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Immediate action needed to control water shortage crisis

BY FARANAK BAKHTIARI

A recent report by Nature Scientific Journal on Iran's water crisis indicates that from 2002 to 2015, over 74 billion cubic meters have been extracted from groundwater aquifers, which is unprecedented and its revival takes thousands of years along with urgent action.

Three Iranian scientists studied 30 basins in the country and realized that the rate of aquifer depletion over a 14-year period has been about 74 billion cubic meters, which is recently published in Nature Scientific Journal.

Also, over-harvesting in 77 percent of Iran has led to more land subsidence and soil salinity. Research and statistics show that the average overdraft from the country's aquifers was about 5.2 billion cubic meters per year.

Mohammad Darvish, head of the environment group in the UNESCO Chair on Social Health told Mehr on Saturday that the situation of groundwater resources is worrisome, and if this catastrophe is not addressed quickly, the future generations may never forgive this negligence.

The statistic is unprecedented, as the total reservoirs of all dams in the country have a capacity of about 50 billion cubic meters; In other words, in the last 14 years, 22 billion cubic meters more than the capacity of all dams have been extracted from the country's underground sources, he explained.

The study showed that no attention has been paid to the ecological potential of the country, which has caused a very worrying phenomenon of land subsidence in the country, Darvish added.

Land subsidence is a phenomenon that, when it occurs on a plain, turns the area into a dead plain and takes at least 50,000 years to regain resilience. Compensation for a 14-year water withdrawal for Iran's groundwater resources may take several thousand years, he lamented.

The report notes that Iran's water consumption has increased due to a significant increase in legal and illegal wells, the expansion of agricultural land, and increasing livelihood dependence on water and soil resources in agriculture, livestock, and poultry, which are mainly caused by human factors, Darvish noted.

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Millennia-old iron production sites discovered in Iran

TEHRAN – Archaeologists have discovered several millennia-old iron production sites across a historical village in southcentral Iran.

"Several iron production sites and kilns for melting iron ores have been discovered across Chahak rural district in Khatam county of Yazd province," a local tourism official announced on Saturday.

The discoveries were made during a survey led by Iranian archaeologist Hossein Azizi under the supervision of the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Tourism, the official said.

So far, 60 cultural and historical relics and sites, including buildings, castles, aqueducts, tombs, cemeteries, and hills, have been identified during the survey, the report said.

The oldest cultural elements and artifacts identified so far in this survey date to the late Middle Paleolithic, a period about 25,000 to 35,000 years ago, the official noted. Available

data suggest the production of iron objects was practiced in the region during the Achaemenid era (c. 550-330), however, the survey is aimed to determine exact dates for the ancient craftsmanship across the village.

According to experts, Achaemenid art is a combinatorial art with its elegance and beauty. One of the most elegant artifacts by Achaemenian artists is metal wares, especially bowls. The Achaemenid bowls are one of the most important documents discovered in different parts of the Empire. Some of these bowls have royal inscriptions which represent the importance of these types of wares in the Achaemenid court. Such bowls give researchers significant information about metalwork, decorating style, techniques of production, and commercial, social, economic, and artistic communications.

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Huge fire breaks out at Israel's oil refinery in Haifa

A huge fire has broken out at an oil refinery in the port city of Haifa in the occupied territories, with initial media reports citing a cyberattack.

The Israeli media said the incident took place in one of the facilities at the BAZAN refinery in Haifa late Friday.

The factory's emergency team immediately began working to extinguish the blaze and rescue forces were called to the site to gain control of the flames.

Israel's English-language daily newspaper Jerusalem Post, citing environment protection ministry, claimed that the fire at the BAZAN refinery had erupted as a result of a "damaged pipe in the CCR system," and a report by Israel's Channel 12 television network said the control valve of one of the installation pipes had broken.

The Israeli paper said the fire has been put out and the plant has currently stopped supplying

fuel to the oil facility in Haifa.

The media outlets have, so far, provided no details about the extent of the damage and the number of possible casualties.

In an unprecedented incident last week, Israel reported a missile blast near its highly-secretive Dimona nuclear facility. Tel Aviv claimed that the missile had landed in the Israeli-occupied territories as a result of "errant" Syrian anti-aircraft fire.

Analysts, however, cast doubt on the regime's account of the incident and said the missile had likely been fired towards the occupied territories by resistance groups in the region.

According to Press TV, Tel Aviv admitted that its so-called Iron Dome missile shield had failed to intercept and down the missile, which made air raid sirens go off and triggered panic among Israeli settlers.

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Iranian clubs prove how strong they are

BY MASOUD HOSSEIN

TEHRAN – Three Iranian clubs did a great job in the 2021 AFC Champions League (West) group stage, advancing to the Round of 16. It means the football clubs in the West Asian country has improved over the past years.

Persepolis qualified for the AFC Champions league final two times in three years (2018 and 2020) and it's not surprising that the

three Iranian teams have booked their place in the next stage. It shows that how strong the country's clubs are.

Persepolis won Group E with a haul of 15 points. The Iran Professional League titleholders once again showed that they are favorites to advance to the next stages. Yahya Golmohammadi's side are also favorites to win Iran league for the fifth time in a row.

Persepolis lost to Al Wahda and there are

signs of weakness in their defensive line. They have to attack their weakness in the upcoming matches. The Iranian giants will take on Tajikistan's FC Istiklol in September in the Round of 16. It could be a difficult task for the Iranian team since the match will be held in Dushanbe and the Tajik team have shown that they are not a minnow team, beating Saudi giants Al Hilal 4-1 in group stage.

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EICO a major supplier of alloy steel in West Asia

Esfarayen Industrial Complex (EICO), in North Khorasan province, in the northeast of Iran, is one of the major suppliers of alloy steels including long products, forged and cast parts and sections in Iran and West Asia.

The complex, which is a subsidiary of Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), with capable specialists and advanced technology, has the ability to meet the strategic needs of the country's industries in the fields of oil and gas, power plants, shipbuilding and car manufacturing, railways and mining and steel industries.

The company's products are exported to many countries including European ones such as Germany and Italy.

S. Arabia supports U.S. policies in West Asia: ex-Japanese diplomat

BY MOHAMMAD MAZHARI

TEHRAN – A former Japanese diplomat says that Washington cannot ignore Riyadh because the latter supports U.S. policies in West Asia.

"Saudi Arabia plays an important role in supporting the U.S. policy towards the Middle East (West Asia)," Shuji Hosaka, the visiting professor of Waseda University in Japan, tells the Tehran Times.

"That's why the U.S. administrations cannot ignore Saudi Arabia, though the Congress and media might have been the anti-Saudi tendency."

The relationship between Riyadh and Washington was cozy throughout the Trump administration.

Unlike Trump, Biden tries to reassess the U.S. relationship with the oil-rich, deeply conservative kingdoms. Saudi Arabia has a less privileged and personal relationship with the Biden administration than it has had with the Trump team.

"Unlike President Trump, who was said to turn a blind eye to the Saudi regime, President Biden seems to keep balance carefully," Hosaka notes.

Many Pundits believe that Biden's attitude towards Saudi Arabia will change its foreign policy and work with regional players to find a solution for political discrepancies.

"Saudi Arabia is also shifting its foreign and domestic policy to the ones more acceptable for the Biden administration," according to the Japanese expert.

Following is the text of the interview:

How do you assess U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan? Could the U.S. achieve its objectives in Afghanistan after 20 years?

I am filled with deep emotion when I reflect upon the 20 years that have passed since the United States launched the war in Afghanistan.

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Leader to talk to people live on May 2

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN**— The Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, will speak live to the people through state TV and social media platforms at 6:00 PM on Sunday, May 2.

This speech will be broadcast simultaneously on the Khamenei.ir website, Channel 1, Islamic Republic of Iran News Network, and national radio.

The official Instagram account of the leader's office posted a banner informing everyone of the timing of the speech and describing it as "the important speech."

IRGC intelligence service demolishes anti-Iran group

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — The intelligence service of the Ashura Corps of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) of East Azerbaijan reported the disintegration of the opposition group "Descent of Iran" by the brave, anonymous intelligence officers in East Azerbaijan.

According to the statement released by the IRGC intelligence service in East Azerbaijan, the so-called "Descent of Iran" announced its establishment in January 2018, trying to overthrow the Islamic Republic by spreading false news and despair among the people.

One of the group's media tricks was to use the misled and elements within the country to operate on social networks. These people would come in different clothes, especially in the uniform of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran. They would appear in front of the camera and present themselves as an isolated military man, reading statements and announcements, inviting people to a street riot.

The monarchists were the group's prominent supporters, relying on Western and Saudi governments to carry out their plans in Iran.

The statement said that the IRGC intelligence officers identified the group's leaders in a complex operation and demolished them.

Iranian police dissolve gang trading American weapons

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN**— According to a commander, the Iranian police forces have disbanded a group of criminals engaged in the illicit online arms trade.

According to the deputy commander of the Iranian police, the gun-running gang was selling guns in cyberspace.

General Ghasem Rezaei said that the police forces tracked down the gun runners and apprehended all gang members in less than two weeks.

According to the general, all of the guns for sale were manufactured in the United States and smuggled into Iran through Turkey, according to the General, who added that

Turkey had been asked to take the required steps to prevent arms smuggling into Iran.

Aref to run for president

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN**— according to Tasnim News Agency, Mohammad Reza Aref, the chief of the Center for Iranians' Hope, will field candidacy for the upcoming presidential elections on June 18.

According to a source close to the former MP, Aref will register as a presidential nominee on May 11 or 12.

He added that Aref has chosen the white color as his symbol, and his slogan is "Justice and Responsibility."

The source said that Aref would have two headquarters during his election campaign, an official one and a people's center, run by his fan base, which mainly does his campaign activities.

The source stressed that the former vice-president would field candidacy regardless of what happens, and nothing will affect his mindset.

The presidential and council elections will be held on June 18.

Many prominent political figures have announced that they are running for president, including Saeed Mohammad, the former director of Khatam-al Anbiya Construction Headquarters, Mohsen Rezaei, Secretary of the Expediency Discernment Council, and Rostam Ghasemi, former Minister of Petroleum.

Nation's Unity party announces presidential candidates

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN**— Nation's Unity party announced five presidential candidates for the upcoming presidential elections on June 18.

Speaking to ISNA, Hossein Nourani Nezhad, spokesman for the party, stated that the party members have unanimously agreed to introduce five candidates.

Mostafa Tajzadeh, a well-known reformist, Mohammad Javad Zarif, currently foreign minister, Es'haq Jahangiri, now first vice president, Shahindokht Molaverdi, The secretary-general of the Women's Rights Protection Society, and Seyyed Mohammad Sadr, former diplomat are the Nation's Unity party candidates for the upcoming presidential elections.

Several political figures have announced candidacy for presidential elections, including Fereydoun Abbasi, current MP, and General Hossein Dehghan, former Defense Minister.

Pentagon Chief: next major war will be much different

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — In his first major policy speech on Friday, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin claimed that the U.S. must prepare for a potential future conflict utterly different from what he called "the old wars" that have consumed the Pentagon for the past two decades.

Austin stressed the need for the U.S. military to move forward a faster and more innovative approach by harnessing emerging technological advancements and computing powers.

Speaking during a trip to the U.S. Pacific Command in Hawaii, Austin said, "The way we fight the next major war is going to look very different from the way we fought the last ones. Galloping advances in technology mean changes in the work we do to keep the United States secure across all five domains of potential conflict — not just air, land and sea, but also space and cyberspace."

"What we need is the right mix of technology, operational concepts, and capabilities — all woven together in a networked way that is so credible, flexible and formidable that it will give any adversary pause," he said, adding, "We need to create advantages for us and dilemmas for them."

"We can't predict the future," Austin said. "So, what we need is the right mix of technology, operational concepts, and capabilities - all woven together in a networked way that is so credible, so flexible, and so formidable that it will give any adversary pause."

According to the Press TV, although Austin did not mention any specific adversary by name, the impetus behind his speech was clearly a rapidly rising China, which has been increasingly intent on challenging the United States on multiple fronts, including in cyberspace.



Adversaries between the two countries mainly derive from the increasing pace of growth in China during the recent years and expand beyond merely economic dominance to include even military power, as some experts believe.

In a recent interview with the Tehran Times, Ashok Swain, a leading Indian academic, concluded that "China's major influence globally and in Asia will remain primarily economic; however, though China is still behind, it is on its way to surpassing the U.S. in military power with increased spending on weapons technology and developing several secretive weapons."

Calling China "recovered" from the covid-19, Swain continued, "China is not bound by the Immediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) between Moscow and Washington, and it has already acquired the largest number of ballistic missiles. China is

particularly the world leader in medium-range missiles and has immense capability to strike with its nuclear weapons anywhere it wants. Though China is estimated to have only 320 nuclear weapons, but is a big unknown and has never given any number of its warheads officially. Nuclear weapons are also part of its ongoing project to modernize its military to close the gap with the U.S. China already has a larger navy than the U.S. China under President Xi has prioritized enhancing its military strength, and it will be foolish to downplay China; growing military power."

