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European demands will only complicate the situation surrounding the JCPOA



File photo

THANK YOU volunteers

BY FARANAK BAKHTIARI
Volunteers are dedicated to building a better global community; they are always at the forefront to fight against bad events without any expectations, even during the coronavirus pandemic, they made great efforts which needs to be appreciated more than ever.

Over the last months, as the epidemic has ravaged across the world, volunteers have been at the forefront of medical, community, and societal responses. Headlines in the world's media have paid credit to volunteers for all kinds of work, from helping to provide medical care, to doing shopping for vulnerable neighbors, or checking up on elderly people living alone.

International Volunteer Day (IVD) mandated by the UN General Assembly, is held each year on December 5. It is viewed as a unique chance for volunteers and organizations to celebrate their efforts, to share their values, and to promote their work.

This year's IVD campaign thanks volunteers worldwide and also shed light on the difficulties and needs of volunteers during the pandemic with the message "Together We Can Through Volunteering."

IRCS Volunteer Organization

In Iran, the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS), which was established in 1922, is one of the first and oldest members of the movement and is currently one of the top five societies in the world due to its significant activities in the national and international arenas.

In 2005, the IRCS received the Henry Davison Award for outstanding humanitarian services, and the IRCS initiative of volunteers was selected as the best project (out of 50 projects from 45 national societies), by the General Assembly of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

The IRCS Volunteer Organization takes a set of coherent and organized actions that are done with the help and support of volunteers according to the needs of the disadvantaged areas and villages to meet the main needs of the community.

In addition to offering services to the victims of natural disasters in the country, it has taken numerous missions in international disasters and incidents helping the people of Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq, Southeast Asia earthquake, Lebanon, Gaza, Somalia, and Yemen.

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Qom a prime destination for pilgrims, day-trippers, history buffs, and nature lovers

BY SAMANEH ABOUTALEBI
Iran's second holiest city after Mashhad, Qom is home to the holy shrine of Hazrat-e Masumeh (SA), several major seminaries, madrasas as well as many tourism resorts both cultural and natural.

Visitors to Qom can be classified into two groups of people; sightseers, day-trippers, and pilgrims, who want to pay homage to the holy shrine, and Shiite scholars and students who come from across the world to learn Islamic studies and browse through eminent religious bookshops.

Qom, which its antiquity goes back to the Sassanid era (224 CE-651), has many must-see destinations such as historical mosques, mansions, and natural sceneries scattered across the city as well as towns and villages nearby.

If as a travel lover you are tired of quarantine over the coronavirus outbreak and are counting

down the days to start your travels again, Qom could be a good warm-up as the first post-corona destination:

Old Bazaar of Qom

The Old Bazaar of Qom is one of the most beautiful historical bazaars in the country in terms of architecture. The bazaar consists of different sections and two rows covered with domes, which help the proper ventilation and lighting. Due to the desert climate, the city of Qom has very hot summers and very cold winters, which is also the reason why the bazaar is covered to stay safe from this extreme heat and cold.

The complex has been made of clay, mud, brick, and stone. The different parts of the bazaar have been built in different historical eras such as the Seljuk, Ilkhanid, Safavid, and Qajar eras. In the early Pahlavi period (1925-1979) new sections were added to the historical structure.

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Iran: IAEA shall ensure confidentiality of safeguards information

TEHRAN – Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the Vienna-based international organization, has criticized the leaking of the recent report on Iran's nuclear development by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), saying the IAEA shall ensure confidentiality of safeguards information.

"@iaeaorg confidential report, based on Iran's confidential letter, appeared in Media immediately even before the BoG Members

could track it down. Agency is not merely responsible to update the development, but shall ensure confidentiality of safeguards information," Gharibabadi tweeted on Friday night.

"If neither the Agency nor its Member States are to be blamed for this crack in confidentiality, @iaeaorg should revise its confidentiality mechanisms including regarding using GovAtom as the safe and confidential means for communications," he added.

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Iran ranks 19th among world's biggest steel ingot exporters

TEHRAN – Iran was ranked 19th among the world's top steel ingot exporters while taking 53rd place for the exports of steel products in 2019, data provided by Trade Map website showed.

According to the mentioned website, in 2019, Iran ranked 159th among the world's top 196 countries in terms of importing crude steel (ingots), IRNA reported.

The country ranked 53rd among 195 countries in the exports of steel products

and it was ranked 85th out of 226 countries in global imports of steel products.

Based on the mentioned data, Iranian imports of crude steel and steel products in 2019 stood at \$42 million and \$302 million, respectively.

The country exported \$312 million and \$252 million worth of crude steel and steel products in the mentioned year, respectively.

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Murder of 39 Afghans by Australian soldiers only 'tip of the iceberg'

BY MOHAMMAD MAZHARI
TEHRAN – An Australian academic says that killing unlawfully 39 Afghan civilians and prisoners by Australian Special Forces is just "the tip of the iceberg".

Noting that Brereton Report did not touch on any of the earlier reported crimes, Professor Tim Anderson tells the Tehran Times that "the 39 murders identified by the Australian Brereton

Report are certainly only the tip of the iceberg."

The Brereton inquiry is a long-running investigation into alleged war crimes committed by Australian Special Forces in Afghanistan. The investigation was led by Paul Brereton, who is both a New South Wales Supreme Court judge and a major general in the army reserve.

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U.S. protests: Portland police car severely damaged after being set on fire

A police vehicle was severely damaged after it was allegedly set on fire in Portland, Oregon, authorities said.

The unoccupied Portland Police patrol vehicle had been parked in a city fleet parking lot in the 800 block of North Graham Street when the blaze broke out, Portland Police said in a news release.

Officers responded to the parking lot after a report of a vehicle on fire at around 8.20 p.m. on Saturday, police said. Portland Fire and Rescue also responded and extinguished the flames, News Week reported.

The cause of the fire is under investigation, but arson is suspected, according to police. No arrests have been made and police said no suspect information was available.

Police said the vehicle was a fully marked 2018 Portland Police Ford Interceptor Utility

vehicle. It had been involved in a minor crash and had been towed to the parking lot for body damage repairs.

The incident occurred after an outdoor kitchen across from the federal courthouse in downtown Portland was robbed at gunpoint and heavily vandalized in the early hours of Saturday morning.

Police said officers were dispatched to the 1000 block of Southwest Third Avenue after a report of a disturbance involving a weapon at around 2.30 a.m. on Saturday.

Officers spoke with a man who said he was working in the kitchen when he was robbed by a group of about a dozen suspects, including one who was armed with a shotgun, police said in a news release.

"The victim said that some of his cooking equipment was stolen and other equipment was damaged," police said.

The U.S. and allies have done little but inflame West Asia...

BY MARTIN LOVE
Heiko Maas, Germany's foreign minister, must be crazy, literally. Or just a blind twit, like so many others in the "Western" establishment of lily-white bigots, racists and Christian imperialists. The king of them though happens to be Mike Pompeo, the soon to depart Secretary of State in the U.S. who allegedly has his eyes on the White House in 2024. These two and people like them with their rabid policy announcements and ignorant fantasies try to

give the impression of aiming for something positive and calming to a world and especially to a Middle East wracked by discord, but in fact they and their kind are doing just the opposite. "Inflaming" might be the best word for what they do and have long done.

Consider what Maas said about Iran this past week: "A form of nuclear agreement is needed, which also lies in our interests. We have clear expectations for Iran: no nuclear weapons, but also no ballistic rocket program

that threatens the whole region. Iran must also play another role in the region." He is correct that a nuclear agreement is needed, if for no other reason than Iran is suffering under sanctions and they must be lifted, but what (the Hell) is wrong with the JCPOA which was working just fine and Iran was fully compliant with it? Nothing, except the overweening hypocrisy, bombast and arrogance of people like Maas and Pompeo.

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IPL the best league in Asia: Stefano Cusin

BY FARROKH HESABI
TEHRAN - Stefano Cusin, Italian-Canadian football coach and former coach of Shahr Khodro, left the Iran Professional League (IPL) at the end of last season but he still follows the country's football and believes that IPL is the best league across Asia.

In an exclusive interview with Tehran Times, Stefano explained about his experience of working in Iran and the reasons that made him leave Shahr Khodro.

What are you doing these days, considering coronavirus situation in Italy?

In Italy we have lockdown, especially in my region Tuscany, near Florence, but the restrictions will be eased next week. I just watch games on TV and stay at home with my family waiting for the right opportunity to start work.

How were you connected with the Iranian football and came here to work?

I had told an Iranian agent that my target is to work in the IPL, because I was well-acquainted with Iranian teams such as Sepahan and Esteghlal at the AFC Champions League. I came to a conclusion that in Iran you have great football potentials, stadiums, fans and IPL is the best league in Asia for me. Last January, the Iranian agent called me and said Shahr Khoro coach Yahya Golmohammadi has moved to Persepolis and they need a coach to prepare the trainings and to work with the team head coach. Their target was to try to qualify for Champions League. I didn't hesitate and just I said "Yes I want to go there". I opted to join the team because Mashhad is a big city and Shahr Khodro are a good club and it was a good step to start working in Iran.

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Bangladesh begins relocating Rohingya refugees to remote island

Bangladesh began moving hundreds of Rohingya refugees to an island, ignoring concerns by human rights groups that it is ill-suited to host them and that the relocations are being conducted without informed consent.

About 1,600 refugees were transported to Bhasan Char island in the Bay of Bengal on Friday, the Associated Press reported. The island, more than 20 miles from the mainland, could eventually host 100,000 of the more than 1 million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, according to the Associated Press.

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Iran criticizes UN decision to remove cannabis from most dangerous drug category

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the Vienna-based international organizations has criticized a recent decision by the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs to remove cannabis and marijuana from the list of very dangerous drugs.



"Cannabis and marijuana are among the most dangerous and addictive drugs and are also prohibited by the law and regulations of the Narcotics Commission," said Kazem Gharibabadi, Mehr reported on Saturday.

"The use of these drugs for medical purposes is also the responsibility of each country and there is no obligation to implement this decision in this regard," Gharibabadi said.

He said many countries still believe that these drugs are very dangerous to human health and, therefore, do not use in their medical sectors based on their scientific studies and research.

"The use of these drugs is absolutely forbidden in Iran and the country, in accordance with its domestic law and the Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961, continues to take national and strict measures over the illegal use and production of cannabis and related drugs with the aim of protecting public health," he added.

The UN Commission for Narcotic Drugs voted on Wednesday to remove cannabis for medicinal purposes from a category of the world's most dangerous drugs, a highly anticipated and long-delayed decision that could clear the way for an expansion of marijuana research and medical use.

The vote by the Commission for Narcotic Drugs, which is based in Vienna and includes 53 member states, considered a series of recommendations from the World Health Organization on reclassifying cannabis and its derivatives. The reclassification passed 27 to 25, with an abstention from Ukraine.

The United States and European nations were among those who voted in favor, while the likes of China, Egypt, Nigeria, Pakistan and Russia were opposed.

Iran: IAEA shall ensure confidentiality of safeguards information

1 → The response by Ambassador Gharibabadi came after Reuters reported that Iran plans to install hundreds more advanced uranium-enriching centrifuges at an underground plant at Natanz.

Citing a confidential IAEA report on Friday, Reuters said Iran plans to install three more cascades, or clusters, of advanced IR-2m centrifuges in the underground plant at Natanz.

Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's permanent representative to the Vienna-based international organizations, also criticized the leaking of confidential information.

"Yet another confidential #IAEA report on #Iran was leaked to mass media immediately upon its circulation in Board of Governors," Ulyanov tweeted on Friday night, adding, "The Ambassador of Iran in his Twitter account has already reacted by suggesting to strengthen mechanisms of confidentiality. Good idea but will it help?"



Iran signed a nuclear deal, formally called the JCPOA, with six world powers, including the U.S., Russia, China, France, Britain and Germany and also the European Union, in Vienna on 14 July 2015.

