



Iran to pursue case against U.S. over IRGC decision **2**



Tehran slams S. Arabia, Bahrain for backing anti-IRGC move **2**



Bagheri Motamed announces retirement from taekwondo **15**



Filmmaker Morteza Avini remembered at Iranian Artists Forum **16**

IRGC in forefront of war on terror

See page 2



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Zarif, his deputies meet top IRGC commanders

TEHRAN — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and his deputies met on Wednesday with the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Chief Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari. Deputy Foreign Minister Morteza Sar-madi and Abbas Araqchi as well as Major General Qassem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC Quds Force, and other top IRGC commanders were present at the meeting,

ISNA reported. The meeting took place two days after U.S. government labeled the IRGC as a foreign terrorist organization. The move was widely condemned by top political and military officials. Speaking after the meeting, General Jafari said the Americans would not dare to take military action against Iran as they know their forces in the region would suffer the consequences. **→2**

Iran's 2-month crude steel output rises 7.6% yr/yr: WSA

TEHRAN — Production of crude steel in Iran stood at 4.245 million tons during the first two months of 2019, indicating 7.6 percent rise from 3.945 million tons in the same period of time in 2018, according to the latest data released by the World Steel Association (WSA).

The WSA data put the world's steel producers' output at 287.609 million tons during the two-month period of this year,

indicating 3.7 percent growth from the same time span of the past year.

World Steel Association also put Iran's crude steel output at 2.015 million tons in February of this year, with a 9.6-percent fall from February of 2018.

As the global organization has previously announced, Iran was ranked the 11th among the world's largest crude steel producers in the first half of 2018. **→4**

UNICEF slams Saudi killing of Yemeni schoolchildren

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) has condemned the killing of more than a dozen schoolchildren in Yemen, where Saudi-led warplanes keep pounding an impoverished nation in an imposed war.

At least 14 people were killed and 95 others, mostly students, 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 huge explosion, which occurred close to two elementary schools at lunch-time, "shattered the windows and unleashed a burst of shrapnel and broken glass into the classrooms," said Geert Cappelaere, the UNICEF regional director for the Middle East and North Africa, in a statement released on Tuesday.

Naming IRGC terrorist group will contribute to regional tensions: Entessar

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Nader Entessar, Professor Emeritus of Political Science from university of South Alabama says that the neocon and regime change operatives in Trump's foreign policy circles have been advocating this policy for many months now.

He adds that "It appears that these elements, especially John Bolton and Mike Pompeo, finally managed to convince Trump to designate the

IRGC as a terrorist group."

Entessar says "This is the first time in the history of international relations when the government of one nation-state single-handedly has designated a military segment of another recognized nation-state as a terrorist organization."

Following is the full text of the interview:

■ What was the goal of the designation of IRGC as a foreign terrorist group?

A: The neocon and regime change operatives in Trump's foreign policy circles have been advocating

this policy for many months now. It appears that these elements, especially John Bolton and Mike Pompeo, finally managed to convince Trump to designate the IRGC as a terrorist group. This is the first time in the history of international relations when the government of one nation-state single-handedly has designated a military segment of another recognized nation-state as a terrorist organization. The IRGC has already been under total and complete US sanctions. The main goal of Washington's latest move is to further bludgeon Iran and force it into submission. **→7**

Oman is important nodal point in Iran's strategic orbit: Adib-Moghaddam

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Professor Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, Chair of the Centre for Iranian Studies at the London Middle East Institute believes that "Oman is certainly an important nodal point in Iran's strategic orbit."

Professor in Global Thought and Comparative Philosophies and Chair of the Centre for Iranian Studies at the London Middle East Institute, also adds that "Oman has played an intermediate role in many conflicts of the region and it will continue to do so."

Here is the full text of the interview:

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

A: The Trump administration is overselling and overmarking this deal. In any serious conflict, their contingencies in the Persian Gulf would

still have to rely on the Strait of Hormuz. There are two causes for this decision: First, it is an admission that Iranian military capabilities are sophisticated enough to control access to the Strait of Hormuz, if necessary. And secondly, it indicates Washington's increasing nervousness about the global reach of China, in particular with reference to their first overseas military base at Bab al-Mandeb in Djibouti. China is also the major investor in Oman, even next to the proposed base in Duqm/Oman. **→7**

Trump's recognition of Golan Heights as Israeli flouts intl. law: Aoun

Lebanese President Michel Aoun has strongly condemned U.S. President Donald Trump's recognition of the occupied Syrian Golan Heights as sovereign Israeli territory, describing the measure as in blatant violation of international law and conventions.

"This threatens not only the sovereignty of a brotherly country and brotherly nation, but also the sovereignty of the Lebanese state, which

possesses land gradually annexed by Israel, particularly in the Shebaa Farms, Kafreshuba hills and the northern section of Ghajar [village]," Aoun said at a joint press conference with his Bulgarian counterpart Rumen Radev in Beirut on Tuesday.

The Lebanese president then urged the Israeli regime to fully comply with UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which brokered

a ceasefire in the war of aggression Israel launched against Lebanon in 2006 and calls on Tel Aviv to respect Beirut's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Aoun also urged Bulgaria to stand by Lebanon in the face of repeated Israeli attacks, and support the Arab country's right to extract crude oil and natural gas within its territory and territorial waters. **→13**



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Army sets up floating bridge in Karun city

Army set up a 140-meter-long floating bridge over the Karun River in hours, connecting Seyyed Saleh village to the city of Karun in the province of Khuzestan.

Flash floods have made the bridge, which connects villages in the region, unpassable.

Unprecedented rainfalls, which started in major parts of Iran on March 19, flooded the rivers in western Zagros Mountains, inundating large parts of Khuzestan province.



PERSPECTIVE

Hanif Ghaffari
Political analyst

Biden worried about rising Sanders' votes

Former Vice President Joe Biden has not yet made his final decision to run for the presidency of the year 2020. However, polls among Democrat supporters suggest Biden has a good relationship with other party candidates. Biden's main concern, however, is for Barney Sanders. One that could prevent Biden from attending the final presidential election.

As "The Hill" reported, Democrats are most confident that former Vice President Joe Biden and Sen. Bernie Sanders can defeat President Trump in a general election, according to a new Hill-HarrisX poll. In the survey, 75 percent of Democratic respondents said that they believed that Biden had a strong or some chance of beating Trump in the general election next year, while 64 percent said the same of Sanders. None of the other potential and declared Democratic candidates were rated by more than half of the party's voters as having at least some chance of defeating Trump.

Forty-five percent of Democrats in the survey said that they believed former Rep. Beto O'Rourke (D-Texas) had at least some chance of defeating the president, while 43 percent said the same about Sen. Kamala Harris. Forty-two percent of Democrats said that Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) had at least some chance of victory, while only 36 percent said they believed Sen. Cory Booker (D-N.J.) had at least some chance of beating Trump, and just 25 percent said the same about Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.). Seventeen percent said they believed entrepreneur Andrew Yang had at least some chance.

The analysis of the results of the polls about the upcoming US presidential election is not so difficult. Biden, who is expected to soon enter the Democratic race, and Sanders have routinely polled at the top of surveys of Democratic voters. The Hill-HarrisX survey suggests Dems desperate to eject Trump from the White House may be gravitating to the two men because they see them as having the best chances to defeat Trump, according to Sophia Tesfaye, the deputy politics editor at Salon.com. "This time around, especially after 2016 for Democrats, the biggest driver for popularity is can you beat Donald Trump," she said Tuesday on "What America's Thinking." **→7**



ARTICLE

Abdul Mumin Giwa
Journalist from Nigeria

Revelation: Why Buhari is illegally detaining Sheikh Zakzaky

The revered leader of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria, Sheikh Ibraheem Zakzaky (H) has been in illegal detention under the Muhammadu Buhari regime since its inception.

The brutal clampdown on the movement by the Nigerian Army in December 2015, a few months after the regime was sworn-in, attracted world's attention and was condemned as a massacre and genocide by major reputable global rights groups.

Over 1000 followers of the revered leader were butchered between 12th to 14th of December 2015 in Zaria including men, women, and children. Some were burned alive, some killed at close ranges and others buried alive by the team of murderers that were commanded by Buhari, Burutai, and Elrufai. This is not talking about hundreds that were subsequently killed in street protests across the northern states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

All known laws were violated in the treatment meted on the movement, including the Geneva Convention but hypocritically and mischievously, the killing was shamelessly justified by the government, some Sunni sectarian extremists and the blind supporters of Buhari claiming that the followers of the Islamic leader blocked the way of the Chief of Army Staff, Gen Tukur Buratai.

The residence of the revered Sheikh Zakzaky was set ablaze by the Nigerian army where he was taken custody. The house was subsequently demolished by the state government and the rubbles packed to an unknown location to hide the evidence of burning human beings alive, using heavy weapons in unarmed civilians and a display of state terrorism by the government.

All efforts by the government to blackmail the movement and Sheikh Zakzaky proved abortive as the movement, despite the suppression meted on it, sorted for redress through peaceful and legal means. **→7**

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



IRGC biggest anti-terror organization: official

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Hesamodin Ashna, head of the Presidential Center for Strategic Studies, has defended the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as the biggest anti-terrorist organization in the world, days after the IRGC was blacklisted as a terrorist organization by the U.S. government.

“The Guards, as the biggest anti-terrorist organization, has had the most successful performance in the fight against terrorism and the outcomes of its work has led to calm for regional nations,” IRNA on Wednesday quoted Ashna as saying.

Ashna said the United States is not just trying to harm the IRGC, the Iranian armed forces and the Islamic Republic of Iran, but the main target is the nation of the Islamic Iran.



Tehran slams S. Arabia, Bahrain for backing anti-IRGC move

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi on Wednesday slammed Saudi Arabia and Bahrain for officially endorsing the U.S. designation of the IRGC as a terrorist organization.

The two countries’ official position “shows their superficiality regarding the realities of the region and their ignorance about the consequences of U.S. misadventures in the region,” Mehr quoted Qassemi as saying.

He said Saudi Arabia and Bahrain’s “injudicious” support of the U.S. move was in contradiction with principles of non-interference and respect for national sovereignty of other countries.



IRGC seizes shipment of smuggled fuel in Strait of Hormuz

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy chief Alireza Tangsiri announced on Wednesday that the IRGC has seized 12.5 million liters of smuggled fuel in the Strait of Hormuz.

The IRGC forces managed to seize a 10,000-ton shipment of smuggled fuel in the southern Strait of Hormuz, located between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, in an intelligence operation, Tangsiri said, Mehr reported.

Some 21 individuals of different nationalities have also been arrested, he added.

In February, three major fuel-smuggling cartels that were involved in smuggling 17 million liters of fuel were dismantled in the southern Fars province.



‘U.S. wrong policies have spread terrorism in Mideast’

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Chairman Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh said on Wednesday that the U.S. “wrong” and “illogical” decisions have led to spread of terrorism and violence in the Middle East region and beyond.

He made the remarks during a meeting with Russian State Duma International Affairs Committee Chairman Slutsky in Moscow.

Falahatpisheh criticized U.S. President Donald Trump’s “wrong policies” in supporting and training terrorists in the region.

He suggested “interaction and cooperation among independent countries to counter the U.S. hegemony and illegal behaviors.”

The senior MP described Tehran-Moscow cooperation in countering terrorism in Syria as a good model to advance policies.



Exhibition on nuclear achievements opens up in Tehran

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — An exhibition on 114 achievements of Iran’s nuclear industry opened up in Tehran on Tuesday, according to the Mehr news agency.

It came after the achievements were unveiled in a ceremony on National Nuclear Technology Day attended by President Hassan Rouhani, Atomic Energy Organization chief Ali Akbar Salehi and vice president for scientific affairs Sorena Sattari and other officials.

Also, the installation of a chain of 20 advanced IR6 centrifuges started in the Natanz enrichment facility in central Iran.

Zarif, his deputies meet top IRGC commanders

1 → Also in remarks after the meeting, Zarif said, “The Americans’ stupid act against the Guards has fortunately increased our unity inside the country.”

“This laughable act by the Americans reveals their desperate regional policies.”



After the meeting, Zarif also posted a tweet, saying, “Honored to meet top cmdrs of #IRGC. Our armed forces sacrificed to defend our nation, region & the world against Saddam & ISIS. We’ll never forget their sacrifice—nor will we allow outlaw bullies to destroy their legacy by fuelling insecurity & instability. Nor should the world.”

Turkey, Qatar, Iraq, China criticize U.S. designation of IRGC as terror group

Turkey, a NATO ally of the United States, and Qatar, also a U.S. ally, as well as Iraq and China on Tuesday objected to U.S. President Donald Trump’s decision to designate Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist group.

“The United States issued this one-sided decision in the context of sanctions and pressure on Iran,” Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said during a joint press conference with his Qatari counterpart Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani in Istanbul, Arab News reported.

“We do not support Iran’s Revolutionary Guards in Syria, but no country can declare another country’s armed forces a terrorist organization. We also do not support unilateral decisions.” Such measures “would lead to instability in the region,” Cavusoglu said.

According to Reuters, the Turkish foreign minister added, “Such decisions will lead to instability in our region and once you start stepping outside international law, it is unpredictable where it will stop.”

Al-Thani said disagreements over the Iranian army’s behavior, or that of any other army, should not be solved by imposing sanctions.

Trump on Monday said he had officially decided to include the IRGC on the U.S. list of terrorist organizations, marking the first time that America formally labels another nation’s military as a terrorist group.

In response, Iran’s Supreme National Security Council decided to include the U.S. Central Command, which is responsible for American military activities in the Middle East and Central Asia, on Iran’s list of terrorist organizations.

Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, who openly show hostility toward Iran, welcomed the U.S. action on Tuesday. However, Iraqi Prime



Mevlut Cavusoglu

Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi said it “could have negative repercussions on Iraq and the region”.

Abdul Mahdi, speaking to reporters, said Baghdad had tried to head off Trump’s decision and added that Iraq would do all it could to bring calm to the region since it maintained good relations with both Tehran and Washington.

“We tried to stop the American decision. We reached out to all sides, to the U.S. and the Saudis,” the prime minister told a press conference, according to Press TV.

Any escalation, he said, “would make us all losers.”

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lu Kang said on Tuesday China always upholds that all countries should observe the basic guidelines of international relations on the basis of the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, rather than pursuing power politics and bullying.

“We hope that relevant countries, especially major powers outside the region, will do more things that are conducive to the peace



Adel Abdul Mahdi

and stability of the Middle East, instead of taking measures that will lead to further tension in the region,” Lu said in a regular press briefing, according to Xinhuanet.

■ Psychological warfare

Mahmoud Va’ez, the Iranian presidential chief of staff, said the U.S. move is just a “propaganda” and “psychological warfare” which is primarily intended to put economic pressure on Iran.

In a tweet on Monday, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said the decision against the IRGC is an “election-eve gift” to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Zarif also called the move a “dangerous U.S. misadventure in the region.”

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. 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.

IRGC Chief Major General Mohammad



Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani



Lu Kang

Ali Jafari on Tuesday downplayed the U.S. move, calling it “ridiculous”. Jafari said the IRGC will become stronger in its defensive and offensive power.

Acting U.S. Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan told Fox News on Tuesday that listing the IRGC as a terrorist group was a policy decision by the administration and was meant to have “non-military effects,” such as pressuring the Iranian economy.

“We’re going to continue to work in Iraq to strengthen security forces. We recognize Iraq’s sovereignty. It’s our role in-country to build security and we’ll continue to do that,” Shanahan said, according to Reuters.

For its part, France called for steps to avoid any escalation of tensions in the Middle East.

In a show of support, Iranian lawmakers wore Guards uniforms to parliament on Tuesday, as Iran marked the annual National Day of the Revolutionary Guards.

“America’s decision to label the Guards as a terrorist group was the peak of stupidity and ignorance of the American leadership,” Parliament speaker Ali Larijani as saying.

IRGC says to give U.S. ‘unforgettable lesson’

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) issued a statement on Wednesday threatening to give the U.S. an unforgettable lesson after Washington named it a terrorist organization.

U.S. President Donald Trump announced on Monday that Washington is designating the IRGC a foreign “terrorist organization”, marking the first time the U.S. has formally labelled another country’s military a terrorist group.

The IRGC adopts the policy of retaliation in the face of

the enemies, the IRGC said in the statement, adding that the adversaries “will be given an unforgettable and exemplary lesson that would make them regret, if necessary.”

It described the U.S. decision to label it a “terrorist group” as yet another episode in a series of U.S. defeats.

The statement stressed that Washington’s move has strengthened the IRGC’s resolve to further boost its defense and offensive systems and capabilities, as well as its rising regional might.

China, EU reaffirm commitment to nuclear deal

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — China and the European Union (EU) have reaffirmed their commitment to the continued, full and effective implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal.

The reaffirmation came as China and the EU issued a joint statement after the 21st meeting of their leaders in Brussels on Tuesday afternoon, Xinhua reported.

The deal was initially inked in 2015 between Tehran and six world countries, namely the U.S., Russia, China, France, Britain and Germany.

Last May, however, U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew his country from the JCPOA — which had been negotiated under his predecessor — and re-imposed the anti-Iran sanctions that had been lifted under the landmark deal.

Despite Washington’s withdrawal, Iran has not left the deal yet, but has stressed that the remaining signatories to the agreement need to effectively offset the negative impacts of the U.S. pullout on Iran if they want Tehran to remain in it.

China and the EU recalled that the JCPOA is a key element of the global non-proliferation architecture and a significant diplomatic achievement endorsed unanimously by the UN Security Council,



the statement said.

The two sides “reaffirm their commitment to its continued, full and effective implementation, as well as their efforts to preserve economic benefits for Iran,” it said.

They recalled the importance of the Arak modernization project, and the need to continue their common efforts in this regard, it said.

In April 2017, Iran and China signed the final version of a contract to redesign and modernize the Arak heavy water reactor.

According to the agreement, the Chinese side is to review the new design of the Arak reactor made by the Iranian experts and confirm its compliance with the international safety standards of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

China and the EU in their Tuesday statement welcomed the fact that the IAEA has confirmed in 14 consecutive reports the continued adherence by Iran to its nuclear-related commitments.

Rouhani: IRGC in forefront of war on terror

U.S. aware of consequences if it takes steps beyond slogans against IRGC, president warns

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday that the U.S. is aware of the consequences if it takes more steps than “slogans” against the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps.

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

During a cabinet meeting, Rouhani said, “Prime minister of the Zionist regime of Israel has said clearly that the U.S. action has been taken upon their [the Israelis] request. All the U.S. crimes and illegal actions have been in line with helping one person in the occupied lands to gain victory in election.”

He again called for national unity against plots.

“The U.S. should know that it is the source of tyranny and terrorism in the region, and the regional people, especially in Iran, have always helped each other during difficult times and the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps has played a remarkable role in this respect,” the president noted.

Rouhani said that the enemies have failed to reach their objectives in the

region and the IRGC has played a fundamental role in their defeat.

“They are angry and take unwise actions,” he added.

Noting that nobody heeds the U.S. terror label against the IRGC, the president said, “The Guards is in the forefront of campaign against terrorism.”

Recognizing the Zionist regime’s occupation of the Syrian Golan Heights and terror designation against the IRGC are part of the “stupid and unwise” moves by the Trump administration to prop up a criminal group in the occupied territories.

In remarks on Tuesday, Rouhani also said, “Today America that holds a grudge against the Guards, blacklists the Guards.”

On Tuesday Rouhani also said if the aim of the Trump administration in reimposing sanctions against Iran is to decrease Iran’s military power they should know that since last year Iran has built missiles and other weapons that they cannot “imagine”.

Presidential chief of staff Mahmoud Va’ez also told reporters after a cabinet meeting on Wednesday that the terrorist label against the IRGC is to put economic pressure on Iran.

Iran to pursue case against U.S. over IRGC move: Hatami

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran’s defense and foreign ministries will push a case against the United States through international channels over its designation of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization, Defense Minister Amir Hatami announced on Tuesday.

“Of course the Foreign Ministry will go ahead with pursuing a case in international institutions against America for such decision, but the Defense Ministry will cooperate as well,”

Hatami said, Mehr reported.

He said Iran will not be the first one to bring instability to the region but it will respond decisively in case of any threat.

From now on, he continued, any encounter “they have with the Guards forces will be met with our strong response.”

The defense chief also predicted that Iran’s response to the U.S. move will make the Americans reconsider their decision.

He added if the Islamic Republic and the IRGC had not

fought with terrorists, the world and the region would be so different today.

Hatami also met with President Hassan Rouhani on Tuesday evening to brief him about the activities of the Defense Ministry during the last Iranian year, which ended on March 20.

During the meeting, Rouhani said the enemies will never be able to hamper the Iranian nation’s progress.

“The nation have been committed to their path and objective through unity and resistance and will succeed,” he added.

U.S. move on IRGC is ‘provocative’, Rouhani says in phone talks with Macron

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said on Tuesday that the U.S. act in designating the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps as terrorist organization is “very provocative”, “dangerous” and “unprecedented”.

During a phone conversation with French President Emmanuel Macron, Rouhani said that

the U.S. action was taken based on Tel Aviv’s request.

“Today, at least two countries in the region would be controlled by Daesh if it was not for the Guards’ sacrifice. These forces caused a serious harm to the terrorist groups in the region,” Rouhani reminded.

U.S. President Donald Trump labeled the IRGC

as a foreign terrorist organization on Monday.

According to Reuter, France has called for steps to avoid any escalation of tensions in the Middle East.

In his talks with Macron, Rouhani also pointed to the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, saying Iran has been fulfilling its obligations, however, there

has been no practical action by the other side.

“We want full implementation of obligations by both sides so that Iran can reap legitimate economic benefits,” he said.

He noted that the International Atomic Energy Agency has confirmed Iran’s commitment to the deal for 14 times and urged Europe to implement the mechanisms to save the deal.

Turkey says it will look elsewhere if U.S. won't sell Patriots, F-35s

Turkey warned on Wednesday that it could buy jets and additional air defense systems from Russia if it cannot get Patriot missile shields and F-35 jets from Washington, raising the prospect of ever deeper defense ties between Moscow and a NATO member.

President Tayyip Erdogan's existing plans to buy Russian S-400 missile defenses have already alarmed the United States, which says they are not compatible with NATO systems and would compromise the security of F-35 jets Turkey is due to receive.

Washington has offered Ankara both carrot and stick in response, proposing to sell it the Raytheon Co. Patriot systems instead of the S-400s, while at the same time warning of sanctions and a halt in the F-35 fighter jet sales if the Russian deal goes ahead.

Turkey has shown no sign of giving ground and Erdogan, who held talks with President Vladimir Putin in Moscow this week, was quoted on Wednesday as saying the July date for delivery of the first S-400s could even be brought forward.

Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu also reiterated Turkey's stance that the S-400 purchase was a done deal and that it would meet its defense needs from elsewhere if necessary.

"If the United States is willing to sell, then we'll buy Patriots. However, if the United States doesn't want to sell, we may buy more S-400s or other systems," Cavusoglu told Turkish broadcaster NTV.

"If the F-35s don't work out, I will again have to procure the jets I need from elsewhere



... There are (Russian) SU-34, SU-57 and others. I will absolutely meet my needs from somewhere until I can produce it myself," he said.

Asked about Cavusoglu's comments, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia was looking for opportunities to broaden its military and technical cooperation with Turkey. "This is an absolutely normal process," he told reporters.

■ "Either F-35s or S-400s"

The F-35s stealth fighters are being built by Lockheed Martin Corp, but Turkish manufacturers are also involved in production, further complicating the fallout from any rupture between the two countries.

Cavusoglu also said Turkey had not yet received a positive response from Washington over its proposal to form a joint working group which Ankara says would be able to

demonstrate that deploying the S-400s would not pose a threat to F-35s.

