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## Investment in free zones jumps 57%

TEHRAN- The amount of investment attracted in Iran's free zones has climbed 57 percent during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-December 20, 2020), as compared to the corresponding period in the past year, according to Morteza Bank, the secretary of Iranian Free Zones High Council.

The official said that despite the limitations and barriers due to the foreign currency, tax and customs issues, as well as

the sanctions, and coronavirus pandemic, some valuable achievements are witnessed in terms of investment making in the free trade zones and special economic zones of the country.

The development of free trade zones and special economic zones through production, exports and investment is one of the goals of creating these zones in the country.

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## Art exclusively for dealers' benefit at auctions

**BY SEYYED MOSTAFA MOUSAVI SABET**  
TEHRAN - "Art for art's sake" and "art for people's sake" are phrases that have been expressed to describe the philosophy of art throughout different periods of history.

However, it appears that art auctions do not endorse any abovementioned ideas; instead, they exist exclusively for the sake of the dealers' profits.

Auctions are generally a phenomenon in capitalist societies, where opportunities

are distributed based on people's financial worth. Consequently at auctions, art is no longer for art's sake, but art is at the dealers' service.

The 13th edition of the Tehran Auction was organized last Friday, causing controversies over the sale of artwork by Iranian painter Aidin Aghdashlu who is facing allegations of sexual misconduct.

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## Iran outlines plan to tackle possible U.S. return to JCPOA

**BY SAEED K. MAVADAT**  
TEHRAN - Iranian officials have moved to elaborate on Iran's strategy to tackle a possible U.S. willingness to rejoin the 2015 nuclear deal on the eve of Joe Biden's inauguration.

Joe Biden is going to be inaugurated as the next president of the United States in a few hours. As of January 20, Biden

will be in charge of steering U.S. foreign policy, which will put his campaign promises to the test. He is expected to face a litany of pressing issues externally right from the start. The 2015 Iran nuclear deal - officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) - is at the top of the list.

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## Syria strongly denies reports of Israeli-Syrian meeting

Syria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates has responded to press reports about an alleged meeting between high-ranking Syrian and Israeli officials at the Russian military base in Hmeimim.

"The Arab Republic of Syria categorically rebuffs the untrue news circulated by some hired media outlets about a Syrian-Israeli meeting anywhere. It underlines that circulating such news is a failed attempt by the funders of these newspapers to cast doubt on Syria's principled and enduring positions toward the Israeli occupation," the Syrian foreign ministry said in a statement on Monday, hours after a Turkey-based think tank published an article claiming that Russia brokered a high-level meeting in December between Syrian and Israeli officials inside the Russian base in Hmeimim.

"Syria reiterates that its policies have been and still are clear and it makes decisions that serve its national interests and the just issues of the Arab nation including the Palestinian Question and the liberation of the occupied Syrian Arab Golan [heights] as well as the occupied Arab territories in accordance with the relevant international resolutions," the statement said.

Syria also said that those standing behind these untrue allegations are seeking to drag the region into a "Zionist coalitions."

"Syria stresses that the forces that stand behind these lies are the same ones who pant for normalization with this entity and are trying to drag the whole region into Western Zionist alliances through intimidation at times or enticements at other times. And when they fail, they resort to such naive ways by circulating fake news," the statement concluded.

The article in question was penned by Mohammad Sarmini, the head of Jusoor for Studies Center, on Monday and was published on the think tank's website. The article claimed that Ali Mamlouk, head of Syria's National Security Council, met with the former chief of staff of Israel's army Gadi Eisenkot in Hmeimim in December.

## Unlike foreign rivals, Iranian coronavirus vaccine has no side effects

TEHRAN - The Iranian-made COVID-19 vaccine has not had any side effects so far, while similar foreign vaccines have had adverse effects, Mohammad Mokhber, the head of the Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam said.

The Headquarters unveiled COVIRAN BAREKAT, the first coronavirus vaccine made by Iranian researchers, on December 29, 2020.

On January 11, the second dose of COVIRAN was injected into the three volunteers. So far, 14 people have received the first dose of the vaccine, and this number should reach 56 people in the clinical study phase.

Laboratory vaccine production is an important issue, but what matters most is its mass production. Over the next month, 2-4 million doses of vaccine will be produced monthly, which will reach up to 4-24 million doses, Mokhber highlighted.

"European countries asked us for masks and medicine, while we have not been in need of the

West in any way since the outbreak," he stated, YJC reported on Tuesday.

During his January 8 speech, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei praised the Iranian-developed COVID-19 vaccine as "a source of pride," underlining that no one should deny the breakthrough.

He also prohibited importing American and British Covid-19 vaccines due to their unreliable testing. Ayatollah Khamenei pointed out that Iranian researchers have tested their vaccine on humans and they will develop an even better and more effective vaccine.

"Importing American and British vaccines into the country is forbidden. I have said this to officials and I am saying it publicly now. If the Americans had managed to produce a vaccine, this corona disaster would not have occurred in their own country.

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## Virginia Senate gathers on 'Lobby Day' under heightened security

Virginia state lawmakers met under heightened security amid concerns about possible civil unrest in state capitals in the days leading up to President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration.

According to AP, several gun-rights advocates came to Richmond on Monday, some of them heavily armed. The Martin Luther King Jr. holiday is typically a chance for citizens to use a day off work to meet with their legislators in what's informally known as "Lobby Day."

Gun-rights activists typically make a large, organized appearance each year. Last year, tens of thousands of gun-rights activists from around the country flooded the Capitol and surrounding area in protest of a new Democratic majority's push to enact new gun restrictions.

This year they organized a series of caravans through the city decked out in pro-gun messages amid the coronavirus pandemic. Gun

laws have gotten much less attention this year and Democratic leaders have not prioritized gun legislation.

In comments to gun-control advocates Monday, Democratic Gov. Ralph Northam urged them to stay "vigilant" and to continue working to elect lawmakers who support what the governor said were common-sense gun restrictions.

"We can't take any chances of going back," Northam said.

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, the state Senate is convening for this year's legislative session at a science museum event center that allows for greater social distancing. House lawmakers are meeting virtually.

A small caravan of about 10 vehicles drove past the museum shortly before the Senate convened on Monday. It was not visible to lawmakers inside the event center. Lawmakers held a brief floor session with little mention of guns.

## Army Special Forces hold maneuvers on Makran coasts

TEHRAN - Iranian Army Ground Force conducted a drill codenamed "Authority 99" on Makran coasts on Tuesday. It involved Special Forces.

The Shiraz Airborne Brigade also participated in the first stage of the drill.

"The Army has successfully conducted combined operation," said General Kioumars Sharafi, the spokesperson of the drill.

The goal of the drill was to prepare the ground forces of the Army to counter the threats. Moreover, the rapid transfer of the forces from terri-

torial region to the region of mission based on the existing plans were carried out.

The Army used original and creative tactics to assess the multiple skills of professional brigades.

In the maneuver, the Army successfully carried out air, offensive and penetration operations.

"The scuba divers of Iran's Army Special Forces were divided into two groups and landed on the water by chinook helicopter," Sharafi explained.

According to Sharafi, the first group of the scuba divers hit the targets in the sea and the second group struck the simulated targets in the beach.

Pointing to aims of the maneuver, he said, "The Special Forces sought to create the disturbance in the command and communication system of the enemy".

Moreover, he said, Army parachutists, supported by helicopters, conducted operations in the Sea of Oman.

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## Iran tourism to return to normal next year, expert says

TEHRAN - The tourist flow from across the world to Iran will return to normal in 2022, the Head of the Iranian Tour Operators Association has announced.

Although there are requests for traveling to Iran in the current year (2021), most travel agencies and tour operators believe that the flow will go back to normal in the next year, ISNA quoted Ebrahim Pourfaraj as saying on Monday.

Beginning mass vaccination against the coronavirus will provide better and safe conditions for international travels in 2022, he added.

Currently, most trips are made in short distances and small groups and tours, mainly with the family members, however, till the virus is contained, there is not much hope for international tours and trips during 2021, he explained.

Last November, the World Tourism Organization announced that international tourist arrivals to Iran plunged 72% during the first eight months of 2020 when compared to 2019, highlighting the severe impact of COVID-19 as the main factor.

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

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## Two unknown martyrs laid to rest

The bodies of two unknown martyrs were laid to rest at Fatemieh mosque during a ceremony in Tehran on Saturday night. The soldiers, aged 18-23, had been martyred in the southern battlefronts during Saddam Hussein's imposed war against Iran in the 1980s.

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the ceremony was held with the observation of health protocols.



## Iran: We haven't received any messages from the Biden team

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** – Ali Rabiei, the Iranian government spokesman, said on Tuesday that Tehran's position over a possible return of the Biden administration to the JCPOA has been uttered repeatedly by Iranian officials.

"The U.S. must fulfil its obligations according to the JCPOA and United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231. It is the only path before the U.S. government," Rabiei told a regular press briefing.

Emphasizing that Iran has not received any messages from the Biden team in regard to the JCPOA, he said, "The negotiation is meaningless as far as the U.S. has not met its obligations and has not rejoined the JCPOA unconditionally."

Seeming hopeful of the JCPOA's revival, the government spokesman said, "The Biden team had declared its willingness to return to the JCPOA during presidential campaigns, however, the U.S. position is not valuable as far as the Biden administration has not lifted the economic sanctions based on its commitments in the JCPOA."

According to the government spokesman, the policy of "maximum pressure" against Iran is doomed to failure and the U.S has no other way except "to abandon the costly actions that posed a danger to peace and security of the world."

He asserted that the outgoing U.S secretary of state is seeking to put barriers in the way of the next administration that is seeking to correct the past mistakes the Trump administration.

Joe Biden, who served as vice president under the Obama administration, is going to take the oath office on Wednesday, ending four years of reckless and injudicious ruling by Donald Trump.

"We are not worried about this, because the next U.S administration can correct its mistakes if it has a real volition to do so."

From Rabiei's point of view, the outgoing Trump administration stained the reputation of America, therefore, the world "wants the U.S. accept its responsibility and respect international law and norms."

## Ayatollah Shabestari opposes FATF

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** – Ayatollah Mojtabeh Shabestari, a member of the Expediency Council, has opposed a ratification of the FATF conventions, saying a majority of the Council members also have such an opinion.

"I am against the FATF and has unequivocally argued that its disadvantages are more than its advantages, and I believe the majority members of the council have the same view," Ayatollah Shabestari said, Fars reported on Tuesday.

He said, "Now the commissions have been considering the FATF, after that the bill will be brought to the floor of Council".

The Expediency Council announced on December 17 that Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has agreed with President Rouhani's request to only extend the time to discuss the FATF-related bills in the Council.

The announcement came several days after the president had asked the Leader to authorize a renewed discussion on the FATF's Palermo and terrorist financing conventions (CFT) in the Council.

La'ya Jonaidi, who serves as deputy to President Rouhani for legal affairs, said she was optimistic the Council would approve the two remaining FATF conventions to help remove unnecessary hurdles that might arise from Iran's continued inclusion in the FATF blacklist.

Critics of the FATF in Iran say the body is excessively influenced by the United States and any move to comply with its recommendations would expose Tehran's efforts to circumvent the illegal U.S. sanctions.

## Zarif: I follow Leader's guidelines on JCPOA

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Iranian foreign minister, said on Tuesday that he follows the guidelines set by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution toward the JCPOA, the official name for the 2015 nuclear deal.

Citing the Leader, Zarif said Iran is in no hurry to see the United States returns to the JCPOA, noting that Ayatollah Khamenei is of the opinion that nothing new has happened to the agreement.

Zarif made the remarks during a parliamentary session when he was explaining on the course of affairs related to the JCPOA.

A recently approved bill by the parliament with regard to the JCPOA intends to consolidate the deal and not to "bury" it, he pointed out.

He referred to the recent remarks by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and said if the United States adheres to its commitments and lifts the sanctions on Iran, it can rejoin the JCPOA as a member of G5+1.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the chief diplomat said the actions of the Trump administration failed to affect the will of the Iranian nation.

The minister also asserted that that if anyone wants to attack Iran, they need to learn lessons from the past experiences.

## Army Special Forces hold maneuvers on Makran coasts

**1 →** General Mohammad Hossein Dadras, the deputy commander-in-chief of the Army, emphasized that the Ground Force is skillful in various fields of wars.



"Today, the Ground Force has achieved remarkable operation capabilities in the missile and drone technology," he added. "The ground force is so powerful and capable to counter any threats".

Major General Sayyed Abdolrahim Mousavi, the commander in chief of the Army, Brigadier General Kiomars Heidari, the Army Ground Force chief, and other military officials were present at the scene of the drill.

# Iran says uranium metal use does not contravene NPT, safeguards

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** – A decision

by Iran to produce advanced fuel for a research reactor in Tehran with uranium metal does not contravene the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or the safeguards system, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said on Tuesday.

