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Violence in Afghanistan Aims to Foment Sectarian Conflict

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Native Americans warn of voter suppression in U.S.

Native Americans have sounded the alarm over a host of congressional bills that they say will suppress their right to vote.

Rights groups advocating for the now minority group say measures including restricting and limiting voter registration as well as absentee ballot practices threaten to deprive tens of thousands of tribal citizens from the ballot boxes.

The concern over minority groups in America and their right to vote freely, fairly, and without restrictions or harassment policies has been growing stronger since the summer of last year; when the House Administration Committee itself found a lack of available polling places was disproportionately likely to impact Native American voters.

In a very lengthy report, the committee acknowledged that firstly Americans in general “have not enjoyed equal access to the ballot. Indeed, only a small fraction of the population cast ballots in the election elevating George Washington as our first president.”

It identified voter identification and documentary proof-of-citizenship requirements “disproportionately burden minority voters,” saying “the burden of these requirements disproportionately fall on Black, Latino, Asian American, and Native American voters, and newly naturalized citizens. Recent studies have demonstrated that Black” ► Page 5

Iranian theaters live up Id al-Fitr celebration with new films

TEHRAN – Iran has provided theaters with new films to enliven Id al-Fitr, the celebration marking the end of the month of Ramadan.

Starring Reza Attaran, Mehdi Hashemi and Ahmad Mehranfar, the comedy drama “Solitary” is one of the films hitting the Iranian silver screens late this week a few days before the Islamic celebration.

The dramas “Bone Marrow” directed by Hamidreza Qorbani and “La Minor” by Dariush Mehrjui are other films selected to be screened at Iranian theaters. ► Page 8

Steel ingot exports increase 25% in a year

TEHRAN- Iran’s export of steel ingots increased 25 percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1400 (ended on March 20), from its preceding year, Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) has announced.

The IMIDRO’s data put the country’s annual steel ingot exports at 7.678 million tons in the past year, and at 6.162 million tons in its previous year.

The Iranian Steel industry has been constantly developing over the past years against all the pressures and obstacles created by outside forces like the U.S. sanctions and the coronavirus outbreak that

has severely affected the performance of the world’s top producers.

Iran’s crude steel production increased by 11.8 percent in the first two months of 2022 when the production by the world’s top 64 steelmakers declined by 5.5 percent, according to the World Steel Association (WSA)’s latest report.

Iran was ranked first among the world’s top steel producers in terms of production growth, followed by India, Germany, Russia, and the United States.

Based on the report, Iran produced 5.3 million tons of crude steel during the men-

tioned two months.

The country’s crude steel production in February stood at 2.5 million tons which was also 3.7 percent higher than the same month in 2021.

According to the World Steel Association, similar to the past two years, Iran has maintained its 10th place among the world’s top steel producers, after countries like China, India, Japan, and Russia.

The country is expected to climb to seventh place among the world’s top steel producers by the Iranian calendar year 1404 (March 2025).

Iran, S. Arabia hold fifth round of talks in ‘positive atmosphere’

TEHRAN — The fifth round of talks between Tehran and Riyadh have been held in Baghdad, Nour News, a media outlet close to Iran’s Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) has reported.

In a tweet posted on Saturday, Nour news said, “The fifth round of talks between the high representatives of #Iran and #Saudi-Arabia was held in Baghdad. The positive atmosphere of the recent meeting has raised hopes for the two countries to take a step towards resumption of relations.”

It continued, “It is expected that a joint meeting between the foreign ministers of the two countries will be held in the near future.”

This is the first time that a media outlet close to Iran’s SNSC labels the atmosphere of Tehran-Riyadh talks as “positive.”

According to the photo released by Nour news, Saeed Iravani, Deputy Secretary for the SNSC, and Khalid bin Ali Al Humaidan, Saudi Arabia’s Director General of General Intelligence Directorate were the top officials conducting the talks.

Meanwhile, a well-informed diplomatic source confirmed the report while speaking to Russia’s Sputnik news agency. ► Page 2



Iranian freestylers take three gold in Asian C’ships

TEHRAN – Iranian freestyle wrestlers claimed three gold medals in the 2022 Asian Wrestling Championships on Saturday.

Rahman Amouzad Khalili defeated Indian Bajrang Bajrang 3-1 in the final match of 65kg.

In the 79kg weight class, Ali Savadkouhi defeated Baliyan Gourav from India 9-9 and won Iran’s second gold medal.

Mohammadhossein Askari Mohammadian defeated Mongolian Batzul Ulziisaikhan 11-0 in the final match of the 97kg.

The 2022 Asian Wrestling Championships are the 35th edition of Asian Wrestling Championships of combined events, and take place from April 19 to 24 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

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Iran marks Earth Day focusing on plastic waste reduction

By Faranak Bakhtiari

TEHRAN – The 2022 World Earth Day was held in Iran with the theme of ‘Invest in Our Planet by Reducing Plastic Waste’.

Every year on April 22, mother earth is celebrated with World Earth Day, which marks the anniversary of the Modern Environmental Movement, which started in 1970. World Earth Day is a reminder for mankind to protect and safeguard the earth and its species, to make Earth a better place for the coming generations.

April 22, 2022, will mark 52 years of Earth Day. Today, Earth Day is widely recognized as the largest secular observance in the world, marked by more than a billion people every year as a day of action to change human behavior and provoke policy changes.

The Earth Day 2022 theme is ‘Invest in Our Planet’. According to the UN, “Despite ongoing efforts, biodiversity is deteriorating worldwide at rates unprecedented in human history. It is estimated that around one million animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction”.

In Iran, in line with this global movement, the Department of Environment (DOE) has considered the national theme as ‘Invest in Our Planet by Reducing Plastic Waste’.

Plastic is a waste that is estimated to have produced more than 3 billion tons since the 1950s, and its volume continues to grow. ► Page 7

Iftar at Imam Reza shrine: a 332-year tradition

TEHRAN – Historical documents indicate that the oldest known Iftar meal was served at the holy shrine of Imam Reza (AS) 332 years ago, which is 1111 AH.

During Islam’s holy month of Ramadan, believers abstain from food and drink during daylight hours, and break their fast with the Iftar evening meals which vary from simple plates of bread, dates, cheese, and tea to heavy ones.

There is evidence indicating various ceremonies held at the holy shrine of Imam Reza (AS) during the Safavid, Afsharid, and Qajar eras in honor of different religious occasions, such as Ramadan, a local official has said.

Among the topics addressed in the historical documents are the special programs of the Qadr nights, the 19th, 21st, and 23rd of the holy month of Ramadan, how to hold Iftar ceremonies. ► Page 6

Iran expresses concern over recent bombings in Afghanistan

TEHRAN- The latest bomb attacks in neighboring Afghanistan has prompted a response from Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson, who said that regular bomb strikes and explosions targeting people in numerous towns across the war-torn country are a source of great worry.

Saeed Khatibzadeh, in a statement on Thursday, alluded to rising reports of recurrent bomb strikes in several Afghan cities, expressing Iran's worry over the steep increase in the frequency of such "bitter incidents."

Khatibzadeh said such terrorist assaults, whose main targets are fasting Muslim prayers, are disgusting, noting that the latest bomb strikes in Afghanistan occurred during the holy month of Ramadan, when mosques are more packed owing to people's attendance.

Khatibzadeh also wished the injured a speedy recovery.

On Thursday, an explosion at a mosque in Mazar-e-Sharif left dozens killed and wounded, which can be considered as the country's second significant attack on the Shia Hazara population in a week.

According to a statement on Daesh's Telegram channel, the attack on the Mazar-i-Sharif mosque was carried out using a remotely detonated booby-trapped bag when the structure was filled with

worshippers.

Two explosions outside a school in Kabul's Hazara minority area killed and injured a couple of people on Tuesday.

The Hazara ethnic group makes up around 22% of the country's population. Its members have already been targeted in a number of large-scale kidnappings and murders across Afghanistan.

Khatibzadeh also denounced the "terrorist" attack on a mosque in Kunduz on Friday, expressing Iran's serious worry over the increase of violence and terror in Afghanistan.

The attack on the mosque in Kunduz province, according to the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman, "clearly shows the vicious intentions of foreign mercenary terrorists who seek to wage civil war in Afghanistan."

Since the Taliban took control of the country, multiple assaults have been recorded once in a while across Afghanistan, some of which have been claimed by Daesh.

The Taliban, who had previously controlled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, retook power on August 15, just as the U.S. was about to withdraw its troops in a disorderly manner. On September 7, the group declared the creation of a caretaker administration. Their rule has yet to be recognized by the international community.

Muslim unity has upset arrogant countries: Iranian interior minister

TEHRAN – Iran's Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi said on Friday that arrogant countries are deeply dissatisfied with the unity among Muslims.

"The global arrogance is deeply upset by the unity among Muslim peoples, and therefore it always seeks to sow division and create hypocrisy among Muslim peoples in order to achieve its goals and objectives," Fars News quoted Vahidi as saying.

The interior minister pointed out that the families of the "defenders of the holy shrines" have a high position in society, saying "the rank of martyrdom is a sublime rank, and it was won by the dear defenders of the holy shrines, and in addition to their emigration, they also struggled for the sake of God and were consequently awarded the lofty medal of martyrdom."

Defenders of holy Shrine refers to those who fought against terrorist groups, including Daesh, in Syria.

Vahidi emphasized that arrogant countries the "devils of the earth" resented all this jihad, pride and bonds between Muslim peoples.

"Given that the Iranian and Afghan peoples stand side by side with one slogan, unity of word and a unified demand, the global arrogance seeks to sow division among Muslims to prevent their unity and cohesion," the minister remarked.

He pointed out that the love of Islam and Ahl al-Bayt created special bonds between the Iranian and Afghani peoples.

"Today, the terrorists are showing their malice and contempt in Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif and other cities of Afghanistan, and they are killing fasting people and innocent children for no reason other than believing in Islam and following the school of Ahl al-Bayt, peace be upon them."

He said unbelievers see "purity, attendance in mosque, fasting and worshipping as unforgivable sins."

He considered the unity between the Iranian and Afghan peoples as stemming from the religious beliefs of the two nations.

The minister stated that the agents of arrogant countries are deeply resentful of unity among Islamic countries, and therefore they commit such crimes, adding such acts only result in an increase in Muslims' belief and more solidarity among Muslim peoples.