"The U.S. F-35s fly over Syria every day and there are S-400 systems there. They pose no threats despite being systems that are completely under Russian control, so will they pose a risk when the are in Turkey's control?" he said.

On Tuesday, leaders of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations and Armed Services Committees warned Turkey that it risked tough sanctions if it pursued plans to buy the S-400s.

"By the end of the year, Turkey will have either F-35 advanced fighter aircraft on its soil or a Russian S-400 surface-to-air missile defense system. It will not have both," Republican Senators Jim Risch and Jim Inhofe and Democratic Senators Bob Menendez and Jack Reed said.

The standoff over the S-400s purchase is one of several issues straining ties between the two NATO allies. They have also disagreed on military strategy in northern Syria, Iran sanctions and the detention of local U.S. consular staff.

Speaking to reporters on his return flight from Russia, Erdogan said he and Cavusoglu were constantly being pressured to abandon it the S-400 deal.

"We answer that 'This deal is done, everything is settled'. The delivery of the S-400 missile defense system was to be in July. Maybe it can be brought forward," Sabah newspaper quoted Erdogan as saying. (Source: Reuters)

Modi rides nationalist fervor ahead of election starting on Thursday

India's prime minister is rallying his nationalist base as the world's biggest democracy begins a general election on Thursday, but it has become tighter than anticipated, thanks to dwindling incomes for farmers and scarce jobs.

Polls predict Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party-led (BJP) alliance will just win a parliamentary majority, a sharp drop from his commanding mandate five years ago, when he vowed to turn India into an economic and military power.

But his government's inability to create a million jobs every month, and ease farmers' distress over low product prices, has taken the shine off what is still the world's fastest growing major economy.

From sugar farmers in northern Uttar Pradesh going unpaid for produce, to small businesses in the south shut because they are unable to meet the requirements of a new, unifying national tax, discontent has brewed for months.

"The election has become a lot closer than we think, sitting in Delhi," said Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, author of a Modi biography and books on Hindu nationalist groups. "There is anger and disillusionment in the countryside."

In December, alarm bells rang for Modi's Hindu nationalists after it lost three key states to the main opposition Congress and its allies, led by Rahul Gandhi.

But a surge in tension with traditional foe Pakistan in February has pushed Modi ahead, as he projects himself as a defender of national security and paints his rivals as weak-kneed, sometimes even questioning their patriotism.

"People were very unhappy, angry that Modi makes tall promises and doesn't deliver," said Shiv Chandra Rai, an Uber driver in the commercial capital of Mumbai.

"Everyone said there are no jobs, everywhere farmers are struggling. But on this issue of Pakistan we are confused now. Some people feel we have to vote for Modi on this issue,

it is a national problem."

Modi ordered air strikes on a suspected camp of a militant group in Pakistan after it claimed responsibility for a deadly bombing in Indian Kashmir, launching the first such raid since the neighbors' last war in 1971.

The nuclear-armed foes engaged in a dogfight after Pakistan sent warplanes into India the next day. They also threatened each other with missile strikes, before Western powers, led by the United States, pulled them back.

Modi claimed victory, vowing more similar action if militant attacks continue in Kashmir. He dismissed concerns over the effectiveness of the strikes and the risk of stirring tension with Pakistan.

"Why do these people get so disturbed when India acts strongly against the forces of terror?" he asked tens of thousands of cheering supporters wearing saffron headbands at a rally this week in western India, referring to the opposition.

A regional leader of a Hindu group linked to the BJP and his bodyguard were killed by gunmen who burst into a hospital in the northern state of Jammu and Kashmir on Tuesday, police said, underscoring the BJP's concern over security in the region.

Militants fighting Indian rule in Muslim-majority Kashmir have warned people not to vote on Thursday.

The BJP was also targeted in the eastern state of Chhattisgarh, when a bomb set off by left-wing militants killed a regional party legislator and four people with him.

■ Congress emphasis on jobs, farmers

The Congress, led by Gandhi, and his charismatic sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, who took up a party post in January, wants to steer the campaign back to Modi's broken promises on the economy.

Gandhi has pledged a monthly payment of 6,000 rupees



for the poorest families, about 250 million of a population of 1.3 billion, in a bid to stamp out poverty.

"Congress is trying to pitch in the election with regard to farm distress, rural crisis, unemployment," said Sanjay Kumar of new Delhi think tank the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies.

About 900 million people are eligible to vote in the election, spread over seven phases into next month so that security forces can ensure a free and fair ballot at about a million polling stations.

Results will follow vote-counting on May 23.

Congress has said Modi's party presents a threat to every opposition group by pursuing its vision of a Hindu-first India, stoking fear among the Muslim minority, a bias the BJP denies.

(Source: Reuters)

WikiLeaks says Julian Assange is being spied on in Ecuadorean embassy

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has been the subject of a sophisticated spying operation in the Ecuadorean embassy where he has been holed up since 2012, the group said on Wednesday.

"Wikileaks has uncovered an extensive spying operation against Julian Assange within the Ecuadorean embassy," Kristinn Hrafnsson, WikiLeaks editor-in-chief said, adding that Assange's "eviction" from the embassy could happen at any time.

Hrafnsson did not immediately give evidence for his claims. Reuters was unable to independently verify the allegations.

Assange's relations with his hosts have chilled since Ecuador accused him of leaking information about President Lenin Moreno's personal life. Moreno has said Assange has violated the terms of his asylum.

To some, Assange is a hero for exposing what supporters cast as abuse of power by modern states and for championing free speech. But to others, he is a dangerous rebel who has undermined the security of the United States.



WikiLeaks angered Washington by publishing hundreds of thousands of secret U.S. diplomatic cables that laid bare often highly critical U.S. appraisals of world leaders from

Russian President Vladimir Putin to members of the Saudi royal family.

Assange made international headlines in early 2010 when WikiLeaks published

a classified U.S. military video showing a 2007 attack by Apache helicopters that killed a dozen people in Baghdad, including two Reuters news staff.

Later that year, the group released over 90,000 secret documents detailing the U.S.-led military campaign in Afghanistan, followed by almost 400,000 internal U.S. military reports detailing operations in Iraq.

More than 250,000 classified cables from U.S. embassies followed, then almost 3 million dating back to 1973. "We know that there was a request to hand over visitors' logs from the embassy and video recordings from within the security cameras in the embassy," Hrafnsson told reporters, adding that he assumed the information had been handed over to the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump.

Assange took refuge in the embassy to avoid being extradited to Sweden where authorities wanted to question him as part of a sexual assault investigation. That probe was later dropped but WikiLeaks fears the United States wants to prosecute him.

(Source: AP)

Iraq receives more T-90 battle tanks from Russia to boost ground force

A high-ranking Iraqi military commander says the country's army has received a new batch of advanced T-90 battle tanks from Russia under a major deal struck between Moscow and Baghdad in July 2017.

Major General Walid Khalifa, the Commander of the Army's 9th Armored Division, told the Arabic-language National Iraqi News Agency (NINA) on Tuesday that the fourth batch of the armored fighting vehicles had arrived in the country, and were delivered to the Iraqi Defense Ministry.

He, however, did not provide any information about the exact number of the battle tanks.

Khalifa noted that Iraqi army troops are prepared to operate the tanks after having received training at the hands of Russian experts. The T-90 is a third-generation Russian battle tank built upon the time-proven Soviet T-72 design.

It is among the best-selling tanks in the world, and known for its firepower, enhanced protection and mobility.

The T-90 features a smoothbore 2A46M 125mm main gun, which can fire both armor-piercing shells and anti-tank missiles.

The advanced tank also features sophisticated armor, ensuring all-round protection of the crew and critical systems, including explosive reactive armor and active infrared jammers to defend it from inbound rocket-propelled grenades, anti-tank missiles and other projectiles.

Indian, Algerian and Azerbaijani militaries have purchased hundreds of T-90 battle tanks in past years. Kuwait, Vietnam and Egypt have also expressed strong interest in buying the tank.

The Iraqi military plans to reinforce its fleet of M1A1 Abrams main battle tanks with T-90s. A large number of American M1A1 Abrams tanks have been damaged in the fight against Daesh Takfiri terrorists.

(Source: Press TV)

Barr says will release redacted Mueller report within a week



U.S. Attorney General William Barr told lawmakers Tuesday that he intended to release within a week a redacted version of the long-awaited report on Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election from special counsel Robert Mueller. Barr, an appointee of President Donald Trump who last month announced what he said were the main findings of the report, told Democrats he would be as open as possible about redactions of sensitive information when he handed over the full document.

"Within a week I will be in position to release that report to the public and then I will engage with the chairmen of both judiciary committees about that report, about any further requests that they have," Barr said at his first appearance before Congress since receiving the report on March 22.

"I don't intend at this stage to send the full unredacted report to the committee," the attorney general told a House of Representatives Appropriations subcommittee.

"I am relying on my own discretion to make as much public as I can," he added.

Mueller turned over his confidential report to Barr last month following his 22-month-long probe into whether members of Trump's campaign colluded with Russia during the 2016 White House race and if Trump then obstructed inquiries into the matter.

After receiving the special counsel's report, Barr wrote in a letter to Congress that the Mueller investigation did not establish that members of Trump's election campaign conspired with Russia.

But Democrats say Americans should see the full report and related documents.

The attorney general provided no indication of how much of the report would be obscured.

However, he said that he was working with Mueller on restricting details about secret grand jury information, United States intelligence gathering and ongoing criminal cases as well as potentially damaging information about peripheral players who were not charged in the Russia probe.

Barr left open the possibility that some members of Congress would be allowed to review secret information from the report within a safe setting.

"I can envision a situation where under appropriate safeguards, that information can be shared," Barr said. "I also think under appropriate safeguards, there is a way of people verifying these categories [of redactions] were not abused."

Democrats repeatedly criticized Barr for his handling of the report, including taking it upon himself in the letter to decide that Trump should not be charged with obstruction of justice.

Nita Lowey, chairwoman of the House Appropriations Committee, said Barr's letter summarizing the Mueller report appeared to "cherry-pick from the report to draw the most favorable conclusion possible for the president."

"In many ways, your letter raises more questions than it answers," she added. The New York Times and The Washington Post reported last week that some investigators on Mueller's team were unhappy with the way that Barr described their findings. The reports alleged that some of the evidence against Trump was more damning than Barr's letter indicated.

Barr said he did not offer to let Mueller help him draft his four-page March 24 letter to Congress on the conclusions of the special counsel's investigation.

Asked why, Barr said, "Because it was my letter." He said the White House did not review the letter to Congress laying out Mueller's findings before he sent it.

Last week, Democrats on the House Judiciary Committee prepared subpoenas that they plan to issue to the Justice Department if Barr does not agree to release the Mueller report in full. (Source: Daily Star)

Algeria's interior ministry allows 10 new political parties

Algeria's interior ministry has issued licenses for 10 new political parties, private Ennahar TV said on Wednesday, after a newly-appointed interim president vowed to organize free elections in the face of growing calls for democracy.

Protesters in Algeria, a major oil and natural gas producer, have been demanding sweeping changes since unrest which erupted on Feb. 22 prompted long-serving, 82-year-old leader Abdelaziz Bouteflika to resign.

On Tuesday, parliament named upper house chairman Abdelkader Bensalah as caretaker president, a move swiftly rejected by protesters who say they cannot accept any figures from the old guard under the National Liberation Front (FLN) that has dominated Algeria since independence from France in 1962.

Allowing new political parties suggests some flexibility by the Algerian authorities, who have faced weeks of pro-

tests demanding immediate steps to introduce democratic reforms including political pluralism.

Bensalah said late on Tuesday he would organize elections that are expected to be held within 90 days.

The military, which has held sway over Algerian politics from behind the scenes for decades, is expected to help guide a potentially volatile transition.

(Source: Daily Star)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	193978.5
IFX	2430.05

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,296 rials
GBP	54,832 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$70.93/b
WTI	\$64.39/b
OPEC Basket	\$68.08/b
Gold	\$1,303.65/oz
Silver	\$15.29/oz
Platinum	\$894.80/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

ICCIMA condemns U.S. blacklisting IRGC

"Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) condemns the U.S. belligerent government's move to blacklist the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC)" reads a statement by Iranian private sector's parliament published on Tuesday.



"The Chamber of Commerce considers the move as a sign of the U.S. government's wrath for not reaching its sanctions objectives, especially in crippling the Islamic Republic's foreign trade," adds the statement.

The organization goes on to describe the IRGC as "the official and legal armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran", highlighting its "major role in crushing terrorist groups, maintaining the security as well as internal and regional stability".

The Iranian private sector says blacklisting the IRGC goes against the international norms, saying the Iranian nation will stand firmer against any sanctions and blacklists.

(Source: IRNA)

Italy's government forecast has economy effectively stagnating this year

The Italian government's gloomy outlook for its economy was confirmed on Tuesday, with new forecasts predicting almost no growth this year.

After a meeting in Rome, the Cabinet cut its target for growth this year to just 0.2 percent. That figure -- down from 1 percent previously -- includes the estimated impact of measures the government has already agreed to implement to help the economy. According to a draft of the document seen by Bloomberg, expansion this year would be 0.1 percent without the steps.

The government said it approved the economic and public finance outlook for the next two years, and isn't planning any additional measures this year.

According to the draft, the deficit forecast for 2019 is 2.5 percent of GDP, while the target including the impact of planned policy measures is 2.4 percent.

The new figures spell out starkly the dire economic situation in Italy, where the economy fell into recession at the end of last year. In addition, the wider deficit number could set the stage for a fresh conflict between the populist government and the European Commission.

There's also a risk of new tensions within the coalition of Five Star and the League. Both have their budgetary priorities, but the lack of fiscal space means that there will have to be compromise on spending.

The new deficit forecast compares with a figure of 2.04 percent that Italy agreed with the Commission after months of haggling. Weaker growth is making it harder -- if not impossible -- to keep that promise.

The spread between Italian and German 10-year debt narrowed to 242 basis points on Tuesday from 249 basis points. It's still almost double what it was a year ago.

"This bad equilibrium is very fragile," Nicola Nobile, an economist at Oxford Economics, said in a report published Tuesday. "The main wildcard remains the political environment. While it is difficult to predict what will happen on the political front, we do not expect the current government to survive its five-year term."

The draft of the document also said the coalition plans to introduce new tax brackets of 15 and 20 percent on personal income, a measure that has been backed by the pro-business League.

Italy will use a contingency fund of 2 billion euros (\$2.2 billion). That could allow it to comply with its commitment on the structural deficit, or net of the effects of economic growth, which Rome agreed with the commission in December after lengthy negotiations.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Iran's 2-month crude steel output rises 7.6% yr/yr: WSA

1 → The WSA data showed that the country's crude steel output stood at 12.516 million tons during the first six-month of 2018, rising 25.8 percent from 9.947 million tons in the same period of time in 2017.

It is while the world's steel production during January-June, 2018 rose just 4.6 percent.

"Iran produces 34 million tons of steel per

year and is aimed at producing 55 million tons of the product by 2025," according to the previous industry minister, Mohammad Shariatmadari.

To hit the target, Iran is in need of attracting €8 billion of investments, he said in last July.

He also announced that the country exports 9 million tons of crude steel per year and



plans to improve the figure up to 15 million tons by 2025.

Iran is one of the top 10 mineral-rich countries where 68 types of minerals have

been identified so far, including the world's largest deposits of copper, zinc and iron ore, which are tempting international investors.

Garment exports up 26% in a year

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The **d e s k** value of Iran's garment exports rises 26 percent in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20, 2019), according to an official at the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade.

Afsaneh Mehrabi, the director general of Weaving and Garment Industries Department of the ministry, also said that the weight of garment exports has increased 30 percent during the past calendar year, Mehr news agency reported.

The rise has come under the very



difficult condition that the country's economy and weaving industry faced in the previous year, the official noted.

IMF cuts 2019 growth outlook again, says risks are 'skewed to downside'

The International Monetary Fund again reduced its global economic growth forecast for 2019 on Tuesday, citing risks like increasing trade tensions and tighter monetary policy by the Federal Reserve.

The fund said it expects the world economy to grow by 3.3 percent this year. That's down from its previous outlook of 3.5 percent, which was also a downgrade. The IMF added that it expects the economy to expand by 3.6 percent in 2020, however.

The IMF's report comes as Congress struggles to pass the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), a trade deal signed by President Donald Trump and his Mexican and Canadian counterparts at the time, which would replace the existing North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Meanwhile, the Trump administration is trying to hammer out another trade deal with China.

"The balance of risks remains skewed to the downside," the IMF said. "Failure to resolve differences and a resulting increase in tariff barriers above and beyond what is incorporated into the forecast would lead to higher costs of imported intermediate and capital goods and higher final goods prices for consumers."

The USMCA was signed Nov. 30, but has not yet received congressional approval and getting it through the legislative body will be tough for the administration. The deal has to get through the Democrat-controlled House and was criticized by Republican Sen. Chuck Grassley. He noted that tariffs on Mexican and Canadian goods should be waved off once a deal is ratified. Trump, however, has not indicated his willingness to do so.

If the deal between the three countries falls through, the ramifications for the U.S. economy would be massive. Canada



IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde

and Mexico are two of the three largest U.S. trade partners and made up 30 percent of U.S. global trade in 2018, according to data from the Census Bureau.

"Higher trade policy uncertainty and concerns of escalation and retaliation would reduce business investment, disrupt supply chains, and slow productivity growth," according to the IMF. "The resulting depressed outlook for corporate profitability could dent financial market sentiment and further dampen growth."

The U.S. is also trying to strike a deal with China, its largest trade partner. China alone accounted for nearly 16 percent of U.S. global trade last year, Census data shows. But while negotiations between the two countries are still ongoing, the outlook seems promising.

On March 27, Reuters reported China had made unprecedented progress on issues like forced technology transfers, which have been sticking points during its negotiations

with the U.S. Trump also said on Thursday "we'll know over the next four weeks" whether a deal between the world largest economies can be struck.

The apparent progress in U.S.-China trade negotiations has boosted world stocks this year. The iShares MSCI World exchange-traded fund (URTH) is up more than 15 percent in 2019. The S&P 500 also has rallied more than 15 percent.

But failure to strike a deal would hurt the U.S. economically and would also derail China's efforts to reinvigorate its economy, the IMF warns. China's economy expanded by 6.6 percent in 2018, which was its slowest pace in nearly 30 years.

Another risk to global economic growth, according to the fund, is a change in monetary policy by central banks, especially the Federal Reserve.

The Fed reversed its stance on policy earlier this year, eliminating all expectations for even a single rate hike for 2019. This follows four rate increases by the U.S. central bank in 2018. The Fed's reversal contributed to the market's hot start to 2019, with the S&P 500 notching its biggest first-quarter gain since 1998.

However, the IMF said: "The market-implied path of expected policy rates remains below the Federal Open Market Committee's projections, raising the possibility of a market reassessment of the expected policy path if U.S. economic data remain strong. This could result in higher U.S. interest rates, renewed dollar appreciation, and tighter financial conditions for emerging market and developing economies with balance sheet vulnerabilities."

Other risks highlighted by the IMF include a no-deal Brexit, political uncertainty as several countries around the world hold elections and geopolitical tensions in East Asia.

(Source: CNBC)

Europe slams 'exaggerated' U.S. tariff threat and prepares to retaliate

The EU has hit back at new U.S. proposals to target European goods with tariffs, following a World Trade Organization (WTO) ruling over subsidies for Airbus.

Trade tensions between the EU and U.S. flared Monday after the U.S. said it's considering \$11 billion worth of retaliatory tariffs on a range of goods in response to illegal subsidies the EU granted to the aerospace firm.

The WTO ruled last year that these allowances had caused "adverse effects" to the U.S., with the decision coming after a long-running litigation battle between the Washington and Brussels over their respective aviation giants.

Shares of Airbus were trading 2.3% lower Tuesday after the tariffs were proposed. A spokesman for the company said there is no legal basis for the U.S. move to impose sanctions, and said the EU had complied with WTO rulings. The European Commission criticized the proposals.

"The EU is confident that the level of countermeasures on which the notice is based is greatly exaggerated. The amount of WTO authorized retaliation can only be determined by the WTO-appointed arbitrator," a Commission spokesman said.

On Monday, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative said it would slap tariffs on EU goods ranging from aircraft to fish, dairy products to binoculars, olive oil and wine, according to a preliminary list.

It said it estimates "the harm from the EU subsidies as \$11 billion in trade each year," although the amount is subject to an arbitration at the WTO, the result of which is expected to be issued this summer.

"This case has been in litigation for 14 years, and the time has come for action. The



Administration is preparing to respond immediately when the WTO issues its finding on the value of U.S. countermeasures," U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer said in a statement Monday.

Double standards

Both sides have now been found guilty of paying billions of dollars of subsidies to gain advantage in the global aircraft manufacturing business.

The EU is still waiting to hear from the WTO about what "retaliation rights" it has after the organization found in 2012 that Boeing too had received billions of dollars in illegal subsidies that had been to the detriment of Airbus. The WTO also ruled in March that the U.S. had failed to comply fully with its earlier ruling to remove all illegal subsidies that Boeing had received.

The European Commission spokesman also said Tuesday that Brussels is ready to retaliate in kind, noting that in the parallel Boeing dispute, "the determination of EU retaliation rights is also coming closer and the EU will request the WTO-appointed

arbitrator to determine the EU's retaliation rights."

Some analysts have accused the U.S. of double standards. GAM's Investment Director for Global Equities, Ali Miremadi, said the U.S.? tariff proposal was "quite bold."

"I have to say the country which is the home to Boeing accusing Europe of state subsidies for Airbus — this is quite bold," he told CNBC's "Squawk Box Europe" Tuesday.

"It's very well established that both Boeing and Airbus exist only at the discretion of their respective hosts or host governments."

President Donald Trump tweeted Tuesday that "the EU has taken advantage of the U.S. on trade for many years."

UBS' Global Wealth Management's Chief Economist Paul Donovan noted wryly that Trump had accepted the WTO ruling much more readily than usual.

"The WTO has ruled that Airbus received unfair subsidies from the EU and U.S. President Trump has, rather unusually, decided to agree with the WTO," Donovan said in a regular podcast Tuesday.

"Whether U.S. President Trump would be quite so willing to accept the verdict of the WTO about unfair assistance from the U.S. to Boeing, which is an ongoing case, is a rather different matter."

Trade wars

The latest U.S. threat comes as tensions are already simmering with the EU over possible tariffs on its cars and auto parts. A final decision has not yet been made.

The U.S. is currently negotiating with China over a trade deal after almost a year of escalating retaliatory tariffs on each other's imports. Europe could be next in line for some rough treatment.

"Even once we are done with the U.S. and China, the U.S. will turn to Europe," Laurence Boone, chief economist at OECD, told CNBC's Steve Sedgwick at the Ambrosetti Workshop in Italy on Friday.

"So, I think by undermining the multi-lateral rules-based system on trade, we have just injected a massive dose of uncertainty in the world that will stay with us for a long time."

Strategists warn that tariffs could not come at a worse time for the EU, with growth and industrial production looking vulnerable. Tariffs "are still a very important dark cloud when it comes to European growth," Luis Costa, head of CEEMEA FX strategy at Citi, told CNBC Tuesday.

"This is coming at a time when German factory orders are down by 4 to 5 percent and output is still in danger, some of those regional manufacturing industries are still in contraction territory, so this is coming at a very delicate time," he told CNBC's "Squawk Box Europe."

(Source: CNBC)

Worries over global economy outweighs geopolitical factors in setting oil prices

By Ebrahim Fallahi

TEHRAN — The upward trend of the oil prices in the market hit a stop point on Tuesday when the International Monetary Fund (IMF), once again, poured cold water on the hopes of oil traders who were getting optimistic about global demand this year.

Oil prices rallied to their near six-month highs over the past three weeks pushed by a series of mostly geopolitical factors.