The three European parties to the nuclear deal – JCPOA - have issued a statement saying, "The production of uranium metal has potentially grave military implications."

Their call came after the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said Iran had notified the nuclear watchdog it was advancing research on uranium metal production, aiming to provide advanced fuel for a research reactor in Tehran.

Asked by reporters about the recent statement from the European parties about Iran's move, Khatibzadeh said, "The statement has been a joint statement from the spokespersons for the foreign ministries of the three countries, not a joint statement from the foreign ministers."

"Anyway," Khatibzadeh added, "as already announced by the Atomic Energy Organization (of Iran), utilization of the uranium metal production factory in Isfahan, stipulated in the Parliament's ratification, and the production of advanced fuel (sil-



icide) to be used at the Tehran Research Reactor, are two totally different issues."

"What the (International Atomic Energy) Agency has reported on applies to the start of research and development activities to design a more advanced fuel for the Tehran Research Reactor, dubbed silicide fuel," Khatibzadeh said, noting that Iran had informed the IAEA about the plan two years ago and has recently provided

the UN nuclear watchdog with the designing information, according to the Foreign Ministry website.

The uranium metal is an intermediate product in the process of producing silicide fuel, he noted, adding, "The Design Information Questionnaire (DIQ) for the Isfahan uranium metal plant has not been yet submitted to the Agency (IAEA), and this will take place after the necessary ar-

rangements and within a deadline set by the law."

The Foreign Ministry spokesman finally dismissed baseless speculation regarding the issue, saying, "Uranium metal also has peaceful applications. A number of countries are currently using uranium metal-based fuel for their reactors, and this is not in contradiction to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Safeguards (Agreement) commitments of the countries. Moreover, this technology is a necessity in Iran, which must fulfill the patients' demands for nuclear medicine with the best quality, and it is completely based on humanitarian and peaceful grounds."

The Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) had earlier urged the IAEA to avoid creating any "misunderstanding" regarding metal use, saying that it had not yet "presented the Design Information Questionnaire of the uranium metal factory" to the UN watchdog.

The Iranian parliament adopted a legislation in December obliging the government to remove caps on nuclear activities in response to the abrogation of the 2015 nuclear deal by the U.S. and imposition of sanctions coupled with an inaction by the Europeans to protect Iran from sanctions.

## JCPOA implementation amid a tug of war between rhetoric and facts

By Amb. G. Hossein Dehghani

The man behind the insurrection at home and disarray abroad!

A few days before the fifth anniversary of Implementation Day of the JCPOA on 16 January 2021, U.S. House handed Trump a second impeachment. What is important in this regard is the fact that Trump was basically indicted by the U.S. legislature for violating the rule of law. The Article of Impeachment clearly states that the president is impeached for high crimes and misdemeanors and the president stands accused of violating the Constitution of the United States. According to the Article of Impeachment he remains a threat to national security, democracy and the constitution. The truth is, Trump has been a threat not only to U.S. national security, but an abominable menace against international peace and security all along; what Iran has clearly understood and signaled to the world since the early days of this outgoing -or the soon-to-be-removed- Trump administration, the international community only secretly admitted and quietly wished for change.

Although the establishment in the United States put a stop to Trump, his unbridled bullying on the international scene persisted for the full duration of his term with little or no practical opposition at all. By his sheer disregard for all established principles and institutions Trump threw the anarchical nature of international relations in stark relief and all the U.S. traditional allies in Europe under the bus as well! Though Trump is now history in the U.S., some worrying signs in the past weeks suggest proper lessons have not been learned by some Europeans and Trumpism towards Iran might persist for quite a while.

### Post-Trump JCPOA

The post-election developments in the U.S. were the source of considerable consternation among the European leaders; therefore, the impeachment was saluted in Europe as they could finally breathe a sigh of relief. Although the impeachment and power transition occur nationally in the U.S., it has nonetheless huge global ramifications. Jo Biden promised in Munich Security Conference of 2019 that they would be back! They are back now. The U.S. president-elect put out words that he would return to the nuclear deal with Iran provided that Iran returns to compliance. In this regard there are a few elements that require prompt attention.

First and foremost, Iran was the victim in the past two years; the victim of an unrestrained bully who made no secret of his disdain for the longest established principles of international conduct, chief among which pacta sunt servanda. Thus, any attempt to twist the facts and portray Iran as the actor who undermines the diplomatic process is grossly irresponsible and highly provocative. Second, unlike the Trump administration's whimsical and unpredictable conduct, all the reversible steps undertaken by the Iranian side have been communicated in a transparent manner to all parties. Third, for every step there has been the element of predictability and nothing came as a surprise so as to ensure good faith throughout the process. Fourth, the reversible steps taken by Iran in the past year, much to the dismay of Europeans, were the inevitable result of Europeans' inaction and non-performance of commitments which deprived Iran of billions of dollars and prevented the normalization of trade and economic relations specifically during the last year when the Covid-19 outbreak inflicted a huge human cost on Iran. Last but not least, the IAEA monitors every step of the way and has mounted one of the



most rigorous monitoring and verification regimes in the Islamic Republic of Iran. This all means that the "concerns", regardless of the scale of their intensity, as expressed by the European parties to the deal in their statements of 6 and 11 January, are only a reflection of the discursively constructed culture against Iran's nuclear program.

With the IAEA in Iran enjoying full access under the Additional Protocol for now, and considering Iran's status as an NPT member state, it is difficult to understand European's "deep regrets" and their "repeated calls" to "reverse all action that are inconsistent with Iran's JCPOA commitments". It is also impossible not see the hypocrisy of it all; for instance, a regional ally of Europe, while sitting atop a vast nuclear arsenal, openly boasts their nuclear weapon capacities and asserts that they do not need to explain themselves on their nuclear war-heads simply because they are not NPT member states. Moreover, there are other regional allies of Europe who are NPT member states, yet they have not even signed the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement, let alone the Additional Protocol.

All through the past two years, Iran has pursued a measured nuclear diplomacy and avoided any action that might hint at provocation or escalation in the nuclear field. The term reversible has been purposefully chosen by Iran in description of its reduced commitments and if Europeans want to see a reversal of actions, they know what Iran expects; it is nothing more than the EU/E3 commitments expressly spelled out in the JCPOA.

Recent postures by the EU and the E3 do not help mainly because they portray Iran as the main culprit of the current nuclear standoff whereas it is only defending its natural interests in a matter of high security stakes. Such statements also ignore one very important fact, or at least tone it down significantly and that is the destructive role that the U.S. withdrawal played in the post 8 May 2018 drama.

### A tug of war between rhetoric and facts

One might ask why it has been the case that Iran's nuclear program is conceived of as a proliferation threat! To find the answer, we should take stock of the security context of the early 2000's when discursive constructs of threat significantly outweighed factual analyses and calculations of the Bush administration. Iraq is a vivid example of such disregard for facts where Bush's blind insistence on the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Saddam's arsenal, based on flawed cherry-picked intelligence despite all internationally verified evidence to the contrary, led to the U.S. invasion of Iraq the scourge of which is still fresh in the region.

It is a peculiar fact that Discourse shapes realities in foreign policy, and it has often been the case that discursive constructs play a far more effective role than substantial facts. The U.S. administration back in early 2000's paid no heed neither to the IAEA expertise, not to words of warning by American senior politicians. At the time of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Bush's claims were unconfirmed and to this day, not a trace of weapons of mass destruction has been found in Iraq. It was maybe for good reason that William Burns, recently tapped by President-elect Biden to lead the C.I.A. laments not "tak[ing] a hard stand against war altogether" and recounts the build-up to Iraq war and failure in mounting and effective opposition to it as his "biggest professional regret".

In that light, it is safe to assert that Iran's nuclear crisis was the direct product of such securitized foreign policy discourse which portrayed Iran's nuclear program as a proliferation threat. Such frame of mind has poisoned everything related to Iran and its non-proliferation policies. From foreign policy circles to intelligence communities, from think tanks to centers of academic excellence, from press to media the rhetorical and constructed notion of "Iran as a proliferation threat" permeates debates and what seems to

be taken for granted is that whatever Iran does, even within the confines of the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement and the Additional Protocol, is inevitably linked to weaponization efforts! This construct has become an open wound that the U.S. and others in the region find easy to poke anytime their powerful lobbies deem it necessary to further their regional agenda of aggression and war mongering.

### A return to the facts

In my capacity as ambassador, and so far as Covid-related restrictive measures would allow, I have been trying hard to accentuate the factual element in Iran's nuclear program to European diplomats. The IAEA is present in Iran and its inspectors have access under the Additional Protocol to the places they might deem worthy of inspection. All nuclear activities in Iran are declared to the Agency and unfold before the eyes of IAEA inspectors. Besides, in sharp contrast to what the U.S. did on 8 May 2018, in the past two years Iran has had a transparent, verifiable and predictable and reversible course of action in its nuclear program. Let's be clear, though, Iran agreed on a provisional basis to take confidence- building measures as stipulated under the JCPOA. You cannot build confidence forever, neither can such measures be taken for granted!

In the end, I would like to invite the European parties to the JCPOA to play a constructive role and acknowledge the fact that Iran was the victim of Trump administration's policies in the past two and a half years. Secondly, I call upon the EU/E3 not to be part of this securitized discourse on Iran and not to tug at the rhetoric end of this discursive war and take the public opinion and its impact into serious consideration. Pursuing a policy of sanctions and coercion failed in the past and it is doomed to fail in the future as well. Finally, with the upcoming U.S. administration and the talks here or there in Washington about a prospective Biden administration return to the JCPOA it is important to build on this momentum rather than to create obstacles to the diplomatic process.

*This article was originally published in www.mod-erndiplomacy.eu/  
Hossein Dehghani is Iran's Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg and the European Union.*

## IRGC chief: Enemies must not miscalculate

### Salami says Iran's finger is on the trigger

**TEHRAN (Tasnim)** – Major General Hossein Salami, the Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, depicted military drills as a reminder that Iran is completely ready to protect its interests, warning the enemies to avoid any miscalculation as Iran's finger is on the trigger.

Speaking to reporters on Tuesday, said

military exercise in Iran demonstrate the country's deterrent power.

The IRGC commander pointed out the war games also make it clear to the enemies that they have to avoid any miscalculation about Iran's defense power.

The general also underlined that the military drills give the enemies the message

that Iran would protect its independence, dignity and identity without any consideration.

"Our fingers are on the trigger on behalf of the great Iranian nation," he said, noting that the IRGC forces are prepared to counter the threats along the border, in the heart of homeland, or deep in the

distant territories. In this regard, the IRGC Aerospace Force hit targets in the northern parts of the Indian Ocean with long-range ballistic missiles from a distance of 1,800 kilometers in a war game on Saturday.

The Iranian Army and the IRGC have conducted several maneuvers across Iran over the past two weeks.



# Iran outlines plan to tackle possible U.S. return to JCPOA

**1→** During his election campaign, Biden vowed to rejoin the JCPOA if he won the election. “I will offer Tehran a credible path back to diplomacy. If Iran returns to strict compliance with the nuclear deal, the United States would rejoin the agreement as a starting point for follow-on negotiations. With our allies, we will work to strengthen and extend the nuclear deal’s provisions, while also addressing other issues of concern,” Biden wrote in a September op-ed for CNN.

After he won the U.S. presidential election in November, Biden said he still stood by the views articulated in the op-ed but said that rejoining the nuclear deal would be “hard.”

In a December interview with CNN, Biden echoed the same position, describing the U.S. return to the JCPOA as being “very difficult.”

“He [Trump] has pulled out to get something tougher, and what have they done? They’ve increased the ability for them to have nuclear material. They’re moving closer to the ability to be able to have enough material for a nuclear weapon. And there’s the missile issues,” Biden said, adding, “All those things, I think, are going to be very difficult. But I know one thing: We cannot do this alone. And that’s why we have to be part of a larger group, dealing not only with Iran, but with Russia, with China and a whole range of other issues.”

Biden did not present any detailed plan to rejoin the deal. He only expressed willingness to reenter the JCPOA but he stopped short of saying how he would do so. Besides, the president-elect did not say why rejoining the JCPOA is going to be very difficult. Biden’s vague promise to return to the JCPOA has sparked speculations in Iran that he is either trying to buy some time or planning to return to the JCPOA gradually. In other words, Biden may have decided to adopt a step-by-step strategy to keep his campaign promise on the JCPOA.



Facing such a possible scenario, Iran has moved to hedge its bets by devising a plan to cope with challenges arising from Biden’s approach toward the JCPOA. Over the past few days, several Iranian officials pointed to what Tasnim, a semi-official news agency, called Iran’s “formal position” on the possible return of the Biden White House to the nuclear deal. The news agency made an interview with Mahmoud Vaezi, the Iranian president’s chief of staff, on Monday. Vaezi outlined a step-by-step plan for Iran to revive the JCPOA in case the U.S. wanted to rejoin it.

