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Iran Sets the Stage for a Deal in Vienna

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Report 

Literacy movement: achievements and plans

By Faranak Bakhtiari

TEHRAN – Shapour Mohammadzadeh, head of the Literacy Movement Organization, described the literacy situation in Iran before and after the Islamic Revolution on the occasion of the forty-second year of the establishment of the Organization.

At that time, a large number of children in need of education were deprived of the opportunity to enter schools, so that, due to the upward trend of population growth, the number of illiterate people was increasing. According to the 1976 census, of the total population of 27.1 million people aged 6 and above, 14.2 million (52.5%) were illiterate.

One year after the Islamic Revolution and due to the importance and necessity of literacy, by the order of Imam Khomeini (RA), in December 1979, the Literacy Movement Organization was established to eliminate illiteracy in the country.

After the establishment of the organization until 1986, nearly 11 million people were added to the country's literate, and the country's literacy rate increased from 47.5 percent to about 61.8 percent.

However, due to various reasons, including the rapid growth of the population and the lack of educational facilities for all children, the absolute level of illiteracy has not only not decreased but has also increased by about 600,000 people.

With the implementation of the literacy mobilization plan in 1990 and the education of more than 4.1 million absolutely illiterate people during a decade, in 1996 the literacy rate reached 79.5 percent (18% increase).

In 2020, the literacy rate has increased to 90.5 percent. But our society still faces about 7.5 million illiterates, but the illiteracy rate in the target group of the organization, which includes 10-49 years old, is about 1.5 million. ▶ Page 7

Interview 

Beijing pursuing balanced foreign policy in Persian Gulf: GSA chief

By Mohammad Mazhari

TEHRAN – Giorgio Cafiero, chief executive officer of Gulf State Analytics (GSA), tells the Tehran Times that “the Chinese pursue a balanced foreign policy agenda in the Persian Gulf.”

The comments by Cafiero comes as Saudi Arabia is building its own ballistic missiles with the help of China, according to United States intelligence assessments and satellite images.

Cafiero also says though there is “no evidence to suggest that the Chinese are intent on replacing the U.S. as Saudi Arabia or other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member-states' security guarantor,” Beijing, Paris and Moscow and noticing that “some of America's traditional allies and partners in the Arab world are doubting Washington's long-term commitment to their security.”

The assessment of U.S. intelligence agencies is that the Saudi kingdom, which is long thought to have acquired missiles from Beijing, is now manufacturing its own, according to a source familiar with the matter and a U.S. official.

Political pundits say this is not a new development that some Arab states in the Persian Gulf region, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, are revising their policy approaches towards the U.S. ▶ Page 5



Israel destroys Palestinians' homes, dreams: again

TEHRAN – Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett has said the country intends to double the number of settlers in the occupied Golan Heights with a multimillion-dollar plan meant to further

consolidate Israel's hold on the territory it captured from Syria more than 50 years ago.

Bennett said the new investment in the region was prompted by the Trump admin-

istration's recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the swath of land in 2019 and by the Biden administration's indication that it will not soon challenge that decision. ▶ Page 5

Foreign Ministry: Iran will name new ambassador to Yemen

TEHRAN — In response to a question posed by the Tehran Times correspondent, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said on Monday that Iran plans to appoint a new ambassador to Yemen.

“Normally, the introduction of ambassadors must go through its own process. Currently, the head of the mission is following up on the work at the Iranian embassy in Yemen.

The new ambassador will be introduced after the approval of the president,” he explained.

Khatibzadeh also commented on the Saudi coalition spokesman's claims that Iran had a role in Ansarallah's retaliatory strikes, saying unfortunately what is happening in Yemen is faced with the silence of the international community and the support of some European countries which sell arms to the self-pro-

claimed coalition that use them against the Yemeni people.

“We are now witnessing a continuation of war in Yemen, as well as an increase in bombings and blind attacks as well as the years-long siege of Yemen that have no other goal than the defenseless people,” he lamented. ▶ Page 2

Iran, Iraq ink deal on completing Shalamcheh-Basra railway

TEHRAN – Iranian Minister of Transport and Urban Development Rostam Qasemi has announced the signing of a deal between the Islamic Republic and Iraq for completing the Shalamcheh-Basra railway, the news portal of the ministry reported.

The connection of the railway from Iran's southwestern Shalamcheh to Basra province in Iraq has been among the issues pursued by the governments of the two countries for many years.

The contract was signed on the sidelines of Qasemi's visit to Iraq, during which he held talks with Iraqi counterpart Nasser Hussein Bandar Al-Shibli, President Barham Salih, and Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi.

Elaborating on the details of the deal, Qasemi said: “The agreement has a clear timetable, and one of its clauses is that implementation of the project will actually begin within the next month.” ▶ Page 4



Iran FM: Co-op with neighbors, promoting economic diplomacy form cornerstones of foreign policy

TEHRAN — Speaking at the fifth session of the history of foreign relations held at the Foreign Ministry building on Monday, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian pointed out that the Ebrahim Raisi administration believes in the promotion of economic diplomacy and cooperation with neighbors as the two pillars of Iran's foreign policy. ▶ Page 2

Hotel occupancy rate in Iran up 40%

TEHRAN – The occupancy rate of hotels in Iran has reached 45 percent, the head of the Iranian Hoteliers Association has announced.

Following the planned measures, the occupancy rate of the country's hotels, which had fallen below five percent because of the outbreak of the coronavirus, has reached 45 percent over the past three months, IRNA quoted

Jamshid Hamzehzadeh as saying on Sunday.

Multiple problems, notably the pandemic, caused a severe impact on the tourism industry, the official explained.

Even before the coronavirus outbreak and in 2019, travel was reduced due to heavy rains and flooding across the country, and the hotel industry had to recoup nearly 100

percent of the costs paid for canceled hotel reservations, he added.

The Iranian hoteliers have lost 220 trillion rials (about \$740 million) over the past two years, he noted.

However, some problems have been resolved and the hotels' condition has improved, he mentioned. ▶ Page 6

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Report 

Venezuela's Maduro 'thanks god' he met Gen. Soleimani, 'won't abandon Palestine'

TEHRAN – The Venezuelan President has heaped praise on the late martyr Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani who commanded the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, saying “commander [Qassem] Soleimani visited Venezuela between March and April of 2019. We were in the midst of the crisis of the electrical attacks launched by the imperialists of the North against Venezuela's electrical system.”

In an interview with the Lebanese based al-Mayadeen news channel, Nicolas Maduro referred to the conversation that took place at the time with the late war hero on various areas of cooperation, including the issue of the electrical system noting that “everything we talked about with him has been implemented.” According to Maduro, “Commander Soleimani was a cheerful and optimistic man in life, and I thank God that I got to know him” saying that “Soleimani faced terrorism and the bloody terrorist criminals, who attacked the peoples of the axis of resistance. He is a brave man.”

He highlighted the importance of “the need to draw lessons from these horrific crimes, such as the assassination of Commander Soleimani” asking “do we want to live in a world where we witness how an order is given from the White House to assassinate a hero of the struggle against terrorism in Iraq, Iran, Syria and Lebanon?” Maduro also stressed the need to “raise our voices once again in rejection of the crime of assassinating the hero of the peoples, General Soleimani.”

Touching on ties between Caracas and Tehran, Maduro says “relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran have ▶ Page 5

Hazfi Cup Round of 16: Esteghlal, Persepolis discover fate

TEHRAN – Esteghlal and Persepolis football teams learned their opponents in Iran's Hazfi Cup Round of 16.

Esteghlal will take on Paykan in Tehran while Persepolis are to play Zob Ahan in Isfahan.

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

Foolad are the defending champions of the competition.

The Round of 16 matches will be held on Jan. 17 and 18, 2021.

Fixture:

- *Zob Ahan v Persepolis
- *Paykan v Esteghlal
- *Nassaji v Gol Gohar
- *Padideh v Mes Rafsanjan
- *Sanat Naft v Kheybar Khoramabad
- *Sepahan v Aluminum
- *Foolad v Mes Kerman
- *Naft Masjed Soleyman v Khalij Fars Mahshahr

Foreign Ministry: Iran will name new ambassador to Yemen

From page 1 ▶ The senior diplomat stated that history will not forget these days, which unfortunately happen by the Saudis and some of their allies.

"Our recommendation is to consider the political solution as the only solution to end the crisis in Yemen today. We stand with the defenseless people of Yemen so that the voice of their oppression can be heard by the world, and we will try to find a lasting solution to the Yemeni crisis as soon as possible," he noted.

Khatibzadeh also commented on Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian's complaint from Saudi Arabia about the delay in the transfer of the deceased Iranian ambassador to Yemen, Hassan Irloo, saying what happened in regard to the transfer of Irloo to Iran was that since he had been injured in the chemical weapons attacks against Iran by Iraq's Saddam Hussein in the 1980s, coronavirus had a more serious impact on him.

"Because of the illegal sanctions and the inhumane siege on Yemen, the facilities were not provided to medically address his situation in Yemen. From the beginning, we tried to transfer him. At first, we asked one or two countries in the Persian Gulf to help, but we had delays in responding, and then Iraq entered at the level of prime minister and talked with the Saudis. However, the transfer was several days after the requests, and maybe if he had been come to Tehran earlier, we would have had him among us and this will remain in the historical memory of the nation," he elaborated.

Iranian negotiators don't allow outside issues to affect Vienna talks: official

TEHRAN – A senior Iranian judicial official says the United States and certain other Western countries are abusing the issue of human rights as a "political tool" to advance their foreign policy goals, noting that the Iranian negotiators don't allow outside issues to affect the trend of talks in Vienna.

In an interview with Tasnim published on Monday, Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran's human rights chief and deputy Judiciary chief for international affairs, said the West is using the issue of human rights against other countries for "political purposes" whenever it fits their interests.

For Americans and Europeans, Gharibabadi said, the pains of the people who are suffering from shortage of medicine and medical equipment due to the cowardly sanctions against Iran, or the catastrophic situation of people in Yemen and Palestine and other countries don't fall within human rights concerns. However, human

Iran FM: Co-op with neighbors, promoting economic diplomacy form cornerstones of foreign policy

From page 1 ▶ Below are excerpts from his speech:

Today, the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran relies on two principles in its foreign policy: Cooperation with Iran's neighbors, and promotion of economic diplomacy.

If we examine these issues accurately, these two pillars imply that Iran, after a century of separation from its peripheral regions, is now determined to open the door to intra-regional cooperation. In this direction, the cross-border Iranian community network can play an important role, a role that is fully consistent with the work of immigrant communities displaced from Iran.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, without discrimination and prejudice, and with open arms, is ready to provide facilities for the establishment of commercial, industrial, financial, economic and capital infrastructure in the geography of its neighbors and in the heart of the world. Prioritizing increase at level of cultural contacts and social exchanges in the public diplomacy plan of the foreign ministry in the coming months with new and creative initiatives will be another policy that is set as soon as possible and with a comprehensive view of cooperation with society. [Problems of] Iranians abroad should be on the agenda of my colleagues. In addition to this comprehensive view, what is extremely important and effective is:

- Providing consular services and facilities
- Ensuring continuous and worry-free comings and goings;
- Change in citizenship laws for children born to Iranian mothers in consultation with the Islamic

Iran, Saudi Arabia have reached commonalities

Elsewhere, when faced with questions about Tehran-Riyadh talks in Baghdad, the spokesman said the two sides have now reached a common ground.

