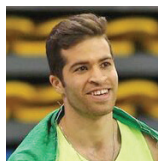


Defense minister says Iran has no limit to export arms *Page 2*



Taftian not satisfied with holding camp in France *Page 3*

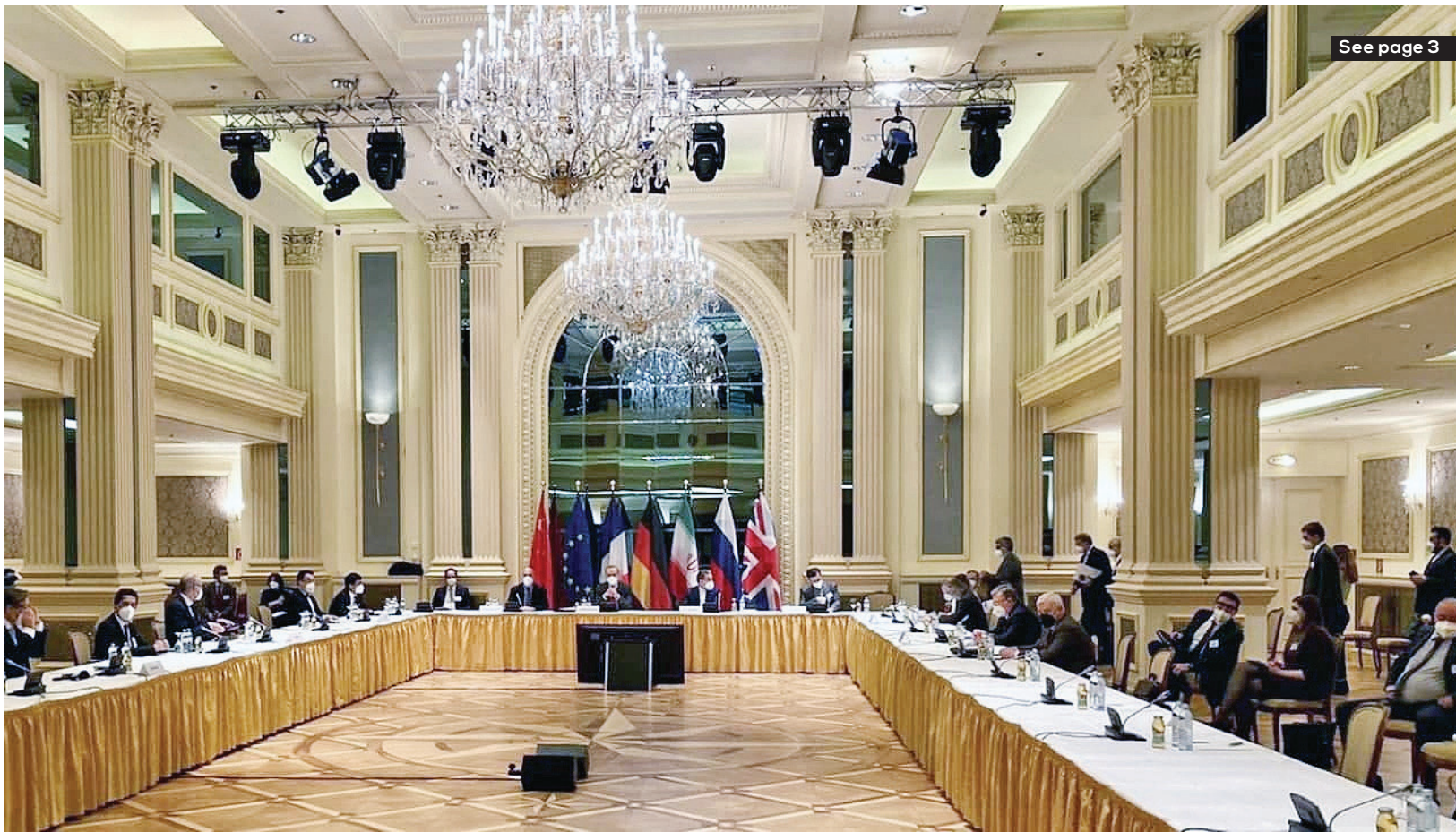


Electricity projects worth over \$690m put into operation *Page 4*



Islamic Revolution Artist of the Year announces 2021 finalists *Page 8*

Iran and P4+1 resume nuclear talks: what to expect?



See page 3

Iran begins mechanical test of new advanced centrifuge

TEHRAN – Iran announced on Tuesday that it will unveil a new, advanced kind of centrifuge on April 10 in the latest move to ratchet up nuclear activities as diplomats from Iran and 5+1 nations gather in Vienna to discuss ways to revive a 2015 nuclear deal. Behrouz Kamalvandi, spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), said, “This year, on the anniversary of Iran achieving peaceful nuclear energy on April 10, 133 achievements and breakthroughs in the nuclear industry will

be unveiled in the Saadabad complex.” One of the advances in the field of nuclear enrichment is the beginning of the mechanical test of IR-9 centrifuge, which has the capacity of 50 SWUs (separate work units), he continued. He pointed out that this machine is one of the most important completely indigenous centrifuges in Iran, which manufactures and operates with new standard methods.

Continued on page 2

1,500 idle industrial units revived in Iran in a year

TEHRAN – Iran’s Deputy Industry, Mining, and Trade Minister Mehdi Sadeqi Niaraki announced that 1,500 idle industrial units have been revived in the country during the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20).

According to Niaraki, over 6,500 new industrial units were also established across the country during the mentioned year which created jobs for over 121,000 people, IRNA reported.

Touching upon the Industry Ministry’s

plans for the realization of the motto of the current year which is named the year of “Production: support and the elimination of obstacles” by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, the official said: “In the year that has been dedicated to the production sector by the Leader of the revolution, the orientation of all government organizations and executive bodies should be towards supporting the country’s industrial and mining units.”

Continued on page 4

“The Zeinabi Division” documentary to be broadcasted soon

TEHRAN - The documentary “The Zeinabi Division”, the first part of the documentary series “These Stars”, including the meeting of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution with the families of the martyrs, will soon be broadcast on IRIB Channel 1.

According to the Mehr news agency, one of Ayatollah Khamenei’s regular plans

is to meet and talk with the families of the martyrs. So far, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution has personally visited the families of hundreds of martyrs from different parts of the country in their homes and talked closely with these families.

Continued on page 8

Iran football totally shocked by appointment of National Team director

BY FARROKH HESABI
After months of talking about it, the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) has finally done it. A new director of football is finally in place at Iran national team.

Mojtaba Khorshidi has been named as the new director of the Iran national football team. His appointment was the matter of debates in the Iranian sports media and among the Iranian football experts and fans. The choice seems a little wired since Khorshidi has not enough experience for the position.

This FFIRI’s decision was met by criticism, and it was not the first decision of the new FFIRI president facing criticism.

Most football veterans and experts believe that the national team’s position is an important position that should be seated by an experienced and well-known figure.

Among the critics of the FFIRI’s decision is Behnam Abolghasempour, former Persepolis and Iran national team player.

In an exclusive interview with Tehran Times, Abolghasempour expressed his view about the issue. “It was shocking. Mr. Khorshidi has worked for many years in some Iranian teams, and I respect him as a person. However, you cannot deny that there were much better choices for the national team’s director position than Khorshidi.

“If I just want to name some of the people who deserve this position, I have to say Mohammad Khakpour, who has been played in Iran national team for many years and speaks English fluently, or I will say Nima Nakisa, former national team goalkeeper, Mehdi Mahdavi Kia, one of the legends of the Iranian football’s history, are deserved for the position,” Abolghasempour added.

“We need a charismatic director for the national team, someone who is accepted by the big players of the national team, most of them are playing in European leagues and have worked with great managers in their careers.

“The federation must announce what has been their measures for such an appointment. In my opinion, it was kind of disrespect to Iran’s football community. I think some external pressures have made the FFIRI president to make such a decision. Mr. Azizi Khadem is in his first days as the leader of the Iranian football, and he has to choose the best path and the best people from the very beginning for the progress of football,” he concluded.

Iran cancels outbound tours to Turkey due to new coronavirus variant

TEHRAN – All outbound tours to Turkey have been canceled due to the spread of a new coronavirus variant, the secretary of the Association of Iranian Airlines has announced.

According to the Interior Ministry, and the National Headquarters for Coronavirus Control, tourist tours to Turkey have been canceled until further notice, IRNA quoted Maqsood Asadi Samani as saying on Tuesday.

However, flights between Iran and Turkey are operated on schedule, the official added.

Earlier this week the official announced that there is no plan at present to suspend flights to and from Turkey. He added that airlines flying to Turkey will immediately halt the service if the National Headquarters for Coronavirus Control votes to its suspension.

Considering the widespread of the mutated coronavirus in Turkey, it is necessary to halt, by the next 48 hours, traveling via land and air borders

to and from Turkey for a week, Namaki stressed.

“Iranian citizens who are in Turkey and intend to turn back to the country, as well as Turkish citizens who are in Iran, can leave the country observing the relevant protocols and doing PCR test to make sure no infection spreads,” he highlighted in the letter. For Iranians entering the country from land and air borders, quarantine is also required for suspicious or positive cases, he stated.

On February 22, the spokesman of Iran’s Customs Administration Rouhollah Latifi said Iran has closed five crossing points with Iraq to prevent the spread of the UK variant of coronavirus, ISNA reported.

Flights between the two neighbors have repeatedly been suspended in recent months for the sake of coronavirus concerns though passengers are required to observe strict health protocols and hold a well-being certificate with a negative coronavirus PCR test result.

Israeli forces have detained 230 Palestinian minors since January

Israeli military forces continue to target young Palestinians and violently arrest them across the occupied territories, having detained 230 minors since the beginning of the current year.

The Palestinian Prisoners Society (PPS) said in a report that the arrests were mostly in the occupied city of Jerusalem al-Quds.

The rights group further noted that the detainees are often released on bail or placed under house arrest, without announcing the number of those who were freed.

“The imprisoned children are subjected to various forms of abuse, including being denied food or drink for long hours, verbal abuse and being detained under harsh conditions,” it said.

The report came just a day before Palestinian Children’s Day, which is marked annually on April 5 with cultural, educational and media activities aimed at raising awareness on the plight of Palestinian children.

Marking Palestine Children’s Day, the Palestine Prisoners’ Club revealed that there are 140 Palestinian children languishing in Israel jails, including two under administrative detention.

Separately, the Defense for Children International - Palestine (DCIP) said in a statement that 85 percent of Palestinian children arrested last year were “subjected to physical violence.”

According to Press TV, the Geneva-based movement noted that it has documented 27 cases in which Israeli forces held children in solitary confinement citing investigation purposes for two or more days.

The organization said the practice amounts to “torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.”

It said it has registered the issuance of administrative detention orders against 36 Palestinian children since October 2015, two of whom are still in detention.

6 Iranian universities in QS Rankings 2021

BY FARANAK BAKHTIARI

TEHRAN – Six Iranian universities have been placed among the world’s top universities announced by the prestigious Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings 2021.

QS is the world’s leading provider of services, analytics, and insight to the global higher education sector, whose mission is to enable motivated people anywhere in the world to fulfill their potential through educational achievement, international mobility, and career development.

The QS World University Rankings portfolio, inaugurated in 2004, has grown to become the world’s most popular source of comparative data about university performance.

Some 1,000 of the world’s top universities are ranked using six different indicators to compile QS World University Rankings 2021. Universities are evaluated according to the following six metrics: academic reputation, employer reputation, faculty/student ratio, citations per faculty, international faculty ratio, and international student ratio.

As per the data published on QS World University Rankings official website, Sharif University of Technology, ranked 409, Amirkabir University of Technology, ranked 477, University of Tehran, ranked between 591 to 600, Iran University of Science and Technology, ranked between 601 to 650, Shiraz University, ranked between 801 to 1000, and Shahid Beheshti University are the top 6 Iranian universities among world-class universities.

Continued on page 7

Arab monarchies worried about U.S. exit from the region: Iraqi expert

BY REZA MOSHFEGH

TEHRAN - An Iraqi analyst says that Arab monarchies in the Persian Gulf are worried about the U.S. move to gradually pull out its troops from West Asia while China is establishing a comprehensive strategic partnership with Iran.

“They see that their strategic ally (the U.S.) is gradually withdrawing and that Biden has even frozen large arms deals with Saudi Arabia and the (United Arab) Emirates,” Ali Fahim tells the Tehran Times.

After Donald Trump ordered assassination of General Qassem Soleimani near Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020, many Iraqi political groups and resistance groups have called for the expulsion of U.S. forces from the Iraqi territory and the region.

