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Iran, Iraq to build 5 joint industrial estates

TEHRAN — Iran and Iraq have agreed to construct five joint industrial estates, Mehr news agency reported on Saturday quoting Mahmoud Vaezi, the chief of staff of Iranian president.

Based on a memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed between the two neighbors, five industrial estates will be constructed through Iran-Iraq joint venture, the official said and added that one of

the estates will be established in Kordestan Province (in west of Iran).

He made the remarks during his visit to the province.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is Iraq's first trade partner, Vaezi said, adding, "Iraq and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) provide the best opportunity for Iran for increasing the volume of exports and bypassing the U.S. sanctions." **→4**

MPs move to 'punish' U.S. allies

TEHRAN — A number of Majlis members on Saturday filed a proposal aimed at punishing the countries which follow suit the United States in sanctioning Iran.

Signed by 52 MPs, the proposal says Iran should "use its amenities which hostile countries lack" as a lever to pressure the enemies of the Islamic Republic in retaliation for unilateral U.S. sanctions against Tehran.

It particularly emphasizes restricting the trade of "oil and any other goods" from Iran by countries which accompany the U.S. in their anti-Iran sanctions, as well as the nationals of such countries.

It goes on to extend the boycott period to 10 years from the day a country is noticed in supporting anti-Iran sanctions. **→2**

Syria's air defenses intercept Israeli missiles fired at Hama military base

Damascus says its air defenses have intercepted some of the Israeli missiles fired at a Syrian military base near the city of Hama, while the remaining missiles hitting the target have destroyed several buildings and injured three Syrian soldiers.

Syrian state media reported that Israeli aircraft carried out the strike near the town of Masyaf in the central Hama province early on Saturday morning.

Explosions were heard throughout the

countryside around the provincial capital.

Syria's official state news agency SANA said the Israeli attack, which was carried out from Lebanese air space, destroyed several buildings and wounded three people.

The Israeli regime launches airstrikes on the Syrian territory from time to time. Such aggressive moves are usually viewed as attempts to prop up terrorist groups suffering defeats at the hands of Syrian government forces. **→13**

'IRGC has always been target of American and regional states animosity'

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Shireen Tahmaash Hunter, a professor of political science at Georgetown University, tells the Tehran Times that "The designation of IRGC as a terrorist organization by the Trump administration is another step in Washington's policy of incrementally increasing pressure on Iran in the hope of forcing it to negotiate, and in the process agree to change some aspects of its foreign policy, notably those vis a vis the Arab-Israeli conflict."

"I suppose who persuaded Trump to declare

the IRGC a terrorist organization are trying to create a situation wherein war becomes inevitable," Hunter says.

She adds that "IRGC has always been the target of American and regional states animosity." Following is the text of the interview:

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

A: The designation of IRGC as a terrorist organization by the Trump administration is another step in Washington's policy of incrementally increasing pressure on Iran in the hope of forcing

it to negotiate, and in the process agree to change some aspects of its foreign policy, notably those vis a vis the Arab-Israeli conflict. Washington hopes that these pressure would convince Iran to stop its financial and military help to groups such as the Hizbollah and the Houthis in Yemen and, in general, end its hostile policies toward America. Because the IRGC has been active in places such as Lebanon, Iraq and Syria and its Quds branch is committed to liberating Palestine, it has always been the target of American and regional states animosity. **→7**

Afghan women have been victims of war and should be part of peace process: expert

By Abdul Wahid Haidari

KABUL — In past several weeks, hectic negotiations have taken place between the Taliban and U.S. to find a solution to Afghan war that has now stretched into its 18th year. But the Afghan government has been sidelined. Women in Afghanistan have also complained about lack of representation in the ongoing talks.

Laila Jafari is a prominent civil society and

women's rights activist in Afghanistan. She is also a member of High Peace Council (HPC), a government body constituted to facilitate peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

In an interview with Tehran Times, she talks about the ongoing peace negotiations, significance of women's representation in these talks and why she is hopeful about the final outcome.

Excerpts from the interview:

■ There have been hectic parleys in recent months to end the 'imposed war' in Afghanistan. What is the present status of peace negotiations?

A: The peace talks are heading in the right direction, and things have seen a marked improvement recently after more than 17 years of protracted war. Today, the discourse of peace has gone beyond Afghanistan's political geography. **→7**

International Relations is becoming aware of its own parochialism: Abrahamsen

By Rooholamin Saeidi

TEHRAN — Dr. Rita Abrahamsen is Professor in the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs and the Director of the Centre for International Policy Studies (CIPS). Her research interests are in African politics, security and development, security privatization and postcolonial theory. She is the author (with M.C. Williams) of Security beyond the State: Private Security in International Politics

(Cambridge University Press, 2011) and Disciplining Democracy: Development Discourse and the Good Governance Agenda in Africa (Zed Books, 2000). Her articles have appeared in leading journals including African Affairs, Alternatives, International Political Sociology, Journal of Modern African Studies, Political Studies, Third World Quarterly and Review of African Political Economy.

Following is the text of her interview with

Asre-Andisheh Magazine:

■ In the year 2007 you wrote in your article "Postcolonialism" that "The 'global voices' in the dialogue of IR are, it seems, not so global after all." Now after about a decade do you see any changes due to the recent evolutions in the discipline or do you still believe that the voices of the repressed or subaltern are barely audible in IR theory or more generally in social sciences? **→7**



ARTICLE

Syed Zafar Mehdi
Journalist
from New Delhi

Odds stacked against Modi in India elections

After the political razzmatazz of many weeks, general election is finally underway in India, bally-hooped as the 'largest democratic exercise in the world'.

The voting began on Thursday in the first phase across 20 states and federal territories, in which 142 million voters were to decide the fate of 91 candidates.

There are total 543 seats up for grabs and six more phases to be held in coming weeks before the results are declared on May 23.

India's national election commission said the voter turnout in the first phase was more than 60 percent. Almost 900 million of India's humungous 1.3 billion people are qualified to cast their votes.

More than 11 million election officials, including security forces, have been reportedly deployed across one million polling stations to ensure free, fair and peaceful polls.

However, despite that, many incidents of violence and irregularities were reported on the voting day.

A supporter of a local political party in southern state of Andhra Pradesh died in a clash outside a polling booth on Thursday, said reports. In Kashmir, two youth were killed by security forces, which sparked tensions across the valley.

India has a parliamentary system of government where the lower house — Lok Sabha — comprises elected representatives. There are a total of 545 seats in Lok Sabha, and the party that claims the majority eventually forms the government. In case of hung parliament, coalitions are formed.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had claimed absolute majority in the last election (2014) and formed a government led by Hindu nationalist Narendra Modi, who is seen as a polarizing figure.

Elections in India are generally dominated by local issues but this time it is being seen as a referendum on Modi, who experts believe has failed to deliver on the promises he made five years ago.

Modi had promised to combat rampant corruption and resurrect the economy. He even pledged to create 10 million jobs for youth annually. But those promises turned out to be hogwash. **→7**



REPORT

Roohullah Ghasemian
Journalist

Pakistani Hazara community demands security

The persecution of minority ethnic Hazara community continues in Pakistan with another heinous attack claiming many precious lives, including women and children.

As a mark of protest, the members of the community continued their sit-in for a second day on Saturday in Quetta city, demanding better security and adequate measures to protect them from attacks.

More than 20 people were killed and scores of others injured in a massive blast that ripped through a crowded market in Quetta's Hazarganji on Friday morning.

According to locals, the attack was targeted against the Hazara community as the area is heavily populated by the members of the minority community.

Protestors staging the sit-in include women and children who demand that the Imran Khan government implements an effective security plan and ensures protection of the community.

Hazara rights activist Jalila Haider took to Twitter to announce that they would protest outside Quetta Press Club against the persecution and would march towards Islamabad if needed.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack but according to sources it could be the handiwork of Lashkar e Jhangvi (LeJ), which has carried out attacks against Hazaras in the past as well.

Interestingly, the latest attack came two days after authorities released Ramzan Mengal, a senior leader of LeJ, according to reports.

Mengal had been detained for three months under maintenance of public order regulations.

The LeJ operates in close coordination with al Qaeda and ISIS in Pakistan and has regularly claimed responsibility for attacks in Balochistan, mainly targeting Shias, whom it refers to as 'heretics'.

In 2013, three deadly bombings killed more than 200 people in Hazara populated areas in Quetta, sparking worldwide outrage. But, locals claim that despite the threats, security agencies have failed to provide them adequate security. **→13**



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Artemia ship once again afloat in Lake Urmia

Artemia ship, which was stuck on the lakebed for a long time due to dryness of Lake Urmia once again floated.

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

Currently, volume of water in the Lake Urmia reached 3.13 billion cubic meters, while last year only 1.99 billion cubic meters of water was flowing in the lake in the same period.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Leader calls forces killed in Gomishan floods ‘martyrs of service’

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has labeled as “martyrs of service” the popular forces who lost their lives in the city of Gomishan during the floods.

The forces were killed after their boat was capsized in the floods while they were trying to help the flood-stricken people, IRNA reported.

The move came after it was proposed by the Leader’s representative in Golestan Province.

Last month, catastrophic floods hit 1,900 cities and villages in western, southwestern, northern and northeastern Iran, leaving 78 dead and hundreds of thousands displaced.



Iran, UNIDO sign MOU on startup, ICT fields

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Information and Communication Technology Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi has signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) Director General Li Yong.

The MOU was signed during Jahromi’s trip to Geneva, Switzerland, to attend the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

Based on the initial agreement, UNIDO will maintain cooperation with the Iranian ministry in startup field and in creating job opportunities in ICT, IRNA reported on Friday.

Iran is in a quadrilateral cooperation with Russia, Azerbaijan and Turkey in promoting startup activities and UNIDO is playing the role of Iran’s advisor.



Iranian military delegation visits Muscat

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Heading a high-ranking delegation, Iranian Armed Forces deputy chief Brigadier General Ghadir Nezami visited Muscat on Saturday to attend the annual Iran-Oman military friendship committee meeting, IRNA reported.

The joint committee started its work on April 13 and will continue until April 20, the Oman official news agency announced.

So far, the two sides have held some 14 joint meetings to examine expansion of cooperation between the two countries.

In previous meetings, armed forces from the two countries reviewed various issues such as the special status of the Persian Gulf, the Sea of Oman and the Indian Ocean in terms of sea trade, shipment of merchandized goods, and oil tankers and how to maintain the security of the region.



Abbas Mousavi named new Foreign Ministry spokesman

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Seyyed Abbas Mousavi has been appointed as the new Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman, replacing Bahram Qassemi who was named Iran’s ambassador to Paris, the ministry announced in a press release on Saturday.

Mousavi is a graduate of the School of International Relations run by the Foreign Ministry. He holds a master’s degree in international relations.

He was serving as director general of communications at the Foreign Ministry’s public and media diplomacy center.

He had also served as first secretary and head of the Iranian representative office in Hong Kong and economic attaché in the Iranian embassy in the Netherlands.



Majlis committee studying motion to bolster IRGC

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Parliament’s National Security and Foreign Policy Committee is set to hold a meeting on Sunday to consider a double urgency motion to bolster the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC).

The motion aims to reinforce the position of the IRGC in the face of its designation by the U.S. government as a terrorist organization, Mehr reported on Saturday.

The meeting will be attended by commanders of the IRGC, officials with the Supreme National Security Council, ministries of foreign affairs, intelligence and defense, and the parliament’s research center.



Ruhol-Amini elected House of Parties chief

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Abdolhossein Ruhol-Amini was elected on Saturday as the new chairman of Iran’s House of Parties during the first meeting of its central council in the new Iranian year.

Ruhol-Amini was elected between two principlist nominees with 9 votes, defeating Hassan Qafourifard who received 7 votes, IRNA reported.

During the meeting, it was decided that the leadership of the organization in the current year be elected from among the principlists and in the next two years from among the independents and reformists.

The House of Parties is a non-governmental organization consisting of legal and registered political parties.

Iran should file complaint against U.S. unjustified act: Pakistani defense analyst

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Lieutenant **d e s k** General Amjad Shoaib, a senior Pakistani defense analyst, said on Saturday that Iran should file complaint at the International Criminal Court and the UN against the unjustified U.S. act in designating the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps as a foreign terrorist organization.

“The U.S. decision in putting the Guards on the list of terrorist organizations is unjustified,” he said, adding it is aimed at “increasing pressure against Iran.”

He also attached great importance to the role of the IRGC’s role in combatting terrorism in the region.

“The U.S. levels accusations against the Guards’ role in the Middle East without any justification,” he told IRNA.

U.S. President Donald Trump labeled the IRGC as a foreign terrorist organization on April 8.

Immediately after the Trump administration labelled the IRGC as terrorist,



Iran’s Supreme National Security Council included the U.S. Central Command,

which is responsible for American military activities in the Middle East and

Iraqis have come to help Iranian flood-stricken people: diplomat

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iraqi **d e s k** Masjedi, the Iranian ambassador to Baghdad, has said that a number of Iraqi intellectuals, heads of nomads and members of the Popular Mobilization Forces have come to Iran to help the flood-stricken people.

“During the past two days, hundreds of Iraqi intellectuals, heads of nomads and members of the Popular Mobilization Forces have come to our country’s embassy (in Baghdad) and consulates in other cities in Iraq to obtain visa and came to Lorestan and Khuzestan to help the flood-stricken people,” he told ISNA in an interview published on Saturday.

He noted that the Iraqis’ action shows the friendly relations between the people of the two countries.

Over the past days, Iraqi groups have



collected aid for the flood-stricken and a part of them has been sent to Iran, he added.

He also praised the Iraqi government and people for their help.

Since March 19, large parts of Iran have been inundated with flash floods. So far, about 78 people have lost their lives and hundreds of thousands have been displaced. 24 provinces out of 31 have been affected by the flood.

Trump’s ‘stupid’ move on IRGC will intensify tension: ISCI member

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — A top member of the Islamic **d e s k** Supreme Council of Iraq has strongly criticized the United States for branding Iran’s Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a foreign terrorist organization, predicting the “stupid” move will intensify tension in the region.

Sayyed Muhammed al-Heidari said this step is one in a series of stupid acts by U.S. President Donald Trump.

“Such a decision was not only strange it was also dangerous,” he told IRNA in an interview published on Saturday.

Al-Heidari said the IRGC is part of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s military system.

He added Trump’s move against the IRGC was a gift for “criminal” Netanyahu who was facing reelection.

It is clear that the IRGC is tasked to guard security in the Persian Gulf and since American troops are present in the

Persian Gulf there is a possibility of military confrontation between the two sides, the members of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq warned.

He added Iran is a power in the region which its role cannot be downplayed.

Al-Heidari said the terrorist designation will help increase the popularity of the IRGC among the Iranians and this was demonstrated in expression of support for the military force.

Elsewhere in his remarks, he said, “Trump made such a decision to put more pressure on Iran and the resistance front because the Guards played a great role in liberating the lands captured by Daesh in Syria and Iraq.”

He suggested that the people in the region and the world are expected to condemn this move by the Trump administration but since their governments are obedient to Trump



they refuse to do so.

It is the first time that Washington has formally labelled another country’s military a terrorist group.

Dutch ambassador says EU working to implement INSTEX

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Dutch **d e s k** Ambassador to Iran, Jacques Werner, has said that the European Union is seeking to implement the financial mechanism, known as INSTEX, for doing business with Iran.

Despite the U.S. withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal and reimposition of sanctions against Iran, the EU will remain committed to the deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA),

the ambassador told IRNA in an interview published on Saturday.

Werner expressed hope that the Netherlands and Iran would expand cooperation in areas of agriculture and transfer of technology and knowledge.

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

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

In a report on Saturday, IRNA also said Le Drian has reiterated that Europe is firm to preserve the JCPOA.

In May 2018, Trump unilaterally pulled

Washington out of the JCPOA and ordered reimposition of sanctions against Iran. The first round of sanctions went into force on August 6 and the second round, which targets Iran’s oil exports and banks, were snapped back on November 4.

The Trump administration has gone to the far by even blocking the accounts of Iran’s Red Crescent Society, actually impeding transfer of money to the Iranian flood victims.

Jewish MP: Trump’s decision against IRGC heralds collapse of Zionism

TEHRAN — Representative of the Iranian Jewish community at the parliament Siamak Mareh Sedq condemns U.S. President Donald Trump’s designation of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization, saying that such decisions indicate the end of international Zionism.

“Of course, such behaviors are a start for the U.S. decline and end. As the Nazi Germany’s actions before the World War II ended the decadent thoughts of Social Nationalism, Trump’s moves and measures herald the end of global arrogance and Zionism,” Mareh Sedq told FNA on Saturday.

He expressed regret that Trump shows a hostile attitude towards not only the Islamic Republic but also the Iranian people and any freedom-seeking nation which wants to live independently, noting that the U.S. and its regional allies want to form tens of Israeli-like countries in the region which are weak and incapable of living independently.



His remarks came days after the United States designated the IRGC as a “foreign terrorist organization”.

Responding to Washington’s April 8 move, Iran immediately declared the U.S. as “state sponsor of terrorism” and American forces in the region “terrorist groups”.

Iran’s top security body, the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), in a statement issued on April 8 declared the United States a “terrorist government”, and blacklisted the

“CENTCOM and all its affiliates a terrorist group”.

The SNSC - that is headed by President Hassan Rouhani - condemned Washington’s move, calling it “an illegal and dangerous action” that poses a “major threat to regional and international peace and security and grossly violates the rules of international law”.

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

“The Islamic Republic of Iran regards this baseless move as a major threat to regional and international peace and security and a blatant violation of the compelling rules of

international law and the United Nations Charter,” Iran’s top security body reiterated.

Earlier, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif had asked Iranian President Rouhani to designate the CENTCOM as a terrorist organization.

Due to the “clear support” US forces in Western Asia lend to terrorist groups, and their own “involvement in terrorist activities”, the U.S. military in the region should be put on a list of terrorist groups in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Zarif said in a letter to Rouhani and Iran’s Supreme National Security Council.

Also in a tweet on Monday, the Iranian top diplomat slammed the decision by the U.S. administration on labeling the IRGC a “foreign terrorist organization”, seeing Trump’s close ties with Netanyahu as a main contributor to the gravely wrong move made by the U.S. president ahead of the Tuesday election in Israel.

(Source: Fars)

MPs move to ‘punish’ U.S. allies

1 → The proposal also prohibits the import of consumer goods to Iran from the U.S. and the countries that adhere to its sanctions against Iran.

Last May, 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 in 2016.

The deal had been finalized in 2015 between

the U.S., Russia, China, France, Britain and Germany to lift nuclear-related sanctions on Iran in exchange for limiting Tehran’s nuclear program.

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.

Saudis ‘gave Libya’s Haftar millions of dollars before offensive’

Days before Libya's renegade General Khalifa Haftar launched an offensive on the country's capital, Tripoli, Saudi Arabia offered tens of millions of dollars to help pay for the operation, the Wall Street Journal has reported.

The offer came during a visit by Haftar to the Saudi capital, Riyadh, ahead of his April 4 military campaign, the Journal said on Friday.

Citing senior advisers to the Saudi government, the Journal said the offer of funds - accepted by Haftar - was intended to buy the loyalty of tribal leaders, recruit and pay fighters, and other military purposes.

"We were quite generous," one of the unnamed advisers told the Journal.

The latest conflict in the North African country pits Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) against forces allied to the United Nations-backed Government of National Accord (GNA).

The GNA controls Tripoli, situated in north-western Libya, while the LNA is allied to a parallel administration based in the east of the oil-rich country, which splintered into a patchwork of competing power bases following the overthrow of former leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.

The United Nations, which had hoped to organize a national conference this month bringing the rival eastern and western administrations together to organize an election, has called for a ceasefire. The United States, G7 bloc of wealthy nations and the European Union have also urged the LNA to halt its offensive.



According to the latest UN figures, at least 75 people have been killed in the fighting between the warring parties while 320 others were wounded. Some 9,500 people have also been forced from their homes.

Warplanes over Tripoli

Khalil Jahshan, the executive director of the Arab Center of Washington DC, said Haftar's backers and supporters were well known before the publication of the Journal's article.

Several Middle Eastern countries including Egypt and the United Arab Emirates have backed Haftar as a bulwark against Islamist groups, notably the Muslim Brotherhood, who took a prominent role in Libya following the

2011 uprising and continued to participate in Libyan politics under the Tripoli government.

"There was an increase in support, clearly, but not a change in the political role. I think Saudi Arabia wanted to up its participation in the conflict in Libya and that probably contributed to the visit of General Haftar to the kingdom and his meeting with both King Salman and the Crown Prince," Jahshan said.

"Immediately after his [Haftar's] return, he kind of escalated his role, his confrontation with his competitors in Libya so clearly he got the political endorsement first and I'm sure he got the financial and military support afterwards even though this is not necessarily the only party in the Gulf or in

the Middle East that has been supportive of Haftar over the past few years."

During his visit to Saudi Arabia prior to the offensive on Tripoli, the Journal said Haftar met King Salman, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) as well as the kingdom's intelligence chief and foreign minister.

The Saudi government and spokespeople for Haftar did not respond to requests for comment.

Meanwhile, at least five civilians were killed on the outskirts of Tripoli on Friday when rockets and shells fired by forces loyal to Haftar hit a residential area.

Al Jazeera's Mahmoud Abdelwahed, reporting from Tripoli, said Haftar's forces had launched several air raids in western Libya.

"Haftar's warplanes have been intensifying air attacks in the west of the country and staff members in Mitiga airport - the only operational airport in the Tripoli - say that there is a state of panic among staff members and passengers," he said, adding that anti-aircraft weapons at the airport were trying to target the warplanes.

"Fighting decreased relatively on Friday compared with the last two or three days but sources at the GNA say that the government forces managed to recapture sites that were taken over by Haftar's forces days ago," Abdelwahed said.

More than 1,000 people also gathered in central Tripoli to demand Haftar stop the advance on the coastal city of about 1.2 million people.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Daesh says it was behind Pakistan market suicide bombing

Daesh (ISIL) terrorist group claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing that killed at least 18 people in a Pakistan market, the group's Amaq news agency said Saturday.

The attack ripped through an outdoor Pakistani market on Friday, killing at least 18 people, half of them ethnic Hazaras, officials said, in an attack apparently aimed at minority Shia Muslims.

(Source: Daily Star)

ICC decision against war crimes probe a 'victory:' Trump

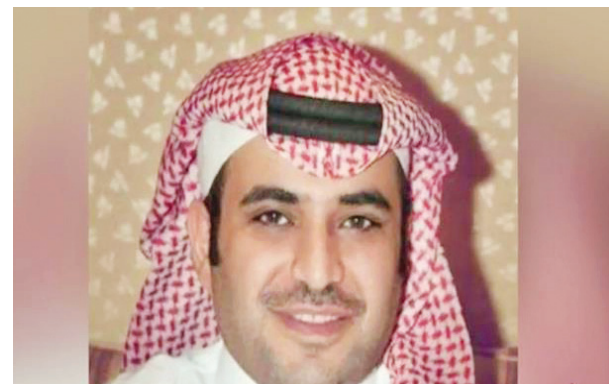
Donald Trump Friday welcomed the decision by the International Criminal Court not to open a war crimes probe in Afghanistan as a "victory."

"This is a major international victory, not only for these patriots, but for the rule of law," Trump said in a statement.

The court earlier turned down a request by its chief prosecutor - whose visa was revoked by Washington over the case - to probe incidents in Afghanistan involving U.S. and other international forces, as well as the Afghan government and Taliban guerrillas.

(Source: AFP)

U.S. 'urged MBS to cut ties' with aide linked to Khashoggi murder



U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo urged Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to cut ties with a former close royal adviser linked to the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, the Guardian reported on Friday, citing unnamed sources.

According to the Guardian, Pompeo has privately raised concerns about MBS's contact with Saud al-Qahtani, who is accused of masterminding Khashoggi's murder.