The expert believes "the concept of a monolithic world has disappeared for nearly a decade now, and the U.S. has already realized it," and the U.S. has already encountered the bitter truth about the new formation of the power in the world.

But as Swain puts it, the challenging issue for China in the near future might be "political

stability," which can impact the countries' ability to expand relations. Swain believes, "There is no doubt that China has already become the global economic powerhouse, and it is expected to surpass the U.S. as the world's biggest economy by 2028 or even before. The former U.S. President Donald Trump's ally-alienating policies within NATO between 2017 to 2020 have pushed China's position upward firmly at the global power table. China is undoubtedly acquiring economic and military strength superior to the U.S. sooner than later. Still, there are some doubts over its internal political stability in the long run and its ability to make alliances with other regional powers in different parts of the world."

Though, many other experts believe that not only China doesn't see "inability to make alliances" as a challenge for its future, but even 'mere mutual cooperation' between China and some sensitive/powerful countries, including Iran, will neutralize many efforts the U.S. has put behind its policies.

In an interview with the Tehran Times, Richard Caplan, A professor of international relations at the University of Oxford, said that although the partnership between Iran and China may not change the balance in West Asia, it will undoubtedly affect the dynamics.

Caplan said, "The agreement, which pre-dates Biden, undercuts U.S. efforts to isolate Iran economically and, to some extent, diplomatically. It also supports China's ambitions to extend its economic and strategic influence throughout Eurasia."

Such alliances will make things much more complicated for the U.S. and cast doubt on the countries' traditional methods of maintaining power in different realms. That said, Austin's "different war" can include various parties.

Vienna talks positive, says Vaezi

→ 1 Vaezi stressed that with the lifting of the oppressive sanctions against Iran, "there will undoubtedly be good days waiting for the country's economy and people's livelihood."

He noted that the government would try to seize every opportunity to accomplish this goal without wasting time.

'Iran welcomes development of relations with neighbors'

Regarding the Iranian foreign minister's regional tour, the chief of staff stated that Iran has always considered the development of relations with its neighbors as a strategic goal and has welcomed dialogue and cooperation with its neighbors, considering the region's shared interests.

"Foreign Minister Zarif's visit to several neighboring countries is a step in the same direction, and considering the areas of cooperation and development of relations, as well as the need for inter-regional talks to meet the challenges

of the region, this tour has been done and fortunately has achieved good results," Vaezi remarked.

'Iran has always welcomed dialogue with Saudi Arabia'

"We have always stated in recent years that we are ready to engage with our neighbor Saudi Arabia to avoid tensions, strengthen cooperation and expand the space for dialogue, and we still stand by that position," Vaezi said about the possible Iran-Saudi Arabia dialogue.

The chief of staff stressed that strengthening Iran-Saudi Arabia relations is undoubtedly in the region's interest and can effectively overcome many unnecessary tensions and challenges.

In a statement on April 29, Saeed Khatibzadeh, spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated that "Iran welcomes the change in Saudi Arabia's tone."

The statement came in response to a recent interview by



the Saudi crown prince in which he expressed willingness to mend ties with Iran.

MP says Natanz suffered 5 acts of sabotage

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN**— Speaking to Fars News Agency, Fereydoun Abbasi, head of the Energy Committee of the parliament recounted sabotage acts done in Natanz nuclear site, revealing new details about the recent power outage.

"This is not the first time something similar has happened in Natanz, but the method of sabotage is new. This is not the first time sabotage and the use of explosives have been reported. For the past 15 years, the enemy has been constantly trying to do this," he said.

Abbasi stated that it is estimated that the recent sabotage was the fifth big attack.

"This time they targeted the distribution network, the cables, and the spare batteries that supply power," he explained.

The senior MP noted that the vulnerability of centrifuges is due to power outage.

"The enemy always plans to cut off the electricity itself, for example, a tower base near Natanz was destroyed once before 2011, but the tower did not fall to cut off the electricity."



Revealing technical details about the recent sabotage act at Natanz, he said, "They (the enemies) think that we only use external electricity, but this is not the case. They now understand that we do not necessarily use electricity from outside, or if we get it from outside, it may be for other purposes. We get the main electricity from a safer place. So this time their plan was to target the end of the power distribution and the cable coming from the battery at the same time."

Sabotage in the Natanz nuclear site occurred on April 11. Israeli media claimed that Mossad conducted the attack.

Gen. Soleimani praised by President and VP

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN**— Speaking at a social media platform on Friday, Iranian Vice-President Es'haq Jahangiri praised late commander Lt. General Ghasem Soleimani for his role in the regional and international negotiations, saying that his concerns were not limited to the battlefield only.

Jahangiri stated that the "commander of hearts" was not just a commander in the field, but he believed that negotiations would solve many disputes.

Paying tribute to the late commander for his intelligence and compassion for others, the vice president said that the title of "commander of hearts" was bestowed upon him, not because of his field activities alone but because he had sacrificed his personal and

factional interests for Iran and had made great efforts to resolve the country's complicated political problems.

The Vice President added, "He (General Soleimani) was present in several negotiations and used to do a lot of negotiating. He was eventually martyred while on a trip to negotiate with Iraq's prime minister regarding talks with Saudi Arabia and the issue of Yemen."

'Rouhani: Soleimani was the best advisor in foreign policy'

Speaking at his cabinet meeting on Wednesday, President Rouhani also praised General Soleimani, calling him the administration's "best advisor" on regional foreign policy and claiming that the respected commander foiled Zionist and American plots in the region.

Parliament will verify sanctions removal, says MP

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN**— In an interview with Tasnim News Agency, Abbas Moghtadaei, deputy head of the National Security Committee of the parliament, said that the lifting of sanctions should be based on the fact that the parliament has taken strategic action to lift the sanctions in accordance with the law.

Responding to a question about the recent Iran-P4+1 negotiations in Vienna, the parliamentarian said that in these negotiations, the Iranian delegate focuses on the complete lifting of sanctions and then the issue of verifications related to sanctions.

He added that the verification of the lifting of sanctions should be based on the fact that the parliament has taken strategic measures to lift the sanctions under the law, saying, "The verification is to sell our oil and transfer its money to the country, to be able to communicate and do business and remove the barriers that the Americans have created in various

economic fields such as transportation and shipping and so on."

Stressing that the negotiations should not avert from the main path, the representative of Isfahan people in the parliament said, "The focus of the negotiations should be the complete lifting of sanctions, action vs. action and avoiding the step-by-step approaches."

Moghtadaei noted that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should provide a report should the sanctions be lifted.

After reviewing that report by the committee, it is reported to the parliament (by the ministry of foreign affairs). The parliament decides what should be done, which serves the interests of the Iranian people.

The Vienna negotiations entered the fourth week, while the Russian and the Chinese delegates unequivocally asked the U.S. to lift all the sanctions immediately.

The Joint Commission reconvenes on May 1 to resume talks at both deputies and experts level.

Parliament only approves removal of all sanctions

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN**— In a tweet sent out on Saturday, the spokesman for the Energy Committee of the parliament emphasized that in the issue of lifting sanctions, the Islamic Republic of Iran's official position is the removal of all sanctions so that Iran would be able to fully benefit the economic effects of lifting those sanctions.

Malek Shariati tweeted, "In lifting the sanctions, Iran's official position is the lifting of all sanctions and the full economic benefit of Iran, not the suspension of some of them, but the United States divides the sanctions into three categories: 1. Removable (cancel + suspend) 2. Indelible (terrorism and human rights) 3. Ambiguous and negotiable (like a non-nu-

clear central bank). The parliament only approves complete lifting of sanctions."

For the past few weeks, Iran has been in talks with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Actions (JCPOA) parties following the U.S. attempt to return to the JCPOA in Vienna. The parties seek to revive the nuclear deal and to return Iran to its obligations.

Iran has explicitly stated that it will return to its obligations only if the sanctions are fully lifted and verified.

The Joint Commission of the JCPOA reconvenes on May 1, in Vienna. Recent negotiations have been described as "constructive" and "on the right track" by various delegates, including Mikhail Ulyanov, head of the Russian delegate, and his Iranian counterpart, Seyed Abbas Araghchi.

SPORTS

Iranian clubs prove how strong they are

➔ Tractor are another Iranian team who made history in the Asian showpiece. They are the only unbeaten team in the 2021 ACL group stage. Tractor, headed by Rasoul Khatibi, will meet Al Nassr of Saudi Arabia in Round of 16. The Tabriz-based football team have a difficult task ahead since they have to travel to Saudi Arabia to play the last year's semifinals. However, they can make history once again by advancing to the next stage.

And Esteghlal are Iran's third club in Round of 16. The Blues qualified for the next stage in a difficult group which has been referred to as a "group of death" for containing Qatari club Al Duhail, Al Ahli of Saudi Arabia and Iraqi team Al Shorta.

Esteghlal also need to strengthen their defensive line since they conceded eight goals in six matches. Farhad Majidi's outfit are also contenders to end title drought in Iran league after eight years.

Three Iranian teams have qualified for the 2021 ACL Round of 16 out of eight teams.

It shows that how strong they are.

Iran to play Japan in 2021 VNL opener

SPORTS TEHRAN — Iran national volleyball team will start the 2021 FIVB Volleyball Nations League (VNL) with a match against Japan on May 28.

The final schedule for the 2021 VNL has been confirmed ahead of the third edition of the competition which begins on May 25 at Italy's Adriatic resort of Rimini with the participation of 16 women's and 16 men's teams.

The competition format is a single round robin pool with each of the 16 teams facing every other ahead of semifinals between the top four of the standings.

The semifinal winners will clash for the title, with the losers playing out for the bronze medal.

The 2021 VNL is the first international gathering of this magnitude since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic caused the cancellation of events in 2020.

The tournament will be held within a secure 'bubble' with all hygiene protocols in place to ensure the health and well-being of all athletes, officials and staff throughout the competition.

Iran's fixtures:

May 28: Iran – Japan
May 29: Iran – Russia
May 30: Iran – Netherlands
June 3: Iran – Canada
June 4: Iran – Italy
June 5: Iran – Bulgaria
June 9: Iran – the U.S.
June 10: Iran – Serbia
June 11: Iran – Germany
June 15: Iran – Australia
June 16: Iran – Brazil
June 17: Iran – Slovenia
June 21: Iran – France
June 22: Iran – Poland
June 23: Iran – Argentina

Bahmanyar secures third Olympics karate spot for Iran

SPORTS TEHRAN — Karate athlete Sara Bahmanyar secured Iran's third spot at the 2020 Olympic Games.

She booked her place at the 2021 Karate 1-Premier League Lisbon Friday night which also serves as Olympic qualifier.

Bahmanyar will meet Recchia Alexandra from France on Sunday in the bronze-medal match of the Female Kumite -50 Kg.

Hamideh Abbasali at the Female Kumite +68kg and Bahman Askari Ghoncheh at the Male Kumite -75kg have already secured their places in the Olympic Games.

The Karate 1-Premier League Lisbon got underway at Alice Arena Sports Hall in Lisbon, Portugal on April 30.

Some 740 karatekas from 87 countries compete in one of the most anticipated moments of the year.

Three Iranian teams learn fate at 2021 ACL (West) Round of 16

SPORTS TEHRAN — The 2021 AFC Champions League (West) Round of 16 cast was finalized following the conclusion of the Group Stage on Friday.

As Groups A and C brought the thrilling group stage to a close on Friday, the final Round of 16 cast saw several of the continent's biggest club sides missing out.

The Round of 16 (West) match-ups will see Tajikistan's FC Istiklol taking on Iran's Persepolis FC, Sharjah playing Al Wahda FSCC in an all-UAE affair, Iran's Esteghlal facing 2019 champions Al Hilal SFC of Saudi Arabia and Al Nassr of Saudi Arabia squaring off against Iran's Tractor FC.

Istiklol capped a dream debut AFC Champions League campaign by finishing top of Group A, edging 2019 winners Al Hilal who, however, advanced as one of the three best runners-up from the five West groups.

Sharjah of the United Arab Emirates, who ended their group stage campaign with 11 points, advanced as the Group B winners with second-placed Tractor FC of Iran also going through.

Group C saw Esteghlal taking the sole ticket, with the Iran side finishing top with 11 points as Qatar's Al Duhail SC and Saudi Arabia's Al Ahli Saudi FC both crashed out.

Group D was topped by 2020 AFC Champions League semi-finalists Al Nassr, with the Saudi Pro League side's two wins over Qatar's Al Sadd proving crucial in their final haul of 11 points. Xavi's Al Sadd failed to advance.

Iran's Persepolis FC, the runners-up in 2018 and 2020, won Group E with a haul of 15 points, with UAE's Al Wahda also advancing as one of the three best runners-up.

The Round of 16 and quarter-finals are scheduled to be played as single leg affairs in September.

The semi-finals and final will be played on a home and away basis, with the last four ties scheduled for October and the final in November, the-afc.com wrote.

