

Vienna Talks Resume With No Change in Iran’s Position

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Report



Iran monitoring wars across the world: army official

TEHRAN – Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari, the deputy army chief for coordination affairs, has said that the Iranian military is closely monitoring all wars across the world.

“For preparation and in order not be caught unguarded we should always keep in pace with the modern day’s technologies. The Supreme Leader as the commander in chief of the armed forces has said that when a war happens in the world you (armed forces) should stay near the mat like a spectator and assess different techniques that they use against each other and then see how we can make ourselves stronger against them. Therefore, we monitor all wars or armed conflicts that happen across the world,” Sayyari said on the sidelines of a fair showcasing technological and scientific advances in defense field.

He added, “We should rely on our domestic capabilities and make progress and become stronger in comparison to the day before. And according to the needs of the day and future, train our forces and make use of existing potentials of the country.”

Sayyari also pointed to the duties of the army, saying, “The mission of the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran is to protect territorial integrity, independence and Islamic system. For doing this mission, the army should undoubtedly be prepared in every aspect and make use of previous experiences in a proper way.” ► Page 2

Free maternity care for all: health minister

TEHRAN – Health Minister Bahram Einollahi has announced all pregnant women will be provided with free maternity services and child delivery in a bid to encourage childbearing.

Referring to the youth population as the Ministry’s main priority, he said that in recent years, the country has been facing negative growth in childbearing.

A committee has been formed to provide the necessary fund for the costs related to maternal care and child delivery to encourage childbirth, he stated.

“That is not good for the country as our future needs dynamic and energetic youth,” IRIB quoted Einollahi as saying on Saturday.

Free maternity services are also offered to those families who have not been covered by an insurance scheme in recent years, he highlighted, adding, up to 90 percent of the infertility treatment costs are also paid.

In line with “Law on Family and Youth Support”, Iran has introduced several plans, including facilitation of housing, low-interest loans, longer maternity leave.

By a decree issued by President Ebrahim Raisi, the “Law on Family and Youth Support” approved by the Majlis (Iranian Parliament) was notified to the Ministry of Health and the Vice Presidency for Women and Family Affairs.

The Guardian Council approved the law on November 17 to implement a population growth and family support plan for 7 years to change the declining trend of childbearing.

The plan stipulates health insurance for infertile couples, providing services and facilities to working women, providing health and nutrition support packages to mothers and children, educational opportunities for student mothers, providing livelihood support to families, and ongoing medical services to pregnant women. ► Page 7



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Record number of workers leaving England’s national health service

New research has shown a record of more than 400 workers are leaving England’s National Health Service (NHS) every week since. It has been continuing since past year amid complaints of burnout and post-traumatic stress disorder.

The new analysis will be disturbing news for the British government which is already grappling with multiple crises in the health sector, one of them being the workforce shortage and the quality of care for patients.

The new findings follow an investigation into the public’s attitude towards health and social care services and have been put together by John Hall, a former strategy director at the Department of Health and Social Care, on behalf of the British charity Engage.

The mass departure of workers will fuel public unease at the lack of service quality being provided to patients with the study finding that more than a quarter of adults saying they or an immediate family member have received poor medical care because of problems with the workforce.

The government has already been sharply criticized for its 1% pay offer for front-line workers during the two years they have dealt with the covid pandemic.

Critics say the offer was a slap in the face and another example of the government’s lack of respect for NHS staff who have been grappling with Europe’s worst covid related deaths and infections.

NHS staff had already complained through demonstrations and protests for suffering from a decade of below-inflation pay rises. ► Page 5

Non-oil trade rises 38% in 11 months yr/yr

TEHRAN – The value of Iran’s non-oil trade rose 38 percent during the first 11 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2021-February 19, 2022), as compared to the same period of time in the past year, a senior official with the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced.

According to IRICA Deputy Head for Customs Affairs Foroud Asgari, Iran traded over 149.4 million tons of non-oil products worth \$90 billion with other countries in the mentioned period, IRIB reported.

Asgari noted that the weight of trade in the mentioned period also grew by 12 percent

in comparison to the figure for the previous year’s same 11 months.

The official put the 11-month non-oil exports at 112.658 million tons valued at \$43.517 billion, with a 40-percent rise in value and 10 percent growth in weight. ► Page 4

Iran victorious over Syria at FIBA World Cup 2023 qualifier

TEHRAN – Iran defeated Syria 80-68 at the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023 Asian Qualifiers on Sunday.

Mohammad Jamshidi of Iran top scored with 41 points with Syria’s Amir Jabbar Hinton scored 18 points. The Persians had suffered a 73-69 loss against Kazakhstan in Group D on Thursday.

Iran sit first with seven points.

Kazakhstan are second with six points and one game in hands.

The top three teams from all groups will be grouped in two groups of six teams, where each team will face teams from another group.

Results from the first round will be carried. The top three teams from each group, along with hosts Japan and the Philippines will qualify for the World Cup. However, if hosts Indonesia manage to qualify by virtue of making through the quarter-finals of the 2021 FIBA Asia Cup, only the top two teams from each group, along with the best third-place team will qualify.



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Sacred Defense martyrs brought home

TEHRAN — The revered bodies of 72 martyrs of the Sacred Defense, who were found in the areas of Fakkeh, Majnoon, East Tigris and Shalamchek by the search committee of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, were returned to Tehran through the Shalamchek border point on Sunday.

ECO ministers invited to inaugurate “Sari 2022” in mid-March

TEHRAN – Ministers and representatives from the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) have been invited to attend the inauguration ceremony of the “Sari 2022” in the northern Iranian city on March 17 and 18.

On Saturday, the head of Mazandaran Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Department Mehdi Izadi said the inauguration ceremony will be attended by ECO ministers as well as other local

and international guests, CHTN reported.

Iranian cities of Sari, the capital of Mazandaran province, and Ardabil, the capital of Ardabil province, were selected in 2019 as the cultural capitals for the Economic Cooperation Organization for 2022 and 2023 respectively.

The successful organization of the international event is of high importance for the country, and Mazandaran in particular, Izadi said.

On March 18, the guests will be transported to visit several historical and cultural destinations including the city of Farahabad, Sari Museum, the traditional bazaar, and Dasht-e Naz Wildlife Refuge, Izadi explained.

Moreover, some memorial trees will be planted in the name of each ECO member state, the official added. ► Page 6

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Interview



Iran showed Doha its respect for Qatar’s sovereignty: GSA chief

By Mohammad Mazhari

TEHRAN – Giorgio Cafiero, chief executive officer of Gulf State Analytics (GSA), says Iran showed it cares about Qatar’s sovereignty.

“The Emirati- and Saudi-led blockade of Qatar, which lasted from mid-2017 until early 2021, had a huge impact on Doha’s relationship with Iran,” Cafiero tells the Tehran Times.

“By helping Qatar weather the siege, Iran demonstrated to Doha that it respected Qatar’s sovereignty and was willing to assist the gas-rich Persian Gulf country amid a time of crisis manufactured by Qatar’s immediate neighbors on the Arabian Peninsula.”

On February 21, Iran’s President Ebrahim Raisi made a two-day trip to Doha to hold high-level talks with the Qatari Emir, Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and to participate in the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF).

Raisi was accompanied by several ministers who signed several agreements aimed at boosting ties between the two countries.

Despite the significance of the visit on the eve of an imminent nuclear agreement in Vienna, some commentators prefer to cast a light on Iran-Qatar’s ties that have improved since 2017.

“The strengthening of relations between Doha and Tehran that took place between 2017 and 2021 has influenced bilateral relations in ways that will likely outlive the blockade period for a very long time,” Cafiero notes.

“President Raisi’s visit to Doha this month underscores how these two Persian Gulf states are determined to continue deepening ties and expanding cooperation.”

Following is the text of the interview:

How do you read President Raisi’s visit to Qatar in light of the imminent agreement on the revival of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal?

For years, the Qataris have sought to prevent tensions over Iran’s nuclear ► Page 5

Writer’s debut novel typed with toes recounts disabled woman’s love story

TEHRAN – A physically challenged Iranian writer who lacks normal use of her hands has written a love story about a disabled woman in her debut novel typed entirely with her toes.

Jamkaran has recently published the novel “Flying in the Cage”, which Fatemeh Mohammad-Sharifi wrote over a period of seven years.

The book contains lessons for all, especially those people who are living with the physically challenged.

“This book tells the story of a woman who is struggling with some wild thoughts. In her struggles, along with her husband, they decide to have a baby,” Mohammad-Sharifi told the Persian service of Tasmin on Saturday. ► Page 8

Iran's balanced policy open to both East and West, Amir Abdollahian says

FM says he has told Amir Khan Muttaqi that Iran will recognize Taliban if it forms inclusive government

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian has reiterated that the incumbent Iranian administration has adopted a balanced foreign policy approach.

"It means that a balanced foreign policy accepts both the West and the East," Amir Abdollahian told Press TV in an interview broadcast on Sunday.

"It means that we won't put all our eggs neither in Beijing's nor in Moscow's basket. A balanced foreign policy pays attention to maintaining ties with all the five continents," the foreign minister pointed out.

The chief diplomat said it will be possible to have ties with Washington as well "if the Americans show a change in their behavior towards Iran, and prove they want to establish ties with Tehran based on mutual respect and observing mutual rights, something they haven't done over the past 43 years and did not do even before the victory of the Islamic Revolution."

"We believe that a balanced foreign policy can best secure the maximum interests of the country and our people," he noted.

He emphasized that Iran follows the "Look to Asia" approach in the field of foreign policy as the Islamic Republic is a major country in the continent and an important and active actor, and has a distinctive geopolitical, geostrategic, and geo-economic position there.

"Logic dictates that we should not ignore the potentials of a continent to which we belong," Amir Abdollahian said.

He went on to say that multilateralism can stop the United States' unilateralist behavior, and that the diversity of actors is the most important issue.

"We will see new coalitions in the future that won't look like the ones that we are witnessing at the moment. It won't be the case that NATO will be the only military actor that's present and effective in all parts of the world," Amir Abdollahian remarked.

'Embarrassing Afghanistan pullout'

Amir Abdollahian also dismissed U.S. claims that the withdrawal from Afghanistan had all been planned beforehand, saying they would not have opted for such an "embarrassing" pullout if they had other choices.

"You saw how the United States withdrew from Afghanistan after 20 years in such a manner. If the U.S. could have



withdrawn with any dignity and avoided the embarrassing pullout, it certainly had not chosen this option," the senior diplomat remarked.

Even though Americans claimed in September last year that all developments in Afghanistan, from the U.S. military's withdrawal from the country to the return of the Taliban to power, had been pre-planned, they requested Iran's cooperation in the end to get through that stage, he noted.

Amir Abdollahian says though Americans claimed in Sept. 2021 that all developments in Afghanistan had been pre-planned, they requested Iran's cooperation in the end to get through that stage.

Amir Abdollahian said he has told the caretaker Taliban foreign minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, during the latter's visit to Tehran last month that Tehran would formally recognize the group after the formation of an inclusive government in Afghanistan.

