

Fresh Pain for Natives in Canada as More Graves Found

► Page 5

Report 

Is MBS lobbying against Biden?

TEHRAN — According to persons familiar with the situation, Jared Kushner, Donald Trump's son-in-law and former senior advisor, met with Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler and top Saudi Aramco officials in recent weeks as part of a regional tour that mingled personal travel and business.

Kushner, who developed a close personal relationship with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS) during the Trump administration, has traveled extensively in the Persian Gulf region in recent months, according to some people who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the matter is private.

While working in the White House, Kushner orchestrated the normalization of relations between the Israeli regime and a number of Arab countries. He has since founded Affinity Partners, a private equity fund.

Although the current trip was not intended to raise cash for that endeavor, Kushner has sought support from the \$500 billion Saudi sovereign wealth fund, which is chaired by Prince Mohammed, as well as other government-controlled funds in the area, according to several of sources.

In addition to meeting the crown prince in Riyadh, Kushner visited Saudi Aramco's headquarters in Dhahran, where he met with Chief Executive Officer Amin Nasser and other key officials from the state-run oil company. According to two of the participants, the conversations centered on potential renewable energy investments.

The journey to Saudi Arabia was part of a larger excursion to several of West Asia's most important economies. He also visited the United Arab Emirates and the Expo 2020 in Dubai with his family, as well as Qatar. ► Page 2

Report 

Russia “embarrassed” the West “without firing a shot”

The United States continues to threaten Russia over the “invasion of Ukraine” despite Moscow withdrawing troops from its eastern border after they completed their role in large-scale military maneuvers Russia is conducting within its borders.

U.S. President Joe Biden has continued his war rhetoric saying “world war two was a war of necessity. But if Russia attacks Ukraine it would be a war of choice”

He says if Russia does invade Ukraine, in the days and weeks ahead “the strategic costs for Russia will be immense”.

Similar remarks have been echoed by some Western countries including the head of NATO.

This is despite, the chief spokesperson for the Russian Defense Ministry, Igor Konashenkov, announcing Russia's troops near the Ukrainian border are returning to their bases after the completion of their maneuvers.

Konashenkov says “the divisions of the South and West Military Districts have finished their tasks and have already begun loading the rail and automobile transport, and today will begin moving back to their military garrisons”.

It is the first major withdrawal of forces amid mounting tensions with the West. More troops are expected to return to their bases in the coming days as the war games themselves are set to end on February 20. ► Page 5



Israel fearful of another Intifada in West Bank

TEHRAN – Palestine is fraught with danger. This is the conclusion of an assessment compiled by a top Israeli commander on the situation in Palestine.

The well-known Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of Jerusalem (al-Quds) has been a scene of clashes be-

tween Israeli security forces and Palestinians since Sunday. The fresh wave of clashes began when far-right Knesset member Itamar Ben Gvir, accompanied by dozens of Jewish settlers, broke into the neighborhood to set up a parliamentary office there.

A member of the far-right Religious Zionism

party, Ben Gvir contributed to inflaming the situation, according to Israeli media. He made a “substantial contribution” to erupting clashes in the neighborhood, a police source told Israeli broadcaster Channel 12. ► Page 3

STAY UPDATED #SaveSheikhJarrah

Al-Zawraa Stadium in Iraq built relying on Iranian engineering

TEHRAN- The head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) inaugurated Al-Zawraa Stadium, in Iraqi capital city Baghdad, which was built by Iranian engineers, TPO portal published on Wednesday.

During his visit to Iraq, Alireza Peyman-Pak inaugurated the 16,000-seat Al-Zawraa Stadium, which represents the knowledge of

Iranian engineers and the result of increasing the exports of technical engineering services, and visited various parts of it.

The TPO head's trip to Iraq is aimed at boosting trade ties between the two countries.

As stated by the chairman of Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce, Iran is planning to

boost its annual trade with neighboring Iraq to \$20 billion.

Yahya Al-e Eshagh made the remarks in a business forum between Iran and Iraq's Kirkuk province back in December 2021, saying that Iranian and Iraqi governments are determined to develop regional cooperation in all areas. ► Page 4

Over 14,700 classrooms inaugurated in current year: minister

TEHRAN – More than 14,700 new classrooms have been inaugurated across the country since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2021), Education Minister Yousef Nouri has said.

Some 100 trillion rials (about \$385 million) has been invested in the project, IRIB reported on Wednesday.

This year, the administration has allocated up to 23.5 trillion rials (about \$90 million) to complete semi-finished projects launched by benefactors, he said, adding that the budget will increase to 28 trillion rials (about \$108 million) in the next year.

The national budget bill for the next year has proposed more than 60 trillion rials (about \$230 million) for school building projects, compared with 46 trillion rials (about \$177 million) for the current year, he concluded. ► Page 7



Iran opens strategic airport on Greater Tunb Island

TEHRAN — The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) of Iran has opened a passenger airport on the important Persian Gulf Island of Greater Tunb.

According to an IRIB News report on Tuesday, ► Page 2

Photo exhibit offers surprising, lesser-seen Iran destinations

TEHRAN – A group photography exhibition has put on show a collection of surprising and lesser-seen travel destinations from every corner of Iran.

Titled “Color, Light, [and] Silence”, the event showcases a careful selection of images taken from the harsh tranquil deserts, star-filled skies, lakes, lush jungles, flower gardens, snow-capped mountains, and mag-

nificent ruins to name a few.

“Most of the works in this exhibition are from the point of view of introducing historical and natural attractions in the dusk,” according to Parham Janfeshan who is tourism chief of Tehran province.

Over the past couple of years, many travel insiders and landscape photographers have

sought to devote much more attention to off-the-beaten tracks, the ones which are generally lesser-known to potential sightseers and vacationers.

Currently, an increasing number of travelers are looking for something different such as spending a day in tranquil countryside, picking fresh fruits, watching rice grow, fishing by the seaside, ► Page 6

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Interview 

Ice Lady Abdollahkhani optimistic on winter sports

By Farrokh Hesabi

TEHRAN – Zohreh Abdollahkhani, known as the Iranian Ice Lady, is optimistic about ice climbing and winter sports in Iran.

Abdollahkhani won the ice climbing bronze medal at the Asian Championship in 2014 in Cheongsong, South Korea. She became the first Iranian woman to win a medal in the sport at an international competition.

In an exclusive interview with Tehran Times, Abdollahkhani explained how she assesses the condition of winter sports in Iran.

“I found it super interesting that there are some sports that we already have the facilities of them in Iran such as ice hockey. We also can attend or practice in the winter sports that we have never been active in before.

“When I took up ice climbing as a serious pursuit, facilities were sparse in Iran. And the good thing about it is that since there are winter games like Olympics, we could have some chances for getting the quota in some sports like curling,” she said.

“I’m living in Norway at the moment due to part of my Ph.D. project. Ice climbing is on the list for the Olympic Games. So, there are chances that we would have it as an official sport in Olympics in the coming years. I don’t know when exactly will happen, but we have some signs of it from the previous youth winter games, so there are hopes for ice climbing to be part of the official Olympic Games in the future. ► Page 3

Play blending Attar tale, Shakespeare tragedy tops at Fajr Intl. Theater Festival

TEHRAN – “A Requiem for Julius Caesar and Several Birds of Simorgh” has won awards in several categories, including best play, at the 40th Fajr International Theater Festival.

Directed by Mojtaba Rostamifar, the play blends William Shakespeare's drama “The Tragedy of Julius Caesar” and the story of Simorgh, the mysterious bird from Persian poet Attar's masterpiece “The Conference of the Birds”.

The closing ceremony of the festival was held on Tuesday at Tehran's Vahdat Hall.

After accepting his award Rostamifar, who is from the southwestern Iranian city of Ahvaz, said “I hope that one day I can finally get a public premiere for my play in Tehran.”

“Whenever I apply for a public performance in a Tehran theater, they say they have no vacant theaters. At least tell me when I can get a theater in the capital to stage my play so that I can make my will and give a CD of the performance to my son for a screening in Tehran,” he joked. ► Page 8

Is MBS lobbying against Biden?

From page 1 ▶ Kushner did not respond to Bloomberg, who first broke the story on Thursday, February 10. A request for comment was also not returned by the Kushner Companies. A request for comment was likewise not responded to by the Saudi government's Center for International Communication. Aramco has refused to comment on the issue as well.

Last year, Kushner began the process of establishing his investing firm. The initiative has sparked considerable debate because Kushner is seeking funding from several of the West Asian countries with which he worked while in the White House, including Saudi Arabia.

According to a filing, Affinity Partners had raised \$2 billion by the end of November. Bloomberg reported last month that the firm intends to adjust the figure to reflect fresh commitments that surpass \$3 billion.

Kushner isn't the only Trump friend who has maintained a high profile in Saudi Arabia since the Biden administration took office.

Former U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin visited Riyadh in October for the annual Future Investment Initiative, dubbed the "Davos of the Desert" for bringing together finance and government executives. Mnuchin's firm, Liberty Strategic Capital, has raised several billion dollars, including an investment from Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund.

During the Trump administration, the crown prince maintained close contacts with the United States, including direct contact with Trump and Kushner, but the relationship has cooled during Biden's presidency. Biden hasn't spoken to bin Salman since his election in 2020, instead focusing on his 86-year-old father, King Salman.

With the Trump-2024 prospect on the horizon, Saudi Arabia seems to be interested in lobbying for yet another MAGA (Make America Great Again slogan, often used by Trump).

In December 2020, which marked the last weeks of his presidency, Trump's State Department approved the sale of \$290 million in bombs to Saudi Arabia.

Also, on July 25, 2019, Trump vetoed congressional legislation to prevent the sale of arms worth \$8.1 billion to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The three resolutions, according to Donald Trump, "would impair America's global competitiveness" and harm the country's relationships with its allies.

The development came after a vote in both chambers of Congress to block the transaction.

Saudi Arabia has been reluctant to resume new round of talks with Iran, and now the MBS meets with the most influential man in the "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran, Trump's senior advisor. Things are not looking good for MBS.

Iran's chief negotiator meets IAEA chief



TEHRAN — On Tuesday, Ali Bagheri, Iran's senior negotiator in Vienna, met with Rafael Grossi, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

In addition, negotiators from Iran, three European countries and European Union coordinator Enrique Mora met in the Palais Coburg.

Bagheri and Mora had a bilateral meeting in Vienna prior to the gathering.

For the first time since the Vienna discussions resumed in April, Israeli diplomats flew to Vienna on Tuesday to meet with negotiators involved in talks

aimed at salvaging the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

The presence of the Israeli delegation so close to the high-stakes talks over the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action appears to have enraged Iranians.

The Israeli delegation, led by Joshua Zarka, deputy director general of Strategic Affairs at the Foreign Ministry, met with Russian Ambassador Mikhail Ulyanov, the Kremlin's envoy at the Vienna talks, on Tuesday.

Ulyanov said on Tuesday that he had discussed IAEA issues with "Israeli colleagues from the capital."

Zarka described his encounter with Ulyanov as "honest and meaningful" on Twitter.

Earlier this week, the group arrived in Vienna. Diplomats met with IAEA chief Rafael Grossi on Monday. They also met with diplomats from several South American countries on Tuesday.

Iranian FM calls for U.S. 'political statement' on commitment to nuclear deal

Iran has proposed that the U.S. Congress makes a "political statement" of its commitment to a nuclear accord with Tehran as talks in Vienna to revive the deal reach a critical juncture.

In an exclusive interview with the Financial Times, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, foreign minister, said Washington had failed to address Iran's demand for guarantees that no party is able to abandon the deal, as the U.S. did under former president Donald Trump in 2018.

Tehran also wants all sanctions imposed by Trump to be lifted. "As a matter of principle, public opinion in Iran cannot accept as a guarantee the words of a head of state, let alone the United States, due to the withdrawal of Americans from the JCPOA," Amir Abdollahian said, using the acronym for the accord, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Experts say it is virtually impossible for the Biden administration to provide the legal assurances Tehran demands. But Amir Abdollahian said he had told Iran's negotiators to propose to Western parties that "at least their parliaments or parliament speakers, including the U.S. Congress, can declare in the form of a political statement their commitment to the agreement and return to the JCPOA implementation."