Khashoggi was killed on October 2, 2018, after entering the Saudi consulate in Istanbul to obtain documents for his upcoming marriage. After initially offering several contradictory statements, the Saudi kingdom confirmed the journalist was killed inside its consulate in Turkey. U.S. intelligence agencies have reportedly concluded that MBS was involved in Khashoggi's killing - a conclusion the kingdom denies.

Al-Qahtani is believed to have played a pivotal role in Khashoggi's assassination by first trying to lure him back to Saudi Arabia. He met the Saudi hit team before they left for Turkey and allegedly gave orders to kill Khashoggi if he refused to return to his country voluntarily.

Al-Qahtani was dismissed as a royal adviser following Khashoggi's murder, but the ambiguity surrounding his status has raised questions about whether he continues to have influence behind the scenes.

In January, the Washington Post reported that MBS remained in regular contact and continued to seek advice from al-Qahtani.

The Post quoted a Saudi source as saying that al-Qahtani had recently made two trips to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), even though he was presumed to be under house arrest in Riyadh.

The adviser also reportedly met senior deputies from the royal court's Centre for Studies and Media Affairs recently at his home in Riyadh and told them that he had been blamed and "used as a scapegoat." Al-Qahtani had run the centre until shortly after Khashoggi's death.

The Guardian also reported that al-Qahtani is still active within MBS's private office.

The State Department told The Guardian it would not discuss private diplomatic conversations. The department did not immediately respond to Al Jazeera's request for comment.

Al Jazeera's Rosiland Jordan, reporting from Washington, DC, said there "has been this perception in the U.S. that Saud al-Qahtani has had an outsized amount of influence on Mohammed bin Salman".

Increased pressure

The Guardian's report comes against the backdrop of increased pressure on Pompeo and the White House to do more to hold Saudi Arabia accountable for Khashoggi's death.

Congress has sent a bill to President Donald Trump that would end U.S. support for the Saudi-UAE war in Yemen. The legislation is seen as a strong rebuke over Trump's support for Saudi Arabia in the wake of Khashoggi's murder. Trump has not acted on the measure, but the White House has previously indicated that the president will veto the bill.

Last week, the State Department barred entry to 16 Saudi nationals, including al-Qahtani, over what it described as their role in the murder of Khashoggi.

The section under which the individuals have been designated "provides that, in cases where the Secretary of State has credible information that officials of foreign governments have been involved in significant corruption or gross violations of human rights, those individuals and their immediate family members are ineligible for entry into the United States".

The State Department previously revoked visas of nearly two dozen Saudi officials and froze the assets of 17 others.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

British MPs say WikiLeaks' Assange should face justice in Sweden

Labor Party calls for PM to prevent extradition

More than 70 British members of parliament have signed a letter urging the home secretary to ensure that WikiLeaks cofounder Julian Assange is extradited to Sweden if a case there is reopened against him.

The letter, signed late on Friday by mostly Labor Party MPs, urged UK Home Secretary Sajid Javid to "stand with the victims of sexual violence" and ensure the rape claim against him can be "properly investigated".

"We do not presume guilt, of course, but we believe due process should be followed and the complainant should see justice be done," it said.

The 47-year-old Australian activist was arrested by British police on Thursday and forcibly removed from the Ecuadorian embassy in London after his asylum was revoked, bringing to an end more than six years in the building.

Assange originally sought asylum at the Ecuadorian embassy in 2012 to avoid extradition to Sweden, where prosecutors wanted to question him over a rape allegation, which he denied.

Sweden suspended its investigation of serious sexual misconduct two years ago because Assange was beyond their reach while at the embassy.

But on Friday, Swedish prosecutors said they were examining the rape case at the request of the alleged victim's lawyer.

Embarrassing information

British Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott said it was right that he should face justice if charges are brought.

"If the Swedish government wants to come forward with those charges, I believe that Assange should face the criminal justice system," said Abbott, who added that the arrest was politically motivated as WikiLeaks has published enormous tranches of sensitive military information.

"We all know what this is about. It's not the rape charges, serious as they are, it's about WikiLeaks. All that embarrassing information about the activities of the American military that was made public and that is what it is about."

The move by British MPs to push for Assange's extradition to Sweden came hours after the Labor Party called on the government to halt his extradition to the United States, where he has been charged with offences related to his work with whistle-blower Chelsea Manning.

Abbott said Prime Minister Theresa May should intervene as she did in the case of British hacker Gary McKinnon, whose extradition request she rejected on medical grounds in 2012.

But May has shown no desire to interfere with the U.S.'s wishes this time. She welcomed the arrest in Parliament on Thursday, where Sajid Javid, the current home secretary, accused Labor of supporting a man with "a track record of undermining the UK and our allies and the values we stand for".

U.S. prosecutors say Assange faces five years in prison if convicted of "conspiracy to commit computer intrusion", though further charges are expected to be brought against him.



Abbott's comments followed a post on Twitter by Labor Party leader Jeremy Corbyn on Thursday that praised Assange's exposing of U.S. war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan and said that his extradition to the U.S. "should be opposed by the British government".

Extradition

The UK's opposition Labor Party has called on the government to halt the extradition of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to the United States, where he has been charged with offences related to his work with whistle-blower Chelsea Manning.

(Source: agencies)

Saudi Arabia resorting to death penalty to quash opposition: Amnesty

Amnesty International says Saudi Arabia is making use of the death penalty to crush opposition figures, as a crackdown led by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman against Muslim preachers, members of the press and intellectuals widens in the conservative oil-rich kingdom.

The London-based rights group said Saudi Arabia's public prosecutor was seeking the death penalty for more people, noting that prominent preacher Sheikh Salman al-Awdah was one of those targeted for execution.

The Prisoners of Conscience, which is an independent non-governmental organization advocating human rights in Saudi Arabia, also announced in a post on its official Twitter page that Awdah, along with two other clerics, identified as Awad al-Qarni and Ali al-Omari, had been in prison for 19 months with no legal reasons.

It further noted that Saudi women's rights activist Khadijah al-Harbi, who is in her last stage of pregnancy, was arrested in Saudi Arabia last week, as the Riyadh regime was selling to the West the lie that it is "empowering women."



Saudi Arabia faces international criticism over the ongoing trial of eleven female activists advocating women's rights, some of whom reportedly faced torture and sexual abuse during nearly a year in detention on trumped-up charges related to their activities and contacts

with foreign journalists and diplomats.

The activists were detained in a sweeping crackdown weeks before Saudi Arabia overturned the world's only ban on female motorists on June 24, 2018. The women had staunchly advocated for the right to drive.

Saudi Arabia has stepped up politically-motivated arrests, prosecution and conviction of peaceful dissident writers and human rights campaigners.

Saudi officials have also intensified crackdown in the country's Shia-populated Eastern Province. Eastern Province has been the scene of peaceful demonstrations since February 2011. Protesters have been demanding reforms, freedom of expression, the release of political prisoners, and an end to economic and religious discrimination against the oil-rich region.

The protests have been met with a heavy-handed crackdown by the regime, with regime forces increasing security measures across the province.

Over the past years, Riyadh has also redefined its anti-terrorism laws to target activism.

In January 2016, Saudi authorities executed Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr, who was an outspoken critic of the Riyadh regime. Nimr had been arrested in Qatif, Eastern Province, in 2012.

(Source: Press TV)

Brazil's Bolsonaro admits working with U.S. to oust Maduro

President Nicolas Maduro has compared Brazilian counterpart Jair Bolsonaro to Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler for working with the U.S. on a military coup in Venezuela.

Bolsonaro on Friday made no effort to hide the fact that his government was working with the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump to bring down President Maduro.

"It is our intention and that of the Americans that there is a rift in the army, because it is they who still support Maduro," Bolsonaro said in an interview with the main Brazilian radio station, Jovem Pan.

"It is the armed forces that decide whether a country lives in a democracy or in a dictatorship," he added.

Maduro reacted to the remarks by calling on the Brazilian military to take action against Bolsonaro, whom he described

as a "fascist pigeon" and a "Hitler imitator."

"I call on the military forces of Brazil to cut off the madness of Jair Bolsonaro and his threat of war against Venezuela," he added. In an apparent break from his boss, Brazilian Vice President Hamilton Mourao said he was not supporting a military intervention to solve the political crisis in Venezuela.

This is not the first time Maduro is comparing Bolsonaro to Hitler. He called the far-right president as "the Hitler of modern era" in January, when Brazil sided with the Trump administration in recognizing Venezuelan opposition figure Juan Guaido as the "interim president" of Venezuela while Maduro's elected government was in place.

Guaido plunged Venezuela into political turmoil by rejecting the outcome of the May 2018 election, which saw

Maduro win a second six-year term.

Bolsonaro, who is also known as "Trump of the tropics," met his American counterpart in Washington in March.

During the meeting, Trump reiterated that he kept "all options" on the table to topple the socialist government of Maduro, including military action.

Besides open threats of war, Washington has also imposed economic sanctions on the oil-rich country. Earlier this year, it confiscated Venezuela's state oil assets based in the U.S. to channel them to Guaido.

The Treasury said in a statement that Venezuela's oil sector continued "to provide a lifeline to" what the department called "the illegitimate regime" of Maduro.

(Source: agencies)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	195202.7
IFX	2473.12

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,516 rials
GBP	54,903 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$71.55/b
WTI	\$63.89/b
OPEC Basket	\$70.41/b
Gold	\$1,291.70/oz
Silver	\$15.04/oz
Platinum	\$894.70/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



Tehran to host intl. hoteling exhibition in late April

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The 2nd international specialized exhibition of hoteling, managing, training, equipment and consumable items (Hotel Expo 2019) is due to be held at Tehran's Shahr-e Aftab International Exhibition Center during April 24-26.

As reported by IRIB, exhibitors from Iran and various foreign countries including Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Malaysia, China and South Africa are due to present their latest achievements and services at the exhibition.

According to the organizers, the exhibition is aimed at introducing and identifying active executive, designing and investment companies in the field of hoteling, as well as introducing and identifying manufacturers and importers of hotel equipment in order to improve the country's hoteling industry.

The participants in the exhibition are designer companies, hotel consultants, hoteliers, leasing companies, hotel groups and hotel equipment manufacturers and importers.



5 cargo ships dock at Chabahar Port

Five cargo ships with different consignments arrived at Chabahar Port, southeastern Iran, on Friday, a senior official said.

Managing Director of Ports and Maritime Department of Sistan-Baluchestan Province Behrouz Aghaei said that the strategic port of Chabahar received five ships carrying consumer and non-consumer commodities on Friday.

The official did not provide details about the names and the origin of the vessels. He went on to add, however, that three of the ships were carrying essential goods and two others were loaded with petroleum products.

Aghaei noted that the comprehensive plans to promote the throughput of the strategic port, including the special tariff discounts, have helped attract many businesses to Chabahar Port.

Chabahar Port, lying along the Sea of Oman, is considered as a gateway to golden opportunities for trade, especially by India, Iran and Afghanistan with Central Asian countries.

(Source: Mehr News Agency)

ECB model suggests euro zone growth could slow further: sources

An internal European Central Bank model indicates the euro zone's economic growth could slow further in the second quarter, suggesting the projected recovery may be delayed even further, two sources familiar with the discussion said on Friday.

The ECB's nowcasting model, presented to policymakers at Wednesday's Governing Council meeting, indicated quarterly growth was just above 0.2 percent in the first three months of the year and may be somewhat weaker in the second quarter, the sources, who asked not to be named, told Reuters.

With euro zone growth slowing sharply, the ECB has already backtracked on plans to raise interest rates this year and has instead agreed to provide even more stimulus, hoping to prop up confidence while the bloc goes through its soft patch.

But the weakness may last longer than thought even just a few weeks ago, underpinning ECB President Mario Draghi's generally dovish tone, the sources said, as global finance leaders gathered in Washington for the International Monetary Fund and World Bank spring meetings.

"We've seen nothing in the data that would suggest any sort of positive surprise," a third source said. "Actually, the March projections already look somewhat optimistic."

But the sources added that the nowcasting model, which looks at a wide array of recent indicators, is prone to big swings and is not necessarily accurate so early into a quarter.

An ECB spokesman declined to comment.

The ECB's economic projections put quarterly growth at 0.2 percent in the first three months of the year and at 0.3 percent in the second quarter. The European Commission, meanwhile, sees growth in the first two quarters at 0.3 percent and 0.4 percent, respectively.

Speaking earlier on Friday, ECB chief economist Peter Praet said he expected growth to bottom out in the second quarter before rebounding in the second half of the year.

(Source: Euro News)

Iran, Iraq to build 5 joint industrial estates

1 → Heading a high-ranking economic and political delegation, Iraqi Prime Minister Abdul Mahdi visited Iran on April 6 and 7. The visit came after Iranian President Hassan Rouhani's landmark visit to Iraq in March.

During their stay in Tehran, the Iraqi officials met their Iranian counterparts to discuss different areas of cooperation between the two neighbors.

In that visit, an Iran-Iraq business forum

was also held at the place of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA).

The event was attended by several senior officials from both sides including Iran's First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri, Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi as well as Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian, Iraqi Minister of Electricity Louay Al Khateeb, Iraqi Trade Minister Mohammad Hashim Abdul Majid Jasim, Iranian

Exports from Bushehr rise 24% in a year

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Exports from Iran's southwest-ern port province of Bushehr rose 24 percent during the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20, 2019), according to the director general of the province's customs administration.

Mansour Baziar said that near 30 million tons of non-oil commodities and gas condensate worth \$18.721 billion were exported from the province in the past year, Mehr news agency reported on Saturday.

Of the mentioned amount, some 19,970 tons worth about \$11.291 billion were non-oil goods and the rest were gas condensate, the official added.

The main exported commodities over the period, in addition to gas condensates, include petrochemical products, offshore oil/

gas extraction jackets, fertilizers, cement and clinker, drilling equipment, fish and farmed shrimp, sulfur, and tomato.

China, the UAE, South Korea, India, Japan, Indonesia, Kuwait, Thailand and Taiwan were the main export destinations in the past year.

Bushehr is considered as a main trade hub of Iran. About 554,000 tons of goods worth \$1.677 billion were imported into the province last year.

According to the head of Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), the country's non-oil trade balance was \$1.7 billion positive in the past Iranian calendar year.

The value of non-oil exports stood at \$44.3 billion in the previous year while \$42.6 billion worth of commodities were shipped into the country.

IMF warns policymakers to ‘do no harm’ as world economy wobbles

The International Monetary Fund warned governments not to rock the boat with trade wars and other disruptions at a time when the global economy is already sailing through choppy waters.

"We see downside risk and that means one has to be very careful," IMF First Deputy Managing Director David Lipton told Bloomberg Television on Friday. "With trade tensions, not knowing where monetary policy is going to go, not knowing how Chinese growth will turn out, it's time to make sure policymakers do no harm."

He urged the U.S. and other nations to resolve their trade conflicts -- a key downside risk the IMF has repeatedly warned about since President Donald Trump began imposing tariffs last year.

"The last thing we want is another downturn," Lipton said, on the sidelines of the fund's spring meetings in Washington.

The threat of political missteps is looming over the global economy amid a backlash against free trade that has fueled the rise of populist governments around the world. The IMF this week downgraded its outlook for world growth in 2019 to the lowest since the financial crisis a decade ago, as conditions worsened in most major advanced economies.

Trade wars

The U.S. and China are locked in tense negotiations aimed at ending their nine-month trade war. Even if they do come to an agreement,



a trade deal between the world's two biggest economies could have unintended consequences if China commits to purchases of U.S. goods that crowds out imports from other countries in Asia, the head of the IMF's Asia-Pacific department Changyong Rhee said Friday.

There's also a risk of new fronts breaking out in the trade war. The European Union is considering hitting 10.2 billion euros (\$11.5 billion) of U.S. goods with retaliatory tariffs over subsidies to Boeing Co., according to a draft list seen by Bloomberg News.

The plan follows a U.S. threat to seek \$11 billion in damages through duties on European goods ranging from helicopters to cheeses to counter state aid to Airbus SE. Both moves stem

Chinese premier says Beijing is committed to free trade with Europe

Chinese premier Li Keqiang insisted that Beijing was committed to "rules-based free trade" with Europe as he wrapped up a four-day trip to Croatia.

Speaking at a summit in Dubrovnik of central and eastern European states and China, Li said the group would "stand together for multilateralism".

Li's visit to Croatia was his first to Europe since Brussels branded Beijing a "systemic rival" and complained that European companies were not given reciprocal access to Chinese markets.

On Friday, Li said China wanted to "treat all companies that operate in China equally and to increase imports from [European] countries".

Earlier, leaders at the summit signed a document agreeing to "provide a fair and just environment and a level playing field for foreign companies doing business in their own countries by upholding the principles of mutual respect, mutual benefit and fair competition".

Previously known as 16+1, the group gained new momentum this week when Greece signaled its intention to join the club.

Brussels views the group warily, with some diplomats worried that it could serve as a Trojan horse to divide the EU. Some of the group's members, such as Poland, have expressed frustration over projects that have not materialized or gone awry. However, smaller EU members, such as Croatia, see the forum as an opportunity to have greater influence on EU-China relations.

Western Balkan leaders have used the group to win loans and commitments from China for large investment projects that Brussels was unwilling to fund. Almost 70 percent of



Beijing's €15.4bn loans and investments in the region announced in this format since 2012 have gone to the five non-EU members: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and North Macedonia.

"There is a sense the EU has not done enough, for instance by denying [funds for large] infrastructure projects," said Dragan Pavlicevic, a lecturer in China studies at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University in Suzhou. "China is coming in to fill the gap."

China's approach to the region has forced the EU to try to catch up, said Anastas Vangelis at the Polish Academy of Sciences.

"If you see the European connectivity plans from five years ago and before, it was nothing but a black hole, as if the Balkans didn't exist," he said. "China's approach gave impetus to the issue of infrastructure investment in the region."

Brussels is keen to point out that the EU is the western Balkans' largest trading partner and provides the countries with grants, as opposed to loans like China. Since 2014, the EU has funded 31 projects worth more than €2.4bn, including €700m in EU grant support, according to a spokesperson for the EU External Action Service. He said total trade with the five non-EU members was worth €43bn in 2016. (Source: Financial Times)



Mahmoud Vaezi, the chief of staff of Iranian president

Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani, Head of Basra Chamber of Commerce Majed Mozan, and Gholam-Hossein Shafeie, the chairman of ICCIMA, along

with representatives of private companies.

During the business forum, the two sides called for further expansion of the trade ties between the two countries.

Iran, Russia can increase trade five-fold: official

Chairman of Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce announced on Saturday that the two countries can experience five-fold increase in their trade exchange after due infrastructures are provided for the goal.

Trade between Iran and Russia stood at \$2 billion per year that can be raised to \$10 billion, Hadi Tizhoush Taban told IRNA.

Referring to unfair sanctions imposed by the Western states on Iran, Taban said Iran should adopt a new approach to develop export to Russia.

Touching upon the agreement reached by the member states of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) on Iran's accession to the body, the official said the move can facilitate the presence of Iranian traders in the EAEU market.

The EAEU member countries include

Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia.

Iranian official went on to say that the rail link project, which became operational in the past months between Iran and the northern neighboring country of Azerbaijan has created a good opportunity for fostering trade exchange among Iran and the union members.

Membership in EAEU is an ample opportunity for Iran that should be seized especially in the field of agriculture and small industries, he added.

Despite the world criticism over Washington's anti-Iran measures, U.S. President Donald Trump reinstated unilateral sanctions on November 5, 2018, and imposed as he claimed "maximum pressure" on the Islamic Republic of Iran.

(Source: IRNA)

from parallel, 14-year-old, disputes at the World Trade Organization over market-distorting support for aircraft makers.

Asked about trans-Atlantic trade tensions, European Commissioner of economic affairs Pierre Moscovici said it's time for the EU and U.S. to "cool down" and steer clear of a trade war. It's "absurd" for the U.S. to consider the EU a threat like China, he said in a Bloomberg TV interview.

In Europe, weakness has been particularly pronounced in Germany and Italy, though the baseline is for a gradual recovery, IMF European Director Poul Thomsen said at briefing in Washington on Friday.

Brexit woes

Meanwhile, Britain's departure from the EU continues to drag. The UK was due to leave the EU on March 29, but has twice had to ask the bloc's other 27 leaders for an extension. The latest plan, agreed this week at a summit in Brussels, is for the UK to depart the bloc by Oct. 31. May's government is holding talks with the opposition Labor Party to see if they can agree a compromise deal that would be supported by Parliament.

"This is not an economic debate," Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond told Bloomberg TV. "Bluntly, if we were only driven by economics, the British people would have decided to stay in the European Union. The

EU tariffs to target 20 billion euros of U.S. imports: diplomats

The European Commission has drawn up a list of U.S. imports worth around 20 billion euros (\$22.6 billion) that it could hit with tariffs over a transatlantic aircraft subsidy dispute, EU diplomats said on Friday.

President Donald Trump on Tuesday threatened to impose tariffs on \$11 billion worth of European Union products over what Washington sees as unfair subsidies given to European planemaker Airbus.

The EU measures would relate to the bloc's World Trade Organization complaint over subsidies to rival Boeing.

WTO arbitrators have yet to set final amounts of potential countermeasures in each case.

The Commission said earlier this week that it had begun preparatory work on countermeasures in the Boeing case. However, it signaled it was open for talks with the U.S., provided these were without preconditions and aimed to achieve a fair outcome.

EU diplomats said the Commission was expected to publish a list of products on April 17 and begin a process of public consultation, after which the list could then be adjusted. The final amount decided by the WTO arbitrator could also be lower. The EU had also initially requested that the WTO authorize countermeasures of \$12 billion.

The arbitrator's decision may not come before March 2020. In the U.S. case a WTO decision could come in June or July this year.

"You could say the Commission is preparing early, provoked by the U.S.," one EU diplomat said.

Plane dispute, car tariff threat

The dispute between the U.S. and Europe over mutual claims of illegal aid to plane



giants to help them gain advantage in the world jet business has dragged on for years.

The case, which has been grinding its way through the WTO for almost 15 years, is approaching the final stages of arbitration after partial victories for both sides.

Trump's public attack on the EU came as his administration tries to hammer out a trade deal with China after imposing punitive tariffs on \$250 billion of Chinese goods.

The EU is expected next week to give final clearance to the start of formal trade talks with the U.S. that could lead to the removal of duties on industrial goods and ease transatlantic tensions.

However, those talks face a series of hurdles, not least the U.S. insistence that market access for its farm products feature in the negotiations, something the EU has ruled out.

The talks follow a detente reached last July when Trump agreed not to impose duties on imports of EU cars while the two sides sought to improve economic ties.

Germany, whose exports of cars and parts to the U.S. account for more than half the EU total, wants to press ahead with talks to ward off tariffs its carmakers, including Volkswagen, Mercedes maker Daimler and BMW. (Source: Reuters)

India ships in 5% more oil from Iran in late 2018 up to March 2019

ENERGY TEHRAN — Indian oil refiners' shipment of Iranian crude oil increased by nearly five percent through March, Reuters reported citing tanker data obtained from shipping and industry sources.

The data showed that despite the U.S. sanctions, the Asian country shipped in about 479,500 barrels per day (bpd) of Iranian oil in 2018/19, 21,500 bpd more than the figure for a year ago.

In May last year, the U.S. brought back sanctions on Iran after withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal which was struck in 2015. However, Washington granted a six-month waiver to India and seven other countries to buy oil from Iran.

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

In March India's oil imports from Iran rose to about 405,000 bpd, about 56 percent higher



than February, the data showed.

March volumes were however about six percent lower than the purchase in the same month a year earlier.

Last week, Indian Press reported that the country is engaged with the Trump administration on the issue of extending the

waiver on imports of oil from Iran as the waiver expires next month.

According to Reuters, Indian Refiners placed orders to buy eight million barrels in April but India would receive higher volumes as some delayed cargoes of March arrive at Indian ports this month.

Earlier this week, S&P Global Platts reported that Oil exports from Iran have increased significantly in March to once again reach to near pre-sanctions level.

According to Platts, Iranian crude and condensate exports increased by 12 percent to 1.7 million barrels per day (bpd) in the mentioned month.

