

Report **50% of UK Muslims struggle for food during Ramadan**

TEHRAN- A UK Islamic charity group says half of all Muslim households in the country do not have enough money to eat after fasting every day during the holy month of Ramadan this year.

British Muslims all over the UK just like other Muslims around the world will spend the next month fasting during daylight hours to commemorate one of the main pillars of Islam.

Traditionally, Muslim people tend to have one meal just before dawn (the suhoor) and one meal just after sunset (the iftar).

However, aid charity, Islamic Relief UK, has warned that many Muslim households in Britain will not be able to afford one of these two meals this month. The non-governmental organization has estimated some 1.6 million Muslim people already live in poverty and deprivation in the UK, 50 percent of the country's Muslim population.

This is in comparison to 18 percent of the general population as a whole who live in similar conditions. The gulf in living standards between white British citizens and British Muslim citizens from ministries groups has grown wider after over a decade of austerity measures that have hit the poorest the hardest.

The charity group's partners have also reported a significant increase in the use of food banks, with the crisis being exacerbated by the rising costs of living, the pandemic, and the crisis in Ukraine.

British food banks are now more dependent on donations than ever before and are said to be working extra hours to provide meals to the fasting Muslims.

Fahim Dahya, the logistics manager at Sufra NW10 food bank, is expecting a pandemic-level crisis warning "the bills are not going to hit until the end of this month, so we are bracing ourselves for a big explosion," he added, "after the pandemic hit, within a couple of months, we had a 400% increase." ▶ Page 5

Interview **Preparation is key to success, Skocic says**

TEHRAN – Iran national football team coach Dragan Skocic says that they need to prepare well for the 2022 FIFA World Cup since the it's key to success.

Iran have been drawn in Group B with England, the U.S. and one of Scotland, Wales, or Ukraine.

The 'Persian Leopards' are looking to book a spot in the next stage for the first time.

The Croatian coach says that he expects the football federation of Iran to arrange good preparation for the 2022 World Cup.

"We've received several offers for the friendly matches and I expect the federation provide the best facilities for the national team," Skocic said in an interview with state-run TV.

"We will do our best to advance. Iran want to advance for the first time," he said.

"I think our draw could have been worse. I didn't like to be paired with Germany, the Netherlands and Croatia," Skocic said.

Iran will renew World Cup rivalry against the U.S. in Doha. The Persians defeated the American team 2-1 in the 1998 FIFA World Cup.

"There is some story between the two countries but we just think about football. We respect them as a strong opponent but we will show a strong performance against them.

Scotland, Wales or Ukraine? Which team he prefers to play?

"I don't care about that. We will wait for play-off match and prepare ourselves for the winners," he said.

"Iran football team have good training camp in Doha and it helps us prepare well for the World Cup. I expect 2022 FIFA World Cup to be one of the best World Cups in history in terms of organization.

"Iran is something different than people think. Everyone talks about the politics but I have never seen the hospitality that I have experienced in the country," Skocic concluded.

Iran Devises Strategy for Industrialized Nuclear Program ▶ Page 3



6,000 MW to be added to Iran's power generation capacity by late June

TEHRAN – Iranian Energy Minister Ali-Akbar Mehrabian has said the country's electricity generation capacity is going to increase by 6,000 megawatts (MW) by the end of spring (June 22) in order to meet the summer's peak demand, IRNA reported.

Speaking to the press at the end of a meeting with the members of the parliament's Energy Committee, Mehrabian noted that 4,500 MW of the mentioned figure will be provided through

developing the country's thermal power plants and another 1,000 MW will also be provided by implementing overhaul operations, while the other 500 MW is going to be supplied by new renewable power plants.

The official further outlined some of his ministry's programs in the electricity sector for the current Iranian calendar year (started on March 21), saying: "We have important programs in various fields including power plant development as well

as demand management and energy saving."

Regarding the ministry's plans to supply electricity during the summer peak consumption period, he said: "We hope this summer will be spent with minimal issues and interruptions in electricity supply."

Back in November 2021, Mehrabian had said that his ministry was planning to construct and put into operation 21 new power plant units by the current year's summer. ▶ Page 4

Some 8,000 inmates of involuntary crimes freed in year

TEHRAN – A total of 7,956 prisoners of unintentional crimes have been released over the past [Iranian calendar] year (March 2021-March 2022), according to the head of the Blood Money Organization.

Freeing prisoners of involuntary crimes is done in three ways. The first way is granting prisoners leave and the second way is providing a number of them with loans to be paid inside the prison.

The third way of assistance is the release of unintentional convicts by paying their debt.

Of the total released prisoners, 345 were female convicts and the rest were male debtors who were incarcerated due to inability to pay financial debts or inability to pay dues (workshop accidents and traffic accidents), Asadollah Joulaei said.

The prisoners had a sum of 34 trillion rials (nearly \$130 million) in debt, and 45 percent of this amount has been forgiven by the plaintiffs, he said. ▶ Page 7



Fishing season wraps up in northern Iran
Fishing season has ended in the Caspian Sea province of Mazandaran.
The fishing season starts routinely in mid-October and lasts for about six months.
Some 1,627 tons of bony fish have been caught by fishermen, a decrease of 34 percent year on year.

Mashhad makes medical tourism a \$48 million industry in year

TEHRAN – Mashhad played host to about 24,300 foreign travelers who reportedly spent some \$48 million to use medical services during the past Iranian calendar year, which ended on March 20.

"Last year (1400), Mashhad received 24,300 foreign medical travelers who were either hospitalized or gained outpatient treatments," said Davood Khoshashkan who presides over the medical tourism de-

partment at Mashhad University of Medical Sciences.

In comparison to previous years, however, the number of medical tourists has achieved considerable growth despite COVID restrictions, the official said.

"The number of foreign travelers seeking medical services in Mashhad jumped 40 percent year on year in comparison to 1399, and some ten percent compared to the year 1398."

Elsewhere in his remarks, the official said Mashhad wants to make medical tourism a \$400 million industry in the years to come.

"Mashhad eyes to earn some \$400 million from medical tourism per year.... Our estimate is to host 200,000 medical travelers per year that would collect a revenue of \$400 million."

"Given the city's capacities, Mashhad's \$48 million revenue from attracting medical tourists in yea is insignificant." ▶ Page 6

From Inside **T**

- Pressure mounts on Russia as Europe begins cutting diplomatic cord **P2**
- Saudi playbook on Lebanon needs revamp **P2**
- Iran to reveal 'comprehensive document' on nuclear development **P3**
- U.S. demands halt to Iran's revenge for assassination of General Soleimani: report **P3**
- Over \$186m to be allocated for agricultural mechanization this year **P4**
- Iran's annual exports to Afghanistan exceed \$1.8b **P4**
- Govt. approves new resolution to facilitate foreign investment **P4**
- Documentation work begins on Mirza Kuchak Khan memorabilia **P6**
- 65% rise in visits to Khorasan Razavi sites during Noruz **P6**
- 10,000 jobs to open up for women heads of households **P7**
- Over 1,900 tons of drugs seized in 2 years **P7**
- Seventh COVID-19 wave on the cards for Iran **P7**
- Filmfest Dresden picks "The Fourth Wall", "Orthodontics", "Form" **P8**
- "The Religion of the Manichees" spreads to Iranian bookstores **P8**

Interview **T**
Russia has no military, strategic reason to launch bio-chemical attack on Ukraine: analyst

By Zahra Samimi

TEHRAN – A geopolitical analyst says that Moscow has no military or strategic interest in targeting Kyiv with chemical or biological weapons.

"To the question of which side might employ WMDs, it's extremely unlikely that Russia would ever do this, simply because it has no military-strategic reason to," Andrew Korybko tells the Tehran Times.

"Kyiv, however, has every such reason to attempt this out of desperation to increase U.S.-led Western pressure on Russia and further discredit it in the eyes of its targeted audience," Korybko adds.

He believes that such false flag provocation by Ukraine to blame Russia for possible use of WMDs could be exploited "to push for direct NATO intervention such as the dispatch of a Polish-led so-called 'peacekeeping force'."

Following is the text of the interview:

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky has accused Russia of committing "genocide" in Bucha. What is your comment?

A: The Bucha incident must be investigated by an independent and multilateral group of experts in order to comprehensively address the Russian Defense Ministry's concerns about the footage that's spread across the internet over the weekend. They correctly noted how their forces departed on 30 March, the day after which the ▶ Page 5

Presidential aide calls on Iranian cineastes' Me Too movement to consult on protective measures

TEHRAN – Vice President for Women and Family Affairs Ensieh Khazali has invited the Me Too movement of female Iranian cineastes to a meeting to search for safeguards to protect them against their male colleagues' misconduct and sexual harassment and abuse.

"The elevated status of women in cinema and their fine performance in the field necessitate safeguarding their great dignity," Khazali wrote in her Instagram post published on Monday.

"The Office of the Vice President for Women and Family Affairs sees it as a necessity to lend a sympathetic ear to the demands of women in the Iranian cinema," she added. ▶ Page 8

Pressure mounts on Russia as Europe begins cutting diplomatic cord

TEHRAN— As the situation in Ukraine is not going as Putin expected, the European countries have tightened the rope on Russia by expelling Russian diplomats, calling them “undesirable” foreign agents.

Four European Union countries have expelled more than 40 Russian diplomats suspected of espionage in a coordinated action, while some other countries have moved to suspend diplomatic ties with Moscow.

Expulsion orders were issued on March 29 by Ireland, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the Czech Republic for a total of 43 embassy personnel.

Similar moves have been taken by other EU states, including Poland, over the last two weeks.

The expulsions, according to Belgian Foreign Minister Sophie Wilmes, were “connected to our national security.”

Ms Wilmes told parliament that 21 members of staff at the Russian embassy in Brussels and the consulate in Antwerp had been requested to leave the country, with two weeks to do so.

She went on to say that the move was done in collaboration with Belgium’s neighbor, the Netherlands, whose foreign ministry announced the expulsion of 17 Russian diplomats it deemed to be “secretly active” as intelligence officials.

Micheal Martin, Ireland’s Taoiseach (Prime Minister), told lawmakers that his government has expelled four Russian diplomats after obtaining security recommendations from the country’s intelligence officers.

According to Martin, the diplomats were requested to leave the country “because their activities are not in compliance with international standards of diplomatic behavior.”

The Russian embassy in Dublin condemned the “baseless decision,” saying it will “further damage Russian-Irish relations.”

Meanwhile, a Czech official told AFP that the diplomat who was ejected from Prague was Russia’s deputy ambassador.

“We are diminishing the Russian intelligence presence in the EU together with our Allies,” the Czech foreign ministry tweeted.

Poland removed 45 authorized diplomats last Wednesday for suspected espionage in the country.

On Twitter, Polish Interior Minister Mariusz Kaminski stated that Polish intelligence officials were “dismantling the Russian special services network in our country.”

Earlier this month, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia fired a total of 20 Russian embassy employees for conduct “contrary to their diplomatic position.”

Italy expelled 30 Russian diplomats on Tuesday due to security concerns, Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio said, while Russia announced it will retaliate.

On Tuesday, Italy summoned Russia’s envoy to the foreign ministry to inform him that the diplomats were being removed.

“The step is in agreement with other European and Atlantic allies and is required for reasons related to our national security and in the light of the current situation produced by the Russian Federation’s unlawful aggression against Ukraine,” Di Maio said in a statement.

Russia will respond appropriately, according to TASS news agency, citing Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova.

Germany declared 40 Russian diplomats “undesirable,” and France announced it will deport 35 Russian diplomats because their acts were “against our security interests.”

German Foreign Minister Annalena

Baerbock described the move as a reaction to the Kremlin’s “unbelievable savagery” in Ukraine.

The diplomats who were expelled from Germany were working “against our freedom, against the fabric of our community,” according to Baerbock. “This will not be tolerated any longer.”

According to Baerbock, Berlin’s decision was relayed to Russian Ambassador Sergei Nethayev after he was summoned to the Foreign Ministry. The envoys who are affected have five days to leave Germany.