However, some Arab regimes in the Persian Gulf region prefer the U.S. to continue its presence and support their governments.

While Biden is going to withdraw some parts of U.S. antimissile batteries from West Asia, Iran is planning to consolidate its ties with Russia and China. This is a move that certain Arab states in the Persian Gulf are unhappy about it.

Following is the text of the interview with Ali Fahim:

Could you update us about the latest developments regarding an exit of the U.S. forces from Iraq?

A: It is obvious that America does not intend to pull out of Iraq at the present time, despite the Iraqi parliament’s explicit decision calling for exit of all foreign forces from Iraqi lands, which was supported by popular demonstrations all around the country.

Continued on page 5



© ISNA/ Ahmad Zohrabi

COVID-19 vaccination for nurses in Qom

On Tuesday, nurses at emergency departments of hospitals in the city of Qom received the coronavirus vaccine.

According to the national vaccination document, vaccination against coronavirus started with priority given to health workers, vulnerable and high-risk groups, and then ordinary people will receive the vaccine.

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

10 officials indicted for Ukrainian plane crash incident

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Indictment has been issued against 10 officials involved in the Ukrainian plane incident and necessary conclusions will be made in court, Tehran military prosecutor Gholam Abbas Torki announced on Tuesday.

“The indictment of the case of the Ukrainian plane was also issued and a serious and accurate investigation was carried out and indictments were issued for 10 people who were at fault,” Mizan news agency quoted Torki as saying.

A Boeing 737 belonging to Ukraine International Airlines with flight number 752 and 167 passengers and 9 crew members on board flew to Kiev from Imam Khomeini Airport at 6:12 AM on Wednesday, January 8, 2020. Shortly after taking off, the aircraft was shot down unintentionally and fell in Sabashahr in Tehran province. All the passengers on board died.

The victims included 82 Iranians, 63 Iranian-Canadians, 11 Ukrainians, 10 Swedes, four Afghans, three Germans, and three British nationals.

Torki, who spoke at a ceremony for introducing new Tehran military prosecutor, said the Judicial Organization of the Armed Forces has issued an indictment against 10 officials who have been involved in the unintentional downing of the Ukrainian plane. He continued by stating that the necessary conclusions will be made in court.

The passenger plane was mistaken for an invading missile as Tehran had attacked a U.S. military base in western Iraq in retaliation for the U.S. assassination of Major General Qassem Soleimani five days earlier.

Israeli spy arrested in Eastern Azerbaijan

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — A local Intelligence Ministry official has announced that several spies, including an Israeli spy, have been arrested in Eastern Azerbaijan province. “Israeli spy and several spies in connection with the security services of different countries in the province have been arrested,” the director general of East Azerbaijan intelligence office said on Monday.

He did not give further details about the Israeli spy. Iran has blamed Israel for last year’s assassination of Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh, a noted nuclear expert.

Iran begins mechanical test of new advanced centrifuge

➔ 1 According to an anonymous official from the AEOI, the advanced IR-9 centrifuges have a capacity of 40-50 SWUs, which are “practically twice the capacity of IR-8 centrifuges.”



The official who spoke with the local newspaper Khorassan on the condition of anonymity in 2019, said the capacity of IR-9 centrifuges is “50 times more than the IR-1 centrifuges currently being used at Natanz.”

Nuclear partners agree to continue expert talks

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — The first round of talks in Vienna on Tuesday resulted in an agreement to continue expert-level talks, the Iranian Foreign Ministry said in a statement following the end of the meeting of the JCPOA Joint Commission.

Two expert-level groups held separate meetings on Tuesday to discuss “technical” issues related to lifting sanctions and reverse nuclear measures.

“These expert-level meetings are to discuss technical aspects and details pertaining to the removal of sanctions and nuclear issues and report the result of their discussions to the [JCPOA Joint] Commission,” the statement said. It also quoted Abbas Araghchi, the senior Iranian nuclear negotiator in the Vienna talks, as saying that “lifting U.S. sanctions is the first and most essential move to revive the JCPOA.”

‘Constructive’
Enrique Mora, the European Union’s senior diplomat who led the Tuesday meeting called the talks “constructive.”

“Constructive Joint Commission meeting. There’s unity and ambition for a joint diplomatic process with two expert groups on nuclear implementation and sanctions lifting,” Mora wrote on his Twitter account.

The EU is the coordinator of the JCPOA Joint Commission. “As Coordinator I will intensify separate contacts here in Vienna with all relevant parties, including the U.S.,” Mora added.

Mikhail Ulyanov, the Russian ambassador to international organizations in Vienna, also called the talks “successful.”

“The Joint Commission meeting of #JCPOA was successful. Two expert-level groups (on sanctions lifting and nuclear issues) were tasked to identify concrete measures to be taken by Washington and Tehran to restore full implementation of JCPOA,” Ulyanov tweeted.

He added, “The groups started to work immediately.” Diplomats from Iran and the U.S. did not meet face to face. Representatives from Europe, Russia and China were to serve as a go-between. Both the U.S. and Iran insist the other needs to make a concession first. Iran insists the U.S. should lift sanctions because it is the U.S. that has quit the nuclear deal. However, the U.S. says Iran should scale back its nuclear program.

Robert Malley, who was present in Vienna on Tuesday leading the American team, told Morning Edition a day before that it’s only a first step in a long and difficult process with the goal of bringing both countries back into compliance.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Defense minister says Iran has no limit to export arms

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran has no problem to export military products after the termination of a UN embargo in 2020, Iranian Defense Minister Amir Hatami said in a meeting on Tuesday with his Tajik counterpart Sherali Mirzo in Tehran.

“Fortunately, the arms embargo on the Islamic Republic of Iran terminated in October 2020 under the (UN) Security Council resolution, and we have no problem in exporting defense items and equipment,” Hatami told Colonel General Sherali Mirzo, Tasnim reported. The Iranian defense minister also warned against spread of Daesh terrorists and other extremist groups in the region including Central Asia.

Daesh operatives have so far committed several terrorist acts in Afghanistan, a southern neighbor to Tajikistan.

Elsewhere in his remarks, General Hatami said, “We have always expressed opposition to the presence of extra-regional forces in wars and various conflicts, whether in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan or elsewhere.”

Hatami also pointed to the high price



Iranian Defense Minister Amir Hatami (left) welcomes visiting Tajik counterpart Colonel General Sherali Mirzo.

that Iran has paid for restoring peace and stability in the region.

Iran’s defense chief said the greatest and most irreparable damage that Iran

Vienna talks ‘can be win-win situation for all,’ Takht Ravanchi says

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Majid Takht Ravanchi, Iran’s ambassador to the New-York based United Nations said on Tuesday that the Vienna talks “can be win-win situation for all”.

The remarks by Iran’s top diplomat to the UN, who was involved in crafting the 2015 nuclear deal, came as senior diplomats from Iran and the P4+1 nations met in Vienna on how to revitalize the agreement.

The U.S. also sent its diplomatic team, led by President Biden’s special envoy for Iran Robert Malley, to Vienna for backchannel talks with diplomats from P4+1 group.

The talks took place within the JCPOA Joint Commission which the European Union is responsible for.

The Tuesday meeting in Vienna was arranged in the virtual talks between Iran and P4+1 countries on Friday.

The U.S. was not present in Friday’s talks.

Although the new U.S. administration has expressed willingness to enter direct talks with the Iranian side, official in Iran has said there will be no talks until the U.S. lifts all

illegal and unjustified sanctions.

Iran has said even there will be no indirect talks with the American side in Vienna.

Takht Ravanchi said the new U.S. administration “has so far failed to honor” campaign promises by President Joe Biden to rejoin the nuclear agreement.

The diplomat suggested that “this opportunity should not be wasted.”

He reiterated Tehran’s long-held position that if the U.S. lifts all sanctions, then the Islamic Republic will “cease all remedial measures”.

Former U.S. President Donald Trump ordered a withdrawal of the U.S. from the JCPOA in May 2018 and returned previous sanctions and ordered new ones within his “maximum pressure” policy. Iran waited for a year to see whether the European trio – Britain, France and Germany - would compensate Iran for the U.S. sanctions. However, Iran started to gradually remove limits on its nuclear activities after seeing no concrete action by the European side.

U.S. started nuclear standoff with Iran and should move first to end it: MSNBC

In an opinion piece published on Monday, Hayes Brown, an MSNBC Opinion Columnist, has said it was the U.S. that quit the 2015 nuclear deal - JCPOA - with Iran and started standoff with Tehran and naturally it must be the first party to fix it.

Following is an excerpt of the article titled “Biden’s Iran nuclear diplomacy needs to fix Trump’s mistakes”:

The Austrian city is where, after months of negotiations, the United States and five other world powers signed a pact with Iran to limit its nuclear capabilities in 2015. On Tuesday, representatives of all seven countries were back to figure out whether the deal can be salvaged.

Of course, it needs to be salvaged only because the Trump administration unilaterally withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, back in 2018, thinking that leaving the deal and reimposing sanctions would lead to Iran’s acceding to an even stricter accord. That, clearly, is not what happened.

Instead, President Joe Biden’s national security team has had to deal with an emboldened Iran, which has spent most of the last few years expanding its nuclear capabilities in defiance of former President Donald Trump’s hostility. On the simple basis of asking whether Iran’s nuclear program is larger or smaller now, it’s clear that the Trump-era “maximum pressure” campaign failed. This left foreign policy hands who favored the initial deal, as well as me, confused and concerned that it seemed like the Biden administration might miss the window for the U.S. to rejoin the deal and get things moving again.

Thankfully, the gears are finally being set in motion. The U.S. and Iran attend the Vienna meeting, though they did not take part in direct talks with each other. Instead, the other members of the talks — China, Russia, Germany, the United Kingdom, France and the European Union — were working on separate deals with Iran and the U.S. designed to lay out a series of steps to return to compliance.

With that in mind, there are three things that U.S. negotiators should be mindful of if the talks are to succeed in the long run:

The U.S. needs to be the bigger country if it wants the moral high ground back

The JCPOA came together only after the U.S. persuaded the world to essentially agree that, yes, Iran’s nuclear program is a problem and that we need to work together to fix it. But the international buy-in, which took almost a decade to craft, including numerous American overtures that Iran rejected, was blown to bits in 2018.

American diplomats can’t avoid that, yes, the situation is the U.S.’s fault. The International Atomic Energy Agency had continually certified that Iran was complying with the deal’s terms through 2018. There was never any justification for withdrawal aside from “we want more,” which goes against the basis of good-faith negotiations.

The Biden team has said it wants the U.S. and Iran back to where things were in 2018 — at least. “We want to get Iran back into compliance. The United States knows that, in order to get back into compliance, it’s going to have to lift those sanctions that are inconsistent with the deal,” Robert

Malley, the U.S. special envoy for Iran, told “PBS NewsHour” on Friday.

But since the presidential election, what we’ve seen from Washington and Tehran is a bit of a dance, in which each side insists that the other go first before returning to the deal’s limits.

That’s ridiculous on America’s part. We left first. We should return first, with Biden immediately rolling back sanctions issued in the last 18 months. That revocation should come with the message that the clock is ticking for Iran to do the same, through decommissioning centrifuges it has spun up or reducing the stockpile of enriched uranium it has produced since 2018 or both.

Keep focused on the problem at hand

As written, the JCPOA’s scope is limited to Iran’s nuclear program, offering global sanctions relief for Iran’s rolling back its atomic development. That annoyed American hawks by inconveniently allowing the U.S. to lessen its economic war on Tehran while the Iranian system remained intact.

Since before the deal was signed, critics of diplomacy with Iran have advocated against any U.S. relief without a total change in Tehran’s behavior. That would include severing ties with militias in the region and ending its ballistic missile program. Which is exactly the sort of one-sided ask that allows hawks to continue arguing that diplomacy can’t work.

At no point in the past three years have I heard where the tipping point is, exactly how crushed the Iranian people must be under American sanctions, for a hypothetical “bet-

suffered was the U.S. assassination of Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the legendary commander in the war against terrorists.

For his part, the visiting Tajik defense minister voiced his country’s willingness to enhance political, military and defense cooperation with Iran, saying the two countries have achieved suitable and strategically valuable results by capitalizing on their cultural and social affinities.

Colonel General Mirzo also highlighted the importance of cooperation between Tehran and Dushanbe in ensuring regional peace, stability and security, stressing that the conflicts and insecurity in the region necessitate closer cooperation between the two countries in the battle against terrorism and drug trafficking.

Tajikistan recently hosted a conference on Afghanistan. The conference titled “Heart of Asia” brought foreign ministers from regional countries together.

Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif participated in the conference and held talks with the Tajik president and foreign minister.



Iran’s actions were in accordance to paragraph 36 of the JCPOA which has “provided a mechanism to resolve disputes and allows one side, under certain circumstances, to stop complying with the deal if the other side is out of compliance.”

Iran, Pakistan hold joint maritime exercise in Persian Gulf



A warship, part of a visiting flotilla from the Pakistan Navy, docks at the southern Iranian port city of Bandar Abbas on April 3, 2021. (Photo by Mehr news agency)

— meant to ensure that the navies are able to communicate and cooperate in times of war or humanitarian relief — in the waters of the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman during the war game.

He went on to say that the Iranian naval units, consisting of Alborz destroyer, a missile-launching vessel and a helicopter, together with marine and logistics units of the Pakistan Navy were present in the joint naval exercise.

The Pakistani flotilla berthed at the southern Iranian port city of Bandar Abbas on Saturday for a three-day visit, and was officially received by the Iranian Navy’s officers.

The visiting flotilla consists of two vessels and is under the command of Commodore Khan Mehmood Asif. During the visit, the Pakistan Navy delegates held meetings with Iranian Navy and military officials and discussed mutual areas of interest.

(Source: Press TV)

Iran and P4+1 resume nuclear talks: what to expect?

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** – Iran and other signatories to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal began important series of meetings that are aimed at reviving the nuclear pact amid a race against time to reach an understanding on the deal in the next few months.

Hopes for a swift revival of the nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), gained steam on Friday when the remaining parties to the deal agreed to continue the talks in an in-person way in Vienna with Iranian and American officials in attendance, though these officials will not be engaged in any kind of direct or indirect talks.

Intense negotiations have been going on between different delegations in the Austrian capital where the joint commission of the 2015 nuclear deal met on Tuesday, the Iranian Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Tuesday.

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Seyed Abbas Araghchi led the Iranian negotiating team in Vienna. He met with the head of the Chinese negotiating team on Monday night and the head of the Russian delegation earlier on Tuesday. The Iranian diplomat also sat down with Enrique Mora, the European Union's coordinator and the chairman of the JCPOA Joint Commission.

The first round of the Vienna talks resulted in an agreement to continue expert-level talks, the Iranian Foreign Ministry said in a statement following the end of the meeting of the JCPOA Joint Commission. Under the



agreement, two expert-level groups held separate meetings to discuss "technical" issues related to removing sanctions and nuclear measures.

"These expert-level meetings are to discuss technical aspects and details pertaining to the removal of sanctions and nuclear issues and report the result of their discussions to the [JCPOA Joint] Commission," the statement said. It also quoted Araghchi as saying that "removing U.S. sanctions is the first and most essential move to revive the JCPOA."

U.S. Special Envoy for Iran Rob Malley was present in Vienna but he did not have any meeting with Iran, which has

roundly rejected the idea of holding talks with the U.S. while sanctions remain in place. Before leaving Tehran for Vienna, Araghchi had told state media that Iran's negotiation team will have no direct or indirect talks with the Americans in the Tuesday meeting. He made it clear that this meeting will only serve as a venue for Iran to announce its demands and conditions for a U.S. return to the JCPOA.

"We demand that the United States first fulfill all of its obligations and lift all the sanctions it has imposed, and then we will verify and return," Araghchi said.

But the U.S. doesn't seem to be willing to lift its sanctions on Iran all at once,

something that is evident from American officials' insistence that negotiations over reviving the JCPOA would be difficult and hard. Malley said on Tuesday that Vienna talks are the first step in a long path aimed at bringing Washington and Tehran back to compliance with the JCPOA.

This is while Iran has announced that it wants the U.S. to lift the sanctions in one major step. It has also ruled out any prospect of Iran and the West negotiating over non-nuclear issues, namely Iran's missile program and its influence in the region.

Whether Iran and the U.S. would overcome obstacles to an understanding about reviving the nuclear deal remains an open question. But some believe that the Rouhani government is working hard to get the deal revived in the next weeks. A source close to the government told Lebanese newspaper Al-Akhbar that the Rouhani government is looking for a breakthrough concerning the JCPOA "as soon as possible and in the coming days" to leave behind a remarkable legacy and strengthen the hand of JCPOA supporters in the upcoming presidential election of Iran set to be held in June.

Al-Akhbar noted that the gap between the U.S. and Iran expectations seems too huge to be bridged in the upcoming months. Therefore, it seems that serious diplomacy between Tehran and Washington has been postponed until after the June election. "It is unlikely that there will be significant and real progress within the next few weeks," the newspaper concluded.

FM Zarif holds talks in Bishkek

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** – The Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif held on Tuesday talks with Kyrgyz leaders including President Sadyr Japarov and Foreign Minister Ruslan Kazakbaev on the second leg of his four-nation tour of Central Asia.

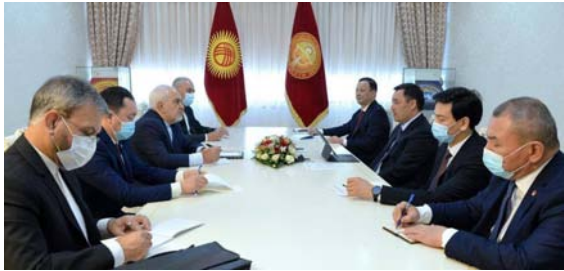
The Iranian Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Tuesday that during his visit to Kyrgyzstan Zarif discussed a range of bilateral, regional and international issues.

The top Iranian diplomat congratulated Japarov on his election as the Kyrgyz president, and touched upon the existing potential for enhancing bilateral cooperation on different fronts, the statement said, noting that Zarif also expressed gratitude to the Kyrgyz president for paying due regard to reciprocal ties, and highlighted the need to follow up on the decisions already made in the previous round of talks by the two countries' joint economic cooperation commission.

The Iranian chief diplomat expressed Tehran's readiness for a third meeting of the commission.

Zarif also referred to cultural and civilizational commonalities between the two countries, saying Iran attaches great importance to the welfare, security and peace of the Kyrgyz people.

In the meeting, the Kyrgyz president emphasized the



importance of boosting cooperation with Tehran, and added the existence of ongoing political relations between the two countries shows that both sides are keen to upgrade mutual cooperation.

He also expressed pleasure with parliamentary ties between the two sides, and underscored the great potential for mutual economic cooperation, especially in agriculture, pharmaceutical and construction domains.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry also said that Zarif and Kazakbaev discussed bilateral issues, regional cooperation and international issues.

The Iranian foreign minister congratulated the Kyrgyz on the successful presidential election and Nowruz,

touching upon age-old, historical and cultural relations between Iran and countries in the region.

He at the same time noted that the extent of trade and economic relations between Iran and Kyrgyzstan is not on a par with the existing potential, calling on both sides to utilize the great potentialities which exist in order to boost mutual cooperation, especially in technical-engineering, road-building, dam construction and transportation domains as well as building thermal, solar and hydro-power stations.

Zarif highlighted some of the impediments to the enhancement of mutual cooperation, including the coronavirus pandemic and Washington's unilateral, illegal and cruel sanctions.

He expressed hope the pandemic could be tackled through vaccination.

He also said he hopes the U.S. would lift sanctions and make good on its commitments, paving the way for Iran and Kyrgyzstan to benefit from mutual cooperation in economic and trade areas.

Kazakbaev, in turn, expressed gratitude to Iran for sending humanitarian aid to Kyrgyz people in the fight against COVID-19, especially at a time when Iran is feeling the pinch of sanctions.

Iran calls for verifiable lifting of sanctions: report

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** – Iran will accept nothing but a "verifiable" removal of U.S. sanctions, a source familiar with the matter told Press TV.

The report came as Iranian and U.S. delegations arrived in Vienna for resuming talks over the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

"The United States has no other choice but to remove all anti-Iran sanctions in a verifiable way," the informed source was quoted by Press TV as saying.

The source said Washington's response to Iran's unilateral commitment to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action is nothing but a unilateral move to remove all the sanctions. "Tehran will not accept any outcome of the Vienna meeting other than the removal of all sanctions," the source said on Monday night.

The source said the Iranian team's agenda in the Vienna talks is clear. "Iran will start its measures to return to JCPOA commitments only after the removal of all U.S. sanctions and verifying it."

"Robert Malley will have to leave Vienna empty-handed if the Tuesday meeting would result in anything other than the removal of all U.S. sanctions," the source added, referring to the U.S. president's special envoy for Iran who was to lead the American team in the Vienna talks.

Reuters also quoted an Iranian official as saying a similar thing. "Our agenda during the meeting (in Vienna) will be removal of all U.S. sanctions against Iran ... as our Supreme Leader has said repeatedly, anything less than that will not be accepted by Tehran," the official said.

The parties to the Iran deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), were expected to hold an important meeting in Vienna on Tuesday. The meeting was arranged during the Friday meeting of the JCPOA Joint Commission, which was held virtually.

Following the Friday meeting, there has been a wave of speculation about possible direct talks between Iran and the U.S. in the Tuesday meeting as many Western

news media outlets broke the news that U.S. officials will be in Vienna.

The U.S. confirmed that it will participate in the Vienna meeting and said it was open to holding direct talks with Iran.

"These remain early days, and we don't anticipate an immediate breakthrough as there will be difficult discussions ahead. But we believe this is a healthy step forward," U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price said on Friday of the meeting in Vienna.

"We do not anticipate presently that there will be direct talks between the United States and Iran through this process, though the United States remains open to them," he added.

But Iran said it will not have any talks with the U.S. in Vienna.

"We will have no direct or indirect talks with the Americans in Vienna. We will negotiate with the Joint Commission and the P4+1 and will announce our demand and condition for returning to compliance with the JCPOA. We demand that the United States first fulfill all of its obligations and lift all the sanctions it has imposed, and then we will verify and return," Deputy Foreign Minister of Iran Seyed Abbas Araghchi said in remarks to state TV.

Iran has said that the main subject that will be broached in Vienna is the lifting of all U.S. sanctions.

"The agenda of this [joint] commission meeting is the removal of all U.S. cruel sanctions against Iran, and in other words, clarification of how parties [to the deal] should fulfill their commitments," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said at his weekly press briefing on Monday.

"The path is clear. All U.S. sanctions [against Iran] must be removed at once. Then [this measure] must be verified [by Tehran], and only then the Islamic Republic will take its step [to return to full commitments under the nuclear deal]," the spokesman continued.

"In other words, we have only one step and not step-by-step [lifting of sanctions], and this one step includes the lifting of all sanctions imposed by the United States.

In return, Iran will be ready to reverse its remedial measures, which were taken because of the opposite sides' violation of the pact," Khatibzadeh said.

He added that the Tuesday meeting in Vienna is no different from previous sessions of the Joint Commission of the nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and is just a periodic meeting between Iran and the P4+1 similar to those held in the past months.

The Iranian foreign minister held phone talks with two of his European counterparts ahead of the Vienna talks to encourage them to show a "constructive" stance on the renewed nuclear talks.

"In a telephone call with French FM @JY_LeDrian today, I urged France to show a constructive stance on the JCPOA in next week's meeting in Vienna. I called on France to honor its commitments under the accord, and to cease abiding by illegal sanctions imposed by the U.S.," Zarif said in a tweet following a call with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian.

The French foreign minister also said a similar thing. "I encouraged Iran to be constructive in the discussions that are set to take place," Le Drian said. "They are meant to help identify in the coming weeks the steps that will be needed in order to return to full compliance with the nuclear deal."

Shortly after this call, British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab requested a telephone conversation with Zarif. They discussed the latest developments surrounding the JCPOA.

"In this phone call, the two sides conferred on the latest developments related to the JCPOA, especially the upcoming meeting of the Joint Commission in Vienna," the Iranian Foreign Ministry said in a statement. Zarif once again underlined the necessity of the full and final removal of the U.S.'s "unlawful and unfair" sanctions in a way that Iran can verify.

"This is how we will return to our commitments," Zarif said.

He also called on the European parties

SPORTS

Taftian not satisfied with holding camp in France

S P O R T S d e s k **TEHRAN** – Fastest Iranian athlete Hassan Taftian says that he would rather hold his training camps in his homeland but there are not enough facilities for his preparation.

Taftian is preparing for the Tokyo Olympics, where he will compete at the 100 meters event. He took part in Rio's 100m semifinal race at the Olympic Stadium, and clocked 10.23 seconds to come last in his group, failing to claim a spot in the final challenge.

Now, the Iranian sprinter trains hard to make splash in Tokyo. Taftian works with French sprint coach Ontanon Guy and hopes to run in the upcoming Games in less than 10 seconds.

