



Congratulations on the birth anniversary of Jesus Christ to all monotheists in the world



Trump's fate will be no better than Saddam Hussein's Page 2



Persepolis did a great job: Ali Daei Page 3



Hossein Parsai to stage 'The Soldier' about Commander Soleimani Page 8

Russia and China may need to clarify their security initiatives



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Iran terms as 'unacceptable' any proposal to revise, renegotiate or extend JCPOA

TEHRAN – Majid Takht-Ravanchi, Iran's ambassador to the United Nations, has rejected as "unacceptable" any proposal to revise, renegotiate or extend the 2015 nuclear pact as contrary to UN Security Council resolution 2231.

The ambassador made the remarks during a meeting of the UN Security Council on "Non-Proliferation: implementation of Security Council resolution 2231 (2015)." "Almost four months after the failed

United States' move to destroy the JCPOA, the Security Council is again considering the implementation of resolution 2231 and the JCPOA," Takht-Ravanchi said.

"The JCPOA is an agreement coming out of hard-won negotiations involving difficult gives and takes, and any proposal for its revision, renegotiation or extension will be against resolution 2231 and absolutely not acceptable to Iran," he pointed out.

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Iran's non-oil trade stands at \$52b in 9 months

TEHRAN – The value of Iran's non-oil trade in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-December 20) stood at \$52 billion, according to the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA).

The total volume of the country's non-oil trade was 110 million tons in the mentioned nine months, of which over 85.2 million tons were exported commodities and about 25 million tons were imported

goods, Mehdi Mir-Ashrafi told IRIB.

The official put the total value of the imports into the country during the said time span at \$26.8 billion, while the value of exports was reported to be \$25.1 billion.

According to Mir-Ashrafi, 17.5 million tons of the imported commodities into the country in the period under review were basic goods, accounting for the lion's share of the imports in terms of weight.

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Iranian children win awards at FAO World Food Day Poster Contest

TEHRAN – Two Iranian children have won awards at the World Food Day Poster Contest that has been organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations.

Atrin Afshari-Tavana took first prize in the 5-8 age group, the organizers have announced. About her painting, she wrote, "Farmers are the best champions in the world."

Atrin's sister, Anahita, took third in the 9-12 age group. "My food heroes around

the world are women and mothers who cultivate food with all their might and give it to people all over the world," she said about her work.

The art contest was organized for children between ages 5 to 19 to celebrate World Food Day. The organizers called on all children around the world to use their imagination and create a poster of their favorite food hero at work.

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Iran captain Ghanbari sad about Iran's position in FIFA ranking

BY FARROKH HESABI
 Zahra Ghanbari has expressed her sadness after Iran women's national football team were taken out of the latest FIFA rankings list completely due to not playing an international game within the last 18 months.

The Iranian team were 70th in the previous rankings released by FIFA but now they are out of the list of the international teams.

It was a devastating blow to the Iranian women football and many of the experts as well as coaches and players have expressed their sadness and concerns about this issue.

Zahra Ghanbari, captain of the Iranian national team and one of the best players of the women's football history, expressed her sadness about the national team's position at the FIFA ranking.

"It is very unfortunate that such a thing has happened for us, something that we think should be reconsidered by FIFA. We got considerable results over the past years and it is a real blow to the Iranian football", Ghanbari said in an exclusive interview with Tehran Times.

"The sad reality is that the national team were left alone and no one paid attention to them for the last two years. We had no friendly matches and no training camps for a long time, so we should expect something like this to happen", Zahra added.

Ghanbari, 28, is the current player of Vochan Kordestan team and the all-time top goal scorer of the Iran Women's Football Professional League.

She criticized the Iranian football federation's officials for neglecting the women's national team.

"We got good results in the past few years and moved up in FIFA's rankings. However, in all those years we also had a few friendly matches, and our few training camps were formed only near the start of a tournament," she said.

"We should have a plan. We need to change the way we think about holding a training camp when we have a competition ahead. There should be long term planning for the national team. The football federation arranged some training camps and friendly matches for the men's national team during the time of the coronavirus pandemic despite the fact that they had no official match ahead," Ghanbari added.

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280 genetic counseling centers operating in Iran

TEHRAN – Some 280 centers are currently offering genetic counseling services across the country, Fatemeh Rezvan Madani, head of the prevention development center of the Welfare Organization, has stated.

The services of genetic counseling centers are free of charge for those under the Welfare Organization's coverage and cost less for other people, she explained.

