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JCPOA Joint Commission to meet in Vienna, there won't be direct Iran-U.S. talks

TEHRAN - Officials from Tehran and Washington will travel to Vienna on Tuesday as part of efforts to revive the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and P5+1 countries, though they will not hold direct talks, diplomats said on Friday.

The decision was taken after the Joint Commission of the JCPOA – the official name for the 2015 nuclear deal – which is led by the European Union foreign policy chief held a virtual meeting on Friday.

Analysts said even without face-to-face talks, which Tehran has ruled out, the presence of both of Iran and the United States in Vienna would mark a step forward in efforts to bring both sides back into compliance with the accord.

"Iran and the U.S. will be in the same town, but not the same room," a European diplomatic source said. A Western diplomat said a shuttle diplomacy approach would be adopted.

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IMF should respond to Iran's legal request: CBI governor

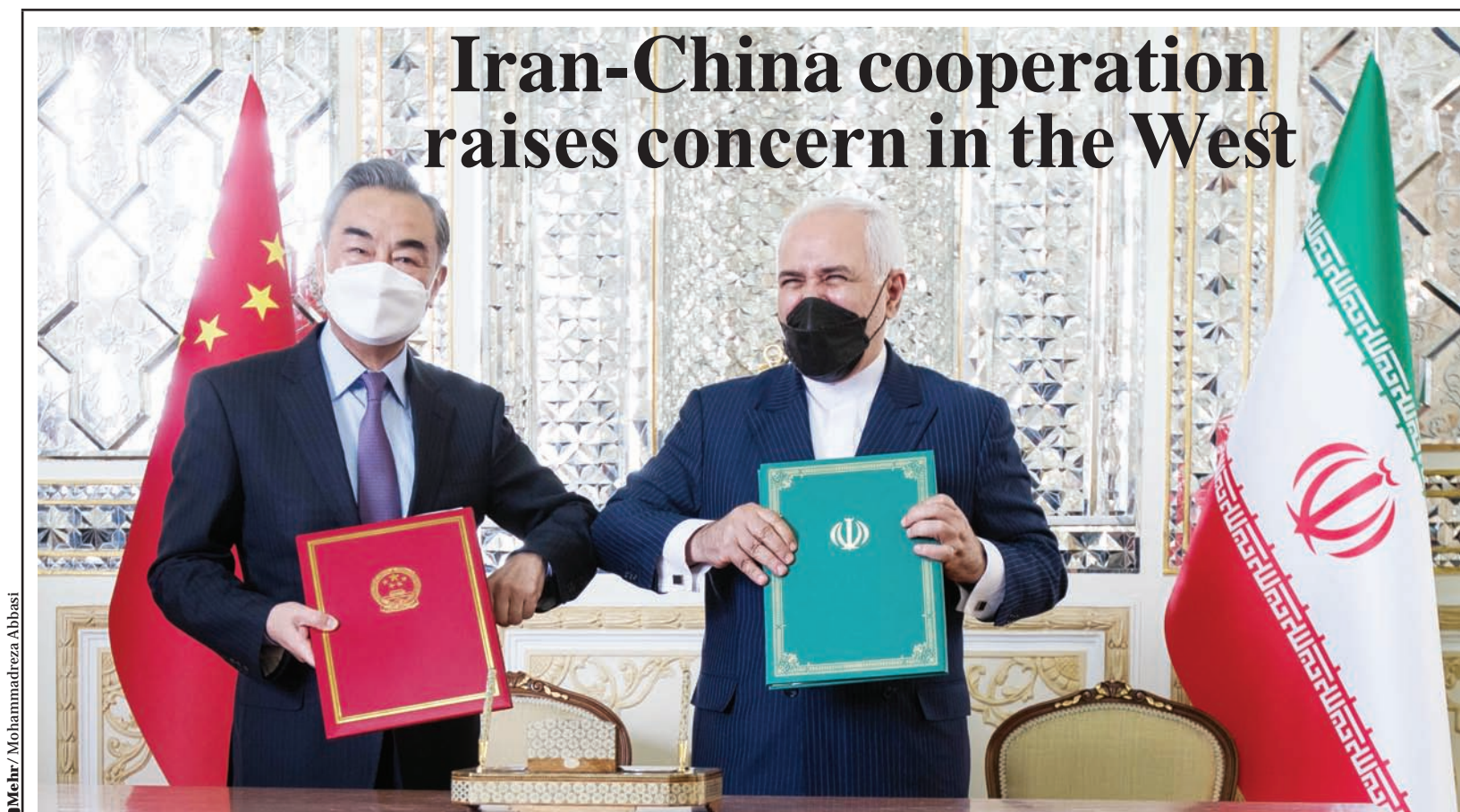
TEHRAN- The governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) said that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) should respond to Iran's legal request.

Abdolnaser Hemmati said, "We expect the International Monetary Fund to respond to Iran's legal request as soon as possible, without discrimination or intrusion or pressure from the United States".

He made the remarks in a virtual meeting held on Thursday on the sidelines of the 2021 Spring Meetings of the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund.

During the meeting, which was participated by the governors general of the central banks of the MENAP region, the CBI governor said since the outbreak of the coronavirus,

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Iran-China cooperation raises concern in the West

TEHRAN – Over history, Iran and China have always enjoyed good relations but their recent cooperation deal will upgrade their ties to a strategic level, something that the West never wanted to see.

History took a new turn on March 27 when Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi signed a document on a long-term cooperation plan that would boost Tehran-Beijing relations in various fields

to a new, strategic level.

The plan, officially known as the "Comprehensive Cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the People's Republic of China," manifested a strategic decision by Iran.

"The document focuses on the capacities and perspectives for bilateral cooperation between the two countries in various areas including economic and cultural fields, among others.

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Promising future ahead of Iran football team

BY MASOUD HOSSEIN

Iran national football team showed a promising performance against Syria in a friendly match held in Tehran on Tuesday as part of preparation for the 2022 World Cup qualifiers.

It was Dragan Skocic's third match in charge of Iran. The team had previously defeated Uzbekistan and Bosnia and Herzegovina in two friendly matches.

Iran look forward to participate in the FIFA World Cup for the third time in a row but they have a difficult task ahead since the remaining matches will be held at the centralized venue in Bahrain in June.

The 'Persian Leopards' are scheduled to play Hong Kong and Cambodia on June 3 and 7 in Manama. The matches against Bahrain and Iraq will be also held on June 11 and 15. For the match against Syria, Skocic showed that he is not afraid to blood young talent into his senior team. Jafar Salmani, Omid Noorafkan, Mehdi Tikhari and Mehdi Ghaedi, who are aged 24 and below, were invited to the team.

The Croat didn't call up veterans Masoud Shojaei and Ashkan Dejagah and it means that he is keen to build on the success of the previous warm-up matches. Even though some of the experts are not optimistic about Skocic's team in the qualifications, his outfit are talented enough to book a place at the final round of World Cup qualifications.

Iran are well-equipped to handle the four games since the team benefit from the players who are playing on a regular basis in their teams. Sardar Azmoun is a key member of Zenit, while Mehdi Taremi has played a key role in helping Porto win a place in the UEFA Champions League quarter-finals. Alireza Beiranvand also plays regularly at Antwerp.

The team could be even stronger by Alireza Jahanbakhsh and Saied Ezatollahi. Iran National Team need support for the four games. They should play one or two more friendly matches to prepare better for the Qualifiers.

Iran, who are going to continue their quest for a sixth World Cup appearance, sit five points behind leaders Iraq in Group C but having played one game fewer.

The eight group winners and four best runners-up will advance to the AFC Asian Cup China 2023 Finals and the final round of qualifying for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

Iranians mark Nature Day at home amid coronavirus fears

TEHRAN – As the government has imposed a ban on outdoor get-togethers, people in Iran celebrated the national festival of Nature Day, called Sizdah Bedar, to help curb the spread of the coronavirus.

Every year on the 13th day of spring, which is an official holiday in Iran known as the Nature Day, Iranian families go on a picnic at parks or in the countryside in celebration of the ancient festival.

To prevent the spread of coronavirus, authorities have closed all parks and public places in Iran on April 2 and have imposed severe penalties for picnicking. Iran's Health Ministry said on Thursday that the total number of coronavirus cases in the country has exceeded 1,897,000 and the death toll has reached 62,759.

While Iranians have always upheld the time-honored tradition on the thirteenth day of Noruz by spending the day outdoors,

the global coronavirus pandemic has forced people to stay home this year and observe self-isolation protocols in the fight against the viral disease.

'Sizdah' means thirteen, and 'Bedar' means to get rid of, bearing the meaning of 'getting rid of thirteen'. Sizdah Bedar also marks the end of Noruz celebrations, which begin on the first day of spring.

It is the second consecutive year that the virus has altered the age-old traditions. Also last year, in an act that was far different from the sole of the age-old Noruz traditions, a majority of people stayed home instead of coming together, visiting loved ones, or spending time in nature.

On the 13th day of Farvardin, which falls on April 2 in normal years and April 1 in leap years, every Iranian people try to spend and enjoy this day in the best possible way.

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U.S. pulls three Patriot anti-missile batteries from Persian Gulf region

The United States has removed at least three Patriot anti-missile batteries from the Persian Gulf region, in a first step under U.S. President Joe Biden to pull the U.S. forces away from West Asia.

One of the Patriot anti-missile batteries was removed from Saudi Arabia's Prince Sultan Air Base, which had been put in place in recent years to help protect American forces.

The changes come while Saudi Arabia has been targeted with drone attacks from the Yemeni forces in acts of retaliation against the Saudi war on Yemen.

Other U.S. military capabilities, including an aircraft carrier and surveillance systems, are being diverted from the region to answer military needs elsewhere across the world, the Wall Street Journal quoted US officials as claiming on Thursday.

According to the paper, an anti-ballistic missile defense system known as a Terminal

High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) was also proposed to be removed, but officials said it would remain in the region for now.

At the end of the Trump administration, there were about 50,000 U.S. troops in the region. As a result of the new move, several thousand U.S. troops are expected to leave the region over time.

The U.S. officials said the withdrawal is an effort to further reduce the U.S. posture in West Asia after decades of military engagement in the region.

The Journal said the changes come while Saudi Arabia endures rocket and drone attacks from inside Yemen.

U.S. reports say American leaders have realized that the kingdom is waging a losing war in Yemen and want Washington to desist from the conflict.

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'Fakhra' vaccine to be mass-produced by late May

TEHRAN – Iran will start mass production of home-grown 'Fakhra' vaccine for COVID-19 by the end of the third Iranian calendar month of Khordad (May 21).

Fakhra vaccine, named after martyred nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, was unveiled and started the clinical trial on March 16.

The first dose of the vaccine was injected into the son of martyr Fakhrizadeh.

The production of various diagnostic kits of COVID-19 and mobile specialized laboratories was the starting point of this fight.

The vaccine has been injected into 15 volunteers, IRNA quoted Ahmad Karimi, manager of Fakhra vaccine production project, as saying.

In the first phase, 135 volunteers will get the vaccine, he said, adding that the second phase will start 35 days later. The process of research and development of the Fakhra vaccine began in March 2020, by isolating the virus from among 35,000 samples of Iranian patients and performing various tests to identify the virus, so that the vaccine reached the experimental production stage in June 2020.

COVIRAN BAREKAT, the first coronavirus vaccine made by researchers at the Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam which was unveiled on December 29, 2020, started to be mass-produced on Monday.

The second Iranian coronavirus vaccine, Razi Cov Pars, started the clinical trial by injecting it into two volunteers during a ceremony on February 27.

On January 27, Health Minister Saeed Namaki said Iran will soon be one of the world's important manufacturers of the COVID-19 vaccine.



Industry, mining, trade projects worth over \$1b inaugurated in 5 provinces

TEHRAN- Iranian President Hassan Rouhani inaugurated some major projects of the Ministry of Industry, Mining, and Trade in five provinces via videoconference on Thursday.

The projects worth 45.3 trillion rials (about \$1.078 billion) were inaugurated in Fars, North Khorasan, Semnan, Qazvin, and Kerman provinces, creating jobs for 1,290 persons.

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Muslims have become the new scapegoats in Europe: historian

BY MOHAMMAD MAZHARI

TEHRAN - An American historian says Muslims have been used as scapegoats for the failures of European policies.

"In many ways, in contemporary Europe, Muslims have been unfairly blamed for the failures of recent European politics," Richard Wolin tells the Tehran Times. "They have become 'scapegoats' whom right-wing politicians - and, increasingly, politicians aligned with the center-right and center-left - have held accountable for numerous contemporary political impasses," Wolin notes.

While contemporary Europe claims equality, justice, and the rule of wisdom, the current situation that minorities, including Muslims, face reveal the true face of European demagogues.

The scholar says history is repeating itself. For example, the historian says, once the Jews were blamed for problems in Europe and now Muslims. "Today, there are few Jews remaining in Europe; consequently, Muslims have become the new scapegoats," Wolin emphasizes.

Following is the text of the interview:

How do you see Muslims' position in contemporary Europe?

In many ways, in contemporary Europe, Muslims have been unfairly blamed for the failures of recent European politics. They have become "scapegoats" whom right-wing politicians - and, increasingly, politicians aligned with the center-right and center-left - have held accountable for numerous contemporary political impasses. Many of these impasses are related to the unprecedented levels of social dislocation caused by globalization.

