

Why U.S. Creates a Sense of Urgency on Vienna Talks

▶ Page 3

Report

Russia calls on NATO to back off

TEHRAN - The Russian Embassy in Washington has denounced a statement by the U.S. State Department on the escalating military activities by NATO near Russia's eastern borders, especially Ukraine. The statement has urged the U.S. not to shift the blame on Moscow and to avoid distorting the reality on the ground.

The Russian diplomatic mission wrote "for the sake of de-escalation, the United States should not create anti-Russian military sites near our borders. In particular, Washington shall undertake to prevent the further eastward expansion of NATO, deny accession to the Alliance to the States of the former USSR, not use their infrastructure for any military activities, and not develop bilateral military cooperation with them"

Earlier, the U.S. State Department spokesman, Ned Price, claimed that "Russia and its proxies are responsible for escalating tensions, not Ukraine or the United States." He called on Moscow "to stop using false, inflammatory rhetoric and take meaningful steps to de-escalate tensions to provide a positive atmosphere for discussions."

The U.S. State Department issued the statement after Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu touched on the situation in Ukraine during a ministerial board meeting on Tuesday where he said the presence of over 120 personnel belonging to American private military companies had been spotted at two sites in the Donetsk region in eastern Ukraine. ▶ Page 5

Iran develops two vaccines of rotavirus, pneumococcus

TEHRAN - Two vaccines of rotavirus and pneumococcus, domestically made by the Pasteur Institute, will enter the country's vaccination cycle next year (starting March 21, 2022) to inoculate children.

The pneumococcal or pneumonia vaccine for children is included in the vaccination program of 70 percent of the world, and soon Iranian children will be able to receive this vaccine produced in the country, Delaram Doroud, vice president of production at the Pasteur Institute said.

Reminding that the infrastructure for the production of the rotavirus vaccine is fully ready, she stated that the technology transfer contract for this vaccine has been concluded and we are ready to produce it in the near future.

Due to the prevalence of coronavirus, the process of technology transfer, and exchange of specialists and supply of pneumococcal vaccine equipment was somewhat slow, and according to the follow-up of the Pasteur Institute, however, it will be finalized soon, she explained.

The Pasteur Institute has been producing BCG vaccines for infants, intravesical BCG, and hepatitis B for decades.

BCG, polio, hepatitis B, measles, rubella, and mumps (MMR) vaccines are among the vaccines in the general vaccination package and are injected to infants and children in Iran. ▶ Page 7

Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul freight train launched

TEHRAN- The Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) railway project, or ECO freight train, was inaugurated with the first freight train moving on Tuesday during a ceremony attended by Iranian and Pakistani officials.

Pakistani Minister for Railways Azam Khan Swati, along with Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, and Adviser to the Prime Minister on Commerce Abdul Razak Dawood inaugurated the Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul freight train at Margalla railway station, in Islamabad.

Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan Seyed Mohammad Ali Hosseini, as well as the ambas-

sadors of Turkey, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan to Pakistan, in addition to the representative of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) were also present at the ceremony.

Addressing the ceremony, the Pakistani minister for railways said, "Launching of the container train from Pakistan to Iran and Turkey was a long-standing dream of the countries of the region, which has come true again".

Terming the ITI freight train an important milestone in Pakistan's history, the minister said that business-to-business contact among the business community would fur-

ther enhance through this train. He said the service would further strengthen relations between the three countries.

Also, Pakistani Foreign Minister Qureshi appreciated the resumption of ITI freight train and said the service would play an important role in regional connectivity and promoting economic activity in the region.

Adviser to the Prime Minister of Pakistan on Commerce Abdul Razak Dawood, for his part, said that ECO train as one of the most effective vehicles can help in expanding exports, imports and trade between member countries. ▶ Page 4

Journey to Faith: Iran pushes heritage agenda at UNESCO, seeks status for Razavi pilgrimage

TEHRAN - The spiritual tradition of pilgrimage to the holy shrine of Imam Reza (AS) along with sustained efforts to safeguard hospitality services for Razavi pilgrims may soon join UNESCO's listing of cultural treasures.

Iran has asked the United Nations cultural agency UNESCO to recognize officially the concept of 'Good safeguarding practices to improve hospitality services for Razavi Pilgrims', an official said.

An all-inclusive dossier on the spiritual pilgrimage site and its associated rituals has been submitted to the UN cultural body for possible inscription on the register of good safeguarding practices, IRIB quoted Mostafa Pourali, who is in charge of Registration, Preservation, and Restoration of Spiritual and Natural Heritage sites at the Ministry of Heritage, Culture, Tourism, and Handicrafts, as saying on Wednesday.

As mentioned by the UN cultural body, the rituals and ceremonies merged with the pilgrimage rites are generated based on the social and religious needs and requirements rooted in the public believes, the consistency and persistence of which exhibit their signifi-

cance and values.

Moreover, the tradition of pilgrimage to the holy shrine, which is situated in the north-eastern city of Mashhad was registered on the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts last year under the number 2015 upon a proposal offered by the tourism department of Khorasan Razavi province.

Mashhad, the provincial capital, is Iran's holiest and second-largest city. Its raison d'être and main sight is the striking massive shrine complex of the eighth Shia Imam that is encircled by dozens of five-star hotels and many other accommodation centers. Mashhad and the buffer zone of the complex present a unique approach and exercise towards the development of pilgrimage areas during history concerning a city and its religious core, in a way that the expression of the pilgrimage concept can be vividly seen in the architectural and urban planning of the city.

The Imam Reza complex, in general also in detail enjoys unique creativity and genius, altogether has formed a unique cultural, artistic masterpiece all over the world. ▶ Page 6

Iran, Russia, Turkey condemn Israeli continuing attacks on Syria

TEHRAN - Negotiating teams from Iran, Russia and Turkey who had met in Kazakhstan issued a joint statement on Wednesday in which they insisted on several important issues, including a condemnation of the continued Israeli attacks on Syria.

"(They) condemned continuing Israeli military attacks in Syria which violate the international law, international humanitarian law, the sovereignty of Syria and neighboring countries, endanger the stability and security in the region and called for cessation of them," the three countries, known as the guarantor of Syria truce, said at the conclusion of the 17th round of talks within the Astana format.

In part of their statement, the participants also said the aim of the talks started on Tuesday in Nur-Sultan, the new name of Kazakhstan's capital, was to ensure peace in Syria.

The name of Kazakhstan's capital was changed from Astana to Nur Sultan in March 2109. Yet, the talks on Syria held in Kazakhstan are still known as the Astana format, Astana process of Astana group. ▶ Page 2

Volleyball coach Campedelli arrives in Tehran

TEHRAN - Italian coach Alessandra Campedelli arrived in Tehran, capital of Iran Tuesday night to finalize her contract with Iran volleyball federation.

She will stay 15 days in Iran and offer her preparation plans to the federation in her stay in the country.

The Italian coach will also watch the women's volleyball league.

Campedelli will lead Iran's women's volleyball team at the 2021 Asian Women's Volleyball Championship if she pens a contract with the volleyball federation.

She has most recently worked as head

coach of Italian deaf volleyball team.

Mohammadreza Davarzani, head of Iran volleyball federation, has already said they want to book a place in the Asian competition's top four.

The 2021 Asian Women's Volleyball Championship will be held in the Philippines in May 2022.

The event was Originally scheduled for Aug. 29 to Sept. 5, 2021, but was postponed to May 15 to 22, 2022 due rising COVID-19 cases.

Book telling children about General Soleimani's peace efforts published

TEHRAN - A children's book illustrating General Qassem Soleimani's noble endeavors to secure peace in the region has been published.

"Hajji Qassem and Flying Paintings" has been written by Rahim Makhdumi, the writer of "The Entry-Forbidden Commanders", which carries stories about 30 Iranian commanders.

"Hajji Qassem and Flying Paintings" has been published by Jamkaran with illustrations by Sahar Parirokh.

The story of the book is formed with char-

acters from Yemeni, Lebanese, Palestinian and Iraqi children, introducing Soleimani as the commander of resistance against invading forces in the region.

The story enlightens children as to the endeavors Soleimani made to bring peace back to the region.

Children's publishers have released many books about Soleimani since his martyrdom on January 3, 2020, in a U.S. airstrike in Baghdad. ▶ Page 8

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Interview

Sophisticated people know Iran has no plan to build nuclear weapon: American scholar

By Mohammad Mazhari

TEHRAN - An American anthropologist says sophisticated people know that Iran does not plan to build nuclear weapons.

"Sophisticated people know that Iran does not have a nuclear weapons program and will not manufacture a nuclear weapon," William O. Beeman tells the Tehran Times.

So far, the talks to revive the JCPOA - the official name for the 2015 nuclear deal - has seen no breakthrough. The talks started in April after President Biden claimed his country is willing to rejoin the 2015 nuclear agreement.

