

Report



U.S. consumer prices hit new 40-year high

Consumer prices in the United States spiked to a new high in February to 7.9 percent, the biggest monthly jump since 1982, forcing American families trying to pay for basic essentials such as rent, food, and gasoline to suffer even further.

Lower-income households bear the brunt of high inflation as they spend more of their income on food and gasoline. Economists expect the annual CPI rate to peak above eight percent in March or April.

For the majority of Americans, inflation is running far ahead of the pay rises that many have received in the past year. Now the major difference between the cost of living and wage growth has become the biggest political threat to president Biden and congressional Democrats as the midterm elections loom over the horizon.

This is while inflation is poised to accelerate more as the impact of Washington's sanctions on Russian oil, natural gas, and coal following Moscow's military operation in Ukraine drives up the costs of crude oil and other vital commodities.

Economists expect the annual Consumer Price Index (CPI) rate will peak above eight percent in March or April

Prices for fruit and vegetables increased the most since March 2010, while the rise in the cost of dairy and related products was the largest in nearly 11 years. Consumers have also paid more for household goods, motor vehicle insurance as well as clothing, and personal care. Some studies have found that rising gas prices have caused families to delay larger purchases.

The U.S. Labor Department says the broad rise in prices has led to the largest annual increase in inflation in 40 years with the CPI at almost eight percent in February in comparison with the same month last year. ▶ Page 5

Report



Seizure of Iran's oil cargo amid Vienna talks may jeopardize agreement

TEHRAN— In an unconstructive move that could jeopardize a possible revival of the 2015 nuclear deal, the United States has discreetly confiscated the cargo of two oil tankers belonging to Iran.

The U.S. claims that the tankers were suspected of smuggling Iranian oil as part of a sophisticated sanctions-busting plot including faked documentation and repainting a ship's deck to conceal unlawful transfers.

Details of the seizure, which had not previously been publicized, were revealed in a federal civil action unsealed last month after the Greek-managed vessels discharged their lucrative cargo, valued up to \$38 million, at the behest of U.S. law enforcement in Houston and the Bahamas.

The seizure came as the Biden cabinet works to resurrect the nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran. The revival of the deal is intended to lift illegal sanctions imposed against Iran in violation of UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

This task has been made more important by Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine and the U.S. plan to retaliate by prohibiting all Russian oil imports, which may remove more than 10 million barrels of oil per day from the market.

Iran, which pumped an average of 2.4 million barrels per day in 2021 but has been able to sell less than half of what it produces due to sanctions, might make up some of that lost supply.

The foes of Iran caution that, even as Ukraine challenges geopolitical calculations and the United States shifts its focus to Russia, the Biden administration should not ease pressure on the sanction-hit country.

"This seizure exemplifies why the U.S. should not ease sanctions," said Claire Jungman, chief of staff of the New York-based group United Against Nuclear Iran (UANI), which carefully monitors Iran's crude imports. ▶ Page 2

Iran Will Move Ahead with Its Defense, Regional Policies

▶ Page 3



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Iranian transport minister visits Baku to pursue expansion of ties

TEHRAN – Iranian Transport and Urban Development Minister Rostam Qasemi traveled to Azerbaijan on top of a high-ranking delegation on Thursday to attend the two countries' 15th Joint Economic Committee meeting.

As reported by the portal of the ministry, Qasemi who is the co-chairman of Iran-Azerbaijan Joint Economic Committee, met with Azeri President Ilham Aliyev on Friday.

Negotiations on increasing transport co-

operation as well as the volume of trade between the two countries are among the major goals of the Iranian delegation's visit to the neighboring country.

Improving cooperation between Iran and Azerbaijan in the field of road transport and the resumption of the Nakhchivan-Mashhad passenger train will also be among the subjects pursued by the Iranian minister.

During this trip, Qasemi will also discuss the resumption of flights of Iranian airlines to

Azerbaijan and increase the number of flights with his Azerbaijani counterpart.

The two sides will also discuss reducing or eliminating the tolls paid by the Iranian fleet when entering Azerbaijan territory.

Following up on the implementation of the Astarachay bridge project, completion of the Astara railway terminal and the Rasht-Astara railway project are also among the topics that will be discussed at the two countries' Joint Economic Committee meeting. ▶ Page 4

Revival of Miankaleh wetland on agenda

TEHRAN – The restoration of Miankaleh wetland has been put on the main agenda of the government by the order of President Ebrahim Raisi, IRNA reported.

Raisi paid a visit to the international wetland in Mazandaran province on Friday, when ordered that the operational work required to rehabilitate and protect the Miankaleh wetland be given priority.

He emphasized the importance of both pumping water and running a 20-kilometer canal to release water in the wetland. The provision of equipment and infrastructure for firefighting in Miankaleh was also stressed by the President.

A treasure under threat

The long and narrow peninsula is 48 kilometers long, and between 1.3 and 3.2 kilometers wide, which sets apart the Gorgan Bay from the Caspian Sea. Four villages namely Ashuradeh, Qezel-e Shomali, Qezel-Mehdi, and Qavasatl are situated on the peninsula.

Miankaleh was designated a Ramsar site in 1975. Major habitats ▶ Page 7

Western Iranian provinces claim bigger share of tourist flow

TEHRAN – Despite having vibrant natural landscapes, countless historical sites, and above all, hospitable people, western Iranian provinces are still somehow lesser-known compared to other parts of the ancient land.

"[Many] domestic tourists have not heard the names of various cities in western Iran... In fact, [when it comes to tourism] those destinations have not been introduced or advertised properly," the deputy tourism minister Ali-Asghar Shalbafian said on Thursday.

To diversify tourist destinations and take advantage of its capabilities, our goal is to define new tourism routes with an accentuation on western Iranian provinces, the official explained.

"In recent months, one of the priorities of the ministry has been tourism development in the west of the country," the official said.

He made the remarks addressing an online conference on tourism and development organized by Kordestan University in western Iran.

"While the western axis of the country has unique natural and historical potentials, it is also important in terms of access to shopping markets."

According to organizers, the conference was aimed to examine the barriers and problems of tourism development and to propose novel solutions to attract domestic and foreign investment. Moreover, attendees exchanged views on the role of proper tourism infrastructure to achieve sustainable development. ▶ Page 6

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Interview



Successive U.S. administrations have used Ukrainian membership in NATO as leverage: professor

By Mohammad Mazhari

TEHRAN – An associate professor at UMass Boston believes that the U.S. administration won't reject the option of a Ukrainian membership in NATO as a leverage against Russia.

"I do, however, believe that successive U.S. administrations have kept the option of Ukrainian membership in NATO open as leverage to try to restrain Putin if need be," Darren Kew tells the Tehran Times.

However, Kew, the executive director of the Center for Peace, Democracy, and Development at McCormack Graduate School, is of the opinion that "both Democrats and Republicans understood that admitting Ukraine into NATO would be extremely provocative to Russia and that neither would likely have gone that far."

After Russia launched its military operation in Ukraine, some pundits blame America for provoking Moscow by encouraging Kyiv to join NATO instead of keeping Ukraine far from Russia-NATO competition. ▶ Page 5

Iran beat Uzbekistan at CAFA U18 Women's C'ship

TEHRAN – Iran football team defeated Uzbekistan 1-0 at the CAFA U18 Women's Championship on Friday.

Negin Zandi scored the only goal of the match in the 38th minute.

Uzbekistan were reduced to 10 in the 68th minute and went down to nine 10 minutes later.

Four Central Asian teams take their first preparatory steps on the road to the 2024 AFC U20 Women's Asian Cup as Tajikistan plays host.

The tournament has brought Tajikistan, Iran, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyz Republic in the round-robin event, which will give young prospects the chance to shine on the regional stage.

"First, I would like to congratulate all Iranian people for this win. I think we could have scored four goals since Uzbekistan were reduced to nine players in the last minutes of the match," Iran coach Maryam Azmoun said in the post-match news conference.

This tournament feature players from the age group that will compete in the opening qualification stage of AFC U20 Women's Asian Cup, which is scheduled to be held in March 2023.

All six matches will be held at Central Republican Stadium, where the action will conclude on Tuesday.

Iran criticizes Western countries for granting immunity to MKO



TEHRAN- Iran's top human rights chief has blasted the Western countries for "granting immunity" to the terrorist anti-Iran Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO) despite the group's lengthy history of murder and atrocities against the Iranian people.

Kazem Gharibabadi, secretary of Iran's High Council for Human Rights, wrote a letter to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres on Tuesday slamming Western nations for providing impunity to the terrorist group.

He also sent letters to the UN high commissioner for human rights, and the UN Human Rights Council, as well as the presidents of the European Council, Commission, and European Parliament in this regard.

Gharibabadi said that the group is responsible for the majority of the assassinations that have targeted the Iranian people since the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

"In order to introduce the MKO, it suffices to say that their top priority and the main basis of performance [relies on] assassination and murdering the individuals, who do not adhere to the same ideas as they [themselves]," the letter read.

The MKO has a long history of killings and bombings against Iran's government and people. The notorious group took

sides with the former Iraqi despot Saddam Hussein during his war against Iran in the 1980s-.

Since the Islamic Revolution's victory in 1979, approximately 12,000 out of almost 17,000 Iranians have lost their lives in terrorist attacks who have fallen victim to the MKO's acts of terror.

Western countries, led by the United States, have, on the other hand, removed the organization off their terror blacklists.

Every year, the organization hosts opulent conferences in Paris, with some American, Western, and Saudi Arabian figures serving as honorary guests. Former U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton, former U.S. President Donald Trump's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani, former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, and former Saudi spy chief Turki al-Faisal are among those who have spoken in favor of the cultish-terrorist group in annual meetings.

Gharibabadi chastised certain European leaders for providing safe havens for the organization, allowing it to establish offices and even letting its members attend government and parliament sessions.

The support, he regretted, has emboldened "the murderous and dangerous organization's ringleaders to [even] introduce themselves as human rights supporters."

"This dual perspective of the issue of human rights" and support for a group, which has the blood of thousands of Iranians on its hands "is not acceptable under any circumstances," the letter said.

Finally, it encouraged the United Nations and the European Union to prohibit the MKO's members from freely moving between European countries and internationally, and to hold them accountable for their atrocities.