"I prefer to train in Iran but there are difficulties in terms of facilities. Being away from my family is annoying but I am forced to leave Iran," Taftian said in an interview with Tehran Times.

"I've participated in the 60 meters event in French championships and the competitions have helped me improve for the Olympics. I hope to run in less than 10 seconds in Tokyo but it will be very difficult to win a medal in the Olympics since, as you know, the world's best sprinters will participate in the Games," Taftian stated.

Taftian will compete at the first edition of the International Athletic Imam Reza Cup Tournament which will take place in Mashhad, Iran.

"The competition will help the Iranian athletes gain experience. The tournament will surely be significant for me to prepare for the Olympic Games," he concluded.

Taftian won the gold medal in 100 meters at the 2012 Asian Junior Athletics Championships in Colombo, Sri Lanka. In 8 July 2017 Taftian became the first Iranian to ever win the gold medal in 100 meters in an Asian Athletics Championships after finishing with a time of 10.25 seconds at the 2017 Asian Athletics Championships in Bhubaneswar, India.



Reza Salehi Amiri meets IFBB President Santonja

S P O R T S d e s k **TEHRAN** - Head of Iran's National Olympic Committee (NOC) Reza Salehi Amiri met with President of the International Federation of Fitness and Bodybuilding (IFBB) Rafael Santonja.

Santonja, accompanied by Polish Federation President and IFBB Executive Pawel Filleborn, arrived in Iran early Tuesday and met with Salehi Amiri in NOC's headquarters in Tehran.

The IFBB numbers 199 national federations and is recognized by or affiliated to numerous other international organizations but is not yet an Olympic or Asian Games sport.

"We need support to become an Olympic sport and Iran can help us in this regard. International Olympic Committee (IOC) has already shown flexibility but the country's committee can give us a roadmap because IFBB wants to take some responsibility in Olympics given the fact that we have good relations," Santonja said.

Esteghlal, Persepolis learn fate at Hazfi Cup's Round of 16

S P O R T S d e s k **TEHRAN** – Esteghlal and Persepolis football teams have discovered their fate at Round of 16 of Iran's Hazfi Cup.

Esteghlal will have to travel to Isfahan to play Zob Ahan, while Persepolis host second-tier Shahin Bandar Ameri.

Titleholders Tractor will face Aluminum in Arak.

The competition will be held in April 28 and 29.

Draw in full:

- *Zob Ahan v Esteghlal
- *Persepolis v Shahin Bandar Ameri
- *Tractor v Aluminum
- *Khooshe Taleai v Sepahan
- *Gol Gohar v Pars Jonoubi
- *Qashqai v Foolad
- *Nassaji v Malavan
- *Kheybar Khorramabad v Sanat Naft

The Iran's Hazfi Cup was founded in 1975 and Esteghlal are the most successful club with seven titles, followed by Persepolis who have won six titles.

Iran chosen to host 2022 Asian Handball Championship

S P O R T S d e s k **TEHRAN** – Asian Handball Federation (AHF) has chosen Iran as host of the 2022 Asian Men's Handball Championships.

The competition is scheduled to be held in January in Shiraz. The competition will serve as qualifying event for the 2023 IHF World Men's Handball Championship.

The 2023 World Handball Championship will be held in Poland and Sweden from January 12 to 29, 2023.

Iran had been chosen to host the 17th Asian Men's Junior Handball Championship but the competition was relocated to Bahrain due to coronavirus fears.

Fekri takes charge of Naft Masjed Soleyman

S P O R T S d e s k **TEHRAN** – Mahmoud Fekri has been named as new head coach of Naft Masjed Soleyman football team.

On March 2, he was sacked as Esteghlal coach after five months in charge. Now, he has returned to Iran Professional League once again. This will be Fekri's second stint with Naft Masjed Soleyman. The 51-year-old coach headed the team in 2017/18 season.

Naft Masjed Soleyman parted company with Dariush Yazdi on Monday following the poor results in the league.

The club are only four points clear of being in danger of relegation.

Annual power generation rises over 5%

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** – Iranian power plants managed to generate over 434 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20) to register a 5.1-percent rise compared to the preceding year.

Based on the data released by Iran’s Power Generation, Distribution, and Transmission Company (known as Tavanir), some 337 billion kilowatt-hours of the mentioned figure was generated by the power plants run by the government and the private sector, and the rest was generated by power plants owned by major industries.

According to the mentioned data, the total production capacity of the country’s power plants reached 58,076 megawatts (MW) in the previous year’s peak consumption period, indicating an increase of 5.8-percent in the production capacity of the country’s thermal power plants.

The production capacity of hydropower, nuclear and renewable power plants, however, decreased by 15.2 percent to stand at 9,098 MW.



Iranian Energy Ministry managed to supply electricity to 339 rural areas across the country, increasing the number of villages with access to the electricity network to 57,759.

Tavanir data also show that the total installed capacity of the country’s power plants increased by 2.2 percent in the previous year to reach 85,313 MW.

Last year, four units of gas power plants with a total capacity of 685 MW, five units of combined cycle power plants with a capacity of 794 MW, some distributed generation gas units with a capacity of 270 MW, several renewable power plants with a total capacity of 53 MW and a hydro-electric power plant with a capacity of two MW were put into operation across Iran.

As reported, a total of 1,804 MW capacity of new power plants were added to the country’s power generation capacity during the previous year.

Back in February, Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian had said that some good investments have been made in the country’s electricity sector and the development of the country’s power industry is going to continue in the current year.

Exports from Alborz province rises over 100% in a year

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN**— The value of exports from Alborz province has increased by over 100 percent in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20), according to a provincial official.

Jahangir Shahmoradi, the deputy governor general of Alborz, also said that the province’s planned amount of export was realized by 112 percent in the past year, which proves that the province managed to realize the motto of the past year, which was “surge in production”.

As the result of taking proper decisions, and also the follow-up measures by the governor general of Alborz, there were some noticeable achievements in the economic sector of the province in the previous year, which is hoped to continue in this year as well, the official stressed.



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.

1,500 idle industrial units revived in Iran in a year

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** – Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian inaugurated five major electricity projects worth 29 trillion rials (about \$690.4 million) across the country on Tuesday, to mark the beginning of the third phase of the ministry’s A-B-Iran program.

The inaugurated projects comprised of 8,142 sub-projects including numerous electricity supply projects, as well as power network modification and optimization projects.

The first phase of the A-B-Iran program (the acronyms A and B stand for water and electricity in Persian) was initiated in the Iranian calendar year 1398 (ended on March 19, 2020), during which 220 major projects with a total investment of 335.6 trillion rials (about \$7.99 billion) were put into operation across the country.

In the second phase of the program that was carried out in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20) 250 water and energy projects worth 500 trillion rials (about \$11.9 billion) were inaugurated in several provinces.



In fact, 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.

In this due, the current Iranian calendar year (began on March 21) has been named the year of “Production: support and the elimination of obstacles”, and all governmental bodies, as well as the private sector, are moving in line with the materialization of this motto.

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

In this regard, the development of industrial parks and supporting the units located in these areas is one of the major programs underway by the ministry.

Electricity projects worth over \$690m put into operation

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The third phase of the program was officially started on Tuesday and like the previous phases, this year, too, the Energy Ministry is planning to inaugurate numerous water and electricity projects in various provinces every week.

In the last week of the previous Iranian calendar year (which was the last week of the second phase of the A-B-Iran scheme) Ardakanian had inaugurated several new systems for improving services in the water and electricity sectors.

The mentioned systems were put into operation in various areas including resource consumption improvement, asset utilization, human resource management, financial resources management, and reforming work processes in order to create transparency and to facilitate and accelerate affairs while eliminating possible bottlenecks.

A smart system for improving the Energy Ministry’s support and emergency centers called Homa, as well as a new customer services system called Chavoush were also among the launched systems.

A mechanized network monitoring system called San-



am was also put into operation; this system is aimed at monitoring the electricity networks of various provinces in order to reduce electricity losses and improve the efficiency of the country’s power network.

1b tons of new copper reserves discovered

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** – Managing Director of National Iranian Copper Industries Company (NICIC) has announced the discovery of one billion tons of new copper reserves in Iran, IRIB reported on Tuesday.

NICIC carried out 101,000 meters of deep drilling to identify new copper reserves across the country in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20), which resulted in the discovery of one billion tons of new reserves, Ardeshir Sa’d-Mohammadi said in a press conference.

Sa’d-Mohammadi put the value of the discovered reserves at 350 trillion rials (about \$8.3 billion).

According to the official, NICIC had



also discovered 523 million tons of copper reserves across the country during the Iranian calendar year 1398 (March 2019- March 2020).

Considering the new discoveries,

NICIC’s total copper reserves across the country have currently surpassed eight billion tons.

The official put the country’s total copper reserves at 40 billion tons, saying that Iran currently has the world’s seventh-largest copper reserves, and hopefully the country will climb to sixth place in the current Iranian calendar year.

Sa’d-Mohammadi further mentioned the new record achieved in the country’s copper cathode production and noted that over 280,000 tons of the mentioned product were produced in the country during the previous year which was 12 percent more than the preceding year.

Pointing to the NICIC’s new projects for the current year, the official noted

Bid Boland Refinery’s daily worth of products stands at \$9.5m

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — The managing director of Persian Gulf Bid Boland Gas Refining Company put the value of the refinery’s products at 400 billion rials (about \$9.5 million) per day.

Mahmoud Amin-Nejad said this value of products is under the condition that 45-48 percent of the feedstock is supplied.

Bid Boland project is leading in terms of benefiting from domestic capabilities.

In mid-January, President Hassan Rouhani officially inaugurated Persian Gulf Bid Boland Gas Refinery through videoconference.

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

The refinery, which took 36 months to complete, has a daily processing capacity of more than 56 million cubic meters of associated gas and when operating at full capacity it will generate \$700 million of revenue every year.



This complex receives about 13,500 tons of sour gas per year from NGL 900 and 1000 Plants while receiving 2.25 million tons of sweet gas from NGL 1200 and 1300 Plants.

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

TEDPIX drops nearly 2,000 points on Tuesday

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), fell 1,934 points to 1.26 million on Tuesday.

Over 3,531 billion securities worth 55.813 trillion rials (about \$1.328 billion) were traded at the TSE on Tuesday.

The first market’s index dropped 2,482 points, and the second market’s index fell 231 points.

TEDPIX had risen eight percent in the last week of the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20).

The index increased 101,000 points

to 1.307 million in that week.

After several weeks of decline, growth finally returned to the TSE, Iran’s major stock exchange, as TEDPIX rose 2.4 percent during the last week of February.

Market analysts and experts suggest investors to focus more on long-term investment in the Iranian stock market and to invest through intermediary tools like exchange-traded funds (ETFs) to prevent possible losses in the current Iranian calendar year (began on March 21).

They also advise shareholders to avoid impulsive decisions for quitting

the market rattled by the surprising fluctuations in the stock market in the previous year.

In this regard, Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors at Tehran Stock Exchange Javad Eshqi-Nejad said the “exit strategy” is the worse course of action that a shareholder can take.

“For some hasty shareholders, exiting the market is their first choice after any fluctuation, while we have repeatedly stated that this is the worst type of strategy in this market,” Eshqi-Nejad told IRNA.



Arab monarchies worried about U.S. exit from the region: Iraqi expert

➔ **1** This is what Commander of the United States Central Command, General Kenneth F. McKenzie, explicitly said a couple of months ago. He emphasized that American forces would not withdraw from Iraq but there would be a reduction of military forces.

He also said that the remaining forces would work to monitor and confront any move from Iran in the future, and there has been a redeployment of American forces to other areas in Iraq, which parallels withdrawals from several bases in Taji and a-Qaim on the Syrian border.

In his visit to Washington, al-Kazemi urged former American President Donald Trump to complete withdrawal of all American forces from Iraq within three years, but that goal failed to be translated into reality due to Trump's defeat in elections in 2020.

After coming to power, Joe Biden showed that he has new plans and priorities that differ from Trump's.

His first step was increasing NATO forces in Iraq in order to train the Iraqi army. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said that "the number of NATO forces will gradually increase from 500 to about 4,000, and they will be deployed out of Baghdad."

Pentagon spokesperson Commander Jessica McNulty said on February 19, "The U.S. is participating in the force generation process for NATO Mission Iraq and will contribute its fair share to this important expanded mission."

Meanwhile, John Kirby, the assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs wrote in a post on his Twitter account that "we support NATO's expanded mission in Iraq and will continue to do so, but there are no plans to increase U.S. force levels there."