President Joe Biden wants to revive the 2015 deal, under which Iran agreed to curb its nuclear activity in return for the lifting of sanctions. But while indirect talks between Washington and Tehran are taking place in Vienna, U.S. and European officials have repeatedly warned that — given the nuclear gains Iran has made since 2019 — time is running out to save the accord.



Biden said the U.S. would return to the deal if Iran agreed to reverse the aggressive advances it had made to its nuclear program over the past three years, with the republic enriching uranium at its highest ever levels.

Amir Abdollahian said: "Iran's commitments are as clear as a mathematical formula. It is absolutely clear what we are supposed to do and how these measures will be verified through the IAEA [the UN nuclear watchdog]. Therefore the other side can have no concern. But we remain concerned primarily about the guarantees [that the U.S. would not withdraw]."

Expressing Tehran's frustrations with Washington's position as weeks of talks in Vienna appear at risk of stalling, he said: "We are facing problems during this period because the other party lacks a serious initiative."

Iran wants the negotiations to lead to the "total lifting" of

sanctions

Diplomats and analysts say the EU-brokered negotiations had been more constructive in recent weeks. A senior U.S. official said last month that the negotiations in January "were among the most intensive", adding that "we made progress narrowing down the list of differences to just the key priorities on all sides". But the official warned that "we only have a handful of weeks left to get a deal" because of Iran's nuclear advances.

The other crucial issue for Iran is the scale of sanctions relief any agreement would provide. Amir Abdollahian said that Iran wanted the negotiations to lead to the "total lifting" of sanctions.

The challenge, however, was that the Biden administration was only willing to remove the economic sanctions authorized by Trump, he said. "This is not all we are looking for. That Trump unilaterally and unjustly imposed sanctions on real and legal entities in Iran under some

allegations as Iran's missile program, regional issues or human rights is not acceptable," Amir Abdollahian said. "This is also one of the challenges which remains on the negotiating table in Vienna."

Trump infuriated Tehran by sanctioning dozens of senior Iranian officials, the office of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader and religious foundations. He also designated the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps as a terrorist organization.

Amir Abdollahian said U.S. officials had sent "many messages" to have direct talks with Iran, but ruled out any such move. "Our last response to Americans and intermediaries was: any direct dialogue, contact and negotiation with the U.S. would have very huge costs for my government," the foreign minister said. "We are not ready to enter into the process of direct talks with the U.S. if we do not have a clear and promising outlook to reach a good agreement with sustainable guarantees in front of us."

He added that Tehran had indicated to the U.S. that if Washington's "intentions are genuine, you should take some practical and tangible steps on the ground before any direct talks and contacts can take place". This could include unfreezing billions of dollars of Iranian petrodollars stuck in foreign central banks because of Trump's sanctions or a presidential executive order to lift some of the sanctions, he said.

However, Amir Abdollahian said that in "general, we are optimistic". "We also welcome a good deal in the shortest time however this deal must uphold the rights of the Iranian people," he said.

Iran opens strategic airport on Greater Tunb Island

From page 1 ▶ The IRGC and Iranian civil aviation authorities traveled to the Greater Tunb on the first passenger flight to the island to open a new runway at its Imam Ali airport.

The Greater Tunb, with a surface area of slightly more than 10 square kilometers, is one of three Iranian islands that overlook the Strait of Hormuz at the opening of the Persian Gulf.

Nearly one-fifth of the world's crude oil passes through the Strait of Hormuz, which is controlled by Iran and neighboring Oman.

Iran has frequently denied territorial claims to the Greater Tunb and two other neighboring islands by the UAE.

Mohammad Mohammadi Bakhsh, head of Iran's Civil Aviation Organization (CAO), stated that the new runway at Greater Tunb's airport will facilitate travel to the island from important business areas in southern Iran, including Bandar Abbas.

He stated that the CAO has provided all necessary clearances for passenger planes to take off and land at the airport.

The airport will soon be able to accommodate round-the-clock aircraft to numerous places in Iran, according to the official.

The IRGC opened the Imam Ali Airport in Greater Tunb in 2010. The new runway at the airport is 2,150 meters long and can accommodate small passenger jets such as the ERJ-145.

The complex is around 130 kilometers (80 miles) from an international airport at Bandar Abbas, an Iranian port city on the Persian Gulf coast.

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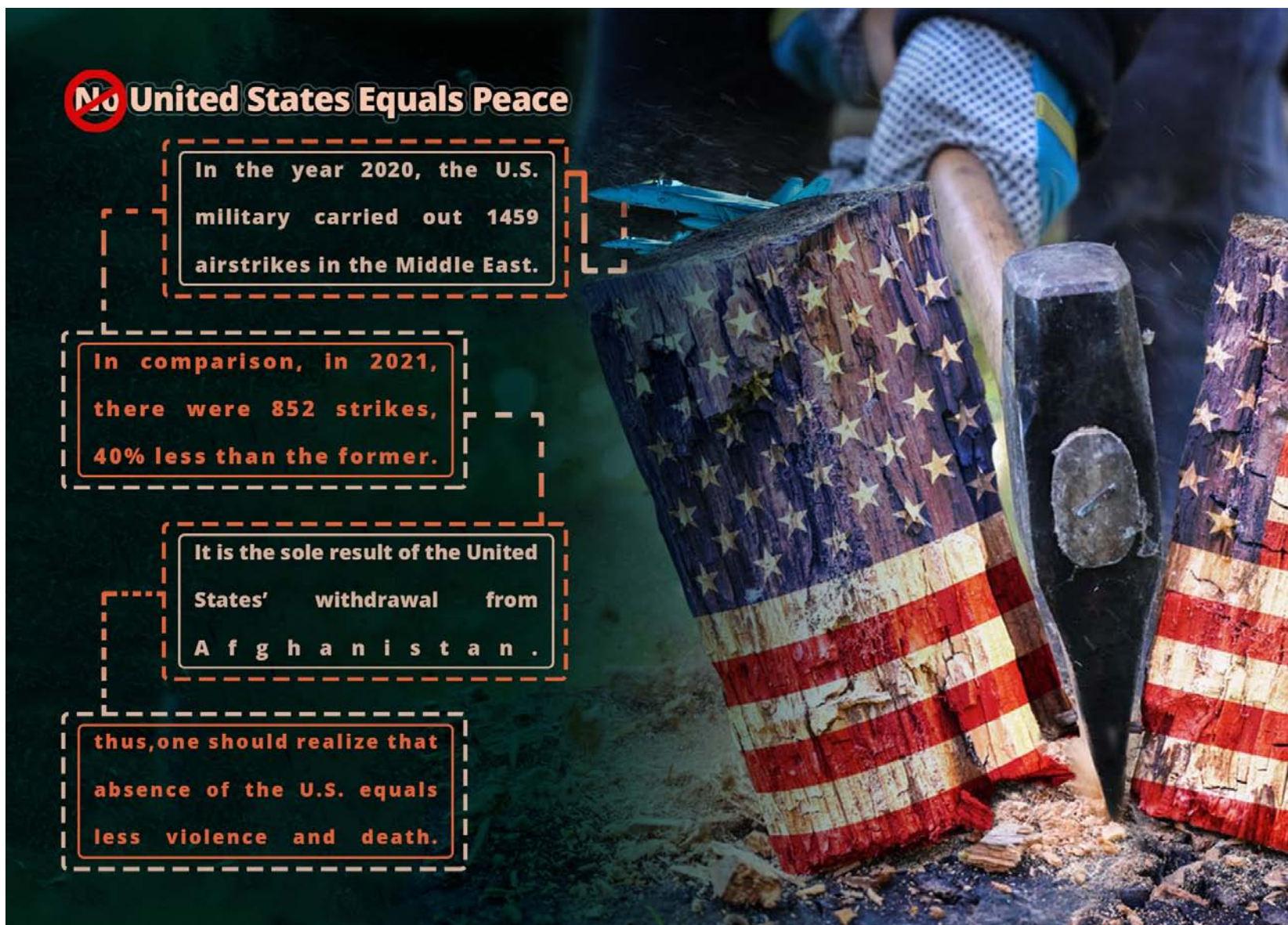
No United States Equals Peace

In the year 2020, the U.S. military carried out 1459 airstrikes in the Middle East.

In comparison, in 2021, there were 852 strikes, 40% less than the former.

It is the sole result of the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan.

thus, one should realize that absence of the U.S. equals less violence and death.



Iran ready to contribute to UN peacekeeping operations: ambassador

TEHRAN – Majid Takht Ravanchi, Iran's ambassador to the United Nations, has reiterated Iran's readiness to contribute to the UN peacekeeping operations logistically and militarily.

In a statement before the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, the Iranian ambassador reiterated Iran's commitment to UN peacekeeping operations.

"I would like to once again reiterate our strong commitment and support to the UN peacekeeping operations as the flagship activity of the United Nations. In this regard, my government stands ready to increase its contribution to the peacekeeping operations logistically and militarily by deploying troops, military observers, police and civilians," Takht Ravanchi said.

In the beginning, he paid homage to those serving under the flag of the United Nations.

"First and foremost, my delegation wishes to pay tribute to the men and women who have served under the flag of the United Nations, especially those peacekeepers who have lost their lives in the cause of peace and in defending the honor of the United Nations," Takht Ravanchi said, adding, "More than seven decades since the founding of the United Nations, maintenance of international peace and security still remains a major challenge for the world today. Therefore, the role of the United Nations in conflicts' prevention, peacekeeping, peacebuilding and sustaining peace requires consistent and continuous enhancement and strengthening now more than ever. In our view, peacekeeping operations, despite its challenges, remain a vital tool for the promotion of international peace and security. In this regard, we emphasize the unique and crucial role of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C-34) as the only United Nations forum mandated by the General Assembly to comprehensively review the whole question of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations in all their aspects."

He noted, "While recognizing the need for UN peacekeeping operations to keep pace with the ever-changing and complex nature of peace and security, we believe that it is highly important to observe the purposes and principles of peacekeeping, namely the consent of the parties, the non-use of force except in self-defense and impartiality. We strongly believe that the respect for principles of sovereign equality, political independence, territorial integrity of all States and non-intervention in matters that are essentially within their domestic jurisdiction should also be upheld in this regard."

The Iranian ambassador continued, "The Islamic Republic of Iran



continues to emphasize the importance of the role of United Nations peacekeeping operations, and, in this context, I would like to bring the following to the attention of the Special Committee: We take note of the A4P+ action plan and its renewed focus on developing concrete deliverables on the A4P agenda. Iran, as one of the signatories of the declaration of Shared Commitments on UN Peacekeeping Operations, expects that this ambitious roadmap will continue to be followed with solid practical results. We emphasize the importance of the active participation of Troop and Police Contributing Countries (TPCCs) in policy formulation and decision-making process in all stages of peacekeeping operations to achieve the partnership and effectiveness required for the United Nations peacekeeping missions. We believe that the principle of equitable geographical representation should be fully taken into account in staffing the headquarters and agencies in the fields at all levels."

He added, "We reaffirm that improving the safety and security of uniformed personnel is a shared responsibility that calls for each stakeholder to fulfill its role in reinforcing and providing UN peacekeeping operations with the necessary capabilities, capacities and resources to ensure the protection, health, safety and security of our troops."

Takht Ravanchi further said, "Protection of Civilians (PoC) is the primary responsibility of host countries. Peacekeeping missions where mandated, should aim to support the national efforts of host countries to protect the civilians. Therefore, any military intervention by the United Nations or by any foreign forces under the pretext of protection of civilians should be avoided."

