

Poisonous Plot

Who benefits from sabotage in Iranian schools? ▶ Page 3

Report

New U.S. strategy in Yemen

By Ali Karbalaee

TEHRAN- The United States appears to be pursuing a new policy in Yemen by occupying the country's natural resources.

This is what the illegal visit of the commander of the U.S. Fifth Fleet and Naval Forces in the U.S. Central Command to the Yemeni governorates of Al-Mahra and Hadhramaut on March 2 strongly suggests.

Yemen has a sufficient amount of oil and natural gas resources for both domestic demand and exports.

And this is something the U.S. and its Western allies are in dire need of getting their hands on amid shortages in the wake of the Ukraine war.

In his latest speech a few days ago, the leader of Yemen's ruling Ansarallah movement, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, revealed that Washington had established military bases in the provinces of Hadhramaut and al-Mahra in eastern Yemen. ▶ Page 5

Iran defense chief condemns aggression against Syria territorial integrity

TEHRAN – Iran's top defense official voiced support for Syria's territorial integrity in a meeting with his Syrian counterpart in Tehran on Sunday.

"We condemn any attack on the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of Syria," Iranian Defense Minister Mohammad Reza Ashtiani said in a meeting with his Syrian counterpart Ali Mahmoud Abbas.

Israel makes frequent attacks on the territorial integrity of Syria in violation of international law.

"We condemn any attack on the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of Syria and we believe that this fake regime only understands the language of force and power. That regime should not be allowed to be more arrogant," the Iranian defense minister remarked. ▶ Page 3

Interview

Volleyball expert Karkhaneh extols Iran's volleyball league

By Farrokh Hesabi

TEHRAN – Iranian Volleyball expert Mostafa Karkhaneh believes that the Volleyball Super League has been among the most attractive leagues in the world in the recent years.

Haraz Amol and Shahdab Yazd qualified for the final match of the super league by beating Peykan and Pas Gorgan, respectively, on Friday. ▶ Page 3

Butcher regime: One Palestinian killed every day since 2023



In a speech delivered before the 52nd Human Rights Council on behalf of the Arab countries, the Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations Office in Geneva, Hend Al Muftah, said that the Israeli occupation government has committed grave violations, war crimes, crimes

against humanity and apartheid against the Palestinians, and it continues to enact discriminatory laws and arbitrary declarations for the expansion of illegal colonial settlements in occupied Palestine in flagrant violation of international laws.

She emphasized that since the beginning

of the current year, Israel has killed 68 Palestinians, arrested no less than 1,000 Palestinians, demolished 58 homes, and its settlers have committed more than 330 terrorist attacks, as part of a systematic policy to harm the Palestinians. ▶ Page 5

Iran's wheat production rises 28% in 2022: FAO

TEHRAN – Wheat production in Iran has increased by 28 percent in 2022, putting the Islamic Republic in 13th place among the world's top producers of the strategic grain, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)'s latest Food Outlook report.

Based on the said report, Iranian farmers managed to produce 13 million tons of wheat in 2022, 2.9 million tons more than the figure for the previous year in which the total production stood at 10.1 million tons, IRNA reported.

According to FAO, Iran was the world's 14th largest wheat producer in 2021.

The organization has also predicted that Iran will produce 13 million tons of wheat in 2023, which will not change compared to 2022. ▶ Page 4

Low-income families provided with apartments

TEHRAN – In a ceremony on Sunday, a total of 23,000 apartments were delivered to low-income families across the country.

The Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation has constructed the apartments. President Ebrahim Raisi handed over three apartments, IRNA reported.

A total of 25 trillion rials (nearly \$50 million) has been proposed to provide housing for the underprivileged in the budget bill for the next [Iranian calendar] year (starting March 21), Morteza Bakhtiari, head of the Foundation said in August 2022.

The Foundation also plans to build 360,000 houses over the next four years.

The project will start next year and 90,000 houses will be built for the deprived annually, 60,000 of which will be built in cities and 30,000 in villages.

A memorandum of understanding has been signed with the Mostazafan Foundation and Housing Foundation regarding the construction of 10,000 housing units in villages and cities with less than 25,000 populations.

needs of the country and region, she mentioned.

Needlework (Souzan-douzi in Persian) is a very common occupation among people of some Iranian provinces. It is the art of drawing images on plain fabrics by sewing delicate stitches using a needle and colorful yarns. They are mainly used to embellish women's clothes; however, such works are applied to decorate bracelets, necklaces, bags, and scarves. ▶ Page 6



Persian painting biennial returns after six-year hiatus

TEHRAN – The 11th edition of Iran's National Biennial of Persian Painting opened on Saturday after a six-year gap resulting from mismanagement and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Abdorreza Sohrabi, the director of the Visual Arts Office of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, a group of cultural figures and artists came together at the Saba Art and Cultural Institute in Tehran to attend the opening ceremony of the exhibition. ▶ Page 8

Needlework export could generate revenue more than oil, expert says

TEHRAN – The currency earnings of needlework could be greater than those of oil, a handicrafts expert has said.

If Iranian needlework is taken into consideration, needlework could generate more currency earnings than oil, IRNA quoted Maryam Sammak as saying on Sunday.

With the help of exhibitions held throughout the year in different countries, it is possible to

have a high share in global markets in this field, she added.

Depending on the needs of the countries, artists should be supported and their works exposed to sale in these exhibitions, she noted.

Europeans prefer delicate works such as silk embroidery and net embroidery, while Arab countries prefer glitzy artworks, therefore, the works should be displayed according to the

From Inside

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Tehran Papers

In the following column, we take a look at some important contents and views in Yesterday's Iranian newspapers.

Politics more important than technical issues

Arman-e- Melli writes: Rafael Grossi's trip to Tehran can be considered the most important visit of the IAEA ▶ Page 2

Iran voluntarily permits IAEA to carry out further verification

TEHRAN- Iran has consented, on a voluntary basis, to allow the IAEA to carry out additional verification and monitoring activities to assist in resolving "outstanding safeguards issues".

The agreement was reached during the most recent talks held with the UN nuclear watchdog.

The announcement was made in a joint statement released on Saturday by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), which followed IAEA Secretary General Rafael Grossi's two-day visit to Iran and his meetings with senior Iranian officials. ▶ Page 2

Iran prohibits private access to nuclear sites

TEHRAN- A senior Iranian nuclear official has denied allegations that individual access to Iran's nuclear installations will be granted based on agreements struck during a recent visit to Tehran by International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director Rafael Grossi.

Speaking to IRNA on Sunday, Behrouz Kamalvandi, spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), said that the two-day visit by Grossi to Iran on Friday and Saturday was not intended to allow for the individual inspection of Iran's nuclear facilities. ▶ Page 2

Calligraphy exhibit features collaboration between Hong Kong, Iranian artists

TEHRAN – A calligraphic art exhibition underway at the Hong Kong Central Library highlights cultural exchange between Hong Kong and Iranian artists.

The exhibit entitled "Calligraphic Art: Interaction between Hong Kong and Iranian Artists" is part of the Hong Kong Culture Festival.

The exhibition opened at the library's Gallery 1-5 on February 25 and will run until March 8.

The Hong Kong section is curated by Wucius Wong, and Yas Mostashari and Nazila Noe-Bashari are the curators of the Iranian section.

"Hong Kong artists specializing in ink painting are generally skilled in calligraphy to strengthen dots and lines, and facilitate inclusion of colophons in paintings," the organizers wrote in a statement for the showcase. ▶ Page 8

TEHRAN PAPERS

Politics more important than technical issues

In the following column, we take a look at some important contents and views in yesterday's Iranian newspapers.

from page 1 ▶ Director General in the past few years because the results of the trip will determine the prospects of revitalizing the JCPOA agreement.

In the past, whenever Iran and the West sought a political agreement regarding Iran's nuclear program, Iran's problems with the IAEA were less. But this time, these problems are between Iran and the IAEA that the solution of which can clarify the roadmap for revitalizing the JCPOA. And it can be said that this time the IAEA's political role is more important than its responsibility in the technical field.

Although we have always been emphasizing that the IAEA should be able to carry out its technical mission within the framework of the JCPOA, we cannot ignore the fact that the differences between Iran and the IAEA have always been under the influence of the political dialogue between Iran and the West.

The more hopeful these talks were, the less Iran's differences with the IAEA. And the more Iran's differences with the Western countries, the more Iran's differences with the IAEA.

Etamed: Iran-IAEA differences can't be solved with a single visit

In an interview with the Etemad newspaper, political expert Ali Bigdeli says: While IAEA's Director General Rafael Grossi was visiting Tehran, the state media described the trip as useful, but the reality will become clear in the future.

It is clear that Iran has not yet answered all the IAEA's questions. But the most important question is the connection of this trip with the future of the JCPOA (the 2015 Iran nuclear deal).

Until the IAEA's questions are not answered, we cannot pin hopes on a revival the JCPOA.

The fact is that the number of differences between Iran and the IAEA is high and it is not easy to resolve all differences during a trip.

The reason for Grossi's trip to Tehran falls within the Agency's routine programs.

The IAEA Board of Governors meets every season and Grossi must submit his quarterly report to the board.

It seems that Grossi held meetings with senior Iranian officials to write his final report.

In general, it seems that the two sides are trying to reduce the differences, although it is still too early to say that the visit will provide the basis for the revival of JCPOA or the beginning of JCPOA negotiations.

Kayhan: Grossi's meeting with nuclear scientists was not necessary

Keyhan says Raphael Grossi is known for

his relationship with Israel. He used to be the deputy of Amano!

After Amano's report on PMD in which in which Iran was vindicated, the U.S. asked him to withdraw the report, and Grossi was among those who agreed with the U.S., but Amano disagreed.

There is a view among nuclear officials in the West and among some American and European journalists that Amano was possibly killed by Mossad so that Grossi could replace him!

Grossi often visits Israel before and after travel to Iran, and he has publicly announced that he consults with the officials of the Zionist regime about Iran's nuclear program.

The Zionist regime's officials have said that they have received information about Iran's nuclear facilities through IAEA inspectors. Israel's sabotage at Iran's nuclear facilities and the assassination of nuclear scientists have also been carried out by using the same information.

During his trip to Iran, Grossi met with a few university professors and nuclear researchers. Undoubtedly, Grossi will provide the report of the meeting to the Zionist regime.

Jomhoori-e-Eslami: Fate of political love with Taliban

Political love with the Taliban caused eventually a problem for the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jomhoori-e-Eslami writes.

It ended up at a point that even Zalmay Khalilzad accuses Iran of cooperating with terrorists.

Iran handed the Afghan embassy in Tehran over to the Taliban which was contrary to diplomatic rules.

A statement by the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that Taliban diplomats had come to Tehran and former embassy officials had given the embassy to them with their own consent. But the former embassy official said that a senior Iranian diplomat had given them a week to hand the embassy over to the Taliban. This action of the Iranian Foreign Ministry is incompatible with the United Nations.

Except China, Russia, Pakistan, and Iran, it is the former Afghan diplomats who are working at the Afghan embassies in all countries and the United Nations. Instead of coordinating with the United Nations, we were in harmony with China and Russia.

