

TEHRAN TIMES

8 Pages | Price 50,000 Rials | 1.00 EURO | 4.00 AED | 43rd year | No. 14134 | Sunday | January 16, 2022 | Dey 26, 1400 | Jumada Al thani 13, 1443

In Iran’s Diplomacy Map, West Is Just “One” Spot

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Contents of Iranian initiative for Yemen peace revealed

The Iranian initiative for peace in Yemen was presented years ago, and the international community and the countries of the coalition of aggression turned a blind eye to it, well-informed sources told Al Mayadeen on Friday.

“The initiative stipulated implementing a ceasefire and a complete lifting of the blockade on Yemen, in addition to opening all land, sea, and air crossings,” the sources said.

The initiative also stipulated initiating political negotiations to reach an agreement on the transitional period following the war and the lifting of the blockade, as well as forming a comprehensive consensus government to manage affairs while providing Yemen with economic support.

“The steps stipulated in the Iranian initiative will need an agreement from the countries of the Saudi coalition, the UAE, the United States, the United Kingdom, in addition to Iran, the initiator. Russia will be joining as a supporting party in addition to the United Nations playing the role of coordinator and mediator,” the sources concluded.

The Iranian initiative to resolve the crisis in Yemen “is key to a solution,” and it deals with the war and blockade in Yemen, ► Page 2

Report

IPL halfway point in review

By Farrokh Hesabi

TEHRAN - With Iran Professional League (IPL) reaching its halfway point, Tehran Times reviews talking points and surprises of the first half of the 2021/22 season.

Esteghlal defeated Naft Masjed Solyma 3-0 on Matchday 15 to claim the unofficial half-season championship. The Blues are chasing to win the trophy after nine seasons. In doing so, Farhad Majidi’s side went unbeaten the league’s first half of the season. Persepolis, the winners of IPL’s five consecutive seasons, ended in second place on the table. However, Yahya Golmohammadi’s side are determined to continue their winning streak to the six, the popular number for the Red’s fan.

Gol Gohar Sirjan were issued three 3-0 losses for fielding Eric Baboue Bagnama, a Gabonese player, failing to meet the pre-requirement of playing four or more international matches with his country’s national team.

This decision favored three teams, namely Sepahan, Peykan, and Esteghlal, who earned three, three, and two points, respectively. Persepolis officials objected to the verdict of the Disciplinary Committee of the Iranian football federation. They believed that the decision hurt them in the title race because their significant rivals, Esteghlal and Sepahan, were rewarded what they called undeserved points.

Sepahan, another title chaser, have dropped points in some crucial matches. Four defeats for Moharam Navidkia’s team are not acceptable, but nine victories out of 15 is about normal for the Yellows.

Aluminum Arak are a cause for celebration in the Iranian league. A competitive provincial team with limited resources in such a lofty position can be considered a measure of the league’s success.

Foolad, a combination of youth and experienced players and a fine coach Javad Nekounam, remain one of the IPL’s most watchable sides, but a bit like Sepahan, the shaky defense has been known to let them down.

Foreign players dominate the top of the goals standings. Godwin Mensha (Gol Gohar), Arthur Yamga (Esteghlal), and Luciano Pereira (Foolad) are the top scorers of the IPL, primarily thanks to goals scored by penalties.

Russia denounces “false flag” allegations



© AP

Accusations by the United States that Russia is creating some type of pretext as a reason to invade Ukraine are unfounded and lack any substance. That’s according to the Russian Embassy in Washington which says the accusations confirm what the embassy has

described as an “ongoing information pressure” campaign on Moscow.

In remarks on social media, the diplomatic mission said, “We noted the statement of the White House and Department of Defense

Press Secretaries during their briefings on January 14 about Russia’s alleged preparation of some kind of pretext for the invasion of Ukraine.” ► Page 5

MOU signed on building oil products transferring strategic pipeline

TEHRAN - National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC) signed a memorandum of understanding with Bank Mellat for cooperation in construction of a strategic pipeline for transferring oil products in eastern provinces, Shana reported.

Valued at about €372 million the 948-kilometer-long pipeline is going to pass through Kerman, South Khorasan, and Khorasan Razavi provinces.

The pipeline is projected to transmit 150,000 barrels per day (bpd) of petroleum products.

The MOU for the construction of the mentioned pipeline was signed on Saturday in a ceremony attended by senior officials including Oil Minister Javad Oji, Finance and Economic Minister Ehsan Khandouzi, NIORDC Head Jalil Salari, and Managing Director of Bank Mellat Reza Dolat-Abadi.

The construction of the mentioned pipeline, which is aimed at transmitting petroleum products from Rafsanjan in Kerman Province to Mashhad in Khorasan Razavi, is going to ensure a sustainable supply of fuel needed in the east and northeast provinces while shortening the transmission route, reducing fuel consumption and reducing transportation costs, ► Page 4

Iran, Saudi Arabia prepare to reopen embassies: legislator

TEHRAN — A member of the Iranian Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Committee announced on Saturday that relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia are being revived and that groundwork is being prepared for Iran and Saudi Arabia to reopen their embassies in Riyadh and Tehran.

“Relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia are being revived and embassies are preparing to reopen, which has important implications for reducing regional tensions and increasing global cohesion,” Jalil Rahimi Jahanabadi wrote on his Twitter page.

Jahanabadi added, “Security institutions and the media must watch out for the evils of the Zionists and the stupidity of the extremists.”

Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian recently told Al Jazeera that Iranian negotiators have held four rounds of ► Page 2



© Mehr / Saeed Reza Razavi

“Daughter of Iran” director crowned best at Ammar Popular Film Festival

TEHRAN - Seyyed Jalal Dehqani was picked as best director at the 12th Ammar Popular Film Festival for his drama “Daughter of Iran”, the organizers announced on Friday evening. ► Page 8

Health Ministry to receive 7m doses of Pastu Covac

TEHRAN – Seven million doses of the Iranian-Cuban Pastu Covac vaccine are ready to be delivered to the Ministry of Health.

So far, 15 million doses of the vaccine have been produced, 8 million of which have been used in the vaccination process and the rest are ready to be delivered to the ministry, Alireza Biglari, head of the Pas-

teur Institute said.

He went on to say that the monthly production capacity of this vaccine is about five million doses and can be increased.

Clinical trials have shown that the Pastu Covac vaccine is highly efficient and reliable.

Developed jointly by the Pasteur Institute

of Iran and Cuba’s Finlay Vaccine Institute, the vaccine is called Soberana 02 in Cuba and Pastu Covac in Iran.

It is a conjugate vaccine with two injectable doses, which consists of the receptor-binding domain of the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein conjugated chemically to tetanus toxoid. ► Page 7

From Inside



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Iwan-e Karkheh, a forgotten gem of Sassanid architecture

TEHRAN – Once a prosperous gem of Sassanid urban setting and architecture, Iwan-e Karkheh is now a gateway to many ancient attractions in Iran’s southwestern Khuzestan province.

It is located near the UNESCO-registered Susa, the UNESCO-registered Tchogha Zanbil, and the UNESCO-registered Shushtar Historical Hydraulic System, and is some 18 kilometers from the city of Dezful along the banks of the Karkheh River.

In the Elamite era, Karkheh was covered with palm groves and its woods were so famous that Ashurbanipal referred to it as the 'sacred Elamite woods'. The ancient city possibly has pre-Sasanian foundations, but the actual construction is attributed to Shapur I the Great (r. 240/42 - 270/72).

Its ruins were largely unexplored by archaeologists, except for two brief campaigns in the 1950s. The first conclusions were fascinating; it is a Sasanian city, founded in the fourth century CE and surrounded by a large, rectangular wall. The enceinte, which is about four kilometers from north to south and one kilometer from east to west, can be seen over large distances.

A large building, excavated in 1950, may have been his palace. The walls were covered with plaster, the building was surrounded by a garden, and it contained a transversal barrel-vault of a type that was to become popular in Christian churches, but has not been attested earlier than Iwan-e Karkheh. This building, which also contained a square hall under a dome, later served as a mosque.

The Sassanid archaeological landscape also represents a highly efficient system of land use and strategic utilization of natural topography in the creation of the earliest cultural centers of the Sassanid civilization. ► Page 6

Deals to implement Iran-China 25-year co-op agreement to be signed in coming months

TEHRAN - Iranian Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Ehsan Khandouzi has said the 25-year comprehensive cooperation agreement between Iran and China is going to be realized through a series of executive deals which the two countries are going to start signing in the coming months.

Speaking to the press on the sidelines of the signing ceremony of a memorandum between National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC) and Bank Mellat on Saturday, Khandouzi said: “In the coming months, we will start signing contracts not at the general level but in different specific sectors.”

On March 26, 2021, Iran and China signed a comprehensive agreement expressing a desire to increase cooperation and trade relations over the next 25 years.



Iran nuclear talks enjoy ‘better atmosphere’: EU



TEHRAN—International talks to save the Iran nuclear deal have entered the New Year with positive signals emerging, including the European Union saying Friday that a deal remained possible.

There has been a marked shift in tone since the current round began in November, even if the Western powers complain how slow the process is.

“There’s a better atmosphere since Christmas -- before Christmas I was very pessimistic,” EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said Friday, AFP reported.

“Today I believe reaching an accord is possible,” even within the coming weeks, he said after an informal meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brest, France.

Iran’s Foreign Ministry spokesman said earlier this week that efforts by “all parties” to revive the 2015 nuclear agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), had resulted in “good progress” during the Vienna talks.

And Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said that the negotiations had “accelerated” and that “the chances of reaching a solution have risen”.

This has also been echoed by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, TASS reported on Friday.

“There has been real progress [...] on the Iranian nuclear program; there is a real desire, between Iran and the U.S., first and foremost, to understand concrete concerns and understand how these concerns could be accounted for in the general package,” Lavrov announced during a press conference while elaborating on Russian diplomatic activities in 2021.

But French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, speaking next to Borrell on Friday, reiterated his view that the talks were progressing “much too slowly to be able to reach a result”.

France currently chairs the EU’s rotating presidency.

Continuous negotiations to salvage the nuclear deal resumed on 29 November after they were suspended in June as Iran elected a new president.

‘Modest progress’

The 2015 deal -- agreed by Iran, the United States (under Democratic president Barack Obama), China, Russia, Britain, France and Germany -- offered Tehran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program.

But Republican president Donald Trump pulled the U.S. out in May 2018 and reimposed biting sanctions, prompting Tehran to begin rolling back on its commitments one year later.

At the time Iran announced if the Europeans party to the nuclear agreement compensate Iran for the sanction it will reverse its decision. However, the Europeans did nothing. The just paid lip service to the agreement.

Determined to revive the deal, Trump’s

successor Joseph Biden, a Democrat who was Obama’s vice president, sent an American delegation to Vienna to participate indirectly in the talks.

European diplomats have been shuttling between the talks venue at a luxury hotel and where the U.S. team is based.

U.S. State Department Ned Price said on Wednesday that although there had been “modest progress in recent weeks” this was “not sufficient” to secure a return to the deal.

The main aims of the talks are to take the U.S. back into the JCPOA, and bring Iran back into line with the limits the deal laid down on its nuclear activities.

Among the outstanding bones of contention between Iran and Western powers are “sanctions relief, guarantees that the U.S. will never again renege... (and) the degree to which Iran has to roll back its nuclear program,” according to Ali Vaez, Iran specialist at the International Crisis Group.

He said that when it comes to verifying sanctions have been lifted, this will be “possible in two areas: Iran’s oil exports and its ability to repatriate the generated oil revenues and frozen assets”.

But the subject of future U.S. actions is trickier as “there is no guarantee that any U.S. administration can provide that would bind the hands of its successor,” he said.

But Vaez said the Biden administration “can and should provide assurances that companies that engage the Iranian market are immune to U.S. penalties as long as Iran is in compliance with the deal.”

