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Hemmati: U.S. move on IRGC shows failure of anti-Iran economic measures

TEHRAN — Governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Abdolnaser Hemmati underlined that the U.S. designation of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a 'terrorist organization' shows its failure in anti-Iran economic pressures and policies.

"The U.S. administration's recent measure against the IRGC is the last sign of failure of its policy to pressure the Iranian

nation and the financial and monetary sanctions in the past year, specially the heavy defeat sustained in the first half of the month of Farvardin (March 21-April 20)," Hemmati wrote on his Instagram page on Tuesday.

He added that if the U.S. was seriously confident of the success of its past policies, naturally, it would not resort to this dangerous move. →4

Resistance groups slam Washington for blacklisting Iran's Guards

TEHRAN — A wave of condemnations followed after U.S. President Donald Trump blacklisted the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC).

The condemnations came notably by resistance movements in various regional countries.

On Monday, the White House labeled Iran "a state sponsor of terrorism" and the IRGC a "foreign terrorist organization," claiming that the elite Iranian force "active-

ly participates in, finances, and promotes terrorism as a tool of statecraft."

This is the first time the U.S. has officially branded another country's military a "terrorist organization."

Iran swiftly retaliated, with the Supreme National Security Council designating the U.S. government a supporter of terrorism and its West Asia force, known as the United States Central Command (CENTCOM), a terrorist organization. →2

UN urges investigation into Saudi killing of Yemeni schoolchildren

The United Nations has called for a thorough investigation into the killing of over a dozen civilians, including several schoolchildren, in an airstrike carried out by Saudi warplanes on a residential area in Yemen's west-central province of Sana'a.

At least 13 people were killed and 92 others sustained injuries after Saudi-led warplanes launched aerial assaults against

an area in Sa'wan district in Sana'a province on Sunday evening, Yemeni Ministry of Public Health and Population said in the aftermath of the gruesome crime.

The ministry at the time said that most of the students had been schoolchildren, as the explosion occurred close to a school.

Other reports, however, including that of the UN, set the death toll on 11 victims, including five students. →13

PERSPECTIVE
Hanif Ghaffari
Political analyst

Trump's political death in Florida

Florida residents' opposition to Donald Trump's re-election as president of the United States is the worst possible news for him. In the 2016 presidential elections, Trump won the rival Democratic Party in states like Florida, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Michigan. However, it seems that if the Presidential elections are held today in the United States, these important and decisive states are becoming signs of the defeat of Trump.

Many American analysts believed that, due to the slight difference in electoral trump votes with Hillary Clinton in the four states, it would be possible in 2020 that the outcome of the election would be to the detriment of the current president of the United States.

As "The Hill" reported recently, a majority of Florida voters surveyed in a poll said they do not believe President Trump should be reelected in 2020. Politico reported that a Bendixen & Amandi International poll showed 40 percent of registered Florida voters said they think Trump should be reelected, while 53 did not support a second term. Among Republicans, 72 percent of respondents said Trump should get another term, and 23 percent said he should not.

Democratic responses were flipped, with 73 percent opposing a second term and 14 percent supporting one. The numbers are potentially concerning for Trump, given Florida's status as a key swing state. The candidate who has won Florida has gone on to win the presidency each of the last six elections.

The fact is that the president of the United States never imagined that the votes of the four states of Florida, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Michigan would change! But this has already happened. During the recent 2018 American electoral campaign, the Democrats were able to vote in the Senate for all three Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Michigan.

In the state of Florida, the Republicans also won a little bit of difference. Trump hoped that after the Republican victory in the Senate elections, it would be important to see an increase in the overall public interest in this state. However, recent polls show that he's mistaken! Defeating Trump in the 2020 presidential election is quite possible given his fall in public support in Florida. →7

Naming IRGC terrorist undermines chances of U.S. returning to JCPOA: Nephew

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Richard Nephew, who served as the lead sanctions expert for the U.S. team negotiating with Iran, is of the opinion that naming IRGC as a foreign terrorist group "was intended to increase the pressure on the IRGC and the Iranian government by adding economic pressure."

The fellow at the Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University, says that "I am not convinced that this will occur but I think that was the intent, at least superficially." He also says that this is also intended to undermine chances of the United States returning to the JCPOA in the future or rejoining negotiations with Iran.

Following is the text of the interview:

■ What was the goal of the designation of

IRGC as a foreign terrorist group?

A: Well, I think the decision was intended to increase the pressure on the IRGC and the Iranian government by adding economic pressure. I am not convinced that this will occur but I think that was the intent, at least superficially. But, I think this is also intended to undermine chances of the United States returning to the JCPOA in the future or rejoining negotiations with Iran. →7

Brandishing IRGC as terrorist group an act of terror itself: Logoglu

By Payman Yazdani

TEHRAN (MNA) — In an interview with MNA following U.S.' recent hostile move against the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, a senior member of Turkey's Republican People's Party (CHP), Faruk logoglu, said "brandishing IRGC as a terrorist group is essentially an act of terror itself."

The United States' increasingly aggressive approaches towards Iran came to a head last night

as the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump designated the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a foreign terrorist organization through an official statement.

In light of this development, Mehr News Agency reached to a senior member of Turkey's Republican People's Party (CHP), Osman Faruk logoglu, who believes that "brandishing IRGC as a terrorist group is essentially an act of terror itself."

He called the move as "unprecedented, unlaw-

ful and devoid of any credibility or legitimacy," adding that the "step is supposedly designed to increase the pressure on Iran and opens a new frontier beyond the realm of economic sanctions."

"Trump continues to stoke the fires of tension and conflict in the region," the Turkish diplomat stressed, adding "this step will only serve to entrench the determination of the Iranian people to resist U.S. efforts to force Iran into submission." →7

Iran responds well by naming CENTCOM as terrorist organization: Askari

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Professor Hossein Askari, an expert on Saudi Arabia who also teaches international business at the George Washington University, believes that "Iran might well respond by naming the U.S. Central Command as a terrorist organization operating in the Persian Gulf and in the greater Middle East, the Navy Seals, the CIA and on and on."

"To the Trump administration the word ter-

ror is fungible. If Saudi Arabia commits an act of indisputable terror, Washington is not quite sure who is behind that particular act of terror but though they say they don't know who did it, they are sure it is Iran or some other 'Islamists'." Hossein Askari, who served as special advisor to Saudi finance minister, tells the Tehran Times.

Following is the text of the interview:

Q: What is the U.S. basis for declaring the IRGC a terrorist organization? Do you agree with it?

A: The reason is unclear to me. I think it is because Netanyahu and Mohammad bin Salman (MBS) have an obsession with Iran and they see the IRGC as a potent force. That is the real reason. These two along with Kushner are hoping to engineer regime change in Iran by inciting a war that draws in the United States. I know it sounds farfetched but to me this is what's behind all this. →7



Students protest U.S. blacklisting of IRGC

TEHRAN — On Tuesday, students staged protests in universities in Tehran and other cities across Iran to voice their rage at the United States for blacklisting the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps.

The Trump administration on Monday announced it was recognizing Iran as a state sponsor of terror and the IRGC a terrorist organization.

Iran reacted in kind immediately and declared the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) a terrorist organization.

ARTICLE
Setareh Behrooz
Tehran Times journalist

Social media and recent floods in Iran, promising or threatening?

Different hashtags on recent destructive floods in Iran have been trending in different social media and the news of the floods went viral in cyberspace.

The covering up of news in Instagram, Twitter and Telegram is more highlighted since the flood hit different parts of Iran during the new year (Noruz) holidays, which began on March 21, 2019.

The catastrophic floods have hit 1,900 cities and villages in western, southwestern, northern and northeastern Iran, leaving 70 dead and hundreds displaced.

The flooding inflicted considerable damage to buildings and other structures, including bridges, sewerage systems, roadways, and canals as well as crops and livestock in many provinces, especially in Mazandaran, Khuzestan, Golestan, and Lorestan.

The social media promote emergency management with reaching more people in less time. They have the ability to disseminate information quickly to wider audience, interact with the users and improve collaboration for helping the disaster stricken areas.

During recent floods, several photos and videos taken by the social media users went viral and many influencers and celebrities accounts called for helping the survivors.

However, the government banned the influencers and celebrities to raise fund for relief efforts in flood-stricken regions and many of them just encouraged people to help Iranian Red Crescent Society and some other charities.

This issue may make us to think about the disadvantage of social media for disaster management.

The social media paves the way for receiving feedback and information directly from survivors. Through monitoring social channels, officials can have information about what is happening in real time to respond accordingly.

However the fast-paced communication may lead to some problems known as 'Wikipedia effect' in which, the false information go viral with the same speed as the correct one. →10

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



'Iran to deal with U.S. forces should they make a mistake'

POLITICS TEHRAN — Major General Mohammad Desaki Baqeri, chief of the Iranian armed forces, said on Tuesday that the Islamic Republic will not remain silent in the face of the United States' "foolish" move to designate the IRGC as a terrorist organization.

In retaliation, Iran "has also labeled the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) in West Asia as a terrorist organization and if they make a mistake, we will deal with them decisively," Baqeri stated.

The fact that the IRGC has been targeted by the "criminal" American regime is worth feeling happy about, the commander remarked.

It means that the IRGC has been in the right path all along, he added.



Commander: IRGC to become stronger after U.S. 'ridiculous' move

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) will become stronger in its defensive and offensive power, IRGC Chief Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari said on Tuesday.

"The measure that the Americans took is so ridiculous," Baqeri said, referring to the U.S. designation of the Guards as a terrorist group a day earlier, Mehr reported.

Because, he continued, the IRGC is in the hearts of the people and "our credibility does not come from the Americans, but from the dear and decent people of Iran."

He further said the Iranian Army and the IRGC will be beside each other.



Rezaee warns U.S. warships to stay away from IRGC boats

POLITICS TEHRAN — In reaction to U.S. designation of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization, Mousen Rezaee, secretary of the Expediency Council, has warned U.S. aircraft carriers to stay away from the Guards' boats.

"Mr. Trump! With this [move], tell your aircraft carriers not to come close to the Guards' boats," Rezaee, a former IRGC chief, tweeted on Tuesday.

The U.S. government announced on Monday that it is designating the IRGC as a foreign terrorist organization. This is the first time the military force of another country is being declared as a terrorist organization by the United States.



Takht-Ravanchi named Iran's ambassador to UN

POLITICS TEHRAN — Former nuclear negotiator Majid Takht Ravanchi has been appointed as the Islamic Republic's permanent representative to the United Nations, Fars news agency on Tuesday quoted Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi as saying.

Takht Ravanchi, 61, is currently deputy director for political affairs at the presidential office. He has also served as deputy foreign minister for European and American Affairs.

Qassemi said Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif suggested the appointment and it was approved by President Hassan Rouhani.

Takht Ravanchi will fill the position which had remained vacant for months after the former envoy to the UN, Gholamali Khoshroo, stepped down in late 2018.



Armed forces: U.S. decision lacks operational value

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran's armed forces said in a statement on Tuesday that it will spare no efforts to fight against the terrorist CENTCOM in West Asia.

The armed forces condemned the United States' designation of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization and warned of the consequences of the move, Tasnim reported.

The move "was a desperate, retaliatory attempt aimed to cover [U.S.] failures in the region... It has no operational value and is doomed to failure," the statement added.

In response to U.S. President Donald Trump's move to blacklist the Guards, Iran retaliated by designating CENTCOM in West Asia and all its affiliates as a terrorist organization in turn.



Minorities' representatives rap U.S. move against IRGC

POLITICS TEHRAN — Representatives of Iran's religious minorities in the parliament on Tuesday censured U.S. for designating the IRGC a foreign terrorist organization, saying the move showed the American regime's animosity toward the Iranian nation.

They made the remarks in a statement which was read out at the end of the Tuesday session of the parliament, Mehr reported.

"The official declaration of animosity by the Arrogance (America) toward this popular institution, while all of its facilities are at the disposal of the victims of the floods, shows the animosity of the American regime toward all Iranian people," the statement read.

Rouhani: U.S. move will make IRGC more popular

POLITICS TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani said on Tuesday that the U.S. mistake in designating the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) a foreign terrorist organization will make Iranians more united and the IRGC "more popular".

Rouhani, who headed Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) in the 1990s and early 2000s, praised the IRGC, saying they have been sacrificing their lives to protect Iran.

"Today America that holds a grudge against the Guards, blacklists the Guards," Rouhani said in a ceremony marking National Nuclear Day.

"America has used terrorists as a tool in the region while the Guards have fought against them from Iraq to Syria," Rouhani asserted.

"By labeling the Guards as terrorist," Rouhani added, "America wants to compensate for its defeats at the hands of Iranians."

On Monday U.S. President Donald Trump labeled the IRGC as a foreign terrorist organization.

In a show of solidarity with the IRGC, Iranian lawmakers attended the parliament on Tuesday dressed in IRGC uniform.

Immediately after the U.S. move against the IRGC, the SNSC took a retaliatory measure by naming the United States Central



Command (CENTCOM) as a terrorist organization and the U.S. government as a sponsor of terror.

Rouhani and other Iranian officials have warned that terrorist designation against the IRGC will endanger U.S. interests in the region.

'Election gift to Netanyahu'

In a tweet on Monday, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said the decision against the IRGC is an "election-eve gift" to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Israel is holding an election today. Zarif also called the move a "dangerous

U.S. misadventure in the region."

'Terror designation shows U.S. stupidity'

Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani also said the U.S. decision shows Washington's "stupidity" and the "depth of its animosity" toward Iran.

Larijani said in the recent years that terrorists had put the region "on fire" it was the IRGC that "broke their back".

"The bravery of the Guards against terrorists is not something that can be concealed from the eyes of nations," Larijani added.

Since coming to power in the White House in January 2017, Trump has been venting anger against Iran. In May 2018, he pulled the U.S. out of a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and 5+1 nations, and reimposed sanctions on Tehran.

This happened despite the fact that the International Atomic Energy Agency has repeatedly confirmed that Iran is fully abiding by the terms of the nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

However, Iran has threatened to abandon the deal and expedite its nuclear work if other signatories to the pact fail to protect Tehran's interest.

"I am telling you (American leaders), if you pressure us, we will mass produce IR8 advanced centrifuges," Rouhani warned.

Ayatollah Khamenei says U.S. evil acts will reach nowhere

POLITICS TEHRAN — Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said on Monday that the U.S. malign against Iran will reach nowhere.

On Monday U.S. President Donald Trump labeled the IRGC as a foreign terrorist organization.

The Leader noted that the U.S. malign acts against Iran will boomerang.

"The U.S. and stupid enemies have done whatever they could against the Islamic Republic during the past 40 years, however, they could not do a damn thing," the Leader said during a meeting with a group of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) personnel and their families.

The meeting took place on the eve of IRGC Day.

Ayatollah Khamenei added that today

the revolution and the Islamic system have become powerful in the world.

He said that the IRGC is a "remarkable apparatus" which has been in frontline of countering enemies.

Elsewhere, the Leader said since the 1979 Islamic Revolution all the plots against Iran have ended in failure and the country has been progressing unstopably over these years. "It has been for 40 years that the ene-

mies have exerted political and economic pressure against the nation, however, they could not do a damn thing even when the Islamic Republic was young," Ayatollah Khamenei remarked.

The Leader said that Iran's power and dignity are result of the people's "resistance, sacrifice and insight" and not nuclear weapons which are contrary to religious principles.

Parliamentarians wear IRGC uniforms to jeer U.S.

Larijani: Terror label against IRGC shows depth of U.S. 'stupidity'

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian MPs said on Tuesday that the Majlis will take decision which befits the Islamic Republic of Iran against the U.S. actions.

The MPs made the remarks in a letter to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei following the U.S. act in designating the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization.

Iranian lawmakers on Tuesday uniformly appeared on the Majlis floor wearing outfits of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps in a move to show contempt for the United States' move a day earlier to name the armed forces terrorist.

All MPs, including Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani and presiding board members, participated in the collective move.

Addressing the MPs, Larijani said, "Majlis condemns this shameful act of the heads of the U.S. regime and supports the IRGC."

He noted that the U.S. act shows the "depth of its hatred and stupidity".

"It is the U.S. government that should account for creating and supporting the



terrorist groups and not the Guards," he said.

He added that the IRGC has "broken the back" of the terrorists in the region who had set the region on fire.

"The Guards' endeavors against terrorists are something that cannot be concealed," added Larijani who served as an IRGC officer in the early years of the Islamic Revolution.

Elsewhere, Larijani said that this act of the U.S. government shows its "frustration" and not its power.

He added that it is an honor for the Iranian people to support the IRGC.

Iran starts installing IR6 centrifuges

114 nuclear achievements unveiled on National Nuclear Technology Day

POLITICS TEHRAN — On Tuesday, concurrent with National Nuclear Technology Day, which falls on the 20th of the calendar month of Farvardin, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) began installing IR6 centrifuges at a nuclear enrichment facility, the IRNA news agency reported.

Following an order by President Hassan Rouhani, the installation of a chain of 20 advanced IR6 centrifuges started in the Natanz enrichment facility in central Iran, the news agency said.

This was part of 114 nuclear achievements unveiled in a ceremony on National Nuclear Technology Day.

"We are happy that the installation of a chain of 20 advanced IR6 centrifuges begins today. This will be a very big achievement for the Iranian nation," Rouhani said in a video conference.

According to IRNA, the centrifuges were produced at the Modern Centrifuge Assembly Center which was established following a decree by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Subsequent tests will be carried out

with the installation of the centrifuges, the report added.

Rouhani also inaugurated six outstanding projects and systems via video conference.

Speaking at the beginning of the event, AEOI Chief Ali Akbar Salehi said Iran has made headways in the nuclear industry, which has also contributed to progress in other industrial and medical sectors.

Salehi, a nuclear physicist, gave a brief description of the six homegrown projects and the equipment unveiled at the ceremony.

He also slammed Washington's unilateral sanctions on Tehran, saying the sanctions will never be able to make the slightest dent in Iran's resolve to advance its nuclear technology projects.

The illegal sanctions on the AEOI shows the poor political judgment of the White House authorities, Salehi remarked.

He further said the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has confirmed Iran's full compliance with its nuclear-related commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), while the U.S. has violated the agreement by its unilateral withdrawal.

IRGC's power has made U.S. angry: defense minister

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian Defense Minister Amir Hatami said on Tuesday that the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps' power has made the U.S. and the Zionist regime of Israel angry.

U.S. President Donald Trump labeled the IRGC as a foreign terrorist organization on Monday.

Based on the constitution, Hatami said in a statement, the IRGC is duty bound to guard the revolution and its achievements and the U.S. act is against the Iranian constitution.

"The U.S. action indicates depth of its frustration in the region and animosity against the Islamic Revolution and also its official support for Takfiri and terrorist movements which have been harmed by the Guards," the defense minister pointed out.

He noted that the Iranians will foil enemies' plots through unity and solidarity.

Elsewhere, he said, "The Islamic Revolution's victories in military sphere and in resistance front and also in foiling

the enemies' plots especially those hatched by the U.S. and the Zionist regime have made them frustrated."

President Hassan Rouhani said on Tuesday that the U.S. mistake in designating IRGC a foreign terrorist organization will make Iranians more united and the IRGC "more popular".

In a show of solidarity with the IRGC, Iranian lawmakers attended the parliament on Tuesday dressed in IRGC uniform.

Resistance groups slam Washington for blacklisting Iran's Guards

1 → Reacting to Washington's latest hostile move, the Yemeni coalition Joint Meeting Parties condemned the act and said the U.S. is the primary sponsor of terrorism.

The coalition added in their statement that Washington's move serves its adventurism in the region and disrupting security in the Middle East to a new high.

Also, Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba, an Iraqi Shia movement known for its active cooperation with the national army in counter-terrorism operations, stressed that the designation will have no impact on the approach of Iraq's Islamic resistance groups towards neighboring Iran.

Nujaba spokesman Hashim al-Mousawi

noted that the blacklisting is part of a unilateral American campaign of sanctions already targeting Iran and the IRGC.

Mousawi further censured the U.S. for using the issue of terrorism as a tool to pile pressure on other countries and wage psychological warfare against them.

Similarly, the fellow Iraqi Kata'ib Hezbollah Shia group condemned the move, saying the term "state sponsor of terror" best describes the United States itself because it has a history full of evil and crimes against world nations, including Iraq.

The belligerent U.S. policy against Iran, Islam and the resistance front will leave no option other than resistance in the face of Washington's acts of aggression, the

group said in a statement.

The "racist" and "stupid" U.S. president, the statement added, has now resorted to a set of measures aimed at plunging the world into tensions and chaos after the resistance front successfully foiled all American-Israeli plots in the Middle East region.

Kata'ib Hezbollah also expressed its solidarity with the Iranian nation in the face of the unilateral and oppressive U.S. sanctions, which it said are supported by the criminal regimes in Tel Aviv and Riyadh.

It further warned that the U.S. military presence in Iraq poses a threat to the national security of the country and its neighbors, urging the Baghdad government

to stop cooperation with the Americans, Zionists and Saudis.

In 2014, when Daesh unleashed its campaign of terror in Iraq, Iranian military advisors rushed to the aid of Iraqi Armed Forces on Baghdad's request, helping them reverse Daesh's gains and ultimately liberate their entire homeland from the Takfiri terror outfit some three years later.

Additionally, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement, in a statement, censured the blacklisting of the IRGC as another hostile and unwise move.

It is the U.S. itself that supports terrorism and commits crimes against humanity, the statement emphasized.

U.S. bars entry to 16 Saudis over role in Khashoggi murder

The U.S. State Department has barred 16 Saudi nationals from entering the United States over their involvement in the murder of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul last October.

The list includes Saud al-Qahtani, a senior adviser to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and Maher Mutreb, a member of the young prince's entourage on foreign trips. "Those individuals and their immediate family members are ineligible for entry into the United States," the State Department said in a statement on Monday.

The group had already been sanctioned by Washington in the aftermath of the apparent hit job on the U.S.-based writer, who was also a Washington Post contributor.

Khashoggi, once a close friend of bin Salman, had criticized his policies in columns written for The Washington Post prior to his death.

Riyadh admitted to killing Khashoggi weeks after he entered the consulate on October 2. Saudi authorities first tried to avert attention from the case by offering contradicting accounts of the journalist's death. But once evidence pointed to a planned murder ordered by the highest royals, they eventually settled on the explanation that he had been killed in an operation masterminded by former advisors to bin Salman.

While the CIA has concluded that the crown prince was in on the operation, the kingdom firmly denies he had any involvement.

The recent action by Washington was



done under the 2019 State Department appropriations bill, which states that the U.S. Secretary of State must deny entry to individuals and immediate family members of foreign nationals who have been "involved in significant corruption or gross violations of human rights."

In November last year, the U.S. Treasury Department slapped sanctions on 17 Saudis

on the grounds that they had "targeted and brutally killed a journalist who resided and worked in the United States."

President Donald Trump's critics say the sanctions are not enough and the administration needs to punish MBS for his deeds. U.S. lawmakers, including some of Trump's closest allies in the Republican Party, have even called for bin Salman's removal.

Rights groups urge Pompeo to ensure fair murder trial

Meanwhile, in a letter drafted to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, several rights groups, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have called on him to monitor the ongoing Saudi trial of the 11 accused in the murder.

"The trial sessions held so far have been closed to the media and the identity of those on trial, as well as the charges they face, have not been disclosed," read the letter, which was also sent to French and British foreign secretaries, Jeremy Hunt and Jean-Yves Le Drian.

Saudis have invited representatives of France, Britain, the U.S., Russia and China to attend the trial in Riyadh.

In their letter, the rights groups pointed to the Saudi justice system's "severe inadequacies" and the regime's long record of concealing the truth through forced confessions.

"This lack of independence, transparency, and fairness has meant that the Saudi criminal justice system falls well below international human rights standards," the wrote.

"In addition to reinforcing the fair trial rights of the accused persons and to guard against potential scapegoating of some individuals, transparency around the trial can work to guarantee that the court proceedings do not cover up the alleged involvement of the Saudi leadership," the letter added.

(Source: agencies)

Algeria's parliament confirms Bensalah as interim president

Algeria's parliament has officially confirmed Senate President Abdelkader Bensalah as acting head of state for the next 90 days replacing Abdelaziz Bouteflika who ruled the country for nearly two decades.