Growing conflicts in Libya and worries over a disruption in the OPEC member's supply, the impact of U.S. sanctions over Venezuela's oil output, OPEC assurance over the compliance with the cuts and a growing optimism over the future of the U.S.-China relations were the top drivers of the prices in the mentioned weeks.

However, the IMF report on Tuesday once again casted the shadow of doubt over the oil market which clearly hasn't been that sure about many of the above mentioned factors.

The IMF set the forecast for this year's global economy growth at 3.3 percent down 0.2 percent from its previous outlook of 3.5 percent, which was also a downgrade.

What is interesting is the fact that despite all the positive signs regarding the U.S. and China's economic relations, the IMF cites the risk of increasing trade tensions as one of the reasons for this downgrade.



The IMF report also warned that growth could slow even further due to intensifying trade conflicts and the probability of problems emerging in Britain's separation from EU.

It seems that the fund is not solely concerned about the trade relations between the U.S. and China and Brexit as well as a growing trade tension between EU and the

U.S. also affected the estimations.

Earlier On Monday, the Washington announced it's considering \$11 billion worth of tariffs on a variety of goods in response to illegal subsidies the EU granted to Airbus.

On Tuesday Reuters reported that Brent crude fell 49 cents to \$70.61 a barrel, after hitting \$71.34, its highest since November. It is the third consecutive time that

IMF is downgrading its forecasts of the global economy citing similar reasons. Consequently, the concerns over a slowdown in global oil demand this year has hit crude prices several times and is considered a determining factor for the oil prices.

Another angle from which the oil prices were pulled down was the Russian President Vladimir Putin's remarks on his country's willingness to end the cuts deal when the OPEC+ meets in June.

"We are ready for cooperation with OPEC in decision-making ... But whether it would be cuts, or just a stoppage at the current level of output, I am not ready to say," Reuters quoted Putin as saying in an Arctic conference in St. Petersburg on Tuesday.

Rising U.S. crude production and inventories is also another faltering factor, weighing on the market.

It seems that, considering the recent developments, suddenly there are cracks appearing in some of the main pillars which are holding the oil prices ceiling.

The market which was breaking records in the past few weeks, is, once again, forced to crawl back to a state of wait and see. Apparently in the upcoming weeks, in the absence of any extreme geopolitical incident, the market would be experiencing more of this downward trend, since obviously the bear factors are outweighing bull ones this year.

S. Korea in talks with U.S. to extend waiver for Iranian oil imports



ENERGY DESK **TEHRAN** — South Korea is still negotiating with the United States for extending the sanctions waiver on Iranian oil imports, Yonhap reported quoting a Korean government official as saying on Tuesday.

As reported, the two sides had also discussed the matter in another meeting in Washington on Monday.

The working-level consultations were chaired by South Korean Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Affairs Yun Kang-hyeon and Francis Fannon, assistant secretary of state for the bureau of energy resources.

"(We) are continuously requesting a waiver, doing our best, emphasizing the robust South Korea-U.S. alliance and the unique characteristics of the (domestic) petrochemical industry, to which condensate is indispensable," the Korean official said.

In November 2018, The United States granted exemptions to eight countries including South Korea allowing them to continue buying Iranian oil.

South Korean companies stopped importing Iranian crude oil in September 2018, however receiving waivers, after a five-month hiatus, South Korea imported \$101.2 million worth of Iranian crude oil in January.

The Northeast Asian country is not an oil producer and more than 13 percent of its total oil purchases come from Iran.

South Korean refiners and chemical firms had relied heavily on Iranian condensate for production of various petrochemical products thanks to a stable supply and price competitiveness.

South Korea is the third-largest buyer of Iranian oil.

Japan seeking extension of sanctions waiver to keep buying Iranian oil



ENERGY DESK **TEHRAN** — Japan is seeking to convince the U.S. government to extend the waivers on Iran oil sanctions, S&P global Platts reported quoting a Japanese government official as saying on Wednesday.

It comes after Japanese refiners have already suspended loadings of Iranian oil ahead of the country's sanctions waiver expiry in early May, the official said.

Earlier on Monday, Japan and U.S. discussed Iran sanctions in which the Japanese plead that that "the U.S. sanctions should not have a harmful effect on Japan's stable energy supply and its corporate activity," the Japanese government official said.

As reported, the Monday meeting was attended by Hiroshi Oka, Japan's Director-General/Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs for Middle Eastern and African Af-

fairs, and Sandra Oudkirk, U.S. deputy assistant secretary, bureau of energy resources, at the Department of State, along with other officials from Japan's ministry of economy, trade and industry and the U.S. department of energy.

Japan is among the eight countries with the U.S.'s 180-day waivers allowing them to keep importing Iranian oil through May 4. Confusion surrounding shipping, insurance and banking rules under the U.S. sanctions kept some of the countries from resuming imports for months after the U.S. granted waivers on November 5.

On February 3, Platts reported that Japan's largest refiner JXTG Nippon Oil & Energy was set to resume loading of Iranian crude oil as early as Monday (February 4), almost three months after the U.S. sanctions waiver was granted.

Smart money is piling into oil

Oil prices jumped to five-month highs this week, pushed higher by a bullish cocktail of supply outages, geopolitical unrest and a sputtering shale sector.

The most recent factor is the sudden eruption of the long simmering feud in Libya between rival factions. The attack on Tripoli by the Libyan National Army (LNA), a militia led by Khalifa Haftar, led to a spike in oil prices on Monday as the market priced in the possibility of supply outages.

One oil export terminal near Tripoli is the most obvious asset at risk. "If this port were to be shut down due to the fighting, this could see a delivery outage of up to 300,000 barrels per day," Commerzbank said in a note on Tuesday. "The oil market is already undersupplied, so if supply from Libya also falls away the supply deficit will become even bigger." Brent jumped to \$71 and WTI to \$64 on the news, the highest level in five months.

Intriguingly, speculators have only recently turned bullish on crude oil in terms of their positions in the futures market. "Indeed, our money-manager positioning index implies that speculative funds only moved from neutral to positive on oil in the latest week," Standard Chartered wrote in a report on April 9. The investment bank argued that major investors only began to properly factor in geopolitical risk in the last few days, having overlooked risk for much of this year. Standard Chartered analysts said that the "supply security" of Libyan oil is "low," and that output could decline in both the short and medium term.

Meanwhile, the U.S. shale industry has already begun to slow down. Weekly EIA



data put U.S. output at 12.2 million barrels per day (mb/d) last week, a jump of 100,000 bpd from the week before (the EIA rounds off to the nearest 100,000 bpd on these weekly estimates). More accurate retrospective data found that U.S. production actually declined in January by 90,000 bpd, offering solid evidence of a slowdown.

Most analysts still see strong U.S. supply growth this year, but the gains have slowed significantly. Standard Chartered looked at three-month periods, which it argues shows a clear deceleration in production growth over the past year. "The 3m/3m change peaked at 861kb/d in August, and has declined since, reaching just 140kb/d in March," the investment bank wrote.

Goldman Sachs argues that these bullish

factors will continue. "We expect the drivers of this deficit to persist through 2Q19: the 'shock and awe' implementation of the OPEC cuts, global activity sequentially accelerating, further tightening of US oil sanctions and an only moderate increase in shale production for now," Goldman analysts wrote in an April 8 report. However, the investment bank said that prices could begin to decline in the second half of the year as OPEC+ begins to unwind the production cuts and U.S. shale picks back up. On top of that, some "long-cycle" projects could hit the market in 2020, leading Goldman to project a \$60 Brent price for next year.

In fact, while the oil market is moving very much in an upward direction, not everyone believes that it will last. "The mood is increas-

ingly turning bullish, but several feedback loops are about to start spinning that stand in the way of a prolonged oil rally," Norbert Ruecker of Julius Baer told Reuters. "Russia already signaled its willingness to raise oil output from June. Fuel remains costly in emerging markets, with soft currencies adding to high oil prices." Russian President Vladimir Putin said at a forum in St. Petersburg that he was comfortable with oil prices where they are, and seemed to suggest that his government was not yet sold on the idea that OPEC+ should extend production cuts.

The higher prices go, especially over such a short time period, the more that cracks will begin to surface in the OPEC+ group. Saudi Arabia clearly wants to stick with the cuts, still smarting from the downturn last year. Russia is less keen.

Meanwhile, some economic concerns still linger. The IMF warned about slowing growth, expecting global GDP to expand by 3.3 percent this year, down from 3.6 percent last year. One glaring weak spot is the fact that emerging market currencies are lagging far behind the rally in commodities and global equities. Higher oil prices and a persistently strong U.S. dollar have put pressure on an array of currencies, and the weakness will make crude oil much pricier in many countries. That, in turn, could dampen demand.

Nevertheless, declining output in Iran and Venezuela, and the threat of severe outages in Libya, at a time when U.S. shale growth has slowed is a powerful combination pushing oil prices to new highs.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Putin says no imminent decision on oil output cuts

President Vladimir Putin said on Tuesday that Russia and OPEC should discuss the future of their oil output-cutting deal later this year, adding that current oil prices suited Moscow.

The Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and other large oil producers led by Russia agreed to reduce their combined output by 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd) from Jan. 1 this year for six months in an attempt to balance the market.

Russia undertook to cut its production by 228,000 bpd but has struggled to comply with the pact.

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

But Putin, the ultimate decision-maker in Russia, seemingly softened that stance, saying it was too early to judge whether the deal should be extended.

"We are ready for cooperation with OPEC in decision-making ... But whether it would be cuts, or just a stoppage at the current level of output, I am not ready to say," Putin told an Arctic conference in St. Petersburg.

"We are not supporters of uncontrollable price rises," he said. Putin also said current oil prices suited Russia, which is heavily dependent on sales of oil and natural gas.

OPEC and allied oil producers are due to meet in late June in Vienna.

"Of course, we and our partners ... are closely watching the market. We agreed that if there is a need for joint efforts, we will gather in the second half of the year and hold discussions," Putin said.

Putin also said Russian companies had their own plans and their intention to develop new fields should be taken into account.

Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak said earlier on Tuesday there would be no need to extend the output deal if the oil market was expected to be balanced in the second half of the year, the RIA news agency reported.

Novak later said all options were on the table.

(Source: Euro News)

Japan favors Abu Dhabi over Far East Russia for light crude oil

Japanese refiners may continue to show preference for light sour Abu Dhabi crude oil over Russian grades in the coming months as cargoes from the UAE trade at a discount to Siberian ESPO Blend crude, while light-heavy crude price spreads have narrowed drastically in the Middle East.

Japan imported 817,197 bpd of crude oil from the UAE over January-February, up 7.6 percent from the same period a year earlier, latest data from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry showed.

Crude imports from Russia, however, fell 13.3 percent year on year to 131,385 bpd during the first two months of the year.

The breakdown of the crude intake showed that Japan received 13.75 million barrels of light sour Murban crude over January-February, up 45 percent from 9.49 million barrels in the same period a year earlier.

In addition, Japanese refiners imported 990,719 barrels of light sour Umm Lulu crude from the UAE for the first time in January, following the launch of the first export of the new light sour grade in July 2018, METI data showed. The imported Umm Lulu crude had an API density of 38.7 degrees and sulfur content of 0.738 percent.

Light-end Far East Russian crude oil bore the brunt of Japan's increased purchases of the distillate-rich Abu Dhabi grades in the first two months of the year, with Asia's third biggest oil consumer receiving just 743,152 barrels of ESPO crude in January-February, down 81 percent from 3.92 million barrels received over the same period a year earlier.

Japan's imports of Russia's light sweet Sakhalin Blend crude also tumbled to 1.41 million barrels over January-February, down 51 percent from 2.91 million barrels received a year earlier.

Lighter-end Persian Gulf grades have become quite attractive amid narrowing light-heavy crude price spreads, providing an impetus to request increment barrels or search for extra cargoes in the Middle Eastern spot market, trading desk managers at two Japanese refiners told S&P Global Platts.

The monthly official selling price spread between Abu Dhabi's light sour Murban crude and medium sour Upper Zakum has narrowed sharply to a multi-year low.

Last week, Abu Dhabi National Oil Co. set the OSP for Murban crude loaded in March at \$68.60/b and Upper Zakum at \$67.55/b, narrowing the spread between the two grades to \$1.05/b from \$1.10/b for cargoes loaded in February.

The spread between the light and medium sour crudes was the lowest since 95 cents/b on October 2003.

Japanese trade participants noted that many of the light sour Middle Eastern grades have been seen highly competitive against distillate-rich Far East Russian grades.

The OPEC's strong commitment to limiting crude output has led to a firm Dubai market structure, but the bullish sentiment has largely been geared toward the medium and heavy Middle Eastern crude complex, not so much for the light-end Persian Gulf oil, the Japanese trading sources said.

Platts data showed that light sour Abu Dhabi grades have been delivered to Northeast Asian ports at a lower cost than short-haul Far East Russian supplies in recent trading cycles. The outright price spread between Murban and first-month ESPO Blend on a CFR Northeast Asia basis has averaged minus 54 cents/b to date in April and averaged minus 29 cents/b over the first quarter.

The spread between Murban and Far East Russian Sokol, also on a delivered basis, has averaged minus 3 cents/b so far in April and averaged minus 39 cents/b in Q1.

"With Chinese buyers so dominant in the Far East Russian complex, it's natural for other buyers to seek cheaper light crude options in the Middle East," said a feedstock procurement manager at a Japanese refiner that regularly imports Abu Dhabi's Murban and Das Blend crude.

Industry sources in Japan and South Korea noted that Murban, which has a gravity of 39.6 API and sulfur content of 0.79 percent, often competes directly with Far East Russian ESPO, Sakhalin Blend and Sokol, which are coveted for their high yield of light and middle distillates such as naphtha, jet fuel/kerosene and gasoil.

(Source: Platts)

Canada's probable next PM is courting the far right to win

By Andrew Mitrovica

Andrew Scheer has a long history of courting white nationalists by appealing unabashedly and overtly to their ugly, nativist, xenophobic and racist temperaments (to describe them as “ideas” is antithetical to the word).

Serious attention should be drawn to Scheer’s relationship with Canada’s extreme right wing since, if accurate, a recent spate of public opinion polls suggest that the Conservative chief may well become prime minister come the next federal election scheduled for October.

Of course, Scheer is a faithful disciple of former Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper who besmirched himself and, perhaps more importantly, the country he served by championing racism-infused “policies” as a means to mine the support of Canadian bigots who would be attracted to such malevolent policies at election time. Harper’s sorry, signature gambit in this regard was the unveiling - stripped of its government-sanctioned rhetorical embroidery - of a “snitch” line, where Canadians were encouraged to report other Canadians guilty of culturally “barbaric practices” deemed “incompatible” with “old stock” Canadian values.

Harper’s legion of apologists insisted that his snitch line and use of the benign “descriptor ... old stock Canadians” weren’t Exhibit A and B of how to practice sectarian wedge politics. So, stop hyperventilating you perennial politically correct types, the apologists cried.

Notorious white nationalists

Today, the same cavalier defense is being employed by the same band of apologists to dismiss as inconsequential Scheer’s undeniable associations with notorious white nationalists that should, if decency had any currency in politics, be disqualifying.

On February 19, Scheer spoke at an event on Parliament Hill organized reportedly by “disgruntled pipeline workers” who had travelled from Western Canada by picayune convoy to Ottawa to “have their voices heard”. He was joined by several members of his Conservative caucus who took dutiful turns praising the “protesters” and pledging fidelity to their amorphous cause.

“We are fighting for you. We are standing with you,” Scheer told the small, yellow-vested gathering. One Conservative senator was less trite, urging the assembly to “roll over every Liberal left in the country”. His invitation to violence was predictably greeted with hoots and cheers.

The rumble-ready “United We Roll” contingent that Scheer and company welcomed, encouraged and applauded, included attendees who - anti-hate groups detail - celebrate their white nationalist, white-supremacist, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim credentials online. Still, for the doubters, the “protesters” convictions surely became apparent when Faith Goldy was also asked to speak at the “rally” as their marquee guest.

Goldy has, for years, flaunted her white nationalism on a variety of media platforms. Among her other noxious “beliefs” is the “theory” that the white race is facing “genocide” and is on the precipice of extinction.

In December 2017, Canada’s racist-in-residence, who also thinks launching another Crusade to retake the Holy Land is a laudable geopolitical strategy, recited, with little prompting and with evident glee on a racist podcast the white supremacist clarion call, The Fourteen Words: “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children.”

A few months earlier, Goldy displayed her white nationalist bona fides again by appearing on a podcast affiliated with (neo-Nazi website) the Daily Stormer while in Virginia.

Scheer knew all this and more when he chose to attend the same event, organized by the same people who thought it appropriate and right to invite Goldy, who told Indigenous peoples who assailed her presence on Parliament Hill: “If you don’t like our country, leave it.”

Rather than say no, Scheer and his caucus colleagues opted to stand - figuratively speaking - rancid shoulder to rancid shoulder with a racist in the rank pursuit of parochial, political self-interest. And with that, the nexus of traditional “conservatism” and the wretched right wing was fashioned - married by two speeches in one place, at one time, separated by just a few metres.

Scheer and Goldy have shared more intimate moments. Before she was fired over her “poor decision” to enjoy a convivial chat on a Nazi podcast, the telegenic Goldy was a host on a network featuring a cavalcade of frothing, perpetually indignant, anti-establishment personalities called Rebel Media.

In early 2017, then-Conservative leadership candidate Scheer was Goldy’s chummy, featured guest on her defunct program On the Hunt - for what precisely remains a mystery.

In any event, the “hot” topic du jour was a non-binding, symbolic motion introduced by a Liberal MP to condemn Islamophobia and all religious discrimination in the aftermath of the Quebec city terrorist who murdered six Muslim men praying in a mosque.

Denouncing the hatred

Scheer told Goldy he would emphatically vote against the motion because, like his effervescent TV pal, he was concerned that denouncing the hatred that fuelled the butchery of Muslim worshippers by way of a parliamentary motion would inevitably morph into an “attack” on free speech. “Absolutely,” Goldy said, approvingly.

Fast forward to the horror in New Zealand, when another racist who referenced “white genocide” and “The Fourteen Words” in his “manifesto” slaughtered 50 Muslim children, women and men and grievously injured scores of other innocents because of where they prayed and who they prayed to.

Scheer’s response? Not surprisingly: muted platitudes on Twitter. “Freedom has come under attack in New Zealand as peaceful worshippers are targeted in a despicable act of evil. All people must be able to practice their faith freely and without fear,” he wrote without naming the faith of the massacred or the sites of their massacres. You see, “freedom”, not Muslims, was “attacked”.

That rapid, perfunctory tweet was consistent with Scheer’s reluctance to offend the odious likes of Goldy et al for fear of alienating a potential well of votes during a likely close election. Donald Trump has proven that racist overtures - blatant or cloaked - can afford a winning edge in a tight race.

Only later, after a torrent of criticism, did Scheer issue a second statement on Facebook, daring to mention Muslims and mosques. By then, it was too late. His initial response indeed reflected the measure of the man and the company he keeps.

Despite claiming now to shun the decaying network, Scheer holds other Rebel Media alumni close to his bosom. His 2019 campaign manager was a founding director of Rebel Media.

Like his mentor Stephen Harper, Scheer is intent on, it appears, leading Canada down a dangerous, sinister slope.

(Source: aljazeera.com)

NATO is 70 and past retirement age

The alliance once had its purpose, but now it keeps Europe weak and makes it too easy for Washington to intervene in foolish overseas wars

By Gil Barndollar

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization turned seventy last week, and Washington has been celebrating the birth of the alliance. Yet for all the talk of the “most successful military alliance the world has ever seen,” NATO is more than just a little past its prime. The militaries of European member states are not only underfunded and increasingly irrelevant; the alliance itself is an irredeemable impediment to the actual national security of both America and Europe. At seventy, it is time for NATO to retire.

NATO was founded in 1949 to contain the Soviets, preventing them from dominating Western Europe and thus accruing power to directly threaten the United States. The alliance was a realistic response to an existential threat to the national security of the United States. The Soviet Union is dead, however, and Russia possesses only a fraction of the Soviet Union’s power and reach.

NATO was also supposed to have an expiry date — at least for American ground troops in Europe. General Dwight Eisenhower, upon assuming command of all NATO forces in Europe in 1951, proclaimed that if “in ten years, all American troops stationed in Europe for national-defense purposes have not been returned to the United States, then this whole project will have failed.”

Nearly sixty years after Eisenhower spoke those words, and thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, over sixty thousand U.S. troops remain in Europe.

As MIT’s Barry Posen recently noted, those troops not only enable Europeans the luxury of not paying for their own defense, they also enable America’s worst interventionist impulses by providing a network of bases and logistical hubs to project power into the Middle East and Africa, regions of diminishing strategic importance.

It is appropriate to judge post-Cold War NATO a failure. The alliance is a paper tiger, beset with slashed European defense budgets and hollow forces. It has become a social club and an appetizer, a prelude to European Union membership for the formerly-communist states of eastern and southern Europe. What it is not is a credible military alliance. Nor is it making America more secure.

NATO’s performance in the foolish limited wars of the past two decades has demonstrated Europe’s failure to take either funding or fighting seriously. In the Kosovo air campaign of 1999, the Royal Air Force nearly ran out of bombs and spare parts.

Moreover, it was U.S. aircraft that had to conduct about two-thirds of all sorties during the seventy-eight-day war.

By the 2011 Libya intervention, the situation had actually gotten worse. Only eight of NATO’s then-twenty-eight members chose to fight using their air forces. Additionally, most European countries ran out of smart bombs and had to be resupplied in a hurry by the United States.

In Afghanistan, some American servicemen muttered that NATO’s ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) actually stood for “I Saw Americans Fighting.” The more charitable would grant that it was “I Saw Anglos Fighting,” including the British and Canadian troops who held ground in the violent south and southwest.

The valor of coalition soldiers

Despite the undoubted valor of soldiers from all nations in the coalition, the reality



New NATO members provide virtually no military capability to help others, but they do bring one thing to the alliance: heightened tensions with Russia. There is ample evidence that the first Bush and Clinton administrations reassured Russian leaders that we would not expand NATO to their doorstep. We have done so, and now wonder why we are continually needing to “reset” relations with Russia.

was that most European contingents were hamstrung by risk aversion, restrictive rules of engagement, and national “caveats” that limited their ability to fight during the misbegotten occupation of Afghanistan.

Some were even worse: the Italians were credibly alleged to have bribed Taliban forces not to attack them.

NATO’s relentless expansion has also long since passed the point of farce. The alliance, fifteen members strong throughout most of the Cold War, is about to add its thirtieth state, the newly-renamed North Macedonia. Macedonia boasts a tiny army of eight thousand men and a defense budget of \$120 million — a rounding error for the Pentagon. The previous mouse that roared, the 2017 addition of Montenegro, is even more militarily irrelevant. Montenegro’s entire army has two thousand men — less than two U.S. battalions, or about 5 percent of the size of the New York City Police Department. These nations have been welcomed into a mutual defense alliance because that alliance is no longer serious about mutual defense.

These new NATO members provide virtually no military capability to help others, but they do bring one thing to the alliance: heightened tensions with Russia. There is ample evidence that the first Bush and Clinton administrations reassured Russian leaders that we would not expand NATO to their doorstep. We have done so, and now wonder why we are continually needing to “reset” relations with Russia.

We are told NATO’s Baltic states face the existential threat of invasion and reabsorption into Russia, but they sure don’t act like it. Despite a recent RAND Corporation war game that showed that Russian troops would reach the Baltic capitals in a maximum of sixty hours, the Baltic countries spend barely 2 percent of GDP on defense. Yet “E-stonia” can afford free internet throughout the nation.

NATO’s heavyweights, the United States excepted, are nearly as impotent per capita as the alliance’s Baltic and Balkan members. These countries have the money, but they have chosen to shirk their Article 3 responsibilities and instead rely on the American taxpayer and the American soldier.

