

# Iran Won't Remain Silent in Face of Israeli Actions

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## Report

### Optimism amid Russia-Ukraine peace talks

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskiy says officials taking part in talks with their Russian counterparts are hoping to ensure direct talks between the two countries leaders in a bid to bring peace to the conflict.

Delegations from both sides have held multiple rounds of face-to-face talks, with the latest on Monday.

The two delegations have been providing optimistic assessments lately with Moscow and Kyiv appearing to look for an end to the conflict.

The question remains as to whether the U.S.-led NATO alliance wants the conflict to end?

Observers have noted the lack of support for these talks by NATO and question if the alliance wants an end to the conflict or is trying to prolong it?

Ukraine does have a desire for direct talks between Zelenskiy and Russian President Vladimir Putin; something that analysts say would not sit down well in Washington.

Speaking during his daily video address Zelenskiy says "our delegation has a clear task, to do everything to ensure a meeting of the presidents. The meeting that I am sure people are waiting for."

"Obviously this is a difficult story. A hard path. But this path is needed. And our goal is for Ukraine to get the necessary result in this struggle, in this negotiation work. Necessary for peace. And for security." ▶ Page 5

### Foreign Ministry: 'We will return to Vienna tomorrow if U.S. takes political decision today'

TEHRAN — Speaking in his last press briefing in the current Iranian new year which ends on March 20, Foreign Ministry spokesman on Monday discussed the latest developments in Vienna at length, saying that the United States is solely responsible for the current status of the Vienna talks.

Saeed Khatibzadeh said if the U.S. takes the political decision on revitalizing the 2015 nuclear deal, the delegate will return to Vienna soon.

"What has been happening in Vienna today with the return of the delegations to the capitals is a short break. Some mentioned the stalemate and the end of the negotiations, which is not true. This break was made at the request of the coordinator of the Joint Commission of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)," Saeed Khatibzadeh said.

He continued by saying that the delegations are in the capitals for further consultations, and receiving a diplomatic answer from Washington.

"Reducing what is happening in Vienna to one or two elements does not clarify the situation. We are not at the point of announcing an agreement right now, because some key issues remain to be decided in Washington, and as soon as the decisions are" ▶ Page 2

### Tehran, Moscow intensify consultations amid Western propaganda

TEHRAN —Iran's top diplomat left Tehran for Moscow amid a flurry of diplomatic efforts to streamline talks in Vienna after Western countries lashed out at Russia for its alleged last-minute "extraneous" demand that brought the Vienna talks to an open-ended pause.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian was expected to travel to Moscow on Tuesday. Saeed Khatibzadeh, spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry, said in his Monday press briefing that Amir Abdollahian was planning to visit Russia on Tuesday.

But the Iranian foreign minister left Tehran for Moscow on Monday afternoon, according

to Nour News, a move that possibly indicates the gravity of the situation around the stalled talks in Vienna over reviving the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The visit was planned after the European parties to the Vienna talks — Germany, France, and Britain (E3) — and the EU coordinator of the talks, Josep Borrell, accused Russia of presenting demands that are not related to the terms of the JCPOA.

After implicitly accusing Russia of presenting "extraneous" conditions on March 8, the E3 pointed the finger of blame squarely at Russia on Saturday, warning of the col-

lapse of the Vienna talks if Russia continued to insist on guarantees it is now demanding to shield its economic cooperation with Iran from Western sanctions over Ukraine.

"Nobody should seek to exploit JCPOA negotiations to obtain assurances that are separate to the JCPOA," the E3 said in a joint statement. "This risks the collapse of the deal."

Nearly two weeks after the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, Russia said it needed guarantees that sanctions being imposed on Moscow by the West over the war in Ukraine won't impede Russia's cooperation with Iran in all fields. ▶ Page 3

### Prehistorical glazed bricks, recovered from smuggler in Switzerland, go on show at Tehran museum

TEHRAN — A collection of prehistorical glazed bricks, which has been recovered from a smuggler in Switzerland, has been put on show at the National Museum of Iran in downtown Tehran.

National Museum of Iran Director Jebrael Nokandeh, and Swiss deputy ambassador to Iran Kim Sitzler were among attendees to the opening ceremony held on Monday, ILNA reported.

Being looted and smuggled out of Iran some four decades ago, the decorated bricks were returned home from Switzerland last year.

Dating back to the 7th or 8th centuries BC, the bricks come from Qalaichi, one of the most important archaeological sites in western Iran, which is just north of the north-western city of Boukan, near the Iraqi border. Qalaichi was the capital of the Man-naean kingdom.

According to The Art Newspaper, the artworks were recovered from a warehouse in Switzerland. The 51 restituted glazed bricks, most just over one square foot in size, have a wide variety of motifs: winged lions and bulls with human heads, mythological figures, birds of prey, deer, and floral or geometric designs.

The artifacts are connected to the Man-

nai civilization, which was once flourished in northwestern Iran in the 1st millennium BC. Mannai, also spelled Manna, was an ancient country surrounded by three major powers of the time namely Assyria, Urartu, and Media.

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, the Mannaeans are first recorded in the annals of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (reigned 858–824 BC) and are last mentioned in Urartu by Rusa II (reigned 685–645 BC) and in Assyria by Esarhaddon (reigned 680–669 BC). With the intrusion of the Scythians and the rise of the Medes in the 7th century, the Manneans lost their identity and were subsumed under the term Medes.

In the 1970s, a farmer plowing at Qalaichi came across a decorated brick, probably from the columned hall of its citadel. This discovery led to extremely damaging illegal excavations, partly using a bulldozer. Eventually, in 1985, there was an official rescue excavation, but this was quickly abandoned because of an intensification of the Iran-Iraq war. There were then 14 more years of illegal digging until 1999 when there was another official excavation. But by this time only small fragments of broken bricks were found.

In 1991, an Iranian antiquities dealer with a base in Switzerland contacted John Curtis, the British Museum's keeper of ▶ Page 6

### Leader writes commendation for book recounting memories of frontline laundresses

TEHRAN — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has penned a commendation for a book that recounts the memories of a group of women who washed laundry in a hospital near a battle zone during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war.

Fatemeh Sadat Miraali, the writer of "Pool of Blood", a number of the women, and a group of cultural officials came together on Sunday evening at the place in Andimeshk, which has now been converted into a concrete block company, to attend an unveiling ceremony of the book.

### Iran qualify for 2022 Women's Junior World Handball Championship

TEHRAN — Iran booked their place at the 2022 Women's Junior World Handball Championship on Monday.

The Iranian team finished in second place due to inferior goal difference than India.

Iran lost to Kazakhstan 30-24 in their opening match but defeated India (42-37), Thailand (28-21) and Uzbekistan (25-21) in

their next matches.

The five-team tournament was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan from March 7 to 14.

India and Iran qualified for the 2022 Women's Junior World Handball Championship, which will be held in Slovenia.

The competition will be held in Slovenia from June 22 to July 3.

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### Iran's 9-month GDP growth at 4.1%: CBI

TEHRAN — The Central Bank of Iran (CBI), in its latest report, has put the growth of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2021) at 4.1 percent.

According to the mentioned data, the figure was 3.4 percent without oil, IRIB reported.

The country's GDP reached 35.1 quadrillion rials (about \$135 billion) in the third quarter of the current Iranian calendar year (September 23-December 21, 2021) which is 5.7 percent more than the figure for the same period in the previous year.

Based on the CBI data, the country's GDP registered a 5.8-percent rise in the mentioned three months with the oil excluded.

During the said period, with the exception of the agricultural sector which experienced negative growth of 2.5 percent due to the drought and reduced crop production, other economic sectors, including oil, industries, and mining and services respectively grew by 5.4, 3.8, and 8.1 percent, respectively.

During the first nine months of the current year, the country's services, Oil, industry and mining, and agriculture sectors also registered a value-added growth of 6.5, 11.7, 0.0, and 2.1 percent, respectively, accounting for a share equal to 3.5, 0.9, 0.0, and -0.3 percentage of the total economic growth in the said nine months.

According to the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI), Iran's gross domestic product excluding oil grew 3.3 percent in the second quarter of the current Iranian calendar year (June 22 – September 22, 2021) compared to the same period last year. The figure including oil increased by 4.2 percent.

The SCI put the average inflation rate in the twelve-month period ended on September 22, 2021, at 45.8 percent, while the unemployment rate was 9.5 percent.



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### Young talented soldiers honored

The 14th festival of the Iranian Armed Forces was held in Tehran on Monday to honor young talented soldiers.

Exemplary soldiers in the fields of defense, security, altruism, diligence, creativity, physical education, and sportsmanship were awarded during the one-day event.



## Foreign Ministry: ‘We will return to Vienna tomorrow if U.S. takes political decision today’

From page 1 ► made in Washington, we will be at the point of returning to Vienna and the final round and reaching a good and lasting agreement. We are not there now and we are waiting to hear the American answer. Consultations continue in Vienna at various levels,” he added.

The spokesman added that the Iranian foreign minister and other foreign ministers whose countries are signatory to the JCPOA are in constant contact with each other, as well as the senior negotiators.

He then informed the press that Amir Abdollahian was leaving for Moscow on Monday night.

“We reiterate to the press and the dear nation that what is a beacon and framework for us in this direction is the definite interests of the Iranian people, and it is these definite interests that determine the framework of negotiations and the final agreement,” he asserted.

Responding to a question about Russia’s demand for guarantees from the United States, Khatibzadeh said that Russia is not a third party to the JCPOA.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told a news conference in Moscow on March 5 that his country has demanded written guarantees from Washington at least at the secretary of state level the sanctions situation will not harm its cooperation with Tehran.

The comments by Lavrov followed after Russia came under severe sanctions by the West for its attack on Ukraine.

“We need guarantees these sanctions will in no way affect the trading, economic and investment relations contained in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action for the Iranian nuclear program. We have asked the American counterparts, who rule the roost here, to provide us with guarantees at least at the level of the secretary of state the current process launched by the United States will by no means affect our right to free and full-fledged trading, economic, investment, military and technical cooperation with Iran,” TASS quoted Lavrov as saying.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman stressed, “We do not have a third party in the JCPOA. Let us not forget what happened in Vienna to ensure a credible U.S. return to the JCPOA and its commitments under this internationally agreed agreement.”

Khatibzadeh pointed out that what was the subject of negotiations was the commitments of the United States.

He noted, “What happened in the first months of the Biden administration into these negotiations was that when Biden was able to reverse everything the previous president had done with just an executive order, he chose the path and failed legacy of Donald Trump.”

The Biden government has played a trick in the Vienna talks every day, he added.

Khatibzadeh continued by stating that today Vienna is “a mirror of yesterday’s unconstructive behavior” of the United States.

“We were not at the point of agreement. If we reach an agreement, we will announce it to the people of Iran loud and clear. The remaining issues between us and the United States require political decisions in Washington that have not yet been



answered to us, and we will return to Vienna when they respond,” he noted.

When asked about a Wall Street Journal report about the Vienna talks and a week-long deadline issued by the U.S. to the Russians to reconsider their demands, the spokesman said that the WSJ narrative is the American narrative against Russia, which is in conflict with it over the Ukraine war.

“I have spoken frankly and I have said in my statements, and all of them have been consistent, that the interests of the nation determine our path. It is the will of the United States to reduce what is happening in Vienna to a Russian request. The responsibility for the current situation we are in now lies with the United States. If the United States responds today, we can return to Vienna. Russia’s request must be discussed in the JCPOA Joint Commission. Russia’s approach has been constructive to date and has been the closest and most supportive among negotiators in Vienna over the past 11 months. Russian officials have stated in private talks and in the Joint Commission that they will not obstruct any good agreement. Do not let other narratives portray this situation differently,” Khatibzadeh stated.

He continued by saying that the Vienna talks is at the last steps, and the last steps are the most difficult ones.

“All issues are now in the American basket, and if they give the right answer today and make a political decision, the delegations can return to Vienna tomorrow,” the diplomat stressed.

He then reiterated that the United States is not a member of the JCPOA to talk about its members, saying that the U.S. has made some eccentric requests to the Joint Commission in the past 11 months.