According to the French Foreign Ministry, the expulsions from France are part of a European response to the massacres in Bucha, where dozens of dead were discovered in mass graves or littering the streets over the weekend.

The Kremlin has refuted Western claims that Russian forces were to blame.

Similarly, Sweden’s foreign minister has announced that it will expel three Russian diplomats for violating international standards, making it the latest European country to do so.

According to Ann Linde, the three individuals’ employment in Sweden was “not in compliance with the Vienna Convention,” referring to the international convention governing diplomatic relations between sovereign states.

But EU’s pressure is not limited to diplomatic pressure. They are seeking to cut Russia off at the source by persuading smaller countries to seek alternatives other than Russia to purchase gas.

The Lithuanian defense minister announced on Sunday that it has sought to buy gas from other countries, declaring its satiety from Russian gas.

According to Germany’s foreign minister, Berlin and its European allies would look into methods to reduce Moldova’s reliance on Russia, the neighbor on whom Europe’s poorest country depends for energy supply.

“Together with our Moldovan partners, we aim to analyze how we can help reduce Moldova’s economic dependence on Russia... and with a view to energy demands, as well as to build the country’s resilience,” Baerbock said at a donor conference in Berlin.

Russia has reacted angrily to allegations that its soldiers committed war crimes in Ukraine, dismissing such claims as fabricated propaganda concocted by Ukrainian special forces to discredit Moscow.

Since Russian troops retreated from towns and villages near Kyiv, Ukrainian troops have started displaying journalists the bodies of what they say are civilians slain by Moscow’s forces.

“These are fakes that matured in the cynical imagination of Ukrainian propaganda,” Dmitry Medvedev, who served as president from 2008 to 2012 and is now deputy secretary of Russia’s Security Council, said on Telegram.

Conversely, Russia’s Defense Ministry stated that it had information that the 72nd Ukrainian Main Center for Psychological Operations had assisted in the staging of such propaganda in a village 23 kilometers (14 miles) northwest of Kyiv, as well as Sumy, Konotop, and other locations.

“Soldiers from the 72nd Ukrainian Main Center for Psychological Operations conducted another staged filming of civilians supposedly murdered by Russian armed troops,” the ministry stated. It didn’t go into any greater information.

Various dimensions of the tragic incident at Bucha is under investigation, with both sides providing multitudes of evidence.

TEHRAN — The Saudi ambassador to Lebanon is set to return to Beirut by the start of Ramadan, according to the Lebanese newspaper al-Joumhouria, after Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati reaffirmed the country’s commitment to restoring relations with Arab governments in the Persian Gulf region last Tuesday.

Mikati said in a statement on March 29 that he had spoken with Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Ahmed Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah on normalizing relations between Lebanon and the (Persia) Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

“I renew the commitment of the Lebanese government to take the necessary and required measures to enhance cooperation with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Lebanon’s commitment to all the decisions of the Arab League and international legitimacy, and its commitment to serious and actual work to follow up and complete the implementation of its provisions in a manner that guarantees civil peace and national stability for Lebanon and fortifies its unity,” the Lebanese prime minister wrote in the statement.

He emphasized the importance of ending any political, military, security, and media activities emanating from Lebanon that threaten Saudi Arabia’s and other countries’ “sovereignty, security, and stability” in the Persian Gulf region.

Mikati also reaffirmed his commitment to combating the smuggling of contraband, particularly drugs, from Lebanon to Saudi Arabia and other countries on the southern shores of the Persian Gulf. He also reaffirmed Beirut’s adherence to the Riyadh Agreement on judicial cooperation and extradition of sought individuals to Saudi Arabia.

According to the Kuwaiti newspaper Al-Jarida, the return of the diplomats to Beirut prepared the way for the return of Saudi Ambassador Walid Bukhari to Lebanon, and that the ambassador’s homecoming might have a beneficial influence on bilateral relations, especially as it happened at the same time. It marks the start of the distribution of humanitarian aid.

Following former Lebanese Information Minister George Kordahi’s criticism of the Yemeni conflict last year, relations

Saudi playbook on Lebanon needs revamp



between numerous Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Kuwait, were frayed.

For the first time in months, since the diplomatic spat between Lebanon and these countries in October 2021, Riyadh is looking to take a more friendly stance toward Beirut.

“Saudi Arabia wishes Lebanon prosperity and the Lebanese people security and stability,” the Saudi Foreign Ministry stated on March 22.

For the time being, the Lebanese dossier is back on the table behind the scenes of Arab diplomacy, and a Saudi political return to Lebanon appears to be on the cards.

Riyadh’s cautious approach to Beirut can be explained by a meeting in mid-March in Paris between Patrick Durel, a French president’s adviser for Middle East affairs; Walid Bukhari, Saudi Arabia’s ambassador to Lebanon; and Nizar Alawla, representing the Saudi royal court; as well as Khaled Saadoun, a senior official in the Saudi intelligence service.

According to Rabi, at the discussion, Durel, who has always been interested in the Lebanese dossier, reportedly urged Bukhari to return to Beirut.

A joint French-Saudi committee was also established to improve coordination between the two countries on the issue.

A few days later, the committee reportedly conducted a virtual meeting at which Durel renewed

his plea to Bukhari to return to Beirut as a gesture of goodwill.

According to the Lebanese website, L’Orient-Le Jour, the Saudi diplomat will return to Lebanon during Ramadan in April to closely monitor the distribution of humanitarian aid from the fund established on Dec. 4, 2021, by French President Emanuel Macron and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in an effort to support the Lebanese people.

According to information confirmed by L’Orient-Jour, there has been chatter in the local media regarding the beginning of a Saudi political return to Lebanon, as well as meetings made in Paris between Saudi and Lebanese officials.

Former Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora met with Saadoun in Paris in early March as part of his preparations to run in the election, despite Sunni leader Saad Hariri’s decision to boycott the May 15 polls.

Several Lebanese political figures also are scheduled to visit Riyadh in the near future. Wael Abu Faour, Rashaya MP for Walid Joumblatt’s Progressive Socialist Party, and Melhem Riachi, a former information minister connected to the Lebanese Forces, were in Riyadh on Monday, on top of their previous visit in December 2021.

“As part of our electoral trip, Ziad Hawat (LF MP for Jbeil) and I will travel to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Paris,” Riachi told L’Orient-Le Jour.

Mikati appeared to wink at Arab countries, particularly Riyadh, in an interview with the Saudi daily Asharq Al-Awsat published on March 21.

“The Lebanese government is extremely committed to maintaining the best of relations with the Gulf monarchies, led by Saudi Arabia, in order to remedy the shortcomings that have marred them,” he said.

Mikati released a statement a few hours later in which he reiterated his government’s resolve to reestablish diplomatic relations with the Persian Gulf Arab countries.

Nonetheless, Saudi Arabia’s attitude to Lebanon has not been the most astute. If de-escalation is their top foreign policy priority, as MBS has frequently stated, the course they have chosen is incorrect.

The timing of the return of the Saudi diplomats couldn’t have been more perfect.

Saadeh Al-Shami, the deputy prime minister of Lebanon, declared the bankruptcy of the “state and the Central Bank of Lebanon” on Monday.

Responding to the deputy prime minister, Riad Salameh, who has been in charge of the central bank for 30 years, refuted the government’s claims of insolvency, claiming that the bank is still working.

According to Al-Shami, “losses will be allocated to the state, the Banque du Liban, banks, and depositors, with no specified percentage.”

“Unfortunately, the state is bankrupt, as is the Bank of Lebanon, and we want to come out with a result, and the loss occurred due to policies that have been in place for decades, and if we did nothing, the loss will be much greater.”

“There is a fact that cannot be ignored, we cannot live in a state of denial, and we cannot open (banking) withdrawals to all people,” he said.

In addition, the approaching parliamentary elections in Lebanon constitute a plot twist in the Saudi playbook. Hezbollah has pledged to win the election, while Saudi Arabia has demanded that Hezbollah disband. The return of the diplomats occurs while the Saudis continue to press their unreasonable demands. It seems that the Saudis need to update their playbook on Lebanon.

Iran embraces ban on poppy cultivation in Afghanistan

TEHRAN- The secretary general of Iran’s Drug Control Headquarters has vowed to support any reduction in poppy cultivation in neighboring Afghanistan.

Eskandar Momeni made the remark on Tuesday in response to Afghanistan’s proclamation of a ban on poppy production.

Momeni stated that Iran will wait to see if the ban is implemented.

“Based on the UN figures, in the year 2000 production of narcotics in Afghanistan was less than 200 tons and some 7,000 hectares of land was used to cultivate poppy. But, with the presence of the U.S. and NATO countries and their support, the production of narcotics surged 50-fold to more than 9,000 tons in less than two decades,” he explained.

“Americans left a great chaos in Afghanistan. Based on existing evidence, Americans and NATO aircraft smuggled drugs and fueled the cultivation [of poppy]. Not only they backed and promoted cultivation of poppy, they also offered technical and technological assistance and supplied high-yielding and improved seeds that led to the production of a huge amount of narcotics in Afghanistan,” Momeni added.

He said that the U.S. utilized narcotics to instill fear in the region, resulting to the current scenario in which Afghanistan accounts for more than 90% of global opium production, according to UN and Taliban data.

Afghanistan is the world’s largest grower of poppies, the source of sap that is processed into heroin, and its output and exports have skyrocketed in recent years.

The Taliban have issued a directive prohibiting the production of opium poppy, in an attempt to allay foreign worries over drug control in the war-ravaged country.

“As per the decree of the supreme leader of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, all Afghans are informed that from now on, cultivation of poppy has been strictly prohibited across the country,” the group’s supreme leader Haibatullah Akhunnzada said on Sunday.

The decree was read out by government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid at a gathering of reporters, foreign diplomats and Taliban officials.

“If anyone violates the decree the crop will be destroyed immediately and the violator will be treated according to the sharia law,” it

added.

Iran has been the primary victim of Afghanistan’s poppy farming. Over the last four decades, it has lost almost 4,000 security agents in the fight against drug dealers. Traffickers mostly exploit Iranian territory as a transit route to transport opium and heroin to Europe.

The U.S. and NATO have accused the Taliban for the sharp rise in production of drugs in Afghanistan, a charge refused by the Taliban.

Reportedly, during their two decades in Afghanistan, U.S. and NATO forces attempted to reduce poppy growing by paying farmers to plant other crops such as wheat or saffron.

Some claim the Taliban, which controlled the key poppy-growing districts and made hundreds of millions of dollars from the trade, foiled their efforts.

Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Salam Hanafi denied that the Taliban aided in the growth of poppy plants during their insurgency.

“How come it was exported all over the world when they (U.S.-led forces) had full control over Afghanistan,” Hanafi said on Sunday.

Iran FM blames U.S. for pause in Vienna talks

TEHRAN — In a tweet posted late on Monday, Iran’s Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian said that the United States is responsible for the current pause in the ongoing talks in Vienna to

remove the sanctions imposed on Iran.

“If there’s a pause in the Vienna negotiations, that’s because of excessive demands by the U.S. side.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry will act forcefully and rationally in line with the best interests of the Iranian people and the red lines of the nation.

We will never give in to excessive demands of the U.S. If the White House acts realistically, a deal is at hand,” Amir Abdollahian tweeted.

Because of the Biden administration’s incapacity to make difficult political decisions, talks in Vienna to resurrect the 2015 Iran nuclear deal have come to a halt.

After a week of diplomatic finger-pointing between Russia and the West over who is sabotaging the Vienna negotiations, expectations for an early conclusion have dimmed due to Biden’s dithering over the last remaining concerns.

Iran appears to have made all of the difficult decisions required to move the talks forward. During the negotiations, Iran offered novel answers to a number of vexing concerns, including guarantees and verification procedures. However, the United States continued to reject the recommendations while failing to come up with fresh answers.

In this regard, the spokesman for Iranian Foreign Ministry said on Monday that the U.S. must make a decision if it

wants to reach an agreement in Vienna.