"It was the Afghan people's resistance that forced the U.S. out of the country after 20 years. The same occurred in the previous decades, when the Soviet Union was forced to withdraw from Afghanistan. I call Afghanistan our honorable neighbors, who truly stand against [foreign] domination

in the mountains and in the terrains," the top diplomat said.

Almost five months after the U.S.-led international coalition hastily abandoned Afghanistan, millions of people in the South Asian country are on the brink of starvation, with no food and no money.

The Taliban's return to power came as the U.S. was in the middle of a chaotic troop withdrawal from Afghanistan in August last year.

The group announced the formation of a caretaker government on September 7, but their efforts to stabilize the situation have so far been undermined by international sanctions, as banks are running out of cash and civil servants are going unpaid.

nations."

Irani went on to describe the students as guardians of the security and tranquility in the seas.

"If you are not present or your role is insufficient, the arena will be prepared for the movement of illegal actors from other regions," he said, addressing the navy students.

He went on to say, "Trans-regional forces not only have failed to provide the desired security for the countries in the region and will not do so, they also make the region insecure and portray the countries in the region as incapable."

He then pointed to the military interaction between the two friendly and neighboring countries of Iran and Pakistan, saying that no country alone can ensure the security of a wide range of seas and it is necessary for the countries of the region to make the most of their various commonalities and synergize in order to have control of their own destiny.

Iran monitoring wars across the world: army official

From page 1 ► "However," the military official said, "the future threats are different from the past. In the events happening in recent years across the world we notice that wars are different from those of the past, and wars are reliant on modern day technology."

He added, "Fortunately, we have reached a stage that when we look back and see our achievements, we enjoy it."

Hopefully, the former Navy chief said, now experts, knowledge-based companies, and universities are working hard to make the country prosperous scientifically and technologically.

Iran has made breakthroughs in defense technology. Iran embarked on developing its defense capability by using the experience of Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran in September 1980. In those years Saddam showered bombarded Iranian

cities and showered missiles on residential areas.

The fighter jets and missile Saddam's regime was using against Iran was mostly provided by the Soviet Union and certain Western countries, including France.

In the 1980s, the Western countries refused to give Iran missiles to defend itself.

The West went further by providing materials to the Saddam regime to build chemical weapons and use them against Iran.

Hossein Askari, a professor emeritus from the George Washington University, says, "Before and after Saddam Hussein invaded Iran, the U.S. did little to dissuade him and might in fact have encouraged him."

Askari also says, "The United Nations was not active in condemning this most serious



of transgressions under the UN charter."

The professor says while the West and Russia sold arms to Saddam, they imposed arms embargo against Iran.

"The U.S. and its European allies, along with Russia, supplied Saddam Hussein with all the weaponry he needed while putting an arms embargo on Iran. The U.S. provided Iraq with military intelligence. Iran, however, managed to overcome its many handicaps."

The professor adds while Iran was driving out Saddam's soldiers from its occupied lands, the Europeans, with a green light by the U.S., provided Saddam with chemical arms.

"As Iran was expelling the Iraqi invaders and threatening Iraq, the Europeans, with U.S. complicity, supplied Saddam Hussein with internationally banned chemical weapons. This was the most

egregious use of chemical weapons since the Holocaust," the professor laments.

On June 28, 1987, Saddam's army dropped mustard gas bombs on Sardasht, Iran's West Azerbaijan province. It dropped bombs on four residential areas. Many of those surviving the gas attacks are still suffering from severe illnesses.

In a report on September 23, 2020, France 24 said, "Saddam Hussein invaded Iran, launching a war that raged for eight years. The late Iraqi dictator also unleashed chemical weapons on Iran. This conflict is considered one of the deadliest in modern history. Today, the survivors of those poison gas attacks still struggle with mental and physical health problems. However, the residents of the Iranian town of Sardasht have not given up their fight for international recognition of the horrific massacre."

Iran's Supreme National Security Council holds meeting on Vienna talks

TEHRAN - Deputy Speaker of the Iranian parliament, Ali Nikzad, has said the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) held a meeting on Saturday to address concerns on the ongoing talks in Vienna.

The Iranian negotiating team as well as Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf also attended the meeting.

In a public session on Sunday, Mohammadreza Pour-Ebrahimi, the chairman of the parliament's Economic Committee, stressed that issues pertinent to Ukraine as well as the Vienna talks are indispensable.

Subsequently, he said, MPs wrote a letter to the parliament's presidium to request a closed session to discuss JCPOA-related issues.

A number of Iranian students are caught in the fight as Russia attacked Ukraine on Thursday morning. The Foreign Ministry is making utmost attempts to bring them home.

"Representatives have a lot of concerns about the Vienna talks," he said. "There are also many issues regarding Ukraine and Iranians residing in the country that need to be decided by the presidium and, if possible, in the third shift of the Majlis (parliament), which will be held at 19:00 (local time), a closed meeting will be held to review such issues," Pour-Ebrahimi explained.

Professor: Russia is trying to prevent Ukraine from joining Western bloc

TEHRAN — Elahe Kolaei, a professor at the University of Tehran, said on Sunday that the invasion of Ukraine by Russia is a continuation of Moscow's efforts to prevent Ukraine from joining the Western bloc.

On February 21, Russia recognized Donetsk and Luhansk as independent republics. Three days later it launched attacks on Ukraine from land, sea and air.

"Russia has insisted on its special privileges regarding the countries which were part of the Soviet Union for the past three decades, and Ukraine is one of these countries," Kolaei, an expert on Russia and former Soviet republics, told IRNA.

Kolaei continued by saying that Ukraine is the second power among the republics that survived the collapse of the Soviet Union, which is located on the shores of the Black Sea and in a very important position in the zone between Russia and NATO members.

NATO expanded in Eastern Europe after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact

Asked how serious Ukraine's

membership in NATO was and what dangers it posed to Russia, she said Russia has been emphasizing the issue of NATO for many years, saying that these countries should not be members of NATO and expected to receive a response.

"With the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, Russia expected that the United States and Europe would dissolve NATO too, but this did not happen. Not only did NATO not disintegrate, but it expanded to Eastern Europe, accommodating countries in the region and moving to the former Soviet republics," she explained.

She then noted that even when there were very good relations between Russia and the West, in the first years after the collapse of the Soviet Union and during the Yeltsin era, Russia announced that it would join NATO.

"Later, as the differences escalated, all agreements between Russia and NATO were conditional on NATO not entering the former Russian republics. This issue has always been emphasized by Russia for 25 years," Kolaei emphasized.

Ukraine and Georgia's efforts to join NATO

The professor said when tensions between these republics and Russia developed and Russia's tension with the West intensified, some countries like Ukraine and Georgia made hard efforts to join NATO, which has always faced Russian opposition.

"In fact, what we are witnessing today in the Russian military invasion of Ukraine is the continuation of the efforts that Russia is making to prevent Ukraine from joining the Western bloc, both economically and politically and security-wise," she noted, adding that this has led Russia to resort to its latest diplomatic tool, which has always had a special place among Russian tools, namely military tools.

Pro-West Russians believed NATO was not enemy anymore

Referring to changes in Russia during the years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the expert said, "Western-minded persons who ruled Russia in the first years after the collapse of the Soviet believed that Russia

with a clear agenda aimed at resolving the remaining points.

Meanwhile Nour News, a media outlet close to the Supreme National Security Council, dismissed a report that the SNSC meeting on the Vienna talks was held at the presence of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, saying that any published news in this regard is not true and is just a media speculation.

Since the Vienna talks have reached a decisive point, the Western negotiators are scrambling to depict a quixotic atmosphere of the talks.

At its last meeting, the SNSC underscored the need to fulfill Iran's legal and logical demands, which are within Tehran's red lines.

On Saturday, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian stated Tehran was ready to "immediately conclude" the Vienna talks if the Western parties "show real will".

"Seriously reviewing draft of the agreement. Our red lines are made clear to Western parties. Ready to immediately conclude a good deal, should they show real will," Iran's top diplomat said on Twitter.

Amir Abdollahian added that Tehran has shown flexibility and seriousness in negotiations with the West over its nuclear policy, warning that some red lines have remained unresolved.

had no enemy and that NATO was not Russia's enemy. NATO also experienced significant changes in its post-Cold War missions and operations in the 1990s. From Moscow's point of view, NATO was moving from political-security to military-security. Thus, in the first years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia did not have much opposition to NATO activities, and even the Russia-NATO Council was formed, and there was extensive cooperation between Russia and NATO."

Kolaei noted that as the gap between Russia and the United States and European countries widens, so does Russia's view of NATO.

The gap is to the extent that in Russia's latest security rites and in its political-military documents, NATO is considered and introduced as an enemy and a threat, the professor remarked.

She continued, "Therefore, for a country like Ukraine, which is very important for Russia in terms of identity and history, as well as economically, politically, strategically and geopolitically, joining an 'enemy institution' was unacceptable for Moscow."

Trans-regional forces will not provide security, Iranian Navy chief say

TEHRAN — The Iranian Navy chief said that trans-regional forces not only have not provided and will not provide the desired security of the countries in the region, but also make the region insecure and portray the countries of the region as incapable.

Admiral Shahram Irani made the remarks among the professors and students of Lahore Naval War University and the University of the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Tehran on Sunday.

Referring to the 90% share of the sea in global trade, the commander said the sea is effective in all aspects of people living in coastal countries. It affects their economy, peace, culture, politics, etc., he remarked.

Referring to the emphasis by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution on the importance of seas in protecting national interests, he said, "Iran and Pakistan are considered maritime countries because of their relationship with the sea. Given these circumstances, both countries need navies based on their geopolitical weight and the dignity of their

Vienna talks resume with no change in Iran's position

TEHRAN – Iran's top negotiator is heading back to Vienna after making consultations in Tehran with relevant officials. The consultations seem to have resulted in no significant change in Iran's position toward a number of remaining issues.

Iran's chief negotiator, Ali Bagheri Kani, left Tehran for Vienna on Sunday night. The talks in Vienna over reviving the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), are expected to resume immediately after the arrival of the top Iranian negotiator.

Before the departure of Bagheri Kani, Iran's Supreme National Security Council held an important meeting on the Vienna talks to take stock of the state of the talks. The Council underlined the need to meet Iran's legal and logical demands which are part of the country's red lines, according to Nour News, a website close to the Council.

During the meeting, it was underlined that the remaining issues, which put the negotiations on the verge of "agreement or deadlock," should be swiftly settled. Accepting any agreement by Iran depends on the settlement of these issues, according to Nour News.

The website also pointed to the issue of timeline of the talks, saying that no timeline can hinder the continuation of negotiations, which will go on until a good agreement is reached. Nour



News said media propaganda that the negotiations are running out of time should not be heeded.

In addition, a lawmaker has hinted that there a number of issues whose settlement needs clear decision on part the of the West, particularly the United States.

"The dialogues have gone a long way and an initial text has been prepared, this text is close to agreement; but there are still some issues that we should not expect an agreement until these issues are resolved," said Abolfazl Amouei, who is a member of the Iranian parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee.

He pointed out that a lot of issues have been resolved in the talks "but several issues that are part of Iran's red lines are still unresolved and Iran's views have not been met, and the Islamic Republic of Iran intends to

insists on its red lines."