“The deal, which is being finalized in Vienna, is an agreement that would take several months for the United States to return to the JCPOA. There will be no change in the original text of the 2015 nuclear deal and its annexes or the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231. Of course, the dimensions, conditions, appendices and stages of the return of the United States are written in this text,” he elaborated.

Khatibzadeh added that the date of the return of the delegations to Vienna will be announced by JCPOA coordinators, Josep Borrell and his deputy Enrique Mora.

“We are ready to return to Vienna today, but we are waiting for the U.S. to respond to the (remaining) issues. My impression is that the break will not be for long,” he concluded.

## Raisi felicitates 30th year of Tehran-Baku diplomatic ties

TEHRAN — In a message on Monday, Iran’s President Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi congratulated President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev on the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

In his message, Raisi said, “Over the past thirty years and based on the will of the people and high political officials, and given the common historical, cultural and religious interests and ties, the two countries have experienced warm relations with mutual respect and good neighborliness.”

The president also stressed that regional and international situation requires more need for strong and regular relations between neighboring countries, “especially those that share a common culture, history and civilization.”

“I am confident that the existing relations in all fields, especially in the field of economy and trade, will be further enhanced in the future for the benefit of the two nations,” he wrote.

Raisi’s message was in response to Aliyev’s message which was sent on Friday, March 11.

In his message, Aliyev stated that the cooperation capacities between Iran and Azerbaijan are much higher, saying, “I believe that today there are many prospects for

further development of our mutually beneficial cooperation.”

Aliyev also said, “The will of our nations, which are intertwined with religious and cultural roots, is the main basis of the relations between Azerbaijan and Iran, which is based on mutual respect and good neighborliness.”

A part of his message also read, “The will of our nations, which are intertwined with religious and cultural roots, is the main basis of the relations between Azerbaijan and Iran, which is based on mutual respect and good neighborliness.

The high level of our friendly relations today is the result of the joint activities of our countries over the past thirty years.

Over the years, numerous reciprocal trips, signed documents, agreements reached and joint projects have played an important role in developing our dynamic cooperation in the political, economic, transport, energy, cultural and other fields.

I appreciate the regular political talks between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Iran and our cooperation in a number of areas. I believe that today there are many prospects for further development of our mutually beneficial cooperation.”

# Iran won’t remain silent in face of Israeli actions

TEHRAN — Early on Sunday, at 1:20 am, at least a dozen ballistic missiles landed inside a vast compound in Erbil that is used by the Mossad, Israel’s external intelligence agency that trains spies.

The missiles were of the Fateh generation, which are domestically made by the IRGC.

According to Iraqi sources, 9 Israeli officials were killed in the strike, two of whom were Mossad agents.

Meanwhile, an Iranian news channel has said that the missile attack launched by Iran against targets in Erbil was a response to a previously unreported Israeli drone attack in the western Iranian province of Kermanshah.

Citing sources familiar with the matter, the Arabic-language Al-Alam news television said the missile attack launched by the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC), which targeted the headquarters of Israel in Erbil, came in response to a recent Israeli drone attack in the Mahidasht region in western Iran.

On February 14, a drone attack in Mahidasht conducted by Israel caused a fire in the logistics center of the IRGC in Kermanshah, but left no casualties.

According to the source, Iran had been planning to reply to Israel’s attack for a long time, but was “waiting for the circumstances in which Israel is the only one attacked with accuracy and sensitivity, and receives the necessary response.”

In response to a question regarding why Erbil was chosen to retaliate to Israel, the source stated that since Israel had launched attack on Mahidasht from the Iraqi Kurdistan, Israel should have received a retaliation from the same region.

According to an informed source, the dead and wounded of the IRGC operation were transferred by air ambulance to another Israeli headquarters in Erbil in a matter of hours, while it was reported that the condition of some of those wounded was critical.

The source emphasized that Israel’s actions against the Islamic Republic were warned against at various stages and through numerous channels to the Iraqi authorities, but these warnings were not taken into account by the relevant authorities.

According to an informed source, while Israelis are not permitted by Iraqi law to come to this nation and vice versa, Israeli operatives do not have security perks in any country in the region, including the Iraqi Kurdistan.

According to the informed official, the two targeted buildings were constructed in a resistant and durable manner for particular purposes, and they served as a gathering and entertainment area for Israelis in the neighborhood, and they are well secured by the Special Forces.

“Central government in Baghdad



must ensure nothing will threaten Iran from Iraqi territory”

Responding to questions in this regard, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said on Monday, “What is clear is that the Iraqi federal government has a definite responsibility to ensure that Iraq’s territory does not pose a threat to Iran’s neighbor. Unfortunately, in all the warnings that have been given repeatedly, Iraqi territory has been abused by third parties, counter-revolutionaries and anti-Iranian terrorist groups, and the United States has conducted military operations against Iran from inside Iraq, and the occupying regime in Jerusalem has sabotage bases in Iraq.”

He added that what Iran has been announced to the Iraqi government is that the Tehran-Baghdad friendship is conditioned based on respect for the interests and sovereignty and, most importantly, the maintenance of the stability of these relations.

“Our warnings were ignored and one of the centers of conspiracy and sabotage was responsibly attacked,” the spokesman noted.

In response to a question about whether the action will prevent the continuation of sabotage activities on the Iranian-Iraqi border, the spokesman expressed hope the message had been received.

“We have already sent messages politically, diplomatically and privately, but we are really at a point where we are being ignored.”

The U.S. flew a drone from Ain al-Assad airbase in western Iraq to assassinate Iranian Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani in January 2020.

Khatibzadeh then went on to say that it is by no means acceptable that one of Iran’s neighbors with deep relations and different levels of interactions, is the center of threat to Iran.

Khatibzadeh then said that this is a direct threat against Iran.

“This is not a threat to a third country. Unfortunately, the Zionist regime has repeatedly created insecurity inside Iran from the Iraqi soil, and some counter-revolutionary rallies have taken place in the Kurdistan region by the terrorist groups in that region. The federal government of Iraq was warned from this podium and they were secretly told many times not to let the borders of Iraq be insecure borders for your neighbor,” he elaborated.

Khatibzadeh stated that Iran does not tolerate a center of conspiracy, sabotage or dispatch of terrorist groups into Iran, either by counter-revolutionary groups and terrorist groups or by the Zionist regime inside the region.

“It has been said in meetings and is well known in international law. My expectation from the Iraqi federal government is to end this situation once and for all and not allow its borders to be abused, especially with all the claims that there are about the promotion of relations between the two countries to new levels,” he cautioned.

The spokesman stated that the Israeli regime should know that Iran has intelligence superiority regarding each and every point where it is present.

What is clear is that Iran will not keep silent when facing threats from the neighboring countries, even if it comes from a country like Iraq that Iran has deeply-rooted ties with.

Tehran respects the sovereignty of Iraq and all other countries, but first things first. They must not let their soil to be center of threat against the Islamic Republic.

In this regard, Iran’s envoy to Baghdad told a news conference in Karbala on Monday, “We respect the sovereignty of Iraq and its government.”

Iraj Masjedi then cited the double standards and hypocrisy in this regard, posing this question, “Why was the attack on Ain al-Assad carried out?”

He continued, “Because the Americans martyred Abu Mahdi al-Mohandes and General Qassem Soleimani in Iraq, and the Americans had to be held accountable. We had (at

that time) only one reaction against the United States, which took place in Ain al-Assad, and the aim was not to target Iraq, but to respond to the Americans.”

The Iranian ambassador added that the Israelis had established a base in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and they were working against the security of Iran from there.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran cannot back down from its own security. We have warned the Iraqi Kurdistan Region officials many times, but unfortunately this base acted against our security and the Islamic Republic acted against it in retaliation,” Masjedi noted.

According to the ambassador, this has nothing to do with the sovereignty of Iraq and is not disrespectful to the Iraqi people and government.

“We first want you to get rid of these (Israelis) from the region and not do these things. Now, if this is not done, should the Islamic Republic wait for the Israelis to act against our security? This reaction (missile operation) was against the Zionists, neither against the Americans, nor against Iraq,” the envoy noted.

He then rejected the claims by Western media that Iran had targeted the U.S. consulate in Erbil, saying, “Why do they say the U.S. consulate was targeted? Not that we like Americans. Everyone knows that we have been fighting the Americans for 40 years and it is not clear how long it will last, but this operation had nothing to do with the Americans. Neither to the U.S. embassy, nor to the U.S. consulate,” he stressed.

Masjedi reiterated that this operation was conducted against a security base acting against Iran in the Erbil area of the Kurdistan Region.

“The base must be wiped off from Kurdistan. Therefore, the sovereignty of Iraq is highly respected by us. Neither you nor I accept that the Kurdish region should become an Israeli base, because they (the Zionists) are acting against the interests of the two nations,” he added.

Since Naftali Bennett took office in Israel, their approach towards Iran has changed. “Killing Iran with a thousand knife wounds,” a strategy endorsed by the Israeli officials and think tanks such as the Foundation for Defense of Democracies known as FDD, consists of destabilizing the region and darkening Iran’s relations with the neighboring countries, as well as creating insecurity inside Iran to provoke people to confront the government.

Iranian intelligence forces on Sunday succeeded in dismantling the biggest spy network affiliated to the Mossad in West Azarbaijan province, northwestern Iran, the IRGC reported. Sending spies as Mossad agents to Iran is a big part of the strategy mentioned above.

Hezbollah chief Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah once said, “Israel is weaker than a spider’s nest.” He was right. Watch out!

## Iranian officials condemn mass execution in Saudi Arabia

TEHRAN — Officials in Iran have condemned the brutal execution of 81 men in Saudi Arabia.

Speaking on Monday in the meeting of the Supreme Council of Young People’s Affairs, President Ebrahim Raisi slammed the application of double standards by Western countries and the instrumental use of human rights, as well as the silence and inaction of the self-proclaimed human rights advocates towards death penalty against innocent people.

“International organizations and free media, as well as relevant institutions must break their silence,” the president remarked.

**Foreign Ministry says executions violate basic human rights principles**

On Sunday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh had reacted to the mass execution in Saudi Arabia.

He said the move contravenes the basic principles of human rights and international law, violated humanitarian principles and accepted legal procedures, and was carried out without observing fair judicial proceedings.

The spokesman underlined that execution and uncontrolled violence are no solution to self-made

crises, and the Saudi government cannot abuse common terms to cover up political and judicial turmoil and crackdown on people.

Khatibzadeh also referred to double standards adopted by the Western governments and their instrumental use of human rights.

He condemned the silence and inaction of the self-proclaimed defenders of human rights in the face of such actions, saying such an approach is a sign of hypocrisy on the part of these governments who exploit the issue of human rights for political purposes and satisfy their political greed against independent countries.

In one of the largest mass executions in Saudi Arabia since 1980, a total of 81 people were killed on charges of alleged terrorism-related activities.

The Saudi Press Agency (SPA) reported that the executions took place on March 12, and included seven Yemenis and one Syrian.

Forty of those executed are reported to have come from Qatif, a region populated by the kingdom’s Shia minority.

The Saudi government claims the executions were carried out on convicts who held “deviant beliefs, pledging allegiance to foreign

organizations.”

The Yemenis who were executed faced charges of allegedly supporting the Yemeni resistance group Ansarallah.

One of the executed, Abdallah al Zaher, was arrested at the age of 13.

International NGOs such as Human Rights Watch (HRW) have criticized the Saudi judicial system for its injustice and its lack of due process.

“People accused of crimes, including children, commonly face systematic violations of due process and fair trial rights, including arbitrary arrest,” an HRW report said on March 2022.

The HRW notes that many of the confessions of alleged “crimes” committed by detainees were obtained through torture, often as the sole basis for conviction.

Despite judicial reforms passed in February 2021, the HRW remains unconvinced about the Saudi judicial system, stating: “Saudi and international human rights groups have raised concerns that many arbitrary charges will simply be codified as wide-ranging, catch-all offenses that criminalize the rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly, among other rights.”