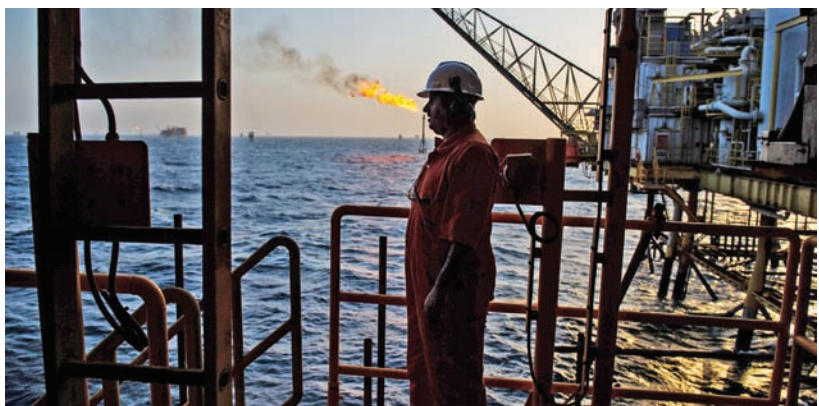
Since the first round of waivers expires on May 4, Iranian oil buyers including India, Japan, and South Korea are trying to convince the U.S. government to get another round of exemption from U.S. sanctions to be able to keep buying crude from Iran.

Earlier on Tuesday, South Korean news agency Yonhap reported that the Asian country is negotiating with the United States for extending the sanctions waiver on Iranian oil imports.

Platts also quoted a Japanese official on Wednesday that Japan is seeking to get exempted from the sanctions for the second time.

According to Platts, China's demand for Iranian crude has also rebounded in recent months. Flows to China averaged 627,710 bpd last month from levels of 571,464 bpd in February.

Oil bullishness is at 2019 high as rally shows signs of sticking



Oil optimists pushed bullish wagers to a six-month high as the rally in prices continued.

Money managers raised optimistic wagers on Brent crude for a fifth straight week while closing out pessimistic bets by the most since January as turmoil in major oil-producing nations heightened supply concerns. Short-selling bets on the global benchmark plunged by 18 percent, according to data released Friday.

Hedge fund positioning on U.S. crude told a similar tale, with contracts calling for a decline in West Texas Intermediate falling off by 17 percent.

"There's not many people who are willing to short this market," said Tyler Richey, co-editor at Sevens Report in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. "We could be near

a market top, but it's just too early to tell. Right now, the path of least resistance is higher for oil."

Brent advanced 1.7 percent this week, bringing its yearly gain to 33 percent, as fighting in Libya and a coup in Sudan added to uncertainty in a market already tightening because of OPEC-led supply cuts. WTI rose for the sixth straight week, the longest run in two years.

The net-long Brent position -- the difference between bets on higher prices and wagers on a slide -- climbed 2.7 percent to 358,141 futures and options contracts for the week ended April 9, according to London-based ICE Futures Europe. Long positions rose 0.3 percent, reaching their highest point since late October.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Fully renewables-based global energy system possible by 2050: study



A global energy system fully based on renewable energy by 2050 is feasible and would be cheaper than the current global energy supply, according to a study by Energy Watch Group and the Finnish LUT University.

"The report confirms that a transition to 100 percent renewables is possible across all sectors, and is no longer more expensive than the current energy system," said Hans-Josef Fell, former Member of the German Parliament and President of the Energy Watch Group, a global network of scientists and parliamentarians.

The study models a transition to 100 percent renewables by 2050 in a world where the population grows to 9.7 billion and final energy demand increases 1.8 percent annually.

Electrification across all sectors means that electricity will constitute more than 90 percent of primary energy demand in 2050. Solar and wind power will lead the transition and together cover almost 90 percent of primary energy supply, says the study.

The levelized cost of energy for a fully sustainable global energy system will be slightly cheaper than for the current system, easing from approximately 54 euros per megawatt hour (€/MWh) in 2015 to 53 €/MWh by 2050. "When taking into account negative externalities of the current system, which have been cited in numerous other contemporary studies, the 100 percent renewable global energy system is a substantially cheaper option," says the study.

(Source: cleanenergywire.org)

Chevron to buy Anadarko for \$33 billion in shale, LNG push

Chevron Corp doubled down on its bet on surging U.S. oil and gas output on Friday, saying it would buy shale producer Anadarko Petroleum Corp for \$33 billion in cash and stock that will make it the second-largest crude producer in the world. The combined company will produce an estimated 3.9 million barrels of oil equivalent per day (boepd), trailing only Exxon Mobil Corp among publicly traded companies, up from fourth. It expands Chevron's reach in two areas where U.S. energy output is breaking records: shale from the Permian Basin of west Texas and New Mexico, and liquefied natural gas (LNG). These have helped make the United States one of the world's largest energy exporters.

"Chevron now joins the ranks of the 'ultra majors' -- and the big three becomes the big four," said Roy Martin, senior analyst at consultants Wood Mackenzie. "The acquisition makes the majors' peer group much more



polarized. Exxon Mobil, Chevron, Shell and BP are now in a league of their own."

These companies are turning to shale and its revolutionary techniques of fracking, blasting sand and water into formations to extract oil. This is cheaper and produces oil more quickly than costlier offshore and LNG projects that take years to generate cash.

The shale oil-and-gas boom reversed a long decline in U.S. crude production and propelled the country to a record 12 million barrels a day (bpd), more than Russia and Saudi Arabia. The United States is also now the third-largest producer of LNG, super-cooled natural gas that enjoys record demand as a cheaper, cleaner alternative than coal for power generation.

The combined companies are expected to produce more than 1.6 million barrels of oil equivalent per day (boepd) in the United States this year and 3.9 million boepd globally, according to Wood Mackenzie.

(Source: CNBC)

U.S. slaps sanctions on four shipping firms, nine ships, carrying oil from Venezuela

The United States on Friday announced more sanctions on shipping companies transporting oil from Venezuela, blacklisting four shipping companies and nine vessels, some of which the U.S. Treasury Department said carried oil to Cuba.

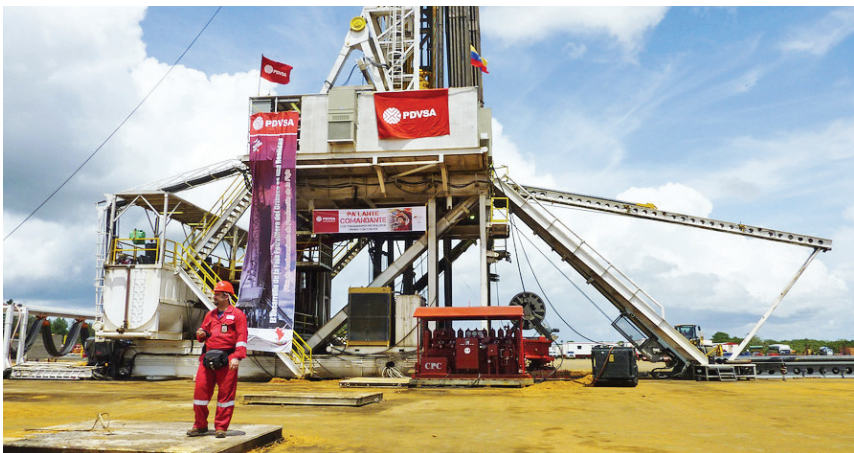
The U.S. Treasury identified the firms as Liberia-based Jennifer Navigation Ltd, Lima Shipping Corp and Large Range Ltd, and Italy-based PB Tankers S.P.A.

It blacklisted one tanker belonging to each of the Liberian firms and six owned by the Italian firm.

A Treasury statement said Venezuela's oil sector continued "to provide a lifeline to the illegitimate regime" of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

"We continue to target companies that transport Venezuelan oil to Cuba, as they are profiting while the Maduro regime pillages natural resources," Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said in the statement.

The sanctions prohibit dealings with the firms by U.S. citizens and block the companies' financial interests in the United



States.

A week ago, the U.S. Treasury imposed sanctions on 34 vessels owned or operated by Venezuelan state-run oil company Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A., or PDVSA, and also on two companies and a vessel that delivered oil to Cuba in February and March.

PDVSA nevertheless shipped 1 million barrels of oil to Cuba after the last round of sanctions, according to a PDVSA document and tanker tracking data.

Last week's sanctions came on top of a previous round in January targeting PDVSA itself.

The United States and most Western nations have recognized opposition leader Juan Guaido as the rightful president of Venezuela.

Guaido invoked the Venezuelan constitution to assume an interim presidency in January, arguing that Maduro's 2018 reelection was illegitimate.

Maduro argues Guaido is a puppet of the United States attempting to oust him in a coup. Venezuela's Foreign minister Jorge Arreaza this week said the OPEC-member nation plans to "fulfill its commitments" to Cuba.

Venezuela has long sent subsidized crude to Cuba. The United States describes the arrangement as an "oil-for-repression" scheme in which Havana helps socialist Maduro weather an economic crisis and the power struggle with the opposition in exchange for fuel.

Cuba has said it will never abandon its ally even as U.S. President Donald Trump's administration threatened more sanctions.

(Source: Reuters)

Anxiety in Libya's oil sector heightens amid risks of a prolonged conflict

Libya's oil infrastructure operators remain on high alert as the self-styled Libyan National Army's effort to capture the west of the country escalates the risk of a prolonged conflict, putting the country on the brink of civil war.

The risk of oil supply outages are growing markedly, not only in the west of Libya, where the LNA is trying to gain ground, but also in the key eastern ports, which it already controls.

There are growing concerns that former Petroleum Facilities Guards leader Ibrahim Jadhra and Benghazi Defense Brigade militia could attack the oil ports in the Eastern Crescent as General Khalifa Haftar's LNA moves west, creating a security vacuum in east, industry sources and analysts said.

"We could see a planned attack on the Oil Crescent by Jadhra and BDB militants," an industry source said. "Warring factions in the west would welcome any opportunity to ease pressure from the southern Tripoli front."

Jadhra was previously responsible for shutting the eastern oil terminals for long periods until he was ejected in late 2016. He briefly retook them in summer 2018.

The key oil ports of Libya are Zawiyah, Mellitah, Bouri and Farwah in the west, along with Marsa el-Hariga, Brega, Zueitina, Ras Lanuf and Es Sider in the east.

S&P Global Platts Analytics said almost 350,000 bpd of oil supply in the west is under immediate threat, adding that "risks of a prolonged fight are high."

Libya is descending into another round of armed conflict due to an escalation in violence between two rival armed political factions -- the LNA and groups linked to the UN-backed Government of National Accord.

"Fighting around Tripoli has continued but no breakthrough military advance into Tripoli has been made," Olivier Jakob, Managing Director at oil consultancy Petromatrix, said in an analyst note. "We go into this weekend with somewhat of a stalemate in Libya as the world powers that support the different sides and factions are negotiating between themselves. Haftar has not been able to make enough of a quick advance and his supply lines are likely to be thin."

Libyan crude oil production and exports remain unaffected despite the fighting, sources close to the matter said. International oil companies such as Eni have already begun evacuating staff from Tripoli in the past week.

These developments which are occurring close to some oil and gas infrastructure have raised the risk of oil supply outages.

The town of Zawiyah, which is home to a 300,000 bpd oil export terminal and a 120,000 bpd refinery, along with Sabratha, where the Mellitah gas terminal for the Greenstream pipeline to Italy is located, are key flashpoints.

Almost all of Libya's key oil terminals and infrastructure, except for those in the west, are already controlled by the LNA.

The Libyan oil industry has been at the mercy of groups vying for control of valuable assets, with armed attacks on key pipelines and production facilities since the 2011 civil war.

Crude output has recovered to over 1.06 million bpd in March, according to an S&P Global Platts survey, due to the startup of the Sharara field a month ago. That came after output dropped to a five-month low of 850,000 bpd in January.

(Source: Platts)

Global energy storage market to hit 158 GWh in 2024

The global energy storage market is forecast to reach 158 GWh in 2024, marking a thirteenfold expansion from 2018, with the U.S. and China taking leading positions in terms of deployments, a new report says.

Projections indicate that deployments over the next six years will grow from 12 GWh in 2018, which saw the addition of 6 GWh of capacity.

According to the report "Global Energy Storage Outlook 2019: 2018 Year in Review and Outlook to 2024" by Wood Mackenzie Power & Renewables, the massive expansion will be the result of \$71 billion (EUR 62.7m) worth of investment into energy storage systems, excluding pumped hydro, in the period under review, with \$14 billion of the total expected to come in 2024 alone. The U.S. and China will lead the global industry, being responsible for around 54 percent of all deployments by 2024. Next will come Japan, Australia and South Korea, followed by Germany, Canada, India and the UK.

The key storage markets between 2019 and 2024 are forecast to expand at a compound annual growth rate of 38 percent and witness a broader set of money-making opportunities. The industry, meanwhile, will see a shift from short to long-duration systems that can begin to displace diesel, oil and natural-gas peaker plants.

In geographical terms, the U.S. will remain the largest energy storage market globally by 2024. After switching on a record 777 MWh of capacity last year, the country will double deployments in 2019 and triple them in 2020, according to the U.S. Energy Storage Monitor by Wood Mackenzie and the Energy Storage Association (ESA). The states of California, New York and Massachusetts will be the major drivers of growth, while Hawaii, Texas, Minnesota and Colorado, where utilities bet on storage both in individual projects and as part of large-scale solar installations, will contribute as well. Additionally, new market opportunities are seen to be available after the regional wholesale market operators were ordered to open up energy, capacity and ancillary services markets to energy storage.

China, the second industry leader, expanded its energy storage market by 40 percent year-on-year in 2018 by adding almost 500 MWh. Its future growth will be based on a 10-year plan to develop the domestic grid-scale energy storage industry.

South Korea, meanwhile, is pushing expansion through a new policy allowing storage linked to solar and wind projects to get renewable energy certificates. It has already surpassed its goal of having 800 MWh of energy storage by 2020 with 1,100 MWh of deployments in 2018.

The Australian market has been driven by solar-plus-storage projects in the residential sector, adding 300 MWh in 2018 that made it the world's first in terms of residential storage deployments. The second and third spots in the residential storage segment was taken by Japan and Germany, respectively.

(Source: renewablesnow.com)

How far can Haftar get with his Tripoli offensive?

By Youssef Cherif

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

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

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

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

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

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

■ Why did Haftar attack now?

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

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

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

With a UN-led national conference scheduled for mid-April, Haftar hastened to maximise his territorial gains and hence his leverage over his opponents at the GNA. At the same time, the on-going civil unrest in Algeria gave him a rare window of opportunity to launch a military operation.

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

For Algiers, the GNA and the Islamist forces in Libya have to be included in any conflict settlement to ensure the stability of the country. It has perceived Haftar's zero-sum games as dangerous and potentially destabilising. Moreover, in its status of North Africa's hegemon, Algiers sees his Arab allies - Egypt, the UAE and Saudi Arabia - as geopolitical foes.

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

The purge that Algeria's security and military apparatus went through in mid-2018 and the uprising which erupted in February 2019 against President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's rule gave Haftar a unique opportunity to launch his expansionist military campaign, without much backlash from Algiers.

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

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

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

Haftar is also hoping to capitalize on the increasing discontent among the civilian population in western Libya.

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

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

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

■ What happens next?

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

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

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

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

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

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

(Source: aljazeera.com)

NATO's German problem: Who needs soldiers or weapons?

Europeans should not rely on Americans to spend, fight, and die for them.

By Doug Bandow

The foreign ministers of America's European allies visited Washington to celebrate the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)'s seventieth anniversary. Members engaged in an orgy of self-congratulation over an alliance which remains better called "North America and The Others." One of the meeting highlights was preparing to bring in the military behemoth of (North) Macedonia, following the inclusion of equally mighty Montenegro two years ago.

One discordant subject was Germany's military outlays, or lack thereof. Berlin had promised to hike expenditures to two percent of GDP by 2024 — subsequently downgraded to 1.5 percent — but new budget figures indicated that the real amount would be lower still. Germany's government evidently lacks the political will to put Europe's defense first.

Without a hint of shame, the German Foreign Office responded to criticism by tweeting: "Germany wholeheartedly supports NATO. We will stand by our commitments. True solidarity is measured in terms of commitment, not Euros." Unfortunately, a barrage of bullets and bombs would be more effective than mere statements of commitments against an aggressor.

Germany has been a "problem" for a century and a half. Originally Berlin was overly-militarized and insufficiently restrained. These failings were on dramatic display in World War II. No wonder General Hastings Ismay, the former Churchill aide tapped to serve as NATO's first secretary general, allowed that one purpose of the alliance was to "keep the Germans down."

Moreover, decades later when the Berlin Wall came crashing down, the venerable Margaret Thatcher was not alone in opposing German reunification. Some Europeans saw the specter of the Fourth Reich, and one wit explained that he loved Germany so much he wanted two of them.

However, the Federal Republic's militaristic heritage has not stirred in the years since; even what passes for Germany's new nationalistic, xenophobic right offers no politician who hints at being Adolf Hitler reincarnated. Certainly, neither avuncular Helmut Kohl, the first chancellor of a united Germany, nor Angela Merkel, who has dominated German politics for more than a decade, acted the part of dictator-wannabe.

■ Establishing armed forces

Far from clamoring to create a military capable of turning the country into a Weltmacht, the German people seemed to forget the reason for establishing armed forces.

According to a Pew Research Center poll, four of ten Germans don't want to defend NATO allies from attack. For years among the Bundeswehr's strongest advocates were social service agencies, which benefited from draftees choosing alternative service. Furthermore, in January the Bundeswehr dispatched mountain troops to Bavaria to ... shovel snow from the roofs of homes after a big winter storm.

Berlin's lack of interest in all things military wouldn't much matter if the United States



In January, Bundestag Military Commissioner Hans-Peter Bartels issued a new report which found few of the military's shortcomings to have been fixed, despite increased expenditures. He complained: "There is neither enough personnel nor materiel, and often one confronts shortage upon shortage."

wasn't expected to carry the resulting burden. However, Europeans are counting on America to contribute dollars, lots of them, not just professions of "commitment." Of course, Germany is not the only free, or more accurately cheap, rider. Among major states, the United Kingdom does best, though it engages in a bit of statistical legerdemain to hit two percent of GDP. France comes close. Other nations with sizeable economies include Italy, which barely breaks one percent, and Spain, which doesn't even meet that minimal level.

Yet Germany's preference to contribute love and kisses rather than manpower and material to Europe's defense is particularly significant. The Federal Republic has the largest population and economy in Europe. It benefited the most from the defense efforts of others during the Cold War and emerged as a continental leader. For Beijing to continue to rely on other states shows a distinct lack of the solidarity in which German officials claim to believe.

Now Berlin appears to be walking back from even its unduly modest military commitments. The Merkel government affirmed NATO's objective of spending two percent of GDP on the armed forces by 2024 but recently said that wouldn't happen until 2030. However, Germany insisted, it was still fulfilling its pledge in spirit since it would be "moving toward" the goal. Outlays would be 1.5 percent by 2024, Germany promised.

Alas, that was then. German outlays ran a dismal 1.27 percent last year and are supposed to hit 1.37 percent in 2020. But Berlin recently projected that number falling to 1.25 percent in 2023. Foreign Minister Heiko Maas insisted that Germany still would meet its commitments, but the prospect of hitting 1.5 percent, let alone 2.0 percent, in a few years, appears

to be infinitesimal.

In Berlin's defense, some German analysts pointed to the steady, though small, increase in military outlays since 2014. Through last year, real spending had increased by almost 12 percent. But that mainly reflected robust economic growth. As a percentage of GDP outlays barely increased, from 1.18 percent to 1.24 percent. Recent expenditure hikes look even less impressive when considering per capita spending. Last year Washington spent \$1898 per person on the military. Germany contributed \$589. That was up only \$56 since 2014.

Overall outlays are important. However, noted Defense & Security Monitor, the "greater concern for core security partners such as France and Britain remains the operational shortcomings of the Bundeswehr." The Atlantic Council's Jorge Benitez said simply: The "readiness of the German military is abysmal."

■ Military's shortcomings

In January, Bundestag Military Commissioner Hans-Peter Bartels issued a new report which found few of the military's shortcomings to have been fixed, despite increased expenditures. He complained: "There is neither enough personnel nor materiel, and often one confronts shortage upon shortage." He urged the government, of which his Social Democratic Party is a member, to speed procurement, insisting that "Soldiers need this equipment now to do their jobs."

The Defense & Security Monitor pointed to a lack of available combat and transport aircraft, helicopters, operational submarines, and naval frigates. Fewer than 30 percent of German Eurofighters were ready for action; fewer than 20 percent of combat helicopters were airworthy. None of Germany's subs could

be deployed. Added DSM, "The Army's main battle tank, the Leopard 2, also suffers from a lack of spare parts and sufficient work-up to bring the fleet into operational readiness."

The army borrowed equipment for deployments. There are shortages of everything from body armor to winter clothing. Recruitment lags and many roles go unfilled. NATO officials recently discovered that German soldiers stationed in Lithuania used cell phones to communicate since secure radios were not available. All told, delicately concluded DSM, "These conditions render German contributions to security missions under an EU- or NATO-led mandate less than optimal, as its troop deployments lack proper logistical support and effective firepower capability."

In Afghanistan, German troops had to rely on civilian helicopters, while Bundeswehr helicopter pilots surrendered their flying licenses since they lacked adequate training time. German forces there also were dependent on U.S. transport and MedEvac helicopters and Ukrainian cargo planes. Internal assessments in Afghanistan concluded "German soldiers mostly don't know how to use their weapons" and they "have no or little experience driving armored vehicles," including not knowing how to avoid roadside bombs. Berlin attempted to protect its troops by imposing numerous "caveats" on their deployment in combat.

Allies were familiar with Germany's difficulties. In 2017, the Rand Corporation figured that it would take Berlin a month to mobilize a heavy armored brigade for dispatch to the Baltics — and would require denuding other units of equipment. Years before that, Britain's Daily Mail reported with malicious delight: "They drink too much and they're too fat to fight, that's the damning conclusion of German parliamentary reports into the country's 3,500 troops stationed in Afghanistan." At the time, Berlin acknowledged that a greater percentage of soldiers than of the overall population was overweight.

In January DeutscheWelle affirmed that "The German Bundeswehr is still underequipped, understaffed and overly bureaucratic." This is why German officials admit that much more needs to be done. However, with few evident threats facing the Federal Republic to justify such expenditures, military spending is likely to become an increasingly partisan issue. The grand coalition between Social Democrats and Christian Democrats is fraying, and the former, desperate to distinguish themselves, appear likely to make defense outlays an issue in the next election.

Even if Merkel's CDU continues to dominate Germany's ruling coalition, it is not likely to find public support for nearly doubling military outlays. But if Berlin fails to fulfill its commitment, transatlantic relations will only get more acrimonious. During the seventieth anniversary festivities, Vice President Mike Pence insisted: "Germany must do more." After all, "It is simply unacceptable for Europe's largest economy to continue to ignore the threat of Russian aggression and neglect its own self-defense and our common defense."

(Source: nationalinterest.com)

Is America hopelessly polarized, or just allergic to politics?

By Samara Klar, Yanna Krupnikov and John Barry

It seems that the only thing Americans can agree on is that we are living in an era of extreme political polarization. As we head into the 2020 presidential campaign, a striking 91 percent of people said in a recent PRRI survey that the country is divided over politics. This is higher than the percentage of people who reported that America is divided over issues of race and ethnicity (83 percent) or religion (77 percent).

Democrats and Republicans have long disagreed over policies, but in recent years the disagreement has turned personal. In that PRRI poll, more people were displeased by the thought that their child would marry someone of a different political party than of a different religion.

Worrying about decades of Thanksgiving dinners with relatives who support the other party might sound like clear evidence that America is hopelessly, alarmingly divided.

But there's also a growing body of evidence that we're overstating the divide. The real issue, it turns out, might not be with polarization. It might just be that most people really don't like politics. Americans are open to people with all sorts of political and partisan opinions, our research shows — as long as they keep those opinions to themselves.

