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Some \$1.7b proposed for corona-affected tourism businesses *Page 6*

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Ex-Iranian diplomats: JCPOA must start from the point Trump quit it

TEHRAN - Some 41 former Iranian diplomats have issued a statement expressing their views concerning the election of Joe Biden as the U.S. president and his promise to rejoin the JCPOA, suggesting that the nuclear deal must exactly start exactly from the point that Donald Trump withdrew from it.

"Despite United States violation of commitments and inaction of Europe with regard to the JCPOA commitments over the last three years and by considering the fact that

some people in Iran are still critical of the JCPOA", Iran has remained committed to the JCPOA, according to the statement.

The former diplomats noted in their statement, "If the U.S. administration is willing to take trust-building and positive steps toward Iran, it should know that returning to the JCPOA will exactly start from the point that the Trump administration pulled out of the deal and breached the JCPOA commitments."

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'Iran's gas industry nearly self-sufficient'

TEHRAN - Head of National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) said the country's gas industry currently has almost no dependence on foreign sources for meeting its equipment needs, Shana reported.

"Fortunately, we have been able to take very positive steps for indigenizing the technology and knowledge for the construction of the equipment needed in the gas industry and currently we have the least dependence on foreign sources in this regard," Hassan Montazer Torbati stated.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the Iran Oil Show, Torbati said: "over the past years, the issue of supplying chemicals, mechanical parts and instrumentation has been pursued seriously in the country, and today we are happy to announce that in areas such as sheet production for gas pipes, which we had some problems, domestic production of metal sheets is on the agenda of our pipe production companies."

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Intl. Silk Road calligraphy exhibition opens in Tehran

TEHRAN - An exhibition of calligraphy works selected from the First Raqs-e Qalam International Exhibition of the Silk Road Calligraphy opened at the Iranian Academy of Arts in Tehran on Friday with a limited number of visitors.

Calligraphy works by 203 artists from 30 countries have been showcased at the First Raqs-e Qalam Interna-

tional Exhibition and Conference of the Silk Road Calligraphy in a virtual exhibition, which officially opened on January 20 in the northeastern Iranian city of Mashhad.

The Iranian National Commission for UNESCO is the main organizer of the exhibition.

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Education for COVID-19 generation

BY FARANAK BAKHTIARI
As the global pandemic lurches toward a second year, numerous challenges and threats are targeting humanity, especially the education of over 1.5 billion students whose learning has been hampered due to school closures.

With restrictions imposed to break the transmission chain, many nations across the globe announced school closure, while the full impact of which will only become clear over time.

On the one hand, the pandemic has shined a harsh light on the vulnerabilities and weaknesses, risks that follow from the privatization of education, and more importantly the world's unpreparedness for a massive shift to distance learning.

On the other hand, online education is available for those who can access it, which caused a major problem for children living in poverty worldwide, who often rely on the physical setting of their schools to provide educational materials and guidance.

Globally, more than 570 million students - 33 percent of the enrolled students worldwide - were affected by countrywide school closures in 30 nations (as of November 2020). The number of children living in multidimensional poverty is estimated to have soared by 15 percent - an additional 150 million children by mid-2020, according to UNICEF.

How pandemic changed education in Iran?

Each year, Iranian students start the school year on September 23, after a three-month summer vacation, while this year, in the light of the epidemic, all educational centers in Iran have been closed since late February 2020, and education was followed in three forms of in-person, virtual, and television-based.

In order for students to keep in touch with their studies, the Ministry of Education launched a homegrown mobile application on April 9, called SHAD, providing students with distance learning programs. Over 60 percent of students and 94 percent of teachers attended 64 percent of classes through the SHAD app, whose acronym in Persian translates as the Students Education Network.

Moreover, the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) also began to broadcast televised educational programs on a daily basis after school closures.

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Syria writes to UN on Israel air raids, stresses right to self-defense

Syria has written to the United Nations in protest at a new Israeli aerial assault that killed four members of a family near the western city of Hama, saying Damascus reserves the right to defend the Arab state's sovereignty and civilians against such acts of aggression.

The Syria Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Friday sent letters to the UN secretary-general, the UN Security Council and the Human Rights Council in the wake of the Israeli missile strikes, which hit targets in the Hama Province in the early hours of the day.

Syrian air defenses downed most of the missiles, but the projectiles that hit the residential areas killed a man, a woman, and their two children.

"Four other citizens of the same family were wounded, and a number of homes belonging to innocent civilians were destroyed," the letters said.

According to Press TV, the ministry further

said the Israeli attacks constitute a flagrant violation of Syria's sovereignty and international law.

It also slammed the international community, especially those who call themselves advocates of human rights, for remaining tight-lipped in the face of Israeli aggression, saying the deafening silence only emboldens the occupying regime in Tel Aviv to keep up its attacks "in suspicious coincidence with the crimes of terrorist groups."

The Syrian ministry further called on the United Nations and its Human Rights Council to assume their responsibilities and condemn Israeli raids, which pose a serious threat to regional security and stability.

Syria, it added, reserves the legitimate right to defend its citizens and national sovereignty via all legitimate means, which are guaranteed by international law and conventions.

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Americans view other Americans as biggest threat to their way of life: Poll

Americans today increasingly view "other people in America, and domestic enemies" as the biggest threat to their way of life, a new poll has found, underlining how deep the political and cultural divides run in the United States.

Most Americans - 54 percent - now believe that other Americans pose the biggest threat to their way of life as opposed to foreign adversaries and economic forces, according to a new CBS News/YouGov survey.

Unlike other issues, there is bipartisan agreement on the most significant challenge to the nation's way of life, with 53 percent of Democrats, 56 percent of Republicans, and 57 percent of Independents describing others in America as the biggest risk.

Only one in five Americans surveyed chose economic forces as a greater threat and a fewer 17 percent said natural disasters and viruses were a key concern to them.

Remarkably, the poll also revealed that only a meager 8 percent of Americans believe that other countries pose the most imminent threat to the American way of life, an indication of how disconnected the U.S. government's perception of threats has actually been from that of the public.

The survey was conducted prior to the inauguration of President Joe Biden and marked the end of Donald Trump's presidency, which saw thousands of his supporters lay a violent siege to the U.S. Capitol, enraged by his claims that the election was stolen.

While a majority of Americans said they were optimistic about Biden as president, they are still bracing for more political violence over the coming years. Slightly more than half of Americans - 51 percent - said they believed violence would increase in the U.S. as opposed to 18 percent who said violence would decrease.

Continued on page 5

Baghdad explosions and the plausible new U.S. orders for the old wounds

On Thursday morning, only a day after the inauguration of U.S. President Joe Biden, Baghdad witnessed twin suicide bombings in a busy market that killed 32 people and wounded more than 100 others. The attack took place in the same area in 2018 shortly after then-Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi declared victory over the terrorist group. As expected, ISIS has claimed responsibility for the attack.

This bloody blast at the same location which claimed lives of many civilians nearly 3 years ago

under the same pattern is worth deliberating; given to the fact that new president of the U.S. has declared to reduce American military presence in Iraq as well as Afghanistan.

Maybe the recent Baghdad bombings only four kilometers from the U.S. embassy compound, could be the Biden administration's first challenge let alone having certain implication for Iran and other regional players. In fact, Biden's team is dominated by old hands from the Obama administration would prob-

ably return to the region with new orders to revisit old issues.

Biden admin: Renowned fellows at Baghdad

Maybe, it remains unclear the kind of approach the new U.S. administration will adopt towards Iraq but the new president has a long history of involvement in the oil-rich country and a controversial track record since the early 2000s.

Continued on page 5

Lebanon and the vexatious politics

BY ABIR BASSAM

We still remember the "demonstrations" that dominated the streets of Beirut on October 17, 2019. It began as an attempt for political and economic reforms. However, it shifted its course to become property damage that crippled the country. Later, the course of events proved beyond doubt that the riots were provoked by embassies that have no interests except caring for the security of the Zionist regime and sowing seeds of discord among the Lebanese.

The "demonstrations", which worsened the economic situation in the country, were one of the reasons for the massive spread of the coronavirus epidemic among the people, in which the risks of infection were ignored, and the health and economic conditions were exacerbated, and the "political malicious" policy emerged.

By the end of 2019, the pandemic, COVID-19, was a heavy guest on Lebanon. And the government of Hassan Diab was about to face two major challenges: the collapsing economy and the pandemic. Lebanon has reached third place in the world in the ratio of victims of the epidemic, after the United States and Britain.

Recently, criticism was sharply directed towards the government and the Ministry of Health over the necessity to play its role in containing the deadly disease. Meanwhile, a provocative political discourse was released. The discourse was used by certain parties that revealed a high level of political maliciousness.

Actually, the criticism against the performance of the Ministry of Health by several political opponents made the matters worse.

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Army officials brief media on drills

Army officials including Major General Abolrahim Mousavi, the commander-in-chief of the Army, and Ground Force Commander Kiomars Heidari held a press conference on Saturday, briefing reporters about the details of the military exercise that the Ground Force held along the Makran coasts. The press briefing was held at the site of the drill codenamed Eghtedar 99 (Authority 99). The Ground Force tested new indigenous electro-optic system in real combat conditions against mock enemy targets during the war game.

Iran from the view of the Atlantic Council: A quick review

By Azin Sahabi

Advice to Iran as a new administration takes over the White House
Jan 14, 2021

Barbara Slavin: *Director of the Future of Iran Initiative at the Atlantic Council*

Given Biden's inclination to return to JCPOA, Iran "should seize the opportunity to not only resume compliance with the deal, but to establish a stronger foundation for Iran's relations with its neighbors and the wider world."

Slavin claims:

"Iran should reverse the escalation of the nuclear program began in 2019 in reaction to the U.S. withdrawal. This needs to be sequenced with U.S. sanctions relief and Biden officials and outside experts are already thinking about scenarios and timetables.

Iranians should also signal to the Biden administration that it accepts the principle of follow-on negotiations to address the deficiencies of the JCPOA becoming even more apparent due to the Trump's withdrawal.

A parallel process of regional dialogue and de-escalation with Persian Gulf Arab partners and, indirectly, Israel and Turkey are necessary

Joining anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism regulations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is necessary for Tehran to enable major multilateral corporations to invest in or even trade with Iran.

The end of the Trump era and the beginning of the Biden offer Iran and its neighbors the best opportunity they have had in years to ease conflict and tension albeit it will take political will on all sides.



Dose Russia really want a U.S. return to the Iran deal?
Jan 19, 2021

Arman Mahmoudian and Giorgio Cafiero
Arman Mahmoudian is a PhD candidate in International Relations at the University of South Florida, and a research associate at the Center for Strategic and Diplomatic Studies. Arman is also an analyst at Gulf State Analytics.

Giorgio Cafiero is CEO of Gulf State Analytics.

The analysts believe:

After Trump withdrew from the JCPOA, neither Beijing nor Moscow offered significant assistance to the Islamic Republic of Iran in practice. In fact, their banks reduced their transactions with Iran rather than risk loss of business in the U.S. Thus, Biden's intent to return to the JCPOA has mixed implications for Moscow:

Arms sales to Iran could negatively affect Moscow's security-economic cooperation with Gulf Cooperation Council states and Israel, but could also provide Russia with additional leverage over Persian Gulf Arab monarchies in the oil and gas market at the same time.

Since the intensification of friction in Iran's relations with the West, Moscow has used its relationship with Tehran as leverage over Western countries. Therefore, if the U.S. and Europe's threat perception of Tehran eases, Moscow's 'Iran card' would slowly lose its significance.

Oil and gas account for almost 60 percent of Russia's GDP, given the fact that Iran has the world's fourth-largest combined oil and gas reserves, the return of Iran to global energy markets could constitute a severe challenge to Russia's oil- and gas-dependent economy.

