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# Not a friend; definitely

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## Is Biden's cabinet Iran-friendly?



© File photo

## Is there any gambling in Iran volleyball?

BY FARROKH HESABI

TEHRAN - Iranian volleyball coaches and players are concerned with rumors about betting and match-fixing in the country's volleyball.

The subject of match-fixing through the betting system came under scrutiny last month when Sasan Khodaparast, ex-coach of Azar Battery, raised the issue of betting in the volleyball.

"Gambling could be damaging for our volleyball. It's two or three years that the results of some games have been really surprising. These incidents have raised suspicion about gambling in this sport and we, who are working in volleyball, understand it," Khodaparast said before retiring from his post. His remarks provoked different reactions. Some did not deny the existence of betting in volleyball but believed that there were no credible documents to prove it.

Tehran Times spoke to some Iranian volleyball figures to find out how they see the situation and what they suggest to prevent further problems in this regard.

Ahsanollah Shirkavand, former player of Iran men's national volleyball team and current captain of the Shahr-dari Varamin Volleyball Club believes that betting is a problem in volleyball.

"We cannot deny that there is kind of betting and gambling in our volleyball, especially in the lower leagues. I'm sure that in the Iranian Super League the betting problems are so small, if any. This is due to the level and positions of the players and coaches who work in the super league, as well as the sensitivities and supervisions that exist in this league," Shirkavand said to Tehran Times.

"Betting in football and some other sports may be far more widespread than volleyball. I believe that even in our volleyball's lower leagues there is not an organized system of betting and it is still limited to sporadic cases. However, we must start the necessary measures now to prevent its further spread. It is really unfair and treacherous that someone, who can be a player, a coach, or a referee, to bet and ruin the efforts of the other players and staff of a team," added the 39-year-old volleyball star.

Mohammadreza Tondraan, head coach of the Foolad Sirajan team, told Tehran Times that he has just heard about betting in volleyball and not seen anything obvious.

"I cannot say with certainty that there is betting in Iranian volleyball because I only have heard about it and have not seen or experienced it personally. However, it is a completely serious issue that should be taken into consideration by the Iranian Volleyball Federation and even the country's security and intelligence official to prevent damage to the reputation of our volleyball," said the former Qatari's Al Arabi head coach.

## New U.S. administration: Challenges and opportunities

BY RAKIB AL HASAN

Joe Biden has been elected as the new president of the United States in a victory. Trump's defeat has brought global relief.

However, the world will not go back to the way it was in 2016 or the rise of the Trump era. The new American administration faces complicated challenges inside and outside the country. Meanwhile Biden has pledged not to compromise on human rights and democracy, especially when it comes to Arab regimes in the Middle East (West Asia).

Let's start with climate change. Biden said the United States would return to the Paris climate agreement. Most countries welcomed the return of the United States to the treaty. Biden says he wants to set a goal of zero-carbon emissions by 2050. To return to the Paris Agreement, he would have to formally set these goals. At the same time, a new national commitment to reduce carbon emissions has to be mentioned.

Most observers expect carbon emissions to be reduced by 45-50 percent from 2005 levels by 2030. The matter is difficult but possible and consistent with what Europe is doing. Biden return to the Paris Agreement doesn't need congressional approval. U.S. public opinion is also largely in favor of a return to the deal. Two-thirds of voters say climate change is a serious problem. However, in order to deal with this problem, it is necessary to consider whether they are ready to pay more for fuel.

There is no doubt over the importance of America's return to the climate accord. In the last four years, people all over the world have noticed that not only the temperature has risen, but also the incidence of floods, droughts, fires and cyclones has increased. Europe has taken an ambitious approach to environment friendly projects and is working closely with China, the world's largest carbon emitter.

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## Seattle police officer drives SUV into group of pedestrians

A Tacoma police officer drove through a group of pedestrians Saturday night, and videos being shared on social media shows people falling to the ground as the police SUV speeds up through the crowd. The videos show the SUV run over a person as onlookers scream.

Meanwhile, police said that people who destroy property in Seattle will be arrested under a tighter policy coordinated between the Seattle Police Department and Seattle City Attorney Pete Holmes.

The tighter policy will be enacted Saturday, Seattle Interim Police Chief Adrian Diaz announced ahead of a scheduled demonstration in Seattle's Occidental Park. The new policy comes after police reported several buildings were vandalized in downtown Seattle Wednesday night, including the city's federal courthouse.

"The events of breaking windows at a variety of different locations with no meaning," Diaz said. "There was no discussion about what they were

fighting for, what type of social justice message. That cannot happen. That level of direct action cannot occur. And we are going to immediately address those issues."

The chief added that he has "been in conversations" with Holmes who will now prosecute those cases. The department posted photos on Twitter of "multiple windows" shattered at the William Kenzo Nakamura U.S. Courthouse, used primarily by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

CNN affiliate KOMO reported the group burned an American flag and threw objects in the streets to block the path of motorists. Several vehicles were damaged before police ordered the group to disperse, KOMO reported.

Additional photos posted by police showed an Amazon Go store with shattered windows and spray-painted anarchy symbols and anti-Biden and anti-police graffiti, and broken windows at the original Starbucks location in Pike Place Market.

## Visit Estil Lagoon, where the trees walk

BY SAMANEH ABOUTALEBI

Wetlands all over the world are important for the environment as they are home to a big part of all species and provide a great part of the food supply.

But more importantly, they offer significant tourism opportunities that can be an important source of income for the countries.

People are naturally attracted to water when they need to be in contact with nature. Every

year, millions of tourists see and experience the wonders of nature in the wetlands, which constitute one of tourism's greatest assets and a unique setting for many tourism activities.

Iran also has a great share of wetlands, as 105 wetlands are in Iran stretching 3 million hectares of land.

There are several domestic and foreign tourists, nature lovers, and bird watchers, who travel across Iran every year to visit the wetlands, of which one of the most magnificent

is Estil Lagoon.

Located in the northern province of Gilan, near the road that connects Astara to Rasht, Estil lagoon offers tourists a unique sight that they may never see again elsewhere.

The first thing that catches visitors' eye is floating alder trees. The surprising thing about the trees is that their roots are actually in the water, so they are always moving through the lagoon.

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## Exhibition of woodworks underway at Tehran center

TEHRAN - The 12th edition of the Woodwork Exhibition is currently underway at Tehran's Niavaran Culture Center.

A large collection of wood artworks in the forms of intarsia, marquetry, wood turning, lattice work, inlay and bas-reliefs, all created by Iranian artists, are on view at the exhibition.

The Research Institute of the Cultural Heritage and Tourism (RICHT) is the main organizer of the showcase, which will run until February 5.

## Iran soon becomes an important Covid-19 vaccine producer: minister

TEHRAN - Iran will be one of the world's important manufacturers of the Covid-19 vaccine in the near future, Health Minister Saeed Namaki has said.

"In the coming days, we will import the first batches of coronavirus vaccine from reliable sources," he added, ISNA reported on Sunday. "Vaccination will start with the vulnerable groups. At the same time, the noble scientists of the country are making efforts round the clock to develop the homegrown vaccine," he explained.

**Mass vaccination by next 2 months**

On January 17, President Hassan Rouhani said the government is trying its best to start mass vaccination against the coronavirus by the next two months with the priority given to medical staff and high-risk individuals.

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

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

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

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## Global effort needed to end chilling effects of U.S. sanctions on Iran: Guardian

In a commentary on January 22, The Guardian said the U.S. sanctions on Iran may have been unilateral, but their chilling effect was global and therefore global efforts, especially by the Europeans, are needed to end them.

Donald Trump officially exited the 2015 nuclear deal in May 2018 and began introducing the harshest ever sanctions against Iran in violation of UN Security Council Resolution 2231 that had endorsed the agreement.

Trump introduced a total ban on Iran's oil export and even refused to relax sanctions during the Covid-19 pandemic.

After waiting for a full year, in May 2019 Iran began to gradually remove limits on its nuclear activities at bimonthly intervals. At the time Iran announced if the remaining members protect Iran from U.S. sanctions it will reverse its decision. However, the Europeans did nothing tangible and they just expressed verbal support for the agreement.

Following is an excerpt of the article:

For nearly three years, the fate of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal has hung precariously in the balance. The Trump administration withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – to use its official name – in 2018, arguing that a policy of economic coercion, dubbed “maximum pressure”, would deliver an improved agreement. But all it achieved was the hollowing out of the existing one. Europe now must seize the opportunity to help revive and even strengthen it.

The JCPOA's original bargain was straightforward: limiting and monitoring Iran's nuclear program and in return delivering relief from international sanctions built up over years.

Trump's sweeping sanctions policy undid those financial benefits, and as a result, Iran began discarding the nuclear restrictions the JCPOA had placed on it. Raising the rate of uranium enrichment to 20% and starting activities related to uranium metal production earlier this month were the latest in a series of breaches that have increased in gravity as the damage from U.S. sanctions cut ever deeper. Iran is now in a third successive year of economic recession.

With the Biden administration taking office, the UK, France and Germany (the so-called E3), which are all JCPOA participants, as well as the European Union, which serves as the deal's coordinator, are well positioned to spearhead the JCPOA's revival as a first step towards engaging with Iran on broader issues. This requires a coordinated and multidimensional effort.

In Washington, the nuclear deal remains deeply divisive. Despite the “maximum pressure” campaign's clear failure in delivering on its stated objectives, critics will insist that Biden's declared intent to reengage with Tehran is folly. That is an argument echoed by U.S. allies in the Middle East (West Asia), notably Israel, whose prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, is loudly urging the incoming administration to stick to its predecessor's line and give the Islamic Republic no quarter on the nuclear front.

European governments are not unsympathetic to some of the Trump team's arguments, which regional players echo, on the need to address other aspects of Iranian policy, particularly its ballistic missile program and regional power projection. They also see room for improvement on the nuclear deal itself.

But the record of the past three years is clear: sanctions did not solve those issues, and in many ways made them worse by raising tensions across the board, while undoing the real progress that had been made toward keeping Iran's activities in check.

If Biden moves toward reviving the JCPOA, Europe should make it clear it supports a move to return the nuclear agreement to full strength as the best means of not just defusing a brewing crisis, but laying the foundation for follow-on discussions on additional issues based on dialogue and negotiations rather than coercion.

The challenge will be to put this into practice. As JCPOA participants, the E3 and EU should work with Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in producing a clear roadmap for Iran to reverse its JCPOA breaches and resume full compliance. This must include a timetable for dismantling surplus centrifuge cascades and blending down or shipping out excess enriched uranium stockpiles. That should be technically achievable within two or three months.

In parallel, Europe should take immediate preparatory steps for reversing the economic harm caused by U.S. sanctions, which deprive Tehran of the relief the JCPOA was always intended to deliver. This could be done through working with the private sector to support trade with Iran. U.S. sanctions may have been unilateral, but their chilling effect was global. Giving companies the clarity and support they need to engage with the Iranian market – freely and without fear of punitive action – in the event that sanctions are relaxed or lifted would be a critical step toward ensuring the economic benefits for all sides.

Last year, Iran submitted an IMF loan request to help deal with the Covid-19 pandemic, an added burden on an already beleaguered economy. Europe should urge the Biden administration to support that request, and also ensure that humanitarian trade is unimpeded while Washington prepares to reverse its wider sanctions policy. The U.S. could also greenlight European pre-purchases of Iranian oil, which could allow Europe to provide Iran with a line of credit to be used for humanitarian trade or other essential purchases – an idea floated by the French president, Emmanuel Macron, in 2019, but obstructed by the Trump administration.

Iran should reciprocate these confidence-building steps.

Another important element in a European diplomatic effort lies in moving Iran and its Persian Gulf Arab neighbors from estrangement to engagement.

## Illegal seizure of Iranian tankers by Indonesia

**POLITICAL d e s k** TEHRAN — Indonesian officials declared they had seized an Iranian tanker and Panamanian tanker suspected of carrying out the illegal transfer of oil in their country's waters on Sunday, January 24.

The tankers - the Iranian-flagged MT Horse and the Panamanian-flagged MT Freya - were seized in waters off Indonesia's West Kalimantan province, said Wisnu Pramadita, a spokesman for the Indonesian Maritime Security Agency.

He said the tankers are suspected of a variety of violations, including not displaying national flags, shutting off their identification systems, anchoring illegally as well as the illegal transfer fuel between ships and spilling oil.

Indonesia escorted the two tankers to Batam Island in Riau Islands province for further investigation, he said.

# Biden can lift economic sanctions through executive orders, expert says

**POLITICAL d e s k** TEHRAN — Hassan Beheshtipour, an international relations expert, says new U.S. President Joe Biden has the power to lift the sanctions that were imposed against Iran through executive order.

