

New Pakistani PM Approached by Saudi Arabia

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Report **UN stands against Israel's "disturbing designations"**

TEHRAN — Finally, the world is turning its attention to Palestine. In a significant development, UN human rights experts called on the international community to take immediate and effective steps to protect and sustain the six Palestinian civil society groups that were designated as 'terrorist organizations' by the Israeli regime in October 2021.

In a press release by the Office of the High Commissioner of the United Nations Human Rights body, the UN experts dubbed the Israelis' heinous act to designate civil society groups as terrorist organizations as a "disturbing designation."

"Israel's disturbing designation of these organizations as 'terrorist organizations' has not been accompanied by any public concrete and credible evidence," said the human rights experts. "We note that the information presented by Israel has also failed to convince a number of governments and international organizations that have traditionally provided funding for the indispensable work of these six organizations."

In October 2021, the UN experts denounced Israel's designation of six Palestinian civil society organizations – Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, Al-Haq, Bisan Center for Research and Development, Defense for Children International, Palestine, the Union of Agricultural Work Committees, and the Union of Palestinian Women Committees – as terrorist organizations. Israel's designation enables it to close the organizations, seize their assets, end their work and charge their leadership and staff with terrorist offences.

"Israel has had six months to substantiate its accusations and it has failed to deliver," the experts said. "We call on the funding governments and international organizations to swiftly conclude that Israel" ► Page 2

UN calls on U.S. to alleviate Afghan suffering

A group of UN-appointed experts have issued a warning over the harmful consequences on Afghans, especially women, as a result of the United States' freezing of Afghanistan's assets.

According to the experts, the Da Afghanistan Bank in Kabul has more than \$7 billion in reserves, that have been blocked by Washington, and which could instead be used to provide desperately-needed humanitarian relief to tens of millions of Afghans suffering in their own country.

The Afghan central bank's funds have been frozen since August last year as the Taliban took over and foreign forces withdrew.

Since then there have been urgent calls from aid groups and the UN for the money to be used to address the humanitarian crisis that has worsened.

While noting the ruling Taliban can take more steps to ease women's rights; the 14 UN independent rights experts have blamed the U.S. government for making life worse for Afghan women by blocking billions of dollars of the central bank assets made up in part of aid money for the country accumulated over decades.

In a statement, the UN-appointed human rights experts said "we are gravely concerned about the growing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, which puts at serious risk the lives of more than half of the country's population, with a disproportionate impact on women and children." ► Page 5



TEHRAN — On Tuesday, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei warmly received university students and shed light on the new world order, which contradicts the Americans' predictions.

At the beginning of the ceremony, the

Leader praised the Islamic Revolution's services to the Iranian education system.

"The great work that the Revolution did for the university was to give identity to the university and consequently, give identity to the Iranian nation. The Revolution gave the

nation a sense of identity, ideals, a sense of character and independence, and a clear horizon. These are things that the Revolution did for the Iranian nation," he noted.

He then went on to say that the Islamic Republic should be proud of ► Page 2

Over 3.4m tons of steel products exported in a year

TEHRAN- Iran exported 3.406 million tons of steel products in the past Iranian calendar year 1400 (ended on March 20), Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) has announced.

The IMIDRO's data put the country's annual steel products export at 2.832 million tons in year 1399.

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 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. ► Page 4

Iran's National Orchestra to perform in Tehran

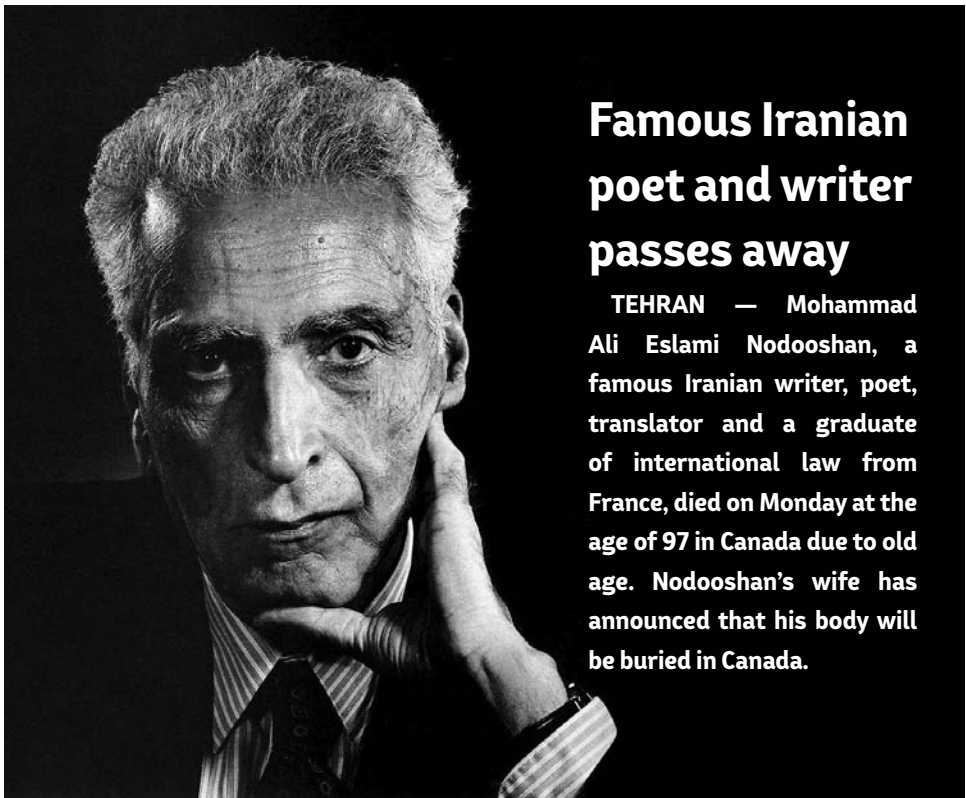
TEHRAN – Iran's National Orchestra is scheduled to give a concert at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on May 19 and 20.

Entitled "From Oud Lajan to Azarbaijan", the performance will be conducted by Shahram Tavakoli.

Vocalists Navid Noruzi and Mehdi Mohammadi will accompany the orchestra during the performance.

The orchestra is due to perform a repertoire of popular pieces by famous Iranian composers, including Ali Tajvidi, Parviz Yahaqi, Farhad Fakhreddini, and Hossein Zandian as well as Azarbaijani musicians such as Khayyam Mirzazadeh, Jahangir Jahangirov, and Ali Salimi.

Oud Lajan is a historical neighborhood in downtown Tehran and a tourist destination in the Iranian capital.



Famous Iranian poet and writer passes away

TEHRAN — Mohammad Ali Eslami Nodooshan, a famous Iranian writer, poet, translator and a graduate of international law from France, died on Monday at the age of 97 in Canada due to old age. Nodooshan's wife has announced that his body will be buried in Canada.

Late Hejazi's SIM card sold to raise fund for children with cancer

TEHRAN – Late Iran and Esteghlal football team goalkeeper Nasser Hejazi's SIM card was sold to raise fund for the children with cancer.

His SIM card, worth nearly \$40,000, was sold in a virtual auction held in Tehran Monday night.

Atila Hejazi, his son, thanked all those who got involved in the charity event and said the fund will be donated to the children with cancer.

The legendary custodian lost his battle with lung cancer

in 2011 in Tehran at the age of 61.

Hejazi was a popular footballer in Iran and even Persepolis' fans, as the archrivals opponents, loved him so much.

For many enthusiasts, earliest memories of football are inspired by him. Hejazi will forever be etched into the heart of the Iran football.

He was goalkeeper of Iran national football team in the 1960s and 1970s and won the AFC Asian Cup on two occasions in 1972 and 1976, and Asian Games title in 1974.

Hejazi also competed in the 1972 and 1976 Olympic Games as well as 1978 FIFA World Cup.

He led Esteghlal to title in Iran league in 1998 and also advanced to the final match of 1999 AFC Asian Championship, where the Blues lost to Japanese team Jubilo Iwata 2-1 in Tehran.

Last year, Hejazi was named as the best Iranian goalkeeper of the XXth century (1901-2000) by the International Federation of Football History and Statistics (IFFHS).

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Interview **T**

Ukraine war is a Russia-US confrontation where Ukraine has only become a casualty: researcher

By Mohammad Mazhari

TEHRAN – A Pakistani researcher believes that the Ukraine war in its essence is a conflict between Washington and Moscow while Ukrainians have fallen victim to this confrontation.

"While the U.S. supports Ukraine, the war in its essence is a confrontation between Russia and the U.S. where Ukraine has only become a casualty," Mahrukh Khan tells the Tehran Times.

"No, one needs to be mindful that the West will never make Ukraine completely independent in a military sense by providing military aid whether, in terms of finances, equipment, hard/software, or training," Khan adds.

The researcher says, "What Ukraine needs is active diplomatic support from around the world that the U.S. can garner along with support from NATO."

Following is the text of the interview:

What are the repercussions of the Russia-NATO conflict over Ukraine? Do you expect the birth of new world order?

The repercussion of the Russian NATO conflicts highlights the fault lines in the current international order that primarily favors the West and its partners and allies. There is a clear divide of interests, convergences as well as divergences in the Russian Ukraine crisis and how the blocs are being formed and regions and countries identified ► Page 5

Negative population growth rate stalls

TEHRAN –The downward trend of Iran's population growth stopped for the first time in the past [Iranian calendar] year (March 2021-March 2022), Hesamoddin Allameh, secretariat of the National Council of the Elderly, has said.

It was predicted that population growth would stop in 2052 and declines to a negative rate, but if the current trend continues for the next 10 years, the population growth rate may not stop, he noted.

Iran's population increased by 569,963 in the past year, and the natural population growth rate was estimated at 0.7 percent, according to the National Organization for Civil Registration.

Over the past year, 1,106,072 infants were born in the country and 536,109 people died, so the country's population increased by 569,963.

The highest population rate in Iran was recorded in 1986 amounting to about 3.6 percent. The population rate has been declining over the past 35 years until it reached 0.7 percent, but last year it was equal to the previous year [showing no reduction], he further explained. ► Page 7



UN stands against Israel's "disturbing designations"

Global community pays attention to Palestine, finally!

From page 1 ► has not established its allegations and to announce that they will continue to financially and politically support these organizations and the communities and groups they serve."

Although Israel has not substantiated its allegations publicly or to the funding governments and international organizations, several of the funders have delayed their contributions to the Palestinian organizations while they investigate these claims. The European Union has formally suspended its funding for two of these organizations. This has undermined the work of these Palestinian organizations and has had an incalculable impact on the communities they support.

The experts said there has been a lack of clarity about the duration of these steps.

"We are deeply disturbed by Israel's apparent misuse of anti-terrorism legislation to attack some of the leading civil society organizations in Palestine. Such misuse must be rejected and countered," the experts said.

"The United Nations has been very clear that the drafting and application of anti-terrorism laws have to be rigorously consistent with international law and human rights protections, including the principles of legal certainty, necessity, proportionality, the rule of law and non-discrimination."

Against this background, the experts welcomed the statement issued on March 23, 2022 by the Belgian Minister of Development Cooperation, Meryame Kitir, who stated, "My administration has conducted an internal investigation into the allegations. This did not reveal any evidence that would confirm the allegations. I have therefore decided not to take any action against the Palestinian organizations in question. Nor is the evidence provided by the Israeli authorities such as to reconsider my decision."

The human rights experts emphasized that they recognize and applaud the indispensable work of Palestinian civil society in holding Israel accountable for its occupation and human rights violations and in promoting

democratic principles and human rights within Palestinian society.

"Applying anti-terrorism laws to well-regarded human rights defenders and civil society organizations – without persuasive evidence to substantiate these claims – seems to indicate a politically-motivated attempt by Israel to silence some of its most effective critics in violation of their rights to freedom of association and of expression," they said.

"If the international community is serious about its support for Palestinian self-determination and an end to the 55-year-old Israeli occupation, it must become more vocal and assertive in defending the work of these organizations, and reminding Israel of its international human rights obligations."