Capable NATO militaries

Britain, considered among the most capable NATO militaries, has slashed its defense spending to the bone since the 2008 financial crisis. The United Kingdom only clears the arbitrary 2 percent of GDP spending threshold through some pensions legerdemain. Britain can now fit its entire active duty army into Wembley Stadium, with room to spare. The Royal Navy is so short of personnel that it had a frigate and a destroyer tied to the pier in Portsmouth as “training ships” for most of 2017 and 2018.

Yet, Germany manages to put Britain to shame in the free rider sweepstakes. With the fifth largest economy in the world, Germany dominates European politics. Yet its military, once a large and proud frontline force, is a laughingstock. Germany’s air force has regularly had less than a third of its fighter aircraft ready for combat. Its defense spending has drawn chiding and, now, outright attacks from generations of U.S. presidents.

In a story reminiscent of the post-Versailles Reichswehr, German troops on a 2015 exercise used black broomsticks to simulate machine guns due to equipment shortages.

Europe still has ample resources to defend itself, even if one accepts the claim that Putin’s Russia is resolutely revanchist and not defensive or merely opportunistic in its conduct. Even without the United States, NATO has five hundred million people and a combined GDP of more than \$10 trillion, more than triple Russia’s population and wealth. It also has two nuclear deterrent forces.

Only two possible reasons exist for European nations’ failure to field credible military power: they have either decided they do not regard Russia or anything else as a serious security threat, or they are content to rely on U.S. defense welfare.

Again, even the frontline Baltic states do not treat their national defense seriously. Germany, a “dangerous pacifist,” is the most unserious of all. In a fitting prelude to this week’s celebration, on March 18 the Wall Street Journal reported that Germany would renege on its goal of reaching even the paltry spending level of 1.5 percent of GDP on defense by 2024. Two years of President Donald Trump’s bluster and threats have achieved the same results as the efforts of his predecessors: nothing.

Defending Europe

Germany’s attitude towards NATO sums up the key, irresolvable problem facing the alliance: Its Western European members have consistently shown they are not interested in defending Europe, not even from Russia. Polls show that a majority of Europeans, especially in the West, expect the United States to fight for the alliance but do not think their own soldiers should do the same.

NATO’s famed Article 5 is not an ironclad commitment to join hostilities. Though Article 5 states that member states “agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all,” how each state responds is left to its own discretion. The commitment is to “such action as it deems necessary.” In the event of a conflict with Russia in the Baltics, particularly if there is even a hint of ambiguity via “little green men,” it is likely that western European states would offer only moral and maybe financial support to their allies.

The United States, meanwhile, is committing itself to fight — four thousand miles from home — for allies who won’t fight for each other. This state of affairs, which has become increasingly clear to both friendly and hostile onlookers, does not create security or even “stability.” Instead, this hollow alliance invites brinkmanship, escalation, and miscalculation that could lead to nuclear war. Will Americans fight and die to defend Europe, when Europeans won’t? We may find out. European collective defense should be built on a bedrock of shared sacrifice and credible deterrence.

As long as the United States remains committed to defending Europe, Europe will lack the will and the means to defend itself. Nearly three decades of post-Cold War defense welfare has made Europe militarily weak and strategically unserious. American pressure for Europe to share more of the defense burden, going back to the Kennedy administration, has had little effect. Americans are increasingly fed up with this unsustainable state of affairs. Only the shock of a U.S. withdrawal from NATO can spur the European nations to commit themselves to their own collective defense.

Furthermore, America is made less safe by remaining in NATO. The opportunity costs of the United States’ counter-productive commitment to European security imperil real national-security interests, especially in Asia. Giving Europe a few years to get its house in order before an American pullout is a reasonable hedge against miscalculation and escalation. That prudence aside, the United States should withdraw from the alliance as quickly as possible. NATO at seventy is decades past its retirement age.

(Source: nationalinterest.org)

I have never seen such widespread anti-Semitism

By Harry Reid

Growing up in the tiny mining town of Searchlight, Nevada, I remember my uncles returning from combat in World War II. I was too young to understand, but soon learned my uncles’ cause. They risked their lives to stop the evil, murderous regime of Adolf Hitler and to stamp out the Nazi’s hateful and anti-Semitic ideology. They, and mankind, prevailed.

During my decades of public service, I traveled Nevada and the country. And while there were undoubtedly anti-Semitic sentiments and actions lingering throughout the country, it was clear we were moving in the right direction. I can’t recall witnessing any overt anti-Semitic acts or incidents during my travels.

Sadly, that is no longer the case.

Anti-Semitic incidents have risen dramatically in recent years, plaguing communities across the United States, including my home, Nevada. According to the latest statistics from the Anti-Defamation League, anti-Semitic incidents in the United States surged nearly 60 percent in 2017, marking the largest year-over-year increase on record. Another horrific milestone was reached in October 2018, when 11 people were murdered at Pittsburgh’s Tree of Life Synagogue. This was the deadliest attack on the Jewish community in American history.

Anti-Semitic graffiti

In Nevada — within the last month alone — we’ve seen a protestor at a Bernie Sanders presidential campaign rally near Las Vegas brandish a swastika sign and a dormitory hall at the University of Nevada, Reno defiled with anti-Semitic graffiti and threatening messages. That event was preceded by similar anti-Semitic hate crimes at UNR and



the University of Nevada, Las Vegas in 2017 and 2018.

I have never seen such widespread anti-Semitism in my decades of public service. I am alarmed and determined to speak out against this scourge.

That’s why I decided to partner with the UNLV William S. Boyd School of Law to host two of the foremost experts on anti-Semitism in America for an important conversation and public event April 11 at the university. I am grateful to be joined by award-winning author and historian Dr. Deborah Lipstadt and acclaimed journalist and author Jonathan Weisman to discuss this alarming rise in bigotry and how we can come together as a country to combat it.

We can no longer look the other way. We need to recognize, acknowledge and address this menace and make clear that we will not allow anti-Semitism to spread its poisonous roots throughout our country.

Acts of anti-Semitism are not always so blatantly obvious or nationally displayed. It is shocking to learn that 31 percent of the American people hold the belief that Jews are more loyal to Israel than the United States. Just because American Jews have an emotional connection to Israel does not in any way mean they are disloyal to our nation.

Extremists demonizing Jews

Similarly, xenophobic extremists are exploiting the issue of gun control to demonize Jews. They claim gun rights are central to white identity, and it is Jews who are threatening to diminish their traditions. In truth, the push for gun reform comes from people of all backgrounds who are concerned for the safety of their country. Most Americans support stricter gun laws, as polls have consistently shown for years.

Anti-Semitic sentiments are also increasingly visible in younger generations, and they’re a rising threat on our campuses.

Growing up in a household where prejudiced behavior is the norm teaches children that such behavior is acceptable, and even expected. While young people drawing hateful messages such as swastikas may not physically harm others, these messages of bigotry create a hostile, threatening environment.

We are fortunate to live in a nation where free speech is protected. We are encouraged to voice our opinions and ideals freely. Unfortunately, this also gives a voice to offensive and even abhorrent attitudes, such as anti-Semitism. The only way to turn next generations against hatred is to educate them of its dangerous effects. When confronted with anti-Semitic conversation we must speak out, even if it is unpopular with present company.

(Source: Newsweek)

Revelation: Why Buhari is illegally detaining Sheikh Zakzaky

1 → It is as a result of the movement's effort to prove that it is non violent that it won a case against the Nigerian government where a competent court of jurisdiction, the Federal High Court, ruled that the revered Sheikh Zakzaky be released, a house be provided for him by the government and be compensated to the tune of N25 million each for him and his wife. It also ordered that he be provided special security by the Nigerian police until he feels safe from any attack.

The Nigerian government shamelessly acted in contempt of court and refused to obey the order. In order to justify his continued detention, a member of the clique of murderers, who is also the governor of Kaduna state, Nasiru Elrufai mischievously concocted another case in Kaduna High Court falsely accusing the revered Sheikh Zakzaky and his wife of abetting killings of innocent persons known to have been killed by the Nigerian army and the police in Kaduna where he is the chief security officer.

More than three years of the Zaria massacre, there is no clear understanding as to why the government launched a terror attack on the unarmed movement.

Along the way, it came to be revealed that it was a plot by America, Israel, and Saudi Arabia to eliminate what they call Iranian influence in the largest black nation in the world.

This didn't bother some of the Nigerians much, especially the blind supporters of Buhari and the sectarian extremists.

Human right activists, Christian groups



and others have all condemned the Nigerian government of genocide and this has even taken the matter to the International Criminal Court in the Hague. The case on the movement at the ICC has since passed the preliminary investigation.

Just of recent, it became clear that Sheikh Zakzaky is being molested and suppressed by the Nigerian government because he is a threat to neocolonialism and imperialism

taking place in Nigeria today.

Sheikh Zakzaky revealed the incident taking place in Zamfara state and places like Birnin Gwari in Kaduna state. He explained that it is a plot and those in power are signatories to it. They are supported into power through a deceptive process called an election in order to serve the interest of their masters in Europe and America.

They are aware of natural resources de-

posits, like gold in Zamfara and Birnin Gwari where they want to clear the people there, establish mining fields, landing and take off fields, and foreign military base to enhance the stealing of the resources by those foreigners who are the funders of the killings.

Now that the killings are getting out of hands and more and more Nigerians are becoming concerned about the terror activities, the Nigerian government, out of fear of revolt, is deceptively stopping mining activities in Zamfara and sending the foreigners out of the country.

This plot has since been revealed over six years ago by Sheikh Zakzaky where he advised against the killing of innocent lives and toying with Islam in the name of religious terrorism. He advised that due processes be established in exploiting such resources and not through deception and inducement of terrorism.

It is now clear that Sheikh Zakzaky is the true savior of Nigeria and Nigerians whose six sons were killed by the alliance of the Nigerian government and the foreigners. He sacrificed his life and everything he has to save Nigeria from invasion by the foreigners who are after the abundant natural resources in the stretch from Sokoto to Maiduguri.

It is now the duty of Nigerians to rise and free the Sheikh and follow him to the path of true freedom and emancipation from the leadership of stooges who exchange the lives of their people for power and wealth. It is now clear why they are after the life of Sheikh Zakzaky.

Naming IRGC terrorist group will contribute to regional tensions: Entessar

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

A: At a minimum, this decision will contribute to regional tensions. Iran's Supreme National Security Council has already reacted to this decision by issuing a statement designating the US Central Command (CENTCOM) and its affiliated forces as terrorist groups. If this statement is operationalized; that is, if it becomes the official policy, then conditions for spiraling and uncontrollable conflict in the region will strengthen. The neocons have long argued that actions against Iran are "cost-free" because Iran does not take reciprocal actions against the US. For example, they point out to the fact that Iran could not and did not take any meaningful countermeasures when the US unilaterally withdrew from the JCPOA despite the fact that Tehran had issued statements about the



dire consequences of Washington's decision regarding its obligations under the JCPOA.

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

A: Decisions such as designating a group as a terrorist entity falls within the purview of the US president and the US laws allow the president the authority to do so.

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

A: Yes. Of course, even without the latest US move against IRGC, the Trump administration would impose a steady diet of sanctions against Iran. For the Trump administration, sanctions are viewed as the only tool that can force internal chaos and regime change in Iran. But the IRGC's new designation will make easier for the US to justify its future sanctions against Iran by portraying such sanctions under the rubric of fighting terrorist interests in Iran.

Oman is important nodal point in Iran's strategic orbit: Adib-Moghaddam

1 → ■ Why Oman accept this deal on this time?

A: In a region with endemic conflict such as West Asia, small states such as Oman will always outsource their security guarantees. This is why securing stability and peace is the cornerstone of a functioning, self-sufficient security architecture which should be the ultimate aim for the governments of this region.

Apart from the security dividend that Oman calculates in its favor, the country is also seeing this deal as a major foreign investment into one of the most deprived

areas of the country.

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

A: Oman has played an intermediate role in many conflicts of the region and it will continue to do so.

Having said that, this deal will make it that much more difficult to be seen as an honest broker. Essentially, Oman has outsourced its security to one of the major causes of insecurity, i.e. the United States. The only way out of this conundrum would be to work out a deal with China and/or Russia in order to ensure that Oman will

be seen as an independent actor. All of this is simple Political Science.

■ Will this deal impact on Oman relation with Iran?

A: Inevitably, Oman will be perceived as a rather less autonomous actor which is dependent in one way or another on the political wind blowing from Washington. This is not a good position to be in for a country with a proud independent history. Iran can't be oblivious of this factor. Having said that, Iran would pursue its interests nonetheless and Oman is certainly an important nodal point in Iran's strategic orbit.



Epic flooding and poor response

Sen. Josh Hawley, Republican of Missouri, said in a statement the Corps was "hamstrung" by "radical environmentalist lobbyists that are forcing the agency to prioritize wildlife over farmers."

To the Right, it's always someone else who's responsible for the catastrophic loss of property, livestock and livelihoods in the soaked Midwest. No one on the Right wants to subscribe that climate change is responsible. And part of the national infrastructure conversation — that we're not having, by the way — is that the Trump administration is more concerned about tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy.

When Barack Obama was president and wanted to invest in infrastructure, Paul Ryan, then-house Speaker (and John Boehner before him) complained about the cost. Ever

wondered why McConnell, Boehner, and Ryan blocked the infrastructure legislation that President Obama wanted to pass?

The real reason is that they didn't want the president to have any victories. But now that their president is in the White House, they're content to kick this problem down the road to when a Democrat regains the presidency. Then it'll resume its place in the culture wars.

The farmers in the flooded areas voted for the hate. Like Donald Trump, they didn't believe in climate change. When Congressmen like James Inhofe and Cabinet members like Scott Pruitt deny climate change — like No. 45 — these farmers are getting exactly what they voted for: nothing. FYI, caring people watch with sympathy and concern

as the extreme flooding wreaks havoc on so many in the Midwest. But kneejerk "thoughts and prayers" are cheap responses. More frequent and more severe than usual weather disasters such as floods, tornados, hurricanes, and yes, even droughts, are the face of climate change. Affected regions should get used to it (also, in a global context, watch Iran for example, and by the way, their response to flooding could be a role model for this administration. Even IRGC is joining forces to prevent further damage to the cities in full force). Or, better, stop sending to Washington politicians who deny even the possibility of human-caused climate change, and are unwilling to take mitigating steps just in case they are wrong.

(Source: newtondailynews)

Trump's unprecedented illegal move against IRGC

TEHRAN (MNA) —To designate Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization is the last illegal unprecedented move of US President Donald Trump against IRGC as a 40 years old segment of an internationally recognized state.

Labeling part of a recognized state as a terrorist organization does not comply with the international law and the charter of the United Nations. USA's regional allies such as Saudi Arabia are supporting this move because they see the Trump's move in favor of their regional ambitions.

All the US administration's moves in the Middle East despite global opposition including the White House decision on the holy city of Jerusalem, recognition of Golan Heights



as a Israel territory, supporting the YPG despite Turkey's warnings and strengthening the embargoes on Iran makes two things crystal clear once again. Firstly, US is not withdrawing from the region just changing its tools and secondly tensions will increase in the Middle East. Power is still the ultimate source. From a realist perspective, interests of a country can come first than global acceptance or values. But world is changing also Middle East.

Iran's response to Trump's decision was quick. Iran declared CENTCOM as a terrorist organization. Iranian foreign Minister Javad Zarif described the US move as "a gift to Netanyahu" and said, "It is another gift to Israel and US misadventure for the region".

Another question coming into mind is that, "How can this decision be taken when IRGC forces support the fight against ISIL?"

This kind of tries, is an effort for the balance of power in the region. USA tries to roll back Iran. Essentially, efforts like this are dangerous and may result in increasing the tensions. It has to be realized that these policies no longer valid.

As a result, this is a fact that regional peace is not related to these kind of moves and they will just increase the tensions. For the benefit of the regional countries, Iran will defeat these aggressive moves via wisdom and calmness.

Hazar vural is a Middle East expert & researcher in Turkey based TASAM think tank.

Biden worried about rising Sanders' votes



1 → Despite this, Biden is still afraid of Barney Sanders' presence in the Democratic Party. The former vice president of the United States is well aware that if Sanders wins in the first states where the Democratic primaries are held, then there will be no difficulty in ultimate victory. Meanwhile, polls in countries such as Iowa, New Hampshire, and South Carolina are close to each other.

Trump's golan recognition runs counter to intl. law: SIPRI chief



TEHRAN (Tasnim) — The director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) said US President Donald Trump's recognition of Syria's Golan Heights as Israeli territory is against international law.

"International law does not allow for forcible change of international borders, which is what the Golan annexation amounts to. President Trump's unilateral decision, like other decisions his administration has taken, puts into question the depth of current US support for international law....," Dan Smith told Tasnim.

Dan Smith has a long record of research and publication on a wide range of conflict and peace issues such as nationalism, identity politics, armed conflicts, ethics of intervention, gender aspects of conflict and peace building. In recent years, his work has broadened to encompass other contemporary issues such as the relationship between climate change and insecurity, peace and security issues in the Middle East and global conflict trends. Smith has served four years in the UN Peacebuilding Fund Advisory group, two of which (2010–2011) were as Chair. He has lived most of his adult life in the UK with a 10-year spell in Norway. He has traveled professionally to more than 60 countries.

Following is the full text of the interview.

■ US President Donald Trump last week formally recognized the occupied Golan Heights as Israel's territory. What's your take on this?

A: International law does not allow for forcible change of international borders, which is what the Golan annexation amounts to. President Trump's unilateral decision, like other decisions his administration has taken, puts into question the depth of current US support for international law. It will be difficult for the US to stand by the law against other annexation, such as Russia taking control of Crimea in 2014, without being charged with inconsistency and hypocrisy.

■ How should the international community particularly the UN react to this?

A: The international community should react through the UN General Assembly and Security Council to insist that international law is respected. It is necessary to make the statement even though the chances of it having practical effect are low in this case.

■ Reports suggest that Trump will recognize West Bank as Israeli territory in his next move. Do you believe so?

A: In Israeli eyes, the West Bank is occupied whereas Golan was annexed - a significant difference. I am not aware of an Israeli appeal to the US to recognize a sovereignty it has not yet claimed. In addition, if Israel absorbs the West Bank, Israel will have a majority Arab population.

In that event, either Israel allows Arabs equal citizenship and an Arab government of Israel will ultimately be elected, or Israel formalizes Arabs' status as second class citizens and becomes an openly apartheid state, forfeiting its legitimacy in Western eyes.

For these reasons, I think the reports about recognizing the West Bank as part of Israel are unlikely to be proven true. On the other hand, my views are also mere speculation and politics today is teaching us to expect the unexpected.

Q: How do you think the decision by Trump could scuttle other ongoing peace-making efforts in the region?

A: I think the decision adds to the probability that, if and when the promised Kushner peace plan for Israel-Palestine is launched, it will not have much chance of success. I do not think the decision will have any impact on peace efforts for Yemen, Iraq or Syria.

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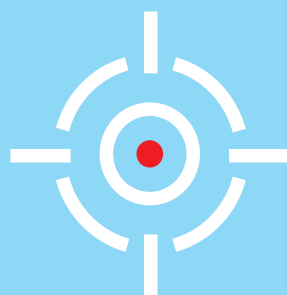
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The Tehran Times new pocket-sized glossary is now available on the market. The reader-friendly is a rich source of the most common journalistic terminology collected by the daily's retired staff.

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144 psychological screening teams in flood-hit areas

HEALTH **TEHRAN** — 144 teams specialized in psychological health have been sent to the areas hit by the recent flash flood in Iran, said Deputy Health Minister Alireza Raisi.

According to Raisi, the teams screened 13,000 people affected by the flood and some type of mental health problem was detected in 1,429 individuals. Also, 1,169 of the screened people had had a psychological disorder diagnosed in them before the flood, and 413 individuals were addicts already supported by a rehabilitation center, IRNA reported on Tuesday.

■ **Sewage backup threatening Khuzestan**

Raisi also referred to some sanitary problems in areas struck by the flash flood.

According to him, Sewage backup is currently among the most alarming issues in Khuzestan province especially in Ahwaz, Hoveyzeh, Susangerd, Rafi, Karun, Dasht-e Azadegan County and Hamidieh.

The problem is that the sewage discharge canals into Karun River are now swamped under water and this is aggravating the sewage backup, he said.

“Another issue is the shortage of sanitary toilets and portable bathtubs. We now need 10,000 uninfected toilets and 5,800 bathtubs in flood-stricken areas,” Raisi added.

■ **Medical emergency teams in distressed areas**

Putting together and dispatching medical emergency teams (MET), medical screening and research teams, as well as equipment for preventing communicable diseases to the distressed areas are



Putting together and dispatching medical emergency teams (MET), medical screening and research teams, as well as equipment for preventing communicable diseases to the distressed areas are among the measures taken by the Health Ministry to control the health condition.

among the measures taken by the Health Ministry to control the health condition, said Raisi.

“We are also constantly in touch with emergency medical teams and are on the lookout for the outbreak of any infectious disease. We are also trying to teach local people about preventing the transmission of such diseases and have done extensive supplementary vaccinations in these areas,” he said.

■ **The key role of electronic health records**

“One thing that helped us in better identifying the area, was the electronic health records that showed us the vulnerable people in each district covered by each health center. So we knew how many pregnant woman or people with diabetes or hypertension lived in these areas,” said the official.

“We have now given medical care to 10,000 pregnant women, 119,000 patients with heart problems and 4,300 patients who needed dialysis,” he added.

■ **807 health centers damaged**

According to Raisi, 807 health centers were damaged by the flash flood in a scale of 10 to 100 percent. So, they quickly identified the centers and who were injured or could provide help to others and set up places for giving help, he also

The Health Ministry quickly identified the damaged health centers and injured specialists on one hand and the centers and experts who were unharmed and were ready to help others. Furthermore, some universities were selected to provide help for other universities affected by the flood.

Iranian scientists build 3D scanner

HEALTH **TEHRAN** — Iranian scientists have built a three-dimensional scanner that can scan the body in less than one minute, ISNA reported on Tuesday.

The scanner has been designed by an Iranian startup. The new device screens the body health and can be used in both medical and sport environments.

In a few seconds, the 3D scanner collects information from millions of body parts by using infrared radiation and then measures different body parameters such as waist size, weight, height, body fat percentage and the volume and dimensions of other body parts.



This technology is a precise way to monitor body changes through time, and it is also used for measuring body mass index.

Other advantage of this device is application of infrared radiation which poses no threat to the user's health. High precision of the device is also remarkable as it measures fat percentage with a 4% precision and other body parts with a 5 milliliter precision.

Both the software and hardware of the new 3D scanner has been produced in the country by Iranian scientists; however, the American version of the device is also available on the market.

First teddy bear hospital opens in Yazd

HEALTH **TEHRAN** — Iran's first teddy bear hospital, aimed at reducing childhood anxiety about medical environments, procedures and professionals opened in the city of Yazd, said a faculty member of Yazd University of Medical Sciences.

Medical students are taking part in running this project, said Fatemeh Zareh, the head of Psychological and Social Health Department of the university, ISNA reported on Tuesday.

Teddy bear hospital (TBH) is an international project in which medical students interact with children and teach them that there is no reason to fear doctors or the procedures they perform.

According to Zareh, parenting workshop for parents, teaching children how to behave in medical environments and setting up playrooms for children are parts of this project.

“Not only children will be introduced to hospitals, in a mock-up environment, but parents will also learn about different



health topics such as dental care and food science,” she said.

“This project will also help the staff to identify kids that might have some disorders. For example, there are painting classes for the children and the medical teams may suspect some psychological disorders with analyzing them. Some questionnaires that can detect childhood disorders will also be given to the parents and the families can be referred to a specialist if they want,” said Zareh.

Zareh finally announced that families can bring their 3- to 7-year-old children to this hospital from April 10 to 12.