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Foes can't win war against Iran even in dreams: top general

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The enemies have realized that even in their dreams they cannot defeat Iran militarily, the IRGC chief said on Tuesday.

Referring to Saddam Hussein's war against Iran in the early years of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Major General Hossein Salami said the enemies "experienced the military war and noticed that this country win over enemies even at the beginning of war and it is due to this reason" that no one can imagine military action against Iran and "the enemy cannot win over the Iranian nation in military war even in dreams."

Speaking at a conference to mark the memory of martyrs, the top general said a combination of faith and powerful weapons has turned Iran into an invincible nation.

The commander also highlighted the diminishing impact of sanctions against Iran, saying the country does not care about the sanctions and does not need the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) anymore either, Tasnim reported.

Lavrov to visit Tehran on April 13

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will pay a visit to Iran on April 13 for talks with his Iranian counterpart, Mohammad Javad Zarif, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova announced on Thursday.

"On April 13, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will pay a working visit to Tehran, at the invitation of the Iranian foreign minister," Zakharova told a briefing.

According to Zakharova, the foreign ministers will discuss implementation of joint energy and transport projects, prospects of strengthening cultural and humanitarian cooperation, and further partnership in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

"They plan to continue exchanging opinions on a range of pressing international issues, including the situation around the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, and, of course, the situations in Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen and the Persian Gulf area," Zakharova added, according to UrduPoint News/Sputnik.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman also said on Thursday that Zarif and Lavrov will also discuss the latest developments in the Caucasus region, cooperation at regional and international levels as well as resistance against U.S. unilateral and illegal sanctions.

Iran says era of Western monopoly has ended

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The West no longer has a monopoly on international relations, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Monday, highlighting the growing role of Asian states on the global scene.

Zarif made the remarks in a meeting with CICA secretariat executive director Kairat Sarybay on the sidelines of the "Heart of Asia" conference on Afghanistan hosted by Tajikistan.

CICA, or the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia, is an inter-governmental forum for enhancing cooperation towards promoting peace, security and stability in Asia. It is a forum based on the recognition that there is close link between peace, security and stability in Asia and the rest of the world. The key idea of the conference is based on the priority of the indivisibility of security, joint initiative and mutually beneficial interaction of small and large states. CICA was first proposed by former Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev on October 5, 1992 at the UN General Assembly.

Zarif expressed Tehran's support to strengthen CICA and cooperation among its member states.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the chief diplomat thanked Kazakhstan for its role in the talks on Iran's nuclear program and the Syria peace negotiations within the Astana format.

For his part, Sarybay acknowledged Iran's participation in and contribution to CICA regional activities, and briefed Zarif on the organization's plans for upcoming ministerial meetings.

CICA has 27 member countries and 8 observers.

Ambassador Sarybay was appointed as CICA executive director at the special meeting of the CICA foreign ministers on September 24, 2020 and assumed his duties from the beginning of October of the same year.

It's not Washington's stance that Iran must take first step to revive JCPOA: U.S. official

Who might take the first step to resume compliance with the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, officially known as the JCPOA, is not an issue for the United States, a U.S. official said on Friday, suggesting greater flexibility on the part of Washington.

"That's not the issue, who goes first," the official told Reuters on condition of anonymity.

"Like, we are going to go at 8, they are going to go at 10? Or they go at 8, we go at 10? That's not the issue," the official said. "The issue is do we agree on what steps are going to be taken mutually."

The Biden administration has been seeking to engage Iran in talks about both sides resuming compliance with the deal, under which U.S. and other economic sanctions on Tehran were removed in return for curbs on Iran's nuclear program.

Donald Trump, President Joe Biden's predecessor, quit the deal in 2018 and reimposed U.S. sanctions, prompting Iran, after waiting more than a year, to remove some of the pact's nuclear restrictions in retaliation.

The United States and Iran have yet to agree even to meet about reviving the JCPOA and are communicating indirectly via European nations, Western officials have said.

In a speech on March 21, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said the U.S. must lift sanctions before Tehran would resume compliance.

The U.S. official sought to dispel what he said was an erroneous view that the United States insists on Iran's full compliance before Washington would take any steps to resume its own commitments.

He also said it was not the U.S. stance that Tehran must take a first step to comply before Washington would take a step.

"It is absolutely not our position that Iran has to come into full compliance before we do anything," the official said.

"As for, if we agree on mutual steps, like we'll do X, they do Y, the issue of sequence will not be the issue. I don't know who would go first. I mean we could — it could be simultaneous," he said. "There's a thousand iterations but ... I can tell you now, if this breaks down, it's not going to be because of that."

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Certain groups, countries unhappy over growing Tehran-Kabul ties, Zarif says

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Monday that certain countries and groups are not happy about the growing ties between Iran and Afghanistan.

Zarif made the remarks during a meeting with his Afghan counterpart Mohammad Haneef Atmar on the sidelines of the "Heart of Asia" conference on Afghanistan hosted by Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

For his part, Foreign Minister Atmar thanked Iran on behalf of the Afghan government and nation for helping extinguish gas tanker explosions at Afghanistan's customs posts in Afghanistan on the Iranian border.

The senior diplomat also called Iran one of the "closest friends" of Afghanistan.

Atmar also called for developing cooperation and consultation between Kabul and Tehran on areas of politics and economy.

The Afghan foreign minister also said his country is fully ready to establish a joint commission with Iran in future weeks.



Zarif and Atmar also reviewed the latest political and security developments in Afghanistan and exchanged views about

the Afghan peace talks.

Iran has been seeking to help reconcile warring sides in neighboring Afghanistan.

Tehran urges U.S. to take 'political decision' to abide by UN resolution endorsing nuclear deal

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The Iranian mission to the United Nations said on Tuesday that it is necessary that the United States make a "political decision" to "fully and immediately" honor all its commitments to the 2015 nuclear deal endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

President Joe Biden's predecessor, Donald Trump, quit the nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and reimposed sanctions on Iran and added new ones under his "maximum pressure" campaign against Tehran.

As a presidential candidate, Biden had promised to rejoin the nuclear deal if he is elected president. However, since he took the helm at the White House his administration has taken no concrete step to honor the U.S. commitments under the JCPOA.

"No proposal is needed for the U.S. to rejoin the JCPOA. It only requires a political decision by the U.S. to fully and immediately implement all of its obligations under the accord and abide by UNSCR 2231," the Iranian mission to the

UN tweeted.

Tehran's mission to the UN added, "Iran is in touch with the remaining participants in the #JCPOA on issues."

The remaining parties to the JCPOA are the three European states of Britain, Germany and France, the European Union, Russia and China.

In a statement on March 24, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, who acts as coordinator of the JCPOA Joint Commission, described the JCPOA as "a masterpiece of diplomacy".

"The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) remains a key achievement of multilateral diplomacy despite existing difficulties. There are difficulties, but despite that, I think that this agreement is a masterpiece of diplomacy," the statement said, according to eeas.europa.eu.

The tweet by the Iranian mission to the UN followed after Biden administration officials, mindful of the increasingly unfavorable calendar, plan to put forth a new proposal to jump-start the talks as soon as this week, two people familiar with the situation told POLITICO.

The proposal asks Iran to halt some of its nuclear activities,

such as work on advanced centrifuges and the enrichment of uranium to 20 percent purity, in exchange for some relief from U.S. economic sanctions, said one of the people, who stressed that the details are still being worked out.

It's not at all certain that Iran will accept the terms. Earlier this year, Tehran rejected a U.S. proposal it deemed unacceptable, then offered its own idea that Biden's team declared a non-starter, two people familiar with the situation said.

Still, officials in both countries are aware that if no breakthrough takes place over the next few weeks, little is likely to happen until September at the earliest, and that's if the deal can be saved at all. The warnings come as progressives pressure Biden to rejoin the deal and as some officials and analysts wonder if Biden is genuine about his stated desire to see the agreement revived.

"Iran is poised to blow through additional nuclear deal restrictions in the next few weeks. This is the crucial time to avoid an escalation of the situation," said Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, an organization that has closely tracked nuclear negotiations involving Iran.

Iran formulating its foreign policy based on national interests, MP says

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — A member of the Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Committee said on Friday that Iran formulates its foreign policy based on national interests.

Fada Hossein Maleki made the remarks in an interview with IRNA regarding the signing of a 25-year comprehensive strategic partnership between Iran and China.

Hours after the foreign ministers of Iran and China signed the strategic partnership on March 27, U.S. President Joe Biden said he has "been concerned about that for a year."

Fada Hossein, a former diplomat, said, "Americans are worried about this (partnership) because they always want Iran to be hung in the air."

Now China's economic ties with Europe exceeds 500 billion dollars and the Westerns say nothing about it and don't say that Europe is being reliant on China or even don't say anything about the great volume of China-U.S. trade ties but "when Iran wants to sign an agreement with China, they say China

is making Iran dependent on itself," Iran's former ambassador to Afghanistan explains.

Maleki said it is a fact that Iran enjoys a "unique strategic situation" in the region and it should have commercial, economic, political and even military relationship with neighboring and regional countries and "this is the will of the Islamic Republic of Iran and it is acting according" to this vision.

Maleki, who represents Zadehan in the parliament called the partnership with China "historic" and said, "The document of Iran-China cooperation is strategic that defines the prospects of cooperation between the two countries and can provide a good impetus to cooperation between the two countries in areas of commerce, politics and economy."

Noting that China as a great economic power needs Iran as trade partner, he dismissed speculation that Iran has given unilateral concessions to China.

The interests of Iran have been surely taken into consideration more than what certain people claim, he added.



In the light of the fact that cooperation in the fields of commerce, economy, politics and energy has been included in the comprehensive document, he said these are things that related bodies in each country should pay due attention to when drafting agreements.

On reports that the document with China may limit Iran's cooperation or halt investment by other countries, he said, "This is a reality that for years we had put what we had in Westerners' basket but we did not get anything instead."

Zarif to Biden: Your admin following Trump's footsteps

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Tuesday that President Joe Biden's administration is following Donald Trump's policy by capitalizing on the illegal sanctions as a "leverage" against Iran.

"Your admin follows Trump's footsteps while trying to use his unlawful sanctions as 'leverage'," Zarif tweeted by making a reference to Biden's tweets on June 20, 2019 in

which he said, "It's sadly ironic that the State Department is now calling on Iran to abide by the very deal the Trump administration abandoned."

At the time, Biden also wrote, "By walking away from diplomacy, Trump has made military conflict more likely. Another war in the Middle East is the last thing we need."

Zarif advised Biden to quit this approach, saying, "Nasty habits die hard. Time to kick this one."

Also, Iranian government spokesman Ali Rabiei warned the West on Tuesday that more delays in removing sanctions against Iran will make the chances for reviving the 2015 nuclear deal, which he described as the only way to resolve differences, more elusive.

However, he added the U.S. administration has no "logical alternative" other than returning to the JCPOA and lifting all sanctions.

JCPOA Joint Commission to meet in Vienna Tuesday, there won't be direct Iran-U.S. talks

→ 1 Iran, China, Russia, France, Germany and Britain — the remaining parties to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action - discussed on Friday the possible return to it by the United States, and how to ensure full and effective implementation by all sides.

The EU, which is coordinating efforts to revive the deal, said next week's participants in Vienna would seek to "clearly identify sanctions-lifting and nuclear implementation measures," including through convening meetings of relevant expert groups, Reuters reported.

"In this context, the coordinator will also intensify separate contacts in Vienna with all JCPOA participants and the United States," it added in a statement.

After Friday's meeting, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi, a senior negotiator in the talks, said the United States would not be present at any session attended by Iran in Vienna and affirmed Iran's stance on what needed to be done.

"Iran will suspend its steps (scaling back compliance with the deal's terms) as soon as (U.S.) sanctions are lifted and this is



verified," Araqchi said.

Writing on his Twitter page, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said "at virtual JCPOA Joint Commission meeting Iran and EU/E3+2 agreed to resume in-person talks in Vienna next Tuesday."

Zarif also said the aim of meeting is to "rapidly finalize sanction-lifting and nuclear measures for choreographed removal of all sanctions, followed by Iran ceasing remedial measures."

Zarif added direct meeting between Iran and the United States in Vienna will be "unnecessary".

A year after the Trump administration quit the JCPOA and slapped sanctions on

Iran, Iran started to gradually remove ban on certain aspects of its nuclear activities. Iran's remedial measures were based on paragraph 36 of the JCPOA.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said it was good that talks were resuming, but time was of the essence.

Russia's ambassador to the UN atomic watchdog said Friday's talks had given him the impression they were on the right track but the way ahead would not be easy.

Senior European Union diplomat Enrique Mora chaired the talks on Friday. In a tweet, Mora said, "Positive meeting today. We will reconvene in Vienna next week. Substantial work ahead for a key opportunity to bring #JCPOA back to life."

After the conclusion of the virtual meeting, the EU issued a statement which reads as follows:

A meeting of the Joint Commission of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was held virtually on Friday, 2 April. Under the terms of the JCPOA, the Joint Commission is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the agree-

In late January, Iran hosted the political leader of Afghanistan's Taliban, offering Tehran's own help as a mediator in peace talks between the insurgents and the Afghan government.