The move to designate Bensalah interim president follows the constitutional council's decision last week to declare the presidency vacant after Bouteflika submitted his resignation. He stepped down after nearly two months of protests.

"I am required by national duty to take on this heavy responsibility of steering a transition that will allow the Algerian people to exercise their sovereignty," Bensalah said on Tuesday.

"We must work to allow the Algerian people to elect their president as soon as possible."

Bensalah will rule until fresh elections are held, in accordance with the country's constitution.

On Friday, three days after Bouteflika resigned, tens of thousands of Algerians marched in cities across the country to demand a complete overhaul of the political system.

In addition to Bensalah, protesters said they do not want Prime Minister Nouredine Bedoui and Constitutional Council President Tayeb Belaiz - all known to be Bouteflika loyalists - to be involved in the political transition.

According to articles 102 and 104 of the constitution, which regulate the process of removing an ailing or deceased head of state, a new government cannot be appointed until a presidential election is held.

"If they keep up the momentum for the next couple of weeks, they will definitely have their message heard by the military establishment," said Al Jazeera's Hashem Ahelbarra.

"You cannot afford to have, in a country like Algeria, a disconnect between a political elite - which is more and more isolated - and a growing democracy movement which is saying the results that we are seeing so far fall short of our demands."

Human Rights Watch on Tuesday welcomed Bouteflika's resignation as a "first step in ending autocratic rule".

"As Algeria finds itself at a crossroads, reform will be



genuine only if it involves dismantling the repressive legal machinery that the authorities have used for years to repress dissenting voices," said Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Qatar files lawsuits against UAE, Saudi banks over currency intervention

Qatar has filed three lawsuits in London and New York against Saudi and Emirati banks, accusing them of using what it called overseas currency manipulation to sabotage its economy amid an ongoing Riyadh-led diplomatic and trade boycott against Doha.

The cases name Luxembourg-based Banque Havilland, the United Arab Emirates' First Abu Dhabi Bank (FAB) and Saudi Arabia's Samba Bank, Qatar's government communications office said in a statement on Monday.

The statement noted that Banque Havilland tried to weaken the Qatari riyal by submitting purported fraudulent quotes to foreign-exchange platforms in New York in a bid to disrupt indices and markets where significant Qatari assets and investors are located.

First Abu Dhabi Bank and Samba Bank also were engaged in "financial market manipulation," the statement pointed out.

The statement did not go into details about the extent of the alleged damage or the compensation being sought.

The Qatar Central Bank is investigating suspected attempts to devalue its currency at the height of a diplomatic standoff with its Persian Gulf neighbors that started nearly two years ago.

Qatar has been facing an economic and diplomatic blockade by Saudi Arabia and a number of its allies since June 2017.



Late last year, the governor of the Qatar Central Bank said the country's economy has shown resilience in the face of the Saudi-led blockade.

"We have surmounted this crisis, we've become even stronger than before," Sheikh Abdullah bin Saud Al Thani said at the Euro-money Qatar Conference 2018 in Doha on December 11, 2018.

He said Qatar's international reserves and foreign currency liquidity amounted to

46.5 billion dollars at the end of September, compared to 45.7 billion dollars at the end of May last year.

Al Thani further noted that the state budget marked a surplus of 7.1 billion riyals during the first half of the current year in comparison to a deficit of 35.4 billion riyals in 2017.

"These results were achieved despite the unjust siege imposed on us. Qatar is stronger today than ever before; and its economy is more resilient than it used to be before June

5, 2017," the governor pointed out.

Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt cut off diplomatic ties with Qatar on June 5, 2017, after officially accusing it of "sponsoring terrorism."

The administration of the Saudi-backed and former Yemeni president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, Libya, the Maldives, Djibouti, Senegal and the Comoros later joined the camp in ending diplomatic ties with Doha. Jordan downgraded its diplomatic relations as well.

Qatar's Foreign Ministry later announced that the decision to cut diplomatic ties was unjustified and based on false claims and assumptions.

On June 9, 2017, Qatar strongly dismissed allegations of supporting terrorism after the Saudi regime and its allies blacklisted dozens of individuals and entities purportedly associated with Doha.

Later that month, Saudi Arabia and its allies released a 13-point list of demands, including the closure of Al Jazeera television network and downgrade of relations with Iran, in return for the normalization of diplomatic relations with Doha.

The document also asked Qatar to sever all ties with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement. Qatar rejected the demands as "unreasonable."

(Source: Press TV)

Brexit extension needs strings attached: Germany, France

German and French officials insisted on Tuesday that any further delay to Britain's withdrawal must come with strings attached and assurances from Britain, as Prime Minister Theresa May prepared to plead in Berlin and Paris for more time.

Britain's partners in the 28-nation European Union say they want clarity from May about what she will do to break the Brexit logjam if another delay is granted. Officials are signaling that they're not keen to give Britain a blank check, though they also want to avoid a chaotic Brexit later this week.

Michael Roth, Germany's deputy foreign minister, said as he arrived at an EU meeting in Luxembourg that "we are in a very, very frustrating situation here." But he also said that a disorderly Brexit would be "the worst of all options on the table."

May's Conservative government and the main opposition Labour Party have been trying to find a compromise Brexit deal before EU leaders decide Wednesday whether to grant a second extension to the U.K.'s departure. If they refuse,

Britain faces a sudden departure on Friday, the deadline set a few weeks ago by the EU. The country was originally supposed to leave on March 29.

May has asked for a new delay until June 30. She is traveling to Berlin later Tuesday to meet German Chancellor Angela Merkel, then to Paris to meet French President Emmanuel Macron.

"We expect finally to have substantial steps in the right direction - so far absolutely nothing has changed," Roth said. "We are of course considering an extension, also a longer extension, but it must be linked to very strict criteria," he added, insisting that Britain can't speculate about not participating in the May 23-26 elections for the European Parliament.

Roth said that "within the European Union, there isn't an endless readiness to keep talking about delays so long as there is no substantial progress on the British side."

European Council President Donald Tusk has urged the 27 remaining EU nations to offer the U.K. a flexible extension of up to a year to make sure the nation doesn't leave

the bloc in a chaotic way that could undermine trade and hurt many EU nations.

France's European affairs minister, Amelie de Montchalin, said the 27 will need commitments from May that the British government will continue to play a constructive role in EU decision-making if a long extension is to be granted.

"We have the question what role Britain wants to play" if such an extension is granted, she said. In Britain, some have suggested that the government should seek to undermine EU policymaking as a way to get more leverage for the U.K. Roth also called for "loyal and constructive behavior" by the British government.

Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney said that officials in other EU countries "will want to encourage" the Conservative-Labour talks in London.

"But they'll also want to see a clear plan in terms of how an extension can deliver the result that we all want, which is a managed and sensible Brexit."

(Source: AP)

Putin: U.S. recognition of Israel's Golan sovereignty illegal

Russian President Vladimir Putin says U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to recognize Israeli "sovereignty" over the occupied Golan Heights violates international law.

At a joint press conference with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Moscow on Monday, Putin was asked about Russia's stance on the U.S. decision.

"Regarding recognition of the Golan Heights as a part of Israel, you already know Russian stance. It's been presented in a statement by Russia's Foreign Ministry. The move violates respective UN Security Council resolutions," President Putin said.

On March 25, Trump signed a proclamation recognizing the occupied part of Syria's Golan Heights as Israeli territory.

On Sunday, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov denounced Trump's decision, saying it "flagrantly violates the UN Charter."

Damascus called the decision a "blatant attack on the sovereignty and territorial integrity" of Syria.

The Arab League also said the unilateral decision "does not change the area's status." Other countries - including Iran, Turkey, Lebanon, Russia, and the European Union (EU) - also rejected the move.

In 1967, Israel waged a full-scale war against Arab territories, during which it occupied a large swathe of the Golan and annexed it in 1981, a move never recognized by the international community. Syria has repeatedly reaffirmed its sovereignty over the Golan Heights, saying the territory must be completely restored to its control.

Russia's Putin says U.S. decision on Golan Heights illegal
Putin: U.S. recognition of Israel's Golan sovereignty illegal
(Source: TASS)

Trump slams EU in aircraft dispute, pushes tariffs on \$11B of imports

U.S. President Donald Trump said Tuesday the United States would impose tariffs on \$11 billion of products from the European Union, a day after U.S. trade officials proposed a list of EU products to target as part of an ongoing aircraft dispute.

"The World Trade Organization finds that the European Union subsidies to Airbus has adversely impacted the United States, which will now put Tariffs on \$11 Billion of EU products! The EU has taken advantage of the U.S. on trade for many years. It will soon stop!" Trump wrote on Twitter.

The two sides have been locked in a yearslong global trade dispute over mutual claims of illegal aid to plane giants, Netherlands-based Airbus and U.S.-based Boeing, to gain advantage in the world jet business. The U.S. Trade Representative Monday announced the planned products targeted in retaliation for European aircraft subsidies, with a final list expected this summer.

Meanwhile, the EU has started preparing to retaliate over Boeing subsidies, an EU official said Tuesday.

The moves comes as the record subsidy dispute, which has been grinding its way through the WTO for almost 15 years, reaches a climax, with both sides in arbitration to decide the size of any countermeasures.

(Source: Daily Star)

Turkey's ruling AK Party to seek new Istanbul election

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ruling AK Party will demand a new vote in Istanbul after local elections held nine days ago, on grounds that irregularities in voting directly affected the outcome, a party vice chairman said.

"We will file our extraordinary appeal today. We will say that there have been events that directly impacted the outcome of the elections and that we demand the renewal of the elections in Istanbul," vice chairman Ali Ihsan Yavuz told a press conference in Ankara.

(Source: TRT)

Tripoli hospitals report 47 dead in recent fighting: UN

Health facilities near Tripoli have reported 47 people killed and 181 wounded in recent days as eastern forces seek to take Libya's capital from an internationally-recognized government, the United Nations' health body said on Tuesday.

The renewed conflict in a nation splintered since the 2011 toppling of Moammar Gadhafi also risks depleting medical supplies, the World Health Organization (WHO) warned.

The death toll - higher than that given by either side yet - appeared to be mainly fighters, although it also included some civilians including two doctors, WHO spokesperson Tarik Jasarevic told a Geneva news briefing. The eastern Libyan National Army (LNA) forces of Khalifa Haftar - a former general in Gadhafi's army - seized largely-desert southern Libya earlier this year before heading to the coastal capital this month, where they are ensconced on the south side. The United Nations, United States, European Union and G7 block have all appealed for a cease-fire and a return to U.N. peace plan, but Haftar has so far not heeded them.

A warplane took out Tripoli's only functioning airport on Monday, and the number of displaced - 3,400 at the last U.N. count - is mounting alongside the casualties.

The conflict threatens to disrupt oil supplies, boost migration to Europe and scupper hopes for an election to end rivalries between parallel administrations in east and west.

U.N. officials said they were concerned that civilians could be used as human shields or forcibly recruited to fight.

"The people of Libya have long been caught between numerous warring parties, with some of the most vulnerable suffering some of the gravest violations of their human rights," U.N. Human Rights High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet said.

"I appeal to all sides to come together to avoid further senseless violence and bloodshed."

(Source: Reuters)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	1832.29
IFX	2430.05

Sources: tse.ir, ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,324 rials
GBP	54,929 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$71.10/b
WTI	\$64.52/b
OPEC Basket	\$69.02/b
Gold	\$1,302.70/oz
Silver	\$15.32/oz
Platinum	\$897.20/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Iran appointed as deputy chair for IDB's 45th meeting

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran has been elected to be the first deputy chair of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB)'s next governors board meeting due to be held in Saudi Arabia in 2020.

The decision was made during IDB's 44th annual gathering which was held in Morocco during April 5-6, IRIB reported.

As reported, the 44th gathering was attended by senior officials, executives and ministers from the member states, along with presidents and representatives of international financial and economic organizations.

An Iranian delegation from the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance also attended the event.

The Islamic Development Bank group comprises 57 countries, including Saudi Arabia, Libya, Iran, Nigeria, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Egypt, Kuwait, Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and Kazakhstan.

China to review anti-dumping tariffs on U.S. distillers grains

China's Ministry of Commerce is set to review its anti-dumping tariffs on imports from the United States of distillers grains (DDGS), an animal feed ingredient, according to a document issued by the China Alcoholic Drinks Association.

The document - dated April 8 and issued to member companies and reviewed by Reuters - said the U.S. Grains Council had asked the commerce ministry to terminate their anti-dumping and anti-subsidy tariffs on American DDGS.

The commerce ministry did not respond to a fax seeking confirmation of the review. It is not clear what the outcome of the review will be.

DDGS are a byproduct of ethanol production and have become a key contributor to profits for makers of the biofuel. After the tariffs were implemented in 2016, imports by China fell sharply.

China bought 3 million tons of DDGS in 2016, mainly from the United States and worth \$684 million in total, according to Chinese customs data. The imports that year were down 55 percent from 2015.

The U.S. industry request comes amid trade talks between Beijing and Washington as both sides try to secure a pact to end a tit-for-tat tariff battle that has roiled global markets.

Beijing has pledged during these talks to increase its imports of American farm goods.

China set anti-dumping duties of between 42.2 percent and 53.7 percent on U.S. DDGS in January 2017, up from 33.8 percent in preliminary duties implemented in September 2016.

Anti-subsidy tariffs range from 11.2 percent to 12 percent.

The document seen by Reuters asked member companies to submit information to the China Alcoholic Drinks Association before April 10 regarding their sales and production of DDGS and income levels from recent years.

It also sought members' views on how removing the tariffs would impact the domestic industry and companies, as well as the local agriculture industry, farmer incomes and poverty alleviation programs. (Source: Reuters)

Eurozone economy stabilizing but remains 'fragile': Sentix

Investor sentiment in the Eurozone improved in April, but the situation remained "fragile", according to the latest data from Frankfurt-based research house Sentix.

The group said the economy of the single currency area had continued to stabilize, extending a slight rebound in March which had revealed a "ray of hope" for investors.

Sentix's overall economic index rose to minus 0.3 in April, up from minus 2.2 previously. This was its highest level since November 2018 and well ahead of the minus 2.1 score expected by analysts in a Reuters poll.

The uptick was driven by improving expectations among investors for the single currency area and came in spite of a bleak picture of the current state of the region. The sub index for views on the current situation fell for an eighth straight time to reach its lowest level since February 2015.

"This means that the economy is still losing momentum, but the momentum is declining," said Manfred Hübner, Sentix managing director. "It seems that the Eurozone could just as easily prevent a deeper downturn."

Hübner said improvement in Eurozone investor sentiment lay largely outside of the single currency area itself and in the hands of the U.S. and China as trade talks between the world's two largest economies draw to a close after a protracted dispute. (Source: Financial Times)

Trade offices to be opened in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran is going to open business offices in some of the strategic countries in the region including Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Lebanon, IRNA reported on Tuesday quoting the minister of industry, mine and trade.

Reza Rahmani announced the decision in a meeting with Iran's Ambassador to Oman Mohammadreza Nouri Shahrودي on Monday.

The official noted that 55 percent of Iran's non-oil exports are destined to 15 neighboring countries while just two percent of these countries' imports is

from Iran. "We plan to increase the exports to five percent," he said.

Rahmani described Oman as a gateway for entering Arab markets, saying that his ministry plans to boost exports, promote home-made products and operationalize mines.

"Considering Oman's open trade with 27 countries, it is a gateway to a 500-million population market and Iran should seize the opportunity by boosting trade ties with the country," the minister said.

According to the head of Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration



Iran's Ambassador to Oman Mohammadreza Nouri Shahrودي (L) met Iranian Minister of Industry, Mining and Trade Reza Rahmani on Monday

(IRICA), the country's non-oil trade balance was \$1.7 billion positive in the last Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20). The value of non-oil exports stood at \$44.3 billion in the mentioned time span while \$42.6 billion worth of commodities were shipped into the country.

Focusing on trade with the neighboring countries and the trade partners in the

region has become one of the Iranian government's top priorities for defying the U.S. sanctions.

Earlier in January, the head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) said Iran will not rely on trade with Europe for developing foreign trade and it will rather count on the capacities of its neighboring countries.

Hemmati: U.S. move on IRGC shows failure of anti-Iran economic measures

ECONOMY TEHRAN — "The CBI along with the government will powerfully implement its plans, including access to sustainable, safe and sanction-proof foreign currency, and such measures will not leave any durable impacts on the markets," Hemmati said.

The United States on Monday designated the IRGC as a foreign terrorist organization, marking the first time Washington has formally labeled another country's military a "terrorist group".

Responding to Washington's move, Iran immediately declared the U.S. as 'state sponsor of terrorism' and American forces in the region 'terrorist groups'.

Iran's top security body, the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), in a statement issued on Monday evening declared the United States a 'terrorist government', and blacklisted the 'CENTCOM and all its affiliates a terrorist group'.

The SNSC - that is headed by President Hassan Rouhani - condemned Washington's



move, calling it 'an illegal and dangerous action' that poses a 'major threat to regional and international peace and security and grossly violates the rules of international law'.

The statement further condemned the U.S. decision as 'unlawful and unreasonable action' prompted by the Islamic Republic's regional influence and success in fighting against terrorists, and blamed CENTCOM for harming Iran's national security as well as ruining the lives of 'innocent Iranian and non-Iranian individuals' to promote the U.S. 'aggressive policies' in West Asia (the Middle-East).

(Source: Fars News Agency)

IFX touches a new record high in past Iranian year

ECONOMY TEHRAN — IFX, the main index of Iran's over-the-counter (OTC) market, known also as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB), touched a new record high in the past Iranian calendar year 1397 (ended on March 20, 2019).

As reported by the Public Relations Department of IFB, IFX gained more than 100% in the past year to stand at 2,258 points on March 19, 2019.

IFB's main index had started the previous year at 1,161 points.

The previous winter came to an end with an increase of 75% in IFB market capitalization reaching 2.572 trillion rials (about \$61.2 million).

Number and worth of trades increased 89 percent and 71 percent, respectively, in the past year compared to its preceding year.

Monthly average volume of trades accounted for 14,182 million sheets worth 84.76 billion rials (about \$2 million) and



value of trades at the First and Second markets amounted to 287.622 billion rials (about \$6.8 million) and worth of trades for Base Market accounted for 170.418 billion rials (about \$4.05 million). This year total volume of trades at the First, Second and Base markets (i.e. IFB stock market) reached 165,586 million shares all witnessed an increase of 75 percent-191 percent.

Notably, this year SME market hosted the trading of 64 million shares worth 457 billion rials (about \$10.8 million) indicating an increase of 95 percent and 153 percent, in terms of number and value, respectively.

Emerging-market currencies are flashing a warning

The year has been great so far for risk assets from stocks to credit, and emerging-market assets have joined in the party. Except, recently, for their currencies.

Among the observations in a widening debate on the missing gains: some fund managers highlight their greater sensitivity to the risks of a global slowdown. The fact that these exchange rates have largely gone sideways since the end of January suggests continuing worries even as global equities build on their first-quarter surge.

Conversely, any pick-up in developing-nation exchange rates could be a good sign that the global appetite for risk is truly back in bullish mode.

"I see two challenges for EM currencies," said Pierre-Yves Bateau, head of emerging-market debt at JPMorgan Asset Management in London. "First, the U.S. dollar is still rather strong. Secondly, the market needs to see more growth bottoming out to buy the 2018 growth laggards -- like emerging markets."

Following are a variety of perspectives on the missing rally in developing-nation currencies:

Growth problem

While bonds and stocks have been able to take heart from central banks' shift away from policy normalization, for the currency market, it's going to take actual evidence of an acceleration in growth before a reaction occurs. That's the thinking of Bryan Carter, head of emerging-market fixed income at BNP Paribas Asset Management in London.

The very reason for the Fed's about-face after all was the sluggish economic data and growing risk of a "growth shock," Carter said. "We don't see FX outperforming until the data in Europe and emerging markets convincingly demonstrate an upturn, and investors reset their forward growth expectations higher."

Dirk Willer, head of emerging-market fixed income strategy at Citigroup Global Markets in New York, puts particular blame on the euro region, saying that a weak euro has held back a rally in a number of other currencies against the dollar. That in turn has stemmed in part from the slowdown in China, on which the region has increasingly relied. With better China purchasing manager indexes, "we may be able to look forward to a turn in euro zone data as well. The pessimism surrounding the euro may start to fade, removing a headwind for EM FX," he said.

Enough already

After a decade of easy money from the rich world's central banks, developed-nation fund managers might have largely had their fill of emerging market currencies. It's a phenomenon that Institute of International Finance analysts including chief economist Robin Brooks call "EM positioning overhang." That's why the Fed's dovish pivot this year -- which has helped stoke the rally in everything from stocks to corporate bonds -- isn't having such a big impact on some exchange rates, they argue. (Source: Bloomberg)



IN THE NAME OF GOD
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN BROADCASTING

INTERNATIONAL TENDER NO. 98-01/100

Second Announcement

Tender Holder:
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN BROADCASTING (IRIB)

Subject of Two-Stage Tender:
Purchasing of H.265/HEVC Encoder according to the tender documents

Deadline of Receiving Documents:
As of publishing second announcement of advertisement latest by the business hour dated on **Monday April 15, 2019.**

Place of Receiving Documents:
Secretariat of Tenders' Commission, Technical Purchasing (KALA) Dept., Media Technology and Development Deputy Office, Bldg. No. 2, IRIB, Jam-e Jam St., Vali-e Asr Ave., Tehran

Type and Amount of Guarantee for Participating in Tender:
The amount of **USD 7,500** which should be in the form of extendable bank guarantee

Time and Place of Delivering Priced Bid:
The sealed A, B & C packages/envelopes should be submitted within one main envelope marked with tender number no later than **15 p.m. on Saturday May 18, 2019** and submitted to the Secretariat of Commission of Tenders.

Time and Place of Opening Envelopes
The date of opening envelopes A&B is at **8:30 a.m. on Monday May 20, 2019** in the office of Vice President of IRIB Planning and Financial Resources and opening of envelope C will be after technical evaluation.
It should be noted that bidders should hold license from the authorized bodies.
For more information, please contact the following phone numbers: **0098-21-22166313**
It is obvious that cost of publishing two advertisements shall be borne by the winner of tender.

Public Relations Dept. of IRIB

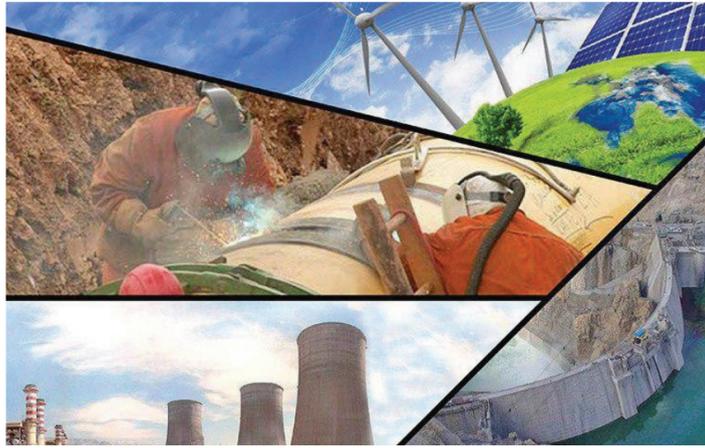
Annual investment in water, electricity industries tops \$3.8b

E N E R G Y TEHRAN – Iranian energy minister said the investment in the country's power and water sectors reached over 162.6 trillion rials (over \$3.87 billion) in the last Iranian calendar year of 1397 (ended on March 21).

According to Reza Ardakanian, more than 1,115 villages were connected to the country's pipeline water network and nine desalination plants were also inaugurated which would be able to supply 913,000 people with drinkable water.

The minister noted that with new dams going operational last year, 1.1 billion cubic meters of water has been stored and 215 megawatts of power generation capacity is added to the total capacity of the country's power plants.

"Last year 126 MW of capacity was



also added to the country's solar power plants." He added.

In January 2018, the energy ministry's news portal reported that some 5301 water and electricity projects were going to be inaugurated on the occasion of Ten-Day Dawn (February 1-10, marking the victory anniversary of the Islamic Revolution).