When it comes to dealing with the physical evidence of Iran’s increased nuclear activity,

“the West wants Iran to destroy its advanced centrifuges” and the uranium enriched above JCPOA limits “will either have to be shipped to Russia or blended down”.

A European diplomat told AFP that while Iran was resisting the idea of destroying centrifuges, “putting them under seal or a range of intermediate solutions” were also on the table.

Pressure from hawks

While the various delegations haven’t set a deadline for success, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Thursday that there were only “a few

weeks left” to save the deal, pointing to the increases in uranium enrichment Iran has been undertaking.

Blinken said that in the case of the talks failing, the U.S. was “looking at other steps, other options” with its allies.

Vaez said new UN sanctions could be an option but U.S. hawks, mainly among the Republicans, opposed to the deal want a campaign of economic and diplomatic pressure backed up by the option of military action.

For example, in an interview with Fox News on Friday, former secretary of state Mike Pompeo said the Biden administration is “living in a fantasy world disconnected from the real world that was the JCPOA.”

Julia Masterson from the Arms Control Association think tank said the deal can be restored if both sides “are creative and flexible.”

According to Politico, Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, has also said, “While President Biden and his team should have moved earlier and faster last year to re-engage with Iran on the steps necessary to restore mutual compliance with the JCPOA, it is still possible — and necessary — for the Iranian and U.S. negotiators to reach a win-win arrangement that heads off a major nuclear crisis.”

in March to support any peace initiative based on ending the aggression on Yemen in addition to a comprehensive ceasefire, ending the occupation, lifting the blockade, and initiating political dialogue.

TEHRAN— Iranian Foreign Minister wrapped up his visit to China with extensive meetings and returned to Tehran on Saturday.

Amir Abdollahian who was leading a high-ranking delegation, held talks with Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

In the meeting, the two foreign ministers discussed a broad range of political, economic, trade, consular, cultural, regional and international issues and explored ways of expanding cooperation over those matters.

Amir Abdollahian congratulated the New Chinese Year and conveyed warm greetings of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to his Chinese President Xi Jinping. The Iranian foreign minister also submitted Raisi’s written message to President Xi. Amir Abdollahian described the letter as an important message at the beginning of the government’s tenure.

The foreign minister reaffirmed Iran’s support for the One China Policy and announced Iran’s readiness to expand all-out ties with China.

He then referred to plans to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Iran, appreciating China for supplying Iran with 110 million doses of Covid-19 vaccine.

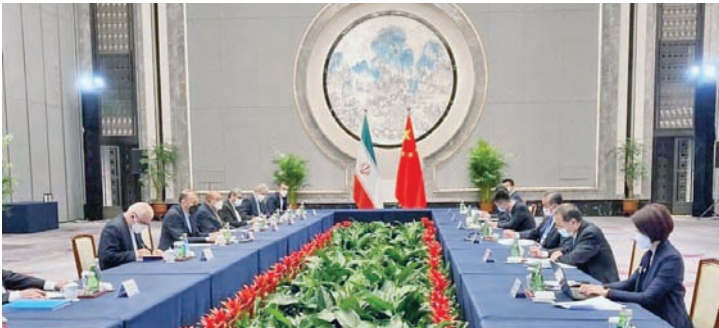
Amir Abdollahian also spoke of the Iranian government’s agreement to let China inaugurate a consulate in the southern port city of Bandar Abbas, expressing hope that this will facilitate people-to-people and trade relations between the two countries.

The top Iranian diplomat also outlined the latest state of cooperation between Iran and China in different areas, underlining Tehran’s determination to implement all infrastructure agreements with Beijing.

Expanding ties with neighbors and friendly nations is a foreign policy priority of Iran, Amir Abdollahian said, underscoring the continuation of Tehran’s constructive role in regional developments including protecting and strengthening security of energy transfer.

Iran’s top diplomat also referred to the significance of cultural relations in view of the ancient civilizations of Iran and China, saying Iranian cultural figures’ interest for closer cooperation with China will provide a valuable

Amir Abdollahian: Iran-China 25-year partnership agreement goes into effect



opportunity to tap the potential for cultural relationship.

For his part, the Chinese foreign minister approved of his Iranian counterpart’s views expounded in his op-ed published in China’s Global Times. Wang said the Iranian foreign minister’s views show the promising horizon in relations between Tehran and Beijing. The top Chinese diplomat underlined his country’s readiness to expand cooperation with Iran in financing, energy, banking and cultural sectors despite the illegal sanctions against the Iranian nation.

Wang announced China’s full support for Iran’s logical stance in face of the bullying policies of the United States regarding the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), saying Beijing’s principled policy is to continue supporting Iran’s position during the JCPOA talks and underscored that the U.S. must redress its mistake of leaving the deal.

The Chinese foreign minister also described the 25-year strategic partnership between Iran and China as highly important and said Tehran and Beijing’s agreement to start implementing the deal is a significant development that will pave the way to fundamentally transform bilateral ties.

The second round of talks was held at the official feast arranged by the Chinese foreign minister for his Iranian counterpart.

During this round of talks, Amir

Abdollahian and Wang discussed the latest state of the nuclear deal talks in Vienna as well as developments in West Asia and the Persian Gulf.

Later, Iran’s chief diplomat expressed his satisfaction over his visit to Beijing in Twitter.

“At the start of New Year 2022, I am very pleased to visit China on my first official visit as foreign minister. Mr. Wang Yi, China’s State Councilor and Foreign Minister, and I reached an important consensus in the beautiful city of Wuxi, Jiangsu

China’s FM underlines Beijing’s readiness to expand cooperation with Iran in financing, energy, banking and cultural sectors despite the illegal sanctions.

Province, over a wide variety of topics ranging from the Comprehensive Partnership Program to consultations on the Vienna talks. I hope that ties between the two countries will take a leap into their second 50 years. I also wish for the Beijing Winter Olympic Games, which will be held during China’s spring festival, to bring joy and vitality to the world during the coronavirus pandemic,” Amir Abdollahian wrote on January 14.

On the sidelines of his visit, Amir Abdollahian told reporters that the 25-year strategic comprehensive partnership cooperation between the two countries went into effect on Friday, January 14.

He added, “Simultaneously with the talks in China, we had prepared the groundwork for announcing today the day of the start of the implementation of the comprehensive agreement on

strategic cooperation between the two countries.”

The 25-year partnership agreement between Iran and China was signed on March 26, 2021, in Tehran. According to the agreement, China will invest \$400 billion in Iran over the course of 25 years.

Accordingly, China will be a regular importer of oil from Iran, although for the time being, despite the U.S. sanctions and pressure, Beijing continues to buy Iranian oil. Another advantage of the 25-year agreement is that it will ultimately increase Iran’s oil and gas production in the country’s three key fields. China has agreed to accelerate the development of phase 11 of the South Pars gas field. China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) boosted its stake in the South Pars development project to 50.1 percent from 30 percent when France left Iran due to U.S. sanctions.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Amir Abdollahian said the detailed discussions were held on the Vienna talks intended to lift the sanctions that the U.S. has imposed on Iran.

He stressed that the Chinese negotiator, along with the Russian, play a positive role in the Vienna talks by supporting Iran’s nuclear rights and lifting of sanctions.

“We hope that we will reach a good agreement in Vienna in a short time,” he said.

According to the chief diplomat, a good agreement will be in line with the rights and interests of the Iranian people.

Regarding the Vienna talks, Amir Abdollahian stated, “The problem that exists in the West which I explained to the Chinese foreign minister is that both the European troika and the United States in the ‘non-papers’ that they exchange or the messages that they send through some intermediaries, they make good suggestions in words but offer no practical initiative.”

He pointed to the behavior of Westerners and their statements, noting that they say “we are worried and in hurry”, but their failure to put forward initiatives indicates that there is a conflict in their behavior and remarks.

“We hope to pass this stage and I am here to declare loudly that the Islamic Republic of Iran welcomes reaching a good agreement as soon as possible, but that depends on the West,” he concluded.

In Iran’s diplomacy map, West is just “one” spot

TEHRAN — In line with the active diplomacy that Iran is pursuing in Vienna, President Ebrahim Raisi is preparing to visit Moscow in the coming days to discuss various issues with his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin.

Government spokesman Ali Bahador Jahromi referred to the dynamic and balanced diplomacy of the government in remarks on Saturday.

“The president is preparing for a visit to Russia and the foreign minister went to China, the minister of transport was in Syria, the minister of culture went to the Dubai 2020 Expo, and Mr. Bagheri is focusing on the Vienna talks.

Last week, several foreign officials were present in Iran.

Diplomacy in the #popular_government pays attention to the #broad field of national interests. Dynamic, all-round and result-oriented,” Bahadori Jahromi tweeted.

It seems that what Iran is seeking is an active diplomatic approach, especially in the economic field.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian visited China on Thursday to hold extensive talks with his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi.

Iran, Saudi Arabia prepare to reopen embassies: legislator

From page 1 ► talks with the relevant Saudi officials in Iraq.

“Due to the holding of parliamentary elections in Iraq and the fact that the Iraqi governing body and the heads of the three branches are all involved in forming a new government in the future, the role played by Iraqis was

naturally affected by the electoral atmosphere. What we have stated as our official position is that whenever the Saudi side wants the relations between the two countries to return to normal, we are ready and welcome the reopening of our embassies and consulates. Soon our diplomats will be stationed at

the office of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Jeddah. I think our diplomats will be deployed soon, which is a good sign. We are also planning to send our pilgrims for Hajj, if the coronavirus conditions allow, and again, if the conditions allow, even for the Umrah

pilgrimage. The Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran also has its own instructions for this issue. I personally think that the Saudi side still needs more time to be able to reach a conclusion and a decision. We have announced our readiness for a new round of talks in Baghdad.”

Contents of Iranian initiative for Yemen peace revealed

From page 1 ► in addition to a negotiation mechanism and a way to de-escalate the situation, Yemeni Foreign Minister Hisham Sharaf said on Thursday.

Tehran had expressed its readiness

Moscow seeking to hold Iranian-Arab conference: Russia FM

TEHRAN - Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has announced that Moscow is seeking to hold an Iranian-Arab conference whose agenda will include the most pressing regional issues.

Speaking at a press conference on Friday, Lavrov said the conference would address issues such as the conflict in Yemen and Iran's missile program, according to U News.

The Russian foreign minister also addressed the talks in Vienna over how to lift U.S. sanctions on Iran through reviving the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

He expressed "Moscow's opposition to the West's attempts to impose additional conditions for the resumption of the nuclear agreement with Iran, including, in particular, imposing restrictions on Tehran's missile program and the behavior of the Islamic Republic in the region."

He continued, "We strongly oppose this, and if this approach prevailed, it was not fair, because the talk revolved around the complete resumption of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which was ratified by the UN Security Council in its original version after the Trump administration withdrew from it."

The foreign minister pointed out that the international powers were eventually able to agree to follow this approach, which was supported by Russia, adding, "As for the missile program and behavior in the region, our position is that there are many complaints from all countries in the region and beyond about each other."

He added, "There are countries,



each with interests outside its borders."

According to the Russia TASS news agency, Lavrov also said that real progress has been achieved at the Iran nuclear deal talks.

"There has been real progress [...] on the Iranian nuclear program; there is a real desire, between Iran and the U.S., first and foremost, to understand concrete concerns and understand how these concerns could be accounted for in the general package," the minister said, according to TASS.

Lavrov underscored that "it could only be a package solution," just like the nuclear deal itself.

"The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was a package solution," he noted.

According to the minister, the experienced negotiators in Vienna "have already penetrated minute details of this negotiation matter" and "are making good progress."

"I am knocking on wood, but we expect the agreement to be achieved," he concluded.

Negotiations between Iran and the P4+1 group of countries are underway in Vienna with the heads of

delegations returning to capitals for more consultation. The talks, however, continues in the Austrian capital at expert level.

In line with an agreement between the heads of negotiating teams, the chief negotiators of Iran and the three European countries returned on Friday to their respective capitals to handle their political affairs and to hold some consultations for two days.