However, the JCPOA was ditched by U.S. President Donald Trump on May 8, 2018. The United States' unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA was deplored by all other parties to the deal.

On May 8, 2019, exactly one year after Trump's withdrawal, Iran began to gradually reduce its nuclear commitments according to the JCPOA, citing the other parties' failure to secure its interests under the deal. However, Tehran has repeatedly said that it will return to its commitments if the other parties can protect its interests against the United States' "toughest ever" sanctions.

In another tweet on Saturday morning, Ulyanov wrote: "A lot of new ideas on how to handle #JCPOA: the law adopted by the Iranian Parliament, the new German ideas in this regard etc. The only private question in this regard- if JCPOA will survive this creativity? Let's hope, yes. So far it demonstrated sustainability."

Iran's Parliament on Tuesday passed the outlines of a plan aimed at lifting the anti-Iran sanctions and protecting the rights of the Iranian nation.

The bill, put forward by the lawmakers in early November, is part of a broader strategy that aims to lift the United States sanctions on Iran. It aims to force the United States into lifting sanctions on Iran by doubling down on nuclear activities.

Speaking after the passing of the plan, Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf said the move's message to the enemies was that the "one-sided game is over".

The bill requires the government to raise uranium enrichment levels to 20% and install advanced centrifuges.

According to the 9-article bill, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) will be required to produce and store at least 120 kilograms of enriched uranium with 20 percent purity at the Fordow nuclear facility every year, and to fulfil the country's peaceful industrial demands with uranium enriched above 20%.

Once the bill becomes a law, it will oblige the AEOI to increase the monthly output of enriched uranium for various peaceful purposes with different purity levels by at least 500 kg.

The oversight Guardian Council was expected to fully endorse the parliamentary bill on Saturday.

Strategic action plan 'not against national interests': SNSC

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Secretariat of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) has issued a statement asserting that the Parliament's strategic action plan does not harm national interests.

In a statement on Saturday, the SNSC emphasized that all procedures relating to the new law have taken place in accordance with the Parliament's regulations and customary norms.

It also noted that its secretariat believes the new law does not cause any specific problem that may be to the detriment of national interests, Tasnim reported.

The SNSC called on all parties to end the futile debates, warning that it will not allow anybody to play with national interests.

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The bill became a law as the oversight Guardian Council approved it by asking the parliament to make some amendments to



it. It will oblige the AEOI to increase the monthly output of enriched uranium for various peaceful purposes with different purity levels by at least 500 kg.

The bill entails uranium enrichment activities with at least 1,000 IR-2M centrifuge machines at Natanz within three months after the ratification of the law, and compels the AEOI to launch uranium enrichment as well as research and development activities with

at least 164 IR-6 centrifuges and increase the number of centrifuge machines to 1,000 within a year after the ratification of the bill.

The Rouhani administration has criticized the new action plan, saying it may create problems in Iran's foreign relations.

"Regarding the Majlis nuclear plan, the relevant governmental bodies were not consulted and it may cause problems in the implementation process, as well as problems in

foreign relations," presidential chief of staff Mahmoud Vaezi told reporters on Wednesday on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting.

"During today's cabinet meeting, some of our time was spent discussing the plan on the nuclear issue which was raised in the Parliament yesterday morning and afternoon," he added.

He explained that most cabinet members were concerned over the plan, because the ministries were not consulted, adding that the plan is immature.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said earlier that the Rouhani administration has voiced its opposition to the plan.

"We have no doubt that the members of the Majlis are pursuing the rights of the nation," Khatibzadeh said on Tuesday during a virtual press conference. "But the administration has expressed its views on this plan and has stressed that it does not agree with the plan."

He said the Rouhani administration's stance is that the plan is not "necessary" and "useful", and it is not clear that the rights of the Iranian people will be protected through the move.

"Unfortunately, our views have not been reflected and the Majlis has taken a different path. We hope that the expert opinions of the Foreign Ministry will be taken into account," the spokesman added.

Zarif urges Germany to end 'despicable Covid Apartheid' against Palestinians

Zarif tells Maas that JCPOA parties must honor obligations endorsed by UN Security Council

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has urged Germany to end its "despicable" coronavirus apartheid against the Palestinian people instead of lecturing Iran on what it should do.

"Here's what @HeikoMaas & E3 must do before speaking about what Iran should do: Stop despicable #CovidApartheid," Zarif tweeted on Friday night.

He was referring to recent reports in the Israeli media that said Germany has promised to include the country in the EU's coronavirus vaccination deal that is being made with large pharmaceutical companies.

According to TRT World, the pledge was made by German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and Health Minister Jens Spahn to Israel's Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi as a continuation of the country's "special relationship" because of the Holocaust.

However, there have been no commitments made by Germany towards the Palestinians, who are suffering from a shortage of medical equipment after more than a decade of a deadly Israeli siege leaving hospitals without vital equipment needed to cope with a pandemic.

In a recent interview with the Tehran Times, the former Palestinian health minister said the Israeli blockade against the Gaza Strip for more than fourteen years has affected all aspects of life in the coastal strip including health, educational, social and humanitarian aspects, especially as the enclave is facing the Coronavirus pandemic.

Basem Naim said many countries have failed to contain the epidemic let alone the Gazans who are under the Israeli blockade.

"Gaza is facing an epidemic, many countries have failed to defeat until now, so the conditions are much more difficult in the Gaza Strip," Naim told the Tehran Times, adding, "The conditions are much more difficult in the Gaza Strip."

■ Honor your obligation and stop violating JCPOA

In his Friday tweet, Zarif also urged Germany to "honor your obligations under UNSCR2231 & stop violating JCPOA."

"End YOUR malign behavior in OUR region: \$100B arms sales to Persian Gulf & blind support for Israel terror," Zarif added.

Zarif's remarks came after Maas called for negotiations with Iran to conclude a broader nuclear deal next year.

Maas told weekly Der Spiegel that it was in the interest of the U.S. and Europeans to reach a broader agreement with Tehran.

"A return to the previous agreement will not be adequate in any case," he said, referring to the 2015 nuclear agreement, officially known as the JCPOA.

"There should be a kind of a 'nuclear agreement plus' deal, which is also in the interest of us," he added.

Maas expressed hope that U.S. President-elect Joe Biden would change Washington's policy on Iran after taking office next month, and pave the way for talks on the nuclear deal.

"It is important to send out a signal, which would be decisive, on whether or not the United States would relax economic sanctions on Iran. Both sides should move forward, come closer. Time is running out because Iran will have presidential elections next year," he said.

Outgoing President Donald Trump had unilaterally withdrawn the U.S. from the JCPOA two years ago, and



intensified pressure on Tehran through the "toughest ever" economic sanctions.

The German foreign minister argued that a broader nuclear deal with Iran will be the best way to address concerns about Iran's nuclear activities.

"We have clear expectations from Iran: No nuclear weapons, but also no ballistic missile program which threatens the entire region," he said.

Iran has strongly rejected calls for talks on its missile program, saying its missile program was developed for defensive purposes.

Addressing the Rome Mediterranean Dialogues 2020 on Thursday, the Iranian foreign minister said the West can talk about other issues only if they stop "their malign behavior in the region" and "malign support" for the terrorist regime of Israel, otherwise they "have to shut up".

Pakistan condemns assassination of Iranian scientist

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Pakistan has condemned the assassination of Iranian scientist Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh late last month.

"We extend sincere condolences to the family members of Mr. Fakhri-zadeh and to

the Iranian people," Pakistan's Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Thursday.

According to the statement, such acts not only run contrary to all norms of interstate relations and international law but also threaten the peace and stability of an already

fragile region.

Israel is the chief suspect behind the terrorist action. Officials in Tehran have been unequivocal in holding Israel responsible for the heinous act and promised to retaliate at proper time.

"Pakistan strongly urges all sides to exercise

maximum restraint and avoid further escalation of tensions in the region," it added.

Fakhri-zadeh, a senior nuclear and defense scientist, was assassinated in a small city east of Tehran on November 27. He was laid to rest three days later.

The U.S. and allies have done little but inflame West Asia...

1 → Germany, for one thing, did not fulfill its role under the JCPOA after Pompeo and Trump withdrew from in, and the other signatories also did not. They all should have slammed the U.S. and imposed their own sanctions on the U.S. and continued trade with Iran. It was all talk and no action. And then Maas mentions Iran's missiles which have been used just once after the esteemed Soleimani and friends were assassinated in early January this year. That against the U.S. airbase in Iraq, and allegedly no one was killed but damage was pinpoint accurate. With a relatively tiny military, how else has Iran had any deterrence except through its missile programs? So far, at least, missiles have kept enemies mostly at bay. Demanding that Iran lose this deterrence is like asking a man to walk across Antarctica buck naked and expecting him to survive even the first kilometer.

And also consider Germany's claim, to cite just one idiosyncrasy, of offering Israelis Covid vaccination medicine...but not half the population west of the Jordan River, the beleaguered Palestinians! Germany, it seems, 75 years after the end of World War 2, remains all hot and bothered with guilt over the Holocaust. It even supplied Israel with submarines that, with no evident objection by the Germans, Israel has armed with its own nuclear bomb tipped missiles. And all the while Zionists are carrying out a slow genocide of their own against Palestinians, also to no objections by Germany.

Such facts just about Germany's postures, not to mention the longstanding U.S. foolishness, underscores the absolute



rectitude of Iran's insistence that the JCPOA, if anything is to be done after Biden enters the White House, be reinstated as it was and sanctions lifted and THEN Iran backs off from its uranium enrichment activities. It seems reasonable to presume that Iran, after a year or two of calm, may (or may not) also then consider some slight marginal modifications to the JCPOA to satisfy the perennially dissatisfied Western powers that still might be freaked out that Iran has ANY nuclear expertise at all. But trust, which has been utterly shattered by the U.S. especially given its dishonesty and incapacity to abide by carefully crafted deals and treaties.

Also, it's worth mentioning what Iran has long and correctly

It (Germany) even supplied Israel with submarines that, with no evident objection by the Germans, Israel has armed with its own nuclear bomb tipped missiles.

advocated: the removal all ALL nuclear weapons from West Asia. This above all makes the most sense, for it obviates Iran EVER building a nuclear weapon because, simply, none are lurking elsewhere in the region to threaten the Islamic Republic. But of course, and sadly, the greatest threat to accord, and fomentor of discord, regionally for over 70 years has been Israel, and Israel is for now anyway not likely to become a country doing anything good in the Middle East (West Asia).

For example, on Friday past, one could read that yet another Palestinian child in the West Bank, a lad of 12, was shot and murdered by the IDF. This sort of crime seems to happen almost weekly in the Occupied West Bank or in Gaza. In a reasonable "West" just this ONE murder ought to have been roundly condemned by the U.S., and Germany and their allies, and some sort of sanctions imposed on Israel given the frequency of such outrages. But no, not a whisper of condemnation and let's face it, the Zionists want the annexation of the entirety of Palestine and more, like the Golan. This has at bottom been the aim since 1948.

As for Iran "playing another role in the region" as Maas suggested, what might that be that it did not already well play under the formerly intact JCPOA? Iran's intentions were peaceful, obviously, and whatever problems Iran has had internally and socially, the country has long been absolutely correct in at least hoping for justice in the Middle East as, at least, a prelude to getting its own house in better order.

Germany, for one thing, did not fulfill its role under the JCPOA after Pompeo and Trump withdrew from in, and the other signatories also did not. They all should have slammed the U.S. and imposed their own sanctions on the U.S. and continued trade with Iran. It was all talk and no action.

FM Zarif welcomes Kuwait efforts to end Persian Gulf crisis

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has welcomed the Kuwaiti mediation efforts to bring an end to the three-year-long crisis between Qatar and the so-called Arab Quartet, which includes Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt.

"We welcome understandings in the Persian Gulf announced by Kuwait. Iran's longstanding policy is diplomacy, good neighborly relations & regional dialogue. We hope reconciliation contributes to stability and political & economic development for all peoples of our region," Zarif said in a tweet on Friday, hours after Kuwait put out a statement saying that "fruitful" talks have been held between all sides of the rift.

Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmed Nasser al-Mohammad al-Sabah appeared on Kuwait's state TV on Friday to read out a statement on the rift between Qatar and the Arab quartet.

"Fruitful discussions have taken place recently in which all sides expressed their keenness for [Persian] Gulf and Arab unity and stability, and to reach a final agreement that realizes lasting solidarity," the chief Kuwaiti diplomat said.

Qatar was quick to welcome the Kuwaiti statement.

"The Kuwaiti statement is an imperative step towards resolving the GCC crisis. We express our gratitude to the State of Kuwait for their mediation & the United States for their efforts. The interest and security of the people of the [Persian] Gulf & the region remain our top priority," Deputy Prime



Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Qatar Mohammad bin Abdulrahman said in a tweet.

Over the past three years, Kuwait has been engaged in continued mediation efforts to put an end to the bitter spat between its neighbors with no success. But a recent visit by an American delegation to both sides of the rift seems to have ultimately paved the way for Kuwait's mediation efforts to bear fruit.

The Kuwaiti statement came on the heels of a not-so-public visit by the U.S. president's advisor and son-in-law Jared Kushner to Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

In June 2017, the Arab quartet severed diplomatic ties with Qatar, imposing a total blockade on the tiny Persian Gulf nation. The UAE, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia closed their airspace, land, and sea routes to Qatari planes, cars, and vessels, a move that prompted Qatar to use Iranian airspace. Kuwait, a country stuck in the middle of a dispute between its neighbors, had studiously worked to reconcile the opposing sides but to no avail.

But Kushner's visit apparently changed the atmosphere.

In a last-ditch effort to secure an achievement for his father-in-law, Kushner recently

paid a visit to Qatar and Saudi Arabia. He sought to convince the Saudi and Qatari leaders to reconcile and reach a deal on several outstanding issues, according to an Axios report.

White House envoy Avi Berkowitz, International Development Finance Corporation CEO Adam Boehler, and former Iran envoy Brian Hook accompanied Kushner.

Following the Kushner visit, the Kuwaiti foreign minister surprisingly announced that progress has been made in the talks between all sides of the row.

Mohammad bin Abdulrahman expressed optimism for a solution to the crisis.

"HE Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani expressed the State of Qatar's optimism for a solution to the [Persian] Gulf crisis, and said that in Qatar we are very positive and always treat any initiative that brings peace in the region positively," the Qatari Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Friday.

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia also expressed optimism that the three-year-long crisis will be resolved soon.

Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan said on Saturday there has been "significant progress" in resolving the crisis that began in 2017.

"We have seen significant progress in the last few weeks, which means we are now hopeful we can reach a final conclusion very soon that will be satisfactory to all parties," the Saudi foreign minister said in remarks made at the International Institute for Security Studies Manama Conference on Saturday.

Europe's unachievable goal

POLITICAL TEHRAN — While Iran keeps insisting on not renegotiating the 2015 nuclear deal, the Europeans not only call for reopening the deal, but also expanding it in a way that includes other thorny issues such as Iran's missile program and its regional influence.

These European demands will only complicate the situation around the nuclear deal with which European compliance is strongly questioned by Iran. Over the past few years, especially after the United States withdrew from the deal, the European signatories to the deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), have been making empty promises that they will mitigate the impact of U.S. sanctions on Iran but they never made good on their commitments. Nonetheless, they continued to call on Iran to reverse its nuclear steps, which it has taken in response to the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA and the subsequent European inaction to compensate Iran for the losses it incurred following the reimposition of the sanctions by the U.S.

The European signatories — France, Germany, and the UK (E3) — continued to do so until early November, when they changed the tone of their remarks on Iran but this change was not in the right direction. Instead of seizing on the momentum that was generated following the projected win of Joe Biden, the E3 started to place land mines in the U.S. president-elect's path to returning to the JCPOA by raising such sensitive issues as Iran's missile program and its influence in the West Asia region.

As Joe Biden was projected to win the U.S. presidential election in November, the E3 rushed to demand new negotiations with Iran that would include missile and regional issues in addition to the nuclear issue.

The E3 foreign ministers recently held a meeting in Germany to discuss issues related to Iran, including the missile program. The meeting came after the French presidency openly called for negotiations on Iran's missile program and its regional activities.

Nearly three weeks ago, the French presidency called for broader negotiation with Tehran that includes Iran's regional role and its missiles, according to an Asharq Al-Awsat

report. According to the report, a French official pointed out in a press briefing that the Iranian nuclear program has reached a dangerous stage, and that would not be the case if Iran continued to respect its obligations stipulated in the 2015 nuclear agreement. The official also said any subsequent negotiations with Tehran should expand to include the ballistic missile program, regional policy, and what he called "interference in the affairs of other countries."

These remarks have drawn strong criticism from Iranian officials, including the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

During his recent meeting with the heads of the three branches of the government, Ayatollah Khamenei strongly criticized the Europeans' position on Iran's missiles, saying they have no right to castigate Iran while they have destructive nuclear missiles.

"The Europeans are constantly taking stances against Iran. While they are making the most improper interferences in the region's issues, they tell us not to interfere in the region. And while France and Britain possess destructive nuclear missiles and Germany is moving in this direction, they tell us not to possess missiles," the Leader noted.

Directly addressing the Europeans, Ayatollah Khamenei added, "What business is it of yours? Correct yourself first and then make remarks."

Other Iranian officials, including senior lawmakers, have echoed the same remarks, saying that the E3 should not seek broader negotiations on the missile program, especially after they failed to honor their commitments under the JCPOA, the very same deal they now try to expand to include other issues such as Iran's ballistic missiles.

"Iran's missile and defense capability are not negotiable at all," Mahmoud Abbaszadeh Meshkini, a member of the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, has recently said.

Some Iranian lawmakers have even called on the E3 and the U.S. to pay Iran billions of dollars in compensation for the damages Iran incurred following Washington's withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal and the failure by Europeans to

honor their commitments.

"The withdrawal of the United States from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and the non-fulfillment of JCPOA commitments by the Europeans have caused damage of between 150 and 200 billion dollars to our country," Alireza Salimi, a member of the Iranian Parliament's presiding board, has recently said.

However, Iran's demands from the Europeans to compensate Iran or at least uphold their obligations under the JCPOA seem to have fallen on deaf ears in Europe because the Europeans are stepping up their efforts to reopen the Iran nuclear deal and replace it with another expanded one.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas has explicitly pushed for such a deal in his recent interview with Der Spiegel.

"A return to the previous agreement will not suffice anyway. There will have to be a kind of 'nuclear agreement plus,' which is also in our interest. We have clear expectations of Iran: no nuclear weapons, but also no ballistic missile program that threatens the entire region. Iran also needs to play a different role in the region," Maas told the German magazine, adding, "We need this agreement precisely because we distrust Iran. I have already coordinated with my French and British counterparts on this."

But Maas didn't say why Iran should agree to a new deal with the West while the existing one has not been implemented by the very same parties that are now calling for expanding it. Iran has long called on Europe and the U.S. to stop violating the deal and international law.

However, the Europeans continued to ignore Iran's calls, instead of honoring their commitments. And this seems to have enraged Iran's top diplomat, who has recently told the West to "shut up" if it is unable to "put up."

Addressing the 6th edition of the Rome Mediterranean Dialogues 2020, Zarif said, "When they are ready to deal with their own problems of their own malign behavior in the region, their malign support for a terrorist regime, then they can start talking about other things."

However, "as long as they're not able to put up, they have to shut up," he concluded.

Iran sends 'biggest fleet yet of tankers' to Venezuela: report

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Iran is sending its biggest fleet yet of tankers to Venezuela in defiance of U.S. sanctions to help Caracas tackle its fuel challenges, Bloomberg reported.

Citing people familiar with the matter, Bloomberg said that some of the flotilla of about 10 Iranian vessels will also help export Venezuelan crude after discharging fuel.

Iran has not confirmed the Bloomberg report.

This is not the first time that Bloomberg claims that Iran sends fuel to Venezuela, which suffers from a fuel shortage. Bloomberg claimed that the last time Iran sent fuel to the Latin American country was in early October when three Iranian vessels discharged fuel in Venezuela. The fuel export from Iran to Venezuela first began in May 2020 when five Iranian fuel takers — Forest, Fortune, Petunia, Faxon, and Clavel — successfully delivered the much-needed Iranian fuel to Venezuela over the objections of the U.S., which sought to prevent the oil trade between the two sanctioned countries with no success.

In August, the U.S. claimed that it intercepted 1.116 million barrels of gasoline going from Iran to Venezuela. In July, the United States also claimed that it had seized over 1 million barrels of Iranian fuel bound

for Venezuela, a claim Iran strongly denied. In September, foreign news organizations broke the news that Iran was shipping fuel to the Latin American country once again. At that time, Bloomberg reported that an Iran-flagged supertanker named Honey delivered a cargo of oil condensate to Venezuela and then loaded Venezuelan oil to export it. The vessel was deemed to have discharged 2 million barrels of Iranian condensate.

The U.S. has sought to stop the oil trade between Tehran and Caracas. Washington announced in August that it had confiscated 1.1 million barrels of petroleum from four tankers en route between the two countries, which are both under U.S. sanctions. In October, the U.S. claimed that it had sold Iranian oil seized on its way to Venezuela for more than \$40 million.

"We're watching what Iran is doing and making sure that other shippers, insurers, ship owners, ship captains realize they must stay away from that trade," Elliott Abrams, the U.S. special representative for Iran and Venezuela, said in September.

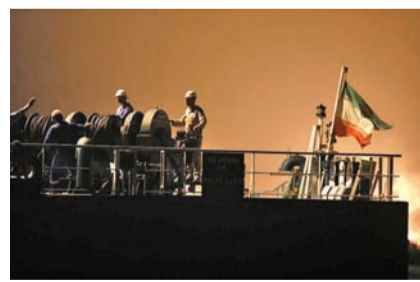
However, it seems that Iran is not heeding U.S. warnings. Bloomberg said that some of the Iranian oil tankers that delivered fuel to Venezuela in May appear to be returning to the South American nation and turned off

their satellite signal at least nine days ago.

Iran-Venezuela relations have been on the rise in recent months, with the latest indication in this regard being the chief Iranian diplomat's recent visit to Caracas. Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif paid a visit to Venezuela in early November and met with the Venezuelan leaders, including President Nicholas Maduro and Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza.

The Venezuelan foreign minister has said in a tweet that the meetings between the officials of Iran and Venezuela are a step toward deepening the strategic alliance and brotherhood between the two countries. He further noted that Iran and Venezuela have shown their solidarity and courage in the face of threats. At the time, he said Zarif had an intensive agenda during his stay in Venezuela.

Arreaza also said in a November interview with Iran's state news agency IRNA that Caracas is going to boost the strategic relations between Iran and Venezuela. Referring to Zarif's visit to Venezuela and also the export of Iranian oil to Venezuela, the top Venezuelan diplomat said despite U.S. cruel sanctions and the limitations caused by COVID-19 in the world, exchange of political delegations, trade interactions, and strategic cooperation between two countries



have not been affected.

The top Venezuelan diplomat also hailed Iran's decision to send fuel cargos to his country, saying that this decision shows Iran's solidarity with the Venezuelan people.

"I believe that Iran and Venezuela have become a clear example of how we can unite despite all the problems and aggression, and this is what has led to the development of our bilateral relations in recent years and will grow much more," Arreaza pointed out. "Iran's move to send ships and tankers carrying fuel, although seen as a serious challenge to the United States, went beyond that to show Iran's solidarity with the besieged nation of Venezuela, especially since our people showed their solidarity with the Iranian nation a decade ago under President Hugo Chavez."

SPORTS

IPL the best league in Asia: Stefano Cusin

I → Tell us about your life in Iran; both on and off the pitch.