Although Moscow is unlikely to actively take measures to try to prevent Washington from re-entering the JCPOA, the Russians would be in a strong position to benefit from a continuation of the U.S. remaining a non-party to the deal. At the same time, the Kremlin understands that even if Biden's administration brings the U.S. back to the JCPOA, Iranians will work hard to try to ensure that the Islamic Republic is not vulnerable to unilateral U.S. actions against Tehran.

Rejoining the Iran nuclear deal: Not so easy

January 2021

Policy Brief

By Brian O'toole, Director of Sanctions and Screening, Atlantic Council Princeton University

The policy brief notes:

Given the challenges and complexities with the seemingly simple "rejoin the JCPOA", the timing and conditions of accomplishing that are not quite clear. It may be that rejoining cannot happen for many months. Or it may be that the U.S. and Iran need to find some steps short of a full JCPOA return that defuse tension and create the conditions for more fulsome negotiations over what a return means. And it may be that both sides need to come to some understanding of a path forward on the negotiations over the litany of other concerns with Iranian malfeasance."

Why Iran could top Biden's West Asia agenda

Jan 20, 2021

By Larry Luxner, a Tel Aviv-based freelance journalist

The journalist notes:

"Iran's recent nuclear advances is the most pressing issue for Joe Biden's administration. This demands attention immediately, and Biden will make that a critical priority of his. Iran is trying to kick the United States from the region and bring China and Russia to fill that void. Now, the most important thing for Biden is come to an internal cohesion about what the remaining U.S. interests are in the region, what its strategic ends are."

Luxner adds: "If a nuclear deal were renegotiated, the Biden administration might allow Iran to resume oil sales. As for how such a development would affect regional geopolitics, it would be a game-changer in the energy market. Iran is expected to release more oil to the market even before any negotiations on a new nuclear deal. But in the context of a global market of ninety-three million barrels a day, it's relatively small."

The tale of snail-pace diplomacy;

and the narrowing window to revive JCPOA

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iran is moving in the direction of implementing a nuclear law that will make it difficult for the United States and its allies to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

On December 10, the official gazette of record for the Islamic Republic of Iran published a 9-article law that set the stage for Iran to substantially increase its nuclear activities, including raising the level of uranium enrichment to up to 20% in early January.

The nuclear law, officially called “Strategic Action to Lift Sanctions and Protect Nation’s Rights,” outlines a step-by-step strategy for Iran to force the West into reconsidering its sanctions policy against Iran by increasing nuclear activities. It stipulates that the Iranian government should take certain nuclear measures such as raising the level of uranium enrichment to 20% and suspending the voluntary implementation of the Additional Protocol to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in few months if the Western parties failed to honor their obligations under the JCPOA.

The sixth article of the law clearly stipulates that if the remaining parties to the JCPOA — Germany, France, China, Russia and the UK — failed to facilitate Iran’s oil exports and the return of Iranian oil revenues in two months, the Iranian government would be obliged to stop inspections beyond the International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards, including the voluntarily implementation of the Additional Protocol.

On January 4, the Iranian government started to implement the nuclear law by increasing uranium enrichment to 20%. On this day, spokesman for the Iranian government Ali Rabiei told Iranian media outlets that the country resumed 20% uranium enrichment at the Fordow nuclear plant, where Iran is banned to do any enrichment activities under the terms of the nuclear deal.



“The process of producing enriched uranium to 20% purity has begun. And the first product of UF6 enriched uranium will be produced in a few hours,” Rabiei said at the time.

According to Rabiei, the government of Hassan Rouhani made the decision to raise the level of uranium enrichment in line with the parliamentary nuclear law. He pointed out that Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has issued an order stipulating that the nuclear law that was passed by the Iranian Parliament in early November should be implemented.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif also stated that the resumption of 20% uranium enrichment was done in line with the nuclear law.

“We resumed 20% enrichment, as legislated by our Parliament. IAEA has been duly notified. Our remedial action conforms fully with Para 36 of JCPOA, after years of non-compliance by several other JCPOA participants. Our measures are fully reversible upon FULL

compliance by ALL,” the chief Iranian diplomat said in a tweet hours after Iran resumed the 20% uranium enrichment.

Iran’s move to raise the level of uranium enrichment was another sign that Iran is determined to resume its nuclear program should the U.S. failed to lift its economic sanctions against Iran. It also indicated that Iranians are running out of patience, according to the Iranian foreign minister.

In an article published by Foreign Affairs Magazine on Friday, Zarif said Iran has exercised strategic restraint over the past few years but it is now reviewing its options to change the situation.

“During the past four years, we have, sadly, come very close to catastrophe several times. Iran has exhibited strategic restraint throughout this period. But Iranians are running out of patience, as legislation our parliament passed in December clearly indicates: the new law requires Iran to boost uranium enrichment and limit UN inspections if sanctions are not

removed by February,” Zarif wrote.

He implied that if the Biden administration and its European allies don’t hurry to salvage the nuclear deal, they will lose the opportunity to redress what Trump destroyed over the course of his administration.

“The window of opportunity for the new U.S. administration will not be open forever. The initiative squarely rests with Washington. The Biden administration’s first step ought to be to seek to redress—rather than attempt to exploit—Trump’s dangerous legacy of maximum failure. It can begin by removing all sanctions imposed since Trump assumed office and seek to reenter and abide by the 2015 nuclear deal without altering its painstakingly negotiated terms,” Zarif said.

The U.S. can still save the JCPOA but the Biden administration needs to know that the more it drags its feet on reviving the JCPOA, the more it moves away from getting the deal revived. Iranians are fed up with the U.S. non-compliance with their commitments. They are like a soldier having his hand on the trigger, waiting for the commander to issue an order to open fire. And the order may be issued in February when the Iranian government will be required by law to expel the international inspectors.

Ahmad Amirabadi, a member of the Parliament Presiding Board, said in early January that will definitely expel the IAEA inspectors if sanctions against the Islamic Republic are not lifted by February 21.

“Iran will undoubtedly stop the voluntary implementation of Additional Protocol if the sanctions against Iran, especially in finance, banking and oil sectors are not lifted by the mentioned day. This is a law passed by the Iranian Parliament. The government is committed to implementing this law,” he warned. “We gave the U.S. a one-month opportunity. The new U.S. administration will take the office on January 21.”

Zarif calls on U.S. to choose comity over failed policies of Trump

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has said that the United States has to make a fundamental choice to make under President Joe Biden.

“The new U.S. administration has a fundamental choice to make: It can embrace the failed policies of its predecessor, and continue down the path of contempt for international cooperation & international law. Or, it can reject failed assumptions & seek peace and comity,” he said in a tweet on Friday.

Zarif also shared his latest article that was published by Foreign Affairs Magazine. In this article, the chief Iranian diplomat outlined Iran’s view on the possible U.S. return to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

“The new administration in Washington has a fundamental choice to make. It can embrace the failed policies of the Trump administration and continue down the path of disdain for international cooperation and international law—a contempt powerfully evident in the United States’ decision in 2018 to unilaterally withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal, that had been signed by Iran, China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the European Union just three years earlier. Or the new administration can shed the failed assumptions of the past and seek to promote peace and comity in the region,” the Iranian foreign minister noted.

He said the U.S. should remove all the sanctions imposed by Trump against Iran. In exchange, Iran will reverse its nuclear measures.

“The incoming Biden administration can still salvage the nuclear agreement, but only if it can muster the genuine political will in Washington to demonstrate that the United States is ready to be a real partner in collective efforts,” Zarif wrote. “The [Biden] administration should begin by unconditionally removing, with full effect, all sanctions imposed, reimposed, or relabeled since Trump took office. In turn, Iran would reverse all the remedial measures it has taken in the wake of Trump’s withdrawal from the nuclear deal. The remaining signatories to the deal would then decide



whether the United States should be allowed to reclaim the seat at the table that it abandoned in 2018.”

According to Zarif, the Biden administration can still salvage the Iran nuclear deal, but the window for saving the nuclear agreement is narrowing, and that it’s up to the U.S. to take the initiative to prevent the JCPOA from collapsing.

“The window of opportunity for the new U.S. administration will not be open forever,” Zarif warned. “The initiative squarely rests with Washington. The Biden administration’s first step ought to be to seek to redress—rather than attempt to exploit—Trump’s dangerous legacy of maximum failure.”

The Iranian foreign minister also called on Washington to remove the sanctions Donald Trump imposed on Iran, saying that removing these sanctions will open new possibilities in the region.

“It can begin by removing all sanctions imposed since Trump assumed office and seek to reenter and abide by the 2015 nuclear deal without altering its painstakingly negotiated terms. Doing so will open new possibilities for peace and stability in our region,” Zarif said.

The foreign minister’s article came two days after Biden was inaugurated as the 46th president of the United States. During his election campaign, Biden had vowed to revive the JCPOA from which the Trump

administration withdrew on May 8, 2018, reimposing sweeping economic sanctions on Iran.

However, Biden said he will rejoin the JCPOA only to use it “as a starting point for follow-on negotiations,” which means that Biden may have concluded that reviving the JCPOA in its original form is not enough. The Biden administration is coming under increasing pressure from Washington hawks to pursue follow-on negotiations with Iran over thorny issues such as Iran’s missile program and its regional influence.

But Zarif said that these issues are not up for negotiations. “Iran’s defense and regional policies were not up for discussion, because the West was not prepared to abandon its interference in our region, which has caused such turmoil for decades; nor was the United States—or France or the United Kingdom, for that matter—ready to limit its lucrative arms sales, which have fueled conflict and drained the resources of our region,” he noted.

The foreign minister said Iran is willing to discuss the problems of the region. “But the peoples of the region, not outsiders, must resolve these issues. Neither the United States nor its European allies have the prerogative to lead or sponsor future talks. Rather, the Persian Gulf region needs an inclusive regional mechanism to encourage diplomacy and cooperation and to lower the risk of miscalculation and conflict,” he continued.

The chief Iranian diplomat once again presented Iran’s Hormuz Peace Endeavor, also known as HOPE, which Iran presented to the UN General Assembly in 2019.

Zarif said the region’s countries can use this forum to “address anxieties with confidence-building measures, resolve grievances through dialogue, and engage in mutually beneficial efforts to solve shared problems and safeguard collective interests.”

“HOPE is not a blueprint for the future—any permanent arrangement has to be arrived at collectively by all regional powers. But the proposal reflects Iran’s aspiration for a strong, stable, peaceful, and prosperous community of countries, free from the impositions of regional or global hegemony,” the foreign minister pointed out.

UK hopes Biden would start talks with Iran over new deal: ambassador

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Stephen Hickey, Britain’s ambassador to Iraq, has expressed hope that the new U.S. administration will start talks with Iran about how to strike a new deal with the West Asian country.

In an interview with the Iraqi Rudaw website, Hickey said, “First of all, I would like to say that the UK, as one of the three European signatories, has an important role in the talks about the Iran nuclear deal. We believe that it’s very important to attach importance to that deal. Iran must comply with its obligations under

the deal such as the limits on uranium enrichment. We hope the Biden administration would start talks about how to reach a new nuclear deal.”

The British ambassador said that he is upbeat about hammering out such a deal.

“Personally, I am upbeat about reaching a deal. However, it is not the Iranian nuclear program alone that worries Britain and the allied countries in the region, but the Iranian ballistic missile program and Iran’s role in the region, especially in Iraq as well,” he pointed out.

Hickey hoped that the Biden admin-

istration will deescalate tensions in the region. “I hope that the new administration will be able to reduce the conflicts in the region between Iran and America. We also hope that the start of the dialogue between the three European countries and Iran will be in the coming months or years,” he continued.