Last year (March 2019-March 2020), 384,000 households were screened at these centers, and the services resulted in the prevention of 1,444 births with disabilities; in addition, the necessary coordination was made with the Ministry of Health for abortion cases, she also noted.

Individuals can refer to genetic counseling centers before pregnancy or marriage; and then to genetic testing if needed, she added.

Over 1.3m persons with disabilities live in Iran

Pirouz Hanachi the mayor of Tehran, said in December 2019 that over 1.3 million people suffering from disabilities live in the country and the figure rises by 50,000 every year.

Majlis [the Iranian parliament] approved both general outlines and details of a bill on the rights of persons with disabilities in January 2018. Development of disability-friendly cities, free transportation, health insurance, free education, job creation, housing loans, and fewer working hours are some of the articles of the law.

Since the approval of the law, education for students with disabilities have been provided in Azad universities, subsidies for patients with spinal cord injury as well as disability care centers have been increased, in addition to residential units to families having members with disabilities.

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Trump pardons Blackwater contractors convicted of massacre in Iraq

Donald Trump has caused further outrage in the dying days of his presidency by granting pardons to four former government contractors who were convicted in a 2007 massacre in Baghdad.

The Blackwater guards were all serving lengthy prison sentences for their part in the massacre, in which more than a dozen Iraqi civilians were killed. The incident caused international uproar over the use of private security guards in a war zone.

Fourteen Iraqi civilians were killed and 17 others wounded.

Supporters of the former contractors had lobbied for the pardons, arguing that the men had been excessively punished in an investigation and prosecution they said was tainted.

The Blackwater firm was founded by Erik Prince, an ally of Trump and the brother

of Education Secretary Betsy DeVos. It has since been renamed.

The Blackwater case has taken a complicated path since the killings at Baghdad's Nisoor Square in September 2007, when the men, former veterans working as contractors for the State Department, opened fire at the crowded traffic circle.

Prosecutors asserted the heavily armed Blackwater convoy launched an unprovoked attack using sniper fire, machine guns and grenade launchers. Defense lawyers argued their clients returned fire after being ambushed by Iraqi insurgents.

They were convicted in 2014 after a months-long trial in Washington's federal court, and each man defiantly asserted his innocence at a sentencing hearing the following year.

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Project to support ecotourism, local communities in Gwadar Bay

TEHRAN – A new initiative seeks to expand ecotourism and consequently to empower local communities across Gwadar Bay, which is home to wetlands and pristine natural landscapes.

"A community-based ecotourism project is ready to be implemented across Gwadar Bay to empower local communities in a way they enjoy the economic benefits generated from tourism activities," Ali Arvahi, the director of the Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project, said on Tuesday.

"The community-oriented nature tourism from

one hand, and making the best use of wetland tourism potentials, from the other, are expected to lead to more clever exploitation [of the wetlands], and to expand participatory conservation [of them]," the official noted.

Gwadar Bay, Persian Khalij-e Gavater, is an inlet of the Arabian Sea indenting the sandy Makran coast at the Iran-Pakistan border. It is about 32 km long and 16 km wide.

Valuable wetlands
 Wetlands play a major role in protecting the

land against floods and the impacts of storms. They provide food and diverse habitats which support genetic, species, and ecosystem biodiversity. Wetlands play a key role in the life cycles of many species and annual migration patterns.

Unfortunately, wetlands are being degraded and lost due to pollution, overexploitation, climate change, and human population growth. In recognition of these challenges, the Ramsar Convention, an international treaty, was adopted in 1971.

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Mehrz/Mohammad Khababakhsh

Resistance festival honors "Where Are You Ebrahim" with Soleimani Award

TEHRAN – The 17th Resistance Theater Festival in Tehran awarded winners during a ceremony at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on Tuesday as "Where Are You Ebrahim" by Leili Aaj won the Soleimani Award, a special prize of the event.

The award was established by the organizers in memory of Commander Qassem Soleimani, the chief of IRGC Quds Force, who was assassinated during a U.S. airstrike in Baghdad on January 3.

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GSA: Trump's unpredictability pushed Arabs to seek partnership with other powers

BY MOHAMMAD MAZHARI

TEHRAN - Chief executive officer of Gulf State Analytics (GSA) says that the "unpredictability" of U.S. policies under Trump's presidency pushed Arab countries in the Persian Gulf region to seek partnership with other powers including China and Russia.

"All Arab countries in the Persian Gulf have had to contend with the unpredictability and incoherence of Trump's foreign policy," Giorgio Cafiero tells the Tehran Times.

