnated, with most experiencing a decline in real wages. The rate of inflation in the U.S. is under-estimated for median worker family households, and inflation is rising for rents, medical, education, and other major items in household budgets. So the immediate future will mean even less real wage gains for the majority of U.S. workers. If they were doing so well, as Trump and even the press report, why is it that 7 million of them have defaulted on their auto loans? And why is credit card, auto

loans, and education loan debt now all over \$1 trillion each?

■ The U.S. has a population of over 325 million people with undocumented immigrants estimated to be somewhere around 10 to 12 million people who are mainly the lowest paid workers. Do you believe in President Trump’s claim of immigrants’ invading American economy?

A: Immigrants are certainly not invading. The 10-12 million number has been stable for several years. And for immigrants for some countries, like Mexico, the numbers are in sharp decline. It is true that more immigrants are coming from Central American countries like Honduras, Salvador and Guatemala. But that is due to the economic crises and violent breakdown of the social order in those countries, which is due largely to U.S. support for the corrupt elites of those countries who encourage the gang violence in their countries and do nothing about the economic crises. If there is a problem with immigration in the U.S., it is a problem of highly educated tech workers being brought in on H1-B and L-1 visas, and rich Asians who can buy themselves a ‘green card’ residency by promising to spend \$50,000 when they come. These groups are taking the real jobs, the high paying tech

and other professional jobs and have been since the 1990s. But Trump is agreeing with the U.S. tech companies to keep bringing them in, taking jobs U.S. workers should and could get. Trump’s immigration policy and draconian action against immigrants from Latin America and elsewhere is about his re-election plans in 2020. By creating ‘enemies’ within and outside the U.S., he diverts his political base from the real problems of America. Blame the foreigner in our midst has always been a useful fascist argument. And Trump is marching down that road, as witnessed in his latest Constitutional power grab by declaring national emergencies to build his Wall and invoking phony national security to justify his trade wars.

■ Donald Trump represents the capitalist economy, which has not worked well for the majority of Americans. Do you believe the widening gap between the rich and the poor in his era can boost Americans’ interest in socialism?

A: The income and wealth gaps in the U.S. are not only widening but doing so at an accelerating pace. U.S. neoliberal policy under Obama was to subsidize capital incomes through Federal Reserve cheap money and by extending and expanding his predecessor, George W. Bush, tax cuts for business and investors. Trump policy has accelerated the tax cuts and now stopped the Fed from raising interest rates. The direct consequence is booming stock and corporate bond markets, fed by \$1 trillion annual stock buybacks and dividend payouts every year since 2011 (now at record \$1.3 trillion in 2018). As wage incomes for the 90% of Americans remain stagnant, barely rise, or decline, the direct consequence is accelerating income inequality and wealth gaps.

Will this boost interest in socialism? It already has. A clear majority, well over 60%, of people aged 34 and younger in the work force, have indicated in various recent polls that they prefer socialism over capitalism. It’s not by accident, therefore, that Trump and the U.S. business press has been launching an offensive to attack the idea of socialism once again. This shift in public opinion will continue as the Trump policies continue to create a growing gap in income, wealth and opportunity in America.

We will see another ‘Arab Spring’ in the next five or so years: Askari

➡ ■ What will the impact of this decision on the final permanent peace agreement?

A: This, coming on top of moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, will make a permanent peace ever more difficult. More recently, the U.S. is also cutting aid to Palestinians. These are moves that the rest of the world does not support. It will isolate Israel even more. Trump does not understand any of this and frankly I don’t think he cares about peace and the Palestinians. It is sad that Jews are on the path of another tragedy. The U.S. should know better. The U.S. will not be accepted as an honest broker in any future peace negotiations. It has lost all credibility.

■ Will Palestinian agree with this decision?

A: No, of course not. But what can they do? Arab leaders—Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, UAE and others in the PGCC—are spineless. All these leaders rely on U.S. military and intelligence support. All they care about is to stay in power and they don’t much care about the plight of the Palestinians. But change will come when Arab regimes change and the U.S. loses its influence in the Middle East. This



process is already under way.

■ What is the impact of this decision on U.S. Arab countries relations?

A: For now, the U.S. will have to increase its support for Arab rulers with more intelligence sharing and covert operations as there may be fears of popular backlash against recent U.S. moves and Arab acquiescence to go along with anything that the U.S. concocts with Israel. For example, just see how vulnerable is MBS is to international isolation after the brutal murder of Khashoggi. Without U.S. support, he would be gone in a matter of a few months. So for now relations are tight but I believe this will change as we will see another ‘Arab Spring’ in the next five or so years and Arab regimes will change and the new leaders will not be as close as they are today to Washington.

The aggravation of Trump’s lack of vision is the world’s burden

➡ North Korea notes how John Bolton shot down any agreement with Trump in Hanoi this winter and is not bending to absurd demands, Trump is not looking particularly good for reelection in 2020 but the Democrats are still looking foolish generally by not embracing progressives and progressive policies.

The U.S. mainstream media has become untrustworthy and sentiment among many U.S. citizens, noted last week in France, too, is sour and dour and frightened by Trump who has dismantled environmental safeguards in favor of the corporate oligarchy. The financial markets have been rigged by the Federal Reserve bank and Trump, and this is becoming clearer by the day.

Maduro, for all his faults (and there are many) is hanging tough in Venezuela and Trump hasn’t a clue what to do next to try to install the hapless puppet Guaido short of invading the country. Trump is thoroughly opposed worldwide and at the U.N. by his unilateral declaration that the Golan is Israeli territory in an attempt to insure Netanyahu wins reelection given that his “base” are the illegal settlers in the West Bank and Golan. The Saudis have at least threatened to sell oil in some other currency such as the Yuan or the Euro. And this is just the short list.

What all this and more actually demonstrates is that the harder Trump tries to shore up U.S. “empire” as it has been this century at least, the more he incites opposition and disgust everywhere, like an abusive husband whose wife (or wives) still cower

in too much fear of a bully and a tyrant.

But no one ever said the fall from grace of the U.S. in world opinion and the fraying of the Empire of Chaos would ever be easy, however necessary for the future health of humanity in general it seems to be. And more than ever, it is incumbent upon countries like Iran that are distressed and hurt by U.S. moves to try to do the exact opposite of Trump and keep an eye on the big picture as it unfolds now and in future.

The lie of the U.S. as a current champion of democracy and peace is increasingly apparent even inside the U.S. although countering moves remain difficult. This means that those who oppose Trump become especially big champions of democracy at home and multilateralism and peace elsewhere.

Trump has been so malleable because he is a know nothing. He has been made a servant to the Zionists and the Neocons. But one must wonder that if someone of sound mind got his ear, he might change course? He is such a narcissist that one must wonder that if he actually heard a good argument pointing out how to make himself a world hero, he might change.

Wishful thinking it is, but if he were to declare a balanced policy in the Mideast, resurrection of the U.S. adherence to the JCPOA, vast relief funds that are not bribes for any country struck by natural disasters as Iran has been of late, the end of overweening support for the Zionist agenda,



the end of smothering sanctions, détente with Russia, an end to the arms race and a vast cut in wasteful U.S. military expenditures, the freeing of Julian Assange, restored safeguards against environmental decay, and much more, Trump would no doubt find himself the most popular President ever everywhere.

And this is precisely what is most aggravating, that he and his administration and many in the U.S. Congress don’t see and understand this. Why not, is the question? The answer is that Trump and many others are hostage to special interests and their own utter stupidity, and the risks are enormous.

America will strengthen its presence in the Persian Gulf: Shireen Hunter

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Shireen Tahmaasb Hunter, a professor of political science at Georgetown University, tells the Tehran Times that “There is no way Oman can balance relations with Iran and the U.S.”

“Oman needs American security umbrella,” Hunter tells the Tehran Times.

She adds that “in future, while perhaps withdrawing from parts of the Middle East America will strengthen its presence in the Persian Gulf.”

Following is the text the interview:

■ The United States clinched a strategic port deal with Oman which U.S. officials say will allow the U.S. military better access the Persian Gulf region and reduce the need to send ships through the Strait of Hormuz, a maritime choke point off Iran. What is the importance of this deal for U.S. from strategic aspects?

A: The United States would like to have military, political and strategic supremacy in the Persian Gulf. The ability to prevent Iran from using the Strait of Hormoz to prevent shipping in the strait is part of this desire. It is also part of the U.S. strategy of containing Iran and forcing it to accept its terms for better relations in the future. In addition, looking to the long-term, control of the Persian Gulf is important for the United States, and indeed Europe, in terms of competition with China. Because China depends for a large part of its energy needs on the Persian Gulf region, by controlling the Gulf’s energy resources and its trade routes, the United States could pressure China should the need arise. Thus, in future, while perhaps withdrawing from parts of the Middle East America will strengthen its presence in the Persian Gulf.

■ Why Oman accept this deal on this time?



A: Oman is a small country dependent on American and British security guarantees. Consequently, Muscat is no position to refuse U.S. demands for port facilities of bases. Moreover, Oman, too, wants to enhance the position of its own ports at the expense of those of Iran. Oman has tried to use Iran as counterweight to other Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia. However, it has no particular love for Iran. With the passage of time the memory of Iran’s help to defeat the Dhoffari rebels in the 1970s is fading. Thus, Oman, too, is reassessing its relations with Tehran in light of new strategic conditions and calculations. Much of Oman-Iran friendship were the legacy of close ties between the Shah and Sultan Qabus.

■ How can Oman balance its foreign policy with Iran and U.S. under this deal?

A: There is no way Oman can balance relations with Iran and the U.S. As mentioned above, Oman needs American security umbrella. Iran is in no position to provide for Oman’s security. Moreover, as Iran-Arab relations have deteriorated, Oman is finding itself in a difficult position. Therefore, it might be considering some distancing from Iran.

■ Will this deal impact on Oman relation with Iran?

A: The impact of the deal on Iran-Oman relations will depend on Tehran’s reaction. If Tehran reacts negatively, then relations will suffer. However, if Iran reacts calmly as it did when Netanyahu visited Muscat, then relations will not suffer much. The fact is, in the Persian Gulf, Iran is not in a position to compete with America. The United States is militarily preponderant. In addition, because of their anti-Iran sentiments and their weak positions, Arab states prefer American presence to that of Iran.

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National Iranian Drilling Company	3185094	PPP/AZD/97/018 48-22-9522023	320,512,000,000
Qualitative evaluation of tenderers Method Based on minimum scoring (60) made in award criterion reflected in the tenderers pre-qualification forms.			
1. The tenderers who have more than four (4) active contracts with NIDC are not allowed to attend in this tender. 2. The tenderers who have more than two (2) active contracts with same subject (exactly compliance with this subject) with NIDC are not allowed to attend in this tender.			
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TenderDocumentDistribution by Company	The distribution of the documents will be started one day after the publishing of second advertisement and ended on the following tenth day thereof. — Distribution Place — A) Hall No. 316, 3th floor, Foreign Procurement Dept. (DRILLING PROJECTS), National Iranian Drilling Company, After Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN. Tel: 061341468222 B) jomhouri street , yaghmah alley nite 8th building floor no : 04 room no 428 -tehran- iran . Tel: 02166700249 Submitting Method <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submitting one original Bank Fund Receipt in the amount of ... Iranian Rials under account number 400114804003991 (Shaha No. IR520100004001144004020491) in name of "NIDC Incomes Centralized Fund" issued by I.R. Of Iran Central Bank. Submitting format Request for the purpose of receiving Tender Documents. 		
DocumentsReceivingMethod	Closing date	14 Days after the last time of Purchasing	
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Type of guarantee	* Bank guarantees or guarantees issued by non-bank institutions that obtain activity license from the central bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran * Submitting one original Bank Fund Receipt under account number 400114804003991 (Shaha No. IR520100004001144004020491) in name of "NIDC saving account" by the central bank of Islamic Republic of Iran. * "NIDC saving account" by the central bank of Islamic Republic of Iran.		
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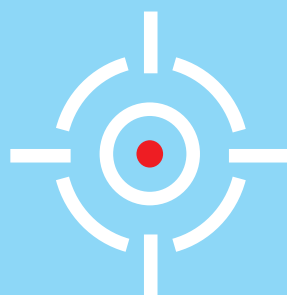
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The Tehran Times new pocket-sized glossary is now available on the market. The reader-friendly is a rich source of the most common journalistic terminology collected by the daily's retired staff.

It can benefit a wide range of tastes from students to professional journalists. Persian equivalents have been given for all entries, including idioms and expressions. The glossary also includes example sentences for entries the authors thought it would be a bit difficult to learn.

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National document on rare diseases being drafted

H E A L T H **TEHRAN** — At numerous requests put in by patients suffering from rare diseases Iranian Health Minister Saeed Namaki has tasked Tehran University of Medical Sciences with devising a national document on rare diseases, Fars news agency reported on Sunday.

Patients with rare diseases have launched and signed a petition calling for drawing up a national document on rare diseases on the occasion of the Rare Disease Day, February 28.

Drafting and completing the national document started since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21) in a collaboration between Tehran University of Medical Sciences and Rare Diseases Foundation of Iran.

Public relations officer at Rare Diseases Foundation of Iran, Shakiba Pordel, has explained that preparing the document will help in promoting plans for treatment and prevention of rare diseases.

Since last year (March 2018-March 2019) Rare Diseases Foundation of Iran has succeeded in identifying 300 kinds of rare diseases, Pordel added.

Drawing up the plan would also set the scene for providing patients with such diseases with better mental and physical care.

■ Rare Disease Day
A rare disease, also referred to as an orphan



Drawing up the plan would also set the scene for providing patients with such diseases with better mental and physical care.

disease, is any disorder that affects a small percentage of the population. Although the disease may be rare, patients and families share a common struggle.

Rare Disease Day is an observance held on the last day of February to raise awareness for rare diseases and improve access to treatment and medical representation for individuals with rare diseases and their families.

European Organization for Rare Diseases established this day in 2008 to raise awareness for unknown or overlooked illnesses. According to (EURORDIS), treatment for many rare diseases is insufficient, as are the social networks to support individuals with rare diseases and their families; furthermore, while there were already numerous days dedicated to sufferers of individual diseases (such as AIDS, cancer, etc.), there had previously not been a day for representing sufferers of rare diseases.

The theme for Rare Disease Day 2019 is 'Bridging health and social care'. Focusing on bridging the gaps in the coordination between medical, social and support services in order to tackle the challenges that people living with a rare disease and their families around the world face every day.

Rare Disease Day 2019 is an opportunity to be part of a global call on policy makers, healthcare professionals, and care services to better coordinate all aspects of care for people living with a rare disease.

Your chronological age doesn't mean much when you live a healthy lifestyle

"You look young for your age." Aside from being flattering, the sentence also highlights the fact that we can inhabit two ages at once: chronological age and biological age. Chronological age dictates the number of birthday candles we blow out every year, while biological age is a measure of our physiological state compared to other people with the same number of annual growth rings.

