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Rouhani inaugurates 2nd, 3rd phases of Persian Gulf water transfer project

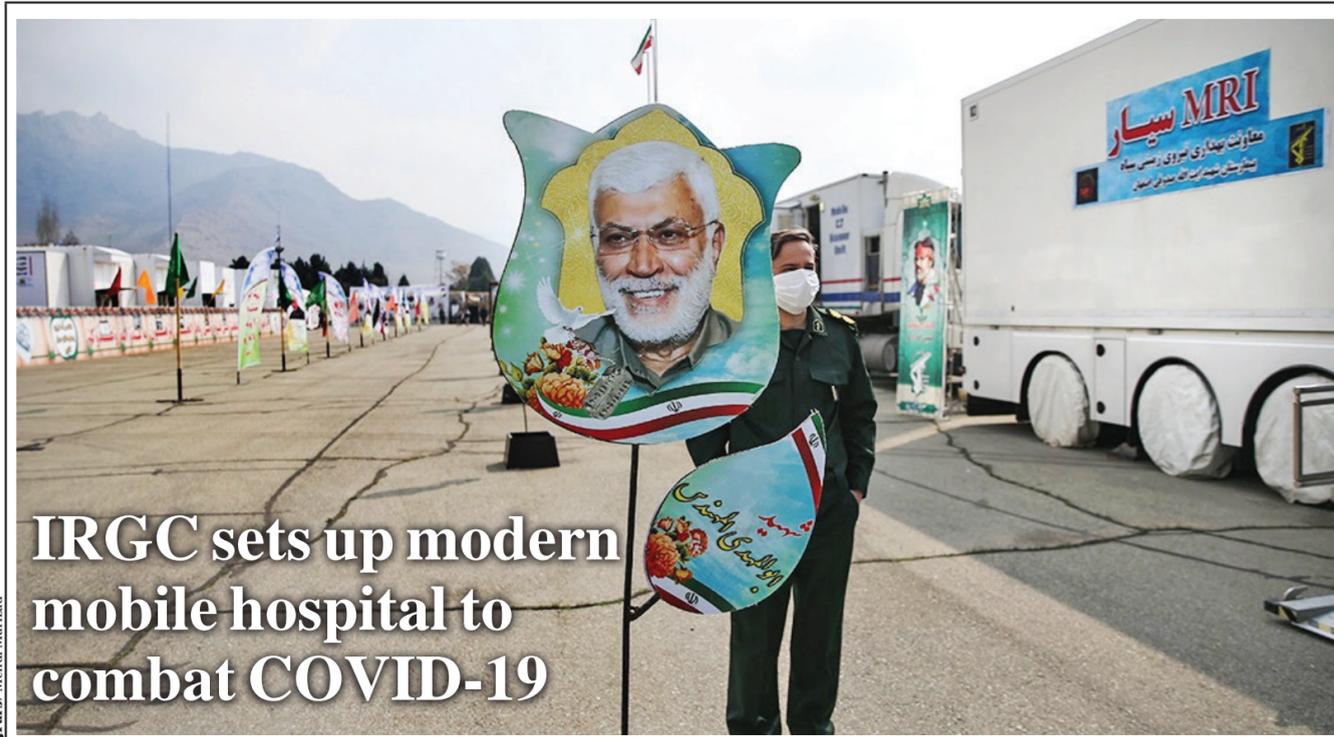
TEHRAN – Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on Sunday ordered the beginning of the second and third phases of Iran's major water desalination and transfer project which is aimed at supplying Persian Gulf water to central and eastern Iran through pipelines.

This project, which is aimed at eliminating poverty and balanced development of the country's central regions, is going to be implemented with a total investment of 1.28 quadrillion rials (about \$30.47 billion). It is going to be fully executed by local

experts and engineers from the private sector and will transform the central and eastern plateaus of the country.

The project aims to promote production, industry, and agriculture, as well as provide drinkable water to residents in arid areas. Maintaining the country's food security and creating new job opportunities and also maintaining the already existing jobs in industrial and production units are also other merits of the mentioned project.

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IRGC sets up modern mobile hospital to combat COVID-19

Now we set conditions for foes: IRGC chief

TEHRAN – The commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps said on Sunday that the Islamic Republic has reached a degree of power that today it "sets conditions for enemies."

However, General Salami reminded that whenever Iran gave in to conditions set by the hostile countries it "lost".

"But when we set conditions for the adversary we won," the senior commander remarked.

Salami added only "faithful persons"

can resist against an enemy that possesses highly sophisticated weapons.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the IRGC commander said Iran has "abundant and modern" weapons and this means that "we don't sermon empty-handed."

Iran also has the modern weapons that the enemies have "but without faithful persons these weapons are not effective," the top general pointed out.

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TEHRAN - On Sunday, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) launched a modern mobile hospital in a bid to help the health sector in the fight against coronavirus.

With a capacity of 128 beds, the hospital is equipped with different wards, including MRI, CT Scan, ventilations, and telecommunication systems.

The hospital is said to be the first of its kind in West Asia.

The Iranian Red Crescent Society

(IRCS) started on Saturday a program aiming to take strict measures for curbing coronavirus across border areas of the country.

With the cooperation of ministries of health and transport, this plan will be implemented with the goal of rapidly identifying and testing incoming passengers and keeping them in quarantine facilities, if necessary, IRIB quoted IRCS head Karim Hemmati as saying.

Giving new life to central Iranian plateau

BY MEHDI GARSHASBI

The national plan for transferring water from the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman to seven provinces situated in the semi-arid central plateau will be completed by 2025, aiming to save underground water resources while flourishing industries and agriculture in the region.

Some 1,200,000 billion rials (about \$285 billion at the official exchange rate of 42,000 rials) will be invested in the plan, creating jobs for around 70,000 people.

Many water-intensive industries, including steel, mining, and petrochemicals have been established in central and eastern provinces which are struggling with water shortage.

This issue has been also one of the main reasons for people to leave villages for cities. So, such projects can help sustain industries and agriculture and reverse the trend of migration.

Four routes

It is projected to supply water through four lines. The first line, extending 820 kilometers will transfer water from the Persian Gulf to the provinces of Hormozgan, Kerman, and Yazd. Some 16,000 persons will be employed to implement the project.

The second line, extending 1,550 kilometers, will supply water from the Persian Gulf to the provinces of Kerman, South Khorasan, and Khorasan Razavi. Some 30,000 persons will be employed to implement the project.

The third line, extending 910 kilometers, will supply water to the provinces of Yazd and Isfahan. Some 14,000 persons will be employed to implement the project.

And the fourth line, extending 820 kilometers, will transfer water from the Sea of Oman to the province of Sistan-Baluchestan. Some 10,000 persons will be employed to implement the project.

Benefits and harms

A number of countries have made attempts to transfer water and have achieved benefits. However, redistribution of water resources is inevitably involved in changes in the ecological environment and endangering nature.

Changes are divided into two negative and positive impacts, including water supply in water-deficient areas, facilitating the water cycle, improving meteorological conditions in the recipient basins, mitigating ecological water shortage, repairing the damaged ecological system, and preserving the endangered wild fauna and flora.

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Top Islamic Revolution history books honored

TEHRAN – Winners of the first edition of the Islamic Revolution History Book Awards were announced on Sunday.

The award has been established by the Institute for Contemporary History and the Iran Book and Literature House to honor publications on the theme of the history of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The awards were presented in the two categories of competitive and non-competitive.

"Rain of Raspberries" by Mostafa Falegari won the award for best novel in the competitive section.

With a critical view, the book revolves around the armed struggles of the Organization of Iranian People's Fadaian before the Islamic Revolution.

The award for best documentary research went to "Islamic Revolution in Savak Documents" authored by Mohammad-Baqer Nozari and his colleagues at the Study Center for the Historical

Documents of the Ministry of Intelligence. SAVAK was the Shah's intelligence service.

"The End of Sculpture: Kashan People's Culture in the Islamic Revolution" by Musa Keikha and Hadi Lotfi won the award in the documentation section.

The award for best memoirs was given to "The Pains that Changed into Gains", which carries Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei's memories of imprisonment and exile during the Pahlavi period and his struggles against the regime.

Published by the Islamic Revolution Publications, the book has been compiled by Mohammad-Ali Azarshab and Mohammad-Hossein Batmanghelij.

Writer Zahra Heidari's "Autumn Has a Taste of Persimmon" received the award for best children's book.

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PA President Abbas appreciates Ayat. Sistani's support for Palestine during Pope visit

The Palestinian Authority's President Mahmoud Abbas has expressed his gratitude towards Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani over the senior Iraqi Shia cleric's expression of support for Palestinians during a recent historic meeting with Pope Francis.

The Palestinian official made the remarks in a letter to Ayatollah Sistani, thanking the religious authority for lending support during the meeting to the Palestinian cause of liberation from Israeli occupation and aggression, Lebanon's al-Manar television network reported on Saturday.

Abbas noted how Ayatollah Sistani had backed "the Palestinians in their fight to restore [their] national rights" in his remarks to the head of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Palestinian president also "expressed his hope that the Iraqi and the rest of the

Arab peoples enjoy prosperity and restore sanctities on top of which is al-Quds."

He was referring to the holy occupied city of Jerusalem al-Quds in the Palestinian territory of the West Bank that has been under Israeli occupation since 1967. Al-Quds hosts the al-Aqsa Mosque compound that is considered as one of Islam's holiest sites.

The pontiff traveled to Iraq on an unprecedented four-day visit from March 5 to 8. The landmark interfaith meeting took place in the holy city of Najaf.

A statement that was released by the cleric's office afterwards offered some details of the meeting. It said Ayatollah Sistani had discussed the adversities that faced the people of the world, "especially the Palestinian people in the occupied territories" with Pope Francis.

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Power is notoriously distributed unevenly: Japanese scholar

BY MOHAMMAD MAZHARI

TEHRAN – Pointing to the violence as one of the means that humans are utilizing to achieve their goals, a Japanese scholar says "in the international arena, power is notoriously unevenly distributed."

"Contemporary states that may be internally characterized by their 'democratic' regimes do resort to wars and other forms of large-scale violence beyond their borders," Yasuyuki Matsunaga tells the Tehran Times.

Although some countries claim that they hold democracy as their ruling regime, many pundits believe that the word is not managed

by democratic order.

The Japanese scholar also says democracies do not necessarily tend to bring about "public goods beyond their jurisdictions".

"Much like liberal institutions, democracy may, at best, be good for those who can benefit from it. A certain group of democracies may benefit from their mutual relations and interdependencies," the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies professor notes.

Following is the text of the interview:

What are the big centers of conflict and confrontation in Asia? Also, why does West

Asia is witnessing hot developments while East Asia is calm?

Conflicts manifest themselves in many different ways, at many different levels, and among many different groups and individuals. Conflicts also take many different forms. It is not the case that violent conflicts are the only ones that merit our attention. Wherever different individuals live side by side, and more importantly, wherever there are powerful people, there will inevitably be many conflicts. Fundamentally, conflicts are functions of power.

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No one allowed to violate law, top judge says

TEHRAN – Ayatollah Ebrahim Raisi, who visited the northern province of Mazandaran on Sunday, said no organization or person is allowed to violate law, warning that if an official breaches law he will face harsher penalty.

"Nobody in our country is allowed to violate law and in case an official tramples law he will face double punishment," the Judiciary

chief remarked.

Prior to remarks by the Judiciary chief, Ayatollah Mohammadi Laeni, the representative of the Leader in Mazandaran province, praised reforms in Judiciary since Raisi took over as the top judge, saying, "Campaign against corruption in the Judiciary during the leadership of Ayatollah Ebrahim Raisi has reached its peak and people are now

more hopeful."

Elsewhere in his remarks the Judiciary chief said the key to the resolution of problems "is not in the hands of foreigners" and "we believe that the way out of (problems) lie in the hands of the youth, people and officials."

He suggested progress in all fields, including military, science, and economy, is the only way to "disappoint" Iran's ill-wishers.

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Biden should return to JCPOA like Paris accord without delay: professor

BY MOHAMMAD ALI SAKI

TEHRAN - An Indian professor calls for an immediate U.S. return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) as it did in regard to the Paris climate agreement.

"As he went back to the Paris agreement without any delay, he should do that with the Iranian nuclear deal," Ashok Swain tells the Tehran Times.

Swain, a professor of peace and conflict research at the Department of Peace and Conflict Research from Uppsala University, believes that the hesitant steps by Biden can be explained that there are powerful political groups in the U.S. who have an anti-Iran agenda.

Some American politicians have urged Biden not to rush to restore the Iran nuclear deal – JCPOA – to avoid division.

However, Swain notes that "Biden probably wants to continue Trump policy for some time in the hope of getting more concession from Iran. But I hope President Biden will do what he had promised to do as Candidate Biden."

Following is the text of the Interview:

How do you see President Joe Biden's policies after approximately 50 days in office?

Biden's foreign policy in his first days of the presidency has been a mixed bag. He has done well to get the U.S. back to supporting multilateralism. He has brought the U.S. back to the Paris Climate Agreement.

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What made diplomacy vulnerable in Iran: An inside-out perspective

By Mehrdad Pahlavani

Diplomacy, as an efficient art or an efficacious tool to resolve problems, has been undermined in the recent history of Iran's foreign relations. It has been done through creating many impediments and blockages for Iran in areas of diplomacy. This phenomenon to resort to hard politics is familiar to Iranians and its rivals. Confining, or even strangling, dialogue and diplomacy through expanding a wide spectrum of sanctions on Iran and cherishing military expenditure in West Asia is a well-known procedure. This abject slip is still underway.