"Our talks with Saudi Arabia are moving forward with an understanding of commonalities. We have certain differences on some issues, but we are trying to take a path that results in greater benefits for the region and the two nations. Iran has announced its readiness to attend the fifth round (of talks) in Baghdad, and three diplomats have been granted visas to begin reopening Iran's representation office in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Jeddah, which could be a prelude to this," he said.

He added that Tehran has given a list to Riyadh and is now awaiting response.

"We gave the list to the other side and we are waiting to receive the answers. There are differences and the two sides are trying to move forward with a constructive approach and we are waiting to get the answer and we are ready for the fifth round in Baghdad," the spokesman noted.

Previously, the Iranian foreign minister had informed the press about Iran's initiatives presented to Saudi Arabia.

"I want to underline that in the most recent round of talks, we offered the Saudi side a series of practical and constructive ideas. The delegates from the two nations will convene in Baghdad soon to work on the next phase of the agreement's implementation," he stated in a joint press conference with his Iraqi counterpart on December 23.

rights get special importance when the Western interests are being jeopardized, Iran's former diplomat lamented.

The chief of Iran's Human Rights Headquarters cited some examples of human rights violations by the United States.

"Violent and discriminatory behavior toward the blacks, open and widespread violation of refugees and immigrants, occupation of the massacre of the innocent people in other countries are only a shred of the back record of the United States in areas of human rights," he stated.

"Anyhow, today we are facing a situation in which the issue of human rights has turned into a tool for issuing baseless resolutions against countries such as the Islamic Republic of Iran and also a 'whip' at the hands of the West for beating the countries independent from the West."

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Consultative Assembly;

- Facilitate the provision of financial services
- Banking facilities to the Iranian community far from home
- Resolving legal problems and lawsuits through secure communication systems in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic to alleviate the concerns arising from the four events (birth, death, marriage and divorce) for the transnational Iranian community that cannot come and go because of the possibility of contracting common diseases during this epidemic.

The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran with the slogan of "No to the East and the West", which is a clear example of anti-arrogance and also with two approaches to rights and democracy, hopes rise for cooperation and empathy with all members of the Iranian nation, including compatriots living in the country or community of Iranians abroad. There is also readiness to take rapid steps towards regional cooperation through relations that exist in the periphery of Iran and with which we have lived for centuries in the context of a common culture and civilization.

Therefore, it is necessary for the research center of the foreign ministry to try to direct applied research projects on the issues and problems of cross-border Iranian communities by compiling new topics. Then share the results with other specialized institutions in the government and parliament to draft plans and bills. As the foreign minister, I will use all my strength to achieve this goal in cooperation with my colleagues, and I am confident that in this path we will enjoy the blessings of our compatriots and the guidance of esteemed professors and researchers.

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro said on Sunday he will soon visit Iran to finalize new agreements on cooperation with the West Asian country, which has become Venezuela's top ally in boosting oil output amid U.S. sanctions, Reuters reported.

Venezuela and Iran have strengthened their ties since last year.

Maduro's government has received vital equipment for its oil industry from Iran, which in return has received crude and other primary resources from the South American country. Iran has been crucial for Venezuela's rising oil production in 2021.

"I am going to Tehran very soon, for a visit that President (Ebrahim) Raisi offered me, so that we meet in person, to hold conversations and sign new agreements ... and speed up processes of cooperation," Maduro said during an interview with satellite news broadcaster Al Mayadeen in Spanish, which was later broadcast on Venezuelan state television.

Maduro said he has had two telephone conversations with Iran's president, adding that they have agreed to work on new plans, without providing details. He also did not give a date for the visit but described the two countries as "fighters."

In 2022, Venezuela will also look to reactivate means of cooperation with Arab countries, Maduro added, saying that "they love us in the Arab world, I know that Arab governments and

Maduro to visit Iran very soon

Maduro says Venezuela and Iran have agreed to work on new plans



peoples love Venezuela."

The tightening of U.S. sanctions since 2019 has affected Venezuela's ability to sell crude and import fuel, which has exacerbated gasoline shortages across the country.

Iran, Venezuela expected to sign 20-year cooperation accord during Maduro's visit

Iran will sign a 20-year cooperation accord with Venezuela when Maduro visits Tehran.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian broke the story in a joint press conference with

his Venezuelan counterpart Felix Plasencia in Tehran on October 18.

A joint economic cooperation commission, which will be formed in Iran's capital before the end of the year, will finalize the details of the agreement, Amir Abdollahian said.

"All of this confirms that relations between the two countries are on the rise," the Iranian foreign minister said, adding that some of the agreements made earlier on cooperation on a wide range of issues, including energy, are currently being implemented.

Plasencia's visit to Iran came

shortly after Reuters reported that an Iran-flagged supertanker, carrying two million barrels of heavy crude provided by the Venezuelan state-run oil firm, was about to set sail for Iran.

The vessel had reportedly arrived in Venezuela in September carrying 21 million barrels of Iranian condensate.

The exchange was part of a swap deal between the two countries that defies unilateral United States sanctions on both states.

During the joint press conference, Iran's chief diplomat expressed full support for the people of Venezuela and President Maduro, saying U.S. policies on Venezuela are "unconstructive".

"In bilateral cooperation, we are now on a path where Iranian goods are accessible in several Venezuelan cities," Amir Abdollahian said.

Plasencia also said devising a long-term cooperation plan between Tehran and Caracas would help defend multilateralism and fight U.S. intervention.

News of the 20-year agreement comes as Iran and China clinched a 25-year cooperation accord earlier this year, with Iran also eyeing a long-term agreement with Russia.

Last month, Iran's years-long bid to become a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was approved, bringing hope to Tehran that new opportunities, in defiance of U.S. sanctions, will now be possible.

Economic diplomacy won't be limited to few European countries: MP

TEHRAN — Mahmoud Abbaszadeh Meshkini, the spokesman of the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of Iranian Parliament, has said Sunday that Iranian economic diplomacy will not be limited to a few European countries.

Meshkini is probably referring to the three European countries of Britain, France and Germany, known as the European troika, which are raising demands that are not conducive to a success of the Vienna talks.

"We should have a balanced relationship with the whole world and establish special relations with powerful countries," he told Fars.

Meshkini referred to the Vienna talks intended to lift sanctions against Iran, saying Iran does not want anything "other than a complete lifting of sanctions, although we assume that the West" is not likely lift sanctions imposed against Iran.

"But," he added, "we must do our job and run the country without paying attention to the pressures, using internal capacities."

The spokesman also said the next Iranian annual budget has been drawn up based on the lifting of economic sanctions.

The next Iranian fiscal years starts on March 21, 2022.

"The annual budget for the next Iranian calendar year has been fixed regardless of the outcome of the negotiations, and we should not tie the country's administration to the negotiations," Abbaszadeh Meshkini insisted.

"This issue has been told to the government by the Majlis (parliament), and we try to get the executive branch to look at the negotiations in a special way," he added.

The MP went on to say that Iran is diversifying its economic interactions with the outside world.

"In recent months, oil sales and export income and foreign trade have increased more than before. Our trade with Central Asian countries has increased by more than 200% over the last three months," he explained.

Iran passes the stage of maximum pressure and turns sanctions into opportunity

Regarding the failure of maximum pressure campaign against Iran, Meshkini said the Islamic Republic has successfully defeated the maximum pressure campaign intended to strangle its economy.

"Westerners admit that the Islamic Republic has passed the stage of maximum pressure, but we must turn this pressure into an opportunity," he said.

The spokesman added that Iran's policy is to neutralize the sanctions.

"The sanctions should be lifted by those who imposed them, but we can, by managing the situation and neutralizing the sanctions, make the Western, arrogant and hostile sides regret it, and make them feel that if they impose sanctions on Iran, they have actually imposed sanctions on themselves," he remarked.

Referring to the need to interact with the countries of the world other than the illegitimate Zionist regime, Abbaszadeh Meshkini said that Iran is not afraid of negotiations.

The also reminded about the bitter experience of negotiations with the American side which resulted in the conclusion of the JCPOA, the official name for the 2015 nuclear deal.

"The Americans were negotiated in the previous

government and at the highest level, i.e. the foreign ministers of the two countries. There were even agreements and the two sides signed commitments, but they did breach the agreements," he lamented.

Media campaign against negotiations in Vienna

Referring to the media campaign against Iran during the Vienna talks, Meshkini said, "The P4+1 group should know that the Islamic Republic has never started a war, but has always vigorously defended the national interests and the rights of its people."

After more than a week-long break, negotiators from Iran and other remaining parties to the JCPOA – Russia, China, France, Britain, and Germany – started talks in Vienna on Monday. The U.S. is participating in the talks indirectly.

The spokesman added that Iran's policy in the negotiations is quite clear, but they are working at the negotiating table behind closed doors on Iran's proposals.

He added, "This is while in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, we worked on their proposals and played in their field. On the contrary, now they are playing in the field drawn up by the Islamic Republic. In the negotiations conducted in 2015, we were in the position of the accused and they tried us. But in recent negotiations, they have been in a position to be held accountable, and we are claiming our rights."

He concluded by saying that the Westerners breached their nuclear commitments without being held accountable and in order to divert public opinion from why they did not fulfill their commitments, they raise questions in cyberspace.

"The Iranian people must be vigilant and improve their media literacy and do not get caught up in the media games of the enemies," he reiterated.

The Four-Days Senseless Massacre of Nogun-ri

At the beginning of the Korean War, US Army ground troops of the 7th Cavalry executed civilian refugees over the course of four days.

1. According to the recollections of victims, US soldiers evacuated them from several villages and lead them to a stream.
2. At dawn, the villagers left the stream and began walking down the Seoul-Pusan highway with other evacuees.
3. When they reached Nogun-ri, several US soldiers appeared, stopped the group, and instructed them to stand on the railroad tracks atop the bridge.
4. The soldiers then radioed for an aerial bombardment and then fled.
5. Soon, fighter jets arrived and strafed the group. Of those who were not killed, many escaped to the tunnel beneath the bridge.
6. For the next four days, July 26-29, soldiers fired at them.
7. Those who survived the four days did so by using dead bodies as shields.
8. US medics visited the group, but did not offer help; they merely checked out the situation under the bridge.
9. It is estimated that 400 died.

TEHRAN – Iran's negotiating team led by Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani arrived in Vienna on Monday after the relatively short break meant to undertake consultations in capitals.

With the Vienna talks kinking in again, Iran has moved to voice its expectations from other parties, especially the European trio – France, Germany and Britain (E3). During the last round, the E3, particularly France, played an unconstructive role in the talks, preventing the negotiators, at least in one case, from hammering out a document that was to serve as the basis for the next round of talks.

The first round of talks under President Ebrahim Raisi began in late November. Since then, two rounds have been held with the current round being the third or based on the European perception, the eighth.

During the two last rounds, Iran presented two proposals on nuclear and sanctions-related measures despite a Western accusation of not being serious and playing for time. The Europeans first rejected the Iranian proposals though they were drafted in strict conformity with the terms of the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). But then were forced to incorporate the Iranian proposals into the two final documents reached at the end of the last round.



A source familiar with the talks told Iran's state news agency IRNA that France played a "disruptive" role in the previous round. According to the source, when the French delegation was absent from the talks due to France's participation in the G7 ministerial summit in Liverpool, "significant progress" was made on preparing the drafts. But the French representative returned to the talks after a two-day absence and "a disruptive trend started again," according to the source.

The source said the drafts were acceptable to all parties but the French negotiators opposed the drafts and "the course of the talks was disrupted."

In addition to the French unconstructive role, the Europeans, together with the U.S., sought to create a sense of urgency by announcing self-imposed deadlines.