Iran has received nothing for all it has given to the Taliban! Recently, the Taliban treated inhumanely with one of the Iranian border guards.

Unfortunately, Iran's foreign policy is in its weakest and most dangerous state and must be fundamentally reformed.

"There was a time the US was backing the apartheid regime in South Africa, the CIA helped it arrest (Nelson) Mandela," Kanaani tweeted on Sunday.

"Today, it is the strategic ally & supporter of the apartheid Zionist regime. The US does not deserve to defend human rights & democracy. It does not believe in them at all," the Iranian spokesman added.

lance cameras at Iran's nuclear facilities.

Given rumors of a significant increase in IAEA inspections of Iranian nuclear installations, Kamalvandi underlined that that such cases of increased inspections are in accordance with the Safeguards Agreements and with Iran's prior decision to raise uranium enrichment to 60% purity.

Iran prohibits private access to nuclear sites

from page 1 ▶ If such requests are made by the IAEA, Iran will definitely refuse them, according to Kamalvandi.

He also noted that all agreements made with the IAEA are within the bounds of the legislation passed by the Iranian parliament.

Kamalvandi denied rumors that Iran and the IAEA had agreed to install more surveil-

Iran voluntarily permits IAEA to carry out further verification

from page 1 ▶ The following is the text of the joint statement by the two sides posted on the IRNA website:

IAEA Director General Mr. Rafael Mariano Grossi visited the Islamic Republic of Iran on 3 and 4 March 2023. In the context of his visit, he met President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, H. E. Mr. Ebrahim Raisi, as well as with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, H. E. Mr. Hossein Amir Abdollahian, and the Vice-President of the Islamic Republic of Iran and President of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), H. E. Mr. Mohammad Eslami.

These high-level meetings addressed the importance of taking steps in order to facilitate enhanced cooperation, to expedite as appropriate the resolution of outstanding safeguards issues.

Both sides recognize that such positive engagements can pave the way for wider agreements among state parties.

IAEA chief notes "significant progress" in talks while in Iran

TEHRAN- IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi has praised his most recent trip to Iran as significant, noting that a clear agreement was achieved about the continuation of cooperation on resolving safeguards-related issues.

Grossi held a press conference in Vienna on Saturday after finishing a two-day visit to Iran.

During his tour of Tehran, he met with important Iranian figures, including President Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian, and Mohammad Eslami of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI).

A general framework for progress has

Security bodies are investigating poisoning of pupils: MP

TEHRAN – A member of the Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Committee has said security bodies have launched an extensive investigation into serial poisoning of school girls under the supervision of the parliament.

"Extensive investigations about the poisoning of pupils have been launched under the supervision of the Majlis," Jalili Rahim Jahanabadi tweeted late on Saturday.

He asked people to remain vigilant and cooperate with security bodies.

Making accusations against the ruling system, provoking riots and gatherings are the main goals of those behind serial poisonings, Jahanabadi remarked.

He added, "National security is possible through the help of all people."

Certain IAEA members leak sensitive information to complicate issues: Russian envoy

TEHRAN- Russia's permanent representative to international organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov said on Sunday that some members of the IAEA leak sensitive information to complicate the talks surrounding the Iran nuclear issue.

"Some #IAEA member states always leak sensitive information. This isn't the fault of the Agency's Secretariat. With a great degree of probability, we can identify those member states who leak confidential information in order to complicate discussions in the IAEA Board of Governors," Mikhail Ulyanov said.

In another tweet, he said, "The removal of cameras from the Iranian nuclear installations was a pretty significant result of #E3 and #US-sponsored resolution of the #IAEA Board of Governors on #Iran. The neutralization of this strategic irresponsible mistake is not an easy task."

IAEA chief Rafael Grossi visited Tehran on



The AEOI and the IAEA agreed on the following:

* Interactions between the IAEA and Iran will be carried out in a spirit of collaboration, and in full conformity with the competences of the IAEA and the rights and obligations of the Islamic Republic of Iran, based on

the comprehensive safeguards agreement.

* Regarding the outstanding safeguards issues related to the three locations, Iran expressed its readiness to continue its cooperation and provide further information and access to address the outstanding safe-

guards issues.

* Iran, on a voluntary basis will allow the IAEA to implement further appropriate verification and monitoring activities. Modalities will be agreed between the two sides in the course of a technical meeting which will take place soon in Tehran.

been reached and alluded to the joint statement released by the UN nuclear watchdog and the AEOI, Grossi stated.

When asked about political accusations regarding the safeguards issues, he responded that trivial technical issues were not brought up in discussions with senior Iranian authorities.

He added that "what is discussed is the level of cooperation, and that it is now time to reach a tangible result."

Grossi responded to another inquiry about Iran enriching uranium to 60% purity by saying that the Islamic Republic is not required to discuss this to the IAEA.

The issue as soon as possible," he added.

The president emphasized that the ministries of intelligence and health, and other relevant bodies will work with the Interior Ministry to address the issue.

He also stressed that any dissemination of information must go through the Interior Ministry.

The president and his foreign minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian say the mysterious poisoning of schoolgirls in several cities is in line with a hybrid war being waged on the country by the enemies.

Meanwhile, the father of a girl has roundly dismissed Western media allegations that her daughter had died following a recent poisoning incident at her school in the city of Qom.

Abolqasem Rezaei emphasized

The IAEA chief stated that the outcomes of his discussions with Iranian officials on Friday and Saturday were "satisfactory".

Additionally, he said that technical meetings will soon be held in Tehran to address safeguards-related issues, giving no additional information regarding the planned meetings' agenda.

Grossi underlined that the current situation is what is essential to him, referring to the protracted effort to settle the safeguarding concerns.

"I feel that significant progress has been achieved in meetings with the Iranian government on the issues I mentioned," he remarked.

that her 11-year-old daughter had been suffering from an infectious disease and kidney disorder prior to her demise.

Abolqasem Rezaei said her daughter, Fatemeh, had not attended classes at Toliat Elementary School, where she studied, for nearly three weeks, and that no poisoning of schoolgirls had been reported at the educational center, Press TV reported on Saturday.

"My daughter's pain and infection started about a week before her death. Even before she was racked with the pain, she had not gone to school in person for a total of three weeks. My daughter's school was closed for the first two weeks due to heating system repairs, and the week after she did not go to classes due to our concerns over her situation," the father explained.

the IAEA chief said any military strike on nuclear facilities is prohibited, in response to U.S. and Israeli threats to bomb Iranian nuclear facilities.

At the meeting with the IAEA chief, Amir Abdollahian reaffirmed Iran's determination to address technical concerns with the Safeguards Agreements as quickly as possible.

For his part, Grossi stated that the IAEA is prepared to resolve disagreements between the two parties through diplomatic and technical means.

The IAEA supports any positive initiatives aiding participants in the Vienna negotiations to agree on a final decision about the resurrection of the 2015 nuclear deal – JCPOA-, Grossi said.

Raisi stated in a meeting with Grossi that Iran has had the highest degree of collaboration with the Agency based on its goodwill gesture.



Poisonous plot

By Soheila Zarfam

TEHRAN – In a mysterious wave of poisoning, hundreds of Iranian schoolgirls were admitted to hospitals, sending Iranian security and intelligence agencies scrambling to get to the bottom of the matter.

Right from the start, Iranian authorities chose to deal with the poisonings in an extremely transparent way. Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, while on a visit to the southern province of Bushehr, said he had instructed the ministries of intelligence and interior to follow up on the issue.

Earlier, the Iranian interior minister, Ahmad Vahidi, had said that the country's intelligence agencies were following up on the case and their finding will be released.

A high percentage of what has happened to the children was due to anxiety that arose as a result of this issue, he said, according to a statement by the Iranian interior ministry.

We cannot yet make a definitive remark about whether these accidents are personal or internal adventurism or related to factors outside the school, he stated.

Our enemies and those who are interested in causing problems in the country with various operations are trying to create fear, Vahidi said.

On Saturday, the interior ministry offered new updates on the issue. "Since the first incident happened in one of the schools of Qom, there have been reports of complications in some students in 52 schools. Medical examination of students who expressed discomfort, they monitored the internal and surrounding areas of the school," it said in a separate statement.

Iran defense chief condemns aggression against Syria territorial integrity

From Page 1 ▶ The Iranian defense chief also lambasted the illegal presence of American forces in Syria.

"The illegitimate and illegal presence of the occupying forces in the Syrian territory is a source of insecurity and destruction, therefore, while emphasizing the territorial integrity of Syria, we emphasize the necessity of the withdrawal of all the occupying forces, especially the American occupation forces," Ashtiani remarked.

* Some U.S. forces are still located in areas of northeastern Syria, such as Hassakeh and Raqqah provinces.

The Iranian defense minister also lauded the close ties between Iran and Syria in the fight against terrorism. "Today, a large part of the strategic depth of the two countries is due to the mixing of the blood of Iranian and Syrian fighters in the fight against terrorist and takfiri groups."

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Iranian defense minister pointed out that common enemies have failed to undermine the deep and heart-felt relationship between Tehran and Damascus.

He added, "Fortunately, the relations between the two countries are experiencing one of the best historical periods."

Referring to the importance and role of Syria in the chain of resistance, the Iranian defense minister emphasized the necessity of strength-

ening and boosting the national and defense power of the country, according to Nour News.

The top Iranian military figure also said the economic war on Syria is a continuation of the military and political war against the country.

He said his country "is ready to share its experiences in facing the economic war with its Syrian brothers."

For his part, the Syrian defense minister, while expressing his satisfaction with the trip to Tehran, said, "This meeting and discussion shows the peak of cooperation with the Iranian brothers in the fight against terrorism and the security of the region."

Abbas appreciated the role of Iran in this regard by referring to the epic fights and bravery of the Axis of Resistance to maintain the security of the region and said, "We are trying to improve and expand the level of relations and cooperation."

Iran and Syria enjoy strong relations. And Iran has recently welcomed a thaw in Syria-Arab relations. A recent trip by Arab parliament speakers and senior legislators to Syria is a positive step toward Islamic solidarity, Iran said, emphasizing that dialogue and regional approaches can solve the woes in the region.

"The recent progress in relations between Arab countries and Syria, including the visit by

phrase "chemical attack" to refer to the poisonings, thus spreading fear and anger among Iranian parents and students. Then they blamed the Iranian government.

"Let this sink in. There are now credible, and multiple reports of chemical attacks on girls' schools in Iran. The regime is poisoning girls to stop them protesting," British MP Alicia Kearns said on Twitter, "We must urgently meet with allies to determine what we can do to save lives and stop the suffering."

But pundits believe that the accusation that the Iranian establishment is behind the poisonings should be taken with a grain of salt because Iran by no means benefits from such a horrible thing. It's a well-known fact that when bad things come about, one should look at who is benefiting from it. Besides, the Islamic Republic has been the biggest fan of women's education. In the years after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, access of women and

girls to private and public education has tremendously improved.

The poisonings came at a time when oppositionist elements publicly called for what they call "acts of honorable sabotage," which refers to damage inflicted on the state and society with the aim of bringing about regime change.

Observers believe that after the recent wave of unrest failed to achieve its goal, the enemy focused on continuing chaos and fear.