Israel turns to blackmail as JCPOA talks make progress

POLITICAL TEHRAN — After failing to dissuade the U.S. from pursuing nuclear diplomacy with Iran, the Israeli regime is now working to secure its interests by asking the Biden administration to compensate it for the U.S. reviving the Iran nuclear deal.

Last week, a senior Israeli delegation comprised of Mossad chief Yosef Cohen, head of military intelligence Tamir Hayman, and National Security Adviser Meir Ben-Shabbat descended on Washington for talks on Iran. Cohen also met with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken according to press reports. Ben-Shabbat and his American counterpart Jake Sullivan held their first in-person meeting since Joe Biden entered the White House on Tuesday.

"The U.S. and Israeli officials discussed their serious concerns about advancements in Iran's nuclear program in recent years. The United States updated Israel on the talks in Vienna and emphasized strong U.S. interest in consulting closely with Israel on the nuclear issue going forward," a readout from the White House said.

The White House said the U.S. and Israel agreed to establish a new group to counter Iran's drones and missiles. "The United States and Israel agreed to establish an inter-agency working group to focus particular attention on the growing threat of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles and Precision Guided Missiles produced by Iran," The White House said in a statement.

Preventing the U.S. from returning to the Iran nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), was the main goal of the visiting



Israeli delegation. But they failed to achieve this goal, prompting Israel to move on to new demands.

The Israeli officials who visited Washington asked the Biden administration to "improve" the JCPOA rather than simply rejoin it, according to Asharq Al-Awsat.

Harboring strong national security fears, Israel is actively pushing for improving the deal to curb Iran's nuclear program, the newspaper said.

Citing officials familiar with the meeting between Israeli and American officials, the newspaper said Israel sought to convince the Biden administration to pursue an improved treaty with Iran that prevents Iran from allegedly obtaining nuclear arms rather than

simply restore compliance to the 2015 deal. Israel also seeks to pressure the Biden administration into compensating it for the U.S. decision to return to the JCPOA.

Haaretz reported that the Israeli delegation to Washington seems to have achieved little in practice regarding the Iran deal. However, the Israeli newspaper said that "Israel will try to secure upgraded aerial capabilities as a kind of insurance policy."

According to Haaretz, the growing impression in Israel's military circles is that the Biden administration is absolutely determined to announce the return of the United States to an amended agreement as soon as possible.

"Israel is already set to draw up a list of additional security requests from the Amer-

icans following the signing of the nuclear accord," it continued.

The Israeli list is expected to further stoke tensions in the region especially after a U.S. return to the JCPOA. Israeli officials have issued threats against Iran and even threatened it with war.

Israel's Intelligence Minister Eli Cohen told Reuters that Israel would not be bound by a bad deal between Iran and world powers and that war with Tehran would be sure to follow.

"A bad deal will send the region spiraling into war," Cohen said. "Anyone seeking short-term benefits should be mindful of the longer-term."

He accused Iran of pursuing nuclear weapons, warning that "Iran has no immunity anywhere. Our planes can reach everywhere in the Middle East - and certainly Iran."

Israel's rhetoric against Iran comes against a backdrop of progress in the Vienna nuclear talks, which have started in April. So far, the talks moved smoothly with all parties announcing that progress is being made to reach a middle ground on how to remove U.S. sanctions in exchange for Iran reversing the remedial measures it has taken in response to the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA in May 2018.

Israel has used everything in its power - from showing alleged "new" evidence of Iran cheating on its JCPOA commitments to pressuring U.S. and European parties to the deal not to rejoin it - to kill the JCPOA. But now that the deal is starting a new life, Israel seems to be counting more on blackmail than any other recourse to achieve its goal of undermining the JCPOA.

Iran, P4+1 group of countries hold talks in Vienna

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Nuclear negotiators from Iran and the remaining parties to the 2015 nuclear deal held another meeting to discuss the latest developments related to the issue of reviving the nuclear deal.

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi led the Iranian negotiating team at the talks, which have been moving forward since they started in April. The main objective of the Vienna talks is to reach an agreement on how to revive the nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

At the start of the meeting of the JCPOA Joint Commission, Araghchi said participants will discuss the outcome of the talks that were held at the level of expert groups.

"After this meeting, delegations will return to capitals," the top Iranian nuclear negotiator said.

Araghchi held a "relatively long" meeting with the Russian envoy to the talks, Mikhail Ulyanov.

"During this meeting, the two delegations re-coordinated their positions and stressed the need to maintain the closeness of the positions of the two countries," Araghchi said in a statement. "The Russian side also reiterated its support for the nuclear deal and the need for the United States to lift sanctions on Iran."

Ulyanov said the Saturday meeting of the JCPOA parties will "take stock of intermediate results of the Vienna talks on full restoration of the nuclear deal."



He also said that all other JCPOA participants, except for Iran, held an informal meeting with the U.S. negotiating delegation in Vienna to discuss the full restoration of the JCPOA.

"JCPOA participants held today informal consultations with the #US delegation at the Vienna talks on full restoration of the nuclear deal (without #Iran who is still not ready to meet with US diplomats)," the Russian diplomat said on Twitter hours before Iran and the P4+1 group of countries held another meeting of the JCPOA Joint Commission.

Last week, negotiators at Vienna talks announced the

establishment of another expert group in addition to the existing ones. So far, the Vienna talks have resulted in the establishment of three expert-level working groups, one to identify the sanctions that the U.S. should remove in order to return to the JCPOA, and another to specify the nuclear activities that Iran should reverse. The third group was set up recently and is called "Expert Group on Practical Arrangements," which is formed with the aim of holding talks on the practical arrangements required for the removal of sanctions and then the U.S. return to the JCPOA.

According to Araghchi, these groups held bilateral and multilateral meetings to announce positions and study draft texts over the past few days.

Following the Saturday meeting of the JCPOA Joint Commission, it was agreed that the talks will be resumed on Friday, according to a statement issued by the Iranian Foreign Ministry on Saturday.

According to the statement, participants discussed the latest developments related to the discussions of the three expert groups.

"It was decided that after this meeting, the delegations would return to the capitals and that the talks would resume next Friday," the statement continued. "The parties agree that in the next round of talks, work should continue more quickly and seriously."

Russia hopes for restoration of JCPOA in 'initial state'

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed hope that the 2015 Iran nuclear deal will be restored to its original format.

Speaking at a meeting with permanent members of the UN Security Council via videoconference on Friday, the Russian president discussed developments in the Caspian region, which he called "a very important region."

Within this framework, he discussed Iran's nuclear program as a Caspian Sea country. "Naturally, we understand that one of our neighbors in the Caspian 'five' is Iran. There is much going on around its nuclear program. I hope that everything related to the JCPOA will be restored to its initial state and we will be able to build relations with all participants of the Caspian club and implement all our plans, including those in the Caspian region," Putin said, referring to the Iran nuclear deal by its acronym.

The Russian president said developments in the Caspian Sea are crucially important for Russia. "I mean both in terms of economic activity and interaction with our closest partners and allies. And, of course, we are speaking also about providing security and the interests of Russia in the Caspian region in general," he pointed out, according to a Kremlin readout.

The meeting was attended by Federation Council Speaker Valentina Matviyenko, Deputy Chairman of the Security Council Dmitry Medvedev, Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office Anton Vaino, Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev, Interior Minister Vladimir Kolokoltsev, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, Federal Security Service Director Alexander Bortnikov, Foreign Intelligence Service Director Sergei Naryshkin and Special Presidential Representative for Environmental Protection, Ecology and Transport Sergei Ivanov.

Putin's comments came in the midst of nuclear negotiations between Iran and the

P4+1 group of countries of which Russia is a member. Diplomats from Iran and the P4+1 group of countries held on Thursday intensive talks aimed at reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Top Iranian nuclear negotiator Seyed Abbas Araghchi said the talks began in the early hours of the morning and lasted until late at night.

"Talks between Iran and the P4+1 group were intensively followed in Vienna yesterday, and meetings were held at various levels and formats from the early morning hours until late last night," Araghchi, who serves as Iran's deputy foreign minister, said in a statement on Friday noon.

"A quadripartite meeting was also held yesterday between Seyed Abbas Araghchi, head of the Iranian negotiating team, and heads of delegations from three European countries," the top Iranian negotiator added.

Araghchi also met with the Deputy Secretary General and Political Director of the European External Action Service, Enrique Mora, and Austrian Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg.

According to Araghchi, talks will continue on Friday on texts at various expert-level working groups.

So far, the Vienna talks have resulted in the establishment of three expert-level working groups, one to identify the sanctions that the U.S. should remove in order to return to the JCPOA, and another to specify the nuclear activities that Iran should reverse. The third group was set up recently and is called "Expert Group on Practical Arrangements," which is formed with the aim of holding talks on the practical arrangements required for the removal of sanctions and then the US return to the JCPOA. The Third group held its first meeting on Wednesday.

Russia is an active partner to the Vienna talks. Russia's Permanent Representative to

the International Organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov said on Saturday that the JCPOA Joint Commission will be meeting on the same day.

"Today the JCPOA participants will take stock of intermediate results of the Vienna talks on full restoration of the nuclear deal," he said on Twitter.

Before the JCPOA Joint Commission's Saturday meeting, Ulyanov and Araghchi held a relatively long meeting in Vienna on Saturday morning.

"During this meeting, the two delegations re-coordinated their positions and stressed the need to maintain the closeness of the positions of the two countries," Araghchi said in a statement. "The Russian side also reiterated its support for the nuclear deal and the need for the United States to lift sanctions on Iran."

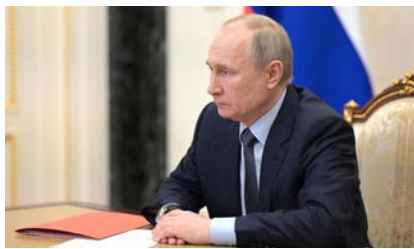
Araghchi and Ulyanov held several bilateral meetings over the course of the Vienna talks. These meetings were mostly held to coordinate positions and exchange views on the negotiation process, which is expected to reach its climax in the coming weeks.

Ulyanov told Sputnik News on Thursday that Washington does not consider sanctions imposed under labels such as terrorism, missile development and human rights violations as restrictions that could be removed, according to Press TV.

"No, the Americans do not consider exactly these sanctions as subject to lifting. They believe these sanctions have nothing to do with the JCPOA," he said.

The remarks came a day after the Associated Press reported that the Biden administration is considering the removal of some of the most stringent sanctions imposed on Iran so that Tehran would go back on its remedial measures it has taken under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in response to the West's breach of the deal.

Last week on Tuesday Araghchi told Press



First train of SP phase 14 refinery to be prepared for operation by early July

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The first train of the phase 14 Refinery of Iran’s South Pars complex is going to be completed and handed over to the commissioning contractor by early July, head of Pars Oil and Gas company (POGC) said.

Referring to the round-the-clock efforts by the refinery’s contractors in different work fronts, Mohammad Meshkinfam said: “As scheduled, the first train of South Pars Refinery Phase 14 will be handed over to the commissioning group in early July this year, and then the commissioning activities will continue to prepare the different units of this train for operation.”

He stated that weekly meetings are being held by the POGC’s headquarters for the mentioned phase to follow up on the project’s progress and address the problems of the contractors.

“Fortunately, with the follow-ups done, the ancillary units of Phase 14 of South Pars are now ready for commissioning, and in the process section, the reception facilities will be ready to receive gas by late May.”



Referring to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the commissioning of the mentioned refinery, Meshkinfam said: “According to the previous announcements, this train was scheduled to be handed over to the commissioning contractor by late June, however, due to the new wave of the pandemic in Europe and the closure of equipment manufacturing companies the handover was postponed to mid-July.”

He added that with the measures taken by the POGC’s HSE department, daily health control tests are being conducted to monitor the health of employees.

Meshkinfam had earlier announced that all the operations of the first phase of the South Pars gas field development project will be completed in the first half of the current Iranian calendar year 1400 (started on March 21).

POGC is in charge of developing South Pars gas field which is divided into 24 standard phases in the first development stage. Most of the phases are fully operational at the moment.

Phase 14 development is aimed at producing 56.6 million cubic meters per day of rich gas, 75,000 barrels/day of gas condensate and 400 tons/day of sulfur, and 1 million tons/year of liquefied petroleum gas and one million tons/year of ethane to be fed to petrochemical plants.

Back in October 2020, the operator of the South Pars Phase 14 development project said the project’s onshore refinery is scheduled to be fully operational by the first half of the current Iranian calendar year (September 2021).

The huge South Pars field, which Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf, covers an area of 9,700 square kilometers, 3,700 square kilometers of which are in Iran’s territorial waters. The remaining 6,000 square kilometers, called North Dome, are situated in Qatar’s territorial waters.

The field is estimated to contain a significant amount of natural gas, accounting for about eight percent of the world’s reserves, and approximately 18 billion barrels of condensate.