He stated, "Regarding the use of modern technologies and intelligence in peacekeeping missions, we believe that using such technologies and intelligence should aim to increase the safety and security of UN personnel, including peacekeepers. The use of such technologies in a peacekeeping

context should be considered on a case-by-case basis while the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, namely the respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of Member States, as well as the fundamental principles of UN peacekeeping, in particular the consent of the host State must be upheld. Further, the legal aspects of using such technologies and intelligence should be defined in appropriate intergovernmental processes. The role of regional arrangements in peacekeeping should be defined in accordance with Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations. Regional arrangements should not, in any way, substitute the United Nations or disengage it of its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security."

Iran development policies explained

Earlier on Monday, Zahra Ershadi, Deputy Permanent Representative of Iran to the UN, addressed a meeting of the UN Commission for Social Development.

In the meeting, Ershadi highlighted Iran's developments policies and their legal requirements.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran highlights the importance of national development policies and strategies as an appropriate platform for addressing the national priorities and requirements of Member States. In this connection, Iran is implementing its '6th Five-year National Development Plan' through the reinforcement of a knowledge-based economy together with the development of advanced technology among a wide variety of subjects. Further, a strong legal and legislative framework has been created that provides a solid platform for planning, implementing and following-up with national development strategies and policies, particularly regarding poverty eradication. Significant achievements have been made so far despite the external challenges ranging from unlawful unilateral coercive measures (UCMs) including sanctions and the COVID-19 pandemic," she stated.

Ershadi added, "Under the current circumstances, the Government of Iran has provided special financial packages as well as social and economic rehabilitation plans for poor and people in vulnerable situation along with economic support measures, especially for small businesses. In the meantime, treatment programs have been provided for around 4 million legal and illegal Afghan refugees. The United Nations system and its specialized agencies can play an important role in exchanging countries' successful experiences in implementing post-COVID economic and social rehabilitation projects, as well as mobilizing international financial resources to achieve the desired national goals in the post-COVID era."

She noted, "The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting the daily life of every single person. Women, children, the elderly, medical personnel, refugees, migrants and those suffering from chronic and rare diseases are the most affected. In fact, the pandemic has made the negative humanitarian effects of unilateral sanctions far more obvious and more disastrous."

According to Ershadi, the illegal sanctions have hampered access of vulnerable segments of the society in affected countries, including Iran, to basic medical items and requirements extremely difficult, thus endangering the lives and health of those citizens.

She added, "Medicines, medical supplies and health commodities have been targeted through tight restrictions of foreign exchange resources, even for these humanitarian items. These illegal actions have directly impacted the lives of Iran's most vulnerable citizens, including women, children and patients. What is further distressing is the reality that many children have lost their lives as a result. As our President stated in his address to the UNGA session, imposing unilateral sanctions against the Iranian people, particularly sanctions on medicine and humanitarian items, are criminal acts on par with crimes committed against humanity. Those who sanction countries should not go unpunished for such heinous crimes."

She said, "The deteriorating economic situation as a result of illegal sanctions severely affects the exercise of economic and labor rights which, in the long run, will increase poverty and impede the achievement of sustainable development goals."

IRAN IN FOCUS

FEBRUARY 17, 2022

Straight Truth
TEHRAN TIMES

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SPORTS

Ice Lady Abdollahkhani optimistic on winter sports

From Page 1 ► "Our ice climbers have been fantastic in international competitions. Being on the top podium of 2012 and now in 2022, we have Iranian players grabbing gold medals 10 years later, which is awesome. But it is super disappointing that the federation didn't send the female athletes to the competition. Hence, it is so sad considering the fact that the world championship will also serve as world rankings.

"Two years ago, Iranian national team, both male and female teams, got the silver medal at the world championship and then we lost our position just because the federation didn't send female players. That was so devastating. They trained so hard, and then they lost their opportunity to compete in that event. I hope better days are ahead of the winter games for Iran's Sport," she concluded.

Chinese Ambassador Hua visits Iranian Para skiers training

TEHRAN – The Chinese ambassador to Iran Chang Hua visited the training camp of the Iranian Para skiers on Wednesday.



Chinese Ambassador Hua along with his accompanying delegation attended the training underway at the Dizin ski resort.

It is worth mentioning that during this visit, the Chinese ambassador presented memorial gifts to the Iranian Para skiers.

Dizin is the largest Iranian ski resort and located in the Alborz Mountain range, about 70km North from Tehran.

Sudanese forward Tito Okello joins Shahr Khodro

TEHRAN – Iranian football team Shahr Khodro completed signing of South Sudanese striker Tito Okello.

The 26-year-old forward joined Shahr Khodro from Kenyan team Gor Mahia.

"Gor Mahia remain in my heart forever because they gave me the amazing opportunity to play in Nairobi. I want to thank the club for helping me become a better footballer and for making me feel at home during my time here," Okello said.

Though he was born in Uganda in a city called Gulu situated in the Northern region, Okello switched allegiance from playing for Uganda's national team the Cranes, and settled for South Sudan.

He made his debut for South Sudan on October 10, 2020, against Cameroon B.

Shahr Khodro currently sit at the bottom of the 16-team table with five points from 17 matches and it will next face Naft Masjed Soleyman at the Behnam Mohammadi Stadium on Friday.

Iranian teams to compete at Central Asian Beach Volleyball C'ship

TEHRAN – Iran will send two volleyball teams to the 2022 Central Asian Zone Beach Volleyball Championship in Sri Lanka.

The first edition of the competition, conducted by the Asian Volleyball Confederation (AVC), will be held on February 18, 19 and 20 at the Beach Park in Negombo.

The Sri Lanka Volleyball Federation (SLVB) will host the event for both men and women.

Iran, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Maldives and Sri Lanka are the participating teams in the competition.

Iran basketball have big motivation against Syria: Mohammad Jamshidi

TEHRAN – Iran basketball team small forward Mohammad Jamshidi says that they are ready to play Syria at the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023 Asian Qualifiers.

It was the upset heard around Asia when Syria pulled off a 77-70 win over Iran at the FIBA Asia Cup 2022 Qualifiers. The game is already more than a year old already, but it still feels fresh, mainly because of how unexpected the result was.

Shocking as it was, life goes on. The qualities that define how strong a team are is by how they conduct themselves following a defeat of such magnitude.

And Iran certainly bounced back.

In the next four games in Asia, Iran won by an average margin of 24.0 points per game.

"That [loss to Syria] was a big shock" Iran's star forward Mohamad Jamshidi told FIBA.com. "But it's basketball and it helped us to improve and make us fully focused in every game we play, doesn't matter who we play."

For Iran basketball fans, however, it might matter a little bit about who the team plays in the upcoming second window of the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023 Asian Qualifiers. On February 27, Iran are scheduled to host Syria in a rematch, facing each other for the first time since the upset.

Jamshidi, who scored 13 points and passed out 8 assists in the last encounter, can't help but admit that there's a little bit of extra motivation heading into that game.

"We have big motivation to play against them," said the 30-year-old forward. "They are good and respectable team, but we will come out to play hard and defend the name of Iran."

They can't be focused solely on that game against Syria either, as they are also scheduled to play against Kazakhstan on February 23 as well. Kazakhstan finished the first window of the Asian Qualifiers without a loss, winning both the home and away game against Syria.

"Kazakhstan are a tough team," said the 1.85m (6'1") sharpshooter. "They play physical basketball and it's a hard game every time we face them."

Nonetheless, Iran are in a good rhythm at the moment. They currently sit at first place in Group D following two straight wins against Bahrain. This window might be a little bit tougher, going up against two teams with World Cup Qualifiers experience, which is why are deep in preparation heading into these two games.

"We have had almost [a month] of hard practice and our confidence comes from that," said Jamshidi. "We believe in our team and we know we can do big things when we want"

Iran's strength, as usual, stems from their core of players with vast experience playing at a high level. There are plenty of names that Asia basketball fans are familiar with whether it is Jamshidi himself or even legends like Mahdi Kamrani in the 24-player preliminary roster.

"We have experienced players and we've played together for so long and we know each other. This is our advantage."

Even with that advantage, Jamshidi emphasized that the team has to be wary of any opponent they face and stay focused on the mission on hand: qualifying for the World Cup.

"We [can't] underestimate the opponent and have be focused for these two important games. We need these two game for points to move on to the next round."

Blanc leaves Qatar's Al Rayyan

TEHRAN – Qatar club Al Rayyan SC have announced the departure of Laurent Blanc, with former Chilean international Nicolas Cordova replacing the French FIFA World Cup winner as head coach.

Al Rayyan are currently ninth in the Qatar Stars League with the club playing to a 1-1 draw with bottom team Al Sailiya in their latest match.

Al Rayyan said on social media that Cordova, who is in charge of Qatar's national U23 side, would take over coaching duties, THE-AFC.com reported.

The 56-year-old Blanc, who won the FIFA World Cup in 1998 and the European Championship with France in 2000, took charge of Al Rayyan in December 2020.

Cordova will coach Al Rayyan until the end of the current season because of his duties with the Qatari national set-up.

Israel fearful of another Intifada in West Bank

From Page 1 ► Since Sunday, there have been violent clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces in Sheikh Jarrah.

The latest wave of Israeli crackdown against Palestinians comes against a backdrop of renewed Israeli violence in the West Bank.

Earlier this month, a Palestinian elderly died in Israeli custody. He was detained by Israeli troops at a checkpoint in the West Bank and was later found dead. An autopsy conducted by three Palestinian doctors found that the man died of cardiac arrest after a stress-induced heart attack resulting from "external violence," according to the Associated Press.

Earlier on Tuesday, a Palestinian young man from the village of Kafr Ein, north of Ramallah was shot dead by the Israeli army at the entrance to the village of Al-Nabi Saleh.

On February 8, an Israeli force assassinated three Palestinians in the Al-Makhfieh neighborhood in Nablus after shooting at a Palestinian vehicle they were traveling in.

On Wednesday, Israeli settlers attacked Palestinian herders in the Bethlehem-area village of Kisan, south of the West Bank, and let their dogs loose to attack their sheep, according to Wafa news agency.

Israeli attacks against Palestinians have seen a sharp increase over the last year, according to Israeli media. Anti-Palestinian violence committed by disaffected young Israelis increased by 50% in 2021, the Times of Israel said.

Independent institutions also reported a rise in Israel's demolition of Palestinian properties. The Office of the European Union Representative in Jerusalem said that demolitions carried out by the Israeli occupation authorities in the West Bank in 2021 reached a 5-year high.

In its One Year Report on Demolitions and Seizures in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem,

covering the period from 1 January until 31 December 2021, it said that a total of 904 structures were demolished and 1,205 people were displaced in 2021, including 650 children.

The Israeli measures and attacks against Palestinians caused a great furor in the West Bank, with some Palestinian cities and towns staging strikes.

The tense situation was not lost on the Israelis themselves. An Israeli security assessment has warned of an explosive situation in the Palestinian territories at the beginning of the upcoming month of Ramadan. The document is a message sent by Israeli commander in the West Bank Avi Bluth and was published by the official Kan channel on Tuesday evening. "The ignition materials are already there, it's only missing a match to ignite the whole area," the Israeli commander said, according to an Al-Arabi Al-Jadeed report.

He added, "The deadline - the beginning of the month of Ramadan. This is a goal for the Israeli forces, as they are supposed to be ready."

He pointed out that "the next escalation will be different from the previous ones."

The Israeli government is also afraid of the deteriorating situation in the Sheikh Al-Jarrah neighborhood, and Prime Minister Naftali Bennett is looking for calm, according to Israeli media.

Israeli media reported that Bennett "is working to stop the deterioration in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood so that the situation does not descend into a battle."

The fear in the Israeli security establishment of a security escalation in the Palestinian areas is real, Al-Mayadeen reported, citing Israeli media outlets.

The statement of the Israeli prime minister comes after sources revealed to Al-Mayadeen that the Hamas movement held talks with the Egyptians about the recent Israeli attacks in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood.



The sources said that Hamas informed the Egyptian side that what is happening is an "escalation of danger that cannot be tolerated," and that the occupation government is "playing with fire again."