In the meantime, western countries are increasingly fishing in troubled waters when it comes to Iran. They have expressed concerns about the poisonings. This while, experts say, these countries were the main supplier of chemical weapons that Saddam Hussein used against Iran in the 1980s war with Iran. Furthermore, these countries have imposed severe economic sanctions against Iran that increased hardships for millions of ordinary Iranians.



Arab parliamentary delegations to Damascus to express solidarity with Syria following the recent devastating earthquake, in addition to being a realistic approach, is a positive step toward Islamic solidarity," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani tweeted on Tuesday.

According to Press TV, Kanaani added that regional countries will be able to resolve their problems through "dialogue and regional mechanisms" if they act realistically, adopt an independent national stance, and pay no heed to the demands of the hegemonic powers.

The high-profile Arab lawmakers visited Damascus on Feb. 26 amid attempts by certain countries, above all Iraq, to restore Syria's membership in the Arab League, more than a decade after it was suspended from the 22-member bloc.

Every year millions of Iranians visit holy shrines in Iraq, especially during the Arabaean pilgrimage.

The defense chief also sounded the alarms about the presence of Iranian separatist militant groups in northern Iraq, saying they are a "potential and real" threat to the security of the two countries.

Iranian-Iraqi cooperation continues in several directions, the latest of which was the visit of Iranian Foreign Minister Hussein Amir Abdollahian to Baghdad, where he held a series of talks with senior Iraqi officials. The talks centered on developing relations, securing borders and railway links.

The Iranian foreign minister also welcomed the mediation by Iraq to restore diplomatic ties between Tehran and Riyadh that were severed in 2016 and heal the rift between Tehran and Cairo. The chief diplomat also thanked Baghdad for trying to put the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement back on track.



Citing data from the Health Ministry, the statement said most people affected by the poisonings were admitted to outpatient departments and discharged after receiving the necessary treatment.

Underlining that intelligence and security bodies are investigating the matter, the statement said, "During the research of the relevant institutions, suspicious samples have been found, which are being investigated in the country's prestigious laboratories for specialized investigations to identify the causes of complications in students, and the results will be informed by the Ministry of Health as soon as possible."

While the authorities are investigating the matter, foreign-based media and western officials have directly or indirectly pointed the finger of blame at Iran, falsely accusing the political establishment of poisoning its own people.

First, they used the horrifying

IRAN IN FOCUS

MARCH 6, 2023

Straight Truth
TEHRAN TIMES

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SPORTS

Volleyball expert Karkhaneh extols Iran's volleyball league

From Page 1 ▶ "All eight teams in the play-off stage had high quality and did their best," said Karkhaneh in his interview with Tehran Times.

"The teams that qualified to the semi-finals and even the ones that didn't, all of them were strong and deserved to be in the highest positions,

"The matches were hard fought and very close and there were no vast differences in the level of the teams. It is good news for the Iranian volleyball that the league has reached such standards in the quality of the players and coaches.

"I'm really optimistic about the country's volleyball because this season's super league promises a bright future for the sport in Iran," added the former head coach of Iran volleyball team and the current member of the technical committee of the Iranian volleyball federation.

When asked about the finalists of the super league, Karkhaneh said: "Haraz Amol beat one of the greatest teams in Iran and Asia, Paykan, in a two-legged tie. It was a monumental achievement for them and they deserved to be in the final with such a performance.

"Normally, the team that win the first game in a two-legged tie, control the match in the second round and the same thing happened for Haraz Amol against Paykan. Behrouz Ataei's side deserved to reach the final because they were at the top of the league table for more than half of this season," he said.

"Shahdab also did a great job against Pas Gorgan. However, Pas had some financial problems and despite these problems, their players played with all their heart," Karkhaneh concluded.

Sepahan, Persepolis victorious at IPL

TEHRAN – Sepaha and Persepolis football teams defeated their opponents in Iran Professional League (IPL) Matchweek 22 on Sunday.

Sepahan defeated Havadar 3-1 in Isfahan's Naghsh-e Jahan Stadium. Farshad Ahmadzadeh and Shahriar Moghanlou scored two goals in the first half and Brazilian midfielder Ygor Catatau was on target in the second half. Hossein Sadeghi scored Havadar's only goal in the second half.

Earlier in the day, Persepolis earned a late 3-2 win over Tractor in Tabriz.

Mohammad Omri and Mehdi Torabi scored for the visiting team in the first half at the Bonyan Diesel Stadium, but substitute Mohammad Abbaszadeh netted a brace late in the second half to equalize the match.

Persepolis defender Vakhdat Khanonov scored a dramatic 95th-minute goal to seal a 3-2 win for Yahya Golmohammadi's team.

Paykan and Zob Ahan shared the spoils in a goalless draw in Tehran and Mes defeated struggling Sanat Naft 4-0 in Rafsanjan.

On Monday, Esteghlal will host Gol Gohar in Tehran, Malavan play Aluminum in Bandar Anzali, rock-bottom Naft Masjed Soleyman face Nassaji and Mes Kerman host Foolad.

Sepahan remained top with 46 points, one point ahead of Persepolis.

Greco-Roman wrestlers win two medals at Bulgaria

TEHRAN – Iranian Greco-Roman wrestlers won a gold and a bronze medal at the Dan Kolov – Nikola Petrov second day in Bulgaria.

Morteza Alghosi seized a gold medal in the 130kg weight class, while Vahid Dadkhah won a bronze medal in the 97kg.

Freestylers Mostafa Ghiasi (79kg) and Arashk Mohebbi (92kg) had won two gold medals and Amir Mohammad Yazdani (70kg) seized a bronze.

Greco-Roman wrestler Shahin Bodaghi (72kg) also took a gold medal on the first day.

The 60th edition of the event began on March 2 in Sofia, Bulgaria and will run until March 5.

The tournament is being held in honor of Dan Kolov who was the first European freestyle wrestling champion from Bulgaria and European and world champion Nikola Petrov.

Ghadimi remains president of Iran hockey federation

TEHRAN – Bahram Ghadimi remained president of Iran hockey federation for a four-year term till 2027.

In the elections held at the Iran's Academy Olympic in Tehran on Sunday, Ghadimi secured 50 votes out of 56 votes cast.

Hassan Abazari finished in second place with four votes and Hamidreza Bokharaei came third with two points.

U20 coach Marfavi disappointed by defeat against Australia

TEHRAN – Head coach Samad Marfavi cut a disappointed figure after Iran suffered defeat despite dominating the match.

The Australian team defeated Iran 3-2 in AFC U20 Asian Cup Uzbekistan 2023 Group B fixture on Saturday.

"I want to congratulate Australia for winning the match," said Marfavi. "The match was a technical affair with both teams being familiar with each other's tactics. However, we were surprised at the beginning of the match after conceding the two goals.

"We couldn't adapt to the tempo at the beginning of the match and despite getting two goals of our own, we still couldn't win. We played better in the second half until we let our emotions get in the way.

"Sometimes you win and sometimes you lose. This is football," Marfavi concluded.

Iran defeat Thailand at 2023 NSDF Futsal Championship semis

TEHRAN – Iran futsal team defeated Thailand 5-1 in the 2023 NSDF Futsal Championship semifinals on Sunday.

Salar Aghapour and Saeid Ahmad Abbasi scored two goals each and Mehdi Karimi scored one goal.

Team Melli had started the campaign with a 11-0 win over Saudi Arabia in Group B and beat Egypt 3-1 in their second match.

Iran will play winners of Japan and Saudi Arabia on Tuesday in the final match.

The international event started on March 1 in Pattaya city and will run until March 7.

Iran are competing at the NSDF Futsal Championship as part of preparation for the 2024 FIFA Futsal World Cup.

Iran come fifth at 2023 IIHF World Championship III

TEHRAN – Iran lost to Singapore 9-2 on Sunday in their last match in the at 2023 IIHF World Championship Division III.

Team Melli started the campaign with a 14-4 win over Malaysia in their opening match but lost to Hong Kong 11-1, Bosnia and Herzegovina 9-2, Kyrgyzstan 18-0 and Singapore 9-2, respectively.

The competition was held in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina from Feb. 27 to March 5.

Group A consists of Turkmenistan, Chinese Taipei, South Africa, Luxembourg and Thailand.

The Group A tournament will be held in Cape Town, South Africa from 17 to 23 April.

ITC SME Trade Academy provides trade courses in Farsi

TEHRAN – The head of Iran Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) has said his organization is collaborating with International Trade Centre (ITC)'s SME Trade Academy to provide trade courses in Farsi to Iranian businessmen.

According to Alireza Peyman-Pak, TPO has translated some courses provided by ITC SME Trade Academy into Farsi in order to make them

accessible through the academy's online platform, the TPO portal reported.

So far two courses have been translated and are available in the mentioned platform titled "Financing Your Business" and "Innovation for Success: A Guide for Entrepreneurs" for which over 750 Iranian businessmen and entrepreneurs have applied.

Iran, Pakistan negotiating free trade agreement

TEHRAN – Iran and Pakistan are negotiating a free trade agreement with the aim of boosting their mutual trade to a targeted five billion dollars per year, an official with Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) said.

Speaking in a televised program on Sunday, Mohammad-Sadeq Qanadzadeh put the two countries' trade at \$2.2 billion in 2022, saying that Pakistan is one of Iran's main strategic trade partners in the region, IRIB reported.

According to Qanadzadeh, the main draft of the FTA has been prepared and reviewed by the governments of the two countries and the two sides are currently working on a list of commodities to be included in the agreement.

"This is a time-consuming and specialized process that involves all related institutions and organizations. Therefore, although the FTA is on our serious agenda, it will take some time to be finalized as we are still working on the technical aspects," the official said.

Land provided for 30,000 National Housing Movement units in Markazi province

TEHRAN- As announced by a provincial official, land has been provided for the construction of 30,000 units of the National Housing Movement Plan in the central Markazi province.

Hamid An'ami, the head of the province's Transport and Urban Development Department, also announced that currently, the implementation of 20,000 residential units with an average physical progress of 35 percent has begun.

So far, 140,000 applicants have registered in the province's National Housing Movement Plan, of which 80,000 have qualified and 40,000 have been recognized as eligible, he official further stated.

In mid-February, the acting head of the National Land and Housing Organization announced that about 71,000 hectares of land has been already provided for the National Housing Movement plan.

Arsalan Maleki said that of the mentioned lands, about 28 hectares have been provided during one past year.

In the past year, about 28,000 hectares of land have been provided within the boundaries of the cities and more than 12,000 hectares have been annexed to the cities, he stated.

The official has previously said that the private sector owners in provinces with land shortages can participate in the National

Housing Movement to provide land.

National Housing Movement to construct four million housing units in four years is one of the major plans of the current government in the housing sector.

According to the plan, out of these four million residential units, 3.2 million units will be constructed in cities and 800,000 units in villages, some of these units are currently being constructed after providing lands and preparing the necessary conditions.

After National Housing Action Plan (started in 2018), National Housing Movement is the government's second major program to provide affordable housing units for the low-income classes.

The operation for the construction of 209,212 residential units of the National Housing Movement began in early February 2022.

The ceremony to begin the mentioned operation and also to launch some development projects in the housing sector was attended by the former Transport and Urban Development Minister Rostam Qasemi.