We conducted a series of experiments and surveys with more than 6,000 people during the 2016 and 2018 national elections. Like other recent polls and surveys, ours asked people whether they would be happy or unhappy if they had a child who married someone from the opposing party, Republican or Democratic.

■ Latest Trump dirt

But we added a new piece of information to this question, which said how often that new in-law would talk about politics. When people learned that their future in-law would rarely discuss politics, fewer than 30 percent said that they would be unhappy with an in-law from the opposing party. On the other hand, when we specified that the hypothetical in-law would never shut up about politics — he or she would interrupt social gatherings and holidays with the latest Trump dirt from MSNBC or Hannity trade from Fox — more than 40 percent of people would be unhappy with the marriage.

This is especially true for those who do not strongly identify with a party, which includes nearly two-thirds of



Americans. In this group, fewer than 20 percent said they would be unhappy with an in-law from the opposing party who rarely discussed politics. When, instead, their child's chosen partner was a talkative member of the opposing party, this number doubled to 40 percent.

Polarization, however, is not just about disliking the other side. True polarization is when you dislike the other party and really like your own party. Most people do not care enough about politics to say they are "happy" simply because their child is marrying someone from their political party.

So when people in our studies were asked to consider a future in-law who rarely discussed politics, only 15 percent could be considered truly polarized. While this number grew to 25 percent among people who have strong connections to their party, it shrank to 10 percent of weak partisans.

Polarization is also low among weak partisans when they are told that the in-law will frequently talk about politics. Weak partisans aren't happy with an in-law from the opposing party discussing politics, but many are just as unhappy with an in-law from their own party who insists on political conversation.

Other studies suggest, much like ours that somewhere between 15 percent and 20 percent of Americans are truly polarized.

In the 2018 American Family Survey, for example, only 21 percent of participants reported that it was important for a married couple to be of the same party. Meanwhile,

81 percent said agreement in feelings about children was pivotal to a marriage.

Looking beyond marriage, a survey conducted by The New York Times found that only 16 percent of people placed their political party membership among the top three terms they used to describe themselves. When the political scientists James Druckman and Matthew Levendusky asked Americans to rank six identities in the order of personal importance, partisanship tied for last (alongside class).

If only a minority of people are polarized, why do 87 percent of Americans think, according to an Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research survey, political polarization is "threatening" to the American way of life? It may be about how we talk about politics.

Those who are most polarized also have the strongest connection to their party. A survey we conducted during the 2018 election suggests that these people are also most likely to be vocal about their political opinions.

■ The political outcomes

For example, the polarized are twice as likely to say they post on social media about politics. These people have deep partisan connections — and some can become what the political scientist Eitan Hersh terms "political hobbyists": emotionally invested in political outcomes, loud and persistent. It is not difficult to imagine how these voices can ruin an otherwise enjoyable Thanksgiving celebration.

The polarized also get the most media attention. Compared with the year 2000, today one can expect to see 20 percent more stories about polarization in the news.

This amplification of the polarized can leave people weary of the opposing party. If the polarized are who comes to mind when Americans imagine a partisan, it is no wonder these Americans aren't excited about that new in-law who supports the other party.

But this hesitation is not the same as animosity and polarization. Some people might genuinely hate the other party. These people may get the most attention, but they are also outnumbered by the majority who just want to discuss other things than politics.

As technology advances, will it continue to blur the lines between public and private? Explore what's at stake and what you can do about it.

(Source: NYT)

Afghan women have been victims of war and should be part of peace process: expert

1 → For many years, it was the people of Afghanistan calling for peace and stability in their war-ravaged country but now regional countries have also joined the chorus.

Secondly, all actors involved in the negotiations believe that war in Afghanistan will not end with continued violence but with negotiations and political settlement. Afghan government has a strategic plan for peace and Afghanistan's High Peace Council has initiated practical steps to bring peace through consensus at national and international level, which augurs well for the country.

■ In Afghan peace process, which regional and international actors have important role to play?

A: Afghanistan's war has foreign roots and we need cooperation of international and regional players to make this peace process a success. Afghan government and the Taliban are the two principal parties and other actors are trying to play the role of peacemaker.

Taliban and other terrorist groups have traditionally used Pakistani territory to create chaos in Afghanistan and the region. Pakistan has strong influence over the Taliban leadership which was evident recently during the military showdown between regional arch rivals India and Pakistan. Pakistan warned that if India does not deescalate, Afghan peace talks would be affected.

It is clear we can't have peace in Afghanistan without Pakistan's cooperation. But, as a representative of Afghan people, especially Afghan women, I believe the talks should be owned and led by the Afghan government without any outside pressures.

■ Taliban has so far refused to directly engage in negotiations with the elected government in Kabul led by President Ashraf Ghani, while it has held many rounds of talks with U.S. What is the possible reason?

A: The reason could be that our 'neighbor' deliberately does not want the Afghanistan government to be in the axis of peace talks. In the past, it benefited from the imposed war in Afghanistan and now it seeks to dictate the terms of peace in our war-torn country. I believe Afghanistan government as a representative of its people must be part of the peace process because ultimately it is about the aspirations of the people of Afghanistan.

■ So far the representatives of Afghan Taliban have held negotiations with the U.S without the inclusion of Afghan government.

If they reach any decision, it will be practical?

A: The two sides have held several rounds of talks but the U.S. State Department and U.S. special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad has emphasized that only people of Afghanistan can make the final decision, which is also the central demand of the Afghan government. The people of Afghanistan are the main stakeholders and without their inclusion the entire process would be futile.

There has been antagonism between the U.S and Taliban which started on September 11 and led to the overthrow of the Taliban. In the ongoing negotiations, the discussions mainly focus on two issues: withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan and Afghan territory not to be used to attack other countries. These discussions are meant to prepare ground for intra-Afghan talks. The final decision will be taken by the people of Afghanistan and we are totally optimistic about that.

■ While peace talks are underway between the U.S and Taliban, attacks are always going on against Afghan security forces, leading to casualties. How can people trust these peace talks?

A: Firstly, Taliban is not the only entity fighting against the government, there are some other groups also that are trying to exploit the situation. Taliban has upped the ante to negotiate from the position of strength. They want to send the message across that they do not negotiate because they became weak.

High Peace Council has many times emphasized that Taliban will not surrender to government and the government will not surrender to Taliban, but negotiations will evolve a political agreement to end the 17-year war which will be in the best interest of all parties involved.

■ What has been the role of Iran in Afghanistan's peace talks?

A: The representatives of Taliban recently came to Iran and held talks with the Iranian authorities. We believe Iran government also has high influence over the Taliban leadership and can play an effective role in peace talks by encouraging the group to join the peace process with the Afghan government.

Peace in the region is not possible without peace in Afghanistan and the foreign ministry of Iran has also clearly emphasized on the importance of involving the Afghan government and people in peace talks.

■ What is the role of Afghan women in



peace talks and do they have a substantial presence in it?

A: Afghan women are not anymore like they were 18 years ago. "War is enough, we want peace" – this was the slogan raised by representatives of women numbering 15,000 from 34 provinces to develop a national consensus on peace process.

Among the representatives, there were many who had lost their close relatives on both sides and they not only pledged their commitment to the peace process but also persuaded their families.

In this 'Afghan Women National Consensus for Peace', thousands of women who had assembled across many provinces discussed the pros and cons of the process and demanded active role and presence of women in the peace process between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

Afghan women have grown weary of war and want peace with full dignity and rights as guaranteed by Islam and the country's Constitution.

■ Why is it important for the women to be part of the peace process?

A: There are two main important reasons for that. One, Afghan women have sacrificed massively over the past 18 years of war. They have been killed, assaulted, abused, forced to migrate, and have lost their loved ones.

They have also experienced various forms of violence and discrimination in political and social spheres, denied access to universities

or good healthcare.

So, women are legitimately concerned about their future and want equal representation in peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

■ What are the roadblocks in Afghan women's participation in peace talks?

A: Afghan women face some critical barriers. Firstly, in peace talks, political figures of all shades are attending, but the presence of women is poor.

Secondly, women's presence in peace talks is poor both in terms of quantity and quality. We want real presence, not symbolic one.

Thirdly, Taliban women who have equally suffered the consequences of war should also be part of the peace process.

They say, 'men started war and men should bring peace'. In this case, both men and women have offered sacrifices, and both should be included in the peace process. Women can play a key role in bringing sustainable peace and help in guarding the gains of peace.

■ But how is it possible for Taliban women to attend the peace talks?

A: The presence of Taliban women, which means female relatives of Afghan Taliban leaders, is very necessary, because women from both sides should engage in talks like men from both sides are doing.

In recently-held Moscow conference, Taliban representatives declared that they will consider women rights from Islamic point of view. History bears testimony that the Prophet of Islam (pbuh) consulted women on important political issues and respected their views. If Taliban want real and sustainable peace, they should allow their women to attend peace talks.

■ What are the main things that figure on the agenda of Afghan women?

A: The rights guaranteed to women by Islam and Afghanistan's constitution figure high on our list of demands. Article 22 of the constitution of Afghanistan says: 'Any kind of discrimination and distinction between citizens of Afghanistan shall be forbidden. The citizens of Afghanistan, men and women, have equal rights and duties before the law'. The presence of women in political affairs, military affairs, universities and schools, health and business institutions should be preserved.

There is no looking back now and peace without the presence of women won't be practical.

International Relations is becoming aware of its own parochialism: Abrahamsen

1 → A: Thankfully a lot has changed in IR and the social sciences in the last ten years or so. One of the most encouraging developments in IR is an increasing awareness of the discipline's parochialism, and in this sense IR is becoming more self-reflexive and aware of its shortcomings as a Western-centric, or primarily American and European discipline. Postcolonial approaches of various kinds are, for example, much more common and prominent within IR today than they were in 2007, and there is also much more attention to non-Western parts of the world and to non-Western agency in international affairs. I think in general, there is also a much stronger awareness among scholars and editors of the need to always double-check our references in terms of inclusiveness of diverse perspectives and voices. As an example, the International Studies Association is hosting a conference in Accra (Ghana) in 2019, focusing on the agency of the global South in international studies. It is hard to say what the actual effects of such initiatives will be, but at the very least it is an indication of awareness of the need for change.

That said, there is still a long, long way to go, and in many ways the statement unfortunately still holds true. I wrote about this in a recent article in African Affairs, and suggested that in most respects, four decades on Stanley Hoffman's 1977 description of IR as 'an American social science' remains a reasonably fair depiction. IR is rarely told from the 'periphery' and IR theorizing remains steeped in Western theories and perspectives. It is, in fact, far from easy to change this, and as I argue in the African Affairs article, simply bringing African or other parts of the non-Western world into IR by looking at won't in and of itself fix the problem. It's not a question of 'add and stir', as bringing non-Western part of the world into IR also involves epistemological and methodological challenges relating to our object of study and political challenges relating to contemporary geopolitics. Overall, however, I think we are in a better place than we were a decade ago.

One more final observation; I have taken your question to refer to scholars of the Global South. If we take it to mean the voices of the majority of suppressed and subaltern people in the world – the poor and excluded – then these voices are still barely audible.

■ Would you please explain the concept of 'provincialize Europe'? This concept is not understood well in Iran.

A: First, let me say that this is not my concept. It comes originally from Dipesh Chakrabarti's book Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference, first published in 2000. So, you should really ask him – but let me explain how I understand it: Chakrabarti shows how in the social sciences Europe occupies a kind of mythical place, whether implicitly or explicitly, that always positions it as the origin of political modernity and social progress. In short, we have no vocabulary for political modernity outside the European tradition – concepts such as state, citizens, civil society, to mention but a few, are intrinsic to the social sciences and to how we analyze history and politics. For Chakrabarti, European thought stands in a tensions-filled relationship to postcolonial societies like his own India; it is both 'indispensable and inadequate' in exploring postcolonial modernity. Because

it is indispensable, it cannot be rejected or abandoned; and because it is inadequate it must be renewed from within the postcolonial world, to serve its purposes. In a way, we could say that it is about recognizing the specificity, as opposed to the universality, of European modernity, or destabilizing its centrality and thereby creating a space for different ways of being in the world – while at the same time holding on to the necessity of a social science that speaks in terms of categories and totalities. As Chakrabarti argues, this is no easy task, hence his emphasis on the simultaneous indispensability and inadequacy of European thought for capturing postcolonial modernities.

■ The murder of Jamal Khashoggi was represented as a catastrophe by western media so public opinions all over the world especially in western countries paid remarkable attention to it. But no one sympathizes with Yemeni people who have been killed innocently since Saudi Arabia attacked their homeland and those children who are starving to death! Why the public conscience in the West awakens so selectively? Is it indicative to the fact that the West still tends to marginalize the poor people of the global south and disregard them?

A: That's a tough one to answer, and I'm not the best person to do so. I think there are so many different factors that go into explaining the world's disregard for the terrible suffering of the Yemeni people, and also the outrage caused by the killing of Khashoggi. At a fairly simplistic level, it is easier for people and the media to associate with one, named individual than with the suffering of thousand nameless people in far-away places. In the Khashoggi murder, it is easy to recognize right from wrong, good from evil. In a complex war, this is much more difficult. There is also undoubtedly some compassion fatigue in the case of Yemen, and somehow the war and then ensuing humanitarian crisis have never really captured the public consciousness in the war that say the Syrian crisis did, or the Ethiopian famine in the 1980s. We can only hope that the global attention to the killing of Khashoggi will spur diplomatic action in favour of ending the conflict in Yemen. At the time of speaking there are promising signs coming from the UN-brokered peace process in Sweden. Clearly there are strong geo-political reasons why Western leaders have not previously put more pressure on the Saudi regime over its actions in Yemen, but the murder of Khashoggi was so outrageous that several countries have now imposed sanctions and stopped arms exports. And even if President Trump is standing by the regime, the US Senate has condemned Saudi Arabia's conduct in the war and argued in favour of ending US military support for the war. That said, perhaps what the suffering of the Yemeni people illustrates more than anything is that humanitarian action is always tempered by geopolitics – perhaps that's why we hear less and less about responsibility to protect?

■ As a female Western scholar, what is your perception of 'Third World Women' especially those with Hijab? Do you think that your perception is constructed by a Western-centric Orientalism or do you think that we should accept the importance of specificity and 'differently situated' experiences?

A: I don't think we can generalize about 'third world women'



any more than we can generalize about 'western women'. There are just too many differences; of class, ethnicity, geography, and so on, to make it possible to draw any sharp distinctions in this regard. Of course, my own views are inevitably shaped by my positionality as a white, Western scholar, but I would like to think (and firmly hope) that this does not condemn me to Orientalism. In terms of the debate about the Hijab, my own view is that liberation and empowerment cannot be reduced to a question of dress-code, and the sexualized and objectified bodies of Western women challenge any easy binary between the free, liberated western woman and the oppressed veiled Muslim woman.

■ Do you think that Postcolonialism has achieved decent status in IR theory or do you still regard it as a relatively new entrant in the discipline which remains on the margins of IR? How do you anticipate the future perspective of this theory?

A: It's no longer new, but definitely still on the margins, although working its way into more mainstream platforms, journals and debates. As I mentioned above, IR is becoming increasingly aware of its own parochialism or Western-centrism, in no small part due to the work of postcolonial scholars and critics from the global South. In this regard, I think the recent efforts to 'decolonize' the curriculum are important, and a way of bringing more diverse voices and perspectives into IR and the social sciences more generally. Postcolonial approaches have also diversified and become much more diverse, which again I think is a good development. For me, this is very much about diversity and a plurality of perspectives. It is not about dogma of any kind, whether western-centric or postcolonial. Moving forward I would hope for an increasing diversity of postcolonial approaches, and also a greater attention to grounded theoretical explorations. In my own work, I've tried to combine a postcolonial sensibility with assemblage approaches, and in this way study Africa simultaneously as a place in the world and of the world, capturing the continent's politics and societies as simultaneously unique and global. For me, that is one way of 'provincializing' or decentering Europe, but I'm sure there are many others and yet more to be discovered.

Odds stacked against Modi in India elections

1 → Unemployment grew to 7.2 percent in February this year, according to reports. And a leaked government report on unemployment said the numbers were the highest in last five decades, which came as a huge embarrassment to the Modi government.

Some of his policy decisions have come under blistering criticism. For example, in 2016, he introduced 'demonetization', calling it a remedy for corruption and claiming that the move would check the circulation of fake currency used to fund terrorist activities in India. But, it turned out to be a disaster and hurt many small businesses.

Farmers played a key role in Modi's landslide victory in 2014, as they were promised debt relief and other incentives to dissuade them from committing suicide. But, they have been left disappointed.

Modi also pledged to make India safe for women. But a Reuters poll last year found the country to be the "world's most dangerous place for women", ahead of Afghanistan and Syria.

While the odds are heavily against Modi in this election, he is banking on the loyal Hindu vote to retain power. During the campaigning, he animatedly appealed to nationalist Hindus to vote for his party.

"Nationalism is our inspiration and good governance is our mantra," he said at the launch of his party manifesto.

Under the BJP government, the religious minorities in India, especially Muslims, have felt increasingly insecure with many incidents of Muslims being lynched by angry Hindu mobs reported across the country. Some of the party leaders have openly made speeches asking Muslims to go to Pakistan.

Last week, BJP president Amit Shah made another controversial remark during election campaigning in West Bengal, saying if his party comes to power again, they will implement National Register of Citizens (NRC) in the entire country and "remove every single infiltrator except Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs".

The remark, which suggested that Muslims and Christians have no place in BJP-ruled India, sparked widespread anger and outrage on social media, with people saying they will not vote for BJP.

Giving BJP a stiff challenge in this election is the Congress party that has traditionally been a powerhouse in Indian politics.

The party's newly-elected chief and the scion of Nehru-Gandhi family Rahul Gandhi showed signs of political maturity after he led his party to crucial wins in three key states in December last year.

His party's manifesto has promised to waive the outstanding loans of farmers, and promised to improve the fledgling economy. The highlight of Congress party manifesto is its minimum income guarantee, in which the poorest fifth of the country would get 6,000 rupees (\$100) per month.

"Vote for Congress, vote for you," the party said on Twitter, promising more jobs and "love over hate", aiming a salvo at BJP.

Gandhi has promised a "final assault on poverty." He has also promised to increase the education budget, and promised to reserve 33 percent of government jobs for women.

He has reached out to powerful regional parties, setting aside ideological differences, to stitch together an alliance in a bid to prevent the Hindu nationalist BJP from coming back to power.

After the first phase, exit polls suggest that no party has a clear edge so far. BJP and Congress are main challengers, but powerful regional parties, especially in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, hold the key in case none of these two parties claims a clear majority.

'IRGC has always been target of American and regional states animosity'

1 → Moreover, America believes that the IRGC yields the real power in Iran rather than the official government. So they want the IRGC to begin feeling the pain of sanctions more directly. By designating IRGC as a terrorist organization America, or at least John Bolton and Michael Pompeo, are also signaling to Tehran that US is determined to increase pressure on Iran, including possibly running the risk of direct military confrontation with it.

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

A: Much would depend on the response of the Iranian government and the IRGC. If the IRGC carries through with its promise of making the region unsafe for American troops, then the risk of an all-out regional conflict will sharply increase. Any attack by the IRGC on American forces will create irresistible pressure in Washington for American retaliatory attack on Iranian targets. This could easily escalate to a much broader conflict. I fear that any military encounter between the IRGC and the American forces would lead to US attacks on Iran. However, the extent of these attacks cannot be predicted. I suppose who persuaded Trump to declare the IRGC a terrorist organization are trying to create a situation wherein war becomes inevitable.

■ Some argue that "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". What is your opinion?

A: I am not aware of any previous situation where a branch of a country's army was designated as a terrorist organization. However, America sees the IRGC more as a para-military outfit specifically designed to export Iran's Islamic revolution to the rest of the Middle East and the Muslim world. It also sees it as guilty of carrying out mists of Iran's military operations in places like Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. It does not see it as a legitimate part of Iran's Armed Forces (Artesh).

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

A: Pompeo/Bolton policy towards Iran has been that of pressuring it to a point where it could no longer resist and thus is forced to accept America's conditions. Failing that, they hope that more pressure will result in the toppling of the current regime from within. Therefore, they will try whatever instruments of pressure that remain against Iran. However, it is difficult to see what more America can do to pressure Iran short of launching a military attack. A naval blockade perhaps? But that is an act of war and will certainly lead to armed conflict. In general, the current escalation of crisis between US and Iran does not bode well for the future. Authorities in Tehran should not wait for Trump's departure to de-escalate the crisis. Most probably he will be reelected.

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

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

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People are living longer despite care inequalities

Islamic Republic of Iran has made considerable progress

The World Health Organization report that life expectancy has increased by 5 years, but data show inequalities in access to health services among countries.

A new global report finds that people are living longer, despite disparities in health-care access.

The World Health Statistics series is an annual snapshot of global health compiled by the World Health Organization (WHO).

The World Health Statistics 2016 report focuses on the health-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by all of the United Nations' member states in September 2015.

The SDGs aim at achieving a more sustainable future for all. The main goals include eliminating poverty and inequality, providing affordable and clean energy, reducing the impact of climate change, giving better access to education, and promoting peace.

The SDGs differ from the Millennium Development Goals, which range from reducing extreme poverty and the spread of HIV to providing universal primary education — all by 2015. The list of SDGs is more comprehensive and looks ahead to 2030.

■ Far from universal health coverage

Global life expectancy increased from 2000 to 2015, representing the fastest increase since the 1960s. The most significant gain occurred in the WHO African Region, thanks to improvements in child survival, malaria control, and access to treatments of HIV. Here, life expectancy increased by 9.4 years to 60 years.

In spite of global gains, inequality persists. When it comes to children, the report shows that life expectancy depends on the country of birth. Newborns in 29 high-income countries have an average life expectancy of 80 years or more, while newborns in 22 countries in sub-Saharan Africa have a life expectancy of under 60 years.

The survival for women and men shows similar trends. Women in Japan and men in Switzerland can expect to live the longest: about 87 years and 81 years, respectively. Meanwhile, people in Sierra Leone of either sex have the world's lowest life



The survival for women and men shows similar trends. Women in Japan and men in Switzerland can expect to live the longest: about 87 years and 81 years, respectively. Meanwhile, people in Sierra Leone of either sex have the world's lowest life expectancy: around 51 years for women and 49 years for men.

expectancy: around 51 years for women and 49 years for men.

"The gains have been uneven. Supporting countries to move towards universal health coverage based on strong primary care is the best thing we can do to make sure no one is left behind," says Dr. Margaret Chan, former director-general of the WHO.

World Health Statistics 2016 measures access to 16 essential services, and results show that universal health coverage is still

a major concern, especially in the African and eastern Mediterranean regions. In addition, many people have to pay high out-of-pocket health costs.

The report shows inequalities in access to health services among countries. Swaziland, Costa Rica, Maldives, Thailand, Uzbekistan, Jordan, and Mongolia have the most equal access to services for reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health in their respective regions.

■ Addressing challenges by tackling risks

World Health Statistics 2016 shows that millions of people die prematurely every year, including:

- over 10 million deaths from cardiovascular disease and cancer before the age of 70
- 5.9 million deaths before the age of 5
- 4.3 million deaths due to air pollution from cooking fuels
- 3 million deaths resulting from outdoor pollution
- 1.25 million deaths due to road traffic injuries
- 303,000 women's deaths from complications of pregnancy and childbirth
- 800,000 people die from suicide
- 475,000 people die from murder

In addition, millions of people contract HIV, tuberculosis, or malaria — collectively about 225 million people every year. And 1.7 billion people require treatment for tropical diseases that the WHO classifies as neglected.

The report also points to significant data gaps that will need to be filled to track progress toward the SDGs. For example, approximately 53 percent of deaths globally are not recorded, although countries such as Brazil, China, the Islamic Republic of Iran, South Africa, and Turkey have made considerable progress.