My life in Iran was great. I lived at a hotel with staff members and some players. I was going to the training, coming back to hotel and preparing for the next training session. I stayed at the hotel and studied and analyzed our next opponent. The rest of the time I visited the Holy Shrine and other parts of Mashhad city. I really enjoyed because the Iranian culture is very similar to the Italian culture. For example, the foods are wonderful and it was surprising for me that many things have the same taste as in Italy. Most of the people in Iran are good people who want to talk with a foreigner and to help him. I visited a lot of cities in Iran and it was a great experience. I was lucky to work with a nice people. Maybe when I came to Shahr Khodro it was the right club but not at the right moment.

■ Working as a head coach for a while in Shahr Khodro, how was the experience?

You know, I worked with Walter Zenga as an assistant and always have been a head coach. First of all, you must know the league that you are working at, you must know the players and you must understand a lot of things. It's a big mistake that a foreigner coach tries to change everything in a short time because this is impossible. First, you must learn many things about the culture, the intensity of the training and a lot of other things and little by little you can try changing the things.

My experience there was that the 'intensity' is very important to make to prepare a good team.

■ For many Iranian fans that's still a question that why did you leave Shahr Khodro and come back?

Look, I left Iran because I had some financial problems with the club. I understand all the problems, but when you work it's normal that you need salary. I spoke a lot of times with the president of the club and other officials. They told me they would solve the problem but nothing happened. That's the reason I left the club. I was happy with the club or with the country and everything was fine for me. I arrived in the training first and left the training last and was always ready to work. So, I didn't expect the club to treat me like this. I don't understand until now why this happened to me and why they didn't solve the problem.

Saeid Marouf returns to China to join BAIC Motor

SPORTS TEHRAN — Iranian setter Saeid Marouf has returned to China to join his volleyball club Beijing BAIC Motor.

The 35-year-old player had failed to travel to China due to coronavirus restrictions.

The China Volleyball League (CVL) had made decision to play 2020/21 season without foreign players, both in men's and women's competitions but it has changed the decision.

Marouf, nicknamed "Golden Claw" for his quick touch, had been previously linked with a move to Italian top flight volleyball team Cisterna after failing to return to BAIC Motor.

The CVL competition can help the world-class setter prepares for the 2020 FIVB Volleyball Men's Nations League and Olympic Games in Tokyo.

Amir Ghafour, another Iranian international player, is without a team since parting company with Italian team Cucine Lube Civitanova.

Qatari sports delegation to travel to Tehran Sunday

SPORTS TEHRAN — Qatari sports officials will travel to Tehran, Iran on Sunday, seeking support for hosting rights of the 2030 Asian Games.

A 12-man delegation of Qatar Olympic Committee headed by Jassim Rashid Albuainain (Qatar Olympic Committee secretary general and Doha 2030 chief executive) will meet with the Iran's National Olympic Committee (NOC) officials in Tehran in a one-day meeting.

Albuainain will be accompanied by his countrymen Dahlan Jumaan al-Hamad, President of the Asian Athletics Association (AAA), and Mohammed Yousef Al-Mana, President of Asian Weightlifting Federation, in the meeting to unveil their plans regarding the arrangements and facilities for the Asian Games 2030.

Albuainain will meet his Iranian counterpart Keykavous Saeidi in NOC's headquarters in Tehran.

The Qatari delegation also held a meeting with Pakistan Olympic Association (POA) on Thursday.

Qatar faces opposition from bitter political rival Saudi Arabia for the hosting rights of the 2030 Asian Games.

The country has already staged the Asian Games in 2006 and is going to host the prestigious Games once again, while Saudi Arabia has never staged the Asian Games before.

The two rivals are also among the nations bidding for the Asian Football Confederation's 2027 Asian Cup.

Saudi Arabia led a blockade of Qatar in 2017, after accusing Doha of supporting terrorism.

The country was joined by others including the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt in severing diplomatic relations.

Iranian teams to observe Maradona minute of silence

SPORTS TEHRAN — Iranian football teams will hold a minute's silence following Diego Maradona's death.

The announcement was made by Iran Football League Organization due to demise of the 60-year-old Argentine legend.

Maradona passed away on Nov. 25 after suffering a heart attack, having been recuperating from the removal of a blood clot on the brain.

The Iranian teams will hold a minute's silence in Matchday 5 of Iran Professional League (IPL).

FIFA has requested its 211 member associations to call upon all competition organizers to hold a minute of silence to honour one of the greatest football icons of all time.

Foreign investment in Iran up 97% in 5 months yr/yr

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran attracted \$2.351 billion of foreign investment during the first five months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-August 21), up 97 percent compared to the same period last year, Finance and Economic Affairs Ministry data showed.

According to the mentioned data, \$1.189 billion of foreign investment had been attracted in the country during the first five months of the previous year.

Also, in the mentioned period the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade approved 81 projects with foreign investment, compared to the 51 cases in the previous year's same five months.

Based on the Finance and Economic Affairs Ministry data, in the mentioned period 590 cases for foreign investment were assessed among which 192 cases had the necessary standards.

Back in October, Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dejjpasand announced that over \$3.8 billion of foreign investment was attracted in the country during the first half of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-September 21).

"Foreign investment acts as a window through which technology, employment, and production enter, so the executive bodies should make their most effort to attract foreign investment," Dejjpasand said.

Dejjpasand also said that Finance and Economic Ministry has outlined a plan for facilitating and expediting the attraction of Iranian expatriates' investment, based on which some incentives and guarantees will be allocated to those investors.

According to the finance minister, materializing the motto of "Surge in Production" requires an investment of 7-10 quadrillion rials (about \$166.6-\$238 billion), and the attraction of foreign investment can play a significant part in this regard.

The current Iranian calendar year (began on March 20) is named the year of "Surge in Production" by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei.

It should be considered that the trend of strengthening domestic production has been started in Iran a couple of years ago, as the country is determined to nullify the U.S. sanction on its economy through boosting production to reach more and more self-reliance.

25 hectares of greenhouses created in Sistan-Baluchestan Province since late March

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The deputy head of the Agriculture Department of Sistan-Baluchestan Province, in southeast of Iran, announced that 25 hectares of new greenhouses have been created in the province since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20).

Amanollah Towqi said that the greenhouse area has now reached 262 hectares in the province.

The official further announced that over 40,000 tons of products are annually produced in the greenhouses of the province, and sent to the domestic and foreign markets.

Since the beginning of this year, 240 tons of tomatoes, produced in the greenhouses of Sistan-Baluchestan, have been exported to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), he added.

While the agriculture sector plays a significant role in the promotion of the Iranian economy, drought in recent years has prevented this sector from being developed as expected.

To tackle this condition, the Agriculture Ministry has taken some measures and defined some programs, such as the improvement of irrigation systems.



One of the major programs that the ministry has defined and is seriously pursuing is the development of greenhouses throughout the country.

In late April, the managing director of Iran's Agricultural Parks Company (APC) said that this company planned to create 1,000 hectares of new greenhouses in the country's agricultural parks during the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 20, 2021).

According to Ali-Ashraf Mansouri, the development of the country's agricultural parks not only is going to create new job opportunities but also increases the country's non-oil exports and helps preserve the environment and the national water and soil resources.

Iran has paid 8.3 trillion rials (about \$197.6 million) of facilities for the development of agricultural parks across the country during the past Iranian year.

The mentioned facilities were paid for the development or construction of various agricultural parks including greenhouses, and those for aquaculture, as well as livestock and poultry breeding.

Offering such facilities and also the other supportive measures have led to the creation of more greenhouses and well as the development of the existing ones in the country.

As announced by an official with the Agriculture Ministry, 1,476 hectares of greenhouses and shade houses have been created and developed in the country during the first five months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-August 21).

Mohammad-Ali Tahmasbi, the deputy agriculture minister for gardening affairs, said that of the mentioned figure, 761.9 hectares have been the development of the previous greenhouses and shade houses, while 714.1 hectares have been the newly created ones.

Iran is anticipated to produce 5,000 tons of fruits and vegetables in the greenhouses throughout the country this year.

As reported, 80 percent of the country's greenhouse fruits and vegetables are exported.

The significance of boosting agricultural export is obvious when taking the country's recent approach to boost non-oil exports into account. The development of greenhouses is a very fruitful measure in this due.

Production of products in the greenhouses is today one of the most profitable methods in the agriculture sectors of the countries, in a way that they have defined it as one of their major production strategies because while greenhouses provide stable production of high-quality products, developing them is a proper way for tackling drought and for optimal use of water resources.

Iran ranks 19th among world's biggest steel ingot exporters

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Last year, the total production of crude steel (ingots) in Iran stood at 26.8 million tons and the total volume of steel products output reached 20.6 million tons, according to the mentioned website.

According to IRNA, foreign trade statistics for the first seven months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-September 21) show that the country exported 4,375,851 tons of steel ingot and products worth \$1.59 billion of which 76.8 percent were billets and blooms.

The value of the steel exports in the said seven-months decreased by 37 percent compared to the same period in the previous year, the Industry, Trade, and Mining Ministry Data showed.

The total exports of steel ingots and products exceeded 10.5 million tons in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19).

As reported, the imports of steel products in the first seven months of the current fiscal year reached 633,665 tons, which shows a



51 percent increase compared to the same period last year. The value of the imported commodities

stood at \$714.6 million in the said time span, also 32 percent less than the figure for the same period in the preceding year.

Over \$7.3b saved in 8 months from current year's budget expenditures

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Head of Iran's Planning and Budget Organization (PBO) said the government has managed to save \$10 trillion rials (about \$7.38 billion) during the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-November 20) by reducing the expenditures set in this year's national budget law.

Briefing the press on the details of the current year's national budget law, on Saturday, Mohammad-Baqer Nobakht said: "According to the budget law, we were allowed to spend 5.71 quadrillion rials (about \$135 billion), of which 3.84 quadrillion rials (about \$91.4 billion) was the share of the first eight months. However, during this period 3.53 quadrillion rials (about \$84 billion) was withdrawn from the treasury which is 310 trillion rials less than the expected figure."

"So far 3.34 quadrillion rials (about \$79.5 billion) of the resources for the first eight months of the year have been



deposited according to the treasury report," Nobakht added. The expenditures in the first eight months of the current calendar year have increased by 39 percent compared to the figure for the same period in the previous year, the

official explained.

The head of the Planning and Budget Organization stated that the government's policy was to spend less in the face of limited resources, and in fact to allocate the amount of savings to the salaries and benefits of employees and the people in order to improve their livelihood.

He finally mentioned the estimations for the oil sales in the next year (starts on March 21, 2021) and said: "We have determined a floor and a ceiling for the next year's oil sales, the minimum figure in the current situation has been one million barrels and the ceiling that we are likely to achieve is 2.3 million barrel. So we have prepared the next year's budget bill based on the sales of one to 2.3 million barrels of oil."

ILNA also quoted Nobakht as saying that Iran would be able to increase the level of oil exports to 4.6 million barrels if the U.S. sanctions on the oil industry are removed.

Zinc exports rise 34% in 7 months year on year

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The volume of zinc exports from Iran reached 110,932 tons in the first seven months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-October 21), registering a 34-percent rise compared to the figure for the last year's same period.

The exports of zinc and zinc products, however, fell 22 percent in terms of value in the mentioned seven months, IRNA reported.

Iran exported \$152 million worth of the said commodities in the said time span.

The total exports of the country's mining and mineral industries in the period under review was reported to be 21,176,921 tons valued at over \$3.049 billion.

Meanwhile, the country imported about 10,890 tons of zinc worth \$6 million in the mentioned seven months, which shows a decrease of 77 percent in terms of volume, and a 71-percent fall in terms of value compared to the same period last year.

Lead and zinc extraction reached 584,248 tons during the first seven months of the current Iranian calendar year.

Also, the extraction amount of lead and zinc in the seventh month of this year was 81,682 tons, which was seven percent more than the figure for the same month in the past year.



According to the data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), the total value of Iran's zinc ingot exports in the first five months of this year (March 20-August 21) was \$73 million.

