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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# A robust computational investigation on C<sub>60</sub> fullerene nanostructure as a novel sensor to detect SCN<sup>-</sup>



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## KEYWORDS

C<sub>60</sub> fullerene;  
Adsorption;  
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**Abstract** This study explored on the adsorption properties and electronic structure of SCN<sup>-</sup> via density functional theory analysis on the exterior surfaces of C<sub>60</sub> and CNTs using B3LYP functional and 6-31G\*\* standard basis set. Then adsorption of SCN<sup>-</sup> through nitrogen atom on the C<sub>60</sub> fullerene is electrostatic ( $-48.02 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$ ) in comparison with the C<sub>59</sub>Al fullerene that shows

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SCN

covalently attached to fullerene surface ( $-389.10 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$ ). Our calculations demonstrate that the  $\text{SCN}^-$  adsorption on the pristine and Al-doped single-walled CNTs are  $-173.13$  and  $-334.43 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$ , indicating that the  $\text{SCN}^-$  can be chemically bonded on the surface of Al-doped CNTs. Moreover, the adsorption of  $\text{SCN}^-$  on the  $\text{C}_{60}$  surface is weaker in comparison with  $\text{C}_{59}\text{B}$ ,  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Al}$ , and  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Ga}$  systems but its electronic sensitivity improved in comparison with those of  $\text{C}_{59}\text{B}$ ,  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Al}$ , and  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Ga}$  fullerenes. The evaluation of adsorption energy, energy gap, and dipole moment demonstrates that the pure fullerene can be exploited in the design practice as an  $\text{SCN}^-$  sensor and  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Al}$  can be used for  $\text{SCN}^-$  removal applications.

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## 1. Introduction

Over these past decades, various carbon based structures have been found such as  $\text{C}_{60}$  fullerene by Kroto et al. (1985) in 1985 and SWCNTs through Iijima (1991) in 1991, encouraging scientists to have drastic attention on their chemical, physical, mechanical, and electrochemical phenomena of these novel materials. Due to technological availability, the most ample  $\text{C}_{60}$  molecule has the most widely adaptation of fullerenes. Thus, it has been of the most focused material to be under research by various chemists of their research areas, including gas storage, pharmaceutical studies, batteries, transistors, sensors and micro-electromechanical systems and sensor applications, due to its exclusive properties of unusual stability, superconductivity, ferroelectricity, non-linear optical properties, ultra-stiffness to ferromagnetism (Ren et al., 2006; Krainara et al., 2012; Sabirov et al., 2008; Liu, 2009; Rondeau-Gagne et al., 2010; Funasaka et al., 1995; Wilson, 1999; Bakry et al., 2007).

Fullerene, particularly  $\text{C}_{60}$ , has been used as a good electron acceptor without changes to its electronic properties during its chemical bonding with other organic molecules (Liu et al., 2008; Shinohara, 2000). Hetero fullerenes have been the source of attention both experimentally and theoretically (Shi et al., 2016; Bezi Javan et al., 2010; Neyts et al., 2011). Doping inside of the fullerene molecule and substitute of heteroatoms (hetero fullerene) with one or more carbon atoms of the molecules of fullerene are two approaches of doping on  $\text{C}_{60}$ . Abundant experimental investigations for endohedrally doped or exohedrally doped fullerenes via metal atoms were performed. Among them, the point of interest has been given to cage structures endohedrally doped with many atoms including some gases, transition metallic, and rare earth atoms (Ren et al., 2008; Murata et al., 2006; Mauser et al., 1997; Larsson and Greer, 2002). The interaction properties between gas molecules and fullerene-doped structures are known among scientists as one of the most important aspects when considering intermolecular interactions (Hernández et al., 2021). For example, the interactions of some polar molecules with endohedral metallo  $\text{C}_{80}$  fullerene was investigated by Jalbout et al. (Jalbout, 2009) who considered interaction energy of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$ ,  $\text{CH}_3\text{OH}$ , HF and  $\text{NH}_3$  molecules with endohedral metallo fullerene. Recently, Bucher et al. (Bucher, 2012) have reported the behavior of water trapped  $\text{C}_{60}$  fullerene. They indicated that the interaction of water with the carbon cage is weak. Also, Neyts et al. (Baei et al., 2011) have studied the interaction of dopant atom trapped inside and bound outside to the carbon cage (endo- and exohedral) or the metal atom via substituting one carbon atom. The adsorption energy of  $\text{SCN}^-$  on the exterior surfaces of C, BN, BP, AlN, and AlP nanostructures have been reported (Soltani et al., 2012; Soltani et al., 2012; Soltani et al., 2014; Kanani et al., 2014; Frisch et al., 2009). Herein this work, the adsorption behavior and electronic structures of interacting  $\text{SCN}^-$  towards the exterior surfaces of pristine and doped  $\text{C}_{60}$  nanostructures were examined to provide further insights on designing novel gas sensor materials.

## 2. Computational details

The equilibrium geometry, natural bond orbital (NBO), and density of states (DOS) calculations were performed (Alireza, 2012) through Gaussian 09 suite of programs (Cao et al., 2021). B3LYP level (Soltani et al., 2017; Soltani et al., 2018; Baei et al., 2014; Kia et al., 2013) was used for geometry development through the 6-31G\*\* basis set. B3LYP/6-31G\*\* level of theory were illustrated as a dependable and usually utilized level to evaluate of carbon fullerenes (Baei et al., 2017; Baei et al., 2017; Hassani and Tavakol, 2014). Three additional nanostructures were examined by substituting one carbon atom in  $\text{C}_{60}$  with one Al, Ga or B atom to form doped  $\text{C}_{60}$  heterofullerenes. The adsorption energies ( $E_{ad}$ ) of  $\text{SCN}^-$  on the nanostructures of  $\text{C}_{60}$ ,  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Al}$ ,  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Ga}$ ,  $\text{C}_{59}\text{B}$  were determined through the following equation:

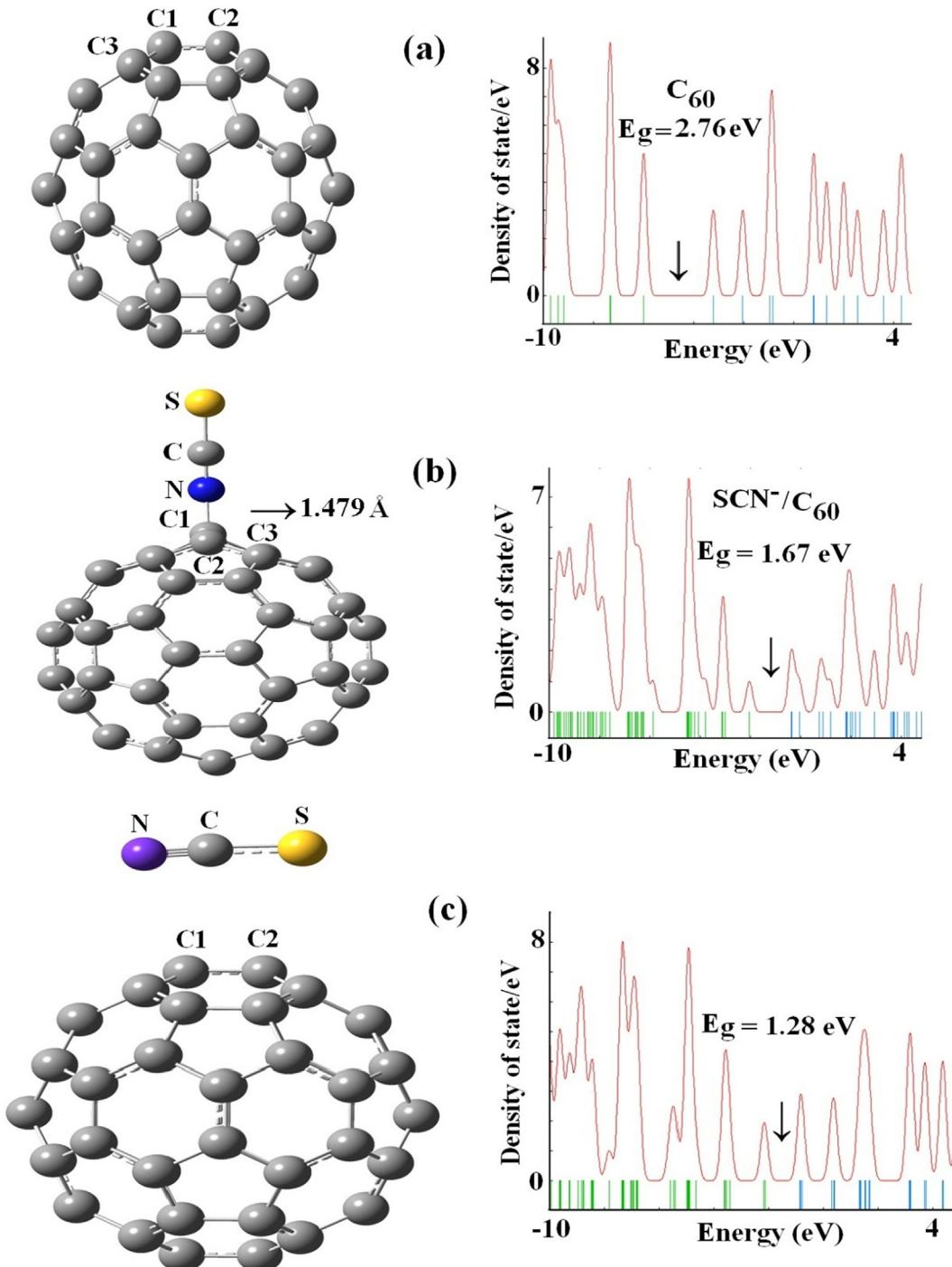
$$E_{ad} = E_{\text{nanostructure}-\text{SCN}} - (E_{\text{nanostructure}} + E_{\text{SCN}^-}) \quad (1)$$

where  $E_{\text{nanostructure}-\text{SCN}}$ ,  $E_{\text{nanostructure}}$ ,  $E_{\text{SCN}^-}$  are the total energies of adsorption complexes, pristine nanostructures and free  $\text{SCN}^-$ . The adsorption energy has been performed for the basis set superposition error (BSSE) in the most stable states by the full counterpoise method. Natural charge analysis with complete NBO calculations was performed by the B3LYP/6-31G\*\* level of theory for relaxed structures (Wang et al., 2022). Quantum molecular descriptors like ionization potential ( $I$ ), electron affinity ( $A$ ), chemical potential ( $\mu$ ), global hardness ( $\eta$ ), global softness ( $S$ ) and electrophilicity index ( $\omega$ ) (Taibi, 2021) (Alireza, 2012) have been computed to predict the physical and chemical features of adsorption complexes, pristine nanostructures and isolated  $\text{SCN}^-$  (Cao et al., 2021; Soltani et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2022; Gallo et al., 1997). The  $I$  and  $A$  amounts have been studied as the negative of HOMO and LUMO energies, respectively, based on Koopmans' approximation (Serkan, 2020).

## 3. Result and discussion

### 3.1. Adsorption state of $\text{SCN}^-$ on the carbon nanocages

Based on present computational analysis, the bond lengths of  $\text{C}_1\text{-C}_2$  and  $\text{C}_1\text{-C}_3$  in the pure  $\text{C}_{60}$  are about 1.395 and 1.453 Å with  $sp^2$  hybridization (Fig. 1). The outputs are similar to the results which is reported by Gallo and co-worker (Chen et al., 2021). After adsorption of SCN through *N*-down on carbon atom of  $\text{C}_{60}$  (Fig. 1b), the bond lengths of  $\text{C}_1\text{-C}_2$  and  $\text{C}_1\text{-C}_3$  in this complex changed to 1.511 and 1.548 Å. These results



**Fig. 1** The relaxed structures and density of states for the pure C<sub>60</sub> and SCN<sup>-</sup> interacting with C<sub>60</sub> systems in different positions.