In order to address the challenges, it is crucial to tackle the risk factors that contribute to disease and death worldwide. The WHO emphasize that changes are necessary to reduce the following figures:

- 3.1 billion people mainly use polluting fuels for cooking.
- 1.1 billion people smoke at least one tobacco product.
- 1.8 billion people consume contaminated water.
- 946 million people have bowel movements in the open.
- 156 million children younger than 5 years have restricted development.
- 42 million children younger than 5 years are overweight.

(Source: Medical News Today)

Ebola outbreak 'not global emergency yet'

The World Health Organization says the spread of Ebola in the Democratic Republic of Congo is not yet a global health emergency.

The Ebola outbreak is the second biggest in history - infecting 1,206 people and killing 764. It shows no sign of being contained soon.

Efforts by healthcare workers have been hampered by conflict and rebel attacks.

And experts have warned it will be "very difficult to bring it under control".

But Prof Robert Steffen, chairman of the WHO's emergency committee on Ebola, said declaring an emergency would not change anything on the ground.

He said: "It does not mean we can lean back and relax. Funds are now needed to avoid a public health emergency of international concern."

The World Health Organization said it had received only half the money it needed to tackle the disease.

The outbreak started in August 2018 and is still contained within two provinces in DRC - North Kivu and Ituri.

However, the WHO has warned a "rising number of security incidents" has been making it hard to monitor the spread of the virus, vaccinate people and contact anyone who has been in contact with an Ebola patient.

Cases have been increasing in recent weeks and the WHO says the risk of the virus spreading to neighboring countries is "very high".

It says the risk of the virus spreading globally is low.



■ What is Ebola?

Ebola is a virus that initially causes sudden fever, intense weakness, muscle pain and a sore throat.

It progresses to vomiting, diarrhea and both internal and external bleeding.

People are infected when they have direct contact through broken skin, or the mouth and nose, with the blood, vomit, faeces or bodily fluids of someone with Ebola.

Patients tend to die from dehydration and multiple organ failure.

Most Ebola outbreaks are over quickly and affect small numbers of people.

Only once before has there been an outbreak that was still expanding - and with such a high number of cases - more than eight months after it began.

That was the epidemic in West Africa between 2013 and

2016 which killed 11,310 people.

Dr Jeremy Farrar, director of the Wellcome charity, said: "The teams in DRC need all our support and resources, including finance, healthcare workers, enhanced security and infrastructure, as well as more international political support."

"This epidemic is at a very dangerous phase in an incredibly difficult environment, and we urgently need the response to evolve to help stop Ebola spreading and save lives."

Unlike the West Africa outbreak, a vaccine has been available which is being used to protect people at risk - including doctors and people who come into contact with an Ebola patient.

However, there have still been 85 cases and 30 deaths among healthcare workers, which further reduces the ability to deal with the outbreak.

There is also a trial of experimental drugs taking place in Ebola centers in the country.

A "public health emergency of international concern" was declared for the Ebola outbreak in West Africa and the Zika virus outbreak in 2016.

Dr Rebecca Katz, the director of the Center for Global Health Science and Security at Georgetown University, said the decision not to declare an emergency was disappointing.

She said: "This is a deeply concerning event, due to the pathogen itself, the total number of cases, the increase in cases just this week, and the difficulty of coordinating the response due to conflict - that needs to receive the appropriate level of attention."

(Source: BBC)

Sunscreen may help maintain blood vessel health

It is a well-known fact that sunscreen protects us against sunburn and reduces the risk of skin cancer. According to a recent study, sunscreen might also help our blood vessels maintain function.

According to a new study, sunscreen might offer benefits beyond protecting against skin cancer.

Scientists have known for many years that ultraviolet radiation (UVR) from the sun is a major causative factor in skin cancer.

UVR exposure also causes cellular and molecular damage that promotes skin aging.

With these two examples being well-documented, a recent study looks instead at the relationship between UVR and the performance of blood vessels in the skin.

Earlier studies have shown that UVR influences how blood vessels in the skin behave.

Specifically, it reduces the level of vasodilation that nitric oxide (NO) mediates.

NO is an important signaling molecule in the human body. Among other roles, NO functions as a vasodilator, meaning that it triggers relaxation in the smooth muscles around blood vessels, thereby increasing blood flow.

■ NO and vasodilation

Vasodilation in the skin serves a vital role in allowing the body to maintain its temperature and respond to heat stress. If the body is overheating, NO produces vasodilation in the skin, thereby increasing blood flow and, therefore, heat loss through the skin.

Virtually every type of skin cell is capable of producing NO, but a chemical called 5-methyltetrahydrofolate (5-MTHF) is essential for this process. Experts believe that UVR reduces the levels of 5-MTHF that are available in the skin, thereby limiting vasodilation.

As the authors of the current study write, NO-associated vasodilation is "a marker of skin vascular health."

NO's influence may reach farther than the skin alone. Some researchers have concluded that vasodilation in the skin may have an overall effect on blood pressure.

A group of scientists recently set out to investigate how using sunscreen might influence the relationship between UVR and vasodilation. They compared NO-associated vasodilation in skin that they had covered with either sunscreen or sweat.

The researchers, from Pennsylvania State University, recently presented their findings at the Experimental Biology 2019 conference in Orlando, FL.

■ Ultraviolet exposure and sunscreen

To investigate, the scientists recruited 13 healthy participants with light-to-medium skin tone. They exposed one arm of each individual to UVR, while the other arm served as a control. The team calculated the UVR exposure to make it equivalent to spending roughly 1 hour outside on a sunny day.

Each participant underwent three tests in parallel on their exposed arm: UVR alone, UVR plus sunscreen, and UVR plus sweat.

As expected, compared with the control arm, the UVR-only test site showed reduced NO-associated vasodilation. In other words, UVR prevented NO from triggering the relaxation of the muscles in blood vessels, thereby reducing the body's ability to cool itself down.

Conversely, both the sunscreen and sweat testing areas did not show a reduction in NO-associated vasodilation.

Importantly, the researchers also found that when they applied sunscreen before

UVR exposure, the sunscreen boosted vasodilation compared with both the sweat-tested region and the control arm. The authors write that "UVR may actually augment NO-mediated vasodilation in the presence of a chemical sunscreen."

"For those who spend a lot of time working, exercising, or participating in other various activities outdoors, using sunscreen may protect not only against skin cancer but also against reductions in skin vascular function."

It is important to note that this was a small-scale study that has not undergone peer review. It is also worth mentioning that, although NO is the primary regulator of vascular tone, other mechanisms play a role in this bodily function.

As this experiment only assessed changes to NO-associated vasodilation, further work will be necessary to understand whether other mechanisms play a part in the interaction.

However, the researchers are not attempting to overturn current recommendations. Whether or not other studies replicate their findings, using sunscreen is still as important as ever.

(Source: flipboard.com)

UK worst in Europe for pollution-linked childhood asthma cases, study shows

The UK has the highest rates in Europe of childhood asthma caused by air pollution, according to a major global analysis.

As many as one in five cases of asthma in children in the UK is linked to traffic fumes and other pollution, totaling nearly 40,000 cases a year, with higher rates in big cities.

This was equivalent to 280 cases caused by nitrogen dioxide per 100,000 children. The next closest in Europe was the Netherlands, with 230 cases per 100,000, followed by Belgium, France and Spain.



Exposure to nitrogen dioxide, which is mainly emitted from road vehicles, appears to be a "substantial" risk factor for the condition, according to a study in journal The Lancet Planetary Health.

The researchers estimate that four million new cases of childhood asthma globally — 13 per cent of those diagnosed — could be attributable to nitrogen dioxide pollution every year.

Nitrogen dioxide accounts for 19 per cent of UK cases, but this rises to 23 per cent in Manchester and 29 per cent in London.

However they added that initiatives like London's ultra-low emissions zone were key steps to tackling the issue.

Out of the 194 countries studied, the UK had the 24th highest proportion of new childhood asthma cases which could be attributable to traffic pollution.

South Korea topped the list, with nearly one third (31 per cent) of new diagnoses linked to nitrogen dioxide exposure.

The researchers said that nine out of ten of these cases were caused by nitrogen dioxide within the safe limits recommended by the World Health Organization.

"Nitrogen dioxide pollution appears to be a substantial risk factor for childhood asthma incidence in both developed and developing countries, especially in urban areas," senior author Dr Susan Anenberg, from George Washington University, said.

"Our findings suggest that the WHO guideline for annual average nitrogen dioxide concentrations might need to be revisited, and that traffic emissions should be a target to mitigate exposure."

Dr Penny Woods, chief executive of the British Lung Foundation, said: "We used to think the only real danger roads posed to children was the threat of a car accident."

"However now we can see there's an equally deadly risk: breathing in illegal levels of air pollution and getting a respiratory disease like asthma, or growing up to have smaller, weaker lungs."

It is thought that pollution from traffic may damage airways, leading to inflammation and the development of asthma in children who are genetically predisposed to the condition.

While it is not clear which pollutant in traffic air pollution is responsible, previous research has suggested exposure to nitrogen dioxide is key.

(Source: The Independent)

Obesity crisis causing 'liver disease time bomb', scientists warn

The UK's obesity crisis is creating a liver disease 'time bomb', research has shown, with one in five young adults already showing excessive build-up of fat around their organs which can lead to serious damage.

Healthy livers contain little to no fat and build-ups, classed as non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD), increase the risk of inflammation which can cause scarring and become life-threatening.

University of Bristol researchers, who have been leading the long-running Children of the 90s study with 4,000 young people born in the city who are now aged 24, found that 20.8 per cent of participants had fat build-ups in the liver indicating NAFLD and half of these cases were classed as "severe".

One in 40 already showed signs of scarring (cirrhosis) on their livers which could mean further damage.

"Certainly high levels of fatty liver disease puts these young adults at greater risk of developing liver scarring (cirrhosis) in the long term," Dr Kushala Abeysekera, who helped lead the study, told The Independent.

Presenting the study's findings at the International Liver Congress in Vienna on Friday, he said they were concerned about the high rates of fatty liver disease in this very young patients.

While NAFLD is the most common form of liver disease, accounting for 20-30 per cent of cases, it is usually seen in older people.

But is becoming increasingly common in younger groups and the Bristol study is the largest to date to look at these rates.

Professor Philip Newsome, vice-secretary of the European Association for the Study of the Liver, said the study showed the increasing problems of our "obesogenic" (obesity causing) environment.

Cheap fast food and inactive lifestyles mean this is particularly a problem in the very young.

"This requires swift changes in public policy if we are to defuse the ticking time-bomb of obesity and NAFLD," he said.

(Source: sg.news.yahoo.com)

1.1m visited Sistan-Baluchestan during Noruz

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — Over 1.1 million visited Sistan-Baluchetan province during the New Year (Noruz) holidays (March 21-April 5), which shows 19 percent increase in comparison to the same period last year, its governor general has said.



“More than 1.1 million people toured Sistan-Baluchestan during Noruz holidays, and over nine million visits to the province’s historical, cultural and natural sites were registered during the period,” Ahmad-Ali Mouhebaty said, IRNA reported.

In March 2017, provincial tourism authorities announced putting a new face to Sistan-Baluchestan was on their agenda in a bid to turn it into a tourist destination.

The southeast province is home to several distinctive archaeological sites and natural attractions, including two UNESCO World Heritage sites, namely Shahr-e-Soukhteh (Burnt City) and Lut desert, shared between it and Kerman province.

Half a million visits to Sa’dabad museums registered in Noruz

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran tourism body has registered over half a million visits to museums at Tehran’s Sa’dabad Cultural-Historical Complex during the New Year (Noruz) holidays (March 21-April 5).



Some 122 thousand people toured the complex during the period, making over 510,000 visits to its sixteen museums and palace museums, IRNA reported.

Mellat Palace Museum, the museum of royal vehicles, the Green Palace, and a museum dedicated to majestic clothing received topmost visitors during the period, the report said.

Sprawled on about 110 hectares of a mountainside parkland, the Sa’dabad complex was once a royal summer residence during Qajar era (1789–1925) and its subsequent Pahlavi epoch (1925–1979).

ROUND THE GLOBE

City of Vicenza and the Palladian Villas of the Veneto

The city of Vicenza and the Palladian villas of the Veneto is a serial site including the city of Vicenza and twenty-four Palladian villas scattered in the Veneto area.

Inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1994, the site initially comprised only the city of Vicenza with its twenty-three buildings attributed to Palladio, as well as three villas extra muros. Twenty-one villas located in several provinces were later included in the 1996 site extension.



Founded in the 2nd century BC in northern Italy, Vicenza prospered under Venetian rule from the early 15th to the end of the 18th century. The work of Andrea Palladio (1508–80), based on a detailed study of classical Roman architecture, gives the city its unique appearance.

The palazzi, or town houses, were fitted into the urban texture of the medieval city, creating picturesque ensembles and continuous street facades in which the Veneto Gothic style combines with Palladio’s articulated classicism.

The definitive Palladian country villa synthesizes, both figuratively and materially, the functional aspects of management of the land and the aristocratic self-glorification of the owner. Its core is the house-temple, embellished with a monumental staircase and crowned by a pediment supported by columns of the loggia. Porticos extend alongside the wings starting from the main building, and often end with towers. The different components are linked by a common classical language and are ordered according to a well-defined hierarchy.

(Source: UNESCO)

Japanese tour operators weighing Iran’s Kerman as a new destination

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — A number of Japanese tour operators and ecotourism associates have recently visited natural attractions in Iran’s Kerman province, mulling over it to become a new destination.

“About 10 tour operators and planners ecotourism reporters from Japan traveled to Iran and exclusively visited Shahdad area in the Lut Desert of Kerman province,” ISNA quoted Seyyed Abbas-Ali Emamieh, representative of Iran’s tourism office in Japan, as saying on Saturday.

“The trip to Iran was the first experience of them all who were very impressed and immediately began planning for a tour in Iran, and in particular in Kerman,” Emamieh said.

They have released a lot of information on Iran and Kerman, especially on Shahdad.... he added.

Referring to U.S.-led sanctions targeting Iran’s economy, the official explained: “Such a familiarizing tour is definitely difficult to be undertaken because of current political and economic conditions.”

“However, we are negotiating with a Turkish airline that operates six routes to Iran, planning to increase its flights to Japan... A domestic airline is also planned

to sponsor the project.”

Shahdad - a major part of the Lut desert in southeastern Kerman province - is home to massive sand pyramids created by wind and water. The “Lut” plain is a natural landscape of Iran which is a UNESCO registered site.

Europeans have constituted the highest number of arrivals in Iran’s Shahdad desert since the beginning of the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 21), ISNA quoted Gholamreza Farrokhi, the provincial tourism chief, as saying in December 2018.

Over 2,300 foreign nationals stayed in eco-lodges across Shahdad during the aforementioned period, which shows 25 percent rise year on year, and most of foreign visitors to Shahdad are from European countries including Germany, Italy, Spain and France, Farrokhi said.

The big and sprawling Kerman province has been a cultural melting pot since antiquity, blending Persians with subcontinental tribe dwellers. It is home to myriad historical sites and scenic landscapes such as Bazaar-e Sartasari, Jabalieh Dome, Ganjali Khan Bath-house, Malek Jameh Mosque and Shahdad Desert to name a few.



The story of 4000-year-old cypress in Abarkouh

By Moslem Foroudi

A 4000-year-old cypress in Abarkouh is a must-see attraction while visiting the central Iranian city. The evergreen tree is inscribed on the National Heritage List.

The cypress is situated next to a wall in southern parts of Abarkouh, some 140 kilometers west of the ancient city of Yazd and it is 1500 meters above sea level. Scientists have estimated that the tree dates back to 4000 years ago which is known as the oldest living being in the country.

It is 25 meters high. Abarkouh Cypress is a symbol of life and elegance in the region, and one of the most exotic wonders of the world. After thousands of years it is still green and healthy.

This tree has been presented as an outstanding tree in the world. For being always green Zoroastrians believe that

the tree has always had a significant importance.

In Abarkouh the cypress is called Zoroastrian cypress as well. It has been said in historical myth that the tree was planted by the Iranian prophet Zoroaster thus adding to the importance, beauty and holiness of the tree.

In antiquities such as the period of Achaemenid empire carvings of cypress symbolize the tree.

We can see bent cypress in a special type of handmade fabric called Terme. In miniature painting cypress is a tree that is painted most often.

Venetian merchant and explorer Marco Polo described the tree as one of the most stunning cypress trees he had ever seen in Iran. I advise all travelers to pay a visit to the cypress and other historical monuments in this city, especially when it is located in the center of tourism and cultural attractions of the golden triangle of Yazd, Isfahan, and Shiraz.

University of Tehran to host 6th Startup Weekend on tourism

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — The 6th Startup Weekend, which has adopted “Sustainable Tourism” as its focal theme, is to be hosted by the Faculty of Entrepreneurship of the University of Tehran.

Organizers of the event aim to put into practice and develop ideas evolved by participants while [they are set to] teach basic concepts of entrepreneurship together with running practical workshops and promoting the spirit of team working,

IRNA reported.

Running from May 1 to 3, the event will be held in collaboration with the Iranian National Commission for UNESCO and the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization.

Based on CHHTO statistics, the Islamic Republic hosted over seven million foreign nationals during the first eleven months of the past Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2018), which is seen as a remarkable rise from the same period last year.

A spring day at Iranian Art Museum Garden



TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — Photos depict people reveling in bright weather at the Iranian Art Museum Garden in northern Tehran on March 21, 2019, which marks the first day of the current Iranian year.

Covering an area less than one hectare, the richly-manicured garden boasts blossoming tulips, lilies, roses, daffodils, and elevated trees. Some say that it’s a very epitome of Persian Garden.

The Iranian Art Museum Garden is also home to miniature models of many historical sites such as mosques, bridges, strongholds, and edifices. The mockups may be very interesting for many, especially those who visit the garden for the first time.

For citizens, it’s a favorable opportunity to cement a friendship with nature and to grasp another face of Tehran during Noruz.

In the absence of stop-and-go traffic, the sprawling metropolis becomes one of Iran’s least crowded cities while choking air pollution and streets teeming with people become rare scenes.

The genuine concept of the Persian Garden, which is a World Heritage, 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 Iranian Art Museum Garden is situated in Elahieh neighborhood.



New species of ancient human discovered in the Philippines

Humankind’s tangled shrub of ancestry now has a new branch: Researchers in the Philippines announced today that they have discovered a species of ancient human previously unknown to science.

The small-bodied hominin, named Homo luzonensis, lived on the island of Luzon at least 50,000 to 67,000 years ago. The hominin—identified from a total of seven teeth and six small bones—hosts a patchwork of ancient and more advanced features. The landmark discovery, announced in Nature on Wednesday, makes Luzon the third Southeast Asian island in the last 15 years to bear signs of unexpectedly ancient human activity.

“For a long, long time, the Philippine islands [have] been more or less left [out],” says study coauthor and project leader

Armand Mijares, an archaeologist at the University of the Philippines Diliman and a National Geographic grantee. But H. luzonensis flips the script, and it continues to challenge the outdated idea that the human line neatly progressed from less advanced to more advanced species.

“This new discovery made me thrilled,” Yousuke Kaifu, a paleoanthropologist at Tokyo’s National Museum of Nature and Science who was not part of the new study, says via email. “It further highlights remarkable diversity of archaic (primitive) hominins once present in Asia, in a way beyond my expectation.”

Aida C?mez-Robles, a paleoanthropologist at University College London who reviewed the study before publication, is

hesitant to unequivocally say the find represents a new species. But she adds that all possibilities to explain the unusual fossils are equally intriguing.

“It’s absolutely one of the most important findings that [will] be out in a number of years,” she says.

■ **Digging deeper into Asia’s past**

Decades ago, the story of Asia seemed far more straightforward, if incomplete. Paleoanthropologists knew that archaic hominins such as Homo erectus ventured over land bridges into parts of what is now Indonesia nearly a million years ago. But farther east, it was thought that these hominins ran into ocean currents considered impassable without boats.

Luzon seemed especially difficult for an-

cient hominins to reach, as it had never been connected to the mainland by land bridges, so archaeologists thought that digging into deeper, older layers of soil wouldn’t yield much. When Mijares first excavated Callao Cave in 2003, he found 25,000-year-old evidence of human activity—but he didn’t dig any deeper than about four feet down.

“Most Southeast Asian archaeologists would only excavate cave sites up to two meters, and they would stop,” Mijares says.

That all changed in 2004, when researchers unveiled Homo floresiensis—a diminutive hominin, also known as the “hobbit,” that inhabited the Indonesian island of Flores until 50,000 years ago. Inspired, Mijares returned to Callao Cave in 2007 to literally dig deeper.

(Source: National Geographic)

In a major milestone Curiosity Mars rover tastes first sample in ‘clay-bearing unit’

Scientists working with NASA's Curiosity Mars rover have been excited to explore a region called "the clay-bearing unit" since before the spacecraft launched. Now, the rover has finally tasted its first sample from this part of Mount Sharp.

Curiosity drilled a piece of bedrock nicknamed "Aberlady" on Saturday, April 6 (the 2,370th Martian day, or sol, of the mission), and delivered the sample to its internal mineralogy lab on Wednesday.

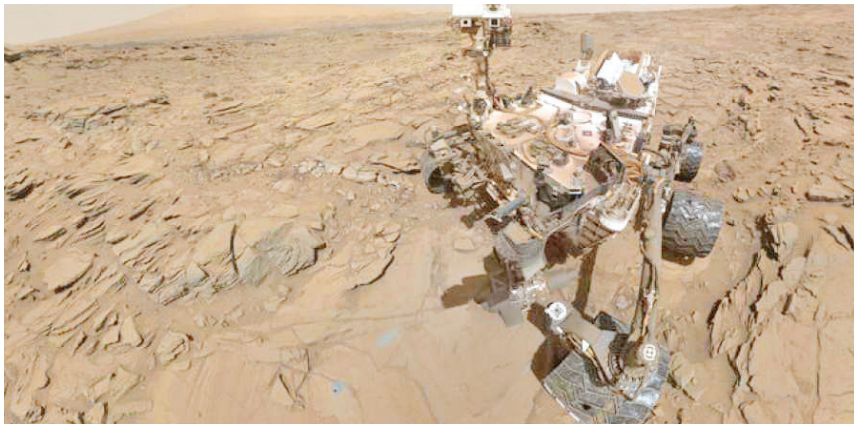
The rover's drill chewed easily through the rock, unlike some of the tougher targets it faced nearby on Vera Rubin Ridge. It was so soft, in fact, that the drill didn't need to use its percussive technique, which is helpful for snagging samples from harder rock.

"Curiosity has been on the road for nearly seven years," said Curiosity Project Manager Jim Erickson of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. "Finally drilling at the clay-bearing unit is a major milestone in our journey up Mount Sharp."

Analyzing the sample

Scientists are eager to analyze the sample for traces of clay minerals because they usually form in water. NASA's Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter (MRO) spied a strong clay "signal" here long before Curiosity landed in 2012.

Pinpointing the source of that signal could help the science team understand if a wetter Martian era shaped this layer of Mount Sharp,



the 3-mile-tall (5-kilometer-tall) mountain Curiosity has been climbing.

Curiosity has discovered clay minerals in mudstones all along its journey. These mudstones formed as river sediment settled within ancient lakes nearly 3.5 billion years

ago. As with water elsewhere on Mars, the lakes eventually dried up.

The clay beacon seen from space brought the rover here, but the region clearly has several other stories to tell.

Now that Curiosity is searching this area,

Curiosity has discovered clay minerals in mudstones all along its journey. These mudstones formed as river sediment settled within ancient lakes nearly 3.5 billion years ago. As with water elsewhere on Mars, the lakes eventually dried up.

scientists can peer around as geological tourists, finding a landscape both ancient and new.

Bedrock and sand

There are several kinds of bedrock and sand, including active sand ripples that have shifted in the past year. Pebbles are scattered everywhere - are they eroding from the local bedrock? Several eye-catching landmarks, such as "Knockfarril Hill," stick out as well.