In an interview with ILNA published on Sunday, Beheshtipour also said, “The U.S. which has withdrawn from the JCPOA since May 2018, cannot expect Iran to return to its commitments first.”

Both during his presidential campaigns and after winning the presidency, Biden had expressed willingness to return to the nuclear deal, officially called the JCPOA, if Iran returns to full compliance with the agreement.

Iran started to gradually remove cap on its nuclear activities based on paragraph 36 of the JCPOA one year after Donald Trump quit the deal and imposed sanctions on Iran. By pulling out of the deal the Trump administration violated international law as the agreement has been confirmed by UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

“Iran waited a year, from May 2018 to May 2019, hoping that the Europeans would



fulfill their commitments, but they did not live up to their commitments. Ultimately, Iran decided to reduce its commitments in five steps every 60 days,” Beheshtipour said.

Pointing to the economic sanctions imposed by Trump's administration, Beheshtipour said, “Since the United States started this path, naturally it must return

to its obligations and fulfill them. Mr. Biden is expected to issue executive orders and revoke Trump's orders to lift sanctions on Iran. In the international arena, when a party initiates a policy, it must take the initiative to compensate. When Mr. Biden lifts the sanctions, then Europeans have no excuse to say that under American pressure they

will not fulfill their obligations.”

He asserted, “Iran and the United States can set a zero point and say that both of them will start returning to their commitments together, but it is the U.S. that has left the JCPOA.”

Noting that the two sides are clear on how to return to commitments, he said, “Biden wants to coordinate with his allies on the JCPOA”. He added, “Unlike Trump, who does not count Europeans at all and treats them very badly, he respects his European partners and may even coordinate with China and Russia on this issue.”

Nevertheless, Beheshtipour emphasized, “We have to be realistic, Biden needs time to consult with American allies concerning how to return to the agreement with Iran.”

Regarding the expectations that the two countries have from each other, including Iran's demand for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the region, he said, “Iran's logic is that the U.S. presence has created insecurity in the region and, instead of creating security, has led to the emergence of Daesh (ISIS) and Takfiri terrorists who carry out various operations in the region.”

## Rouhani says U.S. suffered defeat in economic war on Iran

**POLITICAL d e s k** TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani said on Sunday that the Iranian nation has won the economic war waged by the U.S., stressing that a bright future is awaiting Iranians.

The Iranian people succeeded to foil the plots of the architects of the economic war, promising a brighter economic future for the people, Rouhani added.

“The goal of the architects of the economic war was to unsettle the Iranian economy, but I assure people that a brighter future awaits our economy,” he noted.

The president added, “The angry enemies are trying to stop or slow down the positive trend with broad propaganda and psychological warfare.”

In relevant remarks in late December, Rouhani said that the U.S. economic war against his nation is nearing an end, but meantime, stressed that the Iranian nation is ready for decades of resistance.

“The projects that are being inaugurated today prove the national power of the country that is emerging, and we are witnessing that the whole country has turned into a huge workshop of self-confidence under the economic sanctions,” the president said while inaugurating three major petrochemical projects via a video conference.

He also said, “If this war lasts for 30 years, our people will still stand, although I believe that this war is reaching its end and the one who ignited the war is in the last weeks of his political life.”

Rouhani was openly referring to the departure of Donald Trump from the White House who lost the November 3 presidential elections.

Rouhani called U.S. economic pressure against Iran an economic war. When the U.S. refused to relax illegal sanctions against Iran during the Coronavirus pandemic, Foreign Minister Zarif said sanctions have reached to

“economic terrorism”.

“The Iranian nation will live forever and be proud as it has been proud throughout history,” Rouhani underlined, according to Fars.

“The enemy intended to reduce our foreign exchange earnings by limiting the oil sector,” Rouhani said in reference to a total ban on Iran's oil export by the Trump administration.

“As the Leader said, the first thing to do in sanctions is for us to eliminate their effect, and the second thing is to lift the sanctions,” he added at the time.

Calling the sanctions a joint product of Zionism, their regional allies, and Americans, he said, “We should defuse the conspiracy of the enemies and we should not let their cruel plan against our nation continue.”

He vowed the government's continued effort to improve the living conditions of the Iranian people in the near future.

## Jahangiri: The country will see brighter days in spring

**POLITICAL d e s k** TEHRAN — Iran's First Vice-President Es'haq Jahangiri says “the winter days are going to come to an end and the country will see brighter days in the spring.”

Jahangiri made the remarks while visiting the international oil, gas, refining and petrochemical fair in Tehran on Sunday.

“The country's achievements in the fields of oil, gas, and petrochemicals indicate the failure of cruel sanctions against the Islamic Republic,” Jahangiri remarked.

“The achievements of this exhibition indicate that Iran is moving towards development and progress,” the vice president noted.

Praising Iran's “great achievements” in the fields of oil, gas, refining, and petrochemical, he said, “The exhibition is a reason of the ‘long strides’ the country has taken to make products that can be distributed both inside and outside the country.”

Pointing to the recent inauguration of the Bidboland gas refinery in southwest-

ern Iran, Jahangiri said, “No one could imagine the country can implement such projects under the harshest and toughest U.S. sanctions in the past three years.”

Jahangiri said even in the past few months when Donald Trump was still in office, Iran set considerable records in the export of crude oil and oil condensates.

“At a time when they wished to zero out Iran's oil sales, we achieved the biggest record in crude oil export in December 2020-January 2021,” he added.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the vice president, a graduate of the Sharif University of Technology, said, “The construction of compressors and turbines made with valid international standards by Iran indicates the country's ability to provide great services in the oil industry.”

On Thursday, President Rouhani inaugurated the Bidboland natural gas refinery in Khuzestan. It is one of the largest projects in West Asia. The value of the project was \$3.4 billion.

## Construction of phases 2, 3 of Bushehr nuclear plant has started

**POLITICAL d e s k** TEHRAN — Hadi Beiginejad, a senior member of the Parliament's Energy Committee, said on Sunday that Iran has started construction of phases 2 and 3 of the Bushehr nuclear power plant.

“The second and third phases of the Bushehr power plant development have been signed with the Russians under 10-year and 8-year contracts,” Fars quoted Beiginejad as saying.

The foundation of the second phase of the plant is under construction and the leveling works on the area considered for phase 3 has also began, he explained.

Beiginejad emphasized the need for Iran to diversify its power generation resources, and called on the Parliament and the government to accelerate construction of phases 2 and 3 of the nuclear plant.

The Bushehr facility sits 17 kilometers southeast of the city of Bushehr along the Persian Gulf coasts in southern Iran.

It started operating in 2011 and reached

its full capacity the following year.

Rosatom, Russia's state atomic energy corporation, started site preparation of the two new units of the power plant with a combined capacity of 2100 MW in September 2016. On March 14, 2017 construction formally started. Phases 2 and 3 are scheduled to be completed in 2024 and 2026 respectively.

In November 2019, the concrete-casting operation of the phase 2 was launched in a ceremony attended by Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) chief Ali Akbar Salehi, a number of state and provincial officials, parliamentarians and manager of Russian companies active in the site.

“Cementing process of the nuclear reactor of the Bushehr power plant's phase II is one of the key processes and an important event in the site by which we have taken a giant stride towards development of nuclear power plants in the country,” Mahmoud Jafari, the executive manager for the new phases of the Bushehr nuclear plant, told reporters on the sidelines of the ceremony.

## MP: Iran should not let Tel Aviv, Riyadh to aggravate Iran's ties with the West

**POLITICAL d e s k** TEHRAN — Jalil Rahimi Jahanabadi, a member of the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of the Parliament, has suggested all “should support the government to manage tensions and challenges between Iran and the West and not allow Israel and some rival countries in the region, such as Saudi Arabia, to aggravate the situation.”

On his prediction of the new Biden administration's policy towards the JCPOA, he said, “There is a slow and complex decisions process in the U.S. government because there is a division of power in the U.S.”

Jahanabadi added, “Apart from the division of power in the U.S. political establishment, the U.S. allies, the Europeans and Israelis in the region and some Arab countries and even some of their rivals such as China and Russia, which the U.S. needs them to take measures (against Iran) in the Security Council, play a key role to influence Biden's policies towards Iran.”

To talking ISNA, the MP said currently there is no better agreement than the JCPOA, the official name for the 2015



nuclear agreement.

“First, there is no logical and rational framework for dialogue with Iran on nuclear issues except the JCPOA, and if they want to reach a new agreement, it is not easily possible. Therefore, it is better to revive the JCPOA in the same framework.”

Politicians, officials and pundits believe that Donald Trump's “maximum pressure” campaign against Iran ended in failure.

Through a total ban on Iran's oil export, Trump intended to strangle the Iranian economy.

“The Americans have a bitter experience during the Trump era that failed to create a global consensus and bring Iran to the negotiating table. Trump could not attack Iran militarily and the sanctions did not bring Iran to its knees, so there is no other way but to negotiate with Iran. However, this issue needs a global consensus. I think the U.S. will consult with Europe and with Israel in the region and some of its rivals, and then they will come to Iran for talks,” the MP stated.

The legislator sitting on the Majlis national security committee also backed the Rouhani administration's policy toward the JCPOA.

“First of all, we need to reach a consensus to support the current government. The current government has formed the JCPOA framework. We need to manage the relations between Iran and the West. We should not allow the Israelis and some rival countries, such as Saudi Arabia, to deteriorate the relation between us and the West.”

## U.S. arrest of Iranian university professor violates human rights: ex-diplomat

**POLITICAL d e s k** TEHRAN — Mohsen Pakayeen, Iran's former ambassador to Baku, has sharply criticized the U.S. for arresting Iranian university professor Kaveh Lotfolah Afrasiabi, describing it as a severe violation of human rights and freedom of expression.

“The move has no legal basis; and the arrest of university professors and international relations experts is completely contrary to freedom of expression and freedom of press and is an instance of human rights violation,” Pakayeen told Fars.

“I believe that the international community and the institutions that claim to

advocate human rights in the world should endeavor to set Afrasiabi free,” the former diplomat said, adding that the U.S. does not adhere to any international standards with regard to human rights.

Pakayeen suggested that international bodies have to condemn such acts and compel countries to meet international standards and avoid measures against human rights.

The U.S. Department of Justice announced on Tuesday that Afrasiabi had been arrested at his home in Watertown, Massachusetts, for alleged illegal activities.

It claimed that Afrasiabi was actually a

secret employee of the government of Iran and the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations (IMUN) “who was being paid to spread their propaganda”.

After his arrest, Alireza Miryoussefi, the spokesperson for the Iranian Mission to the UN, blasted the U.S. move and said the Trump administration is famous for its anti-Iran “bigotry and bias”.

“It is unfortunate to hear of the arrest of Dr. Afrasiabi on spurious charges, in the waning hours of the Trump administration, which is well-known for its anti-Iranian bigotry and bias,” Miryoussefi noted.

“Dr. Afrasiabi has not been working as an agent of the Mission and only as a university professor, and an expert on international relations,” he added.

He further explained that Afrasiabi “has provided consultations to the Mission on international issues and his working relationship with us has been open and fully transparent since the beginning.”

Afrasiabi was arrested after he warned a U.S. TV show host to stop belittling and insulting Iran's Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani who was assassinated in a U.S. drone strike near Baghdad International Airport in January 2020.



# Not a friend; definitely

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — While Joe Biden himself has vowed to find a “smarter way” to tighten the noose on Iran, Washington hawks and their allies in the region keep expressing concerns over some of Biden’s picks for top foreign policy and national security jobs.

A barrage of criticism was leveled at the new U.S. president, Joe Biden, after Jewish Insider broke the news that Robert Malley, a former Obama administration official known for his moderate views on Iran, is being considered by the Biden administrations for a position in the Biden administration as special envoy on Iran.

Malley, who served as special assistant to the president and White House coordinator for the Middle East [West Asia], North Africa and the Persian Gulf region in the Obama administration, has castigated former U.S. President Donald Trump for his Iran policy while advocating for a more balanced approach toward Iran. He reportedly met with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in 2019 while the chief Iranian diplomat was in New York attending meetings at the United Nations. He criticized Israel’s decision to assassinate top Iranian scientist Mohsen Fakhrazadeh last November, saying the attack would “make it all the more difficult for [Trump’s] successor to resume diplomacy with Iran,” according to Jewish Insider.

Moreover, Malley is President and CEO of International Crisis Group (ICG), an international think tank known for its advocacy for de-escalation between Iran and the U.S.