“Iran and Iranians cannot be patient forever. If the United States wants to reach an agreement, it must make a political decision as soon as possible,” Saeed Khatibzadeh asserted.

The spokesman said that the United States is responsible for bringing the talks to a halt.

“The solution is in the White House,” he reiterated.

While Iran believes that a deal in

Vienna is close, the U.S. continues to dim prospects for a deal. In recent a phone call with UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, Amir Abdollahian informed him that the negotiations are nearing completion. “We are close to an agreement in the negotiations, and we have transmitted our offers on the remaining problems to the United States side through the European Union’s top negotiator, and the ball is now in the United States’ court,” he said.

Iran devises strategy for industrialized nuclear program

TEHRAN – In the latest sign of Iran's determination to advance its nuclear program, the Ebrahim Raisi administration announced that it will soon unveil a comprehensive document for boosting the country's nuclear development.

The announcement was first made by Ali Bahadori Jahromi, the spokesman for the Raisi administration, on Tuesday and then the chief nuclear official of Iran provided more details on the nature of the document in question.

Bahadori Jahromi said, “the Comprehensive Strategic Document for Nuclear Development” will be unveiled by President Raisi on Saturday.

Speaking at a press briefing on Tuesday, the spokesman said, “The comprehensive strategic document for the development of the country's nuclear power will be unveiled on the 20th of Farvardin (April 9) in a ceremony hosted by the Atomic Energy Organization and attended by the president.”

Bahador Jahromi stopped short of giving any further details about the document. But Mohammad Eslami, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), who is responsible for preparing the document, said it thoroughly addressed the status of the AEOI and



the nuclear policy of the country.

“We tried to prepare a comprehensive document for the development of the organization by forming working groups consisting of all relevant and motivated people,” Eslami said of the document, according to Fars News.

The chief nuclear official added, “This document has passed the legal approval process and fortunately, in the first working days of 1401 [the Iranian new calendar year], we have a comprehensive document for this organization, and God willing, it will be unveiled on April 9, by the president.”

According to Eslami, the document includes all aspects of nuclear technology, the industrialization of Iran in various sectors, the Leader's recommendations, and the spheres

that have not been addressed yet.

Eslami pointed out that, according to the document, qualitative and quantitative targets have been set for the processes of the nuclear fuel cycle. As regards nuclear power, the document sets the stage for the construction of power plants with a production capacity of up to 10,000 MW.

The head of the AEOI also revealed that his organization is in the process of building a 360 MW power plant in Darokhovein in Khuzestan. This plant, Eslami said, will be constructed by Iranians only.

The new document, which amounts to a nuclear doctrine, comes at a time when negotiations in Vienna over reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

(JCPOA), have come to a standstill due to the Biden administration's unwillingness to make political decisions regarding the talks.

It is indicative of Iran's determination to expand its nuclear infrastructure and knowledge by relying on domestic capabilities. Iran has been trying to maintain and advance its nuclear program in the face of Western pressures.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei has recently shone a light on why Iran kept its nuclear program despite pressures.

In a speech delivered on March 10, 2022, the Leader said, “I could equally mention the suggestion to forego our scientific progress. Some people say, ‘You must forget about the nuclear issue because it has led to so much sensitivity and has created many problems.’ Well, the nuclear issue is of a scientific nature.”

He added, “It concerns our scientific and technological progress in the future. We will shortly – not far in the future – be needing the products of our nuclear energy. We will completely need it. Then, whom should we refer to? When must we begin the process to achieve it? Therefore, going without these things and showing negligence towards them is not correct.”

IRAN IN FOCUS

APRIL 6, 2022

Straight Truth
TEHRAN TIMES

3

SPORTS

Tractor complete signing of Tiago Ferreira

TEHRAN – Iranian football club Tractor completed signing of Portuguese defender Tiago Ferreira.

The 28-year-old defender has joined Tractor until the rest of the season.



With six games left in Iran Professional League (IPL), Tractor are in the relegation scrap.

Ferreira began his career in Porto B in 2012. The defender has played in Belgian team Waregem and Romanian club Universitatea Craiova.

Most recently, he was a member of Hungarian club MTK.

Barij Essence learns fate at Asian Women's Club Volleyball C'ship

TEHRAN – Barij Essence learned their opponents at the 2022 Asian Women's Club Volleyball Championship.

The Iranian team will compete in the event which will be held in Semey, Kazakhstan from April 24 to 30.

Kazakhstan A, Kazakhstan B, Iran, Thailand, Japan and Uzbekistan will pit their expertise against one another in the single round-robin competition.

I feel good when I fast: Karim Benzema

TEHRAN – Real Madrid football team forward Karim Benzema analyzed how fasting for the start of the month of Ramadan affects his body as a high-performance professional.

He gave an interview to the magazine Esquire in which he explained Ramadan is part of his life.

“It has no impact. Ramadan is part of my life and my religion makes Ramadan an obligation,” he said.

“For me, it is very important and I feel good when I fast,” Benzema stated.

Iran discover rivals at 2022 AVC Cup for Men

TEHRAN – Iran learned their fate at the 2022 AVC Cup for Men in Chinese Taipei.

A total of 12 teams confirmed their participation in the intense eight-day event, with host Chinese Taipei, Bahrain and Thailand in Pool A.

Iran, Korea and New Zealand are in Pool B, with Pool C consisting of Japan, Pakistan and Kazakhstan.

Pool D comprising title-holder Qatar, Australia and Hong Kong, China.

The competition will be held in Chinese Taipei between August 7 and 14.

Khalilzadeh to undergo foot surgery

TEHRAN – Iran and Al-Rayyan defender Shoja Khalilzadeh will undergo foot surgery.

The 32-year-old defender will undergo surgery at the Aspetar in Doha, Qatar.

Khalilzadeh missed his team's matches in Group A of the 2022 AFC Champions League.

Al-Rayyan has been drawn with Al-Hilal of Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan's Istiklol and Sharjah of the UAE.

The Qatari football team will face Istiklol on Friday.

Paykan, Shahdab know pools at Asian Men's Club Volleyball Championship

TEHRAN – Iranian teams Paykan and Shahdab discovered fate at the 2022 Asian Men's Club Volleyball Championship.

The competition will be held in Tehran, Iran from May 14 to 20.

A total of eight teams will strut their stuff in the one-week-long tournament.

Paykan are in Pool A together with Thailand, Uzbekistan and Japan, with Shahdab, Qatar, Kazakhstan, and Iraq in Pool B.

The first-day encounters on May 14 see Japan meet Thailand, Paykan takes on Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan challenge Qatar and Shahdab faces Iraq.

At the previous episode last year in Thailand, Sirjan Foulad Iranian pulled off a dramatic 3-1 win against Qatar's Al-Arabi in the final clash to capture the eventual title, the Iran's 15th.

Iranian coach likely to train Pakistan taekwondo squad

TEHRAN – Pakistan Taekwondo Federation (PTF) has entrusted the responsibility of coaching the national team to Yousef Karami, the former captain of the Iranian national taekwondo team.

The Pakistan Taekwondo Federation, which is trying to improve the country's position in the sport at international level hopes in the ability of Iranian taekwondo coach.

Karami, the former captain of Iranian national taekwondo team, who previously worked as a club coach in Croatia for two years and has also held various international training seminars, met with Pakistan Taekwondo Federation (PTF) president Wasim Ahmed in Islamabad.

After the meeting, Karami told IRNA that he had met with officials from Pakistan's taekwondo federation and was scheduled to prepare for the team's camps to attend various regional events, including the 2022 Hangzhou Asian Games.

He said that this is his first experience to be in Pakistan and that he is going to coach the national team for the next year and that he is happy to be able to share his abilities and experiences with the Pakistani national team.

Karami described working with the Pakistani team as an important challenge and said that despite being offered to coach the Iranian national team, he was willing to experience this challenge, although the Pakistani Taekwondo Federation is not technically at the desired level, but with support and assistance their position could be upgraded in the sport.

This well-known Iranian and world taekwondo figure announced his plans to hold a joint camp of national teams of the two neighboring countries, the national taekwondo team of Pakistan to visit Iran and hold competitions with our country's club teams.

Wasim Ahmad, President of the Pakistan Taekwondo Federation, also told IRNA the country is considering the revival of Pakistan Taekwondo and has planned in this regard.

He added timely presence of Karami in Pakistan is an encouragement to all officials of the federation, especially the Pakistani national team, adding that the Federation looked forward to working closely with the Iranian coach who, apart from his professional cooperation, is his brother and friend.

U.S. demands halt to Iran's revenge for assassination of General Soleimani: report

TEHRAN – The United States has asked Iran to drop its policy of exacting revenge for the assassination of its top general, Qassem Soleimani, during the talks in Vienna over reviving the 2015 nuclear deal, Al-Alam reported on Monday.

The U.S. presented a set of demands at the talks that Iran refused altogether, the Iranian news television reported.

The United States continues to be a major obstacle to the progress of the talks in Vienna aimed at removing sanctions. Because the U.S. is yet to take the necessary political decisions regarding the Vienna talks.

This was confirmed by Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh, noting that U.S. President Joe Biden had not

taken a decision on returning to the nuclear agreement, and that the Vienna talks had become hostage to U.S. internal affairs.

Khatibzadeh stressed that Iran's patience will not last forever, and that the United States is responsible for the suspension of the Vienna talks.

The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), Mohammad Eslami, confirmed that global arrogance seeks to prevent Iran from achieving development. In an interview with Al-Alam TV, Eslami said the United States has placed many obstacles in order to achieve this goal.

“There is a clear will and a serious effort by the arrogance, especially the United States of America and its allies, to prevent Iran from

achieving development,” the nuclear chief stressed.

Well-informed sources revealed to Al-Alam that the United States' obstruction of the Vienna talks was caused by several positions. The first is that Washington refuses to lift sanctions on the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC), despite the assertion of many Iranian officials that lifting these sanctions is a priority for Iran.

The sources also revealed that the United States asked Iran to abandon the demand for revenge for the crime of the assassination of General Soleimani. Washington also demanded that the issue of the Iranian role in the region be raised at the negotiating table, which was totally rejected by Iran.

Iran to reveal ‘comprehensive document’ on nuclear development

TEHRAN – Ali Bahadori Jahromi, the spokesman for Iran's government, announced on Tuesday that Iran will be unveiling an important document on nuclear development next week.

The document will be announced by President Ebrahim Raisi on Saturday which marks Iran's National Day of Nuclear Technology, the spokesman said.

Speaking at a press conference, Bahadori Jahromi said, “The comprehensive strategic document for the development of the country's nuclear power will be unveiled on the 20th of Farvardin (April 9) in a ceremony hosted by the Atomic Energy Organization and attended by the president.”

The spokesman did not give further detail, which comes amid a pause in the nuclear talks in Vienna.

Mohammad Eslami, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), has recently stressed that global arrogance seeks to prevent Iran from achieving development.

In an interview with Al-Alam TV, Eslami pointed out that the United States had placed many obstacles in order to achieve this goal.

Eslami said, “There is a clear will and a serious effort by the arrogance, especially the United States of America and its allies, to prevent Iran from achieving development.”

Eslami added, “They seek by any means possible to achieve this goal, whether by placing obstacles, creating pretexts and providing false information. Therefore, the International Atomic Energy Agency usually searches for the information provided by them and conducts inspections to discover that this information is incorrect.”

Eslami explained, “In the

framework of the nuclear agreement, Iran has accepted to reduce its nuclear activities and allow more international supervision of these activities in return for these countries lifting the ban on it. Thus, trust is achieved between the two sides, so Iran has implemented its commitments in this field in accordance with the nuclear agreement, while these countries did not abide by their commitments and even used maximum pressure with the aim of eliminating the Islamic Republic, but what happened is that the Islamic Republic did not collapse, but on the contrary became more developed and advanced.”

Talks in Vienna over reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal have come to a standstill due to the Biden administration's inability to make tough political decisions.