Also, in late July 2022, Qasemi inaugurated a project for the construction of the first group of affordable housing units for laborers under the framework of the National Housing Movement.

69,000 ha of lands equipped with modern irrigation systems in Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari

TEHRAN- As announced by a provincial official, 69,000 hectares of lands have been equipped with modern irrigation systems in Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari province.

Gholam-Reza Zaker, the director of water and soil as well as technical-engineering affairs of the province's Agriculture Department, said

This year 320 projects in the field of covering agricultural rivers, restoring and renovating canals, transporting water with pipes, providing and transporting water for the development of gardens in sloping lands, equipping and renovating agricultural lands, constructing irrigation and drainage sub-networks, small water supply projects, constructing swimming pools, the roads between the farms have been planned and being followed up and implemented from the national and provincial funds in the 11 counties of the province.

The project manager of Iranian Agriculture Ministry's smart irrigation systems development program has said 25,000 hectares of the country's farmlands have been equipped with modern

irrigation systems in the first five months of the current Iranian year (March 21-August 22, 2022).

Fariborz Abbasi, who is the head of the Agriculture Ministry's Water and Soil Department, has said his ministry is planning to establish modern irrigation systems for 50,000 hectares of farmlands in the current year (ends on March 20).

The deputy agriculture minister noted that this year the ministry has allocated 15 trillion rials (about \$35 million) for the implementation of new irrigation systems.

He pointed to the supply and production of equipment for modern irrigation systems inside the country and said: "With the cooperation and help of domestic knowledge-based companies, we have reached self-sufficiency in the production of equipment and supplies for these systems."

Abbasi further mentioned his ministry's smart agriculture program and said that the smartening projects are being implemented on 4,000 hectares of the country's farmlands as a pilot in 13 provinces.

Iran's wheat production rises 28% in 2022: FAO

From page 1 ► Despite concerns about the impact of the Ukraine war on the world's agricultural production in 2022, the world's wheat production this year increased by two percent compared to the previous year and reached 794 million tons. In 2021, the total wheat production in the world was estimated at 778 million tons.

China was the largest wheat producer in 2022 with a production of 137.7 million tons, followed by the European Union with 134.5 million tons and India with 106.8 million tons.

Russia, the U.S., Australia, Canada, Pakistan, Ukraine, Turkey, the UK, and Kazakhstan were placed higher than Iran and ranked fourth to twelfth.

In a previous report released in June 2022, FAO saw cereal production in Iran to grow 34.2 percent in 2022, while the imports of such products were seen to drop 25 percent.



Iran opens trade center, permanent exhibition in Kabul



TEHRAN- Iran's trade center and permanent exhibition of Iranian products was inaugurated in Kabul on Sunday, the Iranian Embassy in Afghanistan announced.

In a tweet, the embassy mentioned the purpose of opening this center is to take a fundamental step in the development of trade

relations between the two countries of Iran and Afghanistan.

The embassy added that this center will be a place for Afghan businessmen to familiarize themselves with Iranian products.

The development of exports to Afghanistan with the establishment of a permanent trade center for Iranian goods in Kabul is the beginning of a new chapter in the economic relations between the two countries.

On January 31, Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) held a conference on Iran-Afghanistan business opportunities, during which the capacities of trade with Afghanistan were introduced and some solutions were proposed to resolve the problems created by the government change in Afghanistan.

Speaking at this event, Deputy Industry, Mining, and Trade Minister Mohammad

Mousavi said the trade between Iran and Afghanistan has reached \$1.5 billion in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21- December 21, 2022).

The official expressed hope that Opening trade centers in Afghanistan would increase the level of trade between the two neighbors.

Mousavi further invited the businessmen of the two countries, especially the Iranian industrialists, to take part in Afghanistan's infrastructure projects.

Iran exported 4.187 million tons of commodities worth \$1.839 billion to Afghanistan in the previous Iranian calendar year 1400 (ended on March 20, 2022) to register a 20-percent decline in terms of value compared to the preceding year.

The weight of the exported goods also decreased by 40 percent year on year.

Tehran to host Iran-Qatar business forum



The event is going to be attended by senior officials from both sides including TPO Head Alireza Peyman-Pak, deputy head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA), and Qatar's deputy minister of Trade and Industry, as well as the secretary general of Qatar Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

In addition to introducing the

two countries' economic and investment opportunities, during the two-day event, the representatives of the private sectors of the two sides are going to hold B2B meetings to explore ways of expanding mutual cooperation.

Tehran and Doha have set a target of three billion dollars of annual trade by 2025.

In a meeting between Mohsen Rezaei, the Iranian vice president

for economic affairs, and Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad al-Thani in October 2022, the two sides discussed ways of expanding trade ties between the two countries and emphasized the need for taking the necessary measures to reach the mentioned economic goal.

During the meeting, which was also attended by TPO Head Alireza Peyman-Pak, the Iranian side proposed drawing a roadmap for the two countries' trade development which was welcomed by Qatar's Emir.

Rezaei and Peyman-Pak visited Doha on top of a trade delegation to attend the opening ceremony of Iran's exclusive exhibition in the country.

Transit of goods via Shahid Bahonar port up 65% in 11 months yr/yr

TEHRAN- Transit of commodities through Iran's southern Shahid Bahonar port increased by 65 percent in the first eleven months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2022-February 19, 2023), as compared to the same period of time in the past year, a provincial official announced.

Hamid-Reza Mohamad-Hosseini Takhti, an official with the ports and maritime department of Hormozgan province, where Shahid Bahonar port lies, said that over 4,000 tons of products were transited via this port in the mentioned 11-month period.

He said the main transited goods included cars, fruits, vegetables, and dried fruits, which were transited from Shahid Bahonar port to the three countries of Turkmenistan, Armenia, and Georgia.

As announced by the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), transit of commodities through Iran increased by 5.22 percent in the first eleven months of the current year, as compared to the same period of time in the past year.

Mohammad Rezvani-Far said that 12 million tons

of commodities have been transited via the country in the 11-month period.

After seven years of reduction in the transit of goods from the country, the growth path of transit resumed in the past Iranian calendar year 1400 (ended on March 20, 2022) and with the passage of 12.65 million tons of goods through Iran, a growth of 68 percent was achieved, the former spokesman of IRICA has previously announced.

The policy of paying attention to neighbors and developing political and economic relations with neighboring countries in the current government, increasing attention to road and rail routes in the world and the efforts and co-operation of transportation and trade-related organizations in establishing or activating corridors through the country has led to significant growth in transit of goods through Iran.

Iran is one of the countries that has 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.

TEDPIX gains 7,700 points on Sunday

TEHRAN- TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), gained 7,730 points to 1.795 million on Sunday.

As reported, over 11,789 billion securities worth 70.356 trillion rials (about \$164 million) were traded at the TSE.

TEDPIX gained 165,178 points in the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday).

The index lost 155,778 points (9.22 percent) in the previous Iranian calendar month Bahman (ended on February 19).



New U.S. strategy in Yemen

From page 1 ▶ He added that the commander of the U.S. Fifth Fleet, accompanied by an American diplomat, landed at the headquarters of the illegal U.S.-Saudi military coalition base in al-Mahra.

Vice Admiral Brad Cooper and the U.S. ambassador to the Saudi-led puppet government in southern Aden travelled to the city of al-Ghaydah in Mahra governorate, in a flagrant violation of Yemen's sovereignty.

According to reports citing well-informed sources, Cooper and the U.S. official Stephen Fagin were accompanied by a delegation of top U.S. military officials at al-Ghaydah airport, which has been turned into a military base for American, British and Israeli forces on the Arabian Sea.

They also held talks with the pro-U.S.-Saudi coalition and self-proclaimed governor Mohammed bin Yasser to discuss “maritime issues”.

Since 2018, the airport has been closed to the people of Mahra and has been occupied by the so-called “Commander of the Coast Guard” with the U.S.-Saudi coalition that has been indiscriminately bombing Yemen since March 2015.

The sources pointed out that the U.S. military visit came after a meeting held by bin Yasser with the U.S. official in the Saudi capital Riyadh last January, in a bid to carry out new missions for the U.S. forces occupying al-Ghaydah airport, under the pretext of “combating smuggling” and “confronting the potential dangers of terrorism.”

The eastern oil-rich Yemeni provinces of Mahra, Hadramout, Shabwa and Marib have recently become the focus of the ambitions of the occupying countries of the U.S., UK and France, with the aim of controlling the sources of oil and gas.

U.S. and European countries intensified their movements in the eastern provinces of Yemen after the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine last year, and have shown great interest in these regions.

The latest developments come as the West faces oil and gas shortages



in the wake of its sanctions on the Russian energy sector following the outbreak of the Ukraine war.

Saudi media have confirmed from sources in the U.S. Department of Defense that Washington has retained two CIA military bases in areas under the control of pro-U.S.-Saudi coalition government, including in the city of Mukalla in Hadhramaut governorate.

While the West is claiming that its presence in the region is aimed to deepen bilateral and multilateral maritime cooperation, the evidence on the ground proves quite the opposite.

Yemen considers the presence of foreign forces on its territory as an occupation, and this leads to the question of the reason behind this exceptional concentration of foreign military bases in the country.

Are we are facing a scenario similar to what is happening in northeastern Syria, where U.S. has been plundering the country's oil to the tune of billions of dollars?

Al-Houthi says the U.S. has been working actively to end the talks between Saudi Arabia and Yemen in Oman intended to end the war.

“The U.S. seeks to obstruct the Omani efforts, which is to distance the coalition from any agreement or understanding, and this is totally unacceptable,” he said.

Experts say this makes sense as reaching a comprehensive political settlement means an end to the war.

And ending the war would require the exit of all foreign forces led by the American and British militaries from the eastern and southern Yemeni coasts. For this reason and other reasons as well, the U.S. and the UK are working to impede the talks and obstruct reaching any political settlement.

Likewise, Yemen's geographical location is one of the most important in the West Asian region. It has a large front on the Red Sea and has a large gateway to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea that extends to other regions. The Gulf is what America needs to build military bases and serve its other sinister goals.

The nature of the relations between the western-occupied regions in Yemen, and between Saudi Arabia and the UAE is important as well. The main point here is that the puppet authority in Yemen does not care about the issue of sovereignty.

If the authority put in place by the U.S. and its regional allies had an independent voice, then there would be no occupation, military and naval bases, blockade or plans to seize the country's natural resources.

If anything, the puppet government is contributing to the violation of Yemen's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Analysts have said that the foreign military bases, which have been listed by the leaders of Ansarallah as areas of occupation,

will possibly be targeted to create realistic equations.

Others agree that after showing impressive steadfastness in the face of eight years of war, it would be natural for the Yemeni forces to have the ability to target foreign military bases as has been reflected over the years.

With the U.S. putting the brakes on talks in Oman, Sana'a says its military capabilities are growing, and all branches of the armed forces are prepared for the next stage that could open the door to “the option of a broad military operation.”

All of U.S. President Joe Biden's boasting about ending support for Saudi military operations in Yemen, and the movement in the U.S. Congress that pushed for an end to military aid to Riyadh has now turned out to be inaccurate, and if anything it was just an effort to deflect the growing global condemnation.