Afghanistan has lately become a flashpoint of repeated brutal acts perpetrated by terrorist groups. Over the



last few weeks, Sunni and Shia mosques have been targeted with attacks that resulted in the injury and death of dozens of innocent civilians.

Iran has condemned the rise in attacks in Afghanistan and warned of plots to instigate sectarian wars.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh has expressed Iran's concern about the recent wave of explosions in Afghanistan.

He censured the "blind terrorist acts" that took place during the holy month of Ramadan in which more people attend mosques, describing the targeting of fasting worshippers as a "repulsive" act.

Referring to media reports that dozens of innocent people were killed and injured in one of the explosions in Mazar-i-Sharif on Thursday, Khatibzadeh wished patience for the families of the victims of the attacks and health and recovery for the injured.

He also condemned the bomb explosion at the Mawlawi Sekandar mosque in Kunduz province used by Sunni Muslims, wishing divine mercy for the martyrs and patience and divine blessings for the bereaved.

Khatibzadeh pointed to a series of terrorist attacks in Afghanistan over the past days and described the escalation of violence as a source of deep concern.

"The attack on the Sunni mosque in Kunduz Province, which followed yesterday's attack on the Shia mosque in Mazar-i-Sharif, clearly shows the evil goals of the terrorists serving as mercenaries for foreigners, who are seeking to create a civil war in Afghanistan," he pointed out on Friday.

On Saturday, Iranian President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi issued a message about the rising wave of violence in Afghanistan, warning of the rise of terrorist attacks against Afghan nation and the nations of the region.

Ayatollah Raisi highlighted the responsibility of Afghanistan's rulers in identifying and punishing those behind the recent attacks.

Iran to EU: White House must set aside excessive demands, hesitation

Iran firm to reach a "good, strong and lasting agreement," Amir Abdollahian says

TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian spoke over the phone with EU Foreign policy chief Joseph Borrell on Friday evening.

The two diplomats discussed the latest status of the Vienna talks on lifting sanctions on Iran in tandem with the efforts to revive the 2015 nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The Iranian foreign minister referred to the continuation of negotiations in Vienna, saying there is no doubt about the determination of the Iranian government to reach a "good, strong and lasting agreement."

He added that the White House must put aside "excessive demands and hesitation and take steps towards realism and solutions."

Referring to the tireless efforts of all parties in the Vienna talks, Iran's top diplomat said that the three European countries (France, Germany and Britain also called E3), Russia and China are now ready to finalize the agreement.

He added that the current U.S.



administration must have the "courage to correct the White House's past wrong policies".

Amir Abdollahian appreciated the tireless efforts of Borrell and his deputy Enrique Mora for revitalizing the JCPOA, emphasizing that "now diplomacy is working properly".

Borrell also referred to the positive will of the Iranian side in the Vienna talks, saying, "We believe that Iran wants an agreement and that there have been various initiatives which still exist and continue."

The EU foreign policy chief added that the protraction of the break in the talks "is not constructive" and

suggested that talks between EU coordinator Mora and Iran's chief negotiator be resumed shortly.

Amir Abdollahian stresses the need to establish peace in Afghanistan

Elsewhere in the talks, the Iran's chief diplomat pointed to the escalation of terrorist acts in Afghanistan and the influx of Afghan refugees to Iran, stressing the need for serious cooperation in establishing stability and security in the country.

Addressing the plight of Afghan refugees, Iran's foreign minister called for sending humanitarian aid

to the country.

Iran renews call to end Ukraine war through dialogue

Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian also referred to the vast dimensions of developments in Ukraine, insisting on Iran's call to find a political solution to the Ukraine war.

Iran welcomes temporary truce in Yemen, hopes for a durable peace

Amir Abdollahian also welcomed establishment of a temporary ceasefire in Yemen and expressed hope that the region would see a permanent ceasefire, complete lifting of the blockade on Yemen and a Yemeni-Yemeni agreement.

Referring to the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, Borrell described it as a global crisis that could have negative consequences.

Borrell also welcomed support by Iran to bring the Yemen war to a close and helping the refugees in Afghanistan.

Europe's chief diplomat also stressed that the European Union can establish close consultation, dialogue and joint cooperation with Iran in various fields.

Iran, S. Arabia hold fifth round of talks in 'positive atmosphere'

Talks raise hope for a meeting of Iranian and Saudi foreign ministers

From page 1 ► The source confirmed that the fifth round of talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia in Baghdad on Thursday was held in a very positive atmosphere.

In response to a question about the cases raised in the meeting, the source said, "The two delegations talked about most of the cases in the region, as well as the case of bilateral relations and security in the Persian Gulf region."

The fifth round of Iran-Saudi talks was scheduled to take place in March, but was delayed following Saudi Arabia's mass execution of 81 citizens, about half of them Shias.

During a visit to Tehran last week, in response to a question about the fifth round of talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein stressed, "These talks have continued and have been suspended for a

while. We hope that the next round of these talks will be held between Iran and Saudi Arabia. It is clear that the talks so far have been within the framework of the security offices of the two sides, and from the Iranian side there have been representatives from the foreign ministry, but the framework of the talks has been determined by the security offices. There are some issues that need to be addressed. I hope the next meeting will be held soon."

Hussein said that there has been speculation about the time of the meeting, but he cannot explicitly talk about the time of the next meeting, "but the parties are willing to continue their meetings."

In this regard, Qasim al-Araji, Iraq's national security adviser, had expressed hope that the fifth round of the Iran-Saudi talks in Baghdad



would lead to the reopening of the Iranian-Saudi embassies.

Iraqi President Barham Salih first announced in May 2021 that Iraq had announced talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and that four rounds of talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia had been hosted by Baghdad.

Iran FM lashes out at world inactivity toward Israel's increased incursions

TEHRAN - Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian has stated that the Israeli apartheid regime has been emboldened by the double standards and silence of certain governments and international circles, urging the regime to intensify its acts of aggression and violations of Palestinian rights.

On Wednesday, the top Iranian diplomat wrote separate letters to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Hissein Brahimi Taha, and foreign ministers of Muslim countries, expressing his deep concern over the Tel Aviv regime's raids at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound and the uptick in attacks against Palestinians during Ramadan.

Amir Abdollahian went on to say that any violation of Muslim sacred sites, as well as hurting their sentiments, is prohibited and undesirable.

Tensions have risen in recent days following an Israeli attack on the complex of the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Since Israeli forces conducted raids into the mosque compound for a couple of days in a row, hundreds of Palestinians have been injured and imprisoned as well.

Meanwhile, hundreds of Palestinians have protested Israeli soldiers breaking into Al-Aqsa Mosque, chanting slogans and appealing for Arab and international solidarity with Al-Aqsa Mosque worshippers and Palestinians in the occupied territories who are

experiencing increased Israeli aggression.

The current Israeli invasion, according to the Iranian foreign minister's letters, "clearly attests to the regime's policy of changing the identity of al-Quds."

"The Islamic Republic of Iran ... in accordance with international law ... has put unwavering support for the liberation fight and resistance of the Palestinian people aimed at the full realization of their human rights among the planks of its foreign policy," Amir Abdollahian added, strongly condemning the regime's violations.

The Iranian top diplomat also encouraged the international community and the UN, notably the UN Security Council, to take prompt and immediate action in favor of the

Palestinians, and asked the UN to address recent events in the occupied territories.

The letter concluded that the only way to achieve a sustainable and lasting peace in the region is to stop occupying the Palestinian lands, occupiers return to their homes, and an independent Palestinian state be founded with Al-Quds as its capital.

In a separate call with his Syrian counterpart Faisal Mikdad, Amir Abdollahian also criticized Israel's repeated breaches of Palestinian rights and assault against the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

"We are witnessing Zionists crimes at Al-Aqsa Mosque on a daily basis," Iran's foreign minister said, referring to the Zionist regime's desecration of the mosque.

Raisi says ISIS, Zionist crimes are result of Western policies

Afghan officials must provide security for Shias, Iranian president says

TEHRAN — Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi has said the crimes committed by the Zionist regime against Palestinian worshippers and those committed by ISIS against Afghan worshippers are the result of movements created by the West.

Speaking at a religious congregation marking the anniversary of Imam Ali's martyrdom (PBUH) early on Saturday, Raisi said the current Afghan authorities are responsible for protecting all Afghans, including Shias.

He stated that Imam Ali exhorted Muslims to join with the downtrodden against the oppressors, pointing out that the world is witnessing two crimes against Muslims: the Zionists oppressing Palestinian worshippers and ISIS killing Afghans.

Regarding the Palestinian cause, the president stated that the fate of the Palestinian nation is decided by resistance movements rather than negotiators. He also described the impending International Quds Day as a symbol of Muslim solidarity and integration, expressing optimism

that the day will result in the freedom of Quds and the victory of Palestinians to keep their rights that have been due for 70 years.

Bloodiest Ramadan in Afghanistan's history

An explosion claimed by the Islamic State at a Shia mosque in the northern Afghan city of Mazar-e-Sharif on Thursday killed at least 11 people, a health official said, one of a series of blasts around the country. A separate blast led to at least 11 more casualties in Kunduz, another northern Afghan city, on Thursday, according to a provincial health official.

On Thursday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh expressed Tehran's deep concern over repeated bitter terrorist attacks in different cities in Afghanistan.

Khatibzadeh said targeting fasting worshippers is "disgusting".

The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman called for patience by the bereaved families and wished recovery for the injured.

The Islamic State claimed responsibility for the

Mazar-e-Sharif attack.

The explosions took place during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan and two days after blasts tore through a high school in a predominantly Shia Hazara area in western Kabul, killing at least six.

"A blast happened in 2nd district inside a Shia mosque," Mohammad Asif Wazeri, the spokesman for the Taliban commander in Mazar-e-Sharif told Reuters.

Zia Zendani, the spokesman for the provincial health authority, said 11 people had been killed and 32 wounded in the blast.

Tens of Afghan cities held a demonstration in west of Kabul on Friday in protest to the terrorist attacks on Shias. They demanded "Stop the Killing of Hazaras". The also shouted "Justice, Justice".

The protestors demanded the Taliban to protects the lives of the Shia Hazaras.