U.S. President Joe Biden has expressed willingness to rejoin the Iran nuclear deal — officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) - before and after winning the U.S. presidential election in November. During his elec-

tion campaign, Biden had said that he would rejoin the JCPOA and use it as a starting point for follow-on negotiations with Iran.

Meanwhile, the European signatories to the JCPOA — France, Germany and the UK (E3) — have called for a new deal with Iran, one that would include Iran’s missile program and its regional activities.

Iran strongly rejected the European calls for a “nuclear agreement plus,” saying its missiles and regional activities are non-negotiable.

has said that the Iranian foreign minister will pay a visit to Moscow on January 26 to hold talks with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov.

She added that the two foreign ministers are expected to continue exchanging views on international issues including the situation around the Nagorno-Karabakh region and also the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) as well as the situation in Syria, Afghanistan, and the Persian Gulf region.

Zarif said that the dates of his trips to the Republic of Azerbaijan, Russia, Armenia, and Georgia have already been set and he was waiting the result of his Covid-19 test.

SPORTS

Plucky Saipa edges IPL leaders Esteghlal

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Saipa football team edged past Iran Professional League (IPL) leaders Esteghlal 1-0 here on Saturday.

Hossein Maleki found the back of the net with a powerful strike four minutes into the second half for the Saipa’s plucky kids.

Esteghlal put Saipa under heavy pressure in the second half but failed to capitalize on their chance.

Earlier in the day, Tractor defeated Gol Gohar 2-1 in Sirjan.

Ehsan Haji Saffi put the visiting team in front before the half-time and Younes Shakeri leveled the score from a cross after the hour mark.

Mohammad Abbaszadeh scored the winner in the 76th minute. Esteghlal lead the table with 22 points, followed by Sanat Naft with 21 points and one game in hands.

On Monday, Persepolis will meet Aluminum in Arak and Machine Sazi host Foolad in Tabriz in Matchday 12 of IPL.

Sanat Naft have a chance to move back top of the table with a win over Sepahan in Abadan.

Referee’s decision went against us: Fekri

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Esteghlal football team head coach Mahmoud Fekri says that the referee’s decisions have gone against them.

Saipa football team edged past Iran Professional League (IPL) leaders Esteghlal 1-0 here on Saturday.

Hossein Maleki found the back of the net with a powerful strike four minutes into the second half.

“First of all, I want to congratulate the win to Saipa but we could have won the match. Our players missed their chances,” Fekri said.

“I think the referee’s decisions went against us in this match. Some people are unhappy to see Esteghlal on top of the table,” he added.

Hassan Taftian wins gold at Meeting Elite Indoor

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iranian sprinter Hassan Taftian claimed a gold medal at the 2nd Meeting Elite Indoor in Miramas Friday night.

He won the 60-meter race with a time of 6.68 seconds. French athletes Ryan Zeze and Marvin Rene finished in second and third place respectively, clocking 6.70 seconds.

Taftian, fastest Iranian man, won a quota place for the Tokyo Olympics in the men’s 100-meter by hitting the national record of 10.03 at the IAAF Diamond League meeting in Paris in August 2019.

The 2nd Meeting Elite Indoor was held at the Miramas Stadium.

Iran boxing team to hold joint training camp practice with Syria

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran national boxing team will hold a joint training camp practice with Syria.

The Syrian team entered Tehran Saturday morning to hold a two-week training camp practice with Iran.

The two teams will also meet a friendly match in eight weights in the camp.

It will be Iran’s first joint training camp after the coronavirus epidemic began.

Syria boxing team are among the strongest Asian teams.

Amir Arab appointed head of Tehran’s Zurkhaneh Sports Association

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Amir Arab, former vice-president of the Esteghlal club, has been appointed as head of the Zurkhaneh Sports and Koshti Pahlavani Association of Tehran.

Arab has years of experience working as a manager in Pahavani sports during his career.

The introductory news conference of him and Mohammad Bagheri (Secretary of the Tehran association) was held last week in the presence of the heads and supervisors of Tehran provincial associations at the Araghi Martyr Zurkhaneh in Tehran so that the new era of Tehran’s Zurkhaneh Sports and Koshti Pahlavani association could be officially launched.

Reza Ghoochannejhad scores hat-trick

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Substitute Reza Ghoochannejhad scored three goals against Willem II, helping his team to victory and a solid place in the middle of Eredivisie Friday night.

Never before has a player scored a hat-trick twice as a substitute. Ghoochannejhad managed to achieve this feat after he also scored four times against RKC Waalwijk last season. With the match over Reza is not happy with the status of being a “super sub”, FCUpdate.nl reported.

“You have to be careful, otherwise you will suddenly be a super sub. I don’t want that either”, said the cheerful striker after the match.

Ghoochannejhad enjoyed the game and continued, “Today it was really necessary,” he shared in front of the ESPN camera. “Scoring goals is always nice, today I luckily got a bit more time to show it.” Ghoochannejhad was finally allowed to make an appearance after some time on the bench. “I don’t mean this arrogantly, but I never doubted myself. I didn’t play during a phase, you have to deal with that.”

Captain Bram van Polen was also pleased with the striker’s contribution. “Coincidentally, I called the trainer last week to say that I think he deserves more chances. The boy is doing fantastic in the training sessions, it’s great that it is now coming out.”

Trainer John Stegeman also praised the attacker. “He knows his role, and he is a very clever player.”

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif will start a tour of regional countries on Monday, Iran’s Foreign Ministry said on Saturday.

Saeed Khatibzadeh, spokesman for Iran’s Foreign Ministry, said the chief Iranian diplomat will pay a visit to a number of regional countries to hold talks on a variety of issues.

“The top Iranian diplomat, heading a delegation, is to visit the Azerbaijan Republic, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Georgia and the Republic of Turkey where he will sit down with his opposite numbers as well as other officials of those coun-

Zarif to embark on regional tour on Monday

Point-to-point inflation rate stands at 46.2%

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) has put the country's point-to-point inflation rate at 46.2 percent in the tenth Iranian calendar month of Dey (December 21, 2020-January 19, 2021).

It means that the families have paid an average of 46.2 percent more for purchasing the same package of commodities and services in the tenth month of this year, compared to the same month of the previous year.

According to the SCI, the inflation rate in the twelve-month period ended on January 19, which marks the end of the tenth month, stood at 32.2 percent, rising 1.7 percent from the figure for the twelve-month period ended on the last day of the ninth month.

Central Bank of Iran (CBI) in a statement last April had announced that the annual inflation rate for the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 20) is set to be 22 percent.

The statement published on the website of the CBI read, "Given the adopted policies and taken measures and also taking the country's macro-economic factors into account, the CBI believes that based on the realistic scenarios, the inflation rate in the current year will continue its downward trend."

Last year, CBI Governor Abdolnaser Hemmati had said, "Our goal is curbing inflation rate and no estimation shows an inflation rate of over 20 percent for the next year".

NPC establishes office to develop knowledge-based businesses

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Head of Iran's National Petrochemical Company (NPC) Behzad Mohammadi has announced the establishment of an office of development of knowledge-based businesses in the petrochemical industry.



Making the remarks on the sidelines of a visit to the 25th edition of Iran International Oil, Gas, Refining, and Petrochemical Exhibition (Iran Oil Show) on Saturday, Mohammadi said: "The connection with the country's knowledge-based companies will be strengthened [through this office] in order to further develop the petrochemical industry."

Underlining the valuable capabilities of knowledge-based companies and startups the official added: "Unfortunately, in the past these companies have not been able to connect with the industry, and a proper channel was not provided for them to be in touch with the industry and to offer their capabilities."

Mohammadi stated that the purpose of establishing the mentioned office is to create a platform for the communication between knowledge-based firms and the country's petrochemical companies through NPC, adding: "Fortunately, this goal is currently being achieved and strengthened."

Noting that knowledge-based companies and startups are not financially strong entities, the NPC head continued: "The oil industry has been supporting such companies through setting up an oil and gas technology and innovation park in Rey city (near Tehran) and the Iranian Oil Industry Ventures (IOIV)."

He stressed that the presence of knowledge-based companies in the implementation of petrochemical projects will be very effective, saying: The National Petrochemical Company is strengthening cooperation with these companies to increase their role in the development of petrochemical projects.

He mentioned the signing of research-based deals with four of the country's major universities three years ago and said: "These contracts were also signed in order to develop the technical aspects of the petrochemical operations."

During his visit to the Oil Show, Mohammadi visited the booths of knowledge-based companies, startups, and domestic manufacturers exhibiting in this year's event.

TEDPIX gains 38,000 points on Saturday

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — TEDPIX, the main index of the Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), rose 38,092 points on Saturday, which is the first day of the Iranian calendar week.



The index stood at 1.222 million points at the end of the Saturday trades.

TEDPIX had dropped 3.8 percent in the past Iranian calendar week.

The index stood at 1.183 million points on Wednesday (the last working day of the week).

During the past week, the indices of Iran Khodro Group, Zar Macaron Industrial Group, Parsian Leasing Company, Saipa Company, and National Iranian Copper Industry Company were the most widely followed indices.

TEDPIX had also fallen 6.5 percent in the calendar week ended on January 15.

'Iran's gas industry nearly self-sufficient'

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Elsewhere in his remarks, Torbati described Iran as a very favorable market in the field of the gas industry and said: "This market is also a good platform for domestic producers to introduce and offer their products."

Despite the unjust U.S. sanctions, Iran has made considerable advances in science and technology in almost all areas during the past years, and as one of the main pillars of the country's economy, the oil and gas industry have been at the top of the

mentioned advancements.

Going hand in hand with the oil industry, the country's gas sector has been enjoying drastic technological advances in recent years, and numerous knowledge-based companies, research centers, and institutes have become active to help the industry reach its goals of self-sufficiency.

The growth in the mentioned sector is so fast-pacing that according to Montazer Torbati the country's gas industry will become completely self-sufficient within



the next five years.

Speaking in the opening ceremony of the country's first Gas Tech Show back in December 2019, Montazer Torbati said, "In this process, we completely indigenize

the technology and equipment required in the gas industry so that we won't need to import any technology or equipment in all the industry chain from refining to distribution."

First train of SP phase 14 Refinery to be operational by late Mar.

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The first train of the phase 14 Refinery of Iran's South Pars complex is expected to go operational early next Iranian calendar year (begins on March 21), head of Pars Oil and Gas company (POGC) said.

Speaking on the sidelines of a visit to the 25th edition of Iran International Oil, Gas, Refining, and Petrochemical Exhibition (Iran Oil Show) on Friday, Mohammad Meshkinfam said: "All the 13 onshore refineries of the complex have been completed and only the Phase 14 refinery remains; this refinery's initial production is scheduled to begin early next year."

He stated that all the operations of the first phase of the South Pars gas field development project will be completed by the first half of the next Iranian calendar year 1400.

Engineering studies are also underway for increasing the recovery factor of the South Pars phases and POGC is going to sign a deal for the construction of two 16-megawatt (MW) turbochargers for increasing the recovery factor of the phases in this giant gas field, Meshkinfam added.

POGC is in charge of developing South Pars gas field



which is divided into 24 standard phases in the first development stage. Most of the phases are fully operational at the moment.

Phase 14 development is aimed at producing 56.6 million cubic meters per day of rich gas, 75,000 barrels/day of gas condensate and 400 tons/day of sulfur, and 1 million tons/

'Iran is biggest gasoline producer, exporter in region'

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Managing director of National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC) has said his company is currently the biggest producer and exporter of gasoline in West Asia, Shana reported.

"We are exporting to most of our neighboring countries including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Iraqi Kurdistan," Alireza Sadeq-Abadi said on the sidelines of a visit to the Iran Oil Show exhibition on Saturday.