Iran has been openly meeting with Taliban leaders for the past few years as the United States has started negotiating the exit of its troops from Afghanistan.

Zarif met Taliban political chief Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar in Tehran, and told him that Washington was not a "good mediator" for the conflict.

Iran supports an inclusive Afghan government that would include all ethnic groups and sects, Zarif was quoted as saying.

Taliban spokesman Mohammad Naeem said on Twitter that the meetings had taken place "in a good atmosphere".

"The situations in Afghanistan, Intra-Afghan negotiations, the full implementation of the Doha agreement and Afghanistan's & region's need (for) peace were discussed," he added, according to Reuters.

He also refuted rumors that Iran has given control of free trade zones such as Chabahr port, Qeshm or Kish islands to China, saying even an inch of these zones has not been given to the Chinese.

The MP said as India is now developing Chabahar port cooperation with China will also be in the same framework.

Foreign Minister Zarif has said partnership is neither an agreement nor a treaty and doesn't entail commitment by each side. The chief Iranian diplomat also said the document does not include any figure or number and doesn't relinquish control of any part of land to any country.

The senior diplomat also said relations with China don't negate having good ties with other countries or economic blocs, saying they are interdependent.

"In order to have good relations with China we should have good relations with Europe. And if we want to have good relations with Europe, we should have good relations with China," Zarif pointed out.

The Joint Commission was chaired, on behalf of EU High Representative Josep Borrell, by the EEAS Deputy Secretary General Enrique Mora and was attended by representatives of China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom and Iran at the level of Deputy Foreign Ministers/Political Directors.

In line with the joint ministerial statement of 21 December participants recognised the prospect of a full return of the US to the JCPOA, and underlined their readiness to positively address this in a joint effort. Participants also emphasised their commitment to preserve the JCPOA and discussed modalities to ensure the return to its full and effective implementation.

Participants agreed to resume this session of the Joint Commission in Vienna next week, in order to clearly identify sanctions lifting and nuclear implementation measures, including through convening meetings of the relevant expert groups. In this context, the coordinator will also intensify separate contacts in Vienna with all JCPOA participants and the United States.

Iran's inviolable JCPOA policy in words of Ayatollah Khamenei

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei has outlined Iran's policy on the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, paving the way for Iranian diplomats to pursue the country's interests in a more effective way.

The Leader laid out Iran's policy on the nuclear deal -officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) - in a recent speech delivered on the occasion of the Persian New Year.

He outlined a process in which the U.S. should lift all sanctions first in order for Iran to resume fully implementing the JCPOA.

"This policy is that the Americans should lift all sanctions. After that, we will verify. If the sanctions have been lifted, we will return to our Barjam [JCPOA] commitments. We will return without any problem. This is a definite policy. We do not consider American promises to be valid. If they say that they will lift them on paper, this is of no use. What is necessary is action! They should lift the sanctions in practice. Subsequently, we will verify their statements to make sure that the sanctions have been lifted. Then, we will



resume our commitments," the Leader said on March 21.

Ayatollah Khamenei reiterated that "this policy will not be violated in any way."

The Leader's comments came at a time when Iran and the United States are at loggerheads over how to revive the nuclear deal and that the comments may be intended to make the Americans understand that Iran will not make the first move toward reviving the JCPOA because it was not the party that violated the deal first.

This policy was articulated at a very important time. Iranian and U.S. diplomats are going to visit Vienna next week in a bid to discuss ways to revive the JCPOA, although they will not hold direct talks. The JCPOA parties and the U.S. will be in Vienna on Tuesday in what appeared to be the first serious efforts to overcome difficulties arising from the U.S.'s unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA. Iranian officials said that there will be no meeting between the U.S. and Iran.

"No Iran-US meeting. Unnecessary," Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said in a tweet on Friday.

Iran-China cooperation raises concern in the West

→1 We believe this document will further contribute to the continued development and comprehensive partnership of Iran and China, and will bring about prosperity for the two nations," the Iranian Foreign Ministry said in a statement following the signing of the document.

The China-Iran cooperation plan was warmly welcomed by all Iranian officials across the political spectrum, something that set a new precedent for how all Iranian political factions can join forces to support a major foreign policy decision even during an election season, which is usually characterized by bitter infighting among various political factions.

This consensus reflected a deep understanding of the importance of upgrading relations with China, a move that Zarif described as a "strategic choice" made by Iran.

"Iran attaches great importance to its relations with China, and strengthening cooperation with China is a strategic choice made by Iran," the Iranian foreign minister was quoted by the Chinese Foreign Ministry as saying during a meeting with his Chinese counterpart.

Underlining that the signing of the roadmap of

Iran-China comprehensive cooperation will further reinforce relations between the two countries, Zarif referred to China as the "friend of hard times," according to a statement issued by the Iranian Foreign Ministry.

"Accordingly, we praise the stances and measures of China at the time of cruel sanctions against Iran," the chief Iranian diplomat said.

Facing Iran-China's growing cooperation, the U.S. expressed concern over the signing of the 25-year plan. Asked if he was concerned about the emerging partnership between Iran and China, U.S. President Joe Biden said a few hours after the plan was signed that he has been "concerned about that for a year."

Iran said Biden's concern was right.

Ali Shamkhani, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, responded to the U.S. president's remarks by saying that that enhancing cooperation with the East will hasten the U.S. decline.

"The signing of Iran and China Strategic Partnership Roadmap is part of the Active Resistance policy. The world isn't just the West and the West isn't just the lawbreaking America, UK, France and Germany. Biden's concern is correct: the flourishing of strategic

cooperation in the East is accelerating the U.S. decline," Shamkhani tweeted on March 29.

Active resistance is a policy that Iran adopted in the wake of Trump's withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal, formally called the JCPOA. It helped Iran resist U.S. bullying and cement its ties with other countries, including China. Now, with the so-called "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran in tatters, the U.S. hopes that Iran will relinquish this policy and accept a U.S. return to the nuclear deal without the lifting of U.S. sanctions, something that Iran keeps rejecting.

In addition, the U.S. sought to downplay the impact of the Iran-China cooperation plan on Washington-Beijing ties. Commenting on the Iran-China partnership plan, U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price claimed that the U.S. and China have a shared interest in curbing Iran's nuclear program.

However, Iran and China have expressed interest in working on reviving the JCPOA. According to the Chinese Foreign Ministry, during Zarif's meeting with Wang, Iran expressed interest in working with China to revive the JCPOA.

Russia underlines need to take 'initial' steps to revive JCPOA

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Russia has highlighted the need to take initial steps to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear deal after news media reported that Iran suggested that all parties to the nuclear deal directly move to the full implementation of the deal.

Russia's representative to the International Organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov said in a tweet on Thursday night that directly moving to the final stage in implementing the nuclear deal -officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) — is an option, but reaching the point of completely implementing the JCPOA may require initial steps at first.

The Russian diplomat was commenting on a scoop by Amwaj Media saying that Iran has suggested that all sides "should probably move directly to the final stage," and hinted at the possibility of rapid progress if the U.S. moves first.

"This is an option. But probably before moving to the final stage, it could be prudent to agree on initial and significant steps in order to create much more favorable climate to go fast to the destination point which is full implementation of #JCPOA by all sides," Ulyanov tweeted.

The tweet came one day before a virtual meeting of the JCPOA Joint Commission was held.

The European Union said in a statement on Thursday that the meeting will take place on Friday to discuss a possible U.S. return to the Iran nuclear deal.

"The Joint Commission will be chaired on behalf of EU High Representative Josep Borrell by the Deputy Secretary-General and Political Director of the European External Action Service Enrique Mora. It will be attended by representatives of China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and Iran," the statement said.

"Participants will discuss the prospect of a possible return of the United States to the JCPOA and how to ensure the full and effective implementation of the agreement by all sides."

Iranian Foreign Ministry also issued a statement on Friday announcing the start of the meeting.

The meeting was held amid renewed efforts to revive the nuclear deal, which is now on life support due to Washington's reluctance to lift sanctions. Iran has called on the White House to make the first move towards reviving the deal



by removing all the sanctions that were imposed on Iran during the Trump administration. But the Biden administration refused to lift sanctions, calling on Iran instead to make the first move. The U.S. said the ball is in Iran's court, a claim that Iran sees as procrastination.

Although the U.S. was not invited to participate in the Friday meeting, it welcomed the meeting as a "positive step."

"We obviously welcome this is a positive step," U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters in Washington on Thursday. "We have been clear for weeks now that we are ready to pursue a return to compliance with our JCPOA commitments consistent with Iran also doing the same."

"We have also been open about the fact that we have been talking with our partners in the P5+1 context and elsewhere about the best way to achieve this, including through a series of initial mutual steps," Price added.

"We've been looking at options for doing so, including with indirect conversations through our European partners."

Ulyanov also commented on the State Department's stance, describing it as yet another sign that the U.S. has changed its approach to the JCPOA.

"The U.S. Department of State welcomed the virtual meeting of the Joint Commission of JCPOA with participation of Iran and other Parties to the nuclear deal. Another confirmation of significant changes in the U.S. position which need now to be translated into practical actions," the Russian diplomat tweeted on Thursday.

Earlier on the day, Ulyanov had said that the Friday meeting provides an "opportunity" to discuss the U.S. return to the JCPOA.

"A virtual meeting of the Joint Commission of JCPOA will be held on April

2. The participants will discuss how to ensure full restoration of JCPOA implementation by all sides. It will also provide an opportunity to exchange views on possible return of U.S. to the nuclear deal," Ulyanov said.

"U.S. failing to seize the golden chance for securing a win-win bargain"

The process of reviving the nuclear deal has suffered setbacks after the Biden administration failed to change tack on Iran. Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said in remarks delivered on Thursday that the U.S. is failing to seize the golden chance for securing a win-win bargain on the JCPOA. He criticized the Biden administration's foot-dragging on a return to compliance with the nuclear deal.

"As Leader [of the Islamic Revolution] Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei] announced, if they (the U.S.) return to the JCPOA, Iran will also return to its commitments," the Iranian president said, according to Press TV. "This would mean a win-win bargain for the region and the entire world, which would benefit them. The Americans were not able to understand that and failed to seize this golden opportunity. They have been dragging their feet, and we have been getting messages and news, which show this new [US] administration is far from the reality about Iran."

He pointed out that the U.S. officials' "lack of knowledge" about Iran is ridiculous, adding that if they could get to know the great nation of Iran, its great civilization, and its golden homeland, they would treat the nation with humility.

"Biggest honor of the Iranian nation in moral, political and historical terms"

Rouhani reminded all those who call the JCOPA one of the most significant international agreements that it is the Iranian nation that has been shouldering the burden of the deal since Washington's withdrawal about three years ago.

Pointing to the economic war waged by enemies on the Islamic Republic, the president said, "We did not begin this war. Even after this war was imposed on us, we continued to fulfill all our commitments [based on the JCPOA] for a full year," describing the patience as "the biggest honor of the Iranian nation in moral, political and historical terms."

He added, "Those who are discussing who should return to their obligations first, Iran or the United States, should

know that it was Iran that adhered to all its obligations one year after the withdrawal of the United States and today, after 3 years, we announce that once the Americans return to fulfilling their obligations, Iran will immediately fulfill all its obligations as well."

"Full restoration"

In addition to Iran, other signatories to the JCPOA including Russia fully support reviving the JCPOA. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Moscow is in favor of restoring the 2015 deal in its initial form that was endorsed by a UN Security Council resolution.

Speaking at the Middle East Conference of the Valdai Discussion Club in Moscow on Wednesday, the top Russian diplomat called for "full restoration" of the JCPOA, stressing that the deal should be restored in its initial form as it was approved by the UN.

"We have proposed an informal road map, envisioning Iran's and the United States' simultaneous gradual return to the implementation of their obligations. French colleagues help us formulate the steps, especially the first step, which should launch the process of JCPOA full restoration," he said.

Lavrov is expected to discuss, among other issues, the JCPOA during a visit to Iran scheduled for April 13, according to a statement issued by the Iranian Foreign Ministry on Thursday.

"The visit will be made as part of political consultations between the foreign ministers of Iran and Russia and upon Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif's invitation. Consultations on various aspects of bilateral relations, regional issues especially the latest developments in the Caucasus, Syria, Yemen, and Afghanistan, Iran-Russia cooperation at international and regional bodies as well as important issues like the JCPOA, countering the United States' unilateral moves and unlawful sanctions will be among the most pressing topics of negotiations between Zarif and Lavrov," the statement said.

Ulyanov highlighted the close diplomatic contacts between Iran and Russia.

"Russia and Iran maintain very intensive dialogue at all levels, including the Ministerial level. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs meet on a regular basis, many times per year. This dialogue goes far beyond the most topical issue of JCPOA. Very valuable practice," the Russian diplomat tweeted.

SPORTS

Iran's Foolad ask AFC to change venue in Saudi Arabia

By Farrokh Hesabi

TEHRAN — Iranian club, Foolad Khuzestan have asked the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) to change the venue of their AFC Champions League (ACL) play-off match against the UAE's Al-Ain due to the security concerns.