Farhad Darya, a famous Afghan cultural figure, made a tweet on Thursday saying, "We can save lives! We can stop this genocide together!"

Violence in Afghanistan aims to foment sectarian conflict

TEHRAN — Following the shameful and scandalous withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan in August 2021, sponsors of terrorism have been seeking to sow discord and division among Afghans with the aim of stirring the sectarian pot.

30 people were martyred and 80 others were injured in a terrorist attack on the Seh Dokan mosque in the northern Afghan city of Mazar-e-Sharif, capital of Balkh province on Thursday. The attack on Mazar-e-Sharif happened two days after an attack on a boys' high school in a Shia-dominated district in west of Kabul killed at least 26 pupils.

Seh Dokan mosque in Mazar-e-Sharif is the largest Shia mosque located in a crowded place.

Afghanistan under the Taliban tenure witnessed five deadly explosions in two days: One in western Kabul on Tuesday, and four explosions in Kabul, Balkh, Kunduz and Nangarhar provinces on Friday.

Following the deadly terrorist attacks against Shias in Kabul and Balkh, a number of Kabul residents marched on Friday demanding that the interim Taliban governing body provide security for the Afghan Shias.

During the march, protesters



chanted slogans such as “Being Hazara is not a crime, ensure our security”, “We want justice” and so on.

The attacks were met with widespread reactions, with high-ranking officials from various countries condemning the terrorist attacks in Afghanistan.

On Friday, the Taliban claimed that the mastermind of the terrorist attack on the Shia mosque in Mazar-e-Sharif had been arrested, according to the Bakhtar news agency.

According to Bakhtar, the mastermind of the attack on the Shia mosque in Balkh province was Abdul Hamid Sangaryar, the governor that Daesh designated for Balkh province.

There is barely any doubt that

the Takfiris and their allies are behind the terrorist attacks in Afghanistan. Confronting this evil plan, which is intended to put the entire Afghanistan and the region on fire, requires the unity of the Islamic Ummah.

Takfirists, Salafists and ill-wishers of Afghanistan who seek to put citizens against each other by sowing discord between different sects of Islam see Daesh as an appropriate tool.

However, Western mainstream media outlets have been actively spreading a disinformation campaign, calling the recent attacks “genocide against Hazaras.”

Such disinformation campaign came despite the fact that

terrorists planted bombs in a Sunni mosque in Imam Sahib City in Kunduz province on Friday. Matiullah Rouhani, the head of the Taliban intelligence and culture in Kunduz province, confirmed the blast at the mosque in the province, but did not provide further details. Later, local news sources reported that 60 worshippers were killed and 30 others were injured in the terrorist attack. According to these sources, a mine was planted in the pillar of the mosque, which was destroyed as a result of the explosion.

Meanwhile, a van exploded near Kunduz airport in front of a Taliban checkpoint Friday, killing and injuring 17 people.

On Saturday, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said the current Afghan authorities are responsible for protecting all Afghans, including Shias.

Daesh dos not differentiate between Shias, Sunnis, Hazaras, or Ismaeils, when it comes to ripping the West Asian region apart. They are bound to obey whatever their masters tell them to do.

Battling an empowered Daesh in Afghanistan is not difficult. In this struggle, Taliban bears a great responsibility to prove that it is on the side of the Afghan people.

Daesh’s presence in Afghanistan has led to escalation of terrorist acts in the region: diplomat

TEHRAN – The assistant head of the Iranian Mission to the United Nations, Zahra Ershadi, on Friday affirmed that the presence of the Daesh terrorist group in Afghanistan has led to an escalation of terrorist activities in the region.

Ershadi called on the ruling authority in Afghanistan to take urgent measures to uncover and prosecute those involved in the recent crimes.

Speaking during the high-level meeting entitled “The National Strategy and Initiative of Tajikistan to Combat Terrorism and Extremism 2021-2025”, which was attended by the Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations for Combating Terrorism, the Tajik Prosecutor General, the representative of Tajikistan and other ambassadors and delegates of countries, Ershadi announced Iran's support for Tajikistan's efforts to fight terrorism.

She said, “The Islamic Republic of Iran attaches great importance to cooperation with the Republic of Tajikistan in various fields, including security issues, as well as the stability and security of Tajikistan.”

Ershadi indicated that Central Asia is still facing major challenges resulting from terrorist activities. In this context, the deteriorating security situation resulting from the activities of Daesh and other terrorist activities in the Afghan territory, following the implementation of irresponsible policies by a number of external actors in this country, including the transfer of Daesh terrorists from Iraq and Syria to Afghanistan, deserves special attention, she noted.

Ershadi stated that it is no secret to anyone that the presence of Daesh militants in Afghanistan has led to an escalation of terrorist activities in the region.

She pointed out that the Islamic Republic of Iran strongly condemns the recent terrorist

attacks in Afghanistan, which resulted in the killing of dozens of innocent people, especially children, according to Al Alam.

She added, “The Islamic Republic of Iran is deeply concerned about these painful events in Afghanistan, and we call on the ruling authority in Afghanistan to take urgent action to uncover and prosecute those involved in these horrific crimes.”

Ershadi stressed the need for international cooperation to combat terrorism, given its transnational phenomenon, within the framework of a multilateral agreement or through international and regional organizations.

She expressed Iran's comprehensive support for Tajikistan's efforts to combat terrorism, and declared Tehran's readiness to enhance existing cooperation between the two countries in this field, as well as in the region.

Over the past few days, Afghanistan has witnessed a significant rise in terrorist attacks which targeted Sunni and Shia mosques alike. Iran has condemned this wave of violence.

In light of the published news about the recurrence of numerous explosions in different cities of Afghanistan, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh expressed Tehran's concern about these tragic events.

The Foreign Ministry spokesman referred to the “blind” terrorist acts that took place during the holy month of Ramadan, which coincides with the presence of more people in mosques, describing the targeting of fasting worshipers as a “repulsive” act.

Referring to media reports that dozens of innocent Shia worshippers were killed or injured in one of the explosions in Mazar-i-Sharif on Thursday, Khatibzadeh wished patience for the families of the victims and health and recovery for the injured.

Iran calls on UN to take immediate action in support of Palestinian people

TEHRAN – Iran’s representative to the United Nations has urged the international body to take immediate action in support of the Palestinian people.

Majid Takht Ravanchi made the remarks at a meeting of the ambassadors of Islamic countries on Friday, which was held at the presence of UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres in New York.

During the meeting, important issues of the Islamic world, including recent developments in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the desecration of Al-Aqsa Mosque by Israel and the growing phenomenon

of Islamophobia were discussed.

Referring to the recent developments in the occupied territories and the actions of Israel in attacking Al-Aqsa Mosque and killing Palestinian Muslims, Takht Ravanchi called for urgent action by the international community, especially the UN, to support the defenseless Palestinian people and put an end to occupation and aggression by Israel.

Ambassadors and representatives of other Islamic countries also stressed the importance of the role of the UN for a just settlement of the Palestinian question and the end of the Israeli occupation.

The meeting also discussed the issue of Islamophobia and escalation of extremist moves against Muslims in some European countries, according to Fars News.

In this regard, and at the suggestion of Iran’s ambassador to the UN, it was decided to issue a joint statement by Islamic countries to the heads of the UN General Assembly and the Security Council condemning the recent extremist groups in Sweden burning the Holy Quran and insulting religious sanctities. The proposal was approved by the Muslim ambassadors.

In the meeting, the representative

of Afghanistan also called for the condemnation of terrorist acts in Afghanistan by Islamic countries.

Takht Ravanchi condemned the recent terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, which resulted in the martyrdom of innocent people, and supported the proposal of the Afghan representative.

In a speech congratulating all Muslims around the world on the holy month of Ramadan, the UN chief introduced the issue of Palestine and Islamophobia as important international issues to which he paid special attention.

attack who were riding in a car and opened fire at the checkpoint.

An informed source at the IRGC denied the injury of Hussein Al-Masi, commander of the 110th Brigade (Salman Farsi) in Zahedan, Al Alam reported.

Following the shooting at the car in which Al-Massi was traveling, the bodyguard, Mahmoud Absalan, was martyred, according to Al Alam.

SPORTS

Barij Essence to play Kyrgyzstan VC in Asian Women’s Club Volleyball C’ship opener

TEHRAN – Iranian volleyball club Barij Essence will play Kyrgyzstan VC in the opening match of the 2022 Asian Women’s Club Volleyball Championship in Kazakhstan.



The tournament will be held in Semey, Kazakhstan, from April 24 to 30.

Kazakhstan’s Altay and Kuanys, Barij Essence of Iran, Thailand’s Diamond Food–Fine Chef Sport Club, Uzbekistan’s Jizzakh State Pedagogical Institute and Kyrgyzstan will pit their expertise against one another in the single round-robin competition.

Japanese volleyball team JT Marvelous withdrew from the competition due to the COVID-19 infection among their team members and Kazakhstan’s Kuanys replaced the team.

Javad Nekounam delighted with scrappy win against Al-Gharafa

TEHRAN – Foolad tactician Javad Nekounam was delighted with his side’s scrappy 1-0 win against a wounded Al-Gharafa in Group C of the 2022 AFC Champions League encounter on Friday, which all but assured the Iran side its Round of 16 berth.

Nekounam was prepared to face a determined Al Gharafa, who entered the must-win match on the back of an 8-2 defeat against Shabab Al Ahli Dubai and ready to prove a point.

But his charges were equal to the task, with Brazil’s Shimba adding his name on the scoresheet for the first time in the campaign.

They were in control for most of the match before Al Gharafa piled on the pressure late in the tie as the Iranians held on and remained in the driver’s seat to finish as Group C winners, having already assured themselves a top-two finish.

“I knew it was a tough match. Al Gharafa had the chance to stay in the AFC Champions League and they put their full concentration and focus to win. We had scoring chances in the first half but didn’t convert and in the second half, our opponents came out with everything against us,” Nekounam said.

“It was difficult to defend in the second half. Al Gharafa came at us and we made mistakes and almost conceded. You cannot make mistakes at this level but overall I want to congratulate my players and coaches,” he added.

Win over Pakhtakor kept us in ACL: Navidkia

TEHRAN – Sepahan football team head coach Moharram Navidkia said that the win over Pakhtakor kept them in the competition.