New HIV vaccine could expose latent virus and kill it

Antiretroviral therapy may soon be obsolete, as scientists have successfully used immune cells to kick the dormant form of HIV out of its hiding place and destroy it. The findings may soon lead to an HIV vaccine.

New research brings us closer to an HIV vaccine that could eradicate it completely.

According to recent estimates, around 1.1 million people in the United States have HIV.

With the help of antiretroviral therapy, over half of these people now have a very low level of the virus.

This means that they can no longer transmit it to other people.

Antiretroviral therapy can keep HIV in check so well that the virus is near-undetectable in the blood.

However, HIV continues to “live” in latent form, so people with it must keep taking the medications to prevent it from flaring up.



Antiretroviral therapy can have a host of side effects. These may include gastrointestinal problems, cardiovascular problems, insulin resistance, and bleeding events, as well as effects on bone density, liver health, and neurological and psychiatric health.

So, the search for an HIV cure is ongoing. Now, new research may have found a way to “drag” the virus out of its hiding place and neutralize it. The findings may lead to a vaccine that would allow people living with HIV to stop taking antiretroviral medication every day.

(Source: medical news today)

WHO airlifts medical supplies to people affected by the floods in Islamic Republic of Iran

The World Health Organization (WHO) today airlifted essential medical supplies to the Islamic Republic of Iran to respond to the growing health needs of thousands of people who have been displaced as a result of the flooding in many provinces in the country.

The supplies include trauma, health, cholera and non-communicable disease kits and other commodities requested by the Ministry of Health and Medical Education.

According to an official statement by the Emergency Operations Centre of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, 1,660,100 individuals are in need of health care services in areas where the floods have left 78 people dead and 1,137 injured. As many as 295,787 people have been displaced.

Extreme rainfall which began on 19 March has led to flooding in 28 out of 31 provinces affecting 42,269 129 inhabitants in 253 cities and causing widespread damage to municipal facilities, including health centers and hospitals. Many health facilities in affected areas are either fully or partially damaged, and the risk of water- and vector-borne diseases, including malaria, cholera and other communicable diseases is increasing, also due to the interruption of the water supply.

In 17 of the most severely affected provinces major damage to the health infrastructure has been reported,



with 577 health houses, 52 health centers, 201 comprehensive health centers, 70 emergency medical services stations, 24 clinics and 43 hospitals affected.

“Together with the United Nations country team led by the UN Resident Coordinator Ms Ugochi Daniels, WHO will continue to provide full support to the Ministry of Health and Medical Education and the people in Islamic Republic of Iran to address urgent health needs and undertake recovery measures. We call on the international community to make further funding available. We want to express again our deep condolences to all of those

who have lost loved ones and will do our best to provide assistance to those in need,” said Dr Christoph Hamelmann, WHO Representative in Islamic Republic of Iran.

Dr. Pirhossein Koulivand, Director of the National Emergency Medical Services (EMS) underscored that given the widespread flood damages in most parts of Iran, the EMS has been serving flood victims with all logistical and personnel capabilities, and international assistance like the one from WHO can complement these actions.

“From the first day of the flooding, WHO has led and coordinated the health response of the UN country team in support of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education. A number of health coordination meetings with national and international counterparts have been convened to identify the urgent needs of affected populations,” said Laleh Najfzadeh, Coordinator of the WHO Health Emergency Programme at the WHO country office in Islamic Republic of Iran.

The WHO Health Emergencies Programme is committed to saving lives and reducing suffering during times of crises whether caused by conflict, disease outbreaks or environmental disasters and leads and coordinates the response of all international health partners to contain disease outbreaks and provide effective relief and recovery to people affected.

(Source: WHO)

Your environment is cleaner, your immune system has never been so unprepared

A century ago, British scientists suggested a link between increased hygiene and allergic conditions — the first hint that our immune systems are becoming improperly “trained.”

Should you pick your nose?

Don't laugh. Scientifically, it's an interesting question.

Should your children pick their noses? Should your children eat dirt? Maybe: Your body needs to know what immune challenges lurk in the immediate environment.

Should you use antibacterial soap or hand sanitizers? No. Are we taking too many antibiotics? Yes.

“I tell people, when they drop food on the floor, please pick it up and eat it,” said Dr. Meg Lemon, a dermatologist in Denver who treats people with allergies and autoimmune disorders.

“Get rid of the antibacterial soap. Immunize! If a new vaccine comes out, run and get it. I immunized the living hell out of my children. And it's O.K. if they eat dirt.”

Dr. Lemon's prescription for a better immune system doesn't end there. “You should not only pick your nose, you should eat it,” she said.

She's referring, with a facetious touch, to the fact our immune system can become disrupted if it doesn't have regular interactions with the natural world.

“Our immune system needs a job,” Dr. Lemon said. “We evolved over millions of years to have our immune systems under constant assault. Now they don't have anything to do.”

She isn't alone. Leading physicians and immunologists are reconsidering the antiseptic, at times hysterical, ways in which we interact with our environment.

From the team at NYT Parenting (launching soon!): Get the latest news and guidance for parents. We'll celebrate the little parenting moments that mean a lot—and share stories that matter to families.

Why? Let us turn to 19th-century London.

The British Journal of Homeopathy, volume 29, published in 1872, included a startlingly prescient observation: “Hay fever is said to be an aristocratic disease, and there can be no doubt that, if it is not almost wholly confined to the upper classes of society, it is rarely, if ever, met with but among the educated.”

Hay fever is a catchall term for seasonal allergies to pollen and other airborne irritants. With this idea that hay fever was an aristocratic disease, British scientists were on to something.

More than a century later, in November 1989, another highly influential paper was published on the subject of hay fever. The paper was short, less than two pages, in BMJ, titled “Hay Fever, Hygiene, and Household Size.”

The author looked at the prevalence of hay fever among 17,414 children born in March 1958. Of 16 variables the scientist explored, he described as “most striking” an association between the likelihood that a child would get hay fever allergy and the number of his or her siblings.

It was an inverse relationship, meaning the more siblings the child had, the less likely it was that he or she would get the allergy. Not just that, but the children least likely to get allergies were ones who had older siblings.

The paper hypothesized that “allergic diseases were prevented by infection in early childhood, transmitted by unhygienic contact with older siblings, or acquired prenatally from a mother infected by contact with her older children.

“Over the past century declining family size, improvements in household amenities, and higher standards of personal cleanliness have reduced the opportunity for cross infection in young families,” the paper continued. “This may have resulted in more widespread clinical expression of atopic disease, emerging in wealthier people, as seems to have occurred for hay fever.”

This is the birth of the hygiene hypothesis. The ideas behind it have since evolved and expanded, but it provides profound insight into a challenge that human beings face in our relationship with the modern world.

Our ancestors evolved over millions of years to survive in their environments. For most of human existence, that environment was characterized by extreme challenges, like scarcity of food, or food that could carry disease, as well as unsanitary conditions and unclean water, withering weather, and so on. It was a dangerous environment, a heck of a thing to survive.

At the center of our defenses was our immune system, our most elegant defense. The system is the product of centuries of evolution, as a river stone is shaped by water rushing over it and the tumbles it experiences on its journey downstream.

Late in the process, humans learned to take steps to bolster our defenses, developing all manner of customs and habits to support our survival. In this way, think of the brain — the organ that helps us develop habits and customs — as another facet of the immune system.

We used our collective brains to figure out effective behaviors. We started washing our hands and took care to avoid certain foods that experience showed could be dangerous or deadly. In some cultures, people came to avoid pork, which we now know is highly susceptible to trichinosis; in others, people banned meats, which we later learned may carry toxic loads of E. coli and other bacteria.

Ritual washing is mentioned in Exodus, one of the earliest books in the Bible: “So they shall wash their hands and their feet, that they die not.”

Our ideas evolved, but for the most part, the immune system did not. This is not to say that it didn't change. The immune system responds to our environment. When we encounter various threats, our defenses learn and then are much more able to deal with that threat in the future. In that way, we adapt to our environment.

We survived over tens of thousands of years. Eventually, we washed our hands, swept our floors, cooked our food, avoided certain foods altogether. We improved the hygiene of the animals we raised and slaughtered for food.

Particularly in the wealthier areas of the world, we purified our water, and developed plumbing and waste treatment plants; we isolated and killed bacteria and other germs.

The immune system's enemies list was attenuated, largely for the good. Now, though, our bodies are proving that they cannot keep up with this change. We have created a mismatch between the immune system — one of the longest surviving and most refined balancing acts in the world — and our environment.

(source: New York Times)

Vote Now! UNESCO's World Heritage Journeys website nominated for Webby Awards

Launched in September 2018, UNESCO's World Heritage Journeys website (VisitEUWorldHeritage.com), produced in collaboration with National Geographic, is a finalist for a Webby Award—the Internet's most coveted award.



As a Webby Nominee, VisitEUWorldHeritage.com has been chosen by the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences as one of the five best in the world in the category of Travel websites (and among the top 10% of all work entered) and is competing for The Webby Award and The Webby People's Voice Award. While The Webby Award is chosen by the Academy, The Webby People's Voice Award is voted on by the public. UNESCO and National Geographic would appreciate YOUR VOTE for the People's Voice Award!

VisitEUWorldHeritage.com is the first-ever web platform dedicated to World Heritage and sustainable travel. Supported by the European Union, the platform features 34 selected World Heritage sites spread across 19 European Union countries, and it has been developed in collaboration with National Geographic and the World Heritage sites and local tourism boards. It encourages people to travel beyond the major tourist hubs, staying longer and experiencing more of what the local region has to offer.

World Heritage Journeys invites travelers to travel along four cultural heritage itineraries—Royal Europe, Ancient Europe, Romantic Europe and Underground Europe—which intertwine to tell fascinating stories of Europe's heritage and history. The website has practical information and tools to support travelers in planning their European holidays based on local knowledge about the destinations' cultural heritage.

(Source: [unesco.org](#))

Ancient Greek shipwrecks are now open for scuba diving

A new frontier is opening in Greece for archaeology lovers—under the sea.

There are dozens and dozens of ancient submerged shipwrecks along the Greek coast, generally accessible to archaeologists but not the public. That all changes with the opening of the Peristera shipwreck near Alonissos, an island in the Aegean. The wreck, the remains of a cargo vessel that sank in the 5th century BC while carrying pottery and possibly wine, is one of four sites that a European Commission program has cleared for recreational divers.

Dives are being limited to a select few spots. Scuba diving was mostly banned throughout Greece for years, out of fear of divers destroying priceless historical sites.

These photos from April 7 show one of the first excursions to the Peristera wreck and the underwater bounty that was largely out of public sight for millennia.

(Source: [Quartz](#))



ROUND THE GLOBE

Erbil Citadel

Erbil Citadel is a fortified settlement on top of an imposing ovoid-shaped tell (a hill created by many generations of people living and rebuilding on the same spot) in the Kurdistan region, Erbil Governorate.

A UNESCO World Heritage, Erbil Citadel is a rare surviving example of a formerly fortified settlement which has grown up on the top of an imposing ovoid-shaped tell.



The artificial topography of the archaeological mound conditioned the urban form of the settlement, the structure of the Ottoman period urban fabric of which is clearly legible, in the maze of alleys and cul-de-sacs radiating from the main Grand Gate.

The original fortifications of the Citadel were in time replaced by houses and the continuous wall of tall 19th century house façades still conveys the visual impression of an impregnable fortress dominating the city of Erbil.

Written and iconographic historical records document the antiquity of settlement on the site: Erbil is associated with Arbela, an important Assyrian political and religious center and is mentioned, with a remarkable continuity of its name (Irbilum, Urbilum, Urbel, Arbail, Arbira, Arbela, Erbil/Arbil), since pre-Sumerian times in several written sources.

Archaeological finds and investigations suggest that the mound conceals the levels and remains of several layers of previous settlements, while the immediate and wider setting has revealed traces connected to the early development of the settlement.

(Source: [UNESCO](#))

Bagh-e Narenjestan: A must-see attraction while in Shiraz

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — Set within a gorgeous garden, Bagh-e Narenjestan, which encircles a scenic pavilion, was built for the wealthy and powerful Mohammad-Ali Khan Qavam al-Molk in the late 19th century in Shiraz, southern Iran. Also called Narenjestan Garden, Qavam House or Narenjestan-e Qavam, it was set, according to tradition, as a “Boruni” or public reception area of his family home. It got the nickname “Narenjestan” since the garden embraces an abundance of bitter orange (Narenj in Persian) trees.

For the time being, Narenjestan-e Qavam and its underground museum is open to the public as one of the main attractions of the ancient city.

It is an exemplar Persian Garden, which is a UNESCO World Heritage. The genuine concept of the Persian Garden that is deeply rooted in time interweaves natural elements with manmade components to embody an idea of creating a paradise on Earth by the means of artistic, philosophical, figurative, and religious notions.

The pavilion is connected to the Khan-e Zinat ol-Molk, which was once the “Andaruni” (private quarters) for the family, the two are linked via an underground passage that is not open to the public.

The basement of the pavilion is where archaeological relics have been put on show. The relics have been put together by Ar-

thur Upham Pope, an American scholar who taught at the Asia Institute in Shiraz between 1969 and 1979.

Shiraz is home to some of the country's most magnificent buildings and sights. Increasingly, it draws more and more foreign and domestic sightseers flocking into this provincial capital which was the literary capital of Persia during the Zand dynasty from 1751 to 1794.

■ Under tourists' eyes

Here is a select of comments that visitors to the garden have posted to TripAdvisor, one of the most popular travel websites in the world:

■ “A traditional aristocratic house”

You will certainly enjoy visiting this place. The rooms are decorated with mirrors (aayeneh kari). The orange trees and the coffee shop are very pleasant. (Ghaferi from Los Angeles, California; Reviewed March 2019)

■ “A must see”

This is one of the places which I enjoyed the most in Shiraz. The building has so many beautiful rooms with decorations from floor to ceiling. A must see in Shiraz. Allow at least one hour to see. (LarsSoholm from Skanderborg, Denmark; Reviewed Feb. 2019)

■ “Mirrors everywhere”

The walls and ceilings are made up of mirrors, which gives us a spectacular impression because of the reflections. (Piotr M. from Warsaw, Poland; Reviewed October

Outbound tourism slumps by 45% over Noruz holidays: official



TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran's outbound tourism fell by 45 percent during the New Year (Noruz) holidays (March 21-April 5) in comparison to the same period last year, a tourism official has said.

Speaking to IRNA, Hormatollah Rafiei didn't mention figures for the number of travelers, citing sharp rises in the value of foreign currencies against rial the main reason behind the decline.

Based on statistics released by

the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organization, a total of 5,900,381 Iranians traveled overseas during the first nine months of the past Iranian calendar year, indicating 30 percent decline compared with the same period last year.

The nation makes hundreds of thousands of domestic trips during the almost two-week New Year holidays, when most businesses and workplaces are closed, as are schools.



23, 2018)

■ “Nice for a late afternoon visit”

This house was quite small and didn't take more than a half hour to enjoy. Doesn't quite compare to the houses in Kashan but was still beautiful. It's near the Pink Mosque and a few other sites so it's quite simple to include on your “must see” list. (A. M. from Lisbon, Portugal; Reviewed October 2018)

■ “Beautiful pavilion with small museum underneath”

The small, but traditional Persian garden here is beautiful and peaceful. The pavilion has some amazing glass work and tiles that show how wealthy the family who owned the grounds were. Underneath there is a museum that houses some artifacts, including a gentleman that makes and plays traditional Persian musical instruments. (R0hanL from Amman Governorate, Jordan; reviewed June 2018)

Niavaran complex hosts 8k visitors during Noruz



HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — A total of 80,835 people toured Tehran's Niavaran Cultural-Historical Complex during the New Year (Noruz) holidays (March 21-April 5).

The complex also hosted open-air exhibits of handicrafts and souvenirs as well as live performances and crafts workshops, CHTN reported.

Covering an area of about eleven hectares, the historical complex is composed of several landmark buildings, museums and monuments constructed in the 19th

and 20th centuries during the Pahlavi and late Qajar eras.

The main palace of the complex was originally erected for the purpose of royal ceremonies and gatherings. However, it later turned into the residence of the second king of Pahlavi king, Mohammad Reza Shah and his family.

With an area of 9,000 square meters, the palace is entirely adorned with magnificent plasterwork, mirrorwork, and tilework. Its architecture boasts a blend of pre and post Islamic art.

The key to cheap internet service: a local SIM card

By [Geoffrey Morrison](#)

Want cheap data and phone calls when you're abroad? Here's how.

There's an easy way to get zero roaming fees, inexpensive internet service and cheap phone calls when you travel. The trick is the SIM card, a tiny, removable chip, inside your phone.

■ What is a SIM card?

Subscriber Identity Module cards are roughly the same size, and indeed look like, the microSD memory cards you'd find in a digital camera. (Some phones actually have both microSD and SIM cards, but most just have the latter.) The main purpose of a SIM card is to store a small amount of data that lets the closest cell tower know, among other things, what wireless company you've subscribed to. For example, if you're on Verizon, the SIM card will let Verizon's tower know that, yep, you're on Verizon.

When you're traveling, this creates a problem. When your phone connects to the tower in a different country, the tower effectively says “I don't know you,” and either denies you service, or tells Verizon you're roaming. If the latter, you get whatever speed Verizon and that provider have determined is acceptable, and you get charged exorbitant roaming rates. AT&T works similarly, Sprint, T-Mobile, and Google Fi are different, but we'll get to them later.

If you're wondering if you can just get a different SIM card that will work on a different network, you can.

For years that's how I've gotten cheap data in dozens of countries all over the world. I'd arrive in a city, head to a local cellphone company store (like Vodafone, 3, or Orange), and buy a SIM and a month of service. These would have different names, like “pay-as-you-go” or “prepaid,” but in every store I'd just say I was traveling and wanted a SIM for a few weeks, and they all knew what I was looking for. Put the new SIM in your phone (make sure you don't lose your old one, you'll need it when you go home!) and you're all set. If you're not sure how to do that, the store will probably do it for you. You



can be in and out with cheap high-speed data in less than 30 minutes.

■ How much does a local SIM cost?

The prices vary depending on country and provider, but on average I've paid around \$20 for a month's worth of 4G data and calls in that country. You read that right. Most roaming packages charge that for a few days, and are slow and data-limited as well. Most companies want to look at your passport, so make sure you bring it. A handful of countries have other requirements, so a quick Google search before you go is a good idea.

The catch, and you knew there'd have to be one, is that your phone has to be unlocked. This means your cellphone company has to enable a setting on your phone that allows you to use it on a different network. The process to do this varies, but in most cases you need to have paid off your phone. The actual unlocking process

is free, though. I wrote about how this works over at Wirecutter, the product review site owned by The New York Times Company.

Not every phone will work in every country, but most new phones should be fine. Best to check with your current cellphone company to verify that your phone will work, and if it needs to be unlocked.

A handful of phones have dual-SIMs, which is exactly what it sounds like: two SIM card slots. This lets you keep your home SIM and your “away” SIM in the same phone. Not necessary for infrequent travelers, but for anyone who regularly goes to another country, quite handy.

Times are changing for SIM cards, however. Both Google and Apple have “eSIMs” in some of their phones and tablets. These Embedded-SIMs are essentially a virtual SIM card, and work across multiple cellular networks. This is how Google's Fi works.

Speaking of Google Fi, it, along with Sprint and T-Mobile, have generous free international coverage. Generally, if you have one of these providers, you'll be able to step of a plane just about anywhere in the world and your phone will work more or less normally. Google Fi has 4G data, Sprint and T-Mobile have far slower 2G, but offer 4G packages for a few dollars a day.

■ Where do I get a local SIM card?

You can buy SIMs at airports, but these are often far more expensive and offer less data than those you can purchase from a local telecom company. Lists of the main providers in the Americas, Asia/Pacific, Europe, and Africa and the Middle East can be found online before you depart. There are also “universal” travel SIM cards, but these cost more than a local SIM.

■ Will I have the same telephone number?

No. Your apps will work, but you will have a new number. Your old number will go direct to voice mail until you return home and swap in your original SIM, which will return your phone back to normal. Just something to keep in mind.

(Source: [The New York Times](#))

UV-drenched exoplanets might still host life after all

Whether or not there's life beyond Earth is one of the most profound questions we can ask, and nearby exoplanets are among the best places to start looking. Unfortunately, some of the most likely candidates are bathed in apparently-lethal levels of radiation – but a new study from Cornell University says that might not be a problem. Case in point: Earth.

Red dwarf stars are often considered a good start in the search for life – they're the most common type of stars in the Universe, and are relatively cool and small compared to the Sun.

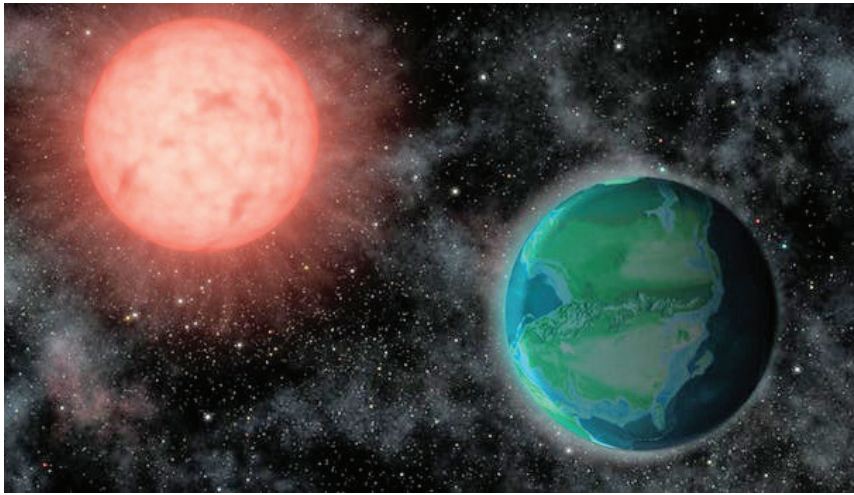
The problem is, that means planets need to tuck up closer to the star to stay warm enough for liquid water to pool on the surface.

And being that close means they are subjected to intense ultraviolet and X-ray radiation, particularly during regular solar flares, which would be enough to kill most life on Earth today.

Planets orbiting red dwarfs

This has led many scientists to conclude that planets orbiting red dwarfs aren't as habitable as they once seemed. But the Cornell study took a closer look, by comparing the possible radiation levels these worlds receive with those our home planet has historically been exposed to.

The researchers focused on the four closest exoplanets to Earth that have been deemed potentially habitable: Proxima-b,



TRAPPIST-1e, Ross-128b and LHS-1140b. Although we don't know the exact makeup

of the atmospheres of these planets, the team modeled various compositions that

And since life had already taken hold by that point in the history of our planet, there's a chance that it could do the same elsewhere. Of course, that doesn't guarantee that life exists on Proxima-b or TRAPPIST-1e – it just means we can't rule it out, and should pay closer attention to these worlds.

could be possible, ranging from modern Earth-like structures to those with very thin atmospheres, and some without the protective ozone layer.

The intense UV radiation that bombards exoplanets orbiting red dwarf stars might not hinder life, according to a new study.

The team modeled how much UV reached the surface of the planets with these different atmospheres.

The thinner atmospheres

As expected, the researchers found that those with thinner atmospheres and lower ozone levels received higher levels of UV radiation.

But importantly, while that was more than the Earth currently receives, it was significantly lower than Earth levels of 3.9 billion years ago.

And since life had already taken hold by that point in the history of our planet, there's a chance that it could do the same elsewhere. Of course, that doesn't guarantee that life exists on Proxima-b or TRAPPIST-1e – it just means we can't rule it out, and should pay closer attention to these worlds.

The "history of life on Earth provides us with a wealth of information about how biology can overcome the challenges of environments we would think of as hostile," says Jack O'Malley-James, co-author of the study.