"It's not all that helpful to talk about chronological age," says Laurie Archbald-Pannone, a physician who specializes in geriatrics at the University of Virginia Health System. "It doesn't tell us how resilient the body is." To put it another way: chronological age has very little to do with our actual physical wellbeing.

For example, a 50-year-old smoker can have the lung capacity of an 80-year-old, says Todd Miller, associate professor in exercise and nutrition sciences at George Washington University. "In other words, the 50-year-old smoker has the 'lung age' of an 80-year-old."

But it's not just active misuse of the body such as smoking that ages us beyond our chronological age. It's also – perhaps even more commonly – inactivity, says Miller, whose lab measures health and performance-related markers such as bone density, body composition and max oxygen uptake. "Many of the things that we consider age-related changes are more related to activity or inactivity as opposed to age," Miller says. For example, "weight gain is not obligatory with age".

If age holds only so much of our fate in its grip, that gives us more reason to incorporate healthy habits into our routines. Although age-related changes are inevitable, they "can be mitigated by sleep, exercise, nutrition and stress reduction", Miller says. Exactly how much can be mitigated bodywide, he says, is unclear. But in terms of specific markers – such as lung capacity – our habits (healthy or not) can change our biological age by several decades.

And just to be clear, biological age is as much about feel and function as it is about

looks. "How we function on a daily basis is what matters the most," says Archbald-Pannone, referring to her (chronologically) ageing patient population.

Elizabeth Brooks, a Washington-based personal trainer, says wellness (good rest, nutrition, community, fitness) makes her feel much younger than her 51 years. Many people assume it's in her genes to look young and be in shape. Brooks was once overweight, something that runs in her family. "It's that concept of nature and nurture," she says. "The majority of who we are is nurture."

Eyleen O'Rourke, a professor of biology and cell biology at the University of Virginia, agrees. "Lifestyle matters a lot for ageing," O'Rourke says. "DNA damage caused by things like smoking and metabolic syndrome accelerate what we think of as age-related illnesses."

Metabolic syndrome is a cluster of conditions such as high blood sugar, high blood pressure and extra body fat around the stomach. It is known to increase risk for conditions such as stroke, diabetes, heart disease and cancer – though the mechanism is not yet understood. Although we might not know why metabolic syndrome is associated with higher rates of cancer, "we do know that excess fat reduces the natural rejuvenation of cells", O'Rourke says.

And there is the crux. The ability of cells to rejuvenate, to respond to damage, is what keeps us "young". Good genes help, but good habits help more. "Your genome isn't determinative. It doesn't have strong predictive power by itself," O'Rourke says. "Everything is context. And there is hope for everyone."

The earlier we start, the better it is. Bone growth is at its prime in childhood and adolescence; and those who train and eat healthily throughout their lives will be stronger at age 70 or 80 than those who take up the healthy habits later. That said, "there is no too old" to start, Miller says. "Muscle responds at any age. You can get positive results even if you start lifting weights at age 80."

(Source: *The Independent*)

On the occasion of World Health Day 2019

Universal health coverage is WHO's number one goal. Key to achieving it is ensuring that everyone can obtain the care they need, when they need it, right in the heart of the community.

Progress is being made in countries in all regions of the world.

But millions of people still have no access at all to health care. Millions more are forced to choose between health care and other daily expenses such as food, clothing and even a home. This is why WHO is focusing on universal health coverage for this year's World Health Day, on 7 April.

World Health Day 2019 falls midway between the Global Conference on Primary Health Care held in Astana, Kazakhstan in October 2018 and the High-level Meeting on universal health coverage to be held at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2019. The Day is one of many opportunities to communicate about the importance of equity in health-care services, for not only the health of individuals, but also for the health of economies and society at large.

■ Statement by WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on World Health Day 2019

WHO was born on 7 April 1948 with a clear and ambitious vision: a world in which all people enjoy the highest attainable standard of health.

Although we have made enormous progress in recent years against some of the world's leading causes of death and disease, we still have a lot of work to do to realize that vision.

Today, half the world's population cannot access essential health services. Millions of women give birth without help from a skilled attendant; millions of children miss out on vaccinations against killer diseases, and millions suffer and die because they can't get treatment for HIV, TB, and malaria.

In 2019, this is simply unacceptable. The good news is that there is a growing movement to address these inequalities.

Last October, we saw a momentous commitment to health for all in Kazakhstan with

the signing of the historic Declaration of Astana on primary health care.

This was a key milestone. Strong and sustainable primary health care is the bedrock of universal health coverage, and the best defence against outbreaks and other health emergencies.

Although there will always be outbreaks and other disasters with health consequences, investing in stronger health systems can help to prevent or mitigate them.

In the Sustainable Development Goals, all countries have committed to achieving universal health coverage (UHC) by 2030. To meet that target, we need to see 1 billion people benefitting from UHC in the next 5 years. This is not an unattainable dream, nor will it require billions of dollars to implement. UHC is achievable, right here, right now, for all of us.

Health for all is possible even with health systems that are less than perfect – countries at many different income levels are making progress with the resources they have.

On Friday 5 April, WHO colleagues joined hands with staff from health and development organizations around the world to symbolize our shared commitment to ensuring health for everyone, everywhere.

This shared commitment will be fundamental as we move forward to the next milestone in the global push towards universal health coverage – at the United Nations High-Level meeting on Universal Health Coverage in New York later this year.

At that meeting, world leaders will have the opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to UHC to ensuring that every mother can give birth safely, that every child survives past its fifth birthday, and that no one dies simply because they are poor.

As we celebrate World Health Day, I pay tribute to health workers all over the world who are working to promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable. I especially thank the dedicated personnel from WHO and our partners who are working around the clock in extreme circumstances, including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique and Yemen.

(Source: *WHO*)

Herbal teas to help reduce bloating

Many factors may trigger bloating, including food intolerances, a buildup of gas in your gut, imbalanced intestinal bacteria, ulcers, constipation, and parasitic infections.

Traditionally, people have used natural remedies, including herbal teas, to relieve bloating. Preliminary studies suggest that several herbal teas may help soothe this uncomfortable condition.

Here are herbal teas to help reduce bloating.

1. Peppermint

In traditional medicine, peppermint (*Mentha piperita*) is widely recognized for helping soothe digestive issues. It has a cool, refreshing flavor.

Test-tube and animal studies suggest that plant compounds called flavonoids found in peppermint may inhibit the activity of mast cells. These are immune system cells that are abundant in your gut and sometimes contribute to bloating.

Animal studies also show that peppermint relaxes the gut, which may relieve intestinal spasms – as well as the bloating and pain that can accompany them.

Additionally, peppermint oil capsules may alleviate abdominal pain, bloating, and other digestive symptoms.

Peppermint tea hasn't been tested for bloating. However, one study found that a single tea bag supplied six times more peppermint oil than a serving of peppermint leaf capsules. Therefore, peppermint tea may be quite potent. You can buy single-ingredient peppermint tea or find it in tea blends formulated for stomach comfort.

To make the tea, add 1 tablespoon (1.5 grams) of dried peppermint leaves, 1 tea bag, or 3 tablespoons (17 grams) of fresh peppermint leaves to 1 cup (240 ml) of boiled water. Let it steep for 10 minutes before straining.

2. Lemon balm

Lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*) tea has a lemony scent and flavor – along with hints of mint, as the plant is in the mint family.

The European Medicines Agency notes that lemon balm tea may relieve mild digestive issues, including bloating and gas, based on its traditional use. Lemon balm is a key ingredient in Iberogast, a liquid supplement for digestion that contains nine different herbal extracts and is available in North America, Europe, and other regions, as well as online.

This product may decrease abdominal pain, constipation, and other digestive symptoms, according to several human studies.

However, lemon balm or its tea hasn't been tested alone for its effects on digestive issues in people. More research is needed.

To make the tea, steep 1 tablespoon (3 grams) of dried lemon balm leaves – or 1 tea bag – in 1 cup (240 ml) of boiled water for 10 minutes.

3. Wormwood

Wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*) is a leafy, green herb that makes a bitter tea. It's an acquired taste, but you can soften the flavor with lemon juice and honey.

Due to its bitterness, wormwood is sometimes used in digestive bitters. These are supplements made of bitter herbs and spices that may help support digestion.

Human studies suggest that 1-gram capsules of dried wormwood may prevent or relieve indigestion or discomfort in your upper abdomen. This herb promotes the release of digestive juices, which can help optimize healthy digestion and decrease bloating.

Animal and test-tube studies report that wormwood may also kill parasites, which can be a culprit in bloating.

However, wormwood tea itself hasn't been tested for anti-bloating effects. More research is necessary.

To make the tea, use 1 teaspoon (1.5 grams) of the dried herb per cup (240 ml) of boiled water, steeping for 5 minutes.

Notably, wormwood shouldn't be used during pregnancy, as it contains thujone, a compound that can cause uterine contractions.

4. Ginger

Ginger tea is made from the thick roots of the *Zingiber officinale* plant and has been used for stomach-related ailments since ancient times.

Human studies suggest that taking 1–1.5 grams of ginger capsules daily in divided doses may relieve nausea.

Additionally, ginger supplements may speed up stomach emptying, relieve digestive upset, and reduce intestinal cramping, bloating, and gas. Notably, these studies were done with liquid extracts or capsules rather than tea. While more research is needed, the beneficial compounds in ginger – such as gingerols – are also present in its tea.

To make tea, use 1/4–1/2 teaspoon (0.5–1.0 grams) of coarsely powdered, dried ginger root (or 1 tea bag) per cup (240 ml) of boiled water. Steep for 5 minutes.

Alternately, use 1 tablespoon (6 grams) of fresh, sliced ginger per cup (240 ml) of water and boil for 10 minutes, then strain.

Ginger tea has a spicy flavor, which you can soften with honey and lemon.

5. Fennel

The seeds of fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) are used to make tea and taste similar to licorice.

Fennel has traditionally been used for digestive disorders, including abdominal pain, bloating, gas, and constipation.

In rats, treatment with fennel extract helped protect against ulcers. Preventing ulcers may reduce your risk of bloating.

Constipation is another contributing factor in some cases of bloating. Therefore, relieving sluggish bowels – one of fennel's potential health effects – may also resolve bloating.

When nursing-home residents with chronic constipation drank 1 daily serving of an herbal tea blend made with fennel seeds, they had an average of 4 more bowel movements over 28 days than those drinking a placebo. Still, human studies of fennel tea alone are needed to confirm its digestive benefits.

If you don't want to use tea bags, you can buy fennel seeds and crush them for tea. Measure 1–2 teaspoons (2–5 grams) of seeds per cup (240 ml) of boiled water. Steep for 10–15 minutes.

6. Gentian root

Gentian root comes from the *Gentiana lutea* plant, which bears yellow flowers and has thick roots.

The tea may initially taste sweet, but a bitter taste follows. Some people prefer it mixed with chamomile tea and honey.

Traditionally, gentian root has been used in medicinal products and herbal teas formulated to aid bloating, gas, and other digestive issues.

Additionally, gentian root extract is used in digestive bitters. Gentian contains bitter plant compounds – including iridoids and flavonoids – that stimulate the release of digestive juices and bile to help break down food, which may relieve bloating.

Still, the tea hasn't been tested in humans – and it's not advised if you have an ulcer, as it can increase stomach acidity. Thus, more research is needed.

To make the tea, use 1/4–1/2 teaspoon (1–2 grams) of dried gentian root per cup (240 ml) of boiled water. Steep for 10 minutes.

(Source: *The Healthline*)

New diabetes diagnosis every three minutes in England and Wales

One person is being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes in England and Wales every three minutes, according to new figures.

Data from 2017 revealed 202,665 people were diagnosed with the disease across the two countries in that year, equivalent to 23 people every hour.

Diabetes UK, which conducted the analysis, said the figures revealed the UK's obesity crisis was fuelling a rapid rise in the number of people living with the condition.

"One person being diagnosed every three minutes illustrates the frightening speed at which the number of people living with type 2 diabetes is increasing," said Chris Askew, chief executive of Diabetes UK.

"However, three in five cases of type 2 diabetes can be prevented or delayed by eating well, being active and achieving a healthy weight, meaning there is hope for the future."

Of the new type 2 diagnoses in 2017, 192,245 were in England and 10,420 were in Wales.

Type 2 diabetes is a largely preventable condition, which can lead to sight loss, stroke, kidney failure and loss of limbs. Being overweight or obese puts an individual at greater risk of developing the condition.

"Action must also be taken to tackle the obesity epidemic,



which has contributed to the rise of type 2 diabetes," Mr Askew said.

"While we encourage everyone to eat more healthily and move more, it's equally important that the government tackle our obesogenic environment, and make the healthy choice the easy choice."

Dr Partha Kar, associate clinical director for diabetes for NHS England said: "These figures underline the importance of wider action on obesity prevention, and confirm the importance of the action set out in the NHS long-term plan.

"This includes expanding the NHS type 2 diabetes prevention programme so that 200,000 people every year can benefit, and introducing a pilot of very low calorie diets that have been shown to put type 2 diabetes into remission in a significant proportion of those that already have it."

The Diabetes UK analysis uses data from the NHS Digital National Diabetes Audit.

The number of people living with all types of diabetes in the UK has reached 4.7m, according to figures released by Diabetes UK in February.

With the disease increasingly being diagnosed in children, the charity has warned that it predicts more than 5.5m people will have the condition by 2030.

Experts have called for better education about disease prevention, as well as some of its worst consequences such as blindness and limb loss, to encourage people to act.

(Source: *The Independent*)

ICT market projected to expand by 2.5 times

TECHNOLOGY d e s k **TEHRAN** — According to the sixth five-year national development plan (2016-2021), the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) market is projected to expand by 2.5 times, the head of Telecommunication Infrastructure Company announced, Mehr reported on Saturday.



Sadeq Abbasi Shahkuh said that the company has made a great improvement in different fields of the international internet bandwidth, national IP, international telecommunication transit and development of optical fiber network during the past Iranian calendar year 1397 (March 2018-March 2019).

He also pointed to development of quality in telecommunication infrastructure services.

“The telecom operators provide good services to the costumers due to an appropriate infrastructure network,” he said.

The expansion of optical fiber network, IP for National Information Network, peering projects, Distribution and Replication Protocol (DRP) projects, International Gateway (IGW) projects are other achievements of the company during the past year, he said.

Promoting civil right (in cyberspace), information access, digital information and e-services in different fields of health, education, e-government and banking are amongst the company’s program, he added.

Iran to hold intl. biotechnology summer school

TECHNOLOGY d e s k **TEHRAN** — The first international biotechnology summer school will be held from September 6 to 11, Mehr reported on Sunday.