"In [the Iranian calendar year] 1396 (ended on March 20, 2018), the production of gasoline in our country was 59 million liters per day; the figure reached 107 million liters per day last year, and



today the country's gasoline production capacity is between 107 to 120 million liters per day," the official said.

Iran has achieved this success despite the external pressures and hurdles imposed

by the U.S. sanctions on the country's oil industry, Sadeq-Abadi said.

According to the deputy oil minister, the significant increase in the country's gasoline production and exports comes despite the fact that nearly two years ago Iran was an importer of the strategic product, shipping in 17 million liters per day of gasoline.

Referring to the offering of petroleum products in the country's energy exchange (known as IRENEX), he explained: "Currently, 120 companies are cooperating with us [on the IRENEX]; If there wasn't for the energy exchange this volume of sales to neighboring countries would not have been achieved."

The official further emphasized that informing the public through the energy exchange creates equal conditions and opportunities for transparent competition among the companies active in the field.

Even after the lifting of the sanctions, the offering of petroleum products in the energy exchange should continue, Sadeq-Abadi stressed.

Iran exported over \$1.4 billion worth of gasoline in the first seven months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-October 21, 2020).

The country exported nearly \$490 million worth of the mentioned commodity during the previous Iranian calendar year 1398 (ended on March 19, 2020).

IME' monthly value of trades increases %7

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Over 2,893 tons of commodities worth nearly \$1.5 billion have been traded at Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) during the tenth Iranian calendar month of Dey (December 21, 2020-January 19, 2021).

As reported by the IME's Public Relations Department, the weight of traded commodities also indicated a five-percent growth compared to the previous month.

The exchange hosted trading of 1,176,000 tons of commodities with a trading value of more than \$740 million on its mineral and industrial trading floor.

On this floor the IME sold 1,093,000 tons of steel, 5,160 tons of copper, 30 tons of precious metals concentrate, 480 tons of molybdenum concentrate, 15,955 tons of aluminum, 800 tons of coke, 20,500 tons of zinc dust, 40,000 tons of iron ore concentrate, 300 tons of cast iron and 54 kg of gold bars.

On its oil and petrochemical trading floor, the IME traded more than 1,707,000 tons of commodities worth nearly \$749 million, which included 602,855 tons of various types of



bitumen, 257,511 tons of polymeric products, 124,965 tons of chemicals, 6,300 tons of slop wax and 503,760 tons of vacuum bottom. Moreover, the exchange sold on this floor 11,825 tons of base oil, 69,725 tons of sulfur, 200 tons of argon and 129,000 tons of lube cut.

23 idle industrial units revived in Ardebil Province

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — According to a provincial official, 23 idle industrial units have been revived in Ardebil Province, in northwest of Iran, in the current Iranian calendar year (began on March 20, 2020).

Mohammad Ahli, the managing director of the province's Industrial Parks Company, said attempts are being made to recognize stagnant production units and reactivate them benefiting from the viewpoints of the province's expert consultants.

He said last year 41 idle industrial units were revived in the province, creating jobs for 609 persons, adding that reviving 40 units has been planned for this year.

"It is hoped that by facilitating investment condition, we will see more presence of investors in the province, so that we can witness the flourishing of the industry and the increase of employment in the province", the official added.

The acting head of Iran Small Industries

and Industrial Parks Organization (ISIPO) has announced that 1,170 idle industrial units have been revived in the country during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-December 20, 2020).

Asghar Mosaheb said that reviving the mentioned units has created jobs for 19,446 persons.

The official said there are over 46,000 small and medium-sized industrial units in Iran's industrial parks and zones, of them about 9,200 units are inactive.

Industry, Mining, and Trade Ministry was initially planning to revive 1,500 idle units in the current year, but then it revised its programs to revive 2,000 units.

Bringing the mentioned 1,170 units back to the production cycle, the plan for reviving such units in the present year has been completed by 78 percent.

According to Mosaheb, preventing the inactive status of the industrial units is a major plan of ISIPO, while lack of liquidity,

problems in terms of supplying raw materials and machinery, and absence of market are the main reasons making the units inactive.

ISIPO's Previous Head Mohsen Salehinia had said that providing liquidity is the main issue for many of the country's production units, so based on the arrangements made, these units can receive part of their needed liquidity through bank facilities.

"Currently, the share of the country's production and industrial units in receiving bank facilities is about 31 percent and it is necessary to allocate a larger share of banking facilities to the country's production and industry," he had stated.

Strengthening domestic production to achieve self-reliance is the most important program that Iran is following up in its industry sector in a bid to nullify the effects of the U.S. sanctions on its economy.

To this end, the current Iranian calendar year has been named the year of "Surge in Production", and all governmental bodies,



as well as the private sector, are moving in line with the materialization of this motto.

Regarding its significant role in the realization of the mentioned goal, the Industry, Mining, and Trade Ministry has already defined its main programs for supporting domestic production in the current year.

The ministry's seven main axes of the surge in production are going to be pursued under 40 major programs.

Lebanon and the vexatious politics

1 → The irresponsible abuse of government authorities, at a time that the epidemic was on the rise, and pushing the partisans onto the streets, violating the partial lockdown, and refusing to abide by the curfew, has brought the country into declaring a complete lockdown.

Criticism campaign was in particular pointed towards Minister of Health Dr. Hamad Al-Hassan. It was led by the Lebanese force's leader, Samir Geagea. Although, Dr. Al-Hassan has not spared any efforts or means to contain the epidemic.

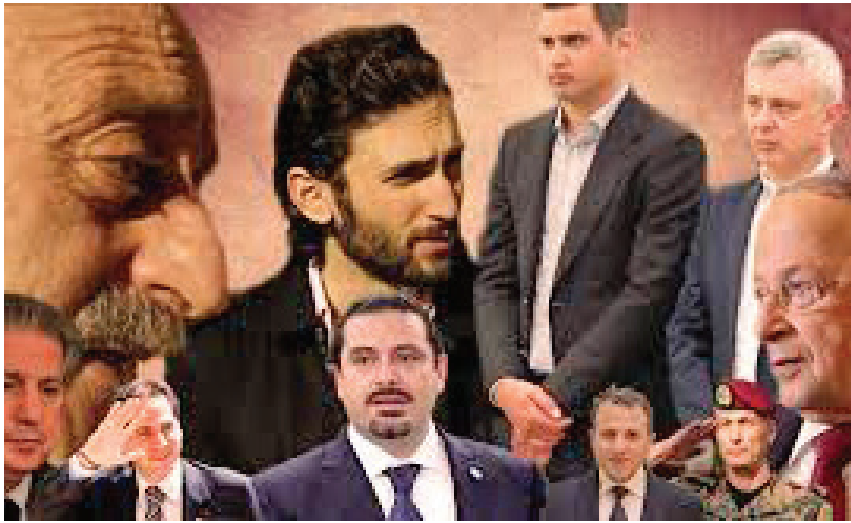
Al-Hassan toured the state to rehabilitate hospitals to make them affordable to receive patients all over the country. The resigned government of Diab pushed towards opening centers to receive the victims of this malicious epidemic and supervising directly the implementation of health protocols.

The opponents' malicious political mentality reflected the great crisis manifested by re-portraying the ugly civil war mentality, which the Lebanese people still live under its burden. It is not only a matter of blindly following the political Leaders; it is manifested in the actions that have to do with violating the law and causing chaos.

Additionally, many Lebanese leaders are pushing through their messages to masses and urging them to violate the law and undermine the government decisions, especially those related to recommendations on how to protect the people from the pandemic. Unfortunately, some media outlets are contributing, even today, in the escalations as if Lebanon is still living in a civil war phase.

Excessive political bickering and the love of comparison with the West in Lebanon are of the most important reasons for the loss of the state's prestige! It is built on the basis of destroying the prestige of the ruling, leading to the destruction of the prestige of the state.

Since the Syrians left Lebanon in 2005, the prestige of the state in Lebanon has departed with them. What happened in 2005 in Lebanon is exactly the same as what is happening today after the port explosion. It seems as if the policies of onslaught practiced by some against others,



and the policies of accusations, are going on unabated.

It did not just cause the overthrow of the only government, i.e., Diab's government, which had worked to the best interest of the Lebanese people since 2005.

While the previous governments were mostly preoccupied with the dues of the National Debt and paying the costs of international loans that have burdened the Lebanese and brought them to this miserable condition. It is a vicious cycle that some Lebanese leaders want to bring Lebanon back into through the internationalization of the port explosion incident.

The maliciousness and political strife did not come out of a vacuum. Rather, it is linked to the external support that violators of national decisions in Lebanon receive from outer players that contradict national interests. Since any arrangement that is committed to the interest of the Israeli occupation cannot be considered as a national interest.

Additionally, in many cases, the causes of disputes are related to the association of politicians and leaders with a class of merchants and businessmen, or they are part of it. It expresses special interests that are not concerned with the development of the state, but rather in holding back the building of an independent economy

based on developing industry, agriculture, tourism, social services and others.

It is a pure heterodoxy that was demanded by Samir Geagea a few days ago. He was demanding the government to assume its responsibilities in order to impose its authority and prevent people from violating rules concerning closure and lockdowns to stop the epidemic. Geagea was one of the instigators of demonstrations since the start of the pandemic until today. He is one of the instigators against the previous government's lockdowns. By blaming the government for not imposing the quarantine by force, Geagea was throwing a match: one after another to foment the people.

Furthermore, when the explosion of the port failed to achieve its goals of isolating Hezbollah and its allies in the Lebanese political scene, the demonstrations that took place widened the scope of the epidemic. The demonstration forced Diab and some members of the government to resign. The previous steps failed to undermine the prestige of the government. Therefore, summoning Prime Minister Diab to be investigated in the case of the Beirut Harbor blast was another step to undermine the government. This is something that many may not realize, but when the investigation did not include the first responsible persons in the entry of the

deadly shipments, Diab must have been targeted in person.

After the liberation of South Lebanon in May 2000, we had family gatherings. In one of the unique gatherings, my father and my older uncles were discussing the function of the recently elected municipality. It was the first municipality to be elected after 25 years of the Israeli occupation. Before the occupation of the South in 1976, the government was completely absent. During the French and Ottoman occupations, the situation was even worse; taxes were the only definition of the relation between the state and the town. The discussion revolved around the mismanagement in the construction sector, opening streets, building services and water scarcity, which my town has been suffering from since its foundation. The most important synonyms used for criticizing the municipality were: "We are in the Emirates have municipalities that were such-and-such in construction," and my father's cousin would reply: "The best is what we have in Canada", then a third discussed the importance of America in this field and a tenth appealed to the magnificence of France. At a time, no single Lebanese example was present.

The same models are referred to by politicians and intellectuals during talk shows, especially democratic models that they want to emulate in building the relationship between the state and citizens. Each one has a different example to present. Another immense calamity exhibited in the Lebanese talks is that: everything good in Lebanon resembles Europe and the West, and everything corrupted in Lebanon because we are part of the Arab World. The two comparisons are pure nonsense. It is all related to the fact that Lebanon is still confused about defining its identity. The creation of Lebanon in 1926 was an enforced section that caused the loss of its identity. Therefore, Lebanon became a multi-identity state, which is one of the most important reasons for the spread of malicious politics that allows violation of the law. If continued, it will lead to a second Lebanese civil war. Clearly, Lebanon is being pushed to.

Baghdad explosions and the plausible new U.S. orders for the old wounds

1 → In October 2002, as the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he was one of 77 senators who gave President George W. Bush the authority to invade Iraq. Also, in a 2006 op-ed in the New York Times, Biden proposed a dismemberment of Iraq along sectarian and ethnic lines. Moreover, as vice president, Biden was assigned by then-President Barack Obama to oversee the Iraq file.

His Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin, and nominee for secretary of state, Antony Blinken, are both well acquainted with the country. Austin served as a commander in the 2003 Iraq War, later headed the U.S. Central Command, where he oversaw the drawdown of U.S. troops.