First of all, Iranian officials have demanded that the U.S. lift all sanctions that were imposed on Iran over the course of the Trump administration. In other words, Biden should reverse what Trump did against Iran to get Iran to reverse its nuclear measures.

“What we say is that whatever has happened under Trump’s administration must go back to the pre-Trump era. We

are serious about this issue,” Vaezi told Tasnim. “Therefore, all kinds of sanctions on companies and individuals should be lifted.”

But lifting sanctions may not be a cakewalk for the Biden administration as the Trump administration worked to pile up sanctions on Iran under counterterrorism sanctions authority, a move that made it difficult for Biden to provide Iran with a quick sanctions relief and revive the JCPOA in the process.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has pointed to this issue in a recent interview with the website of the office of the Leader of Islamic Revolution, saying that the situation has changed after President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. from the JCPOA on May 8, 2018. The chief diplomat pointed out that a U.S. return to the nuclear deal will no longer be enough because the U.S. has imposed pre-JCPOA sanctions and changed their logic to terrorism-related authorities, which have made the lifting

of sanctions even more difficult.

Zarif said that when the JCPOA was negotiated there was a different kind of sanctions on Iran and the nuclear deal has outlined how these sanctions would be lifted but the situation has changed after the Trump administration pulled out of the JCPOA.

“Over the past four years, Trump worked to hollow out the JCPOA and impose sanctions that even if the U.S. returns to the JCPOA, they will remain in place. For example, they (the Trump administration) removed nuclear-related sanctions on our Central Bank and Petroleum Ministry and imposed sanctions on them under counterterrorism authority. They basically changed the logic of sanctions,” the Iranian foreign minister noted.

And this may have prompted Iran to devise its plan, which, according to Vaezi, includes a set of reciprocal steps. The Iranian president’s chief of staff pointed out that Iran’s policy toward the U.S. in the future would be “commitment for commitment”, “implementation for implementation,” and “announcement for announcement.”

Under this plan, Iran may not reverse its nuclear measures all at once if the Biden administration decides to phase out the lifting of sanctions on Iran gradually. Iran has said several times that its nuclear measures are reversible but it did not say it will reverse the measures in one fell swoop. Therefore, the Iranian plan is probably intended to signal that if the Biden administration is to seek a sanctions phase-out, Iran will also back down from its nuclear measures gradually.

Whether Iran’s plan succeeds in convincing the Biden administration into removing sanctions all at once remains an open question. But if both sides choose to go through a gradual process, the revival of the JCPOA will likely take longer time than expected.

## Qatar urges Arab states to start talks with Iran

**POLITICAL d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Qatar has called on the Persian Gulf’s Arab states to seize on the momentum of reconciliation drive in the region and patch up their differences with Iran.

In an interview with Bloomberg TV, Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani once again expressed hope that a summit between leaders of the six-member Persian Gulf Cooperation Council and Iran would happen.

“We are hopeful that this [summit] would happen and we still believe that this should happen. And I think this is also a desire that being shared among the other GCC countries. I just mentioned to you that there is a difference between the countries on the way how to approach such a dialogue. Also from the Iranian side. They have expressed their willingness several times to engage with the GCC countries,” the Qatari foreign minister said.

He said the time should come when the Persian Gulf’s Arab states will sit at the table with Iran and reach a common understanding. “We have to live with each other. We cannot change geography. Iran cannot move the GCC away from its neighborhood and the GCC cannot move Iran from the neighborhood,” bin Abdulrahman continued.

The comments come a few weeks after Qatar mended ties with its Arab neighbors in a reconciliation deal brokered by the U.S. The deal put an end to a three-year-and-half dispute between Qatar and an Arab quartet of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and



Egypt. In June 2017, Saudi-led Arab quartet severed diplomatic ties with Qatar and imposed a total blockade on the tiny Persian Gulf nation. The four countries 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 the dispute between its neighbors, had studiously worked to reconcile the opposing sides and succeeded in doing so in December.

Iran welcomed Kuwaiti mediatory efforts. “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,” Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif tweeted in December.

After resolving ties with its Arab neighbors, Qatar now seems to be trying to foster dialogue between Iran and

Arab states. The Qatari foreign minister also expressed hope that the much-anticipated talks between Iran and the U.S. on the 2015 nuclear deal — officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) — would help soothe tensions between Iran and its Arab neighbors.

Bin Abdulrahman expressed hope that what will happen between Iran and the U.S. on the JCPOA would contribute to resolving the differences between Iran and the GCC. “Of course, things are interconnected at the end of the day,” he noted, adding that Qatar will support negotiations between the stakeholders.

“We will be welcoming this idea. We maintain a good relationship with the U.S. and we maintain a good relationship with Iran,” bin Abdulrahman stated.

He said his country has shared borders with Iran, adding that this country stood with Qatar and supported it during the crisis. The chief Qatari diplomat implied that Doha could act as a go-between Iran and Arab countries or the U.S.

Underlining the mutual respect between Doha and Tehran, the Qatari foreign minister said that his respect “allows Qatar to play such a role.”

On the South Korean ship seized by Iran, bin Abdulrahman confirmed that Qatar has received a request for help from South Korea. “We have received a request from the Korean government. Right now, we are working on it with Iran to find a way. They are talking to each other directly,” he said. “We hope that we can help in facilitating any talks for the release of the tanker.”

## Syria strongly denies reports of Israeli-Syrian meeting

**POLITICAL d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Syria’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates has responded to press reports about an alleged meeting between high-ranking Syrian and Israeli officials at the Russian military base in Hmeimim.

“The Arab Republic of Syria categorically rebuffs the untrue news circulated by some hired media outlets about a Syrian-Israeli meeting anywhere. It underlines that circulating such news is a failed attempt by the funders of these newspapers to cast doubt on Syria’s principled and enduring positions toward the Israeli occupation,” the Syrian foreign ministry said in a statement on Mon-

day, hours after a Turkey-based think tank published an article claiming that Russia brokered a high-level meeting in December between Syrian and Israeli officials inside the Russian base in Hmeimim.

“Syria reiterates that its policies have been and still are clear and it makes decisions that serve its national interests and the just issues of the Arab nation including the Palestinian question and the liberation of the occupied Syrian Arab Golan [Heights] as well as the occupied Arab territories in accordance with the relevant international resolutions,” the statement said.

Syria also said that those standing behind



these untrue allegations are seeking to drag the region into a “Zionist coalitions.”

“Syria stresses that the forces that stand

behind these lies are the same ones who pant for normalization with this entity and are trying to drag the whole region into Western Zionist alliances through intimidation at times or enticements at other times. And when they fail, they resort to such naïve ways by circulating fake news,” the statement concluded.

The article in question was penned by Mohammad Sarmini, the head of Jusoor for Studies Center, on Monday and was published on the think tank’s website. The article claimed that Ali Mamlouk, head of Syria’s National Security Council, met with the former chief of staff of Israel’s army Gadi Eisenkot in Hmeimim in December.

## U.S. must unconditionally lift all sanctions, Iran insists

**POLITICAL d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iran will not renegotiate the 2015 nuclear deal and that the U.S. must lift all sanctions it imposed on Iran since 2018, Majid Takht Ravanchi, Iran’s ambassador to the UN, said in an interview with ISNA on Tuesday.

“Our positions are clear; they (U.S.) should completely lift sanctions. If they do so, we will return to our commitments. We should not be in a rush to achieve this.... It was determined within the JCPOA that, which sanctions must be lifted. We want [the U.S.] to exactly implement that. We don’t want anything more or less than that,” Takht Ravanchi said. “We will neither allow the JCPOA to be renegotiated nor will we allow anything to be added to it.”

He also said that the U.S. should not set any conditions

for its return to the Iran nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

“We should see what will happen. But it’s important that the U.S. decision to return to the JCPOA should not be made with conditions or ifs and buts. The U.S. should not set any conditions for implementing [the JCPOA]. Given their bad track record, Americans should show that they are honest,” said Takht Ravanchi, a former nuclear negotiator.

He also said that Iran will not accept any U.S. effort to lift nuclear-related sanctions and keep terrorism-related ones because the nuclear sanctions were reimposed by the Trump administration under counterterrorism authorities.

“Iran’s Central Bank was under nuclear-related sanctions at first but after Trump withdrew from the JCPOA, he im-



posed terrorism-related sanctions on the Central Bank, a move that we consider as cheating. We will not accept any effort to lift nuclear sanctions on the Central Bank while keeping terrorism-related sanctions in place,” Takht Ravanchi pointed out.

## SPORTS

### My father is my role model: Amir Abedzadeh

**S P O R T S d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iran national team and Maritimo goalkeeper Amir Abedzadeh, son of former Iranian national team legendary goalkeeper Ahmadreza Abedzadeh, says that his father is his role model.



During a live interview with Iran football federation, Abedzadeh talked about several issues.

Abedzah joined Portuguese team Maritimo in 2017 and has shown superb performance in the top flight football team since then.

“Looking back at the past years, I have to say I’ve enjoyed my life despite the difficult times. I try to enjoy every single moment of my life. I love my job so much and no matter how hard I try,” Abedzadeh said.

Ahmadreza Abedzadeh is an iconic figure for the Iranian football fans. He helped the Persians win a gold medal in the 1990 Asian Games in Beijing. He also played for Iranian giants Esteghlal and Persepolis. While playing for Persepolis, he went 802 consecutive minutes without conceding a goal.

“My father has been a role model for me because of his discipline and his dedication. He trains five hours per day at the age of 54. We always talk about my strengths and weaknesses. My father always laughs from bottom of his heart and I enjoy whenever I talk to him. I’ve always tried to learn from my father and he is my role model,” the 28-year-old custodian added.

Amir Abedzaeh has already revealed that he likes to play in Spanish giant Real Madrid.

“In my opinion, a football player should not give up. I want to earn more experience because I want to achieve my goal. I’ve already said I am going to wear Real Madrid’s shirt and I will do my best to make it happen but I need to learn more,” Abedzadeh went on to say.

The training camp for the Iran National Team as part of preparation for the 2022 World Cup qualifiers will begin on March 17 in Tehran.

“Dragan Skocic has injected new players to the national team and is going to elevate our team spirit. I hope we can emerge victorious in our remaining matches in the 2022 World Cup qualifiers,” he said.

In the end, Amir Abedzadeh said he has missed his father and hoped to drink a coffee with him in March in Tehran.

### Persepolis defender Kanaani sidelined for four weeks

**S P O R T S d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Persepolis football team defender Mohammadhossein Kanaanzadegan has been sidelined due to a thigh injury.

Kanaani is expected to be sidelined for up to four weeks with a thigh strain.

He suffered the injury in the match against Foolad in Iran Professional League (IPL) on Monday.

The MRI has confirmed the injury.

Kannani plays pivotal role in Persepolis’ defensive line and his absence will be a big blow to the team.

Persepolis are looking to win IPL title for the fifth successive time.

### Mohammadian wants to empower Iranian women in volleyball

**S P O R T S d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Newly-appointed Vice President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Volleyball Federation (IRIVF) Fariba Mohammadian says that she is going to empower Iranian women in volleyball.

Mohammadian replaced Mahnaz Shaddel who was working in the position as caretaker.

She has a doctorate in physical education, management and planning while participating in the national volleyball coaching and refereeing courses.

“I will follow the goals of Iran Volleyball Federation to promote women’s volleyball; the way to get to it is not surely simple and I will seek the help of the volleyball officials to empower women in volleyball,” Mohammadian said.

The Persians finished in sixth place in the 2018 Asian Women’s Club Championship in Ust-Kamenogorsk, Kazakhstan after going down in straight sets to Indonesia’s Garuda VC in the 5th-6th place playoff.

### Ex-Iran football president Taj released from hospital

**Tasnim** — Former president of Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) Mehdi Taj was released from hospital.

Taj had been hospitalized for emergent cardiac conditions in a hospital in Tehran on Saturday.

The former president of FFIRI had been already hospitalized several times due to his heart problem over the past years.

Taj was working as FFIRI president from 2016 to 2019. He currently is a member of Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Emergency Committee.



## Investment in free zones jumps 57%

**➔** To achieve this target, different measures were taken in the past year, such as attracting innovative and technological units to these areas, and introducing investment opportunities and advantages in these zones.

Last week, President Hassan Rouhani inaugurated 61 projects worth 92 trillion rials (about \$2.19 billion) in some of the free trade zones and special economic zones of the country through video conference.

The projects were put into operation in the production, industry, trade, and infrastructure sectors of the zones in Hormozgan, Gilan, Bushehr, Qom, East Azarbaijan, and Markazi provinces, creating jobs for 3,200 persons.



