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## Iranian heavy crude oil price rises 11.5% in February: OPEC

TEHRAN- Iranian heavy oil price increased \$6.28 in February to register an 11.5-percent rise compared to the previous month, according to OPEC’s latest monthly report.

Iran sold its heavy crude oil at \$60.66 per barrel in the mentioned month, compared to January’s \$54.38 per barrel, IRIB reported.

According to the report, the country’s average heavy crude price was \$57.52 from the beginning of 2021 up to the report’s publishing day, in comparison to \$57.97

in the previous year’s same period.

The report put Iranian crude output for February at 2.12 million barrels per day indicating a 35,000-bpd increase compared to the figure for the previous month.

Based on OPEC data, the country’s average crude output in the fourth quarter of 2020 stood at 1.993 million barrels per day indicating a near 45,000-bpd rise compared to the figure for the third quarter of the year.

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## Gen. Soleimani mourners, former traceur: World Press Photo Awards nominee pics

TEHRAN – Images of a former traceur and mourning ceremony for General Qassem Soleimani by Iranian photographers have received nominations at the 2021 World Press Photo Awards.

The photo series “Thoughts of Flight” by Fereshteh Eslahi has been nominated in the 2021 sports stories category.

The series depicts Saeid Ramin, a for-

mer professional traceur – practitioner of parkour – who lives in the Iranian town of Gachsaran. He fell in a parkour competition seven years ago, injuring the spinal cord in his neck. His injury when he fell was so severe that he could only blink, and doctors said he wouldn’t even be able to sit in a wheelchair.

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# National subway train developed despite sanctions

## AFC’s clear favoritism

**BY FARROKH HESABI**  
The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has chosen Bahrain as host of FIFA World Cup qualifiers in Group C and the decision is a clear favoritism which has deeply wounded 85-million ardent football fans in Iran.

Thursday, 11th March marked the first anniversary of the World Health Organization’s declaration of COVID-19 a global pandemic. On making that dramatic announcement, WHO’s Director General Tedros Adhanom emphasized that “Pandemic” was not a word to use lightly or carelessly.

With that announcement life as we knew it, changed. One-third of the whole world went into lockdown. What did not deem essential came to a complete halt, with sports and football amongst those.

All forms of domestic and international football at all levels stopped. The Asian Football Confederation’s joint FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 / AFC Asian Cup China 2023 matches, scheduled on the two FIFA dates in March 2020 were put on ice. The AFC has since tried to reschedule the last four rounds of their eight qualifying groups to no avail and lost 12 FIFA dates, including the March 2021 window.

The continent’s governing body decided to consult with its member associations in mid-February to make a “collective decision” to wrap up the first round group stage in a centralized format in June to tackle travel restrictions for national teams criss-crossing Asia.

However, the Iranian football fans were weary of this decision as even ahead of the official AFC announcement of matches to be played centrally, they had seen messages across Arabic social media platforms that Bahrain had secured the rights to host the final eight matches in Group C, an act of utter injustice if it were to materialize.

Iran along with other seeded teams had played three away games and one home game against the lowest seeded team in their group. If Australia, China, Japan, Korea Republic, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and The United Arab Emirates could secure the approval of their own country’s health authorities, they would be designated as hosts, by virtue of the spirit of “Fair Play”.

Much to the horror of the Iranian fans, AFC handed over the hosting rights to their rivals, Bahrain, under the pretext of sanctions and the fact that AFC and their commercial partners would not be able to operate in Iran, a completely false pretext.

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## Campaign launched to promote handicrafts as Noruz gifts

TEHRAN – The Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism has launched a social campaign for using domestic handicrafts as gifts to celebrate Noruz, the Iranian New Year.

For more than a year, the coronavirus pandemic has ruined hundreds of thousands of jobs in the country including those related to craftspeople. The campaign, according to advocates, is intended to create a change and to help the handicrafts sector to emerge from a prolonged recession.

Tehran province directorate of the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism has adopted a motto, which is translated into “I will give handicrafts as gift this Noruz”. “Citizens are asked to use handicrafts as a beautiful and lasting Noruz gift to support the employment of craftspeople,” Parham Janfeshan, who presides over the directorate, said on Saturday.

From ancient times to today, gift-giving tra-

dition on a fresh new year symbolizes wealth, prosperity, fertility, or luck. Perhaps the most enduring image of Noruz is about socializing, deepening family bonds, and meeting up with old friends mostly in their homes.

Last May, the deputy tourism minister Pouya Mahmoudian noted that due to the outbreak of coronavirus, suitcase exports of handicrafts were completely stopped since the month of Esfand (the last month of the year), and official exports of handicrafts experienced a steep decline. “Some 295 fields of handicrafts are currently practiced across Iran with more than two million people engaging, majority of whom are women... Handicrafts also play an important role in the economy in our rural villages,” she said.

Over the past couple of years, dozens of high-quality Iranian handicrafts have been honored with the UNESCO Seal of Excellence.

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## U.S. “ceasefire plan” meant to prolong Yemen’s descent into turmoil: Ansarullah

The spokesman for Yemen’s popular Houthi Ansarullah movement has dismissed the U.S. proposal for a nationwide ceasefire in the war-torn country, saying the plan would plunge Yemen further into turmoil.

“The U.S. plan doesn’t include breaking the siege or ceasing fire. It is actually a detour which would lead to a resumption of a (Saudi) blockade diplomatically,” Mohammed Abdul-Salam said in an interview with Yemen’s al-Masirah television Friday evening.

“One of the conditions presented in the initiative is to determine the destinations of flights departing Sana’a airport, and for the coalition of aggression to issue flight permits. This means they are not licensed here in Sana’a,” he said.

“If they were serious to stop the aggression and siege, they would have declared a complete end to hostilities and block-

ade. We would then welcome the measure. Aggression and siege against Yemen have not stopped even for a single day over the past six years, so what is the U.S. concept of ceasing fire or breaking the siege?” Abdul-Salam added.

The Ansarullah spokesman said the U.S. presentation of Saudi conditions as a so-called peace plan once again proved that Washington explicitly supports the Saudi war and blockade against Yemen.

He further noted that what the U.S. special envoy on Yemen, Tim Lenderking, presented was a plot to plunge the Arab state further into turmoil.

“It is unacceptable for an American envoy to present a plan which is inferior to that of the United Nations special envoy for Yemen (Martin Griffiths),” Abdul-Salam said.

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## Iranian ship hit in terror attack in Mediterranean

TEHRAN - One of the cargo ships of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL) has been slightly damaged after it was targeted by a terrorist attack en route to Europe in the Mediterranean Sea earlier this week, the company says.

The container ship, named Shahr-e Kord, was hit as it was traveling in the high seas on Wednesday, IRISL spokesman Ali Qiasi told Nour News on Friday.

The official said the vessel’s hull sustained slight damage, but those aboard were unharmed.

A small fire broke out in the aftermath of the explosion, which was quickly put out by the crew members, Qiasi said, according to Press TV.

The ship, the spokesman added, “will continue on its route after damage assessments and repair.”

Such acts of terror are a clear example of naval piracy and runs counter to the international law on the safety of commercial vessels, he said, pledging that the country will pursue the case

through relevant international institutions to identify the perpetrators.

On Thursday, a report by The Wall Street Journal claimed the Israeli regime had been involved in a clandestine campaign of attacks on Iranian ships carrying oil and arms to Syria since 2019.

The Israeli attacks started in late 2019 and targeted both Iranian vessels, and other ships with Iranian cargo, the report claimed, citing “U.S. and regional officials.”



## Horse racing competition held in Gonbad-e Kavus

TEHRAN – The 16th week of the horse racing competition was held in Gonbad-e Kavus in Iran’s northeastern province of Golestan on Friday.

A total of 58 horse riders participated in the race.

The Gonbad-e Kavus competition was held behind closed doors due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Gonbad-e Kavus has a long history of holding the competitions.

## “Greater Kurdistan” an impossible dream: KRG representative

**BY MOHAMMAD MAZHARI**

TEHRAN – Describing the “Greater Kurdistan” idea as impossible, the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) representative in Tehran emphasizes that this idea is like a far-fetched dream.

“The map of “Greater Kurdistan” may be the desire of some Kurdish parties, but putting it into practice and unification of all Kurds is impossible and is more like a dream because the geography of Kurdistan is divided into four regional countries: Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria,” Nazim Dabbagh tells the Tehran Times.

On Wednesday, the KRG had revealed samples of a proposed postage stamp to be printed on the occasion of the Pope’s visit earlier this month. The stamp was said to have depicted a map that included provinces in Iran, Turkey, Syria and Iraq.

The stamp in question raised eyebrows in the region, causing tensions between the Iraqi Kurdish Regional Government and a number of regional countries.

The stamp was published to commemorate the recent four-day papal visit to Iraq that included a foray into Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, on the third day.

Following is the text of the interview with Nazim Dabbagh:

**What is the Kurdistan Regional Government’s official position (KRG) regarding the controversial stamps issued on the occasion of Pope Francis’s historic visit to Iraq?**

A: Regarding the photos of the stamps that were circulated recently, the KRG spokesman and a number of other Kurdish officials explained that these stamps don’t reflect the official stance of the KRG, not to mention that they are not applicable project.

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## For the “sanctions team”, Iranian clock is not ticking

By Azin Sahabi

**TEHRAN** — In an exclusive interview on March 11, former U.S. Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz, who served as one of Washington’s key nuclear negotiators, told CNBC: “Time is running out for the United States to engage in meaningful diplomacy with Iran...”

With Iran’s presidential elections in June, Moniz, co-chair and CEO of the Nuclear Threat Initiative think tank, says: “I would expect a hiatus while the new Iranian administration gets organized.”

Like most of the American analysts, Moniz, a professor of physics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), believes that the Iranian principalists (conservatives) will lead in the June presidential elections, and should this happen, the already down-the-heel nuclear deal would be much more complicated to manage.

Moniz who appeared as Iran’s Ali Akbar Salehi counterpart to work out the technical aspects of the JCPOA in 2015, warns: “There are probably just about 10 weeks left for some serious diplomacy. There’s a pretty short fuse here to get something done before the Iranian elections will naturally call for a bit of a reset.”

Against this backdrop, it appears that the Biden administration neither intends to rush to a deal with Tehran nor slows its pace due to Iran’s imminent elections. State Department Iran envoy Rob Malley clarified on Wednesday that elections “are not a factor” in likely nuclear talks.



In his first interview since taking office, Malley, one of the American negotiators in the JCPOA talks, told Axios: “The pace will be determined by how far we can get consistent with defending U.S. national security interests.”

Undoubtedly, while Biden seems quite determined to swiftly reverse the process Donald Trump conducted towards the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the timeline is anyone’s guess.

Commenting on Malley’s recent expressions, Sanam Vakil, deputy head of the Middle East (West Asia) North Africa program at Chatham House, says Malley’s comments are primarily geared toward a domestic U.S. audience.

She explains that Malley tries to signal those seriously opposed to a revival of the JCPOA at home that the administration “intends to take a tougher approach. But it doesn’t mean that they are not going to be mindful of the potential political transitions inside Iran.”

Moniz also expresses concerns about Iran’s parliamentary law to suspend the Additional Protocol to the NPT which allows snap inspections. Such a law, which is in line with Paragraph 36 of the JCPOA, obligates the Iranian government to stop implementing some nuclear commitments in retaliation for the abrogation of the nuclear deal by Washington and introduction of maximum pressure campaign against the Islamic Republic.

Meanwhile, Moniz welcomes the three months agreement between the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) made on Feb. 21 which followed the parliamentary law. He says: “I think the first step will not be a full restoration of the agreement on either side, but both sides can take some big steps very early on to set the stage for succeeding steps.”

Iran has rejected an offer from the European Union to restart nuclear talks with the Biden team, insisting that no talks are needed for a U.S. return to the nuclear deal that Donald Trump ditched in May 2018.

Describing Iran’s decision to reject talks as a “negotiating strategy, frankly, not working”, Moniz underlines: “I think what it’s done is actually narrowed the political space on both sides for an agreement to be reached in a short time.”

Indeed, the deep-rooted mistrust between Tehran and Washington besides domestic politics in both capitals foment reluctance by each side to take the first move to rekindle the nuclear deal. In this context, making any arrangement between Iran and the U.S. before August can be considered a remote prospect.

Therefore, Henry Rome, a regional analyst at Eurasia Group says “What’s far more important to the survival of the JCPOA and U.S.-Iran relations is what happens on June 18.”

June 18 is the date for presidential elections in Iran.

Notwithstanding Moniz’s concerns about shortage of time for diplomacy, some American analysts believe that regardless of any political affiliation of Iran’s future president, Rouhani’s successor will hardly have any incentives to honor the commitments he makes. Thus, they claim the possibility that an agreement made under Rouhani may not last, is it actually essential to broker a deal before the new president takes office in Tehran.

Besides, some experts emphasize that rather than being obsessed with Iranian domestic politics, Biden’s administration should be mindful of the dynamics. In their point of view, while looking beyond the Rouhani administration in terms of nuclear diplomacy is wise, linking the fate of such a talk to the likely future status of Rouhani’s nuclear team would not serve the American interests.