As reported by IRIB, some 5119 electricity transmission and distribution projects worth 27.23 trillion rials (near \$602.5 million), over 183 megawatts capacity of renewable projects, seven power plants projects worth \$2.09 billion, 100 water projects worth 101.419 trillion rials (about \$2.24 billion) and 32 water resources management projects worth 3.278 trillion rials (\$72.5 million) were among the projects which were due to be implemented or inaugurated.

Asian LNG glut stronger than China's robust demand growth



China is set to import massive amounts of LNG in 2019 as part of its determined push to switch away from coal and toward the lower emissions natural gas, but this robust demand is unlikely to curb the current inventory glut in Asia, according to Reuters, citing Feridun Fesharaki, chairman of energy consultancy FGE.

While China's LNG demand growth is set to increase by 14 percent in 2019 over 2018 levels—between 30 billion and 40 billion cubic meters—it's lower than the 2018 demand growth of 18 percent, according to data from the National Development Reform Commission. This demand growth is also likely to be lower than supply, which has increased dramatically over the last year as Australia, United States, and Russia increase production.

New production for LNG this year is expected to surpass LNG demand by 2 percent, according to Reuters calculations. This lopsided equation is unlikely to improve

LNG prices which have plummeted about 60 percent in the last six months alone.

On the demand side of the equation, these low LNG prices are still above pipeline gas prices, and as the new Russia pipeline comes onstream to carry gas to China, demand for LNG may falter. CNPC's Ling told Reuters last week, although this is still many months away from completion.

The Russia to China pipeline, dubbed the Power of Siberia, is expected to come online in December 2019.

China continues its effort to switch away from coal, with an eye on lowering coal's percentage of its energy mix to 35 percent in 2040 to 60 percent in 2017, according to BP estimates as published in the BP Energy Outlook 2019. China's domestic natural gas production has so far been unable to ramp up as quickly as they would like, leaving imports to fill the gaps on the road to reduced coal consumption.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Goldman increases 2019 oil price forecasts amid supply cuts, sanctions



Goldman Sachs has raised its forecast for crude oil prices this year, with supply hit by the "shock and awe" implementation of OPEC-led output cuts and by U.S. sanctions on Iran and Venezuela.

The investment bank said in a note dated April 8 that it now expects benchmark Brent crude prices to average \$66 per barrel in 2019, compared with its previous estimate of \$62.50.

It sees U.S. crude oil averaging \$59.50 per barrel, up from its last forecast of \$55.50.

Oil prices hit their highest in five months on Tuesday, with Brent marking \$71.34 per barrel and U.S. crude reaching \$64.77 per barrel.

Crude markets have tightened this year as the United States imposed sanctions on oil exporters Iran and Venezuela, while the producer club of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) has been withholding supply to prop up prices. Goldman added that it expected the Brent

forward curve to shift further into backwardation, a situation where contracts for future delivery are cheaper than spot supplies. Backwardation indicates a tighter market.

That comes as Goldman expects the global oil market to remain in a supply-deficit of about 0.5 million barrels per day in the second quarter.

The bank now sees Brent prices at \$72.50 per barrel in the second quarter, compared with \$65 previously. But it maintained its 2020 Brent oil price forecast at \$60 per barrel.

"While the macro risk-on environment and the threat of disruptions may drive spot prices even higher, we still expect that prices will decline gradually from this summer as shale and OPEC production increases," said Goldman.

How OPEC manages its exit from the current supply cuts will be a key influence on oil prices in coming months and years, Goldman added.

(Source: Reuters)

Russia signals OPEC and allies could raise oil output from June

One of the key Russian officials to foster a supply pact with OPEC, Kirill Dmitriev, signaled on Monday that Russia wanted to raise oil output when it meets with OPEC in June because of improving market conditions and falling stockpiles.

Dmitriev, head of Russian sovereign wealth fund RDIF, was the first Russian official to predict a deal with OPEC in 2016 and since then has become a key defender of the pact despite pressure from domestic oil firms to drop the agreement.

Dmitriev, an envoy for Moscow in the Middle East in general and Saudi Arabia in particular, had in recent months said it was still too early to terminate output cuts, echoing the position of OPEC's de facto leader, Saudi Arabia.

But in an apparent change of position, Dmitriev said on Monday supply cuts may

not be required after June.

"It is quite possible that given the improving market situation and falling stocks, (OPEC and its allies) could decide in June this year to abandon supply cuts and subsequently increase output," Dmitriev told a conference in Moscow.

"This decision will not mean the end of the deal, but a confirmation that participants continue their coordinating efforts when it is important not only to cut but to increase output depending on market conditions," he told the conference.

Speaking to reporters on Monday evening, Dmitriev added that it could be appropriate for Russia to increase output by 228,000 barrels per day, by which it had previously cut production, "and maybe even further".

"It is possible that as part of the June (meeting) a decision may be taken, subject

to market conditions at that time, that it is necessary to remove these reductions," he said.

Dmitriev and energy minister Alexander Novak have come under increased pressure over the past year from firms such as Rosneft, whose boss Igor Sechin, a close ally of President Vladimir Putin, has said Russia should abandon output cuts.

Sechin is arguing that Russia is losing market share to the United States, which is not participating in production cuts and has hence been boosting output to record levels of some 12 million barrels per day.

Russia and Saudi Arabia produce around 11 million and 10 million barrels respectively, but could raise output fairly quickly if needed.

In January, Dmitriev said Russia should not unleash an oil price war against the United States but rather stick with output

cuts even at the cost of losing market share in the medium term.

Saudi Energy Khalid al-Falih has also said it was important to extend oil cuts until the end of the year.

But on Monday he said the market was moving toward balance and added that the picture would become clearer in May.

Global oil markets have tightened despite booming U.S. production after Washington imposed new sanctions on Iran and Venezuela, reducing their output and exports and effectively grabbing their market share.

OPEC and its allies had to cancel their meeting in April and will now convene on June 25-26 as officials said they needed to see first what new sanctions Washington will impose on Iran in early May.

(Source: Reuters)

Oil hits five-month high above \$71 on Libyan supply threat

Oil hit a five-month high above \$71 a barrel on Tuesday, supported by concern that violence in Libya could further tighten supply already squeezed by OPEC cuts and U.S. sanctions on Iran and Venezuela.

Supply curbs led by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries have underpinned a more than 30 percent rally this year for Brent crude, despite downward pressure from fears of an economic slowdown and weaker demand.

Brent, the global benchmark, rose to \$71.34 a barrel, the highest since November, and by 0825 GMT was up 14 cents at \$71.24.

U.S. crude also hit a November 2018 high of \$64.77 and was later up 22 cents at \$64.62.

"Libya's oil production and exports have not been jeopardized but the rise in tension is enough to send oil prices higher," Tamas Varga of oil broker PVM said.

OPEC member Libya pumps around 1.1 million barrels per day (bpd), just over 1 percent of global oil output. Supply has been volatile since the 2011 uprising against Muammar Gaddafi.



"Concerns over the potential squeezing of supply in Libya following the escalation of violence there are adding fresh impetus," analysts at JBC Energy wrote.

On Monday, a warplane attacked Tripoli's only functioning airport as eastern forces advancing on

the Libyan capital disregarded international appeals for a truce.

Yet despite generally bullish oil markets, concerns that an economic slowdown this year will hit fuel consumption have been preventing crude prices from rising even higher, traders said.

Recent increases in U.S. crude inventories have also put a lid on price gains. U.S. crude stocks are forecast to have risen by 2.5 million barrels last week, the third straight weekly addition.

The American Petroleum Institute, an industry group, issues its supply report at 2030 GMT, ahead of Wednesday's official figures.

Looking ahead, a further rally in prices or downward trend in inventories could prompt OPEC and its partners to reconsider their production-cutting pact when they next meet in June.

Russia, a reluctant participant in the supply cuts, signaled on Monday it wanted to raise output when it meets with OPEC because of falling stockpiles.

(Source: Reuters)

Oil markets may have to brace for 'greater disruption,' says strategist

As oil prices climbed to multi-month highs on Tuesday, one strategist warned of the "potential for greater disruption" ahead for crude markets.

"It's almost like 2011, when (former Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi) was toppled. If ... Libya comes into play, that's only going to add more tightness to the market," John Driscoll, chief strategist at JTD Energy Services, told CNBC's "Squawk Box" on Tuesday.

Driscoll's comments came amid a recent resurgence in violence in Libya, a key oil producer in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

Rebel forces loyal to rebel leader General Khalifa Hifter, who effectively controls the country's breakaway east, launched a surprise attack against the home of Libya's UN-recognized government last week. The move risks plunging the country back into civil war.

Reports also surfaced overnight that the airport in Libya's capital, Tripoli, had been hit by air strikes.

In addition to concerns over the ongoing conflict in Libya, Driscoll cited Venezuela and Iran as other potential sources of risks for the oil markets.

For Venezuela, he said: "Things are terrible there, oil output is plummeting, then you've got this wave of electrical outages that have halved their exports."

In January, the U.S. slapped sanctions on Venezuela's state-owned oil company PDVSA in an attempt to oust President Nicolas Maduro as he jostles for power with opposition leader Juan Guaido.

Meanwhile, Washington continues to ratchet up the pressure on Tehran, with U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday labeling Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps a terrorist organization — the first time America has formally labeled another country's military a terrorist group.

Tensions between the two countries have sizzled since the U.S. withdrew from a 2015 nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, with Iran. The administration also reimposed sanctions on Tehran's crude exports, dealing a blow to the Iranian economy.

Commenting on recent statements made by individuals such as U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on the "complete obliteration of Iranian exports," Driscoll said that goal was "unrealistic" and "possibly even delusional."

"As oil prices rise, it's going to be harder to keep that oil off the market," he said. "It will find an outlet."

Driscoll said that in the "black swan event" that Tehran loses patience with Washington and attempts to close the Strait of Hormuz — a critical sea passage for crude oil shipments, it would result in the loss of a "critical choke point where 30 percent of the world's oil and gas passes."

Oil prices scaled to new 2019 highs on Monday, with the international benchmark Brent crude futures contract adding 1.1 percent to settle at \$71.10 per barrel. U.S. crude futures also rose 2.1 percent to settle at \$64.40 per barrel.

In Asian morning trade on Tuesday, prices continued their upward march, with Brent rising fractionally to \$71.16 and U.S. crude futures 0.23 percent to \$64.55 per barrel.

"When I was on the show a month ago, I said we are going to breach \$70 on Brent but it will be short-lived," Driscoll said. "Well, let me amend that. I think this one has got a bit more legs," he said. "Libya has come back into play, Iran, Venezuela, it's all getting stronger."

(Source: CNBC)

Cheap renewables shave \$10 trillion off estimate to curb warming

The cost of reaching global climate goals is falling rapidly as wind and solar prices plummet and policy makers push electrification as the main tool to cut pollution, the International Renewable Energy Agency said.

The industry group known as Irena revised down its estimates for global investments needed by 2050 in clean energy to meet targets under the Paris Agreement on climate change. The Abu Dhabi-based group now says \$115 trillion is needed, down from \$125 trillion a year ago, reflecting lower costs to build wind and solar farms.

"While it's true that Irena envisages higher clean investment needs, it's astonishing how fast the cost of green power is falling," the agency's spokeswoman, Nicole Bockstaller, said by phone before the report was published.

The agency cut its estimate for the additional costs needed to meet Paris Accord goals by 40 percent in the last year, according to the report. Some 174 states and the European Union signed up to the Paris deal in 2015 pledging to keep global warming from rising above 2 degrees Celsius since the industrial revolution by 2050.

The group is advocating greater use of electricity to cut the fossil fuel emissions that are damaging the atmosphere. That would require putting 1 billion new electric cars on the road, increasing the use of power to provide heat and to make industrial gases.

Electricity's share of total energy consumption may grow from 20 percent share now to almost 50 percent in 2050, the report said.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Saudi Arabia: no change to policy of selling oil in dollars

Saudi Arabia said it has no plans to change its longstanding policy of trading oil in U.S. dollars.

The denial on Monday came after reports that the kingdom is threatening to sell its oil in currencies other than the dollar if the U.S. Congress passes legislation exposing OPEC to American antitrust laws.

These reports "are inaccurate and do not reflect Saudi Arabia's position on this matter," the energy ministry said in a statement, adding that the kingdom's decades-long policy of selling oil in dollars "has served well the objectives of its financial and monetary policies."

Saudi Arabia and the U.S. are close allies, but the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi last year has strained the relations between the two countries as many American lawmakers pushed for measures against the kingdom in recent months.

However, the scrutiny over Saudi Arabia's human rights record did not appear to hurt the appetite of investors as the kingdom's state oil company Saudi Aramco prepares to issue its debut international bond.

(Source: Financial Times)

Why Trump's approval ratings barely budge

By Frank Donatelli

The two most discussed political stories of 2019 are, first, the longest federal government shutdown ever and second, the release of the "Top Line" findings of the long-awaited Mueller report. The first saw strong daily criticism of the Trump Administration from all quarters, over the president's promise to "own" the shutdown. The second provided a substantial morale boost to the president and his supporters for the finding of "no collusion" from Special Counsel Robert Mueller.



But there was one common denominator to both stories: The president's approval rating barely budged.

According to the political site "Real Clear Politics" which averages all of the publically available presidential polls, the president's approval rating as of early April stands at 43.7 percent with 52.8 disapproval.

All polls included were completed after Attorney General William Barr released his summary letter. President Trump and his allies have claimed vindication in speeches and media appearances across the country.

Yet for all polls averaged by RCP for the first two weeks of March, ten days prior to Barr's announcement, presidential approval stood at 42.8 percent, less than a 1 percent change even after the president's best media week in memory. Additional surveys through April 3 show the president holding steady at slightly over 42 percent.

The shutdown of the federal government lasted over a month, from December 22, 2018 until January 25 of this year. As noted, the president took incoming fire from all quarters as large majorities of Americans opposed the shutdown.

Yet the average of 28 surveys taken during that time revealed presidential approval of 41.6 percent.

■ The worst presidential news cycle

So the spread between the worst presidential news cycle and the very best ten days after the Barr announcement was 2.1 percent. Maybe the public isn't paying attention.

That would be troubling and unlikely, given the undeniable importance to the country of both stories. But maybe there's something else involved. Maybe most Americans have already made up their minds about the president.

The election outcome is unresolved, but these poll results offer important clues as to how each party will conduct their campaign efforts in the coming 20 months.

For the Republicans, their candidate is seeking reelection and reelections are always first about the incumbent. If the public likes the body of work, they will win.

Most incumbents do win reelection, as have recent presidents Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, George Bush, and Barack Obama. Losing incumbents were not selling what the public wanted. Jimmy Carter was a victim of oil embargos and hostages. George H. W. Bush was running at the end of a 12-year Republican cycle and voters were looking for change.

Trump's approval numbers are not good. However, as the surveys indicate, he has a rock-solid base that will stick with him regardless of events and circumstances, and he begins the race with the largest group of supporters of anyone.

He's already indicated his intent to double down on tried and true issues to boost support from groups that strongly favor him, such as older white voters, gun owners, evangelicals, and Republicans. His campaign will seek to expand the electorate vertically, not horizontally.

Look for a continued heavy emphasis on the threats from mass immigration and unbridled free trade. He is also counting on a strong economy and his conservative judicial selections as "promises fulfilled." The campaign's policy wonks will be dwarfed in number by micro targeters, bloggers, and social influencers.

Democrats face a strategic choice: Will they go for an expanded electorate horizontally, by appealing to moderate centrist voters or will they go vertically, and double down on the progressive activists that dominate the leadership of the party? All candidates will be making their "electability" case, but will have different tactical objectives and target voter groups depending on their strategic outlook.

Former VP Joe Biden leads early national surveys of Democrats and defeats the president in key battleground states. However, this may be the product of higher voter ID. His ideological opposite, Bernie Sanders, also does well in these states, though not as well as Biden. In a good development for Democrats, even the lesser-known candidates run well against the president.

Democrats have a bigger voter pool (50 percent plus of voters who disapprove of the president's job performance) but bringing all such voters under one umbrella will be a challenge.

No candidate is perfect and the reelect team will find weaknesses in whichever Democrat emerges.

A race against a nameless Democrat will not be the same as one against a real candidate with strengths and weaknesses.

■ Scars from primary campaign

Democrats need only look to the scars from the primary campaign in 2016 between Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders that never fully healed. That opening allowed Trump to win a large number of voters who disapproved of him but disliked Clinton even more.

It says here that high propensity voting centrists should be easier to win than lower intensity progressives.

The Democratic candidates' early focus on extra constitutional proposals such as court packing (rejected even by Franklin Roosevelt Democrats) and the abolition of the electoral college, and out of the policy mainstream measures like reparations and abolishing private health insurance, will make it more difficult for Democrats to ultimately win moderate voters looking for a change of direction, but not a constitutional rewrite.

Past successful national Democrats (Carter, Clinton, Obama) have combined soaring rhetoric for reconciliation and a better future with enough specific policy proposals aimed squarely at making life better for the crucial middle class who feel squeezed by economic circumstance.

Such voters might also be looking for a candidate that offers more cooperation rather than confrontation.

A majority of Americans will be open to looking at the out party's candidate and promises. Democrats will argue for a change in direction. Republicans will contend the Democrats' change is too radical. Voters will be hearing it all — for the next twenty months.

(Source: Newsweek)

How far can Haftar get with his Tripoli offensive?

Recent territorial gains and the upheaval in Algeria allowed Khalifa Haftar to advance on western Libya

By Youssef Cherif

On April 4, Libyan strongman Khalifa Haftar announced in a voice recording circulated online that he was launching a military campaign to take over the capital, Tripoli. His media office then released a video purporting to show tens of armored vehicles bearing the emblems of Haftar's "Libyan National Army" (LNA) heading towards the Libyan capital. Tripoli would fall in 48 hours, his forces declared.

The Tripoli-based and UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) seemed taken by surprise. It scrambled to mobilize various militias backing it to defend the capital and eventually launched air attacks against Haftar's forces.

Despite the severity of the situation and the risk of another bloody escalation in the years-long Libyan conflict, the response of the international community was rather weak.

The United Kingdom called an emergency Security Council meeting on Friday night, which resulted in a statement calling on Haftar to "halt all military advances", after Russia and France insisted on minimal pressure on the LNA. Meanwhile, the U.S. pulled out some of its troops stationed in Libya.

As the GNA announced a "counteroffensive" on Sunday, the situation in the country remains tense. With conflicting reports coming from both sides, and what appears to be a massive battle of misinformation raging on, it is very difficult to judge what is really going on the ground.

At this point, what is clear is that Haftar has received enough international backing to press on with his operation and its outcome will be determined by what happens in the coming weeks.

■ Why did Haftar attack now?

An LNA operation to take over Tripoli was always just a question of time. After securing full control over Benghazi in eastern Libya in 2017, over the past year, Haftar has steadily pressed on to expand the territories under his control, while also engaging in talks with the GNA sponsored by various foreign actors.

In January, his forces launched an operation to take over major oilfields in the south and by the end of the month were able to enter Sabha, the largest city in southern Libya.

Having established control, at least nominally, over two-thirds of Libya, Haftar turned his gaze on Tripolitania (western Libya) and the capital Tripoli.

With a UN-led national conference scheduled for mid-April, Haftar hastened to maximise his territorial gains and hence



Despite the severity of the situation and the risk of another bloody escalation in the years-long Libyan conflict, the response of the international community was rather weak.

his leverage over his opponents at the GNA. At the same time, the ongoing civil unrest in Algeria gave him a rare window of opportunity to launch a military operation.

Worried about the Libyan conflict spilling over into its territory, the Algerian leadership has been pressing for a political solution in Libya and has hosted several meetings between Libyan actors.

For Algiers, the GNA and the Islamist forces in Libya have to be included in any conflict settlement to ensure the stability of the country.

It has perceived Haftar's zero-sum games as dangerous and potentially destabilising. Moreover, in its status of North Africa's hegemon, Algiers sees his Arab allies - Egypt, the UAE and Saudi Arabia - as geopolitical foes.

Given Algeria's political and military clout in the region, Haftar had avoided moving close to Algerian borders and kept open communication channels with the Algerian leadership until a few months ago.

The purge that Algeria's security and military apparatus went through in mid-2018 and the uprising which erupted in February 2019

against President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's rule gave Haftar a unique opportunity to launch his expansionist military campaign, without much backlash from Algiers.

Haftar probably also received the green light from his foreign backers. It is no secret that Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and increasingly Russia and France, have been providing the LNA with military and political support.

In late March, Haftar travelled to Riyadh to meet Saudi King Salman, which roughly coincided with a visit Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed paid to Egypt, where he met Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. It is quite unlikely that Haftar's closest allies were not informed about the planned operation.

The timid response by the international community to his offensive on Tripoli - which was launched as UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was visiting the Libyan capital - shows that many countries consider Haftar as the solution for Libya, not just the UAE, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Haftar is also hoping to capitalize on the increasing discontent among the civilian

population in western Libya.

The situation inside Tripoli - as in other Libyan cities - has been steadily deteriorating. Crime, insecurity and corruption have been on the rise, while living conditions have markedly worsened as the local economy has struggled and the provision of social and health services has nearly collapsed.

The capital is divided between different militias, and the GNA is itself weak and corrupt.

As nostalgia for the Gaddafi era has crept in, Haftar has tried to project himself as a military strongman who could unite the country and bring back stability and order. This self-styled image as Libya's savior has been promoted by a massive propaganda machine largely backed by the UAE.

■ What happens next?

The situation on the ground is changing rapidly and is rather unpredictable, but at this point, there are at least three possible scenarios for what happens next in Libya.

First, the Tripoli offensive can become a protracted conflict similar to the one that Benghazi witnessed, which lasted three years. This would take a heavy toll on the civilian population and infrastructure, and would spoil Haftar's hopes to enter the capital as a popular and much-awaited savior.

Second, a quick victory is also not out of the question and it would very much depend on whether Haftar is able to win over enough militias that would join his forces and help him take control of Tripoli without a fierce fight. He has been conducting negotiations with a number of militia leaders already - a strategy that had helped him make quick territorial gains in his campaign in southern Libya.

Striking a deal with armed groups, however, would mean that he will have to guarantee their military and economic interests. This means that the lawlessness which is currently plaguing Libya's west would persist. And if Haftar decides to crack down on militias in the future - as he has promised - he might face a widespread rebellion.

Third, a retreat or a consolidation of the new status quo could also take place, where the LNA forces cut their offensive short but retain strategic positions in order to keep the pressure on Tripoli. This may be followed by another round of negotiations, with or without the UN, in which Haftar would have the upper hand.

Whatever scenario unrolls in the following weeks, one thing is for sure: Libya will continue to be an epicenter of the crisis in North Africa and a major source of concern beyond its borders.

(Source: aljazeera.com)

Afghanistan is paying a steep price for its national security advisor's behavior

By Michael O'Hanlon

During a visit last month to Washington, the Afghan government's national security advisor, and former ambassador to the United States, threw a fit. During an official appearance at the U.S. Institute of Peace, and in private conversations during the same week, the thirty-six-year-old Hamdullah Mohib repeatedly excoriated the United States — and in particular, its special envoy for Afghanistan peace talks, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad.

His core charge was that Washington was going over the head of the Afghan government, led by President Ashraf Ghani, to negotiate a peace deal directly with the Taliban.

As Mohib said about Khalilzad, "he is ostracizing and alienating a very trusted ally and partner." Worse, Mohib accused Khalilzad, himself Afghan-born, of wanting to become viceroy of the country in a way that would shunt aside Ghani's constitutionally-elected government.

Few people doubt that Mohib was acting on Ghani's orders in making these assertions. The mild and erudite Mohib — born in Afghanistan, educated in London, married to an American, successful in his tenure as ambassador in Washington — is no unreconstructed Afghan warlord. I have known him for years and never so much as heard him raise his voice.

But for his sins, Mohib is now persona non grata with the Trump administration. He was asked to leave the country promptly after his March outbursts. Under orders from Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, American officials are now instructed not to deal with him directly — or even to attend meetings at which he might be physically present.

Pompeo probably understands very well that Mohib was speaking not for himself but for Ghani. However, in Pompeo's eyes that may be all the more reason to punish him. Doing so sends a message to Ghani about not crossing the Trump administration, especially in public.