This "created greater doubt about the wisdom of remaining so dependent on the U.S. for security relations and prompted them to explore deeper partnerships with other powers such as China, France, Turkey, and Russia," the DC-based consultant notes.

Washington's policy in West Asia has historically been based on two main goals: securing oil for the U.S. industry and supporting Israel. Although U.S. authorities claim to follow an even-handed approach in dealing with West Asian issues, their practice is traditionally biased in favor of Israel.

At the same time, the United States has adopted punitive measures towards 'uncooperative' states, including Iran, in the region.

Since the victory of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, the country has been under U.S. sanctions. Washington's pressure campaign reached its height during Trump's "maximum pressure" strategy against Iran.

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Iran terms as ‘unacceptable’ any proposal to revise, renegotiate or extend JCPOA

1 → He explained that after its withdrawal from the JCPOA on May 8, 2018, the U.S. re-imposed all its nuclear-related sanctions, and since then, by pursuing a hostile policy towards the JCPOA and Iran, has conducted persistent widespread public and private harassment of Iran's business partners.

By so doing, Takht-Ravanchi continued, the U.S. has committed multiple cases of “significant non-performance” under the JCPOA and as such is in continuous systematic material breach of its legal obligations under resolution 2231, the UN Charter and international law.

“Likewise, by brazenly threatening other States to either violate resolution 2231 or face punishment, the U.S. has not only failed to honor its own commitments under that resolution, but has also substantively obstructed the implementation of commitments by other Member States.”



“The U.S. has also defied the unanimously issued order of the International Court of Justice on 3 October 2018, which includes an obligation to remove impediments to humanitarian trade with Iran,” he added.

The Iranian envoy pointed out that instead of taking any remedial measures authorized in the JCPOA, Iran, upon the E3's request, exercised restraint and strategic patience for one year.

He said Iran's maximum restraint was responded to with the so-called “maximum pressure” of the U.S. and its ever-increasing unlawful sanctions as well as the utter failure of the E3/EU to implement their commitments.

“This left us with no choice but to take certain remedial steps in full conformity with the JCPOA's paragraphs 26 and 36, according to which, in case of ‘a re-introduction or re-imposition of the sanctions’, Iran has the right ‘to cease performing its commitments ... in whole or in part’,” Takht-Ravanchi remarked.

“Therefore, Iran's steps are in full accordance with our rights and commitments under the JCPOA, and more importantly, are completely reversible,” he said. “However, the damages and sufferings inflicted upon Iran are almost absolutely irreversible.”

Takht-Ravanchi quoted U.S. officials as saying that the objective of the sanctions is the “starvation” of the Iranian people through weaponizing food and medicine, which is prohibited even in wartime.

Sanctions prevent the import of humanitarian goods, including vital medicines and medical equipment needed for patients particularly those with rare or complicated diseases, he said, adding that at a time when Iran is experiencing one of the worst outbreaks of COVID-19, sanctions are drastically hindering the country's national response to the pandemic.

■ **U.S. lies that humanitarian goods are exempt from sanctions: envoy**

“The U.S.'s claim that humanitarian goods are exempt from sanctions is an absolute lie. As an example, even today, we cannot easily import medicine for relieving the breathing problems of those injured by chemical weapons which were provided by some Western countries to Saddam and used by him during his aggression against Iran.”

“The U.S. also claims that sanctions are ‘not directed at the people of Iran’. This is also a sheer hypocrisy as sanctions target the most vulnerable people the most, harm the poor more than the rich, the ill people more than the healthy ones, and infants and children more than adults,” Takht-Ravanchi stated.

He maintained that sanctions do not merely create economic hardships, but in many cases, they claim the innocent lives of people from all walks of life.

By any measure, the U.S. sanctions are illegal, illegitimate, immoral, inhumane and oppressive, and have no designation other than economic terrorism and crime against humanity, the ambassador declared.

Pointing to the assassination of Iran's top anti-terror general Qassem Soleimani almost a year ago, Takht-Ravanchi said the assassination was a living example of the United States' bankrupt policy. This terrorist act, conducted at the direct order of the U.S. president, is a gross violation of international law, he pointed out.

“There are also serious indications that the assassination of Martyr Fakhrazadeh, a prominent Iranian scientist, on 27 November 2020, was conducted by the Israeli regime—the closest regional ally of the United States with a long dark record of such terrorist acts against the Iranian nuclear scientists in the past,” he added.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Iranian ambassador repeated Iran's stance on returning to the JCPOA commitments, saying as soon as all JCPOA participants start implementing their commitments unconditionally, effectively and in full, Iran will also resume implementing all its JCPOA commitments.