Sepahan beat Uzbekistan’s side 2-1 in Group D of the 2022 AFC Champions League Friday night at the King Abdullah Sports City Stadium.

The win kept Sepahan’s qualification hopes alive. A win against group winner Al Duhail on the final matchday could be enough to grant the Iranians a place in the Round of 16, should other results go their way.

“I think that Pakhtakor is one of the strongest teams in this group. They played a very strong match against us. In this football game, sometimes luck is not on your side, but I congratulate Pakhtakor for their strong performance in this very difficult group,” said Navidkia.

The seven points collected by Sepahan so far leave them third in the group, trailing second-placed Al Taawoun on head-to-head record.

“I think that the precious victory that we achieved in the last moments kept us in the competition to reserve one of the tickets to qualify for the next round, but now we have to forget about the result of this match and focus on the last match,” he added.

Iran’s Hazfi Cup final relocated to Tehran

TEHRAN – The final match of Iran’s Hazfi Cup will be held at the Azadi Stadium in Tehran.

The final match is scheduled for April 27.

The match was originally scheduled to be held in Tabriz’s Yadegar-e Emam Stadium but finalist teams Nassaji and Aluminum objected to the place of the final due to the far distance.

Nassaji defeated Mes Kerman and Aluminum edged Khalij Fars Mahshahr in the semifinals.

The U.S. to meet Morocco: friendly

TEHRAN – In their first preparation match for the 2022 FIFA World Cup, the U.S. National Team will face Morocco on June 1 at TQL Stadium in Cincinnati, Ohio.

The match will mark the first of the U.S. coach Gregg Berhalter’s tenure, which began in December 2018, against an African opponent.

“We’re excited to face a fellow World Cup finalist and provide our team with a different challenge,” Berhalter said.

“With only six international games before the World Cup, this is a critical period for our team preparation. Combining the magnificent training facilities, the world-class stadium and the amazing atmosphere, Cincinnati ticked all the boxes to give us a great start to these summer matches,” he added.

The U.S. have been drawn in Group B of the 2022 World Cup along with Iran, England and UEFA playoff winners between Ukraine, Scotland and Wales.

2022 Asian Games likely to be postponed- official

TEHRAN – The 2022 Asian Games in China is facing the “possibility” of being postponed, a senior official told AFP on Thursday, after a rumor that it would be moved to next year.

The Olympic-sized event is scheduled to be held in September in Hangzhou near Shanghai, which is grappling with a major coronavirus emergency.

“No official decision has been taken by the committee until now, but there is a possibility that it will be postponed,” said Kuwait’s Husain Al-Musallam, director-general of the Olympic Council of Asia, the Games’ governing body.

Most international sports events have been on hold in China since the COVID-19 pandemic, although Beijing hosted the Winter Olympics in a strict bio-bubble in February.

Shanghai, China’s biggest city, has witnessed the country’s worst COVID outbreak in two years, with weeks-long restrictions keeping most of its 25 million inhabitants confined to their homes.

All 56 competition venues for the Games have already been completed, Chinese organizers said this month, promising to publish a virus-control plan that takes its cue from the Winter Olympics.

Arrest made in deadly shooting at IRGC officer in Sistan-Baluchistan

TEHRAN – The assistant governor-general of Sistan-Baluchistan province for security affairs announced on Saturday the arrest of those involved in a deadly shooting at a checkpoint in Zahedan, the provincial capital.

“This checkpoint is located at the entrance to the city of Zahedan, where it came under fire at dawn today, Saturday, by evil elements,” Ali Reza Marhamati said, IRNA reported.

He added, “In this incident, Mahmoud Absalan, son of Parviz Absalan (deputy commander of the Salman Brigade of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps in the southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan), who was present at the checkpoint, was martyred.”

The security official said those involved in the shooting have been arrested and are now under investigation.

The IRGC forces arrested those involved in the



14 gas storage development projects underway

TEHRAN - Managing Director of Iran Gas Engineering and Development Company Reza Noshadi has said 14 gas storage facility development projects are currently underway across the country, Shana reported.

According to Noshadi, in addition to the geographical distribution of the mentioned projects all around the country, they also have unique features in terms of the required technology and complexity of operations.

Storage in a salt dome and water reservoir are two of the mentioned projects which are being conducted for the first time in the country, while Ghezel Tappeh Reservoir is also one of the country's most exceptional hydrocarbon fields in terms of temperature and pressure, Noshadi said.

"The development of such fields significantly improves the skills of Iranian engineers and leads to the integration of knowledge and technology in the country, so we need to attract experts and experienced engineers to manage and implement these strategic projects," he added.

Noshadi further stressed the importance of timely implementation of storage development projects and called for the allocation of human resources needed to fulfill commitments on



time.

Following the development of the South Pars gas field and the increase in the country's gas production capacity, the construction and development of the country's natural gas storage facilities have become a top priority.

In this regard, the Oil Ministry has been following a comprehensive plan to increase the country's natural gas storage capacity to 6.5 billion cubic meters (bmc) by the Iranian calendar year 1402 (starting in March 2023). The country's current gas storage capacity stands at 3.25 bcm.

Iran currently has two major natural gas storage facilities in Sarajeh and Shourijeh, in which every year the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) stores the gas received from gas refineries all over the country to be used in the colder months of the year.

TPO to hold exhibition on export capacities of SMEs

TEHRAN - Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) of Iran is going to hold an exhibition for introducing the capacities of the country's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in late June, the TPO portal reported.

To be held during June 26-29, the exhibition

is organized in collaboration with the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare, the Vice Presidency for Science and Technology, Iran Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization (ISIPO), and Iran International Exhibition Company (IIEC).

Establishment of 40 new towns on agenda

TEHRAN - Iranian Transport and Urban Development Ministry plans to establish 40 new residential towns across the country in which affordable housing units will be built under the framework of the ministry's National Housing Movement.

According to Transport and Urban Development Minister Rostam Qasemi, over 600,000 housing units will be constructed in the mentioned towns under the framework of the National Housing Movement, the Transport Ministry's news portal reported.

Speaking in a meeting for reviewing the progress of the housing unit projects awarded to the Headquarters for Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order, Qasemi said: "In the new towns, using the lands allocated to the National Housing Movement, in addition to the construction



of housing units, income must be also generated and the proceeds must be spent in order to advance the National Housing Movement."

Earlier this month, Deputy Transport and Urban Development Minister Mahmoud Mahmoudzadeh announced the definite allocation of about 980,000

land lots with residential use for the construction of National Housing Movement units across the country.

Mahmoudzadeh said that 1.4 million land lots have been also identified that their usage should be determined, or they should be added to the area, or be investigated technically by the provincial planning councils

Iran-China quarterly trade rises 18% yr/yr

TEHRAN - The value of non-oil trade between Iran and China reached \$3.85 billion in the first three months of 2022 to register an 18-percent rise year on year, according to the data released by China's customs administration.

The value of trade between the two countries in January-March 2021 stood at \$3.25 billion, Tasnim news agency reported.

Based on the mentioned data, China's imports from Iran in the first quarter of 2022 grew by 30 percent compared to the previous year and reached \$1.93 billion.

China had imported \$148 billion worth of goods from Iran in Q1 2021.

China's exports to Iran in January-March 2022 also increased by eight percent to reach \$1.92 billion from \$1.77 billion in the previous year's same period.

Iran-China non-oil trade stood at \$14.8 billion in 2021, according to China's customs administration.

The value of trade between the two countries during the previous year declined by less than one percent in comparison to 2020 in which the figure was reported to



be \$14.9 billion.

China's imports from Iran in 2021 grew by more than one percent compared to the previous year and reached \$6.5 billion. China had imported \$6.4 billion worth of goods from Iran in 2020.

However, China's exports to Iran in January-December 2021 fell by about two percent to \$8.3 billion from \$8.5 billion in the previous year.

Iran mainly exports foodstuff and agricultural products to China while importing machinery and industrial raw materials, medical

equipment, fabrics, and auto parts.

China is one of Iran's main trade partners that has maintained strong trade ties with the Islamic Republic despite the strict U.S sanctions.

Iran and China officially signed the document for 25-year comprehensive cooperation in March 2021.

The document was signed between Iran's former Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the Iranian Foreign Ministry.

TPO to form specialized committee to support foreign trade

TEHRAN - Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi has tasked the Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) to establish a specialized committee for addressing foreign trade issues and removing barriers in the way of the country's traders, the TPO portal reported.

Speaking in a cabinet meeting on Wednesday, President Raisi underlined the need to make the best use of the capacities of the private sector in developing trade relations with the countries in the region and instructed TPO Head Alireza Peyman-Pak to form the mentioned committee to identify problems and obstacles in this regard.

TPO has been taking new steps for promoting Iran's foreign trade over the past few months.

Earlier this month, the organization signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Iranian Committee of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC Iran) to cooperate in the facilitation and development of the country's international trade.

The MOU was signed by Peyman-Pak and



Secretary-General of ICC Iran Mohammad Khazaei on Monday, the TPO portal reported.

Cooperation in developing the application of new trade tools and knowledge-based solutions to enhance the export potential of Iranian companies, promoting the application of new financial technology tools to facilitate foreign trade, holding training courses required by the country's businessmen and exporters, providing legal and trade advisory services to traders and businessmen, cooperation in resolving disputes between Iranian businesses with foreign parties using non-judicial methods

within the framework of the ICC Iran and TPO duties are mentioned as some of the areas that the two sides are going to cooperate on based on the signed MOU.

Furthermore, developing and facilitating Iran's trade relations with other countries, translating and localizing ICC's international agreements within the framework of the ICC regulations, providing advisory assistance by the ICC Iran to TPO for the development of international trade, cooperation with companies, and facilitating and encouraging their membership in the International Chamber of Commerce, cooperation in translation and publication of reports and statistics published by the International Chamber of Commerce, cooperation and planning in holding joint business events, cooperation in the development of international trade using the capacities of both institutions, coordination, and cooperation for exchanging trade delegations within the framework of the duties of the Iranian Committee are also among the provisions and areas of cooperation.

Annual export from Chabahar port up 3.5 folds

TEHRAN- Export from Chabahar port, in the southeast of Iran, rose by 3.5 folds in the past Iranian calendar year 1400 (ended on March 20), as compared to its previous year, a provincial official announced.