"So for the United States," Beeman argues, "the chief value in returning to the JCPOA is to demonstrate American facility in diplomacy, and to have a political 'win' for President Biden."

Some critics say Iran and the U.S. are not ready to make meaningful concessions because they don't need the JCPOA in its old format.

"Iran can afford to wait, and the United States is under no real pressure to negotiate or make concessions. Hence the stalemate."

Following is the text of the interview:

Are you optimistic about the new rounds of talks to revive the JCPOA? Do you think inflexibility is a prelude for a new deal? ▶ Page 5



Iran puts into service new advanced homegrown tank

TEHRAN - The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC)'s Ground Force has put a new upgraded combat tank dubbed Karrar into service on the third day of a massive military drill underway in southern Iran.

The drill, code-named the Great Prophet 17, included a showcase of Iran's newest homegrown arms and equipment. Various forces of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) began the military drill along the southern coastlines of the country on Monday. ▶ Page 3

Iran, Russia, Turkey condemn Israeli continuing attacks on Syria

“There could be no military solution to the Syrian conflict”

From page 1 ► Following is the full text of the statement:

“The representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey as guarantors of the Astana format:

1. Reaffirmed their strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic as well as to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and highlighted that these principles should be universally respected and complied with;

2. Expressed their determination to continue working together to combat terrorism in all forms and manifestations and stand against separatist agendas aimed at undermining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria as well as threatening the national security of neighboring countries. Condemned the increasing terrorist activities in various parts of Syria which result in loss of innocent lives including the attacks targeting civilian facilities. Reiterated the necessity to further continue their ongoing cooperation in order to ultimately eliminate DAESH/ISIL, Al-Nusra Front and all other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with Al-Qaeda or DAESH/ISIL, and other terrorist groups, as designated by the UN Security Council, while ensuring the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure in accordance with international humanitarian law. Expressed serious concern with

the increased presence and terrorist activity of “Hayat Tahrir alSham” and other affiliated terrorist groups as designated by the UN Security Council that pose threat to civilians inside and outside the Idlib de-escalation area;

3. Reviewed in detail the situation in Idlib de-escalation area, agreed to make further efforts to improve the humanitarian situation in and around the area. Highlighted the necessity to maintain calm on the ground by fully implementing all agreements on Idlib.

4. Discussed the situation in northeast of Syria and agreed that constant security and stability in this region can only be achieved on the basis of preservation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. Rejected all attempts to create new realities on the ground, including illegitimate self-rule initiatives under the pretext of combating terrorism. Reaffirmed their determination to stand against separatist agendas in the east of the Euphrates aimed at undermining the unity of Syria as well as threatening the national security of neighboring countries.

Expressed grave concern, in this regard, with increasing hostilities and all forms of oppression by the separatist groups against civilians in east of Euphrates.

Reiterated their opposition to the illegal seizure and transfer of oil revenues that should belong to Syria;

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Iran to sue Riyadh for deliberate delay that led to ambassador’s death

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian on Tuesday afternoon blamed some executive bodies in Riyadh for a delay in allowing Iran's late ambassador to Yemen, who was suffering from the COVID-19 infection, to exit the Saudi-besieged country, saying Iran will lodge a formal protest over the delay in accordance with international law.

Ambassador Hassan Irloo, 63, died of COVID-19 complications on Tuesday. He had earlier this week been repatriated from Yemen amid a Saudi-led blockade of the war-torn Arab country to receive treatment at a hospital in Tehran.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the ambassador's funeral procession in Tehran, Amir Abdollahian said prior to Irloo's death, the Foreign Ministry had been trying for several days to obtain a permission from Riyadh via a third country to send a plane either from Iran or another state to Sana'a to bring back the diplomat home and immediately transfer him to a hospital in Tehran for treatment.

“However, the Saudi side was unfortunately very late in making a decision in this regard and some executive bodies of Saudi Arabia dragged their feet,” he added.

“We will formally lodge a protest in accordance with international conventions,” he remarked.

Also, he expressed hope that Yemen will be able to get out of this war “as soon as possible through a political solution.”

He once again reiterated Iran's stance on the need to resolve the ongoing crisis through political channels, saying Tehran believes all Yemenis should play a role in determining their country's future.

The chief diplomat condemned the military campaign that the Saudi regime and its allies have been waging on Yemen since early 2015.

“The experience of (more than) six years of war showed that the aggressors cannot achieve any victory through military means. Yemen must be left to the Yemenis themselves so that the problems will be solved through the intra-Yemeni talks,” he added, according to Press TV.

Ali Akbar Velayati, Iran's former foreign minister and current senior foreign policy advisor to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, issued a message on Tuesday offering condolences over the death of the ambassador.

Velayati praised the “indefatigable” efforts of Ambassador Irloo.

“The news of the martyrdom of the revolutionary, kind-hearted, and leading diplomat of our country Hassan Irloo, the ambassador of Iran to the National Salvation Government in Yemen, was very regrettable and tragic,” Velayati said in his message.

In a message on Tuesday, Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf also condoled martyrdom of Irloo. “The demise of the disabled war victim, the late brave Iranian ambassador Hassan Irloo, the brother of two martyrs of the Iraqi-imposed war, was a very sad news,” wrote Qalibaf.

During his two-year mission in Sana'a, Irloo made

efforts to help find a political solution to the Yemen conflict, end the war in the impoverished country and restore stability, security and peace to it, Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian said.

Saeed Khatibzadeh, spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry, said Irloo was transferred to the country in a “bad state” due to the “late cooperation” of some countries, a reference to Saudi Arabia.

The Wall Street Journal had reported that Riyadh claimed there were no signs the ambassador was seriously ill and that in return for allowing Irloo to leave Yemen, Riyadh had asked the Houthis to release a number of Saudis captured by the resistance forces.

Saudi Arabia controls the airspace around the Yemeni capital, Sana'a. The ambassador was flown out of Yemen aboard an Iraqi military aircraft after negotiations by Oman's government with the Saudi kingdom.

The death of the ambassador is only an example of hundreds of thousands of deaths who have no voice.

According to the Guardian, the Norwegian Refugee Council's country director for Yemen, Erin Hutchinson, said the Saudi-led attack on Sana'a's airport “would not change much for the millions of impoverished Yemenis who were already cut off from the rest of the world. Thousands of them die anonymously, waiting for life-saving medical flights promised years ago and never followed through. But it should serve to open the world's eyes to the madness that is punishing millions of civilians who have no say in this conflict.”

Irloo, a war veteran, had sustained injuries from chemical warfare during Iraq's war against Iran in the 1980s.

He contracted the coronavirus at the place of his mission and passed away early on Tuesday “despite undergoing all stages of treatment to improve his condition”, Khatibzadeh said.

Irloo officially began his diplomatic mission to Yemen in November 2020, in defiance of the U.S. opposition to close ties between Tehran and Sana'a.

In December 2020, he was sanctioned by the former U.S. president Donald Trump.

Saudi Arabia, backed by the U.S. and regional allies, launched the war on Yemen in March 2015, with the aim of reinstating the toppled Yemen's former president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi and to crush the popular Ansarullah movement.

The Saudi war has left hundreds of thousands of Yemenis dead, and displaced millions more. It has also destroyed Yemen's infrastructure and spread famine and infectious diseases in the Arab country.

The Yemeni people are still suffering as a substantial humanitarian crisis caused by the long-running war continues, but efforts to put an end to the fighting have failed.

Despite Saudi Arabia's relentless bombardment of the impoverished country, Yemeni armed forces and the allied popular committees have grown in strength against the Saudi-led invaders.

Yemeni envoy says Irloo’s death is credible evidence of Saudi war against Yemenis

TEHRAN - Yemeni ambassador to Tehran Ibrahim Mohammad Mohammad al-Deilami has called the late Iranian ambassador to Sana'a Hassan Irloo a “real man” and a “divine Mujahid”, using an Arabic word for him for his utmost efforts in helping the war-stricken people of Yemen.

Ambassador Irloo was pronounced dead due to the complications resulting from the Covid-19 complications. He died two days after he flown out of Yemen aboard an Iraqi airplane

to receive treatment at home for the deadly virus. Saudi Arabia deliberately delayed his exit from Sana'a.

The Yemen's airspace is controlled by Saudi Arabia, which has been pounding Yemen with Western-supplied modern jet fighters since March 2015.

“The martyrdom of Irloo is the most credible document about the crimes of the Saudi regime being carried out in all these years against the innocent people of Yemen,” Ambassador al-Deilami



said during the funeral procession held for Irloo at the Mahalati neighborhood in northeast Tehran.

Pointing to his amity wit Irloo, Ambassador al-Deilami added, “I never thought to participate in the funeral of this great martyr. Martyr Irloo was the best representative for the country of Iran in Yemen, and the people of Yemen will not forget his presence in Yemen and the sacrifices that he did.”