The school aims to establish links between knowledge-based companies and industry.



It also aims to introduce recent achievements in different fields of biotechnology including vaccine, equipment manufacturing, bio-economy and veterinary.

It will also introduce the prominent professors and industry persons in order to find new ways for commercialization of technology products and idea exchange.

The event is supported by the Biotechnology Development Council of the presidency.

Thailand’s ambitious new solar plants will float on dams and reservoirs

Thailand has big plans when it comes to solar energy: The country’s Siam Cement Group (SCG) hopes to install a giant 45-megawatt floating solar farm at the Sirindhorn Dam — the first of eight dams that may receive the treatment.

Floating solar farms provide the benefits of solar energy without taking up valuable space on dry land in densely populated areas. Other advantages include their comparative ease of installation and decommissioning, along with helping to reduce evaporation as a result of partially covering the water surface. During the approximately 10 years that floating photovoltaics have been around, they have garnered a particularly enthusiastic response in populous countries such as China, Japan, India, and South Korea. Now it seems that Thailand is eager to get in on the action as well.

SCG is among Southeast Asia’s biggest manufacturers of building materials. It has developed its own proprietary floating solar panels that it promises to build, install, and maintain. SCG’s panels are made from high-density polyethylene, which is both durable and recyclable. The company claims that its panels will last for around half a century and take up approximately 10 percent less space than the floating plants developed by rival companies.

The plan to build a floating solar plant at Sirindhorn Dam is the first part of an ambitious floating solar panel project announced by Thailand’s state-run Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT), according to a report from IEEE Spectrum. The department has plans to build floating solar panels, with a total capacity of 1 gigawatt, across eight and reservoirs dams over the next couple of decades. The Sirindhorn Dam will be the first of these, with four other projects to follow on soon after. EGAT hopes to begin construction as soon as April, although it has yet to reveal which company it is going to award the contract to.

At present, Thailand generates around 12 percent of its energy from sustainable sources. (That’s compared to around 18 percent in the U.S., as of 2018.) Thailand’s government hopes that initiatives such as its floating solar plants can help increase this to 37 percent by 2036. Should all go according to plan, around 6 percent of the country’s total power could come from floating solar farm projects such as this one.

(Source: [digitaltrends.com](#))

Flood damage to national telecom network estimated at \$350m

TECHNOLOGY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Estimates

put losses of the recent flood to the national telecommunication network at 15 trillion rials (about \$357 million), Information and Communication Technology Ministry spokesman announced, Mehr reported on Saturday.

Jamal Hadian said that the recent flood in Lorestan province completely washed away the telecom center station in the city of Poldokhtar.

Since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year on March 21 provinces of Fars, Lorestan, North Khorasan, Golestan, Mazandaran, Hamedan, Khuzestan, Kermanshah, Semnan, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad and Khorasan Razavi were hit hard by devastating floods incurring a dramatic loss.

The major damage, which is estimated at 3.5 trillion rials (about \$83 million) belongs to Poldokhtar and the adjacent villages, he said.



The optical fiber is totally disconnected in the region and all the telecommunication

infrastructure were destroyed, he explained. However the 3G and 4G network has been

Amirkabir university to introduce top innovations in agriculture



TECHNOLOGY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Amirka-

bir University of Technology will host an event to promote top ideas in agriculture sector on July 16 at the Agricultural Research, Education and Promotion Organization.

The event aims to introduce innovation and new emerging technologies in agriculture, which are beneficial for marketing. Establishing the link between academic

centers, state-run organization and private sector to promote the agriculture industry is also amongst the aims of the event.

The event will be held in different sections of fishery, husbandry, farming, rangeland and watershed.

Organized by the Agricultural Research, Education and Promotionm Organization, The event supports the winners to establish a beneficial business in the future.

Startup accelerators for water management to be supported



TECHNOLOGY d e s k

TEHRAN — Iran’s presidency department for water, drought, erosion and environment technologies plans to support the establishment and development of three kinds of startup accelerators in these fields, ISNA reported on Sunday.

It includes a professional accelerator related to dust and desert

greening with the priority given to Khuzestan and Sistan and Baluchestan provinces.

The two others are a professional accelerator dealing with technologies of desalination systems in central Iran and one accelerator active in water stats, recycled water and wastewater treatment in Khorasan region and central Iran.

How technology can make government more citizen-centric

Americans’ trust in government institutions is declining. According to the Pew Research Center, public trust in the government is at near-historic lows, with only 18 percent of Americans saying they can trust the government in Washington to do what is right “just about always” (3 percent) or “most of the time” (15 percent). While politics plays a large role in who trusts the government and when, there is work to be done to earn public trust by improving everyday interactions with government via experiences like paying taxes and renewing a driver’s license.

“Services are ... critical in shaping trust in and perceptions of the public sector. Citizens today expect more transparent, accessible, and responsive services from the public sector,” finds a report from McKinsey & Company on improving citizen satisfaction with government agencies.

Improving the delivery of government services by becoming more “citizen-centric” is one significant way to improve constituents’ satisfaction with public agencies. By reducing or eliminating complexities and taking a cue from the private sector on how to streamline processes, local, state, and federal government agencies can provide citizens with more accessible, effective services.

Across sectors, industries are undergoing digital transformations to drive better customer experiences. In order to grow trust and best serve constituents, government agencies must employ similar strategies. Here are three key ways that technology can help your agency or department become more citizen-centric.

■ Reduce red tape and bureaucracy

More than half of U.S. state and local government employees say outdated processes and technology make their jobs more difficult. The effect of this on public experience can be multifaceted: obtaining needed services can take longer and seem unnecessarily complicated, and dealing with also-frustrated public sector employees can erode



the quality of interactions. As such, employing technology to reduce red tape and streamline processes on the back end is an important starting point for transforming the citizen experience.

For example, a work execution platform can provide agencies with key tools for reducing departmental silos and bottlenecks that can frequently occur in the delivery of government services. A secure, compliant work execution platform allows employees to collaborate more effectively across departments and provides real-time status updates and visibility into important metrics, helping to maintain velocity and reduce lags that can erode citizens’ experiences and satisfaction. Projects move forward more quickly, with fewer emails and meetings, creating efficiencies and reducing frustration.

■ Shelve the paperwork

The excessive paperwork involved in delivering government services isn’t just a cliché. For a majority of local and state government employees, all that paper makes it hard to complete their regular workload within a normal work

week. But contrary to the perception, paperwork is not a necessary evil of a government job.

Automation can eliminate much of the time spent on manual, repetitive tasks, from entering the same information into duplicate forms and data files, to providing status reports, to obtaining approvals. According to the Smartsheet report Automation in the Workplace, automating such tasks could save government employees six or more hours a week. These time savings can help to improve efficiencies and speed the delivery of important services to the public. Automation can also help to reduce human error and improve accuracy, which can also help to restore trust in the system.

■ Re-envision the citizen experience

Two years ago, the U.S. launched Login.gov, a single sign-on (SSO) solution that allows citizens to access services from multiple agencies using the same login information. But with information provided on more than 4,500 websites on 400 domains for the federal government alone, there’s still much improvement to be made: one review found that nine out of 10 such websites fall short of design and development standards.

To become more citizen-centric, agencies must improve these key channels used to access government information and services. This includes making a commitment to transparency, accountability, and usability by providing citizens with accurate and up-to-date information and secure, easy-to-use tools and data collection forms.

Modernizing government services is more than just a nice idea — the MGT (Modernizing Government Technology) Act aims to provide federal agencies with a foundation for much-needed innovation and digital transformation. But to be seen as transparent, accessible and responsive, government agencies at all levels must approach technology not as an end in itself but as a means to becoming truly citizen-centric.

(Source: [forbes.com](#))

Humans produced complex technology without understanding it

New research shows that the complex technologies that allowed humans to thrive on the planet were a mystery to the humans that developed them.

shown that the evolution of technology over time may have less to do with our understanding of that technology than we originally thought.

Human beings are one of the most adaptive species on the planet, able to exist in habitats as diverse as the Arctic to the Arabian desert. No other species is known to have accomplished this and humanity owes its success to its ability to develop technology that allows them to adapt to any environment.

As technology is passed down from generation to generation, it is quickly refined to the most optimal extend possible to suit the

environment, and according to new research from Arizona State University (ASU), we don’t even have to understand the science behind the technology to produce these rapid advances.

In a paper published in the journal Nature Human Behaviour this week, ASU researchers have shown that cultural evolution of technology can produce new advances even when the individual humans involved don’t have any idea what they are doing.

“Of course, intelligence is important for human adaptation,” says Rob Boyd, ASU Origins Professor and Institute of Human Origins researcher. “But it is not enough. Our unique ability to learn from each other makes possible the cumulative cultural evolution of superb adaptations - that are at best only partially understood - and this powerful tool

has allowed our species to adapt and spread.”

To test their theory about the accumulation of cultural adaptations leading to increasingly complex technologies that aren’t well understood by those who use them, the ASU researchers set up a new experiment wherein 70 participants were broken up into 14 groups of five.

The researchers referred to these groups as “transmission chains”, which would serve as stand-ins for subsequent generations of human beings in a given society. The task set before them was relatively simple. Find a way to adjust four different weights on a wheel traveling down a ramp to make the wheel move faster.

The first participant—representing the first generation to attempt to solve a prob-

lem with technology—would only have a few attempts to speed the wheel up before the second participant would take over. This second generation would also have a few attempts to get the wheel to its fastest possible speed before having to turn things over to the third participant and so on.

Each participant would watch their predecessor generation working on a solution before being called upon to work on the problem themselves. By the time the fifth generation finished their refinements, in all groups, the wheel was moving about as fast as it possibly could down the ramp, showing how quickly cultural adaptation can accumulate a sophisticated technology to solve a given problem.

(Source: [interestingengineering.com](#))

Mars orbiter saw the same methane spike that Curiosity detected from the surface of Mars

If you're not a chemist, an astrobiologist, or a scientist of any sort, and that includes most of us, then a tiny, almost imperceptible whiff of methane in the Martian atmosphere might seem like no big deal. But it is, gentle humans. It is.

Because it could be a signal that some living process is at work. And even we non-scientists have wondered at some point if the only life in the Solar System, or maybe in the entire Universe, is confined here on Earth.

Some time ago, back in 2013 and 2014 to be exact, NASA's MSL Curiosity rover detected spikes in methane in the atmosphere at Gale Crater.

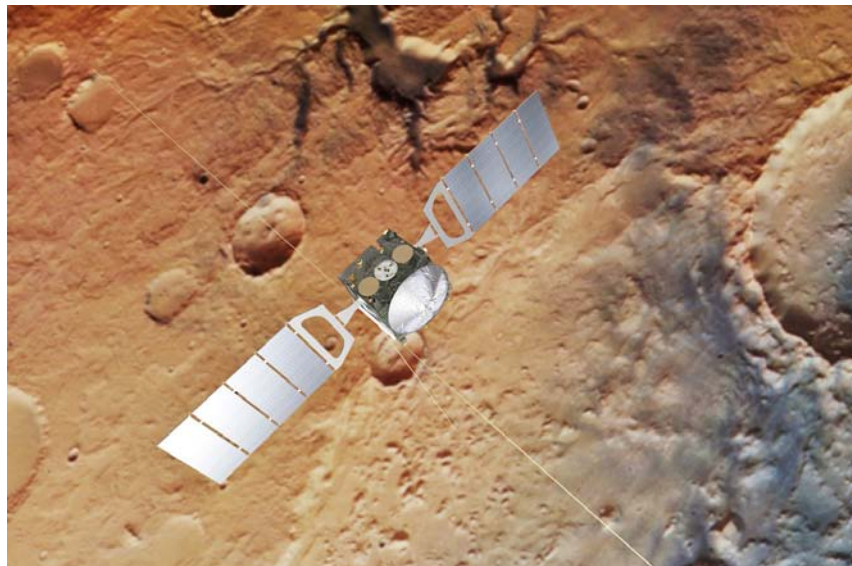
And much earlier, in 2004, the Mars Express Orbiter (MEO) also detected methane in the Martian atmosphere.

Methane is important because it could be an indicator of a living process.

■ **Natural atmospheric processes**
Methane doesn't stick around for long. Once released into the atmosphere, it can be quickly destroyed by natural atmospheric processes.

So any methane detected in Mars' atmosphere means it must have been released recently, although it could have been produced millions, even billions of years ago, and lay trapped in underground rock formations.

On Earth, most methane is produced by living creatures; microorganisms in sedimentary strata, or in the guts of ruminants, for example. Some of it is produced through abiotic or non-living processes, but finding methane at Mars is still, at least potentially, a big deal.



Now, the European Space Agency, who operate the Mars Express Orbiter, have gone

back over the data from June 15th 2013, when Curiosity detected a methane spike,

Now, the European Space Agency, who operate the Mars Express Orbiter, have gone back over the data from June 15th 2013, when Curiosity detected a methane spike, and they've found something. The Planetary Fourier Spectrometer (PFS) on-board the MEO detected methane at the same location that Curiosity did, only one day later.

and they've found something. The Planetary Fourier Spectrometer (PFS) on-board the MEO detected methane at the same location that Curiosity did, only one day later.

This is the first time that a Curiosity methane spike has been backed up by other, independent observations. These results are presented in a new paper published April 1st in Nature Geoscience.

■ New way to analyze data

The results from MEO are part of a new method of analyzing data from its spectrometer. The technique collects several hundred measurements over one area over a short period of time.

The team behind the results also developed a new way to analyze the data.

"In general we did not detect any methane, aside from one definite detection of about 15 parts per billion by volume of methane in the atmosphere, which turned out to be a day after Curiosity reported a spike of about six parts per billion," says Marco Giuranna from the National Institute for Astrophysics – Institute for Space Astrophysics and Planetology in Rome, Italy, the principal investigator for the PFS experiment, and lead author of the paper reporting the results in Nature Geoscience.

"Although parts per billion in general means a relatively small amount, it is quite remarkable for Mars – our measurement corresponds to an average of about 46 tons of methane that was present in the area of 49 000 square kilometers observed from our orbit," said Giuranna in a press release. (Source: universetoday.com)

Photons trained for optical fiber obstacle course will deliver stronger cyber security: new research

Beneath many cities are complex networks of optical fibers that carry data, encoded in pulses of light, to offices and homes.

Researchers from the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Singtel, Asia's leading communications technology group, have demonstrated a technique that will help pairs of light particles smoothly navigate these networks, a breakthrough that will enable stronger cyber security. The demonstration was performed over 10km of Singtel's fiber network.

This new approach supports the deployment of a technology known as quantum key distribution (QKD). Transmitted over fiber networks, it uses signals sent in particles of light known as photons.

Detection of individual photons creates encryption keys for secure communication. Data encrypted with such keys is resistant to all computational hacks.