Accordingly, the human rights experts called upon the international community to:

Publicly conclude that Israel has not substantiated its allegations against the six organizations;

Resume, continue and even increase its financial and political support for the work of these six organizations; and

Demand that Israel retract the designations and cease its harassment of all Palestinian, Israeli and international human rights and civil society organizations which promote human rights and accountability in Israel and Palestine.

Certainly, the steps taken to counter the Israeli regime's odious crimes and designations are insufficient, but this is a good start, as the international organizations have been tight-lipped about the monstrous regime's actions.

Iran, as a pioneer of resistance and resilience of the brave Palestinian fighters, have always urged the global community to take effective measures to stop the Israeli regime's atrocities. Free-spirited people around the world have taken Iran's call, and expressed solidarity with the Palestinians multitudes of times, unlike their arrogant governments, who prefer to have economic relations with the child-killing regime.

Iran's military chief denounces Afghanistan bombings

TEHRAN – Major General Mohammad Baqeri, Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces, issued a message on Sunday sharply slamming the recent serial bombings in Afghanistan, calling for expedient measures to bring the perpetrators to justice and identify the root causes of such attacks.

Expressing sympathy with the bereaved families, General Baqeri said,

"Adoption of expedient measures as well as serious and practical steps ... to discover the reasons and causes of such disasters in addition to identification and categorical punishment of those groups and elements that are behind them is a necessity," Baqeri said in his message, according to Press TV.

He added that the perpetrators of such

terrorist acts have targeted the "security of this Islamic land, including its schools, mosques and [other] religious locations in line with the evil strategy of the White House and enemies of the Grand Prophet [of Islam]."

Afghanistan has been in turmoil since the Taliban took power again in August 2021 amid a chaotic U.S. troop withdrawal from the war-torn country.

Taliban was ruling Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001 before its regime was toppled by the U.S. following the September 11 attacks.

Since the August 2021, the country has been the scene of recurrent terrorist attacks, some of which have been claimed by the Daesh (ISIS) terrorist group.

Ayatollah Khamenei elaborated.

The Leader added twenty years ago George Bush spoke of new world order and American unipolar system. "That is, the United States is at the top of the world. Of course, he was wrong," he asserted.

Explaining about Bush's mistake, Ayatollah Khamenei said, "Then he realized that America was getting weaker day by day than it had been some twenty years ago. It is getting weaker day by day. (It is getting weaker) from within, in its domestic politics, in its foreign policy, in its economy, in its security, in everything, America has become weaker from twenty years ago to the present day."

Leader outlines decline of hegemonic system

From page 1 ► the universities, because today "the universities are not really comparable to the universities at the beginning of the Revolution."

'World is witnessing a new order'

The Leader went on to say that the world is on the verge of a new order.

"A new international order is ahead for the world, which is against the bipolar order that existed twenty years ago, the United States and the Soviet Union, the West and the East, and against the unipolar order that Bush Sr. declared some twenty years ago after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the world's Marxist apparatus and Socialist governments,"

Ambassadors of Latvia, Estonia, Montenegro, Nepal, Armenia and Burundi submit credentials to Raisi

Raisi says Iran opposes war, unilateralism



Latvia's ambassador



Burundi's ambassador



Montenegro's ambassador



Estonia's ambassador



Nepal's ambassador



Armenia's ambassador

TEHRAN – President Ebrahim Raisi received the credentials of the new ambassadors of Latvia, Estonia, Montenegro, Nepal, Armenia and Burundi in separate meetings on Monday.

Receiving the credentials of Latvia's ambassador to Tehran, Raisi stated that Iran's geographical location has provided an opportunity to enhance commerce between Asia and Europe.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the president said, "The presence of the United States and NATO in Afghanistan did not ensure the security of Afghanistan or the region, and it had no other achievement other than destruction and killings."

Raisi went on to say that "Iran is opposed to any move that would lead the world toward unilateralism and war."

For his part, Latvia's new ambassador Pteris Vaivars pointed to the history of diplomatic relations with Iran and said, "We are interested in expanding relations with Iran based on mutual understanding and friendship to ensure the interests of the two countries."

Iran and Estonia enjoy various capacities to strengthen ties

Raisi also referred to the historical background of friendly relations between Iran and Estonia, saying, "Iran and Estonia have various capacities in political, economic, and trade fields" especially through the North-South corridor.

"Strengthening relations

between Iran and Estonia will be a platform for promoting cooperation and international interactions between the two countries," the president added while receiving credentials of the new non-resident ambassador of Estonia.

For his part, the ambassador of the Republic of Estonia referred to the two countries' 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries, saying, "Estonia is interested in expanding relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran in various fields."

Iran's ties with Balkan states have been on the rise

While receiving the credentials of Montenegro's new ambassador, Raisi said Iran has always had good and growing relations with Balkan countries, including Montenegro.

"The two countries have good potential in various fields for the development of interactions and improving the level of relations."

Referring to Iran's long history of cordial ties with Montenegro, Raisi said, "The two countries have good capacities to improve the level of bilateral relations."

Elsewhere in his remarks, the president said, "War is by no means a desired event," adding that Iran has been encouraging peace, stability, and opposing war as a fundamental policy.

The Montenegrin ambassador, for his part, said, "I will try to strengthen

the mechanisms for the development of bilateral relations so that the two countries can develop interactions and relations."

Iran-Nepal affinities provide suitable basis for interaction

In receiving the credentials of Nepal's new ambassador, Raisi praised the cultural and civilizational affinities between Asian countries, including Iran and Nepal.

"The two countries can enrich their relations and interactions by relying on their rich cultural and civilizational background in various political, economic and especially cultural fields," Raisi remarked.

"Iran and Nepal have always had good and friendly relations," he said, adding, "It is essential that we make more efforts to protect our culture and civilization, including in the field of human rights."

At the meeting, the ambassador of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal said, "The two countries enjoy cultural proximity, in a way that there are hundreds of Persian words in the Nepali language, and we must use these appropriate cultural contexts to develop relations in various fields."

Iran, Armenia have long enjoyed cordial ties based on mutual respect

President Raisi also praised the traditionally maintained cordial ties between Iran and Armenia.

"There are various capacities

for development of friendly, long-lasting relations between Tehran and Yerevan," the president said while receiving the credentials of the Armenian ambassador.

During the meeting, Raisi also insisted on the Islamic Republic's unwavering position in rejecting any form of invasion, saying Iran has always backed national sovereignty and respect for countries' territorial integrity.

Armenia's new ambassador, for his part, stated, "Armenia is ready to raise the relations between the two countries to strategic level."

Iran seeking balanced ties with all countries

At the meeting with Gerard Bique Baku, ambassador of the Republic of Burundi, Raisi voiced his optimism for the growth of bilateral relations and said Iran is "trying to realize the existing capacities in line with meeting mutual benefits."

The president went on to say that "we pursue relations with different countries to ensure mutual interests and this is one of the main cornerstones of the diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran."

For his part, Burundi Ambassador Bique Baku said, "The Republic of Burundi is interested in raising its relations with Iran to the highest possible level and making a redoubled effort to make up for the delays caused by the Corona epidemic in the past two years."

Taliban refugee minister to travel to Tehran

TEHRAN — On Tuesday, the Taliban announced the visit of Khalil al-Rahman Haqqani, the group's Minister of Refugees, to Iran, following tensions on the Iranian-Afghan border.

According to the refugee ministry, the trip is scheduled to take place on the eve of Id al-Fitr.

Haqqani has said that the trip will focus on border issues, as well as the situation of Afghan refugees in Iran.

The visit comes as border tensions between Iran and Afghanistan have risen over the recent days.

The Taliban defense ministry announced on Monday that border tensions between the two sides have ended and the situation in the Islam Qala crossing has returned to normal after a day of suspension.

"The tensions between the two sides are based on a misunderstanding and have been fully resolved," said Enayatullah Kharazmi, a spokesman for the Taliban's Ministry of National Defense.

Earlier, Anamullah Samangani, the deputy spokesman for the interim

Taliban governing body announced the Taliban delegation's visit to Iran, citing a telephone conversation between the Iranian foreign minister and the acting Taliban foreign minister.

According to the official, the Iranian and Afghan foreign ministries discussed the general problems of Afghan travelers and migrants in Iran, bilateral relations, diplomatic missions and the security of diplomats, trade, economy and other issues, and the two sides stated that they would not allow enemies to create resentment, pessimism and sedition between the people of Afghanistan and Iran through propaganda campaigns.

"The Afghan delegation will travel to Iran in the near future to discuss Afghans living in the country," he added.

Iran says expects Taliban to act responsibly

In his weekly press briefing on Monday, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman expressed hope that the interim Taliban governing body won't misuse Iran's patience and goodwill.

Saeed Khatibzadeh made the remarks

when asked about the recent border disputes between Iranian and Afghan border guards.

"Our brave border guards on our border with Afghanistan have dealt with restraint to this day due to the internal situation in Afghanistan and the possible unfamiliarity of some of the border guards stationed by the interim Afghan governing body on the border. Of course, this issue and its repetition is a matter of concern," Khatibzadeh pointed out.

He added that Iran's border guards have a responsibility and it is their duty to prevent any illegal trespass.

"We were prepared to give the necessary training to the Afghan border guards on demarcating border and so on," he suggested.

The spokesman reiterated that the recurrence of these issues is a matter of very serious concern to Tehran.

"We have informed the interim governing body of Afghanistan in various ways, and we hope that this restraint would not lead to the misunderstanding and misuse of the other side."

Chinese defense minister to visit Iran on Wednesday



TEHRAN — General Wei Fenghe, the Minister of National Defense of China, will visit Tehran on Wednesday to meet with high-ranking Iranian defense authorities, including Defense Minister Amir Ashtiani, the Iranian defense ministry reported on Tuesday.

The Chinese defense minister, who

will be accompanied by a top military delegation, is scheduled to meet with Iran's top officials to discuss the latest international and regional developments, ways to improve interaction between the two countries' armed forces, bilateral relations and issues of mutual interest.

New Pakistani PM approached by Saudi Arabia

TEHRAN – April has been a politically tumultuous month for Pakistan which is grappling with a growing list of socio-economic and foreign policy challenges.

After nearly a four-year tenure, Imran Khan's job as prime minister came to an end. The Pakistani parliament ousted Khan in a rare no-confidence vote earlier this month, paving the way for a new cast of political leaders.

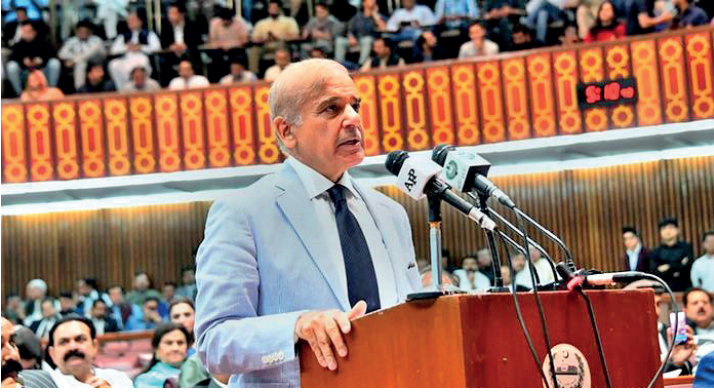
Pakistan's lawmakers elected on April 11 Shehbaz Sharif as the country's new prime minister after ousting Imran Khan. The cricket star-turned-politician vehemently opposed the vote and even sought to dissolve the parliament but his efforts got nowhere. Imran Khan and most of his party members resigned their national assembly seats before the vote.

The resignation of Imran Khan's allies facilitated the rise of Sharif as he was the only candidate for the top executive job after Khan loyalist Shah Mahmood Qureshi, the former foreign minister, withdrew his candidacy.

Sharif is the leader of the centrist Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N). He is a businessman and has served as former chief minister of Pakistan's most populous Punjab province.

Imran Khan has blamed the United States for his ouster, saying that Washington led a plot to unseat him after he visited Moscow against U.S. advice.

Pakistan's National Security Council, a body of top civil and military leaders, has rejected Khan's accusations that Washington had conspired to



overthrow his government through a parliamentary vote of confidence.

Asad Majeed, the former Pakistani ambassador to the U.S. who had written a cable to Islamabad about Washington's take on Khan's Moscow visit, briefed the civil and military leaders on a forum called National Security Committee (NSC), according to Al Jazeera.