Hamas confirmed that the expulsion of Palestinians from the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood is a "red line that the resistance knows how to respond to." In turn, the Palestinian factions confirmed that they "will not leave the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood alone."

Mushir al-Masry, a Hamas leader, confirmed to Al-Mayadeen that "Escalation begets escalation. This equation was imposed by the Palestinian resistance."

Of note, the latest round of war between Israel and the Gaza Strip took place largely due to an Israeli decision to evict Palestinian families from their homes in the neighborhood.

Al-Zawraa Stadium in Iraq built relying on Iranian engineering

From page 1 ► “Despite all events that are happening in the region, the relationship between the two countries of Iran and Iraq are on the upward trend,” the official said.

The current administration of Iran under President Raisi has shown great interest in broadening and enhancing trade and economic ties with neighboring states, he emphasized.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the chairman of the Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce pointed to the country's planning for a \$20 billion trade with Iraq and put the current trade volume exchange between the two countries at about \$13-\$14 billion.

Meanwhile, in mid-January, the Federation of Iraqi Chambers of Commerce hosted a Joint Economic and Trade Conference for the

Iranian and Iraqi chambers of commerce, in which the two sides signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for establishing an arbitration center for resolving business conflicts.

The conference was attended by senior officials from the two sides including Head of the Federation of Iraqi Chambers of Commerce Abdul Razzaq al- Zuhairi and Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Gholam-Hossein Shafeie.

Head of Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce Yahya Al-e-Eshaq, and Head of the Iranian Parliament's Economic Committee Mohammadreza Pour-Ebrahimi were also among the attendees to this conference.

Pre-registration for Iran Oil Show 2022 to begin on Saturday



TEHRAN- Pre-registration for the exhibitors in 26th International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition of Iran (Iran Oil Show 2022) will start on Saturday (February 19) through the website of the exhibition.

As announced by Majid Bujarzadeh, the director of the exhibition, Iran Oil Show will be held during May 13-16, through receiving all related permits from the National

Headquarters to Combat Coronavirus Pandemic, and observing all health protocols.

Pre-registration is for the purpose of identifying applicant companies and needs assessment, and does not mean that the application is definitely approved.

Iran Oil Show is among the most significant oil and gas events in the world in terms of the number of participants and its diversity.

The event covers a variety of oil industry areas, including upstream industries, universities and science centers, start-ups, and science and technology parks, petrochemicals and related industries, gas and related industries, pipes and tubes, valves, refining and distribution and related industries, rotary machines, as well as products exporters, and etc.

Aluminum ingot output rises 24% in 10 months yr/yr



TEHRAN – Production of aluminum ingot in Iran rose 24 percent during the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2021-January 20, 2022), as compared to the same period of time in the past year.

The country's ten-month aluminum ingot output stood at 453,436 tons, while the figure was 364,783 tons in the same time span of the previous year.

As previously announced by Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), the production of aluminum ingot in Iran rose 61 percent during the previous Iranian calendar year 1399 (ended on March 20, 2021),

compared to the figure for the preceding year.

The country's aluminum ingot output stood at 446,800 tons in the previous year.

Iran's major aluminum producers had managed to produce 278,318 tons of the product in the Iranian calendar year 1398.

The country's aluminum ingot production in the Iranian calendar year 1398 had declined eight percent in comparison to the figure for its preceding year.

IMIDRO data show that among the country's top producers, Iranian Aluminum Company (IRALCO) had the best performance in the previous year producing 185,000 tons of

aluminum ingots.

Aluminum ingot production in the country reached 41,000 tons in the last month of the previous year (February 19-March 20, 2021), registering a 38 percent rise compared to the 30,000 tons in the preceding year's same period.

Annual production of the aluminum ingot in the country is planned to increase 63 percent by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20).

Last year, during the inauguration ceremony of Iran's biggest aluminum production complex (in the central Fars province), the former industry minister said the country's aluminum production is expected to be doubled with that unit

going operational.

The official put the value of the Iranian mining industry's production at about \$22 billion, saying that the country is relatively self-sufficient in minerals and a great deal is also exported every year.

He went on underlying the country's capacities in the sector, saying that Iran is ranked 18th among the world's top aluminum producers, and with this new plant going operational the country will climb four places to stand at 14th place.”

Iran plans to reach the annual production of 1.5 million tons of aluminum ingot by the Iranian calendar year 1404 (March 2025-March 2026).

Iran, S. Korea discuss frozen assets payment, oil trade resumption

TEHRAN- Iran and South Korea discussed the details of the options to pay Iran's frozen assets in Seoul and also the possibility of resuming oil trade in preparation for potential U.S. sanctions relief on Iran, during the two-day meetings from Tuesday, Yonhap reported.

South Korea and Iran have held working-level consultations to discuss ways to resolve yearslong disputes over Tehran's assets frozen here under U.S. sanctions, Seoul's foreign ministry said Wednesday.

Iranian bankers and officials from the state-run oil company and the petroleum ministry are in the nation to meet with South Korean government and company officials to talk about pending economic issues as multilateral talks to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear deal enter the final stretch.



Bilateral relations remain frayed over \$7 billion in Iranian funds locked in two Korean banks under U.S. sanctions, which were reimposed after former President Donald Trump in 2018 withdrew from the landmark deal.

Iran, which sits on the world's fourth-largest oil reserves, had been a key oil supplier to South Korea, importing its goods such as industrial equipment, household appliances and vehicle parts.

In a decree in early October 2021, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei banned the import of home appliances from South Korea. The order by the Leader came after local producers sought Leader's help in this regard.

Bowing to illegal pressure by the United States, South Korea has not only been withholding about seven billion dollars of Iranian oil revenues, its two famous home appliances producers- LG and Samsung- also left the Iranian market.

Bowing to illegal pressure by the United States, South Korea has not only been withholding about 8.5 billion dollars of Iranian oil revenues, its two famous in producing home appliances - LG and Samsung - also left the Iranian market.

TEDPIX loses 800 points on Wednesday

TEHRAN- TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), lost 845 points to close at 1282 million points on Wednesday.

As reported, over 6.596 billion securities worth 50.228 trillion rials (about \$193 million) were traded at the TSE.

The first market's index dropped 1,116 points and the second market's index fell 170 points.

TEDPIX lost 17,000 points (1.3 percent) to 1284 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, Isfahan Oil Refinery, Iran Khodro Company, Tejarat Bank, and National Iranian Copper Company were the most widely followed ones.

Earlier on January 25, President Raisi had called on all related authorities to take the necessary measures for resolving the stock market problems.

Following the president's remarks, his cabinet held a meeting with the presence of the head of Planning and Budget Organization (PBO), the first vice president, the vice president for economic affairs, and the head of the country's Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) to discuss ways for resolving the mentioned issues and to support the market.

Meanwhile, on January 22, Head of Iran's Capital Market Development and Stabilization Fund Amir-Mahdi Sabaei said that part of the allocations by the National Development Fund (NDF) has been deposited into the stabilization fund to support the stock market.



Sabaei had previously announced the allocation of 120 trillion rials (about \$450 million) of NDF resources for the Capital Market Development and Stabilization Fund.

The official said the rest of the funding will also be paid based on a mutually agreed schedule, adding: “We hope that the rest of the deposits, like the deposits made yesterday, will be made regularly according to the agreed schedule.”

Sabaei noted that in addition to the resources received from the NDF, the fund can also be financed through the money and capital markets.

The allocation of financial resources from NDF to the Capital Market Stabilization Fund is one of the measures that the government has been taking since the stock market started a downward trend.

Following the 13th government's new strategies to improve the stock market, the Government Economic Coordination Headquarters convened a meeting on November 2, 2021, chaired by President Raisi, during which a decision was made to inject new resources from NDF into the Capital Market Development and Stabilization Fund.

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

According to Sabaei, currently, 30 percent of the SEO commissions are deposited directly to the account of this fund on a daily basis.

The Capital Market Development and Stabilization Fund's mission is to support the Iranian stock market. The money loaned from NDF should be repaid over a specified period and the maturity can be extended. The Capital Market Stabilization Fund is responsible for paying the principal amount plus interest.

The government has applied several new changes in the national budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year (begins on March 21) which according to experts and analysts will ensure the stock market's stability and

growth in the coming years.

Reducing taxes on production units active in the stock market, strengthening the Capital Market Development and Stabilization Fund, eliminating subsidized foreign currency allocations, and stabilizing the ownership interest of the mines are some of the measures considered in the budget bill to support the capital market.

Allocating a 20-percent tax on legal entities is considered in next year's budget bill which is less than the previous years. 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 the 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.

Monthly saffron export down 63% on year

TEHRAN- Iran's export of saffron fell 63 percent in the previous Iranian calendar month (ended on January 20), as compared to the same month of the past year, a board member of Iran's National Saffron Council told ILNA.

Ali Hosseini said this issue should be diagnosed to find where is the problem?

“Currently, about 90 percent of the world's saffron is produced in Iran, but this is not a matter of applying our taste to buyers in global markets, and we cannot sell the product at the

price we are considering,” he said.

“It has been about 30 years since we became the first saffron producer in the world”, Hosseini said and lamented: “No action has been taken in the saffron processing industry and we do not have a share of saffron processing industries in the world and we have just talked.”

Iran is one of the world's top saffron producers and over 90 percent of its production is exported to foreign destinations.

West Azarbaijan province's apple export up 6 folds



TEHRAN- The export of apples from West Azarbaijan province in the northwest of Iran has risen by six folds in the current Iranian calendar year (began on March 21, 2021), as compared to the previous year, a provincial official announced.

Hossein Sadeqi, the deputy governor-general of the province for economic affairs, said that 221,000 tons of apples worth \$60 million have been exported from the province in this year.

He also said that 300,000 tons of apples are currently kept in the cold storage facilities of the province.

As previously announced, by the province's former deputy governor-general for economic affairs, West Azarbaijan provided 60 percent of the apples exported from the country in the past Iranian calendar year.

And as announced by head of the Central Organization for Rural Cooperatives of Iran, the country exported 700,000 tons of apples in the past year.

Saying that Iranian apple has been exported to Russia and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)'s member countries in the past year, Ali Tahmasbi said export of apple has had a proper status in the recent years.

Tahmasbi had said that 50 percent of the exported apples were produced in the northwestern West Azarbaijan province.

He also put the country's apple output at over four million tons in the previous year.

As announced by the spokesman of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), Iraq bought \$105 million, Russia \$95.4 million, Afghanistan \$51.7 million, India \$26.6 million, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) \$21.1 million of apples from Iran last year and were the top five export buyers of Iranian apples in that year.

Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Oman, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Pakistan, Qatar, Armenia, Kuwait, Georgia, Syria, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Libya, Bahrain, Uzbekistan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Egypt, Norway and the United Kingdom were the sixth to 27th destinations, respectively, Rouhollah Latifi added.

As the official has previously announced, food and agricultural products accounted for 7.7 percent of the country's weight of exports in the previous year, and the share of these goods in terms of value was more than 17.6 percent of the total value of exports.

By Mohammad Mazhari

TEHRAN – A professor from the Faculty of Political Science in Moscow State University says Russia is acting in a way as if it wants to invade Ukraine to prevent Kyiv’s attack on Donbas but the Kremlin has no desire to do so.

“Moscow decided to behave as if it wanted to intervene—without any desire to launch an actual intervention—so as to deter Kyiv’s supposed military move in Donbas,” Stanislav Byshok tells the Tehran Times.

“To avoid this negative scenario, these actions by Moscow were interpreted by Kyiv and its NATO partners as Russia’s genuine plans to intervene in earnest,” Byshok argues.

He says many commentators predict that any clash between Russia and Ukraine would inevitably lead to massive loss of lives from both sides and Western harsh sanctions on Moscow among other things.

Following is the text of the interview:

How do you assess the current escalation between Russia and NATO over Ukraine?