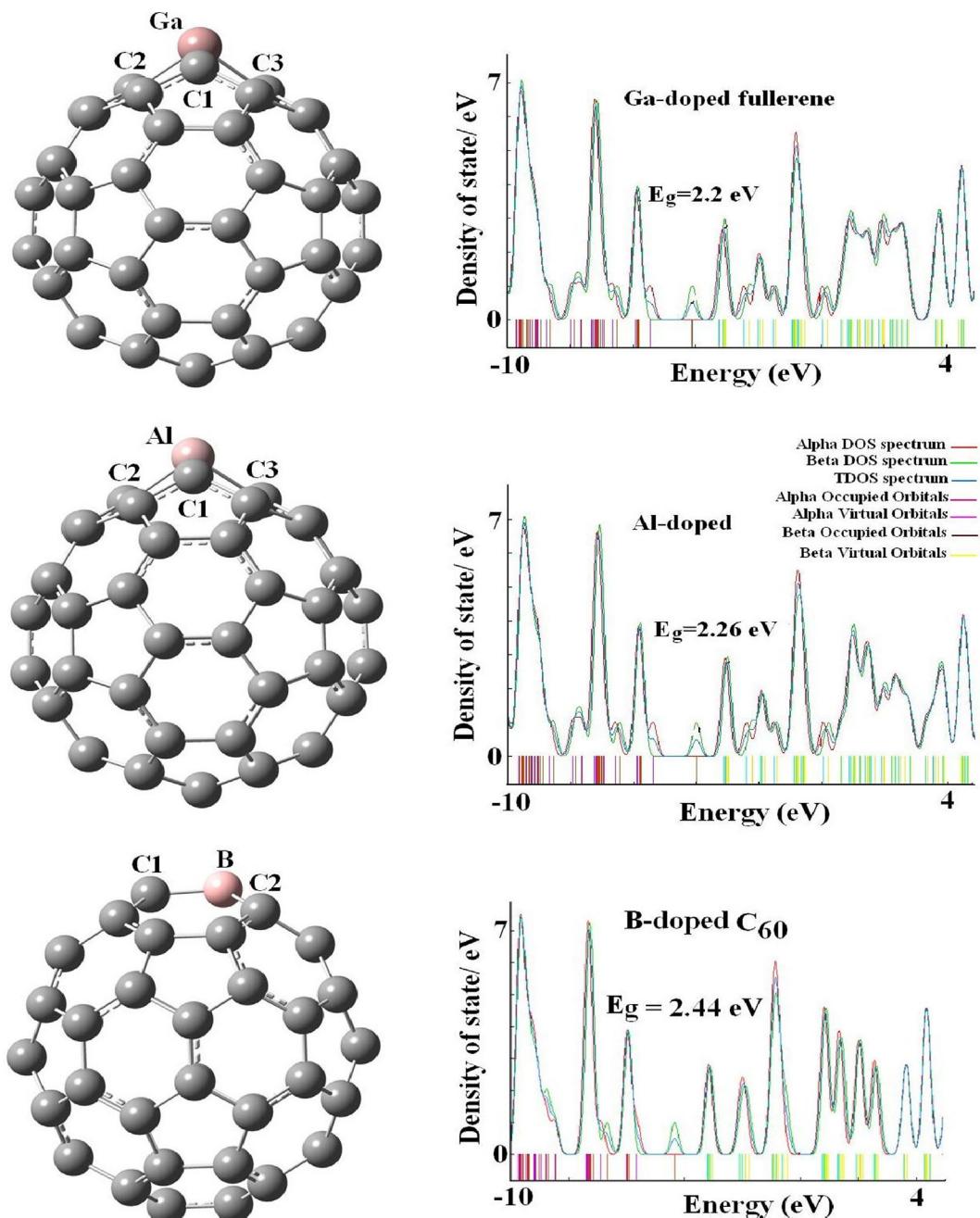
imply that the adsorption of SCN<sup>-</sup> on the wall of the pristine C<sub>60</sub> has noticeable influence on bond lengths of carbon atoms (Peyghan et al., 2013). The most stable configuration for the SCN<sup>-</sup> adsorption (*N*-down) on the pristine C<sub>60</sub> has adsorption energy of  $-48.06 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$  and the interaction distance is 1.479 Å. Similarly, the most stable configuration for the SCN<sup>-</sup> adsorption (parallel position) over the pristine C<sub>60</sub> has adsorption energy of  $-52.41 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$  and the interaction distance is 2.53 Å. After the use of BSSE calculation, the values of E<sub>ads</sub> for the SCN<sup>-</sup> adsorption through *N*-down and parallel posi-

tion on the pristine C<sub>60</sub> have adsorption energies of  $-43.21$  and  $-47.08 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$ , suggesting the nature of this the interaction in the terms of E<sub>ad</sub> has mainly electrostatic character. Upon the adsorption of SCN<sup>-</sup> with C<sub>60</sub> fullerene (Fig. 1c), the average distances of C<sub>1</sub>-C<sub>2</sub> and C<sub>1</sub>-C<sub>3</sub> change to *sp*<sup>3</sup> hybridization of lengths 1.51 and 1.54 Å while the bond lengths of C-N and C-S upon the adsorption of SCN<sup>-</sup> on the wall of fullerene is 1.186 and 1.607 Å, respectively. For this system, the results of NBO analysis exhibits that there is large charge transfer (0.70 e) from SCN<sup>-</sup> to the surface of C<sub>60</sub> full-

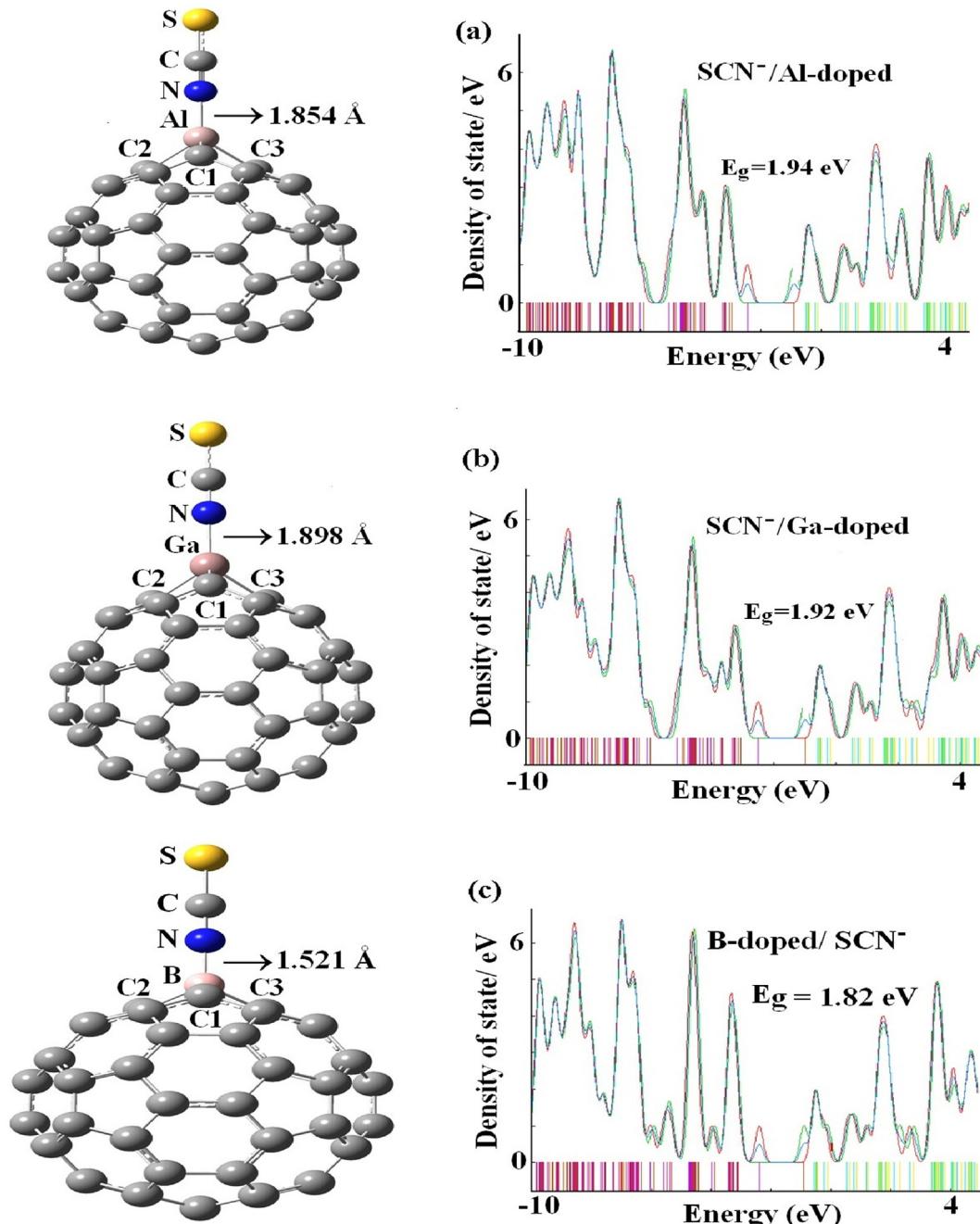
eren. Moreover, the computed adsorption energy of  $\text{SCN}^-$  toward the wall of fullerene is obviously higher than those on the surfaces of CNT and BNNT (Soltani et al., 2012; Soltani et al., 2012). The previous report represents that the value of  $E_{ad}$  for the  $\text{SCN}^-$  on the perfect (6, 0) BNNT was  $-148 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$  (Soltani et al., 2012) and it increased on the outer surfaces of the AlPNT ( $-318.163 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$ ), AlNNT ( $-262.145 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$ ), and BPNT ( $-255.845 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$ ) (Soltani et al., 2014). It is observed from the outputs that the adsorption behavior of  $\text{SCN}^-$  on the fullerene surface is weak electrostatic interaction. While the  $E_{ad}$  value for the  $\text{SCN}^-$  on BNNT, BPNT, AlPNT, and AlNNT surfaces are chemisorption and a covalent bound is expected to produce through