■ Strengthening cyber security

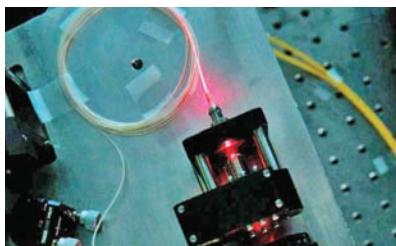
QKD trials are being conducted worldwide as governments and companies recognize the need to strengthen their cyber security. The QKD trials carried out by the NUS-Singtel team use pairs of photons that are connected by the quantum property of entanglement.

Most QKD schemes require that the sender and receiver of a secret message exchange photons directly or trust the source of their keys. With this alternative approach, it is possible to check the security of a key provided by a third party supplier.

It works like this: the supplier would create a pair of photons, then split them up, sending one each to the two parties that want to communicate securely.

The entanglement means that when the parties measure their photons, they get matching results, either a 0 or 1. Doing this for many photons leaves each party with identical patterns of 0s and 1s, giving them a key to lock and unlock a message.

Typically, each photon encounters a different obstacle course of spliced fiber segments and junction boxes. On their



paths, the photons also suffer dispersion, where they effectively spread out. This affects the operators' ability to track the photons.

■ The new trick

The new trick, published on 4 April in the scientific journal Applied Physics Letters, keeps the entangled photons in sync as they travel different paths through the network. This is important because they are identified by the gap between their arrival times at the detector.

"Timing information is what allows us to link pairs of detection events together. Preserving this correlation will help us to create encryption keys faster," says James Grieve, a researcher on the team.

The technique works by carefully designing the photon source to create pairs of light particles with colors either side of a known feature of optical fiber called the 'zero-dispersion wavelength'.

Normally, in optical fibers bluer light would arrive faster than redder light, spreading out the photons' arrival times. Working around the zero-dispersion point makes it possible to match the speeds through the photons' time-energy entanglement. Then the timing is preserved.

Associate Professor Alexander Ling, a Principal Investigator at CQT, led this work for the NUS-Singtel lab. He said, "Before these results, it was not known if the multi-segment nature of deployed fiber would enable high precision dispersion cancellation, because the segments don't generally have identical zero dispersion wavelengths."

(Source: eurekaalert.org)

Gigantic dusty donut around a black hole imaged for the first time, team says

What do radio galaxies, quasars, blazars, Seyfert galaxies and active galactic nuclei all have in common? Everything, it turns out: These are all different names for the same celestial objects viewed from different angles.

Now, for the first time astronomers have directly imaged the last piece of the puzzle that ties them all together – a dusty donut of material that surrounds a supermassive black hole.

Most galaxies have supermassive black holes at their hearts, and in many cases the intense gravity pulls in material, which swirls around it as an accretion disk.

As this debris falls into the black hole, it heats up and shines bright. At the same time, many of these objects are also throwing out jets of material at almost the speed of light.

These objects are all known broadly as active galactic nuclei (AGN), but somewhat confusingly they go by many different names, depending on how they look from here on Earth.

The brightest AGN are called quasars, while blazars are those with a jet that just happens to be pointing directly at us.

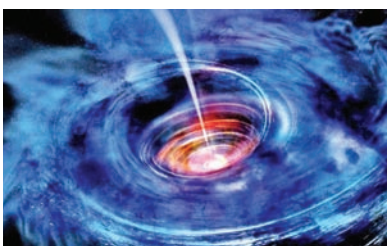
■ Radio galaxies

Seyfert galaxies are basically quasars with visible host galaxies, while radio galaxies are particularly loud at radio frequencies.

But for this "unified model" to work, astronomers long ago proposed that a key component of AGN was a torus – a thick, donut-shaped cloud of dust and gas that surrounds the whole structure. This explains why looking at AGN from different angles makes them appear to be different types of objects.

We see the bright light as a quasar, while if we're looking side-on the dusty donut obscures the light and only the radio frequencies get through, creating a "radio galaxy."

The problem is, no one's ever imaged a torus directly. They have been indirectly



spotted in galaxies like M77, but now researchers at the National Radio Astronomy Observatory (NRAO) have been able to see one properly.

The "torus is an essential part of the AGN phenomenon, and evidence exists for such structures in nearby AGN of lower luminosity, but we've never before directly seen one in such a brightly-emitting radio galaxy," says Chris Carilli, lead author of the study.

■ From different perspective

The "torus helps explain why objects known by different names actually are the same thing, just observed from a different perspective."

To capture the image of a torus, the team looked to a bright AGN at the heart of the galaxy Cygnus A. Located 760 million light-years from Earth, this galaxy hosts a supermassive black hole with the mass of 2.5 billion Suns – and, it turns out, an absolutely massive torus.

The team used the Very Large Array (VLA) telescope to peer at the center of Cygnus A. Lo and behold, the torus came into focus as a clumpy cloud of dust with a radius of a whopping 900 light-years.

An intriguing side note is the other bright spot visible in the lower-right corner of the images. This is a second supermassive black hole, according to the team, which has just recently fired up as it encounters material to chow down on. This suggests that Cygnus A collided with another galaxy in the astronomically recent past.

(Source: newatlas.com)

Possibility of creating rocket fuel that's cleaner, safer and still full of energy

Research published in Science Advances shows that it may be possible to create rocket fuel that is much cleaner and safer than the hypergolic fuels that are commonly used today. And still just as effective.

The new fuels use simple chemical "triggers" to unlock the energy of one of the hottest new materials, a class of porous solids known as metal-organic frameworks, or MOFs.

MOFs are made up of clusters of metal ions and an organic molecule called a linker.

Satellites and space stations that remain in orbit for a considerable amount of time rely on hypergols, fuels that are so energetic they will immediately ignite in the presence of an oxidizer (since there is no oxygen to support combustion beyond the Earth's atmosphere).

■ An unstable chemical compound

The hypergolic fuels that are currently mainly in use depend on hydrazine, a highly toxic and dangerously unstable chemical compound made up of a combination of nitrogen and hydrogen atoms.



Hydrazine-based fuels are so carcinogenic that people who work with it need to get suited up as though they were preparing for space travel themselves.

Despite precautions, around 12,000 tons of hydrazine fuels end up being re-

leased into the atmosphere every year by the aerospace industry.

■ An essential quality

"This is a new, cleaner approach to making highly combustible fuels, that are not only significantly safer than those currently

in use, but they also respond or combust very quickly, which is an essential quality in rocket fuel," says Tomislav Frišić. He is a professor in the Chemistry Department at McGill, and co-senior author on the paper along with former McGill researcher Robin D. Rogers.

Research published this week in Science Advances shows that it may be possible to create rocket fuel that is much cleaner and safer than the hypergolic fuels that are commonly used today.

And still just as effective. "Although we are still in the early stages of working with these materials in the lab, these results open up the possibility of developing a class of new, clean and highly tunable hypergolic fuels for the aerospace industry," says the first author, Hatem Titi, a post-doctoral fellow who works in Frišić's lab.

Frisic is interested in commercializing this technology, and will work with McGill and Acsynam, an existing spin-off company from his laboratory, to make this happen.

(Source: phys.org)

Researchers find method to make light go 30 times faster

In an experiment, the researchers demonstrated how they controlled the velocity of a pulse of light in free space without additional materials. They achieved the feat by using a device called spatial light modulator.

Scientists have developed a technique to control the speed of light which, they say, can improve the efficiency of optical telecommunication.

A team from the University of Central Florida demonstrated in a new paper how they were able to speed up the pulse of light to up to 30 times than normal, slow it down to half the speed of light, and even make it travel backward.

The team used a special device called a spatial light modulator that allowed to manipulate the space and time properties of light.

In 2006, for example, another experiment demonstrated a very similar feat. However, previous efforts typically involved passing the light through various materials to manipulate its speed.

This is the first time that the speed of light was adjusted in the open, without using other materials where the pulse would pass through to either speed it up or slow it down. The research team achieved this with the spatial light modulator.

"We're able to control the speed of the pulse by going into the pulse itself and reorganizing its energy such that its space and time degrees of freedom are mixed in with each other," stated Ayman Abouraddy, a professor at the University of Central Florida's College of Optics and Photonics.

The researchers said they hope that the success of their experiment could inspire similar studies to add and refine the technique. They believe that the findings of the study could advance optical telecommunications, which uses light to carry data.

By controlling the speed of the pulse of light, the new technique could cut congestion and prevent losses as more devices go online and data transfer grows higher.

(Source: techtimes.com)

Volcanic eruptions and hurricanes are weirdly linked, researchers find

When it comes to the weather systems controlling rain and shine across the planet, nothing happens in isolation – everything plays into everything else.

Now, for the first time, scientists have explained how volcanic eruptions can influence the formation of hurricanes.

Investigating this mechanism has been tricky until now, because in the age of sophisticated monitoring equipment, the biggest volcanic eruptions have coincided with El Niño–Southern Oscillation periods, which already trigger more hurricanes.

To solve this lack of real world data, scientists turned instead to detailed computer models to look at how eruption events might affect the formation of hurricanes across the world.

"This is the first study to explain the mechanism of how large volcanic eruptions influence hurricanes globally," says one of the researchers, Suzana Camargo from Columbia University in New York.

Specifically, large volcanic eruptions in the tropical regions can shift the Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ), a point where northeast and southeast trade winds converge. They're known as the doldrums or 'calms' to sailors.

The ITCZ plays a big part in the frequency and strength of thunderstorms, which is where the link between volcanoes and hurricanes comes in.

For example, should a large volcanic eruption happen to go off in the tropical regions of the Northern Hemisphere that would kick the ITCZ southwards, taking hurricane activity with it.

These effects can still be felt up to four years later, the team of researchers found.

These large-scale eruptions don't change the overall level of global activity from hurricanes and other tropical cyclones, the data showed, they just change where that activity is happening.

However, sea surface temperature changes influenced by volcanic activity where found not to have any effect, based on the models.

As the world gets warmer we need as much insight as we can get into how all of these meteorological events piece together.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

Large Antarctic ice shelf, home to a UK research station, is about to break apart

Glaciology experts have issued evidence that a large section of the Brunt Ice Shelf in Antarctica, which is home to the British Antarctic Survey's Halley Research Station, is about break off.

The iceberg, measuring over 1,500 square kilometers -- which is twice the size of New York City -- is expected to break away from the Brunt Ice Shelf within the next few months.

Glaciology experts have issued evidence that a large section of the Brunt Ice Shelf in Antarctica, which is home to the British Antarctic Survey's Halley Research Station, is about break off.

The rift started several years ago and is now approaching its final phase. In anticipation of the iceberg breaking away, the research station, which is currently unmanned, has been relocated to a safer location on the ice shelf, meaning there is no danger posed to personnel.

The iceberg, measuring over 1,500 square kilometers -- which is twice the size of New York City -- is expected to break away from the Brunt Ice Shelf in as little as a few months, when two large cracks which have been growing over the past seven years meet.

As Professor Hilmar Gudmundsson of Northumbria explains: "I have been carrying out research in this area for more than 15 years and have been monitoring the growth of the cracks since they first emerged in 2012.

"Satellite images of the changes in the ice shelf have been shared online and there has been much speculation about the cause of this movement and the impact the iceberg will have when it breaks away.

"However, what many people do not realize is that this is a natural process and something which has happened time and again. We recognize that climate change is a serious problem which is having an impact around the world, and particularly in the Antarctic. However, there is no indication from our research that this particular event is related to climate change.

(Source: sciencedaily.com)

Iran bans scorpion captive breeding, export

ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran banned issuing license for captive breeding of scorpions for export or venom extraction purposes as the species' population is shrinking gradually, deputy environment chief for natural environment and biodiversity directorate has stated.

Protective measures must be taken in order to keep collectors from taking too many scorpions from the wild, IRNA quoted Hamid Zohrabi as saying on Saturday.



Serious threats as well as habitat destruction, illegal export, and environmental hazards have reduced the number of species in some parts of the country, he regretted.

According to scientific documents, captive reproduction of scorpions not only have no financial benefits but leads to elimination of mature and productive scorpions from nature, he lamented, adding, scorpion venom extraction is prohibited.

Any training courses on captive breeding of the species is outlawed, so no licenses will be issued for the establishment of such centers, he highlighted.

Scorpion captive breeding centers which are licensed before, must be continuously monitored and supervised, he stated, adding that if any violations are observed, it will be pursued through the judicial system.

Illegally shipped scorpions seized from the violators must be delivered to the DOE, and should not be discarded before determining kinds of the species and location of their distribution, he concluded.

Over the past three years some opportunists have encouraged people to breed scorpion for milking its venom and have made people believe that it is the most expensive liquid worldwide saying that it costs 40 to 80 billion rials (nearly \$1 to \$2 million) per gram.

According to viralmega.com scorpion venom, is the most expensive liquid in the world and costs a staggering 39 million dollars per gallon.

Scorpions use their venom to kill or paralyze their prey, and as a defense against predators. But it is believed that the venom can be used it to treat diseases like arthritis and to make anti-venom's.

But the reasons behind its extremely high price is that it is incredibly hard to obtain, one yield only produces on average 0.5mgs of venom. Three grams of venom, or 0.000792516 gallons (assuming density of water here), doesn't sound like much. Basically if you could somehow extract that much in a day you would have to extract it from way more than a quarter of a million scorpions.

LEARN ENGLISH

Skiing

A: Welcome ski lovers of all ages! My name is Rick Fields and here with me is the man that needs no introduction, Bob Copeland. B: Thank you, Rick! What a beautiful day here in Aspen, Colorado where the sun is shining, and we've got twelve inches of fresh powder. It doesn't get much better than this.

A: That's right, Bob, but today we have a special treat for our viewers. We're joined here by Ian Roussy, the four-time giant **slalom champion**. And on this special edition of the show, Ian is going to teach us the basics of skiing! So, let's **hit the slopes**! C: Well, first off, let's get those boots on. You're going to want to make sure your boots fit **snugly**. That's right; now **snap** them into your **bindings**. And you're also going to want a good pair of **goggles** to protect your eyes. It's a bright day today, so there's going to be a lot of **glare** out there on the **slopes**. We don't want you hitting any of those **moguls**!

A: Bob, since you're a beginner skier and might **take a few spills**, it is a good idea to have a good warm pair of dry **ski gloves**.

C: Easy there, Rick! Well, let's head on over to the **chairlift**, and test your skills! All right, we're up here on the bunny hill, so, Bob, why don't you do a few **snow-plov turns**. Gnarly run, Rick! Nice **carving**! You've got some mad skills! That was sick! A: You want to see **gnarley**? Well, see that **bump** over there, I'm going to **catch some major air**.

C: Butt plant! B: Ha ha ha! He lost his skis! **Yard sale**!!! A: Ahem, well. Thanks for joining us here today, I think that about does it. Bob, Ian, time for some **apres-ski**? C: No way, man! We're off to **grab some freshies**!!!