"The NSC after reviewing the contents of the communication, the assessment received, and the conclusion presented by the security agencies, concludes that there has been no conspiracy," a statement from the office of new Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, who chaired the NSC meeting, said on Friday.

Aside from how Imran Khan was ousted, Pakistan is facing a litany of economic challenges that could tempt other countries to use to affect the nuclear-armed South Asian country's foreign policy.

Pakistan is over \$100 billion (€92 billion) in debt, needing over \$14 billion

dollars a year to meet debt servicing requirements on repaying loans that it owes to international monetary institutions.

Pakistan relies on foreign aid to achieve financial balancing. And Saudi Arabia is the major source of financial aid to Pakistan. But under Khan, Saudi-Pakistan ties were strained over the former prime minister's foreign policy positions which fell short of Saudi expectations. At times, Saudi Arabia even withdrew its hard currency deposits from Pakistan on short notice, causing uproar in Riyadh-Islamabad relations.

Under Khan, Pakistan developed good relations with other Islamic powers such as Turkey and Iran, a move that created a silent crisis with Riyadh. Shehbaz Sharif strongly criticized the Khan administration's foreign policy toward Saudi Arabia.

In August 2020, when then-Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi made remarks against Saudi Arabia, Sharif was keen to castigate him.

"FM's statement about brotherly Saudi Arabia is highly unfortunate & irresponsible. It flies in the face of history of our special & trusted relationship with the Kingdom. The cavalier attitude by this govt is undermining Pakistan's core relations with friendly countries!" Sharif tweeted at the time.

After Sharif assumed premiership a few weeks ago, Saudi Arabia also was keen to foster good relations with the new leader. The Saudis seem to hope that they would be able to distance Pakistan from Iran and bring it closer to Saudi Arabia.

Sharif will pay a visit to Saudi Arabia by the end of this month. This would be his first foreign trip as prime minister.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman called the new prime minister four days after he assumed office to congratulate him on his new job. Saudi media said the call confirmed the strength of relations between the two countries and stressed the need to strengthen them in all fields, noting that Sharif expressed his gratitude for the support provided by the Kingdom to Pakistan.

But Sharif, while appreciating all the assistance given by Saudi Arabia and other countries, is unlikely to radically change the balanced foreign policy of Pakistan. Because he knows that maintaining good relations with all important players serves the national interests of Pakistan. Some pundits have posited that Sharif needs to be careful in reviewing the demands that some regional powers may present in exchange for providing assistance.

Iran-Saudi talks will benefit regional countries: spox

TEHRAN- Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh has underlined the importance of reducing tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia, saying that de-escalation between the two countries will benefit the entire region.

"It is naturally true that the Iran-Saudi Arabia talks are helping to reduce tensions in the region. Iran and Saudi Arabia are two important countries in the Persian Gulf region and have effects beyond their own environment. It is natural that suitable relations between Tehran and Riyadh will benefit the two countries, and the region's nations as well as the friendly countries," Khatibzadeh said in remarks to ILNA news agency published on Tuesday.

He added, "However, there is a principle in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and that is that we do not include any third country in our bilateral relations. Our relations with Lebanon have been pursued independently of any third factor, and we believe that the Lebanese government and the Lebanese people deserve to have a better present and future, regardless of the secondary factors."

He added, "I do not confirm that the knot in the Iran-Saudi Arabia dialogue was the issue of Yemen. However, Yemen is one of the most important issues in our region today, and it is natural for Tehran and Riyadh to talk about regional issues. But from the first day, the Islamic Republic of Iran had opposed the issue of making bilateral talks conditional on a third issue. It is unlikely that the Saudi delegation has such an opinion. There are important and diverse issues between the two countries that deserve to be addressed in bilateral talks."

About the condition of electricity in Lebanon, the Foreign Ministry spokesman said "Iran's private sector is ready to enter Lebanon and help supply the country with electricity."

He pointed out that the Iranian public sector is also ready to act nationally and solve the electricity problem in Lebanon forever.

Khatibzadeh added that while "our friends in Lebanon have welcomed the offer" but no practical action has been made in this regard.

The fifth round of talks between Iran and Saudi

Arabia was held on April 21 in Baghdad with the attendance of Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi. The talks had been put on hold since September last year.

In its first official position on the fifth round of talks, Iran has hailed the talks as "positive" and "forward-moving."

"The fifth round of talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia in Baghdad was held last Thursday with the efforts of the Iraqi government and the preparations and assistance of the Omani government, and the talks were forward-moving and positive," Khatibzadeh said.

He made the remarks on Monday morning during a weekly press briefing.

"The frameworks that had been pre-planned were thoroughly discussed in these talks. And the talks were serious. If they are upgraded to the political level a bit, we can rapidly witness serious progress in various fields within the framework of the negotiations," Khatibzadeh explained.

The spokesman also raised the possibility of a meeting between the foreign ministers of Iran and Saudi Arabia. But he said, "We are not there yet."

The Iranian delegation in the Baghdad talks was led by Saeed Irvani, an assistant to the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council for international affairs. And the Saudi delegation was headed by Khalid al-Humaidan, the director general of the General Intelligence Directorate.

The Arabic service of Russia Today quoted an Iraqi source as saying that al-Kadhimi attended the meeting between the Saudi and Iranian security delegations in Baghdad.

The source added that "the two sides agreed to end the security negotiations, and they will move to diplomatic negotiations."

The source pointed out that "it is expected that the sixth meeting will be held on Iraqi soil."

The source continued, "The meeting was positive, and they agreed on a set of points of de-escalation between Riyadh and Tehran."

The source indicated that "the meeting lasted for

several hours, and the Iranian delegation paid a visit to religious places while the Saudi delegation left Baghdad late."

Khatibzadeh said the meeting focused on bilateral and regional issues.

"We discussed bilateral and regional issues with the Saudi delegation," he said.

In a tweet posted on Saturday, Nour news, a media outlet close to Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) said, "The fifth round of talks between the high representatives of #Iran and #SaudiArabia 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."

Nour News also released a photo showing al-Kadhimi is flanked by Irvani and al-Humaidan.

During a recent visit to Tehran, 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."

Saudi Arabia severed its diplomatic ties with Iran in 2016 after angry Iranian protestors stormed its embassy in Tehran in the wake of Saudi Arabia's execution of a Shia cleric. Talks to patch up ties between the two countries resumed in April last year and since then five rounds of talks have been held with the mediation of Iraq. But the talks are yet to produce tangible results. The last round resulted in the two sides deciding to move the talks from the security level to the diplomatic one.

Raisi sent a similar message to Zimbabwe to offer congratulation on the same occasion.

Congratulating the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Raisi expressed hope that with the efforts of the two countries, relations between the two countries would develop in all areas of interest.

SPORTS

Antonio Guerra Peixe named Iran beach handball coach

TEHRAN – Antonio Guerra Peixe has been named as new head coach of Iran beach handball coach.

The Brazilian well-known coach will lead Iran in the 2022 Beach Handball World Championships.

Guerra Peixe has won five gold medals out of eight World Beach Handball Championships.

The competition will be ninth edition of the championship which will be held from June 21 to 26 at Crete, Greece under the aegis of International Handball Federation (IHF).

It will be first time in history that the championship will be organized by Hellenic Handball Federation.

Fenerbahce to extend Saeid Marouf's deal

TEHRAN -Turkish men's club Fenerbahce will reportedly extend Saeid Marouf's contract.

The Iranian setter ended his nearly 6-month break from playing volleyball in January and joined the Turkish team.

Now, the Turkish media reports suggest that he will play one more season in the Efeler Ligi.

Marouf, the best setter of the 2014 FIVB World League, said goodbye to the Iran National Team at the end of the Tokyo Olympics last summer.

He briefly went to the U.S. for personal reasons but then reportedly signed for China's Beijing. Given that the beginning of the season there has constantly been postponed, Marouf decided that it was the better option for him to choose another destination, and the choice fell on Fenerbahce.

Barij Essence lose to Thai side in Asian Women's Club Volleyball C'ship

TEHRAN – Iranian volleyball club Barij Essence lost to Thailand's Diamond Food-Fine Chef Sport Club in straight sets (25-22, 25-20, 25-21) in the 2022 Asian Women's Club Volleyball Championship on Tuesday.

Barij Essence had defeated Kyrgyzstan VC and Uzbekistan's Jizzakh State Pedagogical Institute in their last two matches.

"We need to change the mentality of our players. They have to believe in their capabilities," Barij coach Fatemeh Shaban Khamseh said.

"We want to do our utmost best in the next two matches," she added.

The Iranian side, spearheaded by captain and opposite spiker Mahsa Kadkhoda, will play Kazakhstan's Altay on Thursday.

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 compete against one another in the single round-robin competition.

Japanese volleyball team JT Marvelous withdrew from the tournament due to the COVID-19 infection among their team members.

Sayyadmanesh relishing England prospect at Qatar World Cup

TEHRAN – Allahyar Sayyadmanesh admits he's relishing the chance to come up against England at this winter's World Cup in Qatar, which kicks off in November. The Hull City ace, who is currently on loan from Turkish giants Fenerbahce before a likely permanent move to East Yorkshire in the summer, is expected to play a prominent role for Iran when the competition gets underway in late November.

Iran, managed by Croatian Dragan Skocic will face England for the first time ever on November 21 in the pair's first game of the group stages in Doha, and it's an occasion the City frontman cannot wait for after his country secured qualification in some style winning eight of their 10 matches – this will be their sixth appearance at the finals, but they're yet to progress past the group stages.

Allahyar, who bagged his first Tigers goal in the recent 2-1 win over Cardiff City over the Easter weekend and impressed again against Reading, is expected to play a prominent role for his country in Qatar, and will likely lead the line when his side goes up against one of the pre-competition favourites in Gareth Southgate's Three Lions, huldaily@mail.co.uk reported.

"All the teams are good in the World Cup," the 21-year-old Iranian starlet told the Tigers matchday program.

"England are a top team so I'm happy that we will play them and it's always good to play against good teams, so I am looking forward to all the games and I hope we give one hundred per cent and show our best in the World Cup."

City's talented youngster will also come up against the United States and one opponent who is yet to be decided, with Wales waiting on the outcome of the June play-off match between Scotland and Ukraine which will be played at Hampden Park in Glasgow.

Before then, Allahyar will hope to add further to his City total in the remaining two games of the season, ahead of what is expected to be his permanent move from Turkish football to the MKM Stadium in a deal worth around £2m.

Nassaji and Aluminum to lock horns in Hazfi Cup final

TEHRAN – Nassaji and Aluminum football team will lock horns Wednesday night at the Iran's Hazfi Cup final.

The match will be held in Tehran's Azadi Stadium.

Mohammadhossein Zahedifard has been appointed to officiate the match.

He will be assisted by Yaghoub Hojati and Hadi Toosi in this match.

Aluminum defeated Mes Kerman in the semifinals while Aluminum emerged victorious over Khalij Fars Mahshahr.

The Iran's Hazfi Cup was founded in 1975 and Esteghlal are the most successful club with seven titles, followed by Persepolis who have won six titles.

Azmoun is on right track in Leverkusen

TEHRAN – Iranian forward Sardar Azmoun scored his first goal for Bayer Leverkusen since joining the Bundesliga team.

Leverkusen defeated Greuther Fürth 4-1 at Stadion am Laubenweg.

"Of course, I'm happy about my debut goal," Azmoun explained happily, "but for me it's just about giving everything in the current tough games. The most important thing is that we got the win because we want to go to the Champions League."

Coach Gerardo Seoane had bet on Azmoun as a tenth and was right: "Sardar set impulses in the last third with his runs, with good decisions. He has impressively demonstrated that we have more offensive potential with him, although we were a bit more vulnerable defensively."

Nevertheless, the plan with Azmoun worked and, after two games without scoring, brought Leverkusen back on track in the tight race for the premier class. Also striking: Especially in the first half, the interaction with Patrik Schick worked really well.

"Sardar is still missing the last 10, 15 percent explosiveness," says Seoane, "that will probably not change in the short term." Bayer's coach had recently said that the Iranian would need "complete preparation" to get to the top level physically. But one thing is clear: Azmoun is on the right track.