What is happening now in al-Mahra and Hadramout is clear evidence of the ongoing interest of the U.S. in not only its military presence but also the expansion of it, one year after the Ukraine war.

Analysts have pointed out that Saudi Arabia has practically taken full control of al-Mahra in cooperation with the U.S. and local militias, and there are many reports citing Israeli naval cooperation as well, in addition to the U.S. cooperation with the two parties.

Will Yemen turn into Syria? Time will tell.

But judging by the past few years, Yemeni forces have proved capable of confronting threats and turning their chants and slogans into extraordinary retaliatory operations.

“The level of our military capabilities has evolved compared to the beginning of the aggression” al-Houthi warned.

“If we look at the situation today compared to the beginning of the aggression, and to previous years, there is a major difference in the level of Yemeni military capabilities,” the leader of the Ansarallah movement explained.

situation before the invasion. But I know that this is difficult. Principles sometimes are not sufficient. In any case the amount of suffering and the heavy loss of lives is such that all responsible governments should exercise a strong pressure to stop this unnecessary war.

What is your prediction of the post-Ukraine war?

It is difficult to make predictions, but I think in the future Ukraine will do all its best to join the European Union. Military alliances are at a much lower level. Parliamentary democracy will remain and

we see with our eyes that the invasion has provoked a strong sense on national identity that was not there before.

Is it advisable to imagine that after the Ukraine war NATO may expand to include countries outside Europe, such as Japan, South Korea and Australia?

Membership and partnerships are different things. Japan and Australia will not become members of NATO and nobody is thinking about this possibility. But they may become partners with flexible arrangements and formulas, as it is already happening with a large number of countries in 3 continents.

Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, some political-security strategists in the West have said that the war is a confrontation between Biden and Putin and has the potential of a nuclear war. What is your opinion?

I don't think that this is a war of the West against Russia, because nobody wants a war on Russia or to threaten this country in its integrity. There is no reason for such a policy. The West is supporting

Ukraine but there are unwritten red lines, and Russian territory has never been touched. I repeat that the intention is only to support an aggressed independent country. All the suffering and the destruction are in the territory of Ukraine.

The use of nuclear weapons would be a tragedy that would change the face of the world. We should be very careful in not using weapons of mass destruction of all kinds.

WORLD HEADLINES

Butcher regime: One Palestinian killed every day since 2023

From page 1 ▶ She expressed deep concern about the continuing portrayal of equal obligations between Israel, the occupying power, and the occupied state in international reports, calling on the international community to assume its responsibilities, take all necessary measures for accountability and justice in the face of these violations, and end the racist Israeli occupation.

Russia says US, NATO undermining security in Asia-Pacific

By creating new military alliances in the Asia-Pacific, the US and NATO are undermining the security architecture in the region, Russian Ambassador to China Igor Morgulov said on Saturday.

“One of them (of military blocs) has already been created -- the military and technological bloc AUKUS, which includes the US, Great Britain and Australia,” Morgulov said in an interview to China's state-run CGTN television network.

“Formally, all this is furnished with the pretext of creating an Australian nuclear submarine fleet. But it is clear that behind these steps are far-reaching plans to bring NATO's military-technological potential to the region,” Morgulov said.

The ambassador stressed the new alliance will bring problems, undermining the region's security and stability to justify its presence in the region.

“Therefore, I do not see any positive aspects from the fact that NATO may appear in the Asia-Pacific region,” Morgulov stressed.

In the face of such challenges, Russia and China have to make efforts to preserve the existing security structure by explaining to regional players challenges and threats arising from NATO's presence in Asia-Pacific, Morgulov noted.

“For those who do not understand, we will respond by increasing military and military-technical cooperation with the like-minded in the region, including China,” he said, adding that Russia and China regularly hold joint military drills.

“We will continue to increase our defense capabilities to respond promptly to the threats that NATO may create in this region of the world,” Morgulov said.

China sets this year's economic growth target at 'around %5'

China's government announced plans for a consumer-led revival of the struggling economy as its legislature opened a session Sunday that will tighten President Xi Jinping's control over business and society.

Premier Li Keqiang, the top economic official, set this year's growth target at “around 5%” following the end of anti-virus controls that kept millions of people at home and triggered protests. Last year's growth in the world's second-largest economy fell to 3%, the second-weakest level since at least the 1970s. “We should give priority to the recovery and expansion of consumption,” Li said in a speech on government plans before the ceremonial National People's Congress in the Great Hall of the People in central Beijing.

Top US general visits troops in Syria

US troops occupying the petroleum-rich region of northeastern Syria have gotten a surprise visit from America's top-ranking general and a vote of confidence that their illegal deployment is absolutely necessary to keep Americans safe.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley made an unannounced stop at a US base in Syria on Saturday, reportedly to review defenses against attacks by militants and evaluate efforts to prevent a re-emergence by the Islamic State (formerly ISIS/ISIL) terrorist group. After the visit, he told reporters traveling with him that US troops and their local allies are making progress in ensuring that IS won't rise up again.

Asked whether the Syrian occupation is worth the risks that it carries, Milley said removing the troops would jeopardize the security of the US and its allies. “If you think that that's important, then the answer is ‘Yes,’” he said. “I happen to think that's important. So I think that an enduring defeat of ISIS and continuing to support our friends and allies in the region... I think those are important tasks that can be done.”

Iraqi security, defense exhibition opens in Baghdad

Iraq's 11th edition of the International Security and Defense Exhibition opened on Saturday in the capital Baghdad, with the participation of 78 weapons production companies from 19 countries.

Adel al-Masoudi, head of the State Company for Iraqi Fairs and Commercial Services, said in a statement that some local weapons production companies affiliated with the ministries of defense, interior, and industry are participating in the four-day exhibition.

Companies from Britain, Bulgaria, China, France, Italy, the Republic of Korea and other countries have also taken part in the exhibition.

Light, medium, and heavy weapons, towed and self-propelled artillery of various calibers, combat aircraft, drones, tanks, armored personnel carriers, counter-battery radar, and metal detectors are among the items in the exhibition.

Mustafa Ati Hassan, head of the Iraqi Defense Industry Commission, told Xinhua that the defense exhibition is a great opportunity for the commission to cooperate with weapons-producing companies

IDF reserve fighter pilots refuse to attend training in protest of judicial overhaul

A total of 37 reserve pilots out of the 40 members of the Israeli Air Force's 69th fighter squadron have announced that they will not attend a pre-scheduled training session this coming Wednesday in protest of the government's judicial overhaul.

The 37 reserve fighter pilots, from a unit specializing in attacking remote targets with the F15I Ra'am (Thunder) Jet, announced their decision Sunday to the heads of the air force and their squadron commander. Instead of training, they have said they will hold a dialogue regarding the issue under debate outside of government offices.

The announcement by the air force reservists comes on the heels of a previous announcement last week from reservists in the elite IDF 8200 intelligence unit saying that they would strike by not attending some aspects of their reserve duty.

All responsible governments should strongly help end Ukraine war: ex-NATO official

By M.A. Saki

TEHRAN - A former senior NATO official urges all “responsible governments” in the world to press for the Ukraine war.

“All responsible governments should exercise strong pressure to stop Ukraine war,” Alessandro Minuto Rizzo, who was NATO deputy secretary general from 2001 to 2007, tells the Tehran Times in an exclusive interview.

NATO has been supplying arms to Ukraine since the country came under attack by Russia on February 24, 2022. However, some analysts criticize NATO for its support, saying it will lead to the prolongation of the war. For example, they say NATO's involvement in the civil war in Libya and Afghanistan complicated the issues.

Yet, Mr. Minuto-Rizzo, who naturally has predisposition toward NATO, says no NATO member “wants a war on Russia or to threaten this country in its integrity.”

Following is the text of the interview:

The Ukraine war entered its second year on Feb. 24, 2023. Could you imagine the war to drag on so long?

When the war started- to my surprise- I thought that it could be stopped in a few weeks with some reasonable agreement. Remember that the war started under the wrong assumption that Russia could easily win over a country that would quickly surrender. Instead of accepting a quite different reality, Russia has intensified its efforts to this day with destruction and heavy casualties on the territory of Ukraine.

Some argue that the NATO expansion to the East prompted Russia to invade Ukraine. What is your opinion?

At the beginning this was the reason given by Moscow to justify its aggression. If we look at the hard facts, Ukraine has never asked for NATO membership. There was only an invitation in a declaration by

the NATO Summit of 2008 and it was never repeated afterwards. Let's remember, among other things, that the German Chancellor publicly stated a



few days before the invasion that Ukraine accession to NATO “is not in agenda and will not be in agenda”.

Some politicians and analysts are saying that the U.S. and European members of NATO are prolonging and fanning the flames of war by shipping heavy arms to Ukraine. Do you agree with such views?

It is clear that Russia is much more powerful than Ukraine and that in a prolonged war Ukraine could be defeated; this is the reason why a large number of countries is providing military support, in order to help the country to resist such an unjustified aggression. Many countries and not only from NATO and the European Union. This decision is not meant to prolong the war or to attack Russia, but it is a necessity to protect the independence of Ukraine.

Before the war, you were against bringing Ukraine into the NATO alliance. Do you still hold the same view?

We have to look at this issue with some wisdom. In principle every independent country has the right to decide its own foreign policy. And NATO is a defensive organization. On the other hand, the integrity

of Ukraine can be guaranteed in different ways without necessarily becoming a member. It is a matter of good faith and practical solutions are possible. I don't think that this is the most important issue.

How can this disastrous war be brought to an end?

It is easier to start a war than to finish it. Things have become much more complicated with the current intensification of hostilities. This is the most difficult question. I would advocate to go back to the

Needlework export could generate revenue more than oil, expert says



From Page 1 ► The value of Iran's handicrafts exports stood at \$400 million during the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year 1401 (Mar. 21, 2022– Jan. 20, 2023).

The Islamic Republic exported some \$320 million worth of handicrafts during the past Iranian year (1400).

According to the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Iran has the most cities and towns registered with the World Crafts Council (WCC), followed by China with seven, Chile with four, and India with three designated ones.

The WCC-Asia-Pacific Region designated Shiraz, Malayer, Zanjan, and the village of Qasemabad in January 2020, bringing the total

number of craft cities and towns in Iran from 10 to 14. Shiraz has been dubbed “the world city of [various] handicrafts.”

Malayer became a center for woodcarving and carved wood furniture on a global scale. The designation “world city of filigree” was given to Zanjan. The village of Qasemabad, which is renowned throughout the country for its traditional costumes, was also promoted to a major handicrafts center on an international scale.

Iraq, Afghanistan, Germany, the United States, and the coastal states of the Persian Gulf are among the countries that traditionally import ceramics, porcelain, hand-woven clothing, personal jewelry, and semi-precious stones from Iran.

Shanghai museum to highlight Tabriz attractions

TEHRAN – On Sunday, a delegation of museum experts from China met with Iranian cultural heritage officials and experts from East Azarbaijan province to discuss ways to widen cooperation.

Historical attractions of Tabriz, the provincial capital, are set to go on show in Shanghai based on initial agreements they reached on Sunday, IRNA reported.