Many commentators consider the current escalation unprecedented in the whole post-Cold war era. I subscribe to this assessment adding that today’s situation seems completely unprovoked. Sure, the relations between Russia and NATO have been worsening for quite a while. However, since 2015, there have been no major battles between the Ukrainian army and the Russia-supported rebels in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine. Since then, nobody realistically claimed that the Kremlin wants to invade Ukraine, annex its eastern half, take over Kyiv, and install a pro-Moscow puppet government there.

In late 2021, certain Western outlets published reports on Russia’s massive military buildup along Ukraine’s eastern borders. Some claimed Moscow was about to invade its neighbor on behalf of the self-proclaimed breakaway Donbas republics, the Donetsk and Lugansk “people’s republics,” that is, many of whose inhabitants have already got Russian citizenship. When asked about its recent military maneuvers, the Kremlin plainly answered that it has all the rights to deploy its troops and military vehicles anywhere on the Russian territory—yet didn’t say anything about the motives behind that massive deployment. This uncertainty gave more grounds to those suspecting the Kremlin of preparing for the Ukraine invasion. The ongoing large-scale joint Russian-Belarusian military drills near Ukraine’s northern border don’t make things more soothing.

My speculative reconstruction of the recent events is as follows. Sometime in late 2021, Moscow got a piece of intelligence from Ukraine that Kyiv is planning an all-out military operation against the breakaway republics in eastern Ukraine so as to restore full sovereignty over these territories. If that happened, Moscow would be compelled to openly intervene to protect the Russian passport-holders there. This intervention would inevitably lead to massive loss of lives from both sides, destruction, further isolation of Russia from Western economies, more harsh economic sanctions, etc. To avoid this negative scenario, Moscow decided to behave as if it wanted to intervene—without any desire to launch an actual intervention—so as to deter Kyiv’s supposed military move in Donbas. Then, these actions by Moscow were interpreted by Kyiv and its NATO partners

Moscow acts as if it wants to intervene in Ukraine: Russian professor

In today’s information age, many wars are primarily waged in the information sphere, not on the actual battlefields’



as Russia’s genuine plans to intervene in earnest.

Any scholar of international relations knows that states always operate in world affairs having limited and often distorted information about others’ intentions. In this dangerous fog-of-war environment, misunderstandings often happen.

Do you think Western media outlets are fueling the crisis by depicting a war state between Russia and Ukraine?

Not only in the media but also in the political class and among the expert community in the West, there’s a clear consensus that Russia is the principal responsible party for the Ukraine crisis, which started in 2014. The 2014 Crimea referendum was not recognized by the Western powers (and Eastern as well), Russia is believed to be supporting the breakaway republics of Donbas militarily, the tragedy of the Malaysia Airlines flight MH-17, which crashed in Donbas, is blamed at Russia’s surface-to-air missile complex Buk, etc. Granting Russian passports to the breakaway republics’ residents is also considered weaponization rather than a form of protecting them: Moscow has no legal obligation to protect pro-Russian citizens of Ukraine’s east, but if these people obtain Russian citizenship, it makes them too “expensive” a target, as cynical as it sounds, for the Ukrainian army.

Against that backdrop, there’s no surprise that, when the first pieces of information about Russia’s military moves close to the Ukrainian border appeared, many instantly jumped to a conclusion about the invasion preparation. The obvious question, “Why would Russia decide to overtly intervene in 2022 and not in 2014, when the Ukrainian army and the state were much weaker than today?”, is never asked. That’s what amazes me as a political scientist in the current situation. Actors’ motives matter.

On the bright side of it, it’s important to mention that in today’s information age, many wars are also primarily waged in the information sphere, not on

the actual battlefields. The ratio is approximately 90 to 10. That gives us regular people some ground for cautious optimism.

How is NATO penetrating into Russia’s sphere of influence by surrounding Moscow?

Since the late XVth century, when the Russians finally overcame the Golden Horde rule and incorporated the formerly Mongol-controlled territories into the Russian body politic, all the major invasions Russia faced have been from the West—culminating in Nazi Germany’s surprise invasion during WWII. Hence, the Kremlin’s security concerns and its supposed fixation on NATO eastward expansion can be justified historically.

The received understanding of Russia’s military history, as it taught domestically, is that the Russians have always defended themselves and never launched aggressive wars of territorial expansion. This pacifist narrative is challenged by many of Moscow’s (or Saint Petersburg’s if speaking about the imperial period of Russian history) former subjects, including Poland, the Baltic states, and Ukraine. They claim that Russian imperialism

“Any war with Ukraine or any other neighbor is perceived negatively by the Russian public.”

suppressed the cultural, political, and economic development of the states’ ethnically non-Russian peoples and that this policy was perpetuated by Soviet rule and even later, by the contemporary Russian Federation. Hence, when the Kremlin voices its concerns about NATO’s eastward expansion, those former communist Central and Eastern European states, who have already joined NATO or aspire to join, claim that it’s not NATO that is expanding towards Russia, it’s these states that run from Russia, fearful of its eventual aggressive moves. Unfortunately, as of today, it seems that Russia and NATO talk past each other and play the blame game, i.e. explaining their actions in terms of reacting to the opponent’s supposedly unfriendly moves.

Do you think Russia is able to form a coalition with Asian countries and regional powers like Iran and China to curb NATO expansion?

The BRICS group has been an attempt to form some kind of a

balancing coalition, yet it’s hard to call this enterprise a roaring success. The states comprising BRICS are too diverse—politically, economically, culturally, and territorially—to form a unified front. There’s deep animosity between the two most populous ones—China and India. At the same time, India fares among the most pro-American nations in Asia. Concurrently, Brazil, the largest economy in South America and the whole Southern Hemisphere, is very much dependent on its economic ties with the U.S. Last but not least, today’s global popular culture and technologies are, for the most part, products of Hollywood and Silicon Valley. Even if we want to voice our opposition towards American policies, we’ll most certainly do it via American social media platforms on the American-created Internet. That makes the situation even more complicated.

Speaking of a possible Chinese-Russian-Iranian axis, it’s difficult to imagine what it would look like in practical terms. We can realistically imagine a joint statement the three nations can produce—debunking the American hegemony, praising the multipolar world, stating the respect for civilizational diversity, etc. But what practical actions would these ideological statements entail? China, whatever its current relations with the West, is a global power absolutely essential to the entire world economy. The gadgets your readers use as they read this interview are almost certainly China-manufactured. China’s own growing prosperity, which started several decades ago, rests primarily on the country’s being part of the global economy.

Despite their relative strength, both Russia and Iran are incomparable to China in their importance to the global economy. In any possible formal coalition with Beijing, Moscow and Teheran would be junior partners—a non-starter for such ambitious post-imperial nations as the Russians and the Persians. More importantly, there’s absolutely nothing China would get in severing its ties with the West while strengthening its relations with Russia and Iran. For all its Marxist-Leninist rhetoric, China is too pragmatic a nation to launch a world revolution in earnest.

What would be the fallout of U.S. harsh sanctions on Russia’s banks?

The Russian banks have been under severe restrictions since the Crimea referendum and the start of the Donbas conflict in 2014. They are deprived of the possibility to obtain long-term low-interest rate credits from Western banks. That, among other things, has contributed to the economic troubles and considerable inflation in Russia. Of course, if Russia intervened in Ukraine, new, even more, severe sanctions would follow. Nobody in Russia wants it, even the most hawkish hot heads.

Ergo, it brings us back to the central question that is not addressed by those claiming Russia is up to launching an overt invasion of Ukraine: What, if anything, good would the Kremlin get if it decided to attack its neighbor? What, aside from harsh international sanctions and the burden to invest heavily in the newly acquired territories, would it get? Needless to say, any war with Ukraine or any other neighbor is perceived negatively by the Russian public, according to all the recent opinion polls. So let’s hope that the current escalation will fit into the aforementioned 90% of the information warfare that is waged in the media and not on the battlefield.

Fresh pain for Natives in Canada as more graves found

An Indigenous community in Canada’s Saskatchewan province has announced the discovery of 54 unmarked graves at two former residential schools, adding to a growing tally of such burials that shocked the nation and the world last year.

Speaking at a Press Conference, Ted Quewezance, who is leading the Keeseekoowase First Nation’s search for graves near two former residential schools, Fort Pelly and St Phillip’s, announced the new findings.

Canada’s indigenous community are using ground-penetrating radar to find the graves of former children who were forcibly taken away from their parents and sent to the residential school system where they were subject to different forms of torture.

Holding back tears, Quewezance says “Canadians still cannot believe a human being could treat another human being, especially a child, like the way we were treated”.

Quewezance, who is among the estimated 150,000 native children who attended the schools, says the discovery supports what people from the indigenous community have been saying for years “It was not that they could not hear, but they did not believe our survivors”.

The two schools, like all the others, were run by the Catholic Church on behalf of the federal government which backed them with money.

St. Philip’s was operating from about 1928 to 1969 and has been described by survivors as hellish.

Fort Pelly was open as a residential school from 1905-13.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s final report found St. Philip’s school had a widespread problem with sexual and physical abuse.

In the report, Elaine Durocher gave an account of her time at St. Philip’s school saying as soon as she entered the residential school “the abuse started right away.”

“We were stripped, taken up to a dormitory, stripped. Our hair was sprayed ... We were always praying. We were always on our knees. We were told we were little, stupid savages, and that they had to educate us”

Durocher adds “they were there to discipline you, teach you, beat you, rape you, molest you, but I never got an education”.

Another former St. Philip’s child survivor, Fred Brass, told the commission that the institution was dominated by a violent regime of punishment.

He said he lived in fear of abuse day and night saying “I saw my brother with his face held to a hot steaming pipe and then getting burned on the arm by a supervisor”.

Chief Lee Kitchemonia, the project leader of the Keeseekoowase’s search says “these



are not just instances where a principal or a teacher disciplined. These could potentially be murdered children, hidden. We don’t know any of these answers” saying more investigation is needed.

Kitchemonia says the ground-penetrating radar technology suggests there are 42 gravesites at the grounds of Fort Pelly Residential School, and an additional 12 at St Phillip’s.

Just weeks ago, the Williams Lake First Nation announced it had found evidence of 93 unmarked graves on the grounds of St Joseph Mission, another former residential school.

Similar discoveries were made last year at several other residential schools or institutions across Canada.

Since May 2021, more than 1,300 graves have been discovered.

Kitchemonia added that the community faces difficult days ahead saying “It’s going to be a very tough time for our community, knowing that we had unmarked graves in our community, in our common areas, that we drive every day, that we walk every day”.

In total, some 150,000 First Nations indigenous children were taken from 1874 all the way to the year 1996 to these residential schools, set up to forcibly assimilate the country’s Indigenous peoples.

Canada operates more than 130 residential schools.

The truth and reconciliation commission documented abuses at the schools and the deaths of more than 4,000 students mostly from malnutrition, disease and suicide among other issues, in a 2015 report calling it “cultural genocide.”

Indigenous children spent months or years isolated from their families and were not just abused by headmasters and teachers but also stripped of their culture and language.

The wintry weather will delay the latest investigation, however, the shame of what many consecutive governments tried to hide from the Canadian public for decades will now live on forever following the discovery of the graves of children next to what used to be torture chambers for the nations indigenous kids.

Russia “embarrassed” the West “without firing a shot”

From page 1 ▶ Since November last year, the U.S. and NATO have been warning about an imminent invasion of Ukraine by Russia.

Moscow has strongly dismissed the allegations and instead warned NATO against further expanding eastwards by allowing Ukraine membership in the North Atlantic Alliance, deploying troops, and sending advanced military weapons near Russian borders.

The Russian foreign ministry has pointed to the withdrawal announcement as proof that the West was wrong all along about the invasion.

Writing on social media, the Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said “15 February 2022 will go down in history as the day Western war propaganda failed,” adding that Russia had “embarrassed” the West “without firing a single shot”.

Konashenkov, says “as the combat training measures are completed, the troops, as always, will return to their points of permanent deployment”

“Separate units will return on their own as part of military columns”.