It is indispensable to get guarantees from the West: MP

TEHRAN- The representative of the people of Tehran in the parliament has stressed that there will be no deal until all sanctions against the Iranian nation are removed.

Speaking to Mehr regarding the Vienna talks, Esmail Kosari said the Americans violated the terms of the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and failed to fulfill any of their obligations in violation of international law.

He said that the U.S. officials showed they are not even loyal to their own signatures and failed to hold out their own promises by withdrawing from the internationally agreed accord. If they wanted to get back on track, the MP suggested, they should make concessions to Iran and fully fulfill their obligations under the agreement.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran fulfilled all its promises and commitments, but the Western side, by its non-compliance, set the scene for Iran not to enjoy the JCPOA-related benefits," the parliamentarian added.

Kosari went on to say that Iran and its people have stood well against the Westerners, especially the United States, over the years and have shown that they can solve many of their problems through resistance.

"On the flip side, we have shown Westerners that they should respect and abide by their agreement as well as commitments," MP said, adding



"consequently, obtaining guarantees and verifying the lifting of sanctions is important because the Western states party to the JCPOA did not fulfill their obligations."

The Majlis representative also pointed out that there is a perception among Iran's enemies that the country has suffered many economic woes due to the sanctions imposed by countries like the United States. On the contrary, he said, Iran has overcome many problems by relying on the internal strength to nullify the repercussions of sanctions.

Iran will not allow any sanctions to hinder its progress and prosperity, he remarked.

Kosari underscored that the Western countries, including the United States, seek to strike a deal more than the Islamic Republic.

He added Tehran's message is clear: "No agreement will be reached until all the sanctions of the Islamic Republic of Iran are lifted in a verifiable way."

From page 1 ▶ "We must continue to fight to ensure that earnings from the sale of Iranian oil are not used to fund terrorism and other actions that endanger the safety and security of all Americans," she added.

In a long and full of baseless allegations, the Associated Press, which first reported the seizure said, "The long journey that led to the U.S. seizure began in the fall of 2020, when the M/T Stark I, an Iranian-owned vessel subject to U.S. sanctions since 2018, repainted its deck in an apparent attempt to conceal the vessel and evade identification by satellite photography. On October 31, 2020, it arrived at a port in Iran's Khark Island and loaded full of oil."

"On Nov. 3, 2020, 733,876 barrels of oil were transported at sea to a different ship, the M/T Arina. Both ships turned off their transponders — a mandated safety equipment on all large ships — during the perilous ship-to-ship transfer to avoid being picked up on ship tracking databases, satellite pictures, and data given by Jungman claim," it added.

The media seem to have forgotten that the U.S. has a long history of looting Iranian oil.

According to the leaked documents, Donald Trump ordered the seizure of oil tankers carrying Iranian oil off the coast of the United Arab Emirates.

The U.S. also sold the two million barrels of the stolen oil despite the fact that Iran was cash-strapped resulting from Washington's heavy illegal sanctions.

Of course, this is not a first for the big looters. On July 2, 2020, a seizure order for the cargo from four vessels was issued by U.S. District Court Judge Jeb Boasberg of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. The statement said, "The government announced today that it has successfully executed the seizure order and confiscated the cargo from all four vessels, totaling approximately 1.116 million barrels of petroleum. With the assistance of foreign partners, this seized

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property is now in U.S. custody."

The United States has stolen \$110 million, put it into a bank account and freezing Iran's access to it.

Both Iran and Venezuela were and continue to be in need of cash and raw materials to sustain their economies and remain afloat during the devastating COVID-19 outbreaks, which is why Iran dispatched five ships packed with oil to Venezuela in May of last year, bravely breaking past a U.S. blockade. This particular instance demonstrated how critical these trade networks are, which the U.S. considers "clandestine" but are, in fact, conventional trading contacts between sovereign states.

Iran's then Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif referred to the seizure of Iranian oil tankers as "piracy," tweeting, "In 'black is white' world, UN deprived Iran of its voting rights in the #UNGA as we're in arrears. Not considered: US #EconomicTerrorism prevents Iran paying for FOOD, let alone UN dues

My letter to @antonioguterres: ps: UN can also collect from \$110M US stole in recent piracy."

However, the AP continues its

unfounded claims against Iran, reporting, "Despite U.S. sanctions, Iran has received a monetary bonanza as oil prices have climbed in the last year. Hundreds of privately owned, foreign-flagged tankers — termed a 'ghost armada' by Jungman's group — play a key role in the smuggling operation, employing a range of sophisticated ways to conceal their movements.

Even U.S.-owned tankers, such as one controlled by a unit of private equity behemoth Oaktree Capital Management, have been linked to the brisk black market activity. Ship tracking technology has aided efforts to uncover sanctions-evading activity by Iran and Venezuela, whose oil industry is also subject to U.S. export restrictions. Seizing oil supplies, on the other hand, is unusual: prior to this latest operation, it had only happened twice!"

It even went on to claim that "proceeds from the sale of forfeited cargoes are used to recompense American terrorist victims!"

There is a big question why should the revenue from Iran's looted oil go to U.S. "terrorist victims". Has the U.S. forgotten

that Iran was and remains the biggest force against terrorism in West Asia?

Iran regained the authority to sell oil openly on the international market following the 2015 nuclear deal. However, in 2018, then-President Donald Trump unilaterally exited the agreement and re-imposed American sanctions. This effectively shut down much of Iran's lucrative oil trade, which is a major source of revenue for the country.

However, in recent months, Iranian officials have said that they have been able to sell crude oil despite American sanctions. According to the state-run Iran daily, the Central Bank of Iran provided numbers at the beginning of February indicating that it made \$18.6 billion in oil sales in the first half of current Persian year (March 2021-March 2022), up from \$8.5 billion in the same period previous year.

In the midst of difficult negotiations to make up for Trump's idiocy, the Biden administration's unconstructive move has raised doubts about the United States' goodwill in the talks.

Seyyed Mohammad Marandi, a media advisor to the Iranian negotiating team in Vienna tweeted on Thursday, "Is this US goodwill? Is this how they want to conclude a deal?"

According to the media advisor, the hijacking of two Iranian oil cargo ships as well as U.S. "intransigence regarding the removal of maximum pressure sanctions and 'terrorist' designations for the armed forces is because Biden is weak and vulnerable."

"Other issues have solutions," he added on Twitter.

"U.S. piracy and the confiscation of 2 ships with Iranian oil cargo, remaining 'terrorist' designations, new U.S. demands as well as the U.S. failure to remove more companies, businesses and individuals from the 'maximum pressure' sanctions regime are key problems that must be resolved," he continued on Twitter.

MP says IAEA must come to Iran when it faces ambiguity

TEHRAN — Abolfazl Amouei, a member of the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of the parliament, has noted that Iran has repeatedly warned the IAEA to maintain its professional approach and "not be influenced by the Zionists' claims."

Rafael Grossi, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), visited Tehran on March 5. On the same day the IAEA and Iran issued a joint statement to resolve questions raised by the UN nuclear watchdog within the NPT safeguards agreement.

"The roadmap for resolving the remaining issues was the safeguards agreement between Iran and the Agency. The fact is that Iran has repeatedly warned the Agency to maintain its professional approach and not to be influenced by the Zionists' claims," Abolfazl Amouei said in an interview with Mehr.

Amouei added that Iran has always emphasized that if there are any ambiguities for the IAEA, it should resolve them through

technical talks with the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI).

"We spoke about our concerns with Mr. Grossi and stressed the need for bilateral technical talks. Iran wants a solution to this problem," said Amouei, a former diplomat.

The legislator emphasized Iran has accepted a roadmap according to which it will provide explanations about the ambiguities of the IAEA.

"Naturally, these explanations should lead to the termination of Iran's case in the Agency," he asserted.

Amouei added that the parliament's demand is that, firstly, the framework of Iran's nuclear program and its confidentiality be maintained by the UN nuclear body. Secondly, he said, the IAEA must take a non-political approach to resolving these issues and pursue current issues in a fully professional manner.

He stated, "One of the challenges we have in our relations with the Agency is that

sometimes we face destructive moves from the Zionists. So much so that this disruption undermines cooperation between Iran and the Agency. Our expectation is that, thanks to Grossi's visit to Tehran, he will make good progress in resolving such issues."

The parliamentarian stressed that the formation of a lasting solution to the safeguard issues would certainly help an agreement between Iran and the P4+1 nations.

However, he said, without such an agreement and without the termination of the safeguards case, any agreement with the 4+1 group will not be stable.

"However, we believe that the sustainability of the agreement is a fundamental principle," he noted.

"If the Agency takes a professional approach, we hope that this case will end quickly and that our country's nuclear achievements will be preserved," Amouei concluded.

Iran rejects Arab League statement as 'vicious allegations'

TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh has described as "absurd" anti-Iran allegations by Arab League foreign ministers and the so-called Arab Quartet Committee.

Khatibzadeh expressed deep regret that a "vicious cycle of anti-Iran allegations" is continuing, saying such "futile" actions are contrary to their moves to interact and engage in regional diplomacy with the Islamic Republic.

He dismissed the "repeated and unfounded" allegations of Iranian interference in the internal affairs of other countries brought by states that "have a long history of creating tensions and warmongering"

especially in Yemen and other parts of West Asia and North Africa.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman also described such "hackneyed statements" as an obstacle in the way of growing ties between Iran and its neighbors, and once again stated Iran's longstanding stance that misunderstandings among neighbors must be cleared through diplomatic channels. He invited the neighboring countries to dialog.

Khatibzadeh also dismissed the territorial claims over three southern Iranian islands in the Arab League's statement, saying Iran has always acted in the framework of its sovereignty

and territorial integrity and that Tehran condemns any foreign interference in this regard.

Khatibzadeh called the preservation of nuclear achievements and defense capabilities of Iran among the strategic policies and stressed that such statements will never impact the development of Iran's nuclear energy program.

The Quartet Committee, comprised of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt, claimed in a statement issued in Cairo on Wednesday that Iran continued to interfere in the internal affairs of Arab countries and play a role in sowing sectarianism among them by supporting and arming terrorist groups.