# Tehran, Moscow intensify consultations amid Western propaganda

From Page 1 ▶ Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on March 5, “We need guarantees that sanctions [over Ukraine] will not affect in any way the regime of trade, economic and investment ties set out in the JCPOA on Iran’s nuclear program. We asked our American colleagues (because they are running the whole show here) to give us guarantees in writing, at least at the level of the Secretary of State, that the current process launched by the U.S. will not impinge in any way on our free full-scale trade, economic, investment and military-technical cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

The Iranian foreign minister mounted diplomatic efforts to address the situation. He spoke over the phone with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov.

“We are against war and imposition of sanctions, and it is clear that cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and any country, including Russia, should not be affected by the atmosphere of sanctions,” Amir Abdollahian told Lavrov.



The Russian foreign minister responded by stressing “the need for cooperation between Iran and Russia in different fields, including various areas of trade and economic relations,” according to the Iranian Foreign Ministry.

The Russian foreign minister also told his Iranian counterpart that “the resuscitation of the JCPOA should ensure that all its participants have equal rights regarding the unhindered development of cooperation in all

areas without any discrimination,” according to a Russian Foreign Ministry statement.

The Iranian foreign minister also held a phone conversation with his Qatari counterpart Sheikh Abdul Rahman Al Thani on Saturday. After that conversation, Sheikh Abdul Rahman spoke over the phone with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and then headed to Moscow on Sunday. In Moscow, he met with Lavrov and discussed the Vienna talks and the war in

Ukraine. But it is unclear yet if he made any headway in terms of ending the pause in the Vienna talks.

While Sheikh Abdul Rahman was still in Moscow, Amir Abdollahian held another phone call this time with Oman’s Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr Albusaidi.

Amir Abdollahian’s diplomatic efforts could reach their crescendo in Moscow when he will discuss the Vienna talks face to face with Lavrov. Nour News, which is close to Iran’s Supreme National Security Council, described the visit as “meaningful,” underlining that it will provide an opportunity for “serious, frank, and forward-looking talks between two countries which indicated that they can have very close, defining, and successful cooperation on very complicated subjects.”

“The trip could be important in many ways in the midst of the complex context of the Vienna talks, as well as the escalation of the Ukraine crisis, which has led to an unprecedented confrontation between the West and Russia,” Nour News said.

## Iran will remain in Vienna until ‘strong agreement’ achieved: Shamkhani

TEHRAN – A top Iranian security official has said that Iran will stay in the Austrian capital until a “strong” agreement is achieved.

Ali Shamkhani, the secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council, said all pillars of the state are working to secure the country’s interests.

“All pillars of the Iranian state – in spite of all external and internal hype – work hard to preserve and advance Iran’s national interests,” Shamkhani said on Twitter. “We will remain in the #Vienna Talks until we reach a ‘strong agreement’ that meets all our legal and logical demands.”

Earlier, Shamkhani had said the lack of U.S. political decision regarding the Vienna talks has hampered the conclusion of a 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,” he tweeted.

Shamkhani’s latest tweet came after the chief European coordinator of the talks, Josep Borrell, announced a pause in the talks due to “external factors.”

“A pause in #ViennaTalks is needed, due to external factors. A final text is essentially ready and on the table. As coordinator, I will, with my team, continue to be in touch with all #JCPOA participants and the U.S. to overcome the current situation and to close the agreement,” Borrell said on Twitter.

France, Germany, and the UK –collectively known as the E3– made it clear what “external factors” mean. After implicitly accusing Russia of presenting “extraneous” conditions on March 8, the E3 pointed the finger of blame squarely at Russia on Saturday, warning of the collapse of the Vienna talks if Russia continued to insist on guarantees it is now demanding to shield its economic cooperation with Iran from Western sanctions over Ukraine.

“Nobody should seek to exploit JCPOA negotiations to obtain assurances that are separate to the JCPOA,” the E3 said in a joint statement. “This risks the collapse of the deal.”

The European backlash came after Russia said it needed guarantees that sanctions being slapped on Moscow by the West over the war in Ukraine won’t impede Russia’s cooperation with Iran in all fields.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov



said on March 5, “We need guarantees that sanctions [over Ukraine] will not affect in any way the regime of trade, economic and investment ties set out in the JCPOA on Iran’s nuclear program. We asked our American colleagues (because they are running the whole show here) to give us guarantees in writing, at least at the level of the Secretary of State, that the current process launched by the U.S. will not impinge in any way on our free full-scale trade, economic, investment and military-technical cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

Russian and Iranian officials are in close contact to discuss the matter, according to Russian Ambassador to Iran Levon Dzhagaryan.

## Erbil attack was a response to Israeli drone strike inside Iran: report

TEHRAN – An Iranian news television has said that the missile attack launched by Iran against targets in Erbil was a response to a previously unreported Israeli drone attack in the western Iranian province of Kermanshah.

Citing sources familiar with the matter, the Arabic-language Al-Alam news television said the missile attack launched by the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC), which targeted the headquarters of Israel in Erbil, on Sunday morning, came in response to a recent Israeli drone attack in Mahidasht region in western Iran.

The source stressed that Iran had been planning for a long time to respond to this Israeli attack, but “we were waiting for the circumstances in which the Israel is the only one targeted with precision and sensitivity, and receives the appropriate response.”

In response to a question about the reason for choosing Erbil in Iraq to respond to Israel, the source stressed that Israel’s attack on Mahidasht took place from Iraqi Kurdistan and therefore Israel should have received an answer from the same region.

The informed source indicated that in matter of few hours, the dead and wounded of the IRGC operation were transferred to another Israeli headquarters in Erbil by air ambulance, while it was reported that the condition of some of the wounded was critical.

The source stressed the Islamic Republic warned against Israel’s moves in several stages and through various channels, but unfortunately these documented warnings were not taken into consideration by the concerned authorities.

According to the informed source, while the Israelis are not allowed, according to Iraqi law, to travel to this country and vice versa, the agents of Israel do not enjoy security privileges in any regional country as in the case of the Iraqi Kurdistan.

According to the well-informed official, the



two targeted buildings were built in a resistant and durable manner and for special uses, and they were a place for gathering and recreation of the Israelis in the region, and they are fully guarded by the Special Forces.

At least a dozen ballistic missiles landed inside a vast compound that Iran says is used by the Mossad, Israel’s external intelligence agency.

The missiles hit the compound early Sunday morning, wrecking damage to a set of buildings under construction and reportedly killing a number of agents.

The Beirut-based news television Al-Mayadeen said some agents were killed and injured in the attack. Citing sources familiar with the matter, the news channel said the attack was carried out with more than 10 precision-guided ballistic missiles that succeeded in targeting an Israeli intelligence and security headquarters in the vicinity of Erbil. The sources confirmed that the attack led to the destruction of the Mossad headquarters on the Masif road on the outskirts of Erbil.

The IRGC claimed responsibility for the attack, saying it targeted an Israeli “center of conspiracy” in the Kurdish city. “Following the recent crimes of the fake Zionist regime and the previous announcement that the crimes and evils of this infamous regime will not go unanswered, the strategic center for conspiracy and evil of the Zionists was

targeted by powerful and pinpoint missiles of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps,” the IRGC said in a statement.

It also warned Israel against further moves against Iran. “Once again, we warn the criminal Zionist regime that the repetition of any evil will face harsh, decisive and destructive responses.”

The statement added, “We also assure the great nation of Iran that the security and peace of the Islamic homeland is the red line of the armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran and they will not allow anyone to threaten or attack it.”

The IRGC missile operation came nearly a week after the military organization vowed to give an answer to Israel over the Israeli targeting of two IRGC colonels near Damascus. Last week on Monday, Israel targeted a Damascus suburb. The attack resulted in the assassination of two senior IRGC officers identified as Colonel Ehsan Kabralaei-Pour and Colonel Morteza Saeid-Nejad.

The Sunday attack, however, does not seem to be a response to this attack. The IRGC statement didn’t mention the Damascus attack. And Iranian media said the missile operation was a response to a previously unreported Israeli “mischiefs” conducted from Iraqi soil.

A source familiar with the matter told the Tasnim news agency that Israel had carried out some “evil acts” from the Iraqi Kurdistan and that the IRGC decided to give it a response whence it orchestrated its mischief.

“Some of the recent Zionist atrocities against Iran have taken place from Iraqi soil, and for this reason, the Guards intended to punish the regime on the same soil,” the source told Tasnim.

The source also warned that Israel will receive a similar or even more powerful response if it continues its evil acts against Iran.

## SPORTS

### Shahdab Yazd win Iran Volleyball Super League first-ever title

TEHRAN – Shahdab Yazd claimed the title of the 35th edition of the Iran Volleyball Super League for the first time in their history on Monday.

In the match held in Tehran’s Khaney-e Volleyball, Shahdab defeated Paykan 3-1 (25-19, 23-25, 25-17, 25-18) and claimed the title.

Shahdab, headed by Alireza Tolou Kian, had defeated Paykan 3-0 in their first match on Saturday.

The final matches were held on a best-of-three basis where the team with two wins would be guaranteed the title.

Sepahan and Foolad Sirjan took joint bronze medal.

Paykan Tehran are most-decorated Iranian volleyball team, winning the title 12 times.

Shahdab and Paykan volleyball clubs will also represent Iran at the 22nd edition of the Asian Men’s Club Volleyball Championship in Tehran.

The Iranian Volleyball Super League (IVSL) is a professional volleyball league in Iran at the top of the Iranian volleyball league system.

It was founded in 1975 as the Pasargard Cup, but after the Iranian Revolution it was renamed to the first Division. In 1997 the league system was revamped and the Iranian Super League was established.

### Paulo Bento predicts ‘difficult game’ against Iran

TEHRAN – South Korea coach Paulo Bento predicted a difficult match against Iran in the 2022 FIFA World Cup qualification.

Bento on Monday called up most of his usual suspects in a bid to win his team’s final two qualifying matches this month. South Korea will host Iran in Seoul on March 24 and wrap up the final Asian qualifying round by visiting Dubai to play the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on March 29.

With 20 points after eight matches, South Korea are in second place in Group A of the ongoing round, two points back of Iran. The top two teams from each of the two groups in this round will earn automatic berths. Iran and South Korea are already in, while Saudi Arabia, Japan and Australia are still duking it out for the two tickets in Group B.

Instead of playing it safe this month, Bento has taken dead aim at Iran for the top seed in Group A. Winning the group and rising in the FIFA rankings should also help South Korea’s position in the World Cup draw, allowing them to avoid some tough countries, though Bento said he wasn’t yet thinking ahead to the draw.

“We have two games. We should think how we’re going to face the next opponents and how we can do our job and try to finalize this qualifier in the best possible way,” Bento said at his online press conference Monday. “And that is to get the six points and finish in the first place. After that, we will see what’s coming and see where we’re going to be in the draw. I think we have a good challenge before that.”

Facing Iran has been a challenge for South Korea for years. South Korea’s last victory against the ‘Persian Leopards’ came in January 2011. In their most recent meeting, held in Tehran in October, the teams ended in a 1-1 draw, with South Korea blowing a 1-0 lead in the second half.

South Korea have managed just nine wins against 10 draws and 13 losses all time versus Iran, Yonhap reported.

“In the physical aspect as well as in the tactical one, Iran have players that can break balance in our team, players that have experience,” Bento said. “I have no doubt about their quality. We will try to reach the victory in order to reach the first position in the group. I am sure that it will be a difficult game but at the same time, I am convinced that we can do that and we’re going to try to do that without any doubt.”

### Pouraliganji linked with Persepolis

TEHRAN – Iran national football team and Chinese club Shenzhen defender Morteza Pouraliganji says that he is interested in joining Persepolis in the near future.

The 30-year-old defender is recovering from ACL surgery. Pouraliganji trains with Iranian football teams Persepolis and Nassaji in Tehran.



Pouraliganji said he is under contract with the Chinese club but he likes to play for Persepolis.

“I cannot hide my interest. Yes, I like to play for my favorite team Persepolis but at the moment I am under contract with Shenzhen,” Pouraliganji said.

### Iran to participate in NSDF Futsal Invitation Championship

TEHRAN – Iran U19 futsal team will participate in the 2022 NSDF Futsal Invitation Championship.

The tournament will be held in Bangkok, Thailand from March 15 to 20.

Iran are in Group B with Myanmar and Mongolia while host Thailand, Oman and Maldives are in Group A.