“This has always been our principled position throughout the recent years and now it has become a binding legal obligation for the government following the recent adoption of a new law by our Parliament,” he said.

Takht-Ravanchi also called on regional countries to engage in good faith and work toward the establishment of a better, safer and more prosperous region.

“Our Hormuz Peace Endeavor (HOPE) is a recipe for bringing regional countries closer to each other with the aim of resolving their differences and establishing friendlier relations among them. We hope that our honest and sincere call for opening a new page in regional cooperation will be headed by our neighbors in the Persian Gulf soon,” he said.

“Finally, our observations on Secretary-General's report are contained in my letter already sent to the Council covering our views on issues that I did not address in my remarks today,” he concluded.

By any measure, the U.S. sanctions are illegal, illegitimate, immoral, inhumane and oppressive, and have no designation other than economic terrorism and crime against humanity, Ambassador Takht-Ravanchi declared.

Rouhani: Trump's fate will be no better than Saddam Hussein's

POLITICAL DESK TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani predicts the fate of Donald Trump, who is on his way out from the White House, will be no better than that of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.

“We've had two lunatics in [our] history, one was Saddam who imposed a military war on us and the other lunatic is Trump who imposed the economic war on us,” Rouhani said at a cabinet session on Wednesday.

He said Iran emerged victorious in the military war and waited for the Iraqi lunatic to be hanged. “Trump's destiny will be no better than Saddam's,” he emphasized. “We saw how the Iranian people broke them with their resistance against those who wanted to break us,” the president added.

Trump reimposed sanctions on Iran after he pulled out of the JCPOA, commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal, which was signed under his predecessor Barack Obama.

With Joe Biden's victory, however, hopes have been raised over the survival of the nuclear deal. Biden has promised to return the United States into the JCPOA if Iran returns to full compliance with the deal.

Rouhani said his administration's efforts are aimed at reducing the effects of the economic war on the one hand and end



the cruel sanctions on the other.

“We hope to break the sanctions every day,” he said. “If we break the embargo, we will defeat the Zionists as well as the reactionaries and the extremists of the U.S.”

During last Wednesday's cabinet session, Rouhani said his administration is “not excited” about Biden's victory, but it's

happy about Trump's defeat.

“Some say you are excited about Biden's coming [into power]. No, we're not excited, but we're very happy about Trump's leaving,” he said, describing Trump as a person who even blocked the provision of vaccines to patients because he did not adhere to any moral and humane principles.

The remarks came two days after the U.S. Electoral College voted to confirm the final electoral result of 306 to 232 in favor of Biden.

Speaking from Wilmington, Delaware, Biden declared that “the rule of law, our constitution and the will of the people prevailed. Our democracy — pushed, tested, threatened — proved to be resilient, true and strong.”

Rouhani said, “The next U.S. administration can decide for itself. The path is open. If it wants to choose the right path, it's ready. If it wants to choose the wrong path, it's also ready.”

Earlier this month, Biden reiterated in a New York Times interview that the U.S. would rejoin the JCPOA (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), if Iran returns to strict compliance.

Under the JCPOA, which Iran signed with six world powers in 2015, Iran agreed to scale down its nuclear program in exchange for termination of economic and financial sanctions.

Biden said a return to the agreement, which would include lifting the sanctions imposed by the Trump administration, would serve as a “starting point to follow-on negotiations”.

Putin, Macron underline need to salvage JCPOA

POLITICAL DESK TEHRAN — Russian President Vladimir Putin and his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron have stressed the need to preserve the Iran nuclear deal, less than a month after the inauguration of U.S. President-elect Joe Biden, who has promised to join the deal.

The two leaders made the remarks during a phone conversation on Tuesday.

“Regarding the situation around Iran's nuclear program, both sides stated the demand for collective efforts directed at preservation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA),” the Kremlin press service said on Tuesday, TASS reported.

The future of the JCPOA came into question after the U.S. unilaterally withdrew from the nuclear deal on May 8, 2018 and introduced oil export sanctions on Iran.

Putin and Macron also discussed the situation around Nagorno-Karabakh in detail and confirmed

their mutual readiness to continue the coordination on various aspects of the peaceful settlement.

“The Russian President underscored that the situation in the region stabilizes itself, and the November 9 agreements, achieved by the presidents of Russia, Azerbaijan and the Prime Minister of Armenia - are generally being complied with. The sides noted a successful work of the Russian peacekeepers, who ensure the ceasefire and the safety of civilians under the request of Baku and Yerevan. The sides confirmed mutual readiness for further coordination on various aspects of the settlement in Nagorno-Karabakh, within the OSCE Minsk Group in particular,” the press service said.