It further stated that the Islamic Republic endangers Arab states' security and stymies regional and international attempts to address issues and crises in the area peacefully.

The ministerial committee then denounced what it claimed Iranian officials' visits to and statements about the islands of Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa.

This is despite the fact that the three islands have always been historically part of Iran, as evidenced by innumerable historical, legal, and geographical documents in Iran and other areas of the world. The UAE, on the other hand, has frequently asserted illegitimate claims to the islands.

Iran will move ahead with its defense, regional policies

TEHRAN – In his important speech on Thursday, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Khamenei reflected on the importance of pressing ahead with Iran's current regional and defense policies.

The Leader made it crystal clear that with or without a deal in Vienna, Iran will move ahead with its plans to increase defensive strength and regional influence. The Leader put Iran's defense and regional policies in the broader context of building national strength, saying that strong security cannot be achieved through relying on foreigners.

The Leader made the remarks in a meeting with the members of the Assembly of Experts. In the meeting, he described the intertwined combination of factors involved in national strength and stated that attending to the people's problems in livelihood is important.

In addressing the requirements of building national strength, the Leader put emphasis on the need to rely on internal resources. "National strength is vital for every country. If any nation wishes to achieve independence and greatness, the ability to use its own vital resources at its own volition and resistance in the face of others' [illegitimate] demands, it should



be strong. Otherwise, if it is weak, humiliated and intimidated, it will always have to worry about the transgressions of foreign powers," the Leader said.

Ayatollah Khamenei also pointed to some notions that were propagated by some analysts in the past. One such notion is that maybe it's better for Iran to abandon its regional policies so that the enemies won't have any excuse to put pressure on the country.

The Leader, however, said this notion is wrong. Ayatollah Khamenei stressed that proposals such as abandoning regional involvement in order to avoid giving the enemy an excuse and stopping scientific progress in the nuclear sciences are

actually blows to national strength.

"Regional involvement gives us strategic depth and more national strength. Why should we stop this approach? Progress in the nuclear sciences too is related to meeting the needs of the country in the near future. If we abandon these, toward whom should we stretch out our hand in a few years?" he said, according to a readout published by the Khamenei.ir.

Stating that giving in to the U.S. or any other power in order to remain immune from their sanctions is a grave mistake and a blow to the country's political strength, the Leader further said, "There is no idea more naive and simple-minded than the

proposal to decrease our defensive strength so that the enemy won't become sensitive."

In this regard, he stressed, "Over the years, some of these feeble, unfounded proposals have been put forward, all of which were unfitting and indeed they were rejected. If the people who had wanted to cut some of the arms of national strength had been given permission to go ahead, Iran would be facing grave dangers today. However, by God's favor and grace, the possibility of implementing those proposals was never explored."

The remarks came at a time when Iran and world powers in Vienna are hammering out a deal that would put some restrictions on Iran's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief. During the talks, the Western negotiators pushed for broader negotiations to address issues related to Iran's missile program and its influence in the West Asia region. But Iran roundly rejected widening the scope of negotiations and insisted the talks should be restricted to nuclear issues. The Leader's remarks were another indication that Iran will by no means negotiate over issues it considers as pillars of its national strength.

Iran FM, EU foreign policy chief discuss Vienna talks

TEHRAN – Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian and EU foreign policy chief and senior coordinator of the Vienna talks Josep Borrell have held talks over the latest results and the trend of the Vienna talks to remove anti-Iran sanctions as well as some other international issues of mutual interest including the Ukraine crisis.

In the phone call, Borrell said the negotiations are at a critical juncture and now the U.S. and Iran must show more flexibility in their message exchanges and must try to overcome the time limit, according to the Iranian Foreign Ministry.

Borrell said that economic guarantees are important for Iran and the EU supports this, adding, "You and we will continue our efforts to reach a deal because we have come a long way. You Iranians are tough and highly capable negotiators." The Iranian foreign minister, for his part, thanked the EU foreign policy chief for his efforts and the progress made so far. Amir Abdollahian said, "If all sides behave realistically, we are still close to reaching a good and robust deal."

The foreign minister of Iran underlined that the making of new demands by the U.S. has no logical justification and this is at odds with the country's stance on swiftly reaching an agreement.

Amir Abdollahian added that the main issues and sanctions removal must not be affected by

the excessive demands on the part of the U.S.

The top Iranian diplomat also said the U.S. cannot convey a new and different message to the Iranian negotiating team through the coordinator under the pretext of being under the pressure of the American public opinion. "If the U.S. faces a problem in terms of public opinion, I should say that we also face the problem of public opinion in Iran [and] they are monitoring the developments very closely and carefully and seek answers from the government and demand it get the sanctions lifted and preserve a highly peaceful nuclear energy."

Amir Abdollahian also underscored that the issues related to Iran's national heroes are non-negotiable.

Elsewhere in his comments, the Iranian foreign minister outlined the principled position of the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding the Ukraine crisis. He emphasized, "We believe, while considering the UN Charter, that the root-cause of this crisis must be addressed so that lasting stability and security are established in the region through halting the war and focusing on political solutions."

The Iranian foreign minister described his conversation with the EU foreign policy chief as "productive."

"Had a productive conversation w @ JosepBorrellF today. Efforts to reach a good & durable agreement continue; it is within

reach if US acts realistically & consistently. No single party can determine end result; a joint endeavor is needed. Reason should prevail," he said on Twitter.

The talks in Vienna over reviving Iran's nuclear deal have been approaching their end after months of painstaking negotiations. Only a few issues remain unresolved which requires political decisions on the part of the United States. Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, said the United States is not interested in making a strong deal.

"US approach to Iran's principled demands, coupled with its unreasonable offers and unjustified pressure to hastily reach an agreement, show that US isn't interested in a strong deal that would satisfy both parties. Absent US political decision, the talks get knottier by the hour," the top security official said on Twitter.

A group of Iranian lawmakers has urged Iranian negotiators in Vienna to secure demands that the United States won't quit the 2015 nuclear deal again in case it is revived.

The lawmakers urged the negotiating team in the talks with the P4+1 group of countries in Vienna to protect the fundamental elements of the country's nuclear program as the "strongest guarantee" that the United States will never repeat the violation of its obligations as per the landmark 2015 Iran deal, Press TV reported.

Ayatollah Raisi expressed hope that the two countries would see a new stage in relations, taking advantage of past experiences and in the light of mutual will and efforts.

relations between the two countries over the past three decades as a strong and reliable basis for expanding and promoting comprehensive relations between the two countries, according to the website of the Iranian presidency.

Iran calls for full, non-discriminatory implementation of Chemical Weapons Convention

TEHRAN – Majid Takht Ravanchi, Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations has called to the full implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Addressing a United Nations Security Council meeting on Syria on Thursday, the Iranian diplomat said, "The politicization of the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the use of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons for political purposes have major negative consequences for the authority and validity of the Convention and the organization," according to Fars News.

In this meeting, he called for the full, effective and non-discriminatory implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, as well as the preservation of the authority and competence of the organization.

Referring to the implementation of Syria's obligations, Takht Ravanchi said, "Syria is fulfilling its obligations under the Convention and will continue to cooperate with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and it has submitted its 98th report on the destruction of chemical weapons on its soil on January 17, 2022. In addition, Syria has regularly provided information to the Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the UN Secretariat on the possession and use of chemical weapons by some terrorist organizations."

Earlier in late February, Zahra Ershadi, Deputy

Permanent Representative of Iran to the United Nations, issued a similar statement on the situation in Syria. "As a major victim of the most systematic use of chemical weapons, Iran once again expresses its strong opposition to the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, and under any circumstances. We reiterate our call for the full, effective, and non-discriminatory implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the upholding of the OPCW's authority, and we stand ready to actively and constructively contribute to that end," Ershadi said in her statement to the UN Security Council.

She added, "We repeat, however, our concern about the serious effects of politicizing the Convention's implementation on its authority and credibility."

The Organization must not be used to accomplish politically motivated national objectives. In the last couple of years, Syria has been experiencing such attempts by some State Parties. We welcome Syria's ongoing cooperation with the OPCW, including the filing of its 98th report on January 17, 2022 relating to the destruction of chemical weapons and associated production facilities on its territory. Furthermore, during the last year, letters were exchanged between Syria's Foreign Minister and the Organization's Director-General in the context of the issues developed through the years of collaborative work."

Ershadi noted, "The information provided by Syria to both the Technical Secretariat of the Organization

for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the General Secretariat of the United Nations about the possession and use of chemical materials by terrorist organizations as well as the fabrication of chemical incidents to accuse the Syrian Army need to be taken up by the Council. It is equally important to note that the meetings of the Security Council on the chemical file should not be dedicated to the repetition of positions of member states and the discussions of unfounded allegations while the Syrian government has made substantial progress in fulfilling its obligations under the Convention. Therefore, it is wise for the Council to revisit the decision to maintain monthly meetings to discuss the Syrian chemical file. Such meetings undermine the Convention's authority and the OPCW's reputation, rather than achieving the Convention's purposes."

She concluded, "Only thorough destruction and elimination of all chemical weapons globally, and the implementation of all essential measures to ensure that such weapons are not created, one can be certain that chemical weapons will not be used again. This objective has yet to be realized because the U.S., as the only remaining possessor State Party, is not complying with its obligations regarding the final extended deadline for the destruction of chemical weapons. Another stumbling block is the Convention's lack of universality. To achieve this great goal, the Israeli regime must be compelled to join the Convention immediately and without conditions."

IRAN IN FOCUS

MARCH 12, 2022

Straight Truth
TEHRAN TIMES

3

SPORTS

Iran edge Singapore at 2022 Men's AHF Cup

TEHRAN – Iran national hockey team defeated Singapore 2-1 in their opening match of the 2022 Men's AHF Cup.

Iran will play Oman on Saturday in Group B.

Bangladesh and Indonesia are also in the group.

Group A consists of Kazakhstan, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Uzbekistan.

The 2022 Men's AHF Cup is the sixth edition of the Men's AHF Cup, the quadrennial qualification tournament for the Men's Hockey Asia Cup organized by the Asian Hockey Federation.

It is being held at the GBK Hockey Field in Jakarta, Indonesia from March 11 to 20.

The top three teams qualify for the 2022 Men's Hockey Asia Cup.