Iraqi parliament speaker due in Tehran on Wednesday: report

TERHAN – An Iraqi news outlet has reported that Iraqi Parliament Speaker Mohammad al-Halbousi is planning to pay a visit to Tehran on Wednesday.

Citing a source familiar with the matter, the Middle East News website said al-Halbousi will

arrive in Tehran on Wednesday accompanied by a parliamentary delegation.

Al-Halbousi was originally scheduled to travel to Tehran on March 27, but his office announced the postponement due to the two parties' constitutional and parliamentary commitments,

as well as the appearance of Covid symptoms in the speaker of the Iranian parliament.

In a late March statement, the office of al-Halbousi said the visit was at the invitation of the Iranian Parliament Speaker, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf.

and Cooperation Naledi Pandor, Amir Abdollahian also said, "I hope that with the determination of the two governments and by using the existing possibilities, we will witness the growth and expansion of relations between the two countries."

Earlier, Iranian President Ebrahim

BMI inks MOU with NIORDC to fund oil storage project



NIORDC Head Jalil Salari (R) and BMI Managing Director Mohammadreza Farzin exchange signed MOU documents in the presence of Oil Minister Javad Oji

TEHRAN – Bank Meli Iran (BMI) signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC) on Tuesday to finance the construction of an oil storage facility in southern Hormozgan Province.

Held in Tehran, the signing ceremony was attended by senior officials including Oil Minister Javad Oji, NIORDC Head Jalil Salari, and BMI Managing Director Mohammadreza Farzin, Shana reported.

To become the largest petroleum products storage facility in the country, the mentioned oil storage facility which is called Shahid Mahdavi Storage is going to have the capacity to store 600 million liters of oil.

Following the construction of Shahid Soleimani Petro-refinery and Persian Gulf Mehr Refinery in Hormozgan Province and

the increase in the output of oil products in the province, this storage facility is aimed at increasing the storage capacity of such products in the region.

According to Salari, increasing the capacity of the country's petroleum products storage facilities is being seriously pursued in line with the development of refining projects in the country.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, the official mentioned the positive cooperation with BMI in other projects and said that so far, the bank has provided nearly nine billion dollars for NIORDC projects.

Referring to the ways of financing these projects, Salari said that NIORDC attracts investment for some projects by awarding them under Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) contracts, and for some projects the company uses government resources.

"We have plans during this year to be able to sign a memorandum of understanding every month to attract financial resources that have nothing to do with government resources," he added.

The official further mentioned the NIORDC's underway knowledge-based projects and noted that several projects are currently under assessment and NIORDC will probably sign various MOUs in different sectors including software development and smartening of operation in the coming months.

"I hope that the necessary permits will be obtained sooner and the bidding process will be implemented, and finally we will be able to follow the projects one by one," Salari added.

Over 3.4m tons of steel products exported in a year

From page 1 ► Based on the report, Iran produced 5.3 million tons of crude steel during the mentioned 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).

Power plants' overhaul operations to be completed by late May

TEHRAN – The overhaul operations of power plants across Iran will be completed by May 21 and the mentioned power plants will be ready for the summer peak consumption period, Energy Ministry's Spokesman for Electricity Industry Mostafa Rajabi Mashhadi said.

According to Rajabi Mashhadi, about 100,000-megawatt capacity of power plants are currently going through overhaul operations, the work on 85 percent of which has been completed, IRIB reported.

In previous years, it was common for

the overhaul operations to be completed by mid-June but this year due to increased consumption it is necessary to put the power plants back to work earlier, the official said.

In order to ensure the proper operation of power plants in the peak consumption period, the annual power plants overhaul program in Iran starts every year in early September.

Summer months constitute Iran's peak demand periods, so most of the power plant overhaul programs are scheduled to take place during the autumn, winter, and spring seasons.

TEDPIX climbs 15,000 points on Tuesday



TEHRAN- TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), rose 15,526 points to 1.522 million on Tuesday.

As reported, over 12.608 billion securities worth 65.2 trillion rials (about

\$234.5 million) were traded at the TSE.

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

RAI head holds talks with foreign minister on rail transit issues

TEHRAN – Head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (known as RAI) Miad Salehi met with Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian on Monday to discuss issues related to rail transit through the country.

In this meeting, which was held at the place of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, Amir-Abdollahian was briefed on the latest developments and achievements in the field of rail transit, Mehr News Agency reported.

Salehi pointed to the significant growth in the transit of goods in the last six months compared to the same period last year and stressed RAI's determination in operating all facilities to the maximum in order to boost transit through Iran and realize the potential capacities of the country's rail transport industry.

He also presented a report on the latest measures taken to build the missing railway links in the



north-south corridor, including Rasht-Astara and Chabahar-Zahedan railways.

Pointing to the importance of transit in the government's economic diplomacy and the policies for interaction with neighboring countries, Amir-Abdollahian, for his part, thanked the RAI head and all those involved in the country's railway industry for their extensive efforts to improve the country's transit

position in the region.

The foreign minister stressed the continued support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for such efforts and stated that his ministry will follow up with relevant officials to help resolve some bottlenecks and shortcomings in this regard.

During the meeting, the deputy foreign minister for economic diplomacy and the deputy head of RAI for railway operations

also presented a report on the activities related to facilitating rail transit in Sarakhs and Incheh Borun as well as multimodal transportation in the northern ports of the country.

Iran is one of the countries that have a special status in trade and transit relations due to its strategic location and special geography, as the country is the passage of several important international corridors.

In the south of Iran is the Persian Gulf, which is home to the world's major oil-producing countries. This region is considered the energy bottleneck of the world.

In the north of Iran is the Caspian Sea, which is the best bridge between Iran, Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan and can play an important role in trade between these countries.

The country, also, borders Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan, and Afghanistan to the west and east.

Annual pistachio exports exceed \$914m

TEHRAN- Iran exported 135,322 tons of pistachio worth \$914,427,826 during the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20), the spokesman of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced.

Rouhollah Latifi said Iran's pistachio was exported to 75 countries during the year 1400, ILNA reported.

According to Latifi, of the total exported pistachios in the previous year, 115,557 tons were unpeeled fresh pistachios, the value of which was about \$696,043,124.

Also, more than 19,336 tons of dried pistachio worth over \$215.879 million were exported to foreign destinations in the previous year.

Germany, with \$50 million worth of imports, India with \$44 million, United Arab Emirates (UAE) with \$29 million, Iraq with \$25 million, and Turkey with \$13 million were the top five



export destinations for dried pistachios.

However, in total, China was the first export destination for the Iranian product importing \$199 million worth of pistachios, followed by India, Russia, Iraq, and Kyrgyzstan which imported \$85 million, \$53 million, \$50 million, and \$45 million of pistachios, respectively.

The official noted that the country's pistachio exports in the previous year decreased by 33 percent compared to the

preceding year due to drought and damage to the pistachio crops as well as the entry of pistachios from other countries into the world markets.

According to the Director-General of the Iranian Agriculture Ministry's Office of Cold and Dry Climate Fruits Darab Hasani, the country had exported 203,637 tons of pistachios worth \$1.371 billion in the Iranian calendar year 1399 (ended on March 20, 2021).

In August 2020, Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) held a pistachio export desk meeting to investigate the challenges and barriers in the way of the country's pistachio exports.

Addressing the meeting, TPO's former Head Hamid Zadboum put emphasis on the significant status of pistachio in Iran's export basket as the top agricultural export item and said that a national view toward removing the pistachio export barriers should be adopted.

More than 1.7m tons of commodities traded at IME in a week

TEHRAN- During the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday), 1.716 million tons of commodities worth more than \$552 million were traded at Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME).

As reported by the IME's Public Relations and International Affairs Department, the exchange traded on its metals and minerals trading floor 1.307 million tons of commodities valued at almost \$270 million.

On this floor, the IME's customers purchased 1,089,446 tons of cement, 106,138 tons of steel, 43,425 tons of aluminum, 22,000 tons of sponge iron, 11,035 tons of zinc, 9,740 tons of copper, 1,000 tons of iron ore, 250 tons of lead, 150 tons of molybdenum concentrate, 24 tons of precious metals concentrate and 13 kg of gold bars.

Furthermore, the IME saw trade of 365,743 tons of commodities on both domestic and export pits of its oil and petrochemical trading floor valued at more than \$256 million.

The exchange's customers

purchased on this floor 105,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 114,161 tons of bitumen, 79,688 tons of polymeric products, 36,257 tons of chemicals, 15,000 tons of lube cut, 9,450 tons of sulfur, 4,907 tons of base oil, 100 tons of insulation and 90 tons of argon.

Last but not least was the IME's side market with 43,103 tons of commodities traded on it.

The IME traded in its physical market 7.231 million tons of commodities with a total trading value of more than \$2.378 billion during the past Iranian calendar month Farvardin (ended on April 20), the first month of Iranian calendar year.

The exchange sold on its oil and petrochemical trading floor 1.372 million tons of commodities valued at almost \$985 million.

The IME's customers purchased on this floor 412,800 tons of vacuum bottom, 335,276 tons of bitumen, 312,673 tons of polymeric products, 141,990 tons of lube cut, 132,265 tons of chemicals, 20,695 tons of sulfur, 14,594 tons of oil, 330 tons

of argon, 300 tons of insulation and 200 tons of slops wax.

Furthermore, the exchange saw trade of more than 5.748 million tons of commodities worth more than \$1.342 billion on its metals and minerals trading floor.

Items traded on this floor included 4,029,000 tons of cement, 1,024,000 tons of steel, 353,000 tons of iron ore, 260,500 tons of sponge iron, 55,400 tons of aluminum, 26,500 of zinc, 28,200 tons of copper, 450 tons of molybdenum concentrate, 450 tons of coke, 700 tons of lead, 48 tons of precious metals concentrate and 49 kg of gold bars.

Last was the IME's side market on which the exchange traded 110,781 tons commodities.

As previously reported, the value of trades at Iran Mercantile Exchange rose 102 percent, and the volume of trades at the exchange increased 128 percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1400 (ended on March 20), which was the highest level of growth in the history of the exchange since its establishment.



Statistical data show that in the past year, in addition to new records in the volume and value of trades of different products, 10 major records in total value and physical market trades were registered. In a way that besides the total value of trades, the volume and value of physical market trades, the volume and value of industrial products and petrochemicals trades, the value of oil products trades, and the volume and value of side market trades all hit records.

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

East Azarbaijan's annual fishery output stands at over 9,000 tons

TEHRAN- The fishery output of East Azarbaijan province, in the northwest of Iran, stood at over 9,000 tons in the past Iranian calendar year 1400 (ended on March 20), a provincial official announced.

Mentioning the province's capacities in terms of fisheries, Qasem Jafarvand, the director for fisheries and aquatic affairs in the province's Agriculture Department, said that while over 9,000 tons of warm-water and cold-water fishes as well as sturgeons were produced in East Azarbaijan during the previous year, it is hoped that the output will increase significantly and some big steps will be taken in this due in the present year.

As stated by an official with Iran Fisheries Organization (IFO), production of 714,000 tons



of fishery has been targeted for the current Iranian calendar year.

Morteza Afrasiabi, the acting head of the IFO's fishery development department, said

that of the mentioned figure, 277,000 tons will be fishes bred in cages and 70,000 tons will be shrimps.

Achieving the targeted 714,000 tons of fishery requires infrastructure as well as credits and banking facilities, the official added.

Fishery production has increased noticeably in Iran in recent years.

Enjoying high quality, Iran's fishery products were sold easily in the export markets, and also some new export destinations welcomed these products in the past three years; as new markets including China, South Korea, and the Eurasian Union nations opened up for Iranian fishery products.

Ukraine war is a Russia-US confrontation where Ukraine has only become a casualty: researcher

From page 1 ► on their associations as well as tilt in the war. It further shows the depth of fissures between the U.S. and Russia that is the result of the international order as well as the international alliance system today. Whilst the current conflict will not give birth to a new order it will certainly crack open the vulnerabilities and faults in the current world order that has been earlier challenged by China.

Do you expect the Ukraine war lead to a nuclear confrontation between Russia and Western powers?