Behrooz Aqaei, the director-general of Sistan-Baluchestan province, where the port lies, also said that increasing traffic of ships and commodities in the port is on the agenda of his department's activity in the current year.

As Iran's only oceanic port on the Gulf of Oman, Chabahar port holds great significance for the country both politically and economically. The country has taken serious measures for developing this port in order to improve the country's maritime trade.

In this regard, the Islamic Republic has been welcoming investors from all over the world to take part in the development of this port and benefit from its distinguished position as a trade hub in the region.

Chabahar port consists of Shahid Kalantari and Shahid Beheshti terminals,



each of which has five berth facilities. The port is located in Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan Province and is about 120 kilometers southwest of Pakistan's Baluchistan province, where the China-funded Gwadar port is situated.

In May 2016, India, Iran, and Afghanistan signed a trilateral agreement for the strategically-located Chabahar to give New Delhi access to Kabul and Central Asia.

Based on an agreement with Iran, India is going to install and operate modern loading and unloading equipment including mobile harbor cranes in Shahid Beheshti Port in Chabahar.

TSE's main index climbs 58,000 points in a week

TEHRAN- TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), gained 58,000 points (four percent) to 1.512 million in the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday).

As reported, the indices of Tehran Oil Refining Company (TORC), Iran Khodro Investment Development Company (IKIDO), Social Security Investment Company (SSIC), Iran Khodro Company (IKCO), Saipa Company, and Isfahan Oil Refinery were the mostly followed ones during the past week.

TEDPIX also gained 145,000 points (10.5 percent) in the past Iranian month Farvardin, the first month of the Iranian calendar year (March 21-April 20).

In the past few months, Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) has taken many measures to stabilize the stock market, reduce the excitement in trading and return shareholders' trust in this market, and these decisions have showed their effect in the past month.



TEDPIX is expected to follow a mild upward trend in the current Iranian calendar year 1401 (started on March 21), a market analyst told IRNA on April 3.

"The capital market index experienced a significant decline in [the Iranian calendar year] 1399 (ended on March

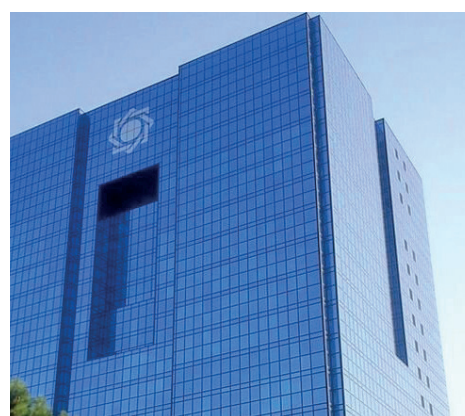
21, 2021) and the transactions at this market also undergone some correction in the previous year. Therefore, it seems that given the relative stability of macroeconomic variables, we will see a slight growth in the market index during the current year," Ali Teymouri said.

According to Teymouri, the main risks threatening the capital market in the current year are budget-related issues, as well as government and central bank exchange rate policies following a possible nuclear agreement.

Transparency in the economic policies of the new government, as well as the resolution of issues related to the nuclear deal, can create stable conditions for the country's economy, which can in return ensure a good outlook for the capital market, the analyst added.

In the last few months of last year, the capital market experienced some turbulence due to the ambiguities about the outcomes of the Vienna talks.

CBI allocates \$11b for imports in a month



TEHRAN- Central Bank of Iran (CBI) allocated \$11 billion for the imports in the past Iranian month Farvardin, the first month of the Iranian calendar year (March 21-April 20), which is almost five times the figure for the same month of the past year.

CBI Public Relations Director Mostafa Qamari-Vafa announced in a tweet: "After allocating \$1 billion for the import

of medicine and medical equipment and \$3 billion for the import of basic goods, with another \$7 billion allocated for the import of other items, the total foreign currency allocated since the beginning of 1401 (the current Iranian calendar year) has reached \$11 billion; It is approximately equal to five times the figure in the same period last year, which was about \$2.3 billion".

Iran imported 30.9 million tons of basic goods in the past Iranian calendar year 1400 (ended on March 20), an official with the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) told ISNA.

Foroud Asgari, the deputy head of IRICA for customs affairs, said that the imported goods were in 25 commodity groups.

Putting the value of the imported basic commodities at \$19.6 billion in the past year, the official said that the imports show a 60-percent rise in worth and 32-percent growth in weight, as compared to the Iranian calendar year 1399.

French elections: Macron v Le Pen and two visions for France

Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen are proposing two very different futures for France, at home and abroad

As French voters decide on Sunday which of the two will lead their country, what are their rival plans for the next five years?

National priority v complete renewal

The cost of living has been the number one issue of the election, and far-right hopeful Marine Le Pen has made it the focus of her campaign. But her other big plan is to make social housing, jobs and welfare a “national priority” for French nationals and to fight Islamism. Under the banner Marine, Présidente, she tells her supporters victory has never been so close.

Her centrist rival has sought to rally voters under the slogan Nous Tous – All of us. And after five years in power, Emmanuel Macron’s offer is for “complete renewal”, as he tries to attract voters from the left as well as the mainstream right.

Cost of living

Marine Le Pen has promised a raft of measures to cut the cost of living, which she wants to make the priority of a Le Pen presidency. She wants to scrap income tax for all under-30s, reduce VAT on fuel from 20% to 5.5% and abolish it on 100 other essentials. She wants to get businesses to raise wages by 10%, making the increases free of employer tax contributions, and to push up teachers’ salaries by 3% every year for the next five years. She also wants to slash toll fees on motorways by 15% by renationalising them, and to privatise public broadcasting by scrapping the TV licence fee of €138 (£115).

Emmanuel Macron says the government has already spent billions of euros capping energy bills, which he says is “twice as effective as dropping VAT”. He proposes that employers should be allowed to give staff an untaxed bonus of up to €6,000. He wants to increase teachers’ wages too in return for extra responsibilities and he is also prepared to scrap the TV licence fee. Bosses’ organisation Medef say his policies are better for growth and jobs, while warning that Ms Le Pen’s are unfunded and would lead France into a dead end.

Pensions

Emmanuel Macron wants to pay for much of his programme by raising the pension age from 62 to 65. But his policy has not played well with voters – especially on the left – and he says he will raise it gradually by four months a year. “It makes sense that I should be ready to listen,” he explained. He has also promised to raise the minimum state pension from €950 to €1,100 (£785-£910).

Marine Le Pen calls her rival’s plan an “absolutely unbearable injustice” and wants to keep the pension age at 62, although anyone who began working at



20 could retire at 60. She wants to raise the minimum state pension to €1,000, less than her opponent.

Immigration and security

Marine Le Pen wants a referendum on immigration to put an end to what she calls “anarchic and massive immigration”, and she plans strict rules for entering France and becoming French. Under a highly controversial proposal called Priorité nationale (national priority), she also wants French nationals to be given housing and social services ahead of foreigners – with 620,000 homes for foreign nationals put on the market for families where at least one parent is French. She was initially in favour of holding a referendum on the death penalty before realising it was “anti-constitutional”.

Emmanuel Macron has accused her of an “authoritarian” drift and failing to respect the constitution. He has condemned Le Pen’s “nationalist agenda, which is not patriotism”. He has promised to free up police and gendarmes from admin tasks to double the numbers on the street by 2030, with 11 new mobile units and 200 brigades of gendarmes (military police). Marine Le Pen also promises 20,000 new prison places and 7,000 extra police.

Headscarves

Marine Le Pen wants to ban women from wearing the headscarf in public places and fine them if they wear it. She calls the veil a “uniform” imposed by people with a radical vision of Islam. France has Western Europe’s biggest Muslim population, and as 69% voted for far-left candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon in the first round, the Muslim vote could play an important part in the second round.

Emmanuel Macron has warned that banning the headscarf could start a “civil war”. He insists that France’s principle of state secularism, called laïcité, does not mean fighting against religion. He made clear his opposition to it by praising a young woman wearing a hijab who said she was a feminist. “This is the best answer to all the nonsense,” he said.

Voting reform

One big question for Marine Le Pen is how she could push through all her reforms if she

won. She has few credible options for a government, relying on promises of a government of national unity. Her National Rally has only six seats in the National Assembly and it is difficult to see her winning a majority in elections in June. The electoral system works against her National Rally party, so she wants to introduce proportional representation (PR) in legislative elections and a seven-year term of office for president. One of her flagship policies is citizen referendums, which would enable 500,000 people to submit a proposal to change the law and bypass the problem of parliament.

Emmanuel Macron is also campaigning to introduce an element of PR to the parliamentary vote, but says his opponent’s plans for referendums indicate that she thinks she is above the constitution and can change the rules.

Europe

Emmanuel Macron has called this election a “referendum on Europe”, arguing that Europe protects France from crises and war, and accusing his opponent of wanting to leave the EU in a “Frexit” without daring to say so.

Marine Le Pen has moved a long way from her original plan to leave the EU, although the Macron camp believes that is her ultimate plan. “Nobody is against Europe,” she said after the first round. And yet in 2012, she was in favor of pulling France out of the EU, a stance which was then dropped in 2017 when she said she wanted to leave the euro instead. Now she speaks of a European alliance of nations.

However, her plans for priority for French nationals would directly contradict EU law and she would do that via a referendum. She would also cause trouble if she tried to tighten border controls, slash French contributions to the EU budget, and give primacy to French law.

She has also vowed to halt all co-operation with Germany, including military tank and warplanes projects, preferring to see France as a “big power that counts”. An admirer of Brexit, she talks about freeing France from the “straitjacket of Brussels”, while denying she harbors hopes of Frexit.

Russia and NATO

Marine Le Pen has been

critical of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, but her reliance on Russia for bank loans to her party and her friendly relations with Vladimir Putin have not been forgotten. “When you speak to Russia you are speaking to your banker,” Macron told her, saying she was dependent on Russian power. Her campaign team had to deny pulping 1.2 million election pamphlets because they featured a photo showing her shaking the Russian leader’s hand ahead of the 2017 election. She is also no fan of NATO, proposing that France leaves its “integrated command” while remaining in the organization, as it was from 1966-2009. After the war she believes there should be a “strategic rapprochement between NATO and Russia”.