According to Amouei, the remaining issues include the scope of sanctions relief, guarantees, verification, and differences between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The lawmaker said the Biden administration agreed to significantly lift sanctions imposed by the previous U.S. administration but it still refuses lifting all the sanctions imposed by the Trump administration in line with the so-called "maximum pressure" campaign.

Amouei described differences between Tehran and the IAEA as "political allegations" that could pose a challenge to agreement and that they should be somehow resolved in the negotiations.

Iran has said it wants a deal as

soon as possible but before such a deal is done, the West should provide guarantees and agree to verification measures Iran demands to verify the lifting of sanctions.

The state of the talks was discussed by Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian and Josep Borrell, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and chief coordinator of the Vienna talks.

In the telephone call, Borrell and Amir Abdollahian reviewed the latest developments in the Vienna talks.

The EU foreign policy chief outlined efforts by all parties to the negotiations, stressing that the Vienna talks have reached a critical stage that require serious decisions by all sides.

Amir Abdollahian also praised the efforts of Borrell, as well as Enrique Mora, the EU's chief negotiator in Vienna.

He also underlined that the Islamic Republic of Iran's definite choice is to not cross its red lines.

Referring to Iran's readiness to reach a good agreement with the P4+1 group of countries, he stressed the need for a political decision by the other side.

Amir Abdollahian added that Iran seeks a good agreement, but within the framework of its national interests and in line with its red lines in the negotiations. The Iranian foreign minister also called for a political solution to the Ukraine crisis.

SPORTS

Mes Shahr Babak claim Iran sitting volleyball league title

TEHRAN – Mes Shahr Babak defeated Zob Ahan to win 22nd edition of Iran's sitting volleyball league.

On Sunday, Mes, headed by Hadi Rezaei, beat Zob Ahan 3-1 (25-18, 22-25, 25-20, 25-9). Shahrdari Gonbad finished in third place.

The tournament brought six teams together in Iran Sports Federation for Disabled's headquarters in Tehran.

The competition helps the coaches to identify the young talented players for the Asian Para Games and Paralympics, Rezaei, who is director of sitting volleyball national teams, said.

"Sitting volleyball are the most decorated Iranian team sport and have won Paralympic Games title seven times. Our players must be supported because the sitting volleyball is their job," he added.

"The league competition is the best opportunity for the players to show their potential. The women's sitting volleyball team have also the great future ahead and I think they have the potential to win medal in the Asian events," Rezaei concluded.

Iran's Mohammadian wins gold at Yasar Dogu wrestling tournament

TEHRAN – Mohammad Hossein Mohammadian claimed a gold medal in the final day of the Yasar Dogu, Vehbi Emre & Hamit Kaplan Ranking Series.

The Tokyo Olympian and two-time Ranking Series gold medalist, who returned to competition for the first time since losing at the Tokyo Olympics, defeated Russian freestyler Alikhan Zhabrailov 4-3 in the final match of 97kg.

The tournament is being held in Istanbul, Turkey from February 24 to 27.

The international event includes competitions in both men's and women's freestyle wrestling.

The tournament is held in honor of the two-time Olympic champion Yasar Dogu.

FIVB removes 2022 VNL from Russia

TEHRAN – The International Volleyball Federation (FIVB) has decided to relocate from Russia two rounds of the Volleyball Nations League (VNL)

The competition was scheduled to be held in Russia in June and July.

The FIVB will continue to closely follow the situation and will review other events due to be held in Russia, including the Men's World Championship scheduled for the second semester of 2022.

The FIVB is listening to, and in touch with, its stakeholders including National Federations, and shares their grave concern for the people of Ukraine.

On Friday, Ukrainian Volleyball Federation requested CEV and FIVB to ban all Russian teams from participating in any of their competitions.

The 2022 VLN is the 4th edition of the VLN with the Russian Men's Volleyball Team being the most successful winning two times (2018, 2019) and finishing 5th in the last year's competition. As for the Russian women's team, their best result has been 8th (2018, 2021).

Replacement host cities will be announced shortly.

Top four confirmed for Iran's volleyball league

TEHRAN – The highly-anticipated semifinals are set for the Iran Men's Premier Volleyball League at the federation hall, with Sirjan Fould Iranian going up against Yazd Shahdab and Isfahan Sepahan challenging Tehran Paykan to vie for the top honor and the lone berth for the Asian Men's Club Championship from May 15 to 22 in Iran.

The final day of the playoff round of the topflight men's club competition, reigning Asian Clubs champions Sirjan Foulad and Yazd Shahdab pulled out their scintillating wins against their respective rivals and ensured their eligibility in the do-or-die semifinals.

Isfahan's Sepahan and Tehran's Paykan have already preserved the semifinal berth on Thursday.

The formula of the playoffs were on a best-of-three basis in which each team had to win against their respective rivals two times to get to the semifinals. In case any team finished in tie (1-1), a deciding match was required to determine the semifinalists.

Sirjan secured their semifinals berth following two consecutive wins against Amol Labaniat-e Haraz. Behrouz Ataei, head coach of Iran national team, who captured the gold title with Iran team in 2021 Asian Senior Men's Championship, knelt down to the Asian winners Sirjan two times.

In the pool preliminaries, Sirjan finished seven on the ranking table while Amol Labaniat-e Haraz stood on the second place. However, Sirjan shrugged off their rust in the preliminaries and engineered a fightback in the playoffs to seriously challenge one of the leading sides Amol Labaniat-e Haraz.

The format of the semifinals will be the same as the playoffs in which teams have to record two wins to be finalists. Therefore, Yazd Shahdab and Sirjan Foulad Iranian face each other twice on March 4 and 6 and in case both teams end in a tie, the third match will be required on March 8 to determine the finalists. Sepahan and Paykan will take the same process to battle it out for a spot in the final.

AFC Executive Committee unveils dynamic enhancements

TEHRAN – The AFC Executive Committee has approved several key strategic recommendations by the AFC Competitions Committee, signaling a new era of growth and success for the AFC Club Competitions.

Both the AFC Champions League and the AFC Cup have grown exponentially in the last decade, underpinning the AFC's Vision and Mission to produce world-class and commercially engaging competitions for its Member Associations (MAs) and passionate fans of the largest stadium in world football, and the latest decisions represent some of the most ground-breaking enhancements to be introduced in Asian club football history.

The landmark reforms, the principles of which were outlined by the AFC President Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa at the 8th AFC Executive Committee meeting in November 2021, will see the AFC Champions League and AFC Cup transition from its current Spring-Autumn season to Autumn-Spring, with both competitions set to be organized across dual calendar years beginning from the 2023-24 season.

The decision, which was taken following a comprehensive feasibility study and a close and in-depth consultation and feedback exercise with the AFC's MAs, will enable Asia's top clubs to benefit from more synchronized transfer windows, improved opportunities to sign quality players and coaches with respect to worldwide leagues' seasons, and a more even distribution of club matches annually to maintain a balance with National Team matches.

Iran steps up efforts to evacuate nationals stranded in Ukraine

TEHRAN – In continuation of its efforts to bring home Iranian students trapped in Ukraine or neighboring countries, Iran ratcheted up diplomatic efforts to facilitate the safe return of its citizens.

To this end, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian, in a telephone call with Iran's Ambassador to Warsaw Hossein Gharibi, inquired about the latest situation of Iranians living in Ukraine, who have arrived in Poland.

While appreciating the measures taken, Amir Abdollahian asked the ambassador of Iran to Poland to provide all necessary needs, including food and health, to the Iranian citizens.

In this phone call, Gharibi presented a report on the latest situation of Iranians and emphasized that necessary measures have been taken to accommodate and provide other necessities for the Iranians and they are going to be returned by air from Warsaw to Tehran.

He also noted that due to a long line of people on the border, people's entry into Poland is slow.

The Iranian foreign minister also raised the issue of the Iranian nationals in his recent telephone conversation with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov.

Amir Abdollahian told Lavrov that Iran is making efforts to bring home its citizens in Ukraine through the war-torn country's neighbors.

Securing the safety and health of Iranian nationals residing in Ukraine is our top priority and we expect conditions be set for their safe exit [from Ukraine]," the Iranian foreign minister told his Russian counterpart.

Also, The director general of the Eurasia Department at the Iranian Foreign Ministry held a meeting with Ukraine's ambassador to Tehran, during which he emphasized the need to ensure the safety of Iranian nationals, including students and diplomats, as well as the headquarters of the Iranian Embassy in Kiev.

Iran FM talks to EU foreign policy chief as top negotiator returns to Vienna

TEHRAN – Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian spoke over the phone with the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and chief coordinator of the Vienna talks, Josep Borrell.

In this call, the two sides discussed the latest state of the negotiations in Vienna over the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Borrell reviewed the latest developments in the Vienna talks. He then described the crisis in Ukraine as having serious consequences for the world and European politics.

The EU foreign policy chief outlined efforts by all parties to the negotiations, stressing that the Vienna talks have reached a critical stage and require serious decisions by all sides, according to the Iranian

foreign ministry.

In this telephone conversation, Amir Abdollahian also praised the efforts of Josep Borrell, the EU foreign policy chief and coordinator of the talks, as well as Enrique Mora, the EU's chief negotiator in Vienna.

He also underlined that the Islamic Republic of Iran's definite choice is to not cross its red lines.

Referring to Iran's readiness to reach a good agreement with the P4+1 group of countries, he stressed the need for a political decision by the other side.

Amir Abdollahian added that Iran seeks a good agreement, but within the framework of its national interests and in line with its red lines in the negotiations. The Iranian foreign minister also called for a political solution to the Ukraine crisis.

Amir Abdollahian and the EU

foreign policy chief and coordinator of the Vienna talks also agreed that the negotiations have reached a critical stage and that all parties have completed most of the process well.

In the end, Amir Abdollahian added that the remaining important issues can be resolved and a final agreement can be reached if a realistic approach is taken by the West.

Following his phone conversation with Borrell, the Iranian foreign minister said on Twitter that Iran is "seriously" reviewing a draft deal produced by way of Vienna talks.

Seriously reviewing draft of the agreement.

"Had a phone call with @JosepBorrellF today, & Mr Bagheri is in contact w Mr Mora. All trying to reach a good deal. Our red lines are made clear to western parties. Ready to immediately conclude a good deal,

Non-oil trade rises 38% in 11 months yr/yr



From page 1 ► The Islamic Republic imported 36.777 million tons of non-oil commodities worth \$46.577 billion in the first 11 months of the present year, with a 36 percent growth in value and a 19 percent rise in weight year on year, according to the official.

Iran's main imports during this period consisted of basic goods, inputs, machinery, medicine and medical supplies that were imported to meet the essential needs of the country.

The customs administration had previously announced that the value of Iran's non-oil trade stood at \$73 billion in the past Iranian calendar year.

IRICA former Head Mehdi Mir-Ashrafi had put the weight of non-oil trade at 146.4

million tons and said that the figure showed a 25-million-ton annual decline, which is the result of sanctions and coronavirus pandemic.

The Islamic Republic's non-oil export was 112 million tons valued at \$34.5 billion, and that of import was 34.4 million tons worth \$38.5 billion in the past year, the official added.