There is no doubt that Iran is the most sanctioned country in the world as just during Trump's incumbency in the White House, 3,800 sanctions were imposed on the country. Trump's crazy way of signing these sanctions was a designed to turn such an act into a spectacle. However, lifting sanctions is a tough and long way that almost no one is ready to undertake. Accumulated hard experiences affect foreign relations, and it is necessary to deliberate on Iranian people and diplomats' experience, mindset, and backgrounds to scrutinize the real genealogy of their concept on diplomatic flow.

As a result of the 1979 Islamic revolution, Iran's administrative section was reshuffled, and top diplomats of the Shah era were not an exception. New technocrats began their careers to work out national problems with a different approach. But several plots and labels from "Iran phobia" to "Islam phobia," from "crippling sanctions" to "maximum pressure" and "regime change," blocked all efforts.

After a short term of a rosy picture of the JCPOA or the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, again sanctions and anti-Iran measures were renewed, and diplomacy was derailed. In this vein, the possibility of a plagued pessimistic approach against diplomacy is a strong spreading factor as far as diplomacy was paralyzed by Western countries' excessive demands, such as zero nuclear enrichment scenarios or 12 preconditions propounded by Secretary Pompeo. A comprehensive need for diplomacy has been repeatedly felt in Iran as a ray of hope, but it is suppressed due to following reasons:

- Track record in Iran shows that it does lack a rich background of diplomatic efforts offered by the West after 1979. Rumors always portrayed that, behind the scene, some diplomatic channels were activated, but results were not tangible.

- During the last four decades, the U.S. sanctions, pressure, and isolation weighed more than diplomatic efforts. As the sanction graph has always been soaring since the Islamic revolution, which means that if a single administration in the U.S. tested the chance of diplomacy, simultaneously it imposed more sanctions and pressure. Maryland opinion surveys in Iran published in February 2021 show the depth of distrust; a majority of respondents would only agree to new negotiations after a few years of U.S. compliance with the JCPOA.

- Annoying memories of hidden or evident diplomacy have existed in the mind of the Iranian public. During the George W. Bush administration, cooperation on Afghanistan with Iran resulted in distrust as Iran was designated part of the so-called "axis of evil," and even after the 2015 nuclear deal hailed as a long-term diplomatic engagement, 3,800 kinds of sanctions were imposed. In this vein, some argue that the nuclear agreement is a trap for the country. The arguments are increasingly prominent in the Iranian media, think tanks and universities. The critics argue: "The deal will take more than it gives Iran. It will only restrict the nuclear and military capabilities without gaining any concrete economic benefits. The result will be a weakened Iran to the United States' true intentions, so as to bring down its political system."

- The most tangible results of diplomatic endeavor for ordinary people will be to lift sanctions in order to create a situation to improve welfare and economic prosperity of the common man which, unfortunately, has never been materialized. Maryland opinion poll in Iran is a testimony to the fact; nearly half of the respondents say the U.S. sanctions have had a "great negative impact," and over four in five say the sanctions have had a negative impact "on the lives of ordinary people." The history of foreign intervention in Iran has also intensified the negative feeling toward diplomacy.

- During recent decades, the importance of diplomacy and interconnection between diplomacy and foreign trade has increased and subsequently led to some sort of economic inter-dependency all across the world. It means countries like Iran grappled in a circle of pressure, sanctions and isolation. Foreign trade paths can only be opened through diplomatic channels. Iran's huge economic capabilities and resources are not a secret, but diplomats will have to shoulder the burden for paving the way. As diplomatic channels didn't lead to easing of sanctions or opening foreign trade routes, nowadays, the diplomatic community in Iran is under pressure due to others' mistrust sitting at the other side of negotiation table. Despite limited economic opening during Obama's era, the tide changed, and Iranian diplomats were accused of defects and shortcomings: lack of financial transaction, hardships to import basic goods, and disability in selling oil were the sensible and outstanding examples of the defect.

A recent and new wave of media "Mea culpas" from those who formerly supported the nuclear deal well explains Iran's current mood, as is the ascendancy of those who framed the United States as an existential threat bent on Iran's destruction.

All the factors mentioned above indicate that Iranians are pushed to choose the path of resistance economy. The approach insists on internal capabilities that it doesn't fully block diplomacy but simultaneously doesn't only rely on diplomatic initiatives.

Economic resilience is somehow a self-reliance approach that is mostly concentrated on economy. It is hard to spill over this approach to political affairs, but if all-out blockages, as was experienced four decades ago, continue, Iran has to arrange to decrease tools of diplomatic pressure. Pressure for diplomatic success would be the worst option for the West, and it will impose more prestige cost on them, an evident matter which the West is oblivious.

Thus far, Biden's "hidden pressure" is in line with maximum pressure or crippling sanctions; even the administration's official position is aligned with his predecessors.

Several choices are on the table before President Biden. But whether the choices would cement Iranians' negative view toward diplomacy, which is a revolting feel relied on recent history, or change the tide to fortify an affirmative approach, remains to be seen. Going forward with the current pace, the latter choice at best amounts to a loss of precious time and, at the worst, amounts to squandering the precious opportunity.

As the tide of American administration has changed from Trump's brinkmanship to a new course known somehow as statesmanship, it is expected to see more logical, doable, and practical policy on the 2015 nuclear deal as a basal measure to overcome tough ideas on diplomacy. The flip side is Iranian people and authorities, who face the current economic situation. They need diplomacy based on an equal and logical terms, not giving the upper hand to incumbents on the other side of the table.

Analyst says the U.S. owes Iran much

"It is absolutely inarguable that the U.S. has been badly in the wrong"

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — A journalist and analyst who writes in Washington Monthly, The New Republic, and the Washington Post, enumerates a number of injustices that the United States has done against Iran.

Ryan Cooper cites the illegal cruel economic sanctions amid the coronavirus, the CIA coup against the democratically elected government of Mohammad Mosaddegh in 1953, support for Saddam Hussein in his war against Iran in the 1980s, the assassination of General Qassem Soleimani, Biden's hesitance to lift sanctions, etc., as instances.

Following is an excerpt of Cooper's article titled "What the U.S. owes Iran" posted on TheWeek.com:

When campaigning in 2020, Joe Biden promised that he would make every effort to re-join the Iran nuclear deal. But some 50 days into his presidency, progress is stalled, and the deal is reportedly on the verge of collapse.

Now that he is president, Biden should grant Iran broad sanctions relief immediately, both as a show of good faith and for the sake of humanitarian relief, as part of negotiations to rejoin the deal. The U.S. has inflicted terrific damage on the Iranian government and the Iranian people, which badly exacerbated the carnage of the coronavirus pandemic there. America owes it to them.

The diplomatic sticking point here is that Biden is insisting on Iran fully recommitting to the deal before any sanctions are lifted, while Iran is asking for the opposite. As Biden wrote in a CNN op-ed in September last year, "If Iran returns to strict compliance with the nuclear deal, the United States would rejoin the agreement as a starting point for follow-on negotiations." By contrast, Iranian President Rouhani said Wednesday: "America was first in breaking with the agreement and it should be the first to return to it."

Any case for which of these two positions is correct must depend on one's view of



diplomatic history and the broader strategic context. On the first point, it is absolutely inarguable that the United States has been badly in the wrong. Iran joined the nuclear deal in good faith, and was living up to its end of the bargain when President Trump abruptly betrayed that trust in 2018 (apparently because of a vindictive hatred of everything President Obama did and the encouragement of various deranged warmongers). Trump proceeded to assassinate Iranian general Qassem Soleimani — who was roughly akin to being both secretary of state and chairman of the joint chiefs — on Iraqi soil, no less. That infuriated both Iranian and Iraqi leaders and sparked a cycle of tit-for-tat violence that continues to this day.

When Trump reimposed sanctions on Iran, that basically wrecked its economy. Inflation spiked, and severe shortages of numerous goods quickly developed — especially medical supplies. This terribly worsened the coronavirus pandemic there, as hospitals struggled to treat COVID-19 patients without proper protective gear or vital equipment. Certainly thousands have died as direct result of American acts.

Moreover, Iran has a lot of historical reasons to distrust America. In 1988 U.S. forces shot down an Iranian airliner and killed 290 people. The U.S. supported Iraq with money, training, and diplomatic cover when it invaded Iran in 1980, leading to eight years of gruesome trench warfare. And, of course, the CIA backed a coup in 1953 against the democratic government of Iran, after which its people endured 20 years of brutal dictatorship.

Finally, on the question of the strategic context, the plain fact is that Iran barely matters to serious U.S. interests, no matter how you define them. It's a medium-sized, medium-income country halfway around the planet. It produces roughly a quarter as much oil as America itself.

Imagine how Americans might feel if Iran had massive military outposts in Canada and Mexico all across the length of those two borders, was strangling our economy with sanctions.

In short, there is every reason on Earth to cut Iran some slack. America broke its promise — as Biden himself wrote, Trump "recklessly tossed away a policy that was working to keep America safe," — and so

America should demonstrate some good faith. It's literally the least we could do. And contrary to arguments from bloodthirsty imperialist warmongers, doing so would actually help the U.S. by reducing the likelihood of getting bogged down in another unwinnable war 7,000 miles away.

It's not hard to see why the Biden administration is hesitating here. The reason is the imperialist D.C. Blob that has been hell-bent on war with Iran for years, and the lobbying efforts of Israel and Saudi Arabia. Those forces are very influential in Congress, which is why senators grilled Wendy Sherman, Biden's nominee for deputy secretary for state, about her role as chief negotiator for the nuclear deal during her recent confirmation hearing. Biden himself has long been implicated in this dynamic.

Biden's recent decision to let Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman skate on assassinating Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi illustrates this perfectly. His op-ed on Iran is full of stern language about the "challenges the regime in Iran poses to America's security interests[.]" But with Saudi Arabia we have an "ally" that is objectively harmful to U.S. interests (even their oil is a massive net negative because of climate change), up to and including ordering the brutal murder of a prominent legal U.S. resident for criticizing bin Salman's repressive dictatorship. Yet because bin Salman has spread hundreds of millions of dollars in legal bribes around D.C., and because a great many American elites are preposterously credulous and/or corrupt, he gets away with it.

All this is a test case for Biden's declared intention to chart a new course in foreign policy. For that to happen he will sooner or later have to stand up to the imperial war machine, and the corrupt hired guns of foreign countries that want to treat the U.S. military as their own personal plaything. If he won't do that, his record on foreign policy will look basically similar to Donald Trump's.

Pompeo admits Trump admin failed to bring Iran to negotiating table

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Former U.S. secretary of state Mike Pompeo acknowledged on Sunday that the Trump administration failed to bring Tehran to the negotiating table for a new nuclear deal.

During an interview with John Catsimatidis on his radio show on WABC 770 AM, Pompeo said, "We didn't get all the way to where we would've hoped we could get in respect to getting Iran to stand down and enter an agreement."

The former hawkish secretary of state again defended Trump's illegal moves against Iran, claiming reentering

the Iran nuclear deal would make West Asia "less secure."

Trump withdrew from the Obama-era Iran nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), in May 2018 and imposed harsh sanctions on the country within his "maximum pressure" campaign.

President Biden has said he would rejoin the deal if Iran came back into compliance regarding limits on its nuclear program. However, Iran has said it was the U.S. that quit the nuclear deal and naturally it should be the first party to rejoin the agreement.

Iran remained fully loyal to the JCPOA one year after Trump pulled the U.S. out of the deal. However, in May 2019 the Supreme National Security Council announced that Iran's "strategic patience" is over started to gradually reduce its commitments to the deal in accordance to paragraph 36 of the JCPOA. At the time Iran said if the European parties to the deal protect Iran from U.S. sanctions it will reverse its decisions. However, the Europeans did nothing in practice and just expressed verbal support for the JCPOA.

Now we set conditions for foes: IRGC chief

Salami also said praised the competence of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, saying, "We have a leader who is far-sighted, who completely knows the enemy and believes

in a monotheistic worldview on the subject of power."

The general also said the "wailing of the enemy is being heard from far distances and it is also seen that the arrogant system is ill."

Salami went on to say that whenever the Leader of the Islamic Revolution as a senior scholar speaks and "affects our hearts, individuals like Qassem Soleimani are trained that the enemy also talks about" his competence.

Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, who was assassinated by the U.S. in a cowardly act near Baghdad's international airport in January 2020, was considered a legendary commander in the fight against terrorism.

"Maximum pressure" stigmatized the idea of engagement with the West: Foreign Affairs

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — In early February, Iran promised that once the United States completely lifted economic sanctions, Iran would return to full compliance with the 2015 nuclear deal, but just two weeks later, Iran declared that Iran might enrich uranium up to 60 percent purity if the country needed it, according to Foreign Affairs magazine.

The American magazine argued Iran isn't just playing hardball and its toughened stance genuinely reflects the mood of a country that no longer sees the West as a likely economic partner, saying, "The reimposition of U.S. sanctions under President Donald Trump discredited for many ordinary Iranians the usefulness of diplomacy, even as it hardened a distribution of wealth. Washington may have turned the screws on Iran's economy in the hope of weakening the hand of its political elite—but instead, Trump's 'maximum pressure' campaign led to a consolidation of economic and political power in Iran that militates against compromise."

The magazine acknowledged that during the first two years of maximum pressure, and even before the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, U.S. sanctions led to the contraction of Iran's economy by almost 12 percent, its per capita real income by 14 percent, and the country's oil exports by 80 percent and said, "The national currency lost almost one-fourth of its value, leading the minimum wage value to drop from \$260 to almost \$70 per month."

It explained Trump's maximum pressure campaign altered the social class structure of the country by moving a significant portion of the middle class to the poverty level and wrote, "The result has been to stigmatize the idea of engagement with the West as a solution to Iran's economic woes."

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Did you know that, since the beginning of the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the support for Sunni religious schools and scholars was provided by establishing large Islamic centers in the west of the country and then through initiating the planning council of Sunni religious schools, with the approval of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution in 2007?