The hills and troughs in this little valley, carved between a ridge and cliffs higher up Mount Sharp, almost look like undulating waves. The Mast Camera (Mastcam) on NASA's Curiosity Mars rover captured this mosaic as it explored the clay-bearing unit on Jan. 23, 2019 (Sol 2299).

"Each layer of this mountain is a puzzle piece," said Curiosity Project Scientist Ashwin Vasavada of JPL. "They each hold clues to a different era in Martian history. We're excited to see what this first sample tells us about the ancient environment, especially about water."

The Aberlady sample will give the team a starting point for thinking about the clay-bearing unit. They plan to drill several more times over the course of the next year. That will help them understand what makes this region different from the ridge behind it and an area with a sulfate signal up higher on the mountain.

(Source: phys.org)

Researchers discover climate change is turning parts of the Arctic brown

Extreme weather events in the Arctic are leaving a trail of vulnerable plants. They also have a lower carbon intake and poor stress response. Known as the Arctic browning, this phenomenon may affect the survival of the region in the midst of climate change.

A UK study reveals another dark side of climate change in the Arctic. At least two extreme weather events lead to a phenomenon the researchers call as Arctic browning.

The Arctic is a frozen, icy tundra, but on certain seasons, such as spring, most of the area burst to life with green vegetation.

Climate change, however, is threatening that as it influences at least two extreme weather events observed by the researchers from the University of Sheffield.

The actual effects of climate change can be difficult to measure. While it threatens the survival of certain species, Arctic warming can also result in green growth. It may also turn some parts of the landscape brown.

Due to high temperatures

To understand the Arctic browning further, Rachael Treharne, Ph.D., and colleagues traveled to Lofoten Islands in Norway to assess the conditions of a heathland. During their stay in the winter, they observed two extreme weather activities due to high temperatures.

The first was one winter drought. It occurred when the snow that was supposed to insulate and protect the plants from the cold began to melt. When the plants became exposed, they quickly lost water. The high temperature also prevented the vegetation from receiving water from the frozen soil.

The high temperatures also resulted in a false spring. The plants lost their ability to tolerate the cold since they mistakenly believed it's already springtime.

These weather events then led to sig-



nificant changes in plant growth, which may also give scientists an idea about the future of climate change.

When the region experienced frost drought, the vulnerable plants started to turn brown or die. The exposure to high winter temperatures also significantly increased their stress levels based on the presence of red pigments known as anthocyanin on the leaves.

All these have a profound effect on the ability of the Arctic to absorb carbon dioxide and the plants' ability to adapt to climate change.

Ecosystem carbon balance

"In more detail, net CO₂ uptake - the primary measure of ecosystem carbon balance - was reduced by 48 percent in vegetation dominated by mortality, and 50 percent in that dominated by stress," said Treharne in Newsweek.

These are not the only changes happening in the Arctic. Shrubs are also growing taller, which can impact the reflection of sunlight back to space.

The researchers, though, admit they are still aren't sure about the actual effects of these changes to the world's climate.

The "scale of the browning we've seen in recent years suggests the reality may be more complex—calling into question our understanding of the role the Arctic plays in global climate, and whether we should expect Arctic ecosystems to slow or accelerate future climate change," noted Treharne.

(Source: techtimes.com)

Scientists just found a fascinating oil-eating bacteria in the ocean's deepest trench

We've still got so much of the undersea world to explore, not least the Mariana Trench - the deepest natural trench in the ocean - which goes down 10,994 meters (36,070 feet) in places. Now another fantastic find from this subaqueous abyss has just been revealed.

The most comprehensive microbial analysis of the trench to date has turned up a new type of bacteria that munches on compounds similar to those found in oil. Scientists have seen oil-chomping microorganisms before, but never at these depths.

Concentrations of this microbial plankton were found to be higher at the bottom of the Mariana Trench than anywhere else previously recorded on Earth, and that could give us a new insight into how life exists and thrives at such depths - where the pressure is the equivalent of 1,091 kilograms (172 stone) being pressed against a fingernail.

"We studied the samples that were brought back and identified a new group of hydrocarbon-degrading bacteria," says one of the researchers, Jonathan Todd from the University of East Anglia (UEA) in the UK.

Organic compounds

"Hydrocarbons are organic compounds that are made of only hydrogen and carbon atoms, and they are found in many places, including crude oil and natural gas."

"So these types of microorganisms essentially eat compounds similar to those in oil and then use it for fuel. Similar microorganisms play a role in degrading oil spills in natural disasters such as BP's 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico."

Whether or not we'll be able to one day recruit these critters to help clean up oil spills remains to be seen, but the researchers are more interested in investigating how these bacteria feed so deep underwater - and maybe what feeds on them.

Part of the study's findings focus on the hydrocarbons that are keeping the microbes



alive, and where they might have come from. Pollution we've caused is likely to be making its way into the trench, located in the western Pacific Ocean.

"We found that hydrocarbons exist as deep as 6,000 meters (19,685 feet) below the surface of the ocean and probably even deeper," says one of the team, Nikolai Pedentchouk from UEA. "A significant proportion of them probably derived from ocean surface pollution."

A unique microbial population

To "our surprise, we also identified biologically produced hydrocarbons in the ocean sediment at the bottom of the trench. This suggests that a unique microbial population is producing hydrocarbons in this environment."

The hydrocarbons the researchers were looking at have been spotted in algae on the ocean's surface before, but their presence this deep down in the water is a revelation. In lab experiments the team was able to confirm the bacteria could indeed consume hydrocarbons in extreme conditions.

The next step is to gather more information on these microbes and where their food might be coming from - probably both natural and unnatural sources. There might yet be other types of bacteria that are able to feed on hydrocarbon compounds in the same way.

"We know more about Mars than the deepest part of the ocean," says lead researcher Xiao-Hua Zhang, from the Ocean University in China.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

Glaciers in European Alps could disappear by 2100, according to new study

The glaciers that cover the European Alps could disappear by 2100 if human-caused global warming greatly increases over the next several decades, according to new climate models.

"In a bad case, everything will almost be gone," Harry Zekollari, a climate scientist with the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, told reporters Tuesday (April 9) at the annual meeting of the European Geosciences Union (EGU) in Vienna.

The researchers simulated the evolution of nearly 4,000 individual glaciers in the European Alps with a new computer model. Scientists used 2017 as their baseline year, with the glaciers starting out at a volume of about 24 cubic miles (100 cubic kilometers), or the equivalent of 40 million Olympic-size swimming pools.

The researchers looked at how the glaciers would change based on different global warming scenarios outlined by the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 2013, known as representative concentration pathways, or RCPs.

The researchers found that about 95% of the ice would disappear under the most pessimistic warming scenario, RCP8.5, which projects that the global temperature average could rise by up to 8.6 degrees Fahrenheit (4.8 degrees Celsius) by 2100.

This would mean "you just have some disconnected ice patches at high elevation, but you don't really have any glaciers anymore," Zekollari said during the press conference.

Even under a more-intermediate warming scenario - RCP4.5 - 80% of the glacier volume would vanish, with no glaciers at all below an altitude of about 8,200 feet (2,500 meters), the study found.

Under a more limited emissions scenario known as RCP2.6 (a rise of less than 3.6 F, or 2 C), about one-third of the present-day glacier volume would remain in 2100. That's the "mini good news" of the report, Zekollari said, as it's better than the other scenarios but still greater loss than previously estimated.

(Source: livescience.com)

Virgin Galactic's first test passenger gets commercial astronaut wings, space team says

Virgin Galactic's first test passenger received her commercial astronaut wings from the U.S. aviation regulator on Tuesday after flying on the company's rocket plane to evaluate the customer experience in February.

Virgin Galactic's chief astronaut instructor, Beth Moses, who is a former NASA engineer, became the first woman to fly to space on a commercial vehicle when she joined pilots David Mackay and Mike Masucci on SpaceShipTwo VSS Unity.

The wings were presented to the three-person crew at the 35th Space Symposium in Colorado by the Federal Aviation Administration's associate administrator for commercial space, Wayne Monteith. "Commercial human space flight is now a reality," he said.

The February test flight nudged Richard Branson's space travel company closer to delivering suborbital flights for the more than 600 people who have paid Virgin Galactic about \$80 million in deposits. Branson has said he hopes to be the first passenger on a commercial flight in 2019.



The 90-minute flight, during which passengers will be able to experience a few minutes of weightlessness and see the Earth's curvature, costs \$250,000 - a price that the company said will increase before it falls.

Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin and Elon Musk's SpaceX are also in the space tourism race.

Blue Origin has launched its New Shepard rocket to space, but its trips have not yet carried humans. SpaceX last year named Japanese billionaire Yusaku Maezawa as its first passenger on a voyage around the moon, tentatively scheduled for 2023.

"I gleaned a lot of firsthand information that we can roll into the design and then also into the training," she said on her return to earth in Mojave, California, in February.

The passengers, some of whom have been signed up since 2004, will train in a mock-up cabin at New Mexico's Spaceport America before their flights.

(Source: Reuters)

A gas could hint at signs of life on Mars, scientists claim

Methane, a gas that offers a tantalizing hint of possible life below the barren landscape of Mars, displays a now-you-see-it, now-you-don't quality that is confounding scientists.

Last week, scientists reported that a careful analysis of data collected by the European Space Agency's Mars Express orbiter revealed a plume of methane rising above Gale Crater near the Martian Equator in June 2013.

The measurement occurred just one day after NASA's Mars rover, exploring inside that crater, had also detected elevated levels of methane.

"It's really hard to reconcile," said Oleg Korabev of the Space Research Institute in Russia and principal investigator of the Trace Gas Orbiter instrument that probed the Martian atmosphere for methane.

The newer spacecraft entered orbit around Mars in 2017 and carries more sensitive instruments than Mars Express, which arrived in 2003. While the Trace Gas Orbiter has so far failed to find methane, that does not mean Mars Express and the Curiosity rover were wrong.

Methane, if it is there in the thin Martian air, is significant, because sunlight and chemical reactions would break up the molecules within a few centuries. Thus any methane detected now must have been released recently.

On Earth, almost all methane is produced by living organisms, although it is also generated by geothermal reactions devoid of biology.

Dr. Korabev and his colleagues reported their findings on Wednesday at a meeting of the European Geosciences Union in Vienna, and in an article published in the journal Nature.

In the Nature article, the scientists said that first batch of scientific data, from April through August 2018, showed no signs of methane. Dr. Korabev said that readings since have also come up empty.

(Source: NYT)

Earliest life may have arisen in ponds, not oceans, new research finds

Researchers report that shallow bodies of water, on the order of 10 centimeters deep, could have held high concentrations of what many scientists believe to be a key ingredient for jump-starting life on Earth: nitrogen.

Primitive ponds may have provided a suitable environment for brewing up Earth's first life forms, more so than oceans, a new MIT study finds.

Researchers report that shallow bodies of water, on the order of 10 centimeters deep, could have held high concentrations of what many scientists believe to be a key ingredient for jump-starting life on Earth: nitrogen.

In shallow ponds, nitrogen, in the form of nitrogenous oxides, would have had a good chance of accumulating enough to react with other compounds and give rise to the first living organisms.

In much deeper oceans, nitrogen would have had a harder time establishing a significant, life-catalyzing presence, the researchers say.

"Our overall message is, if you think the origin of life required fixed nitrogen, as many people do, then it's tough to have the origin of life happen in the ocean," says lead author Sukrit Ranjan, a postdoc in MIT's Department of Earth, Atmospheric and Planetary Sciences (EAPS). "It's much easier to have that happen in a pond."

Ranjan and his colleagues have published their results today in the journal Geochemistry, Geophysics, Geosystems. The paper's co-authors are Andrew Babbitt, the Doherty Assistant Professor in Ocean Utilization in EAPS, along with Zoe Todd and Dimitar Sasselov of Harvard University, and Paul Rimmer at Cambridge University.



The first hypothesis

If primitive life indeed sprang from a key reaction involving nitrogen, there are two ways in which scientists believe this could have happened. The first hypothesis involves the deep ocean, where nitrogen, in the form of nitrogenous oxides, could have reacted with carbon dioxide bubbling forth from hydrothermal vents, to form life's first molecular building blocks.

The second nitrogen-based hypothesis for the origin of life involves RNA -- ribonucleic acid, a molecule that today helps encode our genetic information. In its primitive form, RNA was likely a free-floating molecule. When in contact with nitrogenous oxides, some scientists believe, RNA could have been chemically induced to form the first molecular chains of life. This process of RNA formation could have occurred in either the oceans or in shallow lakes and ponds.

Triops Cancriformis sighted at Hamoun wetland years after disappearance

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — Triops cancriformis, or tadpole d e s k shrimp, was sighted at Hamoun wetland in southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan after two decades of drought in the area, the provincial department of environment chief has said.



Subsequent to recent rainfalls in Iran as well as Afghanistan the wetland which suffered prolonged drought is once again covered with water and restored many animal and plant species in the area, ISNA news agency quoted Vahid Pourmardan as saying on Saturday.

Tadpole shrimp is found in Europe, the Middle East and India. It is considered to be one of the oldest living species on the planet at around 200 million years old. Fossils of this species from the Upper Triassic (Norian) period appear virtually unchanged compared to modern day members of the species, that why tadpole shrimp is considered a living fossil because its basic prehistoric morphology has changed little, exactly matching their ancient fossils.

Due to habitat destruction, many populations have recently been lost across its European range, so, the species is considered endangered in the United Kingdom and in several European countries.

Lost river returns more than 60 years after it dried up and died

A lost river has returned to the Somerset countryside more than 60 years after it dried up.

The unnamed tributary of the River Chew will contain water for the first time since 1956, when a dam was installed and the valley was flooded to form the Chew Valley Lake reservoir.

The river ecosystem eventually dried up and died, taking with it an ecological corridor used by aquatic creatures since the last ice age.

But the half-a-kilometer stretch of river has now been restored and will provide habitats for wildlife including herons, otters and fish.

The work comes as part of a restoration project by Bristol Water and Bristol Avon Rivers Trust (BART).

Matthew Pitts, catchment strategy manager at Bristol Water, said: “It is the first time the river has been permanently re-wetted since the 1950s and will offer a considerable environmental benefit for the downstream river.”

He added that he hoped to see the stream teeming with mayflies, damselflies and dragonflies.

Some residents living in the area have been apprehensive about the river extension following a devastating flood in 1968 which killed seven people.

During a storm which saw five inches of rain fall within just 24 hours, the waters rose so high that it was feared the dam wall would burst. *(Source: The Independent)*

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Industrial action by Cathay Pacific staff

(January 7, 1999)
The flight attendants of Hong Kong based airline Cathay Pacific threatened to stop smiling at passengers. BBC Correspondent Jill McGivering reported.

The **‘flight attendants’** union is looking for new ways of increasing pressure on the airline’s management because the two sides have **‘failed to reach agreement’** on proposed new terms after several months of **‘negotiations’**. Some flight attendants began on Tuesday to wear protest badges on their uniforms. Now **‘union’** leaders say the next step could be a campaign to stop smiling at passengers for one hour each flight as a sign of their discontent. The union’s chairman told the BBC the action would be a way of expressing their feelings without resorting to **‘strike’** action. Cathay Pacific has presented its staff with three **‘options’**: either they work an extra four hours a week in return for a three and half per cent **‘pay rise’**, accept a **‘pay freeze’**, or take **‘voluntary redundancy’**. A spokesman for the airline said the passengers were innocent in the issue and she hoped the staff would be more sensible than **‘to take industrial action’**. In the present **‘economic climate’**, she added, the airline had no choice but to look at ways of managing costs.

■ **Words**
flight attendant: a person who serves food and drink on an airplane. Also known as cabin crew or air stewardess (female) or air steward (male)

failed to reach agreement: a common way in ‘news English’ to say ‘did not agree’, particularly at the end of long negotiations

negotiations: formal discussions to talk about a problem and find a solution

union: short for trade union, a workers’ organization that tries to improve such things as the pay and working conditions of its members

strike: when there is a strike, workers stop working for a period of time to try and get better pay or conditions

options: choices, alternatives

a pay rise: an increase in the money received for a job

a pay freeze: a stop on any pay increases for workers for a period of time

voluntary redundancy: if an employee takes voluntary redundancy, they offer to leave their job because the employer needs to reduce costs. Often someone who volunteers to leave their job in this way is paid a lump sum of money

to take industrial action: when a group of workers take industrial action they stop working or do something to protest about their pay or working conditions. See ‘strike’ above

economic climate: the economic situation at the time *(Source: BBC)*

Resistance groups help flood victims in Iran

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — While d e s k hundreds of Iranians are hit by floods and are displaced, various campaigns have been launched by Lebanese, Afghan, Pakistani, Iraqi, Tunisian, Syrian, Palestinian, Yemeni, Nigerian, and Bahraini resistance groups to help the victims get back on their feet again.

Heavy rainfall, starting on March 19, has caused flooding in 28 out of 31 provinces affecting 42,269,129 inhabitants in 253 cities and causing widespread damage to municipal facilities, including roads, sewage systems, health centers, hospitals, etc.

Following devastating flood hitting Iranian provinces some 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.

According to Fars news agency a public-spearheaded campaign called Ahle-Wafa (meaning worthy of loyalty) launched in Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, and

Tunisia since Wednesday in Gaza.

The campaign calling for contributions will send the donation to the International Centre of Justice for Peace which will be distributed among the flood-stricken victims in provinces of Golestan and Lorestan, the report added.

Moreover upon an invitation from Major General Qassem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC Quds Force, soldiers from the Popular Mobilization Forces [an Iraqi organization composed of militias that are mostly Shia Muslim groups who have fought in major battle against ISIS], and the Liwa Fatemi-youn [also known as the Fatemiyoun Brigade and Fatemiyoun Division an Afghan group formed in 2014 to fight against the terrorists in Syria], have hurried to help flood victims in Lorestan and Khuzestan.

Accordingly Mowkibs (tents) which normally provide Arbaeen pilgrims with services such as free food are put up in flood-stricken areas in Khuzestan and Lorestan provinces by Iraqis and Afghans offering various services

Tehran Municipality to develop bike lanes, bike sharing systems



SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Tehran d e s k municipality will develop bike lanes and bike sharing systems in the capital in the current year (starting on March 21), Mohsen Pourseyyed Aqaei, deputy mayor of Tehran for traffic and transport affairs has said.

The capital is unfortunately jammed with cars and motorcycles, Pourseyyed Aqaei regretted, adding that, there are various highways, parking lots and small traffic fines have all encouraged using private cars in Tehran.

In order to fight problems such as air and sound pollution, traffic congestion, and physical inactivity, citizens must be encouraged to choose transport options which are greener and promote sufficient physical activity, ISNA news agency quoted Pourseyyed Aqaei as saying on Saturday.

Encouraging cycling in the city can decrease fuel consumption, reduce greenhouse gas emission, and minimize air pollution, he suggested.

The deputy mayor went on to say that many streets in the capital have the potential for bike lanes which can lead to subway stations or parks.

Using bikes as well as public transport can have a great effect on various aspects of life in the city, he concluded.

According to the U.S. National Center for Biotechnology, Information Bicycling is promoted as a transportation and population health strategy globally. To attract the broader population to bicycling, many cities are making investments in bicycle infrastructure. These interventions hold promise for improving population health given the potential for increased physical activity and improved safety.

Growing evidence indicates that bicycle-specific infrastructure including off-street bike paths, residential bikeways and cycle tracks (facilities along major streets that physically separate bicycles from motor vehicles) offer substantial safety benefits and increase bicycling.



People are preparing food for the flood victims in the province of Lorestan.

to the residents, Kayhan daily newspaper reported on Thursday.

Popular Mobilization Forces is also providing logistical aids to direct flood waters and stop them from inundating cities since Thursday.

Additionally, according to Tasnim news agency, Shabab_Mogawama (literally meaning resistance youth) from Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria and Nigeria have begun a campaign to collect donations and contributions to support the flood-hit regions.

Iranians donate \$31m in cash and kind to flood victims



SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Iranians d e s k have so far donated some 1.3 trillion rials (nearly \$31 million) in both cash and kind to the flood victims, Iranian Red Crescent Society Chief Ali Asghar Peyvandi said on Saturday.

Floods hitting Iran since March 19 have been highly devastating especially in provinces of Golestan, Mazandaran, Lorestan and Khuzestan, Peyvandi said, Fars news agency reported.

He went on to say that the only region not struck with flood was Kish Island and all other 31 provinces were hit by flood to some extent.

More than 227,000 were provided with emergency accommodation, he added, noting that thankfully the casualties remained low.

No financial aids have been received so far due to the sections, he regretted, adding that some countries like Germany, Kuwait, Armenia, Pakistan, Turkey, etc. have sent in-kind contributions to Iran.

Islamic Republic of Iran Army, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and Basij have collectively attempted to provide services to the flood victims, he concluded.

Heavy rainfall, beginning on March 19 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.

Following devastating flood hitting Iranian provinces some 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.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → چ

Some 50 people die in traffic-related accidents per day

Everyday 40 to 50 people in the country lose their lives on a daily basis in traffic-related accidents, an official with traffic police has said.

Police has taken all necessary measures to decrease the number of traffic related deaths, and considering the current conditions of roads and the budget there is nothing much left to do, Fars news agency quoted Mohammad Hossein Hamidi as saying on Saturday.

Revising the traffic laws and adopting stricter laws, improving road conditions and increasing vehicle safety are essential to decrease the number of road crashes, Hamidi noted.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“cerebro-, cerebr-”

■ **Meaning:** brain

■ **For example:** Passive smoking is considered a major cause of **cerebrovascular** disease, which causes strokes.

PHRASAL VERB

Think something up

■ **Meaning:** to produce a new idea, name etc. by thinking

■ **For example:** She was trying to think up an excuse.

IDIOM

Give somebody a (good) run for their money

■ **Explanation:** to make your opponent in a competition use all their skill and effort to defeat you

■ **For example:** They’ve given some of the top teams a run for their money this season.

جان باختن ۵۰ نفر در تصادفات رانندگی کشور در هر روز

رئیس پلیس راه راهور ناجا گفت: روزانه بین ۴۰ تا ۵۰ نفر در تصادفات رانندگی کشور کشته می شوند.

به گزارش روز شنبه خبرگزاری فارس، سردار محمدحسین حمیدی با اعلام خبر فوق اظهار داشت: اقدامات پلیس به حد نهایی خود در کاهش تلفات تصادفات رسیده و با وضعیت فعلی اعتبارات، سفرها و ... نمی‌توان بیش از این تصادفات رانندگی را کاهش داد

وی تأکید کرد: اصلاح قوانین و افزایش بازدارندگی آنها و اصلاح وضعیت راه و افزایش ایمنی خودروها از جمله ضروریات برای تداوم کاهش کشته های تصادفات رانندگی است.

Kim Jong Un gives U.S. to year-end to become more flexible

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said the breakdown in talks with the United States has raised the risks of reviving tensions, and he is only interested in meeting President Donald Trump again if the United States comes with the right attitude, state media KCNA said on Saturday.

Kim said he will wait "till the end of this year" for the United States to decide to be more flexible, according to KCNA.

"It is essential for the U.S. to quit its current calculation method and approach us with a new one," Kim said in a speech to the Supreme People's Assembly on Friday, KCNA said.

Trump and Kim have met twice, in Hanoi in February and Singapore in June, building goodwill but failing to agree on a deal to lift sanctions in exchange for North Korea abandoning its nuclear and missile programs.

Trump later issued a statement on Twitter that underscored the strength of his personal relationship with Kim and pointed to what he called North Korea's "tremendous potential" for economic success, once the issue of Pyongyang's weapons programs has been resolved.

"A third Summit would be good in that we fully understand where we each stand," the U.S. president said in a pair of Saturday morning tweets.

"I look forward to the day, which could be soon, when Nuclear Weapons and Sanctions can be removed, and then watching North Korea become one of the most successful nations of the World!"

In his speech, the North Korean leader said the outcome in Hanoi led him to question the strategy he embraced last year of international engagement and talks with the United States.