Implementation of development projects in these areas shows the serious efforts and determination of the government to prosper the business environment within the framework of the policies of the resistance economy and achieve the goals of the surge in production this year, as well as increase export capacity, foreign currency earnings and employment.

The data released by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs show that 89,843 trillion rials (about \$2.139 billion) of domestic investment has been made in Iran's special economic zones during the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19, 2020), which has been 173 percent more than the figure of its preceding year.

The establishment of free trade zones in Iran dates back to Iranian calendar year 1368 (March 1989- March 1990) following the fall in the country's oil income in the preceding year which prompted the government to promote non-oil exports.

The first two free trade zones of Iran were established in the Persian Gulf islands of Kish and Qeshm.

Some five other free trade zones have been also established in the country since then, including Chabahar in southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan Province, Arvand in southwestern Khuzestan Province, Anzali in northern Gilan Province, Aras in East-Azarbaijan Province and Maku in West-Azarbaijan Province, both in the northwest of the country.

Considering the important role that the free trade zones play in promoting the country's export and employment, Iran is seriously pursuing the development of its existing zones and establishment of new zones as well.

## TCCIMA explores major economic issues in board meeting

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — The Board of the Representatives of Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) in their 19th meeting on Tuesday explored major economic issues pertaining to the country's private sector.

As reported by the TCCIMA portal, recent developments in the White House and their impact on the Iranian economy, the Iran-Eurasia free trade agreement, the strengths and weaknesses of the steel production and supply chain in the country, the next year's national budget bill, and raising prices were some of the issues discussed in this gathering.

In addition to the above mentioned issues, other significant subjects such as the coronavirus vaccine, recent blackouts and their consequences for industries, bitcoin production farms, and etc. were also addressed by the private sector representatives.



TCCIMA Head Masoud Khansari (2nd R) delivering speech at the chamber's 19th board meeting.

Speaking in this meeting, the TCCIMA Head Masoud Khansari addressed some of the current issues of the country's economy and commented on some of the above mentioned issues.

He referred to the decrease in the death rate and the number of coronavirus casualties and expressed hope that this decreasing trend would continue.

Khansari also mentioned the ceremony for introducing the country's top exporters and said: "Fortunately, last week the National Export Day ceremony was held by Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) after almost three months of delay."

He also criticized some of the government's decisions and policies regarding the country's exports and imports and called on the government for facilitating the conditions for the country's private sector activities.

The exports had a reasonable increase in recent years, but in the past two years many challenges have been created in the field of export and foreign trade, Khansari said.

Elsewhere in his remarks, he mentioned the recent blackouts across the country, saying: "In recent weeks, we have had many complaints regarding the power outages of economic enterprises and industrial production units; the blackouts have caused damage to these units' equipment and machinery."

# Tehran, Baku ink MOU for expanding railway cooperation

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iran and Azerbaijan signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on Monday for the expansion of railway cooperation, IRIB reported.

The MOU was signed by the Head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (RAI) Saeed Rasouli and the Chairman of Azerbaijan Railways Closed Joint-Stock Company Javid Gurbanov.

Based on this MOU, the two sides agreed to expand their railway cooperation to reach a transit ceiling of two million tons per year and to facilitate railroad developments.

The volume of cargo transit between the two countries increased to 480,000 tons in 2020 despite the outbreak of the coronavirus.

The 14th meeting of the Iran-Azerbaijan Joint Economic Committee was held on Monday at the place of the Iranian Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs in Tehran, during which the two sides also inked an MOU



for the expansion of economic cooperation. The MOU was signed by Iran's Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad

Dejpasand and Azerbaijan's Deputy Prime Minister Shahin Mustafayev, who co-chaired the meeting.

## Electricity projects worth over \$57m put into operation

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian, on Tuesday, inaugurated six electricity projects worth 2.4 trillion rials (about \$57.14 million) in Kerman and Yazd provinces through video conference.

Inaugurated in the 37th week of the Energy Ministry's A-B-Iran Program, two of the mentioned projects were put into operation in Kerman province and the other four were inaugurated in Yazd province.

A six-megawatt small-scale power plant and power supply to 11 villages with 128 households were the projects inaugurated in Kerman province, while a 10-MW solar farm, modification and optimization and overhaul of substations and transmission lines, as well as electricity supply to six villages with 96 households were some of the projects put into operation in Yazd.

As reported, the mentioned projects have been put into operation with the aim of increasing the reliability of the electricity network, reducing unwanted blackouts, reducing

electricity losses, supplying electricity to industrial sectors, and creating employment in the downstream industries.

A-B-Iran program (the acronyms A and B stand for water and electricity in Persian) was initiated in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19, 2020), during which the minister made 31 trips to various provinces for inaugurating over 220 major projects with a total investment of 335.6 trillion rials (about \$7.99 billion).

Since the beginning of the second phase of the scheme in the current Iranian calendar year (started on March 20, 2020), every week several energy projects have gone operational across the country.

Back in December, Ardakanian had said that "in the second phase of the program 250 projects are going to be inaugurated by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20) of which so far 154 have gone operational."

The official noted that a total of 500 trillion rials (about \$11.9 billion) of investment will be made in the mentioned 250 projects.



Earlier this month, President Hassan Rouhani inaugurated 26 energy projects worth over 27.61 trillion rials (about \$657.38 million) in four provinces through video conference under the A-B-Iran program.

## Jask oil terminal offshore pipe-laying operation begins

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — The operator of Jask oil terminal project in southern Iran announced the beginning of the offshore pipeline extension operation for the early-phase of this project on Tuesday.

"Following the favorable weather conditions and the completion of initial preparations in recent days, the shore pulling operation of a 2.5 kilometer pipeline leading to the first single-point-mooring (SPM) of the terminal was started," Vahid Maleki said.

The mentioned operation is being carried out by a pipe-layer vessel called Sea Master, according to Maleki.



The official pointed to the implementation of this operation as the first part of the offshore development of Jask oil terminal and added: "the offshore section of the early phase of this

project will be completed with the construction of two 36-inch offshore pipelines with a total length of 12 kilometers, various coastal facilities, as well as a single point mooring."

Maleki put the physical progress of the first phase of the Jask oil terminal at 70 percent and said: "the early operation of this project will be realized by the end of the current [Iranian calendar] year (March 20)."

As the country's second major oil terminal, Jask terminal is under construction by Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC) on 60 hectares of land and with nearly €260 million of investment.

In line with the development of the mentioned oil terminal, a pipeline project, dubbed Goreh-Jask oil transfer project, is also underway which is going to provide Iran with an alternative route for the country's crude oil exports that are currently carried out through the Strait of Hormuz.

At the first phase, this project will have a capacity to transfer over 300,000 barrels of crude oil per day from Goreh to Jask oil terminal, the transfer capacity of the pipeline, however, can be increased up to 30 million barrels per day in the second phase of the project.

## Over 1.2m tons of coal concentrate produced in 9 months

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iran produced 1.224 million tons of coal concentrate in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-December 20, 2020), according to the data released by the Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry.

The ministry's data show that the production of coal concentrate has fallen 1.5 percent in the nine-month period of this year from that of the previous year.

Iran has produced 1.242 million tons of the product in the first nine months of the past year.

As previously announced by the Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMID-RO), a total of 1,585,531 tons of crude coal was extracted in the past Iranian calendar year 1398 (ended on March 19, 2020).

Iran extracted 1,749,599 tons of coal during the Iranian



calendar year 1397 (ended on March 20, 2019). And the coal concentrate production in the mentioned year stood at 732,050 tons.

Due to the special conditions of coal mines in Iran, these

mines are subject to tax exemption and miners who need mining machinery can use the facility and tax exemption in this sector to import their necessary machinery.

The country's average annual coal concentrate production is about 1.5 million tons, while the country's current demand has reached two million tons.

Currently, Iran's coal sector provides employment for 17,000 people, however, the capacity of the country's coal mines is much more than this figure and development of the mining sector and modernization projects can play an effective role in increasing employment in this sector.

Unofficial data indicate that there are 185 small and large coal mines in the country, of which more than 59 percent are currently active, while 10 mines are being equipped and prepared, and the rest are idle

## Rouhani to inaugurate Bid Boland Refinery on Thursday

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani will inaugurate Persian Gulf Bid Boland Gas Refinery through videoconference on Thursday, the refinery's managing director announced.

Mahmoud Amin-Nejad also announced the export of the fifth cargo of the refinery's products on the eve of its official inauguration, IRIB reported.

While emphasizing that so far more than 300,000 tons of C2+ product has been produced in Bid Boland Refinery, he said that according to previous plans, this complex

receives about 18,000 tons of feed per day from NGL 900 Plant.

He pointed out that due to sustainable production, about 11,000 tons of methane for domestic consumption is produced and injected into the country's gas network at the peak of consumption, and added that 1400 tons of ethane, 2,000 tons of LPG and 1300 tons of pentane is produced in this complex per day.

As the largest gas refinery project in West Asia with an investment of \$3.4 billion, the Persian Gulf Bid Boland project is now underway and will be officially inaugurated on

Thursday.

With the project reaching its full capacity in near future, this complex is expected to bring the country \$700 million of revenue every year.

This project was recently nominated for the International Project Management Association (IPMA)'s Global Project Excellence Award at the energy sector.

Bid Boland Refinery, which was also awarded as the country's top mega project by the Ninth National Project Management Award, has been announced as one of the four final

nominees for the IPMA's 2020 Global Project Excellence Award in the energy sector.

Located in Behbahan County in southwestern Khuzestan Province, Bid Boland will have an annual production capacity of 10.4 million tons of methane, 1.5 million tons of ethane, one million tons of propane, 600,000 tons of gas condensates, and 500,000 tons of butane.

With the complete implementation of the mentioned project, the production capacity of sweet and other gases will increase, which will be used to feed petrochemical plants in Mahshahr and supply urban areas in the region.

## Greenhouse development in Fars Province on agenda

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — The head of the Agriculture Department of Fars Province said that his department intends to develop cultivation in greenhouses of the province based on a comprehensive plan by the Iranian calendar year 1404 (starts in March 2025).

Hossein Pejman said, "We are going to develop the greenhouse areas in the province to 7,000 hectares by 1404 from the current 724 hectares."

The official also put emphasis on his department's program for the development of modern irrigation systems in the province.

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 last April, the managing director of Iran's Agricultural Parks Company (APC) had 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).

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.



# #letter 4you

## Youth can be permanent base for Islamic Revolution: ex-Lebanese foreign minister

By Mohammad Mazhari

**TEHRAN** – Noting that the letters that the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei penned to Western youth contain great humanitarian concepts, a former Lebanese foreign minister believes that the young generations in the world can be a permanent base and strong pillar for the Iranian Islamic Revolution.

“This revolution must keep up with the coming young generations in order to understand their demands and stand by their side,” Adnan Mansour tells the Tehran Times. “So that these generations will be a permanent base and strong pillar for the Iranian Islamic Revolution.”

In a letter dated January 21, 2015, and another on November 29, 2015, Ayatollah Khamenei elaborated on the truth of Islam and malicious attempts by certain Western leaders to distort the image of Islam.

The former Lebanese foreign minister says, “These two messages can serve as a bridge to young people in the West to remind them about their human responsibility whilst they are facing new developments in the world.”

The following is the text of the interview: **Ayatollah Khamenei, Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, has penned two letters to the youth in Europe and North America, which are considered among the most important events in recent years, despite attempts by the Western media to boycott and hide the impact of the messages. How do you see the effect of these messages on Western youth and academia?**

There is no doubt that the two messages that the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Imam Ali Khamenei, penned to the youth in Europe and North America contain great humanitarian concepts due to the principles and values they addressed.

These two messages can build a bridge for young people in the West to remind them about their human responsibility whilst they are facing new developments in the world.

Since these young people are undoubtedly reflecting their nations anywhere in this world, Imam Khamenei turns to these young men to look at matters in a real and objective view in order to take appropriate decisions and adopt right approaches regarding their societies and also with regard to the peoples of the entire world.

Iran encounters extremism while it rejects fanaticism, hegemony, and authoritarianism sponsored by the forces of terror who are seeking to tamper with peoples' rights.

There are peoples who suffer from domination and suffer from terrorism that strikes their countries, and we have many examples in this world.

Terrorism, especially in the Islamic world, has destabilized or threatened many countries and regions, from Libya to Egypt and extends to Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Indonesia, and Pakistan.

Therefore, when Imam Khamenei pens these letters, they serve as a bridge to the



youth to show them the reality of the Islamic Republic; a message of love, brotherhood and friendship based on mutual respect, the rights of peoples and the right to self-determination for peoples.

**Why did the Leader of the Islamic Republic directly address the youth generation?**

Certainly, Western youth must think deeply over this message to know the truth of what is going on in this world, especially since there are misleading and hostile media reports directed against peoples in the world while some nations are seeking stability and justice and refuse hegemony and joining the policy of axes and alliances.