However, expert negotiations are continuing non-stop and the return of chief negotiators to their countries does not mean the 8th round of talks has stopped, the Iranian Foreign Ministry said.

The Vienna talks continued on Thursday at the two levels of chief negotiators and experts.

Iranian lead negotiator Ali Bagheri held talks separately with Enrique Mora, the talks coordinator, and the head of Russian team Mikhail Ulyanov.

Bagheri also held meetings with the chief negotiators of the three European parties to the talks.

Meanwhile, some sessions were held at expert level bilaterally and multilaterally.

On Friday, a senior Iranian cleric

said the West tries to prevent the removal of sanctions against Iran.

Tehran's provisional Friday Prayers Leader Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Javad Hajaliakbari blasted the Western countries for hatching plots and trying to prevent the removal of unlawful sanctions imposed by the U.S. against the Iranian nation, and called on the country's negotiators to beware of West's mischievous moves, Fars News reported.

Addressing a congregation of worshippers at Tehran's Imam Khomeini Grand Mosalla (congregational prayers site), Hojjatoleslam Hajaliakbari said, "The negotiators in the Vienna talks should courageously neutralize the enemy's plots on the removal of the U.S. sanctions."

"We are in no hurry in the negotiations, but we will not allow the negotiations to last too long," he added.

Also on Friday, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi highlighted his administration's commitment to efforts at the removal of the sanctions, but noted that it does not condition such efforts to the results of the Vienna talks on the revival of the 2015 nuclear deal, according to a Tasnim report.

"Although the pursuit of removing sanctions is a serious agenda of the government, the effort in the thirteenth government to neutralize the sanctions has not been dependent on negotiations, so that today and under the sanctions situation, our oil sales have increased so much that we no longer worry and the proceeds are also returning to the country," President Raisi said on Twitter.

IRAN IN FOCUS

JANUARY 16, 2022
Straight Truth
TEHRAN TIMES

3

SPORTS

Fans allowed into stadium for Iran, Iraq match

TEHRAN - Iranian football fans will be permitted to return to the stadium after two years.

Iran will host Iraq in Tehran's Azadi Stadium on Jan. 27 in the 2022 FIFA World Cup qualifier.

Group A leaders Iran will qualify for the 2022 FIFA World Cup for the third time in a row if defeat the Iraqi team at the Azadi Stadium.

Up to 30,000 fans will be allowed to enter into the stadium with confirmation of Iran's National Headquarters for Coronavirus Control.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino will travel to Tehran to attend the match.

It seems the FIFA president is going to see the Iranian women in the stadium watching the match since he has previously said women have to be allowed into the stadiums in Iran.

Saeid Ezatolahi signs for Qatari club Al Gharafa

TEHRAN - Iran international midfielder Saeid Ezatolahi joined Qatari football club Al Gharafa.

The details of the deal have not yet been revealed.

Ezatolahi has joined the Qatari top-flight football club from Danish football club Vejle Boldklub.

The 26-year-old midfielder started his playing career in Malavan in 2012 and joined Atlético Madrid C two years.

Ezatolahi has also played in Russian team Rostov, Anzhi Makhachkala and Amkar Perm.

He has also played for Championships side Reading and Eupen of Belgium.

Ezatolahi, who has made 41 caps for Iran national football team, represented the country at the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

Iran Dabbaghi among players to watch at AFC Women's Asian Cup

TEHRAN - Iran national women's football team forward Hajar Dabbaghi is among players to watch in Group A of the 2022 AFC Women's Asian Cup.

Dabbaghi caught the eye in the historic qualification for India 2022, having first made her name at continental level when she helped her nation qualify for the AFC Women's Under-16 Championship in 2015.



However, Dabbaghi's potential was truly witnessed at the 2019 CAFA (Central Asian Football Association) U23 Women's Championship when the forward netted eight goals, helping Iran to a runners-up place and claiming the top scorer award in the process.

The 22-year-old went on to score five more goals in national team colors in the qualification campaign for Tokyo 2020 as well as finding the back of the net en route to the AFC Women's Asian Cup in a 5-0 victory over Bangladesh.

Possessing great situational awareness in the box, Dabbaghi's goalscoring instincts will be key for Iran. As player and country get set to kick off its maiden campaign against host India on January 20, the stage is set for the 22-year-old to shine.

CAFA Women's Futsal Championship 2022 match schedule revealed

TEHRAN - Iran's women's futsal team will open the CAFA Women's Futsal Championship 2022 with a match against Uzbekistan.

Iran will face Uzbekistan on Jan. 21 in Dushanbe Indoor Hall.

Iran will also play Tajikistan and Kyrgyz Republic on 22 and 24 Jan. respectively.

The competition will be held from January 19 to 29 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

Tajikistan, Iran, Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan will take part in the tournament.

The CAFA Women's Championship is an international futsal competition in Central Asia for the member nations of the Central Asian Football Association (CAFA).

Iranian goalkeeper Abedzadeh linked with Sevilla

TEHRAN - La Liga side Sevilla have reportedly showed an interest in signing Iranian international goalkeeper Amir Abedzadeh.

The 28-year-old custodian, who currently plays for Segunda División side Ponferradina, has caught the eye of Sevilla, infobierzo.com reported.

Abedzadeh joined the Spanish team from Portugal's Primeira Liga team Maritimo in July 2021.

Moroccan goalkeeper Yassine Bounou has left Julen Lopetegui for representing his nation at the 2021 Africa Cup of Nations.

Iran weightlifting legend Nasiri to undergo heart surgery

TEHRAN - Iranian legendary weightlifter Mohammad Nasiri will undergo a heart surgery in the coming days.

Nasiri, 76, was hospitalized in a hospital in Tehran, capital of Iran and underwent the coronary angiography.

According to his wife, he will likely need the mitral valve replacement.

Nasiri competed at the 1964, 1968, 1972 and 1976 Olympics and won a gold, a silver and a bronze medal. He also won gold medals at the Asian Games in 1966, 1970 and 1974.

Al Duhail winger Rezaeian linked with Persepolis

TEHRAN - Al Duhail winger Ramin Rezaeian has been linked with a move to Persepolis football club.

Rezaeian, who currently plays in Qatari club Al-Sailiya, waits for Persepolis coach Yahya Golmohammadi to green-light his move to the Iranian giant.

The 31-year-old player was a member of Persepolis from 2015 to 2017 and left the team to join Belgian club KV Oostende.

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

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

Army, IRGC respected by people: president

TEHRAN - Iranian President Ayatollah Seyed Ebrahim Raisi on Friday praised the armed forces, underlining that the people of the country hold high opinion of the armed forces, including the Army and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC).

During a visit to Hormozgan province on Friday morning, Ayatollah Raisi visited an exhibition of achievements and capabilities of the IRGC Navy in the First Marine Region. He appreciated the commanders and personnel of the unit and stated, "This exhibition proved that sanctions and threats do not hinder progress."

The president added, "Your actions are the best manifestation of the expression of 'WE CAN'. What was seen in this exhibition is a symbol of ability and authority for the Revolutionary Guards and the country."

Stressing that the volume of restrictions and military and nuclear sanctions do not exist in any other industry, Ayatollah Raisi

said, "Despite these sanctions, we have made the most progress in this area," according to a readout published by the official website of the Iranian presidency.

Referring to the strong will and capability of the IRGC Navy, Ayatollah Raisi said, "As long as this spirit is revolutionary, the enemy cannot do anything. What has given power to the country today is the steely will."

The president stated, "Today, people are comfortable with the security of the country in various sectors, because no movement is hidden from the eyes of the heroes of the Armed Forces."

Ayatollah Raisi added, "This feeling of security is due to the authority of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, the Army and the Basij. The Army and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps are respected by the people, and the people have a very close relationship with the armed forces."

During his tour of the coastal province, Ayatollah Raisi visited the latest achievements and capabilities of the IRGC Navy in the past year and a half, including drone units, missile systems, forest systems, rocket launchers, missile launchers and torpedo launchers, subsurface equipment, missile launchers, high-speed warships and flying boats.

Also, as part of his trip to Hormozgan province, the president paid visits to the islands of Hormoz and Qeshm.

Raisi met with the people and local officials of Hormoz Island. The president said, "One of the honors of Hormoz Island is that it has dedicated martyrs to the country."

Referring to the lack of a health centre in Hormoz Island, Ayatollah Raisi said, "An active medical center should be established to serve the people of the island

and travelers and tourists."

Ayatollah Raisi emphasized, "One of the government's plans is to construct houses, and it was decided in the national housing scheme to build a number of houses on the island, and the governor-general of Hormozgan will follow up on this issue."

The president stated, "It does not make sense for the people of Hormoz Island to have unemployment problems with so much capacity, and the issue of employment is one of the most central issues that must be resolved on this island."

He emphasized activating the tourism economy in Hormoz. "I believe that by activating the tourism capacity in Hormoz Island, employment will also be created."

During this visit, Ayatollah Raisi also met with the families of the martyrs and war veterans of the island and insisted on preserving the culture and manners of the martyrs in this region and protecting the intentions and goals of the martyrs.

Raisi also visited the village of Gevarzin on Qeshm Island.

The president said, "A lot of work has been done on Qeshm Island thanks to the Islamic Republic, and the face of this island is not comparable to before the revolution."

Ayatollah Raisi pointed out, "Part of the people of this region are engaged in tourism projects, which will increase employment with the development of this industry."

The president held a press conference at the end of his visit on Friday afternoon.

"Based on the analyses that we did before the trip, we visited various projects, and it was decided that the problems that can be solved quickly should be solved in a short time," Raisi said.

The president added, "For the problems that need to be investigated in the capital and the budget allocation, orders were issued and it was decided to follow up the issue in the Planning and Budget Organization."

Referring to the government's concern to deal with flood and earthquake damage in Hormozgan, Ayatollah Raisi said, "We thank God that the damage from these two incidents in Hormozgan was very small, but the government will compensate this small damage, especially to farmers and ranchers."

Referring to his visit to the flood and quake-stricken areas of Hormozgan, the president said, "Good measures have been taken to remove debris and start rebuilding houses."

Referring to the complaints raised in various meetings about employing non-locals in the province's major industries and projects, he said, "In the administrative council, I announced that the

MOU signed on building oil products transferring strategic pipeline



NIORDC Head Jalil Salari (R) and Managing Director of Bank Mellat Reza Dolat-Abadi ink MOU documents as Oil Minister Javad Oji (2nd L) and Finance Minister Ehsan Khandouzi look upon.

From page 1 ► as well as facilitating the export of oil products to eastern neighboring

countries.

The project also includes the construction of two pump stations and three terminals.

The construction of this pipeline is significant as it would provide fuel to the country's northeastern regions which are far away from the energy sources in the country.

National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company is a subsidiary of Iran Oil Ministry. The company was established in 1991 and undertook to perform all operations relating to refining and distribution of oil products.

Although NIORDC was formed in the 1990s, the company has actually inherited 90 years of Iran's oil industries' experiences in the fields of refining, transfer, and distribution of oil products, as well as engineering and construction of installations of oil industries.

Domestic banks to form consortium to implement \$4b petro-refinery projects

TEHRAN – Iranian Oil Minister Javad Oji said some major domestic banks are going to form a consortium with a total investment capacity of four billion dollars to implement petro-refinery projects across the country, IRIB reported.

Speaking to the press on Saturday, Oji said: "A large part of the financial resources required for the implementation of the country's oil projects will be provided with the support of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, and this includes the financial resources needed for the refining sector as well."

Increasing the country's petro-refining capacity has recently become a hot topic among Iran's top research institutions and research centers as a key defense mechanism against the impacts of the U.S. sanctions



on the country's oil industry.

Experts and analysts argue that in addition to generating more revenue, the conversion of crude oil to oil products will have many other benefits including creating new job opportunities, economic prosperity, and

reviving other industries. And most importantly, it will lead to a stronger economy that could easily withstand the U.S. pressures.

Construction of petro-refineries instead of refining complexes emphasized

In this regard, the importance of moving toward the construction of petro-refineries instead of refinery complexes has been emphasized.

Iran's export to Syria rises 90% in 9 months on year

TEHRAN- The chairman of Iran-Syria Joint Chamber of Commerce announced that the value of Iran's export to Syria rose 90 percent during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-Decemembr 21, 2021), as compared to the same period of time in the past year.

Keyvan Kashefi said that Iran exported \$160 million of commodities to Syria in the nine-month period of this year, while the figure was \$84 million in the same time span of the past year.

Most of the exported goods were related to engineering industries (parts and components of steam turbines), food and pharmaceutical industries, he said.

Saying that Iran has exported \$35 billion of goods to different countries in the first nine months of this year, Kashefi said that in this period, Syria was among the 21 countries targeted by Iran's exports.

He put Iran's nine-month import from Syria at \$22.9 million, with 53 percent growth from that of the previous year, and named phosphate as the main imported item.

With \$36.9 billion in Iranian imports in the first nine months of this year, Syria ranks 49th among the sources of imports.

As stated by the head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), the country has allocated a special budget of \$50 million to support the Iranian export



companies active in the Syrian market.

"Iran and Syria have good political relations and we must use this opportunity and encourage the private sector and our businessmen to enter the Syrian market and the government must do its best in this regard," Alireza Peyman Pak said last month.

The official noted that the TPO has it on the agenda to establish offices for promoting barter trade with not only Syria but also all other neighboring countries.

"Syria imports \$4 billion [of goods] annually and exports \$800 million, and the country's exports are mainly cotton," Peyman Pak said.

"Our industries need 150,000 tons of cotton annually, so if the Syrian cotton production increases in a year or two, we intend to import it through barter

trade, which requires a reliable transportation route between two countries," he added.

There is no regular shipping line between Iran and Syria, Peyman Pak said, adding that Iranian investors could invest in establishing shipping lines if the government provides them with necessary incentives.

Iran and Syria signed four documents to boost cooperation in the fields of trade and industry during a visit of an Iranian delegation headed by the country's industry minister to Damascus last month.

The documents were inked at the end of the two countries' joint economic and industrial committee meetings which were held in the Syrian capital.

Meanwhile, during a three-day visit of a high-ranking Iranian economic and political delegation headed by Transport and Urban

Development Minister Rostam Qasemi to Syria which started on Wednesday, the two sides discussed expansion of economic cooperation and trade ties between the two countries.

In his trip, the Iranian minister was welcomed by Syrian Economy and Foreign Trade Minister Mohammad Samer al-Khalil.

Speaking to the press at the airport, Qasemi said: "The end of the war in Syria is the beginning of a new era of economic relations between the two countries, especially since Iran and Syria have been together during the years of the war against international terrorism."

Samer al-Khalil for his part referred to the inseparable ties between the two nations and said: "We in Syria want extensive cooperation with Iran."

After his visit to Damascus, Qasemi announced that Iran and Syria have reached primary agreements for the establishment of a joint free zone and a joint bank during his trip.

Referring to his meeting with President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus on Wednesday, Qasemi said, "During the meeting with the Syrian president, the economic issues of this country, as well as the current obstacles and problems in the economic relations between Iran and Syria were discussed. A joint committee is set to be formed between Iran and Syria [to

resolve such problems]."

He stated that good decisions have been made in the meetings with Syrian officials, adding: "It was decided to form a joint committee between us and Syria to follow up on the reached agreements; We have many agreements with Syria, but some of them have not been implemented, so it was decided to review these issues in a joint committee and then implement them."

Ghasemi also pointed to his meeting with Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad on diplomatic issues between the two countries, saying, "We reached good agreements; A joint bank is scheduled to be established in Syria; In this regard, Iranian and Syrian banks should have branches in both countries."

The minister of transport and urban development also referred to the meeting with his Syrian counterpart and said: "Transportation in various sectors is one of the important requirements for our country's economic development; In this regard, it was decided that the head of the country's Civil Aviation Organization would pursue executive issues in this area with the Syrian side."

Decisions were made on various issues during the visit with Samer al-Khalil, especially the establishment of a joint free zone between the two countries, he added.

TCCIMA Agriculture Committee holds meeting to discuss recent issues

TEHRAN – The members of Agriculture Committee of Tran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) gathered in their 12th meeting this year to discuss issues in various agricultural fields especially the concerns about the level of pesticide residues in Iranian agricultural products.

As reported by the TCCIMA portal, recent rumors about the high level of pesticide residues in some of Iran's agricultural products have raised serious concerns among domestic consumers, while causing serious damage to exporters of agricultural products in the country which have been forced to export canned products.



In this regard, the TCCIMA Agriculture Committee has been holding various meetings with officials from the Agriculture Ministry in order to resolve the mentioned problems.

Speaking in the gathering, Head of the Association of Iranian Pesticide Producers Masoud Gilabadi said the existence of pesticide residues in agricultural products is not the producers of pesticides' fault, noting that this problem should be sought in the distribution and consumption of pesticides by farmers.

Gilabadi noted that the recent incidents regarding the rejection of Iranian agricultural products from other country's including Russia are something new which have never happened before.

Reacting to Gilabadi's remarks, Kaveh Zargaran, head of the TCCIMA Agriculture Committee, stressed that there was correspondence between Russia and the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs (IRICA) stating that the reason that the Russian customs rejected Iranian pepper cargoes was the presence of certain pesticide residues in the products.

Further in the meeting, TCCIMA Board Member Mohammad Reza Behzadian said that pesticide production in the country cannot meet the needs of the farmers to produce residue-free agricultural products, so restrictions on the import of high-quality pesticides from Europe should be lifted to allow the imports of such products.

TEDPIX down 11,000 points on Saturday

TEHRAN- TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), lost 11,630 points to 1.322 million on Saturday (the first day of Iranian calendar week).

As reported, 4.728 billion securities worth 27.68 trillion rials (about \$93.337 million) were traded at the TSE.

The first market's index lost 10,192 points, and the second market's index dropped 18,219 points.

TEDPIX lost 29,000 (2.1 percent) to 1.334 million in the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday).

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

Capital market in a country eliminates the enterprises' need for external financing that requires forex rate risk; and plays an important role in risk sharing and the effectiveness of capital allocation in various economic sectors, and as a result

increases economic growth and welfare in society.

In Iran, where the capital market plays a small role in the long-term financing of enterprises, the government can play an important role in the development of the capital market and take initiatives to develop this market and increase its efficiency.

Some recent measures taken by the Iranian government indicate that the government is determined to support the capital market and strengthen this market's role in the national economy.

One measure was the six clauses in the national budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year (starts on March 21) on supporting the capital market.

The budget bill, submitted by president to the parliament on December 12, has paid special attention to the capital market and bourse companies.

The measures considered in the budget bill and its overall positive effects on the capital market includes 1- Reforming the price of gas feed, as well as electricity,



water, oxygen and other utilities for the petrochemical units, refineries, steel reduction units, and downstream industries 2- Reducing taxes on production units active in the stock market 3- Strengthening Capital Market Development and Stabilization Fund 4- Reducing the government's revenue from selling bonds 5- Eliminating subsidized foreign currency allocations 6- Eliminating pre-ordered pricing.

Reducing the taxes imposed on production units will make them more profitable and therefore their performance in the stock market will improve.

Also, the direct taxes collected from production units is expected to be injected into Capital Market Development and

Stabilization Fund in order to be used to improve and develop the market.

Based on the next year's budget bill, no subsidized foreign currency will be allocated to special entities to import certain goods. Experts and analysts believe that this decision is going to have a very positive impact on the stock market since it will prevent rent and unrealistic pricing.

The draft of the national budget bill also indicates that the government will be less reliant on the stock market to compensate deficits and fund various development projects, which is another positive aspect of the mentioned bill since the stock market will be less affected by the politics and will follow a normal trend created by supply and demand.

The government's second measure, which is also for the profitability of production activities and bourse industries, and a promising market outlook, was approving a 10-article package to support this market in the meeting of the Government's Economic Coordination Headquarters on December 19.

Russia denounces “false flag” allegations

From page 1 ► The embassy's statement added that “representatives of the administration are already describing in detail the scenarios of such provocations, naming the dates of the eventual start of ‘operations’. As usual, there is no evidence”

“Such statements confirm the incessant information pressure on our country. Moreover, the same scenario is repeated: there is a ‘stuffing’ of a sensation, which then, repeated many times by the media, turns into the main news,” the embassy said, adding, “Russia is against the war. We stand for a diplomatic solution to all international problems”.

The remarks come amid increasingly strained relations between Russia and the U.S.-led North Atlantic Alliance.

Western media reports have cited unnamed U.S. officials claiming that Russia is devising a “false flag” incident in order to invade Ukraine.

Likewise, the Kremlin has dismissed the accusations as baseless and unfounded rumors.

Anonymous U.S. officials have also repeated claims by Ukraine that Russia had sent “operatives” into the regions of Donetsk and Lugansk, to prepare some form of “provocation” that could trigger an “invasion.”

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov says “so far, all these statements have been unsubstantiated and not backed up by anything”

According to the Russian embassy's statement “for our part, we would like to warn our colleagues against such adventures. Once again, we declare: the continuous accusations against us in the United States (both at the official level and in the media) are unfounded and cannot have any confirmation”.

The statement added “[Russia] calls on the United States to engage in substantive work to ensure security guarantees based on the draft agreements proposed by the Russian side”.

Speaking at a press conference, the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov has slammed Washington's recent demands, that Russia send its troops (allegedly positioned at the Ukrainian border) back to their barracks, as “barking up the wrong tree.” According to the top Russian diplomat “the time that this has been chosen [to be discussed] simply reflects a period when the West



gets mad, let's be frank”

He says Moscow expects the United States and NATO to provide written responses on the issue of security guarantees noting “we expect our colleagues to give responses, written responses, putting their proposals on paper like we did”.

In mid-December last year, the Russian Foreign Ministry released a draft agreement related to security guarantees between Russia and the United States.

The ministry also released a draft proposal on ensuring the security of Russia and NATO member states.

Several rounds of talks ensued on the matter this month in Geneva and Brussels where a meeting of the Russia-NATO Council took place as well as a session of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Permanent Council in Vienna.

However, according to the top official, the Russian side is still waiting for the West to give “a concrete answer” to its security proposals.

Following the high-level talks, the U.S. and its allies rejected Russia's key proposals out of hand. NATO has instead taken military steps that has left Moscow frustrated. Lavrov says “we categorically cannot be satisfied with this – these are unacceptable approaches”.

He accused the European Union of wanting to “contribute to the training of anti-Russian units.” He also pointed out that “meanwhile, we will certainly continue activities to make sure that we are prepared for any kind of developments”.

According to Lavrov, Russian President Vladimir Putin and his U.S. counterpart Joe Biden (in Geneva last June) emphasized the need for dialogue on all issues related to security and sta-

bility at their meeting.

Analysts say Moscow's patience has a limit and it will take measures to guarantee it's security; if those guarantees are not provided by the West.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov told local

media his county may assign its Navy to take certain measures to confront any future U.S. provocations or continued U.S. military pressure.

When questioned if Russia considers deploying its military in countries such as Venezuela or Cuba, Ryabkov said, “I don't want to confirm anything, but I won't rule anything out either.”

“It's the American style to have several options for its foreign and military policy” he said. “That's the cornerstone of that country's powerful influence in the world.”

Russia will act depending on what the U.S. will do, the deputy minister added.

The diplomat also denounced the EU saying the bloc is “now actively promoting their plans to send a military coaching mission to Ukraine.”

NATO Chief, Jens Stoltenberg, says the organization was ready to discuss issues such as restrictions on the location of its missiles near Russian borders but also made clear NATO will not compromise on its “core values” to meet Russian demands.

Stoltenberg insisted that “only Ukraine and 30 allies can decide when Ukraine becomes a member... Russia does not have a veto”.

Moscow argues it has previously received strong assurances on the matter and U.S. led NATO alliance cannot be trusted.

For weeks now, Washington has been accusing Moscow of planning to invade Ukraine, though the Kremlin has rejected the accusa-

tions as “fake news.” Every year since 2015, U.S. media have been reporting similar warnings, always based on anonymous sources, but the allegations have never materialized.

According to military experts the latest accusations by the West came after Russia conducted military exercises nears its own borders which triggered demands from the west for an immediate explanation amid “concerns” Moscow was about to invade its neighbor Ukraine.

However, experts note the Russian drills involved 3,000 soldiers at a combined arms training ground in four regions, armed with military equipment that would equal one regiment. They say one regiment should not have caused such widespread outrage by the west as it is simply not enough force to cause concern regarding an invasion.

In addition training exercises are pre-planned in advance and not conducted overnight, they take place on a regular basis annually which further erodes the U.S. and NATO's argument.

As it happens, according to a statement by the Russian Ministry of Defense, troops in the country's Far East have begun winter drills. Military officials announced that forces stationed in the Eastern Military District, which covers a vast swath of land from Siberia to the Sea of Japan, were undertaking inspections and exercises intended to ensure their military readiness.

In December, Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu had announced the upcoming exercises for 2022, called “East” and “Thunder”.

In addition to those in the Far East, exercises will also take place in the western part of the country, including near the border with Ukraine. Analysts say it would not be surprising if Western officials and media begin talking about a possible invasion of Ukraine once again.

Critics say it's just a pretext for the U.S. to encourage NATO to place its missiles and advanced military hardware near Russian borders; again to try and provoke Moscow.

Some critics say Western arms manufacturers benefit from the mounting tension, others say some hawks actually want to start a conflict with Russia to perhaps weaken the eastern superpower.

Biden backers ‘not seeing the results’ a year into his term

NEW YORK (AP) — Just over a year ago, millions of energized young people, women, voters of color and independents joined forces to send Joe Biden to the White House. But 12 months into his presidency, many describe a coalition in crisis.

Leading voices across Biden's diverse political base openly decry the slow pace of progress on key campaign promises. The frustration was especially pronounced this past week after Biden's push for voting rights legislation effectively stalled, intensifying concerns in his party that fundamental democratic principles are at risk and reinforcing a broader sense that the president is faltering at a moment of historic consequence.

“People are feeling like they're getting less than they bargained for when they put Biden in office. There's a lot of emotions, and none of them are good,” said Quentin Wathum-Ocama, president of the Young Democrats of America. “I don't know if the right word is ‘apoplectic’ or ‘demoralized.’ We're down. We're not seeing the results.”

The strength of Biden's support will determine whether Democrats maintain threadbare majorities in Congress beyond this year or whether they will cede lawmaking authority to a Republican Party largely controlled by former President Donald Trump. Already, Republicans in several state legislatures have taken advantage of Democratic divisions in Washington to enact far-reaching changes to state election laws, abortion rights and public health measures in line with Trump's wishes.

If Biden cannot unify his party and reinvigorate his political coalition, the GOP at the state and federal levels will almost certainly grow more emboldened, and the red wave that shaped a handful of state elections last year could fundamentally shift the balance of power across America in November's midterm elections.

For now, virtually none of the groups that fueled Biden's 2020 victory are happy.

Young people are frustrated that he hasn't followed through on vows to combat climate change and student debt. Women are worried that his plans to expand family leave, child care and universal pre-K are stalled as abortion rights erode and schools struggle to stay open. Moderates in both parties who once cheered Biden's centrist approach worry that he's moved too far left. And voters of color, like those across Biden's political base, are furious that he hasn't done more to protect their voting rights.

“We mobilized to elect President Biden because he made promises to us,” Rep. Cori Bush, D-Mo., told The Associated Press, citing Biden's pledge to address police violence, student loan debt, climate change and voter suppression, among other issues.

“We need transformative change — our very lives depend on it,” Bush said. “And because we haven't seen those results yet, we're frustrated — frustrated that despite everything we did to deliver a Democratic White House, Senate and House of Representatives, our needs and our lives are still not being treated as a top priority. That needs to change.”

Facing widespread frustration, the White House insists Biden is making significant progress, especially given the circumstances when he took office.

“President Biden entered office with enormous challenges — a once-in-a-generation pandemic, economic crisis and a hollowed-out federal government. In the first year alone, he has delivered progress on his promises,” said Cedric Richmond, a senior adviser to the president. He pointed to more than 6 million new jobs, 200 million vaccinated Americans, the most diverse Cabinet in U.S. history and the most federal judges confirmed a president's first year since Richard Nixon.

Richmond also highlighted historic legislative accomplishments Biden signed into law — specifically, a \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief bill that sent \$1,400 checks to most Americans and a subsequent \$1 trillion infrastructure package that will fund public works projects across every state in the nation for several years.

In an interview, Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, a leading voice in the Democratic Party's left wing, described Biden's pandemic relief package as among the most significant pieces of legislation ever enacted to help working people.

“But a lot more work needs to be done,” he said.

Like other Biden allies, Sanders directed blame for the president's woes at two Senate Democrats: Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona. They are blocking the president's plan to protect voting rights by refusing to bypass the filibuster, having already derailed Biden's “Build Back Better” package, which calls for investments exceeding \$2 tril-

lion for child care, paid family leave, education and climate change, among other progressive priorities.

“It has been a mistake to have backroom conversations with Manchin and Sinema for the last four months, or five months,” Sanders said. “Those conversations have gotten nowhere. But what they have done is demoralize tens of millions of Americans.”

But blaming fellow Democrats will do little to improve Biden's political standing.

According to Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research polling released last month, the president's approval ratings have been falling among virtually every demographic as the pandemic continues to rage, inflation soars and the majority of his campaign promises go unfulfilled. A series of legal setbacks in recent days stand to make things worse. The Supreme Court on Thursday blocked Biden's vaccine and testing requirements for big businesses.

About 7 in 10 Black Americans said they approved of Biden in December, compared with roughly 9 in 10 in April. Among Hispanics, support dipped to roughly half from about 7 in 10.

Just half of women approved of Biden last month compared to roughly two-thirds in the spring.

There was a similar drop among younger voters: Roughly half of Americans under 45 approved of the president, down from roughly two-thirds earlier in the year. The decline was similar among those age 45 and older. And among independents, a group that swung decidedly for Biden in 2020, just 40% of those who don't lean toward a party approved of Biden in December, down from 63% in April.

“Biden is failing us,” said John Paul Mejia, the 19-year-old spokesman for the Sunrise Movement, a national youth organization focused on climate change. “If Biden doesn't use the time he has left with a Democratic majority in Congress to fight tooth and nail for the promises that he was elected on, he will go down in history as a could-have-been president and ultimately a coward who didn't stand up for democracy and a habitable planet.”

Christian Nunes, president of the National Organization for Women, said she wants to see more urgency from Biden in protecting women's priorities.

“In these times, we need somebody who's going to be a fighter,” she said.

Nunes called on Biden to work harder to protect voting rights and access to abortion, which have been dramatically curtailed in several Republican-led states. A looming Supreme Court decision expected this summer could weaken, or wipe away, the landmark Roe v. Wade precedent that made abortion legal.

“We are in a really dire time right now. We're seeing so many laws passed that are really challenging peoples' constitutional rights,” Nunes said. “We need someone who's going to say we're not going to tolerate this.”

Charlie Sykes, an anti-Trump Republican who backed Biden in 2020, said the president is also in danger of losing moderate voters in both parties unless he can shift his party's rhetoric more to the middle when talking about public safety, crime and voting.

“He ran as very much a centrist, center-left candidate, but I think that a lot of moderate swing voters are feeling a little bit left out and wondering where the Joe Biden of 2020 went,” Sykes said.

Having only been in office for a year, Biden may have time to turn things around before the November midterms — especially as Trump re-emerges as a more visible player in national politics. In recent years, nothing has unified Democrats more than Trump himself.

Mary Kay Henry, president of the two-million-member Service Employees International Union, said her members want more from Washington, but they would be out in full force this year to remind voters of the work Biden has already done to address concerns about the pandemic and economic security.

“President Biden is not the obstacle,” Henry said, pointing to the “intransigent Republican caucus in the Senate” who have unified against Biden's Build Back Better package and his plan to protect voting rights. “We're going to have this president's back.”

Not everyone is as willing to commit to the Democratic president.

“We need to see Joe Biden the fighter. That's kind of where I'm at,” said Wathum-Ocama, the Young Democrats of America president. “The unifier is appropriate at times. But we need somebody who's going to fight for our issues if we're going to come out and turn out for him in '22.”

Possible scenarios behind Kazakhstan developments

By Payman Yazdani

TEHRAN— The fast pace of the security developments in Kazakhstan has raised many speculations as to the reasons behind them in the strategically important country.

Tripling the fuel prices by the government in Kazakhstan sparked widespread protests resulting in dozens of deaths and hundreds of injuries. As the protests continued, the Kazakh President tried to bring the situation under control by dissolving the government, and declaring a state of emergency and returning fuel prices to a level even lower than the pre-protests period. However, the demonstrators continued their protests and started armed actions against the government. Armed men started to attack government buildings and even occupied the presidential palace and many other government buildings.

As the protests turned violent, the army took action, and the president appealed to the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which has six members (Russia, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan) for help.

According to Article 8 of the CSTO charter, member states should cooperate in order to combat organized crime, terrorism, threats to territorial integrity, etc. against anyone of the members.

Russia, Armenia and Belarus sent troops to Kazakhstan following a request from the president to help the country.

There are different readings on the ongoing developments in Kazakhstan and the possible motives and scenarios behind the violent unrest.

Given the continuation of the unrest in vari-

ous parts of the country despite returning the fuel prices even to levels lower than before and the dissolution of the government, as well as the history of American hand in the so-called velvet revolution in the post-Soviet states, one can say that the United States could be involved. The following are reasons why the American involvement in the unrest in Kazakhstan is likely:

*Increasing US influence in Kazakhstan as it has massive oil, gas and uranium resources

*Opening a new front against Russia while the tensions between Russia and Ukraine is escalating with the aim of putting pressure on Moscow to make concessions

*Putting pressure on Russia to reduce its cooperation with and support for Iran in the Vienna talks

*Reducing China's influence in Central Asia and putting obstacles in the way of the One Belt and One Road Initiative, a major part of which crosses Kazakhstan and the Caspian Sea.

*Reducing Russia's influence and containing Russia by creating crisis and unrest in a country that shares thousands of kilometers of border with it.

On the other hand, some have accused Russia of being involved in the developments in Kazakhstan, citing the following reasons as Moscow's motive for leading the recent unrest:

*Russia's attempt to bring under its control regions in Kazakhstan that are of Russian descent with the aim of squeezing any prospects for future US and Western influence

*Putting pressure on Turkey and curbing Ankara's expansion of Turkic influence in the Central Asian region, which has been heavily invested in by Turkey since the time of the Second Karabakh War.

*Curbing China's growing influence in the region, the traditional Russian backyard, and gain more concessions from Beijing with regard to the One Belt Road project

*Influencing energy security in Europe and Turkey

Conclusion

Given the need for close China-Russia cooperation, as well as Russia's reluctance to escalate tensions with the United States and NATO in Eastern Europe, the Black Sea, Syria and Afghanistan, it makes sense to accuse Russia of involvement in the Kazakhstan developments

One can say that Russia's intelligence superiority over US and Western actions in Kazakhstan over the past years and months has instigated Russia and its allies to take the initiative in response to developments in Kazakhstan, something that the Americans did not expect

While only time will tell where the developments are heading, the United States and its allies are expected to impose new economic sanctions on Moscow by offering rhetoric against it. The Western powers will seek to force Russia to make concessions with regard to the Ukraine issue and other ongoing conflicts between Russia and the West in the short term, but in the long run, they will weaken its economic structures and cause it to collapse, as they did with the former Soviet Union.

Spreading instability in the region is the West's low-cost strategy to contain Russia and China. The importance of this approach becomes even clearer given the fact that Kazakhstan is one of the largest countries in the world and has lots of shared borders with Russia, which makes it difficult to curb Western-backed extremism and terrorism.

Private sector to invest \$65.6m in Bushehr's tourism



TEHRAN – The private sector is planning to invest 18.5 trillion rials (\$65.6 million) in the tourism sector of the southwestern Bushehr province, the provincial tourism chief has announced.

The money will be invested in various tourism-related projects with the aim of developing the province's tourism infrastructure by the end of the next Iranian calendar year 1401 (ends March 20, 2023), IRNA quoted Mohammad-Hossein Arastuzadeh as saying on Saturday.

The investment will increase the accommodation capacity of Bushehr province by 80 percent, the official added.

Through these projects, the province will be able to expand its accommodation capacity from 3,700 to 6,100 beds, he explained.

Despite the province's tourism capabilities and the number of tourists it welcomes, particularly during the second half of the year, its capacity does not meet their needs, he noted.

Consequently, more investors are expected to enter Bushehr province in order to improve tourism infrastructure because of the available facilities, he said.

Back in October, the deputy tourism minister Ali-Asghar Shalbafian announced

that Busher province should invest a great deal of effort to develop its maritime tourism.

"If the southwestern Bushehr province wants to develop tourism, it should focus on maritime sector," the official said.

"The province needs to inform investors about its capacity in this sector, especially its favorable location on the Persian Gulf coast."

The coastal region, ports, islands and coasts of the Persian Gulf are among Bushehr's greatest natural gifts, therefore, directing the investment capacities and enthusiastic investors to the maritime tourism sector will facilitate the growth of Bushehr as a coastal tourist destination, Shalbafian explained.

With over 6,000 years of history and significant monuments from the Elamite, Achaemenid, Parthian and Sassanid eras, Bushehr Province is one of Iran's most important historical centers.

Besides its cultural heritage, beautiful beaches and lush palm groves make it an attractive destination for world travelers.

The historical and architectural monuments of Bushehr include Islamic buildings like mosques and praying centers, mansions, old towers, castles, as well as gardens.

When it comes to cultural attractions, there are many historical mounds in Bushehr including Tall-e Khandaq with Sassanid architectural style, Tall-e Marv located near an Achaemenid Palace and Qajar era Malek al-Tojar Mansion. Qajar era Kazeruni Mansion, which has been inscribed on the World Heritage List, is another attraction that world travelers love to see among various ancient sites.

Iwan-e Karkheh, a forgotten gem of Sassanid architecture



From page 1 ► Under Sassanids, Persian art and architecture experienced a general renaissance. Architecture often took grandiose proportions such as palaces at Ctesiphon, Firuzabad, and Sarvestan that are amongst highlights of the ensemble.

Crafts such as metalwork and gem-engraving grew highly sophisticated, yet scholarship was encouraged by the state. In those years, works from both the East and West were translated into Pahlavi, the language of the Sassanians. Rock-carved sculptures and

bas-reliefs on abrupt limestone cliffs are widely deemed as characteristics and striking relics of the Sassanian art, top examples of which can be traced at Bishapur, Naqsh-e Rostam, and Naqsh-e Rajab in southern Iran.

At the time of Shapur I, the empire stretched from Sogdiana and Iberia (Georgia) in the north to the Mazun region of Arabia in the south; in the east, it extended to the Indus River and in the west to the upper Tigris and Euphrates river valleys. In 2018, UNESCO added an ensemble of Sassanian historical

cities in southern Iran -- titled "Sassanid Archaeological Landscape of Fars Region"-- to its World Heritage list. The ensemble is comprised of eight archaeological sites situated in three geographical parts of Firuzabad, Bishapur, and Sarvestan. It reflects the optimized utilization of natural topography and bears witness to the influence of Achaemenid and Parthian cultural traditions and of Roman art, which later had a significant impact on the architecture and artistic styles of the Islamic era.

Efforts made by the Sassanids

also yield a revival of Iranian nationalism took place, for example, Zoroastrianism was declared as the state religion.

According to the Circle of Ancient Iranian Studies, like other Iranian cities in the 7th century Iran, Iwan-e Karkheh fell into Arab hands after a long and bloody siege. The city more or less had the same fate as the rest of Iran during the Arab occupation; it was pillaged, most of the male population were slaughtered, children and women were taken into slavery and most of the city was completely destroyed.

Illegal diggers arrested in northeast Iran

TEHRAN – Iranian police have recently arrested seven illegal excavators in Torbat-e Heydariyeh, northeastern Khorasan Razavi province, a senior police official in charge of protecting cultural heritage has announced.

The accused people were traced and finally arrested after police received reports from cultural heritage aficionados and local people about their misdeeds, CHTN quoted Mohammad Ali Modir as saying on Thursday.

The culprits were handed over to the judicial system for further investigation, the official added.

So far 450 historical structures have been identified in Torbat-e Heydariyeh --located



180 kilometers to the provincial capital of Mashhad- of which 80 properties have been inscribed on the national heritage list.

Over the past couple of years, Torbat-e Heydariyeh and its surroundings have yielded traces of the ancient settlements.

First agritourism farm to open in Lahijan

TEHRAN – The first-ever agritourism farm is planned to be inaugurated in Lahijan, northern Gilan province in the near future, the provincial tourism chief has said.

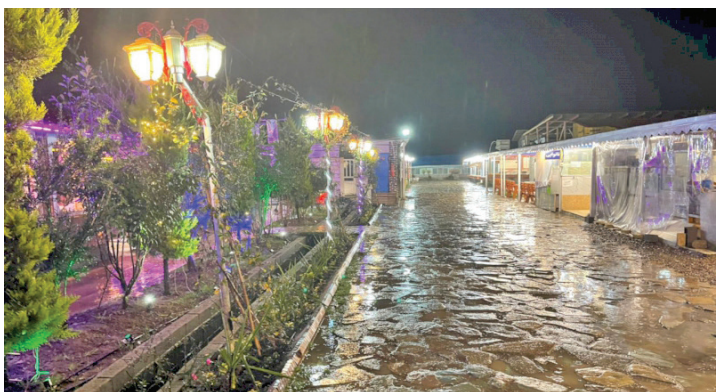
The complex has been granted the first-ever agritourism permit issued in Lahijan, Vali Jahani announced on Saturday.

Such permits are granted to eligible farm owners in the country to launch their agritourism businesses, aiming to set certain standards in a move to ensure the quality of such services in the country.

A budget of one trillion rials (\$3.5 million) has been invested in the project, which is expected to generate 600 job opportunities, he noted.

Today, tourism and its economy constitute one of the main pillars of the world trade economy, and many economists and policymakers see the sector as central to sustainable development, the official added.

In general, agritourism is a new branch of rural tourism that happens around farms



and pastures with activities for entertainment, diversity or for educational purposes to see and enjoy along with historical, cultural and natural attractions, he explained.

Agritourism and nature-tourism enterprises might include outdoor recreation (fishing, hunting, wildlife study, horseback riding), educational experiences (cannery tours, cooking classes, or tea or coffee tasting), entertainment (harvest festivals or barn dances), hospitality services (farm stays, guided tours, or outfitter services), and on-farm direct sales (u-pick operations or roadside stands).

It is a relatively new branch

of the travel industry in which tourists stay with local people in rural areas. Farm/ranch recreation refers to activities conducted on private agricultural lands, which might include fee-hunting and fishing, overnight stays, educational activities, etc.

Experts believe that in addition to the customer services jobs, agritourism pays special attention to the production sector, saying agricultural tourism is much more important and practical than other branches of tourism because it creates a new chain and diversity in the field of production and services.

Agritourism is a subset of

a larger industry called rural tourism that includes resorts, off-site farmers' markets, non-profit agricultural tours, and other leisure and hospitality businesses that attract visitors to the countryside.

Gilan is well-known for its rich Iron Age cemeteries such as Marlik that have been excavated over the past century. It was once within the sphere of influence of the successive Achaemenian, Seleucid, Parthian, and Sassanid empires that ruled Iran until the 7th century CE. The subsequent Arab conquest of Iran led to the rise of many local dynasties, and Gilan acquired an independent status that continued until 1567.

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

Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad to boost religious tourism



TEHRAN – The religious tourism is planned to be developed across the southwestern Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad province, the provincial tourism chief has said.

Several holy shrines and other spiritual sites are located in the province, offering great opportunities for religious tourism, CHTN quoted Saeid Talebipur as saying on Saturday.

In addition, the region's pristine nature and good climate will contribute to its development as a tourist destination, the official added.

Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-

Ahmad is home to many nomadic tribes which make a source of charm for the lesser-known province. Sightseers may live with a nomadic or rural family for a while or enjoy an independent stay and assist them with day-to-day life. It also opens up an opportunity to feel rustic routines, their agriculture, traditions, arts, and culture.

A Cascade of photogenic domes and minarets can be seen in every corner of Iran as inseparable elements of mosques some of which are widely known as timeless benchmarks of Islamic architecture.

The country is home to hundreds of shrines, Imamzadehs, mausoleums, churches, and even fire temples amongst other religious destinations which are dedicated to different faiths. Among the top destinations for international tourists to Iran are the religious cities of Mashhad, Qom, Shiraz, and the capital Tehran. These cities are respectively home to the holy shrines of Imam Reza, the eighth Imam of Shia Muslims; his sister Hazrat Masume (SA); his brothers Ahmad and Mohammad; as well as the late founder of the Islamic Revolution Imam Rouhollah Khomeini.

A unique time for visiting Iran for religious tourists is during the first ten days of the lunar month of Muharram, when Iranians, who are mostly Shia Muslims, hold special ceremonies to commemorate the martyrdom anniversary of Imam Hussein (AS), the grandson of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his 72 loyal companions.

Centuries-old public bathhouse in Shahrud undergoes restoration

TEHRAN – Historical Chahar-Suq public bathhouse in Shahrud, north-central province of Semnan has undergone some rehabilitation works, Shahrud's tourism chief has announced.

The project involves repairing the ceiling and staircase as well as reinforcing the foundation and walls, Hamidreza Hassani said on Saturday.

A budget of 500 million rials (about \$1,700) has been allocated to the project, the official added.

The bathhouse, which dates back to the 18th century, was inscribed on the national heritage list in 2001.

Bathhouses or 'hammams' in Iran were not only places for bathing and cleaning up. They had a social concept for people who gathered at these places weekly.

It was a place where people talked with each other about their daily life and



shared humor and news. There are still bathhouses in Iranian cities but they do not have their social function anymore since most people have bathrooms in their homes due to the modern lifestyle.

Some cities had separate bathhouses

for men and women. They were usually built next to each other. However, there were some bathhouses, which were used by men and women at different times of the day.

There were also male and female public bathhouses; at daybreak, a longhorn (booq-e javaz) was blown to announce that the bath was ready. Men came to the baths from daybreak till the afternoon. Women could use the bathhouses from then to sunset. In some cases, five days were allocated to men and two days to women.

Persian literature is full of proverbs, narrations, and folk stories about bathhouses, which indicate the

importance of the place in the past time.

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

Iranian antivenom produced in Iraq

TEHRAN – Iranian scientists have developed specific serums for envenoming by snakebites in Iraq, according to Razi Vaccine and Serum Research Institute.

The antivenom for scorpion and snakes' bites is the first biological product registered in Iraq, Fakhreddin Rahmani, Razi Institute chairman of the board, said.

Due to the success of the registration process, our long-term plan is to establish a filling site in Iraq and Baghdad, to maintain the export market forever, he added, Mehr reported on Saturday.

Stating that no country has succeeded in registering its biological products in Iraq, he said that we currently have no competitors in the field of snake and scorpion antitoxins in Iraq, and this is a success for both countries.

Biotechnology development
Biotechnology today is widespread in all fields and is no longer limited to biomedical drugs so it



has replaced the injured limbs.

Nearly 800 knowledge-based companies in the country are currently operating in the field of biotechnology and supplying their products and services to the domestic market

Earlier in May 2021, the Biotechnology Development Council launched 129 production projects with the aim of saving up to \$1.44

billion of foreign currency.

Iran is ranked 12th in the world and first in West Asia in terms of biotechnology, as 9.5 percent of the income of knowledge-based companies and more than 60 percent of their exports are related to biotechnology.

Foreign exchange savings of \$1 billion per year by producing 22 biopharmaceuticals, gaining the

first rank in biotechnology products and vaccines in West Asia, and the presence among the top five biotechnology producers in Asia are among the country's achievements, Mostafa Ghanei, secretary of the biotechnology development office of the Vice Presidency for Science and Technology, said in October 2020.

So far, 27 biotechnology medicines, 12 vaccine projects, 90 pharmaceutical raw materials, and 55 projects in agriculture and food security have been implemented in order to gain a 3 percent market share and biotechnology assistance to the development of the economy, he explained.

Some 8 major companies are responsible for managing the country's 117 priority products in the fields of biopharmaceuticals, pharmaceutical raw materials, vaccines, probiotics, equipment, and chemical drugs, he emphasized.

Philanthropists donate \$220,000 to flood victims



TEHRAN – A sum of 62 billion rials (around \$220,000) has been allocated by philanthropists to four flood-stricken provinces in the southern part of the country, IRNA reported on Saturday.

The contributions were in cash and kind;

main items were food, sanitary, carpet, and nylon packages sent to flood-affected areas, Vahid Salimi, caretaker of the Red Crescent Society's Volunteers Organization, said.

In early January, torrential rain triggered flooding in southern provinces of the country, claiming eight lives. Provinces of Fars, Kerman, Hormozgan, and Sistan-Baluchestan have been affected by flooding.

20% of areas at high risk of flood

Twenty percent of areas across Iran are highly prone to flooding, Khosro Shahbazi, former head of the Forests, Range, and Watershed Management Organization (FRWMO) said in January 2020.

"Precipitation in Iran is one-third of the

world's average, as the country is located in a dry and fragile region where we experience 11 millimeters decrease in precipitation every 10 years and an increase in evaporation of more than 50 millimeters every year," he explained.

Rainfall fluctuations usually lead to flood and devastation, so comprehensive planning for watershed management and flood control is required, he noted.

Since most of the water supply is extracted from groundwater resources, the country is in a critical condition in terms of groundwater resources, he stated, highlighting, because intake is less than water withdrawal from the aquifers, the best way to store rainwater is watershed and aquifer projects.

'Clean Air Day' to highlight public rights, national will

TEHRAN – This year, Clean Air Week will be held from January 15 to February 1, focusing on the theme of "Clean Air, Public Rights, National Will".

Every year, January 19, is the National Clean Air Day in Iran in order to remind and highlight the main factors in maintaining air quality, as well as promoting a sense of responsibility and citizen participation in protecting the urban environment and fulfilling social responsibility for the environment.

Unveiling the Clean Air Law monitoring system, unveiling the connection of three air quality measuring stations in Assaluyeh Special Energy Zone to the country's air quality monitoring system, unveiling of the monitoring systems of the chimney and industrial effluent pollution to the comprehensive environmental system, and unveiling the technical inspection system of motorhomes are

among the programs planned for the National Clean Air Day.

Publishing multimedia environmental training packages in social networks, unveiling 9 volumes of environmental literacy books, holding press conferences in the provinces, opening a radio program, holding a bicycle race in natural and forest parks, and holding a painting contest for students are other programs.

The main purpose of these programs is to expand and promote public participation in reducing air pollution and informing the public at various levels and the role of all agencies in implementing the clean air law.

Abbas Shahsavani, head of the air and climate change department of the Ministry of Health, said in November 2021 that expenses related to deaths attributed to air pollution are estimated at \$4.3 billion over the past Iranian calendar year (March 2020-March 2021).



About 10 percent of deaths are caused by air pollution nationwide.

Air pollution is responsible for around 40,000 premature deaths in Iran annually, Mohammad-Sadeq Hassanvand, head of the air pollution research center at Tehran University of Medical Sciences, said in July 2020.

Air pollution kills 7m people worldwide

Air pollution is the contamination of the indoor or outdoor environment by any chemical, physical or biological agent that modifies the natural characteristics of the atmosphere. Household combustion devices, motor

vehicles, industrial facilities, and forest fires are common sources of air pollution. Pollutants of major public health concern include particulate matter, carbon monoxide, ozone, nitrogen dioxide, and sulfur dioxide. Outdoor and indoor air pollution cause respiratory and other diseases and is an important source of morbidity and mortality.

Air pollution kills an estimated seven million people worldwide every year. WHO data shows that almost all of the global population (99%) breathe air that exceeds WHO guideline limits containing high levels of pollutants, with low- and middle-income countries suffering from the highest exposures.

From smog hanging over cities to smoke inside the home, air pollution poses a major threat to health and climate. The combined effects of ambient (outdoor) and household air pollution cause millions of premature deaths every year, largely as a result of increased mortality from stroke, heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lung cancer, and acute respiratory infections.

Health Ministry to receive 7m doses of Pastu Covac

From page 1 ▶ The vaccine prevented symptomatic disease in people inoculated with three doses by 65 percent and its effectiveness in the prevention of severe disease and hospitalization was 96.5 percent.

Pastu Covac is the only homegrown vaccine available for injection in children aged 2-18.

Health Minister Bahram Einollahi has said five coronavirus vaccines have been so far produced domestically.

Iran is one of the few countries that has all vaccine production platforms, Mohammad Reza Shanehsaz, former head of the Food and Drug Administration, said in June 2021.

Meanwhile, World Health Organization (WHO) representative to Iran Jaffar Hussain



said in September 2021 that the Organization was collecting the necessary information for the registration and certification of Iranian-made coronavirus vaccines.

Iran has also produced vaccines jointly with two countries of Australia and Russia.

Climate crisis increasing risk of premature birth and childhood illness



Rising temperatures around the world as a result of climate change are having a devastating effect on fetuses, babies and infants, studies have found.

Scientists from six different studies determined that climate change is causing – among other adverse outcomes – the increased risk of premature birth, increased hospitalization of young children and weight gain in babies, the Independent reported.

The separate studies have just been published in a special issue of the journal Paediatric and Perinatal Epidemiology.

The journal's guest editors Professor Gregory Wellenius and Professor Amelia Wesseling from the Boston University School of Public Health said that a growing body of evidence indicates the ways in which extreme heat, hurricanes and wildfire smoke can increase the risk of pre-term birth.

One of the studies found that pre-term births were 16% more likely in areas experiencing heatwaves. Researchers did this by looking at one million pregnant women between 2004 and 2015 in the high temperature region of New South Wales Australia.

Similar findings were observed in a study that assessed the link between ambient heat and spontaneous pre-term birth between 2007-2011 in the hot climate of Harris County, Texas. The day after mothers were exposed to heatwave temperatures, their risk of premature birth was 15%.

Another study in the journal which analysed 200,000 births in Israel found links between

high temperature and weight gain during the first year of life. Of the 20% exposed to nighttime temperature, 5% had a higher risk of rapid weight gain.

An accompanying study found that as the frequency and intensity of wildfires have increased dramatically over the past two decades in the western US, there had been a 32% rise in a rare condition typically associated with air pollution among pregnant women. Foetal gastroschisis is an abdominal wall defect that is rare, but "increasing in prevalence," according to Prof Wellenius and Prof Wesseling.

Writing in the special edition of the journal which looked at rising temperatures as well as wildfires and pollution on babies and fetuses, the professors and co-editors said: "The evidence is clear: climate hazards, particularly heat and air pollution, do adversely impact a wide range of reproductive, perinatal and paediatric health outcomes.

"The expected pace of continued climate change and resulting impacts on our physical and mental health and wellbeing calls for decisive and immediate action on adaptation."

The professors added that the evidence also found that mothers from more marginalised populations are at much higher risk of being exposed to climate hazards, and were also less resilient to the effects of these hazards due to systematic and structural oppression.

They continued: "Our climate has already changed profoundly due to human activity and these changes are broadly harmful to our health, with some communities and individuals affected much more than others. Reproductive justice is '...the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities'.

"Failure to urgently address the reproductive, perinatal and paediatric health impacts of climate change will perpetuate and worsen reproductive injustices, wherein the most marginalised populations will be deprived of their ability to procreate and safely parent their children."

COVID-19 UPDATES ON JANUARY 15

New cases	1,421
New deaths	18
Total cases	6,218,741
Total deaths	132,044
New hospitalized patients	194
Patients in critical condition	1,369
Total recovered patients	6,062,633
Diagnostic tests conducted	43,326,629
Doses of vaccine injected	125,560,035

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

System to be set up for monitoring, forecasting agricultural drought

A system will be launched to monitor, forecast and report the agricultural lands being hit by drought, Amir Qaderi, an official with Disaster Management Organization has announced.

Over a meeting of a special working group for addressing drought and risks threatening agricultural sector, a plan for establishing a system for monitoring and forecasting agricultural drought in the country was approved and submitted to the Disaster Management Organization for review, he explained.

"Following the study of other countries' experiences and existing global methods, the necessity of establishing a domestic system to recognize the lands prone to agricultural drought was emphasized," he noted.

سامانه پایش و پیش‌بینی خشکسالی کشاورزی ایران ایجاد می‌شود

معاون امور بازسازی و بازتوانی سازمان مدیریت بحران کشور از ایجاد سامانه پایش و پیش‌بینی خشکسالی کشاورزی ایران خبر داد.

به گزارش پایگاه اطلاع رسانی سازمان مدیریت بحران کشور، امیر قادری روز یکشنبه با اعلام این خبر گفت: طرح ایجاد سامانه پایش و پیش‌بینی خشکسالی کشاورزی ایران طی جلسه‌ای با حضور مدیران و کارشناسان سازمان مدیریت بحران و وزارت جهاد کشاورزی بررسی شد.

وی ادامه داد: پس از بررسی تجارب داخلی و روش‌های موجود جهانی، ضرورت استقرار نمونه بومی پایش و پیش‌بینی خشکسالی کشاورزی مورد تأکید قرار گرفت و با مشارکت مراکز پژوهشی سازمان هواشناسی کشور و پژوهشکده حفاظت خاک و آب‌خیزداری طرح ایجاد سامانه پایش و پیش‌بینی خشکسالی کشاورزی ایران پیشنهاد شد.

TEHRAN TIMES



www.tehrantimes.com

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Public Relations Office: Tel: (+98 21) 88805807
Subscription & Distribution Dept.: Tel: (+98 21) 43051603
Printed at: Jame Jam Bartar Borna - 44197737



Tehrantimes79

No. 18, Bimeh Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran P.o. Box: 14155-4843 Zip Code: 1599814713

JANUARY 16, 2022

GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

There are many educated people who have ruined their future on account of their ignorance of religion. Their knowledge did not prove of any avail to them.

Imam Ali (AS)

Prayer Times » Noon:12:14 Evening: 17:34 Dawn: 5:45 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 7:13 (tomorrow)

“The Apple Day”, “Deer” to compete in 2022 Berlinale Generation

A scene from “Deer” directed by Hadi Babaifar.

TEHRAN – Iranian movies “The Apple Day” and “Deer” have been selected to compete in the Generation Kplus competition of the 72nd Berlin International Film Festival.

Directed by Mahmud Ghaffari, the feature-length drama “The Apple Day” will have its world premiere at this festival, which will take place in the German capital from February 10 to 20.

When his father’s truck is stolen and with it, his livelihood as a mobile apple seller, his son Saeid cannot meet the demand of supplying a basket of apples to a school. A razor-sharp look at the age-old city versus the countryside shows a discrepancy that follows Saeid through the alleys and streets of a Tehran suburb as he searches for a solution.