Ibai Gomez joins Iran's Foolad

TEHRAN – Ex-Athletic Bilbao winger Ibai Gomez joined Iranian football club Foolad.

The 32-year-old player has joined Foolad for an undisclosed fee.

Gomez started his playing career in Santutxu in 2008 and has also played for Sestao and Alaves.

He has joined Foolad to help the team in the 2022 AFC Champions League.

"I am ready for the Asian Champions League, a new and surely a great experience. After months of training on my own, the opportunity has come. I needed a project that would motivate me and it has arrived", Gomez said.

Foolad are in Group C along with 2015 finalists Shabab Al Ahli Dubai, Qatar's Al Gharafa and Ahl FC of Turkmenistan – the first ever Turkmen representative in the AFC Champions League Group Stage –.

The competition will be held in Jeddah.

Iran to host first-ever International Rugby Tournament

TEHRAN – Iran was chosen as the host of the Asia Rugby Men's Division 3 West Championship.

Under the new leadership of Iran Rugby Association, the tournament will take place in the capital city Tehran from May 9 to 14.

Qatar are the Division 3 West reigning champions as they won the 2019 event by beating Lebanon 13-10 in the final at the Aspire Rugby Stadium in Doha.

Qatar put an end to Lebanon's success in the tournament who had won the previous two titles in 2017 and 2018, asiarrugby.com reported.

Puskás Akadémia complete signing of Iran's Zahedi

TEHRAN – Puskás Akadémia of Hungary have completed the signing of Iranian forward Shahab Zahedi.

Zahedi parted company with Ukraine's Zorya after soccer's governing body announced that foreign players and coaches contracted by Ukrainian teams can suspend their contracts and move elsewhere –at least temporarily.

Zahedi had been previously linked with a move to Persepolis but he opted to join the Hungarian team.

The 26-year-old forward has joined Puskás until the end of the season.

Puskás Akadémia FC are second in the Nemzeti Bajnokság, also known as NB I.

Iran defeat India at 2022 Asian Women's Junior Handball

TEHRAN – Iran beat India 42-37 in the 2022 Asian Women's Junior Handball Championship on Thursday.

Iran, who had lost to Kazakhstan 30-24 in their opening match, will play Thailand on Saturday. The Championship is the 16th edition of the championship scheduled to be held from Mar. 7 to 14 in Almaty, Kazakhstan under the aegis of Asian Handball Federation.

Kazakhstan, Iran, Uzbekistan, India and Thailand compete in the edition.

It's the fifth time in history that the championship is be organized by the Kazakhstan Handball Federation.

It also acts as the qualification tournament for the 2022 Women's Junior World Handball Championship, with top two teams from the championship directly qualifying for the event to be held in Slovenia.

Previously, the championship was supposed to be held in Uzbekistan, but in December 2021, AHF decided to move the event to Kazakhstan due to unavoidable circumstances.

Qatar gears up for Final Draw for FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 on April 1

TEHRAN – Football fans everywhere are eagerly awaiting the Final Draw for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, which will take place in Doha on April 1.

The draw ceremony will be held in the presence of 2,000 special guests at Doha Exhibition and Convention Center. After the event, the world's best international teams will be able to plot their routes to the FIFA World Cup Final, which will take place at the 80,000-capacity Lusail Stadium on December 18.

Fans are already planning their trips to Qatar, which will host the most compact version of the FIFA World Cup™ in modern history. All eight stadiums are within an hour of central Doha – meaning fans, players and officials will always be in the thick of the action during the 28-day tournament, which kicks off at Al Bayt Stadium on November 21. And uniquely in the modern era, fans will have the chance to attend more than one match a day at the beginning of the tournament, the-afc.com wrote.

Fans applied for more than 17 million tickets during the initial random draw selection, with many supporters already securing their seats during the current payment phase, which finishes on March 21 at 1 PM Doha time.

Iranian GM Maghsoodloo beats world rapid chess champion

TEHRAN – Parham Maghsoodloo, Iranian grandmaster chess player, defeated the world champion in Belgrade rapid chess competitions.

A world junior chess champion, Maghsoodloo defeated world rapid chess champion Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan in the fourth day of the FIDE World Chess Grand Prix Series in Belgrade, Serbia.

Abdusattorov appeared as the new rapid chess genius in late 2021 when he became a champion in world rapid chess competitions.

Maghsoodloo won 2.5 scores by winning the game.

The Belgrade 2022 GM tournament continues until March 14. Ten strong players from different countries have taken part in the games.

Iran's Maghsoodloo is the only super grandmaster in the tournament with a rating of 2701.

Iran targets 12.7% industrial growth for next fiscal year



TEHRAN – Iranian Industry, Mining, and Trade Minister Reza Fatemi-Amin said his ministry has targeted a 12.7 percent growth for the country's industrial sector for the next Iranian calendar year (begins on March 21), the ministry's news portal Shata reported.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony of 100 revived idle industrial units on Thursday, Fatemi-Amin mentioned the government's plan for an eight-percent economic growth in the next fiscal year, saying: "Realizing this goal requires a 12.7 percent growth in the industry sector."

"In the mining sector we must achieve a growth of 10 percent and in the field of agriculture, a growth of nine percent must be realized," he added.

The industry minister stated that if the eight-percent growth targeted for the next calendar year is achieved, the country will return to the pre-sanctions production levels, adding: "So, the existing capacities are enough to return the levels of production for two years ago, and we only need to activate these capacities."

Fatemi-Amin pointed to the revival of

idle and semi-active industrial units and the completion of semi-finished projects as a step towards the realization of these capacities, and said: "If we want to reach the mentioned eight-percent growth and even improve it, we must move towards promoting investment [in the country]."

Referring to the unveiling of 48 major investment projects this year he said: "The positive impacts of these investment projects and the projects that will be inaugurated next year will be tangible in [the Iranian calendar year] 1402 (starts in March 2023)."

He also mentioned some of his ministry's programs for supporting domestic production in the coming years and said: "We have started a chain financing plan in collaboration with the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, which will increase the efficiency of available resources [for the productive sectors] by more than 30 percent."

Back in January, CBI and the Industry, Mining, and Trade Ministry signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with seven acting banks to collaborate on implementing the supply chain financing plan.

The MOU was signed on January 1, in a ceremony attended by Fatemi Amin, CBI Governor Ali Saleh-Abadi, and Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Ehsan Khandouzi.

Later, on March 7, the industry ministry signed another MOU with five other acting banks to collaborate on implementing the chain financing plan to provide facilities to production units across the country.

Iranian transport minister visits Baku to pursue expansion of ties

From page 1 ► Iran and the neighbor Azerbaijan signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for cooperation in constructing a bridge over the Astarachay border river in late January.

During the 15th Joint Economic Committee meeting, officials from the two countries will also discuss the development of mutual cooperation in the field of maritime transportation in

the Caspian Sea including the establishment of Ro-Ro shipping lines, shipbuilding, vessel repair as well as the establishment of joint container shipping lines.

Upon arrival to Baku on Thursday, Qasemi told the press that several rounds of talks will be held and some new MOUs, as well as, a final document will be signed at the end of the joint committee meeting.

Azerbaijan's president had



Transport Minister Rostam Qasemi (1st L) holds talks with Azeri President Ilham Aliyev (1st R) in Baku on Friday.

previously called on Iranian companies to have active participation in the development and reconstruction of the country's Karabakh region which has been recently liberated.

Speaking in a virtual meeting with Qasemi on January 25, Aliyev described his meeting with the Iranian president in Ashgabat as a turning point in the brotherly and friendly relations of the two countries.

Qasemi, for his part, said that Iran enjoys good experiences in the reconstruction of different countries in the region, and this cooperation will contribute to the sustainable development and security of the region.

The Iranian minister had also traveled to Azerbaijan on top of a delegation earlier that month to visit the country's economic areas and explore avenues of mutual cooperation.

Domestic company to build 113,000-ton oil tanker for NITC



TEHRAN – National Iranian Tanker Company (NITC) has awarded the project for building a 113,000-ton oil tanker to a high-level domestic company, the company's managing director announced.

According to Hossein Shiva, NITC has awarded the construction of the mentioned vessel to Iran Shipbuilding and Offshore Industries Complex (ISOICO) and the official deal on this due will be signed soon, NITC Public Relations and International Affairs Department reported.

Shiva said his company has awarded the

mentioned project to a domestic firm in line with the emphasis of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Seyed Ali Khamenei and the realization of the current year's motto which is "Production: Support and the Elimination of Obstacles".

"At the request of the National Iranian Tanker Company, the vessel will be the first domestically built dual-fuel oil tanker to run on liquefied natural gas (LNG) and low-sulfur Mazut," he explained.

The Aframax tanker, which is environment friendly and will be designed and built according to the latest standards of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), will also be in full compliance with phase three of the Energy Efficiency Design Index (EEDI), according to the NITC head.

Shiva stated that the construction of this tanker inside the country is going to create job opportunities for several thousand people and will lead to the development of the country's shipbuilding and other related industries.

He also mentioned his company's

determination for conducting the overhaul operations of the company's fleet inside the country and specified: "So far, the repairs of 24 tankers and submarines have been entrusted to domestic companies, which is aimed at supporting domestic industries and creating jobs in the country."

The official further noted that NITC is also supplying the necessary materials for the mentioned projects including paints, oils, and chemical products from domestic sectors, which has also saved the country a significant amount of money.

The performance of National Iranian Tanker Company and round-the-clock efforts of the sailors of the company's fleet in transporting oil and oil products have been in the center of attention of the country's authorities these days, as it has been appreciated by the oil minister and also welcomed by other members of the cabinet.

Earlier this month, Oil Minister Javad Oji had praised NITC's performance in boosting the country's oil exports.

Helium extraction from South Pars on agenda

TEHRAN- The managing director of National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) said that the company plans to start extraction of helium from South Pars gas field (Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf) in the next Iranian calendar year (starts on March 21).