While all ambassadors were “fleeing” Yemen, Al-Deilami, he

remained in the country and was helping the Yemeni people “shoulder to shoulder” in all their hardship and difficulties.

Al-Deilami also sent condolences to the bereaved family of the martyr diplomat who patiently endured his absence at home.

Irloo, a war veteran, was injured by chemical bombs used by Saddam Hussein's army against Iran in the 1980s. When he was returned home on Monday, he was not in good health condition.

JCOA exit ‘was like shooting in one of U.S. legs’: Russian diplomat

TEHRAN - In a tweet on Wednesday, Russia's representative in the Vienna talks described the withdrawal of the U.S. from the JCOA as shooting itself in the leg.

“Indeed! The decision to withdraw from #JCOA was like shooting in one of US legs. It doesn't matter if it was left or right leg” Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's Permanent Representative to the Vienna-based international organizations wrote on his Twitter account.

He posted this tweet in response to an American journalist who criticized Trump administration's decision to leave the JCOA unilaterally, saying: “We are where we are because of what I consider one of the worst decisions in US foreign policy in the last decade: Getting out of JCOA.”

In another tweet, he also announced that he has had a meeting with Sadiq Marafi, Kuwait's representative to the international organizations based in Vienna, to discuss Iran and the Vienna talks.

“Today I met with a good friend of mine H.E. Ambassador Sadiq Marafi of Kuwait. I briefed him about current state of affairs at the #ViennaTalks. We also discussed the prospects of dialogue on



security in the Persian Gulf after the restoration of the #JCOA,” the Russian diplomat said.

Iran and the remaining parties to the JCOA, namely China, Russia, Germany, Britain and France, began the new rounds of talks in the Austrian capital in April with the aim of lifting the unlawful sanctions imposed against Iran in contrary to the JCOA.

During the first round of the Vienna talks under President Raisi started on November 29, Iran presented two draft texts which address, separately, the removal of U.S. sanctions and Iran's return to its nuclear commitments under the JCOA.

Tehran also said it was preparing a third draft text on the verification of the sanctions' removal.

The Islamic Republic maintains that its presence at the talks is intended to have the U.S. sanctions removed, which would, in turn, secure a U.S. return to the nuclear deal.

The U.S., which is not allowed to directly participate in the talks as a result of its withdrawal from the JCOA in May 2018, claims that it is willing to undo the withdrawal and repeal its “maximum pressure” policy against Iran.

Iran argues that the onus is on Washington to return to the 2015 nuclear deal by lifting its illegal sanctions and offering guarantees that it will not exit the pact again.

The newest and last round of talks in Vienna adjourned on Friday. At the end of the talks in the Austrian capital, Iran's chief negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani said that the pace of reaching an agreement depends on the will of the opposite side.

“If the other side accepts the rational views and positions of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the new round of talks can be the last one and we can achieve a deal in the shortest possible time.”

Russia, Iran, Turkey to hold Syria summit in Tehran in February or March



TEHRAN - Russia, Iran and Turkey have agreed to hold the next Astana format summit in Tehran in February or March 2022, depending on the coronavirus situation, senior assistant to Iranian foreign minister for special political affairs Ali Asghar

Khaji told TASS in Nur Sultan, on Wednesday.

“Yes, it [the summit] is planned. We are preparing to hold it early next year. It will depend on the pandemic situation. But in general, we have agreed to hold the summit. Most likely, we will be able to hold it in February or March,” the Iranian diplomat said.

Khaji said the issue was on the agenda of talks in Nur-Sultan and will be reflected in a separate provision of the guarantor nations' final statement.

When asked whether the summit

will be preceded by a foreign ministers' meeting, he replied: “Yes, we have agreed on the matter. It will be next year. In January or early February, we will hold a meeting of foreign ministers, and a summit will follow that.”

He also said that the next international Astana format meeting on Syria will be convened within a few weeks after the summit of Russia, Iran and Turkey. “It [the date] depends on the summit, several weeks after the summit,” the Iranian diplomat said.

On July 1, 2020, Russian,

Iranian and Turkish leaders held an online summit dedicated to Syrian regulation, discussing the prospects of a face-to-face meeting in Tehran when the epidemiological situation improves.

The 17th round of talks between the Syrian government and the opposition started in Nur-Sultan, the new name of the Kazakh capital that was called Astana until March 2019, started on Tuesday. Special representatives of Iran, Russia and Turkey, as guarantors Syria truce, are mediating between the Syrian government and the opposition.

The recent tornado in the U.S. kills at least 100 people in five states due to the government's weak response. But here is the deadliest natural disaster list of the last 120 years.

Name and Year	Casualties
The Great Galveston hurricane (1900)	6000
The worst North American heatwave (1936)	5000
San Ciriaco hurricane (1899)	3000
The Great San Francisco earthquake (1906)	3000
Hurricane Maria (2017)	2064
Okeechobee hurricane (1928)	1836
Johnstown Flood (1889)	2208
Chenière Caminada hurricane (1893)	2000
The most devastating forest fire (1871)	2500
Hurricane Katrina (2005)	1836

Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul freight train launched

From page 1 ▶ The length of the Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul railway is 6,500 km, of which 2,570 km is in Iran, 2,000 km in Turkey and about 1,900 km in Pakistan, which takes less than half the shipping time and will also be safer and more economical as compared to road.

The freight train will be operated regularly on Tuesday of every week. The freight train had nine wagons initially, said a senior railway official.

As per present arrangement to start the train and the schedule agreed jointly by Turkey, Iran and Pakistan, the running time between Drence-Kapikoy (Istanbul) and Zahedan-Tabraiz



(Iran) will be 90 hours each. From Zahedan to Islamabad, the train would take 135.5 hours.

Industry Ministry should set up an independent department for SMEs



TEHRAN- Given the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), at least one independent department should be established in Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade for them so that they will be specifically supported, a board member of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA) stressed.

Criticizing the same view toward the SMEs as that toward the large industries, Keyvan Kashefi said: "The rules and regulations are the same for both categories of industries, which puts double pressure on small and medium industries."

Today, about 80 percent of Iran's exports are made by about 1,200 large companies, and this has led to the focus of attention and resources, especially the governmental resources, on these industries; he lamented, adding, "Although large industries are driv-

ers of the economy and should be considered, small and medium industries should not be neglected."

He further considered the neglect of small and medium industries as the main harm to the country's economy.

Iran's Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade's data show that 31.187 trillion rials (about \$107.5 million) has been paid to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and semi-finished industrial projects with an over 60 percent physical progress during the first three months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-June 21).

The mentioned facilities, which are provided for renewing machinery, equipping production units, or completing semi-finished projects, have been paid in the form of bank loans to 917 projects and production units.

The program for offering bank facilities to SMEs and semi-finished projects was kicked off in February 2019 by the Industry Ministry in collaboration with the Central Bank of Iran (CBI).

According to the Industry Ministry data, under the framework of the mentioned program 2,023 SMEs and semi-finished projects in 31 provinces registered to receive facilities in the said quarter.

Gas storage at Shourijeh to be increased by 100% in 3 years

TEHRAN - The amount of gas storage at Shourijeh storage facility will be risen by 100 percent in the next three years, the managing director of Iran Gas Engineering and Development Company announced.

Reza Noshadi said that the daily storage capacity of Shourijeh will rise to 40 million cubic meters (mcm) from 20 mcm.

As one of the world's top gas producers, Iran has been following a plan to expand its underground natural gas storage capacity to ensure that enough natural gas is available during peak demand periods to avoid electricity supply shortfalls in the future.

According to the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC)'s plans, the capacity of the two storage facilities, Sarajeh and Shourijeh, is planned to increase to over seven billion cubic meters in near future.

As recently announced by Iranian Gas Transmission Company (IGTC)'s Managing Director Mehdi Jamshidi-Dana, Gas transmission in Iran has hit a new record of over 844 million cubic meters per day (mcm/d) as compared to the previous year.

According to the IGTC head, the transmission capacity of the national gas network has currently reached 818 mcm/d.

Colombo to settle \$251m oil import dues to Iran by bartering tea

TEHRAN- Iran and Sri Lanka signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) based on which Sri Lanka will settle \$251 million in oil import dues owed to Iran by bartering tea.

The agreement was inked by Head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) Alireza Peyman Pak and Sri Lanka Minister of Plantation Ramesh Pathirana in Colombo on Tuesday, TPO portal published.

Announcing the finalization of an agreement for the release of Iran's delayed claim in Sri Lanka, TPO head said, "Nine years ago, about \$250 million of Iranian oil exports to Sri Lanka was blocked and the possibility of payment did not exist. Fortunately, in the recent negotiations, we reached an agreement to return this money and its profit to Iran in the form of goods such as tea."