■ **Key vocabulary**
slalom: a skiing race where you must go through flags
champion: winner
hit the slopes: start skiing
snugly: fitting very tightly
snap: make something attach by pressing down
binding: a bottom part that attaches the boot to a ski
goggles: a pair of glasses used to protect one's eyes
glare: bright light that is reflected by the snow
slopes: a space on the mountain which is used for skiing
mogul: a bump on a ski hill
take a spill: fall
ski glove: a covering of hands with each finger separated
chairlift: a line of chairs through moving cable that carries people
snow-plov turn: a slow, easy turn where you make a V with the skis
carving: turn on your skis with your edges
gnarley: awesome, cool (used by ski lovers)
bump: small hill
catch some major air: used to describe a skier jumps really high
yard sale: falling so hard that you lose all your ski equipment
apres-ski: a party after skiing
grab some freshies: ski on the area that has never been skied before
■ **Supplementary vocabulary**
lodge: the building that has restaurants and stores on the ski hill
pow: (powder) soft, light snow
avy: (avalanche) lots of snow falling on the mountain
liftie: a person who operates the chairlift
bowl: a steep hill with high sides, shaped like a bowl

Heavy rainfalls revive drying Lake Urmia

ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** — Recent downpours causing flood that recently left many provinces of Iran submerged, have made the world's second largest saltwater lake come back to life, as the water level of the northwestern Lake Urmia has raised dramatically.

In 1999 the volume of water was at 30 billion cubic meters drastically decreased to half a billion cubic meters in 2013. Moreover, the lake surface area of 5,000 square kilometers in 1997 shrunk to one tenth of that to 500 square kilometers in 2013.

Currently, due to recent heavy rainfall the volume of water in the Lake Urmia reached 3.13 billion cubic meters, while last year only 1.99 billion cubic meters of water was flowing in the lake in the same period, ISNA reported on Saturday.

The Lake's water level is over 1,271 meters and the lake's surface is more than 2,741 square kilometers, which demonstrates 464 square kilometer increased compared to the same period last year.

Kioomars Daneshjoo, director for the provincial water company said that water level of Lake Urmia increased by 36 cen-



timeters in comparison to the same period of the previous year and also 81 centimeter compared to the Iranian calendar month of

Mehr (September, 2018).

To restore Lake Urmia, 726 million cubic meters of dam water have been released into

the lake so far, which helped the lake to return to a good condition, he added.

Alireza Shari'at, head of monitoring and supervision department of the Lake Urmia restoration program said in September 2018, that in order to maintain the Lake Urmia ecological balance of 14 billion cubic meters over the next 10 years, an annual amount of 3.3 billion cubic meters of water is required.

Director of National Drought Warning and Monitoring Center (NDWMC) Sadeq Ziaeian 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 in the long-term amounts to 232 milliliters.

"There remain more than 5 months for the current water year to end, however, the amount of precipitations have already surpassed that of the last year," Ziaeian 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.

Flood causes massive damage to farms in southwestern Iran



ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** — Extreme flooding beginning on March 19 inundating many provinces across the country have brought heavy financial losses amounting to 9.5 trillion rials (nearly \$226 million) to the agriculture sector in the southwestern province of Khuzestan, head of provincial agriculture organization has announced.

Flood damage to the province's farming lands amounted to 6.7 trillion rials (about \$160 million), IRNA news agency quoted Keykhosro Changalvae as saying on Sunday.

Moreover, Changalvae explained that, flood has resulted in damages to agricul-

tural facilities at 1.6 trillion rials (around \$40 million).

Losses in fruit gardens amounted to 1.4 trillion rials (nearly \$33 million), livestock and poultry losses also estimated at 60 billion rials (about \$1.5 million), he added.

Some 71,000 hectares of wheat, barley, rapeseed, corn and sugar beet farms were damaged by waterlogging, he highlighted.

The crops cultivated over autumn were ready for harvest in the second of the month of Farvardin (March 21-April 20) in 800,000 hectares of farming lands in the region, however, devastating floods have caused massive damage to the crops, he regretted.

Tehran metro line 6 partially inaugurated



SOCIETY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Tehran metro line 6 partially opened on Sunday morning during a ceremony with President Hassan Rouhani in attendance.

Three stations in the southern half of Tehran metro line 6 stretching to 9 kilometers were inaugurated, IRNA reported.

Tehran metro line 6 covering 32 kilometers of the capital consists of 30 stations, which are equipped with proper air conditioning system, escalators and fire extinguishing systems, and are also accessible for physically challenged people. The line connects southwestern Tehran

to northwestern parts of the capital.

Some 6 stations on the northern part of the line stretching to 15 kilometers will be also operational by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 2020), the report added.

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

First artificially inseminated jaguar ‘killed by mother two days after birth’

The world's first jaguar born by artificial insemination has died, amid reports it may been attacked and eaten by its mother.

In a scientific breakthrough, the cub was born in Sao Paulo, Brazil, 104 days after her mother, five-year-old Bianca, was inseminated.

The cub was “born healthy” at the environmental organization Mata Ciliar in the city of Jundiaí, but unfortunately did not live for long.

After two days the newborn animal died, with reports suggesting Bianca ate the baby.

“Despite the sad fact, it is not uncommon for this to happen, both in captivity and in nature, especially in the case of carnivores. Bianca was a first-time mother and this may also have influenced the event,” the Mata Ciliar website says.

Despite the death of the cub, scientists have shown they are able to successfully artificially inseminate jaguars - the “last of the seven big cat species to be produced by AI”, according to Lindsey Vansandt, a researcher for the Centre for Conservation and Research of Endangered Wildlife (CREW) of the Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden, which was also involved in the project.



“By using a systematic research strategy, we were able to improve our understanding of the jaguar's unique reproductive biology and make species-specific modifications to our standard AI approach,” Vansandt said. “From a scientific perspective, we are celebrating the fact that the baby was born healthy and that artificial insemination was a success.

“It's disappointing that the cub did not survive longer,

but it's not uncommon for carnivores, especially first-time mothers, to behave this way with their offspring.”

Bianca was one of five jaguars inseminated using laparoscopic AI methods.

After the viable cub was born, Bianca “showed excellent maternal care” according to WLWT. However, two days after the birth, the cub disappeared from the den - with researchers assuming it was consumed.

“The veterinary team could not conduct a necropsy because the baby had already been eaten,” Samuel Nunes, spokesperson for Mata Ciliar says, according to the MailOnline.

The Mata Ciliar did not respond to request for comment in time for publication.

The cub was born on 16 February this year. WWF rates the jaguar as near threatened, with an estimated 15,000 of the species left in the wild.

Females have litters of one to four cubs, which are born blind.

As with many big cats, a combination of destruction of habitat and hunting has caused a depletion in their population, which is mainly found in South America.

(Source: *The Independent*)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → €

Water drenches 18,000 ha of Hamoun-e Sabori wetland

Hamoun-e Sabori wetland on the Iran-Afghanistan border has been saturated, as rainwater flowed over 18,000 hectares of the wetland, Mohammad Reza Alimoradi, head of marine affairs at the Sistan-Baluchestan provincial department of environment has announced.

“Water entered 18,000 hectares of the wetland in the country, after the afghan part has been soaked in water,” Alimoradi said, IRNA reported on Saturday.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-fest”

■ **Meaning**: gathering
■ **For example**: It's a horror mystery, rather than a **gorefest**.

PHRASAL VERB

Narrow something down

■ **Meaning**: to reduce the number of things included in a range
■ **For example**: The police have narrowed down their list of suspects.

IDIOM

Cream rises to the top

■ **Explanation**: Someone or something exceptionally good will eventually attract attention or stand out from the rest
■ **For example**: I knew you'd succeed. As the saying goes: 'cream rises to the top'!

۱۸هزار هکتار از بستر هامون صابوری آبگیری شد

رئیس اداره دریایی اداره کل حفاظت محیط زیست سیستان و بلوچستان گفت: ۱۸ هزار هکتار از بستر هامون صابوری ایران در جریان بارش های اخیر آبگیری شد.

محمد رضا علیمردادی روز شنبه در گفت و گو با خبرنگار ایرنا اظهار داشت: این اتفاق پس از آبگیری کامل هامون صابوری افغانستان به سمت صابوری ایران صورت گرفته است.

Palestinian official denounces Netanyahu's campaign pledge

Turkey: Netanyahu cannot change West Bank status

➔ Netanyahu has promoted Jewish settlement expansion in his four terms as prime minister, but until now refrained from presenting a detailed vision for the West Bank, viewed by Palestinians as the heartland of a future state.

Meanwhile, Turkey has strongly censured Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for promising to annex settlements in the West Bank if re-elected, saying that the "irresponsible" statement will not change the status of the occupied Palestinian territory.

Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said in a tweet on Sunday that Netanyahu was seeking to lure votes with that promise.

"West Bank is Palestinian territory occupied by Israel in violation of int'l law," Cavusoglu wrote on Twitter. "Prime Minister Netanyahu's irresponsible statement to seek votes just before the Israeli general elections cannot and will not change this fact."

On Saturday, Netanyahu said that if he was re-elected prime minister in the April 9 general elections, he would not shy away from expanding Israel's illegal annexations to cover the West Bank, which the Israeli regime occupied in 1967.

■ **'Shame on Western democracies!'**

Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin also criticized Netanyahu for making the statement.

"Yet another example of how Netanyahu uses electoral politics to justify occupation and undermine the two-state solution. If he is re-elected, will this be a triumph of 'democracy' or occupation?" he tweeted. "Will Western democracies react or will they keep appeasing?"

Shame on them all!"

■ **'Stop Netanyahu's madness!'**

Additionally, Omer Celik, a spokesman for Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party, complained that Netanyahu's pledge violated United Nations Security Council resolutions.

"This pledge not only transgresses the law, but it also attempts to completely destroy it," he tweeted.

Celik also called on the international community to stop "Netanyahu's madness" and condemn his "discourse of hatred," warning that the Israeli prime minister was blatantly risking peace and stability in the Middle East.



He said Netanyahu was encouraged by US President Donald Trump's recent moves to recognize Jerusalem al-Quds as the Israeli "capital" and the regime's "sovereignty" over Syria's Golan Heights.

"There is not a single value or legal provision that he (Netanyahu) did not attack," Celik said. "Those who support the occupation of others need to carefully think about the repercussions as it poses the most fundamental threat to international law and security."

■ **U.S. map of Palestine just an Israeli illusion: Hamas**

The Hamas resistance movement says the purported map of Palestine drawn up by the US President Donald Trump's administration under the so-called "deal of the century" only represents an "illusion" long chased by Israel.

"The new proposed map of Palestine as part of the Trump's deal of the century, no matter if true or not, is just an illusion the Israeli occupation has been chasing. The map of historical Palestine is in our hearts and the next generation will inherit it with their genes," Hamas Political Bureau member Husam Badran said on Saturday.

He also stressed the Palestinian people's right to return to their hometowns, from which they have been forced since 1948, saying that they would defend their lands despite challenges.

■ **Details of 'deal' emerge**

The reaction by Badran came after a

report offered purported new details of Trump's "deal."

Lebanon's Arabic-language al-Akhbar daily reported on Friday that the so-called "deal of the century" would see Trump pushing for Jordan to absorb one million Palestinian refugees in exchange for 45 billion dollars in financial aid.

Granting citizenship to Palestinians would happen in stages, with the largest number of refugees to be taken in at one time standing at 300,000, the report said, adding that the Gazans living in Jordan would also be included in the process.

Trump would also ask Egypt to grant citizenship to Palestinian refugees and receive 65 billion dollars, according to the report.

He would further propose that Lebanon absorb a portion of its Palestinian refugee population.

The report also said that the U.S. plan on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict proposed forming a tripartite confederation between Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority for specific and limited purposes.

But Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has already rejected the peace plan because it is said to be hugely in favor of the Israeli regime.

■ **'Jordanian king opposed to confederation'**

The report said Jordan's King Abdullah II had expressed opposition to the establishment of a joint confederation and told

Egyptian leaders that he preferred Amman to remain in charge of the holy sites in Jerusalem al-Quds "without interfering in the details between the Israelis and the Palestinians."

The deal would additionally include giving Jordan's Naharayim and Tzofar areas — which are currently leased to the Israeli regime — to Tel Aviv. In return, Jordan would receive land from Saudi Arabia.

Earlier this week, the Emirati news website al-Khaleej Online reported that the Trump administration was likely to unveil its "deal" on the 71st anniversary of the Nakba Day (the Day of Catastrophe), in mid-May.

In a leaky White House, very few details of the "deal" have emerged so far. Back in January, Israeli Channel 13 TV reported that the initiative endorsed the Israeli grip over parts of East Jerusalem al-Quds as well as the Holy Basin and stipulated various land swaps and Israel's annexation of areas with major settlement blocs.

Those few details have nevertheless been rejected in their totality by Palestinians.

■ **New settler units**

Separately on Saturday, the so-called Israeli Higher Planning Committee approved the construction of 770 new units in the Beitar Illit settlement, west of the West Bank city of Bethlehem.

The Israeli regime's traditionally close relationship with the U.S. has grown stronger under Trump. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has used flattery — more than once — and has copied Trump's demagogic tactics to appeal to a U.S. president obsessed about his self-image.

That has served well to elicit support. Trump has called Jerusalem al-Quds Israel's "capital," moved the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to the occupied city, and recognized Israeli "sovereignty" over Syria's Golan Heights, all of them in contravention of international law.

Emboldened by Trump's all-out backing, Israel has stepped up its settlement construction activities in the occupied lands in defiance of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334.

At least 600,000 Israelis live in over 230 settlements built illegally since the 1967 occupation of the Palestinian lands.

Maduro fights back as Guaido vows 'greatest escalation'

➔ "Together, permanently mobilized, let's keep defending national peace and independence; no more interference!" he tweeted.

In eastern Caracas, however, a crowd of opponents gathered on the call of opposition figure Juan Guaido who has promised to escalate his campaign to oust President Maduro.

"The greatest escalation of pressure we have seen in our history" has begun, Guaido told the crowd from the back of a pickup truck.

The fresh call for mutiny came after the National Constituent Assembly stripped Guaido of his parliamentary immunity, paving the way for legal action that could lead to his arrest and prosecution.

The administration of US President Donald Trump has warned of a strong response if the opposition leader is arrested.

Guaido has gained support from Washington and its allies, but his hopes of a quick ouster akin to a coup have faded because Maduro enjoys large support among Venezuelans and the country's army as well as foreign allies such as China, Cuba, Russia, Turkey and Iran.

Guaido and US leaders are now hinging their hopes on massive blackouts and the collapse of water supplies which they have blamed on the government's incompetence.

The government says the power outages have happened as a result of "sabotage" by criminals and a US "energy war" against the oil-rich country.