Historical attractions of Tabriz will be introduced in Shanghai in line with the cultural cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and China, a Chinese museum director said.

Bilateral introduction of tourism capacities will be carried out based on an agreement to be inked with the general directorate of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts of East Azarbaijan, the director said.

Reciprocally, Tabriz will hold an event dedicated to Chinese arts, historical relics, and tourism attractions, said Ahmad Hamzezhadeh who is the tourism chief of East Azerbaijan province.

Before this, the exhibitions of Chinese cultural and artistic works had been held in Tehran and Isfahan, Hamzezhadeh said.

Hamzezhadeh announced the readiness of both sides to sign a memorandum of

A haul of Sassanid coins documented

TEHRAN – The Research Institute for Cultural Heritage and Tourism has recently restored and documented a haul of Sassanid coins previously confiscated by Police forces in Nahavand of Hamedan province.

Sasanian coins are one of the most important sources for understanding the art, politics and economy of the Sasanian period, a cultural heritage expert from the institute said on Saturday.

They reveal valuable information about the script, language, the duration of a king's reign, the economic situation when the coin was minted, as well as the historical events that caused the coin to be minted, Azadeh Heidarpour added.

Pointing out that one of the most important features of Sasanian coins is their minting date, she clarified: During the Sasanian era, when each king assumed the throne, associated coins were minted until the end of his reign.

The recently restored coins were confiscated

from smugglers by police forces in 1398 (Iranian calendar year commenced in March 2019), she said.

Noteworthy achievements of Persian civilization were in many ways on display in Iran during the Sassanian era. Experts say that the idea of thin flan coins or coins with relief on both sides, was first introduced by the Sasanian dynasty of Iran around 220 CE.

The Sassanid era saw a general renaissance in the nation's art and architecture. As scholarship was promoted by the government and many works from both the East and the West were translated into Pahlavi, the Sassanian people's official language, crafts like metalwork and gem engraving reached a high level of sophistication during that time.

The Muslim conquest of Persia, also known as the Arab conquest of Iran, led to the fall of the Sasanian Empire of Iran (Persia) in c. 651 and the eventual decline of the Zoroastrian religion. The rise of Muslims coincided with an unprecedented political, social, economic, and military weakness in Persia.

TEHRAN – Iran is likely to be a top source for Neanderthal studies as a new study traced routes that Neanderthals followed into the Iranian plateau.

Based on a paper, published in the journal PLOS ONE, the paper follows computer modeling of Neanderthal dispersal across hypothetical Northern and Southern Caspian routes based on available archaeological and physiological data.

To uncover routes that Neanderthals would have likely taken, researchers developed and analyzed geographical data systems, with bio-geographical data inputs.

These routes suggest potential research locations in lesser-studied parts of Iran and Central Asia, where the modeling indicates the ideal Palaeolithic habitats.

A preceding genetic study led by the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, titled “Neanderthals in central Asia and Siberia”, which is cited in the paper, has linked Neanderthals in Uzbekistan and the Altai region of southern Siberia to being of European origin.

Creating a corridor map

Researchers developed a model to look for the Least-Cost-Path (LCP), using an open-source geographical information system, QGIS, layered with bio-geographical information of past climate conditions.

TEHRAN –There is a great deal of interest in visiting Iran among the Japanese, a tourism expert with the Embassy of Japan in Iran has said.

After the coronavirus outbreak, Japanese travel tours have resumed to Iran, as the Japanese enjoy traveling to Iran, the expert explained, ILNA reported on Sunday.

More than 7,000 Japanese nationals travel to Iran every year, with half of these traveling for business and the other half traveling as tourists, she added.

Due to sanctions against Iran, Japanese travel agencies cannot operate in Iran, so Japan and Iran can only establish tourism relations via the embassy, she noted.

A Japanese traveler is not just a tourist, but someone interested in learning about the culture and customs of Iran closely, and doing this is better achieved by accompanying Iranian natives and nomads through their daily lives, she stated.

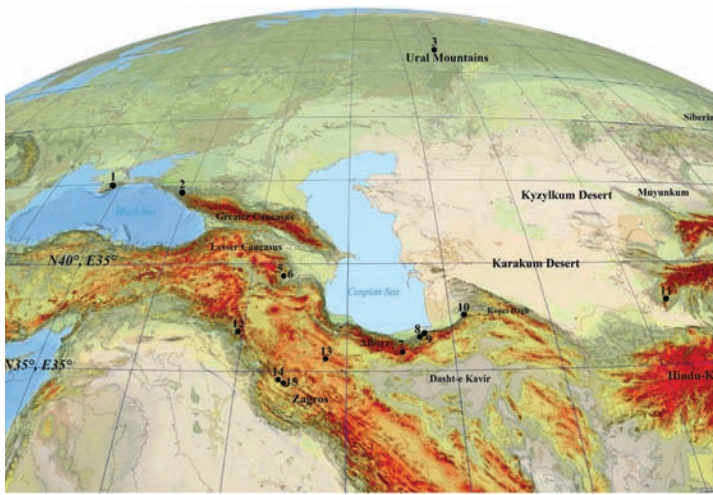
UNESCO-registered Bisotun to host Noruz celebration

TEHRAN –Noruz, the Persian New Year holiday, is scheduled to be celebrated in the UNESCO-registered Bisotun, which embraces giant bas-reliefs and inscriptions of Darius the Great, in the western province of Kermanshah, the provincial tourism chief has said.

In addition to the Noruz celebration, this festival also showcases the province's tourism capabilities and handicrafts in an area of 1,600 meters, Dariush Farmani explained on Sunday.

There is an area and program that is suitable for children of all ages at this festival so that families can have fun together, the official added.

More Noruz festivities are also planned to be held in Taq-e



The study area and important Middle Paleolithic sites mentioned in the text. (Credit: PLOS ONE)

Iran may be top source for Neanderthal archaeology, study finds

Similar to how a GPS in a car will only direct you to a destination by following roadways and may route you around traffic, construction, or road closures, LCP models do not always use the most direct linear paths because they take into account clear paths and expensive obstacles along the way.

Researchers used LCP analysis to model the likely Neanderthal dispersal routes between two cave sites in Russia's Altai Mountains and the Caucasus (one with Micoquian and the other with Mousterian cultural materials).

The researchers searched for regions with the fewest climate fluctuations and those most likely to offer stable environments for flora and fauna using climate data downloaded from various sources.

They concentrated on the Southern Caspian Sea corridor as it stood out as being relatively humid and mild in comparison to surrounding areas, making it an ideal route for expansion and settlement.

In addition to being the ideal route for leaving Europe, it would have been a welcoming entry

Japanese eager to visit Iran, expert says

Their favorite thing to do is not only see historical monuments but also be in nature and photograph it, she mentioned.

Some experts believe Iran is still somehow “unknown” to many potential travelers due to the Western “media war.” Several estimates have been released so far on the extent of the tourism-related losses incurred by the pandemic.

According to the data compiled by the tourism ministry, the tourism of the country was growing before the corona outbreak, its revenues reached \$11.7 billion in 2019, which accounted for 2.8% of GDP, nearing the average share of tourism in the world GDP, which was 3.2 percent. Some 8.7 million foreign nationals visited Iran during the Iranian year (1398) and Iran was ranked as the second fastest-growing country in tourism based on data compiled by the World Tourism Organization.

Experts expect Iran to achieve a tourism boom after the coronavirus is contained, believing its impact would be temporary and



short-lived for a country that ranked the third fastest-growing tourism destination in 2019.

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

Great shortly after he ascended to the throne of the Persian Empire in 521 BC.

The bas-relief portrays Darius holding a bow, as a sign of sovereignty and treading on the chest of a figure who lies on his back before the Achaemenid king. According to legend, the figure represents Gaumata, the Median Magus, and pretender to the throne, whose assassination led to Darius's rise to power.

Below and around the bas-reliefs, there are about 1,200 lines of inscriptions telling the story of the battles Darius waged in 521-520 BC against the governors who attempted to take apart the empire founded by Cyrus.

The inscription is written in three languages. The oldest

point into Europe for migrations of modern humans (Homo sapiens) coming from Africa and via the Levant, raising the possibility that this could have been a significant cross-cultural meeting point between our two species.

Neanderthals lived before and during the last Ice Age of the Pleistocene in some of the most unforgiving environments ever inhabited by humans. They developed a successful culture, with a complex stone tool technology, that was based on hunting, with some scavenging and local plant collection. Their survival during tens of thousands of years of the last glaciation is a remarkable testament to human adaptation.

Neanderthals were the most advanced humans in Europe for several hundred thousand years. They tended to their sick, managed fire for warmth and cooking, and hunted the largest prey as an apex predator. They also made cave art.

In addition, Neanderthals were the most widespread species of people in their era, living as far away from Europe's western and northernmost regions as Central Asia and Siberia. Because modern humans and Neanderthals interbred frequently and in various places, as we have learned from researching our own genomic history, the Neanderthals' history also plays a significant role in our own.



Bostan, Anahita Temple, and the Sassanid archeological landscape, he noted.

Situated some 30 kilometers from Kermanshah, at the foot of the Zagros Mountains, Bisotun was inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage list on July 13, 2006.

The principal monument of this archaeological site is a massive bas-relief and cuneiform inscription ordered by Darius the

Meeting to discuss UNESCO-registered oud

TEHRAN – A professional meeting focusing on UNESCO-registered oud, a traditional musical instrument, is scheduled to be held in the Persian Gulf island of Hormuz, southern Hormozgan province, the provincial tourism chief has said.

A number of musicians, craftspeople, cultural officials, and scholars have been invited to attend the one-day event, which will be held on March 15, Mohammad Mohseni explained on Sunday.

Music enthusiasts and researchers can gain a deeper understanding of this global instrument through such meetings, the official added.

Crafting and playing the oud was recently added to the UNESCO list jointly for Iran and Syria.

The oud is a traditional, lute-type instrument

played in Iran and Syria. The musician places the short-necked instrument on their leg, fretting with one hand and plucking the chords with the other. In both countries, the oud consists of a pear-shaped sound box made of walnut, rose, poplar, ebony or apricot wood. Crafting an oud takes up to twenty-five days, during which the wood is left to dry and harden and is then treated with water and steam for fifteen days to build its durability.

According to the UN cultural body, ouds are crafted in different sizes for different-sized bodies and decorated with wooden carvings and mosaic patterns. They typically have five twin strings, though a sixth string can be added. With its bass and baritone ranges, the instrument can produce melodic and harmonic tones. The oud is played solo or in ensembles and is accompanied by traditional songs and

dance in a wide range of events. Its practice is transmitted through apprenticeships and in musical centers, colleges, and universities in urban areas. Crafters are mostly men, although in recent years young women have developed an interest as well.

Hormuz Island is well-known for its eye-catching ochre, a red-colored earth pigment that attracts domestic and foreign nature lovers and holidaymakers.

The island covers an area of approximately 42 square kilometers, most of which is fairly uninhabited. It is sprawled in the Strait of Hormuz, 8km from the mainland.

Most of its visitors are day trippers from adjacent Qeshm Island and Bandar Abbas. The latter is a bustling port city and the provincial capital.