"During the Iranian

delegation's visit to Sri Lanka, fortunately, very good talks were held with representatives of the government and the private sector, and the two sides stressed the need to expand economic cooperation. During this meeting, we met with minister of plantation, officials of Trade Development Council, and head of Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka, and the outcome of all negotiations will be positive", the official underlined.

Iran is among the top 10 importing countries of Ceylon Tea for the past several decades.

Due to U.S. sanctions imposed on Iran and the absence of an accepted payment mechanism through the banking system, Sri Lanka tea exporters found it difficult to receive export proceeds from Iranian buyers.

The proposed scheme is to seek the possibilities of operationalizing a mechanism



TPO Head Alireza Peyman Pak (L) and Sri Lankan Minister of Plantation Ramesh Pathirana

to settle the long outstanding debt of \$250,925,169 to the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) by Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) through increasing the export of Ceylon Tea, the Ceylon Today reported.

Meanwhile, during the TPO head's meeting with Sri Lankan minister of plantation and the head of Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka, the two sides emphasized establishment of a joint chamber of commerce, establishing Iranian production units in the field of dairy and food industries in Sri Lanka with the aim of re-exporting to countries without tariffs, exporting tractors and Iranian petrochemical products to Sri Lanka in order to develop trade relations between the two countries.

During this visit, Peyman Pak, while explaining the industrial capacities of the country and the measures

taken to develop Iran's trade interactions with the countries of the region, introduced Iran's achievements in the field of medical equipment, medicine and knowledge-based products.

He also considered the establishment of direct relations between Iranian and Sri Lankan businessmen as the best way to develop trade relations between the two countries and suggested the establishment of a joint Iran-Sri Lanka Chamber of Commerce.

The Sri Lankan minister for his part referred to Iran's admirable achievements in various fields of industry, mining and knowledge-based products, and expressed his country's full readiness and welcome to import knowledge-based products, establish assembly lines for Iranian products and cooperate with the Iranian side in exploration and production of minerals.

Over 2.184m applicants register in National Housing Action Plan



TEHRAN- As announced by Ministry of Transport and Urban Development, 2,184,530 applicants have already registered in the National Housing Action Plan.

Registration started on October 20, 2021 and will wrap up on January 5, 2022.

Commenced in winter 2018, the National Housing Action Plan aims to construct 400,000 small and medium-size apartments (70-100 square meters in size) across the country and particularly in Tehran, where housing prices have risen most sharply.

Nearly half of the total number of the said houses will be constructed in Tehran's suburban "new towns" such as Parand and Pardis, respectively located in the west and east of the city.

Back in March, former Transport Minister Mohammad Eslami had announced

that 510,000 residential units will be provided for the applicants under the framework of the National Housing Action Plan during the current year.

In early September 2019, the registration of the National Housing Action Plan was started from Kerman Province. The second round of registration began in ten other provinces in November that year.

Applicants in Sistan-Baluchestan, Qom, North Khorasan, and South Khorasan provinces registered first and those from

Kordestan, Kohgiluyeh-Boyer-Ahmad, and Golestan came in the second stage, while from Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari, Hamedan, and Yazd provinces came in the third stage.

In mid-November, Transport and Urban Development Minister Rostam Qasemi said the construction of 700,000 affordable housing units has begun across the country under the framework of the new phase of the National Housing Action Plan.

Speaking to the press on the sidelines of the second meeting of the government's Supreme Housing Council, Qasemi said the land for the construction of 2.4 million housing units has been prepared and allocated.

Pursuing the National Housing Action Plan, which is aimed to provide people with affordable housing units, the new government has defined a comprehensive program to construct such housing units all over the country.

The official noted, "In the first phase of our new program for the National Housing Action Plan, the construction of two million housing units has been started across the country and the share of each province has been determined."

National Housing Action Plan is aimed to provide people with affordable housing units

"In today's meeting, which was attended by governors of different provinces in the form of video conferences, it was decided that the land allocations for the construction of four million housing units will be determined by the end of the current [Iranian calendar year] year (late March 2022)," the minister said.

He further mentioned a memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed with the Mostazafan Foundation, noting: "According to the signed memorandum, 900 hectares of the foundation's lands throughout the country will be handed over [to the Transport Ministry] free of charge to be allocated for the National Housing Action Plan."

TEDPIX climbs 40,000 points on Wednesday

TEHRAN- TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), gained 40,652 points to 1.359 million on Wednesday.

As reported, over 5.534 billion securities worth 43.65 trillion rials (about \$150.517 million) were traded at the TSE.

The first market's index rose 34,305 points and the second market's index gained 67,655 points.

TEDPIX lost 56,000 points (4.3 percent) to 1.293 million in the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday).

During the past week, the indices of Mobarakeh Steel Company, Iran Khodro Company, Social Security Investment Company, National Copper Company, and Barekat Pharmaceutical Group were the most widely followed ones.

As stated by a capital market analyst, the national budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year (begins on March 21, 2022) indicates that the government has a more positive view on the market

for the upcoming year.

According to Peyman Hadadi, the allocation of a separate budget for the Capital Market Development and Stabilization Fund shows that the government is taking the necessary measures to provide stronger support for the market and to ensure its growth in the future.

"The allocation of a budget line for the Capital Market Development and Stabilization Fund is considered one of the most important points of the [Iranian calendar year] 1401 budget bill," Hadadi said.

The expert also pointed to the imposition of tax on rival markets including the housing market as another important and influential change in the next budget bill and said: "Taxation of luxury cars and expensive housing, along with taxation of bank deposits of legal entities, is also one of the important issues that should be appreciated about the budget bill."



He also mentioned the elimination of subsidized foreign currency allocations and noted that this would create huge changes in the market and will be the starting point for some positive progress in some industries active in the market.

The elimination of subsidies on foreign currency is not only beneficial for the country's macro-economy but also has a positive effect on the capital market transactions, the analyst said.

Meanwhile on December 18, Head of Iran's Capital Market Development and

Stabilization Fund Amir-Mehdi Sabaei said the National Development Fund of Iran (NDF) is going to deposit 120 trillion rials (about \$510 million) into the fund to support the stock market.

"According to a recent decision of the government's Economic Coordination Headquarters, 120 trillion rials of new deposits will be made by the National Development Fund, which will be gradually transferred to the account of the Capital Market Development and Stabilization Fund," Sabaei said.

Sabaei noted that the fund can also be financed through the money and capital markets; while other proposals such as the transfer of government assets worth 500 trillion rials (about \$1.68 billion) to the fund have also been suggested to strengthen the fund's financing capacity.

As IRNA reported, allocation of financial resources from the National Development Fund to the Capital Market Stabilization Fund is one of the measures that the government has been taking since the

stock market started a downward trend.

Following the 13th government's new strategies to improve the stock market, the Government Economic Coordination Headquarters convened a meeting on November 2, chaired by President Ebrahim Raisi, during which a decision was made to inject new resources from NDF into the Capital Market Development and Stabilization Fund.

The allocation of the above-mentioned funding is also part of the outcomes of the November 2 meeting.

Based on the statute of Capital Market Development and Stabilization Fund, the resources of this fund can be provided from three main sources, the first is the government investment which should be foreseen in the national budget bill, the second is the allocation of one percent of the NDF resources for this fund, and the third source would be the allocation of a part of the trades commission received by the Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO).

Sophisticated people know Iran has no plan to build nuclear weapon: American scholar

From page 1 ▶ No, I am seeing no realistic movement in the talks. President Biden is in political trouble in the United States at present, and is facing furious attacks from Republicans. If Biden gives in to Iranian demands, he will be opening the door to further attacks and will be weakened further. Iranian leaders are declaring that they are not feeling pressured to make any concessions to the United States and are willing to wait indefinitely. Additionally, Iran is seeking economic relief from China, Russia, and India who are willing to circumvent American sanctions. European partners in the JCPOA are not willing or able to pressure either the United States or Iran to budge from their locked-in positions. China and Russia are not in a position to persuade the United States to act, since they themselves are under U.S. sanctions and political attack. So while talks continue in a cosmetic fashion, there has been no breakthrough, and no prospect of one.

Biden was able to start the discussions to revive the JCPOA sooner but he is moving too slowly for domestic reasons and now the negotiations are in a stalemate. What is your comment?

This is my view as well. I would go further. Neither Biden nor the Iranian leadership feel confident enough in their domestic strength to be able to make any concessions



to the other side without losing power domestically. This situation is a formula for stalemate.

Some observers argue the JCPOA can never meet Iran's economic demands because no one in the West, including the U.S., is ready to invest in the country, especially as there is no guarantee the U.S. would not quit the deal again. Do you agree with this idea?

I don't believe this to be true. In fact, there are hundreds and hundreds of companies that are anxious to do business with Iran. Iran's largest trading partner at one time was Italy. Italy is ready and willing to resume trade with Iran. Many American companies, especially petrochemical companies, are anxious to work with Iranian concerns. Iran has many things going for it—immense natural resources,

a remarkably well-educated population, a well-developed infrastructure, and a government that is willing to facilitate trade and economic development.