The match is due to take place on April 10 at Prince Faisal Bin Fahad Stadium in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. However, the Iranian club have voiced their concerns to the AFC through the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) over the recent safety and security matters in Saudi's capital city.

Saeid Azari, general manager of Foolad Khuzestan club, believes that given the seriousness of the incidents that took place in Riyadh, the match must be held in a secure venue.

"Based on the international media reports, we have been informed that Riyadh has been attacked by rockets just in recent days. So, we are very worried about the security condition of the host city and our request is that due to the current confusion on the ground, the venue of our match against Al Ain to be moved to another safe and secure one," Azari said in an exclusive interview with Tehran Times.

"It's the best solution for both teams," he added. "It's the most logical solution given that security has to be the number one priority. We hope that the AFC will work on choosing the most suitable alternative venue for the match."

"It's necessary to mention that in the 2019 ACL, the match between Iran's Zob Ahan against Saudi's Al Nassr, which had initially been scheduled to be played in Karbala City in Iraq, was postponed and moved to another neutral venue in Dubai, UAE just because of the missile attacks on another city of Iraq, namely Baghdad," Foolad GM added.

"The Asian Football Confederation has always put the safety and security of all stakeholders at the center of all its decisions. We appreciate the AFC to evaluate our request and to take into account the safety situation in the region to make the best decision in this regard," Azari concluded.

Esteghlal, the other Iranian representative in the 2021 AFC Champions League, are also scheduled to play their Group C matches in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in a centralized format. The question is whether the Blues will also request the AFC to change their host city to a safer one or not.



Ghaemi announces retirement from national duty

SPORTS **TEHRAN** — Iran national team volleyball player Farhad Ghaemi announced his retirement from national duty via his Instagram account.

The 31-year-old outside spiker has ended his career in the National Team due to the personal problems.

Ghaemi has been a vital member of Iran national team over the past years.

"I've played 14 years for the National Team and served as a soldier for my country but it's time to call it a day. From now on, I am a fan of Iran volleyball team and support my country as the other Iranian people. I'm sure more achievements are ahead of the team. I've recently married and need more time to spend with my family," Ghaemi wrote.

Ghaemi helped Iran win two gold medals at the 2014 and 2018 Asian Games as well as a bronze medal at the World Grand Champions Cup.

Para canoeist Behrouzi Rad eyes Paralympics gold

SPORTS **TEHRAN** — Para canoeist Shahla Behrouzi Rad is going to become the first Iranian para athlete to win a gold medal in the sport in Paralympic Games.

Behrouzi Rad will represent Iran at the Tokyo Games. She partook in the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio at the Women's KL3, where she failed to qualify for the final. Now, the Para canoeist is going to make a splash in the Tokyo.

"Winning a gold medal is my aim in Tokyo. I train hard because I want to hoist my country's flag in the Games," Behrouzi Rad said in an interview with IRNA.

"I've been trying to keep up my fitness with hard training during the coronavirus pandemic. I think the Games' postponement helped me improve," she added.

Machine Sazi football team on verge of disbanding

SPORTS **TEHRAN** — Iranian top flight football club Machine Sazi are on the verge of disbanding due to the financial problems.

The Tabriz based football club were founded more than half a century ago but they will reportedly be disbanded soon.

Machine Sazi were founded by Taqi Tavakoli, a pioneer of modern industry in Iran, in 1969 but they cannot survive due to the financial problems.

Machine Sazi were owned by Iranian businessman Mohammadreza Zonuzi but he has transferred them to a new ownership, however the new governmental owner cannot afford to pay their debts.

Zonuzi is owner of another Tabriz based football club Tractor and has said he is unable to manage two clubs at the same time.

Machine Sazi sit at the bottom of Iran Professional League table and are on the brink of being relegated from the league.

The team will likely pull out of the current season and the league could be in trouble with the withdrawal of the team.

Issuance of industrial unit establishment permits increases 40%

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — According to the latest data released by Iran's Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry, during the first 11 months of the past Iranian calendar year 1399 (March 20, 2020-February 18, 2021), 36,162 permits have been issued for establishing new industrial units in the country, which marked a 40-percent increase year on year.

The units are predicted to create jobs for 810,178 persons, indicating 37.6 percent growth year on year.

During the said period, also 6,491 licenses were issued for the commission of newly completed industrial units, indicating an increase of seven percent compared to the same period of 1398.



As previously announced by the ministry, the issuance of permits for setting up industrial units in the country increased 16 percent in 1398.

Most of the issued permits were related to the food industries; and Semnan, Qom, and Khorasan Razavi were the provinces receiving the highest number of permits.

According to Asghar Mosaheb, the acting head of Iran Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization (ISIPO), preventing the inactive status of the industrial units is a major plan of ISIPO, while lack of liquidity, problems in terms of supplying raw materials and machinery, and absence of market are the main reasons making the units inactive.

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

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

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

Bushehr province accounts for one sixth of Iran's annual non-oil trade

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — As announced by a provincial official, Bushehr province, in the south-west of Iran, accounted for one sixth of the country's non-oil trade in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20).

Behrouz Qareh-Beygi, an official with the province's customs department, said that 24.564 million tons of products have been exported from Bushehr, and 482,000 tons of commodities have been imported to the province in the previous year.

As announced by the head of Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), the value of Iran's non-oil trade stood at \$73 billion in the past year.



Mehdi Mir-Ashrafi also put the weight of non-oil trade at 146.4 million tons, and said that the figure shows a 25-million-ton annual decline, which is the result of sanctions and coronavirus pandemic.

Iran's non-oil export was 112 million tons valued at \$34.5 billion, and that of import was 34.4 million tons worth \$38.5 billion in the past year, the official added.

Among the country's non-oil export destinations, China was the first, with importing \$8.9 billion worth of products, Iraq was the second with importing \$7.3 billion, the United Arab Emirates the third with importing \$4.6 billion, Turkey the fourth with importing \$2.5 billion, and Afghanistan the fifth with importing \$2.2 billion, Mir-Ashrafi announced, and named gasoline, natural gas, polyethylene, propane, and pistachio as Iran's major exported products during the past year.

He further named Iran's top sources of non-oil imports in the said time, as China with exporting \$9.7 billion worth of products to the Islamic Republic, the UAE with \$9.6 billion, Turkey with \$4.3 billion, India with \$2.1 billion, and Germany with \$1.8 billion, respectively, and mentioned corn, cellphone, rice, oil meal and oil seeds, wheat, and raw oil as the major imported items.

IMF should respond to Iran's legal request: CBI governor

→1 the economies of all countries, especially developing countries, have been severely damaged, and Iran is one of the countries most affected by the epidemic in the region.

Referring to U.S. sanctions against the country, he said: "Despite the sanctions imposed by the U.S. and the policy of maximum pressure, Iran has been able to overcome the problems and take appropriate measures, but like most developing countries, it needs financial resources to implement its policies."

Hemmati said that the International Monetary Fund has so far provided more than \$100 billion in loans to 85 countries, adding, "The fund has lent nearly \$16 billion to the countries of the MENAP region, but Iran, which was one of the first countries to request emergency funds, has not been provided any facilities, while receiving no logical reason in this due."

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has called on the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to defy U.S. resistance and grant the country the \$5 billion loan which Iran requested to relieve the economic pressure caused by the pandemic.

"We're hoping the IMF board won't remain under U.S. pressure and will live up to its commitments to all countries," Rouhani



has said in a statement shown on state TV.

Fighting the coronavirus outbreak in the country, in last March, Iran asked IMF for an emergency loan to help it contain the pandemic and lessen its economic consequences.

In a letter to IMF in early March 2020, Hemmati requested \$5 billion from the

Fund's Rapid Financing Initiative (RFI), an emergency program that gives loans to countries facing with sudden shocks such as natural disasters.

Although this was Tehran's first request for an IMF loan in nearly six decades, it raised opposition from the U.S. that said it planned

Industry, mining, trade projects worth over \$1b inaugurated in 5 provinces

→1 First development phase of Garmsar Special Economic Zone in Semnan province, and two major mining complexes in Kerman province were among the main projects inaugurated by the president in an online ceremony also attended by Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Alireza Razm Hosseini.

Razm Hosseini said last week that the industrial growth will accelerate in the country in the current Iranian calendar year (began on March 21).

Making the remarks on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting, the minister announced his ministry's target of boosting production and achieving industrial growth in this year through removing the barriers as well as red tape, unnecessary rules and regulations.

The official said that an industrial growth of 7.5 percent was achieved in the past year, which will be increased this year.

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. re-imposition of the sanctions, the self-reliance strategy of Iran has been followed up by all state-run and private bodies.

In the past Iranian calendar year, which was named as the year of "Surge in Production" by the leader of the Islamic Revolution, all ministries defined their comprehensive programs to pursue for materialization of that motto.

Industry, Mining, and Trade Ministry, as one of the major players in this due, also outlined an all-out plan in this regard.

Since the beginning of the past year, the government has urged various bodies and ministries to take the necessary measures for the realization of the year's motto.

In this regard, every week several major projects have gone operational all over the country in different sectors.

The Energy Ministry has implemented a program called "A-B-Iran" based on which the ministry inaugurates several energy projects every week, and the Industry, Mining, and Trade Ministry is also following a new scheme called "Persistent Production-Effective Employment-Sustainable Exports" under which the ministry has inaugurated numer-

Over 10m villagers to enjoy stable drinking water network by Aug.

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The population in the rural areas, who will access to stable drinking water network, will reach over 10 million by the end of the current government's incumbency (August).

Each year, averagely about 1.1 million people (34 villages each week) have been supplied with the stable drinking water in the villages of the country during the current government's incumbency.

Villages are often mentioned as some keys to the development of countries, and the allocation of a proper amount of budget to rural development always brings fruitful



economic results.

In Iran, where villages account for gen-

erating 20-23 percent of the value added in the country, development of rural areas has been always a top agenda of the governments' activities.

The sustainable economic, social, and cultural development of the villages is one of the major priorities of the current government, and many projects implemented and underway in this regard have led to outstanding development in the rural regions.

Last week, Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian announced that electricity will be supplied to the villages with less than 10 families in the current Iranian calendar year



ous projects so far.

The Leader named the present year as the year of "Production: Support and the Elimination of Obstacles."

Regarding this year's motto, the industry minister said that his ministry along with other ministries like oil and agriculture ministries will make every effort to support production and eliminate the obstacles.

Inflation rate stands at 36% in urban areas of Tehran province

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) has put the inflation rate at 36.7 percent in the urban areas of Tehran province in the last month of the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20).

The center put the figure at 35.8 percent in the rural regions of the province.

The SCI has announced that the inflation rate has risen 0.6 percent in the country's urban areas in the last month of the past year.

The center put the inflation rate at 47.8 percent in the urban regions in the last month.

It has also announced that the inflation rate has fallen 0.3 percent in the country's rural areas in the mentioned



month.

The SCI put the inflation rate at 53.3 percent in the rural regions in the last month.

The center has announced that the inflation rate in the twelve-month period ended on March 20, which marks the end of the last month of the past Iranian calendar year, stood at 36.4 percent, rising 2.2 percent from the figure for the twelve-month period ended on the last day of the eleventh month of that year.

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

‘Removing private sector’s problems, new approach of Free Zones High Council’

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The Secretary of Iranian Free Zones High Council Hamidreza Mo'meni said that removing the problems of private sector is the new approach of this council.

Making the remarks in a meeting with some investors in Aras Free Zone in northeast of the country, the official said that with this approach the affairs of entrepreneurs will be eased and facilitated in the free zones.

He further highlighted the projects recently inaugurated by President Hassan Rouhani in some of the free trade zones and special economic zones of the country.

Last week, the president inaugurated 39 projects worth 58 trillion rials (about \$1.38 billion) in the free trade zones and special economic zones of three provinces through video conference.

The projects put into operation in Hormozgan, East Azarbaijan, and Qom provinces

created jobs for 5,400 persons.

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

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

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

The first two free trade zones of Iran were established in the south of the country. The first one was Kish Free Trade Zone established in 1368 on Kish Island in the Persian Gulf and the second one was Qeshm Free Trade

Zone established the year after on Qeshm Island in the Strait of Hormuz.

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

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

More development measures in this field have been taking since the U.S. re-imposition of sanctions on the Iranian economy in November 2018, as Iran is reducing its dependence on the oil income while elevating its domestic production and non-oil exports.



Although the sanctions have disrupted Iran's economic activities, they could not impede the development of Iranian free zones; in fact, the development of these zones has been even accelerated.

Many strides made for increasing activities in the free zones have played a significant part in boosting the country's non-oil exports and brought prosperity in the other economic sectors.

Muslims have become the new scapegoats in Europe: historian

→ 1 Attacks on Muslims and Islam in contemporary Europe represent a “typical” maneuver on the part of political demagogues who seek to avoid taking direct responsibility for political problems they are unable to constructively resolve. Hence, they seek to blame those who are ethnically or religiously “other.” They incite a “politics of fear.” And as we have seen in the past, during periods of political and economic uncertainty, populations are especially susceptible to fear-mongering. In the West, we have seen these tactics at work before: for example, during the 1930s, when European fascist regimes also searched for a scapegoat to blame for the social disequilibrium that accompanied the Great Depression of 1929. At the time, political demagogues like Hitler blamed the Jews. Today, there are few Jews remaining in Europe; consequently, Muslims have become the new scapegoats.