Iran U19 futsal team, headed by Ali Sanei, will open the competition with a match against Mongolia slated for Tuesday.

The team will also play Myanmar on Thursday.

### Giti Pasand, Malavan crowned Serie A, B champions in Iran volleyball

TEHRAN – Iran Men’s National League One came to a close with Giti Pasand and Malavan landing the respective Series A and Series B titles.

Thirty-two teams participated in League One consisting of 18 teams in Series A and 14 teams in Series B.

With overall 159 matches contested in Series A of League One, Giti Pasand and Nowshahr Setareye Tabarestan performed well up to their standards to finish top two places. Chaloos Iranshid and Sirjan Golgozar shared the bronze medal.

A total of 247 matches had been contested in Series B of League One, but Tehran Malavan proved their best above the rest to claim the top spot. Shahre Babak Mess finished second, with Sepehr Ghahreman and Qom Moghavemat in joint third places for the shared bronze medal.

The top two teams in Series A had been promoted to the Super League of Iran in the next season, while the top two teams in Series B had also secured their berths in the Series A of League One also in the next season.

Italian Alexandra Campedelli, head coach of Iran senior women’s team, watched the final match onsite.

The awarding ceremony was held at Khaneye Volleyball where the final matches took place.



## Govt. to hold tender for building 4,000MW-capacity renewable power plants



TEHRAN – The Iranian government is going to award the projects for constructing renewable power plants with the capacity of 4,000 megawatts (MW) to capable companies through a tender which will be held early next Iranian calendar year (begins on March 21), IRIB reported.

According to Head of Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization (SATBA) Mahmoud Kamani, the mentioned tender is going to be held in line with the government's planning for the construction of renewable power plants with the capacity of 10,000 MW across the country.

Kamani said the necessary provisions for the funding of the mentioned projects have been made in the next year's national budget bill and the tender will be held early next year after the bill is approved by the Guardian Council.

The official mentioned the Energy Ministry's recent public call for the contribution of private companies in a project for developing renewable power plants in the country, and said: "After the public call for the construction of renewable power plants, we received requests from private companies for establishing power plants with the capacity of more than 95,000 MW, and we have signed

memorandums of understanding with many of those companies."

According to Kamani, the primary studies have also been conducted for the construction of wind farms with the capacity of 3,000 MW, using the above-mentioned model.

The official noted that renewable power plants with the capacity of 2,000 MW will also be constructed by major industrial and mining companies, their generated electricity which will be provided to the Energy Ministry and the ministry will supply the mentioned companies with an equal amount of electricity from the national grid.

Production units based in industrial parks are also going to fund the construction of such power plants with the capacity of 1,000 MW, in order to use the generated electricity in peak consumption hours.

The SATBA head said the plan is to construct renewable power plants with the capacity of 10,000 MW over the next four years, of which 500 MW will come on stream by the next Iranian calendar year's summer peak consumption period (summer begins on June 22).

Back in January, the Energy Ministry and some of the country's private contractors signed memorandums of understanding (MOU) for cooperation in the construction of renewable power plants to generate 10,000 megawatts (10 gigawatts) of electricity across the country.

Speaking in the signing ceremony, Energy Minister Ali-Akbar Mehrabian said the government has allocated over 30 trillion rials (about \$115.3 million) for the development of renewables in the budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year, saying that it is an unprecedented budget in this area.

## Export from Isfahan province rises 62 percent in 11 months yr/yr

TEHRAN – The value of export from Isfahan province rose 62 percent during the first 11 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2021-February 19, 2022), from the same period of time in the past year, a provincial official announced.

Rasoul Kouhestani, the director-general of the province's customs department, said that 1.944 million tons of commodities worth \$1.216 billion were exported from the province in the 11-month period, also indicating 14 percent growth in terms of weight.

He named Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkey, and Armenia as the major export destinations of the province's products, in a row, during the first 11 months of this year.

As previously announced by the deputy head of Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), the value of Iran's non-oil trade rose 38 percent during the first 11 months of the current year.

Foroud Asgari said that Iran traded over 149.4 million tons of non-oil products worth \$90 billion with other countries in the mentioned period.



He noted that the weight of trade in the mentioned period also grew by 12 percent in comparison to the figure for the previous year's same 11 months.

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

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

less than their net asset value, which we do not have like this among the market funds", Eshqi further stated.

According to Note 2 of the budget law of the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20, 2021), the government is allowed to offer and sell its remaining shares in the state-owned companies in the usual way or through the exchange-traded funds.

Following this legal capacity, at the beginning of the previous year, the cabinet allowed the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs to transfer the remaining government shares in the framework of three ETFs.

An ETF is an investment fund traded on stock exchanges, much like stocks. An ETF holds assets such as stocks, commodities, or bonds and generally

# Oil bonds to be issued for investment in free, special zones

TEHRAN – The Iranian government plans to issue oil bonds in order to fund development projects in the country's special economic and free trade zones, according to the secretary of the Iranian Free Zones High Council.

"Necessary funding for investment and development of free and special zones will be provided through offering oil bonds," IRIB quoted Saeed Mohammad as saying on Sunday.

Speaking in a ceremony for signing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Secretariat of the Free Zones High Council and the National Development Fund of Iran (NDF), Mohammad said that the mentioned MOU has been signed with the aim of mutual cooperation for funding investment and development projects at the country's free and special economic zones.

"This memorandum was signed for cooperation in providing financial resources for investment



and development in free and special zones through issuing oil bonds as foreign currency credits," the official said.

According to Mohammad, based on the mentioned MOU the NDF will cooperate in funding the establishment of joint free zones at border areas, creating free zones in neighboring countries, establishing bank branches in free zones abroad, etc.

"Part of the mentioned resources will also be allocated

to the Vice Presidency for Science and Technology for supporting knowledge-based projects in free zones," the official added.

Emphasizing the NDF role in creating monetary and financial institutions, Mohammad said: "In this memorandum, it was decided to identify investment opportunities and production units that need financial resources in free zones and to provide the list to the fund; then, the National Development Fund will provide

resources to investors based on the rules and regulations that will be introduced through operating banks."

"One of the major areas that have been addressed in this memorandum is the cooperation for funding startups and knowledge-based companies based in the country's free zones," he stressed.

Over the past two decades, free and special economic zones have played a significant role in Iran's economy, and the Iranian government has been seriously pursuing a program for the development of the existing zones and establishing new ones.

According to Morteza Bank, the former secretary of Iranian Free Zones High Council, over 40 percent of Iran's exports are done through the country's free trade zones and special economic zones and \$169 billion worth of commodities have been exported from these areas in the past seven years.

## Commodities worth over \$850m traded at IME in a week

TEHRAN- During the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday), 2.7 million tons of commodities worth over \$856 million were traded at Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME).

As reported by the IME's Public Relations and International Affairs Department, the exchange traded on its metals and minerals trading floor 2.195 million tons of commodities valued at almost \$531 million.

On this floor, the IME's customers purchased 1.295 million tons of cement, 456,222 tons of steel, 321,000 tons of iron ore, 100,500 tons of sponge iron, 7,310 tons of zinc, 18,575 tons of aluminum, 7,020 tons of copper, 240 tons of molybdenum concentrate, 200 tons of lead and 22 kg of gold bars.

Furthermore, the IME saw trade 487,112 tons of commodities on both domestic and export pits of its oil and petrochemical

trading floor valued almost \$309 million.

The exchange customers purchased on this floor 100,076 tons of polymeric products, 108,849 tons of bitumen, 198,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 36,000 tons of lube cut, 41,555 tons of chemicals, 2,375 tons of sulfur and 2,247 tons of base oil.

Last but not least was the IME's side market with 18,583 tons of commodities traded on it.

The value of trades at Iran Mercantile Exchange in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20, 2021) rose 108 percent compared to the preceding year.

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

In the past year, several new records were achieved in terms of the volume and value



of transactions in the mentioned market's various floors including the industrial, petroleum, and petrochemical floors.

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

## TEDPIX drops 500 points on Monday

TEHRAN- TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), fell 595 points to close at 1.334 million points on Monday.

As reported, over 5.206 billion securities worth 37.368 trillion rials (about \$143.7 million) were traded at the TSE.

The first market's index fell 485 points, and the second market's index dropped 1,044 points.

TEDPIX 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.

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

Sabaei had previously announced the allocation of 120 trillion rials (about \$430 million) of NDF resources for the Capital Market Development and Stabilization Fund.

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

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

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

Following the 13th government's new strategies to improve the stock market, the Government Economic Coordination Headquarters convened a meeting on November 2, 2021, chaired by President Ebrahim Raisi, during which a decision was

made to inject new resources from NDF into the Capital Market Development and Stabilization Fund.

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

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

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

## Structure of first, second ETFs to be amended

TEHRAN- The head of Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) said that the structure and charter of the first and second exchange-traded funds (ETFs) will be amended.

Majid Eshqi said that the two funds have become a problem in the capital market and have a special structure.

"If this structure is reformed, the price of these two funds could be closer to the net value of their assets," he added.

Amendments must be made to the fund's charter, the SEO head said, adding, the general approval has been received in this due and the amendments should be submitted to the cabinet for approval.

"At the moment, the current price of these two funds is about 25 percent



operates with an arbitrage mechanism designed to keep it trading close to its net asset value, although deviations can occasionally occur.

In May 2020, the government sold shares in three banks and two insurance companies via the first exchange-traded

fund (dubbed Dara First).

The bank-based ETF holds 17 percent of government stake in Tejarat Bank, 17 percent in Bank Mellat, 18.32 percent in Bank Saderat Iran, 17.34 percent in Alborz Insurance Company and 11.44 percent in Amin Reinsurance Company.

Dara First, listed on Tehran Stock Exchange, which is Iran's major stock exchange, was the first fund from a series of three ETFs, through them shares of some state-owned organizations and companies are planned to be offered.

The shares to be offered via the mentioned Iranian ETFs belong to those governmental bodies defined in Iran's privatization program, a comprehensive plan seriously followed up by the government to downsize and reduce its role in the economy.

The second ETF (dubbed First Refinery, or Dara Second), which holds government shares in four major oil refining companies, namely Tehran Oil Refining Company, Isfahan Oil Refining Company, Tabriz Oil Refining Company and Bandar Abbas Oil Refining Company, was offered in late August 2020.

The government owns 20 percent of shares in each refinery.

It has also a plan to divest shares in giant auto and metal companies through a third ETF (dubbed Dara Third). The third fund is expected to hold 12.05 percent of government stakes in the National Iranian Copper Industry Company, 17.2 percent in Mobarakeh Steel Company, 14.04 percent in Iran Khodro, and 23 percent in SAIPA (the two main domestic carmakers).



# Optimism amid Russia-Ukraine peace talks

From page 1 ► Moscow has not ruled the option out, having previously said that the Kremlin would not refuse such a meeting to discuss “specific” issues, but there have been no further details on a date.

Nevertheless, both sides have hailed progress at earlier rounds aimed at ending more than two weeks of direct fighting between the Russian and Ukrainian armies.

Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Zelensky and part of the Ukrainian negotiating team announced the latest peace talks saying “negotiations go non-stop in the format of video conferences. a negotiating session will be held to sum up the preliminary results.”

His remarks confirmed an earlier statement by Dmitry Peskov, the spokesman for the Kremlin and the Russian presidency. Peskov has been quoted by Russian news agencies as saying that negotiations are scheduled to continue.

The confirmation of the next round of talks come after both sides said they were making headway at the negotiations.

Leonid Slutsky, a senior member of Russia’s negotiating team, told the state-run television network RT that “significant progress” was made following several rounds of talks hosted on the border of neighboring Belarus.

According to Russian news agencies, he told the network “if we compare the positions of both delegations at the start of the talks and now, we see significant progress”.

The Russian official says “my own expectations are that this progress could develop over the next few days into a unified position held by both delegations in documents to be signed.”

This week, Turkey hosted a first

meeting between the Russian and Ukrainian foreign ministers. The talks produced no apparent progress towards a ceasefire, but analysts say the fact they were even meeting has left a window open for an end to the fighting.

According to Podolyak, Russia had stopped issuing “ultimatums” and instead “carefully listens to our positions”. On Saturday, Zelensky pointed out that Russia had adopted a “fundamentally different approach” in the talks.