Why do the Iranians and their American counterparts fail to reach a common logic when it comes to nuclear talks?

There must be a win-win solution to this problem, or it will not happen. The United States does not “need” Iran as much as Iran needs the lifting of trade sanctions by the United States. Frankly, sophisticated people know that Iran does not have a nuclear weapons program and will not manufacture a nuclear weapon. So for the United States the chief value in returning to the JCPOA is to demonstrate American facility in diplomacy, and to have a political “win” for

President Biden. On the other hand, Iranians have an economic escape route in dealings with China and Russia, and the cosmetic “lever” of increasing or decreasing nuclear enrichment as a negotiating device, however inconsequential. Iran can afford to wait, and the United States is under no real pressure to negotiate or make concessions. Hence the stalemate.

The U.S. is defying Iran, Russia, and China simultaneously. Is it reasonable to confront all of them at the same time?

It is a serious balancing act that at present the United States is not handling very well. The fact that Iran, Russia, and China are all involved in the JCPOA negotiations makes things even more complicated. While the United States is on bad terms with China and Russia they might as well not be participating at all in the JCPOA talks, because their differences with the United States make it impossible for them to be persuasive.

Moreover, they themselves are not going to make any concessions to make return to the JCPOA possible. Can anyone imagine that Russia would say: “We will pull our troops back from the Ukraine border,” or that China would say: “We will honor Hong Kong’s political independence,” “if the United States eliminates sanctions on Iran”? That is beyond the realm of imagination.

New analysis further links Israeli spyware to Khashoggi’s murder

New forensic analysis has revealed that operatives of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) installed the Israeli Pegasus spyware on the mobile phone of the wife of murdered Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi just months before his torture killing.

The analysis, conducted by the Canada-based Citizen Lab privacy and security research laboratory, further exposed that executives of Pegasus’ maker – NSO group – lied when they claimed last summer that Khashoggi and his associates, including his Emirati wife, Hanan Elatr, were targeted by the spyware in a surveillance operation on behalf of the UAE government. The Washington Post reported on Tuesday.

According to the report, a forensic investigation of two Android cellphones owned by Elatr discovered that an unknown individual used one of the phones to visit a website that uploaded the Israeli spyware onto the phone. This occurred after UAE security agents at Dubai’s airport confiscated the phone from Elatr just months prior to Khashoggi’s murder in Saudi Arabia’s consulate in Istanbul, Turkey. Further analysis by the Citizen Lab also suggested the website was controlled by NSO group on behalf of “a customer” in the UAE.

Phone numbers belonging to Elatr and to Khashoggi’s Turkish fiancée, Hatice Cengiz, were also found in a list of 50,000 numbers in a data leak that revealed potential targets of the Pegasus spyware, the report adds.

The list also contained numbers belonging to hundreds of more government officials – including French and South African presidents, the Pakistani prime minister and several Africa-based US embassy officials – along with a total of 180 journalists that included major US and European news outlets.

The reported data leak was part of a larger investigation by a coalition of news outlets around the world. The investigation, branded The Pegasus Project, exposed a massive targeting of journalists, human rights activists and politicians.

According to the daily, the international probe found that authoritarian governments have used Pegasus against journalists, human rights defenders, diplomats, lawyers and pro-democracy opposition leaders, with new revelations continuing to roll out. France found traces of the spyware on the phones of five of its ministers. After initial denials, Hungary also admitted using the spyware.

The deep technical sophistication of surveillance exploits developed by the Israeli spyware company was recently revealed in a blog post from Project Zero, a Google security research group. The post offered details of a “zero-click” exploit for iMessage in which a target’s cellphone would be compromised simply by sending them an SMS message containing a link, without the need for the target to open or read the message.

NSO’s operations have long been shrouded in secrecy. In the face of growing evidence of the company’s willingness to assist repressive and authoritarian regimes around the world, including the surveillance of some American officials, however, the US government has begun to take action against the Israeli company.

According to the report, the Israeli regime’s military requires NSO to get its approval before selling Pegasus to a country to ensure that the sale is in line with interests of the occupying regime. NSO says it has sold Pegasus to 60 government agencies across 40 countries.

NSO was recently placed on a blacklist by the US Department of Commerce, forbidding US companies from providing NSO with goods or services. Even a group of US lawmakers has urged the imposition of stricter sanctions on NSO Group and other spyware firms, which would freeze bank accounts and bar their employees from traveling to the US.

The UAE, a federation of monarchies in the Persian Gulf, has been one of NSO’s most notorious clients, the report underlines. The despotic regime has used Pegasus against anti-regime activists, journalists and even a royal princess attempting to escape her father, the

international media investigation and others have found. In October, a British court revealed that NSO Group ended its contract with the UAE because Dubai’s ruler had used it to hack the phones of his ex-wife and her lawyer, a member of Britain’s House of Lords.

In the past, the UAE has also denied allegations that it used Pegasus against human rights activists and other civil society figures.

The UAE, meanwhile, remains a close ally of Saudi Arabia. In 2013, the two countries signed a mutual security agreement promising cooperation on intelligence and law enforcement matters. The UAE has spied on Saudi dissidents abroad and sent them to Riyadh, according to human rights groups and a recent lawsuit filed in a US federal court in Portland, Oregon, on behalf of an imprisoned Saudi human rights activist.

According to The Post, Elatr – Khashoggi’s fourth wife after his three divorces – feels forgotten in the wake of her husband’s murder. “She found out he had disappeared via Twitter after waking up from a long flight, alone in her apartment in Dubai. While she was dealing with the likelihood he had been murdered, she was also learning that he was planning to marry another woman.”

At the time, Khashoggi’s new fiancée, Hatice Cengiz, was waiting for him outside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. He had gone there to obtain a document necessary to marry her. Instead, he was murdered with the approval of Saudi leader Mohammed bin Salman, US intelligence later affirmed.

Elatr, meanwhile, has struggled for attention. Many of Khashoggi’s friends in Washington did not know about his marriage to her in Virginia in June 2018.

“Nobody knew her. Jamal had kept it a secret,” said Sarah Leah Whitson, a longtime human rights advocate and the executive director of Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN), a Mideast-focused organization founded by Khashoggi. “I don’t know what was going on in his head.”

(Source: Press TV)

UN to cut food aid to Yemen due to lack of funds

TEHRAN – The World Food Programme has said it has been “forced” to cut aid to Yemen due to a lack of funds and warned there will be a surge in hunger in the war-torn country in the coming months.

Nearly eight years of fighting between Saudi-backed government forces and Houthi rebels in Yemen has created what the United Nations has called the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.

The food-assistance branch of the United

Nations has announced that it will reduce food rations for millions of Yemeni people from next month due to funding shortage, as a protracted Saudi-led bombing campaign pushes more people into hunger in the impoverished country.

In a statement released on Wednesday, the World Food Programme (WFP), which feeds 13 million Yemenis, said eight million will receive a reduced food ration from January, while five million at immediate risk of slipping into famine conditions will remain on a full ration.

Families on reduced handouts will receive barely half of the WFP’s daily minimum ration, it added, warning that food assistance and child malnutrition

programmes are also at risk of further cuts. “Every time we reduce the amount of food, we know that more people who are

already hungry and food insecure will join the ranks of the millions who are starving. But desperate times call for desperate measures and we have to stretch our limited resources and prioritize, focusing on people who are in the most critical state,” said Corinne Fleischer, WFP Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

More than half of Yemen’s 30 million

population (16.2 million) face acute hunger, with half of the children under five (2.3 million) at risk of malnutrition.

More than half of Yemen’s 30 million population (16.2 million) face acute hunger.

Earlier, UN agencies, including the WFP, had warned of programme cuts in Yemen after they received only \$2.68 billion of \$3.85 billion requested from donors.

“The Yemeni people are now more vulnerable than ever, reeling from relentless conflict and the deepening economic crisis that has pushed millions into destitution,” Fleischer said.

“WFP food stocks in Yemen are running

dangerously low at a time when budgets for humanitarian crises around the world are stretched to the limit. We desperately need donors, who were so generous in the past, to work with us to avoid this looming hunger catastrophe.”

The WFP has estimated that it needs \$813 million to continue to help the most vulnerable in Yemen through May and \$1.97 billion during 2022 to keep delivering food assistance to families on the brink of famine.

Saudi Arabia launched the devastating military aggression against its southern neighbor in March 2015 in collaboration with a number of its allied states and with arms and logistics support from the US and

several Western states.

The aim was to return to power the former Riyadh-backed regime and crush the popular Ansarullah movement which has been running state affairs in the absence of an effective government in Yemen.

The war has stopped well shy of all of its goals, despite killing tens of thousands of Yemenis and turning entire Yemen into the scene of the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.