These young people in the West must understand well the values, message, demand and advice that came in the letters.

**Do you think that the ground is appropriate for dialogue between the Islamic and Western worlds?**

An understanding between the Islamic world and the countries in the Western world needs to take into consideration primarily political, ideological and national issues.

There is no doubt that the difference between religions does not mean clash. It is a must to build bridges between the Islamic and Western worlds in order to understand each other. This matter requires great effort. It is not possible to talk about an understanding between the Islamic and Western worlds while the two worlds remain far from each other or show hostility.

Therefore, there must be forums and meetings at intellectual, cultural and scientific levels to bring together the two sides to clarify the values, concepts, principles, ideals and aspirations of both sides (Western and Islamic world).

Here we should focus on the role of the Islamic Republic, especially since Iran's

revolution, as it has actually carried the slogan of freedom and justice.

Iran suffered a lot before its revolution during the Shah era and before him during the Qajar era. However, Iran has great capabilities to carry out this task and this is due to its political, geographical, cultural, intellectual and literary position. All this makes Iran at the forefront in delivering the message of the Islamic world to the Western world.

As I said, the political differences between the two worlds have resulted in division, hatred and enmity, as well as wars. Therefore, these issues must be overcome by building a bridge for communication and strengthening it at various political and social scenes as well as intellectual, cultural, scientific, literary, political and diplomatic levels.

**Given your experience in the field of foreign policy and international relations, how do you evaluate Iran's foreign policy after the victory of the Islamic revolution?**

Regarding Iran's foreign policy, as I said, Iran's slogan has been a clear message since the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

Iran's foreign policy has not seen fluctuations from time to time at all.

Iran has remained consistent through its foreign policy and has maintained its clear approach and policy, which is extending friendship to friends and brothers and resisting everyone who wants to lie in wait for this nation, and the region.

Therefore, I say there are many opportunities in which to contain the challenges that dominate the arena. Undoubtedly, great efforts must be made. Iran must practice its policies with its friends in order to make its policies and role understandable, rather than looking at Iranian foreign policy from a narrow Western perspective which tries

to portray Iran as a threat to security and peace in the region.

We know very well today how the Western media is mobilizing the Western public opinion against Iran and distorting its image, whether this is in the region or at the international level. Therefore, Iran's mission in this field is a big one, and it must face these challenges to show the actual truth of its role and mission in spreading peace, justice and freedom.

**How do you see the influence of the resistance movement's efforts and moves in the world, especially in countries that are suffering from U.S.-backed dictatorships?**

The resistance within the Arab and Western public drew broad lines and gave great lessons to the peoples of the whole world, which is that when people are under occupation, there is no room for them but struggle and resistance.

Therefore, when a part of Lebanon was under Israeli occupation, the resistance had nothing but to confront this aggression. Over the years and decades, it managed to confront Israeli terrorism and was able to achieve victory and force the Zionist enemy to withdraw from the Lebanese lands.

When Lebanon was also exposed to the Israeli aggression in 2006, the resistance had no choice but to stand in the face of this aggression, whatever the price.

Indeed, despite the tremendous destruction that the enemy inflicted on our hearts, and despite the human losses, the resistance was able to withstand and record a brilliant victory over the Israeli enemy.

This resistance was not only a lesson for the Arab public but rather a lesson for the whole world that how Lebanon was able, with its great resistance, to confront a regime that possessed a formidable military force in the region and was able to defeat its army and record victory over it.

So, this image for the Western audience must be taken from its positive side, to remind the right of any people in the world to stand in the face of aggression, especially since the West has experienced aggression and occupation by the Nazis during World War II.

**What is the message of the Islamic Revolution to the region and the world?**

The message of the Islamic Revolution is clear and explicit through its principles set forth in the Iranian constitution. It is a message of peace and love that seeks freedom wherever it is and seeks liberation, independence in the political and economic decisions.

The Islamic Revolution must also take into account the aspirations of the younger generations, since each generation has its own concepts and aspirations, especially as the world is moving and developing for the better.

Therefore, this revolution must keep up with the coming young generations in order to understand their demands and stand by their side so that these generations will be a permanent base and strong pillar for the Iranian Islamic Revolution.

**"We know very well today how the Western media is mobilizing the Western public opinion against Iran and distorting its image, whether this is in the region or at the international level."**

## Ayatollah Khamenei opened door of dialogue via his letters to Western youth: Lebanese analyst

By Reza Moshfegh

**TEHRAN** — A senior Lebanese political analyst says that the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei opened a door for dialogue between the Islamic and Western world via his letters to the youth in Europe and North America.

In a letter dated January 21, 2015, and another on November 29, 2015, Ayatollah Khamenei elaborated on the truth of Islam and malicious attempts by certain Western leaders to distort the image of Islam.

“The door to dialogue that was opened by Ayatollah Khamenei is a constructive step and we always say the door to dialogue, even if it is half open, is much better than closing it completely,” Amin Hoteit tells the Tehran Times.

“Ayatollah Khamenei knows that the Western media is hiding the facts, and this media is in the hands of the malicious colonial groups that besieges the youth and their minds,” according to the Lebanese university instructor and researcher.

The following is the text of the interview: **What are the implications of Ayatollah Khamenei's letters to young people in the West when he urged them to examine Islam first hand rather than believe prejudiced views?**

The two letters that the Leader of the Islamic Republic wrote to the youth in Europe and North America was a move in consistency with a sound Islamic principle, which is to show the truth and the Islamic call through dialogue.

Ayatollah Khamenei knows that the Western media is hiding the facts, and this media is in the hands of the malicious colonial groups that besiege the youth and their minds.

For this reason, he decided to address the youth, showing them the clear and shining truth, and not leaving them prey to a shameless, lecherous, malicious and unjust media.

**Do you think that the circumstances are proper for dialogue with Western youth and coming generations?**

There is no doubt that when the youth receive this message, they will be in a position of tension between two



currents: the false path led by the media and politicians, and the path of truth that these messages represent it.

I think that a large number of Western youths will follow what was mentioned in the message of Imam Khamenei if they use logic and common sense.

Since Ayatollah Khamenei is telling the truth, this message will have a good and effective impact on the hearts of young people, and it will make them more prepared to receive other messages and then confront suppressive governments.

**How would you assess the dominance of the Western media over the thought of the youth and the average citizen in the West?**

I think that the reason that encouraged Imam Khamenei to write these letters was the fabrication and forgery that we find in the paid media that claim freedom of opinion while in fact, they are confiscating free opinion.

Western outlets claim freedom of expression but they are misrepresenting the truth. Therefore, this move was correct and timely which will lead to important results.

The door to dialogue that was opened by Ayatollah Khamenei is a constructive step and we always say the door to dialogue, even if it is half open, is much better than closing it completely.

That is why I think that although the platform for peaceful dialogue is not available in light of this Western

regime's crimes, restricted dialogue in the existing circumstances is better than a break and turning our back.

**How do you see the position of the resistance in the world in the light of Western media propaganda?**

Unfortunately, Western thought is mostly a prisoner of the media, so you find those who are not biased for injustice heading towards neutrality and a rare few who openly adhere to the truth, contrary to what the media propagates.

Today, when you find someone who lights a candle in this dark tunnel in which the West moves, the truth-seekers will receive this light, no matter how weak it is.

Therefore, I believe that the direct speech from the Leader of the Islamic Republic to the youth can push their thought and logic to search the truth, meanwhile addressing their minds is a very important matter and should be followed up.

The resistance plays a prominent and important role in various fields, but we should be aware that the resistance, with its media, its fields of action and its scope of works under siege by regional dictatorships and their media.

Therefore, we should not lose any opportunity to gain access to the hearts and minds of the youth in a smooth way despite the obstacles. By dictatorships and their flags.

**What is the message of the Islamic Revolution to young generations in the region and the globe?**

The message of the Islamic revolution to the world and the youth, in particular, is a clear message based on four pillars: first, building a secure society, secondly building a society of cooperation and brotherhood among human beings, thirdly preventing maliciousness and confronting arrogance, injustice, colonialism and domination, and fourthly building our homelands and our countries with cooperation, benevolence and peace, and live a safer world full of peace and prosperity.

Consequently, the message of the Islamic Revolution is completely opposite to the message of colonialism, which wants hegemony and domination to possess and usurp wealth.

## Hillary Clinton & Nancy Pelosi suggest Putin ordered Trump to launch Capitol siege in unhinged interview

Democratic bigwigs Hillary Clinton and Nancy Pelosi have called for a probe into Russian President Vladimir Putin's – real or entirely imagined – role in the Capitol riot, theorizing that he may have personally ordered the unrest.

The House speaker sat down with the failed 2016 presidential candidate for an interview on Clinton's podcast, 'You and Me Both,' on Monday, where they discussed the bout of chaos in Washington, DC earlier this month. At one point during the conversation, Clinton argued that President Donald Trump “has other agendas” – though hastened to add that “I don't think we yet know” what those are – wondering aloud about “who pulls his strings.”

“I would love to see his phone records to see whether he was talking to Putin the day the insurgents invaded our Capitol,” Clinton said, asking Pelosi: “Do you think we need a 9/11-type commission to investigate and report everything they can pull together and explain what happened?”

Pelosi responded in the affirmative, saying that when it comes to Trump, “all roads lead to Putin.”

## Israel says normalizing ties with Turkey hinges on closure of Hamas' Istanbul Office

Israel relayed a statement to Ankara that there would be no thaw in relations until the Hamas office in Istanbul is shut down, the Israel's Ynet reported.

Israel has made this a precondition to returning its ambassador to Ankara.

Israel issued a statement to Turkey on Monday, saying it will not normalize its relations with Ankara until it shuts the activities of the Hamas office, which effectively operates as a military wing.

## Trump baby protest blimp enters Museum of London collection

The Trump Baby Blimp will live on long after its namesake has left the White House.

The Museum of London said on Monday that it had added the giant balloon, which depicts Donald Trump as a screaming orange baby, to its collection as an illustration of the protests that greeted the U.S. president when he visited the city in 2018.

“By collecting the baby blimp, we can mark the wave of feeling that washed over the city that day and capture a particular moment of resistance,” Sharon Ament, the museum's director, said in a statement.



The blimp will become part of the museum's protest collection, which includes artefacts from the women's suffrage movement, peace activists who opposed the war in Iraq during the early 2000s, and more recent protests against public spending cuts.

The Trump Baby Blimp was designed by a group of friends who met in a London pub to discuss how they could speak out against Trump's policies. What they came up with was a giant balloon that caricatured Trump as a screaming, diapered baby clutching a smartphone and topped by a quiff of yellow hair.

## Resistance News

## UN experts urge Israel to ensure equal vaccine access to Palestinians

**INTERNATIONAL DESK** **TEHRAN** — South African medical doctor, d e s k Talang Mofokeng - who was recently appointed as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health - has called Israel's refusal to provide the 4.5 million Palestinians under its control with COVID-19 vaccines “morally and legally unacceptable.”

Mofokeng made the comments last week together with Special Rapporteur, Michael Lynk, who covers the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967.

Israel has been lauded worldwide for vaccinating a higher percentage of its citizens than any other country. However, it has achieved this by leaving out the more than 4.5 million Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) that Israel occupies and controls. The Palestinians remain unprotected and exposed to COVID-19, while Israeli citizens living near and among Palestinian villages and towns – including the Israeli settler population in the OPT - have been vaccinated.

The Israeli Public Security Ministry also instructed the Israeli Prison Service not to vaccinate Palestinian political prisoners being held in Israeli jails.

“Morally and legally, this differential access to necessary health care in the midst of the worst global health crisis in a century is unacceptable,” said Mofokeng and Lynk.

Citing the Oslo Accords, Israeli officials claim that it is not their responsibility to vaccinate Palestinians. Mofokeng and Lynk, however, reminded Israeli officials that under the Fourth Geneva Convention, it is Israel's responsibility – as the occupying power - to maintain health services for the occupied population.

The Palestinians agree. “The international community must hold Israel to account and urge Israel as an occupying power to fulfil its obligations under international law and make vaccines available to the occupied population without discrimination. This includes Palestinians in the whole territory of the State of Palestine, which comprise the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, including Palestinians in occupation prisons and Palestinian refugees,” the Palestinian Liberation Organization's Negotiation Affairs Department said in a statement last week.



## Iran tourism to return to normal next year, expert says

➔ **1** 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.”



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) . Iran welcomed some 7.8 million foreign nationals a year earlier, achieving a 52.5 percent increase year on year.

The ancient land embraces hundreds of historical sites such as bazaars, museums, mosques, bridges, bathhouses, madrasas, mausoleums, churches, towers, and mansions, of which 24 being inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list. Under the 2025 Tourism Vision Plan, the country aims to increase the number of tourist arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million in 2025.