Iran, however, said that it will not fall into the trap of "factitious deadlines." Quoting a source with knowledge about the talks, IRNA said Iran's negotiating team will stay in Vienna as long as there is a need.

Iran has also positively engaged in the talks and some progress was made in the nuclear sphere which is germane to Iran. But little has been achieved on the sanctions issue on which the U.S. should play a major role. Despite overall progress, the Europeans tend to portray the atmosphere in Vienna as gloomy. The Western parties are trying to keep the media environment around the talks negative by issuing statements and comments on the content of the talks, in order to put pressure on the Iranian delegation to get concessions, and on the other hand to blame Iran for the possible lack of progress.

This is while Iran has positively engaged and that the ball is in the West's court. But instead of engaging positively, the West continues to foster an atmosphere of urgency regarding the JCPOA.

Recently, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken claimed that the window is closing to resuscitate the 2015 deal. "I'm not going to put a time limit on it or give you the number of meters remaining on the runway, except to say, yes, it is getting very, very, very short," Blinken said.

U.S. special envoy for Iran Robert Malley set the time frame to save the JCPOA at "weeks."

Some observers believe that if the U.S. believes there is an urgency to reach a deal with Iran, then it should relinquish the so-called "maximum pressure" campaign initiated by former U.S. President Donald Trump. But the Biden administration not only refused to give up the campaign but also added to the sanctions on Iran. Furthermore, U.S. officials even began threatening Iran with a military option in case diplomacy failed. U.S. and Israeli officials have held talks to discuss "alternatives." Some believe that Israeli-American talk of other options reflects a strategic confusion on the part of Washington and Tel Aviv vis-à-vis Iran's measured and calibrated moves on the ground and at the negotiating table.

Vienna talks proceed from a new document: Amir Abdollahian

TEHRAN – Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian has said that the talks in Vienna will not proceed from what was achieved on June 20 but from a joint document reached during the latest round of talks.

Speaking to reporters on Monday, Amir Abdollahian said Iran has cast aside the June 20 document, and a new and joint document has been reached during the Vienna talks.

"Today, a new round of talks begins in Vienna. And the issue of guarantees and verification is on our agenda. I think today we have a common and acceptable document on the negotiating table. We call them the December 1 and December 15 documents, both on the nuclear issue and on the sanctions issue. I mean we put aside the June 2021 document and reached a new and joint document," he said.

He added, "From today, our negotiations on that joint document will begin, and among the issues on the agenda in our current negotiations is the issue of guarantees and verification."

He noted, "The most important thing for us is that under these words and issues, we must reach a point where, first, Iranian oil can be sold easily and without any restrictions, and oil money can be deposited in foreign currency in Iranian bank accounts, and we take full advantage of the economic benefits envisaged in the JCPOA."

After a period of consultations in capitals, negotiators from Iran and the remaining parties to the 2015 nuclear deal arrived in Vienna on Monday to resume talks on how to remove U.S. sanctions against Iran.



The latest round of talks was concluded more than a week ago with an agreement on some broad principles based on which the next round of the talks would proceed. The last round of talks faced many ups and downs due to Western refusal to take into consideration the change Iran had undergone in the past months in terms of the election of a new president.

The new negotiating team of Iran led by Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani went to Vienna with a set of new proposals on the nuclear and sanctions spheres. The team brought to Vienna many proposals and it managed to present the proposals in stages. Two of the proposals, one related to nuclear measures and the other on sanctions removal steps, were given to the other side.

While Iran underlined that its draft proposals are subject to negotiations, the U.S. and the E3 - France, Britain, and Germany – chose to portray Iran as an uncooperative and unserious negotiating partner. They even hinted at the failure of the talks based on a figment of their imagination.

On the other side, Iran underlined its seriousness to reach a good and swift deal. In

a recent phone conversation with EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian stressed that a good deal is within reach. He said, "We believe that a good deal is at hand but it requires a shift by some parties away from the language of threat to the language of cooperation and mutual respect that would be also result-based."

Amir Abdollahian further noted on Twitter that such a deal is at hand if the West shows goodwill.

The Iranian foreign minister also commented on the issue of negotiations between Iran and Saudi Arabia on Monday.

Responding to a Fars reporter's question about whether the time of the fifth round of talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia has been decided, he said, "not yet, but we are arranging it"

Iran and Saudi Arabia have been engaged in talks since last April. So far, four rounds of talks have been held but no agreement has been reached.

Amir Abdollahian gas recently said that Iran will participate in the next round of talks between Tehran and Riyadh soon.

Speaking at a joint presser with his Iraqi counterpart in Tehran, the Iranian foreign minister said a new round of negotiations between Iranian and Saudi delegations would take place in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad.

"I want to underline that in the most recent round of talks, we offered the Saudi side a series of practical and constructive ideas. The delegates from the two nations will convene in Baghdad soon to work on the next phase of the agreement's implementation," he stated.

Iran chief negotiator arrives in Vienna

TEHRAN – Deputy Foreign Minister of Iran Ali Bagheri Kani, who leads the Iranian negotiating team at Vienna talks, arrived in the Austrian capital for a consequential round of talks aimed at discussing ways to remove U.S. sanctions on Iran.

Bagheri Kani is scheduled to leave for the Coburg Hotel in the next few hours for diplomatic consultations before the meeting of the Joint Commission of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), state news agency IRNA reported on Monday morning.

The meeting of the Joint Commission of JCPOA is set to be held on Monday afternoon at the level of the heads of the P4+1 negotiating delegations, the European Union and Iran.

In this round, they are supposed to discuss the content of the texts and the roadmap for reviving the 2015 agreement, IRNA said. But the success of this round depends on tough political decisions, especially by the European parties, which did not play a very constructive role

in the previous round, the news agency added.

The European parties are expected to come to the negotiating table more seriously in the forthcoming talks and take practical steps to fulfill their commitments by avoiding media propaganda.

In the last round of negotiations, Bagheri stated, "If the other side accepts the views and logical positions of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the talks of the new round can be the last round of negotiations and we can reach an agreement in the shortest time."

On Sunday, a source close to Iran's negotiation team in Vienna talks said the country would not fall into the trap of "factitious deadlines" that could be set by the 2015 deal's other members, Press TV reported.

Quoted by IRNA on Sunday, the source said the Iranian team sought to stage a "powerful and well-prepared" presence in the talks, and "would stay in the Austrian capital as long as it is needed to."

The previous rounds of the talks

featured discussion about "general issues," the source said, adding that the upcoming talks were expected to focus on contents of a potential agreement.

"If the opposite side is [likewise] prepared to discuss the contents, we can [all] move forward," the source noted.

"Iran is committed to conclusion of a good agreement in the shortest possible time space, but no factitious deadlines [that could be set by the counterparty] would serve to change the country's redlines," it said, asserting, "There is no emergency situation for us in the talks."

The progress that was made concerning the nuclear issues during the previous round of the talks indicates Iran's seriousness about interaction, the source pointed out, adding, "Now, it is the opposite sides' turn to show their good will as regards the issue of the sanctions."

Also, an informed source told IRNA that France sought to throw a wrench into the Vienna talks during the latest round.

SPORTS

Zahra Nemati among top female performers in 2021

TEHRAN – Iranian Para archer Zahra Nemati was chosen by International Paralympic Committee among the top female performers in 2021.

In a year impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and resultant restrictions and regulations, female Para athletes came up with some brilliant performances that left the world amazed.

They won medals, set records, broke new grounds, and opened new gates for others to follow, excelling in their respective fields.

Nemati won gold in women's Individual Recurve open in Tokyo, the third successive gold medal in Paralympic Games.

The reigning World Champion was dominant throughout the competition and kept her opponents at bay. The 36-year-old, who was injured in a car accident in 2003 which left her with spinal injuries and paralysis of both legs, was a taekwondo player and shifted to Para archery in 2009.

Here's a look at top female performers in 2021:

Diede de Groot (Wheelchair Tennis – Netherlands), Zahra Nemati (Para Archery – Iran), Susana Rodriguez (Para Triathlon – Spain), Omara Durand (Para Athletics, Cuba), Leani Ratri Oktilla (Para Badminton, Indonesia), Bebe Vio (Wheelchair Fencing, Italy), Amalia Perez (Para Powerlifting, Mexico) and Sarah Storey (Para Cycling, Great Britain)

Weightlifter Alireza Soleymani to undergo knee surgery

TEHRAN – Iranian weightlifter Alireza Soleymani will undergo a knee surgery next week.

The weightlifter will undergo surgery to repair a meniscus injury.

Soleymani represented Iran in the 2021 World Weightlifting Championships in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

He finished in seventh place with a total of 374kg in the 109kg weight category.

Soleymani will be sidelined for several months due to the surgery.

Bozidar Radosevic will not return to Persepolis

TEHRAN – Persepolis football team Croatian goalkeeper Bozidar Radosevic will not return to the Iranian team.

Radosevic left Iran in early December after the club failed to meet its financial commitment.

This is for the second time he leaves Persepolis in protest to his unsatisfying condition in the team and media reports suggest that he will not return to the Iranian team.

Radosevic joined Persepolis from Hungarian team Debrecen in 2016 but didn't regularly play for the team over the past five years.

Persepolis have encountered so many financial problems during the past years.

Vital Heynen to come to Tehran

TEHRAN – Former Poland volleyball coach Vital Heynen will travel to Tehran, capital of Iran in April 2022.

The Belgian-trained will come to Tehran to teach a three-day volleyball course, Tasnim news agency reported.

Exercise for team preparation, training design courses for advanced teams, team management during the competition and applications of analysis for coaches are among the topics of the course.

Heynen's contract with the Polish team expired in October 2021.

The 52-year-old coach has already traveled to Iran several times as Germany and Poland coach.

Thomas Verheydt on Persepolis' radar: report

TEHRAN – Iran's Persepolis football team have reportedly set their sight on Dutch forward Thomas Verheydt.

The 29-year-old striker currently plays for Eerste Divisie side ADO Den Haag.

Persepolis are looking to win the Iran Professional League (IPL) for the sixth year in a row.

The Reds sit third in the 2021/22 IPL table, three points behind their archrivals Esteghlal.

IPL: January transfer window 2022 will open on Jan. 16

TEHRAN – The 2022 January transfer window of Iran Professional League (IPL) will open on Jan. 16.

The window runs for a month. It opens on Jan. 16 and closes on Feb. 12.

The 2022 January transfer window for the First Division will also open on Feb. 5 and will run until March 3.

The window of Second Division will open on Feb. 12 and will close on March 9.

Everton must sign Sardar Azmoun

TEHRAN – A report from 90min at the beginning of the month claimed Everton had joined the race for Zenit St.Petersburg forward Sardar Azmoun, with the 26-year-old set to be available for free next summer.

However, with the January window now just days away, it would be a good idea for the Toffees to further their interest next month.

Dubbed previously as 'the Iranian Messi', the £22.5m-rated forward has scored ten goals in 21 appearances across all competitions for Zenit so far this campaign, including a goal against Chelsea in the Champions League recently, Football Fan Cast reported.

Furthermore, having joined Zenit from Rubin Kazan three years ago, Azmoun has a prolific record of 62 goals and 23 assists in 104 appearances for the Russian giants. A goal contribution every 1.2 games.

The Iranian has reportedly attracted interest from Everton owner Farhad Moshiri, who is of Iranian descent, and, according to a previous coach of Azmoun, Moshiri previously contacted him and "tried to negotiate a transfer."

The Russian Premier League side may have no choice but to sell the 26-year-old next month in order to receive a fee, with his contract set to expire in just seven months' time.