Meanwhile, Yemeni forces have in recent months gone from strength to strength against the Saudi-led invaders and left Riyadh and its allies bogged down in Yemen.

Russia calls on NATO to back off

From page 1 ▶ Shoigu says they were equipping firing points in residential buildings and socially significant facilities, training the Ukrainian military, and carrying out other activities. He also said that containers with unidentified chemical components had been delivered near the Russian border to stage provocations in the latest deployment of Western weapons.

Meanwhile, addressing high-ranking Russian military officers, Putin has outlined where his country’s defense priorities are. Russian President Vladimir Putin has warned NATO and the United States against the further deployment of heavy weapons in neighboring Ukraine. He says the weapons are reaching Russian borders and Moscow has nowhere to retreat to; before questioning “Do they think we’ll just watch idly?” Putin has warned NATO’s “unfriendly” eastward expansion “steps” will reach a point where Russia will be forced to respond.

He pointed out that Moscow needs guarantees from Washington that rule out any potential intrusion on Russian borders, he says these guarantees must be “long-term” and they must be “legally binding.”

Assurances by the United States are not enough anymore for Russia.

Putin says that even if the U.S. were to offer assurances that rule out any further NATO expansion, it would be difficult to trust any American officials sticking to their words, given what he labeled as Washington’s track record. He cited examples such as America pulling out of international treaties once it was no longer “interested” in respecting them. Putin pointed to the Open Skies Treaty, which Washington unilaterally withdrew from last year. The agreement was highly praised by the international community as it provided transparency about the movement and deployment of each country’s nuclear weapons. He also noted America’s decision to leave the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002, an agreement clinched in 1972, designed to limit the scale of prospective missile defense systems. He says Washington simply cannot be trusted anymore to honor its promises.

The Kremlin has already sent out two documents, one for NATO and the other for the U.S. which laid out a wide range of assurances aimed at strengthening the security of all parties involved in the escalation of tensions. The proposals focus on the movement of military personnel and hardware. Earlier this month, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov sounded the alarm by expressing Moscow’s concern over a significant number of the bloc’s weapons, including American and British hardware, being moved closer to Russia. The top diplomat warned that this could lead to an all-out provocation.

The Russian President has warned about the possibility of advanced NATO military hardware being deployed to Ukraine, saying that if Western missile systems are stationed on Ukrainian territory, “their flight time to Moscow will be reduced to 7-10 minutes, and if hypersonic weapons are deployed – to just five [minutes].”

The build-up of troops and weapons in Ukraine has been a bone of contention between Russia and NATO. Moscow accuses the North Atlantic Alliance of planning to send intermediate-range nuclear missiles to Kiev. This month, the Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova condemned Washington’s broken pledges, arguing that “since the end of the Cold War, Russia has been repeatedly assured that NATO’s jurisdiction and military forces will not move an inch eastwards.” However, she says “all these promises have been forgotten and not fulfilled. The result is the current sad state of European security.”

There is heightened concern over advanced American weapons systems being delivered to Kiev such as American-made Javelin rocket launchers



being tested and handed to forces in the war-torn Donbas region. Russia says NATO is also planning to send intermediate-range nuclear missiles to Ukraine.

Following Putin’s speech, Shoigu also spoke and revealed that Russia’s new high-tech hypersonic missile, capable of flying through the air at around nine times the speed of sound, has finished testing and will begin shipping to the military in 2022. He also noted Moscow will be investing \$3.5 billion into upgrading the arsenal in the coming years saying “by 2026, the number of carriers of high-precision, long-range weapons will grow by 30%, and the supply of cruise missiles of various types will double.” Shoigu also says that U.S. private military firms are preparing a chemical weapons “provocation” in eastern Ukraine. He claimed that containers with “unidentified chemical components” have been delivered to two cities in the Donbas region.

Last month, Putin highlighted the importance of developing and implementing technology “necessary to create new hypersonic weapons systems, high-powered lasers and robotic systems that will be able to effectively counter potential military threats, which means they will further strengthen the security of our country.”

Tensions have been escalating in the east of Ukraine for several months, with Western officials accusing Russian forces of building up their presence near the demarcation line. Western officials claim Moscow has plans to invade its neighbor. The Kremlin has repeatedly denied the allegations as baseless, saying it has taken steps to beef up its defensive positions in the face of NATO’s growing military presence near Russia’s eastern borders. The Kremlin says Western accusations of a Russian “invasion” are growing anti-Russian “hysteria.” Moscow has also accused the West of encouraging Ukraine to provoke Russia and trigger a military conflict in Donbas.

Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov warned that “if the West cannot hold back Ukraine – and actually encourages it – of course, we will take all necessary steps to ensure our security.” He has also told Russian media that Moscow and Washington will hold the first round of talks on Security Guarantees in January saying “It was agreed that at the very beginning of next year, the first round would be a bilateral contact between Russia’s and U.S. negotiators, they have already been named, they are acceptable for both sides.”

According to the top Russian diplomat, the reaction of his American colleagues to the Russian proposals was “business-like.”

Analysts say the United States has shown a tendency to scare-monger the neighbors of superpowers in regions well beyond U.S. borders. Among some of the reasons they cite, is America’s economic decline as well as its declining image around the world following military interventions that ended up embarrassingly badly for Washington. The scare-mongering is to maintain America’s position as a reliable security partner against a threat (which in reality does not exist) and to keep the American military-industrial complex continuing to function. Essentially critics argue; America’s existence is based on wars and threats and escalating military tensions around the world threats and escalating military tensions around the world.

Iran prepares for influential presence at Fitur 2022

TEHRAN – Tens of Iranian exhibitors, travel insiders, and cultural heritage experts have discussed ways that Iran could experience an influential attendance at Fitur 2022 scheduled to be held from January 19 to 23 in Spain.

A meeting was held on Tuesday to formulate strategies needed for a “strong” presence of the Iran pavilion at the Fitur international tourism fair, CHTN reported.

Digitalization of advertisements, preparation of 3D videos, holding Iranology meetings and workshops, presenting investment packages in the field of the tourism industry, utilizing the capacities of Iranian media in Spain, using exhibition wall screens, and creating visual attractions were among elements agreed by the participants to attain the goal, the report said.

The Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Minister has tasked the Touring & Automobile Club of the Islamic Republic of Iran (TACI) to organize the country's pavilion at the prestigious event to promote tourism attractions, handicrafts, and traditions of Iran.

The Madrid Tourism Fair is the global meeting point for professionals in the sector and the leading fair for receptive and issuing markets in Latin America. It is also the biggest event in Spain around the tourism business, with more than 250,000 attendees



from all over the world, as well as in terms of innovation and the promotion of new tourism segments, technological leadership in tourism management, and knowledge transfer tools.

According to its organizers, this annual event represents an economic impact of 330 million euros, with the consequent direct impact on the recovery of tourism and the invigoration of sectors linked to tourism in Madrid.

The Islamic Republic expects to reap a bonanza from its numerous tourist spots such as bazaars, museums, mosques, bridges, bathhouses, madrasas, mausoleums, churches, towers, and mansions, of which 26 are inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list. Under the 2025 Tourism Vision Plan, Iran aims to increase the number of tourist arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million in 2025.

Permanent crafts exhibit opens near majestic Rayen fort



TEHRAN – A permanent sales exhibition of indigenous handicrafts has opened to the public in Rayen, which is home to a Sassanid-era fort of the same name.

The exhibit embraces six stalls dedicated to personal ornamentations with precious and semi-precious stones, traditional knives and textile, metalwork, leatherwork amongst some other crafts.

Experts say the history of life in Rayen goes back to the times of the Sasanian dynasty (226-651) and even deeper.

Rayen is famed for its handmade knives and blades which are both practical and decorative... And it is home to 45 workshops in which some 120 craftspeople practice the art, a local official said.

Niavaran museum displays rarely-seen objects of treasure trove

TEHRAN – Tehran's Niavaran Museum has put on show sets of rarely-seen relics associated with Yalda Night from its treasury, CHTN reported on Wednesday.

Bringing together intangible and tangible heritage rooted in Iranian culture and preserving a traditional ritual in a cultural and historical setting is part of the reasons for setting up the Yalda Night spread in this museum.

One of the highlights is a special spread traditionally used to decorate a Korsi, featuring historic silver dishes as well as Iranian handmade products, which is displayed in the collection, the report added.

Korsi is a 50-centimeter high four-legged table with a heater underneath it, and blankets and comforters are thrown around it. It is usually decorated with a piece of jajim or kilim carpet. Some cushions and poshti (a kind of cushion leaning against the wall) are also put around Korsi.

In the past, the heating source was a fire pan in which, the coals are put when fired. Families with lower income made a hole beneath Korsi and put the coals in that. However, Korsi was not a mere heater in Persian culture. Its pleas-

ant warmth brought all the family together. They ate winter goodies and listened to each other. During nights, grandparents told stories and narrations while all families sat at Korsi.