One aspect of the scapegoating of Muslims that is especially regrettable and unfair pertains to the unwillingness to acknowledge the legacy of European colonialism in the Middle East (West Asia): colonialism’s brutality, its racism, and the legacy of political misery that engendered. What I am getting at is that the West has a special responsibility in light of its colonial past to reconcile with the peoples and religious groups it has wronged.

What are the roots of Islamophobia in Europe and the U.S.?

The legacy of European colonialism also helps us understand the roots of contemporary Islamophobia. Much of the contemporary opposition to Islam represents a continuation of prejudices that originated during the heyday of European colonialism. Of course, since 2015 and the escalation of the Middle East (West Asia) refugee crisis, European Islamophobia has had a new “excuse” to whip up anti-Islamic sentiment. At the time, what was needed was compassion and acceptance with respect to refugees who, through no fault of their own, were forced to flee a war zone.

Amid this sorry picture, the one bright



spot in my view was German Prime Minister Angela Merkel’s decision to accept over 1 million Syrian refugees. Although Merkel acted compassionately, she was unfairly punished for this decision by the German electorate.

In the U.S., the sources of Islamophobia are someone different; in part, they correspond to different historical experiences as well as differences in geography. Most American Muslims are “middle class” and well-integrated within American society, which significantly diminishes the chances of any “real” “conflict,” rather than “imagined” conflict.

As I see it, American Islamophobia also derives from American provincialism, by which I mean American insularity and a lack of familiarity with other cultures and other ways of life—the deficiency that, in part, is geographically conditioned; but geographical isolation should not be used as an “excuse” in light of the fact that, after World War II, as Iranians well know from their own historical experiences, the United States assumed an interventionist

role in world affairs in response to the onset of the cold war.

Do you think that we are in a phase of clash of civilizations, as Samuel Huntington had said?

I have always thought that Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” thesis was very dangerous and that it risked becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. One of the dangers of making such generalizations is that they tend to neglect or suppress important details and specifics. For example, as you well know, prior to Donald Trump’s disastrous presidency, Europe and the United States seemed to be moving toward rapprochement with Iran, as indicated by the anti-nuclear treaty that was signed under the Obama administration. I think it is safe to say that Donald Trump knows nothing about Islam or about the pros and cons of the nuclear deal virtually. (Throughout his presidency, he showed that he had a horror of expertise.) What’s clear, therefore, is that Trump sought to whip up anti-Islamic sentiment for purposes of political gain. This goes back to

the problem of political demagoguery that I mentioned in my earlier answer.

Do you think that conflicts and behavior of governments are inevitable historical fate?

I believe in enlightenment and truth, although I am aware that different cultures have different belief systems and therefore define truth in different ways. Nevertheless, all cultures use the word “truth,” so, at the base, there must be a common meaning.

All of this is to say that because I believe in enlightenment and truth, I do not believe in fate, if by “fate,” one means that we are powerless to change the historical circumstance. I am not naïve; I am well aware that historical circumstances can be very powerful and very difficult to alter. At the same time, usually, if one looks hard enough, prospects for meaningful historical change can often be found.

Are political behaviors by governments mostly reasonable? Why radical views and far-right narratives are usually dominant in our world.

To answer this question, I would need to return in part to my earlier response about the challenges of globalization and neoliberalism. The social and economic dislocations these approaches have provoked all over the world have produced record levels of inequality and existential insecurity. As more wealth accrues to those who are better off and to a handful of extremely powerful corporate actors, the life conditions of average citizens have badly deteriorated. This situation has forced “average citizens” to cast their lot with authoritarian leaders who, theoretically, might be able to take matters into their own hands and, thereby, remedy the excesses of the financial sector and oversized corporate actors.

The problem, however, is that, as we know, these authoritarian political leaders are often self-interested and corrupt; therefore, as we have seen in the cases of Trump and Bolsonaro in Brazil, they end up making a bad situation much worse.

Staggered cooperation in a competitive environment between major powers

By Professor Zhang Yuan

In the high-level strategic dialogue between China and the U.S. in Anchorage, Alaska, which ended on March 19, China and the United States showed a very frank and full of difference attitude. The Biden administration’s Interim National Security Strategic Guidance recognize China as the top strategic competitor America faces and a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system. To the pessimists, the Biden administration did not immediately bring a reboot of friendly relations between the U.S. and China after the strained Sino-U.S. relations during the Trump administration. However, disputes and disagreements among major powers do not mean the loss of the international environment that promotes transnational cooperation, much less a simple analogy to the Cold War of the last century. Strategically searching for different cooperation content and partners in a competitive environment may be a useful idea to solve the dilemma.

Facing up to differences between major powers but abandoning Cold War mentality

China does not subscribe to the law of the jungle. China is not, and has no desire to challenge the current international order. Instead, China is a defender and active participant in the current international order, and is a member of almost all major global organizations. China is highly integrated with the global economy. China has benefited greatly from opening up to the outside world, from international cooperation, and from globalization. Every rational country would recognize that avoiding any form of Cold War is a good thing for the world.

Unfortunately, the U.S. foreign rhetoric in recent years has been full of Cold War mentality shaping non-existent threats and creating enemies. Not only on the China issue, but also pressuring Iran and intensifying conflict with Russia, the U.S. has shown a pattern of urgency to divert domestic attention, suppress public grievances, and conceal domestic incompetence in internal affairs. The flag of multilateralism advocated by the United States is actually limited multilateralism, which is confined within close alliances and focuses only on the interests of the core country occasionally taking into account the interests of some other allies. Biased multilateralism is essentially an extension of U.S. unilateralism and hegemonism front.

Competition does not mean giving up cooperation

The Biden administration has explicitly claimed to be in long-term strategic competition with China, but even so, the crossfire of public opinion does not mean that all willingness to cooperate has disappeared. The U.S.-China high-level strategic dialogue is ostensibly controversial, but the very act of engaging in high-level dialogue implies that there is a willingness to communicate. The dialogue releases the effort to find potential areas of cooperation. The Biden administration does not deny that it needs to cooperate with China in fighting against the epidemic. But of course,



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international cooperation should not stop at stressful cooperation on a single issue.

At present, it is relatively easy to reach a consensus on cooperation between major powers in areas such as climate issues, poverty eradication and the fight against epidemics, while there is a need for continued in-depth exchanges and communication in areas such as the management of new technologies, maritime security, the cessation of tariff wars and the establishment of strategic mutual trust. Staggered cooperation means, first, broadening the field of cooperation; second, expanding the scale of cooperation; third, deepening the depth of cooperation with friendly countries; and fourth, finding new patterns for cooperation.

In the past, even if there were competitive relations between governments, it did not mean that cooperation at the civil level stopped. Regrettably, although civil exchanges have a non-negligible positive role in advancing cooperation at the official level, it is true that to some extent business travel, tourism, and study abroad have all been restricted due to the epidemic, hindering interactions at the non-governmental level and laterally contributing to the current misunderstanding and misjudgment between countries.

Xenophobia is not in the public interest

Hegemony, the law of the jungle and chauvinism are not in the global public interest. The development of a responsible great power is not to deprive other countries of development opportunities, but rather to enhance the chances of global peace and stability with cooperative and win-win development. China adheres to the path of peaceful development.

Exchanges and cooperation obviously help countries increase understanding and mutual trust. And cooperation among major powers should be conducted under the premise of mutual respect and control the disagreement

without expansion. Compared to the previous administration, the current U.S. is beginning to return to the arena of international cooperation and is placing greater emphasis on close relations with traditional allies.

Biden’s view of international cooperation is obviously deliberately exclusive. It is a manifestation of a strategic cooperation view that strengthens cooperation between allies with similar ideologies and stigmatizes competitors. However, international cooperation that excludes key powers, including China, would only be an unbalanced and incomplete multilateralism.

Indulging in unnecessary competition would worsen the symbiotic domestic social environment. The recent occurrence of violent hate crimes in the U.S. is an externalized manifestation of internal racial discrimination. International xenophobia can metastasize into domestic xenophobia, backfiring on domestic governance.

Behind the malicious interpretation of the goodwill of other countries is a deep-rooted cultural discrimination and is a means of covering the lack of domestic governance capacity and diverting public discontent. International cooperation relies on following principles of equality and mutual respect among countries. Mutual respect means respecting the distinctive culture of each country, respecting the choice of development paths and not interfering in internal affairs.

Economic recovery in the post-epidemic era cannot be achieved without cooperation between major powers

Human beings are living in a community of shared future. Major powers should provide global public products to promote the common development of mankind and jointly maintain world peace in particular.

China attaches great importance to both cooperation with other countries on the platform of international organizations and maintaining friendly bilateral cooperative relations with countries. Taking the bilateral relations between China and Iran as an example, 2021 marks the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Iran. Over the past 50 years, bilateral relations have developed soundly and there are many consensus in cooperation. A five-point initiative on achieving security and stability in West Asia proposed by Foreign Minister Wang Yi during his visit to the six West Asia count, the Iranian nuclear issue and resuming compliance with the JCPOA was specifically addressed.

China’s domestic economy is currently recovering with remarkable vigor. Take the movie market as an example, during the past spring festival season, China’s box office hits record high (over \$ 1.2 billion within 7 days). China is willing and capable of cooperating with other countries to achieve global economic and social recovery. Putting aside the so-called disputes over values, working together with a tolerant and open attitude, communicating actively, pursuing mutual benefit and complementarity to boost the economy is the priority in the coming post-epidemic era, rather than forcing the countries to choose side between so-called competing great powers.

U.S. pulls three Patriot anti-missile batteries from Persian Gulf region

→ 1 According to Washington-based conservative defense policy think tank the Jamestown Foundation, “Yemen’s established and emergent elites are more willing than they have been for years to set aside old grievances”.

“The driving force behind these moves to reinvigorate political processes is the recognition that the Houthis (a.k.a. Ansarullah) are not going to be defeated militarily. Thus, the Houthis’ influence and grip on northwest Yemen must be dealt with politically, if it is to be dealt with at all,” it wrote.

Since 2015, outside powers like the UAE and Saudi Arabia, have armed and funded proxies in their battle against Yemen’s resistance forces because they viewed kinetic military action as more expedient than politics. The flow of funds and weapons from foreign powers has helped sustain a war economy and fed the growth of armed factions in Yemen.

In June 2019, the UAE began withdrawing most of its forces from Yemen. Tensions with Saudi Arabia, international fallout from the UAE’s involvement in Yemen, and changing regional dynamics all contributed to the UAE decision. While the UAE remains involved in Yemen as a key supporter of the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC), the country’s leadership has adopted a lower profile role in the war and reduced the amount of money and materiel that it provides.

Dozens killed, many trapped after Taiwan train derails in tunnel

At least 48 people were killed and over a hundred injured after a packed express train derailed in a tunnel in eastern Taiwan on Friday morning, the country’s Central News Agency reported, in the worst train crash on the island in at least 40 years.

At least 70 other people are also believed to be trapped in the wreckage.

The transport ministry also said some 40 injured passengers had already been sent to hospital with others in the process of being admitted. About people are thought to remain trapped, al Jazeera reported.

Emergency services earlier reported “multiple persons with no vital signs” of life.

The Central Emergency Operation Center said rescuers were trying to get to four carriages inside the tunnel that were badly damaged and difficult to access.

A brief video released by the centre from inside the tunnel showed rescuers arriving on the scene and a twisted carriage door.

Images showed an injured passenger being stretched out of the crash scene, her head and neck in a brace, passengers gathering suitcases and bags in a tilted, derailed carriage and others walking out of the tunnel on the roof of the train.

Al-Shabaab militants call for attacks on U.S., French interests in Djibouti ahead of country’s presidential vote

The al-Shabab militant group has called for attacks on interests of the United States and France in Djibouti, almost two weeks ahead of the presidential election in the East African country.

In a video released late Saturday, al-Shabab’s leader Abou Obaida Ahmad Omar told his followers to “make American and French interests in Djibouti the highest priority of your targets.”

He lambasted Djibouti’s President Ismail Omar Guelleh for turning the Horn of Africa “into a military base,” from which “every war ... is planned and executed” against the African nations in East Africa.

Guelleh has been in power since 1999 and is set to win a fifth term in April 9 elections in Djibouti, whose strategic location as a gateway to both Africa and the Arabian Peninsula has made it a sought-after destination for foreign military bases.

Being a former French colony, Djibouti is now home to France’s largest contingent in Africa -- around 1,500 troops. The U.S. has also a permanent base there, hosting some 4,000 troops.

Resistance News

Gaza protesters demand release of Hamas officials from Saudi jails

TEHRAN— Hundreds of Palestinians have staged a protest in the Israeli-blockaded Gaza Strip, urging Saudi Arabia to release two officials from the Hamas resistance movement who are imprisoned in the kingdom.

The demonstration took place with the participants chanting slogans against Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, al-Quds al-Arabi newspaper reported.

They called on the Riyadh regime to release Muhammad al-Khudari, 83, and his son Hani, who are being kept behind bars in Saudi Arabia over the past three years.