"Biden is well known to all the major Iraqi leaders who have met with him many times," said Michael Knights, a fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a Washington-based far-right think tank, formally affiliated with AIPAC.

Although Biden has not elaborated on his likely approach to Iraq after the recent deadly blasts, he may talk on Iran, ISIS (called Daesh in its Arabic acronyms) and the future U.S. military presence.

Iraq: Threats and opportunities for U.S.

Some West Asia experts believe that the current situation in Iraq, as a key player in the region especially after the reemergence of ISIS, creates an opportunity for Washington to redefine its role as a global leader. For example, Kim Ghattas, a scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, says: "I think there is definitely a moment of opportunity, it's going to be very difficult. But there is a moment of opportunity to rethink America's role in the world and to rethink the Middle East (West Asia)."

While Biden played a defining role not just in the Iraq war itself but in its chaotic aftermath, which enabled the rise of ISIS, his new administration seems to have learned from those past experiences. At the same time, given the stated U.S. policy to reduce the number of troops stationed in West Asia,



analysts believe such a move may be to the detriment of Iraq.

Experts envision a scenario that with a power vacuum in Iraq coupled with a further decrease in U.S. troops would lead to a surge in the terrorist group's activities.

Colin P. Clarke, a senior research fellow at The Soufan Center, argues: "The quantity and severity of such attacks would surely rise in the absence of U.S. and allied military pressure."

Also, Husham al-Hashimi, a fellow at the Center for Global Policy believes: "ISIS has been able to use recent developments in Iraq as substantial operational opportunities, widespread public protests since October, the government's resignation and the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq."

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has played a significant role in these developments, forcing the international coalition to suspend its training of Iraqi soldiers in order to prevent outbreaks among the troops in early 2020.

U.S. not to reduce its military presence in Iraq

Biden himself has voiced his support for maintaining a U.S. military presence in Iraq and Syria, but it would be challenging for him to redeploy troops to Iraq, as American public opinion is generally against it. If the security situation remains the same, he will likely keep the same number of

troops in Iraq. As the administration has the option of turning a new page in Iraq, perhaps it will decide to maintain boots on the ground. He has pledged to restore U.S. relations with allies and the NATO alliance.

As Knights mentions: "U.S. participating forces in the coalition are scheduled to remain in Iraq under the Biden administration, which is a strong supporter of the U.S. support to Iraq's military against Daesh."

In this regard, French President Emmanuel Macron expressed hope on January 19 that U.S. President will show a greater military commitment to fight against terrorism in several theaters of conflict, especially in West Asia.

Calling for the U.S. to get more involved in multilateral defense cooperation, Macron stressed that France has maintained its efforts to fight ISIS in the region. The Charles-de-Gaulle aircraft carrier will rejoin the operation in the coming months, he said.

Iraq: A likely issue in the so called U.S. "follow-up" negotiations?

Biden and his key picks for the White House have made clear that they want to re-enter the nuclear deal with Iran under certain conditions. Among them are ending what they call Iran's "destabilizing and other malicious activities in the region."

Blinken has stated that the U.S. will consult with Persian Gulf Arab States in probable negotiations with Iran.

In addition, the Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan, said on 5th of December 2020: "Primarily what we expect is that we and our other regional friends are fully consulted in what goes on vis a vis the negotiations with Iran."

Maybe, given Saudi Arabia's interests in Iraq, besides its apparent support for ISIS, Iraq will be one of the plausible issues at the negotiation table that the U.S. would talk about to fulfill their permanent claim of establishing democracy and promoting human rights in the oil rich country.

Americans view other Americans as biggest threat to their way of life: poll

1 → According to Press TV, healing political divisions looks to Americans like a much bigger challenge for President Biden — far harder than dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic or any other issue in the country.

Forty-two percent of those surveyed described political divisions as the biggest challenge facing the new president, while 15 percent said it was the pandemic, 14 percent picked the economy and 12 percent chose race relations.

Americans also continue to hold a very low opinion of the state of the nation's democracy and rule of law, with only 6 percent describing it as "very secure." Twenty-nine percent of respondents said it was somewhat secure and the rest said it was threatened.

Syria writes to UN on Israel air raids, stresses right to self-defense

1 → Israel frequently targets military positions inside Syria, especially those of the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement, which has helped Syrian army in its fight against foreign-sponsored Takfiri terrorists.

The Tel Aviv regime mostly keeps quiet about the attacks on Syrian territories which many view as a reaction to Syrian government's increasing success in on the battlefield against the terror groups, many of which have the support of Israel in their push against the Damascus government.

British lawmakers seek investigation into UK-registered firm possibly linked to Beirut blast

Two senior British parliamentarians called for an investigation into a British-registered company possibly linked to last year's devastating explosion in Beirut, after Reuters found that the firm had not disclosed its beneficial owners.

The company, Savaro Ltd, is registered at a London address, and like all British firms is required to list who owns it with Britain's companies register, known as Companies House.

In an e-mail to Reuters this week, the woman listed as Savaro's owner and sole director at Companies House, Marina Psyllou, told Reuters that she was acting as an agent on behalf of another beneficial owner, whose identity she could not disclose.

"The person who was and has always been the UBO (ultimate beneficial owner) of the company was always the same. As you should be aware, we cannot disclose his name," she said. She did not say why she could not disclose his identity.

Global corporate governance rules define a UBO as someone who receives the benefits of an entity's transactions, typically owning a minimum of 25% of its capital.

Margaret Hodge, a British lawmaker and former cabinet minister who headed parliament's public affairs committee from 2010-2015, called the apparent failure to list Savaro's ultimate beneficiary at Companies House "outrageous".

"The UK authorities should investigate this, given inaccurate information appears to have been filed. We need to challenge formation agents where it appears they may have acted improperly."

Trump's impeachment trial in U.S. Senate to begin next month

The United States Senate will move forward with a second impeachment trial of former President Donald Trump on a charge of "incitement of insurrection" next month, a Senate leader said on Friday.

House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi has informed the Senate she will transmit the House's article of impeachment of Trump to the Senate on Monday.

Pelosi wrote in a letter to colleagues it "will be a momentous and solemn day, as the House sadly transmits the Article of Impeachment for Donald Trump to the Senate."

According to al Jazeera, Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer said on the Senate floor on Friday, "Make no mistake, a trial will be held in the United States Senate and there will be a vote whether to convict the president."

"It will be a fair trial. It will be a full trial," Schumer said.

The House voted 232 to 197 on January 13 to impeach the former president for "incitement of insurrection".

Resistance News

Haneyya, Mladenov discuss Palestinian election file

INTERNATIONAL d e s k **TEHRAN**—Head of Hamas's political bureau Ismail Haneyya discussed with UN Middle East envoy Nikolay Mladenov the upcoming Palestinian elections and the current efforts to hold them.

According to a decree issued recently by Palestinian Authority chief Mahmoud Abbas, the legislative elections are scheduled to take place on May 22, the presidential elections on July 31, and the national council elections on August 31.

A statement released by the Hamas Movement said that Haneyya and Mladenov talked extensively during a virtual meeting about the intended Palestinian elections and the efforts in this regard.

During the meeting, the Hamas political chief emphasized the important role of the UN and the international community in the elections, especially with regard to ensuring the integrity of procedures, arrangements, and voting and pressuring Israel to refrain from putting any obstacle to the electoral process in the Palestinian arena, especially in Occupied Jerusalem.

He also highlighted the need for the international community to recognize the election results regarding the Palestinian Authority leadership, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and the formation of the government and the executive committees.

He also talked about the great efforts that had been made by Hamas to reach such moment so that the Palestinian people would be able to say their word and choose their leadership on democratic grounds.

Mladenov, for his part, hailed the position of Hamas on the elections and called for necessarily proceeding with the efforts to hold them and overcoming any possible obstacles.

After Arab-Israeli normalization, Al-Aqsa is in danger of destruction

By Wafaa Al-Udaini

Following the signing of the normalization agreements with Israel, brokered by the United States, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco have witnessed the rapid increase in the demolishing of Palestinian homes in Jerusalem (al-Quds). The home demolitions also coupled with an increase in deportations of Palestinians from the city, expulsion from al-Aqsa Mosque and the daily storming of al-Aqsa Mosque compound by hundreds of Jewish Israeli settlers.

Most of the violations and settler incursions are on the al-Aqsa 'Gate of Mercy' towards the eastern region of al-Aqsa Mosque, which constitutes one-third of the area of the al-Aqsa compound. The aim of the settlers is to establish a huge synagogue that is entered from the door of Al-Rahma after the seizure of part of the Bab Al-Rahma cemetery and part of the Yusufiya cemetery that houses the graves of the Jordanian army martyrs and scholars.

Bab al-Rahma cemetery is planned to

be re-constructed into a Talmudic garden and "biblical paths", so that the entire area is linked with the seized Umayyad palaces in the direction of the Al-Buraj or Wailing Wall. The plan also includes the excavation of concrete bases for thirteen columns, with a height of 26 meters, in order to form a path for the flying "cable car" which will be used to bring Talmudic groups, Biblical groups and tourists in large numbers.

This cable car will enable the monitoring of movement and all other happenings taking place inside al-Aqsa Mosque, in addition, to change the overall scene and to cover and block the domes of al-Aqsa Mosque.

Large numbers of Talmudic and biblical synagogues and buildings have been erected around al-Aqsa Mosque, perhaps the largest of which is the establishment of the Judaization project named "the jewel of Israel", which aims to expand synagogue, sitting on an 'Islamic endowment' land and a historical Islamic building, taking up an area of 1400 meters. Building two floors underground and four floors above the ground, 23 meters high from the street,

at a cost of 48 million Israeli Shekels, are all actions which may lead to a radical change in the status quo of Occupied Jerusalem (al-Quds) and it may have far-reaching and potentially explosive ramifications.

The Abraham Accords embedded with dangerous terms

The normalization agreements that have taken place in recent months fall within the framework of the Abraham Agreement. This agreement fundamentally adopts the religious Zionist narrative with all its components, with regards to Jerusalem (al-Quds) and al-Aqsa Mosque, and thus creating conditions under which Israeli control over al-Aqsa Mosque can be established.

Trump had stated on the agreement that "The Abraham Accords" also opens the door for Muslims around the world to visit the historic sites in Israel and to peacefully pray at al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, the third holiest site in Islam."

Shua'eb Abu Snaina, 'Al-Quds International Institution' coordinator, explained that al-Aqsa Mosque (which is exclusively for Muslims, with its known area of 144 du-

nums) is only the "al-Qibli Mosque" (with the lead dome), which is the Islamic sanctuary, while the rest of the squares, terraces, domes and schools are "other religious places" are open to all religions.

The provisions of the agreement also include "restricting Muslim prayer on the condition that it is only for the peaceful ones, who will be allowed to pray. As for the rest of the religions, they do not have this condition."

Abu Snaina further added that this clause "will restrict the entry of Muslims, so that the Israeli occupation authorities have the right to monitor Muslims' behaviour in al-Aqsa Mosque, so the issue of their deportation becomes legitimate, as well as their arrest if the Israeli authorities deem it necessary."

According to the accords of the United Nations, the Arab League, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, East Jerusalem (al-Quds), where al-Aqsa Mosque is located, is an occupied Palestinian Arab city and an integral part of the lands that Israel occupied in 1967.

(Source: Press TV)

East Azarbaijan caravanserais made shortlist for collective UNESCO tag

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – Four caravanserais, scattered across the northwestern East Azarbaijan province have recently received cultural heritage experts' preliminary approval to join the shortlist of historical Iranian caravanserais being prepared for a possible inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage list.



The architecture style and the location of the caravanserais in this province are different from the others in the country, so they were needed to be on the list, the deputy provincial chief has said.

The list includes Ilkhanid era (1256–1353) Yam caravanserai, near the city of Marand, which has turned into a traditional accommodation center and has been inscribed on the National Heritage List.

As one of the rare mountain caravanserais, Goyjeh-Bell Caravanserai is also on the list. Located near the provincial capital of Tabriz the Safavid-era (1501–1736) structure has been designed for mountainous and cold regions with hard and snowy winters.

The other Ilkhanid era caravanserai of Jamalabad is also among the entries. The caravanserai, which was collapsed completely, was reconstructed during Safavid era.

The list also includes Khajeh Nazar Caravanserai in Jolfa, which was built by the order of the famed Safavid king, Shah Abbas I (1571-1629).

Last year, the tourism ministry announced that Iran is developing a dossier for a selection of its historical caravansaries for a possible inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

In this regard, cultural heritage experts are assessing such monuments that are scattered across the country to make a shortlist in terms of their architecture, historical and cultural values.

Caravansary is a compound word combining “caravan” with “sara”. The first stand for a group of travelers and sara means the building. They often had massive portals supported by elevated load-bearing walls. Guest rooms were constructed around the courtyard and stables behind them with doors in the corners of the yard.

Iran's earliest caravanserais were built during the Achaemenid era (550 -330 BC). Centuries later, when Shah Abbas I assumed power from 1588 – to 1629, he ordered the construction of network caravanserais across the country. For many travelers to Iran, staying in or even visiting a centuries-old caravanserai, can be a wide experience; they have an opportunity to feel the past, a time travel back into a forgotten age!

Qajar-era hosayniya being restored to its original splendor

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – Qajar era (1789–1925) Moshir hosayniya, also known as Soltani School in Shiraz, southern Fars province, has undergone some rehabilitation works, an official with the province's Endowments and Charity Affairs Organization has said.

A hosayniya is a congregation hall for holding Shiite Muslim commemoration ceremonies, especially those associated with the mourning month of Muharram, the month in which Imam Hussein (AS) was martyred by the then ruler Yazid.

A budget of 1.8 billion rials (about \$43,000 at the official exchange rate of 42,000 rials per dollar) has been allocated to the project, Saeid Sharifi announced on Saturday.

The project involves repairing the building's façade and entrance corridor with the aim of reviving and renovating the hosayniya, the official added.



The structure was built as a school originally and then was endowed by its owner to be turned into a venue for religious ceremonies.

The building, which was once damaged in a fire almost 50 years ago, was inscribed on the National Heritage list in 1972.

For centuries, the commemoration of the battle of Karbala on the day of Ashura (literally meaning 10th as the battle took place on the 10th day of Muharram) and the epic passion and courage of Imam Hussein (AS) and his 72 loyal companions who were all martyred (in 680 CE) have been honored by Iranians, who are mostly Shia Muslims.

Therefore, hosayniyas and tekylahs, venues for the gathering of mourners who honor Imam Hussein (AS), have been considered important structures throughout Iranian architecture history.

Mourners, known as 'heyat' (literally meaning group or delegation), gather in these places to attend various ceremonies and rituals including Sineh-Zani, in which hundreds of men, all clad in black beat on their chests according to the rhythm of a sung eulogy.

Shiraz is home to some of the country's most magnificent buildings and sights. Increasingly, it draws more and more foreign and domestic sightseers flocking into this provincial capital. Eram Garden, Afif-Abad Garden, Tomb of Hafez, Tomb of Sa'di, Jameh Mosque of Atigh, and Persepolis are among the historical, cultural, and ancient sites of Shiraz that are of interest to domestic and foreign tourists.

Some \$1.7b proposed for corona-affected tourism businesses

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – The national budget bill for the next calendar year (starting on March 20) has proposed 70 trillion rials (about \$1.7 billion at the official exchange rate of 42,000 rials per dollar) to support tourism businesses affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

If the budget receives parliament's approval, it will be spent on different sectors of the tourism industry, which has taken a major hit from the coronavirus outbreak over the previous months, IRNA quoted tourism minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan as saying on Saturday.

Despite the toughest economic pressures and sanctions, the government has provided good support to all sectors of tourism, the minister said.

However, there is hope that the beginning of mass vaccination against the coronavirus will provide better conditions for tourism and businesses related to this sector, he explained.

Referring to the quarantine hotels across the country, he expressed his appreciation for measures taken to turn certain hotels into shelters for coronavirus patients and health care staff to lighten the health ministry's burden.

The sale of handicrafts is partly related to the prosperity of tourism and the presence of foreign tourists, he said, hoping for the prosperity of tourism through containing the coronavirus.

Government's care and support packages

In late October, deputy minister Vali Teymouri announced that a new support package to pay loans to businesses affect-



Tourism minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan in an undated photo

ed by the coronavirus pandemic has been approved.

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

The loans will be allocated to tourist guides, travel agencies, tourism transport companies, tourism educational institutions, eco-lodges and traditional accommodations, hotels, apartment hotels, motels, and guest-houses as well as traditional accommodation centers, tourism complexes, and recreational centers, the official explained.

In September, Teymouri pointed to the

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

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

Tourism industry in critical situation

In October, Mounesan warned that Iran's cultural heritage and tourism will be in a

critical situation if the crises caused by the outbreak of the coronavirus continue.

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

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

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

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

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).

Ecotourism, an opportunity for travel lovers during coronavirus pandemic

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – It's been almost a year since the beginning of the global outbreak of the coronavirus, which forced the world to stop and drop everything.

The coronavirus pandemic has made people have their place of work fully or partly closed. Restrictions on daily life have led to the closure of many companies, which increases global unemployment.

Different sectors of people's lives have been hit by the virus, however, the experts believe that one of the worst-hit fields is tourism.

With travel restrictions all over the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought tourism to a near-standstill, which has also caused accommodation centers major damage.

In such a situation it seems that ecotourism is an opportunity for the people, who are fed up with staying home and quarantine, to look for a safe way to freshen up.

As a four-season country with pristine and beautiful nature in different parts of the country, Iran has a lot to offer nature lovers and eco-tourists.

Eco-lodge units in rural areas and in the heart of nature, away from the hustle and bustle of the city, smoke, and pollution, could free people from the chaos and turmoil of modern life amid the outbreak of the virus, of course by observing strict health protocols.

In recent years, several historical mansions and rural houses across the country have been repurposed into eco-lodge units with the aim of attracting more domestic and foreign tourists.

The houses represent the indigenous culture, local customs, traditions, and stories, while the guests are served delicious food with local ingredients.

The growing tendency of tourists to experience in-

digenous and local cultures has made them want to get closer to natural and indigenous living conditions, experiencing the old-fashioned way of life, considering that staying in these eco-lodge units are much cheaper than other accommodation centers.

Last January, Research Institute for Cultural Heritage and Tourism Director Behrouz Omrani announced that Iran has been constructing hundreds of eco-lodge guesthouses over the past couple of years to meet the demands of rising eco-travelers and sightseers.

“At present, issuing guidelines for eco-tourism development is on the agenda. Historical villages are amongst target destinations for eco-tourism development,” the official said.

Iran's tourism body said in 2018 that 2,000 eco-lodges will be constructed nationwide until 2021. Experts say each eco-lodge unit generates jobs for seven to eight people on average so that the scheme could create 160,000 jobs.

Having a very diverse natural setting, Iran offers varied excursions to nature lovers. Sightseers may live with a nomad or rural family or enjoy an independent stay. The country is home to abundant historical mansions, caravanserais, bathhouses, madrasas, and other massive monuments, which can buttress its budding tourism and hospitality sectors if managed appropriately and refurbished properly.

Experts say each eco-lodge unit generates jobs for seven to eight people on average so that the scheme could create 160,000 jobs.

Back in September, Iran's tourism minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan offered “smart and responsible traveling” as a workable solution for holidaymakers to get assured of safe traveling during the coronavirus pandemic.

In August, the tourism minister said the corona-



virus 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.”

Iran expects to reap a bonanza from its numerous tourist spots 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, it aims to increase the number of tourist arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million in 2025. 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).

Turkmen ritual of Elleshdirmeh added to intangible cultural heritage list

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – The ritual of Elleshdirmeh, which is a part of wedding ceremonies among Turkmen people in the northern Golestan province, has been registered in the National Intangible Cultural Heritage list, CHTN reported.

Elleshdirmeh takes place after Aghd ceremony, in which the couple becomes officially husband and wife when their families put bride and groom's hands together as a symbol of happiness.

During this ceremony, women sing

songs and wish the couple a long life full of joy and happiness.

Nine more items including local dolls, the skill of sewing Qezelbash traditional clothes, and the skill of Qazaq-duzi (traditional needlework) were also registered on the prestigious list.

Silk weaving master Effat Moradi and wickerwork master Seyyed Mohsen Mazangi were also added to the list as Living Human Treasures.

The Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts announced



the inscriptions on Saturday in a letter to the governor-general of the province.

A peek into Kharanaq, Iran's millennia-old mud-brick village

Part 1/2

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – Sitting in a remote valley about 70 kilometers north of Yazd in central Iran, is the deserted and crumbling mud-brick village of Kharanaq. The site has been occupied for approximately 4,000 years, while the dilapidated adobe buildings that draw foreigners from around the world date back around 1,000 years.

The abandoned town is a photographer's dream with a labyrinth of streets, tunnels, passageways, and rooms, as well as more impressive buildings such as a tiny mosque, a shaking minaret, and an old caravanserai that welcomed merchants and pilgrims centuries ago.

Kharanaq, which means 'place of birth of the sun', is divided into two parts – the Old Town, which is almost completely deserted, and the New Town, where some 130 families continue to live.

The Old Town was constructed with sun-baked mud bricks, forming one of the largest collections of adobe buildings in Iran. It was once a prosperous farming vil-



lage, but when water supplies dried up the inhabitants left, leaving the town to turn to ruins.

Kharanaq is much larger than it appears from the road. This village – or walled citadel, more like – spills away

down the hilltop, its buildings several floors high and connected through superimposed maps of pitch-black ground level tunnels, and dusty rooftop walkways. The buildings bulge into the street, organic curves resulting from years of mud and plaster repairs, slapped onto the dry walls one handful after another. In places, they have crumbled: walls turning to yellow powder, to reveal tufts of preserved straw fiber who knows how old.

As in Yazd, water was provided to Kharanaq via a Qanat system: a kind of underground aqueduct built into a slope that brought water from a main well to a series of vertical access shafts throughout the village. Here and there, tucked into corners between high mud walls, are half-covered pits, now clogged with debris, which appear to be all that remains of this once-revolutionary water system.

Some Iranians claim that Kharanaq is more than four thousand years old – counting from the first evidence of human settlement in this area. However architectural historians make a safer claim of one thousand years.

Dam construction, a main barrier to Jazmourian wetland's restoration

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — Dam construction has been the most important factor preventing the revitalization of Jazmourian wetland, Vahid Pourmardan, head of Sistan-Baluchestan province's department of environment, has said.

Halilrood is one of the main rivers feeding the wetland, while the Ministry of Energy has built a dam on it, which has caused agricultural prosperity upstream, so that harvest of greenhouse and agricultural products in some cities like Jiroft increased, Pourmardan explained.

While downstream is facing water deficiency, due to the fact that water rights of the wetland have not yet released, so that farmers started to dig several wells in the area, he lamented.

The multiplicity of wells has caused the destruction of underground aquifers in the region and the same cultivation model in the future can cause the Jazmourian wetland's bed to subside, he emphasized.

Measures have been implemented so far to deal with these incidents and an integrated plan for Jazmourian wetland has been prepared during the past two years, he stated.

Regretting that in recent years, the region also faced a loss of vegetation and the Wetland started generating dust, he said that vegetation depletion has intensified sand and dust storms in Sistan-Baluchestan and its surrounding cities.