The short movie “Deer” directed by Hadi

Babaifar will also have its international premiere at the festival.

In quiet, poetic images of snow-covered, rural Iran, the film tells the story of a little boy who has to watch helplessly while his sick brother struggles to remain alive. When his parents take him away to relatives, Ehsan sets off for home again through the snowy night, to defend his brother against the angel of death.

The ten feature-length films and seven short films that have been selected for the Generation Kplus program thus far stand out for the unconventionality and willpower of their protagonists, the organizers have said.

In addition, “Subtotals”, a co-production between Iran and Poland by Mohammadreza Farzad, will also be screened in the 17th edition of the Forum Expanded section of the festival.

Hafez’s poetic art

Part 3

Although the pen name may be introduced as a vocative or as a reference to a third person, it is usually the speaking voice of the poet to whom the address can be attributed.

Sometimes other voices are involved; for example, the beloved may address the poet/lover, often in the context of a dialogue; personified entities may have, as it were, the last word (e.g.,194: Reason extols the poet’s verse; 382: Reason bids the poet drink wine; 380: the wind exhorts the poet to sing of wine and sweet-mouthed beauties).

Remarkable twists on the pen name include the modest banda Hafez “your humble servant Hafez”, used probably in a panegyric context, and the affectionate but mildly satirical Hafez-e ma “our Hafez”, playing on the literal meaning of Hafez.

This play on the literal sense of the poet’s pen name—“he who has the Quran by heart”—either directly (e.g., 250: “Hafez . . . grieve not, as long as your litany is prayer and study of the Quran”) or indirectly (e.g., 93: “Love will come to your aid if you, like Hafez, recite the Quran by heart in fourteen versions “rewayat,” is a marked feature of Hafez’s ghazals.

The religious connotation allows him to exploit the takhallos in the treatment of one of his favorite themes: the paradox of piety and antinomianism in his own conduct (e.g., 344: “I am a Hafez in [religious] gatherings, a drinker of dregs at parties,” 347: “Whether I am the libertine of taverns or the Hafez of the town . . .”).

The possibility of internal rhyme is seized upon

to contrast Hafez with a typical representative of the religious establishment, the waez “preacher” (e.g., 83: Ayb-e Hafez makon ey waez, “Preacher, don’t find fault with Hafez,” 127: Hadith-e eshq ze Hafez shenow na az waez “Hear the tale of love from Hafez, not from the preacher”).

With ironic ambiguity, he inserts the pen name in a catalogue of other representatives of false piety (195: “The shaiikh, the hafez, the mufti and the mohtaseb [enforcer of morals] . . . all practice hypocrisy”).

The use that Hafez makes of the takhallos in his ghazals is essentially not different from that of other poets. The basic function of the device is to provide the poem with a signature and an elegant conclusion for which a separate motif could be chosen, and which need not be particularly connected to the subject matter of the poem.

This is made explicit, for instance, in 393. A very common motif for winding up the poem is the expression of fakhr, “professional pride or conceit” in his own poetical skills or the success of his poetry.

A few examples are: 37 (“Why, poetaster, do you envy Hafez much?”), 42 (“You conquered Iraq and Pars with your poetry”), 202 (“Already in Adam’s time Hafez’s poetry adorned the pages in the album of the roses in the garden of Eternal Paradise”), 445 (“Come to our gathering so that you may learn from Hafez how to make agazal”). In one instance he compares himself to contemporary poets.

Source: Encyclopedia Iranica

To be continued

“Daughter of Iran” director crowned best at Ammar Popular Film Festival

From Page 1 ► The closing ceremony of the festival took place at the Andisheh Hall of the Art Bureau in Tehran as the jury said that no film deserved the best film award in the feature fiction category.

Established by a number of Iranian revolutionary figures, the Ammar Popular Film Festival has been named after Ammar Yasir, a close companion of Prophet Muhammad (S).

Gelareh Abbasi won the Lantern for best actress for her role in “Daughter of Iran”, which narrates a love story set in the 1980s during the Iran-Iraq war.

The special Lantern of the president of the festival was given to “Troy” written and directed by Mohammad Alizadefard.

The story of the film is also set in the 1980s. After years of dreaming of being a TV announcer, Mohammad is scheduled to appear on Iranian TV tonight for the first time before the broadcast of the popular series “Oshin”. However, the dream

Gelareh Abbasi in a scene from “Daughter of Iran” directed by Seyyed Jalal Dehqani.

never comes true as Bahador, a member of the Mojahedin-e Khalq terrorist organization, is tracking him.

Hashem Moradi won the Lantern for best cinematographer for his collaboration in “Troy”, which also brought a diploma of honor to sound engineer Hossein Bashash.

“Solomon’s Jewel” directed by

Mohammad-Amin Emami was selected as best short drama.

Documentary films were also honored in several categories.

“Sharp Scissors” directed by Sajjad Rezazadeh won the Lantern for best documentary in the Soft War Category.

The documentary is about Abolfazl Baqeri, a teenage gang member who is completely

transformed as a result of his friendship with Rasul so that he gains admission to an Islamic seminary. He then initiates a new method for teaching Islamic lessons to children.

In the Defenders of the Holy Shrine category, the award for best documentary went to “360° Siege” directed by Hamed Hadian.

The film portrays how General Qassem Soleimani, the martyred IRGC Quds Force chief, led the massive operation to break the 89-day siege of the northern Iraqi town of Amerli by the ISIS terrorists in 2014.

In the National Memory Category, the award for best documentary was given to “Golden Boy” directed by Abbas Bahaj.

The film tells the story of the transformation of Ali-Akbar Vahaj, an athlete and ardent supporter of the Shah, to a revolutionary and dedicated follower of Imam Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic.

Tanavoli “Seated Poet” sells for record 550,000\$ at Tehran auction

TEHRAN – “Seated Poet”, a bronze sculpture by Parviz Tanavoli, sold at the 15th Tehran Auction on Friday for 146 billion rials (about \$550,000 based on Iran’s free-market exchange rate: \$1 = 265,660 rials) setting a record for an artwork in national sales.

The 142-meter high bench-shaped sculpture covered with Persian inscriptions was created in 2009.

Tanavoli is most famous for his iconic Heech sculpture series. His bronze sculpture “Master and Disciple” created in 2011 was the second most expensive work sold at the 13th Tehran Auction.

The second most expensive work sold at the sale was “Shiraz”, a 72x150-centimeter mirror mosaic and plaster on wood by Monir Farmanfarman. It fetched 130 billion rials

(about \$490,000).

An untitled oil on canvas by Sohrab Sepehri was the third most expensive work sold at the auction at 118 billion rials (about \$445,000).

“La+La+Sar”, a calligraphic painting on canvas by Hossein Zenderudi, sold for 110 billion rials (about \$415,000) came next.

The 15th edition of the Tehran Auction collected 1588.9 billion rials (over \$5.9 million). All 80 artworks offered at this auction were sold.

The 14th Tehran Auction took in 421.8 billion rials (about \$1.6 million based on Iran’s free-market exchange rate: \$1 = 246,000 rials).

The 13th Tehran Auction grossed about 880 billion rials (about \$4 million based on Iran’s free-market exchange rate: \$1 = 221,000 rials).

Parviz Tanavoli’s bronze sculpture “Seated Poet” is on view in an exhibition for the 15th Tehran Auction. The artwork was the top seller, fetching about \$550,000.

A reflection of the bloody uprising of Khordad 15th in a different novel

An Interview with Marzieh Nafari Admired Author of “Left from Son”

The novel “Left from Son” is a narration of the life story of a man overwhelmed by the wounding of his son and is set to flourish again. Standing on the Bagherabad Bridge, near his house, Salar, a man who has been estranged from the family, got into a fight with people having nothing to do with them. Actually, it does not matter to him why such people have moved to Tehran and why they are indignant.

Marzieh Nafari has spent three years of her life on the composition of the novel to say that reconstruction is feasible. As nominated for various literary awards, including the Islamic Revolution Fiction Festival, the novel was selected as the laudable work of the Seyyed Ali Andarzgu Literary Awards in the adult category. We therefore did an interview with the author of the book whose excerpts are available in the following.

*** Tell us a little bit about Marzieh Nafari. Your name has recently been reverberated in the literary space, especially in many festival circles. Where did you start writing?**

Exactly like many contemporary writers, I started the writing from an essay class in school. During my education, my pieces of writings were received praise over and over and in the second grade of high school in 1376, my story won first place in national competitions, which was very sweet. I became more interested in writing afterwards.

In the meantime, I had detached myself from the world of writing for about ten years and stopped writing anything from 1378 to 1388. In 1388, I embarked on a new journey of writing activities by working with the media. Then I published my first collection of stories and novels for children and teens. In 1397, I started writing the book of “Left from Son” which ended well. It is worth saying

that it was one of the honorable works in the Islamic Revolution Book Festival and was also appreciated in the Seyyed Ali Andarzgu Literary Awards.

*** Introduce “Left from Son” from your own point of view and tell us how you came to write the novel?**

This book is my second novel for adults. The main events of the book take place in the 1340s, especially in 1342. Unlike many works in which heroes narrate the story, it is the antagonist who drives the story forward. Salar opposes the uprising and strives to stand up against the people in any way. He is one of those cracking down the people on the bridge and hinders them from reaching Tehran. This is the story recounting Salar’s rise and fall as well as his rebirth. I lived in Varamin for a while. That is why I followed up all about its news and events. I remember a documentary that asked people about their memories of the events of the bloody uprising of Khordad 15th. I studied the oral history of such events. Among the other narratives, events which took place on the Bagherabad Bridge attracted my attention. They tickled my mind for a while as a subject of a story until the novel

of “Left from Son” was born in the form of a stunning story in which a boy is wounded by his father during the incidents.

*** How does the story proceed? What role does Salar play in the story? And why does a negative character recount the story?**

Generally, I tried to depict the events with a different language and atmosphere. This is a story of a man called Salar, who is estranged from the family, stands on the Bagherabad Bridge to beat people of kind knowing nothing of them. Why did these people try to reach Tehran? Why are they angry? Salar knows nothing about them. What he knows is to use violence against people standing on the bridge to impede their way of moving to Tehran. Sohrab’s young son is missing. Everyone is looking for Sohrab who has changed and thinks big. In the dark of night, Salar stabbed Sohrab with a dagger who is the lovely fruit of his life and was supposed to marry Azar.

Is filicide a repetitive motif in the Persian Literature? In this novel, the focus is on the life story of Salar in 1342. The year known for great historical milestones in which the life of Salar and Azar was ended in fiasco, Sohrab’s path was drastically

changed and Salar’s life was devastated. Salar is doing his best to build from scratch regardless of knowing that reconstruction of ruins is a tall order. Salar plays a key role in the story, becoming the main character of the story, but why a negative character moves the story forward is because I always wanted to look at challenges from the other angel to see what is happening on the other side. Why does a determined person stand against the people and even his own son? That’s why the character fully grabbed my attention. We normally expect a story to be narrated by a positive character, and the motives of such a character are clear, but I wanted to take a different path. I began the narration by telling a story whose principal figure is adamant enough to crack down the people of Varamin and stop them from reaching Tehran. How did this character reach such a stage? Why does he behave like this? Does he regret? And does he feel ashamed or complacent? To understand all of them, I did my best to depict a story from what’s inside the mind of the antagonist. I found it a good experience.

*** Did you choose the name of Sohrab intentionally? Why did you use such a name?**

The selection of Sohrab’s name as the son of Salar who is the main character of the story was intentional, reminding us of the story of tragedy of Rostam and Sohrab in Shahnameh. What I sought is to have a re-narration of combat of Sohrab and Rostam. Discovering a new and different world alongside with his father, the young Sohrab of our story joins people and then is injured with his father in the climax of the story, marking the beginning of a new chapter in the life of the main character.