■ Ghani under siege

At one level, Pompeo's decision is understandable. Yes, Ghani is under siege, physically and politically, from all directions, and can be forgiven for some anxiety. But public outbursts by a top official in the Afghan government against the country's indispensable ally cannot be smart. The Taliban claims that Ghani, like former President Hamid



Polls in Afghanistan consistently repudiate this ridiculous Taliban argument—and the Taliban itself remains widely disliked, with favorability ratings typically in the 10 to 20 percent range.

Karzai before him, lead stooge governments that are simple puppets of the United States.

Polls in Afghanistan consistently repudiate this ridiculous Taliban argument—and the Taliban itself remains widely disliked, with favorability ratings typically in the 10 to 20 percent range. But Khalilzad, Pompeo and Trump seem, in Ghani's eyes, to reinforce the narrative by repeatedly negotiating only with the extremist movement, leaving Kabul high and dry.

President Ghani needs to relax a bit. While his stress level is understandable, it is counterproductive. First, Khalilzad and other Trump administration officials have repeatedly said that until there is a complete deal with the Taliban that includes a ceasefire and a dialogue involving the Afghan government, there is no deal on anything.

Preliminary progress to date on two other matters — the

Taliban promising not to host Al Qaeda and other extremist movements on Afghan soil again, Washington promising to reduce NATO troops over time — cannot translate into a deal absent major headway on these other matters.

■ Commitment to defeat ISIS

And all things considered, Trump's strong commitment to defeat ISIS and Al Qaeda around the world augurs well for at least some U.S. residual presence in Afghanistan for a long time to come.

That said, Washington now needs to forgive Mohib and rehabilitate his standing in Afghan dealings with the United States. It is not about Pompeo and Trump proving they can be nice guys or genteel diplomats. The reasons are much blunter and simpler.

First, it is a general corollary of diplomacy that, in dealings with an enemy, allies cannot be divided — or even give the impression of being divided, lest the enemy sense an opportunity to divide and conquer. That is why, for example, President Moon Jae-in of South Korea wisely works so hard to stay close to Trump in U.S.-South Korea dealings with North Korea.

It is why the Trump administration is rightly working with other Latin American states to pressure the Maduro government in Venezuela, rather than to go it alone, and why U.S. presidents dating back decades have worked closely with allies and Congress to pressure Iran with sanctions with a united front. Second, in regard to Afghanistan in particular, we need to avoid giving the Taliban the wrong idea. The movement's leadership probably thinks that it is winning.

As the old adage goes, while Americans have the watches, the Taliban has the time. That may be an incorrect assessment, as noted above, but there are enough battlefield trends and enough Trump administration inconsistencies to lend credence to a Taliban narrative that Trump really wants to pull out of Afghanistan, with or without a deal.

If Taliban leaders feel that a cold war is emerging between Ghani's government and Trump's, then their smart play is to let it fester and to wait. We should not give sustenance to such a calculation.

Mohib was wrong and it was necessary for the Trump administration to say so. The point has been made. Now let's rehabilitate him and move on.

(Source: nationalinterest.org)

Iran well respond by naming CENTCOM as terrorist organization: Askari

1 → How they justify it in public is different. They argue that the IRGC is aligned with Hezbollah which they declare a terrorist entity say that the IRGC has killed American soldiers in Iraq. Yet when the U.S. or its allies, Israel and Saudi Arabia, kill innocent people, they call it self-defense.

As an aside, I should point out that Trump was okay with the IRGC when he was doing business with IRGC's associates, as reported in Vanity Fair. Now, managed by the triumvirate of Kushner, Netanyahu and MBS, Trump is taking impetuous steps, which could endanger the Middle East and the world.

■ Do you consider Hezbollah a terrorist organization?

A: Absolutely not. They are a legitimate part of the Lebanese government. They have defended Lebanon against Israel. They provide social services for the poor and needy. Yes, they have defended Assad in Syria. I don't personally like the Assad regime but they were invited into Syria by its legitimate government. Others engage in covert operations and kill innocent people, and not invited by a legitimate government, but they are not called terrorists. This is all a game of double standards and smoking mirrors.

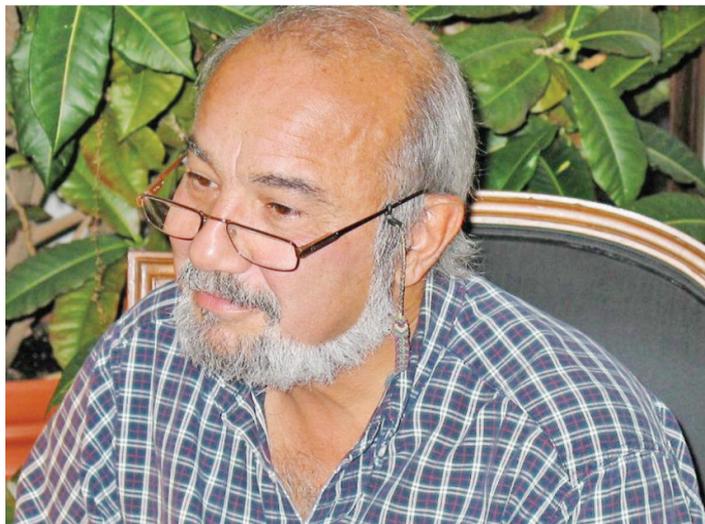
■ What about Saudi Arabia's killing of Khashoggi in Turkey? Wasn't this an act of terror?

A: Absolutely. But to the Trump administration the word terror is fungible. If Saudi Arabia commits an act of indisputable terror, Washington is not quite sure who is behind that particular act of terror but though they say they don't know who did it, they are sure it is Iran or some other 'Islamists.' This is a charade. How can America get Muslim support around the world when it supports such horrific acts and rulers who torture and kill their own people and expect to be believed when it accuses the IRGC and by association Hezbollah and its leader Hassan Nasrallah, possibly the most admired Muslim leader in the Muslim world?

■ So if Khashoggi's killing was an act of terror, is the U.S. a party to terror for protecting MBS and his murderous henchmen?

A: You mean guilt by association? To me the U.S. is rapidly losing all credibility in the Middle East. Yes, of course if the U.S. supports MBS and the Al-Sauds Washington must take some responsibility for their horrendous policies.

■ Can Iran categorize many U.S. enti-



I believe that now that the U.S. has taken the step of naming the IRGC a terrorist outfit, then Iran can name many branches of the U.S. armed forces that conduct covert operations, drone attacks and kill innocent civilians as terrorist organizations and deal with them as the U.S. deals with the IRGC.

ties as sponsors of terror—uninvited covert operations, drone attacks, support of Saudi terrorist acts in Yemen and elsewhere and so on?

A: I believe that now that the U.S. has taken the step of naming the IRGC a terrorist outfit, then Iran can name many branches of the U.S. armed forces that conduct covert operations, drone attacks and kill innocent civilians as terrorist organizations and deal with them as the U.S. deals with the IRGC. Iran might well respond by naming the U.S. Central Command as a terrorist organization operating in the Persian Gulf and in the greater Middle East, the Navy Seals, the CIA and on and on.

■ Can Iran attack U.S. entities it considers acting in terror?

A: If the U.S. adopts such a policy, then

Iran has every right to do the same and reciprocate.

■ Where was the U.S. when Iran was invaded by Iraq?

A: The U.S. said and did nothing when Saddam Hussain invaded Iran. The U.S. in fact made sure that the United Nations did nothing. Even worse, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia led the global effort to isolate Iran.

■ Who supplied Iraq with internationally banned chemical weapons? Was this an act of terror?

A: This was a truly shameful episode in U.S. and Western history. U.S. and Europeans facilitated the transfer of internationally outlawed chemical weapons to Saddam Hussain as the best way he could defend Iraq after the Iranians pushed his forces back. The number of Iranians gassed, with thousands killed and

even more severely disabled and relegated to oxygen tanks, is a constant reminder of the hypocrisy in international rule of law and the pretensions of the sanctimonious Western powers.

■ Who defended Iran?

A: The IRGC. It was the IRGC that kept Iran together in the face of foreign onslaught. They are an integral part of the Iranian armed forces. Iranians respect what they did during the war. If you call them terrorists, then the armies of the greater powers are super terrorists.

■ How could all this affect the U.S. position and its future in the Middle East?

A: I think that the Trump administration has sowed the seeds for the expulsion of the U.S. from the Middle East by continuing to back illegitimate Muslim dictators and going all in with Israel to rob Arabs of their political and human rights and in turn their dignity. Everyone has a limit. Arabs will soon reach that limit if Netanyahu is reelected, if Israel continues with its declaration of sovereignty over the Golan Heights, if it annexes and declares sovereignty over the West Bank, takes over the Temple Mount and annexes the Haram esh-Sharif and the rest of the Al Aqsa compound. In this eventuality, the Muslim World, two billion strong, will turn its anger against Israel, the U.S. and against their rulers who serve Western interests. Needless to say, the U.S. is no longer seen as an honest broker in the Middle East.

Eventually Muslims will resist the oppression they face. There is the Prophetic saying that on the Day of Reckoning the oppressor, the oppressed, and the person(s) who stood by and observed the oppression will be called upon to answer: the oppressor for oppression, the oppressed for not resisting the oppression, and the bystander for not assisting the oppressed.

■ Is there anything you would like to add?

A: Yes. It is indeed ironic that the Persian King, Cyrus the Great, saved the Jews from extinction, and now Netanyahu wants to do all he can to destroy the Persians. Mr. Netanyahu should put on his thinking cap and recall an evident fact. Iran or Persia will be where it is long after he has departed this world. He should study the tragedies that Jews have faced throughout their history and not initiate something that Jews may regret. He and Israel should be aware of the dangers of hubris.

Trumps political death in Florida



1 → The publication of recent polls in the state of Florida suggests that Trump will face a tough run in the 2020 presidential election. Undoubtedly, in the run-up to the Democratic campaign, the policies of the U.S. president will be challenged by infidels such as Sanders and Elizabeth Warren (Democrat candidates).

Naming IRGC as a terrorist group undermine chances of U.S. returning to JCPOA: Nephew



1 → ■ What will be the impact of this decision on regional security?

A: I think the biggest impact is the possible risk of escalation and confrontation between the United States forces in the region and those of Iran. If the Iranians and Americans both view their forces as terrorist groups, then this may reduce options for peaceful deescalation of conflicts and crises.

■ Is this decision according to U.S. Constitution?

A: Yes. The President is authorized to make sanctions decisions of this sort. There are questions as to whether the IRGC is the sort of entity that was intended to be sanctioned under this authority (as opposed to groups like al Qaeda) but there is no constitutional issue here.

■ Can we see more sanctions from President Trump administration against Iran?

A: Yes, almost certainly. A bigger question is whether we will see an attempt at diplomacy by this President.

Brandishing IRGC as terrorist group an act of terror itself: Logoglu



1 → About the consequences of this move, Logoglu maintained that an immediate one was the "reported response from Iran, declaring, in turn, the U.S. armed forces a terrorist organization."

He went on to add, "the broader danger is that these reciprocal and counter-productive steps will only escalate tensions in the MENA and Persian Gulf, and vastly raise the chances of armed encounters between the two sides."

Any such event, he went on to note, "if and when it occurs, would be extremely difficult to keep from leading to a wider military confrontation between the two adversaries."

"This U.S. move on IRGC follows in the footsteps of President Trump's decisions on Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, all presumably serving Israeli interests just as much as American interests," said Logoglu, adding, however, that "this is a misconception because all three steps potentially pave the way for new conflicts while relegating the prospects of peace and security in the region into a very distant future."

"By remaining calm and calibrated, I believe Iran will defeat American designs and provocations to subjugate it," he concluded.

'Wahhabism, Zionist fanaticism lethal mix for world peace'

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — A prominent political expert based in the Italian city of Milan said Wahhabis and Zionists, who have much in common in terms of "extremism and religious apocalypse", are a lethal mix for world peace.

"The ideology of Wahhabism, combined with Zionist fanaticism and the support they receive from Evangelical Christians, is a lethal mix for world peace," Federico Pieraccini told Tasnim in an interview.

"The former (Wahhabism) becomes the instrument at the service of the latter (Zionism) for the benefit of a third party (US Evangelicals)," he added.

Pieraccini is an independent freelance writer and political expert based in Milan, Italy. He specializes in international affairs, conflicts, politics, and strategies. He has covered conflicts in Ukraine, Libya, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq.

The following is the full text of the interview:

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

A: It is important that countries work together, such as with this example of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Istanbul. Dealing with the common problem of terrorism, whatever its origin, must be a priority for Islamic countries today.

The attack in New Zealand has shown that extremists are a danger to all populations. Terrorism affects innocents and is one of the greatest sources of instability in the world today, fueling hatred and division amongst races and ethnic groups.

Whether it is Wahhabi, extremist or white supremacist in its form, or whether it is embodied in the form of the state known as Israel, the death, misery and destruction that terrorism brings on its victims is the same.

The cynical manipulation of Wahhabi extremism, wielding it as a blunt instrument with which to strike at and disrupt (geo)political adversaries, has been one of the favored practices of the United States, Saudi Arabia and Israel over a period spanning more than 30 years. Having unleashed the dogs of extremism for geopolitical purposes, permission has been given to the media, politicians and racists to paint all Muslims with the same broad brush of Wahhabi extremism, thereby justifying the West's geopolitical maneuverings against the Muslim world. With mass migration added to the mix, a generalized fear of Islam has today become quite tangible in major European cities.

As anxiety and tension build up amongst ordinary people, the elite exacerbates this situation by bombing poor Muslim countries, creating migrant flows in the process that only adds to this already charged atmosphere. Increasing numbers of ordinary people fed up with their decreasing standards of living and increasing inequality, and who happen to be white and proud nationalists, increasingly find no other outlet for their exasperation than racism against immigrants and Muslims whom the media have so helpfully offered up as scapegoats.



Islamic countries and populations must begin to follow a winning social model for peace against the stars-and-stripes imperialism or the racism of Tel Aviv.

These unfortunate and perverse circumstances seem less the result of accident and more of deliberate intent.

The three countries that exploit these emotions more than any others, through extremist terrorism, are Israel, the United States, and Saudi Arabia. These are the same countries that have everything to gain from a Christian and Muslim clash of civilizations.

This is not to forget that Christian Evangelicals, Zionist Jews and Wahhabis have much in common in terms of extremism and religious apocalypse.

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

A: I do not believe that there is any coordination between white supremacists and extremist terrorists. Certainly, it remains suspicious that ordinary citizens have been able to purchase and accumulate arsenals of this kind, sometimes warlike (even to the extent of including explosives),

without being identified by the security services of their own country. As has happened with other terrorist attacks, certain intelligence services, by not intervening against a terrorist cell, may actually be the way by which they actually direct and orchestrate such events, such practices labeled in intelligence parlance as "false flags".

If we look at intentional actions, aimed specifically at Muslims, I would look no further than the state of Israel, where an anti-Islamic philosophy is systematically applied to disparage and delegitimize the Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian populations.

This Israeli attitude has pushed some politicians who are friends of Netanyahu, like Trump and Bolsonaro, to use false and racist comments against Muslims in general, giving a wink and a nod to the most extreme fringes of the populations in Brazil, the US, and around the world.

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

A: The ideology of Wahhabism, combined with Zionist fanaticism and the support they receive from Evangelical Christians, is a lethal mix for world peace. The former (Wahhabism) becomes the instrument at the service of the latter (Zionism) for the benefit of a third party (US Evangelicals).

In order to decrease, if not to altogether eliminate, violence in such areas as the Middle East, the ending of the Wahhabi and Israeli Zionist ideologies are necessary conditions for the people of the world to be able to live in harmony with each other. The use of extremism as a tool of war has now gotten out of hand, and the radicalization of populations in the Middle East, with the accompanying misery, hunger and war, has accentuated a problem that will haunt the region for who knows how many years.

The underlying intention of the Saudi, Israeli and American elites was to create an unstable area of the globe without any solution for peace, in order to avoid any domination of the region by any local or foreign powers. Keeping the region in a permanent state of chaos and war appears to be the best means of controlling its resources (oil) and preventing the creation of a peace movement that could oppose extremist terrorism, Israeli Zionist submission, or US imperialism.

Islamic countries and populations must begin to follow a winning social model for peace against the stars-and-stripes imperialism or the racism of Tel Aviv. Such models as that of Iran, which fight against terrorism while favoring interreligious dialogue, is exactly what the Middle East and the world at large need. The vast majority of Jews, Christians and Muslims only want to live in peace and harmony while respecting each other. The political use of religion is just another tool used by US imperialism to implement and reinforce the strategy of divide and rule, which is at the heart of the Western elite's war-financier modus operandi.

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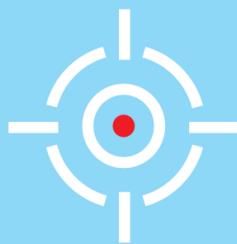
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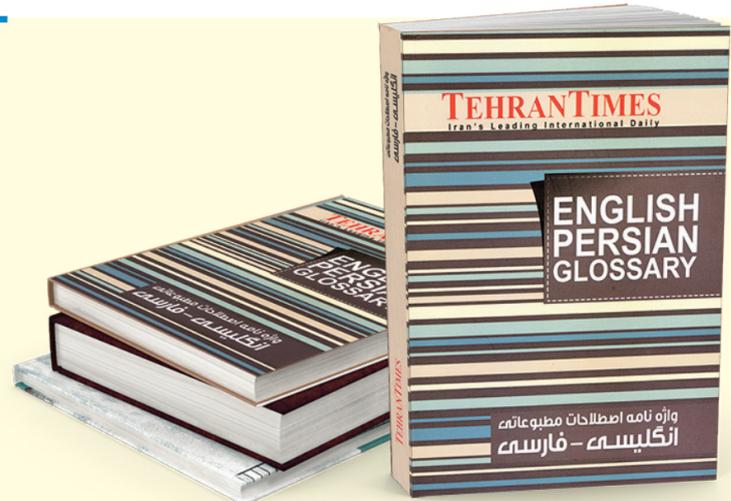
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Water in flood-stricken areas under constant control: health official

HEALTH TEHRAN — Water quality in areas hit by the flood is constantly being examined and water chlorination has also started, announced the director of Communicable Diseases Department at the Ministry of Health.

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

According to Mohammad Mahdi Guya, controlling the communicable diseases that are transmitted through water and food in flood-stricken areas is the Health Ministry's main concern and it is the most important and difficult task they need to face in such areas, IRIB reported on Sunday.

To this end, he said, urban and rural water and wastewater organizations in damaged areas need to cooperate with the Health Ministry.

"Despite the problems and hurdles in the way of Health Ministry to control the health conditions in such areas; fortunately, no case of communicable diseases has been reported yet. However, we should not take this for granted and we need to stay alert in coming days and weeks so that the spread of infectious diseases are controlled," said Guya.

"Flood can cause different infectious diseases in different provinces, so the Health Ministry and the universities of Medical Sciences have come up with different plans for different areas," he further noted.



"Another worry is about the spread of Leishmaniasis, especially in Golestan, Lorestan and Khuzestan provinces, but we have taken measures for controlling rodents and insects in these areas."

Worries over Polio and Leishmaniasis

According to Guya, Polio vaccination for children under the age of five has started in temporary camps in all provinces hit by the flood and the process has already ended in some provinces so there should be no worries about the spread of Polio.

"Another worry is about the spread of Leishmaniasis, especially in Golestan, Lorestan and Khuzestan provinces. We have taken measures for controlling rodents and insects in these areas. Furthermore, some guidelines have been prepared which will be put into practice in time," he added.

Guya further expressed hope that the spread of Leishmaniasis can be prevented in flood-stricken areas as the Health Ministry already has the experience of successfully controlling the disease over Kermanshah earthquake [in November 2017].

Bites and stings by venomous animals

According to Guya, measures have been taken for the prevention and treatment of bites and stings by venomous animals such as snakes and scorpions.

"All the medical teams located in the area have now received the snake and scorpion antivenoms and experts are sent to the areas as well. Luckily, no case of death by bites and stings has been reported yet," he said.

He further noted that injuries by wild animals such as dogs have been reported in some provinces such as Golestan, but all have been treated with vaccines and antivenoms.

Iran health exhibition to host 21 countries

HEALTH TEHRAN —

Iran Health International Exhibition 2019 will be held from June 9 to 12 in Tehran, hosting representatives from 21 countries, IRIB reported.

The exhibition will display medical and dental equipment, pharmaceutical products and machinery, laboratory equipment, food supplements, hospital equipment, consumer products, vitamins and herbal drugs, said the exhibition's director, Edris Mazandarani.

Subjects such as medical tourism, health startups and technologies, health care services and health media are also highlighted in the exhibition, he added.

According to Mazandarani, a total of 600 Iranian and foreign companies are estimated to take part in the exhibition.



Even a low intake of red and processed meat may raise death risk

The connection between eating large amounts of red or processed meat and certain diseases is well-known, but a new study suggests that consuming even a small amount of these foods could be risky.

New research suggests that eating red meat even occasionally may shorten life.

The world is eating more meat. The global consumption of meat and poultry has increased in both developed and developing countries over the past 50 years, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Red meat is the most popular type of meat in the United States. Processed meat that has undergone curing, smoking, or salting to alter its flavor makes up 22 percent of U.S. meat consumption, according to a 2011 study.

Research has linked both red and processed meat to a higher risk of certain health conditions, such as diabetes, coronary heart disease, and even some cancers.

Previous studies have examined the effects of eating moderate-to-high amounts of meat on mortality. However, the impact of consuming a small amount has remained largely untested.

Finding the perfect sample

Researchers at Loma Linda University Health in California aimed to address this imbalance in a new study.

"We wanted to take a closer look at the association of low intakes of red and processed meat with all-cause, cardiovascular diseases, and cancer mortality compared to those who didn't eat meat at all," states lead author Saeed Mastour Alshahrani.

The team's findings suggest that eating small amounts of red and processed meat could increase a person's risk of death.

Another study provides more evidence that a plant-based diet is healthful.

The researchers used data from people who took part in the Adventist Health Study-2 (AHS-2). Between 2002 and 2007, this cohort study recruited close to 96,000 Seventh-day Adventists living in the U.S. and Canada.

Adventists are an interesting group for scientists looking into factors relating to the diet. About half of these believers are vegetarian, and those who do choose to eat meat consume very little of it.

To see whether meat consumption had any effect on mortality, researchers analyzed two factors. The first was the cause of death of more than 7,900 Adventists over an 11-year period. The second was a dietary assessment of the same individuals using food frequency questionnaires.

Higher risk of death

The researchers noted that meat intake was low. Among the people who reported consuming meat, 90 percent ate 2 ounces or less of red meat per day.

When they evaluated the deaths, the investigators found that cardiovascular disease was responsible for almost 2,600 of them, while more than 1,800 deaths related to cancer.

The results, which feature in the journal *Nutrients*, showed that there was an association between the consumption of a combination of red and processed meats and a higher risk of both total and cardiovascular disease deaths. Processed meat alone did not show a similar trend.

Certain groups appeared to be more susceptible to specific meat types. For example, unprocessed red meat was "significantly" related to a risk of all-cause mortality for white people but not for black people. When the researchers looked specifically at the risk of cardiovascular disease mortality, they noted that this was only significant among women and black people.

Black people and women also had an increased risk of all-cause mortality from eating processed meat. However, the team only identified a link between processed meat consumption and cardiovascular disease in women.

The researchers did not report any significant findings relating to cancer, but they noted that other studies have found evidence of a relationship between meat intake and this disease. As a result, they suggest that this association may only become apparent with higher meat consumption.

A new conclusion

The authors of the new study believe that their work supports previous conclusions. "Our findings give additional weight to the evidence already suggesting that eating red and processed meat may negatively impact health and lifespan," comments Michael Orlich, Ph.D., co-author of the study and co-director of AHS-2.

The study also shows something new by demonstrating that eating even a small amount of red and processed meat could be worse for health than eating none.

The study has both strengths and limitations. Researchers adjusted the results for various factors, including obesity, physical activity, and low intake of fruit and vegetables.

To strengthen the findings, they also took into account specific dietary factors, such as intake of dairy, whole grains, and legumes. It also helped that relatively few of the participants smoked or drank alcohol.