(Source: newatlas.com)

The world's glaciers are down by 9 trillion tons of ice in the last half century, research suggests

Things are not looking good for Earth's glaciers. Usually, when it comes to climate change and melting ice, we think of the Earth's polar regions. But they're not the only important ice formations, and they're not the only ice that's melting due to climate change.

New research published on April 8th, 2019, shows that the Earth's glaciers have lost over 9,000 gigatons of ice since 1961. That's over 9 trillion tons. And as a result, they have caused the seas to rise by 27 mm (1.06 inches) since then.

The research comes from an international team led by scientists at the University of Zurich, Switzerland. They relied on glacier measurements, both from the ground and from satellites, taken over the last 50 years. They focused on 19 glacier regions around the world, including Alaska, Greenland, and the Andes.

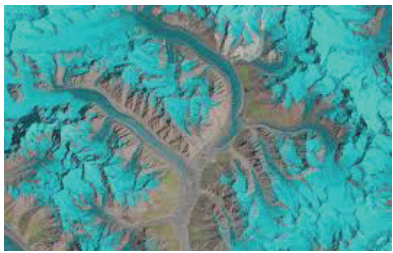
At the heart of this research is the European Space Agency's (ESA) Climate Change Initiative. That program gathers important climate change data and organizes it, archives it, and makes it available to researchers. The CCI has a glacier monitoring program, and it provided researchers with the outlines of glaciers and with information on the changes in ice mass for thousands of glaciers around the world.

Making precise calculations

Frank Paul, from the Department of Geography at the University of Zurich, and co-author of the study had this to say in a press release: "Glacier outlines are needed to make precise calculations for the areas in question.

To date, this information came largely from the U.S. Landsat satellites, the data from which are delivered to European users under ESA's Third Party mission agreement. In the future, the Copernicus Sentinel-2 mission, in particular, will increasingly contribute to the precise monitoring of glacier change."

This study is based on a cornucopia of data sources. The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency's ASTER sensor on the U.S. Terra mission and Germany's TanDEM-X mission featured prominently. Their data was used to construct Digital Elevation Models (DEMs), which give 3D topographic details of a region.



"While we can now offer clear information about how much ice each region with glaciers has lost, it is also important to note that the rate of loss has increased significantly over the last 30 years. We are currently losing a total of 335 billion tons of ice a year, corresponding to a rise in sea levels of almost 1 mm per year."

All of that means some critical decisions and planning choices need to be made, and they need to be well-planned in advance. That's what this data is meant to help. Only with accurate, long-term data can we plan effectively for climate change.

Fluctuations of glaciers

"It is fundamental that we build upon existing monitoring capabilities using observations from the EC's Copernicus Sentinel missions, and other ESA and Third Party Mission missions. Their data crucially allow us to build a robust climate perspective to reveal regional and year-to-year fluctuations of glaciers and other parts of the cryosphere such as snow cover, sea ice and ice sheets," said Mark Drinkwater, Senior Advisor on cryosphere and climate at ESA.

"Bearing in mind the socio-economic consequences, the fate of glaciers in a future climate is something ESA views seriously."

I doubt many Universe Today readers are that skeptical about climate change. There's a massive wall of evidence backing it up. Sometimes the evidence isn't scientific, but personal.

In the town I grew up here in Canada, and the town I still live in at the age of 52, we have our own glacier. It's perched high up in the mountains, plainly visible day by day, year over year, to anyone who wants to look at it. It's even a hiking destination, for those who are prepared and experienced enough to head into the back country.

(Source: universetoday.com)

Genetic breakthrough on tropical grass could help develop climate-friendly cattle farms: new research

Cattle are a mainstay for many smallholders but their farms are often on degraded lands, which increases cattle's impact on the environment and lowers their production of milk and meat.

Researchers at the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) have shown that Brachiaria grass species can reduce greenhouse gas emissions from cattle and increase productivity - and breeding improved varieties can potentially augment the environmental and economic benefits.

But the breeding process is difficult, time-consuming and expensive.

A breakthrough on Brachiaria's complex genome may make breeding much more efficient, and potentially increase the speed with which new grasses begin benefiting cattle farmers and the environment.

Margaret Worthington, a geneticist at CIAT and the University of Arkansas, and colleagues created the first dense molecular map of B. humidicola, a robust and environmentally friendly forage grass. They also pinpointed the candidate genes for the plant's asexual reproductive mechanism, which is a huge asset for plant breeders. The findings were published in January in BMC Genomics.

Creating better crops

The "idea is to create a better crop with less time and less money and to get it out faster to farmers," said Worthington. "By using this molecular marker, you increase the odds of finding that rare winner."

Traditional plant-breeding methods for Brachiaria grasses involve one of two complex techniques. One is to grow the plant to seed, and to study the seeds under a microscope to determine if the plant reproduced asexually. The other involves excising the plant's embryos and conducting a similar analysis. Both techniques require many weeks, significant funds and highly trained specialists.

Asexual reproduction through seed, called apomixis, is key for developing new crop varieties for widespread use.

Crops that reproduce through apomixis conserve the same traits from one generation to the next, essentially locking in sought-after characteristics such as drought tolerance or high nutritional value. Plants that reproduce



sexually do not reliably pass on desired traits to subsequent generations.

With this molecular marker, plant breeders can run a quick and inexpensive test when Brachiaria grasses are seedlings to identify whether they reproduce through apomixis.

The results are available in a couple of weeks. This allows plant breeders to select only asexually reproductive plants for trials, allowing them to allocate more time and resources to plants that have the potential to produce new cultivars.

Brachiaria grasses have often been considered an "orphan crop," due to a lack of investment in research, but their potential for making tropical farms more productive and better for the environment is well known among tropical forage specialists.

One recent study found that B. humidicola was especially adept at reducing the nitrous oxide, a strong greenhouse gas, emitted from soil as result of cattle urine deposition. In addition, CIAT researchers have identified mechanisms that this tropical grass uses to efficiently acquire nutrients from soil.

Improved grass varieties

Brachiaria breeders also value apomixis for smallholders in developing nations who have limited resources for investing in improving their farms. Improved grass varieties that produce sufficient quantities of trait-retaining seeds can eliminate the need to purchase new seeds for every planting, which is a potentially expensive barrier to adoption.

"This breakthrough allows for the acceleration of our breeding program for multiple traits, including the development of tropical forages that can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and make farming more eco-efficient," said Joe Tohme, a senior scientist at CIAT and study co-author.

(Source: eurekalert.org)

Researchers discover glimmering mirror-like pools in the Pacific Ocean

Superheated hydrothermal fluid flows upward from an underwater volcano 2000m below the Gulf of California, Mexico. The resulting eerie mirror-like pools of water enthrall scientists thousands of feet under the sea.

Thousands of feet below the surface are volcanic flanges that create a shimmering mirror-like optical illusion that has left the entire team of researchers in awe.

While aboard the research vessel Falkor, researchers led by Dr. Mandy Joye of the University of Georgia remotely operated a rover called ROV SuBastian, according to a report from the Schmidt Ocean Institute. With this rover, the team was able to capture stunning geological formations on the ocean floor.

Deep in the Gulf of California at a depth of about 6,500 feet or about 2,000 meters, there is a hydrothermal field featuring towering venting mineral structures rising up to 60 feet or 20 meters high.

"We discovered remarkable towers where every surface was occupied by some type of life. The vibrant colors found on the 'living rocks' was striking, and reflects a diversity in biological composition as well as mineral distributions," Joye recalls in a statement. "This is an amazing natural laboratory to document incredible organisms and better understand how they survive in extremely challenging environments."

The only drawback is that the research team found the spectacular environment littered by copious amounts of trash, such as fishing nets, Mylar balloons, and Christmas trees.

As the remotely operated vehicle floated through the water, the rock overhang appeared to be a smooth and level surface reflecting the rock formations below. As the SuBastian traveled to a different angle, the illusion shifted, creating a picture of a cavernous arc of shimmering minerals.

Smithsonian Magazine explains that the water shooting out from the hydrothermal vents is very hot, reaching temperatures of about 690 degrees Fahrenheit (366 degrees Celsius). Since hot water is less dense than cold water, it rises. As this hot water travels upward, it hits collides with the flanges or rock formations.

With nowhere to go, hot water gets trapped at this level. Since the temperature difference between the cool ocean water and the trapped hot water is so massive, light slows from the cold to hot water, forming a mirror-like surface.

(Source: techtimes.com)

Elements can be solid and liquid at same time, research team finds

Scientists have discovered a new state of physical matter in which atoms can exist as both solid and liquid simultaneously.

Until now, the atoms in physical material were understood to exist typically in one of three states -- solid, liquid or gas. Researchers have found, however, that some elements can, when subjected to extreme conditions, take on the properties of both solid and liquid states.

Applying high pressures and temperatures to potassium -- a simple metal -- creates a state in which most of the element's atoms form a solid lattice structure, the findings show. However, the structure also contains a second set of potassium atoms that are in a fluid arrangement.

Under the right conditions, over half a dozen elements -- including sodium and bismuth -- are thought to be capable of existing in the newly discovered state, researchers say.

A team led by scientists from the University of Edinburgh used powerful computer simulations to study the existence of the state -- known as the chain-melted state. Simulating how up to 20,000 potassium atoms behave under extreme conditions revealed that the structures formed represent the new, stable state of matter.

Applying pressure to the atoms leads to the formation of two interlinked solid lattice structures, the team says. Chemical interactions between atoms in one lattice are strong, meaning they stay in a solid form when the structure is heated, while the other atoms melt into a liquid state.

The study, published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, was supported by the European Research Council and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council. The work was carried out in collaboration with scientists from Xi'an Jiantong University in China.

(Source: sciencedaily.com)

Newly discovered ancient sea creature is the world's most underwhelming Cthulhu

For 430 million years, nestled in some rocks in England, Cthulhu waited, dreaming. Now it's finally seen the light of day, and it's honestly a lot smaller than we were expecting.

This fossilized Cthulhu is related to sea cucumbers, and dates back to the Silurian period, when the first bony fish appeared. Its three-centimeter (1.1 inch) body was entirely covered in bony plates, and bristling with 45 armored tentacles, which it likely used to capture food and scuttle across the seafloor.

It's for these features that the paleontologists who discovered the beast gave it the name Sollasina cthulhu, in honor of horror writer HP Lovecraft's famous be-tentacled god.

"In this paper, we report a new echinoderm - the group that includes sea urchins, sea cucumbers, and sea stars - with soft-tissue preservation," said paleontologist Derek Briggs of Yale University.

"This new species belongs to an extinct group called the ophiocistioids. With the aid of high-resolution physical-optical tomography, we describe the species in 3D, revealing internal elements of the water vascular system that were previously unknown in this group and, indeed, in nearly all fossil echinoderms."

To reconstruct the fossil, the team had to destroy it. Layer by thin layer, they ground the fossil away, taking detailed photographs at each stage. These photographs can then be used in a manner similar to multi-slice imaging to reconstruct the animal in 3D.

In echinoderms, this is a circular tube central to the vascular system that moves water through their bodies. This system allows the animals to move hydraulically, rather than using muscles. Such a ring canal has never before been seen in an ophiocistioid. The researchers interpreted it as the first evidence of a water vascular system in the class, placing them closer to sea cucumbers than sea urchins, as previously believed.

But sea cucumbers don't have armored bodies - they're soft and squishy. This, the researchers said, suggests that ophiocistioids branched away from the lineage that produced today's sea cucumbers to do their own thing.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

'Bee safe' pesticide may not be very safe for bees, scientists say

In recent years, concern has grown about the effects of agricultural pesticides on the health of bees, with much of the attention focused on so-called "neonicotinoids," or "neonics" for short.

As the use of neonics has become more and more restricted, manufacturers have developed pesticides that are considered "bee safe." However, one of these substances, flupyradifurone (FPF) — sold under the name Sivanto — may cause harm to bees when a common fungicide is also present. That's according to a study published in the journal Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences.

FPF works in a similar way to neonics. However, because it is marked as "bee safe," it can be used while the insects are actively foraging.

The authors of the study, from the University of California, San Diego and European Union Reference Laboratory for Honeybee Health in France, say that their new findings bring into question the safety of approved pesticides because risk assessments do not currently take into account how toxicity is influenced by combinations between different chemicals.

Exposed to multiple pesticides

"Bees can be exposed to multiple pesticides that may interact synergistically, amplifying their side effects," the



authors wrote in their paper.

To date, the impacts of FPF have not been thoroughly investigated. Accordingly, for their study, the researchers decided to test the lethal and sub-lethal toxic effects of the chemical on honeybees over different seasons and for different worker types, as well as the substance's interactions with a common fungicide known as propiconazole. They used doses designed to mimic the quantities that the insects are exposed to in real-life situations.

The scientists found that bees exposed to FPF, in combination

with the fungicide — both chemicals are often used on the same fields — demonstrated poor coordination, hyperactivity and apathy, potentially affecting their chances of survival.

Worker type and season

Furthermore, they found that these effects were significantly influenced by worker type and season: forager bees were four times more affected than in-hive bees, and both groups were more affected in the summer months compared to the spring.

The authors say that these findings could have significant implications for how certain pesticides are approved for use.

"Because risk assessment (RA) requires relatively limited tests that only marginally address bee behavior and do not consider the influence of bee age and season, our results raise concerns about the safety of approved pesticides, including FPF," the authors wrote. "We suggest that pesticide RA also test for common chemical mixture synergies on behavior and survival."

Though research into FPF has been limited, one previous study found that the chemical impaired bee taste and cognition when exposed to high, non-field-realistic doses. Another paper found that chronic exposure had an impact on the animals' olfactory system.

(Source: Newsweek)

Pakistan dispatches humanitarian assistance to flood-hit Iran

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — On the directives of Prime Minister Imran Khan, Pakistan's National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has dispatched a load of over 32 tons humanitarian assistance to flood-hit Iran.



The Consignment comprising of two shipments contains 500 tents, 2500 blankets and emergency medical kits. The first shipment has already been dispatched to Iranian city of Ahwaz on Wednesday morning.

Iran has been hit by widespread floods causing serious damages to public property and displaced thousands of people. To supplement their own relief efforts Iranian government has requested humanitarian assistance from friendly countries. Pakistan has responded to Iran's appeal as brother/ neighboring country and taken a prompt action to deliver assistance package.

Police helicopter crashes in northwest Iran

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — A police helicopter crashed in Urmia, northwest Iran on Wednesday at noon, Tasnim news agency reported.



Deputy governor general of West Azarbaijan Province for political and security affairs, Ali Mostafavi, said that least one is killed and 8 are reportedly injured.

The doomed aircraft, a Bell 214 helicopter, belonged to the Police and was being operated by the Border Police forces.

Iraq, Azerbaijan provide aids to flood-hit regions in Iran

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Iraq and Azerbaijan have dispatched humanitarian aids to flood-stricken regions of Iran.

Azerbaijan Republic President Ilham Aliyev has ordered to send help to the Iranian people at flood-hit areas. According to Sputnik Farsi, Ministry of Emergency Situations of Azerbaijan Republic said on Tuesday that it will send humanitarian aid to Iran after President Aliyev's order to do so.

Moreover, humanitarian assistance from Iraq entered the country from Shalamcheh border in southwestern Iran, Khorramshahr acting governor Kourosh Mavaddat told ISNA news agency on Wednesday.

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, north-eastern, 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.

LEARN ENGLISH

Groundbreaking Research

A: We've been over this a thousand times. The data is **irrefutable!** Look, we've done **extensive research**, built studies, and read the literature, and there is conclusive evidence to support my theory!
B: Horowitz, I beg to differ. Even in your most recent study, the **investigative approach** was **flawed!** You know as well as I do that the collection of data was not systematic, and there is a large margin of error. To draw a **definitive conclusion** based on that data would be misleading.

A: That is **preposterous!**
B: You are trying to **single-handedly** solve one of the world's greatest mysteries, and yet you are **oblivious** to the fact that you are wrong!

A: I am not wrong! The chicken came first!

B: No! The egg came first!

■ Key vocabulary

irrefutable: correct; not able to be proved wrong

extensive research: very full and complete study to find information

investigative approach: way of looking for information

flawed: having errors or mistake

definitive conclusion: a final judgment that is not able to be changed

preposterous: crazy, foolish, or silly

single-handedly: do something on your own, without help

oblivious to: unaware or don't know

■ Supplementary vocabulary

associated with: linked or connected with

circumstantial evidence: a collection of facts that implies or suggests something to be true, but does not prove it

indicate: show something to be true

a compelling case: an argument that is capable of making people believe that point of view

determine: find out if something is true

(Source: irlanguage.com)

Tehran experienced excellent, good air quality for 306 days last year

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — According to the Air Quality Control Company, Tehran's air quality was good and excellent for 306 days during the last Iranian calendar year 1397 (ended March 20).

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).

Last year, 28 days of excellent air quality was reported in Tehran, while, the residents experienced clean air quality for only 14 days in the Iranian calendar year 1396 (March 2017- March 2018).

In addition, 278 days of good air quality were reported in Tehran last year compared to that of a year ago amounting to 243 days.

Moreover, 59 days of unhealthy air for sensitive groups hit the capital last year, however, the air reached a level which was unhealthy for sensitive groups for 100 days compared to the same period a year before that.

Last year, T ehraners did not breathe a single day of unhealthy air, though, 8 days of unhealthy for all groups reported for Tehran in the year 1396.

Metropolis of Tehran suffered unhealthy levels of air pollution for 9 days, in the Iranian calendar year 1395 (March 2016- March 2017).

Additionally, since the beginning of the current year on March 21 citizens of the capital have breathed 17 days of excellent air quality while in the same period last year only 2 days of excellent air quality was reported.

110,000 housing units destructed in 3 flood-affected provinces



SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Recent severe flooding damaged 110,000 houses in provinces of Lorestan, Golestan and Mazandaran, ISNA reported on Wednesday.

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.

While some flood-hit provinces are not in a condition to estimate the number of affected houses, currently 110,000 demolished housing units are identified in only 3 provinces.

Some 40,000 of the units are beyond repair requiring renovation and 70,000 must be retrofitted, the report added.

Majid Joodi, director for renovation at Islamic Revolution Housing Foundation said that non-repayable loans are being granted to the Lorestan Province residents, which amounts to 120 million rials (around \$3,000) for renovation in urban areas and 100 million rials (around \$2,300) in rural areas.

Majid Qobadi Dana, director of Iran's Welfare Organization said that an amount of budget has been provided to 15,500 financially struggling families covered by the Organization.

Transport and Urban Development Minister Mohammad Eslami said that over 400 vehicles from the Ministry and 140 other from the Islamic Revolution Housing Foundation are operating in Lorestan province to reopen and repair damaged roads.



Relief foundation allots \$4.7m to flood-stricken families in Khuzestan

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Emam Khomeini Relief Foundation has allocated a total budget of 200 billion rials (nearly \$4.7 million) as low-interest loans to those residing in the flood-ravaged province of Khuzestan, the Foundation's head has said.

"Some 10,000 families under the Foundation's coverage have been affected by flooding," Mehr quoted Parviz Fattah as saying on Tuesday.

To help financially struggling families, we ensure that flood-damaged housing units will be fully repaired and retrofitted, he highlighted.

Referring to business units or facilities destroyed by

floods, he noted that loans amounting to 500 million rials (about \$12,000) will be granted to the flood-hit victims.

Additionally, losses inflicted upon farming lands will be compensated by the Foundation and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fattah concluded.

Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation is a charitable organization, founded in March 1979, after the Islamic Revolution, to provide support for families who are struggling financially. The aim is to help such families regain financial stability. Boosting job creation is one of the primary objectives of the foundation.



Last year, T ehraners did not breathe a single day of unhealthy air, though, 8 days of unhealthy for all groups reported for Tehran in the year 1396.

350 volunteer groups offering services in flood-affected areas



SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — More than 350 volunteer groups of people are providing services to the provinces haunted by flood across the country, deputy director for social affairs organization affiliated to the Ministry of Interior has said.

Many NGOs and volunteer organizations made great efforts to help flood victims in Mazandaran, Golestan and Lorestan provinces, IRNA quoted Kamal Akbari as saying on Wednesday.

Currently, 35 volunteer groups in Golestan province, and 125 teams are offering help in flood-hit areas nationwide, he added.

Akbari went on to say that these public associations are active in four fields of health care, monitoring and identifying

the needs, informing locals and producing content, while supporting the residents.

It is planned to hold meetings on the rehabilitation of flood victims in Khuzestan province in cooperation with NGOs, aiming to provide rehab in emphasizing on mental health issues, he further explained.

The volunteer teams provided necessary facilities for those affected by flood through the first phase of the plan, while they will work on rehabilitation issues through the second phase, he added.

He further expressed appreciation toward the volunteer groups for their cooperation with the Red Crescent Society and the other responsible organizations, which accelerated relief operations.

ENGLISH IN USE

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A ← → ب

Recent rainfalls not to fully address prolonged droughts: expert

Despite above normal rainfalls the country has received, it cannot be claimed that the long-term droughts are set right, director for flood control and aquifer at Forests, Range and Watershed Management Organization has said.

That's why water management policies must be still drawn up with regard to water scarcity, ISNA news agency quoted Abolqasem Hosseinpour as saying on Saturday.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“dextro-, dextero-, dextr-”

■ **Meaning:** right

■ **For example:** A good handyman is skillful, *dexterous* and proficient in whatever it is he is doing.

PHRASAL VERB

Nod off

■ **Meaning:** to begin to sleep, usually when you do not intend to and are sitting somewhere

■ **For example:** I missed the movie because I kept nodding off.

IDIOM

Crest of a wave

■ **Explanation:** If you are on the crest of a wave, you are very successful in what you are doing

■ **For example:** Our company is going from success to success. We're on the crest of a wave right now.

بارش های اخیر خشکسالی کشور را جبران نمی کند

مدیرکل دفتر کنترل سیلاب و آبخوانداری سازمان جنگل ها، مراتع و آبخیزداری گفت: پس از بارش های اخیر در کشور، نمی توان ادعا کرد که خشکسالی های بلند مدت ما جبران شده است.

ابوالقاسم حسین پور در گفت و گو با ایسنا، اظهار کرد: سیاست های آبی ما همچنان باید منطبق بر کمبود منابع آبی باشد.

UNICEF slams Saudi killing of Yemeni schoolchildren

➔ Earlier reports said most of the students killed in the attack had been school-children, but according to Cappelaere's report all the 14 victims had been schoolchildren, "most of whom under the age of nine."

He added that at least 16 of the wounded children were in critical condition and as a result the death toll "is likely to increase."

"It is hard to imagine the sheer horror that those children experienced – and the sheer horror and guilt parents may feel for having done what every parent aspires to: sending their children to school," Cappelaere said, adding, "Killing and maiming children are grave violations of children's rights."

Saudi Arabia has not yet claimed responsibility for the aerial aggression and rejects that its warplanes targeted the residential area in Sa'wan, but Yemeni authorities and local witnesses stressed that the incident had been the result of an airstrike.

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 market 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.

"More than 400 children killed and seriously injured since beginning of 2019," Cappelaere added.

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.

"One in five schools can no longer be used as a direct result of the conflict. ... For

more than 2 million children in Yemen today, going to school is a faraway dream!" Cappelaere said.

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.

■ Saudi mercenaries killed, injured in Yemeni army offensives

Over a dozen Saudi-sponsored militiamen loyal to Yemen's former president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi have been killed when Yemeni army soldiers and fighters from allied Popular Committees launched separate offensives against their positions in the kingdom's border region of Asir.

An unnamed Yemeni military source told the Arabic-language al-Masirah television network that Yemeni troops and their allies

fired a domestically-manufactured Zelzal-1 (Earthquake-1) ballistic missile at a gathering of Saudi mercenaries outside al-Rabu'ah town of the region on Tuesday evening, leaving several of them dead and injured.