In a related context, the Daily Mail quoted military sources as saying that the international coalition forces intend to increase their soldiers' number in Iraq to 5,000.

The newspaper said that hundreds of British soldiers would be sent to Iraq in the largest increase of British forces there since the last (Persian) Gulf War.

All of this comes within a new policy adopted by the Biden administration to organize priorities in confrontation with the United States' supposed enemies.

A couple of days ago, the Wall Street Journal said that U.S. President Joe Biden directed the Pentagon to begin removing some military capabilities and forces from the (Persian) Gulf region in the first steps of an effort to realign the U.S. global military footprint away from West Asia.

The newspaper added that the U.S. has removed at least three Patriot antimissile batteries from the (Persian) Gulf region, including one from Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia that had been put in place in recent years to help protect American forces.

The Wall Street Journal pointed out that the number of American forces in West Asia reached 90,000 during the tension with Iran in 2018, revealing that Washington decided to maintain the (THAAD) air defense missile system in the region, stressing that Washington is moving its equipment in order to confront Russia and China because they are the most important threat.

In recent weeks, it revealed that the Pentagon assembled a "tiger team"—



Iraqis never forget their bloody history that was characterized by Saudis sending thousands of suicide bombers who blew themselves up in Iraqi markets, schools and mosques and left thousands of victims.

an ad hoc group of defense policy and military experts—to find ways to help the oil-rich kingdom protect its facilities and oil installations.

This is a strategic shift in the U.S. approaches in Biden's presidency that differs from Trump's previous vision.

This is what Biden pledged in his election campaign, although it did not refer to reducing the military presence in Syria and Iraq or a complete withdrawal from the (Persian) Gulf, but reducing them in West Asia and directing them to other regions within a strategic change plan.

In Biden's priorities plan confronting the Chinese dragon, West Asia is no longer important for Washington as it was in the past as America is now able to secure oil from other resources.

This is why America's allies in the region are worried about, especially the (Persian) Gulf monarchies, while China is establishing a comprehensive strategic partnership with Iran that extends 25 years in which it envisions great cooperation in military and infrastructure fields.

They see that their strategic ally (the U.S.) is gradually withdrawing and that Biden has even frozen large arms deals with Saudi Arabia and the (United Arab) Emirates.

Biden's move is disappointing in the face of their supposed enemy (Iran).

How do you read al-Kazemi's recent visit to Saudi Arabia?

Al-Kazemi's visit to Saudi Arabia came after several visits by diplomatic, military and ministerial delegations. These visits rose dramatically after al-Kazemi's visit to Washington and the Iraqi government's shift towards Riyadh under American pressure and push Iraq into what is called the "Arab embrace".

This move has an economic nature in the first place, preceded by the opening of the Arar border crossing, then the

Jumima border port in the Samawah desert, which was part of a large investment project to be taken by Saudi Arabia, but it was temporarily postponed due to popular objections.

These visits are aimed to repair Saudi Arabia's image in the minds of the Iraqi people, who used to regard Saudis' moves with great suspicion for their bitter experience about Saudi sponsorship of terrorism in Iraq.

Iraqis never forget their bloody history that was characterized by Saudis sending thousands of suicide bombers who blew themselves up in Iraqi markets, schools and mosques and left thousands of victims. In Baghdad, you can hardly find a family that was not affected by the crimes of the takfiri groups.

Then they opened the chapter of ISIS, which threatened the Iraqi sovereignty and integrity with the full support of Saudi Arabia, which allowed the crossing of thousands of Saudi fighters and neglected promises to seize money collected in the mosques to support the fighters in Syria and Iraq.

These all were under the Saudi authorities' gaze, and the religious discourse was directed to demonize Shias.

Saudi Arabia made every effort to clean this ugly image out of the Iraqi public opinion after the October demonstrations, in which some Iraqi youth supported Saudi Arabia fiercely, blaming Shia parties for the deterioration of the situation in Iraq.

All of this preceded the visit of al-Kazemi, which came to detach Iraq from the resistance axis and pushing it towards the American-Saudi-Israeli axis in preparation for normalization of ties with the latter.

This move is not isolated from other developments, especially Iraqi rapprochement with Jordan and Egypt and pushing

Iraq toward entering futile agreements to exhaust its wealth and energy.

However, this trip was important to Saudi Arabia, as it was evident through the great hospitality that the visit received especially escorting the al-Kazemi plane with warplanes and his reception by the Saudi crown prince and artillery firing a 21-gun salute in celebration of al-Kazemi's visit to Saudi Arabia.

But what was announced about the achievements of the visit were not at the expected level for the two countries.

They announced the establishment of a joint investment fund of only 3 billion dollars. What are the real aspects behind this visit that were not disclosed, especially on the security side? Saudi Arabia has blamed Iraq for missiles and drone strikes on its oil facilities and economic interests, accusing factions close to Iran of targeting Saudi facilities.

Do you expect Iraq to establish strategic relations with Saudi Arabia?

Iraq is looking for its interests through establishing relations with all countries of the world, and this is a normal policy.

But is the Iraqi political decision based on free will, or is it affected by American interference that tries to push Iraq toward the circle of the Israeli axis?

Certainly, the answer is no. Iraq is not free in its political decision and its government pursues a policy that is neither neutral nor independent but rather sacrifices the interest of Iraq to serve American interests.

It was evident in freezing the Iraqi-Chinese agreement, which was considered a lifeline for Iraq by its participation in the Silk Road and reconstructing the large port of Faw and the extension of the railway to Syria, Turkey, and Europe.

But the American veto deprived us of this deal and Adel Abdul Mahdi resigned under the pressure of the demonstrations that paralyzed the country.

After the al-Kazemi took up the reins of power, all demonstrations calmed down and ended.

The U.S. imposed its hegemony in Iraq in canceling the contract with the German company Siemens in favor of American companies, as the German ambassador in Baghdad stated.

So Iraq is relatively deprived of its rights when it cannot make a decision freely while it is free just within limits that it should not cross.

How can we trust in the Iraqi political decision-makers when we are talking about strategic relations that stand on fragile foundations built on the debris of bitter experiences that date back to an 8-year war that Saddam Hussein waged on Iran under the pretext of protecting the eastern gate of the Arab world with direct Saudi payment?

Once King Fahd told Saddam, "We supply the money, and you should provide fighters," in a statement that shows direct (Persian) Gulf regimes' support for the former Iraqi dictator.

After the end of the Iran-Iraq war, oil prices fell and (Persian) Gulf monarchies asked Iraq to repay its debts, which led to the invasion of Kuwait and then the unjust blockade of Iraq.

During the blockade, the Arab borders were completely closed and only the Iranian border was open to Iraqis. If it had not for Iran, the situation of Iraq would have been more tragic than what happened.

Gunmen free more than 1,800 inmates from Nigerian prison

More than 1,800 inmates escaped from a Nigeria prison in the southeastern city of Owerri after an attack by gunmen carrying rocket-propelled grenades, machine guns, explosives and rifles, the prisons authority said.

Nigerian police said it believed a banned separatist group, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), was behind the attack, but a spokesman for the group denied involvement.

The secessionist movement in the southeast is one of several serious security challenges facing President Muhammadu Buhari, including a decade-long insurgency in the northeast, a spate of school kidnappings in the northwest and piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.

U.S. military forces smuggle grain from northeast Syria to Iraq again

A convoy of more than a dozen U.S. military trucks has reportedly carried tons of grain from Syria's northeastern province of Hasakah to the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region in northern Iraq.

Local sources, requesting anonymity, told Syria's official news agency SANA that 14 military vehicles loaded with wheat crops from silos of Tal Alou village in al-Ya'rubiya region entered the Iraqi territories on Monday after crossing al-Waleed border crossing.

A few days earlier, 12 U.S. military vehicles passed through Semalka border crossing and headed towards northern Iraq. They were carrying wheat from silos in northeast Syria.

Local sources in Syria's northeastern town of al-Malikiyah also reported back on March 26 that 18 U.S. military vehicles, loaded with wheat crops, had crossed Semalka border, and entered the Iraqi territory, Press TV reported.

This comes as U.S. forces also continue to smuggle crude oil from Hasakah to Iraq.

The U.S. military has stationed forces and equipment in northeastern Syria, with the Pentagon claiming that the troops deployment is aimed at preventing the oilfields in the area from falling into the hands of Daesh terrorists.

Damascus, however, says the deployment is meant to plunder the country's resources.

China's Liaoning aircraft carrier leads naval exercise off Taiwan

A Chinese carrier group is exercising near Taiwan and such drills will become regular, China's navy has announced, in a further escalation of tensions near the island that Beijing claims as its sovereign territory.

Taiwan has complained of an increase in Chinese military activity near it in recent months, as China steps up efforts to assert its sovereignty over the democratically run island.

In a statement late on Monday, China's navy said the carrier group, lead by the Liaoning, the country's first aircraft carrier put into active service, was carrying out "routine" drills in the waters near Taiwan.

According to al Jazeera, the aim is to "enhance its capability to safeguard national sovereignty, safety and development interests", it said.

"Similar exercises will be conducted on a regular basis in the future," the navy added, without elaborating.

Putin passes law that may keep him in office until 2036

Vladimir Putin has signed a law that will allow him to run for the presidency twice more in his lifetime, potentially keeping him in office until 2036.

The Russian president signed the legislation on Monday, ending a year-long process to "reset" his presidential terms by rewriting the constitution through a referendum-like process that his critics have called a crude power grab.

Putin has been Russia's most powerful politician since he assumed the presidency in 2000, after the resignation of his predecessor, Boris Yeltsin.

If he remains in power until 2036, his tenure will surpass even that of Joseph Stalin, who ruled the Soviet Union for 29 years, making Putin the longest-serving Moscow leader since the Russian empire.

Officially, the new law limits Russian citizens to two presidential terms in their lifetime, outlawing the kind of shuffling between the presidency and the role of prime minister that Putin employed earlier in his career.

But the law specifically does not count terms served until it entered into force, meaning that Putin's past four terms (including the current term) do not count and he can still serve two more. Russians say that he has "zeroed out" his terms.

Resistance News

IOF kidnaps senior Hamas official, two ex-detainees in Bethlehem

INTERNATIONAL d e s k TEHRAN— The Israeli occupation forces (IOF) at dawn Tuesday kidnapped senior Hamas official Hasan Wardyan, a candidate in the upcoming Palestinian elections, and other citizens from their homes in Bethlehem.

Wardyan is an ex-detainee who spent over 20 years in Israeli jails. He is one of Hamas's noted figures in Bethlehem province and one of its candidates on its electoral list.

The IOF also kidnapped two ex-detainees from their homes in Bethlehem identified as Nader Abiyat, from al-Fureidis village, and Adel Hijazi, from the central district of the city.

Local sources said that the IOF physically assaulted two citizens from the family of Abu Mahmud during its raids on homes in al-Fureidis village.

The IOF also raided an exchange store belonging to a Palestinian citizen in al-Mahd street in Bethlehem City.

Sino-Iran agreement right move to balance foreign policy

By Payman Yazdani

TEHRAN - Prof. of political science says Iran-China agreement is the correct move by Iran to finally take a major step to balance its foreign policy by recognizing the ongoing transformations in international relations.

Iranian and Chinese Foreign Ministers Mohammad Javad Zarif and Wang Yi signed a comprehensive cooperation agreement between the two countries on Saturday afternoon at the complex of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tehran.

The two countries began consulting and work on the important cooperation agreement six years ago during President Hassan Rouhani's visit to China.

During Rouhani's visit to China, Iran and China issued statements announcing the promotion of the level of relations between the two countries to a comprehensive strategic partnership.

At the time, the two sides declared that they were ready to negotiate a long-term cooperation document.

Later, Ali Larijani, the former Speaker of the Iranian Parliament went to China and took the lead on the consultations that led to the signing of the agreement today. Larijani was in charge of the talks with the Chinese side on the matter.

The Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi arrived in Tehran late on Friday to hold meetings with his Iranian counterpart Foreign Minister Zarif and President Hassan Rouhani as well as the ex-speaker of the Iranian parliament Larijani.



In the meeting between Mr. Larijani and Mr. Yi, which took place on Saturday morning, the two sides consulted with each other about the expansion of bilateral relations.

This very important political document contains strategic, regional and international cooperation.

To know more about the significance of the agreement and the grounds that it prepares for both countries, we reached out to Nader Entessar, professor emeritus of political science from the University of South Alabama.

How do you see the significance of this agreement between the two countries in respect to Iran's efforts to diversify its partners and balancing its relation with western countries?

A: The Iran-China pact is the most significant agreement

between the Islamic Republic and a major international player in more than four decades. It also is the correct move by Iran to finally take a major step to balance its foreign policy by recognizing the ongoing transformations in international relations.