TEDPIX falls 13,500 points on Saturday

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), dropped 13,547 points to 1.194 million on Saturday (the first day of Iranian calendar week).



Over 4.979 billion securities worth 37.586 trillion rials (nearly \$896 million) were traded at the TSE on Saturday.

The first market’s index fell 10,407 points, and the second market’s index dropped 25,694 points.

On Tuesday, senior Iranian officials gathered at the country’s parliament to explore ways for supporting the stock market and resolving its current issues.

Chaired by the parliament speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, the meeting was also attended by the Governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Abdolnaser Hemmati, Finance, and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dejjasand, and the Head of Iran’s Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) Mohammad-Ali Dehqan Dehnavi.

Speaking in the meeting, Qalibaf stressed the need for ensuring the shares of small shareholders, the structural reforms of the SEO, and the amendment of the securities law.

Iran continues to raise oil output in April: survey

→ 1 Iran, plus fellow OPEC members Libya and Venezuela, are exempt from making cuts, so changes in their output do not affect the compliance rate, the report said.

The Islamic Republic has also managed to raise crude oil exports since the fourth quarter of 2020 despite U.S. sanctions, according to various assessments of the shipments.

“The elevated levels that we are seeing from Iran are generally continuing,” Daniel Gerber, chief executive of Petro-Logistics, a consultant that tracks oil shipments, told

Reuters this month.

The latest OPEC report had put Iranian crude output for March at 2.304 million bpd indicating a 137,000-bpd increase compared to the figure for the previous month.

In line with Iran, other OPEC members are also getting ready for increasing their output as of May, hoping for a boost in the demand side.

The 13-member organization pumped 25.17 million bpd in April, Reuter’s survey found, up 100,000 bpd from March. Output has risen every month since June 2020 with



the exception of February.

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

The Reuters survey aims to track supply to the market and is based on shipping data provided by external sources, Refinitiv Eikon flows data, information from tanker trackers such as Petro-Logistics and Kpler, and information provided by sources at oil companies, OPEC, and consultants.

‘Execution of regulations to ensure improvement of business environment’

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iranian Industry, Mining, and Trade Ministry’s Business Environment Improvement Committee held a meeting on Saturday to discuss the ways for realizing the current Iranian calendar year’s (started on March 21) motto and to ensure improvement of the country’s business environment.

The meeting was attended by Industry Ministry officials including Mehdi Niazi, the secretary of the headquarters for facilitating domestic production, and Hamidreza Fouladgar, head of the ministry’s Business Environment Improvement Committee.

As reported by the portal of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mining, and Agriculture (ICCIMA), the necessities for the realization of the motto of the current year that has been named “Production: Support and Elimination of Obstacles” were the main issues discussed in the meeting.

Addressing the meeting, Fouladgar underlined removing barriers in the way of production and monitoring the implementation of laws and regulations as the main



requirements for the realization of the current year’s motto, saying that in a recent meeting with the parliament speaker Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf he has emphasized the need for monitoring the execution of existing regulations such as the

law of improving the business environment, and the law on removing barriers to production, as the most important factors in supporting domestic production.

Further in the meeting, Niazi presented a report on the major measures taken by the headquarters for facilitating domestic production in the previous Iranian calendar year, and mentioned some of the programs for the current year.

“Since the beginning of this year, we have prepared a list of proposed measures in 70 areas, in collaboration with the members of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, the Iran Mine House (IMH), and other related associations and organizations in order to fulfill the slogan of the year,” he said.

According to Niazi, issues related to financing, taxation, social security, supplying raw materials, customs, production infrastructure including issues related to industrial parks as well as energy and business environment challenges are among the main issues that are going to be followed up by the Industry Ministry’s production headquarters in the current year.

12 ports, maritime projects to go operational by late June

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iranian Transport and Urban Development Ministry is planning to inaugurate 12 port development and maritime projects in six provinces across the country by the Iranian calendar month of Tir (begins on June 22).

As reported by the portal of the ministry, the mentioned projects are going to be inaugurated in Mazandaran, Hormozgan, Sistan-Baluchestan, Khuzestan, and Gilan provinces.

The said projects include installing loading cranes, CCTV, and electronic protection systems, construction of logistics services for export and transit, installing fire detection, alarm and extinguishing systems, and multi-purpose warehouses for storing goods as well as tanks for oil products.

Iranian Transport Ministry has been taking serious measures for supporting development



projects in the country’s ports and in this regard the ministry has been cooperating with domestic companies for supplying the equipment and machinery needed in such projects.

Earlier this year, Transport Minister Mohammad Eslami had announced that the capacity of the country’s commercial ports is going to be increased to 500 million tons

over the next five years, to make Iran one of the biggest trade hubs in the region.

Also in April, Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) Head Mohammad Rastad said that his organization plans to take all the necessary measures for supporting the companies active in various maritime sectors during the current Iranian calendar year (began on March 21).

“In line with the current year’s motto which is “Production: support and the elimination of obstacles”, PMO has put it on the agenda to provide necessary supports for producers in order to facilitate the process of import and export of goods in the country’s ports,” Rastad said.

Back in March, Rastad had said that despite the sanctions imposed on Iran’s shipping activities, loading and unloading of goods have been noticeably increasing at the Iranian ports.

Making the remarks addressing the journalists and reporters on the sidelines of the annual gathering of the PMO directors, the official said, “Many fruitful measures were taken in most of the ports, while some good development projects were also implemented this year”.

While the enemy is trying to halt Iran’s exports and imports through imposing sanctions, operations at Iranian ports are underway without interruption as the result of the PMO’s all-out efforts.

Not only the sanctions haven’t been able to stop development activities at the ports of Iran, but some new development projects have also been defined, Rastad said.

As the major gates of exports and imports, Iranian ports play a significant role in the country’s battle against the U.S. sanctions, and the ongoing operation at the ports indicates that they are playing their part perfectly.

Monthly exports from Markazi province tripled yr/yr

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The value of exports from Markazi province, in the central Iran, was tripled in the first month of the current Iranian calendar year (Mach 21-April 20), as compared to the first month of the past year, according to a provincial official.

Esmail Hosseini, the director-general of the province’s customs department, said 96,000 tons of commodities valued at over \$70 million were exported from the province to 50 countries in the first month of the present year.

He said the neighboring countries including Turkey, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, in addition to Bulgaria were the major export destinations of the province’s products during the mentioned month.

The official further announced that about 8,000 tons of commodities worth \$39 million have been imported to the province in the first month, and mentioned the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Turkey, China and Ecuador as the main import sources.

Iran exported 8.302 million tons of non-oil commodities worth \$2.968 billion in the first month of the current Iranian calendar year, registering an 80 percent rise in terms of value compared to the same period in the previous year.



According to the Head of Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) Mehdi Mir-Ashrafi, the country’s non-oil exports in the said period also increased by 56 percent in terms of weight.

Iran traded 10.343 million tons of non-oil goods worth \$5.762 billion with its trade partners in the mentioned month, Mir-Ashrafi stated.

The country’s trade balance was \$174 million positive in the said month, according to the official.

China, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Turkey, and Afghanistan were the Islamic Republic’s top export destinations in the period under review.

Mir-Ashrafi noted that gasoline was the top exported item in the mentioned month.

According to the official, Iran also imported 2.041 million tons of goods worth \$2.794 billion in the said month, which indicated an 18 percent decrease in terms of weight and a 47 percent increase in terms of value.

Mobile phones, sunflower oil, wheat, rice, and meal were the top imported items of the country during the mentioned period.

The UAE, China, Turkey, India, and Russia were Iran’s top five import sources in the mentioned month.

The value of Iran’s non-oil trade stood at \$73 billion in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20).

According to Mir-Ashrafi, Iran’s non-oil export was 112 million tons valued at \$34.5 billion, while that of import was 34.4 million tons worth \$38.5 billion in the past year, the official added.

70 industrial units to be established in Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari province

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — As announced by a provincial official, 70 industrial units are planned to be established in Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari province, in the southwest of Iran, in the current Iranian calendar year (ends in March 2022).

Mohammad-Kazem Monzavi, the deputy head of the province’s Industry, Mining, and Trade Department for the industrial affairs, said that 70 industrial units with a physical progress of over 80 percent are being completed in the province, which are expected to be operational by the end of the year.

This is while the number of industrial units with above 80 percent of physical progress in the province is more than this figure, but the opening of 70 units is targeted for this year, the official added.

He also announced that 20 idle units were revived in the province in the past year, while

the planned figure was eight.

Monzavi said that 10 idle units are planned to come back to the production cycle in this year.

As announced by Deputy Industry, Mining, and Trade Minister Mehdi Sadeqi Niaraki, 1,500 idle industrial units have been revived in the country during the past year.

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.

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.”

Niaraki pointed to a 40-percent increase in the issuance of establishment licenses for industrial units in the previous year, saying: “The number of establishment licenses increased to more than 36,000 last year, which shows that people are encouraged to invest in the productive sectors.”

He also mentioned an 85-percent rise in the allocation of land for establishing industrial units across the country and noted that over 4,500 hectares of land were handed over to applicants in the previous calendar year.

According to the official, there are over 46,000 small and medium-sized industrial units in Iran’s industrial parks and zones, of them about 9,200 units are inactive.

Iran’s industrial parks play a significant



role in making the country independent through boosting production, which is a major strategy of Iran to combat the U.S. sanctions.

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.

Iran-China agreement undermines U.S. leverages against Iran: Lebanese expert

Mohammad Ali Saki

TEHRAN — Ali Yahia, a Lebanese consultant in international relations, says that the Iran-China partnership pact would undermine U.S. efforts to put more pressure on Iran through sanctions.

"The Iran-China framework agreement undermines U.S. efforts and provides additional leverage to Tehran concerning sanction, which incidentally became less effective with a pivot eastward," Ali Yahia tells the Tehran Times.

"Threatened by the cooperation between great powers Russia, China, and Iran, Washington is continually concerned about the potential military, economic, and political power wielded by such an alliance," he emphasizes.

After Biden's decision to pull U.S. troops out of Afghanistan, many observers predict that regional powers like Iran, besides superpowers like China, are ready to fill the gap in the region.

What is your comment on U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan?

After 20 years, the United States and NATO made the joint decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan, a country that has become known as "the cemetery of empires."

America's military withdrawal, scheduled to begin in May with a military exit by the 20th anniversary of September 11, is a continuation of the path initiated by the Trump administration and fulfillment of Biden's campaign promise to end the longest war ever fought by the United States.

According to the "Interim Strategic Guide for National Security" report published recently by the White House, leaving Afghanistan will end the "eternal war that cost thousands of lives and wasted trillions of dollars"; this war which resulted in the depletion of U.S. forces without any comprehensive and successful strategy to develop a sustainable, comprehensive political solution.

However, the U.S. military will not simply leave the region. Instead, it plans to withdraw troops and relocate them to East Asia to con-



tinue to monitor Afghanistan and focus on its biggest strategic challenge, China.

The United States will also maintain its commitment to stand by its existing commitments in political, security, and economic spheres.

Although some liken the possibility of the Taliban's control of Kabul to a military dilemma, this is unlikely due to the presence of 350,000 soldiers, most of whom belong to the former Northern Alliance; Further, there certainly exist 'lessons learned from Afghanistan's civil war (89-92) that are applicable in country's current political, military and economic situation; even most of the Taliban leadership are becoming more receptive to political participation.

"Threatened by the cooperation between great powers Russia, China, and Iran, Washington is continually concerned about the potential military, economic, and political power wielded by such an alliance," the Lebanese expert says.

Following is the text of the interview:
How can U.S. rivals use the opportunity of U.S. exit from Afghanistan?

There is no doubt that the American mili-

tary withdrawal from Afghanistan will leave a strategic vacuum that will be filled by the forces that have worked for years to undermine America's influence in this country. The Taliban, which built its support base even outside of Pashtun nationalism and became more pragmatic due to the experiences of previous decades, will clearly seek to fill this leadership void. China will, of course, try to enter the Afghan arena through Pakistan - its ally on the Silk Road, and Russia, which will try to exploit America's exit. Iran, which shares 921 km of its borders with Afghanistan, is yet another player vying for influence in the country. Given its existing political, cultural, and economic impact combined with the fact that Farsi is the common language spoken between Afghan ethnic groups, it is undoubtedly advantageous to Iran. As a result, Tehran will likely increase its exports and development projects inside Afghanistan. In addition to Pakistan, these three countries will have the opportunity to build a regional security network for the neighboring Afghan countries.

How do you assess the relations between the U.S. and Arab states of the

Persian Gulf in Biden's presidency?

The U.S. will honor its commitment to the strategic alliance with the (Persian) Gulf states while pivoting away from the Trump administration's policies under the direction of the Biden administration. It has signaled as much in its refocusing of policy to address human rights concerns.