Korsi had a crucial part during the Yalda celebration. Also called, Yalda Night, the occasion is celebrated on the eve of the winter solstice, which falls on the last day of Azar (the last month of autumn in the Iranian calendar year). On that graceful night, the winter chill is vanquished and the warmth of love embraces the entire family. It's a time for pleasant family reunions that entails laughter, merriment, and good cheer.

Niavaran Cultural-Historical Complex, covering an area of about eleven hectares, is composed of several landmark buildings, museums, and monuments constructed in the 19th and 20th centuries during the Pahlavi and late Qajar eras. The history of the palace complex stretches back to about 280 years ago when Fath-Ali Shah of the Qajar Dynasty ordered for a summer residence to be built over the then countryside area of the capital. The two-story Ahmad Shahi Pavilion is one of the highlights of the complex.

Journey to Faith: Iran pushes heritage agenda at UNESCO, seeks status for Razavi pilgrimage



From page 1 ▶ The architectural design of the complex has also complied with these traditions and rituals to address the needs of people and the urban landscape. Every year, over 20 million pilgrims visit the holy shrine and perform a set of traditions, one of which is the upper mentioned salutation rituals.

Historical data suggests that the complex has been developed in different stages of time according to the needs of the people and rituals associated with the holy shrine, yet the structure, design concepts, forms, material, tangible and intangible aspects, morphology, entering circumstances, praying rites and the spirit of the complex retained its authenticity and integrity the whole time and with legal and religious support of authorities and people.

Going through the authentic

literature on the initial status of the holy shrine elucidates that the shrine has also had a dome and court composition for the complex at its early stages. During the history of Iran, all the governments have had the concern to preserve and maintain the holy shrine as a value for all the generations and people and as an origin to retain the concepts constantly throughout centuries.

According to UNESCO, the holy shrine is the most significant element giving identity to the urban area of Mashhad. The city is of exceptional examples formed based on the Shia

and pilgrimage culture. From a spiritual point of view, the complex has significance regarding the traditions, view rites to the holy shrine, approaching circumstances, saluting, Tawaf, consecration, etc.

The holy shrine boasts architectural and artistic elements of the Seljuk, Ilkhanid, Timurid, Safavid, Qajar, and the contemporary period.

Its buildings formed progressively during almost a thousand years, around which the city of Mashhad was created according to the needs of this outstanding pilgrimage center. The relation of the city and the holy shrine during different periods lead to a unique experience in the urban planning of the area, a practice which later transferred to the other pilgrim-

age cities by visitors especially Shias.

This way, the complex features a continuous artistic architectural style whose progress spreads over centuries, representing a unique masterpiece of creating a sacred space. It boasts architectural and artistic elements of the Seljuk, Ilkhanid, Timurid, Safavid, Qajar, and the contemporary period. A great number of important structures of the region, including schools, mosques, the memorials of the mystics. Especially in great Khorasan, have been inspired by this complex.

Regarding the cultural, historic, and architectural aspects, as mentioned by UNESCO, the complex could be comparable with several other religious complexes such as “Saint Peter's Tomb” in the Vatican, “Mahabodhi Temple” in India, “Mount Emei” in China and “Lumbini” in Nepal.

Iranian celebrations, music festival one step closer to UNESCO register

TEHRAN – Iranian celebrations and festivities of Yalda, Chaharshanbeh-Suri, Mehregan, and Sadeh as well Regional Music Festival of the country are closer to being inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Heritage list, ISNA reported on Wednesday.

The reason behind this is their recent registration on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage alongside the Silk Roads, which significantly paves the way for becoming UNESCO listed in the future, the report added.

Registration for these festivals took place at an online world summit hosted by the International Information and Networking Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region under the auspices of UNESCO (ICHCAP) in South Korea, and the International Institute for Central Asian Studies (IICAS) in Samarkand on December 10.

The Regional Music Festival of Iran was selected as the only music festival at the meeting.

The festival, which has been held regularly for 14 years, brings together dozens of different types of Iranian music, such as Kurdish, Lori, Bakhtiari, Turkmen, Baluchi, Qashqai, Khorasani, Gilaki, Mazandarani, and others.

The diversity of Iranian instruments and music, and the possibility of establishing cultural exchanges with neighboring countries through regional music are just a few of the important factors that Iran presented for inscribing this festival as a World Heritage.

Yalda

Yalda (the birth of a new sun) and Noruz or Persian New Year (the birth of a new day) are amongst the most popular ancient Persian festivals, which are also celebrated by some countries in western and central Asia.

Also called, Yalda Night, the occasion is celebrated on the eve of the winter solstice, which falls on the last day of Azar (the last month of autumn in the Iranian calendar year). On that graceful night, the winter chill is vanquished and the warmth of love embraces the entire family. It's a time for pleasant family reunions that entails laughter, merriment, and good cheer.

According to the UNESCO website, Yalda



ceremonies, in the best way, point to cultural diversity and human creativity, especially when one considers the wide range of the communities that celebrate it.

Chaharshanbeh-Suri

As every last Tuesday of the Iranian calendar year comes, millions of Iranians make bonfires at sunset to jump over the fire till midnight to observe Chaharshanbe-Suri, just days before Noruz, the New Year holidays.

The festival is held on the night before the last Wednesday of the year when families and friends gather by bunches of open fires and keep them lit till dawn.

Narratives say that ancient Iranians originally observed such time-honored fire festivity in a bid to ward off all the misfortunes and bad omens with hopes that their wishes would come true.

In ancient Persia, the fire was considered a sacred element, a belief that modern Zoroastrians still adhere to. The fire has been supposed to give people its warmth and energy and take away their paleness, sickness, and problems in return.

Mehregan

Mehregan, the largest Iranian festival after Noruz, marks the autumnal equinox when day and night are equal and it dates back to ancient times when the start of autumn brought the start of the new year.

Mehregan typically brings together clusters of Iranian Zoroastrians in celebration of Mithra, an ancient goddess of friendship, affection, and love. The celebrations are usually opened up with keynote speeches by Zoroastrian religious figures and officials, followed by Shahnameh recitations, exciting contests, and other joyful customs.

A key feature for the event is large

Centuries-old Quran manuscript restored

TEHRAN – A historical manuscript of the Holy Quran underwent some rehabilitation work in the western province of Kordestan, the provincial tourism chief has said.

Being kept in the village of Mulanabad, the 300-year-old script needed urgent restoration to regain its original state in the



hands of experienced experts, Yaqub Guylian announced on

Wednesday

That copy of the Holy Quran is considered to be one of the finest in the country, made of paper and covered in leather.

The name Kordestan refers to the region's principal inhabitants. After the Turkish invasion of Iran in the 11th century CE (Seljuk period), the name Kurdistan was

applied to the region comprising the northwestern Zagros Mountains. It was during the reign of Abbas I the Great of Iran's Safavid dynasty (1501-1736) that the Kurds rose to prominence, having been enlisted by Abbas I to help stem the attacks of the marauding Uzbeks from the east in the early 17th century.

School renovation budget up by 17%

TEHRAN – The national budget bill for the next [Iranian calendar] year (starting on March 21, 2022) has proposed a 17-percent rise for the renovation of schools.

A total of 28 trillion rials (nearly \$102 million) was proposed for school renovation in the budget bill, which is 17 percent higher than that of the current year, Mehrolah Rakhshanimehr, director of the Organization for Development, Renovation, and Equipping Schools, said.

Since 2017, the government has contributed more than 60 trillion rials (nearly \$218 million) to school-building donors, he added.

President Ebrahim Raisi submitted the administration's draft of the national budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year 1401, to the Majlis on December 12. The proposed budget amounted to about 36.31 quadrillion rials (about \$123 billion).

Supplying basic goods, treatment, and medical equipment; securing livelihood; supporting production and employment; promoting and supporting non-oil exports and knowledge-based companies are the focal points of the bill.

School building benefactors

Last year, school building benefactors have allocated a sum of 33 trillion rials (around \$781 million



at the official rate of 42,000 rials) to construct educational spaces across the country, IRNA reported.

"Brick-by-brick" national plan started early last year (March 2020 – March 2021), aiming to attract public participation for school construction in deprived areas even by buying a brick.

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

A total of 36 trillion rials (nearly \$857 million at the official rate of 42,000 rials) has been allocated to renovate the schools nationwide

over the past 8 years, Seyed Mohammad-Ali Afshani, former head of the Organization for Development, Renovation, and Equipping Schools, said.

According to Nasser Ghofli, the director of the School-Building Donors Association, 400 school-building charities have been registered in the country so far.

107,000 schools need renovation nationwide

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

schools nationwide.

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

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

About 10 percent of charitable schools are built with the participation of charities abroad. This is a valuable asset, which should be promoted.

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

A total of 28 trillion rials (nearly \$102 million) was proposed for school renovation in the budget bill.