Washington has imposed economic sanctions on Venezuela and confiscated the country's state oil assets based in the US to channel them to the opposition.

On Friday, US Vice President Mike Pence announced fresh sanctions against 34 vessels belonging to Venezuela's state oil company and two companies that ship crude to Cuba.



Hawkish US national security adviser John Bolton tweeted the next day, saying, "This is only the first step." (Source: agencies)

Five killed in protests against Sudan's president

Sudan protesters 'reach army HQ' in new anti-government rallies

Organizers behind anti-government demonstrations in Sudan said security forces have killed at least five protesters in the last 24 hours, a claim disputed by the government.

A protest on Saturday saw one of the largest turnouts in more than three months of demonstrations calling on President Omar al-Bashir to resign.

The protests began in December as a movement reacting to spiralling prices and a failing economy but quickly escalated into demands for Bashir's departure after three decades in power.

Sarah Abdel-Jaleel, a spokesperson for the Sudanese Professionals Association, told The Associated Press news agency on Sunday that four people were killed in the capital city of Khartoum when security forces tried to disperse crowds approaching the military's headquarters.

Another protester was killed in Omdurman, the twin city of Sudan's capital, Abdel-Jaleel said.

The state-run SUNA news agency has quoted police spokesman General Hashim Abdel-Rahim as saying that one person was killed "during disturbances in Omdurman."

Officials say 31 people have died in protest-related violence so far, but Human Rights Watch has put the death toll at 51, including children and medics.

■ **Reaching army HQ**

Chanting "one army, one people", the protesters heeded a call by the organisers to march on the army headquarters, located near Bashir's residence.

Witnesses told Reuters news agency that security forces used tear gas to disperse the demonstrators. Some protesters were reportedly arrested.

State news agency SUNA said civilians and policemen were injured in the demonstrations, citing police reports as thousands of protesters clashed with security forces near Bashir's residence.

On February 22, Bashir imposed a nationwide state of emergency after an initial crackdown failed to rein in demonstrators.

Since the emergency rule came into effect, protests have been largely confined to the capital and its twin city of Omdurman.

But organizers had called for widespread rallies and a march on the army headquarters on Saturday, the 34th anniversary of the 1985 uprising that toppled the then-government of President Jaafar al-Nimeiri.

The military removed Nimeiri before handing over power to an elected government, which in turn was overthrown by Bashir in a coup.

Before the demonstrations began, security

forces were deployed in large numbers at key squares in Khartoum and Omdurman, across the Nile.

Witnesses said plain-clothes security agents were preventing even passers-by from reaching central areas.

Shops and markets in central Khartoum were ordered shut before the march by security agents, according to onlookers.

The protest movement was initially led by the Sudanese Professionals Association, but several political parties, including the main opposition National Umma Party, have taken part since.

Analysts say the movement has emerged as the biggest challenge yet to Bashir's rule.

However, the veteran leader has remained defiant and has introduced tough measures that have seen protesters, opposition leaders, activists and journalists arrested.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Attackers target checkpoint in eastern Saudi Arabia

Four attackers targeted a security checkpoint with guns and explosives in eastern Saudi Arabia as they tried to flee the country, leading to the death of two and the arrest of two others, Saudi-owned Al Arabiya television said Sunday.

The broadcaster, citing its correspondent, said the incident occurred at Abu Hadriyah, a highway connecting the kingdom's Eastern Province with neighboring Bahrain and Kuwait. It reported two injuries among the security forces.

The oil-producing province is a flashpoint between the Sunni Muslim government and the Shia minority, which complains of discrimination and repression.

Starting in 2011, the region was shaken by frequent, though mostly peaceful, protests.

Riyadh has suppressed pro-democracy rallies, but they have intensified since January 2016 when the Al Saud regime executed respected Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr.

In 2017, Awamiyah, another Shia-populated Qatif town, witnessed a deadly military crackdown on protests that

were being held against the regime's attempt to raze the historical Musawara neighborhood.

Saudi rulers claimed the district's narrow streets served as a hideout for armed men who were behind the attacks on Saudi forces in Eastern Province.

Al Arabiya said three of the attackers were on a list of wanted suspects from al-Qatif region, without providing more details. It said the operation took place away from built up areas.

(Source: Daily Star)

Rwanda somberly marks the start of genocide 25 years ago

Rwanda Sunday somberly commemorated the start, 25 years ago, of its genocide in which some 800,000 people were killed, as the country continues to grapple with the lasting consequences of the mass killings.



President Paul Kagame and first lady Jeannette Kagame laid wreaths and lit a flame at the mass burial ground of 250,000 victims at the Kigali Genocide Memorial Center in the capital, Kigali.

Those attending the ceremonies included the leaders of Chad, Congo Brazzaville, Djibouti, Niger, Belgium, Canada, Ethiopia, as well as the African Union and the European Union.

"I am moved beyond words at this memorial to tragedy," said Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the European Commission.

There will be a procession through the capital to Kigali's National Stadium where are many as 30,000 are expected to participate in an evening candlelit ceremony.

"Twenty-five years ago, Rwanda fell into a deep ditch due to bad leadership, today, we are a country of hope and a nation elevated," Agnes Mutamba, 25, a teacher who was born during the genocide told The Associated Press in Kigali.

"Today, the government has united all Rwandans as one people with the same culture and history and is speeding up economic transformation," said Oliver Nduhungihire, Rwanda's state foreign affairs minister.

The mass killing of Rwanda's Tutsi minority was ignited on April 6, 1994, when a plane carrying President Juvenal Habyarimana was shot down and crashed in Kigali, killing the leader who, like the majority of Rwandans, was an ethnic Hutu.

The Tutsi minority was blamed for downing the plane and the bands of Hutu extremists began slaughtering the Tutsi, with support from the army, police, and militias.

Kagame's government has previously accused Hutu-led government of 1994 of being responsible for shooting down the plane and has blamed the French government for turning a blind eye to the genocide.

On Friday, French President Emmanuel Macron ordered a government study into the country's role in Rwanda before and during its 1994 genocide. Macron ordered a commission of researchers and historians to investigate the "role and involvement of France" in Rwanda from 1990-1994. It is to make conclusions within two years.

Kagame has won praise ending that violence and making advances in economic development and health care, although he is criticized for authoritarian control.

Ethnic reconciliation is a cornerstone of the rule of Kagame, Rwanda's de facto leader since the genocide ended in 1994 and the country's president since 2000. He is credited with bringing Rwanda stability, economic growth, and improved health and education.

However, Kagame's critics charge that he is intolerant of criticism and his government is repressive, jailing opposition leaders. Some opponents say that Rwanda's reconciliation is forced.

A quarter-century after the genocide, bodies of victims are still being found. Last year, authorities in Rwanda found discovered mass graves they say contain 5,400 bodies of genocide victims.

"Twenty-five years on, the victims and survivors should remain the center of everyone's thoughts, but we should also take stock of progress and the need to ensure accountability for all those who directed these horrific acts," Human Rights Watch said.

(Source: AP)

Algeria parliament to meet on Tuesday to name interim president

Algeria's parliament will meet Tuesday to name an interim successor to Abdelaziz Bouteflika, according to state media, a week after widespread protests forced the ailing president to cede power.

"It was decided to hold a meeting of the two chambers of parliament on Tuesday ... at 9am (08:00 GMT)," the upper house of parliament said on Saturday in a statement carried by the official APS news agency.

Algeria's constitution stipulates that the speaker of the upper house of parliament, currently 77-year-old Abdelkader Bensalah, should take the presidential reins.

He is to serve for up to 90 days, during which a presidential election must be organized.

The legislators are expected to finalise the "vacancy of the post of president ..." and then designate Abdelkader Bensalah as head of state", Salim Rabahi, communications head for the upper house of parliament, said.

Faced with weeks-long demonstrations and having lost the support of the army, Bouteflika resigned on April 2 after two decades in power.

The 82-year-old had come under mounting pressure to step down over his decision to seek a fifth term despite rarely being seen in public after suffering a stroke in 2013.

Algerians once again rallied on Friday in a continued push for sweeping reform, calling out key Bouteflika allies who have been entrusted with overseeing the political transition.

They are targeting a triumvirate they dub "3B" - Bensalah, head of the constitution council Tayeb Belaiz, and Prime Minister Noureddine Bedoui.

Critics say all three have always served Bouteflika faithfully and should follow his lead and resign.

Protesters are calling for transitional institutions to be set up to implement reforms and guarantee free elections.

(Source: AP)

Barca also insulted referee, says Simeone after Costa red card

Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone cursed his side's bad luck with refereeing decisions in games against Barcelona after Diego Costa was sent off in a 2-0 defeat at the Nou Camp on Saturday which practically handed the La Liga title to the Catalans.

Costa was shown a straight red card in the 28th minute of the top-of-the-table clash for a verbal outburst at referee Jesus Gil Manzano, who said in his report that the striker had made a derogatory comment about his mother.

Barca finally found a breakthrough with a wonderful curled strike from Luis Suarez in the 85th minute and Lionel Messi sealed the win with a goal moments later.

"I asked the referee if what he said was so bad because we have seen Barca players do the same thing, saying things right in the referee's face and they did not get sent off, they got away with it," Simeone told a news conference.

"If Costa really said what the referee claims he did then he was correctly sent off, but we must be doing something wrong as we have had seven players sent off in 11 games.

"I remember we had Fernando Torres, a global icon, sent off here for making two fouls."

Atletico midfielder Koke also aired his frustration.

"We were doing so well until the red card but all the small details went their way," he said.

"Whenever we come here something strange happens, we've had a lot of red cards against Barca and not all of them have been fair." Atletico coped well with 10 men and had one glorious opportunity to break the deadlock in the second half from a free kick but midfielder Rodrigo headed narrowly over the bar.

(Source: Mirror)

Hamilton surpasses Schumacher in F1 career earnings

Lewis Hamilton's earnings from F1 have surpassed the legendary Michael Schumacher for this first time, according to figures published by Forbes.

The five-time world champion has earned £375m from the sport in just his driver salary alone, and the number is significantly more when endorsements and sponsorship deals are taken into consideration. However, when total earnings are taken into account Schumacher remains in front, having amassed total revenue in the region of £610m during his time on the track.

Hamilton is currently the highest-paid driver on the grid, collecting £30m per year from Mercedes, ahead of Sebastian Vettel who is paid £23m per year by Ferrari.

In the all-time driver's earnings list Hamilton and Schumacher are tracked by Fernando Alonso in third, before a gap to Vettel in fourth and Kimi Raikkonen in fifth.

Further down the list sees former world champions Jenson Button and Jacques Villeneuve.

With the size of Hamilton's current deal and assuming for a rise if he stays at Mercedes beyond the end of his contract, the Brit could easily earn half a billion pounds from the sport before he retires.

(Source: GP1)

Cocaine haul emblazoned with 'CR7' logo washes up on Romanian coast

A huge haul of cocaine has washed up on the Romania coast bearing the 'CR7' moniker used by football star Cristiano Ronaldo, as dealers attempt to cash in on the allure of the iconic Portuguese striker to sell their product.

Romanian police collected 131kg of drugs in Cap Aurora on the Black Sea coast on Friday and Saturday, reportedly from a drug-smuggling boat that capsized in the region at the end of March. Images of some of the stash reveal it carries the 'CR7' branding used by Juventus and Portugal ace Ronaldo, in an apparent attempt by dealers to play on the star's huge popularity.

Photos of bags of the white powder shared by the police and circulated by local media show a blue bag stuffed with a high-grade brand of the drug, with packages bearing 'CR7' in green and red inside.

The allusion to Ronaldo has been made by drug dealers before. In December, French police seized a cocaine and cannabis stash packed in bags bearing the image of the five-time Ballon d'Or winner.

(Source: RT)

'We still want to win the league' - Dortmund CEO

Borussia Dortmund CEO Hans-Joachim Watzke has said that his team are still hoping to win the Bundesliga title after their 5-0 humiliation at the hands of Bayern Munich on Saturday.

Bayern reclaimed top spot with their emphatic victory on Saturday, but they remain only a point ahead of Dortmund with six games to go. "Of course we want to win the league," said Watzke during a Sky Sports chat show appearance with his Bayern counterpart Karl-Heinz Rummenigge.

"In a few days, Bayern will notice that they only got three points for their win, and we will realise that we are only a point behind them." Watzke admitted Dortmund were now underdogs, but insisted that his team could bounce back and keep the pressure on the Bavarians. "Bayern are obviously favourites, but I don't think that both teams are going to win all of their last six games," he said. "Our team has enormous potential, and it will be part of the learning curve to put this victory behind us."

"The players need to enjoy playing again and have fun, because yesterday was not fun."

Watzke said that the fact that his team were still in the race at all at this stage was "a great success".

"This is only the third time in a decade that we have a title race in the Bundesliga," he said.

(Source: AFP)

Tourist numbers double at North Korea marathon

North Korea's Pyongyang marathon may be among the most complicated to enter but an easing of tensions on the Korean peninsula has made it a stage to highlight the power of sport amid growing interest for the race.

Athletes can only register through one operator, Koryo Tours, for a chance to run through the capital of the reclusive state in the Mangyongdae Prize International Marathon, as the race is officially known.

But close to 1,000 foreigners — several hundred more than last year — signed up in the sixth year foreign runners are allowed to compete on Sunday, according to officials, as tensions between North Korea and South Korea have eased since 2018.

Among those running were two Olympians — retired Swiss freestyle skier Mirjam Jaeger and British snowboarder Aimee Fuller — who are part of a documentary produced by the Olympic Channel on the Pyongyang marathon and the pair's experience of the local sports culture.

The Olympic Channel is a media operation of the International Olympic Committee and the documentary is set to air in September.

"The start (in Kim Il Sung Stadium) was very busy, the stadium completely full," Fuller, who took part in the 2014 and 2018 winter Olympics, told Reuters in a telephone interview from the North Korean capital.

"It felt as if we were on a world stage competition. That was completely surreal. It was like the Olympics in an Olympic stadium."

Large crowds also lined the street at the start of this world athletics body IAAF-accredited bronze label road race with wom-



en wearing traditional costumes ready at refreshment stations.

"Around mile 13 it definitely started to thin out. Having that unique opportunity to move from Pyongyang out into the countryside was really surreal."

Politics, however, is never too far away from the Pyongyang marathon, with visitors promised a tour of the capital's landmarks "including a visit to the famous Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum and captured spy ship USS Pueblo."

'Nobody has done it, so why can we?' Quadruple almost impossible: Guardiola



It will be "almost impossible" for Manchester City to win the quadruple this season, Pep Guardiola has said.

His City side beat Brighton 1-0 on Saturday to reach the FA Cup final.

They have already won the Carabao Cup, are in the Champions League quarter-finals and are currently second in the Premier League as they attempt to become the first English club to win all four trophies in one campaign. "Surviving is a miracle. It's nice to be there," the City manager said.