This indicates Iran's recognition of religious rights of Sunni Muslims.



SYMPTOMS

Russia can play constructive role in bringing JCPOA back to life

Russia can play useful role to bring JCPOA back to life

POLITICAL TEHRAN – The failure of a European-led process to salvage the 2015 Iran nuclear deal could create ripe conditions for Russia to take charge of the process and play a greater role as a party that enjoys good relations with both sides of the dispute.

Private talks between Iran and the West hit a dead end after the European-brokered mediation process failed to break the ice. The Europeans, who acted as a go-between, further disappointed Iran and exacerbated its suspicions about the sincerity of their diplomatic efforts.

Over the past days and weeks, several capitals around the world have been engaged in a flurry of diplomatic efforts to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Vienna, Geneva, Brussels, Paris, Berlin, Washington, New York, and Tehran have been playing host to these efforts, according to Press TV.

These efforts came on the heels of a last-minute deal between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency which ensured cooperation between Tehran and the UN nuclear watchdog in light of the implementation of a nuclear law passed by the Iranian Parliament that obligated the Iranian government to halt the implementation of the Additional Protocol to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) after the Europeans failed to get the U.S. to lift sanctions by February 23.

With the deal, a potential showdown between Iran and the West was postponed for a period of three months. But the deal also marked the beginning of a race against time to save the deal. To this end, Iran and Europe started to discuss a gradual process to revive the JCPOA.

According to Press TV, the Europeans received messages from Iran outlining "a-step-for-a-step" proposal for Tehran and Washington to revive the JCPOA.

"Based on the proposal, some steps on the part of the U.S. could be followed by some steps on the part of Iran, the American steps featuring unfreezing of part of Iran's overseas assets," Press TV reported.

The U.S. principally didn't object to the proposal but at the same time, it did not want to release Iranian frozen assets before any in-



formal meeting -even a closed-door one- can take place. Iran and the U.S. also had different views about the volume of money that must have been released. Press TV said the volume oscillated between \$1 and \$15 billion.

The proposal went nowhere. And it's unclear yet if discussions about this proposal or a similar one would be resumed at a later stage. But the whole melodrama showed how Iran-Europe relations have been damaged over the past few years. And that begs the question: who will mediate between Iran and the U.S. at a time when Europe is no longer seen as a fair mediator?

Whether Iran will again entrust Europe to once again play the role of mediator remains an open question. But Russia, as a member of the JCPOA, seems to be ready to fill the vacuum. Russia has been a staunch supporter of the JCPOA and it has long said that it seeks to preserve the deal. Russia had even tried to play a sort of mediation role between Iran and the U.S. during the Trump administration.

Back in July 2020, Russia worked hand in glove with the Iranian government to prevent a total collapse of the JCPOA. At that time, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad

Javad Zarif left Tehran for Moscow while Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi was heading to Iran. The chief Iranian diplomat was tasked with delivering an "important message" from Iranian President Hassan Rouhani to his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin. At the end of his visit, Zarif said in a tweet that he "delivered important message to President Putin," and held "extensive talks" with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on bilateral cooperation as well as regional and global coordination. According to Zarif, Iran and Russia had "identical views" on the nuclear deal.

Two days after Zarif's visit, President Putin and his American counterpart "thoroughly" discussed several "issues of strategic stability", including Iran's nuclear program, in a telephone call.

"The situation with the Iranian nuclear program was touched on. Both sides emphasized the need for a collective effort to maintain regional stability and the global nuclear non-proliferation regime," the Kremlin said in a statement at the time.

Meanwhile, Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's permanent representative to International organizations in Vienna, described the con-

versation as "very encouraging."

"A very encouraging news. Not happens every day. The leaders of Russia and [the] U.S. had an exchange of views on Iran-related issues. Both sides underlined the need for collective efforts to maintain stability in the region, as well as global regime of nuclear non-proliferation," Tweeted Ulyanov on July 24, 2020.

As Europe's suspicious behavior increasingly drives a wedge between Tehran and Brussel, Russia once again stands as a counterbalance to the European oscillation. Of course, Russia may not be interested in taking up the role of mediator. But that does not mean the Europeans can easily earn the trust of Iran again. Recent developments showed that Iran is increasingly moving away from a European mediation. In fact, Iran seems to be not trusting Europe even to exchange messages between Tehran and Washington.

Following the European effort to put forward a resolution at the IAEA's board of governors against Iran, Tehran suspected the Europeans of providing the new U.S. administration of "misleading" consultation, according to Press TV.

"Iran's concern about the role played by the European sides was so serious that prompted Tehran to relay indirect messages to them indicating that if Iran and the U.S. were supposed to exchange any messages at all, the official channel through the Swiss Embassy that represents the U.S. interests in the Islamic Republic would serve as a better conduit than the European vehicles," The Iranian news network said, adding, "This means that not only does not Tehran consider the Europeans to be any better than U.S. President Joe Biden himself, but also it suspects that they could be providing wrongful and misleading consultation and assessments to the new American administration. Therefore, it would be better for any potential messages to be relayed through Switzerland."

Press TV also said that during the deliberations over the proposal, the Europeans even showed no interest in lifting sanctions on Iran's oil export, calling such a move "difficult measure." They also regard Iran's potential cessation of 20-percent enrichment as only a small step, something that may further erode trust between Iran and Europe.

Gradual return to JCPOA hit dead end as U.S. refuses to lift sanctions

POLITICAL TEHRAN – Iran and the West have been engaged in intense talks on how to revive a 2015 nuclear deal but the U.S. insistence on maintaining sanctions has stymied the talks, Press TV reported.

"Over the past days and weeks, some instances of multilateral diplomatic activism have been witnessed towards eliminating the deadlock that has been formed around the issue of the United States' potential return to the JCPOA. Vienna, Geneva, Brussels, Paris, Berlin, Washington, New York, and Tehran have been playing host to this activism," Press TV said, adding, "Over the past week, the International Atomic Energy Agency hosted a battle of brawn that had Iran on one side and the United States together with its trio of European allies in the JCPOA on the other."

Referring to the recent deal between Iran and the IAEA, the Iranian news network said the Europeans' move to put forth an anti-Iran resolution at the UN nuclear watchdog's Board of Governors following the deal increased Iran's suspicions about the Europeans' goodwill and "fitness" to mediate between Tehran and Washington.

Iran and the IAEA have recently reached an understanding on how to continue cooperation in light of the implementation of a nuclear law obligating the Iranian government to stop the implementation of the Additional Protocol to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) if the West failed to lift sanctions. The agreement allowed the IAEA to continue inspection and verification activities in Iran for a period of three months. After that period, the continuation of IAEA activities in Iran would be contingent on the U.S. lifting the sanctions.

"Iran's concern about the role played by the European sides was so serious that prompted Tehran to relay indirect messages to them indicating that if Iran and the U.S. were supposed to exchange any messages at all, the official channel through the Swiss Embassy that represents the U.S. interests in the Islamic Republic would serve as a better conduit than the European vehicles. This means that not only does not Tehran consider the Europeans to be any better than U.S. President Joe Biden himself, but also it suspects that they could be providing wrongful and misleading consultation and assessments to the new American administration. Therefore, it would be better for any potential messages to be relayed through Switzerland," Press TV said.

According to Press TV, the Europeans saw no choice before themselves other than to take back their resolution thanks to Iran's insistence on its position that potential adoption of the resolution would prompt Tehran to end its agreement with the IAEA. They had received messages from the Iranian side earlier showing that the "a-step-for-a-step" proposal could warrant examination. Based on the proposal, some steps on the part of the U.S. could be followed by some steps on the part of Iran, the American steps featuring unfreezing



of part of Iran's overseas assets.

The U.S. expressed no objection to this proposal but at the same time, it did not want the unfreezing process to take place before any unofficial or even closed-door meeting with Iran, instead preferring the unblocking process to be announced as the outcome of one such meeting.

Another sticking point has revolved around the amount of the frozen assets that have to be released. This volume has oscillated between \$1 and \$15 billion. Press TV's information indicates, though, that those who have been proposing the idea on the part of Tehran have not been certain whether the proposal was in accordance with the policies of the country's establishment.

Nevertheless, presentation of the issue on the part of some people in Iran and appearance of some relevant hazy remarks in the media heartened the Europeans to play a role in the area. It was then that they tried to portray their withdrawal of the anti-Iran resolution, which had actually resulted after Tehran's official threat, as an instance of their goodwill towards promotion of the "a-step-for-a-step" proposal.

This is while, the Europeans, who still confidently consider themselves to be the JCPOA's defenders, even construe potential removal of Iran's oil sanctions that former U.S. President Donald Trump issued after leaving the JCPOA as a "difficult measure" the resolution of which definitely requires Iran and the U.S. to hold a meeting. On the other hand, they regard Iran's potential cessation of 20-percent enrichment as only a small step.

As regards the informal meeting that the European Union sought to hold between Iran and the U.S., Press TV said that France and Germany sent direct and indirect messages to Iran in an effort to persuade it to attend the meeting.

Paris and Berlin resorted to some intense efforts by funneling some direct and indirect messages to persuade Iran to attend an unofficial meeting with the U.S.

As a result of these contacts and relaying of these messages, in which Brussels would sometimes intervene as Europe's foreign policy headquarters, a proposal emerged in Iran, which advised implementation of a phased-out and months-long procedure involving

reciprocal measures by Iran and the U.S.

According to Press TV, some lobbying efforts inside the new U.S. administration were also effective in the formation of the proposal. These lobbying efforts came on the part of people of Iranian origin, who tried to establish some contact between Iran's representative mission to the United Nations and the person in charge of Iran's dossier in Biden's administration. These people eventually realized, however, that the main proposal was in the making in Tehran amid contact with Europeans.

As part of the proposal that bore some defects completely similar to those of the JCPOA's, the U.S. was supposed to make some unverified commitments in exchange for completely verifiable and palpable commitments on the part of Iran. Nor did the volume of the Iranian assets that were supposed to be unfrozen as part of the proposal bore the smallest resemblance to the \$1,000-billion that Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif recently specified in an interview with Press TV as the damages that the Islamic Republic has incurred due to the U.S. departure from the JCPOA. The proposal, however, came to use for deployment on such symbolic junctures as the final days of the solar calendar year and the National Nuclear Technology Day. Its emergence also well suited the nearing period of campaigning for Iranian presidential elections.

But the proposal did not offer a verifiable sanctions relief, Press TV said, noting that the proposal not only did not enable verifiable sanction relief, but also it would lead to subsequent negotiations that would, in turn, impose harsher, lengthier, and more dangerous commitments on Iran.

The proposal went down the official path of assessment of its commensurability with the establishment's policies, but was deemed irreconcilable with the policies and the establishment's strategies. Accordingly, Press TV aired an exclusive report, announcing that the "a-step-for-a-step" proposal had been ruled out as it did not suit the establishment's policies on the issue of the JCPOA.

Press TV's information indicates that the U.S. has even changed its mind regarding potential unfreezing of \$1 billion in Iranian assets that have been blocked in South Korea. Washington had sought to announce the prospect of unfreezing the money as a result of a potential meeting with Tehran, but began frowning on even such a limited unblocking process after realizing that the Islamic Republic insisted on complete sanction relief.

Based on verified information, Press TV has made certain that no proposal that does not match the Iranian Islamic establishment's declared policy would be used as the basis of the country's interaction in the area. The United States can, therefore, only rely on a proposal that is in accord with the conditions announced by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, especially the ones that the Leader laid emphasis upon through the speech dated January 8, 2021.

SPORTS

Iran takes two gold medals at Karate-1 Premier League

SPORTS TEHRAN – Iranian karatekas claimed two gold medals, one silver and two bronzes at the Karate-1 Premier League event in Istanbul, Turkey on Sunday.



In the male Kumite +84 kilograms category, Grand Winner Sajad Ganzjadedeh beat Ryzvan Talibov of Ukraine 7-0 in the final. Asian champion Zabiollah Poorshab won a gold medal after withdrawal of Kazakhstan's Daniyar Yuldashev due to the injury. Rozita Alipour won a silver medal at the Female Kumite -61 Kg. She had to meet world champion Jovana Prekovic of Serbia in the final match but pulled out of the match due to injury.

Sara Bahmanyar took a bronze, defeating Kateryna Kravchuk from Ukraine 4-0 in the Female Kumite -50 Kg third-place match. Aliasghar Asiabari defeated Turkey's Erman Eltmur 3-0 in the final match of the Male Kumite -75 Kg.

The last international competition was over a year ago in Salzburg in Austria, which ended on March 1.

Nearly 600 countries from 72 countries took part in the competition in Istanbul, Turkey.

Iran's slogan at Tokyo 2020 revealed

SPORTS TEHRAN – Iran's slogan ahead of the Tokyo Games is "All for Iran".

The delegation's name will be "Stars of Iran" and the Jaam-e Arjan (Arjan bowl) has been selected as the symbol of the contingent at the Games.

The Jaam-e Arjan, or Arjan bowl, is from the Elamite era, an ancient civilization that dates from between 3200 and 539 BC and was centered in the west and south-west of what is now Iran.

At the Rio 2016 Summer Olympics, Iran won three golds, one silver and four bronzes and finished 25th on the medals table.

The country's best Games performance was at London 2012 where they took home seven golds, five silvers and a bronze.

The Tokyo Olympics are set to run from July 23 to Aug. 8, and the Paralympics from Aug. 24 to Sept. 5, after being postponed for a year because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Abdi's goal a candidate for best last-minute goal of 2020 ACL

SPORTS TEHRAN – Persepolis striker Mehdi Abdi's goal against Sharjah has been shortlisted for the best last-minute goal of 2020 AFC Champions League.

As the kick-off date for the historic 2021 edition approaches, the AFC.com looks back at the 2020 tournament which turned out to be a thrilling affair despite the challenging circumstances.