interaction of each configuration with  $\text{SCN}^-$  (Soltani et al., 2014; Frisch et al., 2009). Our last investigation on the effect of doping atoms on chemical interaction encouraged us to scrutinizing it on fullerene (Figs. 2 and 3).

The computations of  $\text{SCN}^-$  corresponding to  $\text{C}_{59}\text{B}$ ,  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Al}$ , and  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Ga}$  fullerenes confirmed our expectation with adsorption amount of  $-258.28$ ,  $-389.10$ , and  $-347.71 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$  respectively, with the interaction distances of  $1.52$ ,  $1.85$ , and  $1.90 \text{ \AA}$  (Figs. 2 and 3). Outcomes verifying a chemisorption process as  $\text{SCN}^-$  close to  $\text{C}_{59}\text{B}$ ,  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Al}$ , and  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Ga}$  fullerenes. The adsorption and interaction distance of  $\text{SCN}^-$  through S-down attached to  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Al}$  fullerene in order are  $-308.11 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$  and  $2.31 \text{ \AA}$ . In contrast, the increment in the interaction of



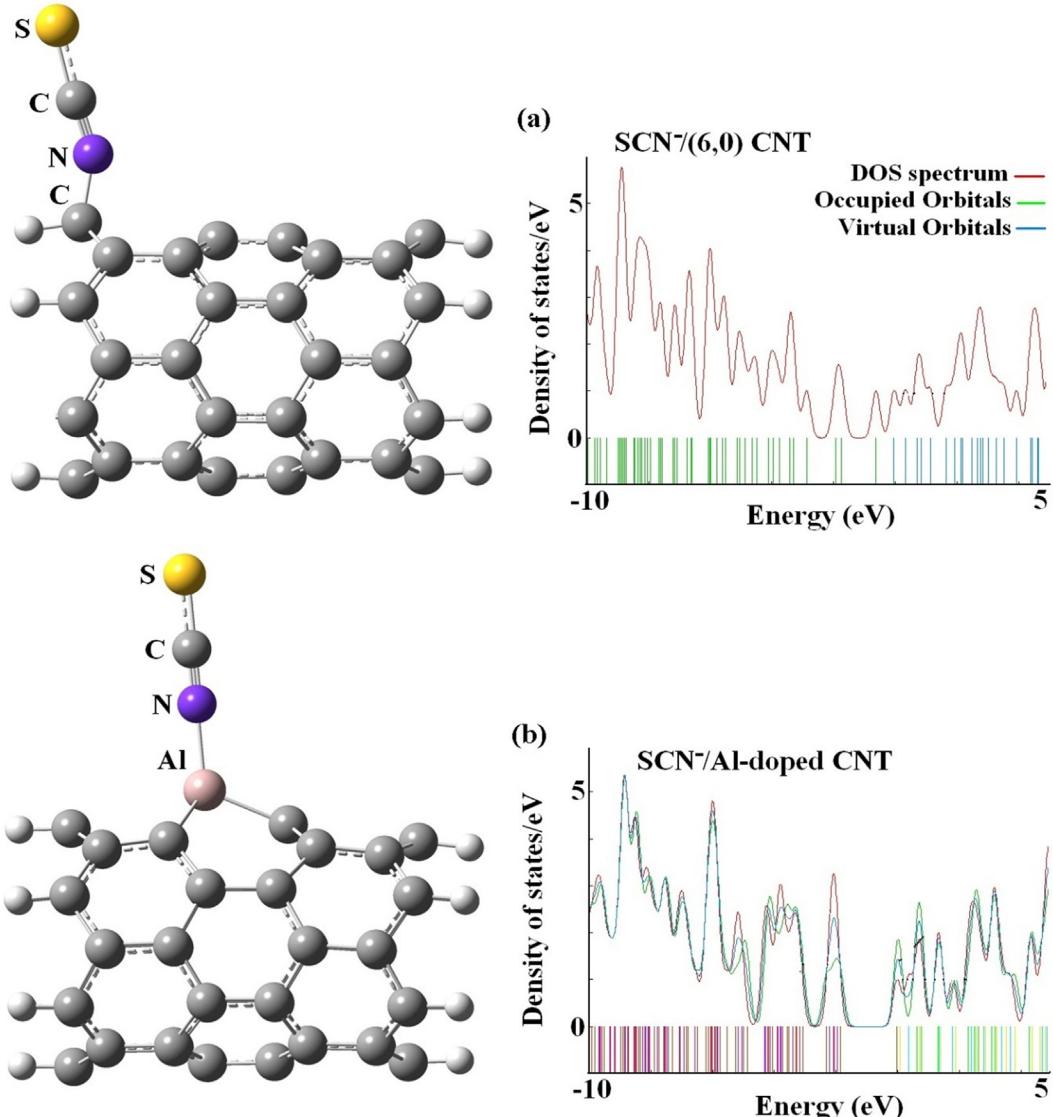
**Fig. 2** The relaxed structures and density of states for the pure Ga-, Al-, and B-C<sub>60</sub> systems.



**Fig. 3** The relaxed structures and density of states for the most stable state (*N*-down) of (a) SCN<sup>-</sup>/C<sub>59</sub>Al, (b) SCN<sup>-</sup>/C<sub>59</sub>Ga, and (c) SCN<sup>-</sup>/C<sub>59</sub>B systems.