After a week of diplomatic blame-game between Russia and the West over who's throwing a wrench into the Vienna talks, prospects for the imminent conclusion of the talks have become bleak due to Biden dithering over the last remaining issues.

After the war in Ukraine broke out, the European negotiators in Vienna accused Russia of preventing the conclusion of the talks for fears that the possible resumption of Iran's oil exports would make it easy to drive Russian oil and gas out of European markets.

Russia categorically rejected the accusation and, together with Iran, pointed the finger of the blame on Washington for refraining from making political decisions required for concluding the talks.

Iran says it has made all the tough decisions that are necessary for advancing the talks.

Over the course of the talks, Iran provided innovative solutions to a number of thorny issues such as guarantees and verification measures. But the U.S. kept refusing the proposals all while refraining from coming up with innovative solutions.

In a recent phone conversation with United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian addressed the latest developments concerning the negotiations in Vienna. He told the world's top diplomat that the U.S. needs to take action to help conclude the talks.

While Iran says a deal in Vienna is imminent, the U.S. keeps dampening hopes for a deal. Amir Abdollahian told Guterres that the negotiations are about to result in a deal. “We are close to an agreement in the negotiations and we have conveyed our proposals on the remaining issues through the European Union's top negotiator to the U.S. side, and the ball is now in the U.S. court,” he said.

The U.S., however, has a different assessment of the current state of play in Vienna. U.S. special envoy for Iran Robert Malley told CNN's Becky Anderson in Doha on March 27 that a nuclear deal “is not around the corner and is not inevitable” due to outstanding issues that “matter deeply” to parties involved in the talks, one of which is Tehran's demands regarding the elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

Iran has demanded that the U.S. remove the IRGC from its so-called Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO) because, many in Iran and beyond, believe that the Trump administration's decision to designate the IRGC as an FTO was mainly driven by a political motive

6,000 MW to be added to Iran's power generation capacity by late June

From page 1 ► According to Mehrabian, his ministry is following a comprehensive program for adding 30,000 MW to the country's power generation capacity by the end of the current government incumbency.

He also noted that the construction of 10,000 MW capacity of power plants had also been started by various industrial sectors, saying: "four major industries have started their work in the field of power plant construction. Based on the contract concluded with these industries, the said industries will not be provided with electricity from the national grid if they cannot deliver the power plants based on the specified schedule."

Over the past decade, constant temperature rising and the significant decrease in rainfalls across Iran have put the country in a hard situation regarding electricity supply during peak consumption



periods.

In this regard, the Energy Ministry has been following new programs to meet the country's power demand during peak periods and to prevent outages.

Constructing new units in the country's power plants and also building new power plants for major industries are among the mentioned programs that are being pursued seriously by the ministry in collaboration with other related government entities.

Iraq still needs Iranian gas, says Iraqi minister



TEHRAN - Iraq's Acting Electricity Minister Adel Karim has said his country is in need of gas import from Iran the coming years, stressing that Baghdad has not struck a deal with the littoral states of the Persian Gulf, IRNA reported.

The Iraqi minister made the remarks on a local TV program, promising a different summer in comparison to previous summers, saying that his ministry was going to take all the necessary measures to meet the electricity demand during the summer.

Karim acknowledged that creating a power grid connection with Arab littoral states of the Persian Gulf would be very costly, noting that the Iraqi government does not accept the prices that such Arab countries propose.

"Iran's gas is appropriate for Iraq and its

price is acceptable," he said, adding, "We need Iran's gas for years."

The minister also referred to three agreements with Qatar, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, noting that Iraq has not yet reached any deal with these countries on energy prices.

Most Iraqi power plants depend on Iran's gas and energy export.

Iraq needs 35,000 megawatts per annum and the demand for electricity is expected to increase by 1,500 MW this year, he went on to say.

Iraqi and Iranian oil ministers had previously discussed the increase in Iran's gas export to Iraq as well as the issue of payback of Baghdad's debt to Tehran.

Iranian Oil Minister Javad Oji met with his Iraqi counterpart Ihsan Abdul Jabbar on the sidelines of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) in Doha in March.

Back in December 2021, Ahmed Musa, the spokesman for the Iraqi Ministry of Electricity, had announced that high-ranking delegations composing of representatives from three ministries of electricity, treasury, and oil along with Salem Chalabi, the CEO of the Trade Bank of Iraq, were scheduled to visit Iran in order to hold talks on demanding for more gas export to the neighboring Arab country.

Annual export from Markazi province increases 39%

TEHRAN- The value of export from Markazi province, in the center of Iran, rose 39 percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1400 (ended on March 20), from its preceding year, a provincial official announced.

Ali Jodaki, the acting head of the province's Industry, Mining and Trade Department, said that over 917,000 tons of non-oil commodities worth \$1.109 billion were exported from the province in the previous year.

He named petrochemical products, aluminum ingots, juices, chemicals, all kinds of glass, casting products, polyester fibers, rebar, flowers and plants, heavy and light polyethylene, and polypropylene as the main products exported from the province in the previous year, and Iraq, Afghanistan, Turkey, Pakistan, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as the major export destinations.

The official further announced that 129,000 tons of products worth \$446 million were imported into the province in the past year.

He named alumina powder, carbon anode, aluminum coil, peanuts, juice raw materials, aluminum ingots, steel pipes and rebars, juice bags, and cotton as the major

imported items, and China, Turkey, the UAE, India and Germany as the main sources of imports.

More than 2,800 production units are active in Markazi province, of which 250 units are also active in the field of export.

As previously announced by the head of Islamic Republic of Iran's Customs Administration (IRICA), the value of Iran's non-oil trade rose 38 percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1400, as compared to its previous year.

Alireza Moqadasi put the country's non-oil trade at 162 million tons worth \$100 billion in the past year.

He said that Iran exported 122 million tons of non-oil products worth \$48 billion in the previous year, which was \$14 billion (41 percent) more than the figure for its preceding year.

The country's non-oil trade record in 1400 was reached while the toughest sanctions were imposed on Iran, but thanks to God and the efforts of entrepreneurs, producers and the cooperation of foreign trade-related organizations, a historical record was achieved in the past year which was unprecedented in recent decades, the official underlined.

Over \$186m to be allocated for agricultural mechanization this year

TEHRAN - The head of Iran's Agricultural Mechanization Development Center said some 50 trillion rials (over \$186.7 million) is going to be allocated for the mechanization of the country's agricultural sectors in the current Iranian calendar year 1401 (started on March 21), IRIB reported.

According to Kambiz Abbasi, if the mentioned funding is provided the Agricultural Mechanization Development Center will be able to increase the total amount of facilities provided to farmers for the purchase of agricultural machinery by 25 percent.

The official noted that the government had allocated 40 trillion rials (about \$148.8 million) for agricultural mechanization in the previous calendar year.

The mentioned funding was used to supply about 30,000 tractors, 800 combine harvesters, and about 50,000 different agricultural machines and equipment used in various sectors like horticulture, livestock, poultry, and aquaculture to the country's farmers.

The official further noted that farmers across the country are going to need 50,000 tractors in



the current year.

According to Abbasi, the mentioned funds were injected into the ninth credit line that has been opened so far for the development of the country's agricultural mechanization, and the new resources will be injected into the 10th credit line that is going to be opened this year.

Iranian Agriculture Ministry has been allocating a separate credit line for the mechanization of the agriculture sector every year.

Since over 95 percent of the technology and knowledge in this area is domestic, despite the U.S. sanctions most of the

goals in the mechanization of various agriculture sectors will be achieved without any problems, according to Abbasi.

In the past forty years, since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has witnessed a remarkable improvement in various sectors and the agriculture industry has been one of the areas in which the country has undergone huge development.

Implementing billions of dollars worth of development, research, and educational projects across the country is an indication of the significant improvements in this sector.

Govt. approves new resolution to facilitate foreign investment

TEHRAN - Iranian government has approved a new resolution to facilitate foreign investment in the country, IRIB reported on Tuesday quoting an official with the Investment and Economic and Technical Assistance Organization of Iran (OIETAI).

According to Abolfazl Koudei, following the suggestion made by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, the cabinet has approved a new resolution, based on which the amount of deposit required to grant a five-year residence to foreign nationals has been reduced from €250,000 in the previous decree to €90,000 euros.

Koudei noted that the main purpose of this decision is to encourage investors from other countries, especially from neighboring countries, to invest in Iran.

The director-general for OIETAI's foreign investment office noted that based on the new resolution, the main investor party along with



the enterprises' managers and experts, as well as his/her spouse, male children under 18 years of age, female children, and dependent parents will also benefit from the mentioned conditions.

Last December, Head of Iran's Planning and Budget Organization (PBO) Masoud Mirkazemi had said that the government was planning to remove the barriers in the way of attracting foreign investment.

Iran's annual exports to Afghanistan exceed \$1.8b

TEHRAN - Iran exported 4.187 million tons of commodities worth \$1.839 billion to Afghanistan in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20) to register a 20-percent decline in terms of value compared to the preceding year, ILNA reported.

The weight of the exported goods also decreased by 40 percent year on year, according to the Spokesman of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) Rohollah Latifi.

The official noted that the Islamic Republic imported only 17,000 tons of goods valued at \$19.5 million from the country in the previous year, however, the imports increased by 360 percent and 200 percent in terms



of value and weight compared to the figures for the preceding year 1399.

Regarding the reasons for the decrease in exports to Afghanistan, Latifi said: "The decrease in exports was normal given the situation in Afghanistan last year. The first point is that for several months we have witnessed crises in this country and the exporters were faced with ambiguities and

concerns about sending their goods to different destinations in Afghanistan."

On the other hand, there was a change of government in Afghanistan, which led to a change in the rules and trade regulations in this country, he added.

"Another important point was that many projects that were being implemented in the country by the former government or international agencies were stopped or changed, and as a result, there were interruptions in their implementation, or some projects were basically shut down, so consumption of construction materials in this country decreased, and naturally

in these conditions, the export of construction materials also decreased," Latifi said.

He further stressed that stability and security in Afghanistan will definitely be in the interest of all neighboring countries and the region, especially Iran, adding: "Recently, at the Afghanistan Neighbors Summit in China, the attending countries discussed the issue of security and economic prosperity in this country, and if the issues raised in this meeting are implemented, Afghanistan will return to the past economic prosperity and in this case the reduction of Iranian exports to this country will be compensated."

Loading, unloading of goods in Gilan ports rises 4% in a year

TEHRAN - Loading and unloading of goods in the ports of Gilan province, in the north of Iran, rose four percent during the previous Iranian calendar year 1400 (ended on March 20), as compared to the preceding year, a provincial official announced.

Hamid-Reza Abaei, the director-general of the province's Ports and Maritime Department, said that over 1.676 million tons of commodities were loaded and unloaded in Anzali and Astara ports in the past year.

Of the mentioned figure, 1.66 million tons was related to the non-oil and about 17,000 tons was related to the oil products, the official said.

He also announced a 51-percent growth in the export of non-oil products from the ports of Gilan in the previous year.

Based on the data released by Transport and Urban Development Ministry, loading and unloading of goods in the ports of Iran rose 17 percent during the past year.

The ministry's data show that loading and unloading of goods in the country's ports reached 152.91 million tons in the previous



Iranian calendar year, while the figure stood at 130.69 million tons in the preceding year.

During the said year, loading and unloading operations in the container sector reached 2.1 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) with a weight of 24.57 million tons, which was 13.5 percent more than the 1.85 million TEUs in the Iranian calendar year 1399, the report said.

The loading and unloading of goods during the previous year also grew by 12.8 percent in the dry bulk sector, while in the liquid bulk sector the figure increased by 12.6 percent, in the general cargo sector rose by 13.1 percent,

and in the petroleum sector grew by 22.5 percent.

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

Such necessity has led the government to define projects for more development of the ports and also take some measures to encourage investment making in ports, in addition, to facilitate loading and unloading of goods, especially basic commodities, there.