Emmanuel Macron has played a key diplomatic role in the war, with France holding the presidency of the EU. He has maintained close contact with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and says the role of France and Europe is to provide Ukraine with military equipment and take in refugees.

Environment

Marine Le Pen is not known for her green views. Not only does she want to stop building wind turbines, she wants to start dismantling the ones that already exist. And she wants to end subsidies for renewable energy. She also wants to ban food imports that don’t meet French standards and she aims to force school canteens to provide 80% of French agricultural products.

Emmanuel Macron has secured the backing of the one Green presidential candidate, Yannick Jadot. He wants to make France the first big country to stop using coal and gas and has pledged to build six new nuclear power stations to add to France’s energy mix of 75% nuclear. He has called Marine Le Pen’s plan to leave renewable energy a “complete aberration”.

Health and education

So-called healthcare deserts in rural areas of France have become a big election issue. Emmanuel Macron wants to recruit another 50,000 nurses and carers by 2027. Marine Le Pen blames her rival for the closure of 18,000 hospital beds during his presidency and proposes a halt to further closures and the creation of another 10,000 nursing places.

Macron also wants to focus on vocational education, with a 50% increase in paid work placements. All schools would provide more sporting activities, so that all six to 12-year-olds would do 30 minutes of sport every day from September. His opponent wants to increase teachers’ pay by 3% a year over five years.

Native Americans warn of voter suppression in U.S.

From page 1► and Latino voters are less likely to have access to birth certificates and passports, documents often required to establish proof of citizenship, than White voters.”

The report cited an example whereby minority groups would face greater barriers to registration than White voters under proof-of-citizenship laws.

It also documented that since 2012, more than 1,600 polling places for Native Americans have been closed.

And despite the lengthy report, nothing has been done to address the matters rather measures have been taken to worsen them.

Many of the laws that have been recently passed used former U.S. President Donald Trump’s arguments of fraud over his 2020 Presidential election to campaign in favor of less access to the ballot boxes.

The end result, analysts say, regardless of whether the American election was rigged or not is having a disproportionate toll on Native American voters and other minority groups suffering the costs.

The biggest measures disproportionately target Native American voters who are older,



rural, and impoverished.

One of the biggest ironies is that Native Americans have resided in the United States for far longer than there has been the United States.

Because some are born outside of a hospital setting, which is said to be a common practice for the older generations, they may not have a birth certificate.

In many countries who value human rights there are simple methods to address this issue and allow this category of people the right to vote; but not in the U.S. it seems where the Native American Rights Fund is considering lawsuits against a new round of bills that require voters to show proof of citizenship in order to register to vote.

Does that mean the Native American who has been living in the United States before there was the United States is no longer a citizen to the extent they are not eligible to vote in some states?

Voting should be an easy process and an alienable right in every country with an accessible process for voters, not a complicated one.

Recently in America and in 48 states, more than 400 anti-voter bills have been introduced. These bills are making it harder and harder for people to register to vote, vote by mail, or vote in person basically creating unnecessary barriers.

At the end of the day, this is going to severely compromise a democratic process and goes against the will of the people that are being targeted.

Democracy works best when all eligible voters, regardless of ethnic background are able to participate and have their voices heard.

In other words, and something which critics have regularly been arguing, the United States is not a democracy.

The two laws passed earlier this year in the state of Montana faced a challenge by the Native American Rights Fund, along with the ACLU and Harvard Law School’s Election Law Clinic, who argued the laws will have a direct impact on the Native American’s rights to vote.

Other states have passed measures requiring photo identification to vote. The list

of acceptable documents they have adopted includes tribal government identifications, though those documents do not always come with photographs, and many Native Americans living in rural areas rely on post office boxes because their homes do not have regular street addresses.

This year in Arizona, one such bill that was passed tightened identification requirements.

Allison Neswood, a staff attorney at the Native American Rights Fund says “structural barriers are impacting Native people’s abilities to vote. We felt like Native issues were being both misunderstood and overlooked at the state level, even by voting rights advocates because our populations can be small.”

Arizona state Rep. Jasmine Blackwater-Nygren, a member of the Navajo Nation told U.S. media “our tribal ID probably won’t meet the requirements outlined in the bill in that not all tribal IDs have photos or we don’t have physical addresses,” she says, adding that she feels “directly attacked when we see things like this.”

Blackwater-Nygren added, “when I tell these stories when I explain to lawmakers, GOP members specifically, I’m told they do know when they were born and it’s ridiculous that

anybody wouldn’t know what day they were born.”

What should be of major concern to U.S. authorities is the plight of Native American voters and the poverty they endure in mostly rural tribal lands, many of which are miles away not only from government facilities but even from paved roads.

This is a clear example of a barrier to accessing a ballot box that doesn’t appear to concern Washington. Those who live so far from modern infrastructure are less likely to have access to transportation, while public transport is literally nonexistent. “Poverty is really costly for folks. It means that people are using a higher percentage of their financial resources, emotional resources, mental resources on just the basics,” Neswood said. “That can make disproportionately hard voting requirements just not worth it for some people.”

The other main issue is that Native Americans can play a crucial role in the voting process. In Arizona for example, which President Biden won by just 11,000 votes, the participation of Native Americans helped swing the state from one party to another.

Many pundits outside the United States have come out and stated American foreign policy does not change with a Democrat president or a Republican one but why should ethnic minority groups suffer from issues that concern domestic policy.

Suppression voting efforts has been emerging in many different methods and practices in the U.S. Restricting the terms and requirements of registration is one of the most common forms.

Then comes also the issue of racism among the police and broader criminal “legal” system, criminalization of the ballot box disproportionately impacts people of color, who are more likely to be penalized. Analysts say this method of voter suppression aims to fuel fear in communities of color and prevent them from voting.

Since last year, Americans witnessed a flurry of activity among state legislatures as they enacted laws that made it harder to vote.

Critics say Republicans and Democrats are both to blame and both behind such plots to win the upcoming elections at the expense of minority groups.

UN chief to meet separately with Putin and Zelenskyy in peace effort

Aspokesperson for Secretary-General António Guterres informed correspondents in a note that on Tuesday, 26 April, he will have a working meeting and lunch with Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and will be received by President Putin in Moscow.

“He hopes to talk about what can be done to bring peace to Ukraine urgently,” said UN Associate Spokesperson Eri Kaneke.

Later on Friday, the UN spokesperson announced in another statement that Mr. Guterres will also travel to Ukraine next week.



He will have a working meeting with Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and will be received by President Volodymyr

Zelenskyy on 28 April.

The UN Chief will meet as well with UN staff on the ground to discuss the scaling up of humanitarian assistance to the people of Ukraine.

The announcements come before the UN’s next appeal for war-torn country, which is being scheduled for next week.

In efforts to end the war in Ukraine, the UN chief wrote separate letters to the leaders of Russia and Ukraine, requesting to meet with each of them in their respective capitals, UN News reported last Wednesday. (Source: UN News)

Rarely-seen Quran manuscripts unveiled at Tehran museum



TEHRAN – Two rarely-seen copies of the Holy Quran have been put on show at the Reza Abbasi Museum in Tehran.

The manuscripts, dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries, are on display for the first time, the director of the museum has said.

The two manuscripts are illuminated and written in Naskh and Thuluth, Nahid Najafi Khalaj explained on Friday.

The museum continues to display these exquisite Qurans until further notice, she added.

The earliest Quran manuscripts were

produced in the mid-to-late 7th century CE (1st century Hijrah), although it is difficult to be precise about their date because ancient copies from this period have not survived intact and exist only in fragments.

Experts say the importance of these fragments cannot be overestimated as they provide the only available evidence for the early development of the written recording of the Quran text.

Named after one of the greatest artists of the Safavid era, Reza Abbasi Museum embraces several permanent exhibition halls, each dedicated to an epoch of Iranian arts and history.

The museum's treasure trove contains artifacts made of baked clay, metal, and stone from prehistoric times to pottery and metal objects, textile and lacquer paintings, manuscripts, and jewelry belonging to the Islamic period. The displays are set according to the time interval from the 7th millennium BC to the early 20th century.

Researchers to explore cultural links at webinar devoted to Persian Gulf

TEHRAN – A host of scholars and researchers are scheduled to exchange views on the cultural heritage of the Persian Gulf region during a webinar to be held concurrent with the Persian Gulf National Day.

The experts will present studies they had carried out on the historical heritage and cultural convergence of the locals across the strategic waterway, ILNA reported.

The national day is annually observed on the tenth of the Ordibehesht (April 30) which marks the anniversary of Shah Abbas I of Persia's successful military campaign when the Portuguese navy was forced out of the Strait of Hormuz in the Capture of Ormuz (1622).

The modern strategic importance of the Persian Gulf dates from the mid-19th century when three great empires confronted each other there: British India, Tsarist Russia, and Ottoman Turkey.

The British established political control over much of the Persian Gulf in the early 1800s and kept it for 150 years, establishing a tradition of outside involvement that persists today. Britain did not establish formal protectorates (as in the case, for example, of Egypt), but did enter into treaties with local sheiks offering them protection in return for control over their foreign policy. In 1899, Kuwait, then considered a dependency of the Ottomans, was brought into this system.

After World War I, the political map of much of the Middle East was redrawn as the Ottoman Empire was replaced by modern states, including Turkey, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. The small Arab sheikhdoms on the western shore of the Persian Gulf were under British



protection until 1971 (in the case of Kuwait, 1961). Iran (Persia) was never a colony, and for much of the 19th and 20th centuries, Britain competed with Russia for influence there.

Spanning some 250,000 square kilometers, the Persian Gulf is bounded by the Shatt al-Arab waterway in the north, which forms the frontier between Iran and Iraq, and the Strait of Hormuz in the south, which connects the sea to the Gulf of Oman and the Indian Ocean.

It shares boundaries with littoral states Iran (Persia), Oman, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman.

Furthermore, the Persian Gulf is important as an international trade route connecting West Asia to Africa, India, and China. It has historically been an integrated region characterized by constant interchange of people, commerce, and religious movements.

The webinar is organized by the Research center for Languages and Inscriptions which is affiliated with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts.

Exhibit of recovered prehistorical bricks extended due to popularity

TEHRAN – An exhibition of prehistorical glazed bricks devoted to objects recovered from a smuggler in Switzerland has been extended by two weeks due to popular demand, the National Museum of Iran said on Thursday.