The Hanoi summit "aroused a strong question if we were right in taking the steps with strategic decision and bold resolution, and evoked vigilance as to the U.S.' true willingness to improve its relations with the DPRK," Kim said, using the initials of North



Korea's full name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

In Hanoi, the United States came "to the talks only racking its brain to find ways that are absolutely impracticable" and did "not really ready itself to sit with us face-to-face and settle the problem," Kim said.

"If it (the United States) keeps thinking that way, it will never be able to move the DPRK even a knuckle, nor gain any interests no matter how many times it may sit for talks with the DPRK," he said.

"We will wait for a bold decision from the U.S. with patience till the end of this year but I think it will definitely be difficult to get such a good opportunity as the previous summit," Kim added.

Kim's comments signal he will not cling to talks with the United States forever, said Kim Dong-yup of Kyungnam University's Institute for Far Eastern Studies in South Korea.

"That probably indicates that the North is triggering plans to diversify its diplomatic relations with other countries," he said.

■ Third summit in doubt

Kim said that his personal relationship with Trump is still good, but that he had no interest in a third summit if it were a repeat of Hanoi. On Twitter, Trump described their relationship as "very good" and added that "perhaps the term excellent would be even more accurate."

At a meeting with South Korean President Moon in Washington on Thursday, Trump expressed a willingness for a third summit with Kim but said Washington would leave sanctions in place on Pyongyang.

Kim said the United States "is further escalating the hostility to us with each passing day despite its suggestion for settling the issue through dialogue." The current U.S. policy of sanctions and pressure is "as foolish and dangerous an act as trying to put out fire with oil," he added.

Still, Kim said he would not hesitate to sign an agreement if it takes into account both countries' considerations.

The United States had continued to provoke North Korea by testing an anti-ballis-

tic missile system and conducting military drills with South Korea despite Trump's announcement that large-scale exercises would end, he said.

Last month, a senior North Korean official warned that Kim might rethink a moratorium on missile launches and nuclear tests in place since 2017 unless Washington makes concessions such as easing sanctions.

South Korea's Blue House said in a statement that officials would "do what we can in order to maintain the current momentum for dialogue and help negotiations between the U.S. and North Korea resume at an early date."

Kim complained that Washington is coercing South Korea into abiding by sanctions and not pushing forward with inter-Korea projects.

North Korea has a choice "to keep maintaining the atmosphere of improving the North-South ties or to go back to the past when the ties plunged into a catastrophe with the danger of a war increasing," he said.

North Korea's state media on Saturday issued a commentary criticizing South Korea's purchase of fighter jets, including two recently delivered F-35A jets from the United States, calling it a "serious provocative act" that could intensify tensions on the Korean peninsula.

"Bringing in weapons of war is an obvious threat. South Korea needs to behave itself better, and think about how such an imprudent act could lead to catastrophic outcomes," said the commentary.

Still, North Korea is committed to better North-South relations and peaceful unification, Kim said.

"I make it clear once again that it is my unwavering determination to turn the North-South ties into those of durable and lasting reconciliation and cooperation by holding hands with the south Korean authorities and to write a new history of the nation, peaceful and co-prosperous," he said.

(Source: Reuters)

Pakistani Hazara community demands security

➔ "Targeted for their religion by sectarian armed groups, (Hazaras) have suffered many such tragedies over several years. Each time there are promises that more will be done to protect them, and each time those promises have failed to materialize," Omar Waraich, an official of Amnesty International, said in a statement.

"Prime Minister Imran Khan's government has made important commitments to protect all religious groups. Those commitments must translate now into policies to effectively protect the Hazaras of Quetta, ending more than a decade of bloodshed."

PM Khan condemned "the terrorist attack" and sought "an immediate inquiry and increased security for the [targeted] people".

Pakistan President Dr Arif Alvi termed it a "heinous act of terrorism which is a reminder for us as nation that few remnants of this menace are still left to be eliminated totally."

Baluchistan is the focus of ambitious \$57-billion China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a transport and energy project between China and Pakistan.

The latest attack came after a lull of at least a year in violence against the mainly Shi'ite Hazara minority in the province, though there have been intermittent cases of shootings and targeted attacks.

Hazara Shias are among the few races whose origin remains shrouded in mystery. There are multiple theories about their origin. Some anthropologists trace their ancestry to Turko Mongols.

They are mainly based in Pakistan and Afghanistan and have faced violence and persecution in both the countries. Hazaras in Afghanistan have faced attacks from both the Taliban and ISIS.

Syria's air defenses intercept Israeli missiles fired at Hama military base

➔ On March 27, the Israeli regime launched multiple missile attacks on Shaykh Najjar industrial city located 10 km northeast of Syria's Aleppo.

The Syrian TV said the majority of those missiles had been intercepted by the Arab country's air defense, and those that hit their targets only caused material damage.

Israel used to be very careful with its operations over Syria after Russia equipped Damascus with the advanced S-300 surface-to-air missiles in October 2018.

However, U.S. President Donald Trump's recent decision to recognize the "Israeli sovereignty" over the Syrian territories of Golan Heights has seemingly emboldened Tel Aviv to launch new aggression on the Arab country.

(Source: Press TV)

Fighting across Afghanistan as Taliban opens offensive before talks

Taliban forces attacked the northern Afghan city of Kunduz on Saturday, a day after the launch of their annual spring offensive, as fighting intensified across the country ahead of the next round of peace talks with U.S. representatives.

Heavy fighting has been going on for weeks but the announcement of the spring offensive while peace talks were due was a blow to any hopes of a quick agreement and was criticized as "reckless" by U.S. special peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said in a statement the movement was committed to the peace process but accused Afghan and international forces of stepping up their own operations.

"We are committed to the ongoing process of negotiation and peaceful resolution, but we cannot be unmoved in the face of military operations and the terrorist wave of occupiers and mercenaries," Khalilzad said.

However security officials in Kabul said that apart from the operation in Kunduz, Saturday's attacks in 15 provinces across the country were limited in scope and had largely been contained.

"They engaged Afghan security forces to show their presence with the start of their spring offensive," one senior official said. "But Afghan forces were on high alert across the country and therefore several attacks were pushed back."

■ Strategic city

In Kunduz, the strategic city which briefly fell to the Taliban in 2015, fighters attacked from several directions in the early hours of the morning, causing heavy casualties, the provincial governor's spokesman Enhamuddin Rahmani said.

A local health official said more than 70 dead and wounded had been brought into the main city hospital.

There were also attacks in the northern provinces of Baghlan, Takhar and Badakhshan, as well as Faryab, Sar-e Pul and Balkh, but there were no reports of significant casualties among security forces.

In southern Afghanistan, Taliban forces launched attacks in the opium-rich province of Helmand, with operations in Nad Ali, Gereshk and Sangin districts, areas that have been fought over for the past 17 years.

Omar Zwak, the provincial governor's spokesman, said the attacks had been repelled at the cost of four soldiers and 15 Taliban. "The fighting will further increase as the weather warms up," he said.

Separately, seven members of the security forces were killed in an ambush in the western province of Ghor, leading to an hours-long firefight, provincial government spokesman Abdul Hai Khatibi said.

While much of the fighting consisted of small-scale engagements, the spread of operations across most parts of the country underlined the struggle facing the Afghan government, still shut out of the peace process by the Taliban's refusal to talk to what they consider a puppet regime.

According to U.S. estimates, government forces control just over half the country, but with many areas out of reach of easy communications an accurate picture is difficult.

Peace talks are due to resume in Doha next week between U.S. envoy Khalilzad and Taliban officials. (Source: AP)

Sudan police: 16 killed by stray bullets at protests and sit-ins

At least 16 people were killed and 20 others injured by stray bullets at protests and sit-ins on Thursday and Friday, a Sudanese police spokesman said in a statement on Saturday as the nation waited to hear from its newly appointed leader.

Government buildings and private property were also attacked, spokesman Hashem Ali added.

The transitional military council said on Saturday the head of the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), Salih Ghosh, has resigned from his post.

"The chief of the transitional military council, Abdel Fattah Burhan, has accepted the resignation of... the chief of NISS," the council said.

Ghosh had overseen a sweeping crackdown led by NISS agents against protesters taking part in four months of mass demonstrations.

The spy chief's resignation comes less than 24 hours after the Sudanese military replaced the country's transitional leader who had been in power only one day.

Thousands of jubilant protesters celebrated in the streets of Khartoum on Friday, after Defense Minister General Awad ibn Auf, announced he was stepping down as head of the ruling military council.

He had been named the de facto leader after President Omar al-Bashir was forced out of office on Thursday after 30 years of rule.

Ibn Auf said he would be replaced by General Abdel Fattah Burhan, general inspector of the armed forces, as head of the transitional council, which will rule the country for two years until elections.

"This is for the benefit of our nation ... This country has great people and a great army," Ibn Auf said in a brief TV statement, adding that he hoped the civilians and the military would work together.

■ New leader

Burhan, who was appointed as al-Bashir's chief of staff and head of the ground forces in February, is expected to speak to the nation on Saturday.

Al Jazeera's Hiba Morgan reporting from Khartoum said the demonstrators "have been very clear that their desire is to see Sudan led by a civilian government. Not one led by the military."

While it's not clear whether Burhan will hand power to a civilian leader she said protesters might be more receptive to Burhan than his predecessors.

"Most people are hopeful because Abdel Fattah [Burhan] is not from the ruling party. He also does not have any political affiliation. He doesn't have the same tainted history as Omar al-Bashir and Awad Ibn Auf. Both were accused of war crimes in the region of Darfur," she said.

Hajooj Kuka, an activist, said removing al-Bashir and his allies was the first step to meeting the demands of the protesters. "We expect after everything settles down to have whoever that committed a crime to be punished. And that should include anyone who has been part of this regime that has committed a crime. It could take a while but we need to have justice," Kuka told Al Jazeera.

Earlier on Friday, the military council had assured the country that they had "no ambitions" to permanently rule the East African nation.

The council also said a two-year timeline for the military to rule was not set in stone and promised that it would be dissolved as soon as a solution to the political crisis had been found.

■ Will of the people

But the protest's main organizers reacted by vowing demonstrators would stay on the streets until they got a civilian government.

With Bouteflika gone, protesters in Algeria demand more change

Hundreds of thousands of protesters demanding the departure of Algeria's ruling elite rallied in the North African nation's capital on Friday and police reported nearly 200 arrests after clashes that left more than 80 officers injured.

Police in anti-riot gear fired tear gas to disperse a crowd of several hundred youths in the city center, witnesses said, after an otherwise largely peaceful march joined by families throughout the day.

Police arrested 180 people after clashes with "infiltrators" among the demonstrators who injured 83 policemen, a police statement said.

President Abdelaziz Bouteflika stepped down after 20 years in power 10 days ago, bowing to pressure from the army and weeks of demonstrations mainly by young people

seeking change in the country.

But the protests, which began on Feb. 22 and have been largely peaceful, have continued as many want the removal of an elite that has governed Algeria since independence from France in 1962 and the prosecution of people they see as corrupt.

Bouteflika has been replaced by Abdelkader Bensalah, head of the upper house of parliament, as interim president for 90 days until a presidential election on July 4. "No to Bensalah," the protesters chanted on Friday.

Reuters correspondents at the scene estimated the crowd size at hundreds of thousands of people as on previous Fridays, although there was no official count.

"We want the prosecution of all corrupt people" and "no to the gang", said banners

held up by the protesters. Many waved Algeria's white, green and red crescent moon flag.

"We came out today to say that Bensalah's position is unconstitutional," one of the protesters, who gave his name as Nawal, told Reuters.

"We do not deserve military rule. We deserve a democratic and free Algeria," he added.

Ali Badji, a 52-year-old grocer holding his son on his shoulders, said: "We are still sticking to our demands. We want a radical change."

State television said similar protests took place in most cities.

Police in a statement said they had arrested members of an unspecified "terrorist group" and also some foreigners who had planned to incite protesters to violence. The



The Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) said in a statement on Facebook that Ibn Auf's resignation was a victory for the will of the people.

The group called for the immediate transfer of power as well as the arrests and trials of all leading figures of the past regime involved in crimes against the people.

"In order to implement these demands fully, we must adhere to our sit-in in front of the army HQ and in the capital and launch action in all Sudanese cities until power is transferred in full to a transitional civilian government expressing your aspirations," the SPA's statement added.

Oil-rich Sudan's economy was hard hit when it split from South Sudan in 2011, and the government is currently facing an economic crisis while also battling several rebel groups.

Protests first started in December over an increase in the price of bread. They quickly evolved into demands for 75-year-old al-Bashir's departure.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

statement gave no details.

More than one in four people under the age of 30 are unemployed - one of the central grievances of protesters who want the economy liberalized and diversified to reduce its reliance on its oil and gas production.

On Wednesday, Algeria's army chief, Lieutenant-General Ahmed Gaed Salah, said he expected to see members of the ruling elite close to Bouteflika, who he called a "gang", prosecuted for corruption and said he would support a transition toward elections.

The army initially monitored the unrest from the sidelines. Then Salah intervened, declaring Bouteflika - rarely seen in public since suffering a stroke in 2013 - unfit to rule.

(Source: Reuters)

Germany approves weapon supplies to Saudi Arabia, UAE

Germany's National Security Council has reportedly approved the provision of certain weapons and arms technology to the two main aggressor regimes involved in a deadly war on Yemen, namely Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), despite a ban imposed earlier on arms exports to Riyadh.

The Council, comprising Chancellor Angela Merkel and her chief ministers, approved the supply of the weapons

and the technology through joint business enterprises with France, Der Spiegel reported on Friday, citing documents from the German Ministry of Economic Affairs.

With the reported new approvals, German company Kamag will offer "technology for low-bed semi-trailer production" to France, which will then send an unspecified finished product to Saudi Arabia.

For its part, the UAE will receive, among other things,

accessories for "Cobra" artillery tracking radar systems from a joint German-French manufacturer.

The approvals come two weeks after the German government extended an arms ban on Saudi Arabia over the murder of dissident Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in October last year. Berlin exempted weapon systems that were jointly developed with other European partners from the newly-extended ban.

(Source: Press TV)

Match in Belgium abandoned after flares thrown

Standard Liege's league game against rivals Anderlecht was abandoned after 30 minutes because of flares thrown by visiting supporters.

The match was twice interrupted before referee Erik Lambrechts ended the Belgian championship play-off match with Liege leading 2-0.

"The management of the club strictly disapproves of the behaviour," Anderlecht posted on social media.

"This is absolutely intolerable for football."

The first interruption came shortly after Liege's Alen Halilovic had a goal ruled out by the video assistant referee (VAR).

Razvan Marin scored the opener in the 22nd minute but play was suspended once more, for about 10 minutes, again for smoke on the pitch. Soon after the match restarted, Liege were awarded a penalty when VAR ruled that Kara Mbodji had fouled Moussa Djenepo in the area. The Anderlecht player was sent off for a second yellow card before Paul-Jose Mpoku converted from the spot.

Another set of flares landed on the pitch resulting in referee Lambrechts abandoning the match.

(Source: BBC)

Normal for title-chasing Liverpool to feel heat - Chelsea's Sarri

Liverpool are under pressure as they bid to end a 29-year wait for an English league trophy but can help themselves by embracing the challenge in the home stretch of the campaign, Chelsea manager Maurizio Sarri has said.

Liverpool, who host Chelsea on Sunday, lead Manchester City by two points with five games remaining although the defending champions have a match in hand.

"They are under pressure but that's normal. If you want to win the Premier League, you have to play under pressure for a long period of time but it is pressure for something positive," Sarri told the club's website. "You can be nervous but also with a great level of motivation so the positive is more than the negative."

Chelsea dented Liverpool's title push with a 2-0 victory at Anfield in the 2013-14 campaign but Sarri warned his third-placed team that they could face a daunting task on Sunday.

"In this moment we are fighting for the top four so we need points. We know it will be difficult to gain points in Liverpool but we have to try in every way," Sarri added.

"To face Liverpool is going to be difficult for us but every game now is difficult. They are one of the best teams in England right now, they reached the final of the Champions League last year and at Anfield it is always difficult.

"We know well the risks of this match but we also know that when we are able to play at 100 percent of our potential, we can gain points anywhere. We are in a very good physical and mental condition right now."

(Source: Mirror)

Tuktamysheva tops free skate, but Americans win world team title

Russia's former world champion Elizaveta Tuktamysheva settled a personal score by winning the women's free skate Saturday, while the United States did enough to capture a fourth world team title.

The 22-year-old, controversially omitted from last month's world championships, produced a flawless performance in Fukuoka, nailing several soaring triple jumps, including a gorgeous triple lutz, triple toe-loop combo, to earn a personal best 153.89 points.

But the Americans finished top of the pile after Bradie Tennell took second spot on 150.3 points ahead of Japan's Kaori Sakamoto and Rika Kihira.

The United States took gold on a total of 117 points with defending champions Japan taking silver on 104 points, just two clear than Russia. European champion Sofia Samodurova finished the women's free programme fourth with 16-year-old schoolgirl Kihira, who set a world record in the short skate, fifth after crashing to the ice attempting a triple toe-loop.

Double world champion Nathan Chen led an American one-two in the men's free skate on Friday as the Americans underlined their recent dominance.

(Source: AFP)

Diverse boardrooms can help clubs to tackle racism better - Kompany

Manchester City skipper Vincent Kompany said diversity in club boardrooms and institutions of power could help in tackling racism in soccer more effectively, rather than just punishing individual offenders. "The upturn in racist abuse is worrying but at the same time it's something that is good to be discussed so much, to ask ourselves the right questions," Kompany told Sky Sports.

Earlier this season, Kompany's team mate Raheem Sterling accused sections of the British media of fuelling the problem with a negative portrayal of young black players.

Sterling also encountered racist abuse during England's Euro 2020 qualifier in Montenegro in March, while there have been other cases in English soccer in recent months.

Arsenal launched an investigation into racist abuse suffered by Napoli defender Kalidou Koulibaly during their Europa League victory on Thursday. Three Chelsea fans were stopped from entering Slavia Prague's stadium for Thursday's Europa League game after a video of a racist chant about Liverpool's Egypt international Mohamed Salah circulated on social media.

However, Kompany said the focus should not lie only on individuals who directed abuse at players.

"The issue is a little bit deeper. I look at boardrooms, I look at mechanisms of power... and I don't see a lot of diversity in that," the Belgian added. "When you ask for them to come up with policies to change the situation, you wonder whether the constitution of those boardrooms are capable of coming up with the appropriate solution.

(Source: Reuters)

European football wrestles with racism

The interruption of the Dijon-Amiens Ligue 1 match on Friday after visiting captain Prince Gouano was the target of monkey chants adds to a string of recent racist incidents across Europe.

It comes after rising Italy star Moise Kean was targeted by racist abuse in Cagliari in Serie A earlier in the month.

Monkey chants were aimed at England players during a Euro 2020 qualifier in Montenegro and there have been a series of episodes involving London clubs.

"Racism exists in the stadiums in France, but we cannot put the situation on the same level as in Eastern European countries or Italy," football sociologist Nicolas Hourcade, a professor at the Central School of Lyon, told AFP.

The goalless draw in Dijon was halted in the 78th minute as players from both sides stopped playing and headed towards the touchline after Gouano said he heard insults.

"It's over," Gouano said. "We're not playing on. I'm taking off my team-mates."

Players, including Gouano went to re-monstrate with fans.

Referee Karim Abed also asked the stadium announcer to "get the message across, if it happens again, we stop."

Following discussions between players, coaches and officials, play then resumed.

"In Dijon, we saw that it was an isolated supporter who could be identified and arrested," Hourcade said. "In other countries, there are collective demonstrations where a whole section of the ground, or a good part



of one, can shout monkey chants or racist slogans."

After the game, the French league (LFP) said it would investigate and also announced that Dijon had identified the culprit. The club said they intended to press charges.

"These disgusting shouts are contrary to the values conveyed by sport, they insult our Republic, and I welcome the rapid reaction of the LFP: racism will never have a place in France," responded Interior Minister Christophe Castaner.

Africa Cup of Nations 2019 draw: Egypt to face DR Congo, Cameroon draw Ghana



Hosts Egypt will face DR Congo, Uganda and Zimbabwe in Group A at the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations.

Defending champions Cameroon are in Group F with Ghana, Benin and Guinea-Bissau.

The tournament will take place from 21 June to 19 July, meaning Europe-based players will not miss club games.

It is the biggest Afcon yet, with 24 teams, and the first to be held in Europe's summer rather than January or February.

The draw was held next to the pyramids of Giza.

Morocco coach Herve Renard is looking to win an unprecedented third Africa Cup of Nations - with a third team. The Atlas Lions are in Group D with one of the previous teams he won it with, the Ivory Coast. South Africa and neighbouring Namibia complete that group.

The first game of the tournament will be Egypt - who are likely to have Liverpool star Mohamed Salah in their team - against Zimbabwe on 21 June at Cairo Stadium.

Two of the three tournament debutants - Madagascar and Burundi - are in Group B with Nigeria and Guinea.

The other new team, Mauritania, are

in Group E with Tunisia, Mali and Angola. Senegal and Algeria are alongside Kenya and Tanzania, who have only qualified once before - in 1980 - in Group C.

Two teams from each group will go into the last 16, with the four best third-placed teams also progressing.

Egypt's assistant coach, Hany Ramzy, said after the draw that the Pharaohs were "comfortable" with their pool.

"We are confident, we are here in our land with the supporters behind us, so we have to work hard to reach the final."

Talking about the opening game against Zimbabwe, ranked more than 50 places below them, he acknowledged that the Warriors will still pose a test to the host nation.

"Whoever you play against, the opening game will be tough, but I think we can win the match," he said.

"The big difference [in quality] between teams is not really there anymore, like it was 10 years ago in Africa. Now every team has players who play in Europe so they have the experience to play at a high level.

"But when you want to win a big tournament like the Africa Cup you have to win against small and big teams."

(Source: BBC)

Moura hits hat trick as Spurs brush Huddersfield aside to go third



Lucas Moura hit a hat-trick as a much-changed Tottenham side made light work of relegated Huddersfield Town, climbing into third while Mauricio Pochettino saved key players for Wednesday's Champions League showdown with Manchester City.

Already missing the injured Harry Kane and Dele Alli, Pochettino opted to make another five changes to the team that had beaten City 1-0 in the home leg of the European quarter-final, most notably omitting in-form forward Son Heung-min from his line-up.

But his boldness paid off as goals from Victor Wanyama and Lucas Moura in the space of just 144 seconds effectively ended the contest before the half-hour mark.

Lucas then struck twice more late on, wrapping up a 4-0 victory as Spurs extended their winning start at their new stadium, with no goals conceded in their three matches so far.

In addition to Son, Toby Alderweireld, Danny Rose and Kieran Trippier also dropped to the bench, while Harry Winks was absent from the squad altogether.

Wanyama made only his second start of 2019 and Juan Foyth was given his first outing since February, while academy graduate Kyle Walker-Peters, Davinson

ventus played at Cagliari on April 2. Kean, along with Matuidi and Brazilian Alex Sandro, were targeted by monkey noises and jeers throughout the match.

■ **'Openly fascist'**

Instead of denouncing their fans, Cagliari's leadership blamed Kean for celebrating his late winner by standing motionless and silent with arms spread in front of the hostile stand.

"Italy is a case apart for two reasons," Hourcade said. "The historical strength of the extreme right, and the presence of openly fascist fan organisations."

But in England too, there have been numerous recent incidents at all levels of football.

On Thursday, half a dozen Chelsea fans posted a video on social media in which they sang that Liverpool's Egyptian star, Mohamed Salah, was a "bomber". Chelsea identified and barred three of the fans.

Arsenal are attempting to identify a fan who was caught on video shouting racist abuse at Kalidou Koulibaly of Napoli in a Europa League game on Thursday.

In December, Manchester City's Raheem Sterling was the target of insults at Chelsea and a Tottenham fan threw a banana in the direction of Arsenal's Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang.

One of the major issues is "to identify the perpetrators of these acts to punish them," said Hourcade.

Spurs' England defender Danny Rose has blasted the game's rulers for failing to rein in racism, calling their efforts "a farce".