Speaking at a Press Conference, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov also says that the

Russian troop pullout was simply proceeding according to schedule noting “this is happening independently from whatever people are thinking, however, they throw a fit about it, whoever deploys this information terrorism” he added “I won’t shrink from that word. The caravan moves on.”

Lavrov says Moscow will continue its dialogue with the West on security issues and is ready for separate talks on intermediate-range nuclear missiles.

He dismissed reports Russia is planning to invade Ukraine as “information terrorism”.

Russian officials have frequently denounced Western intelligence reports and media reports as “hysteria” and “American disinformation”.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry also denounced the U.S. and its allies for “playing up the threat of warfare and creating tension”. It said, “such persistent hyping up and disinformation by some Western countries will create turbulence and uncertainty to the world full of challenges, and intensify distress and division”.

Moscow has maintained all along that it has the right to choose where it stations its troops within Russian territory. It has also proposed security guarantees that the West has oddly enough yet to meet.

Photo exhibit offers surprising, lesser-seen Iran destinations



From page 1 ► eating traditional dishes, or even staying with locals. To put it in other words, many urban residents tend to choose rural tourism to enjoy a slow-paced lifestyle that resembles something like ‘the Internet + countryside’.

Experts believe that the growth of the local economy is the ultimate goal of the rise and development of the rural tourism industry, but in the long run, to enable the long-term development of the rural tourism industry, the healthy maintenance and growth of environmental capacity is very important.

The ancient country is home to thousands of historic and architectural beauties on offer in famed cities like Isfahan and Shiraz, Tabriz, Kashan, Kerman, and Yazd in such a way that its diverse landscapes could be easily overlooked. Moreover, introducing the lesser-known or less-favored destinations is among the policies the tourism ministry follows. For example, over the past couple of years, western Iranian provinces have held several meetings to discuss ways to expand tourism, bringing together local officials, hoteliers, travel agents, and tour operators from provinces of Lorestan, Ilam, Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari, Kohgiluyeh, and Boyer-Ahmad, Kermanshah, Kordestan, Hamedan, Zanjan and East Azarbaijan, amongst others.

Having numerous pristine yet diverse natural gifts, Iran has many to offer to nature lovers. For instance, the villages of Kharanaq, Barandaq, and Lark have been nominated

for the ‘Best Tourism Villages’ label, which the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is projected to grant to a selection of rural destinations across the globe.

In fact, the World Tourism Organization sees rural tourism as a type of activity in which the visitor’s experience is related to a wide range of products generally linked to nature-based activities, agriculture, rural lifestyle, culture, angling, and sightseeing. Such tourism also possesses characteristics such as low population density, a landscape dominated by agriculture and forestry, as well as traditional social structure and lifestyle. Similar to agritourism, rural tourism is seen as a win-win situation both for local communities, and post-modern travelers who are in search of unique experiences.

The Islamic Republic expects to reap a bonanza from its numerous tourist spots such as bazaars, museums, mosques, bridges, bathhouses, madrasas, mausoleums, churches, towers, and mansions, of which 26 are inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list. Under the 2025 Tourism Vision Plan, Iran aims to increase the number of tourist arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million in 2025. The latest available data show eight million tourists visited the Islamic Republic during the first ten months of the past Iranian calendar year (ended March 20).

The six-day exhibit which is held at Honar Garden in the Abbasabad neighborhood will come to an end on February 17.

\$4.5m allocated to develop Gilan tourism



TEHRAN- A budget of 1.2 trillion rials (\$4.5 million) has been allocated to develop some tourism-related projects across northern Gilan province, the provincial tourism chief has announced.

“A sum of 1.2 trillion rials is approved to be distributed to 18 developing projects which are expected to have a considerable impact on tourism infrastructure and job creation in the province,” CHTN quoted Vali Jahani as saying on Wednesday.

Last week, the official announced that a total of 164 tourism-related projects worth 1.5 trillion rials (\$5.7 million) were inaugurated in Gilan to mark the 43rd anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution, which is known as the Ten-Day Fajr celebrations (this

Tourist complexes inaugurated near Maranjab desert

TEHRAN-Three new tourist complexes were inaugurated in the city of Aran-Bidgol

in central Isfahan province on Tuesday, the city’s tourism chief has announced.

A total budget of 60 billion rials (\$228,000) has been invested in the projects, which were carried out in collaboration with the private sector; CHTN quoted Hossein Chakeri as saying on Wednesday.

Archaeological trenches carved to redefine southern Iranian port town

TEHRAN – Archaeologists have carved trenches in and around Najirom amid hopes to find new clues about the history of trade and seafaring in the ancient port town, which is situated in southern Iran along the Persian Gulf.

Three phases of archaeological work have been formulated to respectively define the legal boundaries of the ancient port town, classification of different layers of sedimentary deposits, and finally unearthing possible relics and ruins.

Located in Bushehr province, Najirom was once one of the most important and largest commercial, industrial, and demographic centers of the Persian Gulf.

Archaeologists hope to unearth mosques, ancient structures, and relics from the port town, according to provincial tourism chief Mohammad-Hossein Arastouzadeh.

The historical port, which extends for more than two kilometers along the coast, had never been investigated archaeologically, the head of the



excavation team Hossein Tofiqian said last week.

Parts of this historical site have been destroyed and occupied in recent years as a result of the expansion of industries in the area, and large portions of it are on the verge of destruction, he explained. “As its first archaeological survey, the project aims to determine the legal boundaries of the historical area to prevent further

damage and illegal construction within it. In addition to the demarcation of the site, stratigraphic excavations are also underway to determine the cultural sequence of this historical.”

It has been proven through the studies that Najirom has been a dynamic and active port in a wide area during all historical periods up to the early, middle, and late Islamic eras, the archaeologist explained.

The project is being carried out in collaboration with the Ports and Maritime Organization, and the Iranian National Institute for Oceanography and Atmospheric Science under the supervision of the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage & Tourism (RICHT).

Bushehr province in southern Iran is home to several ancient ports including Siraf, which Iran seeks to register on the UNESCO World Heritage list. Moreover, Bushehr is one of the most significant historical regions along the Persian Gulf, embracing significant monuments from the Elamite, Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sassanid eras.

The historical and architectural monuments of Bushehr include Islamic buildings like mosques and praying centers, mansions, old towers, castles, as well as gardens. Bushehr is also home to various archaeological mounds including Tall-e Khandaq with Sassanid architectural style, Tall-e Marv located near an Achaemenid Palace, and Qajar era Malek al-Tojar Mansion.

Tehran apartment turns into tiny museum of the sixties

TEHRAN – A private collector in Tehran has turned his own apartment into a museum of the sixties, Mehr reported on Wednesday.

For years, Reza Samai has collected a variety of vintage objects mostly from the 1960s in his small home east of Tehran, and now he has turned it into a museum gallery for showing his collections.

Rather than throw away old electronics, he has repaired them so that they now make up a significant portion of his collection. Furthermore, he has put on show some objects with over 100 years of age.

Despite being registered by the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department of Tehran province, the museum gallery cannot be open to the public because it is set within a private apartment.

It has been on the agenda of the tourism ministry to help establish such house museums for years. As part of its efforts, the ministry



encourages the country’s collectors with valuable collections to keep and register those objects even at home with permission from the ministry.

Recently, private and home museums have increased by 50 percent as a result of the project.

Iran is home to one of the world’s oldest continuous major civilizations, embracing settlements dating back to 4000 BC. It also hosts

Daffodil gardens of Kazerun made national heritage



TEHRAN – Iran’s Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts has recently registered several daffodil gardens as national heritage.

Several organic daffodil gardens, which are situated in the rural districts of Jereh, Baladeh, and

Bolbolak in Kazerun county of Fars province, have collectively been registered as national heritage, Mehr quoted Kazerun’s tourism chief Mohammadjavad Joukari as saying on Monday.

In Persian culture and literature, the daffodil symbolizes the eye, usually the eye of the beloved. In poetry, the beloved is likened to the daffodil because of its leafless and green stem, which is hollowed out, straw-like, and curved, which is associated with humility and dignity.

The daffodil is a perennial and grows to about 41 cm in height. Each plant features five or six linear

leaves that grow from the bulb and are about 30 cm long. The stem bears one large yellow blossom with a corolla deeply cleft into six lobes and a central bell-shaped crown, or corona, that is frilled at its edges. This trumpet shape contains the stamens and is the flower’s most conspicuous feature.

Flowers have also thrived into the Persian language. Many girls are named after flowers: Ra’na (Blanket Flowers), Shaghayegh (Anemone), Banafsheh (Violet), Yaasaman (Jasmine), Niloofer (Lotus flower), Nastaran (Eglantine), Laleh (Tulip), Narges (Daffodil), etc.

The ancient region of Fars also spelled Pars, or Persis was the heart of the Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BC), which was founded by Cyrus the Great and had its capital at Pasargadae. Darius I the Great moved the capital to nearby Persepolis in the late 6th or early 5th century BC.

The capital city of Shiraz is home to some of the country’s most magnificent buildings and sights. Increasingly, it draws more and more foreign and domestic sightseers flocking into this provincial capital which was the literary capital of Persia during the Zand dynasty from 1751 to 1794.

Qajar-era garden undergoes restoration

TEHRAN-A restoration project has recently been commenced on the Qajar-era (1789–1925) Golestan Garden of Khorramabad, western Iran, which is situated adjacent to the Sassanid-era Falak-ol-Aflak Fortress in Lorestan province, the provincial tourism chief has said.

The restoration project will touch upon landscape design, floor covering, ponds, fountains, and tourist routes of the garden, Seyyed Amin Qasemi announced on Wednesday.

The garden was once the residence of the rulers of Lorestan during the Qajar period. It was a beautiful place full of towering trees. The garden included a bathhouse, a mosque, an artillery place, exterior and interior residents, which gave it a special setting.

A selection of nine Iranian gardens, which



bear important architectural, traditional, and cultural elements, have been collectively inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list under the title of “The Persian Garden.”

The genuine concept of the Persian Garden that is deeply rooted in time interweaves natural elements with manmade components to embody an idea of creating a paradise on

Earth by the means of artistic, philosophical, figurative, and religious notions.

According to UNESCO, the flawless design of the Persian Garden, along with its ability to respond to extreme climatic conditions, is the result of an inspired and intelligent application of different fields of knowledge, i.e. technology, water management and engineering, architecture, botany, and agriculture.

For millennia, Iranian gardens have combined the magic of nature with the aesthetic qualities of art and architecture to create a symbolic representation of paradise on Earth. UNESCO describes the Persian Garden as an idea that combines natural elements with manmade components to materialize the concept of Eden or Paradise on Earth.



The projects have created more than 15 job opportunities for the locals, the official added.

Aran-Bidgol is the gateway to the Maranjab desert and caravansary, which also draws thousands of domestic travelers each year. The desert, which is a top destination for off-roaders, leads to salt lake from the north, Band-e Rig and

Desert National Park from the east, Masileh Desert, Hoz-e sultan, and Moreh Lakes from the west.

In 2019, a team of Iranian archaeologists found remnants of a centuries-old network, which used to supply water to the underground city of Nushabad, located in the central district of Aran-Bidgol county.

More Iranian young universities in The Times Higher Education rankings

TEHRAN - The Times Higher Education Young University Rankings 2022 listed 37 Iranian institutions among the world's best universities that are 50 years old or younger, up by eleven compared to 2021.

The ranking is based on the same 13 performance indicators as the flagship THE World University Rankings, but the weightings have been adjusted to give less weight to reputation.

The universities are judged across all their core missions - teaching, research, knowledge transfer and international outlook - to provide the most comprehensive and balanced comparisons available.

The 2022 ranking includes 539 universities, up from 475 in 2021.

A further 251 institutions are listed with "reporter" status, meaning that they provided data but did not meet our eligibility criteria to receive a rank.

Kurdistan University of Medical Sciences tops the Iranian universities, ranking 67th with 2,958 full-time equivalency students, 10.6 students per staff, 3 percent international students, and 51:49 female to male students ratio.