## Hundreds of original and fake relics retrieved

**HERITAGE** **TEHRAN** – A total of 844 relics, both original and copies, have been recovered from smugglers or illegal diggers in northwestern Ardebil province over the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 20, 2020).

Iranian authorities have confiscated 844 relics, of which 301 objects were original, and 543 ones were fake, a senior police official in charge of protecting cultural heritage announced on Tuesday.



Ten metal detectors, which were operated by unauthorized users, were also seized in this regard, CHTN quoted Saber Afzalnia as saying.

He also noted that people's cooperation with the authorities and the police forces play an important role in dealing with smugglers and antique dealers.

Sprawling on a high, windswept plateau, whose altitude averages 3,000 meters above sea level, Ardebil is well-known for having lush natural beauties, hospitable people, and its silk and carpet trade tradition, it is also home to the UNESCO-registered Sheikh Safi al-Din Khanegah and Shrine Ensemble.

The province is very cold in winter and mild in summer, attracting thousands every year. The capital city of Ardabil is usually recorded as one of the coldest cities in the country in winter.

## Tourism generates 240 jobs in North Khorasan in 9 months

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** – The tourism sector has created 240 jobs across Iran's North Khorasan province in nine months period, a provincial tourism official announced on Tuesday.

The job opportunities were generated in collaboration with the private sector during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-December 20, 2020), Abolfazl Esmaeili said.



Some 2.5 trillion rials (\$59.5 million at the official exchange rate of 42,000 rials per dollar) were also invested in tourism-related projects across the province during the period, the official added.

Experts believe though the northeastern province may not be the first choice of travelers, its tourism industry is getting momentum.

According to Lonely Planet, most foreign tourists pass straight through North Khorasan in transit between Mashhad and Gorgan, but if you have time to explore, it's worth diverting south from the capital, Bojnurd, towards Esfarayen, famed for its wrestling tournaments, the remarkable citadel of Belqays and the partly preserved stepped village of Roein some 20km north.

# Intl. travels slump by 84% in Iran due to coronavirus

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** — The average of international travels to and from Iran fell by 84 percent during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 20, 2020) from a year earlier.

“Passenger traffic from land and air borders during the first nine months of this year compared to the same period last year, decreased by 84.57% in incoming passenger traffic and 84.33% decrease in outgoing passenger traffic,” Mehr quoted Arezou Ghanian, an official with the Islamic Republic of Iran's Customs Administration, as saying on Tuesday.

“During this period, some 2.7 million passengers entered the country.... and this number of incoming passengers included 2,388,134 Iranian nationals, and 318,965 foreign passengers,” the official said.

“During this period, 2, 619, 507 people traveled as outbound passengers,” she added.

International tourist arrivals to Iran plunged 72% during the first eight months of the year when compared to 2019, according to data compiled by the World Tourism Organization. Restrictions on travel introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic continue to hit global tourism hard, with the latest data from the UNWTO showing a 70% fall in international arrivals for the first eight months of 2020.

Iran, however, has experienced different rates of downfall for inbound pas-



sengers over the past months. In the first three months of 2020 (January, February, March), the tourism industry of the country recorded negative rates of 90, 92, and 94 percent, respectively, compared to the same period last year, according to the organization.

The fall reached 96 and 97 percent in April and May. And in June, a negative 84% was recorded. But the interesting point in the statistics published by the

World Tourism Organization is a steep slope of the improvement of Iran's tourism arrivals during the last two months, as such growth has leaped 35% in July and August.

Optimistic forecasts, expect the country would 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.

## New properties in Qom gain national heritage status

**HERITAGE** **TEHRAN** – A total of 21 historical monuments and aging structures, scattered across Iran's Qom province, have recently been inscribed on the national heritage list.

The Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts announced the inscriptions on Monday in a letter to the governor-general of the central province.

Khadijeh Khatoon ancient hill, Brick Castel of Deir-e Gachin, Keshmiri Mansion, and Shams Abad cistern are on the list, which also includes Mohamadieh and Fatemieh mosques.

The country's second-holiest city after Mash-

had, 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.

The city's antiquity goes back to the Sassanid era (224 CE–651) and several historical mosques, mansions, and natural sceneries have been scattered across the city as well as towns and villages nearby.



## Six amazing and overlooked travel sites in Iran

(Part 2/2)

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** – Though being threatened and even partly eroded by excessive humidity and vegetation rooting in the chinks of its old but lofty walls, Rudkhan Castle is still standing tall in very good condition as compared to other castles of the same time.

### Bekhradi historical house

Located in the central city of Isfahan, this 400-year-old inn built in Persia's Safavid era features four tastefully decorated multi-roomed guest suites and is the oldest house to be restored in Iran.

Its renovation and artistic restoration took local interior designer and restoration specialist Morteza Bekhradi five years to engineer and complete.

Peppered with stained-glass windows and original artwork from the Safavid and subsequent Qajar eras, the house sits between two gardens replete with fruits and wildflowers.

The mansion was built as a caravanserai and then turned into a house. It has been restored several times and currently is used as a traditional accommodation center.

Soaked in a rich history and culture, Isfahan was once a crossroads of international trade and diplomacy in Iran. Now, it is one of Iran's top tourist destinations for good reasons. The city has long been nicknamed as Nesf-e-Jahan which is translated into “half the world”; meaning seeing it is relevant to see the whole world. In its heyday, it was also one of the largest cities in the region with a population of nearly one million.

### Alamut Castle

Nested on top of a hill in a relatively remote village amidst the northern Iran's Alborz Mountains, a well-fortified castle was sheltering the followers of Hasan-e Sabbah (1070–1124), spiritual leader of Islam's heretical Ismaili sect, known as ‘Assassins’.

In popular myth, Sabbah led a bizarre, much-feared mercenary organization whose members were dispatched to murder or kidnap leading political and religious figures of the day.

In the early 1930s, British-Italian explorer and travel writer Freya Stark described her exploration of the place in her book “The Valleys of the Assassins”.

Nowadays, the ruined castle, which is also known as Alamut Castle, is a top travel destination in the northeastern side of Gazor Khan Village in the environs of Mo'alem



A view of Bekhradi historical house in Isfahan

Kalayeh, from the environs of Roudbar of Alamut, Qazvin province.

While approaching the village, you should pass for nearly half along a narrow road surrounded by cherry and pomegranate orchards, until a mass of gray-brown rock looms from distance with fortifications perched atop a summit.

Alamut, which means “eagle's nest”, is a geographic region in the western edge of the Alborz range, between the dry and barren plain of Qazvin in the south and the densely forested slopes of the Mazandaran province in the north.

Narratives say that the name Alamut derives from a regional eighth-century king who spied an eagle landing amid its rugged lofty crags and was inspired to build an impregnable fortress.

The castle was almost forgotten and only returned to public consciousness with the publication of Stark's 1930s travel diary Valleys of the Assassins. A copy of that recently reprinted volume makes a great companion for the trip.

### Soltaniyeh Dome

A UNESCO World Heritage site in the northwestern province of Zanjan, the mausoleum of Oljaytu at Soltaniyeh is topped by one of the world's largest domes.

Built between 1302 and 1312 in Soltaniyeh, the capital city of the Mongols' Ilkhanid Dynasty, the monument is a mausoleum for Il-khan Oljeitu, the Ilkhanid's eighth ruler. Though much of the structure's exterior coloring and tiles have faded through the centuries, the intricate brickwork, tilework, and vibrant designs inside the mausoleum have remained largely unscathed.

The unique double-shelled structure of the Soltaniyeh Dome is also believed to have influenced the design of India's Taj Mahal mausoleum.

Meaning “Town of the Sultans”, Soltani-

yeh was briefly the capital of Persia's Ilkhanid dynasty (a branch of the Mongol dynasty) during the 14th century.

The structure is highly recognized as an architectural masterpiece particularly due to its innovative double-shelled dome and elaborate interior decoration. The very imposing dome stands about 50 meters tall from its base. Covered with turquoise-blue faience tiles, the stunning structure dominates the skyline of Soltaniyeh, an ancient city in Zanjan province, north-western Iran.

The interior has long been under renovation, chockfull of scaffolding poles. However, its decoration is such impressive that scholars including A.U. Pope described it as ‘anticipating the Taj Mahal’. It is the earliest existing example of the double-shelled dome in Iran.

A great-grandson of Hulegu, founder of the Il-Khanid dynasty, Oljaytu was a Mongol ruler who, after dabbling in various religions, adopted the Shia name Mohammed Khodabandeh.

The domes are normally double-shelled. While the interior shell is designed to carry the weight of the structure, the exterior shell serves as both a decorative element and as insulation against the elements. The aerodynamic shape of the domes also makes the structures more sustainable.

### Laleh Kandovan Rocky Hotel

About 30 miles outside the northwestern city of Tabriz lies the troglodyte village of Kandovan. People here live in cone-shaped caves cut out of volcanic rock at the foot of Mount Sahand, a dormant volcano.

Nestled within the 800-year-old village, the Laleh Kandovan Rocky Hotel has been hand-carved into the rocky landscape, with each of the luxury hotel's 16 modernized rooms encompassing a cave, or “karaan.” According to local lore, mineral water sourced from Mount Sahand, long valued throughout Iran for its medicinal properties, originated in the biblical Garden of Eden.

Guests of the hotel can take a relaxing soak in this precious liquid. If there's a spa tub in the room, the mineral water gets pumped indirectly.

The history of this wonderful village dates back to some 6000 years ago. Some researchers on archeology have estimated its age up to 7000 years old.

The village architecture is one of its wonders; the thickness of its walls reaches two meters in some places. The rock acts

According to the newest UNWTO Barometer, international arrivals plunged 81% in July and 79% in August, traditionally the two busiest months of the year and the peak of the Northern Hemisphere summer season. The drop until August represents 700 million fewer arrivals compared to the same period in 2019 and translates into a loss of US\$ 730 billion in export revenues from international tourism. This is more than eight times the loss experienced on the back of the 2009 global economic and financial crisis.

“This unprecedented decline is having dramatic social and economic consequences, and puts millions of jobs and businesses at risk,” warned UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili. “This underlines the urgent need to safely restart tourism, in a timely and coordinated manner”.

### Rebound expected by Q3 2021

UNWTO's Panel of Experts foresees a rebound in international tourism in 2021, mostly in the third quarter of 2021. However, around 20% of experts suggest the rebound could occur only in 2022.

Travel restrictions are seen as the main barrier standing in the way of the recovery of international tourism, along with slow virus containment and low consumer confidence. The lack of coordinated response among countries to ensure harmonized protocols and coordinated restrictions, as well as the deteriorating economic environment, were also identified by experts as important obstacles for recovery.



# Iran begins production of new anti-corona medicine

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — Iran has launched a production line for a medicine effective in the treatment of coronavirus, IRIB reported on Tuesday.

The Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam unveiled three raw pharmaceuticals and a new anti-coronavirus drug called Ivermectin, which had been previously imported.

The Headquarters previously unveiled COVIRAN BAREKAT, the first coronavirus vaccine made by Iranian researchers, on December 29, 2020.

Iran also produced drugs confirmed to be effective in the coronavirus treatment, including, Remdesivir, Tocilizumab.

Mohammad Reza Shanehsaz, head of the Food and Drug Administration, said in January 2019 that the Iranian pharmaceutical industry and scientists are capable of producing any kind of medicine over a two-year period.



Health Minister Saeed Namaki said in December 2019 that some 97 percent of the whole medicine consumed in the country is produced domestically and only 3 percent is imported.

## COVID-19 daily new cases and mortalities

In a press briefing on Tuesday, Health Ministry's spokesperson Sima-Sadat Lari confirmed 5,917 new cases of COVID-19 infection, raising the total number of infections to 1,342,134. She added that 1,131,883 patients have so far recovered, but 4,272 remain in critical conditions of the disease.

During the past 24 hours, 87 patients have lost their lives, bringing the total number of deaths to 56,973, she added.

So far, 8,634,553 COVID-19 diagnostic tests have been performed in the country.

Lari noted that currently, 10 cities are in high-risk "red" zones, and 23 cities are in the orange zone and 163 in low-risk "yellow" zones.

## Ghana seeking Iranian medical services, medicine



**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — Ghana's Minister of Health, Kwaku Agyeman-Manu, has expressed readiness to use Iran's medical services and pharmaceuticals, IRNA reported on Tuesday.

On a trip to Ghana, Karim Hemmati, head of the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS), visited the IRCS medical centers in this country and discussed enhanced medical cooperation with Ghana's health minister during a meeting on Monday.

In this meeting, the two officials discussed medicine export from Iran to Ghana and obtaining the necessary licenses to sell Iranian pharmaceuticals in Ghana's pharmacies.

Considering the high quality of Iranian medicine, reasonable prices, and also people's trust in these drugs, Ghana's Ministry of Health committed to providing the necessary facilities for the registration and widespread distribution of Iranian medicine in the country.