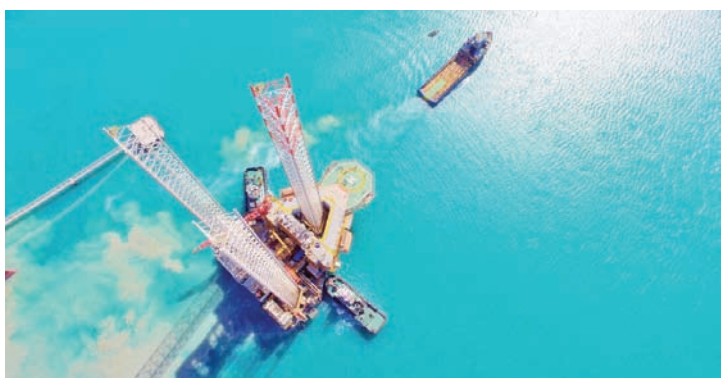
"Helium gas is rare in the world and has special uses. The field that has the most helium gas in the world is South Pars, and we plan to start work on the extraction of helium gas in 1401, which is done for the first time", Mohsen Khojasteh-Mehr explained.

He also expressed hope that South Pars phase 11 will be developed in the next year.

In mid-January, the official had said that digging operation has expedited in phase 11.

Khojasteh-Mehr said, "Developing and completing phase 11 is among the main priorities of NIOC. We are now in the stage of digging wells in this phase and some part of gas extraction from phase 11 will start in the next [Iranian calendar] year".

Of course, some measures were made that gas extraction will start sooner than previously



planned, the official highlighted.

Also, Seyed Shamsedin Mousavi, the managing director of Iran's Petropars Company, which is in charge of developing phase 11, has said the company is going to take all the necessary measures to complete the first part of the mentioned phase's development project by the third quarter of the next Iranian calendar year (starts on September 23).

Earlier in January, Petropars' former Managing Director Hamidreza Masoudi had announced the implementation of two new contracts which would accelerate the development of the mentioned phase.

According to Masoudi, the mentioned deals

were concerned with the construction of an off-shore pipeline as well as the installation of the phase's SDP11B platform.

"The engineering, procurement and implementation activities corresponding to these two contracts have officially started since the beginning of the current [Iranian calendar] month [December 22, 2021]," Masoudi said at the time.

When fully developed, the South Pars phase 11 project will have a production capacity of two billion cubic feet per day or 370,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day. The produced gas will be fed into Iran's gas network.

Iran had previously awarded

the development of phase 11 project to a consortium comprised of France's Total, China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), and Petropars which is a subsidiary of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), however Total and CNPCI pulled out of the project in 2019 due to the U.S. sanctions.

Currently, Petropars is developing the phase 11 project after its partners left the contract.

The drilling operation for the first well of mentioned phase was officially started in December 2020. In the early production stage, the output of this phase will reach 500 million cubic feet (equivalent to 14 million cubic meters) per day.

South Pars is the world's largest gas field, covering an area of 3,700 square kilometers of Iran's territorial waters.

The giant field is estimated to contain a significant amount of natural gas, accounting for about eight percent of the world's reserves, and approximately 18 billion barrels of condensate. The field is divided into 24 standard phases.

the deadline for all organizations to connect to the national permitting system, as the issuance of permits for the start of businesses became electronic since that date.

In fact, the implementation of electronic permitting is a new chapter in business environment with deregulation and facilitation of the permitting process.

As reported, at the beginning of the electronic permitting project, most of the organizations did not cooperate in this field, but now all of them are

Condition ripe for significant economic growth: fin. min.

TEHRAN – Iranian Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Ehsan Khandouzi said on Thursday that the country has passed over the economic uncertainties of the current fiscal year and the condition is now ripe for achieving significant economic growth in the next Iranian calendar year (begins on March 21).

Speaking at a meeting with scholars and economic experts of Ferdowsi University in Mashhad, northeastern Khorasan Razavi Province, Khandouzi said: "Due to the specification of government policies and the national budget for the next year, and also the recent developments in foreign policies (Vienna talks), the conditions will be provided for the country's economic growth in the coming year."

He mentioned a roadmap proposed by his ministry for economic development and curbing inflation in the next year and said: "The roadmap which has been approved by the ministry and covers a 1.5-year horizon, has been sent to the presidents of the country's universities and related scholars to be reviewed."

"We need the help of the country's research institutions and universities to make this roadmap as comprehensive and practical as possible," he stressed.

This roadmap is a document that connects three major entities active in the field of macroeconomics, including Economy Ministry, Program and Budget Organization (PBO), and Central Bank of Iran (CBI), the official said.

Further in this meeting, professors and scholars of the Ferdowsi University's Department of Economics, Accounting and



Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Ehsan Khandouzi (C)

Management as well as a number of economists from other universities in Mashhad spoke about some of the current issues in the country's economy.

The incompatibility of academic research with the needs of the country, the impact of accounting on the transparency of financial institutions, as well as changes in tax laws for start-ups were among the issues raised by the attendees to the meeting.

Facilitating the economic-educational relations between Iran's higher education institutions and those of the neighboring countries, especially Afghanistan and Pakistan, amending the allocation of resources to combat poverty, lack of a unified leadership for government economic management and lack of a clear economic development management strategy were other issues raised by the university professors and economists in this meeting.

TSE's main index rises 5.2% in a week

TEHRAN- TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), rose 67,000 points (5.2 percent) to 1,348 million in the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday).

During the past week, the indices of Tehran Oil Refining Company, Mobarakeh Steel Company, Iran Khodro Company, Saipa Company, National Iranian Copper Company, Social Security Investment Company, and Isfahan Oil Refinery were the most widely followed ones.

SEO completely connected to national permitting system

TEHRAN- All permitting systems of Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) were connected to the national permitting system.

Also, according to the announcement of this organization, in order to promote transparency and ease in issuing permits, the integrated management system of financial institutions (Samin) was unveiled at <https://samin.seo.ir>.

The electronic permitting system has been launched and according to the law, March 9 was

seriously trying to have access to it.

With the launch of this system, applicants no longer need to apply in person to start a business and can obtain the relevant permits electronically.

Also, before the approval of the mentioned system, it was not clear how many permit applicants each organization has, but with this measure, the amount of application or the number of permits issued for each organization can be seen in the national permitting portal.

In addition, prior to this decision, applicants were not sufficiently aware of the requirements for starting any business and were confused, but with this action, they can access all the necessary conditions for obtaining a business start permit at once.

On the other hand, by connecting to this system, the entire permitting process is reviewed and monitored, and the distance between the application registration and the time of receipt of the permit is clear and transparent.

Successive U.S. administrations have used Ukrainian membership in NATO as leverage: professor

From page 1 ► Following is the text of the interview with:

What are the implications of the Ukraine war for the West's allies?

So far, it appears that Russia's invasion has helped to unite the West and its allies against Russia. The economic impacts of rising oil prices may undermine some of that unity, but overall, I think that Putin's actions will reinvigorate NATO in the short term, and perhaps the long term as well.

Some political pundits say the U.S. could prevent this war by discouraging Ukraine in its bid to join NATO. But America victimized Ukraine to find a pretext in order to sanction Russia. What is your comment?

I do not think U.S. leaders were trying to provoke Russia or this crisis. I do, however, believe that successive U.S. administrations have kept the option of Ukrainian membership in NATO open as leverage to try to restrain Putin if need be, although I believe that both Democrats and Republicans understood that admitting Ukraine into NATO would be extremely provocative to Russia and that neither would likely have gone that far.

The Persian Gulf Arab states preferred to take a middle ground and refused to condemn Russian invasion of Ukraine. What are the implications of such about-face for America? Apparently, Arab States no longer bet



on America as a reliable ally.

U.S. ties to the Persian Gulf states are more directed toward containing Iran and continuing the flow of oil, and have less to do with global concerns. Thus I do not expect that the (Persian) Gulf states' neutrality toward Russia will impact their cooperation with the U.S. as it concerns Iran or oil, and I do not expect the Biden administration to put much pressure on its (Persian) Gulf allies to do much regarding Russia at this point.

How do you describe the division inside America over the Ukraine war? Trump's supporters and some Republicans have stood on Putin's side.

"I do not believe Putin's nuclear threat is very serious at this point."

Compared to most issues here, I would say that most Americans are actually fairly united in rejecting Russia's invasion at the moment. The U.S. House just passed a resolution condemning the invasion 426 to 3 — almost completely united.

Nonetheless, some far-right leaders and Trump supporters are still supporting Putin, and it is causing real difficulties for many right-wing pundits and Republican leaders, who are now trying to distance themselves from their past support for Putin. I expect that Republican leaders will try to pivot the public conversation away from Ukraine

and back to domestic issues as soon as possible.

Don't you expect an expansion of the Ukraine war? What about the threat of nuclear war?

I think that much depends upon how far Putin and the Russian leadership plan to go with this invasion. If, as I expect, their goal is to annex the eastern Ukrainian territories and install a pro-Russian government in Kyiv, which will then approve the stationing of Russian troops in Ukraine, then I expect the war will halt once the Russians are able to defeat Ukrainian resistance and impose a new government. Sanctions against Russia would likely continue for some years after that, without further escalation. If, however, the Ukrainian army is able to halt the Russian advance at some point and retain control of part of Ukraine, other countries may seek to support it, which could widen the scope of the war at some point. On the other hand, if Russia wins decisively on the battlefield and Putin goes so far as to annex all of Ukraine, NATO will likely have to move more troops into Poland and the Baltic states, which would create more possibilities for escalation on either side's part.

I do not believe Putin's nuclear threat is very serious at this point, and that the war would have to escalate significantly, perhaps including attacks on Russia itself, before that would be a direct concern.

U.S. consumer prices hit new 40-year high

From page 1 ► Before Russia even launched its military operation in Ukraine on February 24, inflation in America was already haunting the economy and at the same time further eroding President Joe Biden's popularity.

Now, analysts say the fallout from the Russian military operation in Ukraine (which critics blame the U.S.-led NATO alliance of triggering) and the anti-Russia sanctions imposed by Washington will only exacerbate the situation and add to the woes of American families.

The cost of wheat, corn, cooking oils, fertilizer, and metals, including aluminum and nickel, all key Russian and Ukrainian exports, have also skyrocketed since the conflict began.

Investors are mostly scared about oil prices, while other areas of the markets are creeping up because supply chain issues are causing more anxiety. Amid increases in oil prices, queues of container truckers with food supplies have been seen waiting outside big food stores in the capital Washington. Observers have noted that authorities have failed to find a solution to the food supply problem.