Among the country's non-oil export destinations, China was the first, with importing \$8.9 billion worth of products, Iraq was the second with importing \$7.3 billion, the United Arab Emirates the third with importing \$4.6 billion, Turkey the fourth with importing \$2.5 billion, and Afghanistan the fifth with importing \$2.2 billion, Mir-Ashrafi announced, and named gasoline, natural gas, polyethylene, propane, and pistachio as Iran's major exported products during the past year.

Iran's top sources of non-oil imports in the mentioned year were China with exporting \$9.7 billion worth of products to the Islamic Republic, the UAE with \$9.6 billion, Turkey with \$4.3 billion, India with \$2.1 billion, and Germany with \$1.8 billion, respectively, and mentioned corn, cellphone, rice, oil meal, and oilseeds, wheat, and raw oil as the major imported items.

Loading, unloading of goods in ports up 19% in 11 months on year

TEHRAN - Loading and unloading of goods in the ports of Iran rose 19 percent during the first eleven months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2021-February 19, 2022), as compared to the same period in the previous year.

As announced in a report by Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO), loading and unloading of goods in the country's ports reached 140.186 million tons in the mentioned period, while the figure stood at 117.517 million tons in the past year's same time span.

During the said eleven months, unloading and loading operations in the container sector reached 1.883 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs), 13 percent more than 1.662 million TEUs in the first eleven months of the previous year, the report said.

While Iran is combating the U.S. unilateral sanctions on its economy, the country's ports as the major gates of exports and imports play some significant role in this battle. This role makes all-out support to ports and more development of them serious and vital.

Such necessity has led the government to define projects for more development of the ports and also take some measures to



encourage investment making in ports, in addition, to facilitate loading and unloading of goods, especially basic commodities, there.

It is worth mentioning that PMO has defined a high number of projects to develop and improve the country's ports, as the country aims to double the capacity of its ports in a course of five years.

According to the Ports and Maritime Organization, the capacity of the country's ports has increased from 180 million tons in the Iranian calendar year 1392 (ended in March 2014) to 250 million tons in the previous calendar year (ended in March 2021).

The total capacity of the country's ports is expected to reach 280 million tons by the end of the current fiscal year.

Housing price rises 0.4% in Tehran City



TEHRAN- Average housing price rose 0.4 percent in the capital Tehran during the eleventh Iranian calendar month Bahman (ended on February 19), compared to its previous month, according to a report by the Central Bank of Iran (CBI).

Based on the CBI data, the average price for one square meter of a residential unit in Tehran stood at 330.6 million rials (about \$1,271) during the mentioned month.

The average housing price in the said month also increased 16.4 percent in comparison to the same month in the previous fiscal year.

As reported, the number of real estate deals stood at 8,500 in the capital city in the eleventh month of this year, falling 13.1 percent from the previous month, while increasing 117.8 percent,

from the same month of the past year.

The housing market in Tehran was the second-highest returning market in Iran among the country's four major markets in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20, 2021) with 85 percent annual growth.

The information obtained from Kild website (which is a major platform for housing trades) indicated that the housing price index in Tehran grew by 85 percent in the previous Iranian calendar year, compared to its preceding year.

The highest monthly price increase of 12.5 percent occurred in the Iranian calendar month of Mordad (July 22-August 21, 2020), while the biggest monthly price decrease occurred in Azar (November 21-December 20, 2020) with a decline of 8.1 percent.

Back in April, 2021, the head of Iran's Property Advisers Union said housing prices in the country should decrease at least 25 percent in order for people to be able to afford to purchase.

Mostafa Gholi Khosravi stressed the need for establishing a market regulation headquarters for the housing sector to monitor the activities of dealers and real estate agencies in order to balance the prices.

Housing prices in Iran have been constantly rising over the past year due to various internal and external factors.

Iran able to become world's new gas hub: analyst

TEHRAN - Fereydoun Barkeshli, president of Vienna Energy Research Group, believes that Iran could become the world's new gas hub and a significant player in the global gas market with appropriate geopolitical management.

"The time has come for the Islamic Republic of Iran to play a historic role in the gas market, but this market is greatly different from the oil market. In the gas industry, becoming a corridor or hub is important and with appropriate geopolitical management, Iran can become a new gas hub," Barkeshli who is also a member of the International Institute for Energy Studies (IIES), told Shana.

According to the official, having abundant resources will not ultimately ensure becoming an energy hub and for realizing this

goal, meticulous planning and management are required.

"Turkey has no gas, but it wants to be an energy player. Austria does not have gas, but it is Europe's major gas hub. Becoming an energy hub requires a long process of calm, security and investment," he said.

According to Barkeshli, when, 21 years ago, the Islamic Republic of Iran established the Gas Exporting Countries Forum and held its first ministerial meeting, the main goal was to establish a forum with a function similar to the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), however the world was not prepared for such an entity at the time.

"Today, the conditions are ripe for the GECF to play a constructive role in managing the global gas market," he said.



Referring to the atmosphere of the sixth summit of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) which was held recently in Qatar, Barkeshli said: "The GECF summit was held in a context never experienced before in the global gas market. According to the International Energy Agency, global gas demand is rising three times higher than the demand for oil. Unprecedented growth in global gas demand has fueled the steady rise in gas prices."

"For the first time in the history of the world energy market, the price of oil is now dependent on the gas prices," the official added.

So it's the best time for a huge gas producer like Iran that is also one of the founders of OPEC and GECF, to take action and take a stronger part in the global gas market.

Holding nearly 18 percent of the

global gas reserves, Iran is one of the most hydrocarbon-rich areas in the world, and the country's giant South Pars gas field (which Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf) is by far the world's largest natural gas field.

South Pars covers an area of 9,700 square kilometers, 3,700 square kilometers of which are in Iran's territorial waters and the remaining 6,000 square kilometers, called North Dome, are situated in the Arab country's territorial waters.

Although until recently the Islamic Republic was mostly focused on the development of its oil reserves, considering the global shift toward natural gas and the significant rise in the domestic demand, the government started following a new strategy to develop both sectors alongside each other.

Iranian industry, mining, trade minister to visit Yerevan in early March

TEHRAN - Iranian Industry, Mining, and Trade Minister Reza Fatemi-Amin is going to visit Armenia on top of a high-ranking delegation on March 3 to follow up on the implementation of economic agreements previously reached between the two sides.

As reported by the portal of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), Fatemi-Amin will be accompanied by TPO Head Alireza Peyman-Pak and a handful of officials from his ministry during this visit.

According to TPO Deputy Head Mohammadreza Karimzadeh, in this trip, the Iranian officials will hold talks with their Armenian counterparts about various economic subjects, including cooperation in free zones, commodity trade, transportation, customs, and other issues related to trade between the two countries.



Mentioning the visit of Armenian Economy Minister Vahan Kerobyan to Iran back in January 2021, Karmizadeh said: "During that visit, the two sides signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for the expansion of trade ties and now the Iranian industry minister is visiting Armenia to follow up on the

implementation of the mentioned MOU."

The mentioned MOU was signed by Kerobyan and former Iranian Industry, Mining, and Trade Minister Alireza Razm Hosseini.

TPO has made the necessary coordination for a trade delegation to accompany the minister during March 3-4 to pursue expansion of cooperation in various fields, the official added.

During the minister's visit, Fatemi-Amin and the accompanying delegation are scheduled to have meetings with high-ranking Armenian officials, relevant ministers, and officials from the country's chambers of commerce.

Fatemi-Amin will also pay a visit to the Iranian trade center in Armenia, whose building is currently being constructed in the capital, to get informed about the progress of the project.

Kyrgyz companies eager for doing business in Iran: official

TEHRAN - Advisor to Kyrgyzstan President and Chairman of the Board of Directors at Centerra Gold Incorporation Tengiz Bolturuk has said his country's companies are eager for expanding collaborations with Iranian counterparts.

Bolturuk, who visited Iran's southern Shahid Rajaei Port on top of a delegation, made the remarks in a meeting with Head of Hormozgan Province Ports and Maritime Department Alireza Mohammadi Karaji-Ran, the portal of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) reported on Sunday.

He expressed the Kyrgyz government's interest and willingness for investing in Shahid Rajaei Port's hinterland, and said:

"One of our important missions in this trip is to make the necessary preparations for the active presence of Kyrgyz companies in Shahid Rajaei port in order to improve economic relations between the two countries."

Referring to the designation of 32 investment projects in the economic plans of the President of Kyrgyzstan, Bolturuk continued: "Among the mentioned projects in different investment sectors, activity in Shahid Rajaei port, especially in the field of mining, is one of our priorities."

According to the official, Kyrgyzstan is seriously seeking the development of relations and joint economic cooperation with Iran.

"In line with the emphasis of our

president on the implementation of cooperation as soon as possible, we are very serious and determined to invest in Shahid Rajaei Port and we are ready to start our activities in this port as soon as March," he stressed.

Mohammadi for his part, introduced the investment opportunities and advantages of Shahid Rajaei Port, saying: "Shahid Rajaei Port benefits from 60 kilometers of railway lines and has an unloading and loading capacity of more than 140 million tons per year and more than 50 container and goods service areas."

Referring to Iran's positive relations with all neighboring countries and the region in recent years and the special view of the



Chairman of the Board of Directors at Kyrgyzstan's Centerra Gold Inc. Tengiz Bolturuk (2nd L) and Head of Hormozgan Province Ports and Maritime Department Alireza Mohammadi Karaji-Ran (4th L)

13th government in this regard, he said: "We are ready to take practical steps to develop maritime and port cooperation between the two countries."

TEDPIX down 3,000 points on Sunday

TEHRAN- TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), dropped 3,572 points to 1.279 million on Sunday.

As reported, over 3.837 billion securities worth 27.475 trillion rials (about \$105.67 million) were traded at the TSE.

The first market's index lost 5,072 points and the second market's index gained 408 points.

TEDPIX gained 6,000 points (less than one percent) to 1.288 million in the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday).

During the past week, the indices of Isfahan Oil Refinery, Tehran Oil Refining Company, Bandar Abbas Oil Refining Company, Iran Khodro Company, Saipa Company, National Iranian Copper Company, and Bank Mellat were the most widely followed ones.

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.

As stated by Market Analyst Peyman Hadadi, the national budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year indicates that the government has a more positive view of the market for the upcoming year.

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

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

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

Iran showed Doha its respect for Qatar’s sovereignty: GSA chief

‘Doha and Muscat find the other’s efforts to ease friction between Iran and the U.S. as useful’

From page 1 ▶ program from resulting in an armed conflict in the Persian Gulf. Such a nightmarish scenario, if it would ever unfold, would have devastating impacts on Qatar’s vital national interests. Highly dependent on the Strait of Hormuz for its exports and sharing with Iran ownership over the world’s largest natural gas field, Doha would lose a lot economically and in terms of security if the standoff over Iran’s nuclear program would lead to any war in the Persian Gulf. Therefore, it is pragmatic for Doha to do whatever it can to prevent such an outcome.