However, the study relied on questionnaires, which could cast doubt over the results because people may not recall consuming food that they eat very little of or consume irregularly.

More research will be necessary to support the findings of this study. It is also still unclear precisely what causes red and processed meat to lead to adverse health outcomes.

(Source: medical news today)

Scientists quash claims about single 'depression genes'

After completing an enormous study, scientists have dismissed claims that single gene variants, or even a small group of them, can dictate susceptibility to depression. Instead, they suggest that any genetic risk for depression likely arises from very large numbers of variants, each contributing a small effect.

A group of scientists has debunked the 'candidate gene hypotheses' for depression.

Researchers at the University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder) reviewed hundreds of investigations that, over the last 25 years, had singled out "candidate genes" for depression. They found that 18 such genes had featured at least 10 times in previous studies.

Then, using data from hundreds of thousands of people, they showed that the influence the 18 candidate genes had on depression was no stronger than that of genes they could pick out at random.

In an American Journal of Psychiatry paper, the team concludes that early theories about "depression candidate genes" are wrong and that studies identifying them have likely done no more than produce "false positives."

The findings dispel the notion that people will soon be able to take a test that identifies a few genes for depression, and then it is just a matter of drug developers producing new medications that target them.

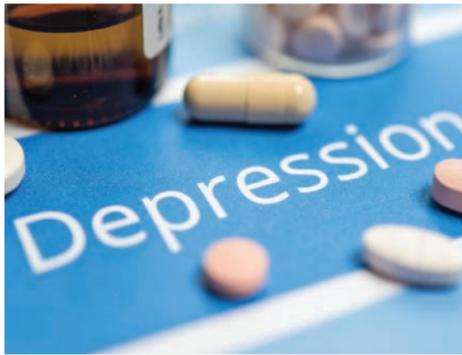
"This study," says first study author Richard Border, who is a researcher and graduate student in CU Boulder's Institute for Behavioral Genetics, "confirms that efforts to find a single gene or handful of genes which determine depression are doomed to fail."

'Candidate-gene hypotheses' and depression

Scientists working in the field of genetics rejected "candidate-gene hypotheses" years ago, adds senior study author Matthew C. Keller Ph.D., who is an associate professor of psychology and neuroscience at the university.

Meanwhile, others in fields including psychology, he adds, have continued to pursue the idea of "depression genes" and seemed to find evidence to support it.

Fundamental differences in nerve cells that make and use serotonin could be why a class of antidepressants does not work for some people.



For example, one of the 18 "historic candidate depression genes" is SLC6A4, which codes for a protein that has to do with transport and recycling of serotonin in the brain.

About 20 years ago, researchers had suggested that having a particular, shorter variant of SLC6A4 could put people at greater risk for depression, especially if they had experienced trauma during childhood.

Dr. Keller explains that the evidence linking candidate genes to depression often came from studies in which the sample sizes were too small. He likens it to the Hans Christian Andersen story of the "emperor's new clothes."

"There's just nothing there," he adds. "I hope this is the final nail in the coffin for those kind[s] of studies."

Feeling sad, lonely, or down is part of everyday life, particularly during times of high stress or loss. Depression, however, is a psychiatric illness in which these symptoms, and others, are severe and persistent.

Depression has many forms and, while each has its own pattern of symptoms, there are also some similarities.

Major depression is the most common type of depression. The symptoms can be so severe that it stops people being able to work, study, and interact socially.

In the United States, depression is the main cause of disability in those aged 15–44 years. In 2016, around 16.1 million adults in the U.S. had had at least one episode of major depression in the previous 12 months.

Data came from very large samples

Dr. Keller and his team analyzed "data from large population-based and case-control samples" that ranged from no less than 60,000 to in excess of 400,000 individuals and totaled more than 620,000. The data came from sources such as 23andMe, UK Biobank, and the Psychiatric Genomics Consortium.

The researchers looked for links between any of the 18 depression candidate genes and depression and also with depression in combination with environmental factors, such as "sexual or physical abuse during childhood, socioeconomic adversity."

However, they write that "no clear evidence was found for any candidate gene," neither with depression or with depression associated with environmental factors.

"The study results," conclude the authors, "do not support previous depression candidate gene findings, in which large genetic effects are frequently reported in samples orders of magnitude smaller than those examined here."

Dr. Keller and his team emphasize that they are not suggesting that researchers should stop looking for links between genes and depression.

What they are saying is that the relationship between genes and depression is not as straightforward as many earlier studies may have claimed.

Research on the risks of diseases such as Alzheimer's and cancer can reveal strong links with individual gene variants, and tests for those are medically useful for screening and choosing treatment options.

However, it is more likely that predictions of genetic risk for depression will involve "polygenic scores" that take into account the effect of very large numbers of genes.

"We are not saying that depression is not heritable at all. It is. What we are saying is that depression is influenced by many, many variants, and individually each of those has a minuscule effect."

(source: medical news today)

Drug-resistant fungus has sickened almost 600 in US and poses global health threat

According to the CDC, between 30–60 percent of patients infected with *C. auris* have died. *Candida auris*, a drug-resistant fungus, which can cause death and serious illnesses in people with weakened immune systems, is spreading across the world — including in some of America's major cities.

As of February 28, there have been 587 cases confirmed in the United States, with the majority of cases occurring in New York, New Jersey and Illinois, according to the CDC.

In New York, there have been 309 confirmed cases, with an additional 104 in New Jersey and 144 in Illinois. People in California, Connecticut, Florida, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, Texas and Virginia have also been sickened by *C. auris*.

In a recent feature on the spread of the fungus, the New York Times reported that some of the symptoms of *C. auris* include fever and chills. The CDC also reports that it can cause bloodstream and ear infections — not to mention death.

According to the Times, an elderly man was sickened by the fungus last year at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York, after being admitted for abdominal surgery. He died after 90 days. Afterwards, the hospital "needed special



cleaning equipment" and ended up removing "some of the ceiling and floor tiles" in the man's room in order to get rid of the fungus.

Based on information from a limited number of patients, 30–60 percent of people with *C. auris* infections have died. However, many of these people had other

serious illnesses that also increased their risk of death," according to the CDC. Most deaths occur within 90 days.

C. auris is difficult to identify, and is only detectable by a lab test. The CDC has labeled it a "serious global health threat."

As *C. auris* is difficult to remove from

surfaces, it has caused outbreaks in healthcare facilities. According to the New York Times, in 2015, there was an outbreak at the Royal Brompton Hospital in London, which resulted in 72 total cases of *C. auris*.

Another outbreak occurred at a hospital in Spain in 2018. The journal *Mycoses* reported that 41 of the patients who were infected died within 30 days.

The first reported case of *C. auris* occurred in the United States in 2013, when a 61-year-old woman with respiratory failure came to New York from the United Arab Emirates, according to the Times. She died a week later.

Early identification is critical when dealing with *C. auris*, although treating the fungus can be difficult, as over 90 percent of *C. auris* infections are resistant to at least one type of drug, according to the CDC.

C. auris infections have been "found in patients of all ages, from preterm infants to the elderly," the CDC says, adding that "patients who have been hospitalized in a healthcare facility a long time, and have lines and tubes that go into their body (such as breathing tubes, feeding tubes and central venous catheters), seem to be at highest risk."

(Source: People)

Remote sensing technology to estimate flood damage to agriculture in Golestan

TECHNOLOGY TEHRAN — Iranian Space Research Center is to perform a plan for estimating the damage caused by the recent flood to the agriculture sector in Golestan province through using remote sensing technology, Mehr reported on Tuesday.

The plan focuses on Aq-Qala and Gomishan in Golestan province which were struck by severe floods on March 22. It aims to assess the damages to crops with sampling, the head of the center Hossein Samimi explained.



The center also provides the Poldokhtar citizens in Lorestan province with 4G network through Bam 50 internet balloon, he said.

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.

EU is making AI rules now to avoid a new tech crisis

Social media faces a crisis of trust. Europe wants to make sure artificial intelligence doesn't go the same way.

The European Commission on Monday unveiled ethics guidelines that are designed to influence the development of AI systems before they become deeply embedded in society.

The intervention could help break the pattern of regulators being forced to play catch up with emerging technologies that lead to unanticipated negative consequences.

The importance of doing so was underscored Monday when Britain proposed new rules that would make internet companies legally responsible for ridding their platforms of harmful content.

"It's like putting the foundations in before you build a house ... now is the time to do it," said Liam Benham, the vice president for regulatory affairs in Europe at IBM, which was involved in drafting the AI guidelines.

The European Union has taken the global lead on tech regulation, introducing a landmark data privacy law last year while going after big tech companies for anti-competitive behavior and unpaid taxes.

AI, which has captured the public's imagination and produced dire warnings on the potential for misuse, is the latest regulatory front for the bloc. It's not an easy topic.

Google, for example, shuttered its new artificial intelligence ethics council last week after a swarm of employees demanded the removal of the president of a conservative think tank from the group.

The European Commission has crafted seven principles for guiding AI development and building trust. While the guidelines are not binding, they could form the basis of further action in coming years.

Transparency is key

Mariya Gabriel, Europe's top official on the digital economy, said companies using AI systems should be transparent with the public.

"People need to be informed when they are in contact with an algorithm and not another human being," said Gabriel. "Any decision made by an algorithm must be verifiable and explained."

An insurance company that rejects a claim based on an algorithm, for example, should ensure the customer knows how and why the decision was made. A human should be able to step in and reverse the decision.

The European Commission said that future AI systems need to be safe and reliable for their entire life cycle. It also said that data protection must be a priority, with users in control of their own information.

The guidelines put responsibility squarely on those who build and deploy the AI systems.

"If a company puts in an AI system, that company is responsible for it ... this is very important if there is any accident," said Gabriel.

Avoiding discrimination

Gabriel also said companies need to ensure their AI systems are fair.

She said, for example, that an algorithm used in the hiring process that was produced using data from a company that employed only men would likely reject women candidates.

"If you have biased input data, that really can be a problem," said Gabriel.

AlgorithmWatch, a non-profit group, said that while it's a good idea to put guidelines in place, there are problems with Europe's approach.

"The guidelines center around the idea of 'trustworthy AI' and that is problematic because it's not a well-defined term," said Matthias Spielkamp, the group's co-founder. "Who is to trust and who is to be trusted?", he added. He also said that it is not yet clear how future oversight will be handled.

Thomas Metzinger, a philosopher and professor at the University of Mainz, helped draft the guidelines but criticized them for not prohibiting the use of AI to develop weapons.

Others are worried about the impact the guidelines will have on innovation.

"We are concerned that the granularity of the guidelines, would make it difficult for many companies particularly [small and medium sized businesses], to implement," said Antony Walker, deputy CEO of TechUK, an industry group.

The European Union will now try to work through these questions and others in a pilot program with Big Tech companies. (Source: msn.com)

Social media and recent floods in Iran, promising or threatening?

1 → This can be controlled through pre-established plans by responsible organizations for providing notices and information for the people.

Before the disasters, media channels of the related organizations should be strengthened. In other words, the organizations should turn into an authenticated source for their audience to receive correct, reliable and accurate news.

In this way, authenticated organizations can lead the news and events during crisis and this may lead to more focused help and support via people.

Different usages of social media in disaster risk management

According to preparecenter.org, beyond improving preparedness and raising public awareness about risk and crises, social media in disaster risk management can be used as surveillance, monitoring, situation awareness and early warning system tool through the technical approaches of crowd sourcing and data mining or by relying on volunteers trained to support media monitoring for humanitarian response.

They can also be used as a tool by providing information and instructions, with real time alerts and warnings. Social media represents one more channel for emergency services to send an alert and warning. This is the case for natural disasters like storms or tornadoes.



During recent floods, several photos and videos taken by the social media users went viral and many influencers and celebrities accounts called for helping the survivors.

Provision of information and instructions with social media like blogs can be used to provide advice by posting information such

as emergency phone numbers, location of hospitals requiring blood donations, evacuation routes, etc.

Iran, largest hub of startups in region: official



TECHNOLOGY TEHRAN — With over 6,000 startups operating in Iran, the country is the largest hub of startups in the region, the vice president for science and technology said, IRNA reported on Monday.

Sourena Sattari said that the startups provide potential capacities for sustainable development in the country.

The industry needs university in which, the machineries are designed for the companies, he said.

Technology and knowledge can be learned and they cannot be bought with money, he said.

The knowledge-based economy creates an ecosystem in which selling crude material is neither desired nor necessary, he added.

He said that the oil economy destroyed entrepreneurship and human resources and promotes bureaucracy.

In an entrepreneurship ecosystem the universities and entrepreneurs can be more influential, he said.

Sattari said that the vice presidency plans for producing items, which are not imported due to sanctions.

The knowledge-based companies provide 130 to 140 services in Iran, he said.

A new generation of entrepreneurs establish knowledge-based companies, which will turn into big firms in near future, he said.

The knowledge-based companies cope with oil economy and deal with problems posed by sanctions, he added.

Iran to hold panels at WSIS Forum 2019



TECHNOLOGY TEHRAN — Iran will hold two specialized panels at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Forum 2019, which is currently underway in Geneva, Switzerland.

The Information and Communication Technology Ministry is to hold a panel on the future of jobs in ICT-based economies.

Another panel is to be held by the Science and Technology University on the future of IT development for universities and jobs.

ICT Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi headed a delegation on Tuesday to Geneva to attend the forum.

He plans to make speech at the forum and have meetings with his Bulgarian and Georgian counterparts, the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunica-

tion Union Houlin Zhao and the Director General of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) Francis Gurry.

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Forum is a global United Nations (UN) multistakeholder platform facilitating the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines for advancing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is co-organized by ITU, UNESCO, UNDP and UNCTAD, in close collaboration with all WSIS Action Line co-/facilitators and other UN organizations.

In 2019, WSIS celebrates its 10th anniversary of the establishment of WSIS Forum from April 8 to 12, under the theme "Information and Communication Technologies for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals".

China wants to ban bitcoin mining, traders say move not a surprise

China's state planner wants to eliminate bitcoin mining in the country, according to a draft list of industrial activities the agency is seeking to stop in a sign of growing government pressure on the cryptocurrency sector.

China is the world's largest market for computer hardware designed to mine bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies, even though such activities previously fell under a regulatory grey area.

The National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) said on Monday it was seeking public opinions on a revised list of industries it wants to encourage, restrict or eliminate. The list was first published in 2011.

The draft for a revised list added cryptocurrency mining, including that of bitcoin, to more than 450 activities the NDRC said should be phased out as they did not adhere to relevant laws and regulations, were unsafe, wasted resources or polluted the environment.

It did not stipulate a target date or plan for how to eliminate bitcoin mining, meaning that such activities should be phased out immediately, the document said. The public has until May 7 to comment on the draft.

State-owned newspaper Securities Times said on Tuesday the draft list "distinctly reflects the attitude of the country's industrial policy" toward the cryptocurrency industry.

"The NDRC's move is in line overall with China's desire to control different layers of the rapidly growing crypto industry, and does not yet signal a major shift in policy," said Jehan Chu, managing partner at blockchain investment firm Kenetic.

"I believe China simply wants to 'reboot' the crypto industry into one that they have oversight on, the same approach they took with the Internet."

Other bitcoin traders said they were not surprised by the government's move.

"Bitcoin mining wastes a lot of electricity," said one



Chinese bitcoin trader who declined to be named due to the sensitivity of the situation.

Last week, the price of bitcoin soared nearly 20 percent in its best day since the height of the 2017 bubble, and breaking \$5,000 for the first time since mid-November, though analysts and traders admitted they were puzzled by the surge.

Bitcoin, which accounts for around half of the cryptocurrency market, was down by around 1.4 percent on Tuesday, while other major coins such as Ethereum and Ripple's XRP also fell by similar amounts. Traders in London said it was unclear how much the Chinese move was weighing on the market.

The cryptocurrency sector has been under heavy scrutiny in China since 2017, when regulators started to ban initial coin offerings and shut local cryptocurrency trading exchanges.

China also began to limit cryptocurrency mining, forcing many firms - among them some of the world's largest - to

find bases elsewhere.

Nearly half of bitcoin mining pools - groups of miners that team up for economies of scale - are located in the Asia-Pacific, a Cambridge University study said in December.

"Half of the network is probably located in China," said Alex de Vries, a consultant with PwC in Amsterdam who specializes on blockchain and researches cryptocurrency mining. He added that the number of mining facilities in the world is still limited to several hundred.

Countries with relatively cheap electricity have emerged as major hosts of cryptocurrency mining. Mati Greenspan, an analyst with eToro in Israel, said any ban by China would cut a key supply of cheap electricity for the industry and raise the average cost to mine bitcoin.

Chinese companies are also among the biggest manufacturers of bitcoin mining gear, and last year three filed for initial public offerings in Hong Kong, looking to raise billions of dollars.

However, the two largest, Bitmain Technologies, the world's largest manufacturer of bitcoin mining gear, and Canaan Inc, have since let their applications lapse.

People familiar with the deals said that Hong Kong regulators had many questions about the companies' business models and prospects.

Bitmain declined to comment on the NDRC's proposal to ban bitcoin mining. Canaan did not respond to requests for comment.

According to Canaan's IPO prospectus filed last year, sales of blockchain hardware primarily for cryptocurrency mining in China were worth 8.7 billion yuan (\$1.30 billion) in 2017, 45 percent of global sales by value.

The prospectus forecasts that sales in China would rise to 35.6 billion yuan by 2020.

(Source: reuters.com)

Cyber crime warning as experts say hackers deliberately target hospitals

Hospitals and the health care industry are being deliberately targeted by hackers, cyber criminals and spies seeking a treasure trove of personal and financial information, a business consultancy has warned.

Attacks by organised gangs and even state spy agencies are a growing concern as they hunt for details that can be used for extortion or even espionage.

The theft of personal details of 1.5 million

people from a Singaporean health database, including that of the prime minister, by a state-sponsored espionage group has highlighted the threat, said BDO.

Hospitals and clinics are also often poorly defended compared to banks or government institutions, despite representing a "honeypot of valuable information" said Gregory Garrett, head of international cyber security at the firm.

He said: "The healthcare industry has the

electronic healthcare records on individuals, they have the personable identifiable information on individuals and in most cases they also have their payment card information."

The UK's National Cyber Security Centre, an offshoot of the GCHQ electronic spy agency, said it is working closely with the health and social care sector "to ensure their platforms are as secure and resilient as possible".

The damage that can be wrought was highlighted in the 2017 WannaCry attack that crippled NHS computers as they were hit alongside other businesses around the world.

The Department for Health later found the attack had cost the NHS £92m, as a third of hospital trusts and eight per cent of GP practices had computers digitally locked up and held for ransom.

(Source: telegraph.co.uk)

Revolutionary camera allows scientists to predict evolution of ancient stars

For the first time scientists have been able to prove a decades old theory on stars thanks to a revolutionary high-speed camera.

Scientists at the University of Sheffield have been working with HiPERCAM, a high-speed, multicolor camera, which is capable of taking more than 1,000 images per second, allowing experts to measure both the mass and the radius of a cool subdwarf star for the first time.

The findings published in *Nature Astronomy* have allowed researchers to verify the commonly used stellar structure model — which describes the internal structure of a star in detail — and make detailed predictions about the brightness, the colour and its future evolution.

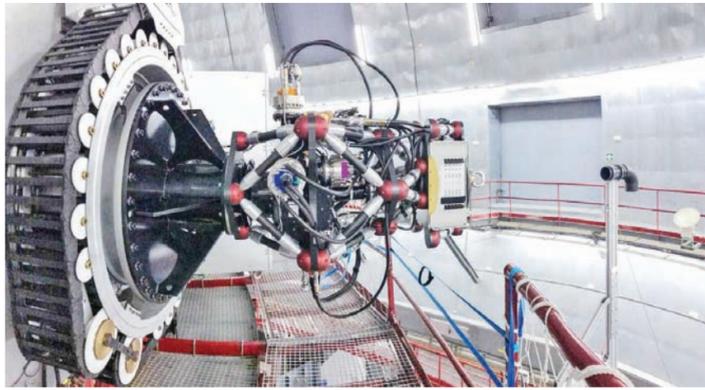
Scientists know that old stars have fewer metals than young stars, but the effects of this on the structure of stars was, until now, untested.

Old stars (often referred to as cool subdwarf stars) are faint and there are few in the solar neighborhood.

■ The stellar parameters

Up until now scientists have not had a camera powerful enough to be able to get precise measurements of their stellar parameters such as the mass and the radius.

HiPERCAM can take one picture every millisecond as opposed to a normal camera on a large telescope which usually captures



only one picture every few minutes. This has given scientists the ability to measure the star accurately for the first time.

Professor Vik Dhillon, Dr. Steven Parsons and Dr. Stuart Littlefair, from the De-

partment of Physics and Astronomy at the University of Sheffield, led the HiPERCAM project in partnership with the Science and Technology Facilities Council's Astronomy Technology Centre (ATC) and the Instituto

The camera can take high-speed images of objects in the universe, allowing their rapid brightness variations — due to phenomena such as eclipses and explosions — to be studied in unprecedented detail.

de Astrofisica de Canarias, along with researchers from the University of Warwick and Durham University.

Professor Dhillon said: "Now we have been able to measure the size of the star we can see it is in line with stellar structure theory. These results would not have been possible with any other telescope.

■ The potential HiPERCAM

"This not only proves stellar structure theory, but has also verified the potential of HiPERCAM."

The paper is the first to be published using HiPERCAM data, which is mounted on the Gran Telescopio Canarias (GTC) — the world's largest optical telescope, with a 10.4 meter mirror diameter.

The camera can take high-speed images of objects in the universe, allowing their rapid brightness variations — due to phenomena such as eclipses and explosions — to be studied in unprecedented detail.

Data captured by the camera, taken in five different colors simultaneously, allow scientists to study the remnants of dead stars such as white dwarfs, neutron stars and black holes.

The GTC is based on the island of La Palma, situated 2,500 metres above sea level, which is one of the best places in the world to study the night sky.

(Source: *phys.org*)

Great white sharks have toxic levels of mercury, arsenic and lead in their blood

Scientists found high levels of mercury, lead, and arsenic in the blood of great white sharks at rates that would likely be considered toxic to other animals.

With their long lifespans, sharks, which are considered as top predators of the sea, may be especially vulnerable to exposure to toxic heavy metals.

Researchers from the University of Miami Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science evaluated the plasma levels of 14 heavy metals and 12 trace elements found in great white sharks that were sampled for a study.

The scientists said that great white sharks can act as indicators for the health of the ecosystem based on the concentrations of toxins in their blood.

Scientists found high levels of toxic heavy metals in the blood of great white sharks of South Africa.

■ High levels of toxins

"Basically, if the sharks have high levels of toxins in their tissues, it is likely that species they eat below them will also have toxins, including fishes that humans eat," said Neil Hammer-schlag, study coauthor and research associate professor at UM's Rosenstiel School and Abess Center for Ecosystem Science and Policy.

The specimens were from a 2012 Oearch expedition. For the study, 43 great white sharks were captured in South Africa. They were carefully raised on a specialized platform as biologists collected blood specimens and took body measurements.

After the sampling, the animals were tagged and released.

It was found that heavy metal concentrations in great white sharks were not related to their sex and body size. With the exception of copper, high levels of toxic heavy metals did not affect the sharks' body condition.

Heavy metals also bear no negative effects on the immune system and health of great white sharks.



Overall, the study suggests that sharks may have protective mechanisms that can mitigate the harmful effects of heavy metal exposure.

This first published account of blood plasma of heavy metals and trace elements in great white sharks can provide novel opportunities for future research on the declining shark population.

■ Comparable to a bus

Great white sharks often weigh 4,000 to 7,000 pounds, and measure as long as 16 to 20 feet. Their large size is comparable to a bus.

They are carnivores that commonly eat small fishes, seals, and dolphins. They look menacing with their serrated, triangular, sharp teeth, which they use to rip apart their prey.

Their torpedo-shaped body allows them to cruise in oceans for a long period, and then swiftly switch to high-speed bursts in pursuit of food.

Despite their status as large and powerful predators, great white sharks are considered as vulnerable species. They are often hunted for their fins and teeth, and as trophies in sport fishing.