The Toffees have appeared stuck all season, sitting in an underwhelming 14th place in the Premier League, and are in desperate need of some extra firepower to propel them up the table in order to avoid any nervy moments in the second half of the campaign.

Luckily, signings that initially received a mixed reaction from fans in the summer have exceeded expectations with Demarai Gray (five goals) and Andros Townsend (three goals) helping to fill the void left by star striker Dominic Calvert-Lewin.

Moreover, with the lack of goals from Rondon who has netted only once, Rafa Benitez's side's attacking output could've been much worse.

Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul train enters Iran



TEHRAN- The Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) train, which has resumed its activity with the cooperation of the railways of the three countries, arrived in Iran on Sunday.

The ITI railway project, or ECO freight train, was inaugurated with the first freight train moving on December 21 from Islamabad to Zahedan in southeast Iran.

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 ambassadors 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 further 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.

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.

ITI 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.

Oil Ministry, ACECR sign 4 MOUs, deals to expand co-op

TEHRAN - Iranian Oil Ministry and the Academic Center for Education, Culture, and Research (ACECR) have signed two memorandums of understanding (MOUs) and two contracts for expanding cooperation in various areas.

The mentioned agreements were signed on Monday by ACECR Head Hamidreza Tayebi and the representatives of companies affiliated with the Oil Ministry, Shana reported.

The signing ceremony was also attended by Oil Minister Javad Oji.

As reported, one of the abovementioned MOUs on the feasibility study and planning of reconstruction, overhaul, and supply of drilling equipment was signed between the National Iranian Drilling Company (NIDC) and ACECR, while the other one on consulting services for industrial wastewater treatment of Qeshm Oil Exploitation Unit was signed between Iranian Offshore Oil Company (IOOC) and ACECR.

The deals, on the other hand, include a \$70-million build-own-operate (BOO) contract for the establishment of crude oil processing units using rapid processing equipment with Petroleum Engineering and Development Company (PEDEC) and a contract for the production and supply of 59 rolls of coiled tubing worth five million Euros with the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC)'s Construction Support and Supply Department.

Industry ministry to provide agricultural exporters with affordable air transportation



TEHRAN - Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry has issued a new directive on providing cargo aircraft with subsidized transportation fees for the exporters of agricultural products to facilitate the exports of such products, head of Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) announced.

ment.

The duration of the first contract is 15 months and the second contract is 24 months.

The Academic Center for Education, Culture, and Research is an Iranian public non-governmental higher education institution established in 1980.

ACECR engages in innovative research and development projects in different fields of science and technology and real-world applications. Its activities can be broadly divided into the areas of research and technology, education, cultural activities, and entrepreneurship.

According to Alireza Peyman-Pak, the mentioned directive has been issued in line with the government's programs for supporting non-oil exports to the neighboring countries and also to the Eurasian Union, the TPO portal reported.

"The credit has been provided to be paid as subsidies for air transportation of agricultural products to neighboring countries and the Eurasian Union. Based on this, Trade Promotion Organization of Iran developed the relevant executive procedure [for the allocation of the mentioned fund] in cooperation with the Agriculture Ministry," Peyman-Pak explained.

Iran, Iraq ink deal on linking Shalamcheh-Basra railway



Iranian Transport Minister Rostam Qasemi (R) and Iraqi counterpart Nasser Hussein Bandar Al-Shibli signing contract documents on Sunday

From page 1 ▶ "For almost 20 years, we have had numerous negotiations with the Iraqi side to implement Shalamcheh-Basra railway, and there were even many memorandums signed in different periods, which never reached the desired result," Qasemi said.

"We agreed to start the primary study and implementation of this project within the next month, which is practically a big step for Iran and Iraq to expand trade, and increase freight and passenger exchanges, which is important for

both countries," he added.

Qasemi noted that the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (known as RAI) and the Iraqi Republic Railways will implement the project together and a joint venture will be established within two months.

By linking railways with Iran, Iraq is going to also access Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and the northern regions, including the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Far East.

Mentioning his meetings with Barham Salih and Al-Kadhimi,

the Iranian minister said the two sides have also discussed the facilitation of the presence of Iranian companies in the Iraqi market.

Iranian companies will have a more active role in the reconstruction of Iraq, he said.

"During the meeting with the Iraqi president, talks were held on the general issues of relations between the two countries and the increase of trade and support

for the Shalamcheh-Basra project, as well as air transportation between the two countries and it was decided to double the number of flights between the two countries," Qasemi explained.

"We also discussed road transportation between the two countries and various other issues, which we hope will be supported by the Prime Minister and the President of Iraq," he added.

Over 1.72m tons of commodities traded at IME in a week

TEHRAN- Over 1.72 million tons of commodities worth \$425 million were traded at Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) in the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday).

As reported by IME's Public Relations and International Affairs Department, the exchange traded on its metals and minerals trading floor 1.428 million tons of commodities valued at almost \$252 million.

On this floor, the IME's customers purchased 1.063 million tons of cement, 220,828 tons of steel, 70,000 tons of I-beam, 35,000 tons of sponge iron, 26,000 tons of zinc dust, 10,650 tons of aluminum, 6,460 tons of copper, 880 tons of zinc, 400 tons of coke and 120 tons of molybdenum concentrate.

Furthermore, the IME saw trade 284,194 tons of commodities on both domestic and export pits of its oil and petrochemical trading floor valued almost \$169 million.

Commodities sold on this floor included 82,407 tons of polymeric products, 69,079 tons of bitumen, 55,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 29,638 tons of chemicals, 25,000 tons of lube cut, 17,600 tons of sulfur, 3,690 tons of base oil, 1,300 tons of slops wax and 150 tons of argon.

Last but not least was the IME's side market with 6,091 tons of commodities traded on it.

As previously reported, over 8.376 million tons of commodities worth \$2.433 billion were traded at Iran Mercantile Exchange in the past Iranian calendar month (ended on December 21).

Trades in the oil and petrochemical trading floor of the IME experienced growth of five percent, and seven percent, in value and weight, respectively, in the past month as compared to its preceding month.



The exchange sold on both domestic and export pits of its oil and petrochemical trading floor more than 1.46 million tons of commodities worth over \$940 million.

On this floor the exchange traded 450,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 420,000 tons of bitumen, 396,000 tons of polymeric products, 191,000 tons of lube cut, 133,000 tons of chemicals, 26,000 tons of sulfur, 20,000 tons of oil, 3,800 tons of slops wax, 550 tons of argon and 48 tons of insulation.

Next was the metals and minerals trading floor with trades of 6.701 million tons of commodities valued at nearly \$1.476 billion.

Commodities changing hand on this floor included 4.643 million tons of cement, 1.511 million tons of steel, 241,000 tons of iron ore, 201,000 tons of sponge iron, 41,000 tons of aluminum, 35,000 tons of zinc, 33,000 tons of copper, 12,000 tons of cast iron, 540 tons of molybdenum concentrate, 400 tons of coke, 81 tons of precious metals concentrate and 16 kg of gold bars.

It's worth noting that the IME also played host to trade of 34,095 tons of non-exchange-listed commodities on its side market.

The head of Iran's Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) has said that Iran Mercan-

tile Exchange has made the country's commodity market observable and transparent.

Addressing a ceremony to launch "futures" for the copper cathode deals at the IME on December 20, Majid Eshqi said, "Pricing is one of the problems that has always existed in this market and we still have this problem in some products."

Futures contracts (more colloquially, futures) are financial contracts obligating the buyer to purchase an asset or the seller to sell an asset at a predetermined future date and price.

In a bid for more risk management in the country's capital market, Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE) officially launched futures contract during a ceremony held in December 2018 at the place of Central Securities Depository of Iran (CSDI), which is the sole registrar, central custodian and clearing house for the Iranian stock market.

IME is one of the four major stock markets of Iran, the other three markets are Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), Iran's over-the-counter (OTC) market known also as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB), and Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX).

The value of trades at Iran Mercantile Exchange in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20) rose 108 percent compared to the preceding year.

During the past year, about 3.5 quadrillion rials (about \$83.5 billion) worth of commodities were traded at the mentioned market.

In the past year, several new records were achieved in terms of the volume and value of transactions in the mentioned market's various floors including the industrial, petroleum, and petrochemical floors.

Smart commercial ID card issuance system unveiled

TEHRAN - A smart system for the issuance of commercial ID cards was unveiled on Monday in a ceremony attended by the Industry Mining and Trade Minister Reza Fatemi Amin and the head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Gholam-Hossein Shafeie.

As reported by the ICCIMA portal, with the launch of this system, the process of issuing commercial ID cards has become fully automatic and the human factor has been eliminated.

After applying in this system, it will automatically make 25 different inquiries from various executive bodies in less than one hour to confirm the applicant's eligibility for issuing commercial ID cards.

Speaking in the unveiling ceremony, Head of Central Headquarters for Combating Commodity



Industry Minister Reza Fatemi Amin (L), Head of Central Headquarters for Combating Commodity and Foreign Currency Smuggling Ali Moayed (C) and ICCIMA Head Gholam-Hossein Shafeie

and Foreign Currency Smuggling Ali Moayed said that smartening of commercial ID card issuance will prevent smuggling and corruption to a great extent.

"With the smartening of commercial ID card issuance, the entry of smuggled goods into the country will decrease," Moayed said.

Further at the event, ICCIMA

Head Gholam-Hossein Shafeie underlined the positive impacts of the launching of the mentioned system and said this system is going to reduce the economic costs of ID card issuance significantly.

According to Shafeie, smartening of the commercial ID card issuance system is also going to improve the country's business environment

and improve the country's ranking in the world.

At the end of the meeting, Industry Minister Reza Fatemi Amin said that the government should take four steps for improving the economy including prioritization, regulation, facilitation, and monitoring.

"By smartening the issuance of commercial ID cards, the monitoring process will be intensified and the ways of corruption will be closed. This process eliminates the rent and the golden signatures. Our effort is to move towards a healthy economy," Fatemi Amin said.

He further mentioned launching the country's comprehensive trade system in the near future and said: "If the comprehensive trading system, in which multiple entities are involved, is fully operational, our way of governing the business environment will change drastically."

TEDPIX gains 16,000 points on Monday

TEHRAN- TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), rose 16,302 points to 1.4 million on Monday.

Over 6.699 billion securities worth 40.142 trillion rials (about \$138.4 million) were traded at the TSE.

The first market's index rose 18,135 points, and the second market's index gained 13,352 points.

TEDPIX rose 66,000 points (5.1 percent) to 1.359 million in the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday).

During the past week, the indices of Mobarakeh Steel Company, Iran Khodro Company, Saipa Company, Social Security Investment Company, National Copper Company, and Berekat Pharmaceutical

Group were the most widely followed ones.

On December 18, Head of Iran's Capital Market Development and Stabilization Fund Amir-Mehdi Sabaei has 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.



Israel destroys Palestinians' homes, dreams: again

From page 1 ▶ "This is our moment. This is the moment of the Golan Heights," Bennett said at a special Cabinet meeting in the Golan Heights on Sunday.

"After long and static years in terms of the scope of settlement, our goal today is to double settlement in the Golan Heights," he added.

Just a few days ago, Israeli settlers attacked the northern village of Burqa in the occupied West Bank, according to Palestinian authorities.

The attack under the cover of night came after a settler rally earlier on Thursday had turned violent, with Israeli forces using tear gas and rubber-coated steel bullets against Palestinians.

Dozens of Palestinians were wounded, medics said.

Reporting from West Jerusalem, Al Jazeera's Harry Fawcett said the events were "extremely serious" and further raised tensions in the

area.