Abdul Majid al-Khudari, a brother of the elderly inmate, told reporters during the protest that his family had repeatedly sent messages to Saudi officials demanding the detainees’ immediate release, but it had received no response, Press TV reported.

“Today, we gathered here to tell the world that there is a human being (Muhammad al-Khudari) who was subjected to oppression and is now in a Saudi prison. He is suffering from cancer,” he said, noting that his brother’s presence in Saudi Arabia was legal and coordinated with the kingdom.

Saudi-led war inflicted \$111bn in damage to Yemen’s agriculture sector: ministry

The Sana’a government’s Agriculture and Irrigation Ministry has enumerated the harm caused by the Saudi-led military coalition against Yemeni people, saying that the Riyadh-led aggression has, directly and indirectly, inflicted \$111 billion in damage to Yemen’s agriculture sector.

At a press conference released by Yem-

en’s al-Masirah news agency on Sunday, the Yemeni ministry said 172 governmental agricultural buildings and facilities, 204 non-governmental agricultural buildings and facilities, and 89 water facilities, including dams and water conservation projects, were destroyed in Saudi-led coalition’s airstrikes during past six years.

The ministry added that 2,314 agricultural warehouses, 75 markets, 45 agricultural unions, and 29 agricultural export centers and cold storage facilities were also demolished.

Elsewhere, the Yemeni Agriculture and Irrigation Ministry said 3,213 agricultural equipment and tools have been destroyed.

Agriculture Minister Abdul-Malek al-Thur said the damage done to the agriculture sector was very large and that more than 56 percent of those working in this sector had been negatively impacted.

Al-Thur said indirect damage in this sector includes loss of production capacity and alternative opportunities.

Iranians mark Nature Day at home amid coronavirus fears

➔ **1** As in many other cultures, the number thirteen is unlucky in the Iranian tradition. Iranians believe that by going outdoors, they welcome the spring, and leave behind all the bad luck associated with the number thirteen.



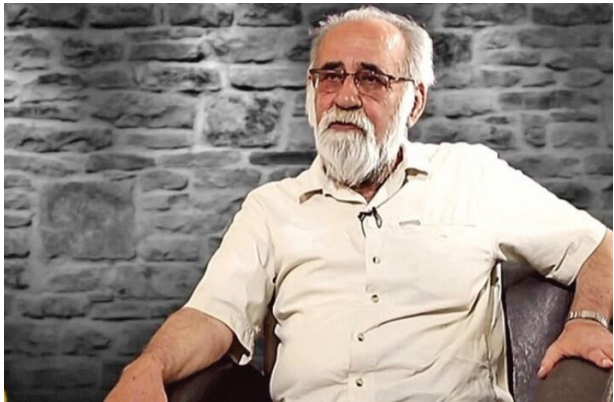
On the eve of Sizdah Bedar, many typically thinking about choosing an appropriate place to spend the day. Some choose parks, some go to the countryside and others come together in a garden to celebrate the day. Usually, several families plan to gather in a place to spend the day outdoors. It is believed that joy and laughter clean the mind from all evil thoughts, and a picnic is usually a festive, happy event.

People spend the day playing traditional games, singing, and listening to music, chatting, or simply resting along the banks of the river. The joy of the day is supposed to ward off an evil that the unlucky number thirteen might bring along with it.

Famed Iranian archaeologist Mir-Abedin Kaboli dies at 76

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** – Mir-Abedin Kaboli, a celebrated Iranian archaeologist who took part in various excavations across the Iranian plateau, died on Thursday at the age of 76.

Born in 1943 in Babol, northern Iran, Kaboli started his professional career at the general directorate of archeology in 1971 and since then he has participated in many archeological excavations in Haft Tappeh, Tapeh Abu Fandowa, and Shahdad, amongst some other sites, ISNA reported.



Excavations at Shahdad, an ancient site in southeast Kerman province, was one of his most famed missions, which yielded jewelry from the 3rd millennium BC. An archaeological team, led by Kaboli, discovered the ruins of a developed ancient city with industrial and residential areas and a graveyard after fourteen stages of excavations in Shahdad.

Kaboli was honored in 2016 as one of the greats of Iran's cultural heritage. He died of kidney failure in his hometown.

Plasterworks, potteries in Ilam made national heritage

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – A total of nine movable historical objects in the western province of Ilam have been inscribed on the national heritage list, CHTN reported on Friday.

Four decorative plasterworks, discovered in various ancient sites across the province, and a centuries-old gravestone are among the properties added to the prestigious list, according to Abdolmalek Shanbezadeh, the provincial tourism chief.



Four earthen objects and clay vessels have been made national heritage as well, the official added.

By registering these properties on the national heritage list, they would benefit from better protection and maintenance, he noted.

Home to almost half of Iran's UNESCO sites, western Iran is a land of hospitable people, wild extremes, and wilder history, and it may be an independent traveler's adventure playground. The region also witnessed the rise and fall of many great empires once bordering Mesopotamia, Ottoman Turkey, and Czarist Russia.

From the fecund Caspian coast to the stark, mountainous northern borders, and the crumbling desert ruins of the southern plains, the region hosts everything from paddy fields to blizzards to Persian gardens.

Coronavirus cases rise in Iran as millions travel during holiday

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – The number of coronavirus cases has been rising in Iran after millions traveled across the country during the Noruz holiday, which officially began on March 20.

The Islamic Republic reported its highest number of daily coronavirus infections in more than three months period after millions challenged government guidelines and traveled during the two-week holiday.

"More than 11,700 new coronavirus cases were detected in the country during the past 24 hours," the Health Ministry's spokeswoman, Sima Lari, announced on Thursday. She further put the death toll from COVID-19 in Iran at 62,759, adding "The disease has taken the lives of 94 patients over the past 24 hours."

According to official data, over 60,300 people have died from the virus across the country since the start of the pandemic a year ago. More than 1,750,000 cases have been reported.

Before Noruz, health officials voiced concerns about the fourth COVID wave due to the traditional travels, mostly to visit family and loved ones.

Authorities had urged people to limit travel and in-person visits, saying that travels during the Noruz festival could lead to another wave of infections across the country.

Before Noruz, 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.

The most dangerous areas were concentrated in the southwest of the country, particularly in Khuzestan province.

The Ministry of Health has classified districts based on the rate of coronavirus infections with red color indicating high risk, orange meaning medium, while yellow implied low risk and blue being the least.

According to the deputy tourism minister Vali Teymouri, the provinces of Mazandaran,

1.3m overnight stays registered across Iran within week

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – Iranians made some 1.3 million overnight stays in the official accommodation centers across the country during the first week of the Persian New Year (Noruz) holidays, which started on March 20, the deputy tourism minister has announced.

Average occupancy rate of the residential centers has reached around 30 percent during the mentioned period, ILNA quoted Vali Teymouri as saying on Sunday.

Appreciating tourists and travelers who followed health protocols during their trips, the official also thanked those who delayed or postponed their travels to help the tourism industry deal with the coronavirus outbreak.

Last year the country went into lockdown during Noruz holidays due to the coronavirus pandemic. Iranians made over 74 million overnight stays during the two-week Persian New Year holidays in 1398 (March 21-April 2, 2019).

Early in March, President Hassan Rouhani declared new travel bans for cities situated in the "red" and "orange"

zones to combat the new COVID-19 variant.

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"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.

historical monuments in Zanjan gain former glory 15

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – Some 15 historical buildings and aging structures in northwestern Zanjan province were restored during the previous Iranian calendar year 1399 (ended March 19).

Jameh Mosque, Shariati School, parts of the Historic Bazaar of Zanjan, the mosques of Chehel Sotun and Mir Bahaeddin, Khadivi Mansion, and parts of the southeastern towers of Gonbad-e Soltaniyeh are among the restored sites, the provincial tourism chief has said.

All the restored monuments have been



registered on the national heritage list, Amir Arjmand said on Thursday.

The culture and civilization of the province are intertwined with historical structures, which need to be promoted and preserved more properly, the official added.

The UNESCO-registered Mausoleum of Oljaytu, locally known as Gonbad-e Soltaniyeh, is the highlight of Zanjan's tourist attractions. Dominating the skyline, the 14th-century monument is highly recognized as an architectural masterpiece particularly due to its innovative double-shelled dome and elaborate interior decoration.

According to UNESCO, the mausoleum's interior decoration is so outstanding that

scholars like A.U. Pope have described the building as "anticipating the Taj Mahal".

The UN cultural body adds the Mausoleum of Oljaytu as an essential link and key monument in the development of Islamic architecture in central and western Asia.

Zanjan is one of the cities founded by Sassanid King Ardashir I (180-242 CE). The province makes a base for wider explorations with the architectural wonder of Soltaniyeh, the subterranean delights of the Katala-Khor caves, colorful mountains, and the UNESCO-registered Takht-e Soleiman ruins are nearby.

Over 6,000 overnight stays recorded in Lorestan in Noruz

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – Iranians made 6,339 overnight stays in the western province of Lorestan during the first ten days of the Persian New Year (Noruz) holidays, starting March 20, the provincial tourism chief has said.

The data has been collected from various residential centers including hotels, eco-lodge units, guest houses, and tourist complexes, Seyyed Amin Qasemi announced on Thursday.

The accommodation centers across the province host tourists and travelers under strict health protocols in order to contain the outbreak of the coronavirus, the official added.

Soaked in history and culture, Lorestan is one of the



lesser-known travel destinations in Iran, which mainly acts as a gateway to the sweltering plains below in adjoining Khuzestan province. Lorestan is also a region of raw beauty that an avid nature lover could spend weeks exploring.

It was inhabited by Iranian Indo-European peoples, including the Medes, c. 1000 BC. Cimmerians and Scythians intermittently ruled the region from about 700 to 625 BC. The Luristan Bronzes noted for their eclectic array of Assyrian, Babylonian, and Iranian artistic motifs, date from this turbulent period.

Lorestan was incorporated into the growing Achaemenid Empire in about 540 BC and successively was part of the Seleucid, Parthian, and Sasanid dynasties.

Beautiful Iran: Ashuradeh Island

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – Ashuradeh Island is the name of an island in the Miankaleh peninsula, located 10 km west of Bandar Torkaman, northern Iran.

Some people believe that the word "Ashuradeh" means "hunting ground" or "pasture". There is also historical speculation that Ashuradeh was a place where one of the kings of the Khwarazmian dynasty (1077-1231) fled after his defeat during the Mongol invasion of Iran, according to Visit Iran, the official travel guide to the country.

Ashuradeh is one of the most prominent wetlands in the world, with an area of 1200 meters in the past. These days, Ashuradeh covers an area of about 320

hectares and only the employments of the Iran Fisheries Organization live on the island and the local people have left it.

One of the historical landmarks in Ashuradeh is the ruins of Safavid fortresses that remain. Ashuradeh was a royal hunting ground in the Safavid era (1501-1736). The "Russian Fortress", the "House of the Russian Minister" and the "Wooden Church" are the relics from the Russian invasion of Iran in 1837. During the Pahlavi era (1925-1979), the Russian castle was used as an outpost, many parts of which are now destroyed.

The fauna of the island includes fox, jackal, wild cat, pig, wild horse, etc. Indigenous and migratory birds such as pheasant, white and black geese, flamingo,

pelican as well as aquatic animals like salmon, starry sturgeon also live in this environment. Among the vegetation of Ashuradeh, sour pomegranate trees and raspberry bushes can be named but a few.

Ashuradeh can be reached via Torkaman Island. If you want to travel and visit this marvelous attraction by your vehicle, you should park and leave your car in the Bandar Torkaman and use boats to cross over the sea through Ashuradeh Island. While visiting this island, you can get a lot of pleasure from browsing the local market, the dunes of Ashuradeh, and watching hunting sturgeons.

It is worth mentioning that about half of the starry sturgeon caviar of Iran is hunted from the shores of Ashuradeh.



After returning from the Island, it is highly recommended to visit the local Bazaar in Bandar Torkaman. The best time of visiting this attraction is during spring until early fall.

Iran to start producing Sputnik V vaccine this month

SOCIETY
d e s k

TEHRAN – An Iranian company is cooperating with Russia to produce the “Sputnik V” vaccine this month, the Iranian ambassador to Russia has announced.

“Cell culture process will probably begin next week and production will start by the next month,” IRNA quoted Kazem Jalali as saying on Thursday.

In addition to joint-production, Iran has received the fifth shipment of “Sputnik V” containing 100,000 doses, he added.

According to the first agreement signed between the Ministry of Health of Iran and the Russian Direct Investment Fund, a total of 2 million doses of vaccine will be delivered to Iran, he stated.

Vaccination of Iranian citizens against



COVID-19 began with “Sputnik V” vaccine on February 9.

COVIRAN BAREKAT, the first coronavirus vaccine made by researchers at the Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam which was unveiled on December 29, 2020, started to be mass-produced on March 29.

The second Iranian coronavirus vaccine, Razi Cov Pars, started the clinical trial by injecting it into two volunteers during a ceremony on February 27.

Fakhra vaccine, the third homegrown vaccine, was unveiled and started the clinical trial on March 16.