Malley’s track record of moderate views on Iran drove Washington hawks crazy. They joined forces to dissuade the Biden administration from hiring Malley, believing that

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the former Obama official would undo four years of Trump unrelenting efforts to squeeze Iran “until the pips squeak.”

“It’s deeply troubling that President Biden would consider appointing Rob Malley to direct Iran policy. Malley has a long track record of sympathy for the Iranian regime & animus towards Israel,” Republican Senator Tom Cotton said in a tweet on January 22, adding that Iranian authorities wouldn’t believe their luck if he is selected.

Cotton, a staunch Trump supporter harboring a deep grudge against Iran, also called a radical whose appointment would contradict Biden’s rhetoric of unity.

“Appointing radicals like Malley gives the lie to all of President Biden and Tony Blinken’s rhetoric of unity,” the senator continued.

Eli Lake, a Bloomberg columnist with

hardline views on Iran, also railed against Malley in a recent opinion piece for Bloomberg.

“President Joe Biden has done a good job so far of calming the anxieties of allies that the U.S. will rush into negotiations to re-enter the flawed 2015 nuclear deal with Iran. Appointing Robert Malley as special envoy to Iran could change that,” the columnist wrote.

The U.S. hawks also wrote a letter to Tony Blinken, Biden’s nominee for secretary of state, calling on him not to appoint Rob Malley as U.S. special envoy for Iran.

The possible appointment of Malley also concerned Israel, though he is a Jew. Israeli daily newspaper Walla reported that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was concerned with some of Biden’s picks for top-level positions, which include Robert

Malley, Wendy Sherman, Biden’s nominee for deputy secretary of state, his nominee for CIA director, and his national security advisor Jake Sullivan.

Most of those officials have served under Obama in various top-level positions, with some of them even developing friendships with their Iranian counterparts. But none of them are pro-Iran. Critics often ignore the fact that none of Biden’s officials will be tasked with policymaking on their own. In fact, the U.S. policies on Iran will be crafted in a collective process with the participation of all relevant government agencies.

Besides, Malley was one of the officials of the Obama administration who played a role in U.S. policies toward the West Asia region and that he is not an unknown quantity.

Those who criticize Biden’s picks for top jobs ignore another fact: some of these figures played a pivotal role in what some U.S. officials called “a non-proliferation achievement,” which is the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The nuclear deal has been a major privilege for the U.S. while Iran did not benefit from this deal. In fact, the deal was so much in the U.S. interest that the Biden administration seems to be intent on reviving it.

Critics of Malley has falsely claimed that he has close ties to Iran and its allies in the region and that appointing Malley will put American families at risk and endanger Israel. But they failed to show how Malley’s appointment would put American families at risk. They also claimed that Iran news media welcomed the appointment of Malley. This is not right. Because Iran basically opposes the idea for the U.S. to have an “Iran envoy.”

## Iran rules out mediation on South Korean-flagged tanker

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Iran will not accept any third party mediation on the South Korean ship seized by Iranian authorities on charges of polluting the environment, says the spokesman for Iran’s Foreign Ministry.

“We don’t accept political mediation on technical issues and we informed the South Koreans of this issue,” Saeed Khatibzadeh said in an interview with the Iranian ISNA news agency, noting that the South Korean-flagged ship was seized because it polluted the maritime environment.

On January 4, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) impounded the MT Hankuk Chemi carrying 20 crew members, including five South Koreans, for polluting the environment. Following the seizure, Iran said that the South Korean ship’s seizure was “a total technical issue.”

“Based on initial reports coming from local authorities, the issue is completely technical, and the vessel was led ashore upon a judicial order because the vessel had been polluting the sea,” Khatibzadeh said in a statement following the seizure of the ship.

Tehran and Seoul are locked in a bitter dispute over Iran’s blocked assets in South Korea, with the seizure of the South Korean being the latest in a series of disagreements between the two Asian countries. Some 7 billion dollars of Iranian oil revenues have been frozen in two South Korean banks since September 2019 due to U.S. sanctions on Iran.

While Iran says that the ship was impounded for environmental issues, South Korea implied that the ship was seized in an effort to put pressure on Seoul to release Iran’s frozen money.

But Khatibzadeh denied that Iran had seized the tanker to force South Korea into releasing Iran’s blocked assets.



“So far, we have tried various means to get our assets released. The South Korean first vice foreign minister’s visit [to Iran] was in this direction,” he pointed out.

Following the seizure, South Korea sent a delegation led by its First Vice Foreign Minister Choi Jong-kun to Iran. The South Korean diplomat met with several Iranian high-ranking officials including Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif but the first round of Iran-South Korea negotiations ended in failure as the East Asian country proposed to barter a whopping \$7 billion of Iran’s assets blocked in South Korean banks for ambulance vehicles and coronavirus test kits, a proposal decried by Iran as “shameless”.

During his visit to Iran, Jong-kun met with Iran’s central bank governor Abdolnasser Hemmati to discuss how to release the Iranian assets. According to Iranian media, the South Korean diplomat proposed to provide Iran with ambulances and coronavirus test kits using Iran’s assets. But Iran rejected the offer, saying that it is willing to use its money in purchasing foods and medicines. Iran also said that the Korean proposal did not include the release of all

Iran’s frozen assets.

The South Korean delegation also failed to secure the release of the seized ship. Following the negotiations, Khatibzadeh said that legal proceedings were underway into the case of the South Korean ship.

“Legal proceedings are underway into the case of the South Korean ship seized in the Persian Gulf waters upon a judicial order due to polluting the environment,” he noted. “So, any developments in the case are subject to decisions by judicial officials.”

In his interview with ISNA, Khatibzadeh said that, during the South Korean delegation’s visit, Iranian officials asked their South Korean counterparts not to seek a political solution to a technical issue.

“During the South Korean delegation’s visit to Tehran, which took place a while ago according to a pre-planned schedule, we asked them why they seek a political solution to the issue of seizure of the Korean ship, which is a technical one,” Khatibzadeh stated.

South Korea made effort to secure the release of its tanker through political negotiations and it even asked Qatar to offer help in this regard after it failed to get the ship released. Qatar confirmed that it has received a request for help from South Korea and expressed readiness to contribute to settling the issue.

“We have received a request from the Korean government. Right now, we are working on it with Iran to find a way. They are talking to each other directly,” Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani said in a recent interview with Bloomberg TV. “We hope that we can help in facilitating any talks for the release of the tanker.”

## Iran says would welcome Saudi foreign policy revision

**1→** “We have always underlined that regional countries should arrive at a common understanding regarding the regional problems,” he stated, noting that such understanding would help establish a “security mechanism” that could be used to govern the region.

Khatibzadeh voiced Iran’s readiness to negotiate with Saudi Arabia if it changes tack, adding that Iran is ready to address Saudi concerns regarding Iran.

“The Saudis may have some concerns, and by the way, we emphasize that we need to talk about these concerns. The Hormuz peace endeavor was in the context of talking about these issues. Some concerns may be illusions that open the door to other powers in the region, and we are even willing to talk about these illusory and imaginary concerns,” the

spokesman continued.

The remarks came after Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan claimed that their hands are extended to Iran to make peace, though he accused Iran of not complying with agreements and not being “serious about talks with Riyadh.”

On Friday, Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif also expressed willingness to resolve differences in the region, once again floating Iran’s Hormuz Peace Endeavor as a forum to soothe tensions.

In an article published by Foreign Affairs magazine, 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,” Zarif stated.

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 September 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.

But Khatibzadeh said Saudi Arabia has so far left Iran’s proposals for negotiation and resolution of outstanding differences between the countries unanswered.

Khatibzadeh reminded that Saudi Arabia tows a long record of violations against the region, from the war on Yemen and support for regional militancy and Takfiri terrorism to a 2017 Saudi-led regional blockade of Qatar.

Even if Riyadh might have some concerns, “the answer is not war,” he suggested.

Khatibzadeh said the ball is in Riyadh’s court. “The solution is in the Saudis’ hands and they can solve this issue whenever they choose to.”

## SPORTS

### Alireza Jahanbakhsh close to January exit

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Iranian winger Alireza Jahanbakhsh will most likely leave Brighton in January.

Jahanbakhsh has struggled for game time this season under Graham Potter and the 27-year-old was quoted recently as saying he is at a point in his career he has to “play a lot more and have better conditions.”

The Iranian international signed from AZ Alkmaar in 2018 for a then club-record fee of £17m but has since endured a frustrating time in the Premier League on the south coast.

He made 24 appearances under Chris Hughton, without scoring or claiming an assist and the arrival of Potter from Swansea in 2019 saw little change in Jahanbakhsh’s fortunes.

Jahanbakhsh said he had ‘good offers’ to move on last summer but was made promises by the club that he would get more opportunities this campaign, brightonandhoveindependent.co.uk reported.

He has made 15 appearances in all competitions this season and last featured for Brighton at Newport in the FA Cup, where he sustained another ‘minor injury.’

“There are offers for me in every window,” he said earlier this month. “But I have a contract with the Brighton club and everything must be done with their knowledge and with their opinion.”

Brighton remain keen to reduce squad numbers and wages this January.

“You can never know,” said Potter when asked if more players will leave this January. “You have to adapt until the end of the transfer window.

“You have always got to be mindful that players might be in a stage of their career where they want to play more for themselves, it might be better for the club that they play regularly somewhere else.

“There are always things in January that you have to consider but be open to anything and be ready to adapt if you need to.”

### Mehdi Ghayedi chosen best AFC Young Player of 2020

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — A breakout star at national, continental and international levels, Iran’s Mehdi Ghayedi is Asia’s Choice for the Best Young Player of 2020.

The award recognizes Asian men’s players (aged 23 or younger on December 31, 2020) for their performances in senior club and youth and senior national teams during the 2020 calendar year.

Ghayedi edged out countryman Mehdi Abdi to win the award, with Korea Republic’s AFC U-23 Championship Most Valuable Player Won Du-jae finishing third.

A creative forward who turned 22 in December, Ghayedi enjoyed a superb year for club side Esteghlal, attracting attention throughout the continent with three goals in five matches in the AFC Champions League.

He also scored in Iran’s Hazfi Cup final, which Esetghlal lost to FC Tractor, and finished as the Iran Pro League’s top provider of assists as his side finished the 2019-20 season as runner-up.

After appearing at the AFC U23 Championship Thailand 2020 last January, Ghayedi made his senior international debut for Iran against Uzbekistan in October and scored his maiden goal for Iran in his second appearance, against Bosnia and Herzegovina the following month.

#### Top 10 Total Points

1. Mehdi Ghayedi (Esteghlal/IRN) 24.40
2. Mehdi Abdi (Persepolis FC/IRN) 21.37
3. Won Du-jae (Ulsan Hyundai FC/KOR) 16.20
4. Takehiro Tomiyasu (Bologna/JPN) 7.83
5. Takefusa Kubo (Mallorca, Villarreal CF/JPN) 6.71
6. Abdulrahman Ghareeb (Al Ahli/KSA) 3.69
7. Kaoru Mitoma (Kawasaki Frontale/JPN) 3.64
8. Mohanad Ali (Portimonense, Al Saliya/IRQ) 3.08
9. Safawi Rasid (Johor Darul Ta’zim, Portimonense/MAS) 3.07
10. Abdullah Al Hamdan (Al Shabab/KSA) 2.81



### Bozidar Radosevic may leave Persepolis

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Persepolis goalkeeper Bozidar Radosevic may leave the Iranian team after they failed to meet their financial commitment.

Radosevic joined Persepolis from Hungarian team Debrecen in 2016 but has not regularly played for the team over the past five years.

Now, in an interview with dalmatinskiportal.hr, the 32-year-old custodian has confirmed he would likely leave Persepolis.

“I have to confirm, unfortunately, it’s true that these are big debts, but I am still a Persepolis player at the moment,” Radosevic said.

Radosevic has played 37 matches for Persepolis so far.

### Fans to be allowed into stadiums from April: official

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — The stadiums will be permitted to hold up the fans from the April, head of Iran Football League Organization, Soheil Mahdi, said.

Iranian supporters have been unable to attend football matches since March because of the coronavirus pandemic.

“We will allow the fans into stadiums from April but we will have to ensure the health and wellbeing of them. The stadiums need to ensure that the protocols are successfully implemented,” Mahdi said.

The death toll from the coronavirus pandemic in Iran exceeded 57,380 on Sunday, while more than 1,164,000 cases have recovered in the country.

Speaking at a daily press conference on Sunday, Health Ministry Spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari put the death toll from the novel coronavirus in Iran at 57,383, saying the disease has taken the lives of 89 patients over the past 24 hours.