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

According to Ports and Maritime Organization, the capacity of the country's ports has increased from 180 million tons in the Iranian calendar year 1392 (ended in March 2014) to 250 million tons in 1399 (ended in March 2021).

Merkel ‘stands by’ past Ukraine NATO decision after Zelenskyy criticism

The Ukrainian president hit out at Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy, blaming them for the current war and suggesting their 2008 stance against admitting Kyiv to NATO was a clear “miscalculation” that emboldened Russia.

Former and current German political leaders pushed back Monday against criticism leveled by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Sunday.

Zelenskyy suggested his country was now suffering Russian aggression as a direct result of political decisions taken by then German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy in 2008.

Zelenskyy called out both former leaders for reportedly blocking Ukraine’s admission to the NATO military alliance during a summit that year in Bucharest, Romania.

“I invite Ms. Merkel and Mr. Sarkozy to visit Bucha and see what the policy of concessions to Russia has led to in 14 years,” the Ukrainian president said, referring to the site of recent alleged atrocities against Ukrainian civilians by Russian troops.

The world has reacted with horror at the images of dead civilians littering the streets of Bucha, some with their hands bound behind their backs.

Ukraine’s 2008 request was reportedly blocked by Sarkozy and Merkel, who determined it was too early for Ukraine to join the alliance given the very unstable political situation in the country at the time, among other factors.

As the NATO summit closed, a final communique promised Ukraine eventual membership though stopped short of actually offering a timeline or a concrete action plan for doing so.

Merkel stands by 2008 decision

Though Sarkozy’s office has yet to respond to Zelenskyy, Merkel quickly released a statement saying that she, “stands by her decisions in relation to the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest.”

The statement continued, “In view of the atrocities uncovered in Bucha and other places in Ukraine, all efforts by the government and the international community to stand by Ukraine’s side and to bring an end to Russia’s barbarism and war against Ukraine have the former chancellor’s full support.”

Merkel, who left politics last year after serving four terms as chancellor, was widely seen as a stabilizing figure in Europe during her tenure but the war in Ukraine has also exposed potential flaws in her leadership with critics saying her policy of detente toward Moscow left Germany and Europe vulnerable.

Another major factor in that criticism is now becoming glaringly obvious, namely Germany’s considerable dependency on Russian oil and gas to power its economy. In 2014, Germany imported 36% of its gas from Moscow but by the time Russia invaded neighboring Ukraine on February 24, it was importing 55%.

The situation has forced Germany into a corner with Berlin claiming it is unable to follow calls by the US and other allies to impose a full energy embargo on Moscow.

Despite outrage at Russia’s aggression and the opprobrium directed at Berlin for its perceived foot dragging, German politicians remain loath to support a complete energy embargo.

Social Democratic (SPD) leader Lars Klingbeil, for instance, called



the plan “the wrong path” for Germany.

Bavarian State Premier Markus Soder of the Christian Social Union (CSU) said an immediate ban on Russian energy would, “lead to a truly massive collapse of the German economy and a truly massive loss of jobs.”

German president: I got Putin wrong

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, long an advocate of Western rapprochement with Russia, expressed regret for his earlier stance, saying his years of support for the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline had been a clear mistake, Reuters reported on Monday.

Steinmeier, a Social Democrat who served as foreign minister under Chancellor Angela Merkel before being elevated to the presidency, said Russia’s invasion of Ukraine meant he and others had to reckon honestly with what they had got wrong.

“My adherence to Nord Stream 2 was clearly a mistake,” he said. “We were sticking to a bridge in which Russia no longer believed and which other partners had warned us against.”

Steinmeier was a prominent member of a wing of his Social Democratic Party, led by former Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, that argued close economic ties to Russia were a way of anchoring it within a Western-oriented global system.

“We failed to build a common European house,” Steinmeier said. “I did not believe Vladimir Putin would embrace his country’s complete economic, political and moral ruin for the sake of his imperial madness,” he added.

“In this, I, like others, was mistaken.”

China’s FM speaks with Ukrainian counterpart

China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi spoke with his Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Kuleba, in a phone call on Monday, with Beijing again calling on talks to end the conflict in Ukraine.

The call, which Beijing said was made at Ukraine’s request, was the first reported high-level conversation between the countries since March 1, when Kuleba asked Beijing to use its ties with Moscow to stop Russia’s invasion, the Ukrainian foreign ministry said at the time.

“Wars end eventually. The key is how to reflect on the pain, to maintain lasting security in Europe and establish a balanced, effective and sustainable European security mechanism,” Wang said, according to the ministry.

“China stands ready to play a constructive role in this regard in an objective position.”

Kuleba tweeted: “Grateful to my Chinese counterpart for solidarity with civilian victims.”

“We both share the conviction that ending the war against Ukraine serves common interests of peace, global food security and international trade,” he said, Reuters reported.

China, which has grown closer with Moscow in recent years while it has also had cordial diplomatic ties and strong trade links with Ukraine, has refused to condemn Russia’s attack on the country or to call its actions there an invasion.

Lavrov slams situation in Bucha as fake

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Monday slammed the situation in Bucha as “fake attack”, TASS reported.

According to him, a fake attack was staged there, which Ukraine and the West disperse through all channels and social networks.

Russia has no military, strategic reason to launch bio-chemical attack on Ukraine: analyst

“The Bucha incident must be investigated by an independent and multilateral group of experts”

From page 1 ► town’s mayor made a video address where he didn’t mention these alleged crimes. Footage shot by pro-Kyiv forces of their troops patrolling the town immediately after the Russian departure also didn’t show any dead bodies either.

The Russian Defense Ministry asked why supposed evidence of these crimes didn’t emerge until after Ukrainian intelligence agents and the media entered the town several days later. They also raised the question of why the cadavers didn’t show the physical signs typically associated with those that have allegedly been left out in the elements for at least half a week according to Kyiv’s official narrative. Another point is that the bodies had white armbands around them of the sort usually worn by Russians and civilians in the areas under the control of that country’s armed forces.

Kyiv has a history of unsuccessful psy-ops in this conflict since its onset over a month ago. These include the so-called “Ghost of Kyiv”, the Snake Island incident, and the Mariupol maternity and children’s hospital bombing, among others. Its claims cannot be taken for granted as fact after prior high-profile ones have already been debunked. The swiftness with which the U.S.-led West is moving to apply additional pressure upon Moscow on the pretext of automatically assuming that it committed war crimes without having even conducted an investigation suggests that they’re exploiting the incident.

One alternative interpretation of what happened is that Kyiv dropped the dead bodies of its fellow citizens into Bucha who were earlier executed by neo-Nazi militias on the basis of supposedly being Russian sympathizers in order to stage a false flag war crime for pressuring its U.S.-led Western partners to urgently dispatch more military and other forms of aid. This possibility can’t be dismissed until an independent and multilateral investigation carried out by credible experts is undertaken and completed. Without doing so, Kyiv’s claims will always remain questionable.

Washington warns about using chemical weapons by Russia, while the Americans have admitted U.S.-Ukraine collaboration to develop bio laboratories in Ukraine’s territory. Do you predict any side to resort to biological weapons in this war?

Nobody can accurately predict the precise course of any conflict, especially regarding a game-changing event such as the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). From what’s been revealed thus far by the Russian ministries of defense and foreign affairs, Kyiv was indeed conspiring with its U.S.-led Western patrons to develop biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons. Moscow has publicly shared this evidence for the international community to review but its geopolitical opponents dismiss it all out of hand as so-called “Russian propaganda”.

To the question of which side might employ WMDs, it’s extremely unlikely that Russia would ever do this, simply because it has no military-strategic reason to. Kyiv, however, has every such reason to attempt this out of desperation to increase U.S.-led Western pressure on Russia and further discredit it in the eyes of its targeted audience. Any such false flag provocation by Kyiv that tries to blame Moscow for the use of WMDs in the current conflict could also be exploited to push for direct NATO intervention such as the dispatch of a Polish-led so-called “peacekeeping force”.

Nevertheless, nobody can confidently predict whether that scenario will indeed come to pass. It’s better to discuss possibilities and the reasons behind why they might unfold than to say with certainty that something will or will not happen. That’s because if whatever it is that they’re predicting doesn’t happen, their opponents might misportray the person who warned about that as having spread so-called “fake news”. Folks can inadvertently discredit themselves and their media partners by saying that something dramatic will definitely happen but then it never ends up occurring.

How do you see Russia’s partial withdrawal from Ukraine? Is it true or just



a fake news?

It’s not fake news because the Russian Defense Ministry itself openly declared that the ongoing special operation is transitioning to its second phase of focusing on the liberation of the newly recognized Donbass Republics. Furthermore, Moscow said that its military drawdown from parts of Ukraine is intended to be interpreted as a goodwill gesture for encouraging further progress on peace talks.

This development suggests that it was never Russia’s intention to capture the Ukrainian capital but that making a move on that city was meant to distract its opponents from its true military goals in the eastern and southern portions of that former Soviet Republic.

In fact, the Russian Defense Ministry actually alluded to exactly that. They revealed that their opponent’s military capabilities have been devastated over the past month so it’s now easier to liberate Donbass with fewer civilian casualties and collateral damage.

How do you evaluate Zelenskyy’s performance in the media war? Every day he appears on TV channels to give an image of the war. Don’t you think he is successful in his performance?

There was never any credible chance that Russia was going to win any so-called “media war” in the eyes of the U.S.-led Western audience. Nobody should ever have had such a false expectation due to America’s dominance of the mainstream media and well as its allies’ censorship of publicly financed Russian international media and some independent Russian-friendly sites.

That being the case, the dynamics are altogether different when it comes to the non-Western audience. Many sympathize with Russia, even if only because they regard it as an obstacle to the U.S. efforts to reassert its declining unipolar hegemony. The vast majority of the international community also hasn’t sanctioned Russia despite immense U.S.-led Western pressure to do so.

Their populations support these governments’ policy of principled neutrality that’s being practiced to strengthen their strategic autonomy. India is a perfect example of this. Despite having grown very close to the U.S. over the past decade, it’s remained loyal to its special and privileged strategic partners in Russia. New Delhi is setting a powerful example for the rest of the developing world.

What are the economic fallout of the Ukraine war, especially after sanctioning Russia and possible problems in supplying energy at the global level?

The Russian economy has impressively managed to survive the initial shock of the U.S.-led West’s unprecedented and preplanned sanctions. This is due to the currency controls that were put into place as well as the fact that the country is largely self-sufficient in terms of basic goods and services, especially agricultural products and energy. Europe, however, isn’t self-sufficient in the latter two and thus risks a major economic crisis if it submits to U.S. pressure to completely “decouple” from Russia.

President Putin’s decree late last month ordering that gas be paid in rubles gave a major boost to his country’s currency. It’s since recovered to its pre-crisis level while Europe is now mired in uncertainty about what might come next. The U.S. has a strategic interest in provoking an economic crisis in the EU so as to reduce the strength of the dollar’s euro rival, create problems for its companies’ competitors there, and potentially even buy some of them out on the cheap if they become desperate enough.

50% of UK Muslims struggle for food during Ramadan

From page 1 ► It has changed the way the food banks operate, he noted, with less time now to even speak with their guests. “It used to be a calming experience, people would come, get some food, have a chat. We’d talk to them and find out about their situation, try to offer help. Now they’re just feeling anxiety and uncertainty.”

Another group that coordinates with Islamic Relief UK is: Give a Gift.

It has also issued a similar shocking warning saying many parents will have little or no food to break their fasts during the coming holy month, just so that their children are able to eat.

Inflation has seen soaring prices of household essentials that has severely impacted families’ spending, with research from the Resolution Foundation suggesting households could be £1,000 worse off in 2022.

However, the disturbing aspect of the data is how British Muslims are suffering from desperate conditions in much higher numbers (per capita) than the wider British population.

Islamic Relief UK says “last week’s spring statement (one of the two budget statements the British Treasury makes each year to Parliament upon publication of economic forecasts) was an opportunity for the government to strengthen our social security systems and raise benefits payments to be, at least, in line with inflation. Instead, they’ve been handed a real term cut in their payments, and with inflation set to rise further this year, the cost of living crisis will become an emergency for the poorest families.”