On January 27, Health Minister Saeed Namaki said Iran will soon be one of the world’s important manufacturers of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Over 6,000 passengers tested for COVID-19 at Iranian borders



SOCIETY
d e s k

TEHRAN – Some 6,173 suspected passengers have undergone PCR tests for coronavirus at the country’s official borders since March 20, a spokesman

for the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS), has said.

During the period, 16,630 rapid tests have been done at the country’s 33 official borders and 33 individuals have been temporarily quarantined, Mohammad-Hassan Qousian Moghaddam stated.

So far, 87,786 passengers have been monitored through the plan, he added, IRNA reported on Friday.

With the cooperation of ministries of health and transport, a plan was implemented with the goal of rapidly identifying and testing incoming passengers and keeping them in quarantine facilities, if necessary.

Thirty border checkpoints have been selected, including 18 land borders, nine air borders, and three sea borders, all incoming passengers will be tested and referred to the quarantine facilities in case of necessity.

Some 5,000 members of the IRCS cooperate for carrying out the plan; while around 8,000 individuals enter the country via borders on a daily basis, Karim Hemmati, head

of IRCS said on March 26.

In February, Khuzestan province’s governor general said Iraqi nationals visiting Iran have worsened the coronavirus pandemic in the southwestern province.

More than 300 Iraqi nationals cross Chazzabeh and Shalamchah borders per day, Qassem Soleimani-Dashtaki said, adding that the issue has contributed to a rise in the number of coronavirus cases.

New cases and mortalities

In a press briefing on Monday, Health Ministry’s spokesperson Sima-Sadat Lari confirmed 11,660 new cases of COVID-19 infection, raising the total number of infections to 1,908,974. She added that 1,633,949 patients have so far recovered, but 3,784 remain in critical conditions of the disease.

During the past 24 hours, 117 patients have lost their lives, bringing the total number of deaths to 62,876, she added.

So far, 12,963,778 COVID-19 diagnostic tests have been performed in the country.

Thousands of migratory birds reach wetland in southern Iran

ENVIRONMENT
d e s k

TEHRAN – Some 10,000 migratory birds flying from Siberia and Central Asia have so far reached Khor Azini wetland in the southern Sirik county, Hormozgan province.

The birds, including pelicans, eagles, gulls, swallows, flamingos, and herons will remain at the wetland until the end of April, IRNA reported.

Measuring 27,000 hectares, Khor Azini wetland is a pristine and unique habitat for migratory birds in the country.

About 90 species of aquatic birds annually migrate to Hormozgan province, which is one of the important wintering grounds for migratory birds.

Hormozgan province, with more than 2,000 kilometers of coastline and 14 islands in addition to 4 international wetlands, is the most important migratory bird habitat in winter.

In Iran, 141 wetlands with ecological value with an area of over 3 million hectares have been identified, of which 25 wetlands are designated as wetlands of international importance (registered in the Ramsar Convention) covering more than 1.4 million hectares and four sites are biosphere reserves.

Chief of the Department of Environment (DOE) Issa Kalantari has said in order to restore wetlands in the country a budget of 600 trillion rials (nearly \$14 billion) is required.

Literacy programs provided for 1.3m prisoners, armed forces

SOCIETY
d e s k

TEHRAN – The Literacy Movement Organization of Iran has so far provided more than 1.3 million prisoners and armed forces with literacy programs.

The Organization, which was established on December 28, 1979, has held literacy courses for around 800,000 prisoners and 500,000 armed forces, head of the Organization, Shapour Mohammadzadeh, said on Tuesday.

In addition to illiterate armed forces, the plan also covers prisoners between 10 and 60 years of age, he added, IRNA reported.

In January, Mohammadzadeh said the

rate of literacy among Iranians between 10-49 years has reached 96.6 percent.

“Before the [1979] Islamic Revolution, according to a census conducted in 1976, over 51 percent of the people were illiterate.”

Over the past four decades, in the Iranian calendar year 1395 (March 2016-March 2017), the average literacy rate in the age group of 10 to 49 has reached 94.7 percent, he noted.

“In deprived areas, we will cover up to 70 percent of the education cost, and all our efforts are to solve the problem of illiteracy across the country,” he highlighted.

Police arrest 301 individuals for smuggling goods

SOCIETY
d e s k

TEHRAN – The Iranian police arrested 301 individuals for smuggling goods worth 278 billion rials (about \$6.5 million) on Thursday.

Kinds of goods, including home appliances, cosmetics, computer equipment, cell phones, medical devices, clothing, fuel, and animal feedstock were discovered and confiscated from the smugglers, IRNA quoted police official Sohrab Bahrani as saying.

Smuggled goods and currency worth 126 trillion rials (nearly \$3 billion) have been discovered across the country over the past eleven months, Mohammad Reza Moghimi, the police chief, said on March 12.

Every year, \$20-25 billion are smuggled in and out of the country, which, if stopped, will create hundreds of thousands of jobs, Hassan Norouzi, a member of the



parliament, has said.

In the Iranian calendar year 1396 (March 2017-March 2018), \$12 billion was smuggled into Iran and \$900 million out of the country, according to the Headquarters for Combating the Smuggling of Commodities and Foreign Exchange.

Iran, which has a 900-kilometer border with Afghanistan, has been used as the main conduit for smuggling Afghan drugs to narcotics kingpins in Europe.

Despite high economic and human costs, Iran has been actively fighting drug-trafficking over the past decades.

In June 2020, the first phase of the national anti-smuggling plan was implemented with the priority given to customs, tobacco, and transit goods.

ENGLISH IN USE

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A ← → E

Iran spends \$477m on refugee education annually

Iran spends about 20 trillion rials (nearly \$477 million at the official rate of 42,000 rials) every year on the education of foreign national students residing in the country, head of the international affairs department of the Ministry of Education has said.

Over 558,000 foreign national children are receiving education in Iran completely free of charge, 474,000 of whom are Afghan children, ISNA quoted Gholamreza Karimi as saying on Wednesday.

Karimi said that there are currently about 137,000 undocumented Afghan students in the country, adding that their parents do not have valid residency documents, “but we have provided the conditions for enrolling them in schools.”

A number of foreign nationals from neighboring countries came to Iran over the past four decades due to numerous regional crises and civil wars, he lamented.

ایران سالی ۲ هزار میلیارد تومان برای دانش آموزان اتباع خارجی هزینه می کند

ایران هر سال حدود ۲ هزار میلیارد تومان برای ۵۵۸ هزار دانش آموز اتباع خارجی در مدارس سراسر کشور هزینه می کند.

به گزارش روز چهارشنبه ایسنا، غلامرضا کریمی رئیس مرکز امور بین‌الملل و مدارس خارج از کشور وزارت آموزش و پرورش گفت از این تعداد ۴۷۴ هزار نفر آنها اتباع افغانستانی هستند. کریمی با بیان اینکه در حال حاضر ۱۳۷ هزار دانش آموز غیرمجاز در کشور داریم گفت پدر و مادر این افراد مدارک اقامتی معتبر ندارند اما ما شرایط ثبت نام آنها را مدارس فراهم کردیم.

تعدادی از اتباع کشورهای همسایه به خاطر بحرانهای متعدد منطقه ای و جنگ‌های داخلی در طول چهار دهه گذشته به ایران آمدند. پس از صدور فرمان مقام معظم رهبری در پایان سال ۱۳۹۳ هیچ کودک ایرانی و خارجی مستقر در ایران نباید از تحصیل محروم بماند.

\$857m allocated to school renovation in 8 years

SOCIETY
d e s k

TEHRAN – A total of 36 trillion rials (nearly \$857 million at the official rate of 42,000 rials) has been allocated to renovate the schools nationwide over the past 8 years, Seyed Mohammad-Ali Afshani, former head of the Organization for Development, Renovation, and Equipping Schools, said.

In the Iranian calendar year 1382 (March 2003- March 2004), about 70 percent of the country’s schools were not meeting the safety standards and were in need of demolition, reconstruction, and renovation so that a bill was approved to allocate \$4 million in this regard, he explained.

The number of old classrooms in need of reconstruction and renovation has been reduced from 30 percent to 19.5 percent over the past four years, Mehrolah Rakhshanimehr, director of the Organization for Development, Renovation, and Equipping Schools, said.

In fact, over the past 8 years, more than 29,000 classrooms have been rehabilitated nationwide, IRNA reported.

Tehran has the highest number of old schools. In this province, measures have been taken to reconstruct the schools, but the capital still has the highest number of old schools, Rakhshanimehr he lamented.

The national budget bill for the next [Iranian calendar] year (March 2021-March 2022) has foreseen a 21-percent rise for the renovation and retrofit of schools compared to a year before, as a total of 51 trillion rials (nearly \$1.2 billion at the official rate of 42,000 rials) was proposed for school renovation in the budget bill.

107,000 schools need renovation nationwide

There are some 107,000 schools nationwide with 530,000 classes, 160,000 of which are dilapidated, not meeting safety standards, accounting for 30 percent of the schools nationwide.

Rakhshanimehr said in August 2020 that some 30 percent of the country’s schools have been constructed by school-building benefactors; there are 450 school-building charities in Iran.

Iran has many school-building benefactors amounting to 650,000 people inside and 1,000 people outside the country.

President Hassan Rouhani officially inaugurated some 1,550 educational, training, and welfare projects across the country in November 2020 via video conferencing.

The projects included 1,422 educational places with 8,051 classrooms, 124 training centers, and 4 welfare centers, measuring a total of 1.1 million square meters.

The Organization for Development, Renovation, and Equipping Schools started operating in the Iranian calendar year 1396 (March 2017-March 2018), which received a budget of 8.5 trillion rials (about \$200 million).

‘Fakhra’ vaccine to be mass-produced by late May

SOCIETY
d e s k

TEHRAN – Iran will start mass production of homegrown ‘Fakhra’ vaccine for COVID-19 by the end of the third Iranian calendar month of Khordad (May 21).

Fakhra vaccine, named after martyred nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, was unveiled and started the clinical trial on March 16.

The first dose of the vaccine was injected into the son of martyr Fakhrizadeh.

The production of various diagnostic kits of COVID-19 and mobile specialized laboratories was the starting point of this fight.

The vaccine has been injected into 15 volunteers, IRNA quoted Ahmad Karimi, manager of Fakhra vaccine production project, as saying.

In the first phase, 135 volunteers will get the vaccine, he said, adding that the second phase will start 35 days later.

The process of research and development of the Fakhra vaccine began in March 2020, by isolating the virus from among 35,000 samples of Iranian patients and performing various tests to identify the virus, so that the vaccine reached the experimental production stage in June 2020.

COVIRAN BAREKAT, the first coronavirus vaccine made by researchers at the Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam which was unveiled on December 29, 2020, started to be mass-produced on Monday.

The second Iranian coronavirus vaccine, Razi Cov Pars, started the clinical trial by injecting it into two volunteers during a ceremony on February 27.

On January 27, Health Minister Saeed Namaki said Iran will soon be one of the world’s important manufacturers of the COVID-19 vaccine.

LET’S LEARN PERSIAN

(Part 150)

(Source: saadifoundation.ir)

■ Present Progressive

■ حال جاری

حال جاری از حال ساده داشتن + حال اخباری ساخته می‌شود.

جای ’داشتن’ معمولاً بعد از فاعل است:

۸ من + دارم + می‌روم — من دارم می‌روم

تو + داری + می‌روی — تو داری می‌روی

او + دارد + می‌رود — او دارد می‌رود

ما + داریم + می‌رویم — ما داریم می‌رویم

شما + دارید + می‌روید — شما دارید می‌روید

آنها + دارند + می‌روند — آنها دارند می‌روند

■ تمرین ۱. مصدرها را به حال جاری بنویسید:

۱. پسرها بلند (حرف زدن)

۲. همه تو مدرسه (بازی کردن)

۳. این بیمار کم‌کم (خوب شدن)

۴. پدرم شما را (صدا کردن)

۵. ما با هم (نماز خواندن)

۶. بچه غذا را روی زمین (ریختن)

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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

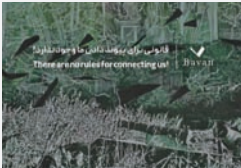
There are five activities that I won't leave off till I'm alive so that they would become part of my tradition. [One of them] is greeting children.

Prophet Muhammad (S)

WHAT'S IN ART GALLERIES



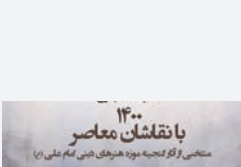
Painting
■ An exhibition of paintings by Saeid Gholami is currently underway at Sharif Gallery. The exhibit will be running until April 9 at the gallery that can be found at 11 Mahruzadeh Alley, Shariati Ave. near Quds Square.



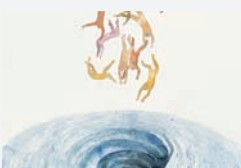
■ Bavan Gallery is playing host to an exhibition of paintings by a group of artists, including Adena Mirzakhani, Pune Oshidari, Elham Purkhani, Elham Etemadi, Mahshid Roshantabar and Shabnam Jahanshahi. The exhibit named "There Are No Rules for Connecting Us" will continue until April 19 at the gallery located at 7 Abdo off Lareztan St. off Motahhari Ave.