SCN<sup>-</sup> with C<sub>59</sub>B, C<sub>59</sub>Ga, and C<sub>59</sub>Al fullerenes can be ascribed to the strong hybridization between dopant *p* orbitals of fullerene and the nitrogen *p* orbitals of anion. Moreover, the doping of Al can further enhance the adsorption of SCN<sup>-</sup> onto the fullerene in comparison with the B- and Ga dopant atoms (Einert et al., 2021). These days, different significant approaches like functionalization, doping and size-dependent were applied in order to enhance or control the attributes of substances (Kurban et al., 2021; Muz et al., 2022; Muz et al., 2020; Olea Ullo et al., 2018; Soltani et al., 2016, 1105). To better understand the adsorption results, we performed the charge

analysis which shows a strong charge transfer of approximately 0.50, 0.32, and 0.29 |*e*| from the SCN<sup>-</sup> to the C<sub>59</sub>B, C<sub>59</sub>Ga, and C<sub>59</sub>Al fullerenes. The analysis of NBO reveals that more ionic-bond-type process of electron transfer ameliorates the adsorption of SCN<sup>-</sup> upon the C<sub>59</sub>B, C<sub>59</sub>Ga, and C<sub>59</sub>Al fullerenes. The strong chemical adsorption between the SCN<sup>-</sup> and the C<sub>59</sub>B, C<sub>59</sub>Ga and C<sub>59</sub>Al fullerenes leads to elongated bond lengths of B-C, Ga-C, and Al-C from 1.548, 1.887, and 1.884 Å to 1.616, 1.942, and 1.950 Å after the adsorption processes, respectively. The calculation thus exhibits that adsorbed N atom of SCN<sup>-</sup> on C<sub>59</sub>B, C<sub>59</sub>Ga, and C<sub>59</sub>Al fullere-



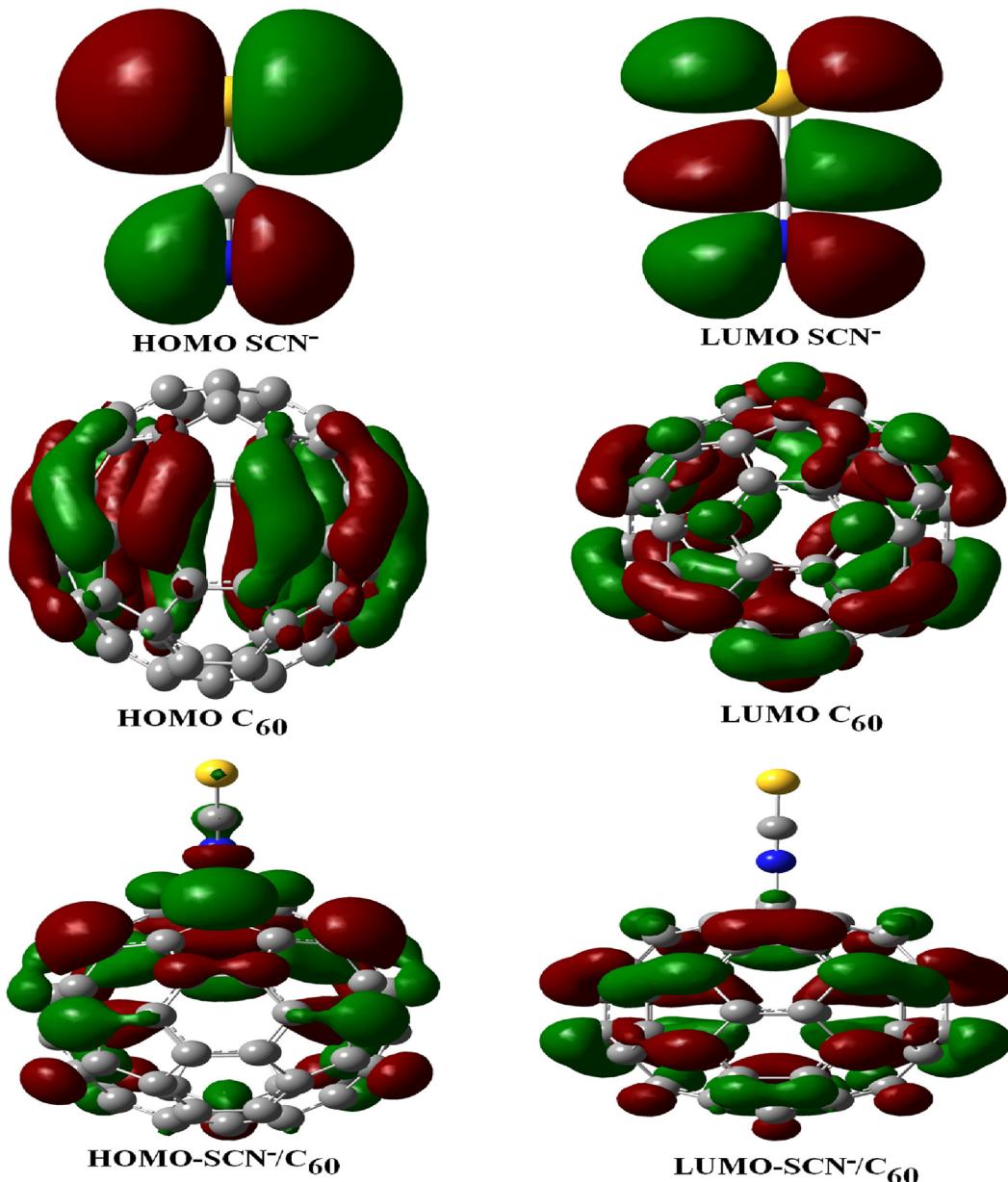
**Fig. 4** The relaxed structures and density of states for the most stable state (*N*-down) of (a)  $\text{SCN}^-/(6,0)$  SWCNT and (b)  $\text{SCN}^-/\text{Al-doped}$  SWCNT systems.

nes had strong covalent bonds. The evaluation of our previous study (adsorption of  $\text{SCN}^-$  on the pure and Al-doped SWCNTs) exhibited that the single point energy (SPE) cannot purvey significant validity because of the lack of geometry relaxation of complexes provided (Soltani et al., 2012). According to our calculations (Fig. 4), the adsorption of  $\text{SCN}^-$  through *N*-down on the pure and Al-doped SWCNTs are  $-173.13$  and  $-334.43 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$ , suggesting that the  $\text{SCN}^-$  can be chemically bonded on the surface of Al-doped CNTs. Based on SPE calculations, the adsorption of  $\text{SCN}^-$  on the pure and Al-doped SWCNTs are found to be  $-26.08$  and  $-286.38 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$ , respectively (Soltani et al., 2012). On the  $\text{SCN}^-$  adsorption with SWCNT (Fig. 4a), the average distances of  $\text{C}_1\text{-C}_2$  and  $\text{C}_1\text{-C}_3$  shift to  $sp^3$  hybridization of lengths  $1.42$  and  $1.44 \text{ \AA}$  while the bond lengths of  $\text{C}\text{-N}$  and  $\text{C}\text{-S}$  upon the adsorption of  $\text{SCN}^-$  on the wall of nanotube in order is  $1.185$  and  $1.604 \text{ \AA}$  (Ramezanitaghartapeh et al., 2022).

### 3.2. Electronic features

Considering the HOMO (high occupied molecular orbital) and the LUMO (low unoccupied molecular orbital), the most effective HOMO and LUMO (Rimadani, 2020) distribution plots for every form are proven in Fig. 5. The electro-positive and electro-negative densities, illustrated in order by the green and red colors, also are determined as almost equivalent in every shape.