“Russia is already beginning to talk constructively,” Podolyak said “I think that we will achieve some results literally in a matter of days.”

Meanwhile, Russian President Putin, who approved a military operation in Ukraine on February 24, says there had been “some positive shifts” in the dialogue and that the negotiations are now being held on an almost daily basis.

Ukraine has previously said it was open to hold talks with Russia, but not to surrender in the conflict. Reports suggest thousands have died, while the United Nations says more than 2.7 million have fled to neighboring counties since the conflict began.

Three rounds of talks between the two sides in Belarus, most recently last Monday, had focused mainly on humanitarian issues and led to the opening of humanitarian corridors for civilians to escape the fighting.

Among the latest developments on the battlefield, a barrage of Russian missiles hit a large Ukrainian military facility outside the country’s western city of Lviv, near the border with NATO member Poland in an escalation of the conflict in the west of Ukraine while fighting raged elsewhere.

Russia’s defense ministry says airstrikes had destroyed a large amount of weapons supplied by



foreign nations that were being stored at the Yavoriv military base as well and killed “foreign mercenaries” who joined Kyiv’s army in its fight against Russian forces.

The defense ministry spokesperson Igor Konashenkov says Moscow had used high-precision, long-range weapons to strike the Yavoriv facility and a separate base in the village of Starichi.

“As a result of the strike, up to 180 foreign mercenaries and a large amount of foreign weapons were destroyed,” he said.

The 360-square km facility is one of Ukraine’s biggest military training grounds and is the largest in the western part of the country, which has so far been spared the worst of the fighting.

Russia has warned that convoys of Western arms shipments to Ukraine would be considered legitimate targets.

Regional governor Maksym Kozmitskyi said Russian planes fired around 30 rockets at the Yavoriv facility and that some were intercepted.

Meanwhile, local authorities in Mariupol say over 2,100 have been killed in the city since hostilities began, raising the toll by almost 1,000 since Wednesday. It is not clear how many of the dead that have been are civilians or combatants.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has warned that

Mariupol faces “a worst-case scenario” if the warring parties do not urgently reach a “concrete humanitarian agreement”.

Fighting has raged on in the Kyiv suburbs as Russian forces advance ever closer to the capital. According to the Ukrainian president’s office,

only roads to the south remain open and Kyiv is preparing to mount a “relentless defense”.

Ukrainian soldiers at the scene have told media outlets that Bucha city to the northwest is entirely held by Russian forces along with parts of Irpin city next to the capital.

Medics and witnesses say an American journalist has been shot dead in Irpin, becoming the first foreign reporter killed since Russia’s invasion. Papers found on the reporter’s body identify him as a 50-year-old video documentary maker.

Ukraine announced on Saturday at least 1,300 of its soldiers have been killed so far in the conflict with funeral processions becoming a daily sight now.

Energy officials in Kyiv say power has been restored at Ukraine’s retired Chernobyl nuclear power plant that was seized by Russian forces in the first days of the conflict.

Eleven people have died in a strike on the southern city of Mykolaiv, according to the regional governor. The city lies on the road to the port city of Odessa, around 100 kilometers away.

The Tehran Times cannot immediately independently verify the number of casualties.

Elsewhere, the United Nations says almost 2.7 million people have fled the conflict in Ukraine, more than 100,000 of them in the past 24 hours; more than half have headed to Poland.

Journalists in Poland say local organizations are helping the refugees with zero help from NATO or the European Union despite Poland being a member of both organizations.

## Russia in Ukraine: Qui Bono?

I don’t know if the U.S. foreign-policy elite wanted Russia to invade Ukraine – an argument could be made for the affirmative – but I’d hate to think it did. Yet given its long record of global mischief (a polite word for its machinations), we certainly cannot rule out the point a priori.

Perhaps the best evidence in favor of the proposition is that President Biden refused to take the few simple steps that might have averted the whole thing. (The attempt would have cost nothing.) But if an invasion might have been averted and was unwanted, why was so much weaponry and other military aid poured into Ukraine in apparent anticipation of a splendid little war?

I acknowledge that none of this constitutes a smoking gun (pun intended), but the question is worth asking. One might say it was a “just in case” move, but the risks were high because, first, US support might have encouraged Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to do something foolish, and second, the arms flow itself might have provoked a Russian response, particularly since the Ukrainian National Guard has the pro-Nazi Azov Battalion incorporated into it.

That said, I am far more confident that, from Biden on down – if I’m not giving him



too much credit – the foreign-policy makers foresaw benefits in the reprehensible Russian invasion.

Benefits? *Qui bono?* To whom? Well, certainly not the Ukrainians who are dying, hurting, and fleeing their homes in terror. Nor do the beneficiaries include the rest of the world’s regular people, including Americans, who now must wonder if the end of the world is at hand, or if not that, then how they’ll cope with the inevitable economic hardship that war and sanctions impose: rising prices, food shortages, and so on.

But make no mistake: there are beneficiaries, as there are in all wars. (“There’s not much I can tell you about this war. It’s like all wars, I guess. The undertakers are winning.”) The American foreign-policy elite itself is a beneficiary because the heightened tensions and potential for conflict offer enormous political opportunities for bigger budgets, grander missions, and the prestige that comes from playing Winston Churchill.

Then there are the sheer economic benefits – the profits, compliments of the taxpayers – to the military-industrial complex, which has profited handsomely from NATO expansion since 1998 and from the increased military budgets in NATO countries. Crystal City, Va., will not be on hard times, so matter how the rest of us fare. (Remember when Salesman-in-Chief Donald Trump used to chide the NATO countries for spending too little on their militaries? Get it now? Did you really think he had the American taxpayers in mind?)

And let’s face it, NATO needed a shot in the arm. The Soviet Union was long gone, and international terrorism has just not lived up to its ominous billing. It hasn’t had the staying power to justify the sinecures that the obsolete alliance had provided over the years. Now things have changed – in Finland and Sweden, historically neutral countries, “public support for joining NATO has surged to record levels,” Yasmeen Serhan writes in *The Atlantic*.

Nor should we underrate the satisfaction that the elite expects to get from the likely prolonged Russian quagmire. As Scott Horton writes,

Weapons to Ukraine had all been supposedly “calibrated” they said, “not to provoke Mr. Putin,” officials told the *New York Times*. Maybe arming an insurgency truly is Plan B after an invasion they truly meant to deter and these Democrats are just very poor at “calibration.” But they sure seem to be

thinking ahead to how an invasion could hurt Russia, with the poor Ukrainians serving as merely an instrument against them.

“The level of military support would make our efforts in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union [in the 1980s] look puny by comparison,” said former Hillary Clinton adviser retired Adm. James Stavridis. I sense some anticipatory glee.

The failed presidential candidate herself – the one who did as much as anyone to ratchet up tensions with Russia during and after her witless campaign – herself weighed in during a Feb. 28 MSNBC interview. She was asked what she thought about Americans going to fight as private individuals (as they did during the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s), and also whether other countries, including NATO members, ought to send troops to fight the Russians. Clinton responded:

*It may well be that some people will go into Ukraine to help fight the Russians.*

*I don’t think it’s a good idea for that to be a government-sponsored effort. And I think people who go should be made aware that they are going on their own.*

*It is heartbreaking to see Ukraine standing alone against Russia, although they’re doing*

*so far an amazing job in rallying their citizens. I don’t think you will find any country right now that will do that.*

And then she added:  
*But, remember, the Russians invaded Afghanistan back in 1980. And although no country went in, they certainly had a lot of countries supplying arms and advice and even some advisers to those who were recruited to fight Russia. It didn’t end well for the Russians. There were other unintended consequences, as we know. But the fact is that a very motivated and then funded and armed insurgency basically drove the Russians out of Afghanistan.*

Did you catch the carefully buried reference to 9/11 and all the death and destruction that ensued in the “war on terror” and that still plagues the Middle East? It’s in these words: *“There were other unintended consequences”* – as though what followed was an insignificant detail of the valiant effort to aid the mujahideen – al Qaeda was there – against the Russians beginning in 1979.

Scott Horton, the author of *Enough Already: Time to End the War on Terrorism*, commented:

*People really should watch the entire clip to see the way Clinton smirks at the cute little irony of al Qaeda’s attacks against America and the entire 20-year terror war: What are two million dead humans, 10 trillion dollars wasted, the 21st century and new millennium started off soaking in blood just a decade after the peaceful victory for the West after the fall of the USSR? Just a few little-old “unintended consequences,” not even worth mentioning.*

Anyone who can talk the way Clinton does is a seriously flawed human being. And she’s not the first. Recall that President Carter’s national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, bragged, no doubt with exaggeration, that he personally lured Russia into Afghanistan so Russia would have its own “Vietnam.” Now here’s Hillary Clinton essentially saying that, with Western help, Ukraine just might be Russia’s 21st-century Afghanistan. Oh, joy!

We shouldn’t be surprised by her cynical neglect of the suffering Afghans and Ukrainians. Remember, she was co-president in the 1990s when she and her husband, Bill Clinton the triangulator, helped to pave the way for every virtually manmade disaster of the 21st century.

(Source: antiwar.com)

## Saudi Arabia puts 81 to death in its largest mass execution

Saudi Arabia on Saturday executed 81 people convicted of crimes ranging from killings to belonging to militant groups, the largest known mass execution carried out in the kingdom in its modern history.

The number of executed surpassed even the toll of a January 1980 mass execution for the 63 militants convicted of seizing the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979, the worst-ever militant attack to target the kingdom and Islam’s holiest site.

It wasn’t clear why the kingdom choose Saturday for the executions, though they came as much of the world’s attention remained focused on Russia’s war on Ukraine — and as the U.S. hopes to lower record-high gasoline prices as energy prices spike worldwide. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson reportedly plans a trip to Saudi Arabia next week over oil prices as well.

The number of death penalty cases being carried out in Saudi Arabia had dropped during the coronavirus pandemic, though the kingdom continued to behead convicts under King Salman and his assertive son, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

The kingdom also said some of those executed were members of al-Qaida, the Islamic State group and also backers of Yemen’s Houthi rebels. A Saudi-led coalition has been battling the Houthis since 2015 in neighboring Yemen in an effort to restore the internationally recognized government to power.

Those executed included 73 Saudis, seven Yemenis and one Syrian. The report did not say where the executions took place.

“The accused were provided with the right to an attorney and were guaranteed their full rights under Saudi law during the judicial process, which found them guilty of committing multiple heinous crimes that left a large number of civilians and law enforcement officers dead,” the Saudi Press Agency said.

“The kingdom will continue to take a strict and unwavering stance against terrorism and extremist ideologies that threaten the stability of the entire world,” the report added. It did not say how the prisoners were executed, though death-row inmates typically are beheaded in Saudi Arabia.

An announcement by Saudi state television described those executed as having “followed the



footsteps of Satan” in carrying out their crimes.

The executions drew immediate international criticism.

“The world should know by now that when Mohammed bin Salman promises reform, bloodshed is bound to follow,” said Soraya Bauwens, the deputy director of Reprieve, a London-based advocacy group.

Ali Adbusi, the director of the European Saudi Organisation for Human Rights, alleged that some of those executed had been tortured and faced trials “carried out in secret.”

“These executions are the opposite of justice,” he said.

The kingdom’s last mass execution came in January 2016, when the kingdom executed 47 people, including a prominent opposition Shiite cleric who had rallied demonstrations in the kingdom.

In 2019, the kingdom beheaded 37 Saudi citizens, most of them minority Shiites, in a mass execution across the country for alleged terrorism-related crimes. It also publicly nailed the severed body and head of a convicted extremist to a pole as a warning to others. Such crucifixions after execution, while rare, do occur in the kingdom.

Activists, including Ali al-Ahmed of the U.S.-based Institute for Gulf Affairs, and the group Democracy for the Arab World Now said they believe that over three dozen of those executed Saturday also were Shiites. The Saudi statement, however, did not identify the faiths of those killed.

Shiites, who live primarily in the kingdom’s oil-rich east, have long complained of being treated as second-class citizens. Executions of Shiites in the past have stirred regional unrest. Saudi Arabia meanwhile remains engaged in diplomatic talks with its Shiite regional rival Iran to try to ease

years-long tensions.