Humanitarian problems, connected to repatriation of refugees, restoration of infrastructure, preservation of religious and cultural memorials were named as the most pressing issues.

“The current situation in Syria and Libya was discussed. Regarding Libya, the importance of observance



of a ceasefire regime and promotion of the effective political process with the participation of representatives of all key Libyan forces was noted,” the statement added.

Russia expects U.S. to fully rejoin Iran deal, says envoy

POLITICAL DESK TEHRAN — Russia says it expects the United States to fully rejoin the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement, formally referred to as the JCPOA, without preconditions.

“No one has asked the United States to act as a world policeman, and the attempts to do that look anachronistic today, as does the reckless and arrogant policy of resorting to unilateral pressure,” Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Dmitry Polyansky said, addressing the UN General Assembly on Tuesday.

“The most logical thing for the U.S. to do would be to fully rejoin the previous



agreements within the JCPOA, without preconditions, of course,” he said.

The U.S., under President Donald Trump, withdrew from the multilateral

agreement on May 8, 2018 and imposed harsh economic sanctions on Iran. It also pressured other countries to follow suit, threatening them with secondary sanctions if they cooperate with Iran.

Iran remained fully compliant with its obligations for a year after the U.S. withdrawal, but as other parties failed to meet their end of the bargain, it decided to gradually reduce its nuclear commitments according to the JCPOA. However, Tehran has voiced readiness to return to complying with the deal as soon as others do.

“We expect that the new U.S. administration will realize that and take the

right steps in the near future. The entire world will benefit from it,” Polyansky pointed out.

“Over the past six months, we have seen how fragile the balance of interests that the nuclear deal is based on is,” Polyansky said.

Meanwhile, U.S. President-elect Joe Biden has voiced support for the JCPOA, saying his administration will rejoin the deal. Biden served as vice president in the Barack Obama administration, under which the nuclear deal was reached.

Biden has said he hopes to return the U.S. to the deal, but he has also hinted he would like to expand it.

Chinese envoy asks for efforts to bring nuclear deal back on track

(Xinhua) — A Chinese envoy on Tuesday called for efforts to bring the Iran nuclear deal back on the right track and asked the United States to rejoin the agreement as early as possible.

The Iran nuclear deal is an important achievement of multilateral diplomacy endorsed by Security Council Resolution 2231, is legally binding, and should be effectively implemented, said Geng Shuang, China's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations.

To preserve the July 2015 agreement is to uphold multilateralism, maintain peace and stability in the Middle East (West Asia), safeguard the international nuclear non-proliferation regime, and the international order underpinned by international law, he told the Security Council.

The U.S. unilateral withdrawal from the deal in May 2018, its continued maximum pressure on Iran, and its undermining the efforts of parties to uphold the agreement are the root causes of the current predicament of the Iranian nuclear issue, he said.

This year, the United States openly pushed in the Security Council for the extension of the arms embargo against Iran, demanded to invoke a snapback mechanism and unilaterally announced the reinstatement of international sanctions against Iran, he said, adding in disregard of the views of the international community, the United States staged several farces.

Faced with the unreasonable demand of the United States, the overwhelming majority of Security Council members adhered to an objective and fair stand, refused to endorse the U.S. position as Washington's actions were illegal and politically motivated, he said.

“The rotating presidents of the Security Council also concluded that they were in no position to take any action on the U.S. request for a snapback. This represents a resounding rejection of bullying by fairness and justice, unilateralism by multilateralism. It reflects vividly the support of the international community for justice and



multilateralism,” he stated.

The envoy added, “At present, the situation on the Iranian nuclear issue is pregnant with important changes and faced with new opportunities and challenges. All parties should maintain calmness and restraint, resolutely implement the agreement, resolve differences through dialogue and consultation, and restore the balance of rights and obligations under the agreement.”

“On Monday, foreign ministers' video teleconference on the Iranian nuclear issue was successfully convened. The parties reaffirmed their commitment to safeguarding the agreement and Security Council Resolution 2231, ensuring their complete and effective implementation, recognizing the prospect of the United States rejoining the deal and agreeing to make joint efforts to positively address the U.S. return as soon as possible,” he said.