“We urgently call on the UK government to review this decision and take the bold actions necessary to avoid pushing families into destitution.”

“This is especially important as Muslim families observe the holy month of Ramadan. Many will be fasting from sunrise to sunset and there is a real risk that families will not have enough food or will go without to feed their children.”

The director of Islamic Relief UK, Tufail Hussain, also says “families across the UK will be suffering as a result of record rates of inflation as well



as increasing energy prices due to the war in Ukraine.”

He has urged the government to swiftly respond to the group’s warning saying “we urgently call on the UK government to review this decision and take the bold actions necessary to avoid pushing families into destitution. This is especially important as Muslim families begin to observe the holy month of Ramadan. Many will be fasting from sunrise to sunset and there is a real risk that families will not have enough food or will go without to feed their children.”

Typically, Muslims tend to give more charity (also referred to as Zakat) to the poor during Ramadan. Over the past twelve months, requests for help to another of the Islamic Relief UK’s partners, the National Zakat Foundation have soared by a massive 70 percent.

The foundation has been giving out grants from Zakat collected from British Muslims to those in need.

Sohail Hanif, chief executive of the National Zakat Foundation pointed out that in the UK “one of the key things is that zakat should be spent within the area where you live. Within the UK there are a lot of families struggling. We’re really seeing it now.”

Islamic Relief UK is urging the government to increase benefit payments as much as possible to the rate of inflation and to strengthen the UK’s social security systems further.

Many Muslims have been hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic including low-income families, the homeless, those suffering from domestic abuse, asylum seekers, and refugees who were already struggling to feed themselves.

Mashhad makes medical tourism a \$48 million industry in year



From page 1 ► He said Iran has immense potential to become a hub for medical tourism, adding, for example, Turkey's revenues from medical tourism surpass Iran's as the neighboring country possesses lesser medics and hospitals yet it does not have pilgrimage capacities.

In 1399, the coronavirus pandemic was hitting hard at medical tourism in the northeastern city, which used to be a thriving destination for health-care seekers in pre-pandemic times.

The number of international medical tourists to Mashhad has plunged 95 percent over the past months since the coronavirus pandemic started, according to Khoshashkan's

predecessor Esmail Khayyami.

Even though Iran has good conditions in terms of competitive price, presence of skilled physicians, and low waiting time among the studied countries, other medical tourism infrastructures are not enough invested. For example, until 2017, Iran has not been able to obtain a JCI license even for one hospital, and the average per capita physician/nurse index is much lower than the global one.

Experts say, to promote medical tourism, it is necessary to recognize the strategic medical tourism status of each province in the country, supply a specialized workforce, provide high-quality services, improve infrastructure, and promote a positive attitude toward authorities to support medical tourism industry.

The Islamic Republic has set goals to exceed its yearly medical travelers to around two million in [calendar year] 1404 (March 2025-March 2026).

Amongst Iran's trump cards are the presence of credible surgeons and physicians, cutting-edge medical technologies, high-tech medicine and diverse specializations, super affordable procedures, and finally its hospitable people.

Five million visits registered for Khuzestan tourist sites

TEHRAN – Tourist attractions across the southwestern Khuzestan province attracted over five million visitors during the Iranian new year holidays (Noruz) from March 16 to April 2, the provincial tourism chief has said.

A total of 5,382,102 people visited historical sites and natural sights throughout the province during the mentioned period, Peyman Nabhani explained on Tuesday, IRNA reported.

The city of Dezful gained the lion's share of the visits followed by Lali, Andika, Shush, and Andimeshk, the official added.

Khuzestan is home to three UNESCO World Heritage sites of Susa, Tchogha Zanbil, and

Shushtar Historical Hydraulic System yet it is a region of raw beauty that its visitors could spend weeks exploring. The province is also a cradle for handicrafts and arts whose crafters inherited from their preceding generations.

Lying at the head of the Persian Gulf and bordering Iraq on the west, Khuzestan was settled about 6000 BC by a people with affinities to the Sumerians, who came from the Zagros Mountains region. Urban centers appeared there nearly contemporaneously with the first cities in Mesopotamia in the 4th millennium. Khuzestan, according to Encyclopedia Britannica, came to constitute the heart of the Elamite kingdom, with Susa as its capital.

65% rise in visits to Khorasan Razavi sites during Noruz

TEHRAN – Visits by Noruz trippers to museums and historical sites in Khorasan Razavi province grow 65 percent over the Iranian new year holidays (started March 21) compared to the same period last year, the deputy provincial tourism chief has said.

“Over 225,900 people toured museums and historical sites across the province during the two-week period,” Yousef Bidkhori said on Tuesday.

Mashhad, the provincial capital, is Iran's holiest and second-largest city. Its raison d'être is the striking shrine complex of the eighth Shia Imam that is encircled by dozens of five-star hotels and many other accommodation centers. Mashhad and the buffer zone of the complex present a unique approach and exercise towards the development of pilgrimage areas during history concerning a city and its religious core, in a way that the expression of the pilgrimage concept can be vividly seen in



the architectural and urban planning of the city.

The Imam Reza complex, in general also in detail enjoys unique creativity and genius, altogether has formed a unique cultural, artistic masterpiece all over the world. The architectural design of the complex has also complied with these traditions and rituals to address the needs of people and the urban

Documentation work begins on Mirza Kuchak Khan memorabilia

TEHRAN – A documentation work has commenced on objects remaining from Mirza Kuchak Khan who was an Iranian national hero and legendary freedom fighter in the early twentieth century.

Moreover, the project is aimed to restore the remaining sites and places that are associated with the movement he launched in northern Gilan province.

The documentation project will be commenced on the objects related to Mirza Kuchak Khan such as clothes, statues, wooden utensils, and paper documents, which are being kept in Rasht Museum, according to the deputy provincial tourism chief Vali Jahani.

After the completion of the

project, the objects will be transferred to the house of Mirza Kuchak Khan, which has been under restoration since August to be repurposed into a museum, the official said.

Both documentation and restoration projects are being implemented by the province's cultural heritage department in collaboration with the Rasht Municipality.

Covering an area of 1120 square meters, the house is located in the Ostadsara neighborhood. The Rasht Municipality purchased the house from its owner a few years ago to convert it into a cultural center. The house was inscribed on the National Heritage list in 2007.

Born Yunes, Mirza Kuchak Khan (1880-1921), established the movement in the forests of Gilan that became known as the Jangal (Forest) Movement in response to the period of political decay brought about by the advent of World War I and the occupation of Iran by Anglo-Russian and Ottoman troops.

The uprising started in 1914 and remained active until 1921 when the movement was defeated.

It laid the ground for a popular movement in the northern part of the country. In this period, the Iranian people were grappling with social unrest, anarchy, political turmoil, abject poverty, famine, and numerous other problems.

After Reza Khan took power in 1920, he issued a highly classified document requesting high-ranking security officials to deliver Mirza Kuchak to him, dead or alive, offering a large reward to whoever did so.

This secret document shows that the king of Iran was desperately seeking to suppress the Jangal Movement as soon as possible to crack down on the new freedom movements mobilized in different parts of Iran.

Mirza and his companion named Gaouk, a Russian-German revolutionary adventurer, fleeing from the central government forces both died of frostbite in the Talesh mountains near Masal on December 2, 1921.

3.2 million visits to South Khorasan attractions recorded

TEHRAN – South Khorasan province has registered some 3.2 million visits to its tourist attractions during the Noruz holidays.

“3,289,620 people explored tourist sites of the South Khorasan province during Noruz,” a provincial official said on Tuesday.

Over 1.5 overnight stays were registered across the eastern province, Alireza Abbaszadeh said, ILNA reported.

The amassed data comes from authorized accommodation centers such as hotels, eco-lodge units, guest houses, and tourist complexes, the official noted.

South Khorasan is home to many historical and natural attractions such as Birjand Castle, Dragon Cave, Furg Citadel, and Poland Desert. It is also known for its famous rugs as well as its saffron and barberry which are produced in almost all parts of the province.

By mid-March Noruz travels traditionally begin in Iran, and roads across the country are packed with passengers who are racing



against time to make the best use of the two-week holiday.

On March 12, President Ebrahim Raisi said Iranians who have received the second dose of COVID vaccine were allowed to travel across the country during the new year holidays.

“Noruz ceremonies and trips, if practiced under health protocols, could be beneficial for the revival of the tourism industry and handicrafts, which have been severely affected by the coronavirus pandemic in many provinces,” he explained.

Last year, the number of domestic

travels fell by 96 percent during the two-week holidays compared to two years earlier due to struct virus-related restrictions, according to data compiled by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts. Before the corona outbreak, tourism revenues of the Islamic Republic 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

Available data suggest the country's tourism industry has suffered \$233m losses due to COVID restrictions over the past two years. “Iranian tourism facilities have incurred a loss of 69 trillion rials (\$233 million) due to the outbreak of the coronavirus over the past two years,” an official with the tourism ministry said early in January.

Noruz is the longest, oldest, and most cherished festival in the Persian calendar. It is when all Iranians celebrate the Persian New Year and nature's resurrection from the long winter.

Kerman handicrafts in great demand during Noruz



TEHRAN – Handicrafts of the ancient Kerman became sought-after during the two-week new year (Noruz) holidays, starting March 21.

Sales of handicrafts in the southern province reached 55 billion rials (\$206,000) during the mentioned time, the provincial tourism chief said on Monday.

A number of temporary handicraft markets were set up inside historical monuments and tourist attractions throughout the province during the period, Fereydon Faali said.

Handicrafts with the highest sales were pateh-duzi (the art of sewing a kind of embroidery by colorful stitches) kilim, precious

and semi-precious stones, handmade knives, wicker work, Khos-duzi (a type of embroidery), golabatun-duzi and hand-made copper dishes, the official added.

Baloch embroidery, hand-woven kilim carpets, wicker works, pateh, and precious and semi-precious gemstones are among popular handicrafts being produced in Kerman province, which is bounded by the provinces of Fars on the west, Yazd on the north, South Khorasan on the northeast, Sistan-Baluchestan on the east, and Hormozgan on the south.

Big and sprawling Kerman province is something of a cultural melting pot, blending various regional cultures over time. It is also home to rich tourist spots and historical sites including bazaars, mosques, caravanserais, and ruins of ancient urban areas.

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.

Hormozgan draws 3.4m travelers in Noruz holidays

TEHRAN – Over 3.4 million travelers arrived in Hormozgan province during the Persian New Year (Noruz) holidays (March 21-April 2), the provincial tourism chief has said.

“A total of 3,436,853 trippers visited the southern province during the two-week period”, Sohrab Banavand explained on Tuesday.

He also noted that some 100 handicrafts markets were launched across the province during the mentioned time to introduce local traditional arts to the tourists and visitors.

Earlier in March, the province's governor has announced up to five million travelers are estimated to visit the province in Noruz.

“There will be a lot of travelers in the province over the upcoming holidays, roughly three to five million people, and in this regard, there should be an increased monitoring process,” Mehdi Dusti said.

Known as the province of islands, Hormozgan province is located on the northern coasts of the Persian Gulf. It embraces scenic islands among which Kish, Hormuz, Hengam, and Qeshm are



the most beautiful ones and top tourist destinations in southern Iran.

Over the past couple of decades, the

coral Kish Island has become a beach resort where visitors can swim, shop, and sample a laid-back and relatively liberated local lifestyle. It is home to free-trade-zone status, with ever-growing hotels, shopping centers, apartment blocks, and retail complexes.

Hormuz, which is mostly barren and hilly, is situated some eight kilometers off the coast of the Strait of Hormuz, which attracts many tourists by its colorful mountains, silver sand shores, and great local people.

Hengam Island has scenery rocky

shores, serene sunset, and kind natives, which can attract travelers who enjoy a relaxing trip by spending time on this tranquil island.