What will be the economic importance of such an agreement both for Iran and China?

If all the provisions of the agreement are implemented without undue delays and unforeseen glitches, this agreement will help routinize China-Iran economic relations and will allow both countries to devise effective mechanisms to combat Western economic sanctions. Of course, overcoming the myriad of Western sanctions is an arduous and relatively long process, but the agreement is the right step in that direction.

What is the significance of China's One Road One Belt initiative for the country's ambitions and what is the importance of Iran's role in the country's project?

China's Belt and Road initiative is indeed an ambitious project, and it is arguably the most important initiative undertaken by any major country in the past 50 years. The scope of this project is wide and encompasses a number of countries. Iran is an important West Asian piece in the implementation of China's Belt and Road project. Iran's unique and unmatched geostrategic location and its potential as an indispensable trade artery for China's expanding relations in the Middle East (West Asia) and Central and South Asia will allow Iran to play a key role in China's foreign economic policy.

Historical arch bridge to undergo urgent restoration near Tehran

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – Restoration and vital rehabilitation works will commence soon on Pol-e Khatun; a centuries-old arch bridge near capital Tehran.

The deck of the monument, which is situated in Karaj, the capital of Alborz province, was slightly collapsed last December reportedly due to severe rainfalls.

The provincial tourism chief on Sunday said that the project to repair and reconstruct the historical bridge will be starting next week, referring to the favorable weather conditions, which makes it possible to conduct masonry, CHTN reported.



Days after the collapse, the monument taped the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan for a personal inspection to the province, some 30 km from Tehran in a westward direction. Visiting the bridge, the minister stressed the need to speed up emergency protection operations to prevent further destruction of the Khatun ["Girl"] Bridge and to provide the necessary conditions for the reconstruction and restoration of this historical monument.

"Emergency protection operations, proper coverage, and installation of warning signs should be carried out as soon as possible to save the lives of citizens.... and a suitable space should be created to prevent further destruction of the bridge." This is a brick bridge, and despite proper and continuous maintenance, some part of it has collapsed and most of it is still standing, he added.

The foundation of the bridge was constructed during the Seljuk era (1037–1194) while its other sections were thoroughly renovated in the time of Safavids (1501–1736). Arch bridges have been built since ancient times due to the easy accessibility of stone masonry, which is an appropriate material for sustaining compressive forces.

An arch bridge carries loads primarily by compression, which exerts on the foundation both vertical and horizontal forces. Arch foundations must therefore prevent both vertical settling and horizontal sliding. Despite the more complicated foundation design, the structure itself normally requires less material than a beam bridge of the same span.

Arch bridges can be classified into deck arch bridges (featuring arches below the deck) and through arch bridges (those with arches above the deck, generally tied arches). In all arch bridges, the structural difficulty can be found in the minimization of the misalignment of the arch axis and the line of thrust, as well as a sufficient bending and buckling resistance. General design recommendations focus principally on the arch-to-span ratio, the arch and deck slenderness, and the number of hangers or piers.

Recent innovative arch bridges include high-speed railway (HSR) bridges, concrete-filled steel tubular and precast concrete arches, high-performance concrete or ultra-high performance concrete arches, and steel-concrete composite arches, and feature innovative erection methods. Recent research has been dedicated to the shape and magnitude of equivalent geometric imperfections, fatigue detailing, erection methods, reduction of the arch's self-weight, and new materials for arches, hangers, and ties.

Batch of Sassanid coins restored in southeastern Iran

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – A batch of Sassanid coins were restored at a cultural heritage laboratory in Iran's southwestern Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari province over the past Iranian calendar year (ended March 20), the deputy provincial official said on Tuesday.



"A total of 314 coins, which date back to the Sassanid era (224 CE–651), have been restored and cleaned over the past year," Kourosh Babaein, the provincial tourism chief, announced on Tuesday.

In about 220 CE the Sasanian dynasty of Iran introduced the concept of thin flan coins, issues that were struck in relief on both sides. In order not to produce intolerable stresses in the dies, since the thinner the material the more force necessary to make it flow into the recesses of the die's design, the depth of relief on such coins was of necessity much shallower than with earlier currency. Such techniques spread by way of Byzantium to northern Europe, where the emperor Charlemagne struck thin flan deniers (small silver coins), or pennies, which became characteristic of both his own and neighboring kingdoms.

In many ways, Iran under the Sasanian rule witnessed tremendous achievements of Persian civilization. Experts say that the art and architecture of the nation experienced a general renaissance during Sassanid rule. In that era, crafts such as metalwork and gem-engraving grew highly sophisticated, as scholarship was encouraged by the state; many works from both the East and West were translated into Pahlavi, the official language of the Sassanians.

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Iranian handicrafts enhance sense of aesthetics in interior design

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – Using Iranian handicrafts in the interior design of houses creates a sense of aesthetics, while boosting sales of handicrafts, the deputy tourism minister has said.

The use of handmade products of the experienced crafters and artisans of different regions of the country will also make interior design more affordable, Pouya Mahmoudian announced on Tuesday.

The ministry is working to develop the concept of the "Iranian Home", in order to give Iranian families an idea of how their homes should look with national products, which could lead to the expansion of products and activities of craftsmen, she added.

It is also a good way to familiarize people with the traditional arts of each region while giving creative ideas to the architects, construction engineers, and interior designers, the official added.

With 14 entries, Iran ranks first globally for the number of cities and villages registered by the World Crafts Council, as China with seven entries, Chile with four, and India with three ones come next.



Last January, the cities of Shiraz, Malayer, and Zanjan and the village of Qasemabad were designated by the WCC- Asia

Pacific Region, putting Iran's number of world crafts cities and villages from ten to 14. Shiraz was named a "world city of [di-

verse] handicrafts". Malayer was made a global hub for woodcarving and carved-wood furniture. Zanjan gained the title of a "world city of filigree". And Qasemabad village, which is nationally known for its traditional costumes, was also promoted to a world hub of handicrafts. Chadour Shab, a kind of homemade outer-garment for women, was, however, the main subject for the WCC assessment for the village.

Iran exported \$523 million worth of handicrafts during the calendar year 1398 (ended March 19, 2020). Of the figure, some \$273 million worth of handicrafts were exported officially through customs, and about \$250 million was earned via suitcase trade (allowed for customs-free and tax-free transfer) through various provinces, according to data provided by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts.

Ceramics, pottery vessels, handwoven cloths as well as personal ornamentations with precious and semi-precious gemstones are traditionally exported to Iraq, Afghanistan, Germany, the U.S., the UK, and other countries.

Iran to unveil Monastery of Saint Thaddeus stamp

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – Iran's Post Company plans to unveil a commemorative postal stamp to honor the Monastery of Saint Thaddeus, a historical monument in West Azarbaijan province.

The unveiling ceremony is scheduled to be held during the joint exhibition of Iran and Armenia postal stamps in Arch Bishop Ardak Manoukian Museum in Tehran on April 11, Iran's Post Company announced on Tuesday.

Organized by the Post and Communications Museum and Arch Bishop Ardak Manoukian Museum, the exhibit, which will be held online due to the outbreak of the coronavirus, will showcase a selection of historical Armenian stamps as well as Iranian stamps issued on Persian New Year (Noruz).

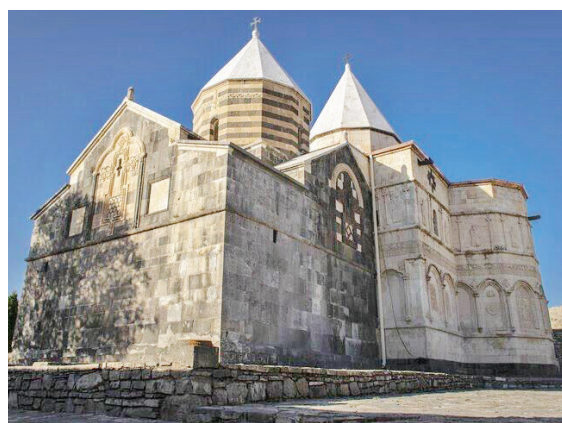
Also known as the Qareh Klise ("the Black Church"), the monastery is one of the oldest surviving Christian monuments in the country. It is situated in Chaldoran county some 20

kilometers from Maku, adjacent to the borders of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey.

The ancient Church shows off elaborate bas-reliefs of flowers, animals and human figures on its façade and exterior walls. It bears verses of Old and New Testament in Armenian calligraphy as well.

Together with St. Stepanos Monastery and the Chapel of Dzordzor, Qareh Klise was placed on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2008 under the name "Armenian Monastic Ensembles of Iran". All the three sites are located in West Azarbaijan and are of high significance from historical and cultural perspectives. They bear credible testimony to interchanges with the ancient regional societies in particular the Byzantine, Orthodox and Persian.

UNESCO has it that the churches bear examples of outstanding universal value of the Armenian architectural and decorative traditions.



Divandarreh worthy to be turned into tourism hub, expert says

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – Divandarreh city in the western province of Kordestan could be developed into one of the main tourism hubs of the country, the provincial tourism chief has said.

Considering the city's historical sites and natural sights as well as tourism-related projects, which are currently underway across the city, its tourism industry can be improved in near future, CHTN quoted Yaqub Guylian as saying on Tuesday.

The ancient Karaftu Cave, which is one of the major attractions of the region, could also be promoted more properly to draw more



tourists and nature lovers, the official added.

However, to achieve these goals, the city's tourism infrastructures need to be upgraded, and the private sector is expected to cooperate

in this area, he explained.

Back in February the deputy tourism minister Vali Teymouri announced that Kordestan province holds the potential to be a dynamic hub for nature tourism due to its beautiful and pristine landscape.

However, the province is needed to be promoted more properly in the fields of nature tourism and cultural tourism, he added.

Baneh, Marivan, and the provincial capital Sanandaj are among the most popular tourist and travel destinations, which require further elaborate introduction, the official noted.

Kordestan can play a significant role in

attracting foreign tourists considering its common border with neighboring Iraq, the official explained.

The name Kordestan refers to the region's principal inhabitants. After the Turkish invasion of Iran in the 11th century CE (Seljuq period), the name Kurdistan was applied to the region comprising the northwestern Zagros Mountains. It was during the reign of Abbas I the Great of Iran's Safavid dynasty (1501–1736) that the Kurds rose to prominence, having been enlisted by Abbas I to help stem the attacks of the marauding Uzbeks from the east in the early 17th century.

Objects, once smuggled to Switzerland, to go on show at home

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – A once-smuggled collection of glazed bricks, which has been returned to Iran from Switzerland, will go on show in the city of Bukan, which is said to be their place of origin in western Iran.

Back in December, a total of 49 glazed bricks attributed to the Qalaichi archaeological site in West Azarbaijan province, which had been looted and smuggled out of Iran some four decades ago, were returned home with the aid of Swiss officials.

The exhibit will be running for a month as of May 18. And the event is intended to highlight the history and culture of the region to the visitors, the provincial tourism chief, Jalil Jabari, said on Tuesday.

Situated about nine air km northwest of Bukan, Qalaichi (or Ghalay-chi) is an ancient settlement that so far yielded a large number of glazed objects. Some of which are



Entrance gate of Bahabad Castle restored

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – Restoration of the façade of the entrance gate of Bahabad Castle in the central province of Yazd has been completed, a local tourism official announced on Sunday.

Over the past centuries, the historical castle has sustained damage due to erosion, and currently many parts of it are on the verge of destruction, Alireza Kazemi said. Castle, which is regarded as the first nucleus of the town, has undergone several rounds of restoration projects over the past three years to strengthen and repair the worn-out parts, the official added.

The Safavid-era (1501–1736) fortification is a quadrilateral structure with irregular sides with five towers, of which now only one remains, he explained.

The official also noted that several relics and artifacts have been discovered from the castle, which are dating back to the different historical eras from the Safavid period to the Pahlavi era (1925–1979).

The castle consists of residential buildings, educational centers, religious monuments as well as public bathhouses, and Ab-Anbar (cisterns).

From very early history to modern times, defensive walls have often been necessary for cities to survive in an ever-changing world of invasion and conquest.

Fortifications in antiquity were designed primarily to defeat attempts at the escalade, and to the defense of territories in warfare, and were also used to solidify rule in a region during peacetime.

Uruk in ancient Sumer (Mesopotamia) is one of the world's oldest known walled cities. The Ancient Egyptians also built fortresses on the frontiers of the Nile Valley to protect against invaders from neighboring territories.

Many of the fortifications of the ancient world were built with mud brick, often leaving them no more than mounds of dirt for today's archaeologists.