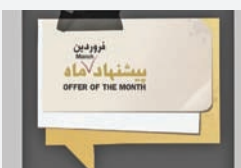
■ An exhibition of paintings by Ali Golestaneh, Bahman Mohammadi, Zahra Qarakhani, Shohreh Mehran, Puya Razi, Sassan Nasiri, Rasul Akbarlu, Rozita Nosrati, Parvaneh Etemadi and several other artists is underway at Inja Gallery.



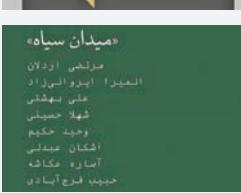
The exhibit named "Perspective: The Painter" will run until April 16 at the gallery located at 4 Pedram Alley, Neauphle-le-Chateau St. ■ A group of artists, including Muhammad-Ebrahim Jafari, Shirin Pilevari, Mohammad-Ali Bani-Asadi, Shahin Tabanfar, Bahman Niku, Reza Mafi, Siavash Kasrai and Nosratollah Moslemian, are showcasing a collection of their paintings in an exhibition at the Imam Ali (AS) Religious Arts Museum. The exhibition will continue until April 20 at the museum located at 35 Esfandiari Blvd., off Vali-e Asr Ave.



■ A collection of paintings by Alireza Chalipa, Kolsum Salehi, Elham Yazdani, Ali Ganjavi, Maryam Sabbaghpur, Mahbubeh Karamli, Amir Karim and dozens of other artists is on view in an exhibition at O Gallery. The exhibitions will run until April 19 at the gallery located at 18 Shahin St., Sanai St.



Multimedia
■ Artworks by a group of artists in various media are on display in an exhibition at Liam Gallery. The exhibit runs until April 13 at the gallery located at No. 118, Fathi Shaghaqi St. near Salmas Square.



■ Emkan Gallery is playing host to an exhibition of artworks in various media by Habib Farajabadi, Asareh Akasheh, Ashkan Abdoli, Vahid Hakim, Shahla Hosseini, Ali Beheshti, Elmira Iravanizadeh, and Morteza Ardalan. Entitled "Black Square", the exhibit will be running until April 6 at the gallery that can be found at No. 3, Second Alley, Mirza Shirazi St.

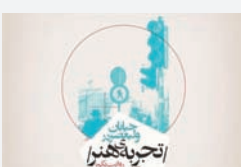


Photo
■ A collection of photos Amir Alimi, Masud Qarai, Sorush Kiai, Bitah Hushmand, Mohsen Yazdipour, Behnam Sedighi, Golnaz Zibandehkhu, Majid Farahani and several other photographers is on display in an exhibition at Vali-e Asr Street Museum. The exhibit will be running until April 14 at the museum located Karimitinat Alley near Monirieh Square.

Islamic Revolution Art Week set for April 7-14

A R T TEHRAN — The Islamic Revolution Art Week has been set for April 7 to 14 as the organizers unveiled a poster for the event on Tuesday.

The art week is organized every year to commemorate the martyrdom anniversary of documentarian Morteza Avini who was killed by a landmine in 1993 during his last trip to the former Iran-Iraq war zone in southwestern Iran while making a documentary about soldiers who were still listed as missing in action.

The Islamic Revolution Artist of the Year will also be announced during this festival, which is organized by the Art Bureau of the Islamic Ideology Dissemination Organization.

The longest of nominees for the title was announced in mid-March and the winner will be selected from among the five finalists, the names of whom will be disclosed in the near future.

Poet Afshin Ala is on the list that features 14 artists and cultural figures.

Ala has been selected for "his timely literary response to events in society and creating the poetry book 'Sarbaznameh' ('Book of



A poster for the 2021 Islamic Revolution Art Week.

Soldiers') in mourning for General Qassem Soleimani."

Tehran-based French writer and

illustrator Claire Joubert is also among the nominees. She has received the nomination for her books based on stories from the

Holy Quran, including "The Woven Shoes" and "Small Drops".

Director and screenwriter Jalil Saman has been nominated for his trilogy, "Gift of Darkness", "Butterfly" and "Breath" on the Islamic Revolution, and the popular TV series "The Antique".

Author and storyteller Mohammadreza Sarshar has received a nomination for having written 143 books for children and young adults.

Director and screenwriter Siavash Sarmadi was selected for his 8-episode documentary, "Syria: A Report on a Major Crisis".

The list also features graphic artists Mikail Barati and Mohammadreza Doostmohammadi, photographer Ali Haddadi, animators Mohammadreza Hesai and Hossein Saffarzadegan, producer Mohammadreza Shafah, authors Zeinab Erfanian and Vahid Yaminpur, painter Abdolhamid Qadirian, and poet Ali-Mohammad Moaddab.

The organizers also plan to select the Islamic Revolution Artist of the Year for 2020. The 2020 Islamic Revolution Art Week was canceled due to the pandemic.

Iranian photographers Mehdi Kazemi, Kiarang Alai win FIAP Gold Medals at Kyrgyzstan exhibit



Iranian photographer Kiarang Alai's photo "The Beauty of Women" won the FIAP Gold Medal in the people section of the 2nd Naryn International Exhibition of Photography in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

A R T TEHRAN — Iranian photographers Mehdi Kazemi Bumeh and Kiarang Alai have

won the FIAP Gold Medals at the 2nd Naryn International Exhibition of Photography in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

Kazemi Bumeh won the honor for his photo "Soar" in the Creative – Altered Reality Section, in which Alai also received the FPC Trophy, and his fellow Iranian photographer Sina Khanbabai grabbed the FIAP Ribbon.

They received the honors for the photos "The Sign" and "Healing" respectively.

"Birth" by Alai, "Graduation" by Benjamin Al-e Ali and "Suspension Bridge" by Ehsan Jazini, all from Iran, won honorable mentions in this category.

Alai won the FIAP Gold Medal in the people section for his photo "The Beauty of Women", which depicts a group of women in an Iranian village.

Mahdi Aqiqi's "Old Couple" was awarded the FIAP Ribbon in the people section, which also gave honorable mentions to Farzad Farzaneh's "Natural Spa" and Baset Mahmudi's "Pir-e Shalyar".

Alai's "When Morning Begins" in the life section also won the FIAP Gold Medal. This photo shows a

village woman emptying out a bucket of water on a fine, foggy morning.

In addition to the creative – altered reality section, the competition organized by the Federation Internationale de l'Art Photographique (FIAP) and the Photographic Society of America (PSA) was also held in the three other categories of open monochrome, open color and photojournalism.

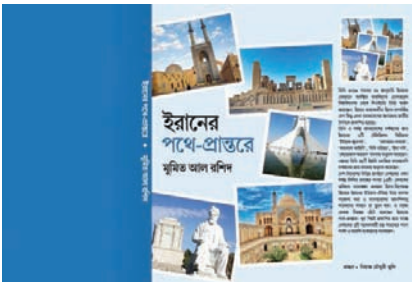
In the categories open monochrome and photojournalism Ehsan Jazini and Baset Mahmudi, both from Iran, won honorable mentions, while the open color section had no winner from Iran.

The Best Author Award – FIAP Light Blue Badge – went to Hungarian photographer Istvan Kerekes.

A jury of the Iranian photographers Asghar Sameti, Ahmad Khatiri and Mohammadreza Masumi judged the submissions.

A selection of the accepted images and all award winning images will be projected at public showings on May 31 at the Asian Photographers Association in Bishkek. Also photos will be published on the exhibition site.

Book on Iran published in Dhaka



Cover of "A Review of Iran" by Bangladeshi author Muhammad Mumit Al-Rashid

cinema, traditional games, Persian music, women's status in Iran, Iranian cuisine and many other topics on the country are discussed in the book.

Gholam-Hossein Gholamhosseinzadeh,

a professor at the Faculty of Humanities at Tehran's Tarbiat Modares University where Mumit Al-Rashid studied the Persian language, has written a preface to the book.

In addition, the book also has prefaces by Ebrahim Khodayar of Tarbiat Modares University and Nematollah Iranzadeh, the dean of the Faculty of Persian Literature & Foreign Languages at Allameh Tabataba'i University.

"What our world of today needs is to love humanity, regardless of differences, and to promote an affectionate dialog to live gracefully and avoid wars and violence; the very same glorious heritage our ancestors left for us in the common civilization from Bosnia to Bengal," Khodayar wrote his introduction.

"Muhammad Mumit Al-Rashid and other scholars living in other countries have had

key roles in clarifying this topic for their countrymen," he added.

There has been a close cultural relation between Iran and Bangladesh over the past few years.

Rodela, a leading publisher in Bangladesh, published Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei's memoirs "The Pains that Changed into Gains" in early 2021.

Pendulum Publications previously released a Bengali translation of a book containing 10 stories by the renowned Iranian novelist and short story writer, Jalal Al-e Ahmad in Bangladesh.

The book has been translated by Muhammad Abdus Sabur Khan, who is a faculty member at the Department of Persian Language and Literature of the University of Dhaka.

Divan of Iranian-Turkmen poet Magtymguly Pyragy rendered into Persian

CULTURE TEHRAN — The divan of Magtymguly Pyragy, an Iranian-Turkmen poet who lived during the 18th century, has been translated into Persian.

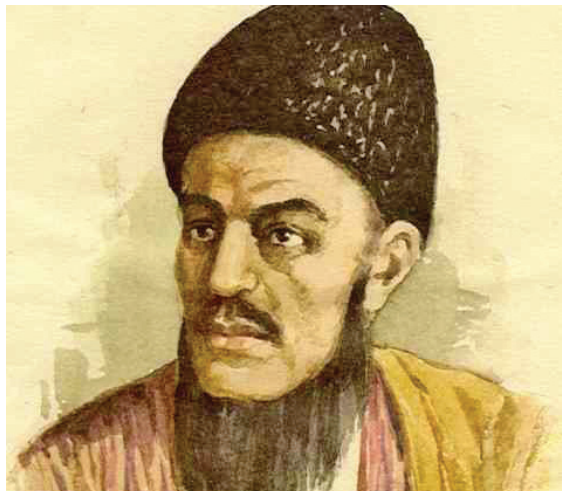
A team of translators consisting of Mashhadqoli Qezel, Musa Jorjani, Hajji Mohammad Qaranjik, Khal-Mohammad Peqeh and Asher-Mohammad Raufi has spent eight years rendering the collection into Persian, the team announced in a press release published by IRNA on Wednesday.

The collection translated in 95 sessions will be published in four volumes in the near future.

Magtymguly Pyragy, also spelled Makhtumqoli Faraghi, was a Turkmen spiritual leader, philosophical poet and Sufi who is considered to be the father of Turkmen literature and the most famous figure in Turkmen literary history.

Born in C. 1733 in Hajjigowshan, a village near Gonbad-e Qabus in the modern-day province of Golestan, Iran, Magtymguly received his early education in the Persian and Arabic languages from his father, Dowletmammet Azady, a leading Turkmen scholar.

Magtymguly studied in various madrassahs, including Idris Baba Madrassah in the village of Gyzy Ayak, Sirgazy



A portrait of the Iranian-Turkmen poet Magtymguly Pyragy.

Islamic arts: zenith of Islamic literature

■ The mystical poem
Whereas the mystical thought stemming from Iran had formerly been written in Arabic, writers from the 11th century onward turned to Persian.

Along with works of pious edification and theoretical discussions, what was to be one of the most common types of Persian literature came into existence: the mystical poem.

Khawajah Abdullah al-Ansari (died 1088), a prolific writer on religious topics in both Arabic and Persian, first popularized the literary "prayer", or mystical contemplation, written in Persian in rhyming prose interspersed with verses.

Sana'i (died 1131?), at one time a court

poet of the Ghaznavids, composed the first mystical epic, the didactic Hadiqat al-Haqiqat wa Shariat al-Tariqah ("The Garden of Truth and the Law of the Path"), which has some 10,000 verses.

In this lengthy and rather dry poem, the pattern for all later mystical masnavis is established: wisdom is embodied in stories and anecdotes; parables and proverbs are woven into the texture of the story, eventually leading back to the main subject, although the argument is without thread and the narration puzzling to follow.

Among Sana'i's smaller masnavis, Sayr al-Ibad ila al-Maad ("The Journey of the Servants to

the Place of Return") deserves special mention. Its theme is the journey of the spirit through the spheres, a subject dear to the mystics and still employed in modern times as, for example, by Iqbal in his Persian Javidnameh (1932; "The Song of Eternity").

Sana'i's epic endeavors were continued by one of the most prolific writers in the Persian tongue, Farad ad-Din Attar (died c. 1220). He was a born storyteller, a fact that emerges from his lyrics but even more so from his works of edification.

The most famous among his masnavis is the Manteq at-Tayr (The Conference of the Birds), modeled after some Arabic allegories.

It is the story of 30 birds who, in search of their spiritual king, journey through seven valleys.

The poem is full of tales, some of which have been translated even into the most remote Islamic languages. (The story of the pious Sheikh San'an, who fell in love with a Christian maiden, is found, for example, in Kashmiri.)

Attar's symbolism of the soul-bird was perfectly in accord with the existing body of imagery beloved of Persian poetry, but it was he who added a scene in which the birds eventually realize their own identity with God (because they, being si morph, or "30 birds", are identified with the mystical Simorgh, who represents God).