The February 2021 release and publication of the U.S. DNI report, "Assessing the Saudi Government's Role in the Killing of Jamal Khashoggi," signals such a shift. Also, in February, the administration announced an end to aid Saudi-led forces in Yemen. Given Washington's tendency to work to cool global hot spots of some (Persian) Gulf countries in the context of a policy of strategic cooling of disputes and tensions with Iran and the war in Yemen, which appeared through the Saudi-Iranian dialogue via Baghdad, and through the Saudi crown prince's recent interview, in which he called for dialogue with Iran and the Houthis in Yemen

How do you assess the Iran-China 25-year partnership pact? Why is the U.S. worried about this pact?

Since World War II, America's primary goal has been to prevent the formation of a Eurasian space. Threatened by the cooperation between great powers Russia, China, and Iran, Washington is continually concerned about the potential military, economic, and political power wielded by such an alliance. Hence the Obama administration's previous efforts to neutralize Iran through the 2011 nuclear deal - "effectively creating, with Afghanistan, a geographical barrier to China.

The January appointment of Robert Malley as Special Envoy for Iran and preparations for the return to the nuclear agreement is only a prelude to the Biden administration's efforts to neutralize Iran in the context of the U.S. repositioning against Russia and China. The Iran-China framework agreement undermines U.S. efforts and provides additional leverage to Tehran concerning sanctions, which incidentally became less effective with a pivot eastward. Consequently, the ceiling of Iranian demands will be higher.

S. Arabia supports U.S. policies in West Asia: ex-Japanese diplomat

→ 1 President Biden started the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan, which neither President Obama nor President Trump could implement. This is an important decision, but it is still unclear whether the withdrawal is a victory or defeat for the United States.

The current Afghan regime cannot stand on its own feet without the help of the United States, even though the latter signed a peace agreement with the Taliban. In addition, the United States killed Osama bin Laden 10 years ago, but the destruction of al-Qa'ida has not been completed.

Do you think the best way to contain terrorism expansion is militarism?

Containing terrorism expansion is difficult, especially in failed states like Afghanistan, in which the Central Government doesn't work.

Military measures are sometimes effective but not all-mighty to deal with terrorism. In Afghanistan, restoration of economy and reconciliation of religious sects and ethnic differences are essential for establishing domestic security. Still, it needs, first and foremost, a strong central government

In Afghanistan, restoration of economy and reconciliation of religious sects and ethnic differences are essential for establishing domestic security.

and help from international society, and the latter cannot be achieved without security.

Why is there no political collaboration and harmony in the war against terror? It seems that states are exploiting terrorism to justify their policies.

There are so many stakeholders with different and complicated interests, beliefs, and opinions fighting against terror. Take a look at Syria. Syria is a bad example. Some countries are against the Assad regime. Others are supporting it. Among anti-Assad groups, some are helping Islamists and others Salafists or secularists. Ordinary Syrians can't get help and assistance from anybody and are being tossed about by the egoistic politics of neighboring countries.

Given Bin-Salman's recent remarks about Iran, do you expect any rapprochement between Tehran and Riyadh? What will be the impact of such a rapprochement on combat on terrorism in West Asia?

Crown Prince Muhammad (MBS) of Saudi Arabia said in a recent interview by Saudi-funded al-Arabiya that Iran is a neighboring country and Saudi Arabia wants Iran to prosper and grow. In comparison with remarks made by MBS a few years ago, he definitely softened Iran's rhetoric, I think. Saudi Arabia has already reconciled with Qatar and lifted the blockade against it. We really hope the next will be Iran, though we understand there are many obstacles to achieving reconciliation between the two countries. If reconciliation between them will come out in the near future, the situation in the Middle East (West Asia) will improve drastically.

Why did the U.S. administration prefer to turn a blind eye to Saudis' contribution on September 11



and terror acts in Iraq, and war crimes in Yemen?

Among 19 hijackers of 9/11, 15 are Saudis, but Saudi governmental involvement in 9/11 or Iraq or Syria is not proved officially.

As for war crimes in Yemen, the UN has said all parties in the conflict, including the legitimate Government of Yemen, the Houthis, Saudi Arabia, and UAE, are responsible.

U.S. administration knows Saudi Arabia is important for the American and Western economy. Saudi Arabia plays an important role in supporting the U.S. policy towards the Middle East (West Asia). That's why the U.S. administrations cannot ignore Saudi Arabia, though the Congress and media might have been anti-Saudi tendencies. Unlike President Trump, who was said to turn a blind eye to the Saudi regime, President Biden seems to keep balance carefully. And Saudi Arabia is also shifting its foreign and domestic policy to the ones more acceptable for the Biden administration.

Boris Johnson's premiership total failure, ordinary people pay the price

By Richard Sudan

It seems at times as though everything Boris Johnson touches results in complete shambolic failure. For many living in Britain, this reality is not new. Nor is it new to the millions who, interestingly in spite of his track record, voted for him as London mayor, and ultimately as prime minister, fulfilling Johnson's long-held dream of running the country.

But Boris Johnson's leadership as prime minister of the United Kingdom has been nothing short of a complete unmitigated disaster.

And his ascension to the highest office in the land arguably serves as one of the ultimate examples of career opportunism, and also duplicity.

The latest claims and allegations levelled at Johnson align perfectly with his track record so far. And despite those claims, including the suggestion that Johnson said he'd rather see "bodies piled high in their thousands" than order a 3rd national lockdown, Johnson, for the time being at least, continues to weather the current political storm. Politics in Britain is in crisis, and Boris Johnson is standing firmly in the middle of the storm.

It's no secret to those with an understanding of his career that Boris Johnson always harbored ambitions to be prime minister and seemed to be of a mindset from a young age that it was his right, almost destiny, to enter 10 Downing Street.

Boris Johnson's own sister has spoken of how

Johnson as a child had professed ambitions to become 'world king.'

Perhaps this partly explains why Johnson, despite the carefully crafted image offered to the public, is so dangerous. And dangerous he is.

His belief and conviction of his own right to rule, at whatever cost to Britain, means he might do just about anything to remain in power, in the face of all the evidence underscoring the fact that he is simply not fit to serve as prime minister.

The current shambles of government reflects this reality, while his own track record proves it. At the time of writing, and not for the first time, Boris Johnson is trending on social media, with many calling on him and demanding he leave office. The current state of affairs in Westminster and around the country was predictable, certainly, when considering the past.

Boris Johnson failed as a journalist. Sacked, to be precise, in 1988, for fabricating claims made in an article. He was sacked as a shadow minister in 2004 over claims about a lurid affair in his private life.

But as London mayor and after a few stints as a pundit on TV, Johnson was able to revitalize his image and use his platform as mayor to endear himself to many in the public.

His subsequent rise to become prime minister and his time in office since have been no different.

Johnson staked his prime ministerial campaign run on being an outspoken proponent of the leave campaign in the run up to Brexit,

regardless of the revelations indicating he had no real serious ideological commitment to either position.

As prime minister, Johnson then made the entire general election, in which he was eventually victorious, about Brexit, pledging to 'Get Brexit Done,' successfully persuading many communities who may yet prove the hardest hit by Brexit to vote for him.

While in office, Johnson famously prorogued parliament in order to push through his widely criticized no-deal Brexit plans, a move which was later ruled as unlawful by the Supreme Court.

And again in office, Johnson was hit with claims of yet another extramarital affair, in his own personal life.

Recently, Johnson's office has also been accused of backing a report that argued that the United Kingdom is not institutionally racist, which itself has been torn apart by experts and analysts.

And Johnson himself, of course, has a long record of having made racist and bigoted comments.

Sadly, the problems characterizing the leadership of Boris Johnson seem endless, and all of course arise amid a backdrop of other very real problems, while Britain attempts to emerge from the grips of a pandemic that threatened and still threatens to cripple the NHS.

In recent days, media reports questioning the means by which Boris Johnson paid for the refurbishment of Downing Street may not surprise

those with a keen eye on the developing political situation in the United Kingdom.

But what should not be overstated is the seriousness of the overarching claim that has shocked millions.

Reports of Johnson allegedly stating that he would rather see "Bodies piled in their thousands" than order a 3rd national lockdown, if true, reaffirm a different kind of shallowness and selfishness.

Thousands have already died due to the pandemic. Many would argue that countless deaths could have been prevented, had Johnson taken serious action, and much sooner, over the pandemic. Johnson himself contracted COVID-19, and by his own admission was saved by the same NHS, which many now believe is under severe strain due to his decisions, and the actions of his party.

While in most circumstances, the controversies surrounding Johnson might have led another leader in another nation to fall on their own political sword, Johnson survives. But at what cost? Johnson continues to survive a political storm of his own making. It is not the first time he clings to power, and it symbolizes a democracy and country in deep crisis, while millions around the country continue to live in a reality and within circumstances that will simply never be felt by either Johnson himself or his cabinet of privileged millionaires.

(Source: Press TV)

Huge fire breaks out at Israel's oil refinery in Haifa

→ 1 The highly-publicized Iron Dome, co-developed by the American company Raytheon and Israeli firm Rafael, is claimed to be capable of detecting, assessing and intercepting a variety of shorter-range targets such as rockets, artillery and mortars.

The anti-missile project was originally developed to counter small rockets that Hamas and other Palestinian resistance groups fired into the occupied territories in retaliation for Israel's crimes against the Palestinians.

The missile system has proven largely ineffective in serving that purpose.

Saudi Ambassador's residence in London 'targeted by arsonists'

The Saudi Ambassador's residence in London has been targeted by suspected arsonists.

Armed police led two men away in handcuffs after an object was thrown over the gate of the residence at Kensington Palace Gardens.

The Metropolitan Police said that one man was arrested at the scene on suspicion of arson, while the other man was arrested for allegedly assaulting a security guard. The security guard sustained minor injuries and was given first aid at the scene.

The two men remain in police custody at a central London police station.

Firefighters from the London Fire Brigade attended the scene after the object set a number of bushes alight.

The London Fire Brigade told The Evening Standard: "We were called to bushes alight at 1.41pm. It was under control by 1.50pm.

"One fire engine attended and there were no reported injuries."

The residence is just meters away from the official home of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge - Kensington Palace.

27 people killed, dozens wounded in bomb attack in eastern Afghanistan

At least 27 people have been killed and dozens more wounded after a powerful vehicle-borne bomb went off in Afghanistan's eastern province of Logar, local officials say.

The deadly explosion occurred after a truck packed with explosives detonated in Azr district of the provincial capital of Pul-e Alam on Friday evening, the spokesman for Logar's governor said, adding that high school students were among the casualties.

He also noted that the huge blast took place near the house of the former head of the provincial council, Didar Lawang.

The head of Logar's provincial council, Hasibullah Stanekzai, said that the said house operated as a guesthouse and the explosion, which occurred at around 6:30 p.m. local time, had struck as guests were breaking their fast during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, adding that 27 people had lost their lives and dozens more wounded.

Explosion reportedly heard in Saudi Jeddah

News resources were reporting that an explosion was heard in the Saudi city of Jeddah.

Some media have just reported an explosion was heard in the city of Jeddah in the southwest of Saudi Arabia.

Social media activists have already reported they had heard explosions in the Saudi city on Saturday afternoon.

Some sources are also reporting that the Jeddah airport has stopped working and some flights have not been allowed to land in the airport.

These new reports come hours after the Saudi Ministry of Defense announced on Saturday morning that the Yemeni army and Popular Committees had attacked the port of Jeddah in the southwest of the country.

The Saudi Ministry of Defense confirmed the attack, claiming that they had foiled the attack.

Yemen launches airstrike on strategic port of Jeddah

Meanwhile, Yemeni forces have reportedly carried out a fresh airstrike against Saudi Arabia in retaliation for the Riyadh regime's devastating military campaign and crippling blockade against their crisis-stricken country.

The air raid reportedly targeted the kingdom's strategic Red Sea port city of Jeddah, located 845 kilometers (525 miles) south of the capital Riyadh, early on Saturday.

Saudi Arabia's Defense Ministry alleged in a post published on its Twitter page that the country's air defense units had intercepted and destroyed an unspecified "hostile air target" in the skies over Jeddah, without providing any further information.

On Wednesday, spokesman for the Yemeni Armed Forces Brigadier General Yahya Saree tweeted that the forces had struck designated targets inside King Khalid Air Base near the Saudi city of Khams Mushait, using a domestically-manufactured Qasef-2K (Striker-2K) combat drone.

The attack, he said, was a "legitimate response" to the kingdom's bloody war as well as all-out blockade on Yemen.

Resistance News

Hamas calls for confronting Israel's plots against Jerusalem

INTERNATIONAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Hamas Movement has expressed its confidence in the ability of the Palestinian people in Occupied Jerusalem to frustrate Israel's schemes that target them and their city.

In a statement on Friday, Hamas affirmed that the Palestinian people from all spectra have a national duty to confront Israel's Judaization plan in the east Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah.

"Today, we are facing the same mentality of the Zionist gangs that chased and killed our people and expelled them from their land. They are now bringing back memories of the Nakba (catastrophe) that were experienced by the families of al-Jaouni, al-Iskafi, al-Sabbagh and other families who came to live in Jerusalem after they were displaced from Jaffa City during the Nakba," Hamas underscored.