TEHRAN – The Vice Presidency for Science, Technology, and Knowledge-Based Economy has allocated one billion euros for implementing 26 large propelling projects over the course of three years.

The projects are to be implemented in the fields of health, transportation, water, and food security, Rouhollah Dehqani-Firouzabadi, the vice president for science and technology, said.

The projects are of high-level technology that will have a great impact on people's lives, he added.

He also said that the projects will be implemented with the support of the Iranian elites living abroad.

“We have defined 18 propelling projects for the current year and eight more for the next year,” Dehqani-Firouzabadi noted.

The Vice Presidency for Science, Technology, and Knowledge-Based Economy has played an effective role in encouraging 2,600 Iranian researchers and experts residing abroad to return to the country.

The goal was attained with the successful implementation of a “cooperation program with Iranian experts and entrepreneurs abroad”, IRNA reported.

This program is a joint collaboration between the Center for International Interactions of Science and Technology of the Vice Presidency for Science, Technology, and Knowledge-Based Economy and the National Elites Foundation.

It has led to the formation of a suitable infrastructure for using the scientific and technological capacity and power of Iranian experts in various specialized fields.

As part of the program, more than 10,000 Iranian experts and researchers residing abroad have been recruited, and more than 2,600 researchers and experts from the world's top universities (mostly from America, Canada, and European countries) have returned to the country.

TEHRAN – Some 53,000 development projects have been implemented in deprived areas across the country by Barekat Charity Foundation.

Starting or completing a total of 58,000 projects in rural and underprivileged regions is on the agenda, IRNA quoted Mohammad Torkamaneh, the CEO of the Foundation, as saying.

The projects include building schools, hospitals, libraries, laboratories, mosques, emergency medical centers, bridges, roads, and water supply networks, he added.

The Foundation pursues the implementation and completion of health and treatment projects in deprived and rural areas of the country with the aim of economic and social empowerment, improving health and hygiene indicators, and providing medical services to the people of deprived and less developed areas.

Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam was founded in 1989. In the Iranian calendar year, 1386 (March 2017-March 2018) Barekat Charity Foundation- the social arm of the organization- with the aim of promoting social justice was established.

Socio-economic empowerment of communities by encouraging entrepreneurship



Some €1 billion allocated for ‘propelling projects’

Some 19 percent of the researchers and experts are graduates of the top 20 universities in the world (such as MIT, Stanford, Cambridge, Harvard, Berkeley, Illinois, Imperial College, Princeton, Michigan, National Singapore, and EPFL) and about 79 percent of the people have spent five years outside Iran.

The Vice Presidency, in cooperation with the National Elites Foundation, launched a joint program with Iranian experts and entrepreneurs abroad in 2016 with the aim of creating a mechanism to benefit from the valuable knowledge and experiences of Iranian researchers and experts abroad.

The program has been developed and implemented within the framework of post-doctorate studies, exchanging professors, establishing technological companies, and holding specialized workshops.

The audience of this program includes Ph.D. graduates from one of the top 200 universities in the world, professors from one of the top 200 universities in the world,

and professionals and entrepreneurs active in one of the leading scientific and technological institutions or foreign knowledge-based companies.

This program aims to solve the basic challenges mentioned by Iranian elites interested in cooperation with the country.

The projects are to be implemented in the fields of health, transportation, water, and food security.

The challenges include a “lack of a specific mechanism to establish relationships with selected scientific and technological institutions and centers”, and “unfamiliarity with the country’s scientific and technologi-

cal situation in the specialized field”.

Over the past six years, it has been able to be a bridge between Iranian experts and scientists abroad with more than 150 scientific and technological centers, including top universities, research institutes, technology parks, and domestically selected knowledge-based companies in the shortest possible time, and has provided them with the capacities available to introduce different fields of science and technology.

Another achievement of this program is the creation of 280 knowledge-based companies and startups in various fields of “Artificial Intelligence”, “Biotechnology”, “Nano”, “Energy”, “Information and Communication Technology” and so on.

These companies have provided the ground for the direct employment of the best domestic specialists and graduates.

Also, more than 450 researchers who have returned so far to the country have been recruited by the faculty of top-ranked domestic universities as part of this program, which has had a great impact on raising the quality level of research, educational and international activities of universities.

Also, in the past two years, special virtual meetings were held with Iranian experts and researchers living in Canada, North America, and some European countries with the aim of introducing the programs of the Vice Presidency for Science and Technology and the National Elites Foundation, focusing on projects and support programs in the field of coronavirus.

The important point in providing conditions for the return of elites is to increase their commitment every time they are in the country to participate in activities related to the field of science and technology.

The goal is to create a sense of dependence and responsibility in Iranian elites towards the country, which should be done step by step.

Thousands of projects completed in underdeveloped areas



prioritizing breadwinner women, developing infrastructures such as water supply and power grids, building roads, constructing schools and increasing educational spaces, promoting health for all, and granting non-repayable loans and insurance, especially in less developed areas and regions most affected by 1980s war and natural disasters are of the priorities of the charity foundation.

A total of 31 trillion rials (nearly \$62 mil-

lion) for the eradication of deprivation in rural areas has been approved by the Majlis (Iranian Parliament) in the budget bill for the current Iranian calendar year (March 2022-March 2023).

The comprehensive development plans aim to develop rural areas in line with cultural, economic, and social conditions, as well as housing provision for the rural residents and improving environmental services.

There are around 40,000 villages in the

WORLD RAMSAR SITES

Stung Sen

The Site is located in Cambodia along the south-eastern edge of the Tonle Sap Great Lake, and mainly comprises seasonally flooded freshwater swamp forests.

Along the Stung Sen River, there are gallery forests, low-stature shrub land, inundated and submerged trees, and extensive mats of herbaceous and aquatic vegetation which provide habitat for a variety of species.

The vegetation of Stung Sen is strongly influenced by the exchange of water between the Mekong River, the Stung Sen River and the Great Lake, and the area is subject to an annual flooding cycle that makes it extremely fertile.

The Site is an important spawning ground for several fish species such as Jullien's golden carp (*Probarbus jullieni*) and small scale mud carp (*Cirrhinus microlepis*), a migratory pathway and feeding ground for waterbirds, and an important habitat for mammals.

It is regionally important for supporting a number of globally threatened species such as the critically endangered Mekong giant carp (*Catlocarpio siamensis*); the endangered yellow-headed temple turtle (*Heosemys annandali*) and Indochinese silvered langur (*Trachypitecus germaini*); and the vulnerable lesser adjutant (*Leptoptilos javanicus*) and smooth-coated otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata*).

Boeng Chhmar

Boeng Chhmar and Associated River System and Floodplain is a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in Cambodia.

It is a lake formed amid inundated forest in the northeast fringe of Tonle Sap lake, consisting of permanent open water surrounded by a creek system and flooded forest which becomes one with Tonle Sap in the wet season.

The site is a good example of near-natural wet-

lands that play a substantial hydrological and biological role in the natural functioning of two major rivers, Stoeng Stoung and Stoeng Chikreng.

The area supports a large assemblage of plant, fish and waterbird species, many of which are listed as rare, vulnerable, or endangered, including the Siamese Crocodile *Crocodylus siamensis*, Mekong Giant Catfish *Pangasianodon gigas* and Giant Barb *Catlocarpio siamensis*.

The site regularly supports more than 20,000 individuals of a number of large waterbird species on an annual basis.

The Tonle Sap region plays a vital role in Cambodia's economy by supplying fish to the population, and several million people depend upon its productivity.

The population in the Ramsar Site increased by 37% from 1998 to 2003, leading to increased pressure on fish resources and wood collection, with more frequent dry season fires, all of which are affecting the site's ecological character, turning the forest to grasslands and shrublands.

However, efforts to manage these pressures continue with the creation a management plan and fish sanctuaries covering part of the Ramsar Site.

Middle Stretches of Mekong River

Middle Stretches of the Mekong River north of Stoeng Treng is a National Protected Area in Cambodia.

It is a 40km stretch of the Mekong River in the north of Cambodia characterized by strong turbulent flow with numerous channels between rocky and sandy islands that are completely inundated during high water, with higher alluvial islands that remain dry.

It lies about 5km from the town of Stoeng Treng where the Se Kong river joins the Mekong river and 4 km south from the border with Laos.

Source: Ramsar.org

country with more than 20 households, for all of which comprehensive development plans have been approved every 10 years.

Currently, 26 percent of the country's population lives in villages, around 39,000 villages have more than 20 households and 23,000 villages have less than 20 households.

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

A total of 31 trillion rials (nearly \$62 million) has been approved for the eradication of deprivation in rural areas.

In Iran, where villages account for generating 20-23 percent of the value-added in the country, the development of rural areas has been always a top agenda of the government's activities.

Many efforts have been made over the past couple of years by the government to support villagers and slow down the trend of migra-

tion from rural areas to cities.

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

A total of 7,509 development projects came onstream in villages across the country by rural administrations.

The projects were inaugurated on the occasion of the victory anniversary of the Islamic Revolution (February 1-11), IRNA reported.

Some 36 trillion rials (about \$72 million) were spent on the development projects.

The largest number of projects were related to the improvement of rural roads with 5786 projects, equivalent to 77 percent of all projects.

Creating parks and green spaces, establishing firefighting stations, as well as sports and cultural places were also among the major projects.

More than 37,300 rural administration offices are operating in the country, offering services to about 95 percent of the country's rural population.

ENGLISH IN USE

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‘Green taxes not used for environmental development’

While the Municipality of Tehran receives green taxes paid by pollutant industries, the money is not used for developing the environment or improving the industries, Ali Moridi, head of department of environment's (DOE) soil and water office has said.

The DOE is trying to revise the law and receive green taxes to use it toward eradicating air and water pollution, wastewater treatment and environmental issues, along with technology and industries improvement, he said, IRNA reported on Tuesday.

Referring to proper laws adopted on waste management, he stated that there are rules which obliges the waste management affairs of the DOE to make the manufacturing and import industries pay taxes and spend the taxes on waste management and recycling.

“Accordingly, if industries do not produce contaminated or hazardous waste, they will be subjected to tax exemptions,” he added.

عوارض آلاینده‌گی صرف ارتقای محیط زیست نمی شود

مدیرکل دفتر آب و خاک سازمان حفاظت محیط زیست گفت: عوارض اخذ شده از صنایع آلاینده در محل خودش و با هدف رفع چالش محیط زیست هزینه نمی شود.

به گزارش خبرنگار علمی ایرنا، «علی مریدی» سه شنبه افزود: در سازمان حفاظت محیط زیست در تلاش برای بازنگری این قانون هستیم تا زمینه‌ای فراهم شود عوارض آلاینده‌گی به حساب صندوق ملی محیط زیست وارد و صرف حل مسایل زیست محیطی شود و بتوانیم به صنایع برای ارتقای فناوری و تصفیه پساب ها کمک کنیم. مدیر کل دفتر آب و خاک سازمان حفاظت ادامه داد: البته قوانین خوبی در زمینه مدیریت پسماند تصویب شده است که سازمان محیط زیست را مکلف کرده تا از صنایع تولیدی و وارداتی درصدی را به عنوان مالیات اخذ و به صندوق ملی محیط زیست واریز کند تا صرف هزینه پسماند و بازیافت شود. وی خاطرنشان کرد: بر همین اساس اگر صنایعی، آلودگی و پسماند آلوده یا خطرناک ایجاد نکنند شامل معافیت مالیاتی می شوند.