Accusing Iran of conducting aggressive regional policies, Moniz stresses that Iran’s activities are a “major, major challenge to the United States and its friends in the region.” He adds: “Whether it’s Saudi Arabia’s oil supply chain, or whether it’s Israel’s security, especially with regard to Lebanon and southwest Syria, I believe that the JCPOA is probably a necessary step on the way to further discussions to resolve those critical regional issues.”

In a piece of opinion in Boston Globe on March 27, 2018, Moniz pointed out that when negotiating nuclear disarmament with the former Soviet Union, President Ronald Reagan invoked “trust, but verify”. However, for the American side at 2015 nuclear talks with Iran, the North Star was and must be “Don’t trust, and verify, verify, verify.”

In fact, the Iran team at the Oval Office is slowly but smartly taking shape. Now, sanctions expert Richard Nephew, a member of the U.S. negotiating team at the JCPOA talks, serves as Malley’s deputy. Also, Jarrett Blanc, who led the implementation of the deal under Obama is another figure and more members are expected to be added. This implies that perhaps, in Washington’s “sanctions team” calculations to hit the big time in reviving the JCPOA, “time” factor does not play a critical role.

# Guardian Council: Persons with military background can stand as candidates

**POLITICAL DESK** **TEHRAN** — Abbas Ali Kadhodae, the spokesperson for Iran’s Guardian Council, confirmed on Saturday that persons with military background are entitled to run in elections, saying the performance of the oversight council shows this in the previous rounds of elections.

“There has been no legal ban for persons with military background in different (election) rounds,” Kadhodae told a press conference.

“More nomination in elections is not legally banned,” he added.

The spokesman was openly referring to some former military figures like Mohsen Rezaee, the former IRGC chief, who ran for president more than once. Also, Mohammad Esmail Kowsari, a former IRGC official, was elected to the eighth and ninth parliaments (2008-2016).



However, Kadhodae said, support for a political faction or party in elections by military personnel is definitely banned.

The next presidential election in Iran will be held in June simultaneously with council elections.

Candidates hoping to run in the elections are to apply in early April for approval. The competence of candidates must be confirmed the oversight Guardian Council.

So far, two military figures have expressed readiness to run for the president. General Hossein Dehghan, a former Islamic Revolution Guard Corps commander and defense minister, who now serves as a military adviser to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, has announced he will run for the presidential post. Also, Saeed Mohammad, who headed the Khatam al-Anbiya Construction Headquarters, has resigned to run in the presidential elections.

## Parliament seeking to lessen sanctions impact: Qalibaf

**POLITICAL DESK** **TEHRAN** — Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, the Parliament speaker, on Saturday stressed the need to lift economic sanctions against Iran, giving assurances that the parliament is endeavoring to reduce the impacts of U.S. embargoes.

“While the Majlis (Parliament) has any opportunity to lift the sanctions on its agenda, it considers preparing the ground to nullify the sanctions as its main strategy,” Fars quoted Qalibaf as saying.

Pointing to the measures adopted by the Parliament to thwart sanctions, the senior MP said, “The Majlis is reforming the structure of the country’s next year budget to control inflation and create more jobs.”

Iran’s next year begins on March 21.

Speaking in a congress in Tabriz, Qalibaf also said the parliament plans to reform the budget structure within the next four years.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Parliament speaker said

that inflation has unsettled the masses.

In January, he emphasized what matters is the lifting of sanctions, adding that a U.S. return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (the JCPOA) is not important.

“The JCPOA is not a sacred agreement. It is just a deal to lift sanctions under the conditions accepted by the Islamic Republic,” Qalibaf noted.

“It does not matter for us if the U.S. returns to the JCPOA, what matters is the practical and tangible lifting of sanctions.”

He noted Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has “clarified the roadmap for all officials to fulfill the demands of people.”

“It became clear to everyone that the main strategy in the face of the enemy is to nullify sanctions, which is also a prelude to the lifting of sanctions,” the speaker said, adding Iran must increase its power in different sectors, including the nuclear industry.

Warning that the EU troika – Britain, France and



Germany - have been following the United States’ wicked policies against Iran, the speaker said, “The Western front should know that it must recognize the rights of the Iranian people; or else, it should be prepared to pay the proportionate price.”

## Zarif’s letter to EU’s Borrell contains no plans: Foreign Ministry

**POLITICAL DESK** **TEHRAN** — Saeed Khatibzadeh, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman, confirms that Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has sent a letter to Josep Borrell, the EU coordinator for the joint commission of the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

On Saturday, he noted, “In a bid to elaborate on the Islamic Republic of Iran’s positions on developments related to the JCPOA, the foreign minister of our country sent a letter on March 12, 2021 to Josep Borrell, the coordinator for the Joint Commission of the JCPOA.”

“Of course, Dr. Zarif has sent several letters to Mr. Borrell and, earlier, to Ms. Mogherini regarding the JCPOA, and this latest letter has been written and sent within the same framework,” he remarked.

“This letter explains the Islamic Republic of Iran’s attitude and contains no plans,”



Khatibzadeh said.

The letter makes it clear that the first step for the U.S. to fully comply with its commit-

ments is to correct its mistakes with regards to breaching the JCPOA and imposing sanctions on Iran, the spokesman explained.

According to amwaj.media, Iran’s chief diplomat has slammed U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken for making “any future progress more difficult” amid continued deadlock over the JCPOA.

Zarif also criticized the Biden administration’s approach to the Obama-era deal, saying that “offering engagement with Iran does not reflect a change of policy,” noting that former president Donald Trump “was also prepared to engage.” Zarif additionally accused Europe of plotting with the U.S. to instigate “a misinformation propaganda cam-

**“Seeking to remove an effect without eliminating the cause...can never work,” Zarif tells the Biden team in the letter to Borrell.**

## Congress may impede Biden’s administration to save JCPOA

**POLITICAL DESK** **TEHRAN** — The Biden administration is caught between critics in Congress and European allies over rejoining the JCPOA to restrict Iran’s nuclear program without accepting Tehran’s demands for financial relief, according to the New York Times.

Three weeks ago, as a sign of both good faith and diplomatic pressure, the United States suggested to return to nuclear negotiations with Iran, however, the American newspaper said, “The double-edged overture fell flat: Iran refused to meet without first receiving financial incentives, and the Biden administration made clear, as the White House national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, put it, that ‘the ball is in their court.’”

The Times reminded diplomats from Britain, France and Germany have since demanded Iran to accept a joint European-American invitation on Feb. 18 to begin informal talks and wrote, “Officials from China and Russia have taken a more sympathetic approach in asking Tehran in recent days to return to talks. President Hassan Rouhani of Iran discussed the delicate diplomacy in a phone call with Prime Minister Boris Johnson of Britain on Wednesday and President Emmanuel Macron of France last week.”

“We have to use this window of opportunity,” Josep Borrell Fontelles, the European Union’s top foreign policy official, told an Atlantic Council forum on Feb. 23.

Still, two rounds of shuttle diplomacy by Rafael Grossi, the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), have rescued the nuclear deal. By convincing Iran last month to allow inspectors to visit its nuclear facilities, Grossi kept Tehran from crossing a diplomatic red line.

The Times said Iran’s leaders are wary of the United States again reneging on its diplomatic assurances and said, “They have insisted they will not go back to the nuclear negotiating table until President Biden begins lifting harsh sanctions that the Trump administration imposed when it withdrew from the deal in May 2018.”

“America was first in breaking with the agreement and it should be the first to return to it,” Mr. Rouhani said on Wednesday during a cabinet meeting in Tehran.

“America should know that we are ready to implement the agreement. We are ready to implement it full in return for full and parts in return for parts. We are ready to return to our full commitments for their full



return or part of our commitments for their partial return,” he added.

The American newspaper claimed Biden has his own reasons for taking a wait-and-see approach toward talks and emphasized, “He appears torn between allies in Europe and critics in Congress over broadening the nuclear accord to also limit Iran’s ballistic missiles program and its support for proxy militias across the Middle East (West Asia).”

Though many senior administration officials had negotiated the nuclear deal while working for President Barack Obama, and still support it, they also say they are unwilling to compromise further — particularly as Iran persistently tests Mr. Biden’s limits, the New York Times wrote.

“Do we expect that before we give them sanctions relief that they will verifiably either be in full compliance with the JCPOA or be on a negotiated path toward full compliance?” Representative Brad Sherman, Democrat of California, asked Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken on Wednesday during a House hearing, referring to the nuclear accord. Blinken said, “Yes”.

The demands for a broader deal to address other Iranian issues echoes the Trump administration’s goals of a pressure campaign against Iran, the paper said. But Biden’s pursuit to “lengthen and strengthen” the deal is also calculated to satisfy Democratic critics of the JCPOA, according to the Times.

Among them is Senator Bob Menendez, Democrat of New Jersey and chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. “Iran’s continuous engagement on so many

paign” geared to extract Iranian concessions via “extortion.”

The letter begins by reiterating Iran’s “full commitment” to the JCPOA and its “readiness to immediately return to full implementation.” However, it says a reversal to full compliance with the deal hinges on the Biden administration’s “full removal of all sanctions imposed, re-imposed or re-labeled” since Trump took office in January 2017.

Questioning the U.S. insistence on Iran being the first party to return to full compliance, Zarif charged that “seeking to remove an effect without eliminating the cause...can never work.”

Importantly, Zarif stated that the Biden administration is “boxing itself into a position that can make it impossible to make progress,” arguing that “statements such as the one made by Secretary Blinken in Congress this week makes any future progress more difficult.”

other fronts - on the ballistic missiles, on the its influence in the region - you know that just going back to the JCPOA is really a difficult proposition,” Menendez said.

The Times reported other Senate Democrats have proposed legislation to address Iran’s missile program “after such time that all sides return to their commitments.” Meanwhile, Iran’s leaders have warned that expanding the accord is a nonstarter, and European diplomats worry that widening it in the delicate talks will damage the entire effort.

“Once we do the first step, then we can continue, or start talking about other pending issues,” Mr. Borrell said at the Atlantic Council, a policy center. “But if you start talking about the pending issues in the beginning, you will never restart.”

Trita Parsi, the founder of the National Iranian American Council and executive vice president of the Quincy Institute, a policy center that advocates military restraint, said both Iran and the United States would “have to swallow some pride and pay a political cost” if negotiations were to restart.

Pointing to the advantages of the JCPOA for Iran, the American newspaper acknowledged, “The accord had secured for Tehran billions of dollars in sanctions relief before the Trump administration reneged, shutting down Iran’s oil exports and sending its weakened economy into a tailspin. That reinforced Tehran’s suspicion that dealing with the United States was a mistake.”

Yet it is widely believed, by diplomats and experts alike that Rouhani and Iran’s foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, want to secure sanctions relief by getting nuclear negotiations well on their way before Iran’s change of power, the Times claimed.

Regarding good-faith efforts by Biden’s administration, last month, the United States lifted travel restrictions on Iranian officials visiting the United Nations headquarters in New York, and dropped its demand that the United Nations Security Council enforce international sanctions against Iran.

Ultimately, the Times concluded, “Despite the impasse, American and European diplomats said informal talks could begin in coming weeks. When they do, it is expected that the United States and Iran could agree to take simultaneous steps toward coming back into compliance with the 2015 accord.”

SPORTS

AFC's clear favoritism

**1→** The rights of this stage of the qualifiers in Asia, as per AFC's own directive belong to each host nation and as such they had no commercial function at any of the 97 matches, including Iran's home tie against Cambodia in October 2019, and will not have any business to conduct in the remaining 63 matches of the first round group stage.

Of the eight seeded nations, six have secured their hosting rights, but not Iran and Australia. The Australian authorities did not sanction the staging of Group B in their country either.

The Iranian fans, who had feared that this decision would be made in the dark corridors of power and away from the proper due diligence, have proven right. The Iranian football authorities alerted AFC of their concerns that they would be the only seeded team not receiving the hosting rights, based on credible evidence. The AFC did not respond to their letter of Sunday, March 7. Tasnim News Agency who had followed online chatters also sent a query to AFC's Media department for a comment. Neither the federation nor the news agency received even an acknowledgement, let alone a proper response.

Was AFC's so-called "consultation process" with their member associations in mid-February just a show? It seems to have been. Next time the AFC displays that "Fair Play" flag at any of their competitions under the watchful eyes of their Bahraini President - Sheikh Salman bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa - should realize how hollow that slogan would sound and look. A slogan, like the word Pandemic that cannot be used lightly or carelessly.

This "endemic injustice" and clear favoritism of Sheikh Salman's own home country has deeply wounded 85-million ardent football fans in Iran, arguably the most passionate across the world. FIFA will need to interfere and save the face of Asian Football before the world game that it governs.

Skocic protests AFC over choosing Bahrain as Group C host

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** – Iran national football team head coach Dragan Skocic is not satisfied with the Asian Football Confederation (AFC)'s decision over choosing Bahrain as host of Group C of the 2022 World Cup qualifiers.

Bahrain was chosen as centralized venue for the competition in Group C by AFC on Friday but the Croatian coach says that Bahrain had been previously determined as host.

The matches are scheduled to take place from May 31 to June 15, 2021. Iran was originally scheduled to host three matches out of four remaining matches before coronavirus shut down the competitions.