Earlier in the day, Yemeni forces and their allies had staged an ambush against Saudi-paid militiamen in the al-Alab border crossing of the same Saudi region, killing 15 of them in the process, the media bureau of the Houthi Ansarullah movement reported.

Separately, a number of Saudi mercenaries were killed and injured when Yemeni troopers and fighters from Popular Committees carried out an offensive in Yemen's northern province of al-Jawf.

The developments came on the same day that Saudi mercenaries lobbed more than ten mortar shells at residential neighborhoods in the al-Hawak district of the western Yemeni coastal province of Hudaydah.

There were no immediate reports about possible casualties and the extent of damage caused.

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(Source: agencies)

Trump's recognition of Golan Heights as Israeli flouts intl. law: Aoun

➔ "We support Lebanon's efforts for balance, dialogue and peaceful solutions to crises in the [Middle East] region. We also appreciate the Lebanese model of ethnic, racial and religious tolerance," Radev said for his part.

On March 25, Trump signed a proclamation, formally recognizing Israel's sovereignty over Golan Heights. The announcement came as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited the White House.

Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, in a statement, called the U.S. decision a "blatant attack on the sovereignty and territorial integrity" of Syria.

"The liberation of the Golan by all available means and its return to the Syrian motherland is an inalienable right," according to the statement carried by Syria's official news

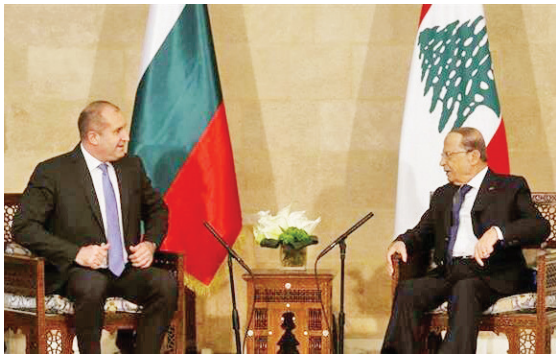
agency SANA, which added, "The decision ... makes the United States the main enemy of the Arabs."

The Arab League condemned the move, saying that "Trump's recognition does not change the area's status."

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said it was impossible for Turkey to accept the U.S. decision on the Golan Heights.

Israel seized the Golan Heights from Syria after the 1967 Six-Day War and later occupied it in a move that has never been recognized by the international community. The regime has built dozens of settlements in the area ever since and has used the region to carry out a number of military operations against the Syrian government.

(Source: Press TV)



As Moon heads to Washington, Kim turns to old friend Moscow

South Korean President Moon Jae-in is stepping into his role as mediator again as he flies off to Washington for a meeting with United States President Donald Trump on Thursday.

He is hoping to salvage what is left of the aborted Hanoi summit where the U.S. and North Korea failed to reach an agreement at the second time of asking.

But as Moon heads to the U.S., North Korea is looking to old friend Moscow, as Kim Jong Un seeks a way out from under the sanctions that are now overwhelming the country's economy.

The Trump-Moon meeting in Washington comes a few hours after Pyongyang hosts its 14th Supreme People's Assembly, where many expect North Korea's leadership to reveal its path with regards to its relations with the U.S.

There are rumors that Kim will be meeting Russian President Vladimir Putin. Last month, a Kremlin spokesperson revealed that plans were under way for the event with the date and location to be decided.

This comes almost a year after Moscow first extended the invitation to North Korea.

Last month, Pyongyang's chief of staff visited Moscow before heading to Vladivostok, a key port city on Russia's east coast and a strategic trade post in Russia-Korea relations.

With sanctions taking their toll on North Korea, Kim has also been pushed to seek

support from its neighbor.

According to Kim Jae-chun, professor of international relations at Sogang University in Seoul, North Korea is in "more economic trouble than was expected".

Last week, Daily NK reported multiple factory closures since the failed Hanoi summit put hundreds of North Koreans out of work.

Pyongyang once again shelved plans for the grand opening of a massive beach resort on the country's east coast. Analysts believe sanctions are making it difficult to import the necessary materials to finish the project.

"The sanctions are working," said Kim Byungki, professor of international security and development at Korea University. "Agricultural production is not able to deliver. Not because there's no land or fertiliser, but because there's no oil."

Putin's offer of a meeting, which Kim may have put on hold as he gauged progress with the U.S., may suddenly have become more attractive.

Last month, Russia delivered 2,200 tonnes of wheat to North Korea through the World Food Program to help curtail what the Russian Embassy in Pyongyang called "unfriendly interpretation of sanctions by some countries".

For Moscow, a meeting with Kim is a chance to grow its influence in East Asia and rejoin the peacemaking process on the peninsula, which it has been largely left out of in recent years, said Kim Hyuntaek, a

professor of Russian Studies at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies.

"They waited a long time. They'd like to make their voice heard," said Hyuntaek.

■ Big ask for President Moon

And as Russia joins China in calling for easing of the sanctions on Pyongyang, these voice may differ from those coming out of Washington.

Moscow has also encouraged inter-Korean dialogue as the best way to resolve conflict on the peninsula, urging Seoul to make its own choices and "not just rely on its alliance with Washington", said Hyuntaek.

However, none of this is likely to help President Moon's case as he, yet again, puts his reputation on the line to barter on North Korea's behalf.

With no developments, Moon will have to sell Trump the same step-by-step approach to denuclearization or perhaps a watered-down version of what was apparently turned down in Hanoi.

"Moon is thinking there's going to be a middle ground," said Kim Jae-chun of Sogang University.

Only Moon's inner circle knows the details of what is on offer in Washington and Kim Jae-chun suggested liaison offices in the U.S. and North Korea could be one item of discussion.

President Moon could also float the idea of formally ending the 1950-1953 Korean War, which has existed under a ceasefire.

Reopening the Geumgang Mountain tourist site might also be on the agenda, said Jae-chun, since South Korean businesses also invested in its development.

While the South Korean president knows the odds he faces in Washington after Trump made it clear in Hanoi that he was after a big deal, Moon's job now is to persuade the U.S. president to agree on a smaller step.

Trump, meanwhile, will be under pressure to hold firm by officials like his national security adviser John Bolton, who North Korea has blamed for the collapse of the Hanoi talks.

They are odds Moon will have to go with. He only has a single five-year term to leverage his relationship with the North Korean leader.

"President Moon always presents himself as a mediator," said Jae-chun. "He understands, given the deadlock, this is the last opportunity to play that role."

Moon has openly stated his hopes for Korean reunification.

It was his herculean effort that saved diplomacy ahead of the Singapore summit, where Trump and Kim struck a bond, if not a deal.

Repeating that success in Washington will be a tall order, but Moon is working on the belief that momentum is something neither side is willing to throw away.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

'Russia ready to expand military cooperation with Turkey on new S-400 supplies'

A high-ranking Russian official says his country is interested in expanding military and technical cooperation with other states, and is ready to consider signing new contracts on delivering advanced S-400 air defense missile systems to Turkey.

"Russia is open, Russia has certain capabilities and technological competence. Of course, Russia is looking for the opportunities to expand this cooperation. This is absolutely normal practice," Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov (pictured below) told reporters in the capital Moscow on Wednesday.

His statement came after Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu indicated Turkey could order more S-400 systems from Russia in case the United States refuses to supply Ankara with Patriot surface-to-air missile systems.

"If the U.S. does not want to sell Patriot to us, tomorrow we may buy another S-400 system and we also can purchase other air defense systems," Cavusoglu told Turkish-language NTV television news network in an exclusive interview on Wednesday.

He also hit back at U.S. criticism of the S-400 purchase, dismissing as nonsense the attempts of some countries to put into question Turkey's membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Cavusoglu then pointed to U.S. threats to cancel a deal for Lockheed Martin Corp F-35 jets if Turkey acquires Russian S-400 systems, stressing that Ankara could buy military aircraft from another source until it is able to produce its own.

The U.S. announced on April 1 that it would be suspending all "deliveries and activities" related to Turkey's procurement of F-35 stealth fighter jets over Ankara's plans to purchase the S-400. Moscow and Ankara finalized an agreement on the delivery of the S-400 in December 2017.

Back in April 2018, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin said in Ankara that they had agreed to expedite the delivery of the S-400. At the time, it was said that the delivery could be made between late 2019 and early 2020.

A number of NATO member states have criticized Turkey for its planned purchase of the S-400, arguing the missile batteries are not compatible with those of the military alliance.

They also argue that the purchase could jeopardize Ankara's acquisition of F-35 fighter jets and possibly result in U.S. sanctions.

The S-400 is an advanced Russian missile system designed to detect, track, and destroy planes, drones, or missiles as far as 402 kilometers away. It has previously been sold only to China and India.

Ankara is striving to boost its air defense, particularly after Washington decided in 2015 to withdraw its Patriot surface-to-air missile system from Turkish border with Syria, a move that weakened Turkey's air defense.

Before gravitating towards Russia, the Turkish military reportedly walked out of a \$3.4-billion contract for a similar Chinese system. The withdrawal took place under purported pressure from Washington.

Ankara's ties with its Western allies in NATO have been strained over a range of issues.

Erdogan has been critical of Washington for supporting Kurdish groups in Syria that he says are responsible for terror attacks inside Turkey, among other issues.

The Turkish leader has also slammed U.S. officials for rejecting his requests to hand over Fethullah Gulen, a powerful opposition figure living in the United States, whom Ankara accuses of having masterminded a coup attempt in July 2016.

(Source: TASS)

Netanyahu on path to win 5th term as Israeli PM

Right-wing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appears poised to secure a fifth term in office after results from Israel's general elections handed him a narrow victory against his centrist rival, Benny Gantz.

With about 97 percent of the votes cast in Tuesday's elections counted, Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party and Gantz's Blue and White alliance have each won 35 of the Knesset's 120 seats.

Likud has so far secured 26.28 percent of the votes, compared to Blue and White's 25.97 percent, according to the preliminary results released on Wednesday.

Five right-wing and ultra-Orthodox parties have managed to secure some 30 seats together, paving the way for Netanyahu to form a coalition administration similar to his current right-wing one, with a solid 65 seats.

The results also give other center, left and Arab parties 55 seats at the Knesset.

Final results are expected by Thursday afternoon, with the ballots cast by army soldiers, prisoners and diplomats yet to be counted.

As polls closed on Tuesday night, both Netanyahu and Gantz, the former military chief of staff, declared victory.

Speaking at the Likud's post-election party in Tel Aviv, Netanyahu hailed what he called a "magnificent victory."

He also made it clear that any administration formed by him "will be a right-wing government. But I intend to be the prime minister of all of Israel's citizens." At the same time, Gantz also claimed, "We are the ones who won."

"The president must give us the task of forming the next government since we are the biggest party," he said in an address to his supporters in Tel Aviv.

Netanyahu's win comes despite the bribery and other corruption charges against him. The scandal-hit premier faces possible indictment in three graft cases.

During his election campaign, Netanyahu capitalized on US President Donald Trump's firm support. Trump has delighted Israelis and angered Palestinians by recognizing Jerusalem al-Quds as Israel's capital and moving the US embassy to the occupied Palestinian city last year.

Two weeks before the election, Trump signed a proclamation, recognizing Israeli "sovereignty" over the occupied Golan Heights seized from Syria in 1967. The US president has also adopted controversial anti-Iran measures to please the Netanyahu administration.

(Source: Press TV)

UN postpones conference in Libya due to fighting

The United Nations (UN) has postponed a conference in Libya that had been meant to discuss the possibility of holding elections in the country, as fighting between rival domestic forces continues near the capital Tripoli and elsewhere.

UN special envoy for Libya Ghassan Salame announced on Tuesday that the two-day conference — which had been due in the southwestern town of Ghadames on April 14-15 — would not be held according to schedule because of the fighting.

"We cannot ask people to take part in the conference during gunfire and airstrikes," Salame said, adding that the meeting would take place "as soon as possible," without specifying a date.

Libya has an internationally-recognized government seated in Tripoli, the so-called Government of National Accord (GNA). But the GNA has been unable to exercise state

powers over the entire Libyan territory, where militia groups have been active since an uprising against the then-dictator Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.

Another major power faction that lays a claim to power is based in the city of Tobruk, in Libya's east. It has its own quasi-army, led by self-styled General Khalifa Haftar.

Last week, Haftar ordered his forces to advance on the capital, in what seems to be an attempt to unseat the GNA.

On their way to Tripoli, Haftar's forces have overtaken several oil fields and towns, but have faced stiff resistance from forces loyal to the GNA near Tripoli, where they have been stopped. The situation is deadlocked, and fighting continues despite international calls for an end to hostilities.

The GNA has carried out airstrikes against the positions of Haftar's forces, which call themselves the Libyan National

Army (LNA). The LNA also conducted one airstrike against the Tripoli airport on Tuesday.

Later that day, the GNA called the attack on the airport a "war crime" and a violation of "all national laws and international agreements," and ordered the military prosecutor's office to issue arrest warrants for Haftar and those collaborating with him, according to Al Jazeera.

The news network said Faye al-Sarraj, the prime minister of the Tripoli-based government, has instructed prosecutors to prepare the arrest warrants.

Sarraj and Haftar had previously participated in UN-brokered reconciliation talks. The offensive on Tripoli has dampened chances for peace and risks plunging the country into civil war.

(Source: Press TV)

Magic Johnson abruptly resigns from Lakers role

Los Angeles Lakers legend Magic Johnson has resigned from his job as the team's president of basketball operations.

The Lakers have failed to reach the play-offs for the sixth year in a row.

Johnson, who played a key role in bringing LeBron James to the team last year, broke the news before the 104-101 defeat by the Portland Trail Blazers.

"I had more fun when I was able to be the big brother and the ambassador to everybody," the 59-year-old said at an impromptu news conference on Tuesday.

Johnson said he had not warned president Jeanie Buss of his decision to bring his two-year reign to an end.

"She doesn't know I'm standing here because I know I would be crying like a baby in front of her, even though I'm about to cry now," added Johnson.

"But it's the right thing to do, the right move to make."

Johnson, who said he had grown tired of the "the back-stabbing and the whispering" this season, also suggested he did not want to have to make a decision over the future of coach Luke Walton.

"Tomorrow I would have to affect someone's livelihood and their life," he said, without referring to Walton directly.

"I want to go back to having fun. I want to go back to who I was before taking on this job."

The Lakers paid tribute to Johnson, a Hall of Famer during his playing days with the team, in a brief statement.

"There is no greater Los Angeles Laker than Earvin Johnson," the statement said.

"We are deeply grateful to Magic for all that he has done for our franchise, as a player, an ambassador and an executive."

(Source: BBC)

Ireland FA's state funding suspended

Ireland's state-funded sport coordination body suspended future funding to the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) on Tuesday after the football body acknowledged that it failed to comply with its grant approval terms.

Sport Ireland, which has been demanding answers from the FAI over a 100,000 euro (£86,451) short-term loan provided to it by former chief executive John Delaney, said the acknowledgement was made in a written statement the FAI was due to deliver to a parliamentary committee on Wednesday.

Delaney, who was moved to a new role of executive vice-president at the FAI shortly after details of the loan were first reported, is due to appear before the committee with other officials on Wednesday to answer questions over a story that has made frontpage news in Ireland in the last month.

In the FAI's statement to the committee, a copy of which was seen by Reuters, chairman Donal Conway said circumstances arose in April 2017 — when it received the loan — that were not related to Sport Ireland in line with grant approval conditions.

The FAI said last month that the loan was needed due to short-term cash flow issues and that it was repaid in full two months later.

Sport Ireland, however, said it was never notified about any deterioration in finances, as the FAI would have been obliged to do.

"The Board of Sport Ireland will consider the reinstatement of funding once all ongoing reports commissioned by the FAI have been completed and the recommendations adopted," it said in a statement, referring to reviews the FAI has commissioned from audit firm Mazars and accountant Grant Thornton.

(Source: Mirror)

AC Milan face potential Champions League ban after latest FFP breach



AC Milan's hopes of qualifying for the Champions League have been thrown into doubt after they were referred to the UEFA Club Financial Control Body (CFCB) for allegedly breaching financial fair play (FFP) regulations for a second successive term.

Milan are fourth in Serie A, and close to returning to the Champions League for the first time since 2014, but could now face a ban from European competition.

They had claimed their financial situation would improve under the ownership of American hedge fund Elliott Management Corporation, after they assumed control of the club from former owner Li Yonghong last summer.

UEFA initially gave Milan a two-year ban from European competition for breaking FFP rules last summer but they successfully appealed against that sanction with the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

"The UEFA Club Financial Control Body investigatory chamber has today communicated its decision to refer the case of AC Milan to the CFCB adjudicatory chamber as the club has failed to comply with the break-even requirement during the monitoring period assessed in the current season and covering the 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18 seasons," a UEFA statement read.

"UEFA will be making no further comments on the matter until a decision has been reached by the CFCB adjudicatory chamber in this case. This referral is not related to the decision that was made by the CFCB adjudicatory in December 2018 and was covering the 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17 seasons."

Under FFP regulations, clubs are not allowed to make losses of more than £26 million over three seasons, a cap Milan were accused of breaching between 2015-17 when they spent £200m on transfers. However, this referral is in relation to the three-year period between 2016-18.

(Source: ESPN)

Disabled Myanmar teen football champ defies the odds

Football-obsessed Myanmar teen Kaung Khant Lin roots for Manchester United, worships star Lionel Messi and was honoured as the best player in a recent tournament.

But the 16-year-old expertly navigates the pitch with just one leg and a crutch, the only disabled footballer on his team.

"Whenever I play football, I forget about my legs and I play as a normal person," he tells AFP after celebrating his goal with team mates. On sandy ground in the outskirts of Yangon, he dribbles a ball with incredible agility, pivoting expertly on the crutch before shooting to score with his left foot.

Kaung Khant Lin was born with a stump for a right leg that today protrudes from his football shorts. He remembers first kicking a ball around the streets when he was five, keeping his balance on a wooden crutch crafted by his uncle.

Now he sees himself as pretty versatile on the pitch and doesn't even see his disability as his main weakness.

"Nobody can get past me. But it's hard for me to defend against free kicks as I'm short."

Nearly one in 50 people in Myanmar has some form of walking disability, according to the country's latest census in 2014.

Unlike Kaung Khant Lin, many are sur-



vivors of landmines planted in the conflicts plaguing the country's restive borderlands.

People with disabilities face huge discrimination and 85 percent are unemployed, says Thin Thin Htet, program manager at Shwe Minn Tha Foundation (Myanmar), which champions the minority's rights.

"Most people think that those with disabilities cannot work," she says.

■ Messi-inspired

Kaung Khant Lin has so far defied the odds, even rising to local fame in a football tournament on Independence Day, a public holiday in January when communities

compete in team games.

His two goals helped propel his side to victory and also clinched his award of "Player of the Tournament".

Teammate Moe Sat Han, 14, explains how they used to worry about their friend's leg getting broken but there was no way they could stop him playing.

They often play the whole day from morning until night, even forgetting to eat, and that's when "his Dad gives him a huge telling off," Moe Sat Han confides.

Kaung Khant Lin's father, a 41-year-old painter and decorator, admits he cannot even bring himself to watch his son play.

"I don't want to see him get injured in front of me," Soe Min Htun says, adding he just wants his son to go to university to get an education.

Kaung Khant Lin is working hard at school in the hope of studying mechanical engineering -- even if he dreams of becoming a football coach one day.

In the meantime, however, he will keep trying to emulate his hero, Argentine and Barcelona legend Lionel Messi.

"He's left-handed and I am too," he says. "I practise free kicks just like he does."

(Source: AFP)

Colombian football rocked by allegations girls were sexually abused



A scandal is brewing in Colombian football as allegations of discrimination and sexual abuse targeting teenage girls has shocked the nation.

Colombia's own #MeToo movement is emerging following painful testimony from a former physiotherapist who worked with one of Colombia's national age group teams.

Carolina Roza, 38, disclosed she had fallen into depression after she was personally targeted by an alleged sexual predator, the coach of the women's Under-17 team, Didier Luna.

In addition she also alleged that girls on the team who she treated professionally had also been groomed by the same man. Sexism and abuse have been known to exist in Colombian football, but it took Roza's outspoken allegations to break the silence.

The disclosures come at a time when women's football is experiencing a worldwide surge in popularity ahead of this year's World Cup, to be played in France from June 7 to July 7.

The charges also shine a light on a post-#MeToo world in which Colombian women feel empowered to speak out against discrimination and sexual aggression.

"It's a very important time," said Colombian journalist Alejandro Pino, who has been documenting abuse cases.

"Now we have a generation of players, especially women, who are educated and are aware that they can demand that their

right be respected."

Roza was appointed physiotherapist for the Colombian teenage squad in late 2017 as the team were preparing for that year's women's Under-17 World Cup in December and the South American championship the following year. She survived just six months in the post and suffered a nightmare experience after refusing Luna's alleged advances.

"He says to me 'I just want you to give me a bit of your heart', then that's when I say 'No, wait a moment... it's not what I'm looking for, please respect that'," she told AFP in an interview.

The rejection triggered an angry response and Luna warned her to "assume the consequences."

She soon found out what he meant, saying that she suffered professional harassment and intimidation, eventually succumbing to depression.

Meanwhile girls on the team who were less able to stand up for themselves faced verbal aggression and touchings, she said.

"I noticed since the gathering in December (for 2017 World Cup preparations) the approach that he had with the girls, touching their backsides, approaching them, challenging them to kiss him, being rude to them, calling them lesbians and then going out and touching their backside. This is not normal," Roza said.

(Source: France 24)

Pochettino fears VAR will change 'spirit' of game



Tottenham Hotspur manager Mauricio Pochettino fears the "spirit of football" is being changed by Video Assistant Referee (VAR) after his side fell victim to technology on Tuesday.

As it turned out the penalty awarded by VAR against Danny Rose for handball was missed by Sergio Aguero and Tottenham went on to earn a crucial 1-0 win in the first leg of their Champions League quarter-final at their new ground.

But that could not hide Pochettino's unease at a system that will be rolled out in the Premier League next season.

While a sliding Rose's arm did make contact with the ball as he attempted to block Raheem Sterling's shot, no City player appealed for a penalty - evidence in itself that the decision was the kind of marginal one that could be debated all night.

Pochettino himself said in the letter of the law it could possibly have been a penalty, but rules on what constitutes handball appear open to interpretation.

As it stands in the International Football Association Board (IFAB) rulebook, a player can be penalised for handball if their arms extend 'beyond a natural silhouette' - even if accidental.

Manchester United beat Paris St Germain thanks to a late VAR penalty this season after Diogo Dalot's shot struck Presnel Kimpembe on the arm and went over the

crossbar - a decision Neymar branded a 'disgrace'.

Pochettino was more measured, perhaps as the penalty was saved by Hugo Lloris, but still raised concerns that there are too many grey areas in deciding on handball.

"There's a lot of work to do with VAR," he told reporters. "We know there are many decisions that no one knows if VAR is going to be used or not, to check or not."

"Maybe technically it was a penalty because it was handball, but we do not know the protocol. There are a lot of question marks and a lot of work to do."

"I think it's going to change the spirit of the game and I'm very worried about how it's going to work next season."

Tottenham fans chanted "VAR VAR" shortly after Aguero's penalty miss, when Harry Kane was challenged in the penalty area - a chant that might become a regular refrain at Premier League grounds next season.

Even when they celebrated Son Heung-min's 78th-minute winner there was an anxious moment when the validity of the goal was checked by VAR - briefly ruining the spontaneity of the moment, which is an integral part of football.

"It's going to be a tough summer to try to find the best way to work. Is it going to check everything?" Pochettino said.

(Source: Reuters)

Tired City pay price of quadruple bid as Guardiola's caution backfires

Pep Guardiola faces a major test of his managerial acumen after Manchester City's draining quadruple chase was dented by his decision to stray from his purist principles in their tired Champions League defeat at Tottenham.