Nursery stock at Sukan Park

Workers are preparing saplings at Sukan Park nursery stock in the northcentral city of Semnan on March 5, 2023.

Measuring 16.5 hectares, the park supplies some 600,000 saplings of cedar, pine, olive, juniper, and acacia annually.

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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

When two persons are together, two of them must not whisper to each other, without letting the third hear; because it would hurt him.

Prophet Muhammad (S)

Prayer Times» Noon:12:16 Evening: 18:22 Dawn: 5:04 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 6:27 (tomorrow)

Georgia’s literary contacts with Persia

Part 2

The familiarity of Georgian society with the works of these classical masters and with the master poets of Shervan, including Nezami Ganjavi, Khaqani Sharvani, Falaki Sharvani, etc., helped further literary contacts between Georgia and Persia.

The growth of cities set the necessary condition for the revival of cultural activities. Frequent receptions and feasts at the royal and feudal courts attracted panegyrists, storytellers (qessakhan), and singers not only from all parts of Georgia but also from neighboring countries as well as from distant lands.

Chakhrukhadze, the historian of Queen Tamar (r. 1184-1212), describes the arrival of the Sharvanshah at the head of a large retinue, undoubtedly including poets, since Khaqani Sharvani alludes to such an occasion in the description of his journey to Tbilisi in his Masnavi.

He mentions a number of Georgian place-names: Mukhrani, Nacharmagevi, the summer-palaces of the royal Bagrationi family.

He also indicates his knowledge of Georgian (gorjiguy) and use a Georgian word (mui, “come”) in one of his rhymes (Y. Marr). The poet Falaki wrote an elegy (marsiya) on the death of Dmitri I (r. 1125-1156), the king of Georgia.

Nezami Ganjavi often mentions and describes Georgia (Abkhaz, which then referred to all of Georgia) in his poems Khosrow o Shirin and Eskandar-nama (Y. Marr).

Almost every page of Georgian literary works and chronicles (e.g., the verse collection Tamariani, the poem Abdulmesiani, Rustaveli’s Vepkhistqaosani, etc.) contains names of Iranian heroes borrowed from the Shahnameh (e.g., Rostam, Kai-Khosrow, Zal, Tur), from Yusuf o Zolaykha (Ioseb [Yusuf], Zelikha/Bazika), from Vis o Ramin (Vis, Ramin, Mobad), from Salaman o Absal (Salaman), from Nezami’s Layli o Majnun (Leili, Kais, Majnun), and from Onosri’s Vameq o Azra (Vamek), Shadbahr, and Ayn al-Hayat (Shatbiar, Analat), etc.

It seems that Georgian readers of the classical period either had Georgian versions of the poems by Ferdowsi, Onosri, Gorgani, Nezami, and of works like the Kalila wa Demna, Hatem Tayy, and the Qabus-nama, or were quite well acquainted with the original texts.

Of this long list, however, only one Georgian version of Visramiani has survived, a complete prose translation of the poem Vis o Ramin by Fakhr ad-Din Gorgani.

Traditionally this translation is ascribed to Sargis Tmogveli, a 12th-century statesman and writer. This Georgian version of the medieval Persian romance, which fully retained the spirit of the original, considerably influenced all further development of Georgian prose.

Its proximity to the Persian original made it possible to use the Persian text when preparing the critical edition of Visramiani.

This Georgian translation, being the oldest known manuscript of the work and preserving a more complete version than the few known manuscripts of the Persian text, helps restore corrupted lines and determine the more reliable variants found in different Persian manuscripts that generally are of later origin (17th-18th cent.) and have many lacunae and corrupted parts.

The Georgian Iranologists Magali Todua and Alexandre Gvakharia produced a critical edition of Vis o Ramin (Tehran, 1970), which for the first time contains variants of the text found in different manuscripts.

Source: Encyclopedia Iranica
To be continued.

Persian painting biennial returns after six-year hiatus

From Page 1 ▶ Over 200 works in different fields of Persian painting, including miniature, taz’hib (illumination) and gol-o-morgh, are on view at the biennial, which will run until April 9.

“The 11th edition of the biennial is a special event; despite the unfavorable social conditions and limited space for the exhibition, we held sessions producing positive results, and now we see 221 artworks hanging on the wall,” Sohrabi during the opening ceremony of the biennial.

He said that a number of the works were previously on display at the 15th Fajr Festival of Visual Arts, which was held in February.

“However, 90 percent of the works have been produced exclusively for the biennial. In addition, we believe that events such as the National Biennial of Persian Painting may help the Fajr festival improve its capacity,” Sohrabi noted.

He referred to the culture ministry’s high regard for the art market and said, “The Visual Arts Office has established a council to support art justice by buying artworks from artists, especially from those artists working in remoteregionsanddeprivedareas.”

The biennial also plans to organize several sessions, during which academics will present their latest articles on contemporary Persian painting and several other topics.

During its meeting in December

An art aficionado visits the 11th edition of Iran’s National Biennial of Persian Painting at the Saba Art and Cultural Institute in Tehran on March 4, 2023. (IRNA/Asghar Khamseh)

2020, UNESCO’s Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage inscribed the art of miniature as a common item between Iran, Azerbaijan, Turkey and Uzbekistan on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

A Persian painting is a two-dimensional artwork that involves the design and creation of small paintings on a book illustration or a separate work of art intended to

be kept in an album of such works called a muraqqa.

The techniques are broadly comparable to the Western and Byzantine traditions of miniatures in illuminated manuscripts.

Although there is an equally well-established Persian tradition of wall painting, the survival rate and state of preservation of miniatures are better, and miniatures are a much better-known form of Persian painting in the West. Many of the most important examples of this art form are in

Western, or Turkish museums.

Persian painting became a significant Iranian genre during the 13th century, receiving Chinese influence after the Mongol conquests, and the highest point in the tradition was reached in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Persian painting was the dominant influence on other Islamic miniature traditions, principally the Ottoman miniature in Turkey, and the Mughal miniature in the Indian subcontinent.

Calligraphy exhibit features collaboration between Hong Kong, Iranian artists

An art lover visits the exhibition “Calligraphic Art: Interaction between Hong King and Iranian Artists Exhibition” at the Hong Kong Central Library in Causeway Bay on February 24, 2023. (SCMP/Jonathan Wong)

From Page 1 ▶ “Some might attempt inclusion of calligraphy-related elements such as words, characters, alphabets and symbols in their work to express a contemporary view of calligraphy and painting from one single source,” the statement added.

“Middle Eastern countries are all immersed in the Islamic faith,” the noted and added, “Their sacred temples are only decorated with patterns based on their special type of writing or calligraphy.”

“Artists are rarely concerned with representational forms. Calligraphy and its variations create highly distinctive visual forms dominating their work. This would be

the first exhibition featuring works from the Middle East displayed alongside Hong Kong works, presenting contemporary calligraphic art trends from different cultures globally,” they stated.

Works by Hong Kong artists Wucius Wong, Wong Hau Kwei, Ma Tat Wai, Wong Chau Tung, Ng Kwun Lun, Lam Tian Xing, Ho Siu Chung and Alex have been selected for the exhibition.

It also showcases works by Iranian artists Hossein Zenderudi, Farzad Kohan, Siah Aramjani, Hossein Valamanesh, Fereidun Omid, Arita Shahrzad, Iman Safai, Mahdieh Pazuki, Farnaz Rabieijah, Mahya Tolukian, Farshid Davudi and Allahyar Najafi.

“The Fish Can Sing” at Iranian bookstores

TEHRAN – “The Fish Can Sing”, a novel by Icelandic author Halldor Laxness who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1955, has been published in Persian.

Soolar is the publisher of the book translated by Sara Mostafapur. The book was originally published in 1957.

“The Fish Can Sing” is one of Laxness’s most beloved novels, a poignant coming-of-age tale marked by his peculiar blend of light irony and dark humor.

The orphan Alfrimur has spent an idyllic childhood sheltered in the simple turf cottage of a generous and eccentric elderly couple.

Alfrimur dreams only of becoming a fisherman like his

Cover of the Persian edition of Halldor Laxness’s novel “The Fish Can Sing”.

adoptive grandfather, until he meets Iceland’s biggest celebrity.

The opera singer Gardar Holm’s international fame is a source of tremendous pride to tiny, insecure Iceland, though no one there has ever heard him sing.

A mysterious man who mostly avoids his homeland and repeatedly fails to perform for his adoring countrymen, Gardar takes a particular interest in Alfrimur’s budding musical talent and urges him to seek out the world beyond the one he knows and loves.

But as Alfrimur discovers that Gardar is not what he seems, he begins to confront the challenge of finding his own path without

turning his back on where he came from.

Born Halldor Guojonsson, he adopted the surname Laxness in honor of Laxnes in Mosfellssveit where he grew up, his family having moved from Reykjavik in 1905.

He published his first novel at the age of only 17, the beginning of a long literary career of more than 60 books, including novels, short stories, poetry and plays.

Confirmed a Catholic in 1923, he later moved away from religion and for a long time was sympathetic to Communist politics, which is evident in his novels World Light and Independent People.

Different narratives of women authors from Chadormalu Mine in Yazd

A review session for “Read Sadi’s Poetry for the Rebars”

According to IBNA, the book “Read Sadi’s Poetry for the Rebars”, is a different story of women writer from Chadormalu mine in Yazd. This book was written by Sara Erfani, Faezeh Ghaffar Hadadi, Zeinab Erfanian and Fatemeh Soleimani, which was recently unveiled.

During the book’s review session, Sara Erfani explained that the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade invited a number of artists, directors, and writers to visit the Chadormalu mine in Yazd so they could use it as a subject for a novel or movie.

“After the visit, we were all so excited that we decided to write about it. We all began writing our own narratives from our individual perspectives,” she added.

Erfani continued that the overall goal of the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade was to visit large industrial projects, and it’s more about showing self-confidence. “When we saw the

mine, we came to the conclusion that people should come and see these scenes and so that they would feel better and feel proud of their country’s progress!” she said.

Faezeh Ghaffar Hadadi went on to say about the way of writing the book that the visit to the Chadormalu mine was in the form of a group of progress, which the Ministry of Industry prepared for a series of documentary makers, writers and artists, and they were also part of this group.

“We were fascinated by the progress and wanted to convey it to our audience and felt we had a mission, and since the narratives are not very long, I wrote them in less than a week,” said Hadadi.

“Read Sadi’s Poetry for the Rebars” is the title of my narrative. In the months following that visit, I felt I should read Sadi’s poem to every rebar I saw on the street because we had no idea how difficult it had been to build it and how strong it was,” Hadadi added.

Erfanian continued that this book was born

from a group trip.

“It was explained to us that we were only spectators on this trip, you could say spectators of huge progress! As sweet as candies, the progress we saw tickled our senses to write it all down,” she said.

Erfanian also stated that she likes this book because it is a connecting point between her and her friends.