"The village of Burqa has been exceptionally tense in recent days. The municipal government of Nablus, the biggest town nearby, said hundreds of Israeli settlers attacked the village ... and dozens were trying to get into individual homes," Fawcett said.

He added that there were clashes between Israeli soldiers and villagers during the course of the day.

The Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) told Wafa news agency that 42 Palestinians, including a journalist, were wounded after being hit with rubber-coated steel rounds, while another 83 sustained suffocation from inhalation of tear gas fired by the Israeli army.

PRCS added that a girl was

treated for shock after a group of Israeli settlers attacked her family's home on the outskirts of the village.

Two ambulances were also hit by Israeli soldiers with stun grenades and tear gas canisters.

The attacks came after an estimated 15,000 settlers gathered near the illegal Homesh outpost, northwest of Nablus, to commemorate a settler killed last week.

Entrances to Burqa had been shut down with earth mounds by the Israeli forces to allow settlers to access Homesh, a pre-2005 Israeli settlement that ultra-Orthodox settler groups are urging the Israeli government to allow them to inhabit.

Since the killing of settler

Yehuda Dimentman by two Palestinian gunmen who opened fire on his car on December 16, attacks on Palestinian villages near the northern city of Nablus have multiplied.

Several Palestinian civilians in Qaryout, south of Nablus, sustained wounds and fractures in a pre-dawn attack by Israeli settlers on December 17, Wafa reported.

Settlers this week also attacked Palestinian homes in the village of Silat ad-Dhahr, the news agency said, blocking a section of the Nablus-Jenin road and denying access to Palestinian vehicles.

Israeli settlements are Jewish communities built on Palestinian land, in violation of international law. Today, between 600,000 and 750,000 Israeli settlers live in at least 250 illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem.

42 Palestinians, including a journalist, were wounded after being hit with rubber-coated steel rounds.

Venezuela's Maduro "thanks god" he met Gen. Soleimani, "won't abandon Palestine"

From page 1 ▶ always been very good," citing friendly warm ties with former Iranian Presidents and the current one. According to Maduro, he has agreed with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on a set of new plans and will soon visit Tehran to finalize the new agreements on cooperation. The intergovernmental committee of both countries is "working on these new projects, which include networking and cooperation between Iran and Venezuela." The two sides have boosted cooperation over the past year or two in the face of illegal, unilateral sanctions from the United States against both countries.

The Venezuelan president also expressed his admiration for the leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, saying that he is "a man of great wisdom and great intelligence."

Elsewhere, Maduro stressed that his county will never abandon Palestine saying "no one in this world dares to ask us to abandon Palestine, and we cannot accept this demand. The sin is just thinking about abandoning Palestine, or leaving it alone." The Venezuelan leader emphasized that "Palestine is the sacred land of mankind, and the land of Palestine has a very great place for us. The name of Palestine is heard loud and great," adding that "these [Israeli] crimes against the Palestinian people will be paid for by (the Israeli occupation) one day."

Maduro affirmed support from Venezuela, all the Venezuelan people and from the Bolivarian revolution founded by leader Hugo Chavez and all its factions towards Palestine and the Palestinians saying "we wish all the best for Palestine, and we have cooperation agreements with [Palestine]; agreements that are going well. We would like to offer more for Palestine", calling on all the people and rulers of the world, all Arabs, and all the rulers of the Islamic world, not to leave Palestine alone. He stressed that Palestine deserves the steadfast and courageous support of the rulers of the whole world, saying that "Palestine is crying out for help. Palestine appeals to you to support it, as it is exposed daily to crimes and killings of young people." Commenting on the killings and attacks happening in the occupied territories, he says that "the crimes of the occupation are unspeakable and unparalleled in this world."

Meanwhile, the Venezuelan leader says that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is "a brave man, a hero and a fighter, and he has a beautiful family and wonderful people," adding, "[Syria] was destined to endure a criminal terrorist war... the Syrian people have suffered a lot during the past 11 years, and they have known how to persevere and



how to win. The Syrian Arab Army, along with the unified Syrian people and President Bashar al-Assad, will rise in Syria again, and will liberate it completely."

Maduro believes that "the Arab world, and the whole world, will be amazed at how Syria will resurrect, in the following years." He also noted that "our Ministry of Foreign Affairs will undertake a set of initiatives in 2022, in order to reactivate the mechanisms of cooperation between the Arab world and Latin America, to build ties at both the financial and monetary levels."

"Venezuela is a country of opportunity, and we offer all constitutional and legal guarantees for investments in oil, gas, petrochemicals, tourism, gold, diamonds, iron, steel, aluminum and food products," he stressed, adding that that his country "is witnessing a process of economic recovery as a result of continuous work, based on the recovery of the productive economy, and on the collective effort of the whole of Venezuela."

Maduro indicated that 2021 is "the first year that [Venezuela] recorded economic growth since the criminal sanctions of U.S. imperialism began" noting that "the growth has been achieved thanks to the economy that produces food, goods and services, and we have witnessed the growth of industry, trade and the internal market in the country."

Elsewhere on the domestic front, the President highlighted that "the Venezuelan people resisted the brutal attacks launched by U.S. imperialism and its allies in the world, but we withstood and resisted" stressing the necessity of believing in the people "in order to stimulate the value of pride and the strengths that they enjoy, both spiritually and morally." According to Maduro, "the Venezuelan people have been heroes. I, as president, had to be as heroic as this heroic people," and "I had to arm myself with patience, great faith and confidence in the

future, rise to the level of confrontation, and go into battle." He pointed out that the late Cuban president, Fidel Castro, had always said that one must struggle in all circumstances, fight until the last breath, and struggle until the last moment.

Maduro says opposition leader, Juan Guaido, was a kind of political "Frankenstein" and suffered defeat, adding that "imperialism believed that Venezuela belonged to it, and that, through its colonial style, it could appoint a president," explaining that "the Venezuelan people stood up to imperialism." He called on Washington to "abandon their imperialism and their Frankenstein in the quagmire" noting that "during Trump's era, the former [U.S.] President appointed a high commissioner named Elliot Abraham to rule the lands of a colony called Venezuela, according to Trump's neo-colonial perspective and imperialism."

Maduro also pointed out that "we have always felt that we are not alone. In the United Nations, they have tried, several times, not to recognize the legitimacy of our government. We were defeating them with the support of the vast majority of governments." He expressed his pride in "the movements of solidarity and resistance in this world" and its leaders.

Touching on former Venezuelan leader and his mentor Hugo Chavez, Maduro says that "Commander Chavez cut the relationship of dependency from the United States. We have sovereign military forces, which are the backbone of stability, peace and democracy in Venezuela."

Maduro noted that "when the leader Chavez was faced with the possibility of undergoing a difficult surgery, he said: If

something happened that prevents me from continuing in my position as president, then Nicolás [Maduro] must take over." He says that Chavez's decision was a big surprise because it "came as a very strong shock. I know very well that when he thinks about something and makes a decision, it is because he already anticipates that something will happen" elaborating that "we, the revolutionaries, are obligated to absorb any circumstance that is imposed on us. And many, you must be prepared. For the battle, to overcome pain, wounds and sorrows, and to carry out confrontation. And this is what it was."

He expressed his satisfaction that he has been faithful to the "legacy of Chavez" and "faithful to the oath that I swore to him, and I continued on the first front line, carrying the banner of victory, the banner of Venezuela."

Beijing pursuing balanced foreign policy in Persian Gulf: GSA chief

From page 1 ▶ Following is the text of the interview with Cafiero:

U.S. intelligence agencies have assessed that Saudi Arabia is now actively manufacturing its own ballistic missiles with the help of China. Do you see this development as a change in China's foreign policy in West Asia where Beijing used to invest in financial projects and not military ones?

China, as well as other powers such as France and Russia, see that some of America's traditional allies and partners in the Arab world are doubting Washington's long-term commitment to their security. This is not a new development. In fact, countries in the Persian Gulf such as Saudi Arabia have spent years calling into question the wisdom of being so dependent on the U.S. for their national defense. Although there is no evidence to suggest that the Chinese are intent on replacing the U.S. as Saudi Arabia or other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member-states' security guarantor, it is safe to conclude that Beijing intends to exploit friction and decreased levels of trust between Riyadh and Washington.

What will be the U.S. reaction to this development given its consequences for U.S. military hegemony?

Under both the Trump and Biden administrations, the U.S. has voiced concerns about the strengthening relationships between China and several regional states such as the United Arab Emirates and Israel. With mixed results, the U.S. has also acted on these concerns and put pressure on these countries to somewhat back off their ties with Beijing. It is safe to bet that the Biden administration will take some actions to try to dissuade the Saudis from cooperating with the Chinese in relation to development of the kingdom's ballistic missiles. But because the U.S. considers Saudi Arabia to be a vital strategic partner in the region, it is perhaps unlikely that Washington would ever impose sanctions on any officials or institutions in the Kingdom because of this development. In any event, as the U.S. leadership is determined to counter China and Russia's growing geopolitical influence in the Middle East (West Asia), the struggle for influence over Riyadh will be important to monitor.

How can China balance its ties with rival countries in the region, especially Iran and Saudi Arabia? Do you think the Biden administration will adopt a similar policy in West Asia, i.e.



adopting a balancing role between Iranian and Saudi competition instead of supporting one side?

The Chinese pursue a balanced foreign policy agenda in the Persian Gulf. Beijing has positive relations with all countries in this sub-region, including both Iran and Saudi Arabia. This marks a major contrast to the U.S. which since 1979 has taken a pro-Saudi and anti-Iran position, viewing Riyadh as a close partner and Tehran as an adversary. Despite all the friction between the Biden administration and Saudi Arabia, this overall U.S. position is very unlikely to change under this current leadership in Washington.

Do you think Saudi Arabia is able to produce missiles given that it is a fully dependent country in terms of military and defense?

In my opinion, anyone who concludes that the Saudis can't produce these missiles domestically might be making the mistake of underestimating both the kingdom's desires and capabilities. Furthermore, with Chinese help this is definitely possible.

Do you think the Israelis consider Saudi ballistic missiles a source of threat to themselves?

I don't believe so. Saudi Arabia has not been confrontational vis-à-vis Israel for decades. Although Riyadh has not entered into the Abraham Accords, the Saudis have been taking mini-steps toward normalization. There is good reason to expect this trend in Saudi-Israeli relations to continue. It's more likely that the Israelis would be comforted by Saudi possessing such ballistic missiles considering Israel and Saudi Arabia's shared perceptions of an Iranian threat in West Asia.

Iraqi nation won't remain silent on anti-terror commanders' assassination: Fatah Alliance MP

A lawmaker from a major Iraqi political coalition says the Iraqi nation will not remain silent in the face of the assassination of top Iranian anti-terror commander General Qassem Soleimani and his Iraqi trenchmate Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy head of the Popular Mobilization Units, in a US drone strike near Baghdad airport last year, calling on the Baghdad government to take proper actions.

Izadi politician Saeed Batush also stated that the two fallen anti-terror commanders greatly contributed to the liberation of Iraqi territories from the grip of the Daesh Takfiri terrorists.

"Izadis are grateful to the late commanders, who sacrificed their lives in order to liberate [the northern Iraqi town of] Sinjar from the menace of Daesh," he said.

Separately, Hadi al-Amiri, leader of the Badr Organization, which is part of the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) or Hashd al-Sha'abi, and secretary general of the Fatal Alliance, called for mass demonstrations across Iraq on the second anniversary of the assassination, which occurred on January 3, 2020.

Moreover, secretary general of Iraq's anti-terror Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq group says resistance fighters will have the right to target American forces in case they prolong their presence and do not pull out of Iraqi soil according to the set deadline.