Sporadic protests erupted Saturday night in the island kingdom of Bahrain — which has a majority Shiite population but is ruled by a Sunni monarchy, a Saudi ally — over the mass execution.

The 1979 seizure of the Grand Mosque remains a crucial moment in the history of the oil-rich kingdom.

A band of ultraconservative Saudi Sunni militants took the Grand Mosque, home to the cube-shaped Kaaba that Muslims pray toward five times a day, demanding the Al Saud royal family abdicate. A two-week siege that followed ended with an official death toll of 229 killed. The kingdom’s rulers soon further embraced Wahhabism, an ultraconservative Islamic doctrine.

Since taking power, Crown Prince Mohammed under his father has increasingly liberalized life in the kingdom, opening movie theaters, allowing women to drive and defanging the country’s once-feared religious police.

However, U.S. intelligence agencies believe the crown prince also ordered the slaying and dismemberment of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi, while overseeing airstrikes in Yemen that killed hundreds of civilians.

In excerpts of an interview with *The Atlantic* magazine, the crown prince discussed the death penalty, saying a “high percentage” of executions had been halted through the payment of so-called “blood money” settlements to grieving families.

“Well about the death penalty, we got rid of all of it, except for one category, and this one is written in the Quran, and we cannot do anything about it, even if we wished to do something, because it is clear teaching in the Quran,” the prince said, according to a transcript later published by the Saudi-owned satellite news channel Al-Arabiya.

“If someone killed someone, another person, the family of that person has the right, after going to the court, to apply capital punishment, unless they forgive him. Or if someone threatens the life of many people, that means he has to be punished by the death penalty.”

He added: “Regardless if I like it or not, I don’t have the power to change it.”

(Source: AP)





## Prehistorical glazed bricks, recovered from smuggler in Switzerland, go on show at Tehran museum



From page 1 ► the Middle East at the time, intending to sell a collection of Qalaichi bricks. Curtis traveled to a warehouse in Chiasso, very close to the Italian border. He warned the vendor that the bricks may have been illegally exported from Iran and advised that they should be returned. His advice was ignored.

## Restoration work begins on Sassanid arch bridge

TEHRAN – A restoration project has recently been commenced on the ruins of a Sassanid-era (224 CE to 651) arch bridge in the western Lorestan province.

The project is aimed to strengthen Pol-e Dokhtar and repair damaged parts, the provincial tourism chief said on Monday.

Traditional materials and methods are being used for the restoration project, according to international standards, Seyyed Amin Qasemi added.

With 270 meters long, Pol-e Dokhtar (literally meaning Girl Bridge) was built on the remains of an ancient structure dating back to the Achaemenid era (c. 550 – 330 BC).

Only one 18-meter-high arch has remained from the original structure, which was a passage between two ancient cities of Shapur Khast and Jundi Shapur.

Inscribed on the National Heritage list, the bridge has been restored several times over the years.

Lorestan, which is a region of raw

The bricks remained in Chiasso for years, but in 2008 the warehouse owners took action after the dealer's storage bill had remained unpaid. The warehouse obtained authority to seize the contents and on finding the bricks, the Swiss authorities were alerted. Curtis, together with a London-based lawyer, Jeremy Scott, contacted Tehran's National Museum, which submitted a formal request for their return.

The objects have led to a reconsideration of Mannaean civilization since they show that its people were highly skilled artists. Their designs also reveal a strong Assyrian influence, such as the human-headed winged bulls.

Curtis, who is now the academic director of the Iran Heritage Foundation, says that before the discovery of the bricks, "the richness of Mannaean civilization and its links with Assyria had not been appreciated".

Composed of 51 pieces of bricks, each bearing a particular figure or motif, the collection will remain on show till April 19.



beauty, was inhabited by Iranian Indo-European peoples, including the Medes, c. 1000 BC. Cimmerians and Scythians intermittently ruled the region from about 700 to 625 BC. The Luristan Bronzes noted for their eclectic array of Assyrian, Babylonian, and Iranian artistic motifs, date from this turbulent period.

Lorestan was incorporated into the growing Achaemenid Empire in about 540 BC and successively was part of the Seleucid, Parthian, and Sassanid dynasties.

## Stunning works of enamel on show at tourism ministry

TEHRAN – A collection of intricate works of enamel has been put on display at the headquarters of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts in Tehran.

The exhibit aims at promoting the art of Minakari (enamel) to those who are fond of Iranian handicrafts, CHTN reported on Monday.

Minakari is an ancient art of painting natural motifs such as flowers and birds on the surface of metals, mostly copper.

Over the ages, the art of Minakari has fascinated many famed people including French traveler Jean Chardin and American orientalist

Arthur Pope.

Isfahan is one of the traditional hubs of the craft in the Iranian plateau. The prices are diverse, therefore you can either spend a lot or little money on these special pieces of art.

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

In January 2020, the cities of Shiraz, Malayer, and Zanjan and the village of Qassemabad were designated by the WCC - Asia Pacific



Region, putting Iran's number of world crafts cities and villages from ten to 14.

The value of Iran's handicrafts exports stood at \$120 million during the first eleven months of the past Iranian calendar year 1399 (March 20, 2020 – February 18, 2021), Mehr reported. The country's

# Persian new year: expert warns about overtourism

TEHRAN – An expert has warned travel insiders and officials about a potential overtourism during the upcoming Iranian new year vacation which starts on March 21.

The Noruz holidays are expected to experience a boom in domestic tourism following two years of travel restrictions, ISNA quoted Amir Pouyan Rafiei-Shad as saying on Monday.

Some tourism destinations, however, may face problems or crises due to some deficiencies in their infrastructure, he added.

Travel demand for Khorasan Razavi, Gilan, Mazandaran, Fars, and Isfahan provinces, as well as Iranian southern cities, usually increases around Noruz, however, it is not clear if these destinations will be prepared to welcome Noruz visitors due to the interruption in tourism caused by the coronavirus outbreak, he noted.

Travel demand to southern cities, Kish Island, and Chabahar has been high for Noruz, Shiraz hotels are fully booked to 80 percent capacity, but the volume of travel for Noruz 1401 is still far less than it was two years before

the pandemic, he explained.

Although foreign trips especially to Turkey and Dubai has been in decline, it still remains in high demand, he mentioned.

"Even though there has been an increase in the exchange rate and a decrease in the number of flights and consequently an increase in air travel expenses, seeking holiday vacations abroad is still very popular during the Noruz holiday."

He also stated that more studies, more accurate information, and more statistics from relevant organizations are needed to better analyze the impact of these trips on the destination community.

Back in January, the deputy tourism minister Ali Darabi announced that Iran needs to get ready for a probable "tsunami of tourism" once the coronavirus pandemic is over.

"Despite not knowing how the coronavirus outbreak will evolve in the future, we ought to plan on hosting tourists during the upcoming holidays of Noruz (Iranian new year)."



Travel and tourism will increase as vaccination becomes a priority around the world and lifestyles align, the official added.

In January, an official with the tourism ministry announced that the Iranian tourism industry has suffered \$233m losses due to COVID restrictions over the past two years.

"Travel is not believed to be the cause of the outbreak, rather it is a lack of adherence to health protocols that have caused the outbreak, but people canceled their trips anyway, causing major damage to the tourist facilities across the country," he explained.

The tourism ministry is preparing safe and smart travel packages for Iranian holidaymakers and travelers during Noruz, he noted.

Nearly 70 percent of the population has been vaccinated, so these trips may be able to partially compensate for the damage done to tourism facilities over the past two years, he mentioned.

Last year the tourism ministry

announced that the tourism of the country was growing before the coronavirus outbreak, its revenues reached \$11.7 billion in 2019, which accounted for 2.8% of GDP, nearing the average share of tourism in the world GDP, which was 3.2 percent.

Iran was ranked as the second fastest-growing country in tourism based on data compiled by the World Tourism Organization.

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

The Islamic Republic expects to reap a bonanza from its numerous tourist spots such as bazaars, museums, mosques, bridges, bathhouses, madrasas, mausoleums, churches, towers, and mansions, of which 26 are inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list. Under the 2025 Tourism Vision Plan, Iran aims to increase the number of tourist arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million in 2025.

## Museums open to public in Noruz holidays

TEHRAN – All museums and historical sites, as well as cultural centers across the country, will be open during Noruz (Iranian new year holidays, starting March 21).

Special programs will be presented at countrywide museums from March 16 to April 5 to mark the Persian new year, Morteza Adibzadeh explained, the director of museums and historical properties said on Monday.

Many museums are scheduled to showcase their rarely-seen objects as a temporary exhibition during Noruz or as a year-long show, the official said, ILNA reported.

For instance, rare copies of Ferdowsi's epic masterpiece Shahnameh, which are usually kept in the museums' treasure troves, will be displayed for the public, the official added.

There are special programs for children this year, and we plan to provide exhibitions and cultural spaces in the museums suited to



their needs, he explained.

Iran is home to one of the world's oldest continuous major civilizations, embracing settlements dating back to 4000 BC. It also hosts some of the world's oldest cultural monuments including bazaars, museums, mosques, bridges, bathhouses, madrasas, gardens, rich natural, rural landscapes as well as 26 UNESCO World Heritage sites.

The name of Iran, formerly known as Persia,

## Discover 12th-century minaret standing tall at Jewish quarter of Isfahan

TEHRAN – The Minaret of Chehel-Dokhtaran is one of the lesser-known attractions of Isfahan that is itself a top tourist destination for good reasons.

Construction of the monument was completed in c. 1107 in the Jewish neighborhood of Jubareh during the reign of Malek-Shah who was a sultan of the Seljuk Empire.

It is decorated with seven parts of brickwork and three inscriptions written in Kufic and Naskh calligraphy.

As a whole, the minaret is a 26-meter-long mud-brick structure, consisting of a 5-meter octagonal plinth with a square-shaped foundation, and a 21-meter circular shaft featuring a window facing Mecca (used to be served for prayer call) and intricate brickwork decorations.

German archaeologist, Ernst Herzfeld, believed that the minaret was built near a theological school that no trace of it is left today.

It is not obvious why the minaret is called Chehel-Dokhtaran (forty virgins). However, in the Persian language, Chehel means "forty", the word which is metaphorically used to describe "many".

Narratives say that locals believed single girls would marry soon if they come to this minaret and give walnut to a passerby!

From the Islamic period, the architectural



achievements of the Seljuk, Il-Khanid and Safavid dynasties are particularly noteworthy. During that time Iranian cities such as Neyshabur, Isfahan, and Shiraz came to be among the great cities of the Islamic world, and their many mosques, madrasahs, shrines, and palaces formed an architectural tradition that was distinctly Iranian within the larger Islamic milieu, according to Britannica.

Iranians' passion for using the script as an artistic impression goes back to pre-Islamic times but it is the work of Islamic era calligraphers and illuminators that elevated its use into the high art we appreciate today. Encouraged by the Islamic preference for the art of calligraphy over representational arts, it developed from epoch to epoch and from style to style.

It is said that the Chehel-Dokhtaran minaret was originally about one meter longer than what is today, but its upper part was ruined over time.



## Five relics kept in Kerman join list for national heritage

TEHRAN – Five historical relics including prehistorical vessels and a royal gold neckless, which are kept in Iran's Kerman province, have recently been registered in the national heritage list of the ancient country.

The newly-registered relics are an engraved bowl, two raised-edge bowls, a gold neckless, and a piece of ceremonial textile, IRNA quoted the provincial tourism chief as saying on Monday.

The relics date from various periods including the 4th and 3rd millennium BC, and the Qajar era (1789–1925), Fereydoun Fa'ali added.