Zinc is used in alloys such as brass, nickel, silver, and aluminum, and also in galvanizing steel structures. Furthermore, the metal is widely used in the manufacture of products such as paint, rubber, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, plastic, ink, soap, batteries, textile, and electrical equipment.

According to the United States Geological Survey, Iran holds the world's largest zinc, ninth largest copper, 10th largest iron ore, fifth largest gypsum and barite, and 10th largest uranium reserves.

Govt. announces new regulations to support pandemic-affected businesses

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The National Headquarters for Coronavirus Control has announced the details of its new regulations approved to support people and businesses negatively affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

In its latest meeting held on Saturday, the National Headquarters for Coronavirus Control approved several new financial and regulatory packages for supporting the businesses and groups of people that have been severely affected by the restrictions imposed due to the outbreak of the coronavirus.

According to Vice President for Economic Affairs Mohammad Nahavandian, the mentioned packages include tax relief provisions, postponing the settlement of bank loans, postponing the payment of employers' insurance share, the extension of payment of bank dues and etc.

According to the new regulations on debt settlement relief, natural persons with up to five billion rials (nearly \$120,000) of dues to the banks and legal entities with up to 20 billion rials (about \$475,000) of debt that were due to settle their loans by the end of the previous year (March 19) will be able to extend their deadline and pay their debts by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2021).

Also for those businesses in red zones that have been severely affected by the pandemic, in addition to facilities and bank loans that are paid to such businesses, the employers can also postpone the payment of their share of social security insurance by two months.

Also, all the facilities and bank loans paid to households or businesses during this period are exempted from the new laws on debt settlement and creditors cannot claim such assets in return for their debts.

Earlier in November, Nahavandian had said the National Headquarters for Coronavirus Control approved 14 financial plans to support households and businesses affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

According to the official, the support packages for households would be provided for those without fixed-income who live in red-zones.

Nahavandian noted that nearly 30 million people were expected to benefit from the mentioned support plan.

Regarding the businesses, the official noted that for all businesses, it was decided to halt the direct tax collection until January 2021, and also for issuing or renewing business licenses, natural persons or economic units would not need to obtain a tax payment certificate.

Next year's budget bill allocates €200m to pressurized irrigation, watershed management

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The national budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year 1400, which starts on March 21, 2021, has allocated €200 million to the implementation of pressurized irrigation and watershed management projects.

Of the €200-million estimated budget for this sector, €100 million is for the pressurized irrigation projects, and €100 million for the watershed management projects.

Vice President for Parliamentary Affairs Hossein-Ali Amiri submitted the administration's draft of the national budget bill for the next year to the Majlis on Wednesday.

The proposed budget amounted to about 24.357 quadrillion rials (about \$579.928 billion at the official rate of 42,000 rials), with a 20-percent rise from the current year's



approved budget.

The bill has envisaged public resources and expenditures, the budget of state-owned companies as well as the budget for various government bodies.

Supplying basic goods, treatment, and medical equipment; securing livelihood; supporting production and employment; promoting and supporting non-oil exports and knowledge-based companies are the focal points of the bill.

The bill has estimated the government's budget at 9.298 quadrillion rials (about \$221.38 billion), with an increase of 47 percent from the figure of the current year.

It has envisaged 3.175 quadrillion rials (about \$75.595 billion) of incomes, while 6.37 quadrillion rials (about \$151.666 billion) of expenses.

Exports from Kerman Province increase 34%

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The value of exports from Iran's southeastern Kerman Province increased 34 percent during the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-November 20), compared to the same period of time in the past year, according to a provincial official.

Mohammadreza Qader, the director-general of the province's customs department, announced that Kerman has exported over 265,000 tons of commodities worth more than \$613 million during the eight-month period.

The official also said that the export has risen three percent in terms of weight in the mentioned time span, and mentioned pistachios and pistachio kernels, copper products, fresh and dried dates, sugar, and ceramic tiles as the major exported products.

He further announced that 29,806 tons of commodities worth \$213 million have been

imported to the province in the first eight months of the present year, indicating 34 percent, and 48 percent drop in terms of value and weight, respectively.

Qader mentioned auto parts and components, modem components and parts, industrial and electrical appliances, other industrial and mechanical appliances and machines as the main imported products.

As announced by the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), the value of Iran's non-oil trade during the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year reached \$44.6 billion.

Mehdi Mirashrafi has said that in the mentioned eight months, Iran imported \$23.1 billion worth of goods, while the exports stood at \$21.5 billion.

The total volume of traded goods was estimated at about 97.7 million tons, of which over 75 million tons were related to exports and about 21.8 million tons were



imported goods.

According to Mirashrafi, the imports in the said period declined one percent and 18 percent in terms of weight and value, respectively.

The exports also experienced a fall of 14 percent and 19 percent in terms of weight and value, respectively.

Noting the downward trend of the country's foreign trade is ending and the trade is getting back to normal, the official

said: "As we announced in previous months, fortunately, the downward trend of our country's exports is approaching normal conditions month by month, and we hope to have better conditions in terms of exports by the end of the year."

Iran's top five non-oil export destinations during this period were Iraq with over \$5.3 billion worth of exports, China with the same amount, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with over \$2.7 billion, and Turkey with \$1.6 billion as well as Afghanistan with \$1.5 billion.

According to the IRICA head, the top five sources of imports during this period were China with \$6 billion, the UAE with \$5.4 billion, Turkey with \$2.6 billion, India with \$1.4 billion, and Germany with \$1.1 billion worth of imports.

Most of the imported goods into the country in the mentioned time span were basic goods or raw materials, Mirashrafi stressed.

Murder of 39 Afghans by Australian soldiers only 'tip of the iceberg': professor

➔ Anderson, the distinguished author and senior lecturer of political economy at the University of Sydney, predicts the Australian government will try to maintain the war crime scandal under secrecy.

"The government will further hide any trial process on 'national security'," he adds.

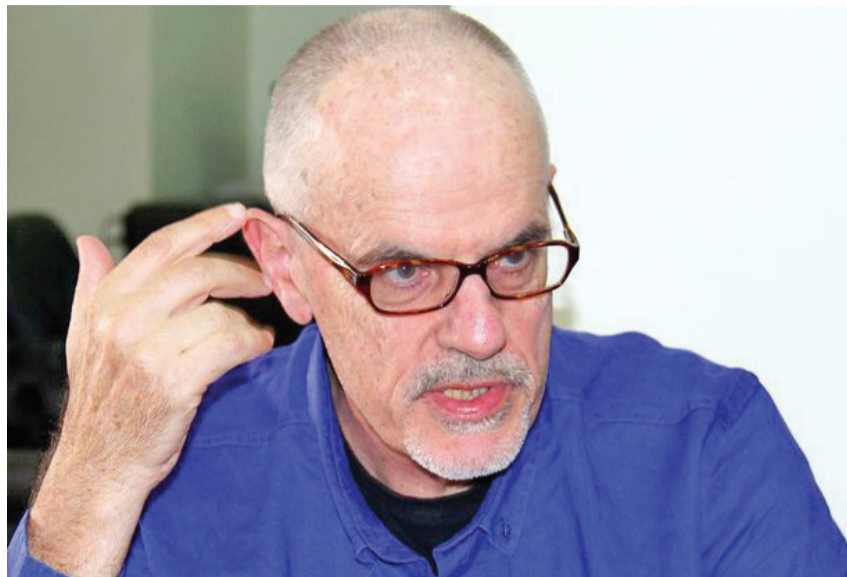
The following is the text of the interview:
■ How do you assess the repercussions of the Brereton Report revealing that Australian military forces in Afghanistan murdered and tortured prisoners, farmers or civilians between 2009 to 2013?

A: When it comes to the U.S., British and Australian crimes in Afghanistan we should look at the full 19 years from 2001 to 2020. Remember, a war of aggression is the mother of all war crimes. The imperial soldier is necessarily programmed to commit atrocities, against people he does not understand, as he is not defending his country. He requires a fundamentally different mentality to the patriot who defends his country. Imperial commanders understand this, and train their troops accordingly, in notorious desensitization techniques.

The 39 murders identified by the Australian Brereton Report are certainly only the tip of the iceberg, so far as Australian crimes in Afghanistan are concerned, and before we get to the crimes in Iraq and Syria.

Details of what are said to be the worst crimes in the Brereton Report have not yet been made public and, so far as I can see, the report did not touch on any of the earlier reported crimes, such as Australian complicity in the murder of ten Sabri tribespeople (mostly teenagers) on 16 May 2002, and the massacre of between one thousand and three thousand prisoners, people who were suffocated in shipping containers, after U.S. operation "Anaconda" operation at Shah-i-Kot, in March 2002. I mention just these two incidents from the early part of the war and occupation. They were not addressed by the Brereton report.

■ Australian Federal Police (AFP) raided the offices of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) over a 2017 investigative report based on leaked military documents. How do you measure the Australian Ju-



diary and police's treatment of possible war crimes committed by Australian forces in Afghanistan?

A: Initially the AFP moved to prosecute journalists, including Daniel Oakes, who had published material provided to them by Australian army whistleblower Major David McBride. (In this sense McBride was our 'Bradley Manning' and Oakes was our 'Julian Assange') However, the AFP has since decided to not proceed against Oakes but to maintain criminal charges against McBride. Charges against the soldiers have yet to be laid and are already subject to secrecy, with the suspicion that the government will further hide any trial process on 'national security' grounds. The Australian government has already undermined the recommendation to withdraw an 'honorable' citation from one army group and has become obsessed with defending itself from criticism that has come from China. **As with the Australian Air Force slaughter of 126 Syrian soldiers in September 2016 (in support of an ISIS operation), this government seems to think it can dispose of its responsibility for shocking war crimes by simply saying 'sorry, mistake', and forgetting the whole thing.**

■ Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission called for the UK "to

open an independent public inquiry to review and investigate the allegations of unlawful killings by UK Special Forces". It seems that there are more possible instances of war crime. What do you think?

A: It is very important that Afghan institutions assume responsibility for such things, however much we might doubt the capacity of the current regime in Kabul, dependent as it is on the U.S. and other occupation forces. Local authorities will certainly be aware of other crimes reported by Afghan citizens, who can only seek accountability through Afghan institutions. They will never find accountability through U.S., British, Australian, or any other sort of occupation force.

■ Do you think Australian authorities will urgently investigate war crime allegations? The Australian prime minister has stated that the issue is complicated, which means there are efforts to prolong the investigation process.

A: Public and private obstruction of the Australian processes is already underway. **The government has shown it is keen to keep control of the process and not allow it to be internationalized. No charges have yet been laid and we have reason to fear a cover-up.**

They will prolong and obfuscate but it is hard for them to totally bury some of the hideous and now public details. For example, the Brereton report (p.120) says Australian soldiers slit Afghan children's throats: "members from the SASR ... saw two 14-year-old boys whom they decided might be Taliban sympathizers. They stopped, searched the boys, and slit their throats. The rest of the Troop then had to 'clean up the mess', which involved bagging the bodies and throwing them into a nearby river". (<https://afghanstaninquiry.defence.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-11/IGADF-Afghanistan-Inquiry-Public-Release-Version.pdf>)

■ How was the Afghans' reaction to the possible war crimes by Australian Special Forces in their territory?

A: I cannot really say, I have just heard that there is the outrage, I imagine not so much at the fact that horrific crimes have been committed - they know that - but that there has been yet another exposure of these crimes and they fear that, once again, they will be denied justice and accountability.

■ What is the Australian motive in participating in the wars that the United States start once in a while? Does it serve Australian security or economy?

A: Canberra turned to Washington in 1942, when Britain abandoned its colony in Singapore in face of a Japanese advance. Australia swapped one 'big brother' for another and we have paid a heavy price for this 'protection' by participating in every war since, from Korea through Vietnam to the multiple 'New Middle East' wars. Our ferocious pro-war media (run by a few giant investment cartels) has normalized war to the point where Australian people are either numb or intimidated and fearful to speak out. This has seriously undermined our democracy. Former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (with support from another former PM, Malcolm Turnbull) recently created a petition which calls for an inquiry into the impact of the Murdoch media on Australian democracy. The Murdoch media has backed every U.S. war in living memory. Engagement with U.S. driven wars now has Australia at odds with its major trade partner China. U.S. dependence is a truly toxic relationship.