“The exhibition, which was due to end on April 19, will now be extended until May 5, according to the repeated requests from people interested in this exhibit,” the museum announced.

Bearing images of various sphinxes, animals, and other motifs, the decorated bricks were originally discovered at the Qalaichi archaeological site in western Iran which was once the capital of the Mannaeen kingdom.

They were looted and smuggled out of Iran some four decades ago, however, they were returned home from Switzerland last year. According to The Art Newspaper, the artworks were recovered from a warehouse in Switzerland.

In the 1970s, a farmer plowing at Qalaichi

came across a decorated brick, probably from the columned hall of its citadel. This discovery led to extremely damaging illegal excavations, partly using a bulldozer.

Eventually, in 1985, there was an official rescue excavation, but this was quickly abandoned because of an intensification of the Iran-Iraq war. There were then 14 more years of illegal digging until 1999 when there was another official excavation. But by this time only small fragments of broken bricks were found.

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

Chock-full of priceless objects showcasing the juicy history of the nation, the National Museum showcases ceramics, pottery, stone figures, and carvings, mostly taken from excavations at Persepolis, Ismail Abad (near Qazvin), Shush, Rey, and Turang Tappeh to name a few.

Iftar at Imam Reza shrine: a 332-year tradition

From page 1 ► for pilgrims and guests, and how to celebrate Eid al-Fitr, the end of Ramadan in the holy shrine, IRIB quoted Zahra Fatemi Moqadam as saying on Friday.

People began praying at the holy shrine during Ramadan month according to these documents, and as the holy shrine was once the center of the city, the prayers could be heard throughout the city during the night, she added.

During the day, people came together at the shrine to read verses of the Holy Quran, she noted.

Then, at sunset, a variety of foods were prepared according to the seasons of the year and all the expenses of preparing these foods were paid for by the holy shrine, she mentioned.

Every day this year, 7,000 pilgrims receive hot food and simple Iftar packages outside the holy shrine in addition to the Iftar meals inside the shrine, she explained.

In the suburbs and deprived areas of Mashhad, 2500 Iftar packages are also distributed each day, she said.

Normally, Mashhad's holy shrine of Imam Reza (AS) where the eighth Shia Imam is laid to rest, is visited by an average number of 500,000 pilgrims each day, according to Astan Quds Razavi which manages the shrine complex and other



associated institutions.

That spiritual tradition of pilgrimage along with sustained efforts to safeguard hospitality services for Razavi pilgrims may join UNESCO's listing of cultural treasures as Iran has asked the United Nations cultural agency to recognize the concept of 'Good safeguarding practices to improve hospitality services for Razavi Pilgrims'.

Moreover, the architectural design of the complex has also complied with these traditions and rituals to address the needs of people and the urban landscape.

For Muslims, the ninth month of the lunar Islamic calendar, Ramadan, also known as "Ramazan-e Karim" (benevolent/merciful Ramadan), is a time for, more than ever, practicing humility, patience, simplicity, empathy, and

acceptance when things don't go their way. It's also a time to make stronger bonds of fellowship.

Muslims observe religious fast from dawn (fajr) to sunset (maghrib) and pray more than usual and with even more intensity to get closer to God. Ramadan is traditionally a time of great hospitality and generosity, so go ahead and accept Ramadan sweets or invitations to feasts, parties, and family gatherings. For Muslims, everything is done ceremoniously and consciously in line with what has been passed down from generation to generation.

Eating, drinking, and smoking in the public are strictly prohibited as they are considered acts of temptation; especially for locals, where failing to observe Ramadan may attract penalties. However, there are exceptions for the ill, pregnant, or physically

weak people and even long-distance travelers!

In reverse, during Ramadan, one can eat their heart out from sunset to sunrise. Pretty much every restaurant, food stand, and even household has food ready after dark.

After a long day's observance of fasting from dawn, Muslim families gather at sunset to break their fast over a meal known as Iftar, which is typically more than just food at the end of a ritualistic day.

During the daytime all restaurants and coffee shops are closed, however, by the sunset, street Iftar meals are ready to grab for those who cannot reach home in time for breaking their fast.

To bring more comfort to the faithful, work schedules in Iran are modified during this month to make the experience of this month as convenient as possible.

Ramadan is estimated to end on May 1. Because of the nature of the lunar calendar system, the dates of Ramadan vary each year and there is always a sort of disagreement among scholars as to when Ramadan precisely start or come to an end.

By tradition, the new moon crescent which is sighted by the naked eye marks the beginning of a new lunar month but these days Muslims prefer to lean towards astronomical calculations to avoid such confusion.

Iranian province seeks UNESCO recognition for its 'Cappadocia'

TEHRAN – East Azarbaijan province is hoping to win a UNESCO recognition for its rocky Kandovan village, which is sometimes referred to as Iran's Cappadocia.

“The UNESCO registration of Kandovan village is one of the ultimate goals of this directorate,” CHTN quoted the provincial tourism chief as saying on Thursday.

Moreover, Kandovan is one of the main destinations for foreign travelers to Iran, Ahmad Ahmadzadeh said.

“Necessary measures should be taken to develop tourism infrastructure in Kandovan with the full cooperation of the public and private sectors because our ultimate goal is global registration of this historic village,” the official explained.

Situated near the city of Osku, Kandovan epitomizes genuine manmade dwellings that have been carved out of substantially eroded rocks and it has been continuously inhabited since ancient times.



As to its shape and appearance, Kandovan is highly reminiscent of Turkey's Cappadocia, a UNESCO World Heritage site that features dwellings, troglodyte villages, and underground towns with traces of human habitat dating back to the 4th century.

Kandovan's history dates back to 6000 years ago. Some researchers of archeology have estimated its age up to 7000 years old.

Aras, Tabas geoparks in line for UNESCO status

TEHRAN – Iran's Aras and Tabas geoparks are in line for possible UNESCO inscriptions, a cultural heritage expert from the UN cultural body has said.

All-inclusive dossiers have been completed for Aras and Tabas geoparks to be registered on the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's Global Geoparks list, ISNA quoted Alireza Amrikazemi as saying on Friday. These sites, however, need to be evaluated by UNESCO assessors, who will visit the country this spring and summer, he added.

Tabas Geopark, which is situated in a vast country of the same name in east-central Iran, has enormous potential to be registered as “the biggest geopark” in the West Asia

region.

Sprawled in the eastern province of South Khorasan, Tabas Geopark includes a variety of scenic landscapes and untouched terrains with the mysterious Kal-e Jeni (canyon of Jinn) located in Azmighan village, among them.

Situated in East Azarbaijan province, Aras Geopark covers an area of about 1670 square kilometers, sprawling across the whole Jolfa county. The topography is generally extremely steep and forms astonishing landscapes so the highest point in the Jolfa region is the Kiyamaki mount with 3347 meters and the lowest points include the northern boundary and the Aras River valley with 720 to 390 meters.

It has an appropriate geo-

tourism attraction, because of its mountainous landscapes, an outcropping of different sedimentary and igneous rocks, diversity in tectonic structures, semi-cold and semi-arid climate, and diverse flora and fauna.

In May 2017, UNESCO included Iran's southern Qeshm Island on its Global Geoparks list. Qeshm embraces a wide range of ecotourism attractions such as the Hara marine forests and about 60 villages dotted mostly across its rocky coastlines. The island has an abundance of wildlife, including birds, reptiles, dolphins, and turtles as well.

Experts believe that the majority of geoparks help promote awareness of geological hazards, including volcanoes,

earthquakes, and tsunamis and many help prepare disaster mitigation strategies with local communities. Geoparks embody records of past climate changes and are indicators of current climate changes as well.

A UNESCO Global Geopark fosters socio-economic development that is culturally and environmentally sustainable directly affecting the area by improving human living conditions and the rural environment. It gives local people a sense of pride in their region, strengthens public identification with the area, and promotes a better understanding of the area's geological, natural, archaeological, cultural, and industrial heritage.

Narratives say the tower has influenced various subsequent designers of tomb towers and other cylindrical commemorative structures both in the region and beyond. The UNESCO comments that the tower bears testimony to the cultural exchange between Central Asian nomads and the ancient civilization of Iran.

Police seize historical relics from smuggler

TEHRAN – A total of 11 historical objects have recently been confiscated from a smuggler in Gorgan, northern Golestan province, the provincial tourism chief has said.

“The relics have been recovered from the house of the smuggler, who is an excavator in the meanwhile,” Rahman Farmani explained on Saturday.

The police detained and surrendered the suspect to the judicial system for further investigation, the official added.

Golestan is reportedly embracing some 2,500 historical and natural sites, with UNESCO-registered Gonbad-e Qabus – a one-millennium-old brick tower – amongst its most famous.

Sustainable agriculture to be implemented in Bakhtegan wetland

TEHRAN – A restoration plan and model of sustainable agriculture previously implemented on the catchment area of Lake Urmia, will be piloted in 15 sites around the Bakhtegan wetland of Fars province.

A memorandum of understanding was signed between the Iranian Wetlands Conservation Project and the Department of Environment (DOE), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the Government of Japan to implement Lake Urmia restoration achievements on Bakhtegan and Shadegan wetlands from 2021 to 2024.

By using the capacity built and the lessons learned, the new project will be scaled up to additional pilots in the surrounding areas of Bakhtegan wetland, head of Fars Agricultural Organization, Mojtaba Dehghanpour said.

“In the field of wetlands, we must specifically pursue three strategies of adaptation, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and short-term measures to combat drought,” he stated.

The environmental, social, and economic impacts of the project are assessed through satellite imagery and space-based technology, he added, IRNA reported on Thursday.

Bakhtegan is a Salt Lake with a surface area of 3,500 square ki-



lometers it was once Iran's second-largest lake. It was fed by the Kor River. Several dams on the river had significantly reduced water flow into the lake, increasing its salinity and endangering the lake's populations of flamingos and other migratory birds.

The main problem of Bakhtegan wetland is the lack of proper planning for available water resources. Although drought and climate change have also been influential, the need for livelihood change, especially in the agricultural sector, is felt to reduce dependence on water resources, Hamid Zohrabi, provincial DOE chief, said.

Wetlands play a major role in protecting the land against floods

national importance (registered in the Ramsar Convention) covering more than 1.4 million hectares and four sites are biosphere reserves.