Fig. 5 exhibits that the HOMO for  $\text{SCN}^-/\text{C}_{60}$  is slightly located upon the  $\text{S}\text{-C}\text{-N}$  orbital and is uniformly distributed upon the carbon atoms of  $\text{C}_{60}$  in energy level of  $-2.05 \text{ eV}$ . The LUMO is more located on the carbon–carbon orbitals in the center of the  $\text{C}_{60}$  in energy level of  $-0.38 \text{ eV}$  (Mohammad, 2014). In contrast, the HOMO of  $\text{SCN}^-$  is more resided on the carbon atoms in the center and near of the  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Al}$ ,  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Ga}$ , and  $\text{C}_{59}\text{B}$ , and is slightly located on electronegative



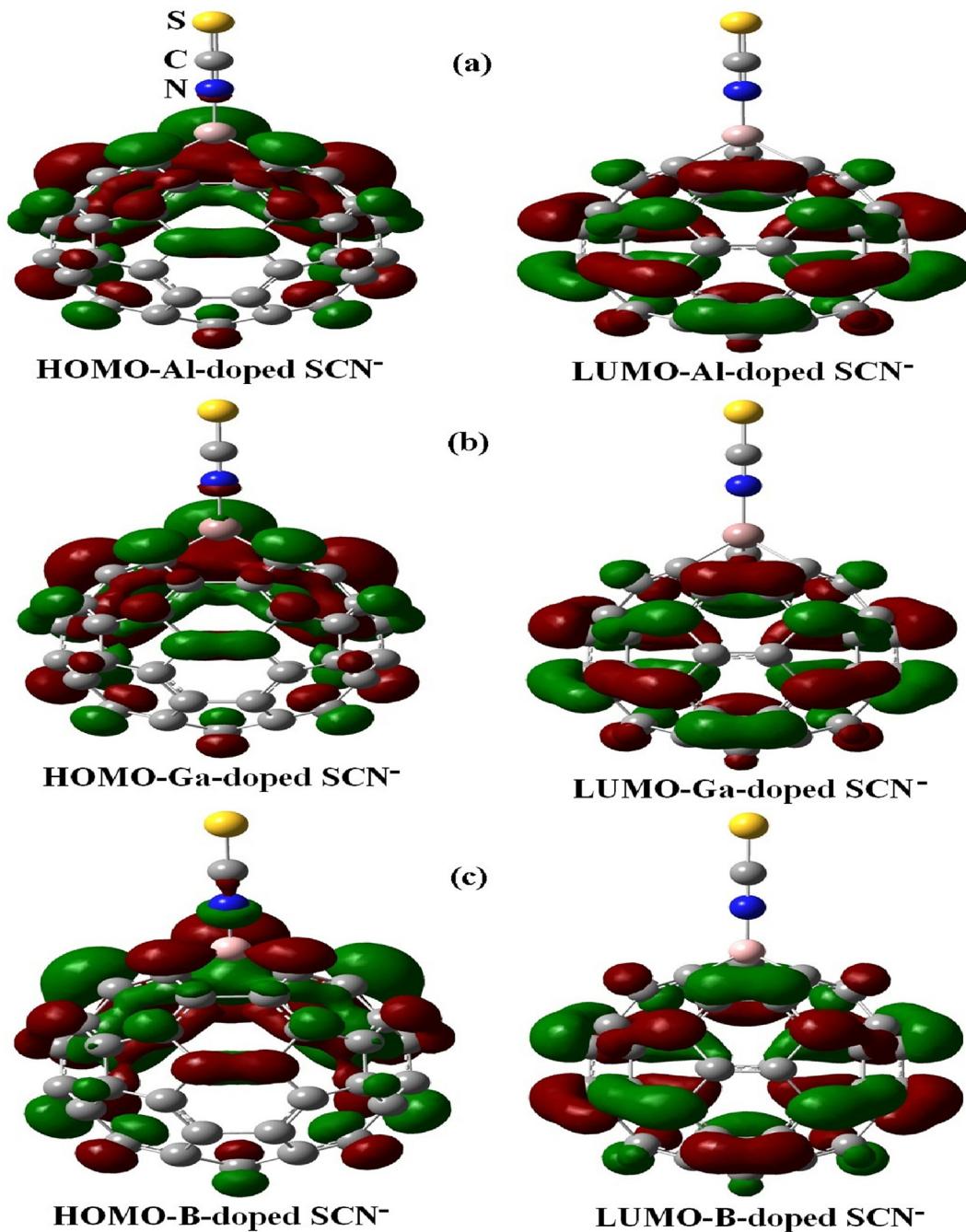
**Fig. 5** Charge distribution of HOMO and LUMO orbitals upon the pure SCN<sup>-</sup>, C<sub>60</sub>, and, SCN<sup>-</sup> adsorbed on C<sub>60</sub>.

nitrogen atoms of SCN<sup>-</sup> anion (Fig. 6) in energy levels of -2.45, -2.51, and -2.39 eV, while the LUMO orbitals for whole configurations are more dispensed upon the carbon–carbon bonds of fullerene cage in order in energy level of -0.51, -0.59, and -0.57 eV (Table 2). Fig. 7 presents the molecular electrostatic potential (MEP) map with an isodensity surface of 0.02 a.u. for pure C<sub>60</sub> fullerene (B., 2022). Analysis of MEP represents that the blue color of the pristine C<sub>60</sub> fullerene acts as electron-rich regions and the red color acts as the electron-poor regions (Avramopoulos et al., 2016).

As it is clear from the Table 1 and 2, there is a significant diminish in energy gaps from C<sub>60</sub> to C<sub>59</sub>Al, C<sub>59</sub>B, and C<sub>59</sub>Ga fullerenes from 2.76 eV for C<sub>60</sub> to 2.26, 2.20, and 2.44 eV for C<sub>59</sub>Al, C<sub>59</sub>B, and C<sub>59</sub>Ga fullerenes (Avramopoulos et al., 2016; Bahrami et al., 2014). The diminish is due to approaching of SCN<sup>-</sup> to the exterior walls of C<sub>59</sub>Al, C<sub>59</sub>B, and C<sub>59</sub>Ga

fullerenes with high reduced placing at SCN<sup>-</sup>/C<sub>59</sub>B complex from 2.44 eV for basic stage to 1.82 eV for mixture plot, as gap energy for C<sub>59</sub>Al and C<sub>59</sub>Ga fullerenes in order are 1.94 and 1.92 eV. Also, the value of E<sub>g</sub> is 2.67 eV for the mixture of SCN<sup>-</sup> and C<sub>60</sub>. Therefore, the reactivity of C<sub>59</sub>Al, C<sub>59</sub>B, and C<sub>59</sub>Ga fullerenes would be increased as SCN<sup>-</sup> approaches to the aforementioned configurations. Therefore, unlike the C<sub>59</sub>Al and C<sub>59</sub>Ga fullerenes, the B-doping improves the sensitivity of the fullerene interacting with the SCN<sup>-</sup> anion. The reduction of E<sub>g</sub> improves the complexes electrical conductivity, which can then be converted to an electrical signal by C<sub>59</sub>B for SCN<sup>-</sup>detection (Bahrami et al., 2014) (S.A., 2018).