It was also decided to issue a work permit for Iranian doctors to provide medical services to the people of Ghana.

Hemmati for his part said that IRCS's humanitarian services in Ghana have been going on for more than 30 years, which will continue to be provided to Ghanaians in need.

IRCS operates as a humanitarian organization in the fields of rescue and relief in disasters, health, treatment, and rehabilitation, educating the public, youth, and volunteers, as well as the production of medicine and medical equipment, he explained.

Agyeman-Manu, for his part, appreciated Iran's medical and humanitarian services, expressed readiness to cooperate with the IRCS in the fields of education, especially the

training of doctors and nurses.

"We have long benefited from medical services of Iran, especially during the coronavirus outbreak, and the needy people of our country can always use these services," he further highlighted.

The IRCS polyclinic center includes various departments such as laboratory, pharmacy, radiology and physiotherapy, and general practitioners along with obstetricians, gynecologists, internal medicine, pediatrics, ophthalmologists, and dentists that provide services in the Ghanaian capital.

## IRCS services worldwide

On January 13, Hemmati said that the Iranian Red Crescent Society provides medical services to people in 13 Asian, African, and Latin American countries.

Currently, some 14 medical facilities are offering humanitarian, relief, and health services to the deprived people in 13 countries, including Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, the United Arab Emirates, Bolivia, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Congo, Kenya, Lebanon, Mali, Niger, and Ecuador, he stated.

The important point in establishing medical centers abroad is that all of these centers are self-governing and earn their income by providing services to patients in the mentioned countries," he noted.

## Police disband drug gang near Pakistan border

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — Anti-narcotics police destroyed an armed opium trafficking gang and arrested five traffickers in the southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan sharing borders with Pakistan, IRNA reported on Tuesday.

Over 1.2 tons of opium were discovered in the armed conflict between the police and smugglers in Iranshahr city, Ahmad Taheri, Sistan-Baluchestan's police chief said.

During the armed operation, a Toyota pickup truck and a Peugeot were confiscated from the smugglers; two weapons with 88 bullets and one illegal hunting weapon were also found, he stated.

On January 5, Ijaz Ahmed Shah, Pakistan's Minister for Narcotics Control, has pledged to further strengthen cooperation



with Iran to combat drug trafficking.

Emphasizing the need to strengthen Iran-Pakistan border cooperation, he welcomed Iran's initiatives and proposals to effectively combat drug trafficking.

Iranian anti-narcotics police Majid Karimi and his Pakistani counterpart, Mohammad Arif Malik announced the

agreement to establish an information exchange committee between the Iran-Pakistan anti-narcotics forces.

## Iran's anti-narcotics measures

Iran seized some 1,000 tons of narcotics in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended March 20, 2020), putting the country in first place in the world, Eskandar Momeni, the secretary-general of Iran's drug control headquarters, said in July 2020.

After the Islamic Revolution (in 1979), 3,800 were martyred, 12,000 were wounded and disabled in the fight against drug trafficking, Momeni announced.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has praised Iran's efforts to fight against narcotics trafficking on the occasion of International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking.

The organization also officially announced that the world's first place in the discovery of opium, heroin, and morphine belongs to Iran.

According to UNODC, Iran remains one of the major transit routes for drug trafficking from Afghanistan to European countries and has had a leading role at the global level in the drug-control campaigns.

UNODC World Drug Report 2020 estimates that in 2018, 91 percent of world opium, 48 percent of the world morphine, and 26 percent of the world heroin were seized by Iran.

Iran's drug control efforts led to the seizure of 266 tons of different types of drugs during the period of April-June 2020, a 20 percent increase compared to the same period in 2019.

## Fighting climate crisis made harder by Covid-19 inequality, says WEF

Tackling the existential risk posed by the climate crisis will be made harder by the growing gap between rich and poor triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic, the World Economic Forum has said.

The body that organizes the annual gathering of the global elite in the Swiss town of Davos said warning signs of the threat posed by infectious disease had been ignored for the past 15 years, with disastrous results, the Guardian reported.

Despite the loss of almost 2 million lives to Covid-19, the WEF's global risks report found that environmental issues were considered to pose the biggest danger in the coming years, both in terms of impact and likelihood.

Klaus Schwab, the executive chairman of the WEF, said:

"In 2020, the risk of a global pandemic became reality. As governments, businesses and societies survey the damage inflicted over the last year, strengthening strategic foresight is now more important than ever."

Schwab added: "Growing societal fragmentation – manifested through persistent and emerging risks to human health, rising unemployment, widening digital divides, and youth disillusionment – can have severe consequences in an era of compounded economic, environmental, geopolitical and technological risks."

The WEF report said the Covid-19 pandemic had widened longstanding health, economic and digital disparities, making it harder to secure the international cooperation needed to combat challenges such as environmental degradation.

Extreme weather events were considered to be the top risk measured by the likelihood of them happening, followed by climate action failure, human environmental damage, infectious diseases and bio-diversity loss.

The top five risks in terms of impact were infectious diseases, climate action failure, weapons of mass destruction, biodiversity loss and natural resource crises.

For the first time, the report assessed risks according to when respondents thought they would pose a critical threat to the world. Short-term dangers – which could happen at any time in the next two years – revealed concern about infectious diseases, employment crises, digital inequality and youth disillusionment.

## Unlike foreign rivals, Iranian coronavirus vaccine has no side effects

**1 →** If they know how to produce a vaccine and if their Pfizer company can produce a vaccine, why would they give it to us? Well, they can use it for themselves so that they will not have so many deaths and so many victims. The same is true of England. Therefore, they are not trustworthy. I do not really trust them," the Leader stated.

## Mass vaccination by next 2 months

On Saturday, President Hassan Rouhani said the government is trying its best to start mass vaccination against the coronavirus by the next two months with the priority given to medical staff and high-risk individuals.

The COVAX vaccines will be provided to the country by the end of the current [Iranian calendar] year (March 20) or at the beginning of the next [Iranian calendar] year, Rouhani said at a meeting of the National Headquarters for Coronavirus Control.

Other vaccines have also been purchased which will be available soon, he noted, adding, a co-produced vaccine called "Pasteur" will also be mass-produced during the spring.

Referring to the homegrown vaccines, he announced that two domestic vaccines that have been licensed for the clinical trial will also be available by the next summer.



## 2020 among three hottest years on record, says UN's science agency

The year 2020 – which saw prolonged heat in the Arctic and the busiest Atlantic hurricane season ever – was among the three hottest on record, according to data from the UN's World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

The analysis, which draws on five global temperature datasets, also finds that the period 2011-2020 was the hottest decade on record, and that the six warmest years have all occurred since 2015.

There is little temperature difference between the top three years, which are 2016, 2019 and 2020, according to the WMO, the Independent reported.

In 2020, average temperatures were around 1.2C above levels seen before the start of the industrial era, the analysis finds.

Antonio Guterres, the UN's secretary-general, said in a statement: "The confirmation by the World Meteorological Organization that 2020 was one of the warmest years on record is yet another stark reminder of the relentless pace of climate change, which is destroying lives and livelihoods across our planet."

"Today, we are at 1.2C of warming and already witnessing unprecedented weather extremes in every region and on every continent."

"Making peace with nature is the defining task of the 21st century. It must be the top priority for everyone, everywhere."

The year 2020 was among the hottest despite being a modest La Nina year, said Prof Petteri Taalas, the secretary-general of the WMO. El Nino and La Nina are natural periodic weather events that are part of an irregular inter-annual cycle called the ENSO cycle.

Global temperatures are typically hotter than average in El Nino years and cooler than average in La Nina years. However, the impact of these natural events on global temperatures is increasingly being overwhelmed by the long-term heating trend caused by rising greenhouse gas emissions, scientists say.

"The exceptional heat of 2020 is despite a La Nina event, which has a temporary cooling effect," said Prof Taalas.

"It is remarkable that temperatures in 2020 were virtually on a par with 2016, when we saw one of the strongest El Nino warming events on record. This is a clear indication that the global signal from human-induced climate change is now as powerful as the force of nature."

The WMO's analysis draws on data from NASA, the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service, the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) and a team of UK research groups led by the Met Office.

Nasa and the Copernicus Climate Change Service, which first released its temperature results last week, estimate that 2020 is tied with 2016 as the hottest on record. (In Nasa's dataset, 2020 is just ahead of 2016.)

NOAA and the team led by the Met Office, meanwhile, estimate that 2020 is the second hottest year on record behind 2016. And Japan's meteorological service finds that 2020 is the third hottest year.

The reason why research groups tend to come up with different estimates is related to the methods used to calculate temperature change, Dr Zeke Hausfather, a climate scientist and director of climate and energy at the Breakthrough Institute in California, previously told The Independent.

## LET'S LEARN PERSIAN

(Part 111)

(Source: saadifoundation.ir)

an acquaintance; acquainted ..... آشنا اِسم صیفت

to get acquainted (with) ..... آشنا شْدَن (با)

acquaintance ..... آشنایی اِسم معنی

to learn ..... آموختَن – آموز زَمَی : یاد گرفتن



آدرین، برزیل

to know ..... بَلَد بودن : دانستن

of what occupation ..... چِکارِه

to speak ..... خَرَف زَدَن : صحبت کردن

out, outside ..... خَارِج

foreigner; foreign ..... خَارِجی اِسم صیفت

to teach ..... دَرَس دَاَدَن

to beat ..... زَدَن – زَن

woman; wife ..... زَن



دانیل، انگلستان

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

## 40,000 flood-stricken families received appliance packages

Iran Red Crescent Society (IRCS) volunteer organization provided some 40,000 packages consisting of household appliances to the families affected by flood, head of IRCS volunteer organization Mohammad Nasiri has stated.

Each family receives a package consisting of a refrigerator, oven, TV, blankets and carpets, he added, Mehr reported on Tuesday.

## اعطای لوازم خانگی به ۴۰ هزار خانوار سیل‌زده از سوی سازمان داوطلبان

رئیس سازمان داوطلبان هلال احمر از اعطای بسته های لوازم خانگی شامل ۵ قلم اصلی خانوارها به حدود ۴۰ هزار خانواده آسیب دیده در سیل اخیر خبر داد.

محمد نصیری رئیس سازمان داوطلبان هلال احمر در گفتگو با خبرنگار درباره جزئیات این بسته‌ها نیز توضیح داد: بسته‌های لوازم خانگی که قرار است میان خانواده‌های سیل زده توزیع شود شامل ۵ قلم از جمله یک تخته فرش، گاز، تلویزیون، یخچال و پتو خواهد بود.



INTERNATIONAL DAILY  
www.tehrantimes.com

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» Advertisements Dept.: Telefax: (+98 21) 43051430  
» Public Relations Office: Tel: (+98 21) 88805807  
» Subscription & Distribution Dept.: Tel: (+98 21) 43051603  
» Printed at: Jame Jam Barta Borna - 44197737

Tehrantimes79 Tehrantimes79 Tehrantimes79

No. 18, Bimeh Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran  
P.O. Box: 14155-4843  
Zip Code: 1599814713



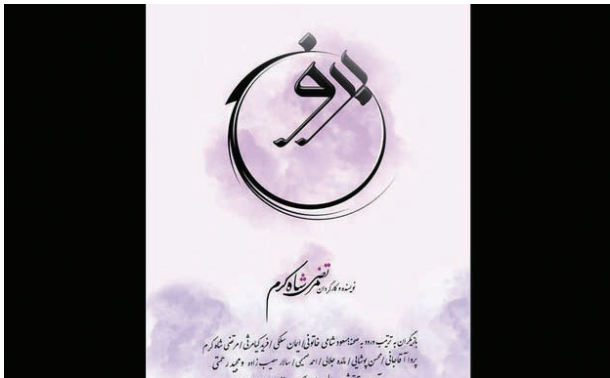
GUIDE TO  
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

When a husband and wife look at each other with love, Allah looks at both of them with mercy.

Prophet Muhammad (S)

## Play on top IRGC commander Borunesi to go on stage at City Theater Complex

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — A play about the life story of Abdolhossein Borunesi, a senior commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, will go on stage at the Sayeh Hall of Tehran's City Theater Complex on Thursday.



A poster for the play "Borunesi", which will be directed by Morteza Shahkaram at the Sayeh Hall of the Tehran's City Theater Complex.

Borunesi was martyred during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war. His military life as a soldier during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah and his activities during the Islamic Revolution and post-revolution life will be shown in the play, which will be directed by Morteza Shahkaram.

A major part of the play will portray Borunesi as the commander of Javad ul-Aemah (AS) Brigade 18, an IRGC combat unit that took part in Operation Badr in March 1985.

Borunesi was martyred during the operation and his soldiers failed to return his remains. However, some of his personal effects, including his ID tag, were excavated 27 years after his death along with a skeleton in the area where the operation had been carried out.