Scientists say that great white sharks population have been declining over the years due to overfishing and accidental catching.

(Source: *techtimes.com*)

Earth could take 10 million years to recover from mass extinction caused by humans

Scientists investigating the possible effects of climate change have predicted it would take 10 million years for the diversity of species on our planet to recover after a mass extinction event.

The authors of the paper published in the journal *Nature Ecology and Evolution* wanted to calculate how long it takes for the Earth to return to former levels of biodiversity following a mass extinction event.

"Humanity is undeniably causing elevated rates of biodiversity loss through climate change, habitat destruction, invasive species introduction, and so on," the authors warned in their study.

To answer this question, paleobiologists looked to the fossil record of the tiny single-celled planktic foraminifera following the Cretaceous-Paleogene extinction event around 66 million years ago.

This was the only major event in the history of our planet which unfolded faster than current climate change, and the most recent and quickest of the five major mass extinctions.

■ Non-avian dinosaurs

Around 80 percent of animals were killed, including non-avian dinosaurs, during the Cretaceous-Paleogene mass extinction.

The team compared different species of foraminifera which existed in the 20 million years towards the end of the Cretaceous mass extinction and into the subsequent recovery period. Only after approximately 10 million years did species diversity recover.

After a mass extinction, one might expect swaths of new species to quickly appear, the authors of the study explained. But fossil records show this can happen slower than predicted. The authors surmised this is because of the way species repopulate.

Dr. Andrew Fraass co-author of the study and expert in planktic foraminifera at the University of Bristol told *Newsweek*:

"Foraminifera are useful at the species level because of their superior fossil record, so we've been able to look at this process in a closer way than anybody else.

"From this study, it's reasonable to infer that it's going to take an extremely long time



— millions of years — to recover from the extinction that we're causing through climate change and other methods."

Pointing out a limitation of the study, Fraass said the planktic foraminifera may be the best fossil record we have, but is of "one group, and a single celled one at that."

It is "very difficult" to calculate how long it would take for biodiversity to recover on a species level with the fossil records currently at scientists' disposal, he said.

■ The previous theoretical work

"Our finding is confirming previous theoretical work, so while that's a limitation, it's hypothesized (that) it'll probably be the same for other groups as well," he said.

The "research" is an apt warning about the time it takes to recover from massive losses in species," said Fraass.

"We focus frequently on how long it'll take to recover from climate change (by getting CO₂ back down to pre-industrial or near pre-industrial levels), which is on the scale of thousands of years, but this work corroborates it'll take millions of years for biodiversity to recover from humans."

He went on to explain: "It's a finer point whether or not we're in a mass extinction currently, as paleontological records are based on shallow marine shells and the number of families/genera that go extinct, while modern extinction is based on all organisms and species.

(Source: *Newsweek*)

Plant diversity increases insect diversity, new research finds

The more plant species live in grasslands and forests, the more insect species find a habitat there. However, the presence of more plant species does not only increase the number of insect species, but also the number of insect individuals.

Simultaneously, animal diversity is not only determined by plant diversity, but also by the physical structure of the plant communities.

These are the results of an international collaboration led by the German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research (iDiv), published in the journal *Nature Communications*. These results have consequences for the insect-friendly management of grasslands and forests.

"Our results make it clear that developments such as the currently observed insect decline can be linked to the way in which we humans manage the ecosystems we use," says lead author Prof Andreas Schuldt from the University of Göttingen, previously with the German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research (iDiv).

■ The number of plant species

Together with his co-authors, Schuldt



evaluated extensive data on plant and insect diversity from two of the world's largest biodiversity experiments: the Jena Experiment and BEF-China. In the first experiment, the number of plant species in a grassland was altered and in the second, the number of tree species

in a forest.

Both experiments were designed to investigate the effects of plant diversity on other organisms and the functioning of the respective ecosystem.

The data show that a reduction in plant species richness (number of species)

caused by, for example, the intensive use of agricultural and forest land, can lead to reduced insect abundance (number of individuals), which in turn reduces insect species richness.

"It is important to note that it is not only the loss of plant species alone which is crucial, but also the associated loss of structural diversity," says Jena Experiment speaker and senior author Prof Nico Eisenhauer from the iDiv research centre and Leipzig University.

"These results show that we can make a significant contribution to the protection of biodiversity through structure-enhancing measures such as adapted mowing times and the preservation of old trees," adds BEF-China speaker Prof Helge Bruelheide from the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg and iDiv.

The comparison of data from widely differing habitats shows the relevance of these research results for key ecosystems used by humans. The study was made possible by extensive funding from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG).

(Source: *eurekalert.org*)

Researchers explain why deadly pyroclastic flows from volcanoes travel so sickeningly fast

It wasn't ash that killed the victims of volcano Vesuvius in Pompeii and Herculaneum in 79 CE. It wasn't lava. It was something called pyroclastic flows — extremely hot clouds of volcanic gas and debris that can move at insane speeds.

Pyroclastic flow speeds are so intense, they seem to defy the laws of physics, given the high static friction of volcanic particles. Now volcanic researchers have figured out how it works — those hot currents generate a layer of air at their base, over which they glide almost without friction.

"Here we show, through large-scale experiments and numerical multiphase modelling, that pyroclastic density currents generate their own air lubrication," the researchers explained in their paper. "This forms a near-frictionless basal region."

Given how deadly pyroclastic flows can be — moving up to 725 kilometers per hour (450 mph) at temperatures up to 1,000 degrees Celsius — studying them isn't exactly simple. Direct observations are out of the question, and their size and speed, seen in the below video, makes scaling them for a laboratory setting difficult.

But volcanologists are clever people, and a team worked out how to simulate pyroclastic flows in a laboratory at Massey University in New Zealand using a large-scale experimental setup.

They mined volcanic particles from the Taupo eruption in 232 CE, heated them up to as high as 130 degrees Celsius, and sent them barreling down a 12-meter (40-foot) chute, 1,000 to 1,300 kilograms (2,200 to 2,870 pounds) per experiment.

This chute was equipped with sensors, including high-speed cameras, to observe the dynamics at play in the flow. As it turned out, within the flow there were extremely high shear rates — the rate at which layers in a fluid flow past each other.

When shear increases, so does air pressure; and when shear rates are at their highest, that pressure produces a cushion of air just above the ground, pushing particles away from each other, with denser volcanic dust layers sliding over the top of it.

(Source: *sciencealert.com*)



The dead exoplanet core could be a preview of Earth's future, team suggests

Earth is currently enjoying the best of the sun's life, but that friendly yellow globe in the sky won't last forever. No matter what we do, the sun will one day destroy the world, leaving a fractured planetary corpse orbiting a dead star. Astronomers have spotted a distant star system that could offer a preview of Earth's future. It's a white dwarf star with a destroyed planetary core spinning around it.

Stars like our sun have life spans measured in the billions of years. At 4.6 billion years old, the sun is a middle-aged star. It hasn't changed dramatically in about 4 billion years and will remain in its current state for another 4-5 billion years. However, energy output will increase over time, and in a billion years could make Earth inhospitable to humans. The real show starts in about five billion years when the sun exhausts its hydrogen fuel and expands into a red giant. This will destroy Earth, but maybe not in the way we expected.

This happened to the star known as SDSS J122859.93+104032.9 in the distant past. This system sits 410 light years away. This object is a white dwarf, an ultra-dense stellar core of "electron-degenerate matter" that remains after the outer layers of the star are blasted into space. Without normal electron orbital around atoms, gravity can squeeze the material in a white dwarf like J122859 down until it's the size of Earth with 70 percent of the sun's mass.

The team determined that the planetary core is about 370 miles (600 km) wide with a density of at least 7.7 grams per cubic centimeter. Any lower and it would have been torn apart by the star's gravity as it orbits very close — just 123 minutes per revolution. Its properties are similar to the Earth's iron core, which is why the team believes it's the husk of an ancient shattered planet. It suggests dying stars might not completely annihilate their planets but break them into pieces leaving only the dense cores.

The team used a spectroscopic technique to detect the planetary core around J122859, which isn't as accurate as the transit method employed by Kepler.

(Source: *extremetech.com*)

Scientists introduce the world's first gene-edited lizard

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

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

Menke, the director of the genetics department at the University of Georgia and another author of the study. Until now, all 10,000 species of reptiles have been off-limits. "People thought they were just too hard to work with," he said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(Source: *nytimes.com*)

Charity foundation to create 10,000 job plans in flood-hit provinces

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Berekat Charity Foundation will launch 10,000 employment schemes in 6 flood-stricken provinces across the country, IRIB reported on Monday. In order to ease destructive flood effects, some 10,000 job opportunities will be generated in provinces of Khuzestan, Lorestan, Ilam, Golestan, Mazandaran and Fars.



To do that, a total budget of 4 trillion rials (nearly \$95 million) has been allocated, the report added.

In the provinces of Khuzestan, Lorestan and Golestan, 3,300, 3,000 and 2,000 jobs will be created respectively, and 1,000, 200 and 500 business plans will be also created in the flood-damaged provinces of Ilam, Fars, and Eastern Mazandaran, respectively.

Berekat Charity Foundation, affiliated to Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam also known as Setad-e Ejrai-e Farman-e Hazrat-e Emam, has been established on December 11, 2007, in order to act as an organization to uproot deprivation, to realize economic and social empowerment and to carry out public affairs.

UK scientists discover world's tallest tropical tree

Scientists in the UK and Malaysia say they have discovered the world's tallest tropical tree measuring more than 100m (328ft) high.

The lofty yellow meranti was spotted in a Borneo rainforest by a team from the University of Nottingham last year.

Researchers from the University of Oxford then carried out 3D scans and drone flights to confirm the record.

The tree, found in the Danum Valley Conservation Area in Sabah, has been named Menara, which is Malay for tower.

Local climber Unding Jami, who scaled the tree with a measuring tape, said it was a "scary and windy" ascent.

"But honestly the view from the top was incredible. I don't know what to say other than it was very, very, very amazing," he added.

Dr Doreen Boyd, from the University of Nottingham, said the find was key because "it's the science telling us these trees do exist, they are reaching heights we have perhaps never anticipated and there will be other tall trees out there that haven't been discovered yet".

"It tells us that we do need to protect these trees," she said.

Dr Alexander Shenkin, from the University of Oxford, said after hearing about Nottingham's discovery, they made the "gruelling" three-hour trek to Menara.

He said: "I've seen what I thought were lots of tall trees, but when I walked up to this giant, your head just keeps going up and up as you look to the top."

"I've never seen a tree quite like it."

(Source: BBC)

LEARN ENGLISH

You Missed the Deadline!

A: And so, I just wanted to check in with you and find out where we are with this project. As you know, you've missed a **fairly significant** deadline last week, and this will negatively **impact** the team's ability to **move forward** with the next stages of this project.

B: I know, I'm really sorry that I missed the deadline. But really, it wasn't my fault. You see, we had all of these **unexpected** technical problems at the **last minute**, and that I couldn't get into the database and extract the kind of information that I needed for the data analysis. You know, if the tech guys would have done their job and kept the CRM stable, then I wouldn't have missed my deadline.

A: Oh, come on! An excuse like that is **tantamount** to lying. You're **B** blaming the tech team for your time management issues, rather than accepting responsibility for the fact that you were **procrastinating** for the past two weeks.

B: No, I'm not trying to **pass the buck** here; I know that it was me who is **ultimately** responsible for getting this done. But the thing is, I could have finished on time if the system hadn't gone down. And you know, with everything I've got going on now, I can't afford to waste time dealing with technical problems. I've got a lot **on my plate** and there are only twenty-four hours in a day...

A: I'm not going to accept this excuse. You're using these small technical glitches **as a crutch** and trying to **rationalize** the fact that you've missed your deadline. Look, we have standards and I expect you to live up to those standards. No **phonier** excuses. If you're **in over your head**, you tell me. No more missed deadlines. Now, I want that data on my desk by nine am!

- Key vocabulary**
- fairly significant:** very important or very relevant
 - impact:** to have an effect on something
 - move forward:** continue, go on
 - unexpected:** coming without warning
 - last minute:** at the last moment
 - tantamount:** same as, equivalent to
 - essentially:** in essence, basically
 - procrastinate:** leave tasks or duties for a later time
 - pass the buck:** blame someone else, pass on the responsibility
 - ultimately:** at last; in the end; eventually
 - on my plate:** another way of saying I have many things to do
 - as a crutch:** used to indicate you justify failure with excuses
 - rationalize:** to explain bad behavior in a way that (falsely) makes it seem proper or better
 - phony:** not true, fake or false
 - in over your head:** too much to handle
- Supplementary vocabulary**
- behind schedule:** later than expected
 - procrastination:** the action of delaying one's work
 - fabricate:** to create an untrue story
 - justify:** to give the reasons why you did something wrong
 - tardiness:** the quality of being late often

Mud left behind after flooding increases risks of SDSs in Khuzestan

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — Ali **d e s k** Moridi, head of soil and water office at the Department of Environment (DOE), warned that the recent flood hitting the southwestern province of Khuzestan carried huge sediment loads which could turn into new sand and dust storm (SDS) hotspots after being dried.

So, we need to prepare action plan in order to fight new SDS hotspots before starting to cause great discomfort for the residents, he highlighted, ISNA reported.

Some experts believe that building dams is a way to ease flood devastation and control flood water, however, it brings heavy economic burden along with being a short term solution that might endanger the environment, he explained.

He went on to say that protecting forests, rangelands and watersheds, as well as preserving rivers, must be considered as an efficient solution for the Ministry of Energy, Ministry of Agriculture and other responsible bodies.

Referring to wetland conservation



Recent flood hitting the southwestern province of Khuzestan carried huge sediment loads which could turn into new sand and dust storm (SDS) hotspots after being dried.

as a way to control SDS hotspots, he stated that many wetland conservation plans are also influential in flood control, adding, dredging of rivers at the entrance to the wetlands (which was important in the Aq-Qala flood control), leaving the river banks untouched, controlling cultivation in the upstream and watershed, all contribute to the restoration of wetlands and proper flood management.

Since there is no comprehensive plan to control flooding in our country, the earliest and most important lesson learned from the recent flood is the development of a comprehensive plan, Moridi stated, adding, in this regard, integrated flood management studies are required through all watersheds of the country (putting high risk areas in priority), which leads to an effective outcome including flood action plan.

Although, for appropriate flood management, action plans must have been drawn up since 10 years ago, it must be taken to avoid further damages, he concluded.

National, international aids mobilized for flood-hit Iranians

SOCIETY TEHRAN — While **d e s k** some flood-hit victims are still struggling with adverse effects of torrential rainfalls in the past three weeks, national and international aids have been sent to the affected regions since the very first days.

Afghan Red Crescent Society, Russian Red Cross Society, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Qatar Red Crescent Society, Danish Red Cross, Austrian Red Cross, Indian Red Cross Society, Palestine Red Crescent Society France, Switzerland and Pakistan have so far expressed readiness to provide aids to the flood-stricken Iranians, ISNA news agency reported on Monday.

Moreover Turkish Red Crescent Society, German Red Cross, Kuwait Red Crescent Society as well as Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Republic of Armenia have sent aids to Iran, the report added.

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has allocated some \$500,000 from Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF).

Unfortunately due to U.S. sanctions



Iranian Red Crescent is unable to obtain any foreign financial aid to assist victims of flood that has claimed at least 70 lives and inundated some 1,900 cities and villages.

Floods have inflicted serious damage to the infrastructures, houses, livestock and crops across provinces in northern, northeastern, western and southwestern Iran, with Lorestan, Kordestan, Kermanshah and Ilam in west, Mazandaran in north, Golestan in northeast and Khuzestan in southwest, being among the worst-hit.

However, Iranians inside the country have made generous contributions of about 690 billion rials (nearly \$16.5 million), Iranian Red Crescent Society announced in a statement issued on Monday.

Tehraners breathed 17 days of excellent air quality since March 21

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — Since **d e s k** the beginning of the current year on March 21 citizens of the capital have breathed 17 days of excellent air quality, IRNA news agency reported on Tuesday.

An air quality index (AQI) is used by government agencies to communicate to the public how polluted the air currently is or how polluted it is forecast to become.

The index categorizes conditions according to a measure of polluting matters into excellent (0-50), good (51-100), lightly polluted or unhealthy for sensitive groups (101-150), moderately polluted (151-200), heavily polluted (201-300) and severely polluted (301-500).

The report highlights that in the same period last year only 2 days of excellent air quality was reported.

Moreover, the first 20 days of the year 1397 (March 2018-March 2019) 5 days of unhealthy air quality for sensitive groups were reported as well.

Heavy rainfalls is the major reason behind improved air quality in the me-



ropolis of Tehran.

Director of National Drought Warning and Monitoring Center (NDWMC) Sadeq Ziaeeian 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 millimeters.

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.

Traffic-related deaths drop by 20% during new year holidays

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Traffic related deaths at **d e s k** the crash scene have decreased by 20 percent during the new year holidays from March 16 to April 6, Police Chief Brigadier General Hossein Ashtari has said.

"Although, trips have increased by 14 percent over the first half of the holidays compared to the same period last year, we called on the residents to avoid traveling due to devastating floods during the rest of the holidays, which reduced the trips by 13 percent," he explained.

Referring to a 15 to 25 percent decrease in road accidents and casualties compared to that of last year, he noted that deaths happened immediately after the accident declined by 20 percent.

According to the data published on Iran's forensics organization last year in the same period some 1024 lost their lives in traffic related accidents.

Over 60 percent of accidents occurs in 30 kilometers from the cities due to reckless driving, sidetracks, villages and factories, he lamented, adding, we are trying to equip the areas having the most road crashes to reduce the fatalities despite lack of facilities.



Mohammad Hossein Hamidi, an official with traffic police in January said that everyday 40 to 50 people in the country lose their lives on a daily basis in traffic-related accidents.

Every year the lives of approximately 1.35 million people are cut short as a result of a road traffic crash, WHO reports. Between 20 and 50 million more people

suffer non-fatal injuries, with many incurring a disability as a result of their injury.

Road traffic injuries cause considerable economic losses to individuals, their families, and to nations as a whole. These losses arise from the cost of treatment as well as lost productivity for those killed or disabled by their injuries, and for family members who need to take time off work or school to care for the injured. Road traffic crashes cost most countries 3% of their gross domestic product.

WHO highlights that road traffic injuries can be prevented. Governments need to take action to address road safety in a holistic manner. This requires involvement from multiple sectors such as transport, police, health, education, and actions that address the safety of roads, vehicles, and road users.

Effective interventions include designing safer infrastructure and incorporating road safety features into land-use and transport planning, improving the safety features of vehicles, improving post-crash care for victims of road crashes, setting and enforcing laws relating to key risks, and raising public awareness.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

Water ambulances to join medical emergency fleet

Five water ambulances will be added to the current medical emergency fleet in provinces neighboring the Persian Gulf, southern coast of the country, head of Iran's Emergency Medical Services Organization Pir Hossein Koulivand, said on Wednesday.

Since air emergency fleet have been developed, the Organization is looking forward to develop the marine medical fleet, he said, adding that in recent years, there were only five helicopters in service of the Organization, which have already added to 40.

شناورهای دریایی به اورژانس کشور می پیوندند

رئیس سازمان اورژانس کشور با بیان اینکه در حال توسعه اورژانس دریایی هستیم، گفت: در حال حاضر اضافه کردن پنج فروند شناور دریایی اورژانس به استان های همسایه خلیج فارس در دستور کارمان قرار دارد.

دکتر پیرحسین کولیوند در گفت و گو با ایسنا، گفت: همانطور که ناوگان هوایی اورژانس را توسعه دادیم، در حال حاضر هم به دنبال تکمیل و توسعه ناوگان دریایی اورژانس هستیم. باید توجه کرد که در گذشته فقط پنج بالگرد اورژانس داشتیم، اما در حال حاضر با اقداماتی که انجام شده ۴۰ بالگرد و پایگاه اورژانس هوایی تامین و ایجاد شده که واقعا افتخاری برای کشور است.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-logy, -ology”

- Meaning:** knowledge or collection
- For example:** Our **biology** requires us to breathe air.

PHRASAL VERB

Nip something off

- Meaning:** to remove a small part of something, by pressing it tightly between your finger and thumb
- For example:** She nipped off a dead flower.

IDIOM

Creature comforts

- Explanation:** modern conveniences that make life comfortable and pleasant
- For example:** I need my creature comforts. I don't know how I'd survive without air-conditioning in this climate!

UN urges investigation into Saudi killing of Yemeni schoolchildren

On Monday, the UN humanitarian coordinator for Yemen, Lise Grande, voiced alarm at the "terrible, senseless deaths and injuries."

"Every effort must be made to understand the circumstances that led to this tragedy." Saudi Arabia and a number of its regional allies launched a devastating campaign against Yemen in March 2015, with the goal of bringing the government of former President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi back to power and crushing the Houthi Ansarullah movement.

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

Children are among the most vulnerable victims of Saudi imposed war on Yemen. Back in October last year, a UN report showed that at least 1,248 Yemeni children had been killed and nearly the same number sustained wounds in airstrikes to the time since the onset of the imposed war.



One of the worst and most tragic cases of targeting Yemeni children occurred on August 9, last year, when Saudi-led warplanes hit a school bus as it drove through a mar-

ket in the town of Dhahyan in the northern province of Sa'ada. The death toll included 40 children out of 51 people, while 56 of the 79 wounded were also kids.

In June 2016, the UN blacklisted the Arab kingdom after concluding in a report that Riyadh was responsible for 60 percent of the 785 deaths of children in the Saudi war on Yemen in the previous year. A few days later, however, the world body, then led by Ban Ki-moon, announced that Saudi Arabia would be taken off the list pending a joint review with the kingdom.

At the time, Ban acknowledged that he was forced to remove Riyadh from the blacklist after the regime and its allies threatened to cut off funding to many UN programs. The move triggered an outcry from human rights groups around the globe.

The war has also taken a heavy toll on the country's infrastructure, destroying hospitals, schools, and factories. The UN has already said that a record 22.2 million Yemenis are in dire need of food, including 8.4 million threatened by severe hunger. According to the world body, Yemen is suffering from the most severe famine in more than 100 years.

(Source: Press TV)

Euroskeptic, populist parties form alliance in Europe

Euroskeptic populist parties formed a new and expanded right-wing alliance Monday that aims to become the strongest faction in the European Parliament and seeks to radically transform European Union policies on migration, security, family and environment.

Italy's hard-line interior minister, Matteo Salvini, leader of the anti-migrant League party, told a news conference in Milan that the goal of the new movement in the EU-wide elections next month was to "win and change Europe."

He was joined by representatives of populist parties from Germany, Finland and Denmark.

At the top of their common agenda, the right-wing euroskeptics demanded a halt to all illegal migration, stronger European borders, restoring political sovereignty to EU nations and protecting what they called "European culture."

Salvini rejected any characterizations that the movement, which includes far-right parties, is made up of political extremists flirting with Europe's totalitarian history.

"Today at this table there are no nostalgic extremists," Salvini said. "The only nostalgics are in power in Brussels. Today, we look ahead with a clear memory of what happened in the past, but the tired debate of right, left, fascist, communist, is not what makes us passionate."

Political experts say the May 23-26 European Parliament vote could prove to be a tipping point in post-war European politics, if traditional political powerhouses lose support and extremist, populist parties gain more clout.

The vote, which involves 705 seats this year, is run as national ballots in each of the bloc's states. National political parties with common ideology then unite in EU-wide groups, like the center-right EPP, the center-left S&D Socialists or the liberal, pro-business ALDE.

The new euroskeptic alliance, launched under the banner "Toward a Europe of common sense," expands on the Parliament's four-year-old Europe of Nations and Freedom

Group (ENF), which already includes France's far-right National Rally, Austria's Freedom Party and the Netherlands' Party for Freedom.

Salvini was joined Monday by the far-right Alternative for Germany's co-leader Joerg Meuthen, Olli Kotro of the euroskeptic populist party The Finns, and Anders Vistisen of the right-wing, populist Danish People's Party. Those parties now come from other parliamentary groups, the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD).

Salvini met last week in Paris with National Rally leader Marine Le Pen to cement their long-time alliance before the expansion announcement. He said the participation of the other ENF parties wasn't planned for Monday. Instead, they were expected at a rally in Milan on May 18.