## Iran’s ambassador submits credentials to Libyan Presidential Council chief

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Accredited Ambassador of Iran to Libya Mohammadreza Ra’ouf Sheybani on Saturday submitted his letter of credence to the head of the Libyan Presidential Council, Fayez Al-Sarraj.

In addition to Iran, the Libyan leader received the letters of credence of three other ambassadors from Herzegovina, South Korea and Rwanda.

The new ambassadors delivered speeches at the reception ceremony in Tripoli, thanking Libya for the warm welcome, according to the Libya Observer news website. The ambassadors also reiterated the friendship relations with Libya, voicing support for achieving peace and stability in Libya as well as for boosting bilateral relations with the country.

“We welcome the new ambassadors and we are happy to receive their credentials today in Tripoli. We hail their countries’ support for democracy and efforts to achieve peace and stability in Libya.” Al-Sarraj said, hoping that the new ambassadors would work on boosting bilateral relations in different fields with Libya.

The newly-appointed Iranian ambassador also met with Libya’s Foreign Minister Mohammad al-Taher Siala on Sunday.

During the meeting, Siala welcomed the new Iranian ambassador, emphasizing the depth of the historical and brotherly and Islamic ties between Libya and Iran and pointing to the importance of strengthening bilateral cooperation and initiating contacts, exchange of visits, especially at the general and private economic level, such as the Chambers of Commerce and the Businessmen Council, as well as consultation and coordination in international forums, according to a statement issued by the Libyan Foreign Ministry.

“For his part, the ambassador expressed his happiness to work as his country’s ambassador to the state of Libya, and that he would make efforts to restore relations to normalcy, intensify visits and hold joint committee meetings as soon as possible,” the statement added.

The Iranian ambassador also expressed his country’s readiness to provide any assistance to the Government of



National Accord in order to solve the Libyan crisis and restore stability, development and prosperity to the Libyan people.



## Qanbari appointed as new head of IPO

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Hassan-Ali Qanbari was appointed as the new head of the Iranian Privatization Organization (IPO).

Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dejpasand appointed Qanbari to the post on Sunday.

Having a Ph.D. degree in economics, Qanbari has been working in the banking and investment sectors.

He has been a former managing director of Bank Sepah, and Omid Investment Group, as well as a board member of Bank Day, Hekmat Iranian Bank, and Post Bank of Iran.

In mid-November last year, Alireza Saleh resigned as the head of IPO, and Hassan Alaei, the deputy head of IPO, replaced Saleh as the acting head of the mentioned organization.

The Iranian Privatization Organization affiliated with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs is in charge of implementing the country's privatization programs by setting prices and ceding shares to the general public and on the Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE).

## Inflation rate rises 3.1% in urban areas

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — The Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) has announced that the inflation rate has risen 3.1 percent in the country's urban areas in the tenth Iranian calendar month of Dey (December 21, 2020-January 19, 2021).

The SCI put the inflation rate at 45.5 percent in the urban regions in the tenth month.

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.

## 32 idle mines revived in Zanjan Province

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — According to a provincial official, 32 idle mines have been revived in Zanjan Province during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-December 20, 2020).



Nasser Faghfour, the head of Industry, Mining and Trade Department of the province, said reviving 43 idle mines in the province has been planned for the current calendar year, and given the 32 mines revived in the first nine months, the planning has been realized by 100 percent so far.

Through implementing a program for reviving idle small-scale mines across the country, Iran has revived 176 mines during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year.

As announced by the Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), 12 mineral processing plants were also set up in the country through cooperation with the private sector during the mentioned nine-month period.

According to the available statistics, the number of active mines in the country is more than 5,600 mines, from which an average of 400 million tons of various minerals are extracted annually, and the share of construction materials is estimated at 60 to 65 percent.

Currently, 257 mines are being equipped as part of a comprehensive program for reviving idle small-scale mines across the country.

Reviving 200 idle mines and setting up 25 processing units have been planned for the current Iranian year (ends on March 20, 2021).

Last year, 146 mines were revived throughout the country.

According to the information released by IMIDRO, the most small-scale inactive mines are located in Khorasan Razavi Province and the least of them are located in the south of Kerman Province and North Khorasan Province.

As reported, under the framework of the mentioned program, 672 idle mines have been identified and prioritized in the current Iranian calendar year, and diagnostic procedures have been performed on 194 mines to determine the reasons for the halt in their production.

The mentioned program, which has been at the forefront of IMIDRO's missions over the past two years, is being pursued in several provinces.

The previous head of IMIDRO has mentioned this plan as one of the most significant plans of "Resistance Economy", saying that IMIDRO is strongly determined to carry out it.

Reviving the small mines not only is a major step toward materializing "Surge in Production", which is the motto of the current Iranian calendar year, it also plays a significant role in job creation throughout the country, Khodadad Gharibpour has said.

Following this program, so far various small-scale mines including chromite, manganese, hematite, and dolomite, iron ore, copper, and construction stone mines have been surveyed by monitoring and diagnosing the problems of the mines and providing solutions for resolving their issues.

According to the head of the Iranian Mining Engineering Organization (IMEO), the mines of Iran have 27 widely used minerals.

Taqi Nabi said that Iran produces 13 major minerals in the world and is among the top 10 countries in this due.

He further referred to the government's plan for reviving the idle mines across the country, and said, "The government has taken good steps to return the closed mines to the production cycle, and good expert measures have been taken."

Mining units are given a three-month opportunity to determine the status of stagnant and inactive mines in order to revive them, he added.

# Iran, Armenia ink MOU on expansion of trade ties

**1 →** Hosseini said Iran is seeking to become a permanent member of the EAEU and Armenia could be of significant help in this regard.

According to the Iranian minister, areas like the mining industry, foodstuff, and home appliances could be good opportunities for the two countries to develop mutual cooperation.

Kerobyan for his part expressed his government's readiness for cooperation to boost mutual trade and produce joint products and to pave the way for Iran to enter the markets of third countries.

"We are ready to support Iranian traders to use Armenia for entering third countries," he said.

**Iran focusing on trade with neighbors**

The Armenian minister also met with the Governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Abdolnaser Hemmati and discussed banking issues and ways of increasing the level of trade between the two sides.

In this meeting, Hemmati noted that Iran is currently focusing on enhancing its trade ties with the neighboring countries.

In this meeting, Hemmati pointed to Armenia's significant geographical position and noted that the country can have a tremendous impact on the development of



*Iranian Industry, Mining, and Trade Minister Alireza Razm Hosseini (R) and Armenia's Economy Minister Vahan Kerobyan in Tehran on Saturday*

trade relations between the two countries and also between Iran and the EAEU as a whole.

"Iran's economic situation is improving despite the pressures imposed by the U.S. sanctions, and we have been able to

achieve positive economic growth this year," Hemmati said.

He expressed dissatisfaction with the current level of trade between the two neighbors, saying: "Unfortunately, the volume of trade relations between the two coun-

tries is not reflecting their long history of bilateral cooperation; therefore, we hope that by holding similar meetings, we will be able to further strengthen mutual relations and witness the development of economic relations."

Kerobyan also called for the development of trade and economic relations between the two nations, especially the fields of investment and production.

**Iranian trade with some partners resuming**

Elsewhere in his remarks, Hemmati pointed to the ineffectiveness of the U.S. sanctions in disrupting Iran's trade ties with its major partners and said: "We believe that the sanctions are not viable; Iran's trade relations with some countries are currently resuming and it is a good time for Armenia, as a friend and neighbor, to expand its relations with Iran."

He finally stressed the importance of resolving the banking issues of the two countries and proposed to travel to Yerevan to pursue specialized banking issues and financial exchanges with the governor of the Central Bank of Armenia.

During his five-day visit to Iran, Kerobyan is going to visit some of the major Iranian production centers, and he will also make a trip to Isfahan Province.

## Domestic company inks \$33m deal to build 5 vessels for PMO

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) has signed a deal worth 1.408 trillion rials (about \$33.5 million) with a domestic company called SADRA Iran Marine Industrial Company (SIMIC), based on which SIMIC will build five small-scale vessels for PMO.

The deal was signed in a ceremony attended by senior officials from the country's maritime and transportation sectors including Transport and Urban Development Minister Mohammad Eslami.

As reported by IRNA, the mentioned vessels are going to be used in the country's northern waters as coast guards and guides.

Also in the ceremony, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed between the Ports and Maritime Organization and Iran University of Science and Technology for cooperation in maritime research projects.

Based on the mentioned MOU, which was signed by PMO

Head Mohammad Rastad and President of Iran University of Science and Technology Jabbar-Ali Zakeri, the two sides will cooperate in conducting research in the fields of marine and port sciences and removing barriers and problems in the production of port equipment.

Speaking on the sidelines of the signing ceremony, Rastad noted that Iran has no shortage in the knowledge for the construction of various types of vessels, saying: "By the end of this [Iranian calendar] year (March 20), domestic manufacturers will hand over a total of 26 vessels to the Ports and Maritime Organization."

The official noted that another 34 vessels are also going to be constructed and handed over to PMO by the end of the Iranian calendar year 1400 (March 20, 2022).

According to Rastad, in addition to the deal which was signed for the mentioned five vessels five more vessels are also under construction in Shahid Mahalati Yard in Bushehr Province to be used in the southern portal areas.



"Given that maritime transport is an important factor in international trade, so conducting research and having foresight in this area is of utmost importance," he stressed.

## Iran begins boosting oil output to reach pre-sanction level

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iran's Deputy Oil Minister Amir Hossein Zamaninia said on Friday the country has started boosting its oil production and will be able to reach pre-sanction levels within two months.

Iranian oil won't create any surplus in the oil market and the market will be able to accommodate the country's maximum oil output of around 3.9 million to four million barrels a day, Bloomberg quoted Zamaninia as saying on the sidelines of Iran Oil Show in Tehran.

As reported, Iran has currently curbed



its oil production to less than half of its total capacity due to the problems that the

country is facing for its oil exports since the re-imposition of the U.S. sanctions.

The U.S.'s newly elected President Joe Biden, however, is expected to seek revival of the nuclear deal reached with Iran in 2015; and officials in Tehran have expressed hope that he will ease restrictions on Iranian oil exports.

Zamaninia declined to specify the current level of Iran's oil exports, but said the numbers were "much better than many assume", the report said.

Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh has also stated that Iranian oil

exports have recently increased drastically.

Over the past few months, Iran has been announcing its readiness for increasing its oil production back to the pre-sanction levels.

Earlier this month, the managing director of National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC) said Iran is ready to rapidly increase its output back to the pre-sanction levels.

"Iran is ready to halt the deliberate reduction in oil production and increase its output to 95 percent of the pre-sanction level in just one day," Ahmad Mohammadi said.

## ISOICO to build 1st Iranian-made jack-up drilling rig

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iran Shipbuilding and Offshore Industries Complex (ISOICO) has signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with North Drilling Company (NDCO) for the construction of the country's first locally-made jack-up offshore drilling rig.

The MOU was signed by the ISOICO Head Hamidreza Rezaei and the NDCO Managing Director Masoud Eydi on the sidelines of the 25th edition of Iran International Oil, Gas, Refining, and Petrochemical Exhibition (Iran Oil Show).

Based on the MOU, the two sides will cooperate in designing and constructing the mentioned drilling rig which will be used for the development of oil and gas fields in shallow waters of the Persian Gulf.

NDCO had previously awarded the overhaul project of the Sahar 2 offshore drilling rig to ISOICO.

Since the re-imposition of the U.S. sanctions on the Iranian oil industry, the country has been taking serious measures for cutting reliance on foreign sources for meeting



*ISOICO Head Hamidreza Rezaei (R) and NDCO Managing Director Masoud Eydi exchange signed MOU documents.*

its technological needs.

Designing and constructing drilling rigs has been one

of the major achievements of the country's oil industry in this regard.

Back in February 2020, Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh unveiled a domestically-built drilling rig in a ceremony held in Khuzestan province, southwestern Iran.

The drilling rig, called Fat'h-72 was completely designed and constructed by experts from the province's Academic Center for Education, Culture, and Research (ACECR) in Ahvaz, the capital city of Khuzestan.

ACECR has signed a €33-million deal with the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) for the construction of three drilling rigs, one of which was Fat'h-72.

Located on the costs of the Persian Gulf, Iran Shipbuilding and Offshore Industries Complex Company is an Iranian shipyard, active as a shipbuilder and ship-repairer of different types of vessels and offshore structures.

ISOICO is a subsidiary of the Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO).

## 'Bid Boland Refinery leading in benefitting from domestic capabilities'

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — The managing director of Persian Gulf Bid Boland Gas Refinery, in southwestern Khouzestan Province, said that Bid Boland project is leading in terms of benefitting from domestic capabilities.