"Nobody has done it [won the quadruple], so why can we do it? It is almost impossible to achieve everything - that is the truth."

City were below their best against Brighton, but Gabriel Jesus' early goal saw them reach the FA Cup final for the first time during Guardiola's reign.

The closest any English club has come to winning all four trophies in a season was Manchester United when they won the Treble - the Champions League, Premier League and FA Cup - in 1998-99.

They remain the only side to have achieved that feat, but Sir Alex Ferguson's team went out of the League Cup in December 1998 and so missed out on a shot at the quadruple.

"Do you believe we can play 60 games and give a fantastic performance every

time? No team can do that," Guardiola said.

"Sir Alex Ferguson won the Treble and not every game was like that. It doesn't work in that way."

City's attention now turns to the Champions League on Tuesday, when they play Tottenham in their quarter-final first leg at Spurs' new stadium.

Only two other English teams have still had the chance of winning the quadruple at this stage of the season: Chelsea in 2006-07 and Manchester United in 2008-09.

Managed by Jose Mourinho, Chelsea's hopes of a clean sweep lasted until 1 May, but they lost to Liverpool on penalties in the Champions League semi-finals. They did win the FA Cup and League Cup, but went on to finish second in the Premier League.

Two years later, Ferguson's Manchester United made it to 19 April before their dream ended with a penalty shootout defeat by Everton in the FA Cup semi-finals. Last season, City, who broke a series of Premier League points and scoring records on their way to the title, were fighting on four fronts until 19 February before losing to Wigan in the FA Cup.

Celtic are arguably the only team in Europe to have won the ultimate quadruple of domestic trophy, European Cup and both domestic league cups.

(Source: BBC)

U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un have met twice in the past year to discuss denuclearization while North and South Korea are planning for a joint Olympics bid in 2032.

Relations between the North and South greatly improved last year, with South Korean President Moon Jae-in meeting his North Korean counterpart Kim Jong Un at several summits.

North Korea had for years pursued nuclear and missile programs in defiance of

'Not a done deal' - Qatar wary over 48-team World Cup



Qatar stressed that the 2022 World Cup remains at 32 teams as FIFA chief Gianni Infantino piled on pressure to expand the tournament to 48 and share it with other Gulf countries.

Speaking to AFP at the Asian Football Confederation Congress, head organiser Nasser Al-Khater said Qatar was still planning for 32 and that studies about adding another 16 teams were just an "assessment".

"There's a feasibility study on the countries that could possibly host. So together with FIFA we're looking into those possibilities," Khater said in Kuala Lumpur on Saturday. "So that's where we are now. It's still open as an idea but it's not a done deal for it to be a 48-team World Cup."

Although Qatar has said it is open to expanding, Khater was at pains to underline that "the status quo is that it's still a 32-team World Cup, everything after that is an assessment".

After winning the right to host a 32-team World Cup in 2010, in a bidding process mired in bribery allegations, the Qataris are coming under sustained pressure to switch to 48.

Oman and Kuwait are being studied as possible co-hosts as Qatar remains under a diplomatic and transport blockade from other Gulf neighbours, who accuse it of supporting terrorism -- a charge Doha denies.

U.N. sanctions but the neighbors moved to thaw relations in 2018.

"I would do it again. It was totally worth it," Jaeger, a 2014 Sochi Olympic participant, told Reuters.

■ **Tourists swell Pyongyang marathon turnout**

Twice as many foreigners as last year gathered in Pyongyang Sunday for the city's annual marathon, tour firms said, as reduced tensions see visitor numbers rise in isolated North Korea. The event -- part of the celebrations for the anniversary of founder Kim Il Sung's birth in 1912 -- is the highlight of the North's tourism calendar and offers the chance to run or jog through the streets of the tightly controlled city.

Around 950 Westerners entered the event, according to market leader Koryo Tours, compared to some 450 last year when numbers slumped. That brought participation almost back to the levels of 2017, before tensions soared as the North carried out a series of missile launches and leader Kim Jong Un traded threats and personal insults with US President Donald Trump.

The same year, Washington also banned its citizens from visiting the North following the death of Otto Warmbier, a US student jailed for trying to steal a propaganda poster who died in a mysterious coma days after his release.

Several other countries subsequently raised their travel warnings, a combination of events that dealt a significant blow to the North's tourism industry.

(Staff & Agency)

Malaysian golfer dies in hotel room during tournament

Malaysian golfer Arie Irawan died of "apparent natural causes" on Sunday in his hotel room on the Chinese resort island of Hainan, the PGA tour said in a statement. He was 28.

Arie, who turned professional in 2013 and won two events on the Asian Development Tour in 2015, had missed the halfway cut at the Sanya Championship, the second event on the PGA Tour China Series.

"The PGA Tour and the China Golf Association grieve at this loss of one of our members and share sincere condolences with Arie's wife, Marina, and his parents, Ahmad and Jeny," the PGA tour statement added.

"When something of this magnitude occurs in the golf world, we all grieve at the same time.

"Out of respect for the family, officials cancelled the final round of the Sanya Championship, the tournament becoming a 54-hole event."

The coroner's report had not been completed, the statement said.

Trevor Sluman, who shot a third-round six-under 66 to



take a two-shot lead on Saturday, was declared the champion and his victory will count as an official PGA TOUR Series-China win.

The American offered his condolences after he learned

of the round's cancellation.

"My heart goes out to Arie's family and his beautiful wife, Marina," Sluman said.

"Along with the rest of the Tour, we're thinking about them at this time. It's very bittersweet today, and I think the rest of the year will be dedicated to Arie and the impact he had on this Tour."

Arie's golf career was interrupted in 2016 when he was involved in an accident on a moped and sidelined for several months. He was ranked 1,366th in the world this week.

He married Marina Malek last May and she sometimes worked as his caddie, even if Arie admitted that she did not know much about golf.

"If I make a bad score she will say 'it is okay, it is okay',” he told Malaysia's The Star newspaper last year.

"She keeps me calm, relaxed and happy so I just go out there and play golf. That helps me a lot. She has always been there for me through the bad and good times."

(Source: Reuters)

Whether I play for my club or Iran, I think of winning the game, Yakhchali

Sometimes, it's a bit difficult to believe that Behnam Yakhchali is only 23 years old. He's already played in one FIBA Basketball World Cup and two FIBA Asia Cups, before starring for Iran recently throughout the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2019 Asian Qualifiers. The shooting guard is already one of the most recognizable players on the Iran national team and should be the face of the program for years to come.

So it comes as a bit of a surprise that basketball wasn't even his first choice of sport.

"I used to play soccer when I was a kid," Yakhchali explains. "At that time my younger brother played basketball. I went to one of his practice sessions and everything started from there."

"The love of the game started to grow on me and I gave up soccer to follow my love for the game of basketball."

We'll never know how good of a soccer player Yakhchali would have turned out to be had he continue down that path. What we do know is that he has turned to be a pretty good player on the hardwood.

The 1.91M (6'3") sharpshooter was one of Iran's top scorer's at the 2013 FIBA U19 World Cup and he's been a staple on the senior's national team ever since. At the FIBA Asia Cup 2017, Yakhchali torched the opposition with 57.9 percent shooting from beyond the arc. He led the entire tournament in three-point shots made (22) and averaged 16.0 points, 4.3 rebounds, and 2.8 assists for the bronze medalists.

Yakhchali has had a vast amount of success wherever he plays, and it all stems down to his mentality and desire to be a winner.

"Whether I play for my club or the national team, all I think about is winning the game," Yakhchali says. "That gives me the motivation and energy to play as hard as I can every time I step on the court."

You'd be hard-pressed to name a better shooting guard in Asia in the same age range. Yakhchali is a deadly shooter and a smooth finisher, but can also play tenacious defense with quick hands and quick feet. He claims that he's a product of mixing up a little bit of everything and it's made him one of the better two-guards in the region.

"I watch all the great players at different levels," says



Yakhchali. "Whether it's in NBA, Europe, or other countries including Iran. I try to learn from them all the good things they do on the court, on the bench, and even off the court."

Through observation and a mindset to consistently improve, Yakhchali has become a solid two-way guard for Iran.

"I always try to work on my game to get better and improve each and everyday," Yakhchali says. "I can't really tell what's my strength but I really feel it every time I take an outside jumper. Most of the coaches I have played for had me stopping the other team's best players, so maybe you can get something from that, too."

Yakhchali is already one of the most important pieces of the Iran national team. At the FIBA World Cup Asian Qualifiers, he led the team in scoring and minutes played

with 14.8 points in 33.7 minutes per game. More importantly, it's means another FIBA World Cup appearance for the national team and hopefully for Yakhchali as well.

"It's been a great year for me especially after qualifying for the World Cup and hopefully there we can show the quality of Iran basketball," says Yakhchali.

Right after the World Cup, Iran will be right back into action at the FIBA Asia Cup 2021 Qualifiers later in the year. In his first two times playing in the FIBA Asia Cup, Yakhchali has already laid claims on a silver and a bronze medal with Iran. There's no doubt that he and the national team will be aiming for gold in the upcoming 2021 edition should they go through the qualifying phase.

(Source: FIBA)

Iran's women's football team keep Olympic Games hopes alive

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran's women's football team thrashed Palestine 9-0 in Group C of Round Two of the AFC Women's Olympic Football Tournament Qualifiers to keep their qualification hopes alive.

Iran now have a chance of qualifying for the third round if they can defeat Chinese Taipei on Tuesday.

In the match held at Saoud Bin Abdulrahman Stadium in Doha, Qatar, Samaneh Chakandi was on target just four minutes into the match, before Hajar Dabbaghi added goals in the 20th and 22nd minutes to have them three goals clear with three quarters of the match still to play.

Mona Hamoudi scored either side of half-time to

stretch the deficit to five, and Sara Ghomi found the back of the net within a minute of coming off the bench to bring up the half-dozen in the 56th minute.

Iran captain Zara Ghanbari added another one in the 67th minute, before she and Ghomi became the third and fourth players to score twice on the day, when they added the final two goals in the 82nd and 83rd minutes.

Chinese Taipei also defeated the Philippines 4-2 in the group.

Iran remain three points adrift of group leaders Chinese Taipei, but their whopping goal difference of +7 means they have every chance of advancing should they muster a repeat performance on Tuesday.



Iran ready to book a place at Olympic Games: Maryam Azmoun

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran's women's football team coach Maryam Azmoun says they are ready to meet Chinese Taipei to make their Olympic Games dream come true.

Iran will book a place in the 2020 Olympic Games if defeat their rival in Doha's Grand Hamad Stadium on Tuesday.

"Chinese Taipei are a good team and I think they deserved to defeat the Philippines



4-2. We also had to beat the Philippines but failed to take advantage of our chances," Azmoun said.

"Now, we are ready to make our dream come true. We want to book a place in the Olympic Games for the first-ever time. We have analyzed our opponent and hope to get a good result against them," she added.

"Football has improved a lot in Asia and we have done well so far. The other Asian

teams respect Iran as a powerful team and it is satisfying for us," Azmoun stated.

In the final round, the successful sides of Group A, B and C, will join Australia, DPR Korea, Korea Republic, China PR and Thailand in two groups of four, with the top two teams from each group advancing to the play-offs.

The two winners from the play-offs will then qualify for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics with host and reigning Asian champion Japan.

Matchday Three: West Zone Preview

Kuala Lumpur: This week marks the halfway point of the 2019 AFC Champions League group stage, and standings begin to take shape as we enter Matchday Three.

Al Zawraa look to extend an impressive defensive record, Al Nassr chase a first-win in eight while their rivals Al Hilal eye a perfect mark. The eight clashes of the 2019 AFC Champions League Matchday Three West Zone take place on Monday and Tuesday with plenty to look forward to.

● Group A

The cards in Group A were reshuffled after a Matchday Two which saw Al Wasl fall to a 5-0 drubbing by Al Zawraa in Karbala and Al Nassr stunned 3-2 by Zob Ahan in a 'home' encounter for the Saudis played in Dubai.

Al Zawraa, returning to the AFC Champions League after 12 years, are the only West Asian side yet to concede a goal in the competition so far. They travel to the Saudi capital Riyadh as group leaders facing bottom side Al Nassr who are without a point.

Second in the table on goal difference are Zob Ahan who play in Dubai for the second game in a row. This time, they are the away side against third-place Al Wasl.

The Emirati side had ended a seven-match winless run in the competition that dated all the way back to 2008 when they defeated Al Nassr 1-0 on the opening matchday. The heavy defeat against Al Zawraa in Matchday Two left them reeling, but the home clash against Zob Ahan offers Al Wasl the chance to stay at the heart of the qualification race.

■ Al Wasl (UAE) vs Zob Ahan (IRN)

Venue: Zabeel Stadium, Dubai

■ Al Nassr (KSA) vs Al Zawraa (IRQ)

Venue: King Fahd International Stadium, Riyadh

● Group B

All four teams are level on three points after two matchdays, and three of them also have the same goal-difference of +1, while Al Rayyan occupy the final spot with a goal-difference of -3.

The Qatari side recovered from an abysmal performance in Jeddah that saw them lose 5-1 to Al Ittihad in Matchday One. Goals from Lucca Borges and Gelmin Rivas earned them a 2-1 home win against PFC Lokomotiv in their second game.

Al Rayyan host Al Wahda on Tuesday. The Emiratis return



to the competition having lost the League Cup final, which was their last hope of domestic silverware this season. Henk ten Cate's men will now be fully focused on the continental campaign as they sit sixth in the UAE Pro League table, 16 points adrift of the top spot.

Saudi Arabia's Al Ittihad, on the other side, have a lot to worry about domestically ahead of their home clash against Lokomotiv. The two-time AFC Champions League winners are facing a real possibility of being relegated from the Saudi Pro League for the first time in their history.

The Jeddah-based side are five points adrift of the last safe position in the league and have also shown both the good and the bad side of their form continentally, thrashing Al Rayyan 5-1 then losing to Al Wahda 4-1.

■ Al Rayyan (QAT) vs Al Wahda (UAE)

Venue: Jassim bin Hamad Stadium, Doha

■ Al Ittihad (KSA) vs PFC Lokomotiv (UZB)

Venue: King Abdullah Sport City Stadium, Jeddah

● Group C

Three of the four teams in this group had been pitted together in Group D last year. Al Rayyan rather than Al Duhail competed against Al Hilal, Al Ain and Esteghlal in 2018 and it was the latter two who reached the knock-out stages.

This year, Al Hilal are the early frontrunners having won both their first two games. They end the first half of the group with an away trip to Doha, the adopted home of Esteghlal.