97% of population aged 6-10 are literate

TEHRAN – The average literacy rate for the age group of 6-10 years is 97 percent, according to the latest national census.

Also, the literacy rate among the urban population is 98 percent and that of the rural population is 92 percent, Shapour Mohammadzadeh, head of the Literacy Movement Organization, stated.

Before the [1979] Islamic revolution, according to a census conducted in 1976, over 52.5 percent of the people were illiterate, he said, adding, only 24 percent of women in the country were literate. Also, the illiteracy gap between rural and urban areas was 35 percent.

In the past Iranian calendar year (March 2020-March 2021), the average literacy rate of women and men was reported 96 and 98 percent, respectively, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

Some 50 percent of the activities of the Literacy Movement Organization are focused on literacy empowerment so that there is no return to illiteracy.

The Organization plans to educate more than 30,000 illiterate foreign nationals residing in the country, Mohammadzadeh said in December 2020.

In deprived areas, we will cover up to 70 percent of the education cost, and all our efforts are to solve the problem of illiteracy



cy across the country, he highlighted.

The average literacy rate of the youth (15-24 years old) in Iran is estimated at 97.4 percent, which is almost 6 percent higher than the global average.

The average literacy rate is almost 6 percent higher than the global average.

Iran develops two vaccines of rotavirus, pneumococcus

From page 1 ► **Pneumococcus**

Diseases caused by Streptococcus pneumoniae (the pneumococcus) are a major public health problem worldwide. In the developing world, young children and the elderly are most affected; it is estimated that about one million children die of pneumococcal disease every year.

Streptococcus pneumoniae is an encapsulated bacterium with a polysaccharide capsule an essential factor in virulence. About 90 distinct pneumococcal serotypes have been identified throughout the world, with a small number of these serotypes accounting for most diseases in infants. Pneumococci are transmitted by direct contact with respiratory secretions from patients and healthy carriers.



tients and healthy carriers.

Rotavirus prevalence

Infection by rotaviruses is one of the major causes of childhood diarrhea with an associated high mortality rate (440,000 deaths/year) and is responsible for 25 million medical visits and 2 million hospitalizations every year, especially during the cold season.

The prevalence of rotavirus infections in Iran has been estimated

as 30 -50 percent while the mean Eastern Mediterranean region. The prevalence of rotavirus infection is reported to be 39.9 percent. According to a WHO report, in Iran, 42 percent of gastroenteritis are caused by rotaviruses which are estimated to have inflicted approximately 2000 and 270 deaths in 2008 and 2013, respectively.

This pattern indicated that the rate of rotavirus-caused diarrhea for Iranian children is similar to the rate in the

BCG, polio, hepatitis B, measles, rubella, and mumps (MMR) vaccines are injected to infants and children in Iran.

transfer technical knowledge of the rotavirus vaccine, IRNA reported.

Glaciers in Himalayas melting at 'exceptional' rate, scientists warn

Glaciers in the Himalayas are shrinking far more rapidly than glaciers in other parts of the world, threatening the water supply of millions of people in Asia, new research warns.

The study, led by scientists at the University of Leeds, found that in recent decades, Himalayan glaciers have lost ice 10 times more quickly than they have on average since the Little Ice Age, when glaciers expanded around 400-700 years ago.

The ice loss is occurring so quickly, the research team described the rate as "exceptional", the Independent reported.

The researchers reconstructed the extent and ice content of 14,798 Himalayan glaciers to reveal how large they were during the Little Ice Age. The model revealed that the glaciers we see today have now lost around 40 per cent of their area, shrinking from a maximum of 28,000 square kilometres to around 19,600 sq km today.

During that period, they are believed to have lost up to 586km cubed of ice – the equivalent of all the ice contained today in the central European Alps, the Caucasus, and Scandinavia combined.

Dr Jonathan Carrivick, one of the study authors and deputy head of the University of Leeds School of Geography, said: "Our findings clearly show that ice is now being lost from Himalayan glaciers at a rate that is at least 10 times higher than the average rate over past centuries.

"This acceleration in the rate of loss has only emerged within the last few decades, and coincides with human-induced climate change."

The Himalayas are home to the world's third-largest amount of glacier ice after Antarctica and the Arctic, and are often referred to as the world's "Third Pole".

The researchers warned that the acceleration of melting of Himalayan glaciers has "significant implications" for hundreds of millions of people who depend on Asia's major river systems for food and energy.

These rivers include the Brahmaputra, Ganges

and Indus.

The team used satellite images and digital elevation models to produce outlines of the glaciers' extent 400-700 years ago and to reconstruct the ice surface.

The satellite images revealed ridges that mark the former glacier boundaries and the researchers used the geometry of these ridges to estimate the former glacier extent and ice surface elevation.

Comparing the glacier reconstruction to the glacier now, the researchers determined the volume and hence mass loss between the Little Ice Age and now.

Himalayan glaciers are also declining faster where they end in lakes, which have several warming effects, rather than where they end on land. The number and size of these lakes are increasing so continued acceleration in mass loss can be expected, the scientists said.

Similarly, glaciers which have significant amounts of natural debris upon their surfaces are also losing mass more quickly: they contributed around 46.5 per cent of total volume loss despite making up only around 7.5 per cent of the total number of glaciers.

Dr Carrivick said: "While we must act urgently to reduce and mitigate the impact of human-made climate change on the glaciers and meltwater-fed rivers, the modelling of that impact on glaciers must also take account of the role of factors such as lakes and debris."

Co-author Dr Simon Cook, senior lecturer in geography and environmental science at the University of Dundee, said: "People in the region are already seeing changes that are beyond anything witnessed for centuries.

"This research is just the latest confirmation that those changes are accelerating and that they will have a significant impact on entire nations and regions."

The research is published in the journal Scientific Reports.

No mountain high enough: study finds plastic in 'clean' air

From Mount Everest to the Mariana Trench, microplastics are everywhere – even high in the Earth's troposphere where wind speeds allow them to travel vast distances, a new study has found.

Microplastics are tiny fragments – measuring less than 5mm – that come from packaging, clothing, vehicles and other sources and have been detected on land, in water and in the air.

Scientists from the French national research institute CNRS sampled air 2,877 metres above sea level at the Pic du Midi Observatory in the French Pyrenees, a so-called "clean station" because of the limited influence exerted on it by the local climate and environment.

There they tested 10,000 cubic metres of

air a week between June and October of 2017 and found all samples contained microplastics, the Guardian reported.

Using weather data, they calculated the trajectories of different air masses preceding each sample and discovered sources as far away as north Africa and North America.

The study's main author, Steve Allen of Dalhousie University in Canada, told AFP that the particles were able to travel such distances because they were able to reach great altitudes.

"Once it hits the troposphere, it's like a super-fast highway," he said.

The research also points to microplastic sources in the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

\$22m earmarked for equipping technical-vocational schools

A total budget of 900 billion rials (nearly \$22 million) has been requested to develop and equip technical-vocational high schools across the country in the current Iranian calendar year (ending March 20, 2019), Mohsen Hosseini, an official with the Ministry of Education has announced.

Describing some of the programs and priorities of the technical and vocational training organization affiliated to the Ministry, Hosseini pointed to improvement of technical and vocational training plans as the Ministry's main priority.

Competency-based education and assessment is among the most important programs of the technical and vocational organization, which must be well implemented in all career and technical education high school, he added, Mehr reported on Wednesday.

تخصیص ۹۰ میلیارد تومان اعتبار برای تجهیز هنرستان های کشور

مدیرکل فنی و حرفه‌ای دفتر متوسطه وزارت آموزش و پرورش از تخصیص ۹۰ میلیارد تومان اعتبار برای تجهیز هنرستان‌های کشور در سال جاری خبر داد. به گزارش خبرگزاری مهر، سیدمحمسن حسینی مقدم در دیدار با مدیران هنرستان‌های فنی و حرفه‌ای شهر شیراز و برخی از مناطق استان فارس با تشریح برخی از برنامه‌ها و اولویت‌های وزارت آموزش و پرورش در بخش فنی و حرفه‌ای، گفت: کیفیت بخشی برنامه‌های دفتر فنی و حرفه‌ای اولویت اصلی آموزش و پرورش است.

حسینی مقدم اظهار کرد: آموزش و ارزشیابی مبتنی بر شایستگی از مهمترین برنامه‌هایی است که در آموزش‌های فنی و حرفه‌ای دنبال می‌شود و باید این شیوه آموزش به خوبی مراقبت شده و در همه هنرستان‌ها اجرا شود.

COVID-19 UPDATES ON DECEMBER 22

New cases	2,103
New deaths	44
Total cases	6,177,885
Total deaths	131,211
New hospitalized patients	344
Patients in critical condition	2,821
Total recovered patients	6,016,324
Diagnostic tests conducted	40,082,066
Doses of vaccine injected	114,651,066