While both the powers that are involved on the opposite end of the Ukraine crisis are nuclear-capable, the idea or estimate of the possibility of a nuclear confrontation on a limited scale cannot be avoided. Hopefully, sanity will prevail and the escalation however bad can be controlled before it leads to a nuclear confrontation only if the allies of both the U.S. and Russia move to a third party mediation either by a country or



the UN and limit the increase in casualties and work towards the overall de-escalation.

Do you think Western military aid to Ukraine is sufficient to confront Russia?

No. One needs to be mindful that the West will never make Ukraine completely independent in a military sense by providing military aid whether in terms of finances, equipment, hard/soft-ware, or training. While the U.S.

supports Ukraine, the war in its essence is a confrontation between Russia and the U.S. where Ukraine has only become a casualty. If anything, more than aid what Ukraine needs is active diplomatic support from around the world that the U.S. can garner along with support from NATO.

Russia has accused Washington of collaborating with Kyiv in chemical research. Your comment please?

When two major powers lock horns in a war it is fairly hard to identify where the propaganda begins and ends. While the U.S. has used accusation tactics in its war such as the Iraq invasion where it accused it of WMDs, Russia is no exception.

What are the fallouts of the Ukraine war on regional players like Pakistan? Some analysts say Imran Khan is paying the cost of his visit to Russia.

The fallout of such conflicts is more detrimental in long term than in the short. Pakistan has been paying a hefty price for aligning with the U.S. during the Soviet war and the subsequent wars. Pakistan is already on a diplomatic tightrope with Russia and aligning with a single party will only increase its isolation from others. Diplomatic wisdom is to try and maintain a balance in its outreach to global conflicts and move to more mutually agreeable solutions that involve international organizations such as the UN as moderators.

UN calls on U.S. to alleviate Afghan suffering

From page 1 ► It said that “while gender-based violence has been a long-standing and severe threat to women and girls, it has been exacerbated by the measures imposed by the U.S., together with the drought”

Analysts say despite the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and its disastrous 20-year occupation that saw poverty levels increase, the American-led withdrawal from the country in August last year has seen Washington still harming Afghans and exacerbating the humanitarian crisis there.

To make matters worse, in February, U.S. President Joe Biden issued an Executive Order to continue blocking the funds and use half of the money for purposes within the U.S.

Observers note the money belongs to the Afghan people and Washington's collective punishment of the Afghan nation by blocking access to their money is not something new.

The White House, regardless of which party is in power, has increasingly resorted to sanctions and asset freezes of other sovereign countries in a common warfare tactic against governments who rule over independent nations around the globe that oppose Washington's foreign policies.

However, analysts believe this type of collective punishment by the U.S. the aim of which to try and get the population revolting against their own governments over their economic affairs will backfire on America itself and its currency the dollar.

In a statement, the UN rights experts appealed to Washington saying that humanitarian exemptions to Afghan sanctions, agreed to by the UN Security Council last December, has led to “no significant progress” in financial or commercial aid to Afghanistan, as many foreign banks were concerned about breaching restrictions.

Gravely concerned about the humanitarian crisis in the country, the experts added that it “puts at serious risk the lives of more than half of the country's population”.

Echoing the UN Secretary-General, who recently described it as an “epic humanitarian crisis on the verge of a development catastrophe”, the experts urged countries in particular the U.S. to re-assess any adopted unilateral measure and lift all obstacles in providing the necessary financial and humanitarian aid.

In January, the UN launched its largest-ever humanitarian appeal for a single country, requiring more than \$5 billion this year to help the Afghan people.

According to international assessments, Afghanistan has now the highest number of people in

emergency food insecurity in the world, with more than 23 million in need of assistance, and approximately 95 percent of the population having insufficient food consumption.

Of particular concern is the vulnerability of more than four million internally displaced, including people belonging to minorities and over 3.5 million seeking refuge in neighboring countries, the majority of whom have been provided refugee by authorities in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Furthermore, the experts highlighted that since the December adoption of Security Council resolution 2651 and the establishment of humanitarian exemptions to existing sanctions, there hasn't been any progress in financial or commercial flows for development and humanitarian purposes to Afghanistan by States or international financial institutions.

The group said “since the adoption, in December 2021, of the UN Security Council resolution 2651 and the establishment of humanitarian exemptions to the existing sanctions regime, mentioned in our last statement, there has been, unfortunately, no significant progress in the financial and commercial flows by States and international financial institutions for development and humanitarian purposes in Afghanistan. Humanitarian actors face serious operational challenges due to the uncertainty caused by banks' zero-risk policies and over-compliance with sanctions.”

The uncertainty caused by banks' zero-risk policies and over-compliance with sanctions has left humanitarian actors facing serious operational challenges.

According to the experts, the U.S. Executive Order may “exacerbate the climate of uncertainty among relevant actors...resulting in over-zealous compliance with sanctions,” thus preventing Afghans from “access to basic humanitarian goods”.

The UN experts called on the U.S. to seriously consider the growing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and reconsider its position towards the plight of Afghans living in poverty; recalling that countries have an obligation under international human rights law to guarantee that activity under their jurisdiction does not result in human rights violations.

They say “such overly broad formulations may exacerbate the climate of uncertainty among relevant actors, including banks, businesses, and humanitarian donors, resulting in over-zealous compliance with sanctions thus preventing people of Afghanistan from any access to basic humanitarian goods.”

They also called U.S. authorities to take all appropriate action to reverse its unilateral measure



toward Kabul and contribute to the international effort in addressing the growing humanitarian crisis in the country.

The experts called on the U.S. to take the matter “into serious consideration”

They added, “we recall that States have an obligation under international human rights law to guarantee that any activity under their jurisdiction or control does not result in human rights violations, and in this regard, we urge the U.S. authorities to take all appropriate action, in line with its international human rights obligations, to reverse this unilateral measure and to decisively contribute to the international efforts in addressing the growing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.”

The 14 special rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country's situation. They are independent of any government and are not paid for their work.

They have sent their observations and warning to the U.S. administration saying “prior to the issuance of this press release, we communicated our concerns and recommendations to the U.S. Government, which has, to this day, much to our regret, not responded.”

However, analysts say they are not surprised by Washington's silence and the lack of empathy it is displaying despite the mounting evidence of a humanitarian catastrophe.

Critics argue that is very concerning when Washington has further evidence now from independent experts about how it's sanctions is worsening the dire humanitarian crisis.

This is a crisis that was created by the U.S. itself, yet the Biden administration chooses not to take any action to address America's responsibility for wreaking havoc in Afghanistan with its 20-year occupation.

Meanwhile, others say the war in Ukraine has overshadowed the dire humanitarian problems in countries like Afghanistan and Yemen where the U.S. played a direct role in the crises.

help him gain some points.

The General Secretary's tour almost coincided with other developments directly related to Russia. The UN General Assembly will vote on a draft resolution to reduce Russia's position in this organization on April 26.

The resolution appears to be an attempt to browbeat Russia, the newspaper writes. At the same time, Turkey's surprising decision to prohibit Russian aircraft, both military and civilian, from flying to Syria over its airspace, made just before the Secretary General's arrival in Ankara, also appears to be a continuation of that. “Are these events related? To a certain extent, yes. Turkey says that the longer the

conflict continues, the longer Russia refuses substantive dialogue, the more Ankara will be forced to get involved in using pressure on Russia, because it is under pressure from the United States and NATO itself,” expert of the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) Kirill Semenov told the newspaper.

The option of exchanging Ukraine for Syria is unacceptable to the Kremlin, thus negotiations on this are unlikely, Nezavisimaya Gazeta writes. At the same time, there is yet to be a victorious end to Russia's special operation, which means that a variety of options, including an agreement on specific circumstances, cannot be ruled out.

US won't rule out military action if China establishes base in Solomon Islands

One of the most senior U.S. officials in the Pacific has refused to rule out military action against Solomon Islands if it were to allow China to establish a military base there, saying that the security deal between the countries presented “potential regional security implications” for the U.S. and other allies.

Ambassador Daniel Kritenbrink, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, was part of a high-level U.S. delegation to the Pacific country last week.

He said the US team, which also included the National Security Council coordinator for Indo-Pacific affairs, Kurt Campbell, had a 90-minute “constructive and candid” meeting with Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare in which the US team detailed concerns about its recently signed security deal with China.

“We wanted to outline for our friends in the Solomons, what our concerns are,” said Kritenbrink. “Prime Minister Sogavare indicated that in the Solomon Islands’ view, the agreement they’ve concluded has solely domestic implications. But we’ve made clear that there are potential regional security implications of the agreement not just for ourselves, but for allies and partners across the region.”

On Tuesday, Kritenbrink reiterated the United States’ willingness to act in the region if a military base were established by China.

“Of course, we have respect for the Solomon Islands sovereignty, but we also wanted to let them know that if steps were taken to establish a de facto permanent military presence, power projection capabilities, or a military installation, then we would have significant concerns, and we would very naturally respond to those concerns,” he said.

When asked what that response could involve, he said: “Look, I’m not going to speculate and I’m not in a position to talk about what the United States may or may not do in such a situation.”

Pressed on whether he would rule out the prospect of the US taking military action against Solomon Islands were a naval base to be established, and, if not, whether he was comfortable with Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison's talk of the base being a “red line” for Australia, he said: “I don’t have a lot to add beyond what I’ve already stated.”

In a statement last week, the Biden administration said the U.S. would “respond accordingly” if China was allowed to establish a long-term presence on the islands, while noting assurances from Sogavare that he had no intention of allowing a military base.

The rhetoric escalated in the wake of the



statement, with the Australian Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, saying Australia had “the same red line” as the U.S. when it came to China's involvement in Solomon Islands, and Defense Minister Peter Dutton using his Anzac Day address on Monday to declare: “Australia should prepare for war”, claiming that China was “on a very deliberate course at the moment”.

Kritenbrink also noted China's military ambitions, saying: “I think it's important in this context, to keep in mind that we do know that the PRC [People's Republic of China] is seeking to establish a more robust overseas logistics and basic infrastructure that would allow the PLA [People's Liberation Army] to project and sustain military power at greater distances. So we wanted to have that candid conversation with our friends in the Solomons. We outlined our concerns ... and we've indicated that we'll continue to monitor the situation closely and continue to engage with them going forward.”

The text of the security deal which was signed by China and Solomon Islands is secret, though Solomon Islands MPs have called for the prime minister to release it publicly.

“I think it's clear that only a handful of people in a very small circle have seen this agreement. And the prime minister himself has been quoted publicly as saying he would only share the details with China's permission, which I think is a source of concern as well,” said Kritenbrink.

However, a draft of the deal was leaked on social media last month and contained provisions permitting China to “make ship visits to, carry out logistical replenishment in, and have stopover and transition in Solomon Islands”.

Kritenbrink said that “the United States of America is not in the business of asking countries to choose between the United States and China or anyone else”. But that it is interested in promoting “a proactive vision for again the shared interests and principles that we believe are vital to all of our friends across the region”.

(Source: The Guardian)

IAEA chief expects deep cooperation with China on nuclear law

Rafael Grossi, director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), spoke highly of China's nuclear law system on Monday, saying he expects the “constructive and permanent conversation” with China on nuclear energy to deepen in the future.

In an exclusive interview with Xinhua on the sidelines of the agency's first International Conference on Nuclear Law: The Global Debate, Grossi said he appreciates the “emphasis on safety” in China's nuclear law system, which covers relevant standards in production, transportation, waste and radiological protection, among others.

He noted that all these aspects are also covered in the atomic energy law that China is currently formulating.

The IAEA has maintained an “extremely constructive dialogue with China” and has kept in permanent contact with the Chinese nuclear regulator and major Chinese nuclear energy companies, the chief of the United Nations nuclear watchdog said.

“The issue of nuclear energy is of paramount importance for China,” he said. “We (the IAEA and China) are here as good partners, each having its own role in supporting the other in this indispensable work.”

Grossi said China is one of the world's leading constructive dialogue users that boast a developed nuclear industry, and the country has been developing its domestic nuclear energy sector to advance its decarbonization drive and has also been exporting relevant technologies to other countries.

The first International Conference on Nuclear Law: The Global Debate opened in Vien-



na on Monday has brought together lawyers and representatives of national authorities, international organizations, nuclear industry and civil society from 127 countries to discuss emerging issues and trends in nuclear law and the applicable legal frameworks.