One glance at City's starting line-up for Tuesday's 1-0 quarter-final first leg loss laid bare the concerns racing through Guardiola's mind before the latest obstacle in his team's gruelling bid to win all four major trophies.

Aware that his fatigued City stars had been feeling the physical and mental strain of competing on so many fronts, Guardiola was stirred into action by the lethargic nature of their 1-0 FA Cup semi-final win over Brighton on Saturday.

Watching City labour to kill off lowly Brighton at Wembley convinced Guardiola that taking on fired-up Tottenham, inspired by the buzz around their new stadium, with his traditional attacking gameplan would be risky.

So the City boss opted for an unusually conservative team that featured two defensive midfielders in Fernandinho and Ilkay Gundogan, while Riyad Mahrez was preferred to the more explosive but temperamental Leroy Sane on the right wing.

Playing the first leg away made some level of caution understandable, but rather than help City win the tactical battle, Guardiola's instruction to proceed with caution only served to lull his side into a submissive display that allowed them to be knocked out of any rhythm by Tottenham's relentless pressing.

There was a sense of deja vu about Guardiola's move as he played the same two defensive midfielders with disastrous consequences when City lost 3-0 at Liverpool in the



Champions League quarter-final first leg last season.

The frenzied atmosphere at Anfield, which saw City's team bus attacked on the way to the stadium, clearly played a part in that loss. But once again City's artists looked restricted by Guardiola's paint-by-numbers scheme.

"Guardiola seemed to put the handbrake on a little with the starting line-up he selected and the system he deployed," former Arsenal defender Martin Keown told the Daily Mail.

"This was one of the first times we've seen Guardiola adopt a more defensive strategy for a big match, and I feel it was linked to that loss at Anfield."

Sergio Aguero's failure to convert his first-half penalty was a major momentum swing.

Yet this was not a one-off -- it was the third successive

game in which City looked to be struggling with the demands of such a hectic fixture list.

■ City malaise

Guardiola's selection at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium showed he was not fooled, but finding solutions to keep City in contention in the Champions League and the Premier League will not be easy.

Kevin De Bruyne's slow return to peak form and fitness after a series of injuries this term has cast a shadow over Guardiola's plans, meaning the Belgian midfielder was not ready to face Tottenham after playing against Brighton.

"I decided to play with two holding players in that position. Fernandinho and Gundogan are more solid. If I played Kevin (De Bruyne) with one of the others it would be tough," Guardiola said in defence of his tactics.

Adding to Guardiola's problems, Aguero's return from two matches out with a muscle injury was supposed to reinvigorate City, but instead City's all-time leading scorer looked rusty and only lasted 70 minutes before coming off.

It must have been concerning for Guardiola that when Tottenham lost Harry Kane to a second-half ankle injury, it was the hosts rather than City who seized the initiative in the tie thanks to Son Heung-min's 78th-minute winner.

And the sloppy nature of the defending for Son's goal will have angered the City boss.

"Sometimes you play a lot with the ball and they have players who kill you on the counter-attack with one or two touches," Guardiola said ruefully.

(Source: AFP)

Bashar Resan: We’re back in the qualification race

Persepolis midfielder Bashar Resan insists the Iranian side are now firmly back in contention for AFC Champions League knockout round qualification after Tuesday’s 2-0 Group D victory over Saudi Arabia’s Al Ahli.

The Tehran team went into the match having picked up just one point from two games, but an acrobatic first-half effort from Shoja Khalilzadeh opened the scoring before Ali Alipour’s close-range finish shortly after the restart secured the 2-0 victory.

There are now just two points separating first-place Pakhtakor and bottom-of-the-table Al Ahli in a compact Group D, with both Persepolis and Al Sadd sandwiched in between the pair.

“These were three important points that returned us to the race for qualification,” said Resan.

“It is a very difficult group. Pakhtakor have five points, Al Sadd have four and Al Ahli have three. The group has become tougher, so these three points are very important for us.”

Since suffering a last-gasp defeat to Al Sadd on Matchday Two, Persepolis have been in fine form, winning three in a row to return to the Iranian Pro League summit, while they are also in the Hazfi Cup semi-finals.

But after a poor start on the continent, the first game of a double header against Al Ahli in Dubai marked a crucial point of their campaign, particularly as defeat would have left them well off the pace in Group D.

With a large Iranian expatriate population in the United Arab Emirates, much of the support inside Al Wasl Stadium was for Persepolis, and the team will hope for a repeat scenario in two weeks’ time.

“As you know there’s a lot of travel involved being an Iranian team; we are always under pressure but thankfully



all our players, both the starting 11 and the substitutes, are of a high caliber,” added the Iraqi international.

“I want to congratulate the fans who came to support us here in Dubai; they were a source of strength for us.

“We are on top of the league and have also reached the cup semi-final. The pressure is huge but all our players are in good condition, thanks to our coaching staff.”

The win yet again showed Persepolis’s ability to bounce back after setbacks under their Croatian head coach Branko Ivankovic, who since taking over in 2015 has guided the club

to back-to-back league titles, the AFC Champions League semi-finals in 2017 and last year’s final.

“We knew this would be a very difficult match and it was important for both teams, especially for us because after two games we had only one point,” said the 65-year-old.

“This win was very important and now we are close to Al Sadd, Al Ahli and Pakhtakor, so the next game will maybe be decisive.”

(Source: the-afc)

Persepolis of Iran beat Saudi Arabia’s Al Ahli in ACL MD3



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran’s Persepolis registered their first win of the 2019 AFC Champions League, defeating Saudi Arabia’s Al Ahli 2-0 on Matchday Three of Group D on Tuesday.

The 2018 finalists took the lead for the first time this campaign after 18 minutes with what was the first real chance of the match.

Al Ahli’s defense failed to deal with a long throw-in from Mehdi Shiri and defender Shojae Khalilzadeh was in the right spot and went for the spectacular, volleying home from inside the box past a helpless Mohammed Al Owais.

The Saudi side could equalized the match just before the break. Omar Al Somah volleyed following a long

throw-in, and his effort was deflected by Nourollahi onto the upright and behind.

Persepolis came racing out of the blocks in the second half and within three minutes, they had doubled their lead through Ali Alipour.

Nourollahi failed to control a cross inside the box, but the ball fell to Alipour who converted into the net from close range to make it 2-0, the-afc.com reported.

Earlier on the day, Al Sadd of Qatar drew 2-2 with Uzbekistan’s Pakhtakor.

With the result, Persepolis climb into third place with four points, while Al Ahli drop to the foot of the group ahead of the reverse fixture in Dubai on April 22.

Iran beaten by Chinese Taipei in AFC Women’s Olympic Qualifiers



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Chinese Taipei cruised past Iran to seal their ticket to Round 3 of the AFC Women’s Olympic Football Tournament Qualifiers on Tuesday in Doha, Qatar.

A powerful first-half display ensured any pre-match nerves for Chinese Taipei quickly disappeared, as Kauzo Echigo’s side reached the last eight with an emphatic victory at Grand Hamad Stadium.

Three teams were still in contention going into Matchday Three, but a draw or better was all Chinese Taipei needed, and they made life easy for themselves with a fast start, which removed any danger of final day disappointment.

Iran knew a win would give them a more than even chance of reaching the last eight, but, not for the first time in Doha, Chinese

Taipei’s Michelle Pao played a starring role to help her side to victory, the-afc.com reported. Pao had come off the bench to jumpstart Chinese Taipei in their stunning come-from-behind win over the Philippines on Saturday, but this time she was in the starting 11, and wasted little time in giving her side a 12th-minute lead.

Chen Yen-ping added a second just three minutes later, and the likelihood of an Iranian recovery looked paper-thin when Tseng Shu-o converted a penalty to make it 3-0 in the 36th minute. Chinese Taipei’s fourth - which was Pao’s second for the match, third for the week and ninth in Tokyo 2020 qualifying - extended the lead in the 47th minute, before Iran captain Zahra Ghanbari pulled one back to provide them with the slightest glimmer of hope 15 minutes later.

Russian boxer Galanov handed two-year doping ban



Russian boxer Tamir Galanov has been suspended for two years for violating anti-doping regulations.

As reported by Russia’s official state news agency TASS, the suspension started from March 12, 2019 and was imposed after his doping samples tested positive for a prohibited performance-enhancing drug.

It was handed to him by the Boxing Federation of Russia (RBF) and confirmed by the Russian Anti-Doping Agency (RUSADA).

Galanov, 30, was a flyweight bronze medalist at the 2017 International Boxing Association (AIBA) Men’s World Championships in Hamburg in Germany.

He lost to eventual gold medalist Yosvany Veitia of Cuba in the semi-finals. Additionally, Galanov claimed the light flyweight silver medal at the 2011 European Championships in Turkey’s capital Ankara and is a four-time national champion.

Russia is scheduled to host the

next edition of the AIBA Men’s World Championships later this year, from September 7 to 21.

AIBA confirmed in January that the event had been moved from another Russian city, Sochi.

In a statement sent to insidethegames, an AIBA spokesperson said the change was made following a request from the RBF.

Sochi, which hosted the 2014 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games, was awarded the event by the AIBA Executive Committee in July 2017.

The decision to award the event to the city initially put AIBA on a collision course with the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) as it was made during RUSADA’s period of non-compliance.

AIBA was itself at risk of being declared non-compliant as a result, but eventually avoided it after WADA controversially lifted the suspension on RUSADA in September 2018.

(Source: insidethegames)

Ethiopian Olympic protest runner Feyisa Lilesa finally gets award



An Ethiopian runner who brought the world’s attention to a wave of protests in Ethiopia at the Rio Olympics has finally been awarded by his government.

Feyisa Lilesa, who received \$17,000 (£13,000), said his struggle had paid off given new freedoms in Ethiopia.

The athlete had held up his crossed wrists as if they were shackled as he took marathon silver in 2016 in protest at the treatment of demonstrators.

He had remained in exile for two years, saying his life might be in danger.

■ ‘No longer shackled’
But sweeping reforms implemented by Prime Minister Ahmed Abiy, who came to office a year ago, encouraged Feyisa to return home last October.

Mass demonstrations by members of the Oromo community - Ethiopia’s largest ethnic group - had precipitated the resignation of his predecessor.

“I’m very happy, not because of the prize

money. I’m happy because I’m witnessing my struggle being fruitful in the country,” Feyisa told the BBC Afaan Oromoo after the ceremony.

He joined Mr Abiy and President Sahlework Zewude in doing a gesture showing that his hands were now unshackled.

Anti-government protesters had used the crossing of arms above their heads as a symbol of defiance.

Feyisa became the first Ethiopian to finish in the top two of a men’s Olympics marathon since 2000, taking silver behind Kenya’s Eliud Kipchoge.

After his political protest, Ethiopian officials denied he was in danger, saying he would be welcomed home from Rio as a hero.

But at the time, Mr Feyisa said he had relatives who were in prison and if they talked about democratic rights they would be killed.

(Source: BBC)

Bagheri Motamed announces retirement from taekwondo

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Olympic silver medalist Mammad Bagheri Motamaed on Wednesday announced that the time came for him to announce retirement from taekwondo.



The 33-year-old taekwondo athlete won the gold medal in the featherweight division (-68 kg) at the 2009 World Taekwondo Championships in Copenhagen, Denmark and a silver in Gyeongju, South Korea two years later.

Bagheri narrowly lost to Turkey’s Servet Tazegül 6-5 in the 2012 Olympic Games in London and took a silver medal.

Bagheri Motamed claimed a gold medal at the 2010 Asian Games, as well as two golds at 2008 and 2010 Asian Championships. He will work as a coach with Indian taekwondo national team.

Iran 2019 Finals draw: All you need to know

The 12 Asian hopefuls will identify their AFC U-20 Futsal Championship IR Iran 2019 group rivals in Thursday’s official draw. Here are some key facts to note.

■ Where and when is the draw ceremony?

The official draw will take place on Thursday (April 11) at the AFC House in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia at 15:30 (GMT+8).

■ Important facts

Instead of 21 teams as in the inaugural AFC U-20 Futsal Championship two years ago, the second edition will feature 12 sides who earned their spots after battling through the Qualifiers last December.

The tournament will be hosted by 2017 winners Islamic Republic of Iran from June 14 to 22, and the reigning champions were as impressive as their senior colleagues, powering through the Central Zone Qualifiers to claim top spot in Group A.

The 12 teams will be divided into four groups of three teams, with the group winners and runners-up advancing to the quarter-finals.

■ Who are the teams?

Host: Iran

Central Zone: Kyrgyz Republic, Afghanistan, Tajikistan

West Zone: Lebanon, Iraq

East Zone: Japan, Chinese Taipei, Hong Kong

ASEAN Zone: Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia

Of the 12 teams, Hong Kong will be making their debut in the tournament after Saudi Arabia’s withdrawal.

(Source: the-afc)

Milan face potential Champions League ban

AC Milan’s hopes of qualifying for the Champions League have been thrown into doubt after they were referred to the UEFA Club Financial Control Body (CFCB) for allegedly breaching financial fair play (FFP) regulations for a second successive term.

Milan are fourth in Serie A, and close to returning to the Champions League for the first time since 2014, but could now face a ban from European competition.

They had claimed their financial situation would improve under the ownership of American hedge fund Elliott Management Corporation, after they assumed control of the club from former owner Li Yonghong last summer.

UEFA initially gave Milan a two-year ban from European competition for breaking FFP rules last summer but they successfully appealed against that sanction with the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

“The UEFA Club Financial Control Body investigatory chamber has communicated its decision to refer the case of AC Milan to the CFC adjudicatory chamber as the club has failed to comply with the break-even requirement during the monitoring period assessed in the current season and covering the 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18 seasons,” a UEFA statement read.

“UEFA will be making no further comments on the matter until a decision has been reached by the CFCB adjudicatory chamber in this case. This referral is not related to the decision that was made by the CFCB adjudicatory in December 2018 and was covering the 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17 seasons.”

Under FFP regulations, clubs are not allowed to make losses of more than £26 million over three seasons, a cap Milan were accused of breaching between 2015-17 when they spent £200m on transfers. However, this referral is in relation to the three-year period between 2016-18.

(Source: ESPN)

Matias Pino named Americas ‘Athlete of the Month’

Matias Pino has been chosen as Americas ‘Athlete of the Month’ for March after receiving 43 per cent of the public vote.

The Chilean table tennis player made headlines in his country after taking silver in the men’s singles class 6 at the Lignano Open in Italy.

Brazilian rider Rodolpho Riskalla came in second with 36 per cent. He started the season on a high by winning all three of his classes in his debut at the Al Shaqab Para dressage competition in Doha, Qatar.

Colombian cyclist Diego Duenas (15 per cent) was third after taking the track world title in Apeldoorn, Netherlands.

The Argentinian blind football team and US snowboarder Noah Elliot were also nominated.

The nominations were compiled from submissions by National Paralympic Committees (NPCs) from across the continent.

(Source: Paralympic.org)

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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

One who is abandoned by close relations is supported by remote strangers.

Imam Ali (AS)

Tehran foundation honors Sacred Defense artists

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Revayat Cultural Foundation has honored a number of artists of the Iran-Iraq 1980-1988 war, which is called “Sacred Defense” in Iran, in a ceremony held on Tuesday.



Photographer Mohammad-Hossein Heidari picks copies of his book “Photographers of War”, unveiled at the Revayat Cultural Foundation on April 9, 2019. (Mehr/Majid Haqdust)

The ceremony was organized to commemorate filmmaker Morteza Avini’s 26th martyrdom anniversary.

The honorees were Parviz Ramezani, the sound engineer of Avini’s documentary “The Narration of Triumph”, directors Hossein Mosafer-Astaneh and Mohammad-Ali Bashe Ahangar, cartoonist Masud Shojai Tabatabai and writer and documentarian Mohammadreza Abolhasani.

Avini was martyred by a landmine in 1993 during his last trip to the former Iran-Iraq war zone in southwestern Iran while making a documentary about soldiers who were still listed as missing in action.

He became famous for “The Narration of Triumph” and was called “the master of martyred writers” by his colleagues and war veterans due to the fervent narrations he wrote for his documentaries.

In addition, “Photographers of War”, a book containing pictures of the war taken by Mohammad-Hossein Heidari was unveiled at the end of the ceremony.

According to Heidari, the photos only reflect one day of all the days he was at the warfronts while he was taking photos.

Heidari hoped that more books of photos on the war would be published in the future to preserve the history.

Parisian center screens “The Last Days of Winter”

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Mehrdad Oskui’s documentary “The Last Days of Winter” went on screen during a program at the Institut National d’Histoire de l’Art (INHA) in Paris on April 9.

The film is a portrait of seven Iranian boys in a youth detention center, talking candidly about their lives.

The program entitled “Nuit Bleue: The Prison as a Subject”, was organized in collaboration with the Sorbonne Nouvelle University and the National Center for Plastic Arts.

“Sluggish Life” named best at Art Slope festival

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Mohsen Mehri’s short film “Sluggish Life” was selected as Best Narrative Short at Art Slope’s 19 - Shorts in the Slope Film Festival, the organizers announced on Monday.



A scene from “Sluggish Life” by Iranian director Mohsen Mehri

The film is about the peculiar life of a sophisticated man.

“Philip Carlson - On Behalf of Talent” by Christopher Ming Ryan from the U.S. received best documentary award.

“Jesse Ray Scheps Sketch Comedy” by Jesse Ray Scheps and “Clark” by Steven Ruggiero both from the U.S. won two awards for best youth short films.

The festival was held in Brooklyn, New York on April 6 and 7.

Filmmaker Morteza Avini remembered at Iranian Artists Forum

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — A number of cineastes, film experts and critics gathered at the Iranian Artists Forum in Tehran on Tuesday to pay tribute to Morteza Avini and commemorate the filmmaker’s 26th martyrdom anniversary.

The three-day program has been organized to review three documentaries by the filmmaker: “And This Is the Best Triumph”, “Story of the Bridge” and “The Ashura Night”.

“And This Is the Best Triumph” was screened on the first day followed by a review session attended by filmmaker Orod Attarpur, film critic Saeid Qotbizadeh, and Avini’s son Sajjad.

French scholar Agnès Devictor, who is a lecturer at the University of Paris and teaches Iranian cinema at the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO), was also among the invited guests who gave a speech about Avini and his films.

Devictor said that she believes the cinema of Avini is different from the world productions on war.

She said that Avini depicts the real meaning of war to a great extent, while other war filmmakers try not to disturb the viewers and mostly observe the viewers’ calmness.

“The documentaries made during the war at the warfronts are usually filmed quickly while Avini has portrayed the meaning of war very slowly and with no hurry,” she added.

Pointing to the narration of the documentary carried out by Avini himself, Devictor also noted that Avini’s tone of voice as the narrator of his documentary takes the viewers to what really has been observed in the war.

She also added that whenever she screens Avini’s “And This Is the Best Triumph” in other countries, the documentary has been warmly received by the audience.

Film critic Qotbizadeh was the next speaker who called Avini a writer and narrator who has been highly impressed by literature.

“Avini’s exaggerations in poetry does not allow the audience to gain much information. However his poetry and special attention to literature have made his films



Filmmaker Morteza Avini in an undated photo

into praises of peace,” he added.

Avini was martyred by a landmine in 1993 during his last trip to the former Iran-Iraq war zone in southwestern Iran while making a documentary about soldiers who were still listed as missing in action.

He became famous for “The Narration of Triumph” and was called “the master of martyred writers” by his colleagues and war veterans due to the fervent narrations

he wrote for his documentaries.

In his brief words at the ceremony Attarpur also said that Avini’s background and his interest in literature made him find the epic form of life.

“When Avini was busy with editing the films, he saw the love and fascination of the soldiers and praised every single of them. He made his films with all his love for the soldiers,” he concluded.

Shahram Nazeri to give benefit concert to aid Iran’s flood victims



Iranian vocalist Shahram Nazeri in an undated photo

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Legendary Iranian Kurdish vocalist Shahram Nazeri plans to perform a benefit concert to raise funds for the victims of Iran’s recent devastating floods.

The concert will be held during My Beautiful Sharif Art Festival at Tehran’s Sharif University on April 30, the organizers announced on Wednesday.

All the money raised by the concert will be donated to the survivors of the floods.

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.

Kerman to host Gunther Uecker’s “Tribute to Hafez”

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — After Three showings in Tehran, Shiraz and Isfahan, German sculptor and op artist Gunther Uecker’s exhibition “Tribute to Hafez” will move to the Kerman Museum of Contemporary Art for a showcase, which will open on April 25.

The collection has been inspired by ghazals of Persian poet Hafez. Uecker has created a series of 42 graphical works in which the ghazals are transformed into colors and the sound of the poems into written images.

This method to translate spoken language into pictorial expressions has characterized the artist’s oeuvre since the 1970s.

In 2016, Uecker first displayed his collection in Shiraz, where the Mausoleum of Hafez lies, and later took his



An art aficionado visits “Tribute to Hafez”, an exhibition of paintings by German op artist Gunther Uecker that opened at the Mausoleum of Hafez in Shiraz on May 1, 2016. (IRNA/Reza Qaderi)

Composer Ramin Djawadi makes his “Game of Thrones” swan song

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Global smash hit television series “Game of Thrones” is about to come to an end, and composer Ramin Djawadi is one of the few people who knows how it all goes down.

Not that he is saying anything. Such is the secrecy around the final season that Djawadi hasn’t even played the music for his wife ahead of the Season 8 premiere on HBO on April 14.

“I watched it by myself and was just floored at what’s happening,” Djawadi told Reuters Television. “I immediately go ‘How am I going to paint this musically and what am I going to do with my score?’ knowing that this is it for me.”

The German-Iranian composer wrote the score for all seven prior seasons of the medieval fantasy about warring families, dragons and zombies in the fictional



A large replica of the iron throne is seen at Rockefeller Center before the premiere of the final season of “Game of Thrones” at Radio City Music Hall in New York, U.S., April 3, 2019. (Reuters/Caitlin Ochs)

kingdom of Westeros.

Using cellos to anchor the score, Djawadi, 44, wrote musical themes for dozens of different characters as well as the rival households.

“I liked the tone of the cello, the range of the cello. It can play really low, and this show being primarily a dark show, I just felt it was a great melody instrument for that,” he said.

Flutes were banned and the piano only made its entrance in the Season 6 finale with the haunting “Light of the Seven” theme when Queen Cersei is silently plotting mass revenge.

Djawadi, who won an Emmy in 2015 for his “Game of Thrones” work, said the no-flute rule came from early discussions with TV series creators David Benioff and D.B. Weiss.

“It really came from the idea that this is a fantasy period piece and we don’t want to have medieval flutes,” Djawadi said.

With its vast cast, “Game of Thrones” is known for the often brutal deaths of beloved characters. Djawadi said he was still traumatized by the burning at the stake of Princess Shireen in 2015, and the loss of gentle giant Hodor three years ago.

“I write from my heart because that’s how I really feel at that moment and it gets quite emotional for me. Sometimes I do have to take a step away and take a moment and work on something else,” he said.

“I think it will be very hard for me to say goodbye to these themes and to the show and the music. How exactly I feel when I do, I just don’t know yet.”

Painting exhibition to raise funds for children with cancer



A poster for “Bright Future”, a charity exhibition for children suffering from cancer.

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — A charity exhibition of paintings by 69 children will be held in Tehran to raise funds for children suffering from cancer.

The exhibition named “Bright Future” will be held at the Mahak Charity Society, a Tehran-based major medical center for children with cancer, on April 18 and 19, the organizer of the event, Tara Behbahani, announced in a press release on Wednesday.

“Children were told to draw the future they have in mind. The results were interesting, and they painted various futures, from their own lives and favorite jobs to wars, lack of water and air pollution,” Behbahani said.

She has held the charity exhibition every year for the past 12 years and the artworks have been created by children attending her painting classes.

All the revenue from the exhibition will be donated to the Mahak Charity Society.