"The scene of injustice and cruelty that has befallen Sheikh Jarrah's families and their exposure to displacement from their land and homes twice entail activating all forms of resistance to respond to the crimes of the occupation and settler gangs," it added.

Millennia-old iron production sites discovered in Iran

➔ **1** The Achaemenid Empire (ca. 550–330 BC) was the largest and most durable empire of its time, stretching from Ethiopia, through Egypt, to Greece, to Anatolia (modern Turkey), Central Asia, and to India



With its winding lanes, a 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.

Tabriz museum featuring Sacred Defense scenes renovated

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — Newly-designed museum displays have been installed at Tabriz’s Sacred Defense Museum, which is dedicated to the 1980-1988 Iraqi-imposed war. A total of 33 costume-designed museum displays have recently been installed at the museum that is equipped with state-of-the-art audio and video systems as well.

Several such museums have so far been inaugurated across the county to present something different in modern Iranian history where one can delve into wreckages of rockets, tanks, rifles, vessels, mortars, radars, air defense systems, grounded jets, military supplies, and artillery pieces amongst others.



Whatever you call it, war tourism, dark tourism, disaster tourism, or danger tourism is what Iran has more to offer. It is high on the ‘will go’ index of adventure travelers interested in such niche tourism which traditionally reaches its climax these days!

The Iraqi army invaded Iran on September 22, 1980, setting the stage for eight years of war. With support from certain Arab and Western countries, Saddam Hussein ordered an attack on Iran nearly 19 months after the Islamic Revolution.

The war drew to a close in August 1988. The United Nations declared Iraq as the initiator of the conflict. In Iran, Sacred Defense Week is commemorated every year from September 21st.

Ramparts, towers of ancient walled city being restored to former glory

TOURISM **TEHRAN** — A restoration project has been commenced on a series of mudbrick ramparts and towers, which were once parts of a defensive wall around the city of Shahrud in Iran’s Semnan province, the city’s tourism chief has said.

A budget of 1.2 billion rials (almost \$29,000 at the official exchange rate of 42,000 rials per dollar) has been allocated to the project, Hamidreza Hassani said on Saturday.

The project involves cleaning and collecting debris, repairing cracks, and strengthening the structure, the official added. The historical structure, which dates back to the Qajar-era (1789-1925), was inscribed on the National Heritage list in 2001.

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 escalades, 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.

The main population centers of Semnan province lie along the ancient Silk Road (and modern-day Imam Reza Expressway), linking Rey (Tehran) with Khorasan (Mashhad). While few visitors spend much time in the area, driving through you can easily seek out several well-preserved caravanserais (notably Dehnamak and Ahowan), cisterns (the Cafe Abenbar in Garmsar is a special treat), and ruined mud citadels (Padeh is lumpy but fascinating). The large, bustling cities of Semnan, Damghan, and Shahrud (Bastam) all have a small selection of historic buildings and Semnan has a fine old covered bazaar.



Officials urge completion of gigantic theme park in western Iran

TOURISM **TEHRAN** — A number of provincial officials have urged to pave the way to complete a gigantic theme park, which is being developed near the city of Malayer in western Iran.

Hamedan province’s governor-general, mayor of Malayer, and the governor of the city were amongst officials who visited the Mini World on Thursday.

“Completion of the Mini World complex is one of our important goals in turning Malayer into a tourist destination,” IRNA quoted the governor as saying on Friday.

“All of our efforts are to remove the obstacles to the progress of this huge tourism complex and to accelerate the construction process of this project,” the official added.

As a window to the world, the theme park is estimated to lure more travelers to Malayer, which has earned a national reputation for its rugs and popular parks.

The project is said to be the first of its kind in West Asia and fourth in the world next to similar projects in Japan, Belgium, and China.

Replicas of Easter Island’s moai statues, the Eiffel Tower, Si-o-Se Pol (Bridge of Thirty-Three Arches), the Hafez mausoleum, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, and some Achaemenian-era sites are amongst tens of



monuments one can see within the theme park so far.

A hub of woodcarving
Malayer may be top on the list for those who are interested to visit a woodcarving hub. The west-central Iranian town is named a

global hub for woodcarving and carved-wood furniture by the World Crafts Council - Asia Pacific Region (WCC-APR).

Located in Hamedan province, the ancient city is home to over 4,000 furniture workshops in which more than 8,000 wood masters and

some 25,000 crafters are engaged.

Although the art had been practiced in Malayer for a long time ago, it is about a half-century that it has gained prosperity in the region. In some cases, the whole family is occupied with traditional furniture making and although they didn’t make much money this way, their love for handicrafts and the increasing perseverance of woodcarving artists of Malayer shows today a new face of this art-craft to the world.

Artists and crafter of this region use the wood of beech, walnut, and plane trees to make different products such as traditional, classic, steel, and sofa furniture. Their other products are dining table, desk, all kinds of chair, bed, and decorative pieces.

Currently, some 60 percent of the furniture and woodcarving products in Iran are reportedly produced in Malayer and they are sent to various Iranian cities or being exported to Central Asian countries, Persian Gulf littoral states, Turkey, and Iraq amongst some others. Known in classical times as Ecbatana, Hamedan was one of the ancient world’s greatest cities. Pitifully little remains from antiquity, but significant parts of the city center are given over to excavations, and there’s a scattering of historical curiosities.

Restoration work completed over Seymareh ancient city

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — A restoration project has been completed over the ancient city of Seymareh, which is located in western Ilam province.

Architectural sites and agricultural lands inside the ancient city, which were damaged by seasonal rains, were repaired and restored, the provincial tourism chief, Abdolmalek Shanbehzadeh, announced on Saturday.

A budget of two billion rials (about \$48,000 at the official exchange rate of 42,000 rials per dollar) was allocated to the project, the official added.

Seymareh ancient city, with an area of 200 hectares, is located near Darreh Shahr city. It dates back to the Sassanid-era (224 CE–651) and is believed to be built on remnants of the Elamite capital, Madaktu.

The first archeologist to visit Seymareh was Sir Henry Rawlinson. He began an expedition to the site in 1836. He was looking for the remaining of Seymareh and considered it to have belonged to the Sassanid dynasty. Jaques de Morgan also visited this historical land in 1891 and introduced it as the same ancient city of Madakto. Then it was Aurel Stein

who attempted to explore it in 1936, according to Visit Iran, the official travel guide of Iran.

The archeological findings show that the city included about 5,000 houses with some modern aspects like a water distribution system through clay pipes and underground sewers. The city was destroyed and deserted after a huge earthquake around 950 BC.

The remnants of the city were inscribed on the National Heritage list in 1931.

Darreh Shahr was once the summer capital of Elamites, a pre-Iranian civilization dated from 2700 to 539 BC. The city also enjoyed centuries of prosperity during the Sassanid era.

Darreh Shahr and its surrounding regions boast vestiges of Sassanid constructions such as arches, ceilings, alleys, and passages that follow a specific order of urban development criteria of the time.

Home to almost half of Iran’s UNESCO sites, western Iran is a land of hospitable people, wild extremes, and wilder history, and it may be an independent traveler’s adventure playground. The region also witnessed the rise and fall of



many great empires once bordering Mesopotamia, Ottoman Turkey, and Czarist Russia.

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

55 ancient objects restored in Rasht

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — A total of 55 historical relics have been restored by teams of cultural heritage experts and restorers in the city of Rasht, northern Gilan province, the deputy provincial tourism chief has said.

Tens of the relics have been discovered in the recent excavation season carried out in the Liar-Sang-Bon, an archaeological site and cemetery in the Amlash region, while others are the objects housed at the Rasht Museum, CHTN quoted Vali Jahani as saying on Saturday.

The project involves documenting, cleaning, repairing, and restoring the objects to their closest original states, the official added. Back in January, DNA samples have been

extracted from some ancient skeletons unearthed in Liar-Sang-Bon revealed that they date back to the Parthian (247 BC – 224 CE) and Sassanid (224 CE-651) periods.

Liar-Sang-Bon was initially identified in the Iranian calendar year 1391 (March 2012-March 2013) while its related mapping and demarcating projects were completed in 1393 and its first season of excavation commenced in 1395.

The site has undergone several archaeological surveys since then and the result has been the discovery of about 100 ancient tombs, a considerable number of historical objects, and very important information about the style and custom of burial of the people of that period.

However, the site was partly looted by antique seekers during a two-year gap in archaeological seasons.

Amlash, now a county in Gilan province, was a small village in southeastern Gilan in 1959. The name originates from the nearby Alborz valleys where archaeological artifacts were discovered during excavations. The artifacts range in date from the late second millennium BC through the Partho-Sasanian period, but most of the objects are dated to the 9th-8th century BC.

Dating and meaning of the known objects (bronze weapons and animal figurines, human statuettes of terra cotta and bronze, pottery animal effigy vases, and burnished black, gray, or orange pottery vessels) are

complicated by insufficient archaeological contexts.

Bounded by the Caspian Sea and the Republic of Azerbaijan on the north, Gilan, in the far past, was within the sphere of influence of the successive Achaemenid, Seleucid, Parthian, and Sassanid empires that ruled Iran until the 7th century CE.

Sophisticated Rasht, capital of Gilan province, has long been a weekend escape for residents of Tehran who are looking to sample the famous local cuisine and hoping for some pluvial action – it’s the largest, and wettest town in the northern region. Gilan is divided into a coastal plain including the large delta of Sefid Rud and adjacent parts of the Alborz mountain range.

Cultural heritage elements in northwestern Iran added to national list

TOURISM **TEHRAN** — A total of six new cultural elements, which are practiced in the northwestern province of Qazvin, have been registered in the national intangible cultural heritage list.

The Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts on Saturday announced the inscriptions in an official document it submitted to the governor-general of the province, CHTN reported.

The skill of spinning in Feshgeldareh village, the talent of making Kabargol pickles and stew, the skill of baking bread in the Alamut region, and the ritual of Tabaq-Gardani were amongst entrees to the prestigious list. Furthermore, the name of Hassan Kokabi, who is a master in traditional locksmithing, was inscribed on the list as Living Human Treasure.

Qazvin was once the capital of the mighty Persian Empire, under Safavids, from 1548 to 98. It is a major



tourist destination with a wonderfully restored caravanserai-turned-arts precinct, some quirky museums, and

Iranian handicrafts: Stone carving in Khorasan

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — Stone carving is deeply rooted in the Iranian plateau when animal hunting tools and daily life utensils were made out of stone, and gradually advanced to reach their peak.

Historical artifacts excavated from Tapeh Yahya in Kerman and other archaeological sites suggest that the history of the craft goes back to four thousand and five hundred years BC. The Discovery of these objects also proves that back then cutting both decorative and applicable objects out of green stones was common in Kerman, according to Visit Iran, an official travel guide of the Islamic Republic.

This type of stone is still being extracted

and sent to the Khorasan region of Iran. These products are made using stones like turquoise, marble, jade, black stone, etc. In the field of arts, next to reliefs of Persepolis and engravings such as Naqsh-e Rostam, Taq-e Bostan, stone carving has mostly been applied to make utensils.

From seven thousand years ago until today, kinds of stone such as Mica have been used to make cooking utensils such as pot, etc. Mica stone containing high levels of iron components is very soft and easily cut into desired shapes. Another characteristic of Mica stone is that the more it is heated, the stronger and more durable it gets. By the art of stone carving, kinds of

utensils, lamp stands, photo frames, chess pieces, vases, sugar cube holders, and other applicable and decorative objects can be made. Important centers of stone carving of Iran are Mashhad, Shahr-e Rey, Qom, and Kerman. Today carvers use raw stones and cut them into desired pieces. The extra parts are cut away by chisel and hammer. Then the piece is cut by smaller chisels. Then the piece is polished first by a file, and later by an electric grinding machine that works faster. In Mashhad, the utensils are polished with oil and painted almost in black. Then motifs like flowers, geometric lines, figures, portraits, hunting grounds, and famous poems are carved on them by

carving pens. This process includes different steps such as tracing, cutting of the backgrounds, and contouring.

Beginning in 1935, a team from the Department of Near Eastern Art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, colloquially “The Met”, excavated for several seasons at Neyshabur (Nishapur), which is one of the flourishing towns of medieval times now situated northeast of modern Iran.

Situated some 70 km west of Mashhad, Neyshabur, which has long been a source of turquoise, was founded around the third century CE. Experts say, that “Nishapur” derived its name from its alleged founder, the Sasanian king Shapur I (d. 272).