In essence, the United States, with a population of some 330 million, relies on trailers because the majority of shops do not have large storage facilities capable of storing essential food items before their expiry date. Trucks bring the food and store it in the shops which are then stocked on the shelves until consumers buy the products, in particular dairy products and bread. If the price of oil prevents the supply chain (as trucks are effectively used as the storage facility) to deliver the goods, then those vital commodities will no longer be available in the shops.

The sharp rise in energy costs, which have been as much as 20 percent in the month of March alone, is expected to add 0.8 percentage points to the consumer inflation index.

With the rising gas prices, there are calls for the federal government to do more to allay fears among the public and undertake swift measures to protect Americans as the soaring inflation is wiping out months of gains from the ordinary workers wages.

Housing costs, which make up about a third of the CPI, have also sharply risen, with apartment vacancy rates reaching their low-



est level since 1984.

Some economic analysts also say consumers' shock at rapidly rising gas prices at the gas pumps will continue to put pressure on the Federal Reserve and policymakers to do something, anything, to slow down the speed at which prices everywhere are moving higher.

The Federal Reserve is expected to start raising interest rates next Wednesday (the first time since 2018). With inflation nearly four times the U.S. central bank's two percent target, economists are expecting as many as seven rate hikes this year.

Critics say the Fed increasing interest rates during times of rising prices in vital commodities will lead to a decline in economic activities and inflation pressure in the U.S. will only heighten.

The measures taken by the Fed will hurt working-class people as history suggests they are ineffective for the average American household.

The consequences of the rising oil prices and other commodities that have been exacerbated by the conflict in Ukraine has led to the question of who should pay the costs of the economic fallout in America?

According to some analysts, the economic measures the Biden administration is trying to implement will affect the profit of small businesses and increase the wealth of the wealthy.

With America having multiple economic problems, one intertwined with the other, Washington is also increasing tensions in the Pacific region against China, and with Beijing not backing down against America's imperialist plots, this could make the economic situation even worse.

whole international community. China is also deeply concerned. We hope that the situation in Ukraine will be settled and the peace will be restored as soon as possible,» Li said.

Regarding rooted principles of mutual respect and mutual benefit, China will "develop cooperation relations with all parties and ensure more stability in the world," the premier added.

Maintain talks between Russia, Ukraine

China finds it important to maintain the negotiation between Russia and Ukraine and welcomes any efforts that will promote a peaceful settlement, the premier remarked.

"The current situation in Ukraine is really concerning, it is necessary to make all the efforts to support the Russian-Ukrainian talks on overcoming differences and finding a peace-

ful solution," Li said.

China will continue to work with the international community to restore peace, the premier added.

Sanctions will affect the global economy

The senior Chinese official said the anti-Russian sanctions will negatively impact the recovery of the global economy after the COVID-19 pandemic and will inflict damage on all the countries.

EU leaders meet in Versailles to discuss Ukraine war and energy independence



EU leaders are meeting at the Palace of Versailles, France, to discuss Russia's invasion of Ukraine and plans to strengthen the bloc's energy independence and defence capabilities.

The two-day meeting is hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron, whose country currently holds the EU Council's rotating presidency.

Macron said the war "completely redefines the architecture of our Europe" and will make the continent "change even faster and stronger."

"Our democracy is threatened, our values are threatened and we must accept that sometimes we have to pay the price," Macron told reporters in Versailles, adding he will soon speak again with President Vladimir Putin.

"I am not going to spare any effort to try to achieve this ceasefire," the president said, adding: "I am worried, pessimistic and this is also why I believe that our Europe must be there."

"Europe must prepare itself for all scenarios," he added. "Europe must prepare itself to be independent of Russian gas, to be independent to ensure its own defense."

Ever since Macron arrived at the Élysée, he has been the most prominent and vocal defender of strategic autonomy, a theoretical concept that posits the EU should become more self-reliant and assertive on the world stage.

Russia's aggression and the resulting set of hard-hitting sanctions that the EU, in coordination with allies, has slapped on the Kremlin have created a new momentum around calls for strategic autonomy, which Macron is set to further amplify.

"I think we took Russia by surprise because we were firm, we were strong, we were united," said European Council President Charles Michel ahead of the meeting.

"It is not enough. We need to identify together what could be the following steps in order to have a positive influence and to [achieve] as soon as possible a ceasefire."

The Versailles gathering follows a series of transformative events for the EU.

For the first time in its history, the bloc will finance the purchase of lethal weapons for countries that are under attack, with an initial €500 million package for Ukraine.

Germany, Sweden and Finland have also dropped long-standing policies regarding military aid. Denmark will hold a referendum in June to decide whether to keep the opt-out clause that has so far removed the country from the EU common defense policy – the only member state currently excluded.

Leaders will build upon these developments to discuss ways to boost defense expenditures, promote innovative technologies and deepen cooperation between member states.

The 27 will also take stock of the situation inside Ukraine, the humanitarian crisis and Kyiv's application to join the EU via a fast-tracked procedure, an unheard-of option. The European Commission is currently examining the request and is expected to issue an opinion in the coming days.

"Let there be no doubt about the fact that the Netherlands and Ukraine stand shoulder to shoulder. But there is not such a thing as a fast tracking of accession. It does not exist," said Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte.

Energy push

In addition to this, leaders will touch upon the bloc's last-minute push to slash energy imports from Moscow and break free from its long-standing dependency.

To this day, Russia remains the main EU supplier of crude oil, gas and solid fossil fuels, a sector that brings more than 40% of the country's revenues. Western countries are increasingly concerned that the enormous amount of money they send Russia to import energy is indirectly financing the war in Ukraine.

In the U.S., President Joe Biden has already imposed a total ban on Russian imports. In the UK, the government unveiled plans to phase out all Russian oil products by 2023.

The EU is not unified enough to introduce a similar ban, given the various degrees of energy dependence that some member states present. However, political willpower is intensifying to speed up the move away from Russian energy.

"I am convinced that we should make a decision to stop energy imports from Russia to get Putin to the negotiating table to stop the war," said Latvian Prime Minister Arturs Krišjanis Karins.

Earlier this week, the Commission unveiled an ambitious roadmap to cut Russian gas by two thirds (around 100 billion cubic metres) before the end of year, most of which will be replaced by liquefied natural gas (LNG) from other providers, such as the U.S., Qatar, Azerbaijan and Algeria.

Biomethane, clean hydrogen, energy efficiency and renewable energy should also contribute to the rapid switch, Brussels noted. The plans offered new measures to deal with soaring electricity bills, like regulated price caps and redistribution of windfall profits.

"We must become independent from Russian oil, coal and gas. We simply cannot rely on a supplier who explicitly threatens us," said EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

The executive's goal is to make the bloc "independent from Russian fossil fuels well before 2030."

Even if Brussels can provide guidance and facilitate joint procurement, the plans will depend on member states and their capacity to swiftly change energy suppliers and sustain the burden of higher prices in the near term.

The transition is already bearing fruit. According to figures released by Bruegel, an economic think tank, Russia's share of EU gas imports fell from 47% in January 2021 to 28% in January 2022, amid tensions along the Ukraine border.

On Friday, the debate was to turn to economic matters, like investment, supply chains and innovation. European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde joined leaders for the discussion.

Even if the meeting is informal and no official conclusions will be taken, the stage gives the occasion an air of solemnity and grandeur. The Palace of Versailles, located outside Paris, saw the signature of the 1919 peace treaty that put an end to the war between Germany and the Allied Powers.

(Source: Euronews)

Anti-Russia sanctions will make recovery of global economy difficult: Chinese PM

The Chinese premier stresses the importance of talks between Ukraine and Russia and highlights the effects of anti-Russian sanctions on the global economy

China hopes that the military operation in Ukraine will be settled as soon as possible and that all parties involved in the crisis cooperate, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang said on Friday.

"The current situation in Ukraine is drawing the attention of the

Western Iranian provinces claim bigger share of tourist flow

From page 1 ► Over the past couple of years, western Iranian provinces have held several meetings to discuss ways to expand tourism, bringing together local officials, hoteliers, travel agents, and tour operators from provinces of Lorestan, Ilam, Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, Kermanshah, Kordestan, Hamedan, Zanjan and East Azarbaijan, amongst others.

One of the potentially-significant travel destinations in the west wing is the Uramanat cultural landscape, which was registered on the UNESCO World Heritage list last year.

Stretched on the slopes of Sarvabad county at the heart of the Zagros Mountains, and shared between the provinces of Kordestan and Kermanshah in western Iran, the scenic landscape embraces hundreds of villages, 106,000 hectares of land, and 303,000 hectares of surrounding properties.

It boasts dense and step-like rows of houses in a way that the roof of each house forms the yard of the upper one, a feature that adds to its charm and attractiveness.

Archaeological findings dating back about 40,000 years, caves and rock shelters, ancient paths and ways along the valleys, motifs and inscriptions, cemeteries, mounds, castles, settlements, and other historical evidence attest to the continuity of life in the Uramanat region from the Paleolithic to the present time.

According to the UN body, Uramanat



A Kurdish woman plays the daff in the UNESCO-designated Uramanat, western Iran. Kurdish people's life is full of colors, songs, and music.

is an exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition of the semi-nomadic agropastoral way of life of the Hawrami people, a Kurdish tribe that has resided in the Zagros Mountains for millennia. This outstanding cultural tradition is manifested in the ancestral practices of transhumance, the mode of seasonal living in Havars, steep-slope terraced agriculture, soil and water management, traditional knowledge for planning and constructing steeply terraced villages, and rich diversity of intangible heritage, all reflecting a harmonious co-existence with nature.

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.

Old cypress named Iran's 1000th natural heritage



TEHRAN – On Thursday, an old cypress situated in Orzueeyeh village of Kerman province was named Iran's 1000th natural heritage.

The cypress is estimated to date 1500 to 1600 years, Mehr reported.

Over the past couple of years, a great number of long-lived trees have been registered on the prestigious list.

Iran seeks to register a selection of its old trees in the UNESCO World Heritage site.

According to the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, the quality, number, and diversity of long-lived trees in the country are impressive and astonishing.