Also missing from the meeting was Hungarian leader Viktor Orban, whose party has been suspended from the main center-right alliance in the EU parliament over values and policies. Despite the tensions, any move from Orban to join the new populist group might be seen as a provocation within the European People's Party.

Salvini identified Islamist extremism – not political extremism – as the main threat to security in Europe.

"As interior minister for 10 months, the No. 1 risk in Italy and Europe is extremism, Islamist fanaticism, extremist terrorism," Salvini said. "There are extreme-right and extreme-left minorities in Italy and in Europe, [but] they fortunately are controlled and of limited numbers."

The leaders said their invitation was open to all like-minded parties to join the new bloc, which will be formed after the parliamentary election. That included any parties from Britain if Brexit hasn't happened by the time European elections roll around.

Salvini also said the new group, if it wins a European parliamentary majority, would cancel for good the process



of inviting Turkey, a Muslim majority nation, to become an EU member. That process has been already stalled for years, much to Turkey's anger.

Salvini's move to solidify the populist movement in Europe, meanwhile, was criticized by his coalition partner at home, 5-Star Movement leader, Luigi Di Maio.

Di Maio, in a letter to Corriere della Sera, wrote that Salvini was aligning with parties that influence policies in countries that have refused to help Italy with the migrant crisis.

Despite the fact that two governing parties will be competing for votes in Italy that could well rebalance power in the coalition, Salvini denied that the European elections would impact the government.

"Because I don't comment on what my allies do," said Salvini said, who then made a sideways reference to Di Maio's meetings in Paris with yellow vest activists seeking to run for European Parliament, creating diplomatic tensions with France.

(Source: AP)

Israelis vote in election as Netanyahu seeks 5th term

The election is largely seen as a referendum on Benjamin Netanyahu who is hampered by corruption charges.

Israel's Central Elections Committee (CEC) chairman Judge Hanan Melcer has filed a complaint to the Israeli police after Likud reportedly provided right-wing activists with 1,200 body cameras to monitor polling sites located in Palestinian populated areas, according to Israeli newspaper Haaretz.

Incumbent Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu responded to the police investigation saying there should be cameras everywhere to "ensure a fair vote."

Police have since removed the cameras. The election pits Netanyahu against Benny Gantz, former army chief of staff, with 37 other parties in the running.

Polls were open from 7am (04:00 GMT) to 10pm (19:00 GMT) at 10,720 polling stations.

Israeli citizens aged 18 and over, including those living in illegal settlements in occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank are eligible to vote. Israeli law excludes expats currently abroad from voting.

The 4.8 million Palestinians living under Israeli military occupation in East Jerusalem, West Bank and Gaza do not have voting rights.

According to the polls, Netanyahu of the right-wing Likud party and Gantz of the centrist Blue and White party are running in a close race for prime minister. The position is chosen by the Israeli president, on the recommendations of Knesset Members (MK).

At a polling station in the occupied French Hill neighborhood of Jerusalem Yafit Scherer

called voting an important privilege.

"I voted for Gantz. I want to change the government. I don't want Netanyahu to continue being PM. [Netanyahu] is a very intelligent and smart person. He's brilliant but he needs to go," she said, because of corruption charges levelled against him.

For real-estate agent Karen Hirshfeld the Palestinian question, which was largely ignored during the campaign, swayed her choice.

"I voted for Meretz because I believe in a two-state solution. We have to separate from the Palestinians and ourselves and give them sovereignty. I think that would be best for this country."

The final poll published by Israel's Channel 13 before the election showed the Likud and Blue and White in a dead heat with each gaining 28 seats.

The poll also predicted that Netanyahu's right-wing bloc would win 66 Knesset seats with Israel's centre-left parties winning 54, as reported by Israeli Haaretz.

On Thursday Israel's Channel 12 released a poll in which respondents were asked who they would prefer to see as prime minister: 37 percent answered Netanyahu and 35 percent said Gantz.

■ Last minute plea

Asked who they believe would form a governing coalition, 58 percent of respondents answered Netanyahu.

However, Netanyahu has been urging voters to head to the polls in a last-minute plea, warning that Likud was trailing be-

hind the Blue and White party, according to Hebrew media.

"People think that we're going to win, so they're not coming to vote," Netanyahu reportedly said at a meeting late Monday night with MKs and Likud members.

"Wake them up everywhere and tell them to bring their family and friends and get out and vote. Our mission is to quickly close the gap as much as possible," Netanyahu said, according to the Times of Israel.

Sixty-one of the 120-seat Knesset seats are needed to form the government. As no single party has ever won a majority of 61 seats on its own, coalition governments are the norm.

After the final votes are counted, President Reuven Rivlin decides which party leader has the best chance of forming a coalition government relying on recommendations from MKs.

Netanyahu told settler leaders in the occupied West Bank on Sunday that he did not think his Likud party would be able to put together a bloc to have the 61 recommendations that would prompt the president to choose him to form a government.

That's in part because the Zehut party, led by Moshe Feiglin, said it would ally with whichever party won the most seats.

"In a situation in which there is no bloc, then [Blue and White party heads Yair] Lapid and Gantz are the biggest parties. That is according to the polls in the media and that is according to our polling," Netanyahu reportedly said according to Israel Hayom.

■ Undecided voters

Israeli newspaper Maariv reported a day before the election that half a million Israelis amounting to nine Knesset seats remain undecided as to who to vote for between the two frontrunners.

The election is largely seen as a referendum on Netanyahu who is mired in corruption charges.

Israel's attorney general announced in February 2019 that he intends to indict Netanyahu for bribery, fraud and breach of trust in three corruption cases.

Gantz formed the Blue and White party in February to unseat Netanyahu.

Akiva Eldar, a senior columnist for Al-Monitor told Al Jazeera that Gantz provides an appealing alternative for those who don't want to vote for Netanyahu, but are not excited for voting for the left-wing Labor party either.

"This was a way to vote in between the two of them for something new, for something that may succeed," Eldar said.

"They don't believe that Labor has the power to get rid of Netanyahu and win the elections, while people believe Gantz can."

"Gantz is not corrupt. He's managed to put together a nice group of people from different parties and it seems that he is a good manager to form [a party] in less than two months [from elections], to be able to bring together three former chiefs of staff and to convince Lapid to give up his ambition," Eldar said.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Navalny hails 'victory' as European rights court condemns Russia

Russia violated the human rights of anti-corruption campaigner Alexei Navalny, a leading opponent of President Vladimir Putin, by holding him under house arrest for a lengthy spell in 2014, Europe's top rights court said Tuesday.

The ruling by the Strasbourg-based court was welcomed as a victory by Navalny, who has sought to expose top-level graft in Russia, but was denounced by the Kremlin.

It is the second time the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has condemned Russia over Navalny, and comes as questions grow over whether Moscow will remain subject to the decisions of the institution.

"The restrictions on him, including tight limits on his communicating, had been out of proportion to the criminal charges he had faced," the ECHR said, ruling that Russia had violated the European Convention on Human Rights.

"It was also apparent that he had been treated in that way in order to curtail his public activities," it added.

Russia was ordered to pay Navalny 20,000 euros (\$22,550) in damages and 2,665 euros (\$3,000) in costs and expenses.

■ 'Important consequences'

Navalny hailed the decision as a "victory" in a message on his Instagram account.

"I am sure that the decision will have important consequences for those in Russia who are subject to such lawlessness all the time," Navalny wrote.

In Moscow, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said: "It's quite unexpected."

"We cannot really agree with it (the ruling). But we have a justice ministry, it is their prerogative to deal with these issues," he added. The ECHR is part of the Council of Europe, a pan-European rights body, and issues binding decisions for its 47 member states.

(Source: AFP)

Trump orders firing of U.S. Secret Service chief

Donald Trump is firing the director of the U.S. Secret Service director, the agency that provides protection for him and other top U.S. officials, CNN reported Monday, one day after the resignation of another top national security official, Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen.

Trump instructed his acting chief of staff Mick Mulvaney to fire Secret Service Director Randolph Alles, CNN reported, citing multiple administration officials.

The White House, Department of Homeland Security and Secret Service did not immediately respond to requests for comment from Reuters.

One official described the firings to CNN as "a near-systematic purge" at the Department of Homeland Security.

The Secret Service director reports to the director of Homeland Security.

Nielsen, who oversaw Trump's bitterly contested immigration policies during her tumultuous 16-month tenure, resigned on Sunday amid a surge in the number of migrants at the border with Mexico.

Trump, seeking re-election in 2020, has taken a hard line toward immigration since becoming president in January 2017, and the issue may be a central theme in next year's election.

(Source: CNN)

Kazakhstan to hold early presidential election on June 9

Kazakhstan's interim president Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has called a snap presidential election, citing the need to eliminate political uncertainty in the oil-rich Central Asian nation.

Tokayev, who replaced Nursultan Nazarbayev following his surprise resignation last month, used a state television address on Tuesday to announce a polling date of June 9.

"We must continue to work on the implementation of the strategy of Elbasy," Tokayev said, referring to Nazarbayev by his constitutional title which translates as "Leader of the Nation".

"This can be done only by the direct expression of the will of the people... As the acting head of state I guarantee that the elections will be held honestly, openly and fairly."

Tokayev said that he had consulted with Nazarbayev as well as other top officials including the ex-president's daughter, Dariga Nazarbayeva, prior to announcing the vote.

"Thanks to Elbasy we have built a successful state that is renowned throughout the world. Kazakhstan has taken up a respected place in the international community," Tokayev said.

Tokayev took office in a pomp-filled ceremony less than 24 hours after Nazarbayev, the only leader an independent Kazakhstan has known, suddenly announced he was stepping down last month.

Nazarbayev, 78, has been known for careful diplomacy that benefits key partners Russia and China while maintaining cordial ties with the West.

But the country has no history of holding elections deemed free or fair by Western vote monitors and is regularly criticized by rights groups for cracking down on dissent.

Tokayev was previously the leader of the senate, where he was succeeded by Nazarbayeva, triggering talk of an eventual dynastic succession.

(Source: AL Jazeera)

Three U.S. service members, one contractor killed in Afghanistan

Three U.S. service members and an American contractor were killed in Afghanistan by an improvised explosive device on Monday, the NATO-led Resolute Support mission said in a statement.

Three U.S. service members were also wounded in the incident near Bagram air base close to Kabul, the statement said.

Violence has been relentless in Afghanistan even though Taliban militants have held several rounds of talks with U.S. officials about a peace settlement. The talks began late last year, raising hopes for an end to the conflict.

Colonel David Butler, a spokesman for U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, said a car bomb had detonated near the security convoy, which lead to deaths and injuries.

(Source: AP)

Japanese fighter jet 'disappears from radar' over Pacific

A Japanese stealth fighter jet has disappeared from radar over the Pacific Ocean during a training mission, according to local reports. Radio contact has also reportedly been lost with the plane.

The F35A stealth fighter disappeared at approximately 7:30pm local time Tuesday, reports the Asahi Shimbun. The jet took off with several other aircraft from the Misawa Air Base, roughly 135km northeast of Misawa City, for a regular night-time training exercise about half an hour before the disappearance.

The aircraft is believed to have one pilot on board. A search and rescue operation is already underway, and the Japanese Coast Guard has deployed two patrol ships to look for the aircraft and pilot.

The F35A is a conventional takeoff and landing aircraft, and is the smallest and lightest of the Lockheed Martin series of multirole fighters.

The jet has been deployed at the base since January 2018. Japan's Ministry of Defense currently has plans to deploy a total of 42 aircraft to the base.

Japan is one of the world's biggest buyers for the fifth-generation stealth fighter. However, the F35 aircraft has been plagued with problems; last September, the U.S. military grounded half of its entire fleet of F35s following a crash in South Carolina. The previous year, a U.S. F35 deployed in Japan lost part of its fuselage mid-flight during a routine training mission.

In February, a Japanese F-2 fighter jet crashed into the Sea of Japan about 130km from its air base in Fukuoka, but thankfully the two crew members were recovered successfully by search and rescue teams.

(Source: RT)

Maradona fined after dedicating win to Venezuela's Maduro

Diego Maradona has been fined for dedicating a recent victory by his Mexican club to Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, Mexico's football federation said on Monday.

The Argentine great, who coaches Dorados de Sinaloa, had dedicated a 3-2 win over Tampico Madero to Maduro and Venezuela in a news conference at the end of last month.

The body said in a statement that Maradona had been fined an unspecified sum for violating the federation's code of ethics which mandates political neutrality.

Maradona had said he was dedicating the victory to Maduro and Venezuelans caught up in an economic crisis. He also criticized U.S. President Donald Trump.

(Source: Eurosport)

Pele leaves hospital in France

Brazilian soccer legend Pele was discharged from a French hospital on Monday after recovering from a urinary infection, media in France reported.

Pele, 78, was admitted to the hospital in Paris last Wednesday with a fever after attending an event in the city with French World Cup-winner Kylian Mbappe.

Pele, considered by many as the game's finest player and the winner of three World Cups, was treated with antibiotics and said on Friday he was feeling much better.

There was no immediate confirmation of the discharge from Pele's press office in Brazil.

(Source: Reuters)

Virgil van Dijk votes for rival Raheem Sterling as PFA player of the year

Liverpool defender Virgil van Dijk has voted for Manchester City forward Raheem Sterling as his PFA player of the year, and said title rivals City had several candidates for his vote.

Van Dijk has been a key part of a Liverpool side boasting the division's best defensive record this season.

Meanwhile, 24-year-old ex-Reds forward Sterling has scored 15 times for City.

"I did what I thought and I thought he deserves it," said Van Dijk, with players unable to vote for team-mates.

"He's had a fantastic season. I could have voted for Bernardo Silva as well, and another couple of players from City.

"But I am just being honest. I think he has improved a lot as a player. We will see if he wins it."

Liverpool currently sit two points above Manchester City at the top of the Premier League, having played one game more, as Jurgen Klopp's side aim for the club's first league title since 1990.

"I think all of the teams of the league would love to be in our position right now. We are in a great situation," added Dutch international Van Dijk, who joined the Anfield club for £75m in January last year and is regarded as a strong candidate for the player of the year award himself.

"It could have been better but it is how it is. We still have a chance to win the title and a chance to win the Champions League.

"It can become a fear when you read all the media and social media. In this situation you need to be very strong mentally."

The awards ceremony takes place on Sunday 28 April.

(Source: BBC)

Chelsea's Drinkwater charged with drink driving

Chelsea midfielder Danny Drinkwater has been charged with drink driving after being involved in an accident near Manchester, British police said on Tuesday.

"A 29-year-old from Nether Alderley has been charged with drink driving following an incident in Cheshire," Cheshire police said in a statement.

"Danny Drinkwater, of Bollington Lane, was arrested shortly after 12.30 a.m. on Monday 8 April following a one-vehicle collision on Ashley Road in Mere.

"He has been released on unconditional bail and is set to appear at Stockport Magistrates' Court on Monday, May 13."

Drinkwater joined Chelsea from Leicester City in 2017 and has made 12 league appearances in total for the London club. His last appearance was in the Community Shield in August.

(Source: Reuters)

Bucharest doping lab reinstated after probe: WADA

The World Anti-Doping Agency on Monday reinstated Romania's main drug-testing facility following a 14-month suspension, a statement said. The Romanian Doping Control Laboratory in Bucharest was suspended in February 2018 amid allegations that the facility had covered up positive drug samples.

However WADA said in a statement an investigation by the agency's Laboratory Expert Group had given the facility the green light to resume drug-testing.

It means the lab is now free to continue anti-doping activities including the analysis of blood and urine samples.

"WADA is pleased to confirm that the Bucharest Laboratory's accreditation has been reinstated," said WADA Director General Olivier Niggli. "We are confident that the laboratory has corrected its deficiencies."

Two senior directors at the laboratory were reportedly sacked last year following the revelations a cover-up, according to reports.

(Source: DW)

Solskjaer faces up to reality as Barcelona roll into town

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer enjoyed a charmed life as interim Manchester United manager but Barcelona's visit to Old Trafford on Wednesday will show him the scale of the task he faces as the new full-time boss.

The Norwegian was rewarded with a three-year deal after dramatically reviving United's fortunes since taking caretaker charge in December, lifting them back into contention for a top-four place and transforming the mood at the club.

The highlight of his reign so far was a dramatic 3-1 away victory over Paris Saint-Germain in the last 16 in the Champions League, which enabled United to overturn a 2-0 first-leg defeat to reach the quarter-finals on away goals.

Solskjaer has given his creative players licence to attack, with Paul Pogba and Marcus Rashford let off the leash to devastating effect. But some of the gloss has come off in recent weeks, with three defeats in four matches badly denting United's chances of qualifying for next season's Champions League and dumping them out of the FA Cup.

Solskjaer, who famously scored the winning goal for United against Bayern Munich in the 1999 Champions League final in Barcelona, was upbeat after drawing the Spanish league leaders in the quarter-finals last month, before he was confirmed as the new long-term boss.

"We want these games against the biggest clubs and the biggest teams. We had the final against them in 2009 and 2011 (both



of which Barca won) and the semi-final in 2008 when Scholesy (Paul Scholes) scored," Solskjaer said.

"It's these games our fans and this club crave. We are looking forward to this one."

Worryingly for Solskjaer, though, some of United's familiar failings under Jose Mourinho have returned to haunt them in the weeks since the draw was made.

Poor run

They were unfortunate to lose at Arsenal but appeared short of inspiration in losing twice to Wolves in the FA Cup and Premier League, while even Solskjaer admitted they did not deserve their solitary win since he was given the permanent job as Watford enjoyed the better of the chances in a 2-1 defeat at Old Trafford.

Solskjaer had a free ride when he took over from Mourinho, with morale at a low ebb and the club 11 points off the top four.

Despite recent hiccups, he has had notable success in his short time at the club and ultimately has his sights set higher than finishing in the top four.

"You've got to aim high," he told ESPN. "You cannot aim too low at this club. You've got to aim to win titles."

"When I came back here as the manager I thought a lot about what makes a winning team. What does it really take to win on the biggest stage? I'm not one to sit back, rest on my laurels."

The 46-year-old will probably be forgiven if United fall short against a Lionel Messi-inspired Barcelona.

But if he fails to reverse the mini-slump and United suffer a heavy defeat to the Spanish champions there is a danger the season could peter out and momentum could be lost.

Questions will be asked as to whether United were too quick to put their trust in a likeable leader and whether Solskjaer has the profile needed to bring in the top-level recruits that United need, particularly in defence, to become serious Premier League and European challengers again.

But he will lead his team out at Old Trafford on Wednesday for their first Champions League quarter-final since 2014 with the same never-say-die attitude he had as a player.

(Source: Guardian)

LeBron defends Walton record amid job speculation



LeBron James has defended Luke Walton's record amid ongoing speculation concerning the Los Angeles Lakers coach's future with the franchise.

Walton is widely expected to be shown the door by the Lakers at the end of the season after a disappointing campaign which saw them fail to make the playoffs for a sixth straight year.

However James said injuries and suspensions throughout the campaign left Walton short of resources for key parts of the season.

James cited the suspensions handed down to Rajon Rondo and Brandon Ingram in the first game of the season as well as a litany of injuries as reasons for the team's problems.

"No one expects for a suspension to happen on opening night," James told Spectrum Sportsnet television in an interview.

"No one expects for injuries to happen the way they did with our franchise this year. Where your starting point guard is out for numerous games. Your starting small forward is out."

(Source: France 24)

"I'm not talking two or three games here, everyone is back in the lineup. We're talking like 15, 20, 25 games."

The Lakers injury toll also included James, who missed 17 games between the end of December and February after suffering a groin strain.

The NBA superstar's absence -- triggered a slump which saw the team fall out of playoff contention in the Western Conference.

James said that when all of the Lakers' key personnel was fit, the team had been a match for most other sides in the league.

"We had a defensive rating of fourth in the NBA, and we were like seventh in offense when we played together over 23 games," James said.

"As good as that is, it's not enough for Luke to even know what he has on a consistent basis, when you don't have a consistent roster every night during the season."

"Like you said, control what you can control and you've got to play the hand you're dealt. I think he played the hand as well as he could."

Assault trial of Russian footballers begins



The trial of Russian footballers Pavel Mamaev and Alexander Kokorin began in Moscow Tuesday, six months after their drunken night out in the Russian capital ended in assault charges.

Mamaev, a midfielder for Krasnodar, and Zenit Saint Petersburg forward Kokorin -- as well as two other defendants, including Kokorin's younger brother -- have been held in Moscow's Butyrka prison since October.

Russian media on Tuesday aired footage of the four handcuffed men rushed from a police van to the Presnensky court, where the hearing is taking place.

According to the Russian press, the trial could last up to two months.

In October the pair attacked the driver of a television host, damaging her Mercedes. She was hospitalised with injuries.

They were then caught on video attacking two Russian trade ministry officials in an upscale cafe, hitting one, an ethnic Korean, with a chair while referring to his Asian appearance.

Several days later, they were ordered to be detained pending trial for "hooliganism." Both are Russian internationals though

Kokorin last played for the national side in late 2017, while Mamaev was last selected in 2016.

The attacks caused outrage in Russia, especially as Mamaev and Kokorin have been in trouble before after partying.

The Russian Football Union suspended the pair in July 2016 after a video emerged from a Monte Carlo nightclub in which Mamaev and Kokorin allegedly spent \$296,000 (258,000 euros) on a champagne-fueled party following Euro 2016, where Russia flopped.

Earlier this month, a court again extended their detention until September 25.

But the severity of the Russian justice system -- all their requests to be granted bail have been rejected -- has angered some.

"In my opinion, this situation goes beyond any human understanding," Sergei Semak, Kokorin's coach at Zenit Saint Petersburg, told the Interfax news agency last week.

"Let's then lock people up for a year for every fight, then it will be clearer for everyone. You fight, you get locked up for a year," Semak said.

(Source: AFP)

Oliver Kahn: Fearsome Bayern legend tailor-made for CEO role

There was a time when Bayern Munich would have been unimaginable without Oliver Kahn, their snarling, self-confident goalkeeper

Those days may soon be here again, as Kahn, now 49 and long retired, prepares to return to Bayern as chief executive officer from 2021.

Bayern's current CEO Karl-Heinz Rummenigge confirmed on Sunday that he would not extend his contract beyond 2021, and that former club captain Kahn would replace him.

"The plan is that Olli Kahn will succeed me, and that I will ease him into the role," said Rummenigge.

"It makes sense: Olli is clever and he knows the club."

Long rumoured to be in line for a leadership role at Bayern, Kahn is tailor-made for the CEO role.

In 14 years at the club, Kahn won eight Bundesliga titles, six German Cups and two European finals, and developed a reputation as a testosterone-fuelled hothead hell-bent on success. Between 1994 and 2008, he terrorised team mates and opponents alike, and became one of the most decorated players in the club's history.

A career high came in the Champions League final against Valencia in 2001, when he saved penalties from Zlatko Zanic, Amedeo Carboni and Mauricio Pellegrino to win the shootout for Bayern.

A year later, his brilliant performances led an unfancied Germany team to the World Cup final, only for his one error



to cost Germany victory against Brazil.

'Balls. We need balls.'

The man nicknamed "Titan" and "Vol-Kahn-o" was known as the human embodiment of his club: proud, unpopular and obsessed with winning.

Bayern are a club who revel in their own unpopularity. Their motto, "Mia San Mia", loosely translates as "We are who we are".

As a player, Kahn delighted in the siege mentality.

"The whole stadium will be against us, the whole of Germany will be against us: nothing is better than that," he said

ahead of Bayern's game in Hamburg on the last day of the season in 2001.

On that day, Bayern snatched the title away from Schalke with the last kick of the game, and Kahn famously ripped out the corner flag in celebration.

He was well known for his on-field aggression. In an infamous performance against Borussia Dortmund in 1999, he notoriously bit the face of Dortmund striker Heiko Herrlich and directed a studs-first karate kick towards Stephane Chapuisat.

Team-mates were also not safe from Kahn's wrath. He once punched Bayern midfielder Mark Van Bommel in the face while celebrating a goal, and after a defeat to Schalke in 2003, he lambasted his colleagues for their lack of spunk. "Balls. We need balls. You know what I mean by that," he told a TV reporter after the game.