"In the video conference held on Feb. 14, I told Shin Mangil, AFC Competitions Director, all decisions have been already taken and the conference is useless," Skocic posted on his Instagram account.

"They wanted to hear our opinions but I think everything was already determined because when we were discussing about the holding the matches in April or postponing them to June, a message suddenly appeared on the screen in which the matches would surely be held in June.

"In the session which was held to talk about the postponement of the matches, the Bahrain's representative, without any introduction, talked about the hosting the remaining matches and it was the thing that surprised me the most.

"Furthermore, I don't understand why the matches were postponed for one year. When we talk about the safety and wellbeing of the players, the strict observance of health protocols is my priority but the coronavirus is no longer a new issue. In my opinion, the AFC has gained experience about holding the competitions over the past year.

"I insistently wanted the AFC representatives to emulate the various competitions in Europe and they told me, "You don't realize the diversity of the Asian continent." Now, with this decision, I am fully aware of the diversity among the continents. Very weird behavior.

"In my opinion, the AFC should have found a solution that equality benefits everyone - not one team - and made a decision according to the spirit of sport. But in the end, all the teams have to face us and we will undoubtedly have a strong presence and surpass this situation," Skocic concluded.

Iran will have to meet table-toppers Iraq, Bahrain, Hong Kong and Cambodia.



Bahman Group reclaim Iran women's basketball league title

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** – Bahman Group basketball team defended their title at the Iran's women's basketball league on Friday.

Bahman Group defeated Mahram 87-63 in the final match of the league.

"We lost the match since our team didn't play as we expected," Mahram coach Nika Beiklikli said after the match.

"As an Iranian woman, I am proud of our league. There is a bright future ahead for the Iranian women basketball players," she added.

Narsina Tehran finished in third place and Palayesh Naft Abadan came fourth.

The 2020-21 season brought 13 teams together in two groups.

Esteghlal complete signing of Arman Ramezani

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** – Esteghlal football club have completed the signing of Persepolis forward Arman Ramezani on Saturday.

Ramezani joined Persepolis in September but failed to score a single goal for the team.

The 29-year-old striker has penned an 18-month deal with Esteghlal.

Ramezani started his playing career in Malavan in 2011 and has also played at Saipa, Mes Rafsanjan and Oxin Alborz.

The details of the fee contract have not been revealed.

# Illogical presence

## U.S. faces trouble justifying presence in Iraq

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** – With the Iraqi people and politicians ramping up their efforts to expel American forces from their country, the United States makes renewed efforts to concoct a plan to justify its illegal presence in the West Asian region, particularly Iraq.

The U.S. has a relatively large number of troops stationed in Iraq that had been sent to the country allegedly to combat terrorism, namely the Daesh terrorist group, which occupied large swathes of western Iraq in 2014.

Following the emergence of Daesh, the U.S. claimed that the main mission of their forces in Iraq was to fend off Daesh, although Iraqi leaders at the time of Daesh's emergence cast doubt on that mission. In fact, some of these leaders even accused the Americans of dereliction of duty for failing to help Iraq in the face of Daesh.

Former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki said that the U.S. stopped short of helping the Iraqis during the war against Daesh, which had occupied large territories of Iraq when al-Maliki was ruling the country.

"Daesh has come [to Iraq] because they [Americans] stopped all types of military support to Iraq and undercut the foundation of the Iraqi army," the former prime minister famously said. "Washington told the Iraqi delegation as long as al-Maliki is in power, they will not give weapons to Baghdad to fight Daesh. This is all while Iran and Russia have opened their arms depots to Baghdad in support of the Iraqi army and the Popular Mobilization Forces [PMF]."

Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, Leader of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, also recently



said that the U.S. created Daesh.

"It was America that created the Daesh and this has been acknowledged by the Americans themselves. It is not us who are making this claim. Rather, this has been acknowledged both by the one who created it and by the one who was his rival. They themselves created that group. And then they have built military bases in Iraq and Syria using the excuse that the Daesh is present in those countries and that they are going to fight them," the Leader said in a recent speech on the occasion of Eid al-Mab'ath.

Pointing to some of the examples of the U.S. helping Daesh, the Leader added, "They provide Daesh with modern, advanced, media tools. They also give them money, allow them to sell Syrian oil and tell them to use the money for their goals. At the same time,

they claim that they are fighting the Daesh."

With help from Iran, the Iraqis ultimately trounced Daesh and restored stability. They called on the U.S. to withdraw its forces from Iraq as their presence is of little help to Iraq. The Iraqi Parliament passed a law earlier last year obligating the government to pursue the withdrawal of American troops. However, the U.S. refused to respect the will of the Iraqi people and kept insisting on continuing its military presence in Iraq.

Now that Daesh has almost completely disappeared, the Iraqis see no good reason for the continuation of the U.S. military presence. Therefore, they have called on the U.S. to withdraw its forces. Facing Iraqi opposition, the U.S. now struggles to find new justifications for its unsolicited military presence.

In the latest effort in this regard, the U.S.

found a new justification for its presence: "Shia-backed militias."

In a March 3 press briefing, Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby accused these unspecified groups of firing rockets on the American forces in Iraq, adding that the U.S. remains focused on these groups.

"We've long been open and honest about the threats that these -- that arise from these rocket attacks that are being perpetrated by some Shia-backed militia," Kirby said, adding, "We're focused on these -- the Shia-backed militias that continue to put at risk and to continue to threaten our people and our Iraqi partners."

Kirby's clumsy claim drew criticism from critics including those in America. They called on him to clarify the exact meaning of "Shia-backed militias." He couldn't. Because there is no such thing as Shia-backed militias in Iraq. There are groups that are part of Iraq's official armed forces that want the U.S. to withdraw its forces. Of course, some of these critics tend to falsely say that there are "Iran-backed militias." But they are wrong too.

Iran has said time and again that it has no military presence in Iraq. Instead, it only has an advisory role in Iraq and Syria. Ayatollah Khamenei said Iran's presence in Iraq and Syria is advisory and at the invitation of these countries. But "the Americans cruelly entered Iraq and Syria and established military bases," the Leader lamented.

The U.S. military presence in Iraq and Syria is not grounded in any logic and its futile efforts to cook up logic for it will only further expose the illogicality of the American presence in the region.

## Iran rejects 'baseless' Israeli human rights allegation at UN

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** – A senior Iranian diplomat has responded to Israeli accusations against Iran by describing them as "baseless."

Esmaeil Baghaei Hamaneh, Iran's permanent ambassador to the UN office in Geneva, called on the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to avoid politicization after Israel used the platform to level human rights accusations against Iran.

Addressing the 46th regular session of the Human Rights Council on Friday, Baghaei Hamaneh said the regime occupying Jerusalem al-Quds has no right to comment on the noble issue of human rights in Iran, according to Press TV.

The remarks came after the Israeli mission in Geneva tweeted, "Today, during the Item 4 General Debate, where HRC46 discusses situations which require its attention, we repeated our call for @UN\_HRC to focus on Iran."

The Iranian ambassador pointed out that the Israeli regime is best described under the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3379, adopted on November 10, 1975. In Resolution 3379, Israel was declared a racist regime.

According to Baghaei Hamaneh, the rule of law makes up the basis for promoting human rights and protecting the foundations of freedom.

The Iranian envoy also expressed regret that some governments focus on weakening the rule of law in developing countries by targeting their judicial systems under the pretext of defending human rights.

No country or group of states should consider that they have the right to dictate their priorities and ideals to others, the Iranian envoy said, stressing that the world's countries can freely choose their governments as well as judicial, legal and economic systems according to the principle of independent action.

He further called on the UN Human Rights Council to distance itself from politicization, double standards and stereotypes.

Baghaei Hamaneh also criticized Canada, Australia, Britain, Denmark, the U.S., France, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria and Sweden for accusing others of rights violations while pretending as if no one was aware of their own contradictory performance both inside and outside their countries.

These states, he added, are accused of widespread human rights violations across the world through exporting weapons to aggressor countries and adopting unilateral policies towards developing countries.

Tensions have been on the rise between Iran and Israel over the past years. The Wall Street Journal has recently reported that Israel has targeted at least 12 vessels linked to Iran since 2019. According to the American newspaper, these ships were mostly carrying Iranian oil.

Iran has not reacted to this allegation.

On Friday, Iran announced that an Iranian merchant ship was targeted with an "explosive object" in the Mediterranean.

Ali Ghiasian, a spokesman for the Shipping Company of the Islamic Republic of Iran, said in an exclusive interview with Nournews that "part of the ship's hull was damaged after an explosive device hit the Iranian container ship Shahrekord on Wednesday, March 11, in international waters in the Mediterranean Sea."

"This vessel, which belongs to the Container Transportation of Iran's shipping company, was on its way from Iran to Europe," the Iranian official continued.

## Biden should pursue 'power of reason' with Iran: diplomat

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, the special aide to the speaker of the Iranian Parliament on international affairs, has called on U.S. President Joe Biden to learn from history and pursue the "power of reason" when dealing with Iran.

"Mr. @JoeBiden should learn lesson from history. With great nation of Iran, one must talk with power of reason, not with coercion. Under force & threats, Iran won't negotiate with U.S. The @WhiteHouse needs to talk first with its polarized society," Amir-Abdollahian said in a tweet on Friday.

The special aide also said that the U.S. sanctions on Iran are coming to an end.

"Sanction against Iran is on its deathbed,"

he added.

The tweet came amid a diplomatic row between Tehran and Washington over the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Iran has called on the U.S. to lift the sanctions it imposed on Iran following the White House withdrawal from the JCPOA and then return to it. However, the U.S. has refused to lift the sanctions, saying that it was up to Iran to make the first move toward reviving the nuclear deal.

**'End illegal sanctions immediately to save lives'**

Apart from the deal, Iran also has said that the sanctions have impeded its efforts to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

Iran's Ambassador to the United Nations, Majid Takht-Ravanchi, said on Friday that illegal sanctions have prevented millions of people all over the world from accessing the Covid-19 vaccine.

"Only together and through an inclusive global approach we can defeat the pandemic. Illegal unilateral sanctions have prevented hundreds of millions of people worldwide from accessing the #COVID19 vaccine. End illegal sanctions immediately to save lives," he tweeted.

Earlier on Thursday, the ambassador denounced sanctions as inhumane, immoral and illegal, saying their far-reaching, devastating and long-term consequences are as brutal and vicious as terrorism, war crimes and

crimes against humanity.

"In order to combat food insecurity in the world, it is necessary to lift siege and sanctions and foster international cooperation," Takht-Ravanchi said via videoconference to a meeting of the UN Security Council on Thursday that discussed how conflict and food security are interlinked.

"The current number of people at risk of hunger and food insecurity in the world is alarming, which has made it essential and urgent to deal with this challenge," he added.

Takht-Ravanchi then highlighted the right to food is the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger and malnutrition under any circumstances, whether in peace or war.

## International double standard made Iran cautious about talks: former Italian diplomat

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Marco Carnelos, a former Italian diplomat, has said that the international community is following a double standard in dealing with Iran and this has made the country wary of rejoining the 2015 nuclear deal.

Carnelos drew a comparison between Iran and Israel in terms of having transparent cooperation with relevant international agencies.

"Israel, having never signed the NPT and being the only Middle Eastern nation to unofficially develop a military nuclear programme, should have been closely monitored," wrote the former diplomat in an article for the Middle East Eye website. "Not a chance. For historical reasons and others somewhat related to US foreign policy, Israel's nuclear programme has always been a taboo for the international community, and it remains so to this day."

Carnelos added, "Meanwhile, this has been 'compensated' for by an international mobilisation against the nuclear programme of Iran - a state that signed the NPT and voluntarily implemented its Additional Protocol, enabling unannounced and intrusive inspections to monitor compliance. While this is called realpolitik, to many, it sounds like double standards. The last six years of Iran's nuclear saga are well known."

According to the former diplomat, Iran, by signing the 2015 nuclear deal - officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)-, accepted limits on its programme

in exchange for an end to international sanctions.

"While Iran complied with the deal, duly certified by the IAEA, sanctions relief never fully materialised - and in May 2018, the US withdrew from the agreement and adopted new, unprecedentedly harsh sanctions against Iran. The UK, France, Germany and the EU tried to keep the deal on track - but ultimately, to avoid US wrath and damaging secondary sanctions, they abstained from economic activity with Iran, maintaining the sanctions de facto and further damaging Iran's economy and trust," Carnelos wrote.

He added, "Less than three years later, and while US President Joe Biden has announced his intention to re-enter the nuclear deal, a new narrative about the nature of the Iranian threat is being advanced by the US and Israel, echoed in some European chancelleries. The nuclear deal is being deemed obsolete and in need of renegotiation, mainly because it does not address two important issues: Iran's ballistic-missile programme and its "malign and destabilising activities" in the region. As to the first objection, ballistic missiles were never part of the nuclear deal's core business - and incidentally, they were already deployed across the region, not just in Iran, when the deal was negotiated and signed."

According to Carnelos, those highlighting Iran's ballistic missile threat are also staunch supporters of sanctions, the so-called "maximum pressure policy."