The Chinese diplomat went on to say that “the foreign ministers' meeting has sent a positive and strong message to the world. All parties should seize the opportunity to speed up engagement and consultations, strengthen diplomatic efforts, and move the deal back to the right track as soon as possible. The most urgent

task at the moment is for the United States to mend its ways, rejoin the agreement unconditionally at an early date and return to full compliance”.

“China understands that certain countries have concerns about issues such as regional security. Yet linking them directly to the agreement and demanding the re-opening of negotiations on it will create new obstacles and add new complications to the issue,” said Geng.

“Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, on the Oct. 20 Security Council debate on the Persian Gulf region, proposed the launch of a multilateral dialogue platform for the region. China is willing to link its initiative with similar ones from Russia and others, learn from each other and form synergies.”

“Security Council members and regional countries can use this as a basis, earnestly engage in dialogue and discussion, gradually accumulate momentum so as to strive for a consensus that addresses the legitimate concerns of all parties -- in response to the expectations of the international community,” he pointed out.

“China hopes that the secretary-general and the UN Secretariat will continue to promote and facilitate the diplomatic efforts from all parties and continue to play an important role in helping resolve the Iranian nuclear issue.”

He added, “China has always been committed to maintaining the authority of the Security Council resolutions and the effectiveness of the Iran nuclear deal. China will continue to stand on the right side of history, firmly uphold multilateralism, and work with all parties concerned to make unremitting efforts to promote the political and diplomatic settlement of the Iranian nuclear issue and safeguard peace and stability in the Persian Gulf region.”

The July 2015 deal was between Iran and the six world powers of Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States. Washington withdrew from the agreement in May 2018, hampering its implementation.

Project to support ecotourism, local communities in Gwadar Bay

➔ In Iran, 141 wetlands with ecological value with an area of over 3 million hectares have been identified, of which 25 wetlands are designated as wetlands of international importance (registered in the Ramsar Convention) covering more than 1.4 million hectares and four sites are biosphere reserves.



Of Iran's 25 Ramsar sites about one-third are under pressure or in critical condition. Chief of the Department of Environment, Issa Kalantari, has said to restore wetlands in the country a budget of 600 trillion rials (nearly \$14 billion) is required.

Tehran airport to tighten anti-COVID measures

TOURISM TEHRAN — Imam Khomeini International Airport is to tighten measures against the COVID-19 epidemic by expanding and upgrading existing facilities and infrastructure.



The Iranian government has paid two trillion rials (some \$47 million at the official rate of 42,000 rials) in loans to support Imam Khomeini International Airport, the CEO of the Tehran airport said on Wednesday.

Segment of the bailout will be allocated to have the runways renovated, Mohammad Mehdi Karbalaei said. The official also added that all flights of the airport are in full accordance with the required health protocols to curb the coronavirus. KIA is the main international airport of Iran, located 30 kilometers southwest of the city of Tehran. It is one of the two major commercial airports serving Tehran and the busiest international air passenger gateway to Iran and it is also the only profit-making airport in Iran.

Bushehr reinforcing tourism structures in long-lasting recession

TOURISM TEHRAN — The cultural heritage and tourism department of Bushehr, like many other Iranian provinces, has commenced reinforcing travel-related structures during a prolonged recession resulted from the coronavirus pandemic.

A vast restoration and landscaping project is commenced on historical and cultural sites which are scattered across the historical core of Bushehr, Ali Darvishi, a provincial official, said on Tuesday. The project covers some three kilometers of routes and thoroughfares along with some 20,000 square kilometers of historical structures located within the ancient core of the city, the official noted.



The tourism sector of the southwestern province is ready to jumpstart after the coronavirus crisis ends, provincial tourism chief Mohammad-Hossein Arastuzadeh announced in April, stressing that Bushehr needs innovative plans and programs to attract more tourists and holidaymakers.

With over 6,000 years of history and significant monuments from the Elamite, Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sassanid eras, Bushehr province is one of Iran's most important historical centers. Besides its cultural heritage, beautiful beaches and lush palm groves make it an attractive destination for world travelers. The historical and architectural monuments of Bushehr include Islamic buildings like mosques and praying centers, mansions, old towers, castles, as well as gardens. When it comes to cultural attractions, there are many historical mounds in Bushehr including Tall-e Khandaq with Sassanid architectural style, Tall-e Marv located near an Achaemenid Palace, and Qajar era Malek al-Tojar Mansion. Qajar era Kazeruni Mansion, which has been inscribed on the World Heritage List, is another attraction that world travelers love to see among various ancient sites.