Kahn has mellowed in retirement, and is now a respected TV pundit. He has also launched various business ventures, including his own line of goalkeeping equipment.

For Rummenigge, this mix of business know-how, familiarity with Bayern and furious competitive spirit make Kahn a perfect candidate to take over as CEO.

"He knows the club well, and he has now got a separate education in finance and business," said the current Bayern boss.

(Source: AFP)

Iranian teams emerge victorious in ACL Matchday 3

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iran's Esteghlal and Zob Ahan defeated their rivals in Matchday Three of the 2019 AFC Champions League on Monday.

Zob Ahan beat the UAE's Al Wasl 3-1 at the Zabeel Stadium in Dubai.

Christian Osaguona scored once and created two goals as Zob Ahan stormed to a 3-1 victory against Al Wasl in Group A.

Coming off the back of their heaviest-ever AFC Champions League defeat, Al Wasl were looking to recover from their 5-0 humbling at the hands of Al Zawraa. Meanwhile, Zob Ahan looked to extend their unbeaten record this campaign to three games.

Caio Canedo, captaining the side in the absence of Fabio de Lima, broke the deadlock in the 14th minute, the-afc.com reported.

Two minutes later, Osaguona equalized the match with a diving header.

Amir Arsalan Motahari made it 2-1 in the 35th minute.

In the dying moments of the match, Hamid Bouhamdan drilled in a powerful strike from outside the box into the bottom corner to seal the victory for Zob Ahan.

Zob Ahan, who moved to seven points, welcome Al Wasl to Isfahan for the reverse fixture on April 23. A repeat of Monday's win would put the Iranians within touching distance of sealing a place in the Round of 16.

Esteghlal also beat Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia 2-1 at Hamad bin Khalifa Stadium I Doha, Qatar.

Ali Karimi's header in the fifth minute gave Esteghlal an early lead.

Esteghlal defender Pejman Montazeri found the back of the net with a flying header at the back post in the 30th minute.

Bafetimbi Gomis took advantage of a defensive mix-up



to pull one back for Al Hilal in the 71st minute.

Esteghlal defender Milad Zakipour failed to clear Hassan Kadesh's cross and the ball fell to the former Olympique Lyon forward who buried it home from close range to half the deficit.

Al Hilal remain top of Group C with six points ahead of April 23's reverse fixture in Abu Dhabi, while the three points help Esteghlal climb up to third place in the group, behind second-placed Al Duhail on the head-to-head.

'Gucci' keen to prove his worth in Asia to Sky Blues fans

The best is yet to come from Reza Ghoochannejhad, but Sydney FC's Iranian star is confident he will make a goallscoring impact for the team when the stakes are the highest.

The club's prized January recruit, Ghoochannejhad is yet to truly hit his straps for the Sky Blues. The 31-year-old has scored only one goal from nine appearances across all competitions, and has been overlooked for a start by coach Steve Corica in three of their last four matches.

But with Sydney's three biggest matches of the season in the next week and a half, the man known as 'Gucci' is aware that his time to shine is now. Brought in on loan from Cypriot giants APOEL, part of the appeal for the Sky Blues was Ghoochannejhad's status as an Asian player, which meant he could be included in their AFC Champions League squad without having to squeeze

out another foreign player.

Sydney's continental hopes go on the line on Wednesday night in a must-win clash with star-studded Shanghai SIPG at Nestrata Jubilee Stadium, and there is no more opportune moment for Ghoochannejhad to show Sydney FC fans exactly what he's capable of.

"At the end of the day, I just want to play and score goals because that's what I'm here for," he told the Herald. "Of course when you arrive to a new team you need some time to adjust."

"It's not always easy, especially in January, because you have to get to know the players, the staff, the system — everything. But I'm ready, whenever the coach needs me — whether it's in the Champions League or the A-League, I just want to play and be important for the team. We'll see on

Wednesday but I'm very excited, delighted and eager to play."

Shanghai SIPG, the reigning Chinese champions, boast by far the most high-profile foreign legion the Sky Blues will confront in Group H. Captained by Brazilian star Hulk, their squad also includes prolific striker Elkeson, former Chelsea midfielder Oscar and Uzbekistan international Odil Ahmedov, who was part of the team that pushed the Socceros all the way to a penalty shootout in the Asian Cup round of 16.

But Ghoochannejhad said Sydney FC would go into the clash undaunted, and with a steely determination to "set things straight" in Asia after failing to win either of their first two matches. "They have big names, of course. But big names don't decide the game. It's a team effort that gets you the win," he said.

After an "extra sweet" win over Melbourne Victory in Saturday night's Big Blue, Ghoochannejhad said Sydney FC would go into the clash brimming with confidence — as well as the crucial A-League matches against Western Sydney and Perth Glory that follow.

Glory's 3-0 win over Central Coast on Sunday means they only need one more point to stitch up the Premiers' Plate — but until it's mathematically impossible for the Sky Blues to finish top, they won't be giving up hope.

"You never know, it's football — Perth might slip up the next game and then we have Perth at home," Ghoochannejhad said. "There are many scenarios possible at the moment. What we do is focus on our own game and our own plan and we'll see after that what happens."

(Source: SMH)

Spain's Prime Minister offended by Guardiola's comments on country

Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said he is still "offended" by Manchester City coach Pep Guardiola's remarks that the country is an "authoritarian state and repressive."

Guardiola was actively involved in the political campaign for Catalan independence and referred to Spain as "authoritarian and repressive" during a rally in Barcelona in June 2017.

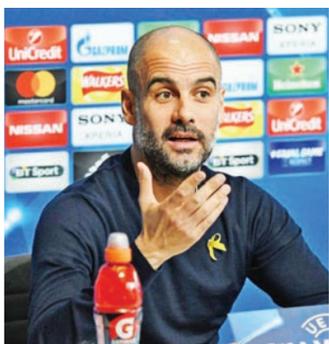
"Yes, of course," Sanchez said when asked by Marca if Guardiola's comments still bothered him. "I'm offended because what he said in that regard is not true whatsoever."

"And what is more, according to some sporting media, that same country that he talks about offered him the chance to coach La Roja [Spain's national team] at one point."

Now in his third season in charge of City, Guardiola, who guided them to the Premier League title last season finishing with a record 100 points, expressed back in 2017 his aspirations of coaching Spain in the future.

But the 48-year-old former Barcelona and Bayern Munich coach said earlier this season that, while he would like to coach a national team one day, he will never be Spain coach because "they [the country's federation] will never offer it [the job] to me."

Guardiola played 47 games for Spain



and won gold at the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona. He also represented Spain at the 1994 World Cup and at Euro 2000.

He has received criticism in Spain for being a vocal backer of Catalonia's fight for independence from Spain, including speaking at mass rallies on the issue.

In 2017, Guardiola dedicated his team's Champions League win over Napoli to two Catalan pro-independence leaders imprisoned in Madrid for charges of sedition.

Last November, he visited jailed Catalan pro-independence leaders to show support for their cause.

"Sport is an element of national pride, it should never be politicized," Sanchez said.

(Source: ESPN)

Real Madrid have invested 236 million euro in Gareth Bale

Since the Welsh player moved to the Bernabéu outfit in 2013, Madrid have invested a total of 236 million euro during his six years in Spain.

Real Madrid have spent €236 million on Gareth Bale. The Welsh player moved to the Spanish club in 2013 for a fee of €101 million moving from Tottenham Hotspur and the close of the current campaign will see the player complete six years with the Bernabéu side with speculation growing that his time in Madrid has come to an end.

The striker's salary outlay also needs to be added to the equation with Bale earning a gross salary of 18 million euro in his first three years with the club (according to information via The Guardian). After his contract renewal which runs through to 2022, the player moved to an increased gross salary of 27 million euro per season which in total added to his transfer fee equates to the 236 million euro overall investment.

■ 102 goals

If this sum is broken down in terms of value for money against goals scored by the Welsh international, the result is thought provoking. Bale has scored 102 goals for the club, which equates to each goal costing a staggering 2.3 million euro. In defense of the Welsh player, recent seasons have seen the



striker's progression hampered by a series of injuries which have seen the Cardiff born striker play in just 225 games for the club since 2013.

For most Real Madrid fans, the Welsh striker's debut season at the Bernabéu was his best with the player bagging 22 goals in 44 games during the 2013-14 season. Each goal coming at a price of 1.6 million euro and each game at 790,000 euro. His poorest return was during the 2016-17 season where he only found the target 9 times in 27 games which equated to each goal costing 4.8 million euro.

(Source: AS)

Mansourian hails his comeback kings

Zob Ahan coach Alireza Mansourian was delighted with the way his side responded after the Iran Pro League side recorded a come-from-behind 3-1 win against the UAE's Al Wasl in Group A on Monday.

For a second consecutive AFC Champions League tie, Zob Ahan conceded early only to rebound in impressive style to secure victory.

Caio's 14th minute opener at Al Wasl Stadium wasn't quite as quick as the goal Al Nassr's Giuliano netted to put Zobahan behind on Matchday Two, but the Isfahan side needed just two minutes to restore parity through Christian Osaguona before adding further goals from Amir Motahari and Hamid Bou Hamdan.

"It's the fourth or fifth time we've made such a comeback recently," said former IR Iran international Mansourian.

"They surprised us really early in the match to go a goal up, but the fact that we were able to respond so well and make such a good comeback shows the team's mentality is very good."



"It was a tough game, but my young players played very well and I'm especially pleased by my captain's performance, he [Ghasem Hadadifar] has a lot of AFC

Champions League experience."

After a goalless draw with Iraq's Al Zawraa on Matchday One, Zob Ahan's win over Al Wasl, coming on the back of that rollercoaster 3-2 win over Al Nassr, now sees Mansourian's men three points clear at the summit of the Group A standings.

Al Zawraa, who lost 4-1 to Al Nassr in Monday's other tie, occupy second place on four points, with Al Nassr and Al Wasl a point further back.

However, despite their status as front-runners at the midway point, Zob Ahan's tactician is under no illusions that a Round of 16 spot is assured.

"As I say, I'm so happy with this result, but we have to remain focused and recognize that we're only halfway through the group stage at this point," said Mansourian.

"My players are young, so they will enjoy this result and be happy to get the win. But we know that we've got the second half of the group stage still to come."

(Source: the-afc)

Shahram Mahmoudi comes out of retirement

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Opposite striker Shahram Mahmoudi has confirmed he will return to Iran national volleyball team.

Mahmoudi, 30, dealt with numerous injury issues through his career, announced his retirement from national duty after the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio.



Mahmoudi was part of the Iranian volleyball team who won 2013 Asian Championship in Dubai and 2014 Asian Games in Incheon.

He has been three times named Most Valuable Player in Asian Club Championship.

Now, he will join Team Melli's training camp for the 2019 FIVB Volleyball Men's Nations League, where Iran will kick off the prestigious tournament on May 31 with a match against Italy in the Chinese city of Jiangmen.

The VNL features five weekends, wrapping up on June 30, before the top six teams move to Chicago for the finals.

Ali Gholizadeh ruled out for rest of season

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Charleroi winger Ali Gholizadeh has been sidelined for the rest of the Belgian First Division A season due to injury.

The 23-year-old player, who has picked up groin strain, will undergo surgery on Wednesday and will miss Jupiler Pro League play-offs.

Gholizadeh had also missed the 2019 AFC Asian Cup after suffering an ankle sprain in early December.

Gholizadeh joined Charleroi on May 30, 2018 from Saipa and scored his first goal for the club on Nov. 25, 2018 in a league match against Lokeren.

Farshad Ahmadzadeh linked with Tractor Sazi: report

TASNIM — Iranian midfielder Farshad Ahmadzadeh has been reportedly linked with a move to Tractor Sazi.

Ahmadzadeh joined Polish football club Slask Wroclaw in July 2018 from Persepolis on a two-year contract.

The 26-year-old player is unhappy at his lack of first-team football at Slask Wroclaw.

The Iranian media reports suggest that Ahmadzadeh has been linked with a move to the Tabriz-based football team.

He was a member of Tractor Sazi on loan from 2013 to 2015 to serve his military duty.

Tractor Sazi are the favorites to win Iran Professional League (IPL) in the current season.

Swedish Government pledges crucial backing for Stockholm Åre 2026 bid

Sweden's Government have pledged backing to Stockholm Åre 2026's bid for the Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games, with Minister of Sport and Culture Amanda Lind claiming they were "united behind the decision."

Stockholm Åre 2026's bid for the Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games has been in doubt, due to a lack of firm assurances the Government would provide guarantees on issues such as security and entry visas into the country which are required by the International Olympic Committee.

Ahead of the deadline for Stockholm Åre 2026 and their Italian challengers Milan Cortina 2026 to lodge their Candidature files with the IOC in Lausanne on Friday (April 12), the Swedish Government have now provided crucial support.

Lind confirmed Government support in an interview with Swedish television station TV4.

"It would be great for Sweden if it was an Olympic Games," Lind said.

"There would be a lot of moving pleasure. For the entire sports movement, it would be a huge boost. As a Sports Minister I am glad that we have been able to give this message. The Government was united behind the decision."

"If we get an Olympic Games then it would be very strengthening, but also very positive in the way SOK and the Swedish Paralympic Committee planned the Olympics, to be able to show that one can do it without expensive new buildings in as far as possible sustainable and climate-smart way."

"It would be a way for Sweden to show how sports events can take place in the future."

Stockholm Åre 2026 bid leaders had been trying to convince politicians that under Agenda 2020, the reform package launched by the IOC in December 2014, they can organize an Olympic Games putting the emphasis on sustainability and efficiency.

Government backing had been in doubt in the aftermath of the inconclusive election last year.

Stefan Löfven was able to form a Government in January, with the administration a coalition of Social Democrats and the Green Party, who Lind represents.

Political opinion had been seen as being split at both national and city level about whether there should be backing for Stockholm Åre 2026.

(Source: Insidethegames)

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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

The insight and judgment of clear-sighted old men in peace is to my mind better and worthier than the patience and steadiness of young and valiant warriors in war.
Imam Ali (AS)

78 Chinese publishers to attend Tehran book fair

TEHRAN — Seventy-eight publishers from China will be attending the 32nd edition of the Tehran International Book Fair as the country is the special guest of the event this year.

Ten writers, translators and book illustrators from China are scheduled to visit the book fair, the organizers announced on Tuesday.

China's pavilion at the book fair will also host special programs including meetings, during which the latest offering from Chinese authors will be unveiled.

Publishers from about 30 countries including Japan, Germany, India, Russia, Serbia, Lebanon and Armenia will also participate in the event.

Fajr festival highlights Amir Naderi's "Runner" in official poster

TEHRAN — The 37th Fajr International Film Festival unveiled its official poster on Tuesday featuring a still from New York-based Iranian filmmaker Amir Naderi's 1984 acclaimed drama, "The Runner".

The film is about Amiru, an impoverished boy who finds conflict with his classmates after enrolling in a school and decides to compete to earn their respect.

A restored copy of the movie will be screened in the Preserved Classics section of the festival, which will be held in Tehran from April 18 to 26.

"The Runner" was the first film of Iran's post-revolution cinema, which was awarded the highest accolades at international events, including the Festival of the Three Continents in Nantes, France.

Mohammad Khodadi appointed culture minister's new press deputy

TEHRAN — Media expert Mohammad Khodadi has been appointed by Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi on Tuesday as deputy culture minister for press affairs.

Former deputy Mohammad Soltanifar resigned from the position in January, and the minister replaced Mohammad-Mehdi Ahmadi as acting deputy culture minister for press affairs in February.

Khodadi was former managing director of the Iran Daily and Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA).

NEWS IN BRIEF



Five Iranian cities to host Danish film festival

TEHRAN — A Danish film festival will be held in the five Iranian cities of Tehran, Kashan, Isfahan, Shiraz and Yazd from May 1 to 4.

The Iranian Youth Cinema Society will organize the festival in collaboration with the Embassy of Denmark in Tehran, the society announced on Tuesday.

No more details were given about the festival's schedule.



Movies from Iran line up for Kinolub festival in Poland

TEHRAN — Five Iranian short movies will be competing in the Kinolub International Film Festival for Children and Youth in Poland during June, the organizers have announced.

The films include "Alan" by Mostafa Gandomkar, "Amir Ali" by Shiva Qanbarian, "Hedyeh" by Sahar Sotudeh, "Moon Said: Blop Blop Help!" by Reyhaneh Kavosh and Ali Rais, and "River Neighbors" by Keyvan Fahimi.

The festival will take place in the southern Polish cities of Lompy and Katowice from June 1 to 20.

Iranian artists back flood relief efforts

TEHRAN — Iranian artists have organized several programs to raise funds for the victims of the recent devastating floods in the country.

A number of cineastes and actors will gather together at Azadi Cineplex on Friday to donate their assistance to Iran's Red Crescent and encourage their fans to support flood relief efforts.

Kamaneh virtuoso Kayhan Kalhor has announced his intention to donate a portion of the box office receipts from his upcoming concerts, "The Silent City", to the relief efforts. His concert will be held at Tehran's Vahdat Hall from April 10 to 20.

Ashkan Kamangari has also donated all the money raised by his concerts scheduled for the 5th Islamic Revolution Art Week at Andisheh Hall on Thursday to the flood victims.

Pop singer Alireza Talishi also dedicated the revenue from his latest concert in Chabahar to the flood victims.

Puzzle Band has also announced that they plan to perform a benefit concert to aid the flood-hit regions.

The concert will be held at Milad Hall of the Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds on April 21.

In addition, the Art Bureau of the Islamic Ideology Dissemination Organization has organized an exhibition of artworks to raise funds for the survivors of the floods. The exhibit, which opens today, will run until April 13.

The recent heavy rainfall in Fars, Golestan, Mazandaran, Lorestan, Khuzestan and several other provinces in western, southwestern and northeastern Iran led to severe flooding, which struck and damaged many cities and villages.

According to the statistics by Iran's Forensics Organization since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (starting March 21), some 70 persons have lost their lives in the floods and hundreds have been displaced.



A woman sits in the ruins of her house in Poldokhtar on April 7, 2019 after a flood hit the town in Lorestan Province last week. (Mehr/Habib Bayat)

Fajr to review international films for Special Screenings



This combination photo shows posters for three films selected for Special Screenings — Best of Countries section at the 37th Fajr International Film Festival. (FIFF)

TEHRAN — A lineup of ten movies from international filmmakers will go on screen in the Special Screenings — Best of Countries section of the 37th Fajr International Film Festival, the organizers announced on Tuesday.

"Woman at War" by Benedikt Erlingsson from Iceland about a 50-year-old environmental activist who crusades against the local aluminum industry is a highlight of the lineup.

"Cake" by Asim Abbasi from Pakistan about a woman who takes care of her

aging parents and their land is also among the films.

Danish director Gustav Moller's thriller "The Guilty" about a police officer who tries to save a kidnapped woman will also be screened.

The section will also review Cambodian-born, France-based filmmaker Rithy Panh's documentary on the Cambodian genocide "Graves without a Name".

The 37th Fajr International Film Festival will take place in Tehran from April 18 to 26.

Actor Mohammad Moti to be remembered at Tehran's Sangelaj Hall



Actor Mohammad Moti in an undated photo.

TEHRAN — A memorial service will be held Saturday in honor of late actor Mohammad Moti at Tehran's Sangelaj Hall.

The stage and screen actor was found dead on March 20 at his home in the Swedish city of Gothenburg, the actor's friend Sam Nobkhat announced. He was 75.

His body will be buried in Gothenburg on Thursday.

Moti was a graduate of theater and began his acting career in Mashhad in the 1950s.

He collaborated with many famous stage directors including Hamid Samandarian

and Ezzatollah Entezmai all staged at Sangelaj.

Acting in the TV series "Sultan and the Shepherd", "Amir Kabir", "Hezardastan" and "Foggy Tabriz" are among other noteworthy credits of the actor.

The actor moved to Sweden in 1986 but returned home 20 years later and began to act in several movies and TV series.

However, he was living both in Iran and Sweden in recent years.

The ceremony has been organized by the Theater Forum and Iranian House of Cinema.

CAMA Gallery to display Mokarrameh paintings

TEHRAN — A selection of paintings by and memorabilia of the self-taught Iranian artist Mokarrameh Qanbari will be put on display in an exhibition at CAMA — Contemporary and Modern Art Gallery on Friday.

"The paintings and her personal things have been selected from the Mokarrameh Qanbari Museum House in the village of Darikandeh near the northern city of Babol," Mokarrameh's son, Ali Bolboli, stated in a press release published by the gallery.

The selection includes Mokarrameh's first painting on a piece of stone as well as her last work before her death. A model of the room in which Mokarrameh created her works will also be set up at the exhibition.

Qanbari was born Darikandeh, and despite her great talent, she never received any formal training in painting. She accidentally began painting at the age of 63 when she came across some artist's paints that her son had



This combination photo shows paintings by self-taught Iranian artist Mokarrameh Qanbari.

left at her home.

She continued her painting using bright, original colors inspired by the beautiful natural surroundings of her region, and within a few years, her works were being recognized by painters in Iran and overseas.

In 2001, Qanbari was awarded an honorary certificate at the Conference of the Foundation of Iranian Women's Studies in Stockholm, and was named the year's exemplary woman.

In addition, she was named the "Female Painter of 2001" by the Swedish National Museum. Iranian filmmaker Ebrahim Mokhtari has made a documentary film about the life and works of the artist entitled "Mokarrameh, Her Memories and Dreams".

She died at the age of 77 on October 24, 2005 and was buried in the courtyard of her home.

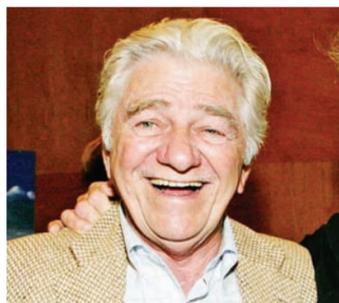
The exhibit will be running until April 23, at the gallery located at No. 44, 10th Golestan, Pasdaran St.

Actor Seymour Cassel, frequent Cassavetes collaborator, dies

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Character actors aren't often called larger-than-life, but Seymour Cassel, was just that. The live-wire pillar of independent film known for his frequent collaborations with John Cassavetes and Wes Anderson, has died at 84.

His daughter, Dilyn Cassel Murphy, said Monday that her father died Sunday surrounded by family following complications from Alzheimer's disease.

With a thick head of hair, a distinctive voice — sly, squeaky and matter-of-fact — and a forehead lined with concern even as a young man, he always made an impression no matter how big the role, whether sharing top billing with Gena Rowlands as one-half of a volatile couple in "Minnie and Moskowitz" or posing as a cancer doctor for Gene Hackman in "The



This May 10, 2007 file photo shows actor Seymour Cassel at the premiere of "The Wendell Baker Story" in Beverly Hills, California.

Royal Tenenbaums." He even left legacies outside of his own industry, as the man who

coined the nickname Slash for the eventual Guns N' Roses guitarist Saul Hudson (he was childhood friends with Cassel's son).

Born in Detroit, Cassel travelled frequently with his burlesque dancer mother as a child, and never met his father.

"I started performing when I was 3; I'd come out in a little checkered suit and pull down the clown's pants — I loved that!" he told the Los Angeles Times in 1992. "I was a little ham and was a very open kid, probably because I was around adults all the time."

He was an angry and rebellious teen, who started drinking at 13. His mother shipped him off to live with his godmother in Detroit, where he stayed until enlisting in the Navy at 17.

He eventually made his way to New York in the 1950s to pursue acting, launching

a 60-year career with appearances in over 100 films. It was there that he met Cassavetes, who he said "saved" his life, and made his film debut in his 1958 feature "Shadows," which he also associate-produced, almost by accident.

It was the beginning of a lifelong friendship. In 1959 he followed Cassavetes and Rowlands to Los Angeles where he lived in their guest house.

He'd go on to work for Cassavetes often, with roles in "Faces", which earned him a best supporting actor nomination in 1969, "The Killing of a Chinese Bookie," "Opening Night" and "Love Streams."

Working with Cassavetes got him on the radar of many and he'd get the chance to work with greats like Sam Peckinpah in "Convoy," Elia Kazan in "The Last Tycoon" and Nicolas Roeg in "Track 29" and "Cold Heaven."