Ali-Mohammad Pour-Reza made the remarks when visiting the 25th edition of Iran International Oil, Gas, Refining, and Petrochemical Exhibition (Iran Oil Show) on Sunday.

Elaborating on the activities of the refinery, he said the refinery receives about 16 million cubic meters of gas per day and sends it to the first national pipeline, which is used for consumption in the country in the industrial,

commercial and household sectors.

Last Thursday, President Hassan Rouhani officially inaugurated Persian Gulf Bid Boland Gas Refinery through videoconference.

Bid Boland Refinery has been put into operation with the aim of increasing the production of sweet gas, reducing the consumption of petroleum products, production of propane, butane, and gas condensate, the export of by-products, the supply of natural gas to urban areas, and supplying ethane required by petrochemical units in the region.

The refinery, which took 36 months to complete, has a daily processing capacity of more than 56 million cubic meters of associated gas and when operating at full

capacity it will generate \$700 million of revenue every year.

This complex receives about 13.500 tons of sour gas per year from NGL 900 and 1000 Plants while receiving 2.25 million tons of sweet gas from NGL 1200 and 1300 Plants.

As the largest gas refinery project in West Asia, Bid Boland will have an annual production capacity of 10.4 million tons of methane, 1.5 million tons of ethane, one million tons of propane, 600,000 tons of gas condensates, and 500,000 tons of butane.

Bid Boland Refinery project was recently nominated for the International Project Management Association (IPMA)'s Global Project Excellence Award at the energy sec-



tor; it was also awarded as Iran's top mega project by the Ninth National Project Management Award.



# New U.S. administration: Challenges and opportunities

**1 →** If Biden can formally set U.S. carbon emissions targets by 2030 before next year's UN climate summit, other countries will be motivated to do the same. China will also speed up its de-carbonization. Of course, not all governments welcome the arrival of carbon warriors in the White House, such as the Brazilian government. This government is destroying the Amazon rainforest. Biden has already threatened that Brazil will suffer extreme economic consequences if it does not stop.

The health sector is another area where the United States is expected greater cooperation. Donald Trump announced the decision to pull the United States out of the World Health Organization (WHO) in July, accusing it of being under the control of China. However, Biden reversed the decision on the first day of his term. The process of withdrawing the United States is expected to end in July 2021. New U.S. president can stop that process with an executive order.

The United States is the fourth largest donor to WHO. In 2019, the country contributed 15 percent of the WHO budget. The United States is expected to join a global coalition to fund the development of Covid-19 test drugs and vaccines and their distribution to poor countries. International cooperation is expected to increase during Biden's tenure compared to Trump.

Since Biden was elected, various countries have been analyzing where their national interests will benefit or suffer. China cautiously welcomed him. A Chinese magazine called him as an "old friend," according to the Global Times.

Under Trump, China was happy that American power would weaken. But China was angry with him for his warlike nature. China feared a sudden shift in U.S. policy on the Taiwan problem that could bring the two countries closer to war. Beijing hopes Washington will be more vigilant under the Biden presidency. Trump built the tariff wall in a futile attempt to equalize imports of goods from China to its exports to that country. The Chinese are skeptical toward American policy. Rather, China expects it to reduce tariffs in some cases.

However, China does not expect involvement in the construction of the 5G network or a change in U.S. attitudes and policies in the South China Sea.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had high hopes for Trump's victory. However, he did not hesitate to send a congratulatory message to Biden after his victory. Biden's role in India is unlikely to be very different from Trump's. Because it is not possible for the United States to strike an effective balance against China without India.

However, India will come under pressure from the Biden administration for human rights abuses and insults to democracy. In particular, the Kashmir issue will be revived.

The Biden administration's important role in the way the Modi government has turned violent in Kashmir, including human rights abuses and torture, is beginning to be seen. In the meantime, new American administration has embarrassed the Indian government over the appointment of two women of Kashmiri descent.

When it comes to asserting their power, U.S. allies in Asia will expect Biden's policy



to be closer to Trump's than Barack Obama's. Obama drew the red line in the South China Sea. He did little when China crossed that line. Trump, on the other hand, vehemently rejected China's claim to the sea and increased the U.S. naval presence. He reiterated America's defense commitment to Japan and sold arms to Taiwan. He sought to restore the credibility of U.S. hegemony in Asia.

China's adversaries are concerned that Biden could give Beijing some leeway on security issues as it seeks to achieve other goals, such as cooperation in climate change. Japan's new Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide expects more relations than usual with his country's main ally, the United States, and therefore seeks professional consultations with the United States.

Trump severed trade agreements with South Korea and threatened to withdraw U.S. troops from South Korean soil if Seoul did not pay more for the presence of U.S. troops. At the time, Biden described the threat as "irrational and reckless." When he came to power, he promised to strengthen the U.S. alliance with South Korea. At the time of the election, about two-thirds of South Koreans wanted Biden to win. Therefore, it is needless to say that the relations between the two countries will improve during his tenure.

Trump called for an ideological fight against Communist China on every front. This is proof that his administration had nothing to do with diplomatic reality. It is true that China is a headache for many in Southeast Asia, but it has not been an ideological threat for decades. Indonesia believes that the region's biggest priority is to help China overcome the epidemic and seek economic recovery where China can act as a driving force for growth. Indonesia wants to welcome the U.S. presence. So neither side wants to resort. That's why Indonesia recently rejected a proposal to set up a U.S. spy base in the country.

Under Trump, the guardianship of multilateralism suddenly and unexpectedly falls on the shoulders of the European Union. The Europeans hope that now after Biden's victory, this responsibility to be shared. They also hope that after rejoining the Paris agreement, the United States will abandon its attempts to weaken the World Trade Organization and revive the Iran nuclear deal. Needless to say, Biden also talked about doing these things.

From a strategic point of view, the main goal of the European Union is to ensure that

no one can drag Europe into the Sino-U.S. hegemony. The EU wants to be a little tougher on China. However, the EU may not support Biden if he chooses the path of conflict. Trump weakened NATO. Biden won't do that, but he will push for NATO allies to invest more money behind their respective armed forces.

Two-thirds of NATO members did not spend 2 percent of their GDP on defense. Germany hopes that even if Biden talks of spending more money on the armed forces of NATO member states, the message will not be accompanied by the threat of imposing tariffs on German vehicles. Germany further hopes that the dispute between the allies will be resolved in silence, not on Twitter.

France hopes that the United States will take renewed steps to address regional conflicts that could jeopardize Europe's security, from Turkish expansionism in the Eastern Mediterranean to instability in Lebanon and Libya. Both Germany and France are relieved that the end of Trump's drive to divide Europe is imminent. Yet there is a strong belief in European capitals that even under Obama, Europe began to slip out of America's sight. America is essential, but the world has also changed. France now wants Europe to do more for itself and differently. French President Emmanuel Macron has an

With Biden elected, Britain hopes to conclude a trade agreement with the United States to offset the damage caused by Brexit and to exert global influence through its special relationship with the superpower. However, Biden hinted that if Britain imposed new restrictions on the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, it would have to forget about such a trade deal. Note that Biden himself is of Irish descent. But Britain will probably lose the role of a bridge between the United States and Europe.

Reviving the Iran nuclear deal will not be easy. Most Republicans and some Democrats in the United States oppose the deal. In that case, Biden could lift some sanctions and then try to negotiate a deal.

Israel and the (Persian) Gulf states want the agreement to be stricter than the original 2015 version. It should limit Iran's ballistic missile program and possibly Iran's support for militant (resistance) groups. If Iran does not comply with such conditions, then America's Middle East (West Asia) allies will call on Biden to maintain sanctions on Iran.

Trump has had remarkable success in persuading Arab countries to recognize Israel. There will be pressure on Biden to continue that policy. Palestinians will expect Biden to reverse Trump's hostile approaches, such as shutting down their diplomatic missions in Washington and reducing aid. Nevertheless, they may not be able to persuade Biden to return to Tel Aviv from Jerusalem, the U.S.-recognized capital of Israel.

The populists, dictators and extremist nationalists who are in power in countries around the world were quite comfortable under Trump. They were also supporters of Trump and wanted him to win the election. These countries now have to deal with a U.S. president who has different priorities in his foreign policy. Even Biden had previously announced that he wanted to hold a worldwide conference on the Road to Democracy, a year after taking office, which could be a kind of red signal for all dictatorial and fascist governments especially Arab regimes in West Asia. If this is effective, the authoritarian regimes must seek a new policy and seek reforms to convince the Biden administration.

Regarding immigration issues, it is expected that during new administration, U.S. immigration policy to be relaxed. Under Trump, this policy was being applied very harshly. Needless to say, immigrants will get some benefits from that. The announcement of new jobs in the United States during Biden's tenure is expected to turn the tide of the economy. Biden also must keep a close eye on racism that has resurfaced under Trump. Education, peace, democracy, these three expectations are higher than Biden. Now let's see how far the implementation goes with the expectation.

*Rakib Al Hasan is an author, activist and youth leader from Bangladesh.*

## Iraqi group claims responsibility for aerial attack on Riyadh

An Iraqi group has claimed responsibility for an aerial attack on Saudi Arabia's capital of Riyadh, saying it was a revenge for the blood of those killed in a twin terrorist bombing in Baghdad.

The al-Wa'ada al-Haq Brigades said in a statement early Sunday that it had "fulfilled its promise by sending drones to the Al Saud kingdom and targeting its strongholds at the al-Yamamah Palace and other sites inside Riyadh."

The attack followed "the excessive demands and insistence of the Arab regimes on their crimes against the regional countries and their continued support for the criminal Takfiri groups such as Daesh that have the blood of the innocent on their hands," it added.

The Iraqi group also said its retaliatory drone operation was just the beginning of its bid to draw the deterrent equation into Saudi Arabia.

## Ansarullah: Saudi to pay heavy price for continuing Yemen war, siege

Yemen's defensive Houthi Ansarullah movement says the Saudi-led coalition will pay dearly for keeping up the war and a siege that it has simultaneously imposed on the impoverished country.

"Invasion of Yemen is a crime. So is the siege of the country. And continuation of these two amounts to a double crime," Houthi spokesman Mohammed Abdul-Salam wrote on Twitter on Saturday.

"And the fact that the criminal coalition is in no hurry to stop its crimes will run up heavy costs for it," added the official, who also heads the Yemeni National Salvation Government's negotiating team.

Saudi Arabia and some of its allies began a campaign of military aggression against Yemen in March 2015 to bring its former pro-Riyadh government back to power.

## Resistance News

## Israeli police bar Aqsa Mosque renovation works

**INTERNATIONAL DESK** **TEHRAN** — The Israeli occupation police on Sunday prevented the Islamic Awqaf authority at the Aqsa Mosque from finishing restoration and maintenance works at the Dome of the Rock prayer building.

Head of the Mosque's rehabilitation committee Bassam al-Hallaq said that police officers stormed the Dome of the Rock and prevented Palestinian workers from carrying out renovations to the interior of the prayer building.

Hallaq added that the officers threatened to arrest them and banish them from the Aqsa Mosque if they insisted on continuing their work.

He also said that the Israeli police on Saturday barred the rehabilitation committee, an affiliate of the Awqaf Administration in the holy city, from carrying out repairs at the Marwani prayer building of the Aqsa Mosque.

## HAMRAHE Aval Launches, Installs 309 New BTS Sites in Khorasan Razavi Province

- A number of 309 new BTS mobile phone sites were installed and launched in Khorasan Razavi province the past year in 1398, aimed at completing the launch of mobile phone network.
- In line with increasing quality and accessing subscribers of HAMRAHE AVAL subscribers to the 'contact' and 'data' services, a number of 309 new BTS internet sites of mobile phone and 1,146 various technologies were launched in 51 cities and villages of this province, costing over 309 billion tomans in the past year. The aforementioned mobile phone services were launched and installed by expert engineers of Naghsh-e Aval Keifiat as the largest subsidiary of HAMRAHE AVAL and technical contractor of this operator.
- Despite all challenges facing ahead of development of the network such as outbreak of the coronavirus, COVID-19, passing from hard=to=pass and arduous regions as well as unilateral sanctions imposed against the country, this giant project has been put into operation in the religious city of the country home to numerous pilgrims.



## Western rulers afraid of Islam's power: analyst

By Mohammad Ali Haghshenas

**TEHRAN** — A Canada-based analyst says the Western governments are afraid of Islam's spread in their countries as it will disrupt their control over puppet regimes in the West Asia.

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

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in the letters, addressed important points regarding the true image of Islam. The letter warned about the approaches and political behavior of the West and the United States while also informing the Western nations of their responsibility to attain a direct understanding of Islam.