## TEDPIX gains 22,000 points on Saturday

**ECONOMY** **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), rose 22,554 points to 1.229 million on Saturday, which is the first day of Iranian calendar week.

Over 8.478 billion securities worth 80.423 trillion rials (about \$1.914 billion) were traded at the TSE on Saturday.



The first market's index rose 18,176 points, and the second market's index increased 39,842 points.

After several weeks of decline, growth finally returned to the TSE, Iran's major stock exchange, as TEDPIX rose 2.4 percent during the past Iranian calendar week.

The index closed at 1.206 million points on Wednesday (the last working day of the week).

## Operation to install Jask oil terminal's 1st SPM system started

**ECONOMY** **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The operation for the installation of the first single point mooring (SPM) system of the Jask crude oil export terminal was started, the operator of Jask oil terminal project in southern Iran announced.

Vahid Maleki also said that this project has an over 90 percent progress in the early stage. Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC) published on its website.

The construction of the mentioned SPM system had been completed and the SPM was loaded to be shipped toward its designated point in the Gulf of Oman waters in mid-February.

Maleki put the capacity of this SPM system at 7,000 cubic meters per hour (equivalent to one million barrels per day) and said: "Soon, with the installation of this offshore structure at a distance of approximately six kilometers from Makran coast, the early phase of this project will go operational."

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



According to Maleki, this SPM system and its accessories, including floating and submersible hoses, weigh nearly 800 tons and are installed and fixed to the seafloor at a depth of 48 meters.

Meanwhile, as announced by Maleki on February 20, the construction of the second 36-inch offshore oil pipeline of the Jask terminal, which will be connected to the SPM, had been completed.

According to Maleki, the construction of the mentioned pipeline was started immediately after the completion of the first pipeline in late January and the project was completed on Friday on schedule.

According to the official, the capacity of this SPM system is 7,000 cubic meters per hour (equivalent to one million barrels per day).

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

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

According to the deputy director of the project in Petroleum Engineering and Development Company (PEDEC) the progress of the first phase of the strategic Goreh-Jask oil pipeline project has also surpassed 70 percent.

Ali Jafarzadeh said that such progress promises that the project will be completed by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20).

Despite the tough condition created by the sanctions and also coronavirus outbreak, this strategic project will be completed at the scheduled time, he underscored.

Jafarzadeh announced the supply of more than 96 percent of the parts and equipment of this project from domestic sources and said: "This is an all-Iranian project and a high percentage of items required for this national project is supplied by the domestic companies."

Back in December 2020, the managing director of PEDEC had announced that the implementation of Goreh-Jask project by domestic contractors has saved the country over €500 million.

Touraj Dehqani said that the implementation of the project so far has created direct jobs for 8,000 people while providing indirect job opportunities for over 15,000 people as well.

Dehqani stated that the first phase of this project with a capacity to transfer over 300,000 barrels of crude oil per day will be ready for operation by the end of the current Iranian calendar year.

So far, more than 780 kilometers (km) of pipes have been delivered to the site and more than 400 km of piping has been carried out, the official said at the time.

According to the plan, the entire pipeline, which is about 1,000 kilometers, will be installed, tested, and operational by the yearend, he added.

Goreh-Jask project, which is aimed at expanding the oil transport capacity in the south of the country to one million barrels a day, was inaugurated in late June 2020 by President Hassan Rouhani.

# Iranian heavy crude oil price rises 11.5% in February: OPEC

**1 →** OPEC Basket prices also rose over 12.3 percent to \$61.49 a barrel in February, up \$6.71 from January.

In its report, OPEC has put the average global demand for oil in 2021 at 96.270 million barrels per day, which is 5.89 million barrels more than the figure for 2020.

In addition to the devastating impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on the global oil industry which resulted in the drastic fall in oil prices, the Iranian oil industry has also been under pressure from the U.S. efforts to isolate the country by re-imposing sanctions.

The country however has been ramping up

its oil production over the past few months following the recent developments in the White House and also the recovery of the global markets from the negative impacts of the coronavirus pandemic.

Earlier in February, Fitch Solutions Incorporation, a subsidiary of Fitch Ratings, which is one of the U.S.'s three biggest credit rating agencies, forecasted a 6.8-percent growth for Iranian oil exports in 2021 if the U.S comes back to the 2015 nuclear deal.

In one of its latest reports dubbed "Iran Oil and Gas Report", Fitch also saw the Islamic Republic's crude oil exports double in 2022 compared to 2020.



"The prospects for the Iranian oil sector have brightened significantly following Joe Biden's victory in the U.S. presidential election on November 3. President Biden has indicated that he will seek to re-enter the

U.S. into the Iranian nuclear deal, paving the way for a roll-back of secondary sanctions and recovery of around 2.0 million barrels per day (bpd) in oil production," the report said.

## PBO, Tehran municipality ink MOU to renovate public transport fleet

**ECONOMY** **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Planning and Budget Organization (PBO) and Tehran municipality on Saturday signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for renovating 31 subway trains and 10,000 public taxis.

The MOU was signed by PBO Head Mohammad-Baqer Nobakht and Tehran Mayor Pirouz Hanachi, IRIB reported.

As reported, over 100 trillion rials (about \$2.3 billion) is allocated only for the renovation of the mentioned 10,000 taxis.

On the same day, Tehran Urban and Suburban Railway Operation Company also signed an MOU with Tehran Wagon Company for cooperation in building 105 wagons for the capital city's urban railway fleet.

Tehran municipality had previously signed an MOU with Iran Khodro car manufacturing company to meet part of the transport fleet's need for 3,000 buses.

"Tehran needs 3,000 buses to reduce waiting times at stops so that we will try to achieve this goal", Hanachi had said in June 2020.

The Iranian government has been implementing several programs, including the renovation of the public transportation fleet and increasing the number of dual-fuel cars,



PBO Head Mohammad-Baqer Nobakht (L) exchanges signed MOU documents with Tehran Mayor Pirouz Hanachi in Tehran on Saturday.

for reducing the country's fuel consumption and also for reducing air pollution in big cities.

## Industry ministry to implement new program to promote investment

**ECONOMY** **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Industry, Mining, and Trade Ministry is going to implement a new program dubbed "Resilient Economy with Top Enterprises" for promoting investment in the country's industrial sectors, Deputy Industry Minister Saeed Zarandi said.

According to Zarandi, the Industry Ministry has been identifying pioneering industries and promoting the establishment of public joint-stock companies over the past two years for guiding public capitals towards such industries, as the first stage of the mentioned program.

In the second stage, the ministry is encouraging the country's top enterprises to participate in the country's investment arena,



IRIB reported.

"We believe that the country's economic development, in line with the policies of the resilient economy, requires increasing pro-

ductive investments based on competitive advantages and completing the value chain in various industries," Zarandi said.

Considering the technical, financial, and effective executive records of large and successful companies in the field of production and export, their role in the realization of this goal is of special importance, he added.

According to the official, every year, the country's top companies are ranked according to their performance in the fields of production and export, job creation, and value-added, and 100 main companies of the current year have already been identified.

"This ranking is done among the country's industrial, trade, and mining companies, and finally the top 100 companies are iden-

tified and selected to implement important projects; 39 of these companies are active in the petrochemical and chemical sectors, 21 companies are in the non-metallic sector, 20 companies in the mining sector and 20 companies are active in the manufacturing of machinery," Zarandi explained.

The official noted that for each one of the mentioned companies, a certain project has been defined and a memorandum of understanding (MOU) will be signed with them to determine their obligations regarding the fulfillment of their investments.

The first of the mentioned MOUs is going to be signed between the Industry Ministry and five investors this week, according to the official.

## Tehran, Islamabad moving towards expansion of trade

**ECONOMY** **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iran's Deputy Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs Hassan Abqari has said that Iran and Pakistan are working together to remove the obstacles in the way of expanding mutual trade.

"Ways to address exchange and banking problems have been identified and pursued by the two countries' governments," Abqari who is also the Head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Foreign Investment Company (IFIC) told IRNA on Saturday.

Abqari, who traveled to Islamabad on Friday to meet with Pakistani officials and discuss economic relations, pointed to the positive measures taken by the Pakistani government, saying: "Fortunately, relations between the two countries are at a very good level under the government of Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, and we are hopeful about the outcomes of these mutual efforts."

The official noted that Iran and Pakistan have a joint venture company, 50 percent of which is owned by the Iranian government and the other 50 percent by the Pakistani side.

"The company is in a good condition and the works pertaining to the financial and credit institutions of the two sides are conducted through this joint venture" he added.



According to Abqari the major focus of the governments of Iran and Pakistan is the expansion of trade, especially in border areas.

He noted that this issue was addressed in a meeting with Abdul Hafiz Sheikh, Minister of Finance and Revenues of Pakistan in Islamabad on Friday.

Referring to the new conditions facing trade and economic relations of countries due to the outbreak of the

coronavirus over the past year, the official said: "We consider these conditions as an opportunity for Iran and Pakistan to improve their previous level of trade relations; we are determined to move forward to resolve some issues related to financial and banking exchange."

In the meeting with Abdul Hafiz Sheikh, the two sides had also discussed the issues related to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the two countries' trade.

During the discussions, Sheikh informed Iran's Deputy Economy Minister about his country's comprehensive economic reform program that is aimed at achieving sustainable economic development.

Considering Pakistan's relatively large consumer market, expansion of trade with the country and boosting exports to its market has become one of Iran's priorities in recent years.

Iran's exports to Pakistan in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19) stood at \$1.18 billion, but in the meantime, financial and banking problems have still created obstacles in the way of trade relations with this country.

Earlier this month, the two sides have held an online meeting to discuss issues related to developing border trade and reached an agreement to establish the two countries' first joint border market.

## Export from Bushehr ports rises 11%

**ECONOMY** **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — As announced by transport and urban development minister, exports from the ports of Bushehr province, in the southwest of Iran, has increased 11 percent during the first 11 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2020 – February 18, 2021), as compared with the corresponding period in the past year.

Mohammad Eslami made the remarks when praising the good performance of the country's ports despite the sanctions limitations and also the coronavirus pandemic.

As announced last month by the head of Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO), the capacity of Iranian ports is expected to increase to 280 million tons by the end

of the current government's incumbency (early August).

Mohammad Rastad put the current loading and unloading capacity of the country's ports at 250 million tons.

"We have signed 300 contracts with the private sector for conducting development projects including the construction of structures, equipment, and even infrastructure in ports," Rastad said.

According to the official the private sector has currently invested over 160 trillion rials (about \$3.8 billion) in the country's ports.

Mentioning the restrictions created by the U.S. sanctions in the country's ports and maritime activities, the official said: "In all areas which were affected by the

U.S. sanctions we tried to rely on domestic capacities and managed to keep the ports active and the country's imports and exports afloat."

The capacity, infrastructure, and equipment of the ports have made it possible for them to be able to load and unload goods in accordance with international standards, he stressed.

"For all kinds of goods and all types of vessels, including light to heavy goods and also super-sized commodities and vessels, there are berths and special terminals in the country that can provide the necessary services," Rastad added.

The official put the total length of the Iranian port wharves at 39 kilometers, saying that this has made it possible for



different types of ships and vessels to be able to dock and load or unload their cargoes.

"Today, we have no problems regarding the loading and unloading of basic goods, bulk goods, and containers in the country's ports, and the commodity owners are not obliged to pay demurrage charges (damages for delayed unloading and loading) to ships because of port operations, and this shows how standard the Iranian ports are," the PMO head added.

# “Greater Kurdistan” an impossible dream: KRG representative

**1 →** Indeed, the stamp design was proposed by a number of Christian artists to the KRG Ministry of Communications; however, it did not meet endorsement by the KRG.

KRG spokesman Jotyar Adel told reporters that Iraq's Kurdish region adheres to the Iraqi constitution and geographical unity. Therefore, this is an arbitrary act by some who have no connection with the Kurdish officials and is not approved by the KRG, especially given the geographical and political conditions of the Kurdistan region of Iraq.

**What do you think of the main reasons and consequences of such an action?**

We saw the consequences and reactions, both from the Turkish government and its parties as well as Iran.

The Turkish government condemned this action and the spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry expressed Tehran's position objecting to the Iraqi government.

Both countries (Iran and Turkey) expressed objection to the Iraqi government over the stamp, and these objections are reminiscent of what happened when the KRG held a referendum on seceding from Iraq.

The Turkish government and parties denounced this move, and spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry, Saeed Khatibzadeh, explained Tehran's stance regarding the controversial stamps.



On the one hand, I think that in the current situation, we should be more careful and just pursue the rights and aspirations of the Kurdish people within the framework of the Iraqi constitution.

On the other hand, we must admit that there is no chance to alleviate the problems without the approval and support of neighboring countries and cooperation with the Iraqi government.

On the other hand, the Iraqi government must abide by the constitution to satisfy the demands of Kurds, then the Kurdish people

feel that they are partners in the Iraqi state.

**The alleged map of “Greater Kurdistan” includes parts of Iran, Turkey and Syria. What will be the repercussions of such an idea on the KRG's ties with its neighbors, especially as this idea is facing serious opposition from the central Iraqi government?**

The map of “Greater Kurdistan” may be the desire of some Kurdish parties, but putting it into practice and unification of all Kurds is impossible and is more like a dream because the geography of Kurdistan is divided into

four regional countries: Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria. Each of these countries has its own distinct characteristics.

Today, we face delicate circumstances where we need to solve our problems and ensure the Kurds' rights and security within the framework of the constitution of the country in which they live. The Kurds are the partner of the Iraqi state and brothers of their Shia, Sunni and Arab fellows.

**Which sides would benefit from conflicts between the Kurdistan region and the regional states, especially the central Iraqi government?**

Those who seek to destabilize the region are the most beneficiary side of these tensions.

By magnifying the problems or tension between the Kurds with Iran and Turkey and even with Iraq's central government, these parties want to fish in troubled water.

Understanding the current situation, the Kurdish leaders and people must not allow enemies of security and stability in the region to take advantage of the differences and cause turmoil and concern about the Kurds. The Kurds are distributed in four countries of the region, so these countries' security and stability.

We should avoid any interference in the regional countries' internal affairs, as the territorial integrity and prosperity of these countries are important to the KRG.

## The U.S. system could very well collapse if reforms are not instituted immediately

By Abayomi Azikiwe

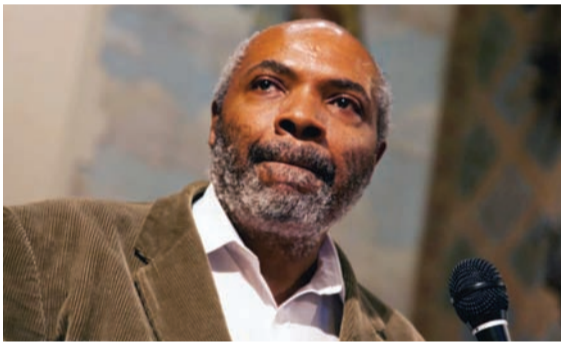
The U.S. has been experiencing various social developments in recent years. There were several factors which have led to the existing social crisis in the U.S. The failure of the capitalist system to provide adequate jobs, incomes and amenities to tens of millions of people while the ruling class is becoming wealthier, inherently weakened national institutions. When the pandemic hit during 2020, the economic impact was catastrophic. Then rather than adequately addressing the problems, the Trump administration sought to ignore the increasing impoverishment and uncertainty, which fuelled anger and righteous discontent.

The mass demonstrations and rebellions across the country beginning in May 2020, further exposed the contradictions between the foreign policy rhetoric of the U.S. as being a leader in international human rights, where in reality the police and vigilante killings of African American and Latin American peoples suggest just the opposite. It was amazing to witness the United Nations Human Rights Council holding hearings on racist violence in the U.S. This event was held at the aegis of the African Union (AU) utilizing a resolution submitted by Malcolm X (El Hajj Malik Shabazz) and adopted during his intervention at the July 1964 second summit of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the

predecessor of the AU. It will be important for progressive elements within the international community to continue their condemnation of U.S. foreign policy related to race relations and Washington's dealing with developing countries, particularly those holding anti-imperialist sentiments.

I think the established political structure in the U.S. is not able to cope up with these challenges and solve the social problems. The system needs a complete overhaul. The profit motive in economics cannot be maintained if the aim of the government is to seek stability. The longer the capitalist and imperialist system is in operation the world will know no peace.

The U.S. system could very well collapse if reforms are not instituted immediately. Even with substantial reforms, there are structural weaknesses and contradictions which will not go away if a new system is not brought into existence. However, even if the American system is in decline, it could continue to function for many years to come causing havoc domestically and internationally. For example, ancient Rome took several centuries to be completely stripped of its power. Even with the collapse becoming inevitable, it did not prevent the invasion of the Horn of Africa during the late 19th century and North Africa in the early 20th century. Fascism arose out of the desire of Mussolini to rebuild Rome as an imperialist state. It would take the defeat of Fascism in the



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1940s to eliminate its strength as an imperialist power. A similar historical trajectory could occur in relationship to the U.S. if the people domestically and internationally are capable of eliminating imperialism as a continuing threat to humanity.

## Ex-Advisor to Saudi Finance Ministry: U.S. to help bin Nayef, bin Abdulaziz to oust MBS

By Zahra Mirzafarjouyan

**TEHRAN** — Hossein Askari, Professor of Business and International Affairs at GWU believes that rather than imposing serious sanctions on Saudi Arabia, the U.S. will instead help and support bin Nayef and bin Abdulaziz to oust MBS.

It has been almost two months since the inauguration of the U.S. government, but U.S. President Joe Biden has not yet fulfilled one of his most important election promises - to return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), known commonly as the Iran nuclear deal and lift sanctions on Iran. But on the other hand, he set a series of preconditions despite the fact the previous U.S. administration has left the deal, not Iran. Biden said that the United States will not lift sanctions against Iran as a means to resuming negotiations, and Tehran needs to stop its uranium enrichment activities first.

Meanwhile, Biden selected some officials with experience in Iran issues to implement his strategy for Iran, and the last person he chose was Richard Nephew, who is named as the “architect of the oppressive sanctions”.

From May 2011 to January 2013, Nephew served as the director for Iran at the National Security Council, where he oversaw the expansion of U.S. sanctions on Iran before the nuclear deal in 2015. Some believe that his appointment as deputy to Robert Malley, who was criticized for being too soft on Iran, attempts to strike a balance on the State Department team.

Nephew's experiences about Iran have led to differing views about his presence on Biden's team and the impact he could have on advancing the White House's policies toward Iran. The views are that Nephew has both the ability to increase and decrease sanctions; Because he himself was involved in designing the sanctions against Iran.

Regarding Biden policies toward Riyadh, some experts believe that the U.S. President is caught between “two opposing forces” when it comes to Saudi Arabia. During his presidential campaign, Biden said the White House would make Riyadh the “pariah that they are” and hold the kingdom accountable on human rights issues. However, Biden now sees that Riyadh's support is important for

his agenda in West Asia.

Last week, the U.S. imposed visa restrictions on 76 Saudis who are believed to have been engaged in threatening dissidents overseas, including but not limited to the Khashoggi killing. But Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has not been directly targeted by Washington, despite an intelligence report finding that he approved an operation to capture or kill journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018.

To know more about these issues, we reached out to Professor Hossein Askari, Economist, Emeritus Professor of Business and International Affairs at George Washington University. Following is the text of the interview with him:

**Richard Nephew is known as the architects of U.S. sanctions against Iran. Some in Iran believe that he has joined Biden's administration because the administration intends to toughen sanction against Iran which will be contrary to President Biden's previous promises. On the other hand, some believe his return to the U.S. administration means the sanctions are going to be softer. What do you think of this?**

The real architect of U.S. sanctions on Iran was Stuart Levy, the former Undersecretary of the U.S. Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence. He was the person who saw how financial sanctions were the most effective weapon. Before him, sanctions were not effective. Levy developed the framework for policymakers. I don't think that Nephew added anything to what Levy and his team developed. His appointment has nothing to do with how tough or easy sanctions will be under Biden. Nephew just has some understanding of the history of sanctions on Iran that will be useful to the Biden Administration as it moves ahead.

**As everybody knows sanctions mostly harm people rather than governments and decision-makers. From your point of view is resorting to sanctions as a tool for achieving political goals that hurt severely usual people is moral?**

A: I agree totally that sanctions invariably cause more harm to the average citizen and especially the poorest members of society.

The decisionmakers in the sanctioned country may even benefit through smuggling and other questionable activities. But the premise of sanctions is precisely that by causing pain on the average person, the government will be forced to change its policies. The best sanction is the well-targeted sanction that directly affects the decisionmakers. But such sanctions are tough to find. In the end, I believe that sanctions have a big blowback. The country that sends sanctions, in this case, the United States, will spawn a lot of enemies for itself. Innocent people who suffer and who even lose loved ones as a result of sanctions will remember as in the case of an unjust war.

Interestingly, the United States used to attack the Arab embargo of Israel. Saying it was illegal and against international law. Now the U.S. imposes more sanctions than all other countries in the world combined. What hypocrisy!

**Biden had promised to return to JCPOA before taking office. But after he took office, he set a series of preconditions despite the fact that the one who left the deal was the U.S., not Iran. How do you assess these contradictory acts?**

Well before he was running to be President and the JCPOA was the Obama Administration's, of which he was the Vice President, signature foreign policy success. So, he wanted to restore this policy's success. But in the meantime, Trump and his Israeli allies demonized Iran—its missile program and support of its allies in the region. Let me also add that Iran has not helped its cause, such as violent verbal threats against Israel that don't help Iran's international image. And Iran has not managed its economy well. So, it was obvious to any thinking person that Biden would step back and demand many of the same things that Trump had initiated. It is now a poker game. And I advise Iran to play its hand carefully. Don't fall into the same trap as before. Namely giving up a great deal on its nuclear program that was not immediately recoverable while getting sanctions relief that could be immediately re-imposed. It was not a symmetrical deal. Iranian negotiators have some good cards now that they should not throw away for little relief.

Regarding Biden's policy towards Saudi

**Arabia, from one side he asks Saudi Arabia to stop the war against the Yemeni people but from the other side, Biden reaffirms its commitment to defend the country. He also releases a report on Saudi rulers' role in slaughtering Khashoggi but from the other side, Biden doesn't take any serious measures to punish the ones having hand in the murder. How do you assess the U.S. new administration's policy towards Riyadh? Is there any difference between Biden's policy and Trump's? It seems that both Biden and Trump have been using Yemen and the Khashoggi cases as a tool to get more economic advantages. What do you think of this?**

I believe that Biden genuinely detests the Saudi regime and especially MBS. But please remember that on the one hand, influential Americans have personal contracts (lobbyists) with the Saudi government and directly with the al-Sauds. Also, there are American corporate interests in Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, Iran is vilified by Israel, the Jewish lobby and the American media. Again, I must emphasize that Iran does not help its own cause across the world and especially in the United States with its rhetoric and actions.

So, while I don't agree with Biden I see where he is coming from. He needs Congressional support for his agenda and being soft on Iran will not help him in the U.S. Congress. But I would agree that the U.S. and special interest groups, that is companies and lobbyists, are and will use these two cases to extract more money out of MBS and Saudi Arabia.

Let me add a footnote. At the time when MBS arrested Mohammad bin Nayef, I said that MBS will in time be overthrown because he has broken the cardinal rule of King Abdulaziz—that is to follow seniority in family rule and not plotting against one another. I said at the time that some members of the al-Sauds would overthrow MBS with the help of the United States. Today, I believe that this will happen under Biden's presidency. Rather than imposing serious sanctions on Saudi Arabia, the U.S. will instead help and support Muhammad bin Nayef and Ahmed bin Abdulaziz to oust MBS. Wait and see!

## U.S. “ceasefire plan” meant to prolong Yemen’s descent into turmoil: Ansarullah

**1 →** He said there is no real change towards ending the Saudi war and lifting the siege, stressing that such matters lie in the hands of the other side.

“They want us to respond through dialogue to what they have not achieved by means of war and siege. Everyone must realize such a fact,” the senior Ansarullah official added.

Abdul-Salam also rejected as “a big lie” the U.S. envoy's allegations that humanitarian aid deliveries have not been distributed among the needy Yemenis, stating that the coalition of aggression illegally impounds Yemen-bound oil vessels irrespective of the fact they all have acquired international permits beforehand.

“We have accepted all conditions proposed by other parties to ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Having found no excuse to continue the blockade, they are alleging aid deliveries have not reached those in need,” the Ansarullah spokesman said.

**Houthi: Trust in U.S. comes from actions, not words**

A member of Yemen's Supreme Political Council said Ansarullah is ready to return to the negotiating table with a serious goal of ending the conflict, but it must first see concrete steps from the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden.

“Trust must be achieved through decision-making. So far, we have not seen any concrete decisions being made,” he added.

He noted that President Biden was a member of former U.S. president Barack Obama's administration, which declared at the time that Washington was joining the Saudi-led coalition against Yemen.

“They also gave the green light to the coalition to continue massacre in our country and agreed to it,” Houthi added.

**“Washington must drop Saudi conditions”**

Abdul-Malik al-Ajri, a member of Ansarullah's political bureau, said on Friday that his movement views the U.S. ceasefire proposal in favor of Saudi Arabia, and would not accept it.

“The U.S. special envoy on Yemen [Tim] Lenderking has presented proposals to end the war and has called on Ansarullah to respond,” Ajri wrote in a post published on his Twitter page.

“The truth is what he has offered is the same as Saudi Arabia's conditions for a ceasefire. Linderking should know in case such suggestions were acceptable, we would have directly received them from Saudi Arabia. There was then no need for the U.S. envoy to repeat Saudis' narrative.”

**Lenderking: Ansarullah's ability is undeniable fact**

The top U.S. diplomat for Yemen on Friday touched on the role of Ansarullah and said its ability is a straightforward fact.

Lenderking said during a webinar with the Atlantic Council think tank that the movement is a “significant player” in Yemen and it needs to be acknowledged.

“I don't think you can operate by denying that reality,” he said, claiming that the U.S. “never said the Houthis have no role in Yemen.”

Lenderking, who recently returned from a three-week trip to the region, added that Washington is looking for the Ansarullah's response to its peace plan.

“I will return immediately when the Houthis are prepared to talk,” Lenderking noted.

## Five Chinese companies pose threat to U.S. national security: FCC

The U.S. has declared more restrictions on five Chinese companies, including the Huawei tech giant, amid Washington's war on Chinese telecommunication firms, over national threat allegations.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) announced that the companies including Huawei “have been found to pose an unacceptable risk to U.S. national security.” “This list provides meaningful guidance that will ensure that as next-generation networks are built across the country, they do not repeat the mistakes of the past or use equipment or services that will pose a threat to U.S. national security or the security and safety of Americans,” said acting FCC Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel.

Last year, the FCC designated Huawei and ZTE Corp as “a national security threat to communications networks.”

The declaration barred U.S. firms from tapping an \$8.3 billion government fund to purchase equipment from the companies.

In August 2020, the U.S. government issued regulations barring agencies from buying goods or services from any of the five Chinese companies.

And in 2019, Washington placed Huawei, Hikvision and other companies on its economic blacklist.

Former U.S. President Donald Trump has blacklisted Huawei to block the company from getting any U.S. telecom equipment contracts and prevent the transfer of American technology to the Chinese firm.

His administration accused Huawei of providing Beijing with a way to spy on communications from the countries that use its products and services.

The Chinese tech firm, however, said that the restrictions are “part of an attempt to irrevocably damage Huawei's reputation and its business for reasons related to competition rather than law enforcement.”

The company called the racketeering accusation “a contrived repackaging of a handful of civil allegations that are almost 20 years old.”

The latest development on Washington's war on Chinese companies comes as the administration of President Joe Biden is reinforcing a hard line on exports to Huawei.

In a 24-page national security document, his administration described China as “the only competitor potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system.”

In the face of “challenges from China and Russia,” the document said, the U.S. military would shift its emphasis away from “unnecessary legacy platforms and weapons systems to free up resources for investments” in cutting-edge technologies.

## Campaign launched to promote handicrafts as Noruz gifts

➔ With 14 entries, Iran ranks first globally for the number of cities and villages registered by the World Crafts Council, as China with seven entries, Chile with four, and India with three ones come next. In late January, the cities of Shiraz, Malayer, and Zanjan and the village of Qassemabad were designated by the WCC- Asia Pacific Region, putting Iran's number of world crafts cities and villages from ten to 14.



Iran exported \$523 million worth of handicrafts during the past calendar year 1398 (ended March 19, 2020). Of the figure, some \$273 million worth of handicrafts were exported officially through customs, and about \$250 million was earned via suitcase trade (allowed for customs-free and tax-free transfer) through various provinces, according to data provided by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts. Ceramics, pottery vessels, handwoven cloths as well as personal ornamentations with precious and semi-precious gemstones are traditionally exported to Iraq, Afghanistan, Germany, the U.S., the UK, and other countries.

## Discover bizarre place of worship in northwest Iran

**HERITAGE** **TEHRAN** – The creation of rock architecture across the Iranian plateau is influenced by the religious, geographical, and political atmosphere of their time.

Ghadamgah, which is the main focus of this article, is a millennia-old subterranean temple that was repurposed to be a mosque. The temple is said to be a place of worship where the ancient Mithraism rituals were observed before the advent of Islam.

The place of worship, which sometimes is referred to as a cave, is situated at the upstream of Ghadamgah's graveyard, near Badamyar village, from the environs of Azarshahr in the northwestern West Azarbaijan province. It is located some 200 meters from a historical cemetery of the same name.

Apart from being called a temple, mosque, or a cave, the dwelling is of high importance in terms of architecture as well as cultural and anthropological values. It was recorded in a list of the country's natural cultural heritage with register number 779 in the Iranian calendar year 1347 (1968).



Currently named Azarshahr Mosque, by many locals, the structure is a travel destination as well, attracting thousands of visitors to the region per annum.

According to the sanctity of mountains and rocks in the ancient religions, especially in Mithraism, valuable temples and places of worship have emerged in the mountains. Their obvious characteristic is circular dome-shaped spaces; simplicity, the arrangement of spaces, and the way of creating light that corresponds with the tradition of Mithraism in Iran.

Mehr Temple in Maragheh, Dashkasan in Zanjan, and Ghadamgah Temple in Azarshahr are the rock temples in the northwest of Iran that signs and symbols on them indicate the performance of Mithraism duties in these temples.

The outside perspective of the Ghadamgah temple is very modest and at the first glance may not even attract the attention of passersby. This perspective is a small opening beneath a rock shelter.

The main area of Ghadamgah is one of the coolest and most attractive spaces that can be thought about in an ancient edifice. This space that is drilled in the cave is a cone with a base diameter of 15 to 15.70 meters. Cone height is 12.30 meters and the diameter of the light well is 105 cm. The walls have been cut regularly from the bottom to the top of the cone.

The main area of the Qadamgah Temple is one of the coolest and most attractive spaces that can be thought about as an ancient edifice. This space that is drilled in the cave is a cone with a base diameter of 15 to 15.70 meters. Cone height is 12.30 meters and the diameter of the light well is 105 cm. The walls have been cut regularly from the bottom to the top of the cone.

Such structures are mostly formed by dominated empires of the time. Sometimes a place of worship has continued to be served in later periods but it has been changed in its functions. Experts say one of the reasons that have attracted man to mountain and rock cliffs in different schools was the religious traditions of the community.

# Iranian, French experts to discuss ways to expand cultural heritage ties

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** – Panels of Iranian and French scholars are scheduled to discuss ways to strengthen cultural heritage ties in an online seminar, Mehr reported on Saturday.

Organized by Franco-Iranian Center in close collaboration with the Louvre Museum the webinar will be held on March 18, the report added.

Iranian scholars Ruhollah Shirazi and Arezou Rasouli as well as the Director of Islamic Arts at the Louvre Yannick Lintz, Director of Louvre Oriental Antiquities Department Ariane Thomas, and several French scholars and archaeologists including Rocco Rante, Julien Cuni, Jean-Claude Voisin, and Sebastien Gondet are scheduled to give speeches during the session.

In 2018, Louvre lent art to Tehran for an 'unprecedented' show, which was held at the National Museum of Iran. The show was the first large-scale exhibition by a major Western museum in the country, putting on show some 50



Museugoers visit Persian collections at Louvre

works including 2,400-year-old Egyptian sphinx, a bust of Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius and drawings by Rembrandt and Delacroix, and other artifacts linked to

Greek, Egyptian and Mesopotamian culture, as well as objects from ancient Iran. In parallel with the Tehran exhibition, the Louvre-Lens presented a vast collec-

tion of objects handcrafted by Qajar-era (1785-1925) talented Iranian court from March to July of the same year.

Iran is home to one of the world's oldest continuous major civilizations, embracing settlements dating back to 4000 BC. The name of Iran, formerly known as Persia, mostly conjures up the first Persian Empire, ruled by the Achaemenids (550 – 330 BC) and sites such as Pasargadae and Persepolis. However, there are tens of prehistorical sites as the Burnt City in Sistan-Baluchestan, Tepe Sialk in Kashan, Susa and Chogha Zanbil in the Khuzestan province, and Ecbatana in Hamedan which predate the Achaemenid period.

From a wider point of view, Iranian history can be divided into Pre-Islamic and Islamic eras. The Medes unified Iran as a nation and empire in 625 BC. The Islamic conquest of Persia (633–656) that put an end to the mighty Sassanid Empire (224–651) was a turning point in the history of the nation.

## New plan to save site of the first millennium BC

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** – A demarcation project has been commenced on the ancient hill of Qaleh Bolandeh, which its antiquity is estimated to date back to the first millennium BC. The site is situated in the small village of Aznav near Malayer.

The project aims at preventing further destruction and damage to the site as well as eliminating threats of land-grabbing, illegal construction, or unauthorized excavations, according to Malayer's tourism chief.

However, there are some residential buildings around the historical site, which need to be taken into account, Ebrahim Jalili announced on Saturday.

Archaeological excavations and surveys are scheduled to be conducted on the ancient hill after the completion of the demarcation project, the official added.

The ancient hill of Qaleh Bolandeh is planned to be inscribed on the National Heritage list in near future, he explained.

Located in Hamedan province, the hill is estimated to

date back to the 1st millennium BC, however, there are remnants of artifacts from the Middle Ages to the Islamic eras.

Over 340 historical sites and monuments have been identified across Malayer, of which about 200 properties have been inscribed on the National Heritage list.

The ancient city is named a global hub for woodcarving and carved-wood furniture by the World Crafts Council - Asia Pacific Region (WCC-APR).

Malayer is home to over 4,000 furniture workshops in which more than 8,000 wood masters and some 25,000 crafters are engaged.

Although the art had been practiced in Malayer for a long time ago, it is about a half-century that it has gained prosperity in the region.

Currently, more than 60 percent of the furniture and woodcarving products in Iran are reportedly produced in Malayer and they are sent to various Iranian cities or being exported to Central Asian countries, Persian Gulf littoral states, Turkey, and Iraq amongst some others.



Known in classical times as Ecbatana, Hamedan was one of the ancient world's greatest cities. Pitifully little remains from antiquity, but significant parts of the city center are given over to excavations, and there's a scattering of historical curiosities.

## Volunteers prepare UNESCO-registered Soltaniyeh, surroundings for Noruz

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** – The UNESCO-tagged Soltaniyeh Dome and its surroundings in northwestern Zanjan province have been cleaned by some locals and history buffs in preparation for the Iranian New Year, which begins on March 21.

It is a cultural and symbolic movement that has taken place in historical sites across the country since 2016 to welcome Noruz, the provincial tourism chief has said.

The project's objective is to create culture and to encourage members of local communities, non-governmental organizations, and citizens to take part in preserving and



protecting historical monuments, Amir Arjmand announced on Saturday.

Due to the outbreak of the coronavirus, the cleaning project wasn't undertaken last year, but this year in collaboration with NGOs, the project was conducted under strict health protocols to strengthen social vitality and hope, the official added.

Dominating the skyline, the 14th-century Gonbad-e ("The Dome of") Soltaniyeh, is highly recognized as an architectural masterpiece particularly due to its innovative double-shelled dome and elaborate interior decoration. The monument is, in fact, the mausoleum of Oljaytu, also known

as Muhammad Khodabandeh, who was the eighth Ilkhanid dynasty ruler from 1304 to 1316.

According to UNESCO, the mausoleum's interior decoration is so outstanding that scholars like A.U. Pope have described the building as "anticipating the Taj Mahal".

The UN cultural body has it that the Mausoleum of Oljaytu is an essential link and key monument in the development of Islamic architecture in central and western Asia. The fairly large dome is the earliest extant example of its type in the country and became an important reference for the later development of the Islamic dome.

## Sassanid monuments restored in southwestern Iran

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** – A restoration project has recently been completed on some of the historical monuments inside the ancient city of Belad Shapur in the southwestern province of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad.

A budget of 20 billion rials (\$476,000 at the official exchange rate of 42,000 rials per dollar) was allocated to the project, the provincial tourism chief has announced.

The restoration project aimed to revive and preserve the ancient city while enhancing its tourism infrastructure, Majid Safai said on Saturday.

Restoring Baft Caravanserai and repairing Mork Mosque were part of the project, along with purchasing several buildings inside the ancient city to be added to the city's historical texture, the official added.

Back in December, a new round of restoration work was commenced on the Safavid-era (1501–1736) holy shrine of Imamzadeh Jaber in the ancient city of Belad



Shapur, which is also called Dehdasht.

A budget of 400 million rials (\$9,500) was al-

located to the project which aimed at strengthening and repairing the shrine, as a part of the historical texture of the city.

Inscribed on the National Heritage list in 1985, the ancient city of Belad Shapur is one of the top tourist sites of the province. The city was built at the time of Shapur I, also known as Shapur the Great, (reigned 241 CE–272), the second king of the Sassanid Dynasty.

Despite all the destruction that took place in this historical city in different eras, with an area of more than 45 hectares, it is currently considered as one of the largest historical structures in the country in terms of size and number of historical buildings.

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

## D-8 conferences discuss impact of coronavirus on member states

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** – Member states of the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation, also known as Developing-8, on Wednesday discussed the impact of coronavirus on the tourism sector as well as ways to rebound.

Furthermore, the participants also discussed several issues regarding the global impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in West Asia and outside of the region, in line with the rapid changes in the political, economic, educational, and social spheres. The event also witnessed research papers and articles from the universities of the D-8 Member States such as Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Turkey.

The Third Meeting of the Senior Officials on Tourism Cooperation was hosted virtually by the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture of Nigeria on March 9 and 10.

Iran's tourism industry has suffered

a loss of some 220 trillion rials (about \$5.2 billion at the official exchange rate of 42,000 rials per dollar) since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Minister said in late February. "Iran's tourism has suffered some 220 trillion rials due to corona pandemic so far.... and we hope that with the production of domestic vaccines, tourism will flourish in 1400 [the new Iranian calendar year which begins on March 21]," Ali-Asghar Mounesan said.

"Over 1.5 million jobs have been lost in the tourism sector of Iran due to the COVID-19 disease.... Many of the tourism-insiders are now unemployed or they are staying at home," Mounesan announced last December. Despite the toughest economic pressures and sanctions, the government has provided good support to all sectors of tourism, the minister said. However,

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

Last November, the Islamic Republic announced it would consider abolishing visa rules for passport holders from the group of D-8 countries. D-8 citizens will not need visas for trade or medical purposes, Iran's deputy tourism minister Vali Teymouri said. The official, however, did not provide more detail on further proceedings, while he was addressing an online conference attended by the member states.

D-8, also known as Developing-8, is an organization for development cooperation among the following countries: Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Turkey. The establishment of D-8 was announced officially through the Istanbul Declaration of Summit of



Heads of State/Government on June 15, 1997. The objectives of the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation are to improve member states' position in the global economy, diversify and create new opportunities in trade relations, enhance participation in decision-making at the international level, and improve standards of living.

# UNDP praises Iran for refugee support

SOCIETY  
d e s k

**TEHRAN** – Iran has always been praised by the world for being committed to global policies in providing financial assistance and support to vulnerable groups and refugees, Claudio Providas, United Nations Development Program representative to Iran said.

He made the remarks in a meeting with the head of the Welfare Organization, Vahid Qobadi-Dana, in Tehran on Friday, IRNA reported.

Given the Welfare Organization's excellent performance, we allocated about 26 percent of the total budget allocated to Iran by the UNDP since 2005, amounting to \$21 million, to this organization, Providas added.

Expressing appreciation to the Welfare Organization for its services to the vulnerable groups, elderly and disabled, he said that the efforts made in the fight against AIDS among vulnerable groups are one of the important achievements of the organization's mobile clinics.

The UNDP, in collaboration with other international partners based in Tehran, is working to help vulnerable social groups, including women heads of households and needy families across the country, and is determined to improve the health system, provide medical equipment, and purchase items from Iranian companies to support domestic production.

He praised the role of the Welfare Organization in supporting non-governmental organizations and considering the expansion of their activities, noting that the role of NGOs in raising awareness, especially in times of crisis, is important and the Welfare



Organization has been able to make good use of this social capacity.

Earlier in March, a memorandum of understanding signed between the Health Insurance Organization and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, to cover 120,000 vulnerable refugees with insurance.

With its implementation, the number of refugees covered by social insurance services has increased by 20 percent in Iran, as 120,000 foreign nationals will be under the insurance coverage.

This measure aims to provide medical services in the form of a comprehensive basic package (outpatient, inpatient, and temporary hospitalization) for one year to the foreign nationals.

A total of 1.4 trillion rials (nearly \$35 million at the official rate of 42,000 rials) have been allocated in this regard, which increased by 20 percent compared to the previous phase.

**Two million foreign nationals residing in Iran**

Deputy Interior Minister Javad Naserian said last week that about one million documented foreign nationals are residing in Iran, and perhaps another one million are illegally living in the country.

At the end of 2018, Iran hosted close to one million refugees, making it the sixth-largest refugee host country in the world. The country was also the eighth largest refugee-hosting country in the world in 2019, hosting 951,142

Afghan refugees and 28,268 Iraqi refugees, according to the UNHCR.

One of the largest and most protracted urban refugee populations in the world is living in Iran; about 97 percent of refugees live in urban and semi-urban areas, while three percent are residing in 20 refugee resorts run by the UNHCR's main government counterpart.

Undocumented Afghans have access to free primary health services and similarly free COVID-19 related testing, treatment, and hospitalization, just like nationals.

In Iran, UNHCR is seeking \$16.2 million for its COVID-19 emergency, while requires an additional \$98.7 million to support Iran in maintaining and sustaining its commendable inclusive refugee policies, under the umbrella of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees.

**Education, health for foreign nationals**

Many of the refugees living in Iran are the second and third generation, according to the UNHCR.

There are 40,000 Afghan students in the country, according to the official report, 17,000 of them are graduated, while the unofficial report is estimated at 26,000.

Some 47,000 people were trained and 10 percent of legal refugees were covered by social insurance with the help of the UNHCR, and other foreign nationals can pay for health insurance like Iranians.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, undocumented Afghans have access to free primary health services and similarly free COVID-19 related testing, treatment, and hospitalization, just like nationals.



**SOCIETY TEHRAN** – Patients over the age of 65 can receive free inpatient services in state-run hospitals across the country, IRIB news agency reported on Saturday.

The plan was launched on Saturday nationwide, and will cover 46 million people, Farhad Khodaei, an official with the Social Security Organization said.

In May 2014, a healthcare reform plan, aiming at decreasing the out-of-pocket expenses for the patients, promoting natural birth, and supporting underprivileged patients suffering from rare or incurable diseases, was launched in the country.

Increased access to medicine and treatment was among the achievements of the plan. In the first, treatment was

## Free medical services for people aged over 65

considered an emergency, and the increase in hospital beds, the accommodation of specialist physicians in hospitals, and deprived areas were among the important measures taken.

With increasing access to healthcare, 11 million Iranians who did not have any health insurance coverage were covered by public insurance.

**Iran's commitment to universal health coverage**  
The healthcare network in rural areas of the country is called Health House, which is under the supervision of a rural comprehensive health center, Mohammad Hossein Nicknam, Immunologist in Tehran University of Medical Sciences said in June 2020.

Each health center takes control over five Health Houses," Nicknam explained.

"With the efforts of Behvarz (healthcare providers), primary care including, preventive care, health promotion, screening, and basic medical services for the predefined conditions, are provided to the rural residents with an approximate population of 1,000 people.

While complicated cases or those with more severe symptoms are sent to the comprehensive health center, and emergency patients are referred to the provincial hospitals," he said.

"Currently, over 17,800 Health Houses are providing services to 28 million villagers nationwide, with a workforce of 31,000, he highlighted, adding, 6,642 family physicians and 5,852 rural midwives are working in 2,794 comprehensive rural health care centers.

Therefore, 98 percent of the country's rural population is covered by the PHC system," he noted.

A similar system is providing primary care in urban and suburban areas by Health Posts with community-based health care workers (called "Moragheb-e-Salamat"), each of whom is tasked with offering services to about 2,500 people, Nicknam explained.

"There is also an urban comprehensive health center which supervises three Health Posts, he noted, adding, some 5,343 health posts and 2,723 health centers are active across the country, with 24,000 healthcare practitioners.

Pointing out that 93 percent of the urban residents are covered by the health networks in the country, he said that 3,987 physicians and 1,2032 health care providers (dentists, nurses, midwives, and health professionals in the fields of environmental health, nutrition, mental health, etc.) provide services to 54 million people," he also explained.

## National subway train developed despite sanctions

**1 →** In the proposed plan, the cost of production was estimated at €20 million, while it cost €12 million, so that, it caused €8 million currency saving, he stated.

It is scheduled to mass-produce the train after obtaining the financial resources, he concluded.

During this ceremony, two more stations on Tehran Metro Line 6 were also inaugurated.

Tehran metro line 6 covering 32 kilometers of the capital consists of 30 stations, which are equipped with proper air conditioning systems, escalators, and fire extinguishing systems, and are also accessible for physically challenged people. The line connects southwestern Tehran to northwestern parts of the capital.

Tehran subway system consists of five operational lines, stretching to 170 kilometers, and lines 6 and 7 are under construction. The lines link south to north, east to west, and are gradually covering more neighborhoods. By completing the two aforementioned lines 70 kilometers will be added to the current railways.

## Covid probably emerged from wildlife trade, not a lab, say WHO experts

World Health Organisation (WHO) scientists say they have found no evidence that Covid-19 leaked from a Chinese laboratory, and instead it was probably caused by the wildlife trade.

The four WHO experts who carried out a month-long investigation in China insisted there was nothing that proved the disease was deliberately developed.

And they called for the threat of pandemics to be treated with the same seriousness as terrorism after the 11 September 2001 attacks.

The scientists said in a Chatham House briefing that they found links between the live-animal market in Wuhan, where people first fell ill, and regions where bats had viruses.

Peter Daszak, a zoologist and president of EcoHealth Alliance, which works to prevent pandemics, said: "There was a conduit from Wuhan to the provinces in South China, where the closest relative viruses to [the coronavirus] are found in bats."



Dr Daszak said the wildlife trade was the most likely explanation of how Covid-19 arrived in Wuhan.

The WHO scientists and their Chinese counterparts considered the most likely explanation was that the virus crossed into domesticated or farmed animals, he added.

The world will find out "fairly soon, within the next few years" what started the pandemic, he predicted. It typically takes many years to pinpoint the animal reservoir of outbreaks.

The team are due to release a report next week on the initial conclusions of their mission to Wuhan.

Marion Koopmans, head of viroscience at University Medical Centre Rotterdam, said they visited the three laboratories closest to the Huanan market in Wuhan, and scrutinized their protocols and research, among other issues.

"We concluded that it's extremely unlikely there was a lab incident," she said.

China has faced claims that the Wuhan Institute of Virology could be the suspected source of the Covid-19 virus.

Dr Daszak called for the threat of pandemics to be treated with the same seriousness as terrorism after the 9/11 attacks.

"We don't put enough energy into forecasting pandemics and working out where the next ones are going to come from and what it might be, whereas we do that with hurricanes and typhoons and all the rest of it," he said.

He added: "After 9/11, we put in place a mechanism to track every single phone call into the US, and the minute there's a rumour on the web or on these phone calls of an attack, the network is disrupted prior to the attack.

"That's the kind of change or shift in thinking we need for pandemics, I believe."

Dr Daszak said: "Let's look at where wildlife are interacting with livestock and people, and see what is out there and try and find out what threats could emerge in future."

## LET'S LEARN PERSIAN

(Part 145)

(Source: saadifoundation.ir)

● تمرین ۱. "من" یا "تو" بگذارید و غلط را تصحیح کنید:

۱. ( ) منو بیمار شده بود. در کلاس خوابید.
۲. ( ) بعد از ظهر توانست به بیمارستان میلاد برود.
۳. ( ) این بیمارستان در شمال بزرگراه همت قرار دارد.
۴. ( ) برج میلاد از همه ی برج ها بلندتر است.
۵. ( ) در اتاق منشی فقط منو و یک بیمار دیگر نشسته بودند.
۶. ( ) منو غذای گرم، استراحت و دارو لازم داشت.

● تمرین ۱. جواب سؤال های زیر را کامل بنویسید:

۱. بیمارستان میلاد در کجا واقع است؟
۲. محل پارک گفتگو کجاست؟
۳. چرا منو به بیمارستان رفت؟
۴. او کی به بیمارستان رفت؟
۵. قبل از دیدن دکتر کجا نشست؟
۶. دکتر به منو چه گفت؟

## Disposable plastic face masks pose huge environmental risks, with 3 million used a minute, researchers warn

The huge demand for face masks in the year since the coronavirus pandemic has swept the globe has resulted in enormous production of disposable masks, but it is now feared that disposal of properly, they pose a major threat to the natural world.

Recent studies estimate around the world humans are now using a mind-boggling 129 billion face masks every month. Taking 31 days in a month that is an average usage of 2.8 million masks a minute being used across the planet.

Researchers now warn the huge volume of mask, with their plastic composition, pose

a growing environmental threat and are urging action to prevent it from becoming the next plastic problem.

Environmental toxicologist Elvis Genbo Xu from the University of Southern Denmark and professor Zhiyong Jason Ren, an expert in civil and environmental engineering at Princeton University, said: "Disposable masks are plastic products, that cannot be readily biodegraded but may fragment into smaller plastic particles, namely micro- and nanoplastics that widespread in ecosystems.

"The enormous production of disposable masks is on a similar scale as plastic bottles,

which is estimated to be 43 billion per month."

But they said unlike plastic bottles, of which approximately 25 per cent are recycled, there is no official guidance on mask recycling, making them more likely to be disposed of in inappropriate ways, the researchers said.

If not disposed of for recycling, like other plastic waste, disposable masks can end up in the environment, freshwater systems, and oceans, where weathering can generate a large number of micro-sized particles (smaller than 5mm) in a matter of weeks and further fragment into nanoplastics

(smaller than 1 micrometer).

Last summer marine biologists warned that improper disposal of pandemic-related waste meant there could soon be "more masks than jellyfish" in the Mediterranean Sea.

French politician Eric Pauget, who represents the department of Alpes-Maritimes, said: "The friable polypropylene nanoparticles making up these masks which protect humans, risk lastingly affecting our ecosystems and their biodiversity."

The scientists now warn that the composition of the masks means they breakdown into dangerous micro-sized particles very quickly.

### ENGLISH IN USE

#### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ج

## 2 billion tons of soil erodes annually in Iran: expert

Iran loses 2 billion tons of soil per year as a result of land use changes, rainfed agriculture, and overgrazing, Hossein Akhiani, environmental and botanical expert has announced.

"Sometimes, to support agriculture, land use changes permits are issued, while being unaware of its dire consequences on the soil," he lamented, YJC reported on Saturday.

"Iran is responsible for the loss of 10 percent of the world's total soil erosion per year due to unsustainable agriculture, overgrazing, destruction of natural reservoirs (interconnected sources of water supply such as rivers crossing the mountains)," he said, regretting, humans with uncontrolled interference, such as damping numerous wells have led to the collapse of these connections and prevented water from reaching some regions of the country.

## فرسایش سالانه ۲ میلیارد تن خاک در ایران

کارشناس محیط زیست و گیاه شناس گفت: سالانه ۲ میلیارد تن خاک در ایران به دلیل تغییر کاربری زمین، کشت دیم و چرای بی رویه فرسایش می شود.

به گزارش خبرنگار حوزه محیط زیست گروه اجتماعی باشگاه خبرنگاران جوان، حسین آخانی اظهار کرد: «برخی زمان ها برای حمایت از کشاورزی اجازه تغییر کاربری به زمین داده می شود، اما غافل از این هستیم که به دلیل ناپایداری خاک ده ها برابر خسارت ناشی از آن را باید تحمل کنیم.

وی بیان کرد: ایران ده درصد کل فرسایش خاک جهان را دارد و این به دلیل کشاورزی ناپایدار، چرای بی ریه، از بین بردن شبکه هیدرولوژیک (منابع تامین کننده آب از طریق شبکه رودخانه و زیر زمینی که هردو با هم ارتباط هستند)، انسان با دخالت های بی رویه از جمله سد سازی و حفر چاه منجر به بر هم خوردن این ارتباط ها شده است و باعث نرسیدن آب به مناطق مختلف ایران شود.

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The best among you is the one who doesn't harm others with his tongue and hands.  
*Prophet Muhammad (S)*

Intl. Neyanban Festival wrap-up honors veteran performers

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — The International Neyanban Festival was brought to an end on Friday evening on Kish Island, honoring a number of Iranian veterans and masters of neyanban (bagpipe). The veterans included Tahmash Borji, Karim Edrispur, Bahram Mehrbakhsh, Sohrab Mashhadizadeh, Ali Ramashk, Ahmad-Ali Sharafi and Pulad Qahreman.



Musicians from Hungary perform at the International Neyanban Festival on the Kish Island on March 12, 2021. (Mehr/ Mahmud Khakbaz)

The honoring ceremony followed by solo performances by veterans and masters. In addition, bagpipe players Richard Patkos and Andor Vegh from Hungary, as well as Sylvain Barou and Yann Ewen L'Haridon from France were honored at the closing ceremony of the festival, which was held to promote the Persian instrument that is most common in southern Iran. Also among the Iranian honorees were Alireza Yunsezadeh, Omid Ali Nazarpur, Purya Mirzai Maqsd, Farzad Sharfai, Amir Tangsiri, Mohsen Asakereh, Danial Daneshvar, Farid Jazayeri, Hassan Ebrahimi, Saleh Ahmadpur, Arash Nadi, Heidar Salmani and Hossein Sangsar. Speaking at the ceremony, deputy director of the Kish Tourism Department Khosro Neshan expressed happiness over establishing an international festival, hoping that it would lead to holding a better and much more developed festival in the coming years. He added that the coronavirus restrictions were certainly a big obstacle for the festival, however, they are happy the festival could inject some happiness into the island.

Siobhan Dowd's "The London Eye Mystery" appears in Persian

**CULTURE** **TEHRAN** — A Persian translation of Siobhan Dowd's "The London Eye Mystery" has recently been published by Paydayesh Publications. The book has been translated into Persian by Arezoo Moqaddas. When Ted and Kat watched their cousin Salim get on board the London Eye, he turned and waved before getting on. After half an hour it landed and everyone trooped off, but not Salim. Where could he have gone? How on earth could he have disappeared into thin air? Since the police are having no luck finding him, Ted and Kat become sleuthing partners. Despite their prickly relationship, they overcome their differences to follow a trail of clues across London in a desperate bid to find their cousin. And ultimately it falls upon Ted, whose brain works in its own very unique way, to find the key to the mystery. Siobhan lived in Oxford with her husband, Geoff, before tragically dying from cancer in August 2007, aged 47. She was both an extraordinary writer and an extraordinary person. Her first novel, "A Swift Pure Cry", won the Branford Boase Award, the Eilis Dillon Award, was shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal and the Booktrust Teenage Prize. Her second novel, "The London Eye Mystery", won the 2007 NASEN & TES Special Educational Needs Children's Book Award. In March 2008, the book was shortlisted for the prestigious Children's Books Ireland Bisto Awards. Siobhan's third novel, "Bog Child", was the first book to be posthumously awarded the Carnegie Medal in 2008. The award-winning novel "A Monster Calls" by Patrick Ness was based on an idea of Siobhan's. Her novella, "The Ransom of Dond", was published in 2013, illustrated throughout by Pam Smy.



Front cover of the Persian translation of "The London Eye Mystery" by Siobhan Dowd.

Gen. Soleimani mourners, former traceur: World Press Photo Awards nominee pics

➔ Saeid couldn't afford extended hospital treatment, but with the help of his family, he improvised rehabilitation equipment in his yard, and despite the doctors' predictions, was able to regain the mobility of his hands. Saeid regained more of his abilities, and is now able to manage a wheelchair. He still likes to do things other people are afraid of. Eslahi is a graduate of the University of Tehran with a master's degree in theater art, and has been working as a photojournalist with Iranian news agencies since 2014. Newsha Tavakolian's single photo shows women mourning during a commemoration service for Lieutenant-General Qassem Soleimani in Tehran on 4 January, 2020 just one day after his assassination.



This photo by Newsha Tavakolian has been nominated at the 2021 World Press Photo Awards in the General News category.

Tavakolian is a self-taught photojournalist and documentary photographer, working with Magnum Photos. Her photo has been nominated in the General News category. General Soleimani was assassinated along with a number of his comrades at Baghdad airport in a U.S. airstrike. Millions of Iranians attended his funeral ceremonies. The Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei called him a living martyr of the revolution before his assassination. The winners of the World Press Photo of the Year and the World Press Photo Story of the Year awards receive prizes of €5,000 each. The winners of the 2021 Photo Contest and the 2021 Digital Storytelling Contest will be announced on April 15 during an online awards ceremony.

"The Sand Wolf" hunts Iran's Flying Turtle

9th edition of the Flying Turtle Awards. The Book City Institute and the Children's Literature Studies Periodical are the organizers of the Flying Turtle Awards, which are presented annually to top children's books in Iran. Winners were honored virtually on the Book City Institute's Instagram on Friday. "The Sand Wolf" contains a number of warm-hearted, poetic stories about a friendship between a boy and a sand wolf. Published by Parian, the collection has been translated into Persian by Namdar Nasser-Qasri. Lind attended an exhibition named "Traces of the North, Nordic Days in Tehran" at the Iranian Artists Forum in June 2019, reading an excerpt from the book series. The jury of the Flying Turtle Awards also honored four other books with silver prizes. One of the books was "Panorama: A Foldout Book" co-written by Fani Marceau and Joëlle Jolivet. The book has been rendered into Persian by Mohammad-Nasser Modudi.



This combination photo shows the front covers of the Persian translation of Asa Lind's book series "The Sand Wolf".

**CULTURE** **TEHRAN** — The Persian translation of Swedish children's book writer Asa Lind's book series "The Sand Wolf" has won the gold prize of the

Iranian movies line up for Hong Kong festival

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — The 45th edition of the Hong Kong International Film Festival has selected a lineup of Iranian movies to go on screen in its World Cinema section. The lineup includes "180° Rule" by Farnush Samadi, "Careless Crime" by Shahram Mokri, "No Choice" by Reza Dormishian, "Son-Mother" by Mahnaz Mohammadi and "The Wasteland" by Ahmad Bahrami. In addition, "District Terminal", a co-production between Iran and Germany by directors Bardia Yadegari and Ehsan Mirhosseini and "Radiography of a Family", a co-production of Norway, Iran and Switzerland by Firuzeh Khosrovani, will also be screened at the event, which will go online from April 1 to 12. "180° Rule" tells the story of Sara, a school teacher whom her students love and who is married to Hamed. As her family gets ready to attend a wedding in northern Iran, an unforeseen obligation falls on Hamed and derails their plans. When Sara's husband



A scene from Shahram Mokri's drama "Careless Crime".

suddenly forbids her to attend the event without him, she makes a decision that sets her on the painful path of atonement. "Careless Crime" goes back forty years to 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, 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. Co-written by Nasim Ahmadpur and Mokri, the film also won the award for best screenplay at the 19th Dhaka International Film Festival in Bangladesh. "District Terminal" is about a junkie poet named Peyman who attempts to finish a poem, where his city of Tehran falls prey to pollution and a lethal virus. "No Choice" centers on a 16-year-old homeless girl who repeatedly works as a surrogate mother for money. A human rights attorney tries to rescue her, but inevitably

faces difficulties. "Radiography of a Family", is literally an X-ray of a family. The film received the IDFA Award for Best Feature-Length Documentary. "Son-Mother" tells the story of Leila, a single mother who lives in the poverty of today's Iran. The factory where she works is facing a crisis and jobs are in danger. Kazem, the factory bus driver, proposes to Leila, but only under certain conditions. When Leila loses her job, she must face a difficult decision — whether to accept Kazem's proposal, which would save her from poverty, but would also force her to abandon her son. In the end, it will be him who will have to decide. "The Wasteland" is about an old brick manufacturing factory that is going to be shut down, and all that matters to the factory supervisor is to keep his lover unharmed. The film won the Orizzonti award for best film at the 77th Venice Film Festival in September, while it also received the Fai Persona Lavoro Ambiente Foundation Award of the festival.

Director says Dutch theatergoers not offended by "Zero"

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Arvand Dashtaray, whose latest production "Zero" was live streamed for Dutch theatergoers last week, said that they have not deemed the play on migration issues offensive to their culture. The play written by Shahab Mehraban was staged at the Koninklijke Schouwburg, a theater in the city center of The Hague, on March 5. Speaking to the Persian service of ISNA on Saturday, Dashtaray said that the play is a monologue trilogy that criticizes the double standard of the world, and Europe in particular, toward emigrants. "In the first episode, the play revolves around a Turkish actor who lives in the Netherlands, the second episode is about a Dutch actor in Iran, and the third part centers on a Dutchman who has chosen to live in Iran," he stated. He noted that the trilogy also embodies a thin layer of Sophocles' features, Oedipus and Antigone, and Euripides' Medea.



Iranian directed Arvand Dashtaray in an undated photo.

"This play is a protest against the double standard toward emigrants, and I thought that it might be deemed offensive by Dutch theatergoers, but this was not the case, and the play was really helpful," Dashtaray said. The play is a co-production between the Virgule Film & Performing Arts Company in Tehran and STET, the English Theatre in The Hague. Robin Steegman is the actor of the monologue, which is about how human identity has been reduced to numbers, the companies have written in a statement for the play. "We are valued by the number of followers or the number of re-tweets we get. What happens if these numbers no longer count? What if we find ourselves without a number?" The performance aims to highlight how boxed in we have all become by numbers, rules and regulations we have created ourselves. Who dares to question the validity of these? Who dares to defy their inner police voice and self-censorship? Who dares to find their inner Antigone and dives in to rewrite the game?"

Brazil's "10 Seconds to Win" named best at Tehran Intl. FICTS Festival

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — "10 Seconds to Win" ("10 Segundos para Vencer"), a feature film directed by Jose Alvarenga from Brazil was named the best feature in the international category of the 12th Tehran International FICTS Festival, the organizers announced on Thursday. "10 Seconds to Win" centers on the famous and poor Brazilian boxer world champion Eder Jofre, who tries to deal with his personal life and the obligations of a world class athlete with the mentoring of his trainer and father Kid Jofre. Winners of the 12th edition of the festival were honored at the closing ceremony that took place at the Enqelab Sports Complex. "The Bull of Pallonetto", a documentary by Luigi Barletta from Italy, received the best documentary award, and "Ronaldo"

by Recep Bozgoz from Turkey was named the best short film. Winners of the national section were next honored. "Tsunami" by producer Ali Sartippi received the award for best feature, while director Milad Sadr-Ameli received the best director award, and actor Bahram Radan was named the best actor. "Tsunami" is about Iranian taekwondo competitor Morteza Nejadi who agrees to be defeated in the 2002 Olympics for political reasons, and then loses everything in his personal and professional life. After eight years, he is called back for another attempt on the national team, but he must face a stubborn, young world champion named Behdad Moqimi who is also known as Tsunami. But there is turmoil in his personal life, too.



"10 Seconds to Win" by Jose Alvarenga.

Sorayya Qasemi also received the award for best actress for her role in the film "Douch" by director Amir Mashahdi Abbas. The award for best documentary was given to "On Foot in Time" by Azam Najafian and Ali Mohammad Qasemi. The TV program "120" by producer Adel Ferdowsipur received the best people's

choice award. The organizers also honored former head coach of Iran's national football team Heshmat Mohajerani, radio anchor Masud Oskui and actor Jamshid Hashempur with lifetime achievement awards at the closing ceremony. They also paid tribute to actor and former footballer Ali Ansarian who died of COVID-19 last month. The Federation Internationale Cinema Television Sportifs (FICTS) is the organizer of the sports film festival, which is a part of the World FICTS Challenge that runs in 16 countries around the world. The Iranian edition of the festival is held in collaboration with Iran's National Olympic and Paralympic Committee, Iran's Ministry of Sports and Youth, IRIB, Cinema Organization of Iran and Qeshm Free Zone Organization.