Qeshm Island is a heaven for eco-tourists as it embraces wide-ranging attractions such as the Hara marine forests and about 60 villages dotted mostly across its rocky coastlines. The island also features geologically eye-catching canyons, hills, caves, and valleys, most of which are protected as part of the UNESCO-tagged Qeshm Island Geopark, itself a haven for nature-lovers.

Seventh COVID-19 wave on the cards for Iran

TEHRAN – A seventh wave of COVID-19 may hit the country as health experts warn of a rebound due to the New Year (Noruz) holidays which started March 21, ISNA reported on Tuesday.

The seventh wave is likely to occur in mid-May, as it probably takes between two to six weeks to appear, Hamid Souri, an epidemiologist said.

Regarding the formation of the seventh wave of the disease in the country, he said that “Wherever the density of contacts is higher, we are more likely to see an outbreak of the new strain, but the main foci of infection are important. At present, there seems to be a combination of omicron and Delta variants in the country.

Given the genetic changes that have taken place in BA.2 omicron, a more contagious variant; vulnerable people in the community are still at risk, and there is no evidence that the epidemic is disappearing, he further noted.



An epidemic is eliminated when the incidence of the virus in the community is limited and enters the eradication phase, he also added.

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 Next-strain clade 21L).

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.

Referring to the reopening of educational spaces, he said that the existence of a care system in schools to regularly monitor the health status of students is needed so that as soon as any change is taken, the necessary measures should be taken; Therefore, we need the presence of rapid response teams in the provinces to identify any outbreak in schools.

Following the decision of the National Headquarters for Coronavirus Control and President Ebrahim Raisi, all universities affiliated with the ministries of science and health, and schools, started education in person on April 3 as the new cases of the disease have notably reduced.

10,000 jobs to open up for women heads of households

TEHRAN – The Welfare Organization will create up to 10,000 jobs to empower women heads of households, Mohammad Nasiri, the deputy head of the organization for cultural and social affairs, said on Tuesday.

A total budget of 3 trillion rials (nearly \$11.5 million) has been earmarked for empowering these women with the approach of home employment, he explained.

According to the Statistical Center of Iran, out of twenty-two (22) million families in Iran, over three (3) million are WHH and most of them are in less-developed areas. The Government prioritized such families for target-



ing socio-economic support.

Earlier this month, Zahra Ershadi, Iran's ambassador and deputy representative to the United Nations, has said that Iran has made significant progress in empowering

women, despite U.S. illegal and inhumane sanctions.

Meanwhile, Ensieh Khazali, the vice president for women and family affairs, said in the 66th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, that about 12,000 female heads of households underwent empowerment training and entered the traditional and virtual market. Also, more than 1.1 million women heads of households are covered by the Relief Committee and more than 300,000 are covered by the Welfare Organization, benefiting from special support such as facilities, insurance, and livelihood services.

Over 1,900 tons of drugs seized in 2 years

TEHRAN – Iranian anti-narcotics police discovered 1,900 tons of drugs over the past 2 years, Majid Karimi, Iran's anti-narcotics police chief, has said.

During the past [Iranian calendar] year (March 2021-March 2022), some 2,500 operations were carried out against drug traffickers, he added, IRIB reported on Tuesday.

The main threat now is the spread of psychoactive substances, and statistics from the anti-narcotics police reveal that 23 tons of psychedelics were seized in the country last year, Karimi said.

In the past year, 10 anti-narcotics police officers were also martyred in the fight against drug trafficking, he regretted.

Iran holds world record for narcotics confiscation

Iran holds the record for nar-

cotics confiscation in the world, Eskandar Momeni, the director of anti-narcotics police headquarters said in December 2021.

However, great achievements in the field of countermeasures have been gained, and the United Nations has officially announced that 90 percent of opium, 70 percent of morphine, and 20 percent of world heroin have been discovered by Iran.

In the Iranian calendar year ended in March 2021, about 1,200 tons of drugs were discovered, which was the highest rate of discovery in the world,” he explained.

According to figures released by the United Nations in 2000, Afghanistan produced about 200 tons of narcotics, but in 2018, it has grown to 9,500 tons.

In other words, the production of narcotics has increased fif-

ty times, which has doubled the need for prevention efforts, he highlighted.

Despite the conditions caused by the coronavirus outbreak and the imposition of harsh sanctions against the country, fortunately, with the efforts of anti-narcotics police in 2020, drug detection increased by 41 percent.

After the Islamic Revolution (in 1979), 3,800 were martyred, and 12,000 were wounded and disabled in the fight against drug trafficking.

The UNODC has praised Iran's efforts to fight against narcotics trafficking on the occasion of International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking.

The organization also officially announced that the world's first place in the discovery of opium, heroin, and morphine belongs to Iran.



According to UNODC, Iran remains one of the major transit routes for drug trafficking from Afghanistan to European countries and has had a leading role at the global level in drug-control campaigns.

UNODC World Drug Report 2020 estimates that in 2018, 91 percent of world opium, 48 percent of the world morphine, and 26 percent of the world heroin were seized by Iran.

Health tips for Ramadan

Part 4

The holy month of Ramadan contains the most blessed days and nights and is an opportunity for Muslims to practice abstinence and give up mundane desires for a short period of time.

On one hand, fasting is a way of developing self-control, gaining a better understanding of God's gifts and greater compassion towards the deprived.

On the other hand, from the Iranian traditional medicine's point of view it can also help the body to maintain health by getting rid of unwanted materials built up in the body over the past eleven months.

The meals of Suhur (eaten early in the morning before the dawn) and Iftar (eaten after breaking the fast at the sun set) are somehow ushering us to the best timing for eating during the day all year round which means to have an early breakfast and dine early at night right after the sunset.

Here are some eating tips to experience better fasting days.

Cut back on leek, onion, tarragon

Try to cut back on some vegetables such as leek, tarragon and onion especially for Suhur

meal as consuming them might work up a thirst during the day. It is better to eat salads especially lettuce with cucumber for Suhur.

Not to eat much Ash-e reshteh, beef

Try to avoid consuming too much Ash-e reshteh (a type of thick soup featuring reshteh (thin noodles), vegetables, beans, chick pea, and lentil) or beef which are all considered as heavy meals.

Spray face with water, rose water

During the day you can spray your face with some water and rose water to quench the thirst.

Never break fast with cold water

Drinking cold water at the Iftar is the worst possible habit. As the stomach is pretty hot due to long hours of fasting drinking cold water can cause damage both to the stomach and the liver (which is in close proximity of the stomach as well). It is like pouring cool water inside a hot glass container which could break or damage it.

Additionally cold water can cause constipation, poor digestion, unquenchable thirst and anxiety.

To be continued

More scientific documents published in Q1

TEHRAN – Iranian researchers published 20,757 scientific documents in the first quarter of 2022, compared to 19,961 in the same period last year, ISNA quoted Peyman Salehi, an official with the Ministry of Science, as saying on Wednesday.

A review of Scopus global ranking in terms of the normalized citation index over the past 10 years shows that Iran has moved up to 16th place in 2020 from 22nd in 2011.

Studies show that in 2021, the number of Iranian scientific articles indexed by the Scopus International Citation Database has reached 77,351. This figure was equal to 71,971 in 2020 and 64,988 in 2019.

While scientific articles and the latest research findings of Iranian researchers in 2019 received about 0.08 percent more than the international average citation, in 2020, it has increased to 14 percent.



Also, research activities resulting from Iran's international participation in science production were about 27.4 percent in 2019, which has increased to 30.7 percent in 2020.

The share of Iranian articles in the top 1 percent of the world highly cited was 1.2 percent in 2019, which has reached 1.3 percent in 2020. This group of articles has the highest number of citations in the world of science.

All rural houses to be reinforced against natural disasters

TEHRAN – By the end of the Iranian calendar year 1410 (March 2031), all houses in villages across the country will be reinforced to resist natural disasters, many floods, and earthquakes.

“Annually, 200,000 rural houses will be reinforced by 1410 in order to reinforce one hundred percent of the houses against natural disasters,” IRIB quoted Majid Joodi, an official with the Housing Foundation, as saying.

There are about five million houses in villages nationwide, he said, adding, only seven percent of rural houses had been reinforced by the year 1384 (March 2005-March 2006).

Currently, 26 percent of the country's population lives in villages, around 39,000 villages

have more than 20 households and 23,000 villages have less than 20 households.

Thus, more than 97 percent of the country's rural population lives in villages with over 20,000 households.

Many efforts have been made over the past couple of years by the government to support villagers and slow down the trend of migration from rural areas to cities.

Rural tourism, agritourism, religious tourism, and ecotourism are alternatives or complementary economic activities that could further stimulate rural development while decreasing rural community dependency on one main economic sector (agriculture, forestry, energy, or mining).

COVID-19 UPDATES ON APRIL 5

New cases	4,615
New deaths	39
Total cases	7,175,780
Total deaths	140,407
New hospitalized patients	477
Patients in critical condition	1,440
Total recovered patients	6,895,961
Diagnostic tests conducted	49,717,847
Doses of vaccine injected	147,353,682

ENGLISH IN USE

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COVID-19 takes lowest toll on foreign nationals in Iran

Iran had the lowest coronavirus cases and mortality among refugees and foreign nationals compared to the population it is hosting, Mehdi Mahmoudi, Director of Citizens and Immigrants Affairs of the Ministry of Interior has said.

Referring to the measures taken for non-Iranian citizens during the pandemic, he said that since the very beginning, when the country became infected with the disease, the community of foreign nationals in our country was no exception to this issue, and prevention programs and necessary measures have been taken for this group.

“We identified foreign nationals in need and tried to provide them with livelihood assistance, as well as health packages and self-protective items needed to prevent the infection,” he explained.

He further added that every year about 800,000 illegal foreign nationals are arrested and deported.

ایران کمترین تلفات کرونا اتباع خارجی را داشته است

مهدی محمودی مدیرکل امور اتباع و مهاجرین وزارت کشور گفت در خصوص ابتلا به بیماری کرونا در بین اتباع خارجی، ایران کمترین ابتلا و کمترین تلفات را نسبت به جمعیت داشته است.

او در گفت‌وگو با ایلنا درباره اقدامات صورت گرفته برای اتباع غیرایرانی در ایام کرونا گفت: از همان ابتدا که کشور درگیر این بیماری شد، جامعه اتباع خارجی هم در کشور ما مستثنی از این موضوع نبود و برنامه‌های پیشگیری و تمهیدات لازم نیز برای این گروه نیز در نظر گرفته شده است.

اتباع غیرایرانی که نیازمند بودند را شناسایی کرده و تلاش کردیم از نظر معیشتی به این گروه نیز کمک‌هایی صورت بگیرد و همچنین بسته‌های بهداشتی و اقلام مورد نیاز پیشگیری از بیماری کرونا در چندین نوبت به آنها ارائه شده است.

او افزود هر سال حدود ۸۰۰ هزار نفر از اتباع غیرایرانی که به صورت غیرقانونی در کشور هستند دستگیر و طرد می‌شوند.

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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

One who imagines himself to be all-knowing will surely suffer on account of his ignorance.

Imam Ali (AS)

Prayer Times» Noon:13:07 Evening: 19:47 Dawn: 5:18 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 6:44 (tomorrow)

Abulqasem Ferdowsi: Life

Part 9

Jalaleddin Homai has suggested that Othman Mokhtari's mention at the end of his Shahriamameh (written between 1098-115, predating Chahar Maqala by some fifty years) of his own reluctance to satirize his patron even if the latter would fail to reward him might be an oblique reference to the Hajwnameh of Ferdowsi.

Moreover, contrary to Shirani's view, not all of the verses of the Hajwnameh are from the Shahnameh, nor are all of them weak. Some of the lines are firm, substantial, and original.

Shirani is not, however, alone in his doubts about the lampoon; Mohammad-Taqi Bahar was also skeptical about the authenticity of the entire poem.