Qatar’s stance is that there are no realistic or viable ways to peacefully resolve this issue aside from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Back in May 2018, when the Trump administration decided to trash the accord by pulling the U.S. out of the deal unilaterally, Qatar—along with Oman and Kuwait—did not join the three other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members—Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—in welcoming the move. On the contrary, the Qatari view was that this move boded very negatively from the standpoint of Doha’s own interests and regional security. Today, Qatari officials are trying to play their diplomatic cards to help with the delicate process of salvaging the JCPOA. To be sure, Raisi’s visit to Doha and the Qatari head of state’s recent visit to Washington all factor into Doha’s diplomatic strategies for helping the P5+1 and Iran settle remaining issues that stand in the way of a revived JCPOA.

Do you think Doha is seeking to replace Muscat in mediating between Iran and the U.S.?

No, I do not. Doha and Muscat find the other’s efforts to ease friction between Iran and the U.S. as useful. Their diplomatic moves to bring



about this outcome complement each other. This is understandable given that Qatar and Oman share interests in the JCPOA being reconstituted as well as temperatures lowering in relations between Tehran and Washington. As two GCC states which maintain good relations with both the U.S. and Iran, Qatar and Oman share concerns about the potential outcomes of tensions between Washington and Tehran spiraling out of control. Therefore, any Qatari success on this front bodes well for Oman’s national interests and vice versa.

What are the lessons of the 2017-2021 siege on Doha and Iran’s role in giving Qatar’s economy breathing space?

The Emirati- and Saudi-led blockade of Qatar, which lasted from mid-2017 until early 2021, had a huge impact on Doha’s relationship with Iran. By helping Qatar weather the siege, Iran demonstrated to Doha that it respected Qatar’s sovereignty and was willing to assist the gas-rich Persian Gulf country amid a time

of crisis manufactured by Qatar’s immediate neighbors on the Arabian Peninsula. The strengthening of relations between Doha and Tehran that took place between 2017 and 2021 has influenced bilateral relations in ways that will likely outlive the blockade period for a very long time.

“Kuwait has demonstrated how it is not making decisions based on Riyadh’s orders.”

President Raisi’s visit to Doha this month underscores how these two Persian Gulf states are determined to continue deepening ties and expanding cooperation. The Qataris are not naïve and they realize that a third GCC crisis could happen down the line and under such circumstances, close ties to Iran will again be important to Doha.

By the same token, Doha and Tehran are not on the same page when it comes to every regional and international issue. Qatar and Iran have fundamentally different stances on questions concerning the Syrian government, certain armed groups in Iraq, as well as opposing views of the role that the U.S. military plays in the Persian Gulf. Yet the governments

of Qatar and Iran have been able to work together in ways that are mutually beneficial notwithstanding some sensitive issues that pit their interests against each other.

To what extent can countries like Qatar, Oman, and Kuwait act independently from Riyadh’s regional policies?

There are countless instances of Qatar, Oman, and Kuwait acting independently of Saudi foreign policy. The same can be said about the United Arab Emirates too. Although Riyadh has influence over the smaller GCC states and the Saudis play a leadership role within this sub-regional organization, there is no doubt about the fact that Doha, Muscat, and Kuwait City are comfortable pursuing their own interests which do not always align with Riyadh’s interests.

Qatar’s willingness to engage with anti-status quo actors in the Arab region like the Muslim Brotherhood throughout the post-2011 period has highlighted Qatar’s tendency to break from the ‘Saudi consensus’ which itself was a major dynamic contributing to the two GCC crises of 2014 and 2017-2021. Oman’s cordial relationship with Iran, unwillingness to join the Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen, and refusal to support regime change efforts in Damascus are illustrative of the Sultanate’s independence from Saudi Arabia. Kuwait’s democratic institutions and tradition of neutrality in many of the Middle East’s (West Asia) conflicts and disputes (such as the 2017-2021 GCC crisis) demonstrate how the country is not making decisions based on Riyadh’s orders, but instead pursues an independent foreign policy aimed at advancing Kuwait’s own national interests.

Ukraine: What will be done and what should be done?

The inevitable has happened. Russia has invaded Ukraine. It was inevitable because the US and its NATO partners had backed Russia into a corner from which it could only escape by military means.

In effect, Russia confronted a future in which the US would increasingly tighten the noose around its neck by further eastward expansion of NATO, combined with military upgrading by the US of its Eastern European NATO proxies.

Accompanying that militarization was the prospect of a ramped-up propaganda war in which western media fanned the flames of public animus against Russia. Side-by-side, US government financed entities (such as the National Endowment for Democracy and the German Marshall Fund) would seek to influence European and Russian politics with the goal of regime change.

At this stage, there are two questions. What will be done? And what should be done?

What will be done?

The answer to the first question is clear. We now confront another era of cold war, which could easily turn hot and even nuclear. Moreover, the situation is far more dangerous than the first cold war as the U.S. is much more powerful than Russia, relative to its standing vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. Consequently, the balance is precarious, which is why it could easily trip into something terrible.

The Neocon tendency holds that the U.S. should be globally hegemonic and militarily unchallengeable, and it has triumphed definitively in US politics. That triumph is reflected in the Democratic Party which represents the “liberal” wing of US national politics. It is also reflected in the opinions of elite liberal media.

The winners are the Washington DC status quo. The biggest winner is the liberal wing of the Neocon establishment which now has a clear runway to push US global hegemony under the false flag of democracy promotion. Even more importantly, the Neocons have ensnared European political leaders, cleaving the possibility of a peaceful productive rapprochement that might have joined Russia with the European economy and European family. The second obvious winner is the military-industrial complex which can look forward to continuing massive profits and larded budgets.

Unlike the first cold war, there will be no payoff for working families. That is because Russia has no global political economic agenda equivalent to socialism, the threat of which forced the ruling elite to make concessions to workers. Indeed, working families stand to lose as the military budget will become even larger. More importantly, the revival of jingoism and militarism stand to play their historic role as a wedge issue that divides working families, thereby enhancing the ability of business and liberal elites to shaft any agenda for progressive economic change.

But by far the biggest loser is Europe which has been shamefully sold out by its pusillanimous political class. First, Europe has foregone the economic opportunity of peaceful partnership with Russia. Instead, it will lose important markets and it will pay a lot more for energy. It will also make itself even more economically vulnerable and susceptible to US punishment, as already happened with the multi-billion dollar fines the US imposed on European banks.

Second, once again, Europe will suffer the backwash of the US push for hegemony. That is what happened with Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Afghanistan. The backwash has already fertilized a European right-wing extremist renaissance, which now promises to worsen. Meanwhile, the US is protected from most of that backwash by the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

What should be done?

Answering the question of what should be done is also easy but getting there is beginning to look impossible. What should be done is a profound recalibration that

diminishes the influence of the US in Europe, strengthens the European Union, and aims for inclusion of Russia in the European family as envisaged by President Gorbachev in 1990.

The starting point is recognizing that there is no going back in time. New facts have been created. They were created by NATO’s eastward expansion, by the 2014 US sponsored coup in Ukraine, by Russia’s reoccupation of Crimea, and now by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Next, there is need for a fundamental change of mind set that requires acknowledging Russia is not the Soviet Union. It is a weak economy with a declining population, and it has neither the capacity nor the desire to rule former Warsaw pact countries.

With those two building blocks in place, the way forward can be mapped out. Ukraine must agree to permanently being a neutral state, as were Finland and Austria in the Cold War. The US must stop arming Poland which is an intolerant nationalist polity that is likely to be a future source of major trouble. And the US must stop upgrading the military capabilities of the Baltic states which is an aggressive provocation.

The European Union must build trade and commerce with Russia. That is an economic marriage made in heaven. Russia has resources and needs technology and capital goods. Europe has technology and capital goods and needs resources.

Even better, by diminishing the threat against President Putin, such partnership will promote internal political improvement in Russia. Authoritarian regimes clamp down when threatened. They are more tolerant when unthreatened.

Now for the difficult part. The Ukraine should be reconstituted as a federal state, and it may even need to be partitioned given the new facts that have been created. With US encouragement, Ukraine played with fire and it has gotten burned.

Lastly, there is need to build a Western European defense force and to diminish US military presence and influence in Western Europe. The US military was an essential presence in the Cold War when Western Europe lacked the capacity to deter the combined power of the Warsaw Pact. Those conditions are long gone. The Warsaw Pact no longer exists, and Russia is a shadow of the Soviet Union. Western Europe now dwarfs Russia in both economic and demographic terms, and it can (and should) look after itself.

The US Neocon menace

Tragically, none of this is likely to happen because it is profoundly at odds with the US Neocon goal of global hegemony, and Western European politicians have disgraced themselves as US flunkies.

A strong, prosperous, and liberalizing Russia would be an enormous threat to the US Neocon agenda. That is why the US has demanded Russian political liberalization now, knowing full well it will only cause weakness and disintegration at this moment in history.

A strong, united, and prosperous Western Europe would compound the threat to the Neocon agenda. And a Western Europe that helped Russia along the path to prosperity would doubly compound the threat.

History and George Orwell’s memory hole

The Western media is now focusing attention on Russia’s invasion. Built into that focus is a tacit remaking of history.

US Neocons want history to begin with the invasion. All else that went before is to be swept into Orwell’s “memory hole”.

That means forgetting the injuries and threats the US has heaped on Russia for thirty years; forgetting how the US helped loot Russia after the fall of the Berlin Wall, forgetting the promise made not to expand NATO eastward, forgetting the threat posed by putting missile defense and launch capabilities close to Russia’s borders, and forgetting the fateful 2014 US sponsored coup in Ukraine.

(Source: antiwar.com)

Record number of workers leaving England’s national health service

From page 1 ▶ Despite the government’s public praise of NHS staff during the pandemic, analysts say if Downing Street had offered the workforce with the wages they really deserve during the pandemic, it may have at least raised morale.

Alistair Ritchie, an advanced nurse practitioner in intensive care says “the pandemic itself was dreadful. We were all working flat out, extra hours, with fewer staff per patient and spending all of our time in PPE”.

The medic highlights and questions that “what makes it worse is a greater amount had already been agreed in the original pay deal. Are we worth less now than we were before the pandemic?”

Another warning came in December last year when the NHS forecasted another 230,000 new cases (between 2020/21 and 2022/23) of its workers will suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder in England because of the pandemic.

Hall, who carried out the latest damaging assessment says “the workforce crisis in the NHS has clearly penetrated the public consciousness”.

He says “the UK has long had significantly lower numbers of doctors and nurses per capita than comparable systems ... More recently, the impact of working conditions is showing an increasing impact on the ability of the NHS to retain staff. Around 50 in every 10,000 staff working in hospital and community health services in June 2021 left the service within the next three months, citing work-life balance as the reason. This was a new record”.

An analysis of NHS Digital figures shows that at least 400 staff a week in England are leaving to improve their work-life balance.

And this comes as evidence emerges of high turnover among social care workers. Recent estimates show more than a third (34%) of care workers left their roles in 2020-21.

The biggest losers will be the British public who are seeking medical care and treatment yet have to wait longer to receive any attention.

More than six million patients are now waiting for non-urgent treatment in England as the waiting list figures reach record highs again.

By the end of December, 6,067,326 patients were placed on the long waiting list for non-life-threatening surgery. That is the highest number

since records began in the summer of August 2007. The massive waiting list is also a rise of 72,000 from the previous month.

This is while the number of patients having to wait more than 52 weeks to start treatment stood at 310,813 in December.