Women inventor rate in Iran higher than global average

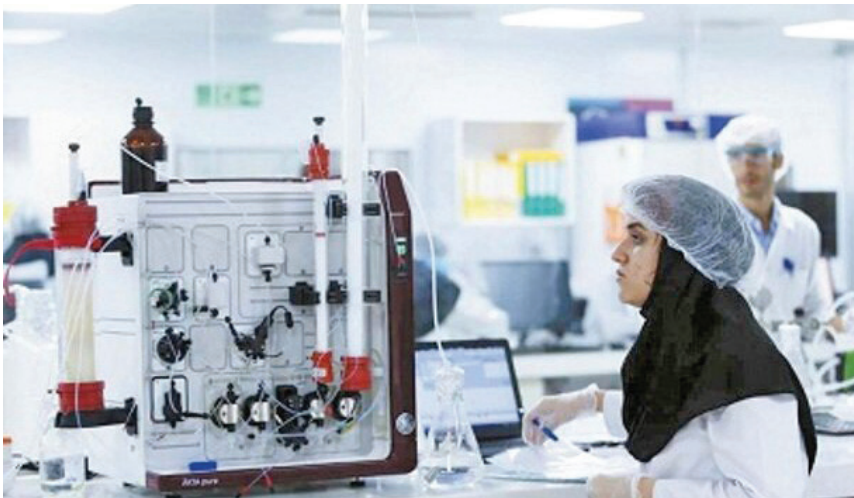
SOCIETY **TEHRAN** – The proportion of female inventors to male inventors in Iran is significantly higher than the global average and even higher than the leading countries in the field of patents, according to the Vice Presidency for Science and Technology's report released on Saturday.

Women make up half of the world's population, but do they play a direct role in the development and growth of innovation at the same rate of 50 percent? Research shows that the proportion of women inventors is still a long way from the assumed 50 percent.

According to the report, while on average in the world, the percentage of women inventors in patent cases is about 14 percent, and in leading countries, this figure does not reach 18 percent, it reaches up to 24 percent in Iran.

The results of this study, which was conducted on more than 2,000 existing cases, showed that for every four male inventors, one female inventor is active, which is a significant ratio compared to the global ratio of 6-to-1.

Women's participation in science
Science Minister Mansour Gholami has



said that the participation of Iranian women in higher education research and development projects has increased from 27 percent in 2000 to 39.6 percent in 2017.

In all levels of education, the share of women has risen from 5.3 percent in 1978 to over 50 percent or even 60 percent during the past seven years, he noted, IRNA

reported on Sunday.

Over 4,500 women enrolled in doctoral courses each year, and in the past three years on average, the number of doctoral theses registered by women is equivalent to 40 percent of the total dissertations registered in the database, he further explained.

While the share of the female population

in higher education was only 281 per 100,000 populations in 1978, now, it reached 4,747 people (4.7 percent, almost 20 times), and the gross female enrollment rate (total number of students aging 18 to 24) has risen from 2.1 percent in 1978 to 41.2 percent (20 times) this year, Gholami noted.

In 1978, only 18 percent of women were faculty members working in higher education institutions, while this number reached up to 30 percent by now, he concluded.

Women's role in research and development

The participation of Iranian women in research and development fields is higher than the global average, according to the UNESCO 2020 report on Women in Science.

Iranian women's participation in research and development has increased from 27.7 percent in 2019 to 31.2 percent in 2020, which is above the global average of 30 percent.

The increase in the share of women in research and development is mostly due to their increasing share in knowledge-based companies, Masoumeh Ebtekar, the vice president for women's and family affairs, said in August 2020.

Japan willing to continue environmental co-op with Iran

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — The seven-year cooperation between Iran and Japan in the successful implementation of Lake Urmia revival has made the Japanese government willing to continue environmental cooperation, Ahmad Reza Lahijanzadeh, deputy chief of the Department of Environment (DOE) for the marine environment, said.

He made the remarks during the 26th meeting of the Steering Committee of the Iranian Wetlands Protection Project held virtually on Saturday.

Pointing to the success of the project on modeling people's participation in the revitalization of Lake Urmia, which is in its seventh year of implementation, he stated that the two countries will cooperate on a three-year document entitled "Sustainability of Lake Urmia Rehabilitation Achievements and Development of Innovative Experiences for Environmental and Livelihood Sustainability in East Azerbaijan, West Azerbaijan, Fars and Khuzestan Provinces."

He expressed satisfaction and hope for the positive and impressive performance of Conservation of Iranian wetlands, despite all the limitations caused by the pandemic, which are the result of the support and cooperation of the responsible bodies, NGOs, and other stakeholders and participants.

UNDP Representative to Iran Claudio Providas also praised the efforts of the DOE as one of the UNDP's oldest executive partners, and the active participation of the related organizations.

The meeting was held with the presence of representatives from the office of wetlands protection and rehabilita-

tion, United Nations Development Program, DOE heads of East Azarbaijan, West Azarbaijan, Fars and Khuzestan provinces, Planning and Budget Organization, Ministry of Energy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture and related organizations.

Japan's eighth contribution to Lake Urmia revival

On February 17, the Government of Japan contributed \$3 million to help revive Lake Urmia through the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

The contribution will be implemented as a component of UNDP's ongoing Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project – a joint project between Iran's Department of Environment and UNDP. This was Japan's eighth contribution to UNDP Iran.

So far, UNDP has implemented several initiatives to stop the degradation trend and restore this important Lake and other wetlands in the country. These efforts have significantly contributed to the stability of Lake Urmia and introducing new approaches based on the improved management of its basin. By the end of the seventh phase, the project was implemented in 183 villages.

In addition to almost \$7 million in financial support from the Japanese government, so far more than \$1 billion has been spent on the project in total.

-----Lake's surface area doubled in 6 years

At the beginning of the Lake Urmia Restoration Program in 2013, the Lake's level was about 1270.32 meters, 1783 square kilometers in surface area, and 1.14 billion cubic meters in volume, which indicates a 50 percent increase in the

lake's surface area in comparison to the current water level.

Lake Urmia's surface area has reached up to 2,917 square kilometers, indicating 1,582 square kilometers increase in comparison to 2013.

The level of Lake Urmia has reached 1,271 meters, which indicates an increase of over 1.39 meters compared to the lowest volume recorded, Farhad Sarkhosh, head of the Lake Urmia Restoration Program's office in West Azarbaijan province said.

The volume of water also raised by 3.81 billion cubic meters, which has increased more than 5 times compared to the Iranian calendar year 1394 (March 2015-March 2016) and before the Lake Urmia Restoration Program started, he highlighted.

The water transfer projects will cause Lake Urmia to reach its ecological level over the next seven years, which is 1274.1 meters with 15 billion cubic meters of water through increasing the lake's level by one meter each year.

With the transfer of water from Zab River, about 623 million cubic meters of water will enter the lake permanently annually.

Lake Urmia, located in the northwest of Iran, was once the most extensive permanent hypersaline lake in the world. Unsustainable water management in response to increasing demand together with climatic extremes has given rise to the lake's depletion during the last two decades. The lake's restoration program was established in 2013 and aims to restore the lake within a 10-year program.

Brazilian Amazon released more carbon than it absorbed over past 10 years

The Brazilian Amazon released nearly 20% more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere over the past decade than it absorbed, according to a startling report that shows humanity can no longer depend on the world's largest tropical forest to help absorb manmade carbon pollution.

From 2010 through 2019, Brazil's Amazon basin gave off 16.6bn tonnes of CO₂, while drawing down only 13.9bn tonnes, researchers reported Thursday in the journal Nature Climate Change.

The study looked at the volume of CO₂ absorbed and stored as the forest grows, against the amounts released back into the atmosphere as it has been burned down or destroyed.

"We half-expected it, but it is the first time that we have figures showing that the Brazilian Amazon has flipped, and is now

a net emitter," said co-author Jean-Pierre Wigner, a scientist at France's National Institute for Agronomic Research (INRA).

"We don't know at what point the change-over could become irreversible," he told AFP in an interview.

The study also showed that deforestation – through fires and clear-cutting – increased nearly four-fold in 2019 compared with either of the two previous years, from about 1m hectares (2.5m acres) to 3.9m hectares (9.6m acres).

"Brazil saw a sharp decline in the application of environmental protection policies after the change of government in 2019," the INRA said in a statement.

Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro was sworn into office on 1 January 2019.

Terrestrial ecosystems have been a crucial ally as the world struggles to curb CO₂ emis-

sions, which topped 40bn tonnes in 2019.

Over the past half-century, plants and soil have consistently absorbed about 30% of those emissions, even as those emissions increased by 50% over that period. Oceans have also helped, soaking up more than 20%.

The Amazon basin contains about half of the world's tropical rainforests, which are more effective at soaking up and storing carbon than other types of vegetation.

If the region becomes a net source rather than a "sink" of CO₂, tackling the climate crisis will be that much harder.

Using new methods of analysing satellite data developed at the University of Oklahoma, the international team of researchers showed for the first time that degraded forests were a more significant source of planet-warming CO₂ emissions than outright deforestation.

Over the same 10-year period, degradation – caused by fragmentation, selective cutting, or fires that damage but do not destroy trees – caused three times more emissions than outright destruction of forests.

The data examined in the study only covers Brazil, which holds about 60% of the Amazonian rainforest.

Taking the rest of region into account, "the Amazon basin as a whole is probably (carbon) neutral", said Wigner.

"But in the other countries with Amazon rainforest, deforestation is on the rise too, and drought has become more intense."

Climate change looms as a serious threat, and could – above a certain threshold of global heating – see the continent's rainforest tip into a much drier savannah state, recent studies have shown.

Immediate action needed to control water shortage crisis

→ 1 What is the solution?

In the first step, the dependence of livelihoods on water and soil resources must be reduced and governments must move towards the extraction of clean energy, including wind and solar energy; In the Sixth Five-Year Plan, the government was required to provide 5,000 megawatts of electricity from new energy sources. If this is done, the pressure on thermal power plants, which is one of the major factors in water consumption in our country, will be reduced.



"With the money generated from the sale of clean energy to the eastern neighbor, the water needed from Helmand can be supplied to reduce the crisis that is now affecting the eastern part of the country;" It is also necessary to provide conditions for the specialized forces of the country to move towards the production of secondary products and to prevent the sale of raw materials, which are highly water-consuming.

There is a lot of potential for revenue generation and development in the country; A country whose average rainfall is one-third of the world average and may change up to 80 percent of its rainfall from year to year should use strategies to make a living without dependency on natural resources, he further explained.

Mohammad Reza Goldansaz, a researcher in the field of water resources, said in June 2019 that an annual amount of 50 billion cubic meters of groundwater resources are withdrawn to supply agricultural, industrial as well as drinking water in Iran.

The amount is 10 times greater than the water covering Lake Urmia, amounting to 5 billion cubic meters.

Environmental official Mohammad Mojabi said in July 2018 that renewable water resources have drastically decreased to less than 100 billion cubic meters from 132 billion cubic meters over the past 50 years, demonstrating a 25 percent decline.

Moreover, the temperature has increased by 1.1 degrees on the Celsius scale over the past 15 years, which mainly decreases the moisture and increase evaporation and accordingly give rise to sand and dust storms, he added.

Groundwater resources are also in a bad condition, he lamented, adding that out of 609 aquifers in the country 309 are depleted and water withdrawal is not allowed anymore in these aquifers.

Underground water drainage has devastating consequences such as dried-up rivers and wetlands, destruction of vegetation, increase in sand and dust storms, land subsidence, formation of holes and long gaps in the plains, and increased salinity of aquifers.

Why subsurface reservoirs are highly vital?

According to the U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) Water Science School groundwater is a valuable resource throughout the world. Where surface water, such as lakes and rivers, is scarce or inaccessible, groundwater supplies many of the hydrologic needs of people everywhere. Groundwater depletion, a term often defined as long-term water-level declines caused by sustained groundwater pumping, is a key issue associated with groundwater use.

The water stored in the ground can be compared to money kept in a bank account. If you withdraw money at a faster rate than you deposit new money you will eventually start having account-supply problems. Pumping water out of the ground faster than it is replenished over the long term causes similar problems. Some of the negative effects of groundwater depletion include drying up of wells, reduction of water in streams and lakes, deterioration of water quality, increased pumping costs, and land subsidence.

LET'S LEARN PERSIAN

(Part 173)

(Source: saadifoundation.ir)

● تمرین ۱. مجهول جمله‌های زیر را بنویسید:

۱. کارمند بانک پول را به محمد داد.

۲. او خانه را به یک خارجی فروخت.

۳. من نامه را به دانشکده فرستادم.

۴. تو صدا را از فاصله زیادی شنیدی.

۵. ما هتل زیبایی ساختیم.

۶. آنها مرا هم در این رشته پذیرفتند.

■ جدول

۷	۶	۵	۴	۳	۲	۱	افقی
							۱. در آنجا حساب باز می‌کنیم. ➔ با آن
							می‌بینیم ولی حرف آخر ندارد. ➔ مخالف
							گذشته. ➔ ما شما ... می‌بینیم ➔ رفتن
							➔ رفتی، آمدن ... ➔ کارمندان ما هم
							زن هستند و ... ➔ بیشتر مردم غذا را با ...
							می‌خورند ➔ رفتن ➔ رفتند بردن ➔ ...
							۷. حرف 'ب' در انگلیسی ➔ رفتن ➔ رفتند آمدن ➔ ...