With its winding lanes, forest of badgirs (wind catchers), mud-brick houses, atmospheric alleyways, and centuries of history, Yazd is a delightful place to stay, referring to as a 'don't miss' destination by almost all travel associates in the region. The oasis city is wedged between the northern Dasht-e Kavir and the southern Dasht-e Lut on a



flat plain ringed by mountains.

Yazd Jameh Mosque, Dowlatabad Garden, the Yazd Atash Behram, also known as Atashkadeh-e Yazd, Towers of Silence, and adjacent desert landscape are among its tourist sites.

the crises caused by the outbreak of the coronavirus continue.

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

the main factor.

Iran's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan in October warned that Iran's cultural heritage and tourism will be in a critical situation if

Over 15,000 COVID-19 recovered patients donate plasma

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Some 15,039 plasma units have been donated since April 2020 by patients who have been recovered from COVID-19 throughout the country, Bashir Haji Beigi, spokesman for the Blood Transfusion Organization has announced.

Following the outbreak of coronavirus, doctors, pharmacists, scientists, and others are looking for a way to control the virus, and so far, many studies and researches have been done in this regard.

One of the studies showed that the plasma driven from recovered patients can be used in the treatment of COVID-19 with the help of the patient's immune system.

Convalescent plasma therapy allows someone who has recovered from a coronavirus infection to donate their blood plasma to someone who is critically ill.

The best time for plasma donation is at least 14 and preferably 28 days after recovery, and donors should age 18 to 60 years.

The highest number of plasma dona-



tors were from the provinces of Tehran, West Azerbaijan, Yazd, and Khuzestan, Haji Beigi noted.

Since the beginning of April 2020, some 18,219 patients who recovered from COVID-19 referred to blood transfusion centers across the country, while 15,039 units of plasma were donated.

More than 85 percent of all donated blood worldwide is used to produce blood products, while the rate is 65 percent in Eastern Mediterranean countries. Iran ranks among the highest-income countries in terms of converting more than 97 percent of the blood donated by people to plasma-derived medicinal products (PDMP).

Only 55 of 171 countries produce PDMP through the fractionation of plasma collected in the reporting country. A total of 90 countries reported that all PDMP are imported, 16 countries reported that no PDMP was used during the reporting period, and 10 countries did not respond to the question, according to WHO.

Second Iranian COVID-19 vaccine to be mass-produced in August



SOCIETY TEHRAN — The second Iranian coronavirus vaccine, Razi Cov Pars, which started the clinical trial on February 27, will be mass-produced in early August, ISNA report on Tuesday.

Developed by the Razi Vaccine and Serum Research Institute, the vaccine is protein-based, which employs recombinant versions of the spike protein and tutors the

immune system against the virus by producing antibodies.

Through the first phase of the human trial, 120 people have so far received the first dose of vaccine, and 42 others the second dose, Mohammad-Hossein Fallah, deputy head of Razi Vaccine and Serum Research Institute said.

In terms of vaccine safety, those who received the vaccine have not had any problems so far, and the situation is improving, he added.

The vaccine is developed in 3 doses, the first two doses are injectable and the third dose is intranasal. The second dose of the vaccine will be injected into the volunteers 21 days later and the third dose will be inhaled 51 days later, he further explained.

Iran started mass vaccination against COVID-19 with Russian-made Sputnik V vaccine on February 9, with the priority given to medical staff, the elderly, and people with underlying diseases; which is also going to be co-produced by the two countries.

The first shipment of the COVAX vaccine was delivered to Tehran on Sunday.

"Currently, about 250,000 people in the country have been vaccinated and about 56,000 others have received the

second dose of the vaccine," Alireza Raeisi, spokesman for the National Headquarters for Coronavirus control said.

Homegrown vaccines

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.

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.

New cases and mortalities

In a press briefing on Monday, Health Ministry's spokesperson Sima-Sadat Lari confirmed 17,430 new cases of COVID-19 infection, raising the total number of infections to 1,963,394. She added that 1,667,079 patients have so far recovered, but 4,138 remain in critical conditions of the disease.

During the past 24 hours, 174 patients have lost their lives, bringing the total number of deaths to 63,506, she added.

So far, 13,256,820 COVID-19 diagnostic tests have been performed in the country.

Six Iranian universities in QS Rankings 2021

→ 1 Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) tops the list for a record ninth consecutive year in QS ranking. MIT is one of five American institutions in this year's top 10.

In a ranking that evaluates universities in six selected subject areas, the three Iranian universities advanced in three fields of engineering, natural sciences, and medical sciences; the University of Tehran was listed in all three subject areas.

Meanwhile, Tehran University of Medical Sciences was the only university from Iran that was listed in the field of medicine.

Iranian universities shine at world rankings

Times Higher Education has published its annual ranking of the world's top universities for 2021, listing 47 Iranian universities,

which shows an increase of 7 universities compared to the last year.

With 47 Iranian universities ranked among 1,527 top universities of 93 countries in the world in 2021 rankings, Iran achieved a great improvement in the academic field.

Some 21 Islamic countries were also listed in the ranking, however, Iran holds the highest share with 47 universities.

With a scientific growth rate of 10.4 percent in 2019, Iran ranked second among the top 25 countries in the world, next to China with a growth rate of 12.9 percent, according to the Web of Science website.

According to statistics released by the International Web of Science Database, Iran's citation rank has always been on the rise over the last eight years, from 24 in 2012

to 16 in 2019.

Iran ranks first in terms of the number of universities in the region and among Islamic countries, according to Shanghai Ranking's Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) 2020.

Two Iranian universities have been ranked among the top 100 universities in Asia, according to Webometrics Ranking of World Universities for July 2020.

Moreover, 7 Iranian universities have been listed among the best 1000 worldwide; including, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Sharif University of Technology, Tarbiat Modares University, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Isfahan University of Technology, Iran University



of Science and Technology.

In June 2020, THE Asia University Rankings 2020 ranked five Iranian universities among the top 100 universities worldwide.

The Center for Science and Technology Studies Leiden Ranking has placed 36 Iranian universities in the list of over 1,000 major universities worldwide in 2020 compared with 26 universities in 2019.

Scientists produce biodegradable plastic made from fish waste

Scientists working on an alternative to polluting plastic have discovered a biodegradable material derived from fish waste that would otherwise be thrown away, which could be used in a variety of products including packaging and clothing.

Canadian researchers say fish heads, bones, skin and guts heading for landfill can be turned into useful material that could replace crude oil-derived polyurethanes, which are found in everything from shoes and clothes to refrigerators and construction materials.

Existing polyurethanes come with a large carbon footprint and are slow to break down.

But the team, led by Francesca Kerton, who is based at the Memorial University of Newfoundland, found that fish-oil

based plastics could provide an environmentally friendly solution while also tackling food factory waste.

Previous studies have developed methods for producing plastics from fish waste, but the latest research goes further in determining how the material might be easily broken down again at the end of its useful life.

To produce the new material, the researchers used oil extracted from bits of salmon left after the flesh had been removed and processed for human consumption.

They developed a way of converting the fish oil into a polyurethane-like polymer, first by adding oxygen to the oil in a controlled way to form epoxides, molecules similar to those in epoxy resin.

Then, carbon dioxide was added to the epoxides and the resulting molecules combined with nitrogen-containing chemical compound amines to form the new material.

"It is important that we start designing plastics with an end-of-life plan, whether it's chemical degradation that turns the material into carbon dioxide and water, or recycling and repurposing," Ms Kerton said.

"When we start the process with the fish oil, there is a faint kind of fish smell, but as we go through the steps, that smell disappears."

Since last summer, the team has been tweaking that process to simplify and speed up the breakdown of the fish oil-derived plastic.

Pollution from Europe's coal plants responsible for 'up to 34,000 deaths each year'

Air pollution from Europe's coal plants could be responsible for up to 34,000 deaths across the continent each year, a new study suggests.

Coal-fired power is the single-largest driver of global temperature rise and phasing it out of the world's electricity supply as soon as possible will be key to meeting the world's climate goals, scientists say.

The burning of coal for power also causes the release of pollutants that can be seriously harmful to human health, including fine particulate matter (PM2.5) – tiny particles less than 2.5 micrometres in diameter that can penetrate deep into the lungs when inhaled.

This PM2.5 pollution has been linked to a wide range of health conditions, including respiratory illnesses, strokes and heart attacks.

The new research finds that PM2.5 pollution from Europe's coal plants causes at least 16,800 excess deaths from cardiovascular and respiratory diseases each year. However, the real level of pollution from coal plants could be higher than official tolls, so this figure could be as high as 33,900, the study says.

Dr Jolinda Kushta, study lead author and a research scientist at the Climate and Atmosphere Research Centre at The Cyprus Institute, told The Independent: "We indicate that there is likely an underestimation of coal power plant source strengths in the official emissions inventory."

The study, published in Environmental Research Letters, uses data from the European Pollutant Release and Transfer Register, which stores information on the pollution emitted by coal plants in the EU and nearby countries, including the UK, Norway and Switzerland.

The researchers used this real-world data to create a simulated map of air pollution levels across Europe in 2015, and a second map of what air pollution levels would have been if there were no coal power plants.

"We simulate air pollution levels with and without coal-fired power plant emissions," said Dr Kushta.

The researchers then used modelling to work out the difference in annual deaths from cardiovascular and respiratory diseases between the simulations with coal power plants and the simulations with no coal.

The scientists studied deaths from lung cancer, coronary heart disease, lower respiratory disease and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), among others.

The findings suggest that, across Europe, PM2.5 pollution from coal power plants causes at least 16,800 excess deaths from cardiovascular and respiratory diseases each year, with a possible range of 14,800 to 18,700.

However, when underestimates in official coal power pollution data are taken into consideration, this figure rises to 33,900 – with a possible range of 33,000 to 37,600.

The scientists also studied the impact of coal power air pollution on different countries in Europe.

The findings show that the number of excess deaths from coal power pollution are high in the European countries with the greatest number of existing coal power plants, including Poland and Germany.

However, the highest excess death rates from coal were found in the eastern European countries located downwind of major emitter Poland. These countries included Bulgaria, Lithuania, Romania, Hungary, Latvia, Slovakia, Czech Republic and Croatia.

The study finds that PM2.5 pollution from coal plants is responsible for at least 1,800-2,260 excess deaths each year in Germany, 1,470-1,840 in Poland, and 2,800-3,600 in Romania, Bulgaria and Greece.

Even the UK – a country that has witnessed a dramatic decline in coal-fired power use over the last few decades – sees a relatively high level of excess deaths as a result of coal power pollution on an annual basis, according to the findings.

The study estimates that coal plant pollution causes at least 1,270 to 1,670 excess deaths from cardiovascular and respiratory disease each year in the UK.

One major reason for deaths occurring even in countries which are phasing out coal power is that, once formed, PM2.5 particles are able to travel hundreds of kilometres across national borders – meaning the health of people living in countries located nearby to major emitters can be affected.

In addition to exploring the current health burden caused by coal-fired power in Europe, the researchers also investigated the possible health benefits that could be provided if it were to be phased out.

The findings suggest that a total phase out of coal power plants in Europe could save between 18,400 and 105,900 lives per year – depending on what actions are taken to address other sources of PM2.5 pollution at the same time.

"The phase-out of coal power plant emissions would make a major contribution to the improvement of public health, especially when applied simultaneously to emission reductions in other sectors," said Dr Kushta.

LET'S LEARN PERSIAN

(Part 153)

(Source: saadifoundation.ir)

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

۱. () زیارتگاه امامزاده صالح در شمال شهر است.

۲. () مردم برای بازی و استراحت به زیارتگاه می‌روند.

۳. () بعضی از مردم فقط برای زیارت به آنجا می‌روند.

۴. () گروهی از مردم پول نذر امامزاده می‌کنند.

۵. () بعضی دیگر به جای پول غذا می‌دهند.

۶. () خیلی از مردم چهارشنبه‌ها به زیارتگاه می‌روند.

● تمرین ۱. جواب سؤال‌های زیر را کامل بنویسید:

۱. زیارتگاه امامزاده صالح کجاست؟

۲. مردم برای چه به آنجا می‌روند؟

۳. در چه روزهایی بیشتر می‌روند؟

۴. مردم چه چیزهایی نذر می‌کنند؟

۵. بازار تجریش در کجا واقع است؟

۶. این بازار چگونه است؟

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

Iran to hold first national online project Olympiad

The first round of online project Olympiad will be held in Iran in the next Iranian calendar year (starting on March 21), Fatemeh Mohajerani, an official with the Ministry of Education has said.