Fakhrizadeh assassination not justifiable by any theories: Richard Falk

Zahra Mirzafarjouyan

TEHRAN—Richard Falk says the assassination of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh cannot be legally, morally, or politically justified by any acceptable theory, and has very negative implications as an international precedent.

Top Iranian nuclear and defense scientist 'Dr. Mohsen Fakhrizadeh', who headed the Iranian Defense Ministry's Organization of Defensive Innovation and Research (known by its acronym SPND), was targeted on Friday in a multi-pronged attack involving at least one explosion and small fire by a number of assailants in Absard city of Damavand County, Tehran Province.

New York Times quoted intelligence officials as saying that the Israeli regime was behind the assassination of Iranian scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.

"One American official - along with two other intelligence officials - said that Israel was behind the attack on the scientist," New York Times reported, adding, "It was unclear how much the United States may have known about the operation in advance, but the two nations are the closest of allies and have long shared intelligence regarding Iran."

The assassination of Iranian scientist Fakhrizadeh provoked many reactions in the region and the world but in the meantime, the silence of many human rights defenders in not condemning this assassination is debatable.

In this regard, the Iranian Foreign Minister had condemned the assassination of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh and called on the international community not to remain silent in the face of this terrorist act and to abandon double standards and condemn the act of state-sponsored assassination.

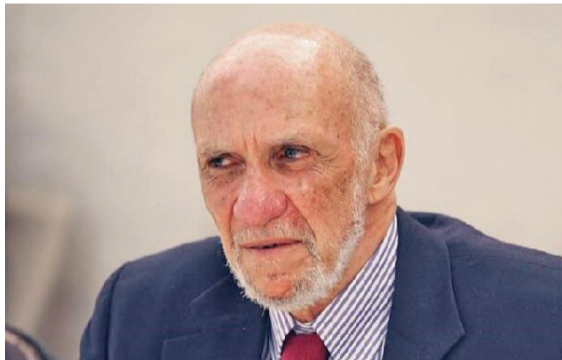
To know more about the issue, we reached out to Richard Anderson Falk, American professor emeritus of international law at Princeton University.

Following is the text of our interview with him:

■ Isn't the assassination of the Iranian scientist against international law and norms?

A: Yes, it is a targeted use of international force that cannot be justified by a valid claim of self-defense, which by the UN Charter, requires a prior armed attack. Such an assassination amounts to an unlawful 'extra-judicial execution,' which the UN Human Rights Council has condemned.

In the case of Afghanistan, the U.S. justified drone assassinations in various parts of the world either by an anti-terrorist rationale or by the contention that a hot battlefield has been extended to foreign countries if linked to the combat. Israel has resorted to extra-territorial assassinations since



Richard Anderson Falk is the author or coauthor of 20 books and the editor or co-editor of another 20 volumes. In 2008, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) appointed Falk to a six-year term as a United Nations Special Rapporteur on "the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967."

its inception despite frequent condemnations.

The assassination of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh cannot be legally, morally, or politically justified by any acceptable theory, and has very negative implications as an international precedent.

■ Many believe the terrorist act has been committed by the Israeli regime. What do you think of this?

A: I find all forms of state terrorism to be unlawful, amounting to international crimes, and morally indefensible, especially aggravated when directed at civilians.

■ Can such an act by the Israeli regime be done without coordination with Trump?

A: As such coordination is rarely acknowledged, we can only surmise that it occurs. Given the timing of Pompeo's visit to Israel prior to the assassination constitutes circumstantial evidence of knowledge before the event, if not active coordination.

■ Why have the terrors been focused on Iranian nuclear and defensive elites?

A: Such a focus corresponds with Israel's security narrative, which seems to have been unconditionally accepted during the Trump presidency. It alleges that Israel's longer-range security is threatened by Iran's nuclear program, which it further alleges seeks to gain the capability to produce nuclear weapons, and its immediate security is jeopardized by Iran's large arsenal of precision-guided missiles. Israel,

and likely Saudi Arabia have been carrying on an unlawful destabilization campaign against Iran for many years, which has intensified during the Trump presidency and the Netanyahu leadership in Israel. Israel may feel emboldened by both the Trump support and the normalization agreements with the UAE and Bahrain.

■ What can be the consequences of such a criminal irresponsible act?

A: This depends on how Iran chooses to respond, essentially whether it awaits Biden's inauguration as the U.S. President on January 20th, hoping for a renewal of U.S. participation in the Joint Comprehensive Program of Action (JCPOA) (2015 Agreement on Iran's Nuclear Program), including the lifting of all sanctions. The Iranian choice of diplomacy versus some form of military retaliation will likely shape the future with respect to 'consequences.'

There are other uncertainties. (1) will Trump/Netanyahu seek to provoke Iran by further aggressive actions in the interim? (2) will Biden follow the Obama path toward diplomacy or be more guided by a policy that strikes a compromise between Obama's and Trump's approach? Such a compromise would extend the 2015 arrangement to cover non-nuclear regional security issues affecting Yemen, Gaza, and Lebanon, and possibly Syria. (3) do the normalization agreements between Israel and several Arab governments create a new regional situation that is different than what existed pre-Trump?

■ What are the goals behind the act considering the timing?

A: As the act, itself has not been officially acknowledged, commentary on its goals is necessarily speculative. The most reasonable interpretation of goals is to provoke Iran so as to give Israel a pretext for retaliation and possibly draw the U.S. into a combat role, and if this fails, to make a diplomatic accommodation with the Biden presidency more problematic for both sides.

■ Why haven't European countries condemned the act strongly and somehow, they have kept silent?

A: Europe has disengaged from active involvement in the region except possibly for France in relation to Lebanon and the East Mediterranean natural gas disputes. Europe is hoping mainly for a renewal of its special relationship with the U.S. as soon as Biden takes over. It does not want to have any distractions from this goal, and it may feel that its future leverage is greater if it pursues equidistance diplomacy that appears not to take sides in this central confrontation between Iran and the Arab/Israel security partnership.

Biden shunned by U.S. military spy masters

U.S. military intelligence agencies have avoided meeting with the projected winner of the disputed 2020 U.S. election Joe Biden's transition team, according to a report.

CNN reported on Saturday that a Trump loyalist in the Pentagon was blocking Biden's intelligence team from meeting with heads of Pentagon's intelligence agencies.

Meanwhile, U.S. President Donald Trump continues to claim he won the 2020 presidential election that was marred by widespread cheating and fraud.

On Thursday, the incumbent president

reiterated that he had gained more votes than was needed to secure his reelection.

Despite Trump's claim of winning and the reports that the Trump administration was blocking Biden's team to meet its intelligence counterparts, Pentagon spokesperson Sue Gough told The Hill that the heads of U.S. military intelligence departments were scheduled tentatively to meet Biden's team early next week.

"The visits are tentatively scheduled for early next week," Gough said on Friday.

The office of the undersecretary of Defense for intelligence & security and the Pentagon

Agency transition director were finalizing coordination for Defense Department intelligence agencies, "including the need-to-know approval process for DOD intelligence agencies per the statute and White House/Biden-Harris Transition Team Memorandum of Understanding," the Pentagon spokesperson told The Hill.

The Trump administration had already given access to transition materials and national security briefings to Biden and his team following criticisms that the administration was hindering Biden's readiness to take office.

In the meantime, Trump declared that he will not change his mind regarding widespread cheating, fraud and vote-rigging in the U.S. presidential election.

During his tenure as president, Trump has been fighting everybody and everything against him.

This include courts of law which did not take his side in the many disputed claims, individuals who unveiled his wrongdoings and criminal activities, and media outlets and agencies that disseminated the truth.

(Source: Press TV)

U.S. considering blacklist for Yemen's Houthis - Oman foreign minister

Oman's foreign minister said on Saturday the top U.S. diplomat for the Middle East had discussed with his country the possibility of Washington designating Yemen's Houthi movement as a terrorist group.

"Yes, that was raised," Sayed Badr Al Busaidi told a Bahrain summit in response to a question on whether the potential blacklisting had been broached by David Schenker during a recent visit to Muscat.

"I don't think there is a solution based on classifying or blocking one key player in that conflict and not bringing them to the negotiating table," the Omani minister added.

Two sources familiar with the matter told Reuters last month that U.S. President Donald Trump's administration had threatened to blacklist the Houthi movement, which has been battling a Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen since 2015.

The United Nations is trying to revive peace talks stalled since late 2018 to end the war that has been in a military deadlock for years, with the Houthis still holding the capital, Sana'a, and most big urban centers.

"My question to that (a U.S. designation) ... is that decision going to resolve the Yemeni conflict given that this group is a key player? ... Or is it better to really support what the United Nations envoy is trying to do by inviting everyone including that group to the table," Al Busaidi said.

UAE to turn elsewhere if Washington refuses to supply weapons it needs

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) ambassador to the United States says his country will be forced to turn elsewhere and acquire the weapons it needs in case Washington refuses to supply the Persian Gulf state with required munitions.

"We would rather have the best U.S.-equipment or we will reluctantly find it from other sources, even if less capable," Yousef al-Otaiba said in a statement on Thursday amid growing opposition and attempts to block Republican President Donald Trump's \$23 billion weapons sale to the Arab country.

Otaiba then sought to portray the multi-billion arms deal as an "investment in the U.S.," pointing out that the agreement would "support tens of thousands of U.S. jobs, sustain the U.S. defense industrial base, and lower future U.S. research and development costs."

The remarks came in response to a Twitter thread published a day earlier by Democratic Senator Chris Murphy in which he pointed to the UAE's cooperation with Saudi Arabia in an atrocious military campaign against Yemen, where they "have killed thousands of civilians with U.S.-made weapons."

Lavrov urges Israel to avoid unilateral actions in West Bank

Israel should avoid unilateral actions on the occupied territories in the West Bank, including the unlawful practice of destroying Palestinian houses there, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in a video address to participants of the Mediterranean Dialogues international conference in Moscow.

"Any unilateral actions by Israel should be avoided. I am referring to Israel's rapidly intensified settlement policy and the illegal demolition of Palestinian houses in the West Bank," Lavrov said.

According to TASS, in his opinion, the situation in that complicated region "will never be completely stabilized as long as the old wound of the Arab-Israeli conflict remains open."

Russia is closely watching the nascent normalization of relations between Israel and several Arab countries, the foreign minister continued.

Bangladesh begins relocating Rohingya refugees to remote island, despite human rights concerns

➔ Human rights activists raised doubts over claims by Bangladeshi officials that all relocated refugees had volunteered for the move.

Human Rights Watch said earlier this week that it had identified 12 families that were instructed to move to the island, according to official documents that reportedly list 4,000 names, having never volunteered to do so.

"I have no idea how my name appeared there, but I never voluntarily put my name on that list," one refugee told the organization. Reuters reported similar incidents.

Resistance News

Palestine to sue Israel at ICC for killing teen at West Bank protest

INTERNATIONAL DESK TEHRAN—The Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates says it is going to sue the Tel Aviv regime at the International Criminal Court (ICC) over the fatal shooting of a teenager during clashes with the Israeli army on the sidelines of a protest in the occupied West Bank.

The ministry, in a statement released on Friday evening, called upon the ICC to undertake an immediate investigation into Israel's crimes and to ultimately hold Israeli war criminals to account.

It held Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's administration fully and directly responsible for the murder of thirteen-year-old Ali Ayman Nasr About Aliya, stating that the crime reflects the nature of instructions that the Israeli regime gives its military forces.

"Such instructions make it easy for them to shoot Palestinian citizens without any fear of punishment," the statement pointed out.