C<sub>60</sub> has icosahedral symmetry (I<sub>h</sub> point group) and composed of sixty carbon atoms (Soltani et al., 2012). The symmetry of the C<sub>59</sub>Al, C<sub>59</sub>B, and C<sub>59</sub>Ga fullerenes is C<sub>s</sub>, so their symmetry is not similar than for the C<sub>60</sub> case, as SCN<sup>-</sup> have



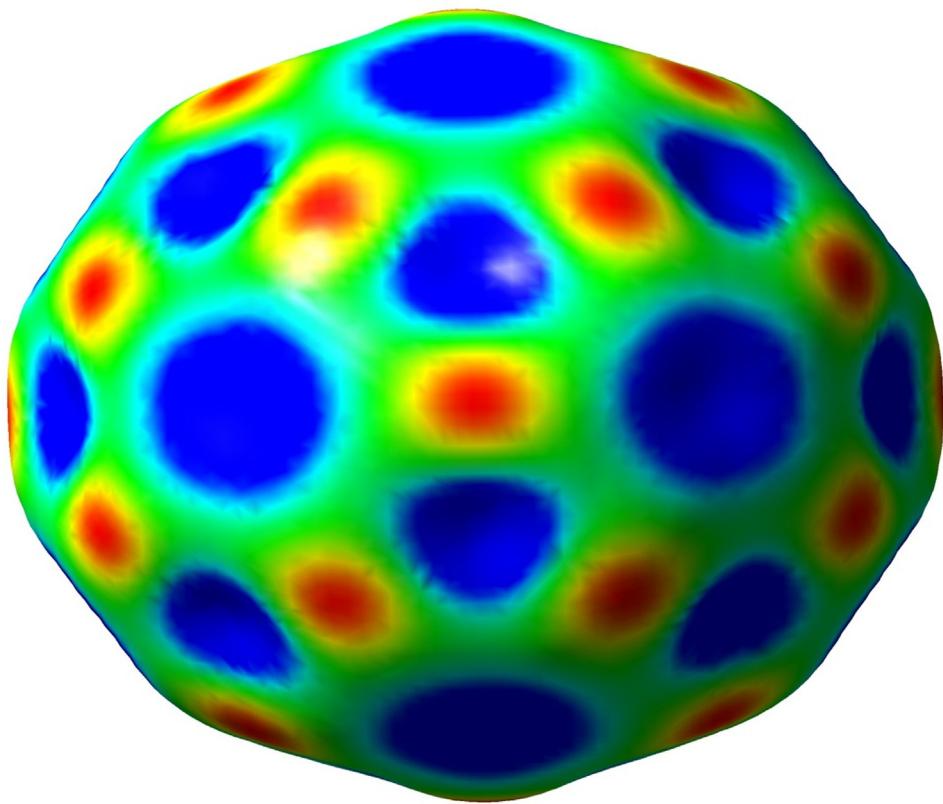
**Fig. 6** Charge distribution of HOMO and LUMO orbitals upon the pure Ga-, Al-, and B-C<sub>59</sub> loaded with one SCN<sup>-</sup>.

**Table 1** Calculated HOMO energies ( $E_{HOMO}$ /eV), LUMO energies ( $E_{LUMO}$ /eV), dipole moment ( $\mu_D$ /Debye), and HOMO–LUMO energy gap ( $E_{LUMO} - E_{HOMO}$ /eV) for the pure and their complexes.

Property	SCN <sup>-</sup>	C <sub>60</sub>	SCN <sup>-</sup> /C <sub>60</sub> (N-down)	SCN <sup>-</sup> /C <sub>60</sub> (Parallel)
$E_{HOMO}$ /eV	-5.38	-5.99	-2.05	-2.14
$E_{LUMO}$ /eV	-3.12	-3.23	-0.38	-0.86
$[E_{LUMO} - E_{HOMO}]$ /eV	2.26	2.76	1.67	1.28
$\mu_D$ /Debye	2.64	0.00	8.27	34.40
$E_F$ /eV	-4.25	-4.61	-1.21	-1.50
$\Delta E_g$ /eV	-	-	1.09	1.48

**Table 2** Calculated HOMO energies ( $E_{HOMO}$ /eV), LUMO energies ( $E_{LUMO}$ /eV), dipole moment ( $\mu_D$ /Debye), and HOMO–LUMO energy gap ( $E_{LUMO} - E_{HOMO}$ /eV) for the doped-C<sub>59</sub> and their complexes.

Property	AIC59	SCN <sup>-</sup> /C59Al	C59Ga	SCN <sup>-</sup> /C59Ga	C59B	SCN <sup>-</sup> /C59B
$E_{HOMO}$ /eV	-5.38	-2.45	-5.44	-2.51	-5.66	-2.39
$E_{LUMO}$ /eV	-3.12	-0.51	-3.24	-0.59	-3.22	-0.57
[ $E_{LUMO} - E_{HOMO}$ ]/eV	2.26	1.94	2.20	1.92	2.44	1.82
$\mu_D$ /Debye	2.64	18.35	1.61	30.01	0.573	19.75
$E_F$ /eV	-4.25	-1.48	-4.34	-1.55	-4.44	-1.48
$\Delta E_g$ /eV	-	0.32	-	0.28	-	0.62

**Fig. 7** MEP map of C<sub>60</sub> fullerene.

$\infty\infty V$  symmetry. Besides, the point groups of SCN<sup>-</sup> on C<sub>60</sub>, C<sub>59</sub>Al, C<sub>59</sub>B, and C<sub>59</sub>Ga fullerenes are C<sub>1</sub>. NBO analysis demonstrates that the electronic configurations of C<sub>59</sub>Al and C<sub>59</sub>Ga models are [Ne] 3 s<sup>0.33</sup>3p<sup>0.39</sup> and [Ar] 4 s<sup>0.38</sup>4p<sup>0.37</sup>, while SCN<sup>-</sup>/C<sub>59</sub>Al and SCN<sup>-</sup>/C<sub>59</sub>Ga models are of [Ne] 3 s<sup>0.25</sup>3p<sup>0.42</sup> and [Ar] 4 s<sup>0.63</sup>4p<sup>0.99</sup>, respectively. Hence, the more reactivity has taken place the more charge transfer has occurred for SCN<sup>-</sup> adsorbed on C<sub>60</sub>, C<sub>59</sub>Al, C<sub>59</sub>B, and C<sub>59</sub>Ga fullerenes. A substantial characteristic that demonstrates the charge distribution when gases are adsorbed to the system is the dipole moment ( $\mu_D$ ) vector of species (Alireza, 2012). As a gas approaches or remotes from a fullerene, alteration of the size and direction of the  $\mu_D$  is predictable. The results of the  $\mu_D$  for whole configurations are scrutinized and speculated that total  $\mu_D$  upraised drastically as SCN<sup>-</sup> approaches to varied configuration of fullerene. Our calculations suggest that the