Some scholars like Theodore Nöldeke, Sayyed Hasan Taqizadeh, Zabiollah Safa, and Mohammad-Amin Riahi believed in the existence of the Hajwnameh and the authenticity of some of its verses.

Nöldeke felt that the use of the term "this book" in the Hajwnameh showed that Ferdowsi appended it to the Shahnameh, thereby negating the various verses that praised Sultan Mahmud in the larger work.

He suggested that, in accordance with Ferdowsi's wishes, all of the verses panegyricizing Sultan Mahmud should be removed and replaced with the Hajwnameh.

The opening verses of the Hajwnameh, which are found in all manuscripts of the Shahnameh as well as in Chahar Maqala, indicate that the dispute between Ferdowsi and Sultan Mahmud was sectarian in nature.

This is the same argument that Ferdowsi makes in the introduction to the Shahnameh, namely, his defense of the truth of Shiism to the exclusion of all other forms of Islam.

Nezami Aruzi also saw this as the reason for the sultan's displeasure with Ferdowsi, which led to the composition of his lampoon of Mahmud.

A verse in the Hajwnameh suggests that certain people demeaned Ferdowsi in the eyes of the sultan, which agrees in some respects with the contention of Chahar Maqala that courtiers opposed to the grand vizier Ahmad ibn Hasan Meymandi were responsible for the sultan's displeasure.

Ferdowsi's Hajwnameh is a rarity among Persian lampoons for its lack of obscenities. The modesty of Ferdowsi's attack is entirely consistent with the decorum of the Shahnameh, which is another argument for its authenticity.

Were it not for mild insults like "ignoble" (bad-gowhar) and "son of a servant" (parastarzadeh) used in its more heated and some combative lines, the Hajwnameh would lose its status as lampoon.

The last verse, whether genuine or not, has proven prophetic: "The poet harmed in some disgraceful way/Will pen a dart that lasts till judgment day."

In the history of Persia, all the reports of Mahmud's military conquests have not made him as famous as Ferdowsi's Shahnameh. By the same token, all the blood the sultan shed has not made him as infamous as the poet's putative Hajwnameh.

Ferdowsi: Mausoleum

The mausoleum of Ferdowsi, a monumental tomb in Tus, Khorasan, was built between 1928 and 1934 and remodeled in 1969.

According to Nezami Aruzi, when Ferdowsi died in 1019-20, a religious leader of the town prevented his burial in the Muslim cemetery of Tus, and the poet was interred in his own garden, located inside the town of Tabaran near the Razan gate.

According to a tradition reported in the introduction to an abridged manuscript of the Shahnameh preserved in Berlin, Abul-Hares Arslan Jazeb, the Ghaznavid governor of Tus, built a domed mausoleum over Ferdowsi's tomb.

Source: Encyclopedia Iranica
To be continued

Nezami Aruzi visited the tomb in 1118, and in 1482 Dawlatshah Samarqandi reported: "At the present time his noble tomb is well known, and pilgrims visit it to seek boons."

Despite repeated destruction of Tus by Turks, Mongols, Uzbeks, and Timur, Ferdowsi's tomb remained a venerated site.

In about 1592, Qazi Nurollah Shushtari wrote: "His tomb is nowadays well-marked and celebrated and people from all realms, particularly the Imami Shias, make pilgrimage to it.

The present writer also has had the honor and blessing of visiting it (be sharaf-e ziarat-e u mosharraf wa faez shodeh)."

In 1822, a small "dome ornamented with lacquered tiles" was still standing, but even this was gone by 1883. In that year Abdolwahhab Khan Asaf ad-Dawla Shirazi, governor of Khorasan, discovered the tomb and began to erect a brick structure over it but was unable to complete the project.

The rise of nationalism in Persia early this century motivated scholars and dignitaries to urge the government to build a suitable mausoleum for the poet who had done so much to preserve Iranian identity and history.

Mohammad-Taqi Bahar wrote several articles on the necessity of the project and urged Reza Khan (later Reza Shah) to prove his asserted nationalism by building a mausoleum. "Otherwise," he wrote, "we, the people of Khorasan, will do it ourselves".

At the initiative of Arbab Kaykhosrow Shahrokh, the nationalist representative of the Zoroastrians in the Majles, the newly established Anjoman-e asar-e melli put out a leaflet inviting the public to participate through financial contributions or a lottery in the construction of an appropriate mausoleum for Ferdowsi, "who has no superior among great Iranians" and who "constitutes a pillar of Iranian nationalism."

Shahrokh was commissioned to visit Tus and locate the site of Ferdowsi's tomb. He succeeded in finding the tomb by consulting literary sources, investigating the ruins of Tus, and interviewing elderly locals who still remembered Asaf ad-Dawla's structure.

Construction of the tomb started in 1928, under the supervision of Shahrokh, and was finished in 1934, in time for Ferdowsi's millenary celebration.

Karim Taherzadeh Behzad provided an architectural plan, evidently following suggestions by the court minister Abdolhossein Teimurtash (Teimurtash forced his views on the Anjoman). But this proved impractical, and work consequently proceeded according to a plan and gypsum miniature model submitted by André Goddard.

The pyramid roof envisioned in this design cracked and collapsed soon after construction and was replaced by a stepped-pyramidal roof planned by Behzad.

The tomb was situated in a garden of fruit trees measuring 25,248 m² (endowed by its owner, Naeb al-Tawliya Qaem-maqami, and later enlarged to some 30,000 m³).

The structure was erected by Hossein Hajjar-bashi Zanjani and Hossein Aqa Lorzadeh, and the masonry came from the Khallaj marble quarry near Mashhad.

The appearance of the monument was reminiscent of buildings at Persepolis and the tomb of Cyrus the Great at Pasargadae. It consisted of three parts:

(1) An innermost section centered around a two-stepped marble platform on which lies the cenotaph, a marble slab (150 x 100 cm) some 50 cm high.

(2) A square (16 x 16 m) chamber built of dressed marble and ornamented on the interior with faience work.

Presidential aide calls on Iranian cineastes’ Me Too movement to consult on protective measures

From Page 1 ▶ She invited members of the movement to attend a meeting, which will be organized by her office to negotiate settlements for the problem.

The Me Too movement of Iranian female cineastes has begun to form since last week after Somayyeh Mirshamsi, an assistant director, accused a renowned actor of misconduct and sexual harassment on a film project that was completed in 2021.

Afterward, a group of about 300 actresses and female filmmakers, including Taraneh Alidoosti, Narges Abyar, Hedyeh Tehrani and Niki Karimi, signed a statement condemning any forms of misconduct, violence, sexual harassment, bullying and rape in the workplace and asking for prosecution of the perpetrators.

Deputy Head of the Iranian Judiciary and Secretary of the High Council for Human Rights Kazem Gharibabadi also offered words of support.

"Due to their susceptibility, the women active in the art fields, especially those who are working in cinema, must be supported

Vice President for Women and Family Affairs Ensieh Khazali. (Jamaran.ir/Amrollah Aziznia)

and protected," he said in a press release published by his office last Saturday.

He asked the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and film unions to adopt regulations to help protect women working in cinema.

In a statement published on Monday, the Iranian House of

Cinema, which is also known as the Iranian Alliance of Motion Picture Guilds, also said, "The house condemns any probable violence, especially sexual violence in its various forms in the art and cultural activities."

The center also said that it is ready to offer "legal consultations" to the victims of the Iranian Me Too

movement.

A number of male Iranian cineastes, including actors Reza Kainian and Babak Karimi, have also expressed their solidarity with the signatories of the women cineastes' statement against male filmmakers' misconduct and sexual harassment and abuse.

Filmfest Dresden picks “The Fourth Wall”, “Orthodontics”, “Form”

TEHRAN – Filmfest Dresden, an international short film festival based in Dresden, Germany, has chosen the Iranian movies "The Fourth Wall", "Orthodontics" and "Form" for screening during its 34th edition opening on April 5.

"The Fourth Wall" and "Orthodontics" will be showcased in the official international competition.

Directed by Mahbubeh Kalai, "The Fourth Wall" is about 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.

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, also honored the film with the Zlatko Grgic Award.

"Orthodontics" by Mohammadreza Mayghani tells the story of Amitis, a teenage girl who has always had to wear orthodontics headgear and is under pressure because of her orthodontic treatment. She suddenly does a strange thing to her friend Sarah.

A jury consisting of Mariana Hristova, John Canciani and Martina Scarpelli will judge the films in the international competition.

"Form" by Saeid Qasemi will be screened in the Beyond Borders category.

The film follows Mahnazir, the daughter of an Afghan immigrant family living in Iran. When her father Kabir gets sick and is unable to work at the brickworks, Mahnazir begins a game of hide and seek with her own family and her father's male work colleagues.

"In life, we repeatedly come up against borders and limitations that we have to overcome," the organizers have said about the Beyond Borders section of the six-day festival.

"And this is also the case for the protagonists

Fereshteh Fuladi acts in a scene from "Form" directed by Saeid Qasemi.

in these diverse short films, who have to struggle with the most disparate of standards, prohibitions and expectations. They set off and face these challenges, in order to be able to go their own way in life. Which also means crossing borders and getting to know new worlds for the audience as well," they added.

“The Religion of the Manichees” spreads to Iranian bookstores

TEHRAN – English theologian Francis Crawford Burkitt's book "The Religion of the Manichees" has been published in Persian by Saleess in Tehran.

Originally published in 1924, the book has been translated into Persian by Seyyed Saeidreza Montazeri and Payman Samimi.

This book contains the Donnellan lectures given by Francis Crawford Burkitt (1864-1935) at Trinity College, Dublin in June 1923.

His subject is Manichaeism, a dualistic form of Christianity that thrived during the fourth and fifth centuries in Central Asia.

In particular, Burkitt focuses on the discovery of fragments of Manichaeen literary texts in Chinese Turkestan, near the Siberian border, early in the twentieth century.

Front cover of the Persian edition of Francis Crawford Burkitt's book "The Religion of the Manichees".

The first lecture introduces the history of the Manichees and reviews the sources of information available about them.

The second discusses the Manichaeen view of Jesus, Manichaeen church organization and Manichaeen eschatology.

The third analyses the influences behind Manichaeen

thought and teaching, including the important influences of Marcion and Saint Augustine.

Burkitt's lectures were influential in publicizing the new finds of Manichaeen manuscript fragments, and remain an important resource for those studying heterodox movements in early Christianity.

As Norris Professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge from 1905 until shortly before his death, Burkitt was a sturdy critic of the notion of a distinct "Caesarean Text" of the New Testament put forward by B. H. Streeter and others.

Burkitt was a noted figure at Cambridge from 1912 to 1935 for his chairmanship of the Cambridge New Testament Seminar, attended by other prominent theologians, including Robert Newton Flew, who left an account of it in an obituary for Burkitt in the Proceedings of the British Academy.

He was also president of the Cambridge Philological Society from 1904 to 1905. Burkitt was one of the founding members of the Cambridge Theological Society that was dedicated to research, and its president from 1907- to 1909.

The deconstruction of “Ahmad Ahmad Memories” in writing a diary

An interview with Mohsen Kazemi

This book focuses on the memories of Ahmad Ahmad, a warrior against the Pahlavi regime who has collaborated and worked with some militant groups and has been arrested, tortured, and imprisoned by SAVAK several times. It has been published by Soore Mehr publication.

"The was released ten years ago, and if it had been published in today's world that diaries have more fans, it would undoubtedly have established a new publishing record," said the author in an interview with IQNA,

"This book deconstructed the diary field in the last decade and was considered a one-of-a-

kind style at the time," he added.

He mentioned that the book took him four years to write and that he wanted the story to be judged by the readers.

In another part of the interview, Mohsen Kazemi described the main character's personality as a strong, honest, and faithful person who suffered terribly on the way to the Islamic Revolution's victory.

"It was hard for Mr. Ahmad to recall all the memories from 40 years ago, and he confessed that the interviews reminded him of past interrogation scenes," said Mohsen Kazemi about Ahmad Ahmad.