So far, more than 2000 long-lived trees have been identified in Iran and their information was recorded.

Long-lived trees are known as genetic, botanical, cultural, and even historical reservoirs in the world and there are countless efforts to maintain and protect them.

Iranian artworks take visitors on hunt for birds of prey at U.S. show

TEHRAN – The key role birds of prey played in the arts and culture of Iran and some other nations takes the center stage at a new exhibition held at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art in Washington D.C.

"Falcons: The Art of the Hunt" showcases objects as old as an Egyptian limestone plaque depicting a falcon that dates from 664-525 BC, to an early 18th-century Indian watercolor of a mounted hunter keeping an eye on a bird at the moment of an attack, the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. reported.

Moreover, the exhibition features a Ming dynasty hanging scroll from the late 15th century of a hawk pursuing water birds, and from Iran, a drawing from the 1640s of two horsemen hunting with their birds.

Massumeh Farhad, the

museum's chief curator and a scholar of Islamic art, says the collection was originally organized in 2020 before the COVID pandemic to complement the outdoor showcase by the Smithsonian Folklife Festival that would spotlight the United Arab Emirates, where falconry is especially cherished and has evolved to an innovative practice of conservation.

Falconry—the sport of training the bird to capture prey and return it to human trainers—may date to 2,000 BC. Scholars disagree where falconry first originated; some argue the practice began in ancient Mesopotamia, others say ancient Iran.

The history of falconry has uncertain origins. "Whether it started in Iran, or whether it started further west in the Arab world. Most scholars believe that by the 8th century, at the



Two horsemen hunting with falcons, Isfahan, Iran, Safavid period, 1640s Charles Lang Freer Endowment

very beginning of Islam we have evidence of falconry becoming part of courtly and royal traditions," Farhad says. "That's where we are in firm ground."

A falcon as a rejected gift is one of the many scenes in a colorful and highly populated Iranian manuscript folio from 1556 to 1565. Even

TEHRAN – The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has agreed to design and install anti-seismic showcases at the vast National Museum of Iran, which is home to countless relics representing the juicy history of the Iranian plateau.

The National Museum of Iran and JICA finalized the support through an MoU signed on March 8 in a session attended by Tokyo's ambassador to Tehran Ikawa Kazutoshi, JICA Senior Representative in Tehran Taro Azuma, and Director General of Museums and Historical-Cultural Property Morteza Adibzadeh, and Chairman of the National Committee of Iranian Museums (ICOM) Seyed Ahmad Mohit Tabatabai.

Based on the MoU, JICA provides the necessary financial and logistical support for the construction of earthquake-proof showcases with standard lighting and other necessary features, an official with the museum told the Tehran Times.

"The showcases will be constructed by Japanese experts and will be installed at the National Museum of Iran."

The National Museum



JICA to install anti-seismic showcases at National Museum of Iran

showcases ceramics, pottery, stone figures, and carvings, mostly taken from excavations at Persepolis, Ismail Abad (near Qazvin), Shush, Rey, and Turang Tappeh to name a few.

The building, designed by French architect André Godard and completed in 1928, is one of the more attractive modern buildings in Tehran, blending Sassanian

principles such as the grand iwan-style entrance with art deco-style brickwork.

Inside, among the finds from Shush, there's a stone capital of a winged lion, some delightful pitchers and vessels in animal shapes, and colorful glazed bricks decorated with double-winged mythical creatures. A copy of the diorite stele

detailing the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi, found at Shush in 1901, is also displayed – the original being in Paris.

Exhibits from Persepolis include a magnificent human-headed capital, a cuneiform inscription proclaiming the might and godly affinity of Xerxes, and a striking frieze of glazed tiles from the central hall of the Apadana Palace. Also on display are a famous trilingual inscription from the time of Darius I, a bull-headed capital and carved staircase, a statue of a sitting dog that looks like it was carved just weeks ago, and four foundation tablets inscribed in cuneiform.

One of the more startling exhibits is the Salt Man from Zanjan. He is estimated to have been a miner who died in the 3rd or 4th century CE, but whose white-bearded head, leg in a leather boot, and tools were preserved by the salt in which he was buried.

Tehran is situated in the world's most active seismic belt, which is thought to produce a severe earthquake in 150 years. Despite such background, significant urbanization has been made in the bustling metropolis while enough measures against a big-scale earthquake had not been taken.

Stone tools discovered on slopes of southern Iranian mount

TEHRAN – Archaeologists have found arrays of stone tools and relics on slopes of Gav-Bast Mountain, which is situated in southern Iran, north of the Persian Gulf.

Fereidoun Biglari, an archaeologist and cultural deputy of the National Museum of Iran, briefed attendees on the discovery during the 19th Annual Symposium on the Iranian Archaeology held in Tehran.

Gav-Bast Mountain is of great importance in Iranian rock art archeology due to the existence of a prehistoric rock shelter that contains a hunting scene including archers, animal games, and a large carnivore.

In his lecture, Biglari first reviewed the history of archaeological research in Eshkat-e Ahou Rockshelter, which began with Khaled Sadeghi's efforts in 2001 that later led to the registration of this prehistoric site in the National Monuments List in 2005 by the General Directorate of Cultural Heritage of Hormozgan.

Regarding his motivation for starting a new study in Gav-Bast Mountain, Biglari said that the focus of previous studies was more on the rock art panel in the shelter itself and the surrounding areas have not been surveyed by archaeologists.

As a result of several short field surveys in 2010 and 2021, which were carried out with the support of the municipality and Bastak Charity Association and



the permission of the Iranian Center for Archaeological Research and the General Directorate of Hormozgan Cultural Heritage, new information about prehistoric settlements on these mountain highlands was obtained.

He added that this research proved that Neolithic human groups used natural resources of these highlands—between 1,100 and 1,800 meters above sea level – probably on a seasonal basis about 7,000 – 8,000 years before present.

The researcher also spoke about the importance of preservation of the prehistoric motifs of Gav-Bast and the measures taken to document the art and its context, including drone mapping, 3D model of the shelter, and its panel using photogrammetry, and other related measures.

In conclusion, Biglari expressed hope that in the near future, the detailed 3D model of the shelter and its paintings will be displayed in the Bastak Museum and the National Museum of Iran would allow visitors to see this remote site and

its painting panel in the museum.

Furthermore, he emphasized that this research would not have been possible without the help and support of the Bastak Municipality and Charity Association.

Gav-Bast Mountain is lined with Zagros Mountains, extending northwest-southeast from the border areas of eastern Turkey and northern Iraq to the Strait of Hormuz. The Zagros range is about 1,600 km long and more than 240 km wide. Situated mostly in what is now Iran, it forms the extreme western boundary of the Iranian plateau, though its foothills to the north and west extend into adjacent countries.

The first well-documented evidence of human habitation is in deposits from several excavated cave and rock-shelter sites, located mainly in the Zagros Mountains of western Iran and dated to Middle Paleolithic or Mousterian times (c. 100,000 BC).

From the Caspian in the northwest to Baluchistan in the south-east, the Iranian Plateau extends for close to 2,000 km. It encompasses the greater part of Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan west of the Indus River containing some 3,700,000 square kilometers. Despite being called a "plateau", it is far from flat but contains several mountain ranges, the highest peak being Damavand in the Alborz mountain range at 5610 m, and the Dasht-e Loot east of Kerman in Central Iran falling below 300 m.

Folk Iranian dances made national heritage

TEHRAN – Three traditional dances each being practiced in a certain Iranian province have been registered in the national list for intangible cultural heritage.

The newly-registered elements include a folk dance performed in West Azarbaijan province, a "wooden horse dancing" performed at weddings in Hosseinabad village of Isfahan province, as well as a special dance with wood sticks that is popular in Semnan province, ISNA reported on Wednesday.

Some 2,000 elements are currently registered on Iran's national list of intangible cultural heritage, tourism minister Ezzatollah Zarghami says.

"So far, about two

thousand intangible cultural elements have been registered in the country," the minister said on March 4.

"Intangible cultural heritage such as culture, religion, and rituals are of very high importance as they shape the identity of any nation," Zarghami said.

In addition, 17 Iranian elements have been registered in UNESCO's list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Among Iran's entries to the prestigious list is Radif of Iranian music; traditional skills of carpet weaving in Kashan; Music of the Bakhshis of Khorasan; Naqqali, Iranian dramatic storytelling; traditional skills of building and sailing Iranian Lenj boats in the Persian Gulf; and traditional skills



of crafting and playing Dotar.

Furthermore, Iran seeks to register five intangible elements on UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in near future. They are ancient festivities of Mehregan and Yalda, crafting and playing [the stringed instrument of] the Oud, traditional craft of silk spinning, and Turkmen Duzi (a kind of traditional textile being practiced by Iranian Turkmen tribes).

Some 7m ha of deserts in supercritical condition

TEHRAN – Around seven million hectares of the country's deserts are highly threatened being in a supercritical condition, Masoud Mansour, head of the Forests, Rangelands, and Watershed Management Organization, has said.

About 32 million hectares of the country are covered by desert areas, seven million of which are in supercritical condition and 2.5 million hectares are dust-generating hotspots, he stated, emphasizing the need to reduce natural hazards.

One of the approaches we strongly pursue is to conserve two sources of water and soil with the participation of the people, he noted, adding, one of the ways to save the country is watershed management to preserve water and soil resources.

This [Iranian calendar] year (ending March 20), some 100,000 hectares of watershed management projects have been implemented with the participation of the officials and the people, he further highlighted.

"In addition, 50,000 hectares were targeted to reforestation, however, with the help of locals, the projected goal was achieved in 85,000 hectares," he added.

Referring to the water, soil, and vegetation as the major affected natural resources, he said that although these threats show their impact, in the long run, today the result appears in the form of floods, sand and dust storms, soil erosion, drying of wetlands and groundwater depletion.

Pointing to 16 tons of soil



erosion per hectare per year, he stated that 250 million cubic meters of erosion have occurred annually in the dam's lake.

In addition, of the approximately 40,000 qanats, one-third are exposed to dehydration and drying, he lamented, adding, in the last 20 years, the country was haunted by more than 3,500 floods, each of which has incurred a considerable loss.