(Source: AFP)

Lakers split with embattled head coach Luke Walton

The Los Angeles Lakers continued their clear-out after a disastrous first season following the arrival of LeBron James by terminating the contract of head coach Luke Walton on Friday.

The club said they had mutually agreed to part ways.

"We would like to thank Luke for his dedicated service over the last three years," said general manager Rob Pelinka. "We wish Luke and his family the best of luck moving forward."

Walton, a former Lakers player, had been coach since 2016, building a 98-148 won loss record. The Lakers have failed to reach the playoffs for the last three seasons.

"I want to thank Jeanie Buss and the Buss family for giving me the opportunity to coach the Lakers," said Walton. "This franchise and the city will always be special to me and my family."

On Tuesday, Magic Johnson plunged the Lakers into further crisis when he surprisingly quit his post as president. Johnson was reportedly unhappy at the prospect of firing Walton.

Despite the addition of future hall of famer James 10 months ago, the Lakers went 37-45 in what was another embarrassing losing season for the once-storied NBA franchise.

Los Angeles was 20-14 when James suffered a groin injury during a Christmas Day win over the champion Golden State Warriors - and it was downhill from there.

"They are losing one of the best human beings in the



NBA," said Warriors coach Steve Kerr of Walton and the Lakers. "They are losing a guy who knows the game as well as anybody I've ever met. They are losing somebody who the players believe in and the players want to play for.

"I feel for Luke. He was dependent on circumstances just like all of us We got wonderful people stabilizing our organization every day. I am lucky to be in this position and to be surrounded by these people. It doesn't happen often in the NBA."

What was supposed to be a revival story turned into a season-long nightmare that saw the losses and injuries pile

up and eventually led to the club sitting star players like a healthy James down the stretch in a desperate attempt to secure a better pick at the summer entry draft. The team used more than 25 different starting lineups this season.

But even that strategy isn't a sure thing as tanking became such a big problem that the NBA was forced to bring in a lottery system to determine the order of the top draft picks.

The Lakers will not only be hunting for a new coach but also a big-ticket free agent as a right-hand man to James. All-star Kevin Durant, Kawhi Leonard and Kyrie Irving top the list of possible targets when free agency begins July 1.

The Lakers are the fourth NBA franchise to unload their coach since the end of the regular season on Wednesday, following Memphis, Sacramento and James's former team Cleveland.

Among the candidates for the Lakers' job is Tyronn Lue, who coached James in Cleveland, and Philadelphia 76ers assistant Monty Williams.

"I liked playing for him," Lakers guard Josh Hart said. "He's a player's coach. Lets you kind of play your game, play with passion, so it was fun to play for him. I think he'll get another job fairly quickly."

Walton may not be unemployed for long as the Sacramento Kings are reportedly interested in interviewing him for their vacant post.

(Source: Guardian)

President Rouhani expects Iranian athletes to shine at Tokyo 2020

S P O R T S TEHRAN — President Hassan d e s k Rouhani says that the Iranian athletes can make their nation proud and happy at the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games.

In a meeting with Iranian Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports Masoud Soltanifar on Saturday, Rouhani said he expects the Iranian sportsmen and sportswomen to shine in the next year's prestigious events.

"Improving access to sports for all and supporting women's sports are top priorities for us and I want to strengthen the sports in two divisions," Rouhani said.

"I wish the Iranian athletes to promote the name of their country and making their people proud and happy in Olympics and Paralympics," he stated.

"Some sports including wrestling, weightlifting, taekwondo and karate have responsibility in these games and we expect them to shine in Tokyo," Rouhani added.

Praising the Iranian football clubs in the AFC Champions League, Rouhani said, "The Iranian clubs have made half of the total population in the country happy so far. I also hope that Iran U23 football team to qualify for the Olympics after many years. The Iranian people should feel at ease with their national football team as well."



Persepolis among top 50 average football attendances



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Persepolis of Iran are among top 50 average football attendances in the world in the last five years.

With over 80,000 spectators per match, Borussia Dortmund are top of the rankings for attendance by club, with 80,230 fans on average watching each of their games over the past five years.

The German side are ahead of four football giants: Manchester United, Barcelona,

Bayern Munich and Real Madrid.

Manchester United aren't far behind in second, with 75,218 and Barcelona are third with 74,876 fans on average.

Bayern Munich and Real Madrid are fourth and fifth with 73,781 and 69,822 respectively.

According to the CIES Football Observatory, Iranian popular football team Persepolis sit in the 49th place with 36,025 fans on average.

IPL: Persepolis move five points clear at top



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Persepolis football team moved five points clear at the top of Iran Professional League (IPL) table after beating Saipa 3-2 on Saturday.

With five weeks remaining, the Reds are on the verge of winning the IPL title for the third year in a row.

Saipa forward Moein Abbasian scored an early goal in the 4th minute but Bashar Resan leveled the score, firing a superb

shot home from the edge of the area in the 32nd minute.

Ali Alipour scored Persepolis second goal in the 50th minute and substitute Mehdi Torabi made it 3-1 just after the hour mark.

Reza Asadi pulled a goal back in the 68th minute. Zob Ahan also edged past Paykan in Tehran thanks to a goal from Hamid Buhamdan in the 22nd minute. Persepolis remain at the top of the table with 54 points, followed by Tractor Sazi with 49 points.

Matchday Three: What They Said

Another exciting round of games in the 2019 AFC Champions League took the group stage to its mid-way point last week.

With some teams now starting to eye knockout round qualification and others trying to salvage their campaigns, the-AFC.com takes a look at how those involved reflected on their latest matches.

■ "We feel like we are alive in the tournament again. We knew it was going to be a tough, important game because they are the team at the top of the group and we really needed these three points."

Esteghlal captain Pejman Montazeri played up the significance of his side's 2-1 victory over Al Hilal in Group C as the Iranian side moved within two points of their opponents.

■ "We benefit a lot from him. Today, he played a huge game and scored two great goals, and to be honest, this is Xavi, you expect him to do that."

Hamid Ismaeil was full of praise for Xavi Hernandez after the skipper scored twice in Al Sadd's 2-2 draw against Pakhtakor on Tuesday.

■ "I think we played some good football and created some good chances. It's always a pleasure to score a goal but for me the most important is the three points and to win the game."

Marouane Fellaini was happy to open his AFC Champions League account but insisted the three points was the most important thing after Shandong Luneng's 2-1 win over



Johor Darul Ta'zim.

■ "It is a huge point to get at Al Duhail's ground. They are a big team with lots of talent throughout their ranks, so we are happy with it."

A draw away to Al Duhail was an excellent result, claimed Al Ain goalkeeper Khalid Eisa after his team came from two down to salvage a point.

■ "At the end of the day, we and our opponents created many chances, and we both scored three goals, so I have to

say that it's a fair result for each team."

Shanghai SIPG's Yu Hai reflected on a thrilling 3-3 draw between the Chinese side and Sydney FC in Australia in what was the highest-scoring game of the week.

■ "It is a very difficult group. Pakhtakor have five points, Al Sadd have four and Al Ahli have three. These were three important points that returned us to the race for qualification."

Persepolis's 2-0 victory over Al Ahli on Tuesday has put them back in the hunt for knockout round qualification, according to midfielder Bashar Resan.

■ "You can't afford to make mistakes because they have that quality, especially in the final third of the field, where they can really take control of the game and even against the run of play they can punish you."

Melbourne Victory captain Carl Valeri on his side's performance in the 4-0 defeat to Guangzhou Evergrande that means the Australian team are still seeking their first point in Group F.

■ "We showed it in the first two games and today in the second half. The challenge for us is to try to improve and maintain this level. We have to look to play like this throughout the whole game and not just for one half."

Johor Darul Ta'zim captain Hariss Harun said his team must show consistency across 90 minutes after their 2-1 defeat to Shandong Luneng kept them bottom of the Group E standings.

(Source: the-afc)

Iran wrestlers bag nine medals in Turkey Victory Cup

IRNA — Iranian wrestlers in four weight categories received four gold, four silver and one bronze medals in 22nd International Cadets Victory Cup 2019 held in Antalya, Turkey.

Iranian Greco-Roman wrestler Amir Reza Deh Bozorgi in the weight category of 48 kg and Hojatollah Rezaei in 65 kg weight category received gold medals.

Mohammad Amin Jebalifar in 65kg and Reza Saleki in 71kg snatched silver medals.

In 55kg weight category, Sajjad Abbaspour received a bronze medal.

In free-style field, Rahman Amouzad (48kg) and Mahdi Veisi (55kg) grabbed gold medals.

Meanwhile, Pouria Kazemi and Amir Hossein Motaghi in the weight categories of 48 and 65 kg received silver medals.

Friendly: Iran U-20 futsal team beaten by Russia

TASNIM — Iran U-20 futsal team lost to Russia in a friendly match on Saturday.

In the match held in Tehran's Payambar-e Azam Hall, the Iranian team lost to the European rivals 2-0.

The match was held as part of preparation for the AFC U-20 Futsal Championship 2019.

Iran will also play Russia on Sunday.

The second edition of the competition will be held in the city of Tabriz, northwest Iran, from June 14 to 22.

Iran have been drawn with Afghanistan and Hong Kong in Group A.

The top two teams from each group will advance to the quarter-finals.

Tractor Sazi keeper Forouzan suspended until further notice

TASNIM — Tractor Sazi goalkeeper Mohsen Forouzan has been suspended until further notice following his mistakes in the match against Sepidrood.

On Friday, Tractor Sazi lost to the Rasht-based football team 3-1 and it could cost the team Iran Professional League title.

Forouzan conceded a goal just two minutes into the match after making a big blunder.



He made another mistake in the second half and failed to save a shot, conceding a goal from close range.

Tractor Sazi's disciplinary committee will make decision about the keeper.

ACL2019 MD3 Player of the Week: Anderson Talisca

Guangzhou Evergrande midfielder Anderson Talisca's two goals in his side's 4-0 win at home to Australian club Melbourne Victory in their Group F Matchday Three clash on Wednesday saw the Brazilian earn this week's accolade.

Talisca's double came in the opening ten minutes of the match at Tianhe Stadium which is the fastest on record since 2013. The exciting attacker also provided 55% of his team's crosses in Matchday Three.

Talisca had a total of five shots on goal and tallied 33 passes to go along with his two goals as he was awarded a 9.3 rating to top the Toyota Player of the Week standings.

Cedric Bakambu (below) likewise shone on Matchday Three with the Beijing FC forward scoring a hat-trick in the Chinese side's 3-1 win at Buriram United.

Bakambu's treble was the first hat-trick for Beijing FC in the AFC Champions League since 2008. He scored the three goals from his only three shots on target in the game in Thailand.

The Congolese striker had the highest number of touches (7) in the opposition's penalty area of all players on the pitch and also recorded 19 passes to earn his 9.1 rating.

We turn to the West Zone to round out the top three with Al Nassr's Yahya Al Shehri (below) taking third spot thanks to his performance in the Saudi club's 4-1 win over Iraq's Al Zawraa in Group A.

Al Shehri scored a stunning free-kick to give Al Nassr their second goal of the night, assisted for their third, and created five chances in the game - more than any player on the pitch to earn his 8.7 rating.

Spanish legend Xavi enters the list at number four with an 8.4 rating. Xavi scored his first ever brace in the AFC Champions League, one of which was nominated for goal of the week, and created two chances.

Completing the top five is Al Duhail's Edmilson Junior who registered an 8.3 in the Qatari club's 2-2 draw with Al Ain.

Fellow Brazilian Renato Augusto is next with an 8.1 after an impressive performance for Beijing FC in the side's win at Buriram, followed by Pakhtakor forward Dragan Ceran and Esteghlal defender Pejman Montazeri who tallied 8.0 and 7.9 ratings respectively.

(Source: the-afc)

Park targeting more success with Vietnam

Park Hang-seo has had an exciting and successful journey since becoming the Vietnam head coach as the reigning Southeast Asian champions have scaled great heights.

Vietnam - be it their U23 squad or the national team - have captured the imagination of the Continent with swashbuckling performances that have brought great dividends. Park - rightly so - has been credited for the great work he has accomplished with the 2018 AFF Cup champions and the Korea Republic native shares his thoughts and vision for Vietnam with the-AFC.com.

■ Can you share with us your managerial journey with the Vietnam national team?

I came here in October 2017. It has now been 15-16 months. I have been managing the national team and U23 team. It has been a really meaningful journey as we made the 2018 AFC U23 Championship final in China, semi-finals of the Asian Games, emerged champions of the AFF Cup and were quarter-finalists in the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019.

They were all big events for us and to me, it was a miracle year. I think everyone in the team did a really good job in their respective positions. Now we are looking forward because we have a lot of challenges ahead.

■ The Golden Dragons have improved tremendously under your stewardship, finishing runners-up in the 2018 AFC U23 Championship in China and winning the 2018 AFF Cup title. What is your secret to success?

I would say the success is the result of the Vietnamese strengths which are solidarity, pride, smartness and fighting spirit. Everybody works not individually but as one team. As the head coach, I have been trying to build confidence and trust in the team.

■ You have been honored with the accolade of Person of the Year 2018 for your achievements with Vietnam. How much does this mean to you?

It means a lot to me and I am very honoured as I received it as a foreigner.

It is fantastic that people here in Vietnam recognize what I had done last year. I really appreciate it.

■ Following Vietnam's run at the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019, the Golden Dragons broke into the top 100 of the FIFA World Ranking in February. Tell us your managerial philosophy?

'Winning mentality'. I managed the team to win as many matches as we could. I am the head coach of the national team. Without good results, it will not be easy to get support from the FA, fans and others. Of course to get good results, hard work is the most basic aspect.

■ Vietnam qualified in style for the AFC U23 Championship 2020, beating Thailand 4-0 to win the group. Can Vietnam now be considered to be the ASEAN powerhouse?

Whether others agree or not, we are the champions of Asean for the next two years. We proved it in the AFF Cup, and we are very proud of it. Yes, we will work harder

to defend the title.

For the AFC U23 Championship Qualifiers, we defeated regional rivals like Indonesia and Thailand. We have gained more confidence from the victories and we proved that we are the best team in Asean at the moment.

■ How will you prepare the team for the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qualifiers and the 2019 SEA Games?

We have to prepare for two very important tournaments at the same time. While I will manage both teams as the head coach, the coaching staff will be different.

For the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qualifiers, the key players will be from the AFF Cup and AFC Asian Cup. We all already know each other so we will be able to prepare efficiently.

For the SEA Games, we have not won the title in the last 60 years. It won't be an easy task for us as we will have to play every two days, so it is very important that all players play the same quality of football.

(Source: the-afc)

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GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

A fool's heart is in his mouth, and a wise man's tongue is his heart.

Imam Ali (AS)

Rasht hosts Shahnameh National Photo Festival

A R T **TEHRAN** — Marlik Gallery in the northern city of Rasht is hosting an exhibition of photos from the 2nd Shahnameh National Photo Festival.

Over 35 selected photos are on display in the exhibition with the motto of "Iran a Gallery for Shahnameh".

The festival, which is organized every two years by the Association of Shahnameh Reciters and the Association of Shahnameh Researchers, intends to focus on the representation of Persian poet Ferdowsi's Shahnameh in people's lives.

The exhibition which opened Saturday will continue until April 18.

Iranian photographer wins first at World Press Photo Contest

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranian photographer Forugh Alaei has won the Sports Stories 1st Prize at the World Press Photo Contest in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.



A photo from Iranian photographer Forugh Alaei's collection

Alaei received the award for her photo collection, which follows Iranian female football fans, the organizers announced on Thursday.

Enayat Asadi, also from Iran, received the 3rd prize in the Contemporary Issues section of the contest.

Asadi received the award for his single photo "Afghan Refugees Waiting to Cross the Iranian Border", which depicts an Afghan refugee, who comforts his companion while waiting for transport across the eastern border of Iran.

"Crying Girl on the Border" by American photographer John Moore was named World Press Photo of the Year.

The photo shows a crying toddler whose mother is taken into custody by U.S. border officials.

"Anna and the Swallow Man" at Iranian bookstores

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — American actor and writer Gabriel Savit's debut novel "Anna and the Swallow Man" has recently been published in Persian by Noon Publications in Tehran.

Translated by Samin Nabipur, the 2016 book is about Anna, a seven-year-old girl, who is left alone after her father is taken by the Germans during the Second World War in Poland.

One day Anna meets the Swallow Man, a strange, tall man, and starts traveling with him.



Iranian cineastes rush to collect relief aid for flood victims

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranian cineastes have rushed to collect humanitarian aid for the victims of Iran's recent devastating floods in a program named "Flood of Kindness".

Organized by the Iranian House of Cinema, a number of cineastes and actors gathered at the Azadi Cineplex on Friday to encourage their fans to support flood relief efforts.

Ali Nasiairna, Amin Tarokh, Amin Hayai, Habiab Rezai, Leila Hatami and Fatemeh Motamed-Arya were among the cineastes who met fans and collected relief donations.

Fans were able to donate their relief aid and receive a card bearing autographs of the participating cineastes and copies of their films in return.

Iran's Red Crescent and Tehran Municipality had also collaborated in this program.

The items collected and the money raised will be donated to Iran's Red Crescent, head of the board of the directors of the Iranian House of Cinema Homayun Asadian told the Persian service of MNA.

"People actively participated in the charity act and the Red Crescent has made great efforts in providing the region with humanitarian aid," Asadian said.

"Since the flood is still threatening several regions in the southern part of the country, we need to regain the trust of the people to collect their humanitarian aid," he added.

"We are also planning to travel to the flood-stricken regions with a team of cineastes and distribute the collected aid under the supervision of the Red Crescent and the representatives of the Tehran Municipality," he concluded.

In addition, Ali Sartippi, the producer of the film "Rahman 1400" and Jamal Sadatian, the producer of "6.5 for One Meter" agreed to donate their Friday box



Several cineastes sitting on the left are meeting their fans who came to donate their humanitarian aid for the victims of Iran's recent devastating floods at the Azadi Cineplex in Tehran on April 12, 2019. (ILNA/Alireza Khazrai)

office receipts to the relief efforts.

Heavy rainfall beginning on March 19 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.

Following devastating flood hitting Iranian provinces some 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.

Seven more films join lineup of Fajr Festival of Festivals



A scene from "Sasha Was Here" by Lithuanian director Ernestas Jankauskas

A R T **TEHRAN** — Seven more films from world cinema have joined the lineup for the Festival of Festivals (Cup of Divination) section at the 37th Fajr International Film Festival, the organizers announced on Saturday.

"Hamid" by Aijaz Khan from India, "Sasha Was Here" by Ernestas Jankauskas from Lithuania, "Deep Rivers" by Vladimir Bitokov from Russia and "X - The eXploited" by Károly Ujj Mészáros from Hungary are among the films.

The lineup also includes "Away from the Shore" by Kostadin Bonev from Bulgaria,

"Laughing" by Valerio Mastandrea from Italy and "Manta Ray", a co-production between Thailand and France by Thai director Phuttiphong Aroonpheng.

The Festival of Festivals also includes "One Last Deal" by Finnish director Klaus Härö and "Summer Survivors" by Lithuanian director Marija Kavtaradze. "The Little Comrade" by Moonika Siimets from Estonia, "Animal" by Armando Bo and "As I Fall" by Magnus Meyer Arnesen, both from Argentina, will also go on screen in this section.

Overall, 14 foreign films and four Iranian films will go on screen in this section of the festival, which is dedicated to those movies which have been screened and won awards at international events.

The names of the rest of the films will be announced in the near future.

The Fajr festival will take place in Tehran from April 18 to 26.

Artist donates Jamshid Mashayekhi's artwork to family



Actor Jamshid Mashayekhi's son Nader (2nd L) receives the drawing done by his father from artist Hojjat Shakiba at the opening ceremony of Shakiba's Exhibit in Niavaran Cultural Center on April 12, 2019. (Honaronline/Hassan Motahhari)

A R T **TEHRAN** — A drawing by Jamshid Mashayekhi, the star of the acclaimed movie "Kamalolmolk", was donated to the actor's family on Friday.

Mashayekhi drew his wife's portrait while he was taking art lessons from Master Hojjat Shakiba, whose exhibition opened in the Niavaran Cultural Center on Friday.

A number of artists and cultural figures, including art critic Javad Mojabi and calligrapher Javad Bakhtiari, attended the opening ceremony.

Shakiba said that he met Mashayekhi while he was collaborating as an art advisor with filmmaker Ali Hatami on his project "Kamalolmolk".

"Mashayekhi did this drawing while he

was taking lessons from me, since he was due to play the role of the Qajar-era artist Kamalolmolk. The drawing is a simple one, but it has been created with love. I took this out of my treasure trove today, and I think I need to return it to its real owner who is his family," Shakiba said.

Mashayekhi's son Nader who received the artwork thanked Shakiba and said that he is very happy to see the artwork.

"We are collecting works by my father and this is one of them," Nader said.

Mashayekhi died April 2 at the age of 85. His family plans to donate a collection of the legendary actor's memorabilia to the Film Museum of Iran.

Shakiba's exhibition will be running until April 19 at the center.

Fajr festival to screen rare rushes of "The Cow"

A R T **TEHRAN** — A selection of newly-discovered daily rushes of Dariush Mehrjui's 1969 cult film "The Cow" will be screened at the 37th Fajr International Film Festival, the organizers announced on Saturday.

"The Cow", which is a forerunner of the Iranian New Wave cinema, turns fifty this year and the organizers have arranged a special screening session for the film.

"The film is due to have a special screening at the festival, so we decided to study all the negatives of the film," National Film Archive of Iran director Ladan Taheri said in a press release published by the organizers on Saturday.

"But while we were searching for the negatives, we discovered the daily rushes and several number of screen tests," she added.

"Part of the rushes show the actors in their casual clothes at the location of the film getting prepared for the screen tests," she noted.



A scene from "The Cow" by Dariush Mehrjui

"Several other screen tests have been carried out in the courtyard of the then art and culture office," she added.

"The rushes are of high importance since they bear

the screen tests of legendary actors Ezzatollah Entezami, Jamshid Mashayekhi and Jafar Vaali who are not among us any longer," she added.

According to Taheri, the entirety of the rushes last 30 minutes and is considered a treasure trove for the cinema of Iran.

Starring Ezzatollah Entezami, Ali Nasirian and Jamshid Mashayekhi, the film is about Masht Hassan, who owns the only cow in a remote and desolate village.

While he is away, his cow, whom he treats as his own child, dies. Knowing the relationship between Masht Hassan and his cow, the villagers hastily dispose of the corpse, and when Masht Hassan returns, they tell him that his cow ran away. Devastated by the news, Masht Hassan starts to spend all his time in the barn eating hay and slowly begins to believe that he has become the cow.

Earlier in the 34th edition of Fajr festival, photos of "The Cow" went on display at an exhibition along with the 1978 French documentary on Iran "The Lovers' Wind".

Oprah Winfrey and Prince Harry making mental health documentary for Apple

LONDON (Reuters) — Oprah Winfrey and Britain's Prince Harry have teamed up to produce an Apple documentary next year aimed at raising awareness of mental health.

Harry, who revealed he had come very close to a breakdown after the death of his mother Princess Diana when he was 12, has made mental health campaigning one of his priorities.

Harry's frank disclosures about his own torment helped to break down some of the

current British taboos over discussion of mental health issues in public.

He and Winfrey, one of the world's most influential media moguls, have been working on the project for a few months. "I truly believe that good mental health — mental fitness — is the key to powerful leadership, productive communities and a purpose-driven self," Harry said in a statement.

"Our hope is that this series will be positive, enlightening and inclusive — sharing

global stories of unparalleled human spirit fighting back from the darkest places, and the opportunity for us to understand ourselves and those around us better."

Winfrey joined Apple on stage in March when it launched streaming television services and announced a global book club and two documentaries.

Photo: Tim Cook, CEO of Apple (L) and Oprah Winfrey hug during an Apple special event at the Steve Jobs Theater in Cupertino, California, U.S., March 25, 2019.