And new figures show a record 16,558 people had to wait more than 12 hours in accident and emergency departments in England’s hospitals during the month of January.

A senior occupational therapist told the charity group Engage on condition of anonymity that she decided to pay for an expensive operation after injuring her knee because she had seen how overwhelmed the NHS had become.

The therapist says “waiting for eight weeks might become 12 weeks or more. Living on my own, I didn’t have anyone to help me, and relying on friends just didn’t feel right. I just felt lucky I was in the position where I could choose when others can’t”.

The senior NHS therapist adds “I think people generally feel overworked and undervalued in the NHS”.

She further notes that “there are problems with recruitment and retention of staff. Some vacancies are unfilled for more than a year. The stress levels on staff in under-resourced teams is massive and it’s a major contributor to them struggling with their mental health and wellbeing. Ultimately, people make the decision to leave, or to take early retirement, or seek other careers”.

Engage has warned the British government that frontline workers are now running on empty and that a plan for boosting the workforce is very long overdue.

The charity group says NHS workers across the country “have spoken to us about feeling overstretched, undervalued, and struggling to get support in a chaotic system. We can’t allow staff to burn out while putting patients at risk of mistakes or spiraling downwards as they wait months for treatment”.

The group warns the government must act quickly “to expand its promise of reform, based on listening to the people who use or work in the system every day. Only answers rooted in real experiences can deliver health and care that



works for us all”.

Over the past years, NHS workers have increasingly complained about back-breaking 12-hour shifts, exhaustion, and burnout saying it has led to a growing number of nurses and other workers leaving their posts, only three years after joining.

A lack of access to food and drink while at work along with stress and the growing demands of caring for patients have also been cited as key factors for the exodus.

Critics say despite the warnings, the NHS staff street protests, and the public research highlighting the serious issues and problems; the government has done almost nothing in meeting the core demands and making the country’s health sector the priority that it should have been.

The lack of government action is now being put on full public display in a very negative light. The impact is being felt not only by the NHS staff who have endured years of suffering but also on the patients themselves who are facing record waiting times and poorer services.

Critics argue the lack of attention by the authorities and the health ministry towards the hospitals and the care homes is one of the leading factors to England facing one of the worst covid death tolls and infection cases in the world.

During the pandemic, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson strongly praised “our modern army of doctors and nurses”, but put nothing on the table in terms of support to prove that he actually meant those words.

In essence, both the NHS workforce and patients have been abandoned; not just by the current PM but consecutive British governments.

ECO ministers invited to inaugurate “Sari 2022” in mid-March

From page 1 ► Sari was selected as the tourism capital of ECO during the 3rd ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism, preceded by the 5th High-Level Experts Group (HLEG) on tourism, which was held on October 3-4, 2019, in Khujand, Tajikistan.

“Sari 2022” is considered the best opportunity for cooperation between Iran and ECO member states and, given this opportunity, all potentials can be used for the prosperity and branding in the field of tourism and economy.

“The province must introduce the capacities of the region in the international arena, with the participation of all institutions, especially the honorable people of Mazandaran.”

On the sidelines of the year-long event, he said, the exhibitions of local foods, handicrafts, traditional arts, and flowers and herbs will be organized.

Local officials believe Mazandaran, which is a top destination for domestic travelers, can be turned into a destination for foreign travelers as well through careful planning.

Sandwiched between the towering Alborz mountain range and the Caspian Sea, Mazandaran has a rich yet turbulent history. An early civilization flourished at the beginning of the first millennium BC in Mazandaran (Tabarestan).

Its insecure eastern and southeastern borders were crossed by Mongol invaders in the 13th and 14th centuries. Cossacks attacked the region



in 1668 but were repulsed. It was ceded to the Russian Empire by a treaty in 1723, but the Russians were never secure in their occupation. The area was restored to Iran under the Qajar dynasty.

The northern section of the region consists of lowland alongside the Caspian and upland along the northern slopes of the Alborz Mountains. Marshy backlands dominate the coastal plain, and extensive gravel fans fringe the mountains. The climate is permanently subtropical and humid, with very hot summers.

ECO is an intergovernmental regional organization encompassing countries from Europe, Caucuses and Central Asia, Middle East and South Asia with more than 460 million inhabitants and over 8 million square kilometers connecting Russia to the Persian Gulf and China to Europe. According to the organization, its overall objective is to materialize the sustainable economic development of its member states and the region as a whole.

‘Visa center’ inaugurated in Mashhad



TEHRAN – Iran’s second ‘visa center’ has recently been inaugurated in the holy city of Mashhad, which embraces the shrine of Imam Reza (AS).

“The first visa center outside the Iranian capital, and the second one in the country, has started operating in Mashhad,” ISNA quoted a local official as saying on Sunday.

Its duty is to monitor, peruse and facilitate visa application processes from EU member states (Schengen) and other countries of the world, the official explained.

“It will help eligible applicants from Mashhad or other neighboring cities to obtain visas for tourism, trade, education, etc.,”

In the current coronavirus circumstances, the center would be very beneficial as local applicants do not need to personally visit embassies in Tehran, the report said.

Going to statistics, some 147m foreign nationals visited the Islamic Republic from the

beginning of the current Iranian calendar year to January 1, a span most of which was subject to severe travel bans due to coronavirus. Citizens from Iraq and Afghanistan were the main source of tourism for Iran from October 23 to December 22, 2021. “226,000 people from Iraq, 103,000 from Afghanistan, 90,000 from Turkey, 22,000 from Azerbaijan, and 18,000 from Bahrain arrived in Iran during the mentioned period,” according to data released by Mehr news agency.

Moreover, neighboring countries have been the main source of tourism for the Islamic Republic. That is why the fair has invited travel insiders, tour operators, and exhibitors from neighboring states to reinforce the trend.

The average of international travels to and from the Islamic Republic fell by 80 percent during the past Iranian calendar year 1399 (ended on March 20, 2021) from a year earlier. “During this period, 4,343,163 passengers entered the country, which included 3,030,464 Iranian passengers and 512,699 international travelers,” according to Arezou Ghaniun, an official with the Islamic Republic of Iran’s Customs Administration.

In the international scene, tourism experienced a 4% increase in 2021, 15 million more international tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) compared to 2020 (415 million versus 400 million), according to data compiled by the World Tourism Organization. International arrivals, however, show 72% below the pre-pandemic year of 2019, according to preliminary estimates.

Abgineh Museum mirrors juicy Iranian culture, civilization: minister

TEHRAN- Tehran’s Glass and Ceramic Museum is a window into the rich Iranian civilization and culture, tourism minister Ezzatollah Zarghami said on Saturday.

“This museum contains Iranian art that dates back hundreds and thousands of years and is an essential part of human civilization.”

He made the remarks during a visit to the Glass and Ceramic

Museum of Iran, known as Abgineh Museum, which is located downtown, IRNA reported.

The museum is very treasured for its magnificent, delicate, beautiful works of art, drawn from ancient beliefs and rituals, the minister added.

“There is a world of culture, history, and ritual that lies behind each of these works of art,” he noted.

By reviewing the history of



the museum, it becomes clear that Iranians have long been a pioneer and a symbol of culture and history, and this is of vital importance, he explained.

Abgineh Museum offers visitors a wide range of glasswork, brickwork, plasterwork, mirror work as well as inlaid artworks that date from the 2nd millennium BC to the present day, all housed within an elegant Qajar-era (1789 to 1925) edifice.

The two-story octagonal structure itself retains a lot of charm as seamlessly blends genuine Iranian architecture with 19th-century European motifs.

It was originally constructed upon the orders of the 20th-century politician Ahmad Qavam better known as Qavam-ol-Saltaneh for his personal lodging. It is situated a short walk northward of the National Museum of Iran on Si-e Tir St.

Archaeologists resume work at Iron Age site northwest Iran

TEHRAN – Archaeological excavations at the Iron Age site of Qareh Hasanlu in northwestern Ardabil province, which started recently, will continue for another two weeks, the deputy provincial tourism chief has said.

The project is aimed to safeguard and protect the historical site against further destruction, CHTN quoted Seyyed Ruhollah Mohammadi as saying on Sunday.

As part of the project, it seeks to discover and identify comprehensive information on possible cultural layers in the area, as well as obtaining more information about its Iron Age settlements, the official added.

Archaeological studies are carried out in the historical site to determine the cultural sequence, historical reconstruction, and recognition of ancient civilizations, he noted.

Iron Age is the final technological and cultural stage in the Stone-Bronze-Iron Age sequence. The date of the full Iron Age, in which this metal, for the most part, replaced



bronze in implements and weapons, varied geographically, beginning in the Middle East and southeastern Europe about 1200 BC but in China not until about 600 BC, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica.

In Iran, the term Iron Age is employed to identify a cultural change that occurred centuries earlier than the time accorded its use elsewhere in the Near East, and not to acknowledge the introduction of new metal technology

As mentioned by Encyclopedia Iranica, Iron artifacts were unknown in Iran until the 9th century BC (the cultural period labeled Iron

Malaysian documentarians explore Iranian soil on fam tour



TEHRAN-A group of five Malaysian documentarians has recently arrived in Iran for a two-week familiarization tour, ISNA reported on Sunday.

The group, which entered the Islamic Republic on Thursday, is scheduled to visit travel destinations in the provinces of Tehran, Isfahan, and Fars, the

report added.

Iranian food and souvenirs are the focus of the fam tour, which will also introduce Iran’s tourist attractions.

The group aims to document the day-to-day lives of Iranians in urban environments such as the traditional bazaar of Tehran.

They will also visit Iranian World

Heritage sites including Golestan Palace, Persepolis, Pasargadae, and the Imam Square.

The documentary is due to air in Malaysia during the holy month of Ramadan as well as on other Southeast Asian TV channels.

Back in September, Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Minister Ezzatollah Zarghami announced the issuance of tourist visas and the flow of foreign tourists to Iran would resume as per President Ebrahim Raisi’s order following 19 months of suspension.

The average of international travels to and from Iran fell by 80 percent during the past Iranian calendar year 1399 (ended on March 20, 2021) from a year earlier caused by various coronavirus restrictions.

Optimistic forecasts, expect the country would achieve a

tourism boom after coronavirus is contained, believing its impact would be temporary and short-lived for a country that ranked the third fastest-growing tourism destination in 2019.

UNWTO’s Panel of Experts foresees a rebound in international tourism in the current year, mostly in the third quarter. However, some experts suggest the rebound could occur only in 2022.

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.

Felt works go on show at Shahr-e Kord exhibit

TEHRAN – Various wool felt products have been put on show at an exhibition in Shahr-e Kord, the capital of Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari province, which has long been a hub for the ancient craft.

The week-long exhibit is organized at the provincial Department of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, a local official said on Sunday.

According to available data, some 40 tons of felt are yearly being made in the southwest province through traditional and modern manners.

Shahr-e Kord is registered as the national city of wool felt products. Moreover, its craftspeople develop over 40 forms of felt products.

Over the past couple of



years, its wool felt has been exported to several countries including the U.S. and Sweden.

Experts believe that Shahr-e Kord has immense potential to be a world city for felt products. Official data suggests some 500 crafters are producing handmade felt products across the province.