Unfortunately, Jazmourian wetland, which was one of the main habitats of bird



Nestled between the provinces of Kerman and Sistan-Baluchestan, Jazmourian is one of the two major wetlands in southeast Iran, which is on the knife-edge of complete desiccation as a result of climate change, excessive dam construction, low precipitation, high-temperature rates, and the depletion of groundwater resources.

migratory, has now become a seasonal wetland that may be irrigated every three to four seasons with floods and rainfall, he further said.

If sufficient water rights are defined for the Jazmourian wetland, it will be much more effective to recover the vegetation in the area and control dust hotspots, he suggested.

He went on to add that the wetland has a great effect on air conditioning during summer at the time of 120-day winds in both Sistan and Baluchestan regions, IRNA reported on Saturday.

The dryness of this wetland has social consequences and leads the farmers who made a living to illegal activities such as fuel smuggling, he also lamented.

Nestled between the provinces of Kerman and Sistan-Baluchestan, Jazmourian is one of the two major wetlands in southeast Iran, which is on the knife-edge of complete desiccation as a result of climate change, excessive dam construction, low precipitation, high-temperature rates, and the depletion of groundwater resources.

The area of the Hamoon and Jazmourian basin stretches to 69,600 square kilometers, with the western part of 35,600 square kilometers in Kerman province and the eastern part of 34,000 square kilometers in Sistan-Baluchestan province.

In local dialect 'Jaz' means 'plants' and 'Mourian' means 'plenty' therefore, Jazmourian means land with plenty of plants, which was once home to countless migratory birds and numerous marine species.

Over 877 tons of narcotics seized in 10 months



SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Over 877 tons of narcotics were confiscated from smugglers countrywide during the first 10 months of the current [Iranian calendar] year (Mach 21, 2020), which shows a 26 percent increase compared to the same period last year, anti-narcotics police chief Majid Karimi has announced.

The anti-narcotics police, despite severe restrictions

due to the coronavirus epidemic, have not only maintained contact and interaction with neighboring countries but have become more active consulting with international forums to counter-narcotics trafficking, he stated.

"We are cooperating with the knowledge-based companies in the field of scientific discovery of crimes and the indigenized equipment and facilities of narcotics seizure," Karimi noted, IRNA reported on Saturday.

Most recently, anti-narcotics police discovered over 1.2 tons of opium in an armed conflict with five traffickers in the southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan sharing borders with Pakistan.

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.

Education for COVID-19 generation

1 → With the downward trends of the disease, the National Headquarters for Coronavirus Control announced on Wednesday that schools with less than 50 pupils and vocational schools are allowed to start operating for practical and workshop courses in accordance with the health protocols, while the students' presence is voluntary and on their choice.

This is while, online education in the country only covered 60 percent of the students, and the rest, amounting to 40 percent of the total students, are facing education loss, especially those residing in the deprived areas of the country.

Before the pandemic, the statistics reported that about 800,000 who have completed primary education drop out of secondary education each year in the country.

In 2019, over 140,000 children were

missing out on education across the country, according to Abdolreza Fooladvand, head of Tehran's Department of Education.

International Day of Education

Education is a human right, a public good, and a public responsibility. The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 24 January as International Day of Education in celebration of the role of education for peace and development.

The third International Day of Education (January 24) will be marked on Monday, January 25, under the theme 'Recover and Revitalize Education for the COVID-19 Generation'. The global event for the Day is planned along with three main segments of learning heroes, innovations, and financing.

Without inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong opportuni-

ties for all, countries will not succeed in achieving gender equality and breaking the cycle of poverty that is leaving millions of children, youth, and adults behind.

Today, 258 million children and youth still do not attend school; 617 million children and adolescents cannot read and do basic math; less than 40 percent of girls in sub-Saharan Africa complete lower secondary school, and some 4 million children and youth refugees are out of school. Their right to education is being violated and it is unacceptable.

Time for intelligent collective action

It is evident that we cannot return to the world as it was before, but what is more needed ever is global solidarity. It is particularly important that the world supports developing countries with investment in 21st-century education infrastructures.



Moreover, new generation education urgently needs investment and structural changes by the governments so that short-term setbacks do not grow into larger, long-lasting problems.

COVID-19 has shown us that future incidents can easily reshape the world so that we must not passively sit back and observe what plays out. Now is the time for public deliberation and intelligent collective action.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ج

Literacy rate in rural areas grows significantly

The difference in literacy rate between urban and rural areas has decreased from 34.9 percent in 1976 to about 12 percent in 2019, which demonstrates a significant rise in the literacy rate of rural areas.

According to the censuses conducted between 1976 and 2016, the literacy rate of urban areas has increased from 65.5 percent to 99.8 percent. At the same time, the literacy rate in rural areas has increased from 30.5 percent to 78.5 percent.

Moreover, the country's population aged 6 and above was estimated at 71.5 million, of which more than 62 million declared themselves literate and over 8 million were illiterate. Accordingly, the literacy rate has increased from 47.5 percent in 1976 to 87.6 percent in 2016, which reached up to 89 percent in 2019.

رشد قابل توجه درصد باسوادی در مناطق روستایی

تفاوت درصد باسوادی در بین مناطق شهری و روستایی از ۳۴.۹ درصد سال ۱۳۵۵ به حدود ۱۲.۳ درصد در سال ۱۳۹۵ کاهش یافته است و این رقم در سال ۱۳۹۸ به ۱۲ درصد رسیده است.

بر اساس سرشماری های انجام شده بین سالهای ۱۳۵۵ تا ۱۳۹۵ میزان باسوادی مناطق شهری از ۶۵.۵ درصد در سال ۱۳۵۵ به ۹۹.۸ درصد در سال ۱۳۹۵ افزایش یافته است. در همین زمان نرخ باسوادی مناطق روستایی از ۳۰.۵ درصد به ۷۸.۵ درصد افزایش یافته است.

بر اساس سرشماری سال ۱۳۹۵ جمعیت ۶ سال و بالاتر کشور بالغ بر ۷۱ میلیون و ۵۰۶ هزار نفر بوده که بیش از ۶۲ میلیون نفر آنها خود را با سواد و بیش از ۸ میلیون نفر خود را بی سواد اعلام کردند. بر این اساس درصد باسوادی از ۴۷.۵ درصد در سال ۱۳۵۵ به ۸۷.۶ درصد در سال ۱۳۹۵ رسیده و این رقم در برآورد سال ۱۳۹۸ به بیش از ۸۹ درصد افزایش یافته است.

Technology to count elephants from space offers anti-poaching hope

Scientists have been able to identify Elephants from space for the first time - technology that could be used to empower efforts to challenge wildlife poaching.

Researchers used commercial earth observation satellites Worldview 3 and 4 to capture high resolution images of African elephants moving through grasslands and forests.

And combined with computer deep learning, an automated system was able to pick out animals with the same level of accuracy as a human would.



The measure could be vital in the battle against poachers who profit over the destruction of the planet's biodiversity - a cause The Independent has championed as part of its Stop The Illegal Wildlife Trade campaign.

The algorithm, designed by Dr Olga Isupova of the University of Bath, could allow vast landmasses to be scanned and assessed in a matter of minutes - outpacing human observers who would typically carry out such work from low-flying planes.

Poaching as well as damage to habitats has caused the population of African elephants to nosedive in the past century, with roughly 415,000 savannah elephants believed to still be left in the wild.

"Accurate monitoring is essential if we're to save the species," said Dr Isupova. "We need to know where the animals are and how many there are."

Satellite monitoring also ensures that habitats will not be disturbed by vehicles used to track animals, while making it possible to observe animal groups as they cross borders that may limit the movements of their human observers.

"This type of work has been done before with whales, but of course the ocean is all blue, so counting is a lot less challenging," said Dr Isupova. "As you can imagine, a heterogeneous landscape makes it much hard to identify animals."

The Independent's Stop The Illegal Wildlife Trade campaign is working with anti-poaching NGO Freeland and African wildlife charity Space for Giants to tackle the conservation crisis exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Raising more than £300,000 for the cause in the past nine months, the campaign has also brought together leading conservation organisations to issue a joint statement at the G20 in Riyadh last December.

It told the world leaders they have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to capitalise on public demand to invest in nature to protect people and the planet.

The group told the G20 leaders in a statement: "Covid-19 has been a wake-up call to everyone on this planet. Now is the time to value and invest in nature by developing sustainable nature-based economic stimulus packages that embrace a One Health approach and address long-term planetary health, food security, poverty alleviation, climate change, and biodiversity loss and work towards achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals."

Among the other organisations that signed the declaration were the World Wildlife Fund, the Zoological Society of London, the African Wildlife Foundation, the Paradise Foundation, Conservation International, Fauna & Flora International and the Jane Goodall Institute.

LET'S LEARN PERSIAN

(Part 114)

(Source: saadifoundation.ir)

چکاره هستی؟

The expression چکاره is not polite enough to address others, especially if they are higher up than the inquirer. Use the following as a polite substitute for چکاره هستی؟

لطفاً بفرمایید شغل شما چیست یا کار شما چیست.

Followed by the ezafe, چکاره‌ی means "of what relation to":

ایشان چکاره‌ی شما هستند؟ پسرعموی من هستند.

In a dispute or quarrel, the expression شما چکاره هستی؟ or شما چکاره‌ای؟ may also mean: "It has nothing to do with you."

جدول

۷	۶	۵	۴	۳	۲	۱	افقی
							۱. برای رفت و آمد از آن استفاده می‌کنیم ۲. ... چه وقت؟ ۳. رفتن ۴. ... دانشجوین دانشگاه‌های ... هم فارسی می‌خوانند ۵. ... دوست داریم. ۶. ... در رفتن ۷. ... رسیدن ۸. ... خوابگاه برای سه دانشجو است ۹. ... دوست است اما ... ندارد ۱۰. ... حرف "ل"

عمودی
۱. یاد گرفتند ۲. دو حرف آخر 'پذیرفتن' ۳. برد ۴. این اتاق یک ... و یک پنجره دارد ۵. حرف 'س' در انگلیسی ۶. برای زندگی از جایی به جای دوری رفتن ۷. هر ۳۶۵ روز ۸. ... دو، سه ۹. آقا است ولی ۱۰. ندارد ۱۱. با آن آب می‌خوریم

● **تمرین ۱. "ص" یا "غ" بگذارید و غلطها را تصحیح کنید:**

- () همه‌ی مراکز آموزش زبان فارسی در تهران است.
- () دانشجویان ایرانی در این مراکز فارسی می‌آموزند.
- () دانشجویان خارجی با فرهنگ ایرانی آشنا می‌شوند.
- () استادان خارجی در این مراکز پذیرفته نمی‌شوند.
- () خارجیانی که در ایران زندگی می‌کنند هم فارسی می‌خوانند.
- () هاروکا در ایران دوست غیرایرانی دارد.

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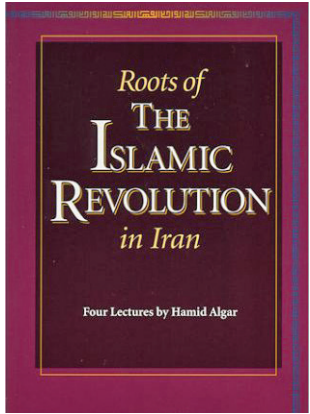
GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Best way to defend Islam, is to practice Islam.

Prophet Muhammad (S)

Scholars discuss Spanish translation of Hamid Algar's book on Islamic Revolution

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — A Spanish translation of “Roots of the Islamic Revolution in Iran” written by Hamid Algar was introduced during a ceremony on the margins of the virtual edition of the Tehran Book Fair on Thursday.