“At this time of change and growth and increased need for nuclear energy in all its aspects, the legal side of the (nuclear) activity must also be strengthened,” Grossi said.

He added that the IAEA nuclear law conference, by bringing together representatives of countries worldwide, would help “make all voices heard” and help the IAEA “take the legal normative framework forward at pace with the development of nuclear energy.”

The IAEA conference, which includes forums, exhibitions and other sideline meetings, will run until Friday.

Is Syria Turkey's bargaining chip with Kremlin to jumpstart Ukraine peace talks?

On Tuesday, April 26, Vladimir Putin was to meet with UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, who has just returned from Turkey, where he discussed the prospects for resolving the Russian-Ukrainian conflict with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The day before, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu made an unexpected announcement, claiming that a particular agreement between Russia and Ukraine was nearing completion. Neither Moscow nor Kiev acknowledged his statements, but nor did they reject them. According to Nezavisimaya Gazeta, this adds to the intrigue surrounding Guterres’



talks in the Turkish and Russian capitals.

The minister's comments could be interpreted as a domestic policy statement - Erdogan's approval ratings are declining, and presidential elections will be held next year, the newspaper writes. His role as a mediator in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict should



Ancient burial places discovered in northern Iran



TEHRAN – Archaeologists have discovered ancient burial spaces during a special survey they conducted in Rudsar, northern Iran.

Preliminary investigation suggests the burial places and their associated structures date from different historical eras, the provincial tourism chief said on Tuesday.

Arranged by Gilan province's tourism directorate, the study is aimed to reveal possible historical layers disappearing beneath the modern town, Vali Jahani said.

"We hope to find valuable information

about the cultural background of Rudsar when results of the survey are obtained."

According to historical texts, Rudsar rose to prominence as a prosperous coast town in the early Islamic era, the official added.

Gilan is well-known for its rich Iron Age cemeteries such as Marlik that have been excavated over the past century. It was once within the sphere of influence of the successive Achaemenian, Seleucid, Parthian, and Sassanid empires that ruled Iran until the 7th century CE. The subsequent Arab conquest of Iran led to the rise of many local dynasties, and Gilan acquired an independent status that continued until 1567.

Sophisticated Rasht, the capital of Gilan province, has long been a weekend escape for residents of Tehran who are looking to sample the famous local cuisine and hoping for some pluvial action – it's the largest, and wettest town in the northern region. Gilan is divided into a coastal plain including the large delta of Sefid Rud and adjacent parts of the Alborz Mountain range.

Laft's historical core undergoes restoration

TEHRAN – A restoration work has commenced on the historical texture of Laft, a southernmost Iranian village in the Persian Gulf.

It is the third phase of a restoration project aimed to amend labyrinthine alleys and aging structures of the fishing village, ISNA quoted a local official as saying on Tuesday.

The project seeks to help protect and preserve Laft's historical texture and its cultural values, the official said.

Situated on the northern coast of Qeshm Island, Laft is one of the best places in Iran to encounter the fast-disappearing traditional culture of the Persian Gulf.

Perched on a rocky slope overlooking the Khoran Strait, Laft has a wonderfully photogenic roovescape of badgirs (wind towers) and minarets.

According to Lonely Planet, views are best from the hill near the ruins of the Portuguese-built Naderi Fort. "From this vantage point, you'll also see dozens of ancient wells and a white-domed Ab-Anbar (water cistern)."

Moreover, a few hundred meters north of Laft is one of Qeshm's many lunge-building yards. These traditional cargo



boats are still used to carry goods back and forth across the Persian Gulf. Laft is also the place to go for a boat trip into the nearby Harra Sea Forest.

Qeshm, itself, 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.

Known as the province of islands, Hormozgan province is located on the northern coasts of the Persian Gulf. It embraces scenic islands among which Kish, Hormuz, Hengam, and Qeshm are the most beautiful ones and top tourist destinations in southern Iran.

Laft was registered on the national heritage list in 2006.

TEHRAN – Tehran is getting ready to host the 1st edition of the Islamic World Tourism Exhibition (IWTE) aimed to turn the spotlight on lesser-known destinations from 15 countries.

Arranged in close collaboration with the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO), the event will touch upon sightseeing tours, ecotourism centers, medical services, e-services, and pilgrimage as well, according to organizers.

Islamic countries have immense potential to deepen tourism relations, Abdolkarim Sadeqdoust, who presides over the ICESCO office in Iran, said on Tuesday.

Sadeqdoust made the remarks during a press conference where he also stated: "We are trying to introduce Iran as one of the axes of the Islamic world in the ICESCO."

A hidden gem and a backpacker's dream, Iran holds vast potential as a holiday destination with stunning landscapes, numerous World Heritage sites, and above all, its hospitable people.

The country is often portrayed as "one of the safest to travel" by most visitors who experienced it, particularly solo female travelers and families, and the Lonely Planet calls its people the "friendliest in the world."

"My advice is: don't believe what you hear on the news. Explore the place, talk to locals and come to your own conclusions. Come to Iran with an open mind and I guarantee you'll make many great friends in Iran," Polish traveler Anna Karsten wrote in her travelogue in 2020.

"To me, being uncomfortable once or twice doesn't mean that the place is dangerous. I never once felt physically threatened, unsafe, or at

Tehran to host 1st tourism exhibit of Islamic world



risk, even when I was wandering the streets of Iran. I felt safer in Iran than if I was walking around in NYC. Even the tap water was safe in Iran!"

Ellis Veen, a cultural anthropologist from the Netherlands who has traveled for more than 20 years to over 50 countries along the ancient Silk Road, says: "After my visit to Iran one of the most frequent questions I got is whether it was safe for me to travel to Iran as a woman. My short answer would be yes and I would recommend Iran to anyone considering it."

"Iran is one of the safest countries in the Middle East (West

Asia) and Iranians are among the friendliest people I have met in my travel history."

It's no surprise for those who are aware of Iranian culture and the great hospitality its people are famous for. Iranians are traditionally generous hosts giving the best of what they have to their guests. In traditional Iranian culture, guests are cherished like precious jewels. It is here in Iran that a typical invitation for a cup of tea can be extended to an overnight stay, or a humble asking for directions may forge a warm friendship.

Long shunned by Western travelers, the Islamic Republic

Off the grid: discover millennia-old place of worship in northwest Iran

TEHRAN – With their breathtaking architecture, splendid facades, and sheer size, places of worship are often some of the most beautiful buildings. However, there are some celebrated for their bizarre situation or great antiquity.

Qadamgah, which is the main focus of this story, is a millennia-old subterranean temple repurposed to be a mosque centuries ago.

In fact, the creation of rock architecture across the Iranian plateau is influenced by the religious, geographical, and political atmosphere of their time.

Such structures are mostly formed by dominated empires of the time. Sometimes a place of worship has continued to be served in later periods but it has been changed in its functions. Experts say one of the reasons that have attracted men to mountain and rock cliffs in different schools was the religious traditions of the community.

Qadamgah is said to be a place of worship where ancient Mithraism rituals were observed before the advent of Islam.

The place of worship, which sometimes is referred to as a cave, is situated upstream of Qadamgah's graveyard, near Badamyar village, in the environs of Azarshahr in the northwestern



West Azarbaijan province. It is located some 200 meters from a historical cemetery of the same name.

Apart from being called a temple, mosque, or cave, the dwelling is of high importance in terms of architecture as well as cultural and anthropological values. It was recorded in a list of the country's natural cultural heritage with register number 779 in the Iranian calendar year 1347 (1968).

Locally called Azarshahr Mosque, the structure is a travel destination as well, attracting thousands of visitors to the region per annum.

According to the sanctity of mountains and rocks in the ancient religions, especially in

Mithraism, valuable temples and places of worship have emerged in the mountains. Their obvious characteristic is circular dome-shaped spaces; simplicity, the arrangement of spaces, and the way of creating light that corresponds with the tradition of Mithraism in Iran.

Mehr Temple in Maragheh, Dashkasan in Zanjan, and Qadamgah Temple in Azarshahr are the rock temples in northwest Iran that signs and symbols on them indicate the performance of Mithraism duties in these temples.

The outside perspective of the Qadamgah temple is very modest and at the first glance may not even attract the attention of passersby. This perspective is a small opening beneath a rock shelter.

Furthermore, the main area of Qadamgah is one of the coolest and most attractive spaces that can be thought about in an ancient edifice. This space that is drilled in the cave is a cone with a base diameter of 15 to 15.70 meters. The cone height is 12.30 meters and the diameter of the light well is 105 cm. The walls have been cut regularly from the bottom to the top of the cone.

The main area of the Qadamgah Temple is one of the coolest and most attractive spaces one usually expects from an ancient edifice.

Strawberry harvest festival to develop tourism in Kordestan



TEHRAN – The annual strawberry harvest festival has the potential to promote tourism in Kordestan, the provincial tourism chief has said.

Over the years, the festival has been able to play an important role in the development of the economy, the creation of handicrafts, and the sale of agricultural products in the western Iranian province, Yaqub Gulyian explained on Monday.

The upcoming festival, scheduled for May 17 and 18, aims to introduce the tourism potential of Kordestan and to revive and preserve the old traditions and pass them on to the next generation, the official added.

has steadily stepped-up efforts to use tourism, over the past couple of years, to help promote its international image battered by endless opposition mostly from the U.S.

Before the COVID pandemic, Iran tourism had constantly been growing, reaching more than eight million visitors in the Iranian calendar year 1398 (started March 21, 2019). That surge, however, helped prejudices to become thick and thin.

Some experts believe even before the pandemic, Iran's tourism was already grappling with some challenges, on top of those Western "media propaganda" aimed at scaring potential travelers away from the Islamic Republic. They say Iran is still somehow "unknown" for many potential travelers due to such a "media war".

In the realm of medical tourism, many domestic experts believe it is a win-win opportunity both for the country and foreign patients, as they are offered affordable yet quality treatment services and the country gains considerable foreign currency.

Amongst Iran's trump cards are the presence of credible surgeons and physicians, cutting-edge medical technologies, high-tech medicine and diverse specializations, super affordable procedures, and finally its hospitable people. The Islamic Republic has set goals to exceed its yearly medical travelers to around two million in [calendar year] 1404 (March 2025–March 2026).

The Islamic World Tourism Exhibition will be held at Shahr-e Aftab International Exhibition Center from June 7 to 10.

Sirjan kilims renowned for superior quality and vivid colors

TEHRAN – Kilims have long been used as floor coverings mostly being made by rustic or nomadic folks of the Iranian plateau.

It is believed that Sirjan is a cradle for Kilim carpets. In fact, superior quality, innovative patterns and vivid colors have resulted in its registration as a global hub for kilims by the World Council of Handicrafts.

Kilim is a pileless floor covering handwoven in most places where pile rugs are made. The term is applied both generally and specifically, with the former use referring to virtually any rug-like fabric that does not have a pile.

According to Visit Iran, Shiriki-Pich or Suzani Kilims of Sirjan is of high importance considered as an intermediate between carpets and Kilims. It is believed that they were invented when the Afshar and Bughachi clans entered Kerman and later during the Afsharid dynasty. However, there are many theories about the naming of these Kilims.

One is that Shiriki Pich is a cover for horses which refers to its first usage. On the other hand, "Pich-Bafi" is a kind of Kilim, and "Shiriki" can refer



to the type of the Shiriki knot that is double knots, or it can indicate that the product was weaved by two persons.

Like many other Kilims, they are woven with wool yarns. The loom is similar to the looms of carpets, and the technique is similar to the technique of carpet weaving. There are two primary knots for Sirjan Kilims, one is "Matn" and the other is "Abduzi".

In these weaves, unlike other Kilims, the weft plays no role in making the patterns but it is the wraps that create them. This Kilim is rarely woven based on a premade pattern.

Sources say almost all Sirjan Kilims are unique and no two similar pieces can be found. The backgrounds are mostly cream, milky white, red, blue, and dark blue. It is possible to describe

these incredible hand weaves by the word "Hessi Baf" or sensational weave, because the mood and emotions of the weavers, who are nomad women, affect even their choice of color during the production.