With 14 entries, Iran

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

The value of Iran’s handicrafts exports stood at \$120 million during the first eleven months of the past

Iranian calendar year 1399 (March 20, 2020 – February 18, 2021), Mehr reported. The country’s handicrafts exports slumped during the mentioned months in comparison to the same period last a year earlier due to the damage the coronavirus pandemic has inflicted on global trade.

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

Cultural elements in Bushehr added to national heritage list

TEHRAN – Iran’s Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts has recently registered traditions long been practiced in Bushehr as the national intangible cultural heritage.

On Sunday, the ministry officially informed the governor-general of the southwestern province about the new entries to the prestigious list, CHTN reported.

The talent of making the local food of Kashkineh, the skill of making Zimun Halva, and women’s Tazieh (Iranian passion play on religious events especially on the day of Ashura) were among the items added to the prestigious list.

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



centers.

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

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

When it comes to cultural

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

Turkey to host Iranian house of innovation

TEHRAN – Iran will inaugurate a house of innovation and technology in Turkey on Tuesday to find new markets for domestic knowledge-based products in the region, IRNA reported.

Simultaneously with the second technology trade meeting between Iranian and Turkish knowledge-based companies, Iran will launch the fifth house of innovation and technology in Istanbul.

Exporting technological products of Iranian knowledge-based companies is one of the important and key programs of the vice presidency for science and technology, and in this regard, four houses of innovation and technology were inaugurated in Kenya, China, Russia, and Syria.

Over the next six months, two centers will also be established in Iraq and Armenia, IRNA reported on Sunday.

By supporting innovative ideas, holding technological and innovative events, the centers will be a platform for the development and promotion of Iranian knowledge-based companies, startups, and creative industries.

The centers are mainly formed with the investment and support of the private sector to provide the necessary infrastructure for their exports through the innovation houses.

Mehdi Ghalehnoei, an official with the vice presidency for science and technology, said in February that last year, knowl-



edge-based companies gained about \$800 million in revenue from export, and next year (March 21), it seems to reach up to \$2 billion.

Africa, neighboring countries, Southeast Asia and Eurasia are our export target priorities, and we hope to create Iranian innovation and technology in all these areas, he added.

Innovation development in 5 years

Knowledge-based companies and creative startups have grown over the past five years, and Iran has risen 45 places in the Global Innovation Index, according to

the UNESCO 2021 Report.

The Global Innovation Index in Iran from 2015 to 2019 has risen from 106 to 61 with continuous improvement, showing 45 steps growth.

The development of accelerators and innovation centers over the last five years has led to a rapid increase in startups and knowledge-based companies.

Between 2014 and 2017, exports of knowledge-based goods grew by a factor of five, before slumping in 2018 after the U.S. withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (2015),

commonly referred to as the nuclear deal, and re-imposed sanctions.

The report states that innovation in Iran has developed rapidly over the past five years, and by the end of last year, 49 accelerators and 113 innovation centers had provided services to startups with the participation of the private sector.

Knowledge-based companies

Today, the country's knowledge-based ecosystem accounts for more than 3 percent of GDP. And the figure is projected to reach 5 percent, however, the main goal is to step toward a 10 percent share in GDP, Sattari told Fars on February 13.

The share of knowledge-based companies in the country's economy has exceeded 9 quadrillion rials (about \$34 billion), and since 2019, it has experienced a growth of more than 450 percent, he stated.

There are currently 6,263 knowledge-based companies operating in the country, offering advanced products and services in various fields of technology to domestic and foreign markets, and some of them have entered international markets, Siavash Maleki, deputy head of the Fund, stated.

The fields of aircraft maintenance, steel, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, oil, and gas are among the sectors that researchers in technology companies have engaged in, leading to import reduction.

Four houses of innovation and technology were inaugurated in Kenya, China, Russia, and Syria.

Iran to participate in UN Environment Assembly

TEHRAN – An Iranian delegation headed by Ali Selajegheh, Department of Environment chief, will attend the Fifth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-5).

The resumed Fifth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-5) takes place online and in Nairobi from February 28 to March 2.

The overall theme for UNEA-5 is "Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals", which highlights the pivotal role nature plays in people's lives and in social, economic, and environ-



mentally sustainable development.

UNEA-5 is an opportunity for the Member States to share best practices for sustain-

ability. It will create momentum for governments to build on and catalyze impact on multilateral environmental efforts to protect and restore the natural world on which economies and societies depend.

The Iranian delegation will represent the country's positions, actions, challenges, and priorities, ISNA reported on Sunday.

Immediately after UNEA-5.2, the Assembly will hold a Special Session on March 3-4, which is devoted to the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the creation of the UN Environment Program in 1972 (UNEP@50).

Free maternity care for all: health minister

From page 1 ► The national budget bill for the next [Iranian calendar] calendar year (to begin on March 20, 2022) has proposed 120 trillion rials (nearly \$444 million) to implement childbearing and family support plans in the country.

Demographic issue

Today, the country's fertility rate has reached about 1.6 children per woman, however, it was 6.5 children per woman, in 1986. The lowest fertility rate in the whole region of

West Asia, North Africa, and the MENA region is recorded for Iran.

While 1,594,000 births were registered in the [Iranian calendar] year 1394 (March 2015-March 2016), the downward trend continued annually to the point that the number of births reached about one million in the [Iranian calendar] year 1399 (March 2020-March 2021).

In other words, the country lost more than 550,000 births in five years.

The fertility rate declined to 1.71 children in the past [Iranian calendar] year (March 2020-March 2021), reaching below the replacement level, according to the report released by the Statistical Center of Iran.

Replacement level is the amount of fertility needed to keep the population the same from generation to generation. It refers to the total fertility rate that will result in a stable population without it increasing or decreasing.

Nicholas Eberstadt, the Henry Wendt

Syria welcomes Iranian technology, expertise for development



TEHRAN – Salam Safaf, the Syrian Minister of Administrative Development, has said his country welcomes the Iranian technology and expertise for conducting development projects.

"In many cases, there are necessary infrastructure and manpower in Syria, but we need technology to be indigenized for implementing development projects," IRNA quoted Safaf as saying.

She made the remarks in a meeting in Tehran on Saturday with Hamidreza Tayyebi, the head of the Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research, an Iranian public non-governmental institution with the mission of presenting a native model for the production of knowledge and technology.

On February 21, Syria and Iran signed a memorandum of understanding on bilateral cooperation in administrative affairs and the employment field.

The memo was signed on the Syrian side by Salam Safaf, and on the Iranian side, Maytham Latifi, assistant to the Iranian president and head of the Organization for Public Administration and Employment Affairs. The memo deals with cooperation in the field of administrative development and benefiting from the experiences of both parties, especially in human capacity building and management, SANA reported.

The two sides also stressed the importance of working within qualifying training workshops that contribute to raising the level of administrative awareness by making use of modern technology.

Iran will launch production lines of knowledge-based products in seven countries, namely Turkey, Armenia, Afghanistan, Bosnia

and Herzegovina, Syria, Iraq, and Kenya, Marzieh Shaverdi, the manager of the Innovation and Prosperity Fund, said in December.

The export support package for knowledge-based companies includes empowering, networking, and financing, IRNA quoted Shaverdi as saying.

Export empowerment includes training and consulting, providing export standards and licenses, and intellectual property, she explained.

The Vice Presidency for Science and Technology will provide special support to facilitate export for knowledge-based companies with quality products over the next 6 months.

Due to the necessity of Iran's presence in the global technology markets and the high capability of knowledge-based and creative companies, the Vice Presidency for Science and Technology stepped into the field to pave the way for the presence in the global market, Mehdi Ghalehnoei, an official with the Vice Presidency, said in October.

To this end, it has developed and implemented programs, policies, and support packages related to the development of export, planning to attract foreign investment, eliciting the participation of Iranians abroad, and connecting domestic capabilities to the global market are among the actions taken in this regard.

Exporting technological products of Iranian knowledge-based companies is one of the important and key programs of the Vice Presidency for Science and Technology, and in this regard, three houses of innovation and technology were inaugurated in Kenya, China and Syria.



Chair in Political Economy at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), wrote in an article in July 2020 that the fertility rate in Iran has dropped by 70 percent over the past 30 years, which has been the highest decline in human history.

Seyed Hamed Barakati, deputy health minister for family and school population, said in May 2021 that Iran's population growth rate has decreased to less than one percent for the first time over the past four decades.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

Iran well rid of 153 swarms of desert locusts

Some 153 swarms of desert locusts from Saudi Arabia which penetrated into the southeastern provinces have been controlled, Esmaeil Najjar, head of Iran's Crisis Management Organization has said.

Since the [Iranian calendar] month of Bahman (starting on January 21) we fought swarms of desert locust in approximately 532,000 hectares of farming lands, IRNA news agency quoted Najjar as saying on Saturday.

Provinces of Bushehr, Fars, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, Hormozgan, Kerman, Khuzestan, and Sistan-Baluchestan have been affected by the locusts which incurred major losses on farming lands and gardens.

Farm lands in the aforementioned provinces have undergone aerial spraying of chemical insecticides and ground pest control operations, he stated.

۱۵۳ دسته از ملخ های صحرائی نابود شدند

رئیس سازمان مدیریت بحران کشور گفت: ۱۵۳ دسته از ملخ های صحرائی که به استان های جنوب شرقی کشور حمله ور شده بودند، نابود شده است.

اسماعیل نجار روز شنبه در گفت و گو با خبرنگار ایرنا درباره آخرین اقدامات برای مبارزه با ملخ های صحرائی در کشور، گفت: از بهمن ۹۷ تاکنون در ۵۳۱ هزار و ۸۸۸ هکتار مبارزه با ملخ های صحرائی انجام شده است.

تاکنون در استان های خوزستان، بوشهر، فارس، هرمزگان، کرمان، سیستان و بلوچستان، جنوب کرمان، و کهگیلویه و بویراحمد اراضی و باغات مورد هجوم ملخ های صحرائی و خسارات جبران ناپذیری قرار گرفته اند. این مناطق با استفاده از هواپیما سمپاشی هوایی و از طریق نیروی انسانی سمپاشی زمینی شده است.

COVID-19 UPDATES ON FEBRUARY 27

New cases	9,524
New deaths	241
Total cases	7,040,467
Total deaths	136,631
New hospitalized patients	1,682
Patients in critical condition	4,049
Total recovered patients	6,634,126
Diagnostic tests conducted	47,168,989
Doses of vaccine injected	141,150,412

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FEBRUARY 28, 2022

GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

One who imagines himself to be all-knowing will surely suffer on account of his ignorance.
Imam Ali (AS)

Prayer Times » Noon:12:17 Evening: 18:17 Dawn: 5:11 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 7:35 (tomorrow)

Jalal ad-Din Rumi: philosophy

Part 1

Rumi's teachings, whether in the Masnavi or his other works, focus on "the roots of the roots of the roots of the religion" (osul osul osul al-din, Masnavi).

By "the religion", he means the Islamic tradition, not religion generically; he is saying that his works go to the heart and soul of the Quranic message and do not get mired down in the limitations of theological formalism or juridical nitpicking.

He sees himself as belonging to the line of prophets (anbia) and saints (awlia), whose God-given function is to provide guidance (hedayat) to the human race.