# Beware of BA.2 Omicron during Noruz, expert says

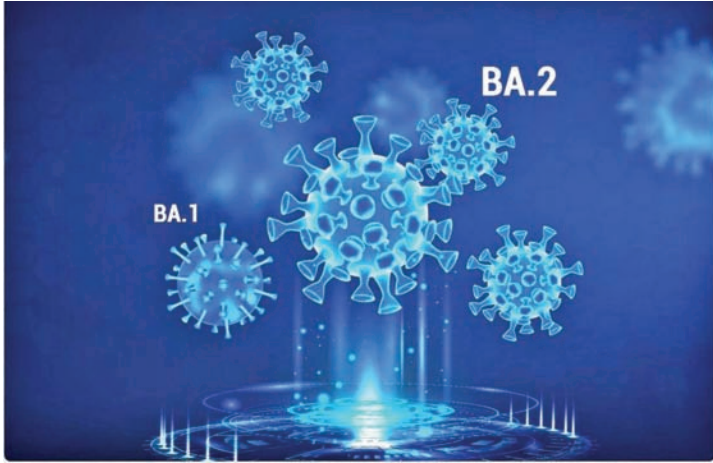
From page 1 ▶

## Omicron sublineages

The Omicron variant of concern is currently the dominant variant circulating globally, accounting for nearly all sequences reported to GISAID – Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data, according to World Health Organization.

Omicron is made up of several sublineages, each of them being monitored by WHO and partners. Of them, the most common ones are BA.1, BA.1.1 (or Nextstrain clade 21K), and BA.2 (or Nextstrain clade 21L).

At a global level, the proportion of reported sequences designated BA.2 has been increasing relative to BA.1 in recent weeks, however, the global circulation of



all variants is reportedly declining.

BA.2 differs from BA.1 in its genetic sequence, including some

amino acid differences in the spike protein and other proteins. Studies have shown that BA.2 has a growth

advantage over BA.1.

Studies are ongoing to understand the reasons for this growth advantage, but initial data suggest that BA.2 appears inherently more transmissible than BA.1, which currently remains the most common Omicron sublineage reported.

This difference in transmissibility appears to be much smaller than, for example, the difference between BA.1 and Delta.

Further, although BA.2 sequences are increasing in proportion relative to other Omicron sublineages (BA.1 and BA.1.1), there is still a reported decline in overall cases globally.

## Migratory birds of Golestan wetlands back to Siberia



TEHRAN – Migratory birds wintering in 23 aquatic habitats of Golestan province start their journey to cold northern regions for breeding from mid-March until mid-April as the weather warms, Mahmoud Shakiba, head of the provincial department of environment, has said.

Migration of birds such as ducks, swans, pelicans, herons, coots, swallows, sandpipers, geese, flamingos, cormorants, and white-tailed eagles started from the cold regions of Siberia and Eastern and Western Europe to Golestan wetlands, due to cold weather and lack of food resources, he explained.

“Having numerous aquatic ecosystems such as Alagol, Ajigol, Almagol wetlands, Gomis-

han International Lagoon, and Gorgan Bay, the province is host to a significant number of people, especially in the second half of the year, to watch at least 100 species of birds.

According to this year’s census, 165,000 migratory waterfowl and shorebirds entered Golestan aquatic habitats for wintering, which shows a decrease of about 50 percent compared to 302,000 reported last year, which is mainly caused by the lack of sufficient tranquility in the aquatic habitats of the province, fish farming, the presence of hunters and the use of these places as recreational places,” he said.

Of the 304 bird species identified in the province, 107 are endemic, 97 are migratory birds, IRNA reported on Sunday.

### Unique birdwatching sites in Iran

Iran is decorated with impressive wetlands that hold a great share of aquatic and bird species and wildlife. Anzali wetland, Qeshm Island, Urmia Lake, and Miankaleh Peninsula are among the most important locations for bird watching in Iran.

Miankaleh International Wetland in Mazandaran, called the birdwatching paradise of Iran, stretches to a total area of 68,000 hectares, which is home to at least 130 species of migratory

species with a population of 1.5 million.

Being an impressive bird-watching destination, the wetland displays a variety of bird species such as otters, all kinds of fish-eating ducks (common goldeneye and Mergus), pelicans, flamingos, cormorants, common pheasants, partridges, mute swan, tundra swan, and coots. Ashuradeh was introduced and registered as one of the world’s first biosphere zones in 1975.

Gomishan wetland in Golestan province is home to over 20,000 water birds, and more than 20 species of birds, which supports three IUCN Red List vulnerable species of waterbirds, i.e., *Pelecanus crispus*, *Aythya nyroca*, and *Vanellus gregarius*, as well as the vulnerable mammal *Phoca (Pusa) caspica*; it is also an important staging area for the fish subspecies *Rutilus rutilus caspicus*.

Located at the foot of the Zagros mountains in north-western Iran, Zarivar is a freshwater wetland hosting over 74 bird species, which is designated as a Ramsar Site.

The site provides a suitable breeding and resting place for birds and other wetland animals, and due to the relatively extensive reed beds, it is an important overwintering site for northern migratory birds.

## ‘We are witnessing a political approach towards human rights’

TEHRAN – Kazem Gharibabadi, the secretary of High Council for Human Rights, has said violating human rights is bad everywhere, but the concern is that ‘we are witnessing a political approach towards human rights’.

The Islamic Republic is against imposing a set of “unified rights standards” on other countries and urges respect for cultural diversity in this regard.

“Human rights is human rights.

If it is violated, it is bad everywhere, whether in Iran or other countries. We do not have bad or good violation of human rights, but what we are witnessing is a political approach towards human rights,” he explained.

He slammed the U.S. and the Western European countries for politicizing human rights issue as a pressure tool against non-aligned countries, Press TV reported on Sunday.



Iran’s strategy towards human rights is based on three pillars, including engagement

with international rights treaties, a pro-active policy through highlighting violations by the self-proclaimed rights advocates, and the promotion and protection of people’s rights at the domestic level, he said.

The Iranian nation, he added, is under the strongest unilateral sanctions imposed by the US and this is against the UN Charter and the international law.

## Newly-discovered bee named after “Maryam Mirzakhani”

TEHRAN – A new species of bee discovered by a research team has been named after late Iranian mathematician “Maryam Mirzakhani”, ISNA reported on Monday.

Researchers in the Department of Plant Protection at Zabol University in recent years have focused on several groups of parasitoid bees, most of which are natural enemies of agricultural pests and are of great importance in pest biological control.

The bee family called Ichneumonids is one of the most important factors in the biological control of pests and includes more than 25,000 species

worldwide, of which less than 500 species have been definitively registered in Iran.

During a four-year study, several other species of this valuable group of beneficial insects were collected and identified in different parts of east, west, and central Iran, some of which were previously unknown to the world of science.

Maryam Mirzakhani, Iranian-born genius mathematician and Stanford University professor, obtained her BSc in mathematics (1999) from Sharif University of Technology, Tehran. She then moved to the U.S. and finished a Ph.D.

from Harvard University in 2004.

She won a gold medal in the Hong Kong International Mathematical Olympiad, in 1994, to be the first female Iranian student to have snatched a gold medal.

In the 1995 Toronto International Mathematical Olympiad, she became the first Iranian student to win two gold medals.

In 2017, Mirzakhani, the winner of the Fields Medal, also known as the Nobel Prize of mathematics, succumbed to breast cancer at 40.

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

## Smugglers of fuel, livestock fined \$570m

Smugglers of fuel and livestock have been fined 24 trillion rials (about \$570 million at the official rate of 42,000 rials) since the beginning of the current [Iranian calendar] year (March 21).

The figure represents a 47 percent increase compared to the same period last [Iranian calendar] year.

Out of a total of about 42,000 smuggling cases, about 28,000 are related to export smuggling, of which 20,000 are related to the smuggling of fuel and petroleum products, mostly to Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to a lesser extent to Turkey and Iraq.

A number of these cases are related to livestock trafficking. Most of the cattle are smuggled to Iraq, and then to the Persian Gulf countries.

## جریمه ۲۴ هزار میلیارد ریالی قاچاقچیان سوخت و دام

متخلفان قاچاق کالا از ابتدای سال جاری ۲۴ هزار میلیارد ریال جریمه شده‌اند که بیانگر ۴۷ درصد افزایش نسبت به سال گذشته است.

به از مجموع حدود ۴۲ هزار پرونده ی قاچاق، حدود ۲۸ هزار پرونده مربوط به قاچاق خروجی است که ۲۰ هزار فقره آن به قاچاق سوخت و فراورده‌های نفتی مربوط می‌شود که بیشتر به پاکستان و افغانستان و کمی هم ترکیه و عراق انجام می‌شود.

تعدادی از این پرونده‌ها هم مربوط به قاچاق دام است. بیشتر قاچاق دام به عراق انجام می‌شود و البته این دام‌ها از عراق به کشورهای خلیج فارس هم می‌رود.

## KARUN, the only navigable waterway in Iran



### Part 2

The majority of the precipitation occurs in winter, mostly from October until May.

The river regime of the Karun is characterized by a fairly delayed flow-off, with peaks in late spring and early summer. Aside from the precipitation cycles, the runoff patterns of the Karun are affected by various forms of human interference, especially dam construction.

Before these human influences, in the early 20th century, the discharge was measured as a range from a minimum of 280 m3/sec. to the flooding rate of 3,700 m3/ sec.; a later account places the minimum discharge at 200 m3/sec. in October and the maximum discharge at 1,700-2,100 m3/sec.

Having many affluents at a relatively short distance from the mouth, compounded with heavy cyclonic rainfall over Khuzestan and the Zagros range, the Karun is prone to more violent and irregular changes in its levels than either the Tigris or the Euphrates.

As a result, major flooding of the marshes around the Karun is a comparatively regular event. Severe damage is caused by the recurring inundation of farmlands and the flooding of settlements and roads. Flooding, in combination with high groundwater levels and high evaporation rates in the summer, contribute to severe salinity of the soil.

The soil, poorly drained, contains relatively large quantities of soluble salts, hence its unsuitability for agricultural use.

Dams. The traditional hydrology of the Karun has been radically impacted by the construction of several dams since the mid-20th century. The first of these was the Kuhrang dam-and-tunnel system at the headwaters of the Karun, to divert the water that would have eventually joined the ocean into the Zayandarud, which flows into the inner Iranian plateau.

The first Kuhrang diverting tunnel (2.7 km long) was constructed in 1948-53; two more tunnels have since been dug.

The upper course of the Karun and its tributaries has also been exploited by the construction of several dams. These serve the purpose of controlling floods, storing water for irrigation, and generating hydroelectric power. The first dam on the Karun, completed in 1978, is commonly referred to as the Karun I dam.

The concrete-arch dam was built at the entrance of a gorge, behind which a large lake has been formed. Three more dams com-

pleted to date are also reinforced concrete arched dams, and a Karun V dam upstream from Karun IV has been proposed.

Dams are also built on the Karun’s tributaries. Aside from the iconic dam on the Dez, a Bakhtiari dam is reportedly under construction, while more dams are projected to regulate the Khersan, Liro, and Bazoft rivers, among other tributaries of the Karun.

These projects, ambitious as they are, trouble those who are concerned about the ecology of the region, the sediment transport, and the relocation of settlements.

Before the construction of the dams, the Karun was utilized for irrigation only on a minor scale, principally by means of water lifts on the banks which were worked by animals.

Modern irrigation projects have benefitted from the regulated flow of the Karun, which is estimated at more than 160,000 hectares from Shushtar in the north to the Bahman-shir in the south.

Bridges. Before the introduction of modern technology, bridges existed only in the mountainous course of the Karun, as European travelers reported in the 19th and early 20th centuries. These included timber bridges of impermanent nature in the highest cols, and stone and mortar constructions in the rest of the upper course of the Karun.

These bridges were too few and too widely dispersed to facilitate communication across the Karun on any significant scale. The Bakhtiari tribesmen, in their annual migrations, often had to cross this winding river more than once each way. The crossing of the Karun by the Bakhtiaris is documented in the 1925 silent film Grass: A Nation’s Battle for Life; in dramatic sequence, it depicts the herders moving their flocks to high summer pastures across the treacherous river.

In the middle course of the river, the remains of the extensive infrastructure built under the Sasanians include fragments of the Band-e Qaysar above Shushtar and another barrage, the Band-e Qir, which marks the end of the middle course of the Karun, as explained above.

Several bridges across the Karun on the plain of Khuzestan have been constructed since the Pahlavi era. The monumental steel arch bridge in Ahvaz was a symbol of the nation’s technological advancement before the Islamic Revolution.