Qom province suffers \$190 million loss under COVID jolt

TOURISM TEHRAN — Qom tourism industry, like many other Iranian provinces, has sunk further into recession, losing eight trillion rials (over \$190 million at the official rate of 42,000 rials), as the result of a colossal financial impact from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The tourism industry of Qom has taken eight trillion rials hit from the coronavirus outbreak over the previous months, provincial tourism chief said on Wednesday.

Due to the long time closure and lockdown, tourism business units and facilities have faced several issues and problems, the most important of which is the lack of liquidity, Hamid Yazdani stated.

The tourism sector is unable to pay for taxes and the insurance of its staff, while the units have problems for paying for energy carriers and maintenance costs as well, the official added.

He also emphasized that the tourism businesses that are struggling with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic need more support and a government-provided supportive package, which includes low-interest loans, could contribute to the tourism-jobs and businesses.

The country's second-holiest city after Mashhad, Qom is home to both the magnificent shrine of Hazrat-e Masumeh (SA) and the major religious madrasas (schools).

Apart from sightseers and pilgrims who visit Qom to pay homage at the holy shrine, the city is also a top destination for Shiite scholars and students who come from across the world to learn Islamic studies at its madrasas and browse through eminent religious bookshops.

Economic response to virus-hit sector
In late October, deputy tourism chief Vali



Teymouri said that a new support package to pay loans to tourism-related businesses affected by the coronavirus pandemic was approved by Iran's National Headquarters for Coronavirus Control.

He also announced that depending on the type and activity of the businesses, they could benefit from at least 160 million rials (some \$3,800) to nine billion rials (some \$214,000) of bank loans with a 12-percent interest rate.

The loans will be allocated to tourist guides, travel agencies, tourism transport companies, tourism educational institutions, eco-lodges and traditional accommodations, hotels, apartment hotels, motels, and guesthouses as well as traditional accommodation centers,

tourism complexes, and recreational centers, the official explained.

In September, Teymouri pointed to the 1.3 million tourism workers in the country, who are facing several issues due to the coronavirus crisis and said "This number, in addition to their households, includes a significant population that makes a living through tourism, who are needed to be considered in ministry's decisions."

Back in August, Teymouri announced that the tourism ministry has approved a total budget of 4,920 billion rials (over \$117 million) to support corona-affected tourism businesses, covering as much as 36,000 people working in the tourism sector.

In October, Cultural Heritage, Tourism,

and Handicrafts Minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan warned that Iran's cultural heritage and tourism will be in a critical situation if the crises caused by the outbreak of the coronavirus continue.

In August, Mounesan said that Iran's tourism has suffered a loss of 12 trillion rials (some \$2.85 billion) since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic.

He also noted that the coronavirus pandemic should not bring traveling to a complete standstill. "Corona is a fact, but can the virus stop tourism? Certainly not. For us, the coronavirus is a new experience in dealing with crises that teaches tourism experts around the world how to deal with such a disaster, and thankfully governments are turning this into an opportunity for better planning."

Back in April, the government announced it will support those who are grappling with fiscal problems by offering loans with a 12-percent interest rate. The Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts also suggested a rescue package for tourism businesses.

The government has allocated a 750-trillion-rial (about \$18 billion) package to help low-income households and small- and medium-sized enterprises suffered by the coronavirus crisis.

Optimistic forecasts, however, expect Iran to achieve a tourism boom after coronavirus contained, believing its impact would be temporary and short-lived for a country that ranked the third fastest-growing tourism destination in 2019.

The latest available data show eight million tourists visited the Islamic Republic during the first ten months of the past Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2019).

Indigenous Iranian lamb stew one step closer to national status

HERITAGE TEHRAN — Yakhni Polo, which is an Iranian lamb stew, is now a step closer to win national heritage status. The fatty dish is very popular in Dargaz, northeastern Khorasan Razavi province.

An all-inclusive dossier, including documentation and essential records, has been developed for the dish, which is also favored in the Indian subcontinent, parts of southern Asia, and the Balkans.

A native flatbread and the skill of making a sweet pudding are other elements the cultural heritage office of Dargaz seeks to add to the national list of intangible cultural heritage, a local official Mohammad Madadi said on Wednesday.

"Traditional foods of Yakhni Polo (a combination of lamb and rice, which is also popular in India and Pakistan) and a kind of local bread as well as the skill of making samanu (sweet pudding made entirely from germinated wheat) are one step closer to possibly be added to the National Heritage list," he said.

As Dargaz is a city with a history of seven thousand years

and a rich culture and valuable traditions, several items could be identified and registered as intangible cultural heritage, the official added.