"If American forces do not withdraw according to the declared schedule, resistance fighters will rightfully give an appropriate response. It rests with the Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee to decide when to respond to the occupiers," Qais Khazali said.

He denounced the announcement that the

United States will keep the current 2,500 troops in Iraq, saying, "Iraqi experts must make a decision on the number of foreign advisors, not Washington."

Earlier this month, Qassim al-Araji, Iraq's national security adviser, said that a final round of technical talks to formally end the US-led combat mission, which was purportedly formed to fight the Daesh terrorist group, had concluded.

"We are officially announcing the end of the coalition forces' combat mission," al-Araji wrote on Twitter, adding that the coalition would continue providing assistance, advice, and training to Iraqi forces.

However, chief Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said that the number of US troops in Iraq won't change.

"Remember, this is a change in mission, right? Not necessarily a change in physical posture," he said. "It's not like today they snap the chalk line and all of a sudden there's a massive change in the daily operations of our men and women over there."

"There won't be a dramatic shift from yesterday to tomorrow, based on how we've already been working ourselves into this new mission," Kirby said.

There are about 2,500 US soldiers and another 1,000 coalition troopers currently based in Iraq. It is unclear how many will remain in the next phase of deployment in Iraq.

Anti-American sentiments have been growing in Iraq since the 2020 assassination, which was directly ordered by former US president Donald Trump.

(Source: Press TV)

Historical properties in Ilam demarcated

TEHRAN –New boundaries have been defined for five historical properties, which are scattered across the western Ilam province, CHTN reported on Monday.

The Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts has announced the exact legal boundaries of the properties in separate letters to the governor-general of the province, the report added.

The demarcation projects are aimed at preventing further destruction and damage as well as preserving and protecting historical sites.

Farrokhabad Archaeological Hill, remains of Qaleh Gol Castle and the Holy Shrine of Imamzadeh Seyyed Salah al-Din Mohammad are among those demarcated recently.

The lesser-known province of Ilam is located on the foothills of the Zagros Mountains. Unlike the north and northwest part of this province which is mountainous, the west and southwest are flat. It is a suitable place for nomad life since the geographical conditions are favorable for summer and winter relocation.

The common handicrafts of this province include carpet, rug, drugget, felt, and coarse blanket weaving. The majority of the people



in Ilam are Kurds, Laks, and Lurs, they speak in Laki, Kurdish, and Luri. Based on the archeological excavations in Ali Kosh ancient area, the civilization of this province dates back to New Stone Age circa 8000 BC.

The land which is called Ilam now was a part of the ancient Elamite civilization that was formed circa 3000 BC and was destroyed by Assyrian King Ashurbanipal in 640 BC.

Elam was an ancient pre-Iranian civilization centered in the far west and south-west of what is now modern-day Iran, stretching from the lowlands of what is now Khuzestan and Ilam provinces as well as a small part of southern Iraq.

Iranian handicrafts: Shawl-bafi of Kordestan



TEHRAN – Shawl-bafi is regarded one of the most important crafts being practiced in the geographic region of Iran. Shawls have been produced since ancient times, just like carpets and silks.

For a long time, however, Kashmir shawls that were made in India excelled the Iranian shawls because they were made of better quality in the early years of the Qajar dynasty (1789-1925), according to Visit Iran.

In many cities like Kerman and Mashhad, Iranian shawls were common thousands of years before the Qajar era. As a matter of fact, the Iranian shawls industry went to India and Kashmir shawls originated from Iranian products.

By the middle of the Qajar era, crafts of Iranian shawls had improved. The making of shawls became more common in the villages, among most nomadic people, and among many urban residents. The Iranian shawl had now become a serious competitor to the Kashmiri shawl.

There were many workshops developed to make the shawls. In these workshops, numerous weaving machines were set up. The machines consisted of two rollers and two pedals installed inside a hole in the ground.

Rooyin: the first traditional textile village in Iran

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The Iranian village Rooyin, which dates back to the Timurid era, is located in the northeastern province of North Khorasan.

The village houses some 800 households. Men in the village often make ends meet through farming or maintaining orchards. And women are involved in traditional textile work as it is an ancestral tradition going back around 400 years.

The textiles woven in Rooyin include different types of wrappers, towels, handkerchiefs, sheets and fabric used to make shirts.

Around 300 villagers are directly



involved in providing thread as well as dyeing, weaving and selling wrappers. They have also received the UNESCO's originality seal in the field of wrapper weaving or traditional textile work.

Hotel occupancy rate in Iran up 40%

From page 1 ▶ Back in October, the official announced that Iranian hotels are ready to receive foreign tourists as the issuance of tourist visas and the flow of foreign tourists from land and air borders would be resumed.

Ninety percent of the hotel staff have been vaccinated against the coronavirus, so the hotels are ready to welcome foreign tourists, observing strict health protocols, he said.

The main destinations of foreign tourists in Iran are specifically cities such as Mashhad, Qom, Tabriz, Shiraz, Yazd, and Isfahan, and to return to the figure of over eight million incoming tourists before the outbreak of the coronavirus, serious planning

is required, the official added.

Iraqi tourists will flood the country once the borders open, but attracting tourists from Europe will require some time, he noted.

However, he noted that two-thirds of the hotel staff have lost their jobs, he added.

Back in September, Hamzehzadeh announced that all employees of accommodation centers across Iran are scheduled to be vaccinated against the coronavirus.

"To vaccinate staffs of all accommodation centers, including eco-lodges, apartment hotels, and guest houses, as well as hotels, more coordination with the Ministry of Health is needed," he added.



Back in July, ISNA reported that the tourism industry of the country has suffered a loss of some 320 trillion rials (\$1.1 billion) since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic.

The pandemic has also ruined more than 44,000 jobs in a once budding travel sector of the country, the report added.

Experts believe accommodation centers suffered the most as a result of the outbreak of the coronavirus in Iran and its subsequent unemployment and financial losses.

Months of steep recession has taken its toll. Many travel insiders, hoteliers, and tour operators have faced big dilemmas such as bankruptcy, unemployment,

debts, and the prospects of not being competitive on the international level.

Panels of travel experts have mapped out new marketing strategies hoping Iran's tourism would get back on its feet once again. For instance, the Head of the Iranian Tour Operators Association has said the international tourist flow to Iran will return to normal until 2022.

Iran is potentially a booming destination for travelers seeking cultural attractions, breathtaking sceneries, and numerous UNESCO-registered sites. 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.

Handicraft courses to provide jobs for inmates

TEHRAN – Training courses in two fields of handicrafts are currently being offered in prisons in the city of Khoy, the northwestern province of West Azarbaijan, Khoy's tourism chief has announced.

Handicraft classes are held in Khoy's prisons to afford inmates the opportunity to gain employment after their release in the fields of cutting semiprecious stones and miniature, Aziz Mirzai said on Sunday.

The courses are also designed to promote handicrafts as a source of income and to empower prisoners, the official added.

Tourism ministry helps empower inmates

In October 2020, the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts signed a memorandum of understanding with the Prisons, Security, and Corrective Measures Organization to create jobs and make income for prisoners.

The MOU also aimed at implementing special educational and promotional programs, identifying talented prisoners, and improving their social status.

The deputy tourism minister Pouya Mahmoudian said that handicraft products made by prisoners have been



displayed in various exhibitions, and the income generated from selling these products has been returned to the prisoners and their families.

Wide-ranging handicrafts

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

In January 2020, the cities of Shiraz, Malayer, and Zanjan and the village of Qassemabad were designated by the WCC- Asia Pacific Region, putting Iran's number of world crafts cities and villages from ten to 14.

Shiraz was named a "world city of [diverse] handicrafts". Malayer was made a global hub for woodcarving and carved-wood furniture. Zanjan gained the title of a "world city of filigree". And

Qassemabad village, which is nationally known for its traditional costumes, was also promoted to a world hub of handicrafts. Chador Shab, a kind of homemade outer garment for women, was, however, the main subject for the WCC assessment for the village.

The value of Iran's handicrafts exports stood at \$120 million during the first eleven months of the past Iranian calendar year 1399 (March 20, 2020 – February 18, 2021), Mehr reported. The country's handicrafts exports slumped during the mentioned months in comparison to the same period last a year earlier due to the damage the coronavirus pandemic has inflicted on global trade.

The Islamic Republic exported \$427 million worth of handicrafts during the first eleven months of the calendar year 1398. Of the figure, some \$190 million was earned via suitcase trade (allowed for customs-free and tax-free transfer) through 20 provinces, according to data compiled by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts.

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

Flooring project begins at historical bazaar of Shahrud

TEHRAN –A flooring project has been commenced on parts of the historical bazaar of Shahrud in the north-central province of Semnan, Shahrud's tourism chief has said.

Over the past decade, the historical structure has undergone several rehabilitation projects, Hamidreza Hassani said on Monday, CHTN reported.

There has been a complete restoration of the bazaar's rooftop, and work is underway to repair the flooring, the official added.

The Shahrud Bazaar was composed of three caravanserai, two passages, and a public bathhouse, of which only the bathhouse survives, he noted.

The historical structure has been inscribed on the national heritage list.

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 caravanserai (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.

Bazaars in Persian towns

Bazaar is, originally, a public market district of a Persian town.

vaulted cupolas or domes, or with awnings.

From another point of view, bazaars are also synonyms of foods, with their unmissable colorful stalls of vegetables, herbs, and spices. Yet, most of these ingredients might be mysterious to a foreign eye. Teahouses help punctuate the walk and a traditional restaurant is a perfect place for lunch.

Browsing through a traditional bazaar may provide new experiences and fresh points of view on the ancient land. Such excursions can be made either in person or by "off-the-beaten-track" tours. Not only it's an opportunity to discover dozens of unique local ingredients, but it's also a chance to taste street foods and delicacies, in some traditional bakery known only by locals and shopkeepers.

People watching and even mingling with them in the bazaars is one of the best ways to take the pulse of the country. Bazaars have traditionally been major economic and social centers in any Iranian city.

National budget rises share of deprived areas by 63%

TEHRAN – The share of deprived areas and cities with development indicators below the national average has increased by over 63 percent as proposed in the budget bill for the next calendar year (starting on March 21, 2022).

The national budget bill has foreseen 320 trillion rials (around \$1.1 billion) for the underprivileged areas, a nearly 63 percent increase compared

The national budget bill has foreseen 320 trillion rials (around \$1.1 billion) for the underprivileged areas.



to the current year's budget of 193 trillion rials (nearly \$714 million).

Also, two-thirds of the three percent of oil revenues are allocated to cities, districts, and rural areas of the less privileged regions of 31 provinces, IRNA reported on Sunday.

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.

'Rural markets' to be developed nationwide



TEHRAN – The development of "rural markets" in different parts of the country is on the agenda in order to directly supply agricultural, horticultural, and livestock products, IRIB reported on Sunday.

Included in the work plan of the Central Organization for Rural Cooperatives of Iran, these markets are usually for direct sales of small quantities of products by farmers to village traders and rural consumers. Rural primary markets often form part of a network arranged on a periodic basis, such as on a specific day of each week.

They are commonly organized at a central place in a village or district center or beside a village's access road. In some instances, markets in small towns also provide an assembly function.

Rural products will be offered in these stores, which have more suitable conditions for people, both in terms of quality and price, Hooman Liaqati, member of the board of directors of the Central Organization of Rural Cooperatives said.

By launching these rural markets, the cost of products for consumers will be reduced and job creation will be provided for the villagers, he highlighted.

So far, 145 rural markets have been set up, which will increase to 250 by the end of this year (March 2022), he concluded.