Mohsen Pushai, Masud Shami-Khatuni, Parva Aqajani, Farid Kiamarsi, Iman Solgi, Ahmad Samimi, Sala Mosayebzadeh, Majid Rahmati and Shahkaram himself are the members of the cast.

The play is from a collection of plays on Iranian veterans martyred during the Iran-Iraq war, which was unveiled by the General Office for Dramatic Arts of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance at Tehran's City Theater Complex in February 2020.

The collection titled "The Bright Pen" contains four books, each of which is comprised of two plays.

Book one contains "Or Not Being" by Kamran Shahlai and "All My Brothers" by Reza Goshtasb. The second book has "Heliborne" by Mohsen Azimi and "Season of Red Sapphire" by Neda Sabeti.

"From Behind His Shoulders" by Mehdi Nasiri and "Borunesi" by Shahkaram are the plays in the third book of the collection. Book four includes "A Drum That Trembled Underfoot" by Maryam Mansuri and "Scarf" by Ladan Shirmard.

## TISFF picks 63 films for intl. competition

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — A lineup of 63 short films from 19 countries will be competing in the international section of the 37th Tehran International Short Film Festival (TISFF), which will open today.

The films are coming from France, India, the U.S., Spain, Germany, Ghana, China, Czech, Poland, Italy, Turkey, Australia, Bulgaria, Denmark, Russia, South Africa, Belgium, Kazakhstan and Iran.

All the nine movie theaters at the Iran Mall, a new major trade center in Tehran, have been dedicated to the festival, which will be running for five days with a limited number of visitors.

The short films will also stream online for filmgoers during the event, and winners will be announced on January 25.

In a press release published on Saturday, the deputy director of the center, Akbar Tashakorinia, said that the Cineplex of the center will dedicate all its energy to better host the festival.

"I think the festival is an important event for Iran's film industry. It is a festival to discover and introduce talents, and this is the first time the mall is hosting a festival and we hope we can do our best while we try to observe the health protocols and social distancing during the event," he remarked.

Mohammad-Mehdi Asgarpur, Mohammadreza Delpak, Nasser Safarian, Esmail Monsef, Bahram Tavakkoli, Ruhollah Hejazi, Roqiyeh Tavakkoli, Ashkan Rahgozar and Hamidreza Lotfian are the jury members for the national competition.

# Art exclusively for dealers' benefit at auctions

→1 His "Memories of Hope", a diptych gouache and colored pencil created on cardboard in 2020, was the most expensive work sold at the auction, fetching 120 billion rials (about \$550,000 based on Iran's free-market exchange rate: \$1 = 221,000 rials).

Part of the controversies aroused over the authenticity of the artwork as people in social media accused Aghdashlu of copying "The Duke and Duchess of Urbino", a diptych by the Italian painter of the Early Renaissance, Piero della Francesca.

Due to the allegations, highly critical comments have been made about the auction's decision to select the work by Aghdashlu.

Some of the people have said that to respect public opinion, it would have been better that the auction had not selected any works by the artist for this year's sale.

"Showcasing or offering an artwork from an artist during an exhibition or auction doesn't imply a comment about the moral conduct the artist; this is a rule all over the world," Tehran Auction director Alireza Sami-Azar, who is also the founder of the auction, told the Persian service of Khabaronline.

He said that the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance had earlier approved all the artworks offered at the auction.

"Beyond all the rumors and allegations, what we know about Mr. Aghdashlu is that no plaintiff has filed a lawsuit against him, but he has sued some people for defamation of character," he noted.

Like any newly-established organization, the Tehran Auction has had shortcomings in its mission over the past nine years following its establishment.

It was set up by Sami-Azar, a former director of the Tehran Museum of



Auctioneer Hossein Pakdel (R) takes a bid for the sale of an artwork during the 10th Tehran Auction at the Parsian Azadi Hotel in Tehran on January 11, 2019. (ISNA/Kimia Nik)

Contemporary Art, "to introduce the best of Iranian art ranging from established and emerging Iranian artists to Iranian art collectors and the global audience."

"It is an endeavor to fulfil the increasing interest in modern and contemporary Iranian art, and to facilitate the acquisition of the best quality works of various genres. It also aims to support the domestic art market as a key basis for the international market."

However, some experts do not take a very positive view of the organization.

"The Tehran Auction throws the art market into disorder in one day, causing the artists to lose their true position," Bahram

Kalhornia, the director of the Vard Gallery in Tehran, told the Persian service of IRNA earlier in 2020.

"Unfortunately, overestimating artworks by a number of emerging artists at the auction resulted in a misunderstanding by the artists who, unconventionally, increased the price of their artworks after each sale of the Tehran Auction," he added.

Kalhornia noted that the auction was not successful in its mission to introduce Iran's premier art and said, "The auction has been planned only according to the interests of a certain minority, therefore, it can never turn into a national event that would include all Iranian artists."

He added that the auction has privileged a certain group of artists, and this attitude has caused unreasonable competition among the gallery owners, who are unable to compete in a public market.

However, he viewed the auction as a matter of necessity, and said that the role of the auction in raising people's awareness of artworks is undeniable.

He proposed that a national treasury for artworks should be set up under the supervision of a council of artists, collectors and other visual art activists to prevent any disorder in the auction.

Lili Golestan, director of Golestan Gallery in Tehran, also confirmed the misunderstanding by the emerging artists, and said the artists do not know the difference between an auction and an ordinary art showcase.

"Pricing at auctions cannot be considered as a criterion for the prices in the galleries' market," she noted and added, "The artists should realize that no miracle has occurred in the quality of their works in the aftermath an auction."

The Tehran Auction has always been accused of colluding with galleries, artists and dealers to select and offer artworks. The challengers also allege that artists collude with dealers to sell their artworks at higher prices.

However, Golestan denied the accusations, "An expert team scrutinizes artworks, and due to their superior technical knowledge of the market, they choose the artworks that have a better chance to be sold."

Sami-Azar had previously said that the Tehran Auction would exclude an artwork if the organizers discover any collusion between artists, dealers and collectors in the sales.

## Neyanban virtuoso Mohsen Sharifian introduces electronic bagpipe



This picture shows a lianic, a Persian electronic bagpipe introduced by neyanban virtuoso Mohsen Sharifian.

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Neyanban virtuoso Mohsen Sharifian is introducing an electronic version of the Persian instrument.

The instrument named "Lianic" takes its name from Lian, Sharifian's band that has performed many concerts across the world.

The instrument is scheduled to be unveiled at a coffee shop in Bushehr, the southern Iranian city that is the hometown of the Lian ensemble.

"Due to the sanctions that make access to similar foreign instruments difficult, we decided to design and make an Iranian electronic neyanban," Sharifian said in a statement published on Tuesday.

"Lianic is a localized instrument similar to what is used in Europe by musicians and learners during their rehearsals," he added.

"One of the problems that makes learning an instrument difficult is the learner's inability to control the volume of the instrument, something that causes annoyance for the people living nearby," he stated.

"Due to its louder sound, the neyanban exhibits this problem markedly, so much so that it becomes virtually impossible to learn or practice on the instrument in an

apartment or in other confined places," he added.

"Thus, with contributions from my dear friend Mohammad Behifard, we designed and made an electronic neyanban, which allows the learners and players to perform wherever they want," he noted.

He said that the lianic is an appropriate instrument for finger exercises and learning rhythms and melodies, and doesn't require tuning.

The album "Music of Kish Island" featuring the folk music of Kish Island in the Persian Gulf was released in early January.

The collection contains 19 tracks recorded and performed based on extensive research by Sharifian.

He performed at the William Kennedy Piping Festival in the Irish town of Armagh in November 2019.

His group also gave a concert in the Indian city of Mumbai during an Iranian festival presenting art and cultural performances from the southern Iranian city of Bushehr under the title "From Bushehr to Mumbai".

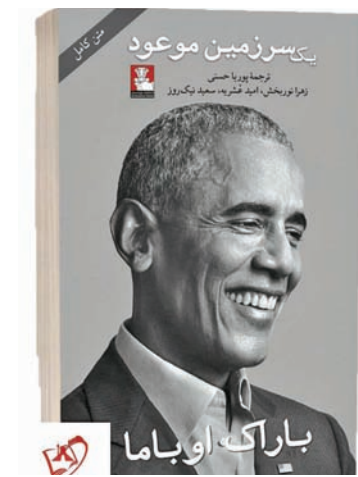
## Barack Obama's "A Promised Land" comes into Iranian bookstores

**CULTURE d e s k** **TEHRAN** — A Persian translation of "A Promised Land" by Barack Obama has recently been published by Mehr-Andish Publications in Tehran.

The book has been translated into Persian by Puria Hassani, Zahra Nurbakhsh, Omid Oshriyeh and Saeid Nikruz. Mehdi Sojudi-Moqaddam is the editor of the book.

The book contains a riveting, deeply personal account of history in the making—from the president who inspired us all to believe in the power of democracy.

In the stirring, highly anticipated first volume of his presidential memoirs, Barack Obama tells the story of his improbable odyssey from a young man searching for his identity to the leader of the free world, describing in strikingly personal detail both his political education and the landmark moments of the first term of his historic presidency—a



Front cover of the Persian translation of Barack Obama's "A Promised Land".

time of dramatic transformation and turmoil.

Obama takes readers on a compelling journey from his earliest political aspirations to the pivotal Iowa caucus victory that demonstrated the power of grassroots activism to the watershed night of November 4, 2008, when he was elected 44th president of the United States, becoming the first African American to hold the nation's highest office.

Reflecting on the presidency, he offers a unique and thoughtful exploration of both the awesome reach and the limits of presidential power, as well as singular insights into the dynamics of U.S. partisan politics and international diplomacy. Obama brings readers inside the Oval Office and the White House Situation Room, and to Moscow, Cairo, Beijing and points beyond.

The readers are privy to his thoughts as he assembles his cabinet, wrestles

with a global financial crisis, takes the measure of Vladimir Putin, overcomes seemingly insurmountable odds to secure passage of the Affordable Care Act, clashes with generals about U.S. strategy in Afghanistan, tackles Wall Street reform, responds to the devastating Deepwater Horizon blowout, and authorizes Operation Neptune's Spear, which leads to the death of Osama bin Laden.

This beautifully written and powerful book captures Obama's conviction that democracy is not a gift from on high but something founded on empathy and common understanding and built together, day by day.

Obama is the author of two previous New York Times bestselling books, "Dreams from My Father" and "The Audacity of Hope", and the recipient of the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize. He lives in Washington D.C. with his wife, Michelle.

## Tehran virtual book fair kicks off

**CULTURE d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The virtual edition of the Tehran Book Fair was inaugurated in a ceremony held at the Iran Book and Literature House on Tuesday.

The ceremony was attended by Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi, Iran Book and Literature House director Ayyub Dehqankar, and Union of Tehran Publishers and Booksellers director Hooman Hassanpur.

Speaking at the ceremony, Hassanpur said, "The book fair is usually held to support publishers and booksellers, and due to the pandemic, we focused more on the supportive role of the event this year."

"This is the first time we are holding a virtual book fair and we might face some shortages and difficulties, however, we will do our best and will review the process day by day," he said.

Deputy Culture Minister for Cultural Affairs Mohsen Javadi, also present at the ceremony, called the virtual book fair a bookshop and even more a cultural venue.

"The book fair offers a greater facility and a simpler way for purchasing books. The virtual space has more capacity, and if we had initiated the project we could even have more foreign publishers in the fair this year. However, we hope we can help promote book reading," Javadi said.

According to the director of the international section of



Home page of the Tehran Book Fair.

the fair, Shiva Vakilmaslani, 110 publishers have registered in the international section of the festival, 80 of which are foreign publishers and 30 are Iranian publishers.

The culture minister was the next who made a short speech at the ceremony.

"The publishing industry had a great loss during the coronavirus era in Iran and in the world. However, book

reading has increased during the pandemic," he said.

He called the virtual book fair a new experience that can be a valuable event.

"The virtual space has helped the publishing industry. E-book and podcasts have helped promote book reading in this space," he said.

"The economy of the virtual book fair is also of high significance. Publishers from other cities had more problems in attending the fair in Tehran while in this online book fair they can easily participate and there will be more space to compete.

"The world of today is the world of data, and the more knowledge and power we have, the better we can reinforce cultural movements," he concluded.

The fair will officially begin its bookselling process on Wednesday and will be running until January 25.

The publishers are from different countries including Spain, Indonesia, Columbia and Senegal, some of which are attending the Tehran Book Fair for the first time," she remarked.

Last year, the 33rd edition of Iran's most important cultural event was scheduled to be held in April and Turkey was slated to be the guest of honor, however, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance canceled the fair due to a massive rise in the death toll from coronavirus in the country.