The motifs come in various colors. Kinds of green, yellow, pink, and blue are used to make geometric and semi-cursive motifs and motifs of fish, giraffe, and birds like the stork, sparrow, peacock, etc.

It is rare to find a Sirjan Kilim plain and without any motif. Herbal and animal pigments such as Cochineal and Vermilion worm are mixed with oxides of metals to dye the yarns. "Gol-o-Godani", "She Kaleh", "Kuh Panj", "Bandi Lozi", "Kheshti" or "Ghalebi" and paisley are some of the most common motifs of Shiriki-Pich Kilims. Today, in addition to making bags, chair covers, and wall hanging, they are considered an important non-oil export of Iran due to their international popularity.

The kilims are often woven on narrow looms, and two mirror-image pieces are sewn together along the long edge to produce the completed kilim. The vertical color junctions

Ramsar Convention Museum to be established

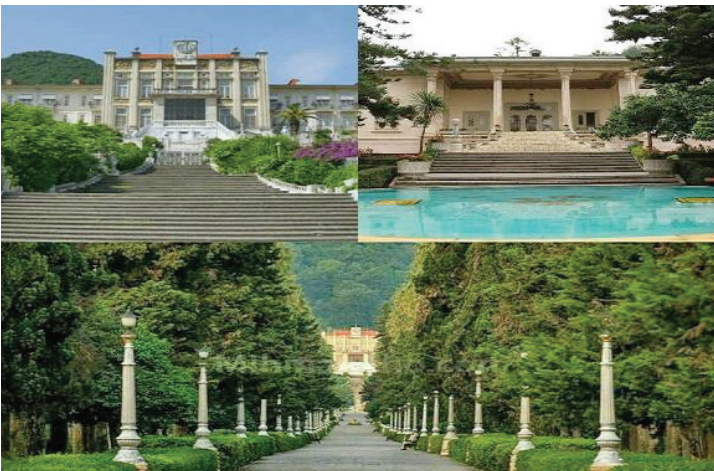
TEHRAN – The Ramsar Convention Museum will be launched in the northern city of Ramsar with the participation of the private sector, Shahram Fadakar, the director of the Ramsar regional center for education and research in Central and West Asia, has stated.

“This museum will be located in a part of the Mazandaran’s Ramsar museum palace and will include published sources and documents along with the approvals of the Ramsar Convention, historical images, and other items related to this convention that is exposed to the public and environmental enthusiasts in particular.

Also, in order to introduce the role of wetlands, part of the museum’s untouched environment will be turned into an artificial wetland so that visitors at different levels are informed about the ecological functions of the wetlands,” he explained.

The Convention on Wetlands is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

It was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and came into



force in 1975. Since then, almost 90% of UN member states, from all the world’s geographic regions, have acceded to becoming “Contracting Parties”.

Wetlands are indispensable for the countless benefits or “ecosystem services” that they provide humanity, ranging from freshwater supply, food and building materials, and biodiversity, to flood control, groundwater recharge, and climate change mitigation.

Yet study after study demon-

strates that wetland area and quality continue to decline in most regions of the world. As a result, the ecosystem services that wetlands provide to people are compromised.

Managing wetlands is a global challenge and the Convention presently counts 172 countries as Contracting Parties, which recognize the value of having one international treaty dedicated to a single ecosystem.

The Convention uses a broad definition of wetlands. This includes

all lakes and rivers, underground aquifers, swamps and marshes, wet grasslands, peatlands, oases, estuaries, deltas, tidal flats, mangroves, and other coastal areas, coral reefs, and all human-made sites such as fish ponds, rice paddies, reservoirs, and salt pans.

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

The Convention on Wetlands is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

Gorgan Bay revival should gather pace: VP

TEHRAN – First Vice President Mohammad Mokher has urged related officials for speeding up the revitalization of Gorgan Bay, Miankaleh, and Gomishan wetlands in the northern Golestan province.

In the fifth meeting of the National Headquarters for Coordination and Management of Wetlands, which was held on Monday, Mokher called on energy minister, department of environment chief, and governor of Golestan province to take the necessary decisions as soon as possible to implement the plan and revive this natural resource.

The country’s wetlands are in danger of drying up, and we must be accountable to the people if we do not take the necessary measures to preserve, and rehabilitate the wetlands, he stressed.

He further highlighted that all related organizations should take steps in this regard, with respect to President Ebrahim Raisi’s order.

In this meeting, reports about the current situation, the main challenges ahead, and priority projects for the rehabilitation of Gomishan International Wetland were represented, in addition to a report on the

comprehensive plan for the rehabilitation, protection, and management of this international wetland.

Covering an area of about 400 square kilometers, the Gulf of Gorgan also known as Gorgan Bay, is located near the cities of Behshahr, Gorgan, and Sari and is separated from the main water body by the Miankaleh peninsula and extends until the Ashuradeh peninsula.

Geological evidence has shown that the Gulf of Gorgan had not yet formed about 2,600 years ago when the water level of the Caspian Sea was 22 meters high, and during the Little Ice Age, at the altitude of 24 meters, the Miankaleh Peninsula began to form and the Gorgan Bay was created.

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

Miankaleh was designated a Ramsar site in 1975. Major habitats include wetlands, inter-tidal mud

with sandy shores, shallow marine waters, forests, peatlands, and agricultural areas.

The ecology of Gorgan Bay is affected by the Caspian Sea, adjacent rivers, and the Miankaleh Peninsula, which play an important role in the growth and reproduction of aquatic, bony, and cartilaginous fish and the attraction of migratory birds.

Therefore, it can be said that Miankaleh Peninsula and Gorgan Bay are environmentally and geographically inseparable.

The bay has a unique, but fragile, biodiversity and not only has valuable cartilaginous fish, white fish, and mullet but also provides a significant share of caviar needed by the country.

But this valuable water basin has been struggling with drought, as the Caspian Sea has dropped by about 25 cm over the past 5 years, which has caused more than 35 percent of Gorgan Bay to dry up.

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

Negative population growth rate stalls

From page 1 ► According to statistics published by the Statistical Center of Iran, the total number of births registered in the [Iranian calendar] year 1399 (March 2020–March 2021) was 1,114,155, while a year before that, some 1,196,132 infants were born.

By 2046, the population of 15-to-65-year-olds is more than two-thirds of the total population, but the demographic window may close a few years earlier, he also said.

The demographic window may close for two reasons. The first is due to increasing life expectancy and the aging population, and the second is that if population incentive policies work, it will take 15 years for the newborns to reach working age, so the demographic window may close sooner, but instead, if population policies are successful, the productive population will remain high after a 15-year period.

According to Allameh, at present, the total

population of the country is equal to 84.9 million.

The birth rate has accelerated over the past few months, which seems to be influenced by incentive policies and benefits provided to increase childbearing.

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

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

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

The plan stipulates health insurance for infer-

tile couples, providing services and facilities to working women, providing health and nutrition support packages to mothers and children, educational opportunities for student mothers, providing livelihood support to families, and ongoing medical services to pregnant women.

The national budget bill for the current [Iranian calendar] calendar year, which began on March 21, has proposed 120 trillion rials (nearly \$480 million) to implement childbearing and family support plans in the country.

Demographic issue

Today, the country’s fertility rate has reached about 1.6 children per woman, however, it was 6.5 children per woman, in 1986. The lowest fertility rate in the whole region of West Asia, North Africa, and the MENA region is recorded for Iran.

While 1,594,000 births were registered in the [Iranian calendar] year 1394 (March 2015–March

Efforts to protect natural resources, wildlife, and ecosystems in Iran

Part 1 Environmental protection efforts before the 1979 Revolution

In Iran conservation consciousness began, as it so often does, with concern for wildlife. In the absence of protective legislation, the more conspicuous plains species—notably gazelles and the wild ass—had been relentlessly pursued by hunters using Jeeps all too often and were obviously threatened with extinction.

The efforts of a group of sportsmen resulted in 1956 in the nation’s first conservation law and the creation of the Game Council of Iran. These measures were soon followed by others: the nationalization of all forest and rangelands in 1963 and of all water resources in 1966.

In 1967 the progressive Game and Fish Law, still in effect in 1994, established the Game and Fish Department, which was responsible for wildlife, protected areas, inland fishing, and conservation. It was incorporated into the Department of Environmental Conservation, established in 1971, which was also responsible for controlling environmental degradation in general.

The Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act of 1974 created the present Department of the Environment, attached to the office of the prime minister. This legislation recognized the complexity of environmental problems and gave wider authority to the Department of the Environment for control of air and water pollution than is found in many other countries.

Apart from administering the Game and Fish Law, the department administered the several categories of protected areas created by the law and all wetlands, including associated outdoor recreation; set emissions and quality standards for air, water, soil, wastes, and noise; oversaw ecosystem protection and the sustainable use of resources; protected natural landscapes; conducted research on the adverse effects of biocides and alternative means of pest control; educated the public in all fields of environmental protection and enhancement; and assisted in the establishment of natural history museums and zoos.

Recent history

After the 1979 revolution, the legacy of environmental protection was also suspect. With

law enforcement in disarray, forests and rangelands, including national parks and protected areas, were pillaged and ploughed, and wildlife was massacred.

Environmental regulations were often either suspended as unnecessary or rejected by some judiciary courts, factories, poachers, and some of the public. The contraction of the country’s economy in subsequent years encouraged the destructive exploitation of the environment and its resources.

Most damaging was the explosive growth in population, from 36 million in 1978 to 60 million in 1991. With a growth rate measured in the 1986 census at 3.91 percent, among the highest in the world, the population is projected to exceed 75 million by the year 2000.

The population explosion has placed a tremendous strain on the environment in both the urban and rural areas. The influx of people into towns and cities has produced uncontrolled urban growth that often uses up scarce agricultural land, unprecedented population densities, air pollution, water shortages and polluted aquifers, and enormous increases in the volume of waste.

Green spaces have disappeared, and recreation areas are increasingly threatened. Important sectors such as energy production and industry face environmental problems similar to those in other countries and thus will not be discussed in detail here.

Recognizing the need to deal with these problems through a coordinated national plan and to make wiser use of the country’s natural resources and environment, while protecting its cultural heritage, the government has begun some of the programs initiated before the Revolution.

The programs had included measures requiring master plans for all urban developments and a “national spatial strategy plan” for the country that were begun in the early to mid-1970s. Similar to the latter and as a result of the resolutions adopted at the Rio Conference of June 1992, sustainable development is putatively slated to be initiated in collaboration with the relevant UN and international agencies.

Source: Encyclopedia Iranica
To be continued



2016), the downward trend continued annually to the point that the number of births reached about one million in the [Iranian calendar] year 1399 (March 2020–March 2021).

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

The fertility rate declined to 1.71 children in the past [Iranian calendar] year (March 2020–March 2021), reaching below the re-

placement level, according to the report released by the Statistical Center of Iran

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

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

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

COVID-19 UPDATES ON APRIL 26

New cases	1,307
New deaths	28
Total cases	7,218,424
Total deaths	141,024
New hospitalized patients	251
Patients in critical condition	997
Total recovered patients	6,972,286
Diagnostic tests conducted	50,914,586
Doses of vaccine injected	148,734,814

ENGLISH IN USE

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Rainfall increases Lake Urmia level

Recent rainfall has increased the level of Lake Urmia to 1,271 meters, a step closer to its ecological level of 1,274 meters.

The lake is expected to reach its ecological level within 10 years by completing the restoration plans which started four years ago.

Farhad Sarkhosh, head of the Lake Urmia Restoration Program’s office in West Azarbaijan province, said that the Lake’s level is now 58 cm higher than it was last year.

According to the latest monitoring, the lake’s water volume is estimated at more than 3.6 billion cubic meters.

He added that the lake surface area has reached 2,883 square kilometers, adding that the figure is increased by 538 square kilometers compared to the same period last year. Although the ecological level of the lake is defined as 1,274 meters, the lake will also have favorable conditions at 1,272 meters and more than 90 percent of sand and dust storm hotspots will be eliminated.

افزایش سطح تراز دریاچه ارومیه بر اثر بارش

بارش های اخیر تراز فعلی دریاچه ارومیه را به یک هزار و ۲۷۱ متر و ۳۸ سانتی متر رسانده است که در حال رسیدن به تراز اکولوژیک یک هزار و ۲۷۴ متر است.