Rural development

Currently, 26 percent of the country's population lives in villages, around 39,000 villages have more than 20 households and 23,000 villages have less than 20 households.

Thus, more than 97 percent of the country's rural population lives in villages with over 20,000 households.

In Iran, where villages account for generating 20-23 percent of the value-added in the country, the development of rural areas has been always a top agenda of the governments' activities.

Many efforts have been made over the past couple of years by the government to support villagers and slow down the trend of migration from rural areas to cities.

Rural markets are for direct sales of small quantities of products by farmers to village traders and rural consumers.

Rural tourism, agritourism, religious tourism, and ecotourism are alternatives or complementary economic activities that could further stimulate rural development while decreasing rural community dependency on one main economic sector (agriculture, forestry, energy, or mining).

Mohammad Omid, the vice president for rural development, said in November 2020 that for the first time in the country, the migration of people from rural areas to cities has reached zero.

Literacy movement: achievements and plans

From page 1 ▶ The literacy rate in the population aged 10-49 was about 48.8 percent in 1976, while according to the 2016 census, this figure has reached 94.7 percent and shows a growth of nearly 46 percent, while in 2020, the rate was estimated at 97.1 percent.

Referring to the gender gap in literacy rate, he said that by allocating about 80 percent of literacy activities to girls and women, especially in rural areas, the literacy index among women has increased more rapidly, so that the results of the census conducted between 1976 to 2016 shows the gender gap in literacy rate has decreased from 23.4 to 6.8 percent and in 2020 reached less than 6.1 percent.

According to the censuses conducted between 1976 and 2016, the literacy rate of urban areas has increased from 65.5 percent to 90.8 percent. At the same time, the literacy rate in rural areas has increased from 30.5 percent to 78.5 percent.

A plan has been developed and implemented with the aim of reducing illiteracy among parents of students by strengthening the role and responsibility of the school principal, using the capacity and facilities of the school, and making good use of the role of students in identifying, attracting and educating parents.

Since its inception in 2014, the plan has been able to identify and educate approximately 544,000 illiterate parents across the country. However, the project was declared a successful national experience by UNESCO and posted on the website of the Institute for Lifelong Learning.

So far, 19,978 illiterate parents have been trained.

A project has been implemented with the aim of providing basic literacy education to non-students in this age group of 10-19, since 2015, this project has been able to cover 96,823 illiterate Iranians and foreign nationals.



A plan is also being implemented with the aim of raising the literacy index and the level of awareness of the country's nomadic community in coordination with the Nomadic Affairs Organization of Iran.

Since its inception, the project has been able to educate more than 326,000 nomadic women and girls under the auspices of literacy courses by empowering thousands of literate educators in the nomadic and rural community.

The Organization has also established local learning centers in order to fulfill the slogan of "education for all", which offers basic literacy education, in addition to life, social, citizenship, job, and professional skills to literate people. Currently, there are 510 centers across the country.

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

ENGLISH IN USE

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Precipitation forecast to reach above normal in next 3 months

The country is predicted to receive above normal rainfall over the next three months (February 20-May 21), head of the climatological research institute affiliated to Iran's Meteorological Organization (IMO) has said.

The whole country will meet normal and above normal rainfalls, the northern parts will receive above normal rainfall while southern provinces will receive normal to lower-than-normal rainfall, IRNA quoted Iman Babaeian as saying on Sunday.

This month, northern and eastern provinces will receive rain above normal averages, while in the first month of spring precipitation will be at normal amounts across the country, he noted, adding, during the second month of spring rainfall will reach its peak.

بارش‌های کشور در سه ماه پیش رو بیش از نرمال است

رئیس پژوهشکده اقلیم‌شناسی سازمان هواشناسی گفت: پیش‌بینی‌ها نشان می‌دهد میزان بارش در کشور در سه ماهه پیش رو (اسفند ۹۷، فروردین و اردیبهشت ۹۸) در حد نرمال و متمایل به بیش از نرمال خواهد بود.

ایمان باباییان روز یکشنبه در گفت‌وگو با خبرنگار ایرنا افزود: مجموع بارش‌ها در سطح کشور نرمال و متمایل به بیشتر از نرمال است اما در نیمه شمالی، بیشتر از نرمال و در نیمه جنوبی در محدوده نرمال تا کمتر از نرمال خواهد بود.

وی اظهار داشت: بارش‌ها در اسفندماه ۹۷ در نیمه شمالی و شرقی بیشتر از نرمال است، در فروردین ماه ۹۸ نیز بارش‌ها در محدوده نرمال و برای اردیبهشت بیشتر از نرمال پیش‌بینی شده است.

Latin America urges US to reduce plastic waste exports to region

Environmental organisations across Latin America have called on the US to reduce plastic waste exports to the region, after a report found the US had doubled exports to some countries in the region during the first seven months of 2020.

The US is the world's largest plastic waste exporter, although it has dramatically reduced the overall amount it exports since 2015, when China – previously the top importer – said it "no longer wanted to be the world's rubbish dump" and began imposing restrictions. Elsewhere around the world imports are rising, and not least in Latin America, with its cheap labour and close proximity to the US.

More than 75% of imports to the region arrive in Mexico, which received more than 32,650 tons (29,620 metric tonnes) of plastic waste from the US between January and August 2020. El Salvador was second, with 4,054 tons, and Ecuador third, with 3,665 tons, according to research carried out by the Last Beach Cleanup, an environmental advocacy group based in California.

While hazardous waste imports are subject to tariffs and restrictions, they are seldom enforced and plastic waste intended for recycling – which until January this year was not considered hazardous under international law – that enters importing countries can often end up as landfill, according to a researchers with the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (Gaia).

A Gaia report published in July also predicted further growth in the plastic waste sector in Latin America due to companies in the US and China investing in factories and recycling plants across the region to process the US plastic exports.

Some view the practice as a form of environmental colonialism. "The cross-border plastic waste trade is

perhaps one of the most nefarious expressions of the commercialisation of common goods and the colonial occupation of territories of the geopolitical south to turn them into sacrifice zones," said Fernanda Soliz, the health area director at the Simón Bolívar University in Ecuador.

"Latin America and the Caribbean are not the backyards of the United States," Soliz said. "We are sovereign territories, and we demand the respect of the rights of nature and our peoples."

Most of the world's countries agreed in May 2019 to stem the flow of plastic waste from the developed nations of the global north into the poorer ones of the global south. Known as the plastics amendment to the Basel Convention, the agreement prohibited the export of plastic waste from private entities in the US to those in developing nations without the permission of local governments.

But critically, the US did not ratify the agreement, and has been accused of continuing to funnel its waste into countries around the world, including in Africa, south-east Asia, and Latin America.

"Regional governments fail in two aspects: the first is inspections at customs because we don't really know what enters the country under the guise of recycling, and they also fail in their commitments with international agreements such as the Basel convention," said Camila Aguilera, a spokesperson for Gaia. "And here it is important to see what comes under the types of recycling because recycling is seen as a good thing."

"Countries in the global north see recycling as something to be proud of, forgetting about redesigning the products and reducing waste," said Aguilera. "It's very difficult for governments to treat plastic like toxic waste, but that's what it is."

Antarctic ice shelf could crack, raise seas by feet within decade, scientists warn

An Antarctic ice shelf could crack and disintegrate within the next decade, allowing a Florida-size glacier to slide into the ocean and raising sea levels by feet, scientists warned Wednesday.

A dramatic chain reaction in the ice could occur by 2031, starting with the Thwaites Glacier, said Erin Pettit, a professor at Oregon State University who studies glacier and ice sheet dynamics.

The glacier, a river of flowing ice, is blocked from falling into the sea by the eastern ice shelf, which sits atop an underwater mountain and is disintegrating, according to nbc news.

New research Pettit presented to a meeting of the American Geophysical Union in New Orleans suggests the final collapse of the ice shelf may occur "within as little as 5 years" and mark the beginning of the end of the Thwaites Glacier.

The ice at the top of the shelf is newly crisscrossed with cracks that are expanding toward the center of the shelf as quickly as 2 kilometers (1.24 miles) a year, the research found.

Scientists pointed to a zigzag path they say is the likely site for the ice shelf to crack and disintegrate.

Pettit's research is under review for publication in The Cryosphere, a scientific journal.

Thwaites is the "widest glacier in the world" and

has "doubled its outflow speed within the last 30 years," said Ted Scambos, a senior research scientist at the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences and a contributor to the research.

"If Thwaites were to collapse, it would drag most of west Antarctica's ice with it," Scambos said in a news release. "So it's critical to get a clearer picture of how the glacier will behave over the next 100 years."

Thwaites contributes 4 percent of annual global sea level rise, according to the British Antarctic Survey. But if the shelf collapses, that amount could rise to 25 percent, the scientists said.

All the water in the Thwaites Glacier would raise sea levels by 2 feet — but if its collapse triggers nearby glaciers to fall, the global sea level could rise by up to 10 feet, Scambos said.

A series of scientific studies of Thwaites in recent years has shown the enormous glacier is melting more quickly and in ways scientists never expected.

In 2019, scientists discovered a 6-mile-long, 1,000-foot-deep cavity under the glacier that means it lost 14 billion tons of ice, NBC News reported.

Later that year, researchers compared aerial films of Antarctica taken in the 1970s to current radar data, which showed Thwaites was melting much faster than researchers thought.

COVID-19 UPDATES ON DECEMBER 27

New cases	1,967
New deaths	34
Total cases	6,186,729
Total deaths	131,434
New hospitalized patients	344
Patients in critical condition	2,766
Total recovered patients	6,028,495
Diagnostic tests conducted	41,592,984
Doses of vaccine injected	117,340,424



DECEMBER 28, 2021

GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Poverty often disables an intelligent man from arguing his case; a poor man is a stranger in his own town.

Imam Ali (AS)

Prayer Times » Noon: 12:06 Evening: 17:19 Dawn: 5:43 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 7:13 (tomorrow)

Iran: Persian literature

Part 24

Eventually, from the Safavid period onwards, the religious material dealing with the lives and martyrdom of the members of the Prophet's family became the most prominent Arabic element in Persian literature.

Far more numerous are the short tales and anecdotes from Arabic sources which were incorporated as hekayats in Persian prose and poetry.

The Greek Alexander romance, which had its origins in Egypt during the 3rd century, was adopted quite early into the Iranian legend of the kings, probably through the intermediary of a Syriac translation. A Greek origin is also ascribed to the story of Salaman wa Absal, treated by Jami.

From the novelistic repertoire of Hellenistic literature came the story of Vameq and Adra, versified by Onsoni in a version which remains close to its model, the Parthenope Romance.

According to traditional accounts, the main influx of Indian stories into Persia took place in the 6th century, at the court of the Sassanid king Khosrow Anushirvan (r. 590-628). Many of the works then translated from Sanskrit into Middle Persian were subsequently rendered into Arabic and thus became available to Muslim Persian writers.

The most successful was the book of fables known as Kalila wa Demna, based on the Indian Panchatantra; from Persia it spread to many different cultures.

Rudaki (d. 940-41) was the first to adapt the book in a Persian matnavi, based on the Arabic translation by Ebn al-Moqaffa. Rudaki also wrote a version of the Sendbad-nama, the story of the ten viziers, which is usually held to be of Indian origin as well.

It is remarkable that these subjects were later almost exclusively treated in prose works with the rare exception of the poetical version of Kalila wa Demna by Qanei, a 13th century poet in Konya.