Front cover of the original book of “Roots of the Islamic Revolution in Iran” written by Hamid Algar.

The webinar was attended by translator Shaykh Abdulkarim Javier Orobio, the director of El Faro International Publishing House in the Colombian capital of Bogota, Angelica Maria Rojas, and Iran's Cultural Attache in Spain Mohammad-Mehdi Ahmadi and guests from Iran and Colombia.

Hamid Algar is a British-American Professor Emeritus of Persian studies at the College of Near Eastern Studies, the University of California at Berkeley.

In his brief speech, Ahmadi said that different reasons were behind the Islamic Revolution, the first of which was cultural

motivation, and the second reason could be the people's obedience to the teachings of Imam Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Revolution, which led to the unity of people and the dissolution of the Shah Regime.

Rojas next stressed that they're making their best efforts to introduce Islamic culture to Spanish readers, adding that El Faro has published books on different topics.

El Faro has published a Spanish translation of “My Uncle Soleimani” in Venezuela, a book written by Mohammad-Ali Jaberi that reflects Martyr Qassem Soleimani's affection for children, as well as “Muhammad”, a novel by Ebrahim Hassanbeigi in Colombia.

Orobio next said that the book is a summary of four lectures Hamid Algar delivered on the Islamic Revolution at the Muslim Institute in London in 1979.

He said that Algar delivered the lectures for the Muslims and talked about the factors that were influential in the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

The virtual edition of the Tehran Book Fair, which opened last Tuesday, has organized 17 international webinars on various cultural topics.

Tehran short film festival to review Pier Paolo Pasolini movies

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — The 37th edition of the Tehran International Short Film Festival (TISFF) plans to review short movies by Italian filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini.



A poster for a review of Italian filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini's short movies at the 37th Tehran International Short Film Festival.

The review will be performed during an online session, which will stream on Sunday at 9 pm through www.hashure.com with the username “@iycs.ir”.

Iranian translator Sanam Naderi, who is the translator of Italian writer Roberto Moliterni's book “Making a Short” (“Fare un corto”), and Italian critic Stefano Casi will review Pasolini's movies during the session.

Some of Pasolini's very best work was done in his rarely screened shorts, among which are “La Ricotta”, a satire about a big-budget film in progress depicting the Crucifixion, with Orson Welles as the director, and “What Are the Clouds?”, the offstage meditations of marionettes who are performing Othello.

His credits also include “Notes for a Film about India”, “The Earth Seen from the Moon” and “The Paper Flower Sequence”.

The 37th edition of the Tehran International Short Film Festival (TISFF) will open on Wednesday.

Intl. Silk Road calligraphy exhibition opens in Tehran

→1 Speaking at the ceremony, veteran calligrapher Gholamhossein Amirkhani called calligraphy a precious heritage whose lofty status must always be preserved.

He emphasized that the Silk Road can help managers present thoughts to the world.

He said it is better to establish a union with a selection of cultural figures who are distant from politics to help convey thoughts to the world.

Calligrapher Mohammad Heidari next said that the secretariat received over 1000 submissions from 30 countries out of which 650 works will be gradually uploaded in the virtual exhibit, adding that Pakistan is attending the exhibit with the highest number of works.

“An exhibition will also be held in the Iran Mall, a large shopping mall in Tehran, which will be unveiled during the closing ceremony on January 28,” he added.

Iranian Academy of Arts acting director Alireza Esmaili said that prominent calligraphers have helped elevate the art of calligraphy and miniature, calling the Silk Road the road of life and manifestation of art, culture and economy.

The ceremony continued with unveiling a postage stamp to celebrate the first Raqs-e Qalam exhibition and the participants visited the calligraphy works on view.

The director of the commission, Hojjatollah Ayyubi, in a press release published ahead of the exhibit, had said, “Many luminaries believe that calligraphy is the attestation of our many other arts.



Veteran calligrapher Gholamhossein Amirkhani (L) and Iranian National Commission for UNESCO director Hojjatollah Ayyubi cut a ribbon to inaugurate the First Raqs-e Qalam International Exhibition of the Silk Road Calligraphy at the Iranian Academy of Arts in Tehran on January 22, 2021. (Mizan/Fatemeh Amuzad)

The commission believes in dialogue between cultures and we are happy to be hosting such a great event.”

“Every night a selection of over 100 works from different countries is being uploaded, while we are keeping in touch live with several of the calligraphers.

The works have been selected by the Iran Calligraphers Association as the coordinator of the event. Since Mashhad is the main host of the event, one night has also been dedicated to the calligraphers

of Mashhad,” he added.

He further noted that a selection of 204 works also will be published and exhibited later in a museum in Mashhad.

The walls across the city of Mashhad, as well as several historical monuments in Tehran and several other cities are displaying a selection of works through video mapping, a system using light and movement as media and buildings or other surfaces as a canvas for some huge, attention-grabbing statements.

Abdolhossein Zarrinkub's book on Persian Sufism published in Russian



Copies of the Russian translation of Abdolhossein Zarrinkub's book “Research on Persian Sufism”.

A R T **TEHRAN** — Prominent Iranian scholar Abdolhossein Zarrinkub's book on Persian Sufism has recently been published in Russian.

Translated into Russian by Nasim Mirzayev, “Research on Persian Sufism” has been introduced during a special ceremony at the National Academy Manas and Chingiz Aitmatov in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

The book has been published with contributions from the Iranian Culture Center in the capital of Kyrgyzstan.

Topchubek Turgunaliyev, the president of the academy, praised the center's efforts to publish the book, and said that it will be a useful source of information on Iranian Sufism for Russian-speaking scholars and those Sufism experts and researchers in Central Asia.

Iranian cultural attaché Parviz Qasemi also attended the ceremony and expressed his thanks for the contributions of the National Academy Manas and Chingiz Aitmatov made for the publication of the book.

He said that this is Zarrinkub's third book has been published in Russian. Zarrinkub's “Civilization of Islam”

had previously been published in Kyrgyzstan, he added.

He announced Iran's readiness to expand its cultural relations with the National Academy Manas and Chingiz Aitmatov.

The ceremony came to an end with screening a video about the life story of Zarrinkub and a speech by translator Mirzayev elaborating on his endeavors for rendering the book.

Zarrinkub, one of Iran's foremost historians and literary critics, was a professor of the Faculties of Theology and Letters of the University of Tehran.

His prolific publications include “History of Iran after Islam”, “Two Centuries of Silence”, “With a Caravan of Silk”, “Literary Criticism”, “An Evaluation of the Legacy of Sufism”, “Poetry without Falsehood, Poetry without Mask” and “From the Street of the Debauched”.

He is also the writer of the essay “Persian Sufism in Its Historical Perspective”, which is based on a series of lectures he delivered at Princeton and the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1969-1970.

Iran's “Exam”, “Eaten” praised at Dieciminuti Film Festival

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranian “d e s k” movies “Exam” and “Eaten” have been honored at the 15th Dieciminuti Film Festival, which has been organized online in Italy.

Directed by Sonia K. Haddad, “Exam” shared the grand prize of the jury with “Pizza Boy” by Italian director Gianluca Zonta.

The short film is about a teenage girl who gets involved in the process of delivering a pack of cocaine to a client, and gets stuck in a weird cycle of occurrences.

The film has been screened at numerous international events, garnering several prizes, including the award for Best Live Action Short Film at the 18th Tirana International Film Festival in Albania last September.

The short animated movie “Eaten”



“Exam” directed by Sonia K. Haddad.

directed by Mohsen Rezapur won a special mention. The story of the movie is set on a mysterious, unknown planet, where a

rabbit-like creature is eaten by a wolf. It meets another rabbit-like creature in the wolf's stomach and they begin a new life with each other, but that's not the end of the story.

“Eaten” won an honorable mention at the 26th Golden Beggar International Film Festival in Slovakia last November.

The Dieciminuti Film Festival awards three films as best film. “Cocodrilo” by Jorge Yúdice from Spain, “My Name Is Petya” by Daria Binevskaya from Russia and “Gunpowder” by Romane Faure, Nathanael Perron, Léa Detrain, Benoit de Geyer d'Orth, Pel-Hsuan Lin and Anne-Lise Kublak from France were the winners of this year.

“Rewild” by Nicholas Chin and Ernest Zacharevic from Indonesia was named best documentary.

This film shows a new forest restoration site on the borders of the Leuser Ecosystem and reveals a Rewind symbol carved into a palm oil plantation in Sumatra. The narrative runs in reverse, rewinding the clock on deforestation to undo the damage caused by the unsustainable production of one of the world's most versatile commodities.

The award for best screenplay went “Baradar” by Italian director Beppe Tufarulo. Francesco Casolo is the writer of the short film.

The film tells the story of 10-year-old Ali and his 18-year-old brother Mohammed who have already been traveling for a long time when they are forced to separate. Three years earlier, a bomb destroyed their home in Kabul and killed their parents.

Serbia's Utopia eager to publish more books from modern Persian literature

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — Serbian publisher Srdan Markovic says that he has plans to publish additional books from modern Persian literature for Serbian readers.

He made the remarks in an international webinar held on the margins of the virtual edition of the Tehran Book Fair on Friday.

Srdan Markovic from the Serbian Publishing House Utopia, Iranian cultural attaché in Serbia Mehdi Shirazi and translator Aleksandar Dragovic were among the experts participating in the webinar to discuss Iranian books and the translation into Persian of books in Serbia.

Dragovic is the translator of a selection from Iranian children's book writer Hushang Moradi Kermani's bestseller “The Stories of Majid”, which was unveiled at the 64th Belgrade International Book Fair in 2019.

“I visited Iran in 2009, and a year later I began to work on book publication. When I went to the United States I brought several Persian books back with me. I also got several books from Iran's cultural office in Serbia and I later translated the couplets of Persian poet Omar Khayyam,” Markovic said.

“I usually publish five to six books every year and I usually look for books for translation that will have more influence on ordinary readers in Serbia,” he added.

Markovic called himself a lover of Iran and said, “I have traveled to Iran twice and several times to India, Pakistan and Tajikistan. And I have tried to publish books from these neighboring countries. We seek out old civilizations to offer



A visitor looks at a book at a bookshop in Tehran.

good books to children,” he said.

He added that he has written several travelogues and one of them is a book on the annual pilgrimage of Arbaeen in Iraq.

Arbaeen marks the end of the 40-day mourning period following the martyrdom of the Imam and his loyal companions on Ashura.

He said that he wrote the book after he visited the holy shrine of Imam Hussain (AS) in Karbala.

“We know that Persian classic literature is of high significance but Iran also has many good modern writers. We are in touch with the Pol Literary and Translation Agency. They provide us with the latest productions and we can

choose our books, however, we can only publish one or two books a year,” he said.

Pol Literary and Translation Agency is a Tehran-based institution that translates Iranian books and presents Persian-language publications around the world.

He added that he hopes the next generations pay greater attention to Iranian books and more books would be published.

“Perhaps there would be increased opportunity to publish additional books because we are after cultural benefits for the coming generations,” he concluded.

Dozens of publishers from Serbia and Italy are attending the Tehran International Book Fair displaying their latest offerings at Iran's most important cultural event, which is being held online this year due to the pandemic.

Francesco Brioschi, Ponte and IsMEO – the Institute for the Middle and Far East are among the Italian publishers attending the virtual fair.

Some officials of the Belgrade International Book Fair and several Serbian publishing houses, including Laguna Publishing, Kreativni Centar, Cigoja Stampa and Utopia, are also attending the fair.

Iran was the guest of honor at the Belgrade International Book Fair in 2016.

In addition, the virtual edition of the Tehran Book Fair, which opened last Tuesday, has organized 17 international webinars on various cultural topics.

The virtual fair, which will run for six days, can be found through tehranbookfair.ir.