dipole moment ( $\mu_D$ ) value for pure C<sub>60</sub> and SCN<sup>-</sup> are 0.00 and 2.64 Debye, respectively that with the adsorption of SCN<sup>-</sup> in the positions of *N*-down and parallel both complexes in order increased to 8.27 and 34.40 Debye (Table 1). The  $\mu_D$  values are found to be 1.61, 2.64, and 0.57 for C<sub>59</sub>Al, C<sub>59</sub>Ga, C<sub>59</sub>B fullerenes, respectively. While it significantly increased as a result of SCN<sup>-</sup> closeness to the outer surface of considered configurations, with 18.35, 30.01, and 19.75 Debye for C<sub>59</sub>Al, C<sub>59</sub>Ga, C<sub>59</sub>B fullerenes (Table 2). To observe the adsorption behavior in these complexes, the DOS of SCN<sup>-</sup>/C<sub>60</sub> complex in comparison with other complexes including SCN<sup>-</sup>/C<sub>59</sub>Al, SCN<sup>-</sup>/C<sub>59</sub>Ga, and SCN<sup>-</sup>/C<sub>59</sub>B was analyzed. As depicted in Figs. 1 and 3, the DOS of practical complexes are remarkably altered when the SCN<sup>-</sup> adsorbed upon the surface of fullerene while it is more noticeable in pure model (parallel position). These data illustrate that DOS close the Fermi

**Table 3** Calculated quantum molecular descriptors for the fullerene and their complexes.

Property	$\text{SCN}^-$	$\text{C}_{60}$	$\text{SCN}^-/\text{C}_{60}$	$\text{C}_{59}\text{Al}$	$\text{SCN}^-/\text{C}_{59}\text{Al}$	$\text{C}_{59}\text{Ga}$	$\text{SCN}^-/\text{C}_{59}\text{Ga}$
I/eV	0.41	5.99	2.05	5.38	2.45	5.44	2.51
A/eV	-7.41	3.23	0.38	3.12	0.51	3.24	0.59
$\eta/\text{eV}$	3.91	1.38	0.83	1.13	0.97	1.10	0.96
$\mu/\text{eV}$	-3.50	-4.61	-1.21	-4.25	-1.48	-4.34	-1.55
$S/\text{eV}^{-1}$	0.13	0.36	0.60	0.44	0.51	0.45	0.52
$\omega/\text{eV}$	1.57	7.69	0.89	7.99	1.13	8.56	1.25
$\Delta N_{\max}/\text{a.u.}$	1.65	-3.34	-1.46	3.76	-1.52	3.86	-1.61

level (EF) are influenced by the  $\text{SCN}^-$  and  $\text{C}_{60}$ ,  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Al}$ ,  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Ga}$ , and  $\text{C}_{59}\text{B}$ . Moreover, the great charge transfer is probable as extracted from EF outcomes revealing as basic amount of -4.61 eV for the pure  $\text{C}_{60}$  to -1.21 eV and -1.50 eV for  $\text{SCN}^-$  through *N*-down and parallel positions on the surface of  $\text{C}_{60}$  fullerene, respectively. The values of EF for the pure  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Al}$ ,  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Ga}$ , and  $\text{C}_{59}\text{B}$  are changed from -4.25, -4.34, and -4.44 eV to -1.48, -1.55, and -1.48 eV for  $\text{SCN}^-$  interacting with  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Al}$ ,  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Ga}$ , and  $\text{C}_{59}\text{B}$  systems, respectively. Our findings introduce fullerene and its doped models as high sensitivity materials to  $\text{SCN}^-$  that resemble a gas sensor.

### 3.3. Scrutinizing of quantum molecular descriptor for $\text{SCN}^-$

Results of Quantum Molecular Descriptor (QMD) represents a decrement on energy gap ( $E_g$ :  $[E_{\text{LUMO}} - E_{\text{HOMO}}]$ ) that results in ionization potential increase from 2.05 eV for  $\text{SCN}^-$  approaching to pure  $\text{C}_{60}$  to 2.45 and 2.51 eV for  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Al}$  and  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Ga}$  respectively, and consequently raise in global hardness ( $\eta$ ) from 0.83 eV for  $\text{SCN}^-$  on the pristine complex to 0.97 and 0.96 eV for  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Al}$  and  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Ga}$  when  $\text{SCN}^-$  is added to them. Similar plot is predictable for electron affinity (A) with 0.51 and 0.59 eV for  $\text{SCN}^-$  on the surfaces of the  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Al}$  and  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Ga}$  fullerenes from basic amount of 0.38 eV for  $\text{SCN}^-$  approaching to perfect  $\text{C}_{60}$ . Chemical potential ( $\mu$ ) increased from 1.21 eV for pure matrix of  $\text{SCN}/\text{C}_{60}$  to 1.48 and 1.55 eV for  $\text{SCN}/\text{C}_{59}\text{Al}$  and  $\text{SCN}/\text{C}_{59}\text{Ga}$  complexes. An increase in electrophilicity index ( $\omega$ ) for  $\text{SCN}^-/\text{Ga}$ -doped  $\text{C}_{59}$  complex is noticeable than that of  $\text{SCN}/\text{C}_{59}\text{Al}$  complex with certain amount of 1.25 eV. Considering softness ( $S$ ), it has decreased from 0.60 eV at  $\text{SCN}^-/\text{C}_{60}$  complex to 0.51 eV and 0.52 eV for  $\text{SCN}/\text{C}_{59}\text{Al}$  and  $\text{SCN}/\text{C}_{59}\text{Ga}$  complexes, respectively (see Table 3).

### 4. Conclusion

$\text{SCN}^-$  adsorption capacity on outer surface of perfect  $\text{C}_{60}$  in comparison with  $\text{C}_{59}\text{B}$ ,  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Al}$ , and  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Ga}$  fullerenes have been investigated through density functional theory calculations. Then interaction of the  $\text{SCN}^-$  with  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Al}$  is covalent in nature with the strong adsorption energy about -389.10 kJ mol<sup>-1</sup>. These results indicate that the chemisorption of  $\text{SCN}^-$  on surface of  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Al}$  with a strong charge transfer about 0.29 e. Our computation study shows that the adsorption property of  $\text{SCN}^-$  on the  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Al}$  surfaces is most notable as compared to  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Ga}$  and  $\text{C}_{59}\text{B}$  for  $\text{SCN}^-$  storages. Moreover, the eligible  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Al}$  nano-cage has significant energetic endurance and slightly larger energy gaps than the dopant Ga and B atoms. Therefore, the presence of  $\text{C}_{59}\text{B}$ ,  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Al}$ , and  $\text{C}_{59}\text{Ga}$  fullerenes can lower the electrophilicity, ionization potential, energy gaps and then upraise the softness or global hardness with the adsorption properties of  $\text{SCN}^-$ .

### Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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