One of the basic questions that the Leader asks in the letter is why the public conscience in the West wakes up with years of delay and why there has been a massive increase of attacks against Islam in Europe during the past years.

It is a mistake for European citizens to allow the introduction of terrorists as representatives of Islam. Defamatory figures should not be allowed to create a gap between European public opinion and the main reality of Islam. The gap leads to the creation of an emotional barrier and the possibility of impartial judgment is further denied.

Following is the full text of the in-

terview with Firas Al Najim:

**Why has the old policy of Islamophobia and hatred against Muslims been intensified in recent years?**

The old policy of Islamophobia and hatred against Muslims has been intensified because the majority of the Western administrations and especially the American admin have an evil agenda towards pure Islam and its influence and effect that could strengthen the world and weaken their evil plans of dividing and conquering the Muslim populated lands. Imam Khomeini's successful and sacred revolution was a big attack on their control of the Middle Eastern (West Asian) region.

**Does the public opinion of the West have a real knowledge of Islam? and from what source do they get this knowledge?**

The Islam that has reached the public opinion of the West is mainly deviant due to the Wahhabi deviant fabricated sect that is the state-sponsored religion of the Western established and backed Saudi regime. One of the main ways they get this knowledge is through their popular media known as the mainstream media that spreads an aggressive image of Islam and this media has a big effect on the majority of the Western nations as the majority blindly trust that media.

**Why does the West introduce terrorists like ISIL as the representative of the Islamic world?**

The majority of the Western admin-

istrations introduce terrorists as the representatives of Islam because they fear the strength and spread of Islam in the West and also the Islamic lands to become sovereign and strong and this would disrupt and destroy their control and theft of the resources of the Islamic lands as they do in the Persian Gulf lands and other places, they occupy either by their armies or their puppet regimes.

**Why does the power structure in today's world tend to marginalize Islamic thought?**

They fear the revolutionary Islam that rejects evil and corruption as it will create strong intellectual thinkers and fight the deviant narratives being promoted to back people away and fear Islam. With the great letter to the youth in the West, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei addressed the West to look beyond the borders and boxes that the West teaches about Islam.

And to do their own study and at least stand for the common goals of human values and principles. Ayatollah Khamenei cares about the people being misled and wants unity based on religious and humanitarian principles to stop any sedition and hate in the world. We hope that the Muslims work harder to spread this letter all over the social media platforms so all the people in the west can truly understand the message of love and caring being sent by one of the most important and influential scholars of the Islamic faith and world today.



## Visit Estil Lagoon, where the trees walk

➔ **1** If you stay by the lagoon for a few days, you will notice that the water of the lagoon also moves. In this movement, short trees go underwater and in the next movement, they come out of it, therefore, the lagoon is called the moving lake by the locals.



Tourists can experience a relaxed memorable stay in dreamy cottages on the water and enjoy the view of mountains, forests, farms, and lush green rice paddies around the lagoon.

Estil Lagoon, which is sandwiched between towering mountains and the Caspian Sea coast, covers an area of 138 hectares.

The lagoon is a haven for birdwatchers as it shelters different species of native and migratory birds. It is also home to a total of 80 species of flora and fauna, some of which are in the category of endangered animals.

The northern provinces of Gilan, Golestan, and Mazandaran embrace a variety of freshwater lakes, wetlands, and lagoons, which are the main destinations for nature tourists.

## Iran extends ban on UK flights once more

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** – Iran has extended the previously-imposed ban on flights to and from the United Kingdom until the end of the current Iranian month of Bahman (February 18) to prevent the spread of the new coronavirus variant.



Tehran-London ticket sales, both direct and indirect, are prohibited, Iran Civil Aviation Organization (CAO) Chief Executive Touraj Dehghani Zanganeh said on Sunday, IRNA reported.

In December, the Islamic Republic halted flights to and from the United Kingdom, preliminary for two weeks, and then the ban was extended for one month at the discretion of the Health Ministry to prevent the transmission of the 'British' variant and to try to maintain public health.

The new coronavirus variant, which prompted the UK government to impose a Tier 4 lockdown in London and southeastern England, and tightened restrictions for all of England over the festive period, is "out of control," Health Secretary Matt Hancock said on January 3 — the same day that the UK broke its daily coronavirus case record, recording 35,928 new cases.

The ensuing wave of travel bans has also cut off UK travelers from much of Europe and other parts of the world. Some experts believe that there was no evidence the new variant was more deadly or would react differently to vaccines, but it was proving to be up to 70% more transmissible.

## Iranian police bust gang of illegal diggers

**HERITAGE** **TEHRAN** – Iranian police have recently busted a gang of illegal excavators in a historical site in Sarchehan county, southern Fars province, a provincial tourism official has said.



Three illegal diggers were detained in this regard and surrendered to the judicial system for further investigation, IRNA quoted Farhang Zare as saying on Saturday.

The ancient region of Fars, also spelled Pars, or Persis, was the heart of the Achaemenian Empire (550–330 BC), which was founded by Cyrus the Great and had its capital at Pasargadae. Darius I the Great moved the capital to nearby Persepolis in the late 6th or early 5th century BC.

The capital city of 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 which was the literary capital of Persia during the Zand dynasty from 1751 to 1794.

# Coronavirus causes \$59m damage to Hamedan's tourism

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** – The tourism industry of the west-central province of Hamedan has taken some 2.48 trillion rials (\$59 million at the official exchange rate of 42,000 rials per dollar) hit from the coronavirus outbreak over the past couple of months.

As the Persian New Year (Noruz) holidays is the golden time for the tourism sector, if the restrictions and lockdown continue to the next Iranian year 1400 (starting March 20), irreparable damage will be done to this sector, the provincial tourism chief Ali Malmir said on Saturday.

Accommodation centers, hotels, restaurants, and halls have suffered major damages during the time as well, the official added.

Back in December, the official announced that the Iranian government has paid 70 billion rials (about \$1.7 million) in loans to the tourism businesses affected by the coronavirus pandemic in the province.

He also noted that there are 180 hotels, apartment hotels, eco-lodge units, and travel agencies across the province, which generate jobs for a total of 2,000 people.

In late October, deputy tourism chief Vali Teymouri said that a new support package to pay loans to businesses affected by the coronavirus pandemic was



approved by Iran's National Headquarters for Coronavirus Control.

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

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

centers, the official explained.

In September, Teymouri said that around 1.3 million tourism workers in the country were facing problems due to the coronavirus crisis.

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

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

The government has 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 is 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).

## 15 eco-lodge units to come on stream in eastern Iran

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** – A total of 15 eco-lodges, which are currently being constructed across the eastern South Khorasan province, will come on stream by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20).

Establishing eco-lodge units could help boost tourism in the region, while it generates job opportunities in the rural areas, the provincial tourism chief has said.

Some 80 eco-lodge units have been inaugurated across the province over the past four years, which has provided the ground for attracting more domestic and foreign tourists, Hassan Ramezani announced on Sunday.

Last April, the official announced that the number of eco-lodge units has increased by fourfold in the province within a year.

"Some 25 eco-lodge [units] existed across the province at the end of the [Iranian year] 1397 (March 2019) while the figure has reached 100, eighty of which are operational."

In December 2019, Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and

Handicrafts Minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan inaugurated eleven eco-lodges during his visit to the province.

Last November, the minister referred to the eco-lodges inaugurated across the country and noted that increasing the number of units could create job opportunities in rural areas and boost tourist arrivals in these regions.

He also noted that promoting ecotourism can help reverse migration and attract more foreign tourists. Apart from eco-lodge units, there are also boutique hotels and traditional accommodation centers which could flourish the tourism sector and provide infrastructure in these regions, Mounesan mentioned.

The tourism ministry has set a target to help build 2,000 eco-lodges by 2021, believing such guest houses could cater to sustainable development and job creation in the countryside and rural areas.

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

The culturally-diverse country never disappoints visitors when it comes to eco-tourism, sightseeing,



and even tribal tourism as it is home to many regional people including ones with Turk and Arab elements in addition to the Kurds, Baloch, Bakhtyari, Lurs, and other smaller minorities such as Armenians, Assyrians, Jews, and others.

## Iraqi Airways resumes flights to Iran after one-month halt

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** – Iraq's flag carrier Iraqi Airways has resumed flights to Iran after one month of hiatus over the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, IRNA reported on Sunday.

Flights from Najaf to Tehran and Najaf to Mashhad and vice versa have been scheduled to be operated since Saturday, the report added.

Although issuing visas on arrival for tourists has been suspended, Iraqis with Iranian spouses and their children, Iraqis residing in Iran or those seeking medical treatment in Iran, as well as students and



businessmen can travel to the country.

Back in August, senior Iranian aviation official, Maqsood As'adi-Samani, announced

that wearing masks and following health protocols during the flights as well as carrying a health certificate with a negative coronavirus PCR test result is mandatory for travelers.

Over the past couple of months, many countries, including the Islamic Republic, imposed travel restrictions to help curb the spread of novel coronavirus. In this line, incoming and outgoing flights have been suspended, and road travels restricted to a great extent.

The pandemic has taken a huge toll on Iran's civil aviation sector with reports show-

ing that airlines lost hundreds of millions of dollars because of flight cancellations during the busy New Year travel season in late March.

Some experts 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).

## Landscaping project begins on Sheikh Safi ensemble

**HERITAGE** **TEHRAN** – A landscaping project has been commenced on the Sheikh Safi al-Din Khanegah and Shrine Ensemble and its surroundings in Ardebil, northwest Iran.

The project aims at altering the view and organizing the area around the historical complex, the provincial tourism chief Nader Fallahi said on Sunday.

Back in September, the official announced that some 100 billion rials (about \$2.3 million at the official rate of 42,000 rials) has been allocated to a project for leveling of the surrounding area of the shrine.

The buildings around the complex have been purchased by the province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Department and are being demolished to expand the area around the historical complex, he explained.

He also noted that after the project is carried out completely, the surrounding area will be open to the public.



Sheikh Safi al-Din Khanegah and Shrine Ensemble is a microcosm of Sufism where arrays of harmonious sun-

scorched domes, well-preserved and richly-ornamented facades and interiors, and, above all, an atmosphere of peace and tranquility have all made a must-see stopover while traversing northwest Iran.

The ensemble is named after Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardebili (1253-1334), who was a Sufi philosopher and leader of Islamic mystic practices. It embodies the essence of Sufi traditions by having a microcosmic 'city', which embraces a mosque, a madrasa, a library, a cistern, a bathhouse, kitchens, a hospital, as well as religious houses amongst others. The place also boasts a remarkable collection of antique artifacts.

Developed between the early 16th century and the end of the 18th century, this place of spiritual retreat enjoys principal elements of traditional Iranian architecture to make the best use of existing space for accommodating a variety of functions.

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

Part 2/2

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** – The location of the nearby Chak Chak fire temple – one of Iran's most famous Zoroastrian temples – would suggest that in pre-Islamic times this was a Zoroastrian settlement, existing perhaps as a stopping place for merchants and caravans on the pilgrimage route. Some of the 80 houses that compose the citadel have been dated to the 14th and 15th centuries... other elements suggest pre-Islamic architecture, in the Seljuk style associated with the 10th and 11th centuries. However all structures share the same basic principle, having been

designed to withstand the severe climate of the region, while benefitting from a fortified hilltop position to defend against enemy attacks.

**Important monuments in Kharanaq**

While most of the Old Town of Kharanaq consists of crumbling homes and collapsing roofs, there still remain a number of historically important and well-preserved monuments, according to ancient-origins.net.

A Qajar era mosque has been fully restored and stands with a 15-meter-high minaret, known as the Shaking Minaret of Kharanaq. The 17th century minaret has three floors and a spiral staircase winding

its way up inside. The minaret is frequently seen shaking and vibrating. The cause of this phenomenon remains unknown.

Another blue-domed mosque stands out against the earthen colors of the surrounding town and landscape.

A well-preserved caravanserai – a place where merchant caravans are halted – from the time of the Qajar Dynasty sits on the edge of Kharanaq.

The caravanserai is fortified with stables for pack animals, storage areas, and rooms for travelers passing through.

Other highlights include an old castle linked to the historical periods of Islam,



ancient aqueducts built to irrigate the surrounding fields, and an ancient but still functional bridge.



# Is reproduction a solution to Persian fallow deer conservation?

By Faranak Bakhtiari

**TEHRAN** – Efforts are being made to protect endangered species of Persian fallow deer which is reported to remain a population of 400-500 across the country, but is this really save the animals from extinction?

The main habitat of fallow deer in the country includes western and southwestern areas, but the declining trend in the number of this valuable species in the 1330s (falling on 1951- 1961) led to measures to save them since the late decade.