عمودی

۱. آب است و از آسمان می‌ریزد. ➔ کلمه‌ی پرسیدن ➔ رنگ آب ➔ ۳. تکرار یک حرف ➔ نقاشی یکی از ... ➔ به شمار می‌رود ➔ ۴. اهل ... ➔ شهر هستید؟ ➔ حرف‌های اول و دوم دانش. ➔ دارای یک معنی ... ➔ پنجره ➔ دو حرف آخر دیدن ➔ ۷. کارگوش

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → E

81% of bus drivers responsible for fatal accidents in 2 months

The number of public transport fleet accidents has increased significantly over the last two months, and 81% of bus drivers were to blame for fatal road crashes, Traffic Police chief has announced. Over 90 percent of the whole transfers across the country are done by ground transport system, while air, rail and sea transportation hold a small share, Mehr quoted Seyed Kamal Hadianfar as saying on Tuesday. Last year, 19 million rides have been delivered transferring over 290 million passengers, mostly through the bus transportation fleet under the Municipalities supervision, he stated.

He went on to say that bus drivers spend more time driving exceeding standard hour due to low income, which increases the risk of road crashes. Referring to the importance of technical inspection for the bus fleet, he noted that all the buses operation in the country's transportation system must undergo inspection and ensure the passengers' safety, as well as limiting the drivers to spend more time offering service.

۸۱ درصد رانندگان اتوبوس در تصادفات فوتی دو ماه گذشته مقصر بوده اند

رئیس پلیس راهور ناجا، گفت: در ۲ ماهه اخیر تعداد تصادفات ناوگان حمل مسافر افزایش قابل توجهی داشته و در تصادفات منجر به فوت و جرح ناوگان عمومی مقمر مسافر، ۸۱ درصد رانندگان اتوبوس مقصر بوده اند.

سردار سیدکمال هادیانفر، افزود: بیش از ۹۰درصد از جابجایی ها در سطح کشور از طریق زمینی صورت می پذیرد و درصد کمی را حمل و نقل های هوایی ، ریلی و دریایی تشکیل می دهد. در طول سال ۹۷ ، ۱۹ میلیون سفر با ۲۹۰ میلیون مسافر صورت پذیرفته است که عمده آن از طریق پایانه هایی صورت پذیرفته که مدیریت آن بر عهده شهرداری هاست.

رئیس پلیس راهور ناجا افزود: رانندگان به علت میزان درآمدشان بیش از ساعت مقرر رانندگی می کنند که ریسک تصادف را بالا می برد.

وی با اشاره به لزوم کنترل ناوگان حمل مسافر از مبدا گفت: کنترل های فنی اتوبوس ها پیش از شروع سفر موضوع حساسی است. اتوبوس می بایست به صورت دقیق از لحاظ سلامت فنی، رعایت ساعت کاری استاندارد توسط راننده و... مورد بازبینی دقیق قرار گیرد.

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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

The one who gets married has completed half of his/her religion.

Prophet Muhammad (S)

Iran launches virtual Quran exhibition

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – Iran launched a virtual Quran exhibition on Saturday to observe the holy month of Ramadan, which is known as the spring of the Holy Quran.

Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi and a number of his colleagues attended a meeting with a limited number of guests to announce the launch of the showcase, which is accessible at <https://www.iqfa.ir>.



A poster for the virtual exhibition of the Holy Quran.

Salehi expressed his hope that the exhibition can help the Islamic society and other people around the world be closer to the Holy Quran.

Copies of the Holy Quran published by various Iranian publishers and books on Quranic sciences are on view at the exhibit, which will run until May 10.

In addition, a large collection of artworks representing Quranic concepts are on display in the exhibition.

The exhibition is an alternative to the International Holy Quran Exhibition, which was organized during the holy month of Ramadan at Tehran's Imam Khomeini Mosalla.

The international exhibit has been canceled over the past two years due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic also forced the organizer to hold a virtual edition of the exhibition with cultural productions from Iran.

“Human Factors” joins Fajr festival official competition

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – The 38th Fajr International Film Festival has picked Italian director and writer Ronny Trocker's drama “Human Factors” to be screened in its official competition.



Sabine Timoteo and Mark Waschke act in a scene from “Human Factors” by Ronny Trocker.

The film, which is a German-Italian-Danish co-production, had its world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah in January.

To escape mounting tensions at the advertising agency they co-own, French-German couple Nina and Jan whisk their kids, Max and Emma, away to their seaside vacation home.

The couple has signed a new politically-charged client, forcing them to confront their clashing priorities. But what is meant to be an idyllic off-season retreat turns sinister when burglars tear through the house, unseen by anyone except Nina.

Though at first, the aftermath brings the family closer, it's short-lived. As the police investigate and the evidence doesn't add up, the account of what took place begins to unravel alongside the couple's faith in each other.

The 38th Fajr International Film Festival, which is scheduled to take place in Tehran from May 26 to June 2, has not announced the lineup for the official competition as yet.

However, the organizers previously announced that Oscar-winning Hungarian director Istvan Szabo's latest movie “Final Report”, Italian director Claudio Noce's drama “Padrenostro” and Ukrainian-Armenian filmmaker Roman Balayan's 2020 movie “We Are Here We Are Close” have been selected to compete in the event.

“The Son” star Soheil Qannadan crowned best at Moscow film festival

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – Soheil Qannadan won the Silver George for best actor at the Moscow International Film Festival for his role in the Iranian drama “The Son”, the organizers announced last Thursday.

He received the award for his portrayal of Farid, a forty-year-old man who lives with his mother.

Farid is very vulnerable and escapes loneliness, but in the meantime tries to prove himself independent and supportive of his mother. However, her sudden death makes Farid frustrated. To escape from this unfamiliar situation, he clings to anyone he encounters outside home to make his loneliness bearable, but he does not know how to communicate, and the situation gets worse each time.

The film is the debut feature of director and writer Nushin Meraji, a 41-year-old filmmaker who started her professional career in cinema in 2004 by making shorts, some of which have been screened and awarded at Iranian and international film festivals.

Filipino director and producer Brillante Mendoza presided over the jury in the official competition of the Moscow festival.

Serbian-Russian actor Milos Bikovic, Brazilian director Karim Ainouz, and composer Yuri Poteenko and director Nigina Sayfulaeva, both from Russia, were



Soheil Qannadan (L) and Nahid Haddadi act in a scene from “The Son” directed by Nushin Meraji.

the members of the jury. The Golden George for best film went to “#dogpoopgirl” by Romanian director Andrei Hutuleac at the Moscow festival, which took place in the Russian capital from April 21 to 29.

The film is a social satire with tragic elements about the Internet era. Inspired by real facts, the scenario proposes a location for us in the Romanian space of the first online

shaming case in the history of the Internet. In 2005, a woman's dog pooped on a metro car in Seoul, South Korea. For unknown reasons the woman refused to collect the mess, was photographed and the incident went viral on an opinion blog.

The film's star Andreea Gramosteanu also received the Silver George for best actress.

Special jury Silver George was awarded to “Bloodsuckers – A Marxist Vampire Comedy”

“Hope to See You Again” recounts memories of literati's meetings with Leader

→ Poets Seyyed Hassan Hosseini and Moshfeq Kahshani, writer Nasrollah Mardani and satirist Abolfazl Zarui Nasrabadi also recount their memories in the film.

The meeting has been held by the Art Bureau of the Islamic Ideology Dissemination Organization (IIDO) in collaboration with the Leader's office since the early 1990s. However, it was canceled over the past two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the past two years, the organizers have replaced the meeting with a poetry night named “Visiting the Moon”, which was held in the courtyard of the Art Bureau in Tehran.

Last week, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei expressed his regret over the obstacles COVID-19 has created for his annual meeting with literati.

In a letter sent to IIDO director Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Qomi, he wrote, “Reducing the pleasant annual meeting to a remote screen gathering, not only fails to calm my eager heart, but also somehow remains as a bitter taste.”

“God's will is currently that I stay deprived of the delightful meeting,” the leader noted in the letter, which was read by Qomi on Tuesday during the poetry night.

“The Last Fiction” director making “The Dragon's Treasure”

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – Iranian director Ashkan Rahgozar, whose first animated feature “The Last Fiction” was acclaimed at international events, is making his second movie named “The Dragon's Treasure”.

The animation will be a co-production of Hoorakhsh, Rahgozar's animation studio in Tehran, and Mystic House PRODUCTION Ltd. based in the Canadian city of Toronto, Hoorakhsh announced in a press release on Saturday.

Arman Rahgozar of Hoorkhash and Mystic House co-director Alireza Kabiri are the producers of the project, which is expected to be completed in 2023.

Hoorakhsh said that “The Dragon's Treasure” is being made based on a Persian

legend, however, it gave no other details about its plot.

Rahgozar's 2018 animation “The Last Fiction” recounts a story from Persian poet Ferdowsi's epic masterpiece Shahnameh.

It is about Zahak's treacherous rise to the throne in Jamshid in Persia. The young and naive hero Afaridoun will have to save the kingdom and its people from darkness. But he must first conquer his own demons in this portrayal of Persian mythology that reveals human nature.

An all-star cast, including Parviz Parastui, Leila Hatami, Hamed Behdad, Baran Kowsari, Ashkan Khatibi, Akbar Zanjani and Farrokh Nemat, has lent their voices to the characters in the production.

The world-renowned Iranian vocalist

Shahram Nazeri has sung the closing credits song in the movie, which has been acclaimed at several prestigious Iranian and international events.

The movie has been screened in numerous international events, winning over a dozen awards. It was named best animated film at the 37th Fajr Film Festival in Tehran in February 2019.

It was selected as best feature animation at the Epic Animation, Comics and Games Fest – Epic ACG Fest in Mountain View, California.

The 3rd Southern Cone International Film Festival-FICCSUR in Valparaiso, Chile also picked the movie as best animation in 2019.

“The Last Fiction” was among the submissions for consideration at the 2020



A poster director Ashkan Rahgozar's new animation project “The Dragon's Treasure”.

Oscars, but it failed to receive a nomination.

The Annecy animation festival screened the movie in a non-competitive section in 2018.

“Metamorphosis in the Slaughterhouse” honored at Bare Bones film festival

CULTURE d e s k **TEHRAN** – Iranian director Javad Darai's drama “Metamorphosis in the Slaughterhouse” has won the Bumblebee Award at the Bare Bones International Film and Music Festival in Muskogee, Oklahoma.

The film is about Shadi, a little girl whose parents have been accused of murdering a girl in the village, and villagers killed her parents to seek revenge. Her uncle adopts her and now Shadi must face the problems that the people of the village have caused.

Darai has previously directed the short film “Limit” about a desperate man who frantically pleads with strangers to accompany him to his home, without being clear on his intentions.

The film has been screened at numerous international events and won several honors, including the grand prix of the 10th Entr'2 Marches in Cannes, France in May 2019.

It also was named best short film at the Woodbury Short Film Festival that took place in March in Salt Lake City, the



“Metamorphosis in the Slaughterhouse” by Javad Darai.

capital city of Utah in the western U.S.

The 7th Speechless Film Festival in the U.S. also gave its award for best student film to the film in April 2019.

Barbara Tuchman's “A Distant Mirror” hanging in Iranian bookstores

CULTURE d e s k **TEHRAN** – A Persian translation of American historian Barbara Tuchman's narrative history book “A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century” has recently appeared in Iranian bookstores.

Mahi is the publisher of the Persian translation and Hassan Afshar is the translator of the book first published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1978. It won a 1980 U.S. National Book Award in History.

The book's focus is the Crisis of the Late Middle Ages, which caused widespread suffering in Europe in the 14th century.

Drawing heavily on Froissart's Chronicles, Tuchman recounts the histories of the Hundred Years' War, the Black Plague, the Papal Schism, pillaging mercenaries,



This combination photo shows American historian Barbara Tuchman and the front cover of her book “A Distant Mirror”.

anti-Semitism, popular revolts including the Jacquerie in France, the liberation of Switzerland, the Battle of the Golden Spurs, and various peasant uprisings.

She also discusses the advance of the Islamic Ottoman Empire into Europe, which ended in the disastrous Battle of Nicopolis. Yet Tuchman's scope is not limited to political and religious events.

She begins with a discussion of the Little Ice Age, a change in climate that reduced average temperatures in Europe well into the mid-19th century, and describes the lives of all social classes, from nobility and clergy to the peasantry.

Much of the narrative is woven around the life of the French nobleman Enguerrand de Coucy. Tuchman chose

him as a central figure partly because he lived a relatively long life and could therefore stay in the story during most of the 14th century.

A French noble who married Isabella, the eldest daughter of Edward III of England, Coucy had ties to both France and England, and was therefore close to much of the action.

Tuchman was a self-trained historian, author and double Pulitzer Prize winner. She became best known for “The Guns of August”, a history of the prelude and first month of World War I.

As an author, Tuchman focused on producing popular history. Her clear, dramatic storytelling covered topics as diverse as the 14th century and World War I, and sold millions of copies.