In 2019, 13 Iranian universities



were included in this ranking among 351 universities, in 2020, the number of universities increased to 20.

Paris Sciences et Lettres - PSL Research University Paris is the world's best young university for the first time this year, with last year's frontrunner Nanyang Technological University, Singapore dropping to second.

Hong Kong has three institutions in the top 10, more than any other territory, while France is the most represented country in the top 20, with five institutions in this group.

Erasmus University Rotterdam in the Netherlands is the highest new entry in the ranking, in fourth place.

India and Turkey overtake the UK to become the most represented countries overall, with 40 institutions each. The UK shares third place with Iran (both have 37 universities).

Academic quality

Most recently, the Webometrics Ranking of World Universities 2022 has ranked 694 Iranian institutions among 30,000 top universities across the world.

Also, 59 Iranian universities have been listed among the top 3,000 institutions in the world in terms of academic quality, according to the 2021-2022 report released by University Ranking by Academic Performance (URAP).

The Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) Graduate Employability Rankings 2022 list has been released, which included three Iranian universities out of a total of 550 institutes worldwide that highlighted graduate employment processes.

Moreover, 34 Iranian universities and institutions were listed among the top 1,000 in the world, according to Shanghai Ranking's Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) 2021.

A total of 58 universities from Iran have been listed in the Islamic World University Rankings 2021 announced by the Islamic World Science Citation Center (ISC).

ISC is the third internationally accredited citation center established in Iran based on a resolution adopted in 2008 by the 4th Meeting of the Islamic Ministers of Higher Education (ICMHESR) in Baku, the capital of the Republic of Azerbaijan, to index, evaluate and publish scientific productions in Islamic countries.

In "ISC world university rankings by subject" includes 4 major criteria of Education, Research, International Activity, and Innovation.

Over 14,700 classrooms inaugurated in current year: minister

From page 1 ▶ Mehrollah Rakhshanimehr, director of the Organization for Development, Renovation, and Equipping Schools, has said some 81,500 classrooms have been constructed over the past 8 years across the country.

The number of old classrooms in need of reconstruction and renovation has been reduced from 30 percent to 19.5 percent over the past four years, he said.

So far, about 280,000 classrooms have been retrofitted to meet the safety standards, he added, ILNA reported.

Over the past 8 years, school building benefactors have donated 85 trillion rials (nearly \$320 million) to construct classrooms nationwide, he also noted.

Benefactors have proposed 28 trillion rials (nearly \$102 million) to be included in the budget bill for the next year for building and renovating schools.

School-building donors allocated more than 30 trillion rials (nearly \$111 million) to construct educational places nationwide in the last year, which has doubled



this year.

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

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

Iran has many school-building benefactors amounting to 650,000 people inside

and 1,000 people outside the country.

Meanwhile, a total of 36 trillion rials (nearly \$140 million) has been allocated to renovate the schools nationwide over the past 8 years, Seyed Mohammad-Ali Afshani, former head of the Organization for Development, Renovation, and Equipping Schools, has said.

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

More than 80 percent of schools across the country are currently safe and retrofitted, Mohammad-Ali Ghoorchebeigi, an official with the Organization for Development, Renovation, and Equipment of Schools, has said.

There are around one hundred thousand schools nationwide with a total of five hundred thousand classrooms, Ghoorchebeigi said, adding that 80.5 percent of the schools are retrofitted compared to 70 percent six years ago.

The fate of our planet hinges on soil, our 'silent ally', says UN scientist

Ronald Vargas is a leading global soil scientist who has dedicated over 25 years to natural resources management with a special focus on sustainable soil management. He is Secretary of the Global Soil Partnership (GSP) at the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and a passionate advocate for the importance of food security and nutrition.

Healthy soils feed the entire food chain, from the food we eat to the water we drink and even the air we breathe. Conserving and restoring their natural balance requires urgent action for the survival of every living organism.

This much is clear to me, having invested

over 20 years of my working life trying to explain why protecting such a vital resource and its ecosystems is an SOS climate emergency - because preserving our soils is like ensuring we have enough life support machines in our hospitals.

I followed last month's COP26 climate change conference in Glasgow, Scotland, with a mixture of interest and expectation. The outcome was not as anticipated despite all the consciousness about reducing emissions. It is our collective duty to fight climate change.

At the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Global Soil Partnership - we position soil

health and the adoption of sustainable soil management practices as one of the viable solutions to at least reduce emissions from the agriculture sector. A sector which accounts for around one third of global greenhouse gases emissions.

Given that soils constitute the biggest terrestrial carbon sink on the planet and hold huge power to mitigate non-CO2 greenhouse gas emissions, they have a role to play.

It takes thousands of years for soils to form, meaning protecting them is pivotal to our very existence. About a quarter of all the animal species on Earth live beneath our feet and provide all sorts of nutrients, meaning soils simultaneously

CovIran Plus elicits protective neutralization against Omicron: study

TEHRAN - Results of a study conducted by Iranian scientists show that the domestically-developed SARS-CoV-2 vaccine candidate, BIV1-CovIran Plus, produces neutralizing antibodies against the Omicron variant.

An abstract of the research titled "Omicron-Based Vaccine Candidate Elicits Potent Neutralizing Antibodies in the Animal Model" published in BioRxiv, indicates that a full human dose of BIV1-CovIran Plus was injected intraperitoneally to five female mice and two Guinea pigs for abnormal toxicity reactions evaluation and pathologic investigations.

"For potency evaluation, four groups of ten mice received two doses of BIV1-CovIran Plus or phosphate-buffered-saline at 7-day and 14-day intervals. The conventional virus-neutralizing test was conducted on sera acquired from vaccinated mice groups seven days after the second injection. There was no evidence of abnormal clinical symptoms macroscopic or microscopic tissue alterations among the animal models."

"In all samples from the study group that received two doses of BIV1-CovIran Plus at a 7-day interval, the sera at $\geq 1/32$ times dilution would neutralize the Omicron variant SARS-CoV-2.

Similarly, the sera of all samples from the study group, which received two doses of BIV1-CovIran Plus at a 14-day interval, at $\geq 1/64$ times dilution, would neutralize the Omicron variant SARS-CoV-2.

Moreover, six out of ten (60%) of the samples in this group would neutralize the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2 at 1/128 times dilution.

CPE formation was observed in all samples from the control group, and no neutralizing activity was detected at any sera dilutions.

BIV1-CovIran Plus was well-tolerated in the animal models, and no safety concerns were raised. Moreover, the vaccine candidate elicited protective neutralization against the Omicron variant.

The B.1.1.529 (Omicron) variant of SARS-CoV-2 with multiple novel mutations has reduced the neutralization potential of vaccinated individuals' sera. World Health Organization has suggested that a vaccination strategy based on repeated booster doses is unlikely to be sustainable.

Global registration

The process for global registration of the "COVIRAN Barkat" vaccine for coronavirus started on January 27 by holding a virtual meeting with the World Health Organization



officials.

COVIRAN is the first vaccine in West Asia that is in the process of global registration, IRIB reported.

Made by researchers at the Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam, COVIRAN Barkat was unveiled on December 29, 2020, and received the license for public use on June 14, 2021.

After presenting and approving the scientific documentation of the COVIRAN vaccine; the first official meeting with the World Health Organization was held online on January 27.

More than 10 Iranian experts prepared the necessary scientific documents within the framework of international law. The submission of these documents for the global registration of the vaccine took place in a process of several months.

Global vaccine registration is a complex process, and COVIRAN is the first vaccine in the West Asian region that is in the process of global registration, which will be ready for export and inclusion in the COVAX facility.

Iran is the sixth country in the world and the first country in West Asia to gain the ability to produce the Coronavirus vaccine.

More effective

According to a new study, the effectiveness of the COVIRAN Barkat vaccine in fighting the coronavirus has been more than foreign rivals, namely Sinopharm, AstraZeneca, and Sputnik.

The study was performed on 1.8 million people in Fars province from the beginning of the vaccination process till October 2021, which considered four vaccines of Sinopharm, AstraZeneca, COVIRAN, and Sputnik, Younes Panahi, the deputy minister of health for research and technology, has said.

COVIRAN vaccine was 87 percent effective in protecting against coronavirus infection and 86 percent effective against Covid-related hospitalization, compared with 84 percent and 82 percent, respectively for AstraZeneca; Sinopharm came in third with 80 percent and 72 percent, respectively.

produce food, store carbon, and purify water.

The soil has the potential to sequester 2.04 gigatonnes of CO2 equivalents - or 34 per cent of global agricultural emissions. Put simply, soils have a massive potential to lock-up CO2, stopping it from being released into the atmosphere with harmful consequences. If soils are managed sustainably, the carbon they already store will be retained.

By increasing organic carbon in our soils, in croplands and pasturelands - we can increase the fertility and productivity of the land. There's currently around three times more carbon in

our soils than in the atmosphere and we want to keep it there.

Fighting climate change is not just about mitigation and emission reductions, it is already happening - so we must also learn to adapt to the changes it brings.

Earlier this month, we marked the UN's World Soil Day. Why do we feel the need to put a date in our diaries every year to stress just how important soils are? The answer is simple. Because the fate of our planet, from its ecosystems, natural resources, biodiversity, and people hinges on the state of its soils.

COVID-19 UPDATES ON FEBRUARY 16

New cases	16,310
New deaths	185
Total cases	6,876,565
Total deaths	134,238
New hospitalized patients	2,775
Patients in critical condition	3,607
Total recovered patients	6,373,678
Diagnostic tests conducted	46,307,661
Doses of vaccine injected	138,357,387

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

'Recent heavy rainfall not to compensate for water scarcity'

Since the beginning of autumn, the country has been poured with rain, experiencing a 14 millimeters increase compared to the long-term average, nevertheless the water scarcity or the severe drop in groundwater resources are not compensated, director for drought and crisis management department at Iran's Meteorological Organization has said.

Since the beginning of the current water year (September 23) up to November 12, the whole country has received some 35.5 millimeters of precipitation which demonstrates a 14 mm increase compared to its long term mean of 21.6 mm, ISNA quoted Sadeq Ziaeian as saying.

"It also exceeded the last year's autumn rainfall rate of 11.2 millimeters by 24 millimeters," he added.

The capital also has experienced 44.7 millimeters rainfall while the long-term averages are 29 millimeters which indicates a 15.7 millimeter increase in mean precipitation, Ziaeian explained.

He went on to say that during the aforesaid period last year, Tehran precipitation rate has been recorded 9.2 millimeters, so it increased by 35.5 mm this year, which was unprecedented.

باران پاییزی کم‌آبی‌ها را جبران نمی‌کند

رئیس مرکز ملی خشکسالی گفت: از ابتدای پاییز تا ۲۲ آبان ماه میانگین بارش نسبت به بلندمدت حدود ۱۴ میلی‌متر بیشتر بود و پیش‌بینی می‌شود که تا پایان فصل پاییز بازندگی‌ها در حد نرمال یا بالاتر از نرمال باشد، با این وجود خشکسالی‌های آبنابسته و اقل شدید آبهای زیرزمینی جبران نمی‌شود.

صادق ضیاییان در گفت‌وگو با ایسنا اظهار کرد: میانگین بارش بلندمدت کشور ۲۱۶ میلی‌متر و برای مدت مشابه در سال گذشته ۱۱۲ میلی‌متر ثبت شده است بنابراین در ایران نسبت به بلندمدت حدود ۱۴ میلی‌متر و نسبت به سال قبل حدود ۲۴ میلی‌متر افزایش بارش وجود دارد.

این کارشناس سازمان هواشناسی اظهار کرد: از اول مهر تا ۲۲ آبان، استان تهران ۴۴٫۷ میلی‌متر بارش دریافت کرده این در حالیست که در این بازه زمانی بارش سال قبل تهران ۹٫۲ میلی‌متر و بارش بلندمدت تهران ۲۹ میلی‌متر بود بنابراین نسبت به درازمدت ۱۵٫۷ میلی‌متر افزایش بارش رخ داده است.