For the past 60 years, the species are inhabiting protected areas, and the most important center for the reproduction of fallow deer is the semi-natural breeding site of Dasht-e Naz in the city of Sari, where in the last two years the population of the species has grown significantly.

Another habitat for the reproduction of the valuable species is the Ashk Island of Lake Urmia, which has become a safe place to protect the species from extinction due to the difficult access of illegal poachers.

Persian fallow deer population in the Dasht-e Naz site has increased by about 60 percent, amounting to 53, in less than two years.

Over the years, 8 areas in different provinces were considered for the breeding of this species, as well as four private breeding centers and zoos, where fallow deer were kept, but some of them did not appear successful and closed down, Shahaboddin Montazemi, deputy head of the Department of Environment (DOE), said.

Iran's Environment and Wildlife Observatory recently announced that out of 320



**Iran's Environment and Wildlife Observatory recently announced that out of 320 fallow deer counted in 2008, only 30 remain in Ashk Island today, and this subspecies is on the verge of extinction.**

fallow deer counted in 2008, only 30 remain in Ashk Island today, and this subspecies is on the verge of extinction.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature has long classified the Persian fallow deer as endangered in 1996, vulnerable in

2006, and endangered in 2010. A situation that has not changed much over the years.

**Conservation or reproduction?** Farshad Eskandari, biodiversity expert said that so far, the programs implemented for the fallow deer have not been conserva-

tion programs, but only reproduction of this species has been considered.

"Conservation is when we return the species to its original habitat after reproduction, and in fact, revival has not been considered in Iran so far," he said.

To reintroduce species to a natural habitat, three things must be considered including water, food, and opposing forces that may endanger species life. For example, in Ashk Island, in addition to the drying up of Lake Urmia, we encountered a large population of carnivorous animals, which affected the life of this species. So that, it is necessary to first eliminate the extinction factors and then introduce the species, he further explained.

All fallow deer in Iran today are inhabiting in semi-captive habitats, while this species has a high degree of flexibility and can live in different regions as it was in the past, he noted.

Research has not been conducted on fallow deer or many other animals in the country, because wildlife studies are expensive and that is why research is scarce, he stated, adding, but now monitoring is of great importance, as we must determine that why the species population do not increase despite being in captivity.

As a result, lack of accurate information and constant monitoring are among the reasons that put this species at greater risk, he lamented.

According to Eskandari, the extinction of Persian fallow deer has had various reasons over the past years. For example, on Ashk island, Lake Urmia's drought, lack of vegetation, and the presence of carnivores are the main causes of extinction.

## French company to implement \$290m environmental project in Tabriz



**ENVIRONMENT d e s k** **TEHRAN** – A French company is planning to spend more than \$290 million to build a waste incineration plant in the north-

western city of Tabriz, in East Azerbaijan province, IRNA reported on Sunday.

Currently, the land required for the construction of the power plant has been provided to the French company for studies, and its study stages are underway, Alireza Asghari, director of waste management organization of Tabriz Municipality said.

He added that studying the project and signing a contract for the construction of the incineration plant are expected to be completed by May next year, and later it will be approved by the city council.

All costs for the construction and operation of this waste-to-energy plant will be spent by the French company and after the end of a 20-year contract, it will be handed over to Tabriz Municipality, he said.

Asghari went on to note that during its operation,

20 percent of the revenue from energy production will be provided to the municipality.

Pointing out that 40 percent of waste is separated and recycled in Tabriz city, he said that in the metropolis of Tabriz with a population of 1.8 million, 1,200 tons of waste is produced daily, and the construction of a waste incineration plant is one of the demands of the citizens and the urban management program for about 15 years.

A waste-to-energy plant is a waste management facility that combusts wastes to produce electricity. This type of power plant is also called a trash-to-energy, municipal waste incineration, energy recovery, or resource recovery plant.

Iran currently has six incineration plants operating in the cities of Tehran, Shiraz, Mashhad, and Noshahr.

## UN warns most will live downstream of ageing large dams by 2050

By 2050 most people will live downstream of a large dam built in the 20th century, many of which are approaching the limits of the useful lifetime they were designed for, according to global research.

To avoid the potential for dam failures, overtopping or leaks, the dams will require increasing maintenance, and some may have to be taken out of service. Many governments have not prepared for these needs, warn the authors of a study by the United Nations University.

The volume of water stored behind large dams is estimated to be 7,000 to 8,300 cubic km, or enough to cover 80% of Canada's landmass in a metre of water. Good maintenance can ensure a well-designed dam can last for 100 years without problem, but many of today's large dams were built long before the risks of the climate crisis became clear.

Changing rainfall patterns and more extreme weather events have been putting dams under strains that were not envisaged by their designers, said Vladimir Smakhtin,

director of the UNU's Institute for Water, Environment and Health in Canada, and co-author of the study. "The rising frequency and severity of flooding and other extreme environmental events can overwhelm a dam's design limits and accelerate a dam's ageing process," he said.

Dam failure risks the lives of people living downstream, and ageing dams should be investigated to assess the threat, but large-scale failures were likely to remain rare, the authors of the paper told the Guardian. A more likely threat is that even without major accidents, countries dependent on large dams as reservoirs and for hydroelectricity may face problems if the dams are not adequately maintained to cope with climatic changes.

"This is an emerging risk," said Smakhtin. "There is no immediate catastrophe at a global level, but there are 60,000 large dams spread around the world, and they all are not getting any younger."

The climate crisis meant large dams across the world should be reassessed, said Duminda

Perera, a senior researcher at the institute and lead author of the study. "Big floods and rainfall changes may be beyond the capacity of these structures, and may cause a higher risk of collapse," he said.

One common issue is that more intense rainfall can cause upstream erosion of water courses, and floods increase the debris and silt flowing into dams, causing a buildup of sediment.

Most of the world's large dams are concentrated in a small number of countries – nine out of 10 are located within 25 countries. China has the most, with nearly 24,000 large dams, while many more are found in India, Japan and South Korea. Nearly half of the world's river volume is already affected by dams, and most existing large dams were built between 1930 and 1970, with an expected life expectancy of 50 to 100 years.

There are about 16,000 large dams aged between 50 and 100 years in North America and Asia, and 2,300 that are more than 100 years old. As of last year, more than 85% of



large dams in the US were operating at or beyond their life expectancy. The estimated cost of refurbishing them is about \$64bn (£47bn), according to the report.

Where decommissioning is necessary, governments will face complex problems. Few large dams have been decommissioned to date, so there are few examples to learn from. "It's difficult to say how many may need to be decommissioned," said Perera. "It is very context-specific, depending on the age and condition – different dams age at a different pace."

### ENGLISH IN USE

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## COVID-19 takes lowest toll on foreign nationals in Iran

Iran had the lowest coronavirus cases and mortality among refugees and foreign nationals compared to the population it is hosting, Mehdi Mahmoudi, Director of Citizens and Immigrants Affairs of the Ministry of Interior has said.

Referring to the measures taken for non-Iranian citizens during the pandemic, he said that since the very beginning, when the country became infected with the disease, the community of foreign nationals in our country was no exception to this issue, and prevention programs and necessary measures have been taken for this group.

"We identified foreign nationals in need and tried to provide them with livelihood assistance, as well as health packages and self-protective items needed to prevent the infection," he explained.

He further added that every year about 800,000 illegal foreign nationals are arrested and deported.

### ایران کمترین تلفات کرونا اتباع خارجی را داشته است

مهدی محمودی مدیرکل امور اتباع و مهاجرین وزارت کشور گفت در خصوص ابتلا به بیماری کرونا در بین اتباع خارجی، ایران کمترین ابتلا و کمترین تلفات را نسبت به جمعیت داشته‌است. او در گفت‌وگو با ایلنا درباره اقدامات صورت گرفته برای اتباع غیرایرانی در ایام کرونا گفت: از همان ابتدا که کشور درگیر این بیماری شد، جامعه اتباع خارجی هم در کشور ما مستثنی از این موضوع نبود و برنامه‌های پیشگیری و تهییدات لازم نیز برای این گروه نیز در نظر گرفته شده است.

اتباع غیرایرانی که نیازمند بودند را شناسایی کرده و تلاش کردیم از نظر معیشتی به این گروه نیز کمک‌هایی صورت بگیرد و همچنین بسته‌های بهداشتی و اقلام مورد نیاز پیشگیری از بیماری کرونا در چندین نوبت به آنها ارائه شده است.

او افزود هر سال حدود ۸۰۰ هزار نفر از اتباع غیرایرانی که به صورت غیرقانونی در کشور هستند دستگیر و طرد می‌شوند.

## 7 Iranian companies selected members of CTCN

**ENVIRONMENT d e s k** **TEHRAN** – Seven Iranian companies and technology groups have joined the United Nations Climate Technology Centre and Network (CTCN), IRNA reported on Sunday.

The CTCN is the operational arm of the UNFCCC Technology Mechanism, hosted by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

The Centre promotes the accelerated transfer of environmentally sound technologies for low carbon and climate-resilient development at the request of developing countries.



With the support of the Center for Progress and Development of Iran, 7 companies have been able to join the CTCN so far.

Globally, 623 companies have joined the Climate Technology Centre and Network, 64 of which are international institutions and the rest are from 94 countries, with the largest number belonging to South Korea.

The CTCN aims to address barriers that hinder the development and transfer of climate technologies and to thereby help create an enabling environment for reduced greenhouse gas emissions and climate vulnerability improved local innovation capacities and increased investments in climate technology projects.

## Iran soon becomes an important Covid-19 vaccine producer: minister

### 1 → Homegrown vaccine

Production of COVID-19 vaccine was followed by 16 Iranian companies since the beginning of the outbreak, and so far 12 companies applied to produce the vaccine, of which eight are operating, one of the companies have entered the human trial phase, and two more companies will soon test the vaccines on human, Kianoush Jahanpour, head of the Information Center of the Ministry of Health, said on January 10.

COVIRAN BAREKAT, the first coronavirus vaccine made by Iranian researchers of the Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam, was unveiled and injected into three volunteers during a ceremony on December 29, 2020.

On January 11, the second dose of the vaccine was injected into the three volunteers.

So far, 14 people have received the first dose of the vaccine, and this number should reach 56 people in the clinical study phase.

After the results of the study are determined, the second stage begins with the injection in 500 people, and after 28 days, the third phase begins with mass production.

Hojjat Niki-Maleki head of the information center of Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam, said by the next six months, vaccine production will reach up to 12 million doses per month.

On January 18, the second homegrown COVID-19 vaccine developed and proposed by the Razi Vaccine and Serum Research Institute has been approved to begin a clinical trial.

### COVID-19 daily new cases and mortalities

In a press briefing on Sunday, Health Ministry's spokesperson Sima-Sadat Lari confirmed 5,945 new cases of COVID-19 infection, raising the total number of infections to 1,372,977. She added that 1,164,794 patients have so far recovered, but 4,090 remain in critical conditions of the disease.

During the past 24 hours, 89 patients have lost their lives, bringing the total number of deaths to 57,383, she added.

So far, 8,905,093 COVID-19 diagnostic tests have been performed in the country.

Lari noted that currently, 18 cities are in medium-risk "orange" zones, and 154 in low-risk "yellow" zones.

## LET'S LEARN PERSIAN

(Part 115)

(Source: saadifoundation.ir)

### تمرین ۱. جواب سؤال‌های زیر را کامل بنویسید:

۱. هاروکا در کجا فارسی می‌آموزد؟
۲. دانشجویان مرکز اهل کجا هستند؟
۳. کلاس‌های مرکز چگونه است؟
۴. این کلاس‌ها برای چه کسانی است؟
۵. دانشجویان با چه آشنا می‌شوند؟
۶. آنها از چه چیزی لذت می‌برند؟

تمرین ۲. چیزهایی را که در باره دانشجویان خارجی کشورتان، مراکز آموزش زبان برای فارسیان و برنامه‌های آن مراکز می‌دانید بنویسید.

### خط فارسی

## آب آبت روزت ادبیت نازت زنت زبانت

می‌شود، از درس‌های بعد آورده شده‌اند:

چستان (جست آن؟)	riddle	مَیْزَت	apology, excuse
عالی	excellent	مَیْزَت می‌خواهم.	Excuse me,
مُیَاثِم	I am sorry.	I beg your pardon.	



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■ Managing Director: Mohammad Shojaeian  
■ Editor-in-Chief: Ali A.Jenabzadeh

» Editorial Dept.: Fax: (+98 21) 88808214 — 88808895  
info@tehrantimes.com  
» Switchboard Operator: Tel: (+98 21) 43051000  
» Advertisements Dept.: Telefax: (+98 21) 43051430  
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Zip Code: 1599814713



GUIDE TO  
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Richness is not having many belongings,  
but richness is contentment of the soul.