به گزارش ایرنا، فرهاد سرخوش رییس دفتر استانی ستاد احیای دریاچه ارومیه گفت سطح دریاچه ارومیه اکنون ۵۸ سانتی متر بیشتر از زمان مشابه سال گذشته است. طبق آخرین پایش صورت گرفته حجم آب این دریاچه بیش از سه میلیارد و ۶۷۰ میلیون متر مکعب برآورد شده است.

وی با بیان اینکه وسعت دریاچه ارومیه در حال حاضر به بیش از ۲ هزار و ۸۸۳ کیلومتر مربع رسیده، اضافه کرد: وسعت این دریاچه نیز نسبت به سال گذشته ۵۳۸ کیلومتر مربع افزایش دارد. هر چند تراز یک هزار و ۲۷۴ متر به عنوان ارتفاع اکولوژیک دریاچه ارومیه اعلام شده ولی این دریاچه در تراز یک هزار و ۲۷۲ متر هم شرایط مطلوب خواهد داشت و بیش از ۹۵ درصد کانون های ریزگرد آن رفع خواهد شد.

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Managing Director: **Mohammad Shojaeian**
Editor-in-Chief: **Ali A.Jenabzadeh**

Editorial Dept.: Fax: (+98 21) 88808214 — 88808895
Email: info@tehrantimes.com
Switchboard Operator: Tel: (+98 21) 43051000
Advertisements Dept.: Telefax: (+98 21) 43051430
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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

“Endurance has four aspects: eagerness, fear, abstention (from the world) and anticipation (of death). So, whoever is eager for Paradise will ignore the passions; whoever fears the Fire (of Hell) will refrain from prohibited acts; whoever abstains from the world takes hardships lightly; and whoever anticipates death will hasten towards good deeds.”

Imam Ali (AS)

Prayer Times» Noon:13:02 Evening: 20:04 Dawn: 4:43 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 6:17 (tomorrow)

Omar Khayyam: Impact on literature and society in the West

Part 3

In France, Omar was introduced by F. Woepcke, who published *l'Algèbre d'Omar Alkhayyami* in 1851.

In 1867, J. B. Nicolas published *Les Quatrains de Khéyam*, containing 464 quatrains in Persian and French, with extensive comments and notes.

Although FitzGerald rejected the Sufi interpretations of Nicolas, the translation of the latter was an important source for his 1868 rendering.

Nicolas' work has been reprinted and translated many times. After Nicolas, many scholars and translators published their own versions of the *Robaiyat*, among them Charles Grolleau, Franz Toussaint, Claude Anet and Mirza Muhammad, Arthur Guy, A.-G. E'Tessam-Zadeh, and Mahdi Fouladvand.

In his translation, *Rubaiyat von Omar Chajjam*, Henry Nordmeyer mentions 31 translations of the *Robaiyat* in German from 1881 to 1963.

Among the translators we find well-known figures, such as Friedrich Bodenstein, Graf Adolf von Schack, Friedrich Rosen, Hector Preconi, Hans Bethge, and Christian Hermhold Rempis.

Rempis, a professor at Tübingen University, founded a German version of the English and American Omar Khayyam Clubs. The Club had its own publishing company, "Verlag der Deutschen Omar Chajjam-Gesellschaft," where Rempis issued his translation *Omar Chajjam und seine Vierzeiler* in 1935.

After the Nuremburg laws of 1935, Jewish members of the club were no longer able to take part in its activities and the club was dissolved in 1937.

In Nazi Germany, Khayyam was out of favor.

As Rempis stated in 1960: "Omar Khayyam's attitude towards life was not particularly compatible with Nazi doctrine."

It was only after the end of the war that the reprints and new translations of Omar Khayyam found their way to German readers.

Although the impact of Omar Khayyam on the literary and social scene did not hold the fascination it had at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, there remains to this day a lively interest in his life, philosophy and poetry.

Freethinkers, pictorial artists, composers, choreographers and poets all over the world were inspired by his work. Mostly they were influenced by FitzGerald's renditions.

There even appeared a new club in The Netherlands in 1990: *Het Nederlands Omar Khayyam Genootschap* (The Dutch Omar Khayyam Society).

Members gather twice a year and organize plenty of activities. So far the club has published four *Jaarboeken* (Year Books) in Dutch, printed by the "Avalon Pers", a private press belonging to one of its members.

It was also responsible for two exhibitions on Omar Khayyam, one in The Hague Museum of the Book, and the other in the Library of Leiden University.

2009 was commemorated in many places as the bicentenary of Edward FitzGerald's birth, and the 150th anniversary of his first edition of the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam, a venture which played such an important role in creating and maintaining an interest in Omar Khayyam to this day.

Source: Encyclopedia Iranica
Concluded

The importance of paying attention to children when writing stories

An interview with Mohsen Hejri

"The Story of the Good," a collection of stories for children and teenagers written by Mohsen Hejri and published by Mehrak Publications, includes stories from the life of Imams and prophets. Each book describes the life of one of these nobles. "The light of worship" is one of the books in this collection that tells the story of Ali ibn Hussein (AS), also known as Imam Sajjad (AS).

Mohsen Hejri has written Imam Sajjad's story in a unique and effective way. He has tried to tell the story in a way that is distinct from the clichés that children and teenagers face in schools.

*** How long did it take you to complete this book? What or who did you get your data from?**

The research took a long time, and I studied a variety of sources because relying on only a few sources might lead to errors and damage. I believe three axes should be examined when researching historical characters: one, Individuals' achievements and lives, two, the words or hadiths that are left from them, and three, other people's opinions on these characters' life. The first of these three factors, in my opinion, is the most significant.

*** How do you think such books can affect the audience?**

Although it's a difficult question to answer, I think we are in an era in which the new generation is facing a lot of problems finding the truth about religion, and

“Last Lullaby in Tehran” leads nominations at ISFA Awards

TEHRAN – Iranian director Mohammad Vahdani's "Last Lullaby in Tehran" received nominations in nine categories, including best film and best director, at the 12th edition of the Iranian Short Film Association (ISFA) Awards, the organizers announced on Tuesday.

The film is about a young man, who goes to a photography studio to pick up his ID photos, but the photos he is given don't look like him at all. Solving the problem in the studio leads to the initiation of a romantic relationship with the receptionist.

Meanwhile, in another part of the studio, the famous Iranian poet and director, Forough Farrokhzad, recite her last poem, just a few hours before she tragically died in a car accident.

Setareh Pesyani has been nominated for the best actress award for her role in the film, while Ashkan Fakhari and Soheil Behnam have been nominated

A scene from "Last Lullaby in Tehran" by Mohammad Vahdani

for the best music award.

"Last Lullaby in Tehran" is followed by director Reza Nejat's "Leniency" with eight nods and Ronak Jafari's "Morse" with six nominations.

"Leniency" is about a student and his friend, who conspire against their math teacher.

"Morse" tells the story of three prisoners who escape from prison, while one of their inmates committed suicide in prison.

The ISFA award ceremony is planned to be held within a month.

Tehran theater hosts “The Good Doctor”

TEHRAN – American playwright Neil Simon's comic play "The Good Doctor" went

on stage at Tehran's Malek Theater last week.

Iranian actor Ashkan Khatibi is the director of the play, which is a musical comedy set in 19th century Russia and consists of a series of short plays based on short stories and other works by Russian writer Anton Chekhov.

The only connecting thread between the series is the character of the writer, who is reminiscent of Chekhov.

The performance is held by a cast composed of Khatibi's acting students including Nura Peidayesh, Mahak Ahmadi, Raya Ramezani, Sepinud Bazargani, and Matin Nasiri.

Khatibi staged the play for the first time in August 2018 at Divare Chaharom Theater, a

private hall in downtown Tehran, and later in 2020 in Tehran's Sepand Hall.

"The Good Doctor" had been performed previously at various theaters in Tehran and several other Iranian cities by different directors and troupes.

Khatibi also staged "Reading Chekhov under the Supervision of a Representative from the Russian Federation" at Malek Theater with the same troupe.

The play is based on plays by English playwright and novelist Michael Frayn, Iranian writer Omid Sohrabi and Khatibi himself.

Both plays will remain on stage until May 21.

Fars to host National Regional Music Festival

general audiences.

Taking part in the festival will be artists from various Iranian provinces such as Lorestan, Sistan-Baluchestan, Fars, Gilan, and Mazandaran, as well as some tribes, and ethnic groups.

A number of workshops on regional music and local rituals are also planned to be held on

the sidelines of the festival.

Iran's regional and folk music is a type of music transmitted through generations among the people of the country, often containing a variety of tunes. The variety of Iranian folk music has often been emphasized, reflecting the ethnic and regional diversities of the country.

Usually, Iranian folk musicians are taught their art by their families. There are different types of traditional musicians who specialize in folk music in Iran, some of whom ascribe to specific ethnic and regional groups.

“The Red Tenda of Bologna” published in Persian

TEHRAN – English art critic, novelist, and poet John Berger's 2007 book "The Red Tenda of Bologna" has been published in Persian.

Mohsen Azarm is the translator of the book published by Cheshmeh Publications, a major publishing house in Tehran.

The book is a dreamlike meditation on memory, food, paintings, a fond uncle, and

the improbable beauty of Bologna, from the visionary thinker and art critic.

John Berger was born in London in 1926. His acclaimed works of both fiction and non-fiction include the seminal "Ways of Seeing" and the novel "G.", which won the Booker Prize in 1972. In 1962 he left Britain permanently, to live in a small village in the French Alps. He died in 2017.

Four brilliant examples of literature from Iran

Iran is much more than what is shown by the media. It is rich in art, culture, and literature. Iranian Literature is amongst the oldest in the world and paints a raw and more detailed picture of Iran that many of people of the world have not seen. Here is a list of four of the most important works in Iranian literature which give you a glimpse of the real Iran.

01. "The Blind Owl" by Sadeq Hedayat

Translated by D. P. Costello

"The Blind Owl" is a frightening story of loss and despair and is regarded as one of the most important works in modern Iranian literature. Filled with powerful symbolism and haunting imagery, the book tells the story of an unnamed pen case painter who drifts into insanity after losing his mysterious lover. The painter then

confesses to a shadow on the wall (that resembles an owl) that he is addicted to opium and has killed his wife. This dark and horrifying tale is as intriguing as it is disturbing, and is often compared to the works of Edgar Allan Poe.

02. "My Uncle Napoleon" by Iraj Pezeshkzad

Translated by Dick Davis

"My Uncle Napoleon" is the humorous tale of an unnamed teenage boy who falls in love with his cousin, the daughter of the patriarch of his family. The story revolves around the protagonist's attempts to stall his cousin's arranged marriage even as his father and uncle plot against each other to settle family feuds. Pezeshkzad also introduces us to various Iranian traditions and cultures, and interestingly unique, hilarious, and memorable

characters. "My Uncle Napoleon" is one of the sweetest, funniest, and most entertaining books to have come out of Iran.

03. "Savushun" by Simin Daneshvar

Translated by M. R. Ghanoonparvar

"Savushun" is the first Persian novel written by a woman and is a magnificent portrayal of mid-20th Century Iran. It is the tale of a Persian family in Shiraz set at the time of the Allied occupation of Iran, during World War II. The story is seen through the eyes of Zari, a young wife and mother, who is caught between her desire for a traditional family and her struggle to find her own identity. Daneshvar touches on matters of gender politics, literature, love, and nationalism, and gives us a glimpse of pre-revolutionary Iran

and its emerging despair.

04. "Shahnameh" by Abolqasem Ferdowsi,

Translated by Dick Davis

"Shahnameh" is among the greatest works of world literature and is called 'the national epic of Persia'. Written between 980 and 1010 CE, it is an epic poem divided into three parts and provides a historical account of Iran. In the first of the three parts, Ferdowsi focuses on the creation of the world, in the second, he details the pre-Islamic era, and in the last, he tells the story of the Arab invasion of Iran. "Shahnameh" covers a range of emotions, such as triumph and loss, love and grief, and courage and cruelty. This literary masterpiece is often compared with the likes of Dante's "Divine Comedy", and the epics of Homer.