The Iranian giants reached the quarter-finals last time

around, but they are now bottom of the group, having lost to Al Duhail 3-0 and drawn Al Ain 1-1 in Tehran. Esteghlal's domestic season has been a disappointment as a 1-0 defeat in the derby against Persepolis last week left them in fourth place.

A repeat of last year's Round-of-16 clash between Al Duhail and Al Ain is up on Monday. The Qataris had emerged 4-1 winners at home 11 months ago, but since then they have changed their manager twice and replaced three of their four foreign players.

Al Ain, on the other side, are yet to record a win in the 2019 AFC Champions League. They lost 1-0 at home to an Al Hilal side led by their former manager Zoran Mamic before clawing back to snatch a 1-1 draw against Esteghlal at Azadi Stadium.

■ Al Duhail (QAT) vs Al Ain (UAE)

Venue: Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium, Doha

■ Esteghlal (IRN) vs Al Hilal (KSA)

Venue: Hamad bin Khalifa Stadium, Doha

● Group D

Marat Bikmaev scored the two goals that helped Pakhtakor claim the summit of Group D, drawing Persepolis 1-1 and beating Al Ahli 1-0.

The Uzbek side end the first half of the group with tricky home affair against 2018 semi-finalists Al Sadd, who will be in a buoyant mood, having just been crowned Qatar Stars League champions for the first time since 2013.

In Dubai's Zabeel Stadium, Islamic Republic of Iran's Persepolis play hosts to Al Ahli of Saudi Arabia. Jorge Fossati's men impressed in a 2-0 win over his former employers Al Sadd in Matchday One, but they then fell to a 1-0 defeat to Pakhtakor in Tashkent. A win against Persepolis could send them to the top of the group.

Branko Ivankovic's side went all the way to the final last year, but they are yet to taste victory in the 2019 edition. Another defeat could further complicate their position in the group as they sit bottom with a single point.

FC Pakhtakor (UZB) vs Al Sadd (QAT)

Venue: Pakhtakor Central Stadium, Tashkent

■ Persepolis (IRN) vs Al Ahli (KSA)

Venue: Zabeel Stadium, Dubai

(Source: the-afc)

Teymourian's strike named best-ever AFC Champions League goal

After over 160,000 votes cast, Andranik Teymourian's stunning strike from the 2013 AFC Champions League has been named the tournament's best-ever goal by fans on the-AFC.com.

Iranian icon Teymourian's breathtaking goal from Esteghlal's quarter-final second leg against Thailand's Buriram United was named as the best goal.

Lokomotiv Tashkent Ikromjon Alibaev's memorable effort from the 2018 competition finishing second.

Following more than 370,000 votes in total, with 16 entries from the inaugural campaign up till as recently as last year, the fans' favorite was decided.

(Source: the-afc)

Match officials for ACL Matchday Three appointed

TASNIM — Australian referee Christopher James Beath has been chosen to officiate the match between Iran's Esteghlal and Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia.

Esteghlal will face Al Hilal on Monday in Doha's Hamad bin Khalifa Stadium in Group C of the AFC Champions League.

Beath, 34, was added to the FIFA International Referees List in 2011, serving as a referee for matches including the Kirin Challenge Cup contest between Japan and Iceland.

In 2015, Beath was involved in an exchange program where he refereed in the J-League.

On 4 April 2017, Chris Beath was appointed as one of the inaugural video assistant referees (VARs) in the Hyundai A-League, the first top-tier football league in the world to implement the technology.

In January 2018, Beath was selected as one of the referees for the 2018 AFC U-23 Championship held in China. Beath refereed the opening fixture of this tournament.

Also, Japanese referee Yudai Yamamoto will be the man to officiate the match between Al Wasl of the UAE and Iran's Zob Ahan.

Yamamoto will be assisted by his countrymen in this game.

The match has been scheduled to be held in Dubai's Zabeel Stadium in Group A of the AFC Champions League on Monday.

Yamamoto has been a full international for FIFA since 2011. He has refereed some matches in AFC Champions League.

Kyle Walker somehow avoids red card after VAR review for headbutt on Jahanbakhsh

Kyle Walker was lucky to avoid a red card after a VAR review decided against sending the Manchester City full-back off for a headbutt on Alireza Jahanbakhsh.

City and Brighton and Hove Albion were contesting the FA Cup semi-final at Wembley when there was an altercation between Jahanbakhsh and Walker after the half hour mark.



The City defender reacted angrily to a shove in the back from Jahanbakhsh and with both players forehead to forehead, Walker appears to aim a headbutt at his opponent.

Walker's movement fails to connect with Jahanbakhsh and brushes down the winger's face as he moves backwards, FA rules state there only needs to be an attempt to strike an opponent for an offence to occur.

The decision was reviewed by VAR, but referee Anthony Taylor and his team decided against sending Walker off. Pep Guardiola then hooked Walker at half-time for Danilo.

BBC's punditry team agreed Walker was fortunate to avoid a red card, with Martin Keown saying on commentary: 'He should have been sent off. When you see the slow-mo, he leans his head in. He gets away with it.'

Alan Shearer echoed Keown's comments at half time, while football fans were left baffled by the decision.

(Source: Metro)

Ethiopian runners sweep Rome marathon

Ethiopia's Tebalu Zawude Heyi won the Rome marathon on Sunday ahead of compatriots Tesfa Wokneth and Yihunilign Adane as the east African athletics power-house swept both the men's and women's events.

Zawude Heyi clocked 2hr 8min 37sec around the Italian capital with Wokneth just behind in 2hr 9min 17sec and Yihunilign Adane timing 2hr 9min 53sec.

Ethiopia also topped the women's race with Alemu Megertu setting a new course record of 2hr 22min 52sec ahead of countrywomen Muluhabt Tsiga (2:26:41) and Chaltu Negesse (2:30:45).

(Source: AFP)

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GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Patience is a fitting cover, and wisdom is a sharp sword. So cover your ugly conduct with patience and kill carnal desires with wisdom.
Imam Ali (AS)

IAF to pay tribute to filmmaker Morteza Avini with special program

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Artists Forum in Tehran plans to pay tribute to Morteza Avini by organizing a special program, which will review three documentaries by the filmmaker from April 9 to 11.

“And This Is the Best Triumph”, “Story of the Bridge” and “The Ashura Night” will go on screen during a program titled “Three Days with Morteza Avini” to commemorate the filmmaker’s 26th martyrdom anniversary.



A poster for the program “Three Days with Morteza Avini”.

Avini was martyred by a landmine in 1993 during his last trip to the former Iran-Iraq war zone in southwestern Iran while making a documentary about soldiers who were still listed as missing in action.

He became famous for “The Narration of Triumph” and was called “the master of martyred writers” by his colleagues and war veterans due to the fervent narrations he wrote for his documentaries.

Busan festival to turn spotlight on Iranian women filmmakers

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The 36th edition of the Busan International Short Film Festival will put its spotlight on movies from a number of Iranian female filmmakers in a section entitled “Hub of Asia: Iranian Women Directors”.

A lineup of eight films, including “Horn” by Qasideh Golmakani, “Leftover” by Yasaman Hassani and “It Was My City” by Tina Pakravan, will go on screen in this section.

“Personal” by Sonia Haddad, “Absent Wound” by Maryam Tafakori, “Breath” by Mona Moradi, “The Derive” by Tanin Torabi and “Lady with Flower-hair” by Sara Tabibzadeh are also among the films.

In addition, the festival will screen Iranian shorts “Hanged” by Roqayeh Tavakkoli and “Breathing” by Farshid Ayubinejad in its official competition.

“Are You Volleyball?” by Iranian director Mohammad Bakhshi will also compete in the Short for Family section.

The Busan International Short Film Festival will be held in the Korean city from April 24 to 29.

Tehran City Council to rename street after actor Jamshid Mashayekhi

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Tehran City Council gave its approval on Sunday to rename Jeem Street in the Velenjak neighborhood, the location of the late Jamshid Mashayekhi’s house, after the legendary actor.



Actor Jamshid Mashayekhi in an undated photo. (IRNA)

Mashayekhi, who starred in such acclaimed movies as “Kamalolmolk” and “Chrysanthemum”, died last Tuesday at the age of 85.

At Mashayekhi’s funeral on Saturday, his lifelong friend, Iraj Rad asked the Tehran City Council to rename a street in Tehran after the actor.

Tehran to host seminar on Leonardo da Vinci

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The genius of Italian polymath Leonardo da Vinci will be scrutinized during a seminar in Tehran next week.

The Iranian National Science and Technology Museum (INSTM) and the Embassy of Italy will organize the one-day seminar on April 15 to observe the Italian Research Day in the World, the organizers have announced.

April 15, 2019 is also the 567th birthday of Da Vinci whose areas of interest included invention, drawing, painting, sculpting, architecture, science, music, mathematics, engineering, literature, anatomy, geology, astronomy, botany, writing, history and cartography.

The seminar, which is scheduled to focus on the role of the new sources in the review of da Vinci’s works, will begin with speeches by Italian Ambassador Mauro Conciatori and INSTM director Seifollah Jalili.

Italian historian Giuseppina Ferriello and her fellow mathematician Romano Gatto of the University of Basilicata will also lecture.

In addition, Alfredo Buccaro, a professor of history of architecture at the University of Naples Federico II, has been invited to deliver a speech at the colloquium.

Mohammad Baqeri of the University of Tehran will talk about perpetual motion in Islamic sources and in the works of Da Vinci.

The Italian Research Day in the World was established by Italy’s Ministry of Education, University and Research in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Health in 2018.

Italy plans to highlight the contribution of its researchers to international scientific efforts and promote the dissemination of the results of their research during the second edition of the Italian Research Day in the World.



A portrait of Leonardo da Vinci.

“Limit” named best at Speechless Film Festival



A scene from “Limit” by Iranian director Javad Darai.

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Javad Darai’s acclaimed short film “Limit” has been won the award for best student film at the 7th Speechless Film Festival in the U.S., the organizers have announced.

The festival took place in Mankato, Minnesota on March 29 and 30.

The film tells the story of a desperate man who frantically pleads with strangers to accompany him to his home, without

being clear on his intentions.

“Limit” has been screened at numerous international events and has won awards at some of them, including the award for best short fiction at the 10th Southampton Film Week, the Bleedingham Horror Short Film Festival, as well as the award for best drama at the NCCC (Niagara County Community College) Film and Animation Festival in the U.S. state of New York.

Mehdi Rahmani selected for jury of Spanish film festival



Mehdi Rahmani in an undated photo.

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian director and producer Mehdi Rahmani has been selected for the jury of the 18th Imagineindia International Film Festival in Spain, the organizers have announced.

Hanna Polak from Poland, Ruchika Oberoi from India, Olga Khlasheva from Kazakhstan and Felix Sabroso Cruz from Spain are other members of the jury.

Three films from Iran will be competing

in the festival, which will be held in Madrid from May 17 to 31. “Appendix” by Hossein Namazi and “Orange Days” by Arash Lahuti will be screened in the official competition, and “Manicure” by Arman Fayyaz will compete in the short film section.

Over 80 films have been selected from around the world to screen at the festival, which plans to honor Indian director Buddhadeb Dasgupta with a lifetime achievement award.

New dramas come to Tehran theaters after Noruz holiday

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Tehran theaters have come back with new plays from foreign writers after about a three-week holiday for Noruz, the Iranian New Year celebration.

Mehregan Theater is hosting theatergoers for Italian director and playwright Dario Fo’s “We Can’t Pay? We Won’t Pay” and British playwright Harold Pinter’s “A Night Out”.

Mehdi Arjmand is the director of “We Can’t Pay? We Won’t Pay”, which is a comedy about consumer backlash against high prices.

Elham Rezaei, Shima Zadpur and Ali Keshvari are the main members of the cast for the play, which will be on stage until May 10.

Mohammad Hosseini directs “A Night Out”, which is about Albert, a young man who finds himself dominated by his mother. One night when he is mercilessly teased by his colleagues at an office party, he returns home and attacks his mother.



This combination photo shows posters of plays on stage at several Tehran theaters.

Mostafa Qadiri, Shiva Khosromehr, Vahid Manafi and Sajjad Tumari are the main members of the cast for the play that will be on stage until April 20.

American playwright Paul Zindel’s “The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds” is on stage at Sepand Theater.

Starring Khosro Ahmadi and Ariana Majd, the play is about Beatrice Hunsdorfer, a terrible homemaker and a questionable parent, who plans to open a tea room

Fans mourn grunge rock icon Kurt Cobain 25 years after death

SEATTLE (AP) — On the 25th anniversary of Kurt Cobain’s death, dozens of people left flowers, candles and handwritten messages at a Seattle park near the house where the Nirvana frontman killed himself.

Cobain, whose band rose to global fame in the city’s grunge rock music scene of the early 1990s, was 27 when he died April 5, 1994, in his home in a wealthy neighborhood near Lake Washington.

Fans trekked Friday to nearby Viretta Park, leaving memorials on benches, where flowers mixed with handwritten phrases like “thank you for your art” and “find your place.”

In an essay on the Crosscut news website, Cobain biographer Charles R. Cross wrote that few Seattle musicians “have been as tied to Seattle in the mind of the popular zeitgeist as Kurt Cobain.”

Nirvana’s breakthrough album, “Nevermind,” was released in 1991. Featuring the hit “Smells Like Teen Spirit,” the album went to No. 1 on the Billboard charts and has sold tens of millions of copies worldwide.

Nirvana was the most prominent of the era’s series of Seattle grunge bands, including Pearl Jam, Soundgarden and Alice in Chains, that would go on to release best-selling records.

Cobain’s angst-filled lyrics and his band’s powerful, dark rock struck a chord with young people. Days after his death, thousands of people gathered near the Space Needle for a public memorial.

An investigation determined he took a massive dose of heroin and then shot himself.

Mick Jagger says he is on the mend after heart surgery

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Rolling Stones frontman Mick Jagger said on Friday he was “on the mend” after undergoing surgery that caused postponement of the band’s planned North American tour.

The 75-year-old British singer underwent heart valve replacement surgery in New York earlier this week, according to media reports.

Jagger and his representatives did not provide details of the surgery but said it had gone well.

“Thank you everyone for all your messages of support, I’m feeling much better now and on the mend - and also a huge thank you to all the hospital staff for doing a superb job,” Jagger wrote on Twitter.

His U.S. publicist said the treatment

had been successful and that Jagger was expected to make a full recovery. Jagger’s need for surgery forced the Rolling Stones last weekend to postpone its entire North American tour that had been due to start later this month.

Billboard magazine, citing unidentified sources, said the surgery involved the replacement of a heart valve by going through Jagger’s femoral artery.

The procedure, known as transcatheter aortic valve replacement, or TAVR, is an increasingly widely-used alternative to surgical valve replacement that requires the chest to be opened. TAVR typically allows for shorter hospital stays and quicker recovery times.

The Rolling Stones tour is now expected to begin in July, Billboard said.