Prophet Muhammad (S)

## Intel. meeting screens animation on earliest example of drama therapy by Avicenna

**A R T** TEHRAN — The World Alliance of Drama-therapy (WADth) shared “Abu Ali Sina”, an animated movie produced by the Iranian Psychodrama and Drama Therapy Association on one of the earliest examples of drama therapy by Iranian scientist Avicenna during its first seasonal conference on January 22.



A scene from “Abu Ali Sina” produced by the Iranian Psychodrama and Drama Therapy Association.

Inspired by a book written by Persian poet Nezami Aruzi, the animation was written by Majid Amrai, the chair of the Iranian Psychodrama and Drama Therapy Association and Iranian representative to the WADth.

Directed by Javad Mirazadeh, the animation shows the eminent Persian physician and philosopher Avicenna making use of the earliest examples of drama therapy in the treatment of psychosis and the earliest example of drama therapy in Iran. Avicenna repeatedly joins the patient in his delusion by assuming a complementary role within the client’s frame of reference resulting in a positive outcome.

This is a dazzling example of Avicenna’s individualized and patient-centered approach to a psychotic patient. He uses psychological therapy as well as biological treatment, most likely, camphor, used in Europe until the 1940s.

Avicenna met Prince Abu Taleb Rostam, son of Queen Sayed-dah of Ray, Iran as a patient around 1014 or 1015.

Prince Abu Taleb Rostam was about 21 when he had experienced this episode of melancholy; a severe psychotic depression or schizophrenia-spectrum disorder. Evidence suggests that prince Abu Taleb was captured by one of the most powerful rulers of the region, Sultan Mahmoud Ghaznavi of Afghanistan in 1029 and sent to Ghazna where he passed away. Other resources suggest that Abu Taleb was sent to India, where he died.

Members from different countries including Kenya, Argentina, Sri Lanka, Japan, Taiwan, India and South Korea attended the virtual conference.

## “Flower, Tree and Forest Police” by Romain Puértolas appears in Persian

**CULTURE** TEHRAN — A Persian translation of French author Romain Puértolas’s “The Flower, Tree and Forest Police” (La Police des fleurs, des arbres et des forêts) has been published by Qoqnu Publications in Tehran.

The book has been translated into Persian Abolfazl Allahdadi. A flower that everyone is looking for could be the key to the mystery that seized the small village of P.

Unusual and surprising, this jubilant literary investigation by Puértolas thwarts all codes.

During the heatwave of 1961, a police officer was sent on a mission to a small remote village. He must investigate the death of Joel, a 16-year-old whose body was found cut to pieces in a jam factory.

Born in 1975 Puértolas is most noted for the bestselling French novel “The Extraordinary Journey of the Fakir Who Got Trapped in an Ikea Wardrobe”, which has been translated into English and has become an international bestseller sold in 36 nations.

An audio version of the Persian translation of Romain Puértolas’s novel “The Extraordinary Journey of the Fakir Who Got Trapped in an Ikea Wardrobe” was released in 2019.

Published by Novin Ketab Gooya Publications, the audiobook has been narrated by actor Mir Taher Mazlumi.

The book has been translated into Persian by Abolfazl Allahdadi and published by Qoqnu Publications.

When the fakir, a professional con artist, arrives in Paris, he has just one goal: to get to Ikea. Armed with only a counterfeit hundred-euro note in the pocket of his silk trousers, he is confident that he has all he needs to thrive. But his plan goes horribly awry when he hides inside a wardrobe at the iconic Swedish retailer, the first in a series of accidents that will send him on a whirlwind tour across Europe.

# Kerman organizing painting contest to boost its child-friendly image

→1 “This is the first time the municipality is organizing an international contest, and we hope it can improve the world’s children’s outlook of Kerman,” he noted.

The Kerman Department of Culture and Islamic Guidance and several other organizations will be contributing to the event. He did not give an exact date for the children’s painting contest or further details.

Kerman and 11 other Iranian cities were selected as pilot cities for UNICEF Child-Friendly City Initiative (CFCI) last June to roll out the global CFCI program in Iran, UNICEF earlier reported.

The other cities selected are Bandar Abbas, Ahvaz, Gorgan, Hamedan, Mashhad, Rasht, Semnan, Shiraz, Tabriz, Tehran and Yazd.

The piloting process will officially start after signing a memorandum of understanding between the municipalities of the pilot cities and the Ministry of the Interior.

According to UNICEF regulations, a child-friendly city is a city or a local community where the voices, needs, priorities and rights



A painting by the 11-year-old Iranian boy, Seyyed Ali Mousavi.

of children are an integral part of public policies, programs and decisions.

The vision for the global CFCI program is that “every child and young person enjoys their childhood and youth and reaches their full potential through the equal realization of their rights within their cities and communities”.

With the support of local and national governments, NGOs, the private sector, media and universities and in collaboration with UNICEF, this initiative covers more than 30 million children in 3000 cities and local communities in over 40 countries.

It is noteworthy to mention that the UNICEF CFCI logo and brand are awarded only after the city successfully completes the CFCI Cycle. During the pilot phase, the city is not yet considered a “child-friendly city” and does not receive the logo or the official recognition.

Cities from Ukraine, Canada, Germany, England, France, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Spain and many other countries have been selected by UNICEF as child-friendly cities.

## Playing to an empty room tough experience: Iranian conductor Qorbani



Ali-Akbar Qorbani conducts the Orchestra of National Instruments during a rehearsal at Tehran's Rudaki Hall.

**A R T** TEHRAN — Ali-Akbar Qorbani, who conducted the Orchestra of National

Instruments during a concert at Tehran’s empty Vahdat Hall on Thursday, said the performance without an audience was a really tough experience.

Vocalists Vahid Taaj and Rashid Vatanooost accompanied Qorbani in the concert, which was performed in the two sections of Iranian and Azerbaijani music with compositions from Ali-Naqi Vaziri, Hossein Dehlavi, Farhad Fakhreddini and several other renowned composers.

“The orchestra did not have a performance for about a year due to the pandemic, however, we decided to hold the online concert,” he said.

“This was the first time we went on stage without an audience, and it was a different experience. When musicians go on stage, they make contact with the audience. The audience always adds additional passion to the performance, but the online concert was void of such feeling, something that made it a tough job for us,” he said.

He further noted that he believes if the coronavirus restrictions and lockdown remain in effect, they must be practiced for all activities.

“Some activities still continue and some, like theater, music and cinema, are shut down. All public transportations

are packed with people. Something needs to be done for music,” he said.

“I know both types of online and physical performances require their special facilities. But physical concerts make it easier for us and help music and art stay alive,” he said.

“However, online concerts are also good for those do not live in Tehran or those who do not live in the country,” he added.

He hoped that musicians and theatrical figures would be supported because they have experienced the most damages. “If music is not supported, we will surely witness the most serious damages,” he concluded.

Vocalist Salar Aqili and his ensemble, who went on stage at Tehran’s Vahdat Hall in July and performed to an empty auditorium, believed it was a really tough experience.

“It is very difficult for me to give a concert without an audience. This is the first time I am doing this but I must say that the audience is always in my heart,” Aqili had said before his performance.

A noteworthy point was that the concert was performed on a stage where the empty seats in the hall served as a constant reminder of the coronavirus days.

## “Carless Crime”, “Sunless Shadows”, “Tirishko” collect awards at Dhaka festival

**A R T** TEHRAN — Iranian movies “Carless Crime”, “Sunless Shadows” and “Tirishko” have won awards at the 19th Dhaka International Film Festival in Bangladesh.

“Careless Crime”, co-written by Nasim Ahmadpur and director Shahram Mokri, won the award for best screenplay during the closing day of the festival on Sunday.

The story of the film goes back to forty years ago, during the uprising to overthrow the Shah’s regime in Iran, when protestors set fire to movie theaters as a way of showing opposition to Western culture. Many cinemas were burned down. In one tragic case, a theater was set on fire with four hundred people inside, most of whom were burned alive. Forty years have passed and, in contemporary Iran,



A scene from Shahram Mokri’s drama “Careless Crime”.

four individuals also decide to burn down a cinema. Their intended target is a theater showing a film about an unearthed, unexploded missile.

The film has been screened at several major international festivals and won several awards, including the best original screenplay award at the Venice festival and the Silver Hugo of the jury at the Chicago International Film Festival.

“Sunless Shadows” directed by Mehrdad Oskui was selected as best documentary in the Spiritual Film Section of the Dhaka festival, which was organized online from January 16.

In an Iranian juvenile detention center, a group of adolescent girls are serving time for having murdered their father, husband or another male family member. Oskui managed to build up a remarkable relationship with these inmates, whose frank conversations and playful interactions he observes, and who gradually open up about the consequences of, and sometimes the reasons for, their terrible acts.

“Tirishko” by Shakiba Khaleqi won the award for best short in the Short Fiction Category.

The film tells the story of a young woman who lives alone in Tehran with her cat, Tirishko. Having learned that her mother in Isfahan is ill, she decides to go and look after her. But as she cannot find anyone to take care of Tirishko, she sets off with the cat in tow. Her subsequent journey is not without incident.

The award for best feature went to “Senior Citizen” by Marinos Kartikkis from Cyprus.

“The Road to Eden” co-directed Bakyt Mukul and Dastan Zhapar Uulu from Kyrgyzstan won the award for best film in the Asian competition, while Ksenia Lagutina was named best director for “Farida”, a co-production between Azerbaijan and Russia.

## Big Sky documentary festival picks three Iranian films

**A R T** TEHRAN — Three movies by Iranian filmmakers will be competing in the Big Sky Documentary Film Festival, which will take place from February 19 to 28 in Missoula, in the northwestern U.S. state of Montana.

The films are “A Horse Has More Blood Than a Human” by Abolfazl Taluni, “Khoniya’s Children” by Arman Qolipur Dashtaki and “Holy Bread” by Rahim Zabihi.

“A Horse Has More Blood Than a Human”, which is a co-production between Iran and the UK, is about an older couple who leave Tehran to return to their idyllic home town on the Turkish border, but their dreams of a quiet retirement are shattered by the realization that their town has become a smuggling gateway into Europe, and everyone they know is involved.

Iranian cinematographer Mehdi Azadi won a Golden



“Khoniya’s Children” by Arman Qolipur Dashtaki.

Frog from the 28th Enegra Camerimage International Film Festival in Poland for his collaboration in the short documentary.

“Khoniya’s Children” produced by the Experimental and Documentary Film Center in a small village in Iran, where four siblings, all over 70 and never married, live together. The villagers shun them, as they believe they are doomed, damned or both, leaving the brothers and sisters to live out their lives in solitude.

In his last film, late filmmaker Zabihi followed the Kurdish Kulbars for nine years to document their lives.

The Big Sky Documentary Film Festival is organized every year by the Big Sky Film Institute to support the people who create documentary films, vibrant events, and expand knowledge and conversation around issues that matter.

## Tehran Intl. Sculpture Symposium set for February 19

**A R T** TEHRAN — The 10th edition of the Tehran International Sculpture Symposium will open on February 19 with sculptors competing in national, international and student sections.

“10 sculptures have been selected out of 165 submissions, while 8 sculptures will be competing in the student section, and three by sculptors from Italy, Greece and Turkey will be competing in the international section,” executive director of the symposium Majid Haqiqi said in a press release published on Sunday.

Haqiqi said that the international section was warmly received by the sculptors and 224 submissions by

124 sculptors from 38 countries were received by the secretariat. However, due to the coronavirus restrictions the organizers decided to select only a few sculptors.

“We hope there will be better conditions next month so that foreign sculptors can attend the symposium,” he added.

Several sculptors have also been selected as reserves in each section.

The 10th edition will be running in the Taraz Cultural Center from February 19 to March 12.

The previous edition of the symposium opened with five Iranian and 10 foreign sculptors in the Abbasabad district in

November 2019.

Laura Marcos from Argentina, Olga Nechay from Belarus, Arijel Strukelj from Slovenia, Georgi Minchev from Bulgaria, Jiang Chu from China and Sangam Vankhade from India were among the participating sculptors at the symposium.

Also included were Ulises Jiménez Obregon from Costa Rica, Victor Arturo Guadalupe Tineo from Peru, Yeh Chuan Hsien from Taiwan and Alex Labejof from France.

The Iranian sculptors were Hedayat Sahrai, Hossein Molai Fumani, Mohammad-Mehdi Ashuri, Reza Qarebaghi and Mehdi Seifi.



A poster for the 10th edition of the Tehran International Sculpture Symposium.