The project Olympiad will focus on special subjects and is very much like Khwarizmi International Award the only difference is that the Olympiad will be carried out online, IRNA news agency quoted Mohajerani as saying on Sunday.

The participants can submit their projects online via a website and a jury will evaluate them, she added.

اولین المپیاد مجازی برگزار می شود

فاطمه مهاجرانی رئیس مرکز ملی پرورش استعدادهای درخشان و دانش‌پژوهان جوان گفت: سال آینده اولین المپیاد مجازی با عنوان «المپیاد پروژه ای» برگزار می شود.

فاطمه مهاجرانی روز یکشنبه در گفت و گو با خبرنگار ایرنا اظهار داشت: این المپیاد یک موضوع خاص را به عنوان یک مساله تعریف کرده و به آن می پردازد و در واقع شبیه جشنواره خوارزمی است با این تفاوت که نیازی به حضور افراد نیست بلکه به صورت مجازی برگزار می شود.

وی افزود: شرکت کنندگان و نخبگان از طریق یک پورتال، طرح ها و موضوعات خود را ارسال می کنند تا مورد داوری قرار گیرد.

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GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

What actions are most excellent? To glad-
den the heart of human beings, to feed the
hungry, to help the afflicted, to lighten the
sorrow of the sorrowful, and to remove the
sufferings of the injured.

Prophet Muhammad (S)

Documentary on “The Zeinabi Division” to be broadcasted soon

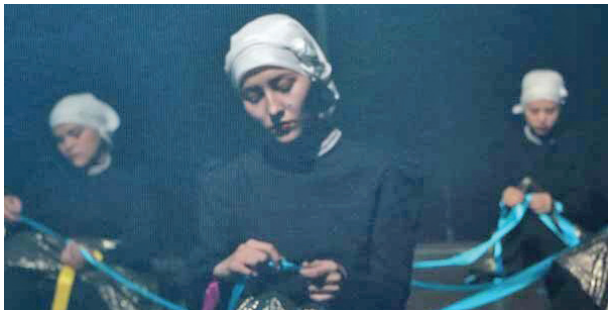
→1 Hosting various gatherings of the martyrs' families and talking to them is also one of Leader's regular plans.

The documentary series “These Stars” aims to convey parts of what is happening in these meetings to Iranian people.

“The Zeinabi Division” is the first part of this series, which is dedicated to an overview of a number of meetings of the honorable families of the martyrs who defended the holy shrines in Iraq and Syria, which were held in the office of the Supreme Leader.

The bitter fate of Hazaras girls from myth to reality

A R T TEHRAN — Emad Rasouli, director of the play “Forty- Girl Mountain”, explained the formation of this play and the bitter narrative of the fate of Hazaras girls and their resistance to oppression.



Emad Rasouli, the Afghan director of the play “Forty- Girl Mountain”, who has staged this play in Mehregan Theater, told Mehr News Agency about this performance: “We staged this play twice on March 28, but unfortunately the theaters were closed and the play was halted to stage. With the reopening of the theaters, we had 3 performances on April 3, 4, 5 and it was decided not to stage the play in April but due to the reception that has been shown in just a few performances of the play, we are going to take the stage again in May.”

He explained the theme of the work: “This play narrates the bravery of Hazaras girls against the tyranny of Abdul Rahman Khan, one of the commanders of the time under British rule in Oruzgan. These girls resisted for 7 days and the leader of this resistance was a girl named Shirin. Finally, Shirin decides to die voluntarily and threw herself from the top of the mountain to avoid captivity and humiliation.”

The theater artist said about the time of this event: “Because some people consider this event a myth and do not accept that it really happened, the exact time of this event is not known, but according to research that I did, it is about a hundred years ago when the British entered Afghanistan for colonization. Unfortunately, not much information is available about this incident, and there is a dichotomy between the Hazaras people and other ethnic groups in Afghanistan as to whether this incident is real or not, which has led to this incident not being recorded in history and being distorted. But in my research in the area, I came across graves that the people of this province believe are the graves of these girls.”

Rasouli noted: “I myself am from Afghanistan and live in Iran and I am interested in folklore stories and the subjects and topics that I choose to perform or make a short film about are related to this in Afghanistan. At first, I was supposed to stage a play about Rabe'e Balkhi, but at the suggestion of my friend, I decided to work on the Hazaras girls, because this play is a feminine work and at the same time, it is bitter and sweet. Since little information is available about this incident, despite my research, I, along with Amir Hossein Alemi and Ahmad Ata'ie, who are other playwrights, enriched the story in order to make it more attractive to become a play. This may not be a true story, but such events are the reality of the women of my country every day, and there are many such incidents.”

The theater director concluded by pointing out that he had been focusing on this play for the past 4 years and that he had planned to stage it two more times before, which was not possible for some reason, and stated: “This play is post-modern and at the same time, it is absurd that we are witnessing the creation of a traditional atmosphere. The play is a combination of form movements of actors and dialogue. We first see the story is narrated by one of the warlords to his wife who witnessed this event, and then we see the presence of these girls in the wife's dreams, which is accompanied by form movements.”

Islamic Revolution Artist of the Year announces 2021 finalists

A R T TEHRAN — Five cultural figures have been shortlisted as the final nominees to compete for the title of the Islamic Revolution Artist of the Year in 2021.

The finalists include director and screenwriter Jalil Saman, poets Afshin Ala and Ali-Mohammad Moaddab, and graphic artist Mohammadreza Doostmohammadi and author Vahid Yaminpur, the Organizers of the Islamic Revolution Art Week announced during a press conference on Monday.

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

Ala has been selected for “his timely literary response to events in society and creating the poetry book ‘Sarbaznameh’ (‘Book of Soldiers’) in mourning for General Qassem Soleimani.”

Moaddab received the nomination for “his hard efforts to grow up a new generation poets and writer, which are committed to the Islamic Revolution, as well as, for his timely literary response to events in society.”



Organizers attend a press conference at the Art Bureau in Tehran on April 5, 2021 to announce the final nominees of the Islamic Revolution Artist of the Year. (Mehr/Mohammadreza Abbasi)

Victoria and Albert Museum in London launches “Epic Iran” Exhibition



A 10-metre-long painted reproduction of the tiled dome interior of Mosque of Sheikh Lutfollah, Isfahan, in preparation for the Epic Iran show. Photograph: Peter Kelleher

LONDON — One of the world's largest arts museums has launched what it has dubbed the “Epic

Iran” exhibition featuring a variety of art works ranging from sculpture, ceramics and carpets, to textiles, photography and film dating back 5000 years according to its official website.

The exhibition was just launched and is open to visitors until 12th September 2021. The ten sections in the exhibition feature the remarkable Iranian culture starting with a show of Iran's landscapes in the “Land of Iran” section, then displaying decorative objects in a portrayal of Iran's significant civilization before the Persian Empire in the Exhibition's “Emerging Iran” section.

In a somewhat controversial move, the museum has announced that several archeological artefacts which are “on loan from the British” as well as collections from the Oxus Treasure Museum which consist of the “Cyrus Cylinder” and “gold armet” are on display in the Exhibition's “Persian Empire” section with the aim of providing an insight into “kingship and royal power” as well as the trade and governance in the society during that era.

The additional sections of the exhibition consist of “Last of the Ancient Empires” section which covers the overthrowing of the Per-

sian Empire, following this; the “The Book of Kings” sections sheds light on how Islam was introduced in Persia featuring poetry works by renowned Iranian poets such as Ferdowsi and its famous ‘Shahnameh’. Further sections of the exhibition include the “Change of Faith” section which dwells into the emergence of Islam in Iranian culture with a fascinating lead into the next section named “Literary Excellence” showcasing Iran's advancement in literature with the emergence of the Arabic script as a literary language in royal courts.

The “Royal Patronage” and “The Old and the New” sections feature the rebirth of the kingship and royal customs in Iran and the imposing of the western culture in Iran by the Qajar dynasty under the pretext of “modernization”.

The exhibition's final section is the “Modern and Contemporary Iran” which according to the museum's official website covers a period of “social and political change”, as well as political changes which led to the Islamic Revolution, and consequently the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran by Imam Khomeini (ra).

Saadi Foundation announces final deadline of registration for AMFA International Exam

A R T TEHRAN — According to the official website of the foundation, the Persian Language Proficiency Test (PLPT) known as AMFA in Farsi, is due to be held on 10th of April 2021. AMFA is the Persian abbreviation for Persian Language Proficiency Test and it is designated to measure the proficiency of Persian language learners. Similar to other international language proficiency tests such as IELTS & TOEFL, it offers successful candidates an internationally recognized certificate known as the “International Persian



Proficiency Certificate”. Recently the foundation extended the deadline for registration to 7th of April 2021.

This will be the second international Persian Language Proficiency exam and it will be held simultaneously in Iran, Russia and Iraq.

AMFA is the only valid and international certificate to assess and verify the Proficiency of Persian Language learners. In line with International academic standards, the test assesses the learners' level of ability in Persian Language within the framework of four main skills; listening, reading, speaking and writing.

Saadi Foundation, which is directed by the Iranian Vice President as chairman,

has institutionalized an official curriculum for the teaching of the Persian Language which is regulated by Iran's Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution and aims to establish the International AMFA certificate as a core requirement for the teaching of the Persian Language abroad.

Some of the advantages of obtaining the AMFA certificate are listed on the Saadi Foundation website as the opportunity of employment in companies in partnership with the Islamic Republic, as well as serving as a valid certificate for foreigners living in Iran.

Tunisian professor: We must bring dimensions of oppression of Palestinians to attention of world

A R T TEHRAN — “We must be able to bring the dimensions of the oppression of the Palestinian people to the attention of the world,” said Fouad Fakhfakh, a professor of Islamic civilization at Carthage University in Tunisia, during a meeting with Iran's cultural attaché in Tunisia.

According to the Mehr news agency, quoting the Iranian cultural attaché office in Tunisia, Meysam Farahani, the cultural attaché of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Tunisia, met with Fouad Fakhfakh, professor of Islamic civilization at Carthage University. In this meeting, referring to the importance of expanding relations between university professors and benefiting from existing scientific capacities to strengthen bilateral cultural and scientific relations, Farahani said: “The history of scientific and academic cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Tunisia is very bright and growing. There is progress, and in the meantime, university professors and thinkers have an important and effective role to play in deepening these relationships.”

Farahani added: “So far, many joint scientific meetings have been held in Tunisia with the participation of the elites of the two countries and in cooperation with the Iranian Cultural Attaché Office, which led to very desirable and lasting results in the development of bilateral relations and it is hoped that by taking advantage of the capacity of bilateral scientific agreements between the universities of Tunisia and Iran, we will be able to hold various scientific meetings and programs in the new Iranian year on the subject of modern Islamic civilization and cultural commonalities between the two countries.”



Farahani also praised Fakhfakh for writing and publishing the book on the Palestinian issues and described it as a lasting and effective step in explaining the issue of Palestine and the oppression of the Palestinian people.

He noted: “The issue of Palestine as the most important issue in the Islamic world has been considered by thinkers, elites, people of culture and politics and Islamic societies, and the Islamic Republic of Iran after the Islamic Revolution, has paid special attention to this issue and has tried in every way to declare the illegitimacy of the occupying regime in Beit-ol-Moqaddas and the oppression of the Palestinian people.”

Iran's cultural attaché in Tunisia termed the designation of the International Day of Quds, holding numerous intellectual and scientific meetings, explicit

support for the Palestinian cause in the international community, support for resistance activists and writers in this field, among other effective measures of the Islamic Republic of Iran in this field.

Referring to Earth Day, Farahani said that the unity of the world in expressing the crimes of the Zionist regime and explaining the various dimensions of the occupation of Palestine was one of the most important issues emphasized on this day and announced the readiness of Iran's cultural attaché office to hold this occasion as glorious as possible.

Fakhfakh also stated in this meeting that one of the most important areas for deepening and expanding cultural relations between the two countries was to benefit from the capacity of universities and bilateral scientific fields, which had been used well so far.

Referring to the publication of his new book on Palestine, the Professor of Islamic Civilization at Carthage University assessed and emphasized it as a basis for further explanation of the Palestinian issue in the current situation and went on to say: “The Palestinian issue will never be forgotten in any time and all of us as Muslims have a duty to use all available capacities at our disposal to explain and enlighten the dimensions of the oppression of the Palestinian people and to raise the voice of support and freedom of the Holy Quds to the world.”

He added: “The Palestine has always been one of the most important issues in Tunisia for all political parties and cultural and popular communities, and during the year, especially on Earth Day and Al-Quds Day, effective measures have been taken in this regard and this year, various programs will be implemented more glorious than previous years.”