Source: Encyclopedia Iranica

Concluded

## COVID-19 UPDATES ON MARCH 14

New cases	3,813
New deaths	114
Total cases	7,126,906
Total deaths	139,063
New hospitalized patients	665
Patients in critical condition	2,871
Total recovered patients	6,785,933
Diagnostic tests conducted	48,323,110
Doses of vaccine injected	145,041,265



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MARCH 15, 2022

GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Failures are often the results of timidity and fears;  
disappointments are the results of bashfulness; hours of  
leisure pass away like summer-clouds, therefore, do not  
waste opportunity of doing good.

Imam Ali (AS)

Prayer Times» Noon:12:13    Evening: 18:30    Dawn: 4:51 (tomorrow)    Sunrise: 6:14 (tomorrow)

## Abulqasem Ferdowsi: Life

Part 3

On the contrary, as has been indicated, he everywhere complains of the king's indifference to his work. At the end of the Shahnameh, he also writes that the powerful came and copied out his poetry for themselves, and the sole profit to the poet from them was their saying "well done" (ahsant).

He only mentions two individuals, Ali Deylam Bu Dolaf and Hoyayy ibn Qotayba, who helped him. In certain manuscripts, Ali Deylam and Bu Dolaf are mentioned as the names of two people, which agrees with the statement of Nezami Aruzi that the first was a copyist of the Shahnameh and the second its reciter (rawi).

If this statement of Nezami Aruzi's is correct, then these two individuals did not give the poet any monetary assistance. Instead, as a copyist and reciter of sections of the Shahnameh for the nobility of the town of Tus, they each profited from the poet's work. In this case line 849 of the Moscow edition is incorrect and should be mended according to the variant readings of the line and the reference in the Chahar Maqala.

Hoyayy ibn Qotayba, in his capacity as financial controller of Tus, sometimes remitted the poet's taxes.

Finally, in his seventy-first year, on 8 March 1010, Ferdowsi finished the Shahnameh. According to Nezami Aruzi and Farid ad-Din Attar (Elahi-nama), the total time spent on the composition of the Shahnameh was twenty-five years.

In the satire, however, there is thrice mention of thirty years and once of thirty-five years. If we place the beginning of work on the Shahnameh in 367 and its completion in 400 the time spent on its composition is thirty-three years, and if we extend the poet's work to the period before 367—the composition of Bijan and Manijeh —and add to this time spent on revision after 400, the figure of thirty-five years is closer to the truth.

There are lines in the Shahnameh which, according to some scholars, refer to events of the year 1011. Ahmad Atesh has gone even further than this and claims that since Ferdowsi, during the course of his praise of Mahmud in the introduction to the Shahnameh, mentions Kashmir and Qannuj among his territories, and since Mahmud first conquered these regions in 1015 and 1018, Ferdowsi must have made the final revision of the Shahnameh and sent it to Ghazna in 1018 or 1019.

He also draws the conclusion that Mahmud sent the poet a financial reward but that this reached Tus in 1020, after the poet's death.

The names Kashmir and Qannuj, which appear in this panegyric beside other names such as Rum (the West), Hend (India), Chin (China), etc. and which occur many more times throughout the Shahnameh, is no indication of a conquest by Mahmud of these two areas.

Their occurrence in the panegyric is simply due to poetic license and leads to no historical conclusions.

Our information on the poet's life after 1010 is limited to the matters reported by Nezami Aruzi. According to him, after the completion of the Shahnameh, Ali Deylam prepared a manuscript of it in seven volumes and Ferdowsi went to Ghazna with his professional reciter Abu Dolaf.

There, with the help of Mahmud's vizier Ahmad ibn Hasan Meymandi he presented the book to Mahmud, but because of the calumny of those who envied him, and the poet's religious orientation, it was not favorably

received by the king.

Instead of 60,000 dinars, payment was fixed at 50,000 dirhams, and finally at 20,000 dirhams. Ferdowsi was extremely upset by this and went to a bathhouse; upon leaving the bathhouse he drank some beer and divided the king's present between the beer seller and the bath attendant.

Then, fearing punishment by Mahmud, he fled from Ghazna by night. At first he hid for six months in Herat in the shop of Esmail Warraq, father of the poet Azraqi, and then he took refuge in Tabarestan with Espahbad Shahriar, a member of the Bavandid dynasty (the report of the poet's journey to Baghdad, which appears in the introductions to the a number of manuscripts of the Shahnameh, is merely a legend; similarly, the story of the poet's journey to Isfahan is based on interpolated passages).

While in Tabarestan, the poet composed 100 lines satirizing Mahmud, but the amir of Tabarestan bought the satire for 100,000 dirhams and destroyed it, so that only six lines survived by word of mouth, and these Nezami Aruzi recorded.

Later, due to events described by Nezami Aruzi, Mahmud regretted his behavior toward the poet and on the recommendation of the above mentioned vizier had camel loads of indigo to the value of 20,000 dinars sent to Ferdowsi, but as the camels were entering Tus by the Rudbar gate Ferdowsi's corpse was being borne out of the city by the Razan gate.

In the cemetery the preacher of Tabaran prevented his being buried in the Muslim cemetery on the grounds that Ferdowsi was a Shia, and so there was no choice but to bury the poet in his own orchard.

Nezami Aruzi tells how he visited the poet's tomb in 1116. According to Nezami Aruzi, Ferdowsi left only one daughter, and the poet had wanted the king's payment as a dowry for her.

But after the poet's death, his daughter would not accept the payment and, on Mahmud's orders, the money was used to build the Chaha caravansary near Tus, on the road which goes from Nishapur to Marv.

The year of the poet's death is given by Dawlatshah Samarqandi as 1020, and by Hamdollah Mostawfi and Fasi Khafi as 1025. According to the first date, Ferdowsi was eighty-two years old when he died, and according to the second report he was eighty-seven.

Many details of Nezami Aruzi's account are inaccurate or even merely legendary. For example, he claims that only six lines survived of the satire, but in some manuscripts of the Shahnameh the number of lines is as many as 160.

Some scholars considered the satire to be genuine. But Mahmud Shirani established that many of the lines are spurious or are taken from the Shahnameh itself, and he therefore rejected the authenticity of the satire.

The spuriousness of many lines in the satire, however, does not establish that the satire never existed at all. Besides, there are excellent lines in the satire which are not taken from the Shahnameh. Generally, it appears that in his article Shirani was mainly seeking to vindicate Mahmud.

There is a line in the satire in which the poet refers to his age as being almost eighty. According to this line, the poet composed the satire before 1018.

Source: Encyclopedia Iranica

To be continued

# Leader writes commendation for book recounting memories of frontline laundresses

From Page 1 ▶ In a meeting with martyrs' families held earlier in October 2021, the Leader also talked about "Pool of Blood".

"I've read a book entitled 'Pool of Blood'; I had seen in Ahvaz and I had personally seen women washing soldiers' clothes and hospital bedsheets stained with blood. I saw that the book is giving an account of this story," he said.

"I am really amazed, and really feel shame about the service these ladies offered during the years of war," he added.

"Pool of Blood" carries the wartime memories of the 64 women who volunteered in the early days of the war, officially called "Sacred Defense" in Iran, to wash laundry at Shahid Kalantari Hospital in Andimeshk.

During the unveiling ceremony, a number of the women were presented with copies of the Holy Quran, silver rings and keffiyehs as gifts sent by Ayatollah Khamenei.

The book has been published

A combination photo shows the front cover of "Pool of Blood" and Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei's commendation for the book.

with contributions from a Zahra Bakhvar, Samaneh Nikdek, Mahnaz Olfatipur, Amaneh research team composed of Somayyeh Tatar, Nasrin Tatar, Lohrasbi and Narges Mirdoraji.

## "The Fourth Wall" wins first at Japan Media Arts animation competition

TEHRAN – Acclaimed Iranian short movie "The Fourth Wall" scored another success on Sunday by obtaining the grand prize of the animation category at the 25th Japan Media Arts Festival.

Directed by Mahbubeh Kalai, the movie shows a stuttering boy who transforms an Iranian kitchen into a fantastic cosmos. The father's body becomes a refrigerator, the mother's belly a washing machine whose spin cycle gives birth to a screaming baby. Even birds on tiles and detergents have a surprising life of their own.

This exuberant animation, dotted with real-life elements – fried eggs, broken plates, pieces of cheese – develops a subtle wit, ironizing ingrained family patterns.

The movie produced at the Documentary, Experimental and Animation Film Center has previously received the Mephisto 97.6 Award for the best animated film at DOK Leipzig, Germany's major international festival for documentary and animated films.

The 31st edition of Animafest Zagreb, a

Croatian international festival for animated films, honored the film with the Zlatko Grgic Award.

The Japan Media Arts Festival is a comprehensive festival of Media Arts (Media Geijutsu in Japanese) that honors outstanding works from a diverse range of media – from animation and comics to media art and games.

In the animation category, four animated films and series, including "Dozens of Norths" by Koji Yamamura and "Fortune Favors Lady Nikuko" by Sanma Akashiya and Ayumu Watanabe from Japan won Excellence Awards.

In addition, "Pui Pui Molcar", an animated TV series directed by Tomoki Misato from Japan received the Social Impact Award.

The grand prize in the art category went to "Sun and Moon Room", an interactive work of art by a team of Japanese artists.

"Naoki Urasawa Presents Manben Neo – Yoshikazu Yasuhiko", a Japanese TV program by Katsumi Ueda, Mitsuru Kuramoto, Aimi

"The Fourth Wall" directed by Mahbubeh Kalai.

Uchida, Tsutomu Tsukada and Megumi Maruyama won the grand prize in the entertainment section.

The grand prize in the Manga Division was awarded to "Golden Raspberry" by Japanese artist Aki Mochida.

"Path of Noise", an application program by Paul Lacroix from France in the geo-cosmos category, and "Dear Virus", a video work by Junjie Wang from China in the Dome Theater Category, won Platform Awards.

to Worcester College as Junior Research Fellow in 1997.

He has been a Senior Research Fellow since 2000 and is director of the Oxford Centre for Byzantine Research at Oxford University.

He is a fellow of the Royal Historical Society, the Royal Society of Arts, the Royal Anthropological Institute, and the Royal Asiatic Society.

He has held visiting fellowships at Dumbarton Oaks (Harvard) and Princeton, and has lectured at universities all over the world including Cambridge, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, NYU, Notre Dame, King's London and The Institute of Historical Research.

He writes regularly for the national and international press about current affairs and about how history helps to explain the present. His work has been translated into twelve languages.

## The joy of discovering "The scent of almond blossom" is for readers

Ali Esmaili, a writer, and literary critic, along with Majid Gheisari and Faezeh Ghaffar Haddadi, held a press conference at the Somayeh Book Café.

"The book's title doesn't directly refer to the Holy Prophet of Islam, and this is intentional.

In the field of history, we were supposed to be creative, although for the past few years we were not. We only saw historical rewriting, and many writers focus mainly on the Holy Prophet's (PBUH) 63-year-old lifetime, however in the modern era, stories must be written that create a vision of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) in our minds," said Majid Gheisari, who was in charge of selecting the stories of this book series.

"What has connected all the parts of the stories in this book is the character of the Holy Prophet, and it is the critics' task to find the inner parts of these stories," said the secretary of Khatam Literary Festival.

"Without a doubt, all goodness reminds us of the prophets and saints, but we wanted a story that specifically refers to the Prophetic way of life," he added.

Majid Gheisari stated that literature is for pleasure, and the pleasure of discovering new

things was one of our goals in these stories. What matters, he continued, is that festivals cause stories to be written, even if they couldn't make it to the festivals.

"This is the first short fiction I've ever written, and what pushed me to do so was a warning from an Iranian resident regarding my son's name, Alireza, and the fact that he had changed his name from Muhammad to something else because of the situation there. Later, a terrorist attack in France was committed by a Muslim named Muhammad, which upset me deeply. Therefore, after all of this, when I heard about the festival, I knew I had to be a part of it," said Faezeh Ghaffar, one of the writers of this book series.

Ali Ismaili, who was in charge of performing the conference stated that Readers might find it challenging to follow the stories in the " the Scent of Almond Blossom" series since they will need to know about the history of Islam.