Of Iran's 25 Ramsar sites about one-third are under pressure or in critical condition.

Former chief of the Department of Environment, Issa Kalantari, had said in order to restore wetlands in the country a budget of 600 trillion rials (nearly \$2.4 billion) is required.

In Iran, 141 wetlands with ecological value have been identified, of which 25 wetlands are designated as wetlands of international importance (registered in the Ramsar Convention) and four sites are biosphere reserves.

and the impacts of storms. They provide food and diverse habitats which support genetic, species, and ecosystem biodiversity. Wetlands play a key role in the life cycles of many species and in annual migration patterns.

Unfortunately, wetlands are being degraded and lost due to pollution, overexploitation, climate change, and human population growth. In recognition of these challenges, the Ramsar Convention, an international treaty, was adopted in 1971.

In Iran, 141 wetlands with ecological value with an area of over 3 million hectares have been identified, of which 25 wetlands are designated as wetlands of inter-

Iran marks Earth Day focusing on plastic waste reduction

From page 1 ► Waste is what the modern and industrial life brought to human beings, and is the most important current challenge of nature in all countries, including Iran.

Today, one of the most important environmental problems in the country is the mismanagement of waste, which incurs a loss of 448 trillion rials (nearly \$1.7 billion) annually.

Annually, more than 61 million tons of various types of waste are produced in Iran, according to the DOE, an estimated 10 to 17 percent of the total produced waste is recycled. While in developed countries this number reaches up to 70 percent.

Improper waste management has caused most of the regions of the country, especially the northern provinces, to face an environmental crisis. An estimated amount of 3,500 and 300 tons of waste is produced in Mazandaran and Gilan provinces per day, respectively.

According to experts, people's lack of awareness of the current state of the earth is perhaps the most important factor in increasing environ-



mental pollution and degradation.

In the meantime, culture and education can be two important principles in preserving the environment.

50,000 tons of waste per day

Per capita waste production in European countries is 300 to 350 grams, and in Iran, it is 700 grams and sometimes up to one kilogram, which unfortunately a very small part of it is separated and recycled.

With an average per capita of 700 grams to 1 kg, Iranians produce more than 50,000 tons of waste per day, which is basically twice the world standard.

This situation is worse in the capital city of Tehran. The per capita waste production in Tehran is 750 to 800 grams per person daily. In fact, every person in Tehran produces about 5 times their own weight of waste every year.

According to statistics, about 8,000 tons of waste is produced daily in Tehran, nearly 17 percent of which is recycled, and the rest is land-filled, while in the developed world 70 percent of the waste is recycled and 30 percent is buried.

Many countries have been so successful that some even claim to reduce waste to zero by 2030, and some are looking to generate energy from waste.

In Iran, it requires the promotion of a culture that must begin in schools, or governments must adopt incentive and punishment systems to reduce waste production and make separation at source into a culture among Iranian families.

Over 5.8 tons of narcotics discovered in a month

TEHRAN – A total of 5,870 kilograms of various drugs were seized at the country's borders over the past [Iranian calendar] month of Farvardin (March 21-April 20), Border Police Chief Ahmad-Ali Goudarzi, said on Saturday.

In the aforementioned period, 2.5 million liters of smuggled fuel, 278 cryptocurrency miners, 14,062 livestock, and 172,824 items of cosmetics were seized by the border guards, he stated.

Referring to a 15 percent increase in border trespassers over the past month, he said that 21,573 border trespassers were identified and arrested.

The border guards are fighting against the smugglers to the death, and unfortunately, a number of these forces have been martyred in

this path, and the result of this sacrifice is a 2.5 percent increase in weapons discoveries over the past month compared to the same period last year, he lamented.

In Iran, 16 provinces share borders with neighboring countries stretching to more than eight thousand kilometers.

Having a 900-kilometer border with Afghanistan, Iran has been used as the main conduit for smuggling Afghan drugs to narcotics kingpins in Europe.

Despite high economic and human costs, Iran has been actively fighting drug trafficking over the past decades.

The country has spent more than \$700 million on sealing its borders and preventing the tran-

sit of narcotics destined for European, Arab, and Central Asian countries.

The Iranian anti-narcotics police discovered 1,900 tons of drugs over the past 2 years, Majid Karimi, the 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.

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.

Moreover, some 1,000 tons of narcotics were seized in the Iranian calendar year 1399 (March

Amphibians and Reptiles from Iran

Part 4

Bufo surdus annulatus, the ring-spotted earless toad, is known from a single individual collected at Mehkuh in Fars province. It has small olive-green ring-shaped spots on the back.

Its small tympanum (ear drum) is hidden beneath the skin of the head, so that externally it appears to lack an ear. The Lorestan toad, Bufoluristanicus, is considered by some authors to be a subspecies of B. surdus, even though it has a small but distinct external tympanum. It is known from a very few localities, all in the western foothills of the Zagros mountains in Lorestan and Khuzestan provinces.

In the lowland southeastern regions where Bufoviridis is lacking, two toads representative of the Indian sub-region of the Oriental fauna occur. The Baluchestan coastal toad, Bufoolivaceus, has been found only in scattered oases in the Makran and near the coast from southern Kerman and Baluchestan to western Pakistan where irrigation in date culture and gardens provides a suitably moist habitat; it ranges up to 1,000 m elevation.

The range of a related species, the Indo-Gangetic toad, Bufostomaticus, extends from the Indo-Gangetic plains to 2,000 m in the Himalayas and scattered locations in Afghanistan, western Pakistan, and eastern Iran.

Nothing is known of its ecology in Iran, where it seems to be of rare and isolated occurrence, but it is found in areas where rainfall is less reliable than in the coastal regions and in areas that are colder in the winter. It is known from northern Khorasan, Sistan and Baluchestan.

While the Iranian species of tree frog, Hylasavignyi, does not climb trees, it does cling to grasses, hedges, rushes, and other low vegetation along the margins of streams and ponds. These frogs are either bright green or light tan to gray and have a black stripe through the eye on the side of the head.

They are the smallest frogs in Iran, but they have the loudest voices, and whenever a frog chorus fills the night air, one can be sure it is this tree frog. Because these frogs require reliable annual rainfall and moist retreats they are restricted to the northern and western provinces; they extend from the northwestern corner of Iran east through Gilan and Mazandaran and south through Kurdistan, Lorestan, Khuzestan and Fars provinces.

The four Iranian species of true frogs (family Ranidae) belong to three major species-groups. By far the most common and widely distribut-



ed species is Ranaridibundaridibunda, whose distribution in Iran closely parallels that of the green toad, namely every province except Sistan and Baluchestan.

Related to the pond and grass frogs of the Holarctic, these frogs vary in color from dirty brown to bright green and have dark blotches on the back and limbs; they have no dark stripe along the side of the head. Their most familiar survival strategy is to sit perfectly still as a potential predator approaches, and then to escape into the water with an explosive leap.

In northwestern Iran, Ranacamnerani is found along streams and around lakes in now deforested areas from the Turkish border to the western flanks of the Talesh mountains and south into Kurdistan. Like other species of brown frogs, it has a dark stripe on the side of the head behind the eye.

Its back and limbs are brownish or olive green, usually with dark blotches, and the undersurfaces of the hind limbs are red. Ranamacrocnemispseudodalmatina, a handsome, rich brown frog lives in especially damp places, often many meters from the nearest stream, on the floor of the Caspian forest of Gilan and Mazandaran.

In the lowlands of southeastern Iran, beyond the ecological range of Ranaridibunda, the skittering frog, Ranacyanophlyctiscyanophlyctis, a member of the Oriental fauna, occurs where irrigation provides near-permanent water in oasis situations; Baluchestan, southern Kerman, and Sistan from the western edge of its wide distribution through southern Asia.

Source: Encyclopedia Iranica

Concluded

Iran has spent more than \$700 million on sealing its borders and preventing the transit of narcotics destined for European, Arab, and Central Asian countries.

2020-March 2021), putting the country in the first place in the world.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (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.

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.

Iran's drug control efforts led to the seizure of 266 tons of different types of drugs during the period of April-June 2020, a 20 percent increase compared to the same period in 2019.

COVID-19 UPDATES ON APRIL 23

New cases	608
New deaths	22
Total cases	7,215,512
Total deaths	140,962
New hospitalized patients	140
Patients in critical condition	1,087
Total recovered patients	6,963,991
Diagnostic tests conducted	50,759,838
Doses of vaccine injected	148,600,690

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

System to be set up for monitoring, forecasting agricultural drought

A system will be launched to monitor, forecast and report the agricultural lands being hit by drought, Amir Qaderi, an official with Disaster Management Organization has announced.

Over a meeting of a special working group for addressing drought and risks threatening agricultural sector, a plan for establishing a system for monitoring and forecasting agricultural drought in the country was approved and submitted to the Disaster Management Organization for review, he explained.

“Following the study of other countries' experiences and existing global methods, the necessity of establishing a domestic system to recognize the lands prone to agricultural drought was emphasized,” he noted.

سامانه پایش و پیش‌بینی خشکسالی کشاورزی ایران ایجاد می‌شود

معاون امور بازسازی و بازتوانی سازمان مدیریت بحران کشور از ایجاد سامانه پایش و پیش‌بینی خشکسالی کشاورزی ایران خبر داد.

به گزارش پایگاه اطلاع‌رسانی سازمان مدیریت بحران کشور، امیر قادری روز یکشنبه با اعلام این خبر گفت: طرح ایجاد سامانه پایش و پیش‌بینی خشکسالی کشاورزی ایران طی جلسه‌ای با حضور مدیران و کارشناسان سازمان مدیریت بحران و وزارت جهاد کشاورزی بررسی شد.

وی ادامه داد: پس از بررسی تجارب داخلی و روش‌های موجود جهانی، ضرورت استقرار نمونه بومی پایش و پیش‌بینی خشکسالی کشاورزی مورد تأکید قرار گرفت و با مشارکت مراکز پژوهشی سازمان هواشناسی کشور و پژوهشکده حفاظت خاک و آبخیزداری طرح ایجاد سامانه پایش و پیش‌بینی خشکسالی کشاورزی ایران پیشنهاد شد.

(Source: Encyclopedia Iranica)

(To be continued)