He has a good deal to say about most Islamic teachings, as can be verified by the traditional commentaries on the Masnavi or modern studies like that of Jalal ad-Din Homai (1900-1980).

Despite the extent to which he has been singled out in modern times as a unique exponent of love, much of what he says about love is fairly standard in Sufi works; it is prefigured in poets like Sanai and Farid ad-Din Attar as well as in Persian prose classics like Kashf al-asrar va oddat al-abrar, the great Quran commentary by Abulfazl Meybodi (completed in 1126), or Rawh al-arwaa fi sharh asma al-malek al-fattah, a lengthy explanation of the divine names by Ahmad Sam'ani (d. 1140).

Perhaps the most systematic exposition of his vision of a world infused by love is provided by another prose classic, Mersad al-ebad men al-mabda elal-ma'ad, written by his contemporary Najm ad-Din Razi (d. 1256). No one else, however, combines explicit and detailed teachings on love with such magical poetry.

The gist of what Rumi is trying to convey is expressed by a Quranic verse cited by Shams-e Tabrizi as the crux of prophetic guidance: "Know that 'There is no god but He,' and ask forgiveness for your sin" (Q. 47:19).

The first clause, says Shams, commands people to seek knowledge of tawhid ([belief in] monotheism), and the second tells them to negate their own existence (Shams-e Tabrizi).

People can only do the latter by living tawhid to the fullest or, to put this in Rumi's terms, by loving, which is tawhid's praxis. Rumi makes the connection between love and tawhid especially explicit in lines that describe love as "that flame which, when it blazes up, burns away everything except the Everlasting Beloved."

Comparing the Arabic word la ("no" in the formula of tawhid) to a two-bladed sword (similar to Zolfaqr, the famous sword of Imam Ali [AS]), he then tells us that love "slays everything other than God," not least the self of the swordsman. This is why "The religion and creed of the lovers is nonexistence".

The role of knowledge: In the just-cited saying as well as in many other passages, Shams-e Tabrizi—despite the popular depiction of him as an unlearned rascal, intoxicated by love—insists that knowledge is the foundation of the path to God, and Rumi echoes this position

throughout his works.

Some modern-day scholars would object to this, not least because Rumi can be highly critical of aql, reason or intellect, the tool that acquires knowledge. But he also points out that aql has degrees, analogous to the degrees of light: There is an aql like a glowing coal, another like a spark, another like a candle, another like the blazing sun.

He commonly differentiates between "partial" (jowzi) and "universal" (kolli) intellect. The former is ruled by the ego (nafs), which was created from the same fire as Iblis (Eblis), and the latter is none other than the angelic light through which God created the universe, "born of Mustafa".

Clever merchants as well as erudite scholars—here Rumi likes to poke fun at Avicenna and Fakhr ad-Din Razi—partake of the intellect's husk, but prophets and saints are "mounted on the intellect of intellect." The husk offers a hundred proofs but can never be sure of itself; the kernel dwells in certainty.

Philosophers and Sufis often distinguished between two basic sorts of knowledge, one deriving from the partial intellect and the other from the universal intellect.

They called the two taqlid (imitation) and tahqiq (realization). In the Masnavi, Rumi compares the human self to a house with a courtyard, in the midst of which is a pool, the heart.

Imitative knowledge, which is acquired through upbringing, environment, and study, is like water piped into the courtyard from aoutside; realized knowledge gushes up from the center of the pool.

Piped water turns stale and burdens the soul, but the inner water is in fact the fountain of life, forever fresh. The human task is to seek the water from within. Those who find the water join the ranks of "the folk of the heart" (ahl-e del), the saints who have achieved realization and see everything with the light of the universal intellect.

It is they who are living witness to the hadith qodsi, "Neither My heavens nor My earth embraces Me, but the heart of My believing servant does embrace Me".

This is not to deny that imitative knowledge plays an essential role in human affairs, not least in the specifically religious sciences; there is no other way to learn language, grammar, Quran, hadith, jurisprudence, dogmatics, and so on.

The second testimony of faith, for example, "Muhammad is the messenger of God," depends utterly on taqlid. Rumi's accomplishments in imitative knowledge prepared him for the coming of Shams and the achievement of realization, which is real understanding of the first testimony of faith, "There is no god but God."

This cannot be achieved from catechisms and creeds, only by discovering it in the heart. Thus the Quran speaks of this formula as a universal truth, known to all prophets and pertaining to the original human nature (fetrat).

Source: Encyclopedia Iranica

To be continued

Iranian girl Parmida Azadian finishes first at UNESCO center art competition

TEHRAN – Eleven-year-old Iranian girl Parmida Azadian has won first prize at the International Visual Art Competition 2020 in Troyes, France.

Parmida, a member of the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA – Kanoon), received the prize in the category dedicated to children aged between 10 and 13, the institute announced on Sunday.

Faranak Purali, Ava Kowsari, Mohammadreza Rezai, Milad Sadeqi, Mohammad-Hassan Hasheminejad, Kiandokht Azizi, Rojan Marjani, Parnia Azami, Baran Qaderi-rad, Sarina Rabi Hamedani, Zahra Javaheri and Chida Qorbani, all of whom are the members of Kanoon branch offices across Iran, were awarded diplomas of honor.

The International Visual Arts Competition is open to everyone from 3 to 25 years old.

First prize in the 3-5 category was given to Cheuk Nam Li from China, while Elyn Han from Canada took first place in the 6-9 category.

Nada Gougou from France

A drawing by Iranian girl Parmida Azadian won first prize at the International Visual Art Competition 2020 in Troyes, France.

received the top prize in the 14-17 category and Ling Joo Yee from Malaysia received first prize in the 18-25 category.

The top award in the medio-social category was given to Fiorenza Geretta Musiris from Peru.

The Louis François Center for UNESCO and the World Art Institute of Youth – Centre for UNESCO (Imaj) organize the

competition to promote the practice of art among children and young people around the world in the hope of uniting them through an international activity.

The World Art Institute of Youth – Centre for UNESCO (Imaj) has assigned itself the task of giving children and youth a place in the memory of mankind.

The center archives all participants' artistic creations

inside its artothèque (art library), "Memories of the Future".

All submissions remain the property of the center, which reserves the right to use the creations for all practical purposes within the framework of its activities.

The theme of this year's competition is "The landscape that I love, the nature I must preserve".

Writer's debut novel typed with toes recounts disabled woman's love story

Frome Page 1 ▶ "My story belongs to all women who want to fight for success and a new perspective despite all the difficulties and limitations. They are well-informed about these problems and take their steps forward steadily," she added.

Mohammad-Sharifi, who has also created numerous paintings with her toes, switched to writing almost ten years ago to recover her balance after a period of mental crisis.

"Flying in the Cage", Mohammad-Sharifi says, is an attempt to help others enjoy the taste of love and affection and avoid prejudice.

"People with a strong body do not necessarily think well. The physically challenged have the right to live and others should help them not to hurt them," she noted and added that she

dedicated her book to those mothers having a disabled daughter.

"They [mothers] are suffering so much pain and feeling grief more than others," she said.

She asked the relevant public organizations to help raise people's culture in the treatment of physically challenged people and noted, "Families should know that they can have a healthy life with a disable child and they should not tell the children 'you cannot,' 'it's not possible,' etc."

"In my opinion, a lack of self-confidence is our greatest problem, in addition, we see our problems greater than what they are," lamented Mohammad-Sharifi who has showcased her paintings in several solo exhibits.

A poster shows a copy of the Persian novel "Flying in the Cage" by Fatemeh Mohammad-Sharifi.

Iranian photographers honored at Asahi Shimbun international exhibit

TEHRAN – Four Iranian photographers have been awarded at the 82nd International Photographic Salon in Japan.

The exhibition is organized by the Asahi Shimbun and the All-Japan Association of Photographic Societies. It was launched in 1927 with the participation of photographers from 15 countries outside of Japan.

Ahmad Khatiri received an award for his work "Alone" depicting a boy clad in a military uniform among a number of Iranian servicemen.

"Alone" has previously received the GPU White Ribbon J1 – FIAP blue ribbon J3 at the Vernon-Normandy Photograph Exhibition in France.

The other winner is Ali Kianjam, who was honored for "Circle of Life" showing some farmers who are chasing birds

"Alone" by Iranian photographer Ahmad Khatiri won an award at the 82nd International Photographic Salon in Japan.

away from their field.

"Harmony in Mourning" by Davud Izadpanah also won an award. The photo depicts a large group of Iranian Shia Muslims engaged in the Muharram mourning rituals.

"Colored" by Omidreza Purnabi was also honored. The photo

shows an Iranian artisan working in his workshop.

Winners were chosen by a jury of eight photographers and experts headed by Takeyoshi Tanuma.

Anju, Etsuko Enami, Shintaro Shiratori, Tokihiro Sato, Ezure Yasuharu, Shigeru Ito, Takeo

Kato and Toru Nakata were the members of the jury.

The jury selected "Worship of the Buddha" by Myat Zaw Hein from Myanmar as one of the three top photos of the salon.

"The photo is superb in its composition and coloring, and does an excellent job of conveying the scene's devout atmosphere," the jury said in a statement.

"It depicts a hazy, fantasy-like setting of a boy and a Buddha statue, with another Buddha figure looming faintly between them. The finished work presents a clear vision of the photographer's aims and is imbued with human drama," the statement added.

"My Lockdown Sports" by Paolo Quadrini from Italy and "Under Water" by Dutch photographer Anne-Marie Vermaat were other top winners.

"The Ballad of the Sad Café" sounds at Iranian bookstores

Front cover of the Persian edition of "The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories" by Carson McCullers.

TEHRAN – "The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories" by American novelist Carson McCullers has been published in Persian.

Published by Mahi, the 1951 novel has been rendered into Persian by Amir-Abbas Alizadeh.

It is a classic work that has charmed generations of readers. This collection

assembles McCullers's best stories, including her beloved novella "The Ballad of the Sad Café."

A haunting tale of a human triangle that culminates in an astonishing brawl, the novella introduces readers to Miss Amelia, a formidable southern woman whose café serves as the town's gathering place.

Among other fine works, the collection also includes "Wunderkind", McCullers's first published story written when she was only seventeen about a musical prodigy who suddenly realizes she will not go on to become a great pianist.

"The Ballad of the Sad Café" is a brilliant study of love and longing from one of the South's finest writers.

McCullers was an American who wrote fiction, often described as Southern Gothic that explores the spiritual isolation of misfits and outcasts of the South.

From 1935 to 1937, she divided her time, as her studies and health dictated, between Columbus and New York and in September 1937 she married an ex-soldier and aspiring writer, Reeves McCullers.

They began their married life in Charlotte, North Carolina where Reeves had found some work. There, and in Fayetteville, North Carolina, she wrote her first novel, "The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter", in the Southern Gothic tradition.

"The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter", written at the age of twenty-three, was filmed in 1968 with Alan Arkin in the lead role.

Her "Reflections in a Golden Eye" was directed by John Huston (1967), starring Marlon Brando and Elizabeth Taylor. Some scenes of the film were shot in New York City and on Long Island, where Huston was permitted to use an abandoned Army installation.