Abdi has been already voted as winner of the Best Headers of 2020.

Mehdi Abdi
Persepolis FC v Sharjah, Matchday Six
Persepolis FC came racing out of the blocks as Shojae Khalilzadeh, Isa Al Kasir and Vahid Amiri made it a trio of headed goals in the first half for the Iran side.

With just seconds to go in the final 45 minutes, Persepolis signed off with a fourth goal as substitutes Arman Ramzani and Mehdi Abdi combined with the former setting up a header that Abdi converted from inside the box to make it 4-0 at the final whistle.

He will compete with Kyogo Furuhashi (Suwon Samsung Bluewings vs Vissel Kobe, Matchday Two), Jun Amano (Shanghai SIPG FC v Yokohama F. Marinos, Matchday Three), Bill (Chiangrai United vs FC Seoul, Matchday Four) and Junior Negrão (Ulsan Hyundai FC vs Vissel Kobe, Semi-final) in the poll.

Morteza Pouraliganji suffers injury

SPORTS TEHRAN – Iran international defender Morteza Pouraliganji has suffered a foot injury.

The Shenzhen defender sustained the injury in a friendly match on Saturday.

The 29-year-old defender has been sidelined at least two weeks. Pouraliganji is one of the iconic players of Iran national football team and will be a vital defender in the 2022 World Cup qualifiers in June.

"I've suffered a foot injury in a warm up match but I will recover very soon," Pouraliganji said.

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.

Dragan Skocic's team will have to meet table-toppers Iraq, Bahrain, Hong Kong and Cambodia.

Esteghlal transfer ban lifted

SPORTS TEHRAN – Iranian football club Esteghlal's ban has been lifted by FIFA.

The Blues had been handed the transfer ban by FIFA's Dispute Resolution Chamber (DRC) over non-payment of dues to former defender Nikolay Georgiev Bodurov from Bulgaria.

In a letter sent to the club, the world football governing body has confirmed that the Iranian team are eligible to sign player. FIFA had already lifted transfer ban of Esteghlal archrivals Persepolis after the Iranian team paid Marco Budimir's payment. Iranian Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports Masoud Soltanifar had previously said that the country's most popular football clubs Esteghlal and Persepolis would be ceded to the private sector in the current Iranian year but the teams have not been Privatized yet.

"Privatization is in line with our new policy to develop the two clubs," Soltanifar said.

The government cabinet has previously agreed abandoning the two big cultural-sport companies to the private sector but it has never happened.

Foreign investment in industrial, trade sectors up over 113% in 11 months

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade has approved 135 foreign investment projects valued at about \$1.821 billion in the first 11 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2020-February 18, 2021), up 113.2 percent compared to the last year's same period.

According to the latest data released by the ministry, the number of approved projects has also increased by 64 percent in the mentioned 11-month period compared to the same time span in the previous year.

The Industry Ministry had approved 82 foreign investment projects with a total investment of \$854 million in the previous year's same period.

Of the total number of investment projects in the current year's 11-month period, 88.9 percent was the share of industry sector, 5.2 percent was the share of mining sector, while trade-related projects accounted for 5.9 percent of the total figure.

The highest volume of foreign investment approved in the industry, mining, and trade sectors in the period under review were in the categories of chemical materials and products, manufacturing of paper and paper products, home appliances, as well as the manufacturing of machinery and equipment, respectively.

Germany, China, Canada, Austria, and Turkey were the top five countries with the highest volume of investment, while, Khuzestan, Sistan-Baluchestan, Fars, Tehran, and Kermanshah provinces were the top five provinces in terms of the volume of approved foreign investment.

Afghanistan, China, Turkey, Germany, and India were also the top five investors in terms of the number of approved projects.

The Industry, Mining, and Trade Ministry had approved 104 foreign investment cases valued at about \$1.447 billion in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-December 20, 2020).

Foreign investment approved by the ministry in the said nine months had also increased 48 percent and 128 percent in terms of number and value, respectively, compared to the same period of time in the past year.

As previously reported by the Industry Ministry, Iran expects a 10-fold increase of foreign investment in the industry and mining sectors by the end of the Sixth Five-Year National Development Plan (March 2022).

TEDPIX climbs 15,000 points on Sunday

ECONOMY TEHRAN — TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), rose 15,763 points to 1,245 million on Sunday.

Over 9.669 billion securities worth 75.399 trillion rials (about \$1.795 billion) were traded at the TSE on Sunday.

The first market's index gained 13,362 points, and the second market's index rose 25,573 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).

Iranian Capital Market Analyst Soheil Kolahchi believes the stock market is not going to go through many ups and downs over the next six months and the market is expected to follow a stable trend.

"In the coming months, the market will not fall heavily, but we also can't expect the index to enter an uptrend soon," Kolahchi has recently told IRNA.

Pointing to the recent decline in the Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE) main index, the expert said: "The stock market is in a good condition both technically and fundamentally, but despite the positive measures that the Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) has put on the agenda to improve the market, it is still following a downward trend; and this has increased the shareholders' skepticism and anxiety."

He noted that the Iranian stock market is usually negative during the last Iranian calendar month of Esfand (February 19-March 20) and that is a normal trend for the country's capital market in the last days of the year.

"Because most of the companies active in the market are looking for selling their shares and somehow turn their assets into liquidity by the yearend," Kolahchi explained.

"We look forward to a positive trend of trading in the next year, he said, adding that the market is now in a very good condition for growth and we can hope for positive days in the stock market and improve the situation in the coming months", he added.

In late December 2020, the vice-chairman of TSE's board of directors had said that the stock market will spend the last months of the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 20) calmly.

Mentioning investigation of the periodical (six-month and nine-month) reports of the companies' performance, Javad Eshqi-Nejad said that given the foreign currency exchange rate situation and the appropriate sales volume, in this period, almost the expectations of listed companies have been met and positive results have been provided for the capital market.

Regarding the continuation of the stock market trend in the first three months of 2021, he said: "In this regard, the main issue is political relations and international behavior; We seem to be achieving good results in the international arena."

While predicting that the stock market will be calm in the last months of this year, he said: "But for the next year, according to the budget, we may face new events whose analysis can have special effects on various industries; in a way that these effects may be associated with some industries for the next 2-3 years."

Industrial growth achieved despite sanctions, pandemic

By Mahnaz Abdi

TEHRAN—The U.S. sanctions have targeted Iran's all aspects of economy and industry, but the "self-reliance" approach that the Islamic Republic has taken to nullify the sanctions has proved that nothing can impede Iran from progress.

Since the U.S. reimposition of the sanctions, the self-reliance strategy of Iran has been followed up by all state-run and private bodies.

In the current Iranian calendar year (began on March 20, 2020), which has been named as the year of "Surge in Production" by the leader of the Islamic Revolution, all ministries have defined their comprehensive programs to pursue for materialization of this motto.

Industry, Mining, and Trade Ministry, as one of the major players in this due, has outlined an all-out plan in this regard, which was announced by the former minister, Reza Rahmani, in April 2020.

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

Developing technology and promoting knowledge-based industries, development of domestic production in line with the Leader's stresses on surge in production, managing imports and development of non-oil exports, improving the business environment, development of financing and investment and finally development of logistics were reported to be the seven major axes of the Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry's works in the current year, which is named "Surge in Production" by the Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei.

Stressing the role of knowledge and technology in the improvement of domestic production, Rahmani noted that the ministry has it on the agenda to support such companies. "The exports of products made by knowledge-based companies are going to be the priority in the country's exports basket in the current year," the official stressed.

He further noted that the imports of consumer products would be seriously restricted as such imports were decreased to only 10 percent of the total imports in the previous



calendar year (ended on March 19).

The prepared plans and the strong will of the ministry to help the country achieve self-reliance through strengthening domestic production bore fruit, as the released reports and statistics indicate that the ministry has achieved growth in production in almost all sectors in the current year.

One important sector is the home appliance industry.

The latest data released in this due indicates that the manufacturing of refrigerators and freezers has risen 30 percent during the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2020 - January 19, 2021), compared to the same period of time in the past year, while that of the washing machines and TV sets has experienced a growth of 53-percent and 44-percent, respectively.

Keyvan Gardan, the director for the electrical and metals industries and home appliances office of the ministry, has said that the manufacturing of home appliances will hit a record high in the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 20).

He said that according to the plans and the efforts made, despite the continuation of sanctions and the coronavirus pandemic, this year the record of home appliance production will be broken after the victory of the Islamic

Revolution (1979).

Making the remarks in a last month meeting of industry owners with the directors of the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade in the field of formulating the strategy of Iran's home appliance industry on the horizon of 1404 (March 2025-March 2026), the official added, "Production was projected to grow by 30 percent this year, reaching a record of 12 million sets of home appliances, but the target was realized by the end of the tenth month (January 19)".

Despite all the sanctions and problems, this industry has been able to continue to grow decisively in the past two and a half years, he said, adding, "Of course, with the ban imposed on the import of home appliances, the people also cooperated and supported this industry, which led to its growth."

Currently, Iranian producers have indigenized the knowledge for manufacturing 70-75 percent of the country's home appliance needs, according to Abbas Hashemi, the secretary of the Association of Industries of Household Appliances of Iran.

The success is also noticeable in car industry, one of the major industrial sectors of the country.

The latest data released in the field show that three major Iranian carmakers, namely

Iran Khodro Company (IKCO), SAIPA Group, and Pars Khodro, manufactured 817,069 vehicles during the first eleven months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2020-February 18, 2021).

According to the data released by Codal website, during the mentioned period, IKCO manufactured 432,006 vehicles, of which 43,912 were produced in the eleventh Iranian calendar month of Bahman (January 20 - February 18, 2021).

SAIPA manufactured 291,220 vehicles in the mentioned period, of which 29,452 were manufactured in the eleventh month.

Pars Khodro also manufactured 93,843 vehicles, of which 12,828 were manufactured in the eleventh month.

Based on the data released by the Industry, Mining, and Trade Ministry, 468,699 vehicles were manufactured in Iran during the first half of the current year (March 20-September 21, 2020), which has been 23.4 percent higher than the figure for the same period of time in the past year.

Considering the mentioned data, while the growth in output has been realized in the first half, car manufacturing is also planned to rise in the second half.

Mohsen Salehinia, the new head of the Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO), has mentioned planning for increasing car manufacturing in the second half, and said, "We are investigating and finalizing the issues in this due".

Deputy Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Saeed Zarandi had said earlier this year that 1.2 million vehicles were planned to be manufactured in the present year, which seems a realistic figure given the surge in production policies of this year.

While production is witnessing surge, import is declining in many sectors, as the import of many industrial parts, equipment, and machinery has been banned, while focus has been put on indigenizing the knowledge and technology to produce them inside the country.

And it should be noted that all these successes have been achieved despite not only the sanctions, but also the limitations created by the coronavirus pandemic.

Rouhani inaugurates 2nd, 3rd phases of Persian Gulf water transfer project

1 -> It includes three major pipelines with a total length of 3,700 kilometers, for the transfer of desalinated water from the Persian Gulf to seven provinces including Hormozgan, Kerman, South Khorasan, Khorasan Razavi, Yazd, Isfahan, and Sistan-Baluchestan.

With the completion of all the mentioned three pipelines, in total, 550 million cubic meters of freshwater will be transferred from the Persian Gulf to the mentioned regions.

The first pipeline transports Persian Gulf water to Hormozgan, Kerman, and Yazd provinces; the second line will transfer water to the provinces of Kerman, South Khorasan, and Khorasan Razavi, while in the third line Persian Gulf water is transferred to Yazd and Isfahan provinces.

Some 163 trillion rials (about \$3.88 billion) was invested for the completion of the first line which was completed and inaugurated back in November 2020.

The second line, with a length of 1,550 km, has been implemented with a total investment of 470 trillion rials (about \$11.1 billion) and will create employment for

30,000 people.

Over 350 trillion rials (about \$8.3 billion) has also been invested in the third line which is 910-km long and has 10 water pumping stations along it. The project will create employment for 14,000 people.

The second and third lines are expected to be completed and put into operation by the Iranian calendar year 1404 (begins in March 2025).

In recent years, due to increasing water consumption for drinking, industrial and agricultural purposes, and sometimes consecutive droughts, the central plateau of Iran has been experiencing severe water shortages, especially in big cities like Isfahan, Kerman, Yazd, and Hormozgan.

These shortages caused many rivers and wetlands in these areas to dry up continuously and consequently, some agricultural plains are not cultivated anymore. This has created significant problems for the rural population in these regions whose main source of income is farming and it is also threatening the country's food security.

The agriculture sector is not the only area that is af-



ected by the water problems in the mentioned regions since most of the cities located in the said areas like Isfahan and Yazd are industrial centers and water shortage is severely impacting the production efficiency of the industrial units in the mentioned cities.

Iran soon to become exporter of world-class gas turbines

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Managing Director of Iran's MAPNA Group, which is the first and leading West Asia-based general contractor of thermal power plants in the MENA region, has said that Iran is going to become an exporter of new classes of gas turbines in near future.

Speaking on the sidelines of the signing ceremony of a deal for manufacturing an MGT-75 gas turbine for Iran's Thermal Power Plant Holding (TPPH) on Saturday, Abbas Ali-Abadi said: "Iran now has the knowledge and technology to design and manufacture a variety of new gas turbines on a global scale."

"We will present this turbine [MGT-75] in the global market soon and it will undoubtedly be well received," Ali-Abadi added.

Mentioning some of the significant features

of the mentioned turbine, the official said that the power plants that use these new turbines will have a very low water consumption so that the water consumption in such power plants would be reduced to one-tenth.

According to the official, the new turbines can also use hydrogen as an alternative fuel in the regions where pollution is an issue.

"This product is made completely inside the country using local knowledge and technology and it is definitely cheaper than foreign models," Ali-Abadi said.

He further noted that the MGT-75 turbine has been designed according to the requirements of the country's power network and can be used for the development of the network in the future.

The MGT-75 turbine has improved ef-

iciency by 60 percent over the previous designs and increased output capacity to 220 megawatts, he noted.

This turbine will impose the least fluctuation on the electricity network while improving the efficiency of the country's thermal power plants, according to the head of MAPNA Group.

The first Iranian-made MGT-75 gas turbine is going to be installed in a thermal power plant in the capital Tehran.

As Iran's top engineering and energy enterprise, MAPNA had previously manufactured E-class and F-class turbines such as MGT-70.

The mentioned turbines have been used in domestic power stations as well as major power projects in neighboring countries like

Iraq.

Iran used to import such piece of equipment from foreign sources such as Germany's Siemens. And now enjoying such technology, the country is among the world's top manufacturers of power plants with high efficiency.

MAPNA Group is a conglomerate of Iranian companies involved in the development and execution of thermal and renewable power, oil and gas, railroad transportation, and other industrial projects as well as manufacturing equipment.

The consortium is playing a key role in upgrading Iran's power industry. It has also operated in the power projects of Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, Oman, and Indonesia, among other markets.

GDP growth at 2.2% in 9 months: CBI

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The Central Bank of Iran (CBI), in its latest report, has put the growth of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20 -December 20, 2020) at 2.2 percent.

According to the mentioned data, the figure was 1.9 percent with oil excluded, ILNA reported.

Earlier this month, the Statistical Centre of Iran (SCI) had put the country's GDP growth at 0.8 percent in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year.

The figure was 0.2 percent with oil excluded in the said period, according to SCI.

The SCI data put the growth for the country's agricul-

ture, industries, and mining, and services sectors at 5.5 percent, 3.7 percent, and -1.8 percent, respectively for the mentioned period.

Back in December 2020, the CBI Governor Abdolnaser Hemmati had announced that the country's GDP growth - both with and without oil - became positive.

"Today's report of the Economic Accounts Department of the Central Bank indicates that the country's GDP growth in the first six months of the current year (March 19-September 20) was positive with and without oil," Hemmati wrote in a statement.

According to the official, the country's GDP excluding oil rose 1.4 percent in the mentioned period, while the figure

increased by 1.3 percent with oil included.

Iran's economic growth in the first and second quarters of the current year with oil were -2.9 percent and + 5.1 percent, respectively, and economic growth without oil in the mentioned quarters was -0.6 percent and + 3.2 percent, respectively, Hemmati said.

In one of its latest World Outlook reports titled "The Long and Difficult Ascend" published in October 2020, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) put the Iranian economic growth in 2020 at 3.2 percent.

The international body's estimation of Iran's economy improved 0.1 percent in this report compared to its previous report published in June 2020.

Biden should return to JCPOA like Paris accord without delay: professor

Under his leadership, the U.S. has started playing a responsible and leadership role within the UN. He has also done his best to get back the trust and respect from the old allies in Europe and bring some order within NATO. He is acting tough against Russia but looks confused vis-à-vis China. While he has sent the right signals to address the coup in Myanmar, the conflict in Yemen, and the civil war in Tigray, he seems to have not been able to decide how to deal with the challenges like North Korea and Kashmir. He and his State Department still clueless over how to undo what Trump has done to the U.S. policy regarding the nuclear deal with Iran and the Palestinian issue. So, the Biden foreign policy has been quite cautious, and the domestic factors seem to have a significant role in this.

Is Biden following a confrontational policy, somehow like his predecessor Donald Trump? Does he want to take advantage of Trump's legacy?

As I said before, Biden has already done the course correction on some critical and multilateral issues and has moved the U.S. approach back to the time when he was the Vice President. At the same time, he has not been forceful to change some of the whimsical and thoughtless foreign policy decisions Trump had made. Biden had promised to return to the Iranian nuclear deal in his election campaign, and it has not been done. The 'Trump sanctions' are still there and nothing has been done to improve the tense relationship with Iran. The cautious approach can be explained that there are powerful political groups in the U.S. who have an anti-Iran agenda who need to be persuaded. Biden also probably wants to continue Trump's policy for some time in the hope of getting more concession from Iran. But I hope President Biden will do what he had promised to do



“The U.S. is facing a decline in some areas, particularly geopolitically and economically.”

as Candidate Biden. As he went back to the Paris agreement without any delay, he should do that with the Iranian nuclear deal.

Why does Biden seem hardliner, when it comes to China?

I think President Biden fully understands the challenge China poses to the U.S.

China is too powerful now, and he has no other way but to find ways to cooperate more and less confront with China. Biden

wants to be seen as the Climate President, and without China's cooperation, he can't do anything on that front. The U.S. economy is in bad shape, and to recover from the Covid-induced economic crisis, Biden also needs China's cooperation. At the same time, Biden is also facing an assertive China that demands superpower status in global politics. There have already been clashes in the UN Security Council on the issues

“He (Biden) and his State Department still clueless over how to undo what Trump has done to the U.S. policy regarding the nuclear deal with Iran and the Palestinian issue.”

of Myanmar and Tigray. President Biden being an intelligent politician he will take a pragmatic approach in shaping U.S. relations with China. It will be often tense, but not as volatile as it used to be under the Trump administration, and there will be structured and institutional cooperation mechanisms in place.

Do you think that the U.S. is entered into a decline phase due to domestic challenges at home?

The U.S. is facing a decline in some areas, particularly geopolitically and economically. As I see, it is less the decline of the U.S. but more the rise of other powers. There has been a severe competition to the U.S., particularly from China. The divisive domestic politics and deterioration of key institutions have also added to the U.S.s difficulties. Despite its decline, I still think the U.S. is most likely to remain the dominant power for years to come unless it does the self-harm to itself as it did by electing Donald Trump in 2016.

Why are right-wing groups dominant in the U.S. and Europe that promote violence and wars?

The rise of right-wing groups in the West has been because of many people for their failure trying to find scapegoats. They have failed to take advantage of what their affluent societies offer in terms of education, health care, and knowledge creation and have not achieved what they think they should have achieved professionally. The immigrants have become scapegoats in explaining this growing dissatisfaction. Far-right politicians are taking advantage of this and making it worse in dividing the societies and countries. Hopefully, there will be a course correction by these societies soon, and the political class will refrain from pushing the ethno-nationalist agenda further. Otherwise, we all know what happened to Europe in the 1930s and 1940s.

PA President Abbas appreciates Ayat. Sistani's support for Palestine during Pope visit

These, the statement noted, included “the injustice, oppression, poverty, religious and intellectual persecution, suppression of basic freedoms, and the absence of social justice, especially the wars, acts of violence, economic blockade, displacement and so on” that was faced by the Palestinians and other members of the international community.

Ayatollah Sistani also expressed his opposition during the meeting to any normalization with the Israeli regime.

Since last September, several regional countries have normalized their relations with the occupying regime with mediation by the United States.

All Palestinian factions and their dedicated supporters have, however, voiced their outright opposition to the development, calling it a betrayal of the Palestinian cause.

Observers have also warned that such rapprochement allows Tel Aviv to interfere in the region's affairs, including the regional security equation.



Power is notoriously distributed unevenly: Japanese scholar

“It is not true that East Asia is calm, whereas the Middle East (West Asia) is in turmoil,” says Professor Matsunaga

That said, however, there are marked differences in the ways conflicts emerge. From time to time, large-scale conflicts manifest themselves and cause long-lasting effects. These can happen anywhere. In East and Southeast Asia today, there are some hotspots such as Hong Kong, Thailand, and Myanmar. It is not true that East Asia is calm, whereas the Middle East (West Asia) is in turmoil.

What are the main roots of wars in West Asia? Regional differences, geopolitical confrontations, or foreign meddling?

The roots of devastating wars and long-lasting conflicts are often traceable to the particular historical encounters that a region has had with the rest of the world. In the case of modern Middle East (West Asia), the most salient roots of the long-lasting conflicts in the region cannot be separated from the experiences that many peoples in the region have had with European colonialism. A case in point is the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Historically, the conflict in Palestine cannot be explained without reference to the British colonial policy. Nor can it be explained without taking into consideration the protection that the U.S. has extended to one side of the conflict ever since the mid-1960's. Similarly, it has to be recognized that sectarian conflicts in present-day Lebanon are modern phenomena. A series of encounters by the key local actors with European powers for the last two hundred years have significantly shaped the ways in which conflicts have manifested in present-day Lebanon. Different historical forces and trajectories have reshaped how different individuals are grouped together. The confessional sects in Lebanon today are modern—and, more importantly, political—constructions.

More recently, however, the roots of regional conflict—not only in the Middle East (West Asia) but everywhere in the world—have become much more complex. Tides of ideological awakenings from secular nationalisms to various formations



of nativist backlashes, centripetal and centrifugal movements of political power in the form of national states, creeping infiltration of global capitalism and neoliberal governmentality, and massive infusion of weapons and other types of technological artifacts have combined to cause and perpetuate divergent forms of local and regional conflicts. Of course, age-old mechanisms of conflict such as personal and group rivalry, competition for resources, and human penchant for domination must be added to the list of frequent causes of conflicts of different scales. Less significant, in my view, are oft-mentioned deliberate schemes such as conspiracies and mischiefs. I tend to see conflicts emerging primarily from material and structural causes as well as historical contingencies.

“What Francis Fukuyama declared at the end of the Cold War was not for the sake of everyone. It seemed to his side of the people that they had just scored a big, albeit fleeting, victory.”

“Historically, the conflict in Palestine cannot be explained without reference to the British colonial policy.”

What is your comment on Fukuyama's “end of history” theory? Could liberal democracy spread successfully in the world?

I don't think so. Liberalism and liberal institutions of power are only good for those who can benefit from them. It is most likely true that collectively constructed and competitively maintained “liberal” institutions tend to fare better than arbitrarily established and easily manipulatable ones often put in place by autocrats. Yet there is no escaping the fact that liberalism tends not to challenge, and more often than not serve, the status quo. If you happen to be on the receiving end of domination of some kind, liberal institutions will unlikely be a solution to the problems that you face. What Francis Fukuyama declared at the end of the Cold War was not for the sake of everyone. It seemed to his side of the people that they had just scored a big, albeit fleeting, victory.

There are also problems with the idea that some institutional arrangements—be they liberal or otherwise—can be “spread” or “exported” from one historical plateau to another. Each place has its own history. In other words, at the end of the day, lasting things in each historical location have to be developed from within its own historical trajectory. Certain technical ideas and institutional arrangements may be shared, or passed around, among differently situated historical communities. But there won't be any universal panacea in human history.

Do you think democracy can prevent wars? We have countries that claim they are democratic while they have waged the most destructive wars.

Much like liberal institutions, democracy may, at best, be good for those who can benefit from it. A certain group of democracies may benefit from their mutual relations and interdependencies. But it does not mean that democracies tend to bring about public goods beyond their jurisdictions. Contemporary states that may be internally characterized by their “democratic” regimes do resort to wars and other forms of large-scale violence beyond their borders. It should not be any surprise. Democracy is a rule by a majority, who mostly likely be a minority in the big scheme of things. When a minority strives to maintain power over others, violence is one of the least complicated means that we humans tend to think of utilizing. In addition, in the international arena, power is notoriously unevenly distributed. There is a long way to go before we could eliminate war as a means to resolve international disputes.

How do you assess China's challenge to the U.S. and other Western powers? Is China going to be a hegemon after its economy becomes dominant in the world?

China is already a military power. But being a hegemon is not simply the same as being a powerful country, be it economically or militarily. A hegemon is a “leader” that provides for public goods. What a hegemon does has to be seen legitimate for the very reason that it serves social purposes. In that sense, the jury is still out. For the moment, it does not appear that China will likely become the sole power in the world. At best, China may become a “leader” of a certain group of developing countries. In that scenario, to the extent that China successfully constructs a parallel set of “legitimate” global institutions, we may then start seeing a development of another Cold-War-type global competition between two rival groupings. But it won't be easy.

UN urges withdrawal of mercenaries from Libya

The United Nations Security Council has called for an immediate withdrawal of all foreign forces and mercenaries from Libya as the conflict-ridden African country ushers in a new era with the formation of a national unity government.

In an unanimously approved declaration, the Council urged foreign fighters to leave Libya “without further delay”.

It also welcomed the Libyan parliament's approval of a new unified government, which is set to lead the North African country to December elections after a decade-long conflict.

“The Security Council calls on all parties to implement the ceasefire agreement in full and urges member states to respect and support the full implementation of the agreement,” the world body said in a statement.

A ceasefire agreement reached in October called for the withdrawal of all foreign forces and mercenaries in three months and adherence to a UN arms embargo, provisions which have not been met.

The UN said in December last year that there were about 20,000 foreign troops and mercenaries helping the opposing sides in Libya.

Calling for full compliance with the UN arms embargo by all member states, the 15-member body stressed on Saturday that plans were needed “for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of armed groups, security sector reform and to establish an inclusive, civilian-led security architecture for Libya as a whole.”

Moreover, the council welcomed the parliamentary approval of Libyan Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah's cabinet.

It said the new Libyan government should take necessary preparations to set Libya for “free and fair national presidential and parliamentary elections on 24 December 2021.”

U.S. military convoy enters northeast Syria from northern Iraq: report

The U.S.-led military coalition has reportedly sent a new convoy of trucks carrying military and logistical equipment to northeastern Syria.

RT Arabic television, citing local sources, reported that the convoy of some 45 trucks crossed Waleed border crossing into Syrian territories on Saturday.

The sources said the trucks entered Syria from the semi-autonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq, and were carrying logistical equipment, four-wheel-drive vehicles as well as fuel supplies.

They traveled along the M4 international highway towards U.S. military forces in Syria's northeastern province of Hasakah and neighboring Dayr al-Zawr province.

The U.S. military has stationed forces and equipment in northeastern Syria, with the Pentagon claiming that the troops deployment is aimed at preventing the oilfields in the area from falling into the hands of Daesh terrorists. Damascus, however, says the deployment is meant to plunder the country's resources.

The U.S. first confirmed its looting of Syrian oil during a Senate hearing exchange between South Carolina Republican Senator Lindsey Graham and former U.S. secretary of state Mike Pompeo in July last year.

During his testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Pompeo confirmed for the first time that an American oil company would begin work in northeastern Syria, which is controlled by militants from the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

The Syrian government strongly condemned the agreement, saying that the deal was struck to plunder the country's natural resources, including oil and gas.

The sources added that the trucks were escorted by US-sponsored SDF militants.

Myanmar civilian leader pledges “revolution” to overturn military junta

The acting leader of Myanmar's civilian government, appointed by legislators who were removed following a military coup last month, says efforts are being made to give people the legal right to defend themselves amid the surging death toll in anti-coup protests across the country.

Mahn Win Khaing Than, the vice-president of the Committee for Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) which is comprised of ousted senior officials from the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD), made the remarks in his first address to the public via Facebook on Saturday.

Myanmar has been gripped by turmoil since the military ousted de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi in a February 1 coup and detained her and several other senior figures from the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) and took control of the country.

“This is the darkest moment of the nation and the moment that the dawn is close. This is also a moment testing our citizens to see how far we can resist these darkest times.”

During his address to the public, Khaing Than also urged anti-coup protesters to move with “invincibility” as the Southeast Asian country neared its seventh week under military rule.

The CRPH's acting leader echoed the anti-coup movement's calls for a “federal democracy” that would allow ethnic minority groups to have a role in Myanmar's governance.

“This uprising is also the chance for all of us to struggle together hand-in-hand to establish a federal democracy union which we all ethnic brothers and sisters who have been suffering various kinds of oppression from military dictatorship have long desired,” he said.

“The federal democracy union... is waiting for us in the near future if we move forward unitedly with invincibility,” Khaing Than added. “We must win the uprising.”

Myanmar has been gripped by turmoil since the military ousted de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi in a February 1 coup and detained her and several other senior NLD figures to take control of the country.

The junta, which has declared a one-year emergency across Myanmar, claims that it seized power after it found fraud in elections held three months earlier that the NLD had won in a landslide.

Since then, hundreds of thousands of people have held numerous protests against the coup leaders in the Southeast Asian country, demanding the release of Suu Kyi and other detainees.

Noruz travels authorized via public transport

TOURISM TEHRAN – No ban on Noruz travels has been imposed for people who would use public transport, Transport and Urban Development Minister Mohammad Eslami announced on Sunday.

No ban has been imposed on inactivity travels via public transport. And the criterion for the activity of the air, rail, and road fleets of the country is the observance of health protocols concerning the coronavirus pandemic, the minister explained.

Earlier this month, President Hassan Rouhani declared new travel bans for cities situated in the “red” and “orange” zones to combat the new COVID-19 variant. Rouhani called on people to avoid traveling during the Iranian New Year holidays to help contain the spread of coronavirus. He said it would be forbidden to make trips to cities marked as “red” and “orange” in terms of the prevalence of COVID-19.



“We request people to avoid traveling during Noruz holidays for the sake of their own health... It will be forbidden to travel to red and orange towns and cities,” he said. “No one should make any plans to travel to these cities,” he stressed.

Late in February, the tourism minister, Ali-Asghar Mounesan, said despite all the obstacles and issues and the outbreak of the coronavirus, the country’s tourism sector is still alive and dynamic.

Noruz ceremonies and trips, if practiced under health protocols, could be beneficial for the revival of the tourism industry and handicrafts, which have been severely affected by the coronavirus pandemic in many provinces, the minister explained.

Iranians traditionally make hundreds of thousands of domestic trips during the New Year holidays, when most businesses and workplaces are closed, as are schools.

New tourism destination to emerge near Persepolis

HERITAGE TEHRAN – Tall-e Ajori, which has recently yielded the ruins of a majestic historical gateway, would be turned into a tourism destination. The archaeological site is situated near the UNESCO-registered Persepolis in southern Iran.

“Tall-e Ajori holds considerable potential to be turned into a travel destination, and it is one of our priorities to do so in near future.... Tall-e Ajori and Persepolis represent significant portions of the Iranian history,” Research Institute for Cultural Heritage and Tourism Director Behrouz Omrani announced on Saturday.

The official said that tours of Persepolis can start from Tall-e Ajor to have a more detailed introduction of the Iranian culture of the time. “The route from this historical and cultural site to Persepolis, allows tourists and researchers to see the art of the Achaemenids from another angle...,” he explained.



Excavations and surveys on Tall-e Ajori are expected to help archaeologists uncover more about the history of the royal city. Supervised by a joint mission of Iranian and Italian archaeologists and cultural heritage experts, the excavations on Tall-e Ajori uncovered vestiges of a massive gateway measuring 30 by 40 meters with a height of approximately 12 meters.

The archaeologists succeeded in proving that Cyrus the Great had ordered the construction of the gateway near Persepolis in Tall-e Ajori and that this magnificent gateway had been put into operation during the reign of his son Cambyses.

“The building had a corridor in the center, which was in form of a rectangular room measuring eight by twelve meters, and inside this central room, there were four living chairs. And the central corridor opened on both sides to the Achaemenid campus,” according to Alireza Askari-Charoudi who is a senior Iranian archaeologist.

The royal city of Persepolis ranks among the archaeological sites which have no equivalent, considering its unique architecture, urban planning, construction technology, and art. Persepolis, also known as Takht-e Jamshid, whose magnificent ruins rest at the foot of Kuh-e Rahmat (Mountain of Mercy) is situated 60 kilometers northeast of the city of Shiraz in Fars province.

The city was burnt by Alexander the Great in 330 BC apparently as revenge to the Persians because it seems the Persian King Xerxes had burnt the Greek City of Athens around 150 years earlier. The city’s immense terrace was begun about 518 BC by Darius the Great, the Achaemenid Empire’s king. On this terrace, successive kings erected a series of architecturally stunning palatial buildings, among them the massive Apadana palace and the Throne Hall (“Hundred-Column Hall”).

This 13-ha ensemble of majestic approaches, monumental stairways, throne rooms (Apadana), reception rooms, and dependencies is classified among the world’s greatest archaeological sites. Persepolis was the seat of the government of the Achaemenid Empire, though it was designed primarily to be a showplace and spectacular center for the receptions and festivals of the kings and their empire.

The site is marked by a large terrace with its east side abutting the Kuh-e Rahmat (“Mount of Mercy”). The other three sides are formed by a retaining wall, varying in height with the slope of the ground from 13 to 41 feet (4 to 12 meters); on the west side, a magnificent double stair in two flights of 111 short stone steps leads to the top. On the terrace are the ruins of several colossal buildings, all constructed of a dark gray stone (often polished to a marble-like surface) from the adjacent mountain.

Iranian tour operators ask government to issue visas for vaccinated travelers

TOURISM TEHRAN – Head of the Iranian Tour Operators Association Ebrahim Pourfaraj has asked the government to issue tourist visas for the international applicants who have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

“The Ministry of Health and the National Headquarters for Coronavirus Control can at least agree that the international tourists who have received the [second dose of] coronavirus vaccine would be allowed to enter Iran,” Pourfaraj said.

He also lamented that the continuation of such a trend would result in losing international tourist markets more than before. “Or at least they should make it clear so that we can respond appropriately to foreign companies and tourists to not to miss the international tourist markets more than before.”

Earlier this month, he said that the reasonable prices of Iran tours are expected to bring back the boom into the tourism sector of the country in the post coronavirus era. “Attractive tour plans are also being prepared for those who are eager to explore the historical attractions and natural wonders of the ancient country and want to experience a vacation here,” Pourfaraj said.

He also expressed hope that international tour operators and companies who have worked with their Iranian counterparts for years, would put Iran back on the world’s travel route again, considering the facilities they can get at cheaper prices than in other countries.

Referring to health tourism as a popular branch in Iran, he noted that medical services in Iran are provided at



a lower price than what may be offered at double the price in other countries. Back in January, he announced that the tourist flow from across the world to Iran will return to normal in 2022.

Although there are requests for traveling to Iran in the current year (2021), most travel agencies and tour operators believe that the flow will go back to normal in the next year, he explained. “Beginning mass vaccination against the coronavirus will provide better and safe conditions for international travels in 2022.”

Last November, the World Tourism Organization announced that international

tourist arrivals to Iran plunged 72% during the first eight months of 2020 when compared to 2019, highlighting the severe impact of COVID-19 as the main factor.

Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan in October warned that Iran’s cultural heritage and tourism will be in a critical situation if the crises caused by the outbreak of the coronavirus continue. Last August, Mounesan said that Iran’s tourism has suffered a loss of 12 trillion rials (some \$2.85 billion) since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic.

Furthermore, the minister also noted that the coronavirus pandemic should not bring traveling to a complete standstill. “Corona is a fact, but can the virus stop tourism? Certainly not. For us, the coronavirus is a new experience in dealing with crises that teaches tourism experts around the world how to deal with such a disaster, and thankfully governments are turning this into an opportunity for better planning.” Smart and responsible traveling should replace “do not travel” recommendations, the minister stressed, adding: “In our country, Corona has caused problems in the tourism industry and the worrying point is the continuation of this trend.”

“We are well aware of what the National Headquarters for Coronavirus Control proclaims [the health protocols], hence as a proposal, we have formulated some smart, responsible travel packages by the implementation of which we could have secure travels,” the minister said. He has repeatedly announced that his ministry is in full coordination with the Ministry of Health for strictly implementing health protocols in travel destinations, hospitality centers, and museums, amongst others, underlining that “people’s health is our priority.”

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

COVID-19 inflicts \$1.1 billion in losses on Isfahan tourism

TOURISM TEHRAN – The tourism industry of Isfahan province has suffered a loss of some 48,000 billion rials (about \$1.1 billion at the official rate of 42,000 rials per dollar) since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, a provincial tourism official announced on Sunday.

“Over the past year, hotels, travel agencies, and tourism destinations suffered 4,000 billion rials each month on average. However, the damages inflicted by the virus to other related sections such as recreational centers, transport businesses have not been taken into account,” Heydar Sadeqi said.

According to available statistics and information, the number of tourists in Isfahan province this year decreased by 90% compared to the past year and the occupancy rate of hotels and accommodation centers reached an average of 10%, the official said.

Isfahan province has some 150 hotels, 444 eco-lodge units, 70 traditional hotels, 150 inns, 230 guest houses, he said. Soaked in a rich history and culture, Isfahan was once a crossroads of international trade and diplomacy in Iran. Now, it is one of Iran’s top tourist destinations for good reasons. The ancient city is filled with many architectural wonders such as unmatched Islamic buildings, bazaars, museums, Persian gardens, and tree-lined boulevards. It’s a city for walking, getting lost in its mazing bazaars, dozing in beautiful gardens, and meeting people.

“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 Ali-Asghar Mounesan said last month. “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.

The government had previously allocated a total of 500 trillion rials (about \$12 billion) to the corona-affected sectors, of which 200 trillion rials (\$4.7 billion) will be given to the health ministry and the rest will be spent on other sectors, he explained. Last month, the minister announced that the national budget bill for the next calendar year (starting on March 20) has proposed 70 trillion rials (about \$1.7 billion) to support tourism businesses affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

If the budget receives parliament’s approval, it will be injected into different sectors of the tourism industry, which has taken a major hit from the coronavirus outbreak over the previous months, he noted. 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.

Government’s care and support packages

In late October, the deputy tourism minister, Vali Teymouri, announced that a new support package to pay loans to businesses affected by the coronavirus pandemic has been approved. Depending on the type and activity of the businesses, they could benefit from at least 160 million rials (\$3,800) to nine billion rials (\$214,000) of bank loans with a 12-percent interest rate, he said.

The loans will be allocated to tourist guides, travel



agencies, tourism transport companies, tourism educational institutions, eco-lodges and traditional accommodations, hotels, apartment hotels, motels, and guesthouses as well as traditional accommodation centers, tourism complexes, and recreational centers, the official explained.

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

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

Rey historical sites, premises being cleaned prior to Iranian new year

HERITAGE TEHRAN – A cleaning project has been commenced on various historical sites and tourist destinations which are scattered across the ancient town of Rey; now attached to the Iranian capital.

The fire temple of Rey, which covers thousands of square meters in area, was cleaned during the first day of the campaign, Rey’s tourism chief, Noruz Taqipour, said on Saturday.

Rashkan Castle, Cheshmeh-Ali, and Naghareh Khaneh Tower are amongst the sites scheduled for the project, the official added.



In preparation for Noruz, nationwide Iranians spring-clean every nook and cranny of their homes. The debris is swept away, carpets and curtains are washed, silverware is polished, and windows cleaned to a sparkle. The spring cleaning, known as Khouneh Tekouni in Persian, is preceded by decorating the house with fragrant plants such as daffodils, hyacinths, and roses.

Rey was one of the capital cities of the Parthian empire (3rd century BC–3rd century CE) and it was captured by the Muslim Arabs in 641 CE. During the reign of the Muslim caliph al-Mahdi in the 8th century, the city grew in importance until it was rivaled in

western Asia only by Damascus and Baghdad.

According to Britannica, Islamic writers described it as a city of extraordinary beauty, built largely of fired brick and brilliantly ornamented with blue faience (glazed earthenware). It continued to be an important city and was briefly a capital under the rule of the Seljuqs, but in the 12th century, it was weakened by the fierce quarrels of rival religious sects. In 1220 the city was almost destroyed by the Mongols, and its inhabitants were massacred. Most of the survivors of the massacre moved to nearby Tehran, and the deserted remnants of Rey soon fell into complete ruin.

Restoration works aim to prepare Sassanid sites for UNESCO tag

HERITAGE TEHRAN – The cultural heritage directorate of Kermanshah has ratified restoration projects for five Sassanid-era sites located in the western Iranian province.

“Five Sassanid-era sites in Kermanshah will undergo restoration projects as part of a long-term plan, which seeks to have them registered on UNESCO World Heritage list,” a provincial tourism official announced on Saturday.

Kermanshah was founded in the 4th century CE by Bahram IV of the Sasanian dynasty (224 CE–651), which is of very high importance in the history of Iran. Under Sassanids, Persian art and architecture experienced a general renaissance. Architecture often took grandiose proportions such as palaces at Ctesiphon, Firuzabad, and



Sarvestan that are amongst highlights of the ensemble.

Crafts such as metalwork and gem-engraving grew highly sophisticated, yet scholarship was encouraged by the state. In those years, works from both the East and West were translated into Pahlavi, the language of the Sassanians.

Rock-carved sculptures and bas-reliefs on abrupt limestone cliffs are widely deemed as characteristics and striking relics of the Sassanian art, top examples of which can be traced at Bishapur, Naqsh-e Rostam, and Naqsh-e Rujab in southern Iran.

In 2018, UNESCO added an ensemble of Sassanian historical cities in southern Iran -- titled “Sassanid Archaeological Landscape of Fars Region” -- to its World Heritage list.

Improving social emergency services on agenda

SOCIETY TEHRAN – A bill on the structure and duties of the Social Emergency Organization has been drafted to reduce social harm in informal settlements and suburban areas, Vahid Qobadi-Dana, head of the Welfare Organization, said on Sunday.

The social emergency management system is also ready to be unveiled, which will provide accurate statistics and proper planning in the field of social emergency, he added, IRNA reported.

“Some 360 centers providing emergency social services are operating across the country, which has reduced social harms to a great extent.”

As per the Sixth Five-Year National Development Plan (2016-2021), emergency social services centers were planned to be set up in the cities having over 50,000 residents in the first year of the plan, and in the second year, these centers have been launched in the cities requiring social



interventions and reduced social harms. These centers are working in order to control and reduce divorce, child and elderly abuse and protect the deprived, he said.

adding that there are 3,500 emergency social services forces including psychologists, social workers, and sociologists.

In [the Iranian calendar year] 1398 (March 2019-March 2020), the social emergency provided services to 1.1 million people, and in the first nine months of the current [Iranian calendar] year, it provided services to over 900,000 people.

The social emergency must be considered to enforce the Child and Adolescent Protection Act, and the establishment of a police force for children has been on agenda, he concluded.

These centers will be set up on the outskirts of the cities and areas where the residents are suffering social marginalization. People can call hotline 123 to report any social harms they witness including child abuse, suicidal behaviors, street children, and family violence. Experts at centers for emergency social services offer phone consultations and attend the scene of violence and abuse in emergency cases.



SOCIETY TEHRAN – One hundred saplings were planted in commemoration of Iranian celebrated women of the century in Tehran on the occasion of the National Week of Natural Resources (March 6-13), IRNA reported on Sunday.

Saplings planted to commemorate ‘women of the century’

Nooshafarin Ansari, secretary of the Iranian Children’s Book Council, Badr al-Zaman Gharib, Iranian linguist and winner of the Iranian Science and Culture Hall of Fame Award, Simin Daneshvar, author and first female novelist in Iran, Parvin Etesami, first Iranian poet and librarian, Tahereh Saffarzadeh, translator of Quran in Persian and English, Toubia Kermani, prominent professor of Islamic philosophy and the first female cultural advisor were among the inspiring women of the century.

By planting saplings in the name of these women, there is a message to convey that those who have been influential in their own lives can be an effective role model for others after their lives, Zahra Behrouz-Azar, director of women affairs of Tehran Municipality said.

Saplings planted naming after artists such as Nozhat Amiri, musician and first lady conductor of the National Orchestra, Mehrabano Tawfiq, musician and the first female faculty member in the field of Iranian music, in addition to famous women in the field of science such as Alnough Tarian, mother of Iranian astronomy, Maryam Mirzakhani, mathematician and winner of the Fields Medal, and Effat Tejaratchi, the first Iranian female pilot, she said.

National Tree Planting Day is annually celebrated on the fifteenth day of Esfand, the last month on the Iranian calendar, which usually corresponds with March 5. The day marks the beginning of National Week of Natural Resources.

Turan Mirhadi, mother of children’s literature in Iran,

Giving new life to central Iranian plateau

→ The negative impacts include salinization and acidification of the donor basins, damage to the ecological environment of the donor basins, and both sides of the conveying channel system, an increase of water consumption in the recipient basins, and spread of diseases, etc.

Pros and cons
Some experts believe that these projects entailing economic and environmental

burden are no solution to droughts, and demanded the water transfer projects to be dismissed due to the irreparable damages to the environment namely deforestation, wildlife habitat destruction, biodiversity degradation, improper land change use, and contaminated seawater.

Mehdi Zare, a seismic expert, says human intervention which speeds up climate change, is one of the major threats to today’s

human life and even the future. One of the threats is that transferring water to dry areas increases the population burden in those areas while imposing unsustainable development where there is no suitable climate for such a concentration.

He went on to note that a mix of rapid population growth, disproportionate population distribution, inefficient agricultural methods, mismanagement, and thirst for

development are the main reasons behind water shortages.

This is while, some other experts, including the Department of Environment (DOE) chief Issa Kalantari, support water transfer projects, arguing that to provide the amount of water needed for drinking purposes and industries, there is no choice but to use seawater, the incredible and abundant resources, now and in the future.

Over half of women say wellbeing damaged by home-schooling children during lockdown

More than half of women who home-schooled a children during the UK’s last lockdown say their mental health and wellbeing, according to new research suggests classroom closures took an uneven toll on parents depending on gender.

Surveys by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) found 53 per cent of female parents felt classroom closures were taking their toll on their wellbeing, compared to 45 per cent of men polled in late January and early February.

The findings reveal a sharp rise from the one in three women who said the government’s decision to shut schools to contain the spread of coronavirus was damaging their wellbeing last spring, when one in five men reported the same.

Boris Johnson ordered the closure of all primary and secondary schools across England in January, with lessons moving online for all pupils apart from the vulnerable and the children of key workers.

Researchers found women spent 55 per cent more time than men on unpaid childcare during the first national lockdown but this figure had surged to 99 per cent in September and October last year.

The ONS also said men and women had experienced “significantly different levels of anxiety, loneliness and worry about the coronavirus, and depressive symptoms”.

Vivienne Hayes, chief executive of the Women’s Resource



Centre, the leading national umbrella organisation for the women’s sector in the UK, told The Independent: “The current pandemic environment is stressful enough for everyone. But if you are a poorer woman, then the pressure is enormous.

“Not only have you got to feed your children, but also home school them, and give them emotional love and care. You are also worrying about your own job and income - if you’ve got one.

“If you are looking after your children, how are you going to keep working. It is not possible to manage this unless you have considerable financial resources. Yet again women are being put under crushing pressure because of sexist government policymaking.”

Ms Hayes noted there had been various research pointing to the disproportionate responsibility women take for look-

ing after children or caring for elderly or disabled relatives.

Victoria Benson, chief executive of single parent charity Gingerbread, said: “This data shows mothers have been hit hard by the pandemic but it doesn’t tell the full story.

“Single parents, 90 per cent of whom are women, have been hit even harder. They have faced a triple penalty of lost income, lost child maintenance, and increased expenses while children have been at home.

“In addition, single parents are unable to share home-schooling responsibilities and cannot juggle childcare as couple parents can. We know that their wellbeing and mental health have been severely affected by this.”

She called for ministers to acknowledge the needs of single parents and make sure policies safeguard vulnerable families who are “already disproportionately exposed to poverty and all the disadvantage this brings.”

The findings come after a recent study found women are twice as likely to need time off work with no pay to look after children due to schools closing.

Research, conducted by Fawcett Society and Women’s Budget Group, found 15 per cent of mothers say they would have to take time off work while not being paid as a result of schools shutting their doors or their child getting sick, whereas only eight per cent of fathers reported the same.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

Clean air days double for Tehraners this year

Tehrani citizens have experienced a 2-fold rise in the number of clean air days since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2018) compared to the same period last year, an official with Department of Environment has said.

Since the aforementioned period, clean air stayed in the capital for 27 days, while last year, during the same period, Tehraners breathed clean air for only 14 days, IRNA quoted Shina Ansari as saying on Sunday.

Also, the air quality of the capital was healthy for 262 days, while being unhealthy for sensitive groups for 59 days, she said, adding that compared to the same period last year, Tehran’s air quality reached healthy levels for 229 days and 97 days of unhealthy for sensitive groups has hit the capital.

تهرانی‌ها امسال دو برابر بیشتر روزهای پاک داشتند

مدیرکل دفتر پایش فراگیر سازمان حفاظت محیط زیست گفت: تهرانی‌ها از ابتدای امسال تا امروز (۱۲ اسفند ۹۷) نسبت به مدت مشابه سال گذشته، دو برابر هوای پاک تنفس کردند.

شینا انصاری روز یکشنبه در گفت‌وگو با ایرنا افزود: تهران از ابتدای امسال تا امروز، ۲۷ روز هوای پاک داشته در حالیکه سال گذشته در مدت مشابه، تعداد روزهای پاک ۱۴ روز بوده است.

وی اظهار داشت: همچنین از ابتدای امسال تاکنون، کیفیت هوای پایتخت برای ۲۶۲ روز قابل قبول و ۵۹ روز ناسالم برای گروه‌های حساس بوده که در مدت مشابه سال گذشته به ترتیب ۲۲۹ و ۹۷ روز بوده که هشت روز نیز ناسالم برای تمام گروه‌ها بوده است.

4,500 ha of Golestan forests undergo reforestation

SOCIETY TEHRAN – A reforestation project has been implemented on 4,500 hectares of the north-eastern province of Golestan, which was exposed to desertification due to drought and excessive grazing, head of Golestan natural resources and watershed management organization has said.

“During the last three years, we have implemented reforestation plans on 16,500 hectares of lands at risk of desertification in Golestan province with the participation of related organizations,” IRNA quoted Abdol-Rahim Lotfi as saying on Sunday.

According to Lotfi, 300,000 hectares of natural resources are exposed to desertification and become a sedimentary plain, 116,000 hectares of which, with high intensity of dust generation, are a priority in the implementation of these plans.

During the last 30 years, climate change such as increasing temperature, decreasing rainfall, increasing evaporation, and rainfall fluctuations in Golestan province have intensified the negative consequences and resulted in poor pastures and sand and dust storms, he explained.

This border province has a climatic diversity from temperate to semi-arid and has a variety of natural resources including high mountains, flat plains, lowlands, saline areas, and the sea.

The lands under the natural resources and watershed management organization’s control are 1.3 million hectares, which include 452,000 hectares of forests, 862,000 hectares of pastures, 20,000 hectares of coastal lands.

Golestan, the oldest national park in Iran, is located in this province, which is a unique refuge for wildlife.

Stretched to 87,402 hectares, it is home to one-seventh of Iran’s plant species, one-third of all birds, and half of the country’s mammals, hosting 1,350 plant species and 302 wildlife species. It has been listed as one of the top fifty ecosystems on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1930.

So far, 150 species of birds have been identified in Golestan National Park. Golden Eagle, eastern imperial eagle, saker falcon, falcon, and bearded vulture are among the endangered birds of the park. Other birds of Golestan National Park include common pheasants, shrikes, griffon vulture, rosy starling, typical warblers, wheatears, finches, and common blackbirds.

The park holds a share of 3 species of amphibians and 24 species of reptiles.

Malaria devastated humans far earlier than expected

New bioarchaeological research shows malaria has threatened human communities for more than 7000 years, earlier than when the onset of farming was thought to have sparked its devastating arrival.

Lead author Dr Melandri Vlok from the Department of Anatomy, University of Otago, says this ground-breaking research, published today in Scientific Reports, changes the entire understanding of the relationship humans have had with malaria, still one of the deadliest diseases in the world.

“Until now we’ve believed malaria became a global threat to humans when we turned to farming, but our research shows in at least Southeast Asia this disease was a threat to human groups well before that.

“This research providing a new cornerstone of malaria’s evolution with humans is a great achievement by the entire team,” Dr Vlok says.

Still a serious health issue, as recently as 2019 the World Health Organization reported an estimated 229 million cases of malaria around the world, with 67 per cent of malaria deaths in children under the age of 5 years.

While malaria is invisible in the archaeological record, the disease has changed the evolutionary history of human groups causing consequences visible in prehistoric skeletons. Certain genetic mutations can lead to the inheritance of Thalassemia, a devastating genetic disease that in its milder form provides some protection against malaria.

Deep in humanity’s past, the genes for malaria became more common in Southeast Asia and the Pacific where it remains a threat, but up until now the origin of malaria has not been pinpointed. This research has identified thalassemia in an ancient hunter-gatherer archaeological site from Vietnam dated to approximately 7000 years ago, thousands of years before the transition to farming in the region.

In some parts of the world, slashing and burning in agricultural practice would have created pools of stagnant water attracting mosquitos carrying malaria, but in Southeast Asia these mosquitos are common forest dwellers exposing humans to the disease long before agriculture was adopted.

The study Forager and farmer evolutionary adaptations to malaria evidenced by 7000 years of thalassemia in Southeast Asia is a result of combined efforts from years of investigation by a team of researchers led by Professor Marc Oxenham (currently at the University of Aberdeen) and including researchers from University of Otago, the Australian National University (ANU), James Cook University, Vietnam Institute of Archaeology and Sapporo Medical University.

LET’S LEARN PERSIAN

(Part 146)

(Source: saadifoundation.ir)

wish	آرزو	
imam	امام	
offspring of an imam	امامزاده : پسر امام	
without; -less	بی پیشوند	
tasteless	بی مزه	امامزاده آبو جعفر
saltless	بی نمک	
to cook	پختن - پز	
sour	ترش	
even	حتی /hattai/	امامزاده عبداللّه /h/
to pray	دعا کردن	
pilgrimage	زیارت	
to go on pilgrimage; to visit	زیارت کردن	
sugar	شکر	امامزاده قاسم

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GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Kindness is a mark of faith and whoever is not kind has no faith.

Prophet Muhammad (S)

Chile Lebu festival picks five shorts from Iran

A R T TEHRAN — Five Iranian movies are competing in the Lebu International Film Festival, which opened in the Chilean city on March 13.

"The Kites" by Seyyed Payam Hosseini, "Passport" by Kusha Afrasiabi, "Recess" by Navid Nikkha-Azad and "Yellow" by Sahar Mahmudi have been selected to be screened in the international short fiction film competition.



Karo Qavami acts in a scene from "The Kites" by Seyyed Payam Hosseini.

"King Sand" by Zahra Shafiei-Dehaqani is competing in the short animation films section of the festival, which will run until March 21.

"The Kites" is about a girl who is playing on the green slopes of a valley in Kordestan, on the border between Iran and Iraq, when her kite is suddenly swept across the river by the wind. Three boys on the other side see her calling for help, but cannot make out what she is saying; she is just too far away.

Separated by the river, the children try to communicate with each other — yet between them lie the explosive remnants of past wars.

"Passport" tells the story of a prestigious doctor who returns to his office building after a few days off. But something strange is happening in the office building. The doctor, who enters his neighbor's apartment to find out the truth, subconsciously enters an adventure that he has unintentionally started! And the more he tries to get out of this game, the more he sinks! Some of the threads are tied up at the end.

In "Recess", Sahar, a rebel, decides to run away from school, disguise herself and go to a football game.

"Yellow" is about an 11-year-old girl living in cultural and financial poverty who is forced by her father to marry a 50-year-old man.

"Shah Shen" revolves around the sandmen, who are born from the sand and fill their sandbags, when a dandelion comes from the sky as a sign of life and beauty. However, many people in the arena are unwilling to see the beauty and enjoy its resonance. They keep collecting sand but have a limited time to come and go.

Over 200 films are competing in the 2021 edition of the Lebu International Film Festival, which is the most important Chilean short film event.

Due to the pandemic, the festival is organized online this year.

"We believe that holding the festival online is a tremendous opportunity, since it will allow us to reach audiences from all over the world, while previously, many of them could not travel and participate in the different activities of the event in person," Lebu director Claudia Pino has said.

Movies from Iran to compete in New Delhi festival

A R T TEHRAN — Iranian movies "Shahre Qesseh Cinema", "That Night's Train" and "Taxi Is Here" will be competing in the 4th New Delhi Film Festival, the organizers have announced.



A scene from "That Night's Train" by Iranian director Hamidreza Qotbi.

"Shahre Qesseh Cinema" by Keivan Alimohammadi centers on Davud, a projector repairman for a movie theater and a movie maniac who falls in love with a girl whose father is a big opponent of cinema. He tries his best to gain her father's approval.

"That Night's Train" by Hamidreza Qotbi is about a writer who also works as a teacher. She narrates the story of an orphan girl to her students. Each student continues the story with her/his own imagination, and this gives the teacher material for her new story. The film was crowned best at the 49th Roshd International Film Festival in Tehran in November 2019.

"Taxi is Here" is a short by Sara Aqababayan. The 4th edition of the festival will go online and the winners will be announced on March 28.

Tabriz opens museum for sculptor Ahad Hosseini

A R T TEHRAN — A museum dedicated to the works of the late sculptor Ahad Hosseini was inaugurated in the northwestern Iranian city of Tabriz on Sunday to house artworks by the 76-year-old Iranian Azarbaijani sculptor and painter, Ahad Hosseini.

The museum, also known as Heidar Baba Art Center, has been built by the Municipality of Tabriz. The center is located in the Maqbarat al-Shoara Complex.

The artworks were previously preserved at the Azarbaijan Museum in Tabriz, which is the capital of East Azarbaijan.

"Tabriz has always been a home to many great artists and outstanding cultural figures, and the management of the city has always regarded the artists and figures," Tabriz Mayor Iraj Shahin-Baher said earlier.

Born in Tabriz, Hosseini worked as a teacher-soldier during his military service in a small mountain village located on the Caspian coast. A sense of loneliness in this remote village drove him to find his talent in sculpture.

His first works of sculpture were of



Art aficionados visit the Ahad Hosseini Museum during the hours after its inauguration in the northwestern Iranian city of Tabriz on March 14, 2021. (ISNA/Maryam Ebrahimi)

Einstein, Bertrand Russell, Beethoven and several other world-renowned figures. He then worked for a short period at the atelier of prominent Iranian sculptor Parviz Tanavoli in Tehran.

He left Iran for Italy in 1972 to study art at the Accademia di Belle Arti (Academy of Fine Arts) of Florence.

After returning to his hometown, he concentrated upon his work and created 12 sculptures he called "Misery Around the World", which he presented to the Azarbaijan Museum. The works are made of bronze and consist of different depictions of human misery.

He then chose to live in Turkey, making some sculptures for Istanbul University. His work "Thinking Man" has been set up at the Faculty of Political Sciences at Istanbul University.

From 1984 until 1990, Hosseini studied and worked at the (Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs) (School of Decorative Arts) in Paris.

His works have been showcased in many major cultural centers in France.



A combination photo shows a number of publications honored by the first edition of the Islamic Revolution History Book Awards.

Top Islamic Revolution history books honored

→1 The story of the book is recounted by Yunes, a teenage boy whose mother is playing host to a group of people coming from the city to their village. They plan to learn carpet weaving from her to make a carpet featuring an image of Empress Farah Pahlavi.

In the non-competitive section, "The Chronicle of the Islamic Revolution" by Mirza Baqer Aliannejad won the first prize in the general section.

"Political Story, Story of the Islamic Revolution" by Mohammad Hanif and "The Encyclopedia of Mottos in the Islamic Revolution" took second and third prizes.

"Wolf Age" by Amir-Hossein Fardi was selected as best historical novel.

The novel is a sequel to "Esmail" that tells the story of a man who, out of the blue, runs into the chaotic

environment of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 in Tehran. The story of "Wolf Age" takes place in Sabalan Mountains in northwestern Iran.

Mohammadreza Sharafi-Khabushan's novel "Romance in a Van Gogh Style" won second prize. It tells the love story between Alborz, the son of a housekeeper at the mansion of Khosro Khani, an artist, and his daughter Nazli. Due to his love for Nazli, Alborz encounters mysterious events leading to Khosro Khani.

Third prize in this category went to "Maftun and Firuzeh" by Saeideh Tashakkori.

In the children's literature section, "Fifth Chapter: Silence" by Mohammadreza Bairami was picked as best novel.

"End of the Dark Night" by Jafar Ebrahimi and "Strait of Raven" by Hadi Hakimian won second and third prizes.

Iranology Foundation to host intl. conference on Persian poet Nezami Ganjavi

CULTURE TEHRAN — The Iranology Foundation will host a virtual international conference on Persian poet Nezami Ganjavi (1141-1209) opening today.

A number of Iranologists and experts on Nezami from Iran, India, Georgia, Russia, Spain and Azerbaijan are expected to attend the conference, Hamed Foruzan, an official from the foundation announced in a press release published on Sunday.

The Iranian lecturers are the Iranology Foundation director, Ayatollah Saeed Mohammad Khamenei, as well as academics Hosseinali Qobadi, Nasser Nikubakht and Najmeh Dorri, he said.

"Differences between the Cultural Borders with Political and Geographical Borders",



Mausoleum of Persian poet Nezami Ganjavi in Ganja, Azerbaijan.

"World Messages of Nezami Ganjavi" and "Nezami Ganjavi, a Turning Point of the Poetic System in the Realm of Persian Language" are among the topics to be discussed.

Akhlaque Ahmad Ansari, from Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, Spanish scholar Joaquin Rodriguez Vargas, and Bartaia Nomadi from Akaki Tsereteli State University will also be discussing the influence of Nezami on the world poets and literati.

Nezami Ganjavi, who lived during the 12th century, is the greatest romantic epic poet in Persian literature who brought a colloquial and realistic style to the Persian epic.

The influence of Nezami's work on the subsequent development of Persian literature has been enormous.

Nezami's reputation rests on his Khamseh, which is a pentology of poems written in Masnavi verse form (rhymed couplets) and totaling 30,000 couplets.

These five poems include the didactic

work Makhzan ol-Asrar (The Treasury of Mysteries), three traditional love stories of Khosrow and Shirin, Leili and Majnun, and Haft Paykar, and the Eskandarnameh, which records the adventures of Alexander the Great.

There are various versions of the Khamseh in Iranian libraries, but the two versions kept at the Central Library of the University of Tehran and the library of the Shahid Motahhari School and Mosque in Tehran were inscribed on UNESCO's Memory of the World Register list in 2011.

The stories in Nezami's poems have provided the Persian art of the miniature with an abundance of subject matter. His Khamseh together with Ferdowsi's Shahnameh were the most frequently illustrated literary works.

"The Bright Pen" second series published

A R T TEHRAN — Iran's Dramatic Arts Center has published the second series of "The Bright Pen" containing a collection of 12 plays, the center announced in a press release on Sunday.

The collection was unveiled during a ceremony attended by Deputy Culture Minister for Artistic Affairs Seyyed Mojtaba Hosseini, Iran's Dramatic Arts Center director Qader Ashena and some of the writers.

Speaking at the ceremony, Hosseini said, "The project 'Bright Pen' is one of the good events in the field of playwriting. In each land where literature is taken seriously, the grounds for the appearance of other arts are also provided. I hope this project continues and we witness more of the dramatic literature," he said.

"We need to consider art as a necessity, and an influential element in order to remove the problems," he added.

Hosseini added that Ashena has read the books, and, calling them very satisfactory, encouraged me to read them during the Noruz holiday.

For his part, Ashena said that the rich Iranian culture and civilization form a good foundation for creating and writing plays.

He added that the writers tried to select a good variety of stories that most clearly reflect social concerns.



This photo shows copies of some of the books of the second series of "The Bright Pen" published by Iran's Dramatic Arts Center.

"I have read every single word of the plays in this collection and I have enjoyed them all. And I believe all of them are good for performances," he added.

He hoped to witness more plays and more performances

in the coming year.

Theatrical figure Saeid Asadi, who is also the director of publication of Iran's Dramatic Arts Center, said that the central theme of last year's collection of Bright Pen was Sacred Defense (1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war), but this year the theme was open in order to collect a variety of plays with different themes.

"The collection contains plays by both veterans and young writers, something that helps to introduce new playwrights," he added.

Theatrical figure Mehrdad Rayani-Makhsus, who had collaborated as the director of the project in the first edition, also said that he is happy that the center has seriously followed the process for the publications of the collection.

"I am well aware of all the plays published in this collection, and express thanks to all the friends and colleagues who sympathetically contributed to the formation and implementation of this project," he concluded.

"Depressed Penguins" by Mohammad Mir Aliakbari, "Gisoo" by Bahram Sadeqi Mazidi, "We Are Dreaming" by Arash Abbasi, "Hand" by Mehdi Zia Chamani, "Nader Shah" by Hamidreza Naemi, "Thirty Three Years Later" by Mahdieh Hosseini and "Desire" by Payam Larian are among the published plays.

Winter's "Boy Who Went Magic" comes into Iranian bookstores

CULTURE TEHRAN — A Persian translation of A. P. Winter's novel "The Boy Who Went Magic" has recently been published by Fatemi Publications in Tehran.

The book has been translated into Persian by Behrang Mojani.

A chain of fantastical mishaps in schoolboy Bert's dull life spiral out of control, but then he's rescued by Finch, a plucky girl-adventurer with metal legs. Soon they're sailing through the clouds on a pirate airship bound for the forgotten land of Ferenor. Magic is their destination, for reasons Bert will soon discover.

Winter's debut novel is a charming tale about long-hidden magic and the extraordinary adventure that unfolds when a naive schoolboy unleashes his extraordinary powers. Bert's hum-drum

existence spins dangerously out-of-control when a school trip to a new museum opens a doorway to another world.

Intrigued by the magical artifacts on display, Bert touches an ancient mirror and finds himself transported to a parallel universe.

After becoming entangled with 'The Professor', Goodrich Roberts (a pirate intent on looting certain artifacts) and having a vision of the sinister Prince Voss, a confused and jittery Bert returns to school only to find another adversary waiting: Cassius is a Quaestor, a government agent appointed to investigate the strange events at the museum.

While liberating his own precarious situation he realizes that there is a long-standing quarrel between the Prince and the Quaestor. Although not fully understanding



Front cover of the Persian translation of A. P. Winter's "The Boy Who Went Magic".

what has gone on he hears enough to work out that the Prince is furious at the royals loss of power, and that Cassius is equally

determined that the government—not the royals—are the true lawmakers in Pennvellyn. As Bert learns more about his mysterious past and becomes further embroiled in the tale of the abandoned magical land of Ferenor, he finds some surprising allies and a new enthusiasm for adventure.

This book plays on the idea that magic is distrusted and forbidden. This is an idea that has been used before but the story fizzles along at a decent pace, and in Bert we have an amiable and intriguing hero.

Winter is a full-time writer and part-time professional chocolate taster living in the city of York. He recently completed a master's degree in creative writing. In his spare time, he enjoys long distance running, martial arts, learning new recipes and avoiding the weather with his cat.