Deforestation in Iran worrisome

Ali Banagar, head of the forestry scientific association affiliated with the Research Institute of Forests and Rangelands, said that the trend of deforestation in Iran is worrisome.

Pointing out that deforestation is a global challenge, he said that drought, floods, extreme heat, cold, sand, and dust storms, as well as climate change, are natural causes of deforestation and reduce the quality of forests.

Apart from natural factors, villa and road construction, development projects, dam con-

struction, wood smuggling, encroachment on forests and land grabbing, forest fires, coal mining, livelihood activities including agriculture, providing fuel and excessive livestock grazing, social and economic problems, and exploitation of natural resources, pests, environmental pollution and landfills, and many other factors have reduced the quantity and quality of forests.

Each of these variables has increased or decreased in recent years, but the result is alarming," he explained.

Between 2015 and 2020, approximately 12,000 hectares of forests across the country were wiped out annually, IRNA quoted Reza Bayani an official with Forests, Range and Watershed Management Organization, as saying.

He went on to say that the country's forests are estimated at 14.3 million hectares, lamenting, deforestation occurs for a variety of reasons, including dam construction, road construction,

fire, and wood smuggling.

The country's northern forests have been estimated at 2,080,000 million hectares about 60 years ago, and today it is stretching to 2,004,000 hectares taking replanted areas into account.

Meanwhile, Yousefali Ebrahimpour, commander of the protection unit of natural resources and watershed management department of West Azarbaijan province, said earlier that shortage of forest protection units, not enforcing laws, and low fines are among the factors exacerbating deforestation.

Each tree produces 2 kilograms of oxygen annually, so one hectare of trees can produce 2,500 to 3,000 oxygen which helps 10 people to breathe oxygen, while they can reduce the area's temperature by 11 degrees.

As forests play a significant role in the carbon cycle, when are cut down, not only does carbon absorption cease, but also the carbon stored in the trees is released into the atmosphere as CO2 if the wood is burned or even if it is left to rot after the deforestation process.

According to climatean-dweather.net, forests store up to 100 times more carbon than agricultural fields of the same area, it is estimated that more than 1.5 billion tons of carbon dioxide are released into the atmosphere due to deforestation, mainly the cutting and burning of forests, every year.

Over 30 million acres of forests and woodlands are lost every year due to deforestation.

Pastu Covac trial study to be published in prestigious intl. Journal

TEHRAN – The study of the Pastu Covac vaccine trial has been accepted by a prestigious international scientific journal, to be soon published, Alireza Biglari, head of the Pasteur Institute, has announced.

Developed jointly by the Pasteur Institute of Iran and Cuba's Finlay Vaccine Institute, the vaccine is called Soberana 02 in Cuba and Pastu Covac in Iran.

The results of the third phase of clinical studies will be available to specialists and the public in the coming days, he further stated, IRNA reported on Friday.

Articles on the preclinical phase of the vaccine have already been published in international journals and are available to the public, he added.

Pastu Covac is the only homegrown vaccine available for injection in children aged 2-18, he said, adding, clinical trials have shown that the vaccine is highly efficient and safe.

In addition to impressive efficacy, it is able to effectively cope with various mutations of the virus and can be used as a booster dose for all vaccines.

The vaccine prevented symptomatic disease in people inoculated with three doses

by 65 percent and its effectiveness in the prevention of severe disease and hospitalization was 96.5 percent, he stated.

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

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

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

The two first phases of the human trial have been conducted in Cuba, while the third phase was carried out on 24,000 volunteers in Iran and 44,000 volunteers in Cuba.

It is the only vaccine in the world that can fight several mutations simultaneously, Biglari said in July.

Homegrown vaccines

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

Made by researchers at the Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam,



COVIRAN BARKAT was unveiled on December 29, 2020, and received the license for public use on June 14.

It proved effective against Indian strain, according to Hojjat Niki-Maleki, head of the information center of Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam.

Eleven countries from Asia and South America, and a European country have asked for importing COVIRAN vaccine, Hassan Jalili, the vaccine's production manager, said in June.

According to the Food and Drug Administration, 14 vaccines are being domestically developed in the country which are in different study phases.

ENGLISH IN USE

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Afghanistan thanks Iran for free services to refugees during COVID-19

Afghanistan has appreciated Iran for offering health and treatment services to Afghan refugees infected with coronavirus free of charge.

The Afghan Foreign Ministry in a statement on Saturday announced its gratitude and appreciation to Iran for its humanitarian efforts to address the issue of Afghan refugees in the country.

All measures, especially the recent decree by the Iranian president to provide free medical treatment to Afghan refugees in Iranian public hospitals, have assured the Afghan government, IRNA reported on Sunday.

افغانستان از همکاری ایران برای مداوای مهاجران مبتلا به کرونا قدردانی کرد

وزارت امور خارجه افغانستان از کمک و همکاری جمهوری اسلامی ایران به مهاجران افغانی مبتلا به ویروس کرونا و مداوای رایگان آنها قدردانی کرد. وزارت امور خارجه افغانستان روز شنبه در اطلاعیه‌ای اعلام کرد: مراتب امتنان و سپاسگزاری خود را از جمهوری اسلامی ایران در رابطه به اقدامات بشردوستانه آن کشور درباره رسیدگی به مهاجرین افغان در آن کشور ابراز می‌دارد.

در این اطلاعیه آمده است: تمام اقدامات به ویژه صدور حکم اخیر رئیس جمهوری ایران برای درمان رایگان مهاجران افغان در بیمارستان‌های دولتی ایران موجب خاطر جمعی رهبری دولت افغانستان شد.

SOCIETY

MARCH 12, 2022

Straight Truth

TEHRAN TIMES

7

Revival of Miankaleh wetland on agenda

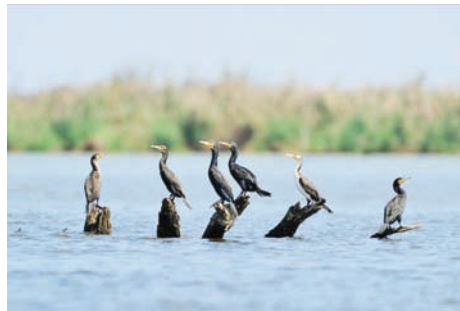
From page 1 ► include wetlands, inter-tidal mud with sandy shores, shallow marine waters, forests, peatlands, and agricultural areas.

It is home to many unique Caspian birds and reptile species native to this region. It's also a very important internationally-recognized refuge for migratory birds.

The peninsula water deficits, additionally mismanagement, unsustainable agricultural practices, and severe depletion of the wells and groundwater resources have exacerbated the Miankaleh peninsula's condition.

Local people earn their income from agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, handicrafts, carpet weaving, traditional poultry farming, and tourism.

Overgrazing, illegal hunting, fishing, deforestation, and the unplanned spread of villages are some of the challenges posing threat to the region's environment.



In January 2020, the media reported the mysterious death of over 40,000 migratory birds in the Miankaleh peninsula; a week later, the veterinary organization announced that "botulinum poisoning" was the reason behind mass bird mortality.

In 2021, a similar incident happened, as some 10,000 bodies of lifeless migratory birds were found around the Miankaleh peninsula and Gorgan Bay as a result of botulism poisoning.

Wildfire burns 100,000 ha of forests, rangelands in 5 years

TEHRAN – Over 100,000 hectares of forests and rangelands have been burned by wildfire during the past five years, Mohammad Hassan Nami, head of the Disaster Management Organization, has said.

Iran, like many other countries in the world, is exposed to climate change, and planning to reduce the effects of this phenomenon is inevitable, he highlighted.

About 140 million hectares of the country are covered by natural resources, 14 million hectares of which are forests, 34 million hectares of which are pastures, he stated.

Factors such as overgrazing, land-use changes in the pasture have intensified the destruction of the rangelands, which will lead to desertification of large areas of the country, he said, pointing out that the dry vegetation is a cause of wildfires.

Referring to wildfire as a threat to forests and pastures, he noted that wildfire burnt 100,000 ha of forests, rangelands in the last 5 years.

Necessary planning in order to predict and prevent fires in the forests and pastures of the country should be on the agenda of the related organization, although some measures have been taken in this regard, it is not enough, he emphasized.

Today, sustainable development is not possible without paying attention to environmental issues and natural resources, he said, adding, the set of actions of different responsible bodies in the development process should be compatible with the capacity of natural resources.

Budget to prevent wildfires up by 10-fold

A total of 1 trillion rials (around \$3.6 million) has been allocated to preventing and extinguishing wildfires in the budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year (starting March 21), a 10-fold rise compared to the current year.

During the last two years, there has been

no specific credit line for forest and pasture firefighting, but a special budget has been allotted in this regard for the next year, Masoud Mansour, head of the FRWMO said.

Some 150,000 people are participating in training courses in the fields of fire prevention and control to help rangers of the Department of Environment as "nature protectors", which have been educated through training courses.

Wildfire in natural areas decreases by 49%

The occurrence of wildfire in natural areas has declined by 49 percent since the beginning of the current [Iranian calendar] year compared to the same period last year, deputy commander of the protection unit of the Forests, Rangelands, and Watershed Management Organization has said.

This year, with the implementation of protective measures and increasing public participation and equipping protection units, the burnt areas in natural resources have decreased by 46 percent compared to the previous year, Ali Mohammadi Moghaddam said in December 2021.

Currently, 5,000 rangers are active to protect natural resources, however, one protection force is needed for every 2,000 hectares of forest and one protection force for every 10,000 hectares of pasture, which has not been achieved in the country due to lack of manpower.

According to Mohammadi Moghaddam, there are currently 135 million hectares of forests and pastures in the country, with one ranger per 6,000 hectares of forest, and one ranger per 30,000 hectares of pastures.

Wildfires are mostly caused by unintentional human error, said that over 90 percent of wildfires are ignited by humans unintentionally while setting fires in nature, smoking, and releasing plastic and glass containers.

COVID-19 UPDATES ON MARCH 11

New cases	3,953
New deaths	139
Total cases	7,117,544
Total deaths	138,711
New hospitalized patients	751
Patients in critical condition	3,069
Total recovered patients	6,768,271
Diagnostic tests conducted	48,108,485
Doses of vaccine injected	144,333,593