Moreover, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's office issued a statement, condemning the "cold-blooded murder" of the Palestinian minor and describing it as the latest episode in Israel's crimes against Palestinian people - Press TV reported.

Abbas then urged the international community to protect the Palestinian nation, end the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, and help establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem al-Quds as its capital.

Book on 'masterpiece of creative genius' published for the unsighted

HERITAGE TEHRAN — A book on the UNESCO-registered Shushtar Historical Hydraulic System, which is known globally as a 'masterpiece of creative genius', has recently been published in Braille.

The unveiling ceremony of the book was held at the World Heritage site on Thursday to mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, Mohammadreza Bahadori, the director of the UNESCO site, said of Friday.



The 35-page book provides necessary information to the dear visually-impaired people, he said.

Situated in Khuzestan province, southwest Iran, the ensemble comprises bridges, weirs, tunnels, canals, and a series of ancient watermills powered by human-made waterfalls. It is named after an ancient city of the same name with its history dating back to the time of Darius the Great, the Achaemenid king.

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2009, the Shushtar Historical Hydraulic System may testify to the heritage and the synthesis of earlier Elamite and Mesopotamian knowhow. According to UNESCO, the ensemble was probably influenced by the Petra dam and tunnel and by Roman civil engineering.

Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad tourist attractions available online

TOURISM TEHRAN — Tourist attractions in the southwestern Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad province are available online, the provincial tourism chief has said.

Several videos and programs have been produced to introduce the province's historical sites, natural sceneries, and handicrafts to virtual visitors, Majid Safai announced on Saturday.

He also noted that the service will be available until the end of the coronavirus pandemic.



Guided excursions had been well established at the heart of travel, but like everything else, the coronavirus pandemic has upset such events, and many starting to go online. Socially-distanced craft workshops, virtual museum tours, city tours accompanied by avatar guides are amongst examples showing us how virtual realities are changing during the pandemic.

Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad province is known for its nomads and nomadic life. Sightseers may live with a nomadic or rural family for a while or enjoy an independent stay and assist them with day-to-day life. It also opens up an opportunity to feel rustic routines, their agriculture, traditions, arts, and culture.

The province attracted over four million people, mostly domestic travelers, during the Iranian year 1397 (ended March 2019), according to data announced by the provincial tourism department.

'First' creative house of handicrafts set to make debut in Alborz

HERITAGE TEHRAN — The first creative house of handicrafts is set to make debut in Alborz province in close collaboration with state-run institutes, crafters, and private investors, provincial tourism chief announced on Saturday.

The house of handicrafts will be running as a comprehensive and all-inclusive center for specialized training in various fields of art, marketing, and sale of products. And it will be also a forum for organizing festivals and exhibitions, etc., Freydoon Mohammadi said.



Iran ranks first globally in the number of cities and villages registered by the World Crafts Council (WCC) as China with seven entries, Chile with four, and India with three ones come next, according to the deputy tourism minister Pouya Mahmoudian.

Alborz province is surrounded by Mazandaran, Tehran, Markazi, and Qazvin provinces. Its name is driven by the Alborz Mountains. A significant part of the mountains is located in the north part of the province. Historical resources and documents as well as archeological studies indicate that Alborz has a rich culture dating back to prehistoric times.

Qom, a prime destination for pilgrims, day-trippers, history buffs, and nature lovers

→ 1 The beautiful and exemplary architecture of the bazaar and its old and pleasant atmosphere always attract many tourists.

● Haj Asgar Khan Public Bathhouse

Located near the holy shrine of Hazrat-e Masumeh (SA) and north of the bazaar, Haj Asgar Khan Public Bathhouse was built in the early Qajar era (1789–1925). The complex consists of three sections, which are covered by brick domes.

With the amendments made for the heating and lighting systems, the bathhouse is still operational and is used by the locals, however, women are not allowed to enter.

● Deir-e Gachin Caravanserai

Deir-e Gachin Caravanserai is one of the greatest caravanserais of Iran, which is located in the center of Kavir National Park, 80 kilometers to Qom.

Considered as the "Mother of Iranian Caravanserais" due to its unique features and antiquity, the caravanserai was built during the Sassanid era (224 CE–651), which means it is more than 1750 years old.

The caravanserai, which was once of the most prosperous roadside inns across the country, was renovated and restored during the Seljuk and Safavid eras, and new sections were added to it during the Qajar period.

The name Deir-e Gachin (literally meaning "cloister of plaster") comes from the fact that gigantic loads of plaster were



People visit the holy shrine of Hazrat-e Masumeh (SA) in Qom

used for its construction.

● Qomrud Castle

In the old village of Qomrud, near Qom, there are remnants of an ancient castle that dates from the Parthian era (247 BC – 224 CE). Unfortunately, there are not many relics of this building left, but still, it is worth a visit.

● Zand Mansion

One of the most beautiful historical buildings in the city, Zand Mansion was

built during the Qajar era as the personal residence of Haj Ali Khan Zand, one of the city's elites.

Stained glass windows and doors, a beautiful big yard and fountains, and a small pool in the middle, which cool the air, can be seen in the building.

The Anthropological Museum of Qom is also located within the mansion.

● Collection of historical mosques

As a religious city and a center for Is-

lamic studies, Qom is full of mosques and holy shrines, most of which with historical values and were built in the Qajar era.

Aqa Mosque and School, Atiq Mosque, Azam Mosque, Jameh Mosque of Qom, and holy shrines of Imamzadeh Hamzeh and Imamzadeh Ahmad ibn Qasem are located in the old neighborhoods of the city and are renovated and restored.

● Kahak

As the city has a hot and desert climate, the surrounding villages are most visited during the warmer months of the year.

Kahak, for its moderate and pleasant climate, is very popular among the Qom citizens during the summer.

The village was also home to the philosopher Mulla Sadra, also called Sadr-ol-Mote'allehin (born c. 1571, Shiraz, Iran—died 1640, Basra, Iraq). His home is one of the main attractions of the village.

● Hoz Soltan Salt Lake

One of the most visited natural spots of Qom is Hoz Soltan Salt Lake also known as Namak Lake. The beautiful lake is in the middle of the desert and several rivers, passing through different salt marshes, flow into it.

Located to the north of Qom, the lake has created one of the most beautiful sceneries in the desert. The visitors could easily walk in the shallow parts, and enjoy the shapes created by the salt, however, the center of the lake could be dangerous, as it is muddy and could easily trap people.

Iran, neighbors explore ways to safeguard Silk Roads heritage

HERITAGE TEHRAN — Cultural experts and officials from Iran and some neighboring states on Thursday discussed ways to safeguard, and benefit from the cultural heritage their nations are inherited from the ancient Silk Roads.

The third webinar of a joint traveling exhibition on the Common Heritage along the Silk Roads brought together experts from the Islamic Republic, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.

The online seminar was coordinated by the UNESCO Regional Office for Central Asia in Almaty on the traveling exhibition: Silk Roads Heritage Corridors in Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Iran with the support of the European Union.

Participants included museum directors and their deputies from the museums of the seven countries, representatives of the Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies of the University of Copenhagen, ICOM International Exhibition Committee (ICOM),



and the director of The UNESCO Almaty Office and the Chairman of the European Union Delegation to the Central Asia Region based in Kazakhstan.

The process of holding a joint traveling exhibition, related strategies, creating a network between participating national museums with the aim of em-

powerment through online training and exchange of successful experiences by holding workshops were discussed.

The event aimed to raise awareness about the rich heritage of the participating countries, to promote the exchanges of good practices along the Silk Roads, and to promote common understanding about the Silk Roads heritage as a bridge between the East and the West.

The ancient roads existed for thousands of years, passing through many different empires, kingdoms, reigns, and societies throughout history. At certain times in its long history, traders could travel freely along these routes, whereas at others, travel was difficult or dangerous.

According to UNESCO, the Silk Roads enriched the countries it passed through, transporting cultures, religions, languages, and of course material goods into societies across Europe, Asia, and Africa, and uniting them all with a common thread of cultural heritage and plural identities.

Online exhibit to display works by female crafters

TOURISM TEHRAN — An online exhibit of handicrafts, featuring works by female crafters of rural areas of Eslamshahr, southwestern Tehran, will be held on Monday.

The exhibit aims at showing the abilities and skills of rural women in producing handmade crafts, Eslamshahr's tourism chief Hamid Karimi said on Saturday.

Holding virtual exhibitions, while the crafters are facing several problems inflicted by the coronavirus outbreak, will encourage crafters to both develop skills and to handle their economy, the official added.

With 14 entries, Iran ranks first globally for the number of cities and villages registered by the World Crafts Council, as China with seven entries, Chile with four, and India with three ones come next.

In late January, the cities of Shiraz, Malayer, and Zanjan and the village of



Qassemabad were designated by the WCC- Asia Pacific Region, putting Iran's number of world crafts cities and villages from ten to 14.

Shiraz was named a "world city of [diverse] handicrafts". Malayer was made a global hub for woodcarving and

carved-wood furniture. Zanjan gained the title of a "world city of filigree". And Qassemabad village, which is nationally known for its traditional costumes, was also promoted to a world hub of handicrafts. Chador Shab, a kind of homemade outer-garment for women, was, however, the main subject for the WCC assessment for the village.

Back in May, deputy tourism minister Pouya Mahmoudian noted that due to the outbreak of coronavirus, suitcase exports of handicrafts were completely stopped since the month of Esfand (the last month of the year), and official exports of handicrafts experienced a steep decline.

"Some 295 fields of handicrafts are currently practiced across Iran with more than two million people engaging, majority of whom are women... Handicrafts also play an important role in the economy in our rural villages," she said.

In Iran, there are 3 million women-headed households, out of a total of 22 million families, and most of them can be found in less developed areas of the country.

Iran exported \$523 million worth of handicrafts during the past calendar year 1398 (ended March 19). Of the figure, some \$273 million worth of handicrafts were exported officially through customs, and about \$250 million was earned via suitcase trade (allowed for customs-free and tax-free transfer) through various provinces, according to data provided by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts.

Ceramics, pottery vessels, handwoven cloths as well as personal ornaments with precious and semi-precious gemstones are traditionally exported to Iraq, Afghanistan, Germany, the U.S., the UK, and other countries.

History's first superpower sprang from ancient Iran

Part (5/5)
Remarkably, Cyrus had no intention of imposing Persian religion, language, or culture on his new conquests. His style of government was based on respect for the many peoples over whom he reigned, and tolerance toward their customs and religions, setting him apart from earlier empire builders.

Displaced peoples were allowed to return to their homes—most famously in the case of the Jews exiled in Babylon, to whom Cyrus gave his blessing to return to Jerusalem. Local governors could conserve their autonomy, provided that they paid respect, and tribute, to the great king.

■ Pax Persiana

If the rise of the Persian emperor was stellar, his end was a grim anticlimax. In 530 BC, when he was approaching his 60s, Cyrus led a campaign to the north-eastern frontier of his empire. According to Herodotus, he believed that "against whatever country he turned his arms, it was impossible for that people to escape."

Do Herodotus's words hint at hubris? Cyrus was killed during a battle against a local tribe, the Massagetae. According to the Greek historian, the queen of the tribe, Tomyris, had lost her own son, the queen and plunged the emperor's severed head in a pail of blood.

Cyrus's gruesome end did not diminish his astonishing legacy, nor did it stall the ongoing expansion of

his already colossal empire. His immediate successor, Cambyses II, conquered Egypt, establishing its 27th dynasty. Attempts by Cambyses to push even farther afield into Ethiopia, and west toward Carthage, were frustrated, and it was left to his successor, Darius I, to take the Persian Empire to its widest span, conquering the Indus Valley and crossing the Danube into Europe.

The son of a provincial governor, Darius had to prove his mettle by quashing numerous revolts. But his greatest legacy was his administrative genius: His schemes to standardize weights and coinage across his vast territories became a blueprint for the world's future empires. Continuing the religious policy set by Cyrus, faiths within the empire were allowed to flourish, including those of the Jews and the Egyptians.

Darius's bid for westward expansion was checked at the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC. The failure by his successor, Xerxes I, to break the Greeks at the Battle of Salamis a decade later, opened a new chapter in world history: the flourishing of fifth-century BC Athens.

The Achaemenian rule of conquered peoples was generally liberal; the empire itself was divided into provinces (satrapies), each administered by a satrap who underwent frequent inspections by officials reporting directly to the king.

Building activity was extensive during the height of the empire, and of the several Achaemenian capitals, the



In 530 BC, Cyrus's body was borne to the Persian capital Pasargadae, and placed in this simple monument built on a stepped plinth.

ruins at Pasargadae and at Persepolis are probably the most outstanding. Achaemenian sculptured reliefs and a great number of smaller art objects present a remarkably unified style for the period. Metalwork, especially in gold, was highly developed, and a variety of carefully executed examples survive.

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When a husband and wife look at each other with love, Allah looks at both of them with mercy.
Prophet Muhammad (S)

Khayyam's impacts on Western literature, society

PART 1

The first scholar outside Persia to study Persian poet and mathematician Omar Khayyam was the English orientalist Thomas Hyde (1636-1703). In his "Historia Religionis Veterum Persarum Eorumque Magorum", he not only devoted some space to the life and works of Khayyam, but also translated one quatrain (rubai) into Latin. The first quatrain in English was published in 1816 by Henry George Keene (1781-1864) in the famous magazine Fundgruben des Orients/Mines d'Orient.

Although the founder of the Fundgruben, Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (1774-1856), translated a few of Khayyam's poems into German in 1818, and Sir Gore Ouseley (1770-1844) into English in 1846, Khayyam was to remain relatively unknown for some time.

In 1859, the London bookseller Bernard Quaritch published the first edition of the Khayyam's Rubaiyat. The writer, Edward FitzGerald (1809-83) had 250 copies printed anonymously, of which 40 copies were for his own use. He distributed copies among a few friends, but although some advertisements tried to draw attention to the poem, it remained "spectacularly unsuccessful".

In 1861, the booklet ended up in Quaritch's remainder box, where it was offered for a penny a piece. No copies were sold until Whitley Stokes, a Celtic scholar, bought one in 1861. He came back to buy additional copies, one of which he gave to Dante Gabriel Rossetti. From Rossetti the poem found its way to Swinburne and Meredith, both of whom sang its praises and passed on their enthusiasm to other members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, including William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones.

The latter showed the book to John Ruskin, who in 1863 wrote a letter to the still unknown translator/author of the Rubaiyat in which he declared that he had never read anything so glorious to his mind than this poem and begged for more.

The Pre-Raphaelites were fascinated by the Rubaiyat. So it was that Swinburne wrote his Laus Veneris in the Omarian stanza (1866), and Morris and Burne-Jones wrote out and illuminated a copy on vellum, which was given to Burne-Jones' wife, Georgiana, in 1872. It was also through Burne-Jones that the young Rudyard Kipling discovered the poem. The poem's rise in fame is described in detail by Carl J. Weber and John Arthur Arberry. In the nineties the popularity of FitzGerald's Rubaiyat had risen to great heights, not only in Britain, but also in America.

In America the poem had been introduced by Charles Eliot Norton (1827-1908), the renowned scholar and man of letters. When he visited England in 1868, Mrs. Georgiana Burne-Jones showed him her husband's copy of the Rubaiyat. Norton got hold of a copy of the second FitzGerald edition (1868) and brought it to the attention of American friends, including James Russell Lowell and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

In 1869, he published a laudatory article in the North American Review. The article aroused the interest of many fellow Americans and also drew the attention of readers in England. Many people wanted to own a copy of the poem. A pirated printing of the 1868 edition appeared in Columbus, Ohio, in 1870, and in 1872 FitzGerald had a third edition printed by Quaritch.

This found its way to many admirers in America where, as in England, there was an increasing interest and demand for the work. A further impetus to the book's popularity came from the artist Elihu Vedder, whose Rubaiyat edition, in an attractive cover and embellished with 56 drawings, caused a sensation when it was published in 1884.

The exhibition of the original drawings at the Arts Club, Boston, drew up to 2100 visitors a day. The book sold out in six days and was reprinted several times. Other editions were reprinted many times as well: "Competing editions cropped up like dandelions all over the literary lawn".

In 1892, admirers of the poem founded the Omar Khayyam Club of London. Mr. Justin Huntly McCarthy, who had published his own Rubaiyat version in 1889, was elected its first president. Similar clubs were founded in other places but, with the exception of the American Club, left almost no traces. The main activity of the members of the London Club was (and still is) gathering twice a year to dine and to commemorate Khayyam, Fitz (as he is called as a term of endearment) and the Rubaiyat, in more or less serious and comic rituals.

The club issued two books, in 1910 and 1931 respectively, with contributions by its members: poems praising Fitz and Omar Khayyam, pictures of menus, miscellanea and lists of members and guests. Among these can be found many famous names: scholars, literary men and artists like Edward Heron-Allen, Edmund Gosse, Andrew Lang, Thomas Hardy, Max Beerbohm, Lawrence Alma Tadema, Arthur Rackham, G. K. Chesterton, Arthur Conan Doyle, Aldous Huxley and W. B. Yeats.

Strand Releasing brings Iran's "Sun Children" into American homes

A R T TEHRAN — Strand Releasing, an independent U.S. film distributor, has purchased U.S. rights to director Majid Majidi's child labor drama "Sun Children", Variety reported on Friday.

The company is a leading distributor of foreign language, American independent, and documentary films in theaters, on DVD/Blu-Ray and via video-on-demand.

Celluloid Dreams, a major French film production and distribution company, is handling international sales for "Sun Children", which is Iran's submission to the 2021 Academy Awards.

"Sun Children" tells the story of 12-year-old Ali and his three friends. Together, they work hard to survive and support their families, doing small jobs in a garage and committing petty crimes to make fast money. Everything changes, however, when Ali is entrusted to find a hidden treasure underground but must first enroll at the Sun School, a charitable institution that tries to educate street kids and child laborers.

"It has been a wonderful honor to reunite with Majid Majidi and it's also such a pleasure to be working with our friends at Strand again," said Celluloid Dreams' Hengameh Panahi.



Ruhollah Zamani and Javad Ezzati act in a scene from Majid Majidi's "Sun Children".

Hengameh Panahi.

In addition, Marcus Hu, president of Strand Releasing, described "Sun Children" as

"an extraordinary accomplishment, managing to be both observant and delicate as well as completely exciting and gripping."

"It is a tour-de-force: a true arthouse film that plays like a Dickensian caper movie. We are so excited to bring the movie to American audiences and to shepherd it through the awards season," said Hu.

Majidi also told Variety that he was "so grateful to U.S. audiences and critics who have responded to [his] past films with such genuine appreciation and enthusiasm."

"I am very excited that my new movie 'Sun Children' will have an opportunity to reach a new generation of American filmgoers, especially young viewers who will have special empathy for the children in the film," he added.

The movie had its Iranian premiere during the 38th Fajr Film Festival in Tehran in February, garnering the Crystal Simorghs for best film, script and set design.

Numerous international events, including the 77th Venice Film Festival, have also screened the movie. The festival honored the film's star Ruhollah Zamani with the Marcello Mastroianni Award.

The 33rd International Film Festival for Children and Youth in Isfahan also awarded Majidi as best director and Zamani as best actor.

SIGGRAPH Asia 2020 to review Iranian animation "H2ope"



A poster for Iranian animation "H2ope".

A R T TEHRAN — Iranian animated short movie "H2ope" will be screened at the 13th ACM SIGGRAPH Conference and Exhibition on Computer Graphics and Interactive Techniques in Asia.

SIGGRAPH - Special Interest Group on Computer Graphics and Interactive Techniques - is an annual conference on computer graphics (CG) organized by ACM

SIGGRAPH, starting in 1974.

The main conference is held in North America and the SIGGRAPH Asia, a second conference held annually, has been held since 2008 in countries throughout Asia.

South Korea is hosting this year's SIGGRAPH Asia, which opened on Friday and will run online until December 14.

The 3D movie "H2ope" on the water crisis has been produced at Hooraksh Studio, an animation and game studio in Tehran.

The movie tells the story of a student who, one day, asks around the class for water. However, none is left. Questions hence arise among his classmates about what would happen if the water runs out?

This story is purely experimental and illustrated according to children's point of view about thirst and the water shortage.

Ashkan Rahgozar, director of the acclaimed animated feature "The Last Fiction", co-directed "H2ope" with Negin Khajei.

Animations from Australia, China, Taiwan, Russia, Japan and several other countries have been selected to be screened along with "H2ope" in SIGGRAPH Asia's VR Theater, which features virtual reality narrative films, so you can move beyond the flat screen as the organizers celebrate the evolution of a new medium and showcase the best in

VR short-form narratives.

"H2ope" was screened at the Bucheon International Animation Festival, which took place in the South Korean city during October.

In addition, the Chaniartoon - Chania Cartoon and Animation Festival, which was held on the Greek island of Crete in Chania in September, screened the animation.

The SIGGRAPH Asia is taking place in a fully virtual format this year on the theme of "Driving Diversity", the organizers have said.

The annual event, which rotates around the Asian region on normal circumstances, attracts the most respected technical and creative people from all over the world who are excited by research, science, art, animation, gaming, interactivity, education and emerging technologies.

"The decision for SIGGRAPH Asia 2020 to go virtual has not been an easy one, but we came to a common consensus that it was necessary in this current climate," SIGGRAPH Asia 2020 Conference Chair Jinny HyeJin Choo has said.

"The theme for this year's SIGGRAPH Asia 'Driving Diversity' will take on a new meaning as we give our diverse group of worldwide technical and artistic contributors the opportunity to connect with and inspire new communities," she added.

"A Tunnel" from Georgia, Germany opens out into Cinéma Vérité

A R T TEHRAN — "A Tunnel", a documentary co-produced by Georgia and Germany, will be screened at the 14th edition of Cinéma Vérité, Iran's major documentary film festival.

The film will go on screen in World's Best, a section that will feature a selection of documentaries acclaimed at 2020 international events across the world.



"A Tunnel" co-directed by Nino Orjonikidze and Vano Arsenishvili.

Co-directed by Nino Orjonikidze and Vano Arsenishvili, the documentary is about a group of people that are working hard to extend a railroad in a remote Georgian mountain village.

When they're done, the new Silk Road Express will run through here. But before this high-speed connection between China and Europe can go anywhere, a tunnel has to be dug, a tunnel that goes right through a mountain where villagers have their fields and pastures.

In his office at the station, an old-time stationmaster prepares for his role in the future, when a lot more trains will be coming through the station.

There are promises of prosperity and progress, but in the dreamy atmosphere of the fairy-tale village, the coming of the express train feels more like a nightmare.

With the rumbling in the mountain coming ever closer, the villagers look on impotently as the ground fractures and crumbles. Uncertainty is growing, because no one knows whether their houses are going to have to be knocked down or not.

Language and communication problems between the Georgian and Chinese workers lead to fierce arguments, and ultimately a tense strike. The gorgeous, disengaged shots perfectly reflect the surrealistic atmosphere of a changing world order.

"A Tunnel" won the award for best film by first or second-time director at the 11th edition of the MakeDox Creative Documentary Film Festival in North Macedonia in August.

This year's Cinéma Vérité was first scheduled to be held from December 8 to 15. However, it was postponed for one week due to a spike in coronavirus cases.

"Tony Driver" by Italian filmmaker Ascanio Petriani, "Two Roads" by Czech director Radovan Sibrt and "Acasa, My Home" by Romanian filmmaker Radu Ciorniciuc have also been selected to be screened in the World's Best section.

Due to the pandemic, Cinéma Vérité will be held entirely online and the international section of the event is non-competitive this year.

Over 20 films on COVID-19 by Iranian filmmakers will also be competing in the festival as the organizers intend to attract attention to this disastrous disease by this special category.

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