The Buddhistoromance of Barlaam and Iosaph has only survived in a masnavi fragment by a Muslim author but copied in the Manichaean script. The Tuti-nama, the source of which is the Sanskrit Sukasaptati, belongs to a later period.

This prose version was written in India by Zia ad-Din Nakhshabi (d. 1350). The Indian influence went deeper than the mere transmission of narrative material. It also bequeathed to the Persian tradition the important tool of the frame story and inspired such imitations of Indian books as the Bakhtiar-nama and the Marzban-nama.

During the Mughal period many translations from Sanskrit literature were made in India, but they never became current in Persia and therefore did not exert a noticeable influence on Persian literature.

It would be futile to seek a source in a different cultural period for every piece of Persian fiction. During the Islamic period, much new material was invented either by literati or by popular storytellers.

Such autochthonous stories can be expected to be most numerous in the form of anecdotes, which frequently deal with people who lived in Islamic Persia (rulers and Sufi sheikhs in particular), popular

tales, jests, fairy tales, and allegories.

Several narrative genres were created in Persian literature. The heroic epic, treating ancient Iranian lore both in prose and poetry, is attested from the earliest period, the time of the Sasanids in Transoxania.

After several attempts, of which only the section done by Daqiqi in motaqareb meter and treating the life of the prophet Zarathustra has survived, the epic genre soon reached its apogee in the great work of Ferdowsi.

The latter gave the style of the Persian epic its classical form, using the same meter as Daqiqi. From the point of view of the development of narrative art, the prominent role in the Shahnameh of elaborate stories, the dastans, was of great importance.

They constitute large independent units within the chronological framework of the epic. They are particularly frequent in the first part of the poem (the stories about Zahhak, Zal, Siavosh, Sohrab, Bijan and Manijeh, etc.).

Many of these stories recount the adventures of the central hero Rustam. Some are also incorporated in the dynastic history of the Sassanids (e.g. the stories of Ardashir-e Papakan's foundation of the dynasty and of Bahram Chubin's rebellion against Khosrow Parviz).

Also remarkable is the description of an entire reign, that of Bahram Gur, in a series of anecdotes about the king's hunting adventures and amorous affairs. Such parts of the poem reflect the kind of historical narrative which must have been popular in Sassanid times.

Ferdowsi used various devices to articulate the contents of his massive work. Many major stories are introduced by passages of a didactic, contemplative, or lyrical nature.

The story about the tragic fate of Sohrab opens with a meditation on the justice or injustice of an untimely death; that of Bijan and Manijeh with a description of the night when the poet received his inspiration from a "loving idol" who told him the plot of the story in a simple "Pahlavi" form; the succession of Hormozd IV, after the brilliant reign of Anushirvan, is marked by a dialogue between the month of July (Tammuz) and a red apple, expressing nostalgia for the bygone days of spring.

The repeated references to his spokesman, either a dastur or a dehqan, is another characteristic of Ferdowsi's narrative style, whether it was meant as fiction or not.

A long succession of imitators of Ferdowsi's epic tried their hand at similar work. Some might have worked on authentic ancient lore left aside by Ferdowsi, but the majority of these epic writers merely elaborated certain features of the Ferdowsian repertoire.

They were particularly interested in the tales about the heroes of Sistan, the family of Rustam. The earliest and most successful of these imitations was Asadi's Garshasp-nama (written in 1054-56), which deals with the earliest times of legendary history.

Source: Encyclopedia Iranica

To be continued

2022 Fajr Film Festival unveils official lineup

TEHRAN – The 40th edition of the Fajr Film Festival, Iran's most important film event, announced its lineup for the official competition on Sunday night.

Twenty-two films, most made by the new generation of Iranian filmmakers, will compete in the festival, which will be organized by a new team under its new president, Masud Naqqashzadeh.

Masud Kimiai and Reza Mirkarimi are the sole big names on the lineup.

Kimiai, one of the few active filmmakers of Iran's new wave cinema in the 1960s and 1970s, is participating in the event with his noir "Killing the Traitor".

Directed based on a true story, the film depicts part of the life story of Mehdi Baligh, a cheat and thief who is known as Iran's Arsène Lupin.

Amir Aqai stars as Baligh in the film

starring Mehran Modiri, Hamidreza Azarang and Reza Yazdani.

Mirkarimi will be competing with his "Night Watchman" starring Mohsen Kiai and Vishka Asayesh. No information about the plot has been published as yet.

Celebrated director Kiumars Puraamad has made a cameo appearance in the movie.

Another big name is Ebrahim Hatamikia who will participate in the festival as a producer for his son Yusef's debut feature, "Golden Night". No details have been revealed about the film. Yusef worked with his father as an assistant director in "Che" about the guerrilla war commander Mostafa Chamran.

"The Loser Man" is another highlight of the lineup from Mohammad-Hossein Mahdavian, director of the

acclaimed dramas "Walnut Tree", "Blood Trap" and "Midday Event".

The movie stars Rana Azadivar and Javad Ezzati, the stars of Mahdavian's popular series, "Mortal Wound".

Due to its subject, Hadi Hejazifar's debut feature "Mehdi's Location" is expected to attract the organizers' attention. The docudrama is about the life story of Mehdi Bakeri, the chief of IRGC 31st Shura Division that carried out several major operations during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war.

The movie is a shortened version of the TV series "The Bakeri Martyrs", which also gives details about Bakeri's brothers, Ali and Hamid, who were martyred during the unrest of the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the war respectively.

Hejazifar also stars as Mehdi Bakeri in the movie.

The Fajr Film Festival is organized every year from February 1 to 11 to commemorate the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. Fajr's international section categories split from the festival in 2014, when the Cinema Organization of Iran, which is affiliated with the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, the main organizer of the event, announced that the international competition would be held separately from the national section for the first time in 2015.

Following the management changes in the Cinema Organization of Iran, the new director of the organization, Mohammad Khazaei, ordered that the Fajr national and international film festivals be combined again for 2022.

However, to avoid any confusion, the festival will not have an international competition section this year.



A poster for the 40th Fajr Film Festival.

Sanandaj picked as Iran's 2022 Book Capital



A view of the western Iranian city of Sanandaj.

TEHRAN – Sanandaj, the capital of Kordestan Province, has been named Iran's 2022 Book Capital on Monday.

In a special ceremony held by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, the jury said in a statement that the city was selected for the

persistence of plans to promote reading.

The city also achieved the title for launching different campaigns for the book reading, use of cultural potentials and innovative ideas for promoting book reading, and great endeavors for the development of bookstores.

The jury picked the city in three stages from among 192 submissions.

In addition, Bam, Evaz, Najafabad and Semnan were selected as Iran's Innovative Cities of Book Reading.

Due to the choice, Sanandaj and the four cities will receive special funds, equipment and service to develop cultural centers and libraries.

With a population of over 410,000, Sanandaj enjoys only seven public libraries.

To promote reading, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance in collaboration with

several cultural organizations, including the Iranian National Commission for UNESCO, selects an Iranian city as book capital every year.

In addition, ten villages across the country are selected as Book Loving Villages of the Year.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ministry was unable to make arrangements for selecting a city as Iran's book capital in 2021.

Shiraz, the hometown of the celebrated Persian poet Hafez and Sadi, was Iran's 2020 Book Capital.

Yazd, the central Iranian city that is home to many magnificent historical mosques and ancient Zoroastrian fire temples, was picked as Iran's 2019 Book Capital.

Kashan in 2018, Bushehr in 2017, Neyshabur in 2016 and Ahvaz in 2015 previously have won the title.

"The Maids" returns to stage at Tehran theater

TEHRAN – "The Maids", a play by the French dramatist Jean Genet, is on stage at Tehran's Divare Chaharom Theater.

A troupe led by director Maryam Shirazi has been rehearsing over the past few months to be one of the groups that would be able to obtain officials' approval to perform after the government eased pandemic curbs.

The first performance was held on Saturday evening and they will continue until December 31.

Negar Afrashteh, Yeganeh Malekmohammadi, Mohammad Javadi, Nahid Mohammadi, Farhad Sharifi and Mahan Ebdati are the member of the cast.

Solange and Claire are two housemaids who construct elaborate sadomasochistic rituals when their mistress



A poster for "The Maids", which is on stage at Divare Chaharom Theater, Tehran.

(Madame) is away.

The focus of their role-playing is the murder of Madame and they take turns portraying both sides of the power divide. Their deliberate pace and devotion to detail guarantees that they always fail to actualize their fantasies by ceremoniously "killing" Madame at the ritual's dénouement.

It was first performed at the Théâtre de l'Athénée in Paris in a

production that opened on April 17, 1947, which Louis Jouvet directed.

The play has been revived in France, England and the United States on multiple occasions, sometimes with men playing the roles of the maids.

A TV dramatization Stuepigerme was done by Danish national broadcaster Danmarks Radio in 1962. A film adaptation of the play

was released in 1974. Swedish composer Peter Bengtson adapted the play in 1994 for a chamber opera.

Genet loosely based his play on the infamous sisters Christine and Léa Papin, who brutally murdered their employer and her daughter in Le Mans, France, in 1933.

Translated into Persian by Farzaneh Sokuti, the play has also been performed by several Iranian groups. One of the troupes performed the play with director Ali-Akbar Alizadeh at Tehran's Molavi Theater in November 2018.

Reyhaneh Nabian directed the play with her group Alma in May 2016 at Tehran's Da Theater.

Director Maryam Malmir also staged "The Papin Sisters" based on the play at the Entezami Hall of the Iran Artists Forum in Tehran in July 2016.

"A Woman in Berlin" comes to Iranian bookstores

TEHRAN – "A Woman in Berlin", an anonymous memoir by a German woman, who was revealed in 2003 to be journalist Marta Hillers, has been published in Persian.

Now is the publisher of the book rendered into Persian by Siamand Zandi.

It covers the weeks from 20 April to 22 June 1945, during the capture of Berlin and its occupation by the Red Army.

The writer describes the widespread rapes by Soviet soldiers, including her own, and the women's pragmatic approach to survival, often taking Soviet officers for protection.

The memoir describes the journalist's personal experiences during the occupation of Berlin by the Soviets at the end of World War II.

She describes being gang-raped by Russian soldiers and deciding to seek protection by forming a relationship with a Soviet officer;

other women made similar decisions. The author described it as "sleeping for food."

Conditions in the city were cruel, as women had no other protection against assaults by soldiers. "... when the woman and her neighbors go to a Soviet commander to complain about the rapes and to seek his aid in stopping them, he merely laughs."

The book is known for its "unsentimental" tone in describing sexual assault but, as a New York Times critic pointed out, "the rapes are by no means all of [the book]. We are also given the feeling inside a bomb shelter, the breakdown of city life and civil society, the often surreal behavior of the enemy, soldiers' arms lined with looted wristwatches, the forced labor clearing out the rubble piles that marks the beginning of the road back."

The first English edition appeared in 1954 in the United States, where it was very successful, and was followed rapidly by translations into Dutch, Italian, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Spanish and Japanese.

When finally published in German in 1959, the book was either "ignored or reviled" in Germany. The author refused to have another edition published in her lifetime.

In 2003, a new edition of the book was published in Germany, again anonymously. It met with wide critical acclaim and was on bestseller lists for more than 19 weeks.

Jens Bisky, a German literary editor, identified the anonymous author that year as German journalist Marta Hillers, who had died in 2001. This revelation caused a literary controversy, and questions of the book's authenticity were explored.

The book was published again in English in 2005 in editions in the United Kingdom and the United States.

The book was adapted as a 2008 German feature film, directed by Max Färberböck and starring Nina Hoss. It was released in the United States as "A Woman in Berlin" in 2008.