He also noted that so far several dossiers have been prepared for various properties and items in the city to be registered on the national heritage list.

Stews are a big part of Iranian cuisine. Ghormeh Sabzi along with Fesenjan and Gheimeh are an essential part of the culinary tradition of the nation and also the most common stews cooked by all Iranians both at homes and restaurants.

Iranian cuisine, usually dominated by fragrant herbs, varies from region to region. It principally accentuates freshness, deliciousness, and colorfulness.

Experts say that food is not merely an organic product with biochemical compositions. However, for members of each community, food is defined as a cultural element.

No Persian meal is complete without an abundance of herbs. Every table is usually set with sabzi khordan, a



basket of fresh herbs, radishes, and scallions, which are eaten raw and by the handful. Persian cuisine is, above all, about balance — of tastes and flavors, textures and temperatures.

Tourism projects worth \$255m underway in northwestern Iran

TOURISM TEHRAN — A total of 31 tourism-related projects worth 10.7 trillion rials (about \$255 million at the official rate of 42,000 rials) are being implemented across the northwestern West Azarbaijan province, the provincial tourism chief has said.

Hotels, hotel apartments, travel agencies, eco-lodge guest houses, traditional restaurants as well as recreational and tourist facilities are amongst the projects, which is aimed to create job opportunities for 1430 people, CHTN quoted Jalil Jabbari as saying on Wednesday.

Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan in



August announced that Iran's travel sector had suffered a loss of 12 trillion rials (some \$2.85 billion) since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic; however,

he mentioned that all the tourism businesses across the country would have the capacity to fully resume their activities both in domestic and foreign markets.

"Many tourism projects have been completed, or are being implemented, showing that a very good capacity has been created in the field of tourism in the country and [this trend] should not be stopped," he explained.

Mounesan went on to say that 2,451 tourism-related projects worth 1,370 trillion rials (around \$32 billion) are being implemented across the country that signals a prosperous future for Iran's tourism sector.

West Azarbaijan embraces a variety of lush natural sceneries, cultural heritage sites, and museums including the UNESCO sites of Takht-e Soleyman and Qareh Klise (St. Thaddeus Monastery), Teppe Hasanlu, and the ruined Bastam Citadel.

The region has been the seat of several ancient civilizations. It formed part of Urartu and later of Media. In the 4th century BC, it was conquered by Alexander the Great and was named Atropatene after one of Alexander's generals, Atropates, who established a small kingdom there. The area returned to the Persian (Iranian) rule under the Sasanians in the 3rd century CE.

Book on Mahan's cultural heritage unveiled

TOURISM TEHRAN — A book containing rare manuscripts and other cultural heritage of Mahan, a historical town in southeast Iran, was unveiled during a ceremony at Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman on Tuesday.

The ceremony was attended by provincial officials, university professors, scholars, calligraphers, and cultural heritage experts, provincial tourism chief announced.

The book represents Quranic manuscripts, handwritten folios attributed to Shah Nimatullah Wali, who was a Persian Sufi Master and poet from the 14th and 15th centuries, amongst other works of art, the official explained.

Historical manuscripts are of special importance when



it comes to the cultural heritage structure, the official said. Picturesque Mahan, 35km southeast of Kerman, is a low-key town that's widely famed for its shrine and UNESCO-listed Persian garden.

With a superb little heritage hotel and a fine (and unpretentious) teahouse at the shrine-area, it's worth considering Mahan as an alternative place to stay in the Kerman region.

Kerman province is bounded by the provinces of Fars on the west, Yazd on the north, South Khorasan on the northeast, Sistan-Baluchestan on the east, and Hormozgan on the south. It includes the southern part of the central Iranian desert, the Dasht-e Lut.

Ancient Iranian utensils, artworks gain former glory

TOURISM TEHRAN — A selection of 21 historical objects have been documented, restored, and preserved in laboratories across Iran's South Khorasan province, a cultural heritage official announced on Wednesday.

12 ceramic and clay utensils, six metal works, two manuscripts, and a glass piece constitute the relics, each date back to

different historical eras, the official added. Cultural heritage experts and restorers completed the job during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (Mar. 20-Dec. 20), he said.

Made of clay, metal, paper, and glass, have been discovered from different historical sites scattered across the eastern province, Hamzeh Hamzeh announced.

Located in eastern Iran, South Khorasan is home to many historical and natural attractions such as Birjand Castle, Dragon Cave, Furg Citadel, and Polond Desert.

It is also known for its famous rugs as well as its saffron and barberry which are produced in almost all parts of the province.