TEHRAN TIMES





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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

He is the wisest and the most knowing man who advises people not to lose hope and faith in the Mercy of Allah and not to be too sure and over-confident of immunity from His Wrath and Punishment.

Imam Ali (AS)

Prayer Times » Noon:12:18 Evening: 18:06 Dawn: 5:24 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 6:48 (tomorrow)

Sadi: works and life

Part 2
But given the likely year of Sadi's death, a birth date before 1200 would require an implausibly long life span of well over a century.

M. Qazvini clears up this conundrum by noting that Abulfaraj ibn Jowzi was also the name of the famous author's grandson, himself a preacher, market inspector (mohtaseb) of Baghdad, and well-respected teacher.

He died during the Mongol sack of the city in 1258, and this identification provides Sadi with a more natural life span. The anecdote set in Kashgar is not so easily resolved.

Sadi was undoubtedly absent from Shiraz for many years, as he states in the introductions to both the Bustan and Golestan and in a ghazal composed after his return to the city, in which he apologizes for his prodigal ways.

It is also certain that he traveled widely during this period, and some of the many first-person stories in his works probably have a basis in biographical reality. But it is a mistake to identify the life of the author too closely with the literary persona.

As a literary artist, Sadi needs to create a narrative voice that fits his purposes: experienced, yet fallible, worldly wise, but committed to certain fundamental values. Casting himself as an actor in his tales contributes to their immediacy and is crucial to establishing his ethical authority and empathy.

His didactic, artistic purposes far supersede the demands of historical or autobiographical fidelity. The very first story of the Golestan, after all, praises the virtues of the beneficent falsehood, and elsewhere, the narrator warns us that "one who has seen the world tells many lies".

Since there are no contemporary external sources to confirm what Sadi's works tell us of their author's life before his return to Shiraz, any account of these years is necessarily tentative. As Zarrinkub observes, Sadi's father is "a nameless shadow in his works, but not without weight."

He was apparently responsible for his son's early education and taught him lessons in tolerance that would remain with him throughout his life, but his death left Sadi an orphan.

Still an adolescent, Sadi left his native city to continue his studies in Baghdad, probably around 1223-24, when Sad ibn Zangi was temporarily ousted from power by Sultan Ghias ad-Din Pir Shah.

He was for a time a fellowship student in Nezamiya madrasa in Baghdad, where, as we have seen, his instructors included the Hanbalite scholar Abd al-Rahman ibn Ali Abulfaraj ibn Jowzi.

He may have also been associated with the Sufi master Shahab ad-Din Abu Hafs Omar ibn Mohammad Sohrwardi (d. 1234); although the verses from the Bustan that would support this are of dubious authenticity, B. Foruzanfar has documented significant similarities between Sadi's teachings and those of this influential shaiikh.

An extended period of travel around the Islamic world followed his course of

studies. First-person anecdotes have the narrator taken prisoner by the Crusaders in Syria and murdering a temple priest in India.

Despite efforts of scholars such as H. Masse and J. A. Boyle, the effort to re-create an exact itinerary of his travels from his works is misguided.

After a careful sifting of the evidence, H. Katuzian concludes that it is probable that Sadi visited Iraq, Syria, Palestine, and the Arabian Peninsula, but unlikely that he ever traveled east to Khorasan, India, or Kashgar.

When Sadi returned to Shiraz around 1257 after some 30 years of travel, he was apparently already a famous and highly respected poet, a fame that must have been based on the wide circulation of his masterful ghazals.

As the quick publication and dedications of the Bustan and Golestan indicate, he was eager to re-establish his ties to the house of Sa'd.

In a short qasida, Sadi credits Abu Bakr ibn Sa'd with creating the stability and prosperity that encouraged him to return to Shiraz. The Salghurid dynasty, however, did not long outlast the poet's return.

Abu Bakr died in 1260, and his eldest son, Sa'd ibn Abi Bakr, died only 12 days later, events that Sadi memorialized in several elegies. Sa'd's 12-year-old son, Mohammad (r. 1260-62), ruled briefly under the guidance of his mother, Tarkan Khatun; both are praised in poems that serve as dedications to Sa'di's collected ghazals, and the latter, according to Qazvini, is the subject of another qasida.

Under steadily increasing Mongol pressure, the fortunes of the dynasty quickly unraveled. Two of Abu Bakr's nephews were installed as rulers after the death of Mohammad, and Sadi wrote three poems in praise of the second of these, Mozaffar ad-Din Saljuqshah, during his short, 5-month reign in 1263.

When he was killed by the Mongols after an ill-advised, alcohol-induced rebellion, rule officially passed to the youngest daughter of Sa'd ibn Abi Bakr, Abash Khatun, but her forced marriage to Mengu Temur, the son of the Mongol Il-khan Hulegu, assured the de facto integration of Shiraz into Mongol dominion. Abash Khatun is probably the subject of another dedicatory ghazal.

Sadi cannot have welcomed the imposition of direct Mongol rule. He had written two qasidas, one in Arabic and one in Persian, to mourn the death of the last Abbasid caliph al-Mostasem bellah (d. 1258), during the Mongol sack of Baghdad and to lament the fall of the caliphate.

Sadi nevertheless wrote a poem to commemorate the transfer of power from the Salghurids to the Mongols, and his collected works contain numerous poems dedicated to both the Mongol governors and their Persian administrators.

Among the most notable of these is Amir Ankyanu, who served as governor of Shiraz between 1268 and 1272; he is the subject of four qasidas and is thought to be the addressee of one of Sadi's prose treatises, Dar tarbiat-e yaki az moluk.

(Source: Encyclopedia Iranica)
(To be continued)

Play blending Attar tale, Shakespeare tragedy tops at Fajr Intl. Theater Festival

From Page 1 ▶ Reza Goshtasb has written the play based on "The Tragedy of Julius Caesar", which follows Brutus, a Roman politician who joins a conspiracy led by Cassius to murder Julius Caesar, and the story of the perilous journey of the world's birds to the faraway peaks of Mount Qaf in search of the mysterious Simorgh, their king, narrated in Persian poet Attar's "The Conference of the

Birds".

Baqer Sorush was selected as best playwright for his "Old Age", written based on Shakespeare's tragedy "King Lear", in which King Lear of Britain decides to divide his realm among his three daughters due to his old age and to retire from the duties of the monarchy.

The following is a list of other winners at the festival.

Director Mojtaba Rostamifar poses after receiving the best play award for "A Requiem for Julius Caesar and Several Birds of Simorgh" during the 40th Fajr International Theater Festival at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on February 15, 2022. (IRNA/Asghar Khamseh)

Best actress: Nora Hashemi for "My Fair Lady".

Best actor: Tinu Salehi for "The Buckle".

Best set designer: Mojtaba Rostamifar for "A Requiem for Julius Caesar and Several Birds of Simorgh".

Best costume designer: Ajman Bijaninasab and Najmeh Zarei for "Hamlet Bijani".

Best composer: William

Nayyeri for "My Fair Lady".

Best lighting designer: Imam Nakhlestani for "A Requiem for Julius Caesar and Several Birds of Simorgh".

Best make-up artist: Mohammad Mosayyebi for "Possibilities".

Best choreographer: Mojtaba Rostamifar for "A Requiem for Julius Caesar and Several Birds of Simorgh".

Iran launches global prize to honor studies on Persian poet Nezami Ganjavi

TEHRAN – The Iranian National Commission for UNESCO announced on Tuesday the launch of an international prize to celebrate studies from across the world on the Persian poet Nemazi Ganjavi.

The studies must throw the spotlight on the significance and impacts of Nezami on Persian language, literature, art and culture, the prize policymaking council said in a press release.

The prize will be presented on Nezami Day, which will fall on March 12 this year.

"Due to our negligence, different aspects of Nazemi have been introduced among the younger generation and this negligence has caused some movements," Iranian National Commission for UNESCO Hojjatollah Ayyubi said in a meeting with the council.

"Different books on Nezami's works have been translated across the world this year, but none of them have referred to his language and identity origin," he added.

He noted that the Iranian National Commission for UNESCO plans to hold the Persian poet in high regard in UNESCO programs more than ever.

"According to numerous documents, the

A portrait of Iranian poet Nezami Ganjavi. (Goethe Institute)

origins of Nezami's family can be traced back to Tad, a village near the town of Tafresh" Ayyubi noted.

He said that the National Museum of Iran plans a commemorative event for Nezami, which will be followed by another cultural program in Tafresh.

Abdolmahdi Mostakin, the secretary of

the prize, also said, "Different massive programs have arranged by the Iranian National Commission for UNESCO to celebrate Nezami's works, which have inspired numerous literary, dramatic, and artistic works in Iran, the region and the world over the past 800 years."

"Due to his creativity and unique innovations in Persian literature and his creative imagination, several countries in the region are trying to connect themselves to the great poet," he stated.

"Regarding his great cultural potential and his Iranian origin, Nezami can join the neighboring nations to the eternal sources of Islamic Iranian culture and develop Iran's soft power in the global culture and civilization," Mostakin noted.

Earlier in January, Iran's Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance announced its plan to commemorate Nezami Ganjavi in a weeklong program in March.

The program, which has been set up as a hybrid event with virtual and live meetings, will begin on Esfand 21 in the Iranian calendar year (March 12), which is celebrated by Iran as Nezami Day every year.

"Occupy the Economy" published in Persian

Mahmud Nabavi.

Today's economic crisis is capitalism's worst since the Great Depression. Millions have lost their jobs, homes and healthcare while those who work watch their pensions, benefits and job security decline. As more and more are impacted by the crisis, the system continues to make the very wealthy even richer.

In eye-opening interviews with prominent economist Richard Wolff, David Barsamian probes the root causes of the current economic crisis, its unjust social consequences, and what can and should be done to turn things around.

While others blame corrupt

bankers and unregulated speculators, the government, or even the poor who borrowed, the authors show that the causes of the crisis run much deeper.

They reach back to the 1970s when the capitalist system itself shifted, ending the century-old pattern of rising wages for U.S. workers and thereby enabling the top 1% to become ultra-rich at the expense of the 99%.

Since then, economic injustice has become chronic and further corrupted politics. The Occupy Movement, by articulating deep indignation with the whole system, mobilizes huge numbers who seek basic

change.

"Occupy the Economy" not only clarifies and analyzes the crisis in U.S. capitalism today, but it also points toward solutions that can shape a far better future for all.

Richard D. Wolff is professor emeritus of economics at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and visiting professor at the New School University. Author of "Capitalism Hits the Fan", he's been a guest on NPR, Glenn Beck Show and Democracy Now!

David Barsamian is the founder and director of Alternative Radio. He is best known for his interview books with Noam Chomsky.

"The Ghost of Karl Marx" appears in Iranian bookstores

TEHRAN – A Persian translation of Ronan de Calan's 2010 book "The Ghost of Karl Marx" has been published in Tehran.

Cheshmeh is the publisher of the book carrying original illustrations by Donatien Mary. It has been rendered into Persian by Shirin Karimi.

At its most basic, philosophy is about learning how to think about the world around us. It should come as no surprise, then, that children make excellent philosophers!

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Front cover of the Persian translation of Ronan de Calan's book "The Ghost of Karl Marx".

Wittgenstein.

Each book in the series features an engaging—and often funny—story that presents basic tenets of philosophical thought alongside vibrant color

illustrations.

In "The Ghost of Karl Marx", the philosopher is saddened when the town weavers must sell their cloth cheaply to compete with machines.

The farmers too cannot sell their crops and have no money to buy new seeds. Forced to leave their work, the townspeople form an angry crowd in front of the factories, but what is to be done when there are so many hungry people and so few jobs to pay for food to eat?

Concealed in one of the weavers' sheets, the philosopher makes a solemn vow to give this story a happy ending by finding the Market, that infernal magician, and ridding the town of him once and for all.

De Calan